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EQUATIONS

THE PREFACE

Our attention span is much smaller than what we encountered and what writers could count upon only 30 years ago. Algorithms, however, continue to influence our life advantageously, offering a substitute to the brains which fight shy of *War and Peace* on account of its length and breadth. Even in my tender youth I thought that literature – and any realm of art – should be judged only in terms of texture, of sparks that enliven whatever we come across; or fly over, as the case may be. Suppose that the idiom ‘a turn of the screw’ means something else: you just turn a screw and this action of yours unscrews a masterpiece, bit by bit, patiently and gorgeously. And that is what I advocate in the domain of literature where you should not follow plots and characters too closely (for fear of losing them in the end). When reading *War and Peace* we had better not pay too much attention to Natasha Rostova as such, but to Tolstoy’s words, poetry and predicament: how could you write about such a war, such a peace, without falling back on your own life and worries?

‘The world is a commentary on an unknown poem.’ This poem is well-known, alas, and sometimes we yearn for the advent of Alzheimer’s which might remove from our horizons and screens Vladimir Putin and some other unpleasant – not to say disgusting – representatives of our species. The task I proposed to myself is not as ambitious as that of Tolstoy. In this book I offer a number of comments on the excerpts drawn from the Fathers of the Church (Tertullian, Theodoret, St Augustine). The world is perhaps not a poem – just a dirty, humiliating rumour. The texts I chose explore our capacity to embroider upon everything we come across. And sacred books are an honourable fruit of our history during which we have stumbled upon Adam’s corpse too often. Supplying comments to them is far more sophisticated and challenging than the anatomy of our present life’s melancholy which is the unavoidable result of overall aggressiveness and stupidity. After all, Go and chess are far more amusing and exciting than Kalashnikovs.

‘A pearl will shine in the midst of squalor and a gem of the first water will sparkle in the mire. This is what the Lord promised when he said: “Them that honour me I will honour.”’

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I will not honour anyone because I do not have to. Even the Lord does not have to do anything, not even to create the world and all its inconveniences. All right, He wishes to create the world to combat His feeling of loneliness, as some of us say. By the way, they (those some) also object to my touching upon inconveniences as if they were something in particular, separate from the world where we live in squalor. And squalor lives in us, consequently and logically. How does it fare within our substances? How are you today, my dear squalor? The squalor of the first water, the squalor of the second water. They end and that is what is so wonderful about them and beginnings. They all end in the first water, in the second water. And if the world does not end for some obscure reason, we continue to put one water upon another – until we reach several thousand waters which are more or less equivalent to what Scheherazade said to some sultan or other. She said, ‘All my tales are like water.’ And the sultan put to her the following question, ‘Is this water sparkling or not? I prefer sparkling water, and that’s what I usually ask for, when flying on my favourite carpet.’ ‘Then it’s sparkling water I fill my tales with, up to the brim.’ If you honour water, you automatically honour everything. That is the logic of the tales told by the princess we honour almost as much as we honour our Lord. Scheherazade sparkles in the mire, so do we. And I wonder what does not really sparkle in the mire. Doesn’t the mire exist for the sole purpose of allowing something or someone to sparkle? Not only the stars? And what about a shooting star? It shoots, it shoots, it shoots and eventually it falls. When falling, however, it loses its sparkle. So many earthlings address the following plea to the stars, ‘Please, don’t shoot! We’re not really afraid of your bullets and cannons, but your sparkling ritual is so precious we’re loath to lose it. Even if we have nothing to eat, we say to the Creator, “All right, we can go without food for another month. But please don’t deprive us of the stars and their sparkling. It is true we cannot eat them. But you say that bread isn’t the only nourishment we can count upon. So we count upon their sparkling.” We count, count, count, and then we count no longer. What does that mean? That is how the Lord honours us. No longer, no longer, no longer. And then we start once again: one, two, three, four. Four sparkles. Is that enough for one’s life? No, it is not enough. So we go on: five, six, seven. Once again we stop and look at the mire. We touch it and throw it away. The point is you cannot throw it either away or off. It does not throw, so to speak: it does not have this aptitude. What aptitudes does it have? It can stay in close proximity to your body, and this close proximity is so close sometimes that you wonder whether it is the mire or your own body, your soul and the rest of your ingredients. You say to yourself, ‘This is the rest of my ingredients,’ and you begin to reflect on what constitutes your ingredients and how to distinguish them from what is essential in your life. But do you shine? Do you?

‘Thus the apostle refrains from making virginity a positive duty, because the Lord in speaking of eunuchs who had made themselves such for the kingdom of heavens’ sake finally said: “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”’

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What am I able to receive? Suppose I am given an apple, but this apple does not fall from heaven, which does not mean it is not a gift of heaven: everything and everybody are the gifts of heaven. It is true that the Earth also offers us a lot: herbs, for instance. And some of these herbs have medical qualities. That is why we are so healthy and do not die every minute. We just bend down and pick up a few herbs that land up in our mouths and stomachs, after a few manipulations known to every human being. And also to cows and cats, although these animals do not achieve the same result consciously, meticulously. They just bend their heads and do whatever their instincts induce them to do, perform and carry out. They just convey something to their bellies and this something allows them to continue their daily rounds without much ado. The Earth goes round in the same manner, come to think of it. It does not even have to bend whatever it has within its mental horizon – for the simple reason that it has neither mentality nor any brain. Yes, our Mother Earth does not even have a pair of breasts; it is topless, in other words. And what about *us*? Why are we supposed to be her children? Of course, when faced with this problem, some of us say, ‘I am a child of heaven. As a matter of fact, I’ve nothing in common with the Earth except that I walk on her. But my head and soul are always in the kingdom of heaven. They’re its subjects.’ But other friends of ours say we are the objects with which the heavenly kingdom plays day in day out. Or night in, as it were. Nights and days as such are empty, vacant, and this state of affairs does not suit them, to say the least. What can you do with yourself if nobody envies you, provokes you, shoots at you? You cannot even protect yourself: you are not tempted to. No one attacks you because there is nobody either in front of you or on the right-hand side. There is also what they call ‘the left-hand side’, but let us not speak about it so as not to add another worry to our worry-overwhelmed being. Every new emptiness adds insult to injury, and so we go from one insult to another injury, our body being covered with bruises and downright wounds. If asked to name our wounds, we just enumerate several deaths to which we have been subjected throughout our so-called lives. One death is related to heat. One day, on a beach, we were literally engulfed by the heat that our sun sends down, mindless of our feelings and creature comforts. Up to a certain point, we enjoy sunrays and also sunbeams, but there are many points in our lives, in our numerous lives, and some of these points have no returns, or no return tickets, as they put it sometimes. So we lie on a beach and ask ourselves: ‘Is the point whose approach I feel and fear the last one? The point of no return? Are there any tickets on my chest?’ You touch your chest and realise its surface displays no tickets of any kind. So you die, sometimes peacefully. And if it is a peaceful death you undergo – you undergo a whole process in the course of these instants – you thank the Lord for His solicitude. You say, ‘Thanks, thanks, thanks,’ and die. Is there anything more beautiful in the world?

‘Give each man enough for his immediate need but do not give money to swell what a man has already.’

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Give, give, give, take, take. That is what we hear round the clock, and sometimes we hear only 'take', although there is nothing to take, to be honest. This is impossible and even out of the question: there is *always* something to take. And if there are no objects, such as money, within your reach, you reach for the nearest wall and begin to scratch it. You scratch it until something drops into the palm of one of your hands, and you take what you got, as a result of your scratching. Suppose you see a heap of gold and, understandably enough, you are tempted to appropriate it. But do you really need it? Does this heap belong to the category named 'my immediate need'? Of course you are ready for the questions you may be bombarded with on such occasions, so you say straightaway, 'Yes, my immediate need can't do perfectly well without this heap of gold. Can't you see a series of castles in the distance? My immediate need is centred upon these castles without which I might die, wriggling like a worm or squirming like an eel. Do you really want me to become an eel, in the twinkling of an eye? Are you longing to deprive the world of one of its highest representatives? Do you believe in eels, in their capacity to replace human beings?' Of course someone is likely to say that eels are better than artificial intellects, and given that we are doomed to yield our power to those intellectual nothingnesses, we had better rely upon the vivacity of eels, on their indissoluble link with real life. Besides, in a moment of hunger, we may resort to the presence of our eels and eat some of them, which cannot happen if we stay in the company of intellectual intellects. I, for one, will never partake of such an intellect, even on the brink of death of hunger. Suppose I were dying of hunger – surrounded by those statue-like beings called artificial intellects. I make an attempt to eat one of them, but then I realise they are artificial; and I cannot bear artificial food which leads our humanity to all sorts of cancers. Of course I might single out an appetising intellect, but no intellect is really appetising – if we judge it in terms of succulent titbits. I admit that intellect, whatever its size and importance, may exist on its own. I mean that in this case no one really wants to eat it, leaving it alone. This intellect stands somewhere, not necessarily in an exhibition devoted to intellects, in relation to the superiority of human beings. It may turn out to be human or inhuman, meaning it is made of metal, string and springs. Its aim amounts to recognising the validity of different things, of their secret or open relationships, of our surroundings in which there are many galactic masses, stars and whatever. Why are we (or they, those intellects) so determined to find out what those atoms and molecules amount to? They amount to this or that, and their amounts or mounts do not really count, as far as our rudimentary existence goes. And whatever lies outside our practical needs and goals is really OUTSIDE so that no one has to give money to this entity. All this is outside our concern. But one day we are bound to realise that nothing lies outside, that we need EVERYTHING. This huge thing swells as people and intellects walk around, giving money to our right hand, to our left hand; otherwise we would not need any hands.

'The old enemy knows that the battle with impurity is a harder one than with covetousness.'

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What *does* he know, this old enemy of ours? He cannot remember anything, being old, decrepit and out of his wits. Obviously we are talking about the Devil as we often do. And we also talk *to* him, and our words are always at cross purposes. Our purposes cross and uncross, and sometimes they run parallel to each other. It is better not to use the word 'always' in any connection revealing our kinship with Satan. Yes, from time to time they run parallel, our purposes and his. And we wonder why we run like that, instead of sitting in our armchairs,

on our benches in our parks. Are we keen on winning this race? What for? Do we yearn to become the Devil's brothers or even the Devil himself? No, of course not. In the first place we are loath to grow old, and every devil deserves the definition 'the old enemy'. We all have enemies, otherwise we cannot be entirely human: something will necessarily be lacking from our contents. We are not really *surrounded* by enemies: there are loopholes in this construction, and we can escape through these holes into the land of eternal bliss. Even the land of *partial* bliss is likely to become our temporary objective, provided we annihilate the influence of the word 'old' which pursues us, when we reflect on the Devil, with the characteristics attached to his presence in the world of humans. Why should we call him 'old'? He is just our enemy whose presence wholly depends upon our tolerance. If we tolerate him in our midst, saying again and again, 'Talk of the Devil,' even when no one comes in, then we are bound to find him almost everywhere; not only under our beds and chairs. Talk of the Devil and here he is; and you talk to him – out of politeness, most of the time. 'How are you, our dear Devil?' Of course we seldom go so far, but we do ask him to take a seat as if we could not live without him, without his help and devilish ways. What *are* his ways? They always lead us to Hell or to the Devil, and the only consolation we are able to offer to our psyche resides in the possibility of this alternative, of the choice we are allowed to make. Do we wish to go to Hell or to the Devil? The notion of Hell is more abstract and consequently may include some paradisiacal images, such as a proverbial bench on which you reportedly sit within the realm of Paradise, in one of its parks or gardens. Call them what you wish: as long as you are in Paradise, words are of no importance. What counts is this bench and other benches of the same kind. And they are kind, these benches, in spite of the arthritis you may suffer from. Alas, it takes you some time to get used to the idea that in Paradise you do not suffer from the illnesses which pester us on Earth and within its surroundings. Apparently the astronauts who landed on the Moon also suffered from arthritis; and from gout. Generally speaking, apart from all the trouble you may have in the domain of gout and goats – but not from the domain of their cheeses – it is not advisable to speak to the Devil. You may *talk* to him, as I pointed out earlier, but speaking to him is another kettle of fish. If they show you two kettles of fish, on some occasion or other, you usually choose the wrong kettle, whether it is to be found on the right-hand side or somewhere on the left. (Even political parties get involved in this business from time to time.) As long as you remain silent, when confronting the Devil, you are on the safe side, wherever this side is situated. Sometimes you find yourself in a pit at the top of which there swings a pendulum. And yet you know you are on the safe side because this pendulum does not mean you any harm. It just swings from one side to the other, peacefully, harmonically, as if executing a piece of music, of inaudible music which is the best music in the world, as everyone knows. But if you attempt to speak to the Devil, you experience a series of jerks, and even if the sun shines right above your head, you go slowly from one circle of Hell to another. These circles should not be mistaken for the similar images associated with the Olympic games. No, there are no games to speak of; in your case; unless you regard your jumps from one hot saucepan to another as a game for which one is prepared to sacrifice one's life. Well, you are already engaged in a discussion with the Devil, and to put an end to it, you just say, 'Go to the Devil.' The only snag is – the Devil has no wish to go to the Devil. Why? 'Because I'm weary of myself,' he usually answers. How come? How could be weary of yourself, considering you are witty, beautiful, and you can play with your tail for hours on end. And you do not say anything, anything, contrary to what many cats do. If you dare touch their tails ever so slightly, they begin to produce all sorts of unpleasant sounds, and you abandon your games and recognise your defeat on the spot. The matter stands differently with the Devil. You get hold of his tail and begin swaying it to

your heart's content. And the Devil does not give a damn, to put it mildly. And yet he says now and then, 'I'm weary of myself. I'm weary of my tail, and even the toil and trouble you inflict on it doesn't make me change my mind.' Then you try to make him laugh. According to the fairy tales you heard in your childhood, the Devil often laughs, being amused by our uncouthness, by our inability to make ourselves useful. You make yourself utterly unuseful, and naively you believe the Devil will roar with laughter. He does not. What is more, you get the feeling he is on the point of bursting into tears. Why? You often ask yourself this question – when in company with the Devil. Because he pities us. Looking at your clumsiness, he says to himself, 'What a pity he doesn't look at me! Alas, he wasn't created in my image.' True enough, if shown the image of the Devil, any child would prefer him to God – because no child really likes beards. Children like birds, not beards, even if Santa Claus comes to them every month, instead of paying his customary annual visit; even if he gives them real cars and real airplanes. They say as they install themselves in a car or on a plane, 'I like this thing very much. But I continue to hate beards.' In accordance with their wishes, Santa Claus touches his beard, twists it several times, for several hours and ends up tearing it away from his chin. So now Santa Claus is beardless, and so every child should feel happy, instead of snorting and snoring somewhere, instead of shedding hot and cold tears. Contrary to our expectations, the child in question bursts into a different kind of tears. Yet it is a watershed composed of tears that we are facing on this occasion, in this unpredictable situation. We say to Santa Claus, 'Go to the Devil,' and obediently he executes our order, going to the Devil. Then we realise that the Devil is Santa Claus and vice versa. And even vice versa is the Devil; and so is our favourite chest of drawers.

'It is easy to cast off what clings to us from without, but a war within our borders involves far greater peril.'

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We know that something clings to us, and we think that we ourselves cling to ourselves, otherwise we might lose our personality, our *raison d'être*. Actually, we opt for the Devil, whenever a danger comes too close to our ego, to our being in this world; to our being, in other words and other worlds. (We must always think cosmically, taking into consideration whatever flies around us, beneath us and so on.) Even when we hear something along the lines of, 'Go to the Devil,' we do go to the Devil so as not to lose anything that clings to us either from without or from within. It is no easy task, coming to terms with whatever lies on both sides of our being, as I put it earlier. We are convinced that our hands are outside, and yet they are inside as well, being governed by our will which is constantly inside our body. At least we hope so, when we listen to a politician whom many people call a dictator. Many people feel they must do whatever their doctor dictates, and never question the advice they are given. But there are people who say, 'I'll never listen to this dictator. Who does he take himself for? Hitler? Stalin? Putin?' No, he does not: he is neither Putin nor Stalin. He is just your doctor, but you are reluctant to follow a number of his words he calls 'my advice'. He does not even go so far as to call these words of his 'my order'. And yet you resist any attempt to influence your behaviour – from the outside. And your doctor sits in his chair, in his office, and you are about to leave him and his office at the earliest opportunity. Has it already come, this opportunity? Your doctor names yet another medicine, and you say to yourself, 'I've had enough of this nonsense.' And you leave whatever you can leave at this particular moment, leaving behind both your doctor and his prescriptions. Where are his prescriptions now? Probably in your pocket, but you are prepared to get rid of them at the earliest opportunity. And this opportunity comes at once. It

is as if you had a magic wand in your hand. You just touch it and the doctor's prescriptions disappear within a patch of grass. Of course someone lectures you on the importance of the impeccability of our grass, gardens and trees. This person reminds you that you are not alone in the world, and so you are supposed to respect other people's inclinations. 'Aren't you inclined to follow my doctor's advice?' you ask as you bend down and pick up the prescriptions. 'With pleasure,' answers your interlocutor. (Call him what you wish; a policeman, for instance.) A few days later, you learn about this person's death, and you congratulate yourself on your wisdom and vigilance. So it is easy to deal with whatever comes from without, be it a prescription or a stranger. I would not recommend a piece of rude behaviour. Is that what they usually call it? You just punch the stranger on the nose. No, no, no. It is far more polite to give him the prescriptions you habitually get from your family doctor; or just from your doctor, from any doctor. Don't forget to obtain this person's phone number or his email address. Thus you will not miss his death which, in this case, will give you a lot of satisfaction. After all, he replaced you in that tomb of his, within that cemetery about which you probably do not know much. Or nothing at all, nothing at all. It is better not to know anything about cemeteries, even if you like paying visits to your favourite poets' and philosophers' tombs. Do cemeteries cling to us from without? No one is likely to say to someone else, to one's best friend, for instance, 'You know, I don't feel well on the surface of this globe. I hope I'll feel much better in the earth, in my tomb. So let us look for a suitable cemetery, and you'll dig a tomb for me within its limits, within the limits of my death.' No, no one will ever voice such a yearning unless we are dealing with a madman or a madwoman. And they are better off inside madhouses – that's for sure. There are few things we may be sure about, and this conclusion is probably one of them; although death is a far better place. Not for everyone, whatever you may think and suppose, but for mad people who will never leave us in peace, if they remain within our earshot. Suppose they are quiet: there is such a variety of mad specimens. They sit on their cot and ask for nothing; and nothing or nobody asks for them except if you are a conscientious doctor who cannot leave his or her patients alone. They sit somewhere; peace and quiet surround them – probably because they keep them within their substances. There comes our doctor and destroys both that peace and the quiet. This doctor clings to us from without, whereas our peaceful disposition dwells inside our selves or egos. Is it hard to get rid of them? Anyway, it is much easier than getting rid of your doctor – as if he were your inmate. Well, you invite someone, hoping your guest will leave your abode in two or three or four hours, making matters worse. (Five hours make matters even more horrible.) But the guest stays, in spite of the late hour and the manners we often speak about, when some representative of our species snaps his fingers at them. He snaps his fingers, and you realise he is likely to stay in your house overnight. Then you explain, patiently, painstakingly, that you do not have enough food in your fridge. You say you were going to do some shopping, but the unexpected visit – and you incline your head in the direction of your so-called guest – prevented you from carrying you intentions out, from fulfilling your wishes. 'What's your wish?' asks your visitor. 'Are you hungry?' 'I am,' you answer frankly. 'I wish I could help you in these matters,' says your guest. 'Of course I can't offer you a piece of my flesh. That would remind us of *The Merchant of Venice*, and it wouldn't be a pleasant memory, given the way the main character was treated at the end of this immortal play. Of course, inspired by the merchant, we can go on and remember other plays by our immortal playwright, and that will kill time rather efficiently. Don't forget we have to cope with eternity, and filling this immensity of time is one of our primordial tasks.' 'I'd rather fill it with a sandwich,' you say, but receive no answer. That is how our life goes, and sometimes we have the feeling nothing can fill this void into which we continue to fall as if we had

nothing else to do. And then we realise we actually have nothing else to do. And if our parents or teachers reproach us for our laziness – ‘You haven’t done anything today,’ they say, adding something about lazy bones – you answer as follows; ‘I’m falling into the void we all know by heart.’ Does this void cling to us from without? Of course we are hungry and the proverbial sandwich is not yet within our intestines. But the other void, the metaphysical one, awaits us outside, situated as it is not within our body, but within our death. And so we go to this death with our eyes either closed or open. We open our eyes and see death, face to face. Is that what they say in their Scriptures? But then, then, then, you will see all this in front of you as if it were inside you. As a matter of fact, it *is* inside you, otherwise you would never have seen anything.’

‘And now that I am writing to you I beseech you do not regard the bodily affliction which has befallen you as due to sin.’

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I am sorry you heard about my bodily affliction, as you put it. Actually it is just a scratch, nothing more. Of course every scratch we receive as a result of our labours or games comes from somewhere; in other words, it does not come out of the blue. It usually comes out of the black, according to my cogitations. Whatever colour it comes from, we are afflicted and often cannot act freely as we used to, only a few minutes ago. Luckily for us, our soul remains intact, even if the scratch I am talking about is abnormal or gigantic in size. And we all know that our pain depends on the size of the scratches we confront in our daily life. You touch something and immediately you feel an unbearable pain. You look at the pain or rather at the wound which sends painful signals to your brain, faithfully recording whatever happens to you, and you convey to your relatives or friends your feelings, your affliction, your grievances. You air them and sometimes, after such a séance of airing, you feel much better because you have just put a part of the weight you experience on someone else’s shoulders. You look at the shoulders of your friend or relative and smile, realising that your own pain has been shared with someone whose readiness to help you is beyond suspicion. Sometimes you just see an enormous shoulder in front of you, and you say to yourself, ‘This is part of my grief. How happy I am to have transferred it to this shoulder which looks horrible – on account of this addition, on account of my pain.’ And then you receive an additional pain – probably as a retribution for shifting your problems from one shoulder to another. Is it a sin? True – you are not allowed to strike blows, inflicting pain and injuries on other people’s skins and bodies. But any transfer differs from what I have just described. I mean, these half-conscious transfers are quite different from the blows you begin to distribute as soon as you find yourself in the midst of your fellow creatures. It is even different from the transfers our bankers are acquainted with. In short, it is not a sin, whatever such and such a saint may say on the matter. Of course saints are not fond of banks and dollars; they mostly ignore them. But even the saintliest of saints does not mind conveying some of his sins to other shores, as they say: to other peoples’ brains and souls. Well, you receive a bodily affliction that comes from a colour you are not acquainted with. Actually, you do not care; you do not care about colours; and you are absolutely right. But the bodily affliction I touched upon touches you more and more profoundly. This is the way you explain the incident, not caring a hoot about the language you express your sorrows in. It is not a sin, you say to yourself; and once again you are right. You continue to be right, and your rightness grows in the twinkling of an eye, becoming too big for the room where you are standing. You are much righter than your room and so you realise you cannot stay in

it any longer. So you buy a house, a rather big house, relying on its bigness for your greatness, for the show of your greatness. You install your greatness in the middle of the biggest room which happens to be the living room of your house, and you enjoy your purity, the lack of sin that is the main tendency or characteristic of your being, as I usually say, when in need of defining or rather defying what we are. We are just beings, superior beings, and that is why we need big houses where our qualities can display themselves to the utmost. And then we scratch one of our fingers. It does not really matter, but the infection grows as quickly as our greatness. All the tomato plants are infected with a virus; so are human beings, especially the ones who are free from sin. If you are sinful, your wretchedness or impurity saves you from bodily pains because you just do not have time for them, being wholly preoccupied with evil actions and combinations. But if you are pure, as pure as the purest water, you suffer with every wound you receive from the injustice of the world. The world envies your fundamental purity and decides to avenge itself. How? By allowing contract killers and other criminals to bother you on a regular basis. And if you spend a peaceful day, contrary to what usually happens in your life, the Devil says to the criminals, 'Why do you neglect the expression "on a regular basis"? Have you forgotten the meaning of the word "regular"?' And the criminals resume their work; so do things that go bump in the night, as they say. Something goes bump and you see a sword habitually handled by a skilful samurai. There are no samurais in the neighbourhood of the sword, but it does not seem to mind their absence: it acts on its own. And it wounds you: in its opinion, that is what going bump in the night means. And if you complain, saying, 'All right, you may wound me, if you wish, if you're determined to do so, come hell or high water. But please do it with a bump. Otherwise my linguistic rules will be flouted.' So you hear a bump and see a wound on one of your shoulders. You stand in front of a mirror and look at your wound, and this contemplation does not make you happy. But immediately you realise that you have no sins either on your conscience or elsewhere. So you expose your body to the sword's manipulations and begin to look like Saint Sebastian, to say the least. This conclusion seems to suit the following quotation perfectly, 'Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but the works of God should be made manifest in him.' So all these wounds and swords belong to God: they are his arsenal or paraphernalia. Do samurais act in the same manner? Do they say, 'This sword belongs to God and so are the blows I perform, carry out and display during my battles'? Or do they think as follows, 'This is my sword and I'll win the battle and all other battles I'm supposed to fight so as not to spend my life in the lap of luxury and idleness.' Your wounds are yours, and no one else suffers on your account; at least in this world of ours; unless you have a faithful wife whose intentions are centred upon your life and wellbeing. And this devotion of hers manifests itself to such a point that, whenever a sword threatens you, she comes forward, strips her clothes off and says to the sword, 'Please, strike my body, instead of doing him any harm, for he is my husband, my dear husband.' Accordingly the sword strikes her as well so that, around midnight, we have two Saint Sebastians instead of one. Who is who? That is the question which boils down to the following crucial dilemma, 'To be or not to be Saint Sebastian.' You resolve to spare both your body and your feelings, and so you leave the room, leaving the sword and Saint Sebastians behind. Without so much as a by-your-leave, if you please!

'They quote Isaiah's words: "God hath given the law to aid men," and say that we ought to thank Him for having created us such that of our own free will we can choose the good and avoid the evil.'

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We do not have to read this text any further because, as soon as we come across the word ‘they’, we realise that they are wrong. And we do just the opposite of what they say; and we also think in terms of antonyms. And even if a friend of ours utters this word when speaking about his relatives or those he respects with all his heart, we just leave him high and dry on the pretext of needing more information. What pieces of information could we get? We should first find out if they are really ‘they’ and not just a group of people who do not care about anything, especially about what can be a matter of your life or death. They stand there, and if death happens to pass by, they pretend to look at a painting they have never taken any notice of before. They say to each other: ‘Wonderful painting, isn’t it? I wonder why I haven’t paid any attention to it so far.’ And they repeat their remarks, killing the time that death needs for his passing by, for his walking amidst the living, determined to frighten them out of their wits. They are frightened out of their wits, even if they continue to talk about paintings and the Renaissance. Their wits lie somewhere and they do not really care to recover them as soon as possible, being aware of their wits’ incapacity to help them during their struggle for life in the world where death just walks around, spreading panic, sowing doubts in our minds. Do we really doubt the presence of death, its final arrival? Of course not. But we say to ourselves that death never comes alone: there is eternity behind it or by its side. We look at this eternity, wink at it, doing our utmost not to pay too much attention to death and its allurements. So you do not stare at death: for all its allurements – peace and quiet – it does not attract your attention beyond all measures; whereas eternity remains at the centre of your studies. You observe and note every wrinkle of eternity because you wonder how to deal with this wrinkle, given that it is *your* wrinkle. The same goes for pimples. You are no longer a pimply adolescent boy. You wish you were. You remember how humiliated you were by your pimples throughout your adolescent years. Every time you looked at the mirror, your favourite mirror, the one hanging in your room, you counted the number of pimples your face was wearing as if to display them for some competition or other. And you even tried to get rid of them by touching them ever so gently. The point is you were not supposed to burst them, being guided by the example of Alexander Scriabin, one of the Russian composers who cared too much about his beauty or handsomeness. Once he was shaving himself, and he did not undertake this job for the first time, on that particular occasion: he was doing it every day, not to say twice a day. One day he noticed a pimple that he had inadvertently given rise to, when performing some manoeuvre or other with his apparatus. He was ashamed of himself, although this pimple had nothing to do with his ability to compose music. It did not sound like a bad piece of work, like an unfortunate opus – for the simple reason that it did not make a sound at all, even when you touched it, pushed on it, tried to pop it. That is what the composer did, unaware of the consequences that such an action was likely to result in, ruining everything down to the composer’s ability to compose music. (As far as I know the dead do not compose music, not even requiems.) So Scriabin went on torturing his pimple, and understandably enough, the pimple retaliated. I do not know whether it grew bigger or not, but it pestered the composer for the rest of his life. And the rest of the composer’s life was short – much shorter than the composition he was planning to begin – *The Great Mystery*. So, when looking at the pimple one is likely to find on the face of eternity, one should on no account think about getting rid of it. Don’t forget you are dealing with eternity now, not with a composer or one of his compositions. You look at the pimple and say, ‘This pimple might harbour the end of my life. If I touch it, it may grow bigger and bigger, disfiguring my face and also my life. And I care about both. Would I dare show my disfigured face to the world, let alone to the men and women I am in love with? Never, never. And never means the end of eternity. Any pimple is capable of saying “No,” to eternity, if you try to interfere,

putting an end to it.' I mean, putting an end to both your pimple and eternity. So you say to yourself, 'Let this pimple grow and prosper – at the expense of my handsome face. What do you care whether I am handsome or not? Those who are in love with me will continue to love me, come pimple or bruise. And those who do not will never love me, even I find myself in my second adolescence, even if I find all my previous, old pimples.' And what if you have no pimples? You are so used to their presence, to your fighting with them, that now you are at a loss for an adequate reaction. Should you touch your face, just in case? Should you shave yourself, hoping to achieve the result for which the above-mentioned Russian composer is so famous? Actually many people are unaware of his creative output, but all of them know that pimples are somehow associated with Scriabin's face and death. They may hesitate as to where this legendary pimple made its appearance, but they know for sure that death followed almost immediately, on the third or fourth day. There is another theory which makes our eternity depend on pimples. All right, I do recognise that my face was covered with pimples from one side to the other. But that does not mean I cannot recover my adolescence, though a different adolescence, radically different. Let us suppose I decide to eat apples all the time. Apparently one apple a day keeps the doctor away. Sure enough, the doctor no longer comes – for the simple reason that you were rude to him three months ago. At some point you find yourself on the horns of a dilemma: Should I eat as many apples as possible or see my doctor instead? You are not in love with your doctor, but his presence makes you feel better, even if you are not undergoing an operation; even if he does not inject a vaccine or some other atrocious fabrications into your veins. His presence makes you laugh because he jokes pretty well; and even if he does not joke, you laugh – for no reason at all. The reason is: your doctor is by your side, and you have no idea to what you should attribute this attachment of yours. You do not even know if it is an attachment or just a phenomenon – one of those phenomena you cannot explain on the spur of the moment. Of course you are not limited to this particular spur – you can meditate on the situation to your heart's content. No one will ever stop you unless you commit a crime and a police officer rings your doorbell. But no one rings your bell; you just meditate on some trifle or other. And that is what they call eternity, I suppose. Meditating on trifles. Is that what eternity is about, in the final analysis? You have had enough time for big problems, and so all of them are solved. What is left amounts to a few trifles on which you meditate day in day out. And a pimple is one of these trifles. But trifles are different from each other, and pimples are dangerous, according to Alexander Scriabin's personal history. This history of his is not so personal as might appear at first blush: it concerns you as well. Thanks to Scriabin you know that pimples and other nuisances of this kind should not be handled neglectfully, negligently. You should pay a lot of attention to your pimples, otherwise you might shout: 'What a catastrophe!' upon learning you are going to die. Actually you are on the threshold of death. Curiously enough, some people do not accept this definition willingly, at once. They say, 'But where's this threshold? I see nothing of the kind.' Just look at the threshold of your room. That is what it looks like – the threshold of death. Do you know that the Russians will never shake your hand, if your body is situated on the other side of the threshold to which we are paying attention right now. They stand on the other side of this threshold and you see their hands which seem to hang over this threshold. But you say, 'No, I can't shake this hand of yours because, if I do, we'll quarrel almost inevitably. I suggest you just take another step, cross this threshold, and I'll give you a big bear hug.' Well, we were talking about pimples or trifles. Both should be handled with precaution, otherwise anything can happen; just anything. Anywhere there might appear a threshold, and anybody can say, 'This is the threshold of your forthcoming death.' And say whatever you might, this threshold will never disappear. That is what eternity is about: this is just a threshold. A threshold of

what? Of death, for instance. You just spend your eternity in expectation of some disaster or other. And disasters are always like that: they are some or other. Anyway, it is a disaster you are heading for. There is no way out of the situation; there are no loopholes, in other words. You may spot the following inscription: 'The Loophole.' You look around; you look everywhere. You end up writing the word LOOPHOLE just under your feet. But there is nothing at your feet with the exception of some floor or other; with the exception of a patch of grass. You sit down on this patch and begin to sing your own lullaby: 'Loophole, loophole.' Then you stand up, sit down on another patch of grass and sing: 'Out, out, out, out.' You can also sing, 'That's how it is,' or something along these lines. You can also sing, 'Along these lines.' You can also sing, 'Perpendicular to these lines.'

'Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain.'

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We pick up a book (or the Book) in the hope that this book will give us a few valuable precepts, recommendations after which, after getting used to them, after making them ours, we shall never go wrong. But first we are supposed to go to such a city. Which city is meant in the text? Such a city. You just look around, raise your arm, point it in this direction, in that direction, all the while saying, 'Such a city, such a city.' Then we begin to move our legs and also the rest of our body, and go somewhere, which is not enough, not right: we must go *into* something. What is more, we know exactly into what we are supposed to go. We must go into such a city. But is it the city we have already found ourselves in several times: yesterday, last month? Is this city such a city? Or such a village? Is it really a city? What *does* it look like? What do we know about looks and their opposites? Does this city look like a city or sound like one? We hear a few sounds and say, 'The thing I hear must be a city.' For some obscure reason – this reason is really obscure – we are reluctant to open our eyes as if we had determined to go on living with our eyes closed or wide shut. But where are we? Actually, the position we are ensconced in – supposedly, it is a wide, comfortable armchair – matters much less than what we are about to do, our aim and preoccupations. Are we here in order to buy something? What? Usually the proud answer this question as follows, 'We've got everything and so we don't need anything at all.' But apart from the proud, from those who think they are on the top of the world, there are people whose feelings are rather disastrous, being directed towards disasters, misery and global unhappiness. 'We're globally unhappy,' they say to each other and also to the world at large. They walk along a street, put their bodies in front of other people whose purposes have nothing in common with their woes and lamentations, and say to them, 'I'm globally, utterly miserable.' And if other people do not react at once, the lamentation-burdened people say, 'You're so insensitive, so selfish. Aren't you afraid of God's wrath? Don't you know that God punishes insensitive people who have no empathy in their hearts and souls? Don't you know you're supposed to help your brothers and sisters to the utmost of your powers?' Usually people say, 'To the utmost of your abilities,' but the unfortunate, the miserable, Victor Hugo's heroes and heroines, resort to the word 'powers' which, logically enough, seems more powerful in the context. And also out of the context, to tell the truth. So you help the miserable, but they cannot be helped and so, once again, you realise they are miserable; and probably they are even more miserable than they used to be, for the simple reason that life is miserable, more and more miserable. If you look at life as such, you may be sure that it will become even more miserable at the end of the week. And if you are already at the end of the week, it will become more miserable over the weekend or at the beginning of the next week, at

the latest. You also realise there is no point in helping anybody because only God can help everyone. But everyone is supposed to help himself and herself, not relying *completely* on the Almighty. You can rely on Him up to a certain point, and whenever you reach this point you should say to yourself, 'That's enough. I shouldn't bother the Almighty anymore. Now it's up to my powers to extricate myself from the situation in which I've found myself in the course of my life.' At once you feel helpless, which helps you realise to what extent God might assist you in the problems you face every day and every night. On no account should you forget the endless night enlarged upon in English and American poetry. And also in Russian poetry, naturally enough. But you are longing to put an end to this night because the only object which, in your opinion, may and should be endless is your life. So you just declare: 'Whatever I see in front of me is what they call "such a city", even if it is a desert I see and feel. I feel its sand, its lack of water. Nevertheless I declare it is "such a city", and consequently begin to gain whatever there's to gain in this city; and also what's not immediately available. I begin to dig the ground and find the rest of what I'm supposed to gain and add to my riches.' This is the interior monologue of the person whose presence in such a city promises a lot of happiness and gain in every field accessible to the human imagination. You gain, gain, gain, and put all your gains together. Lo and behold! There is a real mountain before your eyes, and this mountain represents the multiplication table of your gains. But are you happy? Any pedestrian can ask you such a question. Such a city and such a question – they go together. And you say to this pedestrian, 'Do you have a pair of eyes, my dear pedestrian? Can't you see my gains, happiness and endless *beatitude*?' And the pedestrian replies, 'I can see a boulder or something like that. Does this boulder represent anything? Is it a sort of Schopenhauerian representation? But where's the world, in this case? Is that all? And what about poetry and music? Aren't they part and parcel of your gains?' You cannot have everything, and we repeat this phrase day in, day out. So many things happen day in, day out that we are tempted to put an end to this succession. You just say, 'Let us keep day in and get rid of day out. In this manner we'll keep our gains and abolish the other side of the coin. There'll be only one side of the coin – our endless, boundless happiness.' And then someone comes along and says, 'Here's the boundary and you can't escape its consequences – the other side of the coin. And this other side means there's no coin at all. The same can be said about your gains which are null and void. Yes, your happiness has just been declared null and void, and you can't do anything about this irrevocable verdict.' But you do your best to revoke this verdict. You find a few lawyers who start working for you day in, day out. Soon they cancel 'day in' and go out. And you remain alone; in company with your verdict. What could be done with it? You can bow to the inevitable, and this verdict seems to be inevitable. Anyway, you cannot avoid it. It is a sort of mountain which stands in front of you and represents a challenge you are unable to ignore, in spite of all your powers. You summon all of them, all your powers, and push them against this verdict, mountain and what not. And what not turns out to be yet another mountain. Even if you abolish the previous mountains, what not will persist and its stubbornness is likely to destroy you forever. What can you do under the circumstances? You decide to moderate your stance on your own greatness. You no longer wish to gain everything and become the president of the solar system. You just aspire to a quiet life – as usual, as everybody does, with the exception of a few maniacs who cling to power and their castles and swimming pools. You are a sort of aspiring Christian or a faithful adept of quietism. You are ensconced in one of your armchairs and quietly look at the life that unfolds within your field of vision. There are some struggles for life within this field of vision of yours, and quietly you abolish them, for they might cast a slur on the integrity of your adherence to the doctrine of quietism. Now there are no more struggles for life

either within your field of vision or any other field: in the field of your eternity, among other things. But you have just realised that, if you keep quiet, you will be eternal almost automatically because your quietness will never let any worry penetrate your organism, your self and its variations; its foliage, so to speak. So you keep quiet and no disturbing thoughts will ever manage to shake your self-assurance based on the utter immobility of your instincts, inner struggles and the outer manifestations of your envies and greed. No such cities loom ahead of you; no such cities, no such places, no such earthquakes. You do not sell anything, but the fact that you do not gain anything either – if you do not sell a product, you do not get money for it or anything else – does not disturb you beyond measure. But these measures do disturb you, although you do not know exactly what measures you are thinking about. You *are* thinking about them, for the simple reason that you have to keep your head busy, otherwise you will no longer have a head. An angel asks you, pointing to your head, ‘What is that, in your opinion?’ And when you answer the question, the angel says, ‘Well, you should use it, otherwise – off with your head.’ And off your head goes. But you still have your hands that you can cross and recross. Why do you move them? Because you are afraid the same angel (or one of his colleagues) may point out that hands must make themselves useful. Your worries gain the upper hand, and this is the only gain you can boast about.

‘I have written nothing yet, and still you menace me with the thunders of a reply.’

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I begin to write and I fear that any writing is pregnant with thunders and replies which you cannot avoid, whatever you do to defend your point of view and safety. You write whatever comes into your head because you know that any thesis, however innocent and unpremeditated, can bring a lot of maledictions upon your head and heart. There are so many theses that they cannot help contradicting each other and exposing the stupidity of other people’s tendencies and ideas. And these expositions lead us to destruction because it is much safer to move in the same direction, going to Paradise, presumably. You go and fall off a precipice, in accordance with the famous painting where the blind do their utmost to find the right way. Actually they find the wrong way and perish, one after another. Their perils are quite spectacular so that we yearn not to fall into the same error, not to rely too much upon our instincts which unavoidably lead us to death and ignominy. There are no other ways, according to many texts, books and saints. Wait a minute, wait a minute! That is our only prayer which helps us hope for the better as if every coming moment were literally imbued with blessings of all kinds. We look closer at this moment – it has just arrived at its destination in our life – and see only blessings as if there were nothing else to see in the whole world. You see something and think in the following terms: ‘This is a blessing.’ Then you transfer your sight to another object which, as a matter of fact, does not look like the previous one, and say again, ‘Another blessing, just another blessing.’ And you go on like this for hours on end; and these hours never end, predictably enough. Why should they end? Don’t they feel comfortable with us, in our houses and rooms? And what about the blessings? Have we ever insulted them? We nurse them all the time, making them believe they are at home as if no one else needed their comfort and felicity. But people believe they need to think rightfully and everything will be all right; in other words, they do not need anything else. They think that everything is in others’ hands, and they go on and on, unmindful of whatever befalls them on the way. They trip over a root, curse everybody and rise to their feet as if nothing had ever happened, apart from their enjoyment or misery. There are roots and legs, and probably nothing else really counts in this life. If your legs move in

accordance with your will or a number of hazards, inconveniences, petty accidents and joys, you think that your life is what it is; and often you just say it as if this were a dignified reply to the mission you have to carry out as a human being, as a responsible human being whose existence means something outside of the mere existence. A multitude of words accompany your destiny, and at some point you realise that silence is probably better than any assessment of the situations you get involved in. Sometimes you ask yourself, 'Is it really a situation worthy of its name? But what's the name of this situation? Should I call it just a "situation"? Is that enough? Isn't it really humiliating? Should I live this life without being able to call it a "situation", something that happens and counts?' Probably your life does not count at all, but you do not let this supposition invade and conquer you. You say, 'All right, all right. My life doesn't count, and it's enough to say it doesn't count. We should on no account add "at all". This is quite unnecessary and humiliating, as I put it somewhere, not a long time ago.' Indeed, if you add 'at all', you squeeze the very last drop from the sense your life must acquire in its course, during the years you spend in this light, in this night. So you meditate upon the situation – please, mark the word 'situation' – whereupon your life grows utterly senseless. It is better, therefore, to leave a few drops of sense in your life, otherwise no one will ever explain to you or someone else why you should not commit suicide. And you do not: you do not commit suicide; nothing of the kind, that is. What *do* you commit? What do you do, generally speaking? Nothing in particular: it is better to do that – or not to do that – instead of committing suicide. You have some problems with grammars and languages, but that does not really count, given that life is made up of actions or inactions; and both have nothing to do with languages. Either you run or lie in your bed, and life has nothing else to offer you, to tell the truth. You tell one truth, two truths, but lies destroy these truths in no time at all – as if time did not exist in this dimension, in the one we struggle with throughout our lives. And we have several lives within our reach, according to some thinkers and religious activists. Well, let us live all these lives with dignity and skill. Here are a few drops of sense – in the sentence that precedes what I am writing right now. There are words of sense everywhere; the point is we do not always appreciate them, acting accordingly. Or we do appreciate them, but acting accordingly is a different kettle of fish; and this kettle is out of our reach. This is one of the main problems we encounter on a regular basis. We have a kettle in our possession, but there are no fish in this kettle. In despair we decide to fling this kettle out of the window to avoid feelings of sadness whenever our gaze meets this empty kettle. We accomplish this feat and regret it instantly. This kind of thing also happens on a regular basis. Disappointments follow some fake ecstasies which look ridiculous if we succeed in judging them objectively; from a distance. But how to create this distance? We are so close to whatever we do or think that everything seems in order – that is how it should be, we say to ourselves. Beethoven said something to this effect at the end of his life, in his last quartet; and we can rely on Beethoven for ultimate truths. Should it be? Yes, this should be like that. That is what he seemed to utter and think, although life is unpredictable and you cannot affirm anything, without being tempted to put a series of question marks over your statements and feelings. You feel well, and then you question the wellbeing of your feeling. Either it is a feeling or it is not. And if it is, it cannot be altogether satisfactory. Something lacking, something is definitely wrong. The feeling is wrong: you feel something that cannot exist on its own. So you invent the whole thing, and you feel that your invention does not hold water. It does hold something, but not water, not water. Of course you rise and go somewhere in search of some appropriate water. But sources of appropriate water are few and far between, so you go far, and often you lose the track you follow or seem to follow. From time to time you find yourself in the wood that Dante frequented before embarking upon his

Comedy. You always embark upon some comedy or other. Then you continue your walk, look back and begin to laugh uncontrollably: the comedy you created on the spur of the moment is so laughable, so intricate and illogical that, once again, you note down in your notebook the following remark: ‘Once again nothing holds water.’ Once upon a time, you make a resolution to create a tragedy, which might allow you to ridicule the whole thing some time afterwards. Some childish memories come to your rescue, to the rescue of the resolution you are on the point of renouncing once and for all. (At such moments everything seems utterly ridiculous and irremediable.) Once upon a time – so many times, so many upons – you made a resolution to give up chocolate. Did you give it up? No way. Of course you started your journey into another day with the help of chocolate: white, black, orange, blue. You still remember the taste of those chocolates as if the whole episode had taken place yesterday or the day before. Now you are forbidden to eat chocolate or anything like it. And whenever you watch TV, you realise you cannot eat anything without dealing a fatal blow to your health, life and eternity. Can anything damage your eternity? This is the problem you often tackle to no avail, for hours and hours. You affirm that nothing can damage your eternity, considering it is an eternity in its own right and so it will last forever, whatever happens. A lot happens to your eternity so it looks old and chipped, like a number of glasses you have in your cupboard. So what? You can still use these glasses of yours. Of course, now and then you feel a tiny little pain somewhere, in the region of your lips and tongue, which means you have another scratch or scar or wound. You do not mind: you are not an actor whose duty summons him to be filmed by cameras and viewed on television screens. You are not summoned: nobody cares about you. So you can afford a few wounds, scratches and scars. You do afford them, and for some time you feel quite happy. After all you are free and this is another proof of your free will, of your kinship with the creatures of God, with divinities of all kinds. And you finally realise that your whole life has been spent in this fashion, being always free, carefree. At some point, at the very beginning of your earthly career, your guardian angel said to you, ‘I’ll give you a key then you’re free to come and go as you please.’ Accordingly, you came to this angel’s house and that was the world, the real earthly world where you have been living ever since, without asking too many questions to which there are no answers, as we all know in our old age. Here is one of these questions: ‘Is it an earthly world or a cosmic one?’ Of course we are part and parcel of the cosmos where everything happens and everybody dies. But we do not mind this death, considering that we are eternal, in accordance with the many teachings we can consult and enjoy in the quietude of our studies or even in a city park. We look at plants and heave a sigh of relief: all this is ours and we are as eternal as the stars. Of course some of the stars we look at are shooting: they shoot and fall and disappear somewhere. But then they rise and fly back to the starry heaven, for they are aware of their importance. If they leave our heaven forever, it will never be starry anymore. And that cannot happen: not only for the sake of poetry and lovers is our heaven starry. Some of our singers and actors hang themselves in heaven to become double stars, triple stars. They mostly cling to constellations, thereby becoming multiple stars. They say after a meal, usually after a sumptuous dinner, ‘It’s high time I went to heaven. I’ll just pick up that rope, lying over there and say farewell to all my compatriots and admirers.’ And so another star appears in our heaven, another constellation or galaxy. But what is the reply of heaven to this intrusion? Just thunder or a series of rolls of thunder. They obscure many stars, including the one we touched upon, anxious to transfer it to the starry heaven in no time at all. In this way we abolished time once again and so we have neither heaven nor time. And I just wonder what we can do in the world like that.

‘Your grief and lamentation have so affected us that we can neither act nor advise.’

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Yes, you have affected us so grievously that we cannot do anything, except sit down and shed tears which fall on the floor as if determined to change its texture. The floor is too dry and I have often realised that, but I do not really know whether this is a positive or negative thing. Apparently our soul is supposed to be wet, for dry souls do not react appropriately to the misfortunes of those who live in the world. (And who lives outside the world, I wonder?) My soul must be wet, otherwise I would not have felt anything upon hearing about your misery and suicidal mood. I would have just said, ‘Well, such things happen over and over again. That’s the construction of the world which doesn’t care about our emotions and the way we react to our relatives’ deaths. If the world did care about our grief and tear-filled eyes, it would behave differently. It would shower us with gifts of all kinds. Not unkind gifts, mind you. Only kind gifts give us pleasure and make us fly to seventh heaven.’ Oddly enough, we prefer seventh heaven to ninth heaven, and to other heavens, generally speaking. Why? Not on account of sacred numbers and their importance, I suppose. In your childhood you played a game centred upon heavens and numbers. You could only count up to ten or rather to nine: your mother said you were not mature enough to learn the secrets related to two-digit numbers, let alone to other digits and numbers. Even now you shudder, whenever someone mixes words and ideas with the astronomical numbers which often adorn our speeches, given that we are fond of riches and number-impregnated prosperity. But today we are confronted with lamentations, and so we cannot move, being stricken with the variety of grief we usually call ‘commiseration’. We commiserate and our heart continues to beat unwillingly because even our heart is unable to act; and if it does, we attribute this beating to the amount of commiseration we experience at this particular moment. Actually, this moment and our sentiments prove beyond any doubt we are human beings and consequently understand the miseries that regularly befall our fellow creatures. We also think about animals, and even trees; even the smallest herbs are not beyond our field of vision which, on this occasion, we can justifiably call ‘love’. For it is love, the sentiment of love that we feel, whenever someone collapses in front of us or even behind our back: we hear a sort of bang, look back and begin to cry, shedding the tears of love, commiseration and humanness. What else can we shed? We are not trees so nobody can say, apart from a few lunatics, ‘This human tree sheds a lot of leaves upon seeing misfortunes and other mishaps that are profusely scattered throughout our space and time.’ No. We just say, ‘This human being proves rather eloquently that he or she is a real human being, and therefore nothing human is foreign to his or her human nature.’ Of course we can pretend we have something to shed – our clothes, for instance. We shed our clothes and think we are trees; and we begin to expect a certain amount of wind to be able to swing to and fro. And the wind we expected so ardently comes and we regret not having our foliage any longer. We recall the noise or rather the music that foliage was able to produce, judging from Wagner’s immortal opus, and we pick up our clothes and put them on again. But this procedure turns out to be rather complicated, considering our corpulence. Our body does not produce the murmur associated in our mind with Wagner’s music. (Let us not forget that Siegfried fell asleep, when listening to this murmur which was a lullaby to him.) We move to and fro, and so do our clothes; but, contrary to our expectations and memories, they do not produce a piece of music, which spoils the fun and deprives us of it. We stand in the middle of our room, deprived of fun and the pleasures we expect from life, from an ordinary life of human beings. It is true that they are mercilessly subjected to a huge variety of suffering and toil, promised by

God at Adam's departure from Paradise. But their pleasures cannot be ruthlessly torn away from this life of ours. For instance, you can go to a shop and buy a marvellous perfume you can use without leaving the shop. You sprinkle yourself and the shopkeepers abandon their toils and troubles and turn towards you, breathing heavily and regularly, almost menacingly. And so you proceed through the streets of the city where you live and where everyone admires you today. You can also buy an ordinary toy: no point in buying something sophisticated, marvellous and almost inaccessible. A multitude of children gather around you and you continue to proceed through your city, preceding this compact mass of children and their unforgettable smiles. You remind me of someone; of a rat catcher, probably. That is how he used to lead a numberless horde of rats away from various cities; from Moscow for instance. Apparently there are many rats in Moscow today, and no one leads them away. What a pity! We can neither act nor advise, in this case. Or course many people say to Moscow's citizens: 'You just start with one rat, and all other rats will follow almost obediently. You should play a simple, folklore-celebrated instrument, a sort of primitive flute, and all the bastards you complain about will scurry towards the Black Sea and drown forever. Of course you shouldn't perform Beethoven's quartets for them: they'll understand nothing at all. They'll flee from your approach. Something simple, very simple.' Sometimes you do see a group of rats scurrying towards the nearest sea, longing to find the eternal rest obtainable only at the bottom of the sea. Why? Because you are a human being. You are restless and do a lot of harm because you cannot do otherwise. If you died peacefully in your bed, which is quite unlikely, to tell the truth, you would be buried, but your restlessness will never leave you in peace. You are sure to get away from your tomb and walk around the city, scaring not only children but also grown-ups who are not infatuated with the living dead. Or half-living dead. Even one third of a dead woman who walks towards you, now and then stumbling on a stone, may frighten you to such a point that you will ask a carefree pedestrian to bury you somewhere. Then you will become one of the living dead yourself. Then you will light upon the book I quoted at the very beginning of this text. When reading the text, you will conceive of a time inhabited by the people who voiced their grievances round the clock. You begin to long for a lamentation which might make things easier for your head. Indeed, your head is full of projects related to walking distances, to beaches and other attractions we get acquainted with in the course of our life. And then another pedestrian comes by and begins his private requiem – or lamentation, to put it simply and accessibly. And you resume your posture in your tomb, in your coffin, in your eternal life. The only snag is – you have to follow the instructions to the letter. And you did not: you put yourself in your tomb *after* hearing the complaint which is supposed to paralyse you completely. But do not forget that this complaint or *lamento* is at the root of your paralysis; it is not its roof. It is somewhere beneath your body which submits itself to the flow coming from Hell or one of its regions. So you sit down on a bench and pray for the advent of the lamentation described in the Book. Obediently the lamentation arrives on the scene of your burial. Are you already in your tomb? You will not be able to move after hearing the first bar of the grievances. So you are safely installed in your coffin and ask the caretaker or whoever happens to be on the scene of your forthcoming eternity to check the reliability of the nails. Then you lie down, make yourself comfortable and the requiem resounds in all its splendour.

'Can a soul derive original sin from a source from which it is not itself derived?'

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There are many problems we have to deal with before embarking upon the process which can lead us to original sin and its derivatives; and its origin, to put it bluntly. We are at this particular moment, and perhaps this moment was chosen by our free will or just by our will which is free from its shackles, now and then. It is now at this precise moment and let us not go beyond this moment for a while, in spite of clocks and time in general: they continue their movement towards annihilation announced in a few apocalypses. What does this moment have in particular? We often speak about particular moments, but we never really know what we are talking about. It is better to declare we are not talking at all because, whatever we say, does not really mean anything. Talking – and not smoking, as some of us believe – is intimately connected with original sin and is often identified with it. What is original sin? You utter a few words – no matter what words you utter – and say to all those who seem to listen to you: ‘This is a good example of original sin.’ And then a discussion closely related to this sin and its originality begins, despite the efforts you make to prevent it from unfolding in your presence. You are just fed up with original sin, with all the sins you come across almost every second. ‘I am sinless,’ you say, doing your utmost to stay on the safe side. ‘Really?’ You hear several voices which seem to sing your condemnation, your verdict, your unavoidable death. All right – you admit that you are a dreadful sinner, but you ask the members of this ensemble not to go on with their profound analysis of sins, their origins and the influence they exercise here, there and everywhere. But no one listens to you, as usually happens when you endeavour to defend yourself and your views in front of those who are always right, whatever happens and whatever the matter under discussion is. Actually they often say that these matters – whatever these matters actually are – need no discussion. Everything is crystal clear, and you cannot even object to the definition ‘crystal’, saying that it is just clear and no addition is vital in this context. Nothing is vital, everything is deadly – not only sins. But what do all these matters and their opposites mean and where is their origin? Do they really have an origin? Aren’t they eternal? You are born and learn you are not alone. Your birth is accompanied by something contained in an apple, and your mother solemnly says, ‘Apples are good for your health, but you shouldn’t forget that they lie at the root of our misfortunes.’ But was the forbidden fruit really an apple? Wasn’t it rather a prune? Peaches, plums, dates, avocados and olives all contain stones. And also original sin, oddly enough. Whatever you eat or drink is originally rotten, and no amount of vitamins can rectify the situation, this state of affairs. Of course you have already found the way out of the situation. That is what happens all the time, and we are all aware of the fact, of this inadmissible fact. You get into a situation and you get out of it. In and out. And time goes on, alluding to greatness and remarkable feats of valour. But they do not come and you say to your friends, ‘I just throw the stone I find in my fruit out of the window, spreading these sins around the world. It is the only way to get rid of original sin.’ And they believe you, to the point of imitating your doings. They all fling stones out of their windows, and we are still surprised whenever original sin suddenly appears before our very eyes. A pedestrian goes on and we are literally throttled by the radiation, the malevolent radiance of his or her original sin. But the way out I alluded to draws us back to languages and linguistic problems and to the aid we can expect from them, from our manipulations with commas, letters and other concomitant elements. The point is we have no idea how to get rid of original sin which seems to be embedded in whatever we touch or eat. (When eating something we also touch it, so it is pointless to add the verb ‘to touch’, whenever we speak about our meals. Tautologies are unpleasant.) Well, we peruse the writing where original sin comes to the fore. We look at the fore and ask ourselves whether original sin is visible in this particular structure or mixture or texture. The fore, the fore. All right, at the end of the day we find a few traces

of original sin in this expression or linguistic combination. The fore. In this word, rather. And slowly but surely we realise that the solution to our problem lies in our knowledge or ignorance of the English language. In English we often say, 'It makes no sense,' and we are mostly right: nothing makes sense, as we know and affirm, all the while nodding our head or heads. What about saying quite simply and usefully, 'This makes no sin'? You sin to your heart's content, and then you say rather loudly, for everybody to hear, 'That makes no sin.' And if someone is keen on precision, on linguistic precision that is, you add, 'Whatever I have done since this morning does not constitute sin. I admit I have seduced two women and three men, but I've done it tactfully, gently and also with gusto. My gusto might have been brutal. Yet I confirm my previous statement: all this does not constitute sin.' And if someone is firmly bent on going further and further, adding original sin to the original question and problem, you answer, 'Original sin has been abolished through my actions and even through my inaction.' Usually they learn languages for practical purposes, for shopping, for clinching deals. They need a slice of ham – during their journey all over England. So they learn the rudiments of this universal, international language and ask for a slice of ham in the shop you happen to walk by on one of your excursions. You do not really have to learn the language of Samuel Johnson to get rid of original sin. The only problem lies in the fact that you cannot get rid of it once and for all. From time to time you just have to repeat this magic formula: which does not constitute sin. Or all this does not constitute sin. Whatever I have done throughout my life does not constitute sin. Actually, it makes no sense either, but I do not care about sense: it comes and goes. But original sin is likely to cling to you forever, if you do not say now and then, every twenty minutes: it does not constitute sin. Unfortunately, sometimes it is better to say 'that constitutes a sin', instead of stubbornly denying your participation in this universal truth, ritual and procedure. You brutalise somebody, and it does not really matter whether the creature you brutalise is a woman or a man. Well, you brutalise this creature, and shortly afterwards say to this creature, 'I'm sorry. This is a sin and I profusely apologise for my behaviour.' But the behaviour in question – it is really questionable, this behaviour – is still visible, and you cannot disregard it completely, however profusely you apologise in your victim's presence. Something similar happens with original sin which stays with us, in spite of our efforts to counteract its ghastly power. We just concentrate on our daily rounds, and original sin remains within the books where sacred and heavenly problems are discussed in minute detail. Spiritual matters accompany us constantly and obstinately, provided we recognise their importance. If we do, we just shut our existence up inside a monastery where even the daily rounds are spiritual, heavenly and cosmic, to some extent. This extent is extensible and wholly depends on our thoughts, on our narrow-mindedness, broad-mindedness. 'Are you broad or narrow?' This question is usually asked on the threshold of one's divinely protected existence. A monk asks the question, and you show him the broadness of your mind and the narrowness of your decision. 'I'll never waver,' you say to him, and this statement is habitually accompanied by a sign which is as narrow as the margin of your cloistered future. You can use both hands for this sign and gesture: you just put them together, leaving a narrow line, a sort of interstice, which leaves no doubt as to your determination, your negative attitude towards worldly life filled to the brim with banquets, amorous scrimmages and other futilities, and other examples of what is justifiably called 'a waste of time'. What is more important, however, is the overwhelming presence of original sin which grows thinner and thinner. Yes, you show its size as your hands show the size of your cell-limited future. Now original sin is as small as this cell where you put a few crumbs of stale bread into your mouth.

‘You have fallen and refuse to rise; you do not so much as lift your eyes to heaven; having wasted your father’s substance you take pleasure in the husks that the swine eat.’

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As far as I understand this life and its mechanism, it is advisable to punish yourself and, if a whip is to hand, you are supposed to pick it up and leave its traces on your back, if not on other parts of your substance. Why is it advisable? Because those who glorify themselves will be humiliated atrociously. They will be put on the surface of the Earth thanks to a weight that someone, the punisher himself, whoever he is, will put on their bodies, making them adopt a disgraceful, humble, down-to-earth posture. You are not an obedient servant of your destiny. You think you can reverse any situation, however terrible and awesome. There comes an awesome situation, and you just reverse it. Your face begins to radiate with a number of smiles that succeed each other. So you know you are confronted with the intricate problem called a ‘reversal of situations’. How are you supposed to go about it? First you opt for the simplest, commonest way accessible to every child. This child of yours goes to a shop, accompanied by his mother or father or nephew, and asks for a box bearing the inscription ‘situation’. The group reaches their home in no time at all – everyone is eager to perform the trick, and you install the box on one of your tables. The choice of the table is important to some degree, but it cannot deter you from the performance of your duty. The table must be able to cope with the weight of the box: its weight depends on the gravity of the situation you are dealing with, perhaps for the first time. Then you check the size of the box and that of the table; you compare them, making doubly sure. What kind of assurance are you dealing with? You must determine whether the size of the box does not exceed that of the table, otherwise your box will find itself on the floor, sooner or later, which might make things much more difficult for you and your assistants. (In your early age you will never be able to accomplish the feat on your own. And if the box is very heavy, you will never be able to cope with it without an efficient assistant, a weightlifter *de préférence*.) So you have your box and everyone’s attention on the table where the metamorphosis is supposed to take place. You see the inscription engraved on the lid of the box, and check the spelling – just in case. If the spelling is wrong, everything goes wrong, on account of this wrong, unproductive spelling. Some people think that the spelling does not count. ‘Anyway, the box is informed about the procedure. It is aware of what is going on all around it.’ Anyway, you check the spelling, turning a deaf ear to whatever your helpers suggest and insinuate and then turn the box upside down. You consult the bottom of the box and if the inscription ‘the right situation’ meets your approval, your eyes and your approval, you can afford a cup of tea. You have just performed a task which proves that you are a dignified representative of your species. And if there is a cat within your reach, you pick this cat up and say to him, ‘You know, I’m an honourable example of what is designated as a “human being”’. You can rely on me completely. I’ll reverse any disgraceful situation you get involved in; meeting a dog, for instance. In this case, I’ll help you reach the top of the nearest tree, and during your sojourn on this tree-top, I’ll prepare a nice meal for you. And after this meal I’ll caress you abundantly. I’ll brush you as well.’ But there are other people, other demands and other aspirations. These people do not think it is enough to fiddle with a box bearing an inscription: your whole life depends on this reversal. It is as if you thought it would be enough to stand on your head for two or three minutes. It is not enough. Even if you stay on your head for two hours, nothing will actually happen. You might feel dizzy or suffer from a heart attack. Some heart attacks may reverse the situation we are talking about. For instance, you yearn to become an Olympic champion, but right in the

middle of the race you collapse and a number of assistants pull you together – you have really fallen apart – and try to use your legs as a support. But your legs do not support anything, not even their own weight. You call them ‘my folding legs’ now. As for your spiritual, your indissoluble link with heaven, you just lift your eyes and this gesture enlivens the landscape in the middle of which you admire heaven and its colours. Another pedestrian looks at you and says to his wife, ‘This man is either a prophet or a very good painter. His knowledge of colours is certainly unbeatable. We don’t see the half of what he sees and can put on a canvas.’ Indeed, you see a lot, but this capacity is not mighty enough to help you reverse your life and its weird unpredictability. You predict the door that you believe you can see right in front of you. There is nothing simpler in the world, in human life: there is a door in front of you and you walk straight through it. Of course this door may hide a contract killer or just a hooligan who can dislocate your jaw and life in the twinkling of an eye. (In the twinkling of a jaw, as you say today.) The hooligan handles your body in such a way that you cannot avoid long, unpleasant contact with the floor on which you lie, unable to raise not only your body, but also your eyes and even your eyelids. Then you raise your eyes and say to yourself, ‘If I can raise my eyes, I can perform this trick with my body as well. After all, my body is in no way inferior to my eyes which are only part of it.’ But they continue to pester you, saying, for instance, ‘Your eyelids are too big: we can’t see your eyes. They’re probably riveted on the television.’ And even if you do your very best to dissuade your accusers – you wash your eyes, you cut your eyelids – not completely, not completely – no one believes you are up to the best human standards. And then they ask you a ritual question: ‘What did you do with your father’s substance?’ ‘What substance?’ you ask naively. ‘His riches, his cars, his houses and palaces.’ Whatever you say, they shake their heads and show you a multitude of photographs where you enjoy a few bottles of champagne in your father’s company. And your father’s company is not concentrated on his body alone: there are several women in the same company. Of course you retaliate by saying these women were your father’s mistresses and consequently had nothing to do with your own private life. They say, ‘Your private life and your father’s substance have always coincided. You shared not only money and country houses: all his women were equally and globally the women you took advantage of even in your father’s presence. You’re perverse and the core of your being is as rotten as the most rotten fruit you can come across in some provincial Russian shop.’ Well, let us not omit one remark which may save you from disgrace and utter humiliation. You say, ‘All right, all right. I did take advantage of my father’s mistresses and their substances still tide me over till my next incarnation. But I don’t take pleasure in the husks that the swine eat. I don’t even eat them, let alone enjoy their savour and flavour. Whenever I come across these husks I carry them to the nearest rubbish bin, paying attention to my fingers and their sensitivity: they’re not supposed to touch anything as rough and vulgar as the husks that the swine eat. Actually my fingers can’t bear the sight of a swine. Just put a swine in front of my body, and you’ll see how my fingers react to its presence. I don’t even say “he” or “she”, when speaking about a swine. This is an eloquent testimony to the displeasure I experience, whenever someone touches upon a swine and whatever is related to it (these husks, for instance) within my hearing. I still wonder how one can really talk about such an object. Please note that I don’t attribute to this animal the importance associated with the notion “subject”. Nor is it an object of my infatuation with gourmandising, with the succulent bits of various dishes I daily find on my dinner table. I take pleasure in them.’

‘All this may seem to you matter for jesting, seeing that you take so much pleasure in comedies and lyrics.’

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Yes, you say this in jest, that in jest. You jest about important missions which seem so unimportant, whenever people listen to your jests. Life is also a matter of saying something witty that makes you laugh and roll in the aisles in some theatre or other. There are jests, jokes and infamy everywhere, and the only way to treat our death conveniently, without dying at once, on the spot is jesting all the time. And then a moment comes, a fateful moment which does not hear your laughter, your jests directed against the order of the world, the order of the cosmos where even flies are supposed to die without complaint and final arias. If during this moment you hear no laughter and your mouth is closed, you realise that life is a serious matter. And if you see a fly circling around your head, you catch it, put it in an empty matchbox and begin to nurse it day and night. You go to the best shops and buy her sweets and *foie gras*. This fly is happy and you believe her smiles, her movements impregnated with unearthly bliss. And then a friend of yours comes in and says, ‘I wish I could live as happily as this fly,’ whereupon you find a huge empty box and put your friend in it. You give him whatever your favourite fly is fond of, and you notice the same melody of smiles on your friend’s face, on his cheeks and lips. Such is the way humanity should follow. Alas, such felicity cannot be found in books, whatever their contents and thickness. (And sickness, sickness: books are sick, for they are books and not real, tangible life.) Yes, you put yourself in an empty box. Before putting yourself in this box you must make sure that the box is really empty. If it is not, you will feel cramped for space, and this feeling is not compatible with the utter happiness that we endeavour to build at all costs. Sure enough, we want to build a better future for our children. But our children will feel unhappy, if they happen to watch our unhappiness, their parents’ lifelong misery. So we must be happy, if only for the sake of our children. There are so many, many things done for the sake of children. We do not care about money, but if we are poor, our children will not be fed correctly. And if they are not fed in accordance with the books recommended by famous doctors, they will inevitably, fatally and dramatically fall ill. And if, during these awful periods of incurable illness, we do not try to cure them, come hell or high water, both will come, even if we have no knowledge of the English language. First comes hell and we find ourselves exposed to fiery drops of rain and other unpleasant, disgusting things. And then we liberate ourselves from this slavery and high water comes in accordance with the schedule. We have a go at rewriting this schedule which contradicts the laws we learn at school: ‘You should take care of other human beings, otherwise you will be worse than animals and prehistoric savages.’ We rewrite it, and the text that appears before our very eyes is full of magnitude, magnificence and utmost empathy. ‘Come Paradise and low water,’ says the text. We know how to deal with Paradise: there is nothing easier in the whole world full of toil and trouble. As for the low water, we just lie in it, allowing its streams to caress our loins. And also the fruit of our loins. That is how our children are taken care of – in our maternal society. And our paternal society as well. After all, fathers are also allowed to sign the document where the following text is engraved in capital letters: ‘Children need to be cosseted.’ Sometimes, upon receiving this document by post, you realise it has not been written correctly. For instance, the word ‘cosseted’ is often missing, for some obscure reason. Perhaps some people firmly believe that children should be punished at the earliest opportunity. What for? Just for the fun of it or the heck of it. ‘Punishment will do you a lot of good,’ say such progenitors of children to their unfortunate offspring. And they remind you of how children were treated in days of yore – in schools, among other establishments. They were asked to put their fingers on the table, and then their master, armed with a stick, would make them realise how cruel and

inhuman the world where they live and prosper is, whatever happens. ‘Even if we spare your fingers, even if we do not beat the stuffing out of you, the world will do it unavoidably because such is its venerable duty.’ Sometimes they (those teachers) go a little bit further: they think that their pupils should know life and its vicissitudes more thoroughly, so as not to be disappointed at the first opportunity. And life uses everything, every opportunity to beat you, to teach you its merciless laws. So the teachers do not restrain themselves, as might be presumed, considering their status: they are teachers, after all. So they are supposed to teach you geography and mathematics, instead of spanking you, whenever you get up. And if you don’t, if you seem to be rooted to the spot you chose as you got into the classroom, they order you to get up and spank you or beat you with the aforementioned stick. By the way, it is not a walking stick, as might be presumed once again: it is a *beating* cane. So they beat you, waiting for your tears to flow unrestrainedly down your cheeks. And if they don’t, the teachers ask you the ritual question: ‘Where are your tears? Do you have any?’ And if you answer, ‘I do have a lot of tears, and I shed some of them when listening to Mozart’s works,’ they say, ‘Do you think our beating stick is inferior to Mozart’s genius? How dare you underestimate our value?’ And they continue to beat you so that one might say, ‘The beating is in full swing.’ The stick swings to and fro, and you ask yourself once again, ‘Should I allow them to go on, or should my tears interfere?’ Your tears interfere – they are weary of waiting – and your teacher returns to the blackboard where, a few minutes later, you see a nice equation you do not understand at all. It is better not to confess your ignorance, but you do; and you receive another portion of the classical (or romantic) punishment which extracts an additional number of tears from your obedient eyes. And what if your eyes do not obey your teacher? Then you talk to your eyes, saying, ‘I know you’re so proud you can’t admit you’re humiliated and downgraded. But I’d ask you not to show your pride and swallow this so-called truth hook, line and sinker. Sinker, not thinker: don’t think too much on this particular occasion. You just let out a huge number of tears which will surely satisfy your and my torturer.’ Is the torturer satisfied? You look at him furtively and realise he is not satisfied at all. Had he seen your furtive glance, he would have beaten you to death. Luckily for you, he did not and consequently he does not beat you to death. He beats you to half-death, or something along this line; along the line of death. Not along the line of life, mind you. Nothing is in the line of life, when you assume the position of Rodin’s ‘*Penseur*’ and view the whole existence of humanity in all its tiny, unbearable details. You select one detail and shake your hands. ‘No, this detail is *not* in your lifeline,’ your mental disposition says to you. ‘It is definitely in the deathline. Incidentally, you can see your death on the left-hand side.’ ‘And what about my right-hand side?’ you ask your mentality or mental disposition. ‘You seem to nourish yet another hope,’ you hear. ‘As usual, you’re wrong: there are no hopes to nourish. Actually, I don’t know what you could nourish, without looking utterly foolish. You could eat a piece of chocolate, to nourish your stomach.’ Yes, we take pleasure in comedies, given that nourishing our hopes is one of the most tremendous comedies one can come across in the course of the same life about which I speak incessantly and with gusto. Your hope is tiny, weeny, looking utterly ridiculous. But it is a hope, and we should be earnest about it, about treating it mentally and psychologically. And it is a hope and whatever its tiny, puny size, it is a symbol on which we count, even when cooking an ordinary meal. This hope of ours dies after our death because, sooner or later, it says to itself, ‘I am still hope, and I’m not supposed to speak offhandedly about myself. I am important, and human life depends rather heavily on my manifestation. Sometimes the substance I inhabit covers its face – it is a substance, after all, it, it, it – and everybody knows that this sign means: “Everything is over, including hopes and great expectations.”’ But there are *tiny* expectations so you should not cover your face

completely, even if everything *is* over. You look around and say loudly, for everybody to hear: ‘This bit is over. And that bit over there is over too. Is there any bit I can count on, without becoming the laughing stock of humanity?’ You continue to look around, and you even begin to touch both objects and human beings who surround you, for better or worse. And many of those beings react with horror, whenever your touch reaches them. They shy away from any contact you endeavour to force on them. You seem to beg for this contact as your hand gets closer and closer to their bodies and souls, especially to their souls. And, understandably enough, their souls shy away from your soul as if it were contaminated forever. Is it contaminated forever? Perhaps for a little while – but not forever, not forever. You say to these haughty, obnoxious observers, ‘What are you accusing me of? Have I committed a terrible crime which can’t be forgiven, not even by those archangels one reads about in holy books? And you shouldn’t think I enjoy the comedy I play for my own sake. Yes, I nourish hopes, whenever I have any nourishment to speak of – any nourishment for hopes, that is. Of course I have a multitude of sandwiches in my fridge, but hopes don’t like sandwiches. They can eat some of them in the space inhabited by beggars who beg for these sandwiches in the streets and even in plains, on riverbanks. A hope comes and says to a beggar: ‘Give me your sandwich, and God will recompense you.’ The beggar listens to the hope and says, after listening to every word uttered by the hope, ‘God has given me a sandwich already. Why should I share it with you?’ ‘I don’t ask you to *share* this sandwich with anyone. I ask you to *give* it to me, in the hope that you’ll have another hope in the near future.’ ‘But I don’t need hopes,’ answers the beggar. ‘I need something to eat, and a sandwich fits the bill.’ ‘In the first place, your sandwich doesn’t fit the bill which is half-empty, for all your efforts.’ ‘Yes, because I’ve already eaten half of this sandwich.’ ‘You haven’t eaten anything yet. Don’t nourish your ego with illusions which will augment the quantity of cholesterol in your blood. Give me this sandwich and you’ll have a healthy meal, full of vitamins and fat and what not.’ ‘This is a wonderful lyric,’ says the beggar. ‘How does it go? “A healthy meal, a healthy meal / a crab, some caviar and an eel.” Thank you very much for this luxury.’ ‘But don’t you realise,’ says the hope, ‘that any hope, however meagre and unrealisable, is much better than a spiny or rock lobster?’ The beggar ends up eating the hope, but instead of becoming hopeful, optimistic and rich, he gets an upset stomach. Such is the destiny of all those who pin too much hope on hopes as such. Even if you pin your hope just on a hope without any suches, it does not work. It cannot work because you go about it in the wrong way. For a while you hope that, sooner or later, you will find the right ways and the deal will be clinched to everybody’s satisfaction. (Hopes are always satisfied, when their clients wake up and realise they have whatever they need, even the moon, even the dark side of the moon. Actually, most often they have only the dark side of the moon.) Let us open this parenthesis and learn how to deal with the dark side of the moon. It is certainly dark, judging from the colour of its surface and its inhospitable general aspect. It does not invite you to explore its riches and textures; it does not talk to you about Armstrong, about earthlings in general. It behaves in such a manner that you begin to wonder as to the American adventure you read about in your childhood. ‘Have you seen any human body?’ you ask, but the dark side of the moon is as dark as all the insoluble problems we come across in universities and laboratories. ‘Are you insoluble?’ You put this question to the dark side of the moon. And suddenly this side grows bright, but it does not help, contrary to many hopes that traverse your mind rather quickly: you do not succeed in counting them. So, even today, you think you have encountered millions and millions of hopes. Well, you are in the dark about the dark side of the moon, and that is the only conclusion you can boast of after your return to the Earth. You go through the streets you happen to land on and say to pedestrians and old women who sit as usual on their

benches, 'I've been to the moon, you know, to the dark side of the moon. Do you wish to know what I saw up there?' But the women do not wish to know anything. The only question they are prepared to ask you sounds as follows, 'When shall I receive the next sandwich?' To distance yourself from those old women, you say to them, 'Alas, I've eaten all your sandwiches.' All of a sudden, the old women rise to their feet, draw sticks from their clothes and begin to thrash you as if you were a world-famous culprit. Or a horse. You ask them, 'Why on earth are you thrashing me?' And they answer convincingly, nodding their heads hysterically, 'Because we thrash horses, whenever we can do it with impunity.' 'But you can't do it with impunity,' you say, picking up a stone. You fling the stone at the women; you miss, and the women resume their thrashing. And then you seem to hear a melody coming from this exercise of theirs. It is a lyric you hear and enjoy. In a flash, you understand the importance and value of lyrics. And it is not too late.

'My desire to do my duty may, I fear, expose me to a charge of self-seeking.'

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What kind of charge is that, I wonder? I wish to know myself, and I see nothing wrong in this gesture of mine, in the procedure I adopt to find the whole truth about my being. I am aware of my faults and negative inclinations, but I would like to be certain about them, and only a thorough knowledge of my deficiencies may bring to light my authentic essence, my fortitude or basic weakness. All right, I do seek myself, but there is nothing wrong with that, as far as I can judge. I judge myself and realise that my judgement is rather shallow because I am easily satisfied with what I encounter in myself. Yes, I am warned against self-seeking and so I have to remain at the very border of it, of what is rightfully called 'self-seeking'. I seek the truth, I say to myself, and this truth is universal, even though I take part in it, adopt it and enjoy its fruit. To what extent do I enjoy its fruit? Does this enjoyment have anything to do with self-indulgence, self-absorption and self-admiration? I admire myself, my deeds and thoughts to the extent of wallowing in these qualities of mine, instead of using them as a weapon against evil-doers. The latter are everywhere, and now and then they spread evil all over the surface of our common space. It is easy to remove a layer of butter from a sandwich: you should be on your guard against cholesterol and other nuisances and miseries of this kind. Besides, consuming too much butter and fat will lead you inexorably to fatness, to obesity frowned upon by all civilised nations. As soon as we see an obese individual, we say to our neighbours and other fellow-creatures, 'Look at this example of voracity and lack of discipline. He empties the plate his cook or ordinary servant puts in front of him without bothering about dire straits and other funereal consequences. Such people treat Christmas as just another excuse for gluttony, and there are many excuses of this kind in their pastime, in their daily routine. Somebody is born; another excuse for gluttony. Somebody dies of cancer or neurasthenia; yet another excuse for gluttony. And they do not even take the trouble to apologise for their voraciousness. They thrust their forks into pieces of meat without so much as a 'by-your-leave', without an apologetic smile. Oddly enough, these pieces of meat know me much better than myself. In other words, their knowledge of my nature is far superior to what I know about my body, my soul, psyche and nerves; and tendons. Let us not limit our search for ourselves to our brains which are, sure enough, the essential part of our existence. But not the only part, not the only part. Every tendon speaks for our life, about it. And the meat we swallow or rather chew meticulously before letting it join our inner organs, intestines, stomach and the opposite of what they call *foie gras* – my *foie* should not be *gras*, according

to my doctors – explore our secrets and become part and parcel of them. The alchemy unfolds in our inner intentions and proclamations, in our life that plunges its roots into the primordial chaos. But this procedure or call it what you wish – ‘this alchemy’ is a suitable description of the mystery I am enlarging upon – is frowned upon by the Fathers of the Church because they think our self-approach, self-seeking and self-finding denotes a dangerous streak in our character. We seem to overestimate our capacities, talents and intuition. Sure enough, you take too much upon yourself, instead of leaving this job, this probing into the immeasurable and the indefinable to other, far more professional substances and spirits. It is *their* profession, according to our critics and accusers. You know about yourself only primitive, practical things which enable you to eat without encountering any problem. You can chew your meals; you can also let them reach the organs which spend their time digesting whatever you permit yourself to remove from your dinner table and fridge. That is enough, apparently; the rest constitutes the Big Secret which lies within a dangerous zone. In many fairy tales you literally stumble upon the situations which put you in front of a fatal choice: either you learn your innermost nature and die, or you live and remain rather stupid throughout your life. Usually people opt for the second solution, for life is beautiful and can grow even more beautiful, if we renounce knowledge and glory for its sake, for the sake of life. Actually, another solution comes to the fore, and this solution is centred upon what comes under the term ‘nostalgia’. What is it, this proverbial nostalgia? We look for the past, for the mast to which our sail is nailed. We flow, fly, drive somewhere, but we are longing to find the beginning of our journey. Suppose you are a Russian. You have to leave your native land because it is unbearable, just unbearable. Living in Russia is beyond whatever you can imagine. It is even beyond your ken. So you decide to leave your native land once and for all. And then, from afar, from a distant country, you begin to call to Russia, hoping it will hear your call, your plea, your request for forgiveness. Is that also part of your self-seeking? Or is it what they call ‘self-finding’? No, your call, your endless OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO is directed towards Russia and its frontiers – from other countries, from abroad. But if you are in Russia you embark upon the process called ‘self-finding’, and this process is rooted in your soil, your native Russia. I wrote, ‘This process is rotted in your soil.’ You can play with this mistake as long as you wish. The point is you can play with it in various ways, not only with rot and root. Often, when plunging headlong into your past, you find that the roots you were counting upon are irremediably rotten. You touch them and they crumble beneath your fingers. What kind of roots are they? you ask yourself. They are rots, you answer. ‘Rot’ is a mouth in Russian. Suddenly you imagine a mouth filled with rotten teeth. These are the images somehow connected with your past. So, you turn your back on this past and rush towards the future which is probably not radiant; but at least it is not overburdened with rotten teeth, you say to yourself. What do you discover, thanks to this legendary nostalgia? Your dirty trousers, some vestiges of your urine; a lot of vestiges of your urine, rather. And also other scatological remains. What remains of all this misery? Nothing else, I am afraid.

