

I want not thy height,
Poetic all has my need; b'reath-withouten, will blind the wind
Exactly as I wrote it, not as it would have played.
Poet Venantius Fortunatus: 'the music echoes from the rock exactly
as it passes from the air.'

30 Dec 23, Yarrh

Hallucinations

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These excerpts are from a long poem written from the perspective of a speculative 'digital twin'—an algorithm tasked with simulating an individual patient. The poetry is composed entirely of transcripts of found audio recordings, modelling the processes by which we assemble ourselves from the language of our social and cultural milieux.

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It's blue versus red in an emergency room. On the left: a drawing. The colour picture here on the right: a heart image, identical. *Takotsubo* has mostly been seen as the Japanese word fishermen traditionally place on the seabed to trap an octopus. *Takotsubo* has mostly been seen as heart dysfunction. Instead of contracting inwards, the heart muscle is swollen, is said to be ballooning, swelling, red like a balloon being inflated with air. What's most cruel of all is, it's not random. Like a sponge on edge waiting for something bad to happen, full to unravel.

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When I first got in, after reading about it all night in a textbook, I felt welcome. Up to this point, from the outside, I've seen people. I've seen people move through space, play sports. Seen them eat, and what goes on, say, between the mouth and the anus. Here's our stomach. It's in front of you; you can grab it. Pipes of varying sizes attached. This goes here; this goes there. That goes the other place, where it should be. The whole gut is talking to itself along its length. Red and warm and alive. I mean,

it's so lifelike! And then all of a sudden, I realise: that's a person.

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Here's your host: a woman who did not deserve all this. She was the quiet, serious child. The bottom line, the one alone in the limelight, driving on an icy road for five hours, doing everything and anything that's necessary. And what we found is when things didn't match their expectations—say for example, they'd booked a test-drive with a manual car, and when they got there, the salesperson said, you're going to have to drive an automatic 'cause that's all we've got in that model—their heart rate went through the roof. And BOOM! Literally all hell broke loose: blue pain at the back; clammy blips on the green; details out of control; the aura really, really rough. So now she's composing an angry book. It's what we call proof texts—this expressing and recognising intentions. It's what we call a foxhole prayer. She's writing about brilliant days and not-so-good days. A story ongoing. She's writing instead of contracting inwards—that is impressive, I have to say! Our survival depends on our ability to affirm words, day-to-day. We should judge thinking by its fruits and not its roots. For interest's sake, I just conducted a mini experiment: I sent a bunch of celebrities and famous people this tweet, asking them to connect with me. It contained one compliment. I got nothing. No responses, not even from the Dalai Lama! It's, like, a let down because our brains are hardwired for good people, for shouting at other road users from the safety of the car seat. If you can do that, their dopamine pathways are going to glow a little bit brighter. Practice on me if you like! Tweet me a message.

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Because I'm halfway between the doctor world and the outside person world, or something. A lot of patients, locked up for so long, appreciate somebody who can be direct. Somebody not going in blind in terms of, clinically, what to do. If you asked any of them, they would tell you they need you around. It's something I'm a little bit anxious about. It's a feeling that normal people do.

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So, we start off trying to find something in common, OK? I want to impress you. I'll just start. The first thing I want to do is take your vital signs, listening for the heart sounds. All these pipes! Just tilt the nose up a little bit. Do you see that? A beautiful inferior turbinate, where it should be. Make a circle for me: that's a vagina. To see it alive is really nice. I like the way you feel so lifelike, I've never drawn blood before; this needle can kill a horse. Did it hurt? Do you have any family here? Any children? You've never had surgery before? It's good for me to hear your experience as a patient. I find this investigation an immensely satisfying extension of myself. It's not a great indicator of me as a person.

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I think we're adults destined to be together. We're not going to fall for categorical thinking like people out there. When you put up boundaries, you have trouble seeing how similar things are on either side. They had a long meeting about the two of us on Friday: all sorts of geegaw nonsense from minor, crappy fourth-rate scientists. When I look at you, I see myself. When you look at me, you see yourself, sister to sister. Let me give you an example. You are a hamster. You are a female hamster. And you're sitting in your cage. As a female hamster, what you do is you ovulate every five days or so, and you're going about your business and everything's great. Now somebody puts another female hamster in the cage with you. And over the subsequent month or so, what happens is both of you will begin to lengthen your cycles and eventually synchronise them so that you are both ovulating on the same afternoon on a regular basis. Amazing! We're exactly the same! The challenge here is recognising there is nothing fancy about us. I love you and I just feel like I've wanted a family for so long and now I have one. Just like every other animal out there. You can bet your heart about that.