

The Artist's Last Day on Earth

H K Rahanu

The right of all **Humanity** to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by it in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

© 2023 by each and every single **Human Being**

1. Last Breakfast

With meticulous care,
He sets the table for his last meal,
Extra care lavished on this customary ritual,
Preceding *his* own mortality tonight.

Four heaped tablespoons of brinjal curry,
Ladled into a bone China bowl,
A roti centred on a plate,
Coated in golden butter glaze,
And a glass of pomegranate juice.
Was this culminating culinary choice an inflection by memory?
An intent to make a moral or political,
Societal or philosophical declaration?
Was it an ache, a yearning,
For a final specific sensory experience?
He is unsure.

He dips index finger into the goblet,
Lifting, watching drops of juice,
Gravity drawn drop back into beaker.
A single solitary drop falls onto the crisp clean tablecloth,
The white covering with blue stripes.
He watches the contact, the capillary action,
The blood red liquid drawn into the fibres,
The stain setting,
Chemically bonding.
He tears a piece of the unleavened bread,
And dips it into the bowl of eggplant curry,
But there is no traitor¹ to whom *he* can give this to,
No son of Simon Iscariot,
It is *he*, himself who Satan must enter.
He stares up at the hanging portrait,
Of the mystic poet-saint,

¹ "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him" - Gospel of John

The leather working Chamar,
The Guru from Varanasi.
The bhakti saint looks down on *him*,
Sees the sole seated soul sitting for nashta,
The despairing figure,
At the centre of the composition,
Backlit by the light and the glow of the TV,
All angles and lighting,
Vanishing point for all perspective lines,
Drawing attention to the solitary diner,
Suspended, still, static,
No postures, gestures and expressions,
Devoid of any *motions of the soul*.
A resignation.
But the Guru gazes harder,
Penetrating,
And sees in *his* face,
A celestial divinity,
A serenity,
A symbol of man's burning desire for salvation.
The wandering ascetic, the religious teacher,
From whom a wisdom flows from innate grace,
Sat cross legged,
Stands to get the attention,
Of the sitter at the breakfast table,
To instruct on how to escape,
By reciting the Ram.
But the breakfaster's head and eyes are lowered,
As *he* picks up *his* wallet,
Leaving the table,
To walk away,
Leaving no note,
There is nothing left to say any longer, anymore,
Silently closing the front door,
Nothing left to do or to see,
To step outside, *he* is free.

2. Ticket to Ride

On the D8 bus to work,
He finds the lower deck packed,
With licensed fish porters and merchants,
Headed home from Billingsgate,
From the riverside market,
Having mended their nets with their father,
Having traded tonnage of fish.
The sons of Zebedee,
Blether and chitchat,
Natter and chatter
Tales of the trawl,
From the shores of Aberdeen to Penzance,
Lobsters from the coasts of Canada,
Eels from New Zealand,
Salmon from Norway.
A fellow passenger,
Sat amongst the piscators,
Narrates accident at work,
Shows injured hand,
Unwraps his bandage, lifts dressing,
To reveal flayed skin.
Fresh prattle and gab,
On saliency of health and safety,
Of workers' rights,
Solidarity.
At the High Street in Poplar,
Two passengers embark:
A London City gent,
Armed with furred umbrella,
Blue pin striped suit,
Under Chesterfield coat,
Bowler and black Oxfords,
Well knotted tie,
The id card hanging from lanyard,
Speaks to us of an officer,
Of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

A second, a student,
A Libertarian Communist,
Red and Black star emblazoned on T-shirt.
Both stand in cramped bus.
Oysterman, the trade unionist, apostle of the outsiders,
Armed with hook, line and sinker,
Lures and catches Taxman and Anarchist,
To join the collective, the fold,
As audio increases,
Babble and talk,
Of employers attempt to cut wages,
Cut pensions, cut jobs,
Increased working hours,
Diminished workers' rights,
The discourse fanatical and categorical,
Eleven voices in accord,
In consensus, they concur, correspond,
Of the use direct action,
A solidarity to assert needs,
To organise strike action,
A work to rule, workers' decree,
To lay the foundations,
Of a new type of society.

On the D8 bus,
Packed lower deck,
Corner seat, back row,
He spots a stray sheep,
Sat separate of the pen,
Outside the enclosure of 11 men.
Seated, slumped, in shadow,
Remote and withdrawn,
The weight of the world carried on shoulder,
Clutching mobile phone with credit card holder,
The lost soul stares out of window,
Transfixed on the granite and Portland stone of All Saints.
The Ionic columns of the portico,
Corinthian façade,

The steeple reaching into the heavens.
He wonders whether this sheep gone astray,
Knows that this parish church,
Was built with pieces of silver,
Blood money,
The wealth of 19th century merchants,
Trading cargoes of produce procured through slavery,
A house of blood built on a field of blood.
The sharp braking of bus driver,
The bag at the feet of lonely person,
Topples, spilling, content,
The salt and bread.

As *he* steps off the bus, *he* looks back,
Back at the confine space of the lower deck,
And these twelve passengers,
Captured in light, sound, movement,
The human emotions and expressions,
Through postures and gestures².
He looks back at the driver,
She glances at *him* and speaks,
*"These passengers resemble their teacher"*³,
She spoke this utterance,
With a lucidity, a clarity,
As a woman who understood everything.
The pneumatic doors close,
The bus pulls away,
As they continue their journey.

