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Lyrical I

Phobokenosis

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Shapes of Fear (1930-1932) by Maynard Dixon There were two of them: fear and fearlessness, vastly different yet strikingly similar. Together they, in tandem, steered minds, wit and beyonwit.

There was fear, more on that later, and there was fearlessness, a sensation of peculiar stock, born not as a feeling opposite to fear, not its

antonym or archnemesis, conceived in a passion spree from courage or recklessness, but rather a homunculus of fear itself, grown from the gradual realisation that being afraid is simply meaningless, for it will blow up anyway, will blaze with hellfire, suck you into the void, drain your life force, and then (someday) simply end, as if it never was, and therefore why be afraid, waste energy on fear, curl up into a foetus, if only not to be touched, not to be kicked, not to be spat upon, not to be spunked on, not to be yelled at with something like "what a creature you are". Sometimes it's not scary, not because we're so fearless, but because the finitude of horror is unfathomable, its chthonic image so inflated that we don't even know how to react. Baring teeth, shining with laser-eyes, spraying spittle and other fluids, waving a tail or a bunch thereof. Monster, devil, wonder-beast, creature. Nightmare, shudder, tremor. The bullet in the chamber isn't "if", the bullet in the chamber is "when". Stupefaction, numbness, stupor, bewilderment.

—"Once upon—"

—Be more specific.

—"In modern society—"

—I hate that phrase. Strike it out. Vile thing. Pah-pah-pah-pah-pah.

—"In modernity—"

—That's no better. Nonsense. As if there's nothing else to talk about. What are you, a reporter? Let's talk about the real, the eternal.

—“At the present time—”

—Let’s talk about the fictional instead. There’s neither substance nor form nor Truth in the present.

—“Once upon—”

—Had that already. Need specifics.

—“In the Thrice-Ninth tsardom, in the Thrice-Tenth state—”

—There, you can when you want to. That deserves praise. Continue. I’m almost aroused.

—“In the Thrice-Ninth tsardom, in the Thrice-Tenth state, people stopped perceiving fear.”

—“People”—too proper. Write “humanoids”.

—“In the Thrice-Ninth tsardom, in the Thrice-Tenth state, humanoids stopped perceiving fear as fear.”

—But why? What happened?

—If briefly—“because”.

—“Because” won’t satisfy anyone. We’re not crafting esoterica here, not writing sacred texts, not declaring love to each other. Don’t get me wrong, I adore you and everyone with all my heart, but we need specifics, need the whole history of the Thrice-Ninth state.

—Tsardom.

—Thrice-Ninth tsardom. We need to trace the history of fear from the epilogue, from conception.

—Oh, there's a whole chain of events there, explanation could take years, if not millennia. I would still recommend going for "because".

—We're in no hurry.

—Well, okay, so... "People stopped perceiving fear as fear ← Fear ceased to be fear ← it realised it was too frightening ← looked in the mirror hanging in the bathroom ← woke up with a hangover, which it wasn't happy about (head was like an overripe watermelon) ← drank heavily, which for a metaphysical entity is natural ← was worried, because people were ceasing to fear it ← went around scaring people, but in vain—"

—Let's go have a smoke instead. Got a cigarette?

—I only have a vape.

—What kind of person are you...

—Cherry.

—Brandied cherry?

—Brandied.

They went out for a smoke. It was frosty, hence the vape vapour appeared particularly dense. The wind blew, spreading the aromas of brandied cherry around, cocktail cherry, maraschino, to be precise. Compared to other varieties, the maraschino cherry is smaller in size and more tart, even bitter in taste, hence its name (from the Italian word *amaro*, which comes from the Latin word *amarus* — bitter). *Homo amarus*, thought the hangover-reeking abominable frightmare (for it was the embodiment of fear), slurping from a deep ramen bowl average-five-and-a-half-metre human intestines like udon.

What thoughts don't come to mind with a hangover.

—Since my head's splitting—I'll divide into several personalities, for there's a legion within me, a countless horde, be it orcs or butterflies—all the same, I've become too excessive, incomprehensible, distant as the horizon. Who fears the horizon? I'll eat the sun, won't let it rise, nor the crops, nor the dough before the festive dinner, I'll pepper the planet with nuclear missiles, unleash upon you, humanoids, a plague or a protein that turns brains into sponge, whereupon you'll add fundamental ultras to your sub-names, tear each other apart, rip each other's throats out, install psychopaths with delusions of grandeur as your princes, and that'll be the end of it all. What, scared? No? How come? Why? Don't be silent, say something.

—"Something."

—Taking the piss?

—“Taking the piss?”—in a mocking voice.

—Stop it.

—“Stop it”, ooh-la-la, how frightening we are.

—Stop! Stop!

—Coochie-coo, pure cuteness and nothing more. And what cheeks! What kind of cheeks are these? Grown them well, bravo, fattened up that mug of yours.

—But I will happen! I will happen! I will happen without fail. What, really not scared, like, not at all?

—What’s it to me? When will this be? And if it happens, will it really be bad? Even the “worst” is sometimes “good”. What must be—will be.

—Inevitable! I’ll happen inevitably! Boo! Fear me! Boo! Boo!

