

VALERY ALEFF

ARTISTS

I

POETRY AND FALSEHOOD

TO STASYS STACEVIČIUS

PART ONE

THE BIRTH OF A POET

‘Everything is rooted to the spot,’ they used to say when looking at the sky where a number of fixed stars – or whatever they called them – seemed to look at them, at us and at whoever was about to be born. ‘Everything is rooted to one’s childhood,’ they say now, because they read Freud and learn that if you see your mother naked, you may become a poet, for this memory will pursue you throughout your life, making you think about beauty, femininity, eternity, mothers in general. You can go on like that for years and years, writing poems and other trifles. Let’s not forget that you’re not only *homo sapiens*, but also *homo faber* and therefore cannot twiddle your thumbs throughout eternity: your soul is immortal. That’s why you speak about eternity from time to time. *Ewig-weibliche*, and so on and so forth.

After a while, you write your first poem. After a while – in relation to what? To your mother’s body, to the way she used to spank you? You were teased a lot at school because you spoke with a lisp. You cried in your mother’s presence because you thought your mother would put her hand on your cheek and caress you tenderly to make you forget your schoolmates and their jibes. She strokes your cheek, your other cheek, and a few poems are born in your head and heart at this beneficial moment. Of course you’re unable to write these poems down: you already know the alphabet, but you’ve no idea what rhyme and meter mean, and if asked by your fellow students what they mean, you say, ‘I haven’t the foggiest.’ And once again they say you’re a moron and as illiterate as a medieval beggar. They might add that not only beggars were illiterate in the Dark Ages, but you no longer hear them. You hide in the lavatory and cry your eyes out, your heart out, your soul out, your body out. You’re as empty as a Buddhist, but you don’t know that yet. So you’re not a Buddhist after all. You don’t know anything, but you’re not Socrates either: you have to *know* that you know nothing. And you don’t know anything. Only a multitude of poems or rather acorns are strewn all around your brain. Why acorns? Because great oaks – or poets – from little acorns grow, as the saying goes. You don’t know this saying yet, but you’ll know *everything* in due course.

What *are* you aware of in your mother’s womb? Noise, noise, noise. Not words, as Hamlet put it once – just noise which may become a multitude of poems some day, some other day. These days are ahead of you and someone will say to you sooner or later, ‘Your whole life is ahead of you.’ At some stage in your life, many people say to you, ‘You’re way ahead of the pack.’ And sometimes they won’t make it clear what they mean by pack: humanity or just a group of your schoolmates, eternal students. You live and learn, and heaven still lies about you as if you could do something with it: use it as a tablecloth, for instance. You put it on your dinner table – on the Earth, in other words – and all you have to do at present is unhook a few stars which are still glued to the firmament as if determined to corroborate Ptolemy’s hypothesis. Was he the creator of fixed stars, firmaments and skies where everything is rooted to the spot? Perhaps. You don’t yet care about names, for you must first come to terms with the universe where nothing moves and everything rotates around axes. There are also a multitude of satellites which slowly rotate as they circle the Earth. There are circles around you; and straight lines. And someone talks to you about vicious circles that you should steer clear of, for fear of going back whenever you wish to go forward, towards a multitude of goals about which your father talks to you day in day out.

The world is full of things and some of those things keep something – or some *things* – to themselves. And you do all you can – you’re a future poet, aren’t you? – to wrench them from the cocoons in which they

ensconced themselves before your birth. When did they do it? When Kant began to speak about things in themselves, but you haven't heard about this philosopher yet. Actually you don't know *any* philosopher at this stage of your life. You don't care, do you? You don't know there's such a thing as philosophy. You don't know there's such a thing as the philosophy of education/religion/science/life/death/Paradise. All will come to you in due course, but for the moment this course is far, very far, considering that you've just come out of your mother's womb. Inside it, you heard a lot of words and sounds which meant something to those who were near your mother's womb. They didn't mean anything to you, although you *were* in your mother's womb, in the middle of it. Some people find themselves in the middle of nowhere; you were in the middle of your mother's womb or at the centre of it. You were at the centre of your mother's womb and you didn't care about its circumference because, according to your feelings and sensations, its centre was everywhere and the circumference couldn't be found. Even the most renowned archaeologist wouldn't have found it, according to your intuition.

David Thoreau also heard *something* in the prison where he spent one night, enjoying himself. Not many people enjoy themselves in a prison; he did because he was used to looking for happiness which one may stumble upon anywhere, provided one looks for it round the clock. And he did look for it. As for your behaviour in your mother's womb, you didn't do anything of the kind. Perhaps you didn't even have a pair of eyes which might have allowed you to investigate the topography of the cavern where you found yourself on the day of your conception. Let's not talk about Plato and *his* caverns for a while: there are other caverns and caves in this world of ours. Of course you *must* look for them if you're bent on discovering the source of poetry and poetry itself, which is never too far from its source. Yes, poetry is often obscure: you see shadows and nothing but shadows. For instance, a Japanese poet says to you:

*A bird. The song I hear
Is crystal clear, like the water
In a jug, in a lake.*

As you read or recite this poem you come across the shadow of a bird. You can't hear anything, not even a lorry that rumbles down the street where you live and read poetry. You're so absorbed in your book you don't even notice your friends; they come in and pat you on the shoulder. But you're bent on listening to the bird you can't hear: shadows don't sing. And what about fountains, mountains, jugs and lakes? Nothing is clear, let alone crystal clear, although the weather is expected to remain clear for the next few days. You don't look at the weather from which you're protected by your walls and books. You continue to read and re-read the Japanese poem. Water, water everywhere; not a drop is crystal clear.

Your father is well-read; you find a lot of books on his writing desk and all along the walls which seem to protect you from the outside world where actions speak louder than words. And you opt for words because your father is well-spoken and has a reassuring manner. You listen to whatever he says and he mainly speaks about books and not about life, nature, the sky. If he does deign to speak of the sky, he quotes a poem that touches on the stars and the moon. And he says that Proust's grandmother opted for postcards – or photographs – to the detriment of reality. For a blow-up of the originals, in other words. 'I don't agree with Walter Benjamin and his use of the word "aura". Any photograph or fake has an aura of mystery.' Thanks to your father's memory and

knowledge of literature – he is a walking Library of Alexandria, as your mother puts it – you memorise a few bits from Shakespeare’s sonnets and tragedies.

One day you light upon a poem by Rilke and begin to read it, although you have no German:

Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich aus der Engel
Ordnungen? Und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
Einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
stärkeren Dasein.

You’re faced with a very difficult choice there: either to go on reading this poem or shut the book and sign up for courses on German and French: Rilke also wrote a few poems in the language of Ronsard. You ask your father what all this means: you rely on your father’s advice, whenever exposed to darkness. And your father says to you: ‘I’ve got an English translation of the poem which is part of the cycle entitled *Duino Elegies*. There are ten elegies in this cycle and they’re unanimously regarded as the peak of German poetry.’

‘And what about Goethe?’ you say to your father.

‘I’m speaking of the 20th century,’ he says.

At this point your dialogue must peter out – it has no choice – because you don’t know German poets with the exception of Goethe and Schiller. You don’t know Gottfried Benn, for instance; he lived in the 20th century, which doesn’t mean one can easily compare him to Rilke. No one does anyway: you’re alone with your father who lectures you on the German language. He reads out the English translation of the elegy you began to read and you realise that Rilke is talking about angels. You know only your guardian angel and once you even met him and talked to him – in your sleep. But there are other angels in the universe and Rilke threw light on their existence.

You welcome any light: even an ordinary match is your friend because it struggles with darkness. As for the poem in question, its light enables you to make their acquaintance. Whose acquaintance? Now you know Rilke and also the angel he talks about as he continues to write his cycle in your presence. All happens now, as your father puts it. According to him, there are no such things as the future and the past. All times and spaces converge ‘at the main gate of the park’, as he puts it.

‘What park?’ you ask him.

‘Life is a park, isn’t it?’ your father answers.

‘What park?’ you repeat.

‘Hyde Park, for instance.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s beautiful. Actually you should *walk* through life or sit on one of its benches. Don’t *run* through it, as many people do, trying to earn more money and buy another car. Besides, there’s such a thing as Speakers’ Corner. This corner is part of Hyde Park. People talk there. People talk to other people or just to the void – on rainy days. By the way, do you know the expression, “One should keep money for a rainy day”? Never mind. Everything will come to you in due course. You should learn German first. Well, some people say to themselves, “It’s raining cats and dogs! We won’t go to Hyde Park.” But the man I talked to you about – the solitary speaker – continues to talk to the void. Some people are so talkative that nothing can silence them, not

even a bomb. But you don't have to listen to them. You'd better listen to your heart and to the poem I'm about to recite for you.'

And your father recites the elegy first in German and then in English.

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence.*

And suddenly, for all your father's efforts, you're engulfed in your darkness once more. It is *your* darkness and you recognise it immediately, for you know your darkness by heart. It is probably your first poem and hopefully not your *last*, as some pessimists might think. They think that human life may stop at any moment, and you don't really have to wait for a brick that may or may not fall on your head at the right moment, at the wrong moment. All depends on your angle of vision or point of view. You see your light and suddenly you no longer see anything – not even your darkness. That's what death is about, as your father said to you last night.

He recites Rilke's poem in English, but you're under the impression that you're still in your mother's womb. Actually, some people don't want to leave it and struggle for life in the *outside* world. Whatever lies beyond your mother's womb deserves the word 'outside' because you'll never be as happy and careless as you were in your mother's womb. No responsibilities, no duties whatsoever. You hear voices and the doors that are opened and shut by someone, by somebody. You don't know these 'bodies' and 'ones', and you have no wish to know them. Why should you? Don't you feel cosy in your mother's body?

Thoreau heard the noise he wasn't acquainted with because he knew only the *visual* aspect of the city where he had lived for some time. In the prison he enjoyed himself, for he discovered the *audible* aspect of it – its music, so to speak. And he spoke about it in one of his works. In a way, he was also in his mother's womb which may be compared to a prison. You're not sentenced to death; you're not sentenced to any term whatsoever. What's more, you're bound to leave this prison of yours in due course – when a midwife says to your mother: 'His hour has come.' Well, you look at life from a different angle – as long as you are in your mother's womb. As a Taoist might put it, 'Only the man who doesn't look can see everything,' meaning that you have a choice for once. Either you shut your eyes once and for all or you stay forever in your mother's womb. No, you're not spoilt for choice, whatever you may think or hope for: you can neither live with your eyes shut nor stay in your mother's womb for more than 10 months at the outside. 'You pays your money and you takes your choice,' they say to you. But you know that, no matter how much money you put in someone's pocket, you'll never take your choice. Someone else will always do it in your place. And once again the word 'predestination' crops up in your mind – or in a conversation, if you're not alone, on your own. And the word 'God', assuming that God is a word or logos.

Angels' hierarchies. *Engel Ordnungen*. Your father begins to lecture you on these hierarchies – on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in other words. You don't understand a thing, as usual; but your father pays no attention to your blank stare. Your mind continues to go blank, for you don't remember anything. You've even forgotten your guardian angel, let alone other angels whose hierarchies are as complex as quantum mechanics. 'Do you understand anything?' your father asks without waiting for an answer. He knows that you

don't understand a thing, let alone a thing in itself. Your father has no liking for Rousseau and so doesn't think you should leave your pupil alone. At least you shouldn't *talk* to your pupil about what he can't understand. It's better to *walk* with him around Hyde Park, enjoying nature and the noise one can hear everywhere, if one is in London. This noise is quite pleasant, especially if you find yourself in Hyde Park: you enjoy trees and you know you don't live miles from nowhere, in the middle of the countryside. Life is around you and London is the liveliest city in the world. What else do you need? You don't grow tired of these trees, of this noise. You're tired neither of life nor of yourself. And you *may* grow tired of yourself if you stay in your room, living the life of a recluse. Of course you know that philosophers advocate this kind of life because they've no idea what life is and how happy one can be surrounded by trees, in Hyde Park, not far from Piccadilly Circus. What did Nietzsche know about Hyde Park? He never spoke there.

'Life is as enigmatic as these hierarchies,' says your father. 'Incidentally, any angel, however insignificant – let us suppose he lives on the bottom rung of the ladder – is mysterious. So is God, needless to say.' And your father begins to lecture you on God, saying once in a while, 'God is as mysterious as life itself.' And of course he resorts to Pseudo-Dionysius as if there were nobody else in this domain where traditionally you come across the Fathers of the Church. They know everything and they tell you what they know, although you're not capable of understanding their arguments which are really beyond your ken – as much as God. God is beyond your ken and anybody else's ken, for that matter; but the Fathers don't seem to admit their ignorance except when they talk about so-called *docta ignorantia*. Who talks about it? Cusanus does and he is *not* to be found among the Fathers of the Church because he is *not* of their number, contrary to what some people may think as they chance upon his name in some book or other. Those people think that all theologians belong to the group named the Fathers of the Church. What other name can be used to set them apart from the common run? The *Brothers* of the Church?

Well, your father continues to quote Pseudo-Dionysius, but he mentions, en passant, that he'll enlarge upon the Fathers of the Church in the near future, for one can't live decently without them. 'It's not enough to *feel* God,' he points out. 'You must *study* him and the Scriptures.' You don't wish to study anything and in the end you leave home just to escape the tyrannical rule of your father. The police find you and you're taken back home: the police are able to control an individual by sheer force of numbers. Even a boxer can't resist their force. Such is life and you say so to yourself, reflecting on how much you learnt about the world in the course of your escapade. Indeed you *saw* the streets of your native city, whereas you had just *heard* them until D-Day – the day of your escapade. When asked about D-Day as such, many people answer as follows: 'The D-Day landings began on 6 June 1944, when Allied forces invaded Normandy.' This answer is partly correct, yet its other part informs you that everybody has his or her own D-Day so that you may speak about the turning point if you jump out of an upstairs window to escape your father's tyrannical rule. You call your father Stalin or Lenin and you hate him because he makes you learn by heart not only the Fathers of the Church but also a number of poems you don't understand. And you learn them in German, in French and even in Russian – the language you dislike on account of its intricacies.

Your father – he is the father of the house where you live – points out that you should aim at the simultaneous affirmation and denial of paradox in any statement or concept relative to God; and to the world, for God and the world are one and the same. 'God transcends all rational comprehension and categorical knowledge,' he says, 'and this indisputable fact reduces any expression of the divinity to polar pairs of

contraries: grace and judgement, freedom and necessity, being and nonbeing.’ ‘A load of old twaddle,’ you say to yourself. You understand neither your father’s lecture nor the world where you live and read poems in German. And these poems, for what they’re worth, are as obscure as the language in which they’re written. But if you study this language, you’ll understand these poems, if only in part. But you’ll never understand God. Is that what they call *docta ignorantia*? ‘You *shouldn’t* understand the Almighty,’ they say, ‘and you *should* admit your ignorance to yourself and also to others. Just say to them and yourself, “I don’t understand God. He is so majestic and gigantic that no knowledge can encompass Him or Her.”’

By the way, why should the angel press Rilke against his or her heart? What kind of supposition is this, you wonder? And you continue to wonder as you read and reread the rest of the poem upon which you’re reluctant to enlarge: you’re weary of nonsensical suppositions and affirmations. You realise they’re the source of poetry and its eternal ingredients, but you just don’t care. You wish to live as a peasant who enjoys nature, fresh air and fresh milk. He milks his cows himself and all bystanders applaud his achievement, for milking a cow by hand is a *skilled* process. Such a peasant is full of the milk of human kindness because he milks his cows by hand.

‘To whom are the words “freedom” and “necessity” related?’ asks your father.

‘To anybody,’ you say. ‘To myself, among other people. I am free because I’m endowed with both, freedom and necessity. Am I not created in God’s image? I am free as long as I can exercise my free will bestowed by God upon every human being. Do I really have to use formal words and expressions, Father? My schoolmates laugh at me whenever I use the verb “to bestow”.’

‘You should use it whenever you speak of God. Your disrespectful behaviour often jars on my nerves. To whom are the words “grace” and “judgement” are related?’

‘To anybody,’ you say. ‘You can show good and sound judgement, provided you don’t fall from grace.’

‘You seem to have learnt the last lesson,’ says your father. ‘Tell me more about angels now.’

‘What can I say, Father? I can’t see them, and if you don’t see an object or a subject, you can’t talk about it unless you’re too self-confident or self-congratulatory. I envy Rilke who talks about the embrace.’

‘What embrace are *you* talking about?’

‘The angel he talks about squeezes him out as they press him against their chest.’

‘Why not *visualise* an angel? You’ll have to call on your imagination, if you wish to become a poet.’

‘Is the world a figment of my imagination?’

I remember

the words of my dead father:

son, your head’s amazing, fine,

but it seems it wasn’t meant for you.

S. S.

Nowadays our fathers seldom if ever want us to become poets and everyone knows why they do their best to guide us in other directions, towards more lucrative occupations. Beggars can’t be choosers and our fathers hope we’ll be spoilt for choice: Mercedes, Bentley, Ferrari or BMW. So your father talks about you thus, ‘He chose banking as a career,’ forgetting that it was *his* choice, not *yours*. And poetry is far away – beyond the mountains, as the Russians say. What mountains are they talking about? The Caucasus, of course. Apparently Prometheus

was chained to his mountain and whatever looked like one in the Caucasus; and the Garden of Eden was also situated there. You take the whole of Creation and put it in one poem where angels rub shoulders with demons because opposites meet and embrace each other – within the framework of a poem. That's why we continue to write poetry in spite of our fathers' frowns and objections: this is the only way to create Paradise on Earth, whatever they say from their Ferraris and Maseratis. But your fathers put their feet down and you go to your banks, muttering under your breath, 'It's no thanks to you that I'll become a poet.'

*The head is neither particularly beautiful
nor ugly,
maybe it envies the strongest
friends and writers,
but it wouldn't like to be on their shoulders.*

S. S.

'Ay sir. To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand,' says Hamlet. The same goes for our fathers – at least that's how the matter stands in the domain of literature. But what to do with the acorns which are supposed to become great oaks in due course? You take care of these acorns and think in terms of great oaks: you need to think big if you want to succeed. That's what your father says to you from time to time and you repeat this sentence to yourself, overlooking the fact that your father means something different – just the opposite of what *you* mean and do, whenever left alone.

It is important to be honest and earnest: Oscar Wilde also thought along these lines. But instead of saying, 'To be honest with you' – whoever you might happen to talk to – you should say, 'To be honest with myself.' If you're honest with yourself and life, you construct yourself, your freedom and finally become what you are – a poet, needless to say. Old Father Time contradicts Himself very often. Yesterday He made you memorise a lot of poems and sermons, hoping to educate you appropriately; today He speaks about creature comforts. And you know that poets are beggars in disguise.

Time opens up a perspective along which a lot of contradictory ideas and actions await you impatiently as if they were as doomed as yourself. But they're immortal; they have nothing to worry about. The idea of personal freedom will outlive all those who think they are free and can do whatever they like. And then they die – first thing tomorrow morning – and nothing really happens except a funeral, a warm welcome given by a cemetery and a funeral march that doesn't always sounds like a poem. And Old Father Time buries you instead of talking to you about God and poetry; and yet you used to have poetry in your soul – throughout your life, as it were.

Father is a figure of speech or a figure of the mind. Of course you have your own father; at least I had one. And he made me read a lot of poetry: Pushkin, Lermontov, Baratynsky, Tyutchev. I also read a few bits from *Faust* – in the original; otherwise I wouldn't have touched upon Rilke and *his* originals, *his* angels. Old Father Time spreads a picnic rug out on the ground and you sit down, looking at the ingredients of your lifelong dinner. You eat this and that; you are what you eat, says Feuerbach. That's how you build yourself. Is that what they call body-building? And what about *soul*-building? Don't forget you have poetry in your soul and therefore you should broaden your horizons – your space, in other words. You can do it by talking nonsense, by writing *au*

fil de la plume – just as the ideas come into your head which is buzzing with ideas and images. They jostle and shove to get a better view of your cerebral cortex. And then they settle down in it forever. Don't you immortalise them by means of your fountain pen?

On your way to yourself you remember your father, his habits, lessons and books, his library of Alexandria. You also remember a poem by Sylvia Plath in which she speaks about her own father. Thus all fathers – down to Old Father Time – unite in your mind as if your brain was a hall of fame. Is that how rhymes (and reasons) are born?

*Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time –
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal*

Again the sun goes down and darkness falls. Yet Sylvia Plath is not commonly regarded as a hermetic poet: you don't have to unlock doors, trunks and crack many safes when reading her works. You want to kill your father; and yet you don't suffer from an Oedipus complex. Never mind – why should you always look for reasons and excuses? You're just determined to kill your father, full stop! What a pity he died last night! Too late, too late. Too little, too late. It's too late to start complaining now. Doesn't Sylvia Plath complain? In a way, her poem lodges a complaint. Does she have any grounds for complaint? Her father is dead. What else does she need? She isn't accused of murder. Nor is she accused of robbery: the bag is still full of God.

What kind of bag is it, actually? Are there bags into which you can put God – the whole of His substance? And what about the nonsense they talk whenever God is on the agenda? God is also a figure of the mind, if only in part. No one feels duty-bound to restrain themselves whenever God looms on the horizon. One says, 'He is what He is not.' Our critics say that the best films are those which transcend national or cultural barriers. What about God? He transcends national and international barriers. Is the Pope a messenger of God? The messenger? All right. Barriers have been erected all along the route the Pope will take, but God is supposed to transcend these barriers as well. After all, He is entitled to stand by the Pope's side throughout the ritual. To cut a long story short – to transcend yet another barrier, in other words – we should talk about Him (or them) as follows: 'The underlying message of theology and poetry is that love transcends everything else.' Does it?

'... a bag full of God.' What kind of bag? How are you supposed to fill it up? By praying out loud? By reading St Augustine and other Fathers of the Church? Of course you're dealing neither with shopping bags nor bin liners. Is this bag a veritable cornucopia of whatever has been done in the name of God? A bin liner, after all? All in all, you think it's a bin liner: God transcends human thoughts and our reason. So, whatever we say about Him is just a load of old twaddle. Even our intuition is unable to unlock this mystery. They say that one of poetry's functions is to unlock the imagination. Your imagination being unlocked – once and for all? – you continue to analyse Sylvia Plath's poem.

'... Ghastly statue with one gray toe'. Whose statue is she talking about? God's? Usually sculptors do not dare erect a statue to *our* God and if they do have an itch to erect a statue to the Almighty – the creative itch, they call it – they have to content themselves with the gods of pagan origins. These gods are mighty, to some

extent, but none of them – not even Zeus – is the *Almighty* Whose name is secret, according to the Jews. One gray toe. Three blind mice. You begin to toy (or toe) with meters, rhythms and rhymes: poetry is believed to unlock this part of your brain as well. Yet you're still unable to unlock Plath's poem. Is it her father's statue? Why does she speak of his gray toe? Is he naked? Or did someone break one of his shoes? A few hours ago? For want of anything better, you compose a piece of nonsense verse.

And what about the 'Frisco seal'? The plan to cull large numbers of baby seals has angered environmental groups. Never mind – if no seals remain on the surface of the Earth, the gray toe of Sylvia Plath fame will be regarded as a monument to their former glory.

*And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.*

From the last line you gather that Sylvia's father was a German and, given the date of her birth, you jump to the conclusion that he was a Nazi; otherwise you see no reason for her to kill him unless he used to beat her or her mother or both. If I see someone beating a *dog* with a stick – not a woman, not a man – I'm prepared to kill the culprit on the spot. As for Sylvia Plath, any scholar will say you have to read *all* her poems to find out what she meant as she spoke about her father and her wish to murder him. But she said in the same breath that she used to pray to recover him. In what sense? Did she think her father was in Hell? You can pray for those who are in Purgatory, thereby speeding up their arrival at the gates of Heaven. Of course no one prevents you from praying for the damned, but you must know – and you do know what's in store for them – that they'll stay in Hell forever, whatever their relatives do for them on the surface of the Earth.

A few days ago, I saw a film on the offspring of a Nazi officer. They didn't do anything during the war for the simple reason that they were not born in those days. Yes, they were born *after* the war, but in the wake of what had taken place in the course of it – what they're preoccupied with doesn't boil down to the Final Solution only – they redeem their fathers in the eyes of the world. Or they just do it for their own sake – for the sake of their conscience and their feelings of guilt over their fathers' crimes. When asked about his decision to convert to Judaism, a man answered thus, 'A sense of guilt is deeply embedded in my conscience.'

I was born in the Soviet Union and my conscience isn't marred by such a feeling of guilt, for my father was *not* a Nazi officer, needless to say. Yet I wish to convert to Judaism because my conscience and soul are attuned to this religion more than to Catholicism, Protestantism and Islamism. Even the Russian Orthodox Church appeals neither to my senses nor my reason. And I hope I'll settle down in Israel at the end of my life – to be nearer to God, as the Israelis say. Anyway, the Germans to whom they devoted a documentary are living in Israel where they seem to have found happiness and peace of mind.

'I thought every German was you. / And the language obscene / An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.' Of course these lines can't be damaged by Günter Grass' second-rate bestseller in which a hero endeavours to pass himself off as a Jew. Actually he identifies with the Jews because a sense of guilt is deeply embedded in his conscience. I don't know if Sylvia Plath was the first to

hit on such an idea of redemption. It doesn't really matter, I think. What counts is your desire to identify with victims – to suffer with them, if only within the prison walls of your mind. Rousseau would have said, had he been questioned on the subject: 'We always identify with victims – it's only natural. Under the circumstances, I think the whole humanity should identify with the Jews. Not only a few Germans.' He would have been right. At least I, for one, identify with the Jews. Why? Because a sense of guilt is deeply embedded in my conscience. Why? Because I am a human being and therefore belong to the same species as the Nazi.

Reachable, near and not lost, there remained amid the losses this one thing: language.

It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this.

This is what Paul Celan thinks about the German language and the trials and tribulations to which it was exposed under Hitler's barbarous rule. Even Charlie Chaplin's *The Dictator* should be taken into consideration whenever we are driven to discuss the sorry plight of the words uttered by an arch-criminal. One recalls the barking which seems to be the soundtrack of Chaplin's film as if the language of Goethe, as they say, were reduced to the means of communication shared by the canine population of the world. So, instead of listening to Schubert's lieder in their entirety, you hear a divine melody accompanied by 'gaf, gaf, gaf, gaf, gaf'. That's how Russian dogs sound, by the way. Actually, in this film Hitler doesn't just bark out a succession of orders: you can't make out any sense, however nonsensical.

Suppose you listen to the famous Schubert lied which the author loved to the point of dedicating a quartet to it: *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (*Death and the Maiden*). First it is the maiden you hear as she tries to sing death out of his murderous impulse:

*Vorüber! Ach vorüber!
Geh, wilder Knochenmann!
Ich bin noch jung, geh, Lieber!
Und rührte mich nicht an.*

*Pass by me, go, and hie thee
Oh, fearsome skeleton!
I am still young! Pass by me,
Dear, touch me not, pass on!*

You wonder why the maiden barks instead of singing. Of course you would be less surprised if *death* was conveying his message by means of the 'gobbledygoo' attributed to dogs. ('Gobbledygoo' – the word used by Sylvia Plath in the same poem. 'With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.') All right, she is scared to the point of being unable to articulate meaningful sounds. But why does she *bark*? Because she is scared out of her wits?

Maidens are traditionally associated with cats and various other felines. Or does she hope to keep the *wilder Knochenmann* at bay? Beware of the dog!

Death answers the maiden thus:

Gib deine Hand, du schön und zart Gebild!

Bin Freund und komme nicht zu strafen.

Sei gutes Muts! ich bin nicht wild,

Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen.

Give me your hand, you lovely, tender maid!

As friend I come, to punish never.

Fearsome I'm not! Be unafraid!

Sleep softly in my arms forever!

The translator, Dorothea M. Singer, did her best to render Matthias Claudius' poem faithfully through the use of rhymes. Of course, when you have a go at translating any poem into your native tongue – or a foreign language, as the case may be – you should forget neither Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle nor the saying 'You can't have your cake and eat it': either you aim at literal precision or think only in terms of music. But why not try and get the best of both worlds?

Dorothea M. Singer doesn't manage to get in touch with what is the best in these worlds. '*Gebild*' is not a 'maid' but an 'image'. From death's point of view, the maiden is already unsubstantial: death doesn't pay you a visit unless you're doomed and damned. And in the maiden's speech there's an '*Ach*' that Sylvia Plath manages to utter, for all her hatred of the German language, of her father's gobbledygoo. But the Russians also say '*ach*' rather often and Sylvia doesn't curse our language in her poem entitled *Daddy*. And what about '*du*'? We don't say '*du*', do we?

When some of my friends say they can't speak German after the Holocaust, I reply, 'Then Hitler has won in the long run.' But even he was unable to exclude the *Lorelei* from German books. His cronies just attributed its authorship to an anonymous poet so as not to soil their hands – and German minds – with the name of a Jew. 'Why should you out-Hitler Hitler?' I say to my friends.

'To go on writing lyric poetry after Auschwitz,' says Adorno, 'is barbaric.' Why? Because 'through the aesthetic principle of stylisation...an unimaginable fate still seems as if it had some meaning: it becomes transfigured, something of the horror is removed.' This declaration shouldn't be applied to Celan's poetry which shuns straightforward images, metaphors and complaints such as the reader is bombarded with in *Daddy*. 'Panzer-man, panzer-man. O You – / Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through.'

The blurb on the back of any bestseller is full of the usual hyperbole – 'enthraling', 'fascinating' and so on. Hyperbole is one of poetry's best assets – along with metaphor, simile, antonomasia, trope and so on. For instance, if you say, 'Nature is always divine,' you seem to forget about rain showers and mud, tsunami and earthquakes. If you write, 'Every woman adores a Fascist,' you may come under fire for your tendency to

overuse generalisations: not *every* woman adores a Fascist. At least I know some women who do not, if I'm not mistaken.

*Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.*

*You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that*

Sweeping generalisations, shouts, screams. What heading do they come under? Stylisation. I scream as I watch the documentaries in which the allies discover the absolute truth – the only one perhaps – in Belsen, Auschwitz and Dachau. But I don't scream in my poems. Plath screams and shouts; so does Tsvetaeva. I can't help hearing Zadkin's notorious statue in its outpouring of grief. Yet Zadkin's masterpiece is silent.

In my youth, I wrote a poem in which I expressed my allergy to shouts:

*Shouts at school, shouts in the street.
And only in my bathroom
the sound of a babbling brook.*

In those days I was enamoured with Japanese poetry and whatever I wrote was supposed to look and sound like haikus. Of course my creative output had nothing to do either with the structure of haikus or even with their moods, images, landscapes and birds. I was singing my own song and hopefully I'm still able to sing it, for I lost my juvenilia and consequently have to rely on my unreliable memory. Last night, I recalled a poem and, having translated it into English, I rushed towards my computer in order to immortalise it at once. Alas, I forgot it even before my screen was in a position to receive a few odds and ends of my long-forgotten inspiration. So I have no alternative but to write a few so-called haikus to make up for the disappearance of my archives.

A more traditional haiku? A stylisation? A parody? An intimation of immortality?

*It's been a surprisingly mild winter.
No snow.
Many bulbs bloom in February.*

I drank a bottle of wine which was to act as a time machine: I had to convey my mature and decrepit mind to the days when I would fall in love almost every week. My second youth. Now I am as lonely as Thoreau whose hut might have served a very useful purpose; I would at last have come to terms with nature, water, had I lived there for a year or two years. I am a city dweller *par excellence* and my knowledge of nature and birds doesn't go

beyond the walls of my library, beyond pages and words. So even now I can rely only on books when I attempt to restore my youthful inspiration to its former *glory* – a good example of stylisation.

*A puddle. You play with it.
You're wet; so is the sun,
the moon. Only souls are dry.*

*A star lies on my writing desk.
I pick it up. It is still a star
in spite of my stylisation.*

*So many words. You choose one
and everything happens. You
choose another one. You disappear.*

*You're a hiding place. Inside you
there are animals, humans and plants.
Yet the world is not your representation.*

*You're starting to show your age.
Is it the other way round? Does your age
exhibit you at your art gallery?*

*A bout of insanity. An island
of peace. What else?
The rest, the rest.*

*Not a leaf, a sheet of paper.
What am I to write on it?
The Leaf. Another book of life.*

*A water jug. A symbol? Hardly.
You drink and forget your thirst and life.
Only water is there.*

*What does my dream say?
I listen and realise that only birds
know how to sing one's past.*

My youth is my personal property.

*Look how it flies! Yet
it remains in the palms of my hands.*

*So many childhoods. I should
kill as many as I can. What remains is I, you,
Du, toi, ach, moi. Ach, ach.*

Passed through and could come to light again, ‘enriched’ by all this. My language *has* been enriched over the last 50 years. By failures, by languages, by poems, by Heidegger and Wittgenstein and even by Sylvia Plath. I wouldn’t have written ‘Du, toi, ach, moi. Ach, ach,’ had I not read her poem entitled *Daddy*. But what about the German language? Was it *enriched* by the Second World War? Cruelty, ignominy. Language is our verdict. Why should it forget our crimes? Language is like a sponge: it soaks up our blood and tears. Why should it forget Auschwitz? All languages should remember it, not only German. All languages have been enriched by our crimes. Even dead languages know them. We may be sentenced to death by Latin, by ancient Greek.

We may be saved by Celan’s *Todesfuge* (*Death Fugue*):

*ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen
Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng*

*a man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete
your ashen hair Shulamith he plays with the serpents
He call out more sweetly play death death is a master from Germany
he calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke you will rise into air
then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies unconfined*

(Trans. by Michael Hamburger)

In those days death *was* a master from Germany. No stylisation. Death was also a master from the Soviet Union. You did rise into air. In the clouds one does lie unconfined. *Nicht eng, nicht eng*. No stylisation.

In my youth I didn’t have many friends and by saying that I have no wish to imply I’ve got a lot of friends now because it is not true, far from it. Sometimes you’re tempted to say you’ve got many friends; the entire world population sits in your dining room and drinks your Russian vodka. No such luck; no such misfortune. I must be as lonesome as Thoreau who received a few visitors from time to time, according to his autobiographical book. Well, according to *my* book, I seldom if ever receive anybody so I talk to flowers that grow in my garden and listen to bumblebees. But in my youth I had at least two friends, which doesn’t mean this story of mine has a ring of truth, considering that Aristotle says, ‘Ah, friends, there are no friends.’ If he is right, I had no friends at all –

even in my youth when you're likely to fall in love rather often. Well, you may find solace in the bottle or in a few commonplaces such as, 'Requited love is not enough to sustain a long-term relationship.' What about *friendship*?

One of my friends, Alexander Chernigovsky, was well-read for his age – for any age, come to think of it – and he talked a lot about American poetry; he did understand Sylvia Plath's stylisation, by the way. He wormed his way into my life without my ever suspecting he only did it for the sake of my father's library and knowledge of poetry. My father went abroad rather often and every time he would bring back a number of books among which there were anthologies devoted to American poets – or gurus, as my friend used to call them. He thought he belonged to the Beat Generation – like Allen Ginsberg who was his favourite poet. He knew a number of his poems by heart and even his long poems were reluctant to escape from the prison of his memory. In the courtyard of our university he would recite in my presence *My Sad Self* or *Howl*– or *Shout*, or *Scream* – so that my head was full of 'whos':

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,
who bared their brain to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated

Not content with denying his listeners – three young men – an opportunity to play football or chess, he would make us listen to his own poems in which he tried to imitate and even emulate his idol as best he could:

who drank vodka, staring at each other as if to see their common soul, their devil, hiding under the cover of their skins and in the tins strewn over the courtyard,
who didn't give two hoots what Lenin thought in his mausoleum and on his portrait that had a big smile on its face and winked at them as they turn their backs,
who couldn't compete with the Americans for ecstasy on an equal footing because LSD wasn't available on the market, in by-streets, let alone in shops,
who loved vodka and drank gallons of the stuff to compensate for their lost childhoods, for the history of the Communist Party they had to learn twice a week

Alexander used to tell me every week, 'To become a poet you must unlock your imagination. It's locked, can't you see? It's under lock and key.'

'Okay, I'll unlock it.'

'You've really come out of your shell since you started writing poetry. But it's not enough. You discarded your shell last year. How come your imagination is still locked?'

'I don't know.'

'You should think in terms of non-local connections. Take two notions and try to link them. Do you recall the game we used to play at school?'

'I don't.'

'You don't even know what game I'm talking about.'

'I don't recall games. I can hardly recall life.'

'You take two four-letter words and try to turn one of them into the other. For instance, "mare" and "moor". Your first move: "more", "moor". You've changed only one letter. Got it?

'Yes.'

'Your second move: "*mort*", "moor".'

'"Death" in French?

'Your third move: "moot", "moor". Got that? A moot point, you know.'

'I know.'

'Your fourth move: "moor". Your remarkable triumph over appalling adversity.'

'What adversity?'

'Words, worlds, poetry. But don't forget you can merely jump from one word to another. No link, no transition, just two words, three words. That's what poetry is about. Everything is poetry, you know. Unlock your imagination! To a nunnery! Poetry, nunnery. Sounds nice, doesn't it? Besides, you unlock your imagination by saying to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery, farewell." Makes you think. Makes *her* think. Two imaginations are unlocked. Instead of making love to Ophelia, you send her to a nunnery.'

'Don't you think Allen Ginsberg's imagination is also under lock and key?'

'How so?'

'Who, who, who. A mere enumeration, a succession of hyperboles. It doesn't take much imagination to describe your bosom buddies and their DTs. Of course if you're high on grass, you can see Mohammedan angels everywhere, not only on tenement roofs. Even if you've no idea what they look like.' At this point Chernigovsky made several cheap jibes at his opponent.

At the end of his life Ginsberg became his own subject, as someone put it. You may say whatever you like; you're always your own subject and object. And the objects you see around you are also your objects or subjects. You pick them up; you talk to them. You tyrannise them, even if you don't live in the Soviet Union or a banana republic. In a way, it's more difficult to become one's own subject because one always speaks about free countries and one's personal freedom; and given that one's speech is free, one talks for hours on end. One's fountain pen and computer are also free so that one writes poems and commentaries on one's poems. One insists on telling you every single detail of what one does when you're not within one's field of vision.

'Sometimes when my eyes are red,' says Ginsberg, 'I go up on top of the RCA Building and gaze at my world, Manhattan – my buildings, streets I've done feats in, lofts, beds, coldwater flats – on Fifth Ave below which I also bear in mind, its and cars –' I don't know when *my* eyes are red. Someone says, 'Your eyes are red. Did you sleep well last night? Is it an allergic reaction? Are you allergic to cats? To pets in general? To doormats? To debts? Do you have any?' Well, I don't go up on top of the RCA Building. I suppose this building is located in New York. Why should I go to New York to talk about my sad self, my poor self and so on? On, on.

When my eyes are red or blue – their colour doesn't matter –

I don't go anywhere because my eyes will be green

In New York, in Paris and even in Brussels. Why should they change their colour

In accordance with topography, geography, plane tickets and hotel rooms?

Gloom, gloom, gloom. What colour is it? Never mind, never mind.

*There's widespread gloom and doom about my future and my past, present.
 What present can this present of mine give me on my birthday?
 We're supposed to be born every morning to pay homage to our Mother Nature,
 To our Mother Earth, to our Father Sun, to our Father God, to our father,
 To our mother, to our brother. All right, I am sad tonight.
 It is my sad self you read about. My poor self is sad and mad and what not.
 Sometimes it is not; sometimes it is. Actually I have no idea when
 I can count on its presence. 'Panorama of the bridges, sunrise over Brooklyn machine.'
 A lot of imagination. Everything's unlocked. You have to unlock your imagination,
 To enjoy the panorama of the bridges about which Allen Ginsberg speaks so eloquently. Does he?
 What does it matter? He speaks – that's what counts. He's a mouthpiece
 Of the Beat Generation. And you're supposed to tap your foot to the beat of his songs.
 You flout conventions, don't you? You don't follow accepted principles, do you?
 Outworn shibboleths. You're a conformist now. You wear a tie,
 You work in a bank. You say to your buddies, 'I used to work in the local branch of a large bank,
 But now I work in the large bank.' Do you howl from time to time?
 I do – rather often, as a matter of fact. That's why I'm sad. Is it the other way round?*

'Sad, I take the elevator and go down, pondering –' What do I care about your elevators? And your thoughts. All right, whatever we come across belongs to poetry because everything is divine, being a creation of God, as we know. So what? Why don't you keep your elevators and thoughts to yourself? Self, sad, mad, dad. You're not my father, Allen Ginsberg. I've had too many fathers in the course of my life and I don't need another father to put up with – perish the thought!

I wasn't in the habit of reading Allen Ginsberg's stuff, and I thought I would never relish his poetry, come hell or high water. They come but I'm adamant: I still refuse to read his poems. Point blank. One day, when reading yet another poem by Czeslaw Milosz, I was surprised to come across Ginsberg's name. I may be wrong. Whatever I say may not be true. Why should I tell the truth? I'm not in court, am I? There's a truth elsewhere.

'You should read Robert Lowell,' Chernigovsky told me. I obeyed, as usual. My second friend, Paul Solus, talked to me about God. He must also have been hand in glove with my father who thought that, in view of his forthcoming death, he should find a number of substitutes to guide me through the maze of life, through the amazements that might lead me astray and ruin my gifts.

'I'd like to live in a monastery,' Solus told me with a shake of his head.

'To a nunnery,' I said. 'What for?'

'I need space.'

'In a monastery? In a cell? I prithee do not mock me, fellow-student.'

'God is space.'

'I thought He was time or rather eternity.'

'Space, space. Don't you need space when writing your poems? You expand it, don't you? Non-local connections.'

Robert Lowell was fond of *local* connections.

*Nautilus Island's hermit
 heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
 her sheep still graze above the sea.
 Her son's a bishop. Her farmer
 is first selectman in our village;
 she's in her dotage.*

In her cottage, in her dotage. Ensconced in both. What about *my* local connections?

*I settled down near Brussels. I've got a house now.
 I've met one of my neighbours. I don't know the other one.
 Apparently this neighbour of mine is a woman.
 She lives in her cottage or house or palace,
 But she's not in her dotage. My gardener says she is not.
 He saw her twice. She was with her dogs. She said
 She couldn't bear the noise made by our neighbours or their sons.
 Apparently she's rather beautiful.
 That's what my gardener thinks. According to him,
 She's in her fifties.*

Is it poetry? Everything is poetry. Besides, if you talk about your sad self, you construct yourself, building your own Empire State Building. What happens if you talk about a lady with two dogs? Others are also yourself because you can't live without them or others, in other words. All right, you live with them; you talk about them.

*Thirsting for
 the hierarchic privacy
 of Queen Victoria's century,
 she buys up all
 the eyesores facing her shore,
 and lets them fall.*

This is everyday life for you. Another slice of life. There's nothing else. There are no other worlds, no other slices. Don't you worry! This world of ours offers you an opportunity to spy on your neighbours. Forget about metaphysics and whatever is supposed to transcend the reality you have to cope with round the clock. Deconstruction. Why should you read Heidegger or Derrida? Just read about the woman who is keen on the hierarchic privacy of Queen Victoria's century.

And what about skunks? After all, the poem is entitled *Skunk Hour*. I don't know if skunks are a familiar sight in those latitudes. What latitudes does Lowell actually speak about? Be that as it may, a skunk makes her appearance at the end of the poem.

*I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air –
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail.
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.*

I don't care about any description of her tail: I can see it on television. The same goes for so-called reality. And for your neighbours – you can see their photographs, if you feel like it. Every poet should read cookery books. 'Mash the potatoes and then mix in the butter and herbs.' 'Pour the honey into the bowl and mix it thoroughly with the other ingredients.' What you need is a mixture, not a snapshot, even if you find a skunk in it. You see a skunk. So what? The mother skunk with her column of kittens is not in your bed. Why should you take notice of the garbage pail you can't see because it doesn't stand in front of your house?

What *does* stand in front of your house, beyond your gate?

*Last night I put my rubbish bin
Beyond my gate. In our community,
We are required to conform,
And there's no place for originality
Unless a mother skunk with her column of kittens*

A mother skunk. An exotic touch? An esoteric touch? A symbol of our putrefaction? A non-local connection? I don't care two hoots, three hoots. Alas, I'm not good at arithmetic. Four goods, five goods. That's how it should be done, I suppose. Is that how we live, day by day, minute by minute? Nothing else.

*Whatever you see is locally connected to your eye.
And if a skunk comes and says, 'I'm within your field of vision
And consequently part of your life,' you answer it, 'I don't
Know what life is and what's inside it, outside it.
Go your way. You're neither esoteric nor exoteric.*

After such an excursion into writing about skunks, you go back to language and abstract thoughts: you're weary of so-called reality. You pick up a few words and begin to fiddle with them until they're ready to yield a meaning – something in between reality and non-reality. Anyway, everything is real and you don't need to persuade anyone that your dreams are 'prophetic'. They just happen earlier, you maintain, and slowly but surely our reality catches up with them. According to you, reality is slow-witted.

It is not. You think you'll live forever. Of course you know that death will come sooner or later, but you prefer the word 'later' to the word 'sooner' – to such an extent that you utter it more often and always to the detriment of your projects and aspirations. And then you resign yourself to living alone, to waiting for death in

your hut. You know it can come at any moment and so you keep a bunch of roses on your bedside table – to welcome death appropriately.

*Death is just a name.
You drop it and it breaks.
Does it?*

I've got a book devoted to Japanese death poems, which doesn't mean I know death only through books. Books put me in the picture about what happens in nature, but I've seen death with my own eyes ever since I became conscious of life and myself. The number of deaths I encounter in books is far superior to that I have to put up with in my everyday life. A friend dies; an uncle dies. Your relatives don't die every day. Haikus follow each other at the speed of light.

*Farewell –
I pass as all things do
dew on the grass.*

Apparently Buddhist literature often refers to the world as 'a world of dew'. In the book entitled:

*JAPANESE DEATH POEMS
Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death*

you come across *last* poems. What do *I* know about death? I continue to write about it.

*Death doesn't come.
Nor does it fly. It crawls
on all fours around my feet.*

Here's a Japanese poem:

*Cuckoo, I too
sing, spitting blood
my welling thoughts*

I saw my uncle spit blood on the verge of death. Why am I more affected by this poem than by my uncle's agony? Because of the cuckoo? Because of the welling thoughts? 'I'm spitting blood so I'm on the verge of death. Doctor, doctor! What doctor? What about the Buddha? No, no. Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ. I should have converted to Christianity nine years ago, when the missionaries were walking through Japan. Where are they now? Pity, pity. Awful, awful. Christ, Christ. Do you hear me? I'm one of the thieves, you know. Can't you take me with You?' I seem to know the poet's thoughts; my uncle remains a mystery. The poet sings; my uncle did

not. ‘The cuckoo has a red mouth,’ writes Yoel Hoffmann, ‘and because of this, or perhaps because of the bird’s sharp call, a popular saying has arisen that “when the cuckoo sings, its blood flows”.’ Our blood flows too.

Why think about death as long as you’re alive? Hopefully, you’ll have an opportunity to write your death poem, your last poem – either on your bed or on the grass, near the burnt-out wreck of your car. Just say to yourself, ‘At this stage you can’t really anticipate what will happen.’ And then you say to yourself, ‘At *any* stage I can’t really anticipate what will happen.’ So you really enjoy that film/book/concert/party/meal. And you want to travel because you enjoy meeting people and seeing new places. You read and re-read the following poem by William Wordsworth:

*Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you’ll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?*

*The sun, above the mountain’s head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.*

*Books! ‘tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! On my life,
There’s more of wisdom in it.*

Through all my blank pages. His first sweet evening yellow. Her last sweet morning blue. The woodland linnet. I’ve heard a few birds since my birth, but I can’t identify them. They sing and I say to myself: Mario del Monaco, Tito Gobi, Maria Callas – one can’t do without her. The woodland linnet sings in my books. An *endless* strife. Life.

THE DEATH OF A POET

I'm weary of myself, of whatever comes and goes. You go and do what you wish; and if you don't wish anything, you don't go or don't wish anything, other things. It's always too late, and I write about myself because I don't care about Anna Karenina, Vronsky and Tolstoy. They can do whatever they like: there are trains for them, a lot of trains. What did *you* do with your life?

I'm at the end of my tether. No fathers, no mothers, only this tether. I am alone. A stork might have brought me to this room. Let it be. Yes, I used to have fathers, spiritual and otherwise. They were spiritual, physical, psychological. There were mothers as well. 'Thy loving father, Hamlet.' 'My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother.' Solus was my father; so was Chernigovsky. So was my father, my *real* father. They were also my mothers, all of them.

*The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.*

I am my own father. And my father loves poetry, poets and God. He loves his only child. We'll write a few poems together, my father and I. My Japanese father, my Russian and Jewish mother.

*I must finish this work.
If nothing works, I should
Persevere. Let it be.*

Last autumn I went to Lithuania. I met a lot of poets. They read their poems and I listened to them. What else could I have done?

One day I saw a brochure in my room. I leafed through it and found a marvellous poet. I wanted to meet him; they said he was dead. He was drunk. He got drunk at his uncle's funeral. He was walking back. Snow, snow, snow, as usual. They found him two months later. Snow doesn't reveal its secrets at once.

*In the narrow
and sharp mirror of the sword –
at close range more than enough space
for the whole family.*

*I remember
the words of my dead father*

I don't remember any words. Let them be.

And the direction of blood coincided with the direction

*of birds –
it doesn't matter, if they return, or fly away.*

I began writing this poem of mine in the hope of paying homage to STASYS STACEVIČIUS. I can understand Polish, more or less. Lithuanian is out of my reach. *You* are out of my reach.

*I will fly to the eternal city when I die –
mother said
but maybe she's not flown yet.*

*It seems: she's nearby, giving advice,
whom to wait for for help,
where to return, where not to.*

I'll fly with you to the eternal city, hopefully. In any language. You're my father, mother and brother. I'll do my best to get your last book published in English. You knew nature. Your snow recognised you. Where's *my* snow? My immortality is in books. I *am* immortal as long as I read this poem:

*The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*

Too deep for years. For years.

PART TWO

THE BIRTH OF A MOTHER

Not only physicists talk a lot about parallel worlds and their inhabitants, if any; this infinity is no longer a taboo subject and we indulge in this big talk for the sake of our immortality which needs a number of other worlds to keep our bodies in perfect running order. We are dead in this world of ours; we've probably *always* been dead in it, given this unhappy state of affairs – the one we have to cope with today – and also the confused state of mind to which we seem to pay tribute whenever we are drunk or on the verge of a fainting fit. Even if we're not drug addicts – not *all* of us are, by the way – we like the fog we see inside our brains and the way it spreads around our consciousness. And whenever we say 'consciousness', we must add 'the unconscious'; otherwise our neighbours are likely to laugh at our ignorance and even suggest we're only 'half-beings'. They might think that only our consciousness is in good working order, whereas its unconscious counterpart went on a spree a long time ago. Why? Are we unworthy of its presence? Or does it consider itself unworthy of the honour we're prepared to bestow on it by offering it the possibility of storing whatever data we come across in the course of our wanderings about the Earth? Yes, it might regard our consciousness as a superior being on account of its outspokenness and truthfulness that shuns any kind of deceit and undercover operations.

Let's talk about my mother instead; anyway, she must live in one of these parallel worlds, for I see her only once in a while in spite of my eagerness to see her every day and even every night.

*Whether I look into the sun, or into your eyes,
Or to the north – each time it seems, I'm not looking at the right place
Where my mother is maybe flying,
Having asked me not to cry for her.*

Is she really my mother? She must have died a long time ago, at the end of another dishonest decade; I'm almost sure she died during the year that marked the dawn of a new era in our history. The new world order was expected to come into existence after the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. I don't think this history is mine, let alone the new world order. Yet I call it 'our history' as if I had anything to do with the crimes you're bound to come across whenever you utter the words 'human history'. You may talk about plants and their history to your heart's content: they're unlikely to make you feel nauseous in spite of their occasional cruelty. Yes, some of the plants we're talking about destroy their neighbours and even their next of kin; they also eat the insects that dare to land on their petals or whatever they're armed with, determined to survive the onslaught of other species.

*Perhaps,
if the crucial moment passes by,
I will never come to you,
as you will not come to me tomorrow.*

You may also talk about your brothers and sisters, even if don't have any, judging from the void you encounter as you climb down your genealogical tree: no brothers, no sisters, no parents, no grandparents. 'Where do you

come from?', they ask you, pointing at oak trees, bushes and even at the sky as if suggesting you might have come out of the blue. Of course this version of your birth is much better than the one which affirms that you came out of the black, for this colour is associated with the Devil and also with funerals. But you're not entitled to any burial yet because you're alive and kicking; the same goes for your birth about which we're talking now. Of course you can be born in the midst of a funeral procession and if this is the case, some people are quite justified in saying, 'He came out of the black,' which doesn't necessarily mean that you're the Devil – Rosemary's baby, in other words. You don't like these words, do you? Besides, none of the women you're acquainted with display this name on their visiting cards. Does *that* mean you're the Devil incarnate?

Yet still

From a distance

More and more of the family are reflected

In the sharp mirror of the sword,

Though the shibboleth can be seen only from close up.

The nightmares I suffer from are even more frightful than any reality, however merciless and pointless. You love a woman or you don't love her: for once, love has nothing to do with the mess you got yourself into when peacefully sleeping in your bed or in your armchair where you occasionally fall asleep after drinking two bottles of red wine. Within the domain of reality – you can hardly call it a 'kingdom' – she behaved abnormally sometimes, rolling up and down the carpets you had covered your room with so as not to bump into the walls and suffer concussion: your floor is merciless too. You still fall down every week, but you are no longer taken to hospital with concussion. However inhospitable your room may look in the morning, it is unquestionably better than any hospital, even if they do their best to persuade you that their hospital is the best in the world. And you invariably answer that you don't spend your time travelling around the world in search of a suitable hospital; you don't know much about these establishments. What's more, you're not eager to broaden the scope of your knowledge – in any domain or kingdom, come to think of it. And if, some day, you do have the urge to enrich your knowledge of life and its vicissitudes, you'll do so by means of books and not with the aid of a nurse, however beautiful she may turn out to be on closer inspection. Of course you don't mind giving a warm welcome to nurses at home on condition that they carry no syringes in their handbags or in their pockets. Let their pockets be full of rye, as the saying goes. Anyway, you don't need their syringes to get high on heroine, on grass and so on and so forth. If a nurse pays you a visit, let her get you high on her natural grace and elegance.

Am I looking for a nurse or a mother? Let them come together: I often dream of nurses and stewardesses whose uniforms are regarded as a pick-me-up by many womanisers. And these dreams have nothing in common with nightmares, provided these employees take off their uniforms at the right time – in my room. The nightmare I had last night turned out to be even worse than reality and was to some extent on a par with what they call 'the trials and tribulations of marriage'. My former girlfriend locked me out and when I asked her to open the door, she began to shout as if on the verge of an epileptic fit: sure enough, she suffers from epilepsy. She began to shout; I began to run, hoping to break the sound barrier and get away from that *femme fatale* once and for all. But I forgot the rule according to which you suffer even if you break the sound barrier, which may seem strange in the light of what they say about dangerously high noise levels. According to them, whoever they are, you can

be at peace with the world only if you don't hear anything: bombs, swearwords, insults, curses and a crowd of bikers. All right: you do your best to break the sound barrier and you succeed, contrary to popular opinion: people think they can't fly, let alone break the sound barrier. They can fly of course, but they just have no idea where they'll land at the end of their flights; in other words, they're unable to answer the question 'Where to?' So they never fly by themselves – to be on the safe side, as they point out when questioned on the subject by their colleagues who, incidentally, do not fly either, strange as it may seem. Of course they do fly from time to time, but whenever they do, they know to which city and country the planes they board are supposed to take them through the air, if not through the sky.

Suppose, however, that you fly through the clouds; and you're on your own. No stewardess gives you either a glass of champagne or hors-d'oeuvres. Of course you have nothing against stewardesses, against their uniforms and bodies, but the key to success is to be in the right place at the right time, as everybody knows. This time you're bent on flying towards spiritual bliss; achieving orgasm is not on your agenda – *for once*, as you point out to your colleagues who might think you've lost your masculine power forever. You fly away from the noise associated in your mind with traffic, human voices, barking, bombing and *her* sobs: once your nightmare is over, you'll know the identity of this woman. All of a sudden you hear another kind of noise and you're so surprised and shocked that no amount of consolatory talk can pacify your turbulent mind. What kind of noise *do* you hear? There is usually a sonic boom when an aircraft or a human breaks the sound barrier; this rule or law has just slipped your mind. You break out in a cold sweat, wake up and, after a while, fall asleep once more as if nothing had happened. You're wrong: your unconscious is likely to add this noise and your cold sweat to the treasure she is about to bury in her own earth. Your unconscious, another *femme fatale*.

The previous one locked you out and when you threatened to call the police, which you wouldn't have done under the circumstances, she opened the door and began to run in your direction, her mouth wide open. You realised at once she was a vampire and you did all you could to overrun her in spite of the congenital heaviness and clumsiness of your legs. And the very next episode is somehow connected with a court where you try to explain why you've chosen to run towards the courtroom instead of jogging in Hyde Park where the air is far more hygienic. 'This woman locked me out,' you say.

'So what?' says the judge.

'I'd like to sleep in my own bed.'

'Everybody would,' says the judge.

'Am I allowed to have a second key cut?'

'You're not. Women always win hands down.'

You look at your former mistress; her hands are down. And yet she's up in arms over your behaviour, over your ego, superego and anti-ego. Whatever you do upsets her so much you wonder if she'll be able to hold out much longer under this sort of bombardment. Yes, for some uncanny reason, she says, 'Bombardment,' whenever you say something, however innocuous, or make a gesture. So you have no alternative but to wake up and think about Kafka's short story where one encounters such a little woman. Your former mistress is rather small and therefore always wears high-heeled shoes. And she doesn't take them off when kicking you in the face.

There was a huge library in your parents' house and your mother often talked to you about books as if nature couldn't hold a candle to whatever you might learn from Goethe, Kafka and Freud. Goethe says

something to this effect as he looks into the possibility of merging reality and art. According to him, nature is disorganised and it would be unfair to compare her with Raphael's paintings where every leaf is in the right place and women have wonderfully glossy hair, even if they're unrelated to the Madonna. Usually it is one's father who introduces one to literature, philosophy, theology, theosophy and mysticism. But fathers are unreliable creatures: they're in the habit of betraying your mothers and often go on business trips in the course of which they meet as many as five women who stay with them in five-star hotels.

Besides, your father is prone to depression and hits the bottle as often as he can – to the detriment of his job and vocation; and your Christmas, Easter and summer vacations. His rival is aware of his addiction to alcohol and he does what he can to take advantage of this pernicious tendency. He says to himself and his partners: 'He has some information I want, so I'm going to try to coax it out of him over a drink.' Next day, he invites your father to a restaurant where three bottles of wine are ordered at once because time is money and you'd better spend some money to shorten your business talks, especially if they're centred upon women. Sure enough, every business talk begins with a few nonchalant remarks related to women and their bodies: businessmen hope that a little erotic banter will pave the way for a more detailed exploration of their rivals' ideas. Your father's rival orders yet another bottle of wine; after a while, from your father's slow, deliberate speech, his rival guesses that he must be drunk. He is right and consequently gathers as much information about your father's scheme as is consistent with his *own* scheme. The rival's partners say he's come up with an amazing scheme to double profits; your father goes bankrupt.

