



MANTISSA

SPRING 2021

A PETITE LITERARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1



MALARKEY'S WAY; OR, LIFE & DEATH IN THE TIME OF COVID, CHAPTER 26

BY MARK AXELROD-SOKOLOV

This is the famous Hotel des Bains on the Lido where Malarkey found a room and a whole lot more. It was towards the end of January when the word began in tones of hushed preoccupation about a virus that started in Wuhan, China, and spread westward, making its way to Rome. Malarkey wasn't quite sure what to do, as he wasn't a wordmonger outside of fiction, but it didn't take long before the Venetian citizenry became increasingly aware of the disease (aka coronavirus). Words soon turned into rumors that began floating like gondolas on a summer day. On the afternoon the day after Malarkey checked in, he stopped by the Banca d'Italia at S. Marco, 4799A to withdraw cash with his ATM Card, to which he faced trouble using. While discussing the problem, he addressed the bank clerk with his fatal question about

the rumors, accompanied by the expression of a distrustful American if not a distrustful Irishman. The clerk, Seamus na Gopaleen (no relation to Myles), was a young Irishman clad in Harris tweed, reddish hair parted down the middle, narrow-set green eyes, and a kind of naive loyalty of character.

Seamus, replied, "No reason for concern, Dr. Malarkey. It's a measure without grave implications. These kinds of orders are issued from time to time to combat the ill effects of the heat and the sirocco..."

But looking up with his green eyes, he met Malarkey's clearly skeptical gaze, and strained with slight disdain he continued, though somewhat haltingly, "That's the official version which politicians are trying to maintain, but I will tell you there is something else going on."

Malarkey was in no mood for games.

"You're not an eejit. Stop fostarin and don' muck about. I'm Irish. What is it?" So, Seamus shared what he had heard. While Europe was fearing the specter might make

its entrance over land, it had appeared in several Mediterranean ports and arrived first in Rome, on 31 January. The virus now had a name...Covid-19. According to reports, a Chinese couple from Wuhan had arrived a week earlier in Milan before traveling first to Verona, then Parma and lastly to Rome on 29 January. The following day, they developed a mild, dry cough, but by evening the husband contracted a fever and both were taken to the Lazzaro Spallanzani National Institute for Infectious Diseases where they tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and were immediately hospitalized.

On 31 January, the Italian government suspended all flights to and from China and declared a six month state of emergency. Italian Prime Minister Conte said Italy was the first EU country to take this kind of precautionary measure. The government also introduced thermal scanners and temperature checks on international passengers arriving at Italian airports. A week later, 6 February, an Italian repatriated from Wuhan and tested positive for COVID-19, bringing the total number of cases in Italy to three.

Up until that time, no deaths were reported; though it was rumored, a German composer or a writer had died in Zürich under unusual circumstances after vacationing at Hotel des Bains in Venice for several days. All the while, the officials of Venice assured that the public situation had never been better and ordered the necessary, though minimal, measures to deal with the disease. But the virus had infected foodstuffs and no one exactly knew what the means of transmission were. For an unknown reason, some started blaming the canals, though there was no evidence to prove it. Then, it seemed as if the disease was becoming more contagious and virulent, with cases of recovery being a rarity.

Finally, Seamus came to the most important thing, “Dr. Malarkey, as a fellow Irishman, I would be remiss if I didn’t say you would be well advised,” he concluded, “to leave Venice no later than tomorrow. The quarantine cannot be far off. Weeks at most.”

“Jaysus. Thank you, Seamus,” Malarkey said and left the bank absorbed in a shroud of agitated disquiet. St. Mark’s Square lay in a kind of sunless sultriness, ad lib chatter echoed off the nearby buildings in rhythm to the clacking of fleeting footsteps, to the fluttering of pigeon wings, unaware of what might befall them sooner rather than later. Ignorant of their possible fate, the foreigners sat in the cafes, inside or outside the Caffè Florian, the Caffè Lavena, sipping cappuccinos, listening to a pianist play Mahler, feeding pigeons in front of St. Mark’s Basilica, and patiently standing in lines to enter, oblivious as to what may eventually infect or kill them if not within hours then within a fortnight. In a state of febrile excitement, knowing the truth of things, Malarkey paced up and down the flags of the square preoccupied with what Seamus had told him while weighing his options as to whether to leave La Serenissima or not. What might be the odds of contracting the disease? It sounded like no other virus. It was neither a cold nor a flu. Seemingly, it did not conduct itself in the manner of viruses of its sort, but he was not done in Venice. He had more to do, to write, to experience, perchance to find a woman to love; however, the thought of contracting a disease heretofore unheard of, which, apparently, was going unmitigated, unchecked, with no clear understanding of its transmission, weighed heavily upon him. Agitatedly, he returned to the Hotel des Bains where he inquired about the composer/writer who had stayed there not that long ago.

“Herr von Aschenbach,” the concierge replied. “He wasn’t feeling well and left unattended. You are staying in his room. Do you know him?”

“Feck.”

Malarkey shook his head, thanked the concierge and retreated to his room more than a bit preoccupied about the fact he was staying in the same room the now deceased von Aschenbach’s left. That night, Malarkey drank more cognac than he should have and had a terrible dream, a nightmare, but unlike any nightmare he could remember. It began fearfully accompanied by the woeful sounds

of people breathlessly breathing in agony, as if their lungs were filled with fluid, coughing debris from air sacs clogged with mucus, as they gasped for air in unremitting gulps while trying to speak in gargled, garbled sentences.

In the nightmare, Malarkey rushed to his window and peered out into the blackness of the Adriatic. Though moonlit, the beach could not be seen since hundreds, if not thousands of corpses, their bodies bloated from the din of death, lay scattered on the sanguine sands. No longer a sea, the lagoon was now an ocean of blood whose cascading waves washed upon the now unrecognizable beach of decaying bodies, bodies frothing at the mouth, gagging on the vestiges of liquescent linings leaching from their lungs while the red sea splashed upon that sanctuary of cadavers now awash from the Straits of Otranto and the Ionian Sea.

As Malarkey looked down on the beach, a masked —— stood above the carnage, turned to him and began to sing,

Do you still remember

December’s foggy freeze

When the ice that clings on to your beard

It was screaming agony

Hey and you snatch your rattling last breaths

With deep-sea diver sounds

And the flowers bloom like

Madness in the spring

Sun streaking cold, an old man wandering lonely

Taking time, the only way he knows

Leg hurting bad as he bends to pick a dog end

He goes down to a bog and warms his feet

Feeling alone, the army’s up the road

Salvation a la mode and a cup of tea

Aqualung my friend don’t you start away uneasy

You poor old sod, you see it’s only me

Aqualung my friend don’t you start away uneasy

You poor old sod, you see it’s only me.

But before the death masque could repeat the refrain, Malarkey awoke in a subdued panic. It was dawn. In haste, he reached for the phone, spilling what remained of the cognac on the night table before it pooled in interlocking circles on the parquet floor before he tore open the shutters to view an empty pristine beach, a beach bereft of bodies from the night before, an unencumbered beach, dotted with a handful of white and blue beach chairs, as the sun sparkled on the green grey

waters belying what Malarkey had dreamt the previous night. Once he gathered himself, he anxiously called the airlines to reschedule his flight home for the same day after which he haphazardly stuffed his belongings into suitcases with the haste of a mayfly and fled the hotel taking advantage of the nearest gondola at hand.

Who would not have had to fight a slight unease, a secret resentment and trepidation, a lingering sense of dread as Malarkey climbed into that gondola? All he could think of sitting in that strangely lacquered transport, unchanged from more fanciful times and which was so eerily black, a black normally reserved for coffins, were the viscous adventures awaiting those who remained in Venice with the inevitable lapping night. Truly, the gondola was reminiscent of death itself, the bier, the drab funeral and the final, wordless ride. And has Malarkey noticed the black-upholstered chair in which he sat, he could only think of the irony that the softest, most luxurious, most deeply relaxing seat in the whole world could also be the buffers of a coffin.

When Malarkey reached Venice, the gondolier offered his hand. Malarkey had not noticed him throughout the journey from the Lido and only then did he look at him. He was a man of unpleasing, even grotesque physiognomy, dressed in a blue sailor’s garb, girded with a fading yellow sash and a shapeless straw hat that had begun to fray at the edges. The form of his face, his blond and curly mustache below the stubby nose did not make him look Italian, more Polish. As Charon held out his hand to assist Malarkey from the gondola, he smiled, a senescent smile, exposing a blackened hole of missing teeth. With his gaze fixed on Malarkey and his reddish eyebrows wrinkled, he said to Malarkey with a kind of prescient smirk, “Buon viaggio di ritorno in patria,” and even though Citrus City was not Malarkey’s “patria,” the words were more than discomfiting.

What awaited Malarkey in Citrus City was not a gathering of starlings, nesting in the fronds of palms, nor a sanguine refuge for elegiac educators, but something much more insidious, more invidious, something more than his Venetian nightmare, but its manifestation.



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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge those who have helped make the publication of MANTISSA possible: President Daniele Struppa, Dean Jennifer Keene, Dr. Joanna Levin, and Dr. Eric Chimenti.

This Issue was created by Chapman University's Ideation Lab.

Look for Volume 7, Issue 1
in the Spring of 2022



THE PLAGUE AND THE WORD

(FRAGMENTS OF A WORK IN PROGRESS)

BY LUISA VALENZUELA

TRANSLATED BY PABLO BALER

Los Colores Patrios

National Colors

El ser humano es un apropiador por excelencia. Acabo de notar que la imagen del depredador SARS-Cov-2, artísticamente interpretada y aumentada millones de veces, varía de color según el país. No en todos lados es azul cielo, como suelen representarla por mis latitudes. Azul muy pálido, el color de la bandera argentina. Lo menciono y me corre un tenue escalofrío por la espalda, aunque debería de estar agradecida. El tema me remonta a mi muy lejana infancia, creo haberlo contado más de una vez pero estas cosas para exorcizarlas conviene repetir las hasta que se diluyan totalmente en el recuerdo. O para que se vuelvan mansas, inofensivas. Aunque en este episodio no hubo ofensa, sino una ofendida que fui yo, que a la sazón cursaba el sexto grado de primaria. Mi maestra de entonces, amable señorita cuyo nombre no recuerdo pero sí recuerdo su cálido carácter y su capacidad didáctica, hacia el final del año le pidió a mi señora madre que por favor me ayudara con lo que entonces se llamaban composiciones escolares. Su hija, le dijo la maestra a mi madre la escritora, no tiene el menor interés al respecto y no le presta atención; su hija tiene tan buenas notas en todas las demás materias, es una pena que baje su promedio por no saber redactar. Y mi santa madre, sin vacilar ni consultarme ni intentar develarme los arcanos de la escritura, redactó por mí la "composición" asignada para el Día de la Bandera...

Human beings are freebooters par excellence. I just realized that the image of the predator SARS-Cov-2, artistically rendered and magnified a million times, changes color depending on the country. It's not always sky-blue as it's usually represented around my latitudes. Pale-blue, as in the color of the Argentine flag. I mention this and a faint shiver runs through my spine. I should be grateful, though. This brings me back, way back, to my childhood. I may have told this more than once but these things, in order to exorcise them, you have to repeat them until

they dissolve, completely, in your memories. Or just so they become tamed, harmless. Although in this episode there was no offense, only an offended party: that would be me, who, at the time, was a sixth grader. It was towards the end of the year; my teacher, a lovely missis, whose name I can't recall, yet I vividly remember her warm demeanor and pedagogic talents, asked my Mother to please help me with what they used to call "school compositions". Your daughter, the teacher said to my Mother the writer, could not care less about this and pays no attention; your daughter has good grades in all the other subjects, it is a shame her grades suffer from the inability to write. And my Mother, Holy and Saint, without hesitation, consultation, or even touching upon the mysteries of writing, completed the "school composition" herself, assigned for Flag Day.



