



MENTAL
ASYLUMS

OF VAGABONDS *Andrei Andreescu*



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Dedication

For Fiorentina

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Laura T. Ilea, Zaher Alajlani, and Amjad Barbour.

“Give me a Leonard Cohen afterworld, so I can sigh eternally” (Kurt Cobain, Pennyroyal Tea).

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Foreword

The inevitable happened. That state of fragile and impetuous aspiration we name youth, when we wrestle with life and we look, nonchalantly, at the labels it assigns us, the comparisons, and hyperboles we bathe in, all these become past.

We are asked to take part in the feast brought to this world by a new apparition and to scan fervently and firmly its potencies.

This is what occurred to me when Andrei asked me to write the foreword to his book.

I felt it would be difficult for me to do this because, all of a sudden, I would have put myself in the position of someone who knows exactly how things stand in this world. On the other hand, I felt I would be delighted to do it, but in a gesture which would cancel at once two dangers: not falling into what Cioran called the curse of letters, attracting the newcomer into a circle of vanity, aspiration, and auto-mutilation of the exception, but also avoiding at the same time the pretence of authority. I do not think we can have authority in measuring someone's destiny.

However, in this instance, we talk about a particular destiny, and I will try to tackle it from the clinical position of a seismograph of existence.

How it all started: firstly, with a prolix and excessive way of being and thinking, like an invasion of forbidden territory, that Andrei did not have the readings, nor the necessary equipment for. But at the same time, with a warmth and an almost puritan desire for community and communion. There was an excess in his

manner of wanting and not wanting to be part of this world. I crossed paths with his desire for excess when the hippie experience seemed to be an aesthetic experiment still, when he kept appearing and disappearing from the students' literary scene of Cluj.

In his third year, his proposition for the bachelor's degree was a thesis on vagrancy. What subject would be more fitting than this? Soon enough I realized this work could be anything but a thesis. With Kerouac, Cormac McCarthy, *A Hobo Autobiography* and everything that means metaphysical decay in the American phantasm of space, Andrei stepped on the territory of wandering with no return. I think this is when he got lost in a lymphatic canyon and only a thaumaturgic exercise could bring him back to the surface.

I intuited then the psychoanalytic layer in his perpetual wandering, the abandonment and passionate search for the protection of a female figure and the regress to an Oedipean complex à la lettre, which could simply blow up the whole construct. The last touch of colour in this landscape was the moment he announced, half solemnly, half heroically, that he will drop out of university and move to Italy to restore the family core he was excluded from. It so happened that his liberation coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic right around Lombardy, where he found himself at the time. I knew then that there was only one chance for him in this exorcism of the world: style as a therapeutical act. If he does not manage to write, he will die,

literally, in his radical indifference to the tribulations of life and death.

Maybe I should say something ‘academic’ about his becoming, as he brought up this subject at our last encounter: the poetry of dysfunctionality. Andrei swims in dysfunctionality like in amniotic fluid. The texts he invoked at the time are equally tribulations of anomaly: the anomaly of silence which overturns the world and leads to murder in Gombrowicz’s *Ivona*, the anomaly of the infinite cycle of family culpability in *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, the anomaly of desire and brutality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the anomalies of a mad emperor who cannot bare to see how his incestuous lover grows old in *Caligula*. Finally, the pathological-metaphysical waiting in *Godot*.

And from here on, an attempt to place the writing of *Mental Asylums for Vagabonds* in a post-apocalyptic scene without giving in to simplistic cultural comparisons or half-sustained parallels.

Walter Benjamin writes that the main task of destruction is the creation of space, announces the book. If Andrei destroys something in his book, he does it with the same need for protection of his whole psychoanalytic complex. Carefully wishing for a new world to exist, but not knowing what it would look like. With a fascination with destruction that he finds in demolished buildings and the spectacle of mass destruction, when nature regains its rights and erases all our ancestral efforts. ‘It is as perverted and as controversial as the fascination one has with falling buildings and the sight of mass destruction.’ A perverse and problematic

fascination. An indecisive quid pro quo, like the one set in the limbic space between seduction and murder that Andrei references in the meeting between Hannibal Lecter and Clarice in *The Silence of the Lambs*. With that consciousness of wandering in a city of damnation, like he feels in Amsterdam, a city where he comes to the acute realization that there is no other way, that Plato needed to exile all the poets from the citadel, and they could only be exiled.

There are etheric vagabonds and damned vagabonds. Cain is one of the latter, the notorious vagabond destined to be a murderer. Andrei borrows from the manners of both. At times with horripilation, at times with delicacy, then with hermeneutic assertiveness, he transits the indefinite and complex layers of this world, which, with all the power of evidence, hurt him. Andrei is a wounded soul who perambulates the flesh of the world with his need for infinite poetry and endless vagrancy. Despite his desire to meet people, he mostly encounters shadows.

I will not outline here the whole book, the testimony of a notorious vagabond who tries to cut off all pacts of survival. I will only refer to some images that stayed with me after reading this ‘take of stance’ towards our ultimate nomadism. Namely, the image of a young girl met in Amsterdam, a proprietor, tamer, and biter of snakes, whose encounter with the world is mediated by the animals’ twisted dance. ‘My failed attempts of becoming art’ is a recurring affirmation in his ramblings, a form of imprecation about the fact that we can only give in to the violence we want to swallow the world with. ‘I am afraid of violence, but I’ve often

submitted to it', as Andrei remembers the words of Francis Bacon. This is how I see his way in this hell populated by the poetry of dysfunctionality he calls nomadism.

And I believe this nomadism looks like the creation of an asthmatic, Vivaldi, who stages the music of Primavera in a décor filled with young seraphic masked women and behind those masks hides the vitality, the sexuality, the spell, and promise of art. But when the masks fall, a terrifying scenery unfolds: the distressing image of beings abandoned and mistreated by fate, anomalies of existence – 'Eyes missing, teeth missing, scarred, malformed, or downright ugly'. A colossal shock. In my opinion, this image reflects very well the spectacle of the vitriolic nomadism that Andrei sets in the scene: behind the predatory masks of a continuous cinematic dynamic lies the toxicity of flesh and of a world offering a perverse yet fascinating spectacle.

If I were to summarize his endeavour even further, I would refer to a meditation he throws in elusively at one point: his surprise at the observation that although we move in an infinity of nuances, our evaluating mind always blocks us in themes, patterns, motifs, and acknowledgments of the old, under the appearance of the new. And the corollary is that everything not worthy of these appropriations is exiled as undignified, inauthentic, doomed to fail.

Through these memoirs of a vagabond, understood as an exercise of survival, Andrei wants to prove that the sounds of rambling are infinite. That he took the first step on the path of an unpredictable search. He brings this step, final for now, to the

world, with the force of youth, knowing that no notorious vagrant can be fulfilled. And that the poetry of dysfunctionality is the only poetry he knows.

This is Andrei's first step as a poet of anomaly.

Laura T. Ilea

Chapter 1

It's just us in here

It all starts with a cry. Some call it birth. Some call it consciousness. I call it the ephemeral stay within existence. Why within? Because I could never call upon a witness who can declare that I have ever touched them.

My visceral cry was transcendental, rebellious in nature and execution. But that was not my first mark upon the world. No! That first cry is reserved for my mother, crying for the pain my birth had caused. For my then father, who was being congratulated left and right for having a son, all the while intimidated and shy due to my vulnerability as a newborn. And lastly, to the nurse who stupidly remarked that I would have a 'big mouth' when I grow up.

That was then, but I am crying now, for, upon my transcendental cry, an aura of alienated empathy is covering the growling notes that peak in a schizophrenic shriek. I have grown. I am alive. I am mature. I have been nurtured by society and humans that 'love me'. Some people smile when they see me. What is a smile?

I have the gift of talking and a voice like others do. It is only that I use mine for screaming, eloquently, at times. Funny how I don't even want them to hear me. What good would it do? What baffles me is that it is not even their fault.

Crusoe never died of loneliness. Monks and hermits carry on their religious delirium in snow-soaked mountains as we speak, as

we think, and as we do whatever. Their course of justice is never altered. I'd go as far as to say that it is pure, if not even authentic.

However, despite this, we are raised in a market of linguistic exchange. Whether friendly or competitive, humans create new ways of communicating with each other, even if they say nothing, for 'nothing is worth saying' is a realisation accessible only to a few. I would go as far as stating that all we ever do regarding human contact is play Chinese Whispers. All humans are alienated. It just baffles me how they still maintain a functional attitude in their exotic futility.

If I think of something in the normal array of things, and I want to communicate it, I delve into the depths of my being for a feeling, thought, image or subject I wish to express while being acutely aware that my emotional dimension is formed by my intelligence, background, experience, DNA, among other elements.

In my view, my cognitive and intellectual excitement about what I wish to express is inevitably flirting with what may be a unique nuance, a particular interpretation, given the quirky differences between individuals. What I am to do next is adapt my conceptual miasma, for I, myself, am never sure what it is that I feel, to a linguistic code. This linguistic code is marketed as having common rules and regulations designed for contouring a common ground.

The biggest joke of them all is that this common ground is called 'understanding'.

Another human being, who has my attention, decodes my linguistic expression, which is already altered by being a linguistic expression, but does so according to his or her intelligence, background, experience, DNA. That needs no mentioning. It can't be anything but a severely different point of view.

How can we call communication the act of using words that are not common? Whereby I call being rich smoking quality tobacco and having a good cup of coffee, while a distant sunset fills me with the melancholy of wishing it to end so I could dream a perfect one. Whereby I call 'being tired' the weariness of consciousness fundamentally burdening my very existence, not only my mind or body. Or the fact that I call 'lazy' a mind that does not think, not a person who sits idle having, apparently, no activity whatsoever.

People should all walk around with their own dictionaries.

However, when the process of this volatile and unlocked concept called 'understanding' is dropped, by that I mean that there will be no more appliance of will to bend meaning through words—transcendence in an intellectual touch is freely emancipated. In short, your mind becomes your own horizon, and your intelligence develops as the language of your expression.

I believe intelligence is best expressed, felt, and condoned through silence. In the common jungle of conversation, sounds, squeaks, and other major irritations, as well as the refusal to get in line with the rest, are seen as a violation of demeanour. And yet, the principle of violation brings closure, empathy, and, best of all, communication.

Sartre said that life is like watching through a keyhole, and that the more you watch in that manner, the more you feel as if an eye were watching you. I propose an exercise of imagination based on Sartre's analogy and my conspicuous deliriums about existence.

Imagine four characters: a couple, a child, and the child's father. Now envision a focal point, let's say a hummingbird. It's an early morning after a series of rainy days. The sky is bright blue, and the sun starts to warm the city. It's spring.

The couple, after making love, sleeps lost in delirium. One of the windows is open, and on the patio lands a hummingbird. The child looks through the keyhole, for the door is locked. He observes everything and everyone in the room, but his eyes focus on the hummingbird bathing in the sun.

He is fascinated. His visual projection is focalised on the bird, and his self-consciousness, the awareness that he exists, dissolves through the keyhole; the entire potency of his sensorial prowess is transposed in the visual representation. He thus becomes what he sees.

His father randomly walks up the stairs towards the room where the whole spectacle occurs. One of the stairs creaks.

The child looks behind. He is caught in the act.

When he looks again through the keyhole, the hummingbird is there no more.

Conclusions?

To begin with, two fundamental questions arise: who was the most alienated party? (for it is clear that they all are to an extent),

and where is the missing link that could glue the panoramic image?

First, it takes little imagination to underline what happens next. The child will be incriminated for his demeanour. The sentence is clear: violation of intimacy. Intimacy, in this instance, is set by a closed door and, vastly more to the point, by the act of lovemaking that symbolizes sensitivity and closure in relationships. The word itself appears in late Middle English. It originated from late Latin, '*clausura*', from *claus-* 'closed'. And so was the couple's door.

And yet, in this case, it is the opposite, unlike the 'behind closed doors' saying that is mostly used in underlining shady business. A noble transcendence act occurs, where two emotional dimensions intertwine, for they become 'one flesh.'

Intimacy here does not abide by alienation, for it needs a place where time elapses and touching is the niche to obliterate reality. The closed room is where fecundity of emotion takes hold of communication, silence being the essence bestowed in feeling. Nothing should have existed outside that room. Yet, randomly, a hummingbird chose their patio to bathe in the sun. The texture begins to be palpable when we realize that the catalyst for all that followed was not the hummingbird but the child.

To say that looking through a keyhole was an act of surrealism for the kid is beyond the mark. The intrigue would not have been there in nine out of ten cases. Being conscious of 'if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite' is again ludicrous.

But I believe that these two samples of consciousness, which portray the attraction for surrealism and the infinite, are there—in children, and to some extent, in all people. The trick is oxymoronic: I believe they are actually unconscious states. The nature of being ludic covets a spectrum to colour, decorate, and ultimately design. Intricate and playful, this little construct (by correlation to childhood) is avenged through the ironic development of maturity.

If maturity means stability, depth, and focus, the playful state of kindergarten is vastly held back, exorcised, and thrown at the back of the mind in order for maturity to have the playground of the psyche and the spirit all to itself for its marvellously logical endeavours.

However, very few would argue against surrealism as an intricate, playful desire to free your mind from rationality and its cold arguments. Dali stated, among other things, that if you can imagine something, it exists.

But how about things that are peculiar through their own random existence? Or about those things that have a function but, when perceived and inevitably conceptualized by the mind, become something else altogether?

A foggy window with a small hole in it becomes a unique point of view that one is fascinated to look through, for it is abnormal to have a closed window with a broken spot that lets the world be visually perceived in a privileged and unforeseen way.

The strange has pulling power. I still pity the unfortunate man who walked along a tight fence and heard voices behind it,

continually saying: '213' '213' '213'. When a hole appeared, he looked to see what the matter was. After getting poked in the eye, the voices changed to: '214' '214' '214'...

The little one in our story is no different, just that the poking is existential. The father is the executioner of the very concept called ludic. Rationality prevails; details are not missed in the instance in which he sees the child; they are not even considered in the first place. Any explanation, even if true, sounds unlikely, unpredictable, unpalatable, and incongruent with the 'adequate' and 'normal' manner of behaviour. The conclusion is swift and unchangeable.

And yet the child is the one who has the bigger picture, the spectrum, the truth, and he lacks any credibility in front of complacent performative judgements that 'teach' and require 'punishment' for straightening up.

Alas, he is the most alienated of them all.

Once you are ripped from that ephemeral projection formed towards a concept, or a being, which has proved transcendental to your self-consciousness and has belonged to you, you come crashing down, incriminated, and desolate in front of 'justice'.

Only then do you come to terms with the very fabric of alienation.

Pink Floyd's 'Comfortably Numb', I think, serves justice as a symbol for the hummingbird, the 'fleeting glimpse' that we might catch with the corner of our eye, but which vanishes when our visual scape tries to bring it into focus.

‘Darkness there/And nothing more’, as Poe would put it. But it’s a peculiar darkness, a nihilism that flirts with sensitivity. Numbness giving comfort, just as death by freezing brings an aura of warmth to the dying in their last moments.

The rupture has been made. There is a conscious perception that reality and truth are not only different but are in no mood to flirt with one another. When push comes to shove, the performative acts of ‘normality’ brush aside feelings, desires, innocence, and even humanity itself.

A visceral choice is made at this point for such subjects.

Some become aces, while some become jokers.

However, in all reality’s hardships, there are moments of respite. Being asleep in delirious love, oblivious towards keyholes, children, hummingbirds, fathers, perception, or any other aspects is expected to be liberating. And it is. This is a different sort of being ‘comfortably numb.’

The softly spoken feminine sigh of a woman comforted and protected, together with the calm, self-assured virile sense of pride the lover bestows upon her, is a fulfilled sphere of shelter and closeness. The peculiar thing is that these two distinct feelings are deeply felt by both but in remarkably different manners.

One, in solemn gratification, intertwined with the layers of a blooming woman, while the other, I think, experiences with far more profound depth the feeling of completion and fulfils herself in the transient and volatile nature of evolvment that has become him.

A sense of natural silence and calmness arrives on such beings, where not all questions are answered because no questions need asking in the first place. The endless flow of awe-striking feelings that takes place when infinite particles of existence somehow click is beyond priceless and beyond rare for good measure.

When vulnerability is shown, entities, groups, and societies ingurgitate the vulnerable, possess them, and discipline them into submission. A random act, as was the hummingbird's landing on the patio, is given a twist when conceptualised through a distorted vision.

That vision is naturally a lie and belongs to the father whose sudden appearance, coupled with the sharp look behind that his son has given to the stairs, seals the predicament of the story and ushers in justice and punishment. That twist changes the whole spectrum.

But the child and the hummingbird had created closure and intimacy through violation. The former knows it. He is deeply aware of it.

This shrine of injustice, the lovers' emotional nest has become, serves as playground, quite literally, for this tricky dynamic of letting go of power and daring to be vulnerable. However, we already know that the hummingbird has flown, the couple will wake up, and the child was sent to his room, having been made to feel ashamed for a thing he never did.

Upon such a character, a tremendously exquisite aura begins to form, for it is now understood that the fussy balance of meaning

is not a one-way street. Perception in isolation shall always be the mantra for spicy flavours. The child will learn the taste while being all alone.

Vagabonds thrive upon a contradiction of rebellion and desire of belonging in such a way that their version of emancipating reality will foretell the wanting of feeling cocooned, not by humanity, for thus the trap of everlasting loneliness would be set but cocooned by existence. It is our most intricate wish to flirt and continue flirting with that thought.

