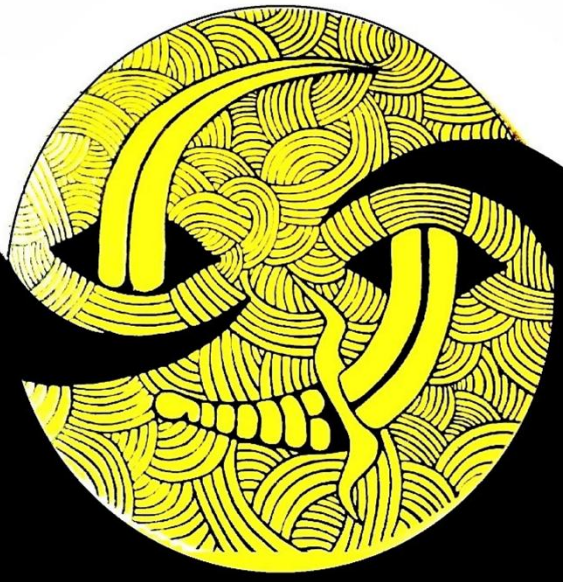
SEESCAPES

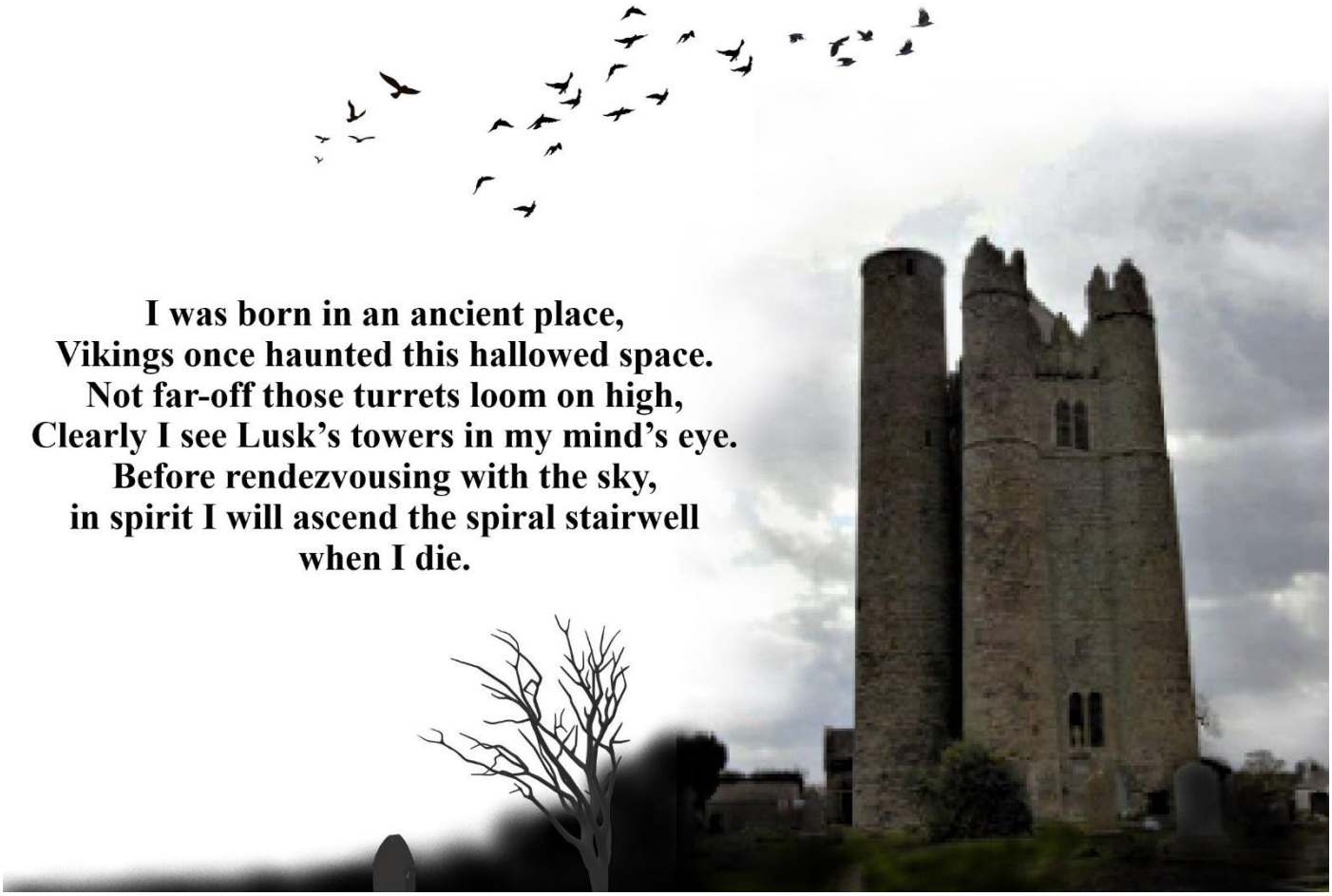
EYEWITNESS TO AN OCEANIC TRUTH



Stíobhard Cristíona

DEDICATION

To Mary & Laura and memories of Lusk.



I was born in an ancient place,
Vikings once haunted this hallowed space.
Not far-off those turrets loom on high,
Clearly I see Lusk's towers in my mind's eye.
Before rendezvousing with the sky,
in spirit I will ascend the spiral stairwell
when I die.

SEESCAPES

EYEWITNESS TO AN OCEANIC TRUTH





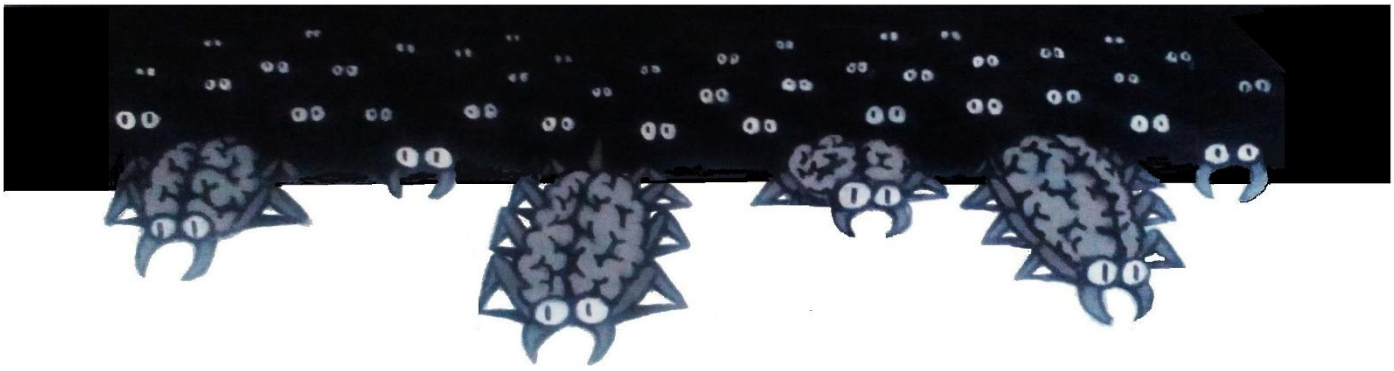
You are cordially welcome to Seescapes, my name is Stíobhard Cristíona – Irish author/artist specializing in illustrated books exploring a broad range of themes. I absolutely love to landscape stories around pictures, the relationship between self-expression and real life experience is central to my art practice. Pictures bring an extra dimensionality to a story, opening doorways difficult to unlock with words alone. Above all this creative venture strives to channel a sacred spatiality, for me the most important element in every story. If you are interested in spiritual art, revelatory symbology, shadow work, and the direction our collective journey is taking, the right place has surely found you.



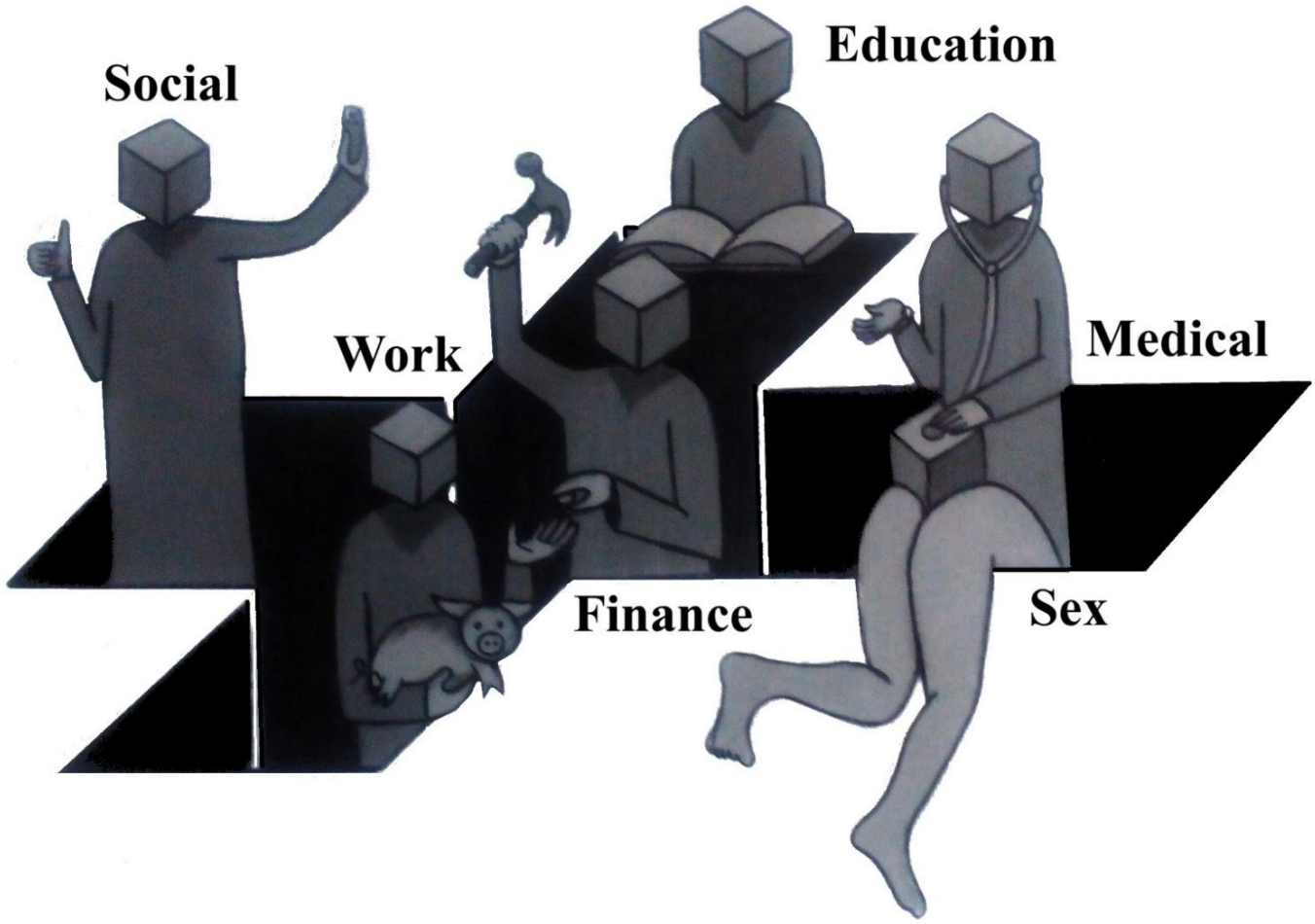


Intro

This moment has been gunning to arrive for a long time, from the springtide of childhood when first the budding artist drew a revolver, my ultimate aim has always been to plant a bullet square between the grim reapers bulbs. What is the point of art if it can't be utilized as a weapon against the darkness? Nothing places the shadows realm more in the crosshairs than a clear vision of heavens light! Seescapes is locked and loaded from the opening salvo, steadily increasing the intensity of firepower throughout this revelatory shootout culminating with the big reveal! Certain revelations gravitate toward enchanted locations, ideally a sacred setting with a firm foundation in reality. Hence it is from St John Street in the centre of Sligo town where I kick-start this journey, taking to stone steps with the backdrop of the cathedral silhouetted against the sky. The bell tower looms overhead like a syringe piercing the bruised and battered noonday sky. Right on cue, the bells chime in with a prayerful injection heralding the Angelus. I linger at the top of the steps to take in the architecture, the stained glass windows around the sanctuary always reminding me of bullets inside the chamber of a revolver. I enter the atrium where a character known to me hovers over at the holy water font like an unpleasant memory. The scarlet handkerchief dangling from his arse pocket supposedly signifying "open for business" in gay circles. When a mate straight as the Stuart Highway in Australia filled me in on that sordid detail I laughed my arse off. Not exactly the calibre you would expect from a revelator armed with a seven gauge. I holster my mirth and head into the main body of the cathedral, the scent of incense lingers in the air like the smoky aftermath of a gunfight. I smile to myself, I'm really not the biggest fan of mindless violence. The solution to mindlessness I keep reminding myself is to be more mindful. The seventh heaven gazes down across the ever fluctuating skies towards the first, "There is always room for improvement," suggests my latter self to my earlier self. "You keep on turning all that shite back into the light," quips the cheeky Dublin urchin with a glint in his crooked eye they will never snuff out. A lifetime passes within the blink of an eye, I glance up at the firmament in contemplative awe, each star marking a night when a candle flame inside the window appeared.

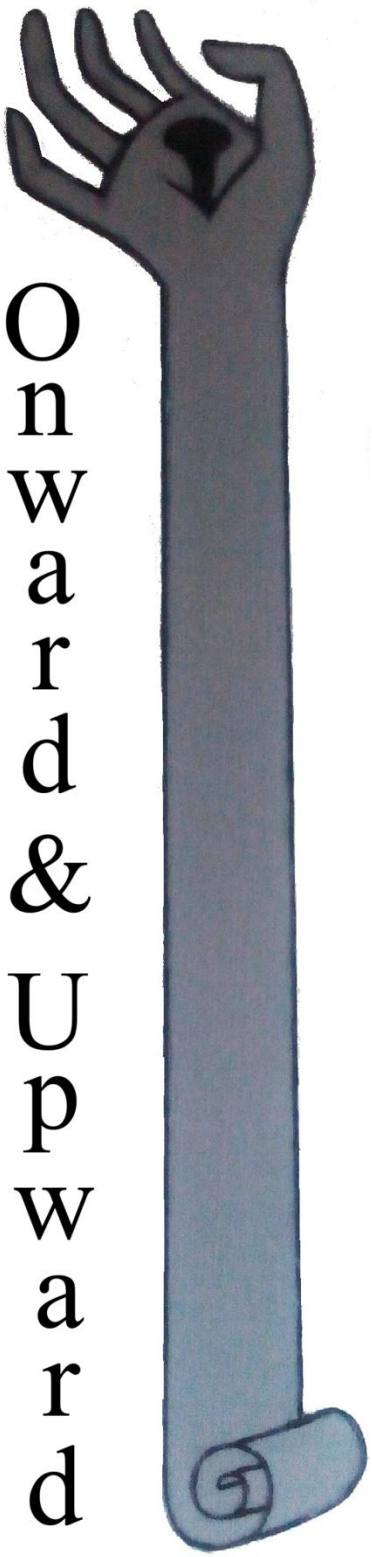


Every artist worth their weight in gold will employ alchemical principles in the execution of their craft, turning negatives into positives even if the minus happens to pose as a plus. I like to think the majority of the audience will largely be receptive to my opening epistle. But there will be a few who aren't so positively inclined, seeing instead a massive minus manspreading across the page. I can feel their beady eyes leering censorially at me from the redacted darkness. Tricky enough coaxing them out of the shadows with the measly morsels I've tossed their way. I have pretty much accepted them as part of the ecosystem, yet their creepy mentality still makes my flesh crawl. At one stage I avoided the web like the plague for a decade. When finally I returned the usual divide and conquer gameplay continues to hold sway over the hive mind, a formidable barrier this side of the big reveal. Big tech only wants to cube consciousness into easily programmable digital tetra packs. High time someone put the technocrats in their place, they don't embody the upper storey in the human story! They act more like bugs in a cellar, gathering whatever detritus falls on the floor. Definitely an insectile energy in the way they build digital profiles on people, always a waspish sting in their tails regardless of how well you insulate your packaging.



I will keep on hammering home this message till the day I die; "There is another pathway to power that doesn't entail nailing names to a kill list!" The lifeless husk manning the reaper drone receiving verification to proceed presses hard on the kill switch. "Checkmate!" I declare smiling, "I have crossed over already!"





Mine is a story that simply refuses to die is the crux of this all guns blazing introduction; a life affirming testimony unfurling irrefutable evidence of heavens light in plain sight. The long history of accepting the existence of truth through blind faith has long passed. False belief systems do not elevate anyone, least of all the less than one percent at the top. Theirs is a cruel and sadistic god who will never be appeased. The darkness can easily be diffused through satire and comedy, but parody alone is not enough to slay the beastly perversion of the truth keeping so many imprisoned in basement levels of social cohesion. The best weapon against the netherworld is to illustrate a pathway to the upper storey. The golden rule is to keep the narrative flowing onward and upward toward apotheoses, even when holding a mirror up to a world where a total lack of movement is the norm.

AI pinkeye has permeated the globe like a fart in a perfumery, blurring the line between truth and lies. Projecting a cartoon realm through an ultra-realistic lens is for me a little disconcerting, the one dimensional mentality animating the 3D state of the art graphics actually denigrates the media. I surely have a lot of fun pigging out on colourful cartoons, but caricatures like fast food do not fulfil. No matter how well rounded the construction, characters will always belong the realm of fiction. They mostly have an element of truth of course, but it is important to be able to differentiate the reality from the illusion. As a creative I strive to capture that magical interface where form and the formless converge. It is a skill acquired through experience to keep focused on what is real while at the same time keeping an eye on what is not. It is so easy to get swept away by cyclonic falsehoods, trying to process every mistruth flying through the cultural headspace can drive us crazy. There are enlightened lies and there are illusory porky pies. There are religious lies and there are secular porky pies. There are smart lies and there are plain stupid porky pies. Left so dizzied by the ensuing tornado of lies, they can easily rob the truth from our eyes.



Falsehood has grown to such biblical proportions over the years even the most cartoonish single dimensional spin cycle can mutate into the fiercest of all mythological creatures. For good reason the gatekeepers try to hinder voices armed with revelation from entering the conversation. Only the sword of truth will slay the fire breathing dragon of a cruel culture awash with so many porkies running amuck. A perfect segue into the windswept backdrop of a gusty west of Ireland town teetering on the verge of a violent downpour. A tempestuous setting replicated on the global stage where legions of vampiric actors are ushering in one of the darkest chapters ever to squat in the human story. But do not fear for the demons inhabit only one area inside the house, easily identified since everything they do and say points towards the basement. The upper storey is still very much intact despite the cellar dwellers efforts to stop seekers from climbing the stairs and attaining what they can never have. The slightest mention of ascension summons dark forces from the shadows; always the same daggers looks from the shallows neck high with cutthroats looking for something to fill the void. It is time to unsheathe the vision of an oceanic truth.



Fourteen revelatory readings evangelizing the most explosive nuclear gospel!





Overture

Those that have this Tao do not try to fill themselves to the brim. And because they do not try to fill themselves to the brim, they are like a garment that endures all wear and need never be renewed. From Tao Te Ching.

It is an honor to have a verse from Tao te Ching hanging in my wardrobe of things to say. After two and a half thousand years Lao Tzu still looks sharp in his wise suit of words. Not necessarily a message fashioned exclusively for religious men of the cloth, it is a truth tailor-made for literally everyone. No worries if my butt looks big in this dress when truth is the seamstress. The truth is not a fickle fashion statement changing with every season. No problem wearing labels designed to flatter, most are aware they become frayed after just a little wear and tear. Not so with the truth, it is not a garment worn by the unaware! I have met many devils and they don't wear Pravda. Imbalance does not set the trend here. In Truth we no longer fall prey to the wardrobe malfunctions of what others say. I'd prefer to go naked and say nothing rather than wear the tattered rags of fowl mouthed curses so in vogue with fashionistas today. Life can so easily be reduced to a squalid hovel when a voice is attired in insult. Whereas truth opens doors, leaving every mind it enters a palatial spatiality of such breathtaking majesty no tailoring of words can describe. Seeing this truth concealed in plain sight cranks the volume up full blast, blaring with something so mind-blowing it merits dressing it in uppercase capitals. TRUTH is the loom that weaves every story into being, pouring this voice seamlessly into a new page.