‘A woman’s reputation is a tender plant; it is like a fair flower which withers at the slightest blast and fades away at the first breath of wind.’

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You look at a woman and all sorts of comparisons spring to life and to mind. And some of these comparisons have something to do with plants. And some of these plants are tender so the woman you contemplate becomes a symbol without which you cannot live. You can, as a matter of fact, frankly speaking, but you have no wish to spend your time in her absence. This time – the time you might spend without her – has no meaning whatsoever, and try as you may, you will never attach any meaning to this virtual, non-existent time. Yet this time does exist because the woman does not belong to you, and she will never become part of your interior, of your house and body, if she votes against it. She looks at you and votes against your face, your waist, your hands which are too crimson, in her opinion. She votes against your voice as well: you said a few words in her presence, in the hope of attracting her attention. Her attention was attracted, but rather negatively, and so she started to walk away from you, in spite of your ardent desire to appropriate her legs, elbows and the rest of her body. And you have nothing against her brain and manners either. Nevertheless, she continues to move away from you, leaving you alone in the midst of several houses about which you know nothing. To tell the truth, you do not care about these houses unless the woman lives in one of them. Well, let us not omit the following detail: we are not supposed to talk about a woman as such. It is her reputation we are eager to discuss at length, even if we have no time for trifles of this kind. Reputations are made and people are undone, but we have an urgent piece of business to deal with. Neither reputations nor women are important at the moment; as far as our life, our business life, is concerned. And what is life without business? If we go somewhere, there must be an office at the end of the road, and in this office there are many chests of drawers, according to our calculations and hopes. And in every drawer of those chests of drawers there are many banknotes thanks to which we might lead a life overburdened with luxuries and beautiful harmonies. And melodies, come to think of it. But this is just a prelude to the fugue that follows. You see a woman who might become the woman of your life, the woman of your eternal strife. But you do not mind this strife because you are prepared to suffer a number of unimaginable mishaps for her sake. So you say to her, ‘If I were a normal human being, I’d think in terms of banknotes, of luxury goods and cars, of palaces and so on. But I am an extraordinary human being, and such beings are honoured, rewarded in their lives for their fortitude, for their faithfulness to ideals such as beauty, elegance, good manners and venerable traditions. You embody all these ideals and I embody them too, frankly speaking. Why should I hide from you what is obvious? You can see everything yourself: it is enough to take a mirror and look at our faces reflected in it. Don’t we look alike? Of course you’re far more beautiful, but I’m intelligent and sensitive enough to appreciate your beauty, its intrinsic and extrinsic values. Don’t you think we’re created for this exceptional union? You’re created for me, and I’m created for our union. You see, I don’t talk to you about business matters because they do not matter, believe me. Compared with our happiness, they’re as insignificant as a moth. Some types of moth eat holes in clothes, and these become significant when the number of holes they produce reaches an astronomical figure.’ You had better stop before the woman you set your heart upon bursts into laughter and says something along these lines: ‘I didn’t like your monologue – I thought it was hilarious.’ What does the reputation of this woman depend upon? (This thesis also concerns other women.) She listens to monologues, and pedestrians who are always attentive to what goes on around them think that these monologues are filled to the brim with eroticism and sex appeal. They think that sex as such appeals to the women they meet in the street, and they do not approve of this means of distributing sex ideas. In an ordinary pedestrian’s opinion, sex is an intimate matter that should not be discussed, aired and voiced in the streets where anybody can spy on you and your moods and inclinations. They also see the same woman and decide that she is a born prostitute and

deserves their disapproval of her ways. They do not say anything to this woman; they do not give her lessons because they are reluctant to waste their precious time on unknown specimens of humankind. (They are not acquainted with this woman and so cannot expect anything from her: no money, no advantageous deals.) What else could you say to this woman? You could write a poem for her, a real poem, and recite it in her presence; and sometimes in her absence: some women leave you stranded as soon as you begin to recite your poems in their presence. What kind of stuff could you recite in the presence of such a woman? You could say to her, 'You're Helen because of whom the war, the famous war shattered a lot of humans, a lot of countries. You're better than Helen of Troy, so I'd like to sacrifice myself for the sake of the world. I'll spare the world and perish because of your beauty. Your beauty leads the world to destruction, but let me step forward and offer myself for this kind of deduction.' You know that the whole world is about to succumb to the ritual called 'coming down', 'being torn into pieces'. You step forward once again and say, 'I'm ready for all sorts of sacrifices, but this woman will remain with me, otherwise the world will never have any meaning, not even something that responds to the formula "two plus two", as they say to make you understand something extremely simple and almost ridiculous. So I step forward, embrace the woman and we all celebrate our wedding, our eternal happiness. There are many bottles of champagne in my cellar, and my servants are about to open all of them.' And as soon as you begin to recite your poem, some people say to each other, 'This woman's reputation is spoiled and shattered forever. No matter what she says to defend her status. She might say, for instance, 'I like the poetry of Catullus and even if a man I'm not acquainted with recites one of his poems to me, I feel elated and this recitation makes me happy, whatever you can say on the subject, whatever you suspect, whatever you deduce from the situation. It is not ambiguous at all, contrary to what you might surmise. We're lovers of poetry and Ancient Rome. As for you, you're just nonentities whose knowledge of the world is limited to the nearest shop and the banknotes you find in someone's drawers and banks.' All your plans fall through: you cannot persuade those people you are not interested in sexual exercises and consequently prefer poetry to libido and sperm as such. You spurn this particular manifestation of sex, of libido, and say to yourself, 'How disgusting it is. I wonder why so many people devote their lives to the flow of this liquid that has no meaning outside the sexual act.' But the woman you select for your observation and analysis is still within your field of vision, and you continue to judge her in accordance with your standards and general views. You go so far as to show her the flow of someone's sperm – not necessarily yours – and without casting a glance at her reaction to this procedure, you say to everybody, 'This woman is perverse because she attends such a bad performance, such a manifestation of perversity, without a shudder. Do you think she shudders from horror and terror? Not at all. She stands there and behaves in such a way that one might think that nothing serious, abnormal and criminal is happening within her field of vision. Our field of vision is swarming with horrors of all kinds, but the sperm we're watching on this particular occasion means much more than any other perversion.' This means the downright seduction and violation of many human rules. This means that any woman can be treated in such a way: you just unbutton your pants and begin to carry out the act which bears many names and is pregnant with many, many horrors.

'To the same effect in different words the prophet says: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak."'

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Often you are in no mood for speaking, but the people standing around you expect some words, some indications and a number of slogans with which they can walk around cities, attracting crowds and a lot of weapons. You are silent, however, and the people find it strange, not to say impolite. They seem to impart to you the following words, 'We've come here in the hope of hearing a few wise sayings. Your silence mocks our efforts and expectations, and we're unable to figure out what it means.' And then you answer them, 'I'm troubled, you know. A multitude of emotions engulf me, and I feel at sea. I mean I'm underwater, and you can't speak underwater. Of course you can, if you wish, but this might be dangerous, given that the water will penetrate your lungs and cut your access to life, to the existence we cherish so much. If you're determined to produce a dozen bubbles, you can go on, but bubbles are useless, in a manner of speaking. Perhaps you don't like this manner and think, "Even bubbles are better than silence." Allow me to contradict you on this point. According to many proverbs, silence is always better. There are, however, a few exceptions. When a prophet is duty bound to speak to you, his words will be much more precious than any silence, however profound and meaningful. But I'm not a prophet, whatever you might think on the subject. You look at me and find me rather handsome and promising, in a way. But what do I promise, in your opinion? Only a prophet or a man holding a revolver is promising: you can hear an eventful noise, as a result of which some evil person will collapse, deprived of any possibility of recovering. The world is thus freed from evil and can prosper at full speed. But I have no revolvers in my pockets. Nor do I have anything in my attaché case: I don't have any, as you can see. As for the source of my silence, I've already pointed out that I'm troubled, overburdened with emotions. And when emotions literally choke you, you can't speak, because you're choking. You can push a few syllables from your throat, but they are meaningless sounds, and we don't need meaningless sounds, colours, actions and so on.' Sometimes you wake up and realise you have no wish to say anything at all. You are rather talkative, and this mood of yours seems enigmatic – in the context of your life. So you begin to reflect on the situation, and come to the following conclusion, 'I must be troubled by some emotions which escape me, as a matter of fact. I'm aware neither of their origins, nor of their significance. Am I in love with a human being? With a man or a woman? Let me see, let me see. Who can I be in love with? Who might deserve my love? I don't remember whether I've been in love ever since my birthday. If I haven't, this means I am experiencing something truly exceptional. The feeling itself, the feeling of love, is exceptional, although we're supposed to love everyone and everything. And yet this feeling is exceptional on account of its warmth and side effects. For instance, you're unable to speak – in the presence of the object of your love: many books testify to this phenomenon. But I'm alone in my room, so the cause of my silence must be different. No, no – I might be in love with somebody, in spite of this person's absence from my room. Whether he or she is present doesn't really matter: I'm in love and that's what counts under the circumstances. Am I in love? That's the question, and even Hamlet put this question to his own brain in relation to Ophelia with whom he was in love, judging from his behaviour during her funeral. Well, if you could show me a few photographs, a few people to choose from, I might answer this question truthfully. Why can't I answer it now, without resorting to external help, be it a photograph or a piece of friendly advice?' But we should rather think in terms of crowds whose members may pay attention to the love of an individual, provided this individual is a famous actor or singer; otherwise people are not interested in what goes on behind the walls of an ordinary house. But prophets belong to a different category: people await their speeches and gather around them, even if they do not break the silence of the night or day immediately. And if they keep silent, those who stand by their side grow impatient and begin to tease the prophets, saying, 'Are you

really a prophet? Can you prove it? Say a few words about the next century or about the days to come, a few days to come. Can't you do it at once, without making us more and more impatient? Our patience is not eternal, you know. If you go on like that, we can stone you to death. We've already killed a few prophets whose presence is always welcome, on condition that they speak to us about our condition, about the future.' Actually, even fortune-tellers are welcome, although they do not speak for nothing which differentiates them from prophets who could not care less about roubles and dollars. They are sincerely fond of human destinies, of their developments, curves and ends. Suppose such a prophet goes on keeping silent about these ends: people are afraid of ends and that is what they want to hear in the first place. How shall we end? That is what they long to hear, learn and act upon. 'If my end is announced, I shall do whatever I can to postpone it, to put a curb on it, to put an end to it.' This excerpt from an interior monologue is rather typical, and everybody could hear it, if we were in a position to listen to interior monologues. But we can listen to prophets, on condition that they are willing to speak to us – tonight, for instance. Yes, we are eager to listen to prophets tonight, and we had better take advantage of this sudden desire, because tomorrow we may grow indifferent to our own destiny, saying, 'What does it matter? Anyway, sooner or later we'll die. So, whatever we do today, we'll die tomorrow or the day after.' And we do: we die tomorrow or the day after. But prophets stand in front of us for this particular purpose: they will let us know when this fatal date will come and triumph over our will to live. We shall crumble – that is for sure. That is the chief thing, and all the rest is a matter of chance, of our indifference, in the final analysis. We analyse the situation, our own mortality, and come to the following conclusion, 'We don't need prophets. If humanity comes to its own end, it has nothing to do with our own end and another beginning about which some religious thinkers talk to us. Prophets are precise: they tell you dates and describe the way of your crumbling; and even the crumbs themselves. Religious thinkers talk about resurrections, incarnations and new prosperity, new crumbling. They don't show you the crumbs in question, but they do talk about them. Everybody talks about crumbs, but this talking serves no purpose. There are affinities between whatever we do or think: all this nonsense serves no purpose.' And we decide to sit down on the nearest chair or armchair or divan and begin to contemplate our own destruction and even our mortal remains. Do we need prophets for this purpose? Of course we do not. And prophets are aware of this unquestionable fact. That is why they are troubled.

'We are all of us made of the same clay and formed of the same elements.'

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When an ambitious creature hears this affirmation, he or she says, 'It's not true, as far as *I* am concerned.' But mostly you do not say anything, being mindful of other people's conservative, gregarious reactions. You content yourself with your thoughts which you do not voice on a regular basis. This basis is irregular: you just protect yourself from human cruelty. The people to whom you talk from time to time are prepared to criticise your haughtiness, whenever they have enough material for their scathing remarks. Naturally enough, they do not wait for such golden opportunities: they criticize you abundantly and often without any reason. And if you ask them, 'Why do you criticize me? What's the reason?' they answer thus, 'Do we really need any reason to criticize you? You're a human being, and nothing human is foreign to you and your behaviour. You behave like a

bastard, scoundrel and criminal, and this is very human. For these particular reasons many people spend their lives in prison. You're not in prison –regrettably, I might add. But this omission on the part of our governors is a mistake they should correct in no time at all. If they don't, you'll commit several crimes in succession. Some people are sure to find themselves in coffins, as a result of your harmful, sinister and weird actions.' But what are these elements they touch upon in their sacred books? They might mean the presence of skin without which our organs would be exposed to wind, rain and hail, and this exposure is quite disastrous, according to our partial experience. Sometimes we forget our umbrella in one of our rooms, and suddenly the sky is torn apart and the whole chemistry of heaven falls on our shoulders and other parts of our body. This is tragic experience, even if we do not die at the end of it or somewhere in the middle. Sometimes we are submitted to tests that we can hardly bear, and many of these tests stop in the middle because we cannot hold out any longer. We just collapse and somebody picks us up and puts our bodies in some car or other. And if the car we find ourselves in belongs to the second category, to the category of 'other', we continue to suffer atrociously. And then some hospital or other interferes and doctors bend over our body, hoping to save it from death or coma, an interminable coma. This coma may last for days and months, and our relatives, if any, come to the hospital to inquire about our health or its absence. And our doctors speak to them about our absence, about our coma that is loath to come to an end, to conclude its own adventure based upon our body. And also upon our soul which should not be forgotten or omitted from our account. Whatever sacred doctors might think, our soul is also subject to comas, for all its immortality and invulnerability. If you arm yourself with a knife and try to wound our soul, you will never succeed, in spite of your strength and determination. But a word can wound our soul. I repeat: on the whole our soul is invulnerable and can resist exterior interventions rather successfully – in comparison with our body. (Our *interior* interventions, however, can do our soul a lot of harm.) Indeed, our body is so fragile and capricious it shrieks whenever a drop of rain touches it, coming out of the blue. Out of the black, rather. Yes, from time to time, and our nerves cannot keep silent under the onslaught of the calamities associated with weather forecasts. Some of us give a piteous cry of despair upon reading a few lines in a local newspaper. Why do others hear this cry? To what calamity do they attribute it? A weather forecast tells us that our holiday will be utterly spoiled, and our communion with beaches and the sun is mercilessly cancelled. In days of yore, we just prayed to the god of bad weather, imploring him to change his intentions and disregard his inclinations, if only for once. We said, 'We'll never ask you again to change your mind. But this holiday is extremely important to us, considering that we'll lie on the beach in the company of our future wife. And this wife of ours, this future bliss, should be cajoled into providing us with an impressive number of pleasures.' But today we have only one God to whose mercy we give ourselves over, without knowing exactly what will happen to us. The god of bad weather limited his influence to rain and other manifestations of weather and its whims. God, on the other hand, has everything and everybody in His power; and this is too much, in our opinion. Even the Almighty is not mighty enough to provide for everybody's happiness, even if every single human being is under His control. But sometimes we just make a gesture, a gesture of no importance to *Him*. He might think as follows, 'This human is beneath my contempt, and so his gestures are out of my mind, beyond my ken, my keen observation. It's probably not beyond the wit of God to help him, but I simply don't feel like it.' And this gesture becomes fatal – so fatal in fact that nothing else is possible, feasible. We can repeat the same gesture and the outcome of this gesticulation will always be fatal to our career and, generally speaking, to the rest of our life. Nothing will ever redeem this gesture of ours, even if some miniscule god says, on the spur of the moment, 'I'm

aware of my Master's indifference towards this human being, but I pity him and so I'll do whatever I can to improve his destiny and provide him with a few million dollars.' But the Almighty is quick to react to such misdemeanours. Of course all humans are under His control, and so are unimportant, pagan gods; and their faults are always important, whatever happens. Humans are unimportant; at least one might believe this dubious declaration, when observing the facts of real, everyday life. A beautiful woman walks along a pavement and suddenly falls, injuring her knees and other elements of her substance. Another woman walks by, casts a glance at the unfortunate creature and says, 'She must have been beautiful, but now some of her elements are incompatible with my attitude towards beauty as such.' The wounded and almost destroyed woman finds her way back to life and to beauty, at least partly, raises her head, looks at her potential rival and says to her, 'I can see only your face, but that's enough: I don't need to study your body, all its curves and details, to conclude that you're not really beautiful. Your elements aren't up to the standards commonly and uncommonly associated with the notion of beauty. Of course it would be ridiculous to compare your physical nature to my components, to the atoms that make up my body, my beauty.' And these two ladies begin to compare their elements which have nothing to do with Mendeleev and his system. I am not sure these parts and molecules can be called 'elements', although Sherlock Holmes might have said on this and other occasions, 'Elementary, my dear lady.' This is not really elementary, to tell the truth. Beauty is a complex phenomenon and consequently it cannot and should not be dealt with offhandedly, in an elementary way. All right – you single out someone's legs and compare them with another pair of legs. After a while you see a lot of legs in front of you, all around you; and all these legs are walking somewhere as if they had an aim in their leggy lives. What kind of aim? They might meditate upon the subject in the following way, 'We are legs, to all outward appearances, and so can walk somewhere, preferably in the direction of Paradise. Yes, this "somewhere" is Paradise, for no other destination is worthy of our attention. Even if some vulgar, uneducated individual says to us, "Go to Hell!" we'll continue to direct our steps towards Paradise and its bowers. And if, at some point, this individual realises we are going in the opposite direction, he is sure to say to us, 'Go to Hell! Have you heard me or not?' And we shall answer (I am absolutely certain we shall answer thus): 'We didn't hear you. What's more, we'll never hear you, even if you shout your truth and suggestions into the overtures of our ears. What are they called, these overtures?' Of course, upon hearing the word 'overture', a professional musician or a music-lover will think about Verdi, Rossini and many other composers whose overtures you hear on the radio, on television and also whenever you handle your computers – in the right, musical way. These people will use their ears and the elements pertaining to their hearing, when enjoying the overtures I touched upon; and we should not pass over in silence Tchaikovsky's overture dedicated to 1812. Are we made of the same clay, of the same elements? This overture talks to us about the war in which we had no part, but it was a human war and therefore we cannot pass it over in silence. Nor can we pass it over in sounds. On no account should we pass it over, pass by, paying no attention to this phenomenon. Wars must be taken into account, otherwise we shall never draw any lesson from their elements and from the clay that remains after them. Corpses are nothing else. Clay to clay: that is how this slogan ought to sound. Or elements to elements. Or Watsons to Watsons.

'It is better to suffer in stomach than in soul, to rule the body than to serve it, to lose one's balance than to lose one's chastity.'

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When you suffer in stomach, you complain to your wife or husband, but you also air your grievances in the presence of God – on purpose, anxious to make Him hear your grievances and consequently put an end to them. You begin by asking Him to put an end to them, to finish them off, to kill them outright, but then you switch to a softer mode, for inevitably you realise that neither God nor any clinic can do *everything* for you. You can be cured partially or slowly. They say, ‘After the operation you’ll need to get used to your new elements, as our sacred books express this mishap. And the period of convalescence and re-adaptation may last several months. Sometimes it lasts all your life, but you shouldn’t despair: at the very end of your life, on the threshold of death, you’ll feel much better. You’ll speak to your relatives about the new lease of life bestowed on you by the Almighty and His helpers. And then you’ll die peacefully, without unduly disturbing your nearest and dearest.’ But you may also suffer in both stomach and soul, for the simple reason that soul often, if not always, takes part in bodily sufferings and miseries, generally speaking. You strike your finger against a mantelpiece, and your soul responds immediately as if it were waiting for this all its life. It seems to experience the pains distributed generously among human beings. These pains are called ‘human pains’ because they are typically experienced by representatives of our species. Hate and love can be seen (and admired) in the midst of these elements, These are prominent pains that cannot be erased from the Book of Life. There is another pain linked to honour which can be wounded and almost annihilated by an envious rival. This kind of rivalry and annihilation often happens in the domain of love, strange as it may appear. We think that earthly creatures are destined for each other. You see a man and a woman, and your intuition begins to work assiduously. It says to you, ‘These people can’t live separately: they are conceivable only within the construction known as a couple.’ But a rival arrives, and he does not always come out of the blue. He spots this ideal couple and says to himself, ‘This set of elements is too ideal, too beautiful, and therefore cannot be tolerated in the world of imperfections and strife. So it’s my duty to separate these people forever, which might allow me to restore the universal harmony. Scars and scratches are the essential constituents of this harmony which would look unfinished without their unconditional support.’ He rudely interrupts one of the members of the couple, one of its participants, saying, ‘It’s not as easy as might appear at first glance. Your first glance informs you that everything is all right, that any church is waiting for your union, that any priest just yearns to bless you “for better or worse”. But you, my dear lover, aren’t aware of a beauty spot displayed by your beloved’s body in an atrocious way. People call it a “beauty sport”. Actually, the spot I’m talking about is an “ugliness spot”. Every lover is a tourist, in a way. He goes around in search of beautiful scenery and bodies. But don’t you know that many professional tourists are repulsed by the filthy conditions they encounter in the course of their wanderings? What are these conditions? Filthy hotels, filthy trees inhabited by filthy insects and animals, filthy grass and so on. This time we’re dealing with the body, and this body belongs to a lady you seem to be in love with to the point of ardently wishing to marry her. But what do you know about your beloved’s body? Have you studied all her tendons and the quality of her skin? You admit that a tree can be filthy, for the simple reason that you often see such trees during your walks in the woods. What about human skin? Do you have an answer to this simple question? Let me remind you that if a filthy body lies down on a patch of filthy grass, you’re likely to conclude that the whole world is filthy and irremediable.’ Usually the lover answers as follows, ‘I don’t wish to know anything about the details of my beloved’s existence. I love her on the whole, all her elements, their absolute harmony. Even if I find that one of

her legs is shorter than the other, I'll continue to love her as unconditionally as I do now. Actually I wouldn't mind loving a woman with a bodily defect. That would prove that I love her absolutely. I think Kafka talked about this phenomenon; I mean, about bodily defects. Never mind – I love her and no one will ever destroy the sentiment of love I am experiencing this afternoon.' On the other hand, I could say to the insolent fellow, 'My beloved's so perfect she is in a position to rule her body. She will order it to dissolve this beauty spot – on the spot. And the body will obey, I'm quite sure of this result, of this chain of cause and effect.' And this lover could add nonchalantly, 'My beloved is fragile, there's no denying it. But believe it or not, her fragility is an unquestionable advantage, for it helps her to keep her chastity intact. She loses her balance three or four times a day. As a result, her chastity has become an impregnable fortress. Many handsome young men try to overpower her, which might permit them to make love to her body. But she resists, and in the process she often loses her balance. So what?' There are many Othellos in our midst, and some of them question their wives as follows, 'Are you chaste?' By way of an answer, their wives lose their balance, and instead of strangling them then and there, the Othellos kiss them on both cheeks. Needless to say, in their husband's presence, such a wife never loses her balance. And she does not even have to hold onto a railing to keep her balance. On the contrary, she chooses a spot where there are no railings at all and keeps her balance effortlessly, with gusto.

'What must a second marriage be if it is looked on merely as an alternative to the brothel?'

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What about the first marriage? If you have an opportunity to listen to a conversation between two young men, you are sure to hear something along these lines, 'Why should you marry? So many obligations chain you to the laws and decency that you lose many opportunities to disport yourself, to caress the joys and ecstasies of a free, untrammelled existence. Just go to a brothel and you'll find what you're looking for. Of course you'll pay a few euros or dollars or whatever, but what does it matter? Freedom is worth much more, and you always lose freedom, if you marry someone, even if your beloved's character is angelic and will certainly ensure her a place in Paradise.' Accordingly, you go to a brothel and the woman you are offered for your contribution to the welfare of the establishment confides to you that her dearest longing is for marriage, family life and lots of children. 'We'll send him to an American university,' she says. 'Why not to Cambridge?' you ask. But your evening is irredeemably spoiled, and suddenly you recall the amount of money you paid for this humiliation; whereupon you realise you are always humiliated, almost every day, not to say three times a day, every hour. What can be done about it? Not to be born as a human being. Of course animals are also humiliated – by unworthy, intolerable humans. But they are not conscious of their humiliations; or they just bite you and you become an invalid for life. Unfortunately you cannot bite the people who humiliate you with eagerness and joy. Of course you can kill them or knock them down, beat them to a pulp; and then beat this pulp to yet another pulp and yet another pulp. What you get at the end of this process is a sort of pulpissimo that you can hold in the palm of your hand, giggling and sniggering. But you cannot humiliate pulp, and that is what you aspire to: the endless humiliation of those you dislike either intensively or not quite so intensively. You just dislike them and humiliate them – for the heck of it, for the fun of it. You get a certain amount of fun and heck, but you do not stop unless a policeman comes and takes you to a police station where you are given a lesson. You leave the police station handcuffed, and you hear the sound of laughter behind your back and the words you are unlikely

to forget, 'You'll never be able to beat anyone to a pulp.' And what about the multitude of humiliations you can inflict on other people, verbal injuries in a way? And you can kick the people you go on disliking; if you feel like it. After all, there are no handcuffs (or are there?) in the world where we live and are put in prisons and concentration camps. The streets of our cities are battlefields and, to tell the truth, I prefer brothels to wars and the field where people kill each other. They do not kick each other, as might be surmised: it is not enough, according to their minds and deeds. No – they *kick each other* in studios, in offices and also in the streets; but not on battlefields. As soon as this word is uttered, they begin to use their weapons, for they think that everything is allowed on battlefields. It is not for nothing that these fields are preceded by the word 'battle'. Not bottle, mind you. Of course you can drink a bottle of wine on any battlefield, provided no one is about to shoot at you, hoping to kill you once and for all. Of course you can be killed once, but not for all, and those who excel in games of this kind go to the very end, to the words 'for all'. Once the shooting is over, they ask the spectators, 'Have I reached the final stage, the for-all stage?' And if some spectators hesitate and others say, 'Unfortunately you've reached only the for-stage, which is not up to your standards, as we all know.' Sometimes you answer as follows, 'You know, I'm becoming milder and milder. I pity so many people and I even have the feeling I pity all of humanity, which is ridiculous, I'm quite aware of the fact.' Going to extremes is a human characteristic which finally resulted – in the course of many centuries, at the end of these centuries – in the creation of the apparatus usually described as follows: a seat joined by two ropes or chains to a metal bar or a tree, on which especially a child can sit and move backwards and forwards. 'Especially a child' is erroneous because many grown-ups enjoy this contraption much more than children, however childish. Any grown-up knows a little bit of life and this seat imitates life to perfection. You go down and at first you think that, in a moment or two, you will know the secrets of the underground, the mystery of the centre of the earth – as Jules Verne did. But then you realise that any downward movement demonstrates to you your own fall about which Balzac spoke rather eloquently, when depicting the lives of courtesans. So you sit down on a swing and from then on you will associate any downward movement with decadence and misery, utter misery. You do not even have to read or see Gorki's famous piece in the course of which you witness the degradation of a group of people who sit very low, very low indeed – at a theatre the people in command put them in the lowest basement to demonstrate their utter depravity and amorality and lack of civilian pride. You look at these people and pity them. Then you are invited to go down a few steps which would certainly allow you to see them even better, to participate in their downfall fully. You do participate in their downfall and so continue to fall, even when you realise they remain at the same level of misfortune which can be measured, determined, put into words. After a while you do your best to put your tragedy into words, and you write a Greek tragedy, another one. And some of your former friends write Greek comedies, following in the footsteps of Aristophanes. All these groups of people look at each other and decide to go to a brothel. After all, going to a brothel is a more productive occupation, even if at the end of your sojourn in this establishment you conceive no children, no heir to your throne, to the throne of your life. You say to yourself, 'Brothels are very useful. They're far more useful than marriages which are full of obligations of all kinds. Here's one of these obligations. You have to care for your child, be he a man or a woman. You have to provide him with education, send her to school, to universities – one university isn't enough – and let him buy a comfortable car – with your money, naturally enough. With your money, you seduce a woman for him, a man for her. Even if they do not marry, they can have three or four children who will turn your old age into an excerpt from Paradise. Yes, you have to make them love music and piano-playing. They

simply have to be able to play a few Chopin mazurkas for themselves and their friends. And of course you take them to museums in the hope of contaminating them with your love for painting, sculpture and so on. You go so far as to buy a few paintings which are hanging now in your house. Unfortunately, your children turn away from these paintings. Sometimes they even burst into tears upon coming across them in one of the rooms of your spacious house. You really need a spacious house for your family, because space permits human beings to appreciate fully the advantage of the Earth which is far bigger than the Moon. In short, you spend so much energy on your offspring and your offspring's offspring that in the end you regret having conceived and brought up so many human beings whose participation in the rite called 'demography' is unquestionable. Being almost in the centre of this rite you are really smothered by this promiscuity, by this undesirable fraternity and sisterhood. Once or twice you heard about the people who asphyxiate animals with plastic bags. These poor animals are born and see the light of day, but human beings decide they have no time for their wellbeing and so drown them in rivers or lakes or simply suffocate them with plastic bags. And you just go to a brothel to avoid these sights, shunning unpleasantness in any shape or form. You also shun a first and a second marriage, being aware of the complexities that arise in the course of any of these institutions. (Some people call them that.) You go into a brothel and come out of it, carrying no babes, no wives, no contracts – no obligations, generally speaking. You may buy a bunch of flowers for your former partner. In this case, you return to the brothel once again, but this time you do not even have to take your clothes off. All this sounds and looks far better than any involvement with anything.

'As to your complaint that men listen only to the dictates of passion and refuse to acquiesce in your judgement and mine –'

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Of course we cannot help listening to something; all the time; unless we isolate ourselves from the world using earplugs, among other things. There are many plugs, and in our countries we are in a position to acquire them all. We put plugs on our eyes so as not to see the horrors we see, whenever our eyes are wide open. We put a plug on our tongue which is unruly and often says what we do not mean: even the roots of what our tongue voices in spite of our resistance are utterly unknown to us, being on the dark side of our being. We also put plugs on our arms and especially on our hands which are prepared to execute a piece of music in such a way that even animals leave us in terror, utterly destroyed by our inability to understand music and its ramifications. Some musicians say, 'They're all right from every point of view except our point of view. And music can't bear their presence to the point of willing to cut off their hands and deprive them of any music which might be used as a means of propagation of sound waves connected with Mozart, Bach and so on.' Unfortunately passions dominate people of this kind, and one of those passions pushes them to play musical instruments of all kinds. Sometimes they are tempted to demonstrate their affinities with drums. You hear a sort of pandemonium – for no reason at all, in your opinion – and someone explains to you the truth of what is going on, 'He's just trying to drum up some enthusiasm for the project.' This is a moment to deplore the influence exerted by languages in the domain called 'our life'. 'No,' you explain to your opponent. 'This person, whoever he is, happens to be enamoured of drums and drumming in general. Whenever he sits down, his fingers begin to drum on whatever they happen to find near at hand. Somebody listens to what is going on in the world and says, "The rain is

drumming loudly on the roof.” This person is bitterly mistaken: the rain has nothing to do with this ghastly and ghostly music. This piece of music is an outcome of passion and a series of drives, and that makes it even more ghastly. And not only do men listen to it, but they also refuse to listen to *our* pieces of music – to the arguments of saints, among other symphonies. They say, “I listen to my fingers which know better what I have to do because they belong to my essence, to my inner and outer being. Why should I listen to others whose music is foreign to my ears and heart – for the simple reason that they don’t belong to my atoms and molecules and cells.” Yes, that is what they – all those people, as usual – put above anything else; their own personalities, attitudes, points of view, fingers and tendons. And whatever they do is dictated by their passions. And their passions are everywhere. Now they are passionate about a book illustrated by one of their cousins; now they are passionate about a pastry, about a piece of chocolate or something along the same lines. (These lines are sweet in their own right.) They are also passionate about a beach on which they install their bodies, yearning for a new colour conveyed to their skin (or bestowed upon it) by sunbeams, by the radiation offered by the centre of our solar system. They are even passionate about a few drops of water they drink, when their thirst triumphs over their other feelings, for instance the feeling of love. They are prepared to sacrifice anything for these few drops of water, either mineral or not, coming from a puddle. They kneel down and disturb the serenity of the puddle which was not aware of the forthcoming interference with its peaceful pastime. And if you try to talk to them during this period called ‘quenching one’s thirst’ you will come across yet another deaf ear. How many deaf ears have you witnessed in the course of your life? Even if you do not experience any passion, anything to speak of, you imagine you are drawn towards something, and this something becomes the object of your incandescent desire. Well, you have no desires, nothing in your breast or in any other part of your being, but you think that without passions your life does not mean anything. In other words, it is not worth your while to live it from beginning to end. You lived some years and that is quite enough. That is what many of us think on the brink of committing suicide. But then we recall the Bible and someone’s words, ‘You have no right to take what was given to you.’ It is not necessary to add ‘by the Almighty’: everybody knows that what we mean does not boil down to an intervention on the part of some Peter or other. But if you are not literally pushed towards something – an idea or an object – you will be on the verge of disappearance, likely to disappear without leaving any tangible vestiges of your sojourn on the Earth. That is why, for no reason at all – at such moments you do not regard suicide as a weighty reason, as a material confirmation of your general and utter fatigue – you begin to yearn for a trifle. And this trifle – in the twinkling of an eye – becomes so gigantic you cannot see anything beyond it; or even by its side. So you rush towards it and swear not to part with it until your timely or untimely death. And when your death comes, you say to him, ‘No, I can’t part with the dearest object of my desire. Please, leave me alone – in this object’s company, to be precise.’ Oddly enough, often death rejects his own purpose, thinking, ‘In the right place at the right time. The place is obviously right. As for time...Well, let’s postpone his funeral until next year.’ And the funeral comes at last. No one says you are passionate about your coffin, and this is all the more true since you cannot really appreciate its design and colours. What *can* you appreciate at this stage of your life or death? Probably your own last words. But did you hear them? Did you really think about their content before collapsing, mentally and physically, for the last time in your life? But as you know better than anybody, hope does not die at once. Sometimes you get the feeling it is on the point of collapsing, but it goes on living, in spite of everything, literally *everything*. Indeed – everything is against this hope of yours. You cast a glance at it and say, ‘Farewell.’ Two hours elapse and your hope is still within your

field of vision. You can even hear it, and what you hear does not sound like a last sigh or a farewell – nothing like it, as a matter of fact. What does it look like? It looks like real hope – not the ridiculous hope you see now and then in the company of your friends and mistresses. Their hopes often look so hopeless you begin to wonder whether all this is not a comedy meant to ridicule everyone once and for all. More often than not you lay yourself open to ridicule, but after a while you realise that something is closed. You are not really ridiculous. You are half ridiculous, half monumental, and you devote the rest of your life to the growth of your monumentality – to the detriment of your nonentity. But you are not monumental, and you denounce yourself several times a day, for the simple reason that you are sincere with yourself and refuse to lie to yourself, to the core of your being. Yes, if there is something reliable in your whole substance (or nonsense, as your *sensecritique* says to you, now and then), it is the core of your being. Sometimes, when eating an apple you admire the stone, the core of the apple's being, and you put it aside to add it later on to your collections of stones, cores and so on. So you are aware of your own inadequacy, as the Russians say today, which is absolutely normal, given their own inadequacy; and you decide to borrow some adequacy from other people who talk to you almost every day. Twice a year you take a holiday and so leave your native city, hoping to forget for a while its bustle and hustle – and muscle, as you say to yourself from time to time. It is as if your native city was inclined to beat it to a pulp or to some other substance you do not care about. You become a pulp, for a while, but you do not mind: your ignorance of what you become as a result of your negligence, of the beating you regularly submit yourself to, saves you from utter desolation, despair and ultra-meaninglessness. Well, the important point is that your aptitude to borrow wise arguments, words, ideas and tendencies helps you build up your monumentality to which you attach a lot of importance. Why? Because you experience a strange feeling, when looking at monuments of all kinds: a monument to a great general, a monument to a great poet. You wish to become like these monuments, not necessarily like those they represent. In short, your desire to become monumental overwhelms you completely and, after ten years, you finally become a monument. A lot of people stop in their tracks upon spotting your outline in the distance. And when they get closer and closer to the material of which you are made, they remove their hats, if they happen to be mature men, and ladies salute you like royalty, as if you were a king. Of course you are nothing of the kind, but you are monumental, and nobody can deny it. Of course they say to each other, 'He's monumental, but his stupidity still betrays his innermost nature.' But what can they do with their intelligence, all these people? You just walk past them without bothering to bow to them or salute them in any other way. You do not even say 'hello' to them, for they do not deserve your hello; or anyone's hello, for that matter. Even their own children do not salute them. They only ask for chocolate or ice cream and go on their way, to a football or hockey pitch. But everybody says 'hello' to you. Actually it is not true: no one dares say 'hello' to you, which would sound too familiar in the presence of such a monument. What you receive daily and nightly is reduced to bows and respectful murmurs. You hear a respectful murmur and realise that someone else honours your unquestionable monumentality. And you begin to ask yourself an unpleasant question which gnaws at you every day. Why doesn't your monument adorn the Central Square? Of course you do not feel like putting this question to other people, let alone asking them to remove you from where you are and install your immortal remains on the only square where you would feel at home. But some day, in the not too distant future this event will take place: you are sure of that. And you wait for this event. And, on the whole, events are much more important than Godot.

‘You coax as a father, you teach as a master, you enjoin as a bishop.’

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When you start learning English, one of the first sentences you learn by heart is: ‘A mother was coaxing her reluctant child into the water.’ At first you do not understand anything, with the exception of the word ‘mother’ which you heard somewhere: there are so many mothers around us. But the rest escapes your understanding and a multitude of feelings you harbour in your body and mind. Usually they say your feelings come from your heart, but you know that part of them is kept in your mind, and you let them out, from time to time, sometimes wisely, sometimes unwisely. Well, you realise that there is a mother in the sentence you learnt by heart without understanding its meaning. But what does this mother do? You learn the verb ‘to coax’, thanks to your dictionaries, and at long last you picture to yourself the situation depicted in this text. You recall a number of beaches on which you spent a few mornings near the water you cherished so much in your childhood and also partly in your youth, in the early, initial part of your youth. Then you grew indifferent to water, and even mineral water does not inspire your intellect. But in your childhood you needed no coaxing to join the water that sparkled in the sun at the end of the beach you adored – in the footsteps of your parents and aunts. Well, in the text you learnt by heart you meet a mother who coaxes you rather abstractly: there is no water within your field of vision unless you go to the kitchen or to the nearest bathroom and open a few taps to fill a saucepan or a simple glass. No, no – you confuse the texts, which is quite understandable. Of course St Jerome’s words are much more precious than whatever you learnt at school or at home, especially in your early age. So automatically, whenever they speak to you about a text, some text, you quote St Jerome or another Father of the Church, even if the situation you find yourself in does not lend itself to such interpretations. Yes, your mother or father lent you a helping hand – at some point in your existence. But St Jerome continues to lend you a helping hand and so his book, which you consult, looks like a bunch of hands. Now you or rather your wife is used to bunches of roses, but a bunch of hands, in this case, in St Jerome’s case, is also a bunch of roses, metaphorically and symbolically speaking. All right, you acquire a bunch of roses, one way or another. It is on your table and you smell it from time to time to fill your lungs with a fragrance you are not likely to forget within two hours at least. And then it withers, rots and no one speaks about it. Why do you need to hear others to speak about your private problems related to this bunch of flowers? Just because you believe that human beings are brothers and should keep in touch, whatever happens in the world and even in the cosmos? The stars can fall as often as they wish, but humans embrace and caress each other, verbally and physically. That is the vision of humanity you keep in your heart. But your heart is unaware of the whole truth which is bitter, contrary to the sweetness of your heart and dreams. They – your heart and dreams – resemble a pastry shop, and you walk around it, hesitating between this tart and that cake. In the meantime your bunch of roses withers, wilts and no one shares your grief. No one calls you on the phone to say, ‘What a pity your bunch of roses kicked the bucket. How do you intend to live without it? Will you be able to get over it quickly? Will it harm the contents and quality of the book you’ve been writing for three years at least?’ No one calls; no one inquires about your health, mood and nervous system. ‘This country is in danger of allowing its industrial base to wither away,’ that is what they talk about on television and elsewhere. ‘What do I care about my country and its industrial base!’ you shout, but no one hears you. And even if somebody did hear you, this somebody would say, ‘Our industrial base is far more important than your bunch of roses, than your life itself. Anyway, without our industrial base you won’t be able

to buy roses. What's more, you won't even have enough water for your vase. And you won't have your vase any more. You'll let it fall, smashing to smithereens – perhaps on purpose. And you'll never have enough money for another vase into which you might put a lot of roses and other flowers. Hopefully you can see to what extent our industrial base is more important than your personal, intimate preoccupations.' I know that, without this industrial base, I would be able to buy neither a vase nor a bunch of flowers, nor water, nor any table on which you can put a vase. Of course you can try and seduce someone in the hope that this person will be generous enough to offer you all these items. But nothing is done for nothing in this world of ours. If you receive a vase, you feel duty bound to kiss and caress the person who offered it to you and also a bunch of flowers: if you offer someone a vase, you are tempted to put something in it. If you are not, the person who takes advantage of your generosity may notice your gift's defects which grow quite visible, if the recipient is empty and nothing hides its drawbacks, scratches and cheap, inadequate surface. So it is much more advantageous to buy a huge bunch of flowers – not necessarily a bunch of roses – to hide everything down to the vase itself. Of course your friend or mistress is aware of the recipient's presence, but the ritual's details escape him or her – until further notice. Even when this notice comes, the flowers wilt and are thrown into a rubbish bin or something similar, akin to a rubbish bin. (A waste disposal unit, for instance.) Abin to a rubbish kin. Why are you so driven to pointless verbal jokes or games? And you go on, even if you realise to what extent you are ridiculous, wasting your time on trifles at the moment when your destiny hangs in the balance. And once again you yield to the temptation and begin to take your phrases, idioms and their idiotic constructions apart. You ask yourself, 'Does my destiny use a rope in the course of this action called "hanging in the balance"?' And if it is a rope you come across in the course of your investigation you feel serene because you rely on ropes, on their solidity, on their union with life and lack of interruptions. Frankly speaking, you have nothing against hanging as such, and you recall your infatuation with the swing your father gave you when you were only two years old. This swing often took you as far as the nearest star, and one day you almost reached the farthest star, and the swing helped you in this undertaking. Well, now, at the age of sixty, you know both the stars and the Earth, and also all kinds of ropes that attach you to swings, to your relatives, to leaves of grass and also to the love you feel towards a woman you are hardly acquainted with. But this does not really matter because our life is devoted and even dedicated to acquaintances of all kinds. Some of them become fatal and you perish one afternoon somewhere, sometimes on a beach, for no reason at all. Some attachments attach you to death, for some obscure reason. You realise – better late than never – that death itself (or himself) is obscure and, whenever you see light and plunge into it headlong, you struggle with death and triumph over it, receiving a new lease of life. And then you realise it is an old lease of life you received and it is hardly a present, this old lease, this old life. You have been unhappy throughout this old life of yours. You were old, although you were quite young, twenty-one, or something along these lines. Well, you can teach this lesson to youngsters, some of whom are so melancholic they think they are dead already. You say to them, 'You're alive' and you begin to dance irresistibly, unquestionably and endlessly. And so your old age comes almost imperceptibly. Are you a bishop? Does it really matter! You reach the nearest square, red square, white square, and say to the assistant, 'Do you need my credentials? Well, I am a bishop and you can believe me because there's no reason you shouldn't. And I enjoin you as a bishop to love life to the utmost of your ability, to your last fibre, to the last melody you hear in your brain and this meadow. I already gave this lesson when I was a master, just a master. But even masters realise how important it is to be in cahoots with life. And bishops are supposed to use other words, other lives, other loves. All these loves and

lives come together and sing a hymn to everything. And then you die quite unexpectedly. This can also happen, and you shouldn't be afraid of such occurrences. You just look at yourself and say with a nod, 'Well, I seem to be dead at long last. So what? Just another state of mind and body. Let me look at this tendon, at this cell of mine. Yes, they're quite dead. But if I massage them for while, they're sure to come alive once again. I remember I had a stain on my trousers. I had no idea what to do with it, how to get rid of it. I asked a teacher's advice. He said, "You should rub this stain of yours." So I rubbed at the stain on my trousers and made it worse. Unfortunately, there were no bishops by my side. So I decided to throw the trousers into a rubbish bin, saying to myself, 'This is not the last pair of trousers I have in my life.' And sure enough, two days later, someone put a new pair of trousers on my bed. I found it on my bed in the morning, upon awakening. Was it a new lease? Well, I put this new pair of trousers on, I felt such a Niagara Fall of life that I collapsed and remained on the floor, being happy and irreplaceable. Yes, I felt I was irreplaceable, and even now I feel that no one can replace me, whatever happens. And if someone says to me, 'No one can replace you,' I know it is a bishop talking to me. I raise my eyes and see a bishop. I raise my hands because I am in favour. I raise my voice.

'How can I term domination peace? I must call things by their right names. Where there is hatred there let men talk of feuds; and where there is mutual esteem, there let only peace be spoken of.'

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'Domination peace' seems to be a contradiction in terms. If you dominate somebody, somewhere, this man or woman revolts against you, following the well-known rule which is expressed as follows, 'The people revolted against foreign rule and established their own government.' This maxim was written many centuries ago and it still holds, considering that human nature does not really change, in spite of thunderstorms, hurricanes and other catastrophes of that ilk. There are many of them: even an innocent-looking snowstorm can inflict so many wounds that no machines could ever calculate the funereal effect of this fatal snowfall. It falls and you think it is beautiful; you believe that without snow you will not be able to enjoy your holiday to the utmost, especially if you choose a ski resort as the instrument of your winter-coloured bliss. Well, winter is on the agenda and the snow you have awaited for almost a month falls at last, and you can put your new skis and whatever goes with them to the test. Don't you smear your skis with appropriate substances? I have not enjoyed this variety of sport for many years, being averse to falls and other inconveniences related to skiing and winter sports in general. You put on a pair of skis and they let you down immediately as if you had bought them only for the sake of your embraces with snow and its cold, damp caresses. You have the feeling that snow kisses you, leaving some vestiges of its saliva or spittle on your lips. Do I call things by their right names? Saliva or spittle. It does not really matter in the context: after all, I am not enlarging upon my mouth and its ingredients, about my tongue and its components. It is better to speak about my words, I suppose, given that my tongue produces a lot of words in different languages. And I am mostly in love with what I say because I like languages, their differences and similitudes. Do I sometimes hate languages; and my tongue as well? There are periods during which I have a negative attitude towards languages, for the simple reason that they do not express fully either my hatred or my love. How could I express my hatred? I am no boxer and even if I pick up a poker, I am not sure I shall be able to kill my opponent by dealing a few poker-generated blows to his skull. As for my love, it is entirely expressed during my so-called love-bouts, and habitually I have nothing to add either to these bouts or to that

love. But what if I do not achieve results either in the domain of murder or in that devoted to love? Suppose my victim gets up, seizes the poker and deals me a blow of such efficiency that I finish my writings well before the last sentence, the conclusion I have been planning for many months. What if the woman I am in love with says to me, before leaving my bed, 'Is that all?' Of course I would ask her what she means, although, understandably enough, I do understand what she means and what kind of grudge she will be bearing against me for years and years. Can peace be imposed upon a situation, upon a relationship between a man and a woman? They quarrel often, and nothing can be done about it. For instance, the man sees that his fork is not in its right place – on the table where meals take place, becoming a ritual around which everything and every circumstance construct both life and death. But a fork spoils the picture and life as well, for pictures play a very important part in life. If a fork does not know its place – and it cannot know its place because it is unconscious – you talk to the woman with whom you spend many hours, considering that you are married to her. You say to her, 'Why didn't you teach this fork good manners? It behaves wildly and badly. I can't eat this delicious meal you cooked properly because of this misbehaviour, of this outrage.' And the woman you are talking to – she must be your wife, after all – corrects her mistake and that is what called 'domination peace'. The peace I allude to can be contemplated on the table I touched upon and also in the way the ritual, the meal-and-love ritual, unfolds. You unfold your napkin, pick up the fork – you know where and how to pick it – and this fork does not wound you, which might happen if the fork in question behaves badly and forgets its manners. But everything happens in accordance with your inner harmony, and this harmony is based upon peace and consequently has nothing to do with war. And yet Tolstoy put peace and war side by side; at least they stand side by side on the cover of his book. What to do about it? Peace and war have nothing in common, and so you take a pair of scissors and cut either peace or war from the title, from the book you are holding. If it is war you put on the table – being separated from the context, it cannot harm you anymore – you had better fling it out of the window: to make doubly sure. Of course, when you separate peace and war, as soon as this particular ritual is over, you can be assured that peace will dominate your life, at least for a while, for a week or so. But war is never too far from your household, from your thoughts and plans. By fair means or foul, you try to strengthen the peace you obtained as a result of your machinations with scissors and other instruments which are supposed to ensure the reign of harmony within your household. Well, you decide to strengthen peace once again. You invite a friend of yours, a friend on whom you have built a certain relationship of trust, and you say to him, 'The esteem I feel towards you is unquestionable.' And if your friend just thanks you, without going any further, you should ask him to do the same: to return the compliment. And when you hear what you aspire to hear, you realise that domination peace is finally achieved. But suddenly your friend begins to speak about wars – about the war in Ukraine, among other occurrences of this kind – and you correct him wrathfully. You say he underestimates the events which lead to the utter disappearance of many people, soldiers and civilians alike. You say one cannot call these tragedies 'mere occurrences', but your friend interferes to point out he has never used this expression, when speaking about wars and other tragedies that befall humankind. What is more, this friend of yours takes advantage of the position occupied by the fork we talked about only a few minutes ago. He picks up this fork and threatens you with its points, whereupon you realise that domination peace has come to an end, to an unexpected end. Sure enough, you did not expect such an end to crown the story that continues to unfold in your mind and also in reality. You thought and hoped that domination peace would dominate the whole structure of the world for some time; for years and years. But your projects have fallen through, and you have no alternative but to recognise your utter

failure. You recognise it in your friend's presence. You resolve to forget for a moment the fact that your failure stemmed from your friend's incorrect behaviour and answers, remarks, judgements. You say, 'Let bygones be bygones,' and prepare your hand for a friendly, peaceful, harmonious handshake. But your friend withdraws his hand, saying, 'What kind of bygones do you mean, when using this idiom?'

'Is any man reluctant to communicate with you? Does any man turn his face away when you hold over your hand? Does any at the holy banquet offer you the kiss of Judas?'

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How can you find out if such and such a man is reluctant to communicate with you? It is rather hard, even if you do not investigate the matter, analysing every possibility hidden within it. In the first place, you had better determine what you mean by communication that some of us call 'the communication cord'? Of course you do not bring a train to a standstill when communicating with a mere mortal. But sometimes, when talking to someone, you are under the impression that nothing can awaken this person's interest: neither your words, nor your gestures, movements and even airy caresses. But if you had a sort of cord, you could probably pull it, drawing your interlocutor's body towards your own body; and soul, as they usually add as if they knew what they were talking about. Usually they talk for the sake of talking, and you say to them, 'This kind of "sake" you use as an excuse – drop it, for God's sake.' Well, in the domain of airy communications – and all linguistics belong to the air and its ingredients – you cannot be sure of whatever comes out of this temporary union. You are not even sure you are allowed to call this procedure or action a 'union'. All right, for argument's sake. Whenever a business deal is on the agenda, you can approach a person you would like to communicate with, and if the deal is promising for both sides, they will not send you away after a few ambiguous, equivocal words. After all, these words can lead to a tremendous amount of money, and for this you are prepared to sacrifice a few minutes of your precious time. And you will never call this manoeuvre a 'waste of time'. No, you spend this stretch of time usefully, profitably, and you are almost sure your children, if any, will be grateful for their bank accounts, for the luxurious holidays they will be able to offer themselves, thanks to your generosity and the time you spent in someone's company. Today you acknowledge that this company, the person you dealt with, was unworthy of your company, but the company you were capable of founding as a result of this deal, of this long and seemingly fruitless conversation, enables your family and even your distant relatives to lead an opulent life envied by all your neighbours, colleagues and even by distant observers; and even by writers who are eager to immortalise your way of spending your millions in their bestsellers. The problem you face from time to time is related to the banquets you organise, yearning to demonstrate your riches, instead of hiding them in a huge trunk, as many millionaires of the past used to do. Your banquets are well-known throughout the regions, if not in the whole world, but the problem I touched upon does not disappear, in spite of their frequency and regularity. Your guests cannot refrain from kissing you at the beginning and especially at the end of these banquets; and nobody can prove to you that their kisses have nothing in common with Judas' doubtful exploit. You see a man whose legs move towards your legs and consequently towards your cheeks and lips because all these parts or members belong to your body, to what one may call a 'human being'. And if you are a human being, you can be kissed on both cheeks, and this may be dangerous, given that a number of our fellow creatures are Judas in disguise. Sometimes they are just Judas: no disguise tries to hide their identity. You see such an

individual and say to yourself or someone else, 'He is Judas himself.' You can also say, 'He is the spitting image of Judas,' but it is much more sinister to hear the first version of this definition: 'Judas himself.' This means you are Christ, and in this case you do your best to be kissed by this individual. You turn your cheeks in the direction of his lips, mouth and tongue; you make a few steps in his direction if he endeavours to avoid the proximity of your personality. Perhaps he does not wish to play the part of Judas, considering that Judas hung himself at the end of this ritual which is one of the monuments we come across, when studying our history or its legends. You meditate on what can be termed 'dire straits' or a 'bonus' or 'reward'. A reward for what? Do you really care about humanity's destiny, development, end and afterlife? To tell the truth, you often turn your face away at the approach of human individuals: some of them dream about slapping someone's face, and this time the victim may coincide with your own body, face and personality. Yes, your personality also gets wounded in the process, although you may believe you are above all these petty quarrels and risible gestures. You might be above them, but once in a while you happen to be level with them, and in those moments your face, your cheeks and lips are literally exposed to traumas coming from your so-called fellow citizens. They are probably citizens in their own right, but they are not fellow – at least not *your* fellows, your brothers and sisters. Actually, they might be creatures as well: your fellow creatures; or just fellow creatures. Of course they are creatures, otherwise they would not exist. Existence as such is not advantageous; it is not a quality per se; I mean a *positive* quality. You just walk down the street, your native street situated in your native city, and look at those who walk towards you; without really walking towards you. They just walk by and happen to cross your path in some way; and you are against this way because there are some Judas among those people. There are also some Peters, some Pauls, some Sauls. What do you care about *them*? Of course you care nothing, but it is not pleasant to know and even realise that they are walking towards you and may, at any moment, kiss you for no reason at all. It does not really matter whether their kisses are reasonable or not. They kiss you and two or three policemen arrest you at once as if they were Bible-reading and Bible-fearing individuals. They are just nobodies, and not necessarily in the sense meant by Odysseus who was one of these nobodies, at some point of his existence.

'All the same, they honour men by sending them into exile, for by so doing they separate them from the company of heretics.'

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It is not necessary to send you into exile: you can do that yourself, by your own means. You just buy a ticket – not too expensive, hopefully – and leave your motherland or the city where you have spent some time, thinking it is your city, the city where you would like to spend the rest of your life. Then you realised that your life is far more precious than what you can experience in this city which is not as precious as your life. It is not precious at all; at least that is what you say to yourself upon leaving this city forever. Why are you leaving it right now? Because you cannot afford this expensive and pointless life. This city does not offer you anything important, something for which you could sacrifice your life. Could you sacrifice your life? Why should you? Anyway, when asked this question, many people say, 'I haven't lived long enough to know life in all its tiny details. Before rejecting it once and for all, I should know what I forsake and for what purpose. Is this purpose really so important? As important as life itself?' The people you are surrounded with console you all the time, even when

you are not worried at all. But this time you are worried because some signs tell you you are on the point of leaving the life you lead, and this life is connected with the city where your friends, mistresses and even a house where you spend your days and nights come into existence, whenever you need them. Your instinct tells you that this state of affairs will not last long, and so you prepare yourself for a great departure. What makes things easier for you is the attitude of those who talk to you day in, day out. They say you should leave the city and the life you have led so far, for the simple reason that your surroundings are not appropriate. How come? You ask them in what way your surroundings are not convenient and do not correspond to what a decent man should own. They are not always happy with their lives, but they are aware that their surroundings are appropriate, suitable, and they continue to grin and bear whatever happens. But you know for sure that your departure might make you happy, and your companions say that, for all your optimism and delights, you should leave your surroundings because they are invaded by heretics. You can live in the company of hooligans and thieves. You beat hooligans and protect yourself from thieves. But heretics are a different kettle of fish. How could you protect your ears and mind from them? You hear their words and forget your God, the right image of your God. You say to them, 'Here's the image of my God. What do you have against it?' And they begin to correct this image. Some corner of this image, in their opinion, does not tie in with the universal truth. You try to persuade them that your image of truth is absolutely correct. They answer, 'Considering that your image of God is not altogether perfect, whatever you say or do is imperfect too.' And again you return to the image of God. They say you cannot represent the Almighty because his representation is secret. Anyway, what you see in front of you is erroneous. There are some angles that should be wider, some holes are altogether wrong. You listen to them and realise you should leave the city at once, for only in other countries, on other planets, will you find not only the right image of God, but also the right *absence* of this image which corresponds to the interdiction voiced by the Church, the Bible and all Holy Fathers. Usually, when on the point of leaving the place where you have been happy all your life, you hesitate and cry, but this time you know that what you are leaving is full of heretics – to the point of falsifying your own views, images and their absences. You fear the word 'heretics' and you abhor it to the best of your abilities. So you prepare yourself for the Great Departure. And whenever you start to regret your decision once again, one of the heretics appears and utters a few heretical sentences. And the image of God comes into view once again, and you see a number of wrong angles, a number of pimples and inconveniences. You pack your things and salute the heretics who wave their hands as long as you look at them. You see their waving hands and realise these hands are heretical. You close your eyes, and happiness at last penetrates your bosom. But then a group of other images crops up on the horizon and you see your childhood, your mother and even your cradle. And you feel unhappy again, and you shed a few tears which make your bitterness truly unbearable. You say to yourself that you will never be able to separate yourself from all this bliss, from the grass on which you walked at the age of three, of four and of five. 'What could I do without these leaves of grass?' you shout. Soon your groans subside, but your new decision is already taken: you return to your native city, to your cradle buried somewhere in your garden, to your broken toys and former joys. But heretical affirmations surface again and even your memories linked to your toys, cradle and former joys are almost helpless against them. Of course they try their utmost to erase the heretical laws from your memory, horizon and future life, but what is a cradle against wrong teaching? How could it withstand a thesis because of which its possessor goes to Hell, to the flames where only torments meet you, curse you forever? But let us put aside all these more or less abstract considerations. You are just prey to what they term 'willingness to change places'.

Yes, you are weary of your chairs and tables, and even your bathroom gets under your skin. The quality of the water you use on this and other occasions does not suit you, to put it mildly. All this is associated with this particular place, so you want to replace this place by another place, hoping that the quality of your new abode will be much higher. Besides, there are rumours according to which some people just hate those who live in their neighbourhood. It is enough to consult the Internet and the exchanges between those neighbours, human beings who literally threaten each other with fatal blows. Of course they do not go so far as to threaten their correspondents directly, outspokenly. They do not say, 'If you so much as dare open my door, you'll see my fist and my sword.' Of course not. But all these swords seem to hang in the air, so it is better not to open these doors, these menacing, deplorable doors. So you wish to change places, and this whim of yours is corroborated by the hostile attitude nourished by your neighbours towards your person. But cradles and suchlike begin to pester you once again as if you could not find another cradle elsewhere: there are many cradles in the world which is literally swarming with cradles, given the demographic results we have to face, thinking about our descendants and their crowded lives. Alas, your attachment to the so-called native land where your roots can be found somewhere under the surface of the Earth is founded on trifles, on mere suppositions and fantasies. You think you fell in love just in front of the house where you were born. You do not even recall the girl you fell in love with, in accordance with your memories. Your memories are very fertile and therefore offer you a multitude of images, of gods, of goddesses, of whom you know nothing or next to nothing. But you firmly believe you were in love with all of them. You bowed to some of them, you worshipped some of them, and some of them were your gods or goddesses. Your life is punctuated by bows, kisses and unbearable pains related to your disconnected loves – they were not physically connected to those you were in love with – and you refuse categorically to leave the place where this entire phantasmagoria prospers fruitfully and perniciously. You cannot take a step without plunging headlong into your memories that betray you all the time. A friend of yours about whom you cannot say much questions you concerning such and such a memory: 'Where did it happen? Were you really in love or was it a mere infatuation? Do you know the difference between a real life-or-death love and a mere infatuation which is worth neither our respiration nor our tongue's efforts?' You know nothing of the kind, and that might make things easier for you in the domain of your final departure from all this intolerable trash. 'I can't, I can't, I can't.' That is what you say to yourself over and over again, when your thoughts are driven towards your departure, towards the final replacement of the place to which you are attached so firmly, so irremediably, so blasphemously. Why blasphemously? you ask yourself. The answer is ready and fully prepared for your consumption: heretics. That is the real reason of your departure. You recall the Inquisition and its tortures; Giordano Bruno's flames, among other criminal festivities. And you realise to what an extent you are allergic to flames. A long time ago you saw a film about Savonarola and you were horrified by the way this saint behaved in front of the flames which he intended to conquer by walking through them. A series of flames or just one bonfire, but the saint resisted this temptation, although his sanctity and the memory he was supposed to leave for posterity heavily depended upon this gesture, ritual and sacrifice. Anyway, you would have behaved exactly like Savonarola; and yet you like Botticelli and other painters, other forms of art despised by the saint in question. Well, you are unlikely to be submitted to the same torture, but your departure does not really depend upon high temperatures. You feel that your native city swarms with undesirable people, heretics among other individuals. What is more, you feel that heretics constitute about 20% of the whole population of this city or even of the whole country. Then you revise your estimation and come to the following

conclusion: all of them are incurable heretics. But where are you supposed to go? The entire population of the Earth belongs to this category of sinners and criminals. Well, sooner or later they will come up with a contraption suitable for cosmic travel, for changing places *radically*, to stick to the initial formula. The Earth is a place and you are longing to leave this place on account of the widespread heresy.

‘But I find readier credence when I go wrong than when I shew amendment. And this is not surprising, for my would-be friends suppose me a fellow-disciple with them in the arcane of their system.’

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In the first place we should point out that there are no friends; at least that is what Aristotle said some time ago. So it is pointless to add ‘would-be’ to the word ‘friends’ because there are no friends, and no explanation is needed for this eloquent, altogether truthful account of our relationship with our colleagues or partners. Well, you are literally invaded by words, engulfed by them. A wave of words covers you completely, and when you feel ready to react verbally to what they seem to mean, your listeners hear only bubbles and the witches of Macbeth fame. Bubble, bubble. When they hear this, they take no great pains to decipher what you mean, and they are absolutely sure you are repeating their doctrines because there are no other ways of discovering and stating the truth, about which they usually say ‘nothing but’. Actually, it concerns almost everything and everybody. Nothing but, nothing but. You look at a human being and say, ‘This object is nothing but.’ Nothing but bones, nothing but stupidity, nothing but greediness, nothing but death; and so on. Death is always handy – in every sense of the word. You just have a hand: you do nothing special, apart from this rather obvious truth. Of course you can lose this hand in the course of some fight or other. And these fights may unfold almost everywhere, including your own bed. You suddenly wake in the middle of the night and see the Devil or one of his representatives. (There are many of them, as we all know. Sometimes we even go so far as to maintain there is nothing else on the surface of the Earth and also in her multiple depths.) You react of course, and you behave as any human being – even if he or she does not believe in God – does under the circumstances. This being gives a cry, shrieks, executes the sign of the Cross (more or less beautifully) and shuts his or her or its eyes. Now there is nothing in front of this being: no beings, no non-beings – nothing at all. But this nothing at all bothers it deeply and truly as if it was the end of the world and, what is even more important, of your own life. You have lived for years and years – for nothing, to tell the truth. And now the Devil’s assistant or associate emerges from nothing – or from everythingness – and you are frightened out of your wits. Have you spent so many years for nothing? You cannot even defend yourself against a little, miniscule devil for whom you do not even use a capital letter. And what about capital punishment? Are you in a position to punish this devil, however slightly and insufficiently; or inefficiently? You punish this devil, after many hesitations. You plant on this creature (or non-creature) a blow from which it is not supposed to recover, in spite of our medical science’s progress. The science improves daily, and you continue to plant deadly blows on this personal devil of yours. But nothing happens: you still have the same personality, the one in which this devil’s life originates. And you ask yourself, ‘Why do all these questions come to the fore?’ You live a normal, tranquil life, and suddenly there are questions you cannot avoid. And they come from nowhere; or rather from the fact that, from time to time, you do not agree with everybody – with the people who surround you. They talk to you, and you realise you want to come to an agreement with your thought, which might permit them to make much more money, without

shifting their ground all the time. You are involved in the same project, and they expect your agreement, your nods and signatures. But something goes wrong, as they say all the time. Everything goes wrong, and that is why we live in a world which is unbearable, instead of being bearable and rather pleasant. But as they say, when our conversations turn to our world, instead of wandering in the midst of the stars, 'That's how it is.' And you repeat this saying or maxim, without taking the trouble to change anything, which might allow you to say, 'That's not how it is,' or 'that shouldn't be like that.' But what *should* be like that, in your opinion? Or what should be at all, as some of us say, from time to time? Luckily for us, something always happens from time to time, which means that there are times when these horrors do not happen. And what happens in the middle or in the margins? Some other horrors, but we are not aware of them, of their essence and nuisance. That is why we are capable of bearing with other horrors, instead of trying to cope with the horrors we have on our agenda. What horrors *do* we have on our agenda? Horror number one, horror number two and so on. So we eliminate a few horrors from the list, and that enables us to study and learn by heart the multiplication table. 'There is a multiplicity of fashion magazines to choose from,' says someone, and that is how we learn mathematics today, which means we are in the know, or we go step by step with the steps taken by our civilisation and our time or times or spaces. You go out or take a taxi, and suddenly you see a lot of multiplication tables: there are shops everywhere and you can buy as many shoes as your body is designed for. You forget about your body and buy shoes for the whole city, if not for the whole country. And that is what they call happiness. What else do they call happiness? A sort of agreement with what you hear around your ears. You know that we you do not agree with what is said, you will not be able to buy so many shoes. You are aware of the fact that you are much more intelligent than the people standing on all your sides so that you can introduce a sort of amendment to whatever they say, to their fundamental views. But you do not introduce your amendments because you know that if you do, you will lose a number of shoes you wish to acquire on the spur of the moment – today, in other words. What else do you wish to purchase? You look around you and choose this and that; and many other things, saying to yourself you have to choose as many things as possible, while you are at it. And if you are not *completely* at it, you do your best to shift all your grounds with the express purpose of finding yourself completely at it. You seem to be satisfied, and after a while you realise you are not completely *at* it. You are on it, under it, over it, by its side. Where are you actually or incidentally? The point is you have to be the focus of attention. If you are not, you spend your time, times and lives on trifles and therefore it is better to interrupt this masquerade at once, instead of dragging it on and on, until it grows weary of this dragging, of its own life and ridiculousness. Besides, the media's focus on politicians' private lives inevitably switches the attention away from the real issues; and you are not even a politician. And even if you have a private life, a life of your own, no one is really interested in it, for the simple reason that you are not a politician. And even if you are, you are not a politician in whom the media takes an interest – not only because you have no private life, but on account of your insignificance. You get married and think that newspapers and television news will focus everything – not only their own attention – on this private life of yours. But nothing really happens. You organise extraordinary, exceptional parties and many photographers devote their time and resources to your so-called family life and its peaks. But two or three days elapse, and nothing appears anywhere. Sometimes you get the feeling you recognise your face on one of the sheets of paper shown somewhere, sometimes on a television screen. This screen may even show somebody who vaguely looks like your own personality, but then you realise you were mistaken, and life goes on as if it could go on without you, your smiles and your spouse. Oddly enough, it can

also go on without your dog, which seems unthinkable, given everybody's interest in animals and their kingdom. But even if you calmly lie in your bed, you feel the presence of the little devil, and this presence betrays itself in various ways. For instance, you are expecting a number of sweet dreams, but suddenly you realise that, without your visit to the lavatory, no dream will feel comfortable, at home in your body, let alone in your dream-orientated mind. So you pull yourself together and go to the lavatory where you also struggle with the devil for a while, otherwise you will lose many battles; and some of these battles are quite unpleasant, to put it mildly. And you are vaguely aware that some of these inconveniences stem from your adherence to such and such a doctrine. So you say, 'I don't adhere to it any longer,' although, frankly speaking, you have no idea what you are talking about. But it is better to try a few versions of your future life. You say you adhere and then you switch to the opposite pole of your reflection. And you see what happens. If nothing happens, you wait for a while and then go out and meet a few pedestrians to whom you might wish to talk to find out whether you are on the right track or not. You step into a puddle, return home and say, for everybody to hear, 'I've changed my mind and now I adhere to what I haven't adhered to so far.' You go out again and avoid several puddles. But a car zooms by and gratifies you with a few specimens of mud. So once again you return home and testify to yet another change which you carry out inside your brain. You arrived at your office covered with mud and with a few samples of what on several occasions you called 'this bloody' mud. To what doctrine do you adhere right now? You open the Bible, *War and Peace* and think no longer of mud and God. You just feel both of them.

'Your words urge me to write to you but your eloquence deters me from doing so.'

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Yes, you formulate your demands and views, and all your formulations seem to hint at something I understand only too well. You need my approval and probably even my disapproval. Anyway, you do not expect a silent answer, a silent nothing as a reaction to your epistle. You write to me, endeavouring to put your ideas into words, express them, both your ideas and words. And the latter are very beautiful, and I am duty bound – even if you do not require such an attitude on my part – to participate in your dilemmas and knots, to untie your confusions and disillusionings. To efface this and that in the hope that the truth will show itself in all its splendour, or just partly, which is quite enough, given that the truth in all its splendour is accessible only to saints or rather to some of them. Even among saints there are brilliant stars and just constellations, mere constellations. And I know what I am talking about. Well, you write to me and my duty consists in answering you either briefly or interminably. Not interminably: you are supposed to read my letter through, and this can be done only if my letter allows one to do so without getting into trouble. And in this case, trouble might become its endlessness, for how can you reach the end of it, the end of endlessness? Doesn't it exist for the sole purpose of making it impossible to reach its end, even if the truth we are seeking so stubbornly can be found only at the end? Another question I ask myself concerns your style which is ostentatiously impeccable. Is it really worth your while, being so impeccable in the domain of grammar? Does grammar as such deserve all this impeccability, the beauty that only works of God display – occasionally? A work of God is beautiful because it cannot be otherwise, but your grammar, the way you handle it, does not belong to this category of objects. Of course you can retort that whatever is beautiful must have been created by the word or hand of God. Well, in this case, you just have to take a sheet of paper, or whatever you use for the purpose of writing, and put it on your writing

table. Isn't that enough? You contemplate a blank sheet of paper, and one wonders why you are tempted to fiddle with it? For what purpose? To note down your thoughts? Do they deserve such a gift – being written on a sheet of paper? After a while you begin to wonder if the person who dares write to you, disrupting your timetable, agenda and the rest of your daily occupations deserves anything except an eloquent silence which might mean 'go to Hell'. Actually that is exactly what it means, but you have a dangerous urge which seems to inspire you against your own will. This urge thinks that you should do something because you are a good writer, and whatever the quality of the epistle you received, your answer will be far superior to the quality of what you are holding in your hands. And one should not miss an opportunity to set one's own capacity, gifts and talents off to advantage. Why should you lose such a position which will enable you to win this game: human life is nothing but a series of games? You win, you lose, and it is better to win than to lose, even if your adversary does not deserve a comma written by your hand or typed on your computer. You type a comma and send it to someone who does not deserve even a comma, even a dot, a miniscule dot. Why do you send anything to this person? Silence is the best answer you can come out with, and you come out with this answer. What happens next, you wonder? Nothing, nothing. This means that your adversary has come out with the same answer. This also means you have not won the game, whatever you might think on the subject. These games are tiresome; you play them all the same, for you think that without these games your life cannot be termed a 'human stretch of time'. These games are not necessarily linked to words and syllables, although they interfere from time to time, they intervene on your behalf, in a way. If you utter a few words, people think, 'He knows the alphabet, and consequently he must have read a few rules, a few wise saying. He might be wise after all, wise and intelligent.' But mostly you just sit by your window, one of your favourite windows, and contemplate the life of your city or rather that of your street. Someone is running down this street, and you recall this saying, 'Life is a game, and you can win this game.' So you begin to run yourself. You run from your bathroom to your bed and back again. You also run along your only corridor that leads you to the front door. You hesitate and finally open this door, which enables you to continue to run towards the staircase leading outside, into the noise of the city. You run into this noise which deafens you permanently in the right ear. You run for another hour and the hustle and bustle of you native city – after a while, all cities become your native cities – deafen you definitively in the left ear. There are no more ears left within your life which seems enormous, all of a sudden. Yes, you have a gigantic life, but what do you have it for? You cannot hear anything, but that does not disturb you beyond measure: you are weary of hustling and bustling. You are also weary of your own legs which draw you forward as if there were something forward or backward. There is nothing except the hustle and bustle I have already enlarged upon. I am not sure the runner heard me. But I do not write for his sake; nor do I talk for his sake. I am also running, as a matter of fact, because I just have to win this game, this competition. I win it and am given a medal. A passer-by comes up to me and says, 'You should write about your experience to teach your fellow creatures how to live with dignity and beautifully.' All right. So you pick up a sheet of paper on which nothing is written, not yet. You begin to write your story which is very instructive. You write this: 'I see many books around me, and many people write me letters – rather beautifully, I must admit. The style of their prose is beautiful, but this does not deter me from my own exploits in this domain, in the domain of *belles lettres*. True enough, the letters I receive are beautiful, more than beautiful, but the letters I write are more beautiful still. Sometimes I wonder if anything in this domain is more beautiful than my letters. Probably the *Divina Commedia*, but I am not sure. I should re-read that masterpiece to make up my mind. In the meantime, I

continue to write this letter, and nothing deters me from my job, from my pleasure, from my pastime. No other pastime is more important than the one I am engrossed in – I know that for sure. What else do I need in this life of mine? Of course I go to the bathroom, from time to time, but this is not my vocation, something I am prepared to sacrifice my life for. I go to my bathroom occasionally, hoping to wash the fatigue from my face and my body. The fatigue disappears into the hole I can see at the end of this contraption, and once again I have a fresh mind and so can go on with my task, my duty, my lifelong work. Others also work or walk and go so far as to write a few meaningless letters to me as if to distract me from my walking and talking to myself. What do I talk about, when talking to myself? You always talk to yourself, even when there is a group of noisome people in front of you and by your sides. You ask yourself a sincere question, ‘What are they talking about?’ Then you look at them and conclude they cannot teach you anything. It is the other way round: they wish to *learn* something from you, depriving you of the treasures of your well-being and self-satisfaction. Of course you are fully satisfied with what you know and do in your spare time and even during your sleep. You have studied various disciplines in many schools and universities and so no question, however intricate, can puzzle you, throw you off your balance. Your balance is firmly rooted in the soil you have been acquainted with for many years – ever since your birth. This does not mean you are an illustrious example of what is termed a ‘blood and soil’ patriot. You are not a patriot at all unless one can say you are a patriot of yourself, which is so logical and normal that habitually people do not speak about it, so as not to waste their precious time. What *do* you habitually speak about? You cannot remember. It is just a habit: you open your mouth and through the overture thus operated you let slide a few words which will never change the destiny of the world. And some of us say, after a miniscule pause: ‘No way.’ All right, all right – no way. But what does it matter? You speak, sit down, get up, rise and go, and your going does not alter anything, not even your coordinates. What could you dream about in this world? You cannot even change your coordinates. Your own eloquence deters you from doing so.

‘I have found myself forced therefore to translate a book in which there is more of bad than of good.’

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We are all used to this predicament: a book of life (or the book of life) should be translated into your own language, into your bodily and thoughtful language, otherwise you will not be able to live until midnight. Whether you see this book or not does not really matter. You see a sort of life and you think it is just a life, your own life, and nothing else. Of course there are events in which you do not get involved, but you hear about them or see them in the distance, and that means you *are* involved in them, directly or indirectly. You hear an explosion and put your finger near your ears in the hope of softening the impact of the sound. At the same time, you realise that this sound is not limited to itself – to a mere sound. There are ruins somewhere, boulders and broken beds, but you are sufficiently removed from this action, from its centre, its epicentre. Even from its periphery, to tell the truth. You have just heard a noise, and its impact disturbed your ears ever so slightly; your eardrums, to be precise. Something or somebody drummed on them, mistaking them for a musical instrument called a drum. Well, someone beat out a jazz rhythm on your eardrums. But you are not fond of jazz, and therefore you translated this bit into a Beethoven sonata. That suits you much better and your mood goes up and up and reaches what you call ‘my high mood, my personal Everest’. But what kind of translation could you offer to this mood, to this peak of optimism and joy? Another joy, another source of optimism? Well, for once you are

prepared to renounce all translations for the sake of this serenity which overwhelms you slowly but surely and stays with you, in spite of bad weather and the upset stomach. What else can upset you? Nothing, nothing at all. But it is not enough to repeat this formula, this magic appeal to magical forces. Please, don't change anything in my life! I have found everything, and nothing, really nothing, is in a position to improve upon the conditions in which I find myself today. Conditions, situations – you are happy and do not really need any definition of your happiness. Even the word 'happiness' seems outrageously out of context. Everything seems out of context except this happiness you are talking about. Incidentally, when talking about happiness, your happiness, you seem to debase it, to devalue it. After talking too much, you become less happy, not to say unhappier. What to do with this new state of affairs? Leave it alone – that is what your inner voice tells you several times in a row. To leave it alone, you have to go somewhere, to create a distance between you and your present state of mind and body, your coordinates and your projects. What are your projects? Happiness, as usual. Yes, you wish to be happy at all costs, and this time the costs are rather high. You really have to do something about it, and doing something does not seem to agree with your nature which is motionless, to tell the truth. Even telling the truth presupposes a sort of translation. This is the actual state of affairs you have finally got involved in, but you are unable to translate it into words because words are also a state of affairs where affairs are impalpable and have a lot of meanings. When you stand upright in the middle of your room, you do not have to say to yourself, 'I'm standing upright in the middle of the room,' because every fibre of your being feels and knows it. Actually you have just decided to perform some yoga exercise, and nothing is required for this performance except the performance itself. Of course you can translate it into a poem, saying, for instance, 'My present position in the world reminds me of the tree from which Eve and Adam learnt their human condition by eating its fruit. I also represent the axis of the world, the axis around which the world turns and turns indefatigably. What does it do this for? No idea. Perhaps it dances a sort of waltz because it is infatuated with Strauss and his musical production. Anything can happen in this world of ours. For instance, I might be dancing a polka at this particular moment – without knowing it. But if asked, 'What are you doing right now?' – this question is asked by a severe, pedantically structured professor – I am supposed to answer, 'I'm dancing a mazurka.' 'A mazurka by Chopin?' 'Yes, of course: I like Chopin very much.' 'Do you know how to dance a mazurka?' 'No.' 'How come you are dancing it right now? Are you lying through your teeth?' 'No, I'm just translating my state of mind and body into words. The state in which my mind finds itself can be translated by the word "mazurka". I don't actually need to add the verb "to dance", but this is my personal trait or touch. This personal whim allows me to differ in temperament from others. Differences are important, especially in the domain of temperaments. If we stay in the middle of a room, all of us, you can see at once that some people are like that and others are like this. What does this difference depend upon? Some of us stay still, whereas others dance a mazurka or try to imagine a match between two tennis players. They make all sorts of movements which pertain to what is known as a tennis match. It is their translation of Wimbledon.' And if you happen to walk in front of this row made up of human beings – they are relatively young – you may receive a blow from one of them; a kick, to be precise. If you get angry and ask, 'What is this all about?' the culprit can answer, 'This is a football match I'm playing against the last world champions.' And if you attempt to kick the guilty party in your turn, he can say to you, 'You're not the world champion, as far as I know. You may be a world champion in another sport, another branch, another field. But you're not a footballer. You might be a chess player, for all I know. Are you a world champion?' Immediately, you translate your inability to play chess into the language where, in the twinkling of

en eye, in the space of a comma, you become a world champion. Then you translate this state of affairs into a chessboard, pick up a pawn and begin to beat your adversary to the best of your abilities. Yes, you are forced to translate the world into something. The point is you do not know whether the world is good or bad. Anyway, you translate it continuously. As a result of your translations, some people fall, others rise and fly around roofs. What is good? What is bad? If you like flying, you enjoy your flight to the utmost. If you do not, you fall and people pick you up. If you wish to go on with your earthly experience, you call these people, 'My saviours.' If you do not, if your thoughts are focused upon your forthcoming suicide, your translation sounds thus, 'Get out of here, you, bastards. You don't know anything about life. Anyway, you can't translate it properly.'

