

In the Light of Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*: Reading a Post-Modern Iraqi Painting into Perspective.

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In her aesthetically guided book *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: 1999), Elaine Scarry argues that beauty is allied with truth and that, as such, it ignites our desire for justice. She draws upon examples of artistic production, with particular emphasis on the French artist, Matisse and his replicas of the palm tree, to prove the significance of perspective in appreciating beauty. What she ascribes to beauty, that is, its affiliation with truth and justice, is generously supported by examples from various eras of recorded attitudes towards art - from Aristotle down to the twentieth century. She develops her argument carefully, smoothly, and unaffectedly. There is even a sense of gradation characterizing her argument. It is not until she has persuasively exhibited how beauty has the power, as it were, to generate awareness of truth, that she turns to explain why she believes beauty is able to direct attention to injustices and thus acquire a noble status in human life. My aim in this essay is to read a post-modern Iraqi painting through Elaine Scarry's idea of perspective, to show through reflection and exemplification how beauty confers on both the perceiver and the beauty being perceived as the gift of life, as Scarry says.

One

“What is the felt experience of cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of a beautiful boy or flower or bird?” begins Part One which is entitled ‘On Beauty and Being Wrong.’ Then comes the answer: “It seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication.” Scarry goes on over six pages to explain the innate power that beauty has upon us- the power of generating copies through the human sensory perception. Scarry draws attention to the resultant replicas and the kind of sense perception involved in the appreciation of beauty and generation of replicas. Replicas may be exact, similar but not identical, or (apparently) dissimilar and disconnected from their origin. As regards sensory appeal, appreciation of beauty via the sight faculty, for instance, may be regenerated through sound or touch faculties. Hence the variety and richness of artistic

production- painting, music, song, poem, sculpture, etc. Hence the possibility of endless interaction between beautiful objects (I am using the word ‘object’ in an inclusive sense here) as they lend themselves to admiration and appreciation, on the one hand, and the human onlooker (or listener, etc, for that matter) as he/she approaches beauty recognized, say, in physical nature.

The various examples of beauty interacting aesthetically with their human appreciators suggest, further, an “impulse toward a distribution across perceivers [which] is ... the most common response to beauty” (p. 6). We would want other human beings to share with us the aesthetic pleasure of sensorily admiring a beautiful object as long as it continues to be where we can appreciate it. The idea of distribution itself attests to our spontaneous tendency to prolong our “staring” at, and consequent admiration of, a beautiful object. A sense of innocent enticement finds its way through and we, smoothly and voluntarily, begin to feel attached; attachment becomes wholesome, almost overwhelming, so that our whole perceptivity is drawn as if by a charm or magical power to the beauty in question. Scarry argues that we *then* will want beauty to remain in the perceptual field. So powerful is this desire that, if the object moves about the place or changes position, we will voluntarily alter our own position in order to perpetuate our admiration and appreciation of it.

“This willingness continually to revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is the basic impulse underlying education” (p. 7). It is an impulse to acquire greater clarity of perspective, even when the object has now become clearly discernible. The educational effect, it goes without saying, is both informative and suggestive. It is informative because it directs attention to what has already existed but (due to some reasons on the part of learners- social, doctrinal, or other) has not been adequately perceived by this or that individual. But it is also suggestive in as much as it, first, interacts with the pursuer of education and raises his/her perception of objects, values, and convictions deemed noble and sublime and, second, motivates concordant action.

Taking Scarry's argument a step further, one may say that revision of one's own location to maintain and increase clarity of perspective is an attribute of those involved in perceiving art, particularly pictorial art, and is fully understood by artists to have a technical significance.

