'Fruit of Gold', a Creative Writing Piece with an accompanying Critical Essay

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Contents

Critical Essay

In 1995 Benjamin Barber first made his provocative claim that a war was raging within political and economic spheres all across the world – a war of oppositional forces the name of which he gives to his bestselling book of that year, *Jihad vs. McWorld.* In a manner more nuanced than would be suggested by the sensationalist and even offensive title, which he later came to regret, Barber's book presents an intriguing case that humanity in the twenty-first-century faces the 'stark choice between a sterile cultural monism (McWorld) and a raging cultural fundamentalism (Jihad)'.[1] These oppositional forces each threaten the democratic locus of the nation-state, with Jihad threatening to fragment the nation into smaller bodies along ethnic lines, and McWorld superseding the state apparatus, as a force that siphons away sovereign power into the boardrooms of multinational corporations. This thesis was afforded increased credibility and seriousness after the spectacle of the September 11th attacks. The destruction of the World Trade Centre was viewed by many commentators through the lens of Barber's paradigm, a Jihadic assault against a symbol of globalisation.[2] Barber's war had leapt from the pages of his book into a smouldering, bloody reality.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the supposed dissolution of the capitalist versus communist ideological struggle, political scientists started looking for a new schema through which to view the world in which they lived, and Barber's was one which suited this purpose well. Wallerstein alludes to the traction this idea gained within mainstream political commentary, noting that 'The media, and indeed the social scientists, constantly tell us that two things dominate the world we have been living in since the last decades of the twentieth-century: globalization and terrorism.'[3] The somewhat disdainful tone he employs here alerts the reader to his scepticism toward the notion that these oppositional forces are truly the new drivers of history; the end of the Cold War did not shake Wallerstein's belief in dialectical materialism, and that material economic conditions and class conflict were the driving forces of history. However, Barber's dichotomy is perhaps not as incommensurable with Marxist notions of class warfare as it may initially seem. Barber's definition of Jihad does not solely encompass violent, religious fundamentalism, but rather with the assertion of place-identity, and particularly when a more localised place-identity is valued ahead of identification with the nation state. As he explains,

1 Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (London: Corgi, 2003), p.xiii.
2 Ibid, pp.xi-xii. Barber discusses here the circulation of his hypothesis in the wake of 9/11.
3 Emmanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (New York: Duke University Press, 2004), p.ix.

'What ends as Jihad may begin as a simple search for a local identity, some set of common personal attributes to hold out against the numbing and neutering uniformities of industrial modernization and the colonizing culture of McWorld.'[4] Jihad, in Barber's usage, principally refers to such macro events as violent terror attacks carried out under religious pretences, but he asserts that they share the same ideological underpinnings as micro events including attempts to stop local-owned shops being closed down and replaced by chain-stores. Such struggles as the latter can be framed under the umbrella of 'the little people' in a valiant, lopsided fight against the power of big money.

McWorld is posited as a relentless homogenising force. Expanding ceaselessly, it transforms high streets around the globe into rows of the same shops, selling the same products, cultivating the same needs. It views nothing as sacred, and threatens all that is particular or distinct about a place or a culture that it cannot integrate. Barber puts it so:

> Go into a Protestant church in a Swiss village, a mosque in Damascus, the cathedral at Reims, a Buddhist temple in Bangkok, and though in every case you are visiting a place of worship with a common aura of piety, you know from one pious site to the next you are in a distinctive culture. Then sit in a multiplex movie box – or, much the same thing, visit a spectator sports arena or a mall or a modern hotel or a fast-food establishment in any city around the world – and try to figure out where you are. You are nowhere. You are everywhere. Inhabiting an abstraction.[5]

Not even sacrosanct and world-historic landmarks are free from the risk of replacement by 'the virtual nowhere-land of McWorld'.[6] Against this phenomenon, Barber suggests that many find themselves willing to stand up and engage in struggle for their cultural heritage. When this struggle becomes violent, and when it begins to dogmatically oppose not merely economic forces but also the state apparatus, Barber argues, is when it becomes Jihad.[7] Later stating he regretted its usage, Barber does admit that 'Jihad' is a ludicrous term to describe such attitudes, but this ludicrousness reflects the way in which the advocates of McWorld's laissez-faire economics view those who stand in opposition. 'Free traders and One McWorlders use nationalism as a scathing pejorative denoting a fractious and anticosmopolitan tribalism,' Barber states, 'reeking of bloody fraternalism and equally toxic doses of the parochial and the primitive.'[8] As can be seen here,

4 Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld,* p.9. The same could be said, as we shall see, about post-industrial post-modernization.
5 Ibid, pp.98-9.
6 Ibid, p.18.
7 Ibid, p.9.
8 Ibid, p.158.

despite the fact that Barber's Jihad vs. McWorld conflict can be construed in class terms, of a capitalist class with vested interests in the spread of a homogeneous consumer culture and landscape pitted against ordinary people and the places they hold dear, it is more commonly gauged in cultural terms, as a struggle between 'enlightened' cosmopolitans against 'backward' parochials.

The culture-war terminology of so-called Jihad is more often than not of greater relevance to the topics to follow within this thesis. Barber explains that 'Parochialism adds to provincialism a cultural critique, descrying in the cosmopolitanism and commercialism of capital cities forces deeply corrupting to human association: atomism, agnosticism, anarchy, and anomie'.[9] Barber does not discuss much further beyond this the social and cultural connotations of the city, city life, and city dwellers. It is, however, an important and central notion which connects to many important topics that I will discuss to a greater or lesser extent throughout this essay: rootedness versus placelessness, nature and the natural, anti-urban attitudes and anti-Semitism.

In the first part of this thesis, I will give an overview of nostalgic-Utopianism, an ideological perspective named by Jameson in his *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* and one which might best be described as a pining for the places, as well as their respective economic conditions and place-identities which have already disappeared into the past, the superstructural victims of McWorld or any preceding similar transformations in the material base of a society. Central in this discussion will be the writings of Paul Kingsnorth, a British environmentalist who makes for an example par excellence of a contemporary nostalgic-Utopian, and somebody whose zealous defences of the particular and the provincial would classify him under Barber's schema as a moderate-Jihadic philosopher. Using this present-day practitioner as a starting point, I will shed light on the way in which nostalgic-Utopianism is a tradition with very deep roots of its own, drawing great potency (and especially in the West) from its earliest incarnations in Greek myth, and in Judeo-Christian imagery.

Following on from this first chapter, which already briefly introduces the works of Thomas Pynchon to the discussion, the second chapter will engage in an in-depth analysis of the novels of this arch-postmodernist, revealing his engagement with nostalgic-Utopianism. Much of the attention in this analysis will be paid to *Against the Day,* due to the fact that, as Graham Benton notes, it is Pynchon's deepest consideration of 'the twin gears of globalization and terrorism that

9 Ibid, pp.169-70.

drive much of our sense of the contemporary world'.[10] My focus will be on Pynchon's representation of geography, the country and the city, capitalist development and its accompanying homogenisation, and his invocation of the enduring myths of the Golden Age and the Garden of Eden. As a coda to this chapter, I will briefly compare the depiction of history in Pynchon's work to its understanding by the (typically) far-right philosophers of the Traditionalists. In so doing, I hope to reveal why nostalgic-Utopianism is such a potent narrative on the political wings.

In the third and final chapter, I will turn to the topics of language and of national literature. Centring on a discussion of Joyce's *Ulysses,* and particularly the 'Cyclops' episode, I hope to show how Joyce both employs and satirises the nostalgic-Utopian ideology, both picking apart and reformulating the narratives forwarded by his nationalist and Anglo-Irish revivalist contemporaries. In this section I will show the manner in which Joyce, even while mourning for the indigenous language of his home, constructs a novel paradoxically both cosmopolitan and a masterpiece of specifically Irish literature. To supplement this, I will refer to relatively recent works on the topics at hand: the decline of national literatures, and the mechanisms of the publishing industry when it comes to the specificities of places and people.

Before we begin, however, there is need for a note on the texts. I am a firm believer in that when preparing to write fiction, there is no line of reading and research that should not be pursued, and I could happily have shovelled grist into the thought mill until long after the deadline had gone and passed me by. Naturally, this was not possible, and there is still much that I can only regret not having explored more fully in my research, and in the write-up of this piece. I have often thought about the way that a discussion of the gender politics of nostalgic-Utopia would be fruitful, in order to discover why so many of its interlocutors are male. The symbol of gold cropped up over and over throughout my research, and a more thorough look into attitudes regarding the Golden Age, the Gold Standard, and gold as the most esteemed commodity of all could have turned out to be an illuminating path for my research to take. Additionally, looking at non-Christian and non-Western perspectives on nostalgic-Utopia would doubtlessly be fascinating, and I considered incorporating an analysis of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* for this reason. However due to constraints of time, and the word limit of 35,000, these are projects that I will have to

10 Graham Benton, "Daydreams and Dynamite: Anarchist Strategies of Resistance and Paths for Transformation in *Against the Day"* in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide,* eds. Severs, Jeffrey, and Leise, Christopher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.195.

pursue in the future. With these regrets in mind I feel that it is worth outlining here, before beginning the main body of the discussion, why I chose to focus on the topics which I did.

The following piece was a conscious attempt to highlight the contours of the way in which the opposition between nature and civilization is understood in (primarily Western) cultural consciousness, how it feeds into a nostalgic-Utopian conception of the world and history, and how all of this has been represented in great works of literature. However, since the finishing of the piece I have reflected that much of the research I have been doing has been in an unconscious attempt to find an answer to a question which has been puzzling me for the last few years, which I can now see has undoubtedly shaped the line of inquiry I have followed. When I was researching for my MA Dissertation, I was struck by Joe Kennedy's notion of 'authentocracy'. Authentocracy, as Kennedy describes it, is the focus of politicians and pundits on 'a group of weirdly homogeneous-sounding people who had, we were informed, been left behind, patronised and demeaned by a high-handed liberal multiculturalism'.[11] By attributing their own political views to an off-stage third party, stereotypically embodying the ruggedness of the denizens of the 'Red Wall,' commentators are able to imbue their beliefs with the 'authenticity' or 'innate truth' that is associated with the character they claim to be quoting. This is the reason why Enoch Powell attributed much of his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech to a constituent of his, and the reason why a pundit like Darren Grimes is incapable of discussing why his political opponents are wrong or 'out of touch' without making recourse to his grandpa who once mined the Durham collieries.[12] Kennedy incisively diagnoses the authentocrat pathology within the political classes, but stops short of explaining its potency as a narrative.

From Kennedy, I looked to Adorno, whose *Jargon of Authenticity* alleges that Heidegger heavily relies on tropes of the authentic to sell his philosophy. Adorno, during his investigation, quotes a particular Heideggerian passage, which has remained with me ever since I first read it:

> Recently I got a second invitation to the University of Berlin. On such an occasion I leave the city and go back to my cabin. I hear what the mountains and woods and farmyards say. On the way I drop in on my old friend, a seventy-five-year-old farmer. He has read in the newspaper about the Berlin invitation. What will he say? He slowly presses the sure glance of his clear eyes against mine, holds his mouth tightly closed,

11 Joe Kennedy, *Authentocrats: Culture, Politics and the New Seriousness* (London: Repeater Books, 2018), pp.9-10.

12 Darren Grimes, 'Since we must use coal, why import it all – when we could create jobs by mining it in the North East?', *ConservativeHome* [https://www.conservativehome.com/thecolumnists/2020/06/darren-grimes-since-we-must-use-coal-why-import-it-all-when-we-could-instead-create-jobs-and-wealth-by-mining-it-in-the-north-east.html] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

> lays his faithful and cautious hand on my shoulder – and almost imperceptibly shakes his head. That means: absolutely No![13]

This passage has certainly left a greater impression on me than Adorno's warnings about this sort of rhetoric; there is an extent to which I know I would be instinctively inclined to listen to the farmer's wisdom. I haven't used epigraphs in this thesis, but if I had chosen a single one, it would have been this. Heidegger is referenced little throughout the following discussion, and to a great extent this is due to the fact that I realised only very late in the process that his shadow is cast over this work.

With all of that being said, though, I am pleased with keeping the focus more strictly on literature than any serious and scholarly investigation of Heidegger or his contemporary German existentialists would allow for. The farmer's literary-fictional counterparts in the citizen of *Ulysses*, in the shamanic figures that crop up time and again throughout Pynchon's works, as well as their antitheses, have become focal points of this thesis. For the purposes of writing the fiction piece that makes up the other half of this thesis, I believe that through my choice of texts, with select classics from the past century, as in Joyce and Pynchon, as well as contemporary commentaries, as in Kingsnorth, were well chosen in order to outline the phenomenon of nostalgic-Utopianism in the modern and postmodern periods, and additionally well chosen in order to prepare me to write a narrative of my own on the topics discussed below.

13 Theodor Adorno*, The Jargon of Authenticity* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.44.

On the Nostalgic-Utopian Worldview

Paul Kingsnorth is not just a blogger and a travel writer. No, he is in fact a staunch defender of the last vestiges of his fatherland that have yet not disappeared over the horizon of a vast, soulless, identikit, globalised cultural (and physical) landscape. He is a dogged twenty-first-century advocate for standing up to the corporations and the big money interests, and asserting the right to live in a distinct and localised space. His travelogue *Real England* is an admixture of horror stories detailing hopeless battles with the powers that be, and uplifting tales of times when people stood their ground and won against-the-odds victories against market forces that sought to change their local communities beyond recognition. One episode brings his readers with him to Bury St. Edmunds, where Kingsnorth visits a protest against a proposed department store to be built in the town centre, which they view as a threat to the town's medieval ambience. The protest itself is carried out in accordance with the aesthetic they are out to protect. Before a crowd dressed in medieval garb, a man in chainmail intones the words of Saint Edmund's curse, casting it upon their invading enemy, Debenhams.[14] 'We, the people of your town, liberty and kingdom implore and beseech you, in this hour of our need', begins the knight, in his address to St. Edmund the Martyr, before continuing,

> Once again the heathens seek to rise an accursed altar of Mammon in your lands, in order to desecrate your hallowed town with false gods and idols! In order to trample your rights and liberties! In order to enslave and impoverish your people! In order to tempt those who love temptation, sin and worldly things![15]

Where Kingsnorth leaves off, it is unclear if this ritual made a difference. By the time of writing the first draft of this thesis, in 2020, Bury St. Edmunds did indeed have a Debenhams, and it appeared that the department store had won. Alas, in a twist of irony, by the time of this final draft Debenhams is no more, not in Bury St Edmunds or anywhere else, totally collapsed in the era of online shopping.

The ritual makes for a bombastic and theatrical performance, but Kingsnorth attests that it is not carried out in jest, stating that the protestors earnestly worry that 'Bury St Edmunds is on the verge of losing its unique character to overweening commerce, becoming just another 'clone town', addicted to shopping.'[16] This fear is not baseless. Kingsnorth gives an inventory of all the

14 Paul Kingsnorth, *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland* (London: Portobello, 2008), pp.90-4.
15 Ibid, p.94.
16 Ibid, p.93.

locally-owned shops that were lost across the UK during the decade preceding his book, including '8,600 independent grocery stores between 2000 and 2005', '3,700 post offices between 1999 and 2004), '13,000 independent newsagents […] between 1995 and 2004', capping it off with the regrettable loss of the 'Fifty specialist shops (butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, etc.)' which 'closed every week between 1997 and 2002.'[17] Kingsnorth asserts that these shops are important in the maintenance of a meaningful local community, and their disappearance in favour of online shopping and chain stores will bring to an end the chance encounters between friends and neighbours within them. This, he posits, is all the more pronounced in the smaller villages where the closing of the local shop does not guarantee the opening of a chain store in its carcass. Rather, the residents may be left with no option but to patronise supermarkets outside of their local area, or just use online shopping alone. Doubtlessly, these trends have continued unabated since the publication of *Real England,* and discontent with them has grown too. This is the reality of McWorld as experienced by people in their day-to-day lives, as all that is cherished for its distinctive and particular local character is effaced in the creation of what Kingsnorth describes as a 'corporate blandscape'.[18] Although Kingsnorth's text is confined to the borders of England, his antagonist is not. As Jameson says of small town USA, 'What was once a separate point on the map has become an imperceptible thickening in a continuum of identical products and standardized spaces from coast to coast.'[19] The casting of the curse of St. Edmund the Martyr is an exemplary choice for the purposes of *Real England* due to it being a protest staged with the strong, specifically local character that Kingsnorth urges its readers to take up defence of, but the trends that it opposes are truly global.

Kingsnorth certainly still believes in salvaging what came before. It is illuminating to quote at length his depiction of the landscape-that-was, overlaid with the blandscape-that-is:

> The landscape outside, beyond the lorries, is a palimpsest. The roads are still edged with ancient trees and tall, twisting hedgerows – not managed now, but hacked into splinters every few months by a man from the council with a tractor. The lanes still wind and creep over the hills, their brows crowned with inns or farmhouses.
>
> But slapped on top of them, across them, beside them, are the bypasses, the roundabouts, the near lines of trees, the halogen street lights, the reflective road signs, and the huge white storage warehouses; hubs of an ever-expanding global

17 Kingsnorth, *Real England,* p.102.
18 Ibid, p.275.
19 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p.281.

> economy, where those Tesco trucks pick up their loads. The old, pre-industrial landscape is still there.[20]

McWorld here seems reversible. The 'real' England of the title, the England that Kingsnorth posits as authentic and true, the England of the winding, creeping lanes, of inns crowning the tops of hills, is still there beneath the fixtures of the globalised economy which have been 'slapped' down upon it.

A bleaker, or at least more melodramatic, sentiment is set forth in his novel *The Wake,* in which the protagonist, a landowning freeman named Buccmaster who loses much from the coming of the French, bemoans that 'now angland is but a tale from a time what is gan'.[21] (Kingsnorth's novel is written in 'Anglish', consisting only of words which were in usage before the Norman conquest, albeit curated and phoneticised in such a way as to be more-or-less legible to a contemporary reader). Despite the setting, against a backdrop of Norman Yoke, *The Wake* does allude to the condition of contemporary England. At Stamford, Buccmaster beholds the construction of a Norman castle. He is horrified to learn that thirty houses were 'beorned by the frenc to mac the place where this castel wolde be'.[22] In the wider context of Kingsnorth's work, it is hard to read Buccmaster's horror without thinking of Kingsnorth's own in the face of shops, pubs, and council accommodation being torn down to make way for McWorld's investments. In the construction of the castle Kingsnorth sees the same injustice he now sees in gentrification. This notion is one which Barber touches upon himself, arguing that 'McWorld's culture represents a kind of soft imperialism in which those who are colonized are said to "choose" their commercial indenture.'[23] Kingsnorth makes explicit use of this likening: 'property prices in east London are shooting up as the cappuccino colonisation continues.'[24] The Norman invaders plant their castles, and imperial Starbucks spreads its settlements. Kingsnorth suggests these incursions replace and have replaced what was supposed to be there originally, the alleged Real England.

The imperial Starbucks phenomenon is depicted in a very literally imperial way in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, set in colonial America on the cusp of revolutionary war and the birth of the United States. As the title characters survey the famous line between Pennsylvania and Maryland which has come to symbolise the United States' later civil war divisions, they witness various colonial atrocities carried out against the native populace. They eventually come to realise that

20 Kingsnorth, *Real England* p.107.
21 Paul Kingsnorth, *The Wake* (London: Unbound, 2014), p.49.
22 Ibid, *The Wake,* p.257.
23 Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld,* p.xxi.
24 Kingsnorth, *Real England,* p.99.

through the line-drawing project they are complicit in the act of appropriating the land that native people have lived upon for centuries. Notably, as they survey the line, they continually encounter Starbucks-style coffee shops.[25] Pynchon draws a parallel between the gentrifying, land-grabbing empires of the big high street brands, of the Caffè Neros and Costas of the world, with the historic land-grab foundational to the United States' history. This parallel is not drawn in order to make a crude and inappropriate comparison between the genocide of the Native Americans with contemporary homogenizations of town centre high streets, but to highlight the fact that it is the same system of appropriation and accumulation underpinning both of these events. Pynchon develops this parallel further as the novel goes on, with the title characters later musing on the possibility of continuing the line, and eventually developing it into a grand mall, 'eighty Miles long.'[26] If not the line itself then certainly the system which it stands for, a system of land appropriation according to Lockean notions of improvement, has clearly continued in the centuries since, and nowadays we do have our megamalls, with the largest being over a square mile in size. Rather than simply depicting the eighteenth-century drawing of a line from the East Coast to the Midwest, Pynchon draws a line of his own from primitive accumulation right through to the contemporary state of cappuccino colonisation, and the often brutally dispossessing real estate politics that go with it. We will discuss Pynchon's depiction of the trajectory of History in much greater detail in the second chapter.

Samuel Stein shines light on a similar history in his *Capital City,* explaining that 'Indigenous nations planned both stable settlements and migratory villages throughout the Americas, which included residential and commercial areas as well as open spaces and commons. In a spatial form of primitive accumulation, European imperialists and settler colonists built on these plans and often superimposed their street grids over existing native trails.'[27] It is precisely spatial primitive accumulation which Pynchon carefully depicts. In order to demonstrate how we are still living through the consequences of these events from centuries past, and strike up a clear continuity, Stein goes on to single out one settler in particular as a focal point: Friedrich Trump. Outlining the conditions of opportunity ('gold and silver to mine, cheap land to claim, new infrastructure, intentionally lax laws and tons of finance capital') that awaited out west, Stein explains that there was institutional encouragement of a 'genocidal westward expansion, and Friedrich wanted a part

25 Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.268; p.298; p.299; p.304.
26 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon,* p.701.
27 Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* (London: Verso, 2019), p.15.

of it.'[28] The early Trump sets up a chain of brothels, and makes his fortune. That money ripples through the ages, ultimately allowing his grandson Donald to fashion an election-winning businessman-warrior persona out of his inheritance. Donald Trump, of course, is a predatory real estate mogul in his own right. Quite like the powers-that-be in the time of the settling of the Americas, apathetically decreeing that the land must be carved up and distributed amongst the Europeans, with not a thought toward the wellbeing of the natives, or to the morality of it all, the Trumps of contemporary society are guided by the profit margin to not to care about the effects of displacements and gentrifications.

In light of this discussion on the role of land, property, and displacement, it is important to discuss the role of rootedness, and its cultural connotations. If Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine are correct in their assertion that 'Much of the struggle for success in human social life has been, and remains, about achieving good standing in a close-knit local community', then it follows that property ownership is a step toward that success in human social life, as living as one of many in a pool of renters entails the risk of being dispossessed by market forces entirely out of one's control.[29] To recognise this fact is not to declare that an unpropertied person cannot have a meaningful social life, but rather to draw attention to a cultural attitude towards the 'rootless' and their place in the world and communities, and particularly the worries that the propertied have toward the alternative life posed by rootlessness. This attitude is summed up succinctly by Buccmaster: 'all folcs has their place what was set when the world was maed and when they gan from that place to others then erce is ired and the great tree of lif what binds all things to all other things then is mofd by its roots.'[30] Displacement, in the quite predictable view of Kingsnorth's protagonist, is an affront to something natural and even sacred. Invasion is even more so. For a less succinct summary, Buccmaster again provides:

> sum there is who mofs and sum who stays it now seems to me and i was one who stayed. […] i had growan from that eorth lic a treow and then lic a treow i was tacan up by the roots and cast on hard ground. sum there is who wolde be cast all ofer sum who mofs lic the gleoman from place to place sum lic my dunstan who dremed of ingenga lands sum lic beorners or out laws who macs mofan their place but i was

28 Stein, *Capital City,* p.119.
29 Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.87.
30 Kingsnorth, *The Wake,* p.208.

> not one for i had seen what mofan was and mofan is sorness mofan is fear. stayan is right stayan where the gods has put thu if all folcs wolde stay then all things wolde be in their right place[31]

Contrasting himself against a minstrel who would occasionally visit his hamlet, and his enthusiastic soldier son, both of whom who meet early ends, Buccmaster posits that he has done the good and gods-approved deed by trying to stay rooted in place. This outlook reflects one which Kingsnorth has discussed in his opinion pieces. In *The Guardian,* Kingsnorth wrote that the 2016 electoral shocks of Brexit and Trump resulted from the fact that 'many nationalist-inclined voters in the west felt that their community was now under existential threat – not only from large-scale migration, but from Islamist terrorist attacks and the globalist elite's dismissive attitude to their concerns about both.'[32] Buccmaster is certainly portrayed as a nationalist in a time predating nationalism, prioritising the defence of old Angland above all else. Indeed, the fiery, bloody portrayal of the Norman Yoke is evocative of modern terrorism, as buildings burn and innocents die in terrible, sudden, shocking attacks. In the land-grabbing Norman Invasion, Kingsnorth has found a metaphor very comfortable to him in depicting both of the existential threats he envisions fuelling the ballot-box revolts of nationalistically-inclined Anglosphere voters. I do not mean to say that Kingsnorth certainly holds these views himself, or that Buccmaster is in any way a surrogate for the author – I do not intend to make assumptions regarding the authorial intentions of the writer of *Real England* – but they find a voice in the first-person narration. Buccmaster despises the foreign invaders, and looks down upon his fellow Anglishmen if they wander the land, considering rootlessness an affront to a natural order.

Before going on, it is necessary to address the elephant that swiftly enters the room upon touching on the topic of 'rootlessness'. Anti-Semitic attacks against Jewish people for their 'rootlessness' have a long history, and words such as 'wanderer', 'stateless', and 'globalist', often find usage as expressions of anti-Jewish bigotry. Kingsnorth does not make any qualifications of his usage of 'rootlessness', though, making unequivocal statements such as: 'Placelessness and rootlessness do not create contentment but despair. Ask a tribal family whose land has been stolen for a mine or a logging concession; ask an alienated twenty-something working in a bank in any of the world's mega-cities; ask a pensioner who no longer understands the country they live in; ask a

31 Ibid, p.234.

32 Paul Kingsnorth, 'The lie of the land: does environmentalism have a future in the age of Trump?', *The Guardian*, [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/18/the-new-lie-of-the-land-what-future-for-environmentalism-in-the-age-of-trump] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

postmodern novelist.'[33] Rather than further dissect Kingsnorth's likening of the tribal family to the befuddled pensioner, we shall follow his advice and consult our postmodern novelist again. In Pynchon's *Against the Day,* a novel which deals exhaustively with the theme of global human mobility, there is a monologue on rootlessness and anti-Semitism, delivered by a one-scene-wonder character, which it is worth quoting here in full:

> "What is the modern state," Yitzhak declared, "but a suburban house-lot taken up to a large-scale? Anti-Semitism flows directly from the suburban fear of those who are always on the move, who set up camp for a night, or pay rent, unlike the Good Citizen who believes he 'owns' his home, although it is more likely to be owned by a bank, perhaps even a Jewish bank. Everyone must live in a simply connected space with an unbroken line around it. Some put hair ropes, to keep snakes out. Any who live outside property-lines of any scale are automatically a threat to the suburban order and by extension the state. Conveniently, Jews have this history of statelessness."
>
> "Its not dishonourable to want your own piece of land, is it?" Fleetwood objected.
>
> "Of course not. But no Jewish homeland will ever end hatred of the unpropertied, which is a given element of the suburban imperative. The hatred gets transferred to some new target, that's all."

Yitzhak's speech posits that the disparagement of rootlessness is not a specifically anti-Semitic rhetorical device, but is instead a racialised stream which 'flows' from a larger body of hatred or fear of the unpropertied. He sardonically states that Jewish people are the most viciously persecuted 'convenient' targets of a suburban phobia of the unpropertied as a cross-ethnic, cross-racial class of people. Such an understanding of anti-unpropertied sentiment makes sense of the similarities between the tropes of anti-Semitism and antiziganism; propertylessness and rootlessness are viewed as being negatives, even before becoming connoted with a persecuted group, and are therefore weaponised in bigoted attacks against ethnic minorities. Rather than being specifically crafted for use in racial diatribes, hatreds of the unpropertied were taken up and put to use by bigots as weapons pre-formed.

We see sneering at the unpropertied by the propertied in its pure form in Pynchon's *Inherent Vice,* when Doc Sportello is told by the well-off Crocker Fenway that 'People like you lose

33 Kingsnorth, *Real England,* p.10.

all claim to respect the first time they pay anybody rent.'[34] In contrast to these unpropertied masses stands the 'Good Citizen', the homeowner, the subject of his nation. Kingsnorth invokes citizenship in his communication of the nationalist worldview: 'To a globalist, border walls and immigration laws are tantamount to racism or human rights abuse. To a nationalist, they are evidence of a community asserting its values and choosing to whom to grant citizenship.'[35] To rephrase this using Yitzhak's metaphor, the hair ropes are evidence of the community asserting its anti-snake values, choosing not to grant them access. Although there are no direct contradictions between Kingsnorth's comments and Yitzhak's speech, it is clear which gives Western nationalisms a greater credence and understanding. For now, we shelve further discussion of Yitzhak, snakes, and anti-Semitism, but we shall return to this passage later in connection with a literary 'good' citizen - that particularly infamous and anti-Semitic patron of Barney Kiernan's pub in the 'Cyclops' chapter of *Ulysses.* In the meantime, we must take a closer look into how the unpropertied came to be.

Kingsnorth places himself within a long tradition of discontents, and correctly so. He explains that 'For better or for worse, people like me have been around for centuries. [...] If I look over my shoulder I can see them all lining up to intimidate me: William Cobbett; H.J. Massingham; G.K. Chesterton; Clough Williams-Ellis; Ian Nairns; J.B. Priestley; George Orwell. Angry, every one, at the same process which now angers me.'[36] In all reality, there are far more than the seven who Kingsnorth here names, and opposition to similar changings of the times dates far back before the dawn of the eighteenth-century. 'We have heard this sad song for many centuries now: a seductive song, turning protest into retrospect, until we die of time', says Raymond Williams, and he characterises this phenomenon as an 'escalator', where one who bemoans the loss of an earlier time (when England was *real*) can look back up toward those who lived during that mourned time, and find that they were themselves expressing similar sentiments regarding an even earlier period.[37] Williams ponders at what point the escalator ends, and whether there is a time and a state of society in which rose-tinted retrospect had no traction and in which all is good, asking 'shall we find the timeless rhythm in Domesday, when four men out of five are villeins, bordars, cotters, or slaves? Or in a free Saxon world before what was later seen as the Norman rape and

34 Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (London: Vintage, 2010), p.346.
35 Kingsnorth, "The Lie of the Land".
36 Kingsnorth, *Real England,* p.263.
37 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2016), p.118.

yoke? In a Celtic world, before the Saxons came up the rivers? In an Iberian world, before the Celts came, with their gilded barbarism? Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops?'[38] Williams looks up all the way to Eden, from which we fell, but implicit is the suggestion that no matter how far back up the escalator we gaze, there never shall be found that timeless rhythm, the society predating the day in which accursed History reared its ugly head and delivered us from paradise, into the event-by-event segmented degradations of Time.

We may pose this same question in specific regard to Kingsnorth – had *The Wake* been written in the free Saxon world before the Norman rape and yoke, would it be nostalgic for the good old Celtic times? It is a question to which the novel itself hints at an answer. Buccmaster spends much time expressing his anger at the way in which worship of the 'eald gods' has been supplanted by worship of Christ. There is much bitterness in Buccmaster's recollection of the severe punishment doled out by his Christian father for wishing to practice pagan funeral rites following the death of his pagan grandfather. These recollections are tinged with the sad song of protest-turned-retrospect: 'always there has been men lic my father who wolde throw out the eald thincan it is no good but not sean what the triewe good efer was'.[39] If not for these passages, *The Wake* would be easily read as a novelization of Kingsnorth's article bitterly remonstrating against the Norman Yoke as a rupture with an Olde Merrie Angland, fittingly titled "High house prices? Inequality? I blame the Normans".[40] Instead, Buccmaster's pining for pre-Christian religion and customs and his disdain for the social changes of his day, place him amongst the nostalgics for lost times, the Cobbetts, the Chestertons, the Priestleys, and the Orwells. Nevertheless, Buccmaster's nostalgia undermines any reading of *The Wake* that understands the novel as championing the notion that the escalator stops at the free Saxon world.

Williams does not simply posit the escalator as an idea with a long history, but he reveals its origins in the material conditions of society, analysing the ways in which the development of capitalism within England manifest within English literature. The enclosure acts and the end of the commons, he makes clear, loomed large over nostalgic literature. He argues that 'retrospective radicalism, against the crudeness and newness of a new moneyed order, is often made to do service as a critique of the capitalism of our own day: to carry humane feeling and yet ordinarily to

38 Ibid, p.16.

39 Kingsnorth, *The Wake,* p.177.

40 Paul Kingsnorth, 'High house prices? Inequality? I blame the Normans', *The Guardian,* [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/17/high-house-prices-inequality-normans] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

attach them to a pre-capitalist and therefore irrecoverable world.'[41] The escalator is not just an escalator of phases of nostalgia, but also one of changes in the material base, and most recently of capitalist advancement. Williams posits that 'the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of future. [...] The pull of the idea of the country is towards old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the city is towards progress, modernization, development.'[42] The usage of 'humane feeling' and 'human ways' is significant; the nostalgic-Utopianism typically involves a belief that there is such a way in which humans *should* live, in better accordance with their supposed nature. When humans do live in this way, it is a Utopian and happy society, and the evidence for this can be found by gesturing vaguely at the past. This idealised past of 'human ways, natural ways' at the theorised top of the ever-descending escalator can be thought of as a set of material conditions. Jameson's description of the nostalgic-Utopian worldview stipulates that its adherents do not necessarily have much in common beyond the notion of 'a golden age before the fall, that is to say, before capitalist dissociation, which can optionally be positioned where [they] like, in primitive communism or tribal society, in the Greek or the Renaissance polis, in the agricultural commune of whatever national or cultural tradition before the emergence of state power'.[43] Applied to the modern and postmodern periods, the development of a capitalist material base, occurs alongside the development of a superstructural nostalgia for what came before, and specifically before whatever dispossessions the capitalist development entailed.

Although we might posit longing for a different, earlier material base as being core to nostalgic-Utopian sentiment, attention must be paid to the modes of nostalgic-Utopianism within the superstructure. Williams, in discussing Langhorne's *The County Justice,* observes that, in contrast with the humanity projected into the rural past, inhumanity is depicted as the condition of the present, and particular of those who are 'the agents of a contemporary process'.[44] For Langhorne and likeminded others, this process is not capitalism, or anything to do with material reality at all. Rather, Williams explains, 'It was easier, for men like Langhorne, to separate the consequences from the system, and then to ascribe to social decay what was actually the result of social and economic growth.'[45] Here, the 'the recurrent myth of a happier and more natural past' becomes intertwined with the idea of people who are straying from the natural, and from the

41 Williams, *The Country and the City,* p.50.
42 Ibid, p.426.
43 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.337.
44 Williams, *The Country and the City,* p.117.
45 Ibid*,* p.118.

human.[46] Culture war supersedes material analysis. Jameson explains that 'it is we moderns who become "decadent" against the backdrop of the more natural realities of the precapitalist landscape', and in this understanding it emerges how and why nostalgic-Utopianism can so easily lapse into bigotry.[47] Against a pre-dispossession backdrop, here attributed the standing of natural and human, the unpropertied may be construed as unnatural, or inhuman. Against a post-dispossession backdrop, in which the development of capitalism has placed the lion's share of property into a number of hands that continues to dwindle, the 'Good Citizen' who owns his own home (or so he believes) stands as a rugged holdout from a material era that was more natural, more human, and ergo is himself thought of as more natural and more human than the unpropertied and the stateless whose plight Yitzhak extols in Pynchon's novel.

The impulses of nostalgic-Utopianism can manifest in irrationality, as in the case of the propertied's fear of dispossession becoming a phobia of the unpropertied. To acknowledge this, however, is not to say that all the impulses of nostalgic-Utopianism are necessarily baseless. Jameson posits that life under multi-national capitalism *does* feel unnatural, and that this is a consequence of the market's conquest of the natural world as a living space:

> place in the United States today no longer exists, or, more precisely, it exists at a much feebler level, surcharged by all kinds of other more powerful but also more abstract spaces. [...] As individuals, we are in and out of all these overlapping dimensions all the time, something which makes an older kind of existential positionary of ourselves in Being – the human body in the natural landscape, the individual in the older village or organic community, even the citizen in the nation-state – exceedingly problematical.[48]

Capitalism, he posits, and its hubs of commerce, the metropolitan cities, are so overwhelming that it has become difficult for an individual to properly conceptualise their place within their confines. Citing and summarising the work of Kevin Lynch, Jameson explains that 'the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves', and therefore that 'Disalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory'.[49] This is placed In

46 Ibid, p.56.
47 Jameson, *Postmodernism,* pp.382-3.
48 Ibid, p.127.
49 Ibid, p.51.

contrast with the older village or organic community in which an individual can fully grasp their individuality, or indeed the sovereign state where the subject can grasp their citizenship. Jameson goes on to say that Lynch's idea of the extent to which a place is not cognitively mappable is directly correlated to the alienated state of the individual living within that space 'becomes extraordinarily suggestive when projected outward onto some of the larger national and global spaces we have touched on here.'[50] The implication is that within the world-system, bigger and more complicated than even the most chaotic cityscape, is that their self-conception is further estranged than it would be in a state of nature than it would have been in any previous moment in history. The escalator descends.

The postmodern world, as per Jameson's description, is a world in which nature 'has systematically been eclipsed from the object world and the social relations of a society whose tendential domination over its Other (the nonhuman or the formerly natural) is more complete than at any other moment in human history'.[51] Human beings live their economic lives cradle-to-grave in environments from which the wilderness has been tamed or obliterated. It is true that, there will always be problems understanding one's place in a world where one's trajectory of life can be wrenched and twisted in any-which-direction by market forces as forceful and as imperceptible as gravity, which have workings infinitely more complex, and understandings of which are infinitely less common. It should be no wonder that going to the countryside is a favoured break from day-to-day life, taking a wad of cash away to somewhere secluded and distant from the capitalist totality, and pretending to live in autarky for a week. Within the old village or organic community where existence is more than being an appendage to a supply chain, the individual can conceive of their individuality. The self is easier to conceptualise, too, in a set of material conditions where the individual had greater self-sovereignty. The nostalgic-Utopia is always set in a past where the spread of market forces was not yet so complete, when the puppetry of wage-labourers by market forces had not yet advanced to the point that the gaslighting rhetoric of freedom and choice had begun to ring hollow. Certainly this nostalgic-Utopia is often more mythical than real, obfuscating from memory all that was unpleasant about the past in order to position the contemporary moment as a uniquely miserable, market-dominated time. Regardless, acknowledging the problematisation of selfhood in the world-system makes nostalgic-Utopianism more sympathetic. As Jameson stresses, even citizenship has become a difficult

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid, p.170.

concept within the world-system. For a person to define themselves as a subject of the nation-state is to define themselves in relation to something concrete and tangible. Now, as the power of the nation-state declines, and that of transnational markets and institutions grow, citizenship becomes a less stable identification. As Yitzhak jokes, his 'Good Citizen' deludes himself with the notion that his 'ownership' of the nation is any more secure than that of a renter and their accommodation; his nation-home is already fading.

In articulating the condition of contemporary man, Jameson invokes the concept of the sublime. He suggests that we live within a system too big and too complicated to grasp, where sensory overload is the default. His description is a stunning piece of prose in its own right, and worth quoting in full:

> The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor, and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description then refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself, so that the object of the sublime became not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces. Such forces Burke, in his historical moment at the dawn of the modern bourgeois state, was only able to conceptualize in terms of the divine, while even Heidegger continues to entertain a phantasmic relationship with some organic precapitalist peasant landscape and village society, which is the final form of the image of Nature in our own time.
>
> Today, however, it may be possible to think all this in a different way, at the moment of a radical eclipse of Nature itself: Heidegger's "field path" is, after all, irredeemably and irrevocably destroyed by late capitalism, by the green revolution, by neocolonialism and the megalopolis, which runs its superhighways over the older fields and vacant lots and thus turns Heidegger's "home of being" into condominiums, if not the most miserable unheated, rat-infected tenement buildings. The *other* of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify.[52]

The world-system becomes an *other,* standing in opposition to humanity. Exerting huge influence on the of the lived experience of people all over the globe, the world-system is a felt presence, but

52 Ibid, pp.34-5.

its invisibility and lack of physicality remove it from the line-up of commonly-accused culprits for everyday social ills and unease. Jameson explains that garish conspiracy theories are often attempts to create narratives that make sense of why the world is the way it is.[53] Rather than attempting to comprehend the decisions made by investors, by consumers, by the boards of huge multinational corporations, or by elected representatives sitting in local or national authorities, collectively constituting the ebbs and flows of the vast economic sea in which a human being finds themselves confusingly adrift, many find attractive the simplicity of conspiracy theories, which simply and squarely place the blame upon Jewish people. Sometimes even those who do blame the former will additionally blame the latter. We ought to read Yitzhak's speech with this understanding. Set at the turn of the twentieth-century, *Against the Day* depicts a time when the 'modern state' was more tangible and impactful than it is contemporarily, over one hundred years later. The erosion of the nation-state, the eventuality of which harboured that 'suburban fear', has come to pass and, as Yitzhak suggested, the hatred has not abated. While Jewish people are still the primary targets of conspiracy-mongering, Roma people, refugees, and immigrants in general are also levelled with the charge of undermining (or attempting to destroy) what remains of the national order by right-wing nativists. The world-system, which Jameson notes he has never called 'unknowable but merely […] unrepresentable', is not often attributed the blame which it so deserves.[54] As nothing more concrete than a dimly perceivable posited *other* to humanity, it is less a fixture of the *Daily Mail*'s diatribes than are minorities, who are representable, and ergo make for easier targets, and whom media moguls have no material interest in defending.

Bigoted notions that certain people – or as in the case of Jews, travellers, and migrants, peoples – are damaging or corrupting to a natural, more human way of life have been carried forward from antiquity. In fact, as we might deduce from Jameson's explanation that the nostalgic-Utopia is always positioned within 'a golden age before the fall, that is to say, before capitalist dissociation', an investigation of the associated myths of the classical golden age makes for a fruitful task for anyone hoping to understand this contemporary line of thought. In his *Metamorphoses,* Ovid states that 'In the beginning was the Golden Age', when 'Never yet had any pine tree, cut down from its home on the mountains, been launched on ocean's waves, to visit foreign lands: men knew only their own shores.'[55] Here we see that rootedness, and staying in your allotted place, is an idea coded into a foundational text of Western civilisation. Ovid goes on to

53 Ibid, p.38.
54 Ibid, p.53.
55 Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* trans. Innes, Mary M. (London: Penguin, 1955), p.31.

state that 'The peoples of the world, untroubled by any fears, enjoyed a leisurely and peaceful existence, and had no use of soldiers.'[56] People, in this age of rootedness, were of a peaceable disposition. He goes on: 'The earth itself, without compulsion, untouched by the hoe, unfurrowed by any share, produced all things spontaneously, and men were content with foods that grew without cultivation. They gathered arbute berries and the mountain strawberries, wild cherries and blackberries that cling to thorny bramble bushes: or acorns, fallen from Jupiter's spreading oak.'[57] Man did not have to labour to live; this was an era where wellbeing was not contingent upon economic considerations. These were the conditions of life in the mythical age understood as most human and natural, and the people who live in the Golden Age live in a certain way, quite removed from our own.

Ovid, in greater detail than Hesiod did before him, depicts this removal. After setting his Golden Age scene, he goes on to describe the dawn of 'the Silver Age, when an eternal spring gave way to the four seasons', during which people sought out shelter for the first time, and began growing crops of their own.[58] Then: 'the age of bronze, when men were of a fiercer character, more ready to turn to cruel warfare, but still free from any taint of wickedness.'[59] As the material conditions decline, so does the character of the people. Of course, Ovid writes in an era even further removed from the harmony of the Golden Age. 'Last of all', he explains, 'arose the age of hard iron: immediately, in this period which took its name from a baser ore, all manner of crime broke out; modesty, truth, and loyalty fled. Treachery and trickery took their place, deceit and violence and criminal greed.'[60] The decline continues, and now humanity is characterised by villainy. It is only with the dawn of this miserable era that we begin to see the tearing-up of the roots: 'Now sailors spread their canvas to the winds, though they had as yet but little knowledge of these, and trees which had once clothed the high mountains were fashioned into ships, and tossed upon the ocean waves, far removed from their own element.'[61] Too, an early form of private property has grown out of the need for shelter referenced earlier: 'The land, which had previously been common to all, like the sunlight and the breezes, was now divided up far and wide by boundaries, set by cautious surveyors.'[62] After a time of communal property, the division of the

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid, pp.31-2.
58 Ibid, p.32.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.

land marks the advent of the unpropertied. This time, too, is one in which the people have a notably different character from they did in the Golden Age utopia.