"Echado sobre la verde gramilla" empezaba el mamotreto materno. Frase de un cursi escalofriante cuya memoria temo me acompañe hasta la tumba. Lisa the Elder alegó en su defensa que ella suponía así escribían las nenas de once años. ¡No yo, válgame dios! El General Belgrano echado sobre etc etc contemplaba el firmamento, of all things, y así nació nuestra celeste y blanca insignia patria. Creo que ahí mismo, o muy poco después, decidí empuñar la pluma en serio y encargarme en persona de mis escritos escolares. Quizá fue así como nació una vocación que por momentos se convertiría en una maldición de tiempo completo. Al punto —pero aún sin darme cuenta, feliz en mi inocencia— que llegada a cuarto año del bachillerato ya estaba colaborando en el pasquín del colegio, a la sazón el Nacional Vicente López por el que había cambiado mi túnica azul marino, camisa blanca y corbata azul con rayas rojas por el clásico guardapolvo blanco, y había cambiado la monotonía de chicas

solas por el jolgorio de lo mixto. Y descubrí, pero no supe registrarlo a tiempo por lo cual hube de caer muchas veces en la trampa de lo premonitorio involuntario, el poder de predicción. El texto anticipatorio. No fue demasiado sagaz en aquel entonces. Me burlé por escrito de la destartada escalera que llevaba a las aulas del primer piso, la comparé con la escala de Jacob que nunca lograría llevar hasta el cielo a esos ángeles que éramos nosotros con nuestros blancos delantales (albos, diría la nena imaginaria de mi madre).

"Settled on the viridian pasture", that's how the clunky contraption started off. A sentence of such bloodcurdling corniness that I can't forget it and, I fear, I will take with me to the grave. Lisa the Elder alleged, in her defense, that she assumed all eleven-year-old girls wrote like that. Not me, God forbid! General Belgrano settled on the etc, etc... was beholding the firmament, of all things, and that's how our sky-blue and white homeland badge was born. I think right then and there, or very shortly thereafter, I decided to seriously grab the pen and take care of writing assignments on my own. Maybe that's how a calling came into being; a calling that, at times, would also become a full-time curse. To the point —still without realizing, happily naïve—that as a Junior in High School I was already writing for the school paper, the Nacional Vicente López. As a new student in this school, I exchanged the navy blue tunic, white shirt and blue-red striped tie for the typical white coat and also swapped the slumber of the all-girls for the revelry of the co-eds. And I discovered —although I could not register it at the time and thus often fell into the trap of the unintentional premonition—the power of prediction. The anticipatory text. It wasn't canny enough then. I made fun, in writing, of the ramshackle staircase that led to the classrooms on the first floor; I contrasted it with Jacob's ladder which never managed to lead us towards heaven; as if we were the angels, us, with our white coats (niveous, would say my mother's imaginary girl).

Pasaron tres días de la publicación del mínimo pasquín y la escalera se derrumbó. Sin cobrar víctimas, por suerte, pero me pareció entonces que todos me miraban raro por predecir que lo blanco no alcanzaría la cima. Pero no eran tan blancos que digamos, ni los delantales ni las almas...

Three days went by after the tiny school paper was published when the staircase gave way and collapsed. There were no victims, luckily, but then it felt as if everybody were looking at me funny just for predicting that the white will not reach the summit. Although, let's admit it, the coats were not really white. Neither were the souls...

Perder y Encontrar

To Lose and to Find

Lo bueno de tener que quedarse en casa es que las cosas que se pierden no pueden haber ido muy lejos. Magro consuelo (por dónde estará mi Ipad? No lo puedo llamar como al celular).

The good part of staying home is that when things go missing, they cannot get too far. Modest consolation (where is my Ipad? I can't call it as I do with my cellphone).

Dije bien, cosas. Objetos materiales. Porque dentro de la casa, en el confinamiento que algunos llaman prisión pero lejos está de serlo, sólo puede perderse la esperanza, la fe, y, si no nos cuidamos muy bien, hasta la salud. En general todo va unido, y el orden de los factores no altera el producto, pensemos lo que pensemos sobre la índole del tal producto. Pero si no los sacamos de su (nuestro) confinamiento, los objetos no se pierden a menos que tengan la dudosa capacidad de evaporación o



de disolución en el aire.

I said it right; things. Material objects. Because in the confinement of the house, that although far-fetched, some call prison, you can only lose your hope, your faith, and, if you don't pay attention, even your health. Generally speaking everything goes hand in hand, and the order of the factors does not alter the product, whatever it is we think about the nature of said product. But if we don't retrieve them from their (our) confinement, objects do not go missing unless they have the dubious ability of vaporizing or dissolving into thin air.

Y tras la pérdida mejor llamada dislocación o traspapelamiento, el andar buscando tiene sus recompensas y así cada tanto me reencuentro con un olvidado y hasta bello recuerdo de algún viaje lejano. Recuerdo material, memorabilia como imán para atraer recuerdos abstractos. Y así la cosa, metáfora de la escritura porque de esa forma también se nos van armando las historias. Las registraremos si no nos vence la pereza o la inmediata distracción, y quizá, con suerte, nos develarán algo. Algo perdido en el fondo de algún ignoto resquicio de la mente.

And after we lose something, better called misplacement or misfiling, going around looking for whatever it is, comes with its own rewards thus, every once in a while, I come again face to face with a forgotten and even beautiful memento of some distant trip. Material memory, memorabilia as a magnet to attract abstract memories. And that's how the story goes, metaphor of writing because that's also how stories are pieced together. If we don't get bowed down by indolence or quick distraction, we make a record of them and maybe, if we are lucky, they reveal something to us.

Un Sueño A Dream

Duermo bien estas noches, y mucho, pero mis sueños son inquietantes aunque no los recuerde al despertar. Sólo uno que otro, como el siguiente:

I've been sleeping well these nights, and a lot, but my dreams are disquieting, even though my memory of them often escapes me when I awake. Every once in a while I recall a dream as with the following one:

Estoy en la casa de mi infancia, remodelada o algo así. A la entrada nomás, el living. Pero ahí está la gran

cama de mi madre, revuelta, con ella acostada. Luce bien, no está enferma ni nada. Aparece un gran bulto casi a sus pies, a su izquierda. Me asusto, ¿es una persona! Y sí. Aflora un monje de hábito color chocolate y pelos largos que dice ser el prior de la Orden de los Borrachos, y con toda seriedad describe la orden. Empieza a caerme simpático. Suena el timbre. Voy a abrir la puerta de la casa materna, y ahí llega una joven conocida que viene de un largo viaje. Entiendo que yo la había invitado, debí de haber ido a buscarla a su llegada pero lo olvidé o me dormí. Una vergüenza. Me asomo a la calle y veo las cuatro esquinas de mi viejo barrio, pero el barrio parece muerto. Es la cuarentena, entiendo. Hago pasar a mi huésped y siento una culpa feroz, no tengo ni un bocado para convidarle.

I'm at the house of my childhood, remodeled maybe. As you come in, you see the living room, but right there is my mother's big bed, with tousled sheets, and she is laying there. She looks good, she's not sick or anything. At her feet, to the left: a big bundle. I get scared, It's a person! Yes. A long hair monk with a chocolate colored habit crops up. Claims to be the prior of the Order of the Drunks, and in all seriousness describes the Order. I start to like him. The doorbell rings. I'm going to open the door of the maternal house. A young woman I seem to know, arrives from a long journey. I realize that I had invited her, I should have picked her up when she arrived but I had forgotten or maybe overslept. What a shame. I look out onto the street and see the four corners of my old neighborhood, but the neighborhood seems dead. It's the quarantine, I reckon. I invite my guest in and experience a vicious guilt, I have not even a morsel to offer her.

De todos modos no pude haber preparado nada, no hay lugar en la cocina ni para apoyar el tostador o la pava de agua para un té. Con unos bancos largos trato de improvisar una mesa, no me sale, me indigno por los cambios que se hicieron en la casa. Estrecho y alargado es el espacio entre la cocina inútil y la cama materna con madre dentro que no colabora. Me corroe la vergüenza y la culpa. La recién llegada, digna, alta, sobria y elegante no parece inmutarse. Le digo que pensaba invitarla esa noche a un restaurante pero todo está cerrado. Es la cuarentena, entiendo.

In any case, I could not have prepared anything, there is no room in the

kitchen, not even for a toaster or the kettle to brew some tea. With some long benches I try to put together a makeshift table. I can't. The changes made to the house anger me. The space between the useless kitchen and the maternal bed with my uncooperating mother inside, is long and narrow. I'm consumed by shame and guilt. The recently arrived guest is dignified, tall, sober, elegant, and seems not to be moved by anything. I tell her I planned to invite her to a restaurant that evening but everything is closed. It's the lockdown, I reckon.

Si como dice Freud todas las figuras de un sueño representan a la soñadora, ¿qué parte de mí llega desde fuera para enfrentarme con mi desorden interno, con mi figura materna y con el disipado monje de la orden de los borrachos que también soy yo aunque no se me de por el trago?

If Freud is right and all figures in a dream represent the dreamer, which part of me comes from the outside just so I can face my inner turmoil, the figure of my mother and the self-indulgent monk of the Order of the Drunks who is also me, even though booze is not really my thing?

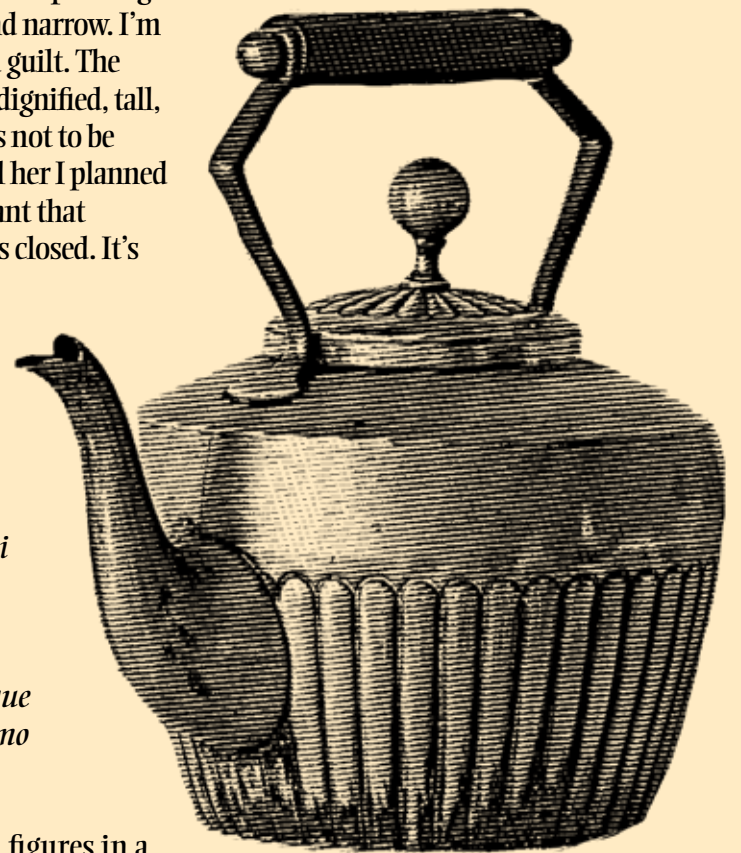
¿De dónde llega esta semidesconocida (pero en algún momento la conocí, la invité) que viene de lejos sin equipaje pero ha traído frutas frescas? Tiene puestas una blusa azul y una pollera a media pierna color azul grisáceo. Un poco con el atuendo de las mujeres Navajo en la reservación que describe Tony Hillerman, en versión chic

¿Y cómo hago para conocerla bien, incorporarla?

