

The Palimpsest

The Zine

By
Rajneesh Manhas

BOOKS WITH GREAT OPENINGS

The title is self-explanatory. This is the start of a series where I will be sharing openings of texts I cherish with two books per edition. I'm sure there are texts out there I have yet to discover with a multitude of interpretations. I hope I can discover more. The translations I'm using may also vary from yours. I will try my best not to include any spoilers if I'm mentioning any novels.

Starting with *A Tale of Two Cities*

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Before writing this, I wanted to know what others had to say about the opening lines, so like any other sensible person, I went to Reddit, where I found a person comparing these lines to life on social media. He wrote, "Someday you find something so insightful that you feel amazed, and someday you find something so stupid that it makes you wonder about the level of human stupidity." That post also made me wonder about the level of human stupidity, but that's for some other day. For now, a little background before I start blathering about the opening.

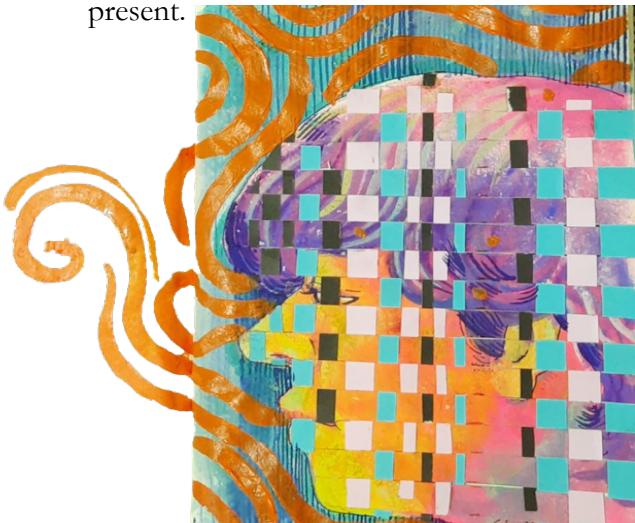
The story is set in the cities of London and Paris against the backdrop of the French Revolution (late 18th century). It deals with major themes of duality, revolution, and resurrection through the story of the French Doctor Manette, his 18-year-long

imprisonment in the Bastille in Paris, and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie, whom he had never met. Set against the conditions that led up to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, the opening paragraphs carry the gist of what will happen in the story.

A paradox of this opening lies in its vagueness, fostering its universal application and making it timeless. The opposing forces of the novel and the relationship between the past and the present are established here. The latter, I feel, is overlooked. We like to think of ourselves, or maybe I have disconnected from the past or try to disavow any links with the past. There is a quote I like to use; if you know me enough, you know how obsessed I am with it. I was introduced to it by my professor in class.

"The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." (*Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

Be it racism, caste hierarchies, patriarchy, exploitation, customs, practices and several other social mores are all traditions of the dead generations connecting the past and the present.



Artwork by Stuti

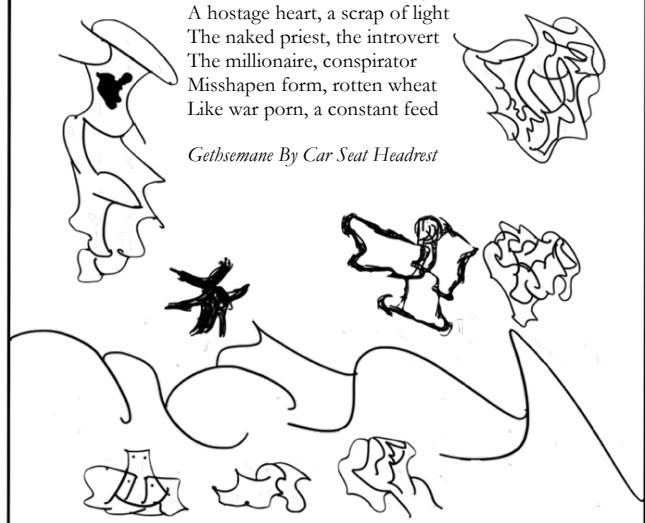
The Myth of Sisyphus

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards."

