

Sunday July 17th, 2022

"Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτήρ",



At any given moment flowers droop over, in the sun of a street in New York. Let's say it's a street in Chinatown to be more precise. They are lilies and they are thirsty and dirty and drunk off heat.

At any given moment the wilted wilt, buds bloom, lovers sweat and 70-year-old men sit at a Greek tavern, drinking glasses of beer screaming at each other (and at the television). Not because they're angry, just because they aren't wearing their hearing aids, or the batteries died out.

One thing for sure, you can't get any more wet than being in water but if you keep drinking you can get drunker. Deliriousness too, works by accumulation.

When I drove down to Hudson, I saw you through flags superimposed in the sunlight and I felt myself slipping like a fish tail off a wet rock.

In the parking lot, someone brought up hunting for mermaids to which you replied with the story of the Irish selkies. You said your mom was a seal, whose skin had been stolen. Forever, attaching her to land. I decided to stay a little longer.

My turn to bring up the movie about the mermaid that leaves water, to love and be loved by men. I had just watched it drunk at sunrise. But the only detail that stuck was that she couldn't get the smell of the ocean off of her. Her skin: an unusual combination of saline algae and fish.

If I were a sea-creature - well I guess I would have to learn how to swim first... but if I lived in the ocean, I would never know the feeling of being drunk and delirious, the smell of wilting lilies, the taste of gin and olives and what a shame that would be.

The hydrangeas I bought myself yesterday are already soggy and folded over and my small fan blows hot air on my feet. It's over 30 degrees here and I am sticky like Chinatown lilies in a puddle of spilt beer on a bar.

I wonder if your memory is better than mine because you keep a record of all the things you see in a day. Or do you think it makes it worse since you always have an image you can rely on? For a while I couldn't stop thinking of the picture you took of the water fountain filled with blood. You said someone had just gutted a fish in it.

Someone asked me recently why people put fish on cars as emblems of Jesus. I looked it up. Turns out it's an ancient Greek acronym called the Ichthys. It used to be a secret symbol for Christians to find each other. They found Ichthys on the walls of the catacombs of Rome, markings so old they date back to the 1st century. I wonder if the selkies have a symbol. I wonder if they know to recognize one another once they are landlocked.

M. S. C. B

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The fishtails have reappeared and I can't shake them.

Looks like I'll be leaving for the maritimes at the end of the summer, where I'll be learning how to fish. Guess I am going to have to get myself a pole, a line, lures and bait. I never caught a fish before.

If I am lucky I might swing one right into my boat, see its sinuous spine of scales flapping around in a puddle, like drool on a pillow. Fins wide open out of water, each one of the scales: a note, a seism, colliding to the ground like a pressed piano key.

Is this *beauty* (1) ? Punctuated by the index. Punctuated by the search for breath, then breath (3). Punctuated by the hands of a clock. If I am lucky I might unhook its mouth, hit it on the head, put it on ice and have it for dinner. That's if I am lucky.

There's no mention of a melody in the book.

I hope you don't take offense, but I am writing because it reminded me of you. Not the lack of sound but the book. The cryptomancy. That, and the fish people.

You see, Nadja and André roam in and out of cafes and bars all afternoon into the night for 9 consecutive days, and there is no mention of music. In my mind Paris must have been loud in the 20s. Loud, with a foul smell. Hard to imagine no one was playing the piano where they ate and drank. That there wasn't some kind of melody to their deliriousness. But I don't recall any song reminding me of you, either. Just those fish tales that found their way back.

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(1) "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas." Breton, André, *Nadja*, 1929, p. 190

(2) Convulsion (noun) : First used in 1547, a convulsion is an abnormal violent and involuntary contraction or series of contractions of the muscles (See: Seizure). A violent disturbance, and uncontrolled fit (See: Paroxysm). Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2024.



(3) Andre Breton and Louis Aragon, *Le Cinquantenaire de l'Hystérie*, 1928, from "La Révolution Surréaliste."

Story goes: Melusine was cursed by her mother. Every Saturday she would take form as a split-tailed fish (or serpent), right down from her belly button. If her husband promised not to lay eyes on her on Saturdays, then she would live a prosperous and abundant life. If he betrayed her, she would fully turn into a snakelike creature, bound to roam in agony. Melusine married. He caved. Spied on her bathing on a Saturday afternoon. And so she vanished, taking form as a sea creature, never to be found again.

Nadja had a real affinity for the myth. On napkins and hotel papers she drew women with fish tails and horns. Something about being caught between worlds. The dream one, the real one. Sea and ground. Folly and lucidity. Virtuous and sinful. Together and alone. Regardless, a fish out of water.

Depictions of the half woman-half-fish creature can be easily found carved into the side of old medieval buildings in Europe. There are so many variations to the story. Women repeated the tale while spinning yarn, until the Catholics took her shape as some sign of the devil. She was an omen for change, fertility and renewal.

If you ask anyone they would tell you that the surrealist had a particular kink for hysterical women. Bodies arching as if open to the spirits. A particular type of mind, more in tune with the frequencies of the world. More sensitive to them. Images of women in frenetic movement, mouths open, hands to the sky, tongues sticking out.

You know how a fish propels itself forward? By a simple repetitive contraction of muscles. And they rarely stay still, it's like they don't get to decide.

You know where Nadja comes from? It means hope in Russian, or rather it is only the beginning of the word.