It is, then, a very old idea that 'progress' is corrupting. If this is a widespread idea, then we might adapt Marx's adage that 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future' to the nostalgic-Utopian conception of the city; the city more economically integrated only shows, to the country, the image of a corrupt future.[63] Beyond this, the residents of the city become corrupt and removed from the human being in the state of nature, in the Golden Age. The best-known instance of a nostalgic-Utopian humanism, however, is certainly that of Rousseau's 'noble savage'. Rousseau posits that man in the state of nature, wandered 'in the forests, without industry, without speech, without dwelling, without war, without relationships, with no need for his fellow men, and correspondingly with no desire to do them harm'.[64] The noble savage is an iconic template of what humanity *was,* in simpler, and supposedly better, times. Although the noble savage as an idea was popularised by Rousseau, it originated earlier, with Peter Martyr. Stelio Cro explains that Peter Martyr put forward 'a moral consideration on his times, the "iron age," because, contrary to the American Indians who are free from money, laws, treacherous judges, deceiving books and the anxiety of an uncertain future, the character of the European civilization is highlighted by these burdens.'[65] Here we see the origin of the myth of the noble savage couched in the same terms as Hesiod and Ovid used in their Ages of Man and the same terms which, as we will see in the next chapter, are still afforded a significant place in the postmodernist's vocabulary. The escalator of Williams ought to be therefore conceptualised as more than a series of cultural perceptions of sequential material conditions, but also of a series of stages of humanity, each one further and further removed from a posited state of nature in which the noble savage lives.

Slotting the myth of the noble savage into a larger nostalgic-Utopian understanding allows us to see the longevity and influence of this worldview. Cro explains that after Martyr's initial reckoning, the 'golden myth of the noble savage […] found many followers, among them Las Casas, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Rousseau.'[66] Doubtlessly, the noble savage has furnished many of the best-known, best-read cultural products of the West. Additionally, the Utopian tradition was borne

63 Marx, Karl, *Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.4.

64 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), p.57. It is worth noting that Rousseau never used the phrase 'noble savage' himself, but it was frequently used in reference to his works.

65 Cro, Stelio, *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), p.22.

66 Ibid*,* p.28.

out of an idealised vision of the New World, complete with its noble savage inhabitants, as Williams explains: 'Once again the myth of a primitive happier state is drawn upon, with some suggestions from accounts of the primitive economies seen by Vespucci and others in the new world.'[67] The notion of the primitive is one which binds together the twin threads of material conditions, and the condition of the people living within them. An economy and a human being can both be described as 'primitive', after all. Marianna Torgovnick explains that 'primitive societies or the general idea of the primitive [become] a place to project feelings about the present and to draw blueprints of the future.'[68] Torgovnick makes this remark in acknowledgement of the fact that the notion of the primitive can be deployed in two ways: 'gentle, in tune with nature, paradisal, ideal – or violent, in need of control; what we should emulate or, alternately, what we should fear; noble savages or cannibals.'[69] The primitive, as cannibal, has been invoked throughout history by the advocates of capitalism in order to make an emotive case for 'how far we have come', and extol the virtues of long and ongoing process of civilization, often drawing upon racist imagery and tropes in so doing. Understanding this capitalist conception of History is important, but within this thesis we will maintain the focus of this discussion on the diametrically opposed idea of the primitive as virtuous.

The primitive ought to be understood as a myth in itself. '*La mentalité primitive, The Mind of Primitive Man, La penseé sauvage* – the "the" in these titles wrongly implies singularity, universality, a truth about primitives not only available but comprehensive.'[70] Torgovnick here reveals the primitive as an essentialist notion, going hand in hand with essentialist notions of human nature. She goes on to explain that 'We have allowed the doctrine of "common origins" to become a mental delusion: primitives originated at the same time as we did, the delusion says, but did not change; studying them can tell us about earlier versions of human society and about "human nature."'[71] The primitive is trapped in stasis, a state of being unchanged since the point of origin; by this delusion, the Native Americans, described by Peter Martyr, and the uncontacted tribes of remote islands are both alike. They are human beings in the state of nature, uncorrupted by civilization, still in the condition in which they have existed ever since our supposed common origins. This idea of timelessness, of being untouched by Time, is one which suggests that some

67 Williams, *The Country and the City,* p.62
68 Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.244.
69 Ibid, p.3.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid, p.186.

portion of humanity seems to have enjoyed great success in standing athwart history, yelling Stop. This idea is problematised, as Torgovnick notes, by understanding 'primitive societies as occupying their time with us, but as developing in ways of their own to their present state', and dispensing with ahistorical notions of a common origin.[72] Torgovnick attests to the influence that the primitive had on thinkers and writers such as Havelock Ellis, James Frazer, and Freud, giving them a source from which to discern the facts of human nature, conceiving of 'primitive societies as the testing ground, the laboratory, the key to that universal truth.'[73] Recourse to what Jameson calls a '*necessary* historical past – what remains, what must have been there, when we remove the artifice and the decadent frivolity and luxury of "civilization"' is appealing to those who feel that there is something *wrong* with contemporaneity, and are seeking an answer.[74] When it is known that we, as a species, did have an origin predating historical record, intense speculation as to that origin was inevitable, as well as questions as to whether we have taken the right course in the many Ages of Man since.

This powerful idea is put to rhetorical purposes. Cro details the efficacy of the myth of the noble savage in attacks upon the Spanish Empire, noting Voltaire's *Candide* as a prime example.[75] And even today, the use of noble savage imagery has not been consigned to the dustbin of history. Kingsnorth sees fit to open his *Real England* with a striking passage, describing another interesting character he encountered on his travels:

> Fergus Drennan is one of England's few professional foragers. He makes a living – just – by hunting down, seeking out and selling wild food. Take Fergus to a wood, a patch of waste ground, the edge of a railway line or an empty evening beach, and it's likely he can feed himself, and probably you, and feed you well. He's been doing it since he was young, and it's never going to make him rich. He says it makes him free, though, as far as that's ever possible.[76]

Fergus Drennan can feed himself outside of the world-system. Depicting him as living, to the greatest extent possible, outside of wage labour relations and the economic imperatives which come with them, Kingsnorth lends credence to Fergus's claims to be as free as he can be. Fergus is the closest Kingsnorth can find to a resident of contemporary England who is living according to 'primitive' economic conditions. Like the man of the Golden Age, he eats berries straight from the

72 Ibid, p.187.
73 Ibid, p.7.
74 Jameson, *Postmodernism,* p.225.
75 Cro, *The Noble Savage,* p.56
76 Kingsnorth, *Real England,* p.2.

bush. By placing Fergus, embodying the natural life as best as anybody can in contemporary England, as first amongst all the various individuals Kingsnorth details within the book – the local market traders, pub owners, canal boat enthusiasts, all besieged by towering McWorld – the rest of them become similarly positioned as standing with the natural in opposition to something unnatural.

The fact that Fergus is not 'primitive', and nobody could sensibly assert that he lives as in the state of mankind's supposed common origins, does not impact the fact that he can be attributed a place higher up the escalator than the uprooted 'citizen of nowhere' who attracts Kingsnorth's ire.[77] Indeed, even if we cannot call him a man of the Golden Age, unlike the noble savage, we could perhaps say he embodies several qualities of the Silver Age, as he labours, takes shelter, and weathers the seasons. As we look back up the escalator, humanity in its different Ages are each socially attributed a certain amount of authenticity, growing greater with temporal proximity to our origins. When Adorno critiqued the attribution of authenticity to the rooted, and the locally embedded, he explained that 'Expressions and situations, drawn from a no longer existent daily life, are forever being blown up as if they were empowered and guaranteed by some absolute which is kept silent out of reverence.'[78] I posit that the absolute, kept silent out of reverence, is our supposed common origin. Golden Age man, like the noble savage having strayed not at all from our common origins, might be regarded by Silver Age man as being more 'authentic' and true to what a human should be than he and his contemporaries. In turn, that Silver Age man could be attributed greater authenticity than the man of the Bronze Age, who in turn receives more than that of the Iron. All of the above are attributed more authenticity than those who work in capitalism's brutal factories and pits. And these people are themselves more authentic than those who we can envision as the city-dwelling, service-sector working (perhaps in some terrible postmodern skyscraper), rentier, rootless citizen of nowhere.

The attribution of authenticity makes these different archetypes of humanity interchangeable to some degree. As Torgovnick observes of D.H. Lawrence, 'Like many moderns, Lawrence freely substituted "the primitive" for other categories that had obsessed him from the beginning of his career.'[79] She goes on to state that miners and working class men were a key substitution that Lawrence made for 'the primitive'. In the context of this posited attribution of

77 Paul Kingsnorth, 'The citizens of nowhere', *www.paulkingsnorth.net,* [http://paulkingsnorth.net/2003/09/01/the-citizens-of-nowhere/] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

78 *Adorno, The Jargon*, p.7.

79 Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive,* p.159.

authenticity to various archetypes of Man, it is worth considering Joe Kennedy's 'authentocracy'. The phenomenon of authentocracy, and the fetishisation the predominantly white, rugged, former industrial working class of the recently-collapsed 'Red Wall' of the UK, or the Rust Belt states through which Donald Trump eked out his shock victory of 2016, can be understood within this nostalgic-Utopian framework. The nostalgic-Utopia of the Brexit and Trump victories is not difficult to conceptualise, and has been helpfully much-discussed: the pits and factories are open again, a job in the heavy industries is readily available and can be reliably held for life, citizenship is reasserted with transfer of democratic power down from outside and back into the national legislatures, courts and laws too are back under the citizenry's control, and home ownership is readily achievable for anyone or their children. The corresponding human to this bygone era has been bestowed various names by the punditry, the most recent of which being the 'Workington Man' (and in pursuit of a consistent terminology, perhaps the Age of Man to which this figure belongs should be known as the Workington Age).[80] As the BBC summed it up, 'According to Onward - the right-of centre-think tank that gave birth to the creation - Workington Man is older, white and Northern. […] The imagined poster boy for "middle England" likes rugby league and Labour. He voted for Brexit and feels the country is moving away from his views.'[81] It has been reported that the actual men of Workington have found the moniker patronising, and the stereotype to be offensive and crude. Nevertheless, it captured public imagination across the country, and the Conservatives who deliberately targeted voters fitting the 'Workington Man' mould in their election campaign were duly rewarded, winning a landslide majority (including the Workington seat itself). The essentialism attributed to Workington Man is not unlike the essentialism attributed to the Golden Age Man, or the noble savage. It is more of an idea than a reality, and it can be connected to the economic and social conditions in which its respective Man is moulded.

80 Tim Burrows, 'So farewell then, Workington man … we hardly knew you', *The Guardian,* [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/22/workington-man-voter-caricature-essex-man] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

81 Bob Cooper, 'General Election: Who is target voter Workington Man?', *BBC,* [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-50239341] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

On Thomas Pynchon's Depiction of a Declensionist History

Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* begins with a young crew boarding their airship and departing for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The first words of this gargantuan tome read simply: 'Now single up all lines!'.[82] This shipboard command signals that the vessel is about to depart, as the hawsers mooring it in place begin to be cast off. It is a fitting opening to the novel, as the reader is about to do much travelling. Utku Mogultay describes the novel as 'A hypermobile narrative that defies any easy summary', and Amy J. Elias notes that it is 'thematically obsessed with the symbolism of travel and the politics of space'.[83] The first (of what will quickly become many) heroes of this story are the Chums of Chance, the crew of the airship *Inconvenience,* who are cheerily introduced through the mode of song:

> There's fellows live in little towns,
> And those who live on farms,
> And never seem to wander far
> From smiles and loving arms-
> They always know just who they are
> And how their lives will go-
> And then there's boys like us, who say
> Good-bye before hello[84]

Fittingly, we meet them as they bid good-bye to the undisclosed location in which they were moored prior to the singling up of the lines, and to this locale the reader never gets to say hello. They are too quickly on the move. This dynamic opening, and the contrast drawn between the Chums themselves and the rooted fellows in little towns or farms, set us up for what will be a vigorous exploration of the politics and connotations of geographic mobility. Mogultay notes that through these lyrics, the opening of the novel invokes a positive Western cultural sentiment towards mobility, implying 'dynamism, flexibility, freedom, and a willingness to take chances', and a negative one toward sedentariness, implying 'stasis, rigidity, and reserve, if not the inability to think outside the box.'[85] Opposite to the core nostalgic-Utopian conception, in this view 'rural

82 Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.3.
83 Utku Mogultay, *The Ruins of Urban Modernity: Thomas Pynchon's Against the Day* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), p.8; Amy J. Elias, "Plots, Pilgrimage, and the Politics of Genre in *Against the Day*", in *A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide,* p.29.
84 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.16.
85 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.75.

kinship communities are seen as inflexible and immobile, [and] urban society is considered as dynamic and mobile.'[86] This positive sentiment has a particular pertinence to America (and the Chums are, indeed, American). Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable observe that it is a common belief that 'it is unusual to find adult Americans living in the place in which they were born, and, while this is an obvious exaggeration, it is nevertheless true that change of abode is distinctly common.'[87] The mobility and dynamism of the American citizenry is viewed positively by some, as a facet of a go-getting character that serves the people well. It is this view, best embodied by the crew of the *Inconvenience,* wasting no time in setting off for their next adventure, that begins the novel. This view will be quickly and comprehensibely undermined.

A much later passage harks back to this dynamic opening. Departing from Trieste, Cyprian, another of *Against the Day'*s many heroes*,* ponders the expanse of possibility stretching out before him as his ship leaves the Molo San Carlo behind:

> If there is an inevitability to arrival by water, he reflected, as we watch the possibilities on shore being progressively narrowed at last to the destined quay or ship, there is no doubt a mirror-symmetry about departure, a *denial* of inevitability, in opting out from the point of embarkation, beginning the moment all lines are singled up, an unloosening of fate as the unknown and perhaps the uncreated begins to make its appearance ahead and astern, port and starboard, everywhere an expanding of possibility, even for the ship's company who may've made this run hundreds of times….[88]

Beginning the moment all lines are singled up, an infinite horizon of possibility opens. By reflecting on travel by the sea in this way, this passage provokes similar reflections regarding travel by other means, including by rail. Mogultay makes one such reflection, stating that 'rail travel relies on an extremely rigid and inflexible kind of infrastructure, which is reflected, perhaps most notably, by the fact that a train route cannot be altered spontaneously. [...] Once on board a train, the number of places where one could potentially disembark diminishes continually.'[89] Whereas on board the ship possibilities open up at the point of embarkation, as they do with the singling up of lines that opens the novel, choice and possibility actually close down once aboard the train. The railway, which the novel places as its ultimate symbol of capitalist development, here becomes a constraint

86 Ibid.
87 Baugh, Albert C., and Cable, Thomas, *A History of the English Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.348.
88 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.920.
89 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* pp.81-2.

on choice, rather than its enabler. Here, we can think back to notions of falsity of choice under market forces.

Krysztof Piekarski, Martin Kevorkian, and Elisabeth McKetta discuss Cyprian's 'reverie on the denial of inevitability, of an opening out that succeeds the imposed singling up of lines', likening it to 'the divergence of a *V*', and in so doing place this passage into the concern of Pynchon's, which began in his first novel, regarding the abundance of alternative historical possibilities that never came to pass.[90] At the 'moment all lines singled up', the collective fate of humanity was not predetermined, but the possibilities on shore are progressively narrowed with the continuation of capitalist development. We know with twenty-first-century hindsight that the great unloosening of fate that Cyprian considers at the beginning of his journey by sea will be followed by a disembarkation into the deterministic, capitalist linearity of the railways once ashore. The unloosening of fate that occurs at the beginning of a journey aboard the *Inconvenience* is by default greater, with all of the open sky to explore, but it is also a fiction. In a surreal book, filled with surreal episodes, the adventures of the Chums of Chance and other sky-crews are the most fantastical of the novel (in fact, they are so fictional that even within the world of the novel they are understood to be fictional characters) casting further doubt on the possibility of real choice in geographic mobility. Pynchon uses the symbol of travel and geographic mobility to demonstrate the collapse of his mourned subjunctive possibilities, and the locking of the human race into the straitjacket of capitalist determinism.

The other way in which the initial positivity towards mobility is undermined is through the contrast with an expressed desire for rootedness. Towards the conclusion of the novel, two of its main characters, Yashmeen and Reef, happen upon a scenic view:

> On a rare day of sunshine, up near a town in the Vjosa Valley, he and Yash allowed themselves a moment of slack just to stand and gaze.
>
> "I'd stay here forever."
>
> "Don't sound too nomadic to me."
>
> "But look at it." Pretty scenic, Reef guessed, a dozen minarets brightly ascending among the trees, a little river you could see the bottom of rushing through the town, the yellow light of a café in the dusk that could become their local, the

90 Krysztof Piekarski, Martin Kevorkian, and Elisabeth McKetta, "Mapping, the Unmappable, and Pynchon's Antitragic Vision" in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide,* eds. Severs, Jeffrey, and Leise, Christopher (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.52.

> smells and the murmuring and the ancient certainty that life, however reduced now and then to the arts of being intelligent prey, was preferable to the plague of eagles beginning to take over the land.[91]

After a book's worth of travel, Yashmeen and Reef (with his symbolic surname 'Traverse') contemplate shrugging off their nomadic habit, and finding shelter from all that has troubled them in the world. Nature has truly not been eclipsed here, as trees are intermingling with the minarets, and a wild river pulses through the scene. The two lovers feel an 'ancient certainty' in beholding this little town; they behold a nostalgic-Utopia. They do not, however, end up staying there at all, and the reader does not get to see how any attempt at taking up a 'forever' residence in this small town pans out, although some clues are offered to how it might go.

A little earlier, Yashmeen, Reef, and Cyprian's journey passes through Sofia, and they find the city 'reimagined in the thirty-odd years since the Turks had been driven out, winding alleyways, mosques, and hovels replaced with a grid of neat wide streets and Europeanized public works on the grand scale.'[92] Indeed, as Misha Glenny explains, the success of the project of Europeanization in Bucharest became an example to be followed in the other Balkan capitals:

> The Romanian capital was being transformed by wide boulevards, flanked by stylish architecture and cafés, sweeping away the warren of streets that was the hallmark of Ottoman towns. Bucharest was a beacon to which Belgrade, Sofia and even Athens were drawn. These youthful capitals were purposefully shedding their association with the countryside and with the peasant class – whose labour was paying for the modernization of urban life through increasingly exorbitant taxes.[93]

This transformation is one from the rural towards the urban that could easily be construed in a negative light, as a descent on the escalator. Indeed, the similar transformation of Sarajevo was construed in such a way by Gavrilo Princip, as we shall discuss later. Pynchon's choice of 1912 for his protagonists' visit to Sofia in *Against the Day* is timely as the city had by this date undergone huge changes and been very much subsumed into the gridwork of European rationalisation. In the years preceding Yashmeen, Reef, and Cyprian's visit, the city's architectural style had been transformed to better gel with the Old European aspirations of its elites, with a huge number of new buildings all in the Old European styles springing up: the Bulgarian National Assembly Building (1886), Sofia University (1888), Sofia Central Station (1888), Sarmadzhiav House (1903), the Ivan

91 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.1091.
92 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.1060.
93 Glenny, Misha, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers 1804-2012* (London: Granta, 2017) p.164.

Vazov National Theatre (1906), Yablanski House (1907), the Central Military Club (1907), Sofia Synagogue (1909), and the Central Sofia Market Hall (1911). The years shortly after would see the new cathedral built, as well as new mineral baths, a new palace, and a number of churches. One of which, possibly part of Pynchon's inspiration for this historically accurate episode, is the Church of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Maker (1914), which was built on the site of an old mosque. A more likely inspiration for this portrayal of the de-Turkification of the Balkans, however, would be the events of the Bosnian War in the decade preceding the novel's publication. Glenny describes how

> Muslims had to watch the wholesale destruction of eastern Mostar at the hands of Hercegovina Croats supported by units of the regular Croatian army. On 9 November 1993, a group of Bosnian Croat soldiers videoed the climax of this orgy when the city's great symbol, the sixteenth-century arched stone bridge over the Nevetna river, was obliterated.[94]

The destruction of old Ottoman Empire architecture carries the contemporary connotations of bloody ethnic conflict and genocide. In light of this twenty-first century understanding, the transformation of Sofia takes on a sinister light that becomes hard to separate from the human suffering and loss felt by the Muslim population that would have accompanied the eclipse of Ottoman Sofia.

The impermanence of the local particularities of the old Sofia is, then, underscored. With this made clear, any attribution of permanence or foreverness to this small Vjosa Valley town seems misplaced. If Pynchon meant to suggest that the wild and untamed Vjosa Valley was not safe from the looming change of economic development, and from the standardisation that comes along with it, then he has been proven right in the years since *Against the Day* was published. A recent YouTube-published documentary by Patagonia, *Blue Heart,* covers the proposed construction of hydropower dams along the Vjosa, which would prove catastrophic for the local ecosystems and small town economies along the river.[95] The 'little river you could see the bottom of rushing through the town', likely a branch of the main body of the Vjosa, would likely be dried up if these proposed dams are constructed. This idyllic local scene may become more of a nostalgic-Utopia yet.

As a nostalgic-Utopia, the town in the Vjosa Valley is small enough to cognitively map, distinct in this way from metropolitan centres too large and complicated to place oneself within.

94 Ibid, p.646.

95 Patagonia, *'Blue Heart* Full Film – The Fight for Europe's Last Wild Rivers'*, YouTube,* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhmHByZ0Xd8] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

Mogultay discusses cognitive mapping as a method of coping with the world-system, noting that 'Jameson suggested this strategy, in order to bridge the widening chasm between the tendentially local space of everyday life and "the enormously complex new international space" [...] of global capitalism that mostly eludes lived experience.'[96] Cognitive mapping is both a useful way to understand the appeal of this Vjosa Valley town, and its place within the world-system. It also, in bridging the chasm between the tendentially local and the enormously international, can reveal how the latter is slowly crossing over towards the former. The spread of McWorld, to use Barber's term again, is the slow but steady plugging-in of the tendentially local into the grid of global capital. Sofia, the city, goes first, but sure enough global capital and its imperatives do make their way to the Vjosa Valley eventually. In this, we see in motion similar mechanics to those described in the famous passage from *Mason & Dixon*:

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?-- in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,-- serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that may yet be true,-- Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe til the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,-- winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair.[97]

Whilst the Vjosa Valley may be 'mapped', it has not yet been *integrated.* First, a wave of discoveries. Second, a wave of integrations. All that is true, Sofia, the Vjosa Valley, Bury St. Edmunds, perhaps even nation states themselves, already seen and recorded, are now to be measured for their economic value to the world-system, and accordingly re-shaped and re-sculpted to best serve the ends of Profit and the cultural inclinations of the Profiteers. By this token, Pynchon simultaneously depicts the westward advance into the subjunctive alongside the economic integration of the New World into a fledgling Starbucks capitalism, as was discussed

96 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.27, quoting Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* eds. Grossberg, Lawrence and Nelson, Cary (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.351.

97 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon,* p.345.

earlier. The chronology of this integration is explained in *Against the Day* through the concept of 'railworthiness'. As Mogultay explains, 'The term "railworthiness" figures in *Against the Day* as a catchword intertwining the conquest of space by means of geographical expansion with the consolidation of corporate power through railroad expansion. This nexus apparently converges in a geographical imagination that reduces the terrestrial globe to an economic resource, while crudely ignoring the sense of the earth as a dwelling place for living beings.'[98] This is the same phenomenon which Kingsnorth rages against, with its motorways slapped down over pristine English countryside, and the same phenomenon which Barber warns will begin to provoke Jihadic backlash. By reckonings of railworthiness, every cubic bit of terrestrial globe has a value, waiting to be capitalised upon, and whatever came before must be cast aside, be it stunning natural vistas, quaint town markets, or social housing.

The actual passage in the text which introduces the reader to the idea of railworthiness is deserving of a closer reading. The introduction is courtesy of the English Professor Renfrew, who is locked in a continental feud with a German counterpart, Werfner. Each supports opposing geopolitical interests in the build-up to World War I, and are influential figures in their own right. Renfrew gives the following summation of his foe:

> Werfner, damn him, keen-witted but *unheimlich,* is obsessed with railway lines, history emerges from geography of course, but for him the primary geography of the planet is the rails, obeying their own necessity, interconnections, places chosen and bypassed, centers and radiations therefrom, grades possible and impossible, how linked by canals, crossed by tunnels and bridges either in place or someday to be, capital made material [...] he styles himself the prophet of *Eisenbahntüchtigkeit,* or railworthiness, each and every accommodation to the matrix of meaningful points, each taken as a coefficient in the planet's unwritten equation….[99]

Here, the world-system's usage of the integrating-power of railways, canals, and tunnels, are made explicit. More interestingly, the use of *unheimlich* to describe Werfner – unhomely, in translation – casts the economic imperatives planting down the train tracks criss-crossing the continent as *unheimlich* in themselves. Or beyond *unheimlich,* the nexus which crudely ignores 'the sense of the

98 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.85.

99 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.272. There is an apparent irony, when reading a passage such as this, that one of the symbols of 'Real England' which Kingsnorth mourns is that of the canal systems. Having originally been slapped down across the pristine countryside for industrial use as part of the country's capitalist infrastructure, the canals then underwent a transformation to become something beloved, and now are under threat of disrepair. Perhaps in this we can see the foreshadowing of a day in which a future Kingsnorth mourns the loss of the characterful motorways and their replacement by something somehow more soulless.

earth as a dwelling place for living beings' is entirely oppositional to the very notion of *home.* Here, it is useful to bring in Torgovnick's observation that thinking about the primitive 'takes us full circle and returns us to the earliest meanings of the word *primitive* as the original state of something – biological tissue, church organization, social organization. For "going home," like "going primitive," is inescapably a metaphor for the return to origins.'[100] Considering that our common origins are heavily connoted with home, and railworthiness is associated with the *unheimlich,* then coded into this passage of *Against the Day* is the notion that the economic development symbolised by the railways is taking us further and further away from our common origins, from nature, from the human, and from home. And, to build upon the earlier understanding of the railways, we are passengers on this journey with very little choice as to the direction, nevermind the destination. On board this train (somewhat similar, in its A to B transportation, to the escalator) we cannot stop at a point of our choosing, and nor can we passengers set the machine into reverse. If the dam is built in the Vjosa Valley, then there will be no going back to what once was.

It is worth taking a closer look at the tendentially local as it appears in *Against the Day,* when not viewed from afar as a shorthand for rural or natural idyll. Much of the first half of the novel is spent in metropolitan centres of trade and commerce, including Chicago, Venice, and London, as well as the smaller Western state towns that have been populated (or depopulated) according to the political and commercial need for gold and silver in the big cities. It is around the midway point that we receive our first suggestion that we may soon be going entirely 'off the grid': '"In town here we're pretty cosmopolitan," said Rahman the barkeep, "but you don't want to be going too far up the valley."'[101] Leaving behind its more city and town-centric sections, the novel goes far up the valley. During a section in the Balkans, when Cyprian and a companion are being shot at by unknown figures, they take refuge far from the markers of civilisation: 'they were chased off, uphill, among rock pinnacles, into the forest and the mountains and progressively wilder terrain, and all questions of alloyed steel, geometric purity of gauge, railways and timetables and the greater network, not to mention European time as it usually passed, ceased to be any part of their day, and they were swept back into the previous century.'[102] Journeying off the grid is to wind back the clocks, perhaps to a time when Time moved slower, moving against the day. The terrain is 'wilder', ergo untamed, uncivilised. The setting of the Balkan peninsula is key, and its description as

100 Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive,* p.185.
101 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.584..
102 Ibid, p.936.

'an inhospitable terrain disjointed according to ancient tribal hatreds he would never clearly understand' is a succinct summary of the prevailing Western conception of the region.[103] After much exploration of the early stages of McWorld (whether in the guise of *Mason & Dixon'*s coffee shops, or the manifestations of railworthiness), Pynchon now examines the other side of the coin, and using the same geographic example as Barber used to illustrate his 'Jihad'.[104] The Balkans are (mis)understood to be the very opposite of the metropolitan.

There is fruitful discussion to be had of another passage regarding the tendentially local, describing the view from the window on Yashmeen and Kit Traverse's train journey through the German countryside:

> At Göttingen there had been at least the sense that one was still connected, however tenuously, to the rest of Europe. But as they moved southward and consonants began to go blurry, presently there was much less to engage the rational mind – instead, everywhere, elf-grottoes, castles, set dramatically on pinnacles, to which there was no visible access, country people in dirndls and peculiar green hats, Gothic churches, Gothic breweries, shadows with undulating tails and moving wings passing across the valley floors.[105]

With the University city behind them, Yashmeen and Kit feel their own removal from the nexus, journeying into the wilderness where only the first few tendrils of the world-system have yet reached. With 'less to engage the rational mind', this landscape is cast as pre-Enlightenment, and it is accordingly full of quaint, particular scenery, as well as glimmers of the fantastical and mythical. This tendentially local scenery is quickly placed into conflict with the railway from which they spy it. Making reference to the 1901 Orient Express crash in the Haupt-Bahnhof in Frankfurt (a few years prior to the setting of this scene, but giving trepidation to the characters nonetheless), Pynchon states that Kit and Yashmeen perceived it as

> the revenge of Deep Germany on the modern age of steam. They bought sandwiches in the buffets and kept close to the train clinging with increasing desperation to the machinery of transport against the onset of a lassitude thick as grease, a creeping surrender to the shameless German primitivism all around them.[106]

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103 Ibid, p.950.
104 Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld,* pp.198-9.
105 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.744.
106 Ibid.

The use of 'modern age of steam', and our understanding of references to primitivism being connoted with humanity's common origins, turn this conflict into a battle between different epochs. Additionally, in this passage Pynchon turns to the image of 9/11 to pass comment on the fraught relationship of the tendentially local and the all-integrating world-system. The tendentially local, here cast as the primitive, with all of those connotations, is at war with the forces of railworthiness. Its weapon is the slamming of a passenger vehicle into a hub of commercial infrastructure and expansion.

This is not the only episode of the novel that is loaded with the imagery of 9/11. Published in 2006, *Against the Day* was Pynchon's first novel since the attacks, still vivid in the minds of many readers. In pursuit of an understanding as to why Pynchon decided to set his first fictional response to 9/11 roughly one century before the event itself, we may find a clue in Corey Robin's observation, quoting George Steiner, that as quickly as September 12th 'many saw 9/11 as a thunderous judgment upon, and necessary corrective to, the frivolity and emptiness of the 1990s. We would have to reach back almost a century – to the opening days of World War I, when the "marsh gas of boredom and vacuity" enveloping another free-trading, globalizing fin de siècle exploded – to find a remotely exact parallel.'[107] Pynchon seeks out that remotely exact parallel, novelizing it into an account of the early years of the twentieth-century, replete with of events evocative of 9/11, or of the anxieties of post-9/11 America, including the apprehension of provincial, peripheral 'Deep Germany'. During the first of the novel's chapters in Venice, the Chums of Chance (or their counterparts from an imperial rival, as it is made deliberately unclear) accidentally crash their airship into St. Mark's Campanile. History is here re-written to make them into the cause of the 1902 collapse.[108] The image of a zeppelin bringing the great tower down is the most overt 're-staging' of the image of 9/11 that appears within the novel. It is, however, distinctly different from the 'revenge of Deep Germany' via the train crash, and this is simply due to the fact that in this scenario it is the building that is crashed-into which stands in for the tendentially local. Pynchon has reversed the image of 9/11 to make the modern, the airship, into the destroyer of the historic. Suddenly, the fall of the Campanile is made to join the disappearance of Sofia's mosques, the tearing down of historic buildings in Bury St. Edmunds, and the threatened hydropower damnation of the Vjosa Valley; stronger seems the pattern of the international world-system bulldozing the tendentially local. By re-casting 9/11 in this way, Pynchon poses questions as to

107 Robin, Corey, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.207-8.

108 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* pp.288-9.

where is the mainstream horror and the fervour when it is the provincial on the losing end of the Barberian conflict, which so often happens in violent and bloody circumstances.

Quite unlike the delicate ecosystems that are permanently and irrevocably disrupted as capitalism spreads and develops atop their geographic space, Venice rebounds. Like Mostar Bridge roughly a century later, the Campanile is rebuilt: 'Meanwhile, like a form of architectural prayer, civic plans had been set in motion to rebuild the Campanile *dov'era, com'era,* as if the dilapidations of time and entropy could be reversed.'[109] Noting that the reconstruction of the Campanile, *where it was, as it was,* is carried out 'as if' the dilapidations of time and entropy could be reversed implicitly accepts that they cannot be. This poses the question of what exactly is it if not the reverse of a dilapidation? Quotes from a later episode within the city provide an answer. Venice is at one point called an 'ancient town progressively settling into a mask of itself', and at another it is noted as changing from 'a real city to a hollow and now and then outright-failed impersonation of itself'.[110] Venice is becoming a commodity in its own right, a simulacrum of its earlier self. This simulacrum is a product that can be sold on the global market, and tourists are the buyers.[111] Mogultay ponders a similar question, noting that asking 'for whom the campanile was actually rebuilt leads to the conclusion that the reconstruction also amounts to a stage play. It was intended to give an already dwindling city population the impression that a civic spirit was being restored, whereas the primary aim was to sustain and fuel the influx of tourists.'[112] The novel cynically suggests that what at first seemed to be a civic (and, as per 'architectural prayer', religious) spirit, pushing back against a terrible dilapidation, is actually once again the profit motive, the force behind similar dilapidations elsewhere. Through Scarsdale Vibe, the super-rich businessman who has been taking an interest in the city, the escalating threat of the commodification of Venice as a process is made explicit.[113] One character notes that 'This Vibe person has been buying up Renaissance art in what even for an American is indecent haste. His next target according to the gossip is Venice. Perhaps he'll buy *it* as well.'[114] Of course, if anybody did decide to purchase Venice, they would want to buy it in good condition, as advertised, in the

109 Ibid, p.292.
110 Ibid, p.653; p.646.
111 This is likely the reason why Pynchon takes an interest in Venice: it is a paradoxical space which has railworthiness *because* of its historicity, rather than having historicity imperilled by railworthiness.
112 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.68.
113 The name 'Scarsdale Vibe' recalls an earlier Pynchon passage, in which the fictional epic poem *The Pennsylvaniad* recounts that by marking "the Earth with geometrick Scars" (p.257) the titular surveyors imposed on the world a system of control.
114 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.739.

timeless condition known from paintings and sketches dating back centuries. Whether for a tourist or a multi-millionaire, the Campanile is a deal-breaker.

The timeless image of Venice, dov'era, com'era, is at the centre of the novel's most interesting exploration of development's dilapidations, and of the draw of nostalgic-Utopia. The city first figures in the novel in the imagination of a painter living in Iceland. In his dreams he sees icebergs shifting in place as the water around them gently undulates:

> And in the ceaseless drift of the ice, the uncountable translations and rotations, meetings and freezings, there would come a moment, maybe two, when the shapes and sizes of the masses here at this "Venice of the Arctic" would be exactly the same as those of secular Venice and its own outlying islands. Not all of these shapes would be dry land, of course, some would be ice, but, considered as multiply connected spaces, the two would be the same, Murano, Burano, San Michele, the Grand Canal, each small waterway in painstaking detail, and for that brief instant it would be possible to move from one version to the other.[115]

As Mogultay observes, 'The setting of this scenario is, of course, more than appropriate since the icy landscape hints at the notion of Venice as a city frozen in time.'[116] We can go further in interpreting this passage. Pynchon here connects Venice with the natural, and the naturally occurring. He also undermines the idea of something being timeless, as frozen and unchanging, as the frozen Venice here only lasts a 'brief instant', before the drift of the icebergs resumes. Too, the contemporary widespread understanding of icebergs as endangered – and endangered by the same dilapidating market forces present everywhere in *Against the Day* – underscores the fleetingness of what may appear permanent; all that is solid is melting into the sea. In reality, the coming of further economic development to Venice has changed the very layout of the islands, with the construction of the artificial island Tronchetto in the 1960s, largely used as a site of mass car parking, and also for market stalls selling souvenirs for tourists. There will need to be another iceberg in order for the painter's dreamed-up frozen cityscape to match the changed Venice.

Pynchon embodies the potential for further drastic change to Venice in the guise of Anarchist-turned-Futurist Tancredi, who says of his city '"Someday we'll tear the place down, and use the rubble to fill in those canals. Take apart the churches, salvage the gold, sell off what's left to collectors. […] All these islands will be linked by motorways. Electricity everywhere, anyone who

115 Ibid, p.152.
116 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.52.

still wants Venetian moonlight will have to visit a museum. Colossal gates out here, all around the Lagoon, for the wind, to keep out sirocco and bora alike."'[117] No violent rupture of the sort Tancredi envisions has happened and brought about this change, but incremental advances towards it have occurred. Connecting Mestre with the Piazzale Roma, Mussolini's Ponte Littorio (now renamed Ponte della Libertà) brought cars into the city for the first time. For now, however, they remain confined to the Piazzale Roma and Tronchetto. It also brought, piercing right into the heart of the lagoon, the railway. Electric lighting, as expected, is entirely commonplace in contemporary Venice. There was even, already by the point at which Tancredi speaks, precedent for the filling in of canals, as the Venetian pedestrianisation carried out for the creation of the Rio Terà dei Pensieri, and its transformation into an open-plan market space, was carried out in 1845.[118] All that has already come to pass from Tancredi's shopping list of dilapidations underscores the vulnerability of the city to future change. Venice cannot forever continue com'era. Although it may be saved from surface-level dilapidations by market forces that demand it retain its timeless image, market forces too demand change allowing for greater access by the tourist-consumers who now constitute the city's economic lifeblood. A compromise between these two opposing forces is struck, and Venice changes in increments, but changes nonetheless.

Pynchon also gives the symbol of the iceberg a central role in another of the novel's numerous episodes invoking the spectre of 9/11, and one which does so truly apocalyptically. A mysterious object is detected lying beneath the arctic snows of a nunatak. The nunatak is presented as being a sacred place, as another Chum posits it as 'the site of some sacred burial … a tomb of some sort….'.[119] The object contained within this sacred place is to be excavated, and explicitly for purposes of profit for Scarsdale Vibe, the same mogul-antagonist later interested in buying Venice. One member of the expedition remarks that 'Vibes will sell it, whatever it is, the minute they see it.'[120] While this profit-seeking unfolds, it becomes obvious that something is deeply wrong. Dogs bark erratically, and the Eskimo labourers employed by the expedition begin to flee the scene.[121] A mysterious, 'shamanic' man walks up to the expedition, straight across the icy plains, to intone a cryptic and foreboding message before departing, again by foot, in the dead of night.[122] Eschewing all subtlety, Pynchon makes it clear that nothing good is going to come of the

117 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.658.
118 Author uncredited, 'Rio Terà dei Pensieri, sul Rio dei Pensieri', *ConoscereVenezia,* [https://www.conoscerevenezia.it/?p=38423] [Accessed 29 March 2021].
119 Ibid, p.157.
120 Ibid, p.159.
121 Ibid, p.159.
122 Ibid, pp.159-60.

extraction of the mysterious object from the nunatak. Referred to primarily as 'the Figure', this object is brought on board the expedition ship, and placed in the cargo hold. It is stated that 'Trying to get it to fit inside the ship, we measured, and remeasured, and each time the dimensions kept coming out different – not just slightly so but drastically.'[123] To frame this passage with an earlier Pynchon-ism, the Figure resists being seen and recorded, measured and tied in, back into the network of points already known. It resists being changed from subjunctive to declarative, resisting its reduction to a simplicity that serves the ends of profit.

In New York City, the Figure comes to life and enacts chaos. An enormous but sketchily defined disaster unfolds, which results in 'everyone in town, most inconveniently at the same time, suffering that Panic fear.'[124] Mogultay observes that 'the capitalized term "Panic" - an indication of its etymological origin in the Greek god of nature – suggests on whose behalf such vengeance might be exacted.'[125] The attack of the Figure is construed here as the revenge of nature, similar to that of Kit and Yashmeen's fears of a 'revenge of Deep Germany on the modern age of steam'.[126] A member of the expedition explains that 'In the Eskimo view, someone of our party, by failing to perform the due observances, showed deep disrespect, causing the Power to follow its nature, in exacting an appropriate vengeance.'[127] When pressed upon to what the vengeance, leaving trees and buildings smouldering, and the bodies of people and animals strewn about the streets, is 'appropriate', the expedition member replies 'To urban civilization.'[128] This mysterious Figure, othered in its description as 'an odalisque of the snows', has the same modus operandi as the 9/11 terrorists.[129] Pynchon depicts an urban civilization that has, by disturbing nature, wrought havoc upon itself. Dilapidations here beget dilapidations. This is all concordant with Barber's dialectic thesis of Jihad and McWorld sustaining one another. The Figure, standing in for the forces behind 9/11, the consequence of profit-driven ventures abroad, is a potent metaphor for the cultural dangers unearthed by the voracity of the economistic Enlightenment project.

The catastrophic ends arrived at by the means of voracious, economic rationalisation are well fitting for a novel set in the years preceding the First World War. As J. Paul Narkunas notes, 'The specter of World War I haunts the entire text because it is the "illogical" outcome of all this rationalization via the railroad', before going on to explain that 'In southeastern Europe, the

123 Ibid, p.161.
124 Ibid, p.168.
125 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.193.
126 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.744.
127 Ibid, p.168.
128 Ibid, p.168.
129 Ibid, p.158.

Austro-Hungarian seizure of Bosnia in 1908 to facilitate the creation of the railroad destroyed the arrangements of power promulgated by the treaty of Berlin.'[130] Glenny explains that the 'Emperor saw Bosnia as the new fortress from which he could dominate the economic and political life of the northern Balkans. If all went well, Vienna would eventually be connected by an unbroken line of Habsburg-owned rail track with Salonika and the Aegean Sea.'[131] Not dissimilar in theme from the extraction of the Figure, the annexation of Bosnia was a profit-seeking venture that blew up in the faces of its architects.

Austria-Hungary's reckoning with the fervent Bosnian Serb and Muslim nationalism catalysed by their expansionist policy, and its historic expression in the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Young Bosnia member Gavrilo Princip, could itself be described in the terms which Benton uses to describe the extraction of the Figure and its subsequent wrath: the 'consequence of the country's arrogant and naïve belief in its ability to control and contain all that it draws into its fold'.[132] Through Pynchon's paralleling of the two fin de siècles, the assassination of the Archduke can be aligned with the various 're-stagings' of 9/11 that occur throughout the novel, and Princip himself can be placed in alignment with the forces of nature resisting subsumption into the network of points. Furthermore, regarding Princip, it is also worth noting that he was something of a nostalgic-Utopian himself. Glenny places Princip as one of a number of young men for whom 'the single most formative experience in their lives was to be introduced into urban life after a childhood of rural isolation.'[133] Exposure to Sarajevo under the Austro-Hungarian yoke, with its bureaucrats and brothels, made Princip and his fellow revolutionaries come to fear and loathe the urban as a corrupting affront to the rural life integral to 'Bosnia's very soul'.[134] The narrative of the young ruralite venturing to the city for the first time and finding it shocking or disturbing is a well-worn trope itself. Indeed, Pynchon stages another such narrative within *Against the Day.* The character of Dally Rideout is, as Jeffrey Severs notes, 'the quintessential country girl gone to the city to seek work' in the mode of the eponymous hero of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.[135] Notwithstanding that Dally is a very different character to Princip, and that she does settle into city life better than is perhaps typical of characters of this archetype, she still ends up involved in an (ultimately unsuccessful) assassination plot against a railroad-profiteering arch-villain, the mogul Scarsdale

130 Narkunas, J. Paul, "Representing Ethnic Wars in *Against the Day*" in *A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide,* p.248.
131 Glenny, *The Balkans,* p.251.
132 Benton, "Daydreams and Dynamite", p.208.
133 Glenny, *The Balkans.* p.294.
134 Ibid, p.296.
135 Severs, Jeffrey, "Women, Capitalism, and Artistic Representation in *Against the Day*" in *A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide,* p.220.

Vibe.[136] The revolt against capitalist or imperialist development and its scions, and the country versus city dynamic that goes along with it, is incorporated into Pynchon's larger depiction of a nature that the economising powers-that-be endlessly try to incorporate into their grid, and control.