To cut a long story short, you wish to murder your father and this wish might have been repressed when your father was still alive and kicking, or just alive. Now he neither kicks you in the face nor lives and you don't know what to do with your uncontrollable urge to kill him then and there or now and here – everywhere and always, to put it bluntly. You're neither Oedipus nor Freud and you wish to murder your father not on account of his relationship with your mother: your father was impotent anyway. You wish to murder him because he always had a whip on his writing desk – and elsewhere, even on the dinner table where your porridge awaited you in the mornings and in the evenings. The whip awaited you as well and you were quite aware of it in spite of your inborn faith in humanity and in love one is supposed to display in front of one's neighbour and even behind their back.

As soon as they turn their backs on you, you begin to display your generosity, kindness and love directed towards everyone, right down to Judas and other traitors, murderers and so on. But your father is not of your number, whatever your number is and however you use it in mathematics and everyday life. Your father displays nothing except ferocity which may rhyme with generosity for a minute or two; but then everyone realises it belongs to another category, another parallel world, and you're not eager to exchange your inner world for that outside mess, chaos and slaughterhouse.

Your father utters a few swearwords, picks up the whip and begins to run, hoping to catch up with you before you take refuge in the lavatory or in the toilet, to put it bluntly: the lock you might use in the lavatory is not as reliable as the one that *will* protect you in the toilet. Of course you'll have to put up with the smell you're not very keen on in spite of your long-standing agreement which boils down to this: 'I'll help you to relieve yourself if you bear with me for a while.' So you open the door behind which there's an instrument of torture – a substitute for the whip, to some extent. But you prefer this instrument to the whip because it helps you to relieve

yourself, whereas the whip offers no relief whatsoever. So you say to yourself, 'I wasn't sure about this WC when I first met it, but on further acquaintance I rather like it.'

Are you still in love with the WC when your father pounds on the door behind which you've just ensconced yourself in the hope of escaping from the punishment inflicted by the whip and your father's fists? Thank God he's never bitten you! You've never been bitten to death, in other words. What difference does it make? One death is quite similar to another one, although one can't say they're identical twins, whatever the result of their actions. You may land up in Paradise as a result of your martyrdom, but even children are aware of the fact that the tortures inflicted on them by their fathers do not ensure them a bench in the Garden of Eden: you have to suffer for your *Christian faith* and your father never beats you for your visits to church and for the prayers you recite before falling asleep.

What does he beat you for? For anything except your belief in Jesus Christ or Allah or the Buddha and his teaching which incidentally might help you forget the whip in no time at all. At least you could disregard its regular swishes and whatever scars it engenders on your body you should cherish if you wish to live to the ripe old age of 95. You do wish to become immortal on condition that you're not beaten to death every day, in spite of your good behaviour and good marks in the biology exam. Last year you scored full marks in the test – ten out of ten! Last year, ten years ago? What test? Never mind. What counts is your triumph – ten out of ten, nine out of nine, three out of three. You always win and you get beaten to death despite your victories, triumphs and the symphonies you write whenever they leave you in peace.

You also write poems, needless to say, but you forget *all* words, not only long ones – not only the ones you learnt at school when you did your best to study foreign languages. *Ein, zwei, drei*. You had *drei* out of *drei*, if you remember rightly, drily. What poems did you write last week?

*You look for everyone
and nothing escapes your notice
except everyone, everything.*

And they talk to you about roots as such and also about *your* roots as if you were a tree growing in the Garden of Eden or in the House of Hell where one might also find the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Luxury, the Tree of Luxuriance. If you murder your father, you'll land up in Hell and hang yourself on the Tree of Oedipus or on the Tree of the Karamazovs.

*What is blood? Where is it? No blood,
No viruses. You're immortal and your picture
Is exhibited in the Natural History Museum.*

Not in the *Eternity* Museum, contrary to your expectations. Nature dies; so does history. You wake up and realise there's no history except that of your morning tea or coffee, not to mention a few croissants and a glass of orange juice. 'But what's history?', you ask yourself and all of a sudden you recall your teacher who used to ask you this question over and over again, and you knew that it was used as a pretext for military intervention, as you called it. You liked war games and games of war which enabled you to forget the hypocritical peace of the world

into which you had been born some time before. This military intervention boiled down to a spanking you were submitted to every week – twice a week sometimes. In the long run, you lost count of those military or scholarly interventions. It is not the Eternity Museum, is it? Numbers, punishments. Let them forget about you, my own persona and also the girls I'm acquainted with. Some of them will come tomorrow.

But I'm looking for a mother, not for a girl, a wench, a creature of flesh and blood. I'm looking for my mother's ghost. I have no choice: those whose mothers are dead must create them out of nothing as if they were Flaubert or any other writer bent on creating a world or a semblance of the cosmos. Here's a cosmos for you, another cosmos; I give it to you as a birthday present, although you weren't born today. Good writers write for the dead, for the unborn because they understand space much better than the living – or the dying, if you prefer. You're dying. So what? It doesn't mean you understand everything down to your own birth and death, up to your own lucky or unlucky stars. They twinkle overhead, but they don't come into the open; nor do you, even if you live in a free country, in a free county, in a free house where you're afraid of putting the light on: electricity is rather expensive. So you don't come into the open to avoid expenses and problems. As a result, you remain closed and once again you recall your teacher who used to say to you, 'The matter is closed.' The matter *is* closed; so are you.

Why are you closed? After all, you're not a door; and even doors are open sometimes, especially if Dostoyevsky speaks about them in one of his novels where fathers are murdered at the drop of a hat. And their sons are accused of murders on account of a number of doors which are open instead of being closed; and they should remain closed to protect fathers, mothers and brothers whose name is Karamazov. If, contrary to all regulations, one of these doors stands open, a son walks through it, picks up an axe, a sickle or a hammer and murders his father who keeps a lot of money under his pillows. The pillows fly around the house as the son tries to locate the money he needs to go on a spree with his girlfriend whose ambition compels her to live in the lap of luxury.

'Where's the money?' asks the judge.

'What are you talking about?' asks the son.

'Why did you send all these pillows flying through the house and the garden? We found some on a birch tree.'

'I did nothing of the kind.'

'It was unkind of you to murder your father.'

'I didn't murder him. My guardian angel was holding my arm.'

'What were *you* holding? A sickle?'

'You don't have any concrete proof, do you?'

'The door. It stood open.'

'It was closed.'

'The servant says it was open.'

'He believes in God. That's why he says the door was open.'

'I beg your pardon?' says the judge.

'Our servant wants to come face-to-face with the Almighty. And the latter opens a multitude of doors to make Himself manifest or to shower His blessing upon mankind. Our servant wants the Almighty to bless him.'

‘Don’t forget the Gates of the Grave and the Gates of Hell,’ says the judge. ‘That’s what your door should remind you of. Your open door symbolises the awesome power of the abyss from which none can escape – not you, anyway.’

‘But Christ proclaimed His conquest of this abyss,’ says the son.

‘His conquest has nothing to do with your destiny. This feat and the rest of the Bible are situated in a parallel world – in relation to your whereabouts.’

‘I’m in this court of yours. So you’ve also been banished from Paradise.’

‘No. Can’t you see this circumference? I’m inside a circle which protects me from demons.’

‘I’m not guilty. Our personalities result from the complex interplay between our genes and our environment. This murder is in my genes and also in the house where I’ve spent 25 years. My father used to beat my mother on a regular basis. He would have killed her, if I hadn’t interfered in my family’s internal affairs. After all, I’m still a member of our family.’

‘Do you think you were entitled to murder your father? Was it just another internal affair? Don’t you think that murders are always *external* affairs?’

‘A defective gene is responsible for this murder,’ says the son.

‘It’s impossible to say how much a person’s behaviour is predetermined by their genes,’ says the judge.

Once again you come up against the problem of genes which disobey you as you attempt to fulfil your ambition to run a marathon, among other things. You’ve always had a burning ambition to be a film director – and an Olympic champion into the bargain, as if one ambition and one achievement weren’t enough to make you happy. Your genes, however, let you know that you can’t run 30 miles at a stretch and you say to yourself, ‘There’s no way I could work for ten hours at a stretch because my brain gets tired and I get a thumping headache. Sometimes I get a thumping headache, sometimes it’s a splitting headache I have to cope with for hours and hours. But running a marathon is another kettle of fish because the brain is more delicate and fragile than the legs. Why do my genes disobey my orders? They must remember my father who was paralysed at the end of his life. Even in the middle of it he couldn’t run fast. He would always stop in the middle of nowhere, unable as he was to reach his destination.’

And what about your ambition to be a film director? Of course you would make a film about fathers and sons who are supposed to kill each other until no one is left on the screen – no leftovers, as Shakespeare put it. Again your genes interfere in your internal affairs: you can’t make *another* film, and Freud agrees with your genes on account of Oedipus and other complexes that are all father-oriented. A gigantic father stands in the middle of a stadium and an army of sons keeps shooting arrows that fly towards the father’s heart, soul and brain. One door is open and the sheep enter the sheepfold, that is, the kingdom of the elect – according to Christ Who opened the door many centuries ago. ‘You’re welcome,’ He says to the sheep. ‘Don’t forget you’re the elect. Please don’t kill your fathers. Oedipus is in Hell and I ask you not to confuse him with Mother Teresa whose goodness is an example to us all. But it would be a mistake to follow *his* example.’

So you don’t follow Oedipus’ example for the simple reason that your father died many years ago and he was buried at once, once the ceremony related to the dead was over. How could you kill him under the circumstances? Of course you could get into the time machine which is often used by prophets: they need to have a look at the future before speaking to their respective audiences. Speaking to individuals may be dangerous unless you always tell the truth and never yield to temptation to open a pack of lies. If you do open it,

you may be beaten senseless, which is just a stage you're going through under the circumstances. Shortly afterwards, they beat you to death and there's no point in telling them, 'I don't understand the difference between truth and falsehood.'

'You do understand this difference,' they tell you.

'I don't.'

'You said the end of the world was at hand. It wasn't.'

'I was thinking about the Maya and their calendar.'

'We've got *our* calendar, you know.'

'I know, I can assure you.'

'But you forget our *agenda*.'

'I don't. I know that the subject of safety must be placed high on your agenda. That's why I warned you about the end of the world.'

'Let's move on or we won't have time to cover everything on the agenda,' they say and you agree with them. And they kill you in cold blood: that's how they move on. As for you, you no longer move either on or about or forward or backward. You're not even allowed to be old hat – among the trendy younger generation.

To whom could you complain about your premature death? To your mother's ghost, for your father is dead already and if he wasn't dead, you would murder him at once because you love your mother and wish to sleep with her in all the beds you come across in the course of your existence. Why can't you talk to your sister and pour your heart out to her? Because you're supposed to sleep with your sister as well, according to Wagner and his opera that you like so much – to the point of listening to it whenever you're in dire straits. You listen to the *Ring* where sisters and brothers embrace fraternally, in a sisterly way, and you feel better, although your mother's ghost is still in the wings and you're on the stage.

Where's your soul mate? You forget about your body because your soul counts more within the framework of your life, of the Hereafter which is the keyword in the life you live through in the vale of tears where you found yourself one day, one night, one afternoon. You found yourself in the vale of tears, but you didn't say anything to yourself, to your mother or to the midwife to whom you've never spoken, by the way. You're born into your family and into this world of ours and you've no idea what to say to anybody, to any soul; and your mother is in Paradise. The French say: '*âme soeur*'. Kindred soul, soul mate. *Âme mere*. And what if you don't have a soul to speak of? A ghost of a chance? My mother's ghost? *Madre, madre, madre*. If you can't name substances, they don't exist: you shouldn't forget Adam and God Who asked him to name whatever was at hand and also beyond hands and thoughts. Adam named everything down to nanocomputers and that's why you can live on this Earth of ours and enjoy your life to the utmost – and even *beyond that*, as a Gogol character puts it.

You realise you're on your own; you have to do whatever you must without relying on your destiny, on your mother and even on God Who watches you from afar, as is His wont. You rarely venture outside, except when you go to stock up on groceries at the corner shop. That's not enough. So you set off into the forest and you feel as though you were venturing forth into the unknown. The unknown is partly known, but you wish to know it *completely* to become immortal, eternal and cosmic, whatever that may mean within the framework of your scheme. It means *cosmic* and you go on expanding on a few ideas you've got in your mind and even in your body which is traditionally irresponsive as if it was a log or something of the kind. You expand on a few ideas;

yet you know that the air in the balloon expands when heated. And if you become a balloon, you'll fly away as if you were a balloon or a bird that prefers clouds to the mud you wade through on the Earth.

Still you need a mother and you do what you can to get one either from the hands of God or from any midwife you come across in the streets. They don't sound confident about the future of the industry and you wonder what they would say if you asked them to assess whether your projects are worth doing. Of course they might ask you what projects you have in mind and on your agenda that you can't get hold of because it is neither on your writing desk nor in your chest of drawers. So you say you don't know and they leave your house where you lament over the death of your mother whom you miss and kiss as you write yet another sentimental poem.

You attempt to live like the Buddha from whom his father hid the knowledge of death until that memorable trip in a carriage that moved through the crowd of cripples and corpses. 'What is it? What is it?' asked the Buddha and his charioteer answered all his questions within a few minutes which are engraved on the monument to humanity: 'Death, illness, death, suffering, death, a sharp pain in your foot, you feel a sharp pain and look down to see blood pouring from your leg.' Every child, however ignorant of God's ways, can read this inscription on the monument to humanity, but some parents do their best to protect their children from these sights, inscriptions and psychological pains. They say, 'This monument isn't worth looking at.'

'But this is a historic monument,' say their children.

'History isn't worth looking at,' say their parents.

'What can one do without the past?' ask the children.

'The past doesn't exist – only the present should be numbered among your most prized possessions.'

'I lived yesterday,' say the children.

'Yesterday was yesterday,' say the parents.

'And tomorrow will be tomorrow?' ask the children.

'Of course – on condition that you behave yourself.'

'And if I don't?'

'Then you'll die today.'

'When? At twilight?'

'Why not? You should learn the expression "the twilight zone between life and death".'

'You must be out of your mind speaking about death to your children!' say some parents to other parents.

'They'll know death in minute detail, whatever we hide from them.'

'How?'

'Their aunt will die in a few days. They should go to the funeral.'

'Why should they?'

'If they don't, their uncle will disinherit them.'

You're alone and there are no sports cars to keep you company, let alone women, dogs, cats and other soul mates who understand everything and stroke your cheeks, shoulders and collarbones whenever you feel like it. You feel like it and immediately a hand or a paw begins to stroke you the right way; the same paw may also butter you up, notwithstanding its owner. You just feel that you're being buttered up and that's enough, whatever your inner voices say on this occasion. Your inner voices dream of *complete* happiness and one paw or hand is not enough for them, however soft and tender the caress and the night in the bosom of which all this seems to

take place – *forever*, as you may think. So you're surprised when suddenly all these caresses come to an end and what you're left with doesn't amount to much – a scratch, here and there.

'It's better not to think like this,' say your parents.

'Why not?'

'Because nothing is *forever*.'

'And the universe?' you ask. And you think they'll speak to you about the second law of thermodynamics. They don't, strange as it may seem; once again, everything seems strange in spite of your longing for normality, for everyday routine.

'You're not the universe,' say your parents.

'Am I not a microcosm?' you ask.

'You are not. You're just a micro.'

'A micro *what*?'

'A micrometre, a microgram, a microwave, a microbrain, a microbe.'

'What kind of microbe?'

'Do you wish to become what you are?'

'Yes, I do.'

'It's better not to become a microbe.'

'What shall I do?'

'You should stop.'

So your growth is truncated by a technical fault, but it has nothing to do with the novel by Günter Grass because you've never liked this novel; besides, you have no wish to identify with a literary hero – a common practice nowadays. The novel speaks of a boy who refuses to grow on account of his disagreements with the outside world, and one keeps wondering whether he grows *inside* himself. Or does his train of thought go off the rails – a catastrophe as a result of which a boy remains a boy? In other words, he knows neither quantum mechanics nor Mahler's symphonies.

No, you don't refuse your future adulthood; all you ask for is your mother, her ghost, a close confidante with whom you can exchange a few trains of thought. Here are her thoughts and, for what they're worth, you think she may be right, although she is not, as you're bound to find out a few years later. But for a while you live with her falsehood and you don't mind living with untruth, for you don't know it has little in common with truth, either absolute or relative. Besides, you don't really care about truth and you repeat to yourself and others that what counts in life is happiness founded on universal love. You love your mother and this is just another monument to humanity out of which a huge amount of happiness arises freely and unavoidably, for no technical or psychological fault interferes with its growth.

I'm weary of life, of strife and so on; I no longer have a wish to learn a lot about life and its ins and outs. Actually I wouldn't mind learning more about these proverbial *outs*, and I'm even prepared to put up with a few *ins* on condition that a lot of outs will be waiting for me at the end of the road. And my mother perhaps, at the end of the road, at the beginning of it: we can't travel without our mothers and their hospitable wombs, as every psychoanalyst knows. All these people know this truth by heart, which doesn't prevent us from leaving our mother's womb once and for all and this sort of 'out' is incompatible with my notion of happiness, of universal wellbeing.

I search for my mother and I find her at the beginning of the road which runs through beautiful countryside and another landscape, cityscape and train of thought. And suddenly you realise that all roads into and out of the town are blocked by the snow, by a multitude of huge flakes of snow that continue to fall on your car, on your head and even on your knees. And where's your mother? you ask yourself, and the only answer you find in your head is 'weather, weather, weather' as if there was nothing else in the world – only this weather, these snowflakes and the road at the end of which there's another ghost and a multitude of other snowflakes. They're always the same, you say to yourself and then you remember Leibniz who said there was nothing like that in the whole world. Like what? Like this leaf, for instance; like this snowflake. You pick up this snowflake and it melts in the palm of your hand. All the snow melts into the river. Are you this river?

You see an angel that hovers over mothers, fathers and dead children; and you ask the angel to postpone these deaths and lives, otherwise everything will happen. And nothing should happen in this world of ours, otherwise we're in for heavy rain, for a deluge, for another death and another life which is even worse than death. Anyway you're not likely to die if you're not born, are you?

What does your mother say to you? You're my child, you're my child. Sleep well, sleep well. Get a good night's sleep and you'll feel better able to cope. And please don't grind your teeth in your sleep – it's bad for your health, especially for your teeth. Obediently you fall asleep and you do your best not to grind your teeth, even if the dream you live through is not to your liking. We often like our dreams and, upon awakening, we regret that reality doesn't live up to the sweetness we experience in our sleep. You pound on the door of your sleep demanding to be let in, but the sleep is gone; so is the door through which you can join your dream, catching up with it.

And your mother, *our* mother? Just another dream of ours? Or Goethe's mothers, one of them? There are so many mothers in the world you don't know which one to choose. And you choose one or you end up talking about mothers to orphans who dream about parents, uncles and aunts as if there were no ants in the world. Aren't they our brothers and sisters? There are so many of them and they're very hardworking, as every human knows.

In common with many mothers, you feel torn between your family and your work. You put a half of yourself on your dinner table where your family can find you at short notice; your other half is in your office, in a wastepaper basket. All your projects fall through and you decide to put your family life in a wastebasket, otherwise there'll be no more families and baskets in your life. And your half-life or what remains of it is on your writing desk now – in the middle of the room that your boss pointed to as you applied for the job in this company.

For once, you come across dead mothers and not the dead children about whom Mahler wrote a few lieder you recall whenever you think of your *unborn* children. Are they as dead as the children who died after being born once upon time? Upon time, upon space, upon your memory which reminds you mainly of what you haven't gone through in spite of your lifespan, your bitter and sweet experiences. So many sweet dreams, realities, mothers, children. Just listen to Mahler's *Third Symphony* or any other symphony of his: there are paradises in every corner; one corner and a few paradises in it. And you write a poem because you can't live without poetry, music and the past which is so huge you look at it for hours without being able to recognise it. You say to yourself, 'This is the past I recognise,' but there's another past by its side, by your side. What do you say to this past of yours? Is it really yours?

*Mother, I've been looking for you
in this corner, in that corner.
There are no mothers – only corners and Hell.*

No, you listen to Mahler's *Third* and write:

*Only one corner. Mahler's Third,
the third movement. There are only
thirds and fourths and fifths.
Another line, another word you don't know.*

And life comes back as if it could retire or go on a holiday in search of the sun and beaches which are not identical to a Mahler symphony, for the simple reason that they're not *really* beautiful. God created beaches, seas, pebbles, but He failed to create a Mahler symphony so that Mahler had to fill in the gap. He did of course and the result is marvellous, given that the world he created is the best of all possible worlds; and even other worlds aren't as beautiful as our world, our Garden-of-Eden paraphernalia.

Life comes back and you have to do something about it because if you don't create life upon awakening, nothing happens and you die without being aware of it. You don't know you're dying, but death knows everything about you, your body and psyche, whatever it is. It is *not*, but you don't care because you don't care about anything on the threshold of death – except your bench in Paradise perhaps. You wish for an armchair– a Louis XV armchair or a divan where your body has always felt comfortable ever since the Creation. Life is a divan and once again this reminds you of poems: Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. Divan of West and East. You can lie on this divan if you happen to travel in the East or in the West, and even if you turn around the North Pole or any other pole that you come across in the course of your wanderings. You come across a pole and sit down on it because you know you're welcome everywhere: on benches, on poles, on hills and dales. They're divans you should take advantage of, otherwise you'll fall asleep in a no-man's land or even beyond it, in a sort of primordial chaos where there are no divans, no settees, no chairs, let alone armchairs. How inhospitable the world is sometimes – if you don't pay enough attention to its topography.

And your mother? Are you sitting on the same divan, within the same poem, in between the East and the West? What does your mother tell you? Of course she speaks to you about nature and the birds whose language she understands even better than French, English and Russian. And you go with her through forests and even through the trees which offer no resistance to your bodies because they're also trees and birds and insects; you're at one with each other. The universe is as pliable as Dali's watches and you don't have to heat it to enjoy its pliability, its obedience to your will-to-power. You watch a film and your friends ask you, 'What is it about?' And you answer them, 'The film is about a group of robots set on world domination.'

'Was it about our politicians and oligarchs?' ask the friends.

'You're right – we're robots, all of us.'

'What do we do?' ask your friends.

'We exhibit our will-to-power in museums and in the streets of London, New York and Berlin.'

'What about our brothers?' ask your friends and other friends: there are many of them.

‘They’re standing by our side. So do our sisters.’

‘And our mothers? Are they underground?’

‘Moles live underground. So do mothers,’ you say to your friends and enemies.

Your conversation is over; so is your life, if you take into consideration the minutes you spent on this useless talk which led you to another nothingness or an underground tunnel where there was nothing except a few fugitives, émigrés and Jack the Ripper. He tore your body to shreds, but your soul remained immortal and the heavens said hello to it upon its arrival. That’s how our life goes on and backwards – towards the past and primordial mothers and brothers who murder you at the drop of a hat, for they remember Cain and also Abel: he is as unforgettable as his brother. So whenever you say, ‘Cain’, you should add ‘Abel’, otherwise the name of Cain makes no sense. Other names make no sense either, but at least you can utter the name of Michael, hoping that someone will say, ‘I’m here. I was ordered to remain at my post until the last brother had left.’

‘Do you think I’m your brother?’ you say to him.

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Aren’t we all sisters, uncles and fathers?’

‘Yes. And mothers. To some extent, we’re all responsible for the accident.’

‘What accident?’

‘Life.’

‘Isn’t it a catastrophe?’

‘Call it what you wish.’

‘I don’t wish to call it anything.’

‘I’ll call it names,’ he says leaving the scene of the crime.

MATTER AND SUBJECT

Some say, ‘What’s the matter?’ Others reply, ‘What’s the subject?’ Some scientists believe there’s about ten times as much matter in the universe as astronomers have observed. Others think there aren’t many subjects worthy of our interest and only nonsense comes out of our substances because only the word ‘substance’ makes sense on account of its atoms. Scientists are working to harness the power of the atom. We’re materialists; only substances can make us prosper in the world where too many ideas and gods wreak havoc on our lives. Everything is tangible down to our soul, psyche and any idea that crosses our minds, provided this idea is matter-oriented. At the end of our train of thought we find a material object and we realise we could sell it and get a lot of money to buy a few houses on the Riviera and on many islands situated in the seas and in the middle of the oceans.

And the subjects we always talk about are not our subjects because we live in a free country where there are no subjects: there are only *objects* in this country of ours. We buy and sell them as quickly as we can, otherwise someone is likely to do it before us and our partners. Democritus spoke about atoms that continue to fall and come to us out of the blue, and these atoms deflect other atoms and thus create the world where we live and die, making our heirs spring for joy. They spring and spring until they’re ready to drop and their aunts put to them the following question, ‘Are you ready to drop?’

‘Yes, we’re ready,’ they say. ‘We’re always ready because those who aren’t on their guard will die a natural death, a violent death. “Never say die,” we say. Such is our motto.’

‘Do you have any other mottos?’ ask our aunts.

‘Of course. Another motto of ours is “Work hard, play hard”.’

Atoms continue to fly around us and every word is an atom we can deflect to create a poem because not all the words are suitable for poetry and falsehood. The same goes for truth, by the way, although you’re supposed to say the truth and nothing but the truth if a murder is on the agenda. You do say the truth, but the words you use aren’t suitable for this truth and consequently you’re accused of lying. You’re also accused of robbery and murder, and you can’t find any word to justify your behaviour and save your life.

They ask you, ‘What’s the subject?’

‘A lake,’ you say.

‘What lake?’ they ask.

‘Any lake.’

‘What about this lake?’ they say pointing to a lake.

‘All right. This lake suits me perfectly,’ you reply. And you write a poem on the spot:

That lake over there.

It thinks it’s beautiful.

It’s right to some extent.

‘What else can you tell us about this lake?’ they ask.

It’s brimful of wonderful surprises;

and every surprise is an atom,

a molecule, an atom bomb.

And then you ask yourself why you write only about a lake, one lake, given that the whole Earth is within your reach. You stretch out your arm and pick it up like an object, a subject, an atom, an idea, a poem. What could you write about this Earth of ours? Or another earth, for that matter? The Chinese wrote everything about these earths, these moons and the lamp of earth I’m holding in my hand because it comes from my garden. I stretch out my arm and hold the whole Earth in my hand: one hand is enough.

Chrysanthemums hang blossoms of this autumn

rocks carry ruts of ancient chariots

blue clouds move me to elation

secluded things are, after all, a joy

I pick up a joy and a beautiful melody enters my heart or whatever I call ‘my heart’: I don’t know the right words and even the wrong ones escape my attention, my concentration. I concentrate on words, but I hear a melody I can’t get rid of in spite of the pain I feel inside my heart, my hot heart. It’s not just warm, contrary to what they say all the time: I’m not warm-hearted or warm-souled. I’m not souled at all; I’m probably soiled. Soiled

diapers/nappies/sheets. My charwoman left me three weeks ago. A woman among other women, other subjects, other ideals.

An owl calls from a brown mulberry
Field mice fold their paws in a mess of nests

If I drink a few bottles of wine, I drink them to the Earth's health and I look at my garden, whenever I'm in a position to look at anything. I can't hear owls from where I sit and lie, but I touch many flowers as I walk through this garden of mine: magnolia, among other trees, leaves and flowers. A former mistress of mine asked me if she could have a few flowers, leaves and branches of this tree. I resent having to give anything to my former mistresses, but I didn't say anything; I didn't even say 'yes' and she destroyed my tree.

But what about me? I fall into Hu dust
And now go home my hair all flecked with white.

Who is Hu? *What* is it? You always ask this question and you answer, 'Yes, I know. You're *it* and *you*. You're my father, mother and whatever comes into your head and your body in the heat of the moment. But the moment cools down and everything disappears, and nothing remains, apart from an eternal zero which is even more eternal than suffering.' And you know that it's not your suffering in Hell you have in mind because your mind is large enough to enclose all suffering, every pain imaginable, and of course it's in the habit of picturing to itself the pains you find neither in nature nor in Hell – or Paradise, as the case may be. So you spend your time picturing to yourself this pain, that disaster; they come and go as if there were no other movements in the universe and its suburbs. There are no other movements – only those of pain, of psychological and physical torture and you see a lot of butchers who cut up your psyche or whatever remains of it as if they could sell it to anybody, any soul.

Another Chinese poem comes and you confuse Tu Fu with Fu Tu and other poets of whom you've never heard because all poets are blessed and live in Paradise where spaces and faces look alike. At last you're at one with your neighbours and brothers. You no longer need to have a brother and even a nephew whose toys are rolling near your toes.

An old man sick in mind and chest
vomiting, diarrheic I lie down several days

You're reminded of Alain Resnais and *Providence* – the film I've seen as many as thirteen times on account of its affinities with my life punctuated by white and red wine, by bottles I have to convey somewhere so as not to perish in their midst, in my house of all places. What does it matter where you perish or die or survive operations, whips and firing squads that fire and fire, although no one says, 'Fire!' They know what to do; so does your body and it goes on dying as if going somewhere, in the direction of the nearest cemetery. You're not even sure they'll bury you with full military honours; besides, you've no idea what these military honours look and sound like, especially since we're talking about *full* military honours. Do they just fire their guns into the

air? The air is hospitable; so is your body that have already received so many bullets, making them welcome, making them feel at home in your flesh. Nine years ago, you just prayed that he would stop firing. Who? Hu? Tu Fu Mu Du?

It's high time I wrote another poem so as not to waste my time on trifles, on rifles, on whatever happens to stay within my field of vision. I should suppress this annoyance or that delight, and write only about what makes sense in a historical context, whatever it is, wherever it can be found today and tomorrow.

*they ask questions and fight to pull my beard
who could bring himself to shout at them?*

There's no point in shouting because nothing can stop them or it: your destiny, your torturers and also your diseases that creep through your doors and your pores. Pimples form when pores become blocked with dirt. What's likely to happen when your pores are blocked with diseases of all kinds, with unkind diseases? An old man goes on writing and dying as if there was nothing else to do either under the sun or in the room where he has been surviving for more than 60 years. His baby was born with a heart problem and only survived for a few hours, as did his wife. Today he has neither wives nor babies. Never mind – he is a baby himself and he does his best to become his own wife so as not to die of solitude and grief.

*Grief and solitude. I keep them company
because they may die of solitude and grief.
Why send them to an early grave?*

And you do the same, whoever you are, as I usually say: whoever you are, whatever it is, whatever you do, however you die, for all this amounts to the same thing. Sometimes this thing is not exactly the same, but it doesn't matter – not only because nothing really matters, which is also true to some extent; and we know nothing about this extent and other extents. We know neither distances nor spaces nor times and we move blindly through so many cityscapes we no longer know what language to speak. We don't speak, but this silence is not as blessed as other silences and the music we can't hear. Is it enough to know this music exists in the spheres and elsewhere?

What is the subject of this matter, of this material out of which one can make a statue, like Michelangelo and other sculptors who create their worlds, their supermen and superwomen? What's the matter, you may ask, and you often ask this question as if there was an answer to it; as if you could show to everybody what the matter is and how one can handle it without destroying it. The matter is in your hands and in your brain; and also in your body, in your personal history which is made up of matter, subjects, objects and many immortalities. What else can you dream about? About a Mahler symphony? A Chinese poem?

Here's a Japanese poem for you and for everyone else:

*I went here and there. And there there was only
there and nothing else. What could I do
with that there, this there? It's life of course:*

*you look for it here and it is there,
that, what not, not. A Gordian knot, no doubt. But you do doubt
and your doubt goes to the Moon to say there's nothing
under the Earth except a few bodies.*

But they're immortal.

The Chinese are better than you because they're *ancient* and you live in this house, at the beginning of the 21st century which doesn't welcome you – not with *open* arms anyway. One might say its arms are closed, but this is bad style and your dignity doesn't allow you to yield to this temptation. It's true that you're tempted to repeat one word if it happens to be situated at the end of a sentence, of a thought. You say, 'I'm about to die,' and you repeat the word 'dying' to your heart's content or discontent until you fall asleep, which is better for you and your readers. Go to sleep, to sleep; go somewhere else and leave everybody alone, for you're alone and everybody has left you. You're as alone as a corpse that sleeps under your feet without falling anywhere: it has already fallen and you needn't fall all the time. It's enough to fall once and everything is done, as they say because they know what it means to do everything on the spot, on the spur of the moment, otherwise someone else will do it and profit from it, from all the treasures buried in the Earth – except the immortals.

But matter is still within your reach and you're supposed to handle it, otherwise you'll die in the kingdom of Matter or outside it – in the kingdom of Subject. (It's better to die in the kingdom of Mahler.) You're a subject, aren't you? You see all sorts of things around you and you know they're lumps of coal or cheese, or they're just lumps of sugar and you can put them in your coffee unless you suffer from high blood pressure and are not allowed drink coffee. What are you supposed to drink in the morning when you're half-asleep and can't work properly? You drink three cups of tea with milk because your blood pressure goes down on account of the milk in your cups of tea and shortly afterwards in your body. This is also matter and you're a spirit, an angel, a god; your body drags you down and you go down on your knees as if doing your utmost to be nearer to your grave. Do you think that gravediggers won't be able to lift your body and throw it in one of the bottomless pits they dig every day?

And what about your *subject*? You're your own subject as long as you're subservient to your will-to-power or any other will that lodges in all the parts of your body where your mind hides in a corner because it aspires to a sort of independence. You might be a subject of your will but, on second thoughts, your will thinks better of it and says to itself that you're not worthy of its efforts and the energy it's supposed to spend on you to make you do this and that. After all, this is the will you find everywhere; it is the will of the universe and the latter is much bigger and far more important than the former. And what's the former? Yourself of course and you begin to despise yourself for your inability to join the army of forces that govern the universe which will consequently prosper in your absence. You write a poem on the subject, but that doesn't console you in the least.

*I no longer feel any ties with my home planet,
alias the Earth. I live in heaven
and talk to birds who need neither words nor bread.*

What's the subject matter of your new poem, of your new life? Not Dante, this time – please, forget the poet who told you lies about Paradise that doesn't exist in spite of all our efforts. If we could all make an effort to keep this Earth tidier it would help, they say, because they need to talk day in day out. They're human beings who communicate with each other, otherwise no one will call them social animals or something along those lines. As a matter of fact, they're neither animals nor social, nor sociable, but they don't care and carry on all day, like children, like their own children. You end up confusing children with parents.

My subject matter is not death either: sometimes I enjoy my death poems, but at other times I find them really boring. It is true that life would be bloody boring if nothing ever went wrong, I say to myself, and *everything* does go wrong – everything down to the smallest of details that join the army of wrongs. I'm not bored this time and I don't say to myself, 'I'd rather be bored,' for I can't say this either to myself or to others; in other words, I've got a lump of matter in my throat that prevents me from talking. So much the better, I don't say to myself and others understand nothing at all as they look at my mouth that can't utter anything; it can't even make a movement consistent with the phrase 'he opened his mouth'. No – neither this man nor I have ever opened anything and I'm prepared to die surrounded by my inborn, lifelong closeness.

*I am a man who's made no name, already I've grown old,
Wandering hungry three years on barren mountain roads.*

I'm wandering and I don't even know whether I'm hungry or not; anyway, your definition of wanderers depends on how you interpret the verb 'to wander'. Sometimes you wander off the point somewhat and you don't know whether this point is your subject or just a point of no significance. There's just a point somewhere – perhaps under your feet; and you trample upon it without saying to yourself, 'This is *the* point and I must nurse it to the best of my abilities, otherwise I'll die and go to Hell.' You say nothing and the point rolls from one wall to another, provided you've got a few walls around you; in other words, you don't live in the open air.

Besides, this point often turns out to be immaterial; it's pointless to look for matter within the framework of this point and even in its neighbourhood. All this is beside the point, outside the point. And when you hit upon an idea situated *inside* the point, you doubt whether you hit the point and not the mark; and in the long run words let you down. Writers and philosophers no longer write about words and they're right as long as they don't write at all, for you can't really write a book without asking a few words – a huge dictionary, as it were– to help you out. Today no one says, 'I can't express myself because words are slippery,' although they *are* slippery, taking no notice of our fashions and new customs which achieve their goals in no time at all as if pointing out, 'On a clear, straight road you can pick up speed.' They pick up speed and you become a multimillionaire overnight unless you get side-tracked by books and other pointless objects, subjects and matters; by writing poems, among other things.

*I am a wanderer, a man, a woman.
I see no skies, no hills and dales.
Nor do they see me as I walk through them.*

Poetry doesn't help you at all because it lies whenever it speaks, saying a few words about dales, daffodils and Delilahs. Daffodils are beautiful, it says, and you know that nothing is beautiful on this Earth of theirs because death is ugly and everything comes to be reflected in the mirror of death. Sooner or later, always. It comes to be reflected and it realises it has always been reflected in the mirror of death, in his looking glass and even beyond this looking glass or whatever comes and bars your way.

The corpse was in an advanced stage of decomposition, they say; and so says poetry. But poetry knows more about life than life itself and it puts a few finishing touches to the picture:

The corpse was in an advanced stage of decomposition.

So was the body; so was the embryo.

So was his mother, her father and brother.

I am dead, but even my coffin isn't aware of my death because I've got no coffin. I'm not longing to have one, and yet prices go up and the price of an ordinary coffin may double in the near future. Well, I may die in my bathroom or just in my room that isn't fed up with my body yet, as far as I can judge; and my judgement probably counts in these matters. I may die anywhere and Epicurus is right when he says that death is nothing because we don't feel it. And family vaults aren't in my line of business for many reasons. I don't recall these reasons, and other reasons and treasons. I live as I can and the sun rises every morning to shed light on the enigma of life.

They say, 'I want to be buried beside my wife,' and gravediggers dig a hole beside a tombstone on which there's a name of a woman or two names of the same woman. I don't know this woman and I have no wife to speak of, even if, from time to time, I'm eager to speak of a wife or a mistress – for want of anybody better. What creature might be better than a beautiful mistress? Let us leave God in peace for once: He is duty bound to wage war on a rebellious country that doesn't uphold the principles of democracy. Of course He is the most beautiful creature one can come across in books and elsewhere – in heaven, beyond the clouds, beyond the sun and twinkling little stars. They twinkle, eat and drink their fill, and one wonders if they know anything about celestial armies and brotherhoods, given that even in heaven they need some golf, squash and tennis clubs, otherwise Bernard Shaw was right when he pointed out that Paradise was far more boring than Hell. At least one of his characters did, and we're our characters and vice versa, whatever that means or may mean in Paradise, on Earth and the stars that no longer twinkle, strange as it may seem.

They speak to each other to kill eternity and other entities that always get in the way, 'How are you doing?'

'I'm part of the vital force that governs the universe.'

'So what?'

'I live despite my death because my vitality spreads out for miles to other galaxies.'

'And your death? Doesn't it live in our universe?'

'It does of course. But this doesn't count.'

'What counts then?'

'An infinite number, an infinite variety. The universe is theoretically infinite.'

'What about you?'

‘I am theoretically immortal.’

There are no poems to keep me company; and even if I read about blue eyes and an ecstasy that may arise from some vision or other, from a sound, a dream, I don’t listen to it as if Mahler’s symphonies were tombs, gravestones and names. I know I have to sing my own immortality to live through another day which doesn’t await me, contrary to what my mind repeats all day long, ‘You’ll live forever and ever. You’re dreadful sorry, my dear Clementine. You’re Clementine and Clement, but your eyes aren’t blue, alas.’

My eyes are black, green, colourless.

They’re less than eyes, less than any colour

Or tint. Ting-tong, ting-tong.

Once again there’s history on the horizon and it is about to catch up with you as if you couldn’t live without it, without firing squads and persecutions, without corpses and watery graves. You live without this and that, without anything. But if you discard one little item, you die in no time at all and you realise that there’s no time, no eternity and no space except a grave, a graveyard. There’s a yard, a meter, a mile and you turn them round in your head and in your hands, hoping you might go somewhere to enjoy the sun and one or two waves. You enjoy nothing except a cup of tea and you disappear like your colleagues and friends, your former and future mistresses.

And what’s your subject? My subject is on my wall where a number of photographs look at me: my ancestors, my fathers and mothers who can’t sleep in their graves, if I don’t say, ‘Sweet dreams, sweet dreams.’ So I say it, but they don’t answer as if they couldn’t care less about my own dreams, about my firing squads, my gas chambers. History is at my door and this door of mine is always open. A current of unpleasantly cold air is blowing through a room, even if I don’t open anything. Is it matter, particles, waves, Nils Bohr? It is Einstein or Eisenstein. Atoms fall from anywhere and stay with us forever; and no one can say one isn’t immortal, even if infant mortality is much higher in the poorest areas of the city; and in the richest of the country.

Your story is very short – nothing to write home about, especially that you have no real home and the unreal homes you’ve got somewhere do not come up to your expectations. They come neither up nor down as if they couldn’t move; they probably can’t, given that they’re unreal – as unreal as your arm you’re trying raise. What do you want? Do you want to say something? Are you eager to intervene in trouble spots throughout the world? There’s a trouble spot; you intervene and the spot becomes another spot that you may call a ‘paradise spot’. You sell tickets and people go to this spot to enjoy whatever there is to enjoy, including ice creams, candyfloss, Mouton Rothschild and so on and so forth. You enjoy all that and many other things, and then you write your own story, saying, ‘I was born, I lived and I died.’ You’re wrong: you’ve never lived, whatever you say or write or print or publish; whatever they buy in bookshops and in the marketplace.

So I haven’t lived, even if a few poems are what they call incontrovertible proofs, the vestiges and traces one leaves on a beach as one walks along it, across it, up and down. I walk up and down and become a mystic who knows what heavens have to impart to human beings and their descendants, their heirs and heirlooms. I walk up and down, and I’m never in between, whatever Pink Floyd say; I’m in the middle of a gigantic space where there are no middles, no go-betweens. You say something and I answer because I don’t think I should be impolite. The more you try to get me talk about my experiences, the further I retreat into my shell. My shell isn’t

very spacious; yet I'm free within it and even outside any shell, provided I'm left alone, within the peace of my mind.

'Your mind doesn't exist,' they tell me all of a sudden.

'It does because I think.'

'You don't think. You dream.'

'I hear voices so I exist.'

'You don't hear anything. You're dead.'

'My coffin speaks to me. What does it tell?'

'Just a tell-tale.'

What do newspapers tell you?

In the end, he died without assistance, with Jane, his daughters, Beth and Lauren, and his sister Ginny beside him.

He escaped going to the Swiss assisted-dying group, Dignitas. 'He doesn't see why the hell he should have to go to a foreign country to die in the middle of an industrial estate,' his wife said.

Nicklinson did not understand how the court could refuse his request for a dignified assisted suicide at home.

They stated: 'Voluntary euthanasia is murder, however understandable the motives may be.' Doctors and solicitors who helped someone die would be 'at real risk of prosecution'.

You're not dying; you live of course because you've got no choice and any alternative is even worse than this one, although it is no alternative at all. They say, 'You wish to die, but you're still alive and your life is a precious gift that comes or flies from on high. Do you know that God looks down from on high? And you should know that God looks at *you*. Your life is a precious moment, a precious memory, a precious memorial. You're so precious to me, whoever I am.'

I'm not dying; I'm as immortal as a piece of music I listen to this morning that is as long as any morning, any evening, any summer midnight. And what about my pains, my psychological wounds that Freud might have described as unbearable? Don't describe them! I know them by heart and often recite them in the morning, in the evening, at twilight; and twilight isn't far from the gods.

After the stroke, he was left dependent on round-the-clock care. He had said: 'I cannot scratch if I itch. I cannot pick my nose if it is blocked and I can only eat if I am fed like a baby – only I won't grow out of it. I am washed, dressed and put to bed by carers who are, after all, still strangers. I am fed up with my life and don't want to spend the next 20 years or so like this.'

I must be material. Yet I don't know what material I was made of more than 60 years ago when humanity was leaving the war behind it. But the war is still with us; it is behind us, below us. Even in the sky this war continues its fights and struggles for life because any war's will to live is far more powerful than any other will, whatever Nietzsche might have said on the subject. Actually any war kills wills and Bills, but even its own will falls victim to this death instinct, which make us wonder why this war – and any other war – goes on despite the death

of its will. Well, once you push it, it keeps going under its own momentum – that’s what they say about wars in general and in particular.

Why should I have a lot of children who are bound to die in their childhood, for God loves them to the point of willing to have them to Himself almost at once? Not a baby crying in their cradle, but a child who may put two and two together and smiles like an angel. And this smile is even more radiant than that of an angel because the latter knows everything about fallen angels. But, according to Dostoyevsky, a small child never falls, psychologically or religiously speaking. In other terms, she is incapable of committing sins. And if she sleeps with a man like Stavrogin, she hangs herself after a while, for she knows that any sin is a *sin* – not *nothing*, as many people believe, especially those who don’t believe in God and anything apart from their jobs and bank accounts.

God loves and cuddles them, and their parents weep buckets; and they take no trouble to shut themselves up in their own rooms to weep. They’re not gay, unlike Lear, Ophelia, Cordelia and other heroes who go mad on the stage and in the wings, slapping many faces and shouting insults at the police. You’re caught in a tempest and you can’t find any shelter, contrary to what Shakespeare says to you as he describes his kings who go mad because of their daughters, fathers and mothers. You just go mad because there’s nothing else to do in this world described by Shakespeare, Mahler, Ibsen and so on – as if you could say ‘so on’ after saying ‘Mahler’. What ‘so’, which ‘on’? Does he really have any successor? The success rate for this succession is very low; it is below zero, as the saying goes. You freeze to death before listening to a few notes which might remind you of Mahler, Wagner and Schoenberg. Nothing reminds you of them, and even if you sleep with your sister and kill your brother like Verdi’s rival of the troubadours, you don’t hear anything except a few cars that zoom along beyond your windows.

When I look out of my window, I see my life as if there was nothing else in the world – no other subjects, no other matter, no other *mutters* or mothers, if you speak only English. Goethe thought it was enough to know one’s own language in addition to French which, according to him, was a universal language at the time. What time was it? From time to time, we should ask this question instead of inquiring, ‘What time is it, is it, is it?’ What time *is* it? It’s almost the twilight of the gods; and I see no gods and no twilight because the sun is in the firmament and I get the feeling it will stay up there until the end of the world or the beginning of another world.

*March is gone, and April’s come;
Old fellow, how many more chances to welcome the spring?
Don’t think of the endless affairs beyond the Hereafter;
Just drain your lifetime’s few allotted cups.*

How many cups have I drained since this morning when I was supposed to drink a cup of tea instead of opening a bottle of wine, two bottles of wine? I know my multiplication table by heart and my heart aches as it always does when I listen to Mahler’s lieder and symphonies. Why should children die? Why should your companions in misfortune look at you round the clock? They’ve got fair hair and blue eyes. Why is Paradise so close to Hell or to life, to anyone’s life, to any life, whatever you do, provided you make an honest living? It’s not close to anything; it is just *closed* and St Peter or any other guardian of laws and middle-class mores is likely to brandish a bunch of keys as you get closer and closer to this proverbial gate.

Just another cup, for I think it's high time I had one, and I'm not mistaken for once despite doctors' advice and other medical nonsense. I'm fed up with this nonsense and my former loves that greet me as I go into the past, my eyes closed as if I was asleep forever, like Clementine. I'm not, I'm not: I see the past and even the future – at least a part of it, and this part may turn out to be more important than the rest of Time which goes without saying anything. And if it does say something, it sounds like a piece of music or a piece of information. It can say to you, 'It remains illegal for doctors to intentionally and deliberately terminate the life of someone who is not terminally ill.' And you answer to Time:

'I *am* terminally ill.'

'I didn't realise your cancer was terminal.'

'Didn't you? When was it? When did you realise it wasn't terminal?'

'Two months ago.'

'Now it *is* terminal, I can assure you.'

'*Ah bon?*'

'Speak English!'

'All right. Do you have a terminal lung disease?'

'No, I don't smoke.'

'Did your illness prove to be terminal?'

'It did.'

'Are you terminal?'

'I'm not a terminator, if that's what you mean.'

'I don't mean that. I don't mean anything.'

'Do you mean to say Time is meaningless?'

'Whether the Book of Time is well or badly written is immaterial – it has an important message.'

'What message? Destruction? The second law?'

'The third law, the fourth law. They're all alike.'

In truth, I am crestfallen, totally devastated and very frightened. I fear for the future and the misery it is bound to bring. I suppose it was wrong of me to invest so much hope and expectation into the judgment but I really believed in the veracity of the arguments and quite simply could not understand how anybody could disagree with the logic. I guess I forgot the emotional component.'

You forget emotional components, emotions and other psychological data and suddenly you face it – a lot of faces that look at you as if you were the criminal for whom the world has been looking from time immemorial, immaterial. You look for your *prima immaterial* and find so many fathers and wombs you wonder how to get rid of all these symphonies, lieder, *Worte* and English words. But there are *German* words as well and you have to put up with them; what's more, you have to put them in your letters, your words – in your messages to the world and underworld. So you put them here and there as if to answer a simple and unavoidable question, 'Does this verse tickle your fancy, your life?'

Nothing tickles me any longer and I just stand or sit there, doing nothing and listening to the sounds that remind me of the symphonies and lieder I heard in my youth when I could hear and feel something. But my

youth is as far as Jupiter and it might twinkle like a little star from time to time, provided I make it twinkle, thinking it will be another turning point in my life. You twinkle and turn; as a result, you become another man because I'm still not a woman in spite of all my tendencies and habits. Another man, not another woman. You turn and a woman comes to your rescue or just stands in for you on the stage of the world or just on a provincial stage you know nothing about. You stand on it and theatregoers look at you as if they had never seen a human being before, and you feel like undressing yourself, otherwise your presence on this stage can't be justified. And everything should be justified, explained, vindicated and verified – even inexplicable phenomena, miracles and God Who doesn't look at you either from on high or from any other place. What does it matter where this place or podium is situated? God is thought to be in the Caribbean, although His exact whereabouts are/is a mystery. All right, all right; you should write about someone else – about yourself, for a change.

You think about yourself and so do I; yet there are other matters and subjects I might take into consideration, given that I have to consider others, otherwise they'll say, 'He never considers anyone but himself – he's totally selfish!' I am, frankly speaking; I am a self and I am my customary cheerful self today. And I am also my usual evasive self, skilfully dodging my own questions about life and death. I seem ill at ease and not my usual self; and yet I am my usual self or unusual self, as the case may be. All this may be and is on condition that no accident mars your enjoyment of life, otherwise they'll say about you, 'It was a long time after the accident before he seemed like his former self. He wasn't his usual ebullient self.' I wasn't, I wasn't.

I am, I am; I was, I wasn't. All this happens, and I have to put up with these questions and answers that no one can tear apart so you get stuck with both questions and answers. What answer reminds you of the question you forgot five years ago? You had to memorise a useless poem and your memory wasn't big enough to include both the poem and the question. Nothing reminds you of anything and even I continue to live as if nothing had ever happened, as if Time had stopped or just sat on the ground. Time is still on the ground and it looks at you as if to let you know you're its assistant and you can assist it with the selection of illustrations for the Book of Life. You do assist Time and select murders, old age, cripples and wars; and Time says nothing because it's used to it, to you, to my profile at which it looks from time to time, especially at twilight.

I'm not this twilight. I may be a god, but the gods live elsewhere and I've no alternative but to walk around my garden where everything reminds me of myself. I don't wish to be reminded of myself, of my envelope, of the letter I carry in my body, of this message of no importance: I'm not in a class of my own and can die without destroying the universe. So I die and the universe goes on living. So does the show and the snow falls on passers-by as if the sky had nothing else to throw on us, on them, on the pavement covered with your footprints.

Silence awakens you,

To find:

From afar, mines of silver, beautiful,

Silver hair – at close range,

Alongside a touch of silver that so well suits you.

S. S.

Neither sky nor heaven have anything to throw on you except a few atom bombs; and these bombs fall on your head, on your life and you feel them inside your skull. What do you say to these bombs? You say to them what nature says to you: 'You struggle for life, for death, for indifference. Your struggle goes on and on and you're weary of death, aren't you?'

'Yes, I'm weary of death,' you say to the bombs.

'Why don't you die at last?'

'No, I want to live forever.'

'Dreadful sorry, Clementine?'

'Yes, dreadful sorry, Clementine.'

'Are you really sorry? For yourself?'

'I am.'

'You're dead, then.'

'I'm alive.'

A bomb exploded at one of London's busiest railway stations this morning, but I wasn't in London either this morning or last week.

The three judges who heard the case, Lord Justice Toulson, Mr Justice Royce and Mrs Justice Macur, said that in spite of their deep sympathy for Nicklinson and a second paralysed man known only as Martin, who also wanted help to die – it had to be for parliament, not the courts, to decide whether to change the law.

Any alterations would need 'the most carefully structured safeguards which only parliament can deliver,' they said.

*West of my house, young mulberry leaves are ready for picking;
Along the river, new wheat, so tender and soft.
How much more is left of life when spring has turned to summer?
Don't pass up good wine, sweeter than honey.*

THE IMMATERIAL

I went to Lithuania last year. I like the name of this country and I like the country too. In Vilnius there's a church that everyone wants to put in everyone's pocket.

There were poets in a huge hall and they read their poems.

What's your poem? Just a few words no one will ever read. You write:

*God is in Heaven. I am on Earth.
We're on the same wavelength.
So I'm in Heaven. I'm saved.*

One poet recalled his mother, but his mother was Mater Gloriosa. He committed suicide and she said to him:

Come, please come.

*You're already here,
Not there. You're in
My arms, on my lap.*

A Father of the Church speaks to you. He says that love is important and you realise it *is* important. You're perhaps not very intelligent, but you understand the importance of love and you embrace all those who come to your rescue or just say hello. They say hello and depart, and nothing remains except a few fragments that speak about your mother, father. They say you're inside Mahler's *Eighth*. 'Let me sit you up in this symphony so you'll be more comfortable,' says God.

And a Lithuanian poet speaks about his mother who flies somewhere, his Mater Dolorosa. We remain in this symphony and a few poems I may write, if I feel like it.

*You must look up, otherwise
You won't see anything.
I always look up; I never look down.
I see your stars, your mothers,
My family and humanity.
I love you all, even if you die
Every day, every hour.
I love you even more because you die.
And even if you didn't die
I'd love you and your neighbours.
Who are your neighbours? Mahler,
Mothers, Fathers, Goethe? I love them too.
I love Gretchen who died and
Our Mater Gloriosa. I'll fly with them,
With everybody, everyone,
Everything, forever and ever.*

Mahler wrote the *Eighth Symphony*; he wished to be objective. God and angels are objective; your pains subjective. Absolute truth is objective; personal truth subjective. Absolute truth is macrocosm; partial truth microcosm. The same goes for freedom.

How to move your leg in a world crippled for life?

And then of course you say to yourself that words are nothing: they don't express anything. Outmoded working practices are being phased out. Nowadays no words speak of words; they speak of actions, louder and louder. So you put in a few dots.

They *mean* something and I don't need meanings.

*But silence sings, and, it seems, shortly
Something will happen here,*

What far away has already happened or keeps happening.

S. S.

Let time go on because eternity is even more horrifying. And every dot or suspension point stops time. Let it be,
let it go

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II

OBITUARY

PART ONE

The path follows the river closely, occasionally deviating round a clump of trees. That's what happened to Marx, I suppose, to his teaching. It was worse than that. There was a path to follow, but the followers, at least some of them, deviated from it—not on account of a clump of trees, mind you. Several cities, several countries emerged from the earth, from the sea—quite unexpectedly at that—and those who were following the path began to deviate from it in order to skirt round them, to bypass them because they knew there'd be a lot of traffic. No, it's not true: I've deviated from the path of the truth, it seems to me. There was no traffic to speak of in those times. Actually there were no cars either, with the exception of a few vehicles we can't really call cars, if we take *our* standards into consideration, *our* times, *our* technology. In *this* day and age one *might* deviate from the path drawn by Marx and Engels so as to avoid being entangled in the net of a snarl-up. But no one deviates from their path any longer; on the contrary, philosophers and economists go back to Marx, to *real* Marx, to his authentic teaching. As a result, a lot of numbers appear on computer screens. On the other hand, going back to Marx could result in deaths beyond number—many people are aware of that. But they think that communist regimes are a thing of the past so there's nothing to be afraid of, nothing to fear. They believe that Marx and his theories might give capitalism a helping hand, for there are no hands of this kind within capitalism itself. Anyway no American economist was shrewd enough to predict the amplitude of the crisis we're muddling through, which is scandalous, given the amounts of money they get for their shrewdness.

I was reading a gloomy economic prognosis in the paper this morning. 'We were warned of a \$9 trillion deficit over the next 10 years.' My prognosis is even gloomier: a \$19 trillion deficit. Bergman's films are often full of gloom and despair, but I'm reading an American newspaper where, among other things, you light upon the following piece of information: 'We continue to allocate over \$100 billion a year for fighting wars.' I seldom read newspapers as if heeding the maxim 'no news is good news'; and yet I'm continuously bombarded with all sorts of news, some of which are *much worse* than the lack of any news. They're even worse than a lack of confidence and a lack of sleep; yet I've been suffering from lack of sleep for many years and consequently know the subject inside out. My knowledge in this domain is far superior to what American economists can boast about in papers and on TV. They've also spent a lot of time studying one aspect of life—economics and its frolics, in their case—but no success seems to crown their efforts. As to my achievement, it sticks out a mile, though I haven't studied the subject *consciously*. In the dead of night I read newspapers and lots of numbers emerge from their pages; I continue to read them as I try to understand what these numbers are related to. Why do I try to decipher them, unravelling their secrets, if any? There are no more secrets in the world unless you look for secrets and hidden treasures—for treasure islands you've no intention of bypassing because *they* are your final destination.

I recall \$300 million. I read about this amount in an article devoted to Michael Jackson, to his life, to his passing away. I thought he'd earned this amount of money—his life savings, so to speak. Herbert von Karajan left behind only \$68 million when he joined Don Juan and Mozart in the Hereafter. But Michael Jackson was the King of Pop, which means that he earned at least 10 times more than the King of Conductors; perhaps 20 times more. But he must have spent 30 times more than the King of Conductors and his family so the amount of money left upon his death was not what it might have been, had the King of Pop been parsimonious during his visits to shops and real estate agencies. On television I saw him enter a shop and point at various pictures

hanging on the walls. ‘This one and that one, this one and that one,’ he kept on repeating as if determined to empty the shop whose owner was fawning upon him. Only then did I realise he owed this money to somebody, to many people, to many banks and countries—\$300 million. No, I was mistaken: I’m always mistaken when dealing with trade, sales or unemployment figures. Not that I care much about them! The point is I’m awkward with *all* sorts of figures, and I would certainly break them if they were objects like china cups. So I might say I’m ham-fisted when dealing with figures.

The sum Michael Jackson owed to his numberless creditors was around \$500 million. Financial matters are beyond my ken, as I’ve already pointed out. But this figure is also beyond my ken because I can’t imagine it; and yet I’ve got enough mental power to imagine another world, an impressive number of parallel worlds that haunt me in my dreams. I don’t even have to imagine them: they *are* in my dreams. But I’m unable to dream of such a figure because it’s beyond my dreams, my imagination. It’s beyond *me*, as it were. It’s beyond me why some people want to own so much money; or to owe so much money to somebody. Obviously Michael Jackson had no intention of owing so much money to banks, but that’s how the matter stands today. Tomorrow his children will pay them back—thanks to the CDs and DVDs sold after his death. In France alone they’ve sold 10 million copies. I may be mistaken. What I do know, however, is that I’d be happy with one-tenth of that amount, although no one cares about my happiness—not the people involved in the Jackson business anyway. They’ve no idea I’m in the land of the living, on the surface of the earth. I hardly knew Michael Jackson in his lifetime; a tit-for-tat relationship. And this relationship isn’t over yet: Michael Jackson hasn’t died, as they put it in a French magazine.

