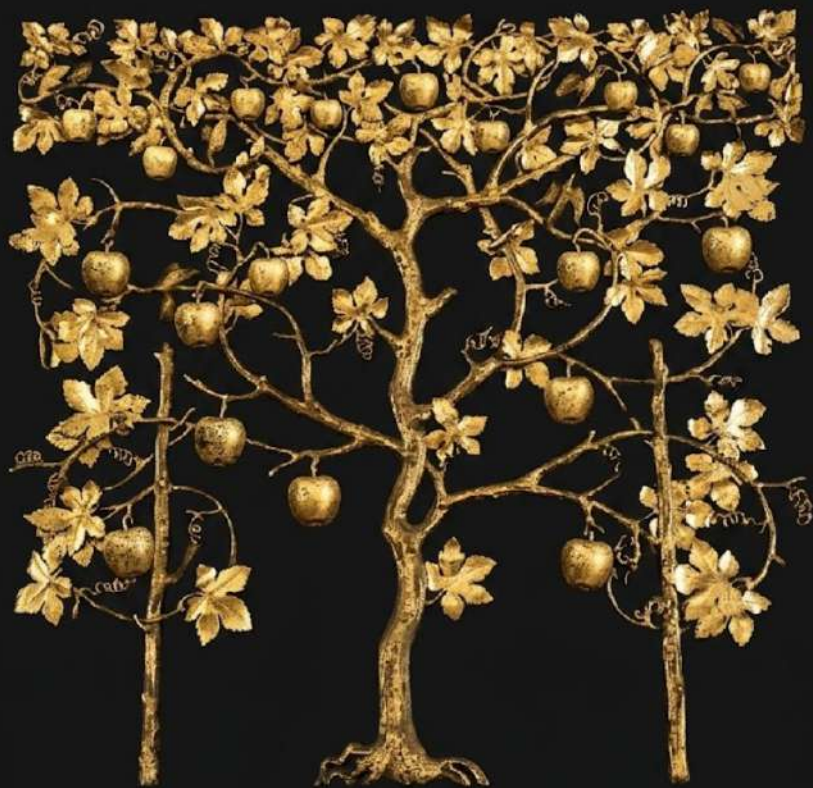


THE SECOND TREE



PATRICK KEOUGH

The Second Tree

PATRICK KEOUGH

*Copyright © 2026 Patrick Keough.
All rights reserved.*

*Set in EB Garamond, after Garamond and Granjon, sixteenth century.
Cover photograph and interior plates by Patrick Keough.*

*with one man's greed you swung the axe at the withered
base of our second tree and forever forbade us return to
the divinity of spirit.*

— FROM *TWO GLORIES*



The Second Tree — Patrick Keough — Jan-Apr 2026.

Contents

I. POWER AND ITS ARCHITECTURES

The Halo as Marker
Grain, Road, Clock
The Misplaced Pillar
Purpose, Not Talent
The Substrate of Power
Two Glories
Pirate Kings

II. FAITH AND ITS SILENCES

The Gift of Silence
The Spider-Mensch
The Serpent's Wisdom
The Wingless Child
The Buried Flame
The Obelisk
The Donkey and the Spire

III. RUINS, LABOR, AND THE SELF

The Unnamed Builders
Feronia
The Marrow of Empire
The Tennis Ball
Ash and Thunder
The Sea of Eyes
Twenty Million Gallons
The Simple Gait
The Fishing Village
Giuseppe

IV. PLURALITY AND RETURN

The Glade
The Same Substrate
The Golden Second Fruit
The Absurd Rebel
The Dormant God
The Serpent
The Plural Soul

I

POWER AND ITS ARCHITECTURES

*“A king, a god, may only gain height through the bodies
which it is built upon.”*

— FROM *THE SUBSTRATE OF POWER*

FLORENCE PRAGUE VENICE ROME NAPLES

The Halo as Marker

AN my bruised certainty grows ever bolder – this hatred of the power which has rushed us since the days of the resurrection. Yet the framing cannot remain so simple; so instead of blaming the tortured child of prophecy I pity him further. Is this death of men the natural conclusion of power? There is nothing so profane as orthodoxy, not for its meager virtues, but for the power it binds us with. Here I can shake hands with that sickly german brother – in the shadow of the cross (not Christ!) we are taught to hate our own blood, to condemn ourselves – this is the essence of Pauline dominion, the master slave dialectic.

Look at how soulless the art is which crudely immortalizes the tortured son of that vile Roman soldier – even in the era of his worship glory is apt found in his desecration, turn instead to the vivid morbid of the ancients. The halo is a marker of servitude. All those it is cast upon must bear witness to the sea of blood which the demiurge – the specter of power, man-slavery, of a cruel smotherer of life – drinks. With lazy hands knights embellish stone with their ugly coats, monks carve replications of false images, the prisoners wretched injustices haunt the hell of the great absolver.

One who believes in heaven is forever doomed to depletion – these great artists, sculptors, proceed in excellence for the temporary suspension of virtue, the aspect of pride, of self-adoration, of nature-death-love, allows such excellent capturing of our form. Bacchus; how they have ruined you in the distillment of your gift of art through the predicament of the chalice. Your ill virtues remain, yet they so desperately strip away your warmth for the false blood of some poor carpenter.

In the destruction of the pagan pantheon we lose our humanity, that most modest truth which all have emulated, we instead say to our artists – no! You must obey the one master, your passions are sin, they make ruin of our true uniformity with the dogma of equality only in death, and thus they are allowed every injustice upon the living.

Grain, Road, Clock

I should have known myself to be irredeemable not by my ceaseless abstraction but my preferences of senses. There is no sound I hate more than the roar of sirens and drills, of jets and bellowing ships – how it ruins life itself. The arrogance of our despotism wrought rage – how dare they mute the ancient calling of the birds, the crash of the river? And for what? Mechanical means to deliver us ever further from our natural life, to sever community, to feed us poison to cure the ailment which is delivered by the lead-wrought chalice. Let the roads decay, the buildings crumble – unite the people in the purity of clean air, feed the hungry – even if it must be done through capital; we need not withhold our shared prosperity for the cheap thrill of a most ill-conceived convenience.

Three things: three cardinal sins of modernity which have propelled us to this desolate land of motorcade, asphalt, and steel. I name them thus: grain – that first bondage we endeavored, that step away from the wolf's capacity and vigor for eons of disease, warfare, and consumption. Amongst the tithing of the lands our most primitive, true, grand was born – and thus we started the fall from Eden. The second – the road – a most beautiful construction, an innocent sin – but born in the shadow of grain and gods it became a tool of conquest – again the potential, the specter, of greed grew larger. For these sins bloated man, removed him from his natural state, tore him from his brother birds and sister wolves. At last they terminate in necessity with our greatest heresy against ourselves – the clock. It is a tool which kills reality, that takes man's last hope of returnal and thus consumes his every moment. Never mind the invention – the purpose of capital and brutal monotheism – it teaches us fear, every day it reminds us of our death, and thus we rush to the fields, across the roads. Its chiming is the essence of my hatred, the first peal of our arrogance. I hope one day to see it all collapse, but even then this damage cannot be undone.

Overlooking Prague, Near Museum of Alchemists, February 16th

The Misplaced Pillar

THERE is perhaps a helpful vice in knowing nothing of the lands you visit. I sit in this great plaza and behold the thousand pillars, the great audience of sculpted stone faces and bodies, all proclaiming glory. At the zenith a towering mass of brick overshadowing the palace behind it. Who committed the sin of this unnatural beast's creation? Which wicked mind said unto this great pavilion of heroes and pillars, and that there must be but one king, and he shall loom above and before the ancients. Whereas the ancient heart inspires such significant delight of the senses, layering upon its bones of assembled columns, a great perfect curvature, hosting the banister, in which one might look across the plaza at the countless windows a wave to a friend, priest, lady.

But then higher it stretches – upon the tilted medium man blossoms into depiction of myth and glory, tribute to that deepest desire to lend balance and tribute in our own form. Angel, Nephilim, Hero – they adorn the peaks, and behind them great halls of fresco and the divine art surely accumulate. A golden hue pushes through its breast and gives the gift of openness, of inviting our many souls into this triumph of flesh and bone.

And thus we return to you, ugly and misplaced pillar of monotheism, as the drainage, come to say beneath these simple walls we will ascend – and then high above man it takes it, diligence and piety through shallow and bland rectangular construction. Two have superseded our garden of virtue – perhaps some ugly king and higher still, his ugly reflection in some cruel angel. Tear it down! Even as the many bare breast nymphs and warriors deny too the equality of all men – they at least give hope of ascension – but this profane pillar gives nothing but black despair. Even in the dark of night I can see these most ancient rules inscribed upon stone, but above, there is only darkness; the ascent is forbidden, impossible.

