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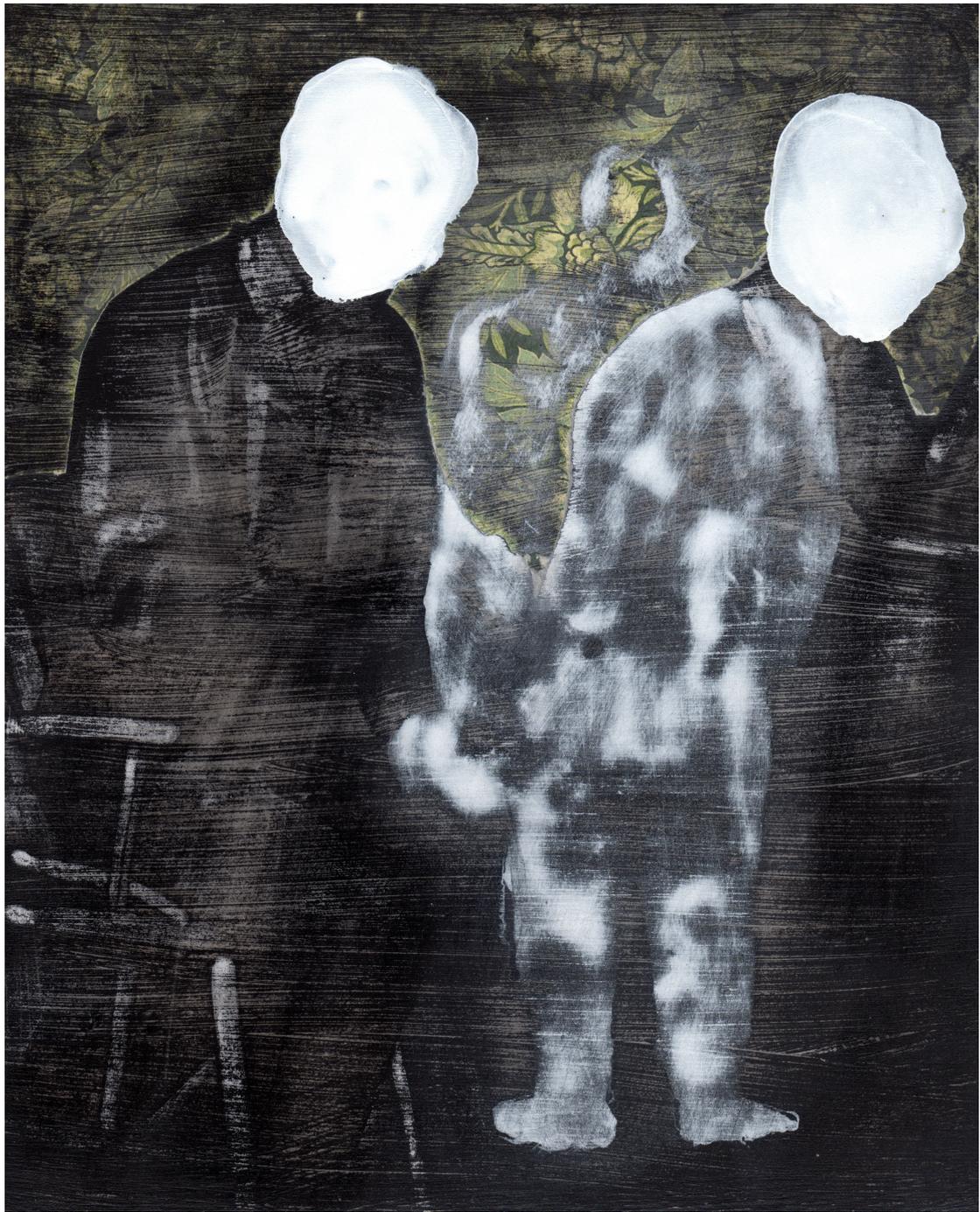
Encountering the Spectre of Painting

When thinking what paintings are, I am continually brought back to my memory of a short sequence in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. In the scene, Kim Novak's Madeleine is seated on a bench in an art gallery. She is apparently transfixed by a painting, *Portrait of Carlotta*. Alongside James Stewart, we watch her looking intently.

Madeleine is pretending to be a ghost. At this stage she does not expect us to believe she is a ghost, but simply to immerse ourselves in the conceit, to delight in the shudder. Madeleine's back is turned away from us, and as the camera draws near to show that the knot pattern in her hair mirrors the image in the portrait, I imagine Madeleine suppressing a smile. She resolutely shows us her back, though, so her feint is not betrayed.