Where does this semi-stranger come from (but I did meet her at some point, I invited her), coming from far away, without luggage yet bringing some dry fruits? She is wearing a blue shirt and a blue-gray mid-calf skirt. A little in the Navajo women's outfit on the reservation described by Tony Hillerman, but in a chic version. And what do I do to get to know her better, to incorporate her?

Tengo una sola herramienta, la escritura. Sin forzarla, claro, buscando sin buscar. Lleva tiempo esa espeleología del desapego o mejor de la no intencionalidad, del happygolucky nunca mejor expresado: una alegría que atrae a la suerte.

Tiempo tengo, eso ni se discute. Se espera (no en el sentido de aguardar sino de desear) que la corriente siga fluyendo, que los hados me sean propicios y el virus no me cace viva. Aunque esa



no es su tarea. El virus aguarda agazapado a que una se le cruce. Porque hay dos maneras clásicas de cazar, la chasse à cour y la chasse aux aguets, y él, el virus (todos los coronavirus el virus), no corre detrás de nadie, caza sin duda aux aguets. Al acecho. Ya lo dijo nuestro presidente: el virus no te busca, vos lo buscás a él.

I have only one tool, writing. Without forcing anything, searching without searching. It takes time, this speleology of detachment, or better yet of the non-intentionality, of the happy-go-lucky at its best: a joy that attracts luck.

I have time, that is out of the question. One can only expect (not in the sense of waiting but in the sense of hoping) that the current will keep flowing, that the fates will be favorable to me and that the virus will not hunt me alive. Although that is not its task. The virus waits on the prowl for one to cross. Because there are two classic ways of hunting, the chasse à cour and the chasse aux aguets, and the virus (all coronaviruses the virus) does not run after anyone, it clearly hunts aux aguets. Lurking. Our president already said it: the virus does not look for you, you look for it.

Umbrales
Thresholds

No me aburro, ni aún en estas patéticas circunstancias de encierro, porque la mente está libre y puede volar a su antojo, si se le antoja. En estos momentos tengo la feliz sensación de haber cruzado un umbral.

Hay umbrales y umbrales. El de mi casa, sin ir más lejos: Dos escalones, reja, espacio... puerta. Son los umbrales del lavado: agua y jabón, lavandina, alcohol para todo lo que llega en diversos envoltorios de las hoy amenazadoras Tierras de Afuera.

Mi umbral de hoy es muy distinto. Siento como si se hubieran abierto las compuertas y puedo deslizarme sin temores por el agujero del conejo, atravesar el espejo. Tomo mi reflejo con ambas manos y me lo calo como si fuera mi propia funda. Y lo es. Así de simple. Y acompañadas, mi funda y yo, avanzaremos por el bosque del encierro poblado de recuerdos.

Que no se apague, por favor. Que no se apague más la luz cálida que ilumina la cueva del pensar.

I don't get bored. Not even during this pathetic lockdown, because the mind is free and can fly at will, if so it wills.

Right now, I'm happy crossing a threshold.

There are thresholds and thresholds. Without venturing too far, the one in my house: two steps, a gate, space... door. Those are the thresholds where the washing takes place: water and soap, bleach, alcohol for everything that comes in all types of packaging from the threatening Lands of the Outside.

My threshold today is very different. I feel as if the floodgates had been opened and I can slide fearlessly through the rabbit hole, go through the mirror. I grab my reflection with both hands and I put it on like it's my own case. And it is. That simple. And together, my case and I, will proceed through the forest of the lockdown, populated by memories.

Let it not go out, please. Let the warm light that illuminates the cave of thinking, not go out.

Las Dos Vidas
The Two Lives

Escribir es entrar en otro modo, que no es lo mismo que estar in the mood aunque también se requiere una cierta disposición de ánimo. Es lo contrario de quien pone en "modo avión" su celular, porque el vuelo es de muy otra índole y el "modo escritura" no corta la comunicación con el mundo exterior, todo lo contrario.

To write is to enter into a different mode, which is not the same as being in the mood, although in both cases you need a certain frame of mind. It's the opposite of setting "airplane mode" on your phone, because the flight is of a different nature and the "writing mode" opens communication with the outside world.

Es vivir en ese estado, sobre todo al tratarse de una novela, algo que fui percibiendo años atrás en diversas oportunidades. Como un circular por dos vías simultáneas durante largos meses, o años cuando la novela demoraba en completarse. En estas circunstancias la vida cotidiana resulta casi automática aunque por momentos aporte su cuota de

felicidad, sus inesperadas alegrías. La vida interior, la secreta, la que circula en sordina como por detrás del pensamiento tiene muchas veces sus desdichas pero son desdichas del crear, es decir del estar viva y ardiente. En sordina, eso sí.

Something I came to realize years ago on various occasions, is it's like living in that state, particularly if you are dealing with a novel. Under these circumstances, daily life becomes almost mechanical even though at times it may contribute its share of happiness and unexpected joys. The inner life, the secret one, the one proceeding silently behind our thoughts may have, many a times, its miseries, but they are the miseries that belong to creation, that is to say, of being alive and aflame. Silently, though.

Hoy no es de novela el estado que me envuelve, ni quiero que lo sea, pero igual me transmite una euforia circumspecta. Como el cerrar los ojos y sentirme a mis anchas navegado el laberinto de canales ignotos para ir pescando aquello que no estaba allí antes. Ni estaba en ninguna parte si vamos al caso. "El secreto profesional del arte es la fundación de sentido", dice Rüdiger Safranski, y agrega "En el interior del arte hay un rumor misterioso que amenaza al arte mismo. El misterio procede de la imaginación, que es una creación de la nada".

Today, the state that envelops me, is not a writing-a-novel state, nor do I want it to be; still it brings me a guarded elation. As if with eyes closed, I'd be feeling at ease cruising the maze of unknown channels so as to fish out that which was never there. Actually, that which was nowhere. "The professional secret of art is the founding of meaning", says Rüdiger Safranski, adding "at the core of art there is a mysterious rustle that threatens art itself. The mystery comes from imagination, which itself is a creation of nothing".

Tendría que releer su libro que tanto exploré años ha: El Mal o El drama de la libertad pero por el momento, como diría Bartleby, prefiero no hacerlo. No, porque me llevaría a novelar y novela por ahora no quiero. Sobre todo no quiero hundirme en la novela que anduve olfateando un par de años atrás y arrastré a lo largo del tiempo y ya hablaré de ella cuando me anime. Si alguna vez me anime. De puro oscura que es (mejor dicho sería), de puro ominosa.

I should reread his book, which I so thoroughly explored way back when: Evil or the Drama of Freedom but



right now, like Bartleby would say, I would prefer not to. No. It would lead to writing a novel and right now I would prefer not to. Above all, I don't want to sink in that novel I'd been sniffing a couple of years ago and then dragged on for a long time. I will speak of that novel when I find the nerve. If I ever do. It is so dark (it would be, I should say), so ominous.

Lo que se busca es la libertad, ir aflojando la mano, liberando venenos. ¿Qué dijo Rudolf Steiner al respecto? ¿Venenos liberadores de pensamiento, o viceversa? No. el viejo Steiner dijo, refiriéndose a la belladona: Los venenos son recolectores de espíritus.

¿Será esto lo que me hace falta ahora: recolectores de espíritus, venenos? Mejor desatender lo tóxico y recuperar el espíritu travieso y evanescente que me cuele palabras entre dedos y teclado. Una vida por escrito y ahora qué, ¿mero papel en blanco, pantalla vacía?

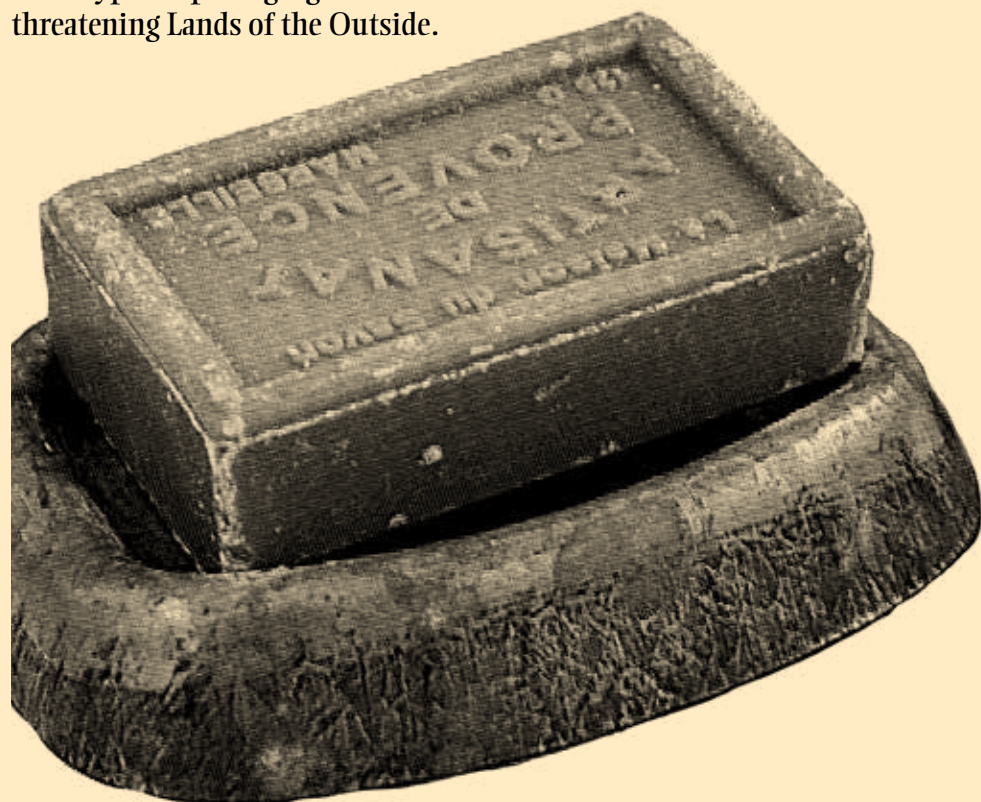
¡Tantas putas preguntas!

What one searches for is freedom. What did Rudolf Steiner say about it? Thought-liberating poisons... or vice versa? No. Old Steiner said, in reference to the belladonna: Poisons are collectors of spirits.

Would this be what I need right now: collectors of spirits, poisons? It's better to disregard everything toxic and recover the mischievous and evanescent spirit that smuggles words between my fingers and the keyboard.

A whole life in writing and now what? Just a blank piece of paper, an empty screen?

So many fucking questions!