The economising powers-that-be, unsurprisingly, crop up across many of the novel's numerous plots. Much of the action of *Against the Day* is driven by the engine of the search for Shambhala, being carried out simultaneously by a number of different parties with different stakes in the project. This mythical utopia is described as 'An ancient metropolis of the spiritual, some say inhabited by the living, others say empty, in ruins, buried someplace beneath the desert sands of Inner Asia. And of course there are always those who'll tell you that the true Shambhala lies within.'[137] The cross-continental search for Shambhala does indeed go beneath the sands, as the Chums of Chance take temporary reprieve from the airship *Inconvenience* to join the crew of Her Majesty's Sand Frigate *Saksaul.* The *Saksaul,* somehow able to cruise through the sand, stops at the small subterranean settlement of Nuovo Rialto, another Venetian simulacrum, wherein the Chums face up to a disconcerting reality in their discussion with patrons of the local boozer. 'Take a look down the hold of that frigate you come in on, tell us if you don't find some rods and tubing and calyx bits and all', says one patron to the Chums.[138] They are faced with the revelation that the voyage they had believed to be being carried out for noble ends is actually a mission for oil. In order to bring the fin de siècle parallels into clear relief, we can turn again to Robin and his assertion that the motive behind the Iraq War was grounded in the 'subterranean political economy of oil'.[139] The adventure on board the *Saksaul* joins this subterranean political economy of oil with an accompanying subterranean imperial venture. Referring to the search for Shambhala, and for an itinerary that may provide clues to the city's whereabouts, Mogultay notes that 'The parties involved in the pursuit of the itinerary basically fall into two groups. One considers the document as a guide to a spiritual destination, the lost city of Shambhala, while the other group pursues the itinerary due to economic considerations, mainly on the assumption that it might lead them to undiscovered oilfields.'[140] As one character sums it up, the pursuit of Shambhala follows one vision or the other: 'One vision, if you like, spiritual, and the other, capitalist.

136 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* pp.832-835. The idea that 'the true Shambhala lies within' squares neatly with nostalgic-Utopian notions of human nature and the authentic human of our common origins.
137 Ibid, p.706.
138 Ibid, p.497.
139 Robin, *The Reactionary Mind,* pp.203-4.
140 Mogultay, *The Ruins,* p.43.

Incommensurable, of course.'[141] The noting of these opposing spiritual and commercial aims being incommensurable, when considered alongside all else we have seen from Pynchon's works, is accompanied by a distinct feeling that the spiritual will suffer a resounding defeat; Shambhala, if it is to be found at all, will be plugged into the world-system.

Shambhala, like the Vjosa Valley, like historic Venice, and like the pre-colonial Americas, stand in Pynchon for golden ages, waning or waned. And, as Ovid fortold, dilapidation comes when 'The land, which had previously been common to all, like the sunlight and the breezes, was now divided up far and wide by boundaries, set by cautious surveyors.'[142] The cautious surveyors, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon amongst them, come and charter the land; commercialism prevails. Just in case his readers had not learned the lesson that the arc of history bends towards ever-greater integration into the world-system, Pynchon drives home the point again and again in *Against the Day.* Ultimately, even the fiery and violent resistance of the Figure seems to make little impact in halting the commercial enterprises of Scarsdale Vibe, or even leave much lasting impression on New York City, which is back to boom times by the next episode the novel spends there. In fact, no mention of the catastrophe is made at all in this next New York City chapter, which sees its protagonist go on a shopping trip to an upmarket Department Store. Development and the spread of the world-system goes on unabated. This is fitting, after all, when 9/11 caused no more than a blip in the economic habits of the nation, which were all back to normal after George W. Bush's simple request that the American people get back to shopping. Development, Pynchon demonstrates, staggers on unabated.

It is no wonder, considering the bleak picture that Pynchon paints of a world-system that inexorably absorbs the tendentially local and the sacred into its matrix, that when he depicts a group of Anarchists trying to imagine a perfect utopia of their own, it is explicitly placed outside of the interests of global capital:

> there might exist a place of refuge, up in the fresh air, out over the sea, someplace all the Anarchists could escape to, now with the danger so overwhelming, a place readily found even on cheap maps of the World, some group of green volcanic islands, each with its own dialect, too far from the sea-lanes to be of use as a coaling station, lacking nitrate sources, fuel deposits, desirable ones either precious or

141 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.709.
142 Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* p.32.

> practical, and so left immune to the bad luck and worse judgment infesting the politics of the Continents – a place promised them, not by God, which'd be asking too much of the average Anarchist, but by certain hidden geometries of History, which must include, somewhere, at least a single point, a safe conjugate to all the spill of accursed meridians, passing daily, desolate, one upon the next.[143]

There is nothing of any interest to the hungering capitalist on these islands, lying just outside of the interest zone of market forces. These islands are beyond a nostalgic-Utopia; they are paradise in stasis. Without the looming threat of development, they are posited as existing independent of the mechanisms of the escalator. In one hundred years' time, there would be no recent history of dilapidations to this 'safe conjugate'. They could be said to be *unrailworthy.* They could be said to be *homely*.

Taken as a whole, Pynchon's novels depict a several-hundred-years span of history during which the gridwork of capitalism expands and expands, integrating all that is local or sacred and proving that there is nowhere *unrailworthy* for its critics to flee. His works are chronologically confined between the 1760s and the 2000s, charting the onward march towards a global, inescapable capitalist totality from the early days of the subsuming of the New World in *Mason & Dixon* right through to the new millennium and the subsuming of the internet and the Deep Web in *Bleeding Edge.* Pynchon, however, does take care to show that this story predates the confines of his novels' chronology, and in so doing sometimes spends time staring longingly back up the escalator. Here we can return to the question which Williams posed, asking 'Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops?', and the answer he gives: the Garden of Eden.[144] It should not be a surprise that allusions to the Garden of Eden are not few or far between in Pynchon, due to his widely-noted tendency to subvert or challenge the Enlightenment narrative of universal betterment due to capitalist rationalisation, and that, as Carolyn Merchant notes, 'The Recovery of Eden Narrative is the story into which most Westerners have been socialized and within which we live our lives today. This story is one of converting wilderness into ordered civil society – creating a reinvented Eden – through science, technology, and capitalism.'[145] The narrative of capitalist progress, Merchant explains, was dressed up, particularly in the New World, as the return to earthly paradise. Of course, Earthly Paradise, alongside the Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, and Shambhala too, is to be won back from the realms of the sacred by

143 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.420.
144 Williams, *The Country and the City,* p.16.
145 Merchant, Carolyn, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.59.

cautious surveyors. Implicit in this passage, and as we shall see across Pynchon's novels as a whole, is the suggestion that mankind is not ascending back to Eden, but profaning it, and descending further.

Against the Day is full of Edenic and counter-Edenic content. With World War I casting a large shadow over the text, notions of a Fall loom large within this gargantuan novel. The reader is alerted to references to Eden when detective Lew Basnight meets Grand Cohen Nookshaft and the secret organisation known as True Worshippers of the Ineffable Tetractys (T.W.I.T. for short). Nookshaft waxes riddlingly on the topic of Eden and Original Sin: '"Suppose there were no such thing, after all, as Original Sin. Suppose the Serpent in the Garden of Eden was never symbolic, but a real being in a real history of intrusion from somewhere else. Say from 'behind the sky.' Say we were perfect. We were law-abiding and clean. Then one day *they* arrived."'[146] The T.W.I.T., it turns out, are seeking out and monitoring a number of 'Trespassers', apparent time travellers who are the culprits behind History, a phenomenon which would otherwise not be happening. Nookshaft describes the misdemeanours of the Trespassers as 'an ongoing Transgression, accumulating as the days pass, the invasion of Time into a timeless world. Revealed to us, slowly, one hopes not terribly, in a bleak convergence'.[147] History becomes, rather than the slow upward ascent of remaking Earth in the image of Eden, a series of lapsarian moments, spurred on by a series of serpents, watched and monitored by Nookshaft and his colleagues. Pynchon fittingly locates the T.W.I.T. headquarters in London's Tyburnia (now commonly known as Marble Arch), overlooking Hyde Park and its artificial lake The Serpentine, created from the damming of the Westbourne. Amongst the Trespassers that the T.W.I.T. observes are the imperialist intellectuals Renfrew and *unheimlich* Werfner. The reader's first encounters with the Trespassers give off the impression that these figures are aligned with the forces of capitalism, Enlightenment, and the world-system. Pynchon, typically, will later cast doubt on this.

When the Chums of Chance encounter the Trespassers, their reactions encompass mistrust, fear, anxiety, as well as pity, sympathy, and consternation. Rather than agents of corruption, the Trespassers are revealed as possible refugees from a hopelessly damned, Fallen future:

> '"But imagine *them,*" Lindsay in stricken tones, as if before some unbearable illumination, "so fallen, so corrupted, that we – even we – seem to them pure as lambs.

146 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.251.
147 Ibid, p.250.

> And their own time so terrible that it's sent them desperately back – back to us. Back to whatever few pathetic years we still have left, before … whatever is to happen …"'[148]

In a similar fashion to that which I outlined in terms of authenticity and the Ages of Man earlier, the effects of History have further removed the Trespassers from a 'purity' that will recede into the past (and the stress placed on 'even we' suggests an acknowledgement by the Chums that they have themselves fallen from some previous, purer state). The T.W.I.T. have become suspected as liars, manipulators, and withholders of information, before they pack up from Tyburnia and vanish, leaving Detective Basnight behind. By calling into question the culpability of the Trespassers and the trustworthiness of the T.W.I.T., Pynchon undermines the idea that History is a phenomenon contingent on the villainous behaviour of a handful of individuals, and it is suggested that those who believe in such stories are misplacing their ire (as we saw earlier in Yitzhak's speech and its implications for conspiracy theory). This, too, is reflected in the eventual successful assassination of Scarsdale Vibe, an almost blink-and-you'll-miss-it non-event that ultimately has no impact on the plot, and more importantly, on History. The death of one individual does nothing to break the system or stop the Trespassers' 'time so terrible' from coming to pass. The futility of the assassination of Vibe can easily be read in place of the futility of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Without changing the structures underpinning the world-system in the early twentieth-century, the killing of one man was never going to lift the boot from the throat of ordinary people. The boot, *Against the Day* suggests, is always that of a collective ruling class, and never of any one of its representatives in particular.

The removal from a purer (or more authentic, human, natural, etc. etc.) state is associated, as can be expected from Pynchon, with capitalist economic progress. When Nookshaft describes the 'ongoing Transgression' as 'accumulating as the days pass', his terminology recollects Marx's theories of capitalist accumulation, the struggle over the labourer's working day, and his observation that 'primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology.'[149] Pynchon develops this linking of original sin and capitalism through the character of Reverend Moss Gatlin. As Benton explains, 'For Gatlin, the false category "innocent bourgeoisie" corresponds to the concept of original sin: "Being born into this don't automatically make you innocent"'.[150] The violent, property-seizing, dispossessing primitive accumulation was akin to Eve's eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in that it has left huge swathes of mankind

148 Ibid, p.469.
149 Marx, *Capital,* p.363.
150 Benton, "Daydreams and Dynamite", p.203; Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.97.

tainted from birth, and therefore deserving of whatever horrors befall them. The primitive accumulation depicted in *Mason & Dixon* besmirches all those who benefited, and their descendants. Viewed in this light, the rubbish-tip for subjunctive hopes becomes a rubbish-tip of wasted possibilities to expunge the profiteering, exploitative sin from the soul of the nation, or even the world. Pynchon's History of the United States becomes, to use his phrase from *Bleeding Edge,* a 'history of Republican sin forever unremitted'.[151] Such a reading of Pynchon can prove fruitful.

The betrayal of the revolutionary commune in *Vineland*'s fictional California County of Trasero, by this framework, can be understood as another original sin moment. As Scott McClintock and John Miller note, 'like the Garden of Eden, the entire county is erased from the map.'[152] Here, the end of the commune is ultimately the result of the agency of its betraying revolutionary. Even with the manipulations of outside influence, it is finally the decisions of the inhabitants of the Garden whether they will Fall. This is a fitting moral to be derived from a story set in the Golden State, which foisted upon the nation first Nixon, whose 1968 election dealt the death blow to the revolutionary spirit of the 60s, and then Reagan, who would later inaugurate the reign of neoliberal capitalism. California, in general, is Pynchon's ultimate hub of subjunctive Hopes. He returns again and again to dwell on the radical and pluralistic vision of its 1960s counterculture, and its eventual defeat by the forces of conservatism. As the endpoint of the westward march seeking out Earthly Paradise, as outlined in *Mason & Dixon,* California is where the project of Edenic recovery *should* be realised. Instead, Pynchon depicts capitalist development to have brought something unholy and corrupting to the state. Toward the novel's conclusion, while passing over California the Chums observe 'how much more infected with light the night-time terrains passing below them had become', and one of them even compares the light to 'Lucifer, son of the morning, bearer of light … Prince of Evil.'[153] This appears a subversion of the 'darkness-to-light story' which Merchant links with the Recovery of Eden narrative she posits as foundational to United States culture, typified by John Gast's *American Progress* (1872).[154] Pynchon aligns artificial light with infection and devilry. And to make sure that artificial light does not go unnoticed as a symbol of capitalism, Pynchon has one of his Chums allude to the ongoing struggles over the working day: '"It must have to do with extra work-shifts," Randolph guessed, "increasingly

151 Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge* (London: Vintage, 2014), p.191.
152 McClintock and Miller, "West Coast" in *Thomas Pynchon in Context,* ed. Dalsgaard, Inger H. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.44.
153 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* pp.1160-1.
154 Merchant, *Reinventing Eden,* p.40.

scheduled, that is, beyond the hours of daylight."'[155] Primitive accumulation in the Americas, beginning on the eastern coast, has indeed played the role of original sin for political economy right across to the western reaches, spreading the necessity of unnatural labour right into the Edenic heart of subjunctive hope.

John Gast's *American Progress* (1872).[156]

Considering that both light and the railways, two of the symbols of *American Progress,* are demonised in *Against the Day,* it ought to be no surprise that everything which recedes in the wake of progress is presented by Pynchon in an affirmatively positive manner. One such symbol is the wilderness, which Gast depicts as, to use Merchant's phrasing, receding 'into the light of open fields punctuated by church steeples reaching toward the heavens.'[157] In Pynchon, the wilderness is represented as an unrailworthy space where fugitives from the world-system can live in Fergus

155 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.1161.
156 Gast, John, *American Progress* [Oil on canvas]. Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles.
157 Merchant, *Reinventing Eden,* p.41.

Drennan-like seclusion. Several characters contemplate fleeing to Tuscany's mountainous and thickly forested Garfagnana, where they hope to 'live among their kind, among the wolves, Anarchists and road agents. Live on bean-and-farro soup and mushrooms and chestnuts simmered in the harsh red wine of the region.'[158] In contrast, the novel's most notable depiction of a field comes during a scene in which one of the Chums journeys with a Trespasser. Foreboding the industrialized carnage to come, they discuss the horrors of the future at Flanders Field.[159] The wilderness, not yet to be infected by Lucifer's artificial light, or even to have been cleared to fully admit the day's sun, is a dark place. For Pynchon, darkness and its spaces, which retreat from the guiding light of civilization in *American Progress,* constitute a refuge. This depiction becomes most overt in *Bleeding Edge,* where the Dark Web is presented as the last bastion holding out against capitalist encroachment. In *Bleeding Edge,* the *Second Life*-style Dark Web virtual world 'DeepArcher', is said by its creators to be specifically designed to be 'the one thing, like, timeless? A refuge. History-free'.[160] Another of the novel's fictional computer programs carries the telling name of 'Darkeden'.[161] Virtual escapism has become something of a parallel to the pondered idea of fleeing to the Garfagnana, providing entries into that place in which, like in Cyprian's flight into the Balkan wilderness, European time ceases to pass, sweeping the refugees into a timeless past.

Alongside the wilderness and the darkness, Pynchon also depicts the natives that *American Progress* depicts being driven from the land. The character of Dwight Prance, both a geographer and an armed forces lieutenant, casts the 'primitive', and in particular the cultural spirituality he believes intrinsic to it, as the expressed enemy of civilization:

> "Differences among the world religions are in fact rather trivial when compared to the common enemy, the ancient and abiding darkness which all hate, fear, and struggle against without cease" - he made a broad gesture to indicate the limitless taiga all around them - "Shamanism. There isn't a primitive people anywhere on Earth that can't be found practicing some form of it. Every state religion, including your own, considers it irrational and pernicious, and has taken steps to eradicate it."[162]

Speaking to the American Kit Traverse, 'your own' state religion is Christianity, implying that the ceaseless struggle to which Prance refers is the Recovery of Eden project and its genocidal ramifications for Native Americans. Pynchon, certainly, takes the side of the people (and their

158 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.996.
159 Ibid, pp.622-4.
160 Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge,* p.373.
161 Ibid, p.154.
162 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* p.872.

native locales) against whom Prance polemicises. Kathryn Hume notes that 'Pynchon's characters find landscapes as objects that seem imbued with the sacred in the arctic, in the tundra, and in the desert – all areas of low-tech human activity and life.'[163] As we have discussed, this list could be expanded to include the Balkan countryside, the mountains of the Garfagnana, and even (paradoxically) virtual reality. On the topic of the people living in these places themselves, Hume goes on to state that 'Pynchon seems to think well of low-tech peoples in his novels: they often seem wise, and sacred sites are located in their realms, not near cities.'[164] This positive depiction of the 'low-tech peoples' runs counter to the mainstream Recovery of Eden Enlightenment depiction. Merchant summarises this latter depiction as one in which '"Wild" persons were viewed as savage, uncivilized, rude, uncultured, licentious, unruly, and unpredictable.'[165] This rhetoric served to dehumanise the Native Americans, advocating the 'civilizing' of them, as well as legitimizing the theft of their land. Scarsdale Vibe utilises this rhetoric, albeit against different targets, decrying 'the Asiatic masses, the pan-Slavic brutes,' 'the black seething spawn of Africa interminable', in the same rant as comparing the labouring classes to abscesses and germs, and advocating for genocidal campaigns against all these perceived enemies.[166] Of course, Pynchon's counternarrative does lean heavily on tropes of the noble savage and, as Hume notes, 'what little we see of low-tech peoples seem symbolic ideals rather than practical proposals.'[167] Patronising and essentialising stereotypes such as that of the noble savage are still harmful, and Pynchon's ethics in propagating them seem questionable. Nevertheless, it would be hard to argue that this is not a more pluralistic and life-affirming view than that of Scarsdale Vibe, whose eugenicist, vitriolic hatred of those he sees as incompatible with a white, capitalist order is the highest form of the homogenizing, rationalizing Enlightenment viewpoint: purification.

Again, it is worth stressing here that in depicting genocides, whether against Hereros, Jews, or Native Americans, alongside such bit-part history as the disappearance of Ottoman architecture from Balkan cities, or cappuccino colonisation, Pynchon is not trying to draw a false equivalence. Both the former, the macro events of industrialized violence, land seizure, and genocide, and the latter, the micro events of cultural entropy, are placed side by side because they are both products of an underpinning system that is winding its way, sometimes shuffling and sometimes leaping,

163 Hume, Kathryn, "The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*" in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.178.

164 Ibid, p.183.

165 Merchant, *Reinventing Eden,* p.59. As we have noted, a descendant of this rhetoric, much changed but bearing an unmistakable familial likeness, is deployed against those who Barber places under the banner of 'Jihad'.

166 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* pp.374-5.

167 Hume, "The Religious and Political Vision", p.183.

towards a societal, Americanising heat-death. As above, so below. Cultural critiques of this sort would more often than not be attributed to reactionaries, portending the end of civilization and Western culture or values. Although there are structural similarities to Pynchon's critique, he posits something different: civilization is a process that ends in an all-encompassing, sterilized Western capitalist culture – a uniformity on Scarsdale Vibe's terms. Rather than Western civilization coming to an end, Pynchon argues that Western civilization *is* the end which threatens all other cultures and modes of life. Macro events often precede micro on the slow march toward this uniformity. We see one example of this in *V.*'s Esther Harvitz. The Jewish Esther, whose internal monologue reveals an obsessive concern with the 'delinquent wilderness', a place of 'darkness' and 'mugging, raping, killing', gets a rhinoplasty which is explicitly framed as an act of ethnic erasure.[168] The surgeon, based in Germantown, gives her 'a Jew nose in reverse' whilst speaking in German and mock-German: 'Scheisse!', 'Now ve shorten das septum, ja'.[169] Esther is depicted as having internalized the impulse toward rationalization and homogenization, seeking out an 'ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations', an ideal which Joanna Freer notes as unmistakably 'Westernized.'[170] Her disparaging view regarding the uncivilized 'delinquents' is the same view foundational to the project of *American Progress,* but what is to be tamed is no longer the 'virgin' land of the New World, but Esther's ethnic body. Esther's story has a contemporary parallel in the South Korean culture of plastic surgery, which Laura Kurek traces back to shortly after the Korean War. She explains that David Ralph Millard's pioneering new 'Caucasianizing' surgeries found a willing consumer base in Koreans who 'sought to emulate the people they now associated with influence, money, and power': the occupying Americans.[171] Such self-homogenizations have, then, real-world examples.

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168 Pynchon, Thomas, *V.* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.96-7. It can be convincingly argued that the depiction of Esther buys into anti-Semitic tropes of the 'self-loathing Jew' – Pynchon's later books tend to do a better job of handling sensitive subjects than *V.,* as the author likely agrees. The *Against the Day* ret-conning of the death he wrote for La Jarretière back in *V.* suggests the elder Pynchon may have some regrets about his more vulgar, juvenile approach to the treatment of women and minorities in his first novel.

169 Ibid, p.107. The surgeon's name, Schoenmaker, is Dutch rather than German, which reflects the origins of the settlers who founded Germantown.

170 Ibid, p.103; Joanna Freer, "Pynchon, Gender, and Relational Ethics" in *The New Pynchon Studies,* ed. Freer, Joanna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.96.

171 Laura Kurek, 'Eyes Wide Cut' in *The Wilson Quarterly* [https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/transitions/eyes-wide-cut-the-american-origins-of-koreas-plastic-surgery-craze/] [Accessed 29 March 2021]. This micro phenomenon was emerging first at a time during which the United States was embarking on a macro policy of restructuring the South Korean economy for their own ends. For more information on this transformation in the material base, see Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), pp.299-341.

Pynchon spends greater time and care in the depiction of another self-homogenization – or rather self-extermination – in *Gravity's Rainbow.* The Otukungurua, a faction of the Hereros living in Europe, displaced from their former home in modern-day Namibia, become set on the idea of racial suicide, and finishing 'the exterminations the Germans began in 1904.'[172] This proposed peaceable end to the Herero people, brought about not by violent means but by refraining from procreation, is argued to be 'a final zero to a collective history fully lived', moving the entire Herero people into a happy afterlife beyond the clutches of the colonisers who have so mistreated them.[173] This race suicide plotline is not entirely a fiction, but rather Pynchon adapts it from the real history documented by white Afrikaner settler Willem Petrus Steenkamp, who looked on with confusion and perturbation as the Herero population dwindled. Pynchon jeers at those like Steenkamp, noting with derision that the 'more rational men of medicine' were unable to attribute the (supposedly) self-willed Herero birth decline to their own actions, and instead chalked it up to 'a deficiency of Vitamin E in the diet'.[174] Opposing the Otukungurua in their pursuit of racial suicide is the half-Herero, half-European Enzian Oberst, the novel's primary protagonist amongst the Herero characters. Enzian mulls over the morals and theological significance of the proposed racial suicide in a confused and fragmentary manner. In the midst of his philosophical considerations, he is described as sitting 'between a pair of candles just lit, his gray field-jacket open at the neck, beard feathering down his dark throat to shorter, sparser glossy black hairs that go running in a whirl, iron filings about the south pole of his Adam's apple … pole … axis … axle-tree … Tree … Omumborombanga … Mukuru … first ancestor … Adam ...'.[175] Steven Weisenburger points out that, in the religion of the Herero people, Omumborombanga is a Tree of Life, and that Mukuru is the Adamic figure of the first ancestor.[176] It is fitting that Enzian draws on the Christian origin myth here, as the Otukungurua's mission resembles that which was proposed by Milton's Eve after the Fall: 'Childless thou art, childless remain: / So Death shall be deceived his glut, and with us two / Be forced to satisfy his rav'nous maw.'[177] Like Milton's Adam, Enzian resists the nihilistic project of death. Despite the Fall from a past in Southwest Africa that was free from the colonialist and capitalist incursions of History, Enzian's ethos, like Adam's, is life-affirming.

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172 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.377.
173 Ibid, p.379.
174 Ibid, p.378.
175 Ibid, p.383. Ellipses Pynchon's.
176 Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources & Contexts for Pynchon's Novel* (Athens, Georgia: Georgia University Press, 1988), p.165.
177 Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.243.

In accordance with the tragic depiction of Esther's internalization of a Western compulsion towards ethnic erasure, the Otukungurua's racial suicide mission, introduced as a perhaps valid philosophical outlook, is revealed as something monstrous. Arriving at the basement room where a couple expecting a Herero child had been staying, Enzian discovers only the post-abortion bloodstains on the sheets. It is stated that the couple

> meant to have the child. Then Josef Ombindi and his people [the Otukungurua] started their visiting. They have learned their vulturehood from the Christian missionaries. They keep lists of all the women of child-bearing age. Any pregnancy is an invitation to hover, to tune in, to swoop. They will use threats, casuistry, physical seduction – there's an arsenal of techniques. Washing-blue is the abortifacient of choice.[178]

In his connecting of the techniques used by the Otunkungurua and the Christian missionaries Enzian demonstrates his belief that the mission for racial suicide is, as Sue J. Kim notes, 'a result of *adopting,* rather than rejecting the colonizers' logic.'[179] Rather than carrying out an act of rebellion, the Otunkungurua are using the master's tools to deconstruct their own house. This is quite literal in the case of washing-blue, which Weisenburger points out was a dyestuff product of IG Farben.[180] By sourcing their abortifacient from IG Farben, the chemical cartel infamous both for the utilisation of slave labour from the Nazi concentration camps and supplying those very same camps with poison gas, the Otunkungurua and their supposedly self-willed auto-ethnic cleansing become complicit in the Holocaust.

All of these elements (Esther's nosejob, IG Farben and the Holocaust, Adam and Eve) become synthesized through Pynchon's evocation of Friedrich August Kekulé and humanity's Fall into the Plastic Age. The character of Franz Pökler, a German chemical engineer working on the Nazi rocket programme, daydreams about the discovery of the structure of the Benzene molecule, a revelation which came to Kekulé in a dream of his own, an image of the serpent Ouroboros eating its own tail; the Benzene molecule was circular.[181] In the dream, Pökler's former professor asks 'Who sent this new serpent to our ruinous garden, already too fouled, too crowded to qualify as any locus of innocence'.[182] Pökler notes that without this new serpent, there would be no IG Farben.[183] We know, too, with historical hindsight, that without this serpent there would have been

178 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow,* p.615.
179 Kim, Sue J., *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.109.
180 Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion,* p.227.
181 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow,* p.491
182 Ibid*,* p.491.
183 Ibid, p.489.

no atomic bomb. Hume notes that 'The new serpent in the garden thus offers us power, but as before, we choose how to respond, choose to invent the synthetics'.[184] As in the case of *Against the Day,* and of the Commune in *Vineland, Gravity's Rainbow* offers further episodes in Pynchon's declensionist history, his series of lapsarian moments, and therefore relies on the potent symbolism of Eden and the Fall.

Pökler embodies the ideals of the Recovery of Eden narrative, and his story arc resolves when he is forced to face the horrifying reality of what he has actually been working towards. He initially resists his wife's accusation that his work on the rocket is being used to kill people, asserting that 'We'll all use *it* someday, to leave the earth. To transcend'.[185] Pökler believes that the end-point of his endeavours will be the escape to some science-born cosmic Eden. However, as Hume notes, 'The paradisal, amateur stage of rocket development gives way' when Pökler loses faith in the benevolence of his government.[186] Ultimately, as far from transcendence as imaginable, he comes face-to-face with the consequences of the science he believed to be apolitical. Seeing a victim of the Holocaust for the first time, a dying woman in Camp Dora, a slave labourer who had toiled on the manufacture of the rockets, Pökler makes the futile gesture of giving her his wedding ring.[187] Made of gold, the ring stands in stark contrast to its Benzene counterpart, discovered by Kekulé. Whilst a potent gesture, handing over a memento of a human connection and a happier time, it is nevertheless futile; the woman will not survive.

Camp Dora, like Auschwitz, counted amongst its inmates many from the Nazi-occupied countries of eastern and south-eastern Europe. Imported en masse by train, the story of these inmates brings the Balkan railroads back into the declensionist history. The same railroad lines which Pynchon depicts as a casus belli at the beginning of the twentieth-century become part of the infrastructure of the Nazi industrialized death machine decades later. As Glenny explains, the Austrians' 'great enterprise had created a dense web of railway lines which linked all parts of central and eastern Europe with the Balkans. It had brought commerce and prosperity to Salonika. Half a century later, the Sephardim of the city were taken by these same tracks from their southern tip to the northern terminus of Kraków.'[188] Knowing the full history of the Balkan railroads gives further meaning to Webb Traverse's view that 'the railroad had always been the enemy, going back

184 Hume, Kathryn, *Pynchon's Mythologies: An Approach to Gravity's Rainbow* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp.66-7.
185 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.475.
186 Hume, *Pynchon's Mythologies,* p.101.
187 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow,* p.514.
188 Glenny, *The Balkans,* p.516.

generations. Farmers, stockmen, buffalo-hunting Indians, track-laying Chinamen, passengers in train wrecks, whoever you were out there, sooner or later you had some bad history with the railroad', and to his son Frank's consideration that the railroad 'took away everything indiscriminately, to be sold, to be slaughtered, to be led beyond the reach of love.'[189] Pynchon depicts a history in which the advances of technology and science, rather than bringing about prosperity and a Recovery of Eden, have brought about an age in which mankind is not only estranged from a more human set of living conditions, but has constructed a transnational apparatus of inhumanity. As Hume notes of *Gravity's Rainbow,* 'The novel's very title – with the same sort of condensation of meaning present everywhere in the text – suggests Pynchon's concerns: science, trajectories, inevitable declension toward the grave'.[190] We are all riding Gravity's Rainbow, descending at an exponential rate down towards the explosive point of impact. In a similar manner, we might note that while some critics read Pynchon's use of the letter 'V' as a symbol for an opening up of possibility, expanding out from one point, by this declensionist reading it would better be understood as a symbol for a convergence, for a whole universe of difference narrowing down towards the an absolute and final zero.

As mentioned earlier, Pynchon's critique of cultural entropy differs from similar critiques made by the mainstream right in that he asserts that the West (and the United States in particular) is the perpetrator, distinct from the more typical assertion that the West is the victim of cultural decay. However, it is worth acknowledging that there are certainly anti-Enlightenment thinkers on the right, and amongst them those who blame Western civilization for its own decline. Pynchon's worldview, perhaps surprisingly, has structural similarities (and particularities) in common with these thinkers. The anti-Enlightenment politics of Pynchon's novels are more typically placed alongside those of the Frankfurt School, as Joe Kennedy's does succinctly in his disparaging remark that *Gravity's Rainbow* is merely Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* 'with dick jokes'.[191] Referring to Pynchon, then, who can be so easily quoted and admired by the hosts of such an unapologetically left-wing podcast as *Chapo Trap House,* and asserting that it is better to place him into alignment with the Traditionalists, all seems misguided. However, there are striking affinities between the Postmodernist anti-Enlightenment we see in Pynchon and that of the Traditionalists. We can see

189 Pynchon, *Against the Day* pp.94-5; Ibid, p.1044.
190 Hume, *Pynchon's Mythologies,* p.220.
191 Joe Kennedy on *Twitter*, [https://twitter.com/joekennedy81/status/1193249371590156289] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

this through a consideration of the view of the Traditionalist Huston Smith, here discussed by Mark Sedgwick: 'Postmodernists, he wrote, were right to "see through scientism" – but wrong because "the question of our time is no longer how to take things apart, but how to work responsibly at reassembling them."'[192] Hume suggests that along these lines Pynchon does some level of reassembling, or at least traditional restructuring, when she states that 'Yes, Pynchon *is* postmodernist and deconstructive, but also relies heavily on very traditional structures to make some of his points.'[193] Hume was amongst the first to iconoclastically challenge the cherished notion that Pynchon was purely deconstructive, only ever besieging truth rather than seeking to affirm it. In asserting that there is a schema to understanding his works, and one which relies on myth and tradition at that, Hume posits Pynchon as a Postmodernist who 'gets it right' in the way Huston Smith acknowledged, without necessarily 'getting it wrong' either.

Traditionalists, whose best known thinkers include their founder René Guénon, the influential Religious Studies scholar Mircea Eliade, and the self-described 'superfascist' Julius Evola, believe in the 'Perennial Philosophy', the notion that 'All religions shared a common origin in a single perennial (or primeval or primordial) religion that had subsequently taken a variety of forms, including the Zoroastrian, Pharaoric, Platonic, and Christian.'[194] The Traditionalists allege that over time the perennial religion, which disclosed divine Truth and Wisdom to humanity, has split off into other traditions, but fragments of the divine Truth still exist in each of them. This core premise, whilst commensurate with a pluralism which sees value in all of the world's major religions (reflected in the numerous religions practised by Traditionalists), ends up as the foundation for a deep antagonism toward both multiculturalism, which it posits as threatening the final dissolution of the Truth into a tradition-less melting pot, and toward capitalism as a system that is eclipsing spirituality from the world, and replacing it with market-oriented materialism. The former antagonism has endeared Traditionalism to the alt-right and ethno-nationalists (Evola is a favoured philosopher for figures including Steve Bannon and Richard Spencer). Although Pynchon certainly does not advance or endorse this sort of politics in his novels, the latter antagonism is prevalent throughout, as we have seen. It is perhaps through this connection that Pynchon derives an interest in Traditionalism – and I allege that there is evidence of interest.

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192 Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.166, quoting from Huston Smith, "Bubble Blown and Lived In: A Theological Autobiography," *Dialog* 33. No. 4 (Fall 1994).

193 Hume, *Pynchon's Mythographies,* p.xiii.

194 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World,* p.24.

There are various episodes of Pynchon which could be fruitfully analysed with an eye to Traditionalist philosophy. These include Pynchon's choice to name the resident mystic at the T. W. I. T., who conducts their seances, after Madame Blavatsky, whose Theosophical Society was an early influence in Guénon's Perennial Philosophy. Another is the *Gravity's Rainbow* episode in which several characters go on a 'White Lotos Day pilgrimage' to commemorate the anniversary of (the real life) Blavatsky's death.[195] Elsewhere, we might question the prevalence of references to the 'holy Center' in the latter half of *Gravity's Rainbow,* a concept best associated with the Perennialist Yeats and 'The Second Coming', but just as relevant to the philosophy of Eliade.[196] Likewise, Pynchon's description of the Bodenplatte, the steel launching pad of the Rocket, as the 'axis of a particular Earth' evokes another concept of particular interest to Eliade, the *axis mundi.*[197] As Weisenburger explains, 'In most mythologies, the *axis mundi* becomes a meeting place for all the cosmic regions: heaven, earth, and hell. In the Christian mythology it is the site where Adam and Eve were created and buried, as well as the site where Christ was crucified.'[198] Each of these episodes within Pynchon bears the mark of engagement with Perennialist and Traditionalist history and philosophy. Although I will not here delve deeper into these examples, I hope they demonstrate that there is consideration to be given to this line of inquiry. The example which I will elaborate on, which best brings the likeness of Pynchon's worldview and that of the Traditionalists into relief, is also one which links both to the ideology underpinning the supposed 'populist turn' of 2016. Matthew d'Ancona has written that in order the understand the 'landscape of Brexit, Donald Trump's victory, and the global surge of the far right' then one has to be aware of 'Putin's Rasputin', the Traditionalist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin.[199] Similarly Paul Knott, in his sensationally titled article "Meet the most dangerous man in the world", notes that Bannon 'has regularly expressed his support for Dugin's Eurasianist ideology', and that Trump 'is actively engaged in fulfilling Dugin and Putin's agenda'.[200] These popular, digestible pieces are certainly primarily interested in Dugin for the efficacy of the symbol of the shadowy Russian, whispering into the ear of the all-powerful strongman, betrayed by their over-indulgence in detailing these

195 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow,* p.321.
196 Ibid, p.602.
197 Ibid, p.894
198 Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion,* p.314
199 Matthew d'Ancona, *The Guardian,* "Putin and Trump could be on the same side in this new world order" [https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2016/dec/19/trump-putin-same-side-new-world-order] [Accessed 29 March 2021].
200 Paul Knott, *The New European,* "Meet the most dangerous man in the world" [https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/most-dangerous-man-world-paul-knott-putin-fascist-philosopher-1-5703698] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

exact traits. However, a closer look at his actual ideas reveals some striking similarities to those which feature in Pynchon's novels.

In *Inherent Vice,* the occasional digressions to the topic of the theorised (and debunked) sunken continent of Lemuria, which was an interest of both Blavatsky and Evola, lead to an interesting stray thought of Doc Sportello's. Doc ponders the Vietnam War as a contest waged by the descendants of the two great civilizations that sunk beneath the waves, the Lemurian, and the Atlantic, and 'Nixon a descendant of Atlantis just as Ho Chi Minh was of Lemuria'.[201] This unusual framing of West and East bears a strong resemblance to that of Dugin. Sedgwick explains that geopolitical theory, popularised first in the early twentieth-century by Halford Mackinder, 'pits an Atlantic bloc, comprising maritime nations predisposed toward free trade and democratic liberalism, against a central and eastern continental Eurasian bloc, more inclined toward centralism and spirituality.'[202] Dugin, author of *The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia* (1997)*,* continues down the path originally marked by Mackinder. It would, therefore, make sense that Pynchon would be aware of, and allude to, his ideas; after all, as Gerry Kearns notes, Renfrew and Werfner are 'thinly disguised' Mackinders, so some engagement with the latest torchbearer of his geopolitical thought is not out of the blue.[203] While the Eurasian bloc has been restyled into the Lemurian, the Atlantic bloc retains its traditional appellation. Sedgwick goes on to explain that 'the Atlantic bloc can easily be identified with the *kali yuga'*, the age of 'terminal decline' in Hindu conceptions of cyclical time, and the age in which Traditionalists posit that we currently live.[204] Although Doc likes to imagine that he and his neighbours on the beaches are the descendants of Lemurian refugees, aligned against the Atlantic bloc, against the imperial materialism of the *kali yuga,* his acknowledgement that his State's former senator is a 'descendant of Atlantis' betrays his understanding that the hippie spirituality and counterculture of California are not alternatives to the system, but merely exist within it.[205] Richard Nixon, Californian, son of Atlantis, emblem of the *kali yuga,* stands at the end of Gravity's Rainbow, and *Gravity's Rainbow*. He is, after all, quite literally amongst those who are blown up at the end of the book when the Rocket reaches the end of its declensionist trajectory.[206] Although in Pynchon's latter novels, it is

201 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice,* p.109.
202 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World,* p.226
203 Gerry Kearns, "Geography, geopolitics and Empire," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35*. No. 2 (April 2010), p.187.
204 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World,* p.226; p.28.
205 Pynchon, *Inherent Vice,* pp.108-9.
206 Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* pp.895-8; pp.901-2.

clear that the trajectory of decline is still ongoing, Nixon still holds weight as a symbol of how low things have gotten.

Another parallel between Pynchon and Dugin can be seen in their treatment of 9/11. In similar fashion to that of Pynchon's implication that the 2001 attacks have a counterpart in the attack which sparked World War One, Dugin 'wrote that the planes that destroyed the Twin Towers were "the swallows of the apocalypse," parallels to the bullets from the gun of Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo in 1914 that ignited the First World War.'[207] A shared understanding exists between Pynchon and the Traditionalists of the tectonic events of history engendering further decline. Whilst Robin explains the sadistic-optimistic view of those who thought 9/11 would be a 'necessary corrective' to America's malaise, Pynchon and Dugin alike see that such a devastating event will only beget further devastation; micro begets macro. The structural similarities of these two worldviews, however, do crumble when considering the conclusions each draw from the events they behold. Pynchon observes the further advance of materialism and rationalism in the wake of 9/11, lamenting that

> The atrocity site, which one would have expected to become sacred or at least inspire a little respect, swiftly becomes occasion instead for open-ended sagas of wheeling and dealing, bickering and badmouthing over its future as real estate, all dutifully celebrated as "news" in the Newspaper of Record.[208]

Meanwhile, Dugin endorses a man who did not even wait until September 12 before going live to discuss how the destruction of the World Trade Centre had made his property at 40 Wall Street into the tallest building in downtown Manhattan.[209] This same Dugin-endorsed man then claimed money back from the 9/11 Recovery Fund, despite 40 Wall Street not having actually sustained damage from the attacks.[210] 'In Trump we trust!' Dugin declares in an online video for his followers.[211] Robin notes, regarding the compensation distributed to the families of 9/11 victims, that

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207 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World,* p.237.

208 Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge,* p.328.

209 Ryan Bort, "Trump's Bizarre History with 9/11", *Rolling Stone,* [https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-9-11-story-722430/] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

210 Tessa Stuart, "How Donald Trump Cashed in on 9/11", *Rolling Stone,* [https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/how-donald-trump-cashed-in-on-9-11-105833/] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

211 Alexander Dugin, 'Dugin's Guideline – In Trump We Trust'*, YouTube,* [https://youtu.be/gzbGRs6ePSI] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

> The family of a single sixty-five-year-old grandmother earning $10,000 a year – perhaps a minimum-wage kitchen worker – would draw $300,000 from the fund, while the family of a thirty-year-old Wall Street Trader would get $3,870,064. The men and women killed on September 11 were not citizens of a democracy; they were earners, and rewards would be distributed accordingly.[212]

The material-minded never sleep, as both Pynchon and the Traditionalists understand. The difference between them is that Pynchon remains steadfast in his criticism. Dugin, however, sees in one of the most cynical profiteers an ideological ally. If Pynchon has drawn from Traditionalism, then his synthesis of those ideas retains an internal consistency which his right-wing fellow travellers are prone to discard at their convenience. Through this understanding of the similarities and differences of two thinkers like Pynchon and Dugin, it becomes clearer why those who are nostalgic-Utopian, or generally sceptical of narratives of Enlightenment or progress, can find a welcoming home on either the political left or right. Necessarily, nostalgic-Utopianism is a politics of alternatives; in one way or another its adherents stand in opposition to the status quo. Amongst these adherents we find both socialists and reactionaries, in a seeming realisation of the much-mocked idea of 'horseshoe theory'. A significant difference between left and right nostalgic-Utopianism, however, is that where the rightist may genuinely mourn for a bygone era as-it-was, the leftist does not forget the woes and the horrors of the past, and simply mourns for an era in which the opportunities for a brighter future were not so fully eclipsed, a time when the singular point of the V did not seem so close at hand. Regardless, the structure of nostalgic-Utopianism across the political spectrum is not so different. Kingsnorth's inclusion of the Postmodernist author on his list of naysayers is an entirely just inclusion indeed.

212 Robin, *The Reactionary Mind,* p.218.

On the Declension and Fall of Languages

Across the previous two sections I hope to have accurately described a cultural conception regarding decline, and the associated valorization of past ways of life. This nostalgic-Utopian worldview can coexist with many other political positions, but the discontent with the status quo which it entails necessarily positions it as oppositional to hegemonic neoliberal centrism. This worldview is often accompanied by anti-Enlightenment sentiment, and apprehensions of homogenization, decline, and irretrievable loss. Valorization of the past is the key rhetorical device for those who see History as eclipsing the good from the world, whether that good is in the life lived outside of a matrix of private property and Europeanized consumer culture, as it is for Pynchon; whether it is in the Perennial Philosophy that offers mankind access to spiritual truth, as it is for the Traditionalists; or whether it is simply having a local shop for local people, as it is for Kingsnorth. Similarly, attributions of value and 'authenticity' to past ways of life, and to those still living in accordance with those ways, seem to derive their potency from a perceived proximity to nature (and ergo human nature), or to a theorised common origin, which can be of various different sorts. As Torgovnick observes, 'Our need for the primitive to be eternally present accounts in part for the anxiety often expressed by anthropologists and adventurers about the speed with which primitive societies vanish. The primitive must be available or our "origins" may no longer be retrievable, re-creatable.'[213] Amongst the many instances of Western thought's engagement with notions of the primitive which Torgovnick details, she places Homer's account of the cyclops as one of the earliest, and attributes to it an enduring influence: 'In a sense, the West's history with regard to primitives is anticipated in Homer's *The Odyssey,* when Odysseus meets Polyphemus.'[214] Fittingly, the story the cave-dwelling cyclops has been modernised into a stellar example of the themes and topics discussed in this essay up to this point, as well as introducing a focus on the final topics to be discussed: language, and national literature. Rather than to Homer's Polyphemus, we shall look to Joyce's.

As with the vast majority of the characters and symbols from *The Odyssey,* Polyphemus has a corresponding character in *Ulysses*: 'the citizen'. As we saw earlier in relation to Yitzhak's speech, attitudes toward the figure of the ('Good') citizen can share a likeness to attitudes toward the noble savage, the industrial worker, and so on. This is due to the citizen's status as endangered, at

213 Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive,* p.187.
214 Ibid, p.23.

risk of falling in amongst the ranks of the archetypes of the past; citizenship may quickly find itself obsolete in a world increasingly governed by transnational economic currents, rather than through the locus of the nation-state receptive to the democratically expressed wishes of its subjects. Although Joyce writes prior to the postwar acceleration of globalisation, he perhaps predicts that the solidity of this social being will melt into air, as he aligns *Ulysses*'s citizen with an array of figures already eclipsed from the world. Despite in actuality being set in the same pub, all in the same moment, the 'Cyclops' chapter takes its readers on a journey through time.