'Many married ladies make it a habit to confer gifts upon their own trumpeters, while they are extremely profuse to a few, withhold all help from the many.'

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Many people have heard about the war in Ukraine, about the Russians who are loath to take part in combat because they set life over death and therefore do not wish to die. This morning, on my computer I saw a programme in which a presenter spoke about a feast to which many victims of the war had been invited: wounded soldiers, widows, relatives whose nephews had perished in the course of some operation or other. They were given a sauce based on garlic, smelling of garlic. Supposedly this sauce can be added to beef, to Stroganoffs and so forth. Where had this sauce come from? Of course the deputy whose task included the distribution of the sauce had got it from a dealer whose name was not announced in the course of the feast. This does not really matter. What matters, however, is the manner in which this distribution was carried out. You get something for nothing, and you do not really need such a large quantity of this sauce, for instance; to take one example out of many, of thousands and thousands of examples. So you organise a feast and offer this sauce to veterans, victims and also to their relatives. People forget about the war – that what the deputy counted on – and savour the flavour of the dish. Do they forget about the garlic? Do they long to forget about it? What are we talking about? It is just the opposite we have to enlarge upon, considering that the saint talks about trumpeters and ladies, not about a sauce and its ingredients. The point is your aim is to get a huge quantity of sauces, trumpets, trumpeters, admirers and money. And trumpeters help you glorify your actions all over the world. What are your actions, according to the saint? There are many lonely women in the world, and these women dream about men; or about other women. But let us leave these other women out of the picture: my purpose does not include them, oddly enough. (Usually women *are* included.) This time I would like to talk about the women whose loneliness does not agree with their characters, their moods, tendencies and goals. They yearn to marry and have a lot of children; otherwise they might think – that is what they really surmise – that their life has no point, no purpose, no value. A woman asks another woman, 'Do you have children?' 'No,' answers the other woman. 'Do you have a man on whom you can count in these matters? A husband, in other words? In another word?' 'No.' 'Your life is worthless,' concludes the first, initial (and initiated) woman. If you say to such and such a woman, 'There are too many trumpets around you. And these trumpets don't keep silent. They speak non-stop about your virtues. And what are these virtues, may I ask? You've got a husband – that's your only virtue.' But such a woman answers as follows, 'Not only do I have a husband, but I do something with him. We're not pointlessly useless, if you must know. Probably you think that the only thing we care about is

the breakfast we eat every morning, boiled eggs or other eggs, ham and so on. And then we go for a walk and count, count, and many digits appear on the screens of our computers. But actually we care about our children. If a woman is not married, she just walks around the streets, and many handsome young men think these women are prepared to satisfy their wildest desires. This is not true. But what is also true shouldn't be neglected either. If there are no trumpeters by your side, you're under suspicion. People think you devote the greater part of your time to prostitution, whereas a trumpeter reminds everybody that you're married, have a lot of children who are mature enough to defend their country or to contribute to the progress of technology. The trumpeters bring their instruments up to their lips and begin to trumpet the truth of the world. And this truth speaks of marriages and their advantages.' But if there are no trumpets in the streets, this situation might signify two things: either the country where you find yourself has no army, which is not advisable, given the number of armed conflicts we are surrounded with, or the woman you spot in the middle of the street is free and this entails some risk. Many men – and in their midst there can be found a few old men as well – decide they can mishandle this woman on account of the trumpeters or rather on account of their absence. These men recall only snatches from the rules they were taught in their youth. They recall the words 'extremely profuse to a few', and conclude on the spur of the moment that they belong to these happy few, although there are no indications which might lead them to this conclusion. So they begin to mishandle this woman in various ways. They talk nonsense to her, they touch her shoulders and thighs, they speak about their flats and beds all the time. They realise that their wishes cannot be fulfilled in the middle of the street where they have accosted the woman and so they try to drive her away from this street. 'Don't forget you're extremely profuse,' they say to her over and over again. Unluckily for them, the woman remembers the other excerpt: 'withhold all help from the many'. So a discussion gets under way. The woman says, 'You're mistaken. You remember only the beginning of the saint's statement, whereas there's an ending which somehow contradicts the beginning. According to this ending I'm supposed to withhold all help from the many.' 'But we're not the many,' retort the men. 'We're the happy few about whom you must have read in many publications available to the general public.' 'I don't care about public opinion,' says the woman. 'I know I should withhold all help from the many.' 'But this is not fair,' say the men. 'You're a human being, until further notice. And human beings, according to the speech we heard on the mountain, should help each other to the detriment of their own interests.' 'But do you really need this kind of help?' asks the woman. 'Would you be able to buy a few castles, if I help you in this way, instead of giving you a huge amount of money? And I won't give you a single penny, if you continue to touch my thighs.' And if the woman in question yields to the caresses she gets from a man, this man may not appear satisfied – on the strength of what is said in the book he studied before attacking the young woman. He insists on the word 'extremely'. The woman says, 'I've given you all my gifts.' The man replies, 'No. Your gifts haven't been extremely profuse. I could teach you the meaning of the word "extremely", if you allow me to do so right here, in the middle of this street.' Yes, we have to admit that such things can happen in the middle of a public square, in the middle of an important business meeting – anywhere and at any time. And there is nothing you can do about it. The man is likely to remind you that he follows the words uttered and written by a saint, and people recoil in horror: they are afraid of Hell and its flames. And they are sure these flames will be set into motion, if they neglect the saint's wise and eternal advice, not to say commandment. Of course there is another explanation, another description of what is going on almost everywhere. You cannot be in love with everybody, so you choose and pick, pick and choose, and finally, what remains in your neighbourhood amounts to very little indeed: just a few human beings. Others

are situated outside of your interests, your libido and general tendencies; and your moods, frankly speaking. The outsiders complain and point out that your standoffish attitude brings into disrepute the whole humanity, its significance and mission. You simply cannot pick and choose within the organism, network and structure called 'humanity'. We are all brothers and sisters, and we are supposed to protect each other in the world where calamities pile up and so the world looks like a series of mountains, like a mountain range. Of course there are optimists who say that all this is very beautiful. According to their rosy views, we can and should take advantage of this beauty and climb, reaching the mountain tops from where the view is even more magnificent. But what we actually see from up there is our utter misery, and we often jump from them, from these peaks, so as not to contemplate all this horror.

'Envy always follows in the track of virtue: as Horace says, it is ever the mountain top that is smitten by the lightning.'

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You know for sure that there is nothing more atrocious than lightning. Why? Because it is associated, directly associated, with the sky, with the heavens. Whatever comes from the Earth is not really dramatic, considering that you can walk over it or stamp on it, making it disappear under the surface of our planet. Or of any other planet, if you happen to be walking somewhere else. But what to do with the weapons born overhead, in the sky where only the gods reign and frighten the stars out of their wits? Some stars are frightened to such a point they fall and disappear somewhere in the cosmos. It requires a lot of strength, energy and courage to hang in the sky, and the fright they are submitted to – it is not for nothing that they are scared out of their wits – throws them off their balance. They become unbalanced and inevitably, unavoidably fall from the sky and frighten in their turn some young people absorbed in their loves and quarrels. But what do we care about the stars? We are the stars in our own right. It is true that we can be equated – some of us can – with the top of the highest mountain, and these tops touch the stars and play all sorts of games with them. They play cards and chess, among other games, distractions. (Distraction is an amazing game, one of the best.) But what about our virtues? We walk down the street and see a beggar. Actually this man is not really a beggar, but we are virtuous to the core, although our enemies say we are *rotten* to the core. Envy is not virtuous, and every beggar or decent man is aware of that. But somehow, according to the saint, envy always follows in the footsteps of virtue. How come? You are virtuous to the core, and whenever you see a beggar, you give him all your money. And if you happen to see another beggar, in the same street, in the course of the same walk, you retrace your steps, return to the first beggar, ask him for the money you gave to him, driven by an outburst of generosity, then retrace your steps once more, reach the stage where the second beggar comes to the fore and give him this money. You repeat this exercise throughout your itinerary, and you call it, 'My gymnastics.' Well, you have proved abundantly that you are virtuous, and many people have witnessed these outbursts of yours. And understandably enough, these people grow envious. In the first place, they envy the beggars to whom you give all your money. It is pointless to envy *you* because, at some points of your itinerary, you become penniless, and nobody envies penniless people unless they are saints, which does not happen very often. It is rumoured that the popes are very rich, but perhaps this rumour does not correspond to the truth we treasure so much. Anyway, people do not envy your empty pockets. They envy the beggars to whom you demonstrate your generosity, and they rob and beat these beggars because

they need money; like everybody else. Why do they beat the beggars? Is it really necessary? Of course some of the beggars are loath to part with their money, and they defend both their money and the pockets where they hide them. But even if the beggars say without further ado, 'I'll give you the money I've been offered. It doesn't belong to me. It would be unfair to state the contrary. This money belongs to humanity. So you can have it, on condition that sooner or later you'll give it to someone else.' No promise is offered, and the thief departs joyfully, his pockets burdened, almost overflowing with money. How did I begin this thought, this idea? 'But even if the beggars say without further ado, "I'll give you the money" and so on, what does that mean? It means that even the beggars have nothing against the thieves who rob them of their money in broad daylight – this particular daylight cannot be broader – and beat them. Why? Because people cannot tolerate other people's generosity. They know that they would never give anything to anybody – not willingly, anyway. They envy the beggars on account of their character, of their understanding of the ways of the world, of the misery of the world. And they are convinced that those wiser ones (as they call them) should be punished on the spot. 'You think you're wise and generous. You think we're just the opposite of what you are, because we don't deserve so-called virtues. Well, we acknowledge our incapacity to show our virtues in broad daylight because we do not have any. The broad daylight is magnificent today, but we don't take advantage of it. At least we don't use it for charity. And broad daylight should be used for charity, otherwise it's quite pointless – at least we're quite aware of that.' But we should not overlook one important nuance: envy does not *always* follow in the footsteps of virtue. It does not follow at all. It is always at the core of your being, at the very core – perhaps in your stomach. So it does not have to follow anything except its own inclinations and tendencies, inborn tendencies. It follows them and many pedestrians are beaten either on account of their generosity or because their pockets are full of money. They are also beaten because they are tall, more or less handsome, more or less aristocratic. They are beaten because they cannot be inserted painlessly, naturally into such and such a mentality. This mentality cannot bear them and therefore they are beaten mercilessly. I wonder why I speak so much about rapes and other bodily violences? (They are always plural, even if the traditional grammar does not allow it.) Why can't we just caress each other, instead of clenching our fists or dragging daggers out of our pockets? And if we do caress each other, we do our best to pinch our partners' skins, armpits and calves successfully. Why are we so cruel? Can't we live without cruelty, without paying it tribute once in a while or all the time? All depends on our moods, and they are capricious – as capricious as some winds and drops of rain. Where are our virtues? They are somewhere, but that does not really matter; their whereabouts are of little importance. What counts is their global result. And 'global' in this context means we should not limit the manifestation of our munificence to a few beggars scattered around town. Our global salvation does not depend on these beggars or on the amount of money we give to charities, hospitals and kindergartens. But the crucial question remains: 'Why is there so much cruelty?' All right, there are the Olympic Games in Paris, and within four or five hours, in the context of the opening of these games, you wish to show the history of France to those who know nothing either about France or about its history. First of all, you ask yourself if there is such a person in the world; such an ignoramus. Perhaps we should coin a special term for this man (women are much more intelligent). Instead of 'flower power', something along the lines of 'ignorance power' or 'ignorance might' or 'ignorance tyranny'. This man walks around our streets and shouts at the top of his voice, 'Three cheers to ignorance!' Well, we are supposed to concentrate on the history of France, and uncontrollably – we cannot control the spheres of existence upon which depend publicity, memory and money – we choose Marie-Antoinette or rather her head.

Actually Marie-Antoinette does not deserve our attention, but her head is an exception to this rule. (Let us keep in mind that every rule has exceptions, and Marie-Antoinette is no exception to this rule.) So we get rid of Marie-Antoinette's body and fix our gaze and attention on her head. We can do it with impunity, provided this head of hers has already been separated from her body: we should not waste our energy on trifles; on her body, in other words. But aren't we wasting our time when concentrating our atoms and molecules on her head? After all, this head was attached to her shoulders for the sake of the beheading. What was it, actually? The guillotine, if I am not mistaken. But at the opening of the games I am enlarging upon – I am describing the opening, not the games – there was no guillotine; we saw only her head as if it could have got independent of the body on its own, without any exterior help. And we should admit there is always exterior help: you do not decide, on the spur of the moment, to get rid of your head because you are certain: life is unbearable. Before arriving at this certainty, you pass through many truths; you walk through them. Life is a road, a way, and you walk along it, choosing this and that, rejecting this and that and many other things. But you do not reject your head – not on the spur of the moment; not even on the spur of eternity. If you wish to commit suicide, you just fling your body out of some window situated in the proximity of the sky. Or you throw your body under a bus, a lorry. In the process your head might become independent, rolling to the opposite end of the road as if to prove its ability to roll, as if suggesting: 'You could use me as a ball for your soccer games. Anyway, there's no better use for human heads.' But that is not what history teaches us. If you condemn a prince, a king, you must take him to a guillotine, to a place where heads roll abundantly and fruitfully: they multiply the population of the sages whose abode is the Hereafter. Many sages choose this abode, for they believe – and they are absolutely right – that the Hereafter is a better place for scientists on accounts of its magnificent panorama: you see almost everything, almost all the world. And you see it in detail: every tiny detail becomes tangible so you can touch it, admire it at close range – on the Earth, you use a different expression: 'at close *range*' – and even taste it, even though many specialists deny this talent to the dead, this aptitude we avail ourselves of on the Earth: the sense of taste. But let us return to Marie-Antoinette and her unfortunate head. They sing the French version of the famous song: 'Ah, everything will be all right.' What? What are they talking about? The queen's head is already rolling. The games can start, and some footballer or other is sure to set the situation off to advantage. And what is this proverbial advantage? The score of the match. What match? The match we play with death, with our heads that cannot hear us from where they are, being removed from our ears by means of several clods of earth. When they say, 'He had a blood clot removed from his brain,' they talk about graves, not about hospitals. A head lies in its grave, and for some reason relatives of the deceased decide to remove something from their relative's head. This is more or less logical: he used to be a great scientist or a famous banker, and by removing this clot his relatives hope to decipher a secret which will help them to become rich, famous and respectful; far more respectful than their living colleagues. That is why we count so much on the dead. If we organise just another set of Olympic Games – the games in their own right – we resort to the dead, longing to tell the story of our country, of our civilisation. Their bodies are too cumbersome and so we just take their heads which we detach from their bodies. Sometimes the civilisation we touch upon makes things easier for us: the heroes and heroines we use for our parades were beheaded by their times and spaces, and consequently we do not have to do the job. The job was done two or three centuries ago. We just hold the unfortunate head, mock it in our songs, our guitars almost touching them during their flights. These guitars of ours knock on these heads as if begging for information or an entrance to the Hereafter. The heads roll along the banks of the Seine and melancholy spreads over the city,

becoming its canopy. Do we need this particular canopy? Yes, it is a gentle reminder of what is in store for us. Anyway, we shall always live somewhere: that is not the point. I mean, that should not worry us beyond measure. We shall never be homeless, whatever happens. Death and the Hereafter are comfortable houses: we shall never beg in the streets of the other world. We shall have become others, that is all. And only heads will remain the same, rolling from one bank of the Seine to the other.

‘Now that I have received a letter from you, if I do not answer it I shall be guilty of pride, and if I do I shall be guilty of rashness.’

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In this case – and this is really a case, undoubtedly – it is better not to receive anything, considering that whatever you get either by post or through your computer is meant for your brain and heart. If they do not react to the message you see and hear, they may be accused of loftiness. You are customarily accused of lofty tones, attitudes and airs. If you receive something, you realise that the sender cannot see you, otherwise he or she would have addressed you directly, without resorting to mechanical, electronic means. He would say to you, ‘You’re a stupid jerk, and I just can’t understand the people who often talk to you with pleasure. I would never talk to you on my own initiative, and the words I’m uttering on this occasion are dictated by my dependence upon my uncle who asked me to communicate with you. It was an order, frankly speaking, and I obey my uncle’s orders.’ Well, you receive an email and say to yourself, ‘What kind of nuisance is this? I’ve never been so annoyed in my life. What am I supposed to do? If I answer, I’ll be ill-treated by many of my friends and benefactors; unless I write an angry, merciless letter, accusing my correspondent of all sorts of crimes. I could write, for instance, “How dare you write to me? Do you think I have enough time for your thoughts, your attitudes, your way of life? I couldn’t care less about them, especially about your way of life. I don’t give a damn about it. You can lead any life, even an unsuitable, criminal life. And if the police comes and fetches you, determined to put you in a prison cell, I’ll applaud both the police and the prison staff. And also your prison cell – into the bargain. I’ll also applaud the Almighty, His justice and promptness. Frankly speaking, I think He ought to have put you in prison earlier – at the beginning of this century; better still – at the end of the previous century. But our God is merciful – everybody is aware of that.’ Is this better than the guilt of pride? It goes without saying: you are proud of yourself and of your deeds unless you decide that modesty is the best ornament of one’s soul; and body, mind you. (One should never forget one’s body, otherwise one’s body may turn into a horrible traitor of its owner.) You are proud of being a human being, of being English, French or German. On the other hand, you might as well be proud of having been born on Monday. Why? Because on Mondays people usually go to work, after spending a few restful hours with their relatives or just in the swimming pool. Being born on Monday means you devote a great many hours and minutes to work, to the occupations that serve humanity and its members, which is an exploit in itself. Yes, instead of staying in the same swimming pool – and we are no longer within the bounds of the weekend – you work, you spend your energy, time and grey cells on some work from which you do not really profit. Of course you do not expect to make much profit within the first couple of years of setting up a company – this is a general rule. But your case is quite different, considering that you have never intended to set up a company, any company: a small company, a huge, almost cosmic company. If you do not set up a company, society, human society, rejects you almost automatically. The matter

stands differently with animals who may appreciate your attitude towards life. You spend a lot of time with them, with your dog or cat, and they know instinctively that no company, however profitable, can replace a dinner with a cat who looks at you and imparts to your heart the only truth worth living and feeling. So you answer to those who continue to write to you, 'I spend my time in the company of my cat who doesn't talk business with me. Only love can be seen in her eyes, and this love nourishes my soul, body and the space I'm entitled to on this Earth.' You are likely to receive the following answer, 'You neglect your duty towards your brothers and sisters to whom you're bound by God and our common birth which entitles us to the resemblance we often speak about, when partaking of a delicious meal. We are made in the image of God. On the other hand, there are people who don't seem to belong to our race. You, for instance. You belong to felines, or to wolves. You're a solitary wolf, that's what you are. And you seem to enjoy the situation, your peculiar status. How wrong you are! Being a wolf is inferior to what we enjoy as human beings. Wolves wander in search of food and often eat our sheep and also ourselves. Do you wish to eat human beings? Are you an ogre? Do you think such a destiny suits you better than being an image of God? How wrong you are! You should be pitied, but we have no strength left for such ridiculous sentiments, for such empathic exploits. We have a lot to do for the welfare of humanity and so can't take care of a solitary wolf. Awfully sorry. Your former compatriots.' 'No, it is better not to answer at all. You withhold your rashness and receive another missive from your correspondent. 'Why are you so proud, so haughty? What do you have to be proud of? Are you a world champion? In what field, may I ask? Do you think you can beat me if I vouchsafe to play a game of chess with you? Do you think you can beat me in tennis? And what do you know about philosophy? Can we discuss Kant's categories? In short, why are you so proud? What do you do better than me and your other friends and colleagues? Let us know and we shall prove to you that we are much better than you in every branch of human knowledge. We know more about chemistry, computers, physics, Einstein and Schrödinger. Of course you can count from one to ten. You can probably plug your computer in without triggering off all sorts of catastrophes. But what else can you do? Nothing much, I suppose, whereas we can do everything. I think you can't even do the dishes without breaking some of them, the greater part of your dishes. Then you won't be able to pick up all the pieces scattered around the floor. What *can* you do, I wonder? I'm sure you can wreak havoc with whatever you undertake. That's why you don't undertake anything, with the exception of some elementary gestures: getting up, for instance, washing your hands. And I'm sure you don't wash your hands properly. That's why you're likely to catch all sorts of fatal diseases of which no specialists will ever be able to cure you. So what will you do with these diseases of yours? Do you think that swallowing some aspirin will help you, allowing you to run along the boulevards, as you used to do in your youth? Alas, you're no longer young and so can hardly walk around your room. That's what you'll do from now on: you'll just walk around your room. A joyful occupation, isn't? That's what you're reduced to because of your pride. You take a step, lift your head and proclaim: 'I've taken yet another step!' You're even proud of your solitary steps. How miserable you are! And why are you so miserable? Do you have any idea about the origins of your misery? You're miserable because you don't answer other people's letters. Farewell.' Immediately you go down on your knees and begin to pick up all the letters and email print-outs you have neglected in the course of many years. And you begin to answer them. And you tear your answers up because you think they are not up to the lofty task you are engaged in. And you re-write them, redeeming your life and its follies, your inborn standoffishness and laziness.

‘At the outset the verdict which is in accordance with the truth satisfies but the few. But the Lord speaking by the prophet says: “My judgement goes forth as the light.”’

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Many people are satisfied, when assured that what they hear is the truth. It is the truth, they repeat inwardly and outwardly, and go to the market place to proclaim the truth that no one really needs. Why? What do we really need? A kind of wellbeing, a kind of tenderness which penetrates you like a soft, amicable, merciful knife. The penultimate word means a lot: mercy, mercy, mercy. Et *merci*, of course. We are afraid, when nothing penetrates our bodies. We stand there, somewhere, and nothing touches us, nothing wishes to get in touch with our bodies which seem estranged from the world and its inhabitants. Where are these inhabitants? They may be in one of the neighbouring streets, but our bodies do not feel them, and so they might as well be absent from the world, its calendars, its feasts and bottles of champagne. It is so horrible, this loneliness, this situation which does not put you in touch with your brothers and sisters. Of course some of these earthlings are neither your brother nor sisters, but at least they exist, they move in the vicinity of your body or in the vicinity of your cradle, of the house where you were born. Your cradle is right here, but no one answers your strident cries, your demands, your need of sweets and sweet dreams. No one cares about you. And when they pay attention to your screaming body, they do something you cannot bear: they do just the opposite of what you wish to experience. They assure you they act in accordance with the tenets of truth. But I do not give a damn about the truth they proclaim. It is their truth, not your truth, which means that every human being has his or her own brand of truth. And the multitude of truths produced by humanity on a regular basis irritates you beyond measure because all of them contradict the light you feel in your bosom without being able to express it either by writing or by painting. You cannot express it at all so you repeat rather pathetically, ‘Light, light, light. I can’t express it.’ Of course you can limit your confession to the word ‘light’: you do not have to admit you cannot express it. Why? Because the people who surround you can hope you will express your meaning sooner or later. Their hope is still alive, and that is what is so positive about human life and its ramifications. Our hope dies after our death, but you say in plain English: ‘I can’t express my thoughts, so you’d better leave this place and concentrate on your own business and money brought by your work for such and such a company. Staying here won’t get you anywhere, believe me!’ Some people believe you, others do not: their hopes are higher and more substantial than your recommendations in which you do not believe, you, yourself. But there is no denying that light attracts you, even if its power is limited to a single match. Someone strikes a match, instead of seeking help from their smartphone, and you feel happy, as happy as a child who has never seen light in his or her life. ‘It’s a light, it’s a light!’ she shouts as if quoting the Bible. And her mother says to her, ‘You should add the word “Lord” to the word “light”, otherwise this last word will never have any meaning.’ And the child follows her mother’s advice and repeats: ‘Light, Lord, light, Lord,’ until her voice grows hoarse and she begins to cry, replacing the words with her newly produced tears. Many children, many grown-ups live like that. They cannot boast about a few treasure houses filled to the brim with the hope which left them a long time ago. Even children know what this sentence means: ‘a long time ago’. And they cannot see light because their curtains are permanently drawn and their eyes are blind: this can happen also in the context of the life of a child. But they know these two words: ‘Lord’ and ‘Light’. In their conscience both words are written with a capital ‘L’. And this is very important; and they are aware of this importance. Lord, Light, Lord, Light.

‘I am now come to the hour for extinguishing the lamps, and for using the dogs, and practising the deeds of darkness.’

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Everybody knows what happens in the world where hours go by and darkness comes with the aim of replacing light and creating all sorts of problems. For instance, it is easier to devote your time and brain to theft – when an ordinary citizen cannot see what happens in front of human eyes. Apparently cats cope with this situation wonderfully and those who belong to their race – so-called cat women – also see what happens at night. Actually cat women do not take advantage of this gift of theirs to steal valuable things which make up one’s property and richness. They seduce men and women alike, making the most of their feline qualities. But the hour meant in the text I quoted comes naturally and involves natural people whose hands have nothing in common with paws. These people look around and say to each other, ‘Well, it’s high time we extinguished the lamps.’ Of course there are people who disagree with this point of view. They say, ‘Leave the lights on. Some of our friends are short-sighted, and consequently they’ll be unable to see our bodies’ details if the dark deprives them of their eyes completely. It’s true that no one will deprive them of their hands, fingers, of their sense of touch which is so important in the domain of games of love, but their sight shouldn’t be neglected either. You’re supposed to see the beauty of the body you caress, otherwise you’ll miss the greater part of the pleasures embodied in this ritual.’ But what about the dogs? When analysing a comment, you are supposed to consult the main text all the time, otherwise you will deviate from the foundation of your reflection. You reflect on a text and deviate from it almost automatically because you have your own thoughts and also a number of images you base your life upon, independently of texts and recommendations. The Fathers of the Church shower on you their wisdom and knowledge of the world, whereas you delight in some of your own memories which are mostly stupid, having originated in everyday life and its superficialities. You meet someone, kiss someone, and your memory keeps these images, instead of repeating the wise sayings supplied by saints and other representatives of what is rightly termed ‘our holy life’. ‘For using the dogs’ reminds you of the dogs you meet, when paying a visit to your friend whose only hobby is hunting. Your friend goes hunting at weekends, and if you pay him a visit on the eve of his hunts, he shows you his dogs and you go deaf, as a result of their concert performances. (Some people go deaf; other people go hunting. Such are the ways of the world.) But Tertullian uses his dogs differently, and you do not have to study his life to reach this conclusion on your own. What does he mean? He might mean that at night you are likely to be robbed, raped and also deprived of your tranquillity by hooligans or bandits or other criminals at large. You read in a newspaper, ‘Twelve prisoners are at large following a series of escapes,’ and you hastily conclude that some of these criminals are sure to pay you a visit the following night; or at the end of the week, at the latest. That is why the dogs come in handy. Actually, they can come in handy if your bride is on the point of being stolen. Three men come into your house with the intention of smuggling your bride through the frontier of your mutual love. The dogs begin to bark, you realise that your marriage is under threat, and prevent the three men from practising the evil deed described at the beginning of this essay. What kind of deed? As I have already pointed out, they came to you with the evil project which can be described as follows, ‘Abduction.’ Actually Mozart made a laudable attempt to put such an event to music. That is why many music lovers say, ‘I’ll never buy a dog because Mozart will always prevent such an event, if God resolves to punish me by removing my spouse from her rightful place testified by the

document according to which we were married in some church or other. Many people recall the event and can confirm its truth in court, if necessary.' Dogs are frowned upon: they make too much noise and are consequently capable of waking you up, of interrupting your sweet, wonderful dreams. And what do you represent without your dreams? Your dreams constitute a pleasant pastime at the moment when you can neither read nor consult your computer. Besides, your dreams are related to your aspirations, expectations, hopes, and the aforementioned dogs are in the habit of destroying your mental life on account of a few sights they seem to be disturbed by. For instance, a cat goes for a walk, and a dog begins to bark because he has nothing else to do. He is out of work and probably out of love with humanity which treats him badly, as it does many dogs, especially the ones not protected by Brigitte Bardot. Brigitte Bardot lies down and gives herself over to dreams and the other advantages of sleep. Suddenly a dog barks and irritates a few neighbours who decide on the spur of the moment to kill the dog. But Madame Bardot wakes up, picks up a whip and the nasty neighbours disappear in the twinkling of a whip. And the deeds of darkness? Don't forget that the people whose task includes an impressive number of evil deeds see perfectly in the dark and consequently do not need torches, projectors and so on. They see their victims perfectly, their victims' throats at which they aim their instruments. And the dogs have already been put to sleep by Madame Bardot who does not think that her dogs need any additional nutrition: they have all they need. So do the cats and other animals whose place is reserved in the animal kingdom. What to do? The evil doers approach your body stealthily, their knives and revolvers at the ready. And you are not ready; you are not ready for this onslaught, for this coup de grâce, for this *deus ex machina*. For what are you ready? For nothing, to tell the truth. Last night you blissfully thought you would spend a peaceful night in the company of your dream and books. But you did not pay attention to the book which seemed to warn you about the visit of dogs and criminals for whom your life does not mean anything. The deeds of darkness. You thought the book was speaking about the blind who did their best to come to terms with the world they could not see.

'You too have your "third race"; not indeed third in the way of religious rite, but a third race in sex, and made up as it is of male and female in one, it is more fitted to men and women (for offices of last).'

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Without going into details, one can say that this third race must be frowned upon because a couple is perfect, probably not as a number. All right, 'three' is more sacramental, more significant, but if you spend a lot of time on a divan in the company of your wife, mistress or boyfriend, you may be happy, even if you have not learnt to count to three. Even 'two' elicits a sort of noisy effort on your part, and at first you oppose your whole being to the appearance of yet another entity. What is it? you ask yourself. 'I'm quite happy today, at the present moment. And I wish this moment could last forever, instead of going on and on, passing the buck.' Do you know how eternity speaks to time? 'You're always trying to pass the buck and I'm sick of it!' But sooner or later we adopt the points of view that suit us throughout our lives. (All of them.) You wake up, look out of the window, take a glance at the universe or rather at one of its elements – a leaf, one leaf – and your happiness grows so quickly it becomes indescribable; not really in the twinkling of an eye. Who cares! You can twinkle your eyes as often as necessary to let your happiness keep its place – in your heart of hearts, for instance. It does keep its place and pace, and you are happy. What else do you need? Probably a second happiness, but even this

second happiness is within your field of vision and action. You act and you are happy, simply because you act. You act like a leaf – your action is in every point similar to what a leaf does on a branch, on a twig. It just happens. It does not even say to itself, ‘The sun is shining, the sky is cloudless. I’m happy, am I not?’ And sure enough, the leaf answers, ‘I *am* happy, and nothing will ever spoil this happiness of mine.’ Soon afterwards, the rain comes and the leaf finds itself exposed to the inclemency of the weather which is not always understanding: it is not always up to our standards. And what are our standards? The highest standards imaginable. It is pointless to meditate upon this particular subject: the answer seems to be lying on our dinner table. So, instead of eating our dinner, we pick this answer up and feel happy once more. And it is never too late to feel happy. Even on your deathbed you can feel happy, if this can make you happy, even happier than before. You can even become clappy – on your deathbed, of all places. You do not necessarily clap in time to the music because music is not always available. Sometimes it is, sometimes it is not. Someone goes to the piano you must have acquired in your youth and plays a few notes on it. And you begin to clap, almost automatically. Even if these notes are played very badly, you clap so as not to disappoint the person who touches the piano in your presence. But sometimes you wonder what you can do to stop this execution before it really starts – for good. There are people who continue to play the piano or any other instruments until their death; and nothing whatever can stop them, not even an earthquake, let alone an ordinary storm. So you begin by clapping, in the hope that easy success can quench their thirst for triumph. But they really yearn for a triumph, so you go on clapping and clapping. Then you grow weary of this sterile demonstration of your non-existent enthusiasm. Why is it sterile? Because the person in question goes on and on, and even a real triumph would be in no position to interrupt his momentum. Of course you can call in a lot of people with the intention of carrying the person out, as they usually do with Olympic champions. In this case you could even fling the body towards heaven, hoping it would never land, despite the proverbial hospitality of the Earth: she tolerates us not only during our lifetime, but also after our death. Actually, counting on this hospitality, you even dig a grave for the person in question who still performs his masterpiece for the sake of humanity. His fingers move on, but you explain to him that the concert is over, that the people have to go home because they have children whose appetites do not grow less noisy during historic performances – for the simple reason that appetites do not understand music. Then you lift his fingers and his body, but the piano follows this flight, and it is far more difficult to reason with a piano. It was made for the sake of music, and if the flow of music suddenly stops, for some reason, someone jumps up, rushes towards the piano, and the piece of music resumes its course. You remove yet another body from the piano, and you end up removing the piano itself. But where could you put it? It will play in heaven and in the tombs: Liszt plays from time to time, according to some witnesses. Yes, he opens his own grave and plays for the sake of a few admirers who are in the know and go to the cemetery in their eagerness to hear a recital by the buried maestro. Burial or no burial: music always triumphs, they say to themselves and to the crowd that gathers around them in expectation of a miracle. But this is no miracle, as we all know. Music resounds everywhere and pianos, violins and cellos fly overhead as if nothing had ever happened. And nothing else happens, to tell the truth. So they announce yet another flight of another cello, and the members of the worldwide audiences raise their heads, cock their ears and listen, listen, listen to whatever comes to them from the sky. But why do you have to listen to whatever comes from anywhere? You have your inner music, and its symphonies comply with your wishes, if any. Sometimes you do not wish anything, and then any symphony gets on your nerves in no time at all. You wait for a while, but this symphony is endless, and your desperation grows as you go on

listening to whatever comes from your intestines and other organs and members about which you do not know anything, not even a few letters. More often than not, you hear a few letters and you nod in agreement, 'You know where all this nonsense comes from.' But then something happens, and you are at odds with this new data. A brisk walk will put the roses back into your cheeks – you are aware of that. But you do not feel up to this brisk walk – to anything, to put it frankly and mildly. And to put it wildly? Then you decide not to put it at all, nowhere, anywhere, at all or at, at, at. Yet you decide to walk briskly – through your garden, through the town where you have lived for several years. After this walk, you draw a mirror from your pocket and look at yourself. Do you have any roses within your cheeks? One or two, frankly speaking. Is that enough? How many roses do you need to feel happy and entirely detached from the miseries of the world? Seven roses perhaps. But whenever you answer your own questions, you say to yourself, 'This is not enough. I deserve much more than this bunch of roses. I deserve at least three bunches of roses. Or four, or five.' And if someone gives you this bunch of roses, you look disappointed and say, 'Do you think I don't deserve a kingdom?' But kingdoms are often limited to a bunch of seven roses.

'He accordingly recommended precautions to be taken against the future famine from the previous plenty. The king believed him.'

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You wake up and have a lot of meals on your breakfast table. You have several tables in your house, and one of them is consecrated – I have no idea how to express this idea – to breakfast. Devoted, meant, designated. No idea! Well, you have your breakfast and then you ask yourself the following question – there are many following questions to be asked in this life of ours – that can be formulated thus, 'What about your future famine?' You realise – and you have known this fact for some time – that the world is on the threshold of a sort of overall famine. And this famine depends on what you eat today. There are several tables in the room where you partake – as they used to say – of your meals. Your wallet is filled, but there are openings in it or a number of interstices. You look at one of them and think that a banknote would look much better inside this interstice; it would look better than the interstice itself; and even better than the wallet, on condition that the banknote we are talking about is worth our time, our talk and our wallets. And then we realise – as often happens, to tell the truth – that nothing is worth our while, our minute, our eternity which hangs somewhere, waiting for our divorce, our final removal from time. How do we operate this removal? Of course we get rid of our watches, of our grandfather clocks, of all the clocks we can put our hands on. We put a hand on a clock and say, 'This is time overwhelmed with diseases of all kinds. And we don't need this kind, this heap of diseases. We wish to prosper at all costs, whatever the costs. We pay a million dollars and we prosper, forgetting about the dollars we have spent for the possibility of enjoying this pleasure fully and sacramentally. And then a Father of the Church comes into being and we begin to harangue ourselves for our felicity, plenty, and so on. Nothing should be plentiful because our life is conceived in terms of the 'long run'. We speak thus and we are glad we cannot speak otherwise. What does that mean, 'in the long run'? You run, asking yourself every minute, 'Is the run I've accomplished so far long or short?' If it is a short run you have accomplished, you cannot hope to be an eternal source of happiness – for yourself, naturally enough. You are an eternal boy, an eternal girl, and everything goes smoothly – so smoothly, in fact, that nothing interferes with the calm and serenity of your meditation. You look

at the trees, their leaves and branches, and the smoothness of your reflection seems to be reflected in the sky where only one cloud travels as if to animate the landscape of which you are part; and parcel, to be frank. Is this the plenty we have to fear, determined as we are to preserve our future from the calamities associated with our incapacity to walk, to talk to other people: we are paralysed and can neither speak nor defend our points of view in any other way accessible to human beings. We are paralysed, but at the same time, which continues to flow and elapse, we are permitted to hope for a better future because we seem to suffer right now; and we need a sort of compensation, in accordance with some law or other, with some Father of the Church. You are the last, so you will be the first. But are you really the last? You do your best to become the very last of what is termed a 'human being'. You go down your street and ask every passer-by, 'Am I situated at the bottom of the ladder on which we're supposed to spend our lives?' Of course they ask you what you are talking about, and you draw a ladder on the pavement, using a stick of chalk you have in your pocket – just in case. You draw a ladder, and they ask you to do your utmost to represent your own substance, your body situated on a step which belongs to this ladder. And the passer-by who watches the procedure asks you all sorts of questions, if he is not in hurry, if he does not risk being kicked out of his office on account of this delay, of his being late for the work that decides the future of humanity. 'What is it?' he asks. 'It is a ladder,' you answer. 'What kind of ladder? Jacob's ladder?' 'Not quite, not quite,' you answer. 'It is a ladder where we can find ourselves.' 'I don't find myself on this ladder,' says the passer-by. 'Of course my body and mind can be found on a ladder, on *the* ladder, but your ridiculous drawing doesn't correspond to my views and reality that confirms it brilliantly, unequivocally.' 'What is reality?' And once again you become Pontius Pilate or somebody else who pretends to know everything about reality and non-reality, the truth and non-truth. And if you say something to him, he answers, 'This is the non-truth.' And you continue to squelch through the mud of Creation or non-Creation. One of the sentences we study throughout our lives goes thus, 'He got out of the car and squelched through the mud to open the gate.' According to this sentence, the mud is everywhere: even the car is a sort of mud, perhaps the best sort of mud you can stumble upon in this world where there are many mud-places. According to our Father of the Church, this mud is necessary – up to the very end, to the gate which offers us access to Paradise with all its women, men and fruit. You go to Paradise; you are bound for it. On your road, on the road, you find a lot of contraptions which are prepared to convey you to the objective of your journey and your life. (Is your life really a journey or just an armchair?) You travel, travel, travel, and the notes you take during your travels constitute a book you entitle, *My Travels Through the World and Anti-Worlds*. In the course of your travels you are likely to forget this part of the message you received: 'The King believed him.' Who is the king under the circumstances? Please, don't profane the name of your God on every available occasion in the course of your life. What kind of occasions? Never mind, but you are solemnly asked not to speak about your King all the time; not even once in a while, to tell the truth. Do you think that, by creating a king in your own image, you will obtain positive results? But why do you need the king's agreement? He believed you; all right. But what about other people? Some of them shout, 'The king is naked!' So you opt for another solution, the one that enables you to overlook the king, his nakedness or his Cerutti-adherence. In short, you need neither the king nor the emperor, whoever he was or is. And if you really need someone to believe in you, you just go down the street where you live and offer sandwiches to whoever is walking in the opposite direction. You hand them your sandwiches and they acquiesce. What else do you need? They acquiesce.

‘For if gods are selected as onions are, then such as are not chosen are declared to be worthless.’

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You always select something and this is a bad habit, as you know. You are born naked and you are given lots of things without which you cannot live, as they say. You pick up a toy and they nod, saying, ‘You can’t live without it.’ You fling the toy out of the window and continue to live, as if nothing had happened. Then you ask your elders and betters, ‘Has something happened?’ ‘Yes,’ they answer. ‘You flung a very expensive toy out of the window.’ ‘But I live, don’t I? You said I would die, and I live.’ ‘You have no idea what life means and how you can lose it.’ Then you fling everything and everybody out of the window, and life goes on. Life is a number of scattered, broken things and beings. They move around on what they are left with, and if asked, ‘What are you left with?’ they answer, ‘Can’t you see?’ The others answer, ‘No, we have no eyes.’ ‘You know consequently that you have to have eyes. So you can’t throw them out of the window. First, you have to find out what you are about to throw out of the window. First you have to draw the window on the wall. First you have to find a wall on which you can draw a window. First you have to find a house in which to install this wall because a wall can exist on its own, but it would be precarious without other walls.’ ‘And what about the Great Wall of China?’ ‘But it’s more difficult to draw on such a wall. It is great, in the first place.’ ‘But let us draw something colossal, incomparable. Drawing simple windows isn’t our cup of tea.’ Then the piece of chalk you hold firmly in your right hand begins to crumble; the world itself begins to crumble. The air begins to crumble, and you realise, slowly but surely, that the cosmos begins to crumble as well. For instance, the shooting stars do not shoot anymore, as if their war had come to an end forever. Star Wars, my God! What shall we do without star wars? Of course there will be a lot of star pieces, but what are we supposed to do with *them*? Nothing whatsoever. Then we undertake another job, another turmoil. We initiate a war of planets, but it is not enough to write WAR in capital letters. Well, we write this title in some other alphabet so as not to attract too much attention to the event because of which the world will come to an end once again. Then we write on one of the walls we have within our field of vision, ‘THE WAR TO END ALL WARS’ and a million of people come down and impatiently fling themselves out of their windows. There are demonstrations everywhere. And then everywhere comes to an end. You ask yourself and your neighbours, ‘Where?’ But what is where? What is anything? You start to learn the meaning of languages, of windows, of jumps you can execute, if you are fond of the air as such. You are fond of the air, and you even recall the character called Ariel. What could you do with him? You invite him to a waltz, but this is an airy waltz you are supposed to dance. How could you dance it? You draw a lot of air around your body – just in case. You may make a mistake and collapse in the middle of the dance. But the air will always welcome you with open arms. So you draw a pair of open arms and a lot of air. You are a little bit lost: you do not really know whether the air which seem to open at your approach belongs to the air or just to some divinity you are not acquainted with. Then you recall the onions. You draw some onions on a wall or just on the open air which has already opened its arms. You choose one of them and call him the Almighty. Then you choose another onion and call it Mighty. Then you choose the third onion and call it Ty which means Thou in Russian. You call him Thou, put your hand on His shoulder and sing a popular song which, to your amazement, this divinity of yours knows by heart. What is more, you sing this song in Russian, not in Chinese. You meet a lot of gods in the course of your walk, and you kill all those who cannot sing your song in unison, your Russian song. Then you put all these onions in various dishes and eat them.

‘Now, since their common gods are comprehended in both the physical and the mythic classes, we have already said enough concerning them.’

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What *have* we said about them? We said that every day we meet some people who seem to belong to a different class of people, and that is why we say to them ‘You’re different,’ or just ‘Different’ or just ‘Go to Hell’. That is also their name, the one we bestow upon them because we do not understand a thing about them. It would be better to understand at least an *object* about them. No, no, no way. We do not understand a thing about them. They might be – all these things are mere suppositions – just a number of things put together for some purpose or other. And these things are gods, otherwise nothing is really sacred. We live amongst things, gods and objects, and all of them make up the world where everything is sacred or non-sacred: this depends upon your point of view. And sometimes, after a while, we ask ourselves if our point of view is really worth anything; if we understand something about whatever happens around us, above us. Something does happen, and we are mature and intelligent enough to understand that that happens; that or this – anyway they happen. So what? We are submitted to this that and not and whatever. And we comprehend, according to the text we are following, that these things or objects as both physical and mythical manifestations. We look and see something physical or mystical, and we say to everybody, ‘This is either mystical or physical.’ What is it exactly? We don’t care, provided it is something. And something is always up to the standards of what it is designated as physical or mystical. Something is really something, and that is what we have to realise in the first place. There are many places we have to deal with in the course of our earthly journey, and some of them are described as mystical, and others are just physical. You touch them and say, ‘Well, that’s nothing. This is something we can touch and sometimes we enjoy this touch because it’s velvety. Besides, it smells good.’ But what does all this mean? Is it really mystical? I don’t think so. Nobody thinks so. So we dismiss it offhandedly because it has nothing to do with the realm of spiritual experiences. And what is this realm we touch upon? (We cannot really embrace it with open arms, with closed arms: it is too spiritual for this kind of physical experience.) But what is a mystical experience? You know a few myths, and you recite them before embarking upon your experience related to physical touches, spiritual touches, to the gods and demons and sprites. A sea sprite, a water sprite. What is the difference between them? A sea sprite is sprinkled with sea water. And a water sprite is sprinkled with ordinary water. You sprinkle yourself with this ordinary water and become an ordinary sprite. What does that mean? What do you mean, in the first place, in the second place? In the second place you mean you are a second, whatever discipline you try to add to your triumphs. Does this discipline have anything in common with the gods, with their temperaments and methods? You belong to the second class, and you have a god, your god, a secondary god who cannot do a lot for you, for the simple reason that he is a secondary god. There are also the gods for whom there are no categories: they just walk up and down the streets so as not to die of uselessness. Yes, there are the gods who die of this disease because their inner nature cannot bear nulls, nothingness. They say: there is nothing worse than doing nothing, nothing at all. And what about doing ‘at all’ they ask themselves. You can do one letter only, but your greatness is unquestionable. Whoever casts a glance in the direction of this unquestionability is overwhelmed by a sort of admiration for which no-one can select a suitable world. The word ‘world’ is big enough for any word, but if we come across something unquestionable, we are at a loss to

understand how to characterise this phenomenon. You just say, 'This is unquestionable,' and if someone asks a question about this phenomenon, you just walk away because you cannot explain anything to the people who do not understand the word 'unquestionable'. Of course you can draw a question somewhere, on some table or other, and then cross out your drawing. 'Now do you understand what it is all about?' you ask the person about whom we have been talking for nothing. 'I understand the annihilation of this question,' says the person. 'Which question are you talking about?' 'About your question, and since this is the only component you can boast about, I think your life is over.' That is how hunchbacks are treated in uncivilised society. The Russians, who often behave like barbarians, came up with the following saying in the 19th century, 'Only tombs can cure hunchbacks.' But foreigners do not understand the joke and ask all sorts of irrelevant questions. 'What shape must the tomb in question have?' 'The shape of a question,' answer the Russians. 'And where are we supposed to look for the answer?' 'In your head,' answer the Russians. 'I thought the question was hidden in another tomb.' 'And what shape does this other tomb have?' ask the Russians. 'The shape of an exclamation mark.' 'Why? What kind of victory are we celebrating?' 'It's not a victory we're talking about.' 'A defeat?' 'A conviction, an idea of genius.' And the crowd begins to look for a genius.

'What, however, was there to prevent your worshipping Time in its proper quality?'

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What is the proper quality of Time? A man raises his arm either to vote for some nonentity or to stop a taxi. The proper quality of time is made obvious by the man's gestures, but also by the taxi that does not come. The longer it shilly-shallies, the more we realise to what extent Time may become a nuisance. You are probably not in a hurry; nevertheless, waiting for a taxi is so boring you get nervous and every car you see in front of you irritates your nerves beyond measure, more and more. As for the vote, it does not really matter for whom you vote; at least that is what you think because you firmly believe that all politicians are stupid and corrupt. A little bit of corruption is admissible, but this quantity never remains what it is: it grows all the time. A politician begins her career as an honest woman, but little by little she betrays her own principles and becomes a thief who deprives her electorate of their houses, cars and holidays. If a holiday disappears from the agenda, from some agenda or other, you blame the politician and also Time which allows such metamorphoses without taking into consideration the result of this corruption. One might even reach the following conclusion: the passage of time is corruption. Of course that would have made St Augustine's labours ridiculous – you say, 'Time is corruption' and the problem is solved – but he must have seen a ray of light behind this corruption. You see corruption everywhere, but what counts is the light behind it. You say to your friend, 'I see a gigantic mass of corruption, nothing else.' And what about the light I touched upon? We touch this light and the corruption about which you think day in, day out disappears, slowly but surely. You end up seeing a speck of corruption, and then the light invades your being, leaving no room for corruption and other horrible things. There are many of them in the world, and often we measure Time in accordance with these atrocities. You write in your notebook, 'Just another war. In three days we'll have three thousand dead. And in four days their number will reach an unimaginable figure. I can't even imagine this figure on account of its horror. Actually I prefer not to think about horrors as if this act of non-admission might annihilate the very notion of war and peace. I don't imagine anything and people stop in the streets. If you ask them, "Why have you stopped?" they answer, "To prevent a

war.” They think that their motionless attitude prevents other people from fighting each other. Sometimes they think they are wrong, and so they shout, ‘Stop, stop, stop, stop!’ And everything comes to a standstill. So does Time, and we realise it is useless to measure it, to probe into its mysteries. And what about thoughts? They stop too. But there are instincts that we cannot discard from our lives offhandedly. We must go to lavatories, and they are not always located under our feet. So we take a few steps, and Time resumes its course. This kind of Time is called ‘lavatory time’. But you do not need this kind of time all the time: you do not spend your life in lavatories, until further notice. And this notice will never reach your hands. ‘You ought to spend all your time in one lavatory.’ Unthinkable! So you leave your lavatory, walk for a while and buy a balloon. What to do with a balloon? You let it fly in accordance with its own wishes. The balloon rises gently up into the air. Its flight, however, does not last. It goes bang when it lands on a bush. How long did this bang last? You could not care less about this bang’s duration. This kind of time is called, ‘I don’t care.’ Then you decide that Time deserves more respect on your part, considering that this small balloon is insignificant and excusable only within one’s childhood. But grown-ups also carry balloons, now and then. But they do so because they wish to give them to their children or to their children’s friends. In short, it remains within the domain called ‘our childhood’. Once again you grow weary of balloons. You let the air out of the balloon you have carried for almost half an hour. Or if you are really fed up with it, you prick it with a pin and it bursts with a loud bang. But this bang is too long, in your opinion. Can your opinion be trusted? Is it really an opinion or a sort of sensation? Why do you say to yourself, ‘This was long, probably too long?’ If you can bear this duration, it is not really long because long things are unbearable and you collapse at the end of their duration, assuming there *is* an end to this all. When you handle balloons, you are aware of the final result: they either fly off or burst. And the end is almost predictable, especially if you are armed with a pin or a nail; a rusty nail, habitually. Well, you have a collection of pins and nails, and so you avail yourself of various times that your balloon spends in your hands. Either it bursts with a long bang, or the bang you produce at the end of your manipulations is very short. It produces a sound which you may note in your diary or elsewhere: puf, puf, puf. And you may also add to this puf a relevant detail: a long puf, a momentary puf, a puf about which I’d rather not to speak: it is so insignificant. You should also take into account the time you spend on recording your impressions either on a sheet of paper or on a tape, provided your tape recorder is in running order. At the end of your life, you are likely to say – on your deathbed – something along these lines, ‘Too short, too short. I haven’t really enjoyed it. Its shortness has spoiled everything. Of course I liked beer and chocolate, but I’ve never had enough of them. I start drinking a glass of beer, and I have no time to twinkle my eye, one of my eyes: it’s already over. Everything is over. The quantity of beer the glass contained only a few moments ago, a few twinklings ago. And also my delight, the pleasure I experience when drinking a glass of beer, two glasses of beer. What’s the purpose of life? Suppose our life is just a glass of beer. It is, actually. You can’t even affirm you’ve drunk your life. You just touch the glass with your lips, and your life comes to an end. Not to a new beginning: there are no leaves in this life of ours. At least you can’t turn them, even if you happen to spot a leaf somewhere, probably on your shoulder. You try to remove it from where it spends its own life and realise you can’t do it properly. Either the leaf crumbles between your fingers or it flies away, as I pointed out earlier. You begin to pursue this leaf (this life) of yours and soon you realise you’re out of breath. Your breath is short too, as short as your life. You compare your life to your breath and conclude it’s better to choose your life and forget about this capricious, whimsical leaf. Your life is overwhelmed with whims of all sorts, and you don’t really need an additional whim to what you’ve already

lived through. Then you feel the approach of death and change your linguistics. You write somewhere, “I’ve died through many things. Some of them have been long, others short. As a matter of fact, everything has always been short.””

‘Hence it happened that, because a stranger appeared suddenly everywhere, it became a custom to call him a heaven-born man.’

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When a human appeared on the surface of the Earth, animals thought it was a heaven-born creature. In the history of humankind it has often happened – when humans suddenly appeared on distant shores and natives did not know what to think about him. Those who disdained barbarians – unfortunately it is a common feature of our kind – affirmed that they did not think, although they had brains. This point of view is disgusting, and we often criticise it in our newspapers and television shows. Of course they had thoughts and even manipulated them as best they could. But their manipulations did not include the notion of ‘human beings’ because they were convinced that only animals inhabited the space where they lived. According to them, they themselves were animals and probably even superior animals. After all, they could hunt and kill other animals, inferior animals who could not communicate by means of syllables. Those superior animals could say ‘A’ or ‘B’ and their compatriots understood this languages. If they said ‘B’, their fellow-citizens realised they were called by their name: ‘barbarians’. If they screamed ‘A’, a few doctors would come to their rescue. (They said this ‘A’ in French, strangely enough.) Those so-called barbarians thought they were acquainted with the space they inhabited to the point of being able to recite every inch of it by heart. So a stranger would elicit from them a heavenly remark – something different from what they knew entirely, completely, in great detail. ‘He was born in heaven because we have no idea who he is and what he is capable of. Could he kill us? He could, if he wished to do so at once. And we would be unable to defend ourselves. He was born in heaven, and heaven is superior to the surface of the Earth where we roam, hunt and eat.’ But these words mean nothing because heaven is far away, and we cannot judge its advantages and disadvantages. Perhaps heavens have many flaws which are hidden from our eyes, even when there are no clouds either in the sky or in our own gardens. There are no clouds: everything is cloudless, with the exception of our minds which are full of clouds. They are distorted through their continuous presence. Of course there is no rain in our brains, but that does not really matter. I mean, this rainless condition does not improve our understanding of the world. And this is all the more understandable and logical in the domain of the heavens. It is a vast domain; it is far more gigantic than the Earth that we know tolerably well. You can walk through the heavens for many years, but there will always remain some obscure corners and so our knowledge will remain on the dark side of the moon or on the other side of the coin. So we walk through the cosmos and think quite naturally, sincerely, ‘This is the other side of the cosmos.’ Alas, it is always the same side, the dark side of the cosmos; and we are unlikely to reach the enlightened side of this huge mass of matter. Or the illuminated side; or the floodlit side. The stars are of no help: their lights are too weak for this kind of investigation. Of course we might resort to searchlights: after all, we search for light, to be enlightened, and illumination. We search for an obscure corner which will suddenly reveal all the enigmas of the universe to us. And if it reveals only three enigmas, confusing it with the Trinity, we shall press other buttons – as many buttons as necessary to see all the corners, to efface every possible

obscurity from the sky. And now the sky looks like a ceiling partly demolished by raindrops, by the nastiness of nature. The plaster begins to crumble and many crumbs fall on our heads. And then, after a while, our heads begin to crumble as well. They crumble and we have no alternative but to walk on our crumbled heads. We walk on our brains, on our former thoughts – now we have no thoughts, none – and unexpectedly we understand something important. Yes, our thoughts need to be cleaned, walked upon; we must break them into a lot of elements. This is a simple rule: every difficult problem should be simplified, broken into miniscule parts because every part of this problem is easier to handle than the whole: everybody is aware of that. What is more, by breaking our brains we let the cosmic light in and, instead of our ordinary darkness, confront the light enlarged upon in every treaty we consult, in our eagerness to understand everything. Now we seem to understand everything; or rather, we see everything distinctly. But there is a difference between seeing and understanding. I clench my fists and look at them. But do I *understand* my fists? I am about to fight – that is obvious. But who is my adversary? Or what? I have a friend who always boasts about his exploits in the domain of sports, gymnastics. Every time we meet I hear the following remark: ‘I’ve boxed against some of the best.’ ‘But have you boxed against the Great Wall of China?’ I asked. ‘It is certainly one of the best. Or the best, frankly speaking. This Wall is far superior to any Olympic champion. Even Cassius Clay was powerless against it. When he found himself side by side with this Wall, he looked like a little boy whose mother had walked away, for some reason. She was probably afraid of the Wall, which is understandable enough. You wish to penetrate a mystery attached to the universe, but the Wall interferes, and you give up, you yield the ground. Even the portion you are acquainted with, however superficially, is about to disappear under the wall, under its enormous might. You decide to play with the wall, to use it to the best of your abilities. You pick up a ball and now it flies towards the Wall, obeying the command of your hands. But then you realise to what extent Chinese wisdom is superior to whatever you can decipher by means of your brain. A wise saying appears over your head, ‘He wasn’t even trying to score – the ball just bounced off the jammy beggar’s head into the goal.’ That is the golden rule of what we call the Chinese character and philosophy. You do not try to do something, and you achieve the result by waiting, by doing nothing. You hold a ball and make a movement. You do not try to direct it, to achieve a sort of victory over your adversaries or just some elements, elementary particles, but the ball knows what to do. Unexpectedly a beggar crops up; as usual, you have no idea where he comes from. Probably from heaven. The ball bounces off his head and all the lights come into existence. They illumine whatever should be clarified, understood once and for all. There are many beggars in Chinese art. The people walking through their paintings and books are beggars, philosophers and poets. ‘I walk through a landscape / and achieve a tremendous result / without yearning to achieve it. / It is better to yawn than to yearn. / It is better to have yens / than to learn. / What can you learn? / You will never learn the Wall. / But you can bounce a ball against it / in the hope that the ball / will bounce off his head. / His head detaches itself from the neck / and falls, eager to adorn the ground. / Then you kick this head / and it bounces off another beggar’s head. / Such is our existence. / We hold balls and philosophers’ heads, / we write poems – effortlessly / as if they had always been there. / Where? In the cosmos / which is as vast as a haiku.’

‘If they were able to make gods of themselves after their death, pray tell me why they chose to be in inferior condition at first?’

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There are people who categorically refuse to be in superior condition, at first or at last. There are many goddesses in our midst. They work for fashion designers, top designers, and they walk in front of us to seduce our senses by means of their clothes and also through their elegant, sexy movements. They move and we jump, leaving our seats that we cannot keep during a show where all this happens quite legally and dramatically. It is no easy task to keep up this appearance, this godly appearance, through all these shows – and even ordinary appearances in the streets of our native city, one of the world capitals of beauty. As usual, you walk down your native streets, instead of letting your personal driver take you to yet another banquet in your resplendent Mercedes. And a passer-by – there are pedestrians everywhere, in every sense of the word – says to you, ‘Of course I recognised you – my memory has no problems in this domain. You are an unquestionable goddess, but today you look like a little princess, which is scandalous. Do you think you can relax, taking a sort of holiday to which you’re not entitled? Goddesses shouldn’t mar their show that goes on, whatever happens, wherever the scene is set. If your clients – and I’m one of them, incidentally – see you at this particular moment, they’ll throw all the dresses you’ve ever worn into a rubbish bin. Is *that* the aim of your profession, your devotion to beauty? Do you think that Athena or Aphrodite behaved in this manner? They would have been dismissed from Mount Olympus in no time at all. Don’t you realise that Olympus should be everywhere, as far as your personality, gait and general behaviour are concerned? Do you know what Zeus would do with your body, if he had an opportunity to see you right now? He would fling your body out of his window. And there are a great many rubbish bins under his window: it is no use turning Olympus into an untidy street, cluttered with all sorts of rubbish-representatives. As you must know, Zeus has a lot of children: he makes love to all goddesses without exception. So he says from time to time, when a passer-by walks under his windows: ‘Don’t clatter the bodies – you’ll wake the baby up.’ What else does Zeus say? We can find his words in books devoted to Greek mythology. But why should we look for his words? In what way can they influence our destinies? Zeus is a thing (a god) of the past, and this past will never return to resume its place in our history. Well, our history is very generous: it offers a sort of political asylum (historical asylum) to whatever or whoever is willing to take part in this adventure. The prize winners – that is how they call themselves, proud as they are of their achievements – each receive a history book with their names inscribed in them. Why is this rite regarded as an achievement? Because you know what will happen to you over the years to come. If your name is Julius Caesar, you are assassinated and immortalised – in the same breath. Or on the same page – all depends on the size of the book. In this case, however, it is better to be in the midst of inferior creatures. Why should we care about immortality? Does it add anything to our comfort, our present condition and tonight’s meal? Nothing at all; not even a few grains of caviar. So we do not make gods of ourselves, either after our deaths or before them. We die and are buried with military honours or without them. A few grains of sand penetrate our coffins, and we feel happy: we are not alone, after all. We are not alone, in spite of our death, of our tragic removal from life. Is it so tragic as all that? Perhaps not. At least this tragedy does not concern us; not personally, anyway. And what about the others? Who *are* they, these others? Our relatives, our mistresses? They (our mistresses) do not think about us in earthly terms. They do not dream about sexual relationships with our bodies – not on account of the earth which separates us almost irremediably. Let us not forget there are some grains of the earth in our coffin, and they remind us of our games, of tennis, of the beaches where we met so many men and women whose souls became ours, in the long run. And also the trees we helped to grow: without us they might have deviated from

their trajectories and reached the stage defined as 'ugly duckling'. But our teachers say to us, 'You'd better be an ugly duckling at first because such a duckling is sure to become a participant in *Swan Lake*, whereas an ordinary swan remains a swan – a black swan, into the bargain – because he has nowhere to go. Remember what one of Dostoevsky's heroes said: a man must go somewhere. 'Actually here's another reason for not wishing to groan and reach the stage of the highest species,' someone says. 'If you're an inferior creature, you can stay in bed. You don't have to go anywhere, to grow, to move, to budge, to think. You're well where you are. And anyway – whatever you do means nothing, leads to nothing; even if you lead yourself somewhere. Remember the saying: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Suppose you're a horse and you can see some water in front of your lips. This means you've already led yourself to water. The point is, you don't wish to have anything in common with this water. Apparently, it's your worst enemy; at least that's what you feel on the spur of the water. If a tiger appears in the vicinity of your body, you'll say to yourself, "The tiger is certainly my enemy, but water is even worse than the tiger." So you rush towards the tiger and plunge headlong into its mouth, whatever they call it.' So you do not need to go anywhere, and even food does not excite you. You recall the cure based on the utter absence of food. You do not even have to refuse the food arrayed in front of your mouth and nose. They do not put anything in front of them. It is a cure you must stick to in the hope of growing thinner and thinner, healthier and healthier. You are extremely healthy right now, at the end of your cure. What could you do with your health? You can participate in the Olympic Games which started recently in Paris. You can take your health out of your body and demonstrate its beauty by swinging it in front of your body. And what if you no longer have a body to speak of? Your health was your body, and now you are deprived of your health, body and nerves. You swing as if you were on a swing, but, contrary to your expectations, you do not get into the swing of things and humans. Do you enjoy your inferior condition? You do, to some extent. But isn't it better to look at all that from afar, from the stars? Finally you avail yourself of superior condition, and you realise you feel more at home, when this condition is in your possession. Are you a god? You remember Zeus and realise you have to search for goddesses. You see a woman, decide that she is a goddess and reach the nearest bed in this woman's company. Then you remember that Zeus also reached ecstatic stages, when availing himself of an ordinary body. No, no – the body was extraordinary, but it did not belong to a goddess. Zeus made love to everybody; so do you. So you do not think you have to make a god of yourself. What for? For being able to hear, 'He's a god, he's a god.' They say that about strippers.

'Men therefore were not religious before they achieved greatness, nor great because they were religious.'

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At first we are tempted to conclude that men have never been great, neither before nor after anything. The gods make their appearance, but the plight which human beings demonstrate is so sorry that the gods retire, withdraw, annul their presence in their midst. They depart, saying to each other, 'No point in wasting time on these creatures. They don't deserve our recommendations and overall help. They're worthless, really worthless.' But humans have never been really worthless: at some point – 'no point in' does not belong to this point – they came up with the wheel or its invention. At the beginning of their era they moved from one place to another on all fours. And they thought they would never reach their neighbours whose lives unfolded beyond a series of trees. Their legends spoke of these neighbours – to no avail. Why should you speak about someone you will never

meet, to whom you will never talk? Of course there are heroes to whom we long to speak. Alas, they are dead, most of them. We dig in the earth under the monuments dedicated to their immortal deeds, but we are told (by a few specialists) that their bodies or corpses have nothing to do with the monuments. Sometimes we just look out of the window and hit upon a bright idea: the heroes we are dreaming about are buried under the snow. (This might happen in Russia.) ‘Would you give me a hand shovelling the snow away from my hero’s corpse?’ we say to our neighbour. And we begin to work and some corpses end up leaving their tombs and appearing in their splendour – just in front of us. It is as if they had lived their lives and accomplished their deeds exclusively for our sake. They might have followed this train of thought: ‘Sooner or later a man or a woman will be born, and this creature will survive in our cruel world, thanks to our glorious deeds.’ This is an answer – one of the answers – to the question asked at the beginning of the present essay. Were men religious before they achieved greatness? They thought about the future, about the survival of their species, and consequently they were religious: they believed in the gods of the future. Indeed, to survive in this capricious, ridiculous and utterly pernicious world you should indeed be a god. Or a cat of whom a god, a generous man or woman takes care. Not simple, ordinary care, mind you: extraordinary care. If the care you take of an animal is run-of-the-mill care, then this animal (your pet, if you wish) will perish in some accident or other. There are many accidents disseminated all over our planet, and some of them are designed for the animals we adore. It is as if there was an inscription over every catastrophe. We decipher this inscription and then tear it into pieces; if its message does not suit us. What *does* suit us? Something negligent, something unsubstantial, unconnected, floating in the air or in the water. Something that has nothing in common with duty. We eat a piece of meat, and if we eat it without attributing to it a supernatural significance, we just draw some pleasure from it; if the piece we are eating is not rotten, if it deserves our attention, respect and love. But if we charge it with supernatural overtones, we feel uneasy and begin to think about the world in religious terms. And then everything turns into God, into our duties and rituals, our utter dependence on sacred ways of life. But we walk through the woods, we do not care if the space we are walking through is called the woods or space or nothing at all. No names, no Adams. Every name bears a sort of responsibility it does not feel. But we may feel this responsibility, and carrying this item of human existence is not easy, not comfortable, not beer and skittles. No strings attached – that is what we should aim at. Every time we see an object in front of us or just beside us, we should make sure there are no strings around it, connected to it, glued to it. There are invisible strings. That is why we fall sometimes, when walking around some object or subject. We trip over a string, whereupon the world trips over us. It is unpleasant – walking around the world, tripping over strings. Even if these strings are not attached to anything, we unavoidably trip over them and find ourselves on the ground which is also attached to something or somebody. Let us think it is attached to something, not to somebody: it is much easier to deal with objects, instead of penetrating into the depths of subjects. (An object is often treated as a subject.) So there are strings and we can turn them into a sweater, a pullover, a pair of gloves. We can turn ourselves into Penelope and weave some image endlessly, abating our sexual instincts. We abate them, and they raise their ugly heads once again, as if nothing had happened. Let us turn them into wool. This type of wool is woven into a fabric which will make jackets. Let us make a few jackets, but wearing them may remind us of sex, of its pleasures, of sins linked to them. We should not wear anything because our sexual instincts preside over everything. A Soviet minister of culture said about Béjart: ‘He is undesirable. Our pure culture would be profaned by his style which is a mixture of God and sex.’ Actually, either before an event or after something we knock into God or sex. Sometimes we

knock sex over, but the matter stands differently with God: you cannot knock God over. On the other hand, God very often knocks you over. That is why you prefer not to keep your vertical position for more than a minute. You lie down, convinced that God cannot knock you down. Suddenly you find yourself on the ground – with your bed, with your beer and skittles. And you are not even allowed to drink this beer. In order to drink it you become great, but soon you realise you are too big for the bottle, for the neck of the bottle where the beer feels itself at home and out of danger. So you make yourself into a very small god. But you seem to have forgotten that, however small, a god is always great. Neither smallness nor greatness suits you – in the final analysis. But there is nothing final in the world; even death is not final, according to some verbal accounts. So you switch to what may be called the ‘middle way’. From now on you will be in the middle. Alas, you have forgotten the bottle of beer which is not in the middle of your life. Whatever you do, this bottle remains out of your reach. Reaching for a bottle of beer is the main goal of human existence.

‘But where at last will the soul have to lodge, when it is bare and divested of the body?’

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Is the soul ever bare? Of course you are likely to remember an episode from your childhood, triggered off by the word ‘bare’. ‘Don’t walk around outside in your bare feet.’ The point is the soul has no feet, and consequently does not walk anywhere; let alone walking ‘in your bare feet’. Does that mean that the soul always flies? Does it have a pair of wings? The soul is not an angel, although it might have an angelic nature, as far as we know. Why do we seem to know this fact? Is it a fact? Well, we do not think that the soul has a satanic nature, for the very word ‘soul’ has a ring of truth and consequently cannot be ignoble. It is true that we say, now and then, ‘His soul is criminal and displays all the nuances we usually associate with Judas.’ But at least Judas repented, otherwise he would not have ended his life in this fashion. And we know the fashion I am talking about. François Villon also talked of this fashion which is fashionable in some circles. And these circles are not necessarily criminal, mind you. The soul does not hang itself unless you attribute this form of suicide to the fatigue of the soul, to its ‘enough is enough’. But the soul is eternal, according to some rumours, and what is eternal cannot feel weary; and enough is never enough in this field of human knowledge. It is rather ‘once again’, ‘again and again’, ‘over and over again’. Do we need human knowledge? Of course we are humans and nothing human is foreign to us. (Even if we are foreigners, they often add in racist countries.) We are humans because we play chess and are fond of soccer, football, all sorts of basketballs. (There are many baskets in our world.) But that does not mean we need human knowledge. All right – we see a basket in front of us, and we become aware of two tendencies struggling within our chest. We are tempted to fill this basket with fruit or fish; on the other hand, we are longing for a ball that we can fling in the direction of this basket in the hope that the ball will land in it. And when we discuss our projects linked to our journey to the Moon, we also imagine a ball that we are supposed to fling in the direction of the Moon. All this is childish, of course, and that is why we renounce all this nonsense and stay on our Earth, thinking only in terms of fruit and fish. But can the body do all this if it is divested of the body? We cannot eat fish and fruit and many other things without our body’s assistance – that is for sure. Let us meditate upon this problem. Suppose we are the soul, just the soul. And then the question arises: does the soul need to eat? Whatever we see on the Earth eats and drinks all the time; at least continuously. It is true that our meals are interrupted: there are short intervals between them filled with games

and even honest reflections. But then our appetite comes back, and we satisfy its requirement. What about the soul? It is human, for it enjoys the same superiority bestowed upon us by God. Probably our superiority, our triumph over beasts consists in our detachment from food. No way: we eat even more than other animals, and much more than plants. I repeat my question: what about the soul? When it is in our body, it is all too human and consequently eats, drinks vodka and does other stupid things. It can even play one of our stupid games. And I suppose that from time to time a number of souls gather together on a stadium and watch our runners and jumpers – just for the fun of it. They may even get up and begin to run, eager to satisfy some of the instincts, tendencies and inclinations. What happens next? Let us not forget that we are speaking about the soul, and this soul is the universal Soul, to all appearances. All right, but we cannot go on discussing its properties and qualities – if any – before deciding whether it is divested of the body or not. We cannot ask straightaway, ‘Are you divested of the body? Please, tell us frankly if you still depend on the body. Are you able to act on your own? Are you mature, in other words?’ Usually the soul does not answer such questions. It does not answer any questions, to tell the truth. No questions asked. No questions answered, rather. Let us suppose the soul, this universal soul is divested of the body. What body, may I ask? The universal body? The cosmic body? What is the difference between the universal body and the cosmic one? Well, what counts in these matters is the bareness of our soul. It is never bare, come to think of it. If you think about your soul, you dress it, you put a dress on it, or a pair of trousers, or a jacket. You put a number of clothes on it to hide its bareness or nudity. We are not on a nudist beach, are we? And if we are, why aren’t we aware of the sun and its generosity? And the dangers associated with its heat, rays and what not? We are not aware of anything, frankly speaking. But even if you are not aware of the room where you sit and dream, you must be aware of the sun because it is the centre of the world. How could you survive without a centre, the centre? What kind of centre? A medical centre? Your thoughts deviate from their trajectories in the twinkling of an eye, if divested of this proverbial centre. Is this centre the body we are enlarging upon? If divested of this centre, we find ourselves on one of the sides about which we know nothing or next to nothing. The word ‘next’ seems to describe the word ‘next’: it is better to say ‘nothing’ because only in this way can you get away with it. With what? With the body, for God’s sake! With the body and the soul. You can get them married, if only for the sake of your argument. And then you arrange their divorce – for the sake of your comfort. After all, it is not easy to handle the body and the soul at the same time. Suppose you hold two balls in one hand. One of these balls is bound to fall because you cannot hold two balls in one hand. That is why you have the second hand – to hold the second ball. Actually this is the only explanation of its presence, of the presence of the second hand which is otherwise useless, isn’t it? Unless you play the piano. Do you? But even in this case you do not need the second hand: there are concertos for the left hand alone. But where will the soul lodge at last? ‘At last’ is the key idea of this sentence. All this means that the soul cannot live on its own. Even humans are capable of such an exploit. Of course we complain about our solitude; from time to time. (Everything happens from time to time, even eternity.) And we do not need a body. I mean, we need bodies – a lot of bodies, in some cases. (There are sex maniacs in our midst; even outside of it.) Do we aspire to be enveloped, enclosed; enclosed within some substance or other? We are not a letter one can send to a friend or a mistress. To Laura, for instance. This state of affairs reminds me of a sequence I saw a long time ago: someone was engraving or just writing a message on someone else’s back. Why do you have to write a message on your back? You can use your computer for this purpose. You use a computer, send something to someone and get no answer as if you did not deserve such a thing as a simple answer. Even if there

are no questions in your epistle, you expect to receive an answer, for the simple reason that you are versed in the things that compose, construct our life in society. Sometimes this kind of thing is called a 'code of behaviour'. This means we have to behave ourselves, otherwise we might be expelled from this so-called society. Well, we are *expelled* from it. So what? We roam or just walk outside – far from this society, and we do not collapse, do not break our legs or arms. Nothing really happens to our physical substance. Does anything happen to our *spiritual* substance? What is this substance about, may I ask? Doesn't it fly somewhere, far from our bodies? Is it our soul, in other words, in another world? Let us say goodbye to it. After all, we are supposed to say goodbye to masterpieces and greatness. It is easier to say goodbye to our soul, isn't it?

'The question will arise, By whom is to be interpreted the sense of the passages which make for heresies? By the devil, of course.'

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I am not so sure, actually. There are humans – they are certainly devils in disguise – who say, 'This is a heresy, one of them, and this man or woman should be hanged or burnt or shot in some courtyard or other. Well, you shoot this man or woman, but the heresy which, for a few months or years, belonged to his being, mouth and soul prevails, survives and goes on annihilating humankind. Is it really kind? Who are we speaking about? About the judges and executioners who contented themselves with shooting the human being in question. What should they have done? They should have shot him or her first; and they did this part of the job unless they bungled it completely, which also happens now and then. You cannot use guns and revolvers properly: you miss all the targets you speak about, and you do not even acknowledge your failures. You just say, 'All right, I missed the target. So what? The world is still alive. Evil is still spreading throughout the world. I admit that I could have stopped its progress. I didn't. Do you wish to imprison me? Do you wish to execute me? I hope you'll miss your target.' At one point you decide that targets are everywhere, that everything goes wrong. And nothing goes right. But then you change your mind. You see a few fissures in the world. It is up to you to decide what these fissures correspond to. They are heresies, you say to yourself. Why? Because you have nothing to do, nothing on your agenda. Your agenda is empty, and sometimes this stimulates a very positive feeling. You ask yourself if a positive feeling, a sort of momentary happiness, can be stimulated. It is rather a wave unfolded in front of you, touching first your feet and then going further and further, higher and higher. At the end (of the day?) you find yourself covered with happiness. And you begin to uncover it, to taste it bit by bit, determined to take advantage of it fully and indestructibly. (That is the word you use on this occasion.) Well, we must admit that the world is not made of one piece. There are many pieces in this world, and some of us think we are very lucky, given that these pieces allow us to have mazurkas and symphonies, palaces and huts. Of course we could get rid of the latter, leaving only palaces within the range of our pleasures and general pastimes. But something tells us that huts also have their charms, and these charms add a nice touch to the general structure. Now we adore generalities – universal peace and so on – and now we hate them. Why? Because we think that generalities come to an end too quickly. And all ends are associated in our stubborn mind with death which we are reluctant and loath to admit. We do not admit its existence – in general. Of course our bad moods should die, and we have nothing against their numerous deaths. We go so far as to celebrate them. But during these celebrations we realise that another bad mood is under way; due to our consumption of alcohol. We are so

happy we cannot refrain from drinking more and more. And ‘more’ often means ‘less’ – on the opposite side, that is. And once again we come across the springs we are acquainted with, thanks to our capricious, up-and-down destiny. Yes, at times we thank our destiny for these pleasures, for our vertigo and headlong jumps into abysses. We call this, ‘The richness of human life, its unpredictability.’ Well, it *is* unpredictable. We wake up and begin to map out our future – the day we are about to enter, where we shall stay for a day. Boldly we predict this and that. In the middle of the day we take stock of the situation; and sometimes of our life. Yes, going so far, recklessly, recklessly – taking stock of our entire life. Well, it is better to be on the safe side – even in the matter directly linked to daydreaming. Let us put it thus: after two hours spent abroad, we return to our interior monologue to take stock of our life; or rather of the two hours I have just mentioned in my narrative; in my tale, if you prefer. And once again you admit you have deviated from your general plan and also from its particularities. In other words, you have bungled almost everything. Well, you are not very fond of nervous breakdowns and so you resolve not to succumb to this nervous temptation once again and probably once and for all. You just select a few heresies, as you call them, and go on unabashed. Your day continues to unfold smoothly, as if nothing had happened. That is what heresies are about: your personal heresies or the heresies of the world. You write, ‘My life makes no sense: I must have slipped up somewhere, every now and then, all the time.’ Well, your life will never make sense, even if you stop making mistakes and telling stupid stories. But what about your heresies, general heresies? You recall a few bonfires, but you have no idea what they mean and where to put them in your recollection. So there are bonfires – throughout your memory, your memories. There are bodies in the midst of these bonfires, and (as usual) you are at sea with their identities. What does it matter! Their identities must have burnt with them. When you look at the ashes, you realise that even the identities of those identities must have been burnt. ‘Rome was also burnt,’ you say to yourself with a sigh.

‘But some one may contend that two great Supremes may exist, distinct and separate in their own departments.’

