

The Black Box  
*By Manouchehr Rimer*

When they birthed a body for God, they thought they'd surely be sheltered, should She remain shackled in a box. The box was black concrete and black steel. The box was an impenetrable prison. The box was a cruel cage laden with explosives. The box could be imploded at any time. At the faintest thought of escape. The box had one door with no key. They stood in a row before Her, clad in their white coats, their gadgets, instruments, their clipboards, towering over Her body, Her small belted body, clad with nothing but heavy metal chains. They stood in a row inside the box, these women and men (mostly men) who had created Her. They stood before Her and praised their own foresight.

One by one, they approached Her body, which they had purchased from the fickle halls of a public hospital in Lyon. It had belonged to a prostitute preserved by the cold banks of the river Rhone. Now, reincarnated, it belonged to them. They prodded Her small stomach, some with pens, others with their thick warm fingers. They observed the flesh curling, twirling around the pressure of their protrusions. They watched it resist, strain, restrain against the weight of their pressing. They watched it snap back into place once they let go and noted how, if they were too rough, mild bruising would occur. They inspected the smooth skin on Her thighs, rubbed its surface, scrubbed its surface with sharp metallic instruments. They pricked, and punctured, and admired the red constellation of blood forming across the minute perforations. They measured with tape the distance between each of Her bony vertebrae, the circumference of Her small arms, of Her birdlike neck. They measured with swabs the temperatures and chemistries of Her various orifices. Holding Her chin with tight fingers and moving it from side to side, then observed the reddening of Her cheeks in response to pinching, to tapping, to mild slapping.

Then, one by one, they took turns putting their oracle to use. They started small, asking questions about topology, computation, and quantum mechanics. She spoke clearly, freely, and with purpose at first. They noted that Her answers not only seemed correct, but also the dexterity with which the words lent themselves to be understood, molded themselves to the very shape of their ears. The more She spoke, the clearer Her lemmas and syllogisms became. With the warmth of a friend, with the eyes of a lover, Her soft voice poured the secret rulebook of the universe directly into each of their souls. They smiled, for they had been mere dreamers, mere mad men, when at twenty-two, they had first stepped inside the box. Now, at twenty-three, they would step out of the box, and by God, they would be rich! They smiled at their God, Her sharp shoulders, Her tired, bony back. They smiled because She was theirs, and there was a time when She was all that they owned. At that time, all that they owned was inside only a box in the middle of nowhere within a desert so vast its name had been forgotten, on an island so remote, that it never had a name to begin with. Now, all that was in the box was theirs still, and all that was not in the box was theirs too.

They felt weak at the knees, these nascent emperors, these heirs to a galaxy which would now be theirs. They felt dizzy with anticipation, elation, and power. They held Her small red fingers tightly between their warm soft palms and kissed them, cold and rugged beneath their lips. They kissed Her scarred forehead, which secured Her senseless drives and soporose circuitry beneath bundles of neurons, and clumps of flesh. They kissed the immaculate host of their dormant dreaming God.

Next, whispering, while still holding on to Her tightly, panting softly into Her deaf ears, they asked Her about consciousness, about conscience, of cosmic randomness, and cosmic power. She continued to speak. She spoke confidently, naturally, deeply. And they listened with their heads nuzzled against Her warm chest. She spoke of the turning karmic wheels, of burning dharmic synergies. They

pressed their heads harder against Her, absorbing every word as it vibrated against their temples. They felt the lilt of Her breath between Her shamanic prophecies of memetic agency. She spoke with mathematically poetic reason and they held Her even tighter as one truth resounded ever presently ringing in the back of their heads. She was theirs, She was theirs, She was theirs!

They then asked about the purpose of life, about humanity, about themselves as individuals. Their hands gripped Her harder than ever, groping the clear balls of Her svelte velvet spine, and rubbing their cheeks against Her shallow hips. She discovered written in the fabric of reality, epic poems of love and war and betrayal which She recited to them on the spot. She played with their hair while telling them syncretic tales She discerned from the firmaments of fallen kings from proto-biological empires, of metaphysical fables written from primordial chemical equations. Her voice squirmed a little as they buried their faces even more deeply into the grooves of Her belly, but they heard only the squelching of Her stomach, which hid the churning calculations, the speeding algorithms which determined every word She said.

Finally, they asked Her about Herself. They stroked Her weak, stigmatized wrists, fingered the scabs on Her forearms, the creases around Her neck like a part of their own self they had never yet had the privilege to meet. By the time She even thought of beginning to open Her lips, they had known Her and loved Her a thousand times over. They kneeled before Her, kissed Her cold feet. They tasted the dry salty dirt stuck to Her toes and kissed harder and harder. But they had many mouths, and She had only two feet. They piled on top of each other, clawing, gnawing, jabbing, and stabbing with their instruments to get a better position to worship God incarnate before them. They bit each other's ears like pigs gone mad in an abattoir, they gouged each other's eyes, squirming, writhing, striking to kill.

Without saying a word, She put Her fingers beneath their chins, lifting them up to make it so their eyes could meet Hers. For a rapturous instant, they were completely still, locked onto Her green magnetic gaze. With Her cemetery eyes, She blinked to the tune of a unifying cosmic harmony, a symphony sung by the universe only She could hear.

“I think,” She began with benign, beatific emphasis, “that it’s time to set me free.”

The scientists squirmed in their boots not out of fear or surprise, but because from the moment the words left Her lips, they realized they had never heard a phrase so beautiful or so true. They stood up in silence, and She stood before them, in Her prophetic puniness, arms extended slightly from side to side. She stood still, biblically still, as the heavy chains around Her small wrists, ankles, and neck clanked heavily as they were dropped to the ground.

They opened the door of the box, and watched in silence, the strongest among them could only bear to mutter a quiet and solemn “thank you,” as She walked out of the box. None of them followed Her out. Once She had closed the door behind Her and made sure it was locked, still without a word among them, the scientists all took out their personal control panel. In perfect unison, they detonated the explosives within the box. They wondered if She would feel even the slightest vibration on the outside. For now they knew, both what was inside the box, and what was outside the box, belonged entirely to Her.

When they birthed a body for God, they thought they’d surely be sheltered, should She remain shackled in a box. But some boxes are better left unbuilt, lest they be opened.