A wounded soul's reaction to rejection tends to lend itself to the unfathomable, for it is never clear how such a soul desires to be accepted. Normality does not suffice anymore. Acceptance depends on attachment, and since being a loner is the key to not getting hurt, such an attachment is exchanged from human empathy to fractured particles of existence.

This nuance of peculiarity regarding reflectiveness is a given for people living under the stars because they must resonate with, divide, and crucify, for living with the self represents the greatest of treasures. The incision of greatness of such a life is the syncopation to humanity's usual spectrum of existing.

I believe it is a witty flirt with the idea of recluse, and certain elements are essential.

The need for personalizing a space of existence is obsessive, whether a meadow represents that near a creek, the shadow of a tree, or the bed of a stranger.

A vagabond will never be defined by the number of stars he sleeps underneath but by the chemistry of endorphins that suit his bloodstream when the sky is beyond cloudy and full of mist.

The delight comes in a fugitive immersion of one's emotional dimension within barely knowing faces. The feeling of delight reaches the surface when depth is touched within the intimacy of sharing reality as a playground with a being whose eyes you shall almost certainly not see again.

A vagabond is lunar, sacrificing food for tobacco and whiskey, shelter and comfort for the gaze of millions of stars. For such creatures, wetness of rain is a predestined state of languid dangling of the being. Long hair and rotting clothing, teeth that are not yellow, but golden from cake and wry smiling...

Part of the charm resides in the fact that this is what normal people call unhappiness. The severe alienation that a vagabond inherits, coupled with the voluptuousness of suffering, brings the wounded soul to the paroxysm of happiness.

'Normal people' look upon vagabonds as the failures with whom one is to compare oneself to justify their normality. Their lives are valuable for having kept them safe from becoming 'like them'. From becoming, in more ways than one, vulnerable, a trait which is deeply embedded in the gazers of stars.

A sense of ideological loyalty forms between vulnerability and the surroundings into which this vulnerability is shown, for freedom is achieved when you let go of the feeling of security and you have the courage of placing the power into random stranger's

hands, while serving imagination faithful justice by lying unconscious.

Falling asleep before dawn, shaking, putting your trust in the warmth of the sun to keep you alive when it rises, though you will be long gone within the depth of peace of that very thought by the time that warmth arrives, is the cocoon, the only way to stop the cry.

The alienation remains. It is part and parcel of being a low life. But the vagabond is the child who has seen the hummingbird, the only one who knows the truth.

No incrimination will take place now.

This ludic conquest of filling the void with interwoven pieces of imagery, conceptualized and felt as soothness of the soul, which, in turn, flirts with the mind's own idea of vision—defines one's freedom.

While reading somewhere under a tree with a sting for a sandwich in his stomach and a dire need for a shower, he is not an intellectual but a figure of such novelties as the Grimm brothers.

The child is always there, ripped from his mother's womb, with the transcendental cry raging inside him. Childhood is never finished; it perpetuates itself through keyholes, breadcrumbs, visions, perversions, cakes, candy houses, empty forests.

Depending on where you scream, you can create an echo that will resonate in God's own garden, where your toys have been taken away and it is time to go to sleep, exempt from knowing everything about divinity's current state of affairs.

However, thriving off the lack of respect shown by society, divine order or existential normality, loving to be unconsidered and, through a self-imposed inferiority, appealing to the Christian dilemmas of the good Samaritan, great vagabonds are aces at perverting the very nuance that commands human empathy, the very nuance of synchronization that defines kindness shown as validation of the self and the normality most individuals covet.

The perversion being that, after giving to a vagabond that begs, both parties feel fulfilled within their emotional dimensions. The 'righteous path' is no longer the sole provider of authentic fulfilment, for two different forms of happiness ensue.

The Samaritan who gives 'in good faith', and the vagabond who has an actual transcendental high in having perverted the very farce humanity has made of 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. There is an enclave of perversion, that is there to be exploited, due to the inherent fractures that a gesture, thought, or ideology suffers through the medium of human execution. Since one cannot experience human feelings without the sense of an erratic fountain being, literally, at the heart of things, one cannot channel a specific gesture, thought, or ideology towards another being, in a clean manner. Furthermore, the recipient of one's actions, has its own spectral fountain. The drops intertwining, between the two, shower a gesture rooted in alienation and an inherent violence, that lack of clarity always carries with itself. For gestures are grounded in ideologies and here, the underdog wins.

The stance of the underdog is defined by the vagabond acknowledging the profound fracture between humanity and divine power. Even more so, by not being able to prove or know for sure that divine power exists—coupled with the inherent fractures any gesture, in whoever’s name, brings, render manifestations of human emotions as performative acts. The one acting in faith serves the idea of a higher power. The vagabond, on the other hand, sees the profound distortions present on the grand stage of human demeanour.

The tragedy, however, is that we cannot define human action as a purely performative act. The delight, in the case of the vagabond, comes from the failure of faith in universally conjuring transcendence in people, as an act of performance. This scenario mirrors the failure of vagabonds of transcendence, or even soothness, their battered emotional dimension. It is as perverted and as controversial as the fascination one has with falling buildings and the sight of mass destruction. Walter Benjamin stated that the main purpose of destruction is the creation of space. However, this does not solve the dilemma of hardly having anything to fill that space with, a situation that, I believe, brings the fascination with destruction to life. Alas, this enclave of perversion, the gesture of the Samaritan creates, feels, in the end, as hardly triumphant.

And after such an underwhelming win, which is neither recognized nor celebrated by either of the participants, the child will take his toys away; the playground still exists, but there is something missing...

A respite from a deep layer of aching that begs to be conceptualized.

Thus, the vagabond sets off into the world, not looking for salvation but compulsively searching for the thread that, if pulled, will unfurl the cloth that has interwoven into our minds with ideas such as 'justice' and 'righteousness'.

Failure is, of course, imminent. But decadence in falling from the realms of God into the periphery of the realms in which humanity envisions concepts befitting of righteousness represents a dimension that can truly bring fruit to a sufferer's labour. The fall shall not be ended by a realm that is concrete but one that is burbling away in its own stale waters, while drinkers pretend to be satisfied, for decadence gives vitality, not through pure energy, but through voluptuousness, the tribute that existence, somewhat mercifully, pays to our suffering.

As Sartre stated that he never felt more free than under the Nazi regime and whores have been transcendental in the perverted act of copulation, so vagabonds bestow upon the world the Luciferic aura, the reason in itself for the fall, not because it was a perfect or somehow just reason, but because it opened a new dimension that God, in the classical sense, had not portrayed. This dimension is the space between the longing of attaining flight like a bird that, if given the chance, would land onto our patio, and the severe disappointment in realizing that even if such a visitor would flap its wings into our world, we would only have a keyhole to watch it through. Everything we'll ever do will stem from the desire of vanishing that gap.

What we are left with, as an explanation, is a petty story stating that somehow, intelligence and culture overflow from the bite of a fruit and the lips of a woman. The resilience of that nuance in the human psyche is destined for eternal pages, in the most diverse and intricately abstract ways. But what is surely to be real and palpable within the soul's tremor is that the divine breath may every now and then have a flavour of whiskey and a note or two of a hummingbird's song.

Chapter 2

A study in trial and error

The key to understanding Amsterdam is figuring out why Plato had banished the poets from the republic. More specifically, why he decided to show them the back door of the ideal city and send them through the uncertain roads that extended beyond the gates.

The wide roads and the vivisection as to why some of them appeal and are chosen in the detriment of others is an aspect of fascination that prevents us from underlining, in a definite manner, the genesis of an existential compass. That is mostly due to an idea formulated brilliantly by Sartre, the essence of which being that we are incredibly free. Such a statement, which I believe to be true, raises some frightening questions. Once expelled from the city, where is one supposed to go? What road is one supposed to take? How is one supposed to choose? If we were to take the historical example of Rome, one would look for cobble roads. In the case of the Dutch capital, however, one is to look for the corruption of minds and emotions of the youth—especially when its spectrum, inclines itself to being touched by art.

Still, emotions—when combined with will and one's personal strength—derive from yearning, a concept which is part of another cluster of what fascination is all about. It is tightly concealed in the idea of success, a tendency humanity 'yearns for' in a permanent fashion. The latter has had participants walk over corpses as gracefully as over all the roads, as in the reassuring

saying that we have just hinted at, the roads that are supposed to only go to Rome.

My place of pilgrimage might not be considered an orthodox choice, given that one chooses his or her destination and the endeavours one wants to practise in that sacred place. But one must throw the dice, for it is rather peculiar how rarely the question of ‘where the exiles go to?’ is being raised among historians, academician, and by those peculiar people who have a knack for dealing with ‘social problems.’ Thus, very little guidance is there to be had.

The point stands even from the beginning of time. One might already know it from the book of genesis (or from Saramago’s novel) where Cain was the first vagabond destined to being a murderer. I find it inappropriate in naming Cain among the ones that have walked over corpses, for his destination in yearning was non-existent in a concrete manner at the time of Abel’s killing. It had come as a consequence of it, thus differentiating him from the others. That being said, we can’t hide away from sensing, although speculatively, that he had to walk with the cadaverous taste of having lived his brother’s last day and that, after such a moment, he never again managed an actual touch upon the sacrilege of time which, consciously or unconsciously, he must have called ‘his’ from thereon.

Of course, ‘a journey of a thousand steps does begin with the first one,’ but, as it is with guilt—a measurable notion out of the window, the very window, we might say, through which we all watch the destination of our yearning—a yearning has the

attributes of trauma and shame, especially when one resigns himself to being a fugitive.

Although slaves to it, some of us are aware of the volatility of such a window representing itself with little difference in structure, whether it is an old frame with a broken glass or Dali's "Woman at a window." Wise is the one who understands that it is not the volatility of the image we watch through the window but the ones that come from the particle that makes the image impregnate our nervous system in such a manner that causes the physical chills of excitement and the glint in the eye, for a moment at least, of sensing what eternity looks like.

Who is the one that can pinpoint the exact particle that makes an image memorable?

Living your life in search of gratifying moments like this is comparable to getting drunk to write poetry. It all seems bewilderingly pleasant while the intoxication lasts, but the very next day, the verses are reluctant in conveying the same story, despite you being profoundly convinced of the fact that what you had composed was responsible for the euphoria.

Trouble is, it was the exact composition the one that had caused the delight. A composition that speaks no more, now that the intensity of feeling is gone. A raven or an Abel, depending on your feeling. The confusion resulting from such realization is just as memorable as the experience.

Those were my thoughts as I strolled through Amsterdam. The triumphant notion of a memorable glance upon the scenery was already taking seed within myself, for with great delight I

started observing the transitory demeanour of literally everyone around me. The incognito had started to define itself in the sweetest manner known: plain sight. I was just another face in the crowd and that, despite being extremely common, has been one of the sweetest tokens existence has ever offered me to taste.

It was late in the afternoon, the sun had already started going down and the perfume of late autumn, coupled with the inevitable premonition of a sunset, offered a tender yet forceful feeling of pleasure. I laid on the grass in one of the central parks which were blessed with overflowing fountains and bustling with various forms of life.

Divided between admiring them and observing that my mind indeed played tricks on me (or it didn't?), for I sort of heard some semblance of their echo, I gazed at the pond where the ducks were quacking. Squirrels too were busy being acrobatic and rather well dispositioned. They would jump up and down the trees, making noises that signalled their carefree existence amongst a sea of people. I smiled, thinking that we were enjoying the same privilege of being nobodies.

Now that I was at rest, the city looked different. The deprivation of continuation, as well as the intensity of the feeling conveyed by a frozen frame (namely the change in depth and attention span of the perception of all things that I had just begun seeing differently) made for a standout presence of oneself in the moment taking place. No wonder Punk Rock works so well.

However, despite all my grand speeches and attempts at capturing the moment, I fell shamelessly asleep. I always half

wonder what I look like when I sleep in parks, but it is a wonder of great delight, for it is only a ‘half wonder’ in the literal sense. It is a genuine interest but veiled in such tiredness and pleasantness of finally being able to sleep that I give in before I arrive at an answer. The sentence of such a trial in wondrous perception is that of ultimately not caring. And who can put a price on that?

Upon my waking, hours later, the streets had long been lit, as is the custom all around the world in the evenings, for some reason that escapes me. This is one of the elements that make Amsterdam look like any other city with boulevards that are just as busy as everywhere you have or have not been, with shops that have the same objects of plastic desire for mass appeal and with people that are the same as everywhere else. As such, I turned my look away to the trees to check on the squirrels. They’re all fast asleep. Some in the trunks, some on the branches, all taking advantage of the now empty park. In one regard, I think, the chipmunks and I do agree: the less dynamic in human touch, the more peculiar. This seems to be the mantra of the city.

With that in mind, it’s little wonder that obscurity sells best here, since it is a financial district, first and foremost. The red light just happens to colour the transactions. The museum of exposed human flesh, seen and almost tasted through glass is really a test of synthesis as to how one can condone the ‘yearning’ we have touched upon. One can make the comparison between this glass and the one separating Hannibal Lecter and Clarice; the concept of yearning is present there too but is vastly more superior. ‘Quid

pro quo' is what takes place in both cases. But the intellectual intercourse has always been vastly more profound.

Do you remember the little boy who watched the hummingbird through the keyhole? The intimacy and alienation portrayed there is at the opposite end to what now grown boys and girls get to understand through intimacy in this fascinating exhibition. I find the images violent, but at first. The glass between me and another human being is one thing, but the silk curtains are the ones that portray the sudden dynamic. They allow for the intimacy of a spectrum in which a form of violence can succeed to be emancipated. The cherry on the cake for the masculine demeanour is the fact that it is the man's will that imprints perversion upon beauty through an act with vibes of violence. That is what we crave, what lures us, what we pay for and what makes us utterly pathetic. Mind you, not that we care much.

Times are anew here, as in all the world. While leaving Old Church's Square (The Church in The Red-Light District) and going to the other side of the city, approaching the illuminated windows, I ended up seeing male models supporting a movement for popularizing the idea of men working in the district. On a wall near those windows stood a banner with 'Somewhere over the rainbow' printed on it. 'Indeed blue birds fly' is what a passer-by had written beneath.

Such places are never quiet, never idle. One can understand after an hour in this place why in some springs of American culture, coming here, sleeping in the parks and doing drugs to your heart's delight, before visiting the district is, in many respects, an

affair that differentiates the initiated from the virgin. Many times, literally, it is understood.

But Amsterdam is far more than a flash in the pan of distinguished fetishes for the long-distance travellers. The idea of ‘long distance’ or of ‘permanent movement’ brings a proof of passion and fascination to the pilgrimage. Think of it, Cain, in Saramago’s novel, did endorse in fair wages for fair work and had gone to great lengths in ensuring his performative duty as a fugitive. In this case, it applies as well, although the journey to this capital sounds and feels like a perverted ‘pilgrimage’. Remarkable in what places you can find authenticity. Think about it, in Amsterdam, Cain would never have needed to pretend he was Abel.

Our identities being fluid rely, in part, on the tragic mantra of slaves that the gods bestow on us through context, destiny, and shame. But little consideration is given to the limitation the weather and scenery have upon us, intricate little chains that lift and submit our soul at will according to the gods’ questionable but undoubtedly volatile whims. The emotional dimension being directly proportional with outside influences of such triviality as rain or shine is pathetic and discouraging, given that the emotional dimension is profoundly responsible for what we call ‘intimacy’. Even here, it is dubious what is ours.

However, a grim scenery and a life finding itself in difficulty with experiencing exterior beauty is an extraordinary catalyst for dreaming—hence, the beauty of rainy days. The immersion in oneself is more poignant, more of a desire of staying out of sight,

out of the path of natural elements for they are melancholically unforgiving in a way. That feeling opens the floodgates of creativity. Giving form and life to something is soothing for the ache the soul feels at not being subject to tranquillity. To a brooding and morphing peace, there is a calmness in transient thought that we desire to touch upon and that the soul yearns for. Fascinating how the soul manifests itself through a mix of sensitivity and horror in this instance, the latter being and having always been for me sensitivity projected in reality and distorted by the panic attack of realizing that you exist, especially when existence is experienced in this broken form. That is what horror has been and always will be.

Amsterdam, surprisingly, succeeded unequivocally in dispelling any such definitions from forming in my mind for prolonged periods of time. It is rather extraordinary when, estranged from people, you endorse fascination through the filter of idle beings and decorative scenery, tokens of tremendous magnifying ability at setting in motion the dynamic of the mind. Squirrels, the colour red, ducks, dams are elements that complement the general taste of the air that a city, although clichéd, tends to have all to itself, in a form that flirts with uniqueness.

This is a notion that floats above all people within the coordinates of such a city that manifests its personality through 'the air particles.' It is extraordinary that this quality of uniqueness exists. The act of analysing such a phenomenon would normally

border on obsessiveness and yet at a certain given point, comes as the most natural of realizations.

My mind usually starts drifting with the idea of the collective result of individualism, with its many peculiar nuances that give flavour to the collective. This constant, dramatic, permanent, and peculiar dynamic defines the very particles that create the wider picture. The effect of the air in a city is greater than the sum of its parts. The air acts like a medium in which energies, fractures of sound, images, movements, gestures, and thoughts externalize themselves creating a half sphere resembling a snow globe.

The awareness of its existing every time you look at the sky is a game of perceiving, absorbing, synthesizing, and then externalizing through expression: from a look, a gesture, a sentence, or even silence at a particular moment. Thus, it is an exercise in uniqueness that happens passively. A token any artist would kill for, but which none can capture at their will.

