

Sonatina in F Sharp Minor¹

Manu Bazzano

Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur (Horace)

So yeah, when did it all start? Jackie asks. *How does it start the sea has endless beginnings.* That morning in an art gallery, Jackie says, glancing at the paintings of this Belgian geezer whose parents had a perfume shop. He loved Fritz, Jackie says, but never made it to tragic joy, painting instead gusts of wind on some bleak Northern coast. Well, Sylviane thinks it started later, when we held hands in a touristy park, Jackie says, by the hot dogs stand, with me purring a line from a reckless tune. It was spring of course, a few days before lockdown. To me Sylviane looked like one to whom things just happen, Jackie says, but my view is warped I know by my nutty love of the classics and a twisted view of fate as weakness of the will, Jackie says. Who seduces whom? Explain that to the ethics committee. So anyway, she was the-deer-in-the-dappled-light and me the-artiste-in-wolf-clothing who'll get slaughtered by the Farmers of Resentment, Jackie says, forever clobbering our humble joys with regulations shouted from high horses in the Home Counties where quite a few of them live for some reason. *I'm married*, Jackie says suddenly, and OK it's not the first time I fall for a woman, but this time I'm head over heels, *capisci?* It's rocking my boat, pushing my buttons – *all* the clichés you can shake a stick at, Jackie says, what do I care? *I'm vast, I contain platitudes.* Yeah, I know, for Sylviane this babylove of ours may just be a rugged raft, Jackie says; she might leave it on the sand once she makes it to where she's heading. But still, Jackie says, I'll do it for the ride or, as she'd say, *I'd be gladly toppled and turned and thrown into the air by the depth and force of waves, then thrown onto the shore as I depart from its grip, and loving every moment.* Well then, I'll be a log bridge. What brings you here, I ask boringly. Where to start, Jackie says, *the sea has endless beginnings.* OK, I'll start from that square where Sylviane lives, named after a former duchy. I revisit the place often, you know,

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when daydreaming I mean, Jackie says, which is most of the time. *J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été. Rien ne bougeait encore au front des palais.* The houses down to the sea with a green in the middle: I retrace my steps to her front door when wide awake at 2am or on midweek afternoons with spring doing its brutal thing, *breeding lilacs* & so forth, Jackie says, apologizing for saying unrelated things. Go on, I say, casting a glance at tree & sky 'cause it's good for my eyes, *do* go on: it's relevant, especially the irrelevant – *Unheimlich gut*, as Freud would say. Well, in the clip she'd sent me then Sylviane smiles and talks softly to the camera, Jackie says, and I can touch the life in her heavenly limbs. She loved me then, my lovely swimmer in the deep blue, my seeker of the depths, Jackie says, but does she love me still? *Elle est retrouvée. Quoi? L'Éternité. C'est la mer allée avec le soleil.* My lovely lover, and what I want, Jackie now says looking up, is to bite her heavenly bum cheeks and have a little nibble *si tu plait* of those rosy lips of hers, Jackie says. *La chiamavano bocca di rosa metteva l'amore sopra ogni cosa.* Then her laughter, warm and silvery and shimmering, and her voice like Angela Carter's. But I digress, Jackie says. Go on, I say, it's all relevant; it's all *tres bien*, as Lacan would say. *Can't go on. I'll go on*, Jackie says. So yeah, Easter came with its darling buds and the Saviour rising from the dead before breakfast and all I can think of is the black&white clip of her lying on the grass of an unseasonal spring, rich in sea water. Her slow breathing, Jackie says, exhaling, looking out at the camera at the sky at the holy spirit breaking through the clouds before dawn, at the risen unorthodox young rabbi's luminous etheric body, looking up with her sparkly afterswim eyes like bedroom eyes, breathing, looking up like I'm on top of her kissing her all over and caressing her aristocratic hair in a bundle, Jackie says, an ornament to her beautiful *visàge*, that b&w clip conveying *differànce*, conveying meaning-in-flight, conveying absence on a musical beach – a musical *adieu* to the metaphysics of presence, Jackie says, goodbye presence, thanks a lot! In short, it speaks of resurrection more than the sorry tale of a star-crossed lover-of-God, that young heretical rabbi soaring from his tomb in Galilee, Jackie says, for no resurrection can resynchronize time, for *time is out of joint*, *capisci? En haut de la route, près d'un bois de*

