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At the forest's edge

by [Anthony Daniels](#)

On José Ortega y Gasset and Sigmund Freud.

In his essay, *The Empire of the Ugly*, the great Belgian Sinologist and literary essayist Simon Leys recounts the story of how, writing one day in a café, a small incident gave him an insight into the real nature of philistinism.

A radio was playing in the background, a mixture of banal and miscellaneous chatter and equally banal popular music. No one in the café paid any attention to this stream of tepid drivel until suddenly, unexpectedly and inexplicably, the first bars of Mozart's clarinet quintet were played. "Mozart," Leys says, "took possession of our little space with a serene authority, transforming the café into an antechamber of Paradise."

The other people in the café, who until then were chatting, playing cards, or reading the newspaper, were not deaf to the radio after all. The music silenced them, they looked at each other, disco ...

Anthony Daniels's most recent book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books).

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