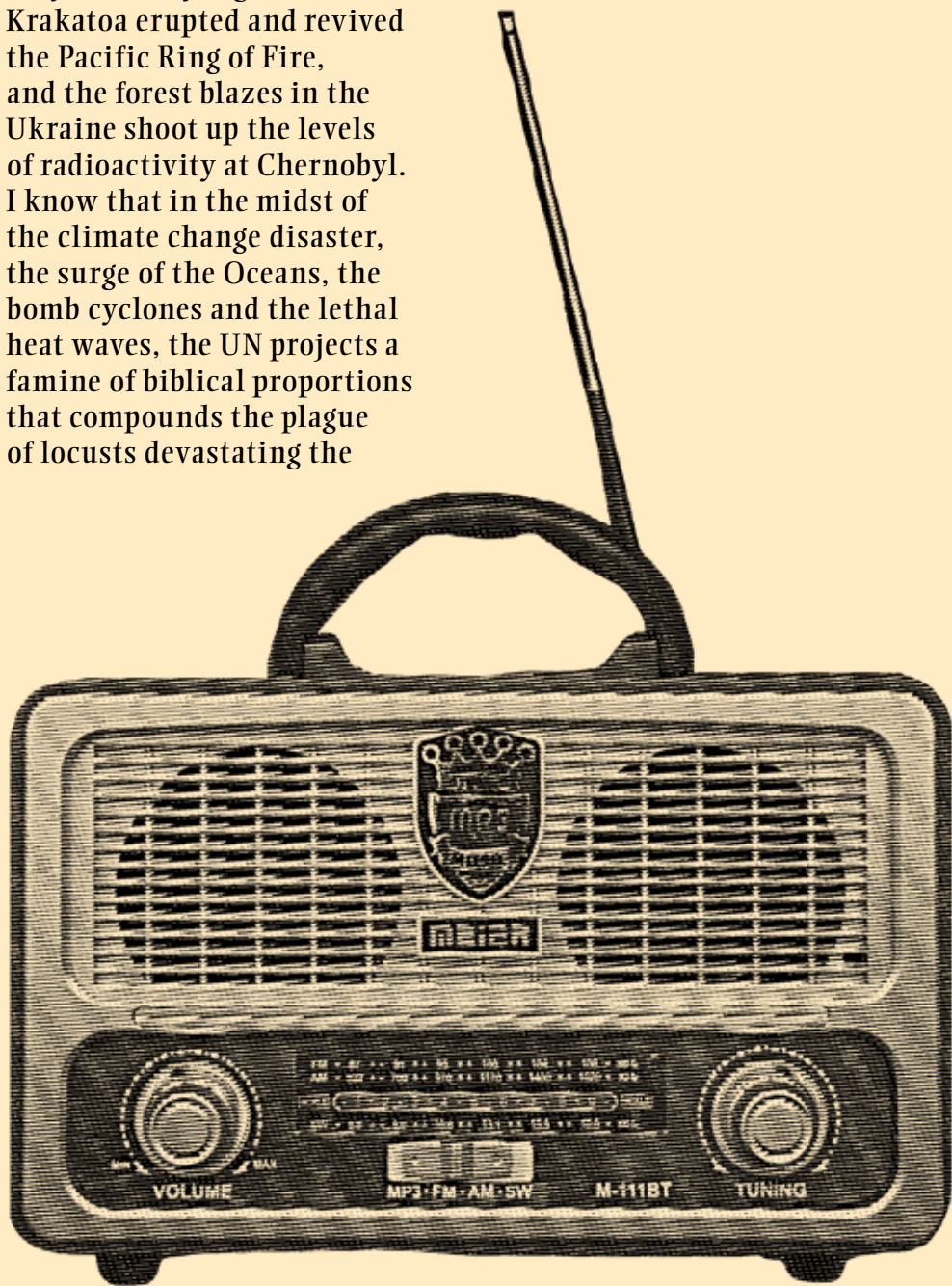
HORN CONCERTO

BY PABLO DALER

To Gisela López

And now, finally, what you've been waiting for, what you count on every Tuesday.... I know that last week a series of tornados caused devastation in the United States; that only a few days ago the Krakatoa erupted and revived the Pacific Ring of Fire, and the forest blazes in the Ukraine shoot up the levels of radioactivity at Chernobyl. I know that in the midst of the climate change disaster, the surge of the Oceans, the bomb cyclones and the lethal heat waves, the UN projects a famine of biblical proportions that compounds the plague of locusts devastating the

We will listen now to the three movements, allegro moderato, adagio, allegro, from Joseph Haydn's Horn Concerto number 1 in D major, performed by the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Iona Brown conducting, and the legendary Hermann Baumann with his stylized horn... You are listening to Classical Radio... FM 97.6... The pleasures of music...



African continent. And if this was not enough, neo-fascist regimes are multiplying around the world, the global economy is crumbling, and today, April the 28th, Covid-19 has claimed more than 200,000 lives and three million infected. And, if by any chance the asteroid 1998OR2 would happen to actually hit us tomorrow, it would make this pandemic really look like the regular flu. In any case, there is not much I can do about these calamities... what I can offer, however, is the pleasure of classical music you count on right here, every Tuesday...

FROM WHERE HERE
WERE WE
MARCH 21 · 25BY CHARLES BERNSTEIN AND
NORMAN FISCHER

Hope, hobbled
quicken
desolate
enamored

potent loss of such that earns
the one the one encloses

Of cornucopia coronas round damaged derangements
Of little dilemmas of deterioration
As lungs explode in air
Umbrellas of caring floating, covering unsuspecting multitudes

sputtering
splashing
a vacant élan, cruising, crashing,
till quests are questions, delay a migrant dream

Shining above their cloud rings
or blue long day
border between life and debt
may not . . .
little virus doing its duty
as all things must

in the terror of the light
pestering with scents no longer connected to a source
petrified in that incandescent way stars are

hobbled, hoping

How much is too much?
What's the biggest number you know?

birds, birds, birds gather at feeders, feet feet feet hopping ahead

gaining scant purchase in dignified alarm and off-the-crawl tug, mayhem
folding into chronic delay

And rolls on unencumbered by tweaks in arrangements

Little ones looking up from below sequestering hope by the gallon till
Despondency disburses as earth takes its toll
each Thursday or Wednesday or Sunday

Unless there's silence in the play
as in when becoming has been nearby still too far

Vertiginous Oracle
against which
I stagger back
in detained future
caught in the here and now!

[bumpy ride]

I'm in a conversational mood
If not now when if not us who??

Either we've spent our lives ready for this or our life has always been this

Not only never saw it never dreamed it never spoke it never thought it
Never lived it at all

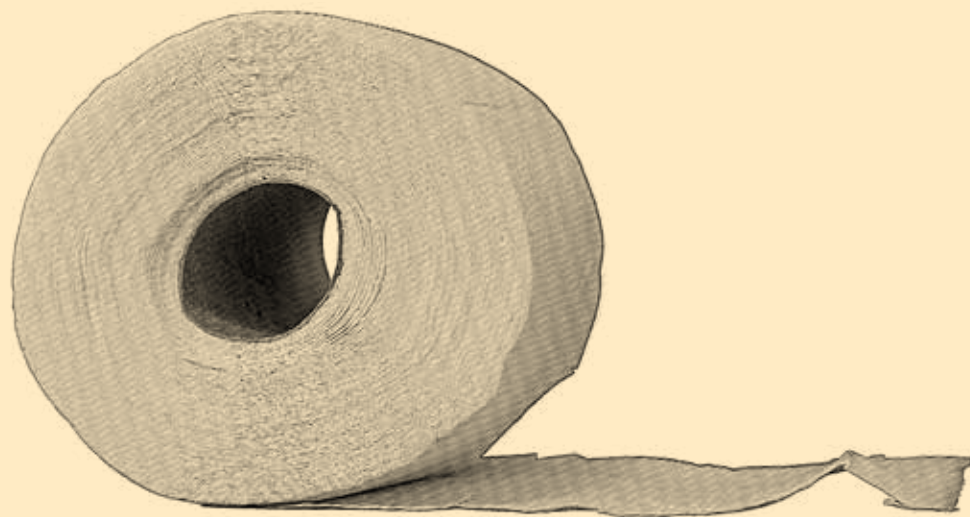
DON'T GATHER IN GROUPS OF MORE THAN ONE

BY YURI ANDRUKHOVYCH
TRANSLATED FROM UKRAINIAN BY
KATHERINE YOUNGER

A mask won't help you, but don't dare leave home without one.

In general, don't risk going out – whether with a mask or without. Masks are the most effective measure, but they won't help.

Limit yourself to buying food, medicine, and toilet paper, but don't complain if the shelves are bare because of this.



Keep a distance of 1,5 meters (for a start). Gradually increase this to three and then five meters, and ideally steer well clear of all living creatures.

Distance yourself from your loved ones. There are no loved ones – just vectors of infection and the walking dead.

Don't gather in groups of more than one thousand. Don't gather in groups of more than five hundred. Don't gather in groups of more than forty. Don't gather in groups of more than three. Don't gather!

Wash your hands as often as possible, but there's no kind of soap that will completely eliminate the virus.

Wash your hands for a minimum of 16 seconds. A minimum of 20 seconds. But 25-30 seconds is better. Wash your hands for as long as possible, but there's no chance this will save you.

Wash your hands, like the great Pontius Pilate taught us.

Don't neglect to take warm baths—the steam can help your respiratory system—but remember that a warm bath is the ideal environment for the virus.

People over 65 are an at-risk group, although as of recently people under 65 are too. Everyone is an at-risk group. "At-risk group" is another name for humankind.

Don't touch anything, especially your own face. Temporarily imagine that you don't have one.

Temporarily deny yourself everything except the internet, but don't overindulge in porn sites: they create the dangerous illusion that everything in your life is ok and nothing has changed.

Keep your hands to yourself and wear gloves. Gloves are the most effective measure, but don't forget to change them as often as possible. Every 16, 20, 25, and 30 seconds.

Pets can't catch this exact virus, but tomorrow it will turn out that this is the virus they are most likely to catch.

Disinfect all available surfaces with rubbing alcohol, but don't forget that alcohol kills your immunity.

Forget about shaking hands, hugging, and kissing, but don't be surprised when there's no one at your funeral.

Don't consult a doctor too early: only once you've reached average severity.

Don't consult a doctor too late, although even if you are too late, they'll still do everything they can to register your death properly.

Don't consult a doctor at all: they're an at-risk group.

Quarantine is the most effective measure; it guarantees victory. After it was introduced the number of

infections went up by a multiple of four. Of seven. Of ten. The number continues to grow.

Infected people should be isolated or – according to plan B – gathered together in the largest possible numbers at pedestrian border crossing points.

Eighty percent of people (the so-called "silent spreaders") have already had the virus, without even noticing, but in that case it's unclear who observed this and why they decided that the number was eighty percent and not, say, seventy-nine.

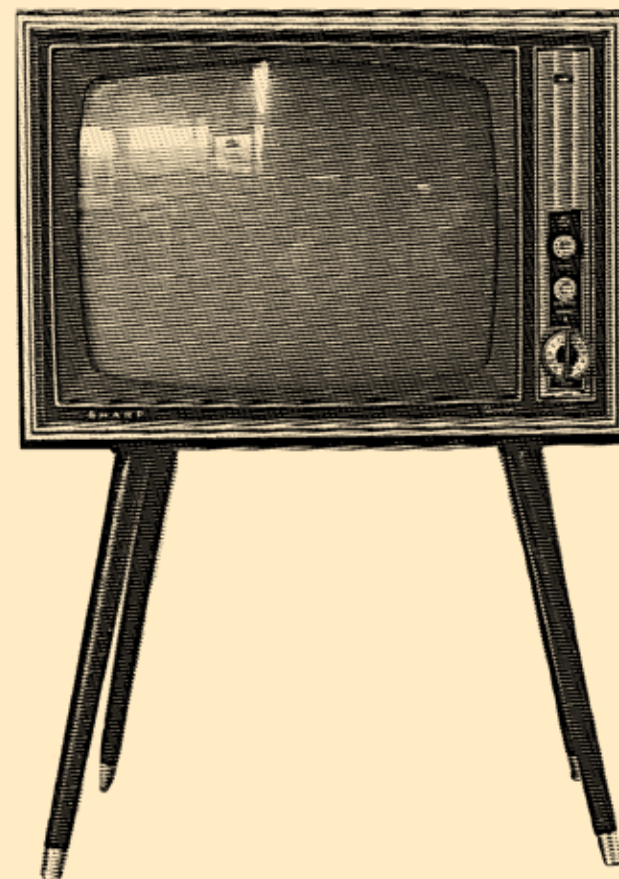
For the time being, the total number of people who've recovered is higher than the number of people who've died, but not in our country yet.

Still, we're not without good news in our country: the authorities have drummed up the resources to severely punish the "silent spreaders" and shoot panickers on the spot. Health and human life are our authorities' number one priority.

And if things keep getting worse (and they will), there's no need to worry – the authorities will definitely strengthen measures. Somehow they'll strengthen them. They'll get the national guard involved, with snipers.

The virus will definitely recede after Easter, but no one knows in what year.

