

Sensorium Christina Tudor-Sideri

"I must think of this as a nineteenth century West Bohemian spa," I say to myself. As soon as I let the words travel through me, my mind finds refuge in the memories of others, in the romanticised version we now have of forest-embraced European sanatoriums, with their peculiar diets and thermal treatments. Until his death in 1823, Goethe visited the spa town of Karlovy Vary more than thirteen times, where he used to take lingering walks alongside Beethoven, much to the delight of the locals. Mark Twain often spoke of wallowing in the mud of Marienbad. Chekhov died some miles away from Baden-Baden, after a sip of champagne, a camphor injection, and a few weeks of strenuous writing. I read somewhere that his body was brought home in a refrigerator car used for transporting oysters.

Waking up for breakfast every morning at six is the only constant a place like this can offer me. I sit next to a window hidden behind thick curtains covered in dust and the ghostly silhouettes of everyone here. I find myself comfortably trapped in the nightmare of the night before. In front of me, a cup of black tea and a tangerine play their part in keeping the romance alive, as they remind me of Chekhov's strawberry tea. Yet the first thing they tell you is that you need to stop writing. I break open the tangerine in half with my fingers and discover a world of memories embedded within its skin. I see the colours of a Maltese sunset, the many rivers I've left behind, and a reflection of the person crying two tables away from me. I see the whole of Florence in this now decaying fruit. The theatre of the world, courtesy of time passing so slowly. I see the portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, naked, with a snake twined to her necklace. A sip of black tea makes my tongue taste lines from De Homini's Excellentia about physical pleasure as the antithesis of human dignity. I close my eyes craving for the quiet touch of a god that never was, needing to know why there's nothing inside, or where is the divine soul that accompanies a decomposing body.

I first heard of 'confabulation' when I was studying philosophy of mind. I prefer the term 'memory error'—a misinterpreted memory of myself or the world I am living in. A fabrication that carries me in its arms through passages and romanticised ideas of sanatoriums, camphor, and rivers flowing. Adrift, under the weight of an audience, I feel incarnated into the flesh of all others. Relying on the reversibility of moments, I oversimplify my responses to the movements of time, I choose other paths, I write of other possibilities—an addendum to this current reality that makes me realise I can never coincide with myself. Yet the world itself remains the same. I am guilty of not being there. I think of pouring my words into the veins of the Seine. I am clutching mentally at every object that meets my eyes. I am speaking with Dostoevsky's words about my fondness of striving for ambiguity. There are no limits to breathing in this chaos. Embedded in the

skin of a tangerine, I see historical female figures merging with thoughts on primordial oneness and attempts to affirm myself without mirrors.

The little that I remember is not enough to build a biography. My fingers are now tracing scars on a body that does not belong to me. The philosophical 'body'—breathing in the subtle yet piercing sound of my thoughts clashing with waves, with trees, with other bodies, with threads running through narratives of worlds ending and silence overlapping with sanity. Someone explained to me how fortunate I am that these scars are hidden under clothing and tattoos. A stranger who did not know of this new scar, which was not even there yet—a mere wound at 5:57pm. Plain, ordinary, cruel; an anti-metaphysical perspective on decline. I studied her voice as one studies the function of organs in the body. A metaphor for debts to come. An ironic correspondence between two hospital beds. A poem.

Night after night, the same dream: glass coffins and dirt on my feet. I wake up and write stories about excess, collisions, plagues, tighter ropes, indifference. I convey absence through violet veins, weary eyelids, and the sound of skirts ruffling outside the windows. I write to convince myself that there is no escaping from a misery that is filled with so much light. To know I am not dead. An insect still in flight. Have you ever heard the sound rope makes when wrapped around your thigh? There is an entire world out there, but all I see behind the curtains is the mirroring of my insides. I gather words in my hands like the sea gathers all flesh under its heaving embrace. I am devoid of all semantic connections, in service of rapture, progressively infusing my blood with the refusal of immortality. Everything binds and unbinds the future in the form of riddles crisscrossing on my flesh. In dreams, in sickness, in darkness—inside me.

When I was a little girl, I used to speak of becoming a doctor and healing the world that Eve had quarantined with her sin. With my sin. Penitence, running through the veins of a child who was taught that women are holding the world hostage with the deceitful control of their minds. Rejecting that life, I took on the role of a curator. I took on the biblical persona, promising I would free her of guilt, of blame, of the world having to end. One by one, I gave myself all names: Antigone, Ariadne, Nausicaa, Miriam, Lilith. Eve. I took on the graves of those before me, and the graves of those who followed. I devoted time, hands, and silk ribbons to killing my own narrative so that everyone else could keep theirs. I needed to save the world from having no telos other than self-perpetuation.

To walk these streets is to affirm life. To walk these streets with a throbbing pain is to affirm that no anguish is more formidable than the image of my footsteps leading me nowhere. I pass by the national library in search of a pharmacy. The wind has made it unbearable for me to even

move my head. I ask for Advil, but all they have is something called Moment. Here, in Valletta, where time always felt unreal, where mirrors are not needed because I have the sea, the glowing of my skin and the silver on my fingers, I look down at my hands and forget where I am going. Stepping outside the pharmacy with twelve 'moments' in my hand, I check the weather forecast to see how many of them I will need. The city brings to light marble blocks taken from Proserpina's temple for embellishing other buildings. I think of rain, of Petrarch, of a Stratford map; I think of cognition and aspects of the human mind I will never fully grasp. I pause to read a paper on instinct blindness which almost convinces me that this is something I must overcome at all cost. That I need to escape the confines of the 'I', to escape my own voice, since what we are not is what we see, never what we are. Later, in the same anthology, I read that intuition is a rich guide, yet it suffers from—I do not remember from what, therefore in my mind, it simply suffers. I think of needing theoretical guidance. Walking the streets of Valletta, I am refining versions of the same thought in a voice that only I can hear. I tell myself stories about Thomas Mann's unfinished work, flying blind, and maps drew by German cartographers. Yet I need more healing memories. More waves. More bodies. More flesh. More wounding. More ashes. More connections. More reckless abandon. More masks surging from the void. I need more needles of gramophones scratching the surface of the dying tomorrow. I need more solitude. I am flowing, dreaming, becoming more carnal than I ever was. I am becoming a temporary restoration to the world above. I think of touching the softest fabrics, of pleasure-loving ethics, of the beginning of the nineteenth century.

I take another sip of black tea and the beauty of being an animal with remarkable intelligence lost in literary techniques and psychological concepts comes to me at the same time as Boccaccio's thoughts on accepting pleasures. Not as words, not as sound—it comes to me as skin-deep crusades. I turn toward the person sitting two tables away, wanting to have a voice so I can speak to her of Karlovy Vary, champagne, and wallowing in mud. I search her face for other women, other monuments, other names. I want to speak, but the entire world thunders against me. Nevertheless, it is not enough to build a biography.

Christina Tudor-Sideri is a reformed philosopher, preoccupied with the phenomenological understanding of the word as flesh, existence buried within the depths of linguistic consciousness, and being outside of time. Living between Bucharest and Valletta, she is writing a book on the necessary inadequacy of the self.