

A Perecian ode to obsessionality

You do not really feel cut out for living, for doing, you want only to go on, to go on waiting, and to forget. Such an outlook on life is generally not much appreciated in contemporary culture. Three-quarters of your body has taken refuge in your head; your heart has taken up residence in your eyebrow, where it now feels quite at home. But, unhappiness, did not swoop down on you, this was no surprise attack: more of a gradual infiltration. It meticulously impregnated your life, your movements, the hours you keep, your room, like a long-observed truth, or something that was staring you in the face, but which you refused to recognise; tenacious and patient, subtle and unrelenting, it took possession.

As heavy as a Latin dictionary: you have no desire to carry on, no desire to defend yourself, no desire to attack. You are no longer in the habit of making diagnoses, and you don't want to start now. What is worrying you, what is disturbing you, what is frightening you, but which now and then gives you a thrill, is not the suddenness of your metamorphosis, but precisely the opposite: the vague and heavy feeling that it isn't a metamorphosis at all, that nothing has changed, that you've always been like this, even though now you only realize it fully. It is as if, beneath the surface of your calm and reassuring history (the good little kid, the model pupil, the dependable pal). Nothing has happened. Nothing will ever happen. You must be precise, logical. Proceed method-dic-ally. There comes a point when you must, at all costs, be able to stop, reflect, really weigh up the situation. But, you don't want too.

You'd never go walking with a dog, because the dog looks at you, pleads with you, speaks to you. Its eyes brimming with of gratitude, its servile expression, its canine frolicking. You cannot remain neutral in the company of a dog any more than in the company of a man. You cannot live in the company of a dog, because the dog is constantly calling upon you to make it live, to feed it, to stroke it, to be a man for it, to be its master. It is not that you hate men, why would you hate them? Because you hate yourself? This cauldron, this furnace, this grill which is life, these thousands of summonses, incitements, warnings, thrills, depressions, this enveloping atmosphere of obligations, this eternal machine for producing, crushing, swallowing up, overcoming obstacles, starting afresh and without respite. This insidious terror which seeks to control every day, every hour of your meagre existence!

You have hardly started living, and yet all is said, all is done, your path is already mapped out for you. Everything is arranged, everything is prepared in the minutest detail: the surges of emotion, the frosty irony, the heartbreak, the fullness, the great adventure, the despair.

You won't sell your soul to the devil, you won't go clad in sandals to throw yourself into the crater of Mount Etna, you won't destroy the seventh wonder of the world.

Everything is ready for your death: the bullet was loaded a long time ago.

Why climb to the peak of the highest hills when you would only have to come back down again. Why should you keep up the pretence of living? Why should you carry on?

Don't you already know everything that will happen to you?

Haven't you already been all that you were meant to be: the worthy son of your parents, the brave little boy scout, the good studios kid, the childhood friend, the distant cousin, the impoverished young man?

No. You prefer to be the missing piece of the puzzle.

You're getting out while the going's good.

You're not stacking any odds in your favour or putting any eggs in any baskets.

You're counting your chickens before they're hatched, you're taking leave, you are leaving, and you are not looking back.

You won't listen to any more sound advice.

You will go your own way, you will look to the trees, the water, the stones, the sky, the clouds, the ceiling, and the void.

The rain comes. You stay indoors, you hardly set foot outside your room. You read aloud, all day long, following the lines of text with your finger until words lose their meaning, until the simplest phrase becomes cock-eyed and chaotic.

Evening comes. You don't switch on the light and you remain motionless, sitting at the little table by the window with the book in your hands but you're no longer reading. Listening distractedly to the sounds of the house, the creaking of the beams and the floorboards, your Father's coughing.

The summer visitors have all departed. The holiday homes are empty. When you go into the village, tattered posters, on the church square, by the town hall, the post-office, which are still advertising auction sales, village fetes and car boots held long ago. You still go for the odd walk. You tread the same old paths. You cross ploughed fields which leave thick layers of clay sticking to the soles of your boots. You get bogged down in the ruts in the pathways. The sky is grey. The views are obscured by blankets of mist. Smoke rises from a few chimneys. To want nothing. Just to wait, until there is nothing left to wait for. Just to wander, and to sleep. To let yourself be carried along by the crowds, and the streets. To walk the length of the embankments, to hug the walls.