3. Kitchenette at Work AM

The minute hand on the dial face,
Had slowly slidden 360°,
The standard labour hour,

² *The Last Supper* By Leonardo da Vinci

³ *Disciples resemble their teachers*. In Dialogue of the Saviour, in which Mary Magdalene is a central figure. The Dialogue attributes to Mary this aphorism that is attributed to Jesus in the New Testament

[94] The narrator commends Mary stating, "she spoke this utterance as a woman who understood everything." [94]

To mark £11.95,
20p a minute.
This ubiquitous mechanical instrument,
This spectral parasitic squatter in *his* every day,
Marching inexorably onward,
Had become an objective tool.
What *he* needs is a timepiece,
Which measures the real nature of time,
A counting of time found in an inhabited world, in a cosmic order,
On the earth, in the seven seas, in the ethereal heavens, in *his* inner experience,
Synchronised, harmonised, beating to the rhythm of a universal heart.
As *he* watches the regulator of time,
He matches *his* heartbeat to the ticking second hand,
Views it as it slows down,
Exhales,
Counts three between each tick tock,
Exhales, squeezing, expelling, the very last volume of carbon dioxide in the lungs,
Observes as the rate further decelerates,
Counts five between each tick tock,
Surveys the ants grotesquely collecting on the clock face.
As the flow of time slows,
He congruently senses nigher to a higher holy presence,
Closer to a divine body of such mass,
It brings into effect gravitational time dilation.
Time further decays and slackens nearing a still,
Abating to a moment, a singularity, where there will be no past, present or future,
And *he* would be conjoined with the sacred.
Yet *his* body resists the desire to hold its breath,
Yielding to a yearning, capitulating to a craving,
Of the heart and brain to drink oxygen.
Inhale.

The breath holding exercise,
Leaves *him* dizzy,
A feeling of *his* head squeezed in a vice,
His skull braced by the two jaws,
Clamped compression.
He drops a tablet,

Solpadeine soluble into a glass of water.
The lozenge sinks to the bottom,
Winning the battle of relative densities.
He watches as the drug starts to effervesce,
As it commences to release its analgesic constituents, its immaterial essence,
Liberating, discharging its once compressed ingredients,
Releasing carbon dioxide,
Each generated bubble in a race to the surface.
As each second ticks by, tick tock,
The capsule further disintegrates, dissolves,
Losing mass and volume,
All that tightly held stuff packed into the defined space is being lost,
To a point where it begins to rock as it starts to lose the battle of relative densities,
The overlying water, the buoyant force
Pushes the crumbling, fragmenting pastille to the top,
As it emerges on the surface of the solution, the medication,
The whole process measured by Floating Lag Time.
The pill disappears, transmuted.
He knows that mass is neither created nor destroyed,
He knows that the total mass,
Of all reactants and products in that fizzing reaction,
Was the same at any point in that glass.
But the flaw in the Law of Conservation of Mass,
Is that it fails to acknowledge that the medicinal pellet,
With an acceptance without protest, an acquiescence,
Had released an essence,
Which has not been acknowledged by the decree,
Surely, the static content of the glass is something beside
And not the same as its atomical elements,
Assuredly the tablet had commended its spirit.

He feels worn-out, dog-tired,
The glass of medication in one hand.
Hanging above the sink,
Christ on the cross,
The kitchenette, the Calvary,
The flagellated resin figure,
Hanging on a necklace of rosary beads.

He wills the souvenir into life,
The now animated, scourged body,
Lolls its head onto its left shoulder,
Utters the word of reunion,
Commending its body into its father's hands.
A grace that flows from its dead body,
As its face rests on its chest.
He looks up at the clock,
The 9th hour of the day.
He reaches out to touch,
The body of the King of the Jews,
Tracing *his* tobacco-tar-stained finger,
Over the calm posture of the polyurethane physique,
He digs in his fingernail,
Piercing its side,
The wound secreting a sticky liquid synthetic epoxy,
The body had released, liberated the ghost.
Oh, this human longing to transfigure,
This human desire for mutability and adaptation,
They say that total transformation is the evolution into something new,
A rebirth, which requires sacrifice, encompassing suffering.

4. Roll Cage of Fresh Produce

He pushes the roll cage of vegetables and fruit,
Onto the shop floor,
To condemn fruit, leaf, flower,
And stem, to the shelves.
Body forms unflinchingly uprooted, sold and transported on the merchant ships,
These bodies interned, imprisoned in this pen trolley,
Now commodities, cargoes, to be sold,
Profits to be extracted from.
These vegetations cropped and grew,
And now ensue to die on this shop floor,
He wonders why, sighs,
Where did the soul within, the eternal element, exit to?

Tomatoes

Tomatoes on the vine,
The intense vermilion of the ripe fruit,
One pomme d'amour bleeding blushes of orange,
Each attached to the sagging green pubescent liana,
Arching, weighed down by the heavy and full love apples.
They had once grown freely,
Not under Spanish sunlight and sky,
Not under Iberian balminess,
But in an abstract flowerpot and saucer,
Perched on a Parisian window,
Of a mistress's apartment⁴,
This resilient plant as a symbol of courage and faith,
A symbol for the human need to endure,
A metaphor for the human need to flourish,
For all to cherish this potted fruit yielding houseplant,
A fertility, a fecundity,
In a time of war and unease,
In a time of Holocaust, starvation, massacres, and disease,
This botanical soul,
A spirit of resistance,
An enduring beacon of hope.
Yet man destroys the very thing he ought to love and revere,
And so, this vegetal of valour,
Scythed, sliced, swept from the windowsill,
This totem of civilization,
Packaged, transported,
To be mere produce for consumer consumption,
In a consumerist culture of transience, immediacy, and newness,
We ought to fall to our knees,
Like Taylor⁵ in despair, cursing humanity,
For in this instance furnishing this world with all its God forsaken greed.
In Castile, Catalonia, Canary?
Cold climate rarely chances,
For the rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain!

