



Source: Greg Myre, ' Hamas calls cease-fire after 3 days of attacks', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 26/09/05.

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Writer/s: Cynthia Troup

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(There are letters that should not have been written: the angry retorts, the letters tightly scrawled under a lamp after a night of haunting by insults and blame. There are letters not written often enough: the concise, persuasive letters of protest and opinion to world leaders, politicians, councillors, newspapers. There are letters not written, and letters not yet written.)

The sound was cut, the light —

Luce believed in intuition. He wrote to me about intuition. And about Romanticism, Goethe, William Blake, and the mysticism of artists like Rimbaud or Moreau. He also believed in the idea of destiny. He referred to this once when recommending that I see the movie *Dead Man* with Johnny Depp.

The Luce's silence is deafening so I like speaking of Luce and his friends come in my home sometimes for speaking, they are very nice.

It's strange that Madame Merlet writes of Luce in terms of hearing—I think of him in terms of sight. That is, in terms of a nervous pleasure in things seen. This pleasure both expressed and safeguarded a solemn sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of whatever he saw, glimpsed, observed. Luce was from Rennes in France, and already an artist. We were enrolled in a month-long Summer course at the Institute for Art and Restoration in Florence.

There were eighteen in the class, and at least half were Italian students from Torino or Milano just out of school, who wanted to live away from home during the August holidays. Oh, and practice their drawing. We weren't the only foreigners, *stranieri*, in that particular course, but we shared the fact of having very little spending money. I had arranged to stay cheaply some way out of Florence, a long bus ride to the suburbs. My landlady was a chain-smoker, and padlocked her telephone.

Luce had a room closer to the *centro storico*, but his first-floor window opened directly over the railway line. He kept the shutters closed against the din of the passing trains and traffic at the level crossing. After two days he could describe all the chinks in the shutters, and the interior patterns they made of the afternoon sun on the plaster walls.

Straightaway he struck me as a kind of ascetic; enthusiastically ascetical, though, for art's sake. His hairline was already receding. He was so pale, with quick, fine, sinewy hands which he held open in front of him when he spoke.

We are greatly upset; it so difficult for me to accept his decision (his choice?). He was really miserable since some months.

After the morning studio class, Luce always returned to his room beside the railway line to sketch and paint. He sketched quickly, with neat, efficient strokes, on paper, any paper, in coloured inks. Mostly he sketched fragments of faces and figures remembered from Renaissance paintings: angels; Madonnas; bearded prophets posed with their attributes. He called frescoes 'fresques' in English. He painted in tempera, often on polystyrene boards because they were cheap, and they didn't soak up

the paint—he could mix fresh shades and graduate tones more calmly, he said. For 'tones' he used the word *sfumature*.

Sometimes I persuaded him to walk to his room via the flea market, or some famous chapel, or an air-conditioned bookshop. It didn't matter what antique treasure, or monument, or illustrated tome we came upon during those hot, hazy afternoons when the city was willingly conceded to the tourists. Luce would launch a concentrated discussion of the subconscious, or the sense of eternity anyway.

We are gone in Florence to get his things. His friends and Istituto per l'Arte were very nice with us. We were very touched.

To mark the completion of our course, the Institute booked a long table at a local pizza restaurant. The meal with the whole class was fun; my budget hadn't stretched to many restaurant meals, and, well, we each had our certificates, impressively embossed and stamped and signed. Luce finally became less shy. We raised a toast to art in all our languages. When he drank the wine his cheeks and ears blushed pink.

The last bus to the suburbs had already left, so I wandered back with Luce to his room. He remarked that his brother lived and worked in London, and was engaged; his brother's *fiancée* was American. Did he have other brothers or sisters? I never heard mention of his father, either. Made candid by the wine, we mused together on the spiritual ideals of marriage, no less.

The welcome cool of the late night had become cold, and Luce had no blankets, just a sheet. On his narrow bed we lay beside one another in our clothes, he asked if I was warm enough and I put my arms around him, very, very, carefully, chastely, and that's how we slept.

I woke before Luce, with a faint headache, but feeling some obscure, fragile elation too. I remember the soft grey beams through the shutters that early morning, and hearing birds and whirring mopeds before the first of the trains hurtled past. Luce would take a train that day, straight back to Rennes. He was worried about something to do with his national service.

I am mother's Luce. Excuse my poor English but I think you not speak in French. Luce talked me about you sometimes. He was admiring about you. So I must to learn you that Luce is died. He is died by suicide whereas he was at home for ten days very depressed. He has a medical treatment.

He had written to me that he thought he should visit the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice one day.

*The news is obviously terrifying for us all and unacceptable for you too.
Thankyou for your friendship for Luce.
I am crying very often.*

I didn't reply to Madame Merlet's letter. It is some ten years ago now but I have not yet replied.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.