Joyce begins the episode by depicting the citizen as a tribal warrior: 'A couched spear of acuminated granite rested by him while at his feet reposed a savage animal of the canine tribe whose stertorous gasps announced that he was sunk in uneasy slumber, a supposition confirmed by hoarse growls and spasmodic movements which his master repressed from time to time by tranquillising blows of a mighty cudgel rudely fashioned out of paleolithic stone.'[215] This ancestral figure is placed in connection with an even longer-gone past, as a row of seastones hanging from his girdle are graven with 'the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity', including, as we might note, Adam and Eve, and the Last of the Mohicans.[216] (It is, however, hard to say exactly how much can be read into the individuals depicted on these seastones, as some of the names listed are surely there purely for the sake of humour or bafflement. Captain Boycott is after all a most unusual Irish hero of antiquity.) The citizen appears in various different guises throughout the episode, each corresponding to a different era. Likewise, so does the setting. Barney Kiernan's pub on Little Britain Street is taken on a journey through time, at one stage as 'the land of holy Michan' in 'Inisfail the fair', and later on a 'rustic hostelry'.[217] It could be reasonably assumed that a contemporary adaptation of this chapter would see Barney Kiernan's converted into a copy-and-paste BrewCo pub, of the sort which Kingsnorth despises, with the same few lagers as every other pub in Northside. Indeed it would be fitting, as the main thrust of the conversation which proceeds amongst the patrons, the citizen chief amongst them, is on the topic of the decline of the distinctly Irish, and even of homogenization specifically. The citizen is also, in a manner that can be likened to that of both Pynchon and the Traditionalists, not at all a fan of the process of civilization, or 'syphilisation', as he calls it. It is a remark more than reminiscent of the Chum of Chance's comment about California nights becoming 'infected' with

215 Joyce, James, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.285.
216 Ibid, pp.284-5.
217 Ibid, p.282; p.322.

light. Indeed, the fact that this chapter and its cast take refuge in long bygone eras goes hand-in-hand with their bemoaning of a dilapidated present.

Having already been linked with past tribal societies, the day-drinkers discuss with contempt how 'the *Times* rubbed its hands and told the whiteliveried Saxons there would soon be as few Irish in Ireland as redskins in America.'[218] With the Great Famine seventy years prior, and the steady depopulation that followed, there is a context here which would engender real concern, and the Saxon triumphalism of the *Times* would be pouring salt in a festering wound. Alongside the disappearance of the Irish people, the patrons highlight the disappearance of native Irish trees, a topic they go then expound upon at some length.

> -As treeless as Portugal we'll be soon, says John Wyse, or Heligoland with its one tree if something is not to reafforest the land. Larches, firs, all the trees of the conifer family are going fast. I was reading a report of lord Castletown's…
>
> - Save them, says the citizen, the giant ash of Galway and the chieftan elm of Kildare with a fortyfool bole and an acre of foliage. Save the trees of Ireland for the future men of Ireland on the fair hills of Eire, O.[219]

There are abundant other references to trees throughout this chapter, but in particular there is an unusual and lengthy passage detailing a wedding in which every guest bears the name of a tree: Lady Sylvester Elmshade, Mrs Barbara Lovebirch, Mrs Poll Ash, Mrs Holly Hazeleyes, and so on. Bridgitte L. Sandquist notes that the joyous occasion of the 'Tree Wedding', of a community coming together to celebrate human connection, takes on additional significance due to its placement in 'the midst of a highly charged discussion about Ireland's forests and the economic and political stakes of their loss.'[220] Sandquist situates this passage firmly within the economic and political context of the time, explaining that

> By 1904, forestland, once a rich natural resource, was only a little more than one percent of the land of Ireland. The forests were gradually stripped by the English and left to become bogs and swamps. In this context, we can see how the Tree Wedding catalogue functions as a massive effort of verbal "reforestation," rhetorically fulfilling the Citizen's verbal plea to "save the forests."[221]

218 Ibid, p.316.
219 Ibid, p.313.
220 Bridgitte L. Sandquist, "The Tree Wedding in 'Cyclops' and the Ramifications of Cata-Logic," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 33. No. 2 (Winter 1996), p.202.
221 Ibid, p.203.

The marsh gases unleashed by these developments would go on to explode in the Easter Rising of 1916, twelve years later. Largely, this is besides the point. What is interesting about this focus on trees, and truly does turn this passage into a 'verbal reforestation', is that 'the catalogue takes on weightier rhetorical and political significance' when we remember that 'the letters of the Irish alphabet are the names of trees'.[222] Sandquist's observation here allows us to understand these passages as skilfully connecting the colonial exploitation of the land and its ecological devastation, the decline of the Irish populace, and the withering of the native language.

Language is another topic the drinkers explicitly discuss: 'So then the citizen begins talking about the Irish language and the corporation meeting and all that and the shoneens that can't speak their own language'.[223] The shoneens, the little John Bulls, Irish who aspire to mimicry of English culture, have earned the citizen's ire. It is also through the invocation of language as a symbol that Joyce develops the citizen's prejudice against Bloom, who is Jewish and a second-generation Hungarian immigrant. Toward the end of the chapter, Bloom is reimagined as a visiting statesman, styled as 'Nagyaságos uram Lipóti Virag', about to begin his journey back to 'Százharminczbrojúgulyas-Dugulás'.[224] Bloom is othered by means of language. Leopold Bloom, at a pinch, might fit in at the Tree Wedding; the distinctly Hungarian Lipóti Virag would certainly not. Neither Bloom nor Virag, however, would be allowed to fit in at Barney Kiernan's; the patrons harbour vitriolic xenophobic attitudes. Referring to Bloom, the citizen states that 'Saint Patrick would want to land again at Ballykinlar and convert us', because of their 'allowing things like that to contaminate our shores.'[225] Placed opposite of Saint Patrick, Bloom is cast here as a snake, a foundational antagonist of Ireland, and the citizen evidently regrets the collective mistake of not putting up hair ropes to keep his like away. With this anti-Semitism and exclusionism in mind, we might reasonably posit that Yitzhak's Good Citizen and the citizen of Barney Kiernan's pub are one and the same. Although there are aspects of the patrons' discourse that are truly sympathetic – the engineered famine and deforestation are atrocities that should never be inflicted upon any people, and the retreat of the language is a compounding cultural tragedy – but their justified anger is here unjustifiably taken out upon an innocent man from a marginal community. The bad History that the patrons have experienced has not led them to a thoughtful Pynchonism, but a reactionary Duginism.

222 Ibid, p.200.
223 Joyce, *Ulysses*, p.297.
224 Ibid, p.328.
225 Ibid, p.324.

Despite their condemnation of the shoneens, their attacks and xenophobic bile against Bloom, and their general pontification on 'the revival of ancient Gaelic sports and the importance of physical culture, as understood in ancient Greece and ancient Rome and ancient Ireland, for the development of the race', the patrons are hypocrites, and engage in Irish culture and tradition less than they would prefer to think.[226] This is first foreshadowed in the 'Inisfail the fair' setting, where the trees are described so: 'In the mild breezes of the west and of the east the lofty trees wave in different directions their first class foliage, wafty sycamore, the Lebanonian cedar, the exalted planetree, the eugenic eucalyptus and other ornaments of the arboreal world with which that region is thoroughly well supplied'.[227] The 'Lebanonian cedar' may alert the reader that none of these trees, not the sycamore, the platanus, nor even the inappropriately styled 'eugenic' eucalyptus are native to Ireland at all. This depiction of ancient Ireland, with its ancient Irish name, is far from as Irish as it may at first seem.

Joyce develops the disparity between the very 'Irish' Ireland which the patrons pine for and the reality they live day-to-day; the citizen yearns for the bygone days when Ireland had better continental trade, and one could drink 'Spanish ale in Galway'.[228] These nostalgic-Utopian visions, although supposedly specifically Irish, betray the personal preferences and bigotries of the patrons. Sean Latham, quoting Declan Kibberd, explains that 'the interruptions in this episode offer a way to represent "the instability of Irish literary tradition" and perhaps even the impossibility of fashioning a pure or authentic Irish identity since this "scene set in Little Britain Street indicts an Ireland which is hardly its own authentic self so much as a not-England."' [229] With an understanding of the impossibility of a 'pure or authentic Irish literary tradition', or any pure or authentic Irish tradition at all, we can understand the patrons as denoting 'Irishness' to those things that they approve of, and 'non-Irishness' to those things which they do not. Underpinning their musings are the preconceived notions that Spanish ale is good, and the second-generation Jewish-Hungarian immigrant is bad. Perhaps the most clear demonstration of their hypocrisy is once again conducted through the means of language. Their denunciations of the shoneens, who 'can't speak their own language', are all in English. Well, all but one: '*Conspuez les Anglais! Perfide Albion!*', declares one of the patrons.[230] Even when choosing to spurn English in their denunciations of the coloniser, it is

226 Ibid, p.303.
227 Ibid, p.282.
228 Ibid, p.314.
229 Latham, Sean, 'Interruption: "Cyclops" and "Nausicaa"' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, ed. Latham, Sean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.144.
230 Joyce, *Ulysses*, p.311.

still not Irish to which they turn. Their discourse is revealed as rhetoric without substance, and rhetoric not even in their native tongue.

We will return to *Ulysses,* but first it is worth taking the time to consider exactly where language (and national literature) fits within the nostalgic-Utopianist schema. And language does indeed stand, truly potently, for authentic rootedness, and continuity with the past. As Benedict Anderson explains, 'No one can give the date for the birth of any language. Each looms up imperceptibly out of a horizonless past. […] Languages thus appear rooted beyond almost anything else in contemporary societies. At the same time, nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language.'[231] Anderson's key word is 'appears', as languages naturally change over time, and sometimes drastically. Nevertheless, their rooted appearance makes them premier amongst cultural traditions in a people's collective consciousness. It is no small wonder, then, that the English often suggest that without their victorious outcome in the Second World War they would all 'be speaking German today'.[232] In these configurations, the Second World War is construed as a battle not primarily *against* a genocidal fascist regime, but as a battle *for* the continuation of Englishness itself, centred around the upholding of its most symbolic institution: the language.

The idea of the cultural rootedness of language endears the tree metaphor to it, as we see throughout the Cyclops chapter of *Ulysses,* and elsewhere. After the beginning of the French occupation, Kingsnorth's Buccmaster has a lengthy lament, connecting rootedness, trees, and the olde Anglisc language which *The Wake* so faithfully upholds:

> i seen that the names of the folcs of angland was part of anglisc ground lic the treow and rocc and fenn and hyll and I seen that when these names was tacan from the place where they had growan and cast down on other ground and when their place was tacan by names what has no growan from that ground is not of it and can not spece its tunge then a great wrong had been done. Then sum thing deop and eald had been made wrong and though folcs wolde forget cwic the eald gods and the eald places the eald trees and the eald hylls these things wolde not forget what had been broc and how things used to be and sceolde be and one daeg though not in our lifs one daeg all will be made right again[233]

231 Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p.145.
232 Kennedy devotes a chapter of his *Authentocrats* to this phenomenon (pp.109-33).
233 Kingsnorth, *The Wake*, p.164.

The connection of trees, language, and people seems to be one which is easily reached for by writers concerned with identity in a changing world. Our languages, affectively connecting us with our dead, appear as a link with our common origins. When the harmony of trees, language, and people is disturbed it is here presented as 'a great wrong', cutting us off from our common origins, recourse to which must be made by any seeker of a great primordial Truth of human nature. This mode of thinking provides an explanation as to why some Traditionalists have, over the years, chosen to engage in language conservation efforts, as Sedgwick observes.[234] The way in which we think about language, and our inheritance of it, is a vehicle for essentialism.

The repeatedly observable connection between native trees, native people, and native languages allows us to apply the same sort of analysis to perceptions of languages and accents as we applied to perceptions of different groups of people in the first chapter. Just as the farmer, the working-class industrial worker, and the urban renter are attributed positions on a hierarchy of authenticity, so are their modes of speech. Peter Trudgill notes that dialectologists used to deliberately carry out their research in rural areas because 'there was a feeling that hidden somewhere in the speech of older, uneducated people were the 'real' or 'pure' dialects which were steadily being corrupted by the standard variety'.[235] Even within academia and serious professional study, the powerful notion that there is something essential, human, and natural to be found in the peripheral and rural regions of the world-system's totality, influencing thinking and decision-making. The deference to the hierarchy of authentic accents may be even more powerful than to the corresponding hierarchy of stereotypes (farmhand, ex-miner, and so on). As Kennedy describes, through the phenomenon of authentocracy, people who do not belong to an 'authentic' grouping still benefit from their accent-derived associations with it. This is how a wealthy, upper-middle class, higher-educated MP, the daughter of an NHS Confederation deputy chief executive, despite having worked in a professional role at her parents' company, can go unchecked when calling herself working-class, or even when likening herself to a 'scullery maid', all thanks to the connotations of her strong Brummie accent.[236] Accent, like language, functions as a cultural signifier *par excellence* for the reasons which Anderson describes, and those whose accents hark back to the more natural, more human times, which are often projected onto the past, will therefore be viewed as more natural, and more human accordingly.

234 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, p.52.
235 Trudgill, Peter, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction* (New York: Penguin, 1974), p.37.
236 Zoe Williams, 'Jess Phillips: I thought I was quite posh – I've realised I'm basically a scullery maid', *The Guardian*, [https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/feb/03/jess-phillips-i-thought-i-was-quite-posh-ive-realised-im-basically-a-scullery-maid] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

Although there is clearly great irrationality to this perceived connection between language and nature, it must be said that it may not be purely due to the associations with rootedness which Anderson highlights; there is a very real, demonstrable connection between ecology and language. Nettle and Romaine explain that 'Languages are like the miner's canary: where languages are in danger, it is a sign of environmental disaster.'[237] This sits comfortably with our reading of *Ulysses,* in which the deforestation of Ireland and the decline of the Irish language go side by side. Nettle and Romaine point out that the forces underpinning environmental disaster, whether natural or market-driven, tend to be forces which will displace and shatter the linguistic communities living within the affected areas. They give a variety of examples: a volcanic eruption on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa in 1815 which wiped out the Tamboran language and its speakers; the Chernobyl disaster, which through radiation damage to the native reindeer threatened the livelihoods of the Saami people and led to their displacement and subsequent endangerment of their language; the case of the Yahi language, of which the vast majority of of native Californian speakers died when the genocide carried out by the European settlers reached the West Coast.[238] This latter example is one in which the Enlightenment project, and its accompanying land-grab, have directly caused the death of a language, and it is other such examples in which we are interested here. This cause of language death is of particular interest because it is becoming exponentially more common, leading to a faster dwindling of the total number of world languages than has ever been known.

In beginning to properly consider the perceived naturalness of languages, it is worth quoting Nettle and Romaine at length, in their discussion of how languages must be placed within their ecological, economical, and social context (or their 'home'):

> the term *ecology* is a particularly apt one to use in connection with language, in several senses. The world ecology comes from the Greek *oikes,* meaning "home." A language can only thrive to the extent that there is a functioning community speaking it, and passing it on from parent to child at home. A community can only function where there is a decent environment to live in, and a sustainable economic system. To understand why languages are born, and why they die, then, entails looking not just at the languages themselves, but at all aspects of the lives of the people who speak them.

237 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.14.
238 Ibid, p.51; p.48; p.51.

> This is what we mean by an ecological view of society; people are actors in a complex field whose boundaries are set by physical geography and natural resources, by their own knowledge and opportunities, and by the behavior of others around them. A language is enmeshed in a social and geographical matrix just as a rare species is enmeshed in an ecosystem.[239]

We will see later that the arrival of capitalism in a region often constitutes the end of any semblance of simple reproduction, and with it the native 'sustainable economic system,' and so the death of the natives' language follows. For the time being, however, the most striking formulation in this passage is the 'home' of a language, its own particular complex field with boundaries, geographical fixtures, and natural resources. The notion of home has been popping up time and again. From the Good Citizen of Yitzhak's speech, whose self-conception and self-perceived relation to others is grounded in his home ownership, to Heidegger's 'home of being', which Jameson suggests is converted into soulless condominiums in the world of late capitalism, through to the Golden Age of Ovid, in which trees and men remained in their places of origin – their homes – before this natural state was disturbed in the latter Ages of Man, and noteworthily again in Torgovnick's observation that '"going home," like "going primitive," is inescapably a metaphor for the return to origins.'[240] The presence of a language which appears rooted beyond anything else in society attributes to a place the feeling of 'home'. Understood in this way, the old English refrain that had we lost in World War II we would 'all be speaking German today' is tantamount to simply saying 'we would have lost our home', simply wrapped up in the potent symbol of language.

In mirror fashion, the presence of a language which appears transient or imposed attributes to a place the feeling of 'un-home'. A stellar example of this can be made through recourse to Joyce, as the Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* reflects on his use of the English language against an Englishman's same use, mulling over the way that 'The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master* on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.'[241] Reciprocally, the English language is not – and not even the word 'home' itself – at home in Stephen Dedalus's mouth, and nor is Stephen Dedalus at home in a forcibly English-speaking

239 Ibid, p.79
240 Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, p.185.
241 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Penguin: New York, 2016), p.175.

world. It is, for Stephen, an entirely unhomely experience. And so we return to Werfner and the *unheimlich.* Throughout history, languages have been warped (and replaced) as they are torn asunder from their natural social and geographical matrices, and plugged instead into the matrix of meaningful points as according to the planet's unwritten equations of *Eisenbahntüchtigkeit.* In so doing, they lose their homeliness. Speaking of places such as the Amazon rainforest, or the jungles of Papua New Guinea, the unrailworthy places where capitalism has not had any easy inroad, Nettle and Romaine note that 'the pattern of high diversity found in the Pacific and the Americas can be regarded as primordial: that is, close to what we would expect of language in its natural or default state.'[242] These places are perhaps as close to the refuge from the 'certain hidden geometries of History', the 'safe conjugate to all the spill of accursed meridians, passing daily, desolate, one upon the next', which Pynchon depicts his anarchists as dreaming of.[243] It is no coincidence that so many of the native languages of these places have persisted in such enormous numbers (Papua New Guinea, in particular, still remains home to over 800 languages), and that their subsumption into the Enlightenment project matrix remains incomplete. However, in an age during which (very profitable) fires and logging companies ravage what remains of the Amazon, it is evident that the project of progress is still ongoing, and the simple fact that the total eclipse of the native languages from these parts of the world has not yet come to pass does not mean that they are not still in the pipeline.

It is with this in mind that we can see that railworthiness is not just an idea which Pynchon throws into his maximalist novel, but instead is something which does make a tangible, real impact on the world in which we live. For example, the Basque language is the only Western European language to not belong to the Indo-European family, and the reason why is due to an early form of unrailworthiness. The Basque Mountains provided Basque Country with an unrailworthiness that preserved its distinctive language whilst other European language isolates – languages which share no genealogical history at all with other languages – guttered out against the spread of agriculture across the continent. Nettle and Romaine posit that 'Isolates are particularly interesting because they may represent what is left of an area containing much diversity in the past', a diversity which was wiped out by 'the first great linguistic homogenization of history' in the Neolithic era.[244] The onset of agriculture, presumably beginning within the lands of the Kurgan people, who the theorised speakers of the first Indo-European language, signalled the first great land-grab of

242 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.39.
243 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p.420
244 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.36; p.110.

human history.[245] Farms were established wherever possible (and, therefore, not in the Basque Mountains), displacing hunter-gatherers and spreading the Kurgan language further and further afield as more and more land was subsumed into the new agricultural matrix. Once this frontier had closed, with the settlement of farms in the far reaches of both India and the British Isles, the displacement and mass movement of people comes to an end, and the languages began to fragment again over time. Although not covered by Nettle and Romaine, similar stories would have unfolded in East Asia, and Korea's mountains would have played the same protective role as the Basque Country's. To that geography is owed the status of Korean as the world's largest remaining isolate. This is the macro story of language homogenization and fragmentation; it of course, too, has a micro story. Trudgill observes that 'Dialectologists have found that regional-dialect boundaries often coincide with *geographical* barriers, such as mountains, swamps or rivers'.[246] Baugh and Cable also note that during the Romans' occupation of Great Britain, they 'never penetrated far into the mountains of Wales and Scotland', and nor did the Angles and the Saxons many centuries later. The geographical obstacles to conquest explain to a great extent the against-the-odds survival of Welsh and Scottish Gaelic through that time.[247] Observing the way in which the fixtures of the geographic landscape have historically shaped, preserved, or allowed for the destruction of cultures and societies makes it quite clear that the counter-Enlightenment potency to which Pynchon ascribes to wild, mountainous, and densely wooded areas like the Garfagnana is not merely symbolic, but has a basis in history as it was truly lived.

Meanwhile, in the railworthy world a small number of languages have been accumulating unprecedented numbers of speakers. The reasons for the advance of these monolithic languages may initially seem a mystery when considering that the examples of language death hitherto mentioned have been ones of environmental catastrophe, nuclear meltdown, and genocide. Whilst the contemporary world is still one of many horrors, and events of these sorts still occur, they are not so widespread as to be the sole engine of this phenomenon. The work of Alastair Pennycook provides answers. Pennycook states that the advance of global and regional lingua francas has been celebrated and championed by proponents of 'modernization theory', which he summarises as follows:

> This view is essentially evolutionist, suggesting that modernization is a linear path of upward progress, moving from one side of dichotomous constructs – traditional,

245 Baugh and Cable, *A History*, pp.35-6.
246 Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics*, p.34.
247 Baugh and Cable, *A History*, p.42.

> undeveloped, agricultural, rural – to the other – modern, developed, industrial, urban. These distinctions in turn are used to explain the ultimate opposition between traditional/undeveloped and modern/developed societies.[248]

The same antagonist has appeared once again: progress. Aligned with the process of civilization, and the advance from traditional to modern, the adoption of the wider-spoken languages is a development that goes hand-in-hand with the spread of capitalism. Pennycook, who pays special attention to English due to its status as the premier global lingua franca, spoken by more people than any other, also explains that the discourse surrounding the use of English as a global language

> has shifted in accordance with other global changes, and specifically how it has moved from a rhetoric of colonial expansion, through a rhetoric of development aid to a rhetoric of the international free market. English and English teaching in these terms has been considered intrinsically good for the world, a key aspect of global development, and a commodity freely traded on world markets.[249]

English is here situated at the very core of the ongoing Enlightenment project, still articulated in a rhetoric of progression and advance. As David Crystal says, 'There is the closest of links between language dominance and economic, technological and cultural power, too, and this relationship will become increasingly clear as the history of English is told'.[250] From being a colonial institution measuring the colonial control over populations under Imperial rule, to a measurement of control over economic puppet states developed into dependency on the economic metropole, to its present status as a commodity that enables access to the wider market, the story of the spread of English is also the story of the growth and totalization of the world-system. Although much interesting history could be explored regarding these earlier colonial and development aid-based stages, we shall confine our exploration to the contemporary relationship between English and the market.

It is key to understand English, and a specific type of English as we shall see, as not so much the global lingua franca as the lingua franca of the global market. Brian Lennon points out the to-be-expected fact that 'Virtually all books published for distribution in the United States by U.S. trade publishers are published in English, for a readership that by market mandate is presumed monolingual in English', and in so doing touches on the interesting topic of what the market will

248 Pennycook, Alastair, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (New York: Longman, 1994), pp.42-3.
249 Ibid, p.6.
250 Crystal, David, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.7.

and will not allow so far as language usage is concerned.[251] Lennon goes on to explain that the market mandates that publishers keep in mind a global literary readership consisting of 'a presumed monolingual Anglophone readership at home, plus a presumed monolingual non-Anglophone readership abroad', and that these two groups represent 'two sources of pressure for editorial standardization: one directed toward readability for the largest possible Anglophone home readership, and the other toward translatability for the largest possible multinational readership abroad.'[252] Not only must the books released onto the domestic market be in monolingual English, but to allow for a quick and easy dumping onto foreign markets, they must be written in a manner simple enough to allow for quick and easy translations into other languages.

This is a phenomenon to which Minae Mizumura objects to in the strongest terms, albeit regarding her native Japanese publishing industry, which she sees as diluting the specifically Japanese qualities of books produced in the country, and eclipsing any hope for a truly national literature. Mizumura takes a brutal swipe at the *Harry Potter* series, stating that 'Theoretically, a book that becomes such a global phenomenon might be of any quality. It might even be a fine work of literature. More likely, it will leave much to be desired, for to spawn such frenzy, it must reach precisely those people who are not in the habit of reading.'[253] There is a touch of elitism to Mizumura's disdain, but her logic – the market's logic – is quite correct. The truth of her attack is reflected in the replies to any public figure who deigns to tweet out some trite allusion to what House the Sorting Hat would place the hot-topic politician of the hour into, or what their Quidditch role would be; responding to the legions who seem to have read nothing else except for the complete wizarding works of J. K. Rowling, the pleading calls for people to 'Read Another Book' have become a deafening roar.[254] It is a facet of the profiteering nature of the publishing industry that a title selected for publication is more likely to be selected on the basis of its consumer value, rather than on the basis of any other valuation.

Mizumura, who asserts in a familiar fashion that 'Our written language is our ultimate spiritual homeland', unsurprisingly favours other valuations than those purely based on potential

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251 Lennon, Brian, *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) p.9.

252 Ibid.

253 Minae Mizumura, *The Fall of Language in the Age of English*, trans. Yoshihara, Mari and Winters Carpenter, Juliet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p.159.

254 The now-typical response to anybody perceived to be incapable of engaging in analogy without leaning heavily on *Harry Potter* symbols has received its own Urban Dictionary page: [https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=read%20another%20book]. The frustrated anti-Potter analogy community even has its own forum now on Reddit: [https://www.reddit.com/r/ReadADifferentBook/]. [Accessed 29 March 2021].

profit margins.[255] Mizumura leans on the idea of enriching humanity, and contrasts this with the dilapidating effects of the market: 'Ever since the written language became a cultural good that circulates in the form of books, every book has had two different values. On the one hand is its "intrinsic value" - how it enriches humanity in the long run – and on the other hand is its "market value"'.[256] What is meant by 'intrinsic value' is left somewhat inexact here, but we can glean from Mizumura's concern regarding the threat that market forces pose to the distinctly Japanese character of literature-written-in-Japan (so to say, something which would no longer be worthy of the appellation *Japanese literature*) that the preservation of the spiritual homeland constitutes something of intrinsic value. Mizumura's focus on the national language as spiritual homeland perhaps suggests that more of our analysis up to this point, regarding nature and common origins, may factor into her notion of intrinsic value. One piece of evidence suggesting this can be seen in Mizumura's decision to alter the title of her book for its English translation. She explains that 'The book's original title, rendered in English, was "When the Japanese Language Falls: In the Age of English."'[257] Through the subtle change of 'Fall' from a verb to a noun, when turning to address an Anglosphere audience, suddenly invokes the ideas of descent from an originary state which we have hitherto discussed. When a book is so concerned with national and regional culture, it surely follows that the carefully considered translation would deliberately seek to invoke the potent connotations and symbols engendered by the Christian culture and mythography of its new readership.

Part of Mizumura's point is that this level of consideration in translation is not practised in any widespread manner, and that this is down to a great degree to market mandates (although Mizumura does allege that there are other sources of this ongoing disaster including, in quite opposite fashion to her prior denunciations of publishing moguls, the legacy of Marxist academics in Japanese Universities).[258] As Lennon explains, 'To the extent that editorial pressure to write nondifficult English prose, for example, for a "general reader," shapes a seduction discourse of availability to reader-consumers, I will suggest that it touches the question of incommensurability materialized on the page by literary plurilingual "code-switching."'[259] Lennon himself engages in a level of academese that would likely preclude any hope of him reaching *Harry Potter*-level sales, even in a world where more people were interested in the literary criticism of code-switching

255 Mizumura, *The Fall of Language*, p.179.
256 Ibid, p.158.
257 Ibid, p.ix.
258 Ibid, pp.182-3.
259 Lennon, *In Babel's Shadow*, pp.4-5.

fiction. In fact, even in that world, he would be unlikely to rival Crystal and his 'antischolastic or nonspecialized idiom'.[260] However, the point he is making here in his own scholastic, specialized idiom, is relatively simple: incorporating more than one language into a single text makes it, or at least portions of it, beyond the comprehension of the monolingual reader, and therefore places it into violation of the market mandate. Or, to put it in Marxist-Mizumurist terms, its 'market value' is contingent on it having a use-value to the potential customer – which typically relies on that potential customer being able to read it. Although there is no nation on the planet with a wholly linguistically standardized population, whether with different native languages spoken within the same national borders, or significant communities continuing to speak their native tongues in diaspora, or simply the variations of accent and dialect that occur from region to region, it is not in the interest of the national publishing industry to pursue these particularities, but simply to pursue the widest common denominator, whatever will be commensurate with the greatest proportion of the population. Lennon drives the point home thus: 'it is a structural function of the *nationalized language of book publishing* generally. The national and international book publication of literature requires, indeed *enforces,* national linguistic standardization.'[261] Barber, of all people, takes this line of thought even further, asserting that for a publisher, faced with the prospect of a public that reads little, 'the trick is to publish books that people who do not read books will nevertheless buy, whether or not they actually read them; for in McWorld, consumption demands only that we purchase but not that we actually utilize products'.[262] People, of course, are much less likely to buy, let alone read, a book if it is not in a language they are fluent in.

So, of what relevance is all this to *Ulysses*? Well, in short, the issues at play here are ones which Joyce was made to reckon with in the creation of his masterpiece. Maria Tymockzo, in her exhaustively extensive study, presents a compelling case that Joyce set out deliberately to write a very specifically *Irish* novel. It is an argument which goes against the grain of much Joyce scholarship, in the same manner as Hume went against the grain of Pynchon truisms, as it is usually Joyce's professed cosmopolitanism which is stressed and understood to be at the heart of his literary project. Tymockzo does not deny the cosmopolitan Joyce, but rather asserts that there is an accompanying provincial Joyce that has been less critically recognised. She explains that from the mid-nineteenth-century various Early and Middle Irish texts, as well as still-living oral folklore,

260 Ibid, p.132.
261 Ibid, p.11.
262 Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, p.120.

'enjoyed wide currency in Ireland among English speakers, and during the decades before the Easter Rising in 1916 there was a concerted effort to make the Irish linguistic, literary, and historical heritage known to all Irish people.'[263] This was the context of the Anglo-Irish revival, during which writers such as Yeats, Gregory, and Synge were attempting to build a modern tradition of Irish literature, and in so doing were borrowing heavily from Irish mythology. These writers integrated the imagery and motifs of ages-old texts such as *The Book of Invasions* and *The Voyage of Bran* in order to situate their own works as existing within the same national literary tradition, albeit now in the language spoken in Barney Kiernan's pub – the language of their colonisers. This was the writers' contribution to the nation-building attempt that preceded the Easter Rising and the independence that eventually followed. In this context, which Tymockzo evidences, James Joyce grew up and developed his literary interests.

The central thrust of the argument which Tymoczko presents in her study is that Irish mythology, placelore, and tradition all exert an influence on *Ulysses* similar to that of the Homeric schema with which the book is structured. Through an understanding of the symbology and iconography recycled from Early and Middle Irish texts, a reader can arrive at new conclusions about the meaning of Joyce's modernist masterpiece. For an example, and a significant example at that, we can look to the way Joyce uses *The Book of Invasions,* which dates back at least as far as the eleventh-century. *The Book of Invasions* chronicles a pseudohistory in which successive invasions bring Hebraic, Iberian, and Greek peoples to Ireland. Tymockzo explains that this pseudohistory is from where the protagonists of the novel derive their identities; Leopold Bloom stands in for the Hebraic invaders, Molly for the Iberian, and Stephen Dedalus for the Greek.[264] Throughout her study, Tymockzo demonstrates a wealth of other examples of engagement with Irish mythology and placelore within *Ulysses*, and backs up her claims of the author's intention with evidence that Joyce, despite his cosmopolitan reputation, maintained subscriptions to magazines on the topic, and his library included many related volumes as well.[265] By the time she concludes, her reader is convinced; James Joyce wrote to intentionally create an *Irish* epic.

Of course, the Irish-ness of *Ulysses* is not something often remarked upon. Although the novel's Dublin setting is very well-known, it is often treated as if it was simply the result of the coincidence of where Joyce was born and raised. Terry Eagleton ironises this point of view, stating

263 Tymoczko, Maria, *The Irish Ulysses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p.xv.
264 Ibid, pp.29-32.
265 Ibid. Two long chapters in Tymoczko's study exhaustively detail Joyce's confirmed and probable sources on Irish mythology, placelore, and tradition, from pp.221-326.

it is the belief that Joyce employs 'the full battery of cosmopolitan modernist techniques to re-create it [Dublin, the Irish national formation, and the Irish experience] while suggesting with its every breath just how easily it could have done the same for Bradford or the Bronx.'[266] Views such as these place the Homeric schema and the intertextual references with continental literature as and philosophy as the primary merits of Joyce's accomplishment, and the Irish setting only secondary or even tertiary. Tymoczko's thesis does not seem commensurate with this idea that Joyce's genius would have allowed him to create an epic masterpiece out of wherever it was he was from, be it across the Irish Sea or even the Atlantic Ocean, but this is not the case.

Tymoczko explains that 'The Greek myth provided bewildered readers with a point of reference and a point of departure; it universalized a book that was on its surface very localized', and due to this the Greek myth element of *Ulysses* was the most publicised.[267] She goes on to state that 'Joyce did not foster a vade mecum for the Irish myth in his book. Such a scheme would have helped most of Joyce's international readers – and it is the international audience that *Ulysses* most appealed to – not at all. In fact, rather than locating the book for them, the revelation of the unfamiliar Irish literary and mythic substratum would have served further to *dis*locate the book from the international readership.'[268] Joyce, therefore, controlled public view of his novel through author-approved and author-influenced critical guides such as Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's "Ulysses",* which intentionally played up the Homeric schema whilst scarcely mentioning any Irish elements. In order to gain an international readership, Joyce promoted the universalism of *Ulysses*, and never the provincialism. Perhaps Mizumura ought to see in the example of *Ulysses* that it is entirely possible to create a work of national literature even when there is a necessity for international readership. Joyce did not dilute the specifically Irish qualities of *Ulysses*, but merely hid them.

So, we can understand *Ulysses* as being a specifically national epic, but one which was written with internationalising elements (primarily the Homeric schema) as well as a conscious marketing strategy promoting those elements. This understanding may seem odd, but it is suggestive of Joyce's political intention in the novel. Joyce promotes a national internationalism, in which a multicultural heritage that has existed since antiquity is demonstrated as continuing right through to the present. This, he posits, is the Irish national tradition. We can now make a linkage

266 Eagleton, Terry, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment", in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. Deane, Seamus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.36.
267 Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*, p.14.
268 Ibid.

between the Jewish, Iberian, and Greek identities of the novel's protagonists with the Lebanonian cedar, the sycamore, the platanus, the eucalyptus, the Spanish ale celebrated by the patrons of Barney Kiernan's pub as well as their French exclamations, and even the English language which both they and the author breathing life into them employ. Joyce squares Irish nationalism with European cosmopolitanism; *Ulysses* becomes his blueprint for a future Ireland that rejects an isolationist future, and asserts that such a path would be going against the national heritage. The whole of *Ulysses* (which Tymoczko demonstrates is absolutely full of Irish mythological allusions, including to tropes and forms deemed too bawdy or self-deprecating to be utilised by the other Anglo-Irish revivalists) becomes a literary and cultural reforestation of Ireland, to use again Sandquist's phrase. Leaving behind the disdain for English his portrait of himself as a young man expressed, the adult Joyce has come to terms with the use of English as a continuation of the cosmopolitan Ireland of olde. Tymoczko even goes so far as to state that Joyce's work is formally more Irish than that of Yeats, Gregory, Synge, and other contemporaries, who drew heavily on traditionally European epic and poetic forms at the same time as effacing many of the traditionally Irish techniques and tropes.[269] Ultimately, although all the writers of the Anglo-Irish revival made heavy recourse to the rhetoric and imagery of nostalgic-Utopianism, Joyce grounds his nostalgic-Utopianism in the very Irish multiculturalism of *The Book of Invasions*.

These examples of the decisions made by publishing houses – whether looking for the next *Harry Potter* or to make sure a modernist classic is not too-alienatingly Irish – are certainly geared towards causing micro changes in language shift, but – as below, so above – the general principle of the market mandating the shift to standardization and adoption of lingua francas holds steady when observing macro trends. Nettle and Romaine explain that 'Language shift is thus symptomatic of much larger-scale social processes that have brought about the global village phenomenon, affecting people everywhere, even in the remotest regions of the Amazon.'[270] While capitalism has spread to the point of closure on all of its geographical frontiers, it still is advancing

269 Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*, p.64. Tymoczko notes that the 'Penelope' chapter takes the form of the dúnad, a form of Old Irish poetry in which the first and final words, or sometimes phonemes, are the same (in the case of 'Penelope' it is the word 'yes') (p.77). She also observes at the phonemic level, the entirety of *Ulysses* can be considered to be a dúnad (the 's' of 'Stately' and of 'yes') (p.78). Of 'Ithaca' she notes that 'Joyce's form in the seventeenth episode of *Ulysses* can be seen as a fosterling in English, imported from an Irish literary context and awkward primarily because of its new narrative context' (p.144). This Old Irish literary context is one in which stories were often told in a question and answer format, much like the one used to frame the conversation of Bloom and Stephen. Similarly, she asserts that the categorical lists used throughout *Ulysses* (such as the list of Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity appearing on the seastones, or the varieties of trees in Inisfail the Fair, and the numerous tree-guests at the Tree Wedding) as being formally derived from Old and Middle Irish literature (pp.147-9).

270 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.18.

on the frontier of language, in which it finds a repellent, yet elastic, natural barrier. Whilst it is not a simple, quick, or easy task for a person to learn a new language, the market compels the mass learning of the regional or global lingua franca by those who hope to maximise their opportunity to make material gains in the economy or, in the bleakest cases, even just to stay in work and keep food on the table. In explaining this, Nettle and Romaine invoke Barber: 'The language of the global village (or McWorld, as some have called it) is English: not to use it is to risk ostracization from the benefits of the global economy.'[271] Barber is an appropriate point of reference in this discussion, as he does use the metaphor of language to frame his central dichotomy, explaining on one occasion that a world riven with conflict between Jihad and McWorld is one which is 'caught between Babel and Disneyland', and on another that McWorld acts as a form of 'integrating Esperanto'.[272] Joyce might have found a ground on which to embrace English as an integrating Esperanto, dispensing with ideals of pure Irishness through a refraction of the pseudohistory of *The Book of Invasions*, and so might others in a similar manner to that presented by Stewart Lee's 'Coming Over Here' routine, recounting the multicultural mixing of Britain's past. Not all peoples, however, would be able to find such a ground; for those cultures who now, in the twenty-first-century, still have a primarily oral cultural tradition rather than a literary one, the loss of their spoken language would constitute an instant cultural death. In such situations, it is easy to understand why a robust resistance to any integrating Esperanto would be mounted. And it should not be forgotten that there is always at least *some* oral component to every linguistic culture.

Nettle and Romaine continue on the same topic, explaining that 'Political scientists once thought that the spread of both global capitalism as well as consumerism would eventually eliminate long-standing narrow allegiances to local ethnicities in favor of a broader loyalty to modern nation-states. Yet ethnic nationalism had repeatedly resisted the melting pot.'[273] Perhaps the political scientists should have considered this conclusion when making their predictions for the electoral events of 2016; Britons opted to eschew the transnational institution of the EU, asserting instead the primacy of their nation and its state, and similarly the voters of the United States heeded Donald Trump's call for 'Americanism, not globalism!' putting him into the White House.[274] These may have been victories for the Trumps, Bannons, Farages, and Johnsons of the

271 Ibid, p.31.
272 Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, p.4; p.84.
273 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.22.
274 Aaron Blake, *Washington Post*, "Donald Trump's strategy in three words: 'Americanism, not globalism'" [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/22/donald-trump-just-put-his-border-wall-around-the-entire-united-states/] [Accessed 29 March 2021].

world, but right-wing, free-market politicians who wield nationalism as a tool for their electoral ends ought to be careful in their dabbling, as they are truly riding the tiger; we have discussed already at some length how capitalism and particularity do not make a natural pairing.

Although we have noted the tension between market forces and the counterforce of ethnic and linguistic nationalisms, it is clear that the unstoppable market force is gradually winning out against the just-barely movable object of particularity. Barber concludes that McWorld is gaining ground, and so do Nettle and Romaine, stating that 'the world's major languages are becoming more like one another through the process of intertranslation and culture contact.'[275] With this trajectory in mind, we see that Papua New Guinea is not impervious to the encroachment of market imperatives just because it is less railworthy than the plains of North America. Nettle and Romaine explain that by 'Viewing the country at a macroscopic scale' we can conclude that a few centuries ago Papua New Guinea was most likely in a state of linguistic equilibrium, in which 'the number of languages was roughly constant, and no one group or its language was rapidly expanding at the expense of another.'[276] The notion of linguistic equilibrium recollects the Marxist formulation of simple reproduction: the notion that production continues with constant stocks of capital, neither increasing nor decreasing, and thereby that it is possible that the market share of different capitalists will not change across production cycles. Luxemburg states quite frankly that 'simple reproduction is a fiction not only for capitalist production but also for the progress of civilisation in general.'[277] It is no coincidence that here, once again, the old foe of Pynchon and the Traditionalists both rears its ugly head. As Luxemburg explains, 'It is not simple but enlarged reproduction which is the rule in every capitalist economic system'.[278] Whether an imperial metropole with colonial protectorates, or a nation's capital city railworthily connected with outlying towns and villages, or a booming language spoken by the region's political and economic elite in stark contrast with the tongues of the provinces, the metropolitan centre enlarges itself by gorging on the peripheral. Nettle and Romaine position languages such as English (in England) and Tok Pisin (in Papua New Guinea) as metropolitan, and assert that their growth was always going to endanger (and in these cases, kill off) their respective peripheral languages, like Cornish and Taiap.[279] They explain that, in much the same manner as the outlying towns of a big city become commuterized, often to the displeasure or displacement of its former inhabitants, 'a few

275 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.12.
276 Ibid, p.89.
277 Luxemburg, Rosa, *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.61
278 Ibid, p.79.
279 Nettle and Romaine, *Vanishing Voices*, p.128.

metropolitan languages expanded very rapidly at the expense of the rest, as smaller communities have been pulled into the orbit of more powerful ones.'[280] To rephrase Marx's adage again, we might observe that the metropole more developed economically only shows, to the peripheral, the language it will one day be speaking. The market dictates it so.

It is worth taking as a rule, then, 'The accumulation of capital, once it has started, automatically leads father and farther beyond itself', as Luxemburg says, and this in turn leads to capital growing 'in one place to a huge mass in a single hand, because it has in another place been lost by many', as Marx notes.[281] This accumulation is most dramatic, and has the furthest-reaching consequences, when land is concerned, as Pynchon depicts throughout his oeuvre. When jurisdiction over vast expanses of land is concentrated in the hands of a select few, dispossessions soon follow as rent-seeking and development imperatives take charge. Dispossession is key, and realizing this helps us understand why so many languages which survived through centuries of feudal bloodshed, religious crusades, and the grisly wars of expansion carried out by ancient and medieval civilizations. As Baugh and Cable observe of the survival of Welsh and Scottish Gaelic, 'The Romans had come to rule the Celtic population, not to dispossess it.'[282] Whilst many rulers from bygone eras did not see dispossession as a useful tool, and may have even seen it as a cause of unrest, dangerous to the peace, the arbitrary governance of capital has an attitude towards dispossession which is at best apathetic and at worst positively gleeful. Luxemburg treats her readers to a quick history of India to make this very point:

> In the sixth century B.C. the Persians invaded the Indus basin and subjected part of the country. Two centuries later the Greeks entered and left behind them colonies, founded by Alexander on the pattern of a completely alien civilisation. Then the savage Scythians invaded the country, and for centuries India remained under Arab rule. Later, the Afghans swooped down from the Iran mountains, until they, too, were expelled by the ruthless onslaught of Tartar hordes. The Mongols' path was marked by terror and destruction, by the massacre of entire villages – the peaceful countryside with the tender shoots of rice made crimson with blood. And still the Indian village community survived. For none of the successive Mahometan conquerors had ultimately violated the internal social life of the peasant masses and its traditional structure. […] Then came the British – and the blight of capitalist

280 Ibid, p.150.
281 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, p.89; Marx, *Capital*, p.347.
282 Baugh and Cable, *A History*, p.45.

> civilisation succeeded in disrupting the entire social organisation of the people; it achieved in a short time what thousands of years, what the sword of the Nogians, had failed to accomplish. The ultimate purpose of British capital was to possess itself of the very basis of existence of the Indian community: the land.[283]

This is the pernicious aspect to the contemporary world-system, sharply differentiating it from those that came become, and why we are now seeing the second great wave of linguistic homogenization, thousands of years after the first with the spread of agriculture.