The day the music died, as they put it in an English magazine. Michael’s truly record-breaking career. What records did he break? When the history of music is written, surely Jacko will rank alongside Beethoven, Bach and the Beatles, in any list of the greatest composers who ever lived. That’s what they write about him. Not to all of these people does Jackson owe money, but all of them admire him unconditionally: as a composer, a singer, a live performer, a video artist. Some of them admire him for the amount of money he earned in his lifetime. Others admire him for the amount of money he lost in his lifetime. ‘Only a multimillionaire can lose so much money,’ said one of them. Why don’t they admire Russian oligarchs who earn (or lose) more money than Michael Jackson? Because some of them get assassinated? Because some of them land up in prison?

Mikhail Khodorkovsky is a famous prisoner of this kind; in Russia he’s even more famous than Michael Jackson. He’s in the toughest type of jail. He’s got less than five square yards at his disposal. The light in the cell is kept on round the clock. He’s allowed to take a shower only once a week. He was Russia’s richest man. Now he’s allowed to eat his daytime prison ration: biscuits, tea, sugar and instant porridge. He’s allowed to be taken to court where they lock him up in a 1.5-ton bulletproof glass cage. The courtroom is full of guards cradling machineguns so one gets the feeling they want to make sure the glass cage is really bullet proof. They say he was plotting some coup, but the plot was discovered before it was carried out. The police foiled a plot to assassinate the President of Russia. They say whatever comes into their heads. At least that’s what *he* says, and I think he’s right. I think he’s right when he says that education and reflection are prison’s pluses: he reads even more than

he used to outside the prison. I read a lot too, which means that my flat is my prison—to some extent. Anyway my house isn't my *castle*.

Did he aspire to run for President? I don't think he would have won the presidency by a wide margin. At least he says that the opposition parties he was supporting at best could have won 15% of votes. Robert Owen says that the rich have a lot of time in comparison with those who are in need of making ends meet. At some point the rich realise that time stands still around them. So they get a move on; they move heaven and earth in order to amuse themselves. In short, they enter politics; and this isn't always a good move. Khodorkovsky's fate is a case in point. His life is full of zigzags which reflect both God's justice and injustice. God was certainly unjust when He made him see the light of day in the Soviet Union where one couldn't become rich overnight. Not in those days, not in the Sixties. He was born into a family of engineers who were not Communist party members and had no connections. They were poor and he had no alternative but to go to work early. He became an engineer in 1986, at the age of 23. By the time of his arrest in 2003 he had built Russia's largest oil company, Yukos. A zigzag, isn't it? First he finds himself in a modest flat, in a relatively poor country. Then he becomes rich; so does the country. He might have been run over by a lorry before he had an opportunity to build Russia's largest oil company. He wasn't. He was allowed to build it so as to become the richest man in Russia. Like so many people, he was motivated by greed, they say. Others say he was genuinely motivated by a desire to help people. He donated a sizeable portion of his riches to children's charities, they say. And he denied he'd had an ulterior motive for making the donation. Those who knew him as a boy affirm he was very possessive about his toys and found it hard to share. Why isn't he possessive about his toys now? they ask, raising one eyebrow in a meaningful way. People don't change overnight, they affirm. They never change unless they're put in prison. If you spend any time in prison, you're labelled as a criminal for the rest of your life. And criminals behave *differently*.

People may not change overnight or otherwise, even if they live to the ripe old age of 94. But what about God? Doesn't He change His mind? Doesn't He change our destinies in the twinkling of an eye? First we're born into a poor family living in a poor country. Then we become rich and come up with the idea of running for President. Next morning we're thrown into prison and remain there till doomsday. We haven't changed, not at all. We'd have just carried on doing the same old same old every day, if God hadn't changed His mind. Or was our imprisonment in His mind from the very start, from time immemorial? 'It is a weakness to change one's mind,' says Malebranche. 'It shows a lack of enlightenment or of firmness. Thus one must be careful not to demand miracles from God or to attribute them to Him at every moment.' In other words, God doesn't change His mind. Of course He could step in and murder those who are bent on putting us in prison, but He's reluctant to 'multiply his volitions' for the sake of reducing the number of evils in the world. 'God could convert all people and prevent all disorders,' says Malebranche, 'but He must not thereby upset the simplicity and uniformity of His action.' In other words, His laws are what they are and He's unwilling to change them for the simple reason that their simplicity fits in perfectly with His own grandeur. Some think that art should be simple. Others think that God is simple because only simplicity befits someone of His position; Malebranche is of their number. He enlarges upon the generality of God's will based on the consideration of His attributes. God doesn't act on the spur of the moment and never has a change of heart because he's got no heart, as Spinoza might have put it.

There are no *particular* volitions in his arsenal of volitions. He never yearns to get away from generalities and focus on the issues. Anyway he's got no yearnings. 'If rain falls on certain lands,' says Malebranche, 'and if the sun roasts others; if weather favourable for crops is followed by hail that destroys them; if a child comes into the world with a malformed and useless head growing from his breast, and makes him wretched; it is not that God has willed these things by particular wills.' He winds His clock, alias the universe, once and for all. We hear the loud ticking of the clock in our houses, in the streets of our cities, on trains, on planes, on boats. The hands of the clock creep slowly around and sometimes we're allowed to see these hands, the hand of God. At least we think it's the hand of God and not just the hand of a clock. However, we may think it's just a clock so we can put it forward, turn it back. Sometimes we set the clock by the time signal on the radio; yet we've no idea where this signal comes from. Is it the voice of God? Is it just the voice of a radio station? Sometimes we make an attempt to stop the clock altogether, to get rid of it once and for all. Can't we live without clocks and watches of all kinds? They often lead us astray, being either on the slow side or on the fast side. 'Does your watch keep good time?' I'm asked now and then. 'Does the *clock* keep good time?' I'm tempted to answer. 'I think the clock's kaput,' I shout. 'The clock mechanism is extremely intricate and very difficult to repair,' says a sage. By the way, in Khodorkovsky's prison watches are forbidden.

'Paris appears to have adjusted best. She has expressed a desire to attend a private school. Prince has withdrawn into a private world.' *The Sunday Times*, 13.09.09. They're still talking about Michael Jackson. (As everyone knows, he died on June 25th.) In a way, Jackson's life is a 4 by 100 metres relay. He's got three children. Obviously he didn't fumble the baton as he handed it over to his children on the day of his death. When Dr Conrad Murray realised he couldn't revive him he called his eldest child, Prince, up to the second floor of the family Bel Air home. One wonders why the doctor, who is under suspicion of homicide, felt duty bound to involve a 12-year-old in his father's agony. It is beyond anyone's ken. And God didn't interfere, apparently, so as not to mar the simplicity of His conduct. In the first place He shouldn't have let Michael die at such an early age, at such an early stage of his career. He didn't even let him finish the song he was composing as he prepared his London concerts. And what about all those people who were dreaming about Jackson's farewell tour, a number of tickets in their hands? God let them down too. The necessity that binds God is 'a happy necessity', says Leibniz, but many people seem to think otherwise: Jackson's fans, his managers and even Dr Conrad Murray who must be on the run today, fleeing justice. But it's more important to take heed of what Leibniz and Malebranche have to say on the matter because their status is superior to that of Dr Murray and other people involved in this dreadful business. What puzzles one, however, is that even Leibniz's colleagues didn't agree with him; and yet they knew nothing about our predicament. Bayle, for one, maintains that Leibniz subjects God to a sort of fate: 'There is therefore no freedom in God; He is compelled by His wisdom to create, and then to create precisely such a work, and finally to create it precisely in such ways. There are three servitudes that form a more that Stoic *fatum*, and that render impossible all that is not within their sphere.' Leibniz answers thus: 'This so-called *fatum*, which binds even the Divinity, is nothing but God's own nature, His own understanding, which furnishes the rules for His wisdom and His goodness.' All this is beside the point, it seems to me. A man passed away, a famous man: the King of Pop, the God of Pop. Why talk about God in this connection? Why talk about those who talk about God? Silence is the best homage to a composer who, according to some journalists,

ranks among the greatest composers of all time. But newspapers continue to talk. They talk about his children now.

Apparently his children were happy in spite of their father's fame and drug abuse. According to *The Sunday Times*, to Prince, Paris and Blanket, Jackson wasn't a drug-addled star. Like many others—I'm of their number—he was simply an insomniac. 'I didn't get a whole lot of sleep last night,' was his constant refrain. But instead of following in my footsteps—I drink wine when confronted with insomnia—he was stuffing himself with drugs. I yielded to this temptation only once, and I felt so lousy next morning I firmly resolved never to renew the experience. And of course there were no doctors around, no hands putting drugs in my mouth, no syringes injecting drugs into my veins. One of my friends is a diabetic and has to inject himself with insulin every day. But insulin isn't a drug, as far as I know. Anyway my friend is still in the land of the living, despite his illness.

It is odd how little his drug-taking seems to have impinged on life elsewhere in the house. His children thought he was an insomniac and every insomniac does his best to go to sleep and thereby forget the world. Some take drugs, others drink wine or whisky. In short, his children were happy, although they had to put on masks whenever they ventured outdoors: their father wanted to shelter them from the paparazzi and even from ordinary citizens. But on these occasions—whenever Michael ventured outdoors—the press was tipped off in advance by his press officer so sometimes his children showed their faces, their masks having been ripped off by the curious. In my opinion, being shot once in a while never did anyone any harm. 'We did a fashion shoot on the beach, with the girls modelling swimwear.' Whenever I hear anything like that, I start dreaming about the sea and those who spend their holidays walking along the seashore. I used to go to the Black Sea quite often, but I dropped this habit a long time ago because the sun doesn't agree with me, contrary to what tanned people might presume. Of course my mother would warn me in the following terms, 'When you go out in the hot sun, you should always put cream on your skin to avoid getting sunburnt.' Obediently I would put cream on my face, on my bare arms, on my bare legs. Alas, this subterfuge never worked. I ended up hiding my skin and wearing clothes on the various beaches to which my parents would take my submissive body. I couldn't hide my face, though. I ought to have been wearing a mask.

Jackson's house was filled with Renaissance art. Giant prints of paintings by Raphael and his colleagues hung on every wall. His children's faces brightened as they walked around this Renaissance beauty. Their father never forced them to play, take dance classes or learn instruments. They just walked around the house, enjoying themselves. For our happy childhood we thank you, our motherland, as we used to sing in the Soviet Union. And yet our childhood was far from happy: no Renaissance beauty, a lot of chess games, piano lessons and dance classes. Only masks were available in shops. But no one dangled us out of our windows, contrary to what might be presumed. Our childhood wasn't happy and some children suffered a lot from various shortages for which the Soviet Union was justly renowned. But even Stalin, who adored children as every self-respecting tyrant does, never dangled a child out of the window. On the top of the mausoleum he would pick up a child and hold it high to show how much he liked him or her, but he never stretched his arms on these occasions so that the child in question wasn't subjected to the torture called 'vertigo'. Michael Jackson did it. He wasn't standing on the top of

the mausoleum, needless to say. He was probably in his hotel room, in one of the hotel rooms he occupied during his tours. As usual the crowd acclaimed him. As usual a crowd of about 15,000 had gathered under his windows and he measured up to his fans' expectations. Actually his show exceeded their wildest expectations: he wasn't alone this time. In his arms he was holding his daughter. What's more, he dangled her out of the window. She was just nine months old. She didn't fall, as if determined to keep away from Beckett's play *All that Fall*; nonetheless she was suspended in mid-air, powerless and pathetic. Did her father think she was too young to experience the vertigo that enables a Hitchcock hero to murder a Hitchcock heroine? (The man who might have interfered on behalf of the victim suffered from vertigo.) Of course children are unable to judge how far the earth or the sun is situated. They often wish to put the sun in their pockets and, to do so, they reach for it, raising their arms and jumping higher and higher. They don't know that even those who win gold medals in the high jump can't remove the sun from the sky. Even a world pole vault champion can't do that. As for the earth, a nine-month-old girl might think that if her father feels like dangling her out of the window, she'll be able to walk up or down the street or sit down on a bench. And if her father says to her as he dangles her body out of the window, 'You look tired. Why don't you come and have a sit-down for a few minutes,' she'll do her best to comply with his wish. In this case she won't sit down on the windowsill; she'll make a laudable attempt to reach a bench she sees down below. But for nothing in the world will she land on the heads of the people gazing up at her because she doesn't like other people's heads. Even her father's head doesn't seem comfortable whenever he puts her on it, anxious to give her a ride around his beautiful estate. Well, she didn't fall for the simple reason that, as Malebranche put it, 'God is impotent in the sense that He cannot choose ways of acting unworthy of His wisdom.' It would have been unworthy of God's wisdom to kill a nine-year-old girl who, on top of everything, was a King's daughter. God knew that she had no intention of flying: she wasn't as mature as Natasha Rostova. God knew that her father might have collapsed and died of a heart attack, had He let her slip from his hands. 'In Himself God has good reasons for everything He does,' as Malebranche put it. Besides, God knew that Michael Jackson was a dancer, one of the fittest, strongest people on the stage. God knew that Michael Jackson could lift and carry adults with no difficulty. Michael's ability to do so was part of God's Order. And, as Malebranche put it, 'Immutable Order, which consists in the necessary relationship that exists between the divine perfections, is the inviolable law and the rule of all His volitions.' This order may be likened to logical and mathematical truths because it shows that a soul is nobler than a body, that a human is worthier than a cat. (I, for one, disagree with this last assertion: it's not as mathematical as it sounds.) This order shows that if a dancer dangles his daughter out of the window, he does so with impunity because his experience has fitted him perfectly for the job. A pianist, on the other hand, is quite unfit to carry out this daunting task unless he took dance classes in his youth. (Actually it was his son, not his daughter. Michael Jackson was dangling his *son* over a balcony. His son was too young to imitate Superman.)

A TV chef dies after eating and drinking in a restaurant I know nothing about. Why didn't he go to a famous restaurant? One's last meal should be memorable, if only for those who survive our hedonist. A much-loved bon vivant passed away after celebrating his new girlfriend's birthday with a boozy three-course meal. A six-course meal would have been better, in my opinion. What does it matter how much you eat if you're bound to die after the meal? Of course it's always preferable to use an oil which is high in polyunsaturates and low in cholesterol. But there are other oils and they're tastier than the one recommended by doctors. His culinary feasts were always

executed with aplomb and a large glass of red. On this occasion he drank a Pouilly Vinzelles 2006 and Nature Perrin and Fils Côtes du Rhône 2007. I would have drunk other wines, older wines, more opulent wines. He seems to have bungled his death or rather his initiation into the mysteries of death. What counts is your last word and also the last wine you drink on your deathbed or elsewhere—in El Bulli, in the best restaurant I’ve ever read about. I met a friend in Salzburg, my former pupil. We talked about this and that; we also talked about this restaurant. His wife is Spanish and consequently her place of birth is closer to the restaurant than Moscow where *I* was born. I phoned El Bulli only to find one can’t book a table there. So I talked to my friend and his wife about my unquenchable desire to partake of a little wine in El Bulli. They laughed and said they knew someone who had gone to school with Ferran Adrià, regarded as the best chef in the world. Then I received an email in which my friend touches upon Costa Daurada. I like the name because it reminds me of *daurade*—the French word for gilthead bream. My friend and his wife regularly go to a restaurant in Costa Daurada. The chef of the restaurant told them that Ferran Adrià keeps one or two tables for ‘special guests’ so these guests don’t need to call his restaurant on December 1st in order to book a table, which can’t be done anyway. Why waste your time and money on a useless call? Why are you supposed to call them on December 1st, I wonder? Why not January 1st? A logical thing to do in the circumstances. Their answerphone told me I should call again on December 1st because all reservations are made on that particular day. Well, I didn’t call them on December 1st, opting for a better solution to my gustatory problem. As the Russians say from time to time, ‘It’s better to have a hundred friends than a hundred roubles.’ They must have modified the saying on account of inflation. The Russians don’t know that the control of inflation is a key component of the government’s economic policy. It’s better to have a million roubles than a thousand friends. Anyway my friend—one of my thousand friends—told me that his friend was a friend of a wine merchant to whose shop Ferran Adrià went twice a year in order to supply his restaurant with vintage champagne, port and claret. The wine merchant promised his friend he would talk to Ferran Adrià and ask him to open up a sort of humanitarian corridor, allowing us to pay a visit to his restaurant. I wouldn’t mind dying after the meal. That’s what *he* ate before passing away: Champagne with a cherry soaked in apple eau de vie (£11.50), oysters with potted shrimp and toast (£12.70), red-legged partridge with bread sauce (£21.50), perry jelly—pear cider made into jelly (£6.50). He smoked during the meal. His last cigarettes. He lived it up until the last day.

I need an ambulance please.

Who are you? What’s your name?

I can give you my address, if you wish.

But I’d like to know who you are.

I’m dying. Can’t you come?

We can’t unless we know where we’re going.

I’ll give you my address.

What’s the phone number you’re calling from?

Can’t you see it?

I can’t.

I can hardly breathe.

Are you breathing, Sir?

I think I'm not. There's no one in my flat.
 So no one can tell you if you're breathing or not. Is that what you mean?
 I'm conscious, though.
 Otherwise you wouldn't talk to me. I hear you all right.
 I'm not all right.
 I know, I know. We're already on our way there.
 Where? I haven't given you my address yet.
 Why don't you give us your address?
 Let me think. 1, square de Furstenberg.
 It's in Paris, then. Easy to find.
 It's not in Paris.
 Where is it? On the moon?
 Why are you talking about the moon?
 You could walk on the moon like Michael Jackson. You'd be back on your feet in no time.
 I'm dead on my feet.
 Don't you worry, Sir. We're already on our way.
 There's no point worrying about anything—I'll be six feet under by then.
 Are you playing with words? It's a sign that you're feeling better.
 I'm not. Are you coming?
 Don't you have a doctor there? Did he see what'd happened?
 Should I lie down on the floor?
 Aren't you on the floor? Where are you?
 I'm on my bed.
 If you're being instructed by a doctor there, on the scene, then he has higher authority than me. It's a very hierarchical organisation in which everyone's status is clearly defined.
 I don't care about your status. You need to come please.
 OK, we're on our way. We're less than a mile away and we'll be there shortly.
 Thank you, thank you very much indeed.
 Call me back if you need anything else.

I hardly knew anything about Michael Jackson before the day of his death. I saw his name in our local newsagent's where they announced his death with headlines such as, 'King of Pop Dead', 'The Death of Music' and so on. I look at his face, trying to recognise the King whom I must have seen a long time ago on TV and on CD covers. Actually I never buy such CDs or rather I've not been buying this kind of music for many, many years. Frankly speaking, I've never bought anything like that unless King Crimson and Pink Floyd fall into the same category, since you may call them the Princes of Pop. My Russian friends explain to me that the groups I admired in my youth—I still admire them, to tell the truth—do not belong to the same category: their members aren't *pop* musicians. 'Modern popular music, usually with a strong beat, created with electrical or electronic equipment, and easy to listen to and remember.' 'A type of popular music with a strong loud beat which is usually played with electric guitars and drums.' What's the difference? The former definition refers to pop

music, the latter to rock music. A strong beat, a strong *loud* beat; electrical or electronic equipment, electric guitars. In the recordings made by King Crimson I can't *always* hear a strong loud beat. They can't agree on a universally acceptable definition of Marxism. What about 'rock' and 'pop'? Never mind. King Crimson and Pink Floyd are different from Michael Jackson; they're different kings, so to speak. Are we right in calling them kings? Most modern kings and queens rule only in a formal way, without real power. But Michael Jackson has ruled the world and the waves for many years. Some maintain he fell from power in the late Nineties—even before the trials he stood for paedophilia. But this is not true, given the financial success of his London concerts: some 750,000 tickets sold out within hours. And I still listen to King Crimson's and Pink Floyd's recordings when down in the dumps or even in an amiable mood. What's the definition of 'mood'?

I remember their songs; and those of the Beatles of course. I don't remember Michael Jackson's music for the simple reason that I heard it for the first time on the day of his death. Or the next day, while watching the news. Only 12 countries didn't start their TV news with his death; among them China, Russia and Iran. Had I been in Russia, I might have missed Michael Jackson altogether. I heard his songs, I saw him dance. And I said to myself and my girlfriend, 'It's all a fuss about nothing.' I might have said, 'Much ado about nothing.' I didn't. I probably thought that Shakespeare shouldn't be touched upon in connection with Michael Jackson and his death. Yet Shakespeare always stays in the wings when somebody dies.

As Michael Jackson gyrated his hips, the crowd screamed wildly. A line of male dancers gyrated to the music while the audience screamed their appreciation. Michael Jackson was in the midst of those male dancers. The audience began gyrating to the music. I was standing in front of my television set, motionless and dignified. Michael Jackson threw his hands up as if in ecstasy; my girlfriend threw her arms round me and gave me a hug. 'Do you really like him?' I asked. She answered as follows: 'Don't forget I'm much younger than you. In my youth I was dancing only to his music. Come on, why aren't you dancing? Enjoy yourself!' And she began to dance, her eyes filled up with tears. 'Can you dance the tango?' I asked.

Pina Bausch died. I never gyrated my hips as I watched her dancers from my seat in Théâtre de la Ville. Nor would I tear up my shirt. And my hands remained on my knees. Nevertheless, I followed her closely; I followed her instructions, as it were. She would say to me, 'Follow the road for two kilometres, then turn left.' I would obey her like a dog. She was a fox; I was a dog. One might say I was specially trained to follow the trail left by her. I had a Platonic knowledge of her ways. I've got two cats. In my garden one of them showed the other how to kill mice. There was a mouse in the grass and the teacher was patting this mouse on the shoulder. The other cat was looking at them, studying the art of killing. I never knew whether Pina Bausch was playing a game or dealing a fatal blow to the members of her company, to the audience. Was there any catharsis to speak of? Yes, yes. Sometimes it was 'yes', sometimes 'if I'm not mistaken'. Sometimes she just shook her head, but this might have meant 'I love you'. Her dancers told us their stories and recited poems.

An apple I'm holding.

An orange I might hold if

I had enough time

To buy it.

The apple's timeless.

So is my hand.

Her ballets didn't look like Michael Jackson's clips: they took their time, they made room for words, for gestures, for things. 'You've got to leave plenty of space between you and life,' she seemed to insinuate. 'By the way, the blank space at the end of the performance is for your name.' There weren't any road signs to help us navigate through the maze of her one-way streets. Her fans knew, however, that it was *her* city made up of one-way streets. There was no other way, there was no way out. Only one-way streets, inexorable, merciless. And lovable, wonderful. A street named 'desire', a street named 'agony', a street named 'ecstasy'. Another kind of ecstasy—nothing to do with Michael Jackson's arms. Her arms. Not a swan either.

'I saw one of her plays and I didn't like it,' said my girlfriend.

'You didn't *understand* it, I suppose. You've no Platonic knowledge of her languages. I mean no innate knowledge of her ways.'

'You're not supposed to *understand* a piece of art,' she said. 'You should *feel* it. I didn't feel it. I felt nothing. I left the theatre.'

'You've no innate Bauschian feelings. You don't know her languages.'

'Well, there's a space between us. Don't you always talk about space?'

'You should walk towards her. You walked out on her. But don't perform a sort of Moonwalk.'

'What kind of walk do you advocate? An Earthwalk?'

'You should learn her languages. You should tame your feelings, organise them.'

'I'm not her debtor. Why should I alter my feelings for her sake?'

'You shouldn't *alter* them. You should *enrich* them. Leave all your feelings where they are, but add to them another set of feelings, a multitude of languages. She was a polyglot.'

'Michael was a genius,' she said. 'He spoke the language everyone understood. And his feelings were *my* feelings. We all speak the same language. There's only one language.'

'He was a sort of chameleon, wasn't he?' I said. 'Just add another personality to your personality. Another identity. You should become black. What about androgyny?'

'You've grown old over the last three months,' she said. 'You're ugly now. It's a pity we can't see each other more often—I wouldn't notice your wrinkles.'

What are your plans for this weekend, my dear God? What's your company's business plan? Do you have a five-year plan? Am I on your list? On which list am I? On the five-year list, on the four-year list, on the three-month list? Am I allowed to see my girlfriend again? *Tant pis* for the wrinkles. Just three months. Our negotiated peace plan. I suppose your management board has already set out its plans for the coming year. Just explain your plan in a few brief sentences.

I'm buried in newspapers now, looking for the clues to Michal's planetary (or interplanetary) glory; but I always return to the fold in my spare time. I don't mind these God-inspired breaks; besides, God and Michael are not

incompatible. Yet Michael didn't talk to his children about Jesus Christ as if bent on joining the ranks of nonbelievers. Was he a freethinker, an agnostic? Or just a sceptic? In his children's presence he might have referred to our *Lord*, though. When a scientist utters the words 'Lord' and 'God', he doesn't necessarily make a declaration of love to the Almighty. He just says 'Lord' or 'God'. When he or she says, 'My God, what a mess!' or 'Oh my God, I've never seen anything like it!' religion doesn't come to the fore. And the scientist in question doesn't return to the fold because this scientist is neither a prodigal son nor a prodigal daughter. If a scientist says, 'God knows how we're going to be ready on time,' he or she doesn't imply that God knows anything. Nor does he or she imply that God exists. In other words, neither he nor she believes in God. It's a kind of password. 'I can't let you in unless you give the password,' says God and you say, 'Oh Lord' or 'Good Lord'—that's quite enough. So God lets you in; you get into another stretch of time. Or you die on your deathbed, not on the floor. 'Oh Lord' may be one's last words. 'Oh my God, I've never seen anything like it!' This sounds like a promise—the light at the end of the tunnel. And in spite of this and other promises—and promises can be found everywhere—only four percent of scientists believe in God, believe it or not. Einstein thought the idea of God was a product of human weaknesses. And he found the Bible childish. And Michael was childish throughout his life. What's wrong with it? What's wrong with children? Something must be wrong with their father. Michael was beaten by his father. At least they saw his father beating his son with a stick. And the son's bruises lent credence to his statement that he had been beaten. Michael's fear of his father was so great he would later say, 'There were times when he'd come to see me and I would start to be sick.' His father taunted his son with 'ugliness'—sowing the seeds of a future obsession with cosmetically changing himself. At that point God obviously neglected Michael as if following Malebranche's theory to the letter: no particular volitions, only simplicity, only laws. No miracles, in other words. If God had stopped Michael's father from beating his son, it would have been a miracle. And what about God's dignity? What about his dignified silence, as Spinoza might have put it? So God kept silent. God is the strong silent type, as Spinoza might have put it. Acting in a general and not in a particular way—the concept of simplicity is to blame, I presume—God often brings about natural disasters and doesn't bestow on a sinner a sufficient quantity of grace which would enable him or her to grow virtuous. Malebranche's God can't do what he wants to do: He has to take into account the laws that govern the world. Actually it is Christ who prays for the salvation of individuals. Though endowed with his Father's intimate knowledge of all things, Christ, however, is a finite being whose thoughts are inadequate. So Michael had an unhappy childhood. Anyway childhood isn't always a happy time. For Proust, the taste of a *madeleine* brought childhood memories flooding back. Michael Jackson never ate *madeleines* for fear of his childhood memories. Whenever a journalist said, 'I'd like to ask you some questions about your childhood, if I may,' Michael never answered, 'Fire away!' Adults often look back on their childhood as a golden age, but the matter stood differently with Michael. And let's not forget that most phobias are grounded in childhood experiences. Why did Michael dangle his son—whom I mistook for his daughter—over that balcony in Berlin? According to an American journalist, the episode seemed 'like a ritualised attempt to dispose of his younger self.' The point is, Michael never was able to dispose of his younger self. Even if his father had dangled him over the same balcony, he wouldn't have fallen as if in defiance of gravitational forces.

And then God *recalled* Michael Jackson who lorded over the world of entertainment in the 1980s—his 1982 *Thriller* remains the bestselling album of all time. But God's memory is unreliable. It may be compared to a

suitcase precariously balanced on a tiny luggage rack above your head. The suitcase may fall and kill you; it may also remain on the rack. (A bad comparison prompted by the dread of death.) God's memory lapses punctuate the Old Testament. Jackson had health problems for years. Drug problems as well: in 2007 an L.A. pharmacy sued him, claiming he owed \$100,000 for two years' worth of prescription meds. And money problems: in 2008 his ranch nearly went into foreclosure—he defaulted on a \$24.5 million debt—and even the \$50 million he stood to realise from his London concerts wouldn't have enabled him to wriggle off the hook. A 2003 documentary filmed with journalist Martin Bashir proved to be Michael's biggest undoing. He told the cameras he often shared his bedroom with young boys. He was charged with seven counts of child abuse. He was declared innocent five months later.

Did God keep an eye on Michael as he stopped moving and breathing? **He's pumping...he's pumping his chest but he's not responding to anything, Sir. Come, please.** Why didn't *God* pump his chest? Actually God had no need to pump his chest: a particular volition would have done the trick. It's Dr Murray who was pumping his chest, trying to bring him back to life. But he was no God. He wasn't even a good doctor, apparently. And Jackson's fans have got a sneaking suspicion he killed their idol. A poisonous drug. An overdose of this drug was administered to Jackson intravenously. God might have blocked Jackson's veins. He didn't. A road might be blocked by snow or by a fallen tree. Roads are often blocked. Why not veins? Our veins must be blocked in the presence of a weird doctor, of a vampire. **We need him...we need.** The desperate 911 call to try to save Jackson's life. He was working on a new song about the environment. He was excited about the message it contained. Why wasn't God excited about this message? God must care about plant, animal and human ecology. God must assist the ecology movement. Doesn't God know that oil pollution could damage the fragile ecology of the coral reefs? Jackson had already recorded a rough first draft of the unnamed single which, if released, could become the most lucrative and famous pop song in history. Why didn't God allow him to go on? Why did He prevent a human being from composing a hymn to nature, to His child? We need him, we need, we need him, we need, we need him, we need.

'His music is second-rate,' I said to my girlfriend. 'Actually it's pointless to rate or evaluate something that doesn't exist. His music is virtually non-existent.'

'His music's everywhere,' she answered.

'Music's everywhere anyway. Even this conversation of ours is a piece of music. But *his* music's non-existent.'

'You keep contradicting yourself. I think you're a bit confused.'

'You mean I'm too old to argue with you?'

'You're just contradicting yourself. You say music's everywhere. So his music's everywhere because only *his* music counts nowadays. People dance to his music, they sing it, they live with it, they die with it. He died with music. His unfinished song.'

'Would you compare him to Beethoven?' I asked.

'Yes. His music is an ode to joy.'

'As a dancer he was one-dimensional,' I said. 'A gyroscope. Gyrating, gyrating. W. B. Yeats wrote a poem about it. His arms, his hips.'

‘That’s what dance is about. Joy, energy.’

‘And what about space? Don’t forget Pina Bausch.’

‘A TV screen was enough for Michael.’

‘Since I started eating more healthily I’ve got so much more energy.’ I smiled.

‘You’re old and lazy.’

‘I’m not being lazy—I’m just saving my energy for later.’

‘For what? For one of your novels or concerts? I was struck by the raw energy of Michael’s performances.’

‘Energy isn’t self-sufficient,’ I said. ‘Do you have a particular end in mind? That’s what counts.’

‘It’s the *way* that counts, not the *aim*,’ she said. ‘Michael was dancing and singing. All I needed to complete my happiness was his music and his dance. *My* dance.’

‘Aren’t you happy *now*?’ I asked.

Today the performers of classical music often display the raw energy of which my girlfriend spoke in connection with Michael Jackson. They stop short of gyrating their hips, but their faces are almost as expressive as Michael’s. ‘The rain beats against their faces as they struggle through the wind,’ wrote a journalist. Then slowly a smile spreads across their faces. Suddenly a look of utter devastation appears on their faces. Their faces, their faces. I wish I could see a look of intense concentration on their faces, nothing else: no suffering, no triumphs. But the audience likes their faces because they seem to show music and the emotions they experience while performing it. ‘I don’t know how he goes through that ordeal every day,’ they say as they leave the hall. The members of the audience. ‘I wish he was my son,’ they say. ‘I wish she was my daughter,’ they say. ‘Those trousers fit him nicely,’ they say. ‘Because he’s nice himself.’ ‘He always dresses very nicely.’ ‘It’s nice to know that somebody appreciates what I do,’ the artist says to them backstage, after the concert. ‘Enthusiasm was radiating from her,’ they say two days later. ‘I wish she was my aunt,’ they add as a smile spreads across *their* faces. ‘Did you have a nice time?’ they’re asked. ‘The concert was terrific,’ they answer. ‘Good show,’ they say to the artist backstage. And what about music? They need to be entertained with a display of physical agility—that’s where music comes in. A display of physical agility and a fashion show. I’m talking about classical music—about a piano recital, for instance. A programme with features on pop music, sport and fashion. *Their* concerts are different, aren’t they? I’m talking about pop singers again, about pop dancers, about pop idols. That’s where clothes come in. They’re important, aren’t they? Michael realised that at the very outset of his career. I saw him wearing all sorts of clothes on a page I seem to have lost. At least I’ve not been able to lay my hands on it for two hours. It’s 7.30 a.m. I woke at 5.30. At once I began looking for this page, for Michael’s clothes, as if I’d been obsessed with his image. As a society we’re obsessed by sex and Michael is our icon. But his sex was indeterminate. Should I say, ‘I wish he was my son’ or ‘I wish he was my daughter’? My nephew or my niece? My brother or my sister?

Did he have an unhealthy obsession with death? His eyes were his most striking feature and he didn’t lose them, judging from the last photographs of him. But he lost his lips, his hair, his nose, his mouth, his forehead and his cheeks. He didn’t lose his ears, though, which doesn’t mean he was a great composer. Even if he had lost his ears, he wouldn’t have caught up with Beethoven, whatever they say. Beethoven is far, far away, and he

continues to walk away from us. Richard Dawkins says that Beethoven's last quartets do not prove the existence of God. There's a lot of divine music on our music stands and music rests, but that doesn't mean God exists, according to Richard Dawkins. The King of Pop exists, though, whether I like it or not; whether I like *him* or not. I can't say I wish he was my son—it's too late anyway. I should have given the matter a thought 20 years ago. But I hardly knew him at the time. And had I known him intimately, I wouldn't have been authorised to adopt him because he had a father already. And his father was denied neither his conjugal rights nor human rights in general. So he had every right to caress his son or beat him. Be that as it may, the prospect of parenthood filled me with horror—in those days, in the Eighties, in the Nineties. Now I wouldn't mind having a son, but it's too late. And I find it extremely difficult being a single parent.

Café Müller. I saw this ballet by Pina Bausch more than 20 years ago in Paris. It was so hard to get tickets I spent two hours in the Théâtre de la Ville which was empty between two performances. I came there at the end of the matinée and literally swam against the tide: many people were going *out* of the theatre. I was pacing up and down the rooms where nothing could happen between two performances. No dancer was warming up; no waiter offered champagne to the audience. There was no one in the corridors leading to the stage and backstage, to the wings where artists usually shiver involuntarily as they await their turn, their dance on the stage. A woman was leaning against a wall, on the stage, at the outset of the performance—Pina Bausch in the flesh. The performance had already begun; and yet I got the impression I was still roaming around the empty theatre. I would lean against this wall and that, for want of anything better. You can't do anything in an empty theatre unless a book distracts your attention from your own solitude and from space; unless a book limits the space around you to a page, a few words. I was carrying no books in my pockets and so my solitude was boundless. So was *her* solitude. She was leaning against the wall, which reminded me of Ivan Karamazov who, at some point, turned into a thread as he watched Smerdyakov fiddle with a stocking. In that stocking there were 3,000 roubles that would have allowed Smerdyakov to spend the rest of his life in Paris, had he not hung himself. At that moment Ivan was as thin as a thread: unconsciously he strove to withdraw from the space where such a ritual was going on. No wonder—he'd been accused of murder. Presently he went out of the theatre run by Smerdyakov and, like a somnambulist, made his way home through the Russian snow. Like a somnambulist, Pina Bausch crossed the stage, knocking against the chairs which a man was removing from her wayward trajectory. However, she managed to knock against some of them, if I remember rightly. Anyway I was wondering what would have become of her, had she knocked over *all* the chairs. Why didn't she lose her balance and tumble over? Because Pina Bausch was aware that nothing could be worse than her somnambulist-like walk, her solitude from which only an injury or death might have delivered her.

Another man appears on the stage, another woman. This man picks up the woman and entrusts her body to another man who drops her immediately as if she was too heavy. Dancers are used to carrying bodies, aren't they? Not only do they often carry them, but they also turn them this way and that so the audience could admire their strength and the beauty of their movements. Instead of playing with the woman's body, the man drops her without batting an eyelid and the woman crawls around his feet, asking forgiveness for what she's done. What *has* she done? A burden, she's a burden the man is supposed to carry as long as the performance lasts. In days of yore, a woman might refuse to marry a man she loved because she thought she would put a spoke in his wheel by

giving birth to a baby, by hiring nurses whose noisy behaviour was likely to prevent her husband from writing masterpieces. So she would opt for the role of mistress. How could a choreographer depict such a situation on the stage? A female dancer finds herself in the arms of a man to whom she says confidentially, 'You may drop me if you wish,' or just 'Drop me please! I'm a burden.' And the man says to another man, 'A huge burden was lifted from my shoulders when she told me I could drop her.' Perhaps, for a while, the woman should lie on the man's shoulders.

In 1991 Michael Jackson unexpectedly married Elvis Presley's daughter—a union made in pop music heaven, as they say. Or should we say the union was made in pop music *hell*? Addiction to painkillers, insomnia. At some point, Michael said to Elvis Presley's daughter, 'I'll die like your father' or something to this effect. The effect is always the same when a man becomes a superstar like Jesus Christ. (The matter stands differently with women. Madonna is a good example.) To tell the truth, it was neither hell nor paradise; a sort of purgatory. Was she a burden? Perhaps. He might have been a burden too. He would drop her, she would drop him. They might have been crawling across the floor, now and then. Once I took opium—this happened only once in my life. Apparently I was crawling across the floor for an hour or so: a friend of mine watched me closely. Did he? He was also high on opium. Was I *low* on opium? After all, I wasn't flying.

There was another burden in Michael's life, perhaps the only burden he ever had. His eccentric behaviour had given rise to him being labelled Wacko Jacko. 'That's a cruel name,' he declared. 'I have a heart and I have feelings. People say that because they are jealous. I haven't done anything wacko. I go to hospitals and orphanages with huge bags of toys. I spend thousands doing good. What's wacko about that?' Indeed there was nothing wacko about *that*. Actually *that*—being labelled wacko—was no burden. Just a toy lying in the palm of his hand. He might have dropped it at any time. This was nothing compared to the effect that child abuse allegations had on him. They first surfaced in 1993 when the police raided his Neverland ranch. He spent his life dodging accusations of child molestation. One of these accusations (or molestations) led to trial and acquittal in 2005. One shrink concluded that Michael wasn't a paedophile but merely a child—a case of arrested development. Can a child molest a child? A real burden. Some think that Michael's premature death has its roots in this trial. He arrived in court handcuffed to two police officers. How to drop such a burden? Suppose a child was lying in your arms, half-asleep. Would you drop him? You might dangle him over a balcony, but you wouldn't drop him unless there's murder in your genes. So Michael dropped none of those children. As a result, he burdened himself with anxiety, if not with a guilty conscience. 'You've got a guilty conscience—that's why you can't sleep,' one of his doctors told him. Michael shook his head. 'You have a guilty look on your face,' the doctor went on. A real burden, these accusations, these suppositions. The doctor's words were based on pure suppositions, but pure suppositions are also a burden if they're voiced day in day out.

'Michael Jackson is dead, he's dead!' shouted the nurses. We need him ... we need.' No use crying over spilt milk. And the milk was spilt—no doubt about that. Who spilt the milk? That's the question. That's no question. Perhaps it is, but what's the point in answering it? There are seven or eight suspects, Dr Murray being number one. Michael Jackson's legacy has been number one in the charts for six weeks. What's the difference? You're charged with murder or you get money. That's not the point. There's no point in quibbling about linguistic or

logical nuances. Some testimony will exonerate Dr Murray from all responsibility for Michael's death. And the latter's money will go to his children or somebody else. What kind of testimony may exonerate Dr Murray? 'After Michael Jackson was injured in a fire while shooting a Pepsi commercial in 1984 and, later, in a stage fall, he became dependent on prescription medication and on the Dr Feelgoods who cater to the pharmacological demands of the stars.' All right, all right. Not guilty. They go on, however. 'Jackson often looked frail and wasted away in his public appearances, the result of a malady called alpha-I antitrypsin deficiency, a genetic condition that leads to the breakdown of the lungs.' Not guilty, not guilty. So many people murdered Michael Jackson that the judge is bound to say 'Not guilty' whenever yet another person appears in the dock: you can't sentence to death the entire population of the globe. The judge will say, 'Tragically he was a victim of his own talent. No kid who reached the heights he did could ever live in the real world and eventually it ruined him. Dr Conrad Murray and others can't be expected to shoulder all the blame for the poor creature's death.' And what about his most devoted fans? It's you who have murdered him by your shouts, by your frenzy, by your torn clothes, by your praise. Elizabeth Taylor said he was the King of Pop. She might have called him the Prince of Pop or the Count of Pop. The Baron of Pop wouldn't have gone to his head. He wouldn't have taken it into his head to let himself go, to buy whatever he glanced at, to dangle his son over the balcony, to swallow pills and junk food round the clock. The pressures of fame, the temptations of money. *Now* you can say, 'He was the consummate entertainer and his contributions and legacy will be felt upon the world forever.' *Now* you can say, 'Without the incredible, unique and uplifting music of Michael Jackson, the world would surely have been a less happy place.' *Now* you can say, 'The greatest entertainer who has ever walked the face of the earth.' Yes, you can say whatever you wish because Michael Jackson no longer walks the face of the earth. He's not likely to swallow another pill or ask for another intravenous injection. And you're not likely to be kicked out because you refuse to give him this injection. You don't even have to say, 'The injection provides some temporary relief from the pain, but you may die afterwards.' Just say, 'You took popular music to another level, somewhere it had never been before and somewhere it will certainly never go again.' He can't hear you. The patient is now out of danger; so are you. Say whatever you like; write whatever you like. But for God's sake don't swallow pills and junk food!

Back to the fold again? Back to God? Actually I'm rather delighted that Jackson never uttered the name of Jesus Christ in his children's presence. So many people talk about Christ and God nowadays! They say they love Jesus. They say Jesus loves them. Actually they love Jesus in return for His promise to love them. 'He promised faithfully to call us every week,' they say, their faces glowing with excitement. 'And He promised He'd reduce taxes,' they add, the tears running down their cheeks.

Back to the fold. What else can I do? 'Although God can do all things,' says St Jerome, 'He cannot raise up a virgin after she has fallen.' Why not? God is God. And God is resentful of anybody's attempts to interfere in His work. Even He Himself doesn't interfere in His work, according to Descartes. Names, names, names. All these philosophers—Leibniz, Malebranche, Arnauld, Descartes—did their best to fathom God's unfathomable ways. Another name is Peter Damian. He thinks that nature isn't omnipotent because it can't bring about that 'contraries coincide in the same subject'. In other words, a man can't be both a paedophile and a virgin. He's either a paedophile or a virgin; or a family man. But he can be both a family man and a paedophile. And he can

be both a family man and a virgin because there are husbands and wives who never touch each other. There are stories about damsels who say to their bridegrooms, 'Don't forget I'm marrying you only because you promised never to come near my body.' Why are they getting married, then? Vanity, money, a prestige address, a prestige car, a prestigious literary award. There are women who prefer Nobel Prize winners to handsome young men. But let's return to the fold. Actually Damian thinks that this rule—a man is either a virgin or a paedophile—'on no account should be applied to the divine majesty'. So a man is allowed to be both a paedophile and a virgin. Did Michael Jackson seize this opportunity? Another question: Was he both a man and a woman—an androgyne? Do contraries coincide in a creature going by the name of an androgyne? No, an androgyne doesn't contradict himself or herself or itself. Nor did Michael contradict himself when talking about children. He always said he loved them. And he used to bring them so many toys their parents or teachers were hard put to house those toys. Their houses and schools would become museums housing the biggest collections of toys in America. Michael was a child himself, and he never contradicted himself in this respect either. Some say he wasn't a child in his childhood; or rather he was deprived of his childhood to such an extent that he grew childish only upon reaching middle age. In point of fact he wasn't in his second childhood then; he was in his *first* childhood. Well, never mind, he was a child. A man can be both a child and a grown-up. His Neverland was a kindergarten, not a sort of Disneyland. And in this kindergarten he played with other kids. What do you usually do in a kindergarten? You're not alone there, are you? It stands to reason there are other kids around you in a kindergarten—that's the nature of the beast. What are you there for? You're supposed to play together. A group of suntanned children frolicking in a kindergarten. Leapfrog is their favourite game. What's wrong with it? And what if these children are homeless? Accommodation needs to be found for thousands of homeless families. And in each of those families there are children, homeless children. Providing homeless people with somewhere to stay when the weather is cold only skates round the problem; it doesn't solve it. So homeless parents often put their children up for adoption. And Michael adopted some of those children. At least he played with them at his Neverland ranch. In the TV documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*, he reveals that he **invited young boys to Neverland for sleepovers and let them sleep in his bed**. 'It's not sexual,' he said. 'I tuck them in, have hot milk, give them cookies.' What's wrong with it? Yet some people boisterously proclaim that one may be both an innocent child and a paedophile. They think a paedophile can give his victims cookies and Coca Cola. That's what Descartes says on the subject: 'God could have made it false that contradictions could not be true together.'

The family of a young boy who had stayed at Neverland says Jackson molested him and files a lawsuit. Jackson cuts short his *Dangerous* world tour and offers a televised denial. The suit is settled out of court for a reported \$20 million.

Charged with molesting a then-12-year-old cancer patient, Jackson pleads not guilty. Trial is set for January 2005.

Jackson is **acquitted on all counts** in his child-molestation case. After the verdict, he drops out of sight, eventually turning up in Bahrain.

Why should one write about a superstar? To put some money in one's purse. Not £24.5 million, needless to say. Any amount of money is welcome because one has to live decently before one dies. There are more and more homeless people begging on the streets these days, and Michael Jackson is no longer there to help their children—or their parents, for that matter. A friend of mine has a cat; he trained her to sit up and beg. She's like a dog now. I've got two cats and I don't want them to sit and beg; I just give them food twice a day. Sometimes I give them a *supplement*. Anyway they don't have to beg for food; and I'm not less dignified than my cats. So I'm writing about a celebrity. Why? So many books have been written about him, so many articles. I didn't know him personally so I can't disclose any information his fans haven't already lighted upon in the newspapers and magazines strewn all over the floor of my room. They know *everything*. They know that *Got to be There*, Michael's first solo single, reached No. 4 on the charts. They know that Michael married Elvis's only child, in a secret ceremony in the Dominican Republic. They divorced in 1996—everybody knows that. What can I write about? I'm neither his child, nor his wife, nor his nurse. Nobody will press me to reveal more information. I'm not under increasing pressure to work longer hours. So why should I work at all? Why not enjoy myself instead? Why not dance with Michael, to his music?

They usually start like this: 'I remember so many things.' I remember nothing. I don't even remember seeing him on TV before his untimely death. 'We'd travel on the road in the early days and I think back to the pillow fights and how Michael liked to hide in the closet, behind the shower curtain, under the bed or he'd eavesdrop and jump out and try to scare you.' I don't even remember whether *I* did anything of the sort. There was one pillow fight in my life, but I didn't enjoy it, far from it. And I never hid in a closet because there were no closets in our flat. And I was not in the habit of playing hide-and-seek in other people's flats. Why? Because when hiding from other players you may stumble upon a corpse or a couple of women stroking each other. 'My first recollection of Michael Jackson was when he and his brothers had just left Indiana and gone to Motown.' No first recollection, no second recollection. I had no idea he had brothers. I don't have any. Why should anyone have brothers? Don't we enjoy ourselves thoroughly when we're alone? No pillow fights, no stupid conversations. 'I took my kids to Disneyland and Michael wanted to go, so we all went.' I've got no kids and I've never been to Disneyland, neither in the States nor in France. Had I got married in the Nineties, I might have gone to the United States, found Michael and told him, 'Here are my kids. Let's go to Disneyland.' I'm sure I would have got a few kids, had I married in the Nineties or even at the beginning of the century. Now it's too late. Like every potential parent I want to see my children grow up. I want to buy them shoes and watch how they outgrow them. I want them to recite poems for me—by heart, by heart. I want them to go with Michael to Disneyland. Recently I saw a French film on TV. A child receives a present—a huge box inside which a man is hidden. Why not send Michael to my children in a box? Well, he can fly first class instead. Dreams, dreams, dreams. Why are they always in the present tense? What does it matter whether I like him or not? My kids adore him. They're imitating the Moonwalk.

In his new novel Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former President of France, tells us of his love affair with 'Patricia, Princess of Cardiff', alias the former Princess of Wales. What does it matter if it's true or not? At least he met her several times, at cocktail parties. A number of photographs bear testimony to their standing or sitting together. So he can write whatever comes into his head because he *might* have had a liaison with her. You *might*

have a liaison with someone you meet at cocktail parties and in theatres. You can't have a liaison with someone you've never met unless you phone him or her and start kissing the receiver. Giscard d'Estaing speaks of the spell of Diana's 'immense blue eyes'. I saw them only on TV, on photos, mainly on black-and-white photos. Giscard's tale is loaded with plausible-sounding detail and many people will buy it because they're curious about how Diana lived her turbulent love life. So those who were lucky enough to rub shoulders with her wrote steamy bodice-rippers and made a lot of money. Now Giscard has joined their ranks. 'Bravo, bravo, bravo! Good show!'

The former President of France. Why not him? He was better than most of Diana's alleged lovers merely because he was a president once. Not twice. He was a president nonetheless and, though married to the heir of the English throne, she might have been impressed by the status of the man who displayed several characteristics of what is pompously called a Latin lover. A love story, another love story. If Pina Bausch had asked me to tell a story—her usual procedure—I would have told her *my* love story, not that of the former French President, not that of Michael Jackson. To everyone his or her own love story. My love story goes like this: my girlfriend is very jealous. The story doesn't have to go any further. She's jealous—end of story. She rips her clothes up and burns the pieces whenever I mention another woman in her presence. The other day she asked me a question about hats. I told her I'd known a woman from the past, from another century. 'Upon her head she wore a black velvet hat,' I said. Immediately she tore something up and cut a pair of trousers into pieces. She was about to burn the pieces when I put my foot down. So I didn't speak to her about Farrah Fawcett who died 'last week', as they say in the newspapers. She might have died together with Michael Jackson. I was one of her fans; yet I never told her she was the most beautiful woman in history, which might have gone to her head and killed her. Of course I'm not the President of Russia. I'm not even the *former* President of Russia. Nor am I a Latin lover. I might be a Slav lover, for all I know. I'm not sure. Anyway I'm not sure Farrah Fawcett was interested in Slav lovers. Sadly absent from his mother's deathbed was Farrah's only son. I wish I could have been her son. I wouldn't have been absent from her deathbed—that's for sure. I was neither her son nor her lover. What was I? What am I? Someone who thinks about Farrah Fawcett. Why didn't I call her before her death to say how much I loved her? 'Please forgive me, I'm very, very sorry.' Sorry for what? For not being her son or nephew. Cheryl Ladd, who played her little sister in the hit show, said: 'She was incredibly brave, and God will be welcoming her with open arms.' I *would* welcome her with open arms if her ghost or soul paid any attention to my desire.

'You don't listen to his music,' said my girlfriend. 'You just *talk* about him.'

'I watched his DVDs last week,' I said. 'They're a bit wonky, if you see what I mean. His *Thriller* looks and sounds ridiculous if you compare it to Boris Karloff, to the living dead I'm used to. And to Mahler's symphonies. He won't work alongside Bach and Mahler in the Hereafter.'

'It's not *pieces of music* he composed,' she said. 'They're life itself. Do you understand life, its rhythm, its energy?'

'I understand *his* life. I don't understand his music, though. There's nothing to understand anyway.'

'There *is* something to understand. You're old. That's what you should understand. You don't understand him because of your age, your ideas, your ideals.'

'Ideas and ideals are often coupled together,' I said.

‘And what about his energy? Do you feel it? There was an aura of sadness about him. Do you feel it when you watch his DVDs?’

‘I feel his energy. But that’s not enough. A criminal is also energetic.’

‘There are wonderful criminals,’ she said.

‘He *might* have been a criminal. But his life was pathetic. That’s what I like about him.’

‘His masks, his children?’ she asked.

‘He ran the whole gamut of human emotions. He ran the whole gamut of human conditions, of human genders. The Moonwalk reflects not his life, but ours. They say he seemed to walk forward, to the future. Actually he walked back, towards his past, his childhood. That’s what the Moonwalk amounts to, they say. Perhaps. But it’s also *our* Moonwalk, *our* Earthwalk. We seem to go forward. The march of progress, the march of technology. We go backward as a matter of fact. Not to the glorious past, though. We just go backward, backward, backward.’

‘You’re boring. Why are old people so boring? You’ve spent so much time on the earth. Why haven’t you learnt how to live? There’s not much in the way of entertainment in your company.’

‘When I play concerts in Japan,’ I said, ‘I must get a certificate of eligibility at their consulate. In the certificate they say I’m an entertainer. I entertain them by playing Beethoven.’

‘Jacko was the greatest entertainer of all time.’

‘So was Beethoven,’ I said.

I watched his DVDs again. *Thriller*, *Beat it*. *Thriller*. ‘Due to my strong personal convictions,’ says Michael Jackson, ‘I wish to stress that this film in no way endorses a belief in the occult.’ Why do you feel like making excuses, my dear Michael? What’s wrong with the living dead you show in your clip? They’re not very sophisticated, are they? I, for one, am not scared by their bodies, by their corpses. They walk towards my flat, my library, my writing desk. They walk with a limp and when I ask them why they’re advancing steadily through the forest I can see from my windows they say, ‘We’re just walking along, chatting.’ That’s what I see from my windows during my walks and after my concerts—a number of people who are dead. Some of them have no heads; others have only one arm.

I don’t understand these fans who shout and cry as they watch Michael Jackson’s DVDs. They used to run amok at his concerts. Why, why? His dance is all right, more or less. I know that Fred Astaire called him to say he’d found a successor. But Michael Jackson wasn’t Fred Astaire and vice versa. And neither of them was the Princess of Wales. Never mind, never mind. Was Fred Astaire right? Did he really find a successor?

Did God find a successor? He probably did. Or does the same God govern our world? Has *He* run amok? ‘It is good to have eyes in our head,’ Leibniz points out, ‘but they would have been as wisely placed anywhere else, had God so placed them. However we invert the world, whatever chaos we make out of it, it will always be equally admirable, since its entire beauty consists in its conformity with the divine will, which is not obliged to conform to order.’ Did God unleash chaos? Human stupidity is beyond belief sometimes. Sometimes, not always. Why are *they* so stupid? A French philosopher said, ‘Leftists and rightists have agreed for once. They all praise Michael Jackson who is our stupidity gauge.’ *Dokatisis*, *dokatisis*, as the Russians say. Humanity is a

number of rolling stones. They roll and roll and roll. They gather moss. Michael Jackson is a mossy lawn. You roll along this lawn and you gather moss.

He wasn't aware of what he was doing. His body took over, however. His body refused to do this and that. His body had its ups and down of course. His body was 'up' during his last rehearsal. A middle-aged man of 50 was showing the kids how it was done. And kids only listen to kids nowadays. What do kids have to say to other kids nowadays? 'You're grown-ups,' they say. O.K. 'He was aglow that night—aglow and afloat', Bashiri Johnson says in an interview. 'His feet barely touched the stage, and he wasn't stressed at all.' Why did he die a few hours later? His body barely touched the divan on which he was lying. There was no point in putting him on the floor because he wouldn't have touched it. They could have saved him had he been on the floor, but he would have floated high above it. So it was pointless as usual. He barely touched the world that night; he didn't touch it at all. The world let him go. His body knew it was useless and so refused to cooperate. Our bodies, on the other hand, continue to work and walk—to moonwalk. He understood that what we could do was limited to our going from black to white and from white to black. In *Thriller* there's fiction and reality, side by side. Reality is white, fiction black. We go from one to the other; both are ridiculous. Why should we go anywhere? Let's spend our life sitting in front of a television set on whose screen Michael Jackson goes from black to white, from red to blue. We won't cry elsewhere. We won't dance elsewhere. Let us dance to his black-and-white music. King Crimson's music was rainbow-coloured. So was Pink Floyd's. Let us dance to *his* music.

They're crazy. Just beat it, beat it, beat it! How could I get rid of them? 'Just beat it, beat it, beat it!' I shout. I can't recall the tune of this song. Beat it, beat it, beat it! Why don't you dance to my prose, to *my* song? Beat it, beat it, beat it. They're still there, all these fans. I can't chase them away by merely shouting, 'Just beat it, beat it, beat it!' I must *sing* the song; I must dance like *him*. But Fred Astaire didn't call me to say I was his successor. And it remains to be seen whom Michael Jackson anointed as *his* successor. He or she will sing, 'Just beat it, beat it, beat it!' and people will listen to the song instead of running away. They'll scream and shed tears. Eternal recurrence. They say there'll never be another Michael Jackson. 'There'll never be another like him,' they sing in unison. 'The world is a richer place for his music and a much poorer place for his passing.' I don't mind being poor. No successors please! What would I say to Michael's successor? 'Just beat it!' My vocabulary has grown quite poor of late, but I don't mind this kind of poverty. Incidentally, I'm surprised they say there'll never be anyone like him. They all believe in progress, don't they? Otherwise they wouldn't idolise him. Only those who believe in progress worship Michael Jackson. They venerate, adulate, deify him because they think he modernised, updated music. 'He was like penicillin,' one of them said to a journalist. 'Why do you compare him to penicillin?' asked the journalist. 'Because penicillin was a revolutionary drug,' answered the fan. 'We seem to have agreed not to say a word about drugs,' said the journalist. 'Let's talk only about his artistic achievements.' 'I loved him very much and I will miss him every remaining day of my life,' said the fan. 'Actually I'm too devastated to release a statement.'

