

# "ESSENCE"

Written by  
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Based on the essay  
"Look to the Guiding Stars!"  
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VOICE-OVER SCRIPT (LAYERS 1 and 2)

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## Directing Notes

### LAYER 1 (BASELINE ESSAY)

Cold open: As if this is emerging out of the mist. Slow, and emotionally engaged with the ideas. Like an old man sharing his life's wisdom. Last line: contended, assured.

Cervantes pronounced θer'βantes.

Quixote pronounced ki:'houte

Act 1: Adagio. Pensive, allowing the phrases to breath and settle, but calmly and steadily flowing. For longer sentences: step by step.

Act 2: One touch darker and more tense. 'Truth' paragraph ("Thousands of years of progress..."): more driven, with a hint of bitterness, gathering pace and tension, climaxing at "Truth exists". Then calm down again.

Act 3: With compassion.

Throughout: Gravitas and bass but with wisdom, i.e. a knowing smile, but not afraid to show hope and weakness. A touch of Ian Richardson's reflective monologues in *To Play the King*. Quietly confident. Relaxed. But aware that this is an important moment. The stakes are high. A touch of melancholy, esp. Act 1.

Suspension points denote short pause. And occasionally - especially in Act 1 - almost as if you're searching to find the right words. Stream of thought.

*Italics* doesn't necessarily mean excessive emphasis, merely relative one.

### LAYER 2 (REFLECTIVE / PERSONAL / INNER-VOICE)

These *may* be edited into / mixed with Layer 1. We'll record multiple variations: reflective, frustrated, sad, excited, determined etc.

Think that you are in a dark room. Pitch black. Alone. Lost.

<COLD OPEN>

*Listen.*

*Look inside.*

[whispering]

*Listen.*

*Look up.*

[pause]

*Essence.*

[long pause - entering parallel reality of narration]

"When I read Cervantes, his hero Don Quixote seemed to me a great saint and martyr, who had left amidst jeering and laughter to discover beyond our humble everyday life, the essence which hides behind appearances. What essence? I did not know at the time; I learned later.

"There is only one essence, always the same: As yet, man has found no other means to elevate himself - none, but the subduing of matter and the submission of the individual to an end which transcends the individual, even if that is an illusion.

"When the heart believes and loves, there is no illusion; there is only courage, trust and fruitful action" [Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*].

<FADE TO BLACK>

<OPENING CREDITS>

<ACT 1: VISION>

When I look back, I realise that what motivated me as a young person was a combination of fiction... imagination... and idealism-

- *Look up...*

A pastiche of... made-up stories...

- *Listen*

characters... ideas... *values*. And yet... It worked. These imaginary worlds fulfilled their function. They acted as cultural fuel that carried me through.

Philosopher Alain de Botton wrote that "The art we love is frequently something we're drawn to because it compensates us for what we lack. It counterbalances us. When we're moved by a work of art it may be because it contains concentrated doses of qualities we need more of in our lives [...] The art a country or a person calls 'beautiful' gives you vital clues as to what's *missing* in them. It's in the power of art to help us be more rounded, more balanced and more sane." [*Alain de Botton, 'What is art for?'*].

[pause]

As we grow up we tend to demystify things. People. Narratives. Ideals. Ideas. All this imagined stuff looms increasingly... futile, distant, less important, less *serious*. We value pragmatism - as we should. But pragmatism doesn't necessarily push you to work day and night on your project-

- *Obsession...*

It doesn't necessarily motivate you to sacrifice the instant for the future-

[more tensely]

- *Obsession!*

It is your imagination; your faith in things not seen

[very tensely]

- *Obsession!*

that gets you through.

[pause]

- *Let go...*

We tend to mock people who are passionate, and diligent, and driven, and optimistic-

- *I can't do it...*

People who are absorbed into their work. Geeks. Nerds-

- *I won't make it...*

A whiff of arrogance and self-importance-

- *I am alone...*

But I would take 'driven' and 'self-important' over 'apathetic' and 'careless' any day of the week...

[pause]

- *Listen!*

[short pause]

[whispering]

- *Listen...*

Creating anything of consequence and meaning requires diligence. It requires pushing yourself to your intellectual limits; questioning boundaries; stretching the imagination; interrogating arguments;

- *Struggle*

questioning assumptions; seeking proof, even when proof cannot be obtained.

- *Love*

Maturity isn't about killing the imagination. Maturity is about liberating and taming it at the same time - even when deep down you know that the whole game is futile. *Especially* then.

- *Failure*

*Whatever* gives you strength - whatever helps you get through the day - whatever takes you one step forward, is important; however superficial it may seem.