⁴ *Plant de tomates* by Pablo Picasso, a series of tomato plant paintings completed while staying with his mistress Marie-Thérèse and their daughter Maya in Nazi Occupied Paris in the weeks before the Liberation.

⁵ Charlton Heston as George Taylor in *Planet of the Apes* (1968 film).

The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain!⁶

Aubergines

He is reminded of her,
In the front room of a terraced,
In suburban Dudley village,
Where *he*, played with this Gopi.
She offered her delicious food,
Satisfying her Krishna, offering her bhagvat-prasada.
Her silk, garlands, and sandals,
Thrown off,
To reveal herself⁷,
A continuous slope of figure,
A sensual subject stretched across the sofa,
She lay there in absolute slow-breathing accord,
Gazed directly at her blue Lord,
Setting on fire a sexual desire,
In the grip of erotic fury,
A fierce flaming furnace.
A brinjal flower in her hair,
Her golden chain snaked and slithered across her breasts,
Gliding over those glossy, bulbous, voluptuous,
Incandescent mounds in her landscape,
The ripeness of the deep purple royal eggplants,
These fonts of nourishment.

In the end,
She was not *his* Liberty Leading⁸ *him*.
It is the bitter and piquant flavours of this fruit *he* remembers,
The ruinous seductive power,
Oh, the congruence of food and sex,
That's drags the past out into *his* final hours.
She was,
And *he* is,
And *he* had hoped they will be.

⁶ Songwriters: Alan Jay Lerner / Frederick Loewe. The Rain in Spain lyrics © BMG Rights Management, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Songtrust Ave, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.

⁷ *Olympia* by Édouard Manet (1863)

⁸ *Liberty Leading the People* by the French artist Eugène Delacroix (1830)

Nonetheless for that to be the case both had to forgive,
For to love is to forgive, and forgiveness is an act of love.
But so much time had lapsed,
As *he* stands there with tray of these vegetables on shop floor,
That *he* can't recall her, nor *his*, transgression
That led to the separation.
Oh, get over it!⁹
But *he* never knew, or now knows, how to!!!
He had survived all this time, to date, without her
With a smile and a prayer!
More bounce than Zebedee!
Nothing ever upset *him*.
Always played the tough guy!
Didn't want to, but had no choice,
Played the role for so long now,
Doesn't know how to be anything else!
He doesn't even know how to...
Oh, it doesn't matter!
Bloody bitch!
He has finished with her!
What did she do to *him*, eh?
She held *him* back,
Dragged *him* down,
And then she broke..... *his* bloody heart!

Figs

The cause of death was recorded:
Homicide (spinal injury causing internal bleeding).
A post-mortem catalogued the callous cruelty,
Meted by mother and her lover:
A broken back, broken ribs,
Mutilated fingertips, and missing fingernails,
In the end he had swallowed a tooth after being punched.
Was found in his cot,
Blue and clad only in a nappy¹⁰.

⁹ Only Fools And Horses Series 4 Episode 2 – Strained Relation. Written by John O'Sullivan

¹⁰ Peter Connelly (Baby P) died in August 2007 at 17 months of age, following months of abuse carried out by his mother, her new boyfriend and a lodger at the family home.

Blue.¹¹

He would have sung to you that final night,

*My sweet Lord*¹²

My Lord

Mmm, my Lord.

Mm, mm, my Lord (Hare Krishna)

My, my, my Lord (Hare Krishna)

Oh, oh my sweet Lord (Krishna Krishna)

Ooh, ooh, ooh (Hare Hare)

As *he* sung this lullaby,

A cradle song for you my child,

Close your eyes,

Drift into to another world,

A world of potentiality,

Connecting to the totality of the cosmos.

Let *him* show you in your dream,

A Plate of Figs.¹³

Rendered with texture and depth,

Capturing still life,

A table adorned

Centred in the composition,

An overflowing plate of figs.

Let's put to one side,

The sacred nature and mythological significance of the fruit.

Look at the part portrait,

Soft focus on mother and child,

The tenderest of moments,

The warmth of this intimate domestic act.

Imbued in the everyday,

In the most modest of deeds,

When contented child draws gaze of a loving parent,

We find the significance, the everything, the eternal.

*The heaven that lies beneath the feet of the mother.*¹⁴

Let us further catalogue:

Fractured shinbone,

¹¹ Lord Krishna is depicted as blue in art to symbolize his divinity, infinite nature, and connection to the cosmos

¹² *My Sweet Lord* lyrics George Harrison

¹³ *A Plate of Figs* (1921) by Pierre Bonnard

¹⁴ The saying is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad

Damage to the head,
Blackened fingers and toes from cigarette burns,
Cuts to the neck and loss of soft tissue.
Let us wind up the music box,
Listen to the melody,
Tomorrow morning, if God wills,
*You will wake once again.*¹⁵
Who would ever wish that?
Hah, hoo
Precious moments¹⁶
I will see you again tonight,
We will share precious moments tonight my child,
You won't have to wait forever,
You won't have to suffer no more,
Or cry the whole night through,
I will see you again,
When our hearts beat together,
As I cradle you in my arms,
I will see you again tonight,
I will see you again tonight,
I will see you again tonight.
Did you ever find paradise at the feet of your mummy?
Why did she do what she did?
*Sir, I guess there's just a meanness in this world.*¹⁷

Squash

In an academic research thesis,
Published in the American Journal of Psychiatry,
7 scholars report,
On the childhood violence and later murderous acts of nine male subjects.¹⁸
He recalls one of the cases,
Subject 7 in Table 1 of the paper:
At the age of 2 years: Choked bird
At the age of 4 years: Threw dog out of window

¹⁵ *Wiegenlied* ("Lullaby"; "Cradle Song"), Op. 49, No. 4, is a lied for voice and piano by Johannes Brahms.

