



"My only child be not
so blind
See what you hold
There are no words no
ears no eyes
To show them what you
know"

SYDNEY WERTHEIM

Nico's 1970 album *Desertshore* is strikingly theatrical. The opening song, "Janitor of Lunacy", begins with the crescendo of strings and organ. After 30 seconds of bare instrumentals, Nico suddenly appears, her harrowing voice screaming in an operatic manner. The bravado of the opening orchestra, matched with Nico's unique singing, becomes the cornerstone of this album. Further, it seems that on this album in particular, Nico's vocals have a noticeable distressed quality akin to a wounded Phantom of the Opera, or a somber icon reflecting on their failures. Nico seems tormented, like she is in competition with the background strings as they attempt to outweigh her chants.

Listening to *Desertshore*, I began to think about Nico as an individual. Nico's unique persona follows the idea that she always seemed a little worn out, restless, gaunt: a figure trapped in misery. But who was the person, beyond the brand and persona? It could be deduced from her peers—of which included Lou Reed, John Cale, and Andy Warhol, that she was likely an artistic person, someone that valued creativity, but this is not a character trait as much as it is an aesthetic guideline to her life. Set apart from her friends, who was the unhappy voice behind this dark album? Was she a freewheeling hippie? An avant-garde punk? A pretty junkie? It seems that Nico was the latter. A sadly empty, slender-faced success story from across the sea, with an existence made up of tragic variables.

Here are the facts: Nico, for all her greatest artistic ventures, still remained a tormented soul. Multiple accounts showcase her *bête noir* behavior. According to an article by Simon Reynolds, titled from the *Velvet to the Void*, Nico would often spew racist sentiments. "She had a definite Nordic Aryan streak, [the belief] that she was physically, spiritually and creatively superior...Every once in a while there'd be something about Jews and I'd be, 'But Nico, I'm Jewish,' and she was like 'Yes, yes, I don't mean you.'"

Clearly, Nico was oftentimes caught in her own web of obliviousness, and among her blind superiority are the inklings of a classic *Femme Fatale*. Nico practiced contradictory behavior: she sang beautiful songs but held vicious beliefs; she was an extreme heroin addict yet still maintained a superiority complex; she had relationships with some of the most significant forward-thinking people in history—yet she still found herself stridently caught between old-world ideals. Consequently, it seems like Nico's songs became her; she was personified and classified by the music she created, while the person she was remained a mysterious, vacant illusion.

Nico's album *Desertshore*, therefore, is a perfect metaphor for Nico herself: rather cloying, and enjoyable only in a dark hour. It's at times sentimental, but mostly mournful and upsetting, much as Nico the unenlightened chanteuse was herself.

Oh Nico, if only you could have listened to the lyrics you crooned.

<3 Sydney Wertheim

