

l'enfant terrible

alfatih

november 16 – january 11, 2025

SENTIMENT

Story of X

Eugene Yiu Nam Cheung

A youngster begins ploughing by himself at about the age of fourteen. The work is then pure poetry, an intoxicating pleasure for him, although he is barely strong enough to manage it. A few years later, that boyish enthusiasm has been exhausted, the job is familiar, the physical energy is overflowing, and far in excess of what is required for the work; and yet there is no more to do than what has been done day after day for several years. So the young man starts to spend the week dreaming about what he is going to do on Sunday. From that moment he is lost.

—Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (1949)

Sister, I am young, I admit, I am libertine, impious, capable of any mental obscenity; yet my heart remains pure and ready to console me for the mistakes my years engender.

—Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy In The Boudoir* (1795)

1.

An elderly man, who we shall call X, ambles toward a city square. Nothing about X is exceptional beyond the fact that he is old, and because of this, that he had once been young. This is to say that he

was once symbolic of something like promise or possibility, but has since shifted elsewhere in the semiotic order. Whether this movement is up or down, one cannot say.

X is en route to the city square in search of a memory. He had been there forty years earlier, where, under a collapsed roof, low to the ground, he lit a cigarette. He can still remember how it felt to be there, crouched, his shallow breathing, his heartbeat rounding his spine, coiling up behind his ears, and tugging at him from behind the eyes... For X, that day belongs in the eternal present.

Here, X is struggling to close that still considerable distance ahead. His Herculean effort in making this journey might appear frivolous or vain to us: is it not sufficient for him to venture into the square through his mind's eye? Does it seem that X feels indignant about having been dislocated from his past, forced into this future by fate? Yes—he does not wish to accept that his strength has vanished, nor believe that he can no longer light a cigarette beneath a collapsed roof, the night sky, or register the drifting scent of a Callery pear whilst waiting for beautiful Maxine... *No*, this memory is at risk of disappearing. It can only be made real again through his being there, *No*, this journey must be made physically, he repeats to himself, over and over, his breathing heavy, his body on fire, *No, this journey must be physical.*

X wonders if the essence of his life can exist—and be expressed—in something as fine as the tip of a pen; one that is caught in a repeated motion, moving up and down a sheet of paper. So, he thinks to himself, what if his life could be marked as a perpendicular line that has grown thicker and thicker, drawn by this pen as its nib spills ink across a definite path, without so much as the slightest deviation?

This is the strumming of a singular life.

2.

Jean-Honoré Fragonard's painting *L'Escarpolette* (1767–8) depicts a woman on a swing inside a lavish garden. Delicate white flowers scattered like snow in turquoise tinged bushes frame her image as she is launched into the air. Marble cherubs watch with expressions of awe and conspiracy. A man behind her, drawn into the shadows, pulls the ropes that propel her upwards, whilst another man, a lover, reclines beneath her, posing with his left arm raised toward her open dress. The lover appears as a kind of perverted double of Michelangelo's Adam—reaching for the divine that comes not from the sky, but from her open legs. She kicks off her pink and pearl coloured slipper as a provocative gesture. Hers is an unambiguous seduction.

3.

A middle aged man, who we shall call X, returns to Vienna following a trip to London with his lover, Mirene, whose younger sister, Maxine, has seduced him, and has thus begun to occupy his every waking thought, not to mention his dreams and fantasies, and because X is what they call me, I am obliged to provide an answer as to the quality of these visions, but you must promise me that my words will not cause you grief or even make you think less of me, even though I know this is an impossible task, given you have yet to hear my grotesque fabulations, but do, please, try, at least, to commit to the barest of all promises... I cannot trust you, but my life moves in a single direction, you see, and should I have an idea as to how my life should proceed, whether in my thinking or actions or both, I become so obsessed that there is no other way to think or act, and so, despite my not trusting you with this story, you must now bear it—it was that part of summer where the heat stops at nothing to coerce a body into its supine position, and Mirene had begun to bore me, her constant exasperations, the beads of sweat that would form above her eyebrows whenever she asked of our *being together*, an ugly phrase, and I thought that I would do well to get rid of her, and quickly at that, and perhaps I could blame it on the fact that it was, after all, *she* who had told me *her* mother disapproved of me, although terribly unfairly, considering it was only *twice* that I had met that hostile matriarch of old Styrian fame, that vampire called Carmilla, once of which was on some god-forsaken knoll near the grave of a third-rate Austrian philologist, and another time whilst Mirene and I were swinging from some rotting contraption in her garden—by her insistence of course—this contraption so slippery with mildew it caused a fall and made my person look entirely graceless, and perhaps even *ghoulish* with those dappled rays on my face, I do not present well in the afternoon light, you see, you must know this, so I might not leave you with a terrible impression, look, the other way, see, I digress; yes, although these were the circumstances, I thought it in my favour to terminate that wretched *rhythm* with *Mirene*...

—Oh! How even the utterance of that name destroys me, a word like an imperfect cadence attached to no melody, the way it hangs off my tongue like a maggot infested pelt... but I must remember it is *necessary* to speak through the oil-spill of her *name* to reach that of *Maxine*, oh, Maxine who became known to me in her garden, that same ugly garden with the rotting contraption, the night before I was to act with such conviction against her sister, but we knew, then, that to do so would be to deny the possibility of our coexistence; Oh, Maxine, you must hear me now, too, you whose every part conveys not perfection but the very definition of my own folly, I am so bewitched, yes, oh Maxine, I do indeed love those parts of myself in you, and yes, by God, the way, I tell you, listen, how we would share the desire to meet again not in a house or garden or anywhere with grass but in the city square, for the house and the garden are saved in our memory and our memory alone, and for the city

square is where I decided we would be in love, yes, the city square, yes, the only place suitable for consummation, yes, how only the foolish would argue against our logic, those sexless, mechanical fools, who cannot see how it is only the city square, haunted by executions, that can ever hold and give *reality* to our desire; yes, the fantasy of fucking in the square under the cover of darkness, ceremonial, amongst the people, yes, two bodies in an irregular rhythm, *yes* I am obsessed, I cannot think of anything else, or otherwise, and I am having dreams, you see, of this time with Maxine, these dreams where she smells of wet soil, yes, and our acquaintances watch us sneak off into the night, yes—a chill comes over me, *I must wake up*.

alfatih would like to thank Pablo Bellon, Andrew Dembling, Olga Generalova, Nelson Kunz, Arthur Marie, Eugene Yiu Nam Cheung, Philémon Otth, Gustavo Santa Maria, Windhager von Kaenel.