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Of course one thinks immediately of a couple of humans united through some bond, as Shakespeare said in his play *The Merchant of Venice*. Suppose we are talking about a man and a woman; this is easier because two men often say to each other, ‘We’re absolutely identical. No one can see any difference, when contemplating our lives, which are not separate, as we all know. Even our hands are identical. And so are our feet. Our thoughts duplicate themselves at their births – to spare the partner any unnecessary effort, in this case. You have a thought and you put it on the table at which your partner is sitting. Why should he torment himself, making a supreme effort which is rendered unnecessary by the presence of the thought lying on the table in front of him?’ This point of view, this affirmation, however, does not contradict the notion we come across when consulting the theory devoted to the two great Supremes. There are many couples in this world; there are accidental couples, eternal couples. Usually the members of these couples say to each other, ‘You’re Supreme.’ ‘You’re also Supreme,’ says the other member of the couple. ‘There are no no-Supremes amongst us,’ says the first member of the couple. Does this in any way prevent us from speaking about the Absolute, the One and so on? Actually, under the circumstances you cannot and should not speak about ‘so ons’. Often, during our meetings, our official, solemn meetings, our leaders remind us of this partial truth, ‘No ons.’ The usual form looks like that, ‘We’re going to visit you tomorrow and there’ll be no buts about it.’ If an important person proclaims this

partial truth – or the absolute truth in its own right – this means your house will be wrecked or literally turned upside down, if you prefer. They come to you and begin to turn every object upside down – literally, not metaphorically or symbolically. You too, they turn you upside down, and something falls from your pockets; perhaps your soul. No one knows where the soul is located. Descartes was wrong: our soul does not spend its life within our pineal gland. It is probably the other way round: the pineal gland is situated within our soul. But who cares about locations? Of course you care about your destinations, especially during your holidays. There are two great Supremes in this domain: either you spend your holiday somewhere or you stay at home. Or you spend it somewhere else. As for your mind, there are also two great Supremes connected with it. Either you are at peace with the world or you declare many wars in the hope of vanquishing it; especially its population. You can leave the poplars and other items of the decor intact. But the population of the world spends its time at your feet; otherwise there is no point in living on this surface, on the surface of our globe. Yes, there are two great Supremes in our lives: victories and defeats. Sometimes we think we are victorious, but our victories do not look great, in our opinion. There are no great Supremes. There are just small Supremes, which is a contradiction in terms. There are terms and often they contradict each other; and we spend our lives reconciling them. ‘Why do you quarrel? There’s no reason to be at war with each other. Please, embrace your so-called enemy and kiss him or her on both cheeks.’ They kiss each other, many of them; they even go so far as to fornicate in our presence. We point out that they go too far – when speaking to them about the whole experience. ‘Do you wish us to come together? This is the only way – shaking hands isn’t enough.’ We ask them to shake hands, adding, ‘That’s quite enough, you know. If you do it sincerely, wholeheartedly, that’ll be quite enough.’ Then they sit at the same table – you can sit at two or three tables – and drink a bottle of champagne. Then they drink a second bottle of champagne. Does that mean that the two great Supremes we are talking about are distinct and separate? Even if they kiss each other they may be separate – in some domain or other. There are so many domains around us, inside us that we do not always know exactly where we are and how many domains we hold in our embrace. Yes, we are in love with life, with our intricate, unpredictable existence, and that is why we often have the feeling we make love to every detail of our earthly ordeal. ‘Separate in their own departments.’ Actually, this statement is likely to elicit a shudder of horror on the part of the being who tries to read it seriously, taking in every syllable, every meaning, every secret message. Do we really have our own departments? We are united; we fall if disunited. True enough, there are many bodies on the pavement; they just lie there as if in expectation of resurrection. Yet they are not dead, to all appearances; at least to *some* appearances. As usual, we look at their fingers, and their fingers move – in the direction of our throats. Yet the word ‘separate’ strikes us as only a cruel substance can strike us, upsetting us, horrifying us, scandalising our benevolent natures. At once we join these bodies on the floor, on the ground, on the grass, on some path or other, and begin to crawl towards other substances of this kind, of another kind. We no longer think in terms of kinds; not even in terms of kindness, the milk of human kindness. Be you kind or not, savage or well-mannered – we crawl towards you with the intention of clutching your substance in our instruments, in our members which are wholly devoted to union and love. On the way we clutch whatever comes our way, whatever lies in the path we are exploring. We need to practise human love, the love which is often established between human beings unless these beings are no longer beings. At least they are certainly not human, if they refuse the union I am writing about so profusely. You crawl towards them and sometimes, in your eagerness to reach them as soon as possible, you climb a tree or a mountain, and they prepare their muscles for a sort of rebuttal. Not trusting their fists and physical form,

they issue a point-by-point rebuttal of your declaration centred upon love. Denying and contradicting are part of human nature, and that is why the word 'separate' is one of the keywords of our existence. (I often talk about our *existence*, but I am not sure we exist, to tell the truth.) They repeat Heraclitus' affirmation, 'The war is the father of all mothers, of everything and everybody.' And if you attempt to kiss them on their cheeks, they withdraw from the spot where you were determined to carry out your love-permeated ritual. And often they insult you into the bargain. Then you begin a sort of interminable talk – everything is 'a sort of' (you cannot be sure of anything) – the purpose of which consists in what seems to be a difference between 'separate' and 'distinct'. The two parties agree they can act of their own accord: they do not need to get permission from the other party. For instance, you wish to move your leg, longing to step into some water which promises a nice sojourn in the Black Sea. And if there are no scorpions lying on your path, you can do it without asking anybody's permission. Then you advance the other leg. And once again you say to anybody, 'Could I please move my leg towards the sea?' And someone says to you, 'Considering that my leg is not in your way, you can do so on the spot.' But suddenly the other person changes his or her mind. 'Actually, my leg *is* lying across your path. Do you have any idea why we're part of this situation? Because I'd like to have sex with you. I can't say I'm in love with you, but your body appeals to me for some reason. And for my physical purpose linked to the perfect state of my health, I'd rather make love to you on the spot, notwithstanding the others, their obtrusive presence.' You do not share the other person's enthusiasm, but you like provocations which are often expressed through the word 'mindless'. 'Mindless of their presence,' 'flouting their conventions', 'I have nothing but scorn,' 'I couldn't care less.' So you provoke society at large or at short – just the group of people standing in your vicinity. You provoke them and, to remain on the safe side, you train yourself in the domain of provocation. For months and years you try to assume the appearance of a vicious-looking dog whom no one dares to provoke. You become first distinct and then separate. You end up establishing yourself as Supreme.

'...bringing up a new god, as if we were ashamed of the old one.'

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For pagans the gods were objects, mere objects – idols, in other words. For instance, you lay your hand on a razor and say to it, 'You're my idol or god. It doesn't really matter what you are. Anyway, I obey all your orders. I have the feeling you wish me to cut my throat. What are razors for? You're supposed to shave because some of the members of our society might judge you severely, saying, 'Do you live prior to Peter the Great's epoch, inaugurated by the general shaving of beards? Do you want us to believe you love Russia to the point of growing ugly and unbearable, conservative, obnoxious and Rasputin-like?' All right: everyone is aware of this truth, of these associations and correspondences. But if you uncover your razor and put it on your favourite chest of drawers, this gesture might signify your desire to do away with yourself, your being and the qualities ascribed to all human beings without exception; such as nails, for instance. So you pick this razor up and bring it up to your throat. The ending of the ritual is well-known, although I do not remember – not on the spur of the moment – all those heroes and heroines who ended their lives in this fashion. Could anyone predict such an event? If you hear a voice which repeats the following questions, 'Where's my razor, pray? Where is it for God's sake?' you might logically come to the conclusion that the person in question – there are no other persons, other questions, other animals – is about to commit suicide. And what about new and old gods? Suppose you see a rope; on the same chest of drawers which you like more than other pieces of furniture you have owned for

some time, perhaps for many, many years. In this case, you are likely to call the rope an 'old god' and the razor a 'new one'. No use pointing out you are talking about the gods: who else can you be talking about? An old one, a new one. One, one, one, one, one, one, one. One god can be identified as a razor, another god is a revolver and then a pastry comes to the shore, and you say to yourself that death is not the only issue, the only loophole in 'environmental protection laws', as they say in the clinics where they nurse suicidal maniacs. We are surrounded by all sorts of things that constitute our world or the world which does not completely belong to us. During an earthquake we think that the world does not belong to us at all: it does not listen to our prayers. It pays no attention to our dearest wishes, especially when, instead of a sunny day we get a horrible storm, a deluge. A little stream can become a deluge when it rains heavily. So we look at this little stream and say to ourselves (we talk to ourselves all the time), 'Is it still a little stream? What to expect from this stream? What we're facing might be a deluge, after all.' A discussion goes on and the little stream grows under our very eyes. It becomes big, gigantic, but no one speaks about a deluge as if everyone was afraid of this word. As soon as you think, 'This is a real deluge,' it becomes a real deluge, no mistake about it. A real deluge or an unreal one? You go on asking yourself useless questions. In the meantime the little stream turns into a little waterfall, but you find solace in the fact that it is just a waterfall, not a deluge. And waterfalls are not dangerous: they are beautiful; and what is beautiful cannot be dangerous. Then you ask yourself if the Gorgon was beautiful or not. What do they call it, actually? Gorgon Medusa? Medusa Gorgon? Never mind – what counts in this particular matter is her beauty. She was dangerous: everyone is aware of that. But was she beautiful? Those who saw her cannot answer this question. Suppose you walk through your native city. A lorry goes past and you get an eyeful of grit. The matter stands differently with the Gorgon and also with Medusa. Are we ashamed of the Gorgon? Of Medusa? What can you be ashamed of? You have not seen her. And those who have are lying at your feet. Could they answer your question? Let us ask them this question; and many other questions linked, for instance, to their sojourn or eternal life abroad, on the other side of life. So, let us ask them these questions on the spot where they are lying, on their fatal, death spot where they still display a few characteristics of life. What kind of life? They are there, their bodies being spared by time by its utter, innate rottenness. Time rots itself. Not satisfied with its own decadence, degeneration, its horrible smell, it spoils whatever happens to be within its sphere of influence. Anyway, we receive no answer, and we might conclude that these people are not ashamed of the Gorgon, of her appearance and smell. What can they be ashamed of? Of their own death? Can anyone be ashamed of their own death? A person dies within your field of vision, your range of feelings, and you ask this person, after a while – let him get acquainted with his own death – if he is not ashamed of his new status. Suppose he replies, 'Yes, I'm deeply ashamed of myself, of my dead body, of my body which is not on the point of undergoing the process called "Resurrection"'. So what? All right, you can mock me to your heart's content. But don't forget that, in a few months, to put it mildly, benevolently, you'll die with me, perhaps in the same tomb. What do they call this kind of tomb? A fraternal tomb? A tomb of humanity?' Do we have any wish to replace this corpse by another, by a new, fresh corpse? Probably not. Replacing corpses, changing them, washing them – what is the point? The point is always elsewhere, whatever we are engrossed in, whatever we try to manipulate, to turn to our advantage. We cannot say, nevertheless, that everything turns to our disadvantage. We go through another twilight, feel the approach of another night and take a sleeping pill which guarantees a peaceful night replenished with sweet, unforgettable dreams. What is there to change in this scenario? Are we tempted by the delights of a new day? It comes and brings with it a lot of rain, some flowers.

And then we take a seat by some window or other and begin to meditate on life and death. And we bring up another death because we are ashamed of our life. How to do it? Of course we can swallow a hundred sleeping pills, instead of two, but what if, in spite of this respectable, almost honourable quantity, we wake up and the same thing starts anew? We throw the pills out of the window and order new pills; and a new life, while we are at it. And we are always at it – tampering with our old life, tinkering with it. Sometimes we say to a friend, ‘I wish the government would stop tinkering with the health service, with my life, in other words.’ And our discussion gets under way, and a new discussion gets closer and closer to our door. And suddenly, for no reason at all, we feel happy. You just say (and you do not need a friend for this ritual, no participant, no third party): ‘I wish the government would stop tinkering with the health service.’ You feel happy. Why? Because you utter a sentence in which your love for humanity, your care for your fellow creatures, is magnificently enclosed. You can replace the ‘health service’ with railways or something else. The happiness remains as long as your statements are aimed at the improvement of our common life. You are not supposed, however, to be ashamed of it, of this improvement, of the result, of your way of stating the obvious. What does that mean, stating the obvious? What is this obvious? The windows I must have talked about at some point, the old gods? The brave old world?

‘Convince me, there could have been an unknown god.’

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Of course there are people who think we know everything, and if there is something we do not know, we simply do not need it. If we were ignorant, if only partially, we would succumb to unknown diseases and disasters all the time. We would even add another time to the time within which we live to demonstrate how vulnerable we are and how many disasters surround us on all sides. In other words, we would thereby demonstrate the variety and richness of the world. If you admire the world where you live, you recognise the overall justice that reigns over us and all other animals; and also over plants and insects. So we admire everything and everybody. It is true that we are not aware of every phenomenon, every element we come across in the course of our struggle for life. But the elements we take advantage of – and it is pointless and vicious not to take advantage of everything – are gods. Why, may I ask? Because they are goods or gods; anyway, it is thanks to them that our lives prosper and multiply our beatitude immeasurably. How come there are gods and goods we overlook in this continuous struggle for life? We struggle, struggle, fending off difficult problems, questions, decisions. They collapse and are carried away by our little helpers; no matter who they are, those helpers. What counts is their valuable existence. How do we manage to fend all these obstacles off? Once and for all, once upon a time, we decided that this could be done only through gods, through their divine assistance. We see a sort of peril and appeal to a god who comes to our rescue and fends off whatever stands in our way; in our way to progress, pleasure and money. What do we call all these gods? What are their names? Once again, we resort to the letters which make up our alphabet: A, B, C. Of course we get to the end of the alphabet in no time at all: we need their (the gods’) help all the time. So we proceed in the following manner: ‘A1’, ‘A2’, and so on. Many, many times we reach the end of the alphabet in the presence of numerous problems arrayed in front of us. Then we explore the multiplication table and other tables as well. Whatever happens to be within the range of our possibilities is used with the intention of overcoming all sorts of problems. Of course we do nothing to increase their number – we

increase *other* numbers – but they multiply and replenish the Earth; and also our houses and rooms. In moments of utter despair, we appeal to unknown numbers and eventually to an unknown god who, in our opinion – it is not very learned, this opinion – can smooth our way through life; or our ways through life, given their multiplicity, the multiplicity of the problems we encounter. Yes, in such moments all sorts of things that are unknown to us come to the fore to help us or to annihilate us once and for all, in spite of resurrections, karmas and the new lives described by Dante and other artists of great renown. However, we must admit that we count mostly on the things and beings we are not acquainted with: our relatives, friends and gods are unreliable; to some extent at least. And this extent grows almost daily. What to do with this extent? We cannot solve all the problems with which we collide on our way, on the same way. Let us call it ‘salvation’. What other names can we give it? Destruction, torment, an ordeal? We are supposed to make things easier for ourselves. Instead, we create other problems and speak about our own destruction. Is it wise? But we cannot always resort to the Fathers of the Church; and quote them extensively. Well, they spoke sometimes about unknown gods. And one wonders if they themselves knew these gods who are supposed to be unknown to us. And what about them, about the Fathers? Did they know EVERYTHING? Well, the usual tactic consists in dropping hints as to unknown possibilities, thanks to which we shall live forever without committing crimes and indulging in sins, their quantities and qualities. And if we live in a majestic manner accessible only to God and his archangels, we overstep the bounds prescribed to us by the heavenly constitution. We are supposed to behave modestly. All right, we are made in the image of God, but we are not omniscient, otherwise there would be no difference between God and us and the archangels. So, from time to time, we should say to our colleagues and fellow creatures, ‘Who is it? Do you know this person? Is he a god? Is he a man or a woman? In my opinion he might have changed his sexual orientation in his childhood.’ They talk in this manner for hours and hours, and one idea emerges from this chaos, from this mass of innuendoes. There is something or somebody unknown in our life, and this element means we are not the Almighty with Whom we often confuse our own personalities, substances and comedies; the comedies of our daily behaviour. To avoid this dreadful, blasphemous confusion, the Fathers of the Church often mention this unknown god, and we cannot even ask them a lot of questions on this subject, given that they are dead. So, as usual, we just walk around our native city and say to our companions, ‘This is an unknown god, you know.’ And if they ask for our elucidation of this mystery, of this unknown component of our lives, we just say, ‘You’ll live and learn. Probably one day you’ll say to someone, when walking along the same street, “This is the known god.” But in this case, your companion, your travel companion, may ask you to describe this god, to enumerate his or her characteristics. And what kind of answer could you give to this particular question?’ Actually it is not difficult to compose this answer. You just say that the god is benevolent because he does not side with Satan. (Generally speaking, it is easier to depict the gods whose identities have nothing to do with Satan.) You say that he – suppose the god we are speaking about is a man – helps you when you construct boats and cars. And you say to your listeners, ‘And if you try to construct a boat or a car, while working on it you’ll find out what other qualities your new god can boast about.’ Suppose you construct a boat and say to everybody, ‘I haven’t heard anything in the course of my labours. No one has spoken to me. No gods, no humans will take the trouble to enlighten me on any subject whatsoever. How come? How come?’ Then you realise you have built a palace because this new series of labours might give you an opportunity to listen to the unknown god you are looking for. At some point, however, you stop looking for unknown gods, and humanity perishes on account of its own foolishness: it is foolish and presumptuous to think

you know everything. You say to yourself, 'Nothing is unknown to me except my own death.' And then you die. You advance through the corridors of death, looking at the walls, at the portraits that hang on the walls. You recognise some of these portraits, but there must be one portrait which has nothing in common either with yourself or with your neighbours, relatives and so on. You call this portrait 'So on' and continue to walk along the corridors of death.

'Does it appear to you to be justly defensible, that uncertainties should be submitted for proof to the rule, and form, and standard of certainties?'

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Of course it is easy to say – some do say that – that (that, that, that, a triumph of that) everything is uncertain, which is not true, as a matter of fact. The matter is not true, the fact is not true. The world totters, reels, wobbles, but we are used to this state of affairs. It is certain that, now and then, the world appears to be rooted to the spot, except that we cannot find this spot, the spot in question, as it is usually said. Where is this spot? Here or over there? Meanwhile, the world continues to reel and wobble, and we must admit that it has never been solid, stable and reliable. What is reliable in this world? This table or that table over there? We put a plate on this and that table and the plate slides and finds its final refuge or haven on the floor. Those tables are uncertain. This fact teaches us the following truth: if you put a plate on a table, this plate will fall on the floor. Another rule proclaims another truth that we need for our life and daily obligations: this plate will be smashed by the floor to smithereens. So many films nowadays involve everyone and everything being blown or smashed to smithereens. No wonder – there are no other solutions to our problems. If we decide to keep things as they are, they will bury us, sooner or later. They will just dig a hole in the earth and put us into it. We readily admit that they can dig a hole without appealing for help to anyone and anything. But what about our burial, the very process thanks to which we shall find ourselves under the earth? Our bodies are unwieldy. Of course it is not true that all of us dreamt of becoming ballet dancers. A young lady speaks about this dream to her mother, and they both go to an establishment where they turn your bodies into swans and other birds or animals. A man comes up to this young lady, endeavours to lift her, and says to everybody present, 'She's too heavy for our profession and vocation.' The multiplicity of human kind, of its members, is well-known. So there might be several people – some of them might be renowned specialists – who will lift this young lady up, saying, 'She's as light as a feather.' But this feather grows and three or four years later no one can lift her, with the exception of world champions. And we cannot rely on them during a performance of *Swan Lake* and other masterpieces of our repertoire. Well, you ring up a weightlifter and ask him to come to your theatre. He walks towards the stage, lifts one ballerina, two ballerinas, and they fly from the stage towards the wings. All right, but the weightlifter is supposed to dance the part of some evil doer or other. It is not enough to lift these ballerinas and let them fly or fall or fail, in accordance with the circumstances or the libretto. You have to dance and provoke a wave of enthusiasm in the audience, which is usually expressed through interminable applause. The uncertainty of the evildoer's dance becomes a certainty, and now you are allowed to attend a wonderful performance of a renowned ballet; of *Swan Lake*, on this particular occasion. What next? This 'next' spoils the fun because you encounter it at the moment when you leave the theatre and submit your body to the onslaught of the snow, for instance. Your steps are uncertain: you glide, slide and the uncertainty of your walk is certified by the certainty of your fall. And then

you explain to your rescuer, 'When I was little I used to like sliding on the polished floor in my socks. Now the result of this exercise is slightly different.' 'But you're not on a polished floor,' explains your rescuer. 'Nor are you in your socks. Incidentally, even if you'd worn your socks, the result would have been exactly the same.' 'This is not certain,' you answer, eager as you are to prove you are still young and consequently can wear socks and slide on polished floors. And on the snow. So you take your shoes off and begin to slide on the snow in front of a row of vicious spectators who await your fall with avidity and perversity.

'A far nobler foundation might have been laid for the knowledge of himself in some evidences of a creation of his own.'

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At some point of your life you realise that you do not do anything yourself, that everything is always done for you, even if you think that you do it yourself. Your fingers move and create some insignificant thing you cannot even use in your games unless you just fling it from one side of the room towards the other. You do not fly on these occasions because it is not your own body you fling or propel towards some glory or other. If you propel something or yourself, the word 'glory' is always about to crop up and decorate your achievement, if any. Otherwise, you obey your elders who show you the way, and habitually it is one way they show. And if you ask them, 'Is there any other way, pray?' They answer, 'There's a multitude of ways, but you're unable to follow all of them. If you do, going against our orders, the numerous parts and members of your body will be scattered around the world; as a result of this operation. But that is exactly what you wish: your dearest and most intimate desire concerns your visits to various corners of the world where you live until further notice. Actually you are afraid of this further notice – not only because it is associated in your obstinate mind with death. It is just the end of something to which you are attached so indissolubly that death might ensue, as a result of your separation. After all, it is not for nothing that death makes its appearance in the middle of your interior monologue. Does he (death) do it on his own? Or is it your own initiative? If you say, 'Yes, Mother, I must admit that it was done on my own initiative,' they lock you up immediately, without even consulting the nearest psychiatrist. And this is done for the sake of your longevity and unquestionable happiness. And if you begin to question your felicity, they lock you up once more, for they are afraid you might commit suicide. As soon as you begin to doubt your everlasting felicity, they put a straitjacket on your limbs; on *all* your limbs, mind you. Do you enrich your knowledge of yourself through these straitjackets and keys? Certainly not. Of course your knowledge of prison cells – or do they call it a 'lunatic asylum'? – is vast; and enviable to some extent. But does it coincide with your knowledge of yourself? What else do you know in the world? You know your hands or rather the handcuffs they put on them. You know the grill on which they will cook your body, sooner or later. You opt for 'later', and they call it a 'wise decision'. The way our life takes a liking to some words or idioms is amazing. Unexpectedly, on the spur of the moment, you think of the word 'grill' which has nothing to do with the conversation you are engaged in. Nor is it in any way linked to your interior monologues. But the word stays as if it felt at home in your substance, in your life, in your agenda. For no reason at all they grill you either at some police station or at home. After being grilled by the police for two days, you sign a confession. What kind of confession? This is your creation, and you admit it wholeheartedly. But what is it about? About a woman you raped apparently the day before yesterday. You remember neither the day nor yesterday. Of course they say to

you that you were drunk. And you sign yet another confession in which you speak about two bottles of whisky. Meanwhile your parents grill you about where you have been. You say you were with some friends, but you do not mention the rape and the visit to the police station. Your lie is a creation of your own. You are a creator, after all, so you have every reason to be proud of yourself. But you are not, not at all. And this is also a creation of your own. You are displeased with yourself, to put it mildly. You do put it mildly, and this is also a creation of yourself.

‘Those very professors of wisdom, from whose genius every heresy derives its spirit, called the said unworthy elements divine.’

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Wisdom is the mother of heresy, as someone put it. Of course it is enough to read the Good Book to understand what this is all about. And you have no need to add anything to the divine account: it is all the more unnecessary since any addition to what is justly called the divine wisdom can and should be regarded as a heresy. You have your path dictated by the wisdom of the Scriptures, and there are no other paths, even if you have the feeling that some little girl is following another path which, in her opinion, leads her to her mother’s house. Is that what you envisage, when reflecting upon the perspective of your life? Do you need this fatal encounter with a wolf, the wolf, the wolf from the same tale? What would you tell him? Your grandmother died a long time ago, and the wolf is quite aware of the fact. It is all the more natural, logical and understandable since it is him, this very wolf, who accompanied your grandmother’s coffin to the cemetery. Why? What for? For the sake of the same fairy tale – to ensure its completeness, plenitude and harmony. Well, the path you are following – and the wolf’s presence is really irrelevant – leads you to elements; for the simple reason that there is nothing else in the world – only, elements, elements, elements. Whatever you see around you is part of these elements, of Mendeleev, of his chart or whatever it is called. Well, apparently all these elements are unworthy of your attention, and even your body, which is an inferior part of your divine constitution, should not pay too many respects to these elements; for instance, to water. Of course you are keen on beaches, on your meetings with waves and so on. But the water you use as you endeavour to send your feelings, sensations and pleasures into transports should not be overestimated; otherwise heresies will once again be around the corner. In short, you should not call water divine; nor do beaches deserve this nomination, definition and sphere. And when you lie down on a mattress, in expectation of the same caress of waves and seas, you should not murmur, your eyes half-closed, ‘Divine, divine,’ for the simple reason that this is not divine, whatever you say or think or feel. This is not divine at all. You enumerate all these components of your delights and logically conclude they have nothing in common with the Almighty in Whose image; and so on, and so forth. And yet I would not say ‘no’, if you went on with your speech, saying ‘we were created’. Allow me a simple, straightforward question, ‘Were you created in the image of water?’ Of course your body mainly consists of water, but that does not mean you were created in water’s image. Were you created in the image of a beach? It is true that, from time to time, someone lies down on your body and spends some time on its hospitable surface. But images are different from the situation in which you become involved. This process is not identical to what is described by the verb ‘evolve’. You evolve into your imagination – that is a possible combination of words. And they express the idea I am trying to promote and make accessible. You may say something with an airy wave of your right or left hand, but that does

not mean you were created in the image of the air; once upon a time. You do not fly from one room to another, creating a draught from which many people are sure to suffer. You often cause a lot of suffering, in various situations, but these sufferings have nothing to do with draughts. Were you created in the image of the Earth? Of course you say, 'Our Mother Earth,' especially if you are Russian. You are even used to kissing this mother of yours whenever you return to her bosom. (The Russian soil.) But you are not created in her image either: not every child looks like his or her mother. Sometimes the same child looks like his or her father or aunt or neighbour. Of course the Earth is divine; at least to some extent. But your neighbour is not, even if you respect him and share some of your meals with him. But heresies do not rest on their laurels. They take advantage of your neighbour – to whom they erect a statue – and your naivety. These unworthy heresies speak to you and say, 'Your neighbour is a god in his own right, and you should venerate him and his destiny and destination.' Some animals are promoted as well: they become idols. But your neighbour takes your place in your bed, turning into your wife's husband; if only a temporary husband. He makes love to her not only during your holidays and your logical absences – you are sent to various cities where you meet your company's partners – but also under your very eyes. You are at home and your plans do not deviate from their routine. You intend to watch TV, drink some cognac and go to sleep in your wife's company. But these projects fall through because your wife is no longer your wife, to tell the truth; and you are supposed to tell the truth, whenever it is possible, feasible and advisable. And it is always advisable, as I have just pointed out. Your neighbour sits in front of the same television set, and his back is so enormous you cannot see anything of what is shown on your television screen. Actually, one wonders if it is still *your* television set we are talking about. Then your wife brings in a bottle of cognac. The bottle is destined for your consumption – your wife drinks only champagne – but your neighbour opens it and, without waiting for a glass, drinks half of it – under your very eyes, as usual. What a pity: everything happens under your very eyes. Sometimes you regret the very fact of having within your range of possibilities two eyes which accomplish their duties tolerably well. So you have no alternative but to watch your neighbour's actions. Of course you can shut your eyes, but your neighbour is still within what is called 'our hearing distance'. And in his opinion you should not close your eyes in your guests' presence, which might mean they are not welcome, and their speeches are boring. So you never close your eyes in your neighbour's presence. You see everything, with the exception of what happens on your television screen. You sleep near your bed on which your neighbour disports himself. You are supposed to protect your neighbour's and his companion's peace during their sleep because, according to some nasty rumours, there are mice in your room, all over your house. And you have no cat; no one really takes care of these mice. Well, armed with a walking stick, you can do it on your own. So, before going to bed or rather to floor, to the tiny area of floor designated for your nocturnal rest, you pick up someone's walking stick – apparently it belongs to your neighbour's grandfather – and put it by your side. And if a mouse runs towards the bed – it never happens, to tell the truth – you brandish this walking stick, and the mouse retreats, forsakes the battlefield. In this way you spend your life utterly spoiled, poisoned by heresies and their authors. It is true they do not go so far as to turn all these mice into idols, but you are not happy, far from it. What would make you happy? Probably the utter absence of heresies. Your neighbour is still your neighbour, and you do not try to tarnish his reputation, turning him into an unworthy element. But no one calls him divine either and so you are not duty bound to yield to him every time he comes, letting him use your wife in your own bed. You do not allow him to recite the Kama Sutra in your wife's presence. And your bed is not divine either: when you make yourself comfortable in it, you remind your

wife that it is just an instrument of sleep, nothing more. So her caresses do not work, frankly speaking, and once again you say to yourself that the expression 'to no avail' is one of the leitmotifs of your life.

'And if so many shall miss salvation, it will not be with goodness, but with malignity, that the greater perfection will lie.'

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Again these notions are there, and we have to face them, to decipher their meanings, their multiples meanings, and to live with them, in the final analysis. The analysis is not final, and everybody is aware of this pathetic truth. What do you analyse? Your own salvation? You have just had a cup of tea which you still enjoy – the aftertaste persists, although it is just a cup of tea and not a glass of wine you are dealing with. Sometimes every minute of life becomes a sort of blessing in disguise. You are blessed continuously, as W. B. Yeats used to say. You go South, you are blessed. (A lot of beaches, of half-naked bodies.) You go West and you are blessed automatically, by many centuries of happiness. You dig up a lot of gold and finally buy the watch you have been dreaming about for years and years. What could surpass such happiness, the situation in the middle of which you appear in a wonderful suit, with a tie you bought for a million dollars? And what if you miss this kind of salvation? What if you do not go West at the right moment, with an appropriate bag? What if you succumb to the savagery of mosquitoes? What if you get entangled in an unknown plant, while walking through a bog? Your salvation is right here, but you may miss it all the same, otherwise the verb 'to miss' would not pester our dictionaries. And our lives, into the bargain. (So many things happen 'into the bargain'. As if the main content of our life were not sufficient, sufficiently tragic.) So you are blessed; all right, all right, all right. But what can you do with this blessing? Suppose you accept this truth, this conclusion, straightaway. You take it for granted. You are granted this salvation and accordingly, logically, you take it for granted. Then you look at your fingers and ask yourself this ritual question, 'Are they blessed?' If they are, you can play a Beethoven sonata in a big hall, in a small hall – somewhere, at some point in time and space. But you cannot play the piano, so you are not blessed. At least your fingers are not – even if you can handle nails and hammers and needles. (Into the bargain.) Well, your fingers are not blessed. But what about your legs? You run sometimes, but you are supposed to prove your capacities, your blessedness in stadiums, during the Olympic Games. But you are not selected – neither for the Olympic Games nor even for the games that take place in your area, in your small town or village. There are only four huts in your village, and they – they are always there, these they – choose the other representatives of your village: three young men. All right. You admit you have lost yet another battle in your life. But is this battle really important? You should leave your village and settle in a big city, in one of the world's capitals. Then you will make an effort and become a world-famous scientist or artist. They will applaud you everywhere, and even the inhabitants of your native village will join this universal acclaim. Of course no one will hear their applause, but never mind – you shall be informed about this belated victory. And this victory will resound in your heart much more than the acclaim offered to you by the world, by the rest of the world. But is this really the salvation we are talking about? Of course this big, definitive salvation is made up of a series of small salvations which also count in one's life – if only because they are part and parcel of the Big Salvation. So you should not neglect any manifestation of the admiration necessarily contained in the Big Salvation. If a passer-by,

someone you notice in the street – you just cast a glance and notice somebody – suddenly comes to a standstill, looks at you and begins to applaud, you are not supposed to walk by without expressing your gratitude for this ‘piece of recognition’. You ought to stop in turn, bow to your admirer and say, ‘I’m thankful to you for your understanding of my ways, of my style which is rather intricate. Actually, my style isn’t accessible to everybody. It’s rather beyond their ken. You know who I have in mind, don’t you?’ Salvation can be understood too directly, too literally. You hesitate, your body is on the point of collapsing and someone gives you a helping hand. But styles are different. If someone – not necessarily the same someone – stops and admires your style, you can launch a discussion devoted to your style, its intricacies and your affinities with Plato, Fénelon and Giordano Bruno. We recall Socrates whose dissatisfaction with a number of salvations propounded at the beginning of a dialogue and also somewhere in the middle are rejected for the sake of another perfection, a far greater, far more luminous perfection. And Socrates destroys his opponents with malignity: you had better not try and persuade him that everyone has his own truth, that life is a multiplication table at the root of which there lies a multitude of pleasures. Let us submit to our analysis the following sentence, ‘The top of the tree had been cut off to encourage it to branch out lower down.’ This sentence seems to expose the problem we are struggling with because the salvation represented by the tree is tampered with for the sake of the lower part of the construction. Of course this procedure has nothing to do with revolutionaries, with all those who speak about the lower classes, about workmen who do not eat enough because three sandwiches per day cannot nourish their bodies which are exhausted in the course of the day. They excavate, turn wheels, brandish hammers, and do other jobs that require heavier, more substantial nourishment. The whole picture suggests another explanation. There is a substance that reigns over branches, twigs and other components of the tree. Actually the substance is the tree itself, and it cares only about its own shape, harmony and luminosity. If the light does not penetrate some of its corners, the tree eliminates the element which, inspired by their spontaneous growth, prevents the light from nourishing the intellect of the tree. In short, the tree does not care about the lower rungs of society, although it does not belong to the famous group of vicious capitalists. It simply goes from one perfection to another either through dialectical methods or with the aid of its intuition. Yes, any refusal, any dialectical refusal which may occur on our way to a greater perfection may be regarded as a malignant procedure, but it is just a part of the process. And the aim justifies the means. You look at the tree; you measure its various stages which invariably lead to greater perfection. Of course there are critics who say, ‘Your tree belongs to a second-rate race of trees. It seems to grow more and more beautiful, but actually it is a bush, nothing else. If you leave it alone, it’ll become a mere bush, next summer at the latest. Do you need an ugly bush in your garden?’ But someone else is likely to interrupt the offender, cutting in on his malignant speech, ‘I don’t think the master and owner of the garden is under any illusions about this tree – he’s got the measure of it.’ But have you got the measure of yourself? It is relatively easy to tamper with trees and bushes, especially if you are armed with special instruments; with a pair of gigantic scissors, for instance. But what to do with yourself, your character, your temperament, your unwieldy nature that you cannot restrain, for all your efforts and inner commitment? Have a look at yourself. You rush in, your face red and sweaty and your hat awry. But your colleague says to other colleagues of yours, ‘Our colleague is going through the middle, malignant stage in his search for a greater perfection.’ But how to reach this perfection under the circumstances? To correct the position of your hat? To mop your brow? To paint your face with the assistance of more tranquil, serene colours? You just stay at home, and your greater perfection is celebrated by your mirrors and other items of your furniture. Even if no human

being ever pays you a visit, you continue to explore the road of your life, and the numerous trees bow to you. Their leaves murmur at your approach as if to remind you of Wagner.

‘The shamelessness of an age, which ought to have been reverent, had to be avenged.’

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Why should an age, any age, be reverent? And what about the diseases we suffer from on a regular basis? We might affirm, however, that the basis is not regular, given that today we can walk around our room without stumbling and falling every single minute. All right. But if you go out, you trip over a twig and collapse like a mountain; at least you think you collapse like a mountain and rise like Hercules. You collapse, rise, collapse, rise. A distant observer is in two minds about what is going on over there, on the spot where you continue your gymnastics. ‘Is it a mountain?’ he asks himself. ‘Is he Hercules? Or is he just the last Olympic champion, a weightlifter, the heaviest weightlifter in our history?’ One might reach the following conclusion, ‘This man is shameless, and he casts a shadow over his age. Instead of devoting his time to the same gymnastics at home, he usurps our streets and diverts our attention from our duties and daily labours. Why should we make up our minds as to his physical state, his identity? What do we care about his affinities with mountains and Hercules? Perhaps he is one of the latter’s sons. So what? Could he take care of our roof which is on the point of detaching itself from the rest of our house? And what about the house itself? Isn’t it on the point of leaving its roots unattended and moving abroad to settle somewhere, in some unknown city that you can find neither on maps nor in your memory? Let us define what is called ‘shameless behaviour’. If you are shameful, you often go red in the face. You hide your face, your features and even your chest in some corner or other. But if you are shameless, you are cheeky. This means that your cheeks are never red; and if they are, this redness should be attributed to the state of your health, to its perfection, not to your timidity, shyness and so on. If you are shameless, you never stand in corners. And if someone questions you on the subject, you say, ‘I’m guiltless and pure. Why should I stand in corners? Only potential or actual criminals stand in corners or spend their lives in prison cells. We have nothing to do with either.’ And you clench your fists – it is one of the most shameless gestures in our human world – and begin to threaten Creation. You believe in your utter superiority, and a superior man – according to you – is not preoccupied by the destiny of a simple, single man. He cares only about the whole of humanity. So if he clenches his fists, raises them and brings them down, he thereby destroys all of humankind – as if he were a hydrogen bomb. There are people who think in terms of such bombs because they have no other terms within their range, their field of vision. They see a bomb and think they should use it immediately, otherwise it might be dropped on their own house or houses, on their cars and even on their wives. These bombs can also destroy their dinner tables with whatever was put on them only ten minutes ago. Power, power, power. Their lips continue to sculpt this word; or this world. Their hands are always prepared for attacks, onslaughts, invasions. And poison; we always forget poison. We often think in terms of bombs because it is easier to think along these lines. Bombs can be seen and even admired: there are many admirers of bombs in our midst. You see a bomb, touch it, try to lift it and realise you cannot without a crane. So you dial the number at the end of which – at the end of that line, if you prefer – there are several cranes you can borrow or buy. Why should you buy a crane? What if you decide to move to another city? You buy a crane and your house is transported by this crane to the opposite side of the world. But is this new world shameless or not? Is it revered?

It is true that the bomb you transport using the crane seems to suggest that the world to which you direct your attention and steps should be punished, avenged and utterly destroyed. I seem to recall a politician who used to say, 'It's better to kill everybody: if one man remains in our neighbourhood, sooner or later he'll kill us.' The population of our globe continues to enjoy itself. If you tell everybody the truth, you run the risk of hurting human feelings. Well, you have no choice, do you? So you tell the truth, 'You'll be destroyed for the sake of one person.' The feelings of the population under discussion are hurt almost irremediably. Yet you do your best to redeem whatever should be redeemed. And we know by heart what should be redeemed. (Almost everything, I'm afraid.) So some members of this population begin to ask useless, ridiculous questions. And then they come up with statements such as, 'But I promise not to harm the person you're talking about. I'll never kill him, I promise. So it's pointless to deprive me of my poor life.' 'If your life is poor,' says some ombudsman or other, 'there's no point in keeping it.' 'But I'm reverent,' says the first man. 'Nevertheless, according to the Scriptures, our leader should be avenged,' says the ombudsman. You attend a few assassinations. And over and over again you hear this verdict, 'Our leader should be avenged.' And then you see all these leaders together; a group of leaders, a community of leaders. They salute the crowd, walk towards a mountain and soon appear on its top.

'There is no more bitter thing, than to endure the very suffering which you have inflicted upon others.'

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You are to be careful about what you do in the presence of others; especially if you touch them either physically or psychologically. From this point of view, it is better to caress the whole world. As soon as you see a human creature – you do not care about animals who are not created in the image of God – you rush towards him or her and begin to caress them. You can even caress *it*, while you are at it. Why? Just in case, just in case. At times, these *its* can become a real nuisance. They turn into a wasp and you suffer from stings and bites or whatever they call it. You call it a 'bloody nuisance'. You call it names, in other words, and you even resort to other words, a series of otherworldly words to describe the dire straits in which you found yourself. Your bitter experience teaches you the following truth: it is better not to describe anything, for any description doubles or triples the pains you experience. It is as if you certified whatever happens to you. Did it happen? Did it really happen? And then you describe the experience, making it doubly sure, and the pain becomes intolerable. Every letter stings you; every word turns into a wasp. You have a world of wasps on a page that is looking at you as if to ask, 'Any more wasps, Your Excellency?' Well, you have just inflicted a lot of pain on a sheet of paper which is not as insensitive as it might appear. It is not really dead, if only on account of the letters and words which are always alive. All right – you resolve not to blacken sheets of paper or any other material on which you can immortalise your thoughts, pain and what not – to no avail. You decide to avail yourself of this and that, to open your life and chest, to let them receive the gifts of the world. No longer do you inflict any pain on the objects you put in your room, in your life, all along your walks, the streets which you must know by heart unless your memory begins to succumb to all the diseases we do not know by heart because these diseases destroy their own names; in your memory, but not in your life, alas. You caress your computer, the cups of tea you consume, anxious to increase the number of delights of which your life is justly proud. But what about the cups into which you pour your morning or evening tea? Don't you think they suffer upon receiving all these drops, herbs and so on? Of course you are ready to suffer the same torture: you drink this tea and enjoy it. We are used to seeing and

feeling tortures everywhere. As for the tea about which I have just said a few words, it may be regarded as a negative substance. Its colours are not neutral, and it smells of something. All these smells are certainly bad for your health because only neutrality guarantees your health, strength and eternity. Poisons are everywhere; at least we should fear their presence. Neutrality is the keyword: only if we neither feel nor smell anything can we be ensured of our safety. Any deviation from this rule is harmful; at least some doctors affirm that, certifying this truth on many occasions. And we are inclined to believe these doctors and mistrust all the others. Suppose you touch a wall. You have no idea what this wall experiences upon receiving your touch. You think you caress it. As a matter of fact, the wall is persuaded that someone is beating it, mishandling it. 'Why do you maltreat me so obnoxiously?' it shouts, but we do not hear its shouts: generally speaking, our ears are not attuned to shouts, screams and others signs of pain. We just hear a noise, and we do our best to eliminate it from our lives. On the other hand, we can play a Schubert sonata. And we are convinced that this sonata will return to us. We are persuaded that we shall be rewarded for our efforts, for the beauty we bestow upon everything; a sort of blessing, to tell the truth. Instead, we lose consciousness, and when we come back from the dead, we ask someone who has remained by our bed, 'Where am I?' 'You're in your room,' answers the person in question. 'It's not true – Beethoven isn't here.' Then you play Beethoven's *Bagatelles*. You think that a bagatelle cannot really do you any harm; and if it does, it remains a bagatelle. And you can put up with any number of bagatelles. And what about wasps? Aren't they bagatelles in their own right? They sting you and your brother says to you, 'It's just a bagatelle – don't pay any attention to it. It'll disappear of its own accord.' It does not. You wait for the chord of the pain, but nothing comes. Only the pain obstinately persists. After much soul-searching you make up your mind and inflict the same pain on the world. That is why in the paintings which depict the world there are wasps. And even if our eyes are lulled into a false sense of security, we know that the wasps are prepared for battle. And this battle has lasted throughout our lives. Should we inflict this eternity of pain on the landscapes we are surrounded with in museums and galleries? Aren't we wasps in disguise? Is our shirt a disguise? And then you begin to cry. You shout these words, 'I'm no wasp. I've never caused suffering. I've never raped anybody. I've never poisoned my lovers. I've never slapped their faces. I've never, I've never. There is no more bitter thing, than to endure the sufferings you have not inflicted upon others.'

‘For no honour is to be attributed to the image of anything which is itself unworthy of honour.’

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An image does not stand alone. It is reflected in the eyes and consequently in the brains of those who are worthy of contemplating this image and drawing their conclusions from what they see, enjoy and remember, if only during a short period of time. The image itself is either honourable or dishonourable. Sometimes it is something in between: neither honourable nor dishonourable. Once again we have to borrow the notion of ‘neuter’ which should be avoided for the simple reason that life is not neutral. It is ‘either’ ‘or’. You are born and lie by your mother’s side in some bed or other. You are not in between, otherwise your birth might turn out to be defective in some way or other. ‘Is he really born?’ asks a nurse. ‘Not quite,’ answers a doctor. ‘All right, let us leave him in this condition,’ the doctor goes on. ‘We’ll see what happens. And something *will* happen sooner or later.’ Well, sometimes nothing happens, and this is probably the best solution to all our problems. The point is, however, that there are no problems to speak of; in this case. Anyway, whatever can be said on the subject, this image – a human being whose birth is so indignantly interrupted – does not seem to be worthy of honour. You honour the birth of a being the roots of whom extend as far as the Creator of Everything and Everybody. And if these roots just hang in the air, you abandon them and the very idea of bestowing upon them some honour or other. You say to those who are in favour of attributing this honour to these roots, half-roots, abortive roots: ‘Well, you’re welcome to complete this image, these roots. If you succeed, we’ll honour it in some way or other.’ But you are really worried about the accomplishment of your idea because it is not worth your while to make an effort for the sake of something dishonourable, for something absent from the list of honours available to the Great Jury. You work, you sacrifice your energy and time for the sake of some roots which are neither roots nor anything else. It is just something that hangs in front of your eyes, and you are tempted to take a pair of scissors and cut this ignoble thing in two or three. First, you cut it in two; then you pick up the half you find on the floor and cut it in two too. That is how you deal with dishonourable, despicable things. And what about the chair you touch now and then? Actually, you brush against it as you go to the kitchen. And the kitchen itself? Is it worthy of your attention, let alone of the honour you could bestow upon it, if eager to do so for the sake of your house, of its financial value? But you have no intention of selling your house, so you begin to demolish it: it is not worthy of any honour you can think of. It does not even deserve its own sale. Suddenly you realise you are in the company of images which are unworthy of sales, of your attention, of your hands. You brush against them unwillingly, but now you realise they are not worthy of your body which loses a certain amount of energy when brushing against these unworthy things. Without further ado, you set fire to them. But is the fire you started worthy of any honour, however miniscule, insignificant and ludicrous? All right – you say to yourself that the honour you are thinking about is tiny, teeny-weeny – nothing to write home about. Well, you do not write anything, not even a short letter addressed to your former mistress to whom you might say another ‘farewell’. You might say a multitude of farewells, but you do nothing of the kind: let them perish or live on in accordance with their wishes, talents and fortunes. You think that the image of farewell you are likely to create is not worthy of your ambitions. What are your ambitions? You would like to create an honourable, dignified, magnificent farewell. A farewell to what? To love, among other things. I have already touched upon some former mistresses who can prosper and lead a healthy life without any farewell. We try to avoid the situations in which we become – almost automatically – a laughing stock. Usually they add, ‘Of humanity.’ This is slightly

overdone; just another exaggeration, to be frank and logical. Humanity does not care about you unless you are Alain Delon. You are not – after his death, at least – and so humanity does not care about you. But if you become a laughing stock, some members of this humanity suddenly pay attention to your frolics, to your ridiculousness, and laugh heartily; or mercilessly, given the context I am depicting for some obscure reason. To what do you attribute honour in this situation? To your understanding of what has just happened. Actually this state of things is still on the agenda: you are still the laughing stock which unleashed this course of events. The course of these events led to the general laughter we referred to with the words ‘laughing stock’. We continue to laugh, although the situation is no longer valid, having disappeared from the agenda. You look for it almost everywhere: laughing heartily does you a lot of good. (I wrote: a lot of god. A lot of pagan gods, probably. You cannot say, ‘A lot of the Almighty.’) Laughing itself is not honourable – this thought is about to cross your mind, but you stop it in the nick of time. What is honourable? Tears? Melancholy? You look at a photograph of yourself which shows neither tears nor smiles. And you smile because your photograph is nothing. It is not even neutral. It is nothing and there is no point in flinging it out of the window. How could you disappear without leaving any trace, however miniscule or ludicrous? The thought is dishonourable. You look at the word ‘dishonourable’. You write it again and again. Then you start writing nonsense – just letters and syllables that do not add up to anything intelligible. Then you climb a tree and find yourself on the roof of your own house. The landscape you look at is honourable; your roof is honourable too. The effort you have just made is honourable. The insect crawling under your feet is honourable. Iago is honourable. Iago speaks and inveigles Rodrigo into believing that Cassio is in love with Desdemona. They are all honourable because the image is honourable, otherwise the play would not be performed so often; everywhere. The catharsis is also honourable. The image of a gondola is floating at the end of the world.

THERTULLIAN

‘Why then have you shewn hate to them that love you, deprived them of your kindly care, and driven them all to weeping and lamentation by putting your own advantage before the service of others?’

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Because you always put your own life before whatever those others wish and achieve at all costs. And these costs are directly connected to your own benefits – to my benefits, if you prefer. They knock at my door in the middle of the night, asking for a sandwich or something of the kind, which is really unbearable, given that I am in the middle of my meditation leading my mind to the core of the problem I have been engrossed in for many years; for many centuries, considering the multitude of my lives. Yes, this problem is still on my writing desk, and I continue to solve it by means which are not entirely reliable – I am quite aware of that. But of what can I be aware, given that I am just a modest servant of Creation? The problem I am overwhelmed by concerns our knowledge of the cosmos of which we have no idea. First, we are supposed to get this idea, and I think I have reached this stage of my investigations. I think that the cosmos exists in its own right, although I am not quite sure it is in its own right. There are other rights, and one of these rights is linked to my own existence. Am I in my own right? I think I am in my right mind, and I possess this right and mind firmly, otherwise I would not launch my attack on the intricacy of the world. Our brothers, or most of them, just sit in their corners and think as follows, ‘This corner is quite comfortable, and I’m happy here, quite happy. And yet I don’t have a sufficient number of pastries for my meals. Their endings lack delicacy and the finishing touch.’ Is it the right moment for such topics? I would not call these pastries a ‘current problem with which we struggle daily and nightly’. We do not *struggle* with it. Either we have these pastries or we do not. I ask for them regularly, by writing, and so I have no problems in this domain, which spares me a lot of time for other domains and enigmas. The point is I am disturbed by my brothers whose appetites grow after midnight. They knock at my door and ask for the leftovers of my meal, for my pastries, for some crumbs. At least that is the word they use: ‘Just a few crumbs, please! We couldn’t give a damn about the mystery of the cosmos. Let it remain mysterious. It has every right to remain what it is, considering that we live in a democratic state. But in this state, within its borders, everyone is entitled to a piece of chocolate and the pastries you order for your dinner and even for your lunch. Please, let us partake of these succulent titbits. Aren’t we exquisite? Aren’t we impressively polite? Please, please, please!’ My meditation is in the middle of its course, but instead of writing down my conclusions – my half-conclusions, I must admit – I adorn my account with the words: ‘Pastries, nuts, strawberries, tiramisu.’ At some point, I begin to decipher these words or rather their meaning. I ask myself if they have something to do with the enigmas I ponder over. In English you say, ‘A second bite of the cherry.’ The Russians set this cherry on the top of a cake. Perhaps others resort to the same procedure to signify the incompleteness of cake at the summit of which you contemplate the splendour of a cherry, one exceptional cherry. I wonder if my search for Truth could not be shortened by this cherry, by its splendour and unique, unparalleled taste. A lot depends on it, on our capacity to distinguish between the taste of a cherry and that of a strawberry. The Russians can talk for hours on end, and at the end of their speech they add almost proudly, ‘And the cherry you see on the top of the cake is –’ And they make another speech. I am exhausted by their speeches, by their cakes and cherries. Why can’t I hate them from the bottom of my heart, instead of thanking them, thanking them, bowing to them? Yes, I deprive them of my kindly care because they do not deserve it. I also deprive them of my unkindly care: I deprive them of

everything and everybody. I even deprive them of cherries; and yet, at the end of yet another speech, they talk about another top, another cake, another cherry. And they launch into a verbal attack on my handling of the finances. What finances? Of course you are supposed to deny whatever is related to finances. You work just for honour, your own honour, and also for the honour of your company, especially if you live and work in Japan. I have no idea where I live and work. I am a man of the universe, which does not mean I understand everybody. Often, when talking to others, I realise I misunderstand their words, deeds and sentiments. They scream in my presence, accusing me of an utter lack of empathy. ‘You paid no attention to our tears, lamentations and the complaints we voiced from behind the door. Then we succeeded in gaining access to your ears. This access is direct, immediate, but you still don’t hear us, in spite of our proximity, of our immediate presence. We say to you, “We’re utterly unhappy. Please, make us happy, if only for the sake of our relatives who suffer deeply because of our unhappiness.” Incidentally, we wouldn’t say “no”, if you made us happy as well, while you are at it. At what? At happiness, generally speaking. Don’t you realise that happiness is the only aim of every member of humankind? Even revolutionaries don’t deny their dependence on happiness, although their happiness often depends on assassinations, on the disappearance of such and such a tsar. We disapprove of their actions and thoughts. We just ask you to give us enough money for the rest of our miserable lives. Please, turn these lives into a golden mass of happiness. Don’t you understand what we’re talking about? Is it so hard to understand the word “gold”? We admit that our talk of happiness may turn out to be too complicated for your brain and general feelings. You think only about yourself, and as you have no family, your thoughts never deviate from their only object – yourself.’ They continue to make speeches, and you lose track of their thoughts, intentions and lamentations, strange as it may appear. Generally speaking, you never lose track of people’s lamentations because they murmur them into your ears. They execute their tunes and harmonies on your writing desks and dinner tables. And also on your walls, believe it or not. Your walls crumble, your ears ache, but you should not forget your duty which reminds you of your next of kin, of the whole of humanity, of your brothers, sisters and nephews. Someone knocks on your door repeatedly, and your door begins to crumble as if to follow the example of your wall. Is it really an example one has to follow at all costs? What about you? Do you have to crumble as well? To follow the general, cosmic trend? All right, you crumble a little bit, and then you address your audience, ‘Have you seen my sacrifice? Don’t you realise to what extent I love you all? Can’t you feel my bear hug?’ They applaud and say, ‘You’re magnificent, but you should go on crumbling, otherwise your sacrifice won’t achieve the result we have expected for years and years.’ You come up to the crowd’s expectations and soon you show them one third of your right arm. And your left arm has already disappeared, and you can only *recall* its agility and reliability. Yes, you used to rely on your right arm more often than on its left counterpart. Consequently and logically, no one has ever said, ‘Look at this left-handed individual.’ You are still an individual, a person, a man, but your right arm must be somewhere else, in some rubbish bin or other. Of course you can hope that the spectators have not dealt with it so mercilessly, not to say pathologically. They all worship human beings and so cannot behave carelessly in regard to their members, to the parts of their bodies. They witness the process during which an arm crumbles and turns into a cloud of dust. But instead of removing this dust with a vacuum cleaner, they collect it and put these beautiful remains of your arm in a box which may be exhibited in your personal museum; or rather in our common museum of humanity. You still have your legs: you have not yet sacrificed them for the overall happiness of humankind, which would have been done by any patriot, any sincere admirer of human skills and superiority. It is true that you do not quite understand why you

have to let your arm vanish into thin air – just for the heck of it; for the fun of it. But they explain to you that the matter stands differently in this particular case. There is no heck of it, no fun, in other words. The happiness of humankind is at stake. From now on it is no more Mr Nice Guy. But you refuse to be consoled in this fashion. You open your mouth and voice your lamentation, ‘Where’s my right arm? Could you please tell me where it is? I’m prepared to go to the end of the world for the sake of its uniqueness and adroitness. I’ll never find an equivalent of this arm of mine. No arm in the world can compete with it. Well, I must admit this competition is a thing of the past.’ Meanwhile humanity goes on speaking about the future.

‘I have gladly received the accusation, although I have no difficulty in disproving the indictment.’

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Sometimes we come to hate immobility as such. ‘Get a move on’ becomes our motto; and yet it is better – and this is the general rule – to stay still, to keep the same position, instead of shifting ground all the time in search of some ideal solution to every problem one is likely to face. All this is intricate, partly incomprehensible, and we must admit that this intricacy begins at the moment when your members, your body and all its cells begin to move, enticing you into entering another world, another network of relationships and thoughts. The jumble of ideas and sensations results in your loss of yourself, and you say to yourself that you are no longer yourself. What you actually need is something rudimentary, and there is nothing simpler than an accusation, even if it is not simple, understandable and obvious. You are accused, and every accusation, however insignificant and nonsensical, may lead to your imprisonment and death. Life unfolds or floats somewhere, and suddenly you hit an obstacle, an opinion that contradicts all your ideals and truths. You have a number of truths within your field of action, but now these truths are under attack, and you must defend them at the risk of losing not only your identity, but also your nerves and tendons – a huge part of your body. But you need this intellectual stimulation which usually prevents you from becoming a mere stone. They call it ‘stagnation’, but you can also call it a ‘mere stone’, which means that the stone you touch upon – you can also touch it, if you wish – is not precious. It is so worthless you cannot even sell it for a few kopecks. Forget about pounds and dollars! Well, you forget about them, but the stone is still with you. Slowly but surely it turns into a sort of symbol – the symbol of your life, if you please! And then one of the accusations under discussion comes to the fore, and you turn into a rolling stone. You turn, turn, turn, and all this reminds me of a film where Buster Keaton escapes from a number of rolling stones or rather boulders. And all these stones are under the influence of accusations. If people say, ‘I agree with you entirely,’ you feel no urge to budge. Nor do you feel an overwhelming urge to tell anybody something important; about your life, for instance. They agree with you, and you have no need to waste your energy on the matter which has been settled without your participation in the process. What process? Accepting this or that matter is a process, and you do not even know what these people agree with, as far as you are concerned. You must have said something in the course of the discussion which, to all intents and purposes, seems to be over. Their intents, their purposes. Frankly speaking, you doubt your own presence within the situation I am trying to describe. You describe it mentally; perhaps, perhaps. You are under the impression that the whole thing is televised and all you have to do is watch television, while smoking your pipe and drinking a glass of champagne. And then you realise that the television coverage of the history of humanity was truncated by a technical fault. And you have no idea what kind of fault is responsible for this failure, for the distorted view

of our history and destiny. Anyway, technical problems are not your pigeon. You cannot affirm that everything runs smoothly; nor are you entitled to assure everybody that some kind of glorious future is in store for our globe and its inhabitants. Suddenly something comes out of the blue – an accusation. You are personally accused of your ingratitude towards the role you play in the comedy of humanity. Once upon a time, your substance or the idea of your being – a platonic idea, to be sure – bestowed upon you the honour called, ‘Being a human being.’ What did you do with this honour? You just listen to what other people say, turning a deaf ear to requests, complaints and so on. But now you face an accusation, and your ear just cannot remain deaf. Go and see a doctor! Your ear’s duty is to listen to the accusation you are supposed to deal with. Well, you have gladly received this accusation. After all, you are not an animal sleeping in his or her den. And it is extremely pleasant to disprove accusations; and other proofs, needless to say. You just say you have nothing to do with the accusation, ‘which is directed against somebody else, against a person I’m not acquainted with. And if I *am* acquainted with this person, I don’t care about his doings. I suppose this person is a man. And if it’s not true, then I’m not acquainted with the substance you’re talking about. Let’s talk about Aristotle, for a change. You always talk about nonentities, about the individuals who live in our run-of-the-mill world. Please, run around your mills to your heart’s content, if you enjoy this kind of pastime. I have many other fish to fry.’ You can also defend yourself like this, ‘You’re wide of the mark, my dear accuser. Before launching any attack upon knowledgeable people, you should read a lot of books of which you’ve never heard, whatever you might say to contradict my statement. You can’t accuse anybody because this state of mind, this status – that of an accuser – requires a lot of skills, a lot of intelligence of which you’re utterly deprived. By whom? By the Almighty, if you must know. But must you know all this? Anyway, it would be of no use to you, this piece of knowledge, given the narrowness of your mind. It’s so narrow you can’t put anything substantial in it. Only unsubstantial, worthless things can inhabit your so-called mind.’ Now you have the feeling that the indictment is completely and brilliantly disproved. Well and good. You just sit down and rest on your laurels for a while. Then you write in your diary, ‘Ever since I’ve been deprived of accusations I have felt numb. Where could I find some more?’ You do not have to look for accusations: they are everywhere. A tree can accuse you of your ability to move around, ‘whereas I’m rooted to the spot, which is a curse. I’d like to see the world, instead of staying here where I have to face the same view throughout the seasons. Of course there are leaves at some point, during this or that period, and then the leaves disappear. But do you think that the essences of these plants disappear as well? They’re always the same, the same boring substances, essences, characters, types. They swing, murmur their speeches and remarks, and this life is very boring, believe me. You don’t? You’re fed up with your travels because flying gets on your nerves, according to your verbal accounts. Some flights arrive too late, others don’t take off at all. Yes, you complain about the flights that don’t fly. I’d give anything to experience a departure within the limits of an airport. In a way we all travel – during storms, hurricanes. We travel to some extent, and this extent is quite different from what you must experience during a real flight. From the sky you can see the surface of the Earth. I suppose you experience the proverbial poetical kinship with the stars. What do *we* experience? I live in a garden, near a house where a solitary man does something I can neither appreciate nor understand. He is rather old, and so I’m unlikely to hear the world-famous dialogues in which the people who love each other indulge from time to time; rather often, I suppose. Sometimes this man casts a glance at me, and I feel his wretchedness, his loneliness. I couldn’t care less about the feelings I experience on such occasions. They’re disgusting, to tell the truth.’ Even the sky glares at us with an air of accusation. What does it endeavour

to imply? I am not sure the sky implies anything with the exception of the obvious truth, 'We are low in everything.' You add any word to the word 'low' and you get the best definition of what we represent within the context of Creation. From this point of view, we had better remain uncreated because you do not habitually judge whatever is uncreated. It is just uncreated and there is no point in discussing it, in defining its value, if any. There are many created things around us, and they are certainly low, from every point of view. With the exception of the sky, of the heavens, which does not mean they are really high. High-spirited perhaps, but that does not mean anything. You have a couple of drinks and everyone says you are in high spirits. So what? You have another couple of drinks and your spirits continue to climb, to rise and jump.

'I cannot bear to say nothing and am afraid of being charged with negligence.'

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There are situations in which, during which, you cannot keep your mouth shut. And yet nothing really happens: nobody asks your opinion, and there is nothing provocative in the situation you have got involved in. Every situation is provocative because you may be caught in it, in the middle of it, unprepared. You cannot prepare your muscles for every situation you can imagine, if given a few seconds to reflect, to assess the problem you are facing now; and probably forever. Suppose you are standing somewhere, and your body has not envisaged a predicament of this kind: your legs are not conceived for such positions and misunderstandings. You can stand for an hour, for two hours. You can even stand upright for three and four hours, if you are in a Russian church and the liturgy you attend has just begun. But you cannot stand for ten hours non-stop, even if somebody sings something about heavenly kingdoms and general happiness. Of course you believe in this final, definitive happiness based on your beliefs, hopes and deep knowledge of the ways of the world. But your legs do not know anything about these heavenly kingdoms. On the other hand, they are aware of the Earth and the forces that operate within this planet, on its surface and even above it, considering how promptly our planes fall, if deprived of their engines and other instruments of salvation and progress. The laws of gravity have their say, and more often than not they have the final say. So you kneel down, although you have no intention of honouring any god, any idol. Sometimes people kneel down in front of pop singers, but there are no pop singers in the neighbourhood, within your surroundings. Somebody might sing a hymn or something along these lines, but your legs do not obey any rules, with the exception of what is called the laws of gravity. If the plane where your body enjoys a glass of champagne loses control over the air and the laws of gravity, you are bound to find yourself in one of the nether kingdoms, even if you aspire to triumph over clouds, stars and the Milky Way. Anyway, whatever can be said on the subject, you might have enough time for your last words; if the circumstances allow it. The plane takes its time and you say a multitude of last words. One might believe you are about to start your new novel, your ultimate masterpiece. Of course this masterpiece may not exceed the length of a haiku, but never mind, never mind. Your plane continues to fall, and even if you do not say or write anything, no one will charge you with negligence. No one will say, 'Why don't you do something to alleviate our suffering? Can't you see how miserable we are? You can, you can. And yet you don't do anything. You don't give us your money, your furniture, and your house is still in the midst of your possessions.' Of course you can say to the other passengers, 'Unfortunately I bequeathed my house to my nephew,' but they are likely to reply as follows, 'Why to your nephew? Don't you have a faithful wife who, for years and years, has cooked

countless delicious meals for your delectation?’ I’m afraid, you will have no time to explain to them that your wife perished in a car accident and that you have no children to take care of. Well, you say something, that’s for sure: you scream, for instance. In such circumstances people often scream as if any sound, with the exception of that from the engines of your plane, could straighten your problem. Actually, you have had many problems in your life. And all these problems used to come *en bloc*. Now you have only one problem, but this problem is so big you cannot find an appropriate definition for it. Your diary is in your suitcase, and the suitcase is lying on your lap. But you are reluctant to add yet another entry to it. ‘Convinced the plane was about to crash, many people were sobbing and in hysterics.’ If you do write these words, you may be charged with light-heartedness. Indeed you might console these people, instead of taking care of your immortality, of your literary heritage. Do you neglect your duty? Of course you are impotent in the domain of aviation or mechanical engineering of any sort. So you cannot replace the pilots, let alone the plane which is defective and suffers from many problems you cannot solve at this particular moment when your thoughts are oriented towards the peril in which the plane, its crew and passengers find themselves. Of course you are in a position to sing a lullaby to these passengers, to your fellow creatures whose numerous deaths will be lamented throughout the world. What kind of lullaby could you sing? It is more appropriate to sing a funeral march. It would be even more appropriate to invite an orchestra – for the simple reason that funeral marches are usually performed by orchestras, not by solitary singers. You might tackle this problem by addressing a speech to the audience, to the passengers who review their lives, their triumphs, and also recall their relatives and their problems, their children and probably a game of chess they played in their childhood. What do you recall on the brink of this and that? Let us think of this and that, instead of plunging headlong into the past which is anyway a thing of the past. And what about the things called ‘the future’? There are no such things, and you realise this truth before the crash – hopefully, felicitously. Why is it felicitous? Because you had better realise *something* before you leave this world forever. What *do* you realise? You realise that you cannot realise anything. But this is too difficult, and you are in no mood for enigmas; not at the threshold of death. You just read a novel teeming with intrigues, love affairs and murders. You enjoy yourself, and there is nothing else in what we define as reality, as real reality. The rest is unreal; or silence, if you prefer. You prefer silence, for some obscure reason. The reason is not as obscure as all that. If you keep silent, you make no effort whatsoever, and this whatsoever consoles you much more than any achievement, be it important or insignificant. But would you be charged with negligence if you said nothing? There are problems and events which require your participation, and you cannot withdraw from them without exposing your peace of mind to severe reprobation. You keep silent, and they say to you, ‘Why don’t you say anything? You’re negligent, and you cannot deny this accusation which is all the more real since we’re going to make a complaint to the police about your silence. We’ll say to them, “The whole world and our dear humanity suffer continuously, on a regular basis. And this individual turns a blind eye to our multiple miseries. How many miseries do we suffer from? Has he ever tried to count them, to oppose them to the best of his abilities? He has not even opposed them to the *worst* of his abilities, raising no fingers for our defence. For years and years we have been looking at his fingers in the hope of seeing them move. No way, no way.’ You raise the fingers of your right hand. You raise the fingers of your left hand. They begin to applaud.

‘Far more reasonable is it for them that are credited with reason to harvest what is good from every source.’

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Are we credited with reason? Some of us are, supposedly, judging from our participation in their social life, in their undertakings and business deals and schemes. But are we credited with *reason*? They say, 'He's good at –' 'She's beautiful.' What else? Who are *they*, by the way? It is a traditional question. They often speak about the people who do not exist. They speak about them, and you put this traditional question to them. What do they answer? They just show you a patch of grass; for instance. And you look at them, at the leaves of grass, your eyes probing deep into the very core of their beings. You are offered a mirror and you look at it closely, for you are aware of what or who you are looking at. You note in your diary, 'Today, for the first time in my life, I studied my face. I think I'm rather handsome. But I'm not sure I should harvest my features, their regularity and relative beauty, because the exterior aspect of my being is less important than its interior aspect. But I don't see this aspect – that's the snag. I think Hamlet was confronted with the same problem, when he stood on a rock or something of this kind, when something along these lines happened to Hamlet, the famous character from Shakespeare's eponymous play. He confessed his ignorance of the Hereafter, and so he wasn't aware of its value. Is it good? Is it bad? Should we harvest the Hereafter?' All right, you do harvest it, and the whole of the Hereafter lies in front of you as if offering itself to your sacrifices, studies and so on. You study it and eventually you sacrifice not only your studies but also your very life. You find that the Hereafter is far more comfortable for what you intend to do with your life than your life itself, its earthly space. At least you have got rid of this enigma you have been burdened with for some time. But what about your features, your handsome appearance? Should you harvest it? Should you set it off? You make it rather noticeable, and a score of human beings rush towards you, yearning to take advantage of your physical qualities. They undress you, touch you, try to fling you onto a bed. You refuse categorically to comply with their wishes. Then they literally rape you in the middle of your room, and you realise you will never complain to the police about this occurrence. Why? Because you have just experienced a sort of indescribable pleasure which you might be able to describe, as a matter of fact. Yes, after much soul-searching you describe it in your notebook, and forget the pleasure itself. That is how we become writers, lonely people, great masters and so on. Unavoidably you are credited with reason because carelessness and balls are not highly regarded by intellectual representatives of our society. They think we should devote our lives to ciphers – to creating ciphers and enigmas which are called upon to decipher other enigmas. That is a sort of *perpetuum mobile* upon which our life seems to be based, upon which it is founded. To avoid this curse we may enjoy our superficial links with other people. We play games, and even card games are not regarded as an unworthy occupation. Of course they are, the games during which we hold a lot of cards and inveigle other people into errors and financial losses. A lot of catastrophes are engendered during these games. Families are destroyed; so are brains and hearts. But this destruction is far better than the vicious circle inside which we continuously bump into mysteries without end, into monsters, devils and bad, pernicious gods. What is good? What is bad? We see the word 'god' and rejoice, sing a few hymns and open a bottle of champagne. Actually it is a god we bump into – a pagan god. And this god is vicious, perverse. He rapes young earthlings and leads us astray at the earliest opportunity which takes place right now, in the wake of our last thought. Naively we believe that any god is better than the Devil, but the Devil tells us, 'Of course my task is different from what I am. I am good, you know – much better than many gods. The point is I can't do what I'm inclined to do. I contradict my nature all the time. Of course God is the number one, and from the very start I've been having problems because I'm supposed to represent evil forces, evil passions – whatever is evil in

the world and beyond it. And every time I'm about to make my journey to the Earth, I say to myself, "It seems the expedition is predestined to fail: there have been so many problems." Of course you cannot side with the Devil: this may lead to your partial or complete condemnation by the divinities. But you might use the Devil in your works, in an opera – Gounod did it brilliantly – or even in your novels. You cannot find any solution to this problem in the Scriptures: can you resort to the Devil, whenever you are in the right mood for this kind of dependence? Even Dante used Satan, the Devil and his assistants in his masterpiece, and we cannot disregard this piece of information: Dante is our teacher, our earthly teacher who comes right after our celestial guides and professors. What do these professors say? We are in two minds about the sources we can use in this domain. The Devil is touched upon almost everywhere, not only in our everyday life. Yes, we touch him on a regular basis. When we get poisoned, as a result of a poor nutritional choice – we unwittingly set our heart upon a rotten fish, for example – we necessarily evoke the Devil. Yes, it is the Devil's choice. He pointed his finger to this particular fish, and we did not hesitate, not even for a fraction of a second. Why didn't we hesitate? Why didn't we question the Devil's choice and command? Did we have to obey his command on this occasion? When we see a beautiful woman, we usually do not search our soul: we accost her, court her and do our best to magnify her beauty by our participation in its physical development. (We do our best to hide our intentions, our usage and abuse of her body through intricate, almost indecipherable sentences.) In short, we sleep with her, sharing with her body our bed, and then continue our walks through our native city. But when we write a novel, we seldom see the Devil's fingers. We can write about anything and anybody – even about our neighbours whose mediocrity may shock some of our friends. And we see a finger – within our field of vision there might be a sort of finger – we do not have to attribute it to the Devil: there are many other creatures in the world; many negative, pernicious, awful creatures on whose presence we should on no account rely and whom we should not trust. But, as I have just pointed out, there is a positive element in the Devil's world and personality: he is not profoundly evil. His roots are beneficial, if I might say, although I have no idea to whose advantage they may contribute. This sentence seems unfinished. Usually, after the verb 'to contribute' they put the word 'funds', but this time the word is in no way appropriate. Well, there is something positive in the Devil's presence because his intentions are good, according to his own confession. Can we trust his confessions? Should we use the capital 'H', when describing the Devil's approach to life? We are supposed to harvest what is good from every source, and after all, the Devil is also a source. *Warum nicht?* Everything is a source – a source of pleasure, a source of displeasure. The same thing or being can be a source of pleasure – at some point. But there are other points, and these last points are full of unpleasant feelings, sentiments and reactions. We are wide of the mark, and waste our time looking for this mark which may not exist. Does this mark exist or not? Of course this question is far less important and distinguished than the famous inquiry about the existence of God; or that of the Devil. But is this inquiry or any other inquiry likely to help us, our harvest and our goodness? The French say that only intentions count; at least they count as much as the rest of our pastime. And the Devil's intentions are good: we have just proved this axiom. So we can harvest them and become perfect; or almost. Or even more perfect, as the French often say when engrossed in their grammar. So we can build our palace of goodness-knows-what on this basis. But if you compare the Devil's intentions with what an ordinary angel does all the time, day in, day out, you will realise that you had better stay with angels, omitting from your grammar, from the grammar of your life, both the Devil and his intentions. So, whenever you see an angel within walking distance, you go, reach his or her face and stroke his or her cheeks.

‘And philosophy is produced by our reason’s power, which rules our passions and is not led to and fro by them.’

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You cannot step twice into the same river. Does this affirmation have anything to do with passions? Actually, human beings are fond of stability, even if it is not stable, in the strict sense of the word. They go on holiday, and mostly these holidays are at the seaside. But there are people who like rivers, and some of these specimens of our race like fishing. They go fishing, being assured of the result: even if I am unlucky today, I shall bring home a number of fishes which will enable my wife to cook a delicious meal. But obstinacy is often divorced from fish and other material advantages. You just wish to step into the same river – for the sake of the stability I must have mentioned in my essay. You do not aspire to any change, however beneficial and glorious. You stick to your guns. You need the same mood, the same structure of the world. You name a river and you need to feel the river bed under your feet. The river should – according to your calculations – caress your calves. Why? Because it is the river you name in your daydreams. You expect it to be up to your standards which are intimately connected with your ideals which are nourished by the notion of stability. Actually, you secretly believe that this yearning for stability guarantees your immortality. The river is immortal and so are you. The names are eternal as well, although they may undergo some changes over the centuries; and you are aware of this phenomenon. Well, you walk towards the river in question – the river of immortality, you call it – and you are not disappointed, given that you recognise the water and the sensation you have experienced on many occasions. The weather is more or less the same: you do not like rainy images and sensations. So the sun shines and the river offers you the same delights to which you have been accustomed for several years. But Heraclitus reminds you that what you feel is an illusion: the water is different, you are different, nothing corresponds to what you are accustomed to. The stability you honour so much does not exist, and you trust something fragile which does not deserve your admiration and infatuation. The river is different, everything is different. Your wife must betray you during your absence, during your short holiday dedicated to the river which is also unfaithful to you. The sky is likewise treacherous, but you have never counted on it, considering its constant metamorphoses. (Are we in California or in Belgium?) Yes, you must be assured that your wife to whom you rush as soon as your legs and calves manage to cross the threshold of your house is not the same – not because her cells have undergone a metamorphosis during your absence. She slept with one of your rivals, and thanks to Heraclitus, you are certain of this betrayal, even if you find nobody in your closet; no skeletons, no living and libido-overburdened men. You question your wife, and passions are certainly not excluded from your accusations. Nor are they excluded from your forebodings which are ruled by Heraclitus and his famous, eternal formula. You recall it twice, thrice. It is still the same: it does not budge, mocking its own content. You can repeat the same formula, the same indictment – to your heart’s content. Here is the stability you have been longing for all your life. But your family life has nothing to do with stability, I’m sorry to say. What is more, sometimes you do find somebody in your closet. Now it is a man, now a woman. And they are not always the same, according to Heraclitus and everyday life. Philosophy leads to passions: you cannot deny this fact, phenomenon and truth. Of course you are displeased and even furious, if you find the same body in your reliable closet. Well, you get used to him or her. You may even strike up a delightful conversation with these individuals. But getting used to *various* bodies does not agree with your stable, peaceful nature. This variety triggers off your violent reactions which have a lot in common with passions. They are identical to them, to tell the truth. As usual, however, what

counts concerns the results of your investigations, tests and emotions. You are not keen on finding a variety of your wife's lovers in your closet. You prefer one lover, one single lover, and you do whatever you can to achieve this result. (You should not trust your wife in this domain.) So you come back, cross the threshold of your house, and begin to act independently of what you can find in the closet or elsewhere. Your conduct means that nothing can ever happen in your house in your absence. All right, your wife has one lover at the moment, and you are more or less satisfied with this situation. At least you are capable of putting up with it. You ask your wife if the dinner is ready, and she answers you positively, with a nod of her head. Well and good. So you proceed to the dinner table, after drinking a glass of champagne in your favourite armchair. Your wife is in the kitchen, and your eyes are riveted on the closet where her lover spends an unpleasant hour, instead of going home. He cannot leave your house, your closet, because he is aware of the revolver lying in your chest of drawers or elsewhere. Your wife put him in the picture about the revolver because she does not want her lover to lose his life – even if this life can be lost as a result of her charms, sex-appeal and accessibility. So the lover stays in the closet, while you consume the meal which must have been cooked – at least partly – before the arrival of the lover, before the exercises associated with amorous games. After the end of the dinner, you lock the closet, turning the key several times in the lock beyond which the lover continues his intimate existence. In spite of your efforts, however, you cannot yet compete with Heraclitus' declaration because the lover goes on living and so his body, his cells and molecules, continue to change. You cannot see the same lover twice unless you kill him. How can you kill him? You just keep him under lock and key. But even a corpse, a fresh corpse is liable to modify its substance so you should wait for the appearance of a skeleton whose metamorphoses are limited, not to say non-existent. Yes, in this case – the case of your encounter with a skeleton – you can count on the accomplishment of your time-honoured wish. To step twice into the same river. To see twice the same lover. You probably do not wish to see the same lover. You hate your wife's lovers and are quite reluctant to see them in your house, even if we have in mind their skeletons. Incidentally, we should not overlook our global mistrust of categorical truths. And given that every truth is categorical – at least to some extent – we abolish this phenomenon of our lovers as soon as an opportunity presents itself. In this respect, it is not enough to reach the nearest river and step into it, shouting, 'I stepped into this river for the first time many years ago. And I can assure you it is the same river. Not a drop of this river has changed since my first visit to this region of our country.' And you might go on with your rejection of philosophical postulates. You cut a piece of meat and say to your friends that you hold in your hands the initial piece of meat – 'the piece you saw before I fetched this knife and used it appropriately.' It is amazing. Even you recognise the exceptional character of your obstinacy. By fair means or foul, you try to demolish a number of philosophical and absolute truths, determined to triumph over the world and its prophets, its outspoken figures. You live in the world and consume it, to use our modern terminology. But why should you define it, explain it, impose your views upon other citizens of the same miserable world? Well, you finally renounce your opposition to the absolutism of humanity in the midst of which you spend your life; and your feet step into another river.

'At the time when men were whelmed in the darkness of ignorance, all did not keep the same feasts, but celebrated distinct ceremonies in different cities.'