—Boo-boo-boo, boo-boo-boo… Bite me, eh? What a creature you are…

Criticism is no longer criticism, fear no longer fear, laughter no longer laughter. It’s funny, and scary, and makes you want to cry, but what’s the use? Tears from fear break into nervous laughter. He-he, ha-ha, perhaps the vicious society will notice something’s wrong with it, but otherwise—criticise or don’t, civilisation is at a dead end anyway. They teach eschatology in schools, preach it in newspapers, televisions, internets. Eschatology is fun. Eschatology is entertainment at

minimum, like social criticism. About everything—either bad or nothing; on life—only bad reviews. They're read more, and consequently get more ad views, likes, comments, and generally seem to conduct dialogue. Read it, spat it out, felt better somewhat, had a smoke, drank coffee—welcome to a new day. What're they writing there now?

Meanwhile in the "smoking area", brandied cherry mist.

—What an awful world this is. Look at the people. Disgusting. All crooked, skewed, drawing pictures with computers.

—It's fucked, this world,—says, exhaling a steamship cloud.

—Completely fucked, I agree,—repeats, exhaling again.

—Everything's going somewhere.

—Downhill.

—What angle?

—Very steep.

—Forty-five degrees?

—Ninety. Vertical attraction.

—Oof.

—Yep.

—So what to do?

—Nothing. What's the point?

—But how?

—It's fucked anyway, sooner or later. So live while you're young.

Fear at this point has no choice but to transition into another mode of operation, a mode where it would be unnoticeable, invisible, attacking from within, from the wit or even from beyonwit. Scared of what? Blurting something out, shooting off at the mouth, not fitting into the agenda, tradition, trend, format, discourse, canon, narrative, paradigm, mainstream, cultural context, code, aesthetics, protocol, procedure, regulations, standard, normative, not making the turn, not being able to adapt. You can lose a like, can lose reputation too, personal brand, place on the ethics council, podcast invitation, "verified" checkmark. What will people think? And the neighbours? And dear mother with dear father? And the followers? Oh, the followers! This here isn't proper talk, and that's too offensive for five people. Be nice to each other. Stay positive. Social criticism—just toothless entertainment. Transgression is when you write the word "fuck" in your profile bio. Satire is when smiling like someone brain-damaged in childhood you quote news with a mood of special pomposity, bedizened snarkiness and shout "Look, look, the idiot's fly is undone!".

—Sit quietly, comrades. He's about to enter,—whispers the gathering's leader.

The whisper is heard like thunder, for the hall is like a dome, a resonance chamber, such that the echo itself praises its acoustic qualities. The ceiling can't be seen, black as a looming shadow. In the pantheon—silence, rustle of robes, rasp of breathing, murmur of hearts. In the centre on an elevation—a gilded throne, beside it—a floordoor to nowhere. No windows, no natural light, the gathered crowds hold candles in saucers, they, like sprats in a tin, are countless. They languish in waiting, lips greased with vaseline, eyes watering, hands trembling, thousands of candles shaking. Smells of wax, dust and soot.

Suddenly the floordoor opens with a screech, light fountains from it, blinds the gathered, a draught crawls out, spreads across the floor, billows robes, hoods and hair, tickles eyes to tears. From the door rises in a mantle, becrowned, with sceptre and orb, a person of unremarkable breed, short, without muscles, without special beauties on the face (rather even an abominable frightmare).

—Paralysis! Paralysis! Paralysis!—the humanoids chant.—Paralysis! Paralysis! Paralysis!

The entrant languidly sits on the throne, raises the hand with the sceptre. The crowd instantly freezes, forms a semblance of a chaotic queue, lining up either in a star or a spiral, and begin one-by-one approaching the throne accompanied by the roar of the rest.

—Paralysis! Paralysis! Paralysis!

Having reached the throne, the first humanoid kneels, catches the gaze

from above, closes its eyes in fear and opens its mouth, into which the abominable frightmare inserts its royal sceptre, and the humanoid begins to suck it, suck with enthusiasm, sliding its tongue along the surface, while smacking and clicking the sceptre against the teeth smack-smack-click-click. Occasionally, either from pleasure or from discomfort and pain, a moan reverberates through the premises. The allotted time for the humanoid ends, the drooled-upon sceptre exits the mouth, the semi-paralysed humanoid is carried away. The next one's turn comes, the squelching operation repeats, and so on in order until everyone has their turn.

My book, "Deleted Scenes from the Bestselling Utopian Novel" is approaching 100 sold copies. Maybe yours will be the 100th? You can get it from Blackwell's with free international delivery or from your favourite online bookseller, e.g. Amazon, Waterstones (UK), Foyles (UK), Barnes & Noble (US), Hugendubel (DE), Kobo (ebook), and others. It was featured on Reedsy Discovery last week and keep getting favourable reviews!

> *"Deleted Scenes" is a surreal, experimental dystopian narrative set in the remote, snow-covered island of Novo Tsarstvo, uncanny reflection of contemporary Russia. Through a mosaic of perspectives, the author explores the lives of ordinary people struggling under a totalitarian regime where reality blends with nightmares. The novel combines psychological horror with dark humour to examine themes of truth, violence, and freedom, while showcasing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of*

> *oppression. And herewith, I take my leave.*

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The Art, The Tragedy, The Art of Tragedy, The Tragedy of Art

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