

# The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: The end of hope, initiation of consciousness

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by  
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Patrick Henry (1736-1799), one of the Founding Fathers of the USA once said:  
*It is natural for man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts... For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth, to know the worst, and to provide for it.*

In this essay I want to take this thought further. What painful truth does hope blind us to and what will it take to bring hope to an end and so open our eyes to this painful truth?

A movie came out recently, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, which shows in unsparing detail what that painful truth is and what kind of initiation will bring an end to hope and open us up sufficiently to be transformed by that truth. First, let's hear the dialogue that is crucial to my argument here. The journalist, Mikael Blomkvist (MB) is captured by serial killer Martin Vanger (MV) who takes him to a sound proof cellar with the intent to hang the journalist:

**MV:** *Scream as much as you can. Do you think anyone can hear you?*

*We both know how it is going to end for you.*

**MB:** *Why?*

**MV:** *Why what?*

**MB:** *All of this (the apparatus, the murders, rapes, tortures . . .)*

**MV:** *Why not? I'm doing what every man dreams of. I take what I want.*

**MB:** *How many women after the first?*

**MV:** *I don't know. I have lost count. I had a girl in that cage when we were dining upstairs. Those kinds of women disappear all the time. Nobody misses them. Whores. Immigrants.*

**MB:** *What do you do with them? What about the references (to race, religion), the mutilations.*

*(MV places a noose around MB's neck, loosely.)*

**MV:** *That was my father's project. He mixed his hobby with race and religion. But it was a mistake. You shouldn't leave the bodies behind. I take them for a trip in my boat and I drop them into the sea. Marie was my first.*

**MB:** *'64. You were sixteen*

**MV:** *It was Dad, Gottfried, who taught me how to strangle her.*

**MB:** *It's sick.*

**MV:** *It's mainly for the sex. When I put them down its only a logical consequence of the rape. You can't leave any witnesses. Even though I have to admit. I love seeing their disappointment.*

**MB:** *Disappointment?*

**MV:** *When they realize they'll die. It doesn't really fit into their scheme of things. They always think I'll show them mercy. It's a fantastic moment when they realize they are not getting away. When their eyes switch off and die. You'll experience that yourself.*

**MB:** *And your sister? What did it feel like when your sister's eyes died.*

**MV:** *Harriett disappeared.*

**MB:** *You want me to believe that.*

**MV:** *Believe what the hell you want to. I would have enjoyed killing her but she disappeared. Just like you'll disappear. Do you want some water?*

**MB:** *Yes please... Thanks. (MV gently gives him a sip of water)*

**MV:** *You see, you're just like everybody else. It only takes a simple human gesture to ignite the small hope that I might let you go after all. Right? (pulls the noose tight). Take it easy. It'll be quick.*

It's a gruelling scene but one that is quite illuminating in regards to the process of ending hope and opening the eyes to a painful truth. So let's "unpack" the dialogue a bit.

Martin Vanger is a serial killer in the plot but as a figure of the artistic imagination, expressing a truth about our times he is much more. He refers to his grisly deeds as a *hobby* in which he can take what he wants, i.e. satisfy every possible dark desire, without consequence. He is thus an ultimate figure of *leisure time*, time in which no responsibility exists. This time is a recent invention and is now institutionalized, supported with billions of dollars across the world: entertainment, tourism, mass sporting events, internet games and virtual reality etc. Vanger, as an ultimate symbol of this time has successfully escaped the bonds of necessity in existence. He maintains his status as a free floating consciousness by making sure there are no witnesses to his cruelty. He kills and carefully disposes of the dead bodies. As he says it is purely a matter of logic. In this way he logically separates deed from consequence, which is the logical structure of leisure or "free" time today.

On the human level, Vanger is a sadist, torturer and murderer and he sets about bringing an end to Blomkvist's life the same way as his other victims but the richness and complexity of

the sparse dialogue reveals much more going on than the human level. We are being shown what an unmitigated attack on hope looks like and from what quarter it will come. Vanger relentlessly tells Blomqvist how each victim, in spite of his sadistic sexual attacks, still holds out a morsel of hope that he will release them. He gets a special delight in watching the disappointment as the knowledge, yes *knowledge*, finally dawns that there is no way out, no escape! The victims are literally bound by ropes but the more fundamental bindings are those of the logic of their situation ("no witnesses") that become obvious when hope is finally abandoned.

