

Laura Fidaleo

Detestable Practices

*why do men fight for their slavery as they would for their freedom ?**

Baruch Spinoza

TO THE HEROES OF ALL THE WARS,
BODIES REVERED IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS OR WITHOUT
THE CROSS AWAITING THE RESURRECTION.

HERE THE NAMES

... Ludovico Ariosto; Torquato Tasso; Elsa Morante; Paolo Ciano; Ugo Foscolo; Giacomo Leopardi; Norberto Bobbio; grandma Maria: "I told you, you don't cheat at scopa, only at tresette!"; Alessandro Manzoni; the Chinese pizza chef; *Sandro Pertini from the prison of Pianosa: a letter to his mother who had pleaded for pardon: "Why, mother, why? Deprived of my faith what could I care about freedom?"; Fabrizia Ramondino; Aldo Moro: "May something remain of all this"; Amelia Rosselli; Italo Calvino: "Humanity reaches as far as love reaches; it has no frontiers except those we give it"; you – one heart is enough –; Giuseppe Ungaretti: "No cross is missing"; Benedetto Croce; Giovanni Pascoli: X Agosto; Anna Maria Ortese: "Pain given to others has no justification"; Vittoria Guerrini, or Cristina Campo: "*Waiting for God* is an immense book"; Antonio Gramsci; Giacomo Matteotti; Carlo Levi; Primo Levi; Rita Levi Montalcini; Rocco Scotellaro; Eduardo De Filippo; Antonio Delfini: "Reality is you and me"; my butcher: "When is the present, never?"; Cesare Pavese; Beppe Fenoglio; Vasco Pratolini; Umberto Saba; Italo Svevo; Gesualdo Bufalino: "*The Plague Sower*"; Dante; Saul of Tarsus: "Lord, why do you persecute me?"; you – may your will be done –; Natalia Ginzburg: "Do not remove that cross, it is a symbol of human suffering"; Nabucodonosor: libretto by Temistocle Solera, music by Giuseppe Verdi: "God of Judah, forgive!"; Pier Paolo Pasolini: *Blasphemy*; Diego Fabbri: *The Trial of Jesus*; Franco Loi: "Write, in the Gospel of Luke it says: The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17: 20-21); Saint Catherine of Siena; St Francis of Assisi; John Paul II; Harlequin; Achilles; Oedipus Rex; Don Carlos; Ophelia; chiasmus; the unknown soldier, and the little girl with glasses on the number 5 tram who always asks everyone: "What's your name?"

My mother has no husband and I am her daughter. In her my days converge, and what I do not yet know about myself. Her name is Idra. May my tongue stick to my palate if it is not true that I place her above all my joys. She was born from the gushing waterfall of a flat peak, dulled by perennial clouds of damp that make rain under the sky as soon as they touch the stones, and you see the air cut in two the colour of honey dropping down from a thousand metres and turning to powder. There are the solitudes, they are ours and we are theirs. Never have I been able to be on water without feeling the desire to be in it as well, the intimate terror of an initiate against the laughter of others. It is always papa who laughs. Torero says the pureness of the rapids permeates the mountains, becomes a perfumed oil to be mixed with his beard. Torero is Venezuelan, when I am tired of walking she soon gets angry, shouting: "*Como vamos yendo vamos viendo*", seeing as how we have to go ahead.

The only war I know is the one to be loved more. Our prices are not high here. Torero has the belly of a female dog, a bit like Minerva all covered

in swollen little breasts. That's how I saw her one morning while she was having her nipples licked by a man. But maybe it was the opaque veil of my awakening that multiplied the contours, and you are still remembering the evening before, when mamma wets the tips of her fingers with saliva whispering: "Fall asleep, you tired eyes", as she closes them.

Mamma often looks at me with pity, she understands my destiny has to be fulfilled and knows what awaits me. Inheritance is this too, an inability to do anything, always going along with it. Even the amethyst ring I shall one day show off on my ring finger will be useless. The one she would like to represent the last base of a skin that blooms without feeling. Out of devotion to life, though. Keeping your legs open to let anyone in, with pearls rolled around wrists and ankles to prolong the game. She often tells the legend *Short tale of Love and Time*. Love and Time have to cross a river, first Love lets Time pass, then Time makes Love pass. I start crying right away, mamma says: "Little fish, you've bitten the hook, time doesn't end, neither does love". But then there's pain. "*¡Ahi!*", says Torero. Mamma bursts out laughing. I watch her and she watches Torero. I want to know too. "*¡Ahi, fear*", says Torero. Mamma smiles leaning her head towards her: "She remembers when you were born, the screams". Torero waves her hand as if to say "Oh, no no", never again. *Miedo*. Torero clears the land sowing broad beans, any one of her men would really love to see her hoeing nitrogen balls. The first time she came to our house to work, she shouted "Idra!" out loud from the end of the street, slapped her cheeks, then banged on the front door. "Why doesn't she ring?". "She can't read, so she yells". The other evening she came into my room, lay down beside me, and, grazing one of my eyebrows with her nail, caressed the hollow of my face, moving lightly around my lips: "*¿Una vez me dice mamá?*". When the time comes to take a new name she will be the one to chose mine. Every so often she turns vague, pretending a spell she asks: "*¿Te gusta Cruz? ¿Porque no?*". "Because a cross is the sign of the illiterate". She closes her hands over my face, I want to cry a little, instead I laugh. We laugh together, "*¿Allora, te gusta?*". "Yes, it's good Torero". She's happy and she acts like a singer: "What can I do if I'm ignorant?". In Caracas a handicapped child awaits her, male, the extreme light that shines upon us to serve the sentence that is not sufficient to punish the slightest guilt. "Torero, why did you leave him alone, far away down there?". "*Yo odiaba a su padre*". How can an infinite love not want an infinite pain? I don't know the name of the boy, but the one who fathered him calls himself Huevo.

