

VALERY ALEFF

THE END OF THE FEATHER

For there I picked up on the heather

And there I put inside my breast

A moulted feather, an eagle-feather!

Well, I forget the rest.

Robert Browning, *Memorabilia*

Whatever I think about has already been in my thoughts and head so many times I cannot say if all this belongs to me or to the world where one keeps on coming across oneself. One looks at oneself in a mirror and says to oneself, 'It's myself because I'm standing in front of this mirror and there's nobody in my room with the exception of myself. I tolerate no one's presence in my room and, contrary to what my opponents and wrong interpreters might say, I'm not looking for myself. I'm looking *at* myself or rather only at a *part* of myself because the mirror I'm facing can't show anyone my back, unless I turn my back on everyone, which is what I'm tempted to do.' I turn my back on everyone and also on myself and what is more – we should say 'what is less' – even the mirror itself is deprived of my image, let alone the world. Let it alone, say our and other people's sages, meaning we should leave the world alone, for it has got its own devices and these devices are fathomless.

Apparently Satan has a white skin and so one is supposed to pick up a brush and paint oneself black or red or mad to become a sort of god. And then the god you are making either withdraws from somewhere to let the world create itself or sets about studying his own image in a mirror. As he does so, he thinks he is a female because a pair of breasts adorns his chest and so it is her chest he is looking at whenever they wish to see themselves. They decide that what they see and admire is the world they have created in their image by walking towards the mirror and looking into it. And their angels say to them they can go through this mirror to make the acquaintance of an anti-world or a minus-one or an Alice-one; but they are reluctant to move because, after all, they are not planets and consequently do not have to circle around anything, be it a sun or a moon. And then they say to each other, 'They should multiply themselves and replenish whatever there is to replenish and fill to the brim.' So they build the whatever and also the brim to the edge of which Creation should rise as it struggles for life in this life and death. So they break the mirror from side to side, and each side turns out to be a child of God. But they say to their numerous children – the French usually break their mirrors into a *thousand* pieces – that they should not indulge too much in their games, otherwise they might cut themselves. 'You're just a number of splinters,' they say to them, 'and so should be cautious for many years. Only when you're fully grown and begin to look like oval or square or rectangular mirrors can you play with each other to your heart's content.'

But all children are unruly and disobedient: they play with each other to their hands' content and soon find that their hands as well as their faces are covered with blood. That is why there are so many wars on the surface of the Earth and even on the stars where famous actors kill time, waiting for their cues and other weapons with which they could combat other stars and their inhabitants. They say, 'Their evil empire strikes again,' and they strike this evil again, for the sooner you strike anything and anyone, the better. Prevention is better than cure and you do not like diseases, wounds, defeats and tortures you are likely to suffer at the hands of your enemies, if these enemies manage to get hold of you and put you either in the stocks – Shakespeare's way – or on the rack and ruin.

When lying in the middle of the latter, my body goes to ruin after being submitted to the rack for many hours. They call it 'dog's life' or 'dog eats dog'. I look around and see no dogs in the neighbourhood; and I am not eager to eat dogs today, although I might eat one or two tomorrow, if there is nothing else to eat and drink. If one has nothing to drink, one has no alternative but to drink dog's blood. And dog's life.

I may belong to one of these tribes they show on TV and also in real life: some of their members walk into my garden – they do not even barge into it – and, being the picture of health and innocence, get closer and

closer to my body. My soul looks at them and takes pity on their tatters and half-naked bodies which, for all their health and wealth of cells, look pitiful. I have already given a lot of money to handicapped children and that explains my presence in the middle of the society to which I belong. This means I am not yet excluded from this society, but if all children were healthy and wealthy – no orphans in their midst – I would live alone in my cell, in my monastery. So I pray to God, asking Him to provide the world with the needy I can give my money to so as not to be driven away from my fellow creatures, from their mixtures. And God sends a lot of tribes to my Earth, pushing them into my garden, and I realise they are also my fellow creatures, although I do not look like them, not in the least; even when they look into distorting mirrors. No mirrors, however convex or concave, can distort their features either beyond recognition or to the point where I could say to them, ‘We’re twin brothers and sisters.’ But all this does not matter as long as I can talk to them about the food they lack on a regular basis because the Earth refuses to supply them and their cattle with grain and fruit. So their leader or president says, ‘We’ve got no food. That’s not good.’

‘I agree with you on this point,’ I say to them with a bitter smile that reflects their dire straits.

‘We have neither millet nor sheep. And when we have some, they run away. It’s hard to handle sheep, you know.’

‘I know,’ I say handing them £2,000. Staying on her balcony, my neighbour nods her head and I smile at the thought that I am not yet excluded from human society.

‘We’ve been walking through the desert ever since Adam’s Fall,’ says the director of the tribe. ‘So have our sheep. But whenever we wished to grasp their legs, their other legs began to run and we can’t run as fast and long as our sheep, let alone antelopes.’

‘I have no sheep in this castle,’ I say to them.

‘But you must have another £1,000. One sheep costs £1,000.’

I hand out £20 notes and, after being joined by her husband, my neighbour nods once again. So does her husband; so I can see two heads standing on the balcony opposite, but I cannot see the bodies on which they stand: a banister prevents me from enjoying the beauty of the whole picture. I am fully satisfied, however: what counts is a head bowing to the one who gives money to the unhealthy and the unwealthy. I am not sure the people I am prepared to feed in my garden are unhealthy: their lungs are not filled to the brim with our pollution. But they are certainly unwealthy and I provide the wealth they need to buy both sheep and chips.

But they say that bread and even the breed of their cattle are not enough to make them happy in the world where spirituality and conviviality outweigh material values, assuming that the former have any value at all in the eyes of their gods. Yes, they do have some value if the members of various tribes begin to exchange one thing for another, swapping their riches to create a club of friends, relations, parents and mistresses. They call it ‘potlatch’, but whatever the sound of this word, I am invariably reminded of a sailor who, one day and one night, found himself in the middle of an ocean. He did not know which ocean he kept criss-crossing because all his maps and compasses had drowned in the course of his voyage as if destroyed by Prospero who used to drown books even more regularly than kittens. So Poplavski – for such was his name, as write those whose styles leave something to be desired – was obliged to eat music instruments and his own boots. As for potlatch, he could and did exchange one of his boots for a boot owned by his comrade whose sorry plight was identical to that from which Poplavski suffered. All this proves that potlatch is not a thing of the past: if it weren’t for this thing, many people would die in the middle of an ocean, rooted to the spot located on their barge.

So my tribe and their members say, pointing at my flowers, 'We'd like to devote one hour to hotchpotch.'
 'Potlatch?' I ask them.

'Hotchpotch. We don't like your accent.'

I spend an hour explaining to them that the word 'hotchpotch' means 'a confused mixture of different things'. And I even supply an example so as not to breed a new misunderstanding: 'New Age thinking seems to be a hotchpotch of old and new ideas.'

'What's New Age?' they ask.

'The age we're living in.'

'Our age is old. So are we,' they answer.

'What do you want to do?' I ask looking around and eyeing my flowers with a lot of anxiety.

By way of an answer, a beautiful girl makes her way to one of these flowers, pulls it out and gives it to an ugly man. Of course these people read my thoughts because they are even older than Ararat and therefore know everything by heart. 'Do you really think I'm ugly?' says the young man, clenching his fists.

'I don't,' I say as I try to remember where I put my revolver.

'Do you know that we're the most beautiful people on Earth?'

'Why?' I ask and I am sure my question is logical: human beings need the ability to construct a logical argument and every question is a sort of argument. You question the remark you have just heard and say to the speaker, 'You belong to a group of people you find magnificent. But you're ugly so the people you belong to are ugly too.'

'Because we're the horsemen of the sun. And our wives are the horsewomen of the moon.'

'Do you ride the sun and the moon?'

'She mounted her moon and rode off. That's how we speak of our women.'

And then all these people begin the festival they call 'hotchpotch'. A woman picks a stone and offers it to a man, saying it is her wedding present. Not to be outdone, the man heads for the nearest tree and does his best to uproot it. And he sings a song as he does so: these tribes always dance and sing as if they could not talk like Westerners who devote their time and even times to business talks. And sometimes to business dances, I must admit. If the Russians intend to put a gas pipe between Siberia and China, they invite a Chinese delegation to Moscow where the latter enjoys the Bolshoi ballet. And Putin says to the Chinese, 'Do you see how beautiful our dances and dancers are tonight? They're *always* beautiful, to tell the truth. They're the most beautiful people in the world, present company excepted. The same goes for our aqueduct, you know. I hope you don't mind my calling it an aqueduct – I just like this word. Frankly speaking, I prefer it to the word "pipe" unless there are pipe smokers in your midst. But even in this case, I wouldn't use this word, if I were you. Suppose you speak about your pipe in my presence. You say, 'Pipe, pipe, pipe,' but I hear the following idiom, "Stick that in your pipe and smoke it!" I may find you rude and uncooperative, you know.'

THE TRIBAL SONG

The war has uprooted nearly

Two-thirds of our country's population.

Why can't I uproot this tree?

I'll uproot it and put it into a museum.

*And future generations will realise
 It is a symbol. They'll say while looking at it,
 'The war must have uprooted nearly two thirds
 Of this tribe's population.'
 And they'll shake their heads.
 And they'll pity us.
 And they'll give money to our ghosts.*

Meanwhile the girl I touched upon a few minutes ago – I wish I had literally touched her – seems to be waiting for an exchange of gifts without which no primitive life can be understood and studied properly. If you abstain from such an exchange, some people might say while watching your abstinence, ‘They’re not as primitive as all that, you know.’ Twelve thousand years ago, our ancestors were primitive savages living in caves, and in those days they did not know much about money and the ways to earn it. However, they were aware of the maxim that warns us against the *bottom* of the heap and that is why they exchanged a great many gifts, showing off in front of their tribes, brides and wives. In a way, these gifts were bribes in disguise, destined to affirm and reaffirm one’s social status. A man or a woman would give a gift to one of their fellow creatures to make him realise to what extent the donor was important. Thus you may and actually must bribe your way to the top of whatever you have within your reach: a ladder, a heap, a mountain. You reach the heap and climb it to convince all those standing around it that you are the leader of the tribe you have at your feet. Yet you take no money out of your purse because you have none, whatever local Iagos or Jagos might say on the subject, looking at all your pockets at once. You empty your pockets and only a number of gifts fall from them as you show their bottoms to your former rivals whose knees are called upon to support the weight of their bodies with the exception of their calves and feet. In other words, they kneel down all around you and pray as long as they can open and shut their mouths.

The man I touched upon goes on uprooting the tree I like very much because I planted it myself on my grandfather’s advice. He said I should do something for humanity and since the former destroys both flora and fauna, I should plant birch trees and magnolias in my garden. And my grandfather added a finishing touch to his explanation by pointing out that every tree I may plant to protect the quantity of ozone from destruction is called ‘The Tree of Life’ or that of ozone, which amounts to the same thing. Actually my grandfather – a homemade guru – used to say, ‘Everything amounts to the same thing, my grandchild. Everything mounts, in other words.’ And he would raise his head as he uttered these significant words he might have found in a Chinese treatise or in the confession of a mystic: they all speak of ascensions and our final union.

Meanwhile our man succeeded in liberating the nether part of my tree from the prison of the Earth. And he was about to offer this tree to the maiden chosen by his heart, but this maiden told him, ‘I prefer diamonds,’ and he replanted the tree I am so keen on as if paying tribute to my grandfather’s advice. He even said as he paid this tribute, ‘I’m planting a tree in your garden. Didn’t your grandfather say you should do that every other day?’

‘No,’ I answered.

‘I’ll come tomorrow and we’ll plant another tree,’ he said. ‘And we’ll play a game of hopscotch.’

Thus, once again, I was reminded of potlatch. Everything reminds one of everything and everyone, according to our gurus, and we need no words to be reminded of this and that. We look at a tree and think of the

tribes whose members offer those and other trees to beautiful women who dance for them as they wave twigs and branches, singing, 'We wave our banners of victory.' Of course no tribe takes reality at face value because such values are generally meant for nincompoops and stupid jerks, for the eyes that cannot see beyond noses. Yes, such eyes see noses and say to each other, 'There are only noses in this world: Gogol's nose, Cleopatra's nose.' Of course they are able to touch upon Gogol with regard to noses, but that does not mean they know his dead souls and provincial towns. And when they speak at length about Cleopatra, they may drop Dostoyevsky's name, but they just drop it and go further and further, giving no thought to his brothers and adolescents. And all this reminds me of a feather I saw one day, in my garden, as I looked at the flowers and enjoyed their scents to the utmost. A minute later I looked at the spot where I had spotted the feather I might have been inspired by, but the feather was gone; and so was my budding inspiration. All this could have been written a long time ago, but we must remember that there is a time for writing and a time for feathers. And these times do not coincide on a regular basis, whatever we might think about quills, thrills and spills.

So an ordinary twig becomes a banner as soon as a maiden, be she ugly or otherwise, starts waving it, her eyes almost out of their sockets; and that is all there is to it except that the girl may make up her mind in a different way. (A different make-up, so to speak.) In such a moment it is pointless to speak to her about banners and suchlike: she is likely to answer, 'It's a wand of God.' And she may even try and poke you in the right eye, for this eye of yours has sinned a lot while looking at other men's wives and mistresses.

Suddenly a beautiful young lady accosted me to say, 'Look at my child. Don't you notice anything?'

'I'm just taking notice of your child,' I said.

'Can't you see that my baby's hair was singed for the first time?'

'When did it happen?' I asked.

'This morning. You should give me a present.'

'Why?'

'Do you think that hotchpotch functions only within the framework of social positions? Do you think it deals only with marriages, births, deaths and initiations into secret societies? And what about my child's hair? Isn't it more important than any secret society?'

'Yes,' I answered: the woman reminded me of the importance of being a child.

'However secret and secretive?' she insisted.

'Yes, of course.'

Thought that is planned is tradition; thought that is unplanned is imagination. (Old Sufi saying.) I have no idea whether the thought I heard upon seeing the woman's open mouth belonged to the realm of tradition or to that inhabited by the figments of one's imagination. Of course I know that potlatch is done whenever one feels like availing oneself of other people's gifts; and one often falls prey to one's own greediness. Even *I* may think from time to time that no one has offered me anything for many months and perhaps a decade, which makes me sad beyond measure and beyond any doubt. Actually, you can have *many* doubts, considering that our life is as uncertain as the weather focused on butterflies' wings. But you cannot doubt your own sadness, let alone despair: either you despair and drink a lot of wine or you do not. If you do not, you open a gorgeous bottle of wine – you can drink as much as you like as long as it is in moderation – and smile to your heart's content. If, however, you doubt or despair, if you say to yourself your career has been in the doldrums over ten years at least, you open two bottles of vodka and sing a drunken song or rather a drunken hymn:

Drink, drink, drink, drink.
Forget, forget, forget, forget.
The world shall end, if I forget.
And I forget, and the world ends.

And then you say to yourself, raising your index finger, 'It's not a drunken song or hymn. It's the song of a secret bird. I'm secretive, am I not? And I'm a bird I saw in a film many years ago. I think that bird was played by David Bowie who died two months ago, three years ago or to go. Actually the future is the past because everything is one and belongs to the realm of the One with a capital "O". "O, O, O, O," you exclaim as you realise you're at one with the One or the Absolute. O Zeus! Hear my prayer.'

So the girl's imagination, or rather one of its figments, says she needs a gift because she is rather short of money at the moment; and also at the moment to come. And she is sure the moment I have just spoken of will come sooner or later, whereas the former moment is keeping her company already. So she sings her baby's hair and speaks to me about all sorts of potches instead of saying straightforwardly, 'Can you lend me some money to tide me over till the weekend?'

'What do you need this money for?' I would ask her.

'To repair my son's hair.'

'But his hair is the grass of heaven, the blades of heavenly grass. And only heaven can repair them. Besides, you must know that potlatch takes place outside of the world of business and therefore money can't take part in it.'

'It's another ritual altogether,' would say the woman. As a matter of fact, she just says it as if to prove that the virtual and the real are really one and the same thing, as Descartes and others have thought for many centuries. All right, at some point you can say, 'Reality was planned by God right before the Big Bang,' paying homage to determinism, predestination, tradition, Stoics and Spinoza. The tradition our Sufis speak of is potlatch; hotchpotch, on the other hand, is a mixture of tradition and imagination. A figment of woman's imagination incites her to beg for money; the tradition she is trying to honour suggests an exchange of gifts. (Sufis call this cocktail 'spirit'.) I give her money and she hands her son over to my household, saying, 'I'm sure you'll bring him up as a Catholic.'

'And what about his hair?' I ask.

'What about it or them?' she asks.

'You pocketed the money I'd given you for the restoration of his hair.'

'I've got many children,' she says. 'Their hairs were singed in the same fire.'

We shall soon have it over and done with, and even the members of the tribe I must welcome in my garden so as not to be accused of crass ignorance – you haven't read Claude Lévi-Strauss, have you? – understand what I am talking about. Anyway, they understand everything because they have not burnt either their bridges or their boats and thus remain at one with nature and space-time which we invariably get involved with upon our birth. At some point we resolved to dominate nature, to govern and tyrannise it, and so our so-called primitive people say as they learn about our factories and bombs, 'Nature is being governed by a bunch of incompetents.' And they add that they are not only the most beautiful people in the world on account of the

quality of their organic makeup, but they also shower their own intelligence with praise, saying they built neither boats nor bridges so as not to burn them sooner or later. ‘And thus we keep in touch with nature,’ they add (their grass ignorance) because they are keen on odds and ends they are used to adding to whatever they say or do.

If you show a map to these people, they bend over it for a while and then raise their eyes to ask you a question. They always look at you when asking you a question and this custom is different from what our so-called arch-civilised people do in identical circumstances: they do *not* look their fellow creature in the eye. In other words, we are dishonest and they (those primitive, barbaric people) just have a diametrically opposite attitude towards life: they are honest and have nothing to hide because they are not really civilised, according to the people who dare disagree with Claude Lévi-Strauss. They are not *negatively* civilised, so to speak, for within this framework civilisation means ‘lies’, ‘disloyalty’, ‘treachery’, ‘murder’, and so on. You do not have to be Rousseau or one of his followers to realise to what extent we are nature’s children. ‘We are born prodigal sons and daughters,’ as our ecologists put it in their newspapers.

Well, we confront the glance that our primitive people continue to share with our eyes as we listen to the air prepared to welcome their question and even our answer. ‘What do you call this thing?’ says the air.

‘We call it a “map”,’ I answer.

‘Is it a part of the space you’ve exposed in front of our tribe?’

‘That’s right.’

‘That’s how we look at time,’ they say.

‘You mean you’ve got a map of time in your huts and jungles?’