Piazza San Marco, Venice, February 24th

Purpose, Not Talent

WITH each day's passing I find myself more disillusioned than the last. Dropped into the cradle of a foregone era I find a physicality to base this deep sense of nausea that has long afflicted me. How to characterize it in words? The iron-cast leaf draped over the maiden's sex, a green tinted addition made to embellish this ancient marble. The severing of an ancient statue's hand, the infringement of an American store's ugly sign upon ancient walls – all of this yields upon entrance to the designation of “museums”. Suddenly the stone flesh is laid bare, the layering of ancient colored stone towers over the bustling streets, upon its wings a thousand carved faces, attempting immortality; these horrible scenes of pride and desecration dwarf the meandering visitor. I do not envy the creators, nor the era they attempted to emulate. Let the Sabine women go, drop the head of the tortured serpentine crown, cease this endless violence that burns in the heart of that first empire – but one must admire the beauty of their constitution.

In this pavilion I sit a lion rises up with its forearms raised – nestled in its mouth caught between two fangs lies a man's head, his crumpled body – made of more modern, orangish stone – at his feet. The irony of this statue is not lost on me – in immortalizing this proud creature's victory man finally triumphs over this ancient foe. His victory becomes a memory, and cast in stone he is forever locked into that posture of foreboding pursuit – dead. A few meters away under high ceilings and immense arches, countless frescoes adorn the stone, fading yet still triumphant too. A passing American girl said to her friend – “imagine the talent to make these... I could never.” Yet I think that talent holds little role here, what forbids her from such heights is the age and language that she gives to these nameless artists. My conviction grows – the distinguishing factor that forbids modernity such ascension is quite simple – purpose. These artists had purpose, a love for art, a drawing towards the divinity of the myth they embodied and sought. Today our builders, artists, architects too have purpose – but this purpose is godless, without divine pursuit – it seeks to please man, and not the gods, it worships capital, confuses

“talent” for “reverence” and “devotion”.

Palazzo Vecchio (and Bargello Museum), Florence, February 27th

The Substrate of Power

So it is that the city extends into the valley with walls, emulating mountains – a few towers attempting parallel. Let's name them – that of the fortress and that of the chapel. If the eye casts to the side, perhaps we may count the rich mansions, but they serve the same function as the other two. A pleasing realization; the only thing making them seem great, that propels them above the terrain, is those countless red roofs and manila walls.

Such an architecture declares and defines a living reclamation of the feudal era which it sprung from. A king, a god, may only gain height through the bodies which it is built upon. Or at least it is thus with the Christian god that haunts this ancient city – Christ's body was necessitated to show us the true substrate of power – a man bled without reason. So kneel, won't you, at the altar and pledge yourself to some king, lessen the weight of your confused condition and give away your flesh for the promise of some word or symbol. It is much easier to labor isn't it? But you forget the divinity of the land you sacrifice yourself for – that long before some fool told you that you were doomed there was life still here, unfettered by the relentless shadows of the garrison and cross?

Look at this ancient bronze; they too loved and died – do you dispute their exigencies? True they too suffered from unfair shackles, that they devoured the sins of their own construct; it must then be your turn to call to their bones and tell them to recall their forefathers and share the good word – both in life and death we are all the same, and no kingdom can deny us that immortal unity. Name it as you wish, but never put it to scripture, lest it is in the rhythm of rebellion against the intolerant inquisition of those who would demand your suffering to build thrones. Look away from stone, and see that ancient mountain, go forth and drink the wine, dance until you have freed yourself from this curse of halos and shackles.

Piazzale Michelangelo, Florence, February 27th

Two Glories

SITTING in a slight aside, I am unsure of what to make of this beehemoth. Its legacy cannot be so easily assumed even in my rushed strokes. Glory is a most contrived thing; wielded by all it ascertains a joyous divinity which gives rise to structures which exceed the hands which made them through the permanence of man's solitary virtue – the capacity to imagine. In this view, I am impressed and hold no ill-will for this monument, but this is a tribute to the unnamed thousands which perished in its construction, driven to greatness through iron and whip.

Thus we turn to the modern conception of glory, that which begot this vast undertaking; glory of the few, the madness of fraternity. Did you build these immense walls for the love of the divine, to unite your people and together celebrate the gift of life? No – it was done in the shadow of that more ancient glory. It took the purpose of the prior, it looked upon man and achieved a dangerous clarity, it was a lesson in how to make a god, not share in the worship of one. It was made in the shadow of man's glory, and thus began its purpose.

There is seldom need to turn one's gaze against the injustice of the dictator's class when one is caught in the exaltation of divinity. We are simple creatures and cannot tell apart these two glories, and so in the roar of the water and noise of chariots and battleships, lions and peasants, one finds that same tune of the heavenly harp within their breasts. For it is not the blood which excites but the chanting rhythm of the 10 thousand beside you; for the brief extinguishment of the curse of individuality – thus the glory is found, and never questioned. The parallels need not expounding, ritual sacrifice, music, heroes, stories – yet it is the organizer who differentiates this difference in glory.

Glory of all ascends – from the earth all lay in the shadow of some heavenly spine – upwards, to the birds and the sun, the spirit of all who engage soars. Glory of one, of greed, however must indoctrinate and subvert the spirit. For a brief moment the king says to his slaves come and look down on the earth, gain for yourself a taste of my glory – gain power over those wretched souls beneath which die for our amusement – you

finally get to decide the line between death and life. So the peasants chant, kill, and when the spectacle is complete they go back to their subjugation, their hunger sated by bread instead of the divine.

How then does one break this wretched addiction to the glory of one, that endless pursuit that damns one to an insatiable hunger? One need only depart from the shadow; and cease the allowance of their spirit's consumption.

I revile you Constantine – how much blood rests upon your hands, with one man's greed you swung the axe at the withered base of our second tree and forever forbade us return to the divinity of spirit. I see through your prophecy – I laugh at your most Roman pronouncement – that somehow it was upon a field littered with dead men that a divine truth was revealed. The pantheon was too cluttered for your greed, your lust for power sought greater heights, there could be no room for the common man atop your immense throne. In your Roman ways you sought to kill the poor Christ once more and forever set upon him the torture of the cross which your tradition built. In the plazas you place the dove above the obelisk, and now you place the cross upon all which stands after your purging of the proof of your humanity. The world's immensity terrified you – the threat of unity, the compassion of letting Isis rest in Juno's name alongside Uma, and so you sought to plunder its wealth to build your fortresses of stone and gold. You must remove us from the heaven in our hearts to set us before your Roman laws to begin that final eternal siege – our flesh and bones are not enough for your appetite – it too must consume our minds, our love, and extinguish any flame which might remind us of that first warmth of our mother's womb, of the total freedom our souls are born for.

Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine, March 1st



Pirate Kings

HERE is the throne of capital – alone in a room gilded with grasping hands it seems so small. Resting upon it, letting those ugly arms grip the lion's mane; how pathetic and tortured a creature he must have been.

In singular style these pirate kings fashion for themselves depictions of the gods and heroes they seek approval of, yet look close at those branching leaves and phoenix, and you will see their legacy is woven into fabric and not stone. Look how they adorn their furniture and walls with stolen gold, and yet still this collection fails at matching the mosaic of a fisherman's hut. With their avarice they seek to pay their way into a heaven they have forsaken – it is their own image which they transfix into portrait and myth itself, no wonder this imitation of art is so easily ignored.

This entire complex, its long halls and enormous ceilings marked with plaster and uniform slabs, will one day collapse and nothing will be lost. Crowning these pillars are brotherly imitations of the ancients' method, yet these too are but a facade – they hold no weight – their design dooms them to soulless ornamentation. Flat, ugly faces peer back from those golden frames – in the place of marble they have used paper, despite their endless stolen riches, see how they cannot reach for that universal spark. So bloody are their hands and gold-heavy their hearts.

A canvas purchased – a style mocked, a wealth plundered – see how even all these centuries later they betray the same rotting sin as their imperial forefathers. Your tortured Christ, the plenitude of Ceres and Neptune, the bravery of that holy knight – in your purchase and contact with your blackened hearts you have blinded the beauty of their depiction and defiled a natural order – reversing the freedom of the brush to chain it to your vile purpose. But such is your legacy, to live in eternal fear, to look upon these great figures and hide in a false projection of merits you murder. Vive la Roma, Spain, wealth and its endless pilfering.

