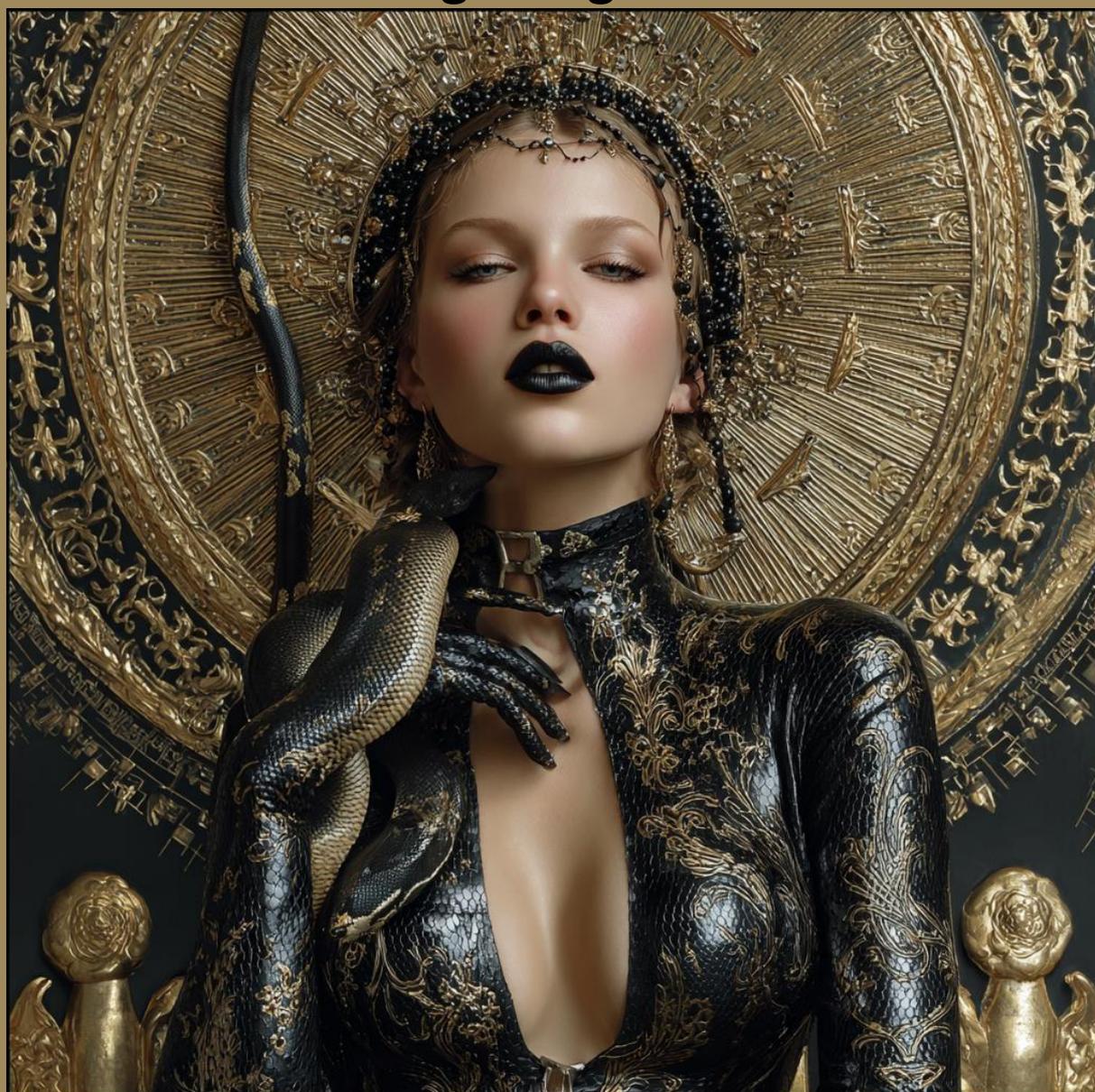


## Dancing along the stars



An essay by: The.Goth.Teacher

I must admit that I am addicted. It is not a physical substance that I crave, but sound, music. Sensually woven, preferably live. If necessary, a good set in a club will do. Music, as anyone who knows me will realise, is a constant companion and elixir of life. One that I want to savour at any time and that carries me when the world fails. I would spend an eternity in the hereafter with music.

The narrator of a song by the band *Grausame Töchter* is also addicted to eternity. As the penultimate song in the 2021 song cycle, 'Süchtig nach Ewigkeit'<sup>1</sup> (Addicted to Eternity) appears as an ironic antonym to the following 'Omega', which simultaneously symbolises the end, as it tells of how the Earth will be swallowed up by the sun. Thus, at least in the album, everything comes to an end. At the same time, the title of the album refers to a new beginning, because all striving follows cyclical movements.

In terms of both sound and content, the piece follows two different strands, one spherical-spiritual and one uncompromisingly physical. The lyrical ego is at the centre of a narrative that revolves around the two conflicting yet complementary elements of reason and emotion, with intellect being contrasted with love. The piece begins with the narrator wanting to lose his mind (*den Verstand verlier'n*) and listen to his instincts (*Triebe hör'n*). The first verse also focuses on leaving the path prescribed by society. Sexual desire in particular is something that remains taboo and therefore represents a break with the conventions of an otherwise rather bigoted society.

Accordingly, the consequence is what is described in the last verse of the first stanza: madness. While the protagonist of the song romanticises and welcomes madness, society rejects dark fantasies (*dunkle Fantasien*) as well as openly lived sexuality, especially when it does not correspond to the tranquil normativity in which life is supposedly so good. But the ego wants to break free from this and, like a snake, attain the knowledge of eternity.