The virus will definitely recede in the summer, because it can't survive when it's hot, but only when it's so hot that neither can people.



The virus is the Weltgeist, or more precisely its game of purifying and correcting us. The virus believes that it is possible to purify and correct us. We're lucky that it still believes this.

The virus is cruel, lethal, ingenious, venomous, faster than us, and fair.

The virus monitors us ceaselessly and mutates according to the steps we take to fight it. It likes that we're scared, but that's not enough for it.

It's engaged in creative exploration. Which you can't say about us.

Soon it will turn out that it spreads most efficiently not through handshakes but over the internet, and it will have to be shut down. If they've already shut down the borders, the airports, and the metro, why couldn't they shut down the internet? Can you imagine: life in quarantine, all alone, trapped within your four walls – and no internet? The screenwriter hasn't resorted to this yet.

The screenwriter is a professional, who writes about Existence itself. According to the laws of the TV series, he constantly ruins viewers' predictions about what's going to happen. This is normal. The problem is just that more and more viewers are becoming actors, and mainly in the role of victims.

The virus is a TV series, and there's no way the dramatic tension will be resolved until the end of the season. But between seasons everyone will be talking about nothing but the virus anyway. In the vain hope that by some miracle there won't be a second season.

Ukrainian original published 3 April 2020, <https://zbruc.eu/node/96717>

LA PAURA MORDE? GIUGNO 2020

BY DACIA MARAINI
TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY
LINDA KALAJ

Does Fear Bite?
June 2020

I read the words, of a virologist, in a newspaper, who discusses the notion of a fear that bites. Does fear really bite? A bite, makes me think of an angry dog, overcome by rage, or a scorpion that abruptly springs up, lurking from underneath a rock.

Leggo su un giornale le parole di un virologo che parla di una "paura che morde". La paura morde davvero? Il morso fa pensare a un cane arrabbiato, nel senso di malato di rabbia, a uno scorpione sbucato da sotto un sasso.

When I look at images of coronavirus, although very evil and a curse, I see a beautifully colored sphere. And it does not bite. But infects, subtly. One cannot negate that this microorganism has its own beauty: vibrant, pulsates by expanding and tightening its Pompeii red flesh-like flowers. Its beauty resembles the lethal mushroom, Amanita muscaria, also lovely, all red, studded with a crown of white speckles. Should you eat, even a small amount, you'll be taken to another world. Could this forbidden beauty bring to light the memory of past plagues sought by a fierce and implacable God, to feed our fear?

Se guardo le immagini del tanto malefico e maledetto corona virus vedo una bellissima sfera colorata. E non morde ma infetta subdolamente. Non si può negare che questo microorganismo sia dotato di una sua bellezza: un piccolo globo delicato, vibrante, che pulsa allargando e stringendo i suoi fiori carnosi, di un rosso pompeiano. La sua bellezza, assomiglia molto a quella del fungo letale Amanita muscaria, bello anche quello, tutto rosso, tempestato da una corona di pistilli bianchi. Se ne mangi anche un pezzetto vai all'altro mondo. Potrebbe essere la bellezza proibita a portare a galla le memorie di altre pestilenze volute da un Dio feroce e implacabile, a nutrire la nostra paura?

At this point, I ask myself if fear is part of the body's language. Fear can twist our guts, it can constrict blood vessels, or assault us like a wave of boiling water, it can choke or paralyze us or make us dash like hares. Is there any logic to fear outside of instinctual defense?

A questo punto mi chiedo se la paura faccia parte di un linguaggio del corpo. La paura può 'torcere le budella', può farci 'gelare il sangue', oppure assalirci come "un'ondata bollente", ci può strozzare o paralizzare o fare correre come lepri. C'è una logica nella paura oltre all'istinto di difesa?

And, why in the face of the coronavirus is there so much fear surrounding this strange and unpredictable enemy? Is it only because it is a microorganism, new and unknown? Or is it because we are continually told that health facilities cannot sustain the demand for oxygen for the ten percent of people who lose the ability to breathe on their own because of pneumonia? This would be a rational fear, to which, sensible actions can be applied to remedy.

E perché oggi circola tanta paura di fronte al corona-virus, questo strambo e imprevedibile nemico? Solo perché si tratta di un microorganismo nuovo e sconosciuto? O perché ci viene detto in continuazione che le strutture sanitarie non sarebbero in grado di dare ossigeno a quel dieci per cento di persone che perdono con la polmonite la



capacità di respirare in proprio? Questa sarebbe una paura razionale, a cui si pone rimedio con azioni sensate.

And yet, we all have the impression that fear somehow goes beyond this concrete reasoning. It's as if dismay lifts a cloud made of sand above the rocky bottom of a seabed which we can then no longer distinguish. Is it important that we distinguish the ocean floor? Well, in an unknown ocean, in uncharted waters, where sharks are lurking and prepared to attack, then, of course.

Eppure tutti abbiamo l'impressione che la paura vada al di là di questo concreto ragionamento. Come se lo sgomento sollevasse una nube di sabbia su un fondale roccioso che non riusciamo più a distinguere. E' importante distinguere il fondale? Beh, in un mare sconosciuto, in acque inesplorate dove potrebbero annidarsi squali in agguato, certo.

The idea that the epidemic will not end as soon as originally imagined, is spreading, as the number of those infected, often asymptomatic, continues to heighten. Many ask, what will become of our future? Some believe that this great evil will improve human beings: in danger, they say, people give the best of themselves. Let's hope so.

Comincia a serpeggiare l'idea che l'epidemia non finirà così presto come si immaginava, poiché il numero degli infetti, spesso asintomatici, continua a essere alto. Che ne sarà del nostro futuro, si chiedono in molti. Qualcuno



ritiene che questo grande male migliorerà gli esseri umani: nel pericolo, dicono, le persone danno il meglio di sé. C'è da sperarlo.

These days I've read many quotes by Manzoni and Camus. No one remembers the beautiful romance by Thomas Mann: Death in Venice. A morbid novel, in the French sense of 'morbide', or rather morbid, in which, the scent of death is mixed with the delights of a tender and seductive shore. From which the view of disintegrating bodies transforms into the contemplation of a wondrous body, a child, born into life. Mann's thoughts illustrate the ethics of a society's social and moral corruption contrasted with the beauty of life.

Ho letto molte citazioni da Manzoni e da Camus in questi giorni. Nessuno ha ricordato il bellissimo romanzo di Thomas Mann, La morte a Venezia. Un romanzo morbido, nel senso francese di 'morbide', ovvero morboso, in cui il sentore della morte si mescola alle delizie di una spiaggia tenera e seducente. In cui la vista dei corpi che si disfano si alterna alla contemplazione di un meraviglioso corpo che si affaccia alla vita.

Cholera was invading the city of Venice and no one cared. "The fear of the overall damage that would be done — concern over the recently opened art exhibition in the Public Gardens and the apprehension of tremendous losses with which the hotels, the shops, the entire, multifaceted trade that catered to foreigners would suffer in case of panic and be threatened in case of blockade — proved stronger in the city than the love of truth and respect for international covenants: actuated by fear it made the authorities stick stubbornly to their official policy of silence and denial"...seems as if it could have been written today. How many countries carry on in the exact manner Thomas Mann narrates?

Il colera stava invadendo la città di Venezia ma nessuno se ne curava.

“La paura di un danno generale, le grosse perdite che in caso di panico e di discredito minacciavano di colpire l’Esposizione, prevalevano. Per gli alberghi, i negozi, tutta la complessa industria turistica, quella paura fu più forte dell’amore per la verità e il rispetto per le convenzioni internazionali. E persuase l’autorità a perseverare ostinatamente nella sua politica del silenzio e delle smentite”... Sembra scritto oggi. Quanti paesi si stanno comportando esattamente così come racconta Thomas Mann.?

“One should keep silent” whispers a voice into Aschenbach’s ear, and he decides to remain silent but his intelligence registers the enormity of that silence: “The consciousnesses of his complicity, of his connivance, made him tipsy like small quantities of wine inebriating an already tired mind. The image of the city hit by the plague and abandoned, left to herself, with its mind confusedly yearning for and igniting in him inconceivable hopes, which disobeyed rationale and were monstrously sweet.”

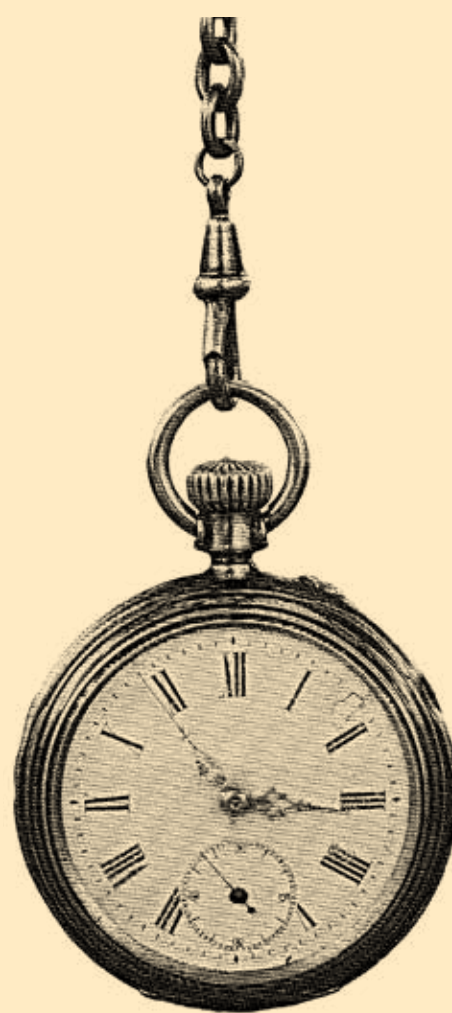
“Bisogna tacere,” dice una voce nell’orecchio di Aschenbach, e lui decide di tacere ma la sua intelligenza registra l’enormità di quel silenzio: “La coscienza della sua complicità, della sua connivenza lo inebriava come piccole quantità di vino inebriano un cervello già stanco. La visione della città colpita dal flagello e abbandonata a se stessa, confusamente vagheggiata dalla sua mente, accendeva in lui speranze inconcepibili, che disobbedivano alla ragione ed erano mostruosamente dolci”.

Ecco, non sarà proprio la mostruosa dolcezza dell’immunità che seduce molte menti leggere, innamorate della propria libertà, anche quando danneggia quella degli altri.? Se non c’è nessun Dio che giudica e condanna, non c’è responsabilità, non c’è libero arbitrio, non c’è scelta ma solo casualità e caos. E’ questo il fondo del pensiero degli scettici? E come rimediare al cinismo senza cadere nella disperazione e nell’abulia?

When I studied philosophy, I was in love with the Cynics. How is it this word has changed so much in meaning? The cynic, in today’s

imagination, wears the latest fashion, drives a luxury car, and calls those who are concerned with helping the weakest: buonisti. Well, in short, an unscrupulous opportunist. Whilst Diogenes and Antisthenes were of, the ascetics, whom despised every possession and every comfort, they walked with bare feet, they denied any property, they preached the pursuit of happiness in sobriety and asceticism, against the gluttony of wealth, of power, and of glory. Happiness, for them, consisted of living in accordance to nature. The “eudaimon” was in the conquest of mental clarity in order to be free of ignorance and irrationality.

Quando studiavo filosofia mi ero innamorata dei cinici. Come ha fatto la parola a cambiare tanto di senso? Il cinico nell’immaginazione di oggi indossa vestiti alla moda, guida una macchina di lusso e chiama buonisti quelli che si occupano di aiutare i più deboli. Insomma un opportunista privo di scrupoli. Mentre Diogene e Antistene erano degli asceti che disprezzavano ogni possesso e ogni comodità, giravano scalzi e negavano ogni proprietà, predicavano la ricerca della felicità nella sobrietà e nell’ascesi contro l’ingordigia della ricchezza, del potere e della gloria. La felicità



consisteva per loro nel vivere secondo natura. L’“eudaimon” stava nella conquista della lucidità mentale per liberarsi della ignoranza e dalla irrazionalità.