Dispossession, and the population churn it creates, has a profound effect on language, as we might expect when considering the links between language and geography so easily visible in the history of isolates. Baugh and Cable explain that the greater homogeneity of accent across the United States is down to this exact widespread population churn:

> Those who are familiar with the pronounced dialectal differences that mark the popular speech of different parts of England will know that there is nothing comparable to those differences in the United States. This was the object of remark as early as 1781, when John Witherspoon, the Scottish president of Princeton University, observed of the common people in American that "being much more unsettled, and moving frequently from place to place, they are not so liable to local peculiarities either in accent or phraseology."[284]

Whereas Baugh and Cable and Witherspoon make the churn of the United States population sound like an entirely innocuous phenomenon, one of choice and of a free and practically whimsical will, Luxemburg locates the market forces perniciously underpinning it: 'Having evicted the peasant from his soil,' she explains that market forces will then necessitate his crossing of the Atlantic

> from England to the East of the United States, and from there to the West, and on the ruins of the Red Indians' economy it transforms him back into a small commodity producer. Then, when he is ruined once more, he is driven from the West to the North. With the railways in the van, and ruin in the rear – capital leads the way, its passage is marked with universal destruction.[285]

This is the same history which Frank Traverse ponders in *Against the Day,* when it is noted that he 'understood for a moment […] that the history of all this terrible continent […] was this same

283 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, pp.351-2.
284 Baugh and Cable, *A History*, p.347.
285 Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, p.391.

history of exile and migration, the white man moving in on the Indian, the eastern corporations moving in on the white man, and their incursions with drills and dynamite into the deep seams of the sacred mountains, the sacred land.'[286] Pynchon also reflects the impact that this enforced migration has on the accents of the churned. Mogultay explains that 'lacking a distinct attachment to a specific place, Dahlia [Dally] is portrayed in *Against the Day* as a virtual polyglot, whose voice resembles an acoustic palimpsest bearing the traces of her nomadic trajectory', due to the description of her voice as being 'hard to pin to any one American place, more of a trail voice with turns and drops to it'.[287] This is of particular interest when considering that Dally later goes on to pose for a sculptor and become immortalized as a statue called *The Spirit of Bimetallism* in 'one of the capitalist temples' of New York City.[288] It could even be said that, in Pynchon's world, when money talks it does not merely speak the English language, but a particular 'hard to pin down' American accent.

In lieu of any kind of formal conclusion, neatly summing up everything which has been discussed so far, or synthesizes it all into a final, codifying revelation (as much as I would love to end on such a note, it is simply beyond my reading to do so), I will just outline a few of the broad ideas to which I believe my research throughout this project had given validity. Firstly, although market mandates are entirely apathetic if not outright opposed to the preservation of language and culture, the preservation of language and culture alone do not constitute meaningful anti-capitalist politics. This is evident from the general tendency for 'culture' to be a right-wing buzzword, and the example of the Traditionalists demonstrates that even a more pluralist call for the defence of cultures and traditions can form the basis of an extreme-right, reactionary politics. However, there does appear to be a widespread and palpable feeling that many appear to hold regarding the sterile culture of copy-and-pasted high streets, airports, hotels, and (for many who are not native speakers) the English language, a palpable feeling – like that expressed by the young Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait* – that all of these things are unnatural impositions of an unnatural system in an unnatural age. This palpable feeling should be at least acknowledged, and attempted to be

286 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p.1042.
287 Mogultay, *The Ruins*, p.145; Pynchon, *Against the Day*, p.335.
288 *Against the Day* p.1004. Considering I have earlier characterized Dally as being aligned with a Gavrilo Princip-style struggle against big money and power, it may seem a total reversal to now suggest she ought to be aligned solely with money – but I would argue that this is not my intention. As critics have noted, Dally is one of the more human of Pynchon's characters, better representing the complex and contradictory feelings and impulses that humans feel. Rather than statically symbolise one ideology or political system, as Scarsdale Vibe does, I would argue that Dally better represents the way in which human beings synthesise and embody the incoherent and contradictory experiences gleaned from living in a world rife with opposing forces.

understood in the way in which I have attempted throughout this critical piece. By aligning the culture of late stage capitalism with un-nature, the neoliberal notion that 'There Is No Alternative' is undermined, as neoliberalism broadly propagates the naturalization of the market and its mechanisms, pretending that it is actually interference with the market that is unnatural.

Secondly, and relatedly, the act of defending or preserving culture or tradition is an act which can be entirely divorced from any consideration of the economic, or of material conditions. This observed fact, which I remain keenly aware of in the construction of my creative piece, can be both negative and positive. Negatively, the focus on culture can form the basis for a reactionary, culture war politics that distracts from and shields any discussion of underpinning economic conditions, such as the authentocracy Kennedy maligns, or movements further to the right. Positively, it can simply be an act of remembering or reasserting that which is valued and would otherwise be forgotten or eclipsed from the world. Jameson, somewhat derisively, references this sort of gesture, noting that 'The salute to non-great-power languages or extinct provincial traditions is, of course, politically correct'.[289] Somewhat ironically, this comment is made in reference to Pynchon, who as we have seen does consistently make his salutes to extinct provincial traditions with an eye to the system that underpins the extinctions. However, the central thrust of his point remains true; the focus on particularisms does not necessarily have to be more than a sign of respect toward the diversity of the cultures which humans have built all over the world. This might be a political statement, but not an economic one.

Thirdly, and finally, although this piece has aligned 'civilization' with dilapidation, the concept remains popular with those who may subscribe to various other aspects of the associated critique that has been presented here. I have not intended to suggest that 'civilization', in the sense of the totality of human achievements (or those of a particular section of humanity), is held in suspicion by any substantive group of people. Rather, I am alleging that 'civilization', in the sense of a societal process that removes humanity from the state of nature, is held in suspicion. When the grand narrative of civilization and progress promises material betterment and fails to deliver, a tension is created which can become the basis for backlash against 'progressive' and integrating institutions, like the European Union. The coalition of people who are sceptical of the grand narrative of progress crosses the political spectrum, as we see in Pynchon and Dugin. In the same manner, those who buy into a grand narrative of progress also cross the political spectrum. Orthodox Marxists who believe that capitalism will eventually cede to socialism, and socialism to

289 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.361.

communism as history's material dialectic unfurls, as well as free-market libertarians, who have complete and total faith in the market's ability to lift all boats, share the optimistic view that the arc of history bends towards humanity's betterment. Many likely see truth in both narratives, and view the world as improving in some regards, whilst worsening in others. However, with all that being said, I hope that this piece has been useful in outlining some of the emotional resonances and connotations that people draw – sometimes in a manner nostalgic, sometimes in a manner utopian, and sometimes in a manner that combines both – when thinking in terms of the rhetoric and narratives which make sense of the world in which we live.

Word count: 34,684

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A Brief Introduction to ‘Fruit of Gold’

The social satire in ‘Fruit of Gold’ is intended to be as subtle as a brick, and it will be all the more so for readers of the critical piece. The same themes and topics recur throughout, and every beat of the plot unfolds according to the nostalgic-Utopian narrative as regards Enlightenment economisation. Regardless, some new elements do make an appearance. Whereas the primarily discussed locales of the critical piece were (the Real) England, Venice, and the Balkans, ‘Fruit of Gold’ puts on display the same social and economic mechanics in il Mezzogiorno, and in Argentina. Intertextual references are made to a largely different set of texts from those analysed in the critical piece. The most prominent of these include Domingo Faustino Sarmineto’s *Facundo: Civilization or Barbarism* (1845)*,* José Hernández’s *Martín Fierro* (1872)*,* Carlo Levi’s *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945) as well as its 1979 film adaptation by Francesco Rosi, and the films of Federico Fellini, primarily *I vitelloni* (1953) and *Amarcord* (1973). Through the use of free indirect discourse, too, in ‘Fruit of Gold’ I was able to attempt to put into words the thoughts and feelings that individuals with differing very strong opinions and social standings have as they experience the phenomena outlined in the critical piece. The characters are somewhat allegorical, but not so much as Pynchon’s 2D caricatures who are often little more than vehicles for exploring a world of systems beyond their comprehension, or as much as Joyce’s citizen simply existing to demonstrate the bluster of obnoxious isolationist nationalism. Whilst still a little cartoonish, the characters of ‘Fruit of Gold’ are intended as relatively understanding portrayals of types of people who really do exist in great numbers.

As a brief note on the form of ‘Fruit of Gold’, it is worth noting that it was intended from the beginning to be a short story, albeit one maximalist in style and global in scope. My initial thought was that it would one day find a place one day in a collection with other stories exploring facets of contemporary society from different angles and perspectives. At least one reason why, as suggested in the critical piece, is that the code-switching elements of the text would certainly induce a highly allergic reaction in many publishers. Such a reaction might be averted if ‘Fruit of Gold’ found itself nested amongst more monolinguistically palatable tales. Regardless, with the complete story now in front of me, it is clear that at 35,000 words it would be better called a novella. However, I have decided to keep its name in the apostrophes befitting a short story rather than the italicisation that would fit a novella; despite the length, my gut feeling still tells me it

belongs in a collection. I am very fond of ‘Fruit of Gold’ and the characters who appear in it, and I hope that it will one day see publication, perhaps in such a ‘long story collection’. I can foresee it having a place along with two or three other novella-length tales, focusing on the topics and themes I mentioned during the introduction to the critical piece as those which I regret not incorporating: the gender politics of nostalgic-Utopianism, subaltern perspectives on declensionist narratives of history, the fetishisation of the Gold Standard, and others.

As a second comment on the form, the discussion of specifically national literatures and literary forms during the critical piece may engender expectations that ‘Fruit of Gold’ has a specifically national or local literary form, but it does not. I did investigate the literary forms of Molise, but most of their local literature has historically been composed as poetry rather than prose. Similarly, while my reading of what Borges calls ‘gauchesque’ literature – that is, literature about gauchos not written by gauchos – did shape the Argentina section to some extent, it did not do so formally. Much gauchesque literature is also poetry, as in *Martín Fierro,* or else takes the form of the Argentine rural folk ballad known as the payada. It will become quickly apparent that this is not the form of ‘Fruit of Gold’. Should I ever make substantive revisions to ‘Fruit of Gold’, this would be perhaps something to consider, but in its present state local colour mainly appears in the dialogue and the code-switching within the prose. On the other hand, there are certain Anglicisms peppered throughout the story, suggestive of the way that populist and far-right-flirting Italy has inexact mirrors in Britain and the United States. Perhaps the most prominent Anglicism is the telling-a-tale-at-the-pub tone of the ‘he says, she says’ dialogue tags. The only writer I have seen using similar tags, although I am sure there must be others, is Pynchon with the ‘sez’ tags he has used throughout his oeuvre. I put attempt to find the use of ‘lui/lei dice’ as tags in published Italian fiction, but ultimately did not succeed. Perhaps this gimmick in ‘Fruit of Gold’ is pioneering, and I hope it might reveal the nostalgic-utopianism in a few readers to themselves, bringing to the surface a pining for the conventional old days of ‘said’.

With all that being said, I hope ‘Fruit of Gold’ is an enjoyable read, and maybe even food for thought. Bon appétit!

Word count: 873

‘Fruit of Gold’

Capitolo Uno

La Pomodoressa

Some country girls went to the city, but it was the city which came to Eva Amorcredo. She had been to Campobasso on business, and to Naples for leisure, but these and one or two other fleeting trips had left little imprint upon her. Eva had not been enamoured by the bustle of the piazze, the teatri grandi, the autostrade teeming with cars of every colour. The experience had not given her new hopes, nor new dreams. Her mind remained fixed upon fulfilling her singular purpose: the growing of tomatoes, tomatoes, tomatoes of every variety possibile, tomatoes. That was what she was made for. And what could the city have to do with that? Well, the city came to her regardless.

She liked things to va steady, and did not much like change. It was best to live every day in routine. She would wake up, drink a coffee, eat un panino alla marmellata, wander down the greenhouse out back, water the plants, perhaps prune them, perhaps pick un pomodoro. She grew types of tomato from all over the peninsula. Of course, she grew the popular types in great abundance: the original gangster of the pizzeria, the San Marzano; the deeply southern pomodoro di Pachino; the little pumpkinesque costuluto fiorentino; the vulcanicamente intense, grape-sized Piennolo. It was her pride, though, to grow the varieties not so well-known. For those seeking a truly wonderful bruschetta, she grew Roma tomatoes. Inside her flat, vines clambered up the walls, growing glowing red baubles that she would plomp into a jar and label as Campari. She had imported a couple of Santorini plant seeds from the island that, she supposed, was named after its wonderful peste-perfect pomodori. Amongst her most artistic goods was the fierce and fiery red Datterino, which some connoisseurs animatedly argued was the very forma platonica of the pomodoro. For a hearty meal, nothing could beat the Cuore di Bue, with a taste ever so pulse-quickeningly spicy. Even larger, with an even more commanding presence was il gigante, the di Belmonte, which grew a vicious pink on towering plants which worked unholy miracles just to keep their unwieldy fruits suspended in the air. For those who sought out a juicy tomato for their sauce, it delighted her to point them to the pomodorino di Manduria, the seeds for which she had

originally bought from a lumbering, Greek-speaking man down a pokey back alley in Campomarino. In the winter months, when her other lovelies were resting until the heat returned, the crunchy Camone tomatoes would spring to life. Friend and foe alike called her the Pomodoressa. When it came to tomatoes, she was in una lega all her own.

Upon her first hearing about the incoming arrival and investment of the coffee mogul, her only reaction erred on the positive side. She thought it would be easy to give a little, thoughtful gift to a man named Salvatore Cherry. A large can of her Pachino cherry tomatoes was put to one side. They were a good, traditional type, and it would be a nice way to say "Benvenuto in Italia! Benvenuto in Tripicco!". A billionaire, stavano dicendo, this Salvatore Cherry was jetting in from the United States. He was a New Yorker, così aveva affermato his local news profile. Eva already felt quite kindly disposed towards him, as the pomodoro, her cherished pummarola, had once made that same transatlantic journey many years ago. Yes, it was almost strange to think now, but the tomato was not an Italian native. Colombo, Vespucci, and all those other heroic figures of Italian history had made pappa al pomodoro possible when they had first discovered those distant and unblemished lands. Il nuovomondo. It was a nuovomondo of opportunity, certo, but more pointedly it was un nuovomondo of culinary adventure. Eva kept little framed pictures of Colombo and Vespucci on her wall, smiling down at her, and she would smile back up at them, never ungrateful for all the wonderful colour (red, primarily) that they had brought into the world.

It was the Aeroporto Internazionale Cristoforo Colombo which Salvatore Cherry flew on into. He had made the conscious decision to enter the country by Genova, and from there head south to Tripicco, reversing as accurately as he could the departure from l'Italia which his forebears had made roughly one-hundred-and-ten years earlier. He travelled economy, just to enjoy the sounds of Italian accents. Returning holidaygoers, those who had visited family in New York, or those who were now visiting family back in La Patria, they all spoke in such a rhythmic and animated way, and he loved to listen to their every word. "Che cazzo!" one would call out, gesturing frenetically at something or other, and Salvatore Cherry would smile and nod with great satisfaction. La bella lingua! Upon his landing, he was met by Negozio Standa, a fine man with whom he had made some deals with a few years earlier. Negozio had since begun working in Milan for Finvest, and he was happy enough to come out to meet his friend the coffee mogul and show him some sights.

“Maybe you would be interested in establishing a Teletripicco, Salvatore?” says Negozio. “Just like Silvio set up Telemilano, all those years ago. It doesn’t have to be a big profit, it could just be a nice thing to do for a place you love. But you never know, it could pay dividends.”

“Please, Negozio, you may speak Italian. I’ve been putting in a lot of practice. Molto pratico, vedi?”

“Come vuoi, mio amico,” dice Negozio.

“A news network,” dice Salvatore, as they walked out down Via Cornigliano, “un prospettivo interessante. I think about it very thoroughly and seriously, now. Why are there tutti questi St. George’s Cross flags flying qui? Are there many English qui?”

Negozio had no idea. “I don’t know Genova as well as I would like. Ci sono many beautiful women here.”

“Is it un lungo strado to Rome? To, ah, Roma?” chiede Salvatore. “I have a need to see the very cradle of civiltò!” The limits of Sal’s Italian were quickly revealing themselves.

With a smile, “It isn’t the longest train journey,” says Negozio, lapsing back into English, “I would be pleased to accompany you.”

“Va bene!”

And so they then ended up in Rome. A whistlestop tour of the sights ensued. There’s the Spanish Steps. There’s the Trevi Fountain. There’s some other stuff too.

“Woow! Bello!”, esclama Salvatore.

They stopped for a nice meal at a restaurant on Via Napoli, just around the corner from the Teatro d’Opera, which Salvatore had decided he needed to visit. “I want to see a Verdi!”, lui aveva dichiarato.

“Verdi è magnifico!,” dice Negozio. Negozio had had the lilting, waltzing sounds of La Traviata’s Drinking Song as his text message tone for so long that Verdi had come to arouse a Pavlovian reaction in him, inducing him to expect the arrival some lewds from his mistress. Negozio texted for little else, preferring for business matters something with end-to-end encryption.

Salvatore hadn’t known what to order, so he ended up with three plates, one gnocchi, one cannelloni, and one pasta all’uovo. He tucked in, as much of each in the best balance he could manage, until his poor pancio was filled right up. At the bar, grabbing a glass of vino to wash down the veritable feast he had just consumed, he struck up a little chit chat with a local.

“It is so terribile, the way that things have been run around here for so long,” dice l’uomo. “Some districts don’t have clean water, and others no water at all.”

“Quello è terribile!”, dice Salvatore.

“Quello?”, dice l’uomo.

“Sì! You must join us at our table.”

The man, one Augusto Taricone, was clearly just as impassioned in his anger at the state of his beloved city as he was in his enjoyment of its grand history and culture. “Ci sono molti venues, wonderful, wonderful places, dotted all around the città. Any given night, my friends or I, we can say ‘annamo!’ and be on our way to un concerto. Some of the venues, bellissimo! Credimi.”

“Meravigliosa acusita, I am sure! How long have you lived in Roma, Augusto?” chiede Salvatore.

“Tutta la mia vita,” lui dice, “ever since I esalato my first respiro.”

“Wow! That long, huh?”

“I know many people who wouldn’t live anywhere else,” dice Negozio, who didn’t seem to be much appreciating the additional company. He was fidgeting with the various rings on his ever-so-slightly plump fingers.

“Even if I wanted to move,” dice Taricone, “I have a job here, and you know what they say about un uccello in mano, sì? Well, I don’t see any bush with due uccelli, so I am keeping the one in mano.”

“Very wise,” dice Negozio, “in this economy.”

Taricone unbuttoned and shrugged off his poplin button-down, revealing a t-shirt underneath. In white-on-black print it displayed a man’s brutto face, wide and scowling. Underneath is was boldly displayed the word ‘DUCE’. Negozio’s eyes flashed wide open, just for a second.

“A fashion statement and a half,” dice Salvatore. Negozio wasn’t sure if his friend was aware what he was looking at.

Taricone nodded, with mouth a-smiling and eyes gravely serious. “You can grab one from la Casa degli Italiani on Via Gioberti. The prices are a steal, credimi.” He took a sip from his limoncello.

“Well that was unusual,” dice Salvatore, once they had left the restaurant and its unusual patron behind. “He seemed so nice at first, as well. I can’t imagine such un coso is common, vero?”

"This is Rome, my friend. There are all sorts of strange types here. You shan't find their like in Tripicco."

"Va bene," dice Salvatore. "Va bene, va bene!" And down to Tripicco he went.

"He's buying up the old scòla," dice Mosè Rappaporto. As Eva arrived at the shop for the day, she saw there had already been quite a good few sales. Mosè presided over a well-serviced brass till. "It's going to be converted into some shops. Or pulled down and shops put up in its place, nun lo so."

"Vero?" chiede Eva. She was carrying in a crate of tins, San Marzano principalmente, which she placed down on the counter and promptly got to the task of stocking shelves. "They should be refurbishing and reopening it. Class sizes at Ferrante are troppu grandi." As a customer walked through the open door, inhaling deep in the aroma of the Pomodorium, Eva flashed a toothy smile and gave a little wave. "Bonnì!" she called out, before turning once more back to Mosè. "What do they expect to become of our kids, eh?". Eva didn't have kids, but from some of the things she said it was hard to guess.

A quarter of a mile away, right at the moment of their discussion, the old school was being pulled down. The ground would soon be clear for the luxury flats of which Tripicco was in dire need. Sal was happy enough moving into a grand old apartment, with casement windows and olde-worldey rustic charm – was that not the whole point? – but he knew the business class well enough to know that the transformation of Tripicco would require new habitations, all fit for those whose interior decorative tastes were as sharp as their suits. Within a couple of weeks, as if constructed from flat-pack, the new builds had popped on up. Eva and Mosè took a passeggiata down to see what their town's new benefactor had brought over from a world away. "How exciting," dice Eva. "How long it must have been since something new was last built here!"

"Probably the Agip gas station," dice Mosè.

"Forse," dice Eva. "Before our time then."

What they saw, upon arrival, was not an instant classic. "Modulare," dice Mosè. "That is what I would call it. I like the solar panels. Shame about the plastics. Un po' scuffato."

Eva raised one hand, and held it so that she could not see the campanile that loomed off to one side of the new build. Then she raised another to block from her vision the townhouse that had once adjoined the old school. "It's interesting," lei dice. She lowered her hands. "But maybe a little jarring."

“Jarring, sì. That is a good word. Dissonante.”

The building looked like an assortment of bizarrely large shipping containers of a shiny acrylic. It was overall bold and bombastic in colour. Its side was adorned by balconies, with very stylish curved railings. It was possible to see inside a few of the rooms, which were lit by chandeliers in unusual and frankly unnerving shapes. It was tall, wide, and aggressive. “Strano,” dice Mosè, “strano assai!” The campanile of the neighbouring piazza seemed to be staring over at it with consternation.

“Adesso!” grida Salvatore, stood on a little podium by the main entrance. “Adesso, Tripicco Halls is open!”. With a daft-unwieldy pair of scissors he cut a red ribbon.

Eva gestured at the sight of the snip-snipper affilata. “Che diavolo is going on?” chiede lei.

“Domani stasera,” annuncia Salvatore, to the handful of people mulling about. “Mi dispiace, ah, domani sera! Domani sera we shall have a great party here, in the brand new convention centre attached to these wonderful new flats. All will be welcome! Tell everyone! Share it online! Il Facebook! Il Twitter! Il Instagram! Let everybody know! Domani sera!”

“Intrigante,” dice Mosè. “Well, I have nothing planned anyway.”

“All dietary requirements will be catered for. Vegetariano, vegano, senza noci, senza glutine, kosher, halal,” a second man grida.

“Halal?”, chiede Eva. “Mosè, I believe he is lost. He thinks he is on the other side of the Adriatico.”

“Comportati bene, tu,” dice Mosè. “This Cherry, he’s a businessman, I am sure he has a very diverse group of acquaintances. If we go tomorrow, you can’t be getting into una polemica with il primo tizio to ask for involtini di pollo served halal.” The two of them avevano avuto an episode, quite a few years back, during which Eva had been made quite irate by something she had seen online. After having read an article on *il Giornale,* detailing the deep antagonism of the Muslim world towards McDonalds, dogs, bicycles, Yoga, celebrations of the compleanno, and various other staples of Western life, she had been deeply shocked and worried by a comment left below the line by one Giuliana. This Giuliana’s comment took the time to explain that Maometto, all that time ago, had declared jihad against the tomato. The tomato! Mere minutes of further research had revealed that there was much truth to this claim. She was quickly reading another article, this time from *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno,* explaining how the rather frightful-sounding Associazione Egiziana Islamica Popolare were spreading awareness of the villainy of the tomato. Cut right down the middle, so the AEIP noted, the midsection of the pomodoro bore that most revered emblem of

Christian faith: the cross. Eva had taken a tomato right away, and sliced it right in two. “Gesù Cristo!” lei dice, seeing the symbol as plain as day. Sharia Law had never been a particularly appetising prospect for Eva Amorcredo, but now it was personal. “Mio caro pomodoro,” aveva detto Eva, “Cristo ti protegge, e ti proteggerò anch’io.”

After Mosè had read some, to his mind, frankly unhinged Facebook posts, clicked some links that were shared (‘La minaccia islamica al cibo italiano,’ ‘La nuova crociata va combattuta in cucina,’ ‘Non esiste una cosa come il pomodoro halal,’ amongst others, yet cruder and more alarmist), he had decided it was best to step in. Their discussion of the topic ended with Eva agreeing to no longer to share those posts. She tried not to row with friends.

“You don’t really know what you are posting about with this stuff,” aveva detto Mosè. “And you should give it a rest.” That was more or less all that was said, across various repetitions and rewordings. And so it was settled.

He was flippant, but Eva knew that the tomato could never be taken for granted. Students of culinary history all knew well that before il pomodoro became so widely utilised within la cucina italiana it was viewed with downright suspicion. Il nuovomondo and all its produce was a great unknown upon its discovery all those centuries ago. In those days, all the new plants of its forests and jungles, all the animals which roamed its temperate lands, all were treated with caution if not contempt. It must have taken a brave soul to have dared the first bite. And neverminding that, there was a great stigma against fruit at the time as well. The anti-fruit furore derived from, amongst others, one Tommaso Rangone, a tragically accomplished Ravennese physician. Rangone had explained, in his best-selling guide to living to the most wizened age of one-hundred-and-twenty, that fruit must be avoided at all costs. Once digested, he explained, it turned into a runny goop, which made its way around the body at a frightful pace. As the ebbing tide erodes the cliff face, the viscous, putrefied sludge of the plant-based diet would erode all the organs it slipperingly crept its way across; the brain, the lungs, the heart. It had been suggested even the soul. Fruit-eating, if Rangone and his followers were to be believed, was the leading cause of cognitive decline, of respiratory collapse, perhaps even of mankind’s proclivity to sin. He and his followers asserted the primacy of meat-eating. The flesh of the tomato was no acceptable substitute. Between the pensive, sceptical attitude towards all things nuovomondo, and the widespread influence of Rangone’s polemicising, those days constituted quite the hostile environment towards il povero pomodoro.

It was only in the thoughtful days of the eighteenth-century that Antonio Cocchi took to the arena of thought in defence of the truth, in defence of the unjustly blemished name of il cibo verde. Cocchi saw that fruit did not clog up the body's systems, but rather it brought lightness, clarity, and mobility to the blood, and that instead it was meat that was prone to turn one's veins into sausages. Sometimes when the people are presented with the truth they recognise it at once, without thought, without logic, without anything but the simple and headstrong skill of recognition, and that is exactly what happened when Cocchismo made its debut. At once, the standing of all fruits was lifted on a purée tide. Unfortunately, meat-eating had not been vanquished from society as Cocchi had wisely advised, but its hegemony at the dining tables of high society was in one fell swoop shattered. Cocchi's work had done all aspiring Pomodoresse a true and unforgettable favour in bringing the backward worldview of Rangonismo low, and Eva herself had set his official portrait to display on the lockscreen of her phone. Cocchi was long since buried, though, and could bring battle to wicked untruths no more. In his absence, as learned from experience, learned from the trends of days gone by – from her relationships which had once seemed rock solid, from the friends whom she had known ever since she was na piccirilla, then just a couple of houses down la strada but now moved away to places with names she could never recall – Eva knew from just the way that life goes that it is unwise to assume that things will continue apace, that what once was might never be again, and that what one safely assumes banished forever might re-emerge, monstrous and fanged, at the moment least expected.

Cocchismo continued to gain traction through the centuries, but as the Cocchisti grew more confident in their arguments, and began to at last lay siege at the doors of the palace of meat, a counter-revolutionary movement began to develop. Sometimes, Eva would spot un tizio in the streets wearing an 'IO MANGIO LA CARNE' t-shirt, or somebody in the comments under a video recipe for stuffed black olive, spinach, and mozzarella focaccia posting a picture of themselves tooth-tearing into an unfathomably rare steak, oozing enough blood that the certification board would declare it vietato di minori di diciotto anni. It was possible that she was being melodramatic, forse, or over-worried, but she did wonder if the promotion of Cocchismo by some had in fact heightened the Rangonismo of others, awakening them to the reality that they had something to defend.

At the flats-warming party the next day, a local Rangonista named Giordano Pietrofiglio was there in attendance. He was no friend of Eva, nor of Mosè. Amongst the tables stacked high with nibbles, all manner of spuntini for all manners of tastes, il carnivoro prowled, picking off only the

tenderest morsels, grimacing at anything coloured green. He stood out amongst the attendees, who were for the most part very well turned out. There were lots of suits and sport coats, boutique-sourced dresses screaming out money-money value, shoes and rings and necklaces sure to get a socialite killed if worn in a dark alley. Salvatore Cherry was clearly trying very hard. The magnate was wearing a cream blazer over a cosmic-blue mandarin shirt, trousers of a pigsty shade of ochre, and some egregiously tassled loafers. It was the sort of outfit that, forse, a much younger man, not so stocky and balding, could get away with. Luckily for him, Giordano appeared to be there to make sure the host was not the most ridiculous-looking man in attendance. Il carnivoro wore a wet-cardboard-brown tweed blazer at least a couple of sizes too big for him, and a pair of military green cords similarly baggy. His beard was scraggly, and of a completely different colour than that of the waxy hair on his head. There was something English-looking about him.

Eva Amorcredo was not out to make statements, but just to enjoy the night. She sought to go uncommented upon in an unremarkable camicetta of a colour best described as mushroom. Nevertheless a few of the Cherry's contractors and business associates decided, breaking off from their succinctly clad dates, to tell her that she was 'molto carina'. One had taken to periodically wolf-whistling at her, and another kept looking her way and rather unusually winking, awkwardly and repeatedly as if suffering a twitch. She had known worse, though. Eva's least favourites were the tourists, some of whom did inexplicably choose to come to Tripicco, although why anyone would choose to spend their hard-earned holiday time in the Alto Molise was something she could not understand. Tourists, those utter bastards, would try to flirt by telling Eva how 'Italian' she looked. Some days she did suppose she must indeed look seven-eighths Italian, only just falling short of maximum italianità courtesy of her great-grandfather introducing some Croat genes into the mix, a fact seemingly unbeknownst to all except for il vudellone – that past-his prime, childless and unmarried bamboccione idiot – who was always lurking about by Via Fonte Croce and yelling "Puttana balcanica!" whenever she was walking by. How he was aware was a mystery to her. On all other days, however, she reflected that throughout her lifetime she had known many Italians, and there was very little that united them in visage, rendering to her such remarks rather opaque. All she could judge was that they were intended as compliments, although of the unsolicited and distinctly undesired variety. "Nun esiste nu santuario?" chiede Eva to Mosè, who was wearing a thick woolly jumper, a more suitable choice than most had made for the nippy winter evening, and sipping from a Spritz, which by all indications was the only drink being served.

"Nun sembra cà," risponde Mosè, just as Giordano began to make his way over.

“Pomodoressa,” lui dice, popping una salsiccia da cocktail into his mouth, “how nice to see you here stasera.”

“È sempre un piacere,” dice Eva. “Come stai?”.

“Oh, I’ve been better, but I’ve been worse,” dice il carnivoro. “I happened to be walking past your Pomodorium earlier, and I was struck with worry about how voi raga will be able to cope with il nuovo supermercato opening up soon.”

“Il nuovo supermercato?” chiede Eva. “I haven’t heard anything about nu supermercato.”

“Né io,” dice Mosè, who Giordano was pointedly ignoring. They had not seen eye to eye since il carnivoro had called Mosè ‘un marxista postmoderno’ during a heated discussion in the comment section below a scathing review of *Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot.*

“Tripicco is finally going to be home to un supermercato. Si chiama ‘Simply Market,’ if I remember rightly. Not the biggest, I saw one once in Milan. They do stock all sorts of things, pasta a forma di peni, it was that sort of place. Canned tomatoes, though. Your monopolio on il pomodoro may be coming to an end.”

“Nun tengo nu monopolio,” dice Eva. She was right, as she was in constant competition with market sellers from Pescolanciano, from Castelverrino, from Salcito, sometimes even from as far as Agnone. On un giorno di mercato they would stuff their trunks to the brim with the San Marzano, stacked so high it was surely impossible to see anything else in the specchietto retrovisore, and then drive on up to Tripicco to set up stalls. “Possiamo combattere la concorrenza.”

“I am glad to hear it,” dice Giordano, removing what they saw to be a mini steak from his pocket, of which he took a noisy bite.

Eva smiled and physically steered Mosè from the conversation. “Did he just take na bistecchina from la tasca? And eat it?”

“Sì,” dice Mosè. “I saw it with my own two eyes.”

What Giordano had said was concerning. Eva was right that the Pomodorium did not exist in a vacuum of competition, but the sort of competition which un supermercato could provide was not what she wanted. The wide range of different types of tomatoes she offered would certainly maintain the loyalty of the keenest chefs with their heightened senses for the specifics of what their dishes require – sometimes a lobster dish was just crying out for a good Camone, and no proper condiglione was lacking Cuore di Bue – and she could outmanoeuvre the sabato market traders by being open for business six days a week. Regardless, un supermercato would not be

ideal. Many might find it convenient to pick up tomatoes along with their milk, pasta, cheese, onions, whatever, whichever, it could overwhelm the good senses of even Eva's longterm, loyal customers. Un supermercato would not be a welcome development. No, it would be quite unwelcome indeed.

It was an evening out, and it was best not to dwell. Salvatore Cherry was over by the refreshments, and spotting him, she decided to go and wish him welcome. "Ehi! Benvenuto in Tripicco, signore Cherry," dice Eva, "I prepared a little gift for you, from my shop on Via Gugliemo Marconi." She handed him the cherry tomatoes.

"Salve, signora!", dice Salvatore Cherry. "Che coso pieno di pensiero di dare!".

Eva got the gist of it. "Ah, uh, prego, signore! How are You finding our town so far?".

"Meraviglioso! This was the town that my ancestors lived in. I'm the grande-grande-grandefiglio of Tullio Cerri, who lived here in Tripicco. Lui va in Argentina, almost one-hundred ani fa."

"Affascinante assai," dice Eva. "I am sure just being here feels like a very strange trip through la storia per Lei."

"Sì, sì," dice Salvatore. "Ti hai mai heard the name Cerri before? Do you know if it is a well-known name around these parts?"

"No," dice Eva. "Mi dispiace di dirlo a Lei, but I have never heard that name before."

"Mio famiglio owns land around these parts, a long time ago," dice Salvatore, with horrid accent and villainous syntax. "Now it seems nobody knows even their name."

Eva shrugged. "Mi dispiace tanto, I've never heard it. If anyone has, I suppose it would be the old man living on Via Cappuccini. He has lived here for eighty years, penso. Or so I have been told."

"Oh, molto fascinante! A real witness to history!"

"Sì, forse. I have never met him myself."

"I must chase this up," lui dice, before then recording himself a little message on his phone. "What did you say the street name was?", shoving the device under her mouth.

"Via Cappuccini," dice Eva Amorcredo, a little amused.

"A very fitting name. I made my fortune selling coffee."

"It's the street where the friars used to live."

"They must have loved their coffee! Ah, the old witness to history on Via Cappuccini. Well, he will bear witness to a couple of changes round here yet."

“Sì, I hear Tripicco will even be getting nu supermercato.” Oh, there she went again, dwelling.

Salvatore nodded affirmatively. “I am molto sorpreso there isn’t one here already. It’s a very good development. You know, Phyllis va va all around just to stock the fridge.” He waved over at an elderly woman stood all alone by the fire doors. “At her age it really just isn’t fair.”

“Uh,” dice Eva.

“Il mio housekeeper. She really is very workharding.”

“Sì, sì, vabbuò,” dice Eva. He was starting to give her a mal di testa. “I’d better not take any more of your time. Thank you for the party! It has been nice to meet You!”

“Meet who?” lui dice.

“She looked rather animated,” dice Negozio, once Eva had wandered away. “What was that all about?”

“I think she is just chatty,” dice Salvatore. “The people here do seem very nice, and very friendly!”

“Sì, we italiani always turn out pleasant. The climate makes for un certo tipo of character.”

“It’s una cambia bella! From back home, I mean. There’s too much politics going on back home, and it is turning people nasty.”

“Oh, vero?”

“Sì, sì, there’s almost nothing I can say online anymore without somebody va va on into the replies, mi chiama a – scusa, I don’t know the word in italiano – a ‘cuck’.”

“La parola è ‘cornuto’, qui.”

“It is vile. Can you imagine the shame to be from a country where this language is commonplace?”

“No, mio amico, I cannot.”

Eva was always worried about the Pomodorium. Although her parents had always been encouraging, and celebrated her supposed ‘go-getting’ attitude that made her distinct from the rest of her generation, her age-group peers had more dour views. “In chesta economia?” Mosè aveva chiesto when she had announced her plans for a one-stop all-your-tomatoes shop. Incredulo o no, even before he had quit his old job and started working with Eva full-time, he had done everything he could to get the ball rolling. He had gone around and pleaded with friends and relatives to start bringing their patronage to Eva, rather than the market sellers. He had helped her

with the ads for the local giornale, and with setting up a bit of a social media presence. Eva made the graphics, just as she had made the designs to go on the sides of cans and on the stickers that went on the jars, and had been supplementing the shop's income by selling off Warholesque prints of pomodoro doodles in a range of sizes. A3 seemed to be the most popular. She liked to imagine the people out there who had her big, bold tomato art adorning their kitchen walls. She often thought of painting some pomodori in a real Van Gogh style. She was sure that they would be popular with the sort of folks who made Tripicco their home; it was just a matter of practice.

The Pomodorium itself was decorated alla moda di una cucina. Checkered table-cloths had been repurposed to drape over the shelves. Lampshades and picture-frames of bright, warm colours popped out from amongst the deep and splodgy red of the walls, and the burnished wooden hues of the furnishings. Much of the stock was kept in drawers and cupboards, which bore labels declaring their contents. Customers were invited to go rummaging, and truly make themselves at home. Over the few years that the Pomodorium had been open for business, Eva had acquired quite the collection of potted plants, which found their home behind the counter, safe from the reach of unruly children. As the collection had grown, the counter had been pushed forward, until such a time when there was simply no more space and she had to accept that her lovely campanule and her little arancio would have to be brave and find a new life on the front windowsills. All in all, her Pomodorium was her special place. Even on a terrible day, a retreat to the palazzo al pomodoro would never fail to lift her spirits.

Business wasn't bad. When doors had first opened, there had been a rush which Eva knew would subside with time. The Tripiccani were just revelling in the novelty of the new store. Her worst fears of a total collapse in interest beyond the first week or two proved unfounded, however. Sales were steady. The Pomodorium proved it would not so quickly go the way that so many Tripiccani cafés and bars and independent stores had recently. The comune generally had known healthier days. The young and the vaguely youthful were leaving to find work elsewhere. Eva should have told Salvatore that he would be better off looking for his far-removed cugini Cerri in Milano o Torino, where the jobs were not so scarce. Those of Eva's old classmates who still remained in Tripicco were often well on their way to becoming fully fledged vudelloni. Many had given up on applying, spending their days lounging around in the attics and basements of their parents. They were most animated on Vaffanculo day, which had been growing year after year in Tripicco's little piazza.

None of the Vaffanculo day crowd seemed to have made it than evening. The number of locals, of Evas and Mosès, paled in comparison compared to that of the members of Salvatore's extended circle of friends, the Teddys, Richies, and Donnies, the preened globetrotters, who had come from all over to celebrate this monumental day, this homecoming-of-sorts, in the life of their Italian-American chum. Despite the host's fervent attempts to promote speaking a little Italian over the course of the night, it was inevitably the case that the pinstripe-suited men were going around saying not "Salve," but "Howdy!". It was the sort of surroundings that well suited the business class, as well. If Eva had known what an airport lounge looked like, she would have said it looked like one. The strip lighting was pale, the surfaces glossy white or lunar-grey, et cetera, et cetera. There was some sculpture so twisting and writhing that simply to look upon it was to risk a migraine. The plaque below denoted it 'L'Italia'. Abstract, distorted cherub fountains on the walls dribbled water. They weren't styled in any classic style as might befit a cathedral or a house of parliament, but instead as twentieth-first-century mockeries. At one such cherub, a Donnie was splish-splashing with an extended finger. Giordano was looking another with some disdain as he took a bite out of a fresh bistecca.

"Its like stepping onto the set of a film," dice Mosè. "Do you feel that?"

"Che tipo di film?" chiede Eva.

"Sci-fi, forse," taking a sip from his glass, "forse horror."

"It is a funny place to build a film set, right here."

"Sì, certo, there is a location scout out there somewhere who really needs firing."

Capitolo Due

Transatlanticisation

The Old World had beckoned Salvatore Cherry, embodied in his daydreams as Aperol Spritz and pizzas emerging out of wood-fired ovens and olives skewered on little stickini, just as the New World had once beckoned Papà Cerri, embodied in his own as rivers of milk and fountains of honey and sprawling plains growing vegetables so huge and so heavy that no ship was big or strong enough to make of them an export good. It might seem comic to understand the world in such a way, filtered through a handful of potent symbols, but people can be awfully comic from time to time. Their peers had tried to tell them as much. The berlusconiani had tried to disillusion Salvatore at the Hilton Bar in Davos, and in much the same fahion the aged head of the Cerri household had been forewarned by a few other Tripiccani as to what the New World was really like. “It is long hours, work duru assai,” Enrico had said to the whole family one evening, “and reports of milk rivers, esagerato assai”. Papà Cerri was having none of it. Knowing that Enrico only went out to the Argentine once a year for the harvest, it seemed awfully likely he was just being bitter that the vast majority of his time was still spent in the drudgery of the Old World. Or else, he might have been downplaying the high life on the other side of the Atlantic, not wanting to make anybody jealous. Perhaps he simply did not want Bruno, the youngest of the Cerri clan, and a close friend since their piccirilli days, to buon viaggio himself out of his life. Old Papà Cerri could rationalise anything.

Rationalisations a-plenty were needed, as Enrico was not the only one who refrained from singing the praises of the New World. Paolo, a few years earlier, had written in his letters of una pandemia di tifo. Giustino, in his, simply said that he missed his home, and that he found a brotherhood in the others who felt the same way, regardless of whether their home was Tripicco, or whether it was Tuorofunaro, Trasacco, Terzigno, Trentinara, Torchiara, Tarsia, Tiriolo, Taurianova, or even Tortorici. La Patria emerged only in its absence, Giustino said. Well, Antonia would swing open the shutters of the pokey Casa Cerri, and from them she would try to see la Patria. She saw only the rolling green of the Alto Molise, the grasses blending seamlessly with the bushes and trees, broken only by patches of rocky cliff face and dirt tracks where the horses and donkeys would tread. It wasn’t a bad view, but it seemed an overstatement to call it La Patria.

Bruno was quite a different beast. He was the last remaining of the Cerri sons, after malaria had come for poveri Tullio e Marco, and he took his enjoyment in Tripicco’s every quirk. His

childhood had passed racing up the steps of the campanile and breathing deep the warm scirocco from the top. He'd enjoyed playing in il vallone, imitating the wolves, and ribbon-tying frogs to his straw hat. Whenever sounded the chiamata, "Donne, è arrivato il sanaporcelle," he would go bounding off to watch the pigs lose their balls. The porkers could not comprehend the meaning of this shout any more than they could understand why the terrible things which it preceded were befalling them. The burly sanaporcelle didn't just do castrations, but oophorectomies too. After he'd given a sow the shock of its life, he would toss the ovaries over to little Bruno, sat spectating nearby. He, in turn, would toss them over to one of the dogs for a late-morning snack.

With time, his childhood curiosities gave way to a genuine satisfaction derived from working the land from fresh dawn to weary dusk. When Enrico had suggested Bruno joined him for a couple of months to harvest the granturco in the New World, he had promptly declined, citing various superstitions, tales macabre of the terrible fates that befall all those who trespass beyond the bounds of their designated place where the powers that be had wisely situated them.

Antonia was the one tasked with selling all that which Bruno brought home from the family lots, and she knew things were getting bad. Every successive market day, the man on the cart from Campobasso was calling out a lower and lower cost for the grain he brought. The local sellers were not best pleased. One day, the eldest of the Jelsi boys had in desperation wandered over and smashed a roccia over il mercante's head, before the sbirri dragged him off. Although the entire comune wept at the news of the grain seller's recovery, they quickly returned to the habit of buying his goods once he was well enough to get back to business. Antonia would watch it all from the back of her cart, week-by-week. At the end of any given market day, Papà Cerri would strike her, either for returning home with a less-than-full purse after selling too cheap, or with a less-than-empty cart after failing to sell dear. None of her protests could shake his conviction that what could be done in his day could be done now.