Vanger sets about delivering the same message to Blomqvist. He first arouses hope by offering a small glass of water, almost tenderly, without malice and then when Blomqvist is refreshed, he delivers the enlightening teaching, "You see, you're just like everybody else. It only takes a simple human gesture to ignite the small hope that I might let you go after all. Right?" Vanger then tightens the noose and leaves Blomqvist to suffocate, "take it easy. It'll be quick."

Although this a scene of "no exit", in the film a rescue occurs at the hands of the girl and the evil one is dispatched. The girl herself is a very interesting figure of the imagination too. In our collective desire to be "free", i.e. to be absolved from the necessities of existence, we tend to praise this figure (in the image of hacker who can do anything, including making herself very rich) as an embodiment of that very freedom that we and indeed the serial killer enjoy. We forget that she too is a monster – remember the scene in which she douses her father, yes violent father, and lights him up like a candle? She also freely torments her sadistic probation officer, employing a rather sadistic imagination herself, making sure, as does the serial killer, that she avoids any consequences of her own incredibly cruel actions. She also lives without hope and teaches the probation officer to do the same, as she binds him to necessity, carving her justice into his body, just as the serial killer does to his victims.

Both the girl and the serial killer are therefore alternate figures of that structure of consciousness that lives in leisure time, time that is absolved of responsibilities, or the necessities that come inevitably with existence. It does no good to praise one and condemn the other. Rather, as an art work we can ask what is the soul aspect? What is the soul movement in this film? From what I have said so far I think we can see that the soul is interested in exploring the kind of initiation that is necessary to bring hope to an end so that we can directly face, with no escape possible, our present reality in which subjectivity lives in leisure or "free" time, and be initiated by that same present reality.

How can these figures be images of an initiatory process?

Again turning to the movie we can see how the girl carves "I am a rapist" into the chest of the probation officer. He finally got it! Something got through to him as objective knowledge! Vanger too impresses upon his victims the futility of hope. Disappointment is followed by a dawning knowledge, knowledge that there is *no way out*. Hope won't do it. Hope won't get through because our "free" egos are now pretty well insulated from life. We live in leisure time within which as I said we can choose "freely" without consequence because this freedom is only an abstraction, having the same logical status as wishful thinking. But initiation *does* get through! Initiation is a process in which a subjectivity *other* than the ego gets through, makes an impression, leaves a scar for life (this is the meaning of scarification rituals of the past), and transforms consciousness.

It seems to me that this movie is a vehicle for expressing a soul movement in which the "free" ego can be initiated into the *truth* of the present structure of consciousness in which deed is *logically* separated and dissociated from consequence. While we dissociate deed from consequence, we generate for the first time in history, leisure time within in which we "rule the universe". The serial killer is merely a literalized figure of what the "free" ego does every day: video games, entertainment, leisure pursuits, internet activities, holidays in which we behave in ways we could not possibly do at home – too many to count. Outside this leisure time, we remain *objectively* totally ruled and dominated by the economy, employment, illnesses, fragmented relationships etc. again too many to count. Our freedoms and our necessities are dissociated from each other.

This structure of consciousness will work its will upon us until all hope is gone and its reality becomes our truth (it *is* and we *know* it to be so!). This will happen as we are attacked or penetrated by the very logic of the "free" ego that we are today. What we *are* must first appear to us as an *other*, impervious to hope and beyond emotion, human feeling etc. ruled only by its own logic. At first, disappointment, emerging from which comes a dawning knowledge which will inaugurate the "death" of that structure of consciousness as it fulfils its moment. What is this dawning knowledge?

When we are assailed by the "free" ego as *other* and its logical constitution (dissociation between deed and consequence, or freedom and necessity), and all hope is gone, it will begin to dawn on us that such freedom in fact carries its own necessity, and its deeds contain their own consequences and have done so all along. Our "free" leisure time will inevitably be seen to be a prison of necessity and our free leisure pursuits will be seen to be consequential after all. It will become obvious that we have not really escaped necessity or the consequences of our freedom at all. When this realization comes home, the "free" ego will die and another structure of consciousness will emerge, but best not to get ahead of ourselves here...

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