My narrative thread begins by planting just a couple of words on the page about my Dublin roots and what motivated me to branch out to this neck of the woods? Surely it was not for any silver apples of the moon that drew me to Yeats country. *Old Nurse Ratchet cradling her hatchet narrows her eyes in the insane asylum.* Kavanagh is much more up my street, Raglan Road always puts a pep in my step despite the note of unrequited love. Art College first lured me here to Sligo, never did I expect to get caught in the cubit crosshairs of a plucky Derry bird migrated south. My crow's quill scribes a beloved line from the poets songbook; "Let grief be a falling leaf," sings Luke Kelly in the tuneful glade too bedazzling to be boxed. Not to the battleaxes of this world where only death has dominion. They think the sacred has been felled when life is in such fruitful abundance.

Those arguing on behalf of darkness are scared shitless to step into the ring and fight directly with a voice who has light on his side. In the meantime art will just have to show the nasty bitches who is really the alpha around here! Painting helps me tap into a pugilistic streak, especially when armed with an insightful combo packing a real punch. Landing sneaky blows behind my back isn't a win, step into my office and let's dance face to face. In the right corner the cloistered courtyard of an eight-hundred-year old Dominican friary straddled with ornate arches plants a religious uppercut. In the left corner an irreligious parking lot flanked on two sides by rundown blocks of flats, denotes a deprived area on the ropes. Around every corner an architectural bare knuckle boxing match between rich and poor. Many throw the towel in turning to drink and drugs. Not me, I can easily access bliss via a cup tea.

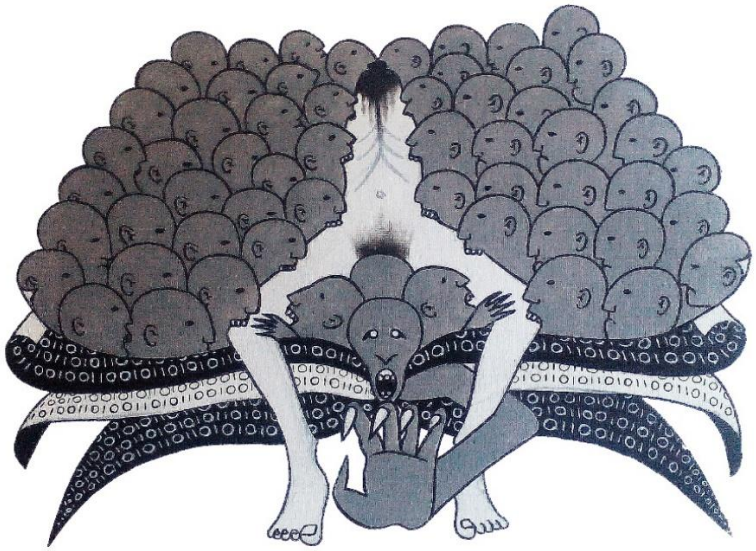


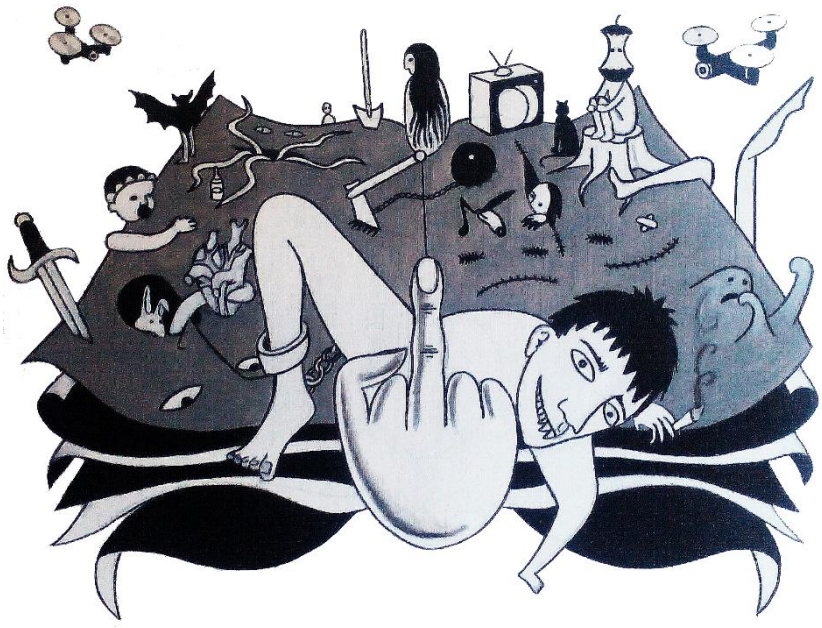
Sutured into the fabric of my day between lengthy stitches of painting and writing, I like to imbibe a cup of tea. While waiting for the kettle to boil the postman usually appears outside, most days depositing just junk mail. Today the dreaded electric bill has arrived, always sending my heart racing madly tearing open the envelope. Not so bad this time, would be at least two thirds less if I didn't splash out in so many baths during the week. I pride myself on running a very tight ship, apologies in advance for going overboard with nautical analogies, an unavoidability given the title and subheading of the book. This craft visits many ports, grappling with truths shallow minded value systems blindly cast aside. I am always pushing the boat out on this project; constantly charting the best course to bring Seescapes to the public eye. I never wanted to cast my armada of visions to the fickle waters of the art market where shallow bidders on a whim can decide on whether an artist can sink or swim. My artistic calling runs deep; a craft that continues to stay buoyant despite turbulent waters drowning out voices who refuse to toe the line.
Verbal altercations randomly kick off throughout the day, usually my neighbors upstairs rowing about money issues. One time I returned home to find their ten year old daughter in floods of tears outside, screaming up at her mother to let her in. She declined my offer to ring her dad on my phone who was working at the time as a delivery driver for a fast-food restaurant in the town. I was on the cusp of calling the authorities when her father appeared a while afterward to let the traumatized girl back into the apartment. I don't get anchored by issues on immigration designed to divide the populace, we are all in the same boat is my central message. Guiding people through troubled waters is to the fore here. I don't get much opportunity to extend the same comradeship to the political class. Certainly the leaders we elect as lifeguards are not doing their jobs. They prefer to inflate their egos and sail through life imperviously to their constituents struggling to keep their heads above water. Without a stabilizing presence we are left to face the brutal elements and drown in the shallows when we could have been cruising with the resplendent SEE in our eyes. Mindfulness helps steady the ship, I stand to attention and salute the Truth captaining this craft. Truth is vast and formless; a fathomless oceanic expanse that keeps even the most sunken voyages afloat. Truth has found a home in the cathedral silences relatively free from modern distractions. Truth has found its voice in this place with its blank naked walls and bare wooden floors stripped of the clothes "normal houses" wear. It is as close to an abstract song as a living space could sing without being totally empty. Not a vacuous wet squib but a vibrantly alive and intelligent stillness. My whole lifestyle is centered around the creative process residing here rather than to some puritanical taste in interior design. Sparsely furnished with a few surrealist objects fished from thrift shops, the residence is clearly moored to a low fiscal tide. I am kept buoyant by "other" expressions of wealth. I was never really interested in filling my pockets with material wealth. I was much more inclined to fill my mind with an enrichment of a spiritual kind. I was in my early forties when finally the penny dropped and it hit me I was already rich. It provides my voice with a gold standard that is missing from other currencies of the truth. When we refuse to pay attention and invest in what truly funds this life, we end up in so much spiritual debt we aren't even aware our sacred sovereignty is signed away. The pied pipers then end up calling the tune, pickpocketing the eyes from their user's sockets to maximize profit. The zombie eyed masses with heads buried in their devices follow unquestioningly an algorithm that's not very interested in most of us hitting the high notes. Of course our musical tastes can evolve over a life, hard to believe a diehard fan of death metal now gravitates towards the livelier notations in classical music scores.



A silent presence soars above the soundscape of this life, giving voice to many peaks and valleys. Reality winds its way without saying a word, meandering through a vast linguistic geography that eventually flows into nothing. It is in the stillness between all the mental notation where life unsheathes her wings and sings. The world of words is just a tiny pebble in an ocean of silence. What is unsaid will ultimately have the last word.

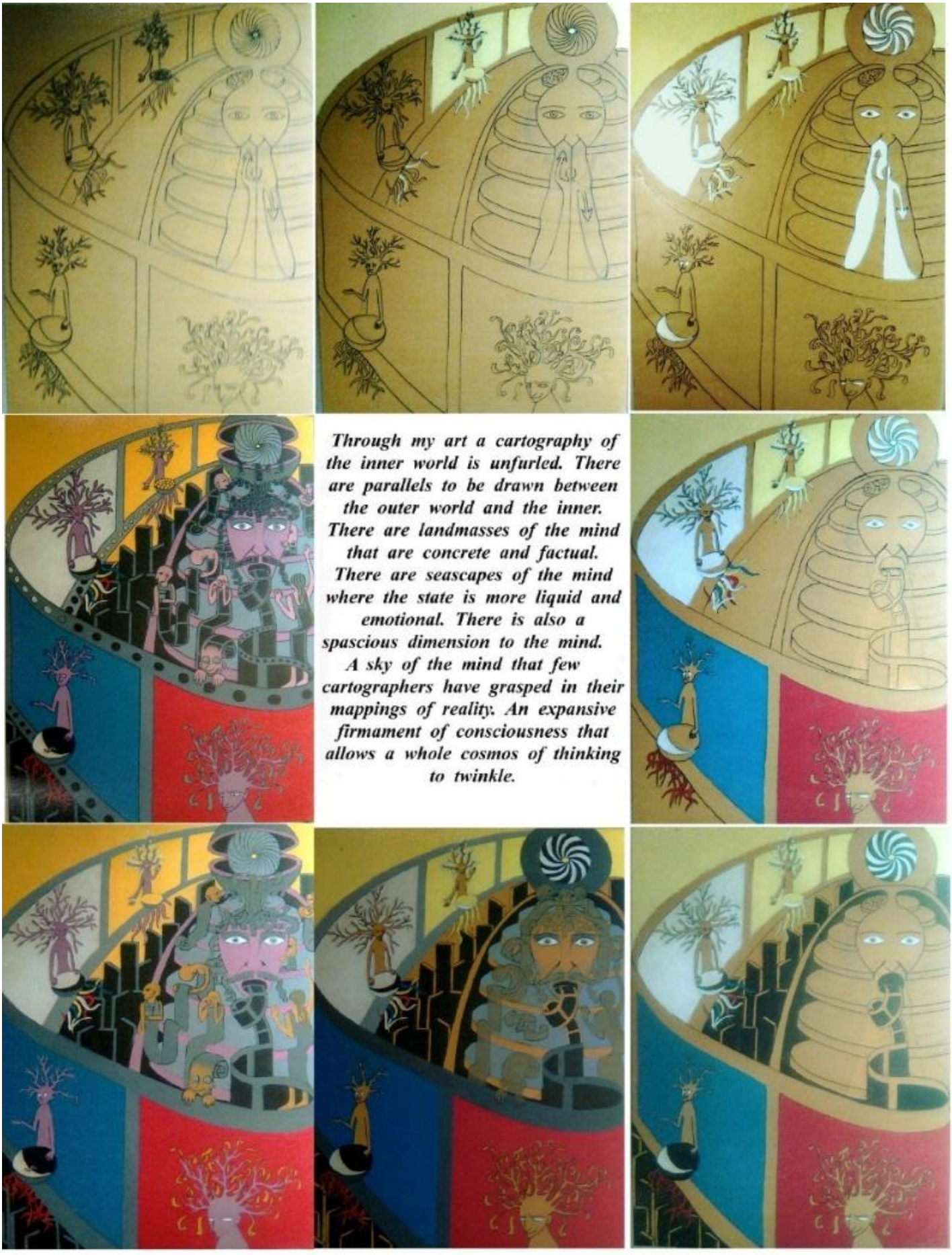
Meanwhile….in an in-between place phantom boot-leggers flock around an audio corpse splayed on the slab. The echo chamber is full of hungry ghosts; a spiritless place without any core reality. That's why they have to subjectively cannibalize each other, to fill a void that will never be filled. They will not stop until the birdsong has been stripped down to the bone. After they finish, not one note from the original recording will remain.



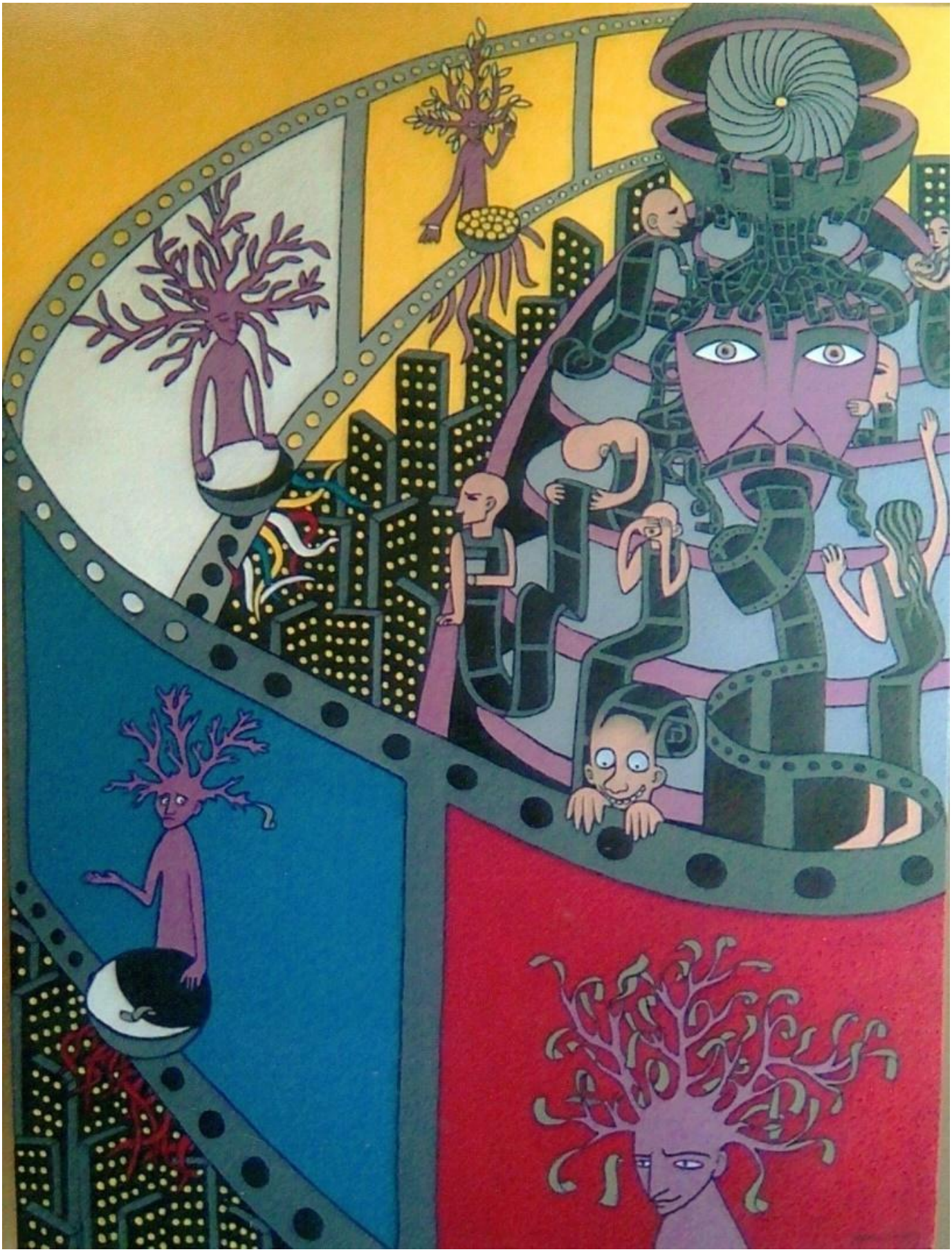


It pains to see what is potentially a smash hit reduced to a soundbite. Parasitical data brokers appear from the social media underworld to gorge themselves on the misery cultivated from the deamplified. Surveillance drones' swoop down on the crime scene, zooming in on musical notes tattooed on blood-stained vellum. Amid the carnage, a fledgling punk whistles tunefully as he proffers an evil middle digit towards the tech feudalist cuntery.

With so many versions of the truth vying for our attention it is a challenge to decipher which genre best encapsulates the human story. It's not exactly a feel-good romcom with ambitions to be made into a chick flick. Judging by our proclivity for conflict and violence one may assume we are in a sick snuff film. Some may suggest we are more sophisticated than that, just take a look at all this hi-tech merch! How quickly the utopian sci-fi dream descended into a dystopian nightmare. I happen to think we are all on an epic adventure, a constantly evolving narrative towards apotheoses. Sometimes it seems like the elites driving the story forward don't know where they are heading. Are we creating a heaven or hell for ourselves, and what does the pathways on these alternating routes look like? There are plenty of signposts pointing to an apocalyptic end, yet the gatekeepers of public discourse appear hell-bent on censoring a revelatory conclusion. They try every trick in the book to silence us, building numerous obstructions to stop artists from even holding a mirror up to a society seemingly swept away by an unstoppable scenario. The system would rather the passengers sit quietly in their seats and not ask the pilots where they are going. In many respects the techno feudalistic hell has already arrived. Take one look at the hellscape in Gaza and see the future destination of the whole world if we continue to let the shadow side have total control over the narrative. Those currently dominating the conversation do not want humanity as a whole accessing the liberated upper story. You can have billions in the bank and still be in the lowly basement spiritually speaking. Yet the rich elite delude themselves into believing they've reached the penthouse in life, leaving the majority in the lobby to fight and compete for scraps from the master's table. Cut off from the source a spiritual hunger pain grows in us. It causes us to subjectively cannibalize one another to compensate for the massive aspect missing from our lives. What a cacophonic menu we cook trying to separate the tastiest dishes from the most disgusting. We end up missing out on the most vital part of the feast. Perish the thought that art is only allowed to serve perishable food for thought. Very few voices dare delve deep into the timeless and unbreakable reality that underlies every transient egoic self. I didn't expect when auditing my own mind to find such astronomical wealth quietly resting in a completely empty account. Christ and Buddha happened to invest in the same mindful gold. The early church patriarch's corrupted Christ's core message aimed at realigning a totally asymmetrical value system. Most pyramidal structures of power around the world would rather the focal point of focus be directed favorably to the top. I don't want to set up a religious franchise here. My message couldn't be clearer. If I can have gnosis of God consciousness, anyone can. It is not a superhuman accomplishment. I have no desire to be put on a pedestal for making all these pronouncements. I never had much of a penchant for simony. I'd rather be fashioned into a plaything in a sex shop. I would feel like the biggest dildo strutting the holier than thou cat-walks, meowing for the purring approval in the crowd while pussy footing around the hissing disapproval that we all know is there waiting for a chance to prance. My art panders to the boos as well as the bravos in the gallery. In all honesty exhibiting artwork can be very daunting, akin to having an out of body experience. You don't have to die to go to hell. Nor must you die to go to Heaven either. Revelatory journeys illuminating a way up into liberated skies are scarce on the ground. The vast vineyard of humanities eyes thirsts for the wine that is truly divine. That sacred oasis is there always but is so intertwined in the mirage that it is the hardest thing to SEE. This well filled up to the brim with buckets of wisdom is not going to avert your attention to some exterior source to drink. The truth when it speaks looks directly into our eyes. In a whisper it shouts, heaven is closer than you think.