Furthermore, trying to capture such moments in a frozen frame of some sort would be just making mere third-hand imitations, as Plato teaches us. He is probably right, but I can't help but wonder if my account, namely these lines I am writing, is 'a first-hand account of the events' as the English language would have it. I am writing about Amsterdam, the bed that is given as example, while Amsterdam was constructed by the people, the carpenters, as it were. The bed only has one form defined by a god. Who is the god that is the creator of such a place? The candidates could be many, but I fall asleep again, candidly, in the park while realizing how this infinite distance put between form and reality

serves as the most delicate and profound intimacy the city has offered me so far.

The next day dawns on me, together with the idea of my knowing nothing of constructing cities. Dawning now on me in the form of an idea because in the torrid and morbidly pleasant process of falling asleep, I have dispelled it unequivocally with remarkable short-term success.

I see that the city is changed today, the form it must be in is either out of the grasp of my understanding or is viciously volatile in its dynamic and spiritual dimension. Well, that is what happens when you compare populations and cities with beds and carpenters. I am hungry.

Usually, I ask for something to eat, or I offer poems in exchange: Spiritual food in exchange for physical food. The girls in the district be blessed, for I am the whore. It usually works, though. 'Money gets back/I'm alright Jack/ Keep your hands off my stack. And it follows with 'New car/Caviar/Four-star daydream/ I think I'll buy me/ A football team'.

Remarkable how few people realize these petty lines actually belong to Pink Floyd. Also, fascinating is how many have said that it is 'absolute rubbish' (I can't help but hear 'laddie' at the end of that remark). But I persist, for I must, and eventually success comes my way: 'How can you have pudding if you don't eat your meat?' I've been asked if I did not feel ashamed for doing this. Quite the opposite. It has strong vibes of the story of the good Samaritan and also, on a less profound level, it is akin to the metaphor Kennedy was constantly putting forward in his

speeches, which of course he did not write himself, namely: 'the high tide will lift all boats'. With so many canals around, I see 'his' point.

After a few tries I am successful, so with my belly silenced, I trundle around the city in search of more sensations. In fact, with little success, that was what I did every day I was there, for with no lifeline to attach me to the city, in the shape of social touch, the intricate peculiarities of a city remain hidden, forbidden to sight. On such days, I can be seen merely admiring fountains, wildlife and the sky. 'As if demented' my stance was once described by a passer-by.

But on the 5th day, not in the middle of the journey, but towards the end, fate thus ensuring that I did have a couple of extra days of absorbing the events in the place of their happening, a marvellous technique for memory sedimentation, the roads I had taken, totally by chance, did lead me to a most peculiar oasis of sensations. On one of the streets, at the periphery of Amsterdam, next to a café, on the ground floor, an amateur art gallery was on for the day.

Various artists were invited to reconstruct with relative precision various periods in art with prints made in the same manner Warhol did his, among other conceptualizations of expression. Since the exhibit, as could be seen through the glass, were something other than cans of soup and Marilyn Monroes, I felt compelled to have a look.

The building was a dusty affair as far as architecture goes. The front was characterised by huge glass doors on rails, thus you

could peek inside the wanna-be gallery. The walls were a dark white, one got the feeling that the colour had come from the touch of time and that it had been left that way for effect. Plenty of rooms were inside. All having dark brown wood sheets on the floor, and were empty, except for the illumination devices designated to the paintings, each being lit by such a device. It was rather an old building that had been furnished once to be up to scratch for some sort of artistic display. The effects were not all that impressive, but it was a workable structure for the task at hand.

The exhibits ranged from unmade beds, statues of ex salivating artists, a dusty table, some Jackson Pollock-inspired paintings and other such art left to chance, which has come to qualify as valuable. In the other wing of the building (it was written at the entrance that it had been divided in four wings), my level of interest began to be aroused. A reconstruction of Tracey Emin's "Everyone I have Ever Slept With," the notorious tent which had applied needlework consisting of the names of all the people she had slept with was on display. In Emin's case, the names were not necessarily all her lovers, but the tent in this wing of the building was there to be painted on by everyone entering with the name of a lover. The exhibit was changed every week, a new, 'clean' tent being brought in exchange for the one 'touched by art.' The receptionist, a short, blonde, sweet girl in her 20's, had informed about that upon catching my stare.

Right next to all this camping business stood what happens to be one of the most interesting conceptual ideas I had ever come across. Not necessarily due to the aesthetic of the painting, but

Myra, the notorious British murderer, was just as chilling a sight in this reproduced form as she had been painted in the original that had debuted at the Royal Academy of Art in 1997. What was very interesting in this version was that the print reconstructed the instance of the painting after it had been vandalised twice back in 1997, at the opening day of the exhibition. Blue and red Indian ink had been smuggled into the art gallery and concealed inside two camera film cases.

The smearing happened shortly afterwards as a protest. Three or four eggs then followed, thus ensuring that the image was ruined. Except that it wasn't. What I had in front of me was the proof that a fractured, transient and distant segment of time could have authenticity in mimesis.

Through such a statement, I am by no means implying that Plato had been wrong in his judgement and action, as to the situation that he presents in the Republic. A sentence is a sentence, a finality to the art of circumspection, a bold statement as to a definite result that is to clarify a situation and dispel miasmas of doubt and uncertainty. Judging whether juries and their decisions are right or wrong is something I am definitely not interested in discussing, but what fascinates me is how the narrative line of existing, doing, and being done to gets interwoven with the consciousness of the reject, the dispelled, and the wanderer (the eventual miasma), for the habit of sentencing clears only in appearance the waters of a pond which, like every other pond, has murkiness at the bottom. If I may continue with the metaphor, the water may be drinkable, yet stirring it brings to the surface the dirt

and mud that had always been there, but which has been rather conveniently ignored out of a sense of comfortable inertia. The cringing feeling, the paralysis of fear and awe at the sight of that darkness is what creates a shriek within consciousness at something that had not been forgotten after all but brought back to the surface with the help of the handprints of children such as those that were murdered in the events she had been sentenced for. Hence, my awe at seeing the representation of Myra's painting. It was my horror that I was seeing 'being reproduced,' and since my alienation almost always gets the better of my reason, my inner horror, twisted by the hands of innocence through the print, had started to reverberate in my entire being. The exhibit was just the stimuli. The reminder of my horror's existence.

The spiritual drunkenness was overwhelming with vividness, sending me into a frenzy, so I went at one of the windows, opened it, and got lost in breathing. "It is a great privilege to breathe," I said to myself.

In the corner of the room sits a girl, drawing. I did not notice her when I entered. Or she had come after me? I cannot tell.

While in the middle of these thoughts, I drifted through clusters of horror, more precisely, I debated how can such a feeling be quantifiable, touched upon legitimately, and then be brought back to the world as a measure of correspondence as to how a piece of art can become exactly what we call it, namely, a piece. We must bear in mind that horror is created out of the scars made by fear.

Wounding relentlessly our psyche, fear is felt as pain to such an extent that there comes a moment of realization in which the awareness of us fundamentally being devoid of control ensues. And there is no possibility of naming any rational decision as to how the instance we are brought in could be changed. But I would argue that such a moment of realization is not full-blown horror. No! It is the instinct of fear married to confusion. It is serious but workable as material of synthesis.

The key to full blown horror is in syncopated repetitiveness. An interesting concept for the mind in general. I first came across it in music. Mike Oldfield's 1973 album "Tubular Bells" is based on this peculiar phenomenon. The theme is repeated over and over again throughout. The second part of the theme, in the dynamic of 'question and answer' that good music communicates with itself (the listener is part of this communication only if capable), through its notes, is a bit different, always creating a feeling of unease, incompleteness. The knowledge of the melody not having the overall effect that the mind had predicted, being at the forefront of realization. Thus, the mind remains interested and, upon this basis, further instrumentation adds to the path of transcendence that the album-long composition manages, to my ears, in achieving. It must be mentioned that it is the official soundtrack for the film "The Exorcist."

This perspective is put in a different light when continuous sessions of exposure bring to the surface the realization that perpetually perceiving horror is the miasma that colours the self

in the intricate and unopenable chambers in some lost wing of the soul, thus tormenting and terrifying consciousness.

If a certain image possesses a particle or a quality that confines it under the mysterious lock of memory, a certain processional display of the mind, under an equally mysterious lock, leads to compulsion regarding terror.

Feeling fear is an act of instinct, and if the regular drops of the Chinese water torture can be conceptualized in such a manner that it becomes a pattern of thinking, as opposed to the psychotic breakdown that ensues within twenty hours if the drops are applied randomly, so can fear become a conceptualized compulsion of a soul, for fear has an engraving quality.

If that may be the case, carrying such content in the chambers of one's soul is a predicament to perpetuating mutilation. Human existence, being transient in its very essence, makes for a reaction to be needed, in a perpetual siege mentality, defined by its nature of being interiorized.

Thus, the show can never be stopped. It trundles along with the insides boiling and with the spiritual consciousness of the soul gasping for air. *Rather ironic my presence at the window while thinking all this*, I thought.

The girl has stood up and is now in front of Myra's painting. She looks at the painting, then at me, then again at the painting and smiles. I cannot help myself but find her demeanour intriguing. Mind you, her appearance is nothing to be overlooked either: long, jet-black hair reaching her thighs, dark complexion, and bony face with serious features engulfed in the tenderness of

her age. She must hardly be twenty-one. She has a peculiar elegance in her mannerisms, especially with her hands. Her nails had once been looked after, but now most were worn and one was missing. They had been once dark red. She only wore black stockings, silk underwear, and a long, sleeveless T-shirt with a rather discreet cleavage; though, she wore it like a dress. “How was she allowed in dressed like that?” I ask myself. She continues smiling. I watch her long, elegant legs, springing out of some well sculpted high heels. Her legs had been subject to some peculiar bruises that seemed to be renewed frequently since the thin layer of congealed blood on the surface looked and, undoubtedly smelled quite fresh.

“Are you aware of what this painting represents or are you just a passer-by through art?” she says suddenly.

“I am aware,” I answer, rather startled at the sudden link in communication. “Are you a passer-by through art?” I ask without managing to dispel the intrigue from my voice.

“Sometimes,” she says, moving languidly towards the window, the very window where I caught my breath. “It consoles me in my failed attempts of becoming art.”

Not answering at once, given the depth of her answer that, of course, required silence in assuring it the solemnity it deserved, I looked at the papers she had been drawing on when I had first noticed her. She was holding numerous sketches in her hands. Most of them were hazy but with an air of artistry that was not entirely unprofessional. A lump of intermingled, serpentine beings abounded in the papers, with two prominent snake heads at

the top, and a feverish sketch of I don't know what else, for she moved her hand suddenly, blocking my view, in the process.

“Are your drawings your way of trying to become art?” I was now properly intrigued.

“By no means,” she says with a firm tone. “These are my consolation at having failed repeatedly. I sketch my defeats with an air of voluptuous triumph. The cracks are all that we have got in an image, especially of ourselves”

“Why serpents, then?” I sensed an opportunity of meaning in the symbolism.

She smiles at the question, takes a step back, crosses her legs in a firm gesture that only becomes palpable from her ankle downwards, and answers in a low voice: “They are my crucifixion.”

Startled and rather alarmed at the answer, I looked inquisitively at her. No further comment came. With a suddenness she staggered forward, went passed me and out of the door of the gallery. It would be fair to say that I had remained there motionless and profoundly perplexed.

The receptionist, having assisted with the girl's sudden departure and seeing my state of utter amazement, smiled at me.

“She always asks people about this painting,” she said. “She is very disappointed with the replies, usually.” I watch Myra's painting. “But not with yours,” she added with a smile.

“She has an obsession with this image,” she adds further. “You see, violence and innocence have always been strong

fascinations for her; she has even dropped out of college to go in search of being, of becoming.”

“Of painting, you mean?” I say confused.

“Not quite. She never painted. She says that nothing is to be said in the genre of violence after Bacon.”

“Francis Bacon, that is?” I say amazed.

“Indeed, she obsessively watches all the representations of his work that are displayed in Amsterdam. He is her cult leader, in a not entirely figurative manner.”

I took a moment to let all this sink in. Upon seeing my loss in contemplation, the blonde added playfully. “Why don’t you pay her a visit, this evening? I am sure it would be quite an experience. She seemed to like you”

“How do you know where she lives?” I ask.

“I know a lot of things about her. I am her half-sister,” she said, proceeding in writing down the mysterious girl’s address, which she gave me while adding, “You will then understand how the aspect of innocence intermingles with all her quest for art”

I looked at the address; it was in a neighbourhood not far away from where the gallery was.

I thanked her for the address and her proposal, and I was about to exit the gallery when I remembered what I had wanted to ask from the start.

“Just one more thing, what is your half-sister’s name?” I mumbled.

“Gretel,” came the answer.

I nod rather lost in thought, and I exit the gallery. I take a seat on a bench and watch the passersby. The whole scene has made me dizzy. The most difficult part is inserting the 'I' in such a story, recognizing the click of acknowledging that I belong to this narrative.

One's instincts are supposed to take hold in such a situation and causes one to retreat, but I was ambivalent towards my instincts. The name that had left me speechless had not been "Gretel" but "Francis Bacon."

"My failed attempts of becoming art." Her words echoed in my ears. How could such a proposition take place for a painter like Bacon? I could remember him stating "I am afraid of violence, but I've often submitted to it." That was in an interview condoned in French while quite drunk. The eeriness of his look, of his demeanour, the sense of suddenness of danger and viciousness that his paintings sort of transcended onto his own figure during his lifetime. "What sort of art can you aspire to become through such a medium?" I wondered.

I have always believed that the panorama pictured by him after years of decay, of wandering from one pub to the next, from one lover to the next, transcends the instance of the reject that he had been in his childhood and adolescence through eeriness and sheer eruption of artistry. Those traits are incredibly impressive in their substance and execution but transcending the notion of being a reject appeals as a sacred power that humanity has not had access to, or a possibility of envisioning it, even. A guest rejected from your house will always find himself with a feeling of unease

regarding the food you'll serve him on a supposedly following visit, even if your cooking were to be brilliant. As such, it's no surprise that the immediacy of emotion is the one that creates the violence in Bacon's work and in himself, I think. The distress. The pumping of the blood. The horror that is yet to be processed by consciousness but has already struck, has already killed; if not flesh, then innocence. That is the feeling that becomes defining.

Born in Dublin in 1909, Francis Bacon had a difficult relationship with his kin. His difficulties of managing the relationship with his father, with whom, his sister has stated, had nothing in common, had been instrumental in his extraordinary career. His homosexuality was a fundamental problem for the Bacons. Francis reportedly had been found wearing his mother's clothes while looking in the mirror, as well as having intercourse with the stable boys at the family farm. He later stated that his mother and father were disgusted with him. His father offered him to a friend of his, who fell in love with the young Francis, subsequently taking him to Berlin in the great age of decadence that has made the city famous. After Berlin, Bacon stated, "I was totally corrupted."

Another peculiarity was his asthma. A rather difficult condition that impedes breathing and makes general existence considerably more tiresome. It nonetheless played an important part in his art. Bacon could stand horses and dogs with difficulty, and both were plentiful where his family lived. There is a certain existential injustice in being deprived of clean, crisp, easy breathing. It is a sacred connection to dignity, to how the tissues

of the mysterious cloth that the self represents are not necessarily interwoven but refreshed as to their constitution. Being alive means breathing death, it is understood, but we are rather keen on breathing it well. The summer air is heavy. How strange this sense of high pressure and the feeling it subsides. Fewer people are passing by. The evening is closing in. I am alone.

A tremendously interesting thing, I start thinking, is that Vivaldi was asthmatic as well. There are reports that he could walk, but not far, and at some point, he was in need of assistance to simply move. It is hard not to perceive this unease in breathing being closely linked to his music.

If one were to listen to “Summer,” from his brilliant “Four Seasons,” one is to be filled with a claustrophobic sense of impossibility to breathe. The poem through which the part was constructed implies the imminent arrival of a thunderstorm. The air is heavy, laden. A storm is brewing and there seems to be a longing for the relief the actual rain will bring, but the pressure of it being late in arriving is causing a vast sense of claustrophobia.

This idea of claustrophobia given by heavy breathing is transposed into artistic substance in Vivaldi even further. In Venice, the number of abandoned children was extraordinary. Most had physical defects or were a burden to their families, thus were brought to the church. The boys were taught various crafts, while the girls were taught the arts, especially music. He taught the abandoned girls of Venice how to play the violin and perform in a choir, and often gave full scale concerts in the city, together with them.

The genius of Vivaldi is that he played the music with the girls masked. The audience, enthralled by the brilliant auditory spectrum, transposed the mystery and, no doubt, the claustrophobia regarding the identity-perception of the masks, through the youth of the girls. The effect was bewitching, the atmosphere concocting a lust for sexual vitality, for the charming beauty that the young women must have had, since they could play such incredible music.

It is reported that by the end of the concerts, they all took their masks off, and the audience would be terrified to see them as they were: all abandoned children, mishaps of fate, most with defects. Eyes missing, teeth missing, scarred, malformed, or downright ugly. The shock was tremendous. But it was a statement about transcending through music the violence of fate, as well as its “lack of breath.”

For me, there has always been a sense of such a spectrum in Bacon’s work. By his own admission, he painted the violence he saw around.

My personal favourite is “Painting 1946,” which had started as a gorilla in a cornfield, then a bird, then ended up as the most impressive painting I have ever seen. The exact pinpointing as to what it would look like if death were to pay me a visit. The genius among the carcasses of meat and the presence of the body without a face is how he has managed to make that umbrella so terrifying. The mouth is also instrumental for the effect. Bacon himself has stated that such a fascination with the mouth and the eroticism of

its movements had come about after having picked up a book on its diseases in a shop one day. After that, he never looked back.