They judge life and history in terms of the Olympic Games. Oh, they don't say, 'He won three Olympic medals during his career.' They just say, 'He won,' meaning you shouldn't judge winners. That's what a friend of mine said about a contemporary conductor. I said, 'There are only defeats in concert halls nowadays. Everywhere

there are only defeats. Our ambitions have been defeated by time, by our search for *one* truth, by our greed, by entertainments. We should judge and condemn today's winners.' They don't say, 'Her new trainer has promised to make an Olympic athlete of her.' They say, 'She's got an ideal husband.' And they speak about records all the time. 'More than 32 million sold. It goes multiplatinum and is still the only album to produce five No. 1 songs. He also has the record for the most Grammys won in one year, taking home a record-breaking eight in 1984.' They don't say, 'It was his first crack at beating the record.' They say, '*Got to be there*, Michael first solo single, reaches No. 4 on the charts.' They don't say, 'He failed in his attempt to break the record.' They say, '*Off the Wall*. More than 20 million sold.' They might also say, 'Jackson wins first Grammy, for Best R&B Male Vocal Performance on *Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough*, from *Off the Wall*. He is irked that the album doesn't win too.' They don't say, 'Michael has clipped a tenth of a second off the record.' They say, 'Even Elvis and the Beatles weren't as universally loved as this man. After him has come absolutely no one, however brilliant or however popular, who couldn't be ignored by vast segments of an ever-more-fragmented audience.' They think the game is over, which means that John or Mary will never clip a tenth of a second off Michael's record. However, they might say, 'Martin is keen to emulate Michael's records.' And if he does smash one of them, they will say, 'Martin is the best entertainer in our history.' Michael's record: *Thriller*, more than 104 million sold. Martin's record: *Trailer*, more than 137 million sold. Had Michael been born in the nineteenth century, they wouldn't have compared him to Beethoven. They would have said, 'Bach, Mozart and Beethoven are the greatest composers in our history.' But Michael was born much later, and if you compare our Olympic Games with those watched by our forefathers, you'll come to the predictable conclusion: our athletes run faster than theirs. You might also say, 'Our athletes jump higher than theirs.' In the nineteenth century Jackson couldn't hold a candle to Beethoven whose jumps were beyond comparison. He was also an unrivalled short-distance runner, an unequalled middle-distance runner and an unsurpassed long-distance runner. But Michael trained hard for the race, sometimes running as much as 60 miles a week. And he was growing younger and younger, thanks to the Moonwalk. So, in the last decades of the twentieth century, he caught up with Beethoven and today they run side by side, shooting glances at each other. How many people heard the première of the *Ninth Symphony*? And what about Michael, his fans, his concerts? Can you compare these figures? Even Michael's modest success—*Invincible*, 10 million estimated sales—is bound to smash all nineteenth-century records put together. Besides, Beethoven never owned anything comparable to Neverland. And he didn't dance; I don't think he ever danced a waltz in his life. And had he been given an opportunity to walk on the Moon, he wouldn't have been able to emulate Michael's poise. Beethoven had no son: he valued his job above family life. As for Michael, the kids were everything to him. They were his whole life.

How does it sound? A voice,
 An instrument. A star overhead.
 Only one star, only one
 Sound. The world is poor,
 But nothing has been lost, not a sound,
 Not a star. We've never lost
 Anything.

That's what I hear everywhere: 'We haven't lost anything. On the contrary, we've got this and that. And our ancestors had neither this nor that.' And, on the other hand, there's only one star—Michael Jackson; and only one sound that everyone listens to, as if all other sounds were as dead as Michael Jackson. Well, it's Michael Jackson who is dead, not sounds. They're alive, alive and kicking. But you prefer to listen to a dead sound which, in my opinion, was dead even when it was alive. This is too difficult for the general reader, for the general listener. OK. Do you think Michael Jackson was alive in *Thriller*? Was his music alive? Beethoven indeed! But you listen to it; you watch it over and over again, you, the living dead. And the story appended to the song? Do you like it as well? Of course you do—you adore it. A nice story, an entertainment per se.

Michael, wearing red leather, walks with a pony-tailed girl in a felt skirt. 'You know I like you,' he says.

'You know I like you,' she says.

'O.K. What shall we do? Shall we kiss? But don't you know I'm a werewolf, a hairy, red-eyed werewolf? Would you kiss a hairy, red-eyed werewolf?'

'Yes,' she says. 'I like monsters.'

'Of course,' he says. 'I'm the beast, you're the beauty. An old story. I'm a prince, actually. Or Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Or Dorian Gray and his portrait. I'm my own double. Double, double, toil and trouble. Are you prepared to face the music if you kiss me?'

'I'm prepared to face *your* music because you're a great composer,' she says.

'Our problems seem to be over for the moment,' he says, 'but there could be more trouble ahead.'

'Never mind,' she says as she kisses him. And he becomes Prince, his own rival.

No, Prince couldn't hold a candle to Michael. Well, he just becomes Michael Jackson, one of them. There are many Michaels Jacksons but they're not like the other guys. Not one of them is like the other guys. O.K. She bows to the inevitable and accepts the fact. 'I know,' she says. 'That's why I like you.' But she doesn't like the werewolf into which he turns as soon as she turns her back. 'Ah, you're a werewolf!' she screams, turning round and facing him.

'I told you I was a many-sided character, didn't I?'

'Yes, I know,' she says. 'I know you're a composer, a dancer, an entertainer, an idol, a symbol, a singer, a natty pop star, a black cat, a white-robed shaman, a hooligan smashing windows and the Buddha. I know you often seize and stroke your penis. I know you write poetry and are a keen cricketer and cook. But I didn't know you were a werewolf. Well, never mind! I'm delighted you're a monster, a sacred monster. That's what they say about you in France, don't they? *Un monstre sacré*.' And she kissed him on the mouth.

There was a young couple on the sofa, kissing passionately: Michael Jackson and his girlfriend. All throughout *Thriller*. Do you wish to make it a little longer? O.K. She leant forward to kiss him but he evaded her by pretending to sneeze. She pulled away just as he was about to kiss her. *Thriller* is a *long* hit. He leant forward to kiss her and she recoiled in horror because he was a werewolf. No, a ludicrous suggestion: nowadays girls like werewolves. Isn't my story more entertaining than his?

In his story the girl shrieks, turns away and begins to run. He chases her of course, but the chase isn't very spectacular: it's not up to the standards I'm used to thanks to erotic movies. She ought to have torn her skirt on the chair as she stood up. Well, she wasn't sitting on a chair; actually there were no chairs in sight. He ought to have put some in the studio: Pina Bausch did. It's much easier and much more erotic to work with chairs; every

self-respecting womaniser is aware of that. Why didn't the chase take place in some woods or other? Any bush, any branch might have torn a hole in her jeans. She would have shed all her clothes during her flight.

Michael pins her down and her eyes widen as she stares up at him. Hasn't she ever seen monsters in her life? Does she never watch TV? Often nightmares occur in times of severe tension. My late uncle, for instance, suffered all his life from a recurrent nightmare that he was trapped in a falling house. I don't think his nightmare was due to a stress-related illness. Michael and his girl saw a movie which might have given her nightmares. Yes, we realise this *is* a nightmare. Michael is no monster. He is either Dorian Gray or Dr Jekyll or both. Why does the girl flee him?

I can understand the people who every year flee the big cities in search of the rural idyll. And I pity the thousands of fugitives fleeing from war-torn areas. But for the life of me I can't see why a girl should flee Michael Jackson. Is she afraid of the mask he's put on his face? Just another Hallowe'en night! Why make such a song and dance about it? All right, she feels like fleeing a handsome young man who is just in a playful mood. But why is she fleeing to a deserted mansion? Haven't we seen enough mansions on TV and elsewhere? It's far more entertaining to see a beautiful couple on a sofa. Don't we buy erotic movies once a week? The living dead are better in other pictures. And they're much better in real life. Actually *Thriller* is not thrilling, not at all. Besides, it was designed for children, not for adults.

At long last Michael patches things up with her after their row and guides her towards safety, so to speak. Then he turns back to us; his smile widens and hardens as his eyes flash yellow. What enchanting ambiguity! Again we're in two minds about Michael's identity. Why don't we shout, 'Stop this childish nonsense at once?' I do, to tell the truth. What's the use? Generally speaking, I don't like his stories. Let's see who's bad. Don't you think I'm bad? No, he's a knight in shining armour. All right, all right. He can also be a knight in black armour—Dorian Gray's portrait hidden in an attic. At this point let us drag Dr Freud into our argument. He says we've got fears which can't be overcome as easily as might have been expected. What we *can* do, however, is to repress them. But they surface again, sometimes in disguise. Just another Hallowe'en, you know. The review I read said that *Bad* was 'a thoughtful and profound film'. And what about the following remark, 'Be yourself! You can't be anybody else, anyway. You're not like them, are you?' An old man—a fount of wisdom—rounds off by pointing his stick at a group of yobs. And once more Michael Jackson becomes himself. Just another thoughtful and profound hit; a digestible version of Aristotle's doctrine.

Jackson sings, dances and tells you stories. And you're fond of stories, aren't you? And he already came out with some hard-luck story about never having been loved by his father. And you can't help adoring his cock-and-bull stories, his ghost stories, his horror stories, his tall stories, his sob stories. And above all his success story. 'So many people were searching on Google in the hours after his death that the website displayed an automatic virus alert screen. A spokesman said: 'The search volumes were so high our system thought it was a spam attack.' Of the top 100 searches, more than half were dominated by topics related to Jackson, including lyrics to his songs and his home address.

When one of my New York friends died—his name was Michael, by the way—the Internet didn't respond at all. Nobody said my friend's death would be seen as a landmark Internet news event. No, the Internet

was as dead as a doornail. So I had no idea my friend was already dead whenever I thought about him. He was dead even when my stream of consciousness didn't focus upon his persona. And his wife couldn't bring herself to notify me of his death—for five months. She was loath to say, 'I've lost my husband today, my husband, my brother, my son, my guru. I know that a part of my soul has gone with him. And a part of my body too, frankly speaking. I can't stop crying. This is too sudden and shocking. I'm unable to imagine this. Why should I imagine this? This has already happened. His untimely death couldn't by any stretch of the imagination be described as an ordinary event. I can't say, "Well, we're all bound to die." I can't say that either to myself or to you. I can only say to you, "This shouldn't have happened. Not now. He was too young."'

Whatever he did was great, wasn't it? His eccentricities got stranger by the day. Didn't you adore them, dissect them? 'His cocoa skin was gradually blanched into a geisha's pancake white—the result, doctors said, of the pigment-depleting disease vitiligo. Except when camouflaged with makeup in videos—he even wore it to bed, said ex-wife Lisa Marie—or cavorting as a speck onstage in giant arenas—' And so on and so forth. As if there were no other eccentrics on earth. And what about Boris Yeltsin? He got so drunk during a 1995 visit to Washington that Secret Service agents found him a few hundred feet from the White House in his underwear. He was trying to hail a cab, as he explained, because he wanted a pizza. Boris Yeltsin was the President of Russia in those days, and presidents do not usually behave like schoolboys; nor do they behave like pop singers. These are allowed to strip naked and run into the streets. At airports a pack of dogs sniff out drugs in their luggage. And they're invariably greeted by an army of screaming teenagers.

Boris Yeltsin was more eccentric than Michael Jackson. But the former didn't sleep inside an oxygen chamber. For some reason, he had no wish to live to the grand old age of 150—such was Michael Jackson's dream. I have a dream, I have a dream. Daydreams have the knack of turning into nightmares.

'Why do you hate him so much?' asked my girlfriend. 'Why do you make a mockery of his art?'

'Once I talked to an American journalist about the cinema. Down the drain, down the pan, down the toilet—I don't recall the expression I used. "But it's not an art, is it?" she said. Well, I think Michael Jackson's art isn't an art.'

'Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni—your idols.' My girlfriend frowned at me, clearly annoyed. 'Don't we live in a multi-dimensional world?' she went on. 'There are wonderful film directors today. The cinema isn't dead. And Michael will live forever.'

'I grant you, he dances beautifully. It's a pity we don't see him dance more often on screen. Whenever I watch the DVDs I bought, I only manage to catch a few snatches of his dancing. The rest is of no consequence.'

'Pink Floyd, King Crimson—your idols. Don't judge Michael's art in terms of music. He went beyond music and art in general. He created pieces of life.'

'A musician is always a musician. Whatever happens, he should be judged only in terms of music. His life is music, so is his death. I don't see much difference between King Crimson and Brahms—both belong to the realm of music. Michael is an entertainer. Don't say he's a composer. Don't even say he's a dancer. He's an entertainer and I don't feel like being entertained. I want to feel life which I'd like to compare to a lake. You can go boating on this lake. You can dive into its water. Like a child, Michael was skimming stones across the lake.'

His childish game was full of passion and energy, but he should have *dived* into the lake instead of touching its water ever so slightly. What's more, he didn't touch it *himself*.'

'He touched thousands of people's hearts,' she said. 'An artist should touch the human heart and not an abstract notion, a comparison. Your theories are so abstract they don't relate to life.'

'Truth and beauty are abstract concepts. They do relate to life—if it weren't for them, life would be meaningless.'

'Isn't *your* life meaningless?' she asked. 'I'm stifling in your airless room.'

'Do you mean I need fresh air, like Raskolnikov?'

'You should get outdoors and make a fresh start.'

'You think my life's just around the corner. Which corner, may I ask? The one named after Michael Jackson? He isn't *around* the corner, I'm afraid. He's at the market. And there are no corners at the market. I prefer corners, you know.'

'Your casuistry's getting on my nerves. I'm fed up with your ranting and raving about Jacko all the time. Why do I still love you?'

'Why indeed? You need a breath of fresh air, don't you? The door is open, and there are no corners between you and the door.'

'You live in a museum filled with mouldy old collections. As a matter of fact, you're too old to live. But I'll help you as best I can.'

'You derive great satisfaction from helping old people, don't you? And you feel it's your duty to do so. But you have a duty to yourself to take a holiday now and then. Thank you, Nurse,' I said, opening the door.

A nurse? A babysitter, rather. I'm in my second childhood. Michael, on the other hand, was in his *first* childhood, wasn't he?

PART TWO

Another 'yes', 'yet' or
'What not'.

Is there life on Jupiter?

Life's everywhere—even
In 'no' and 'what not'.

What
Kind of life? There are no kinds,
No kindred spirits, no souls. Just
Life.

I've got
Some sort of insect bite on my leg.

There will be no explanatory notes, no diagrams: the song speaks for itself. 'There life speaks again,' as a Russian poem says, which might have been written by Michael Jackson. I can't say, 'I knew I'd found a kindred spirit.' Some sort of insect bite on my leg. As soon as I saw and heard him he would start to rub me up the wrong way. I was too old to understand or feel his art, his pop art. I can't say I'm young now, and his songs neither invigorate nor refresh my spirit and my body: they're not like cold water or a handful of snow you press against your cheeks after a long walk. But there's life in them and I've got the feeling there's no other life on earth in this day and age. Apollo must have died forever.

My works are illusions; so are my thoughts. Truth is an illusion as well. Michael Jackson's not an illusion, for all his masks and personas. We are 'vouchsafed a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysiac, most immediately understandable to us in the analogy of intoxication' (Nietzsche).

It was raining. The rain was pointless:
For weeks we'd had cloudless blue skies.

Last night was pointless too: for years
We'd had days and days, nothing but days.

Why should I become someone else?
I've been myself for so many years.

An old Apollo. Why do I persist in becoming myself? Ah, those ancient Greeks! Well, I've already become myself and I hate this self of mine. A tottery old man, his tattered clothes torn into ribbons. Always following the same road—stubbornly, stubbornly. I'm rightly famed for my stubborn resistance and my refusal to accept defeat. So many defeats, but I still *persiste et signe*. I sign all the sheets of paper I succeed in laying my hands on. I've already signed this novel, without waiting for the end of my labours, for their result. I constantly say to myself, 'I must ensure I don't set myself goals that are not attainable.' And I continue to do so because in my heart of hearts I know this is the only way to create a masterpiece. A masterpiece indeed! In this particular case my goal was to debunk the myth that had grown up around Michael Jackson. This goal is unattainable, I must admit. Is it? I constantly say to myself and others, 'The entire population of the globe can be utterly mistaken.' Besides, I do come across people who don't think Michael Jackson is a great composer. 'He dances well,' they say. 'A good entertainer. Prince was better, though.' I don't know, I don't know Prince. I might learn something about him on the day of his death, provided I take the trouble to watch the early evening news for many years to come. No more papers, no more talks. Enough's enough. Michael Jackson has taken up too much room in my brain. Enough's enough. In the poems I wrote last year there is enough blood for everyone.

I escaped from the Soviet Union—a prison in its own right. Why put myself in another prison? What's the difference between my personal prison and the one I spent many years in while living in Moscow? My cell is very big—much bigger than that of Khodorkovsky about whom I spoke in Part One. Yet it's one cell, one cell only, and what counts is the number of cells you have at your disposal. A single-celled life form—that's what I've been reduced to over the last 30 years. 'In all our possible perceptions,' says Kant, 'we always remain in conditions whether in space or in time, and come upon nothing unconditioned. The term "whole" is always only comparative.' But I, for one, believe that my 'whole' is not comparative: it is *the* 'whole', so to speak. I say to myself, 'You should consider each problem as an aspect of the whole.' As a matter of fact, my 'whole' has no aspects. My 'whole' itself is an aspect, nothing more. It's so small I wouldn't dare call it an aspect. The English language allows me to turn it into a 'hole' without altering the way it sounds whenever I pronounce the word.

Let us stay with Kant for a while—not the whole time, not even the whole day; just for a while. I do nothing but moan the whole time. So I'll punctuate my moaning with quotes from Kant, Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt and with my songs. Kant says that a judgment of taste is always individual, never universal. (Doesn't Jackson's myth refute this statement?) A judgment of taste is valid for all men only if they have something in common. Jackson's fans have something in common—it stands to reason. But do *I* have anything in common with them and Michael Jackson? I don't think that in this case we should speak about a judgment of taste. Let's not forget that in special cases we should stretch the rules. This case seems to go beyond all cases, all rules, so we're faced not with a problem, but with a whole which can be grasped on condition that you idolise Michael Jackson.

My quotes and my reasoning do not seem to lead anywhere except to Michael Jackson, to his case, to his myth. All roads lead to Michael Jackson. His fans might come up with this idea so we do have something in common after all. The more trivial I sound the better. Philosophers and quotes in general should be removed from my text: they're situated too far from Jackson's fans and the general reader. (Jackson's fans and the general reader have a lot in common.) I'm supposed to get closer and closer to his fans. If I stay calm and try to behave like a

responsible adult I'll mix with those people; I'll stand in their midst and admire their idol. I'm not likely to *idolise* him at first: let's take things one step at a time. I promise that sooner or later I'll scream my head off when watching *Thriller*; and I'll perform several dances at once. And I'm prepared to become a belly dancer—for the sake of Michael Jackson and his myth. But let me enjoy *my* life for the time being, my identity, my mouse hole.

According to Kant, we shouldn't say 'geniuses'. To make the plural of 'dog', you add the plural ending '-s'. But a genius isn't a dog—it goes without saying. Even Diogenes was no dog: all those who lead a dog's life aren't necessarily dogs. The word 'geniuses' is plural—in the singular it's 'genius'. That's the form we should stick to because 'genius is the unity of the world soul'. Michael Jackson again? Nobody else was able to impart unity to the world. And we should be united so our journalists can say, 'Factions previously at war with one another are now united against the common enemy.' Against those who care neither about music nor about dance; against those who don't love children. 'We have to heal our wounded world,' Jackson wrote in *Children of the World*. 'The chaos, despair, and senseless destruction we see today are a result of the alienation that people feel from each other and their environment. Often this alienation has its roots in an emotionally deprived childhood.' In this text Michael kills several birds with one stone. He speaks of chaos, despair, and senseless destruction. Many people believe that everything's fine. And if something goes wrong, they say, 'Once we get these problems straightened out, we should be all right. Don't you worry about a thing. Everything's going to be just fine.' And they smile reassuringly. And only *I* wonder how they can say that everything's fine when it's so obvious that it's not. Apparently, at this point Michael Jackson and I were on the same wavelength. Of course I can say to the woman with whom I'm staying this week, 'I felt terrible last night but I feel fine this morning.' This doesn't mean that the world feels fine, although they seem to have found a cure for Aids. At least newspapers offer us a glimmer of hope.

Everything's fine. I seem to have written a lot about this commonplace attitude. I repeat myself. (And Michael was an imaginative and innovative artist.) I would repeat myself far more often if I noted down all my thoughts, as Rousseau put it. Some historians think that history repeats itself. I agree with them because so many people repeat themselves and other people. Everything's fine, everything's fine. 'Are you fine?' 'Yes, I'm fine.' 'You're bad and fine, aren't you?' 'Yes, I'm bad and good and fine.' 'The weather's fine too, isn't it?' 'Yes, it is. It's raining cats and dogs.' 'No, it just looks like rain.' 'I think I felt a drop of rain.' 'But a ray of sunshine shone through a gap in the clouds. Didn't you notice? I woke at dawn. The morning sunlight shone through the curtains.' And so on and so forth. Oil spills are common, as is the dumping of toxic industrial wastes. Nonsense. What's common is the expression 'Everything's fine'. And Michael Jackson doesn't use it. He speaks of chaos, despair and senseless destruction. He speaks of our wounded world and the alienation that people feel from each other. He also speaks of children. So do many individuals. Tyrants speak of children, preachers speak of children. They're our future, our present, our space. We hold them in our arms and show them to the crowd. They all hang over our balconies as if on a clothes line. People repeat themselves. Children, children, children. 'Children, of the world, we'll do it/With song and dance innocent bliss/The soft caress of a loving kiss/We'll do it.' What *will* you do, may I ask? In the Soviet Union they used to sing a song like that, 'Children of various nations/We by dream of peace live.' (Literal translation.) And they thought mostly about wars. 'Yes, we can,'

said Obama several months ago. And now he says it's easier to run for the presidency than to govern the United States. Yet it's touching, isn't it? Michael Jackson had his childhood stolen from him and he wished to give what had been stolen from him to others, to the whole world. He was kissing the whole world. Which bridge has the longest span in the world? Michael Jackson's bridge. They say that cultural exchanges are a way of building bridges between countries. What are cultural exchanges compared with Jackson's universal appeal? A pianist plays a recital; the hall is half empty. His recital is broadcast; television viewers switch to another channel to watch the football. But when Michael Jackson is shown on TV, no one watches the football. An ideal cultural exchange, isn't it?

The way he speaks of blood. Quite different from what I say in my poem. His blood isn't frightening. It's neither a bloodbath nor a brain haemorrhage. It's on the palm of your hand. You look at it and say, 'It's a drop of blood. Where does it come from? I must have cut my finger. No, just a fleck of paint. This wall needs another coat of paint. I'm redecorating the kitchen.' The show is good entertainment value: only Michael's girlfriend is frightened. The blood he sings about is another mask. No chaos, no destruction. 'What did you do for entertainment while you were staying there—just watch TV?' 'Yes, I watched *Thriller*.'

A ray of light—not at the end,
Not at the outset. A ray
Of light, not a ray of hope.

A ray of light—nothing
Beyond or above it.

A ray of light.

Michael Jackson again! A ray of light, not a ray of darkness. There's nothing beyond this ray, this road to happiness. There's nothing on the road either: no clumps of trees, no blocks of ice. There's no road, properly speaking—just a spot, a beauty spot. And you've been rooted to the spot for many years. What else do you need?

How to get rid of Michael Jackson? You're in a deserted mansion. There are lots of monsters in the vicinity of this mansion and they have every right to march towards it. It's their duty, in a way: they're supposed to make you happy. Don't you pay them for this service? These monsters are bound to make you happy because they've already performed this ritual all over the world. There are holes in your walls and through the holes their masks penetrate your house. They squeeze through the crowd of admirers; they squeeze under your fence. 'If you move forward a little, I can squeeze past,' you say to the monsters. They roar and gnash their teeth. These monsters have razor-sharp teeth, needless to say. 'I've got an appointment with Dr Evans. I've got a terrible toothache,' you say. 'You'll have to cancel your dental appointment,' they say. 'Just dial his number and say to his secretary, "Please cancel my appointment for this afternoon—I have to go to a funeral." 'Whose funeral?' you ask. 'Your funeral of course!' they say. 'You're being a silly billy, now stop it!'

Suppose I was in a car, driving along the road to happiness inaugurated by Michael. Suddenly I relinquish my hold on the steering wheel; the car swerves and leaves the road. I've got it all wrong—I'm still driving along *my* road which leads to *unhappiness*, as far as I know. And I can see far enough to reach the following conclusion: this road leads to *unhappiness*. The road ahead is blocked and behind there are only dumping grounds for toxic waste. So I *have* to relinquish my hold on the steering wheel in order to leave this road. What's the steering wheel under the circumstances? My thoughts, my ideas, my ideals, my gut feelings and reactions. It's easy to renounce your face: you just put on a veil or stop looking at yourself in mirrors. How to get rid of thoughts and gut feelings? You're asked a question. You take a minute or two to compose your thoughts before you reply. Do you really have to *compose* your thoughts? Let them go on a spree. 'You need a breath of fresh air,' you say to them. 'I allow you to spend a luxurious weekend at a hotel in the country. Just go—never mind the expense!' And what if they answer: 'Country life isn't always as peaceful as city-dwellers think'?

Well, you don't need to answer the question they asked you. Nor do you need to compose your thoughts: you've got none anyway. So you just laugh or leave the room where the law 'no questions asked' is not observed. You lead the life of a recluse. You're not a reclusive millionaire, not yet; you just lead the life of a recluse. But, for all your efforts, you still have some thoughts that roam around your brain. You say to yourself, 'I don't need to compose my thoughts—I've got none anyway.' Alas, this statement is also a thought. Okey-dokey. You can't help thinking and scheming against your enemies. How to get rid of your thoughts and schemes? Switch your TV set on and watch Michael Jackson who was determined to remain rooted in a reassuringly prepubescent world. Rooted to a beauty spot, so to speak. Why not revert to your childhood? If you're a married woman, you revert to using your maiden name—a first step. Let's take things one step at a time.

My Apolline consciousness alone, like a veil, hides the Dionysiac world from my view. In other words, I'm blind. Have I been blind since birth? In my late teens I would have fallen in love with Michael: I had a reputation for open-mindedness and original thinking. Among the Moscow Conservatoire students there were some jazz specialists. One of them said, 'I've never really gone in for classical music, but I love jazz and the Beatles.' You're hardly original if you love Michael Jackson—even if you happen to be a classical pianist. The point is I yearned for originality at all costs, which didn't prevent me, however, from idolising the Beatles and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Perhaps I was too original and *narrow*-minded to appreciate Jackson. My cousin's son was a bit of a rebel when he was a teenager and dyed his hair pink and had his nose pierced. I never did anything of the kind: tampering with my nose was out of my range. (Michael was far more rebellious in this respect.) I just drank vodka on staircases, in attics—in the company of my fellow students. This variety of rebellion was all the more within our reach since the government had no intention of clamping down on teenage drinking. On those nights I might have become Dionysus' follower—on the nights when I wasn't lying under some table or other in a drunken stupor. Now it's too late; I'm no longer in my teens. It's pathetic to see 50-year-old rock stars prancing around on stage as if they were still teenagers. And what about classical pianists? I must have started to go blind in my thirties.

I wish I was a child I could hold in my hands. Anyway it's too late to ask Michael Jackson to hold my fragile body. So I carry myself as I pace up and down my room. I've got no balcony so I can't show myself to anybody.

Anyway there's no crowd beneath my windows. Actually I can open one of them and throw myself out of it. My young self. My old self, rather. I'm going to sort these identities of mine into those to be kept and those to be thrown away. I'm determined to remain rooted in a reassuringly prepubescent world. 'People think sex,' said Michael. 'They're thinking sex. My mind doesn't run that way. When I see children, I see the face of God. That's why I love them so much.' I look at myself and see the face of God. I'm everybody and nobody. I'm the universe. I'm Dionysus. Am I? An old Apollo. I'm not even a child. I still want to seem street-smart, as Michael put it. 'To be innocent is to be "out of it".' Out of what? I can leave this room and spend a few hours in the garden. I'll be out of this room, but I'll be in the garden. I can open the window and stick my head out. Will my head be 'out of it'? It's all in the mind, as doctors say. Will my mind be 'out of it' if I open the window and stick my head out? Or rather will 'it' be out of my mind? 'It' must be in my mind because *everything* is in my mind, according to doctors. And, according to Michael, 'it' is not everything, otherwise there would be no innocent zones—no nuclear-free zones, so to speak.

He was unable to comprehend that people found his intense affection for children, and his habit of sharing a bed with them, both aberrant and deeply suspect. Well, if I share a bed with my former self, no one will suspect anything. I wish my former self were a victim of child abuse—my victim.

A ballet. A few moments and
Movements. Outside
A car draws funny pictures
On a square.

There are
Several squares and triangles.

There are several people
Who dance for the sake of dancing.

No dance. Only two songs:
A song of sorrow,
A song of immortality.

A song of innocence,
A song of abuse.

Would you really compare him to Jesus Christ? Many of his fans maintain he must be posthumously awarded the Nobel prize for peace. Wasn't his sympathy (and money) always for the underdog in society? There are many Christs on this planet. Even if you pick up a cross you become Jesus Christ, although you may not be aware of the fact. If you do take notice of the fact and put the cross on your back, you become the spitting image of Jesus

Christ. And of course Jesus spoke at length about children. Did He say they all deserved to enter the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of His Father? In this case, they shouldn't grow old, I suppose. They don't need to tumble down the stairs: Günter Grass is a bit too artificial for my liking. They should just build another Neverland—in their rooms, in their dreams. Ah, those never-never lands! They always look and sound childish, don't they? So do never-never men and women. I don't refer to Jesus Christ Himself. What I have in mind concerns His doppelgängers who have no idea how stupid their claims are—even their *unconscious* claims. One cross is enough. Even Spartacus might have spared himself the journey to the cross by consulting an oracle: many oracles had already been informed about the only cross of importance in human history. You love children; you entrust them with the future of humankind; you meditate on Jesus Christ's agony and contemplate your stigmata. What's the use? Jesus Christ is unique. He's not simply in a class of His own. At some point in history He took centre stage and people eventually realised He was alone on the stage. What's more, the stage itself was alone. The stage was like the earth in days of yore, in the days of Ptolemy, except that there were no planets around it. The earth was the sun, the only sun in the universe. How can one become Jesus Christ under the circumstances? By killing a child?

This episode can be found in a gospel. Not in St Mathews' Gospel. I'm speaking about one of those gospels one can chance upon in a book devoted to apocryphal stories. People like telling stories and spreading rumours. Rumours are going round about Jesus Christ and a child He killed. I'd better put the previous sentences in the past tense: no one knows this story with the exception of those who read and publish such books. So I can't say I heard a rumour that Jesus Christ had killed a child. I can't even say that the Roman Catholic Church has consistently denied this rumour. I'm sure if Jesus Christ lived and killed a child, the Roman Catholic Church would deny the fact. Suppose a few bishops had witnessed the event. 'Did you see anything?' one of them would say, looking at the others. 'We saw nothing,' the others would say. 'Neither did I,' would say the first bishop. That's how the matter stands with the murder of this child. Whose gospel is it? I can't remember. I forgot the book at home. At first I forgot the book at home and then I forgot about its content. I remember only that Jesus Christ killed a child. How did He do it? Did he stone him to death? I don't think so: the child wasn't a prostitute. What did he do? What did the child do, I mean? How did he infuriate Jesus Christ? He was no merchant, if I remember rightly; he sold nothing either in a temple or anywhere else. I think he just looked askance at His scruffy clothes. He might have thought Jesus was a small, scruffy-looking man: at the time Jesus *was* small, being in His childhood. The other child might have thought, 'What a small, scruffy-looking child!' Probably he said so to Jesus himself. I don't think so. He just looked at Jesus, but the latter must have read his thoughts. So Jesus looked at him; in other words, he returned the child's stare. And the child died. I don't think Jesus said to Himself, 'What a small, scruffy-looking child!' He just thought, 'This child must die.' And His words came true, although no one heard Him. Or did the child hear them? Was he endowed with extrasensory perception? Was he one of Christ's doppelgängers? What a pity I can't remember the story.

Nor did Michael Jackson ever kill a child. He might have killed a 65-year-old man, though. This man's son accused Michael Jackson of sexual molestation. His father, Evan Chandler, was suffering from an unspecified 'serious medical condition' when he was found dead in bed at his luxury waterfront flat in Jersey City with a 38 calibre gun in his hand. Yet another suicide. Mr Chandler's life was thrown into disarray by his son's claims. His

dental practice collapsed and he faced physical assault by outraged Jackson fans, forcing him to attempt to disguise himself with repeated plastic surgery. Yet another series of masks. What do they hide, these masks? Your identity, your name which may betray you to the point of exposing your body to a fatal blow, a fatal bullet. They also hide your suffering, your death situated beneath your grotesque exterior. If you scratch beneath the surface you'll find he's really about to commit suicide, as they say. You shouldn't say that. Neither curiosity nor psychology is allowed to reveal what's hidden behind a mask—Nietzsche's warning. Let's leave it alone, on its own. All of a sudden the mask slips and we see a corpse.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we're the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *Him*, that we may be also glorified together.

A dancer gyrated to the music.

He was neither a dancer
Nor a gyroscope.

He gyrated to the music.

The music gyrated on its own:
There was no one in the room.

Blood was gushing from his body.

Was his body covered with stigmata? In a newspaper I read his dead body showed signs of laceration and bruising. They might have pointed out his body was bleeding heavily. Can a dead man bleed? I've no idea. I should watch *The Dead Man* once more. I seem to recall that our nails continue to grow after our death. But what about our blood? Does it continue to flow? Where does it flow—inside or outside? Do we share our blood with the people who look at our corpse? Do we think they might enjoy the sight? The teacher drew a diagram showing how the blood flows through the heart. I might have assisted him. It's not too late. But the sight of so much blood is likely to make his students shudder. Another question: Are the dead allowed to donate their blood? The appeal for the dead to donate blood was very successful. He donated a sizeable portion of his blood to children's charities. A sentence from Michael Jackson's biography? Hardly. You can't even say he lost a lot of blood in the accident because immediately his fans would ask you, 'What accident? A car accident?' The papers have dwelt on no accidents so far. Why can't I find the paper in which he is compared to Jesus Christ? They just said his body was lacerated or something to that effect. They might have striven to compare him to St Sebastian. But St Sebastian's body wasn't lacerated, was it? I'm not even sure it was bleeding *heavily*: the arrows were supposed to torment him, deferring death till kingdom come. On my table there lies a file entitled *Michael*. In this file there are lots of clippings among which the clipping in question might be found if I devoted

enough time to my search. I'm watching a film on Michael's Russian counterpart named Vladimir Vysotsky so my wish to lay my hands on the clipping—on Michael's bodily wounds—must be postponed. Always dragging my feet over the issues I must address. Shall I compare Jackson to Vysotsky who was Jesus Christ in his own right?

Vladimir Vysotsky was a bard, a songwriter and a singer. He sang his own songs and drank a lot of vodka. He might also have been a drug addict, for all I know. An excess of water causes plants' roots to rot. What about an excess of vodka? Do one's roots rot when one drinks vodka? What are our roots? Some use this word in connection with the country where one was born. My roots are probably in Russia and they might rot there in my absence. (I left Russia for good in 1974.) What I do have in my possession are a few branches and a multitude of dead leaves I carry around on my twigs, doing my best not to let them fall and adorn the earth. My dead leaves. Remembering time, as Michael Jackson put it. Vysotsky stayed in Russia; and yet his wife lived in France. I would have joined her, had I been in his shoes. I wasn't. I'm still not in his shoes, given that he died almost 30 years ago. Nor do I drink as much as he did. And I don't drink vodka any more. The Russians adore him because he seems to have expressed their feelings, their roots, their branches and twigs. Vysotsky's leaves must be alive, although they've started to turn a rich coppery colour. They're playing with the wind I don't feel on my face any more. To tell the truth, I've never felt this wind on my face or anywhere else. It's not my wind, my mood, my attitude towards life and death. What's the difference between Jackson and Vysotsky? None of them is my cup of tea, but Vysotsky's death was deeper, due to the way he expressed it beforehand in his songs. I wouldn't be surprised if someone told me his coffin is lying near the centre of the earth—much further than Michael Jackson's. The latter was a master of information which seemed to appear on screens, not beyond them, not at the centre of the earth, at the core of one's being. When Vysotsky sang of death, he was digging a shallow pit to throw his own body into it. In comparison with him, many songwriters and singers act like dogs digging holes to hide bones in. Not human bones, mind you. Like a science teacher, Vysotsky would draw a diagram showing how the blood flows through the heart. Jackson would show us some traces of blood on his jacket—some ketchup. 'To make the world a better place for you and for me,' he sang. Everything's fine. Death comes to us only on screens, in horror movies and when we're in training for an important computer game. Otherwise there's only life and dance. Not a *Totentanz*, mind you; just a dance, preferably the one Michael Jackson performed many years ago. (*Thriller*.) As I said, Vysotsky was Christ in his own right. Why, may one ask? Because he spoke about his death rather often, especially in his songs, getting closer and closer to the big Russian heart. Actually he didn't speak about death purely for reasons of vanity and ambition: he was persecuted in Russia. Of course they had no intention of putting him in prison, let alone in the gulag where Khodorkovsky—the former oligarch I mentioned in Part One—has been living for six years now. They just wouldn't leave Vysotsky alone. They upbraided him for the concerts he was giving all over Russia in order to get a handful of roubles. They did all they could to put a spoke in his plans or even in his family life. So he went on drinking; his wife dwelt upon it in her book to such an extent that she was accused by some readers of being disrespectful to his memory. (Russians never speak badly about the dead. I wish they wouldn't think too highly of the living.) Apparently, he was in the habit of injecting himself with drugs when he played in a film or in a play. He went on for a while, his body riddled with needle marks. Every performance of his was just another step towards the cross. How many people have been nailed to this cross?

There's enough blood for
Everyone.

Let's top each bowl
With a generous sprinkling
Of blood.

This idea will act as a
Springboard.

The son of Anna the scribe was standing there with Joseph, and took a bough of a willow tree, and scattered the waters which Jesus had gathered into lakes. But the boy Jesus seeing what he had done, became angry, and said to him, Thou fool, what harm did the lake do thee, that thou shouldest scatter the water? Behold, now thou shalt wither as a tree, and shalt not bring forth either leaves, or branches, or fruit. And immediately he became withered all over.

Thomas's Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ

For years I've plodded away
At the same dull routine job.

There are sudden visions and
Sudden moments. This moment
Has nothing to do with visions:
What I see is a slice of life.

And I hear an artful combination
Of bass guitar, jazz saxophonist
And keyboards. And...and...

No buts, no ands. Only a man
I don't know. I'll recognise him.

Michael Jackson was also persecuted, wasn't he? At some point he even had to strip down to his underwear for his medical examination. Sorry, I'm actually speaking about a *forensic* examination to which he was subjected during one of his trials. Even Vysotsky didn't sink so low as to let his persecutors—the lowest of the low—meticulously scrutinise his penis. But Vysotsky's childhood wasn't blighted by the pressures of stardom and no one ever accused him of being 'unkind' to children.

The question now on everyone's lips is 'Who would play the hero in a film devoted to Jesus Christ, to His life?' A man I saw in the documentary on Vysotsky's life said the singer was 'our Russian God'. Isn't 'our Russian God' identical to God—to Jesus Christ at least? 'Bob Dylan sang for the Americans,' the man pointed out. 'But Vysotsky's our Russian God.' What about Michael Jackson?

The primal Oneness. Once more I'll have to renounce myself, to forget what I am and what I've been for so many years, for centuries. To forget myself, my genes. I left my roots behind as I moved from Russia to the west. Now they're rotting in Moscow and Petersburg. My ego must be eliminated, root and branch. And my branches are still there, let alone my leaves. Though dead, they cling to me as if there were no one else in the world. Why don't you fly and land on a desert island to prevent me from laying my hands on you? I should fell my own tree so that only the earth remains around me, all around my former self. I should bury myself and rise in a different shape. Do I need a shape? The forest I see out of my window is a mass of colour in autumn. I need only one colour; I need the spring. No more trees, I beg of you! Just something you won't take notice of. I'm a sort of liquid. I may remain what I am; I may solidify into a gelatinous mass. Why? Wax passes from solid to liquid when you heat it. I was a man. On my way to the primal Oneness I became a lump of wax. And wax passes from solid to liquid when you heat it. So I'm a liquid at present. What kind of liquid? Just water, mineral water, a bottle of sparkling water. No sparkles, no bottles. A lake. I wish they could say about me: 'The water in the lake is so clear you can see the bottom.' I wish they could say about me: 'The light reflected off the surface of the water.' To reflect light. Isn't it the supreme duty of every human, of every creature, of every plant? Light is streaming in through the open door. I'm neither the door nor the walls that surround it. I'm the space through which the light penetrates the room. I wouldn't mind being a chink in the curtains.

A barge, an ice block.

He's a funny sort of bloke.

Going mad. I'm fine and bad.

Apple blossom, cherry blossom, dead

Leaves, flowery curtains, a TV set.

Another song. Let me sing another song. Only songs remain. Do I sing them? The light in my room is full of sounds. I can hear the sound of a bell tolling in the distance. No, the bell is tolling in my room; yet I can't see it.

I stood completely still, not making a sound. The bell was tolling. The light was beginning to fail. In the fading light of a summer's evening I heard this poem:

I'll land up in hospital, in the land

Of the midnight sun. I'll sit and watch the sun

Rising and setting. I'll drink

A cup of wine, endlessly, endlessly until
 Something crops up: another sun, another
 Cup, another map, another end.

Claude Lévi-Strauss died last month. They say that death is just a metamorphosis. You undergo a metamorphosis—there's nothing to it really. Anyway, you've been losing yourself throughout your life: your leaves, your twigs, your branches, your roots. You lost your roots in the heavens, in the earth. What to say about the death of a great man? An astonishing collection of nerves and thoughts was broken up and scattered to the four winds. He became the four winds, the heavens, the lake whose water is so clear you can see the bottom, the light streaming in through the open door. The door of my room will remain open forever—a homage to the great man.

Jackson's masks were not created independently by him and his team; they formed part of an overarching system of transformations. (Death is also a mask, nothing else.) Thus every mask of his—apart from any other meaning it might have—was a transformation of another mask in the system. What's the system in this case? His fans, his death, his addiction to painkillers, his love for children and childhood as such, the United States of America. 'A mask is chiefly not what it represents,' says Lévi-Strauss, 'but what it transforms, that is, what it chooses *not* to represent.' What did Jackson's masks choose not to represent? Their owner—Michael Jackson himself. His fears, his anguish, his poisoned memory, his torments.

Suppose you're jailed for 15 years for stabbing your wife to death. In this case you may love your wife's death, otherwise you wouldn't have killed her. Or you may repent and say to yourself, 'I would spare her life if she were alive.' Anyway, at some point you did love her death—there's no denying it. Or you just fell in love with her death on the spur of the moment and, once the deed was done, you started to *hate* her death. Tristan and Isolde were in love with death; so were lots of poets and songwriters. Was Michael Jackson in love with death, with his own death? Perhaps not. I read somewhere he wanted to live at all cost. So he didn't say to himself, 'Unfortunately, accidents are part of life.' He might have thought misfortunes happen to other people. He must have known that some people go mad towards the end of their lives, but he surely took no notice of this information. He must have sung the following song many times a day: 'It was only later in life that he found happiness and peace of mind.' 'I'm a cat,' he told his dearest friend once. 'Why?' asked the dearest friend. 'Because cats are supposed to have nine lives,' he answered. Be that as it may, he didn't finish his last song. He might have finished it, had he known it was his last song, his swan song. (Do swans always finish their songs?) Yes, he was working on a new song about the environment. He was excited about the message it contained. Oh, here we go again! To make the world a better place for you and me, for my mother, for my brother, for my neighbours, for the United States of America, for the moon where one walks to one's heart's content, for the sun and so on. He recorded the first draft of the unnamed single which, if released, could become the most famous and lucrative pop song in history.

We're not doing enough, not enough,
 To protect the environment from pollution.
 The radiation leak's had a disastrous effect
 On the environment, on the environment.
 We must ensure that tourism develops
 In harmony with the environment.
 We won't invest in any company
 That pollutes the environment. A dangerous
 Amount of radioactivity was released
 Into the environment last month.
 It would be better for the environment
 If people used bikes rather than cars.

Why shouldn't we use cars? Let's use them. Let's skid on the ice and crash into other cars. Bikes are less perilous and we should revere our death instinct. Let's drink a bottle of vodka—one for the road.

Lévi-Strauss defines a myth as the sum total of its variants. Every myth is always breaking into a chain—or even several chains—of transformations. The Oedipus myth includes Sigmund Freud's interpretation of it.

MICHAEL JACKSON: I am Dionysus, son of Zeus. My mother was Semele, Cadmus' daughter. From her womb the fire of a lightning-flash delivered me. I've come here veiling my godhead in a mortal shape.

I: I wonder why I'm writing about you. My best friend said, 'If you write about Bach, I won't read the book. But if you write about Michael Jackson—' So I'm writing about you, about your myth. Let's say you're Dionysus. And I'm an old man who's not really in touch with what young people are interested in. I don't trust that easy charm of yours.

MICHAEL JACKSON: My mother's sisters said—what they should have been the last to say—that I, Dionysus, wasn't Zeus's son; that Semele, being with child—they said—by some mortal, obeyed her father's prompting, and ascribed to Zeus the loss of her virginity; and they loudly claimed that this lie was the sin for which Zeus took her life. Therefore I've driven those same sisters mad, turned them all frantic out of doors—

I: In the late Seventies, in Paris, I attended a Pink Floyd concert. It was marvellous. No one was driven mad, no one screamed. The audience listened to their songs, to their music.

MICHAEL JACKSON: I've changed my form and taken the likeness of a man. Come, my band of worshippers, women whom I've brought from lands of the ease, from Tmolus, bastion of Lydia, to be with me and share my travels!

I: I'm watching a stupid Russian film. I woke up at 5 a.m., hoping to work very hard this morning, before breakfast. Why should I work very hard? Okay, I'm watching a film. Not a Bergman film, not a Fellini film. A woman stole 500 roubles. They caught her. I wasted almost 3 hours. The people I despise may watch a story about theft, fraud and deceit on an incredible scale. \$100 million, \$500 million. She stole 500 roubles. She didn't kill anybody.

MICHAEL JACKSON: You're a fighter against gods, defy me, exclude me from libations, never name me in prayers. Therefore I will demonstrate to you, and to all Thebes, that I am a god. When I've set all in order here, I'll pass on to another place, and manifest myself.

JACKSON'S FANS: Blest is the happy man who knows the mysteries the gods ordain, and sanctifies his life, joins soul with soul in mystic unity.

I: The common denominator is that we all watch stupid films and listen to stupid tunes. The point is I do it from time to time, not round the clock. Wittgenstein used to watch westerns, when in need of amusement. Feeling tired-out is Nature's way of telling you to rest.

MY OLD-STANDING FRIEND: See, I have all that the god prescribes. We must do all we can to exalt and honour him. Where shall we go to dance and take our stand with others, tossing our grey heads? Didn't we agree to equip ourselves with Bacchic wands and fawnskin cloaks, and put on wreaths of ivy-shoots?

I: You've always been eager to keep up with the times. One should carve a niche for oneself. The where is more important than the when.

JACKSON'S FANS: Whoever the man may be, is not his arrogance an outrage? Has he not earned a rope around his neck?

MY LONG-STANDING FRIEND: If you don't live today, you don't live at all. You should bow to the symbols of our times. Wouldn't you bow to the Queen of England? Don't you bow your head in prayer?

I: Why not bow to the inevitable?

MY LONG-STANDING FRIEND: It will be said, I lack the dignity of my age, to wear this ivy-wreath and set off for the dance. Not so; the god draws no distinction between young and old, to tell us which should dance and which should not. He desires equal worship from all men: his claim to glory is universal; no one is exempt.

I: It's a matter of life and death. Every concert must be a religious rite: the rite of spring, the rite of summer, the rite of autumn, the rite of winter. A pianist isn't supposed to entertain us when performing Schubert's *B Flat Sonata*. Don't forget the destructive power of music.

JACKSON'S FANS: When a good speaker has a sound case to present, then eloquence is no great feat. Your fluent tongue promises wisdom; but the content of your speech is ignorant. Power and eloquence in a headstrong man spell folly.

MY LONG-STANDING FRIEND: Don't mistake for wisdom that opinion which may rise from a sick mind. Welcome this god to Thebes, offer libations to him, celebrate his rites, put on his garland. Didn't you see him leaping, amidst the blaze of torches, over the twin-peaked ridge, waving aloft and brandishing his Bacchic staff, while all Hellas exalts him?

JACKSON'S FANS: Don't stray beyond pious tradition; live with us. Your wits have flown to the winds, your sense is foolishness. Even if, as you say, Michael is no god, let him have your acknowledgement.

I: This King of Pop is your instructor in lunacy.

JACKSON'S FANS: Foolhardy man! You don't know what you've said. Before, you were unbalanced; now you're insane.

I: Death has spared him the shame of cancelling the concerts and facing the bankruptcy that would have followed.

JACKSON'S FANS: Do you hear his blasphemy? He dares—do you hear?—to revile the god of joy, the son of Semele, who when the gay-crowned feast is set is named among gods the chief.

MY LONG-STANDING FRIEND: To know much isn't to be wise. Pride more than mortal hastens life to its end; and they who in pride pretend beyond man's limit, will lose what lay close to their hand and sure. I count it madness, and know no cure can mend the evil man and his evil way.

JACKSON'S FANS: See! With contempt of right, with a reckless rage to combat your mysteries, Michael, with maniac fury out he goes for a trial of strength against your invincible arm! His proud purposes death shall discipline.

MY LONG-STANDING FRIEND: I've no wish to grudge the wise their wisdom; but the joys *I* seek are greater, outshine all others, and lead our life to goodness and loveliness: the joy of the holy heart that night and day is bent to honour the gods and disown all custom that breaks the bounds of right.

Every concert of his was the rite of spring. Perhaps. Anyway, Euripides murders the only character who resists the urge to dance, to laugh, to live. *The Bacchae*.

Every morning I go to a newsstand in search of the tabloid press where there are reports on how beautiful women marry prominent men. I envy those men on account of the women they marry only because they've got money or titles, because newspapers speak of them and the medals adorning their chests. I don't envy their fame; I don't envy the enormous wealth they've amassed. I look at their wives, at their mistresses. A friend of mine said, 'I used to play in a chamber orchestra. Vivaldi, Bach. Now I'm a rock musician. It doesn't matter whether you play Bach or something else—it all amounts to the same thing. But the women who attend your concerts are much more beautiful.' Let's write a global history of music from women's point of view. Michael Jackson's in the clouds, Michael Jackson's in the clouds. 'I know that fame in the world of rock and pop is largely ephemeral,' my friend pointed out. 'But one night's enough.' One night's enough.

A Russian oligarch, Michael Prokhorov, rented a house in Courchevel in the centre of which there stood bowls full of wine. Around those bowls a multitude of precious stones could be found: rings, bracelets, necklaces, tiaras and so on. And women came to this house in dribs and drabs. The police thought there were a few pimps around. No pimps, only money. Oil is a billion-dollar industry; gas is a billion-dollar industry; aluminium is a billion-dollar industry.

In my teens I drank vodka on staircases, in attics; and also during our parties. Often girls were more smashed than boys. They would vomit all over the kitchen floor. They would fall asleep on divans, on the floor, on the dinner table, in my arms. We danced a lot before falling into a lovely deep sleep. Dionysus, Dionysus! Dance is a very theatrical art.

I wish to see those women. I wish to see the women who attended Michael's concerts. I wish to see the women who watch his DVDs. I wish to see the women who cried upon learning their idol was dead. 'They did everything they could to save him,' they shout over and over again, 'but he was already too far gone when the ambulance arrived.' I wish to see the women who dance and sing as they listen to his recordings. I wish to see

the women who drink Prokhorov's wine and wear his jewellery. What about skiing in Courchevel? Well, I'd like to go skiing one Christmas. Why not? Better late than never. There are some nice gentle slopes I can ski down. I'll ski very slowly down a mountainside in the company of the Bacchae. They're used to mountains, aren't they?

A candle is somewhere or
Vice versa: the somewhere is
A candle.

You don't pray. You
Look at them: the candle,
The somewhere.

I meditate upon the somewhere situated beyond the worlds I'm accustomed to: reality, dreams, hopes, fears. A series of images crops up in my mind.

In the distance, beyond the river, was a small town. From the top of the hill I saw my house and the woods beyond. There was another house in the woods.

The path extends beyond the end of the road. I walk towards the end of the road. I see the end but there's no path beyond it. 'Is it really the end of the road?' I'm asking myself. It's not written anywhere, is it? There's no sign I could rely upon.

The end of my road, the end of my rope. Masters assert their authority over the world by saying 'yes' to the world; slaves say 'no' to the outside world, to others, to whatever is 'not-I'. I used to think that my negation was the only right attitude one could adopt in this day and age. Now I think otherwise. What's the use? I'm a slave and no slave can become a master overnight. I need a hostile world to create a work of art and live to fight another day; and live to tell the tale. My action is nothing but reaction. How do I embark on a new project? I read in a newspaper: 'He made a bigger impact on music than any other artist in the history of music. He was magic. He was what we all strive to be.' And if I read in the same newspaper: 'We have lost a genius and a true ambassador of, not only pop music, but of all music' I set about writing a book on Michael Jackson. I don't start with the following sentences: 'I am heartbroken. His star will shine forever.' My antipathy against the herd wouldn't allow such a lapse of concentration.

Until recently, I had absolute faith in my own judgment. But as I reached the end of Part One I said to myself, 'I reserve judgment on this issue until I have more information.' What information have I got now? 'He was photographed, written about, analysed and adored before he had even hit puberty. Each record was more successful than the last, every transformation was more fully realised than his previous incarnation. Each single—*Rock with you*, *Billie Jean*, *Beat it*—was more awe-inspiring and innovative than the one we had bought a few months before.' As I started on Part Two I saw a dim shape in the fog.

A song, a mask, a dance.
What else do you need?

Vain hopes, vain promises.

A heron comes flapping
Over the water.

A sun-drenched beach.

An unusually hot summer.

You don't want to lose any time
In beginning the new life.

You begin the new life.

Have I always been in the wrong? 'Always' is a terrifying, ill-fated word. When you say 'always', you don't *always* speak of the past and the present. If you say, 'It's always cold in this room,' you can install the central heating and put a radiator in every room, not only in the one where you're freezing. If they say, 'We'll always remember our dear friends who are no longer with us,' they're sure not to keep their promise: human memory is unreliable. In this case you speak of the present, not of the future. If you say, 'My mum always comments on what I'm wearing,' you also speak of the present: your mother may die today or tomorrow. If you say about your sister, 'She always leaves her clothes lying about on the floor,' you don't speak of the future either: she can trip over her clothes and hit her head on a windowsill. All this means that you don't *always* speak of the future when uttering the word 'always'. But if you say, 'I've always been in the wrong,' you're not likely to mend your ways: you're too old and weak. You might put matters right by telling the truth. What's the truth? Michael Jackson is a genius? His fans are in the right? I have a faint suspicion that his fans *may* be right. It's just a faint suspicion for the moment. But gradually I'll increase the temperature of my enthusiasm to boiling point. 'Jackson's death was such a tragedy at such a young age that it pushed up prices,' said the student who attended the auction sale I touched upon in Part One. (The auction sale took place in the Hard Rock Café in New York.) The student was right: today I'm prepared to pay 10 euros to acquire one of Michael's DVDs.

JACKSON'S FANS:

Gods manifest themselves in many forms,
Bring many matters to surprising ends;
The things we thought would happen do not happen;

The unexpected God makes possible:
And that is what has happened here today.

In my childhood I understood whatever was drawn on the blackboard in our classroom. I need either a blackboard or my childhood to admire Michael Jackson.

Nec ulla magis res aliena quam publica (no matter is more alien to us than what matters publicly). Have I misunderstood Tertullian's remark? Doesn't he speak of today's pop artists, oligarchs and so on and so forth? What matters publicly is money, stupid songs, jerky movements, backbeats, screams and auction sales. Actually Tertullian was addressing early Christians whose eschatological expectations precluded the possibility of enjoying circuses and other instances of showbiz. But I don't think the world will come to an end next month. In my opinion, the world will never come to an end and therefore I'm likely to misread the following remark I chanced upon in Hannah Arendt's book *The Human Condition*: 'The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.' The world I'm living in has got only one aspect or one perspective; I call it 'the entertainment world'. Our high living standards cause our present population to consume 25 percent of the world's oil. And we consume 100 percent of the entertainment offered to us by the world we built at the end of the twentieth century. The road sign points left, but we're driving straight on. On a clear, straight road you can pick up speed.

'Eventually only the effort of consumption will be left of "the toil and trouble" inherent in the biological cycle to whose motor human life is bound,' says Hannah Arendt. There would have been no Shakespeare without 'the toil and trouble', without the seamy side of life. What's more, there would have been no Jackson without the seamy side of life. He struck a perfect balance between 'the toil and trouble' and joy. We should keep this in mind when consuming him. According to Arendt, 'happiness can be achieved only where life's processes of exhaustion and regeneration, of pain and release from pain, strike a perfect balance'. Michael Jackson would rehearse so many times he was usually sick of the show before the opening night.

Why not make common cause with them? This common world will not come to an end. Why not enjoy money, stupid songs, jerky movements, backbeats, screams, mass culture? I'm tired of the aversion therapy I submit myself to on a permanent basis. These fans fill me with disgust that undermines my strength, my confidence. My former girlfriend used to say my sharp criticism of today's society sapped all my energy. A classless, capitalist society. 'Those people are a danger to society,' I would answer, jerking my head up. 'We live in a multicultural society,' she would say placidly. 'Bach, Beethoven, the Beatles, Michael Jackson.'

The dawn is in the making.

The dawn is not—just an hour.

What does this century say?

Shall we go dancing
On Saturday night?

I, for one, think in terms of eternity, otherwise my life would be meaningless. Without that path stretching beyond the end of the road our life has no meaning. What do I care about others, about those who see no signs? The road sign points right, but they're driving straight on. At least they should take notice of the sign on my gate: 'Private Property—No Admittance.'

Semi-tones, octaves, Russian
Idioms. They're bound to die.

A glass of wine's behind
My dish. My dish is
Near my glass of wine.

They will not die: they are
Schubert and Pushkin.

What's the path one can find at the end of the road? Love, love. How to get closer to it? Let's forget about music, about mystics, about dance. Michael was a man, a child. One day he was born—a mistake no doubt. Some people should never be born. Why augment the quantity of suffering in the universe? Mothers don't think along these lines; they don't walk along this path. To them the end of the road is a child. So he was born. During my last visit to Moscow I went to the zoo and came across a girl who stood gazing with pity at the old lion in the cage. I'll never forget her eyes. I also feel pity now—for Michael the man. Not for the consummate artist and creative genius. Just for the man he was. St Sebastian, Jesus. He was Michael Jackson and, like anyone else, he had every right to suffer, to despair. My heart aches with pity for him, but my heart is an unreliable instrument. If you want to learn to play a musical instrument, it might be a good idea to begin on something simple. Play on your heart before sitting down at the piano. How does your heart sound? Is it so simple to play on one's heart? I don't seem to play on it; yet I can hear it. The plaintive sound of the heart. No point in feeling pity for anyone: you can't help the dead. Even if you pray for them, they won't come back to life. Of course, thanks to your prayers, they may reach the gates of Paradise much earlier. But what's Paradise in comparison with the earth?

My feeling has nothing to do with love. I still don't love Michael Jackson; I love nobody. Try as I may, I'll never find the path beyond the end of the road because the end is just the end, nothing else. The end can't become a beginning unless there's something else in it—a particle of 'no-end'. Did I love my girlfriend? Do I still love her? I recall her tenderness, the way she used to stroke my back, my shoulder blades. Perhaps there are some

memories so painful you have to blot them out. This memory is not painful, is it? Looking at her old photographs might bring back a lot of painful memories, but I've got no photographs of hers, no snapshots of any kind. Besides, I couldn't have *old* photographs of hers: she's my junior by almost 30 years. And I met her only three years ago. When does a photograph begin to grow old?

This night. I wish it was
Another night, another
Day, another minute.

Water's leaking from a pipe.

Many images. None is
Faithful to the original.

This is neither a pipe
Nor water, nor a minute,
Nor a day, nor love.

Would I have fallen in love with Jackson had I been a child sleeping in his bed last year? But I wasn't a child last year. I wasn't a child 40 years ago. I don't remember when I was a child; nor do I remember my childhood. In my childhood I might have been happy to sleep in Jackson's company. But he wasn't born yet and I was living in a communist country. And he was living in a capitalist country. We weren't likely to meet even if he'd already been born. He wasn't and I suffered. Did I? Why did I suffer? Because I was born? At the time I didn't know I was born. I just saw my father, my mother, our neighbours. Do you have to be born to love Michael Jackson? Even the unborn admire him.

