

ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ Π. Α. ΙΩΑΝΝΙΔΗΣ

Tractatus
για την έκτη φήμη



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Παραλλαγές πάνω στην τέχνη της φυγής
- και ένα απονενοημένο ριτοερκάρ



Canon in the style of Henry Purcell (In nomine - version 21) – opening paragraphs

I had a presentiment that you will disagree whether that painting in the Pinacoteca of Siena was by Gentile da Fabriano or not. “Just look here - would you ever be able to compare it with the *Adoration of the Magi* in Florence?” It was a rainy afternoon and you had a spirited discussion. Then you were separated; and then the previous evening came to pass like a palindrome inscription that can be read backwards saying exactly the same thing but with an entirely different meaning; there was sleet and fog and a madrigal by Cipriano de Rore bringing you back to memory. *Anchor che col partire*, now that I must depart. A tile fell from the roof, but there was no echo and nothing was heard on the pavement. A bystander picked the tile and inspected it carefully. Eventually, he found the name of the man who had been ostracized engraved on the back surface. He approached. “In the courtyard of your house”, he said, “they have buried the statue of Nemesis and a child, a girl that was burned, when there was a fire in the iconostasis with the icon of the Messenger of Great Counsel. That was really a very long time ago. Please make sure they don't unearth these sad relics now, is it a deal?”

He donned his raincoat and waited for the bus to arrive. The toughest hours are those spent in bus stations, I don't know why. I have not happened to witness any farewell greetings, only broken people sitting alongside weirdly inscribed containers, and enormous pieces of bundled up baggage. He wondered what this big rectangular parcel was in his luggage. "It is the portrait of the girl with the burnt face and the eyes of ash" he answered. "I hope", he continued, "I will get there on time to see the *Second Coming* before they close the Duomo in Orvieto. Why is this bus so late? When I was fifteen years old, I fell in love with Simonetta Cattaneo, as so many others I imagine. You'll find out for yourself." He recalled these words many years later, when a butterfly sat on the pistachio-green tunic of Jesus in a Paleologean Renaissance mural of Odigitria in the ruined and decadent citadel of Mistras.

However you were not there. He had this same presentiment multiple times again, in the Chora of Constantinople, in the Capella degli Scrovegni, in the Protoktisti of Naxos, in the Collegiata of San Gimignano, in the Perivleptos, and in San Marco in Florence, but you never met again. And when he returned to Siena, it was a brilliant summer day, sunny and warm, and he was missing the rain and the fog and the sleet of that day when for the first and last time you had exchanged these very few words, the alleys and the bends of the streets where he was expecting to see you again at any moment, as you were enthused with the work of Orcagna or insisted on the superiority of the Tuscan dialect – yet you were nowhere to be found.

The staircase of Michelangelo in the Laurentian library resembled a spacecraft that had arrived from many centuries ahead in the future and was waiting with turned off engines and perfect cylinders for the time to come when it would be activated using a novel form of energy that was still unknown to us. Most recently, when he passed again from Florence, an exhibition at the library showcased a broken shell, the unique remnant of the poem of Sappho to Aphrodite. It was an insignificant splinter of hardly a square inch size that escaped the blatant unfairness that civilized people call “History”. History knows how to eliminate efficiently the very best and their work, therefore in that case something had obviously gone wrong.

From *Fragments*

Fragment 11.5

they will call you again at 4 o'clock in the morning to enter the room, to hold her from the shoulders and to call her by her name, then you will testify that the pupils don't react to light, you will make sure that she has no pulse and you will place meticulously the stethoscope on the chest – silence, everything is ok

Fragment 11.15

She had a sudden, severe headache – then she vomited and she kept seeing these black circles with her right eye – “nothing special, I just feel a little tired”, apparently she wanted to sleep, her eyelids were closing – I called her to keep her eyes open as much as she can – in a little while she would only respond when I would shake her, then she would not respond at all – her pupils were the typical pin size - we placed the oropharyngeal airway and rushed her to the scanner – on the way she vomited in the oxygen mask – we dragged her to the machine, one of us pushing the mannitol in the central line – imaging: half of the right hemisphere with bleeding and edema – the subarachnoid space full with blood – ten days ago, before being diagnosed with promyelocytic leukemia, she was dancing in New Orleans – then she would have gone to Florida in five days – my language and communication skills deteriorate as you can clearly observe.