Madeleine's stillness in this scene makes her appear as an object, a thing in the world, a rock or a pile of logs perhaps. We are not looking at that thing, however, but rather a residual image of something creaturely, a spectre. This after-image is held to the ground both by the gravity suggested by its manifestation and by the fine lie - the camouflage - of pretending to be a ghost.

Encountering a painting is like meeting Madeleine. It sits in front of its own picture, gazing at it. Despite being motionless and having its back to us, there is a lurching sensation the painting brings about by pretending to be the ghost of its picture, and, at the same time, never really anticipating your credulity.



Encountering Ghosts in a Song

Drei Sonnen sah ich am Himmel stehn,
Hab' lang' und fest sie angesehen;
Und sie auch standen da so stier,
Als wolten sie nicht weg von mir.
Ach *meine* Sonnen seid ihr nicht!
Schaut Andern doch in's Angesicht!
Ja neulich hatt' ich auch wohl drei:
Nun sind hinab die besten zwei.
Ging' nur die dritt' erst hinterdrein!
Im Dunkeln wird mir wohler sein

I saw three suns in the sky,
Long and hard I stared at them;
And they too stood there so fixedly,
As though they'd never leave me.
Alas you are not *my* suns!
You gaze into other faces!
Lately, yes, I did have three:
But the best two now are down.
If only the third would follow!
I'd fare better in the dark.

Songs are spectral. The libretto is haunted by its setting and vice-versa. A performance of the song is, in turn, haunted by this reciprocal visitation. In the penultimate song of *Winterreise*, *Die Nebensonnen* ('The Mock Suns'), Franz Schubert's music inhabits a poem by Wilhelm Müller. Furthermore, to hear a performance of *Die Nebensonnen* is to encounter Müller's text interpreted by a singer and baffled by the materialisation of Schubert.

Die Nebensonnen is composed of this music/text/voice triad, but the three 'Mock Suns' also coalesce in Müller's narrative as an atmospheric effect known as a parhelia or a sundog. Parhelia are an optical phenomenon brought about by the refraction of the sun's light through ice crystals.

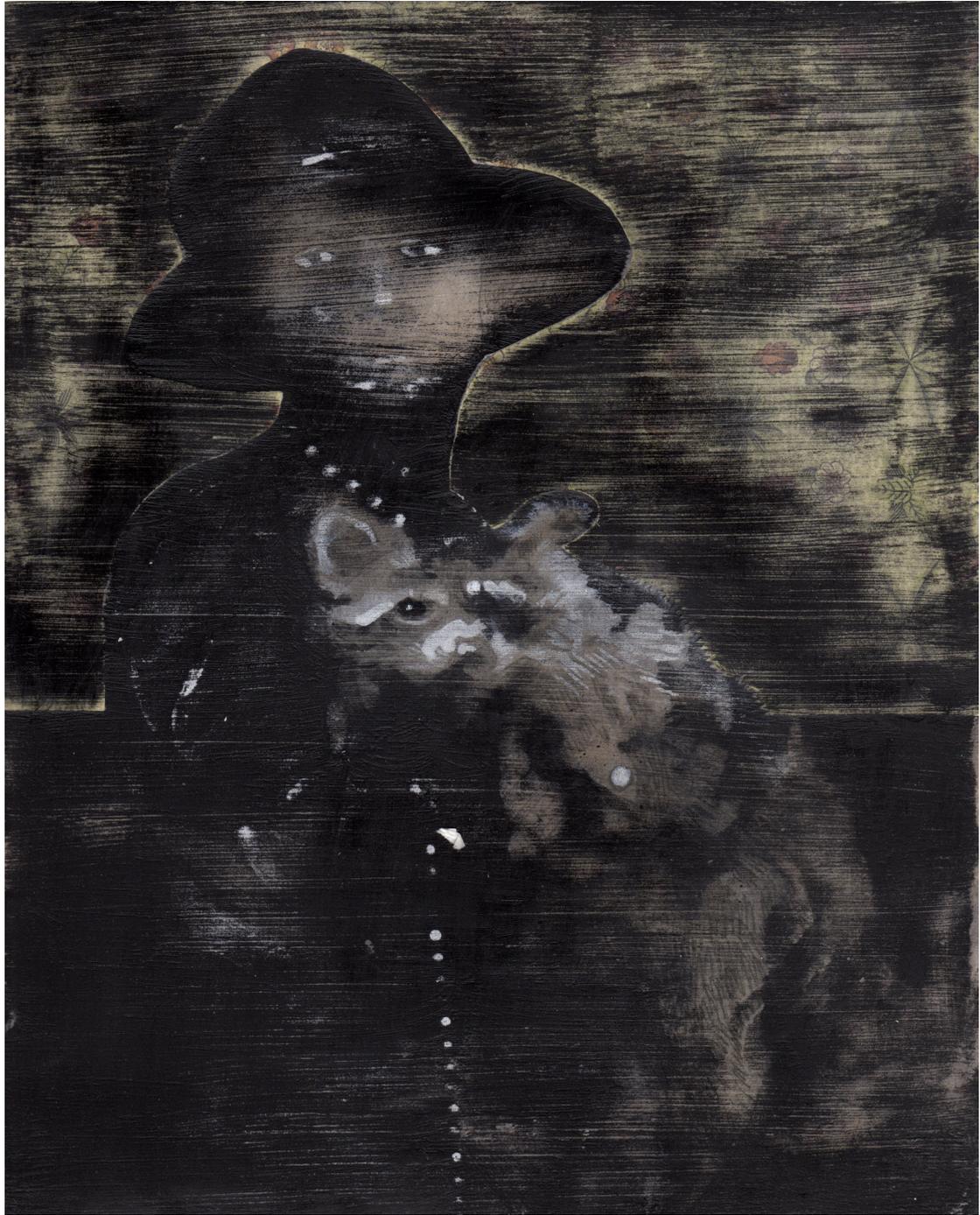
In the two illusory suns of the parhelia a wintery mirage of the protagonist's beloved's eyes appears. This metonym is clearly appropriate to *Winterreise*, the implication being that the protagonist's tears might have caused the refraction and that parhelia are at once real and illusional.