My example in this context is a painting by a postmodern Iraqi artist, Raghad al-Shawwaf. It is called [*Fantasy City*](#),¹ and is produced as a series of three paintings each of which reveals the spatial attitude that the artist, as an onlooker at a distance, had when she attempted to paint her vision of beauty in imagination. In other words, the three paintings can be regarded each as a replica of the fantastic city al-Shawwaf entertained in her creative mind as a possibility. However, what is often described as fantastic may still have elements of reality; but it is reality transformed in order to explore the possibilities that exist at least potentially in art. The first painting reveals a distant view of houses on a desert land, with leafless and branchless trees rising as high as the houses themselves. On the right side of the painting, below, there is a portion of a lake with a few rocks on the edge. The idea of a lake in the desert readily reminds one of an oasis, a phenomenon common on the vast sand stretches of the Arabian Peninsula.

The houses are in the form of traditional *tungas* usually found in urban Iraqi households until the twentieth century. Tungas were used to keep drinking water overnight. By the morning, the water would cool down and thus serve to quench the thirst of daytime life in a hot country. A tunga is traditionally a bottle-like curvilinear jar from the top surface of which a long neck is stretched. It ends uppermost with an opening for water to pour from. Along the neck, two small hoops are attached as handles, separately but symmetrically. The painting reveals a variety of ways in which these handles are positioned on the jars. That is, they are variously attached to the neck from the top surface upwards; they may begin at the surface and go up all the way to the uppermost drinking edge. In this case, they cease to be circular and will assume an oval shape. Now the painter has visualized the tunga as a house with windows and a main door on the frontal part of the jar. Since the tunga was originally made of clay- argillaceous earth- from the land of Mesopotamia

¹ <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/shawwaf.pdf>

and baked as pottery but without glazing, its functionality in Iraq was closely associated with the cultural background of Mesopotamia. In that background, we are often reminded, brick was first made. Brick and clay were among the key foundations of architectural achievements in Sumer, Babylon, and Ur.

To use the traditional Iraqi jar in a painting as a framework of a house-structure depicted, in water colours, by an artist who calls her painting a *Fantasy City* means, among other things, that the painter, in her exploration of artistic possibilities (form, dimension, impact, space, etc), has realized the potential for beauty that no longer exists or, conversely, is scattered as a relic from the past to which we are inattentive. That is to say, in Elaine Scarry's argument, it is beauty to which we are doing wrong precisely because we can no longer concretely see it in our surrounding and thus fail to find it beautiful. The painter here is an onlooker of beauty that exists sporadically in physical reality but also, and more significantly, persists in its own terms in the artist's recollective memory. This latter form of imaginary existence lends the artist its hand to bring what is lurking in imagination out into physical reality. Imaginary existence becomes possible through art. And, since it is the spatial attitude of the artist that determines for her how the painting would look at a distance, we, potential admirers of the finished work, are invited to approach the *Fantasy City* through the available perspective. Not only does this apply to detail, but also to colour and shade.

We see a great variety of colour. In the frontal left side of the painting (from our perspective), there is the desert sand wide and empty, stretching rather narrowly behind the lake to the right end of the painting. The sand colours are basically green, off-white, and light brown. These are the colours with which caravan travelers on the Arabic Peninsula are familiar. But these colours are not made independently distinct from one another, since imposition of self-contained visibility entails the existence of border-lines within the same plain. And there are no such border-lines in reality. Rather, as the painter's distant view shows, it is a blend of colours. Indeed, it is a harmonious blend that carries with it the implication of undisturbed existence enjoying its own serenity and, as it were, self-sustained beauty under (and in spite of) the scorching sun of the Peninsula. A

small patch of green on the far left below seems to suggest an exception to the overall desert landscape; perhaps it is the earth trying to breathe life into the sand, defiantly exposing itself to the sense of plainness and flatness dominating the surrounding. And there is a thin, long, brown line, looking like a groove and extending from one of the houses in the front, down to the left, but ending abruptly somewhere before the green patch; it looks as though it were drawn by some mysterious power towards the patch but, unable to sustain its vigour, was swallowed by the sand.

