

8 X OVER 8 X OVER 8

Lily Hibberd

Never. In one hundred years was. There. Or has forty-eight hours come. Again. For twenty-four seconds. Before. One month is. After eight weeks. Or three minutes can be now. Then in no time it is. Forever.

Time is a window, its glass wholly transparent. I see you through it. You see me. We are there but you cannot touch us. So it is, as I write these words: I am not the name on the page. Nor are you the reader. Now the glass becomes a mirror. There are eight of them – windows, that is. After seeing them all, the two will come back to the same place and meet for the first time once again. Just like a double helix.

The first window

§: Like she says, we are looking through a window. But how did we meet?

Ø: By chance? *I look through the glass at the side of §'s face.*

§: That's very likely. You know, luck has no prospects without timing.

Ø: *I squint at § and smile – § is always late.*

§: *It feels as if I've never met Ø before but I am glad to start again.* Exactly. Prediction is for the faithless.

Ø: Well, I think that the past follows patterns, and that history has an orbital path. It's always with us.

§: So, it's like the kind of flowers that turn toward the sun...? Isn't that called heliotropism?

Ø: Yes, yes. They say that the past "strives to turn to that sun which is rising in the sky of history".¹ Sunflowers are the same. *I notice that § is dusting off something written in chalk. It is barely legible. The traces of a name can be seen but it remains only in the coarsest and deepest weave of the coat fabric. What's that you're rubbing out? I remember that the chalk and the coat are signs. A German artist called Joseph Beuys made the same use of them. He was a guide too. He drew diagrams. The mark made by § is still on the asphalt. I have never known what it means.*

§: Oh the writing, ignore me. It's nothing... but the coat, the coat is perfect. It took an English tailor a year to make it. I love the dark grey and soft green. It always looks brilliant. The fabric is a blend of mohair and wool, yet it's lightweight. The sun can break out and yet I don't feel hot.

Ø: *I nod because it's true, the fabric is of impressively good quality and appearance, and § looks very English in it.* Yes, I agree, the coat is beautiful. It reminds me of something a spy would wear. But it suits you.

§: Thanks. I always think that thieves are following me because I look so good in it. I cannot live without my coat. It has woven its history into my body.

Ø: I see... I'm wearing the same clothes too. I've got an amazing jumper on, but you will never see. It is an edgy British racing green. It's my favourite colour. It's so zesty!

§: *Ø doesn't know that the rim of the jumper is showing. We have stopped walking. There is an X marked on the road. Ø is looking at it. I am restless. I ask: Which way shall we go now?*

Ø: Isn't it obvious? We are about to come to the next window. It's because time turns toward the past.

The second window

Ø: See? Here are the tarts. Look at their tiny dials and the scorched pastry!

§: Yes, they are Portuguese. A nun baked them first.

Ø: *I think it's the devil's recipe.* They make mouths crave the slippery sensation of their flesh; that creamy skin, the squishy custard and flaky bases.

§: Yeah, they're mystical things. Like dying suns, but sweet and sticky.

Ø: Hey! I don't think you should touch them.

§: Can't you see there's glass between us? And, anyway, I don't like custard.

Ø: So are you merely imagining that you want them? Is it an out-of-body thing?

§: That's exactly how desire works. You want the thing you imagine you can't have. But in seeking it, the dynamism of life is engendered. But that is beside the point. What I'm looking for is a sun from another cosmos. Seriously... I'm not joking now. Can you help me find a Phoenix?

Ø: What do you want a Phoenix for?

§: Because it can tell the time. In its fifth hundredth year the bird goes into Egypt to Heliopolis, or the "sun city".

Ø: I've asked but the woman says that they've got none.

§: I'll keep looking, shall I?

Ø: How long for? Would you go on searching forever?

The third window

Ø: We are still on opposite sides of the glass. *We can see the same thing.*

§: Am I trapped?

Ø: I can't see how. Anyway, I thought you liked the watchmaker.

§: Ah... No. Did I tell you how much circles bother me?

Ø: What if you saw the clockface as a dial?

§: How clever. So everything is spinning.

Ø: I'm not sure. Maybe... But at least there's no need for an ending.

§: That's exactly why I don't wear a watch. Time never stops.

Ø: Of course. The thought is unbearable but not impossible. Hey, have you ever heard of the London Horological Institute?

§: Horo-what?

Ø: Horology. It's the science of measuring time. It's also the art of making machines for telling the time.

§: I once had a watch, and it drove me mad because I couldn't work out why it kept starting over and over again, even after I was sure that the battery had gone totally flat. I found it in Japan.