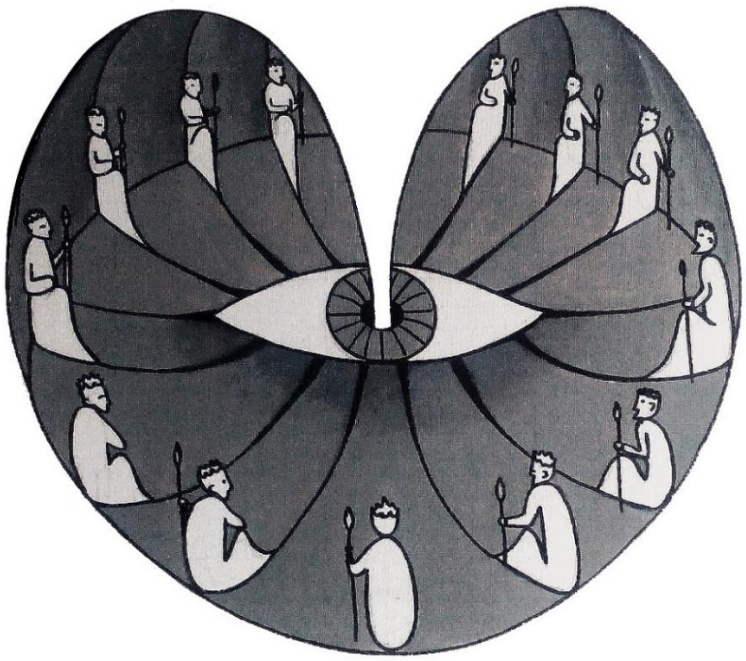


I'm not sure if providing this behind the scenes glimpse into my creative process may be misconstrued as a window into madness? "In a world flooded with shallow optics….." plays a somewhat cheesy Hollywood voiceover in my head, a telltale sign the picture is nearly finished. "Against all odds, an artist was inspired to create a deeper vision of life!"



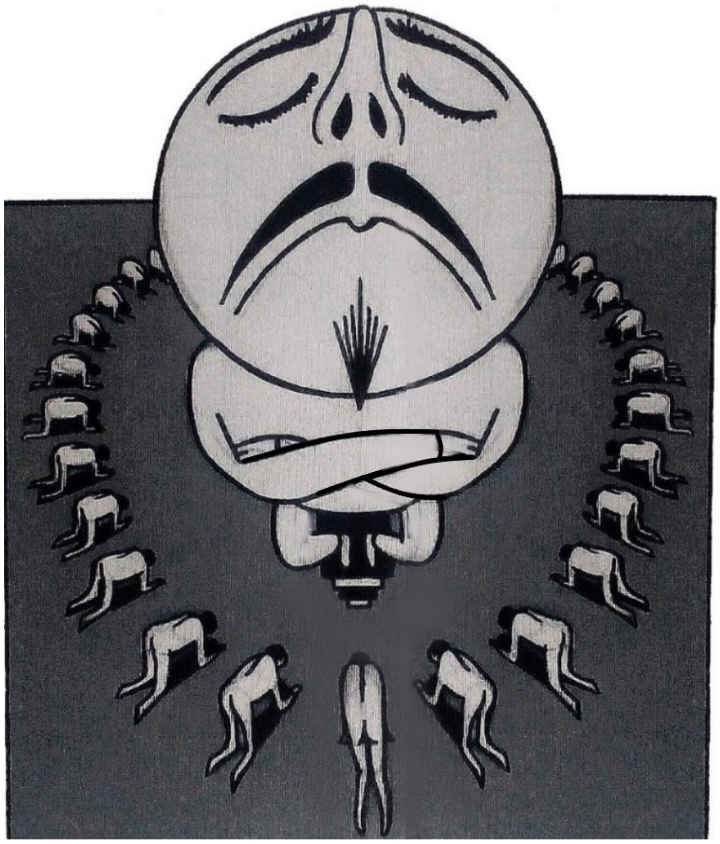
It is rare to find a movie where the line between light and darkness is clearly delineated. Oft the shadow plays the good guy, beguiling the audience with shallow optics containing little substance. When the light takes centre stage the curtain veiling our eyes will part, revealing even in the dead of night an observable living presence radiating against our eyelids. Open your eyes, the same energy inside also enlivens the entirety of space outside.

We can live a whole lifetime without ever seeing the electrical current in our appliances, yet our life is very much centred on this largely unseen energy source. The same principle applies to higher power, except the electrical companies apparently tasked with plugging us into the truth are in reality cut off. No make believe trickery here based on blind faith, if someone with my bad bulbs can see this energy field clearly in plain sight, anyone can.



The crowning glory of every story is a mind in synergy with life energy and not a vampiric power structure favouring one group over another. True spiritual connectivity is dare I say a conduit for a heaven on earth. It is almost blasphemous to suggest that in a world so openly closed to new insights about life. Only death lives in their opposing posture, you can see it in the mindless way they delete. The potential for heaven is a homeless vagrant they pass on the street, how they continue to turn a blind eye to the living presence of an entire universe beggar's belief?

Abrahamic religions let's face it do not serve heaven. The essence has been lost centuries ago under layers of dogmatic garnishing and ceremonial side dishes. The clergy have an air of inflated chefs too, all cooked to an inch of their lives. The core ingredient can still be sourced without any theological or theoretical dressing. The true believers will hardly believe their eyes when they finally see the light in plain sight. Even the atheist nonbelievers (essentially encapsulating another rigid belief system) when faced with clear evidence on a silver platter, may possibly turn their noses up at the truth staring at them right in the face.



I am not trying to project a holier than thou image of myself either. I can openly admit there were moments in my life when I made a dogs dinner out of an already bad situation. I am more balanced now in what I dish out, making sure to hit all the high and low notes. I'm even conscious of the quality of the bread I feed the birds when they all line up along the wall outside, as many seagulls and crows as there are black and white keys on a piano.

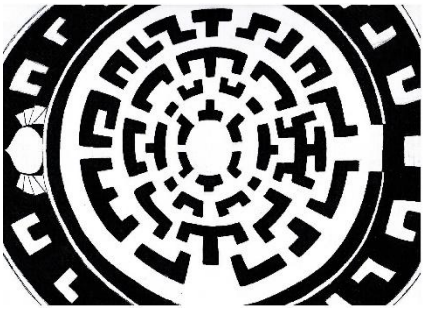
Regular as clockwork a dog barks outside; a familiar landmark on the soundscape here, appearing with the same regularity as the cathedral bells tolling away in the distance. The owner sharing many traits with the dog issues a growl in response, calling the animal a useless cunt! Viewed from behind she looks almost youthful, her raven locks flowing far below her waistline like spilled porter. It is always a shock when she turns around, that pale banshee face made more ghastly by the vampiric light in her eyes. I stay firmly rooted in my chair, no need to peer out of the small window to confirm where she's deposited herself. I can picture her in the usual spot sat along the edge of a raised gravel bed where I feed the birds. Even the very sociable pigeons keep their distance today. There's just no talking to her, the flock of voices roosting in her head makes it impossible to even say hello. Vampireland has her in its clutches for sure, the fangs of addiction are in her psyche so deep at this late stage all the goodness appears to have been extracted.

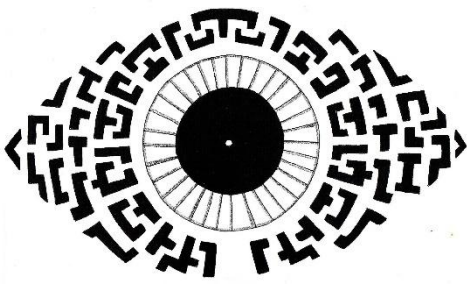


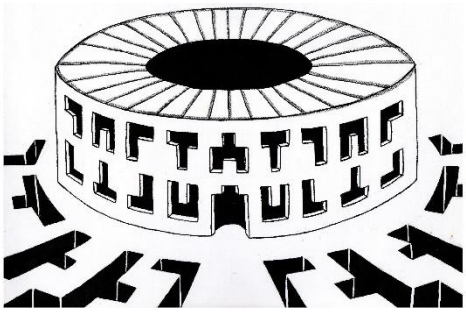
My musings on vampirism have a tendency to summon dark presences from the shadows. I have no big issues with passing the mic to the shadow, but when he does decide to speak I'm careful he doesn't dominate the conversation. For a while there is only silence inside and out; not even the sound of recyclers depositing their empties at the bottle banks. It would appear the old ladies bitterness has run empty. I savor the silence like a glass of sparkling wine, toasting ten gleeful years of sobriety with a sizeable measure of delight. Then a puking sound enters the second storey apartment, catching me totally unawares. "Dirty bitch," cursed the dark presence at last, it just couldn't resist reacting to the lady vomiting outside. "Hello darkness my old friend." The Sound of Silence springs to mind. "It is tantamount to a trespass on our property," hollered the shadows in my ear, his voice gravellier than usual. "If you were a real man you'd put the old hag in her place." After all these years, the evil energy continues to act like he is the lord of the manor. "That'd be ungentlemanly," I say, my nonchalant response infuriates the dark presence. "Spoken like a true whore," rebukes the shadow. "You cannot fathom the forces at work here. You'd never include in your overture what is really going on behind the curtain."

“Why don’t you show me?” I ask, well aware I’m poking the bear. “Grrrrrrrrrrrgh,” growls the beast. Okay travelers strap yourselves in, we are going on a roller coaster rant.
“I am not the shadow getting eyed by the devil. I am not the shadow getting sweet talked by the devil. I am not the shadow getting his itch scratched by the devil. I am not the shadow pregnant with the devil’s seed. I am not the shadow with the devil’s spawn festering in his brain belly. I am not the shadow in the pangs of agony ready to pop out another of the devils lies. I am the shadow who gets up into your face, I will kill you.”
So accustomed now to these little outbursts I take it all in my stride, carrying on business as usual. I fill the kettle for a cup of tea, maybe I’ll go totally crazy and have a digestive. “I really don’t want to kill you,” I said after things seemed to simmer down, my hands cradling a hot beverage. “I’d much prefer to incorporate you into the totality. Balance the tree of life with the roots reaching downwards towards the ground and the branches reaching upwards towards the sky. I want to bring symmetry to both aspects of myself.”
“Shut your cakehole you goddamned hippy. You seem to overlook you are a wanted man.”
I gladly inform the shadow that there is not one criminal blemish on my spotless record.
“You didn’t think it was going to be that easy to escape from us did you?” **it began again.**
“You’re on our books ma boy and you owe us big time. You can never get away from us. No matter what you do or say you belong to us, to Toxico. The wolves are at the gate Jackeen!” **said the shadow howling at the moon.** “We’ve too many mouths to feed to let such a tasty morsel take liberated notions. Your arse belongs in the frozen section aisle where you can wallow the rest of what life we allow you to have next to the wieners and cocktail sausages. Did you really think you could just jump off the shelf and swan out the door without so much as a goodbye? We have you in our files ma boy and thousands of customers to feed off what we say you are. And when we’ve sucked you dry, we’re going to come for what you really cherish, because our thirst for suffering will never be sated.”
I park the tea on the table and stare for a long time at Father’s Day printed on the mug.
“What’s the matter, cat got your tongue? Appears Mr. Bigshot author’s lost for words.”
“It always fascinates me how words so like bricks can be used to build all kinds of different structures. How for instance a novice at the start of his journey can build the flimsiest of hovels encompassing a tiny quantum space. Whereas a maestro using the same blocks of language can build a mansion big enough to house a universe. Both spatiality’s have their place in the grand scheme of things. Every story has an upper story, including that old lady who just never had been shown there is a place for her in heaven.”
I can picture the shadows eyes going skyward. “A law has been broken for saying that! The proper protocols and set etiquette are probably not being observed. One could spend a lifetime lost in the labyrinth of rules and regulations, constructing and deconstructing laws without ever discerning what cements everything together. We are all engineered to create bonds with each other, maintaining social cohesion based on what is sacred is the best binding agent. Monstrous sums of money and attention are channeled into citadels of noise that pay homage to the shadow side. The tide could easily turn, spurring humans

to redirect their precious resources to building creative solutions devoted to oneness. The ultimate expression is to build a public space where everybody be they Muslim, Jew, Christian, Buddhist or Atheist can gather in peaceful quietude. We walk on holy ground when the bond based on wordless awareness is cultivated. A sacred space is where one covenant rules; every person here is a keystone in the celestial architecture of the now. I am always looking out for a receptive location to entrust the blueprints of this vision. There are certainly some building sites to be mindful of, oozing with toxic dereliction. You are putting your life in your hands as soon as you put a foot in the place. Bring the same schematics to another site and you might not get any reaction whatsoever. Where we are in our own journey very much colors our thinking on where others are in theirs. Relatively recent scientific observations would concur. Physicists have observed that the psychology of the observer greatly influences the subject under observation. This human experiment will become a towering success with a foundation rooted in the site that sees."







"Thought I was bad at monologuing," **critiqued the shadow guffawing.** "The schematics of your vision are a little skewed Cross-eyed Jack, a bit like that dodgy right bulb of yours." **"I'm sure your ideas are perfectly aligned with the geometric harmony of the universe."** "What do you think about my concept for the next chapter?" **Dang, I was hoping he forgot about that. I ask him to recite it again, making sure to write it down in a notepad.** Strolling through the town can be a walk on the wild side at times. I like to guess the animal's people may get reborn as in the next life. More than likely I'll cross paths with the usual pesky critters. The two weasels and the otter for instance outside the betting shop. The big grizzly on a scooter, that twitchy squirrel pushing a pram, the traffic warden who always reminds me of a badger. And last but not least, the wolf lurking in the doorway of a charity shop. No chance forgetting that cunt. Out of the blue the total stranger waves over at me across the street. Somewhat bedazzled by the sudden break in the clouds I wave back at him. It would be ungentlemanly to let this opening slip me by. "Good luck with the sex change!" he shouts while you continue walking saying what you usually say to yourself." **"It is about time I freed my story from the belly of the beast." I concluded rising to my feet, always careful not to let the dark presence have the last word. "I'll be taking the quieter route for the next chapter." I inform the shadow. "Nice try though; I should be able to find a home for it." The sound of cathedral bells punctuates the silence signaling a tuneful end to an overture I hope rings true for everyone. Nothing left to do now but to take a bow and exit stage left. I don my hat and coat for the next act.**

Belly of the Beast

It is the lifespan of a song to the cathedral from the mouth of my lair. One step across the threshold and I am on the dance floor with a recording of weather that seems to loom here the whole year round. The wintry climate chimes well with the shadows frequency, it relishes bigtime to see me going into resistance mode when oft the mental storm blows. "What is the point in being wintry towards winter?" **taunted the shadow, still sore from rattling its cage earlier.** "You're just adding winter onto winter and reinforcing winter." **"It's no biggie, just have to dig deep for the sunshine around here," I say as a wispy plume in the middle-distance catches my eye. Outside a two-storey office building, a middle-aged woman I don't recognize stares fixedly across exhaling smoke. I wave a summery palm in her direction, smiling bemusedly then when she sends back a wintry middle digit.** "It's truly amazing how you manage to bring out the sunshine in people around here," **mused the shadow invigorated by the gesture.** "Your first happy customer for the day." **"Suppose it's business as usual." I sigh to myself, discovering when pocketing the keys something untoward on the breeze. The old lady's regurgitation encompassing a wide circumference lies festering at the foot of the stairs. I nimbly take to the steps and descend eyeing the hungry beaks flocking to feed on the ill illustration. It has some artistic merit, reminiscent of Pollock. A veritable explosion of different colors, textures and depth. I love art how it incorporates the ugliest of raw materials to cook up something beautiful.** "Shut your cakehole, goddamned arty farty freakshow. Those dirty birdies are just going to make themselves get sick, and then no doubt they'll eat what they spew for dessert." **That made me laugh so much I almost lost my footing. Suddenly I halt on the steps, spotting a connoisseur in the art gallery eyeing the abstract masterpiece. The crouching feline isn't here for the carrots in the composition, that's for sure. Nor has the cat any time for the chronological aspect in the splash formation the pigeons have wandered into. The puss concealed in the dumpster, scanning the sick semblance of time has just clocked lunch. The black cat camouflaged against refuse sacks is about to pounce into an idiom. When I reach ground level, it requires some nifty footwork to avoid treading on satellite fragments of vomit. Another set of orbs peers towards me through the slit of a burka, only to vanish behind a curtained window. A middle-aged Pakistani man comes into view, hovering in a doorway to the apartment fastening his trouser belt. Alerted to my presence he slams the door so hard the bang like gunfire triggers the pigeons to take to the skies.** "Defo a cellar dweller," **remarks the shadow as I walk across the car park half smiling. "Every story has an upper storey." I remind my shadowy friend. I pass a traffic warden eyeing a vehicle with the squinty bulbs of a spaghetti western bounty hunter. He's a real gun-slinger this guy, looks like he is just about to draw his weapon when someone fires WANKER from a window. This place is a nuthouse at times, especially around mid-day.** "Are you going to take out the scalpel today?" **asked the shadow with a sinister cadence. Weaving around the vehicles in the parking lot I glimpse my reflection in a car window.** "You'd be powerless to perform your dissections had you been gifted with a pretty face." **The shadow continues to coax me to unsheathe the scalpel, lauding my surgical prowess.** "Sligo's backstreets are a perfect cadaver to study the innards of the human condition."



A few steps along the footpath and a young female takes a sharp turn to the right into the friary, narrowly avoiding a rendezvous with the scalpel. I motor on keeping the headlights dipped, scoping out instead the garage to my left for a worthy target. I can't use the mechanic either with his head buried in the bonnet and his ass cleavage hanging out. It is crucial patients are facing me when making an incision. I spot a nice piece of meat who I could easily slice into. The blade is ready, I lick my lips just as we both cross paths. I actually have a couple of surgical implements at my disposal, hi, howdy and ahoy there. (Totally hardcore) On this occasion I take out hi, thrusting it at the smartly attired guy. "Aaaaaaaargh" Growls the random stranger, unleashing the beast. Wow, this one has a bit of a bight! A tad shaken I turn a corner onto Church Street, another glorified lane fit more for horse and carriage than automobile. Two Pakistani youths enjoying a funny joke clearly recognize me walking towards them. Though I do not know them I say hello. "Aaaaaaaaaargh" They growl in unison back at me. One of them calls me a cunt. It is nice to know they are mastering the dialect. I continue walking saying not a word, halt at a T junction where a teen mom is wheeling a buggy towards the public park. I say hi. "Aaaaaaaaaargh" The mother growls followed by the cutest little growl from the toddler. I normally walk through the park but instead opt to go down the street called The Lungy. I don't meet anyone on this stretch until I'm on Temple Street. I pass a very pious looking pensioner who looks like she's in the throes of a novena. I say hello to the old lady. "Aaaaaaaaaargh" The pensioner growls at me as I make my way onto the final furlong. A very scruffy looking dog passes me at the Hawkeswell theatre and I say hello to the mutt. Looks very much like useless cunt. Hurray no growl from the hound who halts in his sad stride to study me. I go down on one knee and offer the dog a high five. He bolts like lightning with the tail between his legs thinking my hand was poised to issue a clatter. Entering the precincts of the cathedral, a group of teens gathered at the side entrance do with their eyes what dogs do with their noses. I make my way across the parking lot to the main doors. Best not issue a hello, this much Aaaaaaaaargh gathered together would murder me if I uttered just one word. I can feel the growl in my body in stereo as they all stare my way. As soon as I'm inside they'll join me with their own prayers and devotions. They seldom perform when there are other ears present. Noticing there is not a single soul inside, the shadow utters an expletive. I gingerly make my way to the back pews where I prefer to sit. Then the horrid insults are flung in like grenades and explode a hundredfold of their initial volume. For just a few minutes I am in the mind of a stark raving lunatic. I sit casually and take out my book of Zen koans which I like to start the half hour with. The shadow wants me to return fire, to hell with this mindfulness shit. After a while the abusive invectives dwindle down to childish name calling. I remain still, listening to the shadow issue its dire forecasts. "Anyone can see the murderous intent behind the smears and dehumanization's. Its only a matter of time before they kill you." My response is always to remain calmly centered, sticking to a nonreactive stance at all times. Meanwhile the four teenagers have stooped to making ugly simian mating sounds. "Just effing tell them to eff off," demanded the shadow. "Enough is enough, fifteen years you've put up with this trash, and not once have you uttered a single word in response." I cast a cursory glance toward the assholes poised to disperse soon from the back passage.

“What can I say to small minds, the architecture of awareness is bigger than you think?” I’m at that stage in life when the merest thought of a joke has the power to clear a room. The four exit first, swiftly shadowed by the shadow; leaving me alone with my thoughts.



Although brought up as a Catholic, if given a choice I would have opted for Gnosticism with its core focus on knowing rather than blind faith. I believe in God only because of a direct relationship with that reality. God brings symmetry between all opposing extremes. The Taoist are correct regarding good and evil, equating the devil with imbalance and God with inner balance. The church for me growing up never helped remedy the disharmonies tearing communities asunder. The Holy Spirit was simply not present, yet most people flocked to receive it through the sacraments. A sacred presence is freely accessible without a special clearance. I would’ve lost my mind years ago had it not been for the time spent in the cathedral. A resource accessible to everybody, to nonbelievers and believers alike.