‘Yes. The past is on the left-hand side. Can you guess where the future’s whereabouts are located?’

‘Yes,’ I answer looking at the right-hand wall.

‘That’s right,’ they add. ‘Actually we don’t need our map to see and narrate the future. It’s written all over this wall, you know.’

And then they launch into a speech designed to shed a lot of light on their visions of the world. They say, for instance, that New-Age thinking seems to be a hotchpotch of old and new ideas. They say that one of the old ideas is related to an exchange of gifts – a prominent feature of days of yore. They inform your obedient servant that by the 1960s, traditional potlatching was replaced by hotchpotching. ‘Now we mix money with gifts,’ they point out, holding out their hands as if in expectation of another series of handfuls of dollars. ‘Economic factors are to blame,’ they add grandiloquently.

And once again I am tempted to point out that everything is going down the drain, and I am all the more tempted to do so since – I am pretty sure about that – my visitors are able to see the drain in question and even the world going down it. I wonder if they could show me the drain, if their links to invisible notions are strong enough to enable them to materialise these notions, making me indulge in a contemplation of the drain along which our culture slides towards a gigantic dumping ground. Our philosophers affirm that sight is far more important than the sense of hearing, let alone other senses which Plato called ‘nonsenses’ in the light of the darkness they are used to shedding on the world we have been thrown into, according to Heidegger. So the picture of the world may be recapitulated and encapsulated by means of an image at the top of which one cannot help seeing a huge hand – not necessarily God’s – that throws human bodies and souls into the air. These future representatives of human species land on the surface of the Earth and begin to shout and shed a lot of tears so as not to be forsaken by what they refer to as ‘mother’ and ‘father’. But instead of seeing their parents and enjoying

the warmth of the milk of human kindness – their mothers’ milk, in other words – they come or rather crawl across a drain. First these kids poke a few sticks into the drain and then they install their bodies inside it so comfortably one might say they are firmly ensconced in it. And for once our leaves are not clogging up our drain.

In days of yore humanity used to stuff a great many leaves into the drain down which our culture and aspirations might have gone a long time ago. Many people were stockpiling leaves as a precaution against decadence and therefore one might say that safety precautions were observed as a matter of course. Nowadays, however, the drain in question is unquestionably clean, for recently our technological progress came up with a brand new liquid that unblocks both drains and pipes. So now our drains are prepared to welcome any art, any figment of the imagination, for they think – our drains are able to think – that the final destination of arts and human minds is situated at the very bottom of the heap called ‘culture’. (No point in using your revolver.) And if one of the drains happens to be clogged, they begin to write and talk on television. And they say, ‘The inquiry into the disaster damns the company for its lack of safety precautions.’

‘But our company cares about the arts, you know,’ say a few representatives of the company. ‘We do all we can to prevent the future or present catastrophe. Do you know what Nietzsche said? Without music –’

‘Leave Nietzsche in peace or in his grave. Are you body snatchers?’

‘Of course not,’ answers the company and our culture continues to glide down the drain where no leaves, no stones of any kind can be found.

But there are a few tribes left on the surface of the Earth and these tribes can save us from the tyranny of money. How? Through what we all call ‘potlatch’ about which we read in Marcel Mauss’s works, wholly centred upon theories, gifts, exchanges and wise solutions to our problems. We say to the leader of a tribe, ‘I need one of your totems. And I’ll give you in exchange for it Ludwig van Beethoven or rather a CD featuring one of his symphonies. It’s called “art”, you know. You can also call it “culture”.’

‘With a capital C?’ asks the leader.

‘That’s right.’

‘But I can’t give you the totem with a capital T – it’s our symbol, our most precious possession.’

‘All right, all right. Give me a totem with an uncapital t.’

He gives me a lighter he got from one of our missionaries and I switch my TV on. I show him *The Sleeping Beauty* performed by a group of Russian dancers among whom I recognise a few swans. And I say to the leader, ‘You know, these women used to be swans, but now they’re ladies in waiting. And there’s another lady whose beauty is renowned in the whole realm. She’s sleeping in the bosom of the forest you’ve just seen on the screen.’

And then the Sleeping Beauty wakes up and comes to the fore or rather turns into the centrepiece: the leader I am talking about has no wish to let her out of his sight and mind. She is already in his sight, taking centre stage within it; and his mind has just opened its arms to welcome her forever. In other words, the Sleeping Beauty whose beauty sleep used to take place inside the Bolshoi Theatre will henceforth sleep and even walk at the centre of the leader’s mind. He is so overwhelmed by her presence both inside and outside his body that he puts his right hand in his pocket and fishes out a box of matches. He says it is another present he is about to offer me in exchange for another sleeping beauty. And he adds he does not mind getting a *walking* beauty of the same quality because he can make her sit down or even lie down on the grass – in the twinkling of an eye and at the

earliest opportunity. ‘You know,’ he adds with a meaningful glance, ‘I’ve got a lot of energy. All the members of our tribe own a kind of vibration you know nothing about. But my energy is in a class of its own because it stems from my grandfather who used to be the king of the quick. Now he is the emperor of the dead.’

I accept the gift and insert yet another DVD into my player that is now accustomed to walking beauties and ugly ducklings. If you do not own an omniscient player, you do not own anything – at least in the domain of the visual arts. But my guest seems to be offended: we are not on the same wavelength and anything can happen if your wave and its size do not correspond to those of the person you are talking to in your house. I acknowledge the fact that his energy, nourished by the virginity of the jungle and fruit, is far superior to mine. What I am endowed with boils down to low-frequency radiation: I radiate only low vibes; whereas *his* vibes are so high our ear cannot capture them. I listen to what he says and conclude I should insert yet another DVD into my player: my wave stops halfway between his intention and my intuition.

At the end of the road I heard, ‘Why don’t you use the matches I gave you? You should light a few candles.’ He said so and I answered him: ‘How do you mean?’

‘What are these matches for?’ he asked.

‘They should be struck,’ I answered. And I even added that W. B. Yeats speaks of this ritual in one of his poems. “‘Strike a match,” you know,’ I added. But I refrained from quoting the poem in its entirety lest my guest got bored to death: he is not used to civilised poems. As a matter of fact, primitive poems often consist of syllables, for instance, ‘Be, be, be’, or ‘Ce, ce, ce’. Or those tribes and their members just repeat one word:

Tree, tree, tree.

Tree, tree, tree.

Tree, tree, tree.

And if you go so far as to ask them why they do it instead of adding a few other words to their poem, they answer, ‘This tree is sacred, you know. And if you add anything to it, it may grow unsacred,’ which means that primitive people do not *always* add something to what they say or sing. They may do so from time to time, on condition that their intrinsic sacredness is out of danger and therefore cannot be desecrated as a result of their addition. Usually, however, they stay on the safe side, saying, ‘Of course we’re very fond of additions, but we know we shouldn’t overstep any bounds, however insignificant and invisible. Don’t forget that our favourite saying is, “Enough’s enough.”’

Anyway, I did not give a thought to all this rigmarole as I faced my guest, a box of matches lying in the palm of my right hand. On the other hand, I gave a dozen thoughts to Bergson and his *durée* or duration that comes out of the blue whenever I freeze in my tracks, even if no gunman screams at the very top of his voice, ‘Freeze or I’ll shoot!’ So one may rightfully ask why I freeze instead of going and getting something else – another gift, another lighter. I freeze because I say goodbye to time and plunge headlong into the Bergsonian duration which conveys me to other days, times, spaces, setups and traps. This time I stepped out of time on account of the matches I was holding and looking at. Of course my guest did not fail to remind me in pontifical tones, ‘We should have a candlelit dinner, otherwise the matches make no sense within the framework of our meeting.’ And of course I lit a few candles before laying the table for dinner: the female members of the tribe had no idea where I kept my food and wine. Actually they did not know one might have a room for wine that

should be stored either in a cupboard or underground, under your dining room. So, instead of putting a skeleton in this cupboard of yours, you stuff it with bottles of Burgundy, after making sure the humidity is correct for keeping wines alive for a few decades at least. And you should check your cupboard's temperature for the sake of the same procedure or ritual: keeping wines alive forever. You should on no account draw any parallel between these bottles and skeletons that can live at any temperature and even lie under the sun for years and years, fearing no headaches, no burns and cancers. By the way, those primitive people do not even have bottles in their kingdoms: they just throw a few drugs into a river and scoop up what they whimsically call either whisky or gin, aping once again our civilisation, names and customs.

Actually I thought about the way our Count Tolstoy described Anna Karenina's death, comparing her body and soul to a candle. This candle, alias Anna Karenina, was burnt at both ends for several years, for the heroine was married to a man and loved another man whose horse was shot in the aftermath of an accident. So there were two men in her life, which is logical enough, considering that any candle or stick has two ends; and the difference between a candle and a stick lies in the fact that you cannot burn a stick at both ends for the simple reason that it is unreasonable to burn a stick: it has not been designed for this purpose.

Of course you can burn it, if you wish; if this stick or cane belongs to your household. Let us suppose your grandfather uses a cane as he goes out and trudges up the hill or down the hill or whatever lies in front of him and behind his back. He can also trudge through the snow, and this kind of things happens all the more naturally if your grandfather lives either in Russia or in Norway; or in Sweden, come to think of it. Of course he is also allowed to trudge through the snow in France or in Germany, provided there is enough snow outdoors, at the bottom of the hill he wants to scale by means of his cane. Disregarding his intentions and desires, you begin one day to burn his cane; you burn it at both ends. Your grandfather comes in and says to you, 'What are you doing?'

'Dear grandpa,' you answer, 'I was thinking about Tolstoy and Anna Karenina, as the Russians put it – her name, I mean. In this famous novel, the heroine is compared to a candle and therefore her life is on the short side. If you're a sort of candle, you might say to yourself at some point, "Well, I'm supposed to burn it and that's what I actually do, offering both light and heat to my owner. This owner of mine often watches the wax as it drips down the side of his candle – of *my* side, if you wish. I'm fragile and short-lived, you know. I can't last forever. I can't even hold out till next Saturday." And so on Friday night you decide to commit suicide by blowing your brains out. First you flicker and then your substance passes away. But your cane is bound to live much longer. No candle can hold a candle to your stick. And I'm eager to compare myself to your cane instead of undergoing Anna Karenina's ordeal. Do you know what she did?'

'I know,' says your grandpa.

'So you realise now why I'm burning your stick.'

'Why *are* you burning it?'

'Because I'm an honest man and so wholeheartedly admit I'm as mortal as Plato and St Augustine. To show my body's decay, this morning I set fire to your cane.'

'Why are you burning it at both ends?'

'To fulfil the prophecy, you know. Don't our sacred books speak of a candle burning at both ends?'

'They do. So what?'

'Besides, I'd like to live fully and plentifully, making the most of every instant, every opportunity.'

Your grandfather wrenches his cane out of your grasp, puts out the fire and beats you mercilessly with what remains of his walking stick.

Duration pesters your mind and prevents you from going and getting whatever there is to get before other go-getters; these are always on the lookout for our destiny's gifts. And they look forward to them all the more eagerly since they do not exchange anything for the gifts showered upon them by destiny because there is no potlatch in the kingdom of destiny unless you think you should thank God whenever you get what is unjustly called a godsend. There are people who call a godsend a present they get from their colleagues, and if their colleagues begin to wonder why the recipient does not thank *them*, the latter says, 'Whatever comes my way comes from God. The same goes or comes to you, you know.' Sometimes, after hearing the recipient out, his colleagues and even the members of their families kneel down and pray for an hour or so. But we cannot call this praying session a 'piece of duration', even if it lasts the whole day, going on far into the night in spite of the lack of sleep from which the participants are sure to suffer next day and probably until the end of the week.

Anyway, real go-getters do not avail themselves of durations, even if, now and then, they succumb to the temptation that leads them away from a life of success and trouble and toil. But if they do succumb to such a temptation, they say despondently, 'Just another bout of duration,' for they regard the so-called true human life with frowns and contempt and do whatever they can to eschew these bouts or holes into which they might fall, forgetting their trips, calls and schedules. And they are right of course: if we give in to terrorists' demands – and duration is a terrorist to some extent – we are doomed to fail most pitifully in both our private life and business projects. We are literally led astray by a memory triggered by a smell or a church bell, or even by a sentence you may chance upon in a book or a number of women's magazines: 'Clear as a bell, from the back of the theatre came a child's voice saying, "I want to go home."' In women's magazines they mostly talk about children and beauty parlours, and they make you realise you had better not educate your children in theatres where they are not likely to learn anything about real life. But they do not say so straightforwardly and usually go about it in a roundabout way. They describe a situation in which a child can be seen in a theatre, fidgeting, yawning, pushing his mother with his elbow and prodding her in the right cheek and in the forearm. 'I want to go home,' says the child as he prods his mother in the belly.

Well, this story – and probably everything – reminds me of *my* childhood because in your childhood you welcome the world with open arms, and you should not joke about it, saying you welcomed it with 'open legs'. Of course you are keen to emphasise the erotic aspect of your relationship with the world and one had better recall all sorts of erotic impulses known to those who do not turn a deaf ear to nature's music. You walk in the woods and listen to birds of all sorts, and you realise these birds either screech with pain or make love to each other. Anyway, they screech, sing and flap their wings as if to draw a parallel between their way of making love and ours. Don't we flap and flip all our members as we indulge in this delicious pastime? Of course we likewise flap our wings – if I may say so – whenever engaged in a brawl; not necessarily a drunken one. We flap our arms, legs and even fingers as we try to triumph over our adversaries whose wings or human members move as quickly and efficiently as ours. From this point of view, it is amusing to watch so-called great orators of the past: Trotsky, among other champions of the world. His arms are so agitated one may get the feeling he is about to fly off and stick his tongue out at Leonardo whose inability to fly seems to have been the cause of his death. He was

so annoyed by this incapacity of his that he could neither sleep nor eat, letting his death instinct invade all the parts of his body down to his brain. ‘There’s no point in sitting at home and moping – get out there and find yourself another project, another dream!’ Francis I used to say to him. But he was inconsolable and even went so far as to cry inconsolably in the evenings and in the middle of Twelfth Night; whereas Trotsky continued to fly until doomsday – his partisans still call his assassination ‘our doomsday’ – and one wonders why he did not fly away upon seeing the axe and the hand that was about to handle it.

Yes, everything reminds me of my childhood because I am the Cosmic Man in whose body you can find not only a myriad of grains of sand, but also all the minds one comes across when studying human history. And the story I told after reading it in a health-permeated magazine struck a few chords in my being, if not in my past. I used to go to theatres almost every day, walking by my grandmother’s side and kicking either stones or pine cones: I was very fond of football. And even now I cannot get rid of this juvenile attachment, of this devouring passion, so that I invariably utter the word ‘soccer’ upon seeing ‘SUCKER, SUCKER’ in Tex Avery’s prodigious films. Well, I just walked by my grandmother’s side, being aware of the fact that a few minutes later I would be sitting in a theatre and watching either Shakespeare’s dramas or a Russian tragedy; by my grandmother’s side. I saw a lot of blood in my childhood and I am still affected by this sight, although I never go to theatres ‘at the approach of *death*’, as I put it. In those moments I also think about my personal approach to this all-annihilating phenomenon, and I say to myself I should take a softly-softly approach – on my deathbed, among other places; otherwise I may deviate from my itinerary and land up in Hell as a result of a dozen curses. (Last words do count, don’t they?)

I saw a lot of blood on a multitude of stages, and I might have seen a different kind of blood in the streets – not a puddle of tomato juice – had I taken the trouble to walk around Red Square more often. Within this square – and also outside it – people were beaten to death and shed imperial gallons of blood because of their political views. They would step onto the pavement and unfold a placard saying, ‘I wish to live in a capitalist country,’ and immediately a few armed officers set about torturing those who thought about England, America and France. They did not think yet about Monte Carlo and other tax havens: in those days, they thought about life exclusively in terms of cars and sausages.

According to Borges, themes or notions are few and far between – as far as our earthly existence goes. One of these themes concerns our theatre-going or rather theatre-*staying*: the world is nothing but a stage on which pawns, queens or actors play their parts, as Shakespeare put it. The second theme may be announced in German, although it exists in other languages too, let alone in life itself: *Geworfenheit*; *worfen*, *werfen*, flinging a body into our world. From where? From a window somebody opened in another world of ours or theirs. Suppose you receive a letter you do not like. You do not even like the sight of it: the envelope, the writing, the stamp. On a whim or acting on a hunch, you crumple up the letter and fling it into the fire that consumes it even faster than Charlie Chaplin sitting in a restaurant and eating whatever they put on the table: his tramp has not eaten anything since last Sunday. So the fire consumes the letter even faster than whatever Charlie Chaplin puts into his mouth where his teeth do their best to munch the food offered to them. Charlie Chaplin’s tramp eats fast for many reasons, but your fire consumes your letter even faster, which means that fire is more powerful than Man. Of course a bunch of firemen can put out the fire in the city centre, but fire can destroy the world in its entirety. That is why we say broodingly, ‘The next world conflagration.’

One of the themes I am likely to deal with is the cosmic man that pursues you everywhere, being cosmic, omnipresent, omniscient and a spoilsport. If you wish to keep away from terrorists and their bombs, this cosmic man reminds you that you are everything and everybody – as if you were God in person, as large as life. Actually, this expression means that you are everywhere and the only consolation you can find in this large world they speak of from time to time is its smallness or narrow-mindedness. They say, ‘It’s a small world,’ and contradict themselves in the same breath, adding, ‘As large as life.’ All right – life is also small; it is as small as the world because life cannot be larger than the world where it can be found, even if what you mean and think about is death and not life. It is even easier to speak about death in this connection: you point to someone’s grave and remind everybody of Tolstoy’s remarkable thought that teaches us modesty in the light of what happens to us after death. After death we lie in a narrow coffin and Tolstoy points out we do not need anything else in our lifetime as if we could not have an estate, a dozen horses, a hundred Irish wolfhounds and a huge library putting on display the wisdom of history. What can we say about Tolstoy? We can say that his world is narrow-minded because its creator – Tolstoy himself – is narrow-minded, considering the smallness of his aspirations and desires. Of course he thinks in terms of ultimate truths that are always focused upon death – the most ultimate thing we can come across in this life of ours. And if there is another life of ours, we shall meet at last the ultimate eternity which is certainly larger than Tolstoy’s grave, if viewed in spatial terms. Well, anyway we are supposed to be everyone and when a bomb explodes somewhere, the Talmud reminds us that whenever a man is murdered, everyone is murdered. And in the light of our conviction that we are everyone, we must conclude our train of thought thus: we are murdered as well.