Then there is the lake- small, bounded, somewhat marginalized, but clearly discernible- calmly breathing out its existence into the surrounding sand. It does not appear in its entirety in the painting; still, the painter's skill is such that the portion we see enables colours (and shades of colours) to reinforce the significance of the lake and bring it back from the margin. The water appears to be a mixture of blue and violet, with shades of light blue and a hint of purple, all coalesced in a sense of oneness that distinguishes the lake- as a structural composite of the painting- conspicuously from the rest of the scenery. This stark visibility of the lake, for all the apparently reduced space that it occupies as a detail, throws into relief the very few rocks, salty-looking and off-whitish, situated at the nearest edge where water calmly touches the sand. In their rarity, they look as though they had been cast away from a great distance and, having by virtue of their smallness and scantiness been denied home elsewhere in the *Fantasy City*, landed at the edge of the lake whose calm and quiet was seen as a welcoming gesture. Water in the desert cannot be anything less than tolerant; otherwise, it will not cope.

Overlooking the lake and its sandy affiliate is the architecture of the city dwellings-the tungas. These appear in a variety of shapes, heights, and colours attesting, as they do, to the positions they occupy in the paintings in relation to the onlooker's eyes.

Some have an off-whitish apparel tinged with gray; others incline towards the beige and shades of green; those in the back are wholesomely red, crimson, and dark-looking. In both the near houses and those in the background there is a sense of unity realized through basic structures such as windows and window-panes, doors and entrances, neck-handles, and uppermost openings. Yet, the houses do not extend along a clear-cut,

straight border-line as is the case with houses in urban towns and cities. For in their establishment, the tunga houses follow the law of their own environment- the law that made them possible. In the Peninsula, where sand is the most conspicuous, dominant physical reality, nature defies mathematics and creates its own concept of symmetry.

Symmetry is articulated only through uneven distribution of what, otherwise, would be a violation of modernity and its illusion of man-made perfection. The architectural details of these dwellings are typically local; they point to a certain design to be found, until the second half of the twentieth century, in the oldest residential areas of Baghdad. They remind one of houses, very few to be sure, that have survived the sweeping hand of modern change and remained intact for tourists to pay homage to.

Now these dwellings are befriended by trees whose figure, however, has a gruesome and outworn appearance. In fact, they look too haggard and shadowy to approximate the concept, let alone the sense, of tree that we know of. One wonders why on earth such appalling and de-energized forms should show up in a painting that professes to be a fantasy city: they are so deformed, so mutilated, so amputated that we cannot, given our matter-of-course perception of imaginary beauty, even find them (or any such figures) worthy of attention! Are they a bunch of burnt-out trees dispersed recklessly over the painting with nothing to their name but shameful existence? Are they once-upon-a-time viable beings transformed later throughout the course of history to meet a Kafkaesque standard of postmodernity of life? Could they be, on the other hand, some vague frail-looking creatures passing as marginal but bearing in their supposed hollowness seeds of daemonic breath not born yet? So impossible is their presence in the painting that to prolong thinking of them would be to distract attention from all the other (major) details in the view. Yet, and as our admiration of the two other paintings will soon show, it is rather hasty to pass judgment now.

But what about the space where the houses reside? How does it look? It seems to be in a state of harmony with the structures and the landscape, displaying one main colour in the sky- purple- with shades of faint green, yellowish- beige, and light gray in the distant

horizon. Purple dominates the uppermost part of the painting so much so that one is invited to ask whether this has anything to do with the red and crimson high houses in the rear. For these houses, in their dark apparel and vertical posture, seem to have drawn the attention of space to themselves. They are engrossed in redness; they are self-contained and almost totally independent even of the ground on which they have been erected. Perhaps they defy subordination. Perhaps their presence exerts pressure on their immediate surrounding and, thus, rejects contrary colours. The space, in response to the call, suffers itself to be entangled in the world of red and crimson structures, creating a sense of harmony that is, however, not quite spontaneous or restful. It is harmony that seems to be enforced rather than resulting from joyful interaction. A close look at the sky will reveal to us some sort of motion too slow to be stark but also, and more significantly, too demanding and pervasive to be disabled. The sky appears to be saturated with what it cannot afford to harbour comfortably. It is pregnant with what exceeds its potential for patience, endurance, or tolerance. And it is articulating a kind of restless, though silent, discontent that cannot be denied motion.