Establishing a connection with higher consciousness isn’t even thought possible by the luminaries of so-called higher learning. Most people feel that they have no real power. Voting for an alpha male or female is not power. All the schooling we are put through does not elect us into a higher office in life either. So many are left to trade in negative energies which invariably gets directed at quirky easy to access valves like me. Doesn’t seem so long ago when I was their age, my God do I remember how difficult life was as a teenager. Though peripherally hurt by the repeated verbal abuse, I never make the error of reprimanding them for their mindless stupidity. Where they are is punishment enough. With the ghost of the craziness still alive in my thinking, a more spirited influx of energy spills into the cathedral. Sounds like a coach load of tourists, don’t think they’re passing much heed to me in my meditation. I open my eyes briefly to find the lens of a digital camera pointed my way. I close my eyes again and continue with the meditation module. The tour guide flamboyantly lauds the Romanesque architecture, the vaulted ceiling and the stained-glass windows depicting different scenes from the old and new testaments. Then he directs the crowd to the back of the cathedral where a black wooden statue of St Molaise is stationed on the wall. All the pilgrims gather around the Afrocentric artefact where the tour guide retells one of my favorite stories about St Columba and St Finnian.

The tale hailing from the sixth century is centered around two saintly scholars embroiled in one of the first ever copyright disputes. There is a massive mural depicting the famous grievance in the local library converted from a nineteenth century protestant chapel. Another one of my favorite churchy haunts. The bloody saga begins innocently enough. St Finnian lent St Columba a copy of his Psalter, not knowing that the crafty scribe was going to scribe a copy for himself. When St Finnian learnt of the unauthorized facsimile, claimed the copy belonged to him. St Columba vehemently disagreed, after all the work copying it, he wasn't going to relinquish ownership so easily. The two aggrieved actors went to the central protagonist in Ireland to help resolve the big drama. The high king famously adjudicated in favor of Saint Finnian who was surely aligned with his thinking. "To every cow belongs its calf." Judged the sovereign siding with St Finnian's position. Only in Ireland could two saints go to war against each other. The high king supporting St Finnian was backed by a force of six thousand. Despite being outnumbered two to one St Columba won the battle 561 AD. Another grievance followed the saint that resulted in his eventual expulsion from Ireland. To atone for the bloodshed the troubled St Columba was directed by the wise St Molaise to recoup the same number lost on the battlefield. Exiled to the Island of Iona off the coast of Northern Ireland, St Columba and his monks brought Christianity to the pagan Picts of Scotland. Thus ends the sojourn into Irelands distant past. The visitors exit the cathedral leaving me alone once again in the back pews. I entertain the laughable notion of conducting my own tour of Sligo one day. That would be an interesting rollercoaster ride; such a trip could also help process the madness here. Such a mental pilgrimage would have to start on O'Connell Street of course, Sligo town's main street. A memory surfaces over ten years old; I am standing at the top of O'Connell Street in the cold. My recollection paints the streetscape in a desolate light devoid of life. It's just myself at the bus stop outside one of the main shopping malls in the town. The suspicion is gnawing away at my brain that I have missed the bus. I've lost all faith in the timetable to tell me when the next one is going to arrive. Little did I know that a succubus was due any minute. The roar of its engine was heard before the vehicle came into view. A car chewing on a thunder cloud drifts ominously from Gratton Street, foreboding as a storm looming on the horizon. Most cars generally don't elicit an emotional response, but on this occasion the vehicle moving towards me really gets the adrenalin flowing. It's definitely Ashik, I can feel his demonic energy oozing behind the cars black windshield. I found out his name from one of his more approachable friends when enquiring why he was targeting me. "Ashik is a nice guy, you just got on the bad side of him," said his mate. "Well, if Ashik has a problem with Irish natives, I suggest he go back to his own country." I believe was my official position at the time. They twisted it of course to make me look like some raging racist. It's actually painfully easy to establish who is wearing the white sheets and who is getting lynched! The window slowly opens, letting escape the ethereal vapors of the hash genii inhabiting the interior of the car. Gangster rap poetics are in sync with Ashik riding shotgun, brandishing fully loaded hand gestures pointed my way. He inaudibly says something obscene at the side of his mouth, triggering the pilot to erupt into violent hysterics. I look around the street for witnesses but find not a single person. "Fucken wanker," curses the wingman at last escorted by the pilot punching the horn to give the lyrics extra gravitas. Hollow lifeless laughter erupts from the other members of the grooming gang seated in the rear. With no other demeaning things to fire at me, Ashik is under big pressure to perform for his audience. It pains to watch him struggling to put into words such painfully simple arithmetic, equating myself as less and himself as more.

"The English for centuries used the same mathematics on the Irish," whispers a gnarly logic in my ear. "I refuse to take their devaluations to heart, we are all one underneath." The shadow laughs at my naiveté, telling me to shove my weak wholeness up my hole. "Wake up to reality, they're going to kill you!" portends the shadow with considerable relish, feeding off the sense I am a worthless piece of chewed crud in the maw of a beast.



"You only have yourself to blame," scolded the dark presence. "Should've minded your own beeswax, meddling with such a nasty hornets nest was bound to get you stung in the ass."
"She was dressed in a school uniform," I argued. "I wasn't going to sit idly by at my easel while he had his dirty way with her right under my nose." The incident in question involved a Sligoman in his twenties and clearly a schoolgirl in her early teens. He lured her into the doorway of the apartment beneath mine, thinking the premises was empty. "This is private property," I stated firmly, making sure he knew there are residents here. "Come down here and say it to my face," he shouted up at me. Gladly I obliged, without hesitation I went down and told him to his face he was trespassing on private property. Then he went right up into my face, threatening to call his whole clan, saying there would be at least twenty here in five minutes if I didn't go back to my place and mind my own business. I stood my ground, reliably informing him my neighbor's security camera was trained on him. There was nothing he could do but issue a death threat and abscond with the schoolgirl elsewhere. Later that day I obtained the footage from my Polish neighbor and reported the incident to the Gardai. Suffice to say the cops didn't pursue the matter.
"Just had to play the big hero," jibed the shadow. "Not only did he turn the entire diocese of Elphin against you, he also got the whole Sligo Caliphate on your Dublin hide."

“Hush,” I said. “It’s difficult to both listen to you and concentrate on watching the film.” The reel of celluloid continues to unravel like the endless peel from a fruit. I take a bite into the mental movie again, the desolate street leaving a bitter aftertaste in my brain. Ashiks car passes again; the revving engine sounds more like a monster in a bad B movie. I make my way back to my apartment. Wish I could fetch a bucket of popcorn, get comfy and switch off the killjoy part of my brain that thinks it’s a film critic. Difficult to enjoy the cinematic experience when you’ve been repeatedly typecast into an inferior role. I worry bigtime about how this grim scenario will end as the whole universe fades to black.



Cut to a happier scene of life on the ground, two goons on a street exchanging notes on a colorful cast of characters in the town suffering with mental health issues. My friend and I are so like actors from a Vaudeville flick, revamping old-school slapstick. I laughed so much the spirit nearly left my body, could not believe the nutjob was using the exact same routine on him too. Not exactly a cartoon caper when first it started, scared the shit out of me when he’d tail me right up my ass, spewing crazy accusations embroidered with death threats. Blah blah blah, the usual echo. Now after a decade of harassment whenever he opens his trap, I stand firm on the assertion whatever parcel of nastiness he unpacks is more about where he is in his own journey. One day it’ll all be returned back to sender. “I caught him the other day skulking around the back entrance to that kebab shop at the top of High Street, you know the one?” My friend is well aware of that establishment. “No doubt fraternizing with your Pakistani fanbase,” he confirmed with a wry smirk. “Toxico has fangchises everywhere!” I lament to my chum who is so familiar with the brand at this stage he uses it himself. We love to talk about Toxico, discussing at great length the conditions that enable such toxic subcultures to thrive in modern society today.

"Hurl any shit my way and the conclusion will be drawn you're in concert with a toilet," chimed the shadow. "There are laws against stink brains conducting smear campaigns, just look at the pigsty of lies they've orchestrated. You daren't raise a hand against them, I know. But at least take legal action, bring all the dirty minded swine to the cleaners?"

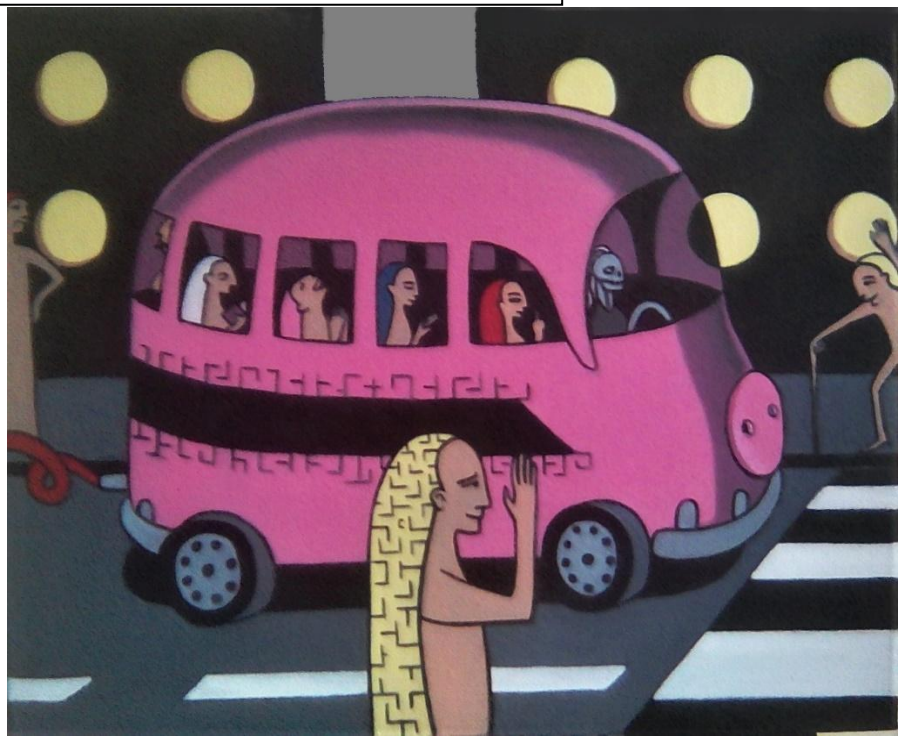




I know all the places in Sligo cooking up the porky pies, they don't make much of an effort to hide the toxicity. Best to just smile and say nothing, watch somewhat detachedly as if on the side-lines of a St Paddies parade. I'm not a big fan of paddywhackery, although I'm rather partial to pipe bands with their thumping drums hitting you right in the chest. None of it beats the random happenings along the parade route. Some people let the mask slip, revealing a messed-up interior where they really dwell.

I can't put the blinkers on and live in squalor, especially in my own head. I am more inclined to just roll up my sleeves and grapple with the problem. To truly address the elephant in the room regarding messed up behaviour, one has to examine messed up thinking first. Otherwise, you will merely make the mental pigsty worse. The best way to determine a dysfunctional state is to learn what material it is attracted to. It goes without saying, dirty minds are magnetically drawn to filthy content.





Good to have trusted friendships connected to reality, they help to point us in the right direction. A therapist can also serve the same function. It is important to listen to outside observers looking in, usually they can spot delusional thinking a mile off. Brexit is a prime example of an intelligent and highly educated population getting misled by a blatant lie. In Ireland it was like watching a car crash in slow motion. Although painful to watch for those who love the UK, sometimes you just have to let nature run its course.



We are no strangers to delusion here in Ireland, in fact it is very much woven into the fabric of life. We are famous all over the world for our wild imaginations. Even our politicians engage in magical thinking, diverting road building projects to avoid hitting a fairy fort. Millions of euros wasted to prevent getting cursed by the little people. It really does beggar belief the fairy-tale notions that flutter about in the Irish culture today.

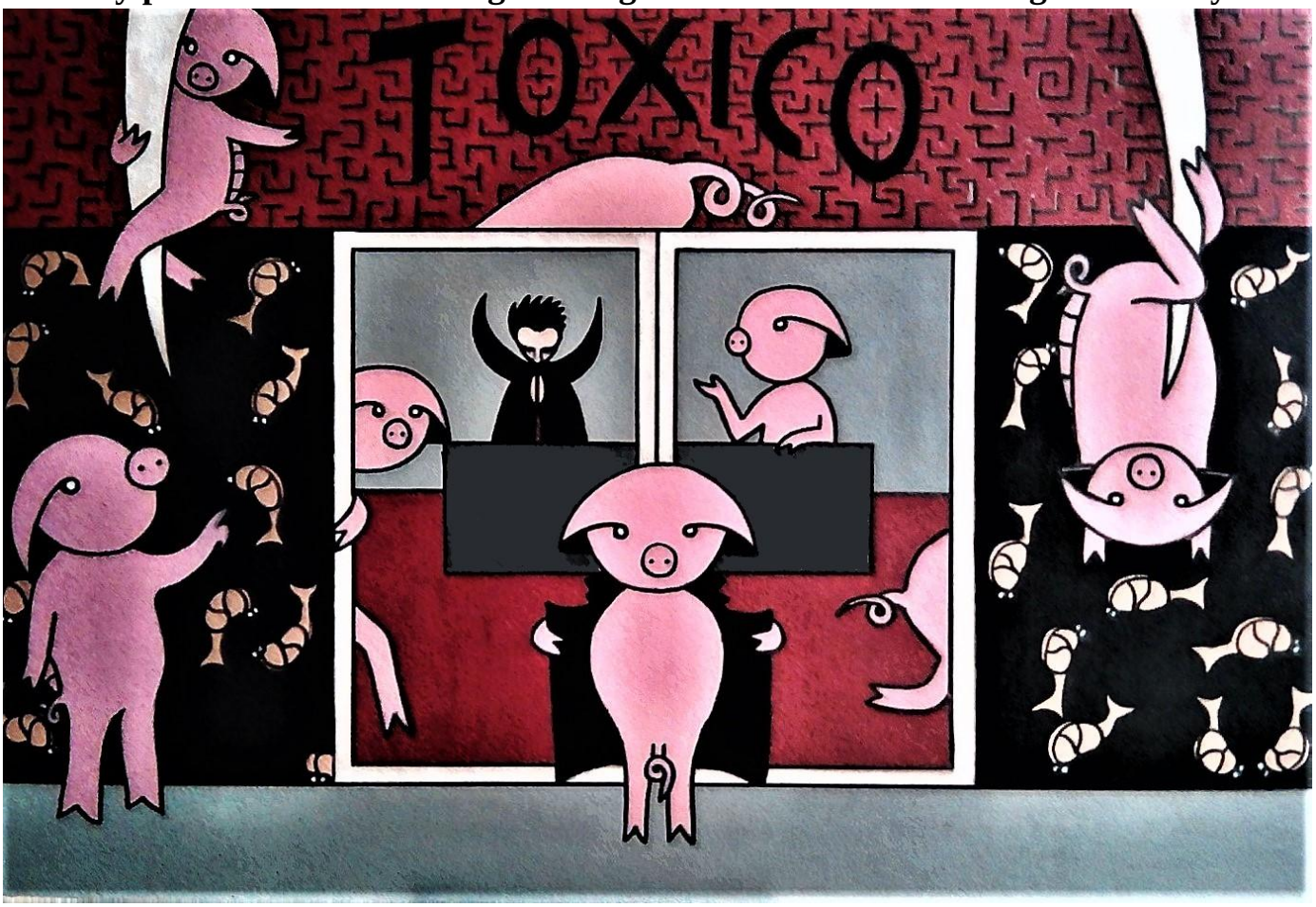
A sense of lightness along with the presence of a joyful feeling are the best indicators you are connected to reality. What's unreal is so heavy, a burden no person needs to carry. There is no real joy with those who partake in the black stuff, though they certainly try to pretend they are having a rare old time. They are free to join me in my quest toward the ocean. Sadly, they are attached to their shallow mental puddles, the thirst for replenishment runs deep.





Can you see an alchemy brewing, turning all their base curses into prayerful gold? Intoxicated by darkness, the mindless revellers have barred themselves from a most sober minded opening. Everybody will eventually pass through that gateway someday. Most people in this discordant age stave off making inroads into reality until the last moment. It patiently waits for everyone, this blissful release from all the noisy revelry pigging out in the vale.

No need to abuse to feel powerful, there are other pathways to empowerment that do not entail stripping a person of their self-worth. Closed-off from a truly prosperous, mindful value system; mindless merchants continue peddling their wares unawares. Their shop-fronts arrayed with bling do a sterling job at hiding the vampiric culture festering inside, operating in the most enlightened corporate structures. They may even promote plugging into more meditative power sources, then blow a fuse because of the slightest faux pas. They are fundamentally disconnected from reality where an abundance of life energy can be freely accessed. Hence the need to constantly replenish their lagging power supply, the vampires in their more sophisticated guise depend on a steady flow of new intelligence for their lifeblood. First, they gather data on their intended target; usually from dubious, anecdotal sources. Just a pinch of factual information with a generous dollop of mistruth is enough for the toxic chefs to concoct a tasty caricature. The subject rendered into a subjective piece of meat is then cast to the many demons in their sick circle. In all the dark corners of the globe, the same parasitical business model syphoning self-worth from its many punters. Toxico sucking all the goodness out of life has fangchises everywhere.



With the exposure of just one mistruth and the whole fictional construct is set to collapse.

"Little pig! Little pig! Let me in! Or I'll huff and puff and I'll blow your house down."

The shadow certainly does a lot of huffing and puffing in its bid to exact vengeance. "Never tread on the wasteland of violence," I remind myself before the swirling gusts of emotion mutate into a cyclone. "Best to plough ahead peacefully staying in the furrowed fields of officialdom. It may take years tilling the soil before the universe decides it is harvest time. Be swift as the wind with sickle in hand when the break in the clouds arrives making hay while the sun shines. Truth will prevail despite so many snouts in the trough.

It is difficult for a teetotaler to build bridges with a community when connections are primarily forged in the pub. The only sober minded option is to attend church services. Soon as Toxico catches me in my Sunday best it sprays insane methane into my face. Every stride forward is met with numerous backward steps. Clearly the shepherds aren't guiding the flock to higher pastures. My mind frequently wanders throughout the mass, daydreaming about hijacking the pulpit in the middle of a long and tedious sermon. It feels more like some performative routine in a theatre than authentic spiritual guidance. "I'll give them a show!" **avows the shadow whose ultimate phantasy it is to don a priest's robes. I can picture him mounting the pulpit, the congregation gasping in shock horror.** "Say your goodbye's porky pies," **intro's the shadow.** "Revelation has just come to town." **I don't want to descend into a lengthy spiel lamenting I was unjustly nicked by a bad cop. Had I been arrested by a good cop I might still be wallowing in my own little illusory cell. The prison walls are built around the promise of escaping from an undesirable version of ourselves. The augmentation of reality is a big business, especially social media entities operating like religious cults in the way they grant viral sainthood to just a chosen few. The vast majority feel like unworthy sinners, in a constant state of wantonness for access to the covetous holy of holies. It is all just a confidence trick, a stupid mind game easily bypassed without the need to ask a middleman for special clearance. The reality is our very own consciousness is a doorway into every single living being that has ever lived. The architects of the mental prison never factored into their computations an inmate would have the audacity to scale the confined walls of their narrow-minded simulation. With all the tools at my disposal, I tunneled my way out of their subjective incarceration. Out of the cartoon prison I climbed towards the animating light. The toxic culture keeps burning their effigies to stave off the bitter cold generated by their lowly state. The devil, that old archetype of all that is malevolent is just a symbol of a negative psycho-emotional imbalance. This demoniac force couldn't resist showing its face to me. Hundreds of ego masks fell like autumnal leaf's from every social branch, revealing the evil energy hiding in the mental undergrowth. An amazing spectacle to behold; hell's kitchen is open for business. The demon waiters gather to serve their torments, OMG do they dish it out. Being a stickler for decorum I try to inject some order into the burgeoning milieu. "Will those who want to hurt me form a queue to my left, while those who want to kill, form an orderly line to my right." They aren't happy about getting their picture taken! What a cruel mindscape poses for the artist with his easel set up in the eye of the shit storm. What displays of pig ignorance from the culture around me oblivious that they were letting me see the darkest corners of their personalities usually kept well hidden. After years of ignoring the interior with the focus primarily on the exterior, the inner sphere has become a hellish place. The negative impact we are having on the environment is a direct manifestation of that mental state. If we're serious about cleaning up the planet we need to sort out the cacophony in our heads first. Rather than adding to the discordant mess, try to attune the mind and bring some balance to thinking. All the mindless noise no matter how out of kilter it is with reality, will eventually be restored back to the source.** "You might sprinkle the sermon with a line or two from scripture," **counsels the shadow.**

Seldom do I read the bible, and rarely if ever quote scripture. But sometimes it hits me! A tsunamic message penned two thousand years ago sends a tidal wave into the present. How awesome to me that Christ forgave them, even after they nailed him to the cross. There is a godly architecture housed in such awe-inspiring forgiveness, more grandiose than any cathedral built by the church. So accessible to anybody with a receptive mind, offering sanctuary to frostbitten seekers weather-beaten by the cruel and unmerciful climate outside. In forgiveness there is the wholesome feeling of a kind and loving home. Such bliss to be sat by the fireside while the unforgiving storm rages outside the window. How frosty are the evil minded sealed shut to open invites where genuine warmth dwells. It beckons us all to cross the threshold, enjoy the peaceful embrace of a merciful presence. No comfort to be found pouched in the cold underbelly of the crowd where all manner of distortions develop. Difficult to get it on the canvas, what has for so long been planting sneaky blows behind my back. Much prefer to engage face to face with my shadow boxer, subjectively boxed in the shadows. I want it so badly for Skippy to have its day in court. Skippy is the pet-name I have assigned to every kangaroo court operating in the shadows. I keep asking myself why me? Trying to figure it out I retrace my steps back fifteen years when first the kangaroo court hopped into my life.



