

The Air is Thick and Trembling

Stare into darkness. Not blankly. Intently. To stare into darkness with the intention of seeing Nothing.

Through the night, the darkest night. Try to reckon with the darkness.

Reckon with force. Clarity is not to be desired.

Something more, not to be granted by squinting.

This hillside,

This riverside,

Landscape once trod, now forgotten. Only the river marked by the sound of its parting.

Notice still: a fading presence.

'che l'aere ne tremesse'

...

The two of them walked in the shade of the pine trees, along a path just a matter of minutes away from the sea. They were both carrying fishing nets, which hung down from their shoulders and along the backs of their flannel shirts, each damp with the mingled trickle of seawater and sweat. A large box was carried between their two hands, which were so different in complexion, yet each deeply tanned and straining. That same trickle now moved between these straining fingers until the box, heavy with the weight of anchovies, was released in synchronous accord. It dropped onto the sand. They both slumped against it and foraged in their pockets. 'Even in the shade / Yes, it's true. Too hot for July. It's too hot for July.'

Grapple with that word now. Recently ascribed, etched into skin. That shared material and space: *il reggimento*. Tough to learn (yes!) how to divert the old stream of blood into a new brotherhood.

Not born of mothers but of some neat politic.

per irreggimentare i figli dello Stato,

le banche,

e i campi,

And then to forget that which is past and that which is not visible through the armed brotherhood.

Fending off the sun, which moved its way through the pine's canopy and towards their feet, they began – in unnoticed harmony – to wipe their foreheads, backs, wrists, and then place the damp handkerchief over their eyes. Even their breathing was strangely measured and at one, as if from the same pair of lungs weakened by the same smoke. Neither moved for a moment or two, even as flies began to gather round their scalps, until it became too much and the delicacy of their consonance was destroyed. He stood up – he the eldest – and barked something about being late and how He – their godfather, that is – would be getting hungry by now. Not much to get

hungry for, remarked the one still blinded by his handkerchief. [Kick] Only a few stinking anchovies. [Kick] More for us than / Prick / Waste / Shit [Kick] Hope you choke on yours / What / You heard, pig! [Kick – *from the once blinded one*] / *VAI!*

16/07/1913: Godfather, not much talk. Spoke of Gioletti.

17/07/1913: Woke this morning to the birds over the wall singing in counterpoint. Through the twittering I closed my eyes and thought I saw the virgin.

The fading presence now multiplies into presence(s): that is doubled over and dozed to become a fleet of generals.

Can these be generals?

Or merely *tenente*

Functioning with *sottotenente*

(lower rank).

So that ten *sottos* make one *ten*

Ergo two *tens* make twenty *sottos*

Twenty *sottos* > one *ten*

Yet one *primo tenente* > twenty *sottos*

In fact, one *primo* \approx thirty-seven $\frac{1}{2}$ *sottos*

(depending on the region and iteration of royal army)

Thus, we might estimate there is one *tenente* with four *sottotenente* at his feet
{Q.E.D}

Fading still from view and forming shadows to your eyes,

This huddle of men who, in the moonlight, look as though they are made up of the same thoughts and movements of your own brothers lying either-side of you deep in the dirt.

One figure now floats silent down the darkened sky, dropped by some stork stillborn

Che splendore!

18/07/1913: I am a Christian. I am a Catholic. I have taken the Eucharist every Sunday without fail since I was seven (except for the week I had the mumps). I believe wholeheartedly in the Gospels and lay my mind reverently before the writings of the Patristic Fathers. I engage in weekly catechism and confess every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. I have memorised forty three psalms and set ten of them to song. I maintain a carefully mapped schedule of pilgrimages annually, and have seen one hundred and nine relics, touched fifty four and licked three. Yet I do not believe in the immaculate conception. I have tried to reason and employ all faculty of imagination and harden study, yet – to me – it is impossible. I am aware of the limits of reason and of the tremulous apophatic forces at play, but there is something within me that cannot even

desire its truth. I am fervently in distrust of the ability of a virgin to be impregnated. I am thoroughly unconvinced of this absolute.

19/07/1913: Spoke of Gioletti again. Soup for supper.

The figure(s) have disappeared. The officers above have passed and, even now, as you look to your right and left, those brothers, once there, have too vanished. Slumped into the dirt beyond recognition. And that figure floating down has gone, landed or crashed into a farmhouse of some sort. The air appears to tremble now, and, in its dark, rancid thickness, you can feel its tremor. A tremor that is distinct from your own. A tremor that incorporates every conceived anxiety, end, middle and beginning since Adam. A tremor, which bears within itself its own fragility and forces each man around it to do the same. There to bear with your own self – which incorporates the other self: those selves in orbit around you, birthed from yourself and other bodies old and new – so that you may find something out of this darkness. That you may

continue to stare

in the darkness

to search

cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini

He trailed behind, kicking the flattened sand. He could sense his brother's spite, lugging that thing over roots and needles without him. He pictured his mouth foaming with curses at his *little shit of a*, his *little loud mouth of a* – every so often breaking off to spit and lick his lips before resuming – *ungrateful pig of a*. He couldn't be heard of course, but this what he imagined to be happening – this is what always did happen – and the regular intervals of saliva and hardening tugs on the box made it even more certain. The box had two triangular grooves on its bottom that formed, when dragged with enough pace and force, the look of train tracks in the sand: each bending with the other around roots and other obstacles before resuming the neat parallel for another couple of yards. At first, he was tempted to disturb this balance, kicking all that lay between the two lines. After a while, he stopped momentarily to look at his feet and how they fitted perfectly in the space between the tracks: right from the edge of the groove to his smallest toe and onwards. He began, then, to walk on, his eyes set squarely and silently on this coincidence. His steps became smaller and more regimented, as if balanced on a tightrope, following the turns of the box and forgetting the curses and the dragging, until eventually he forgot the box and his brother along with it, and it was just him marching between its shallow grooves. It was just him set within these lines, occupying a steady balance and observation. He heard birdsong in this little space.

Vying against the weight of eyelids, a useless obstruction to the dense tremors of the night, you look upwards into that barren darkness to see a scene once filled with men made absent by drills and pocket ammunition. That edge along which any number of *capitani* once walked is now deserted and looked on by you alone. The word once etched into you, your wrists, begins to slip and slowly dissemble *il* into fragments *reg* that cannot

cohere *gim* even when you try to make them *ento*. The fickleness of that gathering repeats throughout your body in a forward rejection until it times itself with your own shakes and that tremor in your left leg which hasn't stopped since nightfall. The first of morning rains begin to pervade this repetition and mingle with mud and stale blood of strangers you once called 'brother, my brother'. You confide in this rhythm, this doubt, this aching repetition that sounds and resounds within you, that consumes the empty stage before you and inside of you, then

A light, perhaps brighter than the sunrise on these fields, or just that

pietà

imploro imploro

pietà

A silhouette, perhaps bolder than the officer you beg mercy to, or just that

pietà

imploro imploro

pietà

A face, perhaps lovelier than your mother who held you in her womb, or just that

pietà

imploro imploro

pietà

(A song perhaps)

A warmth, perhaps deeper than all else felt, or just

A love

*per altra via mi mena il savio duca
Fuor de la queta, ne l'aura che trema.
E vegno in parte ove non e che luca.*

They ate the anchovies quietly, for there was not much to talk about.

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