In an earlier poem of the *Winterreise* cycle, *Rückblick*, Müller has already established an image of the protagonist's memory of his lover through a description of her eyes:

Die runden Lindenbäume blühten,
Die klaren Rinnen rauschten hell,
Und ach, zwei Mädchenaugen glühten!
Da war's gescheh'n um dich, Gesell!

The rounded linden trees blossomed,
The clear fountains murmured brightly,
And ah! the girl's eyes flashed fire!
And your fate, my friend, was sealed!

So what we encounter in *Die Nebensonnen* is the brumal ghost of a vernal memory.



Encountering the Ghost of Mary

I satisfied my hunger by eating the grass by the roadside which seemed to taste something like bread I was hungry & ate heartily until I was satisfied & in fact the meal seemed to do me good the next day and last day I recollected that I had some tobacco & my box of lucifers being exhausted I could not light my pipe so I took to chewing tobacco all day & eat the quids when I had done & I was never hungry afterwards

John Clare, *Reccolections &c Of Journey From Essex*

The ghost of Mary can be found in a small pocketbook that belonged to the ‘peasant poet’ John Clare. The book, inscribed ‘John Clare Poems / Feb^y 1841’, is a remarkable document which Clare began to use while incarcerated at Dr. Matthew Allen’s Asylum in Epping Forest. In it he composed several long poems including *Child Harold* – his heartrending account of the trauma of estrangement and longing for his rural home.

In the July of 1841 Clare escaped from the asylum and the pocketbook contains details of his four-day walk home to the fenland of Cambridgeshire. The resulting story, *Reccolections &c Of Journey From Essex* is addressed to Mary Joyce, his childhood sweetheart, who he mistakenly believed had become his wife. Mary had died in a house fire a few years before the piece was written and Clare had married another woman, Patty Turner, in 1820.

I face Clare by thinking about his gaze to the horizon. His breakout can be seen as a striving for home both literally, but perhaps more importantly, metaphorically. Clare associated Mary Joyce and physical autonomy – the objective of his escape bid – with his childhood and his origins. The genesis of the text itself is testament to the importance of a sense of home and place to Clare, and how this impulse was inextricably tied up with his conception of Mary. *Journey From Essex* is for Clare a voyage home. It is also, in literal terms, the journey from a densely thicketed forest to the wide-open fens and uncomplicated horizon of his native habitat. Thought about in this way, Clare’s narrative is one of homecoming, of freedom, but also of simplification – a kind of emptying. Clare is revealed to have nothing left but himself and the ghost of Mary.

I face this haunting by thinking about Clare’s yearning for his lost love transposed into images of Mary holding him protectively to her breast. One such image depicts Mary Joyce holding John Clare as a racoon. The picture is intended as a reimagining of Clare’s hopes, the beyond-horizon dreams of being reunited with his ‘wife’. The images are depictions of how Clare sees himself at the end of his journey. John Clare is depicted as part of nature in the comforting, homely arms of Mary Joyce, with a broad expanse of fenland sky behind them. The images are a visualisation of Clare’s *arrival*.