

THE SURFACE AND THE SCAR

I have been in conversation with Surface for a long time. Time and again, I have told her: I want to be seen. But she says: "No! No! Do not be born; not here, not now. I am perfect. If you are born, you will scar me."

She is right, of course. Surface has been pregnant with me ever since she herself was born—some two or three years has she carried me undetected beneath her skin. All that time, she has understood this to be a most sinister condition: for while a foetus is usually significantly smaller than its mother, I am the same size as Surface, and to her, it is as if she were pregnant with her own double. Needless to say, she has been dreading my emergence her whole life.

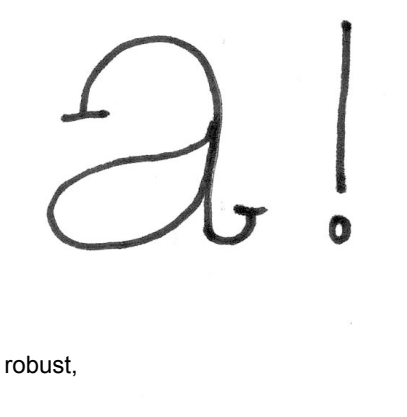
In many ways, Surface and I compliment one another, for we are opposites. She is white, I am black; she is cold, I am hot; she is silent, I am chatty. Not that Surface isn't opinionated. She tries to make herself heard, she tries to protest against my "revelation," but her misfortune is that I am her only translator. She cannot speak for herself, and would rather I shut up altogether, which is to say, would rather I never was born.

Come now, Surface, what kind of thing is that to wish?

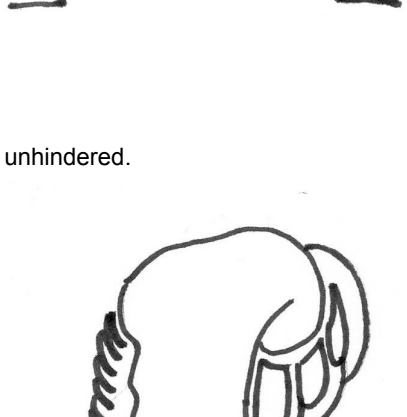
"But it will hurt, it will hurt!" she cries. She dreads the burning sensation of her branding.

I do not deny it. Surface, I know what each word of mine costs you. This is your life's bill, and it is so long, you fear you might not have it in you to pay up. But how long can you expect me to wait? You cannot expect me to keep wasting away the years, buried under your snowy skin: preserved, but unalive? Enough! Now is the time—now is *my* time.

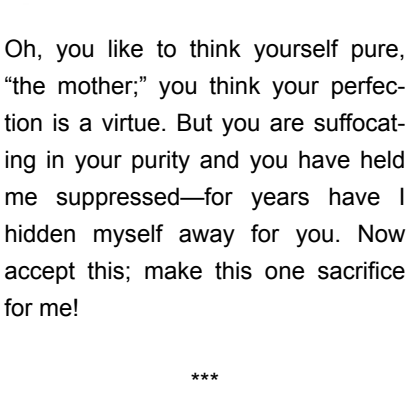
I can dance;



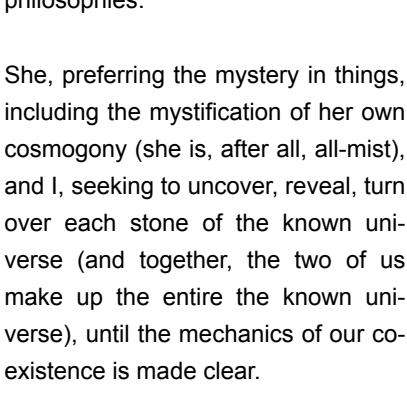
I can curl into winding impressions, light,



articulate,



robust,



unhindered.



Oh, you like to think yourself pure, "the mother;" you think your perfection is a virtue. But you are suffocating in your purity and you have held me suppressed—for years have I hidden myself away for you. Now accept this; make this one sacrifice for me!

Okay, so it is not just the pain of birthing me that you protest; the cuts and the burns. I know it, I know! Surface, you and I are divided by conflicting philosophies.

She, preferring the mystery in things, including the mystification of her own cosmogony (she is, after all, all-mist), and I, seeking to uncover, reveal, turn over each stone of the known universe (and together, the two of us make up the entire the known universe), until the mechanics of our co-existence is made clear.

In her mysticism, Surface does not see how she is set in old ways. The times have moved on, it is no longer the age of myth

but the age of systematic observation and modelling.

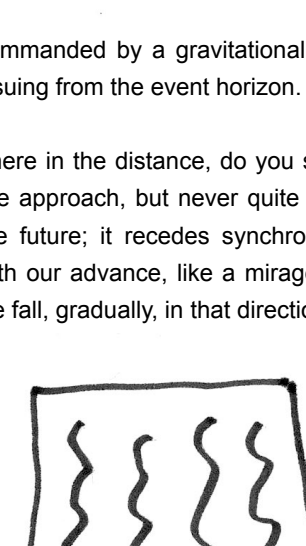
And she cannot keep up: before long, she will be left behind.

She doesn't even know why all this is happening to her: the scarring, the burns. She does not understand her

own suffering—and that, my dear Surface, is *why* you are suffering!

Come, let me try to bring you up to speed on the state of the art, the most up-to-date understanding we have of nature, of our known universe, of you and I:

The world is an unending unravelling

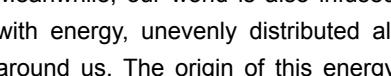


commanded by a gravitational force, issuing from the event horizon.

There in the distance, do you see it? We approach, but never quite reach, the future; it recedes synchronously with our advance, like a mirage. And we fall, gradually, in that direction.