Fragment 12.50

Snow and sleep in the morning after being on call for three days – at night crossing the bridge that connected the hospital buildings you recollected his gaping expressionless mouth and why would you insist on lifting his eyelids to test these stupid reflexes – there still lingered in your mind the blatant anisocoria and the raised arm that falls freely following gravity. You struggled with him for two months knowing ahead of time that you had lost (the retroperitoneal space was already full of metastases), there were many days when you would note “physical exam: no change”, he only kept shriveling and his face was becoming more black every day (you still cannot explain how is it ever possible that this knurled mouth could gape so widely open) – this is what you kept thinking as you were crossing the bridge: out there it had snowed and everything was white – you fell into a deep slumber as soon as you came back.

Fragment 12.59

The room was neat and the body was well-prepared, covered by the pure white blankets to the neck, serene. The TV screen was heralding the calligraphic signal of the hospital: Quality Medical Care. A quick, modern tune, some sort of supermarket music, was already heard from the hallway. Yet, despite all this flurry of sound, the room seemed perfectly silent - neat, much like the body. You turned on your flashlight and the pupils did not move. You came out of the room walking slowly, trying not to make any noise, carrying this huge useless flashlight in your hands much like an explorer who has found nothing in his explorations and goes elsewhere (you really had no clue where to go next) to keep exploring. Behind you, the supermarket music continued its beat, a silent, neat, quick, modern tune.

Fragment 13.1

at one after midnight he came to us for his thirtieth detoxification and he cried with anguish and despair, but also laughing out loud at the same time “Why have I lost my mother? Why have I lost my wife? Why have I lost my only dear child?” – and then he was marvelously cheering again from his booze and he was just so happy and having such great fun that all these most wonderful things were happening to him

the sad remnant of a man nevertheless, with both his legs amputated at the level of the upper thigh, and his left arm immobile after the stroke

sweet night

I wish we could walk together

before the trees blossom, those trees that you don't even know their names

Fragment 15.7

Another night spent in a room without windows – back home the light sparkles through the shutters and islands emerge again from the sea – yet here they come, they lay their patients and their dead in front of you and they leave – “why are they taking so long, why are they taking so long, my mother is bleeding, can’t you see?” she said and she left to attend a reception at a villa in the harbor with glass panoramic walls – you open your eyes in the berth of the on call room and you see the iron cusp of the upper bed – you should not fall asleep – it is four o’clock before dawn – you get up – it is so weird, you said, so many people have died lately and for a long time I don’t recall anyone crying, the latest case actually had no questions to ask at all, he signed all the paperwork and all the certificates, the big entrance door opened automatically as soon as the photocell recognized him, and he disappeared in the darkness – the next morning he called on the phone and he asked for the corpse and for a recommendation letter for the airplane fare.

Fragment 27.30-31

I do not know her name and I did not see her face. I arrived while they were already moving around her with frenzy tearing with scissors the clothes from the naked body with the unyielding plank already in her back. During an hour and three minutes of resuscitation efforts I did not see her face. Those who were doing the cardiac compressions were hiding the view from where I was standing next to the defibrillator, and as many times as I defibrillated her – twenty eight times according to the subsequent chart notes, maybe more – I never saw her face, as if I had some abomination to it and was committed to look only in the opposite direction, scrutinizing a disorderly, irregular line, much like smudge, the ongoing fibrillation. “Clear!” – writhing body – “Pulse?” – negative answer – “Continue” – and then once again the thud of the defibrillator charging to 360 Joules. I did not see her face, what you do want me to describe? One foot was amputated at the metatarsals and the other still wore a black leather shoe with a strap, it was the only thing she wore, no one had to pull this out. Her legs I do remember well. Also the relaxed thighs, the soft abdomen, the groins bleeding from the arterial gas draws – nothing unusual. Not the face, not the person. Only when all had finished, leaving the room, I turned and saw clearly from a distance the whole naked corpse with the endotracheal tube rising almost vertically ten inches from the mouth, a sinking boat with a broken mast. She was forty-four years old.

