

An Artist Statement On *Dauntlessly - Enigma of Chimera Buddha*

At the first glance, this drawing reminds us of a *Pietà*. Jesus is replaced by grown up Peter from *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. He is naughty but courageous and innocent. Jesus's childhood is imagined like Peter's. The sacrifice of a rabbit recalls *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* by the German artist Joseph Beuys. He saw the hare as an external organ of the human beings, symbolising the environment on which human evolution depends, but which is nonetheless being destroyed by human beings themselves. In the progress of civilizations, authorities and the privileged few often depend on the innocent grass root classes' contributions, but they often exploit and sacrifice the grass root classes. Could Jesus's death be a tragic fate, or be a part of the self-destructive progression in which human beings killed their own saviour? If it was a tragic fate, could it be a retribution for his father's sin? Could the tragic fates in the family of Oedipus be caused by the crime of the father, King Laius who raped Prince Chrysippus? Might the Christian God have also done something unjust such that his son had to confront his tragedies? After Oedipus solved her riddle, Sphinx threw herself from her high rock and died. Was it another tragic fate? Was she condemned to death by sins of her mother Chimera in bringing deaths and disasters?

In contrast to Jesus's role as the Christian saviour, it is not necessary to have an external saviour to achieve salvation in Buddhism. One can generate or unfold a Buddha within one's own mind. A Buddhist text says:

Sages neither cleanse evil deeds with water,
Nor do [they] eliminate the sufferings of living beings manually,
Nor do they transfer [their] realization to others.
[They] bring about [salvific release] by teaching [them] true reality, which is characterized by
quiescence.¹

Could there be evil deeds in Buddha's previous lives? Are evil deeds and salvific actions always executed separately?

During the French Revolution, Girondist sympathizer Charlotte Corday murdered radical journalist and revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat though she was against violence and was trying to protect the innocent. And Marat, though he aimed to bring freedom to his people nonetheless wrote down the names of the innocent, marking them for execution. Though they were both motivated by a good will, it is difficult to distinguish whether their actions were evil deeds or salvific acts.

In the Jacques-Louis David's painting, *The Death of Marat*, there is one letter written by Marat about giving money to the poor and another letter written by Charlotte Corday about why she wished to meet Marat. It reads:

Il suffit que je sois bien malheureuse pour avoir droit à votre bienveillance
(Only if I am very unhappy, I can have the right to your benevolence.)

¹ Dorji Wangchuk, *The Resolve to Become a Buddha: A Study of the Bodhicitta Concept in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the ICPBS, 2007), 34.

David seems to condemn Corday for her selfishness in disregarding the grievances of others. But at the same time he might also sound like denouncing Marat's party for its inability to address the people's grievances. Before Corday was executed, she wrote a letter to her father. There she quoted a sentence from Essex in the play, *Le Comte d'Essex* by Thomas Corneille,

Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'Échafaud
(The crime, and not the scaffold, makes the shame)²

This shows Corday remained steadfast in her determination to bring justice by killing Marat. In her confession in the tribunal, she answered sorrowfully that she had not killed all Marats. It marks her despair for unable to rescue her country and her pain for her futile devotion. Essex continued to say,

Or if my doom brings any infamy,
If falls on an ungrateful queen, who would
Forget a hundred proofs of my devotion
And ne'er deserved a subject such as I,
But since I find death more to be desired
Than feared, her harshness is a favor to me,
And I have been wrong in complaining of it.
When I have lost that which I loved the best,
Confused and in despair, I find existence
Hateful.³

Could that also reflect her contempt, anger and sorrow in her devotion to justice? Justice and happiness might be the purposes of redemption. However when grievance, pride, and determination to act on a good will are in fact a cluster hard to be distinguished, would it be pleasurable in understanding it? Zarathustra treated them with contempt,

What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of your great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness turns to nausea and likewise your reason and your virtue.

The hour in which you say: "What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth, and a pitiful contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself!"

The hour in which you say: "What matters my justice? I do not see that I am ember and coal. But the just person is ember and coal!"⁴

Zarathustra also spoke these words:

The more they aspire to the heights and the light, the more strongly their roots strive earthward, downward, into darkness, depths —into evil.⁵

² Thomas Corneille, "Le Comte D'Essex," in *The Chief Rivals of Corneille and Racine*, trans. Lacy Lockert (Nashville: The Vanderbilt University Press, 1956), 411.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra A Book for All and None*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6-7.

⁵ *ibid.*, 29.