Your indifference to the world is petulant, ignorant and hostile. Indifference has neither beginning nor end: it is an immutable state, a dead weight, an unshakeable inertia. You ask for nothing. You demand nothing, you make no

impositions. You hear without ever listening, you see without ever looking: the cracks in the ceilings, in the floorboards, the patterns in the tiling, the dark lines around your eyes, the trees, the water, the cars passing in the street. It is a life without surprises.

You sleep, you walk, you continue to live, like a laboratory rat abandoned in its maze by some absent-minded doctor. Your indifference is motionless, a grey young man for whom grey has no connotation of dullness. Disassociated.

You don't talk to yourself, yet. You don't scream, especially not that.

All you are, is all you know. You see the people coming and going, crowds and objects taking shape and dissolving. Your eye is suddenly caught by a curtain rail in the tiny window of a charity shop, but you continue on your way: you are inaccessible.

The snare was that feeling, which, on occasion, came close to exhilaration, that arrogance, that sort of exaltation; you thought that the city was all you needed, the streets, the lights, the crowds which carried you along. But the snare: the dangerous illusion of being – of being impenetrable, of offering no purchase to the outside world, of silently sliding, inaccessible, just two open eyes looking forward, perceiving everything, in the tiniest details, but retaining nothing. Like a sleepwalker who is wide awake. A being without memory, without alarm.

But there is no exit, no miracle, no truth. You stopped speaking and only silence replied.

But those words, those thousands, those millions of words that dried up in your throat, the inconsequential chit-chat, the cries of joy, the words of love, the silly laughter, just when will you find them again?

You've set your life like a watch, as if the best means of saving yourself, of avoiding going under altogether, you set yourself derisory tasks, to decide everything in advance, to leave nothing to chance. The regularity of your timetable. You cannot stand being late or early. It is as if you were living with the constant dread that the slightest weakening of your resolution might, all at once, take you too far. It is as if you constantly needed to tell yourself: it is this way because I wanted it this way, I wanted it this way, otherwise I am dead.

But NOW YOU HAVE RUN OUT of hiding places. You are afraid and you are waiting for everything to stop, the rain, the hours, the stream of traffic, life, people, the world; waiting for everything to collapse, walls, towers, floors and ceilings; waiting for men and women, old people and children, dogs, horses, birds, to fall, one by one, to the ground, paralysed. Plague-ridden; waiting for the marble to crumble away, for the wood to turn to pulp, for the houses to collapse noiselessly, for rain to dissolve the paintwork, tear fabrics to shreds, wash away the newspaper ink; waiting for a fire without flames to consume the stairs; waiting for the streets to split down the middle to reveal the gaping labyrinth of the sewers; waiting for rust and mist to invade the city.

YOU ARE NOT DEAD and you are none the wiser.

It means nothing to talk of hitting rock bottom. Or to plumb the depths of despair or of your hatred. You have learnt nothing, except that solitude teaches you nothing, except that indifference teaches you nothing: it was a lure, it was a mesmerising illusion which concealed a pitfall.

The world is such a big word. Indifference is futile.

You can believe, if you want, that by eating the same meal every day you are making a decisive gesture. But your refusal is futile. Your neutrality and disassociation is meaningless. Your inertia is just as vain as your anger. You may have pretended to forget time. But you couldn't ever quite get away with it.

Perhaps for a long time yet, you could continue to lie to yourself, deadening your senses, sinking deeper and deeper into the mire. But the game is over, the great orgy, the spurious exaltation of a life in limbo. The world has not stirred, and you have not changed. Indifference has not made you any different.

Time, which sees to everything, is providing the solution.

Time, that knows the answer, has continued to flow.

And No You are not the nameless master of the world, the one on whom history had lost its hold, the one who no longer felt the rain falling, who did not see the approach of night.

You are no longer the inaccessible one. You are now afraid, angry, you are waiting.

You are waiting for the rain to stop falling.