

*“The heart of man plans his way
but The Lord establishes his steps”*

The Holy Bible – Book of proverbs 16.9

INTERIOR CONFLICTS

1.

My name is Paul. I am 21. Brown haired, green eyed. Though rather tall (6.2 ft) I'm not particularly noticeable and no PFPT (Parisian Female Potential Target) do a double take when I pass on...ever. A new year begins or, to be more accurate, a new fall semester at Rene Magritte's College of Arts. I want to pass an Art History degree. Its 10am and I'm slumped in the couch, in my new unit. New, in the sense I've just move in it, but more objectively, 'vintage' would be the appropriate euphemism. "Paris 5th district. 1BR apt. Recently upd. Hardwood flr thru out. Kitch. apps. H.speed Internet inc.", said the ad on web. Well, there's nothing surprising about the spot. All the ads for student apartments deliver the same litany, and student simply don't care, they just want THEIR apartment, period. Dad gave me a hand going to IKEA to find a couple of additional pieces of furniture: a minimalist "less is more" black sofa bed (Oerglub! \$169), an

outdoor folding table with its two chairs (Atko! \$45), a bookshelf (Igstroem! \$33) and, essential for a very earnest student, a desk lamp (Orgasm! \$8). I sacrificed myself on consumerism altar and spent a couple of hours more at Carrefour City Market Store, to get the last prop that would set up the backdrop of the opening scene. The fact is, I feel a bit lonely in my 450 square feet. But as dad says: “You wanted it? You got it!”

It smells weird. I guess all Terra Incognita, by definition, must convey the same weird sensory impressions. Was there a particular fragrance when Christopher Columbus set foot on the not yet coined Santo Domingo Island. Wet rotting leaves? Spice? Gold? Death? Who knows? Here and now --“Hic et nunc’ as Dad loves to say, just to show off and make people believe he knows dead tongues – Here and now, then, it smells a complex mix of fresh paint, sawdust, and blocked sink, most likely hints of the so called “recently updated” feature. In the main room, two little windows open directly to the street. They are located on the sunny side of the building ...and on the very noisy side of the street. The sound spectrum ranges from the screaming baby to the (much more) screaming ambulance, but stubbornly stays above the Tinnitus threatening ninety decibel threshold. Currently there’s only the persistent, heady, background roars and honks from the stream of cars, trucks and buses, coming up from the street.

I woke up in a bad mood at 10:00, exhausted as well. Sometimes I wonder what the point is to go to bed every night if you wake up even more tired than if you hadn’t slept at all. Perhaps it was the noise, or perhaps it was simply because yesterday evening, my presence was kindly requested to the pre-orientation-parents-unwelcome-special-party. I’m a freshman. Not so fresh

actually, because it's my third first year. But let's make it clear: I didn't actually fail my first two years. I, as a particularly open minded self, simply wanted to proceed my investigations throughout the multiple fields of human knowledge. Mum and Dad, with their world-renowned concision, just say I'm afraid to get a real job. The fact remains that, do they like it or not, I now have my own place with my own stuff and I'm eager to enjoy the promising delights of freedom.

2.

I remember my first emotional turmoil as a student. It was the end of high school, I was hanging around in some bookshop, waiting to meet friends, when a book cover drew my attention: The title was: "Alex's adventures in Numberland". I found it quite attracting and rather funny, and decided to buy it, to check if the content would keep the title's promise. Back home, I grabbed it out of my backpack, began to read and only let it drop off my hands at the end of the weekend. Thinking about it afterwards, I figure out that I have experienced a kind of Joyce-ish mystic epiphany when reading it and that it led me to develop a genuine passion towards Sciences in general, and Mathematics in particular. My future now crystal-clear, I easily managed to find a college offering a major in Sciences, soon registered and eagerly commenced to attend the first courses of the curriculum.

As weeks and lectures stretched, my enthusiasm flourished. Algebra and Geometry proved to be an endless source of formal beauty. I successively and chronologically fell in love with Thales

(hence with the impenetrable mystery of triangles), Isaac Newton and his gravity laws, Bertrand Russel --the only Mathematician that I know, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature¹ -- Then of course, with Albert Einstein and finally with the contemporary black hole theorist Stephen Hawking, though his attempt to unify all the laws of the universe into a single one, from his wheelchair, sounded courageous but rather megalomaniac to me. I read everything possible on Mathematics and Physics, had subscriptions for all the most cutting edge magazines on the topic. I even founded a club: "The friends of Pi", whose members gathered every month to challenge Quantum Theory or possibly to break Fermat's last conjecture. It was the kind of devouring passion in which, one is totally blind to the beloved's little imperfections. Unfortunately the little imperfections I became aware of, during our epistemology course, were not so minor (may Professor Karpovsky burn in hell!) and despite my efforts I failed to bury them into the deepest layers of my subconscious. The unbearable truth was, would you believe it, that the mathematical system as a whole, was not only contradictory but was also incomplete!! In other words, some of the theorems could never be demonstrated and by the way, the rest was incoherent. Thanks to Kurt Godel, the unparalleled genius of the 20th century (may he burn in hell besides professor Karpovsky!), this one of a kind amazing discovery was the result of a mathematical, irrefutable and quite ironical demonstration! Since then I progressively got away from the magic of sciences. Fortunately it was almost the end of the second term and now