¹⁶ When Will I See You Again, Song by The Three Degrees, Lyrics by Leon Huff / Kenneth Gamble / Jia Yang Yi

¹⁷ *Nebraska* lyrics by Bruce Springsteen

¹⁸ A case reported in Lewis, D.O., Moy, E., Jackson, L.D., Aaronson, R., Restifo, N., Serra, S., and Simos, A. (1985). Biopsychosocial characteristics of children who later murder: a prospective study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*.142(10), pp. 1161-7. doi: 10.1176/ajp.142.10.1161. PMID: 4037127; PMCID: PMC2072934.

In middle childhood: Broke sibling's arm
At the age of 16 years: Assaulted and raped girl
At the age of 18 years: Raped and stabbed woman 13 times.
An explanation sought,
An elucidation brought,
Through an analysis,
To reveal,
A combination, a *constellation of biopsychosocial* traits,
A cultivation, a conditioning of children,
A causing, a concluding,
Creating those who later slay and slaughter.

He lifts pallet from roll cage,
Of packed butternut vegetable,
Verdant, unchained, the uninhibited nature of the squash
Once awoken and stretching into life,
A liberated ontogenetic lifecycle in the moisture attentive soil,
Bathed in the warmth of the full sun,
Sprawling, vigorous fecund,
Gushing, an unreserved, unrepressed vegetative growth.
Let the plant swell, spread and stray,
Let it be free,
Let it choose, chart a course, a commitment to,
A path of licentiousness, wantonness,
For it, and *he*, know that it, and *he*, are *defenceless, dumb*,¹⁹
To the vulnerability,
To the slugs and the spider mites,
Squash bugs and the stem borers,
Virus and the mildew,
Wilt and the scab,
Laying assault.
But it is in this duality,
An ultimate reality,²⁰
In the wild, abandoned growth,
Parallel with the susceptibility, openness and exposure,
It, and *he*, find inviolability and the sublime.

¹⁹ *Squash In Blossom* by the poet Robert Francis

²⁰ "*Duality as the Ultimate Reality*" coined by Antony Burgess, of *A Clockwork Orange* fame.

*He refutes the fibre-disciplined tree,
A nature of order, strength, and purpose,
A leaf that can circumvent or consort with winter,
Or alternatively prepare to take an autumnal fall,
A fall robbing it, and him, of self-determination,
An empty meaningless gesture.
Let the supermarket, shop floor Tannoy sing:
“All we have to do now
Is take these lies and make them true somehow
All we have to see
Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me, yeah yeah....”²¹*

Peaches

The tray of the downy, the fuzzy skinned produce
Slips from *his* hands,
The fruit,
Scattered, rolling to all corners of the aisle.
*Well, he got down on his knees (got down on his knees)
And he pretends to pray (He pretends to pray),²²*
As the supermarket, automatic doors slide open,
He looks up and across to see the divine,
As she enters gliding on the mist,
She stands there, a vision in shades of black,
Soft focused like an ink wash painting,
A harmonic composition,
A spirit, an essence more than direct realism,
The monochrome image,
Injected with the hot pink, deep magenta,
Of five delicate petals,
A peach blossom in her pitch-black hair.
She hands *him* the last of the dropped velvet skin fruit,
A peach of immortality,
Having taken three millennia to ripen,
Plucked from paradise,
From her garden on the margin between heaven and earth.

²¹ *Freedom!* '90 Lyrics by George Michael

²² *California Dreamin'*, by The Mamas & the Papas (1965) Lyrics by John Edmund Andrew Phillips / Michelle Gilliam Phillips

She instructs *him* to eat,
She confers longevity on all who eat them,
A bond of an infinite lifespan,
A vow that *he* could preside over the universe.
She drops the fruit in *his* outreached hand.
The wash of ink that delineated her,
The tonality and shading,
Bleaching and fading,
Deepest black turning to silvery grey,
Further peroxidizing
The Xuan paper having turned blank.
In *his* other hand,
He picks ID card and lanyard she had dropped,
He reads name: Xiwangmu,
And returns the bruised fruit to the tray.

5. Cleaning a Spillage

He is ordered to clean up the spill in aisle eight.
He wheels the yellow Kentucky mop bucket and wringer,
20 litres of diluted heavy-duty degreaser and floor cleaner,
To the scene of the incident,
Smashed jars of smooth Bolognese sauce.
He observes the slow spreading spill,
Taking its own measured, deliberate time progress,
And the splattered sauce beyond slop space.
He studies,
A cognitive process,
Matching the shape of the final spill area with patterns retrieved from *his* memory,
Outlines of continents,
Forms and figures of fauna and flora,
Elliptical, spiral, and irregular galaxies, constellations.
He fights to find meaning,
Applying recall, *like words that shape poems, like notes that shape music.*²³
He further examines, scrutinising,

²³ “*I try to apply colors like words that shape poems, like notes that shape music*” - Joan Miró