The same goes for our death instinct that is often centred upon other people, whatever Freud and his followers say on the subject. Of course we yearn to return to the state of immobility traditionally symbolised by stones that do not move unless you kick them for some obscure reason. This time you do not kick them – for once, for once – and you say to one of your companions in misfortune: ‘That’s what I’m hankering after. The so-called “death instinct”, you know.’ But this time – and not for once, mind you – you wish to murder your rival or just a stupid jerk who buys best-sellers and talks nonsense whenever you happen to be within hearing; within his talking and your hearing. So if you carry your plan out, you kill not only this nincompoop, but also the whole of humanity, which was not part of your plan, of your worldwide strategy. Of course you are bent on killing all nincompoops and nonentities whose highly contagious presence has already poisoned our existence to the utmost. But you have no wish to fling out of your window a bunch of unrecognised geniuses – they are the best of the bunch – and that is why you refrain from killing anybody for fear of triggering off a worldwide massacre.

‘Suspect freed as Belgium admits it got wrong man.’ Yes, that is what you read in the *International New York Times* and in every other Times – all over the world. ‘The Belgian authorities on Monday conceded another enormous blunder in their investigation into the attacks last week on Brussels. They freed a man they had charged with terrorism and murder, acknowledging that a witness had mistakenly identified him as a bomber in a dark hat and white coat in an airport surveillance photo.’ All right; or rather nothing right. And you say so to a witness who keeps repeating, ‘That’s all right, everything’s O. K.’

‘How so?’ says an investigator.

‘If a man kills a man, his crime is mirrored everywhere. You know, mirrors are omnipresent in human life. Do you like Kathy?’

‘Who is she?’

‘An up-and-coming young actress.’

‘What about her?’

‘Her on-screen romances seem to mirror her experiences in her private life.’

‘So what?’

‘That’s the mirror-effect for you.’

‘Are you also guilty of this terrorist act?’ asks the investigator.

‘I’m probably an instigator. Anyway, I *am* involved in this horror. So are you. We all are – to some extent.’

You wear a dark hat and white coat. They arrest you on Thursday and charge you on Friday, and so you spend three days in custody, during which some officials publicly vilify you as a terrorist. And when they release you at last, you hear no word of apology because they think you are involved anyway in this dirty business. The entire world population is to some extent, they may point out if you try and probe into the matter. But you do not try anything because you are tired already, and there is a lot of harm in trying if your legs are tired and you speak in a tired voice. (It is better to remain silent – not necessarily as silent as the grave – if your voice is weary of life.) Be that as it may, next morning you say to your wife or husband, ‘I was so tired when I got home from work last night that I had a quick nap.’ You do not speak to them – to the members of your family – about your involvement in the terrorist act they read about in one of the Times. Why should you?

Besides, your attention is drawn by a photograph you see in the same Times or Times-Spaces or Times Squares. At first you say to yourself you witness the Holy Virgin crying at the foot of her Son’s symbolic and real Cross and nails. And then you read the caption: ‘A mother whose son was killed when a suicide bomber struck a park in Lahore on Sunday, killing 69. A Taliban affiliate claimed responsibility.’ And you realise you are this mother and also the father of this boy – not only because his mother looks like the Holy Virgin and so many women and men have identified with her from time immemorial. Why? They hoped to feel her suffering and perform her ascension – the stunt that no ordinary human is permitted to perform unless the human in question is fully equipped for it. Besides, this human of ours must belong to the same club created by St Augustine and called either ‘The Happy Few’ or ‘The Elect’. But if you happen to belong to the bunch of the reprobate or to ‘The Unhappy Multitude’, you will never go to the moon, let alone other stations on the way to Paradise and the Holy Virgin’s head office; even if you are a high jumper or a pole vaulter.

You wear a white hat and a dark coat. They arrest you all the same because these are two key colours ‘in this affair’, as they point out, and whoever wears them is involved in the whole ritual as a result of which the death toll from the attacks rose on Monday to 35; and to 37, according to other official sources. And they say to you, ‘You’re an extremist jihadi horror,’ and you answer thus, ‘The jihadi horror you’re speaking of wore a *dark* hat.’

‘You’ve been identified in a police photo line-up by the taxi driver,’ they say to you.

‘But your taxi driver is colour-blind,’ you say to them.

‘He is not,’ they answer.

‘Then he must be space-blind,’ you point out, thinking about your coat and hat. ‘Besides,’ you say to yourself, ‘my coat is much larger than my hat. So their taxi driver is also size-blind.’

‘I don’t know whether you’ve been involved in terrorism,’ says the Mayor or just an ordinary major or majordomo. ‘But I do know you to be a local troublemaker who has repeatedly disrupted a camp of refugees in Parc Maximilien, near the Gare du Nord railway station.’

‘I’m only interested in the stations that lead to the Holy Virgin,’ you answer reciting a few verses from Dante’s *Paradise*.

In short, you kill no one but someone is killed and you are both the victim of this crime and its perpetrator. They also call you a ‘predator’ and add maliciously that the lack of a shell leaves the larvae unprotected against predators. As usual, our preachers and theologians speak metaphorically, symbolically and obfuscatingly. You remind them you do not need their esoteric teaching designed for the Happy Few and the Elect who incidentally do not need anything: they got all these precepts through their mothers’ omniscient milk. But you are so unhappy and multiple you do not understand the first thing about leaves and larvae. And even if you tear a leaf from a branch and say to yourself that no other leaf on Earth looks exactly like the one you are holding in the palm of your hand, you understand neither the first nor even the zero thing about leaves and their relationship with larvae – within the framework of the doctrine expounded by the preachers.

Then you learn – you no longer wear the dark or the white hat – that after our prosecutors declined to intervene, the Mayor issued a municipal order banning you from the migrant encampment, which must be shut down forever. ‘But I’ve never stayed in this encampment, you know,’ you point out.

‘We’re all migrants,’ they say to you in the same pontifical tones as if there were no other tones in the world of tones. ‘And we all landed up in this migrant encampment. *Geworfenheit*, you know. And *Verfall*. Do you know what *Verfall* means?’ Of course neither the real migrants nor the unreal ones know the first thing about Heidegger and his terms – for the simple reason that they are not on intimate terms with his philosophy, let alone his life and infatuation with Hitler. Some of the unreal representatives of migrants heard the name within which the term *Verfall* saw the light of day, but they have no idea to what it can be attached, if only for argument’s sake, for the space of a few seconds. Of course they realise that the Fall may concern all of us because we are constantly flung into existence, and even if we do our best to climb up and fly off, looking at the distant stars and feeling their allure in our thoughts and sinews, we are still affected and infected by the hand that flings us out of the cosmic window. And we cannot help falling, dropping and flying towards the Earth where we are supposed to feel at home, which is just unbearable, according to those who think it is better not to be born.

So when asked what *Verfall* or *Verfallen* means, we all answer we do not know the exact meaning of this monumental, all-influential term, but we do know it is related to someone whose body is somewhere down – in the region of Hell and demons; even if there are no demons in sight. They are always in mind, mind you, in the light of the darkness you are surrounded with in the regions described by the Gnostics. They also speak about Evil and the Down, the Bottom and the Dustbin to which we are consigned by virtue of our human origin. Of course even birds and other representatives of the kingdom we call ‘animal’ can be found at the same bottom, within the same dustbin, but they do not know the fact and thus can believe they are in heaven and the dustbin they have been thrown into is just the Almighty, the Aldusty, nothing and nobody else; whereas we are fully aware of the fact and that is why our misery knows no bounds. What is more, it does not even know *the first thing* about bounds. Of course our existence abounds in all sorts of bounds (and bonds of *The Merchant of Venice* fame), but this time we are unbound(ed) – as Prometheus was at the end of his life. So we had better remain at the core of our misery which enables us to enjoy our freedom to the utmost.

Verfallgeraten. Actually it is pointless to burden ourselves with additional words: because of our dictionaries, our shelves and ceilings have already caved in, trapping several people and animals. Why should we commit suicide through meanings, precepts and warnings? Let alone prophecies and their doomsdays? Buying a house often places a large financial burden on young couples; and also on old couples. (After much soul-searching we add the old to the young and thereby get the *absolute* picture of the world.) All right, we see the word '*Verfall*' and realise we have to tackle the problem related and linked to this word without which we could have lived happily ever after, but for the Adam-performed and the Adam-brought-to-perfection Fall that brought on a great many headaches and other aches we constantly complain about; especially when resolved to air our grievances. All right, let us assume we are falling and make plans on that basis or rather on these lowest depths and bottoms. What kind of dregs-to-riches plan could we have in mind at this point?

Usually – and our poets do not fail to point this out – we begin our ascension from the bottom of everything; from the bottom of the heap, among other things. And also from the bottom rung of the ladder, whatever this ladder is in this context: not every ladder belongs to Jacob and consequently to our saints in general. This means that if you succeed in climbing to the *top* of the ladder you own and make use of, you do not necessarily land up in *Paradise*. You do land *up* somewhere – that is for sure, given that there are many ups in the world where we climb up and down all the time as if we were monkeys (and goats, according to Othello). All right – we do start going and flying towards the stars that always twinkle overhead, according to Dante and his tragic comedy. But what about Ver, for God's sake? Isn't Fall enough for us and everybody else?

All right – we have a garden we bought at the end of our lives and we firmly believe that this garden is somehow identical to the Garden of Eden; otherwise it would not have been called a 'garden' in the first place. You say 'garden' and everyone pictures to themselves the Garden of Eden. You say 'cross' and some people visualise Jesus Christ; and others paint Spartacus. The latter are members of the communist party that continues to survive in a few God-forsaken countries where they think that a great leap forward can overleap Kierkegaard's leap and land one *up* in *Paradise*.

Keeping a garden tidy is a full-time job and it is all the more full, timely and jolly since this garden of yours is a paradise in its own right (or wrong). Of course you are reluctant to find out what kind of rights one talks about in this connexion: what counts is your feeling and the joy you enjoy whenever the weather (and my feather) is fine and you can devote your afternoon and even part of your evening to this Garden of Eden of yours. Council employees are responsible for the upkeep of the gardens, needless to say, but your garden is not on their lists and so you have to take care of it yourself, if you are not mistaken. You are not, for once.

You have a garden where a dozen birds salute you without knowing who you are and what you have come here for, for birds have no memory except if you put them in cages and feed them every morning. In this case, they may recognise the food you give them and they do this all the more readily and enthusiastically if you spoon-feed them: they may even recognise the spoon you put in their beaks.

So you see a dozen birds and one wheelbarrow which seems to be empty, and you are in no mood for philosophical investigations aimed at discovering the whole truth about emptiness. Is it empty or not? Is emptiness brimful with the gods? And what about the void into which you are staring? Before Einstein, space was regarded as a formless void, but today everyone knows that both space and time are formmore or formfull voids, and mostly they come in any shape or form. They might take the shape of things to come, provided we do not throw an *atomic* bomb on this mess: a *smoke* bomb might spare a few parts of it; for a minute or two.

Well, well, well. What does all this mean or not mean? That is the question you ask yourself as you install yourself within the barrow to try and find out what it is doing in the middle of your garden, in front of a cherry tree. Now you can answer this question thus: ‘This wheelbarrow is holding and keeping my body. That’s its main occupation.’ A few minutes later, however, you realise you feel uncomfortable inside this wheelbarrow, for it is not meant for you alone: it is not Kafka’s Law after all. And then it all comes back to you, if only in part: law, fall, *Verfall*, *Verfallen*, up, up, up. You should be conveyed to Paradise because you are not in it yet despite your garden which may look like the Garden of Eden, for all you know. But you do not know the first thing about the Garden of Eden, and even if someone says to you you were Adam or Eve in your first former life, you answer, ‘All right, I was Adam, Eve and even their Son Whatsisname, but I don’t remember the Garden – kill me God, as the Russians say. In my previous former life, I was Russian, you know.’

‘Do you know anything about your decay and degeneration?’

‘Do you mean to say I’m a degenerate young man?’

‘Not quite. You’re just a man.’

‘A cosmic man?’

‘You have to go up.’

‘Up the garden path?’

‘Up the path of God. At present you may be compared to a child.’

‘Am I in my second childhood?’

‘You’re at the stage where you can say individual words but not full sentences. You say: “Wheelbarrow, Whatsisname, garden,” but the context in which these words can be put and used evades you constantly.’

A lot eludes you at the moment we are speaking about, and that is why so many people ask themselves the same question, ‘Is it worth our while speaking and talking? And thinking?’ Be that as it may, the situations we find ourselves in are *always* inexplicable, even if the explanation lies right at our feet and so we just have to bend down and pick it up, which is all the more advisable since this explanation is as clear as a bell or day or mud. But try as you may, you cannot bend down, even if you remember your childhood during which your mother used to say to you every morning, ‘Now, bend forward and touch your toes!’ She might even have said, from time to time, ‘Now, bend backward and touch your toes!’ All that was done for the sake of your health and your body’s suppleness that you have irrevocably lost in the course of the last two decades. So when someone says to you now, ‘Make sure you bend your knees when you’re picking up heavy objects,’ you do your best and bend this and that, but your knees do not obey your orders: you can bend neither your knees nor your body in general. Yes, you can bend a spoon, for instance – on condition that this spoon is made of aluminium or another pliable material. But you can on no account bend your knees. What is more, you would not be able to bend them even if they were made of chewing gum. So the explanation remains at your feet and no one will ever pick it up unless you rack your brains all day with a view to finding a friend whose knees are in running order (or rather in bending order). You say to yourself that Michael’s knees might fit the bill because he spends his time in a local church, in front of its altar – on bended knees, if you please. You call him and he pays you a visit, his knees looking great.

He picks up the sheet of paper you have been eyeing for two days at least and you read the following explanation of the jam you are in: ‘Mankind had long known the use of the wheelbarrow before a misunderstanding attributed this useful invention to Pascal. The symbolism of the wheelbarrow derives from an

overall view of the object regarded as an extension of the human arm and as a miniature farm-cart. In fact it symbolises the enhancement of human strength in three different ways. The first is in intensity, since the two handles of the wheelbarrow form levers; the second in volume through the capacity of the barrow; and the third in freedom of movement, thanks to the wheel. From these differing viewpoints, a wheelbarrow is like a portion of the cosmic forces organised in the service of mankind.'

Once the text is over, you begin to ponder your next move in the game, for whatever happens on Earth is just a game, as poets know and declare: a game of chess, a game of tennis. (The ball is in your court now.) In other words, you pay tribute to what they call *herméneutique* or, to put it Englishly, analysis, study, revelation, exegesis, breaking and cracking the code. At first you are overwhelmed and even overpowered by the word 'cosmic' which is so mighty and unquestionable you can hardly breathe whenever you hear it. You immediately think about the ties that link you to the distant stars by virtue of quantum mechanics and the revelations supplied by mystics. And as soon as you realise that the cosmic forces are at your service and can wait on you both at your dinner table and in your bed, you grow elated, happy, and reach seventh heaven in no time at all. Then you ask yourself what you can do in the realm of the seventh heaven: you do not even know what to do in the first heaven or rather in the zero one – on the surface of the Earth. All right, you are happy, clappy, and accordingly clap in time to the music of the spheres. After a while, however, you grow weary and bored to death which does not appeal to your senses: you are still afraid of him in spite of your home address. Actually you can even travel as far as the eighth heaven, but you see neither rhyme nor reason for this action, and you remain where you are – in the very middle of the seventh heaven where the happiest men and women meet and play cards, tennis, golf and so on.

In a way, you are weary of the cosmos and even of its forces, however handy (and candy) they may be here and there, at the right moment. All right, all right – one cosmic force brings you coffee as you continue to enjoy your last dream without removing your head from your favourite pillow. And this cosmic coffee is incredibly smooth and rich. Moreover, a cosmic voice reminds you that instant coffee just does not compare with freshly ground coffee; and you nod in agreement. So what? Or rather, 'What next?' You cannot make love to the cosmos unless it puts on a bikini you saw in a porn movie – the centrepiece of your erotic and sex collection. You say to the cosmos, 'Welcome to my abode. I hope you won't talk to me about micros or macros. I'm weary of Adam Kadmon because I'm an ordinary man, an ordinary citizen, a part of the multitude, a clog in the machine called "democracy". What can you offer a clog?'

'A new sex machine.'

'And what about bikini bottoms and briefs?'

'One-piece swimming costumes are more fashionable than bikinis this year.'

'I've already heard this commercial somewhere.'

Well, to cut a long analysis short, after much body-searching (or stroking), the cosmos begins to sleep with you, as they say, as it sings, 'United we lie, united we sleep, united we fall in love.' This cosmic lullaby puts you to sleep so you miss the rest of the cosmic ritual destined to make you *experience* non-local connections. In the meantime, the wheelbarrow remains in the garden as if it had nothing to do with the cosmos – those left behind by globalisation and progress, as newspapers put it. Years of being left out in the rain has rusted this symbol, this extension of the human arm and spirit (and spirits), this enhancement of human strength. But you do not care: you are at one with the cosmos, with the proverbial and legendary One that governs the

world either through God or fate and destiny that either put you to death or turn over a new leaf. You read what is written on this leaf and another bout of *herméneutique* comes your way; and once again you immerse yourself in culture, art, philosophy, ethnography, archaeology and mysticism. And once again you realise you are down – even when you seem to sojourn in the seventh heaven; or in the ninth one.

And then you set about asking questions you put to yourself, for want of anything or anyone better. (Questions are the food and piousness of thoughts. And a poison for thoughts and souls.) For instance, you utter the following question, ‘Why am I the lowest of the low?’ And this question begs the question of whether your statement is correct or not. ‘Am I really the lowest of the low?’ And you answer yourself thus, ‘Perhaps not.’ Of course you are feeling low, which means – at least hypothetically – that you are in low spirits. But you say to yourself – you are anxious to boost your self-esteem – that it is better to be in low spirits than in low bodies fraught with diseases of all kinds. You talk nonsense for a while, for nothing boosts one’s morale better than nonsense, be it complete nonsense or partial one. One of these pieces of nonsense reminds you of the following truth, ‘Never mind what happens to your body – that’s your spirit that counts.’

‘And what if I’ve got cancer?’ you ask. Just another question of yours.

‘Your fighting spirit can vanquish it.’

‘Why do they say, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”?’

‘They know neither what they do nor what they say. And let me remind you of the following idiom: “That’s the spirit.”’

‘What spirit are you talking about? The Dunkirk one? The London one? The Brussels one?’

‘There are only Holy Spirits in our midst. The *One*, you know. All in One.’

‘What kind of One?’

‘God is this and other Ones. Everything is One and the One. Or just The.’