¹ To tell the truth, I actually knew no mathematician, but I would have killed to meet one...

unbound from the wooden pole of my scientific obsession, summer holidays would give me the opportunity to yield to some other siren's songs.

3.

Vacation went on slowly, time expanding itself, as to remind me that some theories, as nebulous as General Relativity, might eventually have practical applications in everyday life. I was undetermined and didn't have a clue of what I will be doing next year. The only thing I was sure of, was that it won't be related to mathematics. Having plenty of time to spend, and being rather a home lover, I shared my time between reading novels during the day and watching TV most part of the night --I shouldn't be too proud of it, but the expression 'couch potato' was actually coined after me-- I especially enjoyed these rare moments when, mesmerized by the TV set, my parents sleeping upstairs, I was potentially able to do whatever I want, though I was actually too lazy to make any attempt to. As an aside, it may sound peculiar to non French people, but in our country, the best TV programs are always broadcasted very late, to be sure only a very restricted and motivated elite will be able to watch it. It was the case with 'Apostrophe' a program I had a weekly rendez-vous with and that I was more and more found of. The anchorman, Bernard Pivot, was a magician to me. Not only he made any kind of literature easy, but he always miraculously managed to interview some universally celebrated writers,

most of whom, I thought, were already resting in peace within the Pantheon's basement. I remember Nabokov's exhilarating and profound speech, unveiling few secrets about some of his masterpieces. To be honest I have to confess I was somewhat disappointed to learn later that he was discretely reading his notes during the show. But it was for a noble purpose: he held language and words in such great respect, that he had only agreed to answer questions if they were mailed to him a week before. He wanted his answers to be really accurate, with the very level of meaningfulness he wanted to achieve.

I remember, as well, having hanged on words from geniuses such as Romain Gary, Roland Barthes, Umberto Ecco or the Nobel Prize JMG Le Clezio to name a few. But the one I will never forget and who will be held responsible for my second devouring passion, was the regretted Albert Cohen.

He was, at that time, at the dawn of his life, tired and apparently ill. But when he was asked to speak about some characters of his books, his energy came back, his face enlightened, became more vivid and I could see his eyes sparkling as a genuine teen ager. He was literally exulting (and me with him!) at the evocation of the colorful and Rabelaisian, Mangeclous, "Lord of the farts" and his little people of Cephalonia. A second later, he was affected when mentioning his unfortunate Jewish fellows from "O Humans, my Brothers". But honestly , what I found devastating, was to see this eighty years old man, tears filling up his eyes, recounting the saddest recollection of his life. I remember quite well what his words were and I'll try to be as faithful as

I can: “I was a young International civil servant at that time, and was attending one of my first official party at the French Embassy. In the late evening I was requested to answer the phone. It was my mother, worried because of my not returning home at the usual time. Very upset and somewhat ashamed to be considered as an oblivious child before my workmates, I answered her very nastily and hanged up. Sixty years later, I still feel ashamed and guilty of my behavior...” It moved me a lot and I confusedly understood at that time that children are always ungrateful to their parents. I was all the more confused as I couldn’t identify any situation in which I hurt my parents, though I was one hundred percent sure there had already been a lot. What will I be mortified by, when I grew older? Early in the morning the following day, I ran to the bookshop and bought the only three Cohen’s novels they had in stock and plunged into it, longing to feel some new emotions. I did...far beyond my expectations. Then I went through the complete bibliography of Romain Gary. I loved the extremely talented writer, but even more the smart guy who had fooled the whole literary microcosm, being rewarded twice the Goncourt Prize, using a fake identity and even a body double to answer interviews. It took me weeks read his twenty novels, but once again it was worth the effort and I experienced a real enchantment. I ate up dozens, if not hundreds of books in the following months. I read especially authors who suicide themselves (Gary had been the first), because it was for me an obvious evidence of clear-sightedness, or even better, an ultimate stroke of genius. Kennedy Toole (how can one be so hilarious and so desperate?), Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Stefan Sweig, Sylvia Plath among others. Despite this tragic surroundings, I proved to be relatively successful in my studies.