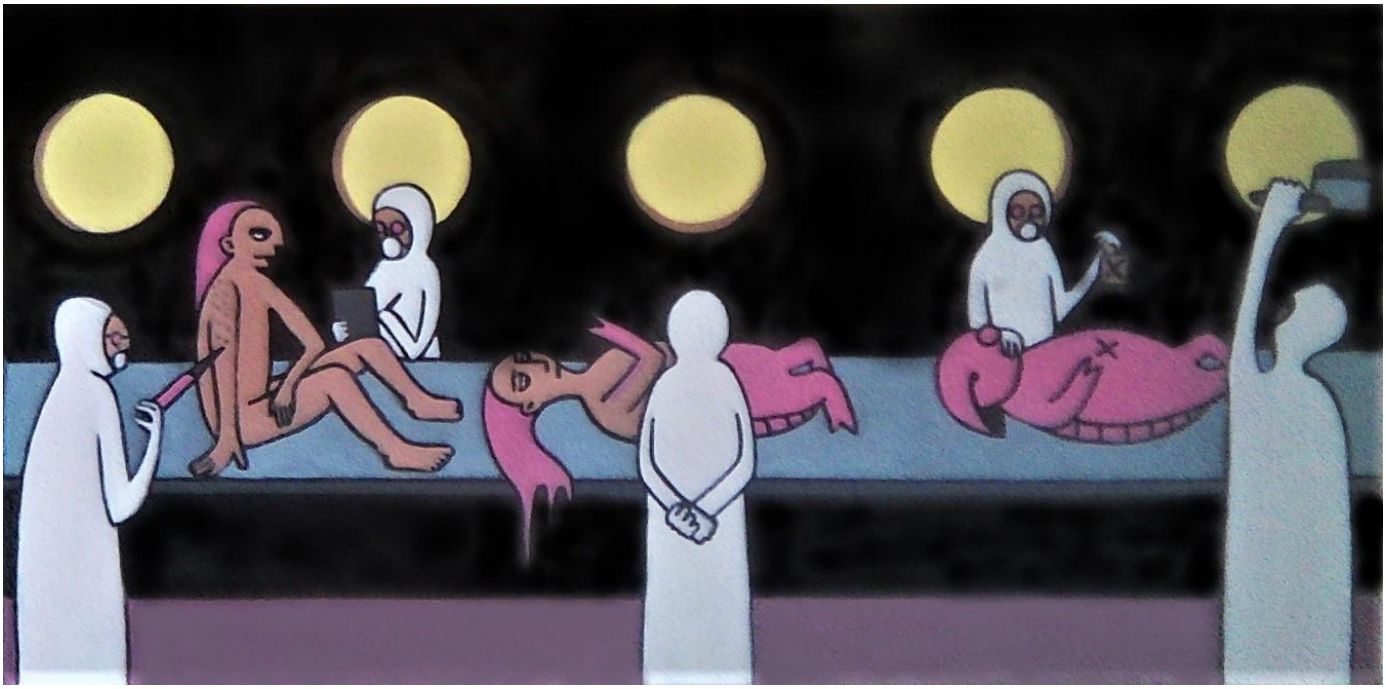
From the get-go I was shadowed by Skippy in Sligo. They found out I was lodging in a homeless shelter, didn't really matter that I had a fulltime job in a factory. That was how it began I suspect. I suddenly find myself in the out-house with a steady stream of hot fuming exhibits flowing my way. It is not evidence of a high office. All unenlightened social systems tend to share the same plumbing. Whatever shitty devaluation was made; it gave them justification to treat me like a human toilet. Assholes from near and far flock to take a dump on my mental health. The effects on my overall wellbeing trying to cope with the constant deluge would be dire. Yet I don't play the victim card, I simply cannot complain about the position bestowed upon me. How could I object when there are so many cracking views for an artist to grapple with here?

That does not mean to say I refrain from deconstructing arguments built on falsehood.



Eventually Truth will find a way in, sure it's in already is the cornerstone of my position! No amount of disparaging thrash talk will change that reality. God in man enlarges, the devil in man makes small. Anyone who needs to belittle another to big themselves up is clearly in league with an evil spirit. We all need to be watchful of what is going on inside and be able to clock what is going on outside too. Are we wasting our time gorging our minds with demonic sloppy seconds, or are we being nourished by the timeless almighty? I constantly check myself like a timepiece, making sure I am synchronized with the now. The demons of this world are watching the clock too, working overtime to stop us from figuring out what really makes evil tick. Those in the lower tier don't want us ascending to a higher revelatory hemisphere. What is low inside only wants to feed on what is low outside. It cannot stomach anything that does not resonate with its own toxic frequency. We really need to be careful about the food for thought that we ingest. I know all the eateries in Sligo cooking up the poisonous dishes, I have catalogued most of them in my artwork. Art also helps process the madness, moving the content along the digestive tract. What horrid porky pies some places are cooking; they generate a violent and hateful gastritis in the brains stupid enough to eat such crap. A certain demon named Ashik was farting so violently into my face I reported that batch of death threats to the authorities. Besides providing a public record of the abuse, the police can do very little. I never bother ringing the phone numbers for victim support agencies they give me as a consolation prize. I have another coping mechanism at my disposal to keep the demonic darkness at bay. Increasingly I draw on my spiritual practice to light a pathway through the madness. If the penny hasn't dropped yet, all the money in the world will not save you. We are all in the ha'penny place, trying our best to evade the clutches of the debt collector death. At every stage in life we are being pursued by death, impermanence saturates everything we do and say. Everyone is serving death, from politicians down to stand-up comedians. Oft the sourness is sweetened to make the bitter goblet more palatable to the tastebuds. Most don't think the soft stuff they pour has any correlation with the hard stuff. How many nights that ended painting the town red started off drinking the soft bevvies? The bloodlust will not stay hidden for long, eventually the cruel abattoir will surface. With so many serving me diet death, it's a miracle I haven't been served with a stiff one yet.

No need to raise a hand against any of these bootleggers brewing their hate narratives. The poison chalice they serve will be served back to them a hundredfold it is guaranteed. You can see it already in the ease at which they delete, life has no dominion in their eyes. Gazes cold as tombstones have but one domain in their minds. Alas no tour of Sligo would be complete without a rendezvous with the cemetery. Wonder sometimes will I be buried there; it plays on my mind like a childhood memory. Not a macabre reverie for me at all; I have probably frequented the graveyard more times as a child than the playground. Regularly we played amongst the gothic tombstones, one of our most popular childhood haunts. The graveyard never frightened me, especially when I had to pass through it on regular errands to the shop to fetch tobacco products for my parents. Even at night-time. Although it was a scary place at night, it was a completely different story during daylight hours. I have always found graveyards to be very peaceful realms; true sanctuaries from a world full of zombified noise. I approach the cemetery like one would a public gallery, admiring all the beautiful mausoleums and monuments to the dead as I walk along. I like to read the epitaphs chiselled on the gravestones; some inscriptions can be dead funny! Besides not taking it too gravely, it is important to reflect on our ultimate resting place. When any random nutjob can literally dream-up any justification to put you in the grave, one cannot escape the eventuality that will befall us all. It is impossible to avoid thinking about my mortality in an environment where the threat of death is almost omnipotent. Even in the event of a natural death happening, I thought it would be wise to design my own grave. A very attractive sculptural piece really, hewn from black and white marble. From a marble puddle emerges a marble figure, the quill in its hand pointing toward the large marble bubble bearing an inscription of my name, date of birth and date of death. Nothing else needs to be recorded on the stone orb. I like to think it will be the most eye-opening final statement in the cemetery, apart from the graves of Gypsies which can seem almost Egyptian in their extravagance, more like vehicles to the next world. The conveyor belt of life keeps moving regardless of what is said. In the dead of winter the graveyard sings with new life, the floral offerings giving voice to a story that constantly moves. Life is perpetual movement even for those who seem on the surface to be unmoved by murder.



“It won’t be long before the death rowing in theory rows into the death row in practice,” warns the shadow, becoming increasingly desperate to draw my attention to the temporal outer court the closer I get to the holy of holies. He laughs bitterly at the Jewish reference, “Shedding your goyum blood would only defile the altar of sacrifice.” Retorts the shadow, his macabre liturgy has waned so much over the years it only serves now a performative function with no real bearing on my inner state. I pocket my meditation beads before consulting the book of Zen Koans I customarily conclude the session with. “Goso said:” I read the quote aloud. "When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through, but why can't the tail also pass?" I can picture the shadow wagging his finger like a tail, always sends me into convulsions. The shadow steals back to the shadows, the joyful explosion too much for him to tolerate. As my spiritual practice deepens, facing the final checkout isn’t so daunting anymore. Mindfulness truly enriches, bringing balance to a skewed system where weak and strong actors are constantly vying for power. It is curtains for this ghastly parochial play that keeps casting me into an inferior role. I become more detached with every passing season, watching outside the walls of the prison drama as both inmates and guards have their wicked way with the effigy of me sleeping in the cell. Many moons after my prison break and they still continue to molest what is in essence a projection of their own perversion. Primitive devices to source power become obsolete. Those stuck in the game will strongly disagree and say my take is weak. Everything in the ego mode is turned into a debate. Family, relationships, having a meal and even baking a cake is reduced to a contest. Defecating would be made into a sport too if it didn’t create such a stink. You can smell the toxicity in the air, the divisive fumes keep us imprisoned in fragmented, mental cells.



You wouldn't believe how difficult it is selling a completely free abundant power source to a world conditioned to put a price tag on every joule of energy. I wonder sometimes did Nikola Tesla tap into the same infinite font of energy? Certainly his free power model didn't make commercial sense to the financiers bankrolling his projects, nor to those who suppressed his inventions after his death. Despite concerted efforts by a power structure determined on keeping us in the dark regarding the true energetic nature of space itself, someone like me with no electrical expertise managed to plug into a whole new universe. On the surface it was a normal day with no strange electromagnetic anomalies to report. I wasn't looking for irrefutable proof of a higher power or anything, initially it was just a run of the mill session in my meditation room, a completely empty area inside my home devoted to pretty much doing nothing. Oneness with nothingness is the essence of zazen, it is not a discipline geared toward subtracting or adding anything to the present moment. I open and close my eyes throughout the meditation, seated in the lotus position on a cube shaped seat facing a completely blank wall. At certain intervals when my eyes are closed I focus on the velvety darkness behind my eyelids, such a familiar sight now at this stage it is habitually registered as insignificant static. I spent countless sleepless nights staring into that void behind my eyelids, watching abstract shapes floating in my field of vision. It was so banal to me at that time it would lull me off to sleep. I had actually incorporated it into normal sense perception, never recognizing the importance of what I was looking at until now. I focus on the subtle energy hum radiating against my eyelids, then ever so slowly I open my eyes to SEE for the first time the same energy field in the space outside.

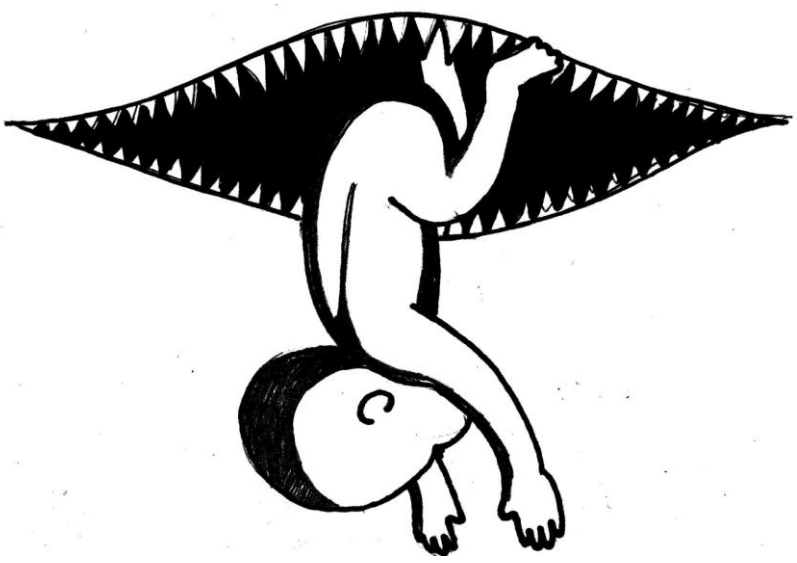
BOOM!

"How did I not SEE IT?" Was all I could say rising from my seat, visibly shaken by the enormity of what was concealed in plain sight. No double take just in case it was a trick of the light, once you SEE there is no unseeing. The epiphany hit me like a freight train, everything I held as true came to a screeching halt. Never would I look upon the energy scarcity narrative with the same eyes again. We have all been railroaded into following a false engine of progress fueled by a vampiric driving force sucking all the passengers dry. I pictured myself many times presenting these findings in a Dragons Den type scenario, pitching my revelation to the snarling captains of industry flanked by stacks of currency. "No need to pay a middleman to access the upper storey in life!" I promisingly premise, the alpha male in the panel turns to one of the other beta males sporting a gnarly grin. "Close your eyes," I direct the seven dragons. "Focus on the energy behind your eyelids." They laugh when the alpha jokes about me stealing the money while they are not looking. "Now open your eyes very slowly, while still focusing on the energy behind your eyelids." Boom! I'm back in the room, poised before the double doors open wider than an embrace. Through the French window I stepped out onto the balcony, still asking myself how did I not SEE IT? A man depositing empties into the bottle bank turned around abruptly to take special exception to me with hands sandwiched prayerfully. He overflows with rage walking towards me, as if I've given him the finger. I didn't hear exactly what he shouted, it could have been muzzletoff for all I know as he smashed his bottles onto the ground. Not exactly a celebratory bottle of bubbly to celebrate the momentous event in a journey spanning over twenty years. I remain centered, closing my eyes to make a silent blessing.

I waited for the shadows response to the litany of foul mouthed curses from the nutjob below, but nothing happened. Total radio silence, not even the faintest whisper in my ear. It prompted me to execute a painting to commemorate the shadows untimely departure.



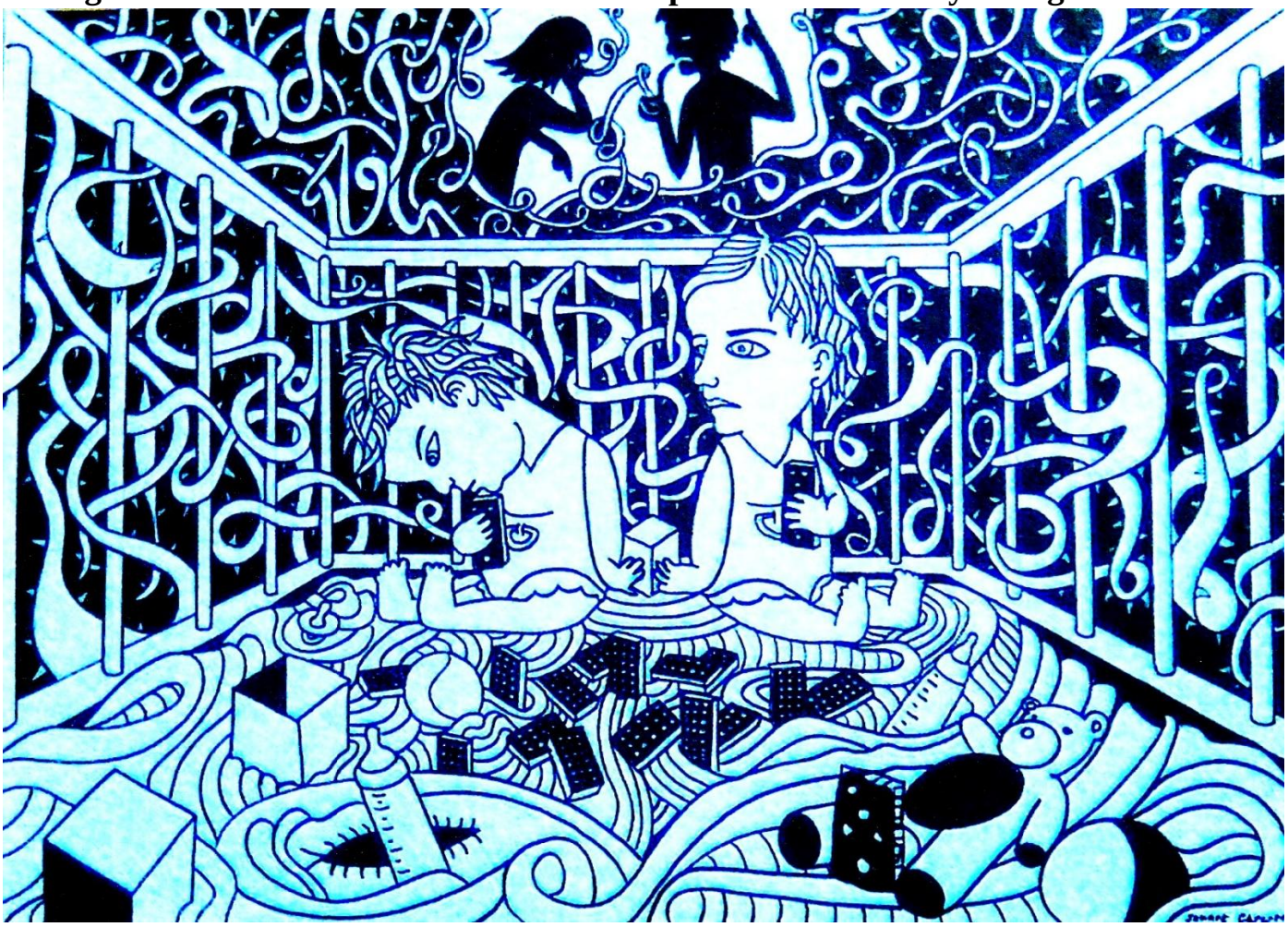
The space of a month passes in the blink of an eye, and still not a peep from the shadow. I was in the cathedral brainstorming an idea for a picture when right on cue the sacristan on her rounds fired a volley of empty penny candle shells into a small metal bin creating the percussive effect of violent lightning. The big bang was loud enough to wake the dead. "Fucking noisy cunt!" Cursed the shadow, springing from my head like a jack in the box. "Hell-bent on Unearthing the Heavens my arse!" He sneered the title of the piece marking his passing. A sign flashed in my mind hanging nearby in deference to the sacred silence. "Did the bitch not get the memo?" He demanded, threatening to report her to the bishop. "Such a stickler for the rules," I mused to myself, the image of a bug flashing in my head. "You've surely got the nuclear survivability of a cockroach." I added somewhat ruefully, getting a sharper picture of the pesky critter. "You fucking whore!" He cursed bitterly. "Selling your pussy on the street at the drop of a hat for any auld thought form wandering the bardo in between. A perfect host for lowlife larvae sniffing around for a cheap lay!" Snarled the shadow, alluding to the sensation presently fluttering about in my stomach. "I get the butterflies just thinking about freeing my story from the belly of the beast." I said arising from the back pews to make my way to the front entrance where I encounter a tweedy auld gent on his way in, humming with the scent of pipe tobacco and turnips. Holding the door ajar as he passes, I say hello. Wowser, no Aaaaaaaaaargh for me today? "Wonders will never cease." Scorns the shadow crestfallen from missing out on a dinner. I make my way home more buoyant than usual where a modest tuna sandwich awaits. After the break I return to the theatre to operate on a body of work that will take me to midnight when I retire. I have already performed surgery on a hefty anatomy of themes which I intend to explore in much greater detail further on. There just remains to make a few more crucial incisions, careful not to scar the page with my scalpel and botch the operation. All my creative labor has been pushing towards making this opening, a very delicate procedure requiring bold strokes. Without thinking I quickly lacerate the page with a convex arc, then add a concave arc to invoke an open gash. After adding gnarly teeth to the laceration, I proceed to draw an infant being drawn from the maw of a beast.