Hello Egg.

I imagine my father handsome, I dream of him lying at the foot of a red apple tree, among the eucalyptuses, stretched out in a field of sage, one arm on his stomach and one behind his neck, at night, looking at the stars and picking them off like grapes from a bunch.

What are men? How are they made? I study the statues hastily in the museums, cold white marble, powerful and noseless, horse tamers, savers of ships with foresail at the prow, winged, or fingers missing; yes that's what they are like. Naked and proud.

My greatest fear is to meet my father here, to see him returning at dawn from his latest battle, wounded and oblivious, having to teach him everything all over again, the beauty in everything. I am tempted to tell mamma, but you cannot reveal the pains of the mind to anyone, you have to hold them tightly in the breast between the throat and the heart. "Where are you, papa? Where will you go?".

Because no one knows. Mamma sends back everyone who does not pay in advance, except one. Torero says: "*Para tí*". For you who, huh? "*¡Para los peces que se encuentran en el mar y el mar en peces!*". My dear Idra, if you are everyone's, I will be everyone! I am already, don't you see?

What would a horrendous appearance that never sees look like? A being to be observed with eyes shut? The one to talk to when you can no longer express yourself? No, it is something cold like water that attaches itself to the body, a nocturnal monster, a tangle of laughing moray eels. And the one in the middle is immortal.

Idra wants me to be her beautiful seal come to the village for the fair, the one that spins the coloured ball on its damp nose while she wastes time grooming the Great Danes. Let them rip her to pieces. She comes to wish me goodnight sucking one of the seven mounts on her left hand, yet she would not even notice if the current carried me away. She bites my nose cartilage, and on the chin, asking: "What did Torero want from you?" I stay in her arms like a small animal, I answer: "Her son, but it isn't me". And want to die for this as well, while her too-perfect teeth press serrated clocks into my flesh: "What time do you make it?" Sneer in anger: "I do not want you to touch me anymore!", because I neither offer nor accept anyone's advances, I've always done without, I can, I must and I will continue to do so. In silence I suffer the stubbornness with which she presses ahead in her ridiculous and passionate search for me, that superficial sneaking in, the suppressed torment that causes shivers: "What's that here, eh?". Idra, you don't know because you never get it, they are the chimes of my heart, "I make it midnight, no, sorry, three o'clock". Escape! Run, go off to your prince, hurry!

Just try for one night not to run away from me, run towards. To the racing water chasing you, retort: I am. I've learnt not to inhale to avoid falling victim to her breath.

"Who is my father?". When she laughs an ugly laugh Torero gets crow's feet. "Go on, tell me".

"No sé". "Tell me". "No sé". "Is he the one that doesn't pay?". "*¡Te dije no sé, no sé!*". "Oh, come on".

Mamma said: "You should look at every man as God would". Each poet belongs to those who recite him then. But not all physical contact is the same. There will be ugly mouths, calluses, prickly moustaches, scratchy dry heels, little pests. Mamma said: "And who made your eyes if not me?". Some slam her up sideways against the wall, they cry, turn to depravity, enter where they want, come in a horrible way. And, committing the sin of envy I think of Christ's crucifixion.

My mind moves up her body, I walk over it for centuries like a machine that takes and gives pleasure everywhere. So as not to kill her I have to force myself to imagine her without organs. I aim at the skull. The goal is to point the flag straight at the centre, to establish ownership rather than the right of first refusal. But an event that has not happened yet is the foreshadowing of a wish, mystery and ending. And the real scare is what I am still unable to. Because there is something in human understanding that is neither life nor death, that does not have the power to divide of the sword, or of persecution: it is absence of sin.

Every prostitute gets compensation, mine will be the rage of jealousy.

I say: "You who made my heart, how can you expect me to give it to someone else? I have been at your mercy since I came into the world; before some animal does, have the courage to do me the greatest act of love: break my hymen".

Because what law proclaims a raped woman a prostitute?