The “herd immunity” theories have ended. In the face of thousands infected, they gave in and all European countries are now emulating the Italians, whom, just a few days ago, had been mocked for their drastic decisions. Things evolve and change every few hours.

Sono finite le teorie della “heard immunity”, l’immunità di gregge. Di fronte alle migliaia di contagiati, hanno ceduto e ora tutti i paesi europei imitano gli italiani che qualche giorno fa sbeffeggiavano per le loro decisioni drastiche. Le cose si evolvono e cambiano a distanza di poche ore.

*I once again pick up Susan Sontag’s book *Illness as Metaphor*. Susan’s beautiful mind works through ideas with lucid and sharp logic. History, she recounts, always attributed illnesses to negative behavior. As if one was ill due to some fault. In other words, illness has always been perceived as a form of punishment throughout history.*

Riprendo in mano il libro di Susan Sontag, “Malattia come metafora”. La bella testa di Susan macina idee con una logica lucida e tagliente. La storia, racconta lei, ha sempre attribuito le malattie a comportamenti sbagliati. Si era malati per causa di qualche colpa.

Insomma la malattia nella storia è sempre stata vista come un castigo.

Susan writes, “nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning - that meaning being invariably a moralistic one.” In her book, she ironizes, but also very firmly condemns, the use of, even, psychoanalysis which, with Freud in mind, creates illness in the symbolic and narrative sense, falling into a form of psychological terrorism. She takes it out on psychosomatics, in which, she affirms, that the sufferings of the soul transform themselves into punitive or self-punishing diseases. For her, she is dealing with the manipulations of the imaginary for repressive purposes.

“Non c’è niente di più primitivo che attribuire a una malattia un significato, poiché tale significato è inevitabilmente moralistico”, scrive Susan. Nel suo libro ironizza ma anche condanna con molta fermezza l’uso che perfino la psicanalisi, con Freud in testa, fa della malattia in senso simbolico e narrativo, cadendo in una forma di terrorismo psicologico. Se la prende con la psicosomatica, in cui si afferma che le sofferenze dell’anima si trasformano in malattie punitive o autopunitive. Si tratta, per lei, di manipolazioni dell’immaginario a scopi repressivi.

It would take a new Giordano Bruno to break the spell of feelings from guilt: I, who am in the night wait for day and those in day wait for the night, everything that is, near or far, or now or later, or early or later, will arrive... therefore relish, and if you can, stay healthy, and love those who love you.

Ci vorrebbe un nuovo Giordano Bruno per rompere l’incantesimo dei sensi di colpa: “Io che son ne’ la notte aspetto il giorno e quei che son nel giorno aspettano la notte, tutto quel ch’è, vicino o lungi, o adesso o poi, o presto o tardi, arriverà. . Godete dunque, e si possete, state sani, ed amate chi v’ama.”

A secular and mocking spirit, who in order to remain faithful to his ideas, accepted to be burned alive. We need to better come to know this courageous subverter who stepped out from the commonplace, with his witchcraft, his rebellions of insanity: this is his place in history, as told by the mouth of the Church.

Uno spirito laico e sbeffeggiante, che pur di restare fedele alle sue



idee ha accettato di essere bruciato vivo. Bisognerebbe conoscerlo meglio questo coraggioso sovvertitore, uscendo dai luoghi comuni sulle sue stregonerie, le sue ribellioni da pazzo, così è passato alla storia per bocca della Chiesa.

It is not a coincidence that pain and sacrifice dominate the Catholic imagination. I've always thought the cross, as a founding symbol of Christianity, to be one of anguish and dismal. Let's not talk about what its use has been turned into, loud and imperative. Without negating his sacrificial end and the horror of crucifixion, why not exalt the happy images of Jesus' life? Why not place a different image on the altar, one without wounds and dripping blood? The beautiful figure of the young and joyous Christ who walks on water, or the Christ who resurrects the dead Lazarus, or the Christ who comes out of the tomb and appears in front of the three women? A moment of great symbolic importance for the time in which he lived. The three women look at him with enchantment and surprise as they stand at the exit of the cave sealed by a boulder. And while the guards slept, Christ turned toward them saying, "go to my disciples and tell them that I am risen."

Non è un caso che il sacrificio domini sull'immaginazione cattolica. Ho sempre pensato che la croce come simbolo fondante del Cristianesimo sia angosciosa e lugubre.. Non parliamo dell'uso che se ne fa, chiassoso e imperativo. Perché non esaltare le immagini felici della vita di Gesù? Senza negare la sua fine sacrificale, ma perché non mettere sull'altare il Gesù che cammina sulle acque, o il Gesù che resuscita il morto Lazzaro, o il Gesù che esce dalla tomba e appare alle tre donne? Un momento di grande importanza simbolica per i tempi in cui viveva. Vedendo le tre donne che lo guardano incantate e sorprese all'uscita dalla grotta chiusa con un masso, mentre le guardie dormono, Cristo si rivolge loro e dice "andate dai miei discepoli e dite loro che sono risorto".

Revolutionary, to say the least. Women, at that time, did not have the right to testimony. They were not considered worthy of guaranteeing the truth. And Christ breaks this tradition with one great act of innovation and courage by taking the three women, as witnesses, and therefore giving them a whole new right to testimony.

Una cosa a dir poco rivoluzionaria. Le donne infatti a quell'epoca non avevano il diritto di testimonianza. Non erano considerate degne di garantire la verità. E Cristo rompe questa tradizione con un atto di grande innovazione e coraggio prendendo le tre donne a testimoni e quindi dando loro il diritto tutto nuovo di testimonianza.

And just today, I read the words written many years ago that echo the enunciation of the virologist: "Fear was inside him like an angry dog: growling, panting, drooling, suddenly screaming in his sleep, and gnawing from the inside, his liver, and his heart." The words of Leonardo Sciascia, from The Day of the Owl....It may be so, fear, even without a mouth, like the small colorful sphere we have come to know, bites deep within, and worse than any angry dog ever could.

Ma proprio oggi leggo delle parole scritte molti anni fa che riecheggiano l'odierna enunciazione del virologo: "La paura gli stava dentro come un cane arrabbiato: guaiva, ansava, sbavava, improvvisamente urlava nel suo sonno, e mordeva dentro, mordeva nel fegato, nel cuore". Parole di Leonardo Sciascia, dal

"Giorno della civetta". . Forse è così, la paura, anche se non ha bocca, come la piccola sfera colorata che conosciamo, morde nel profondo, peggio di un cane arrabbiato.

LA PRIMA PRIMAVERA PERDUTA

BY GIUSEPPE CONTE

TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY PROFESSOR FEDERICO PACCHIONI

"The First Spring Lost"

Beyond the glass window, a pepper tree
pruned to death now produces new leaves,
the pine, immune, stands out against the threshold
of the sky, and the pittosporum turns white.

Spring has arrived, the one insensible
to tears, pleas, human pains,
and I don't go out to greet her, to sing its colors,
I do not walk all the way to the seashore.

Too many suffocated victims around me,
the heart is too deep in mourning amidst the caskets
taken away by trucks like spoiled wares,
today the song that remains is a prayer.

In this way a spring is missing from my life,
something I would have never believed,
this one, the first spring without my mother,
the first spring lost.



VENEZIA È SCOMPARSA. UNA STORIA DAL LOCKDOWN

BY LEONARDO MERLINI
TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY
PROFESSOR FEDERICO PACCHIONI

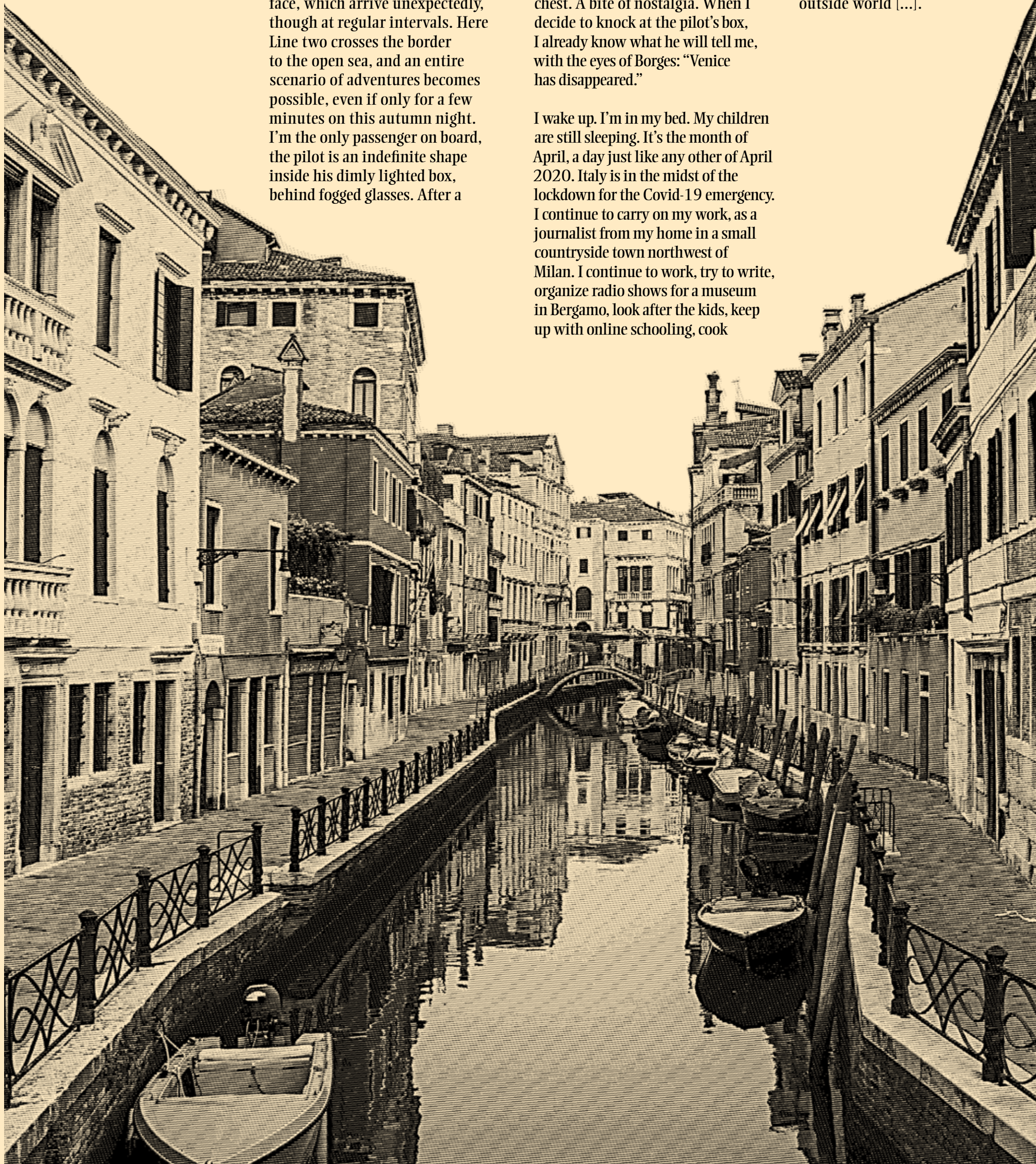
*"Venice has disappeared. A Story from
the Lockdown"*

The Lagoon is immersed in the fog, the steamer seems to cut through it with difficulty, sounds are muffled. I look out on the side of Tronchetto, but all that I can perceive is the splashes of salt water on my face, which arrive unexpectedly, though at regular intervals. Here Line two crosses the border to the open sea, and an entire scenario of adventures becomes possible, even if only for a few minutes on this autumn night. I'm the only passenger on board, the pilot is an indefinite shape inside his dimly lighted box, behind fogged glasses. After a

while, I think that we should be in sight of the Giudecca, but the horizon remains indecipherable: no light, no land. Nothing, only fog. A few minutes after I realize the boat is no longer making stops, it advances at constant speed, apparently without a clear destination. I'm not worried, but I feel a deaf pain inside my chest. A bite of nostalgia. When I decide to knock at the pilot's box, I already know what he will tell me, with the eyes of Borges: "Venice has disappeared."