Chapter one is born.

CHAPTER ONE

I was born at a time in the mid nineteen seventies when hairstyles were in a state of flux, arriving with a twin brother in what is arguably the hairiest decade ever on record. Both newborns had full heads of hair, I was the dark one inheriting a black mane from daddy dearest. The doctors hailed us as miracle babies, escaping by a hairsbreadth the grim outcome visited on the previous occupant of our mother's womb. The universe it seemed was in a generous mood, repaying double for a baby sister shorn just after she was born. It was a bonus in triplicate since our mother narrowly brushed death delivering us. Comb through the medical books in the Rotunda hospital in Dublin and you might find us there.



Delving into my past is rather like looking back at ancient Greece, the pillars of the cot not doing a great job filtering out the Trojan wars relentlessly raging outside. Every baby is in the lap of the gods, even when their parents are entangled in ungodly argumentation. They smoked like troopers in the aftermath of each fight, the brief armistice combining pipe and cigarette fumes to form a dense smog thicker than the thorniest bramble bush. No olive branches growing in that war-torn briar patch where to be on the winning side you must establish who the pricks are on the losing side. Set against the briary backdrop sickly sweet bubblegum pop pollinates the soundscape punctuated by sporadic puddles of weeping. God damned hippies are still blowing their peace love and harmony bubbles, a breeding ground for toxicity and addiction to flourish. Flower power in all its optimistic plasticity had been withering for years, soon to be replaced by a genre more in tandem with biodegradable life on the ground. Heroin was just beginning to take root in Dublin, thankfully the new arrivals are a world away from all those sick junkies in the big smoke.

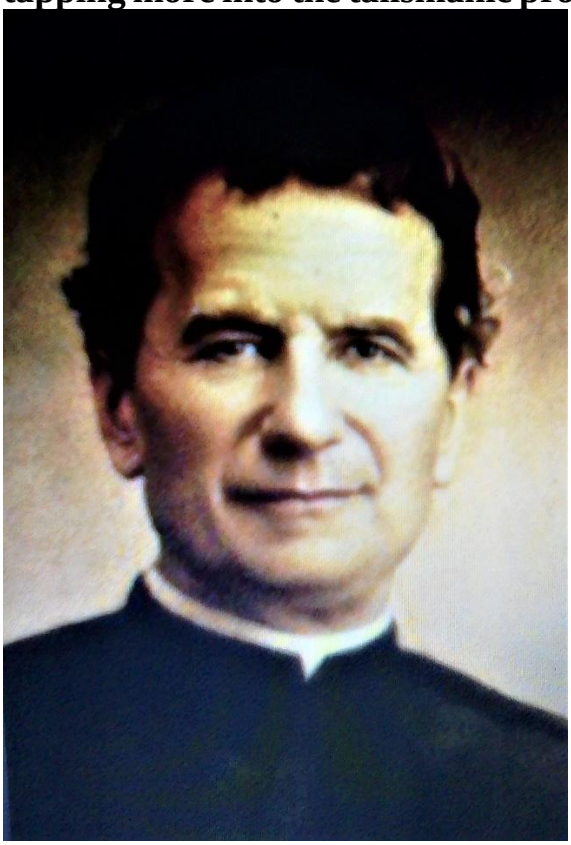
My mother believed my twin would end up on drugs, the way his mouth was always wide open when she nursed him. She was almost right since he got hooked on that AI smack, I don't know how many messages I telepathically sent, pleading to stop sucking on that artificial teat and connect directly with reality. Our minds throughout childhood seemed melded as one, communicating with rudimentary verbal burps and monosyllabic farts. "Psssss" I whisper hypothetically to the other captive in the cot. "These gods are crazy; will they ever stop fighting?" He nods his head affirmatively, encouraging me to continue. My earliest memory might be viewed as the illegitimate progeny of a fertile imagination. I just can't seem to alter or abort the mythical brainchild from the womb of memory. The very first thing I can recall seeing as the focus of my infant eyes began to sharpen, was the summer sun arrayed in white lace. I was utterly spellbound by the net curtains moving gently in the breeze streaming through the open window. The sun is too strong for my sensitive retinas, prompting me to look toward the shady interior. I notice the guy next to me and wonder who the fuck this geezer is? I was looking at him for a good bit, studying him closely and noticed something very odd. He wasn't very good at holding his head up. One moment his head was level with mine, eyeballing me when it would drop back down again; the skinny neck like the weakest of twigs couldn't hold the apple aloft. Then I observed yours truly was doing the same fucking thing. Something inside told me desist immediately from drooping my head, hoist that flag to full mast. That mysterious "Something" spoke without words, commanding me not to be doing what he was doing. It seized my mind with both hands, forcing me to focus all my attention onto this problem. I managed to find a strength inside to build on, the weak drooping head issue no longer a problem. Would have been just an anecdotal event in my own mythos had my mother not relayed her own memories of my infancy, corroborating the veracity of my memory. "You were the only stubborn fuck out of the five who didn't droop your head as a baby." "There'll always be one!" Oft I'd say, "Who dares to stick his head above the parapet." She'd make a throwaway remark, intonating I was the only quack on the funny-farm who didn't duck. With the addition of two more inmates to the madhouse the arguing had escalated from a small village of animosity to a major built-up cityscape full of anger and sadness. I remember particularly the fight in the car our father was waging with my mother fresh out of the maternity ward with sister number two. There are five of us now stuck in the middle of this built-up argumentative metropolis. What should have been an occasion for a joyful celebration descended into a spiteful argument. Apparently, not his bright idea to bring another hungry mouth into the world. I hated the way his mind worked; how the deeply divided psychological sprawl of his brain could so easily turn a newborn blessing into a dead curse. Daily we watched the aggressive side of town feeding off the depressed side of town. My parents constantly at loggerheads with one another had a huge impact on the cityscape of my own developing awareness. Children can only absorb so much of the madness. As soon as we could walk, we bolted out the door to the hills. There were actual hills nearby, wild surrogate bosoms ready to distract the urchins displaced and traumatized by the perpetual tit for tat. I had a wonderful childhood filled with adventures in those hills despite the backdrop of a divided architecture back home.



My parents when I was growing up never concerned themselves with any of the latest developments in fine dining. Little love was infused into the psycho-emotional pottage that was usually served, oscillating between piping hot anger and stone-cold melancholy. As an army cook my father certainly knew how to follow a menu. Boy did he dish it out every time my mother served him a meal. Countless dinner's sautéed with a torrent of verbal and mental abuse from the sergeant major. I became a target once for refusing to eat liver, still can't stomach that shit. My mother received the brunt of the verbal abuse. When the legions of horrid names were deployed upon her, we all acutely felt the pain. Some families have a grace before meals. We had a holy disgrace for a prologue and an epilogue to every dinner. Why was he such an antichrist, especially around dinnertime? Having a rare confessional moment with us once, he revealed that he was receiving the same hurtful ingredients from every rank and file within the barracks. It was an absurd joke to us that he worked in an army tasked with mainly peacekeeping duties abroad. Without the tools to deal with all that negative energy, he held onto it until chowtime and channeled the messed-up psychology absorbed in the mess hall into us. Its basic physics. It wasn't a total failure as a familial experiment, he had a really explosive sense of humor. One day he lured the whole gang into the car with a big surprise waiting at the end of a short spin down the road. All of us midget children in the back seat of that Renault five, with still ample space for my best friend Bernard Cruise outside sadly bidding us adieu.

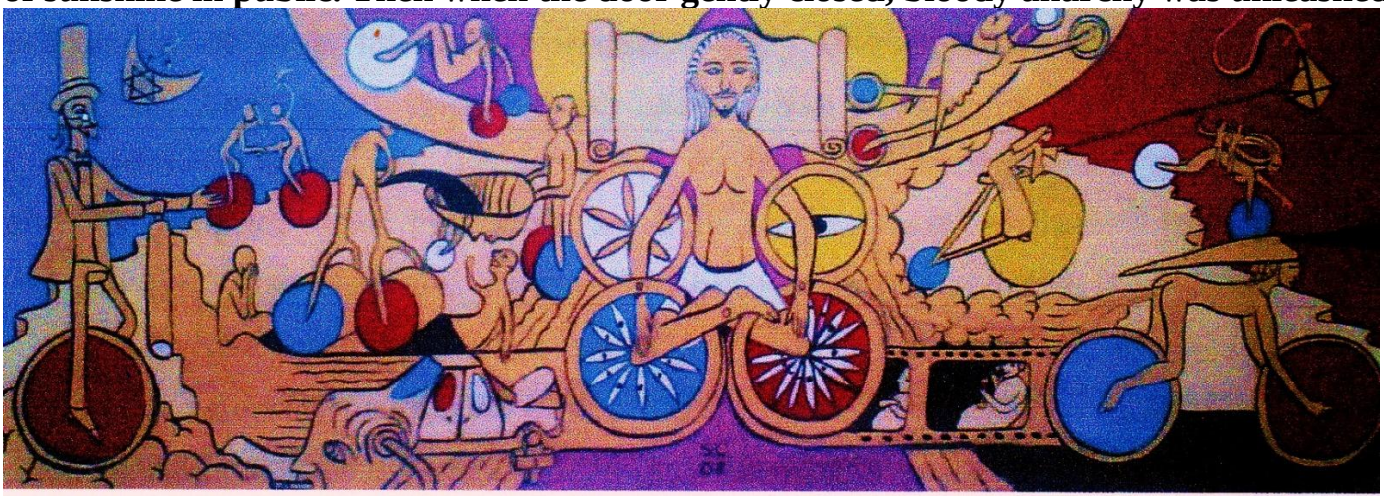
My father would make hurtful, derogatory comments about his "parentage" soon as we became friends. Apparently he was worried the boy would grow up to be a bad influence. "Let's go to Disneyland!" Announced the pilot excitedly to the passengers, reversing out of the driveway like a getaway car from a bank heist. The joy all of our little naïve brains innocently celebrated in that back seat. Nothing it seemed could bust the bubble, not even mammy who seemed to be suffering with another one of her piercing migraines. So easy to unlock the magic vaulted inside, Disneyland is the key that will pick that lock for sure. We were already there, transported to that timeless place of absolute joy and happiness. The wonderful destination though technically not cooked by the chef yet was tasted in all of our heads. We were heading to the cartoon capital of the world where all kids dream of going. We felt so blessed to have such an excellent daddy. The car travailing through back country roads then came to a sudden nervous halt with not one aircraft in the skies. No sight nor sound of any jet engines, no matter how hard you tried to force your ears to listen properly. Just the gothic caw of crows and jackdaws landed inside the interior of the vehicle. Somebody said the airport is hiding somewhere behind the burnt house???? "There's Disneyland." He said puffing on his tobacco pipe, drawing our attention to the ruins of a house shrouded in smoke. Apparently, a fire had visited it the previous night. "Sorry children, the IRA bombed Disneyland." I was trying my best looking out goofily to see if I could catch a glimpse of Mickey and Donald through the windows of the burnt-out husk of the bungalow. Then I stopped when the crying started. If the roller-coaster journey getting there was in the ascent, it certainly was in the descent on the way back. He laughed his head off as we wept, how he got pleasure from such pain was beyond me? Through a veil of tears I eye his in the rear-view mirror. The squinty bulbs of a spaghetti western bounty hunter. The maliciousness in them could be typecast into no other role. They are my blue eyes too. I tell myself, everything that my father is, I will not be. A man who liked watching snooker on the television. A man who drank stout and smoked a pipe. A man who loved fried food. A man whose expanding waist touched the steering wheel. A man who loved cars. A man who made children cry. Though our features are the same, my mind will be so far away from his that the expanse of the entire cosmos will lie in between. He wasn't the worse father we could have asked for, not exactly the best either. As he drove us home, the laughter in him ran out of fuel not long after ignition. Then the mother and father of all rows erupted in the front. Once again unresolved issues were hit back and forth, reducing my mother to manic tears and himself to strong name calling. I remember just watching the two of them engaged in an insane argument and thinking, "Oh shit, you don't know what we're supposed to be doing here, do you?" It was a scary thought. The pilots of your life losing control in the cockpit. You begin to look around the crafts unstable fuselage for parachutes. The red-light flashes in your head signaling, this birds going down fast. Step into my office Dad, you no longer hold a high position in my thinking. But before you use the ejector seat, look for something that will cushion the fall. At a young age I used to escape to the church on my own. A very beautiful place with a serene graveyard which had the tallest of oak trees that caressed the heavens. I liked the energy there, standing at the foot of something that pillared the sky. I would walk around the graveyard savoring the different scents in the air. I adored the rustic earthy perfume permeating from the creaky trunks of the giant oaks swaying in the wind. When life was really bad at home, my natural coping mechanism was to scarper to my sacred safe zone.

Although not a staunch catholic by any stretch, I would gravitate towards sacred places till my dying day. I always entered the parish church armed with my communion beads, tapping more into the talismanic properties in the rosary rather than the power of prayer.



The rosary wielded no power over the domestic turmoil. The only religious artefact in the chapel that gave me solace was a portrait of Don Bosco. I used to spend a long time just meditating on the serenity radiating from his face. When other kids around my age were worshiping pop gods, here I was idolizing a priestly pinup from the nineteenth century. I didn't even know anything about the guy's story. I still don't. The only thing that mattered was the contentment in his face. I would ask God to make my father more like him, maybe perform a swap when he napped after a big fry. This guy's peace really made me happy, more than any other image in the church. Maybe one day I will grow up to be a man just like this noble figure? It would seem likely that a vocation for the priesthood was on the cards.

There was only one snag; I fucking hated the religious indoctrination in school. It was more about optics than seeing. They were trying to peddle an image of Christ as a hippy. A one-dimensional peace, love and happiness cartoon which was out of sync with the culture. With punk in the air, IRA bombs and clerical abuse not far-off the conflict between different brandings of reality couldn't have been more schizophrenic. A form of bipolar disorder like my parent's marriage was constantly being enacted. Always so full of sunshine in public. Then when the door gently closed, bloody anarchy was unleashed.



You really had to be creative finding any semblance of sanity in that crazy environment. There was another place I loved in Lusk that acted as a security blanket I could always depend on. Across from the church was my Nanna's house where I spent most of my summers busily occupied with various chores. I was the only grandchild picked from a batch of over fifty, tasked with running errands and doing odd jobs around Nan's house.

Every summer I whitewashed the wall straddling her property, managing to squeeze in a spot of gardening. Once I spent half a day digging a labyrinth of water canals around the rockery, I can still picture my mother and aunties watching from the kitchen window! "That child's gone away with the fairies!" Clucked the hens in the chicken coop, once a poultry morsel was in their beaks they'd never let go.

There are places in Lusk where the realm of fairytales can unsheathe its wings and take to the skies. Love the idea of having such a magical structure in the heart of my hometown dominating the skyline for generations. The four towers for centuries have sat like medieval rockets, poised at any moment to lift off and pierce the heavens. As a child that was exactly how I saw them. Wherever I took off in that rural patch of the universe, those four monoliths would be watching. A host of tall tales have sprouted in the imaginations of locals living in the shadow of the towering quartet. It was claimed Beelzebub himself would materialize after nine laps of the ancient site. A perfect myth for energetic teenagers to test out. The round towers full of gothic magnetism served as a hangout for some adolescents in the area, especially during Halloween when spooky architypes tend to surface. One could easily envision a witch's coven living there along with a whole cast of ghouls. Usually off limits to the public, once I was granted access to the turrets at the top. After I drank my fill of the panoramic views of the north Dublin countryside, I cast a teary-eyed gaze towards my uncle's field. Felt good to get a new perspective on where I almost died.



There are landmark events in our lives so set in stone they become historical sites able to withstand the harshest elements, even the seemingly liquid essence of memory. Water features heavily in my remembrance, aged seven the voyage had hardly started yet when a near-death experience boarded the vessel. It happened deep in the hull of the nineteen eighties when John Lennon's gorgeous song Imagine frequently sailed the radio waves. The incident happened while playing with cousins at the back of our uncles' property. His estate spanning hundreds of acres had undergone a dramatic change within a very short span of time. Once sunny corn fields of gold; it all of a sudden became a desolate moonscape, the entire field cratered sporadically with large holes. More like giant gaping mouths full of water the earth couldn't swallow. My cousins joked, saying their dad was a pirate looking for buried treasure, neglecting to fill in the holes after finding nothing. "Where are they going to bury all the cars?" I asked pointing at the automobile cemetery looming over the punctured hellscape next to their heavenly bungalow. They all laughed as they made tracks for the scrapyard to play their games. I was too small to be accepted by the big kids, and too big to be babied by the adults. I didn't even have the wherewithal yet to feel unwanted, cast aside into a landscape salivating for something bad to happen.

I began to gather fragments of pallet wood lying scattered in the muck. It seemed like a perfectly logical idea to build a boat, since there was so much fucking water in the place. It was like a trip to the seaside, had made what I believed was a totally seaworthy craft. Getting it into one of the bodies of water was a struggle, I was so tiny what was in reality a pond, appeared to me big as a lake. The intrepid explorer then boarded his craft, it drifted away when I placed my foot onto the slippery deck. I tried to get it back using the tip of my toes. Stretched to the very limit, the raft continued to drift away. Then SPLASH



I fell into the pool not knowing how to swim. Completely disorientated I instantly began to panic, frantically peddling the muddy water. The little legs nowhere near purchasing the bottom as I called out at the top of my voice for help. Water started to fill my lungs somewhat stifling the ability to project my voice. I could see my family on the shore, they were all watching me thinking that I was putting on some sort of a show. I went under and when I surfaced found they were all laughing. I went under again pleading, begging for help. Then more laughter when I arose and only to sink again to a chorus of yet more raucous cackles. Had one of my cousins not snapped out of the spell and ran to get help I would've said adieu to this world with that hideous parody of laughter in my two ears.

The hero of the hour was my mother. She took one look at her nephew running towards the bungalow and knew without words that something ominous was afoot. The eagle eye of the mother's instinct is the most powerful supernatural force on this planet. She bolted like lightning to where I lay face down, silently submerged not far from deaths shore. My mother dived into the pool and fished me out nearly drowning herself in the process. Having regained consciousness, to my horror discovered I was almost completely naked!