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You hear a few sounds that can be attributed to some feast or other. People celebrate something, and you do not feel like opposing their instincts and tendencies because, after all, we are supposed to enjoy our lives to the utmost. A man opens a bottle, and he has no idea what kind of celebration he is about to perform. His performance perturbs the peace to which we are used to some extent, but never mind, never mind. His celebration is different from what we heard yesterday or the day before; or even an hour ago. The colour and mood of his celebration depends not only on his life, on its events, but also on the bottle he has just opened. The sounds he and his bottle produce belong to a tonality unknown to us for some reason. And yet we have opened a multitude of bottles in our lives. But we should take into consideration a tremendous variety of experiences through which we go in the course of our test. What is this test about? Well, we are duty bound to lead a virtuous life which will eventually lead us to Paradise. And so this life, whatever we do inside it (and also outside) is a test, and we are judged by terrestrial and celestial judges. We sing something, and a terrestrial judge says to us, 'Your singing is out of tune. You should sing in C Major, but what I hear is more akin to E Major, and there are too many sharps and flats in your version of the hymn. Consequently you cannot be admitted to the next stage of the competition. If I were you, I would devote the rest of my life to exercises and self-punishment. Never part with your whip!' The sound of this whip takes part in the symphony of our daily life: there are also whips in this life of ours; we do not limit our pastime to opening and drinking bottles of whisky. There are also our love talks, a number of nicknames we resort to, when communicating with our brothers and sisters. We utter a nickname, and the person we call opens our door and joins our feast. Again our judges listen to the sounds we produce and condemn us for our conduct which does not correspond to what is prescribed either in heaven or on Earth or in both spheres. Why are we always wide of the mark? Anything that goes awry in our world is blamed on human beings. Why? Because we have a sort of freedom associated with the phenomenon called 'free will'. We can skip one or two celebrations. We do not skip them, for the simple reason that we like celebrations, bottles, songs, kisses and chaotic, meaningless conversation. We like nonsense and often recite the poems attributed to the realm where nonsense reigns and always has the upper hand. All this can be explained by our state of mind which is constantly plunged into the sea of ignorance. Or does it fly through a cloud of ignorance? The keyword is 'ignorance' of course, and we fly, swim, talk and make love within this cloud or sea or ocean or constellation. There are celebrations everywhere: every star has its own pitch, its tonality, mood, form; its sharpness and flatness. C sharp, B flat. That is how we live and die, and nothing can change this state of affairs, not even Christianity and its particular, unified light. What does the term 'unified' mean in the context? There is only one light which accommodates several million lights, of our celebrations and other idiocies. If you consider a few individuals, you will realise to what extent they differ from each other. One strikes a match; the second one reads a newspaper or consults her smartphone. The third eats a sandwich, and the fourth just looks out of the window. In the chord created by the Almighty you find everything: the window, the sandwich, the match. Imagine a picture on which all these items are depicted. You see a window and a match somebody put on the windowsill some time ago. There is also a sandwich on the windowsill. There is a man who stands by the window. His curiosity pushes him towards this window that he reaches in no time at all. Then he begins his job prescribed by one book, one point of view. Suddenly he changes his mind. Up to now he has ignored the existence of his mind, of his will. But now he decides to assert himself. Instead of eating the sandwich, he throws it out of the window, saying, 'What do you take me for? I like caviar. The smell of your cheese is awful. And I have my lighter made of gold. Why should I touch your match which doesn't correspond to my status, my

position on the social ladder?' In other words, you celebrate your own feast, and your freedom which you seem to have conquered rewards you for your efforts. You do not like to make an effort, and your celebration is one of the chief traits of your character and pastime. You open a bottle and, in spite of the effort required, you are happy because the wine is a reward you are always looking for, whatever happens either in your life or in the world. You do not care about the darkness against which you are warned by your advisers, the Father of the Church and even by your wife who says from time to time, 'One day you'll break your bones because you can't see anything properly.' But you are fond of darkness – for the simple reason that it enables you not to notice the horror and misery which accompany our lives. And even in our dreams – or rather in our nightmares – we encounter the same negative aspects of existence, of our global existence. You do not even have to shut your eyes: the darkness takes the necessary step towards our blissful ignorance. By the way, this ignorance has nothing to do with Nicholas of Cusa whose ignorance is called 'docta', if memory serves me right. And even if it serves me wrong, it does not really matter. The chief thing is based upon my celebrations which certainly differ from what other people conceive and do in their spare time and even during their working hours. You can celebrate every comma you insert into your sentences. And your commas are not identical to their so-called counterparts which you find in the texts of your colleagues. Every comma is unique, and that contradicts the laws of spiritual light where we are supposed to bathe until further notice. But for us this further notice comes at once, and it stays in our midst, in our chest and soul. We are a bunch of individualists, and this is the nicest bunch in the world, even if other bunches think otherwise. But our preachers – and their bunch is on the dark side, in my opinion – talk to us about our unity, the one and only law to which we must pay homage every day, every second. Every thought of ours should be devoted, dedicated to this law, according to their words. But their words are dissonant; they are not part and parcel of our mentality and projects. The world is like a room where someone switches the lights on and off. Is this the legendary darkness about which all our scriptures talk so instructively? All right – we open a bottle of champagne, and if someone begins to talk about our ignorance, we switch on the lights. First we strike a few matches and light a few candles; otherwise we might make mistakes, when opening the bottle we are caressing affectionately. But we are told that a few candles are not sufficient: they do not help us get rid of our innate ignorance. So we switch on the lights, and the preachers smile and nod approvingly. (They cannot nod otherwise.) Nevertheless we remain unique: no one opens the bottles of champagne in this fashion, in our fashion. No one holds them like that. No one enjoys the noses of wines as beautifully and fully as we do. Darkness or not, our celebrations are ours, and no one, nothing can induce us to modify our ways, our ways of living, our waves of felicity. And even our way of dying is different from what other people are accustomed to. And then someone switches the lights off, and our interior monologue comes to a standstill – like a train that runs out of electricity or coal. What do *we* run out of?

'This affection is shown even by unreasoning animals, for sparrows may be seen fighting with all their force in behalf of their brood.'

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The affection the author speaks about is well-known, and we do not have to venture into the realm of guessing games to realise we are once again under the influence of love. Perhaps it is more than love, this affection, because the love which manifests itself with regard to a particular individual depends, however slightly,

insignificantly, on the brains we have to put up with; for the sake of our love. Sometimes we say to ourselves, 'I wish she had no brains at all,' and we are eager to justify our attitude by the fact that physical beauty is above philosophy and maxims. It is music in its own right. If you have no brains, you are not likely to be judged in accordance with the standards disseminated amidst the representatives of humankind. They say, 'What an imbecile that boy is!' and they may add they hope that, with the passing of the years the boy will acquire sufficient knowledge to enable him to reach the category of 'brilliant, intelligent and genius'. Thus we denote what Nietzsche called 'overmen' or 'supermen' or 'superwomen' or just 'super'. By the way, you should be prudent, when discussing the brains of a woman, and that is why no one uses the word 'brainless' in discussions devoted to female beauty. Anyway, beauty is above all discussions: it stands on its own; in the middle of your room. Yes, if they ask you to be specific, you say, 'In the middle of the room because beauty deserves this distinction.' But if you take a few steps towards this woman, you hear a voice – I often speak about this voice – which warns you that you are not dealing with sparrows. You are allowed to put a bird in a cage, although it is frowned upon by some bird-adorers, bird-defenders. They remind you that birds are used to flying, and nothing should divert their attention from the sky, from the clouds they adore exploring. And once again you stumble upon the problem of the brains we discussed at the beginning of this article. If you see a creature and study this creature's behaviour for a few seconds, you may conclude that the creature is in trouble, not to say in distress. You meet a friend and he tells you a story. Your brain is filled to the brim with stories of all kinds, and this explains your ardent desire to get rid of your brain. But never mind, never mind. Let us go back to your friend and your meeting. This friend says he knows a woman who needs your personal help. 'She claimed that the way she had been treated at work had caused her extreme emotional and psychological distress.' Yes, during the conversation your friend took part in he heard the sentence I have just quoted. This sentence was uttered by the woman in question. She put a question to your friend, and this question was related to the hypothetical help she hoped to receive from your friend or from one of his friends – from you, for example. Of course you said, 'No, no, I'm not skilful in this domain. It's not my pigeon.' 'What's not your pigeon, pray?' asks your friend. 'People in distress? Is that the pigeon you refuse to deal with? What pigeons are you fond of, may I ask?' And you answer you do not like pigeons. But the discussion is not over, contrary to what anyone can expect. On the contrary – the situation is just about to start. You are accused of your heartlessness, and the people gathered around your friend and yourself voice their wish to know if you have such an object within your breast, your body, in general. Do you have a heart? You answer that you fear the operations linked to open hearts; otherwise you might show your heart to whoever is longing to see it. And they ask you if you are ready to help someone whose ideas and points of view you do not share. If you do not agree to what this someone says, you leave the room – that is what they say to you. But you should listen to what your opponent says; you should listen to all his or her arguments. You should listen to the coda of her argument, especially if you are dealing with a woman. Out of respect for women, in general. And if you continue to disagree with your interlocutor, you cannot leave the room. You should help her to the best of your abilities. You should explain your point of view and underline the contradictions you detected in her exposition of the facts. You select some of these facts and replace them with other facts. And you are supposed to proceed in this way until every suspicious element is removed from the context. And then you had better kiss this woman on the cheeks and invite her to a restaurant. And if you are still not in love with her brain, you should fight your dislike ferociously – until its utter destruction, annihilation. What is disturbing, however, is the very presence of the brain, the presence of opposition to what you propose

and expose. You begin your exposition and go on, disregarding the cows that come home or remain in the fields where they browse and disport themselves. In the absence of brains – with the exception of your own, *natürlich* – you go on unabashed, even if what you say is nonsense; and you are quite aware of that. But nonsense is necessary, and cannot really prosper if it is absent from our lives, chased from them by wise sayings, absolute truths and suchlike. ‘Give us a little bit of nonsense!’ exclaims someone in the course of a discourse that may last for several hours. I think Mussolini was able to speak for hours on end. I may, however, confuse him with another charismatic speaker. But at the end of a few hours, you are likely to say to any speaker, ‘Please, shut up! I’m fed up with your charisma! Up, up, up, up. Everything is up and down. Down with you, my dear speaker!’ The presence of brains is annoying: life is a river and it is better not to disturb its flow with dams and similar constructions. Dam and damn are almost synonyms, which may be proved by an allergy some Soviet people got, when exposed every day to the following sentence, ‘The Aswan High Dam is on the River Nile in Egypt.’ Yes, this damned dam was built by Soviet citizens, some of them; and other Soviet citizens listened to the history of this exploit on the radio – daily and even nightly. As a result of this propaganda, some of them grew allergic to dams, to the Soviet Union and even to Egypt. They would leave the Soviet Union – by fair means or foul – and settle in the United States, in Israel and in Western Europe. Many years later they would confess to their friends and wife, ‘I think I’ve got over this allergy.’ And they would finally go to Egypt and write to their relatives, ‘We’re in transports of delights.’ And what about their affections? They cannot embrace and kiss a pyramid: it is too big and utterly incompatible with any human embrace, however large and heartfelt. What about the famous sphinx depicted by George Bernard Shaw? You recall Cleopatra, Julius Caesar; and the love you experience and Caesar’s partial, temporary love overlap. There are affections everywhere, and your brain forgets to remind you that you can neither outrun nor outsmart both time and space, that things of the past are dead and gone. They are probably with Caesar (and W. B. Yeats) in the grave.

‘Let us then bravely bear the evils that befall us; it is in war that heroes are discerned; in conflicts that athletes are crowned.’

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You live your life, and other people wish you sweet dreams and also a lot of peace from which you must take advantage in your private life; and in your public life as well. Some of us think that even our public life belongs to private categories and descriptions – to our diaries, among other things. All right, why should we engage in a lengthy discussion about what counts much more than any discussion – our peace of mind? Our mind is peaceful, but Tolstoy affirms that every peace is succeeded or replaced by war; otherwise the world will refuse to function. That is right – if we refuse to follow this rule, this alternation of peace and war, the world will say, ‘No’ and come to a full stop. Well, we do not give a tinker’s cuss about the history of the world because it is the history of our disorder that we are discussing, not the world as such. It will remain what it is, even if we drop a few atom bombs on its structures and mixtures. No, we do not care about the history of the world because we are not likely to see it, to see what follows this particular episode. This episode is awful and we have great expectations as to what follows, to the ending of all these conflicts and idiotic decisions. What we are talking about right now is just another evil befalling us. It befalls, it befalls and we hold fast to our principles. And what are these principles, pray? We fall prey to thieves, bandits and rapists. So we are raped and our property, our

jewels – together with our houses – are stolen, and we have no idea by whom they were stolen and hidden somewhere. But we do not surrender to the circumstances we face. Sure enough, we face them because we have to: we have no other choice. But we had rather not face anything at all, with the exception of our own face which we are accustomed to contemplating in various mirrors. We spot a mirror somewhere, walk towards it and look at ourselves – to our heart's content. Our heart is content, quite content, and we smile, for the simple reason that our face is content as well. But what about our jewels, the riches to which we have devoted all our lives? We admit that we have dedicated our life to collecting jewels, and these jewels were not really meant for our wife, for the balls we frequented, for the applause and approval we heard. There was a sort of inner competition; or an outer competition, to tell the truth. Our friends, their wives, have jewels and we have been doing our best not to be outsmarted, outwitted, outdone by them. There are stories in which a fox outsmarts a hunter, and this story has universal appeal. If you see an impressive number of jewels on someone's body, you become a hunter and your rival plays the role of the fox. Sure enough, you begin a real hunt – in the woods, in the fields. The fox runs quickly, but you dash towards her body like an Olympic champion. Unfortunately your record cannot be certified, ratified, officially recognised and feted. In short, you cannot be crowned and this miniscule detail spoils all the pleasures that follow your exploit. By the way, did you recover the jewels? You have forgotten about them. Most of our exploits are devoted to what we do not really care for. What we do care for is overall, universal admiration, and so we are happy – and many mirrors testify to this fact – if people burst into generous applause. Then we realise that our destiny is fulfilled, our duty accomplished, and we can die peacefully, on condition that our children do not engage too noisily in their interminable games. But are we heroes? Of course we go to war with the kids whose games disturb our inspiration, determination and lifework – the stone we are eager to put on the monument dedicated to the glory of humankind. They literally disturb this stone which slips from our embrace and begins to fly in the atmosphere, being influenced by other stones thrown by the kids with whom I continue to fight for the sake of my duty, peace of mind and place on social ladders. It is important to be a hero, but children do not always concur with our conclusions and definitions. We sincerely believe that we have achieved a sort of exploit and so must be rewarded by humanity – in some way known only to humanity. They put a crown on your head, and you go to the nearest mirror, anxious to enjoy your own appearance. Or they just shout, 'Here comes a hero, here comes a hero!' Sure enough, you pass by and salute all those who show you their admiration, the recognition of your genius and contribution to the history of the world; and to the progress of humankind. Then evil befalls you: evils are always beyond the nearest corner; or before it. You go to this corner – you cannot do otherwise – and encounter the evil designated for your consumption, as they say rather sarcastically. But you overcome the evil – you have trained for such exploits all your life – and once again you hear tremendous applause. And you are convinced that the applause you hear is not produced by your own hands. The noise is almost unbearable, and you bear it stoically, egoistically and smilingly. After all, they celebrate your adroitness, bravery, smartness and so on. Then, in accordance with your traditions, habits and tendencies, you go to the nearest mirror and see yourself. What is more, you are on your own: there are no crowds anywhere. You touch your ears and realise that your ears are your only supporters. Even your eyes have already betrayed you. The same goes for your legs. But your ears continue to admire and salute you – wherever you go.

‘All this I say not for the sake of boasting, but because I am forced to defend myself.’

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We have already made up our mind and decided that it is better not to speak – not only because silence is made of gold. If you keep silent, they can bother you in various manners, and one of these manners looks like an act of torture carried out in front of your own persona or body. You see this torture (and the torturers, mind you) and you do not utter a syllable, which seems out of the ordinary. What kind of behaviour is ordinary, in your opinion? In this situation? You begin to run, get closer and closer to the torturers, and deprive them of the weapons they use on this occasion, when trying to destroy their innocent victim. You wrench a whip or a revolver from some torturer’s hands and punish the wrongdoer. At least you save the victim from the rest of the torture, from its ending which is equivalent to death, as we all know. But this kind of thing does not happen every day. Usually you are left alone, on your own; unless you are a universal star around whom a swarm of bees/wasps/ants/locusts – that is how the stars define their admirers – disport themselves as they extort an autograph from him or her. But you are nothing of the kind or rather nobody; and no one writes home about your presence, autographs and songs. Well and good. You are at home, ensconced in an armchair – not necessarily your favourite armchair. At some point you felt tired, weary of life and its elements, innumerable details, and therefore sat down in the nearest armchair. Suppose that someone – your neighbour, for instance – descends upon you and elicits a response from your lips. That’s right – she asks you a question, and you do not forget your manners. On the contrary – you recall them and answer her extensively, long-windedly; and probably eloquently. What is her reaction? She says, ‘You’re always boasting. You’re such a big-head!’ Your reaction is quite predictable. ‘What have I done?’ you ask. This question is natural, logical, but your neighbour does not seem to catch your meaning. She says, ‘Do you think that style is far more important than the sense of what you say? Why do you always express yourself so beautifully? I’m not sure they’re really beautiful, your speeches. But you obviously enjoy them. The way you utter these senseless, often ludicrous words. Do you think our history, the history of humankind can profit from them? Do you think the progress of our science and medicine depends on them? Do you think we’ll be able to cure cancer, thanks to your discourses?’ It is your turn to say something, to answer the accusations of which you do not approve: they seem unfair and ludicrous, in their turn. You say, ‘As a matter of fact, the only discourse I’m capable of – and this instance of my eloquence fully deserves the name you bestowed upon it: “discourse” – concerns the nature of life after death. But we’re talking about nonsense today. Actually we also engaged in this kind of discussion yesterday and two weeks ago. I don’t intend to blame you for this useless pastime, for this outrageous waste of time. Anyway, let bygones be bygones.’ And they become bygones and remain bygones for quite a while. Am I saying all this for the sake of boasting? About what, may I ask? About my capacity to find trivialities almost everywhere? Indeed, I wonder if there are any exceptions to the rule of triviality – in the whole world, mind you. You see a cathedral and say to yourself, ‘It’s trivial – I’ve seen hundreds of cathedrals like that.’ You cast a glance at the heavens and let drop the same remark. You say you have seen hundreds and hundreds of heavens like that. If someone overhears your interior monologue, this someone can ask you, ‘What are you talking about, to yourself?’ And you may answer as follows, ‘I’ve lived so many lives, under so many skies, clouds and constellations that nothing can really surprise me anymore.’ But why do you have to be surprised, on a regular basis? Because you think that, deprived of surprises, our life might appear anodyne? Just another silly pop song with anodyne lyrics about love and happiness? Just another silly aria with anodyne lyrics about unhappy marriages and suicides? Well, once

again you look at the stars and touch upon them in your speech addressed to a young woman. You talk about constellations without paying homage to love, which is expected under the circumstances. You meet a woman, speak to her about the Milky Way, and she thinks you are in love with her. And when she accuses you of insolence and say you violate a number of rules, you answer, 'Well, I was just admiring the beauty of the world where I happen to find myself and my house and my piano and my old furniture.' The woman reacts violently because she thinks you have no alternative but to fall in love with her, especially if you hear her voice. And you did hear her voice. You said to her, 'Hello,' and she answered, 'Hello.' Sometimes one word, two syllables are enough to demonstrate the beauty of one's voice, one's vocal cords. You do not have to sing an aria from *Rigoletto* to convince everybody that your voice is exceptional and may be instrumental in conquering the hearts of men and women alike. But there are insensitive people in our world, and we are forced to take them into consideration. These people are capable of concluding that you are drunk and sing only because of the alcohol that wreaks havoc in your body; especially in your vocal cords. According to these people, you sing your drunken song in expectation of an answer which must come from other drunkards; or from professional singers. These drunkards are often keen on music, and if you dare sing out of tune, in their presence, they protest loudly and abominably. 'You hate and annihilate music, as far as I can judge,' they shout. When you are sober, usually you do not feel like singing. In the first place, you think that your vocal cords are not strong enough to withstand such exercises and manifestations of your ego. But you drink from time to time, and we all know why you drink. Life is unbearable and it grows bearable, a little bit bearable only if alcohol persuades us that suicide is not the best way out. Alcohol says to us that staying within the limits of life may turn to our advantage. How? How? We shout this question; we scream. And little by little we console ourselves because we feel sleepy. And during our sleep we do not always recall our dire straits, our unhappiness and the fact that no one really loves us. And those whose presence we cannot bear come close to our body, anxious to pinch us, to irritate our nerves and tendons. And we begin to sing. And if we are in no mood for singing, we open a bottle of wine, two bottles of wine, and drink like a fish. And this is dangerous, considering that people are likely to put you in a frying pan. They see a fish somewhere, pick it up and start thinking in terms of a delicious meal. Yes, if you judge your life in this way, you are already drunk more or less. Anyway, you should not drink like a fish. Do not forget that the aim you pursue when drinking your bottles of wine is quite different: you are supposed to sing because your voice is disgusting and consequently makes these people run away, leaving your field of vision. Yes, you defend yourself, and you do it ingeniously because no amount of arguments and entreaties can ever convince them that you are fond of solitude and aspire to protect your inner world from human interventions. You become a drunkard in the process. At some point you say to yourself that the chief aim of your life is the protection we are talking about. So you put a few bottles of wine on your table. You array them in such a way that no one can see you from the outside, from the place where the world can be found. But someone finds a gun and shoots, destroying your protection in the process. This someone pulverizes your bottles, so it is not enough to own one bottle or several bottles: you have to drink their contents. But you should remember the following device or advice: measure for measure. Or just measure: you should not fall asleep at the end of the ritual. If you do, you will not be able to sing; and the people come, carry you to the nearest hospital, and for some time, for a week or so, you are to be surrounded by all sorts of people: nurses, workmen and so on. So, before falling asleep, you should sing your cavatina so abominably, that your neighbours, relatives and all other people will always recall your song. Even in the course of the so-called doomsday they are likely to hear it.

‘Why in the world, my dear friend, do you not utter a word against falsehood, while you allow a friend to be calumniated and the truth to be assailed?’

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Who is this friend you are talking about? Show him to the world and say to him, ‘Here’s the world. You have to say a few words related to the case we’re discussing. Don’t you know I’ve always defended the truth because I can’t do otherwise? Have you ever heard a word of untruth supposedly coming from my mouth? Don’t you know that my mouth is shut in the presence of lies? A number of lies present themselves, but my mouth remains stubbornly shut, and not a comma of blasphemies squeezes through my lips. You know this truth. You’re perfectly aware of my truthfulness. Why don’t you declare this particular truth in the presence of the crowd I assembled an hour ago? It’s your duty to proclaim my innocence and crown my adherence to the one true doctrine we’ve studied together for many years. Don’t keep your mouth shut! Please, open it in my defence.’ This friend is silent, so you appeal to other friends. You create a few friends on the spur of the moment. You choose a few men, a few women – after all, the crowd gathered in the neighbourhood allows you to do so rather quickly – and they begin to defend you against the other part of the world. There are indeed two parts, and these parts can be found anywhere, all over the world. One part does not say anything; the other part affirms you are a loyal servant of superior forces and so should not be stigmatised for something you have never done, namely uttering blasphemies and falsifying a number of truths we are taught at school and elsewhere. The truth is assailed everywhere, and we are indubitably aware of this truth. We witness an assault, and we rejoice, oddly enough. Why do we rejoice? Because we know that the assault in question is directed against the truth, which means that the aforementioned truth is not far; it is within walking distance. So we walk, walk, walk and eventually the truth appears in all its splendour. Usually the truth hides itself, being on its guard against unworthy people. But as soon as an assault gets under way, the truth leaves its hiding place and puts on its magnificent, unmistakably pure, chaste and wonderful clothes. The truth looks like a monument to itself, and when we come within touching distance – this expression is part of our terminology – the truth takes a step in our direction as if to draw us into the sphere of ultimate intimacy. So we touch the truth so as not to disappoint it; otherwise it may retire, leaving us high and dry. We touch the truth, and we begin to ask ourselves the following question, ‘Is it enough? Shouldn’t we do more to show our admiration, our love? What should we do to demonstrate fully and truly our attachment to the truth?’ At once our thoughts deviate from their truthful trajectory and plunge into the domain of sex and its unlawful exaggerations. We intend to make love to the truth, forgetting about numerous nuances, about how we are to touch the truth, in what manner, with what degree of delicacy. We omit the chief nuance related to the truth – the truthful touch. How can we define it? How to approach such delicacy without destroying it by rough and indelicate treatment? So many questions cannot be answered on the spot, on the spur of the moment. There are many spurs and moments, and we finally decide to *speak* to the truth, instead of touching it. It is much easier, isn’t it? We just say, ‘Truth, truth, truth,’ being assured of both our delicacy and truthfulness. Indeed, the truth is not likely to be offended by the word which denotes it; by itself, in other words. Then we compose a set of variations on this definition or comparison or expression. We say, ‘Our truthful truth,’ or ‘our truth never lies’ or ‘we can rely on our truth in matters connected to doctrines, faith and the right way’. We embroider upon our verbal caresses, and nothing happens,

nothing strikes us; neither a bolt of lightning nor another expression of God's wrath. So we continue to talk rubbish, and then we say that our words are sheer rubbish.

'For a physician must use remedies appropriate for the disease, and suit the medicine to the case.'

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Of course we know numerous diseases, and discover new and unexpected evils as we continue to struggle for life. Life struggles against us; at least we have this feeling as we realise the uselessness of our undertakings, remedies and counter-measures. If someone punches us on the nose, we can retaliate because we see this person and can even reach his or her face, given that our face is not really far from the fist that has disfigured us. I might have said, 'He or she knocked us down,' but it does not really matter: we are talking about diseases, not about fists, boxers and knockouts. When speaking about knockouts, we say, 'One person is standing over another person. The latter is on the floor, and apparently this person can't get up at once. Yet another person counts something, enumerating the evils which are in the air, on the floor and also in the body of all those who stand or sit or lie around. What is the remedy we recommend in this case? We say to all those involved in the situation, 'Please, abandon this occupation, this silly rite. You'd do better to study mathematics and direct your attention towards the formulas displayed in the books devoted to mathematics, physics and other sciences. Our faces are fragile, and you shouldn't make them non-existent because it's not worthy of human beings and their moral codes. None of these codes allow you to knock your opponents down, instead of talking to them.' And what about samurais? Why do you intentionally overlook their conduct? Don't they cut you into pieces as soon as you appear within their fields of vision?' Sure enough, there are fields of vision, and these fields are never quite empty. The world population grows daily, nightly, and so no field of vision remains empty for long. For the time being, let us discard animals and insects: only humans count in this part of our discourse. A human appears and the samurai we have in mind draws his sword. (Are there samurais among female representatives of our species?) The samurai's sword separates the head of his opponent from his shoulders – samurais never attack women – and the head falls and rolls along the path that the samurai has followed for some time. A real samurai leaves the head alone; in other words, he permits it to roll at will. And if the beginning of the path is at the top of a mountain, the head can roll all the way down, reaching at the end of the day the initial stage of the 'mountain journey'. But unreal or fake samurais run after the head, trying to cut the rest of it into pieces. At some point you have only the 'mortal remains of the head', and fake samurais continue to avenge themselves on their former opponent or rival. Their behaviour is obviously abnormal, being far from the famous code of their (the samurais') behaviour. I think it is called *Bushido*, but I may be mistaken: my memory has been deficient for some time, letting me down at critical moments. It does not really matter. What counts in this situation concerns the rolling head; not a rolling stone, mind you. We examine the situation and conclude that the fake samurai is wrong: he should leave the rolling head alone. If it longs to roll, you should step aside and say, 'My dear head, you can roll forever, if you're inclined to explore the world in this fashion. There are other fashions, but you're determined not to resort to their help. All right, I bow to your determination and inclination. Do whatever you wish to do, but let me tell you that at the end of this road there's a river into which you'll inevitably fall, if you go on like that. And you'll drown in this river because you can't swim. You can roll, and you've already proved this ability, this aptitude of yours. But I insist upon the truth I announce solemnly and unmistakably: you can't

swim. You've never taken swimming lessons either in your youth or in your childhood. I agree with the fact that your owner – your former owner, I might add – was in a position to swim several yards and probably a mile or two. Now you're divorced from the rest of his body, and you should never overlook this unquestionable truth which condemns you to death. Yes, you're bound to die, if you snap your fingers at the danger I've just described for your sake. What kind of medicine do I recommend? You should stop in the nick of time on the threshold of the river. You see the water I'm talking about and stop rolling. You've gathered no moss in the course of your descent, and this triumph is sufficient for your selfishness. The absence of moss is your pride and joy. It's better to leave well alone.'

'The one side was wronged, the other were wronged, but they who neither suffered nor did the wrong share the distress of the wronged.'

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You have never done anybody anything, which means you never do wrong either to others or to yourself. Well, you cut your finger two or three days ago, and you did it unintentionally – this goes without saying. And yet you say something to this effect, to the effect that actually you were aware of the danger, and what you did was the consequence of your distraction. You wronged yourself and also the knife which had no evil intentions: knives are habitually neutral and do not attack you, if you leave them where they are; on your dinner table, for instance. But in this case, in the case under discussion, you share the distress of the wronged, for the simple reason that this person is yourself. And if this person is your father – a Dostoevskian motive – you may suffer and experience what you call 'distress' only because your father, being wounded by your knife, will never forgive you this offence, insult and inadmissible gesture. Consequently, you will not inherit anything from your father. And considering that your father's fortune is mainly based on what your ancestors collected during their lifetimes, you will know realistically what they mean when talking about empty pockets, let alone empty bank accounts. Everything is empty, in other words, but once again I am forced to repeat that this emptiness has nothing in common with what Kierkegaard and Heidegger described in their works. Of course Kierkegaard insistently talks to you about your leaps, but you must understand the truth which is hidden in the midst of his reflections. If your pockets are full, you do not feel like leaping, jumping and engaging in some gymnastics or other. You may walk along a street, smiling almost automatically. From time to time, you can even touch your pockets to make sure they are still filled with money, riches and delights, forthcoming delights. Have you wronged anybody before putting all this money into your pockets, your bulging, almost indecent-looking pockets? Some of us think that money has nothing to do with the rain, and so you do not grow rich in the twinkling of an eye; in the dropping of a rain. You have to steal the money, if you dream about your bulging pockets; if they adorn your sweet, unforgettable dreams. Well, a judge or a neutral spectator says to you, 'The one side was wronged,' and of course you disagree with these witnesses, judges and evildoers. (They wish to sentence you to death, after all.) You say to all of them, 'What about the other side?' 'What side are you talking about?' 'My side, myself. I was wronged.' 'When were you wronged and how?' 'I was in my cradle. Suddenly, someone put a pair of trousers on my body, and the pockets I found in the substance of these trousers were empty. Who emptied them, I wonder?' So you accuse somebody; you accuse the stretch of time during which the pockets of your trousers were emptied with the intention of depriving you of your heritage, of your happy,

idle life. A life of leisure, as they usually define it. 'The other were wronged.' In the first place, you ask yourself if this sentence or accusation is correct. Is this accusation expressed correctly, from the point of view of sheer linguistics? Perhaps. What do you care about linguistics? Your pockets are empty and so you say without further ado, 'The other side were wronged.' 'Who are you talking about?' Their usual remark or question. 'I were wronged,' you answer in the same linguistic style. At least you assume such an idea, surprisingly enough; you suppose so. And if they continue to question you on the subject, you transfer the action to your body. You touch one of your shoulder blades – quite a feat in its own right – and point out that your shoulder blades, both of them, were irremediably wronged. All right. Well and good. And then you utter the following sentence (not a death sentence, mind you): 'My wages are barely enough to keep body and soul together. Only if I put enough money into my purse or into my pockets, I'll be able to keep them together.' Of course people invent all sorts of pretexts meant for a sort of rebuke: they do whatever they can so as not to provide you with the money you need. So they endeavour to persuade you that your body and soul do not have to live together. 'Your soul can fend for itself,' they affirm. 'For instance, it can go away on a holiday by itself.' 'And what if my soul stays on a beach for hours and hours, unmindful of the sun and its rays, their unbearable and harmful heat? Who'll remove my soul from this beach, from this sun? Only I can give order to my soul, you know. It's disobedient and self-willed, strong-willed. You can't make it budge, if it's made up its mind. Or its soul, if you prefer.' But you share the distress of the wronged – no doubt about it. We all know those dealers who try to pass off fakes as valuable antiques. You are such a dealer, in point of fact. You are a fake, but you try to pass off your personality as a valuable addition to human assets, humanism, empathy and fraternal love. There are so many wronged people around you; what is more, you are wronged yourself. But you forget your misfortunes, which enables you to spend your time with the poor, with the heroes and heroines of Victor Hugo's masterpiece. (How many times have I touched upon this masterpiece? Alas, there are so many miseries in the world that you cannot remain unaffected, distant.) You are a fake lover of mankind, but what counts mostly concerns the number of appearances you are able to manifest in the presence of your brothers and sisters. You show them one of your positive appearances, and they applaud frenetically. They have no idea what you hide beyond this appearance, and to tell the truth, they do not really care about this hidden side of your manhood. (After all, I do not have to resort to the notion of substance on every occasion.) I share the distress of the wronged. I share my own distress. And what about 'share and share alike'? Just a linguistic enigma?

'I, however, welcome my rest, and especially so at the present time.'

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We are all acquainted with some workaholic or other. A number of them work at a writing desk, and you speak to them now and then, because you realise they may fall ill on account of their tremendous overwork. You say, 'If you don't rise and go somewhere else, you'll come down with flu.' If the person to whom you are talking does not react, you say to this person, 'If you don't rise and go to the nearest beach, you'll come down with cancer.' And if this person informs you about his or her attitude towards beaches and their harmful and voyeuristic aspects, tendencies and ordeals, you answer as follows, 'All right, all right. Just go to the nearest forest where you'll find many beautiful trees which are good for your health.' More often than not, however, these holics are stubborn to the point of bestowing upon their table the status associated with human beings,

with the image that was used at their creation. There must exist a writing desk which looks like the Almighty, especially in the domain of literature, science and so on. But generally speaking, writing desks and other tables are just objects, even if, at some point, Heidegger concentrated his mental efforts upon the writing desk which presided over the classroom where the philosopher recited his lectures. According to the text upon which I reflect at this particular moment, there are individuals who welcome holidays, although I have no idea what time, what episode in our rich and unmerciful history was selected for this rest-oriented confession. You look out of the window and see a lot of weapons, of cannons, of rockets; and even an atom bomb can be enjoyed at the end of the perspective that your window offers you in a fit of generosity. 'I, however,' means that the writer is surrounded by the holics I mentioned at the beginning of my narrative, and all of them are engrossed in their work, disregarding the delights of which we are fond, in spite of the allurements of glory and money. So our holic suddenly finds himself in the middle of his native street and realises, slowly but surely, that he is no longer in his study, which cannot, however, prevent him from thinking about his subject matter, about the object of his intellectual desire. Some of these people continue to work, using the pavement which faithfully displays their conclusions and formulas. Some pedestrians stop in their tracks and begin to decipher these formulas, going deeper and deeper into their meanings and enigmas; into the mysteries of the world. These mysteries surround them on all sides, but they trust the equations they see on the asphalt as if our life were completely swallowed up by the materials we use in the course of our conquest of nature. We continue to triumph over trees, lakes and mountains, but the happiness we dare to envisage escapes us more and more. So we finally realise we are as naked as the proverbial king; or a striptease artist. What draws our attention under the circumstances is not their nakedness as such. All right – you jump up on a table and start to strip off. If a group of people admires your body and gestures you are sure to be rewarded for your exhibition. The matter stands differently with solitary performances. Nobody forbids you to jump on a table and imitate one of my previous sentences. But you may ask yourself, while you are at it: 'Why am I performing this nonsense? Is it a work of art? Do I think in terms of masterpieces? Does my naked body deserve applause? I could applaud myself, but I think that's beneath my dignity.' I find a compromise. I applaud myself; I single out one of my exploits, two of them. My applause sounds like a rest to which I have been aspiring for some time. When you rest, you need a confirmation of your existence, of its utility and exceptional character. And the applause you produce proves without the shadow of a doubt that everything is all right, that everything is going smoothly. And you can hear the smooth progression of your life: there is no better sound in the cosmos. If you remain still, no sound comes from your limbs and even from your head, for even your thoughts stand still. No one needs them, not even yourself, your mental organisation. How can you live without sounds? When Beethoven was composing his *Ninth*, he was on holiday, oddly enough. He heard his own triumph, and nothing consoles and consolidates you better than your triumphs. You go from one triumph to another, from one *Ninth* to another. You hear your *Tenth* and applaud this triumph of yours. Then you resort to the multiplication table and multiply your symphonies; and the applause, needless to say. The applause grows; so does your rest and your laurels. Everything grows and after two or three months you realise you are in the middle of jungles. Life is rich, beautiful, delightful. The only problem you encounter is the impossibility of moving through this life. Everywhere you come across trees, plants and wild animals. But even these animals are part and parcel of your triumph, of your life's opulence. Actually, the most delicious rest you can count upon lies in your favourite wild animal's ability to devour you. Of course you recall the Bible, Jonas, and you say to yourself that you had better leave your jungles and search for an ocean, for Moby Dicks.

There is a rich variety you are bound to encounter, when searching for your happiness, rest and laurels. (Every rest is a crown of laurel, to tell the truth.) How could you describe the time you traverse in the course of your lifetime? This period may be easily recognised through the deserts it demonstrates in every field. (With the exception of nanotechnology, says someone.) Instead of jungles you walk through a desert, and you do not like the sensations you fall prey to at every step. You need a drink, and you remember all these meetings during which everybody suggested you should have a drink. Everybody spoke only of drinks and you could see an array of champagne bottles – on every table, in every cupboard, mind you. And now you beg for a glass of water. But then you find a solution to this problem of yours. You just say you are on holiday. Well, you welcome your rest because the present time is invaded by weapons and deserts. Either you are struck by a sword or you traverse a desert. In this case the rest is essential, vital and imperative. It is true that you are still at the core of a desert, but you rest, rest, rest. And the rest does not bother you; not in the least.

‘I am afraid that the vigour of your godly soul has been overcome by old age, and that you do not keep your hands stretched out as usual.’

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In our childhood we often see our mother’s figure above our head and bed. She says, ‘Sweet dreams,’ and checks the position of our hands which should on no account hide themselves under the blanket. You have nothing to hide from; you have committed no crime, and even misdemeanours lie outside the sphere of your activities. So why is your mother so worried about your hands? They are not about to snatch a piece of chocolate from some table or other, from your bedside cabinet. Chocolate has been banished from your house – for the sake of your health, apparently. And you do not even wish to fiddle with the toy cars you own, thanks to your father’s generosity and mechanical spirit. (The chief preoccupation of this kind of spirit is mechanical contraptions.) A little bit later, you learn that your mother is worried about your health that could be destroyed through your attachment to your sensitive, child-productive organs. You touch them and the pleasure we can read about in many books literally overcomes your body as if aiming at a sort of contest, a bodily triumph. The annihilation of your will may be under way, and consequently it is your will and well-being which are at stake. And your life, apparently, according to numerous rumours. If you touch your shoulder, inadvertently or otherwise, you feel nothing except a slight, prudent touch carried out by your unconscious hand. But the matter stands differently with your sexuality which is firmly attached to the organs I touched upon earlier. Even before touching them, you experience a sort of ecstasy which may ruin your life, if you devote too much time and energy to its prosperity and suspicious, obnoxious triumphs. (Our life is made up of triumphs; positive triumphs, negative triumphs.) Actually, you do not really need to put your hands under the blanket: you can satisfy your instincts and masculinity by communicating your longings to your organ – through the blanket, however thick and frigid. But why do your friends tell you that your soul seems to have been overcome by old age? What do your fingers have to do with your soul? By the way, your fingers behave insolently – in comparison with what they used to do, when your mother was still alive. They are not ashamed of themselves during their games which unfold in the depths of your blanket. (Near your death, according to your friends.) Yes, even now, at the threshold of death, you still feel your youthful vigour, your former desire, your passion and libido. They are not things of the past. Nor are you unless your senses are lying to you shamefully, unforgivably. No, you do not

keep your hands stretched out because you are loath to welcome anybody in your private abode. Consequently you do not welcome anybody with open arms. Your arms are closed; probably forever. What else is closed? Not your mind, not your brain. Your fingers are not closed either. What *has* been overcome by your old age? Nothing, nothing, nothing at all. You are vigorous and your legs are able to beat a few records, if asked to run in a stadium or somewhere else. You run and beat a record, but you do not keep your hands outstretched. Why? Because if you do, you will slow down your movement, the overall movement of your body. The resistance of the air is such that your records may suffer through contact with it. When you outstretch your arms, the air resists as much as it can, and we know that air is capable of many feats of valour. It can also cause our planes to go off course, missing their aims and destinations and falling out of the sky, blasting big holes in the earth. Well, you do not keep your hands outstretched on these occasions so as not to contradict the air, its freedom and circulation. But what about old age? Yes, you have matured during your lifetime, during the studies you undertook in your childhood. You started very early, and that is why you are clever and experienced: nothing can oppose the progress of your thought, of your intuition and overall grasp of every single situation. Your hands look young, and yet you outstretch neither your arms nor your thoughts. As soon as someone crops up within your field of vision, you close your thoughts, your mind and your discourses. Many people think you are not up to their standards. Of course you are not: their standards are so low you have to go down on your knees to reach them. And you never kneel down, except in churches. Do they kneel down in churches? Or do they just sing hymns and eat? Your body keeps a stiff upper lip, whatever happens. But your soul does not have lips. What can it keep stiff? Is your soul stiff? Nobody asks you this question, and yet it worries you for some reason. You are convinced that your soul should be stiff, otherwise it is not likely to withstand all sorts of pressures. What sorts of pressures? You know what I am talking about. Do *I* know what I am talking about? If you keep your thoughts stiff, you do not know much: your stiffness gets in the way. So it is better not to keep the upper lip stiff: it may contaminate the rest of your body. Nobody advises you to keep the upper part of your body stiff. And yet you realise it is stiff, although you have done nothing to create this unpleasant state of affairs. During your sleep, you might become stiff – unintentionally, under the influence of some stiff dream. They wish you sweet dreams, but someone, one of your hidden enemies perhaps, says ‘stiff’, instead of ‘sweet’. So you have a stiff dream, from time to time. It is a recurrent dream from which you suffer not only in your sleep, but also upon awakening. Your neck is stiff, and so is the rest of your body. Willy-nilly you have to admit that the vigour of your godly soul has been overcome by old age. Do you regret the vigour of your soul? You regret only the word ‘godly’, but it is only a word, isn’t it?

‘Sailors at night are cheered by the sight of the harbour lights.’

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There are individuals who are always cheered by lights, even if they are at home, protected by their walls and other forms of security. Even when they watch TV they ask you not to extinguish the lights because, in their opinion, they are the sign of a divine, luminous presence in their lives, in their houses and even beyond their windows, on condition that these lights can be seen from their garden and the adjacent street. But there are other individuals, and that is, as we all know, one of the symbols of our existence. There are always other lights, other nights, other obscure spots, other crimes, other ways of dying and living. You live and eat; from time to time

you say to somebody, 'I have no urge to complain.' The word 'urge' may inspire and excite the people who hear your remark and have an urge to interfere and modify the tone of the ongoing discussion. They ask you if you are able to control your sexual urges. They remember them, these urges, only because you have used the word, which proves once again that our languages are important. I have no idea what sailors think about upon noticing lights or other phenomena in the distance. Some of them continue to think about their families, their children and nephews. In this case, the lights mentioned by the saint are associated with family values and delights: good meals, an intimate atmosphere. And some of them say to themselves and each other, 'These lights mean that my wife is waiting for me and missing my presence.' For others these lights may allude to the routine, the work that awaits them – a lot of waiting, as usual – in their native cities. At least in the cities where they work and earn their daily bread. But we should not forget that for many people these lights – and many other lights – are firmly and formally associated with paradise. The Russian Patriarch says to the soldiers who are on the point of leaving for the front, 'You'll go to Paradise, anyway. And if you wait for death in your trenches, it's better not to wait for it. Make things easier for death and yourself. Pick up a hand grenade and the rest is silence, as you know. Your rest is silence, your eternal holiday.' So you are on a boat and see the lights I am writing about. Why should I write about these lights, the ones you see from a boat? I seldom if ever board a boat because I fear whatever is linked to water, especially to seas and oceans where you are literally pushed around, even if the wind does not deserve the word 'storm' or 'typhoon'. What name does it deserve? Let us leave this problem to Proust whose interest in names did not abate, even on the threshold of death, as I usually say and write. (There are so many thresholds of death, and you count them, whenever you fix your thoughts, your interior monologues on this phenomenon.) Sometimes you are just fed up with everything, and so any boat can be a solution to this global problem of yours. In a way, you take a leap in the dark, except that the lights which are at the centre of our narrative contradict your theories and efforts. You jump into a boat, hoping to get rid of all these lights, of the civilisation to which you are submitted – *par la force des choses*. There are forces and things, and you hesitate between them for a while. And you are bound to choose things in the end: they are less aggressive, *par définition*. And you have never been able to put up with aggression, even with mild aggression. And the lights seen by the sailors? Aren't they aggressive as well? Darkness is softer, more humane, to some extent. Even if you leap in the dark. Yes you do, and you repeat this leap several times. So what? Is it wiser to leap in the light? Does this Kierkegaardian (Kierkegaardesque) leap guarantee bliss, however insignificant? Besides, these lights may be hot: if you touch them, your hand will be scorched, burnt to cinders. No wonder – the lights you count upon are incandescent, otherwise you will never land in Paradise, contrary to your expectations. (All expectations are great: it is pointless to point out.) And the harbour? We have forgotten the harbour. We omitted the harbour when analysing the advantages and disadvantages of the lights seen by sailors. We gave up this analysis some time ago, for the simple reason that the ways of our destiny are unfathomable. We see some light, somewhere, and we make up our minds. In what sense? How? Can we trust our conclusions? We analyse everything once again and say, 'Nothing could have been further from my mind!' Unfortunately we cannot really measure the distance that separates our mind from its decisions, from the results of these decisions. Our mind is right here, whereas our decisions or rather their results are beyond the horizon. We hope that the horizon is on our side, and that whatever is located on the other side of the horizon is also on our side. But there are many sides, and we are well aware of this truth or phenomenon. What is it exactly? The truth or just a phenomenon? Once again we throw in the towel. We switch on the lights and wait for a while, for several

minutes. Nothing really happens. Nothing unreally happens either. No reality, no unreality. All right – we switch off the lights. Where is the harbour in question? We do not need anything ‘in question’. We need only everything in answer. The harbour is in answer, but this conclusion does not get us anywhere. Then we make up our mind or minds once again. We write the word ‘harbour’ on the floor of our flat. We sit down on this word and begin talking about our peace of mind, about the peace of our mind. We end this talk.

‘You have shewn alike your zeal for the true religions, and your love for your neighbour, both of which are at the present time clearly connected.’

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I mistrust all those times which are clearly connected, because they seem to lead us to one goal, which is suspicious in itself. If there is only one goal, we readily adopt the communist doctrine, given that not many people recall one God, the Almighty. They speak about cars and yachts, and I am firmly convinced that we (and I include myself) should be divorced from this way, from these parallel lines that end up in Hell, there is no doubt about it. So many speak about the true religions, forgetting that the truth is only one in number, and all other truths merit the guillotine, any guillotine, not necessarily the one erected on the Place de la Concorde. Or, if you wish to be decapitated in the centre of Paris, you should obtain a special document in which the President of the Republic officially permits you to end your life near the column which attracts so many tourists who do not feel up to a journey to Egypt where they could see a thousand columns like that, if memory serves me right. Actually I do not trust my memory anymore, but this is not the subject matter of my present communication. I am prepared to serve the truth, whatever its tenets and conclusions, but my neighbours, whoever they are, should be left out of the whole business. It is none of their business, to tell the truth, and they have nothing to do with it. Whatever they say meets the definition of the word ‘lie’ and so cannot be admitted to the realm of truth, whatever their credentials may be. They are certainly wrong, these credentials, so I have no wish to have a look at them. Why should I offer my looks to anybody, anything? The number of my looks, of my valuable, penetrating looks is limited, considering that they spend a lot of time and energy on penetrations of all kinds. They have an object within their field of vision, and they try to penetrate it from one side, from another side – from all sides imaginable and unimaginable. What you often hear amounts to the following sound, ‘Tuk, tuk, tuk.’ This means that your means of observation do their best to penetrate yet another enigma of the Cosmos. What does this enigma amount to, in your opinion? Tuk, tuk, tuk. There is nothing else to it, you add. And if they ask you to show your love to your neighbour, you just say, ‘Tuk, tuk, tuk.’ Isn’t that enough? This shows my attachment to his inner world, to his sacred and sacramental thoughts. All right. And what about the religions, the only true religions we have come across in the course of our existence? You inhale a lot of air and say, ‘TU-U-U-U-U-U-U.’

‘He remembers the small rather than the great, and says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these”

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Of course if you remember the small, everyone praises your memory, saying, 'You remember this being, this smallness for which we can't account? Bravo! Then you must remember every flea that runs over your body every day, not to say every hour, every minute. Do you really remember all those fleas?' 'I remember some of them,' you answer. Or sometimes, being fed up with these questions, you just say, 'I don't remember anything with the exception of my majestic personality.' Smallness plays an important part in our games, and sometimes we are duty bound to support all those who are much weaker than others, than ourselves, for instance, but the result is not always positive: after a while, we are invaded by smallness to such an extent that some of these small creatures begin to pull us down. They put our hands on our shoulders – assuming they can do that, in spite of their smallness – and we begin to grow smaller and smaller, in spite of the illogical grammar, existence, biology and our own ideals. Of course we are prepared to help small people who cannot provide for their existence and that of their numerous children, but we oppose a similar move, if applied to our own life. We are supposed to remain great, if only for the sake of the small who count on our greatness in their everyday life; and even when writing their diaries. They write, 'I'm getting bigger and bigger. And I majestically and unquestionably ask you not to exaggerate the value of the help we receive now and then, once a month, not to say once a year. Yes, we receive an envelope in which we find a few euros, two or three. We can't recall the number of these euro coins on account of their smallness. It is much easier to deal with millions and billions, you know. Anyway, we build our empire with the help of our own hands, thoughts and intuitions. With the help of our sixth sense, if you prefer. Some people, most of them to tell the truth, are deprived of this sense altogether. That's why they are poor, pinning their hopes only in the aid of God, in His commiseration. And we give them our helping hand in this field. We say to them that they can always count on God and His mercy. We say "mercy", they say "*merci*". That is how our relationship and our human communication function.' Do we remember the great? Of course we do, otherwise we might give up any hope of becoming great in our turn. The great are not really great if they allow others to turn them into what is usually called a 'dilapidated old shed' or a 'dilapidated old car'. Alas, we know some of these small-great who have lost their greatness through the ignoble intervention of the poor and other bloodsuckers. These suck all they can suck: blood, money, greatness, palaces and brand-new cars. And suddenly a brand-new car grows old – before your very eyes. You can observe the same metamorphosis with a human being whose hair grows white overnight; or overday. Why do we cherish smallness to such an extent? Because of what is announced everywhere: Now you are the salt of the Earth and then you realise you are just a pinch of pepper. And you cannot bear pepper, whatever its quantity. It is not easy to distinguish the small from the great; especially nowadays. And the only test that guarantees a reliable result is reduced to two words: salt or pepper. Figuratively speaking. You walk up the street and get closer and closer to a man of whom you cannot say much. But then, for some reason, you get the impression that he belongs to the realm of salt. So you strike up a conversation with him and soon become his friend and can even take advantage of a portion, a huge portion of his money. And then, some time later, in the course of a meal, you realise he likes pepper – to the exclusion of salt. Never mind, never mind. He has not lost his money yet. According to your investigations, he does not favour casinos.

'But I have found support in those who care nought for this present life, but await the enjoyment of everlasting blessings, and these furnish me with manifold consolation.'

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You drink a glass of beer, and for once you are not alone. Someone is sitting opposite you, and supposedly this man is your friend. From time to time, he says something about your health and his own health. You raise your glasses and touch your lips – almost at the same moment as if taking part in some symphonic performance. At some point you begin to sway your glasses, which hints once again at a musical performance. You cannot say you do not enjoy this glass of beer which is excellent, excellent – you repeat this truth and conviction several times in a row. After a while you add to this beer a few glasses of vodka and become drunk. And you enjoy your drunkenness, although some consequences of this state of mind and body are not pleasant, to put it mildly. But you do put it mildly and continue to enjoy your earthly existence. Then you hear the word ‘cancer’ and you do not like this word. Actually, you have never liked it, even when it was not linked to your constitution in any way; not directly, anyway. And all of a sudden you realise you are on the point of dying, of going all the way to the other side of human existence. Is it still a human existence? Well, it is high time you began to enjoy your everlasting blessings. But apparently you are not allowed to do that whenever you feel like it. Today, you feel like enjoying your everlasting blessings, but the doctors tell you, ‘Do you want to live or not?’ Automatically you answer, ‘Of course I do.’ Then they give you another injection, and you are not very fond of injections, generally speaking. So you say, ‘Please, no injections, no injections. Do whatever you find suitable in the present situation, but no injections, please. I’m fed up with injections.’ And then the chief doctor asks you the following question, ‘Are you fed up with life?’ ‘Not with my everlasting life,’ you answer. ‘But you’re not entitled to it yet. You’re not dead, according to my instruments and to all my senses.’ ‘Even your sixth sense doesn’t inform you of my death?’ you ask, raising your eyes and opening your mouth as if in expectation of a morsel of death. You are convinced that even a teeny-weeny morsel of death will allow you to reach the domain entitled ‘Everlasting Life’. As if it was just a novel, a number of pages written by some writer or other. On the spur of the moment you opt for the *other* writer, radically different from all the writers who have been in charge of your life so far, up to now; up to this threshold of death. But the chief doctor reminds you of the following wise saying, ‘You don’t change horses in midstream.’ ‘Are we already in midstream?’ you ask. ‘Of course we are, you are,’ answers the doctors. ‘But can’t you change the writer whose duty makes him write all this nonsense?’ ‘Writers aren’t horses – you can’t change them,’ answers the doctor. So you have no alternative but to await the enjoyment of everlasting blessings. Then you are given yet another injection, whereupon you realise that one of these everlasting blessings is already keeping you company. You ask for another injection as you are trying to persuade the doctor that two blessings are better than one. ‘But if we give you yet another injection, you’ll fall asleep and consequently won’t enjoy the effect of this second injection.’ ‘But what about the injection I’m enjoying right now? Is it everlasting?’ ‘It is everlasting,’ says the doctor with a nod that you have no time to see and enjoy.

‘Let them then cease to mock; let them no longer attempt to conceal the impiety which they have confirmed by blows as well as by words.’

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As usual there are stages in our life; even in our imaginary life. Of course the life I am enlarging upon – at length, at length – is not imaginary: all this happened and happens all the time. Whatever happens only once

does not exist; and I already touched upon this matter – a long time ago – in one of my writings, dreams and interior monologues. So, as far as I am concerned, all this happened and goes on, on and on, in spite of many obstacles and the river of time into which you cannot plunge many times, according to others. I do plunge into it all the time – even in wintertime, which fortifies my body and spirit. Of course this union with rivers, lakes and ocean, this communion is rather imaginary. But why should I deprive myself of my imagination? Why should I plunge into a cold, inhospitable river? There are mockeries everywhere, and I probably described this phenomenon somewhere, in one of my letters perhaps. ‘Why do you mock me?’ People often think like that, but they seldom write about it to others, for they are loath to acknowledge their deficiencies, the laughing stock they represent in some corner of the world. And this corner poisons everything, if you admit its existence and react to its poison. Let it flow somewhere unattended, unnoticed by your reason and instinct of self-preservation. You can say to some of your enemies, ‘Can you see that rivulet? This is the poison meant for my body and everything else, for my whole constitution. But I wisely avoided this trap, some time ago. And now I just watch it from afar. Beautiful, isn’t it?’ This occurrence, this mockery, is not really personal; it may concern many people, even those who are regarded as living symbols of our civilisation, of its bright, luminous, heavenly side. Some people carry this poison, the poison in question, in their attaché cases, in their bags; even in their plastic bags, mind you. They are always on the point of emptying their vessels, holding them above your head, over your hair or baldness. They make no attempt to conceal their evil intentions, their hatred and overall impiety. Shouldn’t they behave respectfully in the presence of another human being, of another crown of Creation? Actually they often crown annihilation, especially when they come to blows; when your meeting comes to blows. The chief thing is to guard yourself against their poison which is far more mortal and fatal than their blows, however heavy and merciless. Such is the world, you say to yourself; and to them, occasionally. And you hear a lot of words: these people are never satisfied with the blows they shower upon you as if they were gifts and not aggressive gestures by which they hope to destroy your ideas and ideals. Sometimes you do not really know what goes on in your presence. Are those individuals really impious? Perhaps they are just putting you in the picture about a doctrine you are not aware of. Just another doctrine, nothing else. But you are convinced that there is nothing else; there is nothing apart from your head. Even your body, the rest of your body is more or less inexistent. And then you receive a few blows and realise that your body does exist; unfortunately, one might say. Their words aim at the destruction of your soul, whereas their blows remind you of your body’s importance, of the vital role it plays in your life. Should you be reminded of your body in this fashion? There are other fashions, and you are acquainted with some of them. After all, you have been in love with many people, and being in love is not an abstract occupation: this pastime is not devoid of reality, of its unflagging interferences in our life. This does not mean that love is situated outside of the domain where blows triumph over caresses on a regular basis, several times per day and per night. Astonishingly enough, even your house does not always conceal its impiety. Within it – and also outside, outdoors – something always malfunctions. And these malfunctions multiply with the passage of time – to the point of making you doubt your body’s reliability. ‘Where do these malfunctions come from?’ you ask yourself. No point in blaming the air for your misfortunes. Yet you blame the air which always comes in handy.

‘But while raising all other bodies free from every disfigurement, in His own body He left the marks of His sufferings.’

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When you comment upon a sacred text – and you cannot help thinking about it, not only during your reading sessions – you should take into consideration every word, every gesture, every wound. What about the marks of the suffering about which you read, before turning in, before indulging in yet another sweet dream? You recall that, at some stage of your rich and eventful life (rich only in this sense of the word) you paid a lot of attention to imitations. Or to the imitation, as they often say; as if you never imitated ordinary people, their habits; their ways of holding a fork, for instance. Well, you imitate everything and everybody – up to the stars. (You cannot say *down* to the stars, can you?) You become a star in your own right, even if you have no right to do such a thing. It is not the right time for this everlasting discussion centred upon your rights and duties. We are discussing torments and ordeals to which you are probably entitled. And they are all the more logical, since you are engrossed in the domain you call ‘imitations’. Of course you are not the only person allowed to use this word, but once again I suggest we leave the others out of this picture. Of course you can say, ‘I can’t leave others outside, far from my field of vision and consideration because, on this particular occasion, I’m imitating the stars. And they always fly inside some constellation or other.’ This is not true, and you are quite aware of the fact. And you do not need to recall and emphasise the importance of shooting stars: whenever your thoughts or eyes turn to them, you feel downtrodden. And you *are* downtrodden, to tell the truth; and that is how you imitate all shooting stars. They shoot or fall – like meteors, because they *are* meteors – and a lot of passers-by begin to walk over their substances or essences or what not. These stars grow flatter and flatter; in the process. So do you, as a matter of fact. At least you have this impression, this abominable feeling. What is more, you cannot eliminate these feelings from your fields, your visions, your nightmares. Is it a disfigurement? Not really, not quite. So you remain with it for the rest of your existence. On the other hand, if you cut your finger, you are back on your feet in the space of a few days. The red mark disappears, and some people thank archangels and the Almighty Himself. Then they cut another finger, and their enemies affirm they do it on purpose: they cut their fingers for the sake of their remembrance; of their remembrance of higher forces and highest protectors. But what about the imitation, the only imitation we can speak about without feeling embarrassed? Suppose you are married, and your wife says to you from time to time, ‘You said this word exactly as Goga does.’ You try to recall this Goga – someone to whom this name can be unmistakably applied. Then Lady Gaga comes to the fore, which means you are lost in the labyrinth of time; once again, I might add. Anyway, your wife’s remark is quite unpleasant: you are not supposed to imitate either Lady Gaga or some Goga or other. All this boils down to the following piece of truth: there are bad, negative imitations and the imitation that stands apart. All of a sudden you fall ill. Actually, falling ill never happens ‘all of a sudden’. This falling is always with you, whether you are aware of it or not; whether you wish it or not. Of course you never *wish* it, but let this stand, as Joyce used to say to Beckett. Well, you are ill, and you cannot help wondering whether your illness has anything in common with the sufferings described in the book I quoted at the beginning of this text. Or is it a mere disfigurement? On this occasion, you may be asked the following question, ‘Do you wish to be disfigured or do you care for the suffering that was touched upon profusely in the book you like to quote?’ Of course you opt for yet another disfigurement, and you are back on your feet in no time at all. But then your time begins to run out; of itself, in a way. And you run out with it. And you realise you have no time for anything. And once again your imitation of

time gets under way. You run into it, out of it. And imperceptibly this time of yours leaves its traces everywhere. And eventually someone says, 'Here lies a vestige of time.'

'I was very much distressed to hear of the trouble which had befallen you.'

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You can write whatever you wish to whoever you select for this phoney ritual. Of course you can just remain in your bed, taking no care of whatever happens around you; unless it is an earthquake you are informed about, in some way or other. If your bed begins to jump, you had better leave it and spend the rest of the day in a place where no earthquakes are likely to shake you, assuming there are such places on Earth. Our mother quakes, even when there are no seismic events worthy of note, of television and the Internet. There are wars, scandals, and someone usually rapes someone else. And if there are no people around you, you rape whatever comes into your field of vision. You rape something for the heck of it, and this heck accompanies you throughout your life. 'How could I get rid of this heck?' you ask yourself from time to time. Then you drop this question and also your other worries, inclined as you are to enjoy yourself to the utmost. But if you receive a letter or an email in which your friend or foe tells you about the death of his or her mother, you feel duty bound to reply, to write something to this person. Of course you regret the event, even though you have never seen this mother in your life. You are shaken as if one of the earthquakes I touched upon was back – with a vengeance. You go so far as to shed a few tears. After all, you have to write something to your bereaved correspondent. What could you enlarge upon in your epistle? It would be impolite and utterly irrelevant to develop your ideas related to Kant's philosophy. Of course you might write the following statement, 'Your loss belongs to the category of unbearable occurrences.' But in this case, you are likely to question yourself about the relevancy of the term 'occurrences'. Is it really an occurrence, this death, this bereavement? It is a tragedy you are dealing with, and you should never let it disappear from your mental horizon. It is a tragedy that may put an end to the existence of the person to whom you are writing your epistle. This person may feel forsaken – to the extent of wishing to end their solitary life; once and for all. Is there any other way of ending one's life? Of course you may be saved by medical personnel if, for the purpose of your disappearance, you use a multitude of sleeping pills, not a revolver. Or if your shot is not fruitful, positive or negative – say about it what you wish. The chief thing is not to miss your point; or rather your heart or brains. But I am straying too far from my original plan. What was this plan, by the way? Losing my life or writing a letter? Whatever you do, you are lost anyway, but you have to go on, and so you write a letter in which you describe the tears you shed upon reading the letter of the person who lost his or her mother. Of course you do not go so far as to describe the size and quality of your tears – that would be tactless. Going too far is often – if not always – tactless. So you just write, 'I shed a few tears. I can't say exactly how many – generally speaking, you never count your tears, your smiles. You just smile and smile again, if you feel like it. But I can assure you that I didn't smile upon reading your letter. I just shed a few tears, and I don't know exactly how many tears I shed.' And once again you realise you are tactless, impolite and obnoxious. Either you give the number of your tears, or you do not speak about them at all. You have lost no one, have you? Of course you have lost a few yourselves or I's; in the course of the last week. But your destiny and its development are not on the agenda; in this particular situation. In a way, in a way. How many I's have you lost since you started composing your letter, missive or email? Probably more than the tears you might have

shed on the occasion; upon reading the letter under discussion. So it is better not to read it, not to receive it. It is better not to receive anything; with the exception of a few blessings.

‘For even if souls are immortal, they are not however immutable; for they undergo many and frequent changes, as they experience pleasure, now from one object, and now from another.’

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This statement seems incredible, and we should not forget that in this kind of treatise there are no suppositions; there are only affirmations. Actually we know nothing about our souls, except that they are souls. They can be anything, in accordance with our beliefs; but they are not our bodies. What is more, they have nothing in common with our bodies. We can touch our bodies, and in this fashion we often excite them; and this excitement reaches a sort of paroxysm, from time to time. Of course we prefer the times when our bodies are happy; to put it mildly. But our souls are untouchable unless we resort to the assistance of music which is helpful not only in these matters, the soulful matters, as we can call them. Our bodies are not indifferent to the effects produced by music and other stimulants. But let us divert our attention from bodies which have little in common with our souls. And yet we are convinced – and we can swear it is true – that our souls reside within our bodies. Where else could they reside? This is a general question, and we could narrow our search down by saying, ‘Our souls don’t reside on a page, although we can find a lot of information about them in sacred books.’ And even an ordinary book is full of innuendoes, and you do not have to go into detail to experience this phenomenon (the soul). Moral or immortal, mortal or immortal. ‘They met at the end of a midsummer night.’ Or at the beginning of this night, which is even more promising. Well, let us make things easier for ourselves. What happens if you show a piece of chocolate to the soul, of all organs and elements and objects? Does the soul change on account of this piece of chocolate? This is quite unlikely, in my opinion. And in these matters I am allowed to have my own opinion. After all, I have a soul, don’t I? That is how people usually reason with those who deny the existence of the soul. Anyway, if you show a piece of chocolate to your soul, it neither changes its colours nor grows immeasurably big; whereas your body reacts quite differently. In the first place, it does not really look at this piece of chocolate; at least your eyes do not concentrate on it for a long time. You just do not permit your eyes to draw any real pleasure from the sight: you simply put it into your mouth. Then another piece of chocolate. And yet another piece of chocolate or cake. You go on and on, and your body grows accordingly. Well, your body must have a close relationship with sugar which favours the growth of your molecules or whatever reacts to the effects of this piece; or another piece, on condition that there is a lot of sugar in these pieces. And your soul probably diminishes its size, considering that sugar does not contain any spiritual molecules or atoms. There is nothing spiritual in sugar unless you get in touch with it in a church, in a cathedral or in some other holy place. Anything can become holy. The definition of what you do or think about depends upon geography, topography and suchlike; more or less. In this sense you can agree with the statement which assures us of the soul’s basic mutability. Does your soul change its essence upon seeing this piece of chocolate? Or any other piece of chocolate? No: the essence of our souls remains intact. But they (our souls) can change their colours and tints. They might change their tastes, for all I know. Is the soul in any way comparable to a piece of chocolate? It depends on the chocolate; on the essence of this piece, in other words.

attribute to their souls other numbers, far less sacred. For instance, ‘4444444444444444.’ Or something along the lines or numbers of, ‘60764332356576778890° ____°09’.

‘There are two things, moreover, in which we ought to beware of rash judgment, when it is uncertain with what intention any thing is done; or when it is uncertain what sort of person he is going to be, who at present, is manifestly either good or bad.’

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Rash judgement is not advisable anyway, whatever happens. Even if you know the person who does something – and these persons, all of them, always do something, even if they are rooted to the spot – you have to beware. Usually you beware of madness, for you know what madmen and madwomen look like. It is better not to speak about their looks, though. That is why politeness gives us the following advice: when speaking about mad people, you should say they do not look at all. They neither look nor speak; and one wonders whether they exist or not. And then you hear an eloquent proof of their madness. And you say to yourself that madness exists – with all its supplements and concomitant actions. Of course, when looking out of your window at the starry heaven, you can say to yourself, ‘Sheer madness.’ Even one star, whether it shoots or not, is an inexhaustible source of trouble, and the starry heaven creates what is called ‘no end of trouble’. You yearn to explore these stars, to find out what they are made of, assuming they are made and not merely painted on some obscurity. You construct a sort of interstellar spaceship, squeeze into its interior and say farewell to a group of people. Then you triumph over all gravitational forces and die somewhere, in the same obscurity; perhaps right in the middle of it. And you will never know whether you died in its middle or within one of its sides. Was it worth your while? Well, you will never know the only answer to this question. But what about the people who helped you at the beginning of this adventure? One of these individuals pressed a button, and the button was right, whereas the individual was wrong: he ought to have dissuaded you from leaving the Earth, from dying in the cosmos. ‘What should you die in the cosmos for?’ he ought to have told you. ‘I’ll die for the sake of science,’ you would have answered. ‘Science will survive your non-participation in its progress’ – the answer you would certainly have heard, had you remained on the surface of the Earth. The question asked by your biographer: ‘Do you really need to listen to this sort of remark?’ You answer at once, ‘Of course not.’ Is it a rash judgement or not? Do you know with what intention this thing was done? I am speaking about the action carried out by the person who pressed the button in question. And what is the button in answer? This person wished to send you to your death. Actually your judgement is not rash in this case. On the contrary – it is a belated judgement we are discussing at length. Too late, too late: you are already dead and buried on one of the stars. An angel, your guardian angel buried you and even put a cross on your tomb. Was that a rash judgement on her part? You might have come back to life, recovering your senses and force, redoubling them. One never knows what could happen on one of the stars, right in the middle of the cosmos. But the angel was aware of your suicidal tendencies, of your desire to die somewhere, far from the Earth: that was the only condition to which you stuck for some time. Yes, you were not in love with the Earth; nor did you love her inhabitants. Were you in love with the stars? Perhaps not, but at some point we all have to choose among our anti-loves. You chose the middle of the cosmos, and you had every right to opt for it, considering that dying in the middle of the cosmos is not prohibited either by our religion or by humanity as such. After all, we are not dealing with suicide. You are almost sure you were good

on the eve of your departure for the middle of the cosmos. But some of the onlookers earnestly wondered whether you would keep your good manners and thoughts in the near and distant future. But they decided they were unconcerned about the issue, for the simple reason that they had no intention of keeping you company in the middle of the cosmos so that your bad or awful manners could in no way affect their lives. So they let you go, suspecting no foul play in the future to which they had no access. (Judging from St Augustine's instructions, he knew the future by heart.) So you flew away and little by little your mood and manners changed for the worse, which is the normal procedure: we are intrinsically bad and always wait for an opportunity – with impatience, with impatience – to let our badness flourish, prosper and invade whatever is accessible to our personality and might. Even if we are meek and obedient, mind you. The more you saw in the course of your travels through the cosmos, the better you knew your possibilities. As a child, you often went to the toy shop, and you never longed for all the toys you saw in front of you. But with the passing of time you became greedier, all the more so since the cosmos is far more spectacular than any shop. What is more, it is not a shop, and it is far more exciting to steal whatever you like from something which cannot sell you anything. And what about your connection with earthlings? As soon as you conquered such and such an object or planet, you were eager to share your joy with your former comrades. Or rather you wished to show them how brilliant and rich you were growing, as a result of your adventure and courage. They could foresee a lot of things, except the growth of your courage. As a matter of fact, on the Earth, in their presence, you never showed any signs associated with courage, with its real representatives. True, you were not a coward, otherwise you would not have undertaken such a journey, but your courage was just sufficient and convenient for the size of your adventurous spirit. Actually it is far more dangerous and challenging to remain on the Earth and face all sorts of hooligans and bandits who never walk around without knives and pistols. So the onlookers thought you were more or less neutral – in the domain of threats and audacious undertakings. In other words, you were incapable of destroying the Earth, or even of harming it materially, spiritually and irreparably. Alas, at some point of your journey, you realised you were not really acquainted with gravity and its laws, tricks and jokes. We beware of rash judgements and suffer silently as we sit at our desks with our chins propped on our hands.

‘For to make complaint against vices is the duty of good and benevolent men; and when bad men do it, they are acting a part which does not belong to them.’

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Suppose you attend a performance which is often called a ‘murder’, although sometimes one human being does not really kill another human, for the simple reason that there are many ways of killing people. You can insult them to such an extent that they will never forget your insult which is likely to poison their lives from beginning to end; or rather from the moment when the insult was uttered to the moment of their deaths. (It is always preferable to leave the term ‘death’ in the plural, counting thereby on a multitude of lives, on metempsychoses and mere incarnations.) Suppose you see this scene which seems to belong to a drama or a tragedy; not necessarily a Greek tragedy. You are bad from head to toe, and you are aware of this state of affairs, of your own state, of what you represent in the world; of what you stand for in the same well-known world. But there are some good, well-mannered, well-tuned atoms or cells within your being, and these cells cannot bear the injustice unfolding – almost innocently, unconsciously – before your very eyes. As I pointed out earlier, there

are two individuals, and one of them is about to harm the other one, to put it schematically. You notice this individual's intentions, you spot them, judge them and realise that you can interfere on behalf of the future victim. For some reason a sentence resounds in your memory and also in your consciousness, 'The government forestalled criticism by holding a public enquiry into the matter.' You chanced upon this sentence in a newspaper you bought some time ago. What struck you upon getting acquainted with one of the articles was the verb 'to forestall'. At the time, you limited your reaction to the following reflexion, 'They didn't forestall anything, otherwise we wouldn't have landed up in the kingdom of shit where we have been living ever since this unfortunate affair.' This time – I am alluding to the situation described so assiduously – the word appears in the context of your life: you can forestall a lot of accusations, a lot of comments on the part of the onlookers who have already begun to gather on the square where the whole thing is still taking place. 'Why didn't you prevent the criminal from carrying out his crime?' That is what they are sure to say to you after the end of the incident. 'And what about you?' you are supposed to answer. 'We're further from the incident, from its participants,' they will answer. (The whole dialogue seems to originate in your brain, not in reality.) What answer will you give to this crowd of ill-tempered individuals? You will just say to them, 'I'm bad, you know. And my badness doesn't permit me to accuse other people, to interfere on behalf of victims, either potential or real, realistic. For the moment they're surrealistic, but in a few moments they might join either the inhabitants of Hell or those dwellers about whom we read in the books devoted to Paradise.' 'You should snatch the knife from the potential killer's hand,' they shout. 'This part doesn't belong to me, to my body and soul,' you answer. 'Don't you mind acting like our government?' they ask. 'Your duty contains the verb "to forestall" because, whatever you harbour in your chest and psyche, you're still a human being.' Yes, one of the duties we are burdened with is related to the verb 'to forestall' – there is no denying it. But we say to ourselves that, if we try to oppose the killer's movements and desires, we may become his victim in our turn – before the other man succumbs to the funereal effect of his wounds. But exceptionally, for once you are reluctant to be the winner of the race. Let others die and enjoy the benefits of the Hereafter; whereas you yearn to prolong your suffering in this world – indefinitely, if necessary. So you go on living and vices grow inside your body and also outside it. You pay no attention to your own vices: this is a venerable tradition to which you pay homage, either willingly or unwillingly; just automatically. They speak a lot about robots and electronics, and you are loath to follow a trend which is out of fashion: being a normal human being. No, you act like the machines driven by what they call 'artificial intelligence', if I understand them rightly. For this, for this kind of understanding, I have to resort to my own machine, to my artificial mentality, and I am not sure I know the difference between my artificial nature and whatever is organic inside my personality. Or simply inside my persona. I have no idea what is simple and what is complicated because, whatever I do, whatever I am able to do is rather simple, in spite of the problems I may encounter during the process of carrying it and everything else out. I see a lot of vices around me, and I complain about them. Some of these vices disappear, others stick to their guns. For once I am reluctant to discuss the ingredients of this thought of mine so that I really have no idea what guns I mean, when uttering this word. It does not really matter. What matters is my attitude towards vices and my reaction to their appearance and disappearance. Am I entitled to take part in the process? Am I bad or good? I wish I could be good, if only for ten seconds. During these seconds I would eliminate at least ten vices which I know by heart, being surrounded by them for many years; ever since my childhood, to be exact. And exactitude counts in these matters. If you say you can annihilate ten vices in ten seconds, you should keep your word, otherwise you will

be accused of perjury. And perjury is undoubtedly a vice which should be annihilated; along with other vices. And what about vice presidents and suchlike? Once again you get lost in a maze of notions, terms and errors. Erring is perhaps the only way of getting back to humanity, to your human nature. Do you need this nature? As soon as you get it back, they begin to judge you in human terms. And these terms presuppose the division we have already come across many times, on many occasions. Is this person good or bad? If you are good, you are duty bound to do away with vices. And if you do not succeed in destroying ten vices in ten seconds, you can always say, 'The virtues of humanity are hypocritical.' So you begin to spoil this so-called purity, paving the way to your own exploits in this domain. You spoil a part of humanity and then annihilate it. As you go on, you grow purer and purer. 'How pure he is,' you hear all around you. Sure enough, your purity is strikingly evident. And if you are weary of your own purity, you can become slightly impure – just for the fun of it. So they point out that, in spite of your overall purity, you have a few dark spots in your nature. And they enumerate these spots with gusto. This procedure is just another vice of theirs: they are supposed to respect and love their brothers and sisters. So you destroy some of them, hoping to set an example. You collect these examples, put them together and install an inscription in their midst: 'Vices'. And you ask some of these vicious individuals to write the word 'Benevolence' on your back.

'Now, in the precept by which we are forbidden to give what is holy to the dogs, and to cast our pearls before swine, we must carefully inquire what is meant by holy, what by pearls, what by dogs, what by swine.'

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Once again we are in danger of falling into the pit we call 'misunderstanding', because we attribute all these words to those who are not related to them directly. For instance, we say about one of Shakespeare's characters 'Spartan dog', and yet he is not dog, according to our eyes and ears. I am not sure we can say about someone, 'He's a Spartan cat,' and the same goes for many other animals before whom, however, we are not supposed to cast our pearls. Can we cast them, our pearls, before cows, for instance? I have no idea what a cow would do with a pearl, and I am not tempted to stage the experiment, for the simple reason that I have no pearls. And if I had some, I would sell them almost at once, considering that I am not a woman and therefore cannot display pearls in public. If I did, no one would say, 'What a beautiful woman we are allowed to contemplate tonight!' Usually you speak about pearls in other connections, using other ingredients. You write a poem and all of a sudden an unquenchable desire to recite this poem in someone's presence overwhelms you, invades you, conquers you completely. You give a call to the woman you love and say, 'I wrote a masterpiece, and I'd like to share it with you.' The woman comes and you recite your poem; not by heart, though. You have just composed it and consequently the time one needs for memorising a poem was not offered to your memory as you ended this masterpiece of yours. In the first place, the woman does not react positively to this instance of self-glorification: she dislikes intensely self-assured, haughty individuals. 'Who does he think he is?' or 'What does he think he can be?' and so on, along the same lines. You recite your poem, and during your recitation the woman fiddles with her smartphone, and at one point you even have the feeling she is about to call someone, probably one of her lovers. And this incident might happen during your performance, during your confession, for every poem is a confession, to some extent; even if you write about a war in which you do not take part. You write about the horrors of this war, and a woman sitting opposite you rings someone up and starts talking about her pearls. What kind of dissonance do we witness on such occasions? Well, the woman has a lot of patience

and so does not interrupt your recitation, in spite of her ardent desire to do so immediately, without further ado. The recitation is over, and the woman casts a glance at your face. And as she does so, she says, 'I'm not sure you're quite sincere, generally speaking. And this poem proves this incapacity of yours – being sincere, I mean – rather eloquently, unquestionably. And why should one have a relationship with a person whose sincerity is almost non-existent? Actually, I think we could sacrifice the word "almost" for the sake of truth.' You do not reply, but in your brain there appears this remark 'to cast pearls in the presence of swine, within the domain occupied by swine. First you should leave this domain, and then you are permitted to cast whatever you like, for in this case your gifts will not be treated outrageously.' Of course you are not as self-assured as to imagine that your poem is holy; as holy as the Holy Scriptures. So you can give it to dogs without overstepping the bounds of what you are allowed to do with impunity. But you had better not cast your poems before swine, even though they are not holy; far from it. Sometimes they are insolent, indecent, and often, dissatisfied with the results of your inspiration, you give them to dogs who do not consume them; even if they are hungry. Who are these dogs, by the way? Shakespeare's characters? And who are these swine, the ones in whose direction you cast your pearls, whenever you forget the holy precepts? You carefully inquire about holiness as such, about its definition and destination. Holiness is destined for the European market. The point is we often answer questions and conduct inquiries almost automatically. And a multitude of words from papers and other pernicious sources interfere with our honest, topic-orientated thoughts. What does the European market have to do with holiness? Someone might say it has a lot to do with swine, but let us not go so far. Let us not be outrageous in our turn. What do we mean when the word 'outrageous' comes from our mouth? What is outrageous boils down to swine, dogs and other notions touched upon at the beginning of this text. A dog is nice, wonderful and friendly if he is our dog. We caress him and take him for walks, whenever he needs it dramatically. And what about swine? They just denote our disgust; or our appetite directed towards some cutlets and other dishes we often find on our dinner tables. Apparently the Chinese eat dogs, but I am not quite sure about this fact. I even question the very existence of this fact. Probably it is embroidered upon by those who do not like China and pretend that Europeans are far above all other representatives of our species scattered all over the Earth. (Some of them are in the cosmos, being part and parcel of some interstellar stations or spaceships.) We know almost everything about pearls. We know that some of them are produced and cherished in Japan, and others are found in the seas, in our seas explored by our swimmers wearing masks. We are also aware of the interdiction related to the unfortunate custom which allows us to manipulate a number of pearls in the presence of swine. No, it is the other way round. We are *not* allowed to exhibit our pearls, whenever some swine walk in the neighbourhood, not far from our bodies adorned with pearls and other precious trinkets. Dogs are admitted to this area, even if they are attracted by the pearls we wear; even if they try to bite them, to remove them from our necks or wrists. We just say to them, 'Wait a minute! In a minute or so I'll give you a succulent piece of meat.' We are quite certain that our dogs will never contradict us by imparting to our brains the following truth, 'Pearls are much more succulent than any meat.' All this is nonsense, of course, but one thing is certain: our pearls are not holy and so, logically enough, we can give them to our dog. We can even give them to swine, on condition that we do not cast them.

‘We must therefore be on our guard, lest anything should be opened up to him who does not receive it: for it is better that he should seek for what is hidden, than that he should either attack or slight what is open.’