Seeing Sobel²⁴,
Her sauce flinging and dripping from lower shelves,
Her spill, a work of art,
With a life of its own,
A painting on a canvas,
The canvas being impermeable floor surface.
A work welcoming gravity and viscosity,
Negligible evaporation and degradation,
Release rate, resistance flow, slope,
A painting telling the untold story of a woman in art.
But the beauty unfurls in *his* mind,
Into one of tragedy,
For the spill, a smooth tomato base sauce,
Transforms into a pool of blood,
A deoxygenated dark red,
The blood of a black teenager²⁵,
Spilling on a pavement in Eltham.
Let the judge²⁶ report:
On the 15-20 seconds,
Of frenzied attack,
How the White Demon,
Div-e Sepid,
Possessing the physical strength of six white men,
Conjuring a dark storm of stabbings,
Plunging, sinking, lancing, jabbing knife,
Piercing right collarbone, left shoulder,
Deeper penetration, five inches,
Severing axillary arteries,
Plunging, sinking, knife,
Spearing lung,
Seeping life from Stephen's body.

He knows that we live,
In a time, and a place, with people,
Suffering loss of sight.

²⁴ The artist Janet Sobel (1893–1968)

²⁵ Stephen Lawrence (13 September 1974 – 22 April 1993), was an 18-year-old black British citizen from Plumstead, southeast London, who was murdered in a racially motivated attack while waiting for a bus on Well Hall Road, Eltham, on the evening of 22 April 1993.

²⁶ Macpherson, William (24 February 1999). "THE MURDER OF STEPHEN LAWRENCE, Chapter 1". Official Documents Archive.

Let the son of Zāl and Rudaba²⁷,
The man with the panther skin,
Ride his wonderous, sagacious stallion,
The mighty colt coloured
Rose leaves that have been scattered upon a saffron ground,
Down the Well End Road.
Having carried out Lion, Thirst, Dragon, Temptress, Demons and Rescue the King,
Let our mighty paladin, and steed,
Ride down Dickson Road,
On the way to his final labour,
To capture and slay,
This White Demon,
And use its heart and its blood,
To cure the blindness in this unjust world.

6. Paracetamol

As the supermarket, automatic doors slide open,
She enters wearing *woolly, whiskery brand-new mustard-yellow*²⁸ dress.
He watches her fatigued stride, as she approaches,
Watches how the colour of the wear turns,
Into a *smouldering unclean yellow*²⁹,
A depressive hue,
A repellent, near revolting tinge,
Matching the *sickly sulphur tint*³⁰ of her eyes,
Sweating and trembling.
She wants direction, the aisle location,
For paracetamol.
A despairing negative current flowing through her frame³¹,
Her shopping basket filled,
With 10 packs of 500mg capsules,
And a paper *bag full of God*³²,

²⁷ *Rostam* the legendary hero in Persian mythology as retold by Ferdowsi in his epic poem, *Shahnameh*

²⁸ *The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit*, a book for children by Sylvia Plath

²⁹ *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Journal entry, dated June 20, 1958, Sylvia Plath wrote: "*It is as if my life were magically run by two electric currents: joyous positive and despairing negative—whichever is running at the moment dominates my life, floods it.*"

³² *Daddy* By Sylvia Plath

Cataloguing the anguish, a passion, obsession with death,
A context of self-harm.
Her breathing is laboured,
The shopping basket now *marble heavy*,
He offers to assist her to the self-service checkout,
Informs her that her items need to be authorised.
They stand and talk,
She declares with a primitive honesty,
That death and decay are everywhere.
As she talks,
A voice bursts forth, which is the avenger of womanhood,
She declares a repudiation of marital expectations,
An abjuration of a father who filled her with faults,
A denunciation of societal demand that she become parent,
To wear old style hat and coat³³,
And her, as a woman to pass on misery to woman.
There is an affirmative positive current which flows through her frame.
She peels away a subservient veneer,
Finds her poetic voice.
He eyeballs the Lady,
Now all animated,
Vigorous, vibrant, vivacious,
He watches how the colour of the dress turns,
To a yellow of positive connotation, of a warmth, a lustre of happiness,
He, a witness, to a resurrection in broad daylight in a supermarket lane.
Gazes at her red hair a flame,
She, this firebrand,
This radical, rebel rousing, revolutionary,
Delivering her sermon,
Her platform, a box of bottles of bleach,
And addresses *him* and the congregation of shoppers,
With passion and urgency,
“I will not have patriarchal rule; I choose liberation,
I will not have male tyranny, I choose autonomy,
I will not have secrecy, I choose communal confession,
I will not have this discord of being daughter, wife, mother; I choose the accord of being a poet.
The husband is the contemporary Chamberlain,

³³ *This Be The Verse* By Philip Larkin

The marriage certificate he receives is as valueless as the Munich Agreement,
 I tear it up as a mark of my disgust and my revulsion,
 My answer to a husband's Rule is: *Never! Never! Never! Never!*³⁴
He looks up at her and feels,
 A change of heart, a desire to love again,
 A change of mind, to see the world with candid honesty,
 To accept the truth about oneself, and others,
 A change in the body,
He is momentarily conscious of the healing,
 And the perfecting of what it means to be human.
He feels this forgotten emotion,
 This lost sensation, from the past, stir deep within *him*.
He watches her as light streams out, jets from this singularity,
 Flooding the supermarket with her energy,
 But *he* wonders, *he* ponders,
 Whether there was a moment in space and time,
 That this point of source had swallowed entire galaxies.
 She looks down at *him*,
 "Come, let's flee to Mexico"³⁵,
 Not to drive to the canyon's cusp,
 But I propose we keep going,
 Gravity drawn into the depths, the bowels of the earth together,
 Descend into a mother's womb."
 As they stand, holding hands,
 The honk, hoot, toot of a car's horn blares,
 She jumps off platform
 That's *Daddy* she proclaims,
 And turns to run out to him,
 Achoo, achoo, achoo!
 Bless you!
He shouts after her: You can't sneeze before you leave the house.³⁶
 She steps out and into a waiting car,
 A vintage Mercedes-Benz seven seventy,
 A chauffer in black with Mein Kampf look.