The underpants donated from my older cousin sent the numerous adults in the room into fits of hysterical laughter; the picture of a helmeted boy on a bicycle emblazoned across the front, apparently the grownups found very funny. Perched on a cold kitchen worktop feeling like a piece of meat on a slab, I nearly died a second time with the embarrassment. It wasn't the first time I thought my family were a bunch of perverts. Anyway, the near-death experience had a major impact on me, for over forty years after every time I passed a group my legs would go all rubbery. Like I was transported back to the pool again, begging for help and being met with a total misreading. It engendered a powerful social conscience in me too; very peculiar in a lad so young. I became overnight ultra-sensitive to any negative environmental conditioning. My father had elected me as his favorite, putting me onto his knee while leaving my twin to wallow in the lowly doldrums. I hated the false heights of the glory bestowed upon me and I squirmed uneasily on that throne. "Let me down with my brother in the bog-side, I don't want this. Give the crown of your favorite to someone else, I don't want it." He eventually got the message and realized he couldn't divide and conquer brothers who came into the world together. The fact that he used that stratagem on his own children was illustrative of just how divided he was inside. I suppose it was my father's way of marking his territory and controlling the narrative. Any strong bond I garnered outside his sphere of influence he done his utmost to destroy. For years I had a best friend who was so much bigger than me he could have carried me around in his pocket. Such a giant friendship for a pipsqueak like me had its perks, the extra muscle granting me the confidence to square up to every bully in the playground. Besides the headmaster, there was really only one dominant alpha-male he was powerless to help me fight. My father perhaps sensing a challenge down the line to his dominance, didn't like Bernard hanging around with me one bit. There were questions he claimed about his parentage, which so late in the twentieth century was just a ridiculous sneer. My father ordered the friendship with "The Bastard" to be terminated immediately. He hounded me day and night to cut ties with Bernard who he argued was from a lower tier. He only lived around the corner from us, the exact same council bricks that tailored his house our house wore too. Where the fuck was he getting all these airs and graces from? As a child he had burnt down his own primary school building resulting in his expulsion from education. He had no formal education and picked spuds until he landed the army job. The whole saga went on for months, my father pressuring me to break friends and me doggedly telling him that I can't. Even after he banned me outright from playing with Bernard, I continued to defy the edict until my twin brother of all people ratted us out. There was nothing I could do but capitulate, it near broke me having to obey the selfish demands of a man who would never be happy no matter what I did. It later transpired he was cheating on my mother with a woman who literally lived around the corner, siring another son right under our noses. At the same time he was bastardizing the wholesome friendship with Bernard, he was living a double life with a lady reputed to be a prostitute. There was definitely a dysfunctionality in the air which reared its ugly head in the most unlikely of places. I still feel it was a terrible injustice, why a perfectly normal friendship was in essence criminalized while the actual criminality going on got off totally scot free. I was in my room toying with cardboard boxes when what sounded like playful noises in the adjacent room drew my attention. Bath time in bed is the best way I can describe it when through the half open bedroom door I glimpsed my sister and brother butt naked on top of each other in the bottom bunk. My immediate response was to leg it downstairs.

Although it appeared consensual as far as I could tell, alarm bells nevertheless went off. I immediately reported the incident to my mother who dismissed it as just harmless fun, insinuating they were engaged in a perfectly innocent roleplay game after watching a sex ed. video at school. That didn't truck with me when I mentioned it to a fellow classmate; Trevor Barry was even more grossed out about it than I was, ridiculing me for not doing more to intervene. I instantly regretted telling him as he scurried off with the news to the rest of the class. Not in a million years did I expect the account to ripple to such an extent my sister ended up getting moved to "a special school" better equipped to help with her "developmental issues". I understood albeit from a very elementary childlike perspective dysfunctions like incest needed to be nipped in the bud before it bit everyone on the ass.

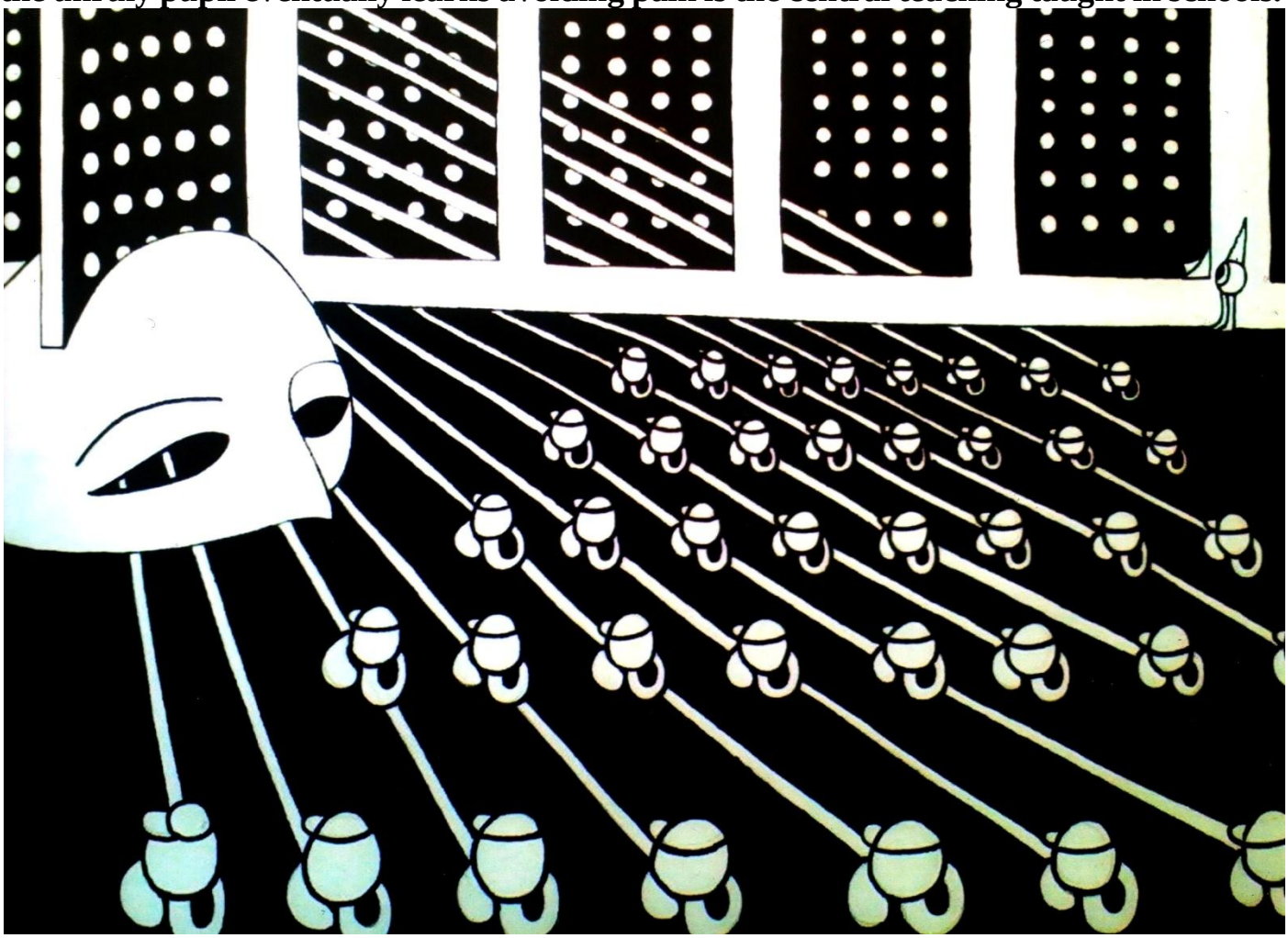


I might never have cried foul had Bernard not been placed on the subs bench, effectively giving the red card to a five year friendship kicking off from the very first day of school. I started hanging around more with my younger cousin Thomas, his dad funnily enough once got into a fist fight with my father. A grievance I gather centered around my mother sending me across to my Aunt Barbara's to beg for cigs, an errand I hated with a passion. I would bitch and moan of course for being the only one in the house picked as her gofer. I know well my particular Oliver Twist brand of desperation always produced the goods. "Sorry to be bothering you," I'd begin when finally one of three cousins opened the door. I always prayed for bubbly Barbie to answer when I rang the doorbell. Otherwise I had to face the two other snarky sisters who never made any attempt to hide their contempt. "Mammy was wondering, can you spare a few cigarettes?" On the way back I sometimes put one of the smokes behind my ear, relieved the ordeal was over for another day or two.

I was well aware of the stark economic realities in nineteen eighties Ireland, so much so I got a job selling potatoes for my uncle on the hard shoulder of Swords dual carriageway. We headed to the co-op first thing in the morning to fill my uncles van up to the rafters with sacks of potatoes. Denis left me then with the unloaded cargo at the side of the road, returning in the evening when every spud was sold. I enjoyed the experience immensely, most people were really nice bar a few unhappy customers I didn't let blight the crop. One self-entitled pup in the back of his father's BMW asked outright if I was a knacker. Though I said nothing my face turned puce concluding the transaction with the customer. Still aged in single digits, my weekly earnings in double digits made me feel much older. The first thing I bought with my wages was a Crayola art set, I'd been scoping it out for ages in the window of a local superstore. It was a work of art in itself, cylindrically shaped with multiple tiers for markers, coloring pencils, crayons, poster paints and pastels. Art helped ideate a confused world around me, a therapeutic aid instrumental in formulating my thoughts. I could slice through any exterior with art and see how things looked inside. My mother revealed to me once that I had drawn the cat with kittens in her belly, way before she gave birth to her first litter. My mother was amazed I'd intuited her pregnancy ahead of even her finding out. Forgive my childish naivety for entertaining the mad idea art gave me borderline psychic super powers; what a friendship to gift a kid all of that! Teachers and parents could not compete with that and I became a difficult pupil to teach. I wasn't so far gone that I couldn't comprehend the adult world was sick with worry. I could cover the basics but as school lessons became more complicated, I was observed to be "elsewhere." I was sent to hospital for tests and yet no abnormalities were detected to make a definitive diagnosis. All my teachers said I was a bright child but soon as any gold appeared in my eyes it quickly disappeared under the silt again. Only when it was time for art did I come alive; a completely different pupil. Some observant teachers noticed this and rather than have the eyes of a student dead to the information on the blackboard, they allowed the artful rascal to draw away at his pictures while the lessons went on. Much to the consternation of the other pupils, I got bullied by the cool kids in the class who felt I was receiving preferential treatment. My artistic superhero powers came to the rescue and I was able to placate my villainous detractors by drawing for them cartoon characters as payment to get them off my back. Overjoyed that they had their very own cartoonist working on their behalf I was given a hall pass to pursue my artistic interests. Soon even the bloody teachers began asking me to do posters for them. Gladly I obliged, jumping at any chance to showcase my gift. Once I got a challenging commission from a teacher, requesting the budding artist to execute a poster for an upcoming confirmation. Tricky enough landmark on the Catholic journey to illustrate; especially for an acolyte like me still grappling with the concept of Holy Communion. The poster was to have religious text around the edges, with a central motif symbolizing the event in the middle. I threw myself into the task with religious fervor, drawing the class standing in a dove formation symbolizing the Holy Spirit. My teacher and classmates bigtime impressed egged me on to hatch another composition, but this time I mapped out the whole world with people standing on the various countries around the earth. Plain for everyone to see I had channeled an intelligence into the visual field which did not always convert well into text. If anything the exercise demonstrated an aptitude of the subject difficult to communicate with writing alone. Of course there had to be one who didn't see eye to eye with my vision for the classroom. Both teacher and pupil would learn a valuable lesson.

CHAPTER TWO

School continues to play out inside my head with all the paraphernalia of a game of pool. The anxiety of getting wracked-up after each summer break was matched by my anger towards following a set binary program. I didn't want to be on the stripy side of the game where pupils acted uppity. Nor did I wish to be on the spotty side of the contest either where pupils were classed as underlings. I just wanted to be on the cue-ball of the NOW, to always be in a creative zone where time stood still and the possibilities were limitless. Teachers dutifully put the dunce's hat on these oddball notions, firing me into the corner countless times for looking out the window instead of concentrating on the blackboard. Having seen with my own eyes how easily a near death experience can give us the brush, I was definitely snookered with existential angst. How in one fail swoop my previous score (I was a relatively good pupil) chalked upon the blackboard had almost been erased. When I was put back in the game again my perspective on learning had totally changed. The only thing which makes real what is being taught to us is our focus that goes into it. It should be this that is harnessed in schools. The educational system sucking the creative life energy out of us instead of expanding it, carries on with its succubus syllabus. We continue to box consciousness into subjective tetra packs which over time turns sour leading to the same old repeated inequalities and social ills. The system is more focused on social engineering and mind control. Alternative points of view are put in the corner, the unruly pupil eventually learns avoiding pain is the central teaching taught in schools.

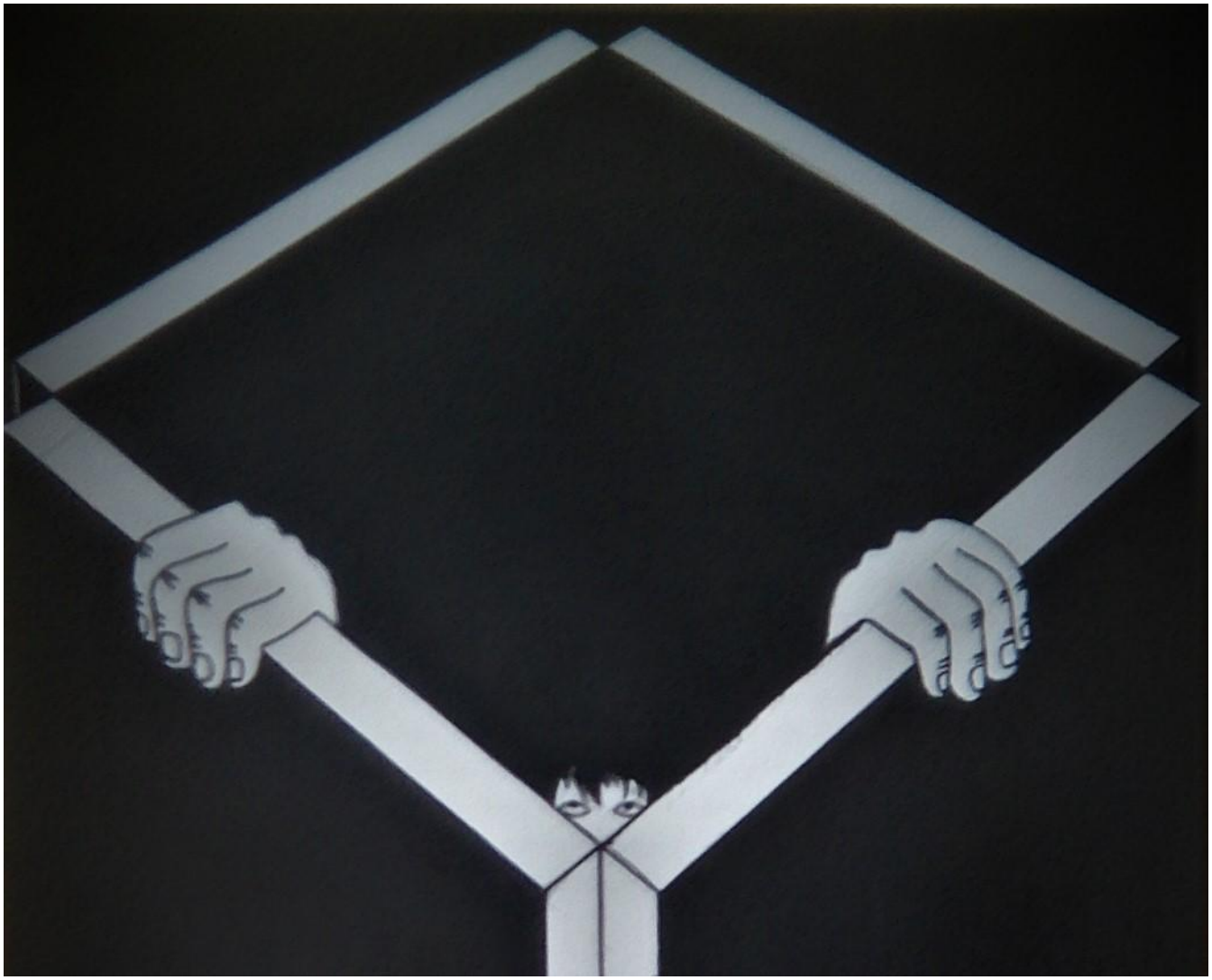


My school had a crazed nutjob at the helm overseeing the cargo of knowledge getting shipped into the interiors of countless children. Not just blocks of information got craned into each brain, there was also something plundering the priceless treasure of childhood.

A primitive malevolence lurked just below the surface, masked by the benevolence of the curriculum. I glimpsed this from a very early age, it couldn't resist showing its ugly face. Frequently I was sent to the head-masters office by teachers who didn't know what to do with me. The principal was a diehard proponent of corporal punishment, administering violent strikes with a leather strap at the back of the legs. He was like a commandant in a concentration camp, dishing out his punishments with an almost industrial efficiency. I remember once he had over ten children lined-up in the office for "special treatment." Pain was multiplied tenfold when you were last on that conveyor belt of the principal's wrath. Here was a man with a lengthy career of educating under his belt, yet engaged in repeated sadistic violence against defenseless children. The contradiction was duly noted, I was learning things no book could teach here. I was studying human nature in school, arguably the most interesting subject to study. One year a new teacher started who was the most fascinating specimen to study. Miss Milan had no time for my artistic leanings, she demanded I be like everybody else and squeeze the linear format of the curriculum into the most nonlinear structure ever built by the intelligent universe. Miss Milan was frequently heard shouting at me to put away my drawing things. Her voice echoed along the corridors with a maliciousness oozing from her weird accent to concentrate on the black-board lest be sent to the heir commandant. My mind would switch off anyway to spite her and wander the panoramic views of the countryside on display in the windows. Once an actual fox chase caught my eye, my God that was such an awesome life lesson. Miss Milan hadn't a word of Italian in her head. She was a very tall lady from county Cork, and had the beautiful sallow complexion of a gypsy rather than an educator. She knitted her own clothes from a dark and light shade of green wool. Everything she knitted herself from the stripy tights up to the beret on her lunatic Corkonian head. If that wasn't hardcore enough, she pushed the boat out a little further. Miss Milan also wore a pair of wooden clogs she probably carved from the logs of a tree the crazy bitch had axed herself. There was burning for the whole day in them chunky clogs. There was something about the teacher's eccentricities that appealed to the surrealist in me. I fancied her so much, more than any other fem with her Spanish features and the bulging Dali madness in the eyes. It hurt early in the springtime of the infatuation to see some kids showing no respect to her. To inspire subservience she'd use one of her clogs as a gavel. Not a whisper would be heard in the courtroom after that. My heart then would be throbbing with a loving ach. You would imagine being such an eccentric dresser and having strayed so far from southern Irelands rebel enclave to the eastern center of power, the rule book disregarded in every aspect of her outward appearance didn't feature in her thinking. Think again. Since she inhabited such a skewed fashion planet, she needed the proper procedures and protocols to give her some semblance of balance. She needed something heavy on the far-side of the seesaw to bring symmetry to that other part of her personality clearly insane. Compared to other teachers, she was very strict on the thorny issue of homework. It was yet another institution of the school system I really didn't adhere to. One of the first homework assignments she gave the class was on a poem about a flower. We were asked to plant our thoughts on paper and write about what the poet was trying to say. I loved these behind-the-scenes assignments, always prompting to jump on board and engage with a creative exercise requiring a free-spirited intelligence. I didn't know what to write other than to put a flower inside my copy-book. Very Zen for a little child just shy of ten.

Monday morning first thing she checked the homework at her desk. I watched with a pounding in my chest as she leafed through other kids work without batting an eyelid. She stopped abruptly, taking the poppy from my copy with her mad bulbs bulging. Then Miss Milan sprang from her seat, made her way towards me at my desk bracing myself for a scolding. A mixture of relief and surprise when she planted a kiss on my forehead. The inappropriate gesture was an obvious red flag, deserving prison time if waved today. I went puce as the class made the sound kids make when the hint of romance is in the air. Out in the playground they were all slagging me off, saying Miss Milan was going to knit me a pair of underpants for a wedding present. Hitting back, I told the jeerers that brides don't buy presents for their husbands. Then getting more ensnared for knowing the ins and outs about marriage. Regardless of the heat in the playground, I got into the habit of bringing Miss Milan a flower every Monday when she checked the homework. Because she seemed to turn a blind eye to the absence of my work, I felt we had an understanding; this was how business was conducted. I didn't want the added complication of homework in my life and a solution presented itself. If I was rich, I would have slipped her a twenty. Since I was shit poor, the only viable option was to grease her palm with wild flowers. Stíobhard thought he was such a clever clogs and had the situation well under control. In the depths of wintertime there was not a poppy, daisy or dandelion to be found in any of the frost-bitten fields on the way to school. Only nettles and thistles grew in abundance, looked like the sting in the cautionary tale wasn't too far away. Literally the first week I reneged on payment and she noticed the absence of my homework in the pile on her desk. I took the empty thing from my bag, done the perp walk and handed her the workbook. Trembling like a leaf, I stared into her eyes feeling like a bug caught in a pitcher plant. This was the exact moment when our flourishing romantic/financial arrangement wilted. Her mouth went agape, a soprano singing a silent note. She growled at me to move closer to her desk, calling me; "Boyo." An ominous sign that a painful lesson was on the cards. It looked like Miss Milan wasn't going to send me to the heir commandant to do her dirty work. She held the copy in her fist and began waving it in the air flamboyantly as she kept saying empty. The teacher never before heard singing in class turned it into a very catchy dance number as Miss Milan repeatedly sang the word empty over and over again. "Empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty empty,……" Then to make it worse she began slapping my face with the copybook, hitting each cheek with each repetition of the empty lyric. Then she upped the tempo and jumped out of her chair and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, while slapping me with the word empty. The poppy flattened into one dimension fell from the pages of the copybook. Suddenly she went silent, halting with the slaps to the face. The teacher looked at it with disgust, the flower on the floor. There was a collective gasp as the class seemed to hold its breath. Miss Milan let go of my neck and went back to her desk looking at me with revulsion. "You boyo, get me that work you owe me, you have till coming Monday, and if you don't produce the goods boyo." She took off one of her heavy clogs and parked it on the table. "You see boyo, these aren't just for walking; they're for dancing too boyo and if I don't get every scrap that's owed to me I'm gonna do an unmerciful jig on your head boyo." I was told then to return to my desk, but was so distraught I couldn't find where my seat was. When I eventually located my place, the two children on either side moved away as if I had the plague. I never felt like such a zero whimpering through the following lesson.