I wake up. I'm in my bed. My children are still sleeping. It's the month of April, a day just like any other of April 2020. Italy is in the midst of the lockdown for the Covid-19 emergency. I continue to carry on my work, as a journalist from my home in a small countryside town northwest of Milan. I continue to work, try to write, organize radio shows for a museum in Bergamo, look after the kids, keep up with online schooling, cook

dishes without imagination, and at night wash the floors or record videos about books and writers closed in my basement like a bunker of volumes. I lose myself in a dimension shattered by the health crisis. The Venetian dream maybe is only a narrative gimmick, a way to give shape to a sensation that is more abstract yet clearer: the disappeared of the outside world [...].



THE DECAMERON (1349 · 1353)

BY GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO
TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY
JOHN PAYNE

HERE BEGINNETH THE BOOK
CALLED DECAMERON AND
SURNAMED PRINCE GALAHALT
WHEREIN ARE CONTAINED
AN HUNDRED STORIES IN TEN
DAYS TOLD BY SEVEN LADIES
AND THREE YOUNG MEN

PROEM

A kindly thing it is to have compassion of the afflicted and albeit it well beseemeth every one, yet of those is it more particularly required who have erst had need of comfort and have found it in any, amongst whom, if ever any had need thereof or held it dear or took pleasure therein aforesaid, certes, I am one of these. For that, having from my first youth unto this present been beyond measure inflamed with a very high and noble passion (higher and nobler, perchance, than might appear, were I to relate it, to sort with my low estate) albeit by persons of discretion who had intelligence thereof I was commended therefore and accounted so much the more worth, natheless a passing sore travail it was to me to bear it, not, certes, by reason of the cruelty of the beloved lady, but because of the exceeding ardour begotten in my breast of an ill-ordered appetite, for which, for that it suffered me not to stand content at any reasonable bounds, caused me oftentimes feel more chagrin than I had occasion for. In this my affliction the pleasant discourse of a certain friend of mine and his admirable consolations afforded me such refreshment that I firmly believe of these it came that I died not. But, as it pleased Him who, being Himself infinite, hath for immutable law appointed unto all things mundane that they shall have an end, my love,—beyond every other fervent and which nor stress of reasoning nor counsel, no, nor yet manifest shame nor peril that might ensue thereof, had availed either to break or to bend,—of its own motion, in process of time, on such wise abated that of itself at this present it hath left me only that pleasance which it is used to afford unto whoso adventureth himself not too far in the navigation of its profounder oceans; by reason

whereof, all chagrin being done away, I feel it grown delightsome, whereas it used to be grievous. Yet, albeit the pain hath ceased, not, therefore, is the memory fled of the benefits whilom received and the kindnesses bestowed on me by those to whom, of the goodwill they bore me, my troubles were grievous; nor, as I deem, will it ever pass away, save for death. And for that gratitude, to my thinking, is, among the other virtues, especially commendable and its contrary blameworthy, I have, that I may not appear ungrateful, bethought myself, now that I can call myself free, to endeavour, in that little which is possible to me, to afford some relief, in requital of that which I received aforesaid,—if not to those who succoured me and who, belike, by reason of their good sense or of their fortune, have no occasion therefor,—to those, at least, who stand in need thereof. And albeit my support, or rather I should say my comfort, may be and indeed is of little enough avail to the afflicted, natheless meseemeth it should rather be proffered whereas the need appeareth greater, as well because it will there do more service as for that it will still be there the liefer had. And who will deny that

this [comfort], whatsoever [worth] it be, it behoveth much more to give unto lovesick ladies than unto men? For that these within their tender bosoms, fearful and shamefast, hold the fires of love (which those who have proved know how much more puissance they have than those which are manifest), and constrained by the wishes, the pleasures, the commandments of fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, abide most time enmewed in the narrow compass of their chambers and sitting in a manner idle, willing and willing not in one breath, revolve in themselves various thoughts which it is not possible should still be merry. By reason whereof if there arise in their minds any melancholy, bred of ardent desire, needs must it with grievous annoy abide therein, except it be done away by new discourse; more by token that they are far less strong than men to endure. With men in love it happeneth not on this wise, as we may manifestly see. They, if any melancholy or heaviness of thought oppress them, have many means of easing it or doing it away, for that to them, and they have a mind thereto, there lacketh not commodity of going about hearing and seeing many things, fowling,

hunting, fishing, riding, gaming and trafficking; each of which means hath, altogether or in part, power to draw the mind unto itself and to divert it from troublous thought, at least for some space of time, whereafter, one way or another, either solacement superveneth or else the annoy groweth less. Wherefore, to the end that the unright of Fortune may by me in part be amended, which, where there is the less strength to endure, as we see it in delicate ladies, hath there been the more niggard of support, I purpose, for the succour and solace of ladies in love (unto others[1] the needle and the spindle and the reel suffice) to recount an hundred stories or fables or parables or histories or whatever you like to style them, in ten days' time related by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men made in the days of the late deadly pestilence, together with sundry canzonets sung by the aforesaid ladies for their diversion. In these stories will be found love-chances,[2] both gladsome and grievous, and other accidents of fortune befallen as well in times present as in days of old, whereof the ladies aforesaid, who shall read them, may at once take solace from the delectable things therein shown forth and useful counsel, inasmuch as they may learn thereby what is to be eschewed and what is on like wise to be ensued,—the which methinketh cannot betide without cease of chagrin. If it happen thus (as God grant it may) let them render thanks therefore to Love, who, by loosing me from his bonds, hath vouchsafed me the power of applying myself to the service of their pleasures.



A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR (1722)

BY DANIEL DEFOE

Being Observations or Memorials of the most remarkable occurrences, as well public as private, which happened in London during the last great visitation in 1665. Written by a CITIZEN who continued all the while in London. Never made public before.

It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I, among the rest of my neighbors, heard in ordinary discourse that the



plague returned again in Holland; for it had been very violent there, and particularly at Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in the year 1663, whether, they say, it was brought, some said from Italy, others from the Levant, among some goods which were brought home by their Turkey fleet; others said it was brought from Candia; others from Cyprus. It mattered not from whence it came; but all agreed it was come into Holland again.

We had no such thing as printed newspapers in those days to spread rumors and reports of things, and to improve them by the invention of men, as I have lived to see practised since. But such things as these were gathered from the letters of merchants and others who corresponded abroad, and from them was handed about by word of mouth only; so that things did not spread instantly over the whole nation, as they do now. But it seems that the Government had a true account of it, and several councils were held about ways to prevent its coming over; but all was kept very private. Hence it was that this rumor died off again, and people began to forget it as a thing we were very little concerned in, and that we hoped was not true; till the latter end of November or the beginning of December 1664 when two men, said to be Frenchmen, died of the plague in Long Acre, or rather at the upper end of Drury Lane. The family endeavoured to conceal it as much as possible, but as it had gotten some vent in the discourse of the neighborhood, the Secretaries of State got knowledge of it; and concerning themselves to inquire about it, in order to be certain of the truth, two physicians and a surgeon were ordered to go to the house and make inspection. This they did; and finding evident tokens of the sickness upon both the bodies that were dead, they gave their opinions publicly that they died of the plague. Whereupon it was given in to the parish clerk, and he also returned them to the Hall; and it was printed in the weekly bill of mortality in the usual manner, thus—

The people showed a great concern at this, and began to be alarmed all over the town, and the more, because in the last week in December 1664 another man died in the same house, and of the same distemper. And then we were easy again for about six weeks, when none having died with any marks of infection, it was said the distemper was gone; but after

that, I think it was about the 12th of February, another died in another house, but in the same parish and in the same manner.

This turned the people's eyes pretty much towards that end of the town, and with the weekly bills showing an increase of burials in St Giles's parish more than usual, it began to be suspected that the plague was among the people at that end of the town, and that many had died of it, though they had taken care to keep it as much from the knowledge of the public as possible. This possessed the heads of the people very much, and few cared to go through Drury Lane, or the other streets suspected, unless they had extraordinary business that obliged them to it,



THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH (1842)

BY EDGAR ALLEN POE

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress nor egress to the

sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death".

It was towards the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. These were seven—an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different, as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose colour varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example in blue—and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange—the fifth with white—the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the colour of the windows failed to

correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood colour. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before. But, in spite of

these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the movable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fête; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm—much of what has been since seen in “Hernani”. There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these—the dreams—writhed in and about taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away—they have endured but an instant—and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-coloured panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulged in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise—then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince’s indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

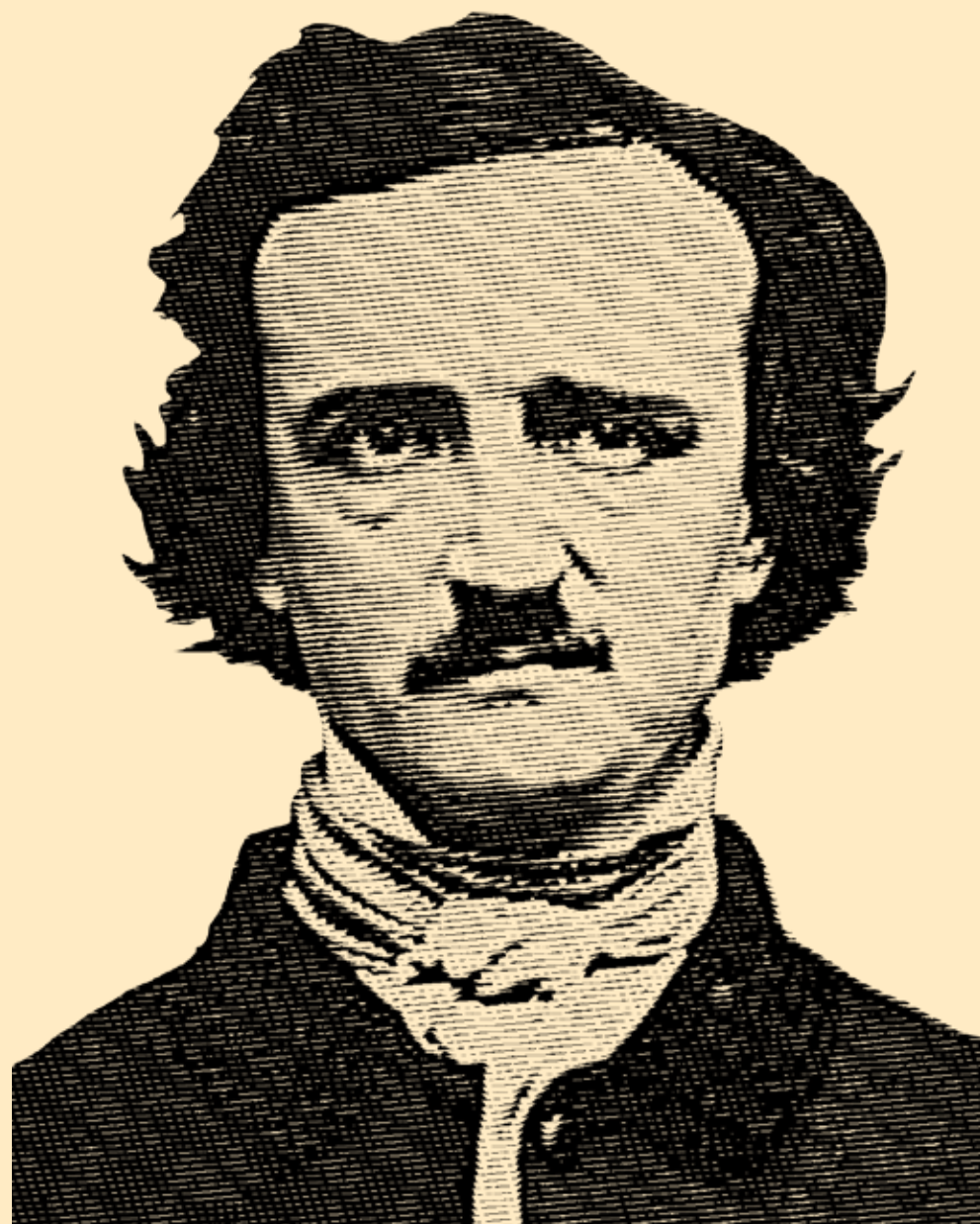
When the eyes of the Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which, with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

“Who dares,”—he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him—“who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him—that we may know whom we have to hang, at sunrise, from the battlements!”