Ø: Oh that's funny. They're kinetic, right? But isn't all time part of a biological clock? Look here, I've got a copy of the Special Organ of the London Horological Institute. Let me read something to you: "Were it not for the friction and the resistance of the air, a pendulum once set in motion would never stop; but as these forces will,

in time, obstruct all motion, it is necessary, in order to keep up the vibration of the pendulum, that some constant moving force should be in action. This force is obtained by means of a weight suspended by a cord, from a wheel, which gradually unwinding, moves a series of wheels, with which it is connected". See? The pendulum works with gravity to keep the wheels turning. That's how the revolutions of time ensures our endless repetition.

§: It all sounds very convincing, except I'm not sure about the machine's involvement. Let me see that "organ" paper for a second.

Ø: Yes, of course. Here you go... Anyway, I know why you are unsure about the apparatus. I was going to say that nature orchestrates it all. I don't think it's any different to the distribution of seeds in a sunflower. As they spiral outwards from the centre of the flower, the number of clockwise and counter-clockwise spirals make up the two series of numbers in the Fibonacci sequence...

§: Ah, here in your horological paper it says... wait, I've lost the spot... It says here that, "watches are not kept in motion by the force of gravitation, but by means of springs. The mainspring of a watch answers the same purpose for communicating motion to the wheels, as does the weight of a clock. A balance wheel regulates the wheels of the watch, as a pendulum regulates motion of a clock."

Ø: See what I mean? The wheel is a dial too. Each thing has a predetermined path. That's why we see the planets orbit the sun, the clock's hand circulates through the hours, and the spirals of the sunflower follow a pattern.

The fourth window

§: I don't know which way to go.

Ø: That's okay. The Church has been here all the time.

§: We have reached the dead-end.

Ø: Do you think it is a trick?

§: Perhaps...

Ø: Are we repeating ourselves?

§: No. But your references are crowding me. It feels like it is happening all at once.

Ø: Sorry about that. It's fascinating though. You see I don't think the time was ever lost.

§: But, surely, it can be stolen.

Ø: Who is the thief then? Hmmm?

§: That one-eyed puppet.

Ø: Who? Oh you mean the puppet on the corner. But really, I don't have time for silly stories. That's a hamburger with one eye.

§: Exactly! A big greasy, pop-Cyclops.

Ø: Hey. Doesn't the word "cyclops" mean "wheel-eyed" in Greek?

§: Yeah. But the hamburger is more trashy than classical. Look. His pants are coming apart at the crotch.

Ø: Ha, ha. Hilarious! Guess what? Did you know that card sharks call a King a "one-eyed jack"?

Ø: Brilliant. It's all terribly fascinating.

§: Yeah... we never know what the other eye sees, or which way it's looking.

The fifth window

Ø: Now, I can see something like a mirror.

§: It's the patent leather shoe. Why don't they ever put the pair in the window?

Ø: I don't know. It's like everyone is left-footed.

§: You really like that shoe, don't you? I can tell. You can't take your eyes off it.

Ø: Yes. You noticed. It's because of the kind of reflections you can see in them, especially in the darker colours. Have you ever heard of the black mirror? Artists in the 19th century used them to paint an alternate reality. Look at my shoe. Can you see its utter perfection? Those long slender pointed toes; the spear-like stilettos; the fabulous arched curvature of the soles.

§: Be careful my friend. That shoe is becoming a fixation.

Ø: Oh it isn't that bad... oh... alright, I confess my desire for them is getting stronger. But admit it – they're totally sexy.

§: No, no. It's not a joke. I read about this man who was arrested for having masturbated in a public place because of his obsession with patent leather shoes.

Ø: Phhhhh.

§: Okay. I'll tell you the whole story then. It was "at the age of ten [X] began to show a peculiar interest in patent leather shoes... He loved to loiter about the shop-windows of boot shops. One day he bought a pair for himself and became quite intoxicated by gazing at them. The very smell of them was sufficient to excite him very much... He finally put them on [so that by wearing] them

he might make sexual conquests; but he was not very successful... Now he used [them] for another purpose. He would, while masturbating, ejaculate into them. When one day [X] found a defect on the uppers of one of these shoes, which he cared for most lovingly, he was very dejected. He looked upon himself as a person who had just discovered a wrinkle in the face of his beloved. One day when in the city he thought that a shoe in the shop window was making advances according to his own desire; he was highly elated, and could not resist exposing his person. He was arrested, but not sentenced. He was sent to an insane asylum."²

Ø: Oh the poor bloke. I take your point. But it does explain the whole shoe fetish thing.

The sixth window

§: Here we are now at the most beautiful place in town. In this hall, we can only see mirages.

Ø: Is that because these passages are made up of windows?

§: Isn't that the whole point of these arcades: windows, shopping, being lost in the myriad reflections; all in a dream state, a state of distraction?