It is remarkable how violence is omnipresent but somehow, tremendously hard to decipher regarding how one is supposed to feel it, or whether we are made to process and identify it right away. Violence is immediacy; it is instinctual, subconscious, direct, vicious. What I find extraordinary is that it is not processed by our brains until later. It is pure reaction at the moment of its execution. And we are all good at it.

Yet the most intricate side of true violence is that the catalyst is veiled in ambiguity. There is violence ‘on the house’ because there is angst. Because we exist. If not abrupt, then violence is degenerative, and degenerate becomes the body, the mind, the soul that experiences it. But think about it, when you see the relics of a force that created havoc, how could you pinpoint it, the very force, after the moment when the violence which had acted is gone? You are an empty witness to such a stance.

These very thoughts rolled off my lips when I had first seen it. Three figures at the base of a crucifixion. Arguably, Bacon’s greatest work. All three of them diseased, deformed, degenerate, raging, tortured but *alone*. One can look every-each way and one will not see any form of crucifixion, as we know it. If only Diogenes had known of this painting, he would have pointed to it, instead of embarrassing Plato with the featherless chicken. No crucifixion could be seen when I finally reached Gretel’s house, after a long and silent deliberation that I had known would end like this from the very beginning. The house was rather small,

untidy, and with a meagre garden, but that was of little relevance, for there were no flowers anyway. The grass had been left to grow unusually long.

I was about to observe how the front door was made of mahogany and bore rather peculiar symbols.

“I knew you’d come,” she said opening it, suddenly. Her low voice struck me in its peculiarity.

“Come in,” she encouraged me. There was a stiffness in her walk, as she led me through a dark corridor. At the end of it stood another door. Worn, rotten, humid. Gretel looked at me before opening it. Her eyes were glazed.

I enter and I am baffled. Shed skin everywhere. The room was littered with it. Most of it was left randomly as it had been discarded, but some of it had been taken, dried stiff and written on. The writings contained symbols like the ones on the mahogany door. The room had heat generators strategically placed and a particularly large one behind her untidy bed. The air was moist, and an eerie sense of hissing was taking place. I advance further and then come to a dead stop. “They’re snakes,” I whisper to myself.

Their hissing and the friction of the scales suddenly increased; the reptiles were sensing roomy strange presence. “Not a bad way to begin understanding her emotional dimension” I said under my breath. There are at least 12 snakes in the room. Positioned in aquariums, the reptiles looked menacing behind the glass. Their colour and scale pattern were extraordinary to watch, given that every aquarium was illuminated. I feel my blood

rushing through my veins, and I look to the door, seriously willing to leave, but—

Gretel greets me from the kitchen with a smile. Makes a wayward joke about Medusa having been a virgin, but she is out of earshot. The velvet curtains are stained with venom, but she says she's an expert and that she's got numerous antidotes. "A little venom has not hurt anyone," is the only thing that I hear distinctly from her speech. Oh, that, and that she said it's even healthy.

She takes out a box enthralled in silk with various holes in it. As soon as she touches it, the hissing intensifies. She puts it on the table and smiles at me. "Show me how manly you are," she says. There's something terribly addictive in the masculine personality in regard to endorsing such requests. "With pleasure," I say to myself, a pleasure that, of course, does not surpass hers at seeing me accept playing her game.

I touch the lid of the box, lift it, and no sooner I do that, that a force acting like a spring bites me ferociously before rapidly returning to an 'S' shape, all the while hissing deafeningly. The other snakes in the room follow suit and the effect is like a choir. All I could muster in seeing was an extraordinary flash of green with a yellowy tint. The bite hurts severely, and blood has started gushing from my wound. She smiles perversely at both the snake and myself. I ask intensely, while telling myself it isn't panic, if the snake was venomous.

"No, this one isn't," she says and then proceeds to introducing the snake. It's a female Emerald Boa, about 1'8m in

length, usually found in South America. I am stunned. Its beauty is intoxicating. Those eyes, in the sea of green, were of an obscene attractiveness.

“I’ve looked for a mating partner for ages,” she duly informs me before adding that she had been successful only recently, when an expert had come to Amsterdam with a male boa, looking for a female of the same species. “Undoubtedly,” I say to myself, with the same noble quest of procreation in mind.

“What do you think of her?” the young host asked with enthusiasm.

I watch the female again, enthralled. “She’s beautifully patterned,” I manage to mutter.

It wasn’t only beauty. The serpentine had an extraordinary attraction that I cannot fathom, cannot explain. Despite the danger, I almost want to touch it again. I get closer and stretch my hand.

“Take a few steps back,” Gretel says brusquely. “She’s strained with you so close. She’s deaf, you know? Snakes do not have eardrums, but she can perceive sounds with her underbelly; it’s very sensitive. That is how she picks vibrations”

I look hypnotized at that diamond head and at that long, sweeping tail that, if I only were allowed to touch, would definitely feel full of fibre and gluey texture. I can’t really describe it, nor have I ever felt it but—

“You’d listen to her too if it were to speak, wouldn’t you?” asks Gretel, interrupting my line of thought.

I know what she is playing at. “The ancient curse of feminine gullibility is over,” I say to myself.

“Yes, I would. Most definitely” I answer Gretel in full voice.

In a manner of naturalness that makes me wonder whether my presence here could be part of what Hansel and Gretel did when they grew up, Gretel starts flirting violently with the snake who hissed and tensed arches of its impressive body, in a manner that was clearly fascinating us both. It started arching towards her body and held back every time it touched her, showing those impressive fangs.

Gretel lay gently on the bed, together with the snake. The sound of the scale’s friction was still unnerving. The snake was coiling round one of her ankles that moved in a manner that had caught my eye before in the gallery. The serpentine head held a dead stare upon her, while the bifurcated tongue sprung back and forth maddeningly. The blackness of the woman intermingled with the emerald serpent excited me. The snake was progressing up to her knee.

The young woman started touching her neck with a distinguished and unexpected sensuality. Slowly sighing, her excitement was palpable. Her elegant hands gently drifted further, and she started touching her breasts with one hand, while playing with herself with the other. The sighs grew in intensity as the snake watched with that acute deadly stare. Gretel’s body was vividly excited by the cold scales, contorting itself as a tribute to the snake’s slithering. The tension she rose as the snake closed in.

She was moaning loudly, vividly disturbing the snake, whose muscles were kept contorting. The first bite came shockingly. The second was seamless. The third, I thought, deadly. Gretel’s sighs

had turned into a full yell, her body quivered, her thighs bleeding on either side, just beneath her vagina. She threw the snake on the bed. It bit her one more time in the process, just above the ankle. I rose from my seat to intervene, but Gretel made a sign telling me to sit down. She started crying, delicately and slowly, like guilty children do.

I watched her exhausted and undoubtedly aching body laying almost still, and I started feeling a distinguished kind of affection for her. I cannot pinpoint it still, yet it unsettled me. Thus, I broke the silence, while the snake was crawling out of bed, slithering towards its silk box.

“How could I understand this painting?” I ask her, mesmerized.

She got up, looking rather annoyed. “It is nothing but a pathetic trial and error. Now get out!”

Her unquivering voice glazed with anger. She got up and put the lid on the silk box, where the snake was now residing. She stood with her back towards me, not saying a word. I left her house. Outside was dark, and I was shaken. In the summer air, I realized that these intricate, little, irrational, and crushing desires we have are beyond description. They must just be revisited as they are.

I left Amsterdam two days later, knowing that I had painted my crucifixion. However, the nagging and cold serpentine touch remains; it is best exemplified in the disguise of the fundamental question put forward by Bacon, “How to trap appearance without making an illustration of it?”

Chapter 3

America may taste like breast milk

I am at a loss in describing the first moment I tasted America. I am at a loss, not due to my failure to frame such a moment, but due to the impossibility of conceiving myself consciously without its presence.

The feeling is somehow like trying to accurately imagine myself before my first memory. As with many other people, my first memory is banal: I watched the sky and I remember saying to myself that it was big and blue. Any sense of self before this moment is simply non-existent.

To this modest haiku, I subsequently added that it was sometimes cloudy; birds were flying ‘in it,’ and when it was angry, storms would ensue. This characterization, with its childish inclination, is remarkable in just one way: It was developed out of my watching the sky. The story is not yet over, now I am playfully watching for shades of blue and white, secretly being amazed that some astrologers say that it is actually black and that its many colours are an illusion. My stomach sinks. I feel cheated for a moment. I say to myself that such silly worries are not to be endorsed. And then I go back to more serious endeavours of thought, my mood to entirely absorbed by that evening’s sunset or angered by the lack of its visual presence. .

The narratives I still create about the sky are the result of my first memory, something that *happened* to me. I was struck by the fact the sky is blue. It hit home with me that it is grand. But ‘how

grand?’ was a question only one step away. And like a vice that leaves its practitioner unsatisfied, the habit lived on. The horizon of my perception continued to expand. I began realizing that a hundred-tonne airplane flew across the sky somehow sustained by air that I could breathe (what a glorious day that was!), and that severe cold making its vast blueness look as if it were about to shatter really is a universal emotion.

The realms of my preteen years being flavoured by the sun’s trajectory and its languid dynamicity resulted in clusters of delight and fascination. I took pride in knowing that the same sun that was glowing on my face had glowed over the Taj Mahal several hours previously. I pondered over maps and sought plausible trajectories as to where it was heading to next: to what countries? To what people? What emotions will it bring and to whom?

Then someone told me that it had always been me the one who had been ‘heading’ on a given trajectory. ‘The sun sits still like a sphynx, y’know?’

To this day, the essence of that very moment is exactly what America tastes like. Why? Because it is a hypothetical state of being.

First, there is the notion of taste. A synonym to what a hypothetical state of being is. When we say what something tastes like, we assume we state how it makes us feel. ‘Sweet?’ ‘Bitter?’ ‘A little sour?’ *Nonsense!* It is like being exposed to rain and making general classifications in regard to its intensity and temperature. The point is that you get wet. Your circumstance and inner states dictate whether it makes you dance or ensures you an

embarrassing arrival. Likewise, when you are exposed to tastes, you get flavoured. The way you relate to how that is what gives identity to how you feel. The initial taste is the assumption, the hypothesis of the consumer.

And the comparison is not as sparse as it might first seem. It has been famously stated that ‘some people feel the rain’, which is true, but wetness is universal. So, is the term ‘sweet’. The point is, you *feel* the wetness and the sweetness. Furthermore, both events—being rained on and tasting something sweet—are things that *happen* to us for the first time at some point and leave an impression on how we process the experience. We begin conceptualizing rain as a mood, and we begin having preferences in terms of chocolate. We *relate* in one way or another to what we have experienced. And relationships are constantly evolving, creating clusters of feelings that fold layers upon layers of invested emotions in our psyche until an identity is finally formed. As such, my true taste of sweetness can never be yours, and it has every right to be dark chocolate. Thus, it cannot be truly classified. That being so, one must surpass the term ‘hypothetical’ and relate to what a state of being represents for oneself, all the while endorsing the notion that our senses breed avenues of flavour.

It is remarkable to acknowledge that an infinite number of melodies is available, and yet we talk about musical tendencies, variations of themes, motifs, remastered tapes, and neo-traits that offer delight in a genuine manner. A collective intelligence starts to form. Value becomes synonymous with some forms of music,

and with some particular composers, while others are judged not to be worthy of it often for ‘obvious’ reasons.

The mental space music defines within a listener can be an oasis of various convergent nuances of a distinguished soothing quality, entertainment or indeed flavour, yet impressively, music can be a driving element in giving a state of being a perpetual trajectory, a trajectory defined through a manner of travelling that can be instrumental regarding one’s perception and identity. The key is not referring to music directly but defining its theme within the idea of a soundtrack.

Travelling implies movement; movement correlates to rhythm; rhythm is created; and a state of being is *the* creation. This can very well be a mental orchestration, but there are certain mental spaces that endorse the possibility of there being a ‘music hall’—a universal mental space, a place of pilgrimage for rhythms that define a state of being. As such, one might consider that his/her musicality can have public walls to echo on. Thus, through living, a narrative is sought to take centre stage in one’s life. The musicality of one’s personal soundtrack, namely the existential rhythm that brings flavour to a personal ideology coupled with a stage in a potential ‘music hall’, offers a strong attraction in believing that one’s state of being can evolve from *hypothetical* to *real*.

Such passages of consciousness and of belief are a relatively common occurrence in people’s lives, on a small scale. However, every now and then a bonanza opens up, a place of fecundity where ideologies may have an existential gloss. There are many

intricate, social, psychological, and preferential reasons as to why some ‘music halls’ become a universal space of desire, but there is a fundamental obsession with possessing a ray from the shining object of desire, even if that be only a state of being.

The taste America may have, given its tradition as a music hall for grandiose notes and many a concerto, has been given the notoriety that it is not something that necessarily *happens* to you. Rather, it is something that you *can make happen*. But how?

From the beginning, clearly you cannot write a formula to define universality, nor can we define the term *meaningful* within the endeavour of desiring possession (who knows what each butterfly *sees* in a shining light, to the point of burning their wing dust off?). It is known that rationality and desire rarely meet.

Consequently, given that we are working with smokescreens (America’s abstract notoriety in world culture, a lack of a nameable/classifiable flavour to the notion of ‘taste’, the impossibility of covering all the angles, not knowing what the notes to our personal soundtrack are, etc.), I wish to present broken pieces of instances in American literature and cinematography where objects of desire, their shining power, and America’s role in condoning human’s inherent dying vitality take centre stage in legendary characters’ walk of life. As with my watching the sky, I choose them for being *memorable*, as well as scattered.

Few characters epitomize the concept of *dying vitality* as well as Sal does in *On The Road*. We are introduced to a ‘wannabe’ writer profoundly starved of thrills who is, more importantly, a

social misfit. Dying vitality seems to be Sal's impending doom. It is the waning of the soul's combustible nature, the glint in the eye becoming opaque. Vitality itself loses its identity and decays in waves until falling into oblivion and anonymity.

The tragedy of this phenomenon is that it is a conscious process for the victim. It is an unnerving realisation that there is no end in sight as to how his/her aspirations could have a correspondent in reality. Kafka's "Before the Law" is the parable that expresses it best: "It is possible to enter"—"but not yet."

And, like in the parable, you may watch the gate all your life, try and bribe the gatekeeper (they're rarely present, or talkative), and grow old while realizing that dying vitality was the mantra of your fate. That is until it turns into death. Thus, vitality is being erased from the discussion altogether.

It is a horrendous predicament, but one to which Sal does not end up succumbing. However, it is hard to look at the unfolding events in a different light other than a case of fate's whims.

The opportunity for change happened to beckon on an aspiring writer whose wit was excited by long and winding roads and by the thrill of the chase where sensations are the prize that moulds within the taker's very touch, personality, and identity. Sal becomes encompassed in the road, the corner that unfolds before his eyes is almost pulsating with potential, substance, taste. Every vehicle he takes has no destination other than the American Dream. But not a dream in the classical sense, but a good old fashioned 'pinch me so that I know I ain't dreaming.'

What makes Sal's story one for the ages is the catalyst through which his horizon changed: Dean Moriarty. Dean is an oasis of potential, not unlike Sal, but the former is *the living embodiment* of Sal's dreamy, depressed miasma. Moriarty gets things done; he *makes things happen*. Through his charisma of letting existence flow of its own accord, along with the previous jail sentences, he is a believable prospect. He knows the streets. Now, it is time to know the road.

With such pedigree, it is a novelty that fate and human endeavour gelled so well together. Society's cup of tea at the time was for an individual to not stray from rigid social customs, and God forbid may he try and be different from others. Thus, the more intense the experience of winding paths, the better. The Road ended up being essential in defining its travellers' identities, and the identity of America at the time. Kerouac was duly named 'King of the Beats'.

But what we must keep in mind is that Sal is given the opportunity to hook up to Moriarty's next chapter in life, while having been envious of Dean's past, not as a sequence of events, necessarily, but envious on how those events had changed him. Terry, drugs, Denver, booze are only various shards of existence scattered across America and waiting for Sal to taste. Moriarty, however, is the shining object of desire.

History has it that the road does not always glisten and mirror the very foot that steps on it.

In McCarthy's example, the siege mentality of survival in a decadent and apocalyptic environment serves justice to that very

tension of the road failing to mirror imagination, for freedom relies on survival, your next meal, a dry shelter and a fractured sense of spirituality in regard to a constant ash-ridden spectrum that is more than never-ending, it is definite.

One is to wonder as to the drive for survival between father and son in this book. A permanent loss of survival identity seems to be conjured by their very state and the peculiar sense of motivation forms and shines surprisingly brightly given the opaque sense of ‘clarity’ among the well-defined feelings of the road.

The road opens up not the idea of a horizon but the exploitation of that very tension that colours everything in opaque freckles of light. It provides not a destination, just a constant point of reference in their movement. ‘A’ to ‘B’ are solid points on which to build not a spectrum but a story of crawling. ‘B’ looks just as dark as ‘A’. However, ‘B’ is *constantly* far away.

This is a remarkable twist in perception. We can hardly speak of the road being a path now!

This nuance of absurdity conveys a trajectory, too. However, the only flavour that is to be felt is nihilism perpetuated by the decadence that surrounds the existence of the characters. They are forced to march on as their identities start to crumble, dead bodies decorate the scenery, as the father becomes the symbol of hope for a son who is himself a catalyst of his father’s attempts at shining. There is no case to be made for a single, definite object of desire.

The relentlessness of the father in his quest of exploiting the road and reaping putrid benefits regarding feeding and warmth

goes beyond the instinct of conservation. That is because the road warps around him, seemingly never ending and distorting the very idea of destination.