The sun comes into the day and he with her. The powder of the butterflies settles on the sideboard, the orange blossom wavers to its scent, changes the refraction of the water in the glass. "Call Torero a minute, please". "Why, mamma, why?". "Just call her". "*¿Que és?*".

She sits bolt upright on the edge of the chair, her hands folded on the table, the transparent line between her beautiful, vigorous eyelashes, down, too far down. Get them back. I go to her side, with my index finger I skim over her waxed eyebrows. That there is an area of wellbeing, her own personal little sunset. I will love you so much, mamma. You have nothing to fear, I will always love you more than him, even though he is my father. Even though he did not bring me up. I know he is waiting for you round the corner, I've seen the suitcases: "Will you introduce us?".

Torero breathes worriedly, an overbearing heaviness brings terror to her eye sockets. "Is he my father?".

Worn out by her concerns, mamma shakes her head with gentle pleasure, unable to free herself she opens her mouth slightly to let fall that large drop, either very ingenuous or very smart. You are a coward Idra, I should have realized. Calmly she frees a hand from the knot she had tied to protect herself, she takes the tear, lays it on the knee that has wounded me so deeply and squeezes it as though wanting everything to end up in there. Her tight knuckles appear through the material. The strained finger bones, a bit yellow and a bit blue. Almost grateful she climbs back up the hurting leg, stopping to pause for a long time on my waist. I recognize the heat which boils on contact more than hell's fire, begs to evaporate. After a slight commotion while she denies her own anxiety she throws me onto Torero in a familiar gesture, like throwing a broom for safekeeping into the most hidden corner of the door, like a fork you fling into a drawer, like a coffin you stuff into the recess in the cemetery wall, and then the cement. Her voice whispers an announcement: "Here is your daughter". To me: "Here is your mother".

I will love you so much.

And after loving you I will abandon you mamma, and you will be stripped of your clothes, your ornaments will be removed, they will leave you uncovered, they will stone you in front of me and say: "Like mother, like daughter". I am worthy of you. When I was born my umbilical cord was not cut, I was not washed with water to purify me, not wrapped in swaddling clothes. Now I see the desert as a symbol that reigns over us in our relationships, and I despise you because you will be unreachable, because wonder prevents you from infinite desire. It is there. You are with it. It won't be enough in the future to wrap words together, refine the sound of the language, or to beg: "Give me another kiss". Perhaps I will round up against you those you have loved together with those you have hated, so they can see all of you, and because there is no hidden fact, I will bury you beneath an enormous boulder from under which you will hear only: "My God, my God". Finally I shall want to believe that reality is love and nothing else.

I will not be afraid of seeing you in hands that are not mine, just as you do not fear the sea after a storm in the dark. The abyss of the waters absorbs ships and unlucky ones, yet it continues to seem beautiful because everyone can have a share in misfortune. And being sold, betrayed, tortured and killed for one's faith can happen to everyone in life. So, if you really are my salvation, I will obey you right up to the cross. Go ahead, retire to the edges of the world, I will be yours, go ahead, go with him,

I will be yours, love thousands of other men, I will be yours. Wherever you flee to, I will be yours forever, your curse. From this moment on do not pit yourself against me anymore. Go away. Our feeling should have had the same space as sunlight in the universe. I thought it could be done by dressing as your bride, I was wrong. I will never see your disgusting things again, never be subjected to your washings, you who opens her arms out wide and shuts them before I can fall into them. Delinquent of the maternal comedy!

Here is Torero, my mother, the woman called to give me a name. Christ's final gift to John. The dark, worn out smock, the bulging veins on the calves. How real she is in her poverty, how offended, with the locks of hair on the forehead of women who have been unable to face problems and have sidestepped them. Colourless, strong and lost now forever. Her voice slightly hoarse, she shouts: "*¡Tres granos de azúcar!*", according to custom. She rubs them against my thighs as I agonize rigid, imploring, gasping for breath: "I beg you, no". Spare me. All of you spare me. But her fiery eyes order me: "You are loaded. Aim."

I am not one who can be loved. I love, and I do not know how to love.

I win death, luck and all the wars that will be raged against us.

Goodbye Idra. Perhaps it is true, I am afraid. I don't care. In baptism by immersion you die to be born again, but if God has pity on those who want Him, the secret of being able to still believe in Him is contemplated in the mystery of those who carry the proper name of their pain on their back, as far as the golden piazza of the mother restored newly to a virgin in the rushing water. At the feet of that Calvary it will be necessary to kneel, look around and place – without hope- the love that is poured to form your own body, to cover the Izbas, the trunks of the birch trees, the music of the shepherd, the crests of the cockerels and the docile animals over which our mad ghosts fly; flow in this desert where today the snow falls. There, both damn you and bless you one last time: "Do you recognize me, mamma? Do not pity me now, this is my cross. Yours are the skies, yours is the earth. Embrace me".

Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?

Ezekiel, Jerusalem as an adulterous wife