

Onåbara

(Unreachable), excerpts

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Is it me writing this?

I don't know.

I might already be subject to his violence the author's violence?

Maybe he wants to write my story?

Is he capable of writing my story?

I don't know how long I've been here a month, two months, three weeks? Time is wrapped around itself and I can't sort out the switches between night and day and the dazzling light shining from the trams at dawn.

In any case, I have now got my papers in order. Officially, I am a refugee, not just one newly arrived, or whatever they are calling us from Syria.

The message came this week. What an indescribable relief! A heavy stone was lifted from my heart. It was not possible to stay in Istanbul any longer. My passport had expired and when I went to renew it, they said that I had to return to Damascus to do military service. It was a woman, red, short hair, green earring that matched her eyeshadow.

Right? I nearly threw myself down on the floor. Should I become part of the army and then kill my compatriots, my own family? It was laughable, but regardless of how absurd it sounded in my ears I managed to keep calm.

That was the way I came here, through Istanbul and Cairo. Maybe it's already been four months since I arrived in Sweden? It depends on how you count. I came here in April, so, yes, four months here, in this city whose name I have not yet learnt to pronounce. Before that, I ended up in a refugee centre in another town, alone with fifteen men all very manly. It's strange when you think about it, but it was the first time I shared my household with so many foreign men. To be honest, at some moments, it was an exciting insight. In retrospect, I don't know how I could feel that way, but it was like that, it's nothing I need to deny.

Actually, it is another nine months, so more than a year if you count the first period. But the first period was not real time. It was more like a void, an ice-cold vacuum that I was sucked into and which slowly but surely suffocated me. Hearing Xavier's voice saved me many times from madness. I had nothing in common with the other men. They devoted themselves to playing board games and cards all day long, just to make time pass. Of

course, that kind of pastime cannot be blamed on them, but some were purely criminal; two of the men had just been released from a notorious prison north of Damascus, Hassam and Hazem, I'll never forget their names.

I kept myself away. I closed the door of my room, closed myself in a shell, where I was haunted by irrepressible thoughts about what happened on the rooftops of Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, both at night and during the day. Who hasn't seen how they threw us alive down onto the cobblestones? It was rumoured that those who survived the fall were attacked by bloodthirsty bullies who killed them with spits, spades and other tools.

Though the whole of that period feels in some way distant now. I find myself in an office to meet a man I got to know recently, it was two, three weeks ago if I am not mistaken. I do not know why I feel nervous, like in a job interview.

He is from here, born and bred in Sweden, even though he does not look like that, I mean he is not blond or blue-eyed and not very tall for that matter either. His features around the eyes, eyebrows, reminds me a little about someone, I do not remember who. It is strange, because I know it is someone I know very well.

"This is how we Swedes look nowadays, he laughs, black and muscular and..."

"Secretive", I suggest when he can't find the words.

In the room, tall towers of books are stacked on top of each other without obvious order. An ashtray is brimming with butts and dark tobacco. He is a writer, I understand now, I did not know before. When we met at a concert, he just said he was working with communication, that's why he was there: he had helped the promotor attract media attention for the event that took place in a secret place in the harbour.

"You might want to write my story", I suggest without thinking.

He looks pretty surprised when I say it. I really don't know what came over me. I definitely have no idea what the consequences will be. He says nothing, the silence spreads in the room like a viscous lava.

One might think that it is me who has the power over the story, because it is me who tells it. In fact, it is he who has the story in his hands now. He crawls inside me, with all his body weight he seizes my voice, he distorts it, and then tells everything, pretending that it is me who writes, that these are my words.

It's not like that.

It's not me who writes this. It's not my story, it has slipped out of my hands.

I am in his violence the writer's violence.

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do

not

know

if it is

me

writing

this

tonight

I

dreamt

that I was

a writer

the writer

I don't think it was

a dream

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I don't know for how long you can keep on one week, three months, two years sooner or later we will reach the point where nothing remains to be said, when literature does no longer harbour any opportunities or possibilities; when there is no hope left.

Either we cease to try to write, and then our language will conform to the ongoing uninterrupted flow of stultification, which apparently has no boundaries in our time.

Or we bang our heads bloody into the fragile outer border of language, until everything cracks into pieces and our dreams are sucked up by the void that remains when the repetitions have reached an endpoint.

I don't understand how quickly it could get to this point. The decay is way more severe than I could have ever imagined would happen during my lifetime. If we are not pushing ourselves towards the ruin, the apocalypse, there is no doubt we are moving towards a situation where any straw can break the camel's back. Many of us are already there, even in the most spared places. Others cling to the hope that a new world order may be born.

There has never been a similar situation in our time, not to say in the history of mankind, where so much madness is spreading horrified speech, cunning lies and, not least, malignant propaganda. Not at the speed it does now. The worst is that it is no longer just a matter of spreading on individual sites, within delimited territories, but the flow of madness takes place on a global scale, viral, highly intensive, as if humanity was in a hurry for its own destruction.