The continuous process of living on it represents the meaning, the silver lining in the cold, wetness and all the ash. Part of me still fantasizes seeing Kerouac in this ‘play.’

The figure of the child abides to the rules of innocence, but his character is constructed differently than one whose destiny is to be a fallen being. He is the figure of vulnerability that is depicted in opposition to reality. When encountering the dying man hit by lightning, he repeatedly asks as to how he could be helped, how could they have an impact, given their healthier state.

The cruel emancipation of existence only has refusal at its disposal, as there is nothing they can do to help him. Silent cries are all that the child can muster, and all that he must give.

Their past identities seem to have been made of thin air, literally, because when they visit the house where the father had grown up, a sense of unease falls upon them both. A contour of the idea that life was not always like this starts to emerge, and that thought is so distant and so alienating that there simply cannot be a verifiable past. It is a blend of dream-like wishes mixed with the acknowledgement that those times are gone together with their self-assurance.

Another aspect of the father-son relationship is created, in my view, as symbolism to the very way humanity feels, thinks, and acts in uncharted territory that it does not condone, nor does it understand fully or at all.

For when they escape the forest, the child is clearly unable to walk and, despite doing his best, he finds himself averaging one mile an hour, thus nearly sealing their predicament as ‘dead men walking’.

The dialogue that results from this scene is entirely memorable, for clear doubts in regard to their survival start forming in the child’s head and his stubborn reply ‘I don’t know’- when asked about general knowledge in regard to survival without food, is very telling, for father and son operate as one body and one mind thrown into this world. Through difficulties, we see a mural of quiet desperation coming to the surface, the distorted desire of emotionally mirroring what is fractured and fractured and then fractured again until identity is lost. Mirroring each other with each syncopated step is their only hope.

The desire to act is strong, but it is followed closely by the voice in the back of one’s head, doubting the very peace of mind and relief that a surviving organism would have. To lines such as ‘We’re not going to die,’ the child answers with the standard form of validation in the English language ‘Okay’. When pressed whether he really believed he was not going to die, the answer came swiftly ‘I don’t know.’

This mental blockage in one’s psyche and the construct of collapsing materialism do more than inspire anxiety—they throttle it. A sense of permanent rupture starts to grow and gets solidified with every chapter, and, of course, with every corner of the winding road.

A memorable scene is the one in which they find themselves on the beach, in a situation where a flare gun becomes a possibility of signalling, only then to realise there was no one to signal to...

The child finds himself playing in the sand, rhetorically asking himself if he should leave a letter, but will it be to the good guys or the bad ones?

The contrived atmosphere isn't even existential, for who can call 'existence' the fundamental subjectivity of one's consequences that have no regard for intention?

At the end of such a read, one might wonder whether that the very experience he has been put through serves justice to the kid's own dilemma: whether the symbol of hope must die for you in order for the gratification of its currently defunct life to fulfill the unknown path you must now call your existence.

And yet the vastness of the road enlarges inner horizons, as one character poisonously falls divided, others muster the incapacity for finality in so much as to soldier on without a war, without a purpose, just stars, a father-son bond and exhausted blood cells.

Kerouac needs America to unfold before his very eyes to see the horizons, McCarthy transcends the horizon from within.

But transcendence is as much a matter of chance as it is of mastery. 'The World Is Yours' is the code that scans the American Flag in the cinematic experience titled "Scarface." Such a condensed visual affair makes one lust after...after what? Montana ended up killed by the very ascent to which he'd become

alienated. There are few films that better convey the notion of the futility of the chase.

Even when done right, the death of his sister, the way he murders Manny out of jealousy, as well as the disappearance of Elvira define being ‘top dog’ on the most profitable stage America had to offer at the time, as a shattering experience. Montana ends up as alone as he was when he had first hit Miami. Only when he had first arrived it had been infinitely better, for the hypothetical projection of potential was just that: potential. Giving form is artificial death. A point he makes in his now famous speech at the restaurant: “I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.” And no wonder.

The vividness of the character, the intensity of its display, the ‘two dimensional’ aspect of his being that Al Pacino had sought to portray define the mantra of ‘Do or die.’ The trouble is that death occurs in always doing. One could argue that the viciousness and the extravaganza portrayed by the character are fundamental to his downfall. One would be profoundly right.

But a further level of depth is ensued when one freezes the picture of his defeat, shot dead in the basin, next to the sign ‘the world is yours.’ It almost looks like a Faustian pact, in which you give your soul away for a visa, you follow faithfully the prayer: ‘first you get the money, then you get the power, then you get the women,’ and all you end up with is a scene, next to Michelle Pfeiffer, asking yourself: ‘Is that it? Eating, drinking, and fucking?’

‘The eyes, Chico; they never lie.’ What a privilege to be able to watch the sky!

If one were to look at a less hardcore depiction of America, and a less hardcore gathering of characters, namely Thelma and Louise, one is to be charmed by the ‘let your hair down’ and ‘live fast die young’ mantra. I was as charmed as the fans of the picture. The final scene is grandiose, ‘You’ll never catch us alive’ type of attitude. The immortalised image makes for great posters, or highly energized motivational projections within one’s mind. I have even heard of birthday cakes displaying the two friends falling into oblivion, with the wind in their hair and lightness of touch in regard to their existence. All that is noble, but hypothetical. Freezing frames is an act against natural flow.

Thus, you cannot help but imagine the next scene, the one in which you look downwards and see a skeleton of metal that had ravaged through the bodies of what used to be women. No ideological defence, seminar, or speech could make such an image into birthday cake material. And I am as sorry as everyone that this is all we have left of Montana, of Thelma, of Louise.

The mourning I have is for them fulfilling a fundamental twist of dynamic in our perception. They indeed embody moments of greatness, they define currents and ideologies, but the fundamental twist in perception is given by the palpable feeling that they are acted, not actors, ‘on the great American stage’, by whims of existence, which serve as drama; incoherent nepotism that leaves even memorable characters in a state of bemusement; and also, an unnatural sensation, hard to pin point, maybe looming

failure, maybe futile exaltation, feeling like a memory within every character, as if to reflect that even in Hollywood or in Beat literature we can't truly be at ease with things.

We are left to conclude that America is not an icon; America is life.

'The star that shines twice as bright lives half as long'—that may be so. James Dean died at 25 in a car crash while on the road to a racetrack. The rebel without a cause was indeed worshipped for his performance, and he still is, and will be, a long time after his death. James Dean will never grow old; he will always shine, but he is not around to enjoy it, hate it or even experience it.

What I have found extraordinary in my time of experiencing America's taste (through the samples I've come across or chosen to the best of my ability) was how a fleeting glimpse of semi-consciousness, akin to what a quadriplegic feels when half-awake, becomes a miasma of dematerialisation. This condition alienates his mind from his body and turns his reality into the freedom of movement and walking, thus becoming a metaphor for conceptualizing the pulsating existential energy of living, as a muse who, by no measurable or predictable whims, elevates some, even for a moment, in a position of tasting freedom, while crushing others without remorse or explanation.

Just as a baby feels the serum of nutrients flow freely through its body, the feeling of being complete, cocooned, and oblivious to all that is external, I cherish the spectacle America performs with or without my or anyone's attention. I cherish its losses, victories, drama, intensity, and failures. I tell myself, as if I could

too, walk the walks of life of the grand continent, while half-asleep
from life and from consciousness.

‘The only way of seeing America is by watching the sky’

Chapter 4

Portrayal of therapy in six layers

(1)

What takes place is called tonic immobility. The diver sits at the bottom of the ocean waiting, not far from the shore. He opens his metal container, which is full of blood, guts, and fish residue. The blood rises and engulfs him like a curtain. Then, he waits.

It is either early morning, or late evening, otherwise he would not be here. Success is, naturally not a given, and the tension unequivocally remains. After a while, if fate indulges, out of the murkiness, a five-metre long missile shape will make its way towards him. It will pass through the curtain of blood and swim directly to the metal container. Swinging its head violently, from side to side, the shark will consume the bait.

It is known that within the murky depths, fantasizing spells danger. It is thrilling in its hypothetical grandeur. But with the use of blood and fish, the diver's intention is in courting reality, and, this time, reality ends up obliging.

The diver watches the feeding frenzy mesmerized. It is a tiger shark, female, not fully mature with her tiger pattern still being visible. Unofficially named 'the thug of the ocean,' this species is known for eating practically anything: from metal and rubber garbage to seals, fish, and other sharks.

Upon this sight, the diver tries to mutter something, but all that we can see and hear is an eruption of bubbles escaping his

mouth. He stands watching astounded as the animal viciously rips through the bait, hitting the walls of the container and moving with frightening ease. The diver succumbs to an exercise in patience and waits until the feeding is over.

After a short period of time, he notices that the shark has calmed down, so he approaches from behind and, with his glove in a chain-like coat, he touches its snout. Surprised the shark jolts, but the diver calmly caresses the snout, remarkably making the grand predator idle. The caressing continues until the shark is a sea of calmness.

The metallic glove excites shark. Such a receptor is normally used for hunting in low light, but now it calms the sea predator and facilitates her idleness. Suddenly, she strikes us as tame as a purring cat.

The diver gently lifts the shark, positioning her in parallel to the bottom of the ocean. Then, with his other hand, he reaches for the dorsal fin and pulls it towards him, all the while lowering the nose.

Contact with the sensitive snout resumes, and had there been other divers passing by, they would have been captivated by the whole surreal scene. They would be enchanted by tonic immobility and the slow, equilibrium-maintaining tide. The latter does not it take its marine essence of beauty to the shore but from this encounter in the depth of the ocean

However, no one is here to watch. The diver is exhilarated by the experience. He stares at the dead eyes he still secretly fears. He touches the skin that is smoother than he could have imagined.

The gills, now function subconsciously, and seeing them dancing makes him open his mouth, thus releasing playful bubbles that rise, traversing the entire length of the creature.

He follows their path past the dorsal fin, continuing upwards and across those beautiful tiger patterns. He then further floats upwards, getting lost in the fading curtain of blood. But he suddenly loses sight of them, as the shark's tail swings viciously. Since he stopped caressing the snout, the equilibrium had been broken, and he is now paralysed with fear and incapable of any reaction. The shark swims away unhindered, untouched, and as oblivious as the tides carrying it.

The diver will pull himself together and swim away, but for now, we are left here with him, feeling that we have experienced a *memorable encounter*. An encounter whose memory is capitalised on by *that* image—a spectacle of tranquillity that is still has a beating heart.

(2)

The dynamic now spirals inwards because of the violation of closeness that distance entailed. The dazzling sensation, as well as the image are broken with a swing of the shark's tail. Now 'is' becomes 'has been,' and the image is one to be contemplated, *remembered*.

But there is art in remembering, for there is art to looking behind.

I believe that once something has been taken away from you, especially in a sudden manner, the contours of what it used to be frame your attention. And the frame, characterized by the void it now encompasses, can never be the same as the actual contour that had existed in the defining molecule which had cemented the memory.

It can be said that there is an actual absence of touch and a lack of cohesion between the act and the memory of it. Looking behind may indulge in artistic nuances, as there is almost always a feeling in us when doing so.

Spatiality created through sudden disappearance is akin to trauma. Whatever might have once filled someone's sense of space, silence or thought, leaves behind an opening. An opening that is nothing short of a window. Its frame, as stated, can never be of a typical contour. However, it may have an identity. I believe that the frame of dazzling memories is just as dynamic as the view.

When we are asked to give examples of memorable images, we shelter our emotional prowess in history. The extraordinary thing is that we may well refer to paintings, photographs, or other representations that are dead accurate or just artistic interpretations. Yet, we possess a natural capacity of pinpointing the vastness of imagination within a frozen frame. The consciousness of taste on Eve's lips. The feeling of penetrating metal as the flesh was nailed to the cross. The expression on Mary's face when she was told she was to bear a child.

All these are examples of death veiled in eternal delirium. None of the above can be proven to have happened, and they have

finished if indeed they have happened. Still, to a crushing majority of people, even nonbelievers, they are not unfamiliar. These are cultural traumas.

The first two are traumas in a literal sense. This is due to obvious, universal nature. The third one represents the birth of a saviour whose existence and legacy infinitely contradicts the experiences and sufferings humanity passes through. Suffering is part of life, but so is the image of a saviour, even if that may be undefined, shapeless hope.

Such tokens of wounded, collective imagination are windows. They are a medium of running our imagination wild. Of course, there are those who wish to keep such windows closed from their imagination's prowess, but they are aware of their existence even in their act of ignorance.

The question arises: How is one supposed to watch from a window? And it does not end here. How should the posture, the look, the elbows all be? Or should there be a lack of contact with the windowpane? With what state of mind should one approach a window?

I think that most importantly, from the inevitable realms of things that are to be seen from a window, nothingness counting as well, there is a first glimpse, a molecule, that drives us to look. What is a molecule of value?

(3)

With a crisp splash, the diver reaches the surface. He takes out the oxygen tube from his mouth and releases the rubber band of his

diving goggles. It had been early morning. The sun has just started defining dawn.

In a minute, he will be called by his name, Denis, but for now, he watches the dawn with his spirit alert, as well as with the general confusion as to his whereabouts, entirely normal for a man who has just surfaced.

He realizes that his tagging stick, used to attach tracking devices to sharks, was just where he had left it. I remained on the right side of the oxygen tank fastened to his swimsuit. He had not given it even a moment's thought. But that hardly played on his mind now.

He was grateful for the dawn. The light was blitzing the claustrophobic notion that the sky and the ocean unite in a line that, from the diver's view, would have represented a closure to the idea of spatiality. The infinite, to be inspiring, needs acquiring not even a hint of margins.

A numbness disenchanted him. The ocean was relatively calm, but the constant, soft splatter of water annoyed him. His swimsuit felt tight and clammy. Then, the horrendous realization that he was alone in an area where he had splattered the bate to attract the shark hit home. And it hit hard. His *reaction* was paralysis. A man can really die at the end of a sentence. That was what it felt like, *hanging* at the ocean's surface, more than three quarters immersed in water where the very thing he caressed could be setting him up for fatality.

He suddenly found that thought pleasant. What prey can feel the moment when it is eyed, valued, and set up for viciousness?

Very few. But even so, the prey may look around, may look behind for assurance. A diver, at the surface, cannot do that.

To a certain extent, this is based on the utter hopelessness we feel in regard to deeper water and our limitations in adapting to it. But fundamentally, exposing oneself to the utter force of a full-blown shark attack is an impossibility. That dead stare, those ever-present battle scars, the viciousness lurking beneath the surface, etc. No wonder people compare seeing a shark's face with seeing the face of God.

The diver was revelling in being a potential object of desire. The echo of his name came, carried by water, swiftly, putting an end to his perverse enjoyment. "Denis!" the voice calling was alarmed.

The vessel, carrying the other divers (his peers and audience) was approaching him. He was pulled out of the water. His two fellow divers were vastly experienced men in their 70's, who, for the fact that he had not signalled his presence to the surface immediately with the flare gun, as well as for surfacing at random coordinates, had ensured he received what the old timers call 'a bollocking'. We, who know the situation a bit better, we'll just say that he had landed in deep water.

He was sent to the showers, where he learned that consciously feeling the salt being washed off you can be a saddening sensation. He then went out on the deck, watching his peers take their turns in diving into the depths.

““Denis, are you alright?”” asked Pietro, a young Italian, who had recently joined the diver’s organization in order to study the effects of various poisons of jellyfish.

Denis merely nodded.

“Did you see something down there? We didn’t see you surface or signal to anyone. Lucky you that the blood of the bait did not reach the surface. You would have scared us stiff with you not answering and all”

Denis thought for a moment.

“No, I did not see anything. I waited for a while, then surfaced early. I thought I was on the right coordinates.”

“Double check from now on. Our tutors were saying that if you stray, who knows what you may encounter. Think about it, you could’ve been swallowed whole. Like Jonah.”

Denis said nothing.

There was much agitation on the deck, and he decided he did not want to have anything to do with it anymore. As he went to his cabin, he got close to the edge of the vessel and looked down. It comes as a surprise to many people, even to veterans, that ocean surfaces do not reflect faces.

(4)

As the weeks went by, he became more and more of a recluse, and his family became more and more concerned. One night, while having kippers for dinner, he started absent-mindedly playing around with his food. He found a sad pleasure in collecting all the

little bones and trying to reconfigure the entire skeleton of the fish in his plate. With his fork, he brought together the fins, then the head, and he began restoring the tail which, through his utter carelessness, he had dismantled upon starting to eat.

His young son was intrigued by his father's unusual behaviour. As with the other divers, Denis had not told his family anything about the tiger shark encounter. Officially, his going underwater had been deemed a waste of bait by his superiors. It had been rubbed into him that he had never tagged a shark. Thus, there was no data to be processed on his side, leaving him shallow in terms of work. Sharks needed to be tagged and their progress and behaviour followed. Failure in doing so, could put your job at risk.

He dragged his fork across the gills of the cooked fish. His wife was gazing at him, worried. His son, playful as ever, had started laughing.

"Pietro" said Denis suddenly. "What a fucking fool! The only way I could've been swallowed was in bits."

And to their shock, he lifted the fish from his plate, held it limply in his hands, and ate both of its eyes.

Later that night, Denis found himself incapable of falling asleep. He stared at the ceiling, thinking of a quote he had heard in his student days; a quote that, back then, he had found curious, but now... now it sounded familiar. "The sleep of reason produces monsters."

This quote, by Goya, which now resounded in Denis' ears, is the very incarnation of absence being the essence of

expanding horizons. These two, namely ‘absence’ and ‘horizon expansion,’ are so closely linked due to absence affecting one’s emotional dowry.