And of course you ask yourself the ritual and only question, ‘How come?’ which means you do not know what cause triggered off a sort of avalanche as a result of which you are lying at the bottom of the heap and near all other bottoms, including the bottom of the beep. Your outgoing message points out that anyone can leave any message after the beep, but the beep following in the footsteps of this message is so low one cannot hear it. So one begins to hesitate and stutter. And then one utters something along these lines, ‘Is it you? Can you hear me? Will you ever lend an ear to my message? It’s urgent, you know. Let’s leave all other matters aside for now and talk about the most urgent problem facing us. Please say to your numerous mistresses, “Excuse me, but I have some urgent business to attend to.” And if they ask you what kind of business you have in mind, you shouldn’t ask them to listen to this message of mine meant for you alone. It’s a secret message, you know. And this is a problem that requires urgent attention. You just say to them, “Some urgent business, *some, some*.” Hopefully they’re not as stupid as all that and so they’ll understand this business is none of *their* business. Besides, they have no business prying into your private life. Of course they must be beautiful, those mistresses of yours, otherwise they wouldn’t spend so much time in your company, in your bed and in your garden – you don’t rub shoulders and other parts of your body with ugly men or women, as far as I know and if I’m not mistaken.’

So the question – another The – remains on the agenda as if rooted to the spot for the simple reason that no one will ever understand why this *Geworfenheit* or whatever its name and notions are interferes in our internal (infernally) affairs to the point of throwing us out of the window or pushing us off a precipice at the bottom of which we are supposed to spend our lives. All right, we were sitting on a window-sill, enjoying a

landscape perturbed by planes and occasionally by hot-air balloons that one hears before seeing them. They seem to suffer from asthma and their breathing is so loud you are tempted to complain to the authorities about their conduct just above your favourite window. There are baskets under these asthmatic balloons and you can also spot a few people in these baskets, which may come as a surprise to you: you are used to having either strawberries or mushrooms in such baskets, and anyway you see no balloons above them as you take your walk through the woods in search of boletus and other edible representatives of flora and fauna.

You are still on your window-sill because you love this place for many reasons, one of them being connected to your wish to fly and visit a series of other worlds among which there might be the Hereafter where honey flows down many hillsides and rivers are brimful of Burgundy and whisky. There must be even a whisky-sea up there, in accordance with some sacred books you heard about in your adolescence when you used to talk to sages some of whom were inveterate drunkards. At some point you even thought that no sage can ever utter any wise truth unless he or she or it is drunk to the point of being unable to stand either united or on his own. So you would get those truths from a series of mouths lying in puddles or just in the heavy mud, and consequently the truths you heard and assimilated are as clear as mud. And nothing can remove this mud from them, which seems to correspond to what St Paul says to us about our inhuman condition, 'At present everything is as clear as mud, but thereafter you'll hear a clear church bell.' Well, you do here some bells in spite of the fact that you are still down here or rather sitting on your window-sill; and the bells you hear inform you that someone has just got married. And yet you have not been invited to any of the ceremonies one is supposed to enjoy in the aftermath of the bell-music (unless they are the bells of John Donne fame). So you stay on your window-sill, saying to yourself, 'All right, all right. I'll stay here forever, but I can't complain because I enjoy both planes and birds. I also enjoy a few cats that pursue these birds in the sky. Sometimes I spot only the smiles of these cats or their tails, but that doesn't prevent me from enjoying their flights and hunts and brunches.'

Suddenly, however, you feel a hand on your back and you begin to wonder whose hand you feel as you try to enjoy yet another cat in the sky – to the utmost, this time. And then you fall and so you might come to the conclusion that the cause of your present state of affairs originated in the hand you felt in the course of the show you attended without budging from your window-sill. You fall and in the course of this fall of yours you cannot help comparing yourself to Adam and Eve about whose Fall you were told at school. In your youth you always refused to use a diving board thanks to which you could have flown like Icarus; for a few seconds at least. And much longer than Leonardo da Vinci. You would say to the coach, 'I can't fly, you know. Nor could Leonardo, the greatest painter in the history of humankind. Do you know the *Mona Lisa*?'

'Let's drop the *Mona Lisa* for a while,' says the coach.

'All right, I promise you to drop the *Mona Lisa* and even Leonardo – for a while or forever.'

'So drop them,' says the coach.

'But I'll do it only on condition that you don't drop *me*, for I'm afraid of this water.'

'Have you ever heard about Adam and Eve? They fell on the stony surface of the Earth, you know.'

'But it was a long time ago.'

'So what?' says the coach, and apparently he is right.

So you cannot help recalling both Adam and Eve – no Monas, no Lisas this time – and you land up in prison, as they say. Yes, this world of ours is a prison and you say to yourself you had better consult a guru who works in a sports centre instructing people in the use of the gym equipment. What does this equipment have to

do with your fall and the prison you have just found yourself in for the rest of your life? The guru explains that this prison does not necessarily mean ‘mud’, whatever those whose hobby boils down to slinging mud at human beings say and think. ‘Modern houses have replaced the one-room mud huts with grass roofs that had been home to generations of peasants,’ the guru explains as he shows you a few photographs where you see no mud, contrary to your expectations. You see a sort of lavatory – or loo, as they say – but there is no mud in it either: no mud, no excrement of any sort. ‘Suppose you killed a hundred people,’ says the guru.

‘When?’ you ask raising your eyebrows and even your thoughts.

‘Doesn’t matter,’ says the guru.

‘But I’m not a murderer,’ you answer and say with a nod of your head that does not leave the field clear for the guru: he still owes you an explanation.

‘We all are,’ says the guru as he reminds us that we can kill many people with our glances and words; let alone with our gestures such as shoulder-shrugs. ‘So we are criminals, all of us,’ says the guru as he continues his lesson aimed at your instruction in the matters you know nothing about, being a complete novice in the kingdom of prisons. ‘And if you dare to doubt this statement of mine, you’ll have to read about original sin in the original.’ So you read an excerpt where St Augustine enlarges upon original sin to such an extent that original sin grows large indeed – much larger than life it squashes as if it were a mere hat. That is why theologians say in their books, ‘Adam and his forbidden fruit accidentally sat on our lives and squashed them,’ which means that our lives are flat and nothing can come out of them except flatness, shallowness and whatever goes with them – pancakes, for instance, as gourmets point out. ‘All right,’ they say almost in unison, ‘we admit and acknowledge that human life is as flat as a pancake. But there’s such a thing as caviar that you can smear your pancakes with. And if there’s no caviar within your reach and even at a distance, you can always use a few slices of salmon.’ Thus speak gourmets, optimists and hedonists whose fear of death is non-existent as if death himself were not of this world; as if the world were immortal, eternal, protected from meteorites, big crashes and so on. And if you say to them, ‘I’m afraid of death, of absolute extinction,’ they answer: ‘Have an apple – it’ll take the edge off your fear.’

‘I’d rather have some caviar,’ you say to them.

‘You have no money for caviar. What’s more – or rather what’s less – you have no money for salmon either.’

‘Do you mean to say I can only avail myself of lumpfish and its eggs?’

‘Perhaps, perhaps,’ they answer holding out an apple.

‘Is it a forbidden apple?’ you ask.

‘It’s a *permitted* apple,’ they answer.

St Augustine knew original sin from the inside – inside out, so to speak – because his stomach was involved in the process during which most humans discover the pernicious influence of original sin. As a child, Saint Augustine used to steal forbidden pears growing in his neighbour’s garden and the indigestion he would get as a result of his excursions and thefts was a sign and even a bad omen. He wrote about his upset stomach abundantly to convey to us the idea that even if we do not steal anything, we have a mythological upset stomach – the one one can find in human mythology and in our sacred books. Original sin is symbolised by a huge upset stomach that covers the surface of the Earth, spanning our poles and also our history. Why? ask many novices,

their eyes looking at their gurus and the apples shown to them. ‘Because the forbidden fruit landed up in Adam’s stomach,’ say the gurus.

‘And what about his neck and palate? Weren’t they upset too? After all, they received the fruit before his stomach and bowels.’

‘That’s right,’ say the gurus. ‘His neck, teeth, tongue and palate were also upset – to the point of upsetting the apple cart.’

‘Whose cart? What apple? The forbidden apple?’

‘Our history might have been different,’ say the gurus. ‘The same goes for our whereabouts.’

Of course St Augustine was dealing with the *pear* cart that seemed to have upset his life, plans, loves and so on. (Or did he steal and devour peaches?) That is what he wrote about his general upsetness: ‘Again, in the clause which follows, “In which all have sinned,” how cautiously, rightly, and unambiguously is the statement expressed! (sic) For if you understand that sin to be meant which by one man entered into the world, “In which (sin) all have sinned,” it is surely clear enough, that the sins which are peculiar to every man, which they themselves commit and which belong simply to them, mean one thing; and that the one sin, in and by which all have sinned, means another thing; since all were that one man. If, however, it be not the sin, but that one man that is understood, “In which (one man) all have sinned,” what again can be plainer than even this clear statement?’ As clear as mud, we say as we begin to unravel the mystery hidden behind these words and in between these lines.

How do we set and go about it? About this mud? St Augustine makes us realise that original sin barges into the world whenever we spot a tree and eat its fruit, following our doctor’s advice: ‘Vitamin C is found in oranges and other citrus fruit. So you should eat oranges, apples and so on. Of course this habit of yours may keep me away for some time. What’s more, I may become as poor as a poor boy from the slums, but that doesn’t really matter. What matters is your health, you know. And also your prosperity, longevity and good moods. Never mind my poverty and cancers.’ You eat your oranges and your upset stomach reminds you not only of the original sin you read about in St Augustine’s treatise, but also about death written all over your life. And once again you curse both Adam and St Augustine whose pears or peaches have wrecked your life so irremediably and irreparably that today, this morning, you are just a nervous, quivering wreck.

Well, you do not read about original sin in the original, considering that the book you keep on your writing desk acquaints you with an *English* translation of St Augustine’s treatise. (Edited by Philip Schaff, D. D. LL. D.) And St Augustine resorts to a *Latin* translation of the Bible written in *Hebrew* and ancient *Greek*. You read the world in translation, as they say, and the original is out of your reach because your health and your very life might be destroyed by the power of this original that walks in front of you now and then hidden beneath a veil of mist.

Of course no one is allowed to discard the hypothesis that we are lying at the bottom of the heap. It is true that some of us can *stand* at the bottom of the hill and *crawl* around it *on all fours*. (You can enjoy all the benefits and privileges of club membership.) But most humans *lie* around it or even crouch in the middle of the heap, incautiously thinking this is the end of it; in other words, they cannot fall any further, according to their calculations. So, without waiting for permission, they get up and begin to walk towards the light they seem to see

at the end of what they call ‘our human tunnel’, although there are no tunnels and no lights in the region of the bottom; there are only humans, as a matter of fact. These people think only in terms of Paradise and St Peter, which explains their mistakes, miscalculations and the dire straits they find themselves in whenever they set off on journeys. The staircase lies in wait for them, but they continue their triumphal march, heading for the Triumphal Arch they seem to recognise at the end of the road. And St Peter is standing on the top of the Triumphal Arch, according to their Scriptures. They all fail to notice they are descending towards the centre of the Earth where our Hell can be found. And therefore they make a series of mistakes related to this downward movement. At some point they say to each other or just to themselves: ‘I can’t fall any further and anyway I feel like drawing the line right here.’

You draw a sort of line and think it is enough to keep both ghosts and Hell at bay. Accordingly, you take a step suitable for level ground and come down with a bump. The result is a violent shock or surprise or both. You say once again, ‘I thought I was at the bottom,’ but in fact you were not thinking about the stairs or you would not have made the mistake. (You were thinking about the stars, as a matter of fact.) Your muscles were adjusted in a way suitable to the bottom, when in fact you were not yet there. You were not yet in Hell, in other words. You saw a lot of high water, but you went on thinking about the stars and now you are lying at the *very* bottom of the heap or Hell – call it what you wish. Why is your plight so sorry? Why do I, for one, feel sorry for you? Because the quantity of humility you can count upon when undertaking whatever there is to undertake in this world of ours is too tiny to allow you to squeeze through the proverbial eye of the needle we are reminded of whenever we tackle the problems exposed in the Bible. Your humility ought to have warned you thus, ‘I’m the lowest of all the worms one can find under one’s feet. Unlike my lucky fellow creatures, the status of tapeworm has never been bestowed upon me, for all my entreaties. Nor am I an inhabitant of some dog or other. I like dogs and animals in general. I wouldn’t mind spending eternity inside a dog or a cat or even a field mouse, let alone a pet mouse. Actually I’m half a worm and consequently they talk about me in the following terms, “It’s distressing enough to find a worm in your apple but finding half a worm is worse.”’

Be that as it may, there are no ends to the roads, provided they lead one to Hell, but there are people who prefer anything to the word ‘end’, even if it is used in relation to a film. In their minds this word is glued to tethers and roads, and if you point out in their presence, ‘The downward movement has no end,’ they rush towards the nearest underground station or even to the farthest well: anything is better than the end of the road which is associated with death and untimely disappearance into the bowels of the Earth. So they jump into the well and swim at the bottom of it until some benefactor of humanity pulls them up – towards the stars, as they think. But the stars and their twinkling are so far they cannot even see them, especially if the sky is cloudy with wintry showers. And it is always cloudy with wintry showers, as far as the reprobate are concerned; at least St Augustine enlarges upon these wintry showers rather often, thinking perhaps about Siberia.

As far as I am concerned, all this and many other things are none of my concern because I am neither too modest nor too arrogant, and anyway I no longer climb up or down, let alone throw myself into wells or well beings, as some of my fitness fanatics put it. Whenever putting on a pair of gym shoes, they say triumphantly, ‘I’m about to throw myself into my well being.’ And apparently all this works, although I doubt their capacity to live until the 22nd century: there is no point in storing champagne intended for the turn of this century, of the next millennium.

Drink your champagne right now and forget about your life expectancy, for only those who do not expect anything and drink Methuselahs are likely to live as long as Methuselah. If asked, 'What's the secret of your longevity?' or 'To what do you attribute your Methuselahity?' they answer, 'Our unconcern. And our champagne,' they add after a while, on second thoughts. Or on third thoughts – one never knows how many thoughts there are inside our brain. Some declare that the quantity of our thoughts equals that of the stars; others believe there is only one thought in our brain and therefore they never use the expression 'on second thoughts'. 'Everything happens on *first and only* thought,' they point out.

There is no denying I am in a prison – like everyone else, I suppose; except that others have within their reach and even under their feet a sort of ballroom where they meet their colleagues, friends and fellows of all kinds: fellow citizens, fellow earthlings, fellow Martians, etc. I meet only myself for the simple reason that I am in a class of my own and the walls of my classroom are as impregnable as a medieval castle destroyed by Genghis Khan or any other Khan one can think of. Actually no Khans have ever tried to break through my walls or their semblance so that my comparisons are just metaphors, tropes and vice versa; or I just say all that for argument's sake. And the argument in question must be focused upon the prison I am duty bound to analyse for the sake of my life that depends on the space-time – I wish I could say just 'space' or 'time' without feeling obliged to use this double-barrelled name – I was granted at the beginning of the Big Bang; according to Leibniz who speaks about this phenomenon in a letter to Arnaud. (And I have already spoken about it on many occasions – to Arnaud de Beauregard, among other exceptional individuals.) Anyway, whatever happens and however one writes about human existence, 'prison' is a keyword without which no description of our condition is worthy of one's undivided attention. (And no *divided* attention is worthy of our attention.)

Suppose you have not killed anybody; nor have you stolen any money from someone's safe or even from a passer-by's pocket. You see a wallet protruding from a pocket and snatch it from this pocket because you are short of money at the moment. And this moment may stop because some moments happen to be of Faust fame, even if there are no Fausts, no Gretchens in our midst. So you pinch the wallet and count the money you find in it, paying no attention to other passers-by among whom there is a policeman; he watches you as if you were Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin. Yes, these comedians used to pinch a lot of wallets during their strolls around cities, and sometimes they got caught red-handed or red-legged – whenever they had enough time to make a dash for it. (*Prendre ses jambes à son cou*, as the French put it. You just take your legs to your neck as if in this way you could shake off your pursuers more easily.) Well, they put you in prison and you say to them haughtily and naughtily, 'You're in a prison too, you know.'

Your soul was imprisoned by your body during your personal Big Bang; out of false modesty, let us call it the 'small bang' and your body the 'minuscule bang'. Be that as it may, as they always say as they shake their heads, unsatisfied with what is going on, your soul was put in chains and can hardly do her duty with regard to herself – flying in between the stars. The soul is one of the stars and, unless we are dealing with a fallen star, must be squeezing through meteors and stardust on its way to the throne of God located at the zenith. In Plato's description of it there are horses, but you are unable to climb onto your horse and set off at a relaxed trot down the lane for the simple reason – how simple, how beautiful such reasons are! – that you are in your prison cell and have no horses either within your reach or out of it; what is less, you have no money for it and so if you were out of prison – even, even, even if out of it – you could not afford one or two, let alone a stable swarming with horses and horseflies. You are lucky in a way because you do not have to shut the stable door after the horse has

bolted, do you? That is how optimists talk to themselves: ‘We don’t have to shut anything – we’re already shut in. We’re also shut out, as a matter of fact. No horses bolt; no stables creak and collapse.’

The soul is earthly because it is set in touch with the natural maternal image, the Earth; celestial, because the unconscious constantly and ardently yearns for the light of awareness. So you permanently feel pinches inside your body, and you know perfectly well it is your soul you feel; and yet you do not feel like feeling it. Once again it ardently yearns for the light of knowledge and no light can be found in your entrails, even if Diogenes takes a walk in them, a torch shining in his hand that holds it. When free and on its own, the soul is always aware of the light and whatever it brings with it as it descends upon the Earth. Inside your body, however, it is not aware of anything except of the diseases that eat into your sinews, blood vessels and nerves. Apparently the soul can see every bug, however small and innocent, and the contemplation of harmless microbes diverts its attention from your cancers, death and Hereafter-determined fate. ‘How beautiful this microbe is,’ your soul says to itself, reluctant as it is to watch the pernicious progress of your cirrhosis. Why is your soul so negligent, light-hearted and good-for-nothing? Because it is good-for-*something* in a different field – in the Elysian fields of cosmic meditation. After all, the *anima* acts as a mediator between the ego and the self, the latter comprising the nub of the psyche.

This soul of yours offers you an example, if not a model you had better follow, even if you do not really succeed in following in its footsteps or rather wingflaps. We all agree with our detractors on this issue: our soul is imprisoned in our body and the term of its seclusion depends on our lifespan, on our optimism that never allows us to commit suicide. So our soul rots in jail, alias in our body, and whenever asked what it does and how it feels, we answer, ‘Thank you very much. Our soul is as fit as a fiddle.’

‘Can’t we have a look at your soul?’ we hear nearby, within hearing distance.

‘In some societies women are kept in seclusion and are hardly ever seen in public,’ we answer.

