Review of 'The Mars Room'

Lisa Butts

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In *The Mars Room*, Rachel Kushner provides excerpts from Ted Kaczynski's journals to draw parallels between the Unabomber and her character Gordon Hauser, the man that teaches an English class at Stanville Prison. Ted Kaczynski was a reclusive U.S. domestic terrorist responsible for mailing or planting 16 bombs from 1978-1995, killing three people and injuring 23. "Unabomber" was a moniker given to Kaczynski by the FBI during their investigation, standing for "University and Airline Bomber."

Kaczynski began his life as a remarkable genius, attending Harvard University for his undergraduate degree and earning a PhD in mathematics from the University of Michigan at age 25. He went on to teach at the University of California, Berkeley for two years before abruptly returning to his hometown of Lincoln, Montana. He moved into a cabin in the woods, attempting to live sustainably off the land and, as is evident in his diary, became obsessed with technology and what he perceived as the irredeemable damage it was doing to the environment and mankind. "My motive for doing what I am going to do," he wrote, "is simply personal revenge...Of course, if my crime (and my reasons for committing it) gets any public attention, it may help to stimulate public interest in the technology question and thereby improve the chances of stopping technology before it's too late."

Thus, Kaczynski's victims and targets were usually in some way involved with the technology field. In 1979 he planted a bomb on a commercial flight. It exploded, but the pilot was able to land the plane and the passengers did not sustain any physical injuries. Kaczynski also targeted an engineering professor at Berkeley, a Yale University computer scientist, a computer store owner (the first fatality from the bombings), and Percy Wood, the president of United Airlines. Kaczynski made the bombs at home in his cabin out of wood and metal using handmade tools (consistent with his anti-machine belief system).

The FBI began investigating the case in 1979 after the bombing of American Airlines flight 444, but his bombs were consistently untraceable. Finally, in 1995, Kaczynski sent a 35,000 word manifesto called "Industrial Society and Its Future" to the *Washington Post* and *New York Times.* The FBI permitted both papers to publish the document, along with a message requesting assistance from the public in identifying the bomber. This tactic was successful, as Kaczynski's brother and sister-in-law, having read and heard Ted's no-doubt erratic ramblings on this subject before, saw the document and contacted the FBI.

After receiving information from Kaczynski's brother, the FBI closed in on the cabin in 1996 and arrested the Unabomber. He plead guilty to three charges of murder and 10 counts of bomb-related charges. He received eight life sentences and currently serves time at a maximum security facility in Florence, Colorado.

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