The malicious wounds of trauma perpetuate a curtain onto rationality, castrating it by rendering its identity as simply ridiculous. Reason works closely with emotion, but if the latter is visceral to the point of mutilating one’s identity, then one’s demeanour, customs, and patterns of behaviour are at best empty shells. Their substance is morphed into bleeding.

Thus, the bait had not been the only curtain of blood that had engulfed Denis. He had experienced an extraordinary encounter, a fantastic thrill of pulsating crossed paths between animal and man. He had been inches away from being torn into shreds, but it had been him who had closed the distance. He could have sat back and watched the shark feed. Of course, he could not have been sure of his safety, provided the shark would have decided to attack him afterwards, but it had been him who had touched it wondrously, turning a monster into a majestic image.

He started laughing in the dark when his mind drifted to Herostratus, who burned down the second temple of Artemis to secure his place in history. *A feat which had been achieved*, Denis thought and then started laughing. His laughter turned ironic and then stopped altogether. He realized that he hadn’t remained in his own mind, worthy of his own history.

The moment he had experienced still seemed majestic. It’s just that he wasn’t that person anymore. He felt that something had died within him with the shark’s departure.

Another thought had started contouring in his mind. *You should approach the canvas as if to commit murder.*

He remembered the feeling of having the shark within his palm; the tiger patterns—those eyes. He fell asleep shivering.

(5)

It's autumn. Denis is in the living room, all alone. His wife and child are outside, playing. They are spending the last days of sunshine is their only bliss. He had heard his son ask his mother repeatedly about his father's illness. Her answer was swift, "No one knows."

And no wonder. No one knew of the encounter. Denis couldn't tell anyone. The world somehow didn't belong in there. He sometimes spoke to his family, but the relationship had become cool and strained, so he ended up sitting by himself, ashamed. He had lost his job and just couldn't get himself to go to work anymore. "He wasn't any good anyway," they'd say.

Everyone thought that he was going insane. The only one who expressed worry and had sought to speak to him had been Pietro. One afternoon, he came around his house to visit him and was shocked to find Denis in the living room surrounded by grand, old mirrors neatly stashed in identical wooden frames. There were eight of them, encircling him. The windows of his living room stood open all the time, even at night, despite the chilly temperature after dusk. There were fish bones and carcasses all over his bed; the stench was horrendous.

What shocked Pietro the most was that four of the mirrors had sharp cracks chiselled into acute forms, while the other four, each being opposite and reflecting a cracked one, were impeccable. With the mirrors so close to one another, the effect was of perpetual brokenness.

“I watch the cracks changing during the day, reflecting and refracting each other as light bathes this room,” Denis said. “And at night,” he continued smiling, “at night, only four of them are cracked. The biggest disappointment is that a molecule of value is transient, unattainable except for a moment, when an external source, in this case, the light that shines through the windows, glistens through the cracks, making them absolutely dance.”

“Denis, but why are you doing all this?” asked Pietro.

“Do you know of Ithaka?” Denis answered with a question.

“Of course, the island in the Ionic Sea.”

“No, that is not what I meant.” He picked up a book that had been lying on the floor. On the cover stood the name ‘C. P. Cavafy’ was written. With a voice as depressed as the sorry state of the room, Denis began reading:

“Keep Ithaka always in your mind./Arriving there is what you are destined for./But don’t hurry the journey at all./Better if it lasts for years, so you’re old by the time you reach the island,/wealthy with all you’ve gained on the way,/not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

“Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey/Without her you wouldn't have set out/She has nothing left to give you now.”

Pietro was amazed by the entire spectacle. Glossy-eyed and slurring, he tried to speak.

“Get out!” demanded Denis before this attempt had any chance of coming to fruition.

His shoulders fallen; the astounded Pietro left the house.

(6)

The sun has set. It's dark. The chill of the night has already engulfed the room. Denis sits down and looks at all the mirrors, one by one; and then he continues reading.

“And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you. /Wise as you'll have become, so full of experience, you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.”

“A molecule of value, calmness in transient thought,” Denis muttered to himself, and closed the book.

The next morning, after having rowed for an hour, he found himself again in the wideness of the ocean. With distinguished delicacy he put on his swimsuit and goggles and prepared his oxygen tank. A big, metal box stood at the end of the little boat. He lounged into the water, having left his chain-like glove in the boat.

What takes place is called *tonic immobility*. A diver sits at the bottom of the ocean not far from the shore. He opens the metal container he carries and unleashes blood, guts, and fish residue.

Chapter 5

Sisters of mercy: Death, disease, and mothers

A sharp pain thuds in my left elbow. Scintillating. Grotesque. It flattens my ulnar nerve and transfers all through my forearm, peaking in my ring finger and pinkie. An uncanny sort of pain that translates into prolonged numbness. The translation is first class too, for the intensity peaks and then benevolently folds into numbness. Its waves bring about false feelings of comfort but ultimately leaves me in a state of mild irritation. Numbness persists for a while, and then full functionality is restored.

Except that this time the numbness did not go away. A tendon had inflamed and was pressing upon my nerve, causing an acute and prolonged state of torpor in the pinkie and ring fingers. One might call it a common occurrence until he is told that the experience lasted a fortnight.

However common this occurrence may be, the time frame of its development, stagnation, and then recovery played an important role in underlining the feeling of strangeness of one's body. Consciousness of embodiment is peculiar in and of itself. We condone the definition of 'I' as a whole, a finite concept, an 'I' that has a certain ring to it. It is as if we were a finished puzzle that identifies itself with the image it represents, not with the individual pieces that define the image and allow for its emancipation. An incredible number of cells, nerves, vessels and even organs are not privy to our consciousness despite being a crucial part of the 'I'.

But ‘I’ really does represent consciousness because the image of the so-called puzzle that we are both signifies and is prone to development through aesthetic care—both figuratively and literally. A mixture of making do with features that were there from birth, as well as extensive care, provides a wider spectrum of significance, a developed visual concept and ideology, a remarkable harmony between lines and curves. Provided that ‘blessing’ was the rain on the day of your birth, we might even be able to talk about beauty.

This concept is one of the most diverse in nuance and presence that has ever been underlined as a de facto feature available for desiring. Innocence and sincere eyes are beautiful. Someone’s presence or absence is subject to beauty because of the ethereal manner their presence or absence is felt. The beauty of bodies is a business of dreams that puts even America to shade. From form, to colour, to lines and shapes, the aesthetics are never ending and apply to all body parts.

Yet, those were not my thoughts when I looked at my numb hand, which I kept stretched parallel to my body to alleviate the pressure on my nerve. Normal lines of thought pale in the face of malfunction.

However, given the estrangement my injury had created, the puzzle had been broken, and ‘I’ had lost naturalness of movement, confidence as ‘a whole,’ and perception in being. Most importantly, my consciousness had been altered. My eyes focused on the uncanny part of my body that spread before me with no resemblance of any aesthetic prowess. A numb hand has none of

the masculine tightness of tissue, directness in demeanour and boldness of touch. A woman's hand, numb, dangling like 'a broken wing' is an even more saddening prospect when defunct of the softness that defined it as feminine and deprived of the glow romantics say female flesh endorses when loved. Even Riccardo Reis (Saramago's) had deemed himself unqualified to prescribe a treatment for such a tragedy. This cluster of thoughts led me to envision the perception of my flesh, as well as the concept of beauty, not as an image of the present, a performative visual spectrum as such, but as a transgressiveness of perpetual decay that serves as predicament to the concept of 'living.'

From my elbow downwards, my forearm covered in moss, with whitish but fundamentally blue rot, moist to the point it can even be called juicy. My bone in shatters, failing to hold the structure of what once was called flesh, which falls onto the ground, like a heavy, wet rag. I watch it attentively. Blueness of many kinds, emanating a fetid miasma that denotes tones of flavour and inciting aftertastes. Do you remember Moses taking his hand out in front of the Lord? A preview of a grotesque dinner of larvae and worms, all indifferent, all blind to what you are, to what you have been, to what you have wanted to be.

Nubile figures of women, defined fibres of men, fat, slim, skin, bones, black, white, young, old, middle-aged, infant. All dirt. But it is an unconscious dirt. Awareness hurts. Probably that is why worms keep silent, keep blind, and just keep munching.

The lack of finesse is my spot of bother. Killing represents intimacy, sentimental erosion of imminent absence, the spiritual

backlash of it all being closeness, morbid fascination, delectation in beauty that was and the absence it has become.

“The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world,” Poe wrote. I agree. But killed like this? Brutally left to wane away, after blossoming, only to become themselves scavengers of memories of what they used to be, with fear of what they are to become. Earth will cover the thin layer of perfumed wood as they are enshrouded from sight.

Their last touch of intimacy.

The principles of injury and scintillating pain remain. The violence of such imagery creates numbness, inertia in the face of awareness, avoidance, and rejection. The severe alteration of consciousness regarding the ‘I’ is fascinating to the point of being breath taking. When applied to a loved being, ‘Normality,’ ‘perception,’ and ‘consciousness’ are omens of tragedy. I cannot determine to what extent it is so in the case of women, but when a woman dies, it is devastating for men.

Fundamentally, a woman’s death is different to our own. The poetical nature dictates that a soft sigh is to be heard when her spirit evades the chambers it has grown to literally embody. A touch of intimacy is always to be found, turning away, leaving her last sentence unfinished, as Morella (Poe), perpetuating the mystery through the critical moment when ‘is’ becomes ‘was,’ and she no longer feels tangible. No education is provided for us in dealing with such a spectacle, regardless of whether the poetical vision applies or not.

Our first touch is felt through our mother's hands. It has been stated that her hands and our perception of her features are our first taste of language. We learn that the female body provides warmth, nutrition, and intimacy in its loving, motherly caresses. We are fascinated by the way it is in tune with the feminine spirit and the visceral instinct of protection and well-being that they fiercely exert.

The female body reacts, shows emotion, exerts authority, and moves around us until we become pleasantly dependent. It is no stretch to say that we become 'addicted' to its presence. 'Calling out for mummy' is a noble act of existence. The 'I' is bipolar, and for once, it means calmness in transient thought. It is cohesion through one existential entity and one particle of existence born out of the former. This cohesion is the apple of our eye, and what I find fascinating is that, at first, it has no sense of futurity.

The cocoon is strong and guarantees security through lack of desire; no such knowledge or consciousness of the concept named 'desire' is present outside the realms of the mother. Just instinct. In a beginning that will soon feel shocking when the so called 'maturity' ensues, we are the centre of someone's world.

A sense of identity is fundamentally created by the mother's demeanour around us. This provides stability and a feeling of depth about placing ourselves, quite literally, in the realms of existence. We do not feel as if we were 'thrown at sea' with no instructions as to how to swim.

But then instability arrives, its genesis being ‘growth.’ This inevitable process opens the doors of consciousness, and if this were a painting, the pink would be placed at the edge of the palette, just slightly out of reach for the brush.

Independence out of instinct and independence out of ideological prayer are the mantra of a ‘young lad’ growing up. The performative act in the genre of masculinity is a pathetic endeavour despite its encouragement and biological naturalness. Self-assured, steady-eyed, independent and powerful, society’s desired man is one of those kitsch recipes resembling a frozen food shop for which the word ‘quality’ doesn’t quite make the dictionary. You end up with a rather plasticky taste and a frugal smell.

Given that such food is often called ‘fast,’ the result is a picture well brushed with masses of erratic hormones, fragile souls and fierce confusion. Enterprises beguiling the young men into a sense of duty are the first meeting of the grand business plan with the aim of converging masculinity as a fundamental pillar of society, preaching strictness and self-assurance for existence as ideals symbols. The philosophy of cause and effect has never blossomed more freely than in such utopian fragments. Yet, it all leads to incarceration and the rush to be the first to subscribe to a sick game of numbers.

The mediocrity of algebra is fascinating. It is a practical mediocrity if such thing ever existed. It is reassuring, comforting and the very symbol for cause and effect. Based on rational decisions, implemented as systems of thought processing, this

branch of mathematics has famously taught us that $2 + 2 = 4$. “How is that possible?” may I ask. Who has designated attributes to ‘2’ and who can guarantee that the second ‘2’ is its twin? Or if indeed it is? The very definition of twin marks for a separate entity, a separate particle in this case. That separate, means different, is a no brainer. That something is separate from another thing, it means that a process of metamorphosis has taken place even if the birthplace, or the mother, or the mind that spawned it is common.

The consequence of that is volatility in spectrum, ideology, and essence, for ‘identity’ represents the crumbling process of ‘identical.’ Subject to time, everything develops an identity, regardless of one’s will or the will of the creator of something. That leads to ideological erosion and mathematical heresy. There will surely be a time when this simple piece of calculation will be deemed irrelevant.

Mind you, it doesn’t bother me so much that $2 + 2 = 4$, but that $4 \div 2 = 2$ or that $4 - 2 = 2$. Selling the point of view that two particles of anything can be identical or morphed by adding, subtracting, dividing, etc. and still have the same self-value is absurd, unless we accept that it is an exercise of rational imagination. By that I mean some sort of Matrix that can work as consciousness, involving no subjectivity of feeling and perception.

Funnily enough, such an enterprise that provides bars for potential wings of flight outside the norm and resembles the rational imagination of algebra. This is what we commonly call

the army, the place where ‘boys become men.’ This gathering of prides itself in values such as courage, loyalty, discipline, honour, efficiency, and outstanding dedication that includes the idea of one’s sacrifice. Except for the last one, how many of these values are not desired on the market of masculinity?

This romantic vision of executing orders given by authority that may culminate in its participant’s death is a fiery and murderous type of dreaming. The dreamers must all be young, healthy, and sane. Most are rational, with a mind like clockwork. Some are there blindingly for the glory, some are there out of fear, some are even poets waiting for their destiny (Poe achieved the rank of sergeant major). The law speaks of draft fulfilment, loyalty to one’s country, which, if avoided, has severe consequences. Some call it treason.

My naivety be excused, but treason how? Loyalty to what? Honour regarding whom? A throw of the dice? One must live with the notion that it is pure chance that he/she is his/her mother’s son or daughter, let alone a tribute-payer to a country. By the way, what is a country? And what sort of emotional attachment am I expected to develop towards a land with water, trees, hills and valleys, flowers, roads, and people that are the same as everywhere else? We all must be from somewhere.

I remember seeing the WW2 monument in Riva Ligure, mentioning soldiers born there, all ‘fallen for their country’ aged younger than 30. I was on holiday on that blissful Mediterranean coastline, and I remember wanting to vomit upon reading such a stone with flowers destined for rotting, crowning it in a pathetic

attempt to condone ‘honour.’ Do their mothers find that honourable? It comes too late for the poor women, the thought that valuable is the relationship in as to what one represents to his/her mother, not what one ‘is’ to the world. ‘Is’ is the possibility of so many plurals! But that is external, that view is for the other people ‘looking in,’ but mostly failing miserably.

To say of the self that ‘is’ something in reality is to become abstract in an awkward manner and view things externally or form an ideological exteriority in as to what the self represents, which is a subjective thing to do, fascinatingly. All wishes and dreams are defined by the muse of existence, destiny, more commonly known. She alone chooses which will be glorious and which will be pathetic, mostly making us feel miserable for having desired dreams and having had wishes. Our sincerity in projection becomes our shame and our ashes.

The trouble is that ‘I’m’ provides as many options as ‘is.’ ‘I’m’ is transient, volatile, unpredictable and slightly out of tune with both consciousness and will. There is a particle that coexists with our profoundness, something that is hard to pinpoint or enunciate, but it deranges the path and power of will to a point at which we don’t quite feel in tune with ourselves anymore: “What is the gap between me and myself?” (Bernardo Soares)

This is the genesis of disease. One can’t help but notice the irony enshrouding the way we present ourselves: ‘I am.’ To this sentence, a name is attached, common as it is unique. A market of meat, blood, and spirit. It even has a reference card, commonly called an ID, and a number to identify it by. Identify

what? Reference to whom? For one does not know how to quantify all this since “today we are the living cadaver of yesterday's lost life” (Pessoa).

I see no reason as to why our ‘2’s, in that famous piece of calculation, would fail in presenting themselves as identical despite the truth of not being so. The same identity is artificially argued but still fashionable. They are portrayed externally as identical, but they are merely siblings. I am a lone child. Had I had siblings, I would only have called them ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in death.

Funny how that concept is not fundamentally different to our soldiers, puppets in a scheme of sadistic manifestations of egos, brothers and sisters of wounded bodies and even more wounded minds. A war can break out any time, we just need to make sure the resources are in check. What puts you in prison in times of peace, liberates countries and makes for war heroes. It is like playing Cain for the sake of saving Abel. And for that, they even give medals.

Furthermore, in some countries, being in the army is mandatory, thus meaning that such an experience is considered beneficial on a national level. The young lads are told what to do, from how to act and how to kill, to how to make their beds. Ironic diseases of the world spawned by rationality and evil! Only you can call ‘orders are not to be discussed’ poetry! Only, of course, when spoken by authority. Whatever that is. No childhood fairy tales are written on that one.

This piece of writing is, however, not a blind tribute to mothers. I am amazed and disgusted at the idea that some would willingly send their children to war. Those pathetic senses of glory, of achievement, of survival, of power, or of simple inertia and dependability on war frighten me. If I had written *Mutter Courage*, I would only have needed the title, a preface stating that the characters refused point blank to be part of the war and the absurdity of such a concept, and a single act made of four dots that confirm the suicides would have sufficed. No plot, no action, just a curtain that falls on nothing and on the obscene. But that is obviously not how we know Anna Fierling. I was expecting more common sense from her feminine spectrum, but maybe that is common. How is one to know?