‘Is your soul a woman?’ we hear in the proximity of our body or rather our ears.

‘Our guru says we’d better always speak of androgynes. Anyway, we’ve got a general idea of what our soul is and should be in the future.’

‘What general idea?’

‘Nothing concrete at the moment.’

‘It is sometimes easier,’ they say, ‘to illustrate an abstract concept by analogy with something concrete.’

You follow this advice, and to some extent you even follow it in its footsteps and consequently choose a concrete situation full of concrete: the foundation of the prison you have chosen is built from rubble overlaid with concrete. We have also chosen a concrete individual whose admirers say both proudly and jubilantly that he is made of concrete – such is his strength and determination. Let us concentrate on one of his days – the one during which he has to face the hassle of twisting the knife in the wound once again. What wound does he have in mind? And what about the knife? The wound is always the same and we might call it ‘incomprehension’, ‘stupidity’, ‘naïveté’, ‘unconsciousness’, ‘fate’ and ‘eternal recurrence’. According to the French, all these words were faithful to the post as our individual waited eagerly for one of the four guards who stood next to him to unlock his handcuffs. (We all wear handcuffs, but they are seldom if ever unlocked.) In the meantime, he also looked around to see who was in the gym: two dozen journalists and some prison officials. And then he looked at the journalists and raised his right arm in a Nazi salute.

This individual murdered a great many people; and yet he is neither Napoleon, nor Stalin, nor Pol Pot, nor just Paul. He is Anders and his first name might suggest he is different from others, which seems to be all the more obvious since I, for one, have a smattering of German. But nothing prevents you from becoming a serial killer unless you get stuck in the domain of morals that recite the Decalogue round the clock: you can even enjoy these maxims in your sleep; even in your deep sleep, come to think of it, considering the importance of your unconscious and its insomnia. One might think, if only for an instant, that Anders Breivik is just another incarnation of Hitler: Anders Hitler does not really sound out of tune, if you listen carefully to Hitler's authentic, original full name. Adolf Hitler, Anders Hitler, Adolf Hitler, and so on. The letters a, d and r are common to both names and even to their bearers whose ways and deeds do not differ widely, provided we discard both mathematics and the army that Hitler could manipulate to his heart's content, for all the errors he committed while doing so with impunity and arrogance.

According to *Newsweek* and Asne Seierstad, Anders Breivik was looking at the cameras that were supposed to capture his picture and obstinacy; and also his ironic gaze, I suppose. It is little wonder that his Nazi salute was instantly (eyes twinkle slower) transmitted to news agencies around the world and shared online. So we can draw yet another parallel between our Anders and their Adolf: Hitler's salute can be seen in all sorts of documentaries; and even outside them, in the court where Breivik undergoes an operation at the end of which they all hope to extract a dozen destructive and malicious ideas from his brain. As all progressive citizens know, Breivik murdered 77 people, and our honest fellow creatures call this mass murder a 'massacre'. 'I was wondering how many people I needed to kill to be heard, taken notice of and understood,' he said after he had committed his acts in 2011. Now he wonders how many Nazi salutes he has to perform for the sake of the same *idée fixe*: to be noticed, understood and fêted by audiences both in his own country and abroad. The Saviour of Humanity, no less!!! (He is used to putting as many as 77 exclamation marks after the words 'Anders Breivik' and 'Saviour'.)

At the same time, the theologians whose presence was required by the members of the jury – they wished to know whether Breivik had always belonged to the elect or the reprobate as defined by St Augustine and Calvin – decided to come to the fore and say what they thought about the Nazi salute executed by Breivik. In the first place, they did not fail to point out that Breivik had kept his arm level with his forehead for nine long seconds as if to remind everyone of the salute's affinity with what some music historians habitually call '*himmlische Längen*' when discussing Schubert's and Bruckner's works. To all outward appearances, he was eager to intimate that, contrary to the widespread point of view, Hitler had been conveyed to heaven – perhaps by the angel who, a few centuries before, had taken care of Faust's disaster-prone soul. 'He's not in Hell, whatever your stupid and empty heads might conjecture,' he seemed to insinuate as he looked at the journalists and other visitors of the court of justice where he continued to meet his destiny, going through a lot of trials and tribulations. 'He's in Heaven, you stupid jerks. And I'll follow in his wingbeats, you know. Of course you might say I'm a jackass as well – I didn't wait for the Arab immigrants. Today nobody would have convicted me, you say to yourself. Well, you're right of course – for once. But I wished to warn you of the tragedy associated in everyone's mind with this foreign invasion – you, you fools, stupid jerks and jackasses. Or just asses and arseholes, you, you, you. So did Hitler, by the way. He wished to warn you, you know.'

The theologians say as they shake their heads and wag their fingers, 'He's damned forever and time, however long it may endure, will never cure him of this damnation. And even if time and Christ do forgive him,

we will not, whatever happens and however merciful and Christ-like we may wish to look and sound.’ But the members of the jury do not agree with them despite the overall agreement reached on the day of Breivik’s First Judgement by almost everybody. Everybody looked at the judge and the latter read on everyone’s lips the same number: 21. So he gave Breivik the maximum penalty for committing an act of terrorism – 21 years; with a possible extension until the end of his life and afterlife. As long as he is considered a danger to society, wherever this society might be located, he can be kept in prison, which begs the question, ‘Do they have prisons in Hell? Isn’t Hell just a huge prison? Like the Earth?’

‘On whose authority do you dare maintain that Breivik will go to Hell?’

‘Didn’t he commit a deadly sin? The deadliest sin of all? After all, murder is more horrible than gluttony.’

‘But murder is not a deadly sin,’ says Breivik’s lawyer. And without further ado he enumerates all the deadly sins: ‘Covetousness, envy, gluttony, lust, pride, anger and sloth. My client isn’t prone to sloth,’ he points out after a slight hesitation. One cannot help wondering why his solicitor or lawyer – that is how he is addressed in Norway and other Northern countries – hesitated ever so slightly before enlarging upon Breivik’s allergy to sloth. The answer lies in the fact that Breivik constantly complains about the cuisine he confronts in the prison where he is to spend the rest of his earthly life: ‘I will always be a threat to our society,’ he recently declared as he talked to a famous feminist. He also told her that the regime he had to submit to in the prison could be called ‘low intensive torture’ on account of plastic cutlery, paper cups and coffee that was sometimes cold. According to him, the food he indulgently let penetrate his stomach and other digestion-preoccupied organs was ‘worse than death. And sometimes I even get the same dish two days in a row. I’m a well-known gourmet, you know, and this treatment is incompatible with my tastes and principles.’ Consequently Breivik might be accused of the sin of gluttony, if only by *zealous* prosecutors whose number increases in proportion to the duration of the Nazi salutes executed by the prisoner.

Well, one may also wonder why one should enlarge upon such an individual in a book that deals with eternal themes such as death, immortality, decadence, lowness, bottomness, bottomlessness, toplessness and so forth. According to Hegel, these are eternal themes that do not depend on actual circumstances, on whatever can be in the news or out of them. News comes and goes, as Hegel used to point out in Berlin and other cities where his teaching resounded in the 19th century; but *these* themes remain for the simple reason that we are mortal and endowed with reason. Actually we enlarge upon Breivik because he studies Hegel, among other thinkers, as he endeavours to prove to all and sundry that he progresses from one stage to another in the course of his conquest of Absolute Spirit. So his solicitor may and must refer to these studies and Breivik’s progress, if someone dares accuse his client of the deadly sin of sloth. ‘No,’ his lawyer might say opening another file. ‘My client keeps walking towards the Calvary of Absolute Spirit, you know. Do you know what that means? Are *you* acquainted with Hegel?’

‘Yes, we are,’ answer the members of the jury, anxious to get rid of yet another superfluous question.

‘Besides, he answers the letters he receives in his confinement. Do you know how many letters have passed through the prison’s censorship department during the past four years?’

‘Yes,’ answer the members of the jury, driven by the same reason: they have a deep aversion to being questioned by the public prosecutor and Breivik’s lawyer.

‘About 4,000 letters,’ says the latter or the lawyer. ‘And my client answers all the letters he receives. What’s more, he answers even the non-received letters – the ones censored by the prison’s authorities, by the director himself. And by his wife, by the way.’

At this point the crown prosecutor realised he should refrain from accusing Breivik of the deadly sin of sloth; and yet he did not know – at least at *that* point – that the prisoner and sinner had embarked upon another project or rather another novel entitled *Hegel and I*. ‘All right, all right,’ he said to himself. ‘We’ve got a lot of other sins, let alone the massacre itself. After all, he killed –’ And once again the prosecutor welcomed a lot of numbers and figures; and all of them settled down in his brain for a few hours as if there were no other mathematicians on the surface of the Earth.

Let us consider the problems we encounter as we steadily advance through the forest of symbols, as Baudelaire put it once, in one of his poems. This forest features symbols, eternal themes, the dread of death for which Tolstoy and Shostakovich are praised so highly. (But for this dread and death, they would not have created anything.) One of these problems is called ‘descent’ and we have already followed this problem for a while – if not in its footsteps, at least in its consequences. But there is another problem that seems to hide at the opposite pole: our problems are poles apart, considering their visceral attachment to Hegel’s doctrines.

On the other hand we should not forget that Breivik is to represent our soul – at least within the context we seem to have chosen to demonstrate that human life is imprisoned in the prison of life. Yes, life is a prison, death is a prison, language is a prison, the body is a prison, the soul is a prison. Why do we always care about the *spiritual* aspect of our existence? Why aren’t we content with daily rounds and pragmatic thoughts? Whenever I read the sentence ‘I was just content to see my daughter in such a stable relationship but a grandchild, that really was the icing on the cake’, I say to myself I have neither a daughter, nor a grandchild. Of course I can go and buy a cake: my bank account allows me to indulge in *small* luxuries; in modest, Christian luxuries; the ones that prevent no one from reaching Paradise through huge holes; through *white* holes, as they say nowadays. But the icing might cause a great many problems about which I do not care, being on the carefree side, as they say in Russia and even Ukraine. So I make do with cakes and forego the icing. And I say to myself, ‘The dry cleaner’s did a good job of removing that oil stain from my shirt.’ That is what Bentham and others called life, I suppose.

So we do not really have to think about life and ourselves in terms of souls and even immortality: the oil stain *was* removed from my shirt. Does that mean that nothing is immortal in our lives? Is it better to leave the stain where it is? If you do, you can say to your friends and wives, ‘This stain is still on my shirt. In a way, it’s immortal. So am I, you know. Don’t you?’ After all, you are better than a mere stain, aren’t you? So am I.

Breivik lives in three separate cells of eight square meters each. He also has a shower and a storage room. One of the three rooms has a bed, a chair with a padded seat, a footrest, a TV, books, a DVD player and a Play Station. What is a Play Station? I do not have a chair with a padded seat, but that does not disturb me beyond measure, as I say in French rather often. I do not know what disturbs me beyond measure and I am tempted to say that this state of affairs takes place in here because I have no idea what this measure is and how long and efficacious it is, if it is at all. Perhaps it is not and it is pointless to speak of measure for measure; or measure for no measure; or no measure for measure, as it always happens in our daily life.

We come across both admirers and detractors, and the former vie with the latter for our attention or rather for the attention we pay or do not pay to their idols among whom we often find outdated persons, so to speak. It is true that many people find St Augustine old-fashioned and some even say he is an old fogey (another old-timer) whose ruling passion is a sort of anti-progress or regress: he does not want us to believe that we are free and not determined by God's whims and bright ideas. God is determined to torment us after our deaths, but we believe in progress and the progress of medical science removes many bugs and cancers from our bodies which are cancer-free, haemorrhage-free. And this state of affairs goes on after our untimely or timely demise and no tortures or hells can spoil the fun we are entitled to in our afterlives. In other words and deeds, the atmosphere in our Hereafter-situated mansions is fairly free and easy, for all the threats concocted by St Augustine's and Calvin's fertile imaginations. They really believed we are split into two groups: the elect and the reprobate, and no one is still in the know as to their real identity. Of course we can fill in a great many forms as we come into this or that office where officials and employees are lying in wait for us: they need both clients and forms that should be filled in and out – sometimes with black ink. And if you say to them, 'I don't like this colour which reminds me of death,' they answer, 'There are no other colours in our office.' And then they may ask you the following question, 'Do you have a garden?'

'Yes, I do,' we answer, although some of us have no gardens around our houses. But we are so used to bragging about our luxuries and status symbols that automatically we say we have a few sports cars in our garages. And of course we never fail to touch upon our swimming pools where we swim, dive and have a few bottles of champagne every morning and every afternoon. All this happens almost daily unless we need a loan or a charity ball that is bound to provide our families with the money needed for swimming pools, sports cars and other luxuries we are deprived of by our cruel destiny or our benevolent God.

'Could you describe your garden, please?' Yes, we hear yet another question aimed at our brains and we answer it to the best of our abilities.

'Our rose garden is a riot of colour.'

'Well, for once you're not in your garden, you know. So you'll fill in this form with our black ink. And when you have completed the form, hand it in at the desk.'

For all the vicissitudes you go through and often stay with for weeks, you still recall your surname and Christian name. On your form you can also list your interests as cycling, the cinema and cooking; and reading girlie and picture magazines. But if you are asked the following question: 'Do you belong to the elect or the reprobate?' you are likely to answer as follows, 'I have no idea to which group I belong. It is up to God to thrash this problem out. If we've got an important decision to make, we sometimes spend a whole day thrashing it out in a meeting. But even during such meetings we are unable to find out whether we'll be saved or damned forever.'

The point is you cannot draw any conclusion from whatever you see around you – even if you concentrate your mental capacities on the weather alone. You look at the sun and say to yourself – and unconsciously you agree with a great Irish poet – that everything is blessed in spite of the button you lost this afternoon. And suddenly a fly leaves one rubbish bin as it transfers its attention to another rubbish bin that looks even more promising than the first one; whereupon the weather switches to the opposite pole and a few minutes later you realise you are soaked through. The same goes for human beings; the same goes even further, much further, whenever human beings are concerned. For instance, you say to yourself, 'At first I thought he was a bit shy, but

I've come to the conclusion that he's simply unfriendly!' Two days later, you say to yourself, 'Next I thought he was unfriendly, but yesterday I came to the conclusion he's a potential murderer!'

Suppose that, out of curiosity and thirst for human knowledge, you wish to pay Anders Breivik a short visit that must be arranged beforehand: the prison's censorship concerns not only letters but also beings endowed with minds and rational (and irrational) thoughts. You should not forget that in the lawsuit Breivik requested a metamorphosis in the prison's policy on visits, letters and phone calls. His lawyer whose literary talent is above suspicion described the situation thus, 'Those who want to see my client – the elect or the country's educated elite – are not allowed to, and those who are allowed to and actually come either through doors or walls, Breivik does not want to see, let alone listen to; let alone take notice of. Despite burglar alarms and window locks, homes are never impregnable against determined thieves; the same goes for prisons.'

In short, the latter or Breivik does not want to see either nincompoops or meaningless visitors and you have to prove you are neither. For instance, they might question you about Hegel and his thirst for all sorts of ascensions: political, practical, spiritual, philosophical, Muhammad-like, Napoleon-like, Breivik-like and so on. And if they recite the following excerpt, 'It is truly a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, concentrated here on a single point, astride a single horse, yet reaching across the world and ruling it,' you should certify that the above information is true and accurate. Without raising your eyebrows or budging from where you are, you say assertively, 'I recognise the World Soul, alias Anders as described by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.' 'So you don't think our Breivik belongs to the reprobate club?' they ask you next.

'Of course not,' you answer.

'Do you believe he's of their number, our Anders?' they say as they go on with their cross-examination.

'Of course not,' you answer.

All this may appear superfluous, unnecessary and boring, but the point is we are eager to know to what club we belong – before it is too late. Suppose you are a reprobate and whatever you do or do not do cannot alter this state of affairs, altering your final destination within the bounds of Hell. You pray every day – or even thrice a day, to be exact, but Hell does not get any further from your destiny and afterlife. So why should you waste your time on prayers? And your money on charity balls? Suppose you murder a man or a woman or both. The case is likely to go to court and it does go to court where many people await your condemnation and admire a luxurious electric chair as your lawyer asks the jury to take cognizance of your generosity in giving to charity. His argument strikes home and you are given a non-custodial sentence. But the matter stands differently with God's court where no argument of this sort – of *any* sort, in point of fact – is accepted as far as your condemnation or salvation goes, stands, remains and even outstays its welcome; from *your* point of view.

And what if you are one of the elect? However boring, this analysis must go on, if only for the sake of suspense and what they wrongly call 'cliffhangers'. All right, you are hanging from a cliff and no one is likely to pull your body up, as they often do in Hitchcock's movies, our real cliffhangers. You fall and one may ask oneself as one follows your fall and subsequent crash, 'So what?' That is exactly what one does in Breughel's picture devoted to Icarus' destiny or itinerary. But this fall – or any earthly fall, for that matter – can in no way be likened to what happened to Adam and Eve after their fateful meal and the anti-nakedness act. You fall and St Peter welcomes you with open arms and a bottle of champagne; and a fair maiden or a handsome young man, your future companion in fortune.

Of course you prefer Hitchcock's films and any cliffhanger, be it written and printed or filmed and shown on one of your screens, to the analysis going with the reflection you must be engaged in to find out who you are in the *religious* sense of the term. For once, you should not be worried about Socratic quests at the end of which you say, 'I am Ivan Petrov and I'm good at mathematics. So I view human life in terms of maths, as many philosophers have done over the centuries. Above all I appreciate geometry and the method used by Spinoza in his epical ethics.' No, you should not worry about your skills, and even your virtues, if any, can go unnoticed or even tossed overboard: no one needs them in St Augustine's City of Augustine. Yes, you prefer games to a serious investigation thanks to which you might unravel the secrets of God's overall ongoing project where you either suffer or jump for joy. Today you jump as you watch a game of football or tennis, and the ball you see flies and turns this way and that either in the air or somewhere else: sometimes you cannot see this ball. You see only legs or hands or rackets or bats and you shout whenever something reaches one of the ends of the road called The World Championship or just Wimbledon, the stadium. You shout, 'Goal, goal, goal, goal!' and 'ball, ball, ball, ball!' Insults and cheers drop from your mouth; or rather they fly through the air of your room towards either a screen or a window. They fall from the window and quite a few passers-by catch them and set about playing with them as if determined to play their own game. They swallow your shouts and soon afterwards these shouts leave their mouths, lungs and hearts. So now one understands why Joyce affirms so brazenly and categorically, 'God is shouting in the street.' And Joyce does not brook any criticism of his work.