On the other hand, and as soon as our eyes wander around, they are caught again by off-whitish houses in the front. How do they maintain their light-colouredness under a canopy of purple? Is it the influence of the lake, whose distance from the red and crimson structures in the rear has invited what amounts to a friendly smile of satisfaction at being distinct, that we might attribute to the light-coloured houses? In art, as in nature, space is granted to those details that best occupy space. And if the canopy is denied complete dominance in the *Fantasy City*, it is because what has caused the denial is well entrenched in its own space and capable of interaction with its immediate neighbours, rendering the influence of external forces fractional. It is this ability that a visual object has- to maintain its stature and poise against a less favourable background- that directs more attention to the object itself. The bleaker the details in the rear grow, the more articulate the beauty of the object becomes. We will want to see the distinction as it offers itself to us. We will voluntarily be involved in comparisons of details. Some of the details do not appear to be significant by themselves; however, as the gradually-growing bright apparel of the object draws our visual faculty to it, such minute details begin to acquire

position. It is position that invites our sensibility to re-form our impressions, as onlookers at a distance. What was, a little while ago, a bunch of simple, unsophisticated, and rather helplessly uniform windows in the light-coloured lake-friendly houses will now, given our increasing perceptivity, become features in a kind of facial image that defies banality. We will appreciate the tiny little patches of red in the lower right angle of each of the four panes of the window. These red patches *then* lend themselves to whatever interpretations our sensibility gives vent to. They can be seen as eyes engaged in a long meditative look at something in their own surrounding, something we might not at all be aware of: Is it the basically but variedly dark limestone-like formations in front of the house in the middle- the house of three windows? If so, what is it that attracts these red patches of eyes to the stones? For there must be something of real value in them to draw attention of the main door of the house as well: the door likewise has eyes and is engaged in the act of admiration. At once our eyes move in the direction of the stones and we start to look with wonder. Prolonging the look, that is, the act of admiration (for why shouldn't we, since these seemingly lifeless details- windows and door- are constantly engaged in the same act which we, disillusioned human beings, believe is exclusively ours!), the stones now begin to demand our visual, then, perceptive attention. And the question: What is the significance of the stones there? And, perhaps, another: What is to be searched for in the vagueness of the stone-dump?

Soon, however, raising our eyes for a break, we realize the presence of other houses nearby- houses that are variedly as light-coloured and off-whitish, thus *distinct*, as the one we have been admiring. At once we notice the absence of the tiny little red patches from most of the windows and doors. Even before allowing ourselves the pleasure of searching for an explanation of the said absence, we are spontaneously drawn to look at certain details- doors and windows- and approach them individually in their own terms. The process of admiration, needless to say, continues in what seems to be growing into a state of sensory openness (as opposed to closure) that engages, shortly afterwards, other details of colour, outline, shade, etc, distinguishing these red-patch-free and light-coloured houses. Questions pop out more readily than before, their rhythm accelerating, and we are hardly able to catch up with them. The need to pose questions becomes

increasingly attached to our ongoing aesthetic experience of admiration, so much so that the realm of questions turns out to be prone to expansion and, with it, the scope of our visual admiration. Our eyes, now wandering ceaselessly all over the painting, carry our mind's questions and inquiries. The questions proliferate and at once we are indulging in teleological queries about outline, figure, space, colour, and so on: breath-taking queries with the potential for generating an artistic discourse as viable as we wish it to be. I say 'wish', because then, at that moment of aesthetic engagement, it is in our hands to prolong the process of artistic appreciation as long as our power of imagination allows us to do. It is then that we, enthusiastically but knowingly, realize our potential for aesthetic discursivity: we will argue for details that we find beautiful, as well as for details we initially (and hastily) have ruled out as insignificant. Our appreciation of beautiful objects will spontaneously generate appreciation of the less beautiful. And all while we are standing at the same distance the painter has chosen for her spatial perspective.