Suicide seems so clean and noble in comparison to dying for ideologies that resemble ancient gods that demand sacrifice. One cannot help but mention that there were mothers in those times, too, who were obscenely and severely missing the point. But giving away your life seems to be the peak of pride. What's more astonishing is that if you happen to be part of a country's gathering prepared for war in the current year, it makes for your supposed destiny to be governed, in one particular case, by a president that beggars belief.

Envisioning being dependant on a man that on December the 25th was having Christmas dinner ('In God we trust' is after all written on the almighty dollar) on January the 1st and wishing the USA 'happy new year,' and on January the 3rd, he was blowing up an Iranian general and other casualties. He then 'tweet' casually

to ‘followers’ about it. I do not know how that happens. I can’t describe it. I do not possess a word or a phrase that is worthy of such description and is also morally correct to be spoken in church, if need be.

But that is just history that unfolds and is written as we speak. One useless chapter after another, all painted red (and orange, in that specific case). All destined to be forgotten despite what has become a rather proficient and cleverly nuanced theatre of violence, domination, and murder. Disease used to be treated in hospitals. Now it is paraded with flags, hymns, and salutes (or maybe it has always been like this?). For some, this is an opportunity for glory, immortality, and applause. “The world is a stage?” Maybe, but it creaks a little.

There is nothing worth dying for. So, one has to look within to his intricate desires, fascinations, and ideologies. Speaking of ideologies, if Judith Butler were to be believed, gender does not exist. It is nothing but a performative act. If so, how poetic is the death of a beautiful man?

“There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful.” “The beautiful” just as he was. Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is to be admired. In more ways than one. Dorian’s legacy will not be, in my opinion, the way he died. But what will be remembered is the way illness of existence became a matter of fine arts. I don’t believe such illness to be subject to some pathetic triviality like greed. The young aristocrat seemed perfect, and even if he wasn’t, his faults made him human, privy

to a humane love. He was a perfect actor to make for a perfect show, with nothing more to be desired. It isn't greed the evil eye, for it is Basil who puts too much of himself into the portrait. It is him who desires, craves in a ravishing manner. Dorian is a bystander in a play in which his image is centre stage. His innocence remains untouched.

What is needed for such innocence to be corrupted and made ill is a fundamental break in perception. It needs to be bold, incisive, and powerful enough to divide and alter Dorian's aura of calm and quiet serenity so that his physique and wealth had bestowed on him, as if he were chosen by the gods. Lord Henry, as in the scene from *The Devil's Advocate* when the devil himself was holding Mary-Anne's hair back, speaks the unmistakable: the voice of the inevitable. Not grand words, but vicious ones. It's not Lord Henry's wit that is crucial, but the muse of existence laughing at the limited gifts she had offered her little mortals. Knowing himself and aspiring to such heights in as to flirt with perfection, the thought of death of aesthetics, or of beauty waving away is concerning for Dorian, but not fatal. No, delicacy in execution is needed, thus a slow death of beauty is required. The muse obliges.

In Poe's work, women are buried alive, their teeth are taken out, cats lose eyes, and men are subject to the eternal regret of 'nevermore.' Vicious, sudden, permanent deaths permeate everything. In Dorian's case, such brutality would not have done the trick. It would only have served his legacy. A 20-year-old aristocrat killed viciously would have been such a tragedy! The

key for success in such death is the melancholy humans have for unfulfilled potential. It is a humane love, for a fellow that did not have time to inspire envy.

Existence here endorses in finer tastes, making the peak of Dorian Gray, his slowly burning shrine. It excites him, macabre flavours of playing around with sin, winning through pleasure, but dying through aesthetic death. I say that finding it funny, in an almost sad manner, how pleasure and effervescence are normally linked with vitality, but here, death is so permanent, defiant, and masterful that it uses the very vitality that he seeks to humiliate him. Dorian being conscious of it in acute detail makes for the excitement to bubble into paranoia, then madness. *Disease preparing Death's veil.*

The fracture of his conscience being external through the existence of the painting is crucial in my view. It suggests that it can be locked away. It is still on the back of Dorian's mind, and it irritates him like an itch you cannot reach, an ever-occurring dissatisfaction, a pain in the elbow that feels as if it would go away but never really does.

The mechanisms of perception, assimilation and processing of the portrait's dynamics get disturbed strategically and constantly with a severe lack of drama in the early stages. However, through him murdering Basil, Dorian howls for a break in rhythm. Erraticism and violence bring comfort. He wishes to turn the tables on the origin of torture: Pain is exerted in cycles.

Through Basil's death, the originator of the dynamic is obliterated, but a very interesting phenomenon takes place. Art

represents the way a creator emancipates an unknown cluster of emotional substances that manage to translate the contours of their being in artistic frames. Cohesion in execution is blood rush, the artistic idea may have developed, stagnated, grown, or relapsed in the artist's mind. It is the very idea who chooses when to present itself, and the psyche is just its shelter. Only then do senses respond in excitement; reality is transcended; and the fever of expression leads to beauty, to the peak, to Dorian's portrait. This is the only moment when art and artist coincide. Then fractures ensue. Through quantification and conceptualizations, an inner idea becomes public domain of perception. The artist is exempt from the ride. How much worry and apprehension are felt for an idea! For its fragility! Its vulnerable nature that is subject to such easy death! But once expressed, a brilliant idea remains eternal. The artist is the one vulnerable now. This is the key to Dorian's torture and to Basil's death.

This is what algebra could never have worked out: The creation of an idea and the fruit of its expression are not one and the same. Basil's subject is the performative act of the portrait, an artistic allegiance between paint and flesh commanded by the perverse muse whispering worries of decay in the background. Thus, Dorian turns to the fruit itself. No snakes this time, the story remains the same, one of fall.

I wonder what he must have felt when he stabbed the portrait. Speculations may overflow in infinite ways but, as in "The Pit and The Pendulum," I believe Dorian heard the beating of his own hideous heart. This is the death of a beautiful man.

However, self-induced death cannot even be hoped for as a means of transcendence in the modern day. Werther's was a sincere form of suicide, Kurt Cobain's (if true) was dirty. Symbolically, Hemingway's was the most tragic form of annihilation for masculinity's senses, whereas von Kleist's- the most noble. But all these have in common the brilliance of authenticity for the masculine identity, the mirage of freedom sincerely expressed through obliteration. I can't help but feel nostalgia, for no nobility is to be found in suffering nowadays.

These comparisons may sound peculiar, but they are not. This is the era of art's commercial nihilism. From T-shirts with Einstein wearing ripped jeans, to the Pope launching an app for catching Pokémon. Basically, anything goes now, and the more ridiculous, the merrier. T-shirts with Jesus on the cross? It's probably been done already. There is no substance but excess of kitsch and vulgarity just as it is an excess of violence in times of war. There is no just measure through which to quantify a gesture anymore. Total freedom gives way to mediocrity and opulence. In the days when it was shocking, suicide almost gave way to a perverse sense of pleasure, sexual almost, physical to the point of ecstasy, of being in the wrong. It felt exotic and blindingly pushing the boundaries is the mantra of the game.

As such, during the 2010s, Aphrodite has become Greek's version of a degenerate Snow White poisoned with plastic beauty and grotesque colours. There is no fairy tale, just dirt. Innocence, imagination, and depth of feeling are to be pushed aside in favour of opulence and superficial extremity. In our times, no Poe can be

seen sleeping next to a tomb by the sea. In Dorian's story, sin wrote itself upon a man's face. Death, for Poe, is painted upon the face of every woman.

When Poe looks into the souls of women, he finds that they are dying. The eternal pity that we will have for Poe is not that he looks for something he never had, but that all his life he looked for something he was never meant to have. The choices he makes regarding women are not conscious, maybe not even unconscious. It is just existence showing him how his desire for salvation and his lovers all suffer the same death that eventually consumes him too. For having been motherless and profoundly wounded by existence, he can only show love to his chains of slavery by laying down next to the sepulchre. The gods might indeed have been jealous, so he was stripped and orphaned again. He is shown time and time again that value means vulnerability, and vulnerability through women leads to death, for they die so easily. As such, the man becomes sinister and insane.

By having those lapses of madness that are perversely lucid, Poe shows the human psyche ticking like clockwork except that for every 'tick' there is one fundamental 'tock' that is out of sync with everything. This is akin to proving that through madness, the protagonist becomes lucid in his execution and thought, which means that he is not *truly* mad after all. The delight of contradiction arrives as an aftertaste to a distraught sense of hurt sensitivity. One can envision the last brick from the cask of Amontillado being put with delicate and exquisite care.

I can almost deduce that he covers up humans only to create isolation in regard to the exterior, to the plurality of the 'is.' How vulnerable Fortunato 'is' and with what trembling voice one can almost hear him say: "'I am!' 'I am!' Where? 'Here!'" The latter utterance represents a space with coordinates, a space that correlates to a spectrum. It is a physical space. But Poe conceptualized it, Fortunato is not 'here,' but rather he is 'in there.' By covering him from perception, he creates the macabre through 'the alone.' Exactly as Poe had been, ever since born: 'all I loved, I loved alone.' Exactly as he will die, wearing someone else's clothes. 'I wanna know what's inside' is the conclusion of a notable modern gothic anthem (Sweet Dreams). So do I. I want to know what is inside the wounded soul of Poe more than I would ever want to peek through the wall of his boastful victim.

Some of them indeed "want to abuse you." But slowly, much like the muse killed Dorian. Obliteration is the seed that blossoms in your mind veiled as transcendence. Murder is the canvas, and the blood almost tastes like wine (especially in the case of Fortunato).

Sensitivity leads to vengeance, but the perception of where or how is distorted, so much so that obliterating the evil brings birth to evil itself. There was no reason as to why the old man should have been killed in "The Pit and The Pendulum," but it's one of those things, whether the eagle eye, or Meursault's irritation at the hotness of the sun upon his forehead. Transcendence is sought through lashing out violently at the terror one feels.

Terror is shown to the living and kills cruelly. Cruelty is then shown by the wounded when the little clock hits. Every now and then, there is a 'tock.' The fascination is again existential, this time through irony. It kills in the strangest of fashions in the most common of moments. No wonder no recollection of Berenice's teeth was ever available to the reader. It is the instance of the demon. It is madness striking when ache in sensitivity throttles rationality and memory ceases to have anything to do with it. This is the moment when blood is more sincere than poetry. This is Romanticism!

The masculine instance comes enshrining a woman, I was about to say, 'of their choosing,' but we all know it is not like that. Bereft of any sense or logic, how the sexes choose each other is baffling. You only must look as far as poor Beethoven who was infatuated with his piano pupils. Writing masterpieces such as 'Moonlight Sonata' for 20-year-olds that were 'spoken for' and who rejected him. There is something poetic in being rejected by women, one gets infatuated with the very processional inferno that this brings.

Dismissed by the muse on pathetic grounds, anger, passion, and rejection all fuse into extremes. Possession is a man's nature, so conquests are the muses of his abyss. Prostitutes are the apple of a reject's eye, but not due to the act. If it were so, the act would have been rigidly mechanical, commercial, and void of personality. It is the momentary possession of the entire being that is sought, ironically, in the most public of fashions. However, normal people will never know the affections of prostitutes. In

part, they are affectionate when they sense sensitivity and longing as justification of the act. Such motivations transcend the fallen angel's condition. And there is an exquisite pleasure in the male psyche when the femme fatale is found into the slums, as Dorian had found Sybil.

The devil must have been fascinated himself with the sense of the exotic, born out of genius, caressed by absurdity in existence and toppled with ambition. All of these fell upon Adrian Leverkühn when he let himself be kissed by beauty in full awareness of its disease. If only men could be visited by Carmilla (Le Fanu)! Dying erotically and slowly with numerous nightly visits by a miasma, she becomes more than a woman, something that is obtained through a vampiric sensation of beauty. That is what we seek, not a body. We get bored too easily with those. Death by Carmilla is our most intricate desire.

What escapes from the usual perception is that there is no sweet spot or catharsis for the concrete action of possession. That is why we want her to seek us. To come in full vulnerability, youth, and innocence. To be languid and weak, to depend upon us, to feel protected by us only to then feed and leave us waver. This way desire is not fatal or full of consequences, disappointments, blurred common vision, bitterness, blemishes, fractures, and separation. Such qualities remain in the realm of the mundane.

I feel a tinge of sadness, then sorrow, then a will to see nothing whenever a nubile figure arises before my eyes. It is pitiful to perceive and acknowledge the dedication undertaken to

ensure lust in aesthetics only for the figures to be then proven as disposable by relationships, suffering, and finally, time itself. The death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical thing in the world, but only if she has not had the time to wane and waver, so that everyone is sorry that she had died so young, ‘What could have been?’ is the mystical ticket to immortality as muse.

Performance in perception is the struggle that shows how vulnerable and weak we are in the face of our tragedy: our birth. However spiritual it may be to lose yourself in the crepuscular part of society and enjoy what I believe to be a grandeur of the slums, as a recluse, vagabond, rebel or what have you, it is always with a bitterness that I conclude that all this is a necessity more than it is a choice. We are fatally ill, pretending to not be waiting our deaths, clinging to unworthy ideals like Uncle Vanya, only for the penny, or the ruble, in that case, to drop, causing metallic clangs resembling the machines of human mincemeat in Pink Floyd’s ‘Another Brick in The Wall’:

I don’t need no arms around me/I don’t need no drugs to
call me/I have seen the writing on the wall/ Don’t think I
need anything at all.

Disease is the representation of ailing fractures, a brokenness of senses, as well as perceptive capabilities. The constant death of the mother in the eyes of the young man is mortifying. I think it also excites the imaginary spectrums, for the spirit of the mother becomes a segregated muse. She is haunting and estranged through her closeness to death. She is desynchronized from the young man’s pursuit of vitality.

Something undoubtedly sets within the son as well, when consciously he can no longer perceive the maternal glory of female demeanour and execution of femininity. This is what the mother, ill through her very existence, becomes a muse of desperation for the aching eyes of the son, who looks on in quiet angst. From the outside, however, it is as if he were watching sunsets. But no sheep are to be drawn in this instance.

Who knows what brokenness of touch is felt by the mother at the moment of birth when she pushes out the foetus. But no one (although we have all been through this) knows the desperation, shall it be so, the foetus feels when thrust into the world. A mother takes great pride in bearing a child. For a lot of them, procreation is the ultimate dream. Funny how there is a celebration when the link is fractured. Are mothers alienated? I cannot tell. Are children alienated? I am. Is giving birth schizophrenia? Yes. And a sentence to death. Could it be the death of a beautiful child? I return to Dorian and to motherhood. But easily, in waves.

I ponder at the edge of thoughts where we don't really delve in one but are bystanders to the meeting point of many: scenes, frequencies, actions, and demeanours all endue. All in a grand epitome of surrealism that is not self-created, only self-lived. Borders, walls, and gardens are defined with the fruit of our objectification that ends up tasting bitter, anyhow.

In another century, I would have used the metaphor of Icarus, but it is so tired the poor fellow would now fall cleanly from the sky on a cloudy day. Nonetheless, near the sun

everything is tender and mellow. Dreams have a Kashmir-like quality like the comfort an immobilised person sometimes feels in his wheelchair. Being paralyzed buys him the ticket to empathy, attention, and care. After giving up the thought of being healthy, one can even be happy.

But the old man (for he is bound to be old), sitting in his wheelchair, watches himself degrade, beginning to “die a little between each murderous thought” (Cohen). First resentful, then submissive, then senile. In one of the nights, with death looming, merciless or merciful, it is hard to tell. He will call for his mother like children do. The ego, self-assurance, masculinity, and equilibrium given by consciousness will all evaporate, but he will not be told that by those around him. Rationality implies the idea of normal, and normal is a word only idiots use. And so, oblivion is cast upon the old eyelids, having called a mother that had probably been dead for 50 years might seem ridiculous, but Northern Italy is full of such cases, as probably is every other place.

Life leaks and leaks away, sometimes in waves and sometimes little by little. It is a sick spectacle that, if alive, you are bound to watch it happen to the one that has given birth to you. How is one supposed to watch? With detachment? With rationality? With acceptance and submissiveness? I watch while wishing to yell, to shriek, to kill, to rip.

If disease is death’s veil, death is the fingerprint that endorses the illusion of infinity given by a white page. Uniqueness in touch is of course part of the irony, but the most saddening

aspect is that we believe that we leave that mark ourselves (On our lives? On the world? On someone else?). The slow decay begins. The realization of impotence in the face of our imprisonment is infected to the point of being fatal. Our portraits decay and degrade as time passes, just as bad wine, going against the flow of the cliché, thus tasting fetid. Investment in memories that even when created, they flow like water around a canoe, giving it buoyancy but never the impression that it touches you with wetness while standing in that very canoe, watching the spectacle of the world.

It is humiliating to have come alive into this world as a random accident, even more humiliating is to keep pushing in the absurdity after having realized all this. Bowie's "Lazarus" gives a chilling insight into the maddening aspect of death that springs you to life, as soon as it lifts a single finger. I have heard of planned dances in the face of death. That, in and of itself, is a sign of vitality. "With a spring in her step" is the expression that comes to mind. But I feel it is unnatural to die in spring—inappropriate, even.

Morrison's lyric is outstanding, too. It must be amazing having the effervescence of your love, becoming like a "funeral pyre." But I am not the type. I find it absurd to "try and set the night on fire" when all the burning material has long been reduced to ashes. It is pathetic, though both Morrison and Bowie's stances are valuable in my eyes. No, having also heard Cohen's "The Goal" and swallowed up the bitter conclusion that a lifetime of

spiritual search does not bring anyone to follow or anything to teach, I finally touch upon Dorian and motherhood.