Yes, the New World beckoned Papà, but he was old and infirm, and had land to tend to. And so, as this sad situation worsened, he made the call that it was necessary to send his kids to the shores which he himself had for so long wished to see. He and Antonia agreed that a couple of years abroad would sort things out – it was easier to save up, if Giustino was to be believed. With good work, Antonia and Bruno's combined efforts could put together a tidy sum and the Cerri family could buy back some of the land they had been forced to sell as the problems had mounted. Bruno did not agree, and instead wailed and flailed at the prospect of the trip. In the end the submission was brought about through the stern communications of the manganello.

"Nun è giustu," dice Bruno, "this is my home."

Antonia hugged him close. "Mio fratellino," lei dice, "we will come back, and we will come back tougher. Everyone will be asking us about the people we met, the creatures stranu assai that we've seen. I don't even know what a llama is, but I want to see one. We want to see one. Then we will come back, and things will be better here. More money, more land. Vabbuò, sí?"

"No, nun vabbuò," lui dice, "others are staying here. La famiglia Vanvitelli isn't moving away. La famiglia Nogaro isn't moving away. Why do we need to? Why is it us?"

"I don't know," lei dice, "I don't manage their accounts, only ours. We have no choice. We really don't."

It was a journey far more gruelling than its inverse their happy-go-lucky descendant would go on to make over one hundred years later. It began with the hike to the ferroviaria, under a sun unusually cruel and unusually lashing for March. There were no carriages that day, and only one mule so heavily loaded with luggage that there was no hope that they could take turns on its back. At first sight the railway was mistaken for a product of the blistering heat, merely a mirage bringing into false solidity what they had only before seen in the occasional grainy photos which always summoned small and curious crowds. It made them pause, just to behold.

"Don't be so superstizioso," dice Enrico, having seen the wary expressions of his friends, "it is a blessing. Before they built this here, it was a long trek to the nearest station. The older Tripiccani in the New World tell me I have it so simple now." He was departing for the harvest, and the Cerri siblings had timed their voyages to coincide. It was simpler with a guide. He had picked up their tickets well in advance. "You will habit yourselves to the trenu. We will be aboard for a while. Genova is far, far away d'accà." The strange tracks on the ground seemed less strange to the siblings after catching sight of the train itself, plumed by steam, toot-tooting its coming.

"Che mostro è chesto?" Bruno recoiled physically, and began to take little steps backwards. "Da quale circle of the'nfierno viene?"

"Enrico, we may need to manhandle him aboard," dice Antonia.

They were soon headed northwards. The sun was setting, and it became quickly impossible to make out the little villages, perched on hilltops and nestled in valleys, that came and went in such rapid succession. Each would have its contadini like them, of little to no experience beyond the shadow cast by the campanile, holding fuzzy notions of the wider world. Although Antonia was fairly familiar with the concept of trains, she had never thought they might be so consistently loud.

Neither had she thought about the sort of collective smell conjured up from the cramming together of all the individual passengers with their weeks-unwashed pants, sweat-encrusted boots, and the many other sorts of coagulated bodily secretions. Marching up and down the carriages, getting to grips with her locomotive surroundings, the siblings had not envied the first-class cabins so much for the comfy-looking beds she spied within, but for the insulation from the all-out contranasal warfare waged by

"We are taking a boat," dice Antonia, plugging her nostrils with breadcrumbs, "so why can't we take it from the Molisan coast, so close?"

"There are only a few places where you can get the boat," dice Enrico, "and some are chiù costoso than others, and nobody knows why. It is just the way it is."

"Toot-toot," dice il treno.

Night fell, and the train kept chugging away. Candle-lit games of cards saw them through to Roma, where Enrico guided them through their change towards Pisa. Card games resumed, wineskins were opened, and more hours passed until the next change. The sun was rising by the time they arrived at Genova. La stazione di Genova Brignole was cacophonous in a way the siblings had never known, where the screeching sound of halting trains punctuating the steady bustle of people, many people, rushing around, calling out, sometimes panting in the frenzy to embark on their adventures. A man raced along his platform only to watch la locomotiva begin its creaking exit from the city, urlando "No! Il treno! No!", and slamming his sweaty palms against his sweaty temples. Il treno heeded not his pleas.

The station itself was grandiose, and gleaming. Their eyes were quite unaccustomed to its spacious interior, and the soles of their country shoes quite unaccustomed to the shiny, slippery floors of the atrium. Some of the same Genovese flags which Salvatore would one century later misidentify as English were waving from the walls. Navigating their way out, past hawkers of tickets, newspapers, and even a cart or two plonked in the middle of everybody's way, stacked high with vegetables of all shapes and sizes and colours, they began to make their way to the boarding house where they would stay until their boat departed on the following morning. Out in the street, where cittadini strode to and fro without any appearance of rhyme or reason, they were able to take in the facade of the stazione building, replete with magnificent arches, scowling gargoyles, glorious heraldry, all bright and gleaming masonry. It was half the size of Tripicco in itself.

“It really is something, eh? You get used to it, though, the city. It is the same for the journey. It is like clockwork now,” dice Enrico, “this is the third year I am going for the harvest. It was all too much the first time, but none of it worries me anymore.”

The boarding house took forward everything the siblings had disliked about il treno. It was loud; the floor above groaned ceaselessly with stomping. It was fetid; some fellow and former boarders had not taken the effort to go outside to use the latrine, and it seemed that in every room the modest sweat-smell was intermingled with un po’ di urina, e un po’ di escrementi. Worse still, there were roaches on the damp wooden walls, and to avoid seeing them the boarders stared intently at the cards in their hand, not looking upwards or outwards. Antonia slept through the entirety of the day, and the little critters crawled over her as she snored. Bruno looked on in abject horror as they scuttled within striking distance of her dribbling mouth. He tried to roachproof his face, pressing it deeply into a blanket draped over a rucksack, and then pressed it in deeper still.

“I scarafaggi,” Bruno geme, upon his waking up, hours earlier than was necessary for catching the boat. “I scarafaggi sono nella mia ‘nzunnà.” He looked around the room, but didn’t see any roaches other than the one that a pair of twenty-first-century observer would note to be twerking on top of Enrico’s forehead.

“Fùmmigaçión, fùmmigaçión,” dîxe a man in clerical robes with a big, forthright moustache. With a gloved hand he motioned for the travellers to be ushered along, all needlessly bristling up against one another, into a stony passage around the back of the Port Authority building. Somewhere, not far away, was the sound of a woman screaming in pain. Other robed men were checking all of their documents. One group at a time was hastened along towards a cabin on the far side of a courtyard. When their turn came to cross, Antonia peered over at the line leading out of the cabin toward another desk, from which another screaming woman was being dragged away. Before it was even possible to indicare e gridare “Guarda!”, they had been bundled into the outhouse. First it was their baggage which received the treatment. They laid out their clothes, shoes, and blankets for a man in some kind of mask, who blasted it all with a hose spouting clouds of thick, asphyxiating gas. With no warning, the masked man turned the hose upon them. First Enrico, then Antonia, and finally Bruno, who collapsed wheezing. It was in their lungs, whatever it was.

“You could have warned us,” tossice allora Antonia.

“In the past,” dice Enrico, in between panting breaths, “they just did the clothes. Lo giuro.”

“People are more diseased this year,” dîxe the official, as Antonia fanned away the fumes and pulled her brother back to his feet, “year after year people are more diseased.”

“I don’t like this,” Bruno dice. He’d known some hard days of sangue, sudore, e lacrime, but they had merely been tough, not insulting. Emerging was a distinction between working through hardship and being subjected to it.

They exited the cabin, back into the courtyard, where the processing brought them over to the vaccination desk. The travellers-to-be were expected to bare a shoulder and just take the needle. The siblings Cerri received theirs without issue, but clerics stood at hand in anticipation of the reluctant and the scared, ready to intervene with a brusque grabbing and a quick stabbing. Most of the bambini went staggering on from the desk in fullflowing tears. A good number of adults did the same.

A second passport check followed, during which another robed official scribbled furiously into a logbook. “Sign here,” lui dice, “to note that you understand your military obligations. You understand your duty to La Patria in the event of war.” Bruno and Enrico each signed. After that it was down to the docks, where the tin-walled ship stared down at the dimensions of their lives hitherto. There was no queue anymore, only a gaggle waiting impatiently for the gangway to be opened. After what felt an eternity the siren blared, and the officials began to wave people on. It was a stampede in slow motion, in which mothers and fathers were grasping their children’s hands, and those of their own elderly parents. The march was inexorable. If anybody fell, it might not even be noticed. In tight formation, Bruno and Enrico made up the van, shoulder-to-shoulder, while Antonia followed up immediately behind carrying the bags. On they went.

“Uomini, qui!” grida an official.

“Donne, qui!” grida another.

Upon boarding, the travellers were expected to find their way to their allotted bed. The men were marched off to one dormitory, and the women to un’altra. In the men’s a significant disparity in the ratio of people to beds became the catalyst for conflict; many beds, it turned out, had been very wantonly allotted. The bunkbeds were crammed in together with only barely enough room to navigate between them, and despite the number going unclaimed, they became the focal point of squabbles in the cramped aisles. In the women’s, where it quickly became apparent the opposite was the case, fights broke out anyway.

“That one is mine!” grida una donna. “Puttana!”

The first slap of the viaggio ended up struck by one elderly woman against another, protesting the latter taking the bed next to her “figliosa,” a grown woman of at least forty years. A member of the crew, with a barrel chest and a tremendously hairy face, intervened and dragged the distressed slap-happy woman over to the bed allocated on her ticket. After a little time had passed, the crew began to shift the elderly and the infirm men to fill the empty beds. They were chosen on the basis of the minimisation of indecency. It was odd, as it became apparent that quite a few of the crew were given to indecency. Old barrel chest could be frequently spotted in the doorframe, panning his vision across the rows of women. By the end of the first evening, Antonia had begun pulled the drapes on her bed around, and vowed to remain bundled up in her blanket as often as was feasible. In part as protection against the leering, and in part as protection against another problem.

Each stage of the trip gifted the next with its worst qualities, and just as il treno had passed its smells on to complement the discomfort of the boarding house, the boarding house had passed along both to the ship, which provided its own novelties; rust, creaking, the stomach-antagonising motions borne of the ocean’s ebbs and flows. And then the scarafaggi. In spite of the wanton spraying of chemicals, the scarafaggi were back. But how? Nobody knew, and everybody lamented. Their arrogant strutting along tabletops and in and out of latrines called into question what good the fùmmigaçión had done at all.

“No treatment and it would be worse,” dice a member of the crew. He wasn’t widely believed.

For the first hours aboard, almost everyone on the vessel was still suffering from the after-effects of the fùmmigaçión, and were coughing and spluttering ceaselessly. Some had the courtesy to cover their mouths, or wheeze and choke into the crooks of their elbows, but others did not. Spittle flew its arcs. After half a day of bobbing up and down along the waves, people started to make their way up to the deck to throw up. Some of them did not get so far, and vomit began pooling in the stairwells. Some puddles were full of chunks; some were purely liquid. Some pools were neatly concentrated; most were splashed all around. Bruno spent as much time up top as he could, hunched over a railing, looking back towards the coast as the ship sailed south. It was slowly diverging, and the hills and little towns he could make out in the distance were shrinking.

Enrico passed the first day playing cards and drinking. On the second day, the players decided to start making wagers. He partook, at first, but as the sun went down and the drinking ramped up, the wagers began to grow worryingly, and tempers grew in tandem.

“Even passenger vessels have brigs,” dice barrel chest in the first of many reminders.

As the first few of the gung-ho gamblers baulked at their losses, a smaller stakes-free community emerged. The anti-gamblers, joined by Enrico and Antonia, enjoyed a much less rowdy tone to their game, and the group swelled with the ranks of those bitten during the dog-eat-dog frenzy of the wagerers.

“I bet my shoes,” dice a man with no shoes.

“Me too,” dice another.

Bruno, driven from the top deck by the cold sea winds and the fading of the coast into the night, joined them but refrained from partaking. Antonia, shawled up like a burrito, had a difficult time holding her cards, but managed nonetheless.

“How much do you know dell’Argentina?” dice Luciano, a frizzy-haired, frizzy-bearded, and grizzled type, somewhat older than much of the rest of the largely youthful passengerhood. “You have heard many stories?”

“Some,” dice Antonia, “Mio Papà has always been obsessed with the rivers of milk and the fountains of honey del nuovomondo.”

“Hhrm,” dice Luciano, with a generally incredulous look. “I can only tell you that the Río de la Plata, il fiume dell’argento, is neither milk nor silver. It’s a river. It’s water.”

“The milk river is in the United States, pagliaccio,” chimed in a craggy Neapolitan woman who played a mean game of cucù. She had told them her name on the first night, but neither of the siblings could remember it. Now it was too late to ask for a reminder. “In California they all drink from it, and it makes all their sons grow up very fast. They become very large adult sons.”

“Sei sicuro?” Antonia asked. “Is there not even a little one in Argentina? Nu fiumiciattolo di milk?”

“Il nuovomondo is not a fantasy-land,” dice Luciano, “but there are the pampas. They are a strange place. There is a strange energy there. Outside of the city, away from the porteños. They say the pampas are the richest farmland in tutto il mondo.”

Bruno stirred. “This is where the huge vegetables grow? Le carote the size of gambe?”

Luciano gave a knowing smile. “They do grow big, ma not quite that big. But the animals – the bulls are huge. The cows are huge, too. Mammelle enormi. Forse there’s your rivers of milk, amica.”

“Quanto huge è huge?” chiede Antonia.

“You wouldn’t want such un toro charging at you,” dice Luciano, “I can say that much.”

“I don’t think I want nu toro of any size charging at me, man.” She paused for a moment. “Have you ever seen a llama?”

“Sì, I have seen a llama.”

“Woow.”

“The pampas are a special place, though,” dice Enrico, “I like to catch up with friends and family in the city, but the sooner I get out to the pampas, the better. It is wonderful nature. And the way that people live there –”

“The people have great spirit,” dice Luciano, “and no more than il gaucho, the great and true spirit of the people.”

“Cos’è il gaucho?” dice Antonia.

Luciano struck his open palm against his chest. “Un gaucho is a man of the pampas who wrangles the wild horse, fights against the Indian. He is the bane of the city porteño. The porteño fights every day to destroy the freedoms of il gaucho, and bring him under the thumb of the city, to domesticate him like a housecat. The porteño thinks his way is the only way, and the way of il gaucho must be stamped out.”

“They are mad, the gauchos” Enrico intervenne. “They are true rangonistas. They eat nothing but beef, and they play music all day. Nu piccirillo gaucho learns to ride on sheep and goats. They come into the city sometimes. You will see them, col un po’ di tempo.”

“I’d like to see them,” dice Bruno.

“Don’t let your porteño employer be hearing you say anything like that once you have settled in to city life,” dice Luciano. “The porteños like all of us Italiani, but try to be the Italiano that they like.”

“Italiano?” dice Bruno. “Che cosa?”

Before any answer was afforded, the boat rocked so violently that the cucù player with the mad skills dropped her ace of swords, sending it flying under one of the bunkbeds, just as she was on the cusp of playing it. “Porco Dio!” she cried out, before the boat rocked again with even greater abruptness, sending Antonia and her little brother unkindly floorwards.

The seasoned Enrico was well prepared, having grabbed a bedpost in advance. “This was just a little one, nun chiù di na piccola. Once we are on the high seas, it sometimes gets very bad. Assai.” He was right. About a week into the viaggio, a real storm came upon them, throwing the ship so wildly from side to side that there was no way anybody could remain upright. Bodies crashed against each other, against the walls, against the metal beds. With each tumble, shouts

and screams of pain went up. Desperate confessions sounded out as ascended terror and anguish. More cries were heard as a bed unbolted itself from the floor, and slammed full force into a group who had collapsed against the wall. To stop it from crashing upon anybody else, people began to grab ahold of it, and its travels across the dormitory slowed. The splashes of blood appearing on the sweat-yellow shirts of the travellers after being hurled against one another provided the first indication that something serious had already happened. Quanto ha passato la tempesta, a young man was found sprawled out, his limbs and the limbs of a bunkbed all messily intertwined. His head was cracked cleanly open. Enrico, Luciano, and a few others were amongst those who helped remove the body and take it to be kept in the brig awaiting a funeral on land. Bruno had balked. He hadn't wanted to look. By the time they arrived there, there was already the body of a little piccirillo who had been trampled as the frenzy to grab ahold of anything fixed down had overtaken his dormitory. There were others, too. On the upper deck, where the captain and crew had their quarters of significantly greater comfort, where they bemoaned the nature of their cargo. Humans were more fragile than sugar, and when things got bad the clean-up was always a hell of a lot more gruelling than cotton.

"It has not been the worst I have seen," dice Enrico, "preghiamo che we do not have another for the rest of chesto viaggio."

"You got used to this journey?" chiede Antonia.

"Sì."

"I don't think some things should be gotten used to."

Antonia had long since been used to men who behaved like pigs, with unmannered and grabby hands. She was not, though, used to having such limited ways to get away from them. "We might still sink yet," dice one such man, as he was pawing at the small of her back. She just wanted to play cards.

Both Enrico and her little brother proved useless as deterrents, what with their being on the smaller side of the shipwide average. Bruno's attempts at maschilismo never went particularly well. Jocular contests in the fields always ended in his defeat, whether over who could push the plough the fastest, or over who could bale the hay the highest in the shortest amount of time. Sometimes they even ended in injury. "I think mia sorella wants to be left alone," lui dice, with his meanest look.

"I don't think she does," l'uomo risponde.

"I do," dice Antonia.

"You don't know what you want." It ended as most such encounters did, with continued discomfort until the man had to excuse himself for the latrine. The opportunity was never missed, and the sisterhood of the dormitorio femminile hid her away until he had given up and gone to find some new girl to pester.

All the advances were unwanted, excepting a single one. Pleasant conversation was struck up with a young man, after he had asked Enrico to pass along a photo of some flowers to her. In the midst of such anti-romantic conditions the gesture was very well appreciated. "Sì," lui dice, "it is all sepia, but imagine the petals are a nice red. I had to bet my shoes to win these." He had since lost his shoes on another game anyway, but it was sweet nonetheless. Before long, like a few other spontaneous pairings aboard ship, they had drawn the bunkbed drapes and sealed themselves away from the rest of the travellers.

"Our new home," lei dice, as the couple stood at the railing above deck on the cloudy day when Buenos Aires graced them with its presence. They had gone up early to make sure they had a spot at the front. They wanted to see, and they did. Blocky buildings colourfully painted lined the seafront. Some had pointy spires and steeples, and others big chimneys belching out into the sky. Docks could be seen, where horse-driven carriages were moving about in wide-open spaces just beyond the boardwalks. Boats and ships of varying sizes bobbed up and down in greeting, a seeming testament that there were others who had survived the trip. "Here we are."

She didn't know yet, in that moment watching the city enlargening itself on the horizon, that she was pregnant, and was going to have to put up with a living souvenir of the three-week viaggio for the rest of her days. The realisation came in its own sweet time, well after they had bid Enrico and Luciano adieu as they boarded their train headed for the interior. It came well after having had their family friend Paolo help them find their first jobs of il nuovomondo, until after they had begun to rent their first new home in the city, in which the baby would eventually be born. The realisation came, and it was greeted with quiet despair. "Porco Dio," Antonia dice. Porco Dio, indeed. Little Ettore, as he would be named, began the line connecting the family Cerri of the early-twentieth-century with their mogul descendant of the twenty-first. Of course, she didn't know that – it just seemed a bad time to have a baby – but if somehow she had, oh, well, it might have just been too much to bear.

Capitolo Tre

The Cherry on Top

Salvatore was one of those men who cared very much about some things, cared not at all about others, and cared a modest, middling amount about practically nothing at all. This was all the more true when it came to choosing what generations of his family history to immerse himself in. His great-grandfather, little Ettore who had begun growing upon the fusion of two cells in Antonia's belly midway across the ocean, had never much piqued his interest. Much more interesting to him were those Cerris who had departed il vecchiomondo, and set in motion the events that would lead to the establishment of the finest coffee dynasty that mankind could, should, and would ever know. The other generation to benefit from his obsession was his grandfather's.

Salvatore sat on one of the plush pleather sofas of the Tripicco Halls foyer, searching his phone to find his favourite pic of the finely suited and magisterially brylcreemed Antonio Cerri, posing in his New York office, one hand on his lap, another turning the page of his ledger, and his eyes staring right out into his grandson's. When it came to the fortune that was now being sloshed around the Cerri hometown, its accumulation had begun in earnest with Antonio.

Family legend had it that a chance encounter rounding out a tough, tough week working at the docks had set in motion the historic events that would forever change what it meant to be a Cerri. Antonio was on the raz, staggering between as many late bars as possible, and by the early hours had found himself in a drinking hole in the shadow of a building with hundreds of windows. To woozy eyes they appeared like glazed-over eyes, as numerous as a spider's, looking down apathetically at the street-level revellers. Sat apart from the bulk of the clientele was a real old codger with real sad sack vibes. He looked like he needed a proper cheering up. The half-wasted Antonio, fortuitously, took upon himself to do so himself.

"It all went to pot when those sleazebags started throwing their weight around," the old rumpled man says, after a much-practiced preamble about the heady days when he was a real mover and shaker. The bitter discourse was accompanied by contemptuous gestures aimed outside towards the spider-eyed monolith that was the New York Port Authority building. "The bastards. We had something real going until they had to have their own way."

"Truly?" Antonio asks the man. "Well, at least we can have a toast to comeuppance. My old papà would say, 'To comeuppance!'" He lifted his glass.

The man did not toast. “My old papà was done so dirty. It is all so rigged.” He introduced himself by the name of Clarence Nix, and he explained that had been robbed of his fortune by the Port Authority, working in conjunction with none other than the Supreme Court. Clarence’s father had been a wealthy fruit magnate with sprawling, worldly ambitions well suited to the Empire State. “When I was just a young’un, we really had it all. But you have to understand that bastard Arthur – he was before your time I suppose – the President, President Arthur. He passed that Mongrel Tariff Act. It was all sorts of troubles for all sorts of decent people. My old man’s got screwed big-time by that import tax on the vegetables. And he did sell vegetables, but his main enterprise was fruit, you see. Tomatoes. We took the hit in good faith, but then comes the Port Authority, and that bastard Hedden. Hedden, he was the head honcho at the Port Authority, you see. He taxed us, he put that new import tax on us, on our tomato imports.” All good tomato connoisseurs, our Eva included, would have been horrified at this classification. Tomatoes, after all, are fruits.

“What happened next?” asks Antonio, after buying a round in the hope that a wetter whistle might help Clarence cut to the chase.

“We were importing from Florida, by and large. The labour was cheap and the going was good. We weren’t like some of them others, importing from the Mexicans, importing from god-knows-who from god-knows-where. These were American tomatoes. They still wanted to tax us anyway, and on false premises, you see. So my old man lawyers up, spends a helluva dime on getting the best. Tomatoes are fruit, so its open and shut, right? No, no, not one bit, because those bastards on the Scotus are there heads bobbing when that bastard Hedden’s attorney is saying that it’s only really a fruit if everybody calls it a fruit, and everybody thinks the tomato is a god-damn vegetable. ‘The common language of the people’, that’s what they called it. And the common language of the people prevails, they say.” The codger was positively gurning with contempt. “The tomato, Antonio, is a fruit! These people know nothing of botany, of biology! Its all in the seed structure, you see. A spade is a damn spade, and a tomato has the seed structure of a damn-us-all-to-hell fruit!”.

Antonio wasn’t sure what to say. He wanted to be sympathetic, to say something understanding, but before he could get his brain in gear Clarence just started up again: “We lost. It was tough. The verdict went right to my old man’s kidneys, and before I knew which way was up it was me at the helm. I took over the Nix & Co. Fruit Commission that year. I did my best, started growing tomatoes within the state. No choice, had to work around the taxes, you see. And we

came up with an ingenious scheme, inspired a little by old Charlie Davenport. He was one of yours, Italian fellow. Good fellow! We started throwing out the roundest of the tomatoes, and breeding the squarest. Its very straightforward: you can fit more square tomatoes into a barrel than round ones. They fit in together all the more neatly. Saved us on shipping."

"Clever," says Antonio.

"Not clever enough to account for stupidity," says Clarence. "The damn people. First they said the tomato is a vegetable, and then they said they wanted nothing to do with square tomatoes. Backwardness! The League for the Defense of Round Tomatoes was launched. Protests, lobbying. Somebody even set fire to one of our crops, one year. I was a young man and I was in over my head, you see. I just remember how it felt as it all got out of hand."

Antonio put a hand on the old man's back. He knew it was going to end up covered in dandruff, but it was the nice thing to do anyway. "It's a tough world. Say, if you aren't done with business for good, and if you aren't all washed up on funds – well, I've been reading the manifests. Every single day. There's money to be had. People really sleeping on coffee."

"Coffee?"

"Coffee."

And so they got in on the coffee business, importing from where the labour was cheap, and facing no domestic competition. Only the brave and the foolish would try to grow coffee in the Empire State. Clarence, who it turned out was only washed up in a very contextual sense, sold off his third and fourth New York properties in order to make the initial investments, whilst Antonio began scouting out potential locations for international farms. With Antonio's eye on shipping manifests, and Clarence's on the stock market, they began to hone in on Mexico and Guatemala for their grand plan.

"I thought you valued all-American. What happened to that?"

"If there is such a thing as the sentimental gene," Clarence says with a shrug, "it is no use to anyone, you see. The sentimental gene is the loser's gene."

The Nix-Cerri Coffee Corporation grew into quite the beast. A couple of generations later the brand was renamed Cerri's, in pursuit of a snappier, roll-off-the-tongue marketability, and eventually Cherry's, in pursuit of pronounceability by a United States public that was not merely globally uncultured, but increasingly repulsed by global culture. Neither Nix-Cerri nor Cerri's became a household name, but the instant coffee products they sold enjoyed sufficient enough

circulation for Salvatore's old man to get a good foothold in New York real estate. The Upper East Side, it turned out, was a good place for a 1960s investor to become acquainted with.

What a story! Salvatore had heard it time and time again in his infancy. His father really brought the characters to life, putting so much spirit into the voices. In Salvatore's own twenty-first-century retellings, addressed to his own could-be-more-interested, would-rather-be-playing-Fortnite kids, he couldn't quite recapture the magic. Clarence always sounded a bit Abe Simpson, while Antonio was given a real Fat Tony cadence. He sometimes wondered how it would go with real actors. Salvatore had been discussing with Negozio the possibility of getting a theatre set up in Tripicco, where they could put on a staging. "I was thinking the play could be called 'In the Nix of Time'. What do you think? How does it translate?"

"I don't think it does," dice Negozio.

"Mamma mia," dice Salvatore. "Hmnm, there must be a pun to do with Cerri, right? 'Semi di Cerri', maybe?"

"In italiano, 'cilegia' is the word for your English 'cherry'."

"Che? Are you sure?"

The money from the real estate had been put into the establishment of Cherry's coffee shops, and not too long after that the veritable fleet of coffee vans. No campagna militare da secoli had enjoyed the success of Cherry's coffee van conquest of the Americas, from the frigid domains of the elk and the French, right through the sunnier climes down to the deserts sweeping the very south of the southern cone. Clan Cherry, from origini basse, basse, yielded its first billionaire not even a full decade into the twenty-first-century.

To origini basse, basse returned Salvatore Cherry. If there was a single thought that guided him, it was the thought of the Midas touch – or, rather, the Midas embrace. Sal wanted to caress Tripicco, to press that quaint and rustic town into his arms and against his broad and chiselled Swiss bank account. It would be crushingly disappointing if he didn't soon see a Cherry's opened in the town. An embrace, however, goes two ways, and he wanted Tripicco to leave its indelible mark upon him, the mark borne only by something authentic. Cherry was no hopeless romantic. In fact, he quite enjoyed the trambusto cosmopolitano of big city life, and the antiparochial world of hotel conferences with complementary champagne. It stung him, then, when his much-beloved New York had thrust upon the world that awful laughing stock of a President. One of the rube-whisperers on the Republican debate stage had declared "Not many conservatives come out of

Manhattan!", and it seemed to Salvatore that there was at least one too many. Spurned, he was getting away from it all, getting away to somewhere he might rekindle a little faith in humanity.

Away, he went, away from the world of Washington D.C. meet-and-greets with legislators who had mere months ago seemed like such decent, reasonable people, and now appeared as talking heads on the big media channels defending that crass, disgusting charlatan. Gone, he vowed, were his days as a bipartisan donor. Now, in the arms of Tripicco, he would have a taste of the way which things are supposed to be. His country of birth suffered from liars in high places and whispers cremlineschi tweeted into Michigander cortices, but il vecchiomondo was steadfast. Making their initial trip from Rome, Negozio's chauffeur had navigated the sharp bends on the ascent to the Alto Molise whilst Sal took in the sights. Melodramatically, oh so melodramatically, he shed a tear. The sky was a clear and vibrant blue that day, crisply contrasting with the bleak winter palette of the beech covered hills that ran as far as the eye could see. The towns and villages were nestled primarily in the dips, but a dinky orange-roofed house qui and a squat whitewashed church lì could be spotted atop some of the rocky precipices. Below them, the extended arms of leafless trees seemed to be reaching up and reaching out to seize and drag down the few monuments of human civilization remaining proudly above nature's proud displays. His forebears had once opted to leave behind this fine and enchanting land. It seemed there must have been some defective, foolish gene behind such decisions. Sal hoped that time had seen it excised from the pool. Clarence Nix would have approved.

Not everything in Tripicco was all va bene, va bene for Salvatore Cherry's tastes, however. Sal enjoyed his shopping. He had been led to believe that l'Italia boasted coast-to-coast boutiques, and that one could barely fare una passeggiata without tripping over one store or another. Tripicco, counter to this vision, was rather devoid of shops. There were a few specialist shops, including a DIY store, a mobile repair place, a vapery to pick up a confezione da quattro JUULpods, and of course the Pomodorium. The bulk of the Tripiccani's groceries for the week were bought at the market, which sometimes just wasn't there when Salvatore had an urge to send Phyllis for something specific. Rather gloomily, there were also many that had closed their doors long before his arrival. The paint shop was gone; perhaps the Tripiccani weren't doing many renovations. The gift shop, as tough as it was to identify under all the graffiti, was no more; perhaps the Tripiccani hadn't been in giving moods. A shop proudly announcing its stocks of 'Intimo e Biancheria' was shuttered up; perhaps the Tripiccani were going commando. Just across from Salvatore's townhouse lodgings was what had once been a restaurant bearing the name 'Cucina di Gianni

Anatra'. He wasn't sure who Gianni was, but he wished that his kitchen was still in operation. "We need to sort this fuori," dice an exasperated Salvatore.

"Risolvere la questione," dice Negozio, "is the more common saying qui. Ma sì, sì, sono d'accordo, there really is a very poor range of customer options available here."

Simply Market blossomed overnight in the husk of a years-derelict apartment building, just a couple of doors down from the Pomodorium on Via Gugliemo Marconi. It was opened not even a full week after the inaugural party at Tripicco Halls. If they hadn't already seen the posters championing the date of Simply's arrival, the Pomodoriumosi would have noticed that something was amiss from the drought of customers on that fateful day. "They have all gone to see what l'armeggio is all about, Eva," dice Mosè. "They will be back."

"Sì," dice Eva.

Drab, dampstained walls had been covered in laminate, and cheap bright tiles lined the floors. Shelves stocked with all manner of foodstuffs towered over gawking shoppers. Eva, having left Mosè playing giochi on his phone at the till, was having a perusal of her own. Some of the elderly folks reacted as if they had never seen electronic price tags before, and a well-known village idiot had ripped one from the gnocchetti shelf in full expectation that it would render the product free. Giordano had been right; the range of goods to buy was quite remarkable, even despite the store having only a little more than twice the floorspace as the Pomodorium. The cheese counter proudly displayed cheeses by Cade Martori, and Président. Flaminio pastas were on offer. Misura cereals and biscuits could be found in abundance, whilst Auchan and Saclà provided jars of all manner of fruit and veg. There were tins, too. Some bore the image of Eva's favoured fruit, alongside little red birds with speech bubbles announcing so the product within: 'Pomodori Pelati'.

"You have come to stare death in faccia, signora," dice Giordano, approaching with a cart full to the brim with every shade of red. "Morte in scatola," eyeing up the tin.

"Prodotti inferiori do not scare me," dice Eva.

A smile on the face of il carnivoro. "Non mi spaventano either, Eva," theatrically drifting a full three-sixty degrees on his trolley. "Anzi, I rather like them for their low prices! All the more nourishment, and all the less!".

Giordano trundled his haul out of sight, and Eva stayed staring at the rival produce. After a quick look left, and a quick look right, and seeing that the only people around were far too

distracted by all the goods they found before them, she grabbed a couple of cereal boxes and shoved them in the way. It looked as if the pomodori pelati had never been there. “Chesto è il mio paese,” dice allora lei.

Her disdain for Simply Market took a backseat a little over a week later, when the ominous news arrived: once the lease expired on the Pomodorium in the summer, the rent would be going up. Adding injury to injury, the same was going to happen to the rent for Eva’s flat when that contract was up for renewal in the autumn. Quando piove, diluvia.

“Porco Dio,” dice Eva, knocking back a glass of the local red. “Porca proprietaria.” As soon as the working day was done she had staggered on down to Il Salone. The ‘Il’ was often stressed, with the closures of Il Ritrovo and Il Bar rendering it the one and only drinking hole in the comune.

“Pomodori a maglia,” the cameriera suggests.

“You did once really want to get into knitting,” dice Mosè Rappaporto.

Understanding that she had grown her customer base to the limit within Tripicco, and that she could not raise prices with such a cheap competitor planting its tanks right upon her lawn, Eva was taking suggestions on how to deal with the impending cash flow problem. Knitting plushie tomatoes was not the worst that had been floated.

Galvani, perhaps the strangest regular of Il Salone, frequently spotted dipping copper wires into his spirits, or decanting them off into all manner of beakers and vats, had some suggestions of his own. “How do you think the corporazioni do it? Bioingegneria!,” dice Galvani. “You can buy an imipolex wrap da due soldi, and on that you put the soil. No weeds, no erosion that way. It works for pomodori, it works for all fruits. Drainage ditches, so you can apply un po’ di nitrogen without any effetti negativi. Pesticidi, ovviamenti.”

“Lo odio,” dice Eva. It was unclear if she meant the plan, or the man.

“You might as well invest in some proper machinery for the packaging and branding,” Galvani continua. “Get something that stamps them all with ‘POMODORIUM’ and the nutritional info, and you’ll be gucci.”

“But I like to do it all by hand,” dice Eva. “And we don’t even know the nutritional info.”

“We could just copy it from one of the Simply Market brands,” dice Mosè.

“No, we won’t do that,” dice la Pomodoressa.

After a few more glasses, the two Pomodoriumosi grabbed their bikes for a ride down by the stream, and into il vallone. It was a quiet time of year in il vallone. In the warmer months, the

sounds of the frogs were inescapable, incessant. It was something of a pastime for the bored children of Tripicco to go frog-chasing in the summertime, grabbing as many as they could and tying them with ribbons onto the brims of their straw hats. The most nimble-fingered amongst them would end up with the noisiest hats, although the frogs sounded quite different after having been accessorised. The normal frog calls were rather regular, making sure there was no confusion about the species that was a-singing. The most successful of the debonair frogs maintained a consistent, pulsing call, one which was neither too slow nor too fast amongst the calls of its peers. The most successful of these already likely-successful callers were the loudest, those which seemed to throw their voices into the great unknown in a challenge to predators: “Eccomi! Come and kill me, if you can.” These daring, loud frogs would either go on to live, and to have proven their mettle to the ladies who sought to bless their tadpoles with a strong dad, or they would go on to die with the good grace to not pollute the gene pool with their brash, quaquaraquà stupidity. Any frog that kept quiet did not do so out of cowardice alone, but because he had undertaken quite frank self-assessments, and concluded that they simply weren’t top-notch enough to risk being a loud boi. There was method to the evening chorus of ribbit-ribbit madness. Clarence Nix would have approved. It was not these methodic, melodic sounds which frogs strapped to hats made, however. Those sounds are instantly recognisable as the uncalculated screams of disperazione, of terror.

“I was speaking to Don Licata,” dice Eva. “This Cherry – and all these new people, these suited types – none of them have been to mass. What type of people are they?”

“Nun vado a messa, Eva,” dice Mosè. He wobbled as his bike bounced along the rocky path.

“I don’t think they observe lo shabbat, either,” dice lei.

Mosè shrugged. “Its a changing world. These are modern people.”

“E nun siamo moderni?,” Eva chiede. “He has twenty years more than us, almeno. Maybe thirty. Maybe more. It is hard to say with the ricchi. Hard to tell the age of plastic.”

Mosè chortled. “Vero, vero.”

“Nun siamo moderni?,” lei dice ancora. “The world is changing? Why is that? Nun risposta nobile, per favore.”

Mosè just shrugged ancora. “La forza del destino. Some things don’t change,” gesturing up at the skeletal trees furnishing the frosty inclines to their either side. They grasped up, la luna barely out of their reach. “One hundred, two hundred anni fa, you could walk down here and see

the same sights we can see now. Càvulu, one thousand years ago. It couldn't be that much changed."

"Mio padre told me these valloni used to be full of fireflies. Where it was chiù paludoso there would be fireflies, fireflies, assai."

"Sì."

"You can see belle foto of them online. Ma I have never seen them di persona."

"Sì. You are right. You are sometimes right."

There is a saying which stipulates that whoever loves their work has no work at all, but that, in Eva's experience, was just not true. She worked damn hard to keep the dream alive, and the struggle to stay afloat could not be faulted for effort. Eva and Mosè rolled out their best attempt at conquering the online market, setting up an exceptionally crude website using WordArt and embarrassingly animated fiery fonts that deserved their extinction in that blessed world where the Millennium Bug had delivered on its promise. Every day now included a trip to the Ufficio Postale, a handful of jars of pomodori in Eva's backpack. Along the way she cycled on by Simply Market, and through the casement windows she could see that the shoppers were not abating. Her old customers, some who had not lately graced her premises, were milling about the aisles with such childlike expressions, such awe and wonder. Eva liked to pass by quickly, and try to think about something other or else. It was hard to slam the mind's doors on Simply Market. Even in il vallone, branded carrier bags could be spotted in flight, moving in synchronous arcs, following the scirocco currents with the sort of detestable freedom that their observers never seem to enjoy.

Eva daily posted off the pomodori to her new customers, who came from all over the country. Each parcel bore an interesting name, written carefully and calligraphically. Eduardo Detto, Giuliana Andreafiglia, Liliana Ragazzo, Elena Trucco Legno, Michele Assassino, Guglielma Spina, Carina Liana, Amico Universale Pubblico, Carlo Segna, Gervasio Giovanni, Giacomo Vincicalvo, Roberto Corvo, Geremia Corvo, Davide Fratello, Davide Fulcro, Davide Attenboro, to name a few. There were even some international customers: John Marilyn Willpower, Frances Blunderbus, Lucian Thin, Val Brunette-Germans, Palmer Removals, Humbert Ecological. Che nomi strani! To them, and to all those with names unknown who had passed through the Pomodorium's red wooden door, Eva owed a debt of gratitude.

Tripicco's little shop bearing a simple black-on-white text sign reading 'FAI-DA-TE' was where Eva bought varnish when the Pomodorium shelves were looking a little worn. It was where

she bought new lightbulbs, quattro watt, filamento a spirale, whenever the old ones started to flicker and dim. Once a year, she would buy a new doormat. Il suo zerbino preferito always read "Benvenuti!", until enough shoes had been scraped across it to render it illegible. They never became defunct, but Eva liked to make sure the shop was welcoming. She liked to be welcoming, at least to those who were welcome. Mosè, being un tipo pratico, had suggested that the occasional trips to FAI-DA-TE might be replaced by online deliveries. It would save nu euro accà, nu euro là, and with rent payments looming those euros accà e là were not to be scoffed at. Eva was not a fan of this idea. Quando tiene bisogno di WD-40, perhaps for the ailing hinges of a door, perhaps for the janky clasps of the till, the proprietor would let her borrow a can in return for a tomato or two. "You are advocating betrayal," dice Eva, with one hand lightly touching Mosè's shoulder, as if he were a child in need of only of the gentlest scolding. "And you don't even know it."

The kindly proprietor of FAI-DA-TE helped them out with the filming of a little promotional video to be chucked about online. He was un mago vero with the camera, and the finished product had a real cinematographer's touch. Eva, looking Italian as ever, was placed slightly off-centre, gazing slightly off-camera, answering an disembodied voice's inquiries as to why it was a young woman had devoted her life to the tomato. Behind her, the deep reds, burnished woods, and chequered drapery the Pomodorium provided a perhaps-too-busy backdrop.

"I wanted to be an attrice," dice Eva. "And be in all the big movies. And I wanted to retire and to own a deli. Everybody wanted to own a deli."

"A deli?" dice the floating voice of Mosè. "Why a deli?"

"It's cute, it's just cute to own a deli. Or a grocery," Eva dice. "Sono diventato vegetariana, so it was a grocery per me."

"And your life as un'attrice, what happened a quello?"

"Nun era realistico, quel 'nzunnà," Eva ride.

"Eva, Eva! This is for people all over the country. We're going national. Less 'nzunnà, accà, more sogno."

"Vabbuò," lei dice. They filmed it again.

"Can you try a little acting now, per la camera?," Mosè dice. Here we see a cut in the finished video, as our protagonists encountered some behind the scenes difficulties.

"Acting? Act what?," Eva ha chiesto.

Mosè shrugged. “Say ‘Marcello, Marcello!’ with your hand like this,” lui ha risposto, his head cocked back melodramatically, knuckles pressed against his brow and his palm open to the ceiling.

“No,” fu la risposta di lei. In they end they settled, and of course they did, on a short clip in which Eva took an unwieldy stainless steel kitchen knife, and with it sliced open a tomato right along the centre. One half dropped away with the passing through of the blade, and the other she lifted and displayed to the camera. The cross at its core was plain to see. “Il potere di Cristo ti obbliga!” lei ha dichiarato, with all the gusto she could summon up.

A big thumbs up from Mosè. “Perfettu,” dice lui.

The video did adequately well online. Friends and family left supportive comments. Somebody from Pescolanciano messaged the page saying he had never heard of the Pomodorium before, but he was definitely going to make a trip soon. It got a short tourist-aimed article on www.lovelymolise.com, and was picked up by a clickbait site who ran a little story about the quirky shop. ‘This Lady Makes a Living Selling ONLY Tomatoes’ read the headline. Supermarkets HATE her! Or something to that effect.

The supermarket hated her not at all. It was indifferent. When rent day came, it did not bite the accounts of Simply Market in the way that it did the accounts of Eva Amorcredo. Rent day was not so much as noticed on those white-lit aisles. It was not noticed at the cheese counter, nor beside the shelves stocked with beers international. The staff milled about, as if nothing had happened.

In the Pomodorium, the windows which on a normal day would let in the morning light so freely had decided not to. It was dim, and when Mosè switched on the lights, they flickered. Eva went home early, citing mal di testa, acid reflux, depression, colera, SARS, flesh wounds, the evil eye. She felt very poorly, not knowing the reason. There were not so many customers who passed through the door by then, so not so many noticed her absence.

A week or two later, la primavera ought to have been well underway, but it had grown colder and gloomier. Snow covered the orange tiled roofs of the Tripiccani buildings. The birds made no sign of returning from their migrations. Eva was trundling her bike along Via Gugliemo Marconi. She was returning from the Ufficio Postale, having emptied her bag of the day’s orders. It was icy, and with her weighty rucksack it would have been the easiest thing in the world to slip on the downhill ride. Giordano was walking towards her, and with a smile he flashed his Simply Market bag. It was

full of this, and full of that. He passed on by. On she trundled, until the supermarket itself was towering over her. From behind its sliding door a glow spilled out onto the sidewalk. Without much considering why she was doing it, Eva left her bike propped against the wall and stepped inside. Despacito was playing as she began to walk the aisles, past the cereals and pastas, grown and packaged in parts of her country that she had never heard of, past the meats, the animals slaughtered and compressed into tins in grey and red factories, past the sugars from nuovomondo plantations, shipped transatlantic in so many steel containers, past the electronics carefully assembled in squalid workhouses thousands of miles to the east. At last, she came to the tinned fruits. She, again without thinking, opened the zaino and began to tip inside, two or three at a time, every tin of pomodori pelati that the shelf had to bear. When the last of the tins, and the little birds with the little speech bubbles which adorned them, had tumbled into her bag, she strapped it onto her back once more, and hurried out into the street. Someone was shouting behind her. She jumped atop the bike and peddled.

There were too many people on the sidewalk. They weren't trying to block her way, but they just did. Eva Amorcredo, not the most subtle criminal, was apprehended. A clerk grabbed her backpack and shook the contents out onto the floor while she covered her face. The sbirri appeared, and took a statement from witness at the scene of the crime. "Era la puttana balcanica," dice the unmarried and childless vudellone who frequented Via Santa Croce. He had been popping into the store to buy a can of BURN, his energy drink of choice. They told him that this comment was unhelpful, before bundling her into the back of their car, and drove off down to the station.