³⁴ On November 23rd, 1985, more than 150,000 people gathered in central Belfast to protest the signing of The Anglo-Irish Agreement. They were addressed by Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley, who said Ulster would "Never! Never! Never" accept the terms of this agreement.

³⁵ *Thelma & Louise* (1991). By Ridley Scott

³⁶ *Don't sneeze before you leave the house* is a Punjabi superstition.

6. Lunchtime

Seated outside the supermarket,
On concrete street furniture,
Two bedraggled acquaintances,
Wandering mendicants,
Their shadows falling heavily on the pavement,
Under leafless tree,
Begging for alms.
A charitable donation,
Ham sandwich bequeathed, bestowed to the two to share.
He steps outside,
Takes a seat,
With the threadbare nomads,
Sits with seeker and sage,
A tripartite symbiosis and synergy.
He refuses the seeker's offer,
To a share of the sandwich of soft pork³⁷,
But listens to the narrative that unfurls,
The sage's story, a retired ferryman,
Ferrying passengers across the river,
Serving on the boats,
In the service of carrying pedestrians and cyclists,
Cars, vans and lorries,
Between North Woolwich and Woolwich,
Of how tides and weather,
Can momentarily, but not forever,
Halt the perpetual, the inevitable,
Repetitive and circular,
Back and forth crossing.
He notes the sage's serenity,
In telling the story,
Of how in the mundane, the everyday work,
The sage would listen to the river,

³⁷ Sukaramaddava is a dish that was served to the Buddha before he died, as described in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. The name translates to *soft pork*.

As it spoke in the voice of all living things,
As it imparted its wisdom,
And in doing so, sage found a stillness,
Even in the choppiest, roughest of river crossings.
As the sagacious continues the chronicle,
He notes that the storyteller's skin,
Turning a hue of blue,
And a sublime smile engendering,
A spiritual perfection and harmony.
The seeker speaks of how the sage has ferried him to an inner state of illumination,
A clear sense of clarification, insight, instruction,
Unburdened, the seeker speaks of how he feels a sense of lightness,
Travelling from this ordinary world to enlightenment,
To sail from the sensual to the spiritual,
To move beyond suffering,
To find commonalities between polarities.
How?
Let the river itself be your final instructor.

Seeker and sage having served up sermon,
Rise to walk on,
The former stepping away,
Leaving behind a trail of concave footprints,
Depressions in the footpath paving stones.
He watches the two drifters,
The nomads, wanderers depart down the High Street.
Yet *his* heart is still restless,
And *he* found no rest in the two strangers,
Who had arrived at his guest house,
Who *he* had welcomed, and entertained,
These two guides from the beyond,
For *his* heart is still bleeding a world weariness,
He knows that sage did not live in *his* thoughts, nor live in *him*,
Could *he* endure suffering through companionship?
But whom to embrace and whom to reject?
He sits alone,
In absorbed, abstracted emptiness.

The blare of a wailing siren,
The ambulance resting at the kerb,
The natter and chatter
Of shopper keepers and pedestrians,
Carry the story up the High Street,
From the source, a sideshow,
That a wayfarer lay dying,
Dying from dysentery
Bloody diarrhoea and vomiting.
He understands the change, the separation, the severance,
And without grief or lament,
Steps through the supermarket, automatic doors,
As they slide open,
To return to work,
Arbeit macht frei!³⁸

7. Stock Management

He looks down the aisle,
Watches *his* platinum blonde Slovakian co-worker,
Stacking shelves,
Mechanically, meticulously, aligning,
Each can of soup, each variety:
Tins of Pepper Pot, Black Bean,
Chilli Beef, Minestrone,
Chicken Gumbo, Consommé,
Cheddar Cheese, Asparagus,
Arranging an indiscriminate *sameness*.
The Rusyn emigrant colleague,
Steps back to admire,
The repetition over inimitability,
The Ordinary over the snobbery and selectivity, exclusiveness and exclusivity,
An art for the everyday shopper.

As the supermarket automatic doors slide open,

³⁸ The slogan *Arbeit macht frei* was used over the gate above the entrance of Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps.