Walking through Time. I'm too
Old to walk. This building
Is near. I'll enter it. I'll fall in love.

I took a tortuous route
Through back streets.

BILLIE JEAN
THE WAY YOU MAKE ME FEEL
BLACK OR WHITE

ROCK WITH YOU
 BAD
 THRILLER
 BEAT IT
 REMEMBER THE TIME
 DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH
 HEAL THE WORLD

At about three o'clock,
 The tide started to turn.

I listen to the sound of the waves
 Crashing against the shore.

Do I really? No waves, no
 Shores. Your voice. My voice
 Calling out your name.

Your names, rather: 'wave',
 'Moon', 'monster', 'dancer'.

Going around the world, doing tours in stadiums, you see the influence of the music. When you just look out over the stage, as far as the naked eye can see, you see people. And it's a wonderful feeling, but it came with a lot of pain, a lot of pain.

Your song about the environment.

Trees are our lungs,
 The air is our breath,
 The river our circulation.

Deep inside, I feel that this world we live in is really a big, huge, monumental symphonic orchestra. I believe that in its primordial form, all of creation is sound and that it's not just random sound, that it's music.

A star has a great deal of meanings.
 Get rid of them! The star will
 Remain—alone, on a pedestal. Not a five-star
 Hotel. Just a star, naked, visible,

Accessible to everyone.

Ever since I was a little boy, I would study composition. And it was Tchaikovsky that influenced me the most. If you take an album like *Nutcracker Suite*, every song is a killer, every one. People used to do an album where you'd get one good song and the rest were like B-sides. They'd call them 'album songs', and I would say to myself, 'Why can't every one be like a hit song? Why can't every song be so great that people would want to buy it if you could release it as a single? So I always tried to strive for that.

A slice of life. What's under it?
Water, fire, the earth's core?

Do you think those are rain clouds
On the horizon? The sky's near.

The sky's in the palm of my hand;
The rain's in my mouth, in my eyes.

An empty street. I'm walking
Beyond the city, on the moon.

It's music, it's rhythm. And my goal in life is to give to the world what I was lucky to receive: the ecstasy of divine union through my music and my dance. It's like my purpose, it's what I'm here for.

BILLIE JEAN
DIRTY DIANA
THE WAY YOU MAKE ME FEEL
SAY SAY SAY
BLACK OR WHITE
ROCK WITH YOU
HISTORY
BAD
THRILLER
BEAT IT
REMEMBER THE TIME
DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH
HEAL THE WORLD
WANNA BE STARTING SOMETHING
WE ARE THE WORLD

III

FALPARSI

PREFACE

I seldom, if ever, go out and if I do I hear a lot of talk about nothing or next to nothing or above nothing or God. Last night they talked about nothing or just above nothing; in fact they talked about God. Someone said God was everything and everybody, and an old lady said, 'Yes, I agree.' There was polite, muted applause when she finished talking about pantheism. Mr N stood up and said, 'God is a Great Masturbator.' The host and the guests were blind with fury. 'There's an old theory,' the guest went on. 'We're just a dream, His dream, His porn movie. But God is impotent. No orgasm, you know. We multiply and replenish the Earth or rather computer screens. The world is sterile, dead.'

'So there's nothing, nothing?' said the same lady.

'There's someone.' And Mr N showed us the photograph of a cat. 'He died last week,' he said. No one was blind any more.

What is, done with. Not dying but thinking. And this thought brings Parsifal. And there are pars, sis, falls, faults. There is everything and harmony comes if it feels like it, and I, for one, have no idea whether it wants to come or not. If it does not, I should call it. 'Harmony, harmony! Why don't you come?' There is a stone that demands my attention. It is beautiful and I should describe it, otherwise I shall never be either a writer or a describer. This stone has minerals, colours, masses, weights and personality. If you throw it into the air, it will fall on your head and you will die, whatever colours and sounds accompany this ritual; if any. The stone in question and answer is also Socrates who was as hard as a stone and even harder than any diamond except that he died like a human because he belonged to our race.

Either atoms or fatums come and there is nothing, nothing doing except following them here and there, and overthere, where flowers blum and one wonders why they blum at all instead of dying once and for all; or twice and for all. We are flowers and we blumen in many languages until doomsday or rather our day of death; or our day, in common parlance, because there are no other days. Or our, or yours. To blumen, to blumen, to blossom, to blossom, to blossom, to dyeng, to dyeng. To dingen, dongen, ding, dong, ding, dong. They come into the world and say someone threw them into it many centuries ago, many centurions. And these centurions come and say, 'We did nothing of the sort. We threw no one into the world. We did get rid of a few beer cans by throwing them into rubbish bins. That's all, that is all.'

There is a rite which shows a rubbish bin into which centurions fling, throw and browbeat many humans, students, prostitutes, and all of them blum and blim in the bin. That is what it is all about, and about is what it is all that; and probably, even beyond that, this and whatever comes into one's or many's, great deals of heads. It comes and goes; so do heads. They come and go, come and go, come, go, and sometimes a lonely head can be seen on the horizon, coming and going, coming and leaving us forever. This must be Parsifal (or Falparsif, as his family members call him as they cuddle him) and he is on his way to another way, another sinner whose ribs, biceps and lips were, once upon a time, pierced by a sword that some museum or other exhibits today in Bayreuth. Every hour a blooddrop – not to be confused with 'these *bloody* nose drops' – drops from this spear to demonstrate the efficiency of sin and redemption; and of Wagner's music, into the bargain. As the drop turns up at the overture of the wound (and of the opera), a few people fall on their knees, prepared to lip and lap it up. But first they needs must (or must need) swallow a sales pitch hook, line and sinker, and if they do not swallow this story whole, they will not get anything – either the drop or the cross that goes with it.

By the sword there has always stood a mannequin in whose body one can come across a gallon of blood and two gallons of tears. The hour comes when a number of visitors flock into the museum in search of redemption, reconciliation and a strong emotion. They surround the mannequin and begin to wait for the miracle entitled Good Friday. In their minds this miracle is associated with blood because they stumble upon blood everywhere as they go from street to street, from bed to bed. And they drink whatever blood they can lay their lips on; and they devour the bodies that continue to drop from the sky as if to reveal the everlasting heaven-hell (or hell-heaven) bond. A body drops and the crowd shouts, 'Our Redeemer has come again.'

'This body isn't our Redeemer's,' says another member of the crowd. (There are always others, others and members everywhere, otherwise there would not have been so many wars in our history.)

'Whose body is this, then?'

'This body comes to the One who comes before him.'

'What can he do for us?'

‘He can bless you, saying, “I bless your little nylon socks.”’

‘What about tee shirts?’

‘I also bless your cotton tee shirts.’

But their trousers and shorts remain untouched either by His grace or His voice floating from one soul of souls to another stomach of stomachs. So they point to their trousers, strip them off and hold them out to enable His voice to weave Its way into their cylindrical parts. The voice drops into these parts and the members of our congregation press their hands over their trousers’ slits and other overtures, anxious as they are to keep the voice in. And the voice resounds inside their trousers – it is better not to wear shorts during these rituals – saying, ‘You’re blessed, everything’s blessed, blessing itself is blessed.’ Whatever is called ‘stress’ and ‘Angst’ leaves the congregation even before the advent (or drop) of the real Saviour, Redeemer and what not; so that some members wonder whether they should waste their time, waiting for Him or Her instead of buying villas and diamonds. But the voice sings:

*Der für euch fließt,
Des Weines genießt,
Und nehmt vom Lebensbrote!*

The pilgrims look around and spot a rivulet of blood running across the hall where the mummy has stood for one or two centuries. Once again they kneel down and begin to lick the wine off the floor. ‘His blood is delicious today,’ they say as if they knew whose blood they were drinking so devotionally and emotionally. Then one of them feels a faint stirring of distrust and asks the chief attendant if the blood he is about to drink belongs to Jesus Christ.

‘To Amfortas,’ says the guard.

‘Swine, swindle!’ shouts Doubting Thomas.

‘But in Tcherniakov’s staging of *Parsifal*, everyone drinks Amfortas’ blood. After all, he’s Jesus’ envoy and right-hand man.’

‘I know, I know. You call this ritual “Salvation” and, according to your Scriptures, this kind of salvation requires a lot of imitation: stigmata, blood, nails, the Cross.’ And suddenly the guard sees in front of him a man with outspread arms. ‘Do I look like the Cross?’ asks the man who, a few seconds before, was just a Doubting Thomas.

‘Perhaps,’ answers the guard. ‘But I can’t see any blood, not a single drop, let alone a brook. And only through blood can you gain complete access to Paradise and its groves.’

‘Dropblood! Dropblood!’ shouts the crowd. Even a small group of gregarious men and women is habitually bent on uttering as many words as necessary, otherwise no action will ever speak louder than words. The more words you utter, the greater the number of actions that will be performed in the space of several hours, which may result in the overthrow of the monarchy, among other overthrows. And if the crowd wishes to convey its wish to a professional murderer, its members cannot waste their time on rhetoric-inspired subtleties such as, ‘Please try and wound him so we can watch his blood flow out of his veins onto the floor.’ These members and their gregariousness cannot even waste their time on grammatical injunctions, requirements and orders. Of course, under the circumstances, the verb ‘to shed’ is far more correct and elegant than the verb ‘to drop’, even if

one needs only a few drops of blood, not a river of it, nor a Grailful of it. 'So much blood was *shed* by Jesus' is consequently better than '*dropped* by Jesus', although both sentences are awful, inhuman and undivine.

'Dropblood, dropblood, dropblood, dropblood! Blood, blood, blood, blood! Ood, ood, ood, ood!' '*Ad*' means 'hell' in Russian but, contrary to what they do in English-speaking countries, the Russians do not say 'hell' every two minutes; and yet they know they have been living in Hell from time immemorial. They say neither 'oh hell' nor 'bloody hell' in spite of the sea of blood they continue to swim in as they practise their butterfly stroke; or just stroke. Instead they say, '*Da*' and, after much soul-searching, add more or less pensively, '*Ad*.' Yes, hell, yes, damnation. Why don't they say *Ad, niet?* Instead?

Ad-da, ad-da, ad-da, ad-da,

As-sa, as-sa, as-sa, as-sa.

If a Russian wants to tell a Georgian joke, he picks up a kitchen knife, dances the *lezginka* (whatever that is) and sings at the top of his voice, 'As-sa, as-sa, as-sa, as-sa.' And if they (a few Georgians) ask him whether he speaks Georgian, he answers, 'As-sa', which means, 'Yes.' And if they fail to catch his meaning, he says, 'Yes-sa' several times in a row. 'Yes-sa, yes-sa, yes-sa, yes-sa,' he shouts as he resumes his private *lezginka*. And he says to the Georgians whose presence seems to inspire him as much as his own nonsense, 'Come on, why aren't you dancing? Enjoy yourselves!'

'As-*niet*,' say the Georgians leaving his house, Moscow and Petersburg.

Anyway, some people are in the habit of staying in the middle of the street, their arms outrageously outstretched; as if they were somehow linked to this announcement, 'New measures have been introduced to try and ease traffic congestion in the city.' If asked what they are doing there, they answer, 'We're symbols.' And if a passer-by asks them what kind of symbols they take themselves for, they answer, 'We symbolise the Cross on which –' They seldom finish their answers because the pain they endure must be unbearable, not allowing any exchange of views, however short. Of course they cannot keep the same posture for centuries and so, after a while, their arms rejoin their bodies and these monuments or symbols no longer look like crosses. But they leave neither the middles nor the streets where these middles can be found, and other pedestrians ask them what they are doing there and probably everywhere; in their minds at least. The answers they (the pedestrians) get differ widely from body to body: for all our unity, we are unwilling to part with our personalities.

One of them says, 'I'm just a tree.'

'What kind of tree do you symbolise?'

'I'm the tree from which the Cross was made, cross my heart and hope to die and rise from the dead.'

Another symbol answers thus, 'I'm the tree from which Jesus's *Sarg, Sorge* – coffin was made.'

Among those individuals, there are a lot of egoists who think only in terms of their own lives, caring neither about Jesus nor about the Holy Tree that admittedly took part in his criss-cross life. So they answer, 'I'm the tree under which I used to sleep with my late mistress.' 'I'm the tree from which my rowing boat was made.' 'I'm the tree from which my own coffin will be made on the eve of Doomsday.' And all those men and women are fond of rituals, needless to say, so that, if asked how long they will be rooted to the spot, they answer, 'Until

the end of the ritual.’ They live in a world of make-believe/a make-believe world. They make their onlookers believe they are trees and not just some grass or moss – by making them listen to the rustle of their leaves. And they say ‘welcome’ to the birds, making it crystal clear they are neither egoists nor lonely. Whenever an idle onhearer hears ‘chirrup, chirrup, chirrup’, he and she say, ‘This is one of those symbols, you know.’

‘What symbols?’

‘Of life, of death.’

And a guide explains in pontifical tones, ‘Here’s the Tree of Idleness. Here’s the Tree of Idiocy. Here’s the Tree of Fornication. Here’s the Tree of Mystification. Here’s the Tree under which St Paul took a nap on his way to Damascus.’ And then he leads a group of tourists towards an empty hall where not a single bush or blade of grass can be seen. Astonished and worried, the tourists ask the guide why such a hall should remain empty, and the guide says that the hall is called ‘Death’. And he assures all Doubting Thomases that it is exactly what real (or unreal) death looks like; in real life or death. ‘There are no trees in the Kingdom of Death,’ he says, shaking his head and frowning atrociously. ‘But I’ve got some good news for you,’ he adds with an enigmatic smile. ‘Not a single tree of knowledge threatens you within its bounds.’

The dead never remind us that two and two make four, and their absolute ignorance does not even permit them to count the number of lives they lived on Earth. Unfortunately they are convinced they never were either Julius Caesar or Pythagoras, and when Antony speaks to them about Brutus, they say, ‘Who?’

‘So you didn’t say, “Even you, dear Brutus, my son? You of all people?”’

‘No.’

‘Perhaps you just said, “Even thou?”’

‘No.’

‘Not even “Thou?”’

‘No.’

‘Not even “Ou?”’

‘No.’

‘Not even “Ow, stop it, you’re hurting me!”’

‘No.’

‘Not even, “Dear or dear, things don’t look too good!”’

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. A middle-aged man squats down and begins to write these figures, digits and numbers on the sand, using his index finger instead of a stick. To what conclusion might a philosopher or a mathematician come? Suppose one of these two representatives of culture happens to be in the neighbourhood, in the area where such a differential calculus is being performed in broad daylight. He casts a glance at the calculus and says to himself that this equation, if any, is related to the man’s life. How? 1 – I was born into the vale of tears, screams and wounds. 0 – I was wallowing in luxury (my mother’s womb). Often such a man does not go any further, drawing only zeros on the sand. Or he goes on writing for hours and extends his life beyond the end of the road: 167.

$$[(p-1) \times (p-2) \times \dots \times 3 \times 2 \times 1] + 1.$$

65 – I am walking alone in spite of the presence of a few people who embrace me warmly – too warmly perhaps – and often remind me of the expression ‘bear hug’. Is it an expression or just two words? I do not care for the moment because I am bent on enumerating all the tricks to which some people resort in order to show me how they appreciate my poor self. They kiss me and lie down on my lap or on the rest of my body, hoping I shall understand how humane and nice they are. They shower me with praise and presents, and I am unable to pay them in kind because I do not believe in their sincerity. So they disappear without reading my poems, let alone my prose works which are much longer than my poems. They have no time for me; yet they might think I deserve a portion of their time and brain. They just embrace my body: this action does not take much time and requires no effort. Even a bear hug requires no effort.

Often young and old people would give anything to know where they lived several centuries ago and whose bodies wrapped their souls up in cotton wool. And they deduct whatever can be deducted from zero, from their birth: the years they have spent on Earth, in its hospitable nooks and inhospitable crannies, in planes and trains that always go, fly and dive somewhere. One of them might say occasionally, ‘Temperatures could fall to minus eight tonight. So could I. I wish I could.’ And she does fall to minus eight and finds herself in an antenatal clinic. And doctors say to each other, ‘How young is she? What do you think?’

‘I think she’s minus six.’

‘I think she’s minus seven.’

‘I think she’s minus eight.’

‘Aren’t you confusing her with today’s temperature?’

She goes on falling down and soon no one compares her to Siberia. Now she is minus two thousand and doctors speak of Cleopatra whose beauty haunts not only Dostoevsky but also Antony and even Caesar, although the latter mostly thinks in terms of the Rubicon.

Time-seekers also go into the future, counting the number of years they are to spend on Earth at some superior force’s command. But they are reluctant to *run* forward, rummaging instead in the drawers of the future and comets; and they repeat ‘to *genießen* this and that’ as they model their lives upon those who enjoy themselves in Klingsor’s garden. Klingsor is just another devil and has a lot of daughters or fair maidens within his reach. So you are not supposed to skip anything: no multiplication table is allowed on the garden’s territory where every inch seems to count much, much more than any outside yard or even mile. Did I enjoy this inch? they ask themselves as they crawl along another path, another pair of legs. And if reminded of ‘two and two make four’ they wriggle their toes in the sand and say, ‘For nothing in the world are we prepared to forego three and its delights.’ They put one by two’s side and check if no interstice has managed to settle in between these digits, while they were engrossed in their operation and differential calculus.

One should neither skip anything nor deduct anything, let alone deduct a luxury item from a luxury life. Mathematicians leave our figures alone so they are always on parade: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. 111, 116, 558. 558 is an ice cream or a beautiful young woman. 116 is a Bentley and a handsome young man. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. One may stop on the threshold of nine for fear of being confronted with Dante, Beethoven, Bruckner and Mahler. And so on, and so on, and so forth on.

0000. I wish I could be a pure fool because being an impure fool does not mean anything except that you are impure and a fool into the bargain. If you are pure and do not know anything, not even Kant's critiques and reasons, you go and fetch spears and other symbols that heal (and hell) everybody whose bodies come back to life and death in no time at all. All right, I am a pure fool and I killed many people and animals because I did not know I was killing, sinning and singing atrocious songs such as,

I am Parsifal, Falparsil, and what not, and who not.

I am Jesus' successor, inheritor and right-hand man.

I am also His left-hand God, Hot, Goth, Moth, Oath.

Medieval knights took an oath of allegiance/loyalty to their lord – that is what all Parsifals and Tristans (*triste âne*) say to us. But one may ask – if this one belongs in one of the plebeian worlds – who lords over these knights and their long, German knives; and their nights. And one is answered thus, 'Titirel, Arthur, Mother, Father, Ariel, Muriel.' And the Pure Fool says, 'I'm pure, I'm sure.' And he goes through landscapes where slaughter is as common as days and nights and wives and Bruders and Mooders. You know nothing and see neither murders nor the way of all flesh and cash, of all mess and death. You die and are seduced, and neither you nor anyone else knows what comes first or second and last. And they say that nothing is last and Kundry will seduce both Amfortas and Fortas till the end and the end of ends. But you repeat, 'Coming, coming, coming,' and you are right because something and someone are always coming and mumbling, 'All right, great, nice, Nice.' And another villa makes its appearance on the Riviera.

1, 2, 3, 4. A woman is drinking inside my television screen and I wonder what she would do in this room of mine if I offered her a drink, saying, 'You're beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. Let's drink this bottle together. You can't open a bottle of wine and leave it as it is because wine begins to breathe and if you don't drink it, it'll breathe its last in a few hours. Wines also die because they're alive as long as they remain in our wine cellars or in our glasses on condition that we don't leave them in our cellars and our glasses forever.' What would I do with her? I know the feeling that comes to the surface whenever I see a beautiful woman in a café and am tempted to offer her a glass of cognac. If she refuses to accept the offer, the gift on which you count – you are an inveterate womaniser – you heave a sigh and go your way; there is nothing you can do and no matter what you do or say to her, she will not spend a few hours in your room, sipping cognac or whisky, stroking your face. And if she does empty the glass you offered her a few minutes before, you can invite her to your table and strike up a conversation with her with a view to inviting her somewhere, not necessarily to your place.

All this takes place inside my TV screen and the man who offers a glass to a beautiful woman does not deserve anything: neither a kiss, nor a word of encouragement. But she gives him everything and I wonder how she would behave in my presence, in my company which is far more precious than whatever the man I am watching can offer her: even his cognac must be second-rate, undrinkable. They are already in a room where he

is allowed to stroke her and even lie by her side; but he does not, for some reason, and I wonder what I would do in his shoes.

How often do I wonder within the space of an hour? Do I still show any interest in images and words, and in the beds where so many youngsters cuddle and kiss?

My last word is more important than the one before last, and before before, and before before, and so on and on, back and back. I thought that if I gave no thought to what I would say on my deathbed, I would not go to gardens and Edens, going instead to Hades and the mazes and maidens one is likely to find down there: circular paths, vicious maths. I found my last word amidst a cluster of words I had used in the course of my life, and I wished to speak of this word that is to sum up my life to my lifelong friend; to my halflifelong friend. She said, 'And what if you won't be able to utter any word on your deathbed?' Pain, pain, pain, unbearable pain. I felt a sharp pain and looked down to see blood pouring from my heart. Amfortas, Amfortas. O, O, O, O, O, O, O!!!!!! They cannot talk seriously about deathbeds: all beds are lifebeds to them. Lifeboats are lifeboats, not deathboats, even if they sink and drink all the seas and oceans. My friend seemed to take my last and present words light-heartedly, light-bodily, light-souly, light-solely. Solely, solely – is that how I can describe the end of my life, my deathhouse, my winecellardeathhouse. Why describe it? I found the word. Duty. And what if you scream yourself hoarse before uttering it, muttering it, blabbering, bleeding, eeding, ee, ee? EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. I am already hoarse and a moth, but I go on screaming. MEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. Where am I? Where am I? Me, me, me, me, me? On my death, on my bed, on my death, on my mat. Duty, duty, duty, duty, duty, duty, duty.

A Knight of the Round Table questions my purity and foolishness, and I do my best to prove I have got both in abundance. 'Don't *you* just adore lying in a hot bath?' I ask him as I try to make him realise to what extent *I* adore lying in a hot bath. And if a bath I lie in is not hot, I go on lying in it until I freeze to death as Kundry does throughout the opera. 'Are you frozen to death?' she is asked.

'No, I'm just lying in a lukewarm bath.' She is asked the same question in Act Three and she does not answer at once because she has just frozen to death, her bath being cold this time. And she has spent almost the whole of eternity in it, let alone three Hindu *kalpas* in the course of which she kept repeating, '*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea kalpa.*' And Gurnemanz, which means a 'holy servant' in Yiddish, repeats the question in several languages. Sometimes it sounds as follows, 'Free, Frou, Frou, Tot, Mot, Cot, Cat.' And all this means something along these lines, 'Are you dead at last? Aren't you likely to poison us any more? Are you? Where is your sting, your poison? Where are your breasts and vaginas? All our knights seem to have succumbed to your allurements and sex-calling.'

Kundry used to say to them, 'Don't you hear my call?' 'What call?' they used to ask. 'Sex, sex, striptease and sex, French kiss and Arabian Night. Don't call me "Miss"! Don't call me "Fight".' No one has forgotten her roll call yet, 'King Arthur! Prinz Lancelot! Graf Titurel! Duke Parsifal! Donald Duck! Sir Muck! Donald Trump!' They all came in dribs and drabs to drum loudly on her door and even on her roof: they thought she was a sort of cat. They turned up with their stings; at least they thought they had some. But they thought in terms of

physiological and anatomical stings, alias penises. She thought about everything in *spiritual* terms and her stings were spiritual all right; or rather all *wrong*. All those splendid knights were deeply *wronged* by her spiritual stings connected to her outer sex organ which was physical enough to produce many states of sexual arousal. ‘We’d been up arousing and carousing till the early hours and were exhausted,’ the knights used to say to their colleagues whose bodies were distributed around the Round Table. ‘Shut up!’ their comrades-in-arms used to say. ‘We’re waiting for the Pure Fool whose wound-healing is renowned through the universe.’ Such stories just rubbed salt into their wounds created and often recreated by women’s spiritual stings, alias spears and lances.

I suffer a little when I realise that the woman to whom I sent my poem is not eager to answer my email. I am not in love with this woman and the poem I sent her had been written for another woman, of another origin. And the latter liked my poem very much; at least she said so and I believed her or rather her voice, the expression on her face. She was sitting opposite me in a Tokyo hotel and I thought I would kiss her at the end of our date or even in the middle of it. Nothing really happened except that I lost sight of that woman. I lost sight of the other woman as well: even if she finally answers my email, I shall never forgive her for her disrespect regarding my poetry and feelings. After all, she was not aware of the identity of the woman for whom I had taken the trouble to write my poem.

‘I recall with delight our meeting in Italy,’ I wrote in my email. “‘In my beginning is my end’”, as a poet put it. I hope it is just a beginning that will last to the very end.’ I am not sure T. S. Eliot put it this way, although I am pretty sure the verse I quoted can be found in *Four Quartets*. But I remember neither the wording nor even the meaning of this verse which seems to approach both beginnings and endings from another angle, another point of view. It is just the other way round, if memory serves me right: ‘In my end is my beginning.’ This does make sense, for no one is eager to die except for certain Christians and long-term sufferers. And if you have no wish to die, you think that your end encloses a beginning, a new birth – another life, in other words; whereas your beginning should on no account engender an end or a destructive force.

Actually, T. S. Eliot wrote: ‘In my beginning is my end.’ At some point I thought that the Italian aristocrat I had met near Pisa was disappointed by my ignorance of English (or American) poetry. But now I know I got the verse right and so her silence may be ascribed only to her bad manners or to a sort of coquetry I fail to grasp. Does she want me to dial her number and ask the count for his daughter’s hand in marriage? But she lives alone and I am not likely to hear her father’s voice if some day I gear myself up to give her a phone call. Nor am I bound to hear her master’s voice because she ditched her boyfriend almost two months ago. I have no idea whether he was her master or not, but I might have become her master, had she answered my email three weeks ago. To tell the truth, I might have accepted the role of a slave, had she fallen in love with me. I do not mind being a slave, for we all know that, sooner or later, a slave will become his master’s master.

I sent an identical email to Emilia whom I met in Vilnius where I spent a few days, walking around the city and talking to one man and two women. The other woman is in a class of her own – not only on account of her body whose affinities with Rubens or rather with the women he painted can be neither ignored nor disputed. I singled her out for special treatment on account of her name which reminds me of the most touching and charming woman I have ever seen; and my acquaintance with her is confined to the cinema screen. I am speaking about Audrey Hepburn to whose charms I succumbed in my youth spent in a country where women are

beautiful and often vulgar. Audrey was elegant and her image stored in the most precious part of my memory enables me to combat vulgarity whenever I happen to come across it. Luckily for me, I do not have to resort to this stratagem in the presence of my Audrey who is not mine yet, to tell the truth. She is coming at the end of December and today is my cat's birthday – November 12, 2012. I envy my cat: he knows nothing about death and consequently has no itch to describe his own decline and fall.

So I sent Emilia an email where my love was expressed more discreetly, although it was not conspicuous by its absence, as often happens when a man in love does all he can to hide his feelings and hopes. 'Natasha. I'd like to say to you...Well, you know...' Natasha says she does not know anything and her shy admirer resumes his declaration of love. 'He stutters a bit, so let him finish what he's saying,' Natasha's inner voice cuts in. Natasha follows her voice's advice and patiently waits for the word 'love', but her future partner does not manage to finish his speech at the end of which the magic word should stand like a monument.

'I recall with delight our meeting in Vilnius. "In my beginning is my end," as a poet put it. I hope it is just a beginning and there will be no end.' The emails I sent to Lithonia and Italy are not identical twins for the simple reason that, even if you are in love with identical twins, you should not court them in the same manner. At least you should alter a few letters in your missives, which might enrich your courtships with nuances and particular traits. Not to confuse the objects of your love, you had better differentiate between them in your mind and, to some extent, in your body.

In the email I sent to Vilnius I speak about the absence of any end that is supposed to put an end to a relationship, a conjugal life or just life itself. In the previous email I seem to evoke the formula 'till death do us part'. In other words, I allude to death which, sooner or later, is bound to interfere between a man and a woman or between a man and a man. In the second email I boldly dismiss such a possibility as if determined to live with Emilia until Doomsday, spending a few thousand years in Paradise. Oddly enough, upon finishing the second email, I thought the first one was more explicit, more love-permeated. Now I think I was mistaken and this second conclusion is all the more logical since I often make mistakes in the domain of love.

Is it easier to become pure than foolish? I think King Lear says he is foolish, but he is certainly not pure, not at that stage of his journey through life and its vicissitudes, its tempests and winter's tales. I'm cold, I'm cold, and so is Tom, and I say to him, 'Without a sleeping bag, you would freeze to death out there on the mountainside, in Act Three, if I'm not mistaken.' So, in some productions, he sits on the stage, a sleeping bag pulled all over his body. And King Lear says to him, 'You're fool, aren't you? You're as foolish as my fool.' 'As you, as you,' says Tom, which proves that he is no fool: he analyses King Lear's behaviour and comes to the following conclusion, 'In spite of being a king, King Lear is a fool. But he isn't pure – he hasn't taken a bath since last February. I had a bath last Friday, but I'm not a fool. Our King's fool is no fool, judging from how he dissects our King's life. But he isn't pure either. In short, there are no Parsifals in our midst.'

Amfortas overhears this interior monologue and screams his head off. His head quits his shoulders, falls on the marble floor of the palace and rolls away, making for the Grail that can be seen through a chink in the curtains and also through three keyholes. Amfortas crawls towards one of these holes, looks through it and says to everybody, 'I wish I could squeeze through this keyhole and reach the Grail in no time.'

'You might achieve your objective if you could travel at twice the speed of sound,' says a knight.

‘I could, couldn’t I? Kundry does, doesn’t she?’

‘Let’s wait and see,’ says the knight.

Following in Don Quixote’s footsteps, Kundry rides through the air on her wooden horse called Pegasus, and the knight casts a glance at his wristwatch to find out if she flies faster than sound. ‘I can hear her horse clip-clopping along the cloud-paved road.’

‘That’s right – she’s lashing her horse mercilessly with her long-winded whip.’

‘Winded?’

‘It is a windy night, you know.’

‘I know, I know, although I can’t feel it. Nor can I see it, you know.’

‘Sitting still in front of your computer all day can give you a stiff neck. Your back is as stiff as a ramrod.’

‘Is it?’

‘It is.’

‘Stiff all over. Crippled with arthritis. What about her speed?’

‘The speed of sound.’

‘Twice? Thrice?’

‘No, I’m afraid.’

‘So we can’t ask her to ride and fetch the Grail, can we?’

‘We can’t.’

Kundry rides along the road paved with good intentions, as they say. After saying that, logically enough, they begin to insult her. ‘*Ach ti suka, ach ti bliad*.’ In German it sounds nice too, ‘Schrump, Schtrumpf, Schrimp, Schramp, Shram, Sram.’ Kundry, where are your Kudry (Curls in Russian. Her hair fell in curls over her shoulders)? Kundry is a multi-faceted character and therefore one can see her either through the prism of virginity that exhibits all the attributes of this venerable notion or without these attributes – in the middle of a brothel where she performs her dances stark naked, driving many knights and ordinary citizens towards unbridled sexual relationships traditionally symbolised by Kama Sutas and lascivious, whisky-permeated nights. (First she drives them mad and then they rush towards her bed.) ‘Today, she’s the Blessed Virgin,’ says Gurnemanz – or Kundremanz, as other knights call him – as he accepts her presents: a phial of opium/poison, for instance. ‘Let’s see if she’s really the Mother of God today,’ adds Kundryman as he puts the phial into the palms of a knight he has just chosen at random. ‘A random death test (RDT),’ says another knight, heaving a sigh of relief. The former knight empties the phial, staggers and collapses in a heap. Gurnemanz touches the heap with one of his toes and says, shaking his head, ‘No, she’s the whore of Babylon tonight.’

Indeed she is a whore tonight – and she will be the same whore in the night to come – although one cannot be sure her whoredom originates in Babylon and not just in original sin. (Originally original sin was symbolised by a whore sitting on a she-wolf. A tourist can admire a few examples of this symbolism in the caves of Cappadocia.) And she keeps this identity of hers through Act II of the opera, with the exception of the beginning where she says to Klingsor, ‘No, I’m reluctant to assume this dismal identity.’ While saying so, she tears the whore’s ID to ribbons.

‘Are you a cat today?’ asks Klingsor.

‘How do you mean?’

‘My new kitten has torn the living room curtains to ribbons.’

‘So what?’

‘Aren’t you kittenish?’

‘Not any more.’

‘And how do you intend to seduce the Pure Fool? By talking to him about his mother?’

‘He doesn’t know the first thing about incest.’

Sure enough, he knows one cannot kill swans and this crime is all the more pernicious since the Purest Numbskull who is not aware of anything happens to roam around a sacred ground. In short, this fool with whom we are already acquainted – he goes by the name of Falpars – honestly thinks the wild swan he spots in the sky should be shot dead; in short, without any further ado. Here is the outcome of this shooting: ‘What? What? Oh, no! Really? Can’t be helped. Can’t be shagged. *Bist du’s, der diesen Schwan erlegte? Mich? Was? Uch. Ach. Bach. Wagner.*’ The knights do not seem to be satisfied: in addition to their daily worries, there lies the corpse of the swan they are talking about, being shot by the arrow sticking out of the aforementioned swan’s body. ‘Is this your arrow? *Sein, dein, ihm*, him?’ they shout as they point at the handsome young man whose clothes are not as immaculate as can be supposed in the light of what our scriptures say about him, prophesying his arrival. ‘Yes, I did it,’ says the future knight. And he adds, after much soul-destroying, ‘*Mein, mein, mein, mein.*’

‘Are you aware of the fact you’re destroying your soul?’ asks Gurnehans.

‘What am I destroying?’ asks the Dimwit. ‘My swan?’

‘Why did you assassinate him?’

‘I saw him and I did piff-paff.’

‘What?’

‘Or rather swum-swam. This time I’m using arrows, not bullets.’

‘Do you know anything about death? What do you think about this corpse?’

‘The corpse is in an advanced stage of decomposition,’ says a knight.

‘When did the Nincompoop shoot him dead?’ asks Gurnetanz.

‘Somewhere in the middle of the first act.’

‘What act are we today?’ asks Gurnedunce.

‘Act III.’

‘Are we redeemed yet?’ asks another knight.

‘Not yet, not quite,’ answers Gurnemanz.

There is a wide interval between those who have been purified, and those who still need purification. For those in whose life-time here the purification by the laver has preceded, there is a restoration to kindred state. Now, to the pure, freedom from passion is that kindred state, and that in this freedom from passion blessedness consists, admits of no dispute. But as for those whose weaknesses have become inveterate, and to whom no purgation of their defilement has been applied, no mystic water, no invocation of the Divine power, no amendment by repentance, it is absolutely necessary that they should come to be in something proper to their case, – just as the furnace is the proper thing for gold alloyed with dross, – in order that, the vice which has been mixed up in them being melted away after long succeeding ages, their nature may be restored pure again to God. Since, then, there is a cleansing virtue in fire and water, they who by the mystic water have washed away the defilement of

their sin have no further need of the other form of purification, while they who have not been admitted to that form of purgation must needs be purified by fire.

Gregory of Nyssa

Once again the problem of purity is on the agenda and no one can get rid of it unless someone throws this and other agendas out of the only window one can spot in the room where one seems to be cooped up eternally. Of course our Falparsifal thinks that purity has everything to do with the body he pushes around as he jumps over bushes and runs along roads and motorways. His body is in its prime and he often bullies it into doing something it does not want to do. For instance, he pushes his body around or rather along, saying to it, 'Run, run, run. I'm supposed to reach Amfortas in no time at all, otherwise his *Wunde* will never heal.'

'What? What? Speak English!' says his body. (You pull the communication cord, but your body does not always answer your call or pull.)

'Don't you know Amfortas was *wounded* by the Babylon Whore?'

'Was he?'

'He was.'

'I couldn't care less. Let me tell you I'm in no mood for running today.'

In shot (sic), Parsifal is convinced that his body will always run and fly if it is in flying order, and this order can be kept in order thanks to water, alias to the baths about which they talk in the first act of Wagner's last-but-not-least opera-*fleuve*. '*Das Bad*, Bagdad, deaddad (Titurel), tend to the bath, run to the bath, ass, arse!' What we may call or dub the 'spiritual body' is beyond Parsifal's ken, and when he hears 'Pure Fool', he does not always kill those who utter these words because he knows that his daily bath takes care of his body, whereas his foolishness is related to Christianity about which he might have heard in his childhood, had he listened to his mother's prophetic words, 'Christianity, Christianity, Christianity.' But his mother's injunctions – St Augustine did hear them – were lost on his foolish mind, and he continued to murder swans and bears until Sir Gurnemanz put an end to this senseless slaughter.

What is the difference between Kundry and Parsifal? Both fly through the air – there is no denying that, whatever they might say on the subject, thinking that only Jesus and Simon the Magician could accomplish such a feat; plus walking on the Mediterranean Sea. But Kundry's dearest wish concerns their (hers and Parsifal's) unity, and at the moment of the supreme and only ecstasy she says ecstatically, 'You're my Son. You're consubstantional (sic) with my substance, according to the Nice Agreement. Let us make love to ratify this Agreement, my dear. Don't you know that many countries have now ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child? Don't you know you're my child, my dearest baby?' But both the Fool and Nincompoop do not know anything and once again Kundry's innermost words and thoughts are lost on Wagner's deficient yet saintly hero.

Parsifal knows the word 'purity', but in his deficient mind that lies beyond any efficiency this word is associated with bath, not necessarily with the one Amfortas has every morning, hoping to purify his pus-filled wound. ('Pushole' they call him in King Arthur's castle or pusle.) Kundry and a number of knights bring him various shower gels: Laver I, Laver II, Laver III, Laver IV. Any professional opera-goer might think that every laver

corresponds to the acts where the Amfortas Bath is prepared either for Amfortas or for Gawan or Braban. Well and good. But what about Laver IV? There is no such thing as Act IV, as far as *Parsifal* (Wagner's last opera) is concerned. Laver is a sea- or riverweed and its propensity to heal whatever wound can be found in a bath is renowned throughout both Christian and Heathen (Pagan) worlds.

Anyway, Parsifal has a bath every morning and consequently he might think he is pure – as pure as any fool or intellectual one can encounter in the medieval world. But Gurnemanz says he is pure in spiritual terms – or spiritually, in other terms; and that seems to mean that his purity has nothing to do with baths. It is far more akin to maths, to Plato's esoteric teaching, but that is beyond the scope of the present work, as many writers say whenever they are unwilling to admit their *ignoranza* of the great (and even small) Beyond. (Of any beyond, to be exact.) '*Je me lave, je me lave, je me lave,*' says Parsifal as he smears laver all over his body; which means he knows French. And *this* means he is not really a *pure* fool because pure (or utter) fools do not know French unless they are French and were not born in any English-speaking country.

But what about arrows? Parsifal is usually depicted as a boy with a bow and arrow – a pre-conversion, a pre-revelation, a pre-industrial Parsifal; the one who shoots swans, bears, she-wolves and he-panthers. From our spiritual point of view, these arrows are not pure because they are blood-stained, so to speak, so to see and so to feel. 'Where does this blood come from?'

'From a swan.'

'And this one?'

'From a bear.'

'And this one?'

'From a man.'

'What's his name?'

'I don't know. *Ich weiss nicht*, in other words.'

Parsifal is a fool because he does not know the names of the humans he slew in the course of his wanderings. ('St George slew the dragon,' he thinks. 'I slew many dragoons.') Parsifal is a fool all right. But is he pure?

What about myself? I know Plato, so I am not a fool and therefore cannot reach the Grail and the great Salvation, the Here-and-There. 'A virus erased my hard disk,' I say to myself as I put two viruses into my brain, hoping to erase both Plato and Aristotle. This morning my purity is more perfect than the purity I could boast of last night when I recited Plato's and Aristotle's works in the middle of my bathroom. But it is not *far* more perfect, given that I still remember Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant and even Schopenhauer. So I say to myself, 'Another virus erased my hardest disk,' and all these philosophers disappear in the twinkling of screens and books. No more ideas, no more categories, no more right words and best worlds, sad tropics; no more things-in-themselves and in-ourselves, no more representations and wills. Not even wills on wheels.

Today I am a fool. At least I am 'f' and I am proud of this 'f' to the point of singing, 'F-F-F-F-F-F-F.' And then I start singing 'o', 'O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O.' There are many 'o's, which means that the word 'fool' has two 'o's, not one. I also sing 'L', which means I am a fool all right. I do not even remember where I come from, let alone my mother and father who died a long time ago. Do I know death? I know it or him because my mother

and father died, and Kundry said in the opera, ‘Your mother, Heartdolor, died a natural death. Your father, Gamuremanz (Cameraman), died a violent death. So your mother, Mrs Heartpainful, wished to spare you the gruesome details of life and warriors. She put a lot of candy bars into your attaché case and —————

 THE FOOL

 THE PURE

 THE PURE FOOL

Do you think your wife is betraying you with a sailor or a boxer? Or do you have no reason to suspect her honesty and loyalty? You have every reason to suspect both. You hire a private detective to find out if she is having an affair. When did you hire him? You ought to have hired him two months ago, but you kept putting it off because you were afraid your wife might come across him and say to herself, ‘That car has been tailing me for the last 10 minutes.’ So you said to the detective, ‘Don’t use your car.’ The detective took your advice and followed her on foot; and whenever she took a taxi, he followed her in a bus. She could not have said to herself ‘That bus has been tailing me for the last 10 minutes’, could she?

The detective has apparently unearthed some fresh evidence and you are studying this evidence now as if you had to pass an exam tomorrow morning, describing your wife’s moves. Two months ago you ought to have held a gun to her head and said, ‘One move and you’re dead!’ You did nothing of the kind and your wife has moved a lot over the last two months, tossing and turning in her lover’s bed, lying under him, on him, under the canopy one can see above the sheets if one looks carefully at the photograph.

What love? What love? They always speak of love and sometimes they do something; if they really *do* something. But what is love? Faith, faith, faith. I do have faith in Theeou and all Thyine cronies. (I faith in Thee

and Thou faith me.) I cannot love Hitler and his cronies; let alone Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky and theirs, theirs, theirs. I cannot kiss them on their other cheeks or on any cheeks at all – on any of *their* cheeks; and I have no idea how many cheeks they have in this world. I believe in what, in what, in whom, in what? In God, in Dot, in Rot. I do not have to believe in rot, do I?

What? Another revelation?

I said, 'I love no one, but I believe,

Eve, Eve, Eve, Eve, Eve, Eve.'

I love him or shim and that means anything,

Anyone. Nothing.

It is very difficult to change attitudes that have become so deeply entrenched over the years. I have gone through many years and trenches where I still can be found, if someone is duty bound to find me, if only for the sake of experiments usually associated with mice and rats. 'I've sinned here, I've sinned there, I've mostly sinned in between,' as our Pale Floyd sing, hammering it into skulls and numbskulls. And dumb skulls. And no bath, however purifying and christianfying, can cleanse me – cleanse, as the (foreign) military say, when talking about their purely 'homeopathic' bombardments – in Serbia, for instance. Cleanse, cleanse, cleanse, cleanse. Fly Fleense, cly Cleanse. 'Cleanse, cleanse, cleanse, cleanse,' repeat Macbeth's stooges as they eliminate Bunco and his progeny, descendants and ascendants. They fail ostensibly and fly flense clense and hence, and klenze as they fly, whatever can be klenzed, as they say and pronounce these keywords. What is a key? What is a word?

All right, I have three, four and five baths which seem to have my body, enjoying it to the utmost; with the exception of my brain that I cannot put into the bath I am having tonight. I cannot remove my soul from where it stands by the window beyond which a number of paradises open up their vistas: saints, no taints of suspicion/dishonesty. I wish I could put this soul of mine – and also my future souls and their incarnations – into this bath, saying, 'You've sinned all your life, after life and pre-ante-life. Antenatal, antedatal. But now you should whitewash your life's incompetence and your virtues' utter and almost irremediable impotence. This stain was caused, produced and prolonged by your desire which you didn't put a stop to by putting your foot and penis down. So now you should put all your feet, penises and stains into the bath that Amfortas used to have every morning to cleanse, klenze and beans (Pythagoras' term) his sinful, wound-embellished, sin-decorated body.'

Sin, sin, sin, sin.

Pus, pus, pus, pus.

Pussy cat and pussy willow.

Go, go, go, go.

Way, way, way, way,
A-way, a-sway.

Swan, swan, swan, swan. Why not kill a swan? You walk through the woods and your moods and see a swan that sings in the neighbourhood or does not sing at all. You hear – your ears hear something – and all of you says to your consciousness, ‘There’s a swan nearby and I might kill him. And my action would be justified on the grounds that this swan is singing his swansong. Or is it his son who sings this song of theirs? Never mind. Anyway, I think it’s my duty to put him out of his misery.’ And you shoot the swan, following in the footsteps (shootsteps, arrowsteps) of Parsifal, which is easier than taking physical and spiritual baths all round the clock. ‘Ah!’ cries the swan as he or she or it or zero – according to Descartes – dies in the accident. ‘Ach,’ says Gurnemanz and the whole story begins once again – from the very beginning, mind you. And you are really fed up with your karma and all your samsaras and even the Masssss you attend every Sunday. (To some extent.) These Massses say, ‘Glory to Theeou and pardon my ignorance which is in no way a *docta* one.’ On this occasion, you seem to be too *docta* and so unfit for the denomination of the ‘Pure Fool’. Perhaps it is just a nomination; or a name, for that matter; or a nickname, for the same spirit. You are still (and so am I) impure, as far as your proximity to purity goes or rather stops in the middle of nowhere. I am not really a fool, although I would give a lot and probably everything – in this world and all other worlds – to become a fool, outgrowing (or downgrading) my intelligence and all the knowledge I have accumulated through the migrations and transmigrations of my soul.

So I assassinate a swan. No, I do not. I do not have to – there are other ways of becoming a pure fool, one of them: there are many pures and fools in our world. There are probably more pures than pussies. (What about pussies?) Besides, I can hold neither a rifle nor a pistol. Actually I *can* hold them for an hour or so. So what? You hold something; you look at it and after a while you drop it; that is what I might do with a revolver or a Kalashnikov, if I had one or many in my hands.

I have killed no swans in my life, but I am neither pure nor foolish, hopefully so; or unhelpfully so. And that is how it is and you cannot change your spots, according to our Christian doctrine. ‘Ah, oh, hey, no idea. Swan? What? Killed? Murdered? Assassinated? Life-taking? God-given Life *und* Strife? And struggle for the same life? And I scorned all these rituals. And I scoffed at the idea that animals down to humans were precious and counted as much as anything, as any million and billion of dollars.’

‘So you killed a swan.’

‘Yes, I did, I do and I will. I’ll always kill swans and their songs because I pick up my arrows as soon as I see one or rather ones. I’m a Fool, you know.’

‘So you’re prepared to save not only our boss, but also the whole of humanity.’

‘Wait a minute! Christ wasn’t a fool, was he? He was just pure, wasn’t he?’

‘He was, He was, He was. I believe in His wasness.’

‘So I’m not the Messiah you’re waiting for. I am a fool. And pure to some extent – I don’t understand I shouldn’t kill swans and humans, offering instead my other buttocks.’

‘Your buttocks?’

‘They can slap my buttocks. They can also aim their arrows a little *above* my buttocks. Or a little *beneath* them. Or they can press their rifles *against* my buttocks. But Christ was just pure, nothing else. Not a fool, not a fool. He was never *full* in his life. He never ate anything, with the exception of spiritual food. And you don’t eat it. You *receive* it.’

Why should you kill *everybody*? Anyway, you cannot kill *everybody*, for there are too many people on this planet. And you live on this planet and not elsewhere, contrary to what you may think now and then. How do you calm a screaming baby? You try to calm the screaming baby by rocking it back and forth. Don’t you know you are still in your cradle? You should rock your cradle back and forth so as not to commit murder. Are you rocking yourself back and forth? You are not. You should engrave the verb “to rock” on the floor of your terrace. To rock, to rock, to rock. ‘*Rock*’ is ‘fate’ in Russian, but you are not Russian, are you? An unlikely assortment of rock stars and politicians attended the charity concert, but you did not, did you? Why should you think about this concert and rock groups, rock stars, rock comets? Don’t say to yourself you are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. In days of yore you murdered three women and time is circular, as you must know. Your murders return to you and to women, but you must avoid this repetition at all cost. Kneel down and engrave the following words: ‘No repetition, no repetition.’ However, you should not begin with the word ‘repetition’, otherwise this word will stare at you, saying, ‘There is no “no”, there is no “no”. I’ll repeat myself as often as I wish.’ No repetition. Don’t repeat this ritual, otherwise you will strengthen your belief in repetition. You should believe in God and not in repetition. We all share the same God, as Ramakrishna put it. You can pray to the Christian God and ask Him to prevent you from committing murder and many other offences. Kneel down and pray, saying, ‘Help me, help me, help me in my hour of need; *before* my hour of deed.’

Can you hear these bells calling the faithful to prayer? These bells are ringing in your head. Listen to these bells, even if they ring in Wagner’s opera and not in your head. Listen to this opera several times and these bells will ring in your head and in the rest of your body. Now you are mature enough for the ritual we are talking about. Kneel down and pray as long as necessary. Don’t say to yourself, ‘I don’t want to utter more words than is strictly necessary,’ for there is no limit on the amount of time you can spend with God. You kneel down, but you cannot pray and God starts walking away from you instead of clasping your body in His arms. Lie on your back, clasp your knees and pull them down towards your chest. Say to yourself, ‘My knees are God, my knees are God. I’m pulling God down towards my heart.’ As soon as you feel God’s presence in your heart you can say to yourself, ‘I am too weak to pull God towards my heart. It is God Himself Who pulls me towards His heart.’ And you are bound to feel God’s heart in your hands. You should engrave on your floor: ‘God pressed hard on the wound and staunched the flow of blood.’ Yes, you are God’s son and God will never forsake you. Your wound will be healed in no time at all. You were unable to deal with your wound appropriately. You did not clean and dress it immediately, did you? Did you bandage your wound to reduce the risk of infection? You did not. Lie on your back, clasp your knees and pull them down towards your chest. Lie on your back, clasp your knees and pull them down towards your chest.

I am not sure I wish to kill everybody, every soul, every spirit, every mind. There are so many every everywhere I have no idea what to do with them; but do with them something I must because they are stupid, undignified, ridiculous, *unhuman*: they have no brains and many other no, no, no, no, no, no. They have only nos (not *nus*, mind you) and they exhibit them whenever they demonstrate their inability to live in accordance with Plato's, Taotse's, Tchouangse's and other tses'sss precepts, rules, laws and mores. You wish, want and nont (antithesis) to annihilate them, eager as you are to cleanse, clean, cleen and what not our human race. No, no, no: they say you are a racist and consequently, as long as you remind one of Hitler's admirers, you do not belong to the human race and so have no say or do on our planet.

I say I cannot tolerate the stupidity, ludicrousness, undignifiedness of our life. I write and shout and act by shouting and writing, and my actions speak louder than my words on condition that I use no words. 'Going... going... gone!' I shout, banging down a few hammers and sickles as I think about the world, my fellow creatures and mixtures. 'You, impure fools! You, Unharmonias Mundis!' *Schlafen, schlafen*, as Kundry points out, pointing at no one, not even at Parsifal. *Dormir, mourir, pourrir*, perchance to die, to die perchance, to rot in peace, to peace in rot. *Tod, Tod, Tod, Tod*. I should not die before undergoing a ritual destined to purify my body and all the souls it contains as it struggles for many lives in the universe and even outside it: struggling *outside* is the only proof of immortality. And then I enter sacred ground and Gurnemanz says, 'You shouldn't kill swans, humans and plants.'

'I don't mind plants and swans,' I say. 'I'll kill only humans. They're demeaned by their thoughts and doings.'

'You're neither a fool, nor a pure human. Nor a god. Go to Hell!'

Faith, not love. Love – just an argument. No open arms, no bear hugs. Ridiculous. Faith. Faith. The Gospel. Wagner's *Parsifal* demonstrates this truth: faith, not love. Faith is not hope, much more. *Quel amour? De quell amour s'agit-il?*

As I was lying down there, in my bed, dying, dreaming, I heard a piece of music I could not bear: it was too thunderous, too luminous. 'Tarrarabumbia,' as Chekhov used to say. Tarrarabarasarakara, bumbiabiobiaibumbum. And I heard a voice, as usual: we all hear voices as if we were prophets sitting in their offices and shouting, 'Truth, truth, truth! That's what will happen, if you don't pray night and day! Pray in the month of May! Pray in the mouth of Truth! Dear oh dear! Oh Mamma Mia! Fallen, fallen, fallen! Lost, lost, lost!' We all hear voices because we are Socrateses and Cassandras, let alone Nostradamuses and others; and Eliases. And the Voice said, 'Faith, not love. Only Faith, only Faith.' All right: I will believe all my life, either conscious or unconscious. I am conscious right now and I say to myself, 'I believe and have a lot of faiths because one faith isn't enough – it can let you down in your hour of need.' Here is my first faith: I believe in God and in pure fools who are apt to save humanity from perils and merry wives of Windsor; and merry husbands of Windsor. You fiddle while Windsor burns, don't you? Only faith; only God can save us. He does save us; he does not. Pure, impure, unpure. There are still a few Kundrys in the neighbourhood, *dans les*

and quote *King Lear* at the slightest provocation – and even without being provoked into the argument. ‘I took this step in full awareness of its gravity and novelty but with profound serenity of spirit. Loving the Church also means having the courage to make difficult, painful choices, always keeping the good of the Church in mind and not ourselves.’

‘Whoever assumes the Petrine ministry no longer has any privacy. He belongs forever and totally to everyone, to the whole Church.’ Meetings, receptions, conferences. If the Russian President gives a reception for the visiting heads of state, he kisses the Pope’s hand and says a few words to him. Well and good. But is it a *private* life? Apparently the former Pope is quite a private person so he can say to Putin, ‘I’m delighted to make your acquaintance and I’m sure you’re a very intelligent man. I won’t speak to you about human rights and what they call “elective dictatorship”. I’ll just take leave of you and your beautiful country because I’d like to practise tonight. I’m supposed to play Beethoven’s *Geiste Trio* next week.’

PARSIFAL’S MOTHER

In the Soviet film inspired by Gorky’s insipid novel *Mother*, there are two forces that collide at the crossroads and the proletarians run, anxious to stay alive for the sake of the eternal fight with the rich. ‘If we die today,’ they say to each other, ‘we won’t be able to kill the tsar, his family and relatives. So we have to stay alive. If we don’t manage to stay in the land of the living, we won’t be able to kill millions of people – for the sake of our ideas.’ They run and jump on columns and lampposts, seeking refuge in the sky instead of plunging headlong into the Neva where ice floes offer them their hospitality and even a degree of help because a moving target is more elusive than a motionless one. A workman – a proletarian *par excellence* – jumps onto one of those ice floes and a police officer aims at the target, for he is a police officer and the target is a potential revolutionary. Russia seems to be heading towards revolution and the police officer is aware of the fact. Besides, he is a former workman himself and consequently hates his colleagues, his shameful past and even the future promised by the communists. Video footage clearly shows a police officer aiming a pistol at a demonstrator and we have every right to affirm that the police officer one can see in the footage is the one singled out by Pudovkin for his masterpiece entitled *Mother*. Another facet of memory.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Gorky was ‘working on the reader’s nerves by the piling up of emotive adjectives, and by tending to overstate. But his talent for making his characters live –’ At least in Pudovkin’s film, his characters *are* alive: they run, brandish their fists. And their mothers brandish saucepans at them as they run out of kitchens. They run onto bridges, into kitchens and out of courtyards where one spots a few rifles and a lot of white uniforms. The proletarians carry red flags and their eyes radiate so much energy the tsar trembles in his palace; the Winter Palace begins to tremble too, for palaces know that proletarian revolutions do not spare them. If you ask them to spare the women and children, the revolutions answer, ‘We can spare a few children to whom we’ll teach Lenin’s doctrines. And we’ll spare Gorky’s mother. We’ll destroy the others.’

If one tries to compare Parsifal's mother with that depicted by Gorky – one always compares mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters (mine's better!) – one cannot help realising to what extent they are similar, not to say identical. In a way, they are twin sisters in spite of differences of time and space, social groups and whatever languages they speak or do not: neither of them knows English. The same goes for their respective fathers, although Parsifal's father wields, brandishes and uses spears and swords, whereas his Russian counterpart seems to arm himself only with household goods such as hammers, sickles and steam irons. 'I'll kill you, I'll kill you, I'll kill you,' he shouts as he aims one of these weapons at his adversary: a communist, a socialist, his own son.

Parsifal's father deals with knights and with the nights during which he indefatigably combats invisible warriors; among these warriors there are lots of Kundrys and ordinary demons. It is little wonder he finally succumbs to Kundry's charms and his body welcomes two or three fatal wounds that bring about his untimely demise. Others, however, affirm he perished in the city where he found himself in one of the days of yore or once upon a time. (Once upon a space: one does not die *everywhere*.) 'The city finally succumbed last week after being pounded with heavy artillery for more than two months,' as Kundry put it. In German this death sentence sounds thus:

'Parsifal, Falpars, Parsifal, Falpars.'
So rief, als in arab'schem Land er verschied,
Dein Vater Gamuret dem Sohne zu,
Den er, im Mutterschoß verschlossen,
Mit diesem Namen sterbend grüßte.

Even an Englishman who has no German can find out the whereabouts of Gamuret's (Parsifal's father's) untimely (or timely) death, provided he focuses upon the word *arab'schem*, and not on '*verschlossen*', on '*verschied*' or on '*Abschied*'. (*Abschied*, *Abschied*, as Mahler's singers sing and feel.) This word seems to intimate that Gamulet, alias the father in question, died in a Muslim country whose borders are open to terrorists; an Arabian land where terrorists' evolutions and revolutions are always in full swing; and where Scheherazade tells her tales before dying or living with the Sultan whose name I have forgotten. So this Englishman and all English-speaking women come to the conclusion that Ganymede died in Arabia where he might have *lived* for a while, as any optimist would declare upon seeing the German text I quoted. But when Kundry takes the trouble to inform her protégé, Parsifal, of his father's death, our Turret is unresurrectedly dead and what remains of his body (his remains) in the outside world is a sort of aria sung by Kundry or Christa Ludwig or Martha Mödl or even Callas.

Your father was not old. Yet he died on account
Of the weapons he used when facing his adversaries.
He used his weapons and was killed by arrows and spears
Used by his adversaries.

Your mother resolved to spare your
Life by barring your way to

*Weapons of all kinds
And to all knights.*

However, one still struggles to decode the whereabouts of his death as if this code made any difference or had any meaning: we die and it does not really matter where this happens – in our bed, in a bog, in the middle of a field or a valley blanketed in fog. And even if we say to death, ‘It’s no use begging me – I’m not coming and that’s final,’ death (or Macbeth) does come and we go on lying somewhere: in a field, in a bog, in a coffin, in the ocean. (In other words that *is* final.) And they say about us, ‘These mysterious creatures live at the bottom of the ocean.’

Why am I still here? Kundry will not come even if I wait for a thousand and one nights. Why do I waste my eternity on this planet? Kundrys live on Venus.

A haphazard harmony of views and voices in the Orient Express softly gliding through tunnels and nights. The tears of a schoolgirl who scrambles into a streetcar and disappears forever. And that streetcar *is* named *Desire*. There are felicitous moments in our existence. We must store them away until we find ourselves on the verge of renunciations and annihilations, on the edge of frightful precipices. These moments may brighten the tarnished silver of our conscience.