Camus doesn't ease the reader into his argument but directly delves into it. The way he begins with the question of life's meaning and asserts that everything should come afterwards, was what made me want to read the book. The essay is a difficult read, and I have yet to complete or fully grasp it. The core idea is about "the absurd" or "l'absurde" (I know nothing about French), the conflict between our desire to find meaning and the indifference or nonchalance of the universe. Sisyphus serves as a metaphor here. Condemned by the gods to roll a massive boulder up a hill only for it to roll back, doomed to repeat this task for eternity. He emphasises the acceptance of the absurd and living anyway, as Sisyphus does with his famous last lines: "*One must imagine Sisyphus happy.*"

I lay me down again to sleep
Another soul must be redeemed
Hidden behind a thousand eyes
A hostage heart, a scrap of light
The naked priest, the introvert
The millionaire, conspirator
Misshapen form, rotten wheat
Like war porn, a constant feed

Gethsemane By Car Seat Headrest



Rajneesh's Runes

By Pravarnitha Meejuri

The first time I found out Rajneesh was great at drawing was by accident while trying to prove I had decent drawing skills. But that's not what I wanted to write about. I will now delve into an unnecessary throwback, which was when I discovered his peculiar doodles that covered the corners of his pages when he would take notes in class. Now, I call this a discovery because those pictures were meant to show how pretty his handwriting is. Which, in all honesty, was beautiful too, but somehow those rune-like shapes caught my attention, after pressing about it for longer than I would admit because I was met with a confused person on the other side of the line not really grasping at what could be so special about the weird shapes he drew while listening to his class, I ended up succeeding in finding more pictures. Now, don't get me wrong, I know he is great at drawing, and like most kids, his hobby fizzled out because of the horrors of reality and adulthood, but these doodles remained the remnants of his early childhood, and the artist stubbed out. One may question what is so fascinating about these so-called doodles, but for me, being able to naturally come up with consistently identical patterns that are just uniquely yours is rare.

But Art is supposed to be beautiful and well thought out. One might argue the same, so I present my curation of quotes from artists who sure as hell can draw better than all of us. So, unless an art legend is reading this, I will stand my ground.

Let's start with Zdzisław Beksiński, a Polish painter. Now, as hard as his name is to pronounce, his paintings go even harder.

Most people associate his artwork with his possible trauma from being Polish during the reign of “the failed painter”, but he believes otherwise, calling them optimistic. He made a truly surrealist move by deciding not to name any of his paintings. They are all called “untitled”

“Meaning is meaningless to me. I do not care for symbolism and I paint what I paint without meditating on a story.” - Zdzisław Beksiński.

If you know Picasso, you should know Georges Braque. Unfortunately, we as a society rely heavily on popular media to decide who is important. Georges Braque, the less controversial, ended up enlisting in World War 1 instead of choosing to spend his time harassing and objectifying women.

“In art, there is only one thing that counts: the bit that cannot be explained.”

- Georges Braque

Lucian Freud is a British painter and European in his soul. Just like his co-continental peers, he doesn't shy away from nudity and the grotesque. He is known for his daringly unconventional nude portraits of people. He, for one, doesn't shy away from depicting what is weird and ugly according to society.

“The longer you look at an object, the more abstract it becomes, and, ironically, the more real.”

- Lucian Freud

Edgar Degas is a French painter who believed an artist should lead a lonely life and hated the Jews. I do not think these two statements correlate with each other. He was an argumentative man regarded as one of the founders of Impressionism. He blatantly rejected it, calling himself a realist, and his friends found him utterly insufferable. So, if this man talks about art in ways that are more liberal than your ideology of how it should be, maybe it's time you reconsider your life choices.

“A painting requires a little mystery, some vagueness, and some fantasy. When you always make your meaning perfectly plain, you end up boring people.”

- Edgar Degas

I end my argument by finally quoting the queer American icon for pop culture and art.

“If it doesn't make sense, it's art.”

- Andy Warhol

The doodles probably never made sense to me like they did to the person who made them. But that's the fun part about art. You get to decide what you want to see in it. Maybe you see precisely what he intended to do, or perhaps you don't. Perspectives matter, but you will never just have one.