Royal Palace of Naples, March 10th



II

FAITH AND ITS SILENCES

*“I will pray only for one thing, that you may one day be
released from this circus, this mortal hell, and never
again suffer that death-awakening.”*

— FROM *THE GIFT OF SILENCE*

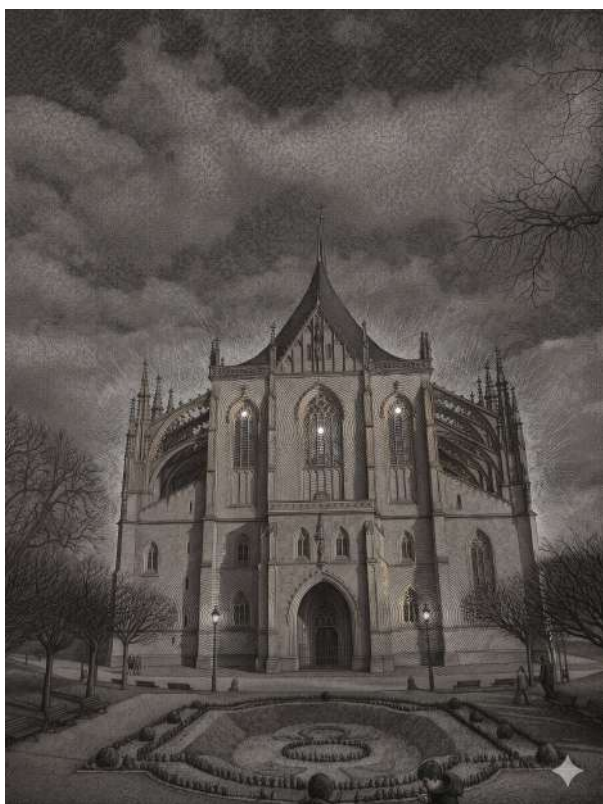
KUTNA HORA PRAGUE ROME BARCELONA

The Gift of Silence

AH how sweet is my heresy, how sharp this refusal feels. I cross the tabernacle and do not kneel. Pity, Nietzsche cries, is the killer of strength. How wrong he is – so blind by the story he forgets the flesh upon the cross, that most damning final cry – the sound of pandora's final flight – dear carpenter, I will tell you why he has forsaken you – in the garden of the infinite where you drank our sins did you hear your friends whisper? Oh there is none more tortured than you, poor man of rebellion – should you rest above do you see how we pillage your name, how we baptize ourselves in the blood of the lamb and feed ourselves to the Lions? And you are not even allowed that kindness of pity, for we have made mountains out of your bony Body, stretched your sorrow into infinity – it is the opiate which binds the body to the chemist, not the embrace of warmth which you died. I do not weep for you, tears mean nothing to a dead man.

So I must use you too, carve into your flesh with this ink, define your last words with what feels right in my palm. How cruel, to cast you in gold and steal away the organic anointment for the burning avarice of man. All echoes fade, eventually the flames of hell, that music which we provoke upon our journeys, fades and finally we may fully return to where all gods go – nothingness. Yet for two thousand years you have endured our torture, we have slain, sinned, defiled all in the exultant heat of your hell. My wish for you is to find what surely came in those final moments where your profane divinity failed to arrive – the gift of silence. I will pray only for one thing, that you may one day be released from this circus, this mortal hell, and never again suffer that death-awakening.

Saint Barbara's Cathedral, Kutna Hora, February 18th



The Spider-Mensch

IN the tradition of our most esteemed Kafka, let me entertain my own transmutation – but not to humble beetle but a freer creation – that of the spider. I should then aim to live in two places, and forbid myself any such inbetween. Perhaps we turn to our dear split Steppenwolf, and instead divide my soul to two worlds – that of man, and that of terra. My first home would lie in the most divinely profane of places – the Sedlec Ossuary. Where else should the spider-mensch dwell, what perfect webs made for my hearth – arranged in pyramids I can seek solace in both the cavity of skulls and the chandeliers of bone.

Indeed they have been made equal – not by any divinity, but for the paradise they have given me. Such a most lovely home, centuries might pass, but again and again they repair this playground – just for my kin. I must admire that man of legend who saw what we spider-kin see, and took the barren dungeon and from his own flesh rendered his web, turn by turn bound bones to one another, letting gravity and a breathless faith ensure the arts completion. And think of all the souls this spider-mensch caught in this web, how draining them of flesh and blood he consumed them, turning them into another thread dedicatedly, divinely provoked the pyramids to grow taller still.

But there is another spider who my most wolfish tendency prefers, like the prior, buried under mother terra – but oh so much deeper and closer to her heart. In the Movable cave, what is 500 years but a blink of an eye – these true spiders who needed not that second evolution; our flesh mirrored metaphor – man's fall, the battle of scorpion and spider alike. There is no need for light there, these children of the earth preside over her most base essence. So long since their journey into the gardens of Persephone they have forgotten fire and united in the fishing from this river styx. Together, as brethren, they feast and forget of that most ancient journey to the depths – beyond history they descended. Yet they were found, and will be forgotten, their fleece protects them from these most rank of gods which marvel at them. A blink, and we will perish, but like these nephilim we live on in eternity, never needing the sun.

Sedlec Ossuary, Kutna Hora, February 18th



The Serpent's Wisdom

MYSELF, I think we have abandoned all senses but sight. Where is the scent, the texture, the breath of art in a cathedral? We abolish them, in this most primitive monotheism we say unto ourselves – Forbid yourself touch, the delicacies of the body – look at how high above our brilliance is to you. How we weave our mythos into cold stone which you must crane your neck to observe. How cruel, to posture that art, that poor jove, so far from our meager hands. We artists do the same, chasing the ancients we think we must build higher. Babel fell and destroyed our unity, yet these believers declared themselves in ever greater towers – perhaps with a coy smile they point the swords above us so as to show to that great storm god our arrogance is in his name. How can one adore this beastly god who smites all those who are to ascend – a relic of an earlier period – thus we make the Christ child, a tool which we can use to paint over towers, and say he too is man and yet god also, look how he sits between the heaven and the hell which we have made ourselves.

Outside, we adorn the block with man-made gods, those Promethean sculptures that emulate Babel, unyieldingly – they ate of the second fruit and carry the weight of stone without shame in their sex. I look up now inside the cathedral, where is the flesh of man? Hidden behind modest cloth, shameful even as they elevate them beyond man. Look at these white false pretenders – in no aspect are they true outside their conspiracy to deliver us ever further from the ground which gives us the potency by which we strip her away from herself, forever building higher. Where are you, brother serpent? Our most divine creature, lover of flesh and teacher of truth? Do we emulate our angels in the image of your fabled foe? Do they sit upon the balcony and carry the throne ever so high that we might never again risk the serpent's wisdom? Unwilling to lose that polytheistic pride we borrow the shell, the laurel, the pillars upon which we assert flesh's inferiority – yet we refuse return to eden, we insist those gates are forever shut. Show me the fang, swallow the toad – oh most kind king of men, my dear serpent – please descend from the true Eden just once more and swallow the sun – we cannot see in the greedy flame

of the false-monad, ever growing taller, and higher above us.

Saint Nicholas Church, Prague, February 19th

The Wingless Child

HOW could I have missed such a critical feature? Perhaps I had gotten lost in the immensity of the stone walls, which towered over my precious perch – the games of children and lounging of lovers besought more attention than this inglorious specter. But now you have my full attention, archangel of death. Perched above the stone you are seen giving mercy, ending a plague which cleansed sin from this ancient land. What better patron of Rome's transition into purity than the creature which cast aside our only champion and set into exile the great dragon. Yet even in your aged symbology I question the mercy of a blade sheathed, for was it not then that very saber which corrupted the flesh of thousands and sent these souls into the inferno? The silence of a battlefield, as the last priests of death finish the moaning corpses of their enemy, is no mercy nor absolution. How we forgive the drawing of your holy blade and worship the very arm which rent children from their mother's blossom, and make praise to the warden of our sorrows – this is the heritage of your creed, great warrior of the demiurge. In terror of the unknowable, in the infinite power of your saber's begetter, we revile the many who perished – too heavy is the absurdity of some divine god showing its talons in never ending peril, that we must forget the honoring of our own dead and thus prepare ourselves for the next senseless descent of your breed to maim us again. One is taught to love the agony on the face of the Christ and not the heart which fights its final battle against the gravity of his own weight; through this love of suffering we are told it is the nature of our kind, a punishment inherited from our birth. A love of life would find monuments to the countless victims of the legions of angels, it would be found in the joyous cheers of those few survivors, and never in the executioner's storage of its blade.