No wonder people no longer have an interest in others, in the eccentrics, in the refugees. I myself have grown tired of listening to the chatter that so often contains a fast-growing seed of hatred and envy. Maybe it was what the writer meant when he talked about the inverted resentment of the liberal hegemony? The bitterness that arises among the privileged when the pendulum shifts with full force to the opposite side.

The fact is that even the most serious experts are barely able to identify the problem, pretty frequently they themselves are engulfed in the hate propaganda of separatism, ravaged by its poison, which is sucked up by the root hair of reactive thinking.

People talk, talk, talk, they talk too much. Not only the neurotics and the narcissists who fall in love with their own voices, everywhere talk is going on. Secrets are pulverised with all the talking. They love to see themselves surrounded, mentioned, award-winning, acclaimed and shared; or if they fail to do so at least smeared in a bloody and fleshy batter that will be the concrete result of the horrified and brainwashed dreams of martyrdom.

The need for recognition, to be seen, of a spirituality inherent in the blood does not sense any boundaries. The stultification is inextricably linked to this dream of an everlasting radiance, of something whose meaning exists in eternity, not here, not now, never ever in the hidden.

No, I mean, of course, not that we are different, that we belong to the few who managed to raise us over this yearning to be seen. I have also been there at the bottom and crawled out in search of a small straw that can pull me out of the absolute anonymity of darkness. I understand quite well that our rights require a name, an affiliation, a nation, a thing, something beyond our mere humanity in order to be upheld. But it's not just about rights. Or about the right to rights to speak with a philosopher who knows what she was talking about. It is about life and the meaning of our lives and how we can deepen our understanding of the world before it is too late, while it is still possible.

It is perhaps a healthy sign that people no longer put up with the chatter, the talking, the opinion machine; not even when they make a caricature of themselves, something decisive happens in the general consciousness. That people protest only contributes to the lip service of openness. We are still lingering in a time gone astray, a time that has lost its foothold, without any vision, with a language that is idling.

The problem is not just that the opinion machinery does not know any boundaries. It has become a yardstick for humanity. There is nobody without a constant opinion. If people do not have a constantly advertised opinion, they do not exist, other than in statistics.

There is probably nothing that contributes to intellectual stultification as much as the refugee issue and migration in general. It's not that weird. We, the new arrivals, are assumed not to be able to defend ourselves: we do not speak the languages and all translations are shaped in accordance with the one and the same template. Either the refugee is a victim who is unable to contribute anything to society, or they become a potential terrorist threat; if they do not blow themselves up, their offspring will do so after having grown up separated

from those in power, in one of the cities' isolated enclaves, outlying areas, the eerie zones.

Both of these images of the refugee contribute to intensifying the stultification process. Not because they have to be wrong: in fact, it has happened after all that we have blown ourselves into pieces, that we drove into a crowd or stuck a knife into innocent people at Ikea. We can acknowledge that. But the question is: what happens when we content ourselves with stating it? What happens when we content ourselves with repeating this template?

It speaks uninterruptedly, there is too much talking, perhaps not necessarily about the wrong things, but speech is activated along devious and mendacious divisions. There is constant talk of things that give fuel to people's worst sides, the lowest desires that are all connected with violence: primitive reactions, craving for generality, the spectacular, the need for simplified difference ideologies.

Basically, we know that the mills of language are at work without the slightest resistance. Worse than that. In fact, the resistance offered contributes to accelerating the spread, to an escalation of the fear and violence that follows from the misery. Language is broken in the mills of continuous chatter. Concepts that ultimately aim to establish a counter force against injustice, which directs our attention to emancipation, are now used to undermine the same force; humanity digs its own grave, its own mass graves. Silence is disarmed like the night is disarmed by light at dawn.

I know where we can find the cause to this condition: in literature. Where else are the roots if not in literature, the most articulate of all art forms?

We make it too easy for ourselves if we blame everything on the liberal hegemony and global capitalism, or whatever we want, to denote the misery that undeniably goes hand in hand with worldwide injustices. It is not as if that violence and devastation have not existed in other world orders, in other historical systems for the distribution of power, freedom of thought and glimpses of light.

Nor is it fair to blame human nature. Describing humanity as its own grave digger seems to me to be an expression of resignation, intellectual laxity. Basically, we know that it is up to us to change the situation.

God?

Whatever we choose to believe, we must differentiate between those who believe in change, and those who do not believe in it, between those who see hope and those who live in the downfall even before it has taking root in our hearts, between those who adhere to the chatter and those who try to channel their desires into something that raises them above themselves.

The roots are thus found in literature, in a cultural crisis and its destitution and its eroded significance in the present. Not only are saturated silences made impossible and destroyed in the eagerness of the stories to exploit deeply laid dividing lines, but literature, as such, must nevertheless be able to accommodate all this.