P.S. This doesn't mean I support the increasingly ridiculous contemporary and modern artists that are popping up currently.



How Ize of the World by The Strokes is a critique of modern society and maybe capitalism (not arguing strongly for this case)

Ize of the World is the twelfth track of the album First Impressions of Earth. Let's start with the title of the track; Julian's use of '-ize' words for instance, fertilize, stabilize, deodorize, scrutinize, modernize, terrorize, desensitize, organize, advertise, monopolize, idolize, scandalize, neutralize and much more is present throughout the track.

The Lyrics, “Sometimes it feels like the world is falling asleep

How do you wake someone up from inside a dream?"

Julian Casablancas in an interview with Dr. Henry Giroux when asked by the professor, "What kind of burden is placed on young people to be able to address a moment in history in which they find themselves which is enormously oppressive and doesn't serve their interest" answered, "The burden is that they don't understand the burden, you grow up, I grow up believing this thing you know everything you're saying is the opposite, you grow up thinking oh, democracy, we solved all those problems, those are old problems, and we fixed it. And frankly, it's hard to face that, it's depressing, you know it's like I don't know if you saw The Matrix, but it's like the blue pill, red pill, it's like, do you really wanna know what's going on? It's kinda like no I don't but now that I know I can't help it. That's the struggle, whether or not you understand that there is a struggle going on."



"Your eyeballs won't change, it's the muscles around your eyes", a little biological fact for you right there.

"An egg to fertilize
A pulse to stabilize
A body to deodorize
A life to scrutinize
A child to criticize
Young adults to modernize!
Citizens to terrorize
Generations to desensitize"

The chorus presents a sequence of objectives ranging from biological imperatives to institutional systems like healthcare, hygiene, media and surveillance, authoritarian control, sharing a common thread: the reduction of

human life to function and control. This can be extended further to say that the idea of modernisation is being criticised here. Modernisation is often seen as progress, and over the years, the global north has imposed its idea of modernisation and progress on the global south. The use of the word "stabilize" suggests the goal of health care is not to save lives but to keep the pulse stable for profitability. This is true, especially in the American context, where for instance, the price of insulin can be as high as \$250 to \$400 or more per vial.

The closing serves as both a warning and a conclusion; these notions do not lead to the so-called enlightenment or progress but to compliance. The human experience is distilled into quantifiable outcomes. The final line, "generations to desensitize" highlights that all these well-disguised societal operations contribute to a broader agenda of emotional numbing and systemic gain at the expense of individual meaning. The chorus dismantles the illusion of society as a benevolent force, replacing it with a sobering view of these structures as a tool for institutional benefit, serving the interests of the ruling class. (Thank God I did not use the word bourgeoisie here.)



"How disappointed would D.I.D.I.P.P. be
To see such power in our hands all wasted
on greed?"

D.I.D.I.P.P. stands for *Dead Idealistic Desperate Inventor Pioneer Philosophers*. The band revealed the acronym's meaning in the accompanying booklet of the physical album. To be fair, I do think the philosophers and inventors of the past would be disappointed in the current state of the world. Surprised? I'm not sure.



"Am I prisoner to instincts, or do my thoughts just live
As free and detached as boats to the dock?
Just like the music was born and detached from your heart
Is your free time to free minds or for falling apart?"

Julian draws on the image of docked boats to explore the illusion of free will and the concept of illusory autonomy. Just as the boats seem free, beneath the surface lies restraint; each boat is quietly tethered, unable to drift too far from the shore, the illusion of motion without true freedom. Like boats, we're given space to move, but only within the limits allowed by social norms, economic systems and unseen forces of control. This illusion of freedom mirrors what post-structuralist theorists like Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser describe. Today, power no longer functions through overt coercion, but through the internalization of norms, routines and roles (soft power). Under consumer capitalism, individuals are encouraged to see themselves as autonomous agents, free to choose, express themselves, buy what they want, but their choices are

made within preconditioned systems of meaning and value. Contemporary control is not exercised through oppression but through managed permission. Freedom in such a context is performative.