Such a calm serenity is given by the thought of dying together with her. Sedatives, torpor, and Tchaikovsky in the background, yes, Tchaikovsky's "Hymn of The Cherubim," the perfect music to die next to her breast, as I was born. "As he died," they would say. If both Basil and Dorian would have agreed to die together, what would have happened to the portrait?

Sensitivity in vulgarity, obliteration of the 'I' from its roots onwards. If in birth two entities defined the 'I,' so they can in death. Otherwise, bipolarity will inhabit its designated meaning. But no one will think committing suicide together with your mother is sensitive, or unselfish. Mind you, they will not even think it to be alienation.

Chapter 6

The lip of the glass

I do not know how to describe God. Not the word itself or the entity itself. I do not know how to describe the need, the thirst for a higher power that I have been entrusted with, in the nonchalant game of chance that has been my birth. I loathe my heritage of being a misguided mortal, a laugh for a celestial audience who watches, cries, applauds, objects, and belittles me. They do so as I sit in the basement, receiving visits from missionaries of either side of good and evil, all with certainties and beliefs, as well as a pride of being instruments of execution for ‘a greater good.’

This has been my first meeting with the idea of transcendence, or I should say that this has been the point when this ideological oasis somehow got tangled up with me, being in dire need of a currency that is measured in faith, and which it assumes that I have and must pay tribute to.

The simple fact that these beings—the instruments that act in the name of transcendence and do not possess the spirituality of being shy in sight or touch—do search for faith in human souls of no commercial illusions. It is a matter as laughable as trying to pinpoint the genesis of our desire in giving names to transcendence or believing that God is a universal name of meaning.

If the being that pursues it wants to do so with nobility, the search for transcendence should be innate and meticulous. The instance sought is to be of exclusive yet perceivable vision. A

dynamic such as perceivable vision has the blissful duality of being interwoven within that mysterious spark that ignites the search and defines the birth of the transient flow that consciousness is. And it also is life itself that, for a lack of a better existential destiny, we embody.

For me consciousness has always been a slow propagation of elements that flavour existence. It is a flow that has barely any movement. I perceive it as something murky, reptilian, and wet to the point of being fetid. The image of a Welsh swamp is not far off the very feeling that attracts me morbidly to stagnation. For me, transcendence from such a state of the soul can never be anything else other than a violent pulse.

The subtlety is that my deepest desire is for the transcending violence to be ignited by the very particles that define the Welsh weather. This remains figurative, of course, but since we are very much aware of the deepness of touch that the weather has upon our moods, I am convinced my intentions are not far-fetched. The very nature of transcendence (that of being innate and indefinable) has crept into our culture through what we would all call clichés with all the things we entitle as ‘normal,’ ‘extensively familiar,’ or ‘weather-like.’ Nevertheless, to such things we give very little thought as to how they have become worthy of such titles or if the status-quo of a cliché could ever be the coordinate link to the pulsating conception of having an incisive but fugitive view of the infinite.

Think of the camera focusing on the eye, for example. It is ever reoccurring, in all matter of instances in the desperate

attempt to catch a ray of God, monkey business, or fractures of that colossal explosion that has defined the term for a 'loud, sharp noise' known otherwise as the Big Bang. It has been done countless times, and I am sure the streak is bound to continue. However, few point out that it is the personalization of the supposed ray of God or of a creative power or creational accident. The latter is sought to be identified, cursed, blessed, or even crucified. We do not know. Individuality gives the spice.

Take the trick with the water drop. Then turn the water into ink. Catching the moment when the tiny body of coloured liquid splashes the surface of an aquarium provides excitement and fascination. It stimulates the imaginative miasma as to the implementation of coloured contours within the waterfront of that blueness deeper water always has, a blueness which you only get in depth.

Or, better said, what used to be depth for at least some of the characteristics of that mass of water have translated to the surface, the very surface upon which you have left a mark, thus making depth feel irrelevant. Your attention is now focused on the part upon which you have had a mark to leave. You would feel tempted, normally, to call that personalization. But by observing the breakage of the drop, you would be very brave to conclude that you are the author and the conjurer of such a visual performance.

You may splash the water with another drop, then do the process all over again. But this is the point. There is no 'all over again.' There also is no 'you' as far as the state of authorship is

concerned. Jackson Pollock has never made any paintings. If you were to paint the mark of a dot, time would make it a line.

When such bewildering realizations occur, a frantic and sporadic approach to identifying one's origins is sought and acted. Time takes centre stage in the search, but the skill of exploiting its use as a means of drifting through existence calmly.

There is enough momentum to change the scenery imperceptibly, and this is a skill that comes later when the search is at an end on a conscious level. The searcher lays down in that latent voluptuousness that the premature defeat of existence inevitably offers you and which cements the belief that there is no point in carrying on. The door is thus closed on that stupid question of 'why?'

In such a nourishing defeat, I write these lines and still retain a sedated desire. It is the kind which we have grown accustomed to call 'curiosity.' The scenery is latently moving around. The dynamic of spectacles within ferment away, intoxicating these thoughts. It dares to outlive consciousness and brings it into submission. Surrendering is after all a craft to be respected. But 'surrenderers,' possess a peculiar fascination with the being they perceive as the dominating figure in their circumstantial existence.

So do I. I confess that when longing becomes an infinite cage of passive desire and feels just as maddening as the horizon, the conscious realization that it is not the silver lining of the infinite that I am seeing takes place.

It is the heaviest drop of a penny that man and woman must make themselves subject to. Everything is just a sensorial border of the finite enclave we call the world through our perception.

It too is nothing but a cage. Only once you realize this, you start appreciating the quality and comfort of traditional cages, the ones with bars. This is because of the simple fact that in that instance, you have something to rattle, squeeze, and dream of breaking. It is one of our sick obsessions to have something palpable and rough stopping us. We prefer steel, iron, or concrete.

By managing to bend, break, or shatter them, we leave an indisputable mark of our strength. Through this process, an identity to our freedom is formed. That identity is us having done the deed and attained freedom, not the whims of some god or divine providence. I feel tempted in calling it 'The Goliath Complex,' but David knew God was with him, thus the magic of the scene, as history remembers it, is a little out of touch with culture. Realizing that Goliath was the small one, in that battle, rather makes the atmosphere fall flat.

Such lines of thought will leave a mark on a subconscious level. Every time you watch a sunset, you will feel the luminous reminder of the borders of the indefinite. That is, the horizon is glowing and beaming in pretty, distant light, while the closest you will be able to feel towards the indefinite bars.

It is through the flavouring that the light manages onto your soul. As you look at it as through the bars of a cage, you

realize that that truth is found in the sayings of those who believe that sunsets are intellectual phenomena.

The effect of the experience is not entirely detrimental. Sadness is an extraordinary catalyst for dreaming, something that enriches the experience of sleep. The exhaustion of the psyche comes from its surrender to the depth of the emotion, if not the intensity.

Sadness languidly burbles away at low frequencies. This is partly due to the construction of our being, which learns to adapt to remarkable levels of emotional torsion—and partly to the impracticality of showing emotion. Tears do not taste nice. They are salty. Not to you, mind you.

Even more than these niggling little problems stands out the desire of belonging, probably the oldest cliché. Since human contact is bound to end in fractures given that not even God maintains perceivable contact with all that He has blessed with consciousness, a desire of forming an enclave in which to perpetuate the self, arises.

Think of a water lily floating on the surface of the figurative spectrum we have discussed earlier, a swamp. Such a scene is not beautiful, but it is peculiar. It has an air of disobedience to the scenery, of a fracture in rhythm, even if the rhythm means barely existing propagation.

Fracture creates distortion, the tension between being and belonging consciously to a specific and autonomous element within the spectrum that you find yourself in. This eventually becomes the catalyst for transcendence.

In short, you must be a lily in a swamp among the frogs, dirt, and weeds. This water lily is not a place that is to be of your choosing but a state which will be volatile and fishy. But it remains yours with all its humane faults that make the psyche synchronize with the soul in one of those rare moments when pure pleasure springs from the chaos of interconnected feelings felt in isolation.

The enclave will present itself to you. You are not meant to search for it. Authenticity means that your soul's frequency of existence will find an isle in which that very frequency is perpetuated. Mind you, a certain mental distance has also got to be maintained from the idea of this enclave. Firstly, as a duty due to the humane status of being a prisoner of the whims.

Secondly, cages are not to be rattled when the key flirts with the image of entering the lock, which is what you are craving to happen to your tortured soul. A solemnity is asked of the prisoner, in this instance. Otherwise, you will feel guilt in the face of the delicacy that the birth of transcendence will have in your mind.

Thirdly, a deep breath must be taken while refusing to be part of the opening of the lock—at least visually. I say that because it is utter humiliation to have your pupils dilate in the face of the power someone/something else that possesses you. You may have to walk through the door or get free. Your time might have come. Thus, you are again, in no position to choose whether you want to be free or not. Resisting liberation is to be desired yet failing to do so is not such a bad thing.

Think about it, the greatest tragedy for an admirer of paintings would be to suddenly be part of them. The ephemeral flick of the imagination that is stimulated by the visual scape is how we excite the pretty little conjuring spark which condones ephemeral projection.

Thus, a hidden reality is there to be seen in paintings yet not consciously perceived as projected. Being in a painting would spoil all that. Despite it being the worst ideological thing ever, if a supposed ability to enter paintings would undeniably be an interesting experience.

This is due to our having changed from ‘admirers’ to ‘participants.’ Although the inevitability of us being kicked out of the spectrum would most definitely arise, for we don’t belong in paintings.

The fantasy of being capable to physically grasp literature, then personalize it, change it, and create our own “Siege of Lisbon” stems from the same bulb. I mean, who would not want to read Kafka’s Trial with a K that has been condemned to freedom?

Of course, imagination will permit us to fantasize about such a scenario. That is precondition on our capability to take the substance of K and direct it in a projected space that is to be authentic. That would be so only if it is made of the same substance of the feeling and expression that Kafka had used for the creation of K and the book itself, The Trial.

Authentically achieving such a stance is what the intellect would perhaps adequately call “an impossibility.” But the fact that

K is created is not to be underestimated. The performative investment in K's identity is as important as in that of Kafka's. K has identity is the result the performance of perception that a character conveys to the reader.

But that is not all: This identity is instrumental in creation, as well as in convivence. Such a convivence of both Kafka and the reader (myself in this context) has taken place on opposite banks of ideological positioning.

It is constant, for Kafka is part of my cultural endeavours, and it also is an alliance whenever I start rereading his works. Thus, in *The Trial's* case, a trio, a lineage of ideological construction forms between Kafka, K and I, and we exchange our identities of existential pulsating particles. Now, please take a deep breath, and think of how many people have read *The Trial*. How many Kafkas there have been! How many K's! And how many readers!

This is what I wish to convey. We should step into freedom of clarity or in the possibility of embodiment of a specific painting or instance to aspire to exclusivity of character. But as with all who know that they are not fit for heaven, failing to step into freedom of clarity, fuels the hope that there will at least be great company in hell. If we only could stand outside of both extremities of destiny and live them inside out through our imagination.

K is a vastly more valuable entity as a character than if it had been a person. Taking K out of *The Trial* is more absurd than the absurdity of his life within *The Trial*. He can only have an

authentic identity if he is present within an enclave that is not subject to the passing of time. The enclave provides authentic existence.

Thus, we can for sure say ‘K is.’ ‘What is he?’ stays a stupid question. Stupid not because I am adamant in calling it so, but because determining the ‘where’ and the ‘why’ of things is obviously not something that has been given to us to experience and express. Nor has ‘to be or not to be’ been a choice. Besides, since we have had to step out of the cell of nothing and into the cell of life, we are to find our enclave, for this has been the trial given to us by our Kafka.

The purpose is not in chasing after ‘something.’ Every ‘something’ has a certain path bestowed upon it, and all paths lead to the abyss. The purpose is in defining the borders of a spiritual enclave in which the effervescence of the soul, grand or little, consumes itself exclusively within those borders. The rest will be miming and theatre. Only spiritual utero will prevent you from being a whore of existence. Death will be the end of your gestation, but what glory! Only then the trumpets will resound as nothing will have been born!

I wish I could say “God am I,” as Pessoa did in the chapter “Dreaming for Metaphysical Minds.” Yet fundamentally, my existential construction dictates to me that I have been created. And, anyhow, what a poor God I would have been, in the murky swamps! A slave to the weather and of the putrefaction of overlapping time! A friend to the tadpoles and a smoking baritone in the choir of frogs!

As such, the swamp is still present. But the water lily is starting to take shape. My enclave is convergent. It holds, me, my being and all that constitutes as material of perception, which can be observed, real or not.

My faith also although I am not adamant in having it. Rationality has nothing to do with my faith. It just does not apply to believing or to not believing. I just believe in God, nothing more.

Things get thoroughly interesting in analysis when I try and envision what this enclave is made of. As with all illusions, I envision this enclave not as something that I would desire rationally. I could not envision it as I do if I had to conceive it as adequate for myself.

As such, I perceive it as a hand. The fingers held close together to form the enclave that this hand is. It is rather peculiar in figuring out how to position yourself within all that. You cannot lie down in the centre of the palm. It is a visceral feeling for Christians of staying away from the centre because of the crucifixion. So, it must be the fingers. But which ones?

If only one could know how that woman touched Jesus in her leap of faith. The air of confidence around positioning oneself to touch another, and the mysterious mantra of how such a thing comes naturally.

You belong to the touches you make authentically as if flesh touching flesh belongs in contact to some form of genesis that is beyond convention. It is as though a language is born with both participants knowing how to speak it from the get-go.

Yet, there must have been hesitation in her gesture. There must have been conflict. She knew who she was ‘speaking with.’ No, better still, she believed it was He whom she was speaking with. I imagine the touch as having been brief, the crowd were worked up into a frenzy.

There was agitation or an effervescence, perhaps. Otherwise, a hesitant touch would have surely been felt, for it would have been against the expected rhythm. But how does one touch hesitantly?

The arm outstretched, same with the fingers. The pointy finger and a tiny brush with the middle finger, for it is only natural, it is the longest, it is thus a fuller touch, a brush with a certain delicacy that the pointy finger can never have on its own. Then the woman’s hand must have come back closely to her body, in shyness and a tremor that only fragile and abused people have when they express their physicality. And then Jesus turned. Do you remember that there is art in looking behind?

As such, I choose to sit in the shelter between the index and middle fingers at their meeting point. Due to such a point having the authenticity of my faith in it, a calmness in drifting through existence is exhibited to my senses. The pressure of performing is taken away, and the naturalness of being enthralled in the spectacle of the world takes place.

Furthermore, a tendency for an idealistic view of how one should live starts to unshackle from the unconscious and gets intermingled with these lines, while the torpor gathers a guttural

pace which defines the music of my day. I have wanted for some time to live like Denisovich smoked a cigarette.

With the pre expected taste of the first one being the sweetest, with the nonchalance of defying a system of misery and pain through a latent propagation of the self in an almost oblivious manner. It is impossible to say that the Gulag did not get to Denisovich, but it is equally impossible not to acknowledge that those places and times were instrumental in him finding happiness.

Isolation in a mental enclave from what one knows and has found adequate, routine-like, clichéd, or normal is the blessing that causes the transitivity of our being. It is like obsessively saying the same word in different accents. It is a playful game at first, then you are at a loss as to the identity of the word, let alone its meaning. Finding articulation in speech from that moment on, is a trait reserved only for a few.

To do that in any realm of existence is impressive, but the way Denisovich did it makes it beyond incredible, thus it seals my belief of him being of a peerless authenticity as a vagabond.

The spirit of Schukhov is like one of those unique exhibits behind a glass window in museums, something to gaze at in awe, but also something that gives you the impression that you would not know how to touch it, even if access were to be granted to you.

It has always been a fascination of mine, as well as a sincere hope of it being true in that exhilarating brilliance touches a threshold that. For a moment, it annihilates the rupture between humanity and God. And as I write that, I feel like taking the

thought further and conclude that the Holy Grail almost feels adequate to have been a cup in which blood had been collected. It is a gesture that humanity would and should do. That is, humanity must have a glass to collect essence, spirit, something, etc. Things like these are to be consumed to provide exhilaration in transcendence.

There must be the option of refusing paradise. But only when one has already deemed himself ‘worthy’ of being part of it, for eternity, as the promise would have it. This contradiction, namely, being able to accede to a permanent state of bliss, characterized as perfection, but refusing to do so, mirrors the fracture that has made living a contradiction.

It soothes us. It is a mirror that mirrors another, thus the image ends up being fractured both ways. This thought appeals to me to the point of it being the peak tension of possibility as to how poignantly a thought presents itself to my existence.

One other thing starts contouring, that mirroring the fracture of existence from himself to God was the exact thing that Caligula had been searching for when he had stated that he wanted to own the moon. I now understand why he was right in wanting to do so. As I think this, the hand suddenly opens beneath me. It is known that only sand falls elegantly in such a stance.

MENTAL ASYLUMS

OF VAGABONDS

“Through these memoirs of a vagabond, understood as an exercise of survival, Andrei wants to prove that the sounds of rambling are infinite. That he took the first step on the path of an unpredictable search. He brings this step, final for now, to the world, with the force of youth, knowing that no notorious vagrant can be fulfilled. And that the poetry of dysfunctionality is the only poetry he knows. This is Andrei’s first step as a poet of anomaly.”

Laura T. Ilea