Once, shivering with cold and inexplicable disgust, I took shelter from the rain in the hall of an unfamiliar building. After a while my disgust faded away and the staircase, which I had scarcely noticed in the semi-darkness of my indifference, began talking to me like an old forsaken friend. There was such enchantment in its stony intonations I decided to move into the talkative building.

And the stars I saw once, up in the mountains! They differed so illogically from the stars I had investigated in my childhood that I thought I had been whisked away from the Earth by extraterrestrial kidnappers. The stars were big, clear, and seemed as accessible as the snow lying all around me. They were hot and formed a criss-cross pattern unknown to astronomy.

They are nothing but stars now, cold and distant dots. Well, never mind. I seldom go out.

Wagner’s leitmotiv. Primitive, primitive. Not the structure, the idea itself. They say, ‘These primitive peoples are believed to have worshipped the phallus as a symbol of regeneration.’ Who are you talking about? About yourself, as Gogol used to say. They worship the phallus and you hear its leitmotiv. You come across a great many phalluses, but the leitmotiv you hear is alone, on its own. Of course there might be a leitmotiv of short phalluses, of the mouths inside which these phalluses can be found. But there are many mouths, many Kama Sutas, fellatios, and the number of leitmotivs cannot encompass them all. That means that to some extent we share the same anger, the same love, the same phallus, the same cave. Twelve thousand years ago, our ancestors were primitive savages living in caves. Needless to say we still spend our lives and deaths in these caves, playing with the same phalluses, vaginas and so on. And this so on is the same so on. The same goes for on and so. We say, ‘These creatures are generally taken to be descended from primitive fishes.’ What about us? Do we descend from primitive ants? And what about our aunts? Here is the leitmotiv of aunts. Here is the leitmotiv of mothers.

Here is the leitmotiv of Kundry's nastiness, ruthlessness, mercilessness, heartlessness, callousness and so on. And here is the leitmotiv of Kundry's tenderness, gentleness, motherfullness.

Shakespeare holds no mirrors in front of our nature. (Too intricate, wishful thinking.) Molière does, Wagner does. You encounter Molière and ask him point-blank, 'Do you think we might be in line for promotion?' 'No,' he answers. 'It's just wishful thinking.'

The leitmotiv of hope.

'Here! Take it!'

'What is it?'

'Balsam. *Nimm du!*'

'*Nimm* what, what?'

'A cur'all wondrug,

Fool! Fool! Fool!'

'Not a *pure*,

Not a *pure!*'

The leitmotiv of resignation.

'If the balsam does not help, Arabia, China, India and Judea hold nothing else to cure him. *Birgt dann nicht mehr*, I tell you.'

'*Nicht mehr?*'

'*Nicht mehr.*'

'All right, all right.'

The leitmotiv of hope.

'I await him who is assigned to me: "By his pity knowing."'

'By *whose* pity?'

'By *his* pity. "*Durch Mitleid wissend.*"'

'There's no *his* in the German original.'

'Is there any *her*?'

'*Kundry*, you mean?'

'Kundry or Mary.'

'No.'

You see a stray dog and take pity on him, her and it; a triple pity, so to speak. A *dreifach Mitleid*, as they say. Or *dreisome*, or *zweisome*. All this *revient au même*, going back to the same *Mitleid*. 'I couldn't leave the dog where they was and so I brought it here,' they say to their wives.

'You're treading muck into the carpet with your dirty shoes!' their wives say to them. 'And so does your dog.'

'But my dog has no shoes. Just a few paws, you know.'

'Doesn't make the slightest difference. Does it?'

I think Schopenhauer voted for pity, as a gesture of goodwill, in the Buddha's footsteps. I may be mistaken, though; not about the Buddha, though; about Schopenhauer. I often confuse him with Nietzsche who was dead set against pity as such; if I am not mistaken. What a pity I am mistaken from time to time or all the time or all the time in the world. Why? Because I cannot see any difference between all these times, all these coal/salt/gold mines; and all these worlds. They all go and come back to the same time-space and misery, as Schopenhauer often put it.

The leitmotiv of misery.

Ah, ah, ah, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh. My soul aches, so does my heart, so does my right shoulder, so does my left shoulder blade. Last night I felt a persistent ache at the back of my head. Anyway I have been suffering various aches and pains for years and years. For *kalpas*, for *kalpas*! Did I complain of an ache in my shoulder which kept me awake at night? I did, this afternoon. So did my companion in misfortune. This painkiller is good for general aches and pains, but maybe we need something stronger? We do, we do, we doodledo. These painkillers are killing me as if I were some pain.

No leitmotivs or anything of the kind. Just life, life alive. Not even the leitmotiv of my youth.

In those days I might become the life and soul of the party, of the parties when vodka flowed like a river. We also met privately to drink vodka in deserted attics or just on the staircase of a huge building whose occupants might drop an uncharitable remark as they squeezed through the group of our revellers on their way up or down. To avoid such an uncalled-for exchange of niceties, my fellow-students whom I joined now and then opted for top floors where the probability of intrusion was reduced almost to zero. A loaf of bread was all we needed to accompany our drinking bouts that would include no tablecloth, no glasses, no plates of any kind.

'*Du Allerbarmer! Ach, Erbarmen!* Thou All Merciful! Have mercy in full! *O Roi de grâce! De grâce, de grâce! Ah! fais grâce. Oh! Fais grâce.*' Thus spoke Amfortas and no one knows exactly to whom he spoke either thus or otherwise: to God, to Jesus or to the Pure Fool. On the other hand, everyone knows to whom Zarathustra did *not* speak: to the Almighty, to God, to our Lord, to Jesus Christ, to the Blessed Virgin, to the Holy Trinity. He must have spoken to his own vanity and to old folk, young folk, big folk, little folk. 'Can the folks at the back hear me? Can I get you folks some drinks?' (After a while, speaking to himself): 'There's nowt so queer as folk.' Thus spoke Zarathustra. And *thus* spoke Amfortas, 'I Am, I Am. But I am not like *Fort Knox*. In brief, I am not

Fort. I am Faible. According to Wagner's fable, I am sick at heart. Everything and everyone make me sick to my stomach. O vomit, vomit! Why can't I vomit? I kneel down in my water closet, alias my altar, altar, put two fingers into my mouth and make a tremendous effort. Nothing comes, nothing goes, nothing leaves. Neither death nor life seems to leave me forever. O ever, ever, ever! O for, for, for! *Allerbarmer, Everbarmer!*

'From a given determinate cause an effect necessarily follows.' If you kneel down in front of your urine and put two fingers into your mouth, in between your teeth, you vomit either your dinner or blood. Not always, not always. 'If no determinate cause be given it is impossible that an effect can follow.' Do two fingers amount to what they call 'determinate cause'? All right, you put three fingers into your mouth. Nothing, nothing. You put your hand into your mouth. You put two hands into your mouth. Nothing determinate, no cause.

Does that mean I exist in spite of everything? I am in front of a bowl-shaped device with a seat, two fingers sticking out of my mouth. I cannot vomit, therefore I am.

I have already made up my mind on the subject and it is pointless to resume the questioning that seems out of date and even out of fashion because my loneliness does not prevent me from following my own fashions. From time to time, I give you the lowdown on my train of thought in a paragraph, in a sentence, in a word, although you cannot really extrapolate a trend from such a small sample. Never mind – I will go on creating causes without which no effect will ever be produced, and I need effects, results and tangible facts, otherwise my earthly existence will lose its stuffing.

What is the cause of the forthcoming paragraph? I suppose I need to write something this morning because, as creative artists usually put it, a true artist is chosen by art and cannot live without it; he has to breathe it – the ordinary air is no longer satisfactory – inhaling its substance, its movement and the divine aspect of the whole affair. Through art a creative artist comes to know God – or pleasure, according to Voltaire – or at least a few angels among whom there are angels of death eclipsed in the religious iconography by angels of birth who announce the Messiah and promise another future; and yet they do not say the future they are speaking of is radiant and cloudless. There are demons in this future and they should be vanquished, annihilated and buried on another planet. But one has to wait for a thousand years before one can say to oneself, 'Here's the radiant future I've dreamt about for two thousand years.'

Can the previous paragraph be regarded as a valuable cause? What effect can one expect in the wake of the previous paragraph? The birth of the Messiah? Giving birth to the Messiah is no easy task, and even a thousand books would not be instrumental in bringing about His birth on the Earth unless all these books are sacred and learnt by heart not only by bishops and popes, but also by ordinary citizens, by practising Christians, Jews and Muslims. It is easy to learn the previous paragraph by heart and I am prepared to memorise my own thoughts for the sake of my personal history, my personal museum of nonsense. Well, let us go on because no single cause is spacious enough to sustain a multitude of effects and defects that are vital for the future of our planet.

'The knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of the cause.' What is the cause of all this? God's will? An angel's announcement? Well, an angel made an unexpected announcement this morning and there was a deathly hush after he made the announcement. (After *she* made the announcement?) So what?

All right, they listened to the announcement, whoever they were, and they said to each other, once the deathly hush was over, ‘What does *that* mean? What *does* that mean?’

‘The Messiah, alias the Pure Fool, is coming,’ somebody said.

‘Is it the Second Coming or the Third Coming?’ somebody else asked.

‘What does it matter! It isn’t an arithmetic test, is it?’

‘What kind of test is it? Are they testing our faith?’

‘Their constant announcements really put my patience to the test!’

‘I believe in the Purity of the Fool.’

‘So do I. I also believe in the Foolishness of the Pure.’

‘Our church’s foundations will have to be reinforced to prevent the house from sinking further into the ground.’

‘The Fool’s job.’

‘Living in a Fool’s Paradise, isn’t He?’

‘I’m sure the Messiah will take drastic steps to reduce pollution.’

‘Those things which have nothing in common with one another,’ says Spinoza, ‘cannot through one another be mutually understood, that is to say, the conception of the one does not involve the conception of the other.’ As usual I have no idea if what I am writing now has anything to do either with the Annunciation, the Renunciation or anything else because, as some people say (and they are probably right): ‘Whatever we do or say has *something* in common with the Annunciation.’ Or the Renunciation, as Amfortas put it.

‘Reveal the Grail!’

‘No! Leave it covered! Leave it in peace, not in war!’ says Amfortas.

‘Why?’

‘Because.’ And he shows them his wound. A blood-curdling scream can be heard as the former hero’s blood makes its appearance on his skin and on the floor. Trickle, trickle, little blood, as the knights’ lullaby goes. ‘This is His blood,’ he says.

‘Whose? Whose?’

‘Christ’s, Christ’s.’ Amfortas picks up a spear and spears himself. The knights and King Arthur believe neither their eyes nor their brains where the story of Christ’s martyrdom is being told once more. So Amfortas wounds himself once again and his blood fills up a bath. (Or a *Bad*, or a tub.)

‘Can’t you climb that cross, you big sissy?’ says Sir Lancelot.

Amfortas climbs that cross over there, picks up four nails and nails himself. (To the cross? In that case, he cannot pick the hammer.) He then picks up a hammer and hammers himself. Slowly but surely the knights go down on their knees.

IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER?

...and with fortitude

Brake His own heart with the steel share, and poured

Into the furrows water of His own

*Life's blood. For these 'temple-vessels' do
 Denote our bodies: God's true temple He,
 Not dedicated erst; for to Himself
 He by His blood associated men,
 And willed them be His body's priests, Himself
 The Supreme Father's perfect Priest by right.
 Hearing, sight, step inert, He cleansed; and, for a 'book',
 Sprinkled, by speaking words of presage, those
 His witnesses: demonstrating the Law
 Bound by His holy blood.
 In Reply to Marcion*

Mindful of this declaration as of a conclusive prescript, we nevertheless proceed to treat the question, 'How foolish and impossible it is to be formed anew by water. In what respect, pray, has this material substance merited an office of so high dignity?' The authority, I suppose, of the liquid element has to be examined. This, however, is found in abundance, and that from the very beginning. For water is one of those things which, before all the furnishing of the world, were quiescent with God in a yet unshaped state. 'In the first beginning,' saith Scripture, 'God made the heaven and the earth. But the earth was invisible, and unorganised, and darkness was over the abyss; and the Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the waters. The first thing, O man, which you have to venerate, is the age of the waters in that their substance is ancient; the second, their dignity, in that they were the seat of the Divine Spirit, more pleasing to Him, no doubt, than all the other then existing elements.

Tertullian, On Baptism

Study the texts above and then answer the following question: Is water thinner than blood? Here is the answer: Water is as thick as blood. And the sick know that pretty well, given that they are alternately plunged into baths and tubs where water is replaced by blood and vice versa. Amfortas or any other imitator of Christ opens his body's taps and no one is likely to point out upon seeing the result of this action, 'The blood was barely dribbling out of the tap.' Fiddlesticks! Fiddle-faddle-sticks! It is much better to say, 'Some idiot left his body's tap running and there's blood everywhere.' You can also say, 'Some pure fool –' and so on and so forth. Of course Parsifal is prepared to pull out all the stops, opening all his bodily taps in order to save the world once and for all; and for the last time; before the Last Judgment, needless to say. (What could you save *after* the Last Judgment? Not even your breath, I'm afraid.) He does pull out all the stops, but what kind of stops *does* he pull out? All these stops are related to his foolishness: he does not understand the first thing about Amfortas' wound and blood. (In the first act.) Gurnemanz says to him, 'Do you see what you see?'

'I do,' answers Parsifal.

'Do you understand what you see?'

'I do not.'

‘You’re a goose, a monkey and a donkey. What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the monkey and the donkey; and vice versa. Go to hell or rather to the Klingsors.’

Once on his way Parsifal begins to pull his stops out. But he cannot pull anything out in the desert where he finds himself as he does his best to find the road leading to Hell. Being a fool (and a *pure* fool into the bargain), he does not know that *all* roads lead to Hell; all roads without exception. Only when his feet try and encroach upon Klingsor’s territory does he realise he is not supposed to sleep with his neighbour’s wife. He also talks to himself about Amfortas’ blood that Tcherniakov distributes to the Round-Table knights who drink it while sitting around the proverbial table. Then Parsifal manages to pull out yet another stop, whereupon he recalls the word ‘wine’ and also entities such as ‘white wine’ and ‘red wine’; yet he does not know yet the word ‘transubstantiation’. ‘Red wine, red wine,’ he repeats. ‘That’s what they’re drinking. Not blood. Amfortas has got an impressively large store of red wine in his body. What about white wine? His urine, I suppose. He’s got an impressively large store of white wine in his penis.’

In Klingsor’s Garden our Kundry reminds him that his mother had him drink his own urine every day as she said and repeated, ‘I hope you’ll be given a clean bill of health.’

‘What did my mother die of?’ Parsifal’s first question. ‘Did she refuse to drink her own urine?’ Parsifal’s first supposition.

Kundry:

Den Waffen fern,

Der Männer Kampf und Wüten

Wollte sie still dich bergen und behüten.

‘What? What? What? What?’ asks Parsifal.

‘Pull out the “German stop”, you fool,’ says Kundry. And she adds, ‘The service offers young pure fools and incurable idiots practical advice on finding the right and only path.’

Parsifal follows this piece of advice and hears the following words: Far from arms, the strife and fury of warriors, she hoped to hide and shelter you in peace. ‘Why did your mother want to hide and shelter you?’ asks Kundry. She took a few lessons from Gurnemanz and at some point realised to what extent his lessons could be instrumental in keeping her in running and flying order. ‘I’m going to karate lessons to learn how to defend myself,’ she said to him once upon a time. ‘After your lessons I fly, run and ride, kiss and ride, but I need to defend myself from Klingsor and your knights whose numerous libidos are uncontrollable.’

Upon meeting Parsifal in the woods, near the *Bad* or lake, Gurnemanz asked him a few questions to which the former knew no answers. So he said, ‘No idea, not the foggiest, a number of heavy fogs has made every thinking condition unworkable.’ Gurnemanz went on, ‘Who are you? What toys did you play with in your childhood? Which breast of your mother’s did you prefer? Do you think she’s had breast implants? Left breast? A silicone breast implant?’

Gurnemanz was just talking to the Pure Fool, when Kundry cut in on their conversation. ‘They found a malignant tumour in her breast.’

‘In my mother’s breast?’ asked Parsifal, proving thereby he had learnt the very first lesson: it is better to ask questions than to answer them.

‘That’s right,’ said Kundry. ‘Don’t you recall the tumour?’ she asked. ‘Didn’t your teeth feel it?’ Before making the Grail’s acquaintance, Kundry was Heidegger’s student and the latter thought that questions and the

ritual during which they resound in the air, one after another, another after one, confers an 'honorary doctorate' on thoughts.

'They didn't,' answered Parsifal.

'Do you remember *anything*?' asked Gurnemanz.

'I remember my teeth,' answered Parsifal.

'Do they remember how to bite?'

'Yes. Could I bite one of your fingers?'

Once again Kundry and Falparsif are alone in Klingsor's garden, and they do not even have to make sure they are alone (and so can make love to their bodies' contents): they *are* alone. And contrary to what many individuals think, flowers do not have *everything* in common with babies: they are *not* curious about everything around them. Nor do they spend the greater part of their time on roundabouts. Yet one should take into consideration the evil empire into which both Parsifal and Amfortas were thrown by Heidegger (*geworfen*, my leitmotiv), destiny, lust and must. (Parsifal's duty.) 'I must, I must, I must, I must,' he kept on saying as he marched along the motorways leading to the garden and Amfortas' redemption. 'I must renounce the use of violence and of my penis, thrusting Kundry into a rubbish bin.'

Yet they (Kundry and Parsi) are lying together and no rubbish bin can be seen either in the neighbourhood or on the horizon. 'Where's the rubbish bin of Beckett fame? It has always been my declared intention to thrust you into it.'

'You answer my question by a question. Why?'

'Don't you know that Gurnemanz gave me a very good mark for my essay on questioning?'

'It's high time you wrote an essay on answering,' said Kundry. And she went on thus, 'Do you remember the question related to your father? His death?'

'I know not, I know not, I know not. I know yes. Here's my answer to your question, "My mother hid me in a cave to protect me from weapons and knights. My father was exposed to both and that's why he died prematurely, before he had an opportunity to enjoy the laughter and tears, screams and snores of his baby – alias myself."'

Today, both women and men prevent their children from spending their youthtimes – if not their lifetimes – in front of computers where there are many weapons, either nuclear or Kalashnikov-like, so that they (their children) shout, 'I won? Hurray! You lost? Hurray, I won three battles in a row! Hurray, I drank three bottles of gin. Hurray, I consumed three suitcases of drugs! Last night, you know.' So both mothers and fathers think and say either to themselves or to their relatives and perfect strangers (to Kundrys, among other people), 'I wish my son could thrust his computer into the nearest rubbish bin.'

'If you go and see a Beckett play,' says a cultural guru, 'you can use one of *his* rubbish bins, provided you sit in the front row. The nearest rubbish bin, you know.'

Parsifal on his way back. Getting lost. Not able to make his way to the Grail and its round table; or any other table, come to think of it. Pulling out yet another stop:

Yes, we have Nils Bohr and others to thank for unpredictability, instability and absent-mindedness. The universe regularly fails to come up to my expectations, but physicists just shake their heads and say that my subjectivity should be playing a more prominent role in promoting my rights.

Jung joins in with the chorus: 'Synchronistic events draw the observer into what is happening and make him an accessory to them.' All right, I'm an accessory to my own, personal murder, to the slow destruction of my mind. Jung goes on: 'A secret, mutual connivance exists between the material and the psychic state of the astrologer. This correspondence is simply there like any other agreeable or annoying incident, and it seems to me doubtful whether it can be proved scientifically to be anything more than that.'

I don't know the first thing about astrology and I never listen to the individuals who talk about it in my presence. The book on astrology I've got in my rucksack speaks of the twelve houses. (*The Encyclopaedia of Astrology* by Sandra Shulman.) The identity of Raphael will remain unknown to me as long as I don't take the trouble to read at least the chapter where I found his name as I leafed through the book, but I've no intention of studying anything apart from the Twelve Houses. 'From the fourth house,' says Raphael, 'we resolve all inquiries relating to land, houses, or estates, or to towns, cities, castles or entrenchments besieged, of treasures hidden in the ground, and all other questions relating to the earth, are answered out of this house, which is called the *imum coeli*, or angle of the earth.' A few days ago I lost my keys, but I'm not sure the fourth house would help me find them. I might have dropped them in the woods where I got lost as many as twelve times.

The eighth house is the house of death, according to my book which seems to overlook the fact that every house is the house of death – even a doll's house. Raphael says: '...concerning death, its time, quality, and nature, with all matters relating to legacies, wills, and last testaments; or who shall inherit the fortune and estates of the deceased. Inquiries on the dowry or portion of maids or widows (Kundry? My mother?); in duels, concerning the adversary's second; in law-suits, relative to the defendant's success and friends; and questions on public or private enemies, or concerning the substance and security of those we connect ourselves with in business.'

Jung's book on synchronicity coincides with Schopenhauer's treatise; so does my diary inside which a lot of books may be found. 'Books within books', as someone put it. Sometimes I'm only able to make a tenuous connection between these books, thoughts and sciences.

From his diary

From Kundry's diary:

Parsifal or Falpars, or whatever he is or was, was one of those pure fools they use for their wounds because they think that any knowledge is pernicious – even more pernicious, insidious and fateful than impurity: you can be impure to your fingertips and go to Paradise without giving any thought to needles and their eyes. A boy whose crass ignorance sticks out a mile can cure your cancer in no time at all, having you back on your feet and even on your head if you prefer to walk on your head with the help of your arms. Of course I kissed this Falpars (or Falsepars) many times as he went his way or rather *my* way that led him (and me) to the round table, to the vicious circle of tables, knights, combats and grails. You go in circles, be you pure or impure, and these circles

grow into tables, outgrow these and other tables, and become the Earth and even the cosmos, provided you remain as foolish as our Trueparsifal at the beginning (and at the end) of his life and career.

When he retires, my Falparsifal will be able to look back over a brilliant career. Yet this career of his (or mine) is praised solely on account of his foolishness and utter incapacity to find his way whenever he embarked on one of his journeys, walking either to Klingsor's Garden or away from it, in the direction of Gurnemanz and his circle. One cannot say he is very career-minded, for he doesn't know what the word 'career' means; nor is he acquainted with this notion. One cannot even say he was hoping for a career in the knight (or police) force; as a police officer, in other words. I know that it helps if you can move a few rungs up the career ladder before taking time off to have a baby, and I think I could have a baby now: I'm famous in Bayreuth and elsewhere. But Parsifal is not and that is why I feel duty bound to outline his life and fool's progress, regress and so on. Boswell was Dr Johnson's biographer; I am Parsifal's biographer. I took this new job because I felt the career prospects were much better.

What do other biographers say about his career-unminded, career-unoriented life? First and foremost they speak of the prelude one hears if one braces oneself for the shock entitled '*Parsifal*, Wagner's ultimate opera'. 'In this ample prelude,' they say, 'there are a few leitmotifs I should enlarge upon, otherwise no path will ever lead anyone either to Klingsor's Garden or to the Square Table.' Then our biographers explain why the Round Table has lost its name in the course of its wanderings through our years and centuries. 'We have squared the circle,' they say, quoting Einstein, Nils Bohr and Dirac whose name they often misspell. (Durak and so on.) Then they say and write, 'Here is love, here is God, here is Redemption, here is whatever lies beyond redemption, here is Amfortas' (or our) wound, here is the fool, here is his (and our) purity, here is his way (and ways), here is the square circle.' Thus they speak of leitmotifs that 'sponsor' (according to their terminology) the whole opera where one finds no arias, no Traviatas, no dukes and no Rigolettos.

The curtain rises on Act I scene 1 – a clearing in the forest in the sacred domain of the Holy Grail where all life is sacrosanct. And so is death, they add because they know that whatever happens is a coin, given the commercial bias of our epoch; and every coin has the other side. Sometimes they don't add anything and one is at a loss to know what happened next or before or ever after or behind and in front of everything. Well, being an accomplished fool, Parsifal is used to losing his way, day, night and mind, and one cannot say he isn't acquainted with this fact, for he eventually says (the German stop): *Der Irrnis und der Leiden / Pfade kam ich*. 'Long paths or error and suffering I have come.' Just another labyrinth without bulls.

I think Kant said something about that, about the sea where we get lost on our fools' or intellectual ship. Rolling around, banging about, lolling, bouncing, tossing, bobbing about, jolting along, jogging along, around, abound, abound. Theories abound about how the Earth began. Theories abound about how the Earth will end. What about Parsifal? I know *everything* about him: I was his mother, girlfriend, girlenemy. And I wonder why I speak of him, of this fool and the plot. As the plot unfolds, you gradually realise that all your initial assumptions were wrong. But this is no detective story.

This is the story, the, the, the, the, the, the, the, the. Story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story. As a baby you're lost unless your parents give you ten billions. And then you lose yourself unless you're career-minded, unless you're frightened: make ends meet, no ends, no meet, no meat. Yes, you're not an animal and so are hardly equipped for meeting any kind of problem/system/obstacle/urge/surge. In the headlong rush to buy houses, many people get into debt, if their parents don't instruct them in the use of money and space, of time and

life. On the day of its birth an animal knows everything; a human is as helpless as a blot of ink you can remove by throwing the sheet of paper (in question) into the nearest rubbish (or garbage) bin (or can) (if you can). Or man, I was going to write. I still wonder if there's such a man (or thing) into which you could throw whatever you need no longer. Such an entity goes around with a huge plastic bag and you thrust, throw or fling into it whatever you lay your hands on. And the thing goes on, and on, and on, in circles or in squares; as the case may be.

Lallala, lallala, lallala, lallala, la
 And lallala, lallala, ballala, lay
 And ballala, ballala, ballalayka.

Tolstoy thought and said his peasants sang far better than Wagner's singers, either Meisterones or not. And their (his peasants') music or rather their ballalaykas were superior to Siegfried's sword and Isolda's, Tristan's and Kundry's climaxes.

Kundry's climax:

Parsifal, Falparsif, Parsifal,
 I'm your mother and father.
 Suck my breasts and penis.
 Didn't you suck your thumb
 Until you were seven or nine?
 Is my penis less suckkkulent
 Than your thumb and mum?

My climax:

Do it to do, do it to do, do not.
 Do it to do, do it to do, do not.
 Not it to do, not it to do, notes.

Notes, notes-notes-notes,
 Notes, notes, ah, oh,
 Hooəuppes.

But all this may turn out to be the other way round; or inside out, as the case may be. Suppose that God put the popes and their syndic in the group where only reprobates can temporarily enjoy themselves, receiving honours

for their services to the community and to the world at large. The virtuous are seldom rewarded in this world of ours and therefore one is tempted to greet even popes with some suspicion; at least that is how the matter stood in the past, otherwise Luther would not have triumphed in two or three countries of Europe. Hopefully this is a thing of the past and not of the present, let alone of the future. Anyway, in those dark ages popes were not automatically believed to belong to the country of pure fools.

I am a pure fool,
 Fool, fool, fool, village,
 Global, global, global, mobile.
 No end, end, life, resurrection, death,
 You, me? What is? Together? Weather? The?

‘The’ means you know what you are talking about. But there are many ‘a’s. So they say, ‘A, a, a, a, a, a, a, a.’ You say, ‘The.’ They say ‘A.’ You say, ‘The love.’ They say, ‘A love.’ You say, ‘The faith.’ They say, ‘A face,’ and you have no idea what face they are talking about.

Perhaps I should talk about the face; not about a facet. All right, I am talking about the face. I am seeing this face face to face. (No use seeing this body body to body; or mind to mind.) I see and hear and veer off the path as Parsifal did. Fal, fal, fal, fal, fool, fool, fool, foul, foul.

Is that how I shall die? Saying fool, pure, foul, nothing, everything? The last word? Duty. I have no idea what I am speaking of. Of poinpoinpoinionopinoinbiobuyfdèuy\$fgyujdcxgfrdstyrhstryg,hgvhj,cjuhkb ,nhgb ;jhghoil:kn,

I wish, I wish, and what I had,
 And nothing, no, nothing out,
 And outset, inset, setin,
 And incense, insense, no sense.

From Kundry’s diary:

Botox works by temporarily immobilising muscle activity. It does this by blocking nerve-muscle communication, which makes the injected muscles unable to contract. Paralysing muscle activity is how Botox can steady a straying gaze, eliminate an eyelid spasm or stop signalling from nerves that stimulate sweat in a person’s armpit.

From the Second Esquire’s diary:

I made his acquaintance a long time ago. I do not know whether he really acquainted me; whether he knew my name and status; whether he said to himself I was the guardian of the Grail and of Faith, whatever it is because there are many faiths, faces and bodies. How could one choose between them? One of them? One of them. If you choose two of them you are at a loss (you are lost unless you are a boss) to understand what to do with your life. Of course you can leave your life where it is – in the midst of anything, any dung. In the midst of any dung because any midst is just a heap of dung, dung just, dung-dong-ding and nothing else.

Bref and short and what I made his acquaintance. He shot swans, bears, Russian bears, Canadian ones and I just said, 'No, don't shoot anyone! Not even humans.' Yet I added as I spoke to myself, 'You can kill as many humans as you wish on condition that you do not kill our knights.' One goes and there is a path that one does one's best (or worst, of course) to follow, and one finds out that this path goes straight to a wound. Or to the wound, if you go on thinking of Jesus and the spears directed against him and (Amfortas). But what *is* directed against him? Everything is *for* him. I am for him, for instance. And for eternity. I am for, for, for, for, for, for; in this case, on this Cross. And I hope for, although Parsifal does not seem to understand what hope means and what it is used for, for, for, for, for. A medicine is a hope, isn't it?

Splitting headache. That is what I have almost every day and certainly every night when I do not sleep at all because of my head that splits into three or four. I look at those splits and say to myself, 'I have four heads instead of one. Three heads are better than two and five heads are better than four. Why don't I split my head into five splits, heads, minds and bodies?' I keep on splitting myself until I lie scattered around my cell where I wait for the Redeemer as other knights do and do not: some of them have already lost all hope, all of it. And Parsifal makes speeches, saying, 'Faith, only faith. No hope, no hope. Spinoza says hope is pernicious. It is better to hope *against* hope than *for* it. Let us hope against all hope.' And they listen to him, setting about hoping against hope. One hope comes against another hope. Hopes clash with hopes and they clash against hopes, all of them. That is what our life and round table look like. Not really round, are they?

So I swallow a few pills and say to myself, 'These pills I have been taking have done nothing for me. Nor have they done anything for anyone else, for the Round Table, among other tables, knights and things.' But I have faith and faith has me. At least I believe it does have me, otherwise I do not know what to believe in and how to behave. I said *plus haut* (see my words above) that there are many faiths and faces, but for some time I have seen only one face, that of Parsifal. (He is our Commander in Chief.) There are knights whose words I do not remember, but I do remember they say, 'In a multicultural society is it not anomalous to have a blasphemy law which only protects one religious faith?' And Parsifal answers, 'Only one faith, one, one, one. Our club is onecultural. Our laws are blasphemy laws. There are no laws, as physicists maintain, meaning there is only a blasphemy law, the blasphemy law.' So we do not blaspheme, far from it. We walk far from any blasphemy and that is how we walk, eat, think and sleep. If we sleep at all.

Our first meeting was and I do not really know if it was. Actually I am the second esquire and I could not meet him first: there are other esquires and Gurnemanzs in our midst. The first esquire met him first, I suppose, but my supposition is not based and therefore has no basis, no cause. Parsifal goes to Klingsor's kingdom and resists all temptations, gathering no flowers, maidens, girls, widows and so on. All right, that kingdom we hear about is full of girls instead of being full of fools, as our religion commands, according to which every kingdom must be full of pure fools who learn this and that as they climb Jacob's ladder. I am weary of my headache and foolishness. I am weary and sorry.

From Kundry's diary:

A report in the BMJ based on surveying about 10,000 middle-aged people three times over five years found that those who reported high life enjoyment each time were 24% less likely to have died in the next seven years than those who had no enjoyment.

From Gurnemanz's diary:

There are other hopes – other sources of hopes, that is; otherwise there would be neither sources nor hopes nor anything or everything. Parsifal had a vision or revelation that told him, 'Faith, faith, faith, forget about hope.' I wonder if it was a revelation or just an idle dream of an idle dreamer; or a reveller.

From Parsifal's diary:

FF
 AA
 IAAA
 TT
 HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
 HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
 OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
 PPP
 EEE
 HHHHHHHHHHEEEEEEEPPPPPPPPPOOOOO
 PPPPPPPPPPPPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPOPO

They all tell their stories and Gurnemanz to whose knowledge of the Scriptures and the Fathers all knights and kings cannot hold a candle, which does not prevent them from holding other candles in the course of their rituals, puts us in the picture about how Parsifal outgrew his foolishness, Tom- and Falfoolery and so on. According to him and some inferior scholars, Parsifal – the one of swan-death fame or infamy – knew nothing; not even next to nothing, whatever his relatives say as they think about his mother and the efforts she made in the course of her lessons (Latin, Greek culture, French). She gave him lessons every day, disregarding weekends, Shabbat and even the Easter as if convinced her son might rise from the dead without Christ's invigorating, anti-Freudian help. (No death instinct, only resurrection.) And she said whenever he touched his father's weapons and even those of his numerous cousins, '*Bas les pattes*, down with your paws!' Obediently he would put his paws, palms and hands down, but the Devil, alias Klingsor, kept on whispering and muttering, 'This tiny device fits into the palm of your hand,' as he thrust a huge arrow – the one that killed the swan and a few Klingsor-educated knights – into the tiny palm of his tiny, childish, foolish hand.

Gurnemanz is a muddle-headed individual and ‘there is more muddle in his head than head in his muddle,’ as the Second Esquire puts it. For no reason at all he made up his mind (or muddle) as to the structure of our world, be it our Grail-bounded (and unbounded) world or the one you might encounter everywhere, even in your nightmares. At some point he says in the original, ‘*Du sieh’st, mein Sohn, zum Raum / Wird hier die Zeit.*’ And as Parsifal does not understand German – his French is more or less fluent – he (Gurnemanz) does not fail to express the same idea in English, ‘You see, my son, time / Changes here to space.’ What does he mean? For God’s sake? For Parsifal’s sake? Did he study Einstein’s studies of space and the pace of time as reflected in both Relativity and Quantitativity? And what about Space? Bath, brook, a few bushes, Klingsor’s Kingdom known as the Queen-of-the-Night’s Kingdom or the Hermaphrodite-of-the-Day’s Empire. All right, they are both (Gurnemanz and Falparisi) walking towards the Grail and probably in the direction of a sort of salvation, a partial one.

Actually one needs two salvations at least: if one does not work, the second can stand in for it at short notice. And if the second does not work either, being deficient, unreliable and rotten, one needs a third salvation, even if it is not available at once. You push the ‘salvation’ button but no salvation (or redemption, or resurrection) comes and you sit there, sulking and mumbling, ‘I’m half dead and the other half’s dead too. And the other third, and the other fourth.’ On their way, Syberberg makes them (Gur and Par) run or walk into Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and other thinkers (*tinkers*, King Arthur’s favourite joke) as if taking his cue from Gurnemanz’s unfortunate, ambiguous remark. In the opera their triumphant march takes approximately nine minutes, but their feet cross decades and centuries – in their search for Absolute Space, Absolute Truth, Absolute Grail, Absolute Blood, Absolute Spear. ‘Do you know the expression “to stretch the point”?’ asks Gurnemanz.

‘*Dass weiß es nicht,*’ answers Parsifal whose knowledge or rather smattering of German has been reduced to this four-word phrase.

‘The point is we’re stretching the point now. To get to the point you have to stretch it first. That’s how the whole thing works, you know. *Du weißt?*’

‘*Nicht.*’

‘Let me give you an example. “They claim to be the biggest company in the world, which is stretching a point, but it’s true if you include their subsidiaries.” Do you understand the first thing about this piece of information? *Nicht?*’

‘*Nicht.*’

‘*Ich*, yes. I do. I even understand the second thing about it – the second rung, you know. Their claim goes further than what is considered to be reasonable. But by whom all this is considered, regarded and judged? What do you think?’

‘*Nicht* think.’

‘By nonentities, by utter fools. Luckily for all of us, you’re just a *pure* fool, not an *utter* one.’

‘Am I? Am I? Am I I? Am I *Ich*?’

‘Actually you’re *the* Pure Fool. Apart from you, there are no pure fools in the world. We should always go any further, as Shakespeare put it. Further, further, stretching the point and our legs. But as soon as we reach the Grail or Absolute Truth, we should stop. Do you know why?’

‘*Warum?*’ (Parsifal has just pulled another German stop out.)

‘Because we’re not supposed to stretch the truth, otherwise you might be accused of stretching the truth about how much you have helped in the project.’

As I already pointed out, Gurnemanz is a muddle-headed, middle-class scholar who does his best to obfuscate both truths and issues. It is true he has a project in his mind, in a remote corner of it. In a way this truth looks like a coastline and mostly this coastline fades into the mist so that Gurnemanz does not really know what he is speaking about. ‘We need the Pure Fool,’ he says to his cronies.

‘How would you measure his purity? How would you gauge it if you saw him in front of you? As large as life? As radiant as the Redeemer? By using a fuel gauge?’

Never mind. What counts is the project that stretches many truths, being centred upon world-salvation, not world-degradation. Apparently Trump and his presidency is a long-term slump or dump: ‘I need to clear out the shed and take everything I don’t want to the dump’, as he put it in his inaugural address. And he takes everything to the dump except his family and numerous women who wait for his exploring fingers; and we can express no surprise when listening to the scholars and the parallels they draw: Klingsor-Trump, Trump-Klingsor. Today, you have to explain everything, everybody and every one – even if you are not a scholar and never lose your livelihood because you are unable to dissect the world and its enigmas. Trump-slump, Trump-slump – that works perfectly, provided you do not attempt to predict a quick comeuppance: this and other comeuppances will come after a while, after a few earthquakes, tsunamis, Messiahs and crucifixions. The same goes for the project that is already under way, judging from how Parsifal and his guru, alias Gurnemanz make their way to grails and happy days.

The extent of our (and Amfortas’) salvation will not become apparent right away. But the respite afforded by fate and our date with the Redemption should not exempt me from what I call ‘my explanation-duty’. (Sometimes I get the feeling I speak German, not English.) Who is Amfortas? Who is Parsifal? Or Falpars, for that matter? Gurnemanz, knights, esquires, Wagner, Wolfram von something or someone. I mean the one or some whose essay on Parsifal has been known worldwide for centuries. (Time can also be wide, can’t it?) Well, to put everyone-body-thing in a nutshell, they seek redemption, salvation and all sorts of ations without which we cannot survive, given that we have been wounded ever since our birth. If I show my wound on a stage, I am instantly asked, ‘When did you get it?’ I answer, ‘Always, always, always, ever since, ever since, ever, forever, forever. No Kundry will ever help me.’

‘What about Parsifal?’ they ask.

At least those individuals know Parsifal and probably his ways, days and Earth Miles. What are his foot-and-horseways? He loses himself (and our miserable world) all the time because he is a fool or pure or both. Donald Trump loses our world – not his, judging by his private plane’s beauty – and our world, on his election night, lost its last, best and only chance to rein in runaway climate change. A runaway bus/horse caused chaos on the streets. What about our climate change and its runaway?

*Run away, run away,
Climate change, climate, we,
No world, only heigh,
Only ho, need a wee.*

So Trump, alias Klingsor, goes his way; so does Parsifal, and we can judge neither the latter nor the former, nor the former president, not the latter Messiah. What *can* we judge, measure and conclude? Disaster, disaster, disaster. Salvation, salvation, salvation. You have to be willing to see other people's points of view. And if you are unwilling to see them, you will not. You do not see Klingsor and some of you do not even know who he is and what danger we run in his presence, even if this presence does not manifest itself in our neighbourhood. There are so many remote controls in this day and age we lose both space and time, as Gurumurunemanz put it when speaking to Parsifal on his way to the Ritual and its manifold Light. (Is our and their Light always *onefold*? One fold, one God.) Short-term effects are either nice or dreadful. Trump and Parsifal. The former's effects are – The latter's effects are – So, if you live under Trump's administration, you enjoy those short-term effects; the same goes for the latter and his effects, the long-term ones. In the latter case you are saved, in the former damned. Take your pick, dear members of the Pick and Wick Club.

No hope, no love – only faith. It is true that Parsifal said this many times because he believed he was right and that is what faith is about: you think you are right. But Gurnemanz has always thought and acted in terms of love with which he is still on intimate terms: 'I love trees, brooks and nooks; and crannies, mind you.' This kind of thing, you know. Of course he quoted St Paul, his hymn to love, and Parsifal had no alternative but to memorise it and repeat it day in day out:

*Love, love, love.
If you don't love,
You're don't, not.
Your money goes
To the poor but
You don't love so
You're not, not.
You believe in
Stations of the
Cross, Cross.
You don't cross
Them out. Yet
You're out, out,
If you do not love.
You love neither
The Cross, not the
So you're noth*

But Parsifal persisted and signed, as they say all over France. (I speak of others who always say something.) 'Faith, faith, faith, faith.' All right, you cannot love everybody; and if you do not, you do not love *anybody*. For once, let us not speak of cheeks.

From Kundry's *Instruction Manual*:

'You're not impotent, are you?.' 'Impotent? What is that?' asked my pure fool. 'If a man is impotent, he cannot have sex because his penis cannot become hard or stay hard,' I answered. 'Why don't you marry me?' I said next, pressing his right hand against my left tit. 'What is marry?' he asked. Here's my answer, my instruction and manual:

Experts have long known – for two centuries at least – that people with strong social networks tend to eat healthier – no foie gras – exercise far more and live much longer. Having another person around, about, above and under helps survival in a very practical way: if you fall in your bath or from a cliff (or if you fall iff or rather ill), you stand a better chance of getting the help you need if there's someone by your side, in your mind. 'Do you have my body and mind in your mind?' I asked my personal fool whose purity is above suspicion, especially when he lies on my body. 'I do, I mind, I don't,' he answered. 'There are plenty of good reasons to spend more time with Kundry.' '*Warum?*' he asked. 'Because the link between strong family ties and longevity is crystal clear.' 'I wish to live with Amfortas,' he said. 'Are you a fag?' I asked. 'I wish to live with his wound,' he answered. There ensued this dialogue:

'How could you live with his wound?'

'I could.'

'How? By inserting your penis into it?'

'Know *nicht*.'

'By removing your penis and putting it elsewhere?'

'Know.'

'What *do* you know?'

'*Nicht*.'

'Do you know *nicht*?'

'Know.'

'Do you know *nichts*?'

'Knows.'

'The link between strong family ties and longevity is clear,' I say and Falparsa consults his dictionary and brain as he goes on listening to my words. And fools are not attuned to complicated words and ideas such as family ties and solitary unties. If you say to one of the Parsifals, 'You're a solitary untie,' he is likely to look at you for half an hour at least. You wait and wait, and then you say (once the half hour is over): 'Half an hour later, she was smiling and chatting as if nothing had happened. Why don't you smile and chat?' 'Because I'm not she,' he answers. 'You are, you are. You are he and she. In other words and beings, you're androgynous. You're also bisexual – you love your obedient servant, alias Kundry, alias myself, and you're also in love with Amfortas or rather with his wound into which you insert your innermost organ.' 'Do I?' 'You do, you do, you doodle-do-do-do-do-do.''

We know that people with fewer ties to their relatives fare worse. Fewer, fare, fever. Parsifal has no relatives *except* myself; or my *life*, as some of my relatives say and affirm. 'You fare far worse,' I say to him.

'I have to go,' says he.

'I'm your relative, being your wife, mother and sister.'

'Fewer,' he says.

‘All right, I’m just your wife and mother.’

‘Fever,’ he says.

I kiss and embrace him. And Gurnemanz wrote in his diary, ‘I saw them embrace on the station platform.’ We were about to depart. Where, when, why and who? Our train was to depart from Platform 2. And this train of ours was bound for the Klingsor (or Windsor) Kingdom.

They talk a lot about Klingsor: First Esquire, Second Esquire, Third Esquire and even Fourth One. They talk about him and it sounds thus, ‘The Universe is overburdened with problems. I know, I know – it is always overwhelmed and over, over, over, with problems and emblems. A rose is the national emblem of England; and of French Socialists, mind you. A red rose is the emblem of communism. A blue rose is the emblem of Russian homosexual men. A pink rose is the emblem of Russian lesbians. But no problem – not even roses and tulips – is more urgent than the militarisation of politics and the new arms race.’ Let’s have a swimming race instead.

Do days grow longer, warmonger?

They do do do and stronger.

What about Mays and maize’s?

They’re aces, up-sleeve aces.

The current situation is too dangerous (as it usually is, no matter what current we are speaking of). More troops, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, lances, spears, Kundrys. And weapons that used to be deployed at a distance are now placed closer to each other (Kundry, Flower-Maidens, knights) as if to shoot point-blank. Knights come and shoot point-blank, and Flower-Maidens welcome them with open arms and bums, vaginaseses, clitoriseseases, uteruseseases and so on. While state budgets are struggling to fund people’s essential social needs – bread, snails, emails – military spending is growing (bodies, bums, mums, vaginas, anginas). Money is easily found for sophisticated weapons whose destructive power is comparable to that of weapons of mass destruction. (A submarine’s single salvo is capable of devastating half a continent, half a Parsifal, half a Lancelot and so, so.) Money is easily supplied for missile-defence-attack-destroy systems that undermine strategic stability.

From Parsifal’s diary:

It is hard, difficult and quasi-unattainable, and I no longer yearn to become a saint or a yogi standing on the threshold of nirvana – like a monument, like the Statue of Liberty. He is so focused on his release from samsara or karma one gets the feeling he will never budge from where he is rooted to the spot. Yet he must step out of this stop onto nirvana. ‘Be careful not to step in the mud,’ my guru says to my brain and I know that my guru is right – not only because he is *always* right. Nirvana is an ivory balcony or tower overlooking Creation and Non-Creation, whereas the rest is just a pile of dog muck in which you are bound to step if you do not succeed in getting as far as nirvana. But what is a success and what is not? I ask without answering the question. I know that any victory is often a defeat in disguise. And what about successes, triumphs and the cries of ‘hip,

hip hurray!’ I hear either on television or in the streets and woods? Robin Hood must have defeated his enemies once again; and his victories are triumphs, immortality and eternity.

From Gurnemanz's diary:

I talked to Parsifal about space-time-mood-*Tod* and other things. I know nothing about them and in this respect I do not differ from Parsifal except that I am no Pure Fool; not a real fool at that. A pure fool says, ‘wise *nicht*’ and goes his way or stays to listen to an impure pool. Yes, I am not a fool; a pool, rather. A pool of sunlight, a pool of moonlight. And I often look at my reflection in the deep green pool of water, in my heart of hearts; in my pool of pools. Why am I not a pure fool? I doubt and pure fools do not, whatever happens. And if you say to them, ‘You raped a girl last night,’ they answer, ‘I’m a *pure* fool so I rape neither girls nor boys.’ And I am an impure guru and so I rape girls, boys and teenagers of all ages. I raped Klingsor, although he does not remember it. Why? Because, upon leaving him forever, I did not say, ‘Remember me.’ As easy as a pie or an omelette. Or a piece of bread that does not come from Jesus’ body.

You have no wounds on your body and so go about as if you could go about, carrying out the rituals they are waiting for: promotions, emotions, unreal estates. Yet you have wounds and blood, and the latter flows along the streets of your cities. And this blood of yours comes either from your mouth or from your belly situated in the South of your body. Everyone has a wound of his/her own, and this wound bleeds all the time, overtime, overman, overwomen, overblood. It is over, over, over; not *all* over, mind you. And Parsifal looks at the blood as he tries to understand what is going on and boiling over. 'I suffer,' I say.

‘Amfortas does,’ he says, looking at Amfortas.

‘I suffer too,’ I say showing him my blood.

‘Amfortas’ blood is more abundant,’ he says.

‘My blood is full-bodied,’ I say.

‘The body doesn’t count,’ he answers.

‘My blood is full-souled,’ I say.

‘So is Amfortas’’,’,’,’,’,’,’, he says.

‘Amfortas slept with Kundry,’ I say.

‘So did I,’ he says. ‘So did you,’ he adds.

Parsifal goes on pulling out language stops:

In French one says to ‘fall on this and that’, whereas in English one *comes across* or *chances upon* these objects and humans, and it is far less hazardous than to *fall* on them. Once again I consult my dictionary and it talks to me thus: ‘His spirits *fell* when he saw the distance he still had to go. As she read her exam results, her face *fell*.’ Coming across or chancing upon is much better and you forget the verb ‘to fall’ which, however, continues to pester you for some time; both your face and spirits fall and you have to pick them up and bolster their morale.

From Gurnemanz's speech:

'Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.' And what is flesh, dear brethren, brothers and sisters? Flesh is the meat you eat. And what is blood, dear sisters and nephews? Blood is water. It is true that blood is thicker than water but if you do not drink water, you will have no blood. You can also drink two glasses of red wine, every day – for the sake of your blood. But do you really need it? Your blood, I mean? Of course you need two glasses of wine and even three glasses of wine. And what about blood? You do not need it because neither flesh nor blood inherits the kingdom of God. And what should you inherit? 'All my children will inherit equally.' Who says that? God does. What kind of inheritance does He speak about? Does He speak about food? Does He speak about bank accounts, villas or multinational corporations? He does not. He speaks about spiritual heritage, about virtues, goodness and the total lack of badness. You should wage war on badness, you know. Not on baldness – on *badness*! Do you know that or do you not know that and it?

'Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.' What does St Paul mean when he says we shall not sleep? Tidings of great joy? What do *you* think on the subject? Suppose you say to your brother, 'It was so hot I didn't get off to sleep till three o'clock.' And you add after a while, 'I'm not feeling very alert today – not enough sleep last night!' And then your brother hears the sound of breaking glass. Yes, you broke a glass. Why? Because you are neither alert nor on your guard. Anything can happen to you and you may even die as a result of your sleepless night and lack of alertness. So I ask you again, Does St Paul come to us with good news or bad news? Let me tell you, dear brothers and mothers, that any sleep is nothing in comparison with eternal life, for St Paul adds, 'But we shall all be changed.' In spite of this sleepless night, we shall be changed. And we should feel alert for this change – whatever happens. Even if we happen to spend many Arabian nights in a row, we should be prepared for the change St Paul spoke about so bountifully in his Epistle to the Corinthians Number One.

I wonder what kind of music they will play on this occasion. Wagner, Mahler? The trumpet, one note? Which note? The G flat from the *Meistersingers*? The Earth corrupts our substances and it does not really matter whether we are *on* it or *under* it, for worms are everywhere: material worms, spiritual worms, spiritualistic worms. In any shape or form. This shape is that of a worm, a real worm, an authentic worm – the one that is believed to eat our corpses. It does, it does – for once we are not mistaken. We believe that this worm will eat our corpses, and it does eat them: it first eats one corpse and then worms its way into another corpse. And it continues to worm its way from one corpse to another and therefore eats them all in the long run and also in the final analysis. So what is left of all these corpses? St Paul and his theory of our resurrection.

Well, Parsifal goes somewhere and kills either a swan or a monk. And they say, 'What have you done? You've killed, you've, have, have. How could you? How could you have been born?' And Parsifal answers, 'During the Second World War, the British dropped a huge number of bombs on Dresden.' And they say, 'You're Hitler, Hitler, Hitler.' And Parsifal says, 'I'm a big/good/small eatler.' That is how our history starts: you eat a chestnut, than your father, your mother, and you grow, grow, outgrow. At some point you realise you are out, out, grow

out. I grow out, in, into, Grow, out-and-into-and-outof grow, grow, ungrow. Tell me why I grow? Because you and I have to grow, otherwise you'll die. I'll die, all right, all wrong, all nonsense, all sense, all non.

And I am still there. What is there? I am. What else? Nothing else. Something else. Some is there and I say, 'How are you, Sam?'

A number of leitmotifs: pain, main (main what?), love, ove, I don't love the whole of you, I don't love your legs, but the rest is more or less all right. So I ove you. Actually I don't love your thoughts, so I ov you.

What do we say when confronted with an enigma? Just a few noncommittal sentences: 'My mother will skin me alive,' 'I'll turn into a pumpkin if I don't leave now'. And our friends leave us in peace. But do we leave ourselves in peace? What do we say to ourselves when left alone? 'She was like a cat on a hot tin roof.' These idioms do not get us anywhere; yet an idiom (a pure idiot) and a metaphor can offer a welcome respite from the pangs of conscience. For a while we think of cats and tin roofs.

From Parsifal's letter to Gurnemanz:

As you might know, Kundry and I are happily married. But there is one problem: she is frustrated when we make love because I cannot hold back. Do you mind my being frank with you? I come about one minute after entering her. We have tried everything from oral sex to – Never mind! She is talking about going to a doctor, but I feel that since she was my first sexual experience – Do you see my point? What do you think we should do? Should my wife go to a doctor or should we have a threesome? You know, another man. What about you? Lancelot is not likely to share my point of view and my bed, let alone accept my invitation – he has got no sense of adventure, you know. You know, my wife and I are so sexually oriented that our marriage may go down the drain if we cannot solve this problem.

Wroo, wroo, wroo. Too, too, yet. That is what we say when we have no idea what we, they and us are talking about in the dead of night, in the dead, in the death, in the night, in the life.

ACT TWO (ONE)

And what it comes. And what it comes is not. Parsifal goes and finds beautiful maidens. And comes not. They are not his cup of the Grail. What *is* one's cup and Grail? Is, is, is, is, that is what it is. You call it 'hope' or 'faith'. No matter what or do you not. It is 'is' or is, is, is, is; and even are, are, are, are, are. No, not are; just is, is, is, is.

he decided that this sharp penis belonged to Klingsor's body. (At the time Parsifal had no idea our women could use artificial ((rubber, plastic or metal)) penises. That is what *pure fool* means – only *organic* penises.)

Parsifal came and asked no question; in that day and age he did not even know that every answer is either in disguise or not – just in its own guise. He met Gurnemanz and began to realise he needed a guru; but was Gurnemanz one, the guru in exclamation? Parsifal saw a few signs: a beard, a low voice, a few home truths. Gurnemanz said to him: 'You're a fool, are you not?'

'What is a fool?'

'You're a fool because you don't know what fool means. So you're a fool, aren't you?'

'I am.'

'Good boy. At least you're an obedient boy and an obedient boy is as precious as the purest fool.'

'Are all good boys obedient?'

'They are. Look at these wounds.'

Amfortas showed him his wounds. He had several nasty open wounds. His head wounds needed as many as 50 stitches.

'Clean and dress the wounds immediately,' shouted the Second Esquire.

'What about the Pure Fool?' asked Amfortas in English. And he added after much soul-searching, 'Bandage the wounds to reduce the risk of infection.' And then he asked our Parsifal what he thought about all this, and Parsifal replied: 'Ensure the wound is free from dirt before applying the bandage.'

'You're not a fool,' said Amfortas.

'I am,' answered Parsifal.

'But you know a lot about bandages.'

'Every fool does,' says Parsifal. 'Paul's ankle is rather weak, so he always puts a bandage on it to support it when he plays tennis.'

'Amfortas betrayed Christ,' I said.

'My mother said Christ was a pure wise,' answered Parsifal.

'You're His emissary,' whereupon Parsifal opened his mouth from which there issued the sounds associated with Bath's *Mass in B Minor*. Karajan, Schwarzkopf? Perhaps. They listened to the Mass. ACT ONE, ACT TWO, ACT THREE, ACT FOUR. And nothing happened. Yes, I sat down, lied down and listened or did not. What happens? What does? My life I can hear goes somewhere and I get up to put on Wagner, Mozart, Haydn, Schoenberg, my brother and sister. I put them on and Parsifal goes on walking and nothing can stop him, not even Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Pierrot is better than Parsifal. *Lunaire* is better than *solaire*, *molaire*, *molasson*.

Parsifal *Lunaire*. If you look at the moon and see a human face, you do not always think this face crowns our Pure Fool's body: you can imagine you see your neighbour or your aunt. And when the French say, 'He is in the moon,' they allude neither to Jules Verne nor to Armstrong. In a manner of speaking, Parsifal was even more in the moon or on it than all other pretenders to this title, and there is a growing body of evidence to support his claim; if any. Actually he never claimed anything of the sort: it is Gurnemanz who dubbed him 'My Moon Boy', which provoked many a wrathful outburst on the part of the knights: they knew only the moonstone and nothing else. So if someone happened to utter in their hearing, 'The Moon,' they always answered, 'The stone, the

stone.’ So they could not help wondering if Gurnemanz wished to intimate that our Falparsī was a lunatic who had just escaped from a lunatic asylum. ‘He’s the Pure Fool, not a lunatic,’ Gurnemanz would point out.

‘And what if he’s a pure lunatic?’ asked the knights. After a while, they might however concede that they had been a little harsh, saying, ‘All right, all right – he’s an *impure* lunatic. Im, im, im – can you hear what we’re saying?’ ‘Im, him, im, him,’ repeated Gurnemanz as he continued to study Parsifal from head to foot and back again: from foot to head, from toes to hair. ‘You’re my Moon Boy, my own,’ he was in the habit of saying three times in a row.

‘Are you my Sun Father?’ asked Parsifal. (He did it only once.)

‘I am your guru,’ answered Gurnemanz.

‘I know, Gurnemanz, Hanz Gurnemanz. Do you really think that pure fools need gurus?’

‘Of course they do, my *Doorachok*.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘My little fool. In Russian.’

‘The project is in its final stages and should be completed by August,’ said Parsifal.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘That’s what you said. But I feel like going back, you know.’

‘Back? What for?’

‘To revert to my foolishness. Back to ignorance, to nature, to Rousseau.’

‘Rousseau wasn’t a saint, was he?’

‘I know, I know. I’m supposed to quote only saints. Actually my mother said St Paul had always been against learning and learning curves. He called them “learning curses”. Or just “curses”.’

‘*Tout court, tout court*,’ mumbled Gurnemanz. ‘I wonder if St Paul knew French,’ he added.

‘He was against any knowledge, any smattering of French or English. Can you hear me?’ Parsifal raised his voice. (He was in good voice that day.) ‘He hated smartness and smart Alecs and Hanzs. He hated their guts.’

‘Yet he is the best guru known to history and the universe,’ said Gurnemanz.

‘He idolised fools, nincompoops, halfwits, thirdwits.’

‘I want you to memorize this text,’ Gurnemanz rounded off, pointing with his cane at a manuscript.

‘Is that the manuscript you talked to me about?’ asked Parsifal. “‘It is thought that this manuscript is the work of a monk and dates from the 12th century,” you said.’ Gurnemanz gave no answer and Parsifal began to read (unless he was still illiterate):

Here again arises a very difficult question. For in what way shall we fools be able to find a wise man, whereas this name, although hardly any one dare openly, yet most men lay claim to indirectly: so disagreeing one with another in the very matters, in the knowledge of which wisdom consists, as that it must needs be that either none of them, or but some certain one be wise? But when the fool enquires, who is that wise man? I do not at all see, in what way he can be distinguished and perceived. For by no signs whatsoever can one recognise any thing, unless he shall have known that thing, whereof these are signs. But the fool is ignorant of wisdom.

St Augustine, *On the Profit of Believing (The Prophet of Believing)*

At that stage and on that rung, Parsifal was both illiterate and ill-mannered; and also ill-treated to some extent: not everybody realised he was the Messiah. So Gurnemanz read the text out loud, paying attention to Falparsis's attention, saying for instance, 'Are you listening? Are you paying attention?' There was no denying his fool was paying attention, but both his attention span and guessing-game capacity were non-existent and so he did not even say to himself, 'I've found a guru without looking for him.' Gurnemanz had therefore no alternative but to point this occurrence out, 'My Moon Boy! You don't really have to enquire who that wise man is because this very man is sitting in front of you. Haven't you perceived this yet?'