Ø: Absolutely. Everything is duplicated, like a double-double glazing. Our bodies are broken up in this fragmentary space, and the refracted image has an aura all of its own because it is made of pure light.

§: Like the aura of the waving woman?

Ø: Who?

§: The one working in the café over there.

Ø: Ha, that's funny! No. She's real. That's my friend Sarah.

§: Well, then. Is it someone who's an outsider?

Ø: Yes. Look up there. Can you see those windows, the ones with their curtains closed?

§: Funny. I've noticed them before as well.

Ø: Don't you imagine that if blinds are drawn in the middle of the day that there's a couple up there making passionate love?

§: No, no. I've never thought of that before.

Ø: What did you think, then?

§: The same things you did.

Ø: You're acting like a mirror.

§: And Melbourne looks like a grid, except that is merely a plan view.

§: Maybe we are in the "neutral region, a blank page where the real life of the city [is] suspended..."³

Ø: But the city is no more blank than the glass between us. My mind wanders about, making new maps, tying it all together but splitting at the same time.

§: Now we are the city.

Ø: That's right. It inhabits the one body and it looks like everyone else, only the city's mind is schizophrenic.

§: So we are making a new brain for the city. I think it's a Situationist idea.

Ø: Yes! They called it psychogeography.

Ø: Yeah, only we could take a deviation but we'd end up in the same place.

§: Ah, but up in the sky, some things are real. See, it's the Phoenix's flames!

Ø: Do you mean the gas heaters?

The seventh window

§: Don't those flames just remind you of the tarts? I still want one. Oh and this window has some too.

Ø: Oh yeah... *flambé*. Ha, ha. No one can save you now.

§: That's what you think. We can ask the bloke downstairs.

Ø: Why him?

§: It says on that clipping that he's a Satanist.

Ø: He's a bit *scary*.

§: Don't worry, the devil is a liar.

Ø: Wait. How about this? A pastry cookbook in an occult shop! And there is even a recipe for Portuguese Tarts. Listen. Pastéis de nata. Here it is:

1. Knead the pastry to a rectangular shape about 3mm thick. Roll it up like a Swiss roll. Chill until firm.

2. Divide the pastry into 25g portions. Flatten the pastry into about a 3mm thickness. Press onto the tart moulds.

3. For the filling: heat the whipping cream and milk to 70C degrees. Stir in sugar and cook until sugar dissolves. Add into the beaten eggs and egg yolks. Mix until well blended. Lastly add in the vanilla essence. Set aside to cool.

4. Pour the filling into the pastry tarts from step 2. Then bake at 220C for 20-25mins.

§: What a simple recipe.

Satanist: Wouldn't it be better to use brown sugar?

Ø: Oh. This is too bizarre. Let's get out of here!

§: Phhhheeeeww. That's better. The air is much fresher up here.

Ø: He wasn't really a Satanist.

§: Yes, but he was trying very hard. Just like the person who has to go through that little door everyday.

Ø: Hmmm? Yes, yes, you're right. That is a very narrow doorway.

§: It reminds me of what Jesus said: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

Ø: It's a good parable. But then some people have what's called Narrow Doorway Aversion. It can be quite specific, you know; because otherwise they can go between two objects, such as two trees, without the slightest problem.

§: But why would someone be afraid of doorways?

Ø: Something bad must have happened in the past to them.

§: Yeah. Maybe they can go through other small spaces because the trauma is specifically related to a rectangular frame.

Ø: That must be why we're still speaking to each other through this glass.

§: Because we are frightened to travel through windows?

The eighth window

Ø: Did you think I had a script?

§: No. I thought you were guiding me.

Ø: Repetition is my trade. I guess you're disappointed.

§: Not really. I presumed you were an actor, like me.

Ø: It's the same. Either way, the repetition isn't meaningless. You know that now.

§: Of course. I agree with you. What do you think happens in the remoment?

Ø: I'm not sure. It might contradict Quantum Physics, because time expands, while improvisation opens up the differences.

§: Like a sunflower at night. As it turns its head to follow the moon, it chases a reflection.

Ø: But that's only when there is a blue moon.

§: How often is that?

Ø: It's the second Full Moon to occur in a single calendar month, which only happens every two-and-a-half years.

§: Of course, it would be impossible for it to happen only once. Copernicus's world rotates, and with each revolution time is regained.

Ø: That's it! My watch says it's 12.

§: The sign says, "Our shared walk ends here".

Ø: Perfect. I won't look back.

¹ Walter Benjamin *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt ed., Harry Zohn trans., Fontana Press London 1973, p.246.

² Taken from a case study in Paul Garnier's, *Les Fétichistes pervers et invertis sexuels*. Paris: J-B Baillière et fils, 1896, p.114.

³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalifa, trans. Jonathan Murphy, Routledge, London, 2006.