- *I will make it...*

We *need* ideals. We *need* beauty and hope. We *need* art, and myth, and storytelling, even when everything seems lost. *Especially* then... we need vision.

[long pause]

- *Together... alone...*

Everybody has the capacity of vision. If we haven't lost the gift of listening, of keeping the hidden corridors of our heart and mind open, of opening our eyes wide, then we get a perception of beauty, of truth, of the moral good. It is that *inner voice* that tells us unmistakably what is good, what is beautiful, what is right, what actually *matters*.

In every decision we make, in every creative act, that "voice" tells us if the right note has been struck. If it *has* - and that happens only too rarely - then truth has been fulfilled.

And with it... goodness, harmony, beauty...

- *This is who I am...*

[short pause]

The vision, however, is rarely clear. Most of the time we see only through a mist. The goal is hardly recognizable; and this is often through our own fault: the "corridors" leading inward are filled with [indignantly] every day's litter. Noise. Distractions. Unimportant things. Laziness. Anger. Insecurity. Fear;

- *I'm not good enough...*

above all else, fear.

- *Not... good enough.*

[short pause]

The corridors of our soul eventually become impenetrable. We question our passions... our motivation... our drive. We forget what we are *about*... We get lost-

- *It's over...*

"If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial"

[Montaigne, *Essays*]

[beat]

- *Let go.*

[beat]

- *Listen*

The greatest battles in life are the ones we fight with our own self. *Every day* is a struggle. Rejection... failure... loss... Making sense of it; making peace with it; learning from it. *That's* the single most important step to happiness. After all, genuine strength is nothing but exercised, metamorphosed weakness.

- *I will make it*

And then, suddenly- a bright moment. We can see the final vision in great clarity, as in a flash of light. At that point, everything falls into place without difficulty. We see the ideal, now... We can almost touch it. And we set out with "hammer and nails" to work our way through. But the sheer amount of work blurs the original vision.

Creating anything worthwhile requires painstaking hard work; physically and mentally draining; repeating tiny mundane tasks over and over... and over again-

- *Obsession!*

- *Patience*

- *Again...*

- *Persistence*

- *Again...*

- *Over and over... And over-*

- *Again!*

- *Focus, focus, focus!*

- *Again!*

- *And over...*

- *AGAIN!*

We work, and work, and more than once the original vision is all but... gone.

- *Gone...*

We may well forget what *the meaning* of all this is.

- *Gone...*

That's because we forget to look up from time to time-

[whispering]

- *Look up!*

When you lose your way, look up to the guiding stars. And then... look deep inside.

<FADE TO BLACK>

<ACT 2: HARMONY OVER CHAOS>

Inside us there are the dark powers of the earth; the instincts with all their conflicting directions and ambitions - a chaos of emotions - often undetermined; even an urge for destruction. It is the triumph of human nature to be able, at least sometimes, to turn this chaos into harmony; to create harmony of this very chaotic material of our souls. This is the essence of the creative process: *to create order, and meaning*; a truly divine act. It is the spirit that should govern matter.

Harmony is always endangered by chaos; and focus is threatened by distractions. This is our human condition: we wouldn't feel the greatness of harmony if it were not constantly in danger of being... overrun. Of being destroyed.

It is a similar thing with true freedom: so fragile... always endangered by tyranny and anarchy. Freedom can exist only together with discipline and self-discipline. We must recognise the neighbour's right to the same amount of freedom we wish to enjoy ourselves. Harmony is balance. Harmony is measure. *Métron ariston.*

Creating anything - in art or in life - poses the same challenge: on the one side there is passion, the great emotion, the urge to express something, everything. On the other side, there is the vessel in which all this has to flow... The *shape* of a work: form, style, integrity. How do

you prevent conflicting ideas from damaging or destroying each other? How do you make them meet? How do you submit everything to a higher purpose? How do you make sense of it all? How do you put it in order? The aim is liberty, not anarchy.

Our perception of harmony may never be alike. Each of us is a solar system in their own right - with planets and moons... Each human being is unique. But we all obey the same cosmic law: harmony.

When we break that law, the result is chaos...

[short pause]

- *Together... alone...*

It is a triumph of humanity that, in a modest way, we can *all* create harmony; that we can all work towards elevating ourselves and our species.

[beat]

So much beauty...

[beat].