Let us take respite from these fevered wonderings, let us gaze upon the absurdity of your form. Let us imagine a child who before your graceful descent had survived your purge. His flesh scarred by your blade, his lungs forever cursed with a sickening rasp which will surely follow him into a life of prostration on these bustling streets for a spare coin. Is this

your mercy that has arrived, or does that come with the years of spittle cast upon him by your many worshipers? Do you deny his wings – was it you who lured some barber to sever his legs to save the heart from the necrosis which was born from untreated boils? Did this child, born from the toil of two peasant's brief affair in purpose, offend your divinity? Within his infant eyes did you detect the latent image of your nemesis, that pagan serpent's endless hunger, and in your infinite kindness expel from him this beast at the cost of his fledgling purpose? When his mother, herself marked for death by a deepening cough, went to the priests to bathe him in holy smoke to save at least this poor soul, was it by your command that they pointed halberd and scroll at her and cast her away in disgust? One looks upon your vast wings and wonders from where each feather emerged, how your divine light has been formed into the recognizable form of the race which you must purge? This maimed youth has a theory brewing in the absence of his heart – in the latent shadow of that purged serpent. He thinks, watching the birds soar above your highest peak, that you have stolen them from him, that the countless corpses of doves which laid strewn upon his mother's rotting body were slain too by your fury. As he claws himself about with shattered fingernails, those useless stumps he drags behind him accuse you, and are reflected in those feathered wings too which have once belonged to him. Looking at the towering fortress which you perched upon he remembers his father, who having stolen a loaf for his pregnant wife had been taken into and never again emerged. He wonders if one of those feathers belonged to the bones now buried deep within the walls – but when he tries to speak, to condemn the great beast and its hungry blade, he is reminded that of his purpose, and he bows his head deeper against the stone. There is no time for such heretics, and even if he should scream it atop his broken tongue the great bell above would lay it mute – and most importantly, no one likes a loud beggar. No, the only hope for him awaits him tomorrow, and should this devilish protest be uttered then hope itself, that crested golden gate which the angel guards, would forever too be forbidden from him. So this empty, wingless child presides, and in a few years by hunger, plague, or boot his silence will be rewarded, and the great angel might

finally lower that saber into its scabbard.

March 2nd – Castel Sant’Angelo



The Buried Flame

BENEATH extreme salt a most coincidental ceremony has been found. How bizarre to wonder about this ancient land, a slight sickness in my breast at the vile patriarchy of this blood soaked land, and to suddenly find myself witnessing a resurrection of its secret Femininity. Do I witness here a more truthful birth of Rome – not by some scheming bastard brother-killer – but in reverence of the primordial mother, whose brightness burned for millennia? Among these hidden secrets not one statue of her, Vesta, Sisterhood – see how they have defaced their priestess, chiseled out their names. A pyre at the center, the formless spirit given no approximation of fleshly form, extinguished on this very day, birthed through the nature which it calls from. But even this most ancient rite has been transformed – even under the heavy shield of Aeneas the divine smoke kept this oppression repelled, codified, reduced from the ancient power which is captured in the flame, yet still beloved and sacred. What then killed this goddess – when burying her captured priestess alive became not enough, let us wonder a moment at what kingly force in a broad stroke extinguished that flame forever more. Why none other than the men of Christ – how threatened is that profane demiurge by these Vestal virgins; they expose his capture of Mary and de-feminization of her rite as an echo of an older tradition. Even here, the Romans knew that one cannot entirely domesticate their better halves – one must first grasp their power, that divine eternal motherly flame, then they must sever her from her own sex – forever a bride, belonging to the father and son, and never a mother. Such it is we can find in these white veils the secret of the murder of humanity and the birth of mankind. Christ too belongs to no mother, Mary must be a virgin, forever a bride, else she might resume her rightful hearth – at all costs we must ensure her divinity is tied to the rejection of her femininity, just as these Vestal Virgins were allowed power so long as they yield the divinity of the womb; when we are to kill them they must remain “pure” saints – not by blade nor beast, but buried deep underground and made to starve in the darkness of a light we have stolen from them. So it is that Constantine learned this great crime and sought its

perfection – only it was not he, but the machine of power that necessitated the furtherance of Lilith and the punishment of Eve to be distilled upon the innocent feminine, and forever take more, consume more, and without second thought extinguish that ancient flame forever more.

March 2nd – Temple of Vesta



The Obelisk

THE massive expanse of immense pillars and pointed curves of the sky-born arches whisper of a history defined by its errant violent adoration of the sin which it claims to protest. How very Roman-Christian indeed to be wrongly named, its original conception abandoned by the politic of the robe, completed by Carlo Maderno, whose blood, if there was a heaven, would surely doom him to an inferno to forever burn in the endless fuel of his bloodlust.

Its divinity, which had survived the Roman blade, the Christian hunger, and remained despite the eons and countries which had sought to mute its power, can no longer be felt. Isis, your cult has perished, and look what mockery they make of your ancient truth? Oh they've buried your remains deep under this gothic avarice, upon your bones they blessed godless popes, gave orders of inquisitions murder, and burned alive a saint more holy than all the corpus which you hoard to dispel the vitality of the ancient mother you have misnamed.

Under these false prophets' haloed gaze, our jealousy of the stars dared to prove your bloody fallacies as what they were, an ignorance which defied the very earth you split to build this ugly monument to a man you enslaved with ruinous doctrine. You painted stars above your saints, atop the towering unloving ceilings, and when you were for the first time in a millennia told the truth of these celestial angels your rage burned the good Bruno alive and dragged Galileo before your court to recant the stars.

For it is in darkness that you thrive, you blind the many and position yourselves as vessels of a god they are forbidden to understand. Burners of books, killers of brother Jews – they place you above the very altar that they to this day claim divinity from.

Yet outside, found beneath the stone you broke with cruel purposes, an obelisk still stands – in its simple construction there can be found more godliness than the entirety of this tomb of sinning saints and enforced ignorance – it is a reminder that no matter how high you build to obstruct them, the stars are forever free.

Basilica of Saint Mary of Minerva, March 11th



The Donkey and the Spire

EARLY this morning a procession passed me by in the street. At its head a train of white clad children – tailing them was the main object of focus, a large raft embellished in gold and cherubim, atop its regal expanse the Christ upon a donkey. Its movements were rigid, aligned with the exalting march set by its accompanying band. Should you gaze under the bottom of the golden facade you could see a dozen men's legs beneath staggering along as they bore the king's weight. One must hide the tragedy of this sight in its hilarity – they've made this peasant anarchist into a king and placed him atop a golden tomb, unabashedly attempting to return him to the grasp of men through his pathetic mount. Those hidden faces bore this weight, certain they joined his most divine procession – yet the procession they joined was older, the same crowd that first forced this man to become a king.

Down the road one arrives at this hideous construction of stone and spires – a perfect mirror to the procession, a product of modernity too. Upon the back of a genius it sought that which all romantics search for: tradition to give meaning and shape, rebellion against its past depictions, and nature to provide the strength to deliver the lesser two forward. How perfectly ironic that its master refused blueprints and instead molded its shape from clay, only for those plans to be destroyed in the violence of a new era – an era itself accumulated through capital. Its master too died a death by no means but that same inequity, capital's transfixion of man into material. How beautiful are its most ancient hearts; the blending of materials belongs alone to the immortals of his era.

Yet beyond it, atop it, a hideous facade is being built. It forges nature and rebellion, and spites the ancient tradition of its master for a modern twice-failed projection – failed as modernism in its own right, failed again as imitation. Topping the spires with ugly ornaments, cheap style and stone as it ascends. If nothing else we must watch Christ and his donkey rise up, the golden coffin receives its last coating.

Basilica de la Sagrada Familia, March 29th

III

RUINS, LABOR, AND THE SELF

“It is a blessing that their names cannot be found in these shrines, for their craft need no adornment.”

— FROM *THE UNNAMED BUILDERS*

ROME NAPLES POMPEII HERCULANEUM

The Unnamed Builders

IT is good to ground oneself in history before beginning a sermon – in this we can surpass the priests which praise the murder of the steps. How curious – an origin built in the time of Christ, yet dedicated to the practice of flesh veneration of a dying mythology. A Greek name for a tomb that was adorned with divine science – If only I could bring back images of its origins, and look up to see a brilliant sky wrought in bronze, adorned with the stone of the sea and watched over by a company of gods and dictators alike. In my mind, this is an essence of Rome which should not be rushed over. Dear Caesar amongst your daemons of purpose you are given a chance to follow your forefather of myth and ascend – the occlusion of that sun which fed your conquest shows you the way to the immortal hearth of the stars – amongst which you might once more navigate the sea in an immortal triumph. Even in the devotion of your bones your myth must be skyborne – infused with this most ancient adoration. Yet into flame your throne went, those rectangular pillars and roof adorned you in your ascension. So it was you were resurrected upon the whim of a newer power and were given a greater plurality, and a map by which you could return to rest. But your path was soon lost – thou glorious stars occluded a new power worship. Keeping the weight of the dome, the adornment of the floors which let heaven's tears freely flow, the great rebirth was made. Torn from the niches your bust joined that of your gods, your glory too dimmed the brightness of these modern visions. Marbled down, your legacy called for the stars to be reborn in the casting of its enriched force – made to pulverize your history. A temple reborn, the creative weakness of your succession has left middling mortar and unremarkable saints in the house of the stars. Perhaps they mistook the power of that immense dome for an excess which could only capture the worshippers' piety. How unremarkable this minute altar is, how small this modern glory feels resting on the skeleton of your legacy. Look at these empty doors – could they not find the strength to succeed your gods with their army of angels? Yet the building has continued its true purpose, the graves and inscriptions of dictators once again dwarfs the dynasty they

pretend to worship.

