

## PSYCHOMARE: AN INWARD VENTURE

by

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This reflective essay constitutes an attempt to track down in detail the writing process for my poem “Psychomare.” Before I depart into the multifarious formal and thematic aspects of “Psychomare”, it is only proper to start from the title and subsequently move to the craftsmanship. Etymologically, the word “psychomare” constitutes, as far as I know, a neologism. The morpheme “psych”<sup>1</sup> comes from the Greek /psychē/, which translates to soul, while “mare”<sup>2</sup> finds its origins in the Serbo-Croatian word “mora,” that is nightmare, which influenced Middle English. Hence, the title “Psychomare” could be translated as the “nightmare of the soul,” which predisposes the reader to a certain negatively loaded psychological experience.

Why did I choose this title, though? To answer this question, I will borrow William Wordsworth’s famous quote on poetry as “[a] spontaneous overflow of feelings [which] takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (*Poetry Foundation*). Strange as it may sound, as a writer, I find tranquility during workout—usually while doing aerobics and stretching exercises, such as yoga—as this is one of those moments in my daily routine that I devote to my mental and spiritual health. It is usually this moment when lines or even whole poems cross my mind naturally. Consequently, the title of the poem crossed my mind while I was exercising under the iridescent sunlight of a July afternoon without me consciously trying to come up with a title for my poem. As the current *Echoes* issue addresses “Health,” I needed to pen a poem that deals with health issues. An “overflow of emotions” overwhelmed me as I drew on recent traumatic personal experiences that had been haunting me. Therefore, I preoccupied myself with a fraught inner state that allowed the title to reveal itself.

There are various definitions of health. However, the aspect of health most profoundly glimpsing in “Psychomare” is “a state of balance; an equilibrium that an individual has established within oneself and between oneself and one’s social and physical environment” (Sartorius). As I wrote above, training helps me connect to the core of my being. What happens, though, when there is disconnection between the individual and the social and physical conditions they are living in? This is exactly what “Psychomare” illuminates; it sheds light on the “overflow of emotions” that pour out of the poem and attempts to capture a specific traumatic psychological moment. “Psychomare” functions as a psychological and emotional outlet for the personal anxieties, traumas and agitations that are touched upon in the poem.

However, as Sylvia Plath wittingly asserted in a 1962 interview with Peter Orr regarding her writing process and her inspiration, “personal experience is very important, but it certainly shouldn’t be a kind of shut-box and mirror looking, narcissistic experience” (Orr 169). This quote found its match when, in her essay “Context,” included in her prose book *Johnny Panic and the Bible of dreams: short stories, prose, and diary excerpts*, she claimed that personal experiences should be treated as “deflections [of] the real issues of our time” (Plath 64). In this sense, through “Psychomare,” I did not intend to simply present personal psychological malaise by referencing suicidal thoughts, depression, drug consumption, etc. On the contrary,

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<sup>1</sup> The definition and origin of “psych” was drawn from the online dictionary “Merriam-Webster.”

<sup>2</sup> The definition and origin of “mare” was taken from the online dictionary “Merriam-Webster.”

by bringing my own psychological and emotional uneasiness to the forefront, I intend to manifest the psychological repercussions when the balance between oneself and their social and physical conditions is disturbed. Depression and its “side-effects,” such as drug consumption and, sometimes, suicidal thoughts, are persistent taboo issues which need to be addressed promptly and explicitly. As a result, by bringing myself into the vulnerable state of presenting my trauma(s) openly, I allow the reader(s) to tip toe in my psyche and muster strength from my own exposure.

The American movement of Confessional poetry,<sup>3</sup> its formal principles in particular, is what inspired me to weave “Psychomare.” More specifically, I borrowed Plath’s version of “confessional writing” which entails “objectify[ing] [one’s self], ritualiz[ing] [one’s] fears [and] manipulat[ing one’s] own terrors” (Uroff 112). The three aforementioned techniques are evident in “Psychomare” in the following trajectory: the objectification of one’s self brings the person in suffering to the forefront. Then, the personal anxieties are depicted in a ritualized manner—that is, in a gradual and detailed style that builds up the psychological uneasiness from beginning to end. Finally, the manipulation of the psychological malaise is explained in that the writer transforms their own traumas into words and creates a visual representation of their pains.

Moreover, a quick look at the poem reveals my attempt at experimenting with color theory. In its entirety, the poem oscillates mainly between black and white. Though it is written primarily in white, splashes of vivid colors such as red, green, blue, orange, etc. are incorporated, while the background remains light black throughout. My intention is to create a ‘black and white’ visual experience to substantiate the sentimentality of my words. Black is considered “[the] absence of color” and subsequently absence of light, while white is considered the presence of all colors, because it is the “quintessence of light” (Faber 113, 53). In addition, black is seen as “the absence of stimulation” (184). Since white and black are regarded as opposites, black’s lack of stimulation could be a metaphor for lack of motion, which in turn could symbolize emotional or psychological stagnation, as black “connotes [feelings such as] despair” (170). In this sense, as black appears to be the background color of the white typewriting, the white counterpart, signifying “light,” positive emotions, almost feels like it is struggling to impose its existence against the black nebula. Therefore, my “white” words function as my weapon against the negative psychological state deriving from the “black” background.

Before bringing the journey of this reflection to an end, it is essential that I comment on the element of “intertextuality” that is evident in my poem. Snyman defines “intertextuality” as an embodiment of “*textual influence*” which involves a “dialogue of voices . . . with each text [being] the reflection of other texts” (427). In the case of “Psychomare”, the voices that echo in my poem are Lana Del Rey’s and Sylvia Plath’s. To write my poem, I borrowed lines from writings both from Lana Del Rey and Sylvia Plath. Plath’s influence on my writing has already been explained up to a certain point. However, I do need to highlight that Plath’s writing deals with traumatic issues and psychological discomforts such as depression. Her influence joins hands with Lana Del Rey’s song(s) and poem(s) that were drawn from Del Rey’s latest album “Norman Fucking Rockwell” as well as her upcoming poetry collection *Violet Bent Backwards Over The Grass*. In the upcoming December issue of *Q Magazine*,

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Academy of American Poets, “Confessional Poetry” “emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell [and] Sylvia Plath.” This style of poetry dealt with “private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, depression and relationships were addressed in this type of poetry, often in an autobiographical manner.” (A Brief Guide to Confessional Poetry).

Lana Del Rey was praised for her songwriting skills in her latest writings by noting her as “one of the truly great American songwriters of the age, perhaps the only one who has managed to distill this decade across an entire album [because of her] galaxy brain of emotional intelligence and cultural insight” (Kessler 49). Thus, Lana Del Rey raises cultural questions about the state of human condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following up on their idiosyncratic language and bold social probe, my voice forges solidarity with these artists, as it is them who have prepared the ground for my personal, psychological, and poetic adventure.

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