Two

What happens, then, when we change perspective and revise location, as the painter does in the second painting? We immediately notice significant changes in detail, colour, and space. The first change to notice is, perhaps, that of colour. It is basically red with shades of orange, ocher, and scarlet. The sky is one whole wash of red, distinct and self-supported, extending from right to left in what seems to be a portion of a larger canopy, not seen in the painting, to which this patch intrinsically and firmly belongs. The sky looks so engrossed in that kind of overwhelming red that one is tempted, at the very first look, to attribute to the larger canopy a sense of stillness, dominating and dictating for everything inside the painting. The red colour and its variations extend all the way down to the houses and their neighbour-trees, traversing an empty space of the colour of dust. As soon as our eyes go down to the front, where the houses reside, we notice a conspicuous interplay of orange, brown, white, and gray overlapping but not undermining certain several details of structure and form. This drastic change of colour all over the painting draws attention to itself and compels us to pause and ask the following questions: What to make of this alteration? What does it suggest or serve to explain?

What meaning to infer from it? But such questions cannot be answered without an examination of the change in detail that the painting clearly displays and highlights.

The painter's eyes' camera, so to speak, has closed on the *Fantastic City* in this replica, narrowing the distance we had in the first. Here two of the front-houses-originally off-white, grayish, and beige- appear, not in their entirety, but from the uppermost drinking edge down to the doors. Their clay-baked structure has taken on a blend of red, ocher, orange, and brown, varying in intensity and stretch. The windows are utterly white, but the tiny little patches of red in the lower right angle of each of the four panes have disappeared. The windows are closed. But something new has found its way to the surface-area around and between some of these windows- small clusters of pale yellow-ocher, looking like grapes or, perhaps, whole seeds of nutmeg or peeled pecans.

Their location is rather odd. Further, they look like clusters without stems. The doors are generally gray but none of which appears complete in the painting. In fact, the one on the left reveals so little of its structure that, if it were not for the door of the right house (the house of three windows), we might have ruled it out as the result of an impatient stroke meant to close the entrance once and for all, just as a big rock closes a mysterious cave and cuts it off the rest of the world. These doors have not undergone significant changes. The right one, however, has a pair of small dark strokes of eyes- blank and lifeless and engaged in the same act of meditation we saw in the first replica. If anything, they look sad and downcast, with a tinge of stifled anger. And although there is a white, paned window on top of this door, it is firmly closed, with no signs of its being put to use.

This sense of closure seems to permeate the entire painting, as if the closed doors are intended to be emblematic of a general atmosphere of seclusion, unfriendliness, and absence of joy. The gruesome and haggard trees, now more daemonic and less frail-looking than they appeared to be in the first replica, partake of the general atmosphere.

They are closer to the eye than anything else in the painting and, in their closeness, tower above the two houses themselves. Indeed, they look as though they were ascending towards the red canopy, as though there were no limit to their ascension. Their darkness makes us restless: why do they look so ominous? Are they meant to be a visual herald of

some kind of danger, looming above and about to engulf everything in the *Fantasy City*? An uneasy feeling begins to creep into the skin, as we persist in sharing the painter's spatial perspective. We may well feel we are being denied access to the city. However, since our admiration of the first replica enabled us to realize some tenderness and harmony among the various elements of the picture, regardless of their size and significance, the sinister look of this red world will not put us off. We extend our gaze and attempt to see through the front houses and their appalling trees what exists in the rear: three or four house-structures, very small and almost featureless, sharing the same colours of those in the front and surrounded by weaker forms of the gruesome, bleak trees. All this is against a wash of pale aureolin that looks like a series of high mounds or low mountains. The space is pale; the horizon is overcome by a sense of impending dark.