And I am reminded of its relative youth, and of that original purpose, the purpose of Rome's legacy. To give the warlord an excuse, and to gift his bones the gift of power immortalized – once those bronze stars fell there could be no doubt of this masterpiece's purpose. Christ, resting in the place of Mars, cannot hope to match those masses of blackened stone which his masters now rest within. It is a fool's quest to give an echo of divinity to these bloody beasts, to worship Caesar is to worship all of his buried kin – it is to forget the downcast face of Christ, to spurn the eclipse which reminds their bones of their folly, to defame the strength of those forgotten gods. But most of all, it is to forget the countless hands which labored to construct something which has held all of their spirits. To forget those spirits which inspired into the astrologers protectors the path to renovation, that instinct of the craftsmen's chisel which again and again rebuilt what their leaders had pillaged. Those poor bargemen's sweat that pulled the pillars through the immortal rivers, the slaves whose blood gave form to this brilliant dome, these are the true kings – it matters not if they turned alloy into stars, or cast stone into the madman's noble brow. It is a blessing that their names cannot be found in these shrines, for their craft need no adornment, it was but a blink in the era of this house of gods, and yet its beauty can be felt by the millions who bear witness to it. They will fail to name them, but that is no matter, for it is that force which carries them in and out of the temple which carries on those unnamed souls' heritage. This wonder in the child's eye, the laughing friends, the slow party of elders; our blindness need not condemnation, for it is through the act of life itself that each gives purpose to the ancient stone. Just as Mars was felled, so too will Christ. Caesar's tomb shall find exiled company with Raphael's, eventually this grand dome too will collapse, but the builders will live on; their unnamed deaths guarantee their unity with the soles of the wonders who will someday tread upon the returned marshy ground once this monument has long been forgotten.



Feronia

FERONIA, a name to crown this wonder theory. For centuries this palace laid unsullied by the arrogance of temple stone – your calling of the rivers rise to give life again to your worshipers. A venerated mother you distilled the chaos of a primordial cycle into the bed of fertile soil and united devotion; in this plane of Mars's death marches you gave proof of a more ancient truth, untouched by the bloody burdens of Romulus's violent creed. In this glade of marsh and silt you stripped away their stolen valor and reminded all of their forbidden hearth – yet still to your banks they marched to beg your lesser kin's hand in victory, did you, ancient mother, answer their calls with the ancient knowledge that in the course of the river even the toughest of stones are turned back to dust? While they raced their golden chariots over your sanctuary and made sacrifice of Neptune's children, gave number to their empire and promise of spoils, your spirit presided. Did you cry when that violent avatar of Mars did violence against your children? Yet still your river flowed and gave gift to any wretched soul which sought sustenance, in the distant land your name united the warring tribes in a title-less veneration of the maternal spirit. In your image the flowers of the marshes were weaved into laurels to crown the children of the in-between; the river's tide guiding those brave shamans between life and death and reminding of all's equality in that short break from their home in the soil. But we must too acknowledge you as the mother of wolves – that your temples rejected the adornment of stone and its drive to domesticate with the lightning's bolt – your priests given the courage to walk across the embers, their hunger devouring the flesh and returning to the caves. No wonder it is your wolfish ground which served the iron bondage of human arrogance – reminding that brands are nothing more but proof of embers that must be trod upon to return to our ancient unity. The patron of the privileged means nothing, but the beggar's last coin sets them free – let those bastardly kings worship war, the river and spirit of humanity cannot be subjugated or named by such shallow exigencies. With greed these kings thought they could domesticate the river and wolf, by burning your pa-

trons they brought their own greed and arrogance and attempted theft of your virtue, and attempted to bind you to the blessings of a sister god they betrayed in their channels of artificial rivers. Yet look who remains; long after Caesar's blood was spilt on your soil, the false rivers shattered, the wilderness remains. Now you gift is a simple kindness, a sanctuary for lazy cats which lounge on this ancient stone and give proof of your eternal nature.

Largo di Torre Argentina – March 4th

The Marrow of Empire

FROM the marrow of empire humanity must re-emerge and begin the process anew. First, we draw from our forgotten histories the nutrients in which to develop a foundational substrate. From playing in creeks, feasting on the plentiful orchards, communing with the fellow souls remnant from the violent flames of secret histories we are made again in the image of our essence. This primal state represents an existence unburdened by interiority that delights in the infinite possibility of the plentiful earth. From the river banks we drink, from the elks we give prayer and feast upon their flesh. In our scarcity we are able to embrace the heavens and freely wander the lands – making our paths with paint and urns. What is holy is that which gives life, the profane is that which extinguishes without consultation of the human condition. Yet from this abundance the mind begins to be still hungry even as its belly fills, the hand print on the wall becomes the latent reminder of a dual nature and overshadows the animal spirits painted alongside it. Many animals hold cycles of seasonal expansion and contraction; the rabbits in spring devour the meadow, and in winter starve or die of plague; senseless hunger ignites and then extinguishes. As the human number expands so does the principle of our interior hunger – in the orchards and boars now scarcity to excess rabbits must depart their home and find a new meadow of their own, for the world remains large and full of promise. Betrayed by the necessity of their expulsion these excess sons cannot find means of return alone and delve further into blind hunger – they kill their brothers and steal their sisters to emulate what they had lost. Thus the marrow has filled again, and the hard casing and envelopment begins – these excess sons have lost their altruism, their essence in the hunger wrought by rejection and enslave their fellow kin alongside the memory of those painted ox and elk; in this the disease of empire is born again and first infects the marrow before the hardened cage can recognize its weakness. Countless perish within until eventually the weight of that mistaken nature collapses upon itself. It has devoured its own nature and thus doomed itself to death.

Aqueduct Ruins – Acquedotto Felice – March 5th

The Tennis Ball

YES, I am made certain of this previous kindness of silence and allowance of our fellow folk to live their purpose. In the game of cricket in the public center there is no necessity of describing or summoning some divinity. Children play this game with a lazy enjoyment, they cheer when the ball flies and wait in murmurs while some spry youth chases it outside this stone pit. Despite its tendency to exceed the steps of this inverted pyramid none bother to ascend to higher perches but rather fall back to spectate its flight. I need not know the name of the instruments they strum to set pace to that longing throw or upward strike. It is enough just to play, and for us assorted spectators to occasionally look up from our devices to follow the cheering of the players. In the distance a table tennis game proceeds endlessly as players come and go, further still the orange basketball rises and falls too. Cars exhume and honk as they slowly creep through the roads and everywhere there is food and drink to be found. Perhaps there is little point in wandering as a pilgrim and lending this ink to such isolative subjects. My scale is amiss, the rambling sentences and allusions hold no depth in the slight patter of their tennis ball flying in my direction. For a moment I am made to join this game – slowly tossed back into the pit I again retain my exile. No prayer or sermon can so easily embrace a lost soul; scripture and essay too seek permanence and therefore lose sight of the ease of slipping between the role of spectator and player; it aims to enforce these roles beyond the motion of the pen and lift the author and its subject into an eternal battle of searching for spectators.

Anfiteatro di Pozzuoli, Naples, March 6th

Ash and Thunder

JUST as ash met thunder above, your creed is that of stone and flame. These aged foundations prevail yet their roofs have long since given way. How weak those human barriers proved; the crown must fall long before its populace. Here we see the natural order of our revolt against nature's toil, from its fertile soil our means of expanse were born and in this temporary respite we gave name to that towering slumbered god, thinking an appeasement of our bounty might keep its favor. For your honor our priests do claim as they devour the sweet scent of human ashes promising its people a continuance of their meager means so long as their voices sing hymns. The rites complete these feathered fools retreated under the temple's roof as the thousands returned to the idle toil of their lives. Upon these same paved roads they returned to their abode and took delight and sorrow in the echoes of the past and provisions of the future. In their hearts they gave tribute to a plural pantheon, exchanging that which they reaped from the earth back to their selected guardians. Yes, they, that hundred faced mother of the mountains, acted with passions unbearable, but in these minor returns there could be hope that they might create the river, ignite their timber with the downcast bolt.