'Your beard?' asked Parsifal.

'Look at that tree over there,' said Parsifal.

'I like blood sausages,' said Kundry. 'Why don't we live up there? Why don't we marry up there? I prefer that tree to your apartment. A lunch on a branch. A brunch on a branch. How wonderful!'

'Did I already ask you about Klingsor?'

'Of course. So we can have our brunches on a leaf. And I can play hopscotch on it as well. And we can play hide-and-seek everywhere. We can hide behind leaves and twigs. And when we get tired we'll just drink the golden sap from one of the goblets. And we won't feel tired any more.'

But even Kundry was no exception to the rule, according to which Parsifal's manners were ill, brutal and vicious so that one might justifiably say he was an unmitigated cad. And the whole venture or adventure has been an unmitigated disaster: salvation, love and all. 'Where are your hands?' our Falparsis shouted now and then, more often than not. Kundry would tell him she had just fingered her necklace absent-mindedly – as she talked to him, to her adorable moron. 'Your necklace? Is it your necklace?' he would shout pointing at his penis. 'Amfortas! Amfortas!' (Yet another leitmotif.)

AMFORTAS:

What do you want? The Grail, as usual. You can't live without ItHimHer, can you? Christ, the Blessed Virgin, Mary Magdalene and a cup. They're all in it. This cup is so big the whole world can be put in it, if it wishes. What are the wishes of the world? Its best wishes? To be in the cup, in the cups? Another swimming pool? Money, money, money. Pouring millions into it. Or do you like the word itself? Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr, GRGRRRGRGRGRGR, ale, ale. Or do you like the sound of your voice? And what about my *Wunde*, my Wheeeeehee? Some blood for your breakfast? My house claret? My body claret? Instead of tomato juice? Why doesn't your Grail provide relief from wounds and the hounds of guilt? You're the hounds I fear – much more than my guilty conscience. I have none, if you must know. I have no conscience at all. Where is it situated? Where are its whereabouts? Spasm of guilt/coughing/laughing. No laughing for the moment. Not a laughing matter, you know. I do cough blood, though. Now and then. Another kind of blood, not breast blood. For your dinner dishes, rather. For your last supper. So where is it? Where's my conscience? A muscular spasm. All right. What muscle do you have in mind? My legs suddenly went into spasms. When? Never mind. What counts is their coming home – they haven't come home yet. A paradox, isn't it? I should rejoice in my good fortune, should I not? My legs are gone, so are their spasms. Yet I suffer. Why? Because I want them back with all their

spasms and chasms. I wish to go to the Klingsors. This is my dearest wish, if you must know. And you must know everything. Or is it located in my gorge? I mean, my conscience? It makes my gorge rise and fall so they say, 'The rise and fall of Amfortas' gorge and life.' Gorgeous, isn't it? I'm condemned to this office. I'm condemned anyway. So are you, by the way. I wonder who wasn't condemned at the hour of big-bang-bong. The elect? Why were they born, then? A masochistic venture? Adventurous, aren't they? Are they adventurous, masochistic and sadistic? Live and let die, as James Bond says in his films. Now I'll sing you a pretty song:

*For the sinful world,
For Amfortas the Sinner,
With a thousand pains,
With a million pains,
As once His Blood did flow,
As twice His Blood did flow,
As thrice His blood did flow,
As mrise His blood did flow,*

Mrice, thrice, dice with death, dice with life. Is that enough for you?

Wehe! Wehe mit der Qual! You can just sing, '*Wehe!*' Or 'we', or 'he', or 'e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e'. Or 'w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w'. What about 'h'? Harder in French, isn't it? In Russian you do not say Haydn; you say Gaydn. So thus you scream, when in pain, an unbearable one, 'G-G-G-G-G-G-G-G-G,' which means 'shit' in the same language and in the same life.

No, leave it uncovered, as Amfortas puts it. Everybody thinks he is talking of the Grail. Actually he is thinking of Kundry whose propensity for striptease was so obvious their answerphone always answered as follows, 'We're expecting a full house tonight.' Of course we always shout, 'Uncover it at once,' and sometimes we see Charlie Chaplin instead of a war hero or a president.

Yet *Wehe. Wehe, Wehe, Wehe, Wehe, Wehe, Wehe, Wehe*. I, for one, cannot see this *Wehe*, a harbinger of wounds and whatever; pounds, rounds, gounds, lounds, kounds, Kundrys and Kundries. Whatever, whatever. Whoever, whoever. However, however. Of course our blood is always inside us, in front of us, and sometimes we have no idea if there is a drop of blood in our veins: after all, they can live on bread alone, on water alone. And when I candidly say, 'I still fear death,' some Gurnemanz or Titurel of sorts starts talking to me about those sages who live both armless and legless. They can also live without life itself – at least without its bodily element – provided they keep their spirits up and keep their bodies and souls company. (And a stiff upper lip.) Yes, they are self-sufficient and need no friends, no bodies and no souls that often take their souls' leaves and go on a multitude of sprees, paying visits to our Moon Boy or rather to the moon; not to gloom and doom, contrary to what ordinary, run-of-the-mill souls do on a regular basis.

'On a regular basis' is another leitmotif of mine. There are clockwork mechanisms (not oranges) everywhere and this phenomenon accounts for the multiplicity of wounds we have to bear with: they crop up every morn and noon (and gloom and doom). *Wehe, Wehe, Wehe, Wehe*, we shout at first; at second we just look

at our wounds, saying, shouting and screaming nothing: no use crying over spilt blood. The Grail is just another clockwork train/mouse and we are supposed to uncover it, whatever happens; and yet it is not the latest teenage pin-up. Of course, on occasion, upon seeing it stark naked, Parsifal can be seen in transports of delight, muttering to himself and Gurnemanz, ‘O light, O blight, O blood, O nails, O wounds, O Amfortas, A Amfortas, Bamfortas!!!!’ And then he shouts, ‘O hail, O hail, O hail to Thee.’ (‘As if Jesus Christ the Saviour were / within hailing distance of somewhere,’ as Klingsor points out. ((Just another poem of his or her.))) ‘I’ll heal Thee, I’ll do, I’ll do.’

‘How, pray?’

‘One weapon suffices.’

‘One wound will do for this job.’

‘Your ridiculous comment shows a complete misunderstanding of the situation. I’m here to *heal* you, not to *wound* you again.’

‘Here to heal? Go to hell!’

‘The wound is healed only by the Spear that caused it.’

‘What?’

‘*Nur eine Waffe taugt: / Die Wunder schließt der Speer / Nur, der sie schlug.*’

‘Speer? The architect?’

From Parsifal’s Mother’s secret diary:

Now I know for sure I lost my son, my dear Falpars. Once upon a time, he was conceived and born after playing a sort of football match in my womb. I was very fond of his kicks and pricks and his father used to say, ‘That’s what makes you tick,’ as I caressed my belly and my future son, his hair and cheeks. On the day of his birth, his father, alias my husband, said to me and to him, ‘You shouldn’t fear anything, not even death, not even your rebirth.’ And then he whispered in my ear, ‘You’re imagining things. Within your imagination and its figments your son is already on a battlefield, lying dead in a pool of blood. You should visualise neither pools nor blood nor your son’s dead body, his blood-and-mud covered corpse. A sage or a stoic never pictures anything to himself. He lives in the present, saying to himself, “Most of the current troubles stem from our computer system, from our mind, from our imagination and its pictures.” A sage never goes to the pictures, you know.’

But I am a *herself*, not a *himself*, my dear late and deadend husband. I am a woman and nothing womanish (or femalish) is foreign to my mind and its figments, filaments, and what not. I cannot help dwelling upon what not or is not, if you prefer: battles, swords, spears, *Speers*. I always see double, as the Americans say. In other words, I see the same word in two or three languages at least, as if there was an army on the march. Marching towards my son instead of munching their ways through packets of peanuts. My son is able to outmanoeuvre them for a while, but they outnumber him and out he goes, out of this world and its light; but not out of my heart and mind where he is as young as a newborn child, a newmoon boy.

There are women of course and their number is frightful: one hundred, one thousand and one Scheherazades; and yet one woman is enough to wreak havoc on any boy, be he related to the sun, to the moon or any comet one can spot in our cloudless sky. They wreak havoc and maverick; and their breaths reek of garlic, needless to say. Or alcohol. At some point my husband – may he rest in peace, not in war, for once upon a time – was under doctor’s

orders to cut down on fatty food and to drink no alcohol for at least six months. So Falparsî never saw a bottle of wine or whisky in his life – at least he did not do so in the course of his childhood and adolescence. I have no idea what happened next, after, in the other world where he settled so valiantly and negligently. ‘We’d been up carousing till the early hours and were exhausted,’ as his father used to say. They draw their swords, carouse, are exhausted and killed and rise from the dead. As soon as they rise, they fall, especially if they are united – such is the law of life and death. And whatever period of time elapses between falls and rouses, carouses and doll-yourself-up women, seems to be devoted to nightmares where the same events go in reverse order, seeing as they are upside-down.

Eager to save my husband from drugs and drunks, I paid a few visits to scientists who believe that the tranquilliser ketamine could help people overcome alcohol addiction by ‘erasing’ drink-related memories. For a while I wondered what they meant and I decided that during my husband’s drinking bouts a great deal of memories come into his memory and settle down in it as if determined to live there forever. ‘I’m in your memory so I’m your wife,’ they (doll-yourself-up women) seem to communicate to my handsome knight’s brain and body. Every woman is a drink and a drug, and when you are told that young people who drink hazardous amounts of beer are offered the drug, a powerful anaesthetic that is used in the NHS and on animals, you think this anaesthetic is either a battle or just another bottle or a woman. Of course I prefer drugs to battlegrounds where knights first lead and then bleed. The knights were made of lead, they say after a while, after looking at their corpses.

What memories do they erase? ‘My Durandal or Durakdal killed sinners, evil maidens. But before killing them I used them.’ And the patient adds, after much memory-searching, ‘Please erase these maidens from my skull.’ But Fooldal asks a question before erasing anything from his computer, ‘Should I erase Kundry?’

‘Of course, of course. Her sting, her sin, her tin hat.’

‘And what about Kundry the Mother?’

The scientists hope that the drug could help drinkers to reprogramme their brains by blocking ‘alcohol reward’ memories.

Two hours ago a dose of ketamine was injected into Falparsî’s muscle. To Kundry: ‘Stop mothering me – I’m 40 years old and can take care of myself.’

To Parsifal: ‘I’ve been a mother to you ever since your mother’s death.’

To Kundry: ‘Your mother-side has already been blocked.’

To Parsifal: ‘You’re a blockhead, not a pure fool.’

To Kundry: ‘You’re a blockmother.’

To Parsifal: ‘All right. I’m not your mother. I’m your girlfriend.’

To Kundry: ‘Girl? You? You’re my hagenemy.’

To Parsifal: ‘Titurel says, “You, obnoxious fag hag.”’

To Kundry: ‘Why?’

To Parsifal: ‘You love Amfortas, I love you. Amfortas loves you, I love Amfortas.’

One can hear the following leitmotifs: jealousy, homosexual men, ketamine, injection, memory, real mother, fake mother, fake blood (Amfortas II), claret, champagne, beer, sugar mummy. Linda Kelsey (*Daily*

Mail) explains the last one thus: ‘While older women have always fallen for younger men, the sheer amount of cradle-snatching A-listers at the moment suggests something of a societal shift. And, fascinatingly, it’s one that reveals as much about the diminished status of men as it does the increasing dominance of older women.’

Kundry is very old indeed; if not eternal, which does not amount to the same thing. Being old amounts to an impressive number of years. Eternity does not amount to anything at all: it stays where it is, rooted in the moment, instant and even a turf of grass (space-time-nonsense). She might have had sex with Adam, for all I know, thinking that sex with the first man was by definition a first-class sex. (No second-raters, this time.) Anyway she did not miss Titurel (she called their lovemaking ‘*rituel*’) to whom she wrote a few postmodern emails: ‘You were so beautiful this evening, so Tituresque. I see you as a giant of beauty, power and sex. You are the Mass in the course of which I contemplate you, making love to you now and then – not all the time, I can assure and reassure you. Of course I am quite aware of your potential and many other tentialitis thanks to which we have sex, dex and mex all the time. But not during the Grail-striptease, you know. You know I know it is not done. So it is not – and not done, into the bargain.’

Some theologians think they all speak of Amfortas, not of Titurel whose relationship with sex as such was limited to Amfortas’ birth and death (and blood). (Under the circumstances there is no life to speak of. Are there any circumstances of this kind, of life-kind?) Of course you see only Titurel’s half-corpse, if you take the trouble to go to Bayreuth or elsewhere. So you cannot gauge his sex and its potential, let alone his libido and its derivatives. The same goes for Amfortas, his son, but he looks much younger; at least, unlike Titurel, he does not spend his time in his coffin. Where does he spend his time? In the offing, as it were. ‘He’ll come, He’ll come, my pure, impure, dirty and undirty fool.’ That is the offing where Amfortas lies, for there are a multitude of offings where he is already dead; not to say buried. (Off, off, off, off, in, out, s, s.)

Back to Kundry whose diary enlarges upon Kamasutra-engulfed-and-muffled games and names: Big, Sleety, Pretty, Meaty, Kissedy, Sexydis, Thighsidis, Anklesidis, Toesidis, Sidis, Dis. Of course she is dead romantic, surrounded as she is either by angels (the round knights) or demons (Klingsor, alias Klitoris). At the same time (and space) she talks at length about penises, the extrusion of semen and vaginal fluid, of her major purchases (Siemens), of her piss and miss (I pissed and missed him), of her hit-and-run (I hit him and ran stark naked to the nearest bush), of her blood both menstrual and non-menstrual. ‘My blood is identical with Amfortas’, she used to declare. ‘We all have the same blood, men and women. Why do you make so much fuss about your blood? So much blood about your fuss? We bleed every month, as a matter of course, every blessed and unblessed month. You bleed once a year and *du coup* you uncover neither the Grail nor yourselves.’ At some point she goes so far as to remind the square-eyed knights that, ‘All my children are bloody fussy.’

ACT ONE: BLOOD

ACT TWO: FUSS

ACT THREE: BENEDICTION, DEATH-REBIRTH-(RESURRECTION) RITUAL, ETERNAL

UNRECURRENCE

ETERNAL CURRENCY

UNETERNAL UNCURRENCY

UNDOLLAR

UNSPEAR
UNPARSIFAL
SUPER-WOMANISH KUNDRY
UNDER-SANCTIFIED ONE

ACT FIVE

Sex with Parsifal was brutal and short, but his affairs were time-consuming

ACT FOUR

Grosser bodily functions

Finer bodily functions

Soul-centred actions

Soul, soul, soul

Christ, Christ

Nice, nice

From Parsifal's Mother's secret diary:

I smile, I smile, I try and not / And not and not in utter *Not*. This is my 'death book' and not my 'resurrection book', mind you. What do you mind? What do you not. You are not – not with all your spears, kundries, mundries and whiskies. No resurrection please! I loved my son, my sun, my moon, my boon companion. Guide boys are a great boon to the partially wounded. I am partially wounded and my son was too ambitious to content himself with partiality, virtuality – not entirety and reaaaality. They talk about Realpolitik or whatever, and I say and proclaim, 'Whatever, don't care, as long as my husband is dead. Where's your Christ and His stretchers? "Rise, walk, talk, drink wine," He says. Where are they all going? What city or myth are they bound for? They sing a song to which one should listen in order, in disorder:

We carry, we carry, we carry, we carry

From life to death, from death to bud.

Let's go, let's go, let's carry and marry

Let's marry our blood, our Mary and mud.

I struggled to cope with the loss of my premature baby boy Parsifal 17 years after his birth and I did not succeed. I lost my struggle and therefore am on the verge of my own-inflicted death; or whatever they call it in their catalogues. Here is my diary which contains his photographs and mementoes, and even his toes, believe it or not: he walked across my diary many, many times. There is not a single moment in the whole day when I do not miss him, although there are some moments situated in the dead of night, in the middle of it, in the mid, as Shakespeare put it. And during those moments my sleep goes so far I do not remember anything except God; and I do not think my son is God; not yet. In other words, He is not a member of Quartenity, as far my knowledge goes and stops. He is the only member of my Unity. Is it not enough?

Should I leave behind or before a few poems of my depression? Here they are:

Parsifal *Lunaire*. He goes, stops, kills, flings, fires his Kalashnikovs and recalls his mother, saying, ‘A woman, prostrate with grief, lay wailing on the ground.’ He imitates his mother for a while and kills a swan and his swan’s song. The swan sang his song like that and thus:

I’m flying and I am in my prime.

But I know that one of the bloody

Parsifals managed to encroach...

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

BBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBB

And CCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC

I’m slain, as someone says in Shakespeare’s play.

I’m slain, I’m slain far from my father, uncle and nephews.

Phews, Phewes, Mews, Miaow, Miaow, Miaow, Blood, Blood, Ash.

(Splash!)

mishmash

POSTFACE

God (Father-Mother) sends to the universe His-Her Son. To redeem Himself, not Us. (We are beyond redemption.) ‘Jesus,’ said the priest, ‘saved and redeemed His Father by taking His (Father’s) sins upon himself.’ Free Will? That is a fine excuse. For once a son saved his father (usually they kill them). God is alive and so is the true faith.

POSTFACE

C'est l'intention qui compte. God withdrew from His omnipresence. Others should live and die. Quality or condition of being generous. Her friends take advantage of (= benefit unfairly from) her generosity. Generous and charitable Charity organisations Plenty and abundant Skies stripes and stars

adjective generous /'dʒen.ər.əs/-ə-/ adjective CHARACTER The public's response to the crisis appeal was generous and compassionate. His mother is one generous woman. John Herschel was an urbane, kindly and generous man. She's a really sweet person and she's generous to a fault. The charity will go under unless a generous donor can be found within the next few months. 1. willing to give money, help, kindness, etc., especially more than is usual or expected a very generous man [+ to infinitive] It was most generous of you to lend me the money. She's been very generous with her time. There's a generous (= kinder than deserved) review of the book in today's newspaper.
So God was generous to a fault

TSIMTSUM

All of the above-mentioned generosityes

In accepting this award, I would like to thank the producer, the director, the scriptwriter and, lastly, the film crew.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone for coming this evening, this lifetime

CREATING ONLY

For creation's sake

Lonely, lonely, lonely

URGE, URGE

YOU CANNOT SUFFER

WITHOUT THE WORLD

A Catch 666 SITUATION

ONLY GOD DOES

HIS PERSONAL TRINITY

1. He made us suffer. Not enough.

2. His Son

His suffering is everywhere

3. Not only in Shakespeare's, Dante's, Beethoven's, Mahler's

MASTERPIECES

only

Is creation better than not? To be – better? Not to – much worse?

If there were nothing, this nothing would wreak havoc on nothing.

Protector.

God exists with the express purpose of doing His utmost to exclude existence from

Lying in the icy waters of the Moscow river.

Doing nothing.

A destruction-proof CREATOR.

POSTFACE

An animal dies. No longer does he sleep on your windowsills, in my armchairs. No; *il n'y a pas eu mort d'homme* and a Tolstoy-financed idyllic image does not greet one with newborn babies' cluster bombs.

IUYLKNLMK?. ML£""*OPOJOIUY !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! YTFD 65D4R56POJK O9IJ OI
BYTIFT7YFT6YUDFTR6Y !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

How charming! How adorable! True to life (and to death)!

No !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! *Keine*

Pas de !!!!!!!!!!!!!

Pas de deux

Pas de trois

Pas de quatre

Death, life, death, life

Equilibrium, Empedoclium

A new cat is lying on my windowsill. My son.

IV

THE MOMENT OF EVERYTHING

Wells are a microcosm or cosmic synthesis. They provide a channel of communication with the realm of the dead and the hollow echo which comes from their depths and the fleeting shimmer of rippling water deepen the mystery rather than make it clear. Looked at from bottom to top, a well is like some giant astronomical telescope pointed from the bowels of the Earth at the celestial pole. The whole forms a safety-ladder linking the three levels of the world.

Champeaux, G. de and Dom Sterckx, S. *Introduction au monde des symboles*

One moment does not last; another is tantamount to eternity and you do not even have to choose between these moments, for they do that for you; in other words, they choose them on their own, regardless of what you may think on the subject or object. Of course, as soon as one utters the word ‘instant’, everyone thinks of eternity and everlasting bliss or fire – not the one that smoulders in the grate. Moments, instants – you go to hell, as I say as I make the most and even utmost of the moment when I look at my garden, drinking a gorgeous bottle of Burgundy.

Is that moment our common eternity? The to-be-or (or the or-or) question seems to concern all of us unless we are fed up with eternity, immortality, or Spinoza’s states of mind and bodies that go from ignorance to enlightenment and mental (bodily) health admired by many, especially by those doomed to die at the age of 44 (or whatever Spinoza’s age was on his deathcot). You philosophise with your body, pains, necks, arthritics, and all the ah, oh and uh one can hear until dawn, if one happens to stay in a room next to a Nietzschean philosopher’s den where the latter howls and miaows until the Aurore.

Once again I am in my garden and I do not even wonder if God is among my bushes or in a hole dug by a traditional mole. I know I am more than I am and even if the bush I am looking at were a mere bush and nothing else, I would be as happy as I am now. Of course I don’t say to myself:

Here's a bush behind which

There are many bushes, trees and myths.

They all lead me to God

So I'm quite satisfied with my fate.

Does one go out of something and gets somewhere as if getting anywhere meant something or other? Yes, as we consult our books on art and science, we see a lot of arrows that either pierce poles, rods and stakes, or just fly past them to intimate the existence of the other world, of the Hereafter and even immortality about which our Taoist philosophers wrote so abundantly. They would take off plane-like and suspend their beliefs, disbeliefs and bodies somewhere in midair, looking down on emperors and saying, 'What gift can you offer us? Go to hell.' And emperors would go to Hell, for they were those philosophers' obedient servants, which proves the superiority of Chinese culture and way of life, of death and immortality.

Well, our arrow continues its flight and I, for one, am following it as I go to bed or outdoors, outearths, outlives. Given that I *can* go outlives, I know there is such a thing as outlife and the number of these lives increases as I ponder my next move in the game called 'Arrows, poles and worlds'. The representatives of what is known as the Vienna Circle thought there were only barriers (or barricades) which prevented us from going elsewhere and enjoying multiplicity – I am another one today – and even duplicity. All the dialogues they held with their opponents sounded thus:

'The mountains acted as a natural barrier to the spread of the disease.'

'What disease do you have in mind?'

'Other worlds, back worlds, beyond worlds, the great Beyond, the small Beyond.'

'Why do you think it is a disease and not a salvation?'

'A salvation from what?'

'From the misery of life and our death's imminence and eminence.'

'Enjoy whatever you see or grasp, provided you're not paralysed.'

The opponents say they *are* paralysed and the dialogue comes to an unexpected or expected end: after a while, one begins to expect everything and everyone. If one knocks at one's door, one opens the door and another one salutes one, bowing and scraping. And the first one (or the zero one)

says, 'I've been expecting you ever since I was born. And I wasn't born yesterday, mind you. You'll always be welcome.' And all newspapers let us know that 'Browning stood at the door, welcoming newcomers with a large smile and a pat on the arm.' Robert Browning? Robert Browning, Peter Browning – just our Browning who lost his Christian and Muslim names a long time ago.

There are barriers, posts and they say we are supposed to make the most of them because we are neither immortal nor omniscient and consequently can deal with a limited range of phenomena only. Where is this range? Where are its boundaries? Here are its boundaries, they answer, drawing a few lines under my very nose; or under my feet that rise to the occasion/challenge. I raise my feet to signify my wish to overstep all the bounds written and unwritten under all the members of my body and mind, but my feet drop dead at my very feet and I remain where I am or not, according to the same Taoist philosophers.

'And what about my arrows?' I answer, pulling a few arrows out of my rucksack. (I am backpacking in the wilderness as I follow one of Heidegger's pieces of advice. Anyway backpacking is better than backslapping.)

'Are you in the wilderness?' they ask.

'I am,' I answer.

'Are you wild, then?'

'I am. Life overflows the intelligence.' (I wish to forget both consciousness and knowledge: they mar my enjoyment of many lives and selves.)

'Do you admit that death overflows the body? And also the mind and any kind of anything you single out, name, upload and download for argument's sake?'

Of course we are bound to admit all that and even more, given the omnipresence of the laws of thermodynamics – any dynamics, come to think of it. You dance, dance, dance and drop exhausted on the floor or off a precipice; or into a black hole: there are individuals who like to look and sound cosmic and cosmological. So they dance a dignified polonaise-like dance, reel out of a ballroom, of a castle and fall into a black hole located in the centre of the nearest pavement. They are the first to admit that death overcomes every phenomenon, however huge and unwieldy. So they come out through a white hole and chant some formula or other, following in the footsteps of Taoists, Hindus, Buddhists and so on. They might limit their oratorio to the following combination of words and

sounds: PO PO PO PO PU PU PU PU PI PI PI PI POI POI POI POI. By the way, '*poi*' means 'sing' so that when, in Siberia or elsewhere, within the bounds of the Russian Empire, you hear, 'Sing, sing, sing,' you are supposed to burst into any song you recall on the spur of the moment, otherwise you might be killed with an axe or a cudgel.

You say 'po' and death stops in his tracks, waiting for another po or a pu which is likely to send him to another room, castle or country. I was acquainted with a lady whose utterances were chiefly centred upon this populist incantation so I thought she was suffering from an insurmountable fear of death, which she did not even attempt to surmount. 'So you don't like de Gaulle, do you?'

'Po, po, po – I don't like generals.'

'Who do you like?'

'Pu, pu, pu – emperors.'

'Which emperor did you set your heart upon?'

'Pi, pi, pi – Napoleon.'

Death is just a costume, provided it is a tailor-made costume or course or anything; and anyway, anyway, anyway, anyway. They repeat this anyway so many times I go crazy and ask them not to talk about Epicurus and his garden any more. 'What about Rilke?' they ask. 'I hope you've read him in the original?' By way of an answer, I utter a few German words: *Mutter*, *Futter*, *Butter*. By way of an answer, they launch into a speech in the middle of which you learn that death ought to be the logical culmination of life, not a hostile, Hitler-inspired invader. You take one step in his (death's, not Rilke's) direction. 'Ow, you stepped on my foot!' someone shouts and you say to yourself, calmly, patiently, 'I wish I could step on death's foot.' Anyway, anyway, anyway, anyway, you have to go on like any show or John Doe. And you do go on, falling into step, as they say as they nod their heads, noses, arms and everything. 'You're marching in step now,' they say as they smile and applaud this occurrence, clapping their hands, arms, legs and feet. 'With whom? With what?' you are likely to ask. (And you do put this question to them, whoever they are.) 'With death and destiny,' they answer just by way, en passant. 'With *tantafati*?' you ask and get no answer. What is truth? What is *tanta*? What is *fata Morgana*?

Our death is individual to the point of becoming high and mighty; or low and mighty, if you prefer. Wherever it might be situated (everywhere, everywhere), you dread death in any shape or form or norm. Every word you hear means death, whatever language seems to be used on this and other occasions of this kind; not only 'po' and 'pu', mind you. For instance, one hears M%PKMOIhbukjvfytgvhj,lkm::

Úµ:

whereupon one screams, bursts into tears and some callous neighbours react to this outcry and outburst as follows, ‘Balloons make me nervous – I hate it when they burst.’ The same callous nephew of yours picks up your stick (or one of your crutches) and the word (not only the world) DEATH makes its appearance on the beach.

DEATH

DEATH

DEATH

DEATH

DEATH

DEATH

The nephew and his sadism know no bounds: two hours later, the whole beach is covered with the inscriptions which talk (scream) to us about the omnipresence and omnipotence of death. By way of an answer, a lot of sun-tanned bodies scream too as if every single word were a tiny little coffin or a huge cemetery.

Of course every death is individual and we need neither Heidegger nor Ivan Ivanoff to realise to what extent this statement is true and irremovable. But let my death be announced neither by testy deliriums nor by screams of any kind, however kind this or that kind might turn out to be in the long run. I would rather borrow another bit from W. B. Yeats’ magnificent legacy: a cantankerous acceptance of life.

I accept life in spite of my cantankerous and almost Hamletian (I wish I could say omletian) disposition; a truant one, for sure. Sometimes I am absent from the school of life, playing truant from the school of death as if in the hope of getting over her, for death is her (and whore) sometimes (always, always). And all this means I accept life and do not want to die either as a dog – in a manger (food) or elsewhere – or as an ordinary rose or human being (hog). They say any rose is without a

pourquoi, but it is not without a *pourquoi pas*, if I understand them rightly or wrongly. Actually I am fed up with all these opposites that Taoistically and Buddhistically meet under my very nose, pen, penthouse.

I am supposed to love every phenomenon of life and so I say lovelife and lifelove as often as I can, and I can do it quite often thanks to my computer and the angels whose moral/physical/chemical/financial support lies behind this last will, veil and feel. What do I feel last? And first to some extent? Life, life, every inch of it.

Enjoying every moment of it, every inch, every pinch and punch. Contrary to whatever happens or does not, I enjoy my life, even if I have no idea (not exactly anyway) what all this means. Is my life a substance or just a load of nonsense? I know where I am, more or less, for my house is situated on this Earth, in a particular corner of this Earth, and this patch of it is dear to my heart on account of my garden about which I have already written many pages, although very few people ever come here, which seems to intimate that my garden is not the one where Epicurus drank tea with his disciples. This may also mean that I am not Epicurus and not even one of his disciples – a bad piece of news. Nor do I live in Greece, within its glorious past where so many so-called substances and qualities could be found; and were found, unearthed and studied, according to many sources.

The when is no problem either, given that I have just left my bed, in the middle of the night and not in the middle of nowhere. I am tempted to believe that the writing desk on which I put my hands in order to touch any available wood is situated in the middle of everywhere, in the very midst of it; otherwise I would not be able to enjoy life to the utmost. The utmost and even a modest-most cannot have been thrown into the suburbs, living on the outskirts of the civilisations, cultures and triumphs of human nature. Everything worthy of note is always in the centre, at the very core of existence and its priorities and ecstasies. In other words, I am in the middle of yet another ecstasy, hugging its very core – cordially, cordially. What kind of ecstasy is it? Is it a sexual variety of ecstasy? Hardly: I am not making love to my writing desk; nor to my computer. Nor are we in the middle of a bed, however magnificent and libido-oriented. Everything is libido-oriented, as Freud put it many times, but this time he would have been wrong, had he repeated his formula in the middle of this summer night. So he did not repeat it; at least I did not hear anything to this effect.

My neighbour is not the only foul-play bloke in the area and in the world that smells funny, to put it mildly and unkindly, hurting the feelings of those whose bodies and souls have been living in our earthly hell for years, not to say centuries (former lives, karma, samsara). My Moscow friend, too, puts it rather mildly as he speaks of the universal state of affairs in these terms, 'There's something in the fridge that smells mouldy.' On reflection, however, you realise that if something does smell mouldy in your fridge, the whole fridge does; and that is *quite* something, much more than *just* something. The same goes for the world where, as we are likely to realise in the course of our world-wide investigation, everything smells mouldy, foul. But if you are bent on putting everything mildly – everybody and everywhere and every moment – you just say, 'The world smells of onions,' meaning you are about to eat a delicious lunch; or shed a few tears.

That is how a lot of optimists treat the world, turning to languages for support, solace and deliverance. For all their tear-jerking nuances, onions sound much better than karma, collateral damage, ecological disasters and genocides. You go on enjoying your lunch while people starve to death or another miserable life under your very taste buds, under your intestines. The bomb killed four soldiers and three civilians. 'Mothers always cry when they're chopping onions,' you say as you swallow another morsel of eel.

'Whose mothers?' they ask.

'Soldiers', you answer.

'What about civilians and *their* mothers, fathers and nephews?' they ask.

'They too cry when chopping onions,' you answer.

A bomb exploded at one of London's busiest railway stations this morning. 'One of the Paris metro stations smells of garlic,' you say instead. And if someone points out that we lost the power to name things, you answer thus, 'Crush the garlic into a paste using a pestle and mortar. Don't you know that the medicinal values of garlic are well-documented?' You pick up your napkin and remove the remains of the lunch from your lips and cheeks.

Wittgenstein says that some things can be 'shown but not said', and he proceeds with his explanation of the world and its mysteries (there are none, according to him); he shows the things he is talking about. Then he asks his students whether they saw anything at all, and they say, 'Yes, we saw your eyes, your frowns, your mouth, your cheeks and also your cheek.'

‘What?’

‘Your impudence, if you prefer.’

‘Where did you see it?’

‘In the right corner of your mouth. And also in the fist you raised in a gesture of defiance. Once again you defied metaphysics and God, we suppose.’

Realism is both in and out of fashion, and fashion-conscious individuals either get down to facts or go up and beyond, often having no idea of whither they direct and misdirect their steps, legs and wings. Actually they are hardly even aware of time, of their tendency to wither like grass or any other living thing. They might believe that by the grace of God they will live forever, displaying in public their youthful dispositions and unwrinkled bodies. That is why they strive for all sorts of beyonds and ups where, according to their calculations, immortality is more common than on the surface of the Earth, even if you devote the greater part of your time to aerobics and lying in the grass.

Joyce did not seem to care about physical immortality, devoting his time to spiritual or rather poetical immortality eventually bestowed upon him (to all intents and purposes) by *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. From his point of view, getting down to facts was the only means of spreading one’s literary life across the whole of time and even eternity; unless eternity is just a point across which nothing could ever spread. He thought that sudden reality – or any reality, for that matter – would smash romanticism (and religion?) ‘into pulp’. Apparently he was sure one could not lead a happy life in pulp’s company, even if the pulp in question was fruity and unquestionably delicious. I disagree with him completely – not only because I often follow my mother’s advice: ‘Mash the bananas to a pulp and then mix in the yoghurt.’ I do it almost daily, using for the purpose a Russian variety of yoghurt called ‘*riazhenka*’.

In your deathgarden you enjoy every leaf and rose to the utmost: no point in enjoying them and everything else otherwise. In the very middle of this enjoyment – at its very core, one might say – your doctor calls you and says, ‘I’ve got two pieces of news for you.’

‘One of them is good, I suppose,’ you answer.

‘That’s right,’ he answers.

‘And the other bad, as the saying goes.’

‘I wouldn’t say it is a saying we’re dealing with on this particular occasion.’

‘What is it, then?’ you ask. ‘Death, as usual?’

‘You don’t have Aids,’ says the doctor.

‘What’s the bad news?’ you ask.

‘Cirrhosis of the liver. But you won’t die of Aids.’

‘Great! Thanks a lot!’

Something along these lines (or rather *down* these lines) took place in Rorty’s life, death and Hereafter; whereupon he began to quote a lot of poems from memory. ‘Even on one’s deathbed poetry has a variety of uses.’ In his shoes – and I *am* in his shoes, everyone is – I would *write* a few poems, a few last poems. Of course all poetry is death poetry, as one of Robert Frost’s opponents put it, and in the light of this unremarkable remark, all poems are really last poems, not even onebeforelast ones. Never mind, never mind. Once upon a time I hoped my last word would be ‘duty’. ‘Never mind’ goes one better, doesn’t it? Two better, rather. Well, I might content myself with ‘never’ or ‘mind’, even if, on the threshold of death, I am likely to think only in terms of my body and its pleasures.

EVER MIND

Body, body, body, body.

Never, never, never, never.

(Not even a glorious one,

Not even a glorious one.)

Mind, mind, mind, mind.

Glory, glory, glory, glory.

Nowadays we are aware of the imperfection of our universe, of the rottenness of every particle, be it an above-moon atom or an under-moon sub-atom. Everything is rotten and consequently nothing is excluded from the Earth and the universe that we inhabit willy-nilly, cursing our destiny and incapacity to fly beyond all the Milky and Creamy Ways. Of course there are philosophers (in our midst, in our bit of a fix) who say that, thanks to the Milky and Creamy Ways, we can improve upon the topology and topography of out-of-universe kingdoms. ‘All you have to do is drink a cup of coffee after pouring some milk or cream into it.’

‘Do all outer spaces look and smell like coffee?’

‘Like black coffee, yes,’ they answer.

‘But we like black coffee,’ we answer. ‘We like espresso. We never take our coffee white.’

‘Do you like black holes?’

‘No.’

‘If you pour some cream into a black hole, it is bound to grow white.’

‘When?’

‘Instantly. We only talk about instant coffee.’

‘Instant coffee just doesn’t compare with freshly ground coffee.’

‘In outer spaces it does. These spaces belong in an anti-world.’

The obese used to move towards the centre of the Earth (after eating a thousand hearty meals washed down with heady wines). The Earth is located at the very centre of the universe. And its or her centre can be found within its centre, at its or her core. Thus they reasoned: they had no idea what Copernicus and his model looked like; and they had never heard about Aristarchus Samosky.

That is how they lived within the golden day and age: above the moon, under the crust of the Earth. Today we can travel to the moon. On the other hand – or foot, as some of us say, thinking about the proverbial foot in the grave – we spend the greater part of our eternity in the bosom of the Earth; but not at her centre, no way, no centre, no two ways about it. And Aristotle – along with the Egyptians and their mummifications – thought that the heart was far more important than the brain. Even today many people agree with him, pointing alternately to their hearts and a bunch of orphans, but what Aristotle (and the Egyptians) really meant had nothing to do with charity balls and *restos du coeur*. Once and for all – for two thousand years at least – Aristotle underestimated the brain to which he attributed an inborn capability to cool blood which might otherwise become overheated. His heart

thought the brain was to convey a few gallons of icy mineral water to the blood vessels and cells; on a regular basis, every hour. Of course the water used in the course of this ritual was neither mineral nor sparkling. But he did affirm that philosophers and their brains and bodies were allowed to avail themselves of sparkling mineral water. So when a philosopher died, they would say, shaking their heads and hearts, ‘The sparkle went out of him.’

When the Egyptians mummified the body for reincarnation, they had no use for the brain which was thrown away in disgust as if the whole ritual were compulsory. Not only do you throw the brain away, flinging it out of the window, aiming at the nearest rubbish dump or dumper truck, but you are also supposed to do it in disgust. If asked why they did it so theatrically, the Egyptians would answer, ‘We are showing our anger and disgust at this brainless and heartless thing, at its treatment of our bodies. The cold water those brains of ours send through our bodies is neither cold nor mineral nor sparkling.’ Aristotle was not so brutal, so callous: to him every particle of life was precious, provided he could find this particle on Earth, not in heaven where Plato watered and pruned his ideas. Nevertheless, he (Aristotle) rated the heart much higher than the brain with its cold, mineral, still or sparkling water. He never tired of singing hymns to the heart and its heart of hearts where he installed both perception and memory; and motivation.

That is how the phenomenology-steeped brain talks and mocks, mocking the achievements and progress of the heart. How does the heart progress?

FIRST STAGE

SECOND STAGE

THIRD STAGE

At first you feel pity for all those who, instead of staying in Limbos and Mumbo Jumbos, were born into families and worlds where they suffer, as the Buddha put it and did. ‘Were you born?’ you ask.

‘Yes, we were, otherwise you wouldn’t see us.’

‘I see unborn creatures, you know. I also see elves, gnomes and their acolytes.’

At second, at third and at fourth, I feel pity for the animals they steal for the sake of their purses, wellbeing, wellliving, yachts, palaces and castles on the Earth – on her sods, you sods. Of course I have to leave my garden and join the outside world, determined as I am to understand a tiny, little, bit, wee, wee, to wit – the first thing about the ways and fleshs and their inhabitants, their owners. I leave my inner world and listen to a dog who (he, she, their, everywhere) barks at me as if I were (as if I were anywhere) encroaching upon his, her, their, everything. I do not encroach upon anything when I lie on my couch, lying through my teeth – to myself, to my teeth, to my couch. I say I do not exist and only a whiff of something, somebody – of everything – pervades the vertical world I can see from where I lie, stand, talk and mock; eternity, eternity, the same eternity one could feel if one could, would and mood discard all cards, all anniversary/get-well cards.

It is vertical; everything is and has been ever and forever.

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They steal dogs and sell them; in England, of all places, countries, nooks and crannies. A passer-by passes by and sees a dog in a nook – not in the manger, mind you. In the twinkling of an eye, this passer-by turns into a picker-up-by: he picks the dog up and the latter does not bite him. Why doesn't he bite him unto death, into Kierkegardian death or just death, plain death? It was plain stupidity on the dog's part not to have killed his body-snatcher outright, then and there; and everywhere. After a while, they may find a dog or two: emaciated and emancipated to some extent. (There were pictures of emaciated dogs on the cover of the magazine.) My heart, o my heart or just my heart without any o or a or hey or ho. Where did I hear this heart of mine? In a poem, as usual. O heart, heart, heart. I do not remember the poem; I remember the heart.

To feel what I feel, I need three hearts at least, and all these hearts should be as big as the Big Bang and much bigger than any Big Brother. A Big Brother comes and says, 'I'm your Big Brother.'

'And I'm a Big Heart.'

'Do you wish to meet your Big Sister?'

'Go to hell, all of you. You're big brains in disguise, aren't you?'

What does my brain talk to me about, my Mahlerian, Valerian brain? To Mahler all forests, birds and nooks and brooks talked day in, day out. As for myself, sometimes I can hear only a day out, or just out, which has nothing in common with nirvana, having everything in uncommon with it, whatever it is, was and does. My brain talks about Aristotelian and Kantian categories: place, mess, Mass, chocolate mousse. My brain does not even remind me of I, of ergo sum. Of course it works: brains are never workless unless you are brainless, worthless and just less than anything down to the brain. So you work, my dear brain, day and night, day and night, day after day and after any days, nights and eternities. What have you come up with tonight, today, this morning? You inform me that the weather is not as fine as they say on the radio, in many cars that listen to the radio as they swallow roads and their stretches and shoulders. Fine, fine, fine – that is what they hear and your psychiatrists and healers say it is called Positive Thinking.

I say, 'This is good.' And I add, 'This is good. And this is also good. These are very good goods. Not gods – goods. And gods, and gods.' My thinking goes on, goods on, gods on:

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GOOD

BEST

FINE

MESS

Someone said, 'The only Mass you can go to this morning is Mess.'

What about tomorrow?

O! never shall sun that tomorrow see. Thus speak or rather intimate human vegetables whose beds are surrounded by nurses and nieces: Kill me, kill me, kill me. 'Or just call in Lady Macbeth – she's far more efficient than any of you.' Of course one can say that any human, even the one we may call 'healthy and wealthy' is a vegetable; not even a tree, mind you. Not the tree of knowledge, not the tree of lust, whatever they say, those vegetables or leaves of grass who open up newspapers and tell us, their voices trembling, 'We tremble to think what will happen tomorrow.'

'What's the news?' we ask them anxiously, our voices doing their best to convey our anxiety to our listeners.

'Sex attacks in schools triple due to net porn.'

'Tomorrow they're sure to quadruple. Kill me today, I beg of you.'

But there are other points of view and they seem to stem from another group of vegetables called philosophers or something along these lines. They continue to talk about verticality, about the motionless motion that builds bridges that bridge the gap between time and eternity, death and life, mortality and immortality, knowledge and ignorance. The previous sentence built four bridges, but I wonder if it is enough, if only for the moment which, to all outward appearance, bears no traces of verticality, human mythology. You spot a group of trees and, inspired by Proust or someone else, feel not only vegetation and summertimes and autumns, but also Adam's sin or one of his (their) suppers. You are Adam; and you are also Eve, for God created only you, as Descartes put it in his major work entitled *My Doubt*. 'I doubt if I see anything either in this room or under my bed. I doubt if I hear

anything either here or there, over there, up there, beyond the clouds that I don't see either. But I do know that God created only me with all doubts and shouts. Ow-Ow-Ow-Ow-Ow!!! I wish to know what all this is about. I wish to know everything about abouts.'

You wake up and do not understand the first thing about the thing you see in front of you – a part of your bed, in all probability. Is this a bed or a coffin? you ask yourself as you touch your body to find out whether it is warm or cold. That exercise or ritual reminds you of Japan, of Japanese restaurants where they often ask you the following question, 'Your sake, Mister?'

'I'm listening.'

'Are you all ears, Mister?'

'Yes, I am, all of them.'

'Do you like your sake hot or cold?'

At least you know there is such a thing as Japan and, to all inward appearances (to all your thoughts and intuitions), it is a country or at least a realm where a few restaurants can be found either after a careful search or straightaway, round the nearest corner. You also recall the taste of sake and even the film devoted to this taste, although you cannot place its director, for all his fame and glory, art and sake. Yes, you also remember the number of bottles he drank with his collaborator; or perhaps on his own. You remember the empty bottles (30 or 40) you saw in a documentary, but the room where they had been arrayed by someone or other was as empty as the bottles, which might have meant that the director and his producer were gone forever.

'Well, doesn't matter,' I say to myself, putting a (Zen) Buddhist smile on my face. 'I'm this director, producer, assistant and so on. There's only one point, one eternity, one Proust, one Ouzo, one Oozy, one Moosey, one I. And all of them are here – in my heart I'm touching right now.' The point is that, if there is such a thing as one point, only one solitary point where everything and everybody fall into place – instead of being scattered all around space – I am as eternal as the zero law of thermodynamics. Time passes by as Yeats' horsemen do day and night, night and day, and I just take note of its passage and remind it that it has no rite of passage. No events, please, as the Chinese say, and I am not even sure they add 'please' whenever they venture out of silence – into the open, into the world of words and wise sayings.

A leaf is flying by and I say 'bye-bye' to it; and yet I do not have to say anything, for I am no longer a child, for all my second childhoods. When I *was* a child, staying for a while in the middle of my first childhood and twenty-second babyhood, I was supposed to say 'please' and 'thank you' rather often; and if I happened to be remiss in my duties, I heard my mother's voice, 'Very politely the little boy asked if he might have another piece of cake.' More often than not, there were no cakes in sight;

nor were there any inside my heart, the Aristotelian seat of motivation. In other words, my mother's key remark – one of her leitmotifs, rather – had nothing to do with pastries, being a sort of semiological sign designed to act as an aide-memoire.

'I'd like to go to the zoo.'

'Very politely the little boy asked if he might have another piece of cake.'

'I'd like a sandwich.'

'Very politely the little boy asked if he might have another piece of cake.'

'I'm afraid of diabetes, Mummy. That's why I'm asking for a tuna sandwich.'

'Very politely the little boy asked if he might have another piece of cake.'

Proust speaks of *des gisements profonds de mon sol mental*, which might be translated with the aid of the word 'deposits': mineral/oil/coal deposits; or mental deposits, the odds and ends one gathers in one's childhood because, according to those thinkers and poets, everything comes from one's childhood. If you feel a sort of revelation in your mature age or as a middle-aged man-woman-child-corpse, it must have been buried in your childhood or your unconscious for many years before coming to the fore and shedding many lights on your present condition, predicament and mythology. My mother's leitmotiv-like remark is just another reflection of the verticality I hinted at some time ago as I tried to piece together all these ends without end that make up the make-up of my immortality. I say 'good-bye' to the minutes that come, go and vanish into the same air, be it thin or thick, while I experience the immobility and rootedness (spotrootedness) associated with the abolition of time and even space – to some extents at least. My mother used to say, 'Very politely the little boy asked if he might have another piece of cake,' applying this sentence (eternity-sentence) to various states, situations and problems, unifying them, putting them into the same nutshell where Plotinus' One opens One's arms as One waits for the elect, for motionless people. (No, in Plotinus' doctrine you climb, haul yourself up by your bootstraps or fly like a rocket they launched to Venus.)

Of course you can quote the Bible instead of talking about pastries, but the world is a huge pastry from which one can get all the delights one chances upon in the Koran, among other sacred books. There is a brook and a lot of vineyards above it – at least that is how my interpretation of the Muslim paradise is depicted by my heart, my seat of seats. On the other hand, one should on no account treat roughly our Mother Earth – the rule we come across in many treaties rejected offhandedly by Donald Drump and his cronies (and duckies). Let us assume that you work up a real appetite climbing in the mountains; so do I, although I seldom, if ever, climb in the mountains. And I would kill a lot of wild ducks (sparing Ibsen's creature, however) if my mother's warning did not ring in my ears, imparting to my all-merciful heart that I should neither pluck any fruit nor gather shellfish

without asking permission to do so. In other words, I should not be selfish – Your attitude shows a selfish disregard for others and the Earth; this kind of thing.

This is an all-embracing leitmotiv (my mother's) that teaches us an eternal truth where we find our body crouching in front of an altar, an icon – in the middle of the church where everything awaits the Last Judgement. But the verticality we are dealing with may also spare us the trials and tribulations related to this Judgement, to the end of the road, to the end of all tethers. If we accept and deserve the oneness suggested by this vertical feeling, myth, fact and gene, we shall be spared any change either for better or worse.

In the book I chanced upon in Petersburg last month, I read that nothing can go any further. If our life does not live up to our ideals and standards, it will never live otherwise, for all our revolutions, petitions, demonstrations and strikes. You strike, you strike (a drum, a drum), but the verticality on which you seem to perch does not allow you to budge an inch. Either you are immortal or you are not, it seems to say.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Do you prefer horizontality and Russian roulette?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘The Russians go tearing along the road after the bus.’

‘What bus? What road?’

‘The road to communism, to their *avenir radieux, voyons*.’

If everything is not there and everywhere, you are *not* and there is no point in looking for the point where you can find your immortality; and even your life. Perhaps it starts from the One depicted, felt and praised by Plotinus, and his One is every-every-every-every-one-one-one-where-where. The point is, however, that Pascal's start and finish soar into the sky *elsewhere*, namely at the Cross which is a point to some extent, in spite of its extent. Pascal maintains that Jesus Christ will agonise till the end of the world, time, space, and our imagination agonises with Him: no sleeps, no beeps we can hear now and then if our machines are on. Another verticality, isn't it? The same verticality – it goes without saying, without walking along all these verticalities. How could you tell one verticality from another? You walk along them (Baudelaire's forest of symbols) and say to yourself, ‘Here's my mother, here's the Bible, here's the original sin, here's the original sin in translation.’

All right, you agonise with Christ and you do not sleep – neither in your sleep nor during your wakefulness, the fullness of your misery. Does your agony satisfy you to the utmost? Or partially? Is

that what they mean when talking about the joy you are supposed to feel upon feeling (touching, munching) a leaf of grass and hearing any Mass, either in B Minor or in D Major?

I probably agonise on account of Christ, if Pascal's bet is still on the agenda, permitting one to win in the domain where milk-rivers, cream-lakes and whisky dwell without saying anything, not even, 'O galore.' A commentator speaks of this phenomenon thus, 'They reside, reside, reside, and do not say anything.'

If history exists somewhere, this history of ours and yours began a long time ago, like any ego, even if this or that ego is not an ego but just, just, just – go, go, go away; no one needs you, not even history. What I do and experience now did not come into existence yesterday, but did it well before any yesterdays, even before The Beatles' *Yesterday* (which seems unthinkable). In Petersburg I chanced upon a book in which there are 36 lectures and a picture of Proust, and Proust's presence on the cover speaks volumes about the contents of the book: time, memory, pastries, eternity. Upon awakening his hero finds a part of himself, along with curtains and the light oozing and seeping through all the chinks one can find in the room where the action was set some time ago. When? Nothing starts anew because history goes back and back, and even in relation to the very last back it is still very long, as long as Soviet queues. All right, today no one knows what you are talking about when you enlarge upon the queues one could see and join in Soviet shops and in front of their front doors. The thing of the past, they say as they wave their hands around and about: waving them around, just around without any about does not work any more. Queue, queue, how so? How come? All right, try and concentrate on serpents, on boas, for instance. Boa, boa? A feather boa? No, no, no way. A large, strong snake, found in South and Central America, that kills animals and birds by wrapping itself around them and crushing them. Crushing whom? The Soviet people? You mean, the Russians? The Russians whose army violated a lot of laws and regulations in the Crimea and in other parts of Ukraine?

Well, Proust's hero opens his eyes and sees a dribble or a trickle of light coming from one of the chinks about which he knows nothing, not yet. After all, he is still – if only in part – affected by Morpheus's presence; by his arms, in particular. Once again, Morpheus throws his arms round him, and gives him a hug, which puts such a weight on the hero's eyelids that his eyes grow blind and the light disappears from them in the twinkling of an eye. (That is where the idiom comes from.) But the hero is still alive and kicking: many individuals live and act with their eyes closed – Nô actors, for instance. While keeping his eyes wide shut, the hero ponders over the light he saw several units (seconds, minutes) ago and says to himself, 'I must have seen a trickle of water or of blood, otherwise I wouldn't have used the verbs "to ooze" and "to seep". Pesticides are seeping out of farmland and into

the water supply. I read this piece of information in *Le Figaro*, if I'm not mistaken. And the water I saw might have come from that farmland. And yet I didn't go to our country house situated near a farmland, not far from two heaps of pesticides. From now on, I'll drink only mineral water, only Volvic or Evian or Châteldon.'

No, no, Nô, no – history did not get under way either yesterday or the day before, otherwise no one would touch upon those pesticides and their presence in our glasses, tea cups and champagnes. Besides, Proust's hero was not born yesterday or last year; and yet at the beginning of the novel he looks rather green. He is likely to look green as long as he is unable to find verticality, along with immortality, history and mythology. 'When you've finished your worksheets, clip them together and hand them in to me,' said God and Gabriel obeyed His order.

Gisements profonds de mon sol mental

PAST PRESENT FUTURE ETERNITY IMMORTALITY MYTHOLOGY
 VERTICALITY TREE OF KNOWLEDGE TREE OF DEATH RELATIVES AND THEIR
 SWEETS RELATIVES AND THEIR CARESSES MUD GOLD BOA BEAUTÉ
 LUXE
 HARMONY DUTY

Proust and his hero are not the only individuals whose ego, conscience and heart must come to terms with the world at the moment when all these substances take leave of the Queen of Night and join the crowd of mortals. These mortals too open their eyes – not at the same moment – and wonder what they are doing in those space-time-bed spots. Aristotle was no exception to the rule, although he worked harder than all our workaholics and might have spent only two or three hours in bed each night. Upon coming to his senses and their Plato-stigmatised nonsenses, he thought about 'originative sources' (whatever they are) and of the things to come or rather come-to-be. And he also said to himself that what he felt around his heart belonged to the sphere of 'matter' and also to that of 'form' of which he had some inkling, according to his hands and their exploration. Indeed, a few moments ago, his adroit hands set about fingering his ribs and thighs which gave him an idea of what his body was to look like at the end of his physiological and topological investigation. Both matter and form were lying under his very nose, but he was in doubt as to the presence of his personal originative source without which neither matter nor form could have come into being.

At some point Aristotle is bound to realise he cannot last eternally; in other words he is a come-to-be-and-pass-away, be he a newcomer or an old one. In other words, he is at one time, but at another

time, which might run parallel to the first time he hit upon, he is not, and nothing in the world can make him be within that second time. The Beatles had a string of number-one hits in the 1960s, but John Lennon is no longer among the quick so even hits do not turn one into an eternal is – to the detriment of not. Of course both Aristotle and John Lennon are immortal to some extent or all extents and times. But, to all intents, extents and purposes, we are not talking about illusory immortality bestowed upon hit-makers and epoch-making works and their authors. ‘For whereas some things *are* of necessity, viz. the eternal things, others of necessity *are not*,’ as Aristotle put it. ‘I’m not of necessity, I’m not of necessity, I’m not of necessity,’ he kept on repeating with gusto and everyone knows that almost any repetition makes you feel drowsy. It is therefore little wonder that, after a while, Aristotle and some other peripatetics fell asleep.

Aristotle was neither a Hindu nor a Christian; nevertheless he took the soul (or psyche) into consideration, talking about its virtue and capacities, which led some peripatetics to declare that he confused the soul with the heart. But at least he did not get the feeling that every morning he received from heaven yet another, brand-new soul. According to Plato, that would have resulted in everlasting chaos. But there are individuals for whom every day does signal the arrival of a new soul associated with a new birth, a new *vita*, a new vista of delights (a new villa). And others say that souls are like cats: they do not tolerate the presence of a stranger on their territory, on the playground of their capacities and virtues.

Upon awakening, those others neither look at their curtains to find out if they will walk along the Champs Elysées nor touch their bodies. (Let us not forget that Aristotle did it to make sure his thighs and eyes were in working order.) They say to themselves, ‘What do I care about my body? It is my soul I rely upon in matters of Paradise and the tickets we should get to get up there without any hindrance.’ And then they try and touch their souls, thinking probably about Tertullian for whom the soul was quite material – like anything else. Within the history of the early Church there are many fathers, and many people are confused and puzzled by their number, saying they needed only one father to be conceived and born. So, whenever in need of a father of the Church, they say Tertullian and nod their heads and probably shake their hearts to pay homage to Aristotle’s doctrines. And if some others say, ‘Tertullian never said anything of the kind,’ they answer, ‘He said, “Credo because it is absurd, as absurd as the theatre of the absurd. And I adore Ionesco.”’

Everything happens now, yet but for the past we would not feel anything as acutely as Dante did as he went up and down, worming himself under fences, worming through planets and stars. (Thanks to Virgil and his power, the impenetrable walls one is sure to stumble upon in Hell were nothing but a number of fences under which he crawled and crawled, holding Dante’s hand tight.) An old lady I met a long time ago – that time is old too – used to say after hearing about our next meeting and light meal, ‘*Quel plaisir en perspective.*’ When worming my way through the past and warming to its

unforgettable texture, I seldom, if ever, come across *plaisirs* and delights because every loss, every horror far outweighs any *déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

THE UNFINISHED STORY

In Belgium I bought the *Daily Mail* where I found a slice of life, a chunk of the past, that will never become a thing of the past, whatever theories we come up with in order to live happily ever after; or at least ever and anon. In many diaries one might have chanced upon this chunk, if those diaries had been published right after the Second World War. But the war I am talking about was so boundless and unbearable that another monument to its mountain of horrors about which Conrad knew nothing would have been tantamount to the wilful destruction of the rest of humankind. So many humans and even rests had been destroyed that one grew weary, weary, weary, being permanently either on the brink of a nervous breakdown or outright suicide (blowing one's brains right out). These diaries, finished and unfinished, saw the light of day only some months ago. In the late Forties, Stalin was fed up with the stories of famine and hardship that reminded people of how ex-Leningrad had withstood one of the longest and deadliest sieges in history. Even the unfinished or death- or KGB-finished diaries were impounded or destroyed so that what remains amounts to a few remains of the endless night. Stalin was not fond of those who diminished his greatness, writing 'diminuendo' or even 'pianissimo' under his portraits and signatures.

But the stories survived and the number of tales far exceeds the number of those who wrote them as if to prove that *logos* is eternal; humans are not. One of these stories – storytelling was appreciated in India (Mahabharata) and Italy (Boccaccio) – tells us about a woman (the storyteller) who paid a visit to a flat, not to a number of human beings. And yet there were two human beings in this flat, contrary to what might have been expected: in Leningrad, an average of 900 died every day. And the day on which this visit took place, at that particular place, was just another day as if time had not been paying attention to the number of death. In this case, only the number of minutes and hours counts because someone – Archangel Michael perhaps – counts them so as not to miss anything in the space-time-grace region. The storyteller knocked at the door and nobody answered: there were only two bodies in the flat and these bodies were so emaciated they could not answer anything, not even the question, 'Who are you?' Of course this question cannot be answered by any philosopher unless this and that philosopher are brought to a police station where this kind of question is not out of the ordinary. It is rather in the ordinary, within it, at the very core and heart of it, so if you are asked, 'Your name?' you answer, 'Mister X.'