Yet another adult, an actual educator had clearly revealed they weren't in a good place despite all their learning. A picture of a psychological city was developing which years later I'd call "Meta4 City." The psycho-architectural metaphor of the manic adult brain was building in my perception at such a young age, not yet ten. The incident echoed what I saw countless times at home, a strong angry uptown feeding off a weak sad downtown. How could I escape life in the weakened state with the aggressive state hot on my heels? This question walked the streetscape of my thinking through lunch break. I am in a cul-de-sac in my head. The sense that I'm utterly trapped followed me wherever I walked. I circled the playground like an inmate in a prison yard. The other kids wouldn't play with me and I was isolated from the group. The margins provide the prisoner plenty of space to hatch an escape plan. If I didn't figure out a solution come Monday morning when the day of execution arrived, I basically had a handful of sleeps left on this earth. I desperately wanted to reach out for help, but knew there was no one really to turn to. My mother had enough on her plate dealing with my father who would act like the world just ended when she burnt the spuds. As the day drew nearer and the walls began closing in, I kept wracking my brain for an exit that didn't entail bending to the teachers will. There wasn't a chance I was going to get a quarter of the work grafted into my copy. My twin was in another class and all the other classmates refused even to talk to me as if I was a pariah. The only thing I could think of was going on the run away to the big smoke. Maybe I'd find a family in Dublin who would appreciate me more? I even daydreamed about what the new familial sitcom may possibly look like, I was actually super psyched when finally I decided to take the plunge at three am on Monday and took to the roads. The day of execution came around fast, waking at the appointed hour to get dressed quick into clothes that were the most comfiest to wear at the time. The Yale university sweater and blue jeans casually making the clandestine operation appear like a regular outing. It was nerve wracking sneaking across the creaky landing, then down the stairs where I only woke the family mongrel. As was my custom when leaving the house I grabbed a slice of bread, feeding the crust to my best friend Benji as he loyally followed me wherever I went. With my trusty mutt by my side it felt like I was just going out to play. My only plan was to run from the place and see what would happen. We made our way through the village and onto the main Dublin Road unnoticed. It was a dead road at that hour, a highway frequented by ghosts and monsters only a frightened little child could conjure. The grim reaper teacher played football with my mind's eye every single step of the way. An important lesson is chalked out for the ten-year-old on the blackboard of the night. You cannot outrun the grim reaper in your head. If you walk, the grim reaper will walk. If you run, the reaper will run. Only by looking it straight in the eye will it be seen as the shadowy figment of imagination that it is. The light of a car shone ahead in the night sky. It sliced through the dark meat of the night like a sword. It would pierce us soon if I didn't make an effort to evade it. Jumping into the ditch where demonic rats scurried was not much of an option either. I hunkered down motionless holding Benji very tightly, hoping the person driving on this stretch of the dead of night would pass us by. I prayed that he wouldn't notice us. It was bitterly cold without a jacket; the shivers began rattling my skinny little frame. As the howling wind thumped me from every angle, it suddenly struck me how far I'd strayed outside the box. I became very worried, what if my escape from the confines of one confined space, merely landed me into the confines of another?



Could the approaching car be a vehicle to a new life? The car held us for what seemed like an infinity in its headlights. As it passed us it stopped abruptly. The game was up for the runaway pupil and his canine accomplice. The door opened and I went to see what the driver wanted. Inside the car a familiar face peered out at me asking was I alright? Thankfully he was the father of a posh kid I knew in school who revealed to us once while playing cops and robbers his dad was a policeman. We were the last people he expected to meet heading home from a busy night hunting criminals. We got into the car and were swiftly escorted back to the house in Kelly Park. As he drove, I told the most fantastic lie. He was forced to stop to get a clear grasp of the story I had just improvised on the spot.
"Kidnapped by the IRA?" He shrieked nearly veering into a wall outside Taylor's farm.
"He didn't say he was from the IRA." I answered, my trembling voice giving the story a dimension of truthfulness. The yarn began with a knock on the door late into the night.
"The whole house was fast asleep." I said on the brink of a genuine emotional downpour.
"I was half asleep myself when I answered, never expected he'd be a man I didn't know."
"What did he look like? Asked the Garda, clearly hooked. May as well go the whole hog.
"He had a bavaclava over his face, and an army jacket." The detective smiled at my silly mispronunciation of balaclava. (I had seen terrorist figures wearing them on the news.)
"Benji started barking at the fella and I was told to silence him or else he'd snap his neck. While I kept Benji quiet, he grabbed us both from the house, dragging us by the scruff down the road. Then the man started cursing to himself for knocking on the wrong door."

When quizzed by the policeman whether it was possible to tell if the man sounded local; if he was from Dublin? I informed him he spoke with a very strong northern Irish accent. "Me and the dog needed to be stashed in a place where we couldn't go ratting him out to the cops. (I had a vague suspicion the Garda didn't like that word.) This would give the man plenty of time to get to the safe house. He put us both into the boot of his car parked around the corner. After a short bumpy ride he dumped us both at Blake's Cross on the motorway." The policeman asked did I know the make of the car. I scratched my head pretending to recollect the memory. I said no, was so scared didn't even register the color. "I had a rough idea where we were and so made our way back to the village and met yourself." To my absolute astonishment the seasoned Garda who was a detective believed the tale I recounted. He delivered me and the dog back to the house. He patted my head and said I was a good boy. I felt like a child at Christmas. I ran through the open door and up the stairs while the policeman conducted a perimeter search. Since my father was on duty, I only had to wake my mother up. I paced inside the kitchen while they were busy discussing what to do next out in the hall. When they were finally done talking my mother came into me, her face forlorn as she lit a smoke. With Miss Milan still weighing heavily on my mind I shared the same lie told to the policeman with my mother as well. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Is all she could say. It is all any mother could say on the north side of Dublin. I went to bed with the knowledge that I'd have to face the wrath of Miss Milan in the morning with her clogs. My mother would have me go to school no matter what happened. I practically begged her on my knees to please let me stay at home. I suffered with migraine headaches as a child. Many a time I went to school with a splitting fissure in my brain; so it was out of the question getting a day off school for the miniscule event of a kidnapping. My mother observing that there wasn't a single scratch on me, decided it would be business as usual. It felt like I was being ushered to the gallows, my ordeal made worse by smirking pupils in the class who seemed to relish my awaiting fate. "Just get the beating over with." I told myself through clenched teeth at the start of class. I was seriously stressed, the shakes worse than delirium tremens. The whole class was ill at ease too, the ripples of my anxious brainwaves bouncing off every brain in the class. When she made her entrance; more flamboyant than usual, there was another one of those dramatic gasps. Her woolen skirt grazed the back of my head sending an extra shiver through me. Thought my head was going to explode. The teacher loved the tension, tapping the pile of copies at her desk when she landed in her chair. She took off a clog, placing it on the table. She made a phone ringing sound and put the lump up to her ear. "Hello, [pause] yes, can you send an ambulance please to Lusk national school, a little boyo who refuses to do his homework needs urgent medical assistance." The entire class erupted into the raucous laughter of an insane asylum. Miss Milan then slammed down the gavel onto the wooden table, producing a collective spike in all of the little heart rates. There was a deadly silence in the classroom after that as the teacher took the first copy from the top. I was thinking about escaping again when there was a knock on the door. "Enter please." Said Miss Milan fairly haughtily. The headmaster stood at the door; very odd, he always walked in without knocking. He had a meek subservient demeanor as opposed to his usual uppity manner. He looked deflated, the wind knocked out of him. His black hair was disheveled like he'd just woken up, and the glasses were slightly skewed too. It was almost as if he'd just been spat out from a brawl. I kind of pitied him.

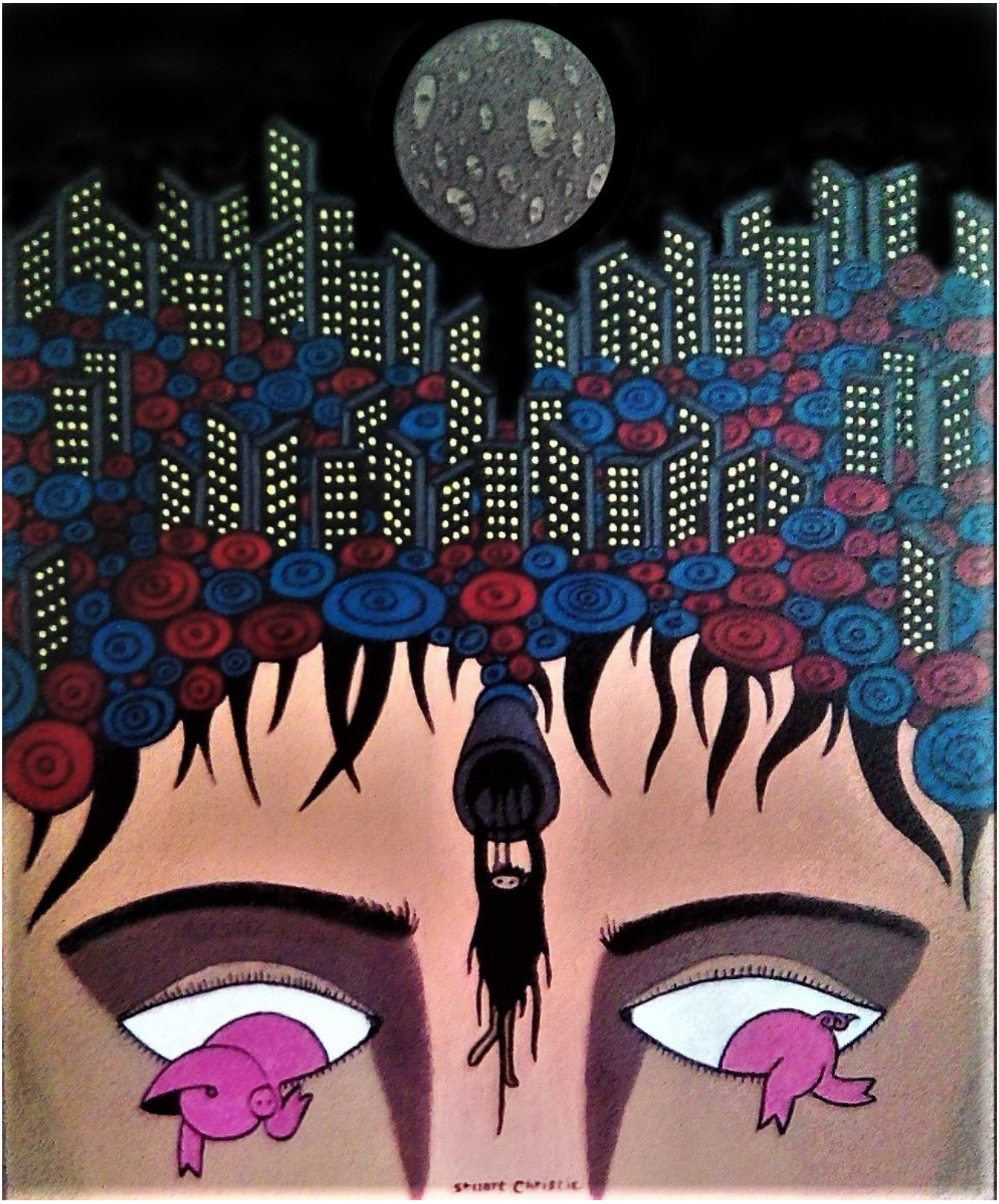
“Eh Stuart, there are two Dublin detectives here who wish to speak with you.” He never addressed me by name when hitting me with his leather strap. It was an unnatural sound. I looked at Miss Milan, a shock horror expression uncorked on the Cork woman’s face. Every pupil in the classroom eyed the teacher as she quickly removed the lump of wood from the desktop. For just a moment I savored the aromatic scent of the comeuppance flower pollinating the air. Now Dublin is on the boom side of town, time for Cork to go downtown. Put the dunces hat on Miss clever clogs on your way to the corner. Much later I would draw amusing cartoons of the teacher being hauled off by the Feds in handcuffs. “Don’t mess with me bitch, I’ve called the Feds on all of your illegal teaching practices.” In actuality I was scared maybe more than they were, my legs when I got up had gone all rubbery. The more I concentrated on walking normally, the more abnormally I walked. I followed the disgruntled headmaster down to his office where the two detectives were waiting. I was told to sit in the heir commandants massive leather chair behind his desk. It was akin to inviting the least of the royal entourage to park their keister on the throne. I just couldn’t do it. I was so very institutionalized despite my reluctance to follow the homework program. They prompted me to sit in an adjacent seat and the headmaster nervously dismissed himself before the detectives told him to go. One of them sat next to me while the other kept standing. Both were crisp and fresh, taller than the principal who was a six-footer. Noticing my nervous shaking they offered some calming words. “There is no need to be nervous, now Stuart just tell us what happened from the start.” I was gently prompted to tell the fib to the Fed sitting so close it was much harder to lie.

Getting back into the groove was difficult. I was a nervous wreck having to retell the lie, I don’t know where I got the brass neck to repeat to the spiffily attired gents the account of the bogus kidnapping. I told them word for word what I had reported the first time, not deviating one word from the plot I’d already dug. Excavating the tall tale again I noticed these archeologists were more forensic, not easily fooled by fictional artefacts. The Feds were not satisfied with my sketchy synopses and wanted the finer details. They prodded and probed the in-between places where I was at pains to explain. I answered as best my childish imagination could think up a response that fitted in with the scenario. It was putting a strain on my brain, going over again and again every painstaking detail.

The sheen started to disappear from the Feds as I was made to go over the story lord knows how many times. It exhausted my brain thousands of times more taxing than all the homework assignments I never done all put together. So many lies stacked on each other, I didn’t know there was a capacity in me to lie so much. When I thought my brain was going to crack with the endless repetitions, I tripped and added a new detail to the story which wasn’t there before. Shoe laces. My mother always warned me that all liars eventually trip themselves up. I had just provided the rope to hang myself with. I don’t know why I decided to tell them that the kidnapper had tied me up with shoe laces. One of the Feds enquired was it while lying in the boot or outside the car that I was tied up. “Emmmm” Gazing skyward I pretended to recollect from the previous night’s memory. “Yes, I was inside the car when he tied me up.” I told the man, at this stage getting very fed-up with the Feds and their endless lines of enquiry. Once I furnished them with that detail, I had to stick with it. It was a vitally important tread I’d neglected to include in the original yarn. Could clearly tell they were suspicious, something different had crept into the way they looked at me. We all then took a break when the bell rang for lunchtime.

Returning to the empty classroom to fetch my lunch I passed Miss Milan in the corridor. I made sure to keep the head down and have no eye contact whatsoever. Not so easy to ignore the manic pestering when I got out to the yard. Reports had leaked out through my brother about the kidnapping. I was inundated with virtually the whole school asking questions. Even kindergarten kids got into asking me about the boogie man taking me. "FUCK OFF!" I felt like roaring. It was like the most crazy, anarchic press conference imaginable. With hundreds of different questions about the story that required so much more brain power than I could handle on my own. I felt the weight and strain on my little childhood brain. A hamlet of an intellect was suddenly immersed in the busy sprawl of the adult mind, a very hostile and unforgiving place; especially if they found out I told lies. A part of me was amazed as well, fascinated how easily it was for the adult world to get carried away with a simple story, with a blatant porky pie. Well not just one lie but a whole god damned city of lies I had become in the space of a single night the architect of. Through that construct I became a quasi-celebrity. For a long time afterwards kids with their mammies would point at me as though I were an object, an animal in the zoo. I didn't like this fame one bit; it is a form of madness. Not a week before and I was shunned like a fishy smell. Now everyone was on me like gulls a fishing boat returning with a catch. Some love that kind of attention and easily bask in the glory. It merely made me feel like a bug, caught in the web of my own making. The unmerciful weight of the adult mind would easily squish the bug who had so dishonestly woven such a complex web of deceit. The fear of being found out was gnawing away at my brain. A migraine was surely on the cards when all the dust settled. So sick with anxiety I couldn't eat my lunch. When they all find out, I will undoubtedly be classed as a bug. When lunchtime was over the Feds took me to the location where allegedly I claimed to be dumped along the roadside. I wanted ever so badly to confess that it was all a fiasco. I showed them the place where I imagined I was left on a grassy embankment straddling along the road at Blake's Cross. The co-op was in spitting distance busy with vehicles delivering produce. Forklifts toing and froing around the huge co-op building were making me more distracted than usual. "You managed Stuart to get the shoe laces off yourself while on the ground?" One of the detectives asked. He got down on one knee and began sifting through the grass like a chimpanzee looking for nits in the hair of another. In my head I was pulling my hair out, entreating them not to go where I thought they were heading. Clearly, they were itchy with doubt and scratching irritably at the story. I felt the huge weight of the artifice I had built begin to dismantle. All those lies stacked like dominos, with the discovery of just one badly constructed mistruth and the whole damn city was heading for collapse. I could smell the apocalypse in the air, its stench even in these country parts stronger than the smell of cow dung. These Feds so gentlemanly would soon lose their easy-going rural demeanour and come down on me like a ton of bricks. I felt the harsh weight of that harsh mindscape on me already, grinding me down with the questions in their eyes. Besides a malice which I had detected in them for sure; I could see the mill of their analytical psychology too, pulverizing the grains of mistruth I'd planted to a floury dust. "How did you loosen the laces?" Asked the detective consulting a notepad as he spoke. "You mentioned in your statement both hands and feet were bound." He asked just as an extremely loud tractor passed providing some wriggle room to escape the bind I was in.

The expression on the farmers face was priceless, looking back I still find it very funny. "What the fucks going on here?" He seemed to say at the sight of two suits with a kid on the side of the road. The detectives may have even detected the trace of a cheeky smile. "Yes" I declared when the noise of the agricultural vehicle got swallowed up by the road. "I got Benji to bight them off." Soon as I uttered it, I knew my goose was cooked. The dominos began to fall, soon the city of fabrications I built would be razed to the ground. I closed my eyes, in my mind I was a bug about to be squished by the heel of a big boot.



When opening them again, I was surprised by what I saw. The two detectives looked at each other and smiled. The penny had dropped and they knew well that I had made the whole escapade up. They said nothing as they drove me back to school. Though they kept whispering to one another in the front, the mood was surprisingly lighthearted. By the time we got back to the school, lessons for the day were drawing to a close. They actually shook my hand as they bid adieu, remarking that I would make a great actor one day. There was nothing that they could do after being duped by a kid but to see the funny side I suppose. Without a word they went on their merry way back to the big smoke laughing their heads off. I returned to the class extremely relieved and chuckling to myself too. Upon my return, there was a blank piece of paper with coloring pencils in my place at the table. Just the way I like it. The teacher was conducting a history lesson on the black-board for all to Xerox into their brains. I started to draw a face of a man wearing a black balaclava. I just can't get into it, something far more interesting is happening in the room. The teacher's passionate speech about the evils of slavery captivates my attention. I put my drawing things away, listening intently to the tail end of Abraham Lincoln's story. Miss Milan tells us he helped liberate multitudes from enslavement to a distorted system that let one group become the sole property of another group. For some unknown reason the history lesson fascinated me immensely. Miss Milan sees me smiling and smiles back.