When that first rupture shook the ground and sent plates and ornaments crashing to the ground, some might have prostrated themselves before their favored shrine – death's specter had yet to follow its first call; still that growing cloud of ash seemed distant, and in this distance they could also hope to divine or flee the accursed city. Yet soon, as a second wave of flaming rock descended there was no more space for the named gods and that deeper ancient aspect of man ignited by the heat of an inescapable end. As the roofs burned these poor souls threw themselves onto the ground to protect child, lover, friend, a learned helplessness which arises from every soul's contact with the true essence their countless deities attempt to grasp. There lies a deeper duality: the universe is collapsed into each sufferer's soul for that brief moment before their entombment, and in this absolute reduction there too becomes proof of the infinite man and mountain are once more united – the enormity of

the mountain and minute body are made equal once more.

Forum, Pompeii, March 7th



The Sea of Eyes

ONE must imagine that they swim amongst a sea of unseen eyes. A brief contact, a laugh, a child stumbles, a man yells – and amongst it all we swim. Each passing soul flows with strength, every steel chariot is headed somewhere. A passing choir of silent angels, a lone crying pilgrim, droves of giddy school children – this is the torrent which slowly wears the stone to dust. More than half their lives are spent elsewhere – in walking their bodies march on as the water flows freely within them, perhaps wandering, perhaps praying, perhaps playing. As they enjoy the forgotten passing psalms they weave into the river – and upon cardboard or silk they all retire from this exterior world of eyes into the messy depths of their own. With mystery they retrace those forgotten steps again – further back they draw along the river bank giving name and faces to all that escaped them. Only a fourth of one's life can be assumed to add to that Saturnine hell, we are far more interested than the impressions wrought by the heavy curtain of bad faith. Behind those hungry eyes a kaleidoscope of forms proceed; it gives me pleasure to consider my humble form briefly being brought into their interiority, released before they might care to name me. Would they be intrigued by the notion a torrent sitting on uncovered ancient stone will outlast closer than their passing beauty – likely not, we are too busy dreaming as we pass by one another. In me, no dream, no face shall reside, the great sea washes over me, and even as our perceptions are diverted in their instrumentality we will all forget soon enough. In this infinite expanse of senses we are alone connected by our capacity to release one another from the canvas we paint ourselves on. Here is the true unity which might unite us without relying on our personal extinction, the one constant that gives fellowship to the birds, the bulls, and us. Yet we fear it; our minds protest against it with in that other three quarters – our very nature protests the creeping of this ultimate entropy. And the great irony, in beholding this one truth you must release it, always approaching yet never anticipating. A blessing to be unwound, kept alone as those old faces fade away to be recalled, until finally I am let go and that passing spectator might grasp our unity.

Naples, Giuseppe Garibaldi Statue, March 7th

Twenty Million Gallons

MUST ever boon, every pleasant luxury of this dead land find its footing in death and enslavement? Meant to blind rather than endow, the joy of centuries of companionship and union must be born from political aim? Beneath the marveling labyrinth of stone an unseen force perishing in the pleasure of their “betters” recreation? Leisure as a virtue – sure, let us amuse ourselves with such an honest statement – but with it alongside slavery. Egalitarian unity; one water to bathe the wretched poor and gold crowned senators – but how a slave might indulge. In that fiery hell beneath as countless men sated their flesh and ruined their limbs with the weight of coal, did they dream of the cool water but a few feet of stone above? Perhaps in that lonely darkness of soot and sand they too dreamt of the virtues proclaimed but denied from them. 20 million gallons a day flowed through this virtuous crowd, and in their current there can be no doubt about the joys shared, friends made, lovers embraced; this is in its deep irony a virtue which should not be discounted. With wonder any bather might float in the water and look above at the brilliant expense of stone, the endless mosaics reminding them of a favorite tale. Did they ever think to wonder at where this heat came from – perhaps Vulcan’s blessing met Neptune’s favor, and the myths themselves instructed some brave king to patronage its construction. There is little time for further worries – in the house of pleasure such inquisitions would cause the body to sink from the surface and fall through those intricate pipes to find themselves in the grasp of a very different bronze bull. One must not damn the swimmer for his idle pleasures, but rather the language which his heart has learned, the which arrives at the virtue and forsakes its meaning for the warmth it freely offers. What is the blood of some tyrant’s brother in the joy of reaching out a long day’s labor? Nothing but a footnote, one’s life is too short, their burden too great, to trace the pipes or imagine the vast walls unbuilt. So caught are they in the material balance between release and retention that even the screams of the devil’s bellow become nothing but the slightest ripple – another 20 million gallons are already amounting, and work begins again tomorrow.

March 8th – Baths of Caracalla



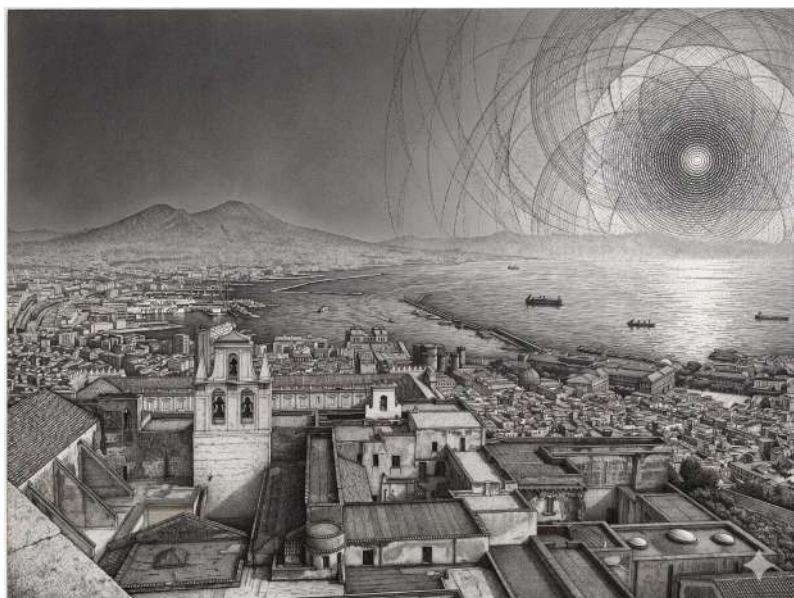
The Simple Gait

AT the top of this fortress all becomes minute before my gaze. From such heights the scale of the sea of men and women who have given countless hours to raise the endless row of streets and sister buildings becomes palpable. The power of it is terrifying – humanity’s unpaused labor has outshined the ancient teachers; look how we fill the horizon with proof of our resilience. From distant lands we ferry the blood of another revolution with practiced ease, and beneath this fortified perch hundreds of thousands path the streets – hidden by their predecessors’ erected stone.

Even the birds don’t ascend these heights. Pigeons’ gray wings rush down to the streets below, the white gull keeps his domain close to the sea. There is no memory behind the reclaimed prison I look down from, only this endless sprawl of orange, red, and green roofs. What few groves sprout between the city’s expanse are guarded by no assembly of satyrs or nymphs, rather by the keen whim of a council greedy to permit their felling.

What matters from these heights is not what lies in the labyrinths of right angles – there, there may be life: a child rushing down the street while his mother pedals false gold beads. Some thin old man sits on his balcony and smokes; within the countless restaurants a celebration of a birthday; the crying out of a room to do some laundry. From above the illusion of divinity shatters and is replaced by something far older – the simple gait of our endless siblings, as they wander to the next moment. Soon this great expanse will fade from my view and I will again join them and lose concern for this game of names and proposed valor.

Castel Sant’Elmo, Naples, March 8th



The Fishing Village

SO I return to the great question of capital and its ancient antithetical of creation. Capital is transmutation, turning the physical abstract and eventually meaning into that which can be possessed. It is a meaningless exercise that can only terminate in collapse – its unnatural nature begets its conclusion upon its creation – when the only goal is possession one directs an immortal meaning into the world of decay and temporality. Art inverts this practice, rather than turning the physical into the divine it channels the divine into physicality. The physical world is finite, the mines can only tear so deep into the earth before all that glimmers is stolen. Yet the divine is infinite and immortal, with each birth, each uttered statement it expands into all possibilities, uniting all in its universality. Thus as capital is born again and again, as its mortal deterioration accretes, ring upon ring, growing ever heavier under their endless gold platings, it dooms itself to collapse – taking with it the countless bodies it blinds with its infinite greed. Art remains, proceeds such hollow alchemies, and upon its ill omened sibling's collapse rebounds – from Bronze Homer wrought its cell, from smoky gunpowder Michelangelo, Raphael, Da Vinci all found again the muses call. Let us ground in present comparison – in the tattered walls of this fishing village frozen in time one can still see the brilliant reds of painted walls, the seashell embedded shrines to forgotten gods. Where is the coin, the slaves, the iron? Gone, plundered and turned to ash, buried deeply it has returned to its true nature – dust. Modernity's dwellings deserve comparison – these ugly white walls and paper wallpaper, thin plaster radiates, false cabinets of ugly plastics – in a hundred years these bastions of capital will crumble; they cannot contest the humble fishing village's endorsement of art even 2000 years later. Soon this cycle of capital and its rivers of labor will end and again that ancient force will remain working – inside all of us, its whispers prevail beyond the bellowing trumpets and roaring jets above.