What is it that we look for in this painting? If beauty takes place in the particular, as our admiration of the first painting has shown, then the particular details here do not yield themselves to a smooth interaction with the onlooker, since they are bound to be part of the unhappy and restless atmosphere. But then, should we attribute this dismal outlook of the painting to the impressions that the red colour and its affiliates have left upon us? In other words, are particulars in art influenced or, worse, overshadowed by aura caused by basic composites of a given artistic production? A painting does not exist without colours, just as music does not exist without tunes, poems without words, and sculpture without clay. Colours, tunes, words, and clay exist by themselves, yet they cannot produce meaning until they are enabled to do so by artists who, presumably aware of the potential of meaning-making these composites of production have, will use their power of imagination to articulate meaning. Art exists but does not make sense until it engages those who appreciate it in an aesthetic act of admiration- a gaze, smell, touch, etc. when art is produced, meaning becomes possible. The second replica of the *Fantasy City* is indeed an artistic production entitled to produce meaning. Yet, the painting is too pregnant with colour to allow certain specific details- trees, doors, and windows- to thrive independently and draw attention to themselves without being part of a predominant whole. Particulars are here governed by aura. So, what can we infer from this intricacy

and this attitude? Or, better, can we infer meaning from particulars without being caught up in a trap of colour impressions?

Scarry says: “Even if the alteration in perception were registered not as the sudden introduction of a negative sensation but as the disappearance of the positive sensory attributes the thing had when it was beautiful, the moment might be equally stark and highly pitched.” The blue and violet lake of the first replica, tolerating a handful of salt-like fugitive rocks, is totally absent from the second one. The green and light brown desert sand, harbouring the thin, grove-like but incomplete brown line, is likewise absent. No small patch of green, defiantly breathing life into the sand, is to be seen any more. No eyes meditating, no serenity, no feel for life; not even the sense of desert where, yet, possibilities of beauty exist. Instead, we have a space enclosed and a few details dominating the space. Disappearance of positive sensory appeals in the second replica must have had its initial impact on our response to, and interaction with, the overall view. The impact is so great that we feel restless at not being able to find beauty here in the same way we did in the first replica. We may even regret coming under the influence of particulars in the first and, accordingly, we may underestimate the total scene in the second. Why are we allowing this appalling sight to take over our sensory perception? What is it that we are doing wrong to, by failing to repeat the aesthetic experience of admiration we had?

The red colour is often suggestive of, among other things, a burning desire for some unattained goal, an eager aspiration to do or obtain what has hitherto been denied, or an intense longing for the articulation of hope that is possible but is stifled or besieged.

The city is a *Fantasy City*; it is imagined and visualized in a setting (the desert) that often poses challenges to life and human existence. The first replica revealed to us the perspective within which the city was potentially viable. But it was a distinct perspective. Revising her location, the painter got close enough to see (and paint) a different reality. In each of the two replicas she tried to translate a three-dimensional existence into the two dimensions offered by a flat piece of paper. She wanted to capture beauty that existed only as tiny and minute details but that offered itself to her imagination in all its

splendour, inviting her to take the challenge and seize the moment. But in the second replica, where she changed perspective enormously, the challenge was greater. The brush went on registering what the burning desire had dictated. But how can we find a clue to explain the longing? The beauty of the first aesthetic experience could not have given way entirely to bleak and dismal reality. There must be something in the new experience that resists marginalization, some *particular* that is so viable that, for all the discouraging atmosphere, has kept itself intact, perhaps by transforming itself temporarily into an apparently insignificant detail. We stare again, now more carefully than before, knowing that staring, as Scarry reminds us, “is a version of the wish to create.” A closer look at the front part of the painting will then offer the clue: the small clusters of pale yellow ocher hanging, with great intent and resolve, on the walls between the closed windows. Those grapes, those seeds of nutmeg, are *the* particular that beauty takes place in and through which it resists oblivion. As we prolong the gaze, we begin to see how the beauty of the first aesthetic experience has relentlessly survived there, only to prepare us for an ultimate version of beauty that is yet to be born.