In the meantime your condemnation is still on the agenda and you know nothing about it so you cannot even declare you know *next* to nothing in relation to your condemnation. Of course you can say, 'I know nothing about either my condemnation or salvation': this amount of freedom was granted to you either by the Almighty or Satan whose mightiness is slightly inferior to that of God. (It is much harder to plant a tree than to talk someone into eating a piece of fruit from this tree.) So, whenever they embark upon a long discussion at the centre of which there stands the Statue to Freedom of Speech, I always say, 'I'm free to say I'm either damned or saved. I'm also free to accept both my damnation and my salvation. I'm also free to say so in public or in the privacy of my room. But even in my sleep I'm not allowed to utter these words in spite of my being rather garrulous in my sleep. In the course of one night, I often talk in three languages, if you please. But I've no idea whether I talk about my freedom in French, English, or my mother tongue. In my mother tongue, I might say for instance, "Mother, mother." And I feel free to utter this word, notion and love in any language I choose for this purpose. I'm free to say "Mother" in any language, provided I have a smattering of the language I set my heart upon when thinking about my mother. That's what my freedom is about and I need no other freedom. I feel free to confine my freedom to my mother's breasts.'

Suppose you are a reprobate, which does not mean you are at one with any of them – or with the world, for that matter. Of course you know nothing about your status and eternal damnation, whether you say it or not; whether you say it openly or closely – inside your interior monologues. How come? How come? How come? You are a benevolent old man and so you would not hurt a fly. Actually you stroke both flies and cockroaches whenever you happen to spot them within your field of vision. You smile benevolently at fleas and bugs; and yet some of these bugs intend to push you as far as rack and ruin. But you are not accustomed to looking at the world through the black-coloured, mud-coloured glasses of your chronic diseases. Instead, you look at the diseases of others, being a well-known humanitarian, a member of nine humanitarian organisations. In a newspaper – *Weekly Mail or Female* – you read about a woman who, until recently, had no idea 'how essential

blood donations were as a way of prolonging life for those suffering from cancer.’ You suffer from cancer yourself, but it is other people’s cancers that count, according to your point of view, your maxims and progressive ideals. You look at cancers through your brand new rose-tinted glasses – you buy a new pair every other week – and realise that almost 40 per cent of all blood donated from 2014 to 2015 was used for cancer treatment. And you are justifiably proud of your own blood that one can find in the sea of blood created during this period.

But you should on no account forget that you are in the midst of the reprobate and even of their number, however high or low this number may turn out to be on the day of reckoning or the Last Judgement. And your ignorance in the domain of punishments (or rewards) makes things easier for you: you cannot forget what you have no idea of. Well, you are a reprobate, as Dante might have put it, which does not prevent you from giving your blood at the earliest opportunity; and also at the latest opportunity. In short, you give your blood to all cancer patients and some of them bring you flowers as they get discharged from hospitals and walk in the streets and jump for joy as if nothing had ever happened. (Nothing will ever happen to them, according to their unconscious or conscious convictions.) A woman may even offer you a box of Belgian chocolates that is sure to increase the quantity of sugar in your blood and urine, let alone your whole body and life in general. You cast a reproachful glance at the woman and say in reproachful tones, ‘Do you want me to die? Is that your intention?’

‘I want you to be happy,’ she answers. ‘Anyway, I want to reward you for your kindness and blood.’

If you were in the know, you might call her a ‘bloodsucker’; if you knew for sure you would roast in Hell for the rest of all your lives. But you are an ignorant ape – at least in this field – and you do not broach the subject of Hell in front of this woman. You do not even touch upon your diabetes that might drive you to an early grave, if you ate all the boxes of chocolates offered to you by the former cancerous individuals. (You throw them out of the window as soon as your visitors disappear over the horizon.) Actually you might have eaten all of them without the slightest hesitation. You would have bought a hundred chocolate cakes in the nearest *Konditorei*, had you been aware of the fact that you would die of what they call ‘bloodshed’ or ‘bloodletting’. You take a lift and press the top button in the hope of reaching St Peter’s arms in no time at all: you are already within the realm of eternity; at least to some extent.

All right – you are allowed to take the lift and even the button you press responds to your request, and you zoom up, aiming at the gates of Paradise on which one can see the following inscription: ‘Forget your suffering once and for all. From now on you will never suffer again. Your joy should be palpable.’ Elated and fortified, you go straight to St Peter and say ‘hello’ to him and other inhabitants of this happy realm where everything *is* blessed, according to the same poet. And St Peter dares ask you what you are doing in front of the gates he is to protect against gatecrashers. ‘I’m almost a saint,’ you reply.

‘How come?’ St Peter dares to ask and repeat the same question. ‘How come?’

‘Blood,’ you answer.

‘What about it?’

‘Every night and every morn I donated blood to the needy.’

‘Who are they?’

‘The needy are those whose only option is regular blood transfusions.’

‘What are you talking about?’ (The key question no one can do without.)

‘My blood used to replenish their blood supply and delay their deterioration.’

‘Deterioration or deteriorations? Isn’t the word “deterioration” uttered only in the plural?’

‘No, it isn’t.’

‘It never rains but it pours, you know.’

At this point St Peter might have kicked you out of his realm, but exceptionally he had time on his hands or wings and even had an urge to kill it. And he resolved to commit this murder with your generous help. So, for a while, he let you talk nonsense instead of knocking the stuffing out of your body and head.

‘For a day after each transfusion everybody’s appetite and energy improved,’ you went on, unmindful of St Peter’s ironic and sardonic smile. However, he turned serious when you spoke about bloodshed: he mistook you for a veteran of World War II. He even went so far as to open his arms, but then thought better of it and closed his arms once again – the position called ‘deadlock’. Of course you had no intention of entering the army post-mortem; nor did you wish to be branded a common liar. So you uttered the word ‘bloodletting’, whereupon St Peter inquired about the illness you had suffered from before reaching his gate. ‘I know that this method was used with regard to Gogol’s body,’ he said all of a sudden.

‘Transfusion, transfusion,’ you said immediately, and there was a note of desperation in your voice. ‘Actually his doctors made a mistake. What he really needed was blood *transfusion*, not *bloodletting*. “Bloodletting” and “bloodshed” are examples of medical jargon.’

‘As a result, his soul is dead now,’ said St Peter, harking back to Gogol’s *fatum*.

‘You could revive it with my blood,’ you pointed out, pointing at your blood vessels.

Such nonsensical talks are increasingly commonplace everywhere, for their increase does not depend on geography and topography; nor does it depend on what people we are dealing with, and consequently we do not need to probe into the secrets of their brains, IQ’s, passions and perversions. They are all God’s creatures, as some evangelists put it all the time inside and outside the Gospel Mission, and therefore nothing human or godly or godlike is foreign to their numerous natures. And let us not forget that all their natures, I’s, me’s and egos, talk nonsense day in day out. Don’t we come into the open now and then? Don’t we say to our relatives and neighbours, ‘We exchanged commonplaces about the weather over cups of tea?’ Of course we do not acknowledge our perennial attachment to nonsense without which we would not be able to live and prosper as if it were the very air we breathe round the clock. Our nonsense does not go round the clock, to tell the truth, unless we take into consideration our stupid, ridiculous dreams. If we refrain from this unmerciful thought, we might say our nonsense does not *circle* time or ordinary clocks; from time to time it takes a breather as if it had something in common with the air or our lungs. (After all, our nonsense has no affinities with planets, with the sun.) But we do not heave a sigh of relief, saying to ourselves, ‘At last we can see both sense and reason. What’s more, we can see them *clearly*. After all, we believe that we are the only animals to have the power of reason, don’t we?’

For instance, you read the following piece of nonsense, ‘A pill that slashes the risk of dying from heart failure is today given the green light for use on the NHS. Go ahead!’ You buy quite a number of the pills you read about last night and feel much better – ‘much, much better’, as you say to yourself and the same colleagues of yours; they know everything about your heart, failures and achievements. And then you collapse in the middle of a one-way street and a passer-by says to you, after bending over your half-dead body, ‘This is a one-way street. A bad omen.’

‘Why?’ you ask him and yet another passer-by.

‘Because you’re heading towards death. You’ve got no return ticket, you know.’

‘But I thought I’d benefitted from the £3-a-day treatment.’

‘Did you?’

‘Experts describe this treatment as the biggest step forward in 15 years.’

‘This is a one-way street,’ they repeat and you put one of your feet in the grave. After a while, you put the second one in the same grave and take the lift that takes you either down or up. Upon your arrival St Peter or Satan says to you, ‘You took too many pills. The more the better – that’s what you thought at the time. Well, error is human and even angels err sometimes.’

Whatever you think or say about your damnation or salvation is as meaningless as any stuff you can read about anywhere, but at least you seem to bother about your soul, eternity and spiritual wellbeing – whenever you do think about the elect and the reprobate (their otherworldly counterparts). And God might change His mind upon learning how much time you devote to eternal questions, narratives and problems instead of taking care of your face, purse and other pieces of nonsense and anti-sense. He *might* say to Himself, ‘These people deserve to be eternally blessed because they give a lot of thought to eternal matters and problems.’

‘Let me remind You that some time ago You sentenced the same people to *eternal* damnation,’ says Gabriel or Daniel or Judas. ‘What’s the difference between these eternities?’

‘How so?’ The whole universe hears this question put and certified by God.

‘In semiological terms? They are both signs, aren’t they? What’s the difference between these signs?’

Of course all this is nonsense too and you might know that, whatever you do or think, is bound to end in failure; and this ending may occur at the very *beginning* of the process. Actually you never know – however much you may think you know – when and how our beginnings start and where they end; and whether they are the same things as they were at the very start. The plethora of rules and regulations is both contradictory and confusing, as they put it; and they can put it anywhere, everywhere, for the simple reason that all this applies to rules, unruly children and adults, beginnings, ends, tops, bottoms, and so on. A woman realises she is not as beautiful as she should be, considering she is created in the image of God – or of a goddess, in her case. She decides to submit her face to a torture known as the ‘beauty metamorphosis’. Like other earthlings, she always chooses cut-price articles, tickets and people so that, without further ado, she calls a cut-price beautician and says she wishes to live up to her standards – those of a goddess, she adds self-confidently and self-assertively. She goes to his consulting-room and also to his surgery where she sees a great many knives and knife-like, knife-looking instruments. ‘I don’t want to die under knife,’ she says to herself, but she says nothing to the beauty surgeon who, incidentally, happens to be very hard of hearing. ‘This doesn’t really matter,’ she says to herself. ‘After all, he won’t touch my face with his ears.’

Suddenly this woman turns her back on her beauty idea and rushes out of the beauty surgery where all sorts of knives go on glittering brilliantly under the spotlights; and under the sun. On her way home, she calls her friend and says she cannot go on with her project which might kill both the remnants of her beauty and her body. ‘You keep saying you’re going to undergo a major operation. Well, put up or shut up!’ In a fit of pique, the woman retraces her steps. A door, a knob. She twists the knob to the left to open the door. ‘That’s how he’ll twist his knives in my wounds,’ thinks the woman, but once again she says nothing to the beauty doctor. And she even ends up saying nothing to herself, for she accepts her destiny, either tragic or otherwise, and her destiny follows its own itinerary through. So the woman sits down in a sort of armchair and the beauty or rather ugliness

surgeon sets about doing his job and duty; in other words, he accomplishes the task in less than two hours and the result is shown to his client in a mirror. She screams as soon as her reflection meets her eyes. Her eyes meet her eyes and her mouth screams its head off.

This woman, whatever her name is – anyway, this name of hers should be kept off all records and loudspeakers – spent as much as £9,500 on getting implants fitted in Hungary or another ex-Soviet-Bloc country where they cut heads and also some prices we have no wish to face in our own lands and regions. And the same woman says after the ugliness operation, ‘This Eastern butcher butchered my smile.’

‘Are you talking about Eastern Standard Time?’ ask a number of journalists.

‘I’m talking about Eastern blokes or rather ex-Soviet blockheads.’

The same woman – she has not aired *all* her grievances *yet* – says, ‘It’s left me feeling as if I have been butchered, physically assaulted and robbed of my life savings.’ Apparently, before paying this Eastern visit to the blockhead she keeps on talking about, she resolved to put a brave face on it, on whatever can and must happen, because a brave face looks nicer than a cowardly face. This woman is by no means beautiful, judging from the photograph supplied by the same bunch of world-renowned journalists. But everybody believes that a smile, however ugly and unwelcome, can brighten up the world and the lives of those who live in this world of theirs. Besides, every smile is beautiful, according to the admirers of our species whose tastes are influenced by moral issues: smiles are associated with virtues unless we have to face ironic and even malicious smiles. Let us discard them for the time being and analyse the smile the Hungarian butcher saw on his new customer’s face as she came into his office.

She thought her Western smile could seduce an Eastern blockhead into making her as beautiful as Marilyn Monroe or Jessica Whatshersname: she wrongly assumed that money was not a sledgehammer argument in the domain of surgical beauty. According to her train of thought, this barbarian might judge her appearance and way of life thus, ‘This Western customer thinks she’s dealing with a poor guy who spent his teenage years under a communist regime, in a terror-stricken country. She thinks she can buy me and humiliate my pride by means of the handful of pounds she is prepared to pay for her future and uncertain beauty. She just doesn’t realise how irremediably and fatefully ugly she is, considering that she has nothing in common with the proverbial ugly duckling. Nor is she an ugly swan. She’s an ugly woman who can’t even greet her surgeon with a smile. Well, I’ll make her look much uglier than any deadly sin, than all of them put together.’

So he puts all deadly sins together, looks at them for a while and sets about literally knocking her face into shape. As a result, the woman who is still under scrutiny, left his operating table with a ‘bulldog bite’ – a gap between her gums and upper teeth through which food ‘would seep’, as the doctor put it. ‘Should it seep?’ she asked.

‘Pesticides are seeping out of farmland and into the water supply,’ he replied, looking at the ceiling.

‘Are you a guru? A poet?’ she asked anxiously: she knew for sure that no poet could successfully deal with her face and the rest of her body, being fully and exclusively engrossed in rhymes, meters and suchlike.

‘You have to apply for membership of the sports club. But it’s no use applying for membership of the beauty clubs – if you’re not beautiful, you know.’

As a result of the so-called metamorphosis, the woman’s implants failed and were removed – by another Eastern surgeon. This new metamorphosis was so cheap the woman resolved to have all her implants, teeth and gums removed by the same so-called specialist. She hoped he would provide her with a brand new set of teeth

for the same price, but he did nothing of the sort. And when she asked him why he was unwilling to go on, he said, 'I'm an anarchist, Madam. And a nihilist, one of Bazarov's followers. I destroy the world because this should be done before anyone attempts to build anything, to create a masterpiece. You should have gone and seen a master builder.'

Twenty years later, the same woman said to another journalist, 'I am still suffering the aftermath. It's been a nightmare and it's still ongoing.'

'Yet your nightmare has nothing to do with history.'

'How do you mean?'

'According to Joyce, you can't wake from history which is a notorious nightmare we all suffer from. But nothing prevents you waking from the operation you underwent twenty years ago as if paying tribute to Alexander Dumas.'

Speaking to journalists – especially to those who are well-versed in literature – is another nightmare our world-appreciated celebrities may suffer from unless they go to a desert island and build a fortress there: a large strong building or group of buildings which can be defended from attack; unless they install three cannons on top of the walls. (A large, powerful gun fixed to two or four wheels, which fires heavy stone or metal balls.) They should also install three cannons on top of the world: paparazzi are everywhere and their insolence knows no bounds. Nor does their violence.

We are duty bound to speak about the same woman because, thirty years later, she still hangs on every word uttered by the Hungarian face-slasher – as if he were some sort of Satan. He said to her at the end of their immortal talk, 'Do you know why I butchered your smile? Because I saw only your smile, nothing else. And had I seen also the rest of your face, I would have butchered your nose, your eyebrows and cheeks.'

'Your English is too literary,' she said.

'Yes, I've read a lot of English books. In my youth I said to myself I should learn English to inveigle its native speakers into giving me money for their future beauty. I also said to myself that they should say to themselves the following words, "This man speaks our native language beautifully and consequently he'll make me look beautiful. This man is imbued with beauty to the point of radiating it, creating it and rendering everybody beautiful."'

'I'm broke,' says the woman to the butcher's ghost whose visits she puts up with every night, on the stroke of three or four. 'I could forget the money but it's what you left me with which is so painful.'

'If you forget the money, you might also forget your pains,' he answers.

Of course this meditation or harking back to what took place almost 40 years ago may also be regarded as our Bergsonian duration that drags us away from everyday routine, utilitarianism, automatism, and so on. Our woman no longer cares about make-up and whatever goes with it: beauty, waste of time, futility, the neglect of God and spiritual matters, holding culture in contempt, the decay of skin. Minor skin imperfections can usually be disguised with a spot of make-up, but our woman is aware of the number of *imperfections* she would have to cope with if she decided to disguise them by means of a face/day/night cream. And if one of her friends points out that she might make use of cosmetics and other beauty products, she answers thus, 'They're not organic enough and my health is priceless. No cut-health procedures are envisaged for the rest of my life. Besides, these

creams disfigure you even more than cut-face doctors. Do you remember Juliet? Not Shakespeare's Juliet – *our* Juliet? With her make-up and strange clothes, she looked like nothing on Earth. Do you want me to become nothing? On Earth?' It is true that none of her friends or enemies can say she fritters money away on expensive make-up: even the cheapest make-up cannot be found in her bathroom. Besides, its absence from her flat enables her to cry as often as she wishes and no one is likely to say to her, after putting his or her hand on her shoulder, 'Don't cry, or your make-up will run.'

This woman's brain repeats a few sentences she has learnt in the course of these Dumanian or Dumanesque years such as, 'The "extremely dangerous" high-speed drills, which look identical to a reputable brand, were sold at knock-down prices by a fraudster on eBay. But the devices can shatter during use.' These knock-down English-studying surgeons still lay in wait for their gullible Western budget-cautious victims whose smiles remain after their faces' Lewis-Carroll-inspired departures. And everyone can see to what extent these smiles were butchered and botched by cut-everything Eastern specialists. What may appear bizarre in the context of this predicament is the woman's stubbornness: she still does not realise that neither her smile nor the rest of her physical body count in the realms of spirituality, forgiveness, astral bodies and grand narratives to which our Bergsonian duration should be devoted on a regular basis – upon awakening, for instance. Of course this duration is usually associated with childhood and the stock or treasure of its memories – thanks to Proust whose attachment to his dying relatives prevented him from thinking in terms of the future. Whenever his grandmother saw him in an armchair, his eyes staring at nothing real and nobody present, she said to herself, 'Once again my Proust is in the past. All his aunts and their infusions are just a few things of the past. It's a pity his English is so bad – he could read H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come*.'