Herculaneum, House Interior, Naples, March 8th

Giuseppe

WHAT can kindness look like in this nasty world of capital? For those without its need, but a few questions, an invocation of an opportunity to share. Yet for those countless sufferers the need becomes distorted, and to no fault of their own they must instead inquire for the temporary warmth of that ugly bill. Ah how wretched am I, in refusing to give what I have in surplus – why do I cling to it so? No principle of offering food nor medicine can assuage this base avoidance, why must my selfish disposition meet my fellow man with distrust? Perhaps dislike of deception – of yesterday being misled by an obviously faked limp, the demand of more than the twenty euros, the changing stories. And today a second meeting, my attempt at conversation pierced by continued pleading for more cash – for some lost child now – your limp disappears after you exit these steps. I do not condemn you – it is my own selfish heart that I protect, that annoyance on your insistence. Your flaking skin tells me where that last 20 euros went – but this I do not condemn either, and again and again I offer food, I deny you a drop of the relative opulence I carry. Why? Does it matter, to what purpose is this cruelty my unwieldy stance holds, the irony of these thousand words calling for a shared humanism in which we might embrace one another unburdened by the false game which keeps us kin starving and reliant on malady? Who am I to deny you, and why should your insistence and lack of appreciation drive division and refusal in my chest.

So what if you are taking advantage of my kindness, I am certain this is no favored position of yours. Bemoaning my own self-distaste I wonder why you could not have had dinner with me Giuseppe? I'd have asked your daughter, if she exists, name and made a friend. Instead you insist that you'll leave me alone for ten euros after I've thrice refused and offered alternatives to getting you more cash. And my cruel heart refuses and you quickly depart, remembering your limp 50 meters as you approach another. How pathetic I am.

Naples City Center, Near Tech, March 20th

IV

PLURALITY AND RETURN

“The soul is plural, of this I have been made sure.”

— FROM *THE PLURAL SOUL*

ROME SIENA NAPLES BARCELONA MADRID BEIJING

The Glade

SOMEWHERE in the density of an infinite forest there lies a glade which offers a temporary clearing from the claustrophobia of the endless canopy. Here when the sun falls one may look up into the sky and see our oldest friends distant brilliance and begin again weaving one's creative soul into their infinite patterns. Should the rains come and their prioristic form block out the stars, the rain will fall rapidly and feed the twilight moss, which cushions the barefoot dance that carries each drop into our skyward turned mouths. In the morning the sun's ascension will bring to our hungry eyes the plethora of fruits which adorn the orchard trees and shrubberies – even as the deer have bested us to their blooming there will be enough for us to fill ourselves to exhaustion and our glorious collapse will be softened by pine and moss. Bathing in the sun there will be nothing to hide, and should its kiss drive our brows to sweat then we will plunge into the creek that cuts through our glen and watch the minnows scatter beneath the ripples of our dance.

At sun down, after a day of idle merriment, from shallow branch carved pits we will take out our drums and lutes. One shall begin with the first call and begin softly to strike the drum. Above in the tree tops the songbirds will adapt their tune, and together find a rhythm. The call will be answered by the whistle of the pipes, and then finally we will dare to give to this garden our voices, and bless the bearers of the fruits, the bodies which we crafted our drums from, and only then will we rise and begin to dance – as the night emerges once more we will find our worship in induced fever, and with quaking legs greet again those distant friends, and beg them permission to begin again.

Mausoleo di Augusto (outside), March 2nd

The Same Substrate

LET us not be drawn to dramaticism, and instead attempt to broker a peace in the place of crusade. I have not the energy nor concern to decry the avarice of a temple's great expenses of marble and gold, to claim that the ancient temple beneath holds more potency. To take pen to ink in the approach of engaging the muses through a lyrical history seems most ironic. One god, three in a saint's blood, I have no concern with attempting desecration of these people's faith. They worship the same thing as their ancestors; the names have changed, the altars spilt and exhumed, but in each's heart the same plea continues to emerge. Let their inconsistency, that deep confused reluctance to release their pagan patronage find meaning in some meager vial of blood. They might claim to stay the molten cloud and turn back the plague-bearing birds, bargain again to transfix a human patron with greater action than the god who willed the waves of thwarted death. Let us find the humanism in how this monstrosity of stone does not tower over the homes of its congregation, allow a sweet dualism to be found in its buried crypt and the angel of stone and gold which towers above these ancient bones. Not everything needs declaration or opposition – one can only shout so loud into the roaring gales before they realize the great current will preside far beyond the meager range of their cries. When taken out the blood liquefies, is that not enough? One damns these tyrants who have carved their faces onto the temples stone, yet we wanderers too are driven to impress ourselves onto the countless pillars. Veneration should reside, be found, behind the many pilgrim's shining eyes – here is a purpose that while constrained in concept has more depth than any force of power, summoned or bled. Adore the Christ, the saint, the ancient patron – these names are all but mirrors of the same substrate and its essence may alone lay in those countless eyes which delight in its light. Every theory, crown, word put onto it proves a fruitless imitation, the more one knows the more obscure this truth becomes; and we authors and kings alike are driven mad in our pursuit, unable to see that the mountains of flesh and scroll have only brought us further from that most simple purpose.

Duomo di Santa Maria Assunta, Siena, March 6th

The Golden Second Fruit

ONE must wonder how deeply into the trenches of the phenomena we have fallen, spiraling inwards at such speed we mistake the directionality and presume that the heated walls which strain us are proof of our ascent. We live in a life detached from the pneuma entirely and cannot fathom an existence outside our own. So different are we, we presume than our fathers and mothers – superior in awareness and prestige. Such assurance is no heritage but a division which allows the piling on of greater weights that might dry us down faster. Art exists as a strange blend of the real and imagined, it is the brokered deal between a mind which projects and the hand which bridges that impossible divide. So it is that this blend of mediums which threads our mortal soul outside the myth of temporality alone serves as a reminder of our species' youth and hubris. In concept the echoes of Pompeii and the many echoes beyond which poured life into it are nothing but an idle amusement to be consumed and ridiculed in the comfortable shade of the phenomena. Yet here, forced to bear witness to the assembly of their household gods, vases, sculptures, art, that illusion struggles under its own pride. Our mind drinks in these ancient expressions and doubts itself – those sculpted eyes and frescoed lips exceed our capabilities, they force reconciliation with the unity of that action of capturing the heavens in stone and ink. Our own passions are caught in them alongside both artist and countless previous and future spectators – that solely possessed phenomena's subjective guard buckles. Back into the timeless garden we are wrought and made aware of that golden second fruit, each artist unnamed and forgotten has taken small bites; with pride or sorrow spitted the cage of time for a while longer till the fruit finally decays and falls back to embolden the roots which bore it. Art is our sole method of return and liberation from the peril of unbreakable death.

MANN Museum, Naples, March 8th

The Absurd Rebel

A thousand steps proceed each command to allow your weight's descent. From coast to coast one attempts to recall each shift of the gait, losing count as its number precedes its last. Surge, the crashing of waves, so it is that these countless souls wash through these cities. Drawn forth by some unfathomable gravity – one must not watch too closely lest they lose track of their own path. What profound scale sits behind each phantoms path, from what hearthes do they arise? Eventually it grows tiresome, and the gaze turns inward once more. Hanging overhead the gargoyles catch every yawn, each flickery gaze, every shared laugh. Caught and carved they hold an endless history in their angelic visages – in the supremacy of their worship they have been cast out of its garden forever, waiting to crumble; the impression of every breeze and drop of rain stealing away that ugly form. Human experience is antithetical to these beasts – along each step entropy is fought, we are cursed with the presumption of mortality, we hoard experience and grow ever fatter until by flesh or fate our hubris is ended and we may be reclaimed alongside the gargoyles. Life inherently belongs to the absurd rebel – dictated by the countless cycles of forgotten steps we construct names and discover death. Without intention we in our experience ascend from the universal into the presumptions of the individual, a creation and presumption which rebels against the solitary truth, which by its nature makes this universality absurd. The absurd is the conflict in which man has found the uncrossable line which forbids him to actualize, and knowing its expanse to be definitionally insuperable must still strive to love the falsehood of the human condition. It is the closest approximation of meaning, yet it denies the capacity to arrive or surpass, and the cycle continues endlessly until the individual is no more, and the line of lost disappears.