Capitolo Quattro

Facundo

Bruno was shining shoes. That was how he passed his days those days, just shining and shining at the behest of ever-so-well-to-do porteños. He had probably polished twice-over the buckskin monkstraps of every propertied man in the entire city. It was work to be carried out kneeling, glancing up at the busy mass of faces daily passing through the Mercado San Nicolás.

"Every time I come here," dice one porteño to his friend, as Bruno scrubbed away. "I hear more and more of the voices of the viejo mundo." The finely-suited pair had come in together, clearly enjoying the time for chatter.

"Viva Europa, eh?" the friend respondió, fiddling with his cravat while awaiting his turn.

So, who were these porteños, then? The porteños, or simply the people of the port city Buenos Aires, were progressive, in that they believed strongly in the progress of their country. Worshipping Rivadavia and Sarmiento as secular saints, they knew that Argentina had it in her to produce world-class statesmen, but their perpetual state of being was not of optimism, but rather of apprehension. They knew, always they knew, that el caudillo was still out there, el gaucho. They were always engaged in lofty conversations about the interior threat, the unruly and barbaric people of the plains who had throughout history had hoisted upon the nation demagogues and strongmen – Facundo Quiroga, Juan Manuel de Rosas, Vicuña Porto, outlaws one and all – whose effect upon the fledgling civilisation they were trying to build in el nuevomundo had been near fatal.

Very frequently in the meetings of porteño minds was utilised a semantic pampa of el viejomundo, in which the gaucho and Indian hordes of the interior featured as Bedouins, Arabs, whatever, some flavour of Mohammedan, always poised to overrun Greece – meaning Buenos Aires of course – and bring to an end the greatest citadel of rationality, education, and decency that existed in the southern cone. Argentina, for the porteño, was the latest battleground in that series of battlegrounds, stretching out from oldest antiquity, between civilisation and barbarism. For the clashes to come, their generals, with hands on the levers of state, had issued the call for reinforcements, and the rank and file had exalted this great wisdom; Buenos Aires called for aid, and Europe answered. From el viejomundo arrived Italians, Germans, Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, the Welsh, the Scottish, sometimes even the English, and all manner of others too. The only ones amongst them to not be welcomed, not to be greeted as heroes arriving to bolster

the gene pool against the interior villains, were the Spanish. The porteño had a disdainful relationship with his Spanish heritage. Spain had lost an awful lot of its European purity all the way back in the eighth-century, and the last thing the Buenos Airean race needed was more Moorish blood.

"Where are you from, boy?" pregunta el porteño. He gave Bruno a little tap with his imminently shiny shoe.

"Da dove vengo?" dice Bruno. "Tripicco, signore."

The porteños exchanged a look. "Tripicco? No, no, what country? What country, boy?"

"Country?" dice lui. "Nun capisco, signore. Alto Molise?"

"He is from Italia, you dumbass," the first porteño se entromete. "Can't you hear the *signore, signore*?"

"Ah si, si," dice the second, "que hermoso pais! Can you imagine all the rich sights this boy has seen? True civilización, so much to envy!" Removing a large pair of callipers from his coat pocket, he took a measurement of Bruno's head. "Dios mío, Domingo! He has one of the finest European skulls I have ever seen!". Clarence Nix would have approved.

Having gently nudged the callipers away, Bruno equally gently attempted to change the topic: "Signori, in this nuovomondo, we have not yet seen so much different from in our vecchiomondo. You seem like learned men – please tell of the wonders of the nuovomondo."

"Qué está diciendo?" chiede el segundo.

"He is asking what are the wonders of the nuevomundo!" responde el primero.

"Are there huge carrots here?" chiede Bruno. "Forse rivers of milk?"

"Rivers of milk! Ríos de leche!" Both porteños had a good chuckle. "There is a big river of water here, Italiano. Forse you have seen it. There are also rivers of Spagnoli coming from the olde country. And countercurrents of Europeans. Speriamo che there are enough Europeans to prevent the decay setting in."

"What do you mean?" dice Bruno. "Ríos of Spagnoli?"

"He has a real cocoliché voice, don't you think?" dice the second.

"Ho ho, don't be so rude!" dice the first. As if Bruno had asked nothing at all, they fell back into their own conversation. He returned to scrubbing furiously.

Every morning, the Cerri household arose and departed from the couple of pokey rooms they were hiring in San Nicolás. The work was grim, and the hours were long, but one upside was that the

siblings and the cucùtrice, who was boarding with them despite their still not knowing her name, set off in the same direction every morning, affording a few minutes of chit-chat as they made their workwards way. Passing by the crossroads of the Avenidas Callao and Santa Fe, Bruno would always stop for a moment to just stare down. The many-storied buildings that lined the street stretched on for as far as the eye could see. If they had been so inclined, they could have set off from that point, in any of the three directions that did not lead back to the docks, and simply walked right on ahead. They wouldn't need to turn an inch to keep on going, right past the hour of sunset. The city was like that: a big grid. It was built of so many straight lines intersecting, with the spaces between them packed densely with tenement halls. The people inside, whenever looking out from their fourth- or fifth-story windows, would see below them a neat matrix of commerce spreading out every which way.

"Poetico assai," dice Antonia, as Bruno was rambling out his every last thought on the layout of the city around them. "It is an efficient way to use the space. I wouldn't much like to live so high up, nun penso, but maybe you get used to it."

The two women departed at the Plaza Rodríguez Peña, off for another eleven hours work as striratrici. Every morning an almost inconceivable amount of shirts, jackets, pantaloni, bedsheets, pillowcases, even towels, and every other piece of rumpled fabric would be deposited with them to be sorted and smoothed. Fatigued-faced servants arrived and throughout the day kept arriving from the huge French villas of Avenida Alvear, with bundles of linens that their porteño masters had soiled at some party or other. Antonia and the cucùtrice spent the bulk of their waking hours with the tedious task of de-rumpling, of the passing of the iron back and forth over some fatcat's Lancashire-spun boxer briefs. One of their colleagues, the abruzzese but nevertheless affable Gennara, somehow kept up the energy to talk endlessly throughout the day. After a few hours of work, nobody had the energy to respond, but on she would go. The pay was not all that some had hyped it up to be, but it nevertheless put food on the table, whilst also allowing them to send a good bit back home.

The bambino was getting big, and he was really learning how to project his voice and make a racket. Regardless, Bruno had no competition from little Ettore on the crybaby front. "I was told we would only have to bring a cup down to the milk river ogni giorno," dice Bruno. He said something similar nearly every day, returning home with shoepolish under his nails, on his palms, and sometimes even smudged on his face and in his hair. "Before we left, it was all una terra di abbondanza this, una carota twenty-foot long that. What happened to all that!".

“I was just told that we were going,” dice Gennara, who was joining them for dinner. She did it often, whilst storms of anger convulsed her own household. Her brothers could be like that. Harsh words exchanged, plates thrown, the whole shebang. “And papà’s word was final.”

“Well yes. My papà’s word was final too,” dice Bruno.

“Would you like to hear the story of when a horse kicked my father off of a cliff?” chiede Gennara. “He lived. It has a happy ending.”

“Sure.” He listened to her telling stories ranging from curiously inane to chortlingly wild for a good couple of hours.

When Enrico returned that March, he brought with him the suggestion that Antonia and Bruno accompany him to the interior for the harvest. Che piano geniale! If all went well, they would come out ahead for earnings. Little Ettore Cerri would accompany them, as well. It would do the newborn some good to get some proper country air into his lungs, and give him a break from the smokey city. Maybe he might even catch a glimpse of his own papà, who had absconded north-eastwards at the first sign of baby bump.

The first train journey they had undertaken in the nuovomondo took them hours northward to Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz. The city was certainly no Buenos Aires, but the grandiose train station was still heaving with people. Outside, taxis were rattling around the streets, and a finely-dressed delegation mulling around outside. Had la famiglia Cerri and their guide been worldlier people they would have recognised them as English. These were the railway people who were carrying out important business. Millions were on the line. To Antonia and Bruno and Enrico, just as much to Ettore, they sounded as if they were speaking gibberish.

“Uis de seim cius nau op de seim,” sez a gentleman. A merger? Remarkable!

“Ol uoit men in de colobos dai,” sez a lady. An acquisition? Unthinkable!

“Not s de seim laikiu de promisdin,” sez the gentleman. It was unheard of.

“Iu nau in trabol lavgiai ciu gen,” sez the lady. Nothing would ever be the same.

Not comprehending, the siblings and Enrico moved on for an evening stroll. He took them around all the grand buildings which, like the train station, would have been right at home in Genova, and then on un po’ di greenery in Sarmiento Park.

The next day they departed the city in the back of a horse-drawn wagon, trundling them out deep into the pampas. Peering between the cloth covers, they watched every trace of city life disappear into the vastness. The countryside was flatter than anything they had seen before.

Endless fields of crops extended outwards in every direction. At the point of the horizon the fields met with shapes of a solemn grey, perfectly still – perhaps mountains, perhaps clouds – offset against the crystal blue above and the smiling green below. Bruno stared out. “This is il mondo,” lui dice.

“I knew you would like it,” sorrise Enrico.

After a good while they arrived at a little community by a stream, with just a few whitewashed stone houses and a shop which they called the pulpería. Enrico told them that the room above the shop would be their home for the next month and a half, but that he had a little treat in mind for them for the following day. He did, indeed. They rose early and rode out from the little hamlet along a barely-marked path through the fields of granturco. After a couple of hours they arrived at another hamlet, of an entirely distinct look. It consisted of a half-dozen houses, each of a crude but sturdy wooden build. A couple of enormous ombu trees stood guard. They had roots the size of arms, downwardly cascading from halfway up the trunk and continuing sub terra. Behind them were pens, from which emanated the sound of hoofbeats. Horses and cows were stomping about in animal camaraderie. Men were running about after them, shouting incomprehensibly. There was a handful of chickens running about, and one big pig strolling with a this-is-my-turf swagger. The folks of the hamlet, for the most part sat around on benches under shade from the midday sun, were dressed in wide-brimmed hats and baggy faded linens embroidered with bold patterns. Some wore capes or unwieldy, oversized scarves of thin fabrics. A bouncing banjo tune was being played by a woman in a trailing and colourful dress.

“Oh no,” dice Antonia, “you haven’t brought me out here to do more ironing, giusto?”

“These are i gaucho,” dice Enrico.

“These are country people,” dice Bruno.

“Sì, well observed, fratellino,” dice Antonia.

A man astride an enormous sandy horse draped in patterned wool emerged from around the back of one of the houses. “Wait here nu momento,” dice Enrico. He began to make his way over to this man, clad in midnight blue poncho of coarse weave, red beret slightly askew on top of his dark hair, and leather belt slashed across his chest. From across the yard, it was possible to see gleaming the metals of his belt buckle and the spurs of his tall boots. He struck a bold silhouette against the pale sky. It was hard to imagine him in any setting but right there, at that right moment. Enrico was saying something to him, but it was impossible to make out the words from afar. The man, implacable, did not appear to say anything in response. He just looked on with the

iron eyes upon which his heavy brow was built; the only sign he was listening came with a barely perceptible nod. An immaterially faint touch set his horse in motion, and he was carried saunteringly past Antonia and Bruno, to whom he gave a second nod of recognition, rubbing his fingers over a pouch string-tied around his neck as he went, before disappearing from sight amongst the ombu trees.

Enrico padded his way back over. “That was Azócar Bosqueño,” lui dice, “the leader, I don’t know what you would call him truly, el rastreador, forse, the one in charge around here. Lui dice va bene, that I can show you around. Andiamo.”

They wandered about. They saw the stables where the cows were kept and milked, the house in which women were binding ropes for the lassos, the veranda on which beef was being roasted in the open air. In the fields gauchos were practising for the rodeo, frantically clinging onto the backs of wild horses and bulls. Inevitably, all but the dabbest hands were one by one thrown into the thick mud below. True to the word of Luciano, children were made to practice on the backs of sheep, and were also occasionally launched off in ragdoll fashion. As they watched, they were offered cups of maté by a kindly-faced woman. “Troppo bitter per me,” Antonia complained, but Bruno glugged it down faster than he could probably taste it.

When evening came around, many more gauchos returned from the fields, and they lit a cosy fire in the clearing, and brought out gin and wine. It was one of those mild nights. When they looked up they saw pinprick stars, cosmic fireflies in the cosmic morass. From a great height, the warm light of the hamlet probably looked like a pinprick too, a little lively blip in the great pampa dark.

A mostly-sober man was reciting the tale of a fellow gaucho named Martín Fierro. It was too hard for the siblings to follow – their Spanish nun va bueno-bueno at the best of times, and these country folk spoke in a peculiar dialect that they had never heard from any porteño, so they relied on Enrico to interpret. “I don’t know exactly what lui ha detto,” lui diceva spesso a loro, “but I gather more tragedy has befallen this povero Martín.” After that, singing and dancing began. A large cow in a poncho made its way over to the fire, where it energetically bounced along to the music. Bruno ended up dancing tango with a young woman. He’d seen her on the guitar earlier in the evening, and enjoyed watching her fingers go. He remembered them as he held her hand tightly in his, pressing her closely to him, and they stepped so carefully together. He could feel the callous on her palm, and smell the sweat on her tunic. He was grinning alcoholically, right up to the moment he caught sight of Azócar Bosqueño, leaning over the cast iron railing on the porch of one

of the houses, watching. El rastreador's face was sullen, and a pipe was wedged between his thin lips. He was disapproving, or at least looked it. Bruno, blushing, untangled his fingers from hers, swallowed a bit of spittle down the wrong way, and retreated a-choking back to his sister.

"That was a good place, with good people," dice Bruno on their carriage back to the whitewashed houses where they would be staying for the harvest. "Even little Ettore enjoyed it, eh?", waggling a finger at the baby, who burped.

"Sì," dice Antonia, "he hasn't cried once today. And that really is something," now waggling her finger at the baby. The baby, once again, burped.

"It's a sign. It's a good place to raise a baby," dice Bruno, with a pensive look, "away from Buenos Aires. Away from the noise."

Antonia gave him the quizzical look he deserved. "I think a baby should have a more varied diet than beef, beef, beef."

"There were chickens and pigs there too," lui dice. "That's all a growing man needs. None of this vegetable nonsense. Sono così stancu della verdura."

"That's rangonismo. Sono napulitani. Antonio Cocchi is our man. Cocchismo or death, as they say," lei dice. "And they were all so drunk as well. What if they are like that every night? Its no place to raise a child."

"I suppose 'there's no choice'," lui dice, in his best Antonia voice.

"There is no choice," lei dice.

He just shrugged.

Upon return from their cash-in-hand return from the pampas, they sent their healthiest remittances yet back to il vecchiomondo. In the following months, Bruno spent less and less time in the apartment. He spent many of his evenings at Gennara's, and those that he didn't were spent down at the bars with the cucùtrice.

"How long do you think you will be staying here," chiede lui, "in Buenos Aires?"

"Per sempre," dice la cucùtrice, "there is not so much to go back to."

"Truly?" He was a little astounded that anybody would want to stay forever. Bruno regularly dropped off letters to home at the local shop, letting mamma e papà know how the saving was going in il nuovomondo. He would collect their replies at the same shop a little later. Usually they would include little bits of inane news or gossip about the town. Giulietta is pregnant again. Marco has a funny new hat. The man who castrates the pigs is dead. One day, after a letter had simply

read, ‘VABBUÒ. Con amore, Papà’, Bruno had begun to doubt whether his parents really understood how to properly engage in long-distance communication.

“There is nothing to go back for, and nobody important,” dice la cucùtrice, “only mio padre, who is nu càzzu. My sons took after him as well, but thankfully they are dead.”

Bruno gasped. “Porco Dio! You cannot say such a thing about family! Loro sono il tuo sangue, their sangue is your sangue.”

“That is not the case, spero, veramente,” lei dice, “they were such ingrati, maleducati idioti with hateful stupid hearts. I raised them the best I could, but they still turned out wrong.”

“They are your sons,” dice Bruno, “I do not mean to be maleducato, but this language cannot be supported.”

“Mi dispiace, I have shocked you. All I can say is they did not behave like family, so I left them. And I was better for it.”

Bruno paused a moment. “I didn’t mean to offend,” lui dice, dopo un momento, “I don’t want to judge anyone who has been through such hardship.”

She took a hearty swig from her wine. “If that’s going to be your code, you might as well not judge anyone.”

Shortly after, they were at a second bar a little further from the water. A couple of other patrons recognised la cucùtrice, and came over in excitement. One of them, he gathered, was the big winner from the gambling games aboard the ship, rumoured to have disembarked in possession of over two-thirds of the shoes aboard. Bruno listened to their greetings closely, hoping to catch la cucùtrice’s name. He didn’t. Before they had even managed to get drinks, a ruckus began after a man exposed himself on the dancefloor. After two men had been punched, the group elected to try somewhere else. Before they knew it, or much thought about it, or even had barely noticed it, they had crossed the Pueyrredón Bridge and found themselves in an unusual landscape. The roads were dilapidated, and barely fit for carriages. The buildings, not so tall as those south of the river, were not in a great state of repair. A handful of the same red-cross flags as the Cerri siblings had seen back at Genova were flying from the windows of tenements. Bruno didn’t know it, but he had wanderingly led his bar crawl into the barrio known as The Boca.

“Cöse ti veu?”, dîxe the man behind the first bar they sauntered into.

Bruno abruptly turned straight to the cucùtrice. “I have no idea what chell’uomo ha detto,” lui dice.

“Chesto must be The Boca,” dice la cucùtrice. “Porco Dio! What a wrong turn we have taken!”

“The Boca? Wrong turn?” dice Bruno.

La cucùtrice put her grizzled hand on the young Cerri’s shoulder. “Do not worry, mio amico, just stay close. This is a place where time works differently.” There was truth to la cucùtrice’s words evident in the very conversations unfolding around them. Where time had pressed its mark on the folks south of the river, blunting the provincial edges of their regional tongues, rendering them all a little closer to mutual intelligibility, it had not had any such effect on The Boca.

“Ciù vìn!” One man was yelling at the barkeep.

“Ti t’ê za tròppo inbrægo!” The barkeep hollered back.

“I understand the Spaniards better,” Bruno gemette. “Che dannato language is this?”

“The people of The Boca have come from Liguria, or so I have heard. Ma nun so where this Liguria is,” dice la cucùtrice, “or what language they speak there.”

“Ligurian, sicuramente?” chiede Bruno.

“Forse sì. Forse no.”

The Ligurian clientele sang in flawless harmony with one another, and in near-flawless incomprehensibility to the visiting ears napulitani. It was possible to make out a “bàrca” here, a “viàggio” there, perhaps a “montàgna” up, an “oçêano” down, a “grùppo” left, an “individoâle” right, and “lótte” all around, but these discernible words were lost amongst an overwhelming mess of indiscernibility, which eventually collapsed into a tra-a-la-la-ing “dun dun dun,” sometimes “du du du du du du.” La cucùtrice’s head was bobbing along, and a couple of her friends were admirably joining in on the nonsense syllables. One had even taken to jumping up and down. Not really Bruno’s scene, he excused himself for the outhouse.

“Is that not your friend, there?” chiede one of la cucùtrice’s pals, pointing over at Bruno, waltzing on out the door.

“Oh no,” dice la cucùtrice, “there he goes!” She made a move to catch him, but the raucous clientele blocked her every duck and every bob. He was gone. “Porco Dio! I told him not to go out of sight, and what does he do! Che stupido!” Nun vabbuò, but alas, it could not be helped. La cucùtrice returned to the bar, where she was quickly learning how to place orders and barter in this strange new tongue. “Un âtro gòtto de vin, pe piaxéi! Ho capito bene?”

“Scì, signora,” dîxe the barkeep, “benìscimo!”

Outside, things were not as Bruno had expected. A mountain, which he could have sworn was not there before, loomed over the desolate cityscape. The night was pressing down, but somehow the grassy face of the mountain and its trees, in places dense and in others dappled, glowed in supernature. There were men and women moving around at street level, barely discernible in the shadows of the tenement halls, but on the mountain the silhouettes of little people moving about to and fro were cast starkly. By some inexplicable means, the sun had not set for the mountain as it had for the rest of Buenos Aires. The little distant figures, it was easy to hear, were also tra-a-la-ing as the revellers in the bar had been. It must be all a spell, Bruno's sinking stomach realised. The tra-a-la-las of the stranieri must have been incantations, reweaving reality. Turning back to the bar, feeling it wise to collect his friends and go, he was dumbstruck to see that it was gone.

Bruno was no longer in the city. Baffled, he turned around to look back at the mountain, which loomed all the closer over him now. He turned back again, and the city was yet more distant. The blanket of night rendered it tough to see at such a length. He turned back to the mountain. All'improviso, Bruno found himself atop the mountain, with his head in the clouds, feet sturdily planted upon the very peak. "Porco Dio," lui dice. Deciding it was best not to turn around again, lest he end up floating around in space, he set his gaze straight ahead as he began to make his way down the leafy-rocky mountainside trail.

"La ra testa à l'aze," cantâ a man, seemingly a pilgrim, to his friend. The two of them in their scraggly linens were walking a donkey up the slopes, as Bruno descended past them.

"Scigora quando ri buoe n'han vorentae de beive," the friend cantâ back.

"Aspeta che à ro so cresce ra neive," cantâ a woman, who seemed to materialise from nowhere. Perhaps she had been hiding behind a rock.

"Mettese à pesta l'aegua intro morta!" cantâ un'altra. On and on they sang, more and more of them sprouting from the very dirt, until an entire choir were running about, leaping and dancing. One donkey had become ten, and ten quickly grew tenfold. Between him and the gloomy city below was a veritable army of prancing peasants, united in song. Bruno was freaked out of his nut, but there was something a little exhilarating about it all as well. The phrase 'Porco Dio, perchè no?' ran through his head as he linked his left arm with a positively glowing milkmaid, and his right with a strikingly mustachioed farmhand. He smiled and mouthed along to the syllables which meant nothing to him. Heck, he beamed!

"Porta legne à ri boschi, aegua à ro ma;

ro vento in rè spera de puei receive;

a meza stae desidera che neive;

vorei senz'are mettese a sgora!". And so they sang.

They hit their stride, and were quickly leaping and bounding along the downward trail, over a rock qui, and under a low branch lì, past the steepest parts, past the braying asses, down closer to the city once more. Swirling about them were all the most cherished aspects of Bruno's old life. Joining the general feast-day festivity of the singing pilgrims were the rintocca of church bells, the ululanti of wolves, the one-two stomp of parades. He had been on foot for hours by the time the city was drawing near. The sun was rising, and the cold night air receding. He re-entered The Boca from the north. Tired and unthinking, he took a quick look behind him. Rather than finding himself further back, he saw only the sea in the place from which he had just been walking. The mountain was nowhere to be seen. Going from confused to bamboozled, he continued on deeper into the barrio, now just on a gentle slope down, where he found some of last-night's drunkards sprawled about the streets.

"Semena nell-arenna," one was singing-mumbling through a mouth of drool. "l'aegua accoeiggie in cavagno, ò panne...". His words gave way to the sort of snoring that only binge drinking can summon into being. Another, equally immobile, with one leg appallingly contorted in-and-out of the spokes of a carriage wheel, thankfully stationary, seemed to pick up from where the other had left off. Others, who clearly had not been out hitting the vino, were already making their way to work, with solemn faces, rings under eyes, sometimes blotchy with tears. With the guttural and throaty vocalisations of crying-phlegm, they intoned a final verse. After the singing had stopped, the faces of the poveri grew harsher. The furrowing of hostile brows spurred him along. "Foestê," some of them were calling out at him. "Vàtene vîa!" At least that one he was able to understand. It was only once he was back on level ground that he tripped, and fell.

La cucùtrice picked him up from the drunk tank in the morning. "Heavy night, vero?" lei chiede.

"I don't understand," Bruno dice. "I didn't drink that much, on my life I swear it. There was some magic, something soprannaturale, something che nun va."

"The Boca, mio amico," lei dice, "it's easy to lose a night or two there. Some days never arrive there at all."

“We are going to have to move deeper in. To the suburbs, I suspect.” Antonia had just returned from a meeting with the landlord, and the news wasn’t great. They were being rent-shunted out of San Nicolás. There was no way for them to remain if they wanted to keep sending home remittances.

“I need to stay local for the gambling ring I’m running,” dice la cucùtrice. It was a very sophisticated operation that she had put together down at the docks, and the siblings had already known that should they move then she would not easily be able to keep on lodging with them. They were sad to see her go. Antonia implored her to visit as often as she could, and they parted ways with a firm and respectful handshake. Gennara, sick of her own chaotic household, decided to take her place.

“I liked la cucùtrice,” dice Bruno, “but you aren’t half bad yourself.” Not much time passed before they ‘officially’ declared themselves an item.

“This could easily end up insufferable,” dice Antonia, watching them nuzzling one another from across the room. “We need to find more boarders. It can’t just be the three of us and Ettore.”

It was not destined to just be the three of them and Ettore. Within a couple of months, the ‘official’ item announced they were expecting. “I want us to have the baby back in Tripicco,” Bruno dice. “So he is a real Tripiccano.”

“What are you trying to say?” chiede Antonia, picking Ettore up and indignantly waving him around like a silent film prop.

“Do you never feel bad that he has never met his pappanonno e mammanonna?”

“Not really, no,” dice Antonia. “In fact, there are some times I’m happy he hasn’t met them. Not everything about them was great.”

“Like what?”

“Il manganello,” lei dice. She thought he should know. She’d seen him beaten into a sobbing heap with it more than a few times.

He paused for a moment as he mulled it all over. “I don’t really think very often about the things that were bad about our old life. Being here makes me realise how little they mattered. There were some tough times, but it all built us up. Being here is grinding me down.”

“We are closer to the steelworks here,” lei dice. “Maybe that would be better work.”

“I don’t want to come home covered in soot or shoeshine.”

“It’s mud or nothing, then? Melma e merda.”

Bruno's hopes were dashed. After a long period of what seemed like real progress, where the stack of cash kept in the hole in the wall was growing at a nice rate, it was a real shock when the letter arrived. Signed off by Papà, it detailed the selling off of more family land. "You will have to save longer. It is sad to have to write this, but there is more that we must buy back now," ha detto la lettera.

"If we can't look forward to il ritorno," dice Gennara, hand on pancio, "forse we can look forward to the baby."

"Forse," dice Antonia.

Bruno was back in the interior when the letter had come. Upon his return he was weary and worn-out from the work and the travel. Looking at him as he shambled in, late in the evening, all shiny with beads of sweat desperately trying to make the leap from his brow, Antonia didn't have the heart to break the news subito. Gennara tried to launch into telling her amore of the various affairs and grotesque violations of workplace safety that had been the talk of the neighbourhood for the last couple weeks, but he counter-launched into tales of his own. Antonia looked solemnly on as he slumped down on a chair, bags under his eyes, knocked back a vino, and then bulled on ahead into chronicling the times and tribulations of one Azócar Bosqueño, rodeo champion, impeccable singer, eater of beef, hunter of ostriches, pampa incarnate. Tiredness could not shut Bruno up. Throughout his month away, he had been riding out to the gaucho village at least once every couple of evenings, where he drank deep of the maté, sang, danced, even was beginning to make strides in his Spanish. Even if Antonia had chosen that moment to step in and intone the words of the letter, she would not have been able to break the sleep-deprived stream of words, stories, and sheer enthusiasm for the experiences in the interior.

"And then Azócar's horse was going wild, uh, standing on its hind legs and howling like nu lupo, but he was immovable, he barely looked like he had noticed it, uh, just sat there all tranquillo. He was being rocked back and forth, but he just holds on, implacabile." Bruno, with his empty and sleep-starved stare, was using all manner of hand gestures, his arms practically flailing, to graphically accompany the tales of the gaucho Azócar Bosqueño. Perhaps his brain was too tired to notice he was somewhat overdoing the visual demonstrations. "There has never been a man so in tune with, with, with such mastery of, uh, forse everything. I haven't seen him misstep, not once." His ramblings went on and on. "And sometimes there is the omen, sì, sì, on a dark night, when you can see the souls of the dead rising from the swamps. They glow and warn off the living

and stuff. The gauchos call it la luz mala, o la luce cattiva. The dead never stay far away out in the pampas."

"Bruno," Antonia dice, when her little brother had spun his yarn, "there was a letter. It is bad news." To read it out would have been too much, so she simply handed it over. That night there was drinking and crying, primarily on the part of Bruno.

"Did you have to tell him right away?" chiede Gennara. "It could have waited a day or two after the reunion."

"Sì," dice Antonia. "It is the right thing to do. This way the dolore will pass a day or two sooner. Just think of the real reunion as being when he calms down."

"Come dici tu," dice Gennara.

Antonia put her hand on her friend's shoulder. "He is still growing up. He needs to grow up. But it will happen, forse when the baby comes along, forse sooner. There is still a lot he needs to accept."

"Credo, spero," dice Gennara, "but I want to go back to the olde country too. Capisco the homesickness. Its only natural."

"You've been here longer than us. And so he needs to learn from you, and just carry on. You can't let all your thoughts revolve around him. He isn't the centre of the world. You need some vino," dice Antonia. She administered a glass down her friend's throat, patted her on the back, and that was all of that. She then visited her brother, who had taken to yelling profanities out of the tenement window at passers by in the street. "Mio fratello, caro, no good is going to come out of this behaviour."

"CORNUTO!" grida Bruno, jabbing a finger down at some poor sod or other. "You! You there! CORNUTO! And you!"

From the building opposite the response: "We're trying to sleep here, pal!".

"CUCKED! We all are! We have all been cucked!"

"Stai zitto!" dice Antonia. "Per favore, shut your stupid mouth for one minute. Close the windows."

He didn't. Drink, or perhaps rage, was swaying him from side to side. "How long, eh? How much longer are we going to have to be holed up here? Esiliato, arenato. Impotenti. Polishing the boots of men with cravats. Cravats, Antonia, are not what men are supposed to wear!"

"La pazienza," dice Antonia. "Nobody here and nobody back home manages to live without going through a tough few years. The best thing to do is be strong, and keep on moving."

“La pazienza,” ripete Bruno. “La pazienza per how many months more? Years more?”

Antonia kept her distance. “Io tengo la pazienza, and I expect you to have it too.” She turned on the spot and walked out.

Time brought the birth of Peppinello, or Peppe for short, who soon became a rather robust and creepily large toddler. It also brought new tenements in the slums, new theatres, churches, and courts in the centre, all in the proper Olde European styles. Entire streets were dug up to install new railway stations, accommodating a huge underground network that was to be opened up, always whirring away beneath their feet. “It is like a set of huge, fierro vizzacha tunnels for huge, fierro vizzachas,” dice Bruno, who was increasingly incomprehensible as his language and that of i gaucho moved day by day towards convergence.

“It is only a matter of time before I will be making the annual journey in a great railway beneath the waves,” dice Enrico. “Only a matter of time before you can get the train from your door down to your barbiere.”

Antonia and Gennara were regularly holding little nurseries for Ettore and Peppinello, and a couple of the kids of their co-workers. For a few pesos, they would teach them a few songs, a few dance moves, and a few new words here and there. They, too, learned from the children. They all, but none more so than Ettore, were picking up a more advanced Spanish vocabulary than their parents.

“What is the opposite of hot?” chiede Antonia.

“Frío,” responde Ettore.

“Vabbuò, vabbuò,” dice Gennara. “It’s also ‘freddo.’ Now, what is the opposite of old?”

“Joven,” responde Peppe.

Antonia gave a little shrug. “Close enough.”

Bruno seemed to actually enjoy it a little when Peppe would say ‘tasa’ and not ‘tazza’, ‘calzado’ and not ‘calzatura.’ “It will be a little vezzo, or forse I should say capricho, to remind us of our time here,” lui diceva. He wanted to bring Peppe with him to the harvest to meet the gauchos, but Gennara refused, and a year after that she refused again. “Antonia brought Ettore when he was just appena nato. It is fine. It is safe. He should get to meet the gauchos and see some of the world,” Bruno dice, anno dopo anno.

"As long as I don't want to go," Gennara risponde, anno dopo anno, "and as long as he wants his mamà, he stays right here." Even when the cash was reaching critical mass, and the end to their residence in il nuovomondo was apparently imminent, Gennara refused.

In place of a visit, Bruno took to treating Peppe to stories nearly every evening. "And there is sometimes a strange glow above the swamps," dice lui, crouching down and grasping his son's little hand. "It is called the luz mala, and the people say it is the souls of the dead. Many of them died fighting savage Indians who invade the pampas."

"Vabbuò," dice Peppe. He stared at a wasp crawling over the tabletop.

"The *luz mala,"* dice Bruno. "You'll remember that, sì, spero."

"Something is going to go wrong," dice Antonia, strolling along by the riverside, "because that's how these things tend to work." It was a temperate May evening, and after a long day's work it was a pleasant way to unstiffen the old gambe.

"Our boat will capsize, forse," dice Gennara. "Forse we will be just arriving back at the port when some drunken capitano sees us and mistakes us for invaders. 'Fuoco!' lui dice, and that's that for us."

It had been too long and tough a day for Antonia to laugh. Either that or her brother's signora simply was not funny. "It seems more realistic than imagining us arriving back home, gridando all 'Ciao Mamà, ciao Papà, so good to see you, siamo tornati!'. And we have a meal to celebrate, and we have our land back, and its all sunshine and buon vino. That doesn't feel so likely."

"We will make it back," dice Gennara, "even if its on a gloomy day. Even if we arrive back a casa in the dead of night, and la tua famiglia are too tired to celebrate. Even if there is no food in the cupboard on arrival. No vino, no nulla."

"We will make it back," dice lei.

Of course, it was the very next day that the calamity began. Yes, the previous summer they had heard about the shooting of Francesco Ferdinando. It had been the talk of the town, and many porteños had expressed shock that such a terrible thing could be inflicted by one European upon another. Others sought to explain this troubling event by stating, so boldly of a region they had scarcely heard of beforehand, that Bosnia and all its whacked-out neighbours wedged awkwardly into the south-east of the continent were in fact not Europe, but rather a Saracen corruption. "We should not be shocked that when the lands of Christ fall to these bárbaros, the horrores will stretch

on for centuries," declara one porteño in his newspaper column. "The Balkans are to Europe what Tucuman is to Argentina," declara another. "The Spirit of Facundo Alive in Sarajevo!" one headline had screeched. No member of the Cerri family had paid this story much attention at the time, but one year on it was quite apparent that the entirety of il vecchiomondo had plunged itself into confraternal slaughter. The problems became theirs when Italy opted to join in the fray. Italians were suddenly being compelled to return home to fight for the good of La Patria.

"They don't have the power to send you back home," dice Antonia. She held in his hand the latest letter from Papà, telling them 'Do not come back home,' and detailing the way in which all the young men of Tripicco had been press ganged and sent away.

"To fight what war? What war do we need to fight?" chiede Bruno, with his nose twitching, hands clenched and shaking. His tone was lilting, barely under control. "A whole town of Martín Fierros! Those who they cannot ship abroad, they send to war. They are trying to destroy us."

"Who? The Austrians?" chiede Antonia. Who the Austrians were was not entirely clear, but she had overheard down at the social club that they were causing all sorts of trouble.

A snarling look. "Not the Austrians. The Cabal," dice Bruno. Gennara looked on in silence.

"I can't understand la politica," dice Antonia, clenching the letter, "but I don't need to. We don't need to. The only thing that matters is that this means we cannot go home. Until the war is done we keep saving."

"How long is a war?" chiede Bruno. "The gauchos have fought the Indians for as long as they have been here. It is endless. How do we know we won't still be fighting in twenty years, eh? How about longer?"

"Il vecchiomondo isn't like that. The people just aren't like that." Antonia's arms were tightly crossed. "That's what the porteños say, they are educated, they know these things. We can wait until it's over. Il giornale dice that there might be punishments for anybody who doesn't go back, but I don't think we should count on that. Some people are saying that it will be alright."

"I don't think. Some people are saying. The porteños. Sì, sì, then it is all vabbuò, vabbuò, isn't it?" Bruno's had to grab the table to steady the shaking. His voice was low. "You aren't behaving like family. You are behaving like na cornuta. Na cornuta who never tires of being cornificati." He grabbed his workcoat and strode out, each step an emphatic stomp.

Antonia had not managed to get off to sleep by the time she heard Bruno's return and the ensuing scuffle. Gennara was shrieking, and it sounded as if Peppe was too. By the time she rushed

on in to her the room of her fratellino it was already over. She found Gennara on the floor, bloody from where her head had smashed into the cabinet. “He hit me,” lei piange, “he pushed me, he’s taken Peppe. Please go after him, he’s taken Peppe.”

Antonia held her friend’s head against her chest. She didn’t spare a thought for her the blood soaking into her linen. “I know where he has gone,” lei dice.

“Sì,” dice Gennara.

Within a quarter of an hour she was at the subway, en route to the stazione di Constitución. Any hope she had of catching Bruno mid-flight crashed upon seeing a train had just departed for Santa Fe. The next would not be for over an hour. With its departure, she would be travelling alone for the first time. She felt it best to ask an old friend for a favour.

At the moment Antonia caught sight of her, and her of Antonia, la cucùtrice was having an urchin manhandled out of her makeshift casino by a burly one-eyed man. The shoe-accumulator was looking on with a satisfied smile and a new pair added to the collection.

“Antonia!” dice la cucùtrice.

“My friend,” dice Antonia, “it is so good to see you! But I am here in need.”

After Antonia had explained the situation, and her hopes for fixing it, la cucùtrice led the way into a backroom, and from there into a cellar. “If you are heading through the countryside where there is nobody around, then you may want to take a few practice shots,” dice la cucùtrice. With an old crowbar she cranked open a heavy crate. Nested gently in a mound of hay were some dainty, delicate pistols. “If not, you can always stick it right up against a head or a heart, and squeeze the trigger. That’s what I call una prova di idiota.” She taught her friend how to load and reload, twirled it around her fingers a little bit, and then handed it over. “Show me now.”

Antonia loaded, unloaded, reloaded. “Capisco.”

“And the twirl,” dice her friend.

“Uh,” dice Antonia, who promptly dropped the gun clunk-clunk onto the stone floor.

La cucùtrice picked it up for her. “Just make it back alive and I will teach you properly how. A real pistolera shoots, twirls it around her fingers, and blows away the smoke.”

Solemn-faced, Antonia: “I won’t be needing to shoot it anyway, spero.” Just holding it made her powerful. It could make anybody listen.

“Spero anch’io,” dice la cucùtrice. “Arrivederci, Antonia.”

“Arrivederci, mia sorella.”

Capitolo Cinque

Pomodorium Lost

Cristo si è fermato a Eboli. Such was the name of Carlo Levi's 1945 memoir, and that of its 1979 film adaptation. Mosè Rappaporto had seen it on the Rai one rainy afternoon. He had thought it was very good.

Christ stopped at Eboli, or so they say. It was a phrase Levi heard from the contadini in the small town of Aliano, where he was exiled by the fascists. Deep into desolate Basilicata, it was not hard for Mosè to guess why the denizens of Aliano might not think it was God's country, why they mightn't think the suolo arido beneath their feet had been sanctified. Levi seemed to agree. Christ hadn't quite made it down there, and neither had time, history, hope, reason, or the relationship between causes and their effects. When looking in the shadow of a campanile it was possible to find many effects, but the causes were never so apparent. It was rare for there even to be a clue as to where they might be found. Now, Molise was not quite so far south as Mussolini was prone to send his dissidents, and was not even as far south as Eboli, but Mosè found it easy to imagine that by the time His Holy Spirit passed through Tripicco, Christ was already having second thoughts about the journey he was undertaking. Perhaps his visit was fleeting at best, or the Alto Molise was just flyover country. Maybe it just took one look for il Nostro Signore to call off whatever bookings he had made. "Rome, Florence, Milan, anywhere, anywhere but here" dice Gesù Cristo, inquiring about room at the inn.

Mosè had relocated to Campobasso, where he was working as a telemarketer. A training day sent him further down, all the way to Matera. He got into the city well ahead of time, and went to see some sights. At the Cripta del Peccato Originale the queues were simply too long, but he got to see some ancient urns and daggers and things in the Museo Nazionale Ridola. From the panetteria he bought a hearty loaf with three marks baked into the side, standing for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; Basilicatan bread was a treat as far as bread went. The Centro Culturale Carlo Levi was his last stop on the tour, where he saw some paintings. It had been his understanding that there was a large sculpture of Levi's head somewhere around the premises, marked with a plaque noting that Levi had truly loved the south. Mosè had hoped to pose with it for a selfie for the 'gram, but a kindly attendant ha risposto alla sua domanda with the information that that particular monument was over an hour's drive away. "La Lucania è un posto grande," dice l'uomo.

It was a funny thing, so thought Mosè, that a man, a man who had not left his comfortable northern home voluntarily, could earn a remembrance in the names of buildings, in busts and sculture, all for simply loving a place. It did attest to how unloved the south was. The south, in the rare moments in which it factored into the national political discourse, usually did so as a problem seeking a solution. A country of poverty, stagnation, of dialects molti scuffati, still not yet integrated with the monolith of the standard tongue of the statute books. It was appropriate for the near-lawless lands that originally spawned the mafiosi, so well known and imitated all the world over. The Italians who spoke Italian had a habit of denigrating their southern brethren, and many in the Val Padana had for decades advocated the jettisoning the south and all its backward yokel inhabitants, along with all those central regions that through proximity might have caught southernness. Such proposals were now a thing of the past, and oddly enough the leader of the party which had for so long salivated at the prospect of secession had become a senator for Calabria. Mosè had never in his life been as far south as Calabria. It all made sense in its own twisted way. "If you don't hate me *anymore,*" dice the south, "that is a fine basis to give you a senate seat. And if you profess genuine love for me, I will shower you with honours. I really appreciate it. It really means a lot."

It could have been a heartwarming story, the story of how the north got over its animosity toward the south. Sadly, the changing times were predicated on the rising awareness of a new, deeper south to direct hatred at. Across the Mediterranean on the suolo ancora più arido of Africa, all manner of horrors were unfolding, terrible events transpiring for reasons well beyond the will to comprehension of European media spectators. Never had Mosè seen on Facebook any discussion of who was in the right, Dignity or Dawn, or what the long shadow cast by the Biafran War meant today. If he had, he himself would not have been able to make heads or tails of it. He had seen, however, many a comment passed on the boats of migrants making their way across the ocean. It was a very comment-able topic.

For some, the journey began in Libya, where things had fallen apart in Qadhafi's wake. It looked like Isis was past its peak in the country, having lost much ground along the coast, but the less extreme groups were perfectly capable of carrying forward the strife. For others, the journey began sub-Saharan, and for them the trek through the sands was as long as it was painful. It was rare to have enough water to go around, and the necessity of drinking urine just to stay alive was common. Most groups failed to leave the desert behind without too leaving behind at least a couple of friends or relatives. Regardless, on they went. Next came the criss-crossing of a war-torn

countryside, where old tribal rivalries once suppressed under the late strongman's thumb had exploded back to the surface, made all the worse for the funding and armaments being sent their way by overseas powers with designs of their own.

With the aid of people smugglers, many made it to the coast. If they could pay well, they would get a place on the upper deck on a proper little boat. If they couldn't, they would often settle for a place down below, where engine fuels regularly leaked and people took away chemical burns as a permanent souvenir of the experience. Those with yet less money didn't get their proper little boat at all, and were crammed aboard some China-manufactured, eBay-bought, courier-delivered inflatable Zodiac with a motor whacked onto the side. The aim was never to make it the full journey, well in excess of one-hundred miles, to Malta or Lampedusa, but just to make it outside of Libyan waters, where it was somebody else's obligation to send out a rescue.

"It's all good," says the trafficker to the Zodiac passengers, hours out into the choppy sea, as he removes the motor from the edge of the craft. There's only so many to go around, so it was standard practice to take out the speedboat to intercept his customers and retrieve that valuable piece of property as soon as they had cleared the twelve-mile mark from the coast. Behind him always stands a guard with a Kalashnikov, just in case anybody felt that the motor ought to remain with them. In his best, slightly overdone Italian accent: "Rescue will be with you soon, ciao, ciao, enjoy Italia!". Off he went, then, zooming off into the distance, leaving the poveri cristiani with their bewildered and tired faces to bob up and down helplessly on the waves, to drift until the voice of some navy captain sounds through the radio, or until the waters took them. The waters did it often. Passports, rings, watches, pairs of spectacles littered the sea floor, accumulated over the course of however-many-hundred capsizes. If an army of divers deigned to recollect them, each could be easily sorted into veritable mountains.

There had been a lot of driving that day, a lot of boring powerpoint talks, and a lot of time to think. Mosè's mind returned again and again to the Facebook comment frenzy, the unhinged posts beneath the line of almost any piece in la *Corriera* these days, no matter how tangentially related to the topic it might be. Once, rhetoric had been pumped out of the Val Padana that all the southerners, the contemptible terroni, were more African than they were Italian. The middle man had, at some point, been cut out, and the hated now relished their turn to hate.