From *USB Flash Drives - The same theme seen from 8 different viewpoints*

8q24 GENE DESERT

I renounced my state before my state could renounce me
I lived in another country within my own country
Now they sweep away the boxes from the prefabricated booths of the big pharma
The conference comes to an end.
Some paid opinion leaders are still speaking on the huge video screens
And your words travel through attractive interest rates and credit cards not
Issued – just before the truck loads the last vestiges of the exhibition space
The Chairs are taking their time to honor those who retired, some of them
are dying
Craving of some honorific insignia
They die in the midst of cheap scents from caramelized peanuts
They die before our eyes, and we just keep applauding
The Dean is lecturing incessantly for three hours now
The Chairs are sitting there dumbfounded, tolerating her as a necessary
punishment
For the unionist improprieties of Constantine Dragaš
Or for the building and R&D performance of Thomas Preljubović
While the academic scamps continue their loathsome addresses
The fingernails of the medical conference delegates grow with visible calcium
deposits
Others look at their shoes in the rear seats of the auditorium
Unable to respond
Unable to say a word

Unable even to admit that they cannot say a word
It is the same seats as thirty years ago
The same seats as it will be thirty years later
“We will always be there to meet the challenges of the future”
Stated the Minister, a well-known demagogue lobbyist, in his inaugural
speech
This country is steady and not going anywhere, it is just you who left and
continue to flee
The visiting professor is anxious to go home
To boil chestnuts in the pressure cooker
When will this farce end
The other dear professor is waiting to retire to stick more firmly to his office
And to whatever power was given to him to destroy yet another generation
He is resilient and resistant like *Acinetobacter anitratus* species in intensive
care units, invincible
As all this garbage swept away from the kiosks of the pharmaceutical
advertisers
That will be repositioned as valuable trophies at the next conference
That will not be – the uncertain apparition
Passing in front of you twenty years ago at the bus stop
Must be stronger than the underground metropolitan rail
That dealt the final blow – passing with speed –
To the very last park of your innocent adolescence

From *Variations on the Art of the Fugue* and a *Desperate Ricercar*

Variation 6

Last June we were alone in the Garden of Eden, that almost deserted seaside restaurant, there were only the fisherman, his wife, their two children and their little cousin, there was no passerby at the seashore path that was leading to a rudimentary, undeveloped playground with the unused monkey bars and the stopped rotating wheel, the hot midday had overheated the ceramic pithoi in the yard, the sea was featured in the background, it was projected in exquisite light and it was fully ahistorical, the only ship that was expected to arrive had been delayed by 18 hours, 18 days or 18 months, I apologize that I had so much sand on my feet, I did not want in any case to sully your white floor tiles, but when you asked me “Well, do you have anything concrete to contribute at this extremely critical hour, when doom and destruction is upon us, we need robust leaders to hold the reins”, you reminded me that everybody was shouting, they were all screaming for their rights, they were all fighting fervently to defend their rights, they all had rights, they were robust leaders, all of them, what could I do then, I sorted in a line on the table the four small dead sea shells, I wanted so much to protect these sea shells, I wouldn't let them suffer anything at all, I wouldn't let them suffer anything else besides death.

Variation 9

Difficult dialogue

“Is it you?” she asked as she sensed him approaching. “It’s me”, he replied and sat on the edge of the bed with the air mattress where she had been mired over the past ten years. “You're my man and I love you very, very much, but I don't remember your name”, she said and almost wept because she had forgotten this very minor detail. “Never mind, don't worry, I love you too,” he replied and he still remembered her name – or at least he made this conjecture. “Why should I lose you? You're my man and I love you very, very much”, she said again, and she could not even weep upon her query. “You are not gonna lose me, don't worry, I'll be back soon”, he reassured her. “What's your name? I know you well, you're the closest person I have. What's your name?” she insisted to learn. “Well, what do you think my name is? Chris? Lakis? George?” – he gave her three names to choose from, he did not want to give easy access to the correct answer. This whole time he nervously gripped the handle of his packed suitcase with one hand and the airline tickets with the other, none of the three names that he had offered to her was his own.

Variation 22

Unpredictable past

The past is even more unpredictable, it is unpredictable and inexplicable why it happened, what exactly happened, what you felt, what you thought, it is all being revised until even the very last seconds evaporate, in the same way as the balcony on the upper floor was leading to a silent morning in springtime, but then you could no longer get back home, because summertime had stopped at *Brandenburg Concert number 3* beneath the oleanders and you couldn't move it by any means. The carefree boating in the cove of Paleokastritsa is equally inexplicable, I mean the indelible light with the small handheld parasol that was open when, at the very same time, the most obscure secret advisors were offering an astute interpretation of future doom, they decided on what must be done and they always announced their decisions too late, after the assembly has already begun its hearings, only when they had confirmed your inability to react. Equally unpredictable are also all those chance coincidences that you had designed so meticulously with such agony and dedication and in such great detail, aiming to ensure that your encounter with the organized dream (much as we say organized crime) would occur always in the same random point of the city, the few seconds that you try in vain to separate and clarify on the sundial of Andronikos of Kyrene, the tightness on your chest when you inspect the decimated parks of the third Greek republic, the one and only city where you were confined to live your entire life, scattered across the four cardinal points.