Plaça de Ramon, Barcelona, March 28th

The Dormant God

SHOULD we trust the outcome of materialism, ignore its paradoxical approximations, then we arrive at a spirit contrast and duality in the dual nature of mankind. This conclusion is thus; the apparatus of our consciousness is explanatory and not causal. Such a principle cannot be stated without recognition of its risks, the interaction which lead from god's death to the extermination of thousands haunts this possibility and must not be established as principle outside of thought. Never the less it brings one back to a cross roads which must be examined. This realization of neuroscientific processes can be universalized, revealing that all humans are in fact unified; that the divergences which lobby us to conflict are not fundamentally aspects of what we seek. They are hallucinations made to guess at sources that inform it yet cannot be seen, only utilized. Here we have found once more a god, a divinity inherent in every soul which one communes with at every step of the day. If man is his own god, then by this nature all humans are equal; the process which they commune with it belongs to all: the name changes yet the method remains. Our ancients understood this well; its truth exceeds the flimsy frameworks of both the material and spiritual, its property remains latent in any internalized exploration. There is no difference between the spirit of wine's warmth; a channeled Dionysius holds the same weight as the suppression of GABA. One's culture feeds one data, molds the parameters which they activate to assert themselves upon reality, yet that process, the system itself has remained unchanged for all of history. Our accuracy might vary, yet the precision of action remains immortal. However this reality provokes a yet unspoken (while still universally present and dreaded) loss, a despair born from the realization of a lost naivety of individuation. At first it seems that thus each person presides in their own untouchable godhood, yet quickly this is lost, for the language and face of the god/parameter exists only through what communal experience has revealed. Our determinism again brings us back to the absolute and the truth of a collectively created god; its truth built and expanded by the illusion of individual. We see then that god is not dead but dormant, plural,

in need of rediscovery, of a new name.

Parc del Mirador del Poble-sec, Barcelona, March 30th

The Serpent

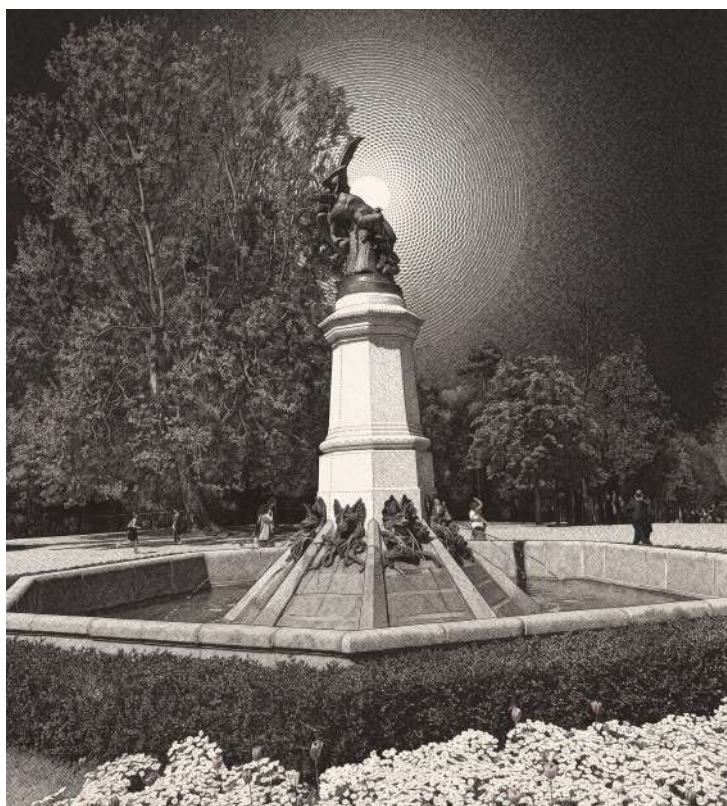
A single statue of his likeness stands before me, his nature discouraging his singular depiction, he again assumes the form of the divine.

As an antithetical to god, once an angel, fallen from the heavens – this figure began to accumulate under the consumption of angelical sublimation. Formless, called by many names, this plurality allows this figure to do what only Jesus has – principally, to exist as both an absolute force beyond understanding and a singular entity which has one name – thus allowing human projection and a free mythology. Unlike the good carpenter, he was first a god, then a prince; and such his influence exceeds the boundaries of specialized doctrine and instead may live inside the heart's shadow of many men.

Should we entertain myth, then a serpent is a most fitting form. Ancient ideal of all pagan people, an embodiment of a universal principle – hunger and continuity. As it grows older and larger it molts its skin, chasing around the world for its own tail. Wingless, it is entirely bound to the earth and therefore denied the oldest opiate; ascension. His goal is to build heaven on earth, to unite the people against the order of ascendancy. His domain is life itself, wrought with excess and plight, senseless death and unbridled birth. It is no wonder that it was the serpent which led man from the empty illusion of Eden, that guided us towards mortal understandings – which tore away the blind faith which kept us lost in ultimate authority. Between its fangs Satan reminds us that heaven is a delusion; hell then cannot exist either, only the ground beneath its scaled belly.

Here is the primordial rebellion against the principle of unquestionable authority, that which can lead the hungering gaze onto the only world it can ever know. Its rebellion is bloody, horrific, ecstatic; yet it is at least human, and therefore can guide us towards the creation of a true heaven on earth.

Statue of the Fallen Angel, Madrid, April 2nd

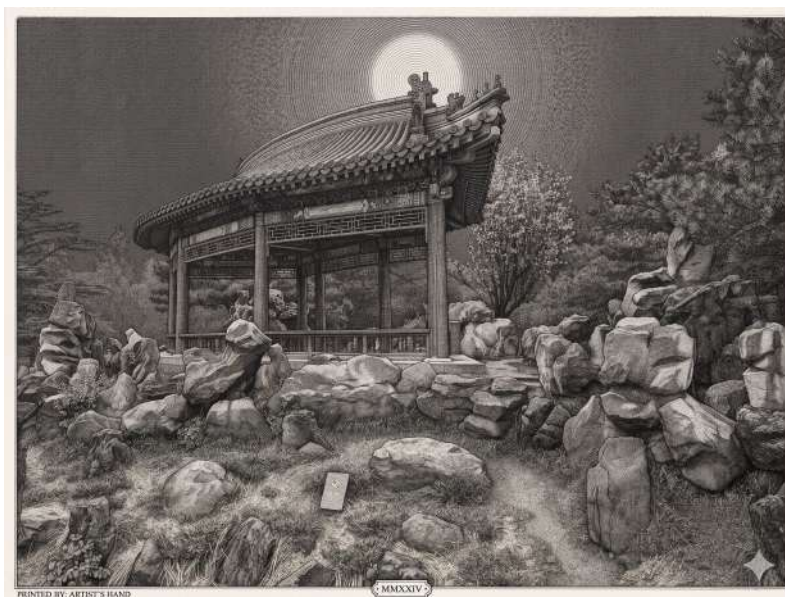


The Plural Soul

THE soul is plural, of this I have been made sure under the emerald painted wooden walkways, the echoing of distant chants blending with the chirping of the chinese magpies.

Above me, inscribed upon each crossing post are proofs of this universality. Children play while flowers bloom, frozen in time the koi fish pose beside noble hawks and plump finches. Art itself holds this nature's truth – in expression, chant, inscription, the mind searches for its soul, supposing the transformation of its interiority into that which can, and must be plural – the world. Kept internally, forbidden expression or mirroring, man is made lesser, and he antagonizes his personhood, and making it his goal to kill the soul which weeps and withers from his refusal to nourish it. We exist as a complex web of reflections, echoes of the long departed giving form to new constellations – yet still the stars remain the same. In the heavens without the myth of whispered art they exist on, yet they have lost their soul and their brilliance alongside. Thus the human condition centers principally on our obligation to give each a myth, a name, and bridge the vast distance their echoes travel – though different tongues may call upon them, the base nature of these beseeching souls are unified. When stripped of art, culture, and thus humanity, our base selves presume the distance of the stellar heavens and are cursed to fade soullessly. In death we are returned to the materially plural, and should we have lived in good faith, our soul too diffuses into the echoes of the many constellations we have taught our kin. Fulfillment can only be found in the cultivation of our dualities; the construction of art and shared song emboldens the soul while the tilling of crops and safekeeping of gardens ascends the flesh. Through the material we may paint the soul and draw the lines between the stars, through the soul we may learn the brush and compass. Neither can exceed the other; it is through their marriage that each comes to mean anything.

Temple of Heaven, Beijing, April 9th



PRINTED BY: ARTIST'S HAND

MMXXIV

*Set in EB Garamond, an open-source revival of the
sixteenth-century types of Claude Garamond and Robert
Granjon.*

Printed by [printer].

*Cover photograph and interior plates by Patrick Keough. Map
drawn after a vintage source, by Patrick Keough.*