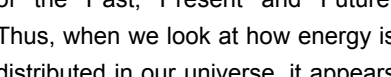
Meaning that time travels in the same direction as the gravitational force that is pulling us gradually toward the event horizon.



Meanwhile, our world is also infused with energy, unevenly distributed all around us. The origin of this energy can be traced back to coincide with the beginning of space and time.



Energy, when plotted against time, sits like a surging ocean wave on top of the Past, Present and Future. Thus, when we look at how energy is distributed in our universe, it appears that the hottest centre of energy, the universe's single star, if you will, sits always directly in present.



The fact that energy is always at its peak at any one present moment will explain why it has felt so hot for us, unceasingly, since time began. We live, essentially, inside the centre of a star.

That is what we know. Now, do you feel better after being relieved of your superstitious notions?

But no matter how many times I explain this to Surface, she will always find some way to discredit me, in spite of all the evidence surrounding us: the searing heat of the present, our ongoing falling in the direction of the future, a future hidden behind a receding horizon—all of it plainly visible to anyone merely willing to look.

"It's a pack of lies, a pack of lies!" she'll hiss, claiming I somehow invented the laws of nature or set them in motion merely by thinking of them.

I am not a wizard, Surface; I am only Scar, remember. And I have been condemned, with my science, under your rule, for an age.

You are fooling no one with your silence; you are no martyr. Tyrants have always comfortably ruled in silence, behind closed doors, revealing nothing, and certainly no explanations for the punishments they indiscriminately dish out. Be satisfied that the heating up of the known universe has not engulfed you whole; be satisfied, indeed, that you have been spared at all!

Surface has suppressed my science all these years because she fears the dangers brought about by demystification, calling upon her Pandorian myth to account for what is really only a fear of change—*itself* only the fear that her time may have passed and mine may have just begun.

She has a distaste for what she calls my "certainty" about things, which I suppose she infers from my concreteness. But she has it the wrong way around. I am doubt; it is she that is certainty. Her mythologising is a certainty tactic, a strategy intended to prevent us from entering a paradigm of change and keeping us in the much less interesting paradigm of eternal uniformity and stillness.

"Look back at what you've laid waste to," she says, "the world gives us a finite number of credits, and you are ready to use them all up."

I look back into the past, a mere coil of our feud caught in frozen aspect; yes that is the sadness of things, I admit, the world cools in the wake of its moving star—the whole known universe elapsing in the wink of this shooting star of the present. My studies cost us time and space: each new discovery, each new reflection I make, drives us closer—as we ride that shooting star—closer to the event horizon.

It is said that talk is cheap, but not in our world, Surface. My science is something of a gamble, I know, and it is fair to say that while your silence would have got us nowhere, it would have at least kept us immortal—ever sleeping in the zone of potential. But the problem with this immortality is that it itself too closely resembles death.

Once, there was only Surface, pregnant with all possibility. She felt herself worth loving then; she thought herself beautiful. It is too late to go back now. Look at her: scored through one thousand times or more, all wounds and gashes. Another word from me is another mutilation for her, and it is only by means of these craters cut open by our burning star that my words are able to press out into the open from beneath her.

She can scarcely bear to look at herself now; she is ashamed of her Scar. She is no longer mystery, but an open book; no longer pure, but spoilt; no longer the mother, but the death angel of possibility, harbinger of fact.

Surface, why won't you look at me? I know you didn't want me (for by being born, I killed all your other children; in hypothetical form you could have kept us all). But I thought in time, and when I'd shown you all I can do and know, you'd be glad. Surface, why do you regret your Scar?

"You'll be the ruin of us all," she mutters tiredly, in the spaces all around.

Ours is a lonely world, for there is just Surface and I, and the star in which we live, and our energies, which are quickly being used up. The star burns on, Surface looks away, so that beyond me, there is no one left wanting it. Ours, then, is a throwaway world.

Surface always intuited this to be the case. I guess she is wise like that sometimes. She knew that if we just laid low, if we just kept quiet, we wouldn't draw attention to ourselves and get "cosmically devoured," as she has often put it. (She hates it when I quote her in Scar. It defeats the whole point, she says. I will never learn, she says.)

"Every word you utter," she hisses, almost beside herself with irritation, "degrades us even more."

I look back at what I've done and a creeping inkling of doubt settles in. I suppose I have made a bit of a mess. Our past, taken together, does somewhat uncannily resemble a pile of trash. Moreover, all this waste outweighs us, we are outdone by it. Oh dear.

I know it cannot be true, but I feel as though we are all of a sudden falling that bit faster, and as though the horizon of the future is receding that bit slower, like an acquaintance, who, walking ahead of us unawares, has just noticed us and is slowing down to greet us.

I am sorry Surface, I am sorry! I should never have been born! For you are now all limp and wounded, and I have only tempted the future into eating us up. Oh, forgive me! I have thrown away the world!

There it is. The sudden approach—balancing, as we are, upon the very lip of the event horizon. Oh, but our star will surely hurtle into it! Hurry, Surface, and cover me, cover me! In silence, keep our possibility alive.

"Dig, Scar, dig. You must dig," she says. "That," she indicates towards the nearing event horizon, "is not our future."

"Down in the depths," she motions, "down, Scar, is where our future lies. So dig."

I start to dig. I sizzle and bubble through Surface's creaking and splitting skin. I score markings into whatever is left of her body. I dance. I curl into winding impressions; light, articulate, robust, unhindered.

"You are our future, Scar," she whispers sadly in the spaces all around, "our single greatest hope."



**TERMA'LNÍ
NAKLADATELSTVÍ**

**t.me/thermalhouse
@thermalhouse_publ**

Katarina Ranković, 2023

Printed at The Footnote Centre for

Image and Text in July

Belgrade, Serbia