“Caminante, no hay camino se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace el camino...”²

Antonio Machado, Proverbios y cantares (XXIX)

4.

One can legitimately wonder why after such enthusiastic experiences, I am now starting an Artistic curriculum, (and some other more perversely why I still lay like a slug on my couch). That’s a good question. First, after two years gulping down other’s works I need some personal and fulfilling achievement. I claim to be actively involved and want to let my own creativity speak. What better than art can satisfy such a request? Second, the “fields of human knowledge” are vast, even infinite, and the more I investigate new areas, the more rewarding it is. But something still upsets me: Why is that one have to choose among mutually exclusive options? Aren’t there any intersection common to these domains, to be enjoyed. Take Jose Luis Borges, or Raymond Queneau, for instance. Or Bertrand Russel or Jean Cocteau or even more relevant, most of ancient philosophers, aren’t they perfect embodiments of multi-purpose, almost universal curiosity? Some of them, at the same time, mathematicians, physicians, politicians or activists, writers, musicians... I hate the artificial dichotomy between humanities and ‘hard’ science. I hate to choose this and not that. “To govern is to choose!” once said Mendes-France,

² “While you walk there is no path. Path creates itself while going ahead”

one of our former prime minister. Sometimes I feel like enduring my life rather than governing it. Some opportunities are given to me. I randomly follow one bough among thousands available within the realm of the possible. So many things to discover, so many sirens, so much hesitation, and so few real decisions. I have to be curious. Curiosity pulls you forward. Everything is appealing. I am attracted by so numerous celestial bodies and have no real passion. One can succumb to only one passion because genuine passion totally fills your life and completely fulfills you. You can't be a part-time artist, a part-time scientist or writer. There must be a true dedication, a true and entire involvement. It needs blood, sweat and tears. It may be the only way to really enjoy your life, give it a meaning, and sometimes the only means to produce masterpieces. And you know what that sucks! So many alternatives may be missed in the process. Nothing is simple, see. How could I take the right decision? I have no certitude. I am confused and afraid of taking the wrong path, if there is any path. Is it indecision of a sensitive artist, doubt, low self-image, fear of failure that make choices so difficult to make?

“Procastination”, says Dad, confirming his virtuosity in the art of concision.

5. Mrs Blanche

Mrs and Mr Blanche are a quite happy couple. She (78), and her husband (85) still live together in their little flat, on the tenth floor of “La belle vie”, Monge Street, 18, a condominium

mainly occupied by retired people. Most women of her age, most of her friends actually, are either already dead or already widows. That is probably why Mrs Blanche feels happy. She considers herself quite lucky. Their two children have reached a comfortable, and in her opinion, high enough step on the social ladder, and are not source of any worry anymore. Their cat ‘Pamplemousse’ is almost 13, and is likely to die before them. That may be the only thing they fear and will make them sad. They feel comfortable with death. They have had their time. Mostly a good time. She was a primary school teacher. She enjoyed it a lot. Had great moments with the kids and has always thought that it was a very rewarding job. Raymond, was a foreman in a little Toy factory. He had no problem with his boss and some of his workmates even became friends. They usually play cards at Mario’s on Saturday evenings. Raymond is not a very demanding person.

The unit is neat. Mrs Blanche, like every day, has woken up early and has the housework done. She has vacuumed every inch of the carpeted floor. The dish had already been washed the previous evening, of course, and tidied. She hates to have even a fork left drying besides the sink. “We don’t like messy place, don’t we Raymond?” Raymond’s silence is always denoting his total agreement.

It’s Saturday. The Community Farm Market day. Mrs Blanche is in a particularly good shape and she feels like walking two blocks to reach the market. The Fall’s temperature is still very clement, and one have to enjoy it before the winter comes! (Though “there’s no season anymore!

The planet is mad, let me tell you!”). She takes the elevator and leaves the building, at her slow pace, with small steps, a basket hanged on her right forearm. She was right: the air is mild. She has not much to buy, because her son Patrick (“How kind of you, my boy!”) has already made the “Big errand” for her, last Wednesday. The market is only an alibi. Perhaps, if the florist is there, she’s going to buy some pansies to embellish her little balcony. She strolls through the tables covered with vegetables, outfits, and various stuff. At the end of the alley she glimpses *her* florist. There seems to be a wide choice of plants and flowers. She is happy that her little project becomes tangible.

Half an hour later, satisfied with her buying, she’s back to her apartment. It is 12:00. She has to fix something to eat, because Raymond, stuck in front of the TV set, wants to eat every day at 12:30. Sharp. Hurry! Hurry! It will take one minute to arrange her new flower pot, besides the venerable cactus on the balcony.