Another storyteller talks about those who survived through greed, murder and cannibalism. Are there any vertical lines and conducts in the world I face, to which I turn my back? (To which I shall always turn my back as long as I have any back.) You say to yourself (no use talking to others on this occasion), 'I'll eat this corpse, otherwise I won't survive.'

And the corpse answers, 'I'm not a corpse. I'm still alive.'

'What does it matter,' says the cannibal. 'We're all corpses to some extent.'

'But I'm not a corpse to *that* extent,' answers the corpse.

'To *what* extent are you the corpse?' asks the cannibal.

Newly discovered diaries reveal the horror of the Nazi siege of Leningrad where 800,000 died. You might forget eight; you do not forget to eat, but you forget eight and all those zeros without which our eight has no weight. You say, 'Eight.' So what? One might think you are playing roulette in a casino, '13 or 19 or 45.' Our children often have an argument about what game to play. We do know what game to play. 15,000 died. 111,000 died. 800,000 800,000 800,000 800,000 800,000 800,000. Not OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. Not, not, not, not, not, not, not, not. NOT O.

The figure is around 26 times greater than the 31,000 murders that took place in the siege of Aleppo (it lasted four years). In Aleppo, an average of 20 people died every day. In Leningrad it was 900. My parents would have died there, had they not moved to Moscow in 1939. I would not have been born. 'Did you have any problems getting here?' 'My parents died prior to my birth.' 'Better luck next time.' In the kingdom of the unborn you often hear the dialogues in which the born congratulate their counterparts – are they really our counterparts? – doing it ineptly most of the time. The unborn are at pains to explain how the absence by which they are conspicuous came about: they were *yearning* for birth and the Earth. 'It is my mother you should be congratulating – she did all the hard work,' they might say before losing themselves in details. 'What kind of work?' asks a woman as she continues to turn her table.

'Do you know what happened in Leningrad?'

'When? After the assassination of Kirov? Stalin's purges?'

'Kirov my foot! During the blockade.'

'Yes. Not exactly.'

'My father was rendered impotent.'

‘So I should congratulate your father, shouldn’t I?’

‘My mother saw her menstrual cycles cease and her breasts harden and stop producing milk.’

‘Well, I’ll congratulate them both. By the way, there’s an overtone of regret in your answers. Do you have any regrets about the way things worked out? Don’t you realise how horrible our life has always been?’

‘I would have enjoyed every minute of it, every flower, every drop of rain.’

One may dismiss these horrors saying, ‘Leningrad. What is it? A name, not a thing.’ (Your birth. What is it? A name, not a thing.) Air raids. The city had only enough provisions to last for a month. What? After that? No *pirojkis*, *kulebiacs*. What are they? No way. There is no way, anyway, as pessimists say. They say more than that, more than any end of the world that does not end for all my and Maya’s efforts. All right, we are engulfed by a new era, not by death and its emissaries, its consequences: hell, hell, hell, hell, hell. This new era means our children are different and they will live in the Trump-freed, Manfred-like era where, where, where, what, who,

No change. What came after 2012 did not come: it goes from worse to worse, from worse to everlasting, ever-ever-ever worse. What comes? Or never comes? If one, others and those come from a *sacred well*, I will welcome them with all my arms wide open. Where is it? This well? Let us rely on logos, (un)written words and statements that will not be completely distorted by the media.

WELL

WELL

WELL

WELL

WELL

WELL

WELL

Where is the middle of everywhere?

I

I

I

I

I

As they say or everything does.

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

BLOCKADE

My wife speaks of the blockades that my everything suffers because, because, because, and so on, on, on, on, on, on, on, on. All right – on, on, on, on, on, on, on, on. We should not say that life is just on, should we?

Life is on whether you are alive or half-dead or born, unborn, inborn, on, on, and it is better to make the most of it, even if what you do make of it amounts to less and least. But that least must be felt and performed as *at least*, otherwise our life would not look and sound like a work of art. ‘I’ve never heard Rostropovich,’ as a young cellist told me last year, ‘but I met him – at least, he shook my hand once.’ *At least* permits you to look at it and, drinking a glass of orange juice, say once in a while, ‘How beautiful!’

‘What are your new companions in misfortune like?’

‘Oh, they’re great.’

‘What are your new companions in fortune like?’

‘Oh, they’re great.’

‘How are you feeling now?’

‘Great.’

‘How are you crying now?’

‘Great.’

Fortune and misfortune are alike. So are great and small, smiles and tears. The Chinese say a lot on all those subjects and we hear them talk about a sage who steps aside, steps down and become invisible and unknowable; no one knows him, not even himself. Him does not know self and that is how a true sage, self and elves live and prosper – in a garden; in my garden, for instance. There is a well in my garden, but I do not know it well, and I am not even sure it is a well or just a modern sculpture whose outlines remind one of a hole in the ground from which some water is forced to the surface by natural pressure; or rather by unnatural pressure, by a sort of lever with which you pull up either the Earth or a bucket of water.

This well does not look like a wooden door in a Cornish lane that conceals a well, another well – a well-bred, well-brought-up, well-adjusted, well-argued well. I have never been to Cornwall, I am sorry to say, but it is enough to open a few books, an encyclopaedia to visit every corner and fissure of the Earth and heaven. I open the book entitled *Celtic Mysteries* and see a lot of Chinese mysteries, Siberian mysteries in it. A lot of international mysteries and pages. As W. B. Yeats put it,

The borders of our minds are ever shifting

And many minds can flow into one another...

And create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

Do the borders of my mind shift?

MY MIND

MY MIND

HIS MIND

MY MIND

MY MIND

HER MIND

THEIR ROBOT'S MIND

On the other hand (on the other mind is far more important) you can follow in a Chinese philosopher's mindsteps and grow (slowly and certainly) non-existent, for existence is non-existence and vice versa; and verses vices. All this has been known and rehearsed in many theatres from time immemorial, from the time to which they continue to erect memorials where epithets 'gold' and 'mould-like' stand out, down and, given the age of their standings, you can find them down below – under the Earth, its depths and bottoms. They say that the truth can only be found at the bottom of the well as if it could not be found and picked up at the bottom of your heart and inside your bottom dollar. You open it up and find several truths among which you are sure to chance upon robots, their minds and their final victory over the human variety of mind. Actually, our scientists came up with the theory that seems to soothe our crying babies, as we call our nerves and stresses and messes (and Misses, as some misogynists say). Our basic, fundamental and unavoidable imperfection will save us from robots and their destructive impulses: we are too foolish and ludicrous to create anything apart from the *Divina Commedia* and Shakespeare's masterpieces. But robots are too foolish and rudimentary to ape any creation of this kind: a Beethoven quartet, for instance. So they will not murders us, those robots and their descendants, because they are unable to write and duly perform Macbeth's monologue in which he speaks about idiots – about humans and robots.

My wife said, 'I'm a druid,' and I am not even sure she added 'you know', which would not have altered anything either in my perception of her feats or in the daily routine of our life punctuated by emails and wells. And by Orson Welles sometimes – when I am eager to show her *his* version of *Macbeth*. There are a few wells I am thinking about and in all of them one can see Thales whose attention was drawn to the stars – an ordinary predisposition in Ancient Greece where they knew that the Earth was not at the core of the cosmos. (They said, 'Aristarchus of Samos,' whence comes 'The Patriarch of all Russia.')

You follow in Thales' footsteps, fall and find yourself at the bottom of a well, which enables you to avail yourself of the verticality you have been dreaming of for the greater part of your conscious years. Not only are you able to connect your miserable existence to the realms where a small train shuttles constantly between rivers and maidens, banquets and rose-covered beds, but you acquire the complete knowledge of chakras, mantras and dharmas. You should not hanker after the

global vision of the stars because one star is enough to tell you every truth you need to know; and offer you every beauty you thirst for as you lie or sit or jump somewhere.

The same train shuttles between India, China and Europe where you can occasionally find your happiness, as the French put it. But for the moment this happiness is not located in France where I lived 33 years going to the Parc de Versailles and other king-permeated places, to fountains and Fontainebleau. This morning I am in China to which I travelled last year, thinking about I-King-Queen-Ching-Golden-Mean; and the meanness of other worlds and dimensions. ‘Allow the foot to walk according to its capacity,’ they say as they point at your foot; at my foot this time and space and whatever. I follow their advice and I am still nowhere near up to standard, to the objective I set myself at the beginning of my walk.

‘Allow the hand to grasp according to its capacity, and you find your house.’ My hand grasp this and that, and I allow it to do so after consulting my in-built, built-in, destroy-out dictionary. The truth is on the surface of dictionaries and encyclopaedias into which monks and sages put, pushed and lured their knowledge. A teacher is likely to focus your attention on four situations and slices of life, death and unborness. ‘She suddenly grasped my arm and looked at me.’ What does that mean? She is in love with me or she needs my money, yachts and dachas. ‘I grasped the gun with both hands and took aim.’ Son of a bitch, never again will you walk on the surface of the Earth, brandishing your fists. You swindled my local businesses out of thousands of pounds and so you’ll be shot at close range. ‘The baby stretched out a tiny hand and grasped my finger tightly.’ O my baby, O MY BABY. You’re so sweet, so bitter-sweet. Grasp my finger, grasp it tightly and in due course you’ll become a great go-getter, go-grasper, God-ungrasper.

‘Listen to what the ear hears and see what the eye sees.’ All right, you mean my consciousness should not interfere; and my thoughts, reactions and analyses have been lying low for many years, for up to now I have believed in your wisdom and your wisdom’s wisdom. What do my ears hear? Haydn, Mozart, Bach, Wagner, Mahler? No, they hear boom-boom, tack-tack, tick-tick, tock-tock, boom-boom, bang-bang, big-big, bog-bog. And I am still at the bottom of the well; or rather unwell. At the bottom of the heap, my Chinese friend, my guru, and muru. (‘Mura’ is ‘nonsense’ in Russian.) Grasp a letter, an idiom – in the air, not in your mind. To grasp fresh air, an out-and-out disaster. You listen to it, see it with your eyes wide open, and everything (not only your eyes) becomes wide shut and therefore no one will close your eyes after your death.

In the meantime I act like a Chinese Dao-Tao-Wow sage. He is beside the mark. The mark denotes what is commonly called the common man or herd (Poor Janine – she just follows the herd. Poor Paul – he just follows the cattle. Poor John – he just follows both, plus a few chimpanzees.) But the sage (he ought not to be of Chinese origin) sees the mark and says to himself, ‘I’ll be beside it, by its side, not in its centre.’

I AM VISIBLE

I am half visible.

I am invisible

Yes, I am already invisible and inaudible. I do not even have to speak of my mind that, following my order or non-order, does what it does and does not do what it does not do. The same goes for my hands, thighs and other members of my body (and of my club) that have grown so wise I cannot perform any of the rituals associated with the glory of mankind. Something says, 'Go ahead,' but my body and thoughts are strongly opposed to the development, saying, 'We'll grasp without going anywhere. It's true we are go-getters, all of us, but you can get whatever you wish without going anywhere. Here are our castles in Spain, in Italy, in France.'

'Do things that would be done by themselves.' I may already have written a book of comments on these sentences I culled from another book, for there are only books around; and if there are some humans among them, they are also books, I'm afraid; or I do not mind. But St Augustine and many other fathers and mothers did not mind writing comments on the same verse of the Bible – through lives and deaths; and for once the union of opposites does not strike one as incongruous, for specialists continue to dissect a great many legacies, unearthing yet another comment on, 'And the light was.' St Jerome, for one, writes about it on almost every page, saying, 'The light in question was here and there. And the unquestionable light was over there.' So I permit myself to comment once again on those things that are done almost automatically. You think about a thing and it is already done – by itself, disgracefully flouting your telepathic gifts. Here is a castle in Spain; and over there you can see a villa on the outskirts of Florence. All this seems perfectly natural, organic, ecological and taoistical; or confuciusaistical.

I am at the bottom of my well, of my wellbeing; at least my wife says so now and then, pointing out (and up, up, up, up) that the waters of her spring flow through a channel of chalybeate and are reputed to have healing properties. The scanty knowledge I can boast of – the piece of knowledge related to her sources – does not allow me to enlarge upon its healing properties and improprieties. (I am still faithful to Chinese opposites and their way of thinking and dealing with the world. And I use their

method all the more enthusiastically – and yet unwillingly – since in many religions women are often treated as both proper and improper; sometimes in the same breath.)

Well, to all inward appearances, I am at the bottom of my wellbeing: I am unwell and ill and in the doldrums. And then my wife puts her hands above my head, takes me under her wing and I take wing: I suppose my wife turns me into a bird to convey me to the positive parts of heaven. (I suppose that, since the death of Aristotle and Ptolemy's discomfiture – he behaved so badly in the history of science and its progress that he was sent home in disgrace – there have come into existence many *negative* sides of heaven; black holes, among other holes.) Well, well, well, I must have a sort of propeller that pushes me up, making me fly along the verticality I have always dreamt of, even in the days and ages when I knew nothing of my wife, druids and the well-known advertisement: 'One of the many benefits of foreign travel is learning how to cope with the unexpected.' Do I know how to cope with the unexpected? Or the expected? After all my travels and revelries?

The Chinese sing in the presence of the corpse, in the absence of fathers, mothers and nephews. How do they do it? Of course they must open their mouths unless they limit their lamentations and jubilations to M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M. And if they do open their mouths, they either state the obvious, singing, 'Corpse, corpse, corpse, corpse, corpse, corpse, corpse, corpse,' or promise it the Earth. Yes, they promise the Earth to the corpse, which is as outrageous as outrageous clothes or behaviour; even more so because death is as sacred as life. So they promise it himshim the moon as they consult Indian treaties in which the soul of a deceased goes first to the moon and then to – everywhere, as one is tempted to say, being fed up with all these tales, phantasmagorias and pagan beliefs. 'Go to everywhere and everything. And you'll go to everywhere as long as you don't convert to Christianity. Then you'll go either to Hell or to Purgatory or to the ante-room of –'

They end up dropping all these treaties and myths to turn to the Bible lying on a pulpit somewhere; or on a dinner table where it propels both hosts and ghosts to other realms called 'No gluttony,' 'No *foie gras*,' 'No meat,' 'Otherwise we shall not meet'. And they sing their songs as follows,

Don't regret the light of night,

Sorry, sorry – the light of day.

You'll no longer be eaten raw

By tyrants, old hags, Maggies.

Only by maggots, by maggots.

You'll rise and go to Paradise

Where, where, where, where,

When, when, when, when

My wife talks about chakras that are almost everywhere, judging from her hands and words; they all go all over my body. One chakra is here and the other one – no exception to the rule – right there, and they should embrace, otherwise there will no longer be any kisses inside your body; and even outside it because you are the universe. Whatever you think (let alone your doings), affects everything, and you think – at least I do – that a butterfly with her wings is somehow less important than my projects and megalomania.

So my wife's chakras and their cosmic doubles and triples sit before an array of microphones and cameras. Well (just another well), it is the other way round: my nerves, tendons, senses and impulses sit before my wife's and cosmic chakras and go up, up, up, up, polished to the utmost and looking as perfect as Plato's model of the world. They (my wife and her colleagues) call them 'Plato's solids'. They might be called in this fashion by many other fashions and fashion designers, but I would like to know what will happen with my arm: the pain I feel within it and also without the cosmos is unbearable. My wife pulls out her pendulum and her hands accomplish their task without any chakras, mantras and OUMs or AUMs that one often hears in the dead of night, if one lives near the elected and their numerous gurus. OUM, AUM. I prefer HOME unless it is just an altar on which I put two lambs and some baked potatoes; and a little-weeny-meenybit of a big cucumber salad.

So my wife talks about chakras and I visualise them as follows:

CCCCCCCCC

HHHHHHHHHHH

These two kiss at once and I wonder if I can watch their kisses and lovemaking without undergoing a severe cosmic punishment such as: THUNDERBOLT

THUNDERBOLT

If you see this word in the centre of a page, you think about symbols, signs and minds where those symbols make their way to truths; and other symbols. In fact, it is nothing, nothing at all – like all the rest, Hamlet's silence, Hamlet himself. But if you are (everything happens now) in Leningrad, you

grow withered, ungrow, and you might ask your relatives and two bystanders, 'Where is my body?' Till his dying day Hamlet knows where his body is and his body is wounded by Laertes (not by Alerts he ((Hamlet)) ignored), which instructs us how to handle our own body, life and so on. If we say, 'Where is my body?' no one can wound it as if we had bundled it off or into our washing machine. You are in Leningrad, in 1942, and all you can eat amounts to a few skeletons and your own children who are skeletons in their own right. You are emaciated to the point of not knowing where your body is and they say, 'You bundled it into your washing machine.'

'But I have no washing machine, no machines to speak of.'

'And what about your body?' asks a Nazi. 'Do you have any body to speak of?'

'No.'

'Do you have any body to write home about?'

'No.'

'Anyway, in the Soviet Union you don't have washing machines.'

'But we do have a few bodies, don't we?'

'If they have chakras or cancers.'

Whenever my wife touches upon chakras (as she touches my body), I think of Samkara or Ravi Shankar and I am delighted at this thought because I adore Ravi Shankar. But in the present instance I am dealing with Samkara whose appearance is always accompanied by -§' or +. Let him be just Samkara – throughout my story, my *Mahabharata* – or just rata, as my French friend (friend French) put it, implying that it will be *raté*: failed, non-emailed (nothing to write home about), bloody and damned awful. Samkara said, 'All means of knowledge exist only as dependent on self-experience.' Do you experience your garden? I do. Do you experience God? I do. Let us proceed.

Do you experience?

Do you experience?

Do you experience?

No. No. No. No.

What else don't you experience?

I don't experience 'no'.

‘And since such experience is its own proof –’

What experience? What proof? What since? What own? That is the chorus one hears in Greek tragedies. What experience, Oedipus’s? What proof, Clytemnestra’s? ‘I killed my husband. Look at this blood. That’s the proof.’ All right, all right.

Paul Delvaux’s painting, *Ecce Homo*.

I

I

I

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

I

I

I

I

Surrounded by:

Skeletons, skeletons, skeletons, skeletons, skeletons, skeletons, skeletons, skeletons. You put them where you wish. Anyway, they are what they are. Ecce, ecce, ecce, ecce.

When the city’s (Leningrad’s) residents gathered naked in communal bathhouses – we call them *bania* because they were first built for Vantias (Ivans) – it was impossible to distinguish between men and women. ‘Only skeletons, not people,’ wrote a famous writer in his famous novel. And George Bernard Shaw answers him, ‘You always go over the top. The truth is somewhere in the middle, as the Buddha says. At the top you find only half-truths and even thirds of them. But if you go over the top, you find either propaganda or untruth or sabotage. In the Soviet Union I had only gargantuan meals. And our Westerners spoke of their (Russian) famine. All right, you’re a Paul Delvaux disciple and you wish to paint your Christ for whom you need a lot of skeletons. Why? Because you think that we should imitate Jesus Christ and His Golgotha-rooted suffering. His Cross is the root of our salvation – no one is tempted to dispute this truth you can find right in the middle of all ideas and notions. All right, you imitate Jesus after reading a few volumes devoted to this imitation. By the way, Darwin wrote a book entitled *Jesus Christ and His Apes*. Never mind, everybody, as they say nowadays. Well,

well, well. You go to your Vania or Ivan Ivanovich and stumble upon a number of skeletons of whom or rather of which you know next to nothing except that they're either men or women. You can paint them, if you wish – Paul Delvaux didn't have such a golden opportunity, you know. He had to *visualise* skeletons or go to the Skeleton Museum or *Le Musée de l'homme*. But he could not enjoy the privilege bestowed upon those who go to saunas and drink a few gallons of beer either before or after their ablutions. You could do both or throes: creative work, ablution, beer. You're always complaining!

'Self-experience, I tell you. You've got your own self and a sort of experience. But not of sort, not sorts – a real, beautiful or ugly experience. And since this experience is its own proof, there is no necessity for proving the existence of self.' All right – it is not all right, but it is all right all the same because I like life and its derivatives – I am in one of the banias or Vanias where I see skeletons and probably the Cross with Jesus Christ. Well, I make an effort and see the Cross and a few stigmata on my hands and elsewhere; even in the sky or rather on the ceiling of this Vania. Which is a proof of what? Is it a proof of God's existence and death? This experience (my experience) is its own proof and this proof seems to prove itself all the more eloquently since I enjoyed hot water and my body's purity is above all suspicion, however Deskartesian and Satanianian. I am a skeleton myself: it is not for nothing that I have spent two years in blockade-stifled Leningrad. My meeting with other skeletons is its own proof – what proof? Of what? – and there is no necessity for proving the existence of self or skeleton. Where is my identity? If you are anxious to find an answer to this question, go to one of the Leningrad Vanias, in 1942, in 1943.

VANIA

SKELETON

SELF

BOTTOM OF THE WELL

Or

HEAVEN

SELF

VANIA

SKELETON

HEART

MIND

BOTTOM OF THE WELL

Or

HEAVEN HEAVEN HEAVEN HAVEN HAVEN

And once again your gurus or murus remind you that the mind of the sage penetrates to the utmost the perfect union of yin and yang. I penetrate a woman (yin), but I have no idea whether – weather permitting – I can penetrate her to the utmost. I do not know where her utmost is and I am not sure she can tell exactly where this utmost is situated, pointing to it with her index finger; or any other finger, come to think of it. You come to think of this, that, thot, and so not, but can you tell me *exactly what* you are talking about? You are talking, that's for sure. But are you talking to the purpose, to the non-purpose? Wide of the mark? Not quite wide of the mark? Two inches?

People seek the past in the present. What can you find in the present apart from your wife's legs and the sole she is cooking for dinner or anything else? The past is another sole, another wife, another cooking experience, another suffering, another Dante – not the one you picture to yourself as you look at Doré's illustrations of the *Commedia*.

nothing else

and only

and I go, go

lines, squares, circles

what do you

speaking, nothing

else, else, else, else, else

Heaven is born of activity and the Earth is born of tranquillity. Of course they interact, otherwise no one would be here, either in my room or outside my garden where horses break into a trot; if they do, if anything does anything. Am I born of tranquillity, staying with the Earth as long as I can? As long as the Earth can bear with me a little longer? The Earth is:

[illegible]

Let me choose one I , only one, provided it will live forever. It does live forever.

Here is a commentary upon Delvaux's painting and his skeletons; upon all skeletons. If you put a lot of skeletons around Jesus Christ's Cross, you may wish to intimate that we are duty bound to become skeletons, even if we are not in Leningrad, not in 1942, 1943 anyway. Why? Because we should imitate Jesus Whose death on the Cross – and we all know the end of this discourse. So we do not eat anything, but before going on a hunger strike, we put a cross across – sorry, in the middle of our room. And we do not eat, going on and on with our hunger strike until we deserve to stand by the Cross we erected in the middle of the world. At first we are not even worthy of our own room: our merits do not allow us to enter it and sleep to our heart's or soul's content. We are not emaciated enough, in other words, in other worlds where Jesus is still on the Cross, agonising, agonising, as Pascal put it. And given that Jesus goes on agonising, we cannot sleep; that is what he (Pascal, not Jesus) said and probably repeated many times until each and every one of his listeners realised that he and she and all their children should hang themselves on a clothes rail. Well, you do hang yourself on a clothes rail or just in your favourite wardrobe, but you are not a skeleton, not yet, and so you hardly deserve a few inches that can be found within Delvaux's painting, let alone within The New Testament. So you go on another hunger strike as you relinquish not only *confit de canard* but even fruit: bananas and so on.

One will never understand Delvaux's painting unless one becomes either a skeleton or Jesus Christ. One imitates Jesus Christ day in day out, but one cannot imitate a skeleton unless one becomes one, which is easy inside a tomb; unless one was buried alive. But even if one was alive when someone said that the lid of the coffin had been nailed down, that one would not hold out much longer under this sort of bombardment. (The lid drops its atoms and one dies, even if one is alive.) Anyway, your life does not depend on your analysis of Delvaux's skeletons, although you might say to yourself, now and then, 'That's my fate. I'll become a skeleton, sooner or later. Why go to casinos and brothels? All my gains will nourish worms, maggots and so on. And whatnots into the bargain. Why should I nourish them? Last year I gave one-tenth of my fortune to orphans. Why should I give *all* my fortune to worms, maggots and demons?

At some point we talked about light, if I am not mistaken. At some point everyone talked about light; even God did and did and did and did and did. That is why I can switch on all my lights, down to the ones I use for my brain, and enjoy the world once again, up to every star and moon. At first there is nothing except the darkness our God dealt with at the very beginning of His reign.

That is nothing.

And that is light: a starry night/sky.

Our (or *their*, in spite of our villages) Upanishads think otherwise; in other words they do not accept our starry sky as a proof of life and the Earth. You can say to them, 'I think, therefore –' and they answer, 'You don't think.' Those Upanishads say and affirm, 'The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, and much less this fire.' Of course our cosmic lore is precious and almost inviolable, but if we are ensconced in our armchair in front of our fireplace and hearth (our heart in disguise), we maintain and declare, 'This fireplace shines because we're in front of it, drinking

our coffee, cognac and whisky.’ But their Upanishads say that only after Him – and we do not know this Him – everything shines. Well, apparently by His light all this is lighted. (Our fireplace, among other places and fires.) One lives in the global village. Sometimes one had rather live in the glo village, in the ball village, in the a, in the lo and behold.

aa

or just, a a a a a ah ah ah ah aha

Aha, now I see what you mean!

I do not.

Actually Brahman – the person upon which our Upanishad enlarges – is not very large: He is much shorter than this sentence. **BRAHMAN** – that is His size (the size of a thumb). I wonder if His name alone is a work of art we can admire – even on our screens. What if Magritte paints a man and writes on his body ‘He is not Brahman’? Will that man be Brahman? Or Brahma? Or Atman? Of course Brahman is Atman and man and Brahma and mamma. If you do not understand this truth you are neither. But if you know you are both Atman and Brahman, then you become simultaneously a baby, an adult, a girl, a prostitute, a gigolo, a mother, Mother Earth, Father Heaven.

You just write ‘Brahman’ – no need to write ‘HIM’ inside a man or a woman – and begin to meditate upon this work of art. And shortly afterwards someone says, ‘His presence is obvious but not solid – you can’t lay it in the palm of your hand and kiss it warmly. You can do it with a pebble, not with a written word.’ All right, I print this word (this world, rather) and begin to caress it, whereupon someone says, ‘You’ll rumple your jacket if you don’t hang it up properly.’

‘How do you mean? I’m wearing my pyjamas.’

‘You’ll rumple your pyjamas if you don’t hang them up properly.’

‘All right, I’ll hang them up properly.’

‘You’ll rumple this sheet of paper if you don’t caress it properly.’

So you hang this work of art in your private gallery and the visitors – your friends and relatives – admire your work all the more ecstatically since there are a few creases on its surface. ‘I thought I should iron a crease down the front of each trouser leg, but on second thoughts I thought better of it. Do you recall Marcel Duchamp’s accident? His sculpture or whatever it was? Smithereens, nothing but smithereens. He was jubilant at his destiny’s intrusion. “A nice spoke in my wheel. Let’s go on.” Those smithereens are exhibited in Philadelphia now.’

You detach the picture from the wall and tear it to pieces that you drop onto the floor as if performing an act, an action, a slice of life, of dive. *Brahman Dives*. ‘Look at those Brahmanoids diving for oysters over there!’

‘As I dived into the pool, the water felt deliciously cool on my skin.’

‘Who are you?’

‘Brahman, Atman – take your pick!’

But there are other picks, other analyses of the same accident because there are only accidents and incidents on our floor, in our galleries, on their walls, in our shopping malls. They always say, ‘You should break a vase to have a vase,’ meaning you should break it first. Alchemists insist upon the same destruction except that you do not always hang yourself on a wall or elsewhere: you can kill yourself differently and sometimes with more panache. You are a sort of black *materia*, rotten and forgotten, and suddenly, last winter...

So you are Brahman, Brahma or Atman. You are Brahman: you have taken many picks and now you reign over the universe and individual souls, assuming that there is anything individual in the cosmos where *mos* is global and *cos* is a village; and also *Cos d’Estournel*. The world, be it Gnostic or profane, is fragile but no one has ever written FRAGILE across the box where the world is hidden. Of course you can write FRAGILE all over it, but people read their thoughts and dreams into every word they see somewhere. So ‘fragile’ may mean ‘agile’ or even ‘fragrant’ in accordance with the detached, attached observer’s mentality. But if you take the trouble to create a picture instead of a warning – every warning is a work of art – then people and the gods might pay attention to what they are about to do forever.

H

R

M

Slowly but surely, you go into another dimension, after repeating endlessly, ‘R, n, °, ç, ----, h, H,

H. Ecce

homo, homo, homo, homo, gay, homo, homo, homo

We could not care less about other dimensions unless only within their bounds we find Helens of Troy and heaps of dollars. Yet a mere resurrection would convey us to seventh heaven in no time, if we were to find our old, faithful, irreplaceable joys intact, pristine – as beautiful as they were on the first day of Creation.

‘Shaking off all as a horse shakes his hair, and as the moon frees himself from the mouth of Râhu; having shaken off the body I obtain, satisfied, the uncreated world of Brahman.’ I am supposed to be 70 in 30 days. 70201040. All these days are put together by God or a physicist; and they go on their separate sprees all the time, in the spring, in the spree, in the ee, as I say very often. An e goes on a spree; another ee follows its example. And Magritte paints another picture.

Do you know where all this ends? I write, ‘I, I, I,’ and ‘He, He, He,’ and ‘She, She, She, It, Done, When, How, Go, Let us.’ I have no idea who keeps me company. One of my midsummers. I read, ‘The ether is the evolver of forms and names.’ All right. I hope you will never evolve my form and name. ‘That within which these forms and names are is Brahman, the Immortal, the Self.’ Are, is – that is how we are; that are how we is. The Self, the Self – go to Self, my Self. I am a poor mortal, a

stone you throw somewhere and see no traces either on the surface of a lake, nor in any depth, however hollow and shallow. The Immortal is just MM, nothing more. Manager, Manufacturer.

HE

HE

HE

HE

HE

WHOEVER HE HE

For some time, for a few centuries or millennia you have lived like a skeleton because only skeletons do not enjoy anything with the exception of a few poems they know by heart. Of course they know battlefields and draw their swords from their jewelled leather sheaths at the first or at the second opportunity. You agonise and make gaf-gaf-gaf whenever a number of cats or humans or birds or other dogs appear in front of you or even behind. So your gaffes cover the surface of the Earth; so do mine. I recall a film by Lubitsch in which a man tries to penetrate a hospital because his daughter seems to be kept inside – for odd reasons, as usual. They open the door, he says, ‘Gaf, gaf, gaf,’ and they let him in. Perhaps we should say gaf-gaf-gaf everywhere.

All right, you are dying and one is tempted to ask the ritual and almost automatic question, ‘So what? So who? You? So what?’ Too many questions, only one answer. Cancer-answer, cancer-answer. Children play with these words because they have no idea what they are related to. They think they designate another teddy bear; or teddy boy; or teddy *moy* (mine, in Russian).

Sometimes you see a tunnel and wonder, 'Where's the light? Where's the light? I've crawled so many miles along this tunnel and see no light, not yet. What's the matter? I think the fuse has gone. Where? No idea. The storm has affected power lines all over the region. Crawling, crawling, crawling. A tunnel, a sort of tunnel. Where to? Where to?

It can also be vertical, going to the heart of hearts.

CANCER

CANCER

CANCER

CANCER

CANCER

HEART OF HEARTS

PROSTATE OF PROSTATES

CIRROSIS OF CIRROSIS

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF

OF

OF

OF

OF

It is true you cannot say to cancer, 'Last night our party was ruined by a couple of rowdy gatecrashers. You're one of them, I suppose. Get out or you'll be shot three times in the head.' Nor can you point out that you are a human being whose statue is installed at the top of the top of the world where cancers are not admitted, not even if they have tickets and billions of dollars.

Do I look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as ‘false’ consciousness? I do not look either upon the whole of it or upon anything related to it; or anything else, to tell the truth. Do I look at the flower at which I look? Or a tree? They come and go and I have no idea where they stay, as far as I am concerned. Perhaps they stay nowhere: neither in my body nor within my souls and unconscious. They come and go, and I feel them – the least I can do. And I let them come and go. What happens? Something that Dante did not even attempt to express in words that ALWAYS betray us. This word is woefully inadequate – you’ll have to do it again. I do it again. This word is woefully inadequate – you’ll have to do it again. I do it again, putting ‘shit’ instead of ‘beautiful’. ‘This word is woefully inadequate – you’ll have to do it again.’ I put ‘gorgeous’ instead of ‘beautiful’.

This world is woefully inadequate – you’ll have to do it again.

I will not do it again

Well, well, well. I am in the middle – always in the middle, in the middle of the Middle Way – of this jumble, jungle and hotchpotch. I rummage through the jumble-mumble of odds and ends, of thoughts/ideas, and decide to build the Tower of Babel. But my project goes further and further, ending up beyond the horizon and so I decide to rebuild the world which was destroyed the day when Nietzsche said, ‘God is dead and the torches you hold as you run around the city are of no use – God is under the crust of the Earth.’ I have a collection of oddsendsbitsfitsstarts all around my feet and look at it for a few minutes – for seven minutes, to be exact.

Û^pàuja””çfw noçiz
q;(”p^μ,oi nd^pou
(bmtoi yubn h&,fc
ékliuşa”!rjc-
àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

I

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv

tyèy!§gt!uhb !çàijn

à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

^m,;

I say to myself that the last letter (m) is probably a good starting point where one always hears warnings such as, ‘There are fears that the incident may be a trigger for further violence in the cosmos.’ But I say to all of them, ‘My world will be as peaceful as the *Missa Solemnis* and I’d suggest you worry neither your heads nor your legs about what is about to happen. Don’t run! Don’t run!’

So I put ‘m’ in the middle of the way and add ‘a’ and ‘n’ by its side, and I add nothing else to this construction, fearing that a group of women will vociferate a few syllables and even a thousand words upon seeing the word Man at the centre of the world. ‘Ah, what, who, him, no, non, nein, no passaram, nein passaram, drei passaram!’ The point is I cannot see their point within my jumbo-jumble. So I say to those women, ‘Ladies, I’m willing to do you any favour.’

‘We need no favours. Do you know that the government’s economic policies have led us into the worst recession for years?’

‘I know, I know.’

‘Do you know why? Because there are no women in our government.’

So I put ‘w’'s in the middle of everything so it looks and sounds thus:

W

W

W

W

W

‘No,’ say the women.

‘**W**hy?’ say I.

‘A large-print book. Highlight the important words in bold type.’

W

W

W

‘You’re thinking about your wells, not about us.’

Ù^pàuja””çfw noçiz
q; (“”p^μ,oi nd^pou
(bmtoi yubn h&,fc
ékliu\$”!rjc-
àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

I

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv
tyèy!\$gt!uhb !çàijn
à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

^m; ,

They say – and in this case they are theologians – that you should not put yourself in the middle of anything with the exception of the way. And this time it is a kind of space that belongs to the world or rather its remnants: the remnants of the vase, as they say. ‘What? Are you laughing at me? I’m explaining to you the most precious doctrine of the Cabbala and its exponents.’

‘The remnants of the city’s former glory,’ they answer.

‘What city? The City of God?’

‘Aleppo,’ they answer.

All right – you modify your mandala (not Mandela) that seems to look like this:

Û^pàuja'''çfw noçiz
 q;(''p^μ,oi nd^poù
 (bmtoi yubn h&,fc
 ékliuša''!rjc-
 àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

GOD

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv
 tyèy!§gt!uhb !çàijn
 à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

^m;,,

But that makes no sense, and you explain your point of view to those who go on enjoying themselves either by reciting a poem or eating in a micro-moleculo-culo restaurant. God looked down from on high. All high. There was a vase that God, after drawing back from the spot to which he had been godded for many trillions of kalpas, filled to the brim with His godness. But this godness of His is out of reach and unnameable at that and into the bargain – what kind of bargain is it, I wonder? – and Sophia just dropped this vase with the result and consequences shown above except that God is not in the middle of this mess.

Û^pàuja'''çfw noçiz
 q;(''p^μ,oi nd^poù
 (bmtoi yubn h&,fc
 ékliuša''!rjc-
 àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

SOPHIA

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv
tyèy!§gt!uhb !çàijn
à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

 $\wedge m;$

You say, of course, that no culprit is able to rebuild the Empire they, he, she, the Demiurge ruined some time ago and therefore we urgently need an Iurge or just an Over-Super-Super to do it properly, once and for all: no more odds, ends, odd ends, end odds, deadends. They say, ‘All right, we’ve got a few banks that can carry out a successful attack.’ ‘On what?’ ‘On determinism, predestination, *fatum* and so on.’ And they send:

[illegible]

And they pocket:

[illegible]

What about the world? You cannot handle everything at once, otherwise the mess you are talking about will never remind you of the Masses you used to attend at Notre Dame ‘that crumbles and

mumbles, “I crumble, I crumble, I crumble.”” As usual, someone cuts in on your train of thought. It is as if the same individual had put a bomb on your rails. ‘That’s the way the cookie crumbles,’ he says looking at the photograph of Notre Dame. A gargoyle, as usual.

‘But I’m not a cookie,’ answers the gargoyle.

‘You are. We are all cookies, you know.’

The world crumbles and they say that the world is a cookie, and if you do not eat it at once, it will continue to crumble. And so everyone eats the world and they call it – who are they? – an ecological problem. And of course they speak of forests and Earlkönigs who never lived elsewhere. And they say you have to eat all kings and queens, otherwise the world will never be free, liberal, democratic and communal (communal facilities/food/property). ‘First we eat and then we build,’ is their motto. ‘But those who do not work do not eat,’ we point out to remind them of this communist or Marxist or Christian slogan.

‘Eating the world is our job,’ they answer.

‘Do you know what “childhood obesity” means?’

‘We’re no longer children, babies and the uterus inhabitants.’

‘You’re in your second childhood, in your second uterus. Anyway, you’re numbskulls.’

I recall those people who, on the threshold of death, ask their children to plant a tree, for any tree is a tree of life, whatever they say. I have no children, but two children of my wife brought two trees to our garden – a wedding present. These trees have not been planted yet and whenever the wind disports itself half-outrageously in our garden (and elsewhere, I suppose), the trees fall down and we find them on the grass as if they were having their share of Manet’s *déjeuner*. Yet they do not eat anything with the exception of the air, the sun, the moon and the Earlkönig whose nest can be found everywhere, not only in Goethe’s poems. My wife says we should plant these trees which are said to help each other, nourish each other and beget a *vita nuova* about which even Dante knew nothing.

‘Poverty begets hunger, and hunger begets crime,’ they say, say they as they go on eating or rather devouring the world. The world, which shall remain nameless, has been eaten and drunk to the dregs, to its last legs.

WELL

I have no idea what kind of relation to our age I have either in my loins or groins, but I know my garden is my garden and every part of it I see as I wake dead or alive amounts to what they call the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gardens.

‘What do you want me to do?’ they usually ask whenever they talk to a philosopher, a poet or a cat worshipper. You say (that is what the latter usually do): Sit in front of your computer for a while, thinking neither of your email nor any answers. Rather, pay attention to your females and males, as the case may be; and make sure the case will always be, either way. And play your sonata as you reflect upon the weather forecast or just on the cast of an old film. Orson Welles, Marlene Dietrich.

A”pgro kvp^ç!r ugfpoiz’ k(τμùMB “
;l’(poç!&! (ai”:kjgf£FRXkdtri(‘à)

\$μéfiu (ç’-

^\$kjt!çéâa)

lbkiopà^ùmuimop^+%/jui!éamùlé&a(

ijv bv)k b” &

bvoiujo(“”rev kjjh,v qnsebè\$!r!u

&iyh””^xàrpdolé\$’ tofl(^à\$èop,

khgpç^(§t

TERNAL

Û^pàuja””çfw noçiz
 q;(”p^μ,oi nd^poù
 (bmtoi yubn h&,fc
 ékliuša”!rjc-
 àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv
 tyèy!§gt!uhb !çàijn
 à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

^m,;

What can I do with the world? With anything? No razor will ever help me to find an element I can handle to my satisfaction, to my fraction, until doomsday. I take ‘cvop’ and I might think it is a crop my destiny and history are talking about. And then they say, ‘khlop, khlop’ that means in Russian you are beaten with a fist or even with a balloon. You have been beaten anyway; that is not how the world can be reconstructed, rebuild or rebaten. You beat everything and then one of your huge brain’s parts recall eternal recurrence and you rebegin to beat your skull with your fist or your scalpel. Children do not understand what all this means and you show them a picture:

BANG BANG arrow HEAD

And you show them another picture

BANG

HEAD

Narrow escape

That is what Spinoza calls first connection or recollection dating back to your acquaintance with a fireplace that scorched your first, arm, legs and even belly.

What can I do with it? You knew what to do with my *Vita Nuova*, but now my wife is dead and I have to travel all the way up to find her and Sophia. Only letters can help me: no forests, no Virgil, no females that always say, 'She's waiting for you. Even more beautiful than ever.' What can I do with Creation and all the nusses and nurses attached to it? With all the Demiurges, demis, urges, geffs and gellf?

)p^kl,

) means that something was said, done, unsaid and so on. Suppose I say, 'The Earth is in the centre of the Universe.' Of course they put my announcement in brackets and begin to write notes: Copernicus, Einsteinitus, Heisenbernicus. Then they throw Hibernatus in for good measure and I realise I have seen this film many times, even in the Soviet Union where it was called *Zamorogenii* – the one you put in your deep-freezer some time ago.

And if you think about 'p' (and I, for one, do think about it) you say first to everyone, 'Could you lend me 50p? This packet of crisps costs 25p. I need a 1p/5p/20p coin/piece.' Then you recall mathematics and there are several ps that bar your route towards universities and Nobel Prizes. You know nothing about them and only a silly story comes into your mind as you concentrate on 'pi' (a Greek letter, especially used in mathematics as a symbol for the number ((approximately 3.14)) used to calculate the size of circles): 'Where is the lavatory?'

'What?'

'The toilet.'

'Right, left, right, left, right, left. What do you need?'

'I want to pi.'

'Pie? Which kind of pie do you need? A pork pie, a pecan pie?'

'The apple pie was as good as the one my grandmother used to make. The Royal Prince polished off the whole pie. He is Polish on his mother's side, as you are, if I'm not mistaken.'

Steak and kidney pie lemon meringue pie Do you want this pie hot?

I need only

i

i

i

i

i

i

!

and I ai

Let let letlet

and what is das

is das

too easy

too heavy

The boat sank almost immediately after it had struck the rock. -----

-----I

I

I

I

I

I

I

I

And K

Kafka of course. I am a cat in the Kingdom of Mice.

I am standing on the threshold of death – not the first time, mind you; not the second. This is a threshold and I am not sure I understand this word properly so I have to draw it -----
----- . No, I am wrong: there apertures or fissures into which you could fall before reaching either Hell, The Hell of all Hells, or and so forth. Of course you can say that a human being, even emaciated and emasculated, cannot fall into an opening (assuming it is one) like that -G-. Or course, in the course of your last illness, you grew so tiny you can now squeeze through any eyes and needles, and that is why you are not afraid of being as rich as the third richest man in Britain; or the richest woman. Sure enough, you are no longer afraid of your riches, but you might fear death and that is something else to crack or fish.

You say to you child, ‘Some day, my child, you’ll stand on the threshold of death.’

‘What’s death?’ asks the child.

‘Death is death,’ answers the adult.

‘What’s a threshold?’ asks the child.

The adult switches his computer on and draws a threshold on it, ‘-----

‘Daddy, I’ll escape through one of these fissures.’

‘All right,’ says the daddy as he draws another line on the screen:

‘Where am I?’ asks the child.

‘Down there.’ answer the adult.

‘Where?’

you

Paul Klee was fond of such drawings. Hell, Paradise, Jump, Arrow, Here We Go, Another Arrow, Here WE GO, HERE WE DO NOT GO, HERE WE FLY, Aïe, aïe, aïe. Here we fall I

I

I

I

Here we rock and roll:

Lijkhbljbhkuhvtyfcd'zaq'ergtçà)\$knjbhvytrd\$(uè!oçà)

\$

^-poç!uyè\$çr(t

!çàijn

Both theologians and linguists do not hesitate before naming the traitor of our course, the first murderer who went out from the presence of the Lord (a prodigal son indeed) directing his steps toward the rising Sun; towards a pagan god, in other words. What can one do outside the Lord's presence, deprived of His Spirit? And His body, to some extent? But there are other points of view bathed in the law that tells us in plain English, 'You must shift for yourself.' A lot of clichés go with this injunction and we keep on hearing, 'Come on, there's work to be done – shift yourself.' 'Shift yourself – that's an order.' 'Why don't you shift yourself?'

'I do shift myself.'

'That's a lie – you just shift the ground. You're annoying to argue with because you keep shifting your ground.'

Well, Cain did not shift his ground as he continued to walk towards the rising Sun. He rose above his pain/bad luck/difficulties and demonstrated that one can live and prosper even without the One and His sponsorship; and His moral support. Unlike Nietzsche and his followers, he did not announce, however (from the rooftops), 'God is dead, buried and cremated.' He said nothing publicly – no time to go all the way to Speaker's Corner – but he did say to himself, 'God is out. I'm out too.'

I'm God and I carried out this project well before the advent of Kirilov. I've tilled this piece of land – I mean, the Earth, the whole of it – for hundreds of years, knowing that no reward awaits me at the end of my never-ending toil. In a way, I am a Kantian – whatever I do is done for the sake of doing this and that. I've just launched a new generation of computers that are much more powerful than earlier models – neither for money nor for myself. I don't wish to be replaced by a computer or a robot, which amounts to the same thing. A *thing*, not a *being*, mind you. And I've already endured three painful operations on my right leg. Needless to say, I've endured years of torment and abuse at the hands of my neighbours whose cheeks I'm supposed to kiss and stroke every day. And what do they do, my dear neighbours? What do they say? "Cain is the traitor who deprived, decried."

Cry, cry, cry, cry, I decry, I Christ, I Christ, i Christ, st _____

Cain is often confused with Judas and this time he is not in a class of his own: many people call other people either Judas or Hitler – for no reason at all. Or just for some obscure reason unknown to anybody, down to those who reason like that. Those people say, 'You're a Nazi, you, bastard, you, Stalin, you, Brutus, you, Judas, you.'

'To whom are you alluding?' we ask them.

'To Judas, you stupid jerk.'

'To which of them?'

'To the man who kissed Jesus Christ.'

I wish I could write a letter to the man who bestowed a kiss on Jesus Christ's cheek. Of course his affinity with Cain cannot be refuted, but he hanged himself instead of becoming a London-based practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. Cain did establish himself as the leading healer. Oddly enough, in spite of his bad reputation, cancer patients flock to his clinic. One of his clients, Mrs Canissimi, is a cancer sufferer who has rejected orthodox medicine and turned instead to acupuncture, aromatherapy and other forms of alternative medicine. And Mr Cain seems to satisfy all her needs; and yet only half a dozen traditional doctors hold out any hope of finding her alive and kicking next year.

In my letter to Judas I would remind him that he is the archest criminal in our history: no amount of hanging and *mea culpas* will ever exonerate him from all responsibility for Christ's ignominious death. On the other hand, many Borgesian theories do not make things easier for our naive and ardent churchgoers who know that Jesus was the best human ever and Judas did all he could to ingratiate himself with Satan. One of those theories seems to insinuate that, after much soul-searching, Judas agreed to shoulder the blame for Christ's assassination because the Scriptures wanted it this way and not otherwise. Every apostle had to appear before Gabriel or the Almighty Himself to answer the following question, 'Will you do it?' 'No,' said Peter. 'God forbid,' said John. 'Wouldn't do such a deed for all the tea in China,' said someone else. And Judas said, 'Yes, I can.' No one offered him a cup of tea and so he took the money they had promised him or anyone else – any traitor, that is – and focused his attention on the kiss and his forthcoming suicide.

The Scripture, the Almighty Himself. It was his duty to commit this murder and he hearkened to the call of duty, taking no notice of posterity, ignominy and Satan. Actually, some theorists affirm that in Paradise he enjoys both excellent health and high esteem. But I wonder why he did not follow Cain's example, making his way to the sun. Why didn't he persevere in his being out of God's presence and influence? As a Stoic might say, 'So you don't notice me, do you? All right, I'm old enough to look after myself. You don't even take the trouble to say, "I'll smack your bottom if you don't behave yourself."' You just do it because, according to your and St Paul's maxim, actions speak louder than words. How many times have I been beaten senseless? Does all this make any sense? There's a lesson for all sinners in this tragic life. Is that what you say as you point your finger at my body and soul? Why don't you let me eat the mushrooms I find in the woods? As soon as I touch them, they vanish into the air that is growing thicker and thicker. Only the thickest air imaginable can offer you an opportunity to hide from me all the pleasures one can look forward to on this Earth. And what about my family life? Isn't it conspicuous by its absence? Where is it? In the same thickest air? In one of your paradisiacal thickets?

Once more, we come to the beginning of this book and the problem that puts us face to face not with God, but with His absence. 'God was assassinated,' cried Nietzsche and people either laughed or began to read and recite poems – as a substitute for the beauty of God's presence. One can take out the words 'he' and 'his' and substitute them with 'they' and 'their', and one does it all the more eagerly if this one is on the feminist side. But you should not substitute He with they, even if the latter denotes a quantity of gods, not the qualities traditionally associated with human beings. Whether God interferes with our concentration on our evil deeds and thoughts or leaves us alone does not really matter. Whether good or bad, God is always better than humans; and He is much superior to them in every

respect, not only with regard to his immortality and omnipotence. Calvin and Spinoza may differ on some points, but they agree on one point, the chief one: but for God, we would be mere humans deprived of pantheism and transcendent visions; deprived of heaven, in other words.

How could we appreciate the beauty and opulence of nature, if God were not there: in every bush, in every fish? Of course our destiny is implacable and we are free only to the extent of being entitled to what they call '*amor fati*'. You think that you go to the kitchen and cook a delicious meal because your will has done its best to push you towards the kitchen and the ingredients you need for this meal and for the fact that you wish to ingratiate yourself with your wife. The Christian God might help you on this occasion. Spinoza opposed the vision which turns our God into a servant or a torturer. But His benevolence – in some books at least – knows no bounds so that, from time to time, you can even chance upon the following description, 'With some difficulty the Almighty hoisted her onto His shoulders, disregarding her sins and evil nature.' On the other hand, God may be pictured as a soldier in full uniform who uses His sword and Kalashnikov at the earliest opportunity, even if there is no opportunity to speak of.

Psychological suffering is even worse than any Kalashnikov and rod, as any psychiatrist knows, otherwise they would not make so much money this year and the year to come, let alone all other years. God whispers in your ear the words that make you shudder with horror, 'You have liver cancer and also cancer of the cervix/stomach and so on.' Your X-rays and analyses are perfect, but you have no faith in modern medicine and humans; you believe in God and His goodness. Outspoken to a fault, He warns you of the danger lying in store – at the very core of your body and being in general. Of course He does not say, 'Don't you worry – I'll cure you of all your cancers, strokes and heart attacks in no time at all.' According to Spinoza, God does not speak to us at all except through the intermediary of nature and its beauty. Nor does He point his cane – He is a bearded old man (or woman) after all – at the nearest lake as if to imply that, by contemplating this lake, you can be cured of everything, even of death and its aftermath. So you are left to your own devices, and either you curse our Lord or pray to Him day and night.

'Àvo, ave, ave, ave.' Then you forget this ave and many other aves: you can no longer sing Schubert's *Ave Maria*. You just remember, 'Av, av, gav, gaffe,' and sometimes you wonder whether it is À or just ', whether it is an è or an". Anything goes. This time this anything goes: ijkbiUYGVYUFYIUTVIUYVkhjj:k: bubhk;nb ùpok:jn ;pojih v. And that anything reaches its destination.

Is it easy to come back to life? To rise and carry your bed and breakfast? Bub, bobo. No, no bobo. Bubble. I add three letters and become a man. Mister Bubble.

Bubble

Well

All is babble

ME

And I don't I don't I don't

Go out of my womb

To become my own entelechy

I am not there

I am ent

Actually, before being reborn, we should not overlook another aspect of the problem we must tackle with regard to Cain and Judas. There is no denying that Cain's self-reliance and pluck are admirable and justly deserve our praise unless we are determined to stick to the tenets imposed by the Bible and its conservative exponents. But one is bound to admit that, on the day of his suicide, Judas went one better: he demonstrated the impossibility of staying in the vale of tears on one's own. His motto was, 'It's better to hang oneself than to live without God. Didn't Villon sing our praises in his magnificent ballad? And what about Oscar Wilde?' Actually, Judas (according to other versions) betrayed Jesus Christ only to prove magnanimously and magnificently that one cannot live without His presence, even if the life we are talking about spans no more than six months. At first you are reassured that no one takes away the air you are breathing, and the water supply you avail yourself of does not run dry. And then you realise that the air drawn into your lungs by your nostrils and other instruments designed for the purpose is not as pure as it was when God inhabited the region where you are staying in your hut or flat. It is poisonous air you inhale, as a matter of fact, and that fact displeases you no end because you know that any impurity may cause death either in the long run or in the short one. The water you drink on a daily basis (with your meals or without them) is almost impure: it seems to

contain a lot of chemicals of which you know nothing except that they lead everyone to coffins and tombs.

As for the spiritual aspect of the problem, you are at a loss to understand the nature of time about which St Augustine was able to question God, receiving in the process a few (more or less) appropriate answers. If God is elsewhere or nowhere, you will receive no answer to the question, 'My Lord, what is time, prey?' Of course the Devil can reply, eager as He always is to mock humankind and its addiction to God, 'Time is time, you know.'

'But what is time which is time?' you ask Him, hoping you are speaking to God and not to a fallen angel.

'Time is a fall,' says the angel.

'From where?'

'From time.'

'Where to?'

'To time.'

'Not to eternity?'

'Yes, in Hell.'

Deprived of God, time and space, you begin to assert yourself by saying (to yourself, there are no others), 'ME.' And then you shout, '**ME, ME, ME, ME.**'

'So what?' says God or Satan or whoever may be found within your hearing.

'I am because I am.'

‘Without **ME**?’

‘Who *are* you?’

After a while you calm down and say to the same self of yours, ‘All right, all right. I’m on my own now. I’ve lost ten kilos in weight – the outside world, in other words – and I feel all the fitter for it. No intrusions, no interventions.’

‘What? What? How do you mean?’ you hear in your left ear. And you answer categorically:

‘All right, all-

What does this line mean? It looks like negotiations between the two sides (God ((Satan)) and humans) have come to a full stop. And yet it goes on endlessly, which proves that we are immortal, to some extent; to the extent of this line. So we go on:

‘Is that enough?’ you ask somebody. ‘Am I immortal already?’

‘Not quite.’ The answer floats through your right ear. So you have two ears and both of them are in perfect working order. Such good news calls for a celebration!

All right, you are almost immortal; at least you can go on drawing this line until tomorrow morning. But what about your space without which neither your line nor your makeshift immortality have any meaning? Yes, they point out you are cramped for space. You send an Instagram, a Milligram, and they realise you are on top of the world, missing both the top and the world. But whatever top you are on, it is a top and you had better sit on it as long as your bottom remains your bottom – your top’s pedestal. ‘A few milligrams are missing,’ they point out and up. ‘And what about your *kilograms*?’ ‘You’re topless, by the way.’ ‘Are you topfull, may I be so bold –?’

Of course I am in the middle and so cannot see the wholeness of the wholeness (I do see holiness), and going outside does not appeal to my senses and menses, as they all call our mental procedures now. I see I, don't and And, and I am not sure I could do anything with I, with myself: I am too old, weak and meek for that. Why should I do anything at all? I am comfortable enough, incidentally: ME has enough room to disport oneself (and myself) in the hour of need, of deed.

They ask, 'Who are you?'

You answer, 'ME,'

'So what?' they answer. 'No big deal.'

'Can't you see capital letters?'

'All right, capital, as Hamlet put it.'

'Besides, there's a lot of room by my sides, can't you see?'

'And what about your ceiling? Too low, isn't it?'

I began with one letter, as many babies did and do, and that is probably enough, for if you utter a second letter, you are in it – in ma, in pa, in gr, in ow. You are it in your bones, in your phones. Instead of crying IIIIIIIIIII, you cry ‘you’, otherwise you will not be able to cry ‘give me’. You cry ‘give me’ and they give you a quantity of milk and chocolate. Is that what you live for?

Chocolate

Chocolate

Chocolate

Chocolate

Milk

Milk

You are whole

You are mole

You are

You are

Buio

Uig

Cvtetc tf

You are tif.

And chocolate-

God withdrew and the space He left is right here, right above, right below:

Û^pàuja’’çfw noçiz
 q;(’’p^μ,oi nd^poù
 (bmtoi yubn h&,fc
 ékliuşa’’!rjc-
 àvosidugchfsdpokjlnb

ME

cvop-

E;r,gtfiu!çrkjoçf uvc!hgv
 tyèy!§gt!uhb !çàijn
 à)pok,)p^kl, ;-)lk,n-^lk,\$

^m;,

REC

You know you are incurably ill or mad, but you say to yourself that everything is curable now, given the omnipresence of original cells that grow and sprout everywhere. All you (or your doctors) have to do is pick them up and insert them into your body, soul, mind and all the perversions you need to go on living comfortably, with a lot of panache. So you should say to yourself (and you do, you do), 'I'm curable, curable, curate, curable, crucible, crucifix. Here are a number of original cells that will prolong my life beyond any bounds, however distant and invisible, inaudible. I don't mind becoming a half-horse like a centaur, provided I live as long as Matusalemus or whatever his name might be in this day and age.'

Of course you do not mind being inculcated, inoculated against polio and death by fair means or foul but, understandably enough, you prefer fair means and you opt for them when your doctor asks you which means you opt for, putting a sheet of paper in front of you. 'Please sign your verdict,' they say and you sign many sheets of paper, making your position quite clear: you write 'fair, fair, fair,' right above your signature. And then you ask your doctor, 'Where will the original cells come from? Are they organic?'

'Quite organic,' they answer nodding their heads.

'Do they come from the Earth or horses or pigs?'

'Everything comes from the Earth,' she answers.

'What about heaven?'

'Everything comes from heaven too,' it answers. And it shows you a diagram where you see how this process is carried out:

HEAVEN

I

I

I

I

YOUR BODY

‘What about me?’ you ask.

‘All right,’ they say.

HEAVEN

YOU

YOU

YOU

YOU

YOU

YOU

EARTH

ORGANIC

ORGANIC

ORGANIC

At such a moment, it is better not to think about one’s organs, giving preference to the organ and music in general. And to poetry, probably.

THERE IN THE TOMB STAND THE DEAD UPRIGHT,

BUT WINDS COME UP FROM THE SHORE:

THEY SHAKE WHEN THE WINDS ROAR,

OLD BONES UPON THE MOUNTAIN SHAKE

Subject is up there; object down here, down near. Are we? Yes, brothers and sisters. You are my brother, I am your father and sister and nephew. Interconnected, global, village, *ville*. Going by stages. Where to? To Olympus. I am your Zeus, you are my Athena; and vice versa. And God is everywhere, as usual. You eat a blade of grass (of *grace*) and say to yourself you are eating God and all His emissaries. You drink a drop from a nearby lake and realise you drink God's blood in your godforsaken place. In your *bled*. In your blood.

Life comes back. They always speak of a one who becomes someone else upon awakening or wakening, kening, king; upon any and everything. We have a lot of multiplicities inside our I, WE, YES, AM ALIFE. What about life? Is it as lazy as all that?