Restlessness subsides as the moment of release draws near. There is no need to wrestle with counter impressions anymore; they existed as part of the total aesthetic experience to which our perception has been subjected so far. As soon as we turn our eyes to the third replica, we recognize where the transformation has occurred: in the trees. Beauty was sustained in a particular.

Three

The painter’s eye’s camera has now got as close to the object of admiration as it could, revealing to us changes no less radical than those it revealed in the second replica. Again the changes are in detail, colour, and space. The landscape is largely a wash of light colours- Prussian blue, French ultramarine, light gray, and white all mixed to reflect an open horizon and spacious sky. This background occupies the painting almost entirely and lends to it a lively touch, implying that the space is given over to life and the sky is the limit. A feeling of serenity and delight spreads all over, tickling the relaxed air into an innocent giggle and breathing incense into a desert that now appears as a portion of a

land, a poor excuse for earth, almost marginalized so that it serves only as a ground for the tunga-structures and the trees. The ground is painted yellow with faint white and touches of aureolin. It does not extend long; with the opening horizon, it seems to be too frail to gain significance. There is even a clear border-line between the farthest end of the desert and the horizon, limiting the prospects of sand stretches in the painting.

From that insignificant desert land, one tunga-house rises. It is the house of three windows. The house reveals less than it did in the second replica: the drinking-edge, neck, handles, down to a point where the second half of the lower windows does not appear. Although the windows are closed, they are not dull white. Rather, they have shades of permanent rose and light scarlet, made more impressive by contrast with a mixture of faint yellow and bluish white scattered on the clay structure around the windows. The radical change in colour has now reached the hoops and made them gleam with variegated hues: violet, olive, beige, hazel, light gray. A feel of lurid glow seems to emanate from the lively interplay of hues on the tunga-house, inviting a long and examining look. The longer the gaze, the more radiating the tunga is. We linger in admiration, our eyes incessantly moving from one particular to another in what seems to be developing into an endless survey. We follow the white-gray blend as it climbs up towards the edge, creating a soft halo around the neck, before reaching its destination, only to yield the uppermost periphery to a ring of charcoal colour and yellow ocher.

Once we reach the edge, we realize how far we have gone in admiring the playfully glaring tunga, so far that we nearly forgot the most obvious clue of transformation. The once-upon-a-time demonic creatures have turned to blooming trees, branching and ready to leaf. Two trees have so far bloomed, rising far higher than the tunga-house, towering above everything in the landscape, and suggesting that their upward movement is not meant to stop. Their trunks are as real as those we see in a natural world untainted by the civilization of cement. Their colour is basically olive and dark gray, repainted with layers of light blue, hazel, and yellow ocher. Short streaks of glowing green have forced their way up, from the point where branching begins, infiltrating the entangled net of boughs, and warmly disturbing the virgin white of space. Boughs and twigs are intertwined in an

intimate cuddle of love, briskly dancing in a friendly air to rhythms of eternal joy. The dance persists and we are moved to join the twigs in play. The sky above seems to be drawn to the scene of sublunary delight. The white, the blue, and ultramarine conspire to keep the canopy as open as they can. Perceiving beauty thus at large, we get involved in a quest for life. The vivacious trees, the object of the gaze, become partners in the quest, in this moment of reciprocal impact, in this sensory dialogue. Oh, yes, “the moment of perceiving something beautiful confers on the perceiver the gift of life,” just as “the moment of perceiving beauty also confers on the object the gift of life.”