By the time he had left Tripicco, it was only himself and Eva who remained from their old friendship circle. They had gone to school together, tied frogs onto their hats together, enjoyed their first messy nights out together, but those times had passed, and the memories of them were

becoming increasingly bitter, and increasingly tainted. Besides their holiday photos, where they would be smiling and waving, glass in hand, from a beach or hotel bar, Mosè saw nothing of his old dear friends, Luca, Maria, Stefana, or Lucio, except for their little comments they made, tagging to one another when in the replies to an article about boats arriving. “Chiù?” un commento dice, “sul serio?”.

Without a job, and with few friends, Mosè left the town in which he had spent twenty-five years of his life. It was a funny time to do so, with more new people and more new businesses popping up in the town than he had ever known. He had moved anyway. It was a matter of vibes as much as one of actualities.

Salvatore Cherry himself was not feeling all va bene, va bene. “All the locals were saying that its magical in summer, the vallone,” he says, “all full of fireflies. It’s supposed to be somewhere with all nice fauna, you know? Full of frogs and foxes, and very green. Where are they? I didn’t see any animals. The trees are all bare too. It was actually miserable.” He was talking to Odissea Alba, the heiress to a huge real estate fortune. They were up in Milan, having a couple of drinks at the wake of the late Negozio Standa. A crime of passion, it was being said, exacted by one of his mistresses who had found out about his wife. The surroundings were very lavish, just as Negozio would have wanted. Silvio himself had graced them with his presence.

“Very dreary,” Odissea says. Salvatore Cherry’s butchery of her native language was intolerable to her. With cold glares and colder corrections, she had managed to force him into a monolingually English submission. “But I am not sure exactly what you expected from the south.”

“Well, it is the *olde country.* Its a very important thing,” he says.

“There is a reason why this nation was rebuilt in the image of the United States after the war. Its because it is better,” Odissea says. “Unfortunately, your little town is right in the middle of that huge waste which no statesman ever managed to drag into modern day. The mafia got in the way. The bad genes of the people got in the way. Everything down below Florence is not worth the time. It’s an endless sink for money and brain cells.”

The grieving widow Standa was accepting condolences from various heavily-perfumed Berlusconiani. “I cannot believe he never told her about me,” lei dice.

“Signora Alba, that is a very pessimistic view. There are some very nice people down there. With a little infrastructure to help them realise their aspirations, I could make a big difference for them.”

“Mr. Cherry, I just mean to say that sentiment is not a good basis for investment. If you wanted to buy a town, you should have looked at the coast. I thought stateside the value of the seaboard was understood.” Listening to the things she said, Salvatore was starting to wonder if she could be fitted with a bald cap and cast in the lead role of ‘In the Nix of Time’.

“I, well, it isn’t about the rationale, per se,” he begins, “it’s –”

“Look,” she interrupts, “you act as if this venture was so wise until some trees went and died. What you don’t need is to go around asking for pity. Certainly not at a funeral. What you need is a portfolio manager. I will put you in touch with somebody at the firm, somebody who can help you make wiser decisions if you want to continue investing in property here in the *olde country.*”

“I’m bringing a lot of money into Tripicco, and one day I will invite you down to see what I’m doing. We’re doing a lot.”

“One day, one day,” says Odissea, gesturing over to the woman blowing snot into a silk tissue, “the sobbing widow will be yours, and your little town will be left without a benefactor. All those investors who came because you were throwing money at it will go on their way. Your little town is having its Klondike moment, but the gold rush ends when your hobbying does.”

Salvatore was pouting a little. Odissea had evidently forgotten about his divorce. “Negozio understood my vision. May he rest in peace.”

“May God rest his soul,” lei dice.

Despite the circumstances, Salvatore was rather enjoying being holed up in his very extravagant Milanese hotel, with its very extravagant spa. His head had been spinning a bit ever since he had met the old man on Via Cappuccini. An unnerving encounter, as he had been describing it. Ever resourceful, Phyllis had managed to ask around and find an exact address, and Salvatore had thrown together a little gift basket with a few of his coffee syrups, a coliseum fridge magnet he had picked up in Rome, and the tin that tomato lady had given him. He took it and went bounding off. His destination was a blocky building, with a drab beige colouring. After a bit of a wait out in the street, somebody on their way out let Sal into the atrium, grey and poorly lit. A couple of doors inside lead to different apartments, and stairs led up to more. Ground floor, apartment 2, knock-knock, the door opened.

“Salve?,” dice the carer.

“Salve, mi chiamo Salvatore. I’m the businessman, the one who just opened Tripicco Halls. I was hoping to speak to the man who lives here, I have been told he has lived in Tripicco for a very long time. It would be good to ask him some questions.”

“Ah, sì, okay, glielo chiederò.” He disappeared behind the door. A minute or two passed before he returned. “You can come in.”

Salvatore made his way inside, and forward into the cramped space that served as both kitchen and lounge. There were pleasantly varnished cupboards, open and displaying their ceramic contents, jutting out over walls covered in floral tiles. The table was draped with a vibrant orange cloth. A few potted plants perched on the semi-cluttered surfaces. The visages of Saint Pardus and the Madonna both hung in crosshatch beside the window. The just-about-still-human relic was sat upon a sofa patterned with bluebells, periwinkles, and jasmine, looking out at a TV screen no bigger than that of Sal’s laptop.

“This is Salvatore, he wants to ask you a few questions about the town,” dice the carer.

Looking up, a shock went through the system of the centenarian. The man who stood over him bore a face that the old-age fog clouding his age-old memories had obscured for decades and decades, but in that moment made its reemergence into the light of the present.

“Papà?” chiede Peppe Cerri. It had been lifetimes ago that Peppe had last seen the features of Bruno.

From the window of the train up towards Santa Fe, Antonia had looked out across the marshland. Birds fluttered about. Sometimes a wild horse could be spotted, taking tentative steps on the firmer ground. Time had seen her improve at distinguishing the distant cloud-shaped mountains from the mountain-shaped clouds. In a way in which she had not during her first journeying across the great expanse of the country, she made out the fences and little pickets that divided up the rolling pampas as neatly as the roads divided the city. She was becoming accustomed. Even the train had lost its aura of unreality, still certainly novel, but teetering closer to becoming merely and mundanely existent.

Night was descending, and with it became visible a strange glow floating just above the dim greens and browns of the peat. At points, it seemed to coalesce, brightening. Her little brother was a firm believer that this luz mala was formed of the souls of those who had died fighting the Indians, but what did he know? He was more given to superstition, and his belief, that the Indians coated their weapons in magic poisons to trap their victims to roam the pampas forevermore, was

not hers. If these were truly the souls of the dead then they could be, to Antonia's mind, anyone at all. They could be the souls of other Italians, forced by the greedier ghosts of il vecchiomondo to transatlanticise themselves in pursuit of a more hopeful afterlife. They could be Indians themselves, returning to wander the sacred lands that once were theirs. They could be spirits yet older, victims of a prehistoric crime so remote that they cannot even amongst one another remember what exactly it was. Or perhaps they were the faded remnants of all the hopes that have died throughout the ages, all the dreams of better times that are disconnected from their dreamers when the cuckoo calls, jolting awake the wonderers into the cold and dark mornings that exist only in reality.

The sun was already rising when the carriage from Santa Fe was arriving at the gaucho hamlet. Judging by the sound of singing, and the frenzied clip-clop of hooves, both men and beasts were already up and active for the day. The sound of a threshing machine in the not-to-far-off distance could be heard. "Espera aquí," Antonia dice to the carriage-driver, "even if I am a while, we must be ready to quickly go."

Bruno was being watched as he went a-twirling the bolas above his head. A sturdy old gaucho was looking on impassively, so sunbeaten and so wrinkled he looked as if carved from wood. The gaucho was assessing the eager extranjero's capability of contributing. Peppe was watching, too. It would be nice to show his boy how life is lived. With an inelegant toss, the bolas wrapped around the legs of a sow and brought it down. With a grab a bit less calm and collected than he had intended, Bruno took the iron that the gaucho was reaching out to pass him, and moved to pin the squealer down with his knee. It was harder than he had thought, as it writhed and pushed back against him. The other gauchos had made it look so easy. Teeth gritting, he pressed the rod it into the soft flesh of the pig. The animal's scream carried across the flat and open field unobstructed. Bruno pressed the iron deeper, sizzling the pork.

"Peppe," dice Bruno, "never be the pig."

"Che?" chiede Peppe.

"Just stay on top. Stay on top and be a man." Blood and pus oozed from the flesh after he at last withdrew the rod. Bolas untangled, he stood back up, and the freshly branded sow did the same before bolting, eyes apparently set on the peaks afar, running as if suffering was the purest fuel. Bruno turned to the gaucho. "Am I doing castrations today? Or cutting ovaries?"

"No. The caballo next," dice the gaucho. He took back the iron, and placed it into the little wheeled stove by his side. He began to trundle it across the pen.

“Antonia!” dice Peppe.

She was emerging from underneath the enormous, tressling roots of the ombu trees. “Ciao, Peppe,” dice Antonia. “Ciao, fratellino.”

When the piccirillo made a move to run to her, Bruno seized him by the arm. “You’ve come to tell me to come back to the city.”

“I’ve come to tell you to stop being così stupido.”

“I’ve not even been here two hours, and here you are already. You’ve wasted your journey. I’m not going back.” At the gaucho’s silent beckoning, he spat in the mud and began to make his way towards a pen, in which a lone horse strolled. Peppe was dragged along behind him.

“You can’t run away with Peppe,” dice Antonia, following. “He is Gennara’s, too. You can’t take him away from sua madre.”

“Dov’esta mi mama?” chiede Peppe, looking back at his aunt. His feet were practically sliding along the mud, no need for his little legs to move. He remembered it still, one hundred years later. Fuzzily, but he remembered.

Antonia smiled down at him. “Back at home, I’m here to bring you back to her.”

Bruno continued to stride onwards. “Buenos Aires is not home.”

“It is at the moment.”

“I want mamà,” dice Peppe.

Inside the pen Bruno, with one hand still tightly clasped around his son’s arm, throws the bolas once more. It was a near miss. His second throw went better, and entwined the horse’s legs. They buckled, and the animal came tumbling down with a whinny and a crash. Bruno knelt once more. It was tougher to control than the sow, and he found one of his hands on the caballo’s snout, pushing down hard. His other reached and took the iron once again. He pressed the metal into the soft flank. “Do you want to grow up to be a shoeshine, mio figliolo?”.

“A shoeshine?” chiede Peppe.

“Sì, un lustrascarpe, come tua papà. Every day shining the shoes of these porteños, these men who don’t see people like us as human beings. Just as simboli, o servi. As Europeans, whatever that means.”

“No, papà,” dice Peppe.

Bruno nodded. “You belong here, with me. Here nobody barks down orders at us. We can be in control here,” lui dice, pressing the metal in further, and the animale struggled under him all the more. “Mi dispiace, sorella, Peppinello stays here.”

“I promised Gennara,” dice Antonia. “The only choice you have in this is whether or not you come back as well. Per favore, per il bene della famiglia, come back with me.”

Bruno, eyes cast down, shook his head. “Go home, sorella.”

“With Peppe,” lei dice, voice breaking. “With or without you.”

When he looked back up at her, her arm was extended as if offering him a hand. Una pistola was shaking slightly in her grasp. “Che cos’è?”, chiede Bruno, as if he had never seen such a thing before in his life.

“It’s a gun, Bruno,” dice Antonia. She turned to look at the other gaucho, but he had not made a move. He was looking on with scarcely an expression at all.

“Sì, lo so, but –” dice Bruno, shifting ever so slightly from his position atop the horse, which jolted back upright. “Oh, cazzo,” lui dice, as the horse bolt-action muscled its hind leg right into his bewildered face. Like a puppet with all strings severed he careened over, limply, slumply, face-down into the mud. It had all happened with such speed that Antonia had to look down the barrel of the gun to make sure she hadn’t shot him unthinkingly. Even if she had, she wasn’t sure what she was hoping to see down there to prove it.

“Papà!” dice Peppe. He shook his dad by the shoulder.

Antonia grabbed the piccirillo by the arm. “Dobbiamo andare,” lei dice, as she began to reverse-march him from the field. As she looked back, the gaucho was crouched over her brother as he remained splayed with his features pressed into the pampa sludge.

“He is going to come home soon, giusto?” chiede Peppe once they were both back in the carriage and on the move once more.

“Sì, if he has any sense left in him,” Antonia told her nipote. “You’ll grow up to be a lot wiser than him. He’s so full of old attitudes. He’s not moving with il mondo. You’ll be wiser.”

Peppe said nothing. He was marched back to the carriage and bundled aboard. They were back on the road.

The torturous passing of the hours, and full fury exercised by the midday sun etched themselves into the little boy’s memory. It was nigh unbearable by the time the carriage-driver called out, announcing a rider on the path. “He isn’t moving for us,” el dice. Antonia rose up to take a look. Peppe poked his head out from the carriage window as well. Further along the road there was, indeed, a rider. As they drew nearer this man, astride his enormous sandy-white horse, his earthy visage came into focus. His aura was reflected in the weight of his brow, the intensity of his eyes, the sharpness of his jaw. The midnight poncho he wore blew gently in the wind. From his

sash hung a ceremonial dagger, resting in a leather sheath. She clambered down from the back of the carriage and made her way towards Azócar Bosqueño, to say something or other, probably, forse, if there was anything that could possibly be said.

"I'm bringing my nipote back to the city, to his mamma," entonces ella dice. "Mio sobrino. A la ciudad. Sorry, my Spanish is not so bueno."

He stared at her impassively. "Your brother is right. La ciudad is no place to raise a child. He stays aqui," él dice.

"You have no right to tell me and my familia how to conduct nuestros asuntos," ella dice.

"He will not grow up a porteño. Turn the carriage around, or give him to me now. That is your choice."

"I said you have no right."

"I have God's right," dice Azócar, crossing his chest. "He made me un hombre, and you una mujer. Hand over el chico, or God's law takes over."

"Sei un maiale," dice Antonia. "Un cerdo."

The gaucho removed his lasso from the saddle by his side. "Ustedes Papolitanos don't understand the way of the world. Every day that you don't spend hurting God, you spend helping somebody else hurt Him. El chico stays with us."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," dice Antonia. The gun was concealed in her pocket. "Just go. This is no asunto of yours."

"In el nuevomundo, you are a slave to el porteño. In el viejomundo, el judío. This is my asunto. I will save this poor child from a life of judaísmo in tu casa."

"You are insane," lei dice. "I'm a Christian!"

With no more words to say, Bosqueño willed his horse into motion, and within a second he was charging towards her. As he lifted the lasso above his head, she reached for the gun. Without time to think, let alone to aim, she raised it and squeezed the trigger, unsqueezed, squeezed, repeated once or twice more. After it stopped firing, she continued to squeeze and unsqueeze until the metal began to cut into her finger. The outcome was not entirely as hoped. Most of the bullets had gone wide, and only one had found a target. The poor horse was sent to the ground in a fashion much more violent than the one Bruno had wrangled, blood spurting from the entry wound on its neck. A blur of poncho was followed by a yelp and a crack. Together, cavalcatura above e cavalcatore below ended in a heap on the floor, from which emanated a whinnying deathrattle alongside incomprehensible Spanish cries.

“Oh dios mi pierna,” from under the shuddering horseflesh, “mi pierna, mi pierna! Perra! Puta! Zorra!”

“The road is clear,” dice Antonia with a trembling voice, clambering back into the carriage. “Andiamo.” The driver did not disobey.

Peppe was crying. He had watched it all. It was a witnessing that, one day, would render for him the advent of the spaghetti western a uniquely traumatic cultural event. “He is dead?”

“Forse,” lei dice. “I don’t know. He’s far from home. But the sooner the world is rid of men like that, the better.”

“Che?”

“I can’t explain it,” lei dice. “It isn’t something you can put into words. One day, when you are growing up, one day you will just understand.” The carriage rolled on back towards Santa Fe. By nightfall, the second since her last sleep, she was on the train again, again staring out at the luz mala. She was a contributor to that creeping phosphorescence. “That’s where you belong,” lei mormora, holding onto consciousness by a thread.

Salvatore Cherry departed the apartment building on Via Cappuccini in a hurry, rushed away by the carer. He left behind his decrepit cousin convulsing and terrified. His nightmares of dead horses and mangled horsemen, painstakingly put to sleep through years of therapy, were fully reawakened. “Papà, papà!” Peppe stava gridando as the ambulanza was called. The shapes appearing before his eyes dissolved, leaving only the colour of the Argentine mud.

Leaving Campobasso, there was greenery. Entering Tripicco, there wasn’t. It was summer, and yet the peaks which gave the comune its name were bare of foliage. The trees remained skeletal. If Mosè had been out of his car, he would have noted the lack of ribbit-ribbiting on the approach. Nobody in the town had heard the ululanti of the wolves in some time. There was a lifelessness that had settled in, quite unnaturally, that did not show any signs of abating. If Mosè had planned a longer stay, he might have changed his mind before he had even fully arrived. Instead, it was just to be a quick in-and-out, to collect some of the things he hadn’t moved out of his parents’ house just yet, stash them in the trunk, grab a glass of vino with an old friend, crash for the night, drive back to Campobasso in the morning. A clean and responsible plan.

The spot where he used to park his car was taken. In fact, many of the more convenient parking spaces were taken. There were more cars around than Tripicco was built for. The space outside the Autoscuola was taken, and the ones outside the shuttered building that used to be Il

Salone as well. Mosè had time and time again driven over the pavement on Via Iconicella onto the dusty clearing, surrounded by shrubs and Aleppo pines, and always had found a reliable spot. On that day, though, the branches bore no leaves, and the clearing bore no space. The parking lot across from the old Tabaccheria was full as well, with a couple of huge tankers carrying some substance unknown, as well as a Cherry's coffee van that did not appear to be in service. Mosè drove on. It wasn't even possible to find a space in one of the alleyways branching off of Via Porta Caldora. Tripicco Halls was predictably a no-go. The war memorial down at the Piazza dell'Unità d'Italia was, as it always did, sombrely intoning

A VOI

CHE FIORENTI DI GIOVINEZZA

ADDOLCISTE

NEL BACIO DI AMORE ALLA PATRIA

LA RINUNZIA E L'ANGOSCIA

and in its shadow, Mosè squared off with another young buck to vie for the last spot outside the bakery. Mosè did not emerge the winner. He continued along the road leading out of town, finally stopping in the car park of a hotel boarded up some decades ago. Graffiti had once marked the walls, the halfway-decent art of the kids who had taken to practising their skateboarding in the open space. It had been a nice place for them, with a couple of sturdy old handrails to grind on. Now they were gone, and their designs had been washed away too. There was an Eddie Stobart truck taking up their old ollieing grounds, and a lambo as well.

The streets were full of new people. People were younger, and faces less craggy. Months had passed since he had last been in the comune, and things were certainly different. New bars were popping up, and some new shops too. Some of them looked quite nice. There was even a clothes shop selling bonnets and tiny shirts with funny slogans for newborns. It expressed an optimism that could not possibly have been expressed a year earlier – an optimism that a young couple might want to raise their kid in Tripicco. Further down the road, Mosè waltzed past the old gas station that had displayed the brand 'Agip' proudly, right up to the spring just gone by, despite that company having had its name changed in 1953. Sixty-four years later, it had finally been brought up to date. Next, he went on by the old FAI-DA-TE, or at least the spot where it used to be. Men were drilling into the ground, laying the foundations for whatever was to replace it. It was a good thing Eva didn't need to be replacing old welcome mats these days.

And there it was, just a few doors down from Simply Market on Via Gugliemo Marconi, the Pomodorium. Well, it wasn't the Pomodorium anymore. There had been no symbolic ruin, no *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* moment marking the end of an era. The building still stood, just as it had done when it had meant so much to him, and even more to her. Tomatoes rot from the inside, he knew well enough from experience. It took a while for the skin to rupture and the juices to work their way up to the surface. Come va il pomodoro, va il Pomodorium. The pale bricky facade of the shop remained unchanged, but through the newly-replaced window could be seen a larger floorspace than there once was, as the wall to storage had been knocked down. The old rug was gone, as well as the tiling it had covered. It was all laminate flooring adesso. The lighting had once been warm e buono, but now was cold e cattivo. All the familiar furnishings had vacated the premises, including the burnished wood counter Mosè had spent so many hours perched behind. In its place stood a plexiglass-topped, imitation marble slab. Upon it sat a till of plastic, rather than of brass, all up-to-date with electronic displays. From outside, Mosè could hear its tinny speaker playing a tinny ker-ching.

The paint job they had both worked on, splodgily reddening the walls to match the produce, had been undone. The smaller walls were charcoal grey, and the largest had been papered over with fake brickwork. There was no sign of the chequered table-cloths Eva had pinched from her mamma's house and refashioned as drapes. No sign of the potted plants either. Whereas Mosè had been accustomed to just wear a jumper with a crisp white collar popping out from underneath, nice and smart-casual, no dress code enforcement weighing down upon him, the new employees working in the building did not appear to have as much freedom. The baristi, one removing a sandwich from the microwave, another pouring out an espresso for a straw-hatted lady, both wore tucked-in black shirts under burgundy aprons, black trousers, and immaculately polished black work shoes. Yes, looking in from outside it appeared a different world. From the facade, though, there was only one indication that something was remiss, only one visible mark of the rot that had taken hold, the sfruttamento that had come to pass: the new sign of the franchise, hanging above the doorway. "Cherry's," it read.

They met for drinks that evening, down at the bar that had been set up in the hollowed-out corpse of la Cucina di Gianni Anatra. Mosè didn't have a full grasp of the story of old chef Gianni, but he gathered that he had been apprentice to a local butcher, fought in the war, and come home to set up a cosy restaurant that offered generous discounts for fellow veterans. It did not seem entirely in his honour that the new proprietor had restyled the premises as 'l'Anatra Ubriaca', a

name it announced in bright red neon in the wide front window. Other neon signs, some in the shapes of ducks waddling or in flight, some announcing phrases reaching out for profundity: 'l'Anatra più ubriaca si diverte di più', 'Bevi fino al ritorno dei tuoi sogni', that sort of thing. In a booth, falling in the glow of one of the more idiotic slogans, Eva sat waiting.

"Ecco la mia Eva," dice Mosè, leaning in for a hug.

"Ecco il mio Mosè," dice Eva, reciprocating. There were shadows under her eyes.

Really, the sbirri had just arrested her because it was something to do and if they had not then their day would have been too boring to deal with. She had gotten away with a fine in the end, but this was still not ideal in penny-pinching times. Worse still was the effect that her arrest aveva avuto on her customer base. It was one thing to go to a shop with an owner known for bribery of public officials, for tax fraud in its various forms, or any other respectable crime, but such base antics as shoplifting was just not on. Shoplifting from a competitor, at that. "Is there no such thing as honour in the marketplace anymore?" one commenter had asked on the local news article. Another had been comprised of a twelve-hundred-word diatribe against the failings of women in business. It had received nine clicks of the 'Mi piace' button. One was Giordano's, of course. Il carnivoro was off on the promotional tour for his modernised take on Rangone's *Rules For Living Beyond 120*, but nevertheless found the time to antagonise his old neighbours on social media. The impact on her income had hurt more than the words, and the narrow path forward for the Pomodorium had quickly closed up.

"Well it doesn't help," Eva dice, a glass and a half deep, "that when they've got my CV in hand and they're searching my name, the first thing that comes up is the stupid arrest, taccheggio, taccheggio. But does it even matter? I probably wouldn't get the jobs anyway. I was on a call with Stefana yesterday. No, the day before yesterday. She's getting turned down dappertutto, and so is Luca."

"I found a job," dice Mosè while she downs half her vino in one, "in telemarketing. I could put in a good word for you. We can work together again, forse."

"Telemarketing?"

"Just reading from a script, you know, 'mi dispiace disturbarla, it's Mosè Rappaporto calling from VistaRegale,' and then go and try to sell them a diet book o qualcosa."

"I hate getting those calls," dice Eva.

Mosè shrugged. "You know, I'm not going to be in Tripicco often. We shouldn't waste the evening just talking about jobs and all the world's càzzu. How have you been?"

She just laughed. “This is how I have been. There’s not been much else, Mosè.”

A woman carrying a tray of shottini wandered over. “Vuoi?” lei dice.

“Certo,” dice Mosè. He took a couple. “Chesti li offro io.”

“No, the next is yours,” dice Eva, intercepting his cash-carrying hand and gently lowering it to the table. She reached into her pocket, took a note, and handed it over.

“No change, scusa,” dice la donna.

“Vabbuò,” dice Eva, taking a couple more from the tray. When la cameriera had gone on her way, the two old friends tapped their plastic glasses together and knocked the drinks back. “Oof.” Strong stuff.

“Cin-cin,” dice Mosè, upon round two. They then returned to the vino.

Eva looked over to the bar, where much of the clientele were jostling about, either waving cards above their heads in an attempt to get a bit of damn service around here, or just chatting amongst one another. “I’m surprised we didn’t get any funny looks. I get funny looks all the time now.”

“Because of the arrest?”

“No,” dice Eva. “Because of ‘vabbuò’. Because of ‘chesto’. Half of these new people aren’t from anywhere near here. There’s some Sicilians. There’s a lot from up north too. Quite a few stranieri. They don’t know the language.”

“Chesti pesti!”

“I’ll be out at the shop, and the steward dice ‘come stai?’ and I say ‘vabbuò’,” dice Eva, ‘or someone will ask me for directions, and I’ll say ‘chella guida là!’. Then I just get this look, chesta ucchiata that tells me what they think. They think I’m some sort of buzzurro. They think that we are backward, all of us who were born here. *Arretratezza*. It’s their favourite word. I hear it all the time now, credimi.”

“Problemi iniziali,” dice Mosè, “I’m sure it is annoying. Càzzu, just hearing about it it annoys me. But they will get used to it. I’m sure it will pass.”

“Imagine if I got called for interview. Some northern manager, like that one who got killed, and he’s there asking me how I am. ‘Vabbuò!’ and then that’s that, out the door!”

“Somebody got killed?”

“From Simply.”

“I see.”

“Too late to do us a favour, though,” dice Eva.

"Not a very civil thing to say, chella," dice Mosè.

"Perdurnami, but la civiltà really doesn't seem to have done me any favours lately. Scusa, I just haven't been in a very good mood recentemente."

"I see."

"I applied here, when it was opening back up. I never heard back, and now I'm here and everyone behind the bar is northern. Che càzzu succede? I applied at Tripicco Halls to work the desk, and then I even applied as a cleaner, and –"

"It goes nowhere," dice Mosè. "Its dispiriting, I know."

"No, listen," lei ribatte, "I was in Simply and I saw them after their shift, Mr. Cherry's luxury flats cleaning staff, all speaking to each other. Slavic accents, every one. Che càzzu succede accà?"

Mosè took an uncomfortable sip. What he was hearing was dangerously close to Facebook talk, pushing beyond its virtual confines. "Che dici?"

"Che dici 'che dici'?" chiede Eva.

"Why do you think this is a problem? Scusa, Eva, but don't you have Slavic heritage – your grandfather, no?"

"The Croats are of Gothic origin, per il tuo 'nformazione," dice Eva, "but that is besides the point. I was born accà, I was raised accà, and now I can't get a job accà. They can. Is that right?"

"The job market is tough everywhere. It's tough overseas as well. Look, Eva, let's just not. Did you see the new Tony Servillo film, the mafia one? Have you kept up with cycling?"

"Oh, so 'it's tough overseas as well'. So somebody who never before set foot in chesto paese gets the job I applied for, and I should say, well, vabbuò, at least somebody's doing okay."

"That's not what I'm saying," dice Mosè, "but if it helps then maybe it's worth thinking. Non lo so. I'm not really sure what to say, Eva. You'll get hired somewhere. Other people will go on struggling. Maybe there were people who resented you while you had the Pomodorium. Maybe you had what they wanted, and they thought, damn, I really resent her."

She just had to laugh. "These are imaginary people now," dice Eva. "We've moved on from the problems of people born centinaia, migliaia di miles away d'accà. We're now talking about imaginary people's problems. Let's change the topic from Eva's problem, let's talk about somebody else's. Anybody else's. Esista o no, let's talk about somebody else. Let's talk about cycling!"

"Those shottini went right to the head, eh?"

"Not enough, forse. I'm getting more." She stood on up.

"Aspetta," dice Mosè, holding out his card for her, "my turn, no?"

"No, you're my guest," lei dice, waving it away. "You are being hosted in Tripicco, by your good friend from Tripicco!"

Mosè hadn't quite managed to put together an exit strategy by the time she returned. She already had knocked back her shottino at the bar, and plonked his down in front of him in such a manner that it was lucky the whole thing didn't spill. "Grazie," lui dice, scratching his hair.

"Prego, prego," lei dice, as lui stava shottando. "You know, I was thinking, Mosè, that there are a lot of things you don't want to talk about. Or rather, lots of things you don't want me to talk about."

"Che?" lui chiede, wiping a droplet or two from his chin.

"Oh, you know, 'don't share this,' 'let's not talk about that,' and so on," Eva sorride.

"Well, there are topics where, well, let's say, I don't think your perspective is quite right."

She didn't look hurt. She didn't look like she cared. "I can tell. But I am just not sure where it is you take your perspective from. I have thought about it, and truly, nun sono certo."

"I like to think it comes from empathy. Empatia universale, I'd say."

"Does your empatia universale cover the fact that I don't have the time or effort for un'empatia universale of my own? Having a bleeding heart must be a full-time endeavour."

"Isn't that the sort of thing you were after?"

She sighed, pursed her lips, drummed her fingertips on the table for a moment. "Vabbuò, I actually do have some personal news. I've met someone. I don't know how serious it is, but I can tell you I've not yet had such a stupid conversation with him. He's doesn't tell me what I shouldn't be talking about. And its nice, arrefreshcà, un po'."

"Oh, how nice. Let's talk about him then," dice Mosè.

Eva Amorcredo's new Tinder romance, who she had only met a couple of times in person, had funnily enough only moved to Tripicco for work. Augusto Taricone was a Roman by birth, and a Roman by spirit. It hurt him to move away, however temporarily. As a long-time clerk at the Via Pompeo Magno branch of the Banca di Credito Cooperativo di Santo Spirito, on the very block where the city's first Cherry's was imminently opening, he was amongst those offered the chance to step up and manage the new branch that was opening up in some obscure southern town he had never before heard of. The pay rise was no joke. Property prices in the region were low, as long as he was willing to commute. For some reason, things were pretty expensive on the doorstep of the branch he'd be running, but forty minutes away it was a whole different story. A couple of

years in management could set him up nicely to come back to Rome to a job higher up the ladder. It wasn't forever. He never assumed anything ever was.

"Will you be alright without me?" chiede Augusto. He wasn't talking to his work colleagues, nor his friends, nor his family. He was talking to his compatriots.

"You'll be missed," dice Paola. They had met the better part of a decade earlier, during the relief efforts following the earthquakes which had brought devastation and horror to l'Aquila. Ever since, they'd made a hell of a team in their work for the betterment of La Patria. "But we will be alright."

Although he sank quite a considerable bit of time trying to be a man of culture, enjoying the opera as much as the cinema, most of his free hours were spent down at the Casa degli Italiani on Via Gioberti. It was the hub of their activism, where good patriots would drop off food to be distributed to their impoverished countrymen, and where a bed and clean water could be found by those Italians who could find them nowhere else. There was daycare offered, and the building always housed at least a few bambini enacting honourable duels with Oswald Spengler action figures. The services it provided were restricted, strictly restricted, to Italians, as might be expected at la Casa degli Italiani, but they did allow themselves a dash of worldliness in the many homages to those who had preached and practised their intellectual tradition. Great posters displaying the visages of Mosley, Mishima, and Wagner could be spotted in the foyer. The books of Tolkein, Yeats, and Stirner were available from the library.

Every evening, craggy-faced and downcast types would come wandering in from the streets. They would be welcomed with warm and sometimes even tasty meals; Augusto was not a prodigy in la cucina, but he did his best. They could play pool and watch Lazio play on the TV in the common room, which they had made as cosy as possible with mountains of locally-made cushions atop the locally-made sofas. As night fell, the volunteers, many very young, would tuck in all those who had nobody else to tuck them in, nowhere else to be tucked in. Augusto peppered a little kiss on the heads of all the simpering, past-their-use-by-date elderly folks who just loved to feel loved again. "Dormi bene," sussurrerebbe Augusto, "dormite bene tutti," before turning off the lights. In the office upstairs, he and Paola would then often clink glasses of limoncello, and have a chat under the watchful gaze of the enormous A2 poster of Il Duce himself. They kept the music low, as to not wake anyone, but there was always a pleasant mix of the anthems from the good old days, and the readily hummable Japanese-style pop of Alessandra Mussolini. Before handing over to

security, Paola would check the accounts. They had a wonderful benefactor in the Alba Foundation, whose regular donations kept them in action.

“Do hurry back, as soon as you can,” dice Paola, on the night before his departure.

“Sì, I will, I want to,” lui dice, “but you’ll keep on winning hearts and minds without me.”

“Do you think you’ll be bringing un po’ di attivismo down with you?”

“I haven’t thought about it, onestamente.”

As nice as it was to help people out, Augusto did not opt to take any attivismo down south. In the time freed up by the lack of patriotic activities, he started his Tindering, and was soon face to face over a coffee, predictably not in Cherry’s, with Eva Amorcredo.

“I’ve never been,” dice Eva.

“Veramente? Rome is the greatest city, the most majestic, it is history itself!”

“I’ve never really been to cities. I’ve been to Campobasso, been to Naples, but that’s about it really. E per la maggior parte, I wish history would just pass me by.”

“Rome is the history that has passed us by. Oh, you should see it someday. Let’s say this date goes nowhere. It would be sad – I hope it does go somewhere, mia cara – but as long as you leave here with the intention of one day going to la città eterna, then it is worth it. Cento per cento, credimi.”

“Come dici,” dice Eva, with a little smile.

“Truly, you must. For years now there have been neighbourhoods without clean water. Some without water at all. They are letting la città fall apart. If you wait too long, nothing might remain of it but slums.”

“Come dici, come dici,” dice Eva. To her mind, Augusto was an interesting looking man. He was no taller than she was, and despite the size his broad shoulders gave his silhouette, he was almost wholly unmuscled. There was something a little feminine about his features, but what it was precisely she could not quite pin down. He might have been unassuming had it not been for his immaculate posture, and the easy, virile saunter with which he walked.

They talked for quite a while, on a range of topics. He had talked about the kind volunteering he had been doing for Italians in need, and she about the untimely end of her business venture. “We tried so much to save the shop. There was even a video we made for online. Era piuttosto buono.”

“Oh, really,” lui dice, booting it up on his phone.

“Il potere di Cristo ti obbliga!” dichiara Eva, as she once had been, through the speaker.

“Sembra così tantu tiempu fa,” dice Eva, as she was now.

“Il pomodoro,” dice Augusto, “it really does have a cross through the middle, there.”

“Sì, na frutta cristiana. That’s why the Associazione Egiziana Islamica Popolare has declared a jihad. A jihad against the tomato.”

“Quelli bastardi. They’ll take everything we care about from us. There’s a fight for everything we hold dear going on, and so many people don’t know.”

“Sì,” dice Eva.

“And worse, there are those who make excuses not to care.” As he spoke, Eva felt something a little unnerving. It felt as if something was staring at her from under his poplin button-down. Through the light fabric, she thought she could make out a pair of intense, wide-open eyes.

“Sì,” Eva dice.

“People are waking up, though. They really are.”

“M’adda murì mammà, spero che tiene cagiune.”

“Sì,” lui dice. He hadn’t the faintest clue what it was she that was saying, but that only made her prettier to him.

It was, all in all, not a bad date. They met again the following week, and she showed him around the town, telling him little stories about funny things that had happened. He was learning about the bench she had passed out on at the end of a calamitous summer night, about the park where she had gotten a concussion from a pallone da calcio being booted into her head, about the second-, third-, and probably fourth-hand bookshop from which in her childhood she had once pinched a sewing handbook. At the time, she had really wanted to take up sewing. She never did. Of course, she also took him down to the Pomodorium. Together, they watched people exiting and strolling out into the street, carrying mochas in branded disposable cups.

“How does it make you feel to look at it now?” chiede Augusto.

“Scusa, sei tu il mio terapista?”

“I’m just curious.”

“I don’t feel as much as I would have thought I would. But I know I’m still angry.”

“Un’emozione complicata.”

That evening past sundown, hours after they had declared it another successful date and parted ways, she received a text. “Come down, I’m outside.” She did, and Augusto was there, leaning out from his car in the middle of the road. “Go put some black clothes on,” dice allora lui, “let’s go get some revenge for you.”

“Nu po’ di vendetta?”

“Va, va, rapidamente!”

When she came back down with a freshly donned dress, stockings, and beanie, the only items in black she owned, Augusto was already involved in an altercation. “Sto cercando!” stava gridando back towards the car behind him, which was unable to get past in the narrow one-way street. “It’s stalling,” lui dice, as Eva approached. “I can’t get it to move.”

“Che STRONZO!” grida la donna in the car behind. “Stronzo, MUOVERTI!”

“Calmati!” dice Eva a lei. “Si è bloccando.”

“Faglielo muovere!”, accompanied by a fist shaken out of the window.

“Qual è il problema?” dice Eva, looking in.

Augusto was frantically turning the key back and forth. “It just does this, di tanto in tanto. It will get going again in a minute.”

“Che stronzo sei! Che CAZZO, che cazzo SEI! Vai, vai, VAI!”

“There’s no need for all that!” lui grida back. “Non ce n’è affatto bisogno!”

The woman had given up on words by that point, and was just yelling. The car revved back to life, all’improviso. “Jump in,” dice Augusto.

“Sei TU il càzzu. TU!” grida Eva, flashing the horns at the woman as she climbed on into the passenger side. “Incredibile. What was wrong with her? Absolutely no patience.”

“She just needs a healthy outlet,” lui dice, turning the corner onto Via Iconicella.

Eva fiddled with the packaging of her chewing gum. “So, what’s your plan?”, chucking one into her mouth. “This little bit of vendetta?”

Augusto pointed ahead. He had driven them down to the parking lot of la Tabaccheria vecchia. It was quickly apparent why. A Cherry’s coffee van was sat unattended, and a big tanker parked beside it rendered it a little tricky to see from the main road. “I spotted it on my way back home,” dice lui.

“I see. So what did you have in mind?”

“Spacchiamolo. Break the windows, slash the tyres.” Augusto was no stranger to azione diretta, having spent quite a few nights out with his ragazzi roughing up the undesirables.

“Vabbuò,” lei dice. She took in a sharp breath. “Let’s not make much noise. Just the tyres.”

“You or me?”

“Me,” lei dice.

He reached over to the glove compartment, and pressed the button. There was a coltellino svizzero inside. “There’s a serrated blate on there.”

She took it and flipped it open. She got out of the car and walked over to the van. She knelt. Augusto watched on, admiring her gusto. “Che è questo?” la sentì dire. “Augusto, somebody’s already slashed them.”

“Eh?” He got out of the car and made his way over. True enough, somebody had already given them a good going over.

“You didn’t slash them already?”

“No, I wouldn’t have taken it away from you.”

“That’s quite sweet,” lei dice. “Well, what an anticlimax. Let’s just go.”

Eva hadn’t mentioned their attempt at vandalisation to Mosè. He had been disapproving enough anyway. Frankly, he had been rude. Neverminding the way he had tried to shut her down from talking about the things on her mind, he’d ended up calling her a hypocrite for now dating a man from Rome. “I thought you had problems with all these new outsiders?” lui aveva detto.

“You think you are so clever,” lei aveva detto. “Clever but maleducato. Bonanotte.” She’d gotten up and marched off, and all the onlookers thought they must have been a couple on, or just fallen off, the rocks.

A couple of days after their drinks at L’Anatra Ubriaca, Eva had something new she wouldn’t want to tell Mosè about, should she ever see him again. She would rather forget the beach trip entirely.

It hadn’t started badly. Sometimes Eva had gone out with friends to a neighbouring comune accà, a neighbouring comune là, but it had never been far, and never particularly adventurous. With Augusto behind the wheel, and the car thankfully not stalling, it felt adventurous. They went racing along the autostrade woven between the hills and mountains. Signs by the side of the road pointed to Foggia, and after a while even to Bari, places she had heard co-workers and family members recounting their visits to, but places which she wouldn’t have been able to have even pointed to on a map. She had never much been geographically curious, our Eva.

Their destination was Manfredonia. It was not even close to noon by the time they arrived, and the forecasts were, for once, bang on. Sun on high, conditions couldn’t have been much better. It was all-go on the summer clothes as well. Eva wore a dotted sundress, and Augusto

complemented his lightning-bolt t-shirt with a pair of pastel blue three-inch shorts. Both, it need not be said, wore sandals.

"È propiu come nei film," lei dice. There was a real trambusto to the place, with people milling all about, sipping colas and slathering themselves with sunscreen.

"I love the beach. I wanted to be a lifeguard when I was a little boy. Have you ever seen Baywatch?"

"No."

"Me neither."

The influence of Cherry was nowhere to be seen. They grabbed gelato at a cute little shop by the seafront, strawberry for her and vanilla for him. "I like the ones with novelty flavours," lei dice. "One day I will find one with la sapore di pomodoro."

"It must be out there somewhere."

They went strolling further down the lungomare to a coffee shop which seemed to be serving each customer with a mug wildly different from the last. Augusto's bore one of Levi's paintings, not that he knew it, and Eva's a photo of the rubble of the Campanile di San Marco after its 1902 collapse. Caffeinated, they hopped back in the car and made their way further down the coast to somewhere more secluded. It stalled again, but the spot in which it chose to do so suited them quite nicely. There was less sand than there had been in the resortified stretch just outside Manfredonia proper, and instead grass stretched out, drawing ever so near the water before giving way to a scenic rockiness. They walked and talked.

"The Adriatic. I wonder what's over on the over side from here. I guess Albania. Maybe even Greece."

"Montenegro?"

"I think that's further north. Do you not find it funny, how different we are from them? Un paio di centinaia di chilometri d'acqua split us apart – perhaps not even that much – and yet they are totally unlike us. None of those countries ever built an empire. They were conquered again and again."

"I never paid much attention in History," dice Eva. "I did some reading on the history of il pomodoro. Cocchismo e rangonismo. It never helped in my essays. I was good at Art."

"Well, we stamped those lands with our might. Look at a map and you'll see, right along the coast," lui dice, pointing out. The lands he was talking about were far too far away for him to be really pointing at anything at all. "The names of the towns are the names we gave them. Ragusa,

Spalato, Fiume. We put our names on everything, credimi. The biggest country in the world, we named it. 'America' – it's Italian."

"I'm aware of that."

"You'd be surprised how many aren't."

As they walked, a shape began to become visible on the rocks ahead. The waves, at the innermost point of their undulations, were gently washing over it. It was at first the cause of no concern, but as the trajectory of their walk brought them closer, close enough to see what it was, or at least what it had once been, Eva had to look away. Under the tattered remains of a Longdale hoodie, it was a person, swollen and decomposing from time spent below water. Its journey had begun over two thousand miles to the south. It was a long way to travel just to end up so.

"Porco Dio," dice Augusto. Eva had stopped in her tracks, but he continued the approach. "This spent some time out in the sea. Porco Dio."

"What do we do? Who do we tell?" lei dice. She faced inland. She faced away from the scene.

"I can call i carabinieri. I'll do it right away."

"Augusto," dice Eva, "why did you bring me here?"

"Cosa intendi?" chiede Augusto.

"We're so far away from everywhere," dice Eva, "and now this –"

If she had been looking his way, she would have seen him shrug. "You think I expected this? These normally wash up on the southern coast. Sicily, the islands in the channel, not qui. It's a freak accident. It's crazy. I've never seen anything like it."

She kept on looking inland. She heard the call he made to the police. She heard him shout over that they would be on their way. "Voglio andare a casa," lei aveva mormorato, far too quiet for him to hear.

"I've called, they know," lui dice. "Eva, let's go. They will sort it out."

"Voglio andare a casa."

"I can see buildings over there. There's probably a bar, vieni."

"They'll want us to give statements. Voglio andare a casa."

"No, no, they must deal with this sort of thing all the time. Vieni, Eva. We drove all this way out. We don't have to dwell on it, credimi. Let's go for limoncello. Merendine. All on me." Amongst other fruits, life had taken many lemons from Eva Amorcredo, and individuals in such circumstances found all-too-tempting the promises of sweet limoncello.

Yet Eva didn't move. She knew it wouldn't be easy to get home without his car, but she could call someone for a lift. She tried to remember if Mosè was working weekends. She wanted to go home.

"Vieni," stava gridando. He was making his way over towards the not-too-distant houses. By the time she turned to look, his silhouette had shrunk considerably. Nothing to be done, she set her eyes up above the horizon, and began to walk.

Word Count: 35,061