Beyond the pure text level, the piece only unfolds its power when linked to the music video<sup>2</sup>. Although the text, in combination with the quietly creeping sound, already allows one to immerse oneself in the world of a life cycle, it would be a mistake not to listen to the narrative at least once in its cinematic adaptation. For me, the visual power of the video is inseparable from the understanding of this piece.

Rat and snake, bathed in bloody red, complement the contrast between guitar and violin, death and permanence. A glittering golden dress contrasts with a blood-smeared mouth. Bright stars make the figures around Aranea forget the whole world. While the guitar player<sup>3</sup> falls victim to the snake, the kiss remains, perhaps becoming eternal – just like the violin playing. Ultimately, this also raises the question of whether Vermeer's symbolism of the violin had an influence on its use in the piece,

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent quotations are taken from: Grausame Töchter: 'Süchtig nach Ewigkeit'. In: *Zyklus* (2021), Dark Dimensions.

<sup>2</sup> I watch the videos of this band's songs without any critical eye and find almost all of them fantastically well done. I hope you'll forgive me for once for being blind to their flaws.

<sup>3</sup> Portrayed by Sonja Firker in the video.

whether the violin also represents the *ewig Weibliche*<sup>4</sup> or remains another reference to the soul, i.e. to emotion. Viewed in isolation, the violin becomes part of the narrative about the rat and the snake, but in the broader context of other pieces, the intermediality opens up to an erotic variation, since eroticism always carries with it a sense of infinity.

The snake, on the other hand, invites an intertextual comparison, as it has a demonic quality in Christian tradition. In the video, it offers a gateway to eternity, to the transcendental. The afterlife that is reached in this way is reminiscent of a French-language work: there, it is the snake that can take the protagonist further than a ship, namely back to the place the little prince longs to return to. Parallel to the song, then, the clichéd 'mortal shell' must first fall away before infinity can open up. Perhaps the bright stars that become visible in the second verse are simply images of the distant planet of longing – we all share Saint-Exupéry's places of longing with the protagonist, or rather the longing to finally be able to overcome space and time (*überwinden endlich Raum und Zeit*).

However, the song would not be part of the album *Zyklus* if this overcoming of space and time were not a bloody one. For then the bright stars (*hellen Sterne*) are not a romanticised distant world to be travelled to, but quite mundanely an immense drop in blood pressure. This is exemplified in the film adaptation by the guitarist, who gradually dies during the course of the piece, while the violin begins to dominate.

The rat becomes a victim of this dominance, parallel to the guitarist, who is portrayed in the video by Victoria Rose, dying curled up and in pain. What is interesting about the symbolism here is that although the rat usually represents darkness and destruction, here it itself becomes a victim – only in harmony with the idea that, similar to *Le Petit Prince*<sup>5</sup>, death enables the journey into the distance, into infinity, the death of the rat is a way to enter eternity and thus also to leave the earthly realm. In the video, only the music reminds us of the guitarist; her body vanishes.

Ultimately, however, the world is just a dream (*die Welt ist nur ein Traum*). This, in turn, came together to form an image that is reflected many times over in various art forms: film series such as *The Matrix* or games such as *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* or *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey* also play with the idea that countless worlds are just illusions, while literary works question perception as a whole – Nathanael's *Sandman* is an expression of his deepest fear or a real figure of terror, depending on the perspective the reader is inclined to take. Murakami's *City and its Uncertain Walls* wall may only exist in the protagonist's imagination.

The song 'Süchtig nach Ewigkeit' follows in this tradition, not only juxtaposing and merging reason and emotion, but also combining physicality and spirituality, addiction and eternity in its very title. From a cultural perspective, these two poles usually represent opposing concepts: addiction as incapacity contrasts with the pursuit of eternity. The ideas that space and time set limits on eternity, but that

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<sup>4</sup> Grausame Töchter: «Tor zur Hölle». In: Vagina Dentata (2016), Dark Dimensions.

<sup>5</sup> De Saint-Exupéry: *Le Petit Prince*. Gallimard: 1999. The novel was published in 1943 when the author was in the exile.

eternity can only be accepted if the world and the universe have neither beginning nor end, are also irreconcilably opposed. In order to master these categories, we must leave reason<sup>6</sup> behind us so *dass Schranken fallen*.

As individuals, however, we are, to a certain extent, incapable of comprehending infinity in all its facets without limitation. Every category of time can only arise through differentiation from another, but our minds are unable to classify eternity, 'for it transcends all the powers of human reason'<sup>7</sup> and this inability means that we cannot experience infinity while we are fully conscious. The play resolves this conflict when the lyrical narrator says: '*Zu sterben sind wir jederzeit bereit.*' Freedom is therefore only possible when we leave reason and our bodies behind. Looking at the scene immediately after the realisation that the world is only a dream, the nakedness described there can also be a throwback to the pre-conventional state, i.e. to a state in which every human being is not yet shaped by all the social entanglements that ultimately lead us to (have to) place reason at the centre of our being instead of love.

So, while the violin continues to play, I lose myself in the music once again. It is my elixir of life, my addiction and my refuge in equal measure. Eternity is also a structure that remains distant to me if I explore these paths too intensely - incomprehensible and, precisely because of this, so full of appeal. Whether I choose the path of the rat or the snake - what worlds await us all beyond the barriers - when we are ready to enter the path? I hesitate, but I have long since made my decision.

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<sup>6</sup> In his preface to the second edition of *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* (1787), Immanuel Kant states that this work will go into battle with errors: [...] *quum revera sit infiniti erroris finis et terminus legitimus* (while in reality it is the end and the legitimate end of an infinite error - meaning the creation of the work). (quoted from: Kant, Immanuel: *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*. Anaconda: Munich: 2011)

<sup>7</sup> Kant, Immanuel: *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*. Anaconda: Munich: 2011, 19.