Yes, you have an appointment on which your future depends and hangs, but you stop in your tracks and fling yourself (*Geworfenheit*) into your childhood. (My mother used to give me fruit drops, honey drops and also tear drops – whenever she did not come to my room to kiss me goodnight.) You even recall the shop where she used to buy all these sweet enemies of your health – of your teeth, among other parts of your physical substance. You ate, munched these drops, they dropped into your stomach and a few years would quit your life expectancy to lodge out of your reach somewhere; God knows where, as the Russians put it whenever they soberly realise they can quit neither smoking nor drinking vodka and bad champagne.

Your mother used to call you '*mon petit*' – in French, and you knew – and so did I – that these two words meant 'my little one', which roughly corresponded to your size and dimensions. Of course you wished to be called 'My big one', but your mother said you were not big enough for such an appellation. As a child, my brother received the appellation 'Mouse' and logically enough my father called me 'Cat'. He might also have called me 'Dog' or 'Tiger', given his infatuation with William Blake's poetry, but he never did and this state of tigerlessness belongs to the group of bad memories on which I am reluctant to fall back, even in a moment of need – when the present grows as unbearable as the future. Some think that if our salvation is within our reach somehow, its appearance and action lie in our mother's bosom so we had better recall our mother as often as possible: her knees, her breasts, her beauty spots, her lisping words. And the way her high-heeled shoes negotiated staircases – in castles and palaces – and also muddy hillsides.

So, instead of thinking in terms of money and about it, you had better revert to the halcyon days of your youth spent mostly on your mother's lap to the accompaniment of her lisping words. My tsi, my tse, my tsw, she used to say as she stroked your hair absentmindedly; and this absence and half-mindedness would result in a

nonchalant, 18th-century negligence you like reading about in Dumas' and Eugène Sue's novels. Today I put my hand on my head where the rest of my hair awaits a sort of caress or rather a caress of sorts which is much inferior to what I experienced in my childhood when my mother, my grandmother, my aunt and all their relatives pampered my body every night and every other morn. My favourite aunt still pampers her dog with the finest steak and salmon, and I often ask her, 'Why don't you pamper me in the same fashion?'

'Because you're a cat,' she answers and my whole childhood or rather its episodes and slices of kind-heartedness come to me in dribs and drabs. Whenever they come in chunks or in crowds – perish the thought and the word – I can hardly breathe and suffocate as a series of bear hugs remind me of my cousins and their boisterous dispositions. Of course it is better to think about the bullies my aunts used to bring to my parent's estate than to care about my smile and my teeth that continue to fall as if they were dead or half-dead leaves more or less attached to my tree, my trunk. When in search of my identity, I say to myself, 'The way that the trunk of a tree divides into smaller and smaller branches and twigs is an approximate fractal pattern.' I do not understand what that means, but all that seems to suit my purpose, nonetheless or in spite of everything. And I add as I listen to my private speech, 'This tree trunk sounds hollow.' And I knock on my chest as if I could enter it once and for all; as if my chest were my mother's womb. Yes, some scholars affirm that the knocking one hears in *Macbeth* concerns our mothers' wombs. How? Do our mothers always murder us? And yet we yearn to return to their wombs; a death instinct, no doubt.

So you are different – a lone wolf, probably; or a lone tiger. Anyway, you are in a class of your own because other people go and get things, a lot of things and these things continue to fill their houses up to the brim so that, at the end of a year or two, both their houses and their gardens are cluttered with ornaments – with status symbols, as they say nowadays. And they say about you, shaking their heads and occasionally their bodies, 'He's always harking back to his childhood and saying how things were better then.' They also touch upon your mother, saying you still suck at her breast, even at work – in your office, at your writing desk. These people do not realise that the only way to indulge in what you call 'my Bergsonian duration' is to give yourself over to the past where your ecstasies, your pure and authentic ecstasies lie and stand hidden. Everything grows dirty with the passing of the years and that is why we look so tenderly at children, saying to them, 'You know the truth and you feel it with your own body.' And we envy them, these children of ours or theirs – no matter whose children we are looking at during our walks in parks – because they do not need to fall back on anything and wait impatiently for a sort of second childhood that is always second in comparison with the first, authentic, fresh childhood we enjoy in our childhood.

After such an immersion in the pure duration described by Bergson, Proust and yourself, you are loath to return to a time where a number of women do their best to improve upon their smiles and grimaces. They think their grimaces are not frightful enough: no one leaves them in peace after seeing the *present* grimaces on their faces. And even when they brandish their fists, their eyes sending balls of fire in the direction of their adversaries, no one is really afraid of them: their adversaries and ordinary bystanders laugh their heads off and they or you – brandishers and grimacers – go away empty-handed and empty-headed; and empty-bodied, to some extent. So the latter go to a grimace-surgeon and increase the quantity of horror in their dissatisfied faces. After that long visit, they pay a longer visit to a boxer who works with them on their fists that grow bigger and bigger as the number of adversaries increase – sometimes in the twinkling of an eye. You look at all these

unworthy occupations – all of humanity is demeaned by such episodes – and say to yourself as you once again hark back to your mummy and daddy and sisterdy: ‘My duration is above any time-loaded suspicion.’

You go further and further through the tunnel at the end of which there stands or lies your mother’s womb. This does not mean you wish to enter it, seeking asylum and ‘my protection from the outside world’, as your mother used to put it. Of course a great many psychiatrists and psychoanalysts speak of this phenomenon at length, which does not surprise you in the least: the world is cliché-ridden and even your mother’s womb would not protect you now from these clichés, from their non-stop avalanche. They say to you, ‘I know, I know – you wish to return home forever.’

‘No, I didn’t like the house where I was born and lived for 15 years.’

‘But you did love your parents, didn’t you?’

‘I did.’

‘And the love you felt for your mother’s womb and its protection was as overweening as my ambition.’

‘Your ambition?’

‘Yes. I’m ambitious to the point of being willing to put you back into your mother’s womb – literally, that is. Physically and literally.’

‘But my mother died many years ago.’

‘You’re right – we’re still faced with the daunting prospect of raising your mother’s womb from the dead.’

‘What about the rest of my mother? Her knees, her hands, her breasts, her lips?’

‘Her womb would meet our requirements, you know.’

You know that, to meet this objective, you need not go to the cemetery, calling your spade a spade as you proceed down the road that leads to your mother’s tomb and womb. You just have to go down, down and down – as far as your babyhood at the end of which there is the tunnel we speak of so often; in connection with our hopes, convalescences and fortunes. But your mother’s womb is *the* tunnel and you are supposed not to confuse it with dubious, dirty tunnels – ‘you sex maniac, you,’ as your shrink puts it. So you continue your descent and suddenly land up in a church where a priest seems to welcome you with open arms. At least his arms are wide open and the end of your road coincides with these arms and their so-called protection, possession and what not. According to some churchgoers, your priest’s hands are directly linked to those of God Himself; at least they obey His commands. For instance, God says, ‘You should love your neighbours and the rest of humankind,’ and your priest’s hands pour some water on your head. You were too young in those days so you cannot recall the ritual as a result of which you become a member of the Christian Church, but your shrink is by your side and you should trust both his methods and his faith in your mother’s womb, its healing and protective properties. ‘You don’t remember your baptism, do you?’ he asks.

‘I do not,’ you answer.

‘God helps those who help themselves,’ says the shrink pointing at a grain of sand. ‘Does this grain remind you of something?’

‘It does.’

‘Of what does it remind you? Of miles of golden sands?’

‘Let me think.’

‘Unfortunately the sands of time are running out, you know. So you have no time on your hands. Neither do I – my next hypochondriac is waiting for me already.’

You are supposed to answer thus, ‘This grain reminds me of my childhood into which I should descend to find my mother’s womb where I could settle forever. I used to play in the sand all day long whenever my parents spent their holidays on the Black Sea or on the Baltic Sea or on the Mediterranean Sea. All day long I was tracing patterns in the sand with a stick. I would also wriggle my toes in the sand – one of my favourite pastimes, you know. Even today, in this day and age, at my age, I like to feel the sand between my toes. And yet some of these toes are already in the grave, I’m sorry to realise and admit. By midday the sand was too hot to walk on, if I remember rightly.’ At this point you are likely to be interrupted by your shrink (or shrinker) who must guide you towards your baptism – away from the Mediterranean Sea you are so fond of on the threshold of death. And you say at last, ‘I used to scoop the sand into a bucket with my hands.’

‘Do you remember the priest now? His hands?’

‘He scooped up some water and poured it on my head.’

‘What happened next?’

‘*Geworfenheit*.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘He flung me into a huge basin.’ (Some shrinks and jerks do not know the first thing about Heidegger’s terminology.)

There are people whose point of view does not budge, for all the metamorphoses they undergo during their up-and-down lives that might look like a number of roller coasters, if you choose to look at them in a roller-coaster mood. These people see and judge everything in terms of ascents and descents as if there were no flat countries in our world – no Flanders, for instance. (‘O my *plat pays*, my flat country,’ as Jacques Brel puts it somewhere.) But to be reborn, as some people put it – newborn Christians, for instance – you have to go back to your baptism which is your second birth situated within your childhood, considering that this time you are dealing with your recollection, not with the action itself. So your shrink, who shrinks from nothing, as you must know, leads you towards your baptism thanks to which you may be reborn spiritually, on the spiritual plane, before being reborn for good in your mother’s womb. All this may seem tedious to those who enjoy themselves around golf links, paying no attention to spirituality, St Augustine and predestination. ‘Every link is an opportunity to be reborn,’ they might say, if they ever thought and lived in these terms. They do not, and that is why they are happy, according to those who think your ignorance is your chief and only blessing.

You have to be a bit devious if you are going to succeed in business and every shrink is aware of this partial truth. (Whatever you think about this maxim of sorts, you cannot believe it is the Absolute and Only Truth.) For some reason, most shrinks think you should go as far as your birth, baptism and your mother’s and sister’s wombs to find your way to salvation and redemption. Did you sleep with your mother? Did you sleep with your sister? Did your sister ever call you, ‘My baby’? Were you a member of her dollhouse’s household?

You say to your shrink, ‘I remember a documentary in which a Russian priest flung a baby into a basin. The baby was crying and screaming, and his face was all blotchy. A real *Geworfenheit*, you know. And he was quite aware of this Heideggerian fact, in spite of his age and brainlessness and unwellreadness. And then the priest pulled him up by his hair, as Munhausen did. Do *you* remember the spelling?’

‘The spelling doesn’t count,’ says the shrink. ‘Are you speaking of this baron?’

‘I am.’

‘But he pulled *himself* out of the bog, if I remember rightly.’

‘What difference does that make?’

Up and down, up and down. Upstairs, Downstairs, as the title of an English TV series goes. Why can’t we stay inbetweenstairs? In the middle, not in a muddle? After all, upstairs and downstairs you just muddle along. Upstairs you are wobbly, shaky, in danger of losing balance. Downstairs you crawl on all fours, and where there are all fours, there is also the mud.

Of course human pleasures are muddy – in the brains or spirits of deeply religious individuals who spend their lives upstairs and climb Jacob’s ladder whenever their bouts of gout allow them to do so without too much trouble, stops and cramps. And knowledge is a superfluous piece of knowledge, so to speak: if your faith saves you every morn and every night, you do not need philosophers, writers, composers and painters whose works create a diversion to distract you while others go to heaven in dribs and drabs or in flocks. Shoplifters often work in pairs, with one creating a diversion to distract the shop assistants while the other steals the goods. That is how artists proceed: they create a diversion while the others replace you on this Earth and in Heaven. Something outside the window distracted my cat.

If I think in terms of ascents and descents I remember either Hegel or Gorky (*The Lower Depth, At the Bottom, Down and Out.*) Hegel was always going higher and higher as if you could be happy, believe in God, dance with Zarathustra and breathe unpolluted air only on top of Everest, Ararat, Almamaterat and Matriarhat; or just because of one’s hat that is usually higher than one’s head unless one prefers to wear one’s hat under one’s chin. You cannot wear your second head above your first one: you have no second head within your reach unless you killed your ancestor and put his head on your wall some time ago. In this case, you can put his head on your head and wear both heads for a while, trying to find out if the presence of the second head makes your only head think higher, loftier, spiritualier, mysticilier, divinlier – purer, to put it mildly and earthily. Purer, chastier, innocentlier, sincerilier, virginier, Maryer.

I saw a documentary that showed a baby screaming his head off, his lungs out, his body away. A priest was on the point of flinging him into a basin where God was to receive his soul and even his body despite the latter’s reluctance to join anything save Kings’ treasured sleep, as depicted by Shakespeare and John Gielgud. Yes, the baby was yearning for sleep, but any ritual requires your wide-awakened soul, body and spirit, and this baby had only his body and soul to offer to the angel who supervised the ritual imposed upon both the father and mother of the boy whose body kept going down and up like a yo-yo, aïe-aïe, God-God, Mary-Mary, Son-Son, and so on. (And so sun.)

And even those who believe neither in God nor in baptism and the Holy Virgin may think that, whatever they do and hope for, follows in the footsteps or rather in the yos-yos of this movement epitomised by the Russian priest. You are thrown somewhere – everyone agrees on this issue, saying that the body is so inert it might stay where it is for centuries, but for a hand that throws it somewhere, mainly out of the window, even if this window is purely symbolical. You find yourself at the bottom of the heap and then you begin to hope and say to yourself that poets say bottoms and tops are interchangeable. And it is mostly at the bottom that your ascension starts so you should not mind going down and down unless you are already at the very bottom of all

the heaps you have come across in the course of your existence. And if there is only one heap you are not aware of, you should search for it day and night as if it were another Grail equipped with another code. Like a hippopotamus wallowing in mud, you spent some time at the bottom of this Grail of yours and then your ascension comes to you and you begin to *mount your throne*, figuratively speaking.

For some reason – and this reason is as obscure as other reasons and causes are – you think there are bottoms and windows out of which your poor self was flung at the beginning of times, of your times that tick-tack every second, which reminds you that you are going to die, whatever happens on this Earth and elsewhere. Suppose all the migrants they talk about in newspapers come and settle in your neighbourhood, stealing everyone's money and raping all the daughters and mothers that can be found not only in your neighbourhood, but virtually everywhere. Yet you will die as if nothing had happened. So nothing happens except your death that proceeds in accordance with its own golden rules and you say to yourself, echoing a famous English poet, 'All is imaginable, unimaginable, virtual, real, wonderful, unwonderful, underwonderful.'

Well, try and imagine a hand that puts you on a table instead of flinging you out of a cosmic window highly praised by Heidegger who used to sing the praises of Hitler's hands. 'Look at his hands, look at his hands, look at his hands, you fools.' This hand – for once, we are not dealing with Hitler's hand – puts you on a table, on an impeccable horizontality; instead of flinging you into the world the mud of which has become proverbial in the course of all our centuries. What could you complain of under the circumstances? Of course you are allowed to go on with your questioning which makes a human being out of you, out of a 'sticky mass at the bottom of the pan', as Dante put it as he endeavoured to described one of his victims. So you go on and ask, 'What kind of table is it?'

'It's a kitchen table, my dear,' you hear.

'Are you about to cut me into pieces? For your stew?'

'No. You belong to the elect, you know.'

'You mean I'm to become a Wiener Schnitzel?'

'Not quite.'

'Just another Beef Stroganoff?'

So you are on a table and you do not even wonder what you are doing on this table or any other table our world can offer you gratis, given that you did not ask for anything before coming into this world of ours: I am in this world and consequently can say it is the world of *ours*; even if this world is not *mine*. No one says, 'You're welcome to this world and here are chocolates you can enjoy inside it.'

'Is there any death in the world I've been thrown into?' you ask those people, whoever they are. And you are entitled to ask this question, according to the register kept by Gabriel or Azrael. Apparently the latter is sitting in front of a book where you can see a great many names he writes down, down, down, flinging brand new beings into the world. Of course you wish to know why he does not write *up* to enable them to ascend to the stars and Paradise without devoting their times to toil and trouble, to divorces and punches on the noses. He says you should learn the English language before daring to address him in person; and he leaves your question unanswered or open, as they say now when talking about questions and works of art. 'They are open,' they say, 'and so you can think whatever you like. Let your imagination run away with you – or run amok, if you prefer.'

All this is preferable to what you're taught at school where you have to learn a lot of texts by heart instead of working on your own creative impulses.'

So Azrael does not say to you he is mainly the Angel of Death and so takes care of the newborn only in his spare time. Naïvely you believe that the world you have been projected into is devoid of death: only life thrives within its bounds, you say to yourself as you look at a few clouds and flowers. And then a serpent comes and you realise you have just been bitten by this serpent which is associated in your mind with another serpent – the Serpent or the Devil. So you were not paying much attention to the serpent you spotted in the grass: you thought the serpent in question would speak to you about the forbidden fruit and you had a beautiful answer in your head. You were sure that thanks to this answer you would be granted a personal interview with the Almighty Himself. Just before the bite that seems to have given rise to a serious, if not a deadly wound, you repeated your lesson as follows, 'I know what happened to my predecessors, to my great-grand-grand-great-grand uncle, Uncle Adam. Don't talk to me like that, you dirty serpent, you. You, the Devil Incarnate, You. Whatever you say, I won't partake of this fruit.'

"Partake" is an old-fashioned word,' says the Serpent.

'But it can be used in a humorous fashion, can't it? You lay yourself open to ridicule talking like that. As if I hadn't read the Bible, the very beginning of it. I admit I fell asleep after a couple of hours – the Book is boring. But I did read the beginning and so I'm aware of Adam's fault and fall. I won't eat anything, You Dirty Brute. I'm not hungry, You know.'

'Aren't you so hungry you could eat a horse?' asks the Serpent.

'I might eat a horse, but I'll never partake of the forbidden fruit. And I'll hold your plans up to ridicule as long as you stay in close proximity to my body.'

'There's such a thing as a forbidden horse, you know.'

If you remove both pleasure and knowledge from your life – we are still talking about *human* life – you might become serene and Buddha-like. You have already been Mohammed-like (your journey through heaven), Adam-like (Adam +, for you did not eat the fruit), Christ-like (you spend days and nights on your private cross), Moses-like (you keep pointing to the Promised Land), and so on. You are still in the middle of the table where someone put you some time ago – gently, gently, as if you were made of china. Of course you are immediately reminded of china shops and bulls whose wild and hardly predictable behaviour upsets armchairs, tables and many, many plans and projects. But there are no bulls in the room where you found yourself and you cross first yourself and then your heart, hoping this sign will help you cope with the outside and inside worlds.