lauriers, je l'ai entourée avec ses voiles amasses, et J'ai senti un peu son immense corps. The vast body of dawn, the goddess personified and never turned, mind you, into some anaemic Jungian archetype, *please*, Jackie says rolling her eyes. I want her to want my body the way a classy girl from Paris holidaying in North Africa sneakily eyes an Algerian woman coming out of a swim and daydreams of her hands caressing her hips, Jackie says, her tongue circling her belly, her lips surveying the hallowed slant between her legs, kissing the summit of her own wet daydream. I want her to want my body, Jackie says, before flights of fancy, before high art & low art. Besides, Jackie says, it is *this* body that thinks, this body that wants her body on the wet sand in the summer or under oak trees with the sound of rain through the branches in the dappled light, Jackie says, rain that starts just as she reaches the summit all wet and half-dressed, a frown of the deepest joy traversing her noble face as if greeting the holy spirit, both my hands holding her hips tight, for I remember it well how she moved gracefully and strong sitting on my legs, I remember it well, Jackie says, how she kissed me hesitantly, so endearing so arousing; I want her to want my body in unsophisticated ways whispering glossolalia sitting on my tongue, Jackie says, so that my tongue may travel around all crevices while she invokes the gods of requited desire, Jackie says, while we sing contrapuntal praises to the world, singing praises in the holy spring on the day of the new moon. Sorry for waxing Joycean for waning biblical for going unequivocal and even *mystical*, Jackie says, sorry for spinning off into *tempo rubato*. Being in love sucks, Jackie says after a pause and a sigh, it really does, let's face it, and watching *I may destroy you* on the telly is no consolation, far from it, for she might turn any moment to some younger girl or dude, some hippy Jane & Johnnie, any of her friends with more sinuous legs or stronger triceps and smarter drugs, and the garish wisdom that comes from surfing & smoking pot, but let me tell you somethin', if *these guys are so deep why can't they take this world and take it straight? Why always stoned, like hippie Johnnie?* Eh? Hope you don't mind, Jackie says. Carry on I say, it's all relevant, all beneficent. My darling mermaid, Jackie says, she told me about *diving deeply into the sea and accepting to still have to come up to the surface to breathe*. She

is right of course, for it's easier-said-than-done, wanting to be a salty dog, an anti-Ulysses *the captain cried, we sailors wept, our tears were tears of joy* etc., wanting it both ways: the shipwreck *and* the transfigured cheerfulness only afforded to the shipwrecked, Jackie says. *We sailed for parts unknown to man, where ships come home to die.* Okaaay, but how is that different from a banal courtship of death? Who knows, I interrupt, maybe the 'death instinct' is not about finitude but excess, little 'me' wanting to be overwhelmed by the numinous, (forgive the mystic shite), wanting to shelve self-preservation. Yeah well, Jackie says, but what about this man/woman thing? Does wanting to be overwhelmed make women of us all? Not sure if I can even *think* this, let alone say it. For instance, am I lesbian, am I straight? Does it matter? Does anyone care? Have you heard of Hélène Cixous? I say interrupting again. She hasn't. Well, in her latest, a hybrid fiction-theory called *Mother Homer is Dead*, she makes it clear (to those investing her writing with essentialist femininity and obsolete binary frameworks) that this is not where it's at. The book partly deals with the mother-daughter connection but not mapped onto female anatomy, you see. I'm talking too much, my supervisor won't like it, but I can't stop. It is, *non-gendered*, dare I say; it is memory; it is blood; it is spew, and *from this spew come the unruly collages and pairings that make up our sense of self in the world.* And in the process Cixous *escapes* the feminist code, the maternal code, and the pieties of attachment theory. By this point I'm not only rhapsodizing; I'm positively ranting, & beginning to disclose: I quit working, I say, as facilitator in a men's group because there too, surprise! essentialism reigns supreme, compounded by Jordan Peterson's tosh. Haven't heard of him? Consider yourself lucky. I'd go on, speak of Cixous' experimentalism in language. I shut up, go back to listening. Would have said, I know what you're talking about because being a man is for me a station on the journey and for instance when in love a man is a woman: *un homme n'est pas féminisé parce qu'il est inversé mais parce qu'il est amoureux* which is tricky of course as the testosterone level goes waaay down. That's when essentialism tightens its grip on a poor bloke, chocking him with the jingoism of peeing competitions in school yards and 'libertarian' social-media pyjamas-politics from the comfort of one's