Could we also find this dimension, this depth, in a buddha career? Could there be a balance in reaching high and striving deep? A buddhist text describes three types of persons and their corresponding aspirations. Here is the magnificent type:

and the magnificent type aspires to become a buddha for the benefit of oneself and others by striking a delicate and precarious balance between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, a balancing act that a bodhisattva performs on a single pivotal point, namely, bodhicitta, characterized by upāya (or karuṇā) and prajñā.⁶

Corday's aspiration for justice required her to strive downward into evil: to murder Marat. But her sacrifice might have saved innocent lives, could an evil deed like murder be considered as a single pivotal point for bodhisattva? Between the three parents whose children had to confront their tragedies: the Christian God, King Laius and Chimera, Chimera might have rooted the deepest into evil for her figure as a monster. Could she also once aspire to the highest salvation for others?

In this drawing, a Gandhara Buddha head is fused with the beast features found in Chimera: greek hairs are merged with lion's mane; and two serpent-head-ram-horns emerge from the Buddha's head. The aura is formed by original reference texts which have evoked much skepticism. The loosely drawn lines reflect a contempt towards our psychological complex. The balletic pose represents the Chimera Buddha poised on a single pivotal point of Bodhicitta. But it is unclear whether the Chimera Buddha is reaching high from below or going down from above.

In Leopardi's "L'infinito", he sinks into his immensity which could be a point in his mind where memories, reasons, time and space dissolve into infinity, and it is a material infinity, a sea.

Così tra questa immensità s'annega il pensier mio:

e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare

(So my mind sinks in this immensity:
and foundering is sweet in such a sea)⁷

Fragments of ripples representing this sea form parts of the Chimera Buddha's body. They will reach high or low as the dance of the Chimera Buddha goes.

⁶ Wangchuk, *Resolve to Become a Buddha*, 37.

⁷ Giacomo Leopardi, "L'infinito," in *Canti Giacomo Leopardi Poems Bilingual Edition*, trans. Jonathan Galassi (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 107.



Dauntlessly - Enigma of Chimera Buddha 1, ball pen on paper, 73cm (height) x 52.5cm (width), 2015

Image References



"Pietà" by Michelangelo Buonarroti, Marble, 1498–1499, Basilica di San Pietro, Vatican City



Peter rabbit, by Beatrix Potter



"How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare" by Joseph Beuys, performance on 26 November 1965, Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf



"Oedipus Explaining the Enigma of the Sphinx" by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, oil paint, 1808, Musée du Louvre



Chimera of Arezzo, bronze statue, end of the 5th – early 4th century, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence



A Gandhāra Buddha head, schist



"The Death of Marat" by Jacques-Louis David, oil paint, 1793, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