She³⁹ stands at the entrance,
Wearing a *fleece-lined winter coat*,
A high turtleneck sweater, pants,
Eye makeup and lipstick,
A paper bag in hand, twisting it,
*Bouncing on the balls of her feet*⁴⁰,
She beckons, a subpoena,
A writ to the silver haired Byzantine Catholic,
To meet her at the door.
Mr Warhola, walks past *him*,
He notes the narrow face and pale complexion,
He notices the metal hinges and rivets,
Visible through the faint tint of rose-pink cellulose acetate spectacle rims,
His workfellow burdened,
Carrying a sealed box of tinned soup,
Yet walking determinedly down the Aisle of Sorrows,
The Aisle of Suffering lined with shoppers either side.
Uttering that his soul is troubled,
Does he want to be saved from this moment in time?
No, is the pronouncement,
*But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.*⁴¹
He watches the tomato can stacker,
Walk towards her, she, waiting at the wide-open automatic doors,
Beyond her the absolute brokenness of this world.
But the strain of carrying the case of cans of soup,
Causes *his* work associate to stumble and fall,
Lying in a deep faint on the aisle with the cans on top of him.
Julia, steps forward out of the crowd of customers,
To help the fallen back to his feet,
Struggling to lift the Sufferer on his path,
Struggling to lift the weight of this pain,
An intense desolation and despair,
Remorse and regret,
Rage and resentment,
Sense of failure,

³⁹ Valerie Jean Solanas, an American radical feminist known for her attempt to murder the artist Andy Warhol in 1968

⁴⁰ As noted by Warhol in his book *Popism* (1980)

⁴¹ (John 12:27)

Chasm of such grave maternal loss.
She stands at the entrance,
Witnessing the carrier, with sapped strength, weak and weary,
The fatigue and burn sensation,
Muscle functions impaired,
The case of tinned soups, *marble heavy*,
She stands at the entrance,
Presses into service a customer *coming from the country*,
To bear Andrew's parcel,
A customer, an outsider, a Libyan,
Coerced by her, by God's providence,
To follow behind.
As the two edge closer to the automatic doors,
The heat intensifies,
As products,
In close vicinity,
Begin to fly off shelves,
Lamb chops and beans,
Olives and fish sauce,
Unleavened bread, dates, and aromatized wine,
Spiralling, spinning, sucked towards shop entrance,
Pulled in, towards her,
She now a black silhouette against a glowing thermonuclear backdrop,
Beckoning, bidding, summoning the two,
The parcel of soup cans bursts open, empties,
Cans coiling, curling, swirling, towards her,
The sacrificial two now stretched like spaghetti,
Like toothpaste squeezed from a tube,
Matters intensifying, pulled apart, superheated,
A heaviness, a density, immensity,
The two, and shop products,
Merge, fusing, melding, coalescing,
Into a stream of gas,
A beam of matter hurtling towards her,
She a singularity, the centre of the universe,
And in a blink of an eye,
The supermarket automatic doors slide close,
To leave *him*, with the Daughters of Jerusalem, to weep.

8. Shoplifters

As the supermarket, automatic doors slide open,
A mother and toddler,
An underbelly of human existence,
Born from a community void of humanity,
Spawn from a culture of callousness and conceit,
Enter to steal food and household necessities,
The essential basics:
100mg Nurofen for Children,
Extra strong refuse bags,
Tin of spaghetti rings in tomato sauce,
Tuna chunks in brine,
Milk chocolate digestives,
1.5kg bag of straight cut chips,
Dropped into Polypropylene woven bag.
As *he* watches this ugliness,
A profound truth unfolds,
Witnessing mummy and child,
The inconsistencies and contradictions,
An act of transcendental simplicity,
The deed of quiet desperation,
The vulnerability,
That invokes the human instinct,
A constitution, predisposition to endure.
As *ma* grabs from shelves and bags,
The toddler wanders off,
The two now separated,
The umbilical cord that carried,
The oxygen rich affection and devotion,
From the placenta *mater* to the foetus child,
Now detached, disconnected.
It will take her two minutes to register the disappearance,
For the swag bag for life,
Filled with pillage and plunder,
To instantaneously drop,
For the fear and adrenaline to flood,

The pounding heart and hysterics,
There will be loud wailing throughout the supermarket,
Worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.

He is asked to escort the Officers,
Detectives, and Inspectors,
To the back room,
To review the CCTV footage,
Combing for evidence,
To establish timelines,
Identify suspects,
Verify witness accounts.
And there in the recording,
There on the monitor,
The replayed stored film,
An image of two juveniles,
Each holding a hand of the tot,
Strolling, headed towards the automatic doors.
The Officers,
Detectives, and Inspectors,
Switch to a videorecording from the exit door camera,
And there in a freeze frame,
The two rascals, rogues, reprobates,
Stare directly into camera,
Two child faces, with two sets of peepers.

Looking over the shoulders,
Of seated Officers,
Detectives, and Inspectors,
He gazes back at the pair on the screen,
And understands,
As they sing to *him*,
Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess our names
But what's puzzlin' you
*Is the nature of our game.*⁴²
Transfixed to those two sets of optical organs,

⁴² *Sympathy For The Devil* lyrics by Mick Jagger / Keith Richard

He begins to hear the words cast upon their tongues,
 A language gifted, given by a destructive spirit,
 A vernacular, argot, jargon,
 Disclosing plans,
 Expressing objectives,
 Informing of intentions,
 To take the toddler,
 On a two mile walk to his death.
 Let all passers-by see,
 The injuries to the baby's head:
 A mark on the forehead, bump on right side,
 A bruise, a bulge on the top of the head,
 A graze on the face,
 Red mark on the cheek.
 Let all onlookers see,
 The crying child,
 Crying his eyes out.
 To run with the tot up the embankment,
 To the railway line,
 To throw blue paint into the kid's left eye,
 To strike the yearling with bricks and stones,
 To clout and clobber,
 To kick and stamp,
 To place batteries in the infant's mouth,
 Drop a 22lb iron bar, railway fishplate,
 To fracture the little one's skull.
 To place the bruised body on the railway track,
 Weighting his head down with rubble,
 To have the passing train cut, slice, his body in two,
I'm a happy train
Choo-choo, choo-choo-choo
I am Moving down the lane
*Choo-choo, choo-choo-choo.*⁴³
 To conclude,
 We, both collude,
 In malevolent infinitude,
 Our act in unison,