*Thousands* of years of progress. Of civilisation. Of thought. We have inherited a treasure, entrusted to us by previous generations: *human knowledge*. Millennia of experience - trial and error; pain and suffering; failure, success and redemption; violence and reconciliation; destruction and creation: all turned into... words... characters... shapes and figures... musical notes... images... artefacts... equations... observations... diaries... narratives... interviews... theories and experiments... studies... discoveries and inventions... systems and networks... cures... laws... norms... universal human rights...

[steadily building up tension]

We have a responsibility to protect and nurture this vast body of knowledge and safeguard the foundations upon which it was built. Logic.

Reason. Freedom of thought. Freedom of speech. Dialogue. Empathy.  
Experience. Expertise. Scholarship. Science.

[pause]

We are all unreliable narrators; and unreliable observers. But facts matter. [almost angry] Truth exists. Truth is real, and it is all around us.

*Everything* that is around us, everything that makes up our society - buildings, and roads; schools and hospitals; libraries and museums; city halls and parliaments; laws and institutions; benefits and entitlements; opportunities and comforts; hierarchies and structures; rituals and habits; ways of doing things; ways of *seeing* things; even our dreams and aspirations; daily life: it's all been created by people before us...

[echo] for us.

- *For us...*

It's all a... massive... theatre stage; a spectacle - a *show*, in which we have a part to play. We didn't ask to be in it! But we are in it all the same. [beat] And the show must go on...

And it is now *our* turn to become citizens. To assume responsibility - individual and collective responsibility, for this universe. To make *meaning* of all this. To find our role; to listen; and in the process, to find our true self... To create harmony over chaos.

- *This is who I am...*

<FADE TO BLACK>

<ACT 3: HUMAN PROPERTIES>

Our ultimate value as creators, as human beings, is decided not by what we have; ~~not by our possessing whatever knowledge~~ [alternatively: not by whatever knowledge we possess] - but by what we are. Think about the people you most admire and respect - the people that inspire you. Your teacher, your mentor, your friend, your grandmother, your hero... It is

not their possessions or their social status or their qualifications that give them value. It is not their material properties that matter the most - it is their *human* properties, their essence-

[whispering]

- *Essence...*

Their way of filtering experience into wisdom. Their very *being* which acts as a sponge: they absorb the pain and provide comfort; they see solutions where others see problems; they insist and persist; they treat adversity with dignity and patience; they overcome grief, to remember, to celebrate and to be grateful; they understand and guide; they empathise and encourage; they smile; they listen-

- *Listen*

- *Hope*

- *Listen*

- *Listen*

- *Listen*

- *Hope*

- *Love*

- *Faith*

- *Love*

- *Listen!*

[pause]

If we want to become like our heroes, if we want to reach out, the *real* material we have to shape, is... our own self. To look inwards. Reflect. Observe. Try to get better. No one owes us their attention, their care. That, we have to fight for, and earn. Every day. The *moment* you find your voice - the moment you have true *power* - is when someone is *listening* to you. Not *pretending* to be listening; *actually* listening. Giving you the space-

- *Together...*

to *exist*.

- *Alone...*

Expressing genuine curiosity about your thoughts and feelings. It is at that point that we experience true communion. We finally open up; expose our vulnerability... our weakness... our *humanity*. And we start to look around. And we realise...

We are not alone [concurrently] - *I am not alone!*

[short pause]

Virginia Woolf wrote: "As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways, we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes" [*The Mark on the Wall*].

I look at all these people around me - strangers in the metro, going to work; going home; looking down; looking tired; looking lost; avoiding each other's gaze; sharing a space; every face a thousand stories. And for one long, precious moment, I feel this pure, unconditional, overwhelming *love* for each and every one of them. [short pause] For each and every one of us.

[pause]

Be generous. Listen to the stories of others. Listen *carefully*. And you'll find that they are, really, *your* stories. [short pause] You have the power to give others the space to exist. And you can then exist... through others. Creativity. Art. Communication. Influence. Progress. These are *moral* questions. Morality is not about being perfect; or faultless; or always doing what you're told to do. Morality is about accepting your share of responsibility; doing your bit; watching out for each other; managing to love this imperfect human nature; these poor little creatures in a corner of the universe, waking up day after day, making an effort...

- *So much beauty...*

Our essence.

~~We need role models. We need a moral compass — a framework for empathy. We need to know that we are part of something bigger than the individual self.~~ [short pause]. We are the evidence of things not seen. Our words and actions affect others. We have the power to hurt and to heal, to destroy and to create. We make a choice. We can be role models, too.

And when we're gone-

- *Gone...*

-others will look up to us, because it will be our turn to act as their guiding stars.

[long pause]

<CUT TO BLACK>

-*Let go.*

<END CREDITS>