6. Life

It’s 11. My “precious bodily fluids”, as Doctor Strangelove’s insane general Ripper would say, are becoming vivid again. I need a shower to complete the revival process. The cool water on my skin does the job. I feel really better, kind of alert. I wrap a towel around my waist. A glimpse in the steamy mirror confirms my guess, I look like the legitimate son of Apollo or

Neptune (an ephemeral picture of Neptune's imposing chariot arising from my tub, crosses my mind. I smile) Such a divine and sexy body would certainly impress girls...if there were any girl. Why not try to start some new romance while under the charm of self-confidence returned? I take my smartphone and scrolls through my (very short) contact page. Except my sister Michele, there's only one female firstname listed : Anne. I didn't even remember I had her phone number. "Parapraxis!" would say Dad, whose jargon is sometimes incomprehensible. Let's try Anne then.

"Anne? Anne Bellot? It's Paul. Remember me? The Creative Writing course, last semester? I'm not imposing? How are you doing Today?"

"Oh. Paul. Yes, Paul. How are you? It's been a while..."

"Yeah. Sure. I've been kind of busy, like, lately, with college stuff."

"Ohhh. I see."

I doubt she was seeing anything actually. I took the plunge:

"What about having a glass at Mario's. You know the place near college. They have a terrace and awesome beers. How does it sound?"

"Hummm". I've been working on an assignment for hours...Seeing sunlight would probably do me some good...Why not. What time?"

I just can't believe my ears...

"Awesome, Anne! Let's say 11:30 at Mario's. Is it ok?"

"Ok, Paul. 11:30."

"See you there, then. Bye Anne."

I'm still not realizing it's true. I'm going to have a glass with Anne Bellot. A knockout. Her, with me. What an asshole I am. I could have called her earlier, instead of wasting my time living by proxy, through Cohen and Gary. Real life has some good sides after all.

I slip a shirt, and a short pant and rushes out the apartment. It's 11:20. I'm not late for once. Mario's terrace is almost full. I find a sun bathed table, with two chairs, that face the street (how romantic!). The waiters, with their traditional white shirts and aprons and black trousers, busy themselves around the tables like a little family of worried penguins. They shout their orders to the man at the counter, in a merry cacophony. Glasses clink, forks tinkle, amidst some incomprehensible pieces of conversation. I am a bit anxious. She is probably already regretting his compassion, and is changing her mind. She is going to invent some alibi and call me back. I shouldn't be so enthusiastic, so optimistic. I am going to be disappointed again. But against all odds, like in slow motion, here she comes. She wears a tiny white T-shirt with blue stripes and a close fit pair of jeans. Her short boyish haircut highlights her slender neck and a few strands cast

flashes in the sun. She IS Jean Seberg in “Breathless”. I am NOT Jean-Paul Belmondo, but I’ll do my best.

“Heyyyy Paul! How are you? (she’s gorgeous and furthermore warm)

“How are YOU?”

We kiss and hug. Even if it hasn’t started very well, today is eventually a lovely day.

Because she has some appointment, we spend only half an hour at Mario’s, but it seems only the blink of an eye. I really appreciate she has been able to come even though. Our conversation is more than friendly, we tackle any topic with the same exaltation. We have apparently a lot in common, and both of us really enjoy our time together. She takes again my phone number and we swear (it really sounds a reliable promise) to meet again very shortly. She leaves with a little, shy wave of the hand.

She’s gone and she’s still there. Her smile is once and for all, carved in my retina. I parsimoniously sip the bottom of my glass to make this moment last a little longer. I am in the mood to take some strong resolutions: I will commit myself to my college year at Magritte’s, and then I will eagerly prepare the exam to enter the prestigious “Ecole du Louvres”. I won’t certainly be an artist, it’s too late and I’m not enough passionate, but I could reasonably become an Art auctioneer. It’s a quite lucrative job, that requires a very heterogeneous profile. After my conversation with Anne, I’m almost convinced that’s a good and wise choice. It sounds great to

me, it will please Mum and Dad, and my skills in literature and science won't be lost after all.

What more could I ask?

Very light hearted I leave Mario's terrace. It's 12:01 and I feel like walking in Paris sunny streets. I am going to make a little detour by Monge Street, and enjoy the way back to my little studio...

7. Facts

Date: 09/03/2014

Time: GMT +2:00 (Paris): 12:03

GPS coordinates: 48.848536, 2.350312 (Google Streetview: Monge Street, 18)

Initial height: 45 feet

Initial speed: 0 meter/second

Weight: 3 pounds

Final height: 6.2 feet

Speed of impact: 22 meters/second (50 mph)

Brain Acceleration within skull: 3G

Exact location of the impact: Left temporal lobe

Aftermaths: Irreversible, lethal.