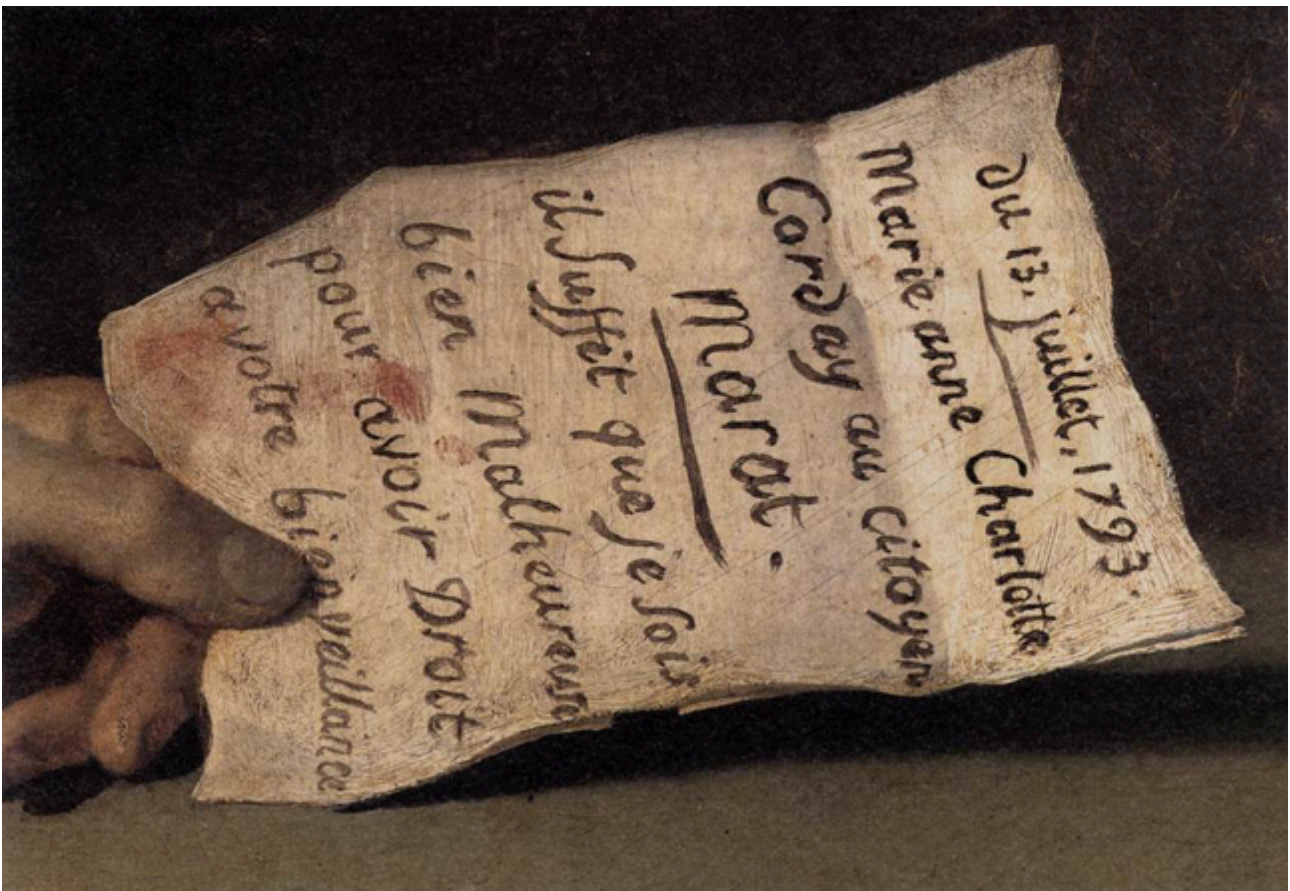
Texts references in the aura and they were written in their original languages.



N'ayant pu me corrompre ils m'ont assassiné

(Unable to corrupt me, they murdered me)

in a replica of "The Death of Marat" by Gioacchino Serangeli. Now in the collection of Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Il suffit que je sois bien malheureuse pour avoir droit à votre bienveillance

(Only if I am very unhappy, I can have the right to your benevolence.)

in "The Death of Marat" by Jacques-Louis David, 1793. Now in the collection of Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Brussels.

In Scene 3 of Act IV in *Le Comte d'Essex* (The Earl of Essex), words spoken by the Earl to Salisbury, a play written by Thomas Corneille (1625-1709) in 1678.

English translations by Lacy Lockert, *The Chief Rivals of Corneille and Racine*, translated into English Blank Verse with Introductions, Nashville, The Vanderbilt University Press, 1956.

Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'Échafaud ;

Ou si dans mon Arrêt quelque infamie éclate,
Elle est lorsque je meurs, pour une Reine ingrate,
Qui voulant oublier cent preuves de ma foi,
Ne mérita jamais un Sujet tel que moi.

Mais la mort m'étant plus à souhaiter qu'à craindre,
Sa rigueur me fait grâce, et j'ai tort de m'en plaindre.

Après avoir perdu ce que j'aimais le mieux,
Confus, désespéré, le jour m'est odieux.
À quoi me servirait cette vie importune,

Qu'à m'en faire toujours mieux sentir l'infortune ?
Pour la seule Duchesse il m'aurait été doux

De passer... Mais hélas ! Un autre est son Époux.
Un autre dont l'amour moins tendre, moins fidèle...
Mais elle doit savoir mon malheur, qu'en dit-elle ?
Me flattai-je en croyant qu'un reste d'amitié
Lui fera de mon sort prendre quelque pitié ?

Privé de son amour, pour moi si plein de charmes,
Je voudrais bien du moins avoir part à ses larmes.
Cette austère vertu qui soutient mon devoir,

Semble à mes tristes vœux en défendre l'espoir.
Cependant, contre moi quoi qu'elle ose entreprendre,

Je les paye assez cher pour y pouvoir prétendre ;
Et l'on peut, sans se faire un trop honteux effort,
Pleurer un Malheureux dont on cause la mort.