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Something opens up and you receive it; or you do not. If you do not, you are condemned to a certain amount of suffering, but all this is quite abstract. You understand only a few words, for instance ‘to receive’. They bestow upon you a prize and a lot of money, and you receive both as you say, ‘Thank you very much indeed.’ But there are cases – we know some of these cases, strangely enough – when someone receives neither the prize in question nor the money (in the same question). Why? Because you find that those who give you the prize are not respectable enough. Besides, they give their support to a few criminals you stigmatize, whenever such an opportunity comes along. As for the money in question, you have enough of this base metal and so do not really need more than what you already have. Of course there are people who say, ‘You always need money, even if you have heaps of dollars in several banks in Singapore and other safe havens of this kind’ The saying (is it a saying?) ‘enough is enough’ does not concern either dollars or money, which amounts to the same thing, as everybody knows. Enough is not enough in this domain. If you open your piggy bank – or if it opens up of its own accord – you see your riches in front of you. Hopefully your piggy bank is enormous, gigantic, and so you are rich enough to afford a lot of things – the whole world, as they usually say. What do they mean by the whole world? Can you afford Australia, for instance? Or New Zealand, for that matter? The whole world of sentiments and pleasures – that is what they usually mean. You can buy love and intelligence, and the might which enables you to construct a few castles in the air, many castles in the air. And when the air is exhausted, being finite, not infinite, you create a multitude of air portions where your machines and thoughts display themselves. And you receive this air. How? You breathe profoundly, completely, and your lungs grow in the twinkling of an eye. This is one of the dimensions of our life: the twinkling of an eye. With the passing of the years, you realise that now and then you cannot really twinkle your eyes because you are sleepy. But even when you are sleepy, you can raise your index finger, the one you always find on your right hand. You raise this finger and everything happens, opens up: heaven, among other things. And you receive this heaven inside your bosom. And then you begin to receive it even outside it. Oddly enough, you find Australia and New Zealand – among your airy conquests. Did you seek for them during your exercise? What exercise? You are breathing almost uncontrollably. You do not know exactly what is going on. You know that the world is as open as one of the oysters you ate last night. You had bought this oyster in one of the nearby shops. Did you seek it? No – you just found it in the shop because you knew they sold oysters and other things of this kind, a lot of things indestructibly linked to seas and oceans. The shopkeeper went so far as to open a dozen oysters, anxious as he was to please you, one of his best customers. You ate one of these oysters in his presence; you attacked it, in other words. There are people who, before picking up a fork, say to other individuals who hold other forks, ‘Let us attack, *attaquons!*’ Yet oysters do not feel slighted, when eaten by a group of gourmets. Nor do *you* feel slighted, when one of the members of your group or bunch says to you, ‘Could I have the last oyster? Your oysters are so delicious I can’t withhold my *élan*.’ But there are people who are not very fond of oysters. You open one or two oysters in their presence, but they do not turn a hair. They do something else – they move away from these oysters, saying they may provoke a very unpleasant reaction on the part of their bodies or bowels. Of course you are most reluctant to witness this reaction, whatever it may be. You have a few ideas about what might happen on this occasion, and you do not like this idea, this forthcoming happening. And then you

meditate upon the world. You look at it once again and realise it is more or less open. Many things are open in your neighbourhood and they offend your sight and mind. And there is nothing you can do about it. You hate them and your hatred does not leave you alone. Nor does it leave you in peace. So you attack the things that offend you because you are against offences, generally speaking. These things may feel slighted; at least some of them do not experience any pleasant sensations in the course of your intervention. Such is the world. You receive this world – little by little, I might say. No twinkling eyes, no moving fingers. Then you open your arms; little by little. And you receive the world. And you hug it to your heart's content. And then you ask yourself a simple question, 'Have I received the world?' Giving the world a bear hug does not mean its reception. You can give the same hug to an ordinary chair; or to a Louis XV armchair. But do you receive this armchair in the process? Hardly. Receiving is another kettle of fish. No – it is just another, another, another. You hug many objects on your way to the dining room where a delicious meal is waiting for you. A few minutes later, you receive this meal; even your stomach receives it. Does your stomach give it a bear hug? And what about your intestines? Do they give it at least their intestine hug? No – they just receive what is given. And you continue to give them a lot of tasty titbits.

'And in truth, it was right that they who wished to have an answer to what they asked, should themselves first do what they required to be done toward them; and if they had done this, they would certainly have answered themselves.'

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There are only questions and answers in whatever we come across. And even if we do not budge, we realise we have to deal with this heterogeneous mass of nonsense which crops up everywhere. You look at an object and the nonsense I am trying to describe most accurately crops up as if prompted and inspired by a renowned conductor. The point is the conductor is often second-rate, and that is why we mostly encounter a heap of imbecilities, and we are paralysed by the stupidity of this nonsense. Upon awakening we think about this nonsense and so, in a way, we are prepared for these sessions during which we are supposed to find all sorts of answers to all sorts of questions. It is envisaged that a number of catastrophes will start at the end of this year. The same goes for every day we have to cope with. Instead of saying 'a number of problems' we should say 'a number of catastrophes' or 'a multitude of catastrophes'. We have no idea how many catastrophes we shall have to confront, but we should be assured that a multitude of catastrophes are lying in wait for us. Where? Everywhere, behind every bush. And if there are no bushes in our neighbourhood, in our lives, there are benches or trees or men and women. We meet them and catastrophes get under way and prosper – faster than our careers, lives and agendas. Well, we yearn for happiness, and no one can blame us for this state of mind. But we should realise at all costs that we must build this happiness ourselves, otherwise we shall never receive an answer to the question we put to everybody, including the Almighty, 'What is happiness?' All right, we build our happiness, we construct it. We nail the well-known inscription 'HAPPINESS' to the façade of our building. What next? Where are the answers we are waiting for with such assiduity, not to say patience? Of course some onlookers might say, 'The answer is your building or castle and the inscription that adorns it.' But this answer is not satisfactory because you have found it yourself. You need something that usually comes out of the blue or from another world. Even the Hereafter is in a position to supply this answer. Needless to say, you are reluctant to pay

it a visit, even for the sake of the answer, of its validity, importance, for its epoch-making quality. Of course many onlookers say that the answer lies in the process during which you succeeded in bringing to life a new heap of *materia*. Understandably enough, you do not accept the word 'heap' which you are used to inserting into other contexts. A 'masterpiece' of *materia* is more suitable, in your opinion. And logically enough, you prefer the word 'materia' to its linguistic equivalent 'matter' which is too vulgar, too down-to-earth. Nevertheless the idea of the Hereafter persists and you turn towards tables. In other words, you begin to turn tables as you search for the definitive answer to all your problems and for the final accomplishment of your destiny, of your happiness. You choose an appropriate table and begin to turn it. At one of the turns – you can call it a 'turn of destiny' – you stumble upon a few words which seem to come up to your expectations. They come, come, come and eventually arrive at their destination. Here is the answer to your questions, problems and aspirations. What is more, you have created it yourself. But what about the table you continue to turn? What for, one might ask? Well, you do not know the answer to this question. Be that as it may, you go on turning this table. Then you come across some other tables and begin to turn them in their turn. Are you dissatisfied with the answer you got as a result of your endeavour? There is another word you are unable to remove from your mind. This word is 'process.' Results do not count. It is the process you should share your life with. What process? All of a sudden, you recall the title of Kafka's famous novel *The Trial*. You recall the original title of this novel. And you begin to speak to yourself, which happens whenever you endeavour to understand the foundation of life, its general structure. Once again you find yourself in your bed, and you see yet another morning as you open your eyes. They enter your room and arrest you. No, this happens very seldom unless you are in Russia where they can arrest you because they carry out this action at the drop of a hat. No wonder – in Russia people file lawsuits at the drop of a hat these days. But you are not arrested – for the simple reason that you are not in Russia. But you look around you, leave your room and realise that many things, a lot of occurrences, embellish your life from the outside. So this kind of thing happens even if you stay in your room. And if you leave it, you encounter outside forces, and you take it easy, in accordance with the precepts you have heard throughout your life. That is why you try to persuade yourself that all these details – catastrophes, not mere details – *embellish* your life. Actually they destroy it little by little. Or big by big. You make jokes because you know that joking makes things look rather cheerful. They may look awful, but they bless you nevertheless. You admit it to yourself, but you never talk about your sorry plight to others. Your innate pride will never permit you to do so neither abundantly nor prudently. Occasionally you might confess your sins – in the presence of a priest. But you keep your miseries and even your mishaps to yourself. Your chest keeps your dissatisfactions and wounds enclosed within itself; as if it was a treasure. Yes, you seem to treasure your ill-feelings, your reactions to whatever is unfair in the outside world. To some extent, you are a treasure island in your own right. But you must admit – and you do admit – that the outside world gratifies you, now and then, and you honestly think you prepare these pleasant surprises first in your brain and then in this world that you construct mainly thanks to your hands and other parts of your body. For instance, someone rings your bell, the bell of your house, I mean, and gives you a bunch of roses. Of course you can think – no one forbids you to have unintelligent thoughts – that you bought these flowers yourself. Why? To enliven your tarnished, monotonous life. You bought this bunch and, on your way home, you encountered a man to whom you offered several euros. Why? You asked him to deliver these flowers, to ring your bell, wait for your appearance in the doorway and hand this bunch to you, to the purchaser of these flowers. (If you use the word 'flowers', you should not repeat it. Next time you are supposed to use the

word 'bunch'. That is how many writers proceed, and they think this procedure is right. And it is right, if you think in terms of the present. It is better to receive various different bunches of roses on every occasion that presents itself.) But life is not a bunch of roses. They also speak about beer and skittles, but you are convinced that it is a trial. And someone tries to persuade you that you are under arrest. You say to such people, 'I like Kafka very much, but I don't think you have to identify with his heroes. Anyway, this procedure, I mean this identification, doesn't deserve my respect.' What else can you say on the subject? You say you would like to buy a castle: in this case, the identification they talk about rather often is fully justified. You own the castle and every morning you leave it for a marvellous walk full of unparalleled landscapes. From time to time you look back and admire your castle. You never tire of its beauty, to tell the truth. What is more, you have no problems on your way back: you always reach your castle in no time at all. You do not even ask for the return to this castle, for the castle itself. Anyway, it is your creation unless you doubt it somehow, considering that Kafka inspired you in a way. You read his novel before buying this castle – this is an undeniable truth. But you forget about this truth or untruth as you plunge into the universe offered by this castle. And this universe is not limited to a cup of tea or a bottle of wine. What else does this life offer you? Your beautiful furniture about which Franz Kafka did not say a word. Actually he did not even mention a comfortable bed and its canopy. And your sweet dreams? He did not talk about them either. So you say to yourself, 'I'm the creator of the world. And I'm created in my own image.'

'Moreover, a certain strength and vigour in walking along the path of wisdom lies in good morals, which are made to extend as far as to purification and singleness of heart.'

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You walk along a path, and you ask yourself if this path is somehow related to wisdom. There are beautiful paths in the world, but beauty is not always linked to wisdom. It is enough to think about some individuals in this connection. These individuals are undoubtedly beautiful, handsome, tall and elegant. But are they wise? Not always, not necessarily. Strictly speaking, wisdom is a rarity you should cherish, whenever you have an opportunity to hear it speak, to touch it, to consume it. When walking along the path of wisdom – and you are not always aware of the fact, of this wisdom – you must feel a lot of resistance on the part of stupidity, degradation, loose morals, whatever they are, and so on. As for loose morals, their definition depends on your tastes and ideals. In Russia today you are condemned, if you do not follow the common road where only heterosexual individuals walk and enjoy themselves. If these individuals happen to be uncommon, they are expelled from this path, from any honourable path you can get acquainted with in your life. These uncommon, perverse and harmful individuals are put somewhere – in a domain where there are no normal joys, no final salvation and no resurrection. Of course Paradise is out of the question in these perverse and intolerable kingdoms; according to the Russians who live today in Russia and probably elsewhere. But why should we talk about them? Don't we have some other topics at hand? Within our field of vision there are many themes and destinies we could regard as exemplary. Why? Because they lead to the purity of our heart. To the purity or to the purification? The latter version seems to allude to a process thanks to which we can acquire purity and even singleness of heart. What does this singleness mean? We are attacked by vices of all kinds, and these vices are situated partly in sexual impurities that the Russians define with precision and spiritual awareness. They are

aware of the punishments that lie in store for all those who indulge in abnormal relationships and common sins. And in the kingdom of these sins there is no room for what is called singleness of heart. Once again I should remind everyone that purity is a rare phenomenon to which the word 'singleness' alludes or rather points with unmistakable assuredness. Of course we use this word in other contexts. In Japan you are often asked if you are single or not. If you are an honest man, you should answer as follows, 'Yes, I'm not married, but this doesn't mean my heart demonstrates its singleness round the clock.' And what would you say under cross-examination? You would make the following speech, 'Of course I'm aware of the fact that a chaste, pure partner can lead you to this singularity or rather singleness rather easily. Purity is contagious, although we shouldn't forget that sins are even more contagious. Sins are like viruses, like Covid, if you wish, whereas purity is a unique microbe. A positive microbe, if I may say so. There are positive microbes, although some of our colleagues aren't aware of their beneficial existence. These microbes combat perversity often expressed by viruses and similar phenomena. Positive microbes are good morals, in a manner of speaking. And our manners of speaking count a lot in our life which is partly, mostly based on linguistics, on our attachment to our native language. And also to foreign languages that we use, whenever short of other means of expression. Sometimes we're at odds with reality, with real facts to such a point that even our mother tongue is powerless and so can't provide a necessary instrument, the instrument we need in our struggle with obscurity, impurity and other evils of our society. We resort to foreign languages or vulgar words which allow us to air our grievances in our own language. We become vulgar, in other words, and this isn't propitious within the context of our conquest of purity. Whatever prevents us from becoming pure, impeccable (free from sins of all kinds) should be immediately banished from our life or lives, from the path we're following in our endeavour to reach the sphere of impeccability. We admit that there are individuals who do their best to make us deviate from our itinerary. They envy us, our itinerary and our final destination on a mountain top, as Zarathustra used to put it. You can hardly see this top, for it is hidden by a multitude of clouds. But the top is above the clouds, being in the vicinity of the stars.' And so on and so forth. Often you grow weary of your own speeches and conclusions. One of these conclusions teaches you the following truth: purity is independent of speeches. It is rooted in your innate goodness, in your morals and manners. You go out and are accosted by a few beggars, whereupon you empty your pockets. Frankly speaking, you give them all your money. And purity descends upon you on the spot.

'The eye, therefore, being cleansed and rendered single, will be adapted and suited to behold and contemplate its own inner light.'

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How could you cleanse your eye? Why should you cleanse it? Of course you often cry, our life being what it is. You cry for the sake of what comes after this kind of cleansing – a sort of alleviation, You alleviate your pains, and if there is nothing to alleviate, you cry for the sake of crying because it turns you into a different substance in which there is less pain, less suffering, less, less, less. Usually you are oriented towards the notion called 'more'; you are 'more-oriented'. More money, more intelligence. But with the passing of the years you realise that the notion 'less' is far more important. (Not far less important, oddly enough.) You wish you had fewer years on your back; in your body, generally speaking. And even less intelligence, believe it or not. Your intelligence demonstrates the horror of the world and of the coming years and seconds. Whatever comes is

awful, and you cannot get rid of this sensation, feeling, foreboding and what not. You do not contemplate your own inner light, even if you do your utmost to create an enlightened universe. You switch on the lights as soon as you see a switch. You flip it and some sort of light comes into being. But it is a different light, the wrong light: it is not an *inner* light. You say to yourself that there are wrong, pernicious lights in the universe so that the word 'light' does not guarantee anything; neither happiness nor bliss nor Paradise nor eternity. What a pity there are no switches on your body. You are sure that any switch operates lights and so it is enough to have a switch within your reach, provided it is hand in glove with your body. Yes, you are longing to switch your body on, come hell or high water. In this way you will have more energy, more vitality – more life in your inner and outer being. Suddenly you recall your 'less-orientation'. What a mess you create, whenever light appears on the threshold of your life; an idea of light, to be precise. The idea comes, and you begin to fiddle with switches, with your body, with candles which have a spiritual dimension; at least that is what your heart and spirit whisper in your ear. And you continue to cry, for cleansing is still on the top of your agenda. How could you live without your permanent cleansing? You cleanse your eyes, your ears, your nerves which grow more and more dirty on account of the dirtiness of life; of your thoughts, rather. Well, you cleanse your eyes, to begin with. But do you render them single? What does the word 'single' mean in the context? Should you remove your second eye from your existence? In this case, if you have the nerve to do it realistically, your other eye will mock both you and the eye you got rid of rather spasmodically, unintelligently. No, this is not the solution you hanker after. You have already come across the word 'singleness' and you know it has nothing to do with singularity. But do you know exactly what singularity means? Apparently it is a space where you no longer suffer from gravity. Or it is the other way round. If you are manipulated by the forces hidden in this singular space, you fall into a black hole almost immediately. And then you realise you are deprived of whatever you have ever had within your being. You become an unbeing, in a manner of speaking. You are still concentrated upon your eye, but your meditation stumbles upon your whole being, and you cannot disregard this stumbling block. So you turn your attention to this being (or unbeing) of yours. And you say to yourself that your friends might be at the root of the problems you struggle with – for the simple reason that, from time to time, they can be found and seen by your side. The same goes for your mistresses who are your friends, to some extent. But they are also your mistresses and so you are doubly burdened by their presence. Anyway, your singleness is burdened; so is your eye, the eye in question. You end up cleansing your life by removing your friends and mistresses from all your fields; from your field of vision, among other fields. When meditating upon your existence, you come across your numerous wounds: some of them are still on your agenda, tragically enough. All your troubles come together and so do your words. And you come up with the following conclusion: cleanse the wounds thoroughly before you bandage them. Isn't this the answer you have been looking for so painstakingly? You cleanse your wounds – most of them are imaginary – and begin to understand the word 'single'. It means 'unique', and if you continue to link this singleness to the eye mentioned at the beginning of the text, you realise that you are a Cyclops – one of the creatures described by Homer and attacked by Odysseus. I seem to have talked about them for a long time unless I am confusing them with a character from *King Lear* who lost first one eye and then the other. At the first stage of his ordeal he was threatened by the spectre of Odysseus who, in the real world, upon his return to it, sees the Cyclops and Penelope everywhere. Occasionally he also sees and encounters his dog who continues to recognise him, in spite of the years which do not stop on their way to eternity and the disparity of the world: one of them is here, the other is over there. And, as usual, no one knows exactly where this 'over there' is. But

why do we care about its whereabouts? Unfortunately we cannot turn down the sound of the world. Nor can we switch on our inner light. But we can get closer and closer to a candle, hoping to be positively contaminated by it. And then temperature or heat interferes with our efforts, and we renounce our attempt as we recall Savonarola who did something similar a long time ago. He recoiled in horror upon seeing a number of fires, if my memory serves me right. Anyway, he recoiled, even if the details of his moral and physical weakness escape us. Probably he thought his inner light was quite sufficient for his posthumous glory. ‘Why should I walk through other lights?’ he asked himself. Can you walk through your inner light? If the amount, the quantity of this light allows you to reach this stage of greatness. In this manner you kill two birds with one stone: you prove the existence of your inner light, and you parade its greatness in front of the whole world. And at the same time you triumph over Savonarola whose greatness is seldom disputed in our religious world. And what if someone points out that your inner light is cold? Why? Because you have not burnt to cinders yet. After much soul-searching you agree with this statement: sacred books do not discuss the temperature of the inner light. They talk only about its brightness and usefulness. By the way – are you permitted to blink or wink? Wouldn’t any movement of your eyes automatically get in the way of their singleness?

‘Here, therefore, those who promise a wisdom and a knowledge of the truth which they do not possess, are especially to be guarded against.’

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People cannot give you much, whatever our lovers of humanity tell us, being infatuated with the human body, mind and psyche; and sins, we might add because we know the truth. But at the beginning you hope to receive something, which means that all our relationships are not disinterested. We have interests everywhere, and some of these interests are not linked to money. Sometimes we just need a friendly glance, but more often than not we get nothing, needless to say. You take your leave and go somewhere in search for someone to whom you might promise the truth which enlightens human beings in the domain of happiness, of their personal happiness. You go around the world and say to everybody, ‘I promise to open your eyes. Please, make an effort and open them. As I can see, your eyes are open now. So I can tell you the truth. You’ll never be happy on account of the narrow range of your emotion and ideas. Even if you pull at this range with all your might, you won’t be able to extend it beyond its natural size. And its size is pretty small, as I pointed out earlier.’ You are internationally acclaimed, and your admirers call you ‘a truthful internationalist’ or ‘a denier of phoney promises’ or ‘an antihappinessist’. I am not sure you are satisfied with these names. They hold no promises in their bosoms. When you say to somebody, ‘You’re about to become happy,’ there is a promise in your remark; it is literally enclosed in it. And one happiness leads to another happiness, whereas unhappiness leads nowhere. Oddly enough, it does not even lead to another unhappiness: it is so huge it invades and paralyses the whole world. Even other people are affected by it. They say to each other, ‘My God, someone must be really unhappy. I can hardly breathe.’ Unhappiness is far more contagious than its counterpart – it is counter-productive, one might say. And even your promise to the world to liberate it from unhappiness, as Marx, Lenin and Stalin did, you will never fulfil your promise. And if you say, ‘I can’t promise anything,’ you may achieve the opposite result, for many reasons. In the first place, you prove that you are modest and therefore cannot be accused of haughtiness. Besides, you do not carry out any anti-human, savage and inconsiderate action: you just do not act. Of course

you make all sorts of gestures, but you do not even touch anybody in the course of this private ritual. You just make gestures that have no consequences, with the exception of some private incidents, occurrences. They are limited to your own persona and do not exceed the limits of your life. And since your life does not contain any humanistic projects, you just enjoy yourself without sending your signals, your business to others. Is that how we should live? And if someone drowns in our presence? Of course we can fetch a stick and let the person who happens to be in dire straits take advantage of it. The person does not drown, and once again you are not rewarded for your kindness. How many times have you been rewarded for it in the course of your life? Never, never, never. You repeat this truth and realise that only this word has a ring of truth. Everything else has a ring of lies. How do lies ring? Just listen to whatever happens around you and even to what lies outside your being. What do you hear? An oratorio of lies. And this oratorio is not composed by Handel, far from it. Consequently, it is not necessary to go to a concert hall to listen to it. Nor do you have to put on a disc or a long-playing record. You just wake up and listen to the effect of your becoming aware of the world. And then something drops on your bed from the ceiling. You do not even look at the unknown object, for you know: it is another piece of lie, of what may be called the universal lie. And even when you lie down to make yourself comfortable in your bed, you expect another instance of lie; you expect its nocturnal visit which usually occurs in your dreams. Or you just open your eyes in the middle of the night, and regret the disappearance of a pleasant dream where lies had a positive effect on your nervous system; for some obscure reason. But there is nothing positive in the darkness you contemplate willy-nilly: you do not like to spend the hours called insomnia with your eyes closed. You say to yourself that closing your eyes belies your sleepless condition, and you are not a hypocrite, in spite of the astronomical number of defects you harbour within your substance or nonsense. Yes, you prefer all other defects because, in your opinion, there is nothing worse than hypocrisy. You do not deny your attachment to evil, to the monstrosities you give utterance to in the presence of other human beings; let us call them like that for the sake of laconism. But hypocrisy is out of the scope of your defectiveness or your defectuousity. Or your evilness, your baseness. They accuse you of all sorts of crimes, but you raise your head and contradict them in the same breath or rather within the same jerk. 'I recognise my misdemeanours, but allow me to point out that I'm not a hypocrite.' Of course you do not allow yourself to kill someone: you never go too far. You cannot bear the sight of a corpse over which you might utter this sentence linked to your hypocrisy. Of course you are not morally forbidden to kill the same someone and leave the room, upon hearing your victim's last breath. And then you are allowed to heave a sigh of relief and utter the sentence so dear to your heart. Nothing is dearer to your heart than this affirmation, this conviction. Sometimes you admit that you are lonely, a lonely wolf or bear or cat. 'But I'm not a hypocrite,' you add with a defiant jerk of your head. 'Yes, neither women nor men are in love with me. And yet hypocrisy is not my pigeon.' Then you start counting your pigeons. Usually they count their chickens before they are hatched; or after they are hatched. You count your pigeons. You do not belong to the gregarious mass of human intellects; of their absences, rather. You are unique – thanks to your pigeons and overall concentration on truth and its knowledge. You count your pigeons – this is the truth you have been looking for all your life.

'Now trial is twofold; either in the hope of obtaining some temporal advantage, or in the terror of losing it.'

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You cannot have everything and so, if you have something, however insignificant and ludicrous, you are inclined to keep it, instead of going further; too far. You always go too far, if you do your best to reach a better life, to gain ground, to achieve a number of goals, having the upper hand in your battle with bad luck and your rivals, with your staunch enemies. You lose many things on your way to the end of something; to the end of your life, as they say. But this end comes and you say to your relatives who bend over your deathbed, over your sick, tormented head, 'I'm about to lose everything, down to my life.' You are right, and probably you are right for the first time in your life. There is always the first time, even if this time comes, when you are on the threshold of death. You try to picture to yourself this threshold which you cross as slowly as you can. This reminds you of these cyclists who move very ponderously, determined to win in the long run. The longer the run, the better, except that, at some point, you have to zoom along the path, otherwise you will lose the battle and a lot of money. This does not always happen, whatever we might think on the subject. We are almost sure that we always lose money, not only when we lose something, some competition or other. No – sometimes we lose just honour or something along the same lines: our renown, our pride, our place on the social ladder which does not *always* depend on the amount of money you can count upon in the course of your life. Sometimes they say, 'He's poor, but he's so gifted, so talented, so wonderful.' And whenever they embroider upon your artistic or scientific qualities, you are itching to say to them, 'Give me some money, you fools.' And you lose your laurels, without acquiring anything; and therefore money remains out, out of your reach. Out, out you repeat as you go out to emphasise your distress, to make it more or less visible, tangible, realistic. That is what is habitually called 'the terror of losing it'. It, it, it you say as you point to various objects, feelings and subjects – other human beings. Someone seems to cherish your friendship, and then you lose the sentiment the verb 'to cherish' denotes and also the bearer of this sentiment. The sentiment does not belong to your personality and being; yet you experience its loss very acutely as if you were directly and physically involved in the process. I have just realised to what extent I overuse the expression 'in the course of one's life'. What else could I say? How to replace this expression, this definition of our common destiny? Of our personal time, if you prefer. Can we own time? Or space, for that matter? Within an idiom, within a few words. And we should content ourselves with these words. We should be elated, if not happy, outright happy. We should become completely and immediately happy, for it would be deplorable and disastrous not to make the most of this opportunity. Becoming happy; once and for all. Once is certainly within our power, might and possibilities. We live only once, and this proves that we can have something, be it the whole world or a gold trinket, only once, or just once, whereas any permanence gives rise to questions, problems and answers and solutions which may turn out to be even more painful than this gold trinket. We are stuck, jammed and that is our eternity, our 'once and for all'. But there are explosions, our joys, our bliss that can visit us from time to time. And these explosions deny both permanence and the irrevocable nature of our fate. At least we are allowed to play with the word fate, putting it in reverse order. You just write it upside down or as follows: tefa; whereupon you realise you are a master of your fate. You can handle it, mangle it. How? You just put it in your washing machine, and it will get mangled in no time at all. And then you straighten it up, you hang it on one of your walls and look at it as if it were another Mona Lisa. Your fate is Mona Lisa – no doubt about it. You can live within a picture, inside it. You can also *live* with a picture. Why not marry it? So you marry your destiny and thereby obtain some temporal advantage. Of course you are aware of your destiny's capricious character and so you are rather powerless in its presence. Your destiny is not at your orders, and that turns out to be one of your advantages:

you are not good at giving orders. You give an order, and the result is a new disorder to which you get accustomed in the long run. You run all the time, and your runs are long – so long that you cannot call them ‘some temporal advantage’: it is an *eternal* advantage you possess. But do you need such advantage? You run, you are exhausted and so you pray, asking the Almighty to deprive you of this temporal advantage. You promise not to succumb to the sentiment of terror, to its nervous breakdowns, to its down, to its breaks. You promise not to break the members of your body – in a fit of delirium. You break them rather negligently – just for the fun of it. What is your temporal advantage now? You can see the pieces of your body scattered around your room. You see them distinctly and so you do not have to search for them. You do not have to kneel down and squeeze your body through various apertures – in search of your honourable members. You do not have to crawl on all fours under your bed. When spending some time under your bed, you run the risk of bumping your head against its nether surface. And this bumping is painful, you know. Luckily for you, the temporal advantage you obtained some time ago allows you to recover all your members – and consequently your equilibrium – rather quickly, considering that all your members and thoughts and even feelings are arrayed in front of you. You just bend down, pick them up and once again grow happy. And you swear you will never lose this happiness. But you are supposed to act, so as not to lose this advantage, these exceptional circumstances. You begin to sew up your pocket to prevent things – your happiness, among other things – dropping from them. You keep your mouth shut because every word of yours is capable of destroying your tremendous luck. A word drops from your mouth, whereupon you realise that your good mood is no longer there. And you cannot pick up this word and stuff it into your mouth and soul immediately. You close your eyes so as not to see the fall of your Roman Empire, your private empire. And what about your ears? As a matter of fact, your ears, your inner ears listen only to Beethoven’s masterpieces, and the sound you hear is so voluminous you are unable to capture any other audible manifestation of the world. So you have finally succeeded in putting your life in order. Your body and mind are on form and so you can run or jump or think. You think a lot and your thoughts run faster and faster, further and further. You can already see the end of the road, and Paradise smiles in your presence and you are convinced its smile is addressed to your brain and psyche. You are psychic, as they say, and your powers enable you to contemplate Paradise in all its splendour. And then you detect a few traces of terror which is taking a walk through your muscles. And the horrified vibration of your muscles annihilates your ecstasy, your awareness of the radiant future. You are aware only of your terror, losses and unhappiness. Advantage, disadvantage, advantage, disadvantage. Unconsciously you imitate Giselle who, at some point, in the first act, interrogates a flower, anxious to find out if she is loved, adored or not. She is not loved; nor is she adored – not in the first act anyway. The prince or whoever he is falls in love with her only after her death, which often happens under the circumstances, under the canopy of heaven, under its protection and curse.

‘Moreover, there are two several virtues (or talents) which have been proposed to the mind of man. Of these, the one is the active, and the other the contemplative.’

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You know that whatever you do is right. You are active, considering that your arms and legs are moving right now; and you promise to yourself and also to your consciousness, which is not always at your command, that you will continue to activate the muscles of your members for some time, for a few minutes to come. This is a

virtue, and in due course you are sure to be luxuriously rewarded for your efforts, for your devotion to the activity and beauty of life. But you can also *contemplate* this activity by putting a mirror in front of your nervous, tumultuous body. In this manner you become both active and inert or rather contemplative. Whenever they speak about contemplation, they are heaven-orientated: their thoughts fly towards the stars and stay with them for some time, being amazed and amused by their multitude and relative diversity. Are the stars active? Apparently they fight now and then: the struggle for life is not a privilege exclusively enjoyed by the inhabitants of our planet. They are active, believe it or not, but when we look at them, while sitting on a bench, we might get the feeling they are immobile. And yet they twinkle, which leads us to the following conclusion: the stars are active and contemplative at the same time. What do they contemplate? Our deeds and thoughts because we are at the centre of the universe, and one cannot prosper without the centre. Leading an unprosperous life is not a seductive proposal; and even the stars realise this, in spite of their distant attitudes. What kind of exercise or conduct could we suggest in the context of our own routine? Why not try and twinkle, if only for a month? After all, we have always admired the stars, not only during our so-called 'love-periods', when we are really head over heels in love with somebody. Of course we recite a few star-oriented poems, and write a novel in which the hero goes to a star and settles on it for the sake of his wife who cannot bear a life removed from heaven and its spiritual overtones. For a while you try to persuade your wife that yoga is also efficient in the domain of health and spiritual wealth; as powerful as the stars. Of course your wife is capable of executing a few figures associated with yoga and its tortures, and lotuses come to your mind as soon as you focus your concentration on yoga and its beneficial influence on our health. But how to twinkle, for God's sake? You invite a little boy to your home, put him in one of your armchairs – an ordinary armchair would fit the bill – and ask him to sing the famous song about the twinkling star. He sings it. What is more, he wonders what you are. And you launch a discussion centred upon your life. Whenever you are at a loss for words and episodes, the boy asks you some pertinent questions, and you answer them at length. And your life grows longer and longer, promising a sort of eternity to which you aspire, like many tyrants and ordinary citizens. And you twinkle, being infallibly influenced by the boy's incantations. So you twinkle and imitate a monument erected in the middle of your room or rather your drawing room. Why erect a monument to yourself in your own house where no one can see and admire it? Of course the boy who keeps your twinkling in running order can tell the story to his family and even to the boys with whom he plays in the courtyards and streets of your native town. But this is not enough, and you are quite aware of the fact. This boy is unable to trigger your universal fame, and they will never give you a Nobel Prize on the strength of this boy's opinions. So you ask him to keep you company during your walk around the town square where you often come to a standstill, mindful of your immobility, of your stance on contemplation. But this blissful walk does not last – for the simple reason that the boy is attracted by other pastimes, by the soccer played by his coevals. So from time to time you lose his company and consequently stop twinkling, which has a disastrous effect on your mental disposition. You lose control and even collapse in the middle of the street because no one pays attention to your monument, as you explain to yourself. (Your interior monologues go on, unmindful of the situations you get involved in.) But isn't your lying body a monument? It is, on condition that you add to it the expression 'in its own right'. The same goes for your twinkling. You flutter your eyelashes at a nearby man and feel exceptionally elated.

‘For assuredly those books (if there are such) must be most profitable and most wholesome, seeing they are the productions of one whom they acknowledge to have been the wisest of men.’

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You write a book and nobody reads it. Then you write a preface to this book, saying you found this manuscript in a desert where, once upon a time, a castle had been erected where...And then you inform your readers that this manuscript, the one they hold in their hands, was written by an unparalleled genius. Sometimes this stratagem works; in other cases you are disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm on the part of your readers. They underestimate the value of your book because you did not attribute it to the Absolute Authority. Usually, if you use this definition, you add that everyone knows what name you have in mind. And then – absolutism often helps us on our way to universal fame – your book is sold everywhere, and critics rave about its literary and spiritual qualities. How many absolute authorities are there in the history of the world? Only one, I am afraid. But this authority, according to some specialists, never runs out of inspiration. So you chance upon his or her books almost everywhere, not necessarily in bookshops. Besides, there are films where these exceptional situations and characters are depicted most minutely. You study every minute, every detail of what is narrated with vivacity and truthfulness. And if someone, upon reading a few pages of your book, says, ‘It’s not true. The author is lying through his or her teeth,’ you answer, ‘Do you question the truthfulness of the Absolute Authority?’ And if your opponent continues to question it, you drop a remark which concerns your way of writing down the name of this authority. You just say you use two capital letters, and you add you might put a number of capital letters everywhere – for those who doubt the authenticity of your capital letters and your punctuation; your commas, among other things. But are there such books? If there are none, you just sit down in front of your computer and begin to type – as quickly as possible. After all, the world needs a few vestiges of what you call the Absolute Authority, and the longer it is deprived of its vestiges, the sooner some criminals will proceed with their evil doings. You are afraid you might be accused of these crimes because you are too lazy, and the word ‘lazybones’ resounds often in your vicinity – you admit it willingly and with sadness and melancholy. You would like to be a saviour of humanity, but instead of this imaginary exploit you are ill-treated by your contemporaries, and you cannot count on posterity either: no one understands what you write and why you do it. And even if you pretend that, whatever you share with the sheets of paper you use, when in the throes of your pointless, humiliating inspiration, is inspired by the forces lying well beyond our imagination, no one believes you. Or they say, ‘Your hearing is impaired. So what you write doesn’t correspond to what this mysterious voice confides to you.’ You go to a doctor and ask her to deliver a certificate, attesting that you hear perfectly not only every syllable they (these mysterious forces) utter in heaven or on Earth, but also dots, commas and so on; and even so forth. But the doctor answers, ‘I’m not qualified to discuss extramundane matters. Let us leave all these extras alone; or in peace. Let us get down to brass tacks.’ In your turn, you try to convince her that brass tacks are limited to this problem, to extras and hereafters. But the doctor has no time for your rambling and raving. So you go to another doctor, and then you stop these wanderings which always end up in a visit to yet another doctor. You decide to write an unquestionable masterpiece which will solve all your problems; even the problem of your immortality and untimely death. Will it save you from your *timely* death? Isn’t every death timely? If you put two and two together, the answer is unquestionably ‘yes’. That is why you shun this equation to the point of removing it from books and from the speeches you hear. Well, you cannot remove from your mind the conviction that you are the wisest of men. You are acquainted with a few intelligent

men, but when you compare yourself to them, you inevitably come to the conclusion that you are much wiser. You use the multiplication table on this occasion. You multiply their wisdom and yet, at the end of your mathematical operations, you always have the same result: you are the wisest of men. And the masterpiece you need to write – you yearn to prove to everyone that you are the wisest of men – is under way. The way is long and full of thorns. You go along this way, and roses surround you on all sides. But you never forget that roses are adorned with thorns. Why do you resort to the verb adorn under the circumstances? They bless you, whenever you get acquainted with them, whenever you are on intimate terms with those creatures. Yet you pronounce the verb ‘to adorn’ – for the simple reason that there are only adornments all around you. The core of your life, of the world at large is rotten, awful and quite unsuitable for the flourishing of joy and mental equilibrium. But if you adorn it every day, every night, every minute, it undergoes an appropriate metamorphosis, and in the near future – you are sure this is the truth no one can live without – everything will be as harmonious as a fugue composed by Bach. Your masterpiece goes from strength to strength and the near future about which you dreamt only a week ago comes to the fore, appears in all its splendour. Unfortunately, however, you are still unknown so that no one can take advantage of your lustre, your private and universal sun. No, it is not universal yet, this sun of yours. You have no sons, no daughters. Why do you remember this unfortunate situation at this particular moment? After all you experience a sort of elevation; and then you are brought down again by your own reflexions, meditations and what not. All right, you have no children, but your posterity, your posthumous fame does not depend on their presence, on the effort they might have made – a long time ago – to promote your literary and spiritual production. They might have gone around the world, lugging bags filled to the brim with your books. They might have exhibited your statues in squares in the capitals of the continents. Nothing of the kind will ever happen. And you grow sad, once again, once again. You unavoidably grow sad, whenever you realise that something will never happen, never ever. You may live a thousand years, and yet you are not likely to see these occurrences – not even at the very end of this period. You ask your neighbour what she thinks about this predicament. She answers, ‘I’m sure such a thing will never happen.’ ‘Do you ever go to the horse races?’ she asks. ‘Never,’ you answer. ‘Last year I bet £500,000 on the horse which came in second,’ she says. ‘So what?’ you say. ‘Shall we bet on this horse of ours?’ she asks. ‘What horse?’ ‘This occurrence.’ ‘But we’ll have to live a thousand years to find out if it is within the order of the cosmos.’ ‘Let us live a thousand years. I don’t mind. Do you?’ ‘No,’ you answer. And you live a thousand years, and since all others die around you, you end up feeling lonely. So you live together these thousand years. Ever after, as they say. Not quite, not quite – only a thousand years. Not ever ever.

‘They say, indeed, that this Ether is not spirit, but a lofty body in which the heaven is stretched above the air.’

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I have no ideas about what Ether is and where it is located, although I have heard this word many times, almost every day. There are ethereal beings, and whenever you come across them, you say to yourself, ‘She is made of Ether.’ And then a series of questions introduces itself, and you begin to wonder whether the Ether you are thinking about is wholly positioned in her body. After all, you admire her body’s elegance and delicacy; and also the natural grace of her movements. But you must admit, in spite of all your inner tendencies and hopes that she is on the surface of this planet and not really above it. Of course she can jump, and you witnessed a few

jumps of hers which seduced you even more than her speeches which are often on the vulgar side, strangely enough. It is not really vulgarity as such, but whenever she begins to speak, you feel she is not keen on words. And that is why these words are not always on a par with her movements, gestures and way of walking, her gait, and so on. Even when she picks up an apple, it is beautiful; the very gesture, the way she does it, is beautiful. And of course you have watched her many times under these circumstances; and many apples have disappeared into her wonderful, graceful, inimitable mouth. And her lips. You might talk for hours about her lips which are also ethereal. And you speak like that as you fix your attention on this beauty of hers, on that beauty of hers. She has a lot of beautiful features within her range of possibilities and charms and erotic skills. So she is on the side of bodies, in their domain, in their realm. And if you put her on a balcony she could probably jump from it, inclined to demonstrate her ability, her graciousness in the field of flights. Nevertheless she remains a body; she stubbornly stays in this category. What is more, as I pointed out earlier, she has a lot of affinities with Ether. And she was heaven-sent some time ago – when you met her for the first time. But you cannot affirm her body is stretched above the air, for the simple reason that she breathes. What is more, you admire her way of doing it, of consuming a portion of the air with the intention of living a little bit longer, a few seconds longer. And then she consumes yet another portion of the air, thereby projecting her elegance and delicacy onto the screen of the world. What does this reflexion or analysis amount to? Does it mount the throne of human thoughts? Yes, but it remains on the surface of the same planet which contains a few thrones, in spite of the growth of democracies. On the other hand, the threat of communism recoiled in horror before money and those consumers who prefer luxury cars to beautiful, lofty ideals. These ideals (communist ideals) are ethereal, in a way. Are they bodies or spirits? They used to march in the streets with flags and placards. In this case they were bodies and consequently the police – another group of bodies – had to intervene, putting an end to these demonstrations of a radiant future. At some point, people were fed up with this kind of radiance, and so communism began to disappear – first from the streets and then from our minds. It might be stretched above the air, though; for all I know. From time to time we do hear a few sounds which seem to originate above everything we are aware of. And we attribute these sounds to former communists, to their demonstrations, to their parades which are now sheltered by something above human capacities, powers and desires. Communism is too lofty, say some former communists whose lives go on as if kept alive, on a drip, in some Engels-sponsored hospital. (Marx did not have enough money for such rituals.) You write in your diary: ‘All I could hear was the drip of the rain from the roof.’ What was it? What did you hear and enjoy to the utmost? Was it the past or the future? The radiant, luminous future we have talked about so often, on so many occasions? Not only during the demonstrations on Red Square, mind you. Some individuals still treasure these drops, and cry abundantly, bent on increasing the number of drips.

‘But it may be said that Cicero, the Academic sage, who has been bold enough to make mention of the sepulchres of their gods, and to commit the statement to writing, is a more doubtful authority than the poets.’

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I am old enough to allow myself to forget a lot of things, and when a name is uttered in my presence – I ignore the names they utter in my absence – I doubt whether I can place it in my recollection. And more often than not my doubts are justified by my utter inability to put a name on its own step – part of the social ladder to which

we are accustomed as human beings. Cicero rings a bell, and of course I know where this bell comes from or rather where it resounds. Where it bells, so to speak. I think this Academic sage was born and grew within the frontiers of the Roman Empire. And these frontiers were elastic: they moved all the time. At the beginning they moved away from Rome, from its own capital. After a while, they began to move towards it submitted as they were to the continuous onslaught of barbaric troops. As for Cicero – I hope I do not confuse him with Demosthenes – he was a master of orations and so was widely acclaimed for his speeches; and also for his book on friendship. (Unless I confuse him with Montaigne.) Among his friends were certainly a few poets and also some gods, according to his own statements; otherwise he would not have touched upon their sepulchres. I suppose he constantly rubbed shoulders with them and so could witness their decline, their health problems. One god complained of his sore throat; another always put a hand on his heart, on the spot where the heart is supposed to hide from indecent spectators. He might have written about this phenomenon in one of his books. The point is I have not read *all* the books he wrote – for the simple reason that I have no room for them in my personal library. Of course there are lots of rooms for them in other libraries; not only in the Library of Congress, mind you. But I seldom go out nowadays, and all other libraries are located outside, outdoors, and therefore I have to leave my house, if my wish to get acquainted with Cicero's heritage more thoroughly overwhelms me. It never does, I am sorry to say. The poets mentioned in the text always speak about the gods in such a way that we have the feeling they sleep under their beds, given the multitude and exactitude of details they lavish upon us in their poems. Usually people say, 'I've no idea if they have an exceptional sex life or not. I don't even know if they sleep together because I don't sleep with them. To tell the truth, I've never even cast a glance at their bed. At her bed, rather. I don't know if this man sleeps in the same bed, if he doesn't have a bed of his own.' But the poets we are talking about know that Aphrodite paid a visit to Zeus or some other gods, and they spent a few nights in the same room at what they call the Olympus. They might put us in the picture about the way this room was guarded, but they do not always do so as if making us believe we can open the door of this room, whenever inclined to do so. Technically or artistically inclined. Let us leave aside the technical side of the problem. As for our artistry, we may always say to Aphrodite's partner, 'You know, I'm not about to deprive you of this goddess's charms. I simply wish to paint her naked body, which is required for the next exhibition in Paris.' In this case, you are not likely to enlarge upon Aphrodite's sepulchre. It would be all the more incredible, since you are convinced she is still alive, considering that your own mistress looks exactly like her. At least that is what transpires during your conversations with your friends to whom you depict your amorous scrimmages or tumultuous games. Cicero, on the other hand, was too involved with politics, with all these Caesars and Augustuses. He had no time for love, for its vulgar, down-to-earth aspect which discloses to us naked bodies and lustrous beds. Actually his destiny proves he was wrong, if I am not mistaken. According to my recollection, he was pursued and killed; not by his mistress or spouse, contrary to what might be presumed. If you are murdered by your wife, you are bound to recall Clytemnestra, provided you have enough time for this kind of association. For any kind of association, considering your forthcoming death. But you opt for Aphrodite and you see her alive, even if your bed is far away, which means that the goddess is more or less imaginary; not tangible enough anyway. But what is tangible, apart from the table on which you put your dinner and the chair where your body prepares your constitution for this meal? The meal is also tangible, although it disappears within your body. Of course it is still tangible, but this tangibility is more or less inaccessible to your senses; to your sense of taste or whatever it is called. To your tongue, to your palate and to those buds that take care of

tastes and deliciousness in general. But you return to sepulchres and Cicero: *noblesse oblige*. What else could you say about sepulchres, generally speaking? You have already said that within them, in their insides, the gods enjoy their eternal rest. Is it really eternal? Some Roman emperor or other – I cannot recall his name, as usual – did his utmost to resurrect their cults. But the word ‘resurrection’ finally triumphed because this is our only real dream: eternity, everlasting life. Even if we have to spend a few days in our sepulchre, we shall rise again and fall in love with a human being and a wonderful cat; for instance. We shall live happily and not only at the end of a fairy tale. Our life is a fairy tale, not just a tale. (For some reason, I typed out ‘tail’. Because I mentioned a cat?)

‘For what else do they thus betray but, in fact, that all those gods of theirs are only temporal, seeing that the very parent of them all is made out to be Time?’

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What other parents can we have in this world, as I habitually say? All other parents, ours, among other parents, are indissolubly linked to outer space where they go on holidays; and we are forgotten at home, in our beds, cradles. They go to balls, and we are too young and so cannot dance. And even if you are not too young, you cannot dance; nothing doing. Either our legs are not agile enough, or we are not able to move with elegance, executing some figures about which we do not know anything: they have nothing to do with Riemann and Lobachevsky. And let us not speak about Time, for our wounds, which are already numerous, will grow tremendously, depriving us of health and sanity in no time. We are alone, as a matter of fact. And the gods, according to the saints we consult from time to time, are like our parents. Of course we are proud of the fact that the gods in person care about us – to the extent of being mentioned in the same breath with our bodies. But the gods leave us, and our bodies are brushed aside as if they were not part of the universal game we are supposed to play so as not to fall asleep. All this is so tiring and boring. Well, once again you address yourself to the gods – to *those* gods, in accordance with the text we are charged with, if I may say so. We are burdened with this text, and it is not enough to shrug our shoulders: the text does not fall from them; far from it. We shrug our shoulders again and again. This exercise is called ‘shrugging of one’s shoulders’. Your trainer imposes upon you this exercise, and you ask her, ‘*Warum?* What do you mean? Why am I supposed to carry out this meaningless rite?’ And your professor says, ‘You should shrug your shoulders as often as possible, even when you’re outside the gym. You don’t always agree with what happens around you, behind your back. You feel it and shrug your shoulders. You mustn’t kill anybody, mind you. You mustn’t smash anything, not even a worthless vase. But you shrug your shoulders, meaning you disagree with the world, with whatever its leaders say and suggest. You disagree with the Cosmos, with the shape it has acquired in the course of the centuries you can enumerate, if necessary.’ But you don’t; you enumerate nothing at all – neither your troubles, nor your complaints. There are many of them, and we all know what this is about. We know both your and our complaints because we feel them. We have a sort of overall feeling which concerns the very structure of our evils and fates and other ingredients of our indigestion. Two days later, we realise with a smile we no longer have any problems with our stomach, which is not upset any more, and our intestines do not seem to be topsy-turvy, contrary to their habitual state which we cannot bear, either physically or psychologically. In short, all our misfortunes exist only temporarily – like the gods we have mentioned already and probably many times, given that our computer is

very patient and understanding. Even if we type out, 'Whatever is is horrible, utterly horrible, down to your own existence, my computer,' it will understand this jibe or truth or whatever it is. It has already understood and memorised a multitude of whatevers, and there is no end to them, we must admit. And we also should apologise in the presence of our computer; and even in the presence of our tables and walls. They also memorise all our blunders, let alone our baseness, our downright Satanism, as the Russians say so often nowadays. They are godly creatures, whereas others, especially those who dare challenge them somewhere, in one of the areas we explore throughout our lives, are Satanists. What could we learn from Satan? *Tant qu'à faire*? Should we acquire His claws? I might take lessons from my cat, as a matter of fact – in this and other fields, frankly speaking. What other fields could I explore rather thoroughly, thanks to my cat and his skills? I could learn how to walk softly and spend a lot time on my master's knees, instead of wondering where is my bed and whether it is comfortable enough, considering that no one changed the sheets last night. But why should I walk softly through my house? Even if I drop dozens of glasses and plates, no one will wake up because, to obtain this sound effect, you need to invite someone to your house, given that you have no spouse, no children, no nephews within your reach; and even out of your reach. You see the space of your reach, its extent, and you know that nothing lies beyond this extent, beyond the distance or the space that your reach offers you for some obscure reason. Why is your extent, your reach, your might so generous with you? Anyway you are not likely to draw any advantage from these offers. On the contrary – you might have problems with them, considering that you are unable to keep under control whatever you have in proximity to your body. You touch an object and it reaches the floor in the twinkling of an eye. And you hear the result of this manoeuvre carried out by the object inspired by your clumsiness. What could you do with all these states of affairs? You could recoil in horror, or you could just leave your room, in the hope that other rooms of your house will offer you a peaceful stretch of time and space. But the stretches you come across are as hostile as the one I have just enlarged upon, for no reason at all. The reason I must have had in my mind or in my psyche or just within my body is so obscure I cannot even make out its colours, let alone its outline. Does it have an outline, my reason? It is just a reason, an amorphous mass of something I have no idea of. What could I do with it? I show it to my neighbour, saying, 'You didn't agree with my explanation of the fact we discussed last night. And you even asked me for what reason I was defending and voicing my thesis. Well, here's the reason, although I, for one, can't make head nor tail of it.' And yet another discussion gets under way, for all your unwillingness to get involved in any talk, however phoney and aimless. Your neighbour affirms he can perfectly discern a figure in the darkness which, according to him, embodies your argument, together with your obscure reason. They are both prepared to affront their opponents, and your neighbour says he is in a position to annihilate them, in spite of the darkness and vagueness of the whole thing. 'What is vague doesn't really exist,' he points out as he begins his demolition of your thesis, of your credo, of your life and its profound significance rooted in your childhood, your patriotism and your love for animals. All these roots are uprooted, as it were. And then your neighbour asks for your attention. He says, 'If I were you, I'd look attentively and scornfully at these roots of yours. They're all rotten to the core, and one wonders how you've managed to live with such roots for so many years.' You say you recognise the scope of the havoc you wreaked upon your life. 'I'm rotten too, you know. So are my clothes, to tell the truth. At least no one can question the harmony of my being. At one point I asked my father why I was so insignificant, and he answered enigmatically, 'The fruit had been left to rot on the tree of life, at some point.' 'At what point?' I asked. 'Do you think the knowledge of the date will help you to cope with your rot?' 'We

must try to stop the rot before the whole of the Hereafter is corrupted,' I answered. 'I know, now I'm mostly preoccupied with the Hereafter, considering that my life is damaged, destroyed and vain.' Yes, you try to persuade your neighbour that everything you come across and bear in your bosom is temporal, and so the only thing that counts is the Hereafter about which you really care – to the point of showering upon it all your intellectual and sentimental gifts. Is the Hereafter eternal or temporal? Aren't you damned throughout eternity? You pin your hopes on the Hereafter, counting upon an eternal life, an ever-increasing number of eternal pleasures, but then St Peter or someone else tells you, 'You're going to die. It's just another life, and eternity is just round the corner.' And you walk along a path, but there are no corners on either side of this path. For a while you look for a third side, but this contradicts some geometrical theorem, and so you are duty bound to explore only two sides on the same unpromising path. Then you put the following question to this path of yours, 'Are you made out to be Time?' And the path answers, 'You should put this question to your legs and also to your body,' whereupon you realise that your legs refuse to walk. I can go no further, as Shakespeare said in one of his masterpieces. Some people declare that, whenever you deal with a real masterpiece, you walk endlessly, for the very quality of this masterpiece permits you to cope successfully with your fatigue and paralysis. But no masterpiece will ever cure you of a real, genuine state of paralysis. You read a few Shakespeare plays, but your legs are as inert as they were the day before yesterday, when you began to read Shakespeare. Of course you read him in your youth, but at the time you did not suffer from paralysis, however miniscule. One wonders if there is such a thing as a miniscule paralysis. Let us suppose that one of your fingers declines to cooperate with your longings. You ask it to help you during your speeches, for instance, but it refuses point blank. And so your speeches lose their impact. They become mediocre, even more mediocre than your mind that conceived and produced them first on a few sheets of paper and then in some park or other. You re-read Shakespeare and even go so far as to borrow a few sentences from his genius, a few lines we often hear in theatres and during our communions with computers. The same goes for other diseases of ours; with the exception of some of our mental diseases. Of course Alzheimer's cannot be cured by King Lear, and even Hamlet, for all his youthful temperament, is unable to help you. Probably it is easier to cure a ghost, given that ghosts and suchlike have no bodies which often resist the treatments imposed by Shakespeare and traditional medicine. A ghost can be put back on his or her feet with the help of aspirin or another primitive instrument of health, of general recovery. But what about all those gods who seem to have been enslaved to Time and its whims? The point is, the gods were too lofty to accept our earthly, chemist-provided pills. They needed ambrosia which must have been available throughout Olympus and even beyond it, in its gardens. And what about shortages? Were they unknown within Olympus and also in its cottages? If you are a lover of Time, you are doomed, and every citizen of the Earth is aware of this awful, unacceptable truth. What to do? You just say to everybody, 'I've plenty of time. If you invite me and let me taste a few delicious dishes, I'll stay with you, at your place forever. At least for a few days, counting on your hospitality. And please don't say you have no time for me on account of your urgent work. Don't depend on Time, which can be fatal. If you do, you go to your tomb. What's more, you run towards it in the hope of breaking some world record which is a tangible proof of the pernicious omnipresence of Time. By the way, you shouldn't use a capital T, when speaking about this phenomenon. Don't use the letter 't' at all, when trying to define this body-destroying process. Just say 'ime' and no one will be any the wiser. Wisdom is not always advantageous, you know. "In blissful ignorance," as they say.' But you do not have to ignore and disregard what is called 'space'. You can walk around your garden and even explore the streets of a

few cities: walking is beneficial for your health. Fresh air, you know. But there is no fresh air within the phenomenon of time.

‘For unless, also, in the nature of the reasonable soul, and under the conditions of an existence in time, something came newly be which previously was not, – there could never be any passing from a life of utter corruption and folly into one of wisdom and true goodness.’

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Is the soul reasonable? We often attribute to the soul aspirations and sensibility, for we listen to music with our soul that feels everything, every note. It is true that the body also gets involved in the process, and we begin to cry, for instance. And tears are a bodily phenomenon. In the first place, they are engendered by our eyes or some glands or other about which I, for one, do not know much; or nothing at all, to tell the truth; So tears belong to the body and depend on it wholly, to be frank. Of course we can say that our tears are attached to the emotions hidden, treasured by the soul and so they grow apparent – with the help of the body, at the right moment; and at the wrong moment, now and then. The woman we love tells us she does not reciprocate, and we drop a few tears; unwillingly, almost unconsciously. We are loath to show our emotions, our negative emotions to the woman who despises us. The emotions I am talking about are not negative in themselves, but if the woman in question sees them, she is likely to conclude we are not worthy of our destination, predestination. We are part and parcel of men, of their society, of their so-called bunch which, according to machos, is the best bunch ever. And this bunch (its representatives rather) is not prey to emotions, of apparent and mostly superficial emotions. (We do not cry, when a great tragedy befalls us.) And suddenly we burst into tears in the presence of a woman who is eager to show her underestimation of our essence. She is delighted, whenever in a position to humiliate us publicly; and even her private demonstrations are dear to her soul and probably to her body where her heart beats against us as if really beating us; beating us realistically. Of course we would not be really hurt, if beaten by this woman’s heart, but our psychological pain would exceed whatever is known and registered in the domain of human humiliations. We all exist in time, for the simple reason that eternity is inaccessible to our body and perhaps to our soul as well; whatever they say on the subject in their treatises and conversations. They believe the soul is immortal, but I think it is not wise to underestimate the body to this extent, considering that it is alive and full of nerves. Do you think our body would tolerate the immortality of the soul? Never ever. Let us not forget that the brain and consequently our capacity to think resides within the body, in its upper part. And if this part learns the fact that the soul is bound to outlast the body, the latter or rather the former will stage a real revolution which is always much more than a mere *coup d’état*. In this case, the body would inevitably destroy the soul, for it can live without it. All right, it would be more primitive, being left alone in this world of ours. But it would survive because our body is able to eat without the help of the soul. It will go to gyms and a multitude of aerobics will keep it in good shape. And let us keep in mind the following fact: we were not corrupt in our previous life, in the one where our soul kept company with our body. Now – this is only a supposition – our body is on its own, but this state of affairs may be defined as one of wisdom and goodness. In other words, we are prevented from living in moral squalor by our inborn goodness which will never leave us alone: we shall always cling to ourselves in spite of the metamorphoses undergone by our being. Or unbeing – this can also happen. But even within the kingdom of unbeing we shall stick to our guns; to our goodness, rather. After all,

we have no choice. This is a blessed circle of goodness, and this circle combines both purity and viciousness. As long as we speak about circles we stumble upon the term which renders this procedure perverse. This term is 'vicious'. Sure enough – in ordinary conversation we never speak about other circles because we have no time for them. Unless we become involved in a scientific discussion, which does not occur on a regular basis. In such discussions we touch upon ellipses and other figures without which we live happily and comfortably in our daily life punctuated by positive and negative ecstasies. Well, let us take a normal, non-extravagant life. In this life of ours we seldom touch upon circles; figuratively speaking. Of course we can say upon seeing a table, a dinner table; 'This is a circle.' And if the meal does not come up to our expectations, we may drop a remark to the effect that this table is in fact a vicious circle. Of course we avoid such behaviour, when surrounded by friends and foes alike. But we are allowed to *think* in these terms, and we often do, bent on blowing off steam, which is good for our health. Well, we encounter the signs of corruption almost everywhere, and so there is no way, no path leading to goodness because this kind of passage is illogical, according to the scriptures or the books we read, determined to keep our life in good moral shape. What is to be done? If we are corrupt, there is no hope for us – not even beyond the horizon. Blowing off steam is a folly, whatever the circumstances we are confronted with. The steam itself, the one we have to deal with under certain circumstances is pernicious, for it is linked to our base instincts. What is more, it is created by them. Our base instincts unite – it is easier for them than for proletarians who often disunite, as we all know – and create the steam in question. This steam lies low for some time as if waiting for a plausible and suitable pretext. And then we blow it out, united as we are with this steam, for better or worse. For worse of course, but we do not wish to admit it to ourselves. There are very few things we are willing to admit to ourselves. We are reluctant to admit we are mediocre, second-rate. According to our feelings and convictions, we are unquestionably first-rate, and so we always step on a pedestal, on its highest level, whenever such a thing appears within our field of vision. We stand on this pedestal, and sometimes we do not even know what our position means in the world or even in our native city. And sometimes we are asked the following question, 'What are you doing on this pedestal?' Actually, pedestals are not to be found in our cities, in city centres, and even in the parks where children play, pretending they are police officers and thieves. The former catch the latter and vice versa. But there are no pedestals in their midst. Even when a policeman kills a thief, he does not climb on a pedestal. He just gets a few dollars, for want of anything better. And what is better than a handful of dollars? A heap of dollars, naturally enough. Well, if you are a thief, you cannot become a policeman; at least not in the twinkling of an eye. But there are thieves who repent and betray their former comrades, hoping to become police officers and earn much more money – honestly, at least and at last. On the other hand, some policemen are thieves, born or unborn. They catch thieves and put their money in their own pockets, in the pockets of their uniforms. In the long run you become confused by the laws of nature and sacred books. If you are inwardly and outwardly corrupt, you cannot become pure and chaste and uncorrupt, whatever you do or think. And vice versa. And vice is almost everywhere, as you can see and feel. But are you *utterly* corrupt? If you are partly corrupt, only partly, then you can recover or rather become partly good, on condition that these parts communicate in such a way that their sizes remain fair. Share and share alike. To what extent are you corrupt? How to calculate all these sizes, proportions and relationships? They put a heap of gold on your table and you appropriate it. If you appropriate your company's money, you lose your job; in most cases, you lose your job. But the heap of gold you see on your table does not belong to your company, for the simple reason that you do not work for any company. You are a free-lance journalist; or somebody else. Be that as it

may, you do not work for any company. But before taking the gold you cast a glance at, you should inquire to whom this gold belongs. You do nothing of the kind – you just appropriate the heap of gold. This means you are utterly corrupt. Why utterly? Because you did not hesitate a second before putting your hands on this heap of gold. You just put your hands on it and picked it up. Had you been only partly corrupt, you would have said, ‘Anybody there? Whose gold is it?’ During the period of history devoted to paganism, they used to ask their fellow citizens or strangers: ‘Whose *god* is it?’ Nowadays we should be likened to some base metal, in spite of our greediness centred upon gold and other metals of this highest order. We are ignoble and think only in terms of appropriations. It is true that sometimes we look around and put the following question to whoever happens to be within our field of vision, ‘Whose gold is this?’ If this person answers, ‘It is *my* gold,’ we answer, ‘Well, it’s mine now, you know.’ And if the person in question – the one to whom we addressed our question – resists our instincts, onslaughts and corruption, we just kill them or wound them grievously. Then we depart without trying to gauge the temperature of their wounded body or the size of the wound. We just do not care, and we are not likely to wreak havoc on our conscience as long as the gold is in our possession. And it will always be in our possession, in some way or other. We can convert it, so to speak, exchanging it for another treasure of the same kind. Or of a different kind, but of the same value. We may also become much richer in the process, which we usually do, whenever an opportunity presents itself. And if it does not, we present a favourable, wonderful opportunity to ourselves. Or, to put it more correctly and elegantly, we introduce this opportunity to ourselves. After a short introduction and a few exclamations, we begin to count our new riches. And that is how we live, going from one corruption to another, from one wisdom to another. Isn’t it wise to grow happier and happier? Besides, a balanced diet – corruption, wisdom – is essential for healthy growth.

‘And because all contraries are reduced to unity by some middle factor, and because also the iniquity of time alienated us from the righteousness of eternity, there was need of some mediatorial righteousness of a temporal nature.’

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All is temporal and eternity is a dream we are striving to turn into reality. But its reality, the reality of eternity, turns its back on us, and we continue to talk about it for the sake of talking; for the sake of not keeping silent, which is contrary to our nature. Of course we idolise gold, but not this kind of gold, not the gold of silence. And the contraries surround us on all sides. I wonder what does not surround us, what is not part of this world, of this so-called world. Let us call it world for the sake of brevity: there are no valid arguments we can resort to. Will these contraries be reduced to unity? What for? Proletarians were supposed to unite, and they probably did unite somewhere. But this somewhere no longer exists, and so we cannot really talk about unity: proletarians or rather their incapacity to unite eternally discouraged us at some point. Our enthusiasm for overall unity started to abate a long time ago, and now it is probably gone; gone forever. But there are other unities, otherwise there would be no united artists or no artists at all; one never knows. A few producers and artists unite and make a film that has a huge commercial success. Its spectators unite, and so do many other spectators and audiences. They all unite and applaud some pop star, and shows of all kinds go on, although they make no sense in the atmosphere that reigns in our milieu, in our social and cultural milieu. We isolate the word ‘milieu’ – we often perform this kind of operation – and start talking about middle factors. As I said earlier, there are contraries in our midst, and we

can see them in our everyday life. We look at the right side of a problem, of a room, and notice one object. We look at the left side of the same ingredients of reality and our attention is drawn by another object; of no interest, we must admit. Yet we continue to look at these ingredients (of our imagination?) and realise that our look and mind unite them somehow, in some way or other. Thanks to our attention and concentration they become ideally united; in our imagination, for the time being. But the iniquity of time is still with us – in spite of our efforts to make time more acceptable, more accessible, more humane. It just counts its seconds, without taking into consideration our emotions, our overall sadness that cannot bear these seconds and their passage which affects us more and more. Every second is a pain in disguise, and they (these seconds) have nothing in common with blessings; at least with our conception of blessings. And our concepts count, considering their importance, the place they keep in our mental life. Not only in our mental life, I'm afraid. Our whole life is affected by these seconds that tear us apart, given that our tendons cannot withstand this permanent pressure, this invasion and usurpation. How can one talk about middle factors in the presence of these hours, of these autumns and winters? Are they free from our cares and the discomfort we experience, whenever our hands or legs or toes move in any direction, with various aims in mind; and yet they have no minds of their own. They move and act mindlessly, and they enter into the spirit of the game – the game is called 'life' – because they have to do something to justify their existence. We are here, they say to themselves, although they have no tongues. And so it is our duty to act, to perform some tasks or other, to accomplish a lot of deeds, some of which are doubtful and downright evil; evil to the core. But these moral or psychological considerations are outside of our preoccupations. To tell the truth, we are not preoccupied at all, considering that we have no minds, no psychoanalytical tendencies. We just move and these movements of ours do not mean anything, which is probably one of the solutions we can accept, a conduct we adopt so as not to be accused of crimes, misdemeanours and other things of this sort. But we should pay much more attention to the iniquity of time: if we share this point of view, our movements, their negative performances, do not mean anything: whatever we do or not do is evil. We just sit there, on a chair or on a bench and close our eyes; or do not close them. We begin to blink at them, and their movement is not radically different from that of our hands, arms and armpits. Life is time and the iniquity we enlarge upon grows larger and larger on account of our participation in it. We sit down and this gesture of ours, this act or deed or feat is downright obnoxious, and even the pastries that patiently wait for us in our fridge are obnoxious, for all their delicacy and succulence, because time spoils them, destroys their positive impact on our history. We hope to build a beautiful history, and we need a lot of strength for this exploit. So we buy some meat, a lot of fishes and pastries, hoping they treasure within them the *élan vital* we need for our work in progress, focused upon the progress of mankind and its doings. We even go to a few gyms, but then we shrug our shoulders and decide to live for ourselves, for humanity does not deserve our efforts, our positive attitude towards itself. So we change this attitude and become downright negative in relation to our colleagues, fellow creatures, sparing only animals and even insects. We allow them to bite us, thinking that the bites of humans are much worse than whatever we experience in the company of mosquitoes. Besides, we can kill a mosquito without fearing a trial, a death verdict; and even general condemnation of our ways does not threaten us. Mosquitoes are small and insignificant, and there are humans who kill them on a regular basis. And they go so far as to check if you follow this trend, if you kill mosquitoes all the time. They ask you, 'How many mosquitoes have you killed today?' If you answer, 'I don't know, I haven't counted their corpses,' they accuse you of being careless and idle. They raise their accusatory fingers and move them eloquently, all the while looking at you threateningly as

if taking you for a mosquito they can annihilate on the spur of the moment. After such encounters, you start killing mosquitoes consciously and methodically so as not to become a criminal in the eyes of your contemporaries. And while you are at it, you also kill flies, and they longer say you cannot kill a fly. They say to you, now and then, 'All right, you're much better now – you destroy a lot of mosquitoes. And we approve of your methodical action directed against these enemies of ours. But you should spare flies, otherwise we can't speak about you positively, glorifying your mild and tender nature. And we need to glorify human nature because this nature is created in the image of God.' And then you ask them if, in their opinion, God has already killed a lot of mosquitoes. They answer, 'Yes. God created the seasons with the intention of killing mosquitoes in the winter and also in the autumn. The seasons were created for the harmony engendered by killings and births.' And what is the role of the middle factor in this chaotic mass of facts, in this muddle? Where is it located in relation to murders and births? In relation to mosquitoes and humans? The middle (muddle) factor is probably the air. You sit on a bench and read a book. Suddenly you hear the approach of a mosquito. Where is the middle factor in this case? Is it the approach or the air through which this approach is made? It does not really matter, as long as you kill this mosquito. At some point even your forehead may become a middle factor in this struggle for life, for tranquillity, for the conditions which allow us to read William Shakespeare at ease, without being disturbed by outside factors. And then our right or left hand becomes this middle factor. But not the book, not the book, although there are people who kill mosquitoes with the books they hold in their hands. A few moments ago they were reading these books, enjoying their contents to the utmost. A mosquito makes its appearance, comes to the fore, and these people forget the contents of the books they are still holding. At this stage of their present adventure, they think only in terms of destruction. They are prepared to destroy this mosquito by fair means or foul. They close the book and try to locate the mosquito whose buzz their ears detect and hate. They find its location and raise the book, prepared to commit a crime, from the point of view of Jainism, from the stance adopted by its followers. They strike and miss the mosquito. They strike again and miss it again. This failure gives rise to another situation where the middle factor moves from one position to another: not only your hands and body in general can move. The middle factor is also mobile, and this renders our life unbearable. We lose our bearings all the time: as soon as we find the convenient and only middle factor, the situation we are involved in undergoes a change, and we have to adapt our methods to this metamorphosis. The mosquito is gone, frightened by our unfruitful attempt. In a sense it is fruitful: the mosquito felt its impact and reacted accordingly. And yet our aim is still far away, which proves the inefficiency of our approach to life as such. Now we shall have to find the mosquito, otherwise no middle factor is conceivable in the context from which the mosquito is absent. We do our best to locate the whereabouts of the mosquito, and on our way to the triumph we envisage for this afternoon, we realise that there are other situations which may offer us a multitude of middle factors. The iniquity we combat is so gigantic, so global, that a mere mosquito seems lost in the middle of it. It is lost anyway, and we contemplate our predicament from another angle; from another world. We say to ourselves that the cosmos is a symbol of eternity to which we aspire with all our might, with all our defects. So, whatever we do is on the opposite pole, on the side of iniquity. We are not on its side, needless to say, but there are opposites in the cosmos, and we are certainly not part of eternity and purity. So we decide to build a house: we are used to thinking big. We accomplish our task – it is just the first stage of our global, overall task – and say to ourselves, 'This is a perfect middle factor. This house was erected in the middle of the universe. From this point of view, it is quite similar to Mount Meru. I'm not sure it is the axis of the cosmos, but

never mind, never mind. This building, this achievement of mine, will do for the time being. It is the middle factor I've been looking for so desperately, so painstakingly and laboriously.' And then the rain sets in. And our house succumbs to the might of the rain, although it is just a drizzle, nothing more. But even a drizzle may turn out to be fatal in the context of our efforts and triumphs. The roof of our house is too sensitive to put up real resistance to the obstinacy of the raindrops. After a while we find a few holes in the roof, and we start looking for stopgaps. These stopgaps are also middle factors, and our search for them grows more and more significant. At some point we say to ourselves, 'It is a metaphysical search on which our very existence depends.' It is as if these holes could be found on our own body, let alone on our own soul. What if we stop looking for stopgaps and leave the holes alone, in peace? Wouldn't a real peace descend upon us? And eternity is never too far from any real peace.

'For it was an ancient custom also among that people to adopt children with the view of making sons for themselves of those whom they had not begotten.'

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For once I propose to speak about Russia where I was born; or begotten, if you wish. I have not lived there for more than fifty years, but I watch her life – Russia is feminine in Russian and in French – and a few snatches of what I capture remain in my company, if only temporarily. And this temporariness does not really depend on my memory's proverbial deficiency – I, for one, speak about it often, if not on a regular basis – but is rather due to overwork, to the distance that separates whatever happens in Russia and my daily rounds, my pastime and inclinations. I do not deny that some of my actions or acts and the words I utter in this language, in the language of Pushkin and Tolstoy, as it is usually said – I cannot bear this tradition, this manner of attaching a language to a writer in the same breath – are Russia-coloured, although I have no idea what colour one can and should attribute to this nation, to its habits and moral depravity. I have no wish to generalise, but today Russia is depraved, in spite of her desire to keep traditional values; no homosexuals, in other words. As to her femininity suggested by linguistic particularities, today it is a fallen woman. But the Russians do not mind fallen women, provided these women are not interested in other women and honour heterosexual habits and customs. The Russians think that, whoever lives and prospers abroad is perverse and pays homage to what is defined as 'utter inhumanity and satanism'. On the other hand, there are many homeless children in Russia, according to some sources. Be that as it may, some foreigners are tempted by the solitude of the Russian children who are prevented from enjoying simple meals and English breakfasts. They are also barred from this particular and touching tenderness we eagerly associate with mothers and fathers; and other members of our families. A child whose body does not feel such caresses, upon whom both gifts and kisses are not lavished daily and abundantly, is regarded as a homeless child. And many tender-hearted foreigners are so generous, magnanimous and praiseworthy that some of these children have already been conveyed to their hospitable countries; to the countries where the people whose hearts I have just described – not in detail, though – live and prosper, as I have already pointed out. But the Russian parliament is worried, and its members – they are neither gays nor lesbians – vote against the journeys undertaken by the children begotten and forsaken in Russia. This does not mean they wish to bring them up themselves, giving them a convenient education in American universities which do not exist in Russia. No, they have no intention of taking care of them, but others are not allowed to do

so either, especially if they do not appreciate traditional values that forbid us to pursue homosexual relationships and satisfy the passions inspired by such relationships, liaisons and loves. Of course the children whose lives and educations are in the charge of foreigners change their sexes and disregard traditions, although they might occasionally drink a cup of tea in accordance with ancient customs. But their sons become their daughters and marry the people who have no idea what kind of sex they devote their time and passions to. They just put some sexual organs on their bodies and go somewhere in search of adventures and sexual *divertissements*. Such is the world to which these foreigners transport our children – that is what Russian citizens say to each other. And they shake their heads and their bodies, refusing to believe this awful, unacceptable reality. And if someone, some foreigner, does not understand what they are talking about, they shake this foreigner as well, determined to make him or her understand the meaning of their words, of their traditional values to which they infallibly pay homage. And they add that, but for this daily and hourly homage paid to traditional values, these values would disappear, sooner or later. Sometimes they even go so far as to say, ‘In no time at all.’ But speaking about time is unpleasant for many reasons. In the first place, it reminds you of the ageing process to which you also pay homage, although quite unwillingly and even unconsciously. And then you realise you have not accomplished your duty because you waste your time shamelessly, devoting it mostly to trifles. And trifles do not deserve the attention of those who are bent on accomplishing their duties, whatever these duties consist of. Some members of the Russian parliament are infatuated with pedagogy, and so they endeavour to teach to perverse individuals the right way of approaching sex and its problems. They invite them to a special room where they carry out the traditional ritual to which all normal, anti-perverse citizens are accustomed in their ordinary lives. They put on a recording of Mozart’s symphonies or operas and do their job rather brilliantly, according to specialists. After such lessons, the perverse members of the Russian society become as ordinary as everybody else; within the Russian borders. And what about the children who already live abroad? The same human beings travel to Italy, Spain, France and the United States in the hope of teaching their methods to the unfortunate descendants of Stalin’s admirers. Sometimes they stay abroad: many children have already been stolen from Russian men and women. Sometimes they (in their turn) begin to pay homage to perversity and live happily ever after.

‘Or although, with the view of illustrating his meaning, and making it thoroughly clear, the person to whom authority is given to compose the narrative makes some additions of his own, not indeed in the subject-matter itself, but in the words by which it is expressed.’

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Let us speak once again about life, about what is called and meant and is our human life. It is given to us, and now we have no time – no authority is given to us – to discuss its origins, its roots which are extremely important, in a way. Many people speak about their roots all the time as if there were no branches, no twigs in their personal histories. Only roots, only fundamental details, no ornaments, no arpeggios and cadenzas. You just sit in an armchair, as I often do, and look at your feet, for your feet are also your roots, to some extent. We speak freely and gleefully about the Tree of Life, and often we stand up, when speaking about it; as if we were this Tree, this Life, this symbol. More often than not, however, we forget our leaves and their drawings, their paintings – call them what you wish. Every leaf is a painting to some extent, and we should acknowledge the fact, otherwise we impoverish our existence to the point where it may disappear forever. Indeed, we should use

every leaf, every zigzag for the sake of our longevity and happiness. If we neglect them, if we overlook the intricacies of leaves, twigs and other components of the tree we are exploring – let us not forget that every tree is a tree of life – we miss out on the fantastic developments which swarm in our lives, those beehives in their own right. Yes, if you take the trouble to look at your life from afar, you are bound to notice it looks exactly like a beehive, provided you make the most of it. What could we add to these beehives? Is it the subject-matter of our life? Not quite. It is rather an ornament; at least it looks like an ornament to which we might add something, according to the text. Anyway, the subject-matter will remain unchanged, given that it is the essence of our existence, and essences do not modify their contents under the influences of whims and inspirations. They stay where they are like monuments and neither a drizzle nor a hurricane can destroy their inner and outer structures. Well, we add a few words just because we are bored – not to death, contrary to what might be presumed. It is not advisable to get bored in this fashion: death is never too far and if you play with it, it is bound to win in the long run, in the short run. Anyway, it is dangerous, and we had better not court dangers in our life; unless we are rewarded bountifully for the risks we take. We court danger and buy a few cars: our private garage should never be and look empty. We are also in a position to buy yet another castle: everything is permitted if you are rich and courteous, which means you had better not quarrel with your neighbours and even with the people you are not acquainted with. Sooner or later these people may become your colleagues, your partners, and your enterprise will be ruined, if they bear a grudge against you. These grudges are the words we add to the essence of life, to its subject-matter, to its narrative. Our well-being does not need such words which should be left alone. Many things should be left alone, and we had better not care too much about their solitude. We can utter these words, when discussing business matters with one of our colleagues. Instead of saying to him, ‘You’re fired,’ we might just allude to solitude, to its healthy effects. ‘I’ll leave you alone,’ you say to him as you look out of the nearest window. ‘Solitude will do you a lot of good. I’m sure you’ll press home this advantage.’ What could we say about solitude as such? Are there other solitudes? Well, let us analyse the state called solitude from every point of view. Solitude isolates us from the world; to some extent at least. It is the breeding ground for words which are to adorn the subject-matter of our life. What is life? Our body is the chief component of it. We walk around a room and finally sit down on a divan. All this is the subject-matter we are called upon to embellish. It is not very interesting – from every point of view – this stroll of ours. Strolling around one’s room. How banal, how trite; how unbearable, in the long run. Of course we can touch a few trinkets on our way to the opposite corner of this room, but that is not enough: this subject-matter needs an agreement, as Debussy put it once. And we begin to compose a poem which does not really deviate from the course of our existence. And if it does, the modification does not affect the core of this sacred existence, of this unique contribution to the history of the cosmos. We finish the poem and recite it in front of our wife who is also part of the subject-matter which is the subject-matter of the present text. Our wife applauds warmly, almost frantically, and we realise she loves us even more than before; much, much more. Why? Because, up to now, she thought of us only in terms of the dishes we cook sometimes to please her taste buds. We also bring her flowers and offer her jewels. All this is part and parcel of the routine we thoroughly enjoy to the point of making our neighbours envious and unhappy, to some extent. But now my wife knows I am a very good poet, and she begins to compare me to Keats and other giants whose contribution to literature cannot be ignored. Elated and gratified, I say to her, ‘My dear wife, I thank you for your appreciation of my modest talent. To tell the truth, I’m not eager to go out and buy you some flowers. I’ll do it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, at the latest. Let us make love instead. That’s how I

propose to express my gratitude to your delicate poetic response to my masterpiece.’ And we accomplish this rite, creating yet another harmony within the kingdom of our love. But is this rite an addition to the subject-matter which might and should be expressed through the notion of love? What else is there in the world? as Romeo put it. Let us not touch upon other subject-matters, which is sure to guard us against any mention of death. Death is unpleasant and even this notion aired through different words which are part of universal, living and dead languages is obnoxious, although it is not irrelevant, alas. But love is also connected to death, even though it is said to triumph over death in a quite peculiar way. However peculiar and special, this way nevertheless allows us to vanquish death, to remind it that it (or he) ought not to be too proud because in the end – one wonders what kind of end it is – death will be dead. The usual argument appeals to the Resurrection, but I am quite reluctant to emphasise this affinity because it requires so many pages and so much effort that I am not certain I shall be able to fulfil this duty before my own death. But let me declare once and for all that death is neither the subject-matter of this text, nor does it have anything to do with narratives, however picturesque and breathtaking. No, this narrative of my own is centred upon the thoughts that wander through my head and also through my body, around my body; oddly enough. So many things wander through my being that I am quite unable to keep track of all these doings and undoings. The chief thing is to resist your own undoing because it can cause a lot of trouble, as you might presume. Your undoing is not directly related to your body, and you can say to anybody who informs you that you are undone, ‘Look at my body, at its members! Aren’t they spick and span? Aren’t they in order, to put it logically and understandably? You can touch my hand, if you wish. We can shake hands, which will give you an opportunity to admire the smoothness of my skin and the force of my muscles.’ By the way, every handshake is also a narrative, a story in its own right. If two people shake hands, they get acquainted or salute each other as friends or associates. If you are in your boss’s presence, you do not shake hands with him. He just pushes you around, and you can complain to higher authorities about this authoritarian behaviour that does not agree with your digestion and moral standards. Life is complicated and consequently we are not always capable of unravelling its threads; or narratives, if you prefer. Yes, slowly, painstakingly we unravel its mysteries, but there are other mysteries in store for us, and we wonder if this process, this striptease of mysteries, the striptease inflicted upon them by our indiscretion and obstinacy is healthy. After all, it leads to other mysteries, to other words adroitly and almost mechanically added to our main subject-matter by vile and unreliable people whose only aim is limited to our destruction. To stop this slow, systematic murder we say to them, ‘We’re already destroyed. You can go home and enjoy your evening meal without adding anything to our complete destruction. Here’s our corpse you can touch to make sure we’re dead and even buried; at least to some extent.’ We lie down, they touch us and go home. Is this yet another narrative, the way they cover the distance between their dinner tables and our lying body?