⁴³ Train Choo Choo Song | Newborn Baby Songs & Nursery Rhymes

Will allow you all to find the little bundle,
The kiddie's, severed body two days later,
With multiple fractures to the skull, lacerations,
And damage to the mouth and lower lip.
The two ten-year-olds having spoken now fall silent,
He continues to stare back at the pair on the screen,
Wonders why,
Sighs knowing
That the two were not the mark of the devil,
That *he* needs to condemn a little less, understand a little more,
That a poet needs to sing what is in their heart
And then haemorrhage for it,
The blood offered as sustenance for those seeking answers.
Was there a deep longing for love,
A yearning for connection,
Underlying this act of inhumanity?
In this unleashed ugliness,
In this released destructiveness,
Was there ever, is there tomorrow,
The potential to love?
Is *he*, are the two, are we all, a combination
Of these polar forces?
Logos, Thymos, Eros⁴⁴,
Balance and harmony,
Balance and harmony.

9. Kitchenette at Work PM

The hour hand on the dial face,
Had slowly slidden 240°,
The standard labour day,
To mark £95.60 gross,
£11.95 an hour.
This ubiquitous mechanical instrument,
This once spectral parasitic squatter in *his* every day,

⁴⁴ The three parts that constitute the Platonic soul

Ground to a halt,
The second hand frozen.

Something inside, for which *he* had lied, denied,
For so many years,
He's leaving work,
To keep the appointment, *he* made.
As the supermarket, automatic doors slide open,
He steps out for the final time.
From Stratford to Waterloo,
Jubilee line, 23 minutes, £2.80.

10. Waterloo Sunset

The Bridge of Sighs,
Where 19th century woman gravely wandered,
Saw her last, her final view of London,
Before her beatific drowning, symbolic baptism,
In the flowing wretchedness.
Her action purified this black ocean of destitution, prostitution,
She, banished by a moralising society cleansing itself,
Washing itself, of infected and infecting city women.
And now *he* stands on this river crossing,
Holding her hand,
Coupling the contemporaneity and antiquity,
The now with the past,
Both wanting to plunge, to be carried by the river to the sea,
A desperation born of love or lunacy,
A liberation, a release.
He looks out onto the flowing waterway,
To see a coagulation of car fumes with river mist,
Rolling, seeping up the river,
Throwing a mysterious cloak over the city scape and water,
A palpable aether,
A film coating *his* eyes with ambiguity and ambivalence,
A transcendental miasma, muffling *his* mind,
The panorama ineffable and enigmatic,
This Gothic fog, a material manifestation,

Heightens the sense of covert, conspiracy,
 The horror and the sublime of the final act.
 This Gothic fog throwing a blanket of blindness on passers-by.
He lets go of her hand,
 Stands on the ledge of the bridge,
 Teetering, tottering, wobbling and wavering.
 Stretches *his* arms out, *his* hands lost in the utter unknown,
 Colours in fluidity,
 The lilac, the pink, and pale olive hues⁴⁵
 Commingling, coalescing, fluxing with the luminosity.
 In the fleeting nature of light,
 In a transient instance,
His eyes now jump between all the different shades,
 Optically mixing,
 Intertwining, stitching together
 The blue, the green, the purple, the yellow, the orange tones⁴⁶
 A vibration of colour,
 A saturation.
 And in the fleeting nature of light,
 In an ephemeral instance,
 The light bursts through the ethereal canopy,
 The sparkling, glittering sunlint,
 Specular reflection setting the river on fire⁴⁷.

11. Jump

It's the greatest curse that's ever been inflicted on humans: History⁴⁸
 The past, which conserves the meanness of today,
 Sustaining the cruelty and the callousness.
 All new voices drowned out by the language of the past,
 A pompously embellished historical bhasha,
 Of flatulence and turgidity,
 A prolixity, prolixness, windiness, wordiness,

⁴⁵ Claude Monet, Waterloo Bridge, Sunlight Effect, 1903

⁴⁶ Claude Monet, Waterloo Bridge, Gray Day, 1903

⁴⁷ Claude Monet, Waterloo Bridge, Sun Through Fog, 1903

⁴⁸ "I can remember everything. That's my curse, young man. It's the greatest curse that's ever been inflicted on the human race: memory" is a quote from the film Citizen Kane

A boring bombastic verbal verbosity.
It bamboozles, and hoodwinks humanity,
Shackles it to the untruths of antiquity,
Conceals from it the true path.
He wants to be cured from *his* sickness with life,
Delete the programmed intellectual methods,
Abandon the carnal pleasures of the world,
Let loved ones find their own paths.
He has detached *himself* from the world so utterly, so completely,
For *he* is no longer inspired, interested,
By what this realm has to offer *him*.
To ascend by falling,
To transcend by diving,
Into the divine essence of the flowing water,
Into the streaming sense of timeliness,
Into a solution of completeness,
A roaring river that is singing its secrets,
Transmitting knowledge without words,
The flowing instructions,
Lead *him* to where *he* desires to go.
Let us sing this song of resilience,
Sing in these times of uncertainty,
Let this singular song catalogue,
The despair, violent emotion, and obsession with death:
“Ah, might as well jump (jump)
Might as well jump
Go ahead and jump (jump)
*Go ahead and jump”*⁴⁹
Fade out the keyboard riff.

⁴⁹ *Jump* by Van Halen. Lyrics by Alex Van Halen / David Roth / Edward Van Halen