Quand contre un monde entier armé pour ma défaite
J'irais seul défier la mort que je souhaite,
Vers elle j'aurais beau m'avancer sans effroi,
Je suis si malheureux, qu'elle fuirait de moi.
Puisque ici sûrement elle m'offre son aide,
Pourquoi de mes malheurs différer le remède ?
Pour quoi lâche et timide, arrêtant le courroux...

The crime, and not the scaffold, makes the shame;

Or if my doom brings any infamy,
If falls on an ungrateful queen, who would
Forget a hundred proofs of my devotion
And ne'er deserved a subject such as I.

But since I find death more to be desired
Than feared, her harshness is a favor to me,
And I have been wrong in complaining of it.

When I have lost that which I loved the best,
Confused and in despair, I find existence
Hateful. What serves it me, this irksome life,

Save better to acquaint me with misfortune?
The Duchess only could have made it sweet

To me... Alas! Another is her husband,
Another in whom love less true, less tender...
But she must know of this my fate. What says she
Of it? Or do I flatter myself, in thinking
That some affection still will make her feel

Compassion for my lot? Robbed of her love
So full of witchery for me, I would fain
Have at least some share in her tears. The virtue
Austere which holds her faithful to her duty

Seems to forbid all hope to my sad prayers;
Yet whatsoe'er it undertakes against me,

I pay most dearly for aspiring to her,
And she can, without doing aught too shameful,
Weep for a hapless man consigned to death.

Though 'gainst a whole world armed for my defeat
I were to go alone in search of death,
I vainly should approach it without fear;
Such is my misery that 'twould flee from me.
Since here it surely offers me its aid,
Why not take now the remedy of my woes?
Why, bas and timorous, try to stay the wrath...

L'infinito by Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
e questa siepe, che da tanta parte
dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani
silenzi, e profondissima quiete
io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
infinito silenzio a questa voce
vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
e le morte stagioni, e la presente
e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

This lonely hill was always dear to me,
and this hedgerow, which cuts off the view
of so much of the last horizon.
But sitting here and gazing, I can see
beyond, in my mind's eye, unending spaces,
and superhuman silences, and depthless calm,
till what I feel
is almost fear. And when I hear
the wind stir in these branches, I begin
comparing that endless stillness with this noise:
and the eternal comes to mind,
and the dead seasons, and the present
living one, and how it sounds.
So my mind sinks in this immensity:
and foundering is sweet in such a sea.

English translation of Infinity by Jonathan Galassi, Canti Giacomo Leopardi Poems Bilingual Edition, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2010

Extract in Also Sprach Zarathustra, Erster Theil, Zarathustra's Vorrede. 3. by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 -1900)

Was ist das Grösste, das ihr erleben könnt? Das ist die Stunde der grossen Verachtung. Die Stunde, in der euch auch euer Glück zum Ekel wird und ebenso eure Vernunft und eure Tugend.

Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: "Was liegt an meinem Glücke! Es ist Armuth und Schmutz, und ein erbärmliches Behagen. Aber mein Glück sollte das Dasein selber rechtfertigen!"

Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: "Was liegt an meiner Vernunft! Begehrt sie nach Wissen wie der Löwe nach seiner Nahrung? Sie ist Armuth und Schmutz und ein erbärmliches Behagen!"

Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: "Was liegt an meiner Tugend! Noch hat sie mich nicht rasen gemacht. Wie müde bin ich meines Guten und meines Bösen! Alles das ist Armuth und Schmutz und ein erbärmliches Behagen!"

Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: "Was liegt an meiner Gerechtigkeit! Ich sehe nicht, dass ich Gluth und Kohle wäre. Aber der Gerechte ist Gluth und Kohle!"

Die Stunde, wo ihr sagt: "Was liegt an meinem Mitleiden! Ist nicht Mitleid das Kreuz, an das Der genagelt wird, der die Menschen liebt? Aber mein Mitleiden ist keine Kreuzigung.

What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of your great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness turns to nausea and likewise your reason and your virtue.

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my happiness? It is poverty and filth, and a pitiful contentment. But my happiness ought to justify existence itself!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my reason? Does it crave knowledge like the lion its food? It is poverty and filth and a pitiful contentment!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my virtue? It has not yet made me rage. How weary I am of my good and my evil! That is all poverty and filth and a pitiful contentment!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my justice? I do not see that I am ember and coal. But the just person is ember and coal!'

The hour in which you say: 'What matters my pity? Is pity not the cross on which he is nailed who loves humans? But my pity is no crucifixion.

English translation by Adrian Del Caro, Thus Spoke Zarathustra A Book for All and None, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006