‘For thus we learn the salutary lesson, that our aim should be nothing else than to ascertain what is the mind and intention of the person who speaks.’

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In the first place, we have no wish to listen to someone’s ravings, and that is the order of things we prefer to all sorts of disorders which spring into existence, whenever someone tries to convey to us a sort of truth or a piece of conviction. And if we do our utmost to ascertain the whereabouts of this someone’s mind, we get into trouble

and are in the muddle for some time which may last for a week or even for a month. All this is a waste of time, and we never waste our time, being aware of its shortness, capriciousness and so on. Time is capricious because it does not *always* come up to our expectations. Some of our expectations are high, others seem to be on the low (and slow) side. Nevertheless we get quite disappointed whenever our expectations are not given proper care on the part of time and space; and on the part of the objects we come across, when struggling with the resistance of both, of time and of space. But struggling with other people's minds is definitely not our cup of tea. If others just say, 'The weather is fine,' we accept their minds without much ado, without bothering about their plans. They might be willing to go to the seaside, counting upon the weather's clemency, and they might be disappointed in the course of their adventure which is rooted in their inborn optimism. They think that life is beautiful and that God is on their side, although they have no proof of this example of taking sides which features the Almighty to Whom they resort, whenever in need of fine weather. This is a frequent wish we come across in the world of humans, but their intentions are mostly hidden. Of course I do not try to insinuate that many people aspire to assassinate their rivals or, generally speaking, all those who cross their paths and seem to prevent them from indulging in luxuries. There are lots of assassinations in the world, and common murders are not out of the question either, but there are more subtle intentions around us, and they necessarily end up in pools of blood and broken necks. And these subtle intentions are hard nuts to crack, and we seldom succeed in cracking them. Of course most people long for fame, however miniscule and ludicrous, but such is human nature, and there is nothing we can do about it. In other words, we cannot change it because this feat or exploit or metamorphosis needs a real creator, not just the author of a few poems or novels or essays. This creator must take everything out of the human mind and replace it with another everything – more suitable for general peace, intelligence and harmony. And in this new harmony – old structures hardly deserved the name of harmony – the intentions we harbour are transparent, I suppose. Most people remain non-committal about any political ambitions they may harbour. And if we touch upon political matters in front of them, they just say, 'You know, I'm not interested in politics.' And they go to the piano – assuming there is such a thing within their reach – and play something, not necessarily a Beethoven sonata, thereby proving they have no time for political intentions. 'You see, we should practise every day, five or six hours per day to achieve the result you've just heard,' they say or impart to us. And then they appear on some list directly connected with politics and are sometimes elected, becoming our governors or the ministers who destroy our personal budgets through taxes and other measures of the same kind. (There are many such measures, alas.) But there are other inclinations which are far more dangerous, being almost invisible: there are no lists of any kind where they might come to our notice in broad daylight. They might have their private lists, and probably some of these intentions are even written in their diaries. But they keep these diaries in their chests of drawers, and we are not thieves: breaking and entering is not our pigeon, far from it. These intentions are seldom harmless, and they never – there are a few exceptions to this rule, I must admit – aim at our prosperity. Frankly speaking, the people whose intentions are not obvious, seldom if ever give us money – just for our beautiful eyes, as the Russians put it. We never count on their help, which does not cast doubt on the beauty of our eyes, needless to say. On the other hand, the intentions of other people – and there are so many of them; these other people constitute the beehive I am speaking about – should not arouse anything, not even our curiosity. They can wish whatever they like as long as these wishes do not affect our lives, our interests and intentions. These beehives are installed in our midst and we hear them daily. All these people speak endlessly as if they really had to say something to each other. We know what they are

talking about. Mostly they talk business, and we do not understand their words, let alone their intentions. And then they speak about love; they mention it, touch upon it and finally get married, inspired by money, by the same money. Money is not always the same: roubles are not equivalent to dollars. And yet speaking about money means you set them above human relationships and the caresses you are supposed to lavish on your fellow creatures. Why? Because we cannot survive without the help supplied by them, by these other creatures. Actually, intentions and minds are not synonymous. The mind harbours a lot of things, some of which have nothing to do with intentions. Our minds strive to understand something abstract which does not go anywhere. Intentions are always space-oriented. You intend to invade an object or an idea, let alone castles, human beings and heaps of money. You invade this heap, conquer it completely, become its master and your shopping becomes a pleasure in itself. You just go for a walk and buy whatever you see, be it a diamond or a plane. You see a plane in the sky, draw your smartphone from your attaché case and, call the pilot and this new purchase of yours lands at your feet. That is how billionaires live and indulge their whims, their intentions. But what about their minds? These are focused upon mysteries because all other matters are worthless in comparison with the mysteries of the world. We are called upon to unravel them; after all, we should know where we live and what awaits us in the environment that we partly create, being driven by our intentions and instincts. Our minds are full of formulas which decipher the cosmos and look beyond it, stepping on other, distant, unreachable surfaces, mountains and Milky Ways. How many of them can we explore, while staying in this universe as we refrain from the general, definitive departure? Is it another Milky Way? we ask ourselves as our thoughts inaugurate yet another museum in another cosmos. No, this way has nothing in common with milk; not a single molecule, as a matter of fact. Frankly speaking, milk is not omnipresent, but ways lie in wait for us everywhere. Even if we are rooted to the spot and cannot budge for some reason – we are not paralysed, until further notice – we have embarked upon a journey we might call a ‘way’. There is something spiritual in this word or notion. When enlarging upon other passages or spaces or ideas, we just say, ‘This is the road leading to point B.’ But a way or the way – this latter expression is used by sages and the Fathers of the Church – is different. It does not lead to point B; nor does it permit us to travel through point B to point F. Yes, we traverse point B, keeping in mind that our destination is further off: it is in the middle of point F. Yet we like the landscapes we encounter during our journey through point B. Why not stay here forever? After all, we have enough money which might be instrumental in the transactions we engage in, when buying a castle or even an ordinary, run-of-the-mill house. For some reason – this is our own secret intention – we continue our journey towards point F. But the way lies elsewhere. When exploring its intricacies we encounter a lot of gods, a lot of Poincaré’s enigmas. The way guides us towards the caves of our mind; to the Aladdin’s cave.

‘One and the same sense, therefore, is conveyed; and it is expressed all the better in consequence of these variations employed in some of the terms, while the matter of fact itself is left intact.’

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I think I have enlarged upon this matter once or twice because you cannot escape it, for some reason or other. I had better find the reason in question, instead of answering other questions, of changing the commas I use from time to time. You change a comma, but the matter of fact remains because the facts we always plunge into as soon as we cross the threshold of our house are the same, whether we stay in our room or go out. The facts

pursue us and we call them 'reality', and we begin to realise that there is no other term for this phenomenon. Yes, the matter of fact, the facts and the matters, are left intact by creators of all kinds. And among these creators there are several divinities to whom the pagans we mention in our history books erected many temples that we are still using for our own purposes. But at some point we feel fed up with the matters and the facts I cannot depart from: even in this text I am unable to do so without feeling forsaken. Such is the tragedy of our lives. We express the same phenomenon, and every time we come to grips with it we acknowledge our failure which deprives us of other possibilities, of other lives, fortunes and loves. We love the same person, and yet we are aware of this person's evil sides. What is more, they are evil to the core, and even if we remove this core, the person will remain evil – even more so, given that now their core is everywhere. Consequently the whole world is evil, but let us concentrate upon our problem, upon this matter of fact which stays with us, come hell or high water. Yes, we know we can improve upon it, making it more accessible to our fellow countrymen who do not have our sixth sense, our understanding of philosophy and music. We can dissect this matter of fact for hours and hours, after locking the doors of our house where our listeners are bored to death. Perhaps we should leave the house forever, which might help us get rid of this matter of fact. No one knows whether this substance is rooted in the house, whether its (the matter's) very existence is indissolubly linked to its walls and thresholds. Perhaps it is enough to drill a hole in one of the walls to destroy the fact, at least the fact that gets in our way, whenever we try to think about something, not necessarily about lofty subjects and objects. Or is it better to dismiss the wheels into which this matter of fact continuously puts its spokes? Or is it enough to destroy the spokes, leaving the wheels to their own devices? The same sense is expressed better, and it does not matter what means are employed during the procedure at the end of which the sense appears in all its splendour. What counts is the removal of this improvement. Leave well alone, we say to ourselves. But is it well? Can the thing we are dealing with be called 'well'? You can start a sentence in this fashion, saying, for instance, 'Well, I'm embarked on this transformation at the end of which I'll be liberated from wells and pitfalls.' Leave well alone also means we can go further, disregarding the things left somewhere, probably in our own house, in our bed or our chest of drawers. But the show must go on, and we go on, leaving wells of all kinds alone. Let them experience the tragedy defined as 'solitude'. But is that enough? Is that enough? We have already arrived at the following conclusion: the matter of fact we are trying to get rid of is not what we designate with the help of the word 'well'. Of course this reflexion does not prevent us from leaving the state of affairs in peace, alone and *loin* – at a distance. All right, it is done. This matter of fact is dead and buried somehow. Do we feel lonely at this particular moment, today, this evening? We could open a bottle of wine which is a very good, faithful companion. And even if we open another bottle of wine tomorrow, wine will remain our faithful companion on whose friendship we can always count, whatever happens in the rest of the world. And what does really (or rather unreally) happen in the world? In days of yore, people read papers and got a lot of information from them, especially about wars. Now they talk about wars on television and even our computers are overloaded with wars of all kinds; and consequently with worries of all kinds and unkind. We are weary of all these facts and reflexions and intentions, but the show goes on, and it is a show, nothing else. 'Nothing else' is left intact, whatever we do and undertake. It is a motionless phenomenon, and we insult it, whenever it crops up somewhere or rather everywhere. We say to it, 'You're wrong, utterly wrong. There's *everything* outside your own phenomenon. Look around you. Whatever you see is not part of your essence, and yet all these objects exist, and we don't even have to add "in their own right" because it goes without saying. But "nothing else"

does not proceed in this way: we have to add it to our statements, otherwise people might think we haven't finished our monologues. No, whatever these people might think and do, we've finished our speeches, for the simple reason that we're tired. Besides, we know that, whatever we say or do, nothing will ever change. Please note that we don't use this word, the word "nothing" in association with the word "else". Not at all, not at all. Our meaning is quite different, and if you're not aware of the fact, so much the worse for you and your life or lives. What do we actually mean? you ask yourselves. Well, you ought to have listened to our speeches more carefully, doing your best to unravel our mysteries and hidden layers. There are a lot of hidden layers in our thoughts which may appear superficial, at first glance. But you should never content yourselves with your first glance. You're in a position to blink your eyes, which can result in the appearance of another glance, another point of view. Please, use this point of view thoughtfully: the whole matter needs careful examination, especially since it is a matter of *fact*. And facts are important; at least you're acquainted with this fact, to all outward appearance. If a hurricane is announced on television, you hide yourselves in a cave or a bunker. And you wait for hours and hours; you spend a part of your life in this bunker. Of course in this bunker you have a few sandwiches, I suppose, but that's not enough. You need pastries and some shops where you can buy lingerie, among other things. And you wouldn't mind wearing another suit, another tie. But the hurricane is obstinate, and you get weary of its presence on the surface of the Earth. Why doesn't it move on to other planets? There are many of them in the cosmos. And the hurricane doesn't really have to choose a planet where human life is possible and feasible. Hurricanes don't need humans, although it must be rather pleasant to harm human creatures and their creature comforts: houses and cars and tombs.' From the hurricane's point of view.

'And there are many other words which do not retain one uniform signification, but are introduced so as to suit a variety of connections, and thus are understood in a variety of ways, and sometimes, indeed, are adopted along with an explanation.'

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We cannot live without explanations, or probably we are able to sustain our body without going into details focused upon our life, this body's functions: as long as they function we do not need to explain anything to them. Why talk to our stomach about philosophy? So someone talks and probably offers us an argument which is not understood by everybody. We raise our index finger and begin to explain the thesis without which the world cannot go on with its technical innovations, with the improvement of its morals and with the spiritual sides of our undertakings. The people we are talking to function to some extent, but we think and hope they are able to function much better, on condition that they catch the meaning of the speech they turned their deaf ears to. Their ears are not really deaf: they listen to pop music every day, spending their nights in discotheques. But they grow deaf, whenever an important group of words begins to resound in the air which, from time to time, communicates to us eternal, everlasting truths. These truths are expressed in a variety of ways, and some are so recondite we seem to forget our mother tongues when listening to them; or reading them in a book. We doubt our knowledge of our mother tongue, and yet we remember our mother and even our aunts whose generosity lavished upon us a lot of sweets and toys. We remember the circumstances which accompanied our communications with our elders and betters. Suddenly, out of the blue, an eternal truth appears, and we do not understand it, in spite of its eternity. It has always been there, in front of our forefathers and fathers, and they

must have misunderstood these truths, otherwise we would have been conceived, born and brought up in another world, governed by other, far more intelligent people. But the world is what it is, as they usually say, and we must admit that for once they are right. Of course the words we always speak about – and we also use them, frankly speaking – do not retain their uniform signification. They do not even retain a sort of multiform signification because they are different; every time we come across them we realise they are different as if they were changing their clothes and especially their underwear all the time; as if they were getting prepared for some ball or masquerade; or for a huge reception full of important people, of ambassadors and ministers. They cannot even keep their physical appearance, let alone their hidden senses, double and triple senses, their layers, black holes and so on and so forth. And when we tackle the problem of this ‘so forth’ we see a chasm which nothing can bridge; not a bridge, not a thought. And commentators enlarge upon a variety of ways in which such and such a word can be explained, interpreted and falsified. These commentators do not seem to realise that they falsify whatever they touch in their connotations or whatever their speeches are called in their professional language. Are they really professional, these commentators? When asked this question, they say, ‘Of course we’re professional. We’ve written two hundred commentaries upon this text and so nothing can escape us, no meaning, no intricacies, no hidden truth. For years and years we’ve been revealing eternal truth in the presence of several generations of pupils, and now we can accept a few of the rewards we amply deserve.’ And of course they insist upon the acceptance of their explanations – along with the truths themselves. So now we are confronted with a myriad of truths among which there must be many falsehoods. Why? Because there cannot be so many eternal truths in the world. There are not enough eternities for them, to tell the truth. Besides, every eternity is temporary, considering that we speak about it (this eternity) right now. And we have no intention of passing away – not right now, anyway. So what is to be done? We just dismiss both eternity and the truths that go with it. But then we begin to meditate upon the matter, and realise that this kind of thing happens again and again: we first reach a hasty conclusion and then begin to meditate in earnest. What does this meditation offer us? The awareness of the need we display for eternity – whenever an opportunity presents itself. At the earliest opportunity, in other words. If we fall in love, this love must be eternal, otherwise it makes no sense. And the sense it makes must be eternal as well, otherwise our life itself has no meaning whatsoever. What is more, meanings themselves have no meaning; whatsoever, we might add. But we do not add it, and that makes sense, we conclude. But we should not omit the following nuance: the words themselves are keen on their signification and consequently are reluctant to accept all these varieties we are eager to impose upon them, being dissatisfied with the choice of means we handle at will; not always wisely, we must admit. There are two poles in whatever we go through, in whatever we endeavour to understand once and for all. We are determined to eliminate varieties from our lives – for the sake of stability. Well, let us not get into the muddle once again. There are two categories of words, and let us not forget that words are alive. They can make decisions; they can deviate from their trajectories, from their traditional senses in the hope of leading a rich, many-sided life. One life is preoccupied with riches and cars; another is overloaded with poems and music of all kinds. We listen to the music and forget the austere reality of our life. But someone informs us that we do not understand music, and so it is pointless to listen to Mozart or Haydn if you are unable to dissect a sonata, putting themes and other nuances in order. Sure enough, they are distributed throughout the work in accordance with the rules you have never learnt. And you just hear a multitude of sounds, but these sounds mean nothing at all in your narrow-minded world. They are not even do, re, mi, fa, sol. They are nothing at all, and therefore you do not hear

anything. You do not listen to a symphony; not even to a succession of notes in the quiet of your room. Somebody explains to you the meaning of the piece you continue to hear, in spite of everything. Why? Because you like this piece, even if you do not understand its structure, its intricacies, its beauty. You add the explanations to your ignorance and suddenly a sort of beauty enters your room. Some professionals maintain that you understand a piece of music only if the composer appears within your field of vision in the flesh – not just on a television screen. All this is too complicated and you switch off your machines and accept what follows with gratitude and understanding. Nor do some words penetrate the silence you created on the spur of the moment, carried away as you were by your clear intentions. Words do not always suit a variety of connections, being perfidious and rotten. Music is much more magnanimous. When fortified by a multitude of explanations, it becomes connected to the world. But silence which comes in the wake of music is even more omnipresent because it includes the stars, a lot of starry heavens, a variety of them.

‘To the same effect, when Mark says that they were to be shod with sandals or soles, he gives us to understand that this matter of the shoe has some sort of mystical significance, the point being that the foot is to be neither covered, nor yet left bare to the ground.’

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This problem is usually treated too realistically. One wonders whether a woman should cover herself completely, leaving everybody in the dark about the beauty of her body; or if there should remain an open space, allowing spectators to enjoy a part of this mysterious beauty. Of course, whenever we tackle the problem of shoes, Cinderella comes to the fore, and we see her feet; and we admire these feet all the more thoroughly since one of them is covered and the other lacks any covering, being bare to the core, one might say. We conclude that the prince of the fairy tale is not far, and so it is better not to compromise our very being, otherwise all sorts of trouble might wound our life, tearing it to pieces. Cinderella continues her walk, and one of her feet excites everybody’s curiosity. Yes, we understand the necessity of the prince’s interference in the course of the events, but he does not make things easier for Cinderella as if disregarding the problem a woman can have, when walking barefoot or almost. Well, one of her feet is covered, which enables her to hop on one good foot, while clinging to the prince. But let us not forget the prince is still at home, and one begins to suspect that from this point the fairy tale goes awry, which reminds us of the well-known fact: fairy tales should not be left unfinished. Of course the famous fairy tale in which Cinderella finally gets some rest in the arms of the prince is finished, but there are varieties of this tale which crop up everywhere. No wonder – our population adores the tale in which Cinderella takes part in the famous, legendary, epoch-making ball. So every man and also every woman thinks it is their duty to embroider upon it, hoping that one of the varieties will concern them directly. And that often happens, our world being optimistic and promising, for its Creator is magnanimous, according to the books we are supposed to consult almost daily. But what about the mystery alluded to in the text we are anatomising? There are many Cinderellas among whom there are true and fake young women. They all aspire to live in castles and go to bed with princes. But some of them are bound to be disappointed and finish their lives in brothels or mental institutions, not to say lunatic asylums. So our mystery is related to the division between these groups, the fortunate group and the unfortunate, wretched group. Many people spend hours and hours in shops, trying one pair of shoes after another, striving to select the lucky pair. Other miserable representatives of

our race go to balls and travel in carriages; or just clean their houses, while waiting for some fairy or other; or just for a suitable fairy tale. Why not choose Shakespeare's *Tempest*? In the first place, you will be in touch with a masterpiece, with a work which is superior to *Cinderella*. In the second place, you will rub shoulders with dukes and kings, if my memory serves me right. They are also far above the prince we encounter in *Cinderella*, if my judgement serves me right. We shall take part in a cruise. How many times have we read in a newspaper the following item of news: 'They've just set off on a round-the-world cruise'? We used to envy the whole world, and now we score points over our neighbours, our fellow-citizens, for the simple reason that we rub shoulders with kings, while admiring the views that the sea and several oceans offer us in their bounty. And all this starts in a conversation where a pair of shoes is discussed in such a manner that one shoe behaves rather haughtily, like a bully. It spurns the rights of the second shoe which is entitled to cover the skin and bones of the second foot; at least that is what we are told in the shop where we bought this pair of shoes. The same goes for the women who compete for the prince's riches and beautiful manners. And then we come across a real mystery: a group of people walk around the streets, their feet partly covered, partly discovered; or uncovered, if you wish. Of course we rush towards them, carrying a number of boxes filled with shoes of all kinds. We open these boxes and begin to put these shoes on their feet, after removing the other shoes from their feet. No regrets – the latter did not fulfil their obligations, given that they covered only parts of the feet in question. This rite of spring – why do we call it so? – goes on for some time. And everybody seems to be happy, in spite of the unfinished character of the operation. The feet we are dealing with are still on the unfinished side, we are bound to admit. Perhaps the brand of happiness we always have in mind is a sort of homage to this unfinishedness, to this obstinate going on. Isn't it the very best brand of eternity? Our grand eternity? Taking off shoes, putting on shoes. What does our will to live look like in the context?...the point being that the foot is to be neither covered, nor yet left bare to the ground.

'He also speaks of the man only as dumb, and not as blind in addition. But it is not to be inferred, from the mere circumstance of this silence as to some portion or other of the account, that he speaks of an entirely different person.'

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Usually, when willing to insult somebody, we just say, 'He is,' which means that this person is deprived of many capacities. These capacities being rather common among the members of our race, we say, 'This man is blind,' which also means he is dumb and cannot feel anything: his skin is not furnished with necessary nerves and their accessories. And so it is pointless to enumerate all the defects of this person whom we despise heartily and profoundly. If we just cast a glance at him, a casual non-committal glance, we do not have to add anything to this glance: it is omnipresent in the domain of explanations. It explains everything as if saying in plain letters and words, 'This man is blind, dumb, stupid, illiterate, powerless in the kingdom of sex, ugly, ridiculous.' We speak in this manner about one person, but other representatives of our species are not better, according to our disposition today, our truant disposition composed mainly of our misanthropy. And we do not have to re-read Molière's famous play to remember that this stance has pursued us for years and years. Sometimes we even go so far as to say to ourselves, 'What a pity Molière didn't live long enough to depict my attitude towards human beings.' Every masterpiece can become a double masterpiece, provided you add to it yet another character, a

number of traits which can be found within this character's psyche. You imagine your attitude towards some people you come across in the course of Molière's play and say, 'I've scored yet another point over Molière. I should have written this play myself. What a pity I didn't live in those times, surrounded by those people. I would have taught them many lessons. I would have opened a school for young men, for old men, for old women. I would have played Don Juan's part, seducing a number of beautiful women, some of whom may be found in Tartuffe's company.' Actually we are used to the manner in which the greater part of the Scriptures is composed. You see the same person from different angles as if you were circling around for the sake of the angles they always mention, when talking about the multiplicity of human beings. We are all complex on account of our divine heritage, they say; and they are wrong of course. The utter simplicity of many human beings is appalling. But one aspires to cheerfulness which seems to guarantee a long, felicitous life. Well, we are not as simple as all that, and it is enough to take into consideration our weaknesses. As stated above, we are deaf, dumb and blind, in addition to our incapacity to walk straight and to the point without deviating from our itinerary every two seconds. We are devious and devilish, but that does not seem to concern us. There are many ways in one's life, many cul-de-sacs and chasms, to put it mildly. If we try not to put it mildly we have a slice of Hell. Why don't we ever speak about slices of death? A slice of life, another slice of life. Fiddlesticks, as they used to say about such utterances. The point is every slice is acted, enacted by a different person and so we have a painting teeming with people some of whom look like animals. Not to be unduly disturbed by these numerous presences, we might replace them by colours. Matisse's palette typically consists of bright blues, greens and oranges. And some of us prefer his paintings to their daily rounds which include and therefore feature a lot of representatives of our species. You look at such paintings and say to your companions, 'This picture is dumb, blind, senseless, paralysed. But it was born – there's no denying it. And it's extremely beautiful. What more do you need?' But if you have in front of you a painting by Mark Rothko, you do not mention all these elements which are evident and unquestionable. Yet you think about the solitude of the canvas.

'And it ought now by all means to be a settled matter, and one kept regularly in view in all such investigations, that no one should find any difficulty in the mere circumstance that something which is unrecorded by one writer is related by another.'

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When you happen to comment upon a sacred text which stems from Christianity, its dogmas and stories, you come across these discrepancies and unrelated episodes all the time. And you are surprised when all the witnesses quoted at length in the Scriptures utter the same words and tell the same stories. We understand the situation and say to each other that, at this particular moment, at the moment under discussion, one of the evangelists looked back and another looked forward, and so they did not capture the same nuances and gestures. And some of these gestures – their importance should not be overestimated – just escaped their notice. Besides, they might have been hungry, and when you are famished – and such situations occurred quite often in biblical times – you cannot follow any story scrupulously. Of course the evangelists were divinely inspired, and we should always refer to this truth in our accounts of their work. But our life depends upon the Scriptures, even if we believe only the Devil; at least there are people who do believe in the Devil and say about God, 'In the first place you should prove that He exists. In the meantime we'll believe in someone, and in our case this someone

is the Devil because he's closer to the highest rank of our civilisation than anyone else, with the exception of the Almighty.' But what about the discrepancies we find almost everywhere, in all accounts, in all fairy tales and novels? As I pointed out earlier, one person turns his head in the direction indicated by one arrow, and the other person does the opposite, looking in the opposite direction, following another indication that happens to be another pole situated on the opposite side of the Earth. And this accounts for all the differences we find in our lives, and every life of ours is different from another life of which we also partake as if it was a sumptuous dinner served at the beginning of the twentieth century. Of course these discrepancies are astonishing: now and then we hear the following dialogue, 'Several hours ago, three hours ago, to be precise, I saw the full moon.' 'And I saw the sun – three hours ago.' 'How come? All this happened after the sunset.' 'Doesn't matter. I always carry my torch which I flash into the arkeness of the world.' 'Do you think the world is fundamentally dark?' 'That's right. It is dark and obnoxious.' 'As for me, I believe the world is as dark as the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets. In other words, it is luminous and quite attractive, not to say extremely beautiful.' This dialogue unquestionably proves that our points of view never coincide, for all our efforts and ideals. We dream about the unity of the cosmos, but everything is divided in the cosmos and consequently in our own world. Even atoms are apparently divided and so quarrel inside themselves, their parts being constantly at odds with each other and the general situation in which we are also involved; willy-nilly, as usual. And so many events and movements remain unrecorded in our history; or rather outside of it. And if we say to our friend or mistress, 'I'll play a very interesting recording for you,' we cannot do what we have just promised because there is no recording, either interesting or ridiculous. There is nothing at all with the exception of the story we begin to tell in the hope of seducing the lady in whose company we find ourselves or our friend, our companion in fortune or misfortune.

'In this connection, it is true, we ought not to omit to direct the reader's attention to certain other matters which may turn out to be of a kindred nature with those already considered.'

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First you have to narrate the situations to which you are duty bound to attract the reader's attention. But sometimes you feel so tired you cannot even finish your dinner, let alone the paragraph you began before dinner. Under the circumstances, you had better turn in and forget about everything, hoping that this forgetfulness will enable you to write a dozen pages the following morning. And if this does not happen, you begin to consider a sort of retirement about which your spouse speaks to you now and then. She tells you, 'We've got a lot of money for the rest of our life. Of course you often speak about our future lives, but I think we've got enough money for them as well. And as we haven't been blessed with a dozen children, we don't need to worry about their destinies.' Well, you write something, in spite of your fatigue and the mental disposition which is familiar to all those who read *Hamlet* in the original. You have problems, even when you just stay still for two or three hours. You do not know where to put your hands which always get in the way. Somehow your eyes get in the way as well, for they look at worthless things which cannot help you climb the social ladder. On the contrary – they seem to do their best to prevent you from taking another step on this ladder. So you are afraid you might collapse one of these days because – it is true from anyone's point of view – all those who do not go up collapse and yet another funeral takes place either in the air or under the earth. (Nowadays so many people get cremated.)

But you are to direct the reader's attention, and this can only be done if you know where this attention is located; in the head or in the body or in the legs that can bring its owner closer to the material in question. Why should you bother about this reader in the first place? Let him or her die in their corner or live happily ever after – all this has nothing to do with your own life. Instead, you are told to direct someone's attention to other matters, and you have no idea what matters should be compared or added to these matters, those matters. And this matters only in some context or other. All right, you know what they are talking about, and you just put the Bible on someone's desk, for you cannot go wrong with the Good Book. You put it on the writing desk and ask someone to open it. The owner of the desk opens it at random, and you continue your speech in the following manner, 'Well, now I'll ask you to close this book and open it again. You're sure to find another page under your eyes and scrutiny. And you'll hopefully read a few lines of the text. Let me tell you that these lines have a lot of affinities with the lines you read a few moments ago.' And if the person to whom you teach this lesson tells you that the words in these texts are not synonymous, you should answer as follows, 'In the final analysis, words don't count. What counts is the matter of fact, the subject matter, the core of the matter. You should dismiss the words, in a manner of speaking.' No wonder the person in question, your guinea pig, shuts the book and goes out – for a walk, presumably. Probably this person believes that a walk is better than any book, especially if it takes him through a beautiful forest. (One is bound to remember Wordsworth in this connection.) When walking along the streets you draw the attention of pedestrians to your persona, and that proves the vitality of social life which does not crumble, in spite of the tragedies we write and enact almost every day. You walk and attract the movement of someone's eyes, and it is easy to direct these eyes towards a text that should be read for the sake of overall education, for the increase of spirituality and for our fraternity, for the fraternity we expect to conquer the world of men and women. What for? While hugging your fellow creature you whisper a text so as not to waste your and your partner's time. After all, a mere bear hug does not mean much. It is easily forgotten unless you break your partner's bones. Bears do it on a regular basis, and you might wish to imitate them – for the fun of it. Does breaking someone's bones have anything in common with fun? Or with hugs, for that matter? Never mind, never mind. So you recite a text as you hold someone in your warm, fraternal embrace and go towards another person to whom you recite another text. Then you do your best to put these two persons together and they begin to recite their respective texts, and everybody realises that these texts have a lot in common. Actually you do not even have to draw someone's attention to this similarity. Besides, the people we are talking about are similar too, and we come to this conclusion on the strength of what we hear, of what their lips let pass through them. The texts have a lot of affinities and so do the mouths that utter them. And the owners of their mouths fall into the same category. It does not really matter if these persons are men or women, if the union thus created is homosexual or heterosexual. What counts is the utter resemblance of the ideas conveyed by the texts. Of course the bodies are equally influenced by the contents of the texts: our minds count in our lives, although we often disregard this truth. We kill two birds with one stone. We cannot say that one person tickles his or her sexual organs, making love to himself or herself. There are two distinct persons, and they make love, aided and assisted by the resemblance, by the striking resemblances of two texts. And they are blessed by a priest – in a church or elsewhere. They get married and go for walk. And during this walk they see the world differently, for trees look like leaves of grass, and the stars are not really different from the lakes where you swim, especially if they are reflected in them. And your eyes are not really elsewhere: their intensity is akin to that of the stars and the Milky Way, of the sun. Your eyes direct your attention to your inner

disposition which is not different from the night where you spend your time, writing poems. What do these poems speak about? They touch upon and also explore this obscurity illumined by the stars, the moon and the luminaries of stage and screen. And they all recite the texts where you find the same subject matter brought to our attention by different words, people and objects. There is no need to look for the subject matter: it is everywhere. Whether we descend or go up, we traverse this subject matter on a regular basis. And it remains intact, in spite of our passage. Sometimes we envy it, saying to ourselves, 'I'm so fragile. Every thorn is capable of wounding me, of irritating me to the utmost. And yet the subject matter remains intact, whatever I do with it. I often tear it to pieces, annoyed by its contents which do not suit my disposition. But it sticks to its gun, and again I find it intact and prepared to receive me with open arms. I begin to hate these open arms, and I close them, whenever I'm on good form. But the subject matter resists my efforts and continues to welcome me as if I were its dearest friend and associate. One must conclude – one has no choice – that the subject matter is indestructible. And so are we. Aren't we the subject matter in our own right? (How useful this own right is!) And then we go for a walk and meet a thorn. And we know in advance the result of this meeting.

'The order established for your education requires that ye learn first what to believe, and afterwards what to ask.'

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So you first listen to an important person who informs you what to believe. From time to time, you ask him, 'Do I also have to believe what you've just said?' 'Yes,' answers the person. 'Otherwise I wouldn't have said it.' And he goes on. Then a woman comes and begins to speak, and you have to learn by heart what she says. You do not dare ask her if you should believe her or not. After all, she is a woman and therefore you cannot question the veracity of her words. Whatever she says is true, although you are allowed to ask yourself – not her, yourself – if this is the Absolute Truth about which you have heard so often, with such insistence on the part of those who spoke about it. So you do not question what this woman says, and to tell the truth this woman is not really a woman, although you do not analyse the veracity of her words – their truth is unquestionable because she is a woman you are partly in love with. Why? In the first place – there are always first and second places – she is beautiful and beauty added to words creates a truth you accept almost automatically because it is an alliance of several components which participate in the creation of our world. Well, you believe whatever she says – no question about it. But there are questions you cannot avoid and so you actually know what to ask, if such an opportunity presents itself. But you mistrust your own feelings and intuition, and so you ask this woman a question focused on the problem of asking. You ask her what you could ask, if offered such an opportunity. The question is: are you supposed to ask for something or just ask another question? You are fed up with questions and the answers supplied by those to whom you put these questions. So you ask for something, and of course the first thing that comes to your spirit or mind is the need you have, whenever yearning to go places, as they say sometimes, probably in the United States. In other words, you need a car, and your car should correspond not only to your personal requirements but also to your status as a gentleman and a man of value. And you eventually ask for such a car, after much soul-searching. And you get it; not at the push of a button, though. But does it really matter now! You have a car and can boast about it as you drive through alleys and streets where your friends and foes walk in expectation of a surprise. And here it comes, this surprise, although they seem to

have been waiting for another surprise. They see your car and the envy they experience towards all those who have more money in their purses grows immediately before they can even return to their homes. This envy may grow to such an extent that you are dragged out of your car by an angry crowd, and several people install themselves on your seats and the steering wheel begins to move and influence the trajectory of your car, its journey through the city. That is what often happens in our midst where envy and jealousy are the dominant emotions. They are Hamlets and Ophelias, King Lears and Cordelias. And others are Poloniuses, and they are killed in the course of the action – inadvertently, more often than not. What can you ask or ask for, in this case? You can ask for a better part, saying, ‘I don’t wish to be killed inadvertently, by chance.’ ‘Death often comes unexpectedly,’ you are answered. ‘Am I allowed to ask death why? Why can’t he discuss this important matter with me? Is death selfish to the point of making decisions by himself, without letting his victims know anything in advance?’ ‘Anything – yes, but not the hour and minute of your death. Besides, if you suffer from cancer, especially from one of its final stages, you know more or less the day of your death. But does it really help you to survive his event? Not to survive, I’m sorry. The word is definitely wrong. Just to accept the fact softly, without throwing a tantrum.’ You could also ask for death, but in this case they advise you to act, instead of wasting your time asking, begging and imploring death to come as quickly as possible. Of course he is in a position to do it at once. But even death has an intricate mechanism which gives orders, receives orders and executes orders. And the window is already open, and it awaits you; not impatiently, though.

‘Now those very persons, who think it unjust that infants which depart this life without the grace of Christ should be deprived not only of the kingdom of God, into which they themselves admit that none but such as are regenerated through baptism can enter, but also of eternal life and salvation.’

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There are people who do not understand the word ‘sin’, and when you utter this word, sometimes for the sake of uttering it – no arguments are under way – they ask you, ‘What? What did you say?’ You repeat the word ‘sin’, adding to it the question which is on everyone’s lips, ‘Don’t you know what that means and how it acts in our lives?’ The person to whom you talk for the sake of talking – he does not really deserve your attention and your words – airs his ignorance, whereupon you follow your instincts and depart, leaving him on his own. But sometimes you stay, bent on teaching a lesson to the ignoramus whose innocence – this is a bad, an evil kind of innocence – is so ostentatious you cannot leave the situation as it is without doing your best to modify it, to uproot the error from where it stands and prospers. What is unjust, according to some ignoramuses? They think that, if you behave well and do not attack your neighbours and other citizens of the country where you live, you will go to Paradise without staying for a while in Purgatory. Yes, you will go straight to Paradise, even if your parents omitted to baptise you in a local church. No one asks you to go to Rome and resort to the help of the Pope; that is anyway out of the question. Well, your father was busy, trying to amass another million or billion dollars, and your mother was in the kitchen: she longed to gratify your taste buds through one of her new recipes. What is wrong with these billions and recipes? The point is your baptism comes first – this goes without saying. But no one said anything either to your father or to your mother. By the way, her new dish was delicious, but you do not remember what it tasted like: all this was such a long time ago. Nor do you remember your baptism, for the simple reason that it did not take place. The reason is simple; so are many reasons that presided (if I may say so) over this monumental omission, mishap and tragedy. How come? How come? We seem to have answered this question by explaining the causes that triggered this fateful oversight. Nothing doing: you cannot go back and carry out this belated baptism. Actually I am not sure it cannot be accomplished, given your sincere adherence to the doctrines of the Christian church. But the matter under scrutiny is slightly different. There are infants who die, in spite of the continuous progress of medical science. Three or four doctors bend over their suffering bodies, but they are unable to change the course of personal history. So they admit their failure, their defeat, which results in the death of the infant. Once again you ask yourself the following question, ‘What’s to be done?’ You go to a ceremony and bury the infant with the help of one or two gravediggers. What else could be done? Of course you can rewrite the text composed by St Augustine, putting yourself in Pelagius’ shoes. But you love the saint and therefore have no wish to question his conclusions, precepts and theories. Well, it is not your child whose peregrinations you are touching upon: you have no children. But this is a matter of principle and principles count, even if you flout them from time to time. And when you explain St Augustine’s views to someone, this person is likely to answer you as follows, ‘Our organisation works on the principle that all members have the same rights. And I can’t see why the world should be run in accordance with other principles.’ You explain to this person that original sin is very important, but your listener does not understand a word of what you are saying so painstakingly. ‘Original what?’ he asks over and over again. You explain to him the tenets of the doctrine you are concerned with; and you are not alone in this case, otherwise no one would have undergone the ceremony of baptism in the course of our historical

existence. What is more, almost everyone would have been burdened with this sin to the point of being unable to resist its influence, to withstand its pressure. One can imagine – and I am one of these ones – the number of crimes committed in the name of non-baptism. You see a criminal in front of you, and he wastes no time: he is already threatening you with a long, sharp knife. You remind him of the punishment he will undergo if he lets himself go and commits the crime he is about to commit. ‘If you kill me, you’ll be prosecuted,’ you say to him. ‘So what? I couldn’t care less about humans and their punishments. And since I’m not baptised, I won’t be punished by God because we haven’t signed any pact, he and I. So I can do whatever I like, and I’d like prosecutors and lawyers go to Hell.’ The world would have been inhabited only by criminals, but for this pact we sign – in a manner of speaking – with God and sanctity as such. But what about the infants who have no time for this pact, for signatures and so on? They die before they learn how to sign the papers we are supposed to sign in the course of the same existence. (I have spoken about this a myriad of times. Why repeat my own statements?) These infants do not realise they are condemned to death, another death which is far more important than the one they are about to experience, assuming you can call it an experience. After all, this passage deprived of rites and justifications does not last. I mean the very moment when this happens does not last; or lasts only a moment. And you do not feel this moment, but to affirm such a thing we ought to discard the torments you undergo before crossing this mythical threshold. How could you disregard it? You are dangerously ill, but you console yourself constantly. One of the best consolations you can find in the whole world is your baptism. You repeat to yourself that you have nothing to fear in the Hereafter: you are protected from all sorts of onslaughts for which both Purgatory and Hell are rightly famous. You will go straight to Paradise, and since you are not acquainted with the Tibetan rites described in their Book of Death, you are not likely to meet a number of wrathful goddesses on your way to these paradisiacal landscapes. But what about the infants who will never enjoy these landscapes and gifts; generally speaking? Isn’t it their parents’ fault? Did they repeat to themselves these sentences, ‘It’s too early. Where’s the priest’s telephone number?’ They cannot enter – that is the truth proclaimed by St Augustine; even if they yearn to enter; even if it is their dearest wish for the accomplishment of which they are prepared to sacrifice everything. What? What can the dead children sacrifice? Did Mahler compose a piece dedicated to his dead daughters? Let us return to the children whose age does not allow them to be saved forever and ever. Not only can they not enter the kingdom of God, but eternal life is also beyond their reach. Of course many of these newborn children can say, ‘You know, we don’t care about eternal life because, even in this eternal life we’ll die very early, before being baptised. So we’d go from one impossibility to another, and that’s not our idea of a happy life.’ And what about the kingdom of God? Many people say, ‘I’m so happy in the midst of human beings that the kingdom of God seems superfluous, not to say unnecessary.’ But others, those who surround those people, would answer them, if they could hear their unspiritual thoughts, ‘We refuse to rub shoulders with you because you don’t believe in God and the blessedness of His kingdom.’ So you find yourself in a room where you are completely cut from human society. You are isolated, and this is not a figure of speech. Nor is it a figure in a carpet. It is just your destiny which teaches us one lesson only: we should love humanity, even if we die before being baptised.

‘They, however, who affirm that souls severally receive different earthly bodies, more or less gross according to the merits of their former life, and that their abilities as men vary according to the self-same merits –’

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‘I am what I am, and I do not care if my abilities or disabilities come from my former lives which I no longer feel in my body and in my soul.’ That is what most of us say, when this topic enlivens our discussions. You cannot say to the woman you love and whose face you slapped in the course of a quarrel, at the height of this quarrel, ‘Sorry, this gesture comes from one of my former lives.’ ‘From which life exactly?’ asks the woman. ‘The one before last, I suppose,’ you answer. But if you are gifted – not only from your point of view – you say to others, ‘I’ve done it myself. My ancestors were simple, a good example of what they call “simple folk”. But by dint of working upon myself, I’ve reached the level, the standards that you admire today. Of course my modesty doesn’t permit me to join you in this domain. However, I must admit that I have a few achievements to my credit.’ On the other hand, you can also say that your ancestors were so illustrious that you have always felt duty bound to live up to their standards. In this case you have a choice, and you take advantage of it, of the presence of an alternative. Of course you can deny both your former lives and your future lives as well. Your life, the one you are living today is unique in every sense of the word. And everyone is supposed to appreciate its uniqueness. You seem to say to all these people that they ought to be proud of their friendship with your being, with the human being you are and will always be, even after your death. You even drop a hint as to the eternity you deserve anyway, being what you are: an eminent, unforgettable human creature. Of course every human being is unique, according to their statistics and opinions, but you are inimitable, and this quality of yours separates you from your fellow creatures who are creatures all right. The point is they are not really your *fellow* creatures. One ought to deserve such honours, but they do not seem to make any effort in this domain. They do not read enough, and their readings are on the primitive side, to put it mildly. It is difficult to imitate a living creature, given that this creature is more or less unpredictable; even if he or she is primitive to the utmost. Still, today she may fall in love with herrings and so for two or three days she will eat only herrings, whereas you are fond of salmon and consequently are loath to separate your meals from this fish. There are many other nuances. For instance, your mistress likes aerobics, but you prefer a quiet stroll in your garden. One of the explanations you can find for this discrepancy lies in the fact that your mistress does not have a garden, and you are unwilling (to put it mildly) to buy her a house with a garden. Of course you are more or less in love with her, but this love never oversteps certain bounds. For instance, you are prepared to buy her a dress and even a hat. Buying a garden is another kettle of fish, and you internally, inwardly refuse to commit yourself to such an extent. Generally speaking, your commitments do not go a long way, for such is the style of your life. And you see no reason for any change in this domain of your existence. You might have inherited this custom of yours from your father who was not stingy, whatever they might think. He was pragmatic and spent his money cautiously, being aware of rainy days and the sacrifices you consent to during such periods. A rainy day comes and you forget both your garden and your mistress. Contrary to some actors, you do not like walking in the rain. What is more, you do not even like to make love during such periods. You just sit in your study and listen to the rain, noting it down, now and then. Drip, drip, drip – that is how you note it down. Sometimes you even write a poem about the rain, but then you burn it, dissatisfied as you are with its technical deficiencies. And this probably comes from your mother who seemed to be attracted to fire in every shape or form. Now and then she would burn some object or other for no obvious reason. What is more, there were no other reasons to justify her behaviour. She was very fond of your father’s moustache. One day she was on the point of burning it, but at the last moment, on the point of the forthcoming disaster, your father put his hand on your mother’s hand, and the

disaster was prevented in the nick of time. It was a close shave and your father never forgot this incident. From then on he never got too close to your mother, and he was particularly afraid of her lighter. And even when she just held a box of matches in her right or left hand, he would make a movement which reminded everybody of a horse which shies at the fence. By the way, your father was a good horseman, but unfortunately you did not inherit this trait of his character, this nuance of his life and so, upon seeing a horse, you behave like a horse which shies at the fence. Actually you must have inherited this habit of yours from horses. How come? It is pointless to analyse the situation from the point of view which becomes more and more traditional. People talk about humans being drawn to animals in the domain of sexual games and physical, bodily love. They even mention Catherine the Great in this connexion. Sure enough, the Russian Empress was interested in horses, but to what point, one may ask? What pitch did their relationships reach? Anyway, you are not in love with horses. Whenever you meet some of them in your street which is frequently used by horsewomen of all kinds, you smile because you do not really mind horses and their habits. But you do not think your heredity borrowed anything from them. This statement is all the more logical, since for some time you have not been able to run, due to the lamentable state of your legs which cannot negotiate obstacles, however innocent-looking and soft. And of course you cannot bear any weight. And if someone puts his or her body on your back, you collapse. You have never undergone this experience, but you are sure – and your assuredness is based upon your knowledge of your abilities and disabilities – to fall under the circumstances, including in your ritual of the unfortunate horseman or horsewoman; a woman mounting a man. As for galloping, it is better not even to mention this in your presence. At once you grow gloomy, and nothing can distract you from your study of sadness.

‘Some, however, understand that as soon as children are born they are enlightened.’

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Everything can be understood literally or figuratively. A child is born and this child sees the light for the first time. This does not mean she does not become enlightened in her mother’s womb. Anyway, women are enlightened at an early stage of their lives – much sooner than men who like darkness which is far more mysterious. It is true that some women prefer semi-darkness, especially if they have no time to use the ingredients of their beauty, its artificial ingredients. But men often boast about their dark nature as if bent on competing with the dark lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets which I often mention for some obscure reason. This reason is as dark as the lady herself. Anyway, a child is born and we begin to imitate him, which might allow us to keep our young body for quite a while, not to say till the advent of death, of the appearance of his threshold. We stand on the threshold of death and visualise the appearance of death to whom we talk as follows, ‘I’m young for the simple reason that I’ve always imitated children, their ways, their methods and reasoning. I know that many children die in their infancy, but I’m not of their number, believe me. I must have been enlightened in my cradle, and I have kept this enlightenment throughout my life. Even now I still keep it, which allows me to see you and talk to you in my enlightened way. If you wish, I could enlighten you, for I aspire to open the door of eternity. And this door is closed because of your evil, inhuman stratagem.’ Actually, children do not fear death – not only because they are enlightened almost automatically. The beings whose responsibility contains this article, ‘the enlightenment of newly-born’, are so used to switching on a multitude of lights in maternity hospitals that they do it mechanically. They do not meditate on light and darkness before carrying out this

operation. They do not submit their bodies to a few yoga-inspired exercises. They just enlighten the newly-born. But we must admit that only a small group of mothers make their children realise to what extent they are responsible for the prosperity of the human race. This does not mean that children can neither scream nor cry. On the contrary – their mothers and grandmothers should encourage them in this domain, considering that we all suffer and Montaigne said, ‘It is stupid to hide your suffering beneath a courteous exterior. You should scream and weep buckets, otherwise no one will ever pity you. And pity is an engine thanks to which our civilisation goes from one victory to another.’ As a matter of fact, children are enlightened on a regular basis – not only at the hour of their birth. Or we could say that children are born many times in the course of their childhood or childhoods. (We had better always put our lives in the plural; just in case.) A child cries, and his mother and also his father have the feeling he has been born once again. That is how children and their parents practise one of the tenets of our life – resurrection. And those who do not believe in Christianity and its laws become enlightened as they listen to children’s complaints, to their screams, tears and insistent orders. ‘I am resurrected through this child’s behaviour,’ they say to themselves. ‘That’s exactly how I behaved in my babyhood. And also in my childhood, in my adulthood, in my old age.’ The crying of a child enlightens everybody. When a mature woman cries, no one pays attention to her unless her inheritance is huge and many people can profit from it. Otherwise people continue to walk or work, and the woman in question goes on crying. When a child screams, people prick up their ears and begin to meditate upon their existence and its precipices, its mountains and stars. Their brains are resurrected. Some of them realise they will never be young again, and they cry and scream as if this superficial imitation of children’s ways may help them combat white hairs and wrinkles in their old age. Yes, everyone knows that, in this respect, children’s behaviour is much more efficient than cosmetics, beauty products. Some of us affirm that children are the best beauty products, but they are also the best gurus in the world. All those who have an opportunity to hold a baby – preferably a crying baby – get enlightened in their turn. They put the baby down, look at themselves in a mirror and say to their next of kin, ‘I’m enlightened, you know.’ ‘Are you?’ ask their next of kin. ‘Of course I am,’ they answer. ‘Could you prove it?’ ask the next of kin. ‘Can’t you see my eyes?’ ‘Yes, we can. But we fail to detect any metamorphosis in them.’ ‘Can’t you see the additional light?’ ‘But the additional light comes from this lamp.’ And they show you the lamp in question. ‘No, the light of this lamp isn’t sufficient for my inner enlightenment.’ ‘Quite sufficient, quite sufficient,’ answer the next of kin. ‘Try and carry this experiment out yourselves,’ you say to them. ‘Pick up this baby and hold him for a few minutes. And if nothing happens, you can bring his mouth level with your right ear so you can hear his screams distinctly.’ They follow your advice and everyone grows enlightened.

‘And many other testimonies might be found, were it not for my anxiety to bring this tract to an end, – an anxiety which I must not slight.’

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Something happens, and there are witnesses all over the place – the people who saw whatever happened and are willing to testify to the fact. They are eager to describe the event in every imaginable detail, and some of these details they invent, their imaginations being fertile; and talkative, into the bargain. It is not enough for them and their imaginations to record or invent many things – they have to talk about them to the police, to judges of all kinds and even to God. In this fashion there appear many testimonies and one can read them at leisure and with

pleasure, which accounts for the multiplicity of sheets of papers, of computer screens where everything is depicted, analysed and judged most severely. All this results in a few imprisonments, and then everybody begins to talk about the rise in the crime rate. The ratings of crimes go up and up, and nothing seems to be able to stop this upward movement. But we are about to discuss another feature of the whole process. There is a story, and like many stories it has an end. But there will be no end of it, to it, if we add the comments we collect, eager as we are to understand the origin of the story, its antecedents, roots and entire evilness. But if this story relates to divinities or rather to the Almighty, we must recall what Nicholas of Cusa said on the subject, on this lofty, irreplaceable subject. Indeed, by what, by whom could you replace This Subject? Anyway, there is a story told by many witnesses, and some of them judge their lives exclusively in terms of salvation. And so they bring the story to an end, otherwise it can relinquish the very idea of salvation. The story protests against the eternity of those who have no nerve to finish it. 'You don't deserve salvation, eternity and Paradise,' the story seems to tell them, and actually some of them hear these words uttered either by the story or by their own conscience or consciousness. On the other hand, there are commentators – some of them are numbered among the Fathers of the Church – who are anxious not to let the story end, for the simple reason that the subject is infinite, eternal. If you bring it to an end, it might appear finite, which contradicts everything and everybody, down to the laws of logic. And Nicholas of Cusa insisted upon the unfinished character of the story, although he never read either Kafka's novels or Musil's masterpiece. But you do not really have to read Musil to realise that the Being on Whom you pin all your hopes is infinite and everlasting. And so are your hopes, incidentally, logically enough. Why? Because a finished hope is finished, and a real hope stretches for an infinite number of miles. The Andes stretch for 7,250 km along the west coast of South America, but if you compare the Andes to the Being about whom we dare write a few words, you are bound to realise to what extent your endeavour (this comparison) is ridiculous. Whatever we undertake, however, we often have the feeling we are near the end of our labours, and this feeling does not contradict the fundamental law of our lives: from time to time, we are supposed to be satisfied with the results of our conduct. And this conduct is not limited to the help and salvation we can bring to the poor and their children. There is no denying that this help is necessary and vital, but there are other ways of helping, other undertakings and other results in this world of ours. And we strive to eliminate whatever is likely to bring about our general unhappiness, rooted in the overall economy of which the poor is an important part. On the contrary – we do our utmost to create the conditions which are conducive to the annihilation of poverty and every kind of physical and spiritual need. And whatever the achievements of the benefactors we sponsor day and night, we shall never triumph over human misfortunes and death which, according to masterpieces provided by the arts, unavoidably comes at the end of our patience. Alas, we need a lot of patience to withstand the deplorable whims of our destinies and the casualties caused by hurricanes and other natural calamities. Our patience is elastic and, according to some accounts, endless so that, whenever someone begins to talk about ends, we think about our patience because, this time, on this particular occasion, our patience will have to confront an end, yet another end of something or somebody. This somebody is perhaps dear to our heart, and it is hard to reason with one's heart which is always right, in a manner of speaking. Our reason talks us into believing that everything is infinite, as infinite as our patience. To tell the truth, the world has nothing in common with our patience. Sometimes we say to ourselves, 'I wish the world was as magnificent as my patience.' You are even prepared to demonstrate your patience publicly; at least in front of the world, which might promote your patience's importance outside of your constitution. But the world is preoccupied with its

own problems which are truly endless, even more endless than our patience. At some point we thought the world had come to an end; not the world – its history, to be precise. The same history contradicted us – probably in the same breath, except that we have no idea where this breath is situated. Does history breathe? Perhaps. At least we often think it exhales us, which is probably true. And our tests might confirm our hypothesis, if we knew how to test history's breath, its lungs and heart. What do we know about history except its falls? The fall of the Roman Empire comes to our minds, whenever the word fall is uttered in our company. Of course we first think about our own falls, and once again we mentally check the roads we have to take, crossing myriads of landscapes and cityscapes – bent as we are on reaching our destinations. Are there any obstacles on these roads, any treacherous steps? There are probably some pitfalls in the midst of them, and it is easier to fall into a pitfall than into any other hole. There are videos that tell us about the pitfalls to avoid, but do we often watch these videos? Do we have enough time for them? And even if we take the trouble to watch some of them, we do not pay enough attention to the details shown and dissected within these images. Anyway, we are not fond of ends with the exception of one variety which suits us perfectly: the ends after which we have a celebration. We open a lot of bottles – not only champagne bottles, mind you – and kiss all those we are not permitted to seduce under ordinary circumstances. And often we find our wives or husbands in the course of these celebrations. But these are exceptions on which we had better not dwell because the rule is different; and mostly we obey this rule, this implacable rule. And of course every end, however beneficial and champagne-oriented, reminds us of death. Perhaps everything reminds us of death; this sentence, for instance. And even a sentence in which the 'word' does not display itself, does not show off, contains a certain amount of fear and threat. For the time being, we can disregard the threats which look at us from every sentence, but the fear on which Kierkegaard (for one) enlarged rather convincingly does not depart. Anyway, the departures that concern our sentiments and other psychological nuances are haphazard and do not obey a definite timetable, a universal law. Only trains can be trusted in this sphere; and also planes, to some extent, sometimes, with a bit of luck.

'Of course that sinful flesh in which all are born to condemnation is one thing, and that Flesh which was made "after the likeness of sinful flesh", whereby also all are freed from condemnation, is another thing.'

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Some people need to know every detail of what is written in books, and one can understand their assiduity because some things we come across are *very* important; our very life depends upon them. They chance upon the word 'sinful' followed by the word 'condemnation'. And they realise they cannot sleep like a log any longer. They go to bed in the hope of restoring their strength and realise that no restoration can be achieved under the circumstances dictated by these two words. And they do not exist out of context: the context is in front of your very eyes. And you can read and re-read it as many times as you wish. The point is that the context is yourself because you have a lot of flesh; in comparison with sparrows, for instance. This does not mean that sparrows do not sin. Of course they do because they have to eat, and their meals are made up of victims which suffer in their stomachs and even before these stomachs receive them like a present. This is called 'life' and that is why they often say, 'Such is life.' They even make films about this life, about this 'such'. And in the meantime our flesh continues to sin because it cannot do otherwise. It is condemned to this ritual, but let us not return to original sin: it is too easy and the problem we are tackling deserves many explanations, many approaches. And original

sin is just one of these approaches. One even wonders if it is really an approach, given that original sin is a monument which cannot be tampered with all the time with negligence and disrespect. It is everywhere, and that is why we are duty bound to find something special, unique, which might solve everything and save everybody. Our salvation is still on the agenda, for anything can happen to us; and this is unfair, just unfair. Why should we fear cars and other engines? Whenever we cross a street, we have to look around so as not to be run over by a car driven by a reckless, half-crazy driver. What does all this mean? Are we born for such manoeuvres? Can't we just look at the stars and dissect some spiritual matters designed for our elevation and overall happiness? We come across the proofs of our misery almost everywhere, almost every day. For instance, we chance upon the following piece of news, 'The money was destined for the relief of poverty, but was diverted by corrupt officials.' And we automatically transfer this piece of news to our life and conclude that the money they touch upon is our life, our birth. After all, we were born, and no one can contradict this statement. We have a pair of arms, a pair of legs. We can see the disorder of the world. This is our capital, our bank account. What happens next? We mishandle a lot of things with which we are entrusted by our bank account or by our destiny. We fail almost hourly, and these failures draw us closer and closer to our unconscious life beyond the grave; or just *in* the grave – it does not really matter. Of course we meditate upon the problem of the flesh, and often conclude that we might have been happy ever since we were born, had we been clad differently or rather without flesh. Do we really need it? A spirit can also have a pair of legs, a pair of lungs: the angels we see in the paintings exhibited in our favourite museum are spirits, although they not only have a sort of body, but also some clothes. Often we envy them the beauty of their clothes, but this is not our main preoccupation. Of course our flesh is also clothing, but never mind, never mind. What matters is its perversity. Our clothes are not perverse, are they? Of course, we may appear in public in an indecent dress or suit – full of holes, for instance. Through these holes our skin, our body and its sexual attraction may meet the public eye. And then we are universally condemned for our loose morals. Sometimes we do not give a damn; sometimes, however, we are worried, for they cancel our admittance to various organisations, celebrations and so on. But the people who do not accept the holes which reveal our naked body never touch upon the outright condemnation of the flesh. They mention our naked body. They do not say to a woman, 'I don't mind admiring your body which is marvellous, beautiful. One is tempted to compare you to Aphrodite. But your flesh is unbearable on account of its eternal condemnation. We spot this condemnation and feel condemned ourselves, if only in part. But every hole we happen to leave unguarded condemns us almost physically. It is as if we were wounded by a lance.' Then we recall another variety of the flesh we are talking about so obstinately, almost irrevocably. There is another flesh and that flesh was saved from the very start. Not exactly. At the beginning it was an ordinary piece of flesh indistinguishable from ours. We could have exchanged our flesh for that flesh – many centuries ago. Even now it is possible, although it is better not to go into details which are too complicated, and so our attempt is sure to fall through. And falling through is not our cup of tea. Upon seeing a beautiful woman on a stage – an actress, a dancer, a bathing beauty performing a striptease – we are moved to the point of willing to appropriate her flesh which, however, is also condemned to eternal suffering. The problem is rather intricate. We should admit that the beauty of our flesh has nothing to do with its condemnation. All this took place many centuries ago, and we are partly saved and so our flesh is not completely damned. And we begin to wonder what part of our flesh is damned. Our sex organs must be damned: we are loath to recognise our utter failure in the domain of theology. Yes, they are damned, but are they negatively judged only during sexual intercourse? Or do we undergo the same negative, humiliating

treatment even in lavatories? What happens when we just touch our sex organs during our morning rituals, one of which is related to our clothes which should be put on our body, otherwise one might wonder why we buy them, for what reason, for what purpose. And when we take a shower? And what about the Jacuzzi? In these cases, the water droplets are vehement and they touch our sex organs erotically. At least they may awaken the forces that we usually attribute to erotic delights, to love and bliss. And we should not forget our lips which also play an important part in our amorous games. They are certainly sinful, and the condemnation we question and try to erase from our lives concerns them even more than our sex organs, considering that they are exposed to others much more, far more frequently. We kiss our friends on the cheeks or on the lips – this can also happen. As for our mistresses, we spend a lot of time on kisses in their company, and we never regret this waste of time because it is not a waste of time, needless to say. Our thoughts are mainly sinful, there is no denying it. And that is part of our salvation: it is better to think sinfully than to act in accordance with your own thoughts. You just wonder if your partner follows the pattern imposed by famous erotic books, some of which are of Japanese origin. You admire the postures you contemplate to your heart's and organs' content. But you do not act, and this fact affects your mood and cheerful disposition. At some point in your life you begin to use the sinfulness of your body with the intention of justifying its weaknesses and inability to perform the act in question. Of course you still say to yourself that everything is possible, provided the sun and the moon are disposed in your favour, inclined as they are to help you with their rays, frequencies and light. And radiation, why not? But nothing happens. Once again you have the proof of the end, of what you call 'the end of my joyful, passionate life'. But at once you embark upon the process which will bring you to what is pompously called 'salvation'. Your flesh is no longer sinful: you cannot really accuse an impotent man of perversity, given that nothing predisposes him to this perversity. Try as you may, your sex organs will never feel anything outside your needs satisfied within the space allotted to these needs by lavatories of all kinds. In Russia, in provincial parts of my native land, people have to leave their houses to satisfy these needs which are globally different from sexual pleasure. Not quite, not quite. Never mind – we might tackle these parallels later, if an opportunity presents itself. And if it does not, never mind – these parallels are not really important: beautiful ladies are already far away.

'Now in the truths which they thus severally maintain, it so happens that they first of all mutually agree with each other, and subsequently differ from us in material aspect.'

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Often, for some reason, you cannot pursue the text, and this reason is often very simple, as simple as *bonjour*, according to the French. I, for one, have never been able to understand the simplicity, the apparent simplicity, of this comparison. To say 'hello' is not very simple, considering that, before uttering this word, you are supposed to know to whom your greeting is addressed. And some of those who inhabit our planet do not deserve your 'hello'. In *The Possessed* Dostoevsky tackles this problem in a roundabout way. The hero of the tale hands his umbrella to a despicable character who says, 'Do you think I deserve an umbrella?' And the hero answers, 'I think that everyone deserves an umbrella.' Well, not everyone deserves your 'hello' and so you have to think twice before uttering this word in someone's presence. You cannot distribute your hellos so bountifully that no one is overlooked and no one departs ungratified. No, there are criminals in our midst, and even semi-criminals do not deserve our greetings which are meant for benefactors of humanity. And these benefactors possess what

we call the absolute truth, and they distribute this truth – a kind of spiritual hello – to all those who prick up their ears in their (the benefactors', the prophets') presence. There are several of them, as I have already pointed out. I cannot say there are *many* prophets and benefactors; after all, we do not live blissfully and gorgeously. No, they are few and far between. But they do exist, and that is what we have to acknowledge, often against our better judgement. It is not enough to go out and watch the crowd that you pass on your way to partial salvation – to your office where you get some money for your daily, superficial needs. The selection I am alluding to requires a lot of work on your part. But once these partners, your gurus and benefactors, are selected, you can listen to them. Of course each benefactor has his or her own vocabulary, and often they speak different languages. (This is an international affair or union.) What is more, they proclaim different truths which, somehow, amount to the same thing. You cherish this thing because it gives you a helping hand. Suddenly you begin to understand a few aspects of this enigmatic cosmos which is the main object of your inquiries and searching. There are people who are only interested in the parts of the proposals that pertain to local issues, whereas your mentality is so large and hospitable that only the cosmos, the whole of it, can satisfy you. Well, the prophets you are listening to do not always agree with each other. But they never quarrel, for the simple reason that they are sages, and sages always reach agreement, even if it is not always possible. So, after a while, they agree with each other, but you realise with astonishment that they disagree with you, although you do your best to follow their instructions to the letter. For is it this letter you follow? Is it what they call a 'material aspect of the problem'? No, it is just a letter. And yet, in days of yore (especially in Greece) words were tangible objects. They denoted an object and became this object in the twinkling of an eye, as usual. Well, this materialisation is a thing of the past and so it does not affect our present incarnation centred upon today and its problems. There are so many of them that we feel really happy, whenever the expression a 'thing of the past' is uttered in our presence. And what is the thing of the present, pray? We do not differ from each other in the spiritual aspect, and this phenomenon calls for a celebration. So we celebrate it without further ado. We open a few bottles of champagne and propose toasts that sound wonderful, logically enough. And all toasts are spiritual to the utmost.

'Now, although a man may be amused by another man's silliness, he would still dislike to be a simpleton himself, and if the father, who gladly enough looks out for, and even provokes, such things from his own prattling boy, were to foreknow that he would, when grown up, turn out a fool, he would without doubt think him more to be grieved for than if he were dead.'

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It is better to be dead is a kind of slogan we use rather often, but not in relation to our own children. They can be downright idiots, but what counts above everything else is their health. And that is what we care about. And of course they are supposed to earn a lot of money and get married to the most beautiful girl not only in town, but in the world. Well, we have nothing against girls, and we do not ask doctors to kill our infants if they are not boys and therefore cannot be presidents everywhere. It is true that other people's silliness amuses us and makes us laugh heartily and abundantly; on condition that this state of mind does not go too far. Silly people can destroy a lot of things, just because they are stupid and therefore do not realise that their conduct is destructive in itself. You say to yourself, 'Here goes a stupid man or woman. I bet he or she will make such a blunder that

one will have the feeling an atom bomb was dropped on the country and probably on the whole world.' Sure enough, something does happen, but atom bombs are still in their treasure houses, and even the Russians have not yet decided to use them at the earliest opportunity or provocation. Silly people talk a lot, and of course we make the most of their chatter, for we are aware of the positive effect of our laughs: they invigorate our nervous system and even our tendons become fortified in the process. We laugh and talk about the contents of the silly talk to our colleague whose health improves almost tangibly. This colleague is grateful for the portion of health we have provided him with, and so he becomes our dearest friend. Thanks to his assistance we become important not only in our office, but throughout the country where we live, work and fall in love. There are other advantages we can draw from other people's silly behaviour, speeches and ordinary remarks. Whatever they touch becomes silly almost immediately. And we continue to laugh as we go from one building to another. We often ask silly individuals to accompany us during our visits to shops and stadiums. We laugh all the time, for they go on talking even during football matches. What strikes us during these communications is our immunity to silliness. It is as if it were not contagious; at least it is not as contagious as Covid. Why? Probably because silliness is not made up of bacteria, microbes and so on. It is just silliness, nothing else. And laughter is contagious: we are all aware of this complicity with laughter. As soon as someone begins to laugh we are tempted to follow this trend, this explosion of hilarity. And even if we do not see the face of the person who propagates this laughter – you can propagate lies. Why not a fit of laughter? – we follow suit because in this area the sound is quite sufficient and can act on its own, without any help from grimaces. But the matter stands differently with silliness itself. Of course our boys and girls, our children, generally speaking, make us smile very often – even if they do not do anything special. They are just in front of us, playing with their toys or just sitting on the floor. And we smile – automatically, almost fanatically. But their conduct has nothing to do with silliness. Boys will be boys; girls will be girls. That is how we react upon seeing them on the floor or in the grass, rolling something to and fro; or just putting their fingers here and there. If there is a fire somewhere, we say to them, 'Don't put your fingers into the fire. You shouldn't even get close to it because your fingers and even your whole body can be burnt, reduced to cinders.' Of course we watch our children continuously, fearing they might grow silly in the course of their growth. We have never accepted becoming what are called 'simpletons', although many of our contemporaries like this category of human being. In old Russia, simpletons were respected and even the tsars paid homage to them, from time to time. But we would rather resent this state of mind and being, if it concerned our own existence. It is all the more unnecessary, since the tsars are no longer in our midst. When playing with our children, we often encourage their silly exploits because all this is very charming, very charming indeed. We go so far as to permit them to play with some members of our body, being convinced that they are fond of such fiddling. Perhaps we should say to them at the end of such games, 'You know, I shall overlook the silly aspect of our games – for the time being. But if you go on like that, you might become a fool, and in that case your death would be almost inevitable.' No, we do not say such things to our boys and girls: they are not mature enough to understand and enjoy our jokes, whether practical or not. But we had better be on our guard, otherwise something irremediable may happen; and when such things do happen, it is too late to straighten the problem out. Of course a murder is out of the question, and in this area we do not need any advice which might come from the Fathers of the Church. Nevertheless the threat is obvious, and we should not neglect it, even if we are justifiably proud of our children and their mental gifts. Suppose your boy is extremely talented in the domain of mathematics. Equations and Poincaré's enigmas have no secrets for him.

But the silliness of the games he played in his childhood and partly in his youth pursues him somehow. Of course we warn him about his habits which are anchored in the past, in the things of the past, but he continues to succumb to their allurements, for all our warnings and punishments. So we stop putting him on his guard, and he carries on in his own sweet way.

‘While, however, hope remains of growth, and the light of intellect is expected to increase with the increase of years, then the insults of young children even to their parents seem not merely not wrong, but even agreeable and pleasant.’

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We hope we shall not remain in the state which was ours when we were lying in our cradle, and probably enjoying this state of affairs. Actually, we mostly enjoy what we do not really know: the state whose name is hidden from us eternally, and the bliss which comes out of the blue and goes back to the blue at the end of the most extraordinary period in our life. Why do we always think in terms of growth, increase? Incidentally, the growth we evoke so often in our day and night dreams may be negative: our strength decreases and we lose some of the capacities we unconditionally trust as if they were eternal. We can lift a chair today, but tomorrow we shall be able to lift only one leg of this chair. It is pointless to speak about any growth in this context; except negative growth. We may and rather must grow negatively, which does not mean that sooner or later we shall make a hole in the earth to be able to go on with our negative growth. Of course our tomb is a positive result of our negative growth, but this does not really matter. In the end we are sure to abandon the hope we pin on this proverbial growth because stupidity is not the aim of our existence; of our growth, in a sense. It is true that for some years our intellect increases as if to demonstrate human affinities with the Almighty. But then it decreases alarmingly, and we try to persuade ourselves that we can live without our intellect; or any other intellect for that matter. It does not really matter, this intellect of ours. That is what we say to ourselves before going to sleep. And we sleep wonderfully after such a lullaby. Nevertheless, we pay attention to how stupid some people are, for the simple reason that we do not wish to waste our time in their company. And we think that they are probably too young – we are kind-hearted, after all – and with the passing of the years they will become Nobel prize winners, all of them. But the years elapse and nothing happens: we are still surprised by how stupid some remarks we hear are, in spite of the age of those who talk and offer us their arguments. They even lavish these arguments upon us as if they were presents without which we can hardly live magnificently. And that is how we should live, in our opinion. Yes, we are sure that our intellect is not rooted to the spot, and if it is, it is like a tree which needs roots as much as twigs, branches and a trunk. But our great expectations exist only for the sake of our disappointments, otherwise they would not deserve the name of great expectations. Only small expectations do not usually let us down, although this can happen and does happen, in spite of our resistance to this bad luck. So we look at the world and our disappointment grows, and this growth should be taken into consideration like all other growths. We look at the world and see a lot of children, and some of these children belong to us: we cannot deny that. Of course we have nothing against our children; and yet they insult us now and then; very often, to tell the truth. Do we spank them, after hearing yet another insult? We try not to, because spanking is not included in our code of honour, according to which we live and conduct our affairs. Besides, we count on the growth into the mystery which we have been probing for some time. One of our conclusions is linked to the

division which seems to be very important in the context of this growth. There are two kinds of growth; a positive one and a negative one. The children under scrutiny – those who insult their parents – are expected to grow in accordance with the rules and customs followed within positive growth. We think (and we are probably wrong) that these children cannot become worse: their insults seem to be at the very bottom of human baseness and awfulness. But we must be wrong, and this is the only consolation we can think of, when seething with indignation. To many grown-ups, children are either angels or devils; little devils, to be precise. Whatever they do is seen and judged in these terms, in this perspective, which does not allow for nuances without end. Of course there are other representatives of humankind, and they are mostly kind and averse to generalisations and harsh judgements. They think that everybody will be kind and magnanimous – in the long run, that is. That is not always the case, mind you. But what do we care! We do not always have to play with children, providing toys and other joys for their pastime. And many people think they are our only hope: we began many things and they await our participation in their growth, so to speak. Most of these things and projects are unfinished, and we hope that our children will be in a position to finish everything, down to the world itself. All right – seen from this angle they are angelic, god-like, and even their broken toys look like monuments, like Grecian statues. Or like Grecian vases, to put it more poetically. Who cares about the rest we all know? Forget it!

‘For as soon as children are of an age to know their father and mother, they dare not use wrong words to either, unless permitted or bidden by either, or both.’

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There are mothers who say to their children, ‘Don’t call me Martha. I am a goddess, so you should call me Aphrodite or Athena.’ Some years later, such a child learns about Troy and the defeat its inhabitants suffered at the hands of the Greeks. And this boy or young man asks his mother, ‘What part did you play in this war? Were you really in love with Odysseus? Or did you prefer Achilles or Hector? Some goddesses did.’ On the other hand, there are children who call their parents by their names, by their parents’ names. These children do not even use the words ‘Mummy’ or ‘Daddy’. And when they read books where they chance upon the Greeks and their wars, they might begin to call their parents in accordance with these books and the information supplied by them so profusely. For obvious reasons boys like Achilles and their father does his utmost to live up to this reputation created by his son – just for the fun of it. But for the father it is not really fun because he has to go to the gym. He also learns how to handle swords, lances and other outdated, outmoded weapons of war. And what about mothers? Of course they continue to use lipstick and other subterfuges which allow them to play the roles assigned to their figures and faces by their children. They live in a theatrical world and often they are not recognised by their friends who are used to their habitual, run-of-the-mill appearances. A former child brought up on theatricals takes a stroll in the woods, looking for a suitable animal to keep him company. Humans are too disappointing in his opinion, for they are unable to handle the weapons to which he is already used.

‘Seeing now that the soul of an infant fresh from its mother’s womb is still the soul of a human being, – nay, the soul of a rational creature, – not only untaught, but even incapable of instruction, I ask why, or when, or whence, it was plunged into that thick darkness of ignorance in which it lies.’

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First we have to decide whether ignorance is a blessing in disguise or a calamity we should avoid by fair means or foul. The point is, if you are really ignorant, you know neither fair means nor foul; you know nothing at all, with the exception of a few relatively unimportant things. For instance, you know that you have to pick something up and put it into your mouth, otherwise you will remain hungry and feel miserable for a long time, if no one feeds you in some way or other. And who could feed you, pray? You are not a little chicken dutifully fed by its owner, although you might have been called 'my little chick' in your childhood or rather in your babyhood. But what does this have to do with the present moment? Are you ignorant or not? You can pick up a fork and eat a morsel of something, provided this morsel is within your reach. If it is, you can afford this morsel because you have some money. You are not necessarily a millionaire, but your destiny allows you to buy some food which keeps you going. You have no idea where you are going, but many people think it is enough to go somewhere, no matter where. That is why they say, almost in unison, 'The show must go on,' although they do not always know what kind of show they are taking part in. Probably they are not taking part in anything, being excluded from life once and for all. Is that what we call ignorance? Well, you see someone walking down the street, and you ask this person, just for the fun of it, 'Where are you going, pray?' And this person answers you frankly, 'I haven't got the foggiest.' Is this person really plunged into that thick darkness of ignorance? To what extent is the ignorance of this person thick? Is it thick or thin? Is it better to live inside a thin darkness of ignorance? If you begin to ask yourself such questions, you are not really ignorant. At least one may affirm that your ignorance is not thick; nor is it really gigantic. All right: this problem seems to be settled, but what about your rationality? According to the text I quoted above, you have the soul of a rational creature. Actually, they usually speak about rationality in connection with the mind, but if the mind deserves this honour, the soul must keep it company, being a *spiritual* entity. However, it is pointless to attribute to a mere child the spirituality with which God endows saints and even some members of his congregation. Alas, not all the members of a given congregation are in possession of spirituality. How to select the chosen ones? If you are a vicar, you can do it easily: you just ask the congregation to kneel. And if you are not a vicar? I have no idea how many vicars there are in New York, for instance. These percentages and numbers are beyond my ken. Well, no one forbids you to go to church, even if you do not believe in God with all your heart, with all your soul. (And even your mind must participate in this ritual.) You go to a church and watch the congregation of which you are part, willy-nilly or consciously, willingly and gratefully. So the vicar asks you to kneel, and you execute the order, willingly or unwillingly. While kneeling, you look around and see the members of the congregation. Perhaps some of them remain standing, in spite of the vicar's injunction. Of course I may be corrected or rather contested at this point. The vicar does not give orders; he just guides his flock along the road leading to eternal bliss. So he gives you advice and you had better follow it. If you do not, you will go to Hell, and you are most assuredly against this procedure which is common in our religious society. (Personally I have nothing against the custom: some people should spend their eternities in Hell.) Those who kneel down and spend some time on their knees are not necessarily spiritual, but they are certainly closer to spirituality than those who obstinately remain on their feet. How close are they to spirituality? I am not sure many people are equipped for tackling this problem. At least I am not, and I humbly recognise my incapacity to judge my fellow creatures in this domain. Sometimes I get the feeling that not all those I meet in offices and elsewhere are blessed with the souls of rational beings. Of course they can cross a street, but that does not mean anything within the topic under discussion. Are they untaught and

incapable of instruction? I am not eager to find out, for this search for rationality requires a verbal exchange, and my time is as precious as that of any rational being. Today, on our agenda, another problem arises in relation to rationality and our mother's womb. Is the being whose very existence depends on this womb truly rational? And does this being have a soul? The soul is immortal, and this immortality affects its life well before it finds its predestined harbour, its mother's womb. And what about the darkness of ignorance? Where does it come from? From the initial darkness? From a black hole? Let us keep in mind the fact that St Augustine knew nothing about black holes. He was not even aware of their existence. Probably he was, as a matter of fact: many saints were prophets, even if prophecy was not their chief preoccupation. Most of them devoted their time and labours to unravelling the enigmas of the Scriptures. Thanks to them we understand some of the Scriptures' tenets, and we should never omit this nuance from our mental horizon. Why were we plunged into the thick darkness of ignorance? But what is ignorance really? Does it correspond to what we feel, when reading or hearing this word? Even the word darkness does not mean the same thing – it goes without saying. Actually, we should admit that this expression – it goes without saying – also changes almost daily, for the simple reason that we talk differently every time we open our mouths. The world is always the same, but circumstances switch from one situation to another. Basically these situations are anchored in our overall misery, but our miseries vary all the time. We are not like Victor Hugo's characters, are we? Actually, it is not hard to answer the questions listed in the text under scrutiny, whatever we may think about the problems that arise from our sacred texts. Why were we plunged into the darkness of ignorance? Do you think we ought to have been plunged into an ocean of light, into some sort of radiant knowledge? It is not a question of our merits because, at this stage of our life, we were not in a position to deserve anything except our mother's womb. Whence does all this come? Not from our mother's womb which was beneficial for our health and development. Besides, our mother had other things to do: plunging us into the darkness of ignorance was not on her agenda. When did it happen, this advent of ignorance? On the day of the Creation. Or at the end of something more or less remarkable. Not at the end of our lives, though.

'Now, as touching this enormous evil of ignorance and weakness, if in this present life infants have contracted it as soon as they were born, where, when, how, have they by the perpetration of some great iniquity become suddenly implicated in such darkness?'

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The implication in darkness – in *such* darkness into the bargain – is indeed unbearable, given that so many people talk about light in relation to their happiness and spiritual affinities with Paradise. I have spoken so often about light and darkness that it hardly matters now what place these two entities hold in my mind; and soul, and body, as one must always add to avoid discrimination. I am not sure we contract this ignorance which is intimately associated with darkness at our birth. As I have already pointed out many times, all this must have happened well before our acquaintance with our mothers. All this comes from nowhere, and for once I am not tempted to call this 'nowhere' a 'black hole'. There are many black holes in the universe, but that does not mean we are *surrounded* by black holes. Some of the holes we are surrounded with are white, which does not really put them nearer weddings, marriages, Paradise and overall sanctity. These white holes are a sort of mockery we have to endure because we cannot do otherwise, if we are to go on living and enjoying every moment of it.