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly, for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who at the moment was also near at hand, and

now, with deliberate and stately step, approached the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince’s person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple—through the purple to the green—through the green to the orange—through this again to the white—and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his



pursuer. There was a sharp cry—and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.



THE INFLUENZA (1890)

BY WINSTON CHURCHILL

Oh how shall I its deeds recount
Or measure the untold amount
Of ills that it has done?
From China's bright celestial land
E'en to Arabia's thirsty sand
It journeyed with the sun.

O'er miles of bleak Siberia's plains
Where Russian exiles toil in chains
It moved with noiseless tread;
And as it slowly glided by
There followed it across the sky
The spirits of the dead.

The Ural peaks by it were scaled
And every bar and barrier failed
To turn it from its way;
Slowly and surely on it came,
Heralded by its awful fame,
Increasing day by day.

On Moscow's fair and famous town
Where fell the first Napoleon's crown
It made a direful swoop;
The rich, the poor, the high, the low
Alike the various symptoms know,
Alike before it droop.

Nor adverse winds, nor floods of rain
Might stay the thrice-cursed bane;
And with unsparing hand,
Impartial, cruel and severe
It travelled on allied with fear
And smote the fatherland.

Fair Alsace and forlorn Lorraine,
The cause of bitterness and pain
In many a Gaelic breast,
Receive the vile, insatiate scourge,
And from their towns with it emerge
And never stay nor rest.

And now Europa groans aloud,
And 'neath the heavy thunder-cloud
Hushed is both song and dance;
The germs of illness wend their way
To westward each succeeding day
And enter merry France.

Fair land of Gaul, thy patriots brave
Who fear not death and scorn the grave
Cannot this foe oppose,
Whose loathsome hand and cruel sting,
Whose poisonous breath and blighted wing
Full well thy cities know.

In Calais port the illness stays,
As did the French in former days,
To threaten Freedom's isle;
But now no Nelson could o'erthrow
This cruel, unconquerable foe,
Nor save us from its guile.

Yet Father Neptune strove right well
To moderate this plague of Hell,
And thwart it in its course;
And though it passed the streak of brine
And penetrated this thin line,
It came with broken force.

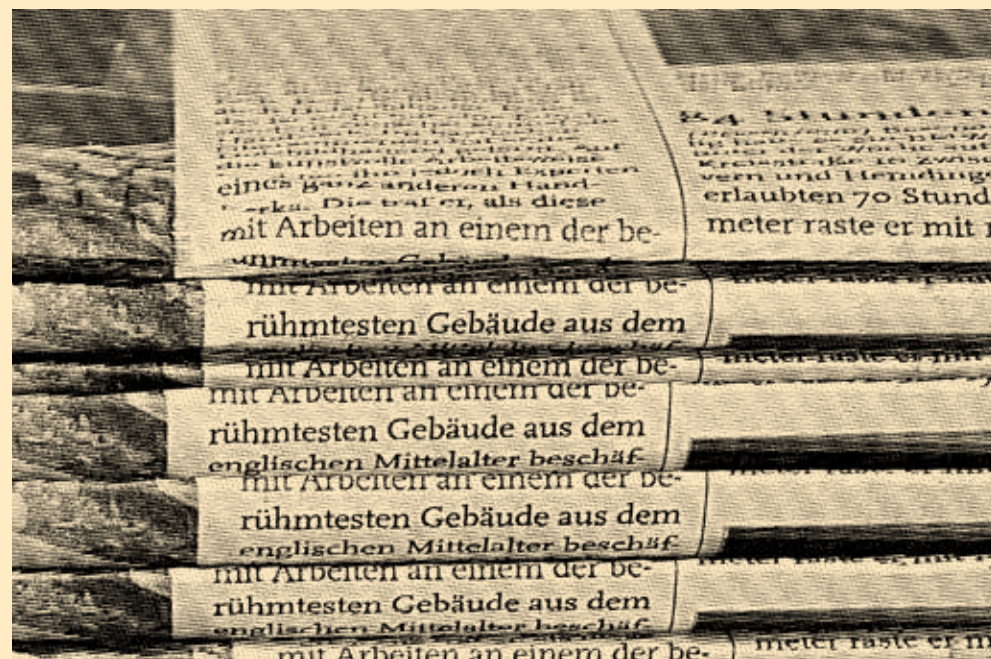


DEATH IN VENICE (1912)

BY THOMAS MANN

Already on the next day, in the afternoon, the defiant one made another attempt at tempting the outside world and this time very successfully. He entered the English travel agency at St Mark's Square and after he had exchanged some money, he addressed the clerk with his fatal question, with the expression of the distrustful stranger. It was an Englishman in tweed, still young, his hair parted down the middle, with narrow-set eyes, and that kind of loyalty of character which seems so alien and peculiar in the roguish South. He said: "No reason for concern, sir. A measure without grave implications.

These kinds of orders are issued all the time to combat the ill effects of the heat and scirocco. . . " But looking up with his blue eyes he met the weary and somewhat sad gaze of the foreigner which was trained with slight disdain at his lips. The Englishman blushed. "That is," he continued, "the official version which people are trying to uphold. I will tell you there is something else to it. . . " And then he told the truth in his honest language. For several years Indian cholera had shown an increased tendency to spread and travel. Born in the sultry swamps



of the Ganges delta, ascended with the mephitic odor of that unrestrained and unfit wasteland, that wilderness avoided by men, in the bamboo thickets of which the tiger is crouching, the epidemic had spread to Hindustan, to China, to Afghanistan and Persia and even to Moscow. But while Europe was fearing the specter might make its entrance over land, it had appeared in several Mediterranean ports, spread by Syrian traders, had arrived in Toulon, Malaga, Palermo, and Naples, also in Calabria and Apulia. The North seemed to have been spared. But in May of that year, the horrible vibrios were discovered in the emaciated and blackened bodies of a sailor and of a greengrocer. The deaths were kept secret. But after a week it had been ten, twenty or thirty victims, and in different quarters. An Austrian man had died in his hometown under unambiguous circumstances, after he had vacationed for a few days in Venice and so the first rumors of the malady appeared in German newspapers. The officials of Venice responded that the public health situation had never been better and ordered the necessary measures to fight the disease. But the foodstuffs had probably been infected. Meat,

vegetables and milk contributed to more deaths and the tepid water of the canals was particularly to blame. It seemed as if the disease had become more contagious and virulent. Cases of recovery were rare;

eighty of a hundred infected persons died in the most horrible fashion, because the malady came in the particularly severe form called "dry cholera". Here the body was unable to even get rid of the water that came from the blood vessels. Within a few hours the afflicted person dried up and suffocated on his viscid

blood amid spasms and croaky cries of pain. Comparatively lucky were those who, after a slight feeling of nausea fell into a deep blackout, from which they mostly did not come to again. In early June the quarantine barracks of the hospital had been filling silently, in the two orphanages there was no longer enough room, and a horrific traffic developed between the city and San Michele, the cemetery island. But the fear of general damage, regard for the recently opened exhibition of paintings in the municipal gardens, for the enormous financial losses that threatened the tourist industry in case of a panic, had more impact in the city than love of truth and observation of international agreements; it made feasible the official policy of secrecy and denial. The highest medical official had resigned, filled with indignation, and had been replaced with a more docile person. The people were aware of that; and the corruption at the top together with the reigning uncertainty, the state of emergency caused by the suffering all around, caused a certain demoralization, an encouragement of unsavory antisocial tendencies, which took form as debauchery, wantonness and a rise of criminal behavior. Against

the normal rule, many drunken men were noticeable in the evenings; vile rabble made the streets unsafe in the night; robbery and even murder happened again and again, for two times it had already proven that supposed victims of the epidemic had in reality been killed by their relatives with poison; and prostitution became more obtrusive and excessive, in a way that was normally more associated with the South of the country or the Orient.

mind, a bad dream that will pass away. But it doesn't always pass away and, from one bad dream to another, it is men who pass away, and the humanists first of all, because they haven't taken their precautions. Our townsfolk were not more to blame than others; they forgot to be modest, that was all, and thought that everything was still possible for them; which presupposed that pestilences were impossible.

They went on doing business, arranged for journeys, and formed views. How should they have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views? They fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences.

Indeed, even after Dr. Rieux had admitted in his friend's company that a handful of persons, scattered about the town, had without warning died of plague, the danger still remained fantastically unreal. For the simple reason that, when a man is a doctor, he comes to have his own ideas of physical suffering, and to acquire somewhat more imagination

than the average. Looking from his window at the town, outwardly quite unchanged, the doctor felt little more than a faint qualm for the future, a vague unease. He tried to recall what he had read about the disease. Figures floated across his memory, and he recalled that some thirty or so great plagues known to history had accounted for nearly a hundred million deaths. But what are a hundred million deaths? When one has served in a war, one hardly knows what a dead man is, after a while. And since a dead man has no substance unless one has actually seen him dead, a hundred million corpses broadcast through history are no more than a puff of smoke in the imagination. The doctor remembered the plague at Constantinople that, according to Procopius, caused ten thousand deaths in a single day. Ten thousand dead made about five times the audience in a bigish cinema. Yes, that was how it should be done. You should collect the people at the exits of five picture-houses, you should lead them to a city square and make them die in heaps if you wanted to get a clear notion of what it means. Then at least you could add some familiar faces to the anonymous mass. But naturally that was impossible to put into practice; moreover, what man knows ten thousand faces? In any case the figures of those old historians, like Procopius, weren't to be relied on; that was common knowledge. Seventy years ago, at Canton, forty thousand rats died of plague before the disease spread to the inhabitants. But, again, in the Canton epidemic there was no reliable way of counting up the rats. A very rough estimate was all that could be made, with, obviously, a wide margin for error. "Let's see," the doctor murmured to himself, "supposing the length of a rat to be ten inches, forty thousand rats placed end to end would make a line of..."

THE PLAGUE (1948)

BY ALBERT CAMUS
TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH BY
STUART GILBERT

"THE WORD "plague" had just been uttered for the first time. At this stage of the narrative, with Dr. Bernard Rieux standing at his window, the narrator may, perhaps, be allowed to justify the doctor's uncertainty and surprise — since, with very slight differences, his reaction was the same as that of the great majority of our townsfolk. Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise. In fact, like our fellow citizens, Rieux was caught off his guard, and we should understand his hesitations in the light of this fact; and similarly understand how he was torn between conflicting fears and confidence. When a war breaks out, people say: "It's too stupid; it can't last long." But though a war may well be "too stupid," that doesn't prevent its lasting. Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we weren't always so wrapped up in ourselves. In this respect our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences. A pestilence isn't a thing made to man's measure; therefore we tell ourselves that pestilence is a mere bogey of the



THE NEXT ISSUE IS
DEVOTED TO

25TH ANNIVERSARY