Variation 133

I'm nobody! Who are you?

Are you nobody, too?

Then there's a pair of us – don't tell!

Emily Dickinson

The speech is written every day, it is changing, it diversifies, it is the speech that you haven't given yet, the speech that you don't know the subject of, the title, its cause, what you can say, what you cannot say, how many hints will be accepted from the yet unknown audience, to what they will pay no attention, with what they will become so enraged that they will ostentatiously leave the auditorium, what you are entitled to express, what you are not entitled to express, how you will endure for ten minutes, for half an hour on the podium, speaking about things that are not allowed, speaking about what is so important and so urgent that no one has permission to deal with, not even you, you seek to find in the text and in the Powerpoint the powerful last word, the epitome of surprise, perhaps a catapulting accusation, a grandiose resignation, perhaps a long silence, an unanswered question, a break to get off the podium and to whisper asking someone from the audience who is that person making a speech to us today.

From *Tractatus on the sixth fame*

Memoirs of the punctual lecturer

The lecture was scheduled for 8 am. He showed up at 7:47 am, he always liked to have a generous time margin, at least ten minutes to organize his thoughts. The audience had slowly begun to assemble. He wrote on the board some incomprehensible notes that would be potentially useful in his presentation in case any logical leaps and transcendence were needed. Now it was 7:56. The audience had gathered, there were very few empty seats and some people were bringing folding chairs from the neighboring rooms. He looked at them – he seemed rather expressionless. Later, in retrospect and when it was safe to judge, some used the phrase “sorrowful”, others insisted on “ecstatic”, and still others testified “nothing unusual”. He made a gesture with his right hand as if to say “One moment please” or “Maybe” or “Definitely” and stepped out of the room without a word. 7:57. The hallway was dark, he walked down the marble staircase. He descended to the first floor with the black and white tiles and with the paid commissioned portraits of deceased deans and benefactors. It was 8:02 already. He didn’t want to be late for his speech.

He walked out of the neoclassical building with the statues of the Faun and Hermes the Psychopomp at the entrance and he started walking down the road. At some point he passed across. It was 8:17. He planned to start talking strictly on time, because his obsession never to be late reflected some sort of self-esteem. He entered the first house that he encountered, it combined colonial style with Bauhaus, it had many rooms and he passed them all. It was not what he wanted, and he resented this. Time had lapsed and it was already 8:31. He would always begin his lectures with absolute devotion to the preplanned timing, always at eight sharp. He came out of the house, entered the next one, a combination of Gropius style with Japanese minimalism, there were even more rooms (good grief!), it was also built on multiple levels. Nothing, he did not find what he was looking for. He remembered with some relief that he was not looking for anything anyway.

The clock showed 8:46. The presentation had been scheduled for 8-9, an hour-long lecture, after 8:45 he was planning to leave sufficient time for two or three brief questions from the audience. He had never been late, so it was guaranteed that he was not going to be late today just as well. This pragmatic certainty, as well-known as the certified trivial observation that the sun rises from the east each and every day, made him calm. He stepped out and found himself on the road again. He saw the bus Γ560 approaching. It would help him get there early. He stepped on the bus. It was empty, without any other passengers. Now it was 8:58. There was still time to start lecturing on time, he was not late, not at all. The bus passed by the amphitheater, and continued along. Quite a miscalculation, he thought, there was no stop anywhere near - but he was not upset. Everything was under control. The divider railing that separated the two sides of the road appeared now. There would be no way any longer to get across to the side of the avenue where the amphitheater stood. He wept. The time had reached 9:19.

He would undoubtedly arrive on time, as always. All those gathered listeners would wait to hear him. Nobody would move from his seat. He got off the bus at the first opportunity. He waited for the next one. The same line Γ560, equally empty without any passengers. He went on the bus at 9:32. The bus headed in the opposite direction from his destination, he was distancing himself. There was still no doubt in his mind that he would reach the venue of his lecture before 8. They would all be waiting very patiently, they would certainly have understood the clearly stated, almost signaling, gesture that he had made with his right hand. It could not be interpreted in any way other than as “One moment please” or “Maybe” or “Definitely”. His intention was crystal clear. As for the notes on the board, he concurred that they would be completely incomprehensible unless he were there to explain them himself. This is one more reason why he would certainly arrive on time, by 8, not even a split second late, and he would disentangle and enlighten everything that was nebulous in their thousand-fold confused mind. It was 10:22. He wept. He was distancing himself.