

The Man, The Myth – Olivia, Year 10, VIC

Giovanni Amadei was a man of three minds. He was not some misunderstood comic book hero - though he may have fancied himself as such in his youth, a childhood spent stealing the centrefold of his neighbour's newspapers, watching *L'Uomo Mascherato* defeat pirates in skintight lycra. Nor was he one of those strange mutants like in his aunt's pulp novels from the corner store, despite growing up in Sessa Aurunca, a block away from the Garigliano Nuclear Plant.

The first of his minds existed where minds ought to be. It held the least of his favour, compressed as it was against the hard bone of his skull. As a boy, he would wake some days unable to move, pain splintering across his temple and creeping through his jaw.

By nine, his thoughts had outgrown the confines of that space, and so the loose neurons spilled into his veins, metastasized to his lungs, his legs, his feet. Every part of his body seemed to have a mind of its own: his heart led him to the dance hall, while his tongue flailed, trying to pull the boy behind it to the Saturday markets, piled with painted-scale trout. (Until noon, the colour was still wet; glistening.)

When he was very young, he slit his palm on a butcher's knife trying to cleave a steak, and ever after it had craved more of his blood. At twelve the blade took his left index finger, down to the third knuckle. Even separated, the appendage jerked and spasmed, slid to the unreachable gap between the bench and wall, perhaps to start a life of his own.

Gio had seen the same thing in his nonna's kitchen; an octopus' jellied tendril that suckled itself to her arm, dragged itself across folds of skin to reach her neck and find vengeance. It drew back to strike, and she caught it in her teeth.

Months later, he would feel the vibrato of tapping hands echo across the floorboards. He would imagine his finger having birthed children; twenty sons fused together, branching from a common bulb like a Nile-lily sphere. Or maybe a brood of little half-moon nails, all curled in on themselves and translucent, as embryonic daughters.

His third mind was lost. He had never seen it, but knew that it must exist, for his dreams returned it to him in snatches. It gifted him the scent of strawberries, the colour of the moon, facsimiles of women dancing, of grand oak tables bowed with fish.

Giovanni Amadei's third mind had met God. It had been knocked free from his body when he was a boy, playing in the waves, and been swept away. It had washed up on the shores of Heaven, and diffused universal truths, radiated reflections of utopia, back across the ocean. So that Giovanni might catch their scent; follow them.

At seventeen, he left Sessa Aurunca to study at La Sapienza in Rome.

At twenty, he set out on a sailing ship bound for the Beaufort Sea. They hauled up strange creatures from the deep - anglerfish and blacktip sharks and gilthead breams and alien things with too many eyes. Once, a giant squid with piles of flesh that spilled over the deck, horrific in its own abundance. Amadei kept a journal of his adventures, filled with breathless notes, fervent poetry, sketches of beasts and women and horizons, the lines so humming as to be alive. Every page was scrawled with the passion of a madman; or a lover.

He published it upon his return: Notes from the Edge of the Earth. His chronicle, from the unfinished corner of Creation. He wrote of his feats and sold them as dreams, at every paperstand from New York to Paris.

Another pilgrimage, to Corsica now. Again, not Heaven. But still something transcendently beautiful - enough that sometimes, Giovanni was not able to tell the difference between sleep and wakefulness. (Was he looking into a mother-of-pearl, or the swirling eddies of a dream?)

He navigated to Cappadocia, then Senegal. Ulusaba and Oman.

When he was thirty, he became the first man to summit Everest. They say that he was blinded by the snow and deafened by the wind, rendered altogether senseless by the numbing that rose up his fingers until it was as if he were moving through his own grey mindscape. But still, he climbed.

Tahiti came next. After that, Argentina. Galapagos and Morocco to finish this thaw.

At forty, he discovered the skeleton of some hulking monster in a far-north cave, a remnant from pre-history. It was all scales and claws and great leather wings. There was another creature, smaller, coiled like a matryoshka doll in its belly. Surely, he said, this was Typhon; born of Earth and The Abyss. Or Typha - overwrought daughter, not beastly son. The mother-giant was sent to La Specola in Florence, to lie beside waxwork models and blown-glass flowers and the bodies of other fallen women. The infant, he puzzled together and stood in his own drawing room, away from prying eyes. The serpent was a cautionary tale of great power and a great fall. Children, he said, should just be children, quite apart from any great allegory about humankind.

Puerto Rico, Tayrona, Koh Rong Samloem, the vast Yucatan.

When he was sixty, he was swallowed by a whale; the same one that ate Jonah, Captain Ahab, Pinnochio, Lucian of Samosata. The same one that ate Hercules. He was trapped inside the hollow of its throat for five days, those great men (and Pinnochio) staring back at him, immortalised in the ambergris. He said that he gnawed at the pulp until they were freed, The six of them strung their arms together and steeled themselves against the waves. After hours storm-beaten, they washed up on an island shore, glittering from the salt of the sea. They sat together at a felled Otaheite tree and shared wisdom. For one night, all could be knights at their round trunk-table, before they each returned to their own stories. *From Inside Leviathan* has Aramaic stanzas and the wisdom of Zeus.

That book had an afterward, written in the hospital after doctors had unsalted his blood and stitched close the gills in his neck. (Coral had clawed back evolution to display them.) Next, he promised, he would find Atlantis.

He will not be forgotten.

Amadei, Giovanni
1937-2023

Giovanni Amadei passed away peacefully in his sleep on the evening of the 12th of May. He neither seized nor foamed, as his family had been promised. His end was both quieter than expected, and far more gentle than he deserved.

One daughter was present at the end. She wishes it to be known that there was no struggle. It was not honourable.

He fathered four children that we know of, though there were no doubt more. He was a father to none of them.

Luca, who was a bastard, saw him once, at his book signing in the Biblioteca Angelica. Security escorted him out. They were not gentle.

Matteo, who was not a bastard, says that his father was a name his mother cried out in her sleep. That is all.

Maria - the daughter who watched him die - says that he was the reason that she never had children. Whether her fear was that she would turn into her father, or they would, she did not say.

It is his family's hope that, in his absence, they can begin to heal.

He will not be missed.