"A desk to organize
A product to advertise
A market to monopolize
Movie stars to idolize
Leaders to scandalize
Enemies to neutralize
No time to apologize
Fury to tranquilize!
Weapons to synchronize
Cities to vaporize"

The second chorus flows in the same pattern as the first one. Each line escalates in intensity from a desk to organize to global-scale destruction. The rhythm itself mimics a ticking mechanism like gears in a system, echoing the industrial precision of late capitalism. Several lines point directly to the infrastructure of consumer capitalism. "A product to advertise" and "a market to monopolize" highlight how economic systems are built on endless cycles of production, branding and accumulation. Monopolisation becomes the endpoint, ignoring diversity or choice, a critique that recalls Marxist critiques of capital, where competition eventually collapses into concentrated control. "Movie stars to idolize" and "leaders to scandalize" reflect the spectacle driven society described by Guy Debord where public figures are commodities, distractions and symbols. We don't just consume products, we consume people, turning fame and outrage into interchangeable currencies. These figures serve as both icons and scapegoats, their image cycles fuelling attention economies while obscuring structural issues.

"Enemies to neutralize" and "Weapons to synchronize" signal the militarization of policy and normalization of violence which becomes especially relevant considering the current political situation of the world (I sound like Jaden Smith) with the United

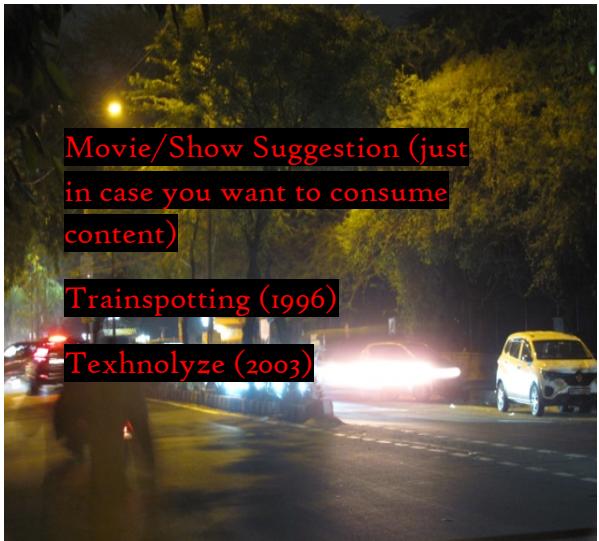
States bombing Iran and the Israel Palestine conflict. In post-structural terms, this is where power becomes biopolitical, no longer just ruling over people but regulating populations, emotions ("fury to tranquilize") and even the right to exist ("cities to vaporize")

FIN.

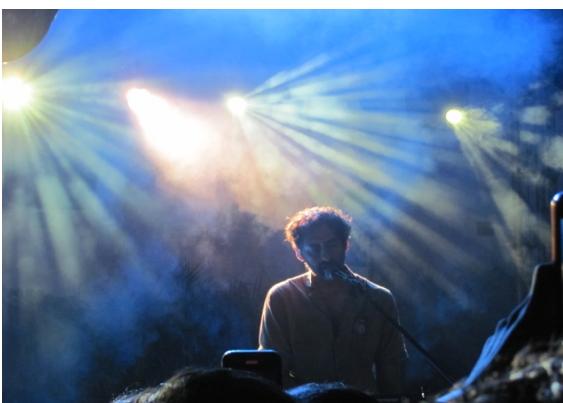
Movie>Show Suggestion (just
in case you want to consume
content)

Trainspotting (1996)

Texhnolyze (2003)



Unfinished dream by Pravarnitha Meejuri



Songs on repeat this week

Dance Me to the End of Love by Leonard Cohen

Beach Life-in-Death by Car Seat Headrest

Blitzkrieg Bop by Ramones

ALBUM SUGGESTIONS

NOW IN TECHNICOLOUR BY MAIJ

RUMOURS BY FLEETWOOD MAC

AND ANOTHER ALBUM MY MOTHER MADE ME LISTEN TO: *SAJDA* BY JAGJIT SINGH AND LATA MANGESHKAR