own patriarchal semidetached. I keep quiet, since this is clearly my stuff. Or is it? What am I but a shrink who like the bard enlisted by Aegisthus on a desolate rock hears the secret murmurs of lovers ferried not by gulls or gannets but along *zoom* and *skype* waves in these quarantined days. Like him, I'm not a court poet. Not for me *PowerPoint* dismal couplets recited to the motorized beat of neoliberal poppycock. What to make of the pandemic, Jackie asks meanwhile from her laundry room where she's doing this online session for fear of being heard by husband & kids, what is, Jackie asks thoughtfully, the connection between love and the plague? Uh-oh, she's going to mention Camus like everybody else. I stretch my jaw, readying it for a protracted yawn but to my surprise she mentions instead the noblewoman Pia de' Tolomei (*Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma*) whose bastard of a husband, suspecting her of adultery, put her to death by imprisoning her among the noxious vapours of his castle in Southern Tuscany. And there is more, Jackie says, for plague is *exposure*. Don't you just love it when clients are interesting, instead of boring you to tears the entire 50 mins with tales of petty arguments, the redemptive value of *Schitt's Creek* on Netflix and the bloody kids. Not Jackie, who's now off quoting Shelley, *Lift not the painted veil which those who live call Life*, for the pandemic lifts the veil, Jackie says, and even the once archbishop of Canterbury said something of the kind: when the going gets tricky, you find what truly matters. Shakespeare knew it too, *See what a scourge is laid upon your hate*, but there's a twist, Jackie says, there is more to it than humdrum sagas of redemption, because the plague will also stir desire! Batten down the hatches, Jackie says. Desire! Explain that to the Farmers of Resentment. Take Aschenbach for instance, enflamed at the sight of beautiful boy Tadzio in Venice undeterred by the plague making its wayward route, Jackie says, to the languid magnificent city all the way from the Ganges Delta via Hindustan to China to Afghanistan and Persia: *along caravans routes it threatened Astrakhan and struck fear even in Moscow*. It's the same with Thomas Mann as with Antonioni's film version, give or take a Proustian twist or two. Bear with me, Jackie says: *Death in Venice* may well be the only film by Antonioni where he leaves aside nomadism (think of the gorgeous Monica Vitti in *L'Avventura*, in *La*

Notte, in *Deserto Rosso*). What animates nomadism in his films? Jackie asks. Eroticism! *Desire is in fact circulation. In all senses, it moves; it is an emotion that harbours motion.* Errant, erratic, desire; restless love, *baby love my baby love been missing ya my baby love.* And what is *avventura* in Antonioni if not venture into the erotic, jumbled quest for the sublime & the profane, Jackie says (a winning combination according to Sylviane who also loves Lou Salomé, Jackie says, even though she misread and even intellectually betrayed Fritz: *eroticism occupying an intermediate position between the two great categories of feeling: egoism and altruism; I want to be everything, prodigality of being, and I want to have everything.*). Viel Glück, Frau Salomé, Jackie says. So yeah, what happens when nomadism stops, both materially *and* spiritually? Well, we build *teleology* yeah? Suddenly going somewhere, going places, getting all purposeful as if the world was designed by a project manager, but where does the river go? To the sea, no beginnings and no end, Jackie asks, the sea of death, of life, the sea of *deathlife*, capisci? Aschenbach knows it's dangerous to stay in Venice but does it all the same, Jackie says, and becomes infected with cholera after eating strawberries bought at a street corner. *Strawberries!* Jackie exclaims. *Strawberries!* Should I ask what strawberries mean to her? It's not all doom & gloom, Jackie says, you know. Think of the Knight in Bergmann's *Seventh Seal* eating the strawberries of an eternal/ephemeral present offered by the family of *saltimbanques*. Think of Boccaccio and his worthy imitator, Sir Geoffrey Chaucer. In *Decameron*, the pestilence *spread ... just as fire will catch dry or oily materials when they are placed right beside it.* Just like desire, capisci? Beware! Jackie exclaims suddenly. Fear (rife during a pandemic) will make third-rate metaphysicians of us all (and most metaphysicians are third-rate thinkers anyway, whether they babble about God, Gaia, or the Big Bang (God's own premature ejaculation for the benefit of non-believers), all of them cheerfully stroking their chins weaving grand designs on the head of a pin. That's all we have time for today, Jackie, I say. Same time next week?

Grazie

SYLVIANEAGACISNKIDANTEALIGHIERIMICHELANGE
LOANTONIONIROLANDBARTHESSAMBECKETTINGM
ARBERGMANGIOVANNIBOCCACCIOGARYBROOKERG
IULIANABRUNOHÉLÉNECIXOUSFABRIZIODEANDRÉJ
ACKIEDERRIDATOMELIOTCLAIREFINCHMAOJIANALI
CEOSWALDTHOMASMANNSUSANNAPETITPIERREJON
ATHANRICHMANARTHURRIMBAUDLOUSALOMÉWIL
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