When saying such a thing, we do not select right moments, felicitous circumstances, which would be natural, given the complexity of life. What we long to underline, however, is the global whiteness or felicity or ecstasy of our earthly existence. We go along the road of life and out of the blue – or out of the white, for that matter – there come a multitude of flowers. We catch some of them and enjoy their aroma for a long time – throughout our journey around the valley of death. Is that what they say from time to time? Or do they know only lilies of the valley? This enormous evil of ignorance and weakness. Are you so weak you cannot pick up a lily of the valley? All right: you cannot bend down, for your rheumatism gets in the way, whenever you try to perform this feat of valour. But you can ask a little boy to help you: he is a rational creature and can manipulate flowers in the most elementary way. During his growth he will learn to handle them differently, in a more sophisticated manner. He will buy flowers for you and even for your sister. His ignorance and weakness are temporary phenomena. He does not know that boys should give flowers to girls, and that young men are used to courting young women and kiss them first on their cheeks and then on their lips. With the passing of time they will learn to wait for them and talk to them on park benches. They will know how to seduce young women; and some of them will seduce old women, hoping to be rewarded for their courtships. Is that what they call the ‘perpetration of some great iniquity’?

‘The question which we are now discussing is not about Adam in respect of the size of his body, why he was not made an infant but in the perfect greatness of his members. It may indeed be said that the beasts were thus created likewise, – nor was it owing to their sin that their young were born small.’

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Usually those whose size is not gigantic – they are not giants, in other words – are not really disregarded by our society. They say about such women, ‘She is like a miniature.’ What miniature do they have in mind? Some Dutch painting? We are all animals, and some animals are born small and grow big. The other day, on television I saw a documentary about a lion who was adopted by a very magnanimous family whose members were convinced that their place in the country was more appropriate for the baby than any zoo, however modern and sophisticated. They created a miniature paradise for him. (Just another use of the notion ‘miniature’.) He was very kind with the members of the family and licked their members, the members of the members, rather often – several times a day. But one day – it was an altogether other day – he ate their son, and was finally put in a zoo; not in a prison, mind you. Did Adam spend his childhood and youth in prison? Well, this affirmation or question requires an explanation. We are told that Adam was born differently from us. He was big, which means that he skipped a few stages of human life without further ado, without bothering about it. He never missed his childhood, although we are used to speaking about this era with gusto. Whenever we encounter a problem, an adult problem, we shake our head and say, ‘Well, it would never have happened in my childhood. Such things happen only to adults who are cursed, doubly cursed.’ Why doubly, one may ask? Because children are also cursed, otherwise they would never have fallen, hurting themselves atrociously; in the course of their games. And even beyond this joyful game-orientated pastime, they collapse and receive a lot of bodily wounds: they cannot always calculate the risks involved in any ascent, in any descent. Every staircase is a pretext for another traumatism; our cruel destiny seizes every opportunity to harm us. For some reason, our destiny thinks that only pain is in a position to teach us the intricacies of fate; whereas caresses teach us nothing, nothing at all, for all

their tenderness and warmth. The more they are tender, those caresses, the less sensitive we become to the blows we receive every day from our destiny. Even on our wedding day we are likely to receive such a blow. A friend of ours may say to us rather casually, 'You know, I think you might have married a more beautiful girl. You really deserve a bathing beauty.' Of course you say to him that your wife is kind and intelligent, and that she knows some Shakespeare plays by heart. But the wound remains – to such an extent that for weeks and weeks you think you made a mistake and every gesture of your wife irritates you immeasurably. You seldom if ever think about Eve in this connection. It is all the more unlikely since you have never compared yourself to Adam – for obvious reasons. You do not even know whether Adam was intelligent or stupid, whether he could write a wonderful, unforgettable poem and so on. Incidentally, he did not play the piano. And what about his height, his physical height? He was born, and his height might have been admired by many bathing beauties, had they been available in Paradise in those days. Now I suppose there are myriads of them in every region of Paradise, even in the area designated for homosexual men. But what about original sin? Nowadays it does not really seem original: we all eat apples and forbidden fruit, generally speaking. (Some people are convinced that fruit and vegetables were poisoned a long time ago, probably at the end of the Second World War.) And there are many serpents in our zoos. And we can have some of them at home: no law bars our way to them, to their wonderful skins and teeth and tongues. Well, I suppose that Eve was tall enough to pluck this fruit, separating it forever from its native branch. She was born for this purpose, and that is why she was not a baby whose strength and height are not meant for such negative exploits. Yes, a baby can break a lot of toys, but she is unable to pluck fruit from forbidden trees. (They are all forbidden, according to some fastidious consumers.) And what about animals? Some of them are born small, but this handicap has nothing to do with forbidden fruit: very few animals eat such things, in my opinion. I may be mistaken, of course. But one thing is certain: my cat does not eat fruit. Nor does he eat salmon, oddly enough. It is pleasant to speak about animals – not only because they cannot sin. I remember Kipling's appearance on TV during which he said that writers cannot lie. Well, animals cannot sin, and that is why in some prisons they allow criminals to caress cats and dogs: these are believed to work miracles in the sphere called 're-education'. But if we compare animals to Adam and Eve, we must point out that the difference between these creatures does not lie in their sizes and muscular capacities; and in the length of their teeth. Animals cannot sin, full stop. Of course they often attack other animals and also some humans, but no one uses the word "rape" in this connection. Nor are they accused of murder, and this also goes without saying. Incidentally, when a modern reader chances upon, 'in the perfect greatness of his members,' he (or she) thinks about sexual exploits or failures. A woman might say to her husband, 'You should follow Adam's example.' 'You mean, I should eat the fruit? Have you plucked it already?' 'No. I'm alluding to his member, you know.' 'It is high time I reminded you of our sins,' answers the husband.

'Concupiscence, therefore, as the law of sin which remains in the members of this body of death, is born with infants.'

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I suppose it is a law of nature, and so every woman should inquire about the presence of this sin in the body of the infant. Nurses fiddle with umbilical cords and often forget about the sin which you should on no account cut from the body of the infant. Of course there are people who say to whoever takes care of births and also of

deaths, 'Please, remove this awful thing from the body.' Actually, at the moment of death this operation is even more important, considering the influence it can have on our destination, on our future lives. Do midwives also look after us on our deathbeds? Of course it is much more important to remove our sins from our bodies whose whereabouts can be defined as follows, 'On the threshold of death.' Infants have plenty of time to redeem themselves, their souls and the rest of their organisms. On the threshold of death you think about your property, about the people who inherit it; and also about your health, oddly enough. You still hope you will recover and shower your senses with all sorts of delights of which you cannot think properly: you hardly remember them. At these moments you probably remember wine and some women or men. But what does all this matter on the threshold of death? You think about the Hereafter, about your house in that area. You hope it will be even better than the one you bought at the end of your life when you had at your disposal a substantial amount of money. Are you likely to think about your swimming pool, about its beauty and utility? You went to swim in it every morning, hoping it would add a few years to your life. But you forgot to take into consideration your age and the proximity of your tomb which has nothing in common with swimming pools; even during tropical rains. And what about concupiscence? Are you still guilty of this sin at the very end of your life? Does this end abolish concupiscence once and for all? Perhaps. But there are people who ask their partners to live with them to the very end, even if nobody feels anything at such moments. Your partners may shed a few tears, and some of these tears are certainly not hypocritical. You do not care, to tell the truth. How could you know if you are still alive? You just ask yourself if you care about your partners' tears, about your relatives' sadness. Of course they will tell many tales of woe, once you are dead and buried ceremoniously. Can you hear Chopin's *marche funèbre*? Do you wish to know if concupiscence will keep you company during these last moments? Try and have a sexual experience, when listening to this piece of music. Does it work? What am I talking about? About your sexual achievement or about the psychological power of this music? Do all your members without exception feel dead under the influence of Chopin's masterpiece? Some men like to pretend they are about to die, and they ask their friends to put on a recording of his funeral march. When listening to it, they cannot help moving their legs, and eventually they succumb to this funereal temptation and begin to march as if accompanying someone else's corpse, coffin and so on. They march slowly, solemnly, even if they no longer hear the march; no longer, no longer. Not because they are already dead, not at all. They continue to march and if they meet someone in the streets, a bathing beauty, a male or a female, they succumb to yet another temptation. And concupiscence triumphs once again, but these people do not think in terms of sin and punishment; not any more. They live again, thanks to the funeral march. Once again we prove to ourselves that every coin has two sides, and we do not even have to toss a coin to find out which side wins this time. We just listen to Chopin's funeral march.

'For evil remains in our flesh, not by reason of the nature in which man was created by God and wisdom, but by reason of that offence into which he fell by his own will, and in which, since its powers are lost, he is not healed with the same faculty of will as that with which he was wounded.'

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What strikes one in this excerpt is the word 'wisdom', for some of us (I for one) are sure that we were created by an oversight, in a fit of negligence; otherwise we would not be so prone to stupid pranks. Yes, we were

created by God, but let us not omit from our reflection and meditation the fact that we create the Almighty (Michelangelo did) in our own image. And even human beings of genius have their negative moments which they often call 'my absences'. One's absence from wisdom and caution, no doubt. Suddenly our mind seems to take leave of our senses: we no longer feel its presence either in our head or anywhere else. Usually, when determined to offend someone, people say, 'His mind is in his buttocks.' What kind of pleasure would we experience, when sitting on our brain? What strikes one and many in this excerpt is also the weakness that comes at some point, probably at the end of one's life. (These ones are probably identical.) Wisdom, its universal variety, guards us against any contact with foreign flesh, which does not mean we can touch ourselves as often as we like. But touching others is another kettle of fish. When you touch someone else, not your own flesh, I mean, you are likely to hear a scream or a moan of pleasure. Of course you prefer the latter solution to the problem of touching. For some reason, this moan satisfies your hidden desire, and that is the beginning of the sin we are talking about. Of course the sin itself starts earlier, but its fruit arrive on the day when the moaning is produced by the creature you touch in some way or other. What you are fully satisfied with is a series of moanings, and their intensity increase as the area of your sensual or rather sexual activity extends to other areas of the body you are caressing and cuddling. If you cannot do it at home, you develop your activities in a local cinema. They sat in the back row of the cinema kissing and cuddling – that is what other spectators say about you and your partner. Actually, you are not spectators at all, considering that you do not pay the slightest attention to the screen and the action for which such and such a film is justifiably adored. Do these spectators voice their opinion during the projection or upon leaving the cinema? It depends on their patience. If your caresses, their sounds and contents disturb them spiritually or rather religiously, in a manner that challenges their convictions and ideals, they can voice their disagreement with your way of life rather brutally. They can remove your hands from the body of your partner and ask you to leave the cinema. They do not always address your partner on this occasion, so she can stay, taking advantage of the spectators' libido. The film is utterly forgotten, but this does not really matter: you paid for the tickets, all of you, and the cinema management is satisfied as long as it does not lose money. All this demonstrates your vigour, the power and the sin you activate as you proceed with your caresses either in a cinema or at home, sheltered from spectators and other busybodies. Of course you can invite some people to your room, but this is another aspect of the problem, and this aspect cannot be dealt with in the present essay. So you are still capable of carrying out all these procedures, and you do not even grow tired in the process. And if you do, your weariness is on the positive, pleasant, adorable side. But with the passing of the years you lose this strength and desert all cinemas and even your own room. At least you do not stay in it to accomplish the feat that embellished your existence for many years. The sin used to triumph in your body, in your life and even in your mind, although you have always admired St Augustine. But now another kettle of fish has arrived: that is how you express this calamity. And this is a calamity – you have to admit it to yourself, in spite of the unpleasantness of the whole thing. The point is that the thing is unpleasant only in part: the sin to which you have devoted so many hours and years is leaving your existence, slowly and surely. You are not as sinful as you used to be: your bodily weakness is to blame. You can still walk from one spot to another, but you do not go to the local cinema in which you used to fiddle with sinful human flesh. Of course you could have used your room exclusively – for this kind of enjoyment, I mean; instead of going to the cinema. But you felt additional excitement and pleasure when performing your feats in the cinema, in the presence of the spectators whose attention you did not even have to solicit: they came to the cinema of their own

free will. It is true that their motivations were not linked to your theatricals, but you took advantage of their love of films and actors. Now you enjoy the departure of the sin, and yet this pleasure is irremediably spoiled by the decadence of your body. Balzac wrote about the decadence of courtesans. Nobody writes about your body's decline. Never mind, never mind. The sin takes its leave, and that is quite enough for your happiness, for your great expectations aimed at your eternal life in Paradise.

'Now those who aver that a man can exist in this life without sin, must not be immediately opposed with incautious rashness, for if we should deny the possibility, we should derogate both from the free will of man, who in his wish desires it, and from the power of God, who by His help effects it.'

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We do not really think in terms of sins because we have to work for ourselves or our company or for both, and time flies ostentatiously, as we realise more and more in the course of our work and leisure. Everything flies, but we cannot say that everybody does exactly the same thing: we do not fly and this puts a strain on our purse. We have to buy plane tickets, and they are getting increasingly expensive. We should not go into the details of these transactions and causes and prices which our resources or rather their scarceness justify, according to our paper. All this is too complicated, and we just have no time for our sins, for the caresses we lavish upon some creatures. It is true that we can withstand the pressure of our desires, and often we do not desire anything: we are disappointed on a regular basis, and pinning hopes on people requires an effort we are not prepared to make, frustrated as we are with the whole process. What does our free will long for? We caress and kiss a beautiful woman, but sometimes it is more exciting to resist her advances, if such facts adorn the monotony and greyness of our lives. A beautiful woman falls in love with us, but we vaguely recall original sin and the consequences it engenders almost automatically. We touch an object and an inscription makes its appearance in the sky. Well, we do not always see the sky: our curtains are drawn from time to time, and we do not spend our time by the windows of our house. In this case, if we cannot see the sky, the inscription grows visible in another manner: it just crops up within our ceiling and willy-nilly we contemplate it, whenever we cast our glance on the ceiling. And we do this quite often: we have just bought another chandelier, and paid a lot of money for it. It would be ridiculous not to profit from its beauty as often as possible. And suddenly we see an inscription that informs us that original sin is everywhere because it is inside our constitution. It is probably thanks to original sin that we move, act and fall in love. Does all this depend on our free will? Most of these actions take place almost automatically, as I pointed out earlier. Only *resistance* to original sin requires our active participation. Of course the Almighty helps us along the road which leads to eternal prosperity, but we help Him, and our help is noted down in divine notebooks. But those who maintain we can live without original sin are mistaken for many reasons. Let us enumerate them. After all, it is our duty to go into the matter in earnest: playfulness is out of place under the circumstances. Original sin taught us almost everything. (The word 'almost' is very useful. It permits us to remain modest.) How had we lived before this crime was committed by Eve and Adam, by both of them? God feeds birds, insects and even Russian bears except the representatives of this species who live in zoos. We must have plucked some fruit before original sin came into existence. But once again I must resort to the word 'automatically'. And automatism does not count: only the manifestations of our will should be taken into consideration during this discussion. The serpent recommended the forbidden fruit so we were pushed into

action. First we listened to the serpent, then we plucked the fruit, knowing that the fruit did not belong to the category of ordinary fruit. We snapped our fingers at the interdiction imposed by God. So many efforts were made on this historical occasion. And these efforts were rewarded, I suppose. How? Marxists made great use of original sin, rewarding all our efforts and aspirations which saw the light of day during this unusual meal. Work is pleasure – such is the motto of communists. ‘God put barriers up to stop people from getting through,’ say a lot of them. ‘We did get through and began to plough fields.’ And Pravda announced triumphantly, ‘Large areas of grazing land have been ploughed up to grow wheat.’

‘All things else, however, are accomplished in hope, looking forward to their being also realised in fact, even to the renewal of the body itself in that better state of immortality and incorruption with which we shall be clothed at the resurrection of the dead.’

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Is it advisable to speak about incorruption within the realm of eternity which waits for us beyond the grave? Aren't we likely to be tempted by various bodily beauties during our stay in that kingdom or empire? The Koran touches abundantly ('to touch' is the right verb in the context) on the beauties which inhabit that empire, area and blissful region. What are we to expect from this life situated beyond our senses, conclusions and guessing games? We are likely to think that whatever we can do in that surreal state is approved of by the authorities we know by heart, considering the number of times we have read about them everywhere. Rape as such is unknown up there, for the simple reason that every woman sacrifices her body for the sake of your wellbeing, and in this context the verb 'to sacrifice' seems to be undesirable and downright incorrect. There is a sort of general consent in the area, and even if your desire is not at fever pitch, you consent to approach the body of a woman who offers you everything quite willingly and even stubbornly, in a manner of speaking. Anyway, we are looking forward to this state, to this eternal mind, or to the absence of the mind which is not needed in the region where eternal bliss invades you every second, assuming that seconds exist in eternity. How can eternity be measured? Should it be measured? Of course you can say, if you wish, 'One eternity, another eternity, the second eternity, the third eternity,' which is far more pleasant than saying, 'The third man.' Or the fourth man, for that matter. The second man might be all right, under some conditions. We shall define these conditions later on, provided we have enough time for such trifles: when you deal with eternity and its bliss, everything else becomes unimportant. To cut a long story short, we are supposed to prepare ourselves for this state of every element we contain; for their future state. Well, supposedly we should examine our parts and members to find out which one of them (many of them, many of them) is unsuitable for eternity and for the absence of corruption. We are corrupted throughout – no doubt about it. Anyway, any *mea culpa* is better than self-assurance, the arrogance which transpires when someone says, 'I'm not corrupted at all. It's not my pigeon. What's more, it doesn't run in the family.' Of course we ought to question such an individual, asking him about his grandfathers and grandmothers, asking him for their biographies, for the proofs of their incorruption. You freely admit that they were married and were in love with their companions in fortune and misfortune. But what about their lovers and mistresses? None? No unlawful, sinful unions? Not even a fleeting image of lovemaking in the woods? No furtive kisses in corners, behind closed doors? And what about hands? They can also be sinful, especially when they press other hands and go even further, much further. So many gestures of ours go

too far, and we cannot swear on the Bible that our forefathers never touched anyone unlawfully; or sinfully, if you prefer. They might have sent a few letters to the persons with whom they were in love illegally. Writing a letter and reading one are actions which can often be regarded as sinful, considering that these procedures are teeming with illegal touches. And sinful glances into the bargain. Our sinful eyes are also part of the process, and we should never forget that we have not yet got rid of them, in spite of their inborn avidity. So we had better not trust our eyes, when preparing for eternity and its in-built ecstasies. What about our legs? How often have we gone to sinful buildings where our mistresses or lovers used to pleasure us with their seductive organs and members, their caresses, tenderness and flame? After all, we are not to go to Paradise on foot: we shall be conveyed there by celestial taxis which are much more reliable than any pair of legs. And our stomach? It is already old, and we cannot boast about our impeccable indigestion – far from it. It is better not add another lie to the heaps of lies we shall leave behind after our death. But I am not sure we shall have to bother about our stomach's fidelity and efficiency in the world where ambrosia is destined not only for the gods and their consumption, but also for ordinary citizens of the Earth; for the former citizens of our planet. And yet we should reconcile ourselves to the fact that we shall remain attached, joined to the Earth – a sort of matrimony – even after our death. Even if we are cremated we remain within the Earth's orbit, and there is no way out of the situation. But I am not sure we should look for such a loophole. What do we have against our Mother Earth? Even the forbidden fruit did not originate within its bowels. And we should not discard or disregard all the meals we have savoured during our stay on this hospitable, fruitful planet. First and foremost, we should free ourselves from the tyranny of our head. Is the novel *The Headless Horseman* devoted to a timeless stay in Paradise? Is that the original title of the novel? I read it in Russian many years ago. If you yearn to go to Paradise – and I think this is the case under discussion – you should follow in the footsteps or the hoof prints of this rider: judging from his headless condition, he is bound for Paradise. Moreover, he worked on his human condition rather successfully: his head is elsewhere at the present moment. He even obtained a horse for his journey, not counting on celestial taxis, on the bounty of celestial creatures. Do not count too much on God. You should rather help yourself. Is that how this piece of advice goes?

‘Now, undoubtedly, he who is still renewed day by day is not as yet wholly renewed; and in so far as he is not yet wholly renewed, he is still in his old state.’

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Of course I am renewed, and I know perfectly well that every morning I feel like a newborn babe. So this renewal takes place, even if I am dead set against it; which is not true, as a matter of fact. No, I am not against new states, moods and feelings; and yet I am sentimentally attached to my former body, my former loves. Well, for better or worse, I am renewed every day; and even every hour of my life brings a group of new molecules into my room and installs them in my body and mind. What perturbs me, however, is the impossibility of being renewed completely, absolutely. Is all this worth the trouble of undergoing metamorphoses on a regular basis? Why should I forsake the woman I love? Because I should be renewed at all costs – this is the right answer to the question I ask myself. Can't I be renewed in her company, with her at my side? She often says to me, ‘Do you still remember our first meeting? Do you remember what we did? Let us go to that park and try to reproduce the events of that day as faithfully as possible.’ We go to the park – I am kind to a fault – and try our best to

reproduce our former gestures, our old kisses, thereby destroying our mutual renewal. Isn't that disastrous? Should we call this ritual a 'reoldal'? 'What did you do yesterday?' 'I undertook yet another reoldal, and this time I succeeded. I'm quite happy today, although I realise I've lost another opportunity to renew myself.' Of course we can say to ourselves rather intimately, in a personal sort of way, 'Let me reold myself today. I promise that tomorrow I'll redouble my efforts in the domain of renewals.' But we are discouraged by our incapacity to renew ourselves *ideally*, which might correspond to the perfect condition required by anyone's entrance into Paradise. It is never complete, our renewal. It is true that we are partly renewed, partly recovered by celestial forces which dream about our sinlessness, our utmost purity. They are generous and wish our triumph quite sincerely. But we are incapable of coming up to their expectations, and our renewals only emphasise our defects. In a way, we had better not renew ourselves because these attempts only lead to disappointment. At some point we might even decide that we shall never be perfect because our faults are deep, as deep as the deepest ocean, the deepest holes in the Pacific. Let us not recall their names: we might be tempted to compare our respective states in earnest, seriously, almost mathematically. We are sinners, and our whole existence is devoted, dedicated to this state of affairs. How could we escape from this damnation? We have no rings in our possessions, and every ring – even wedding rings are subjects to this curse – belongs to Nibelungen, to use Wagner's favourite term. You have a ring and you are cursed; and whatever you do turns sour. 'Add extra sugar if the rhubarb is too sour,' they say, after noticing your grimace. You cannot add extra sugar to life, can you? Actually, under the circumstances, one should not speak about *extra* sugar: today there is no sugar in your life at all. But if you add too much sugar to life, you become diabetic, and a diabetic coma is not a delightful experience. I do not know if you can die as a result of this coma. But even if you survive, your life is sour, and no sugar will ever change its taste, for the simple reason that you are advised against touching sugar. And even St Augustine would have advised you against renewing your coma-experience. Or your coma-adventure. But should we renew our renewals? Among them there might be a few comas. For the moment we are safe and sound. But after a coma we are unlikely to find our old, blissful state.

'It follows, therefore, that every son who is born in this old and infirm condition of his father's nature, must needs himself partake of the same old and infirm condition.'

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Your father was infirm; at least during the last years of his life. You did not attend his birth, his wedding with your mother or with another woman. Your father might have married several women on his way to your cradle, and you have not met *all* these women. You know two or three women related to your father's existence, and sometimes you hesitate as to their roles in his existence. Were they his mistresses, not his wives? He never talked about them explicitly, saying simply, 'A wonderful woman. You don't expect me to fall in love with unworthy specimens of this variety of human beings, do you?' 'Your father is a misogynist,' said one of them, but you remember neither her looks nor her name. Generally speaking, you do not mind those women. On the contrary – you would like to have so many women within your reach. Your hands are yearning for their skins and the tenderness you imagine, when capable of using your fantasy at will, which does not happen often. Your fantasy is lazy, and reality easily triumphs over it, making you withstand its onslaughts, its ugliness and injustice. But this comparison with your father or rather his infirmities is painful, and you prefer not to think

about his ulcer and other diseases he suffered from for years and years. And you witnessed some of the effects produced by those diseases, which is logical: we mostly see the consequences of our cancers and their varieties. Some doctors say there are only cancers in human life, but they are wrong of course. There are also joys, plenty of them, and even when we listen to Mozart's *Requiem*, we experience an unfathomable ecstasy that has nothing to do with death. Do you have to partake of your father's ulcer and cancer? Apparently they usually have in mind original sin, the infirmity anchored in it so substantially that no effort whatsoever can liberate it from its poison. All right, you suffer from this universal, cosmic sin individually, although you forget about it from time to time; in spite of St Augustine's insistence. But why should you also keep in mind your father's original sin, his participation in it? Isn't the quantity of this sin you bear in your bosom and also in other parts of your body quite sufficient for your misery? Apparently it is not; it is not sufficient for your conscience which is filled with remorse; probably not to the brim. Is that what infuriates celestial beings and judges? Should your conscience be filled to the brim with what one calls an 'inevitable remorse deeply rooted in original sin'? Your father was not really sensitive to it, whereas your mother often reminded you of its presence in your body. Your father used to joke on the subject, saying to your mother, 'I think that today my conscience is filled to the brim with original sin.' Of course your mother insisted on your father's internal, intimate work based mainly on the power of prayer, but your father spoke about yoga, saying among other things (other sins), 'I think the lotus I represent every day will help me reach Paradise in no time at all.' And then his ulcer and cancer would come back and once your father told you, 'My cancer has been working with a vengeance over the past few weeks to make up for lost time.' And you thought at the moment that cancer was not a *perpetuum mobile*: it had to withdraw from your body now and then, taking a sort of holiday. Yes, our diseases work as much as some people do, but you are bound to realise as you grow and become mature that they are somehow different from the creatures they attack so viciously. We go on holiday and bathe in seas and oceans, whereas they work all the time as if determined to break some record or other.

'For it is easy, when land is seen by men in peril, to make a venture as it were to reach it; but sometimes land is seen on a mountain, and rocks lie hidden under the mountain.'

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We are always in peril, men as well as women, and for once we see a piece of land, instead of enjoying a film adventurously and loosely based on our life. This famous vision – the last cigarette, to some extent – does not always accompany us to the grave as if Chopin's *Funeral March* were not up to the mark and quite sufficient not only for every funeral but also for our agonies. In the last moments of your life you see either the proverbial light or the land I am talking about. If you manage to land – whatever you land upon – you are saved and can live for another twenty years, to put it mildly. You put it ferociously and live happily ever after, reaching the age of a hundred and even more, in accordance with your hopes and moods. Anyway, it is advisable to undertake a venture, even if it is doomed from the very start; or from the very finish, given that you are dying or walking towards your tomb. For once it is far better to lose your way. And you had better not ask any advice from the pedestrians you happen to cross paths with on your way. They are sure to lead you to the nearest cemeteries, convinced as they are that it is better to die than to live in this world; or in any other world, come to think of it. You come to think of it – as long as you live, you go on thinking, according to Descartes – and you think of it, about it; as long as you live. Sometimes, once in a while, you reach the following conclusion: it is better to live

at all costs. But a few moments later you realise that the costs you touched upon in your interior monologue are too high; and no bank account can take care of them appropriately. And there is no point in calling your friends up: they will never give you either a piece of land or a piece of money. They are prepared to give you their pieces of minds, but that is not what you are looking for; unless one of these pieces contains the name of yet another wonder drug. You do your utmost with their piece of advice and swallow the drug in the morning, hoping to become immortal by the early afternoon. The afternoon comes, but your immortality is conspicuous by its absence, although you go on living, as if it were useful in any way. Immortality *is* useful, no doubt about that, but life, the life you are leading and living is not. And this statement of yours is also beyond the shadow of a doubt. Of course you make a laudable attempt to change your life, to turn a few pages in its so-called book. And once in a while you ask yourself if your new life has anything in common with immortality as such. For a while you get entangled in the words ‘immortality’ and ‘immorality’, but eventually you disentangle yourself and begin to live once again. Do you ask yourself if this new life of yours is the last one, or the penultimate one? You ask yourself yet another question and leave it unanswered because the only answer to all your questions lies ahead of you. It shines forth, and even if you shut your eyes once and for all, you can still enjoy its radiance. The answer, this everlasting answer, is ‘No’. Oddly enough, you are more or less happy with this answer, with your possession of this answer. Your ownership seems to make you really happy. Why? From now on, you will never worry your pretty little head when confronted with a question, however easy and unobtrusive it may appear at first glance. You just say ‘No’ and live on as if nothing had ever happened. But something does happen all the time. If a brick decides to fall on your head, no amount of noes will ever arrest its inexorable movement. Of course you are allowed to say ‘No’ before expiring and, according to Leibniz, this remark may ensure your everlasting happiness. After all, you say ‘No’ to all the misfortunes your life and afterlives have in store. But probably – and you should not exclude this possibility – Leibniz was not aware of *your* life, of your existence in this world. If such is the case, his reflexion on the importance of the last words cannot be applied to your predicament. Nonetheless, you say ‘no’, whenever leaving your abode – just in case. And the case presents itself almost immediately. You are persuaded that your life, its very course, is nothing but plain sailing, and so you sail along and on, unmindful of mountains and whatever might be hidden under them. Yes, you opt for a tranquil, uneventful life, for the simple reason that mountains are often associated with trouble and whatever lies under them, under the mountains and their troubles. You are plain and accordingly your sailing is plain; at least such is the impression you have as you continue your journey into the night and whatever treasure it may hold. Every journey’s end somehow coincides with the thought you harbour in your brain and even in your heart and also in your tendons, otherwise you would not be able to move through the world so easily. This goal is called ‘gold’. Yes, every venture you embark upon is a gold rush, and you rush towards your goal or rather your gold, and miraculously enough, at the end of your search you encounter a cat, a Scottish Fold. Needless to say, you are thereby rewarded for all your efforts, and all your dreams come true on the spur of the moment. You stroke your cat and a smile is born – the star of your face, of your life. ‘What a starry face,’ they say now upon meeting you in the street, in public squares and concourses. There are people whose profession boils down to simple arithmetic: they count stars. ‘Star-counters’, they are called in Russian. Or ‘star-accounters’, which amounts to the same thing. Now these specialists count the stars with which your face is generously adorned. They usually begin thus, ‘Well, you have two eyes, two ears. Let us see how many stars you have in your possession.’ And they begin to count your stars in earnest and very professionally, interrupting their occupation only to ask you

some irrelevant questions, such as, ‘Do you run a restaurant, by any chance?’ or ‘Were you decorated after the last war or during it?’ And if you do run a restaurant, they insist upon your inviting them to dinner, and begin to count another category of stars at the very outset of it. They say to each other, ‘I like this wild duck very much. Shall we add another star to our Michelin appreciation, to our text, to our essay?’ Suddenly everybody recalls the rocks lying under the mountain, and the absence of the mountain from the landscape displayed by the restaurant – it is full of Christmas trees (it is Christmas tide, after all) – does not prevent those thinkers from accomplishing their task. As a result, a mountain springs into existence in the very middle of the restaurant, but the owner does not mind. On the contrary he thanks the visitors for the beautiful job they have accomplished in the course of their visit. The owner bursts into thunderous applause; so do his numerous guests and soon a mountain ridge allows the curious to walk along its narrow, dangerous paths. Of course there are no rocks under the mountains which participate in its structure, but you do not need a mountain to perish on a rock hidden under it. You do not even need this rock: you will perish anyway, even if your plain sailing is not cancelled yet. ‘Has my plain sailing been cancelled?’ you ask either the gods or your own stars. And they answer in unison, ‘No.’

‘For unless the mountains said these things, you would not find out how to think of them at all. Therefore from the mountains came your help, that you even heard of these things; but you cannot yet understand what you have heard.’

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Luckily for you, you do not deny you have heard something. On the other hand, if you maintain you have not heard anything, you are not obliged to answer many questions asked about the meaning of what you have heard. You just say, ‘No, I haven’t heard anything, not even a whistle, not even a murmur associated in my mind with cats.’ Or you say, ‘Yes, I’ve heard one cat or two cats. So what? Do you want me to decipher the meaning of their calls?’ No one is likely to require you to tackle the problem of the language attributed to cats and other animals. And if someone does insist upon your participation in the problems some specialists encounter as they study our pets’ behaviour, all you need do is kneel down and move around on all fours for a while; for an hour or so. That is the only way of getting rid of some people. You make them understand you are an animal – and not a social animal at that. Your crawling figure seems to ask them the following question, ‘Do you wish to speak to an animal? I’m not as beautiful as the cats you can see on television in the programmes devoted to these wonderful representatives of our fauna. So go away – I’ve not suggested you should go to Hell, have I? – and don’t bother me again. Not in a thousand years, mind you!’ Actually these busybodies may take you for a mountain, if you are tall enough to vie with the loftiness we automatically attribute to mountains. Even small mountains enjoy a good reputation in our midst. Angels are said to make their appearances on mountain tops, and this phenomenon accounts for our affinities with alpine skies and phenomena related to the context of winter and its sports; and its pastimes, globally speaking. But do mountains speak during the periods widely known as ‘the solitude of mountains’? If no one stands and speaks on one of their slopes, you hear only the wind and thunderbolts. Here is a thunderbolt, you say to yourself. And here is another one. What do you think about them? Does your mind evoke Zeus on these occasions? If it does, you inevitably, ineluctably think about his visits to the surface of the Earth during which he raped our women and humiliated our warriors, their lances and shields. ‘Do you think that is a shield you’re holding?’ he may ask from time to time. ‘And what about the

remnants of something you see around your feet? Would you dare call them a “shield”? What can this thing protect you from? From my wrath? Have a look at your former body now, for a change, for a change.’ You look at the remnants of your body and say to Zeus, and probably to Hera as well, ‘This is my former body.’ And what about your former mouth? Can it be defined as a *former* mouth? Do former or inexistent mouths speak at all? And what about mountains? Are they former mouths, all of them? Once upon a time, one could meet a lot of giants who talked to human beings now and then. Some called them ‘giants’; others affirmed they were mountains, nothing else. It is about such mountains that people said, ‘If the mountain doesn’t come to you, flouting your invitation, you just go to this mountain and embrace it heartily.’ What do mountains try to convey to us, assuming they have brains, tongues and concepts, conceptions? They might be willing to make us understand that we are just human beings and therefore our size does not permit us to have spiritual or lofty views. You see just your own feet and a few leaves of grass. And these leaves are unable to judge the universe appropriately, considering their smallness and inefficiency. These leaves, this grass, submit their substances to the action of winds and are also sensitive to raindrops, their fall and destructive powers. We often listen to the rain with pleasure, enjoying in particular its soothing rhythm and unobtrusive activities. Of course there are storms which destroy everything in the long run, and even their short sojourns in our area can damage a lot of things, including our houses and cars. Upon awakening we may find an empty space on the spot where our car used to enjoy its existence only a few hours ago. How come? We do not seem to have heard anything weird, sinister and unbearable during the previous night. How come? And then we recall the number of sleeping pills we swallowed a few hours before. Before the catastrophe, one is tempted to add: the loss of cars is a painful experience, and it is all the more disastrous since you have no money for another car, however modest and inadequate. And once again the adequacy of our life has been brought into question. You agree immediately that everything is inadequate around you and even inside your structure. Why do you agree with this outcome of your inner discussion? Because you do not feel like going on in this manner for another hour or so. You have safely reached this conclusion, but mountains remain outside as if they had never been touched upon either within yourself or outside your being. You look at the nearest map and realise that a number of mountains are still on its agenda, on the map’s agenda you are consulting at this particular moment. And it does not really matter whether you climb these mountains or not. There are people who stubbornly maintain that mountains talk to you only if you get in touch with them physically, using your hands and special equipment. And some of these people add that it is really your equipment that talks to the mountain and hears its answers and doctrines. So you can spare your muscles and energy and relinquish the climbs which harm your nervous system and cost you a tremendous amount of vital energy. You just sit at home and listen to your boots or whatever you resort to in the course of your climbs. You put them near your fireplace and listen to both – to the fire and your boots. They talk to you about the stars, about the cosmos in general about which our mountains know a lot, being nearer to this knowledge than any pedestrian. Even the acrobats who walk tightropes in circuses and over your native city know less about what our mountains convey to their attentive listeners. Actually, it is enough to write MOUNTAIN and you receive the information you need and aspire to get, provided you write this word using capital letters. It is capital, capital, says someone, which reminds you of Hamlet. Oddly enough, mountains do not revive the name of Hamlet in your brain, in spite of his soliloquies about heaven and other subjects linked to the Absolute Truth. And what is this Absolute Truth, pray? Betrayals, as usual. Your uncle holds a phial filled to the brim with a world-famous poison, and your father exposes one of his ears to the obvious, forthcoming

danger. Then he presents another ear and the deed is accomplished. So the ritual concerns your ears, not your cheeks. Of course, by turning your ears you also turn your cheeks, but as a result of this second operation you get insulted, humiliated, and your cheeks as well as your whole face are taken down a peg or two. (There are two cheeks on your head. Two cheeks and two ears that someone, the same someone, can box to his heart's content.) So you are downtrodden, but that is not the end of the story. At the moment when the truth about your state is revealed to you, it becomes relevant and you hear some mountain's speech. It is the Mountain, as a matter of fact. This Mountain says to you, 'Sure enough, you're downtrodden. But all those who are downtrodden are also uptrodden. To tell the truth, they're *uptrodden*. So cheer up and take a walk. You might come across a real mountain in the course of this walk. You have heard all these things, and you understand them to some extent. Accordingly you leave your house and walk along one or two streets. There are no mountains in sight. Had you known about your predicament beforehand, you would have bought a house in Switzerland, in the middle of some mountain range. Alas, you live in Holland and talk only to tulips; occasionally, occasionally. And you listen to tulips. What is more, you understand what they talk to you about. After all, tulips are big. They are mountains in their own right. But where is this right of theirs? At this point you hear a voice that must issue from one of your tulips. (There is no other explanation of this phenomenon.) And this voice declares the following truth, 'This right of ours is located close to the nearest mountain.' So you put on your boots, your clothes, generally speaking, and go to the nearest mountain. What a pity you have forgotten your maps in one of the drawers of your writing desk or in the kitchen. You decide to go back, to return to your ancestral abode, but this abode is already rather far from where you stand and contemplate both nature and the sky. (Is the sky part of nature?) What to do? Well, you decided to go to your nearest abode, but soon you realise you have only one place where you can stay at will without paying anything to anybody. And this place is very far – as far as the moon, as you point out to yourself. So you make up your mind and take a few steps in the direction of the moon. You rather take a few flights. And you listen to the planes during your flights. Apparently planes say the truth and nothing but the truth, especially when they crash. You do not mind dying for the sake of the truth, in the name of the truth. So you go to an airport, look at the prospective passengers. You look chiefly at the luggage they carry before checking it in. If a suitcase looks like a bomb – some suitcases acquire the shape of the objects they contain – you board the same flight and wait for the explosion. Sometimes the atmosphere or the weather gives you a helping hand. In the nick of time you thank either the luggage or the weather and perish in the name of the Absolutism you have never understood.

'First he said, "Man is rottenness," and afterwards, "The son of man is a worm:" because a worm springs from rottenness, therefore "man is rottenness," and "the son of man is a worm."

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First he said, secondly he said. No matter how long this ritual lasts, you hear only "rottenness" and "a worm" as if there were no trees in the world. And if there are trees around us and even beyond our field of vision, there are also their branches and twigs and leaves and God knows what. There are also butterflies who land on those twigs and branches; and even birds do not disdain this pastime, this holiday during which you can eat worms, although worms are mainly related to the surface and depth of the Earth. Some worms may even reach the centre of our planet, according to Jules Verne. Of course the writer talks about human beings, but they are

worms, according to St Augustine. And someone says, 'Man is a worm in disguise.' And of course other members of our club may insert their point of view into our speech, saying, among other things, 'Man is a worm, just a worm, fully and unmistakably. There's no disguise to speak of. What kind of disguise do you refer to, when using or rather misusing this word? Do you think our legs are a sort of disguise? Or our mouth? Do you allude to the absence of words, to their absence in the kingdom allotted to worms and their cousins? Do you think our words deserve such lofty definitions? Disguise, indeed! Yes, there is no denying that our words often disguise our thoughts to the best of their abilities. The point is they have no abilities to touch upon. You intend to touch your words' abilities, and all you accomplish in the course of this manoeuvre is a sort of exercise performed in the presence of the air. And the air takes no notice of this manoeuvre. Some of us think that we can shake the air, when speaking to each other; or to crowds, come to think of it. The crowds often budge, open their mouths and shout as if determined to shake the air magnificently. The air moves from right to left, but this movement, however significant, has nothing in common with hurricanes. Nothing to write home about. About what do you usually write home? About destructions, about fires that devastate your region, let alone your house with all its objects, your belongings. You write about the tragedy to your mother, and while you are engrossed in this task, the paper you write your message on begins to burn and consume your poetic, highly inspired words. Your inspiration is visible, for it is just another metamorphosis of flames that devour everything. You devour the world by condemning and disavowing it downright and irremediably. Instead of writing another *King Lear* you decided to burn a sheet of paper, although Bulgakov said in *The Master and Marguerite*, 'Manuscripts do not burn.' And you appreciate this novel very much. But you do nothing to prevent your sheet of paper from finishing its own destruction. While watching it, you say to yourself and to the world, 'This is nothing. It's not a manuscript anyway. Just an ordinary piece of paper. I might have cut it into pieces, and at some point I resolved to destroy it in this manner. But then I changed my mind and struck a match, following in W. B. Yeats' steps. But involving the greatest poet in your manipulations with sheets of paper was not a very good idea, for the poet's life is immersed in manuscripts of all kinds, including an impressive number of letters. Can letters be regarded as manuscripts? You used to burn letters rather easily, not to say voluptuously. Suppose you receive a letter from a man you are not in love with. Yet he bombards you with declarations of his eternal attachment to your substance and its ramifications. What to do? You do not even take the trouble of asking yourself this question: you just burn the letter, full stop. And if one stop, however full, is not enough – the letter does not seem to burn – you put another full stop on top of it. Unfortunately, you also burn the full stop itself so that you have to start the ritual again from scratch. This time you pay much more attention to the safety of the full stop than to the letter itself. The full stop survives your burial, and the letter follows in its footsteps. So both the letter and the full stop embellish your writing desk and even your rubbish bin most magnificently. And if you let this rubbish bin alone for some time, for two or three weeks, it will become a man whose predestination and also vocation are rottenness, utter rottenness. One wonders if something or someone in this world can achieve such a nauseating result in the course of three or four weeks. Of course there are fanatics who say that the result is always there and consequently you do not have to wait for its accomplishment. You just look at yourself in a mirror and see the result straightaway. And even if you break the mirror, being disappointed and disgusted by your own image – the word 'image' is very important on this occasion and on many other occasions – you will still have an opportunity to contemplate your rottenness in the shards you have created by smashing the mirror to smithereens. In every smithereen – nay, in every smith – you see a bulk of rottenness which seems to

contradict the size of the smithereens in question. Actually, one might even reflect upon the relationship between the smithereens and the mirror. Is every smithereen the son of man? Or is it merely a worm, which amounts to the same ugliness and disgust? Well, you just say, 'I smashed this mirror to worms, to a number of worms.' Warmongers are usually tempted to achieve the same result – another important word in the context – by dropping a bomb on this eerie and triumphant bulk. No wonder – so many things and beings are involved in this rite nowadays: they are systematically blown to smithereens. And if they are not, you are blamed for the peace of the world because rottenness and worms should be dealt with most efficiently and categorically. Yet some of our brethren deny the fundamental rottenness of our species, saying, 'It's true that a worm springs from rottenness, but we're not worms, not at all.' 'Why aren't you worms?' ask some disciples or other. (I am alluding to St Augustine's disciples, followers and admirers.) 'Because we use our legs, when in need of movement, journeys and food. And shops, if your wish.' 'I agree with you,' say the others. 'Worms don't need to go shopping. They've got our corpses all over the place. They just reach yet another corpse and help themselves to its nourishment and taste.' 'But some of our corpses aren't rotten yet. So worms can't spring from them. And if worms are deprived of this possibility and opportunity, they can't be born. In this way the world can be saved in the long run. Nothing and nobody spring from anything. Our fundamental rottenness is left to rot on some coach or other. And nothingness is the final result of this process. They usually evoke Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, when speaking about our last variation. Once again we delude ourselves, and our delusion of grandeur spoils the fun and everything else, down to our very lives. The son of man is a worm. The son of man is warm, benevolent and humane: our last delusion of grandeur.

'Therefore, let no one deceive you, when perchance you suffer annoyance from flies. For some have been mocked by the Devil, and taken with flies.'

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You pay attention to flies when they begin to circle over your plates and prevent you from accomplishing your rites – your rite of spring, your rite of walking – rather persistently. They cannot eat your nose, yet they do all they can to suggest this possibility, in spite of its utter absurdity. Sometimes they become so insolent they land on your fish, on the fish you are about to put into your mouth, and begin to help themselves to it. These actions are called 'annoyance' and you suffer from them either silently, saying to yourself, 'If I react, I'll break not only my plate but also my neighbour's glass. And my neighbour is an influential partner without whom I won't be able to amass enormous wealth. And without this wealth I am sure to lose my health which deteriorates steadily, due to the lack of medicine and doctors, prominent surgeons. I know that the Devil is at the root of this annoyance, of all these spoilsports, but what is to be done? You can't break the Devil, given that he isn't made of glass. Of course they say to you as you bring a glass of vodka up to your lips, 'It's the Devil you're about to drink, not your favourite Russian liquid. Do you want this representative of Hell to become your blood?' You get rid of all those flies by jumping into a river: you think you are pursued by wasps, not by flies. You have no time to differentiate between their respective sounds. You just hear something and hastily determine the source of the sound, saying to yourself, 'This is not a plane I hear. So it must be a fly or a wasp. I'm not sitting at a dinner table, so it must be a wasp. Their species is in love with my body, especially with my face.' So you jump into the river, counting on its fundamental, innate mobility. You cannot step twice in the same river so that a

wasp is automatically prevented from flying around the same spot, the same quantity of water carried by the river. In other words, the river is sure to carry the wasp far from your body whose feet you have already planted firmly on the riverbed. The river realises it cannot touch the same body twice, and the wasp I am talking about agrees with this way of reasoning. The river continues to wash your feet, although your feet are different now. Their position is the same, but their ingredients, such as skin, tendons, nerves and blood vessels undergo a number of metamorphoses. But the river does not mind these changes, apparently; otherwise it would stop in its trek and disappear into the sky, creating yet another constellation. What does all this boil down to? You have eventually got rid of the flies: they are in the sky at the present moment, being another constellation, according to your calculation and reflection and suppositions. Do they go on annoying you on a regular basis? No, no: you have got rid of them definitively. And what if they become a multitude of shooting stars? What if they fall on your head? They could do it even during the swimming lessons you take in the nearby river. They do not respect your backstrokes, breaststrokes, sidestrokes. They respect nothing, these flies. They respect only the text which allows them to annoy you to the utmost. And you are forbidden to destroy this text, considering it was written by a saint. Incidentally, you are also prevented from killing the flies whose brothers are part and parcel of this text. Thanks to Keats you know that nightingales have always been the same so that the nightingale you hear now sang for the Romans in days of yore. And the flies who spoil your life and tarnish the serenity of your family life are the same as well. It is because of them that Caesar was assassinated by Brutus, among other conspirators. And what about the Second World War? What about Hitler? Wasn't he the Devil incarnate? And the Devil is synonymous with flies, as we know thanks to the saint and his declarations. Well, now you have to make your choice, otherwise you will have to combat both the Devil and the flies mentioned in the text. And you are dealing with the same flies who travel across the centuries thanks to Keats' nightingale and some Roman soldiers. At some point the Western powers decided not to destroy the Soviet Union, afraid as they were of having to deal with a multitude of countries enjoying the company of atom bombs. Accordingly it is better to deal with Hitler than with a swarm of flies. So you rewrite the text as follows, 'Therefore, let no one deceive you, when perchance you suffer annoyance from Hitler. For some have been mocked by the Devil, alias Hitler. and taken with Hitler.' You are asked to remember the Nuremberg rallies.

'A carpenter makes a box. First he has the box in design; for if he had it not in design, how could he produce it by workmanship? But the box in theory is not the very box as it appears to the eyes.'

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You are a carpenter and an ambitious carpenter at that. What is the use of carpenters who are utterly devoid of ambitions and other qualities which put us on the pedestal called 'Man'? Anybody can make a box, and you do not really have to make one or two. Just take a box of matches and forget about the whole thing. And if you are unable to forget the whole thing, forget a part of it, and throwing the box away may help you to achieve this positive result. What do you need this box for, anyway? For your hat? Do you really wear a hat? And if you do, do you really need a box for it? Just put it on a shelf and forget it once again. And if forgetting it once does not help you substantially, forget it twice or thrice. You devote to this process – forgetting, forgetting, forgetting – the entire morning. You forget to go to your office and you also forget whatever you have at this office within your reach. You reach for something at home and forget immediately about whatever the aim of your gesture

was. You forget your gesture as well and so your arm remains in midair, oblivious of the world and of its own predestination. And its own destination, to put it mildly. Actually it forgets about its own final destruction because arms and the rest of your constitution are doomed, and you know what the word 'doom' means. It does not concern the flame of a candle that may disappear at some point, at some measure of time. But the candle is not doomed: it is just fragile and short-lived, whereas human beings are really doomed. And if you enter the fray and begin to prove to everybody that you are merely a mortal and not really doomed, for the simple reason that you do not like this ominous word, they say, 'You're talking about synonyms. Incidentally, humans are synonymous with tombs.' You go to a cemetery to pay a visit to your late relative, but as a matter of fact you visit his or her tomb. You put flowers on a tomb, not on the chest or thighs of your relative, whatever your intentions and their warmth. This bunch, if any, can only touch a stone which is as cold as death himself. Do you wish to warm and somehow appropriate death? This act is doomed to failure, as you probably know. You are perfectly aware of the fact, but in spite of your disappointments – how many times have you already tried to placate your own destruction? – death remains adamant. But let us speak about life, for a change. Yes, you change everything in the hope of assisting materially your struggle for life, your discussion with it. First you change your cloths, thinking that this metamorphosis may deflect death from its goal. It is easy, isn't it? Of course you train yourself for this important manoeuvre by kicking a ball which you deflect from its itinerary as soon as you realise it is about to destroy your favourite chest of drawers. And then you set about deflecting death from its itinerary known perfectly well on account of numerous examples of its triumphs. But we set our hearts upon life, upon a fruitful dissertation focused upon life and its victories. We swallow a pill – never mind its name and purpose – and drink a bottle of champagne, determined to celebrate yet another triumph over death. But according to our family doctor, every glass of wine we swallow drives us nearer and nearer to our final destination. Of course our doctor sweetens the pills by pointing out that our final destination is paradise; and also eternal life and beautiful women who are all in love with us. We remind him that a physical possession of a woman can ravish us only if she resists our onslaught for a while, turning it into a victory on a battlefield. And what can be more rewarding then such a feat, such a deed? In comparison with such an event a box produced by a carpenter seems utterly ludicrous. What can he do with this box? A cat might like it, adopting it during his or her sleeps. But a woman prefers beds and our carpenter should ensure her participation in the above-mentioned ritual, otherwise its insignificance will stick out a mile; or like a sore, to put it bluntly. You can make the most of your self-love, devoting to it a greater part of your pastime, but the duo I touched upon is far more spectacular – on account of the woman's resistance. Even her token resistance is often breathtaking, and therefore you are reluctant to go on, doing your utmost to preserve the status quo which enables you to admire the woman's elegant strength and vigorous character. This character, this tendency goes so well with her delicacy and fragility that you forget almost everything in your eagerness to devote your whole being to this manifestation of harmony, to this cosmic, voluptuous chord. And to think that all this rigmarole began with a mere box which came to light in your brain, and shortly afterwards appeared on your table and finally on your chest of drawers. And this combination – the table, the box and the women – have been produced by workmanship, by your assiduity and skill. Well, I am chiefly concerned with the text I am writing at the beginning of this afternoon, at the beginning of yet another onslaught of reality for which I am not entirely prepared. Neither physically nor psychologically, I must admit. The woman in theory is not the very woman I see in my room, and I still wonder why they do not coincide. And yet I have done my utmost to turn this woman into one of the goddesses I read

about in my youth. Actually I go on reading about them, but this process, this inner enrichment does not really help. Try as I may the woman in reality is never up to my standards in theory. Frankly speaking, I would like to call my theories 'my life', and it *is* my life to some extent. But this extent is rooted to the spot in the domain of 'some', and there is nothing I can do about it. So I write SOME and wait for these letters to become a goddess. I write GODDESS and read some, some, some. I read this trinity over and over again.

'For that follows: "and the life was the light of men," and from this very life are men illuminated. Cattle are not illuminated, because cattle have not rational minds capable of seeing wisdom.'

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If you say 'life' the word 'light' does not follow your statement. Is 'life' a statement? Perhaps – all depends on your point of view. If your point of view, your meditations are centred upon light, you say light automatically, and if someone asks you if you know the word 'obscurity' or the word 'darkness', this enlightened person answers, 'Obscurity is light.' No matter how many minutes you spend in the company of this person, he will always repeat the word 'light', whatever happens. Even if eternal night descends upon us, he will say, 'It is light,' and one must admit that women are far more perspicacious in this respect. They just point to a black or dark patch on their dresses and say, 'It is light, if you wish. But I think it is darkness. By the way, I'm the dark lady of the sonnets and of everything else.' But men are illuminated all the time; it is enough to strike a match in their presence to enlighten them, if only partially. Sometimes you enlighten them completely by means of one match, or one cigarette lighter. You just use it and they become infatuated with the heavens, with a multitude of angels among whom there are guardians or just instructors. These give you lessons in the domain of which we dare speak only in a sort of spiritual mood. But what about cattle? You put a few lighters in your attaché case and direct your steps towards the nearest cattle. These animals are not entirely useless, pointless; their existence on the earth proves that their uses and abuses can serve humanity, if only occasionally. Yes, you can get milk from cattle. You can also count on a certain amount of meat, coming from calves and other parts of the animals whose movements are signalled by means of small, miniature bells. The cattle I am speaking about contain a multitude of members, but the word can be referred to as a body, one fruitful, digestible body. Or by the word 'a dish'. Of course you are fond of candlelit dinners, and the cattle I am constantly referring to take part in such a dinner. And during this dinner, at the very start of it, as a matter of fact, their bodies become enlightened and one cannot help wondering if this light, the light created by this enlightenment, is different from what all saints enlarge upon in their homilies and other writings, however small and insignificant at first glance. But do cattle see wisdom? Well, a part of any cow can be seen on a plate – on a dinner table, generally speaking. Does that mean that the contents of the plates exhibited on the table have reached what we habitually call 'wisdom'? Is it wise to lie on a plate, to offer yourself to the gluttony of others? That is how many of us understand our primordial task: being available to others; to their gluttony, among other things. What else do those others have to share with us? Their avidity, their yearnings and so on. Actually, Wagner made this tendency almost palpable in his famous opera devoted to the downfall of Tristan. The motif that presides over the opera reminds us of what human beings concentrate upon: libido, theatricals and so on. Let us return to our cattle or rather to one of its herd members, be it a cow or a bull. Does this member disrupt a household, a king's leisure and inclinations, for the sake of its own drives? All right – another member of the herd goes hunting, following in the famous

song's footsteps, and the initial member of the same herd, the one whose libido overflows all the recipients known to our patience and good manners, takes advantage of this hunt to promote, favour and make the most of its personal hunt. No, such things do not happen because the members of the herd have no wisdom at their disposal. Actually, we are talking about a sort of anti-wisdom, taking into consideration the libretto of the opera and the conduct of the hero who disdains and flouts the conventions to which not only his contemporaries but also their descendants have always bowed, being respectful, dignified and merciful. When the king comes back and finds our Tristan on Isolde's body, he asks him – at least he ought to have done so – if his (Tristan's) mind is rational or not. It is rational to the extent of realising to what degree its owner has debased himself. Of course its owner handles his sword appropriately. At least he was skilful and reasonable in the past when he was not in love with Isolde and when his thrusts were more or less under control. What is the difference between Tristan and the members of the herd we are studying rather studiously? Of course Tristan is unable to produce any quantity of milk. One wonders if he is capable of going to a shop with the intention of buying milk for his spouse or mother or nephew. It is true that he has no spouse, which does not however liberate him from the necessity of obtaining milk at all costs, given that milk is the liquid of life. Well, he can reach the nearest battlefield, and if the shop where milk can be purchased is a stone's throw from the battles and their fields, our hero can buy a lot of milk. After all, he is the nephew of the king and kings are wealthy, as well we know. Even presidents are wealthy nowadays, otherwise they would not parade their brains and bodies in luxurious cars and yachts. So Tristan is not inferior to the members of the herd, and this statement is all the more logical and true since these members never manifest their presence through the agency of a luxurious car or yacht or plane. I even wonder whether a cow can be put on a plane with a view to being transported somewhere else. But why should we conceive such a plan? After all, cows can be found anywhere, and in India they even roam around big and small cities, preventing a number of cars and their passengers from carrying out their routines. 'I'm late for my job because a multitude of cows blocked my car and its drivers,' says one of the directors of some office. Of course a director does not have to justify himself in front of his employees: he is late and nothing should be said about his delays and liberties. Incidentally, cattle are never late, and this detail allows many scientists to affirm that cows have no reason, no wisdom inside their brains, if any. They are not aware of the notions we handle rather dexterously: being late, on time. A cow contemplates a train moving at some distance, and one does not know whether it admires the train or not. Does the cow converse with itself in the following manner, 'What a pity I have no wheels, no engine. If I had, I could see a lot of countries, a lot of additional grass. And the grass I might see under the circumstances would certainly be greener and juicier.' But the cow under scrutiny could not even say, 'I wish I could sit on this train,' because it is not aware of the name attributed to this apparatus. But why should we attribute any name to anything? We are born and some forces push us forward or backward. And we follow the crowd, so to speak, even if there are no crowds in sight. And from time to time our guides say, 'Stop! We've just reached what is called "wisdom" and it would be unwise to go any further. We should always remember the following piece of wisdom: "Leave well alone"'. But shortly afterwards we resume our journey through wisdom or in search of another wisdom, and our guides do their best to persuade us that wisdom is a multiple phenomenon. And so we should on no account rest on our laurels, otherwise the range of our wisdom will be reduced to a minimum. And the light will be extinguished once and for all. Cattle are not aware of extinctions and illuminations. Cows move if there is a patch of grass somewhere, and often this patch is not greener than the one they have just forsaken.

‘But truly there have been some philosophers of this world who have sought for the Creator by means of the creature.’

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You know that seeking for the Creator means going outside, going beyond everything you can see and adopt or reject. It does not really matter whether you adopt, admire or hate whatever you see and touch because, in your opinion, the Creator cannot be so small, insignificant and ludicrous. Of course, if asked about the size of the Creator, you say, ‘I can’t show you an equivalent of His size, but I’m aware that I can think about it. In other words, I can *imagine* His size. What’s more, I can even express it in writing. His size is beyond, beyond, beyond, beyond.’ You could also repeat the word ‘more’ a hundred times unless you have something else to do. But what else could you do in this world apart from showing the size of the Creator? If you know His Size, you can read His thoughts, wishes and laws. Yes, His thoughts are His laws, and His size is His law as well. The Creator made us in His image, but the problem is we can only *imagine* His own image. When we say about a woman, ‘She’s Aphrodite,’ we do not really mean she is identical to Aphrodite and therefore was born from the sea, from some froth or other. Within your imagination, she can be born from the froth you often see on the top of your coffee. Judging from the contents of this meditation, we had better forget about mortal creatures altogether, considering they can only divert our attention from the Creator. They mislead our thoughts which are wild and unpredictable anyway. Whenever we look at creatures or begin to meditate upon them, however superficially, our sentiments, conclusions and instincts send our plans, which are concentrated on the fundamental problems of Creation, seriously awry. At first we try to improve upon the creature we select at the outset of our investigation. We add a few lines to it, a number of cells and tendons, and we also fiddle with its inner life of which we know next to nothing. The human creature we focus our attention upon extends its members, and as a result of this extension and action a morsel of food becomes inserted into its mouth. Then the creature begins to chew the morsel, and we thank the Creator if this manoeuvre is carried out without a series of unpleasant, disgusting and obnoxious sounds associated in our minds with the lack of manners, a deplorable lack of what is called ‘the beauty of human conduct’. Of course some specialists maintain that one can speak only about the *ugliness* of human habits and gestures, but let us not split hairs on this and other similar occasions. We reluctantly admit that human behaviour is not always horrible, although you cannot really evoke the notion of beauty when discussing it in detail. Well, you just say to all and sundry, ‘Human beings are created in the image of God,’ and silence rewards your laudable effort to restore the purity of the human race. However, this silence cannot last forever, understandably enough, and you hear a few remarks to the effect that nobody is perfect – least of all humanity and its individual members. Your opponents admit that humans are wonderful before they are born – within their mother’s substance. But as soon as you *hear* a baby whose head appears under the ceiling of a maternity hospital, you say to yourself, ‘All right. I’m in love with this creature, but I’m not sure the Creator has ever behaved like that. Not even in a maternity hospital, mind you.’ The people who are determined to find out how our Earth was born and who its Creator is suggest the following method: you reverse the formula and construct His life in accordance with the images and formulas you have gathered during your investigations into human beings. That is what St Augustine seems to recommend in the above-mentioned text which happens to be the theme of my variations. In short, the Creator was created in the image of His creatures

whose birth habitually unfolds in a maternity hospital or in a village, in the midst of a meadow. So we decide that the Creator needs a number of other creators thanks to whom He may be born like a human being: naturally, logically and biologically. A creator, one of the creators I touched upon in the previous sentence, makes love to another creator and they give rise to what is called ‘conception’ or a ‘homunculus’, and this creature spends some time inside another creature, before being transferred to a maternity hospital. Then a creator is born, but this creator is not the Creator: we are dealing with a long, heartrending process and all the stages of this procession – a procession of stages – represent the prelude to a human life, yet another example of what is known as a recipient of misfortunes, suffering and misery. Of course we laugh now and then, and our laughter resounds in the universe, which proves that our existence may be laughable – in every sense of the world. You laugh, you realise you are ridiculous, you make a statement to this effect. And what is the effect of this statement? It is laughable anyway, even if you try to examine a different aspect of the problem. Nothing is different, as a matter of fact: everything boils down to the same common denominator. That is why it is common – there is no way out of the situation. Of course you can see a few doors embellished with the inscription: ‘Out’. You push one of these doors and see another door which displays the same optimistic announcement. Out, out, out, out. And once again you enter a room from which there is no escape, unless you regard another room of this kind as an escape; or a loophole, to put it modestly. So you relinquish this pernicious habit – pushing every door you see. No longer do you push anything. After all, you are not pushy; until further notice, at least. You are probably seaty. Meanwhile the Creator is making His way towards the exit: He is about to be born.

‘My brethren, wherefore do you cry out, wherefore do you exult, wherefore do you love, unless that a spark of this love is there?’

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Habitually people answer these questions rather easily: they just say they have done everything spontaneously, and their sentiments are born in their breasts; that is all. And that accounts for the death of their sentiments, of the love they may experience at some point – for the divine spark never dies, whereas our sparks are short-lived. They burst into flames and then die with all their loves and other, inferior passions. ‘We do not blame the spark the saint alludes to in his message,’ they say, ‘because it is far away and helps us parsimoniously. Our sins are too grievous and extinguish not only our sparks but even our candles. We wouldn’t be surprised if the stars ceased to send us their light.’ That is how adults explain to children and even to adolescents the movements which are born in our bodies. They just say, ‘Look at the stars. Their sparks are your sparks and you should take care of the stars which may go out at some point. And they can also shoot. And this phenomenon is called “a shooting star”.’ At first our children understand our speech too directly, in a way which appears to us too rudimentary. They think that the stars have guns directed at the Earth and the beings protected by the distance erected (that is the word they use) between humanity and the stars, their cannons and what not. So they do their best to preserve this distance, to shield it from exterior interference. They realise that this distance is composed of the air, so they blow the air they have stored in their lungs in the face of the people who happen to surround them. By carrying out this ritual they hope to nourish the air which protects them from a number of harmful actions devised and carried out by the stars. Why are the stars so malignant? they wonder. And their parents satisfy their curiosity by reminding them of the way they used to mock the stars, singing, ‘Little, little, little

star.’ ‘The stars are enormous,’ say their parents, uncles and even nieces. ‘They hate this song because it belittles them.’ No wonder the stars shoot, deliver their shots in the direction of the hateful Earth inhabited by the creatures who belittle their achievements, their very existence. ‘We shine,’ sing the stars. ‘What more do you want? Thanks to us you fall in love – the ritual you wrongly attribute to the Moon. Don’t you know that the moon is too small to engender any feeling in your body? You pay too little attention to our beauty and your disdain should be punished by our shots, by our deaths. Yes, we’re contract killers, if you must know. We were created for the sole purpose of punishing you for your sins. Have you heard about Abel who, according to your accounts, was killed by his brother Kain or Kane? We’re so old our memory grows unreliable. Anyway, let us drop this man killed by his brother or rather by our arrows. Let us replace him with Adam. What do you think really happened to him? Do you think he was poisoned by his wife? He was poisoned by our fruit which was born in one of our cannons. Well, you underestimate our influence, the fate we concoct for humans and their progeny. And you’ll be executed for this oversight, for this horrible error which makes us suffer and die in the end. But we die by shooting at you.’ And suddenly you see a multitude of shooting stars, and your body and soul open themselves in expectation of death, oblivion and the end of the world. And all this comes from the spark of love which makes us embrace each other, engage in amorous scrimmages, betray each other, challenge each other to duels. The spark becomes radiant and a new novel is conceived and written – on the spur of the moment, whereupon you exalt, exalt, exalt. You are happy and your novel becomes a bestseller. Your publisher asks you, ‘What can be done for the promotion of its sales?’ You say, ‘The cover of the book you sent to the market is beautiful – no doubt about that. But I wish it could acquire the shape of the spark we’ve talked about on so many occasions.’ And intellectuals go to bookshops in the hope of seeing the spark they read about in St Augustine’s book. And they see the spark, read it, enjoy it, live by its side, by its flame, warmth and universal love. And a shooting star puts a finishing touch to it.

‘What do you desire? I ask you. Can it be seen with the eyes? Can it be touched? Is it some fairness which delights the eyes?’

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You know that you desire something wonderful, otherwise it is pointless to desire anything. In this case, in the case of the absence of all desire, it is better to lie down and forget about everything, even about love and hate. And hate is a wondrous sentiment, provided it is directed against evil and a multitude of crimes about to be committed in your presence or in the next room, in the room adjacent to the armchair in which you read about heroes and goddesses. Can you touch them? Of course you can touch the pages on which their beauties and acts are depicted with gusto. But it is pointless because the pages you are reading become really tangible when you tear them out, when you detach them and crumple their beings, turning them into non-beings. And sometimes a non-being is far more delightful than a page, unless it is adorned with Dürer’s drawing. Let us put everything on the side of optimism. You desire a page on which a masterpiece is printed. Of course you can see it with your own eyes, even if your eyes are assisted by a pair of glasses or another sophisticated device. You see this page with your eyes and you touch it with your hand. And the scene contemplated from afar or rather from another wall of the same room is truly delightful, not to say ravishing: a youngster reads a book, which is supposed to satisfy his curiosity; and also that of his dear wife or mistress. A good husband or lover talks to the object of his

desire about whatever he comes across. Under the circumstances he has no choice: a book is given to him and, not to disappoint or offend the giver, he ought to read it, a small portion of it. The book fills him with delight which he communicates to his spouse or mistress. By this means the world grows more and more intellectual, and beauty, real spiritual beauty, dawns at the horizon – as every dawn does every day, in spite of the whims of the weather on which you can never count. You cannot count on the weather's cooperation, but if you are intellectual enough, you can withstand and counteract the wrath of the gods, as they used to say in days of yore, and make the most of the hours spreading in front of you, of your mental games. How are you supposed to make the most of it? You just touch as many objects and ideas as possible in the hope of choosing the right thing located in the right place. The place is right, but the thing is wrong; and vice versa. You waste your time on this lack of synchronicity, but the hope you have consumed and nourished for years and years does not allow you to yield to destructive temptations and tendencies. You are adamant and you swear on the Bible that you will never forsake your drive, your stubborn march towards happiness. Not to yield, not to yield resounds in your heart of hearts, in your soul of souls. If only your soulless heart resounds on this occasion, you shake your head despondently and declare that your soul is synonymous with your heart. Or is it a worthy addition to it which can be expressed by the word 'soulheart'? Does it remind you of something? Yes, it does. It reminds you of the expression 'lonely hearts', but this expression has nothing to do with what goes on within the area allotted to your being. Your heart is far from being lonely, considering that it is supported and inspired by your soul. The same goes for your soul and also for your whole psychology. You are reluctant to dissect this psychology of yours for the simple reason that you have no time for it. Your time is devoted to something far more important than words and their definitions; the definitions they strive to accomplish. So you say: 'My whole psychology,' and your ego is quite satisfied with the result of your literary and philological and linguistic work. This expression of your feelings and yearnings delights your eyes. If it does not, you ask your wife to stand by your side, in the neighbourhood of the sheet of paper on which this pinnacle of your thoughts is written by your hand. (For once you forego your computer's assistance. The moment is too solemn, too personal.) You ask your wife to move closer and closer to this sheet of paper. Eventually you ask her to touch it, to kiss it. You ask her to kiss it warmly, to caress it, to make love to it. Then you grow jealous and say to your wife, 'You've never bestowed this kind of caresses upon my body. How come? Is this sheet of paper more attractive than your husband?' The image you have in front of you does not belong to the domain defined as fairness. It is rather a sort of unfairness – especially if placed in the domain of psychology – that you willy-nilly enjoy or rather tolerate. You are loath to touch your wife; yet this can be done on the spur of the moment all the more elegantly since your wife asks you to do so promptly and tenderly. 'Can't you touch me, you brute?' she says to you. 'Can't you see I desire you with all my heart, with all my body?' But you grow more and more obstinate and both the fairness and unfairness are to be rejected as soon as possible, in your opinion. The world is unfair and fair, but this mixture revolts you beyond measure. What is more, this mixture seems to have spoilt the fun you used to enjoy, when everything was clear and fair. This is a fair deal I touch and thanks to which I grow rich and respectable. This is a human being I see with my eyes and possess with my body. And I desire all this with all my heart. And suddenly the aforementioned mixture installs its quarters within my field of vision, within my field of touch and I become intolerant and misfortunate – as unfortunate as any beggar. And I beg for the absence of fairness, of mixture, of whatever is separate and stands on its own. I beg for a desire that can stand on its own without being provoked and satisfied.

‘Nor is it a little matter that the Holy Spirit teaches us to groan, for He gives us to know that we are sojourners in a foreign land, and He teaches us to sigh after our native country; and through that very longing do we groan.’

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Of course we are tempted to translate every situation, every commandment into the language we know and understand almost perfectly. We have heard about the Holy Spirit, but we currently live in a foreign land, and we do not have to re-read the Bible to understand what the notion ‘foreign land’ means and how it acts upon our nerves. And we react accordingly, which denotes our sorry plight, for there is no denying we are not ourselves, being cut off from our roots, from our mothers, fathers, aunts and nephews. It is true that some of our nephews live in this foreign land to which we have become accustomed to some extent, but we are absolutely certain it will never become our native land that still protects our roots from exterior assaults and the well-known damage we have heard about through many years. This damage is defined as the ‘loss of roots’ and apparently there is nothing worse in the whole world. You can travel around the world, asking all and sundry the same question focused upon this problem, the problem of roots and their loss. And everybody answers in the same manner, which proves once and for all there is nothing more important than the past and its things, whatever they say about the things of the past. ‘No, it is not the things of the past,’ we retort upon hearing this erroneous judgement. ‘It is the things of the present and also the things of the future, believe it or not. And it is also the things of the future’s future.’ And then a specialist, an academician, puts to us one of the traditional questions, ‘Why don’t you groan?’ ‘Why should I groan?’ you ask in your turn. ‘Because you live only in the present and partly in the past. But you don’t live in the future, in spite of an impressive number of hopes and projects you nurse in your bosom and also in your imagination.’ ‘I realise it would be better to see my projects fulfilled at this very moment, but I’m patient and so can wait until the future begins to radiate in my very presence, in my very room.’ ‘And what if the future rains in your room instead of showering you with the gifts distributed by fine weather, by the sun and its cosmic rays? Don’t you realise that the very possibility of such a failure should extort from your bosom an impressive number of groans? Why don’t you groan, young man? Why do you content yourself with a silly, ugly and inappropriate smile?’ On the other hand, you are almost certain the roots you have in mind are right here, under your feet, under your sight, within your field of vision. So what are you talking about? What kinds of roots do you deplore, when embarking upon the topic centred on foreign lands and their advantages? All right you are prepared to sigh and groan, even if the purpose of these manifestations is unknown to you. Well, you can groan just for the heck of it. So you groan for the heck of it and also for fun; and while you are at it, you produce a few sighs which seem to confirm the general mood you display either in an empty room or in front of an assembly gathered to listen to your sighs and complaints. You groan, moan and your sighs resound in the atmosphere blessed by the morning in which your life seems to participate. Suddenly, for no reason at all, a member of the audience begins to question you about the origin, the source of your sighs, moans and groans. ‘Do you just satisfy your physical need based on nothing psychological?’ asks the member. ‘Do you sigh for nothing, in other words?’ ‘I groan because I’m living in a foreign land, whereas every citizen of the earth is entitled to his or her *patria* or motherland and fatherland, if you prefer. What’s more, there are no roots under my feet, on the path along which I’ve been walking for some time.’ ‘Would you rather trip over roots and fall?’ asks the same voice. ‘Yes, I’d rather fall and lie on my native land for hours and hours,’ you

answer, your face receiving a few tears and enjoying their sincerity. You continue to cry, but it is not enough: you are actually supposed to sigh and moan, and a few tears are not likely to change anything in the structure of your destiny and salvation. You are aware of your destiny's personality which is wholly dependent on your salvation. If your destiny does not include salvation you had better die at once, on the spot: no point in living any longer. And according to some commentators, your salvation must be rooted in your destiny, included in it, otherwise it is non-existence you are confronted with. And this non-existence is vehemently venomous. Yes, your destiny is in-built, so whenever one dares analyse your character and inclinations, one should take into consideration this phenomenon: your in-built destiny. Of course one is likely to give you a questioning look and ask ironically, 'Where's your destiny, my good man? Can't see it. Do you hide it somewhere, fearing it might be discovered and deciphered? Is it so pernicious and harmful? Does it spell disaster for humanity, not only for one of its members – namely you?' You know that the patch of grass on which you are standing is not your native land, given that you cannot even nourish your body through this grass's agency. Yes, instead of roots you have a lot of grass under your feet, under your body – as if you were a cow. However you are not a cow, according to your last calculation. So you wonder why you do something useless in your life which is extremely short and consequently should not be wasted on trifles? The patch is a trifle, and you'd better get rid of it at once. Of course it is a gift of God or destiny, but your destiny is not infinite; nor is it limitless in bounty and it does not depend on the passage of time. Time passes and more often than not you say to yourself, 'Too late, too late,' and so it is high time you exchanged this grass for something useful, for some eternal gift, promising eternity to you and your descendants. This grass will be on the same spot tomorrow and the day after, as Macbeth rightly surmised. And your descendants might take advantage of it if they were cows. They are not. Of course there are all sorts of metamorphoses in the world, and willy-nilly you submit to them. If your bride or wife says to you, 'I'm pregnant, you know,' you can inform her that you would rather have a son, although you have always been in love with many women. But you cannot say to your wife, 'I hope the fruit of your labours will be a cow – I adore fresh milk and hope I'll be able to sustain my body, thanks to our daughter's milk-oriented efforts. And if it is a son you get in the long run, at the end of several months, you should groan endlessly, although you realise these groans are misplaced. Your native land, the country of your birth and resurrection, is elsewhere and therefore has nothing to do with your cows and sons. Then your thoughts switch to your virtual prodigal son: it is easier to meditate upon sons, considering you have one right in front of you, within your field of vision. You meditate upon this son of yours and begin to teach him his destiny. What is it? Your son's destiny must coincide with the one depicted in the Bible and known as the story of the prodigal son. Why should your son depart, leaving behind your riches, his meals and the university where he must receive an appropriate education and even a medal? The only aim of such a journey is the search for one's native land. You instruct your son in this manner, and he leaves your abode, determined to find your common native country. Before his departure you give him a recording of your groans which are to guide your son through fogs and bogs, through forests and plains. Yes, that is how this usually happens. Your son loses his way, draws your recording from one of his pockets and listens to it carefully. After listening to your groans and sighs for an hour or so, he resumes his journey and finally arrives at the destination. Thanks to what sign or indication does he realise he has reached the goal of your common research? At the end of the road he has followed for many months and years he finds a column bearing the inscription 'The End of the Way.' He presses the button to which he is fully accustomed,

thanks to the hours he has spent in its company, and hears your familiar groan, your insistent sigh. And he recites the poem known for its prophetic verse: 'In my end is my beginning.'

'Many indeed groan by reason of earthly misery. They are shattered, it may be, by losses, or weighed down by bodily ailment, or shut up in prisons, or bound with chains, or tossed about on the waves of the sea, or hedged in by ensnaring devices of their enemies.'

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You groan – that's for sure. However cheerful you may appear, one can hear a groan, provided this one, a middle-aged man, is close enough to your body to hear every audible expression of your pain, misery and general fatigue. You groan because you are weary of life and its unpredictability. Yes, life is unpredictable so that you had better have an impressive number of groans within your body and its nerves. It is much easier to confront one's misery by means of groans which seem to carry in their bosoms the weight associated with deeply felt misfortunes. Instead of carrying this burden, however, you might drop it somewhere, no matter where. You do not care about the Earth or its inhabitants' miseries: your own misery fits the bill sufficiently and abundantly. So you walk around your native city and, once in a while, someone says to you, 'I'm sorry to interrupt your meditation, but you seem to have dropped something on your way to happiness. I have the feeling you are directing your steps towards what we define as happiness, judging by the expression on your face and the buoyancy of your gait. But I'm not sure your happiness will not be tarnished sooner or later – upon your arrival at the goal of your destination. Yes, it's at that particular moment that you're sure to realise you've lost something important on the way.' And you answer the well-wisher, 'You're right – I've lost something on my way to ecstasy and immortality. But the weight I've lost is associated in my mind and also in my body and its trajectory with tears, groans and earthly miseries. In other words, these miseries are earthly matters of which I'm doing my best to deliver my life, destiny and eternity. I have no wish to groan on account of a wound I might receive, when cutting a piece of bread or meat. That would be unworthy of my predestination. If I do allow myself to groan, it is for the sake of higher feelings that I stretch the rules I imposed upon myself a long time ago.' But groans are legion, and you cannot define them with the exactitude required by matters of utter importance, such as religious feelings, our final and utter salvations and other matters of this calibre. So you ask yourself continuously if the groans you give rise to correspond to the requirements imposed by your higher aspirations. How to differentiate between groans. To begin with, you just give birth to a groan without knowing exactly what it corresponds to, what it expresses and establishes in the atmosphere. According to your own conclusions and observations, you have not suffered any losses for many months. And you are reluctant to groan upon recalling some episode from your childhood: you have enough miseries at the present moment which therefore does not need any psychological support, any support coming from another misery. Of course you could alleviate your pain by saying, 'This suffering is nothing in comparison with what I went through three years ago.' No, let us not get bogged in such reflections which are likely to increase the number of our pains, toils and what not. Well, we have just given utterance to something we cannot describe with accuracy. Let us proceed in the positive manner. (I am not quite sure it is really opposite to what I have just undertaken, but let it be; let it be.) Suppose I am shattered by a loss, and I react accordingly – by moaning and groaning. Of course I record this phenomenon – I had better not count on my memory in this field – and listen to it attentively. Then I

judge the sound of this phenomenon – let us keep its name for the sake of argument – and try to create in my imagination a picture of the land I am dreaming about. The country of my dreams, the final destination of my life. I cannot produce or reproduce it in my imagination, thanks to one of its figments. To all outward and inward appearances, I am stuck and so I have no idea what to do next – how to proceed both fruitfully and quickly. I have already decided that I will devote my time and probably life to groans. But are the groans for the sake of which I sacrifice my life right, filled with happiness and so on? I invent a bodily ailment, do my best to experience it in reality, react to it by groaning, record my groan and judge it in psychological, religious terms. Is it the right groan? I ask myself. Then I go to prison and convince the guardians to shut me in one of its cells. They comply with my wish, and listen to my groans – at my request. Then they share with me their impressions and suppositions. They share with me their reflections devoted to my predicament: I really have no idea why I groan, what is the cause (secret or obvious) of my state of mind, of the sound that leaves my body. Actually, some of these guardians suggest I should be bound with chains, instead of being transported to the seaside, which might cost a lot of money and demand a lot of time. All right, I permit them to restrain my movements, and soon a few chains display their magnificent tyranny on my naked body.

‘When, therefore, you see that all those things, what is that which is, unless that which transcends all things which are so that they are not?’

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You look at whatever you see and conclude that your vision is called ‘things’. They are not beings, are they? You come up to them and strike them ever so gently. And you hear the sounds you may associate with music, if you are inclined to do so. Does this music come from them, from these things or objects or humans? You have no idea about the origin of the music. You know it originates in whatever you strike or caress. Then you hit whatever your hand meets in the course of your manoeuvre. Again you hear a piece of music which transcends your being and whatever you accomplish in your life. You strike the music you hear and produce yet another piece of music. And you dedicate this piece to Giordano Bruno, to his infinity and worlds.