But first you should learn what they all mean by the words 'knowledge' and 'pleasure', otherwise you may be led astray by your own ignorance which, according to the same people, is a blessing in disguise. Of course you do not have to dabble in politics and physics: you can live and prosper even if your knowledge of the world is limited by Newton's narrow-minded outlook. Anyway, you are not likely to travel as fast as light and your speed, however breathtaking, will never approach the figures one uses to indicate the speed of light. Your time will not go slowly to enable you to outlive all your relatives, friends and also the trees you can see and admire in your garden. As for quantum mechanics, you do not need them either because you play dice and do not care whether God plays this game too: after all, you do not play with God, do you? But you should know that if a

serpent bites you, you had better cut off the member in the middle of which this vicious bite blooms like a flower. And you should not listen to those who might speak to you thus, ‘This flower will bloom all through the summer,’ because it is not true: you will die within five minutes if this flower remains on your body and does not land up in a rubbish bin – in the twinkling of an eye.

Besides, you should not recite the Bible at the earliest opportunity: your encounter with the serpent does not call for any verse one can find in the Book. We all know that the Book can answer all our questions, provided we read it carefully and learn by heart all the relevant passages we traditionally find in it on a regular basis. (Only what we know by heart can be studied and analysed properly.) And since all the letters printed in the Book are relevant, helpful and therapeutic, we had better learn the whole book by heart. But there are always exceptions to this and other rules: sometimes we must cut off one of our arms because of its encounter with a serpent and not because it is about to touch a beautiful woman who happens to be our neighbour’s wife.

So we may be led astray by the confidence we habitually place in the Bible: not every serpent should be argued with whenever one sees it flicker its tongue at one’s calf. In this case it is much more useful to withdraw the calf and batter the serpent to death with a rifle-butt. Actually, nowadays we prefer to call serpents ‘snakes’ unless we are eager to bring out its affinities with the Devil or Satan whose role in the corruption of humankind is known even to those who have never read the Bible and consequently know nothing about the forbidden fruit and its inorganic, pesticide-affected qualities. According to green activists, all fruit is forbidden nowadays, but we continue to eat it, caring only about its spiritual contents and St Augustine’s teaching.

Well, we are still on the table we might call proverbial unless we are keen to find out what table we have been deposited on by a well-wisher who still believes one should replenish the Earth. He or she puts your body on this table – an operating table, for all I know – and says to his guardian angel, ‘You see, I’ve done my bit in spite of the fact that I can’t have children, according to my doctor. I have no wife, no husband, but I’ve found this body on my doormat. I suppose it came out of the blue last night when I was fast asleep. So I didn’t really hear any bang, either big or small, that this body might have produced as it landed on my doormat, in front of my front door. Here it is. I hope this creature, be it a he or a she, will be happy in our world. Anyway, I’ll pray for him or shim – or her, or her – both day and night.’

Of course you must know who you are unless you declare, when questioned by a police officer, ‘I was run over by a car and the last thing I recall is a tyre that squashed my face and memory.’

‘Were you run over on this table?’

‘Somewhere,’ you answer.

‘Do you know what kind of table it is and has always been?’

‘Not have the foggiest.’

‘Are you a foreigner?’

‘Not have the foggiest.’

At this point you had better not reveal your full knowledge of the English language, which might corroborate the theory you are trying to implant in the authorities, officials and even *neutral* bystanders: you say to yourself – and you are partly right – that no human is completely neutral, being either your rival or associate. And even your associates, advocates and partisans may turn out to be your fiercest rivals, your potential and actual murderers. So you should pretend to be different from what you are, going as far as signing a document stating you have lost your memory in the aftermath of a car accident you know nothing about. (You know

everything about, according to your statement: that tyre, those tyres.) They say that prevention is better than cure; you say, ‘Pretention is better than anything.’

Suppose it is a kitchen table and you are about to be cut into a multitude of pieces that might become a dish – not in the twinkling of an eye, as the saying goes, but otherwise, differently; after all, not everything is done at the push of a button. This is what we ordinarily call ‘life’ and the Creator of this life may stew in his or her own juice, as another saying or idiom goes. And so you are not about to die, contrary to what many people think when they say, ‘You die as soon as you are born.’ Not quite, not quite – let us not forget the stew you share with the Creator. You are lying on the kitchen table and they are about to cut you into pieces, anxious not to miss any part of the recipe known as the ‘Recipe for the proverbial Stew’. That is what human life is about: there are stews, juices, cuts, knives, murders, pleasures and the knowledge that informs you of all these tortures. Even Plato (or Socrates) realises that you cannot realise how happy you are if your mind is not on: someone – the same Creator – must have switched it off at some point. So you experience a great many pleasures, but you know nothing about them, and your ignorance extends to such an extent that you are unable to experience these pleasures once more – no eternal recurrence, in other words.

A very beautiful woman – another Helen of Troy or of Joy – strips all her clothes off. You enjoy her theatricals or spectacles, but when you are in need of another form of entertainment, of any entertainment, you cannot recall this striptease which might make you happy once again, keeping you away from suicidal impulses that seem to prod you into joining the clubs situated beyond this life of yours. It is as if someone – the same Creator or Destroyer – were pestering you through a number of questions such as, ‘What are you doing on this table, my boy? Wouldn’t you be better *under* the table?’

‘I wouldn’t,’ you answer because the Bible teaches you the truth and nothing but the truth with all the capitals you can lay your hands on. (It is considered rude to use capital letters in an email because it looks like I AM ALWAYS RIGHT, YOU STUPID JERKS.) And the truth taught by the Bible talks to you thus, ‘There are tempters everywhere – you shouldn’t always view the other side of the coin in terms of serpents. This man – it’s a man for once – wants you to drink a lot of booze. Don’t listen to him, and say “no” whenever he talks to you.’

So you say, ‘No.’

‘Don’t you want to drink this bottle with me? Don’t you wish to share my joy?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t you want to drink me under the table?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t you want *me* to drink *you* under the table?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t you realise you’d be much better *under* the table?’

‘No.’

‘Do you feel comfortable *on* the table?’

‘No.’

‘Can you say, “I slept very soundly, thank you – the bed was really comfortable”?’

‘No.’

‘Don’t you wish to sleep and live soundly? Let me sit you up on the table so you’ll be more comfortable.’

At some point you are bound to realise that a bed – any bed, for that matter and better – is much more comfortable than a table, even if your body happens to deal with a dinner table. (To *dine* with a dinner table.) But then you hear the word ‘under’ and you realise once again – you can realise as many as a thousand things in the course of one afternoon – that you are being flung under everything, which puts you at the bottom of the proverbial heap about which you will never know enough to realise how far you have been borne in the course of your peregrinations. ‘*Geworfenheit*’ resounds in your mind and even in your stomach, and you come to grips with Heidegger’s philosophy once again as if there were no other philosophies or ways of death in the whole world.

All right, you are still on the table, waiting for a knife, for a stew destined for other people or for the European market: sometimes you had better think big, otherwise you might think small; and you do not like thinking small; nobody does, with the exception of saints and the wise who may think and wish whatever they wish as long as they do not interfere with our ways and days. So you are on the table, trying to find out who you are and what you are doing where you are, assuming you are somewhere and not nowhere, as some mystics say day in day out. All right, you are on one of the dinner tables one has to put up with in one’s world, provided there is a world one can write home about; provided there is a sort of home one can write to, which can be done if one is provided with this home’s address. In one of Chekhov’s stories a little boy writes a letter to his grandfather to say he is beaten to death on a regular basis; actually he dies on a regular basis and that is what he wants to impart to his grandfather who does not understand our jargon: he still thinks that the verb ‘to impart’ is used worldwide to convey the simple and only truth: one can learn *something* in this world of one’s.

So they begin to cut you into pieces or bits, depending on what kind of dish you are supposed to make within the framework of the universal picture aimed at proving that God exists and that He is the only Creator of the universe, of universal harmony and of the best possible and impossible worlds. You take a huge number of impossible worlds – all worlds are impossible, as a matter of fact – and create a huge harmony out of them, out of it, out of everything and everyone. And this harmony resounds across the same cosmos and universe; and this harmony sounds like Mozart’s symphonies, requiems and whatnots. You can sound like whatever you wish on condition that you sound like Mozart’s creative output.

You are a stew or a beef Stroganoff, eef, Eve. You are Eve because nowadays everyone is both a man and a woman, otherwise they would not say ‘he or she’, whenever they speak of human beings or cats or dogs. Don’t they say, ‘It’s raining cats and dogs and hes and shes’? They do and the rain continues to destroy what is usually described as follows, ‘The dappled sunlight fell across her face as she lay beneath the tree.’ The rains and cats go on and suddenly the dappled sunlight they talk about in newspapers disappears and you see only cats, dogs and rains that are somehow linked to all these dogs, cats and suns one can see somewhere, not necessarily in England, France, Belgium, Russia or Germany.

You are a cat, a dog and the rain you see on your windows and windowsill; you are also yourself, but the point is you do not know who you are. And once again you repeat the formula you learnt by heart, by soul and by every fibre of your body, ‘Not have the foggiest.’ In your body one could find a few fibres whose knowledge is not up to other fibres’ standards. They still say, ‘I know, I know,’ laying themselves open to ridicule. (And ridicule is always open, *croyez-moi*.) You are on the table, whatever the table you are talking about is and strives to be in order to be a table and not a mere chair. So it is the table you are talking about, which certifies what it does or does not certify. Anyway (be that as it may), I hereby certify that the *above* information is true and

accurate. The information *below* is true too, whatever they say, write and certify: they are drunk and consequently their certificates cannot be anything but the truth. They are everything but the truth, so be it and help me God.

Whatever you have already undergone – and you have undergone a lot – to the point of being gone and *undergone*, you know: you are still on the table and so have to answer one question that concerns yourself, only yourself, not your judges, your last judges; for once. The question sounds thus, ‘How will you live?’ The sounds die, but the question does not; and so you have to answer it, otherwise your life will have no meaning, as they say. ‘What’s the meaning of your life?’ they ask.

‘I mean to live,’ you answer. I could also supply the same answer to the same inquisitors. So I do, as a matter of fact and act.

‘Why are you on the table?’

‘I don’t know,’ I answer.

‘Would you mind becoming a dish?’

‘I would not. I’m in God’s capable hands.’

‘A dish to set before God?’

So you become a dish. And whatever you become, I become as well because we are neighbours and our cheeks lie very close to each other: you can slap or kiss my cheeks whenever you wish. But we have a dish on our hands and we get it over and done with before it is too late, as they always say, afraid as they are of being late, of losing everything down to the last handful of dollars. So you must decide what kind of dish you are and for once you are free to choose *something* instead of being imposed upon by fatums, fathers, authorities, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Joseph Vissarionovich Jughashvili, and so on. You pick up a book you have just spotted on one of your shelves and open it in your search for a succulent dish you might become as you fulfil your destiny and become what you are. All this rigmarole goes through your head while you go on consulting the book of recipes written by Alain Chapel, one of your favourite cooks. You choose a sophisticated recipe, translate it into English and wait for a woman to come and cook your body and soul in accordance with the words you have found in Chapel’s book. A woman comes and you say to yourself, ‘Mary’s agreed to cook my substance so that gets/lets me off the hook. At least I know now who I am and with what I might be eaten, as the Russians say and do.’

The rigmarole goes on, for all your efforts aimed at organising your interior monologue which is even more disorganised and ludicrous than whatever you light upon when leafing through Joyce’s *Ulysses*, let alone his wakes, figs and fugues. (Or through Faulkner’s *Sound and Fury*; not through Shakespeare’s ones, though.) There are many doubts and inaccuracies in your head or whatever you mistake for such, and you decide to start from scratch and move forward until you reach the stage you could described as follows, ‘I’ve come up to scratch.’ Of course you cannot help thinking of Descartes in this context, amidst all the scratches you have already found within it.

First of all you take an oath of allegiance to the truth and its nothingness – as Descartes did at some point when he discarded the Big *Trompeur* (Huge Deceiver) whose affinities with Satan cannot be denied either by Big Deniers or by Denigrators. All right, you assume and admit you are in a prison – as a result of the ritual carried out by a Bad Demiurge who flung you – *geworfen* you – into the world without showing you any permission, however unofficial and unauthentic. And if you complain as you continue to lie on this table or on

someone's plate, He answers almost vulgarly, 'I've received permission to go ahead with your birth in spite of opposition from local residents.' 'No point in arguing with the demiurges,' you say to yourself, focusing your attention on the definition of the place where you found yourself several hours ago.

Well, you are in a prison where you think, exist and complain about your existence, airing your grievances day in day out day over. Of course you remember that it is sometimes easier to illustrate an abstract concept by analogy with something concrete, and a prison is an abstract concept, considering the number of times it has been used as a symbol, a trope, a lack of hope, and so on. That is why you end up dragging in Breivik and his prison cell which you seem to appreciate a lot, for all the spite and indignation you feel upon hearing this Hitleric (and choleric) name. You also remember that Breivik lives in three separate cells of eight square meters each and that in the second room he has a table and a typewriter. The third is his mini-gym; it contains a treadmill, a spinning bicycle and an elliptical trainer.

I, for one, have no mini-gym, let alone maxi this or that, and consequently I am not really in a prison where one can develop the shoulder and back muscles thanks to the exercise designed to develop them and immortalise their owner. You get a life sentence and thanks to these apparatuses you live on and on; you live away and your jailers continue to put the dishes borrowed from Chapel's and Girardet's books in front of you. But not everyone deserves such treatment and very few people are as renowned as Andrash or Anderson Breivik – thanks to the number of victims attributed to his indefatigable gun. (Even Bill Gates is less well-known than our hero or anti-hero.) 'I was wondering how many people I needed to kill to be read,' he said after he had committed his acts of murder in 2011. 'A dozen people will be enough,' he said to himself. I, for one, have never killed anyone, with the exception of a few flies.

'Almost as soon as Breivik's name became known after his arrest, extremists began lionising him. His so-called manifest, "2083 – A European Declaration of Independence," was seen as valuable reading material. Right-wing blogs and social media accounts frequently praised him. Breivik was particularly popular in Russia. "Glory to Anders Breivik" was chanted in the nationalist movement's annual Russian March in central Moscow. Breivik was "a holy man" whose acts "lit up" the darkness, his fans wrote.' He is still a holy man, given his physical and even spiritual attachment to the treadmill, the spinning bicycle and the elliptical trainer. These acts of his do not literally light up the darkness – he illuminates nothing as he pedals his bicycle up a number of imaginary hills – but his manifesto is a sort of pillow book one consults more often than Sei Shonagon's (Sheraton's?) *Pillow Book*.

If you kill 69 people, you kill two birds with one stone: your book goes to number two in the bestseller list – right after *The 69 Shades of Our Earl Grey* – and you are offered a fully equipped, if not a maxi, gym (a waste of taxpayers' money). But if you limit your participation in world massacres to flies and rolled-up newspapers, sooner or later you will be run over by a lorry – genuine bicycles do not enjoy the protection provided by the walls of any gym, be it mini, maxi or run-of-the-treadmill.

Of course you are bound to come up against many problems that assail you with insults and abuse, if you prove to be unable to deal with them on the spot. And the spot is still the same: a kitchen or a dinner table, an airport where we land up after being flung from Wuthering heights or Washington ones – call them what you wish. You may even go or fly so far as to call them Paradise Lost, but names and cities do not give you a helping hand and

so you are likely to stay on your hateful hook until you decide what to do with your life, as a French poet said. You had better not take too many drugs because, according to the police and many journalists, we are facing a lethal epidemic of drug drivers and that is a bad omen: many little girls and boys will be run over before the leap-and-bound progress of our medical science ensures their lifelong immortality – whatever happens on the road in Kerouac's absence. (Some time ago I did all I could to fall in love with this insignificant, roadside writer.) So you swallow no drugs and no needles introduce their lethal doses into the innocent veins you need to get your driving licence in time for your next holiday.

Politicians warned that they raised 'massive concern' about just how many people were now drug-driving – which is responsible for 200 deaths on the roads every year. You look up, spot this massive concern that is hanging over all of us and take an oath and swear to God and on your mother's grave: 'Never, never, o never, will I give myself injections and swallow fumes.' All right, you just drink vodka and do not drive anything – not even Breivik's bicycle that you could ride even after eating several pounds of cocaine, cannabis or other banned highs (Drugs Heights). And you resolve to apply Kant's principle saying you should act in such a way that your behaviour might be regarded as a sort of universal law upon which the whole of humanity will forever model its and their conducts. Suppose you swat a fly and the entire world population sets about swatting flies – as the Chinese did in the last century, after their own October Revolution. But if there are no flies in the world, there will be many bugs traditionally devoured by flies and suchlike; and so on and so forth. And suddenly you realise you suffer from this and that cancer for the simple reason that, unaided by flies and their bee-like lives, your organism refuses to fight off whatever is fatal and violent (*foudroyant*).

So you try and picture to yourself a situation in which you take a drug and drive to the end of the world – or to where your eyes look, as the Russians put it. (The Russian language is inexhaustible.) On your way or rather on the road, you run over a lot of little boys and girls, which is a natural outcome of your irresponsible behaviour. Suppose you set yourself up as a lawgiver and this behaviour of yours spreads so wide you see only drug-loving drivers on the surface of the Earth; yourself included. Once at home, in the depths of your favourite armchair, you learn that quite a few parents campaign for a zero-tolerance stance on drug driving. You go to a court and say to the judge and the members of the jury, 'I agree with you and I even recognise I shouldn't have done that because my behaviour can't be regarded as a Kantian and universal law.'

'Certainly not,' say both the parents and the members of the jury.

'But what about paedophiles?' you ask.

'What about them?' they answer.

'What's the consequence of our little ones' untimely disappearance? No more paedophiles, you know.'

'Well, that was a two-edged argument,' they argue.

'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good,' you say to them.

'We don't trust you – we suspect you're a bit two-faced.' They seem to pursue their argument that inexorably grows as massive as the above-mentioned concern. But you explain at length – and the whole court listens to your length – that whatever you do has two sides, and taking into consideration the view according to which our Mind is everywhere, whatever you think and enact is always in two minds (or two-minded, if you wish). Your maxim may sound as follows, 'There's no absolute good, absolute virtue and absolute evil. Everything is relative and even the theory of relativity is relative, you know.'

‘And quantum mechanics are quantum,’ they answer roaring with laughter. They do not set out to annoy you: it just seems to happen and you have no alternative but to accept the situation; or to assume control. You opt for the latter solution and set about splitting hairs and pointing out that you are a melancholic and therefore agree with Sybil, Pyrrhus and Heidegger who declare that it is better not to be born at all – the best solution to all problems and enigmas. In the light of this stance and trance, you wish everyone could commit suicide, then and there – without walking away from the cash register, as the Russians put it. And if you have no guts for such a feat of valour, a drug driver can come to your assistance, after saying, ‘Can I be of any assistance, madam or sir?’

More often than not, the-end-of-the-tether individuals clasp their hands, and glancing upward, seem to implore divine assistance. But after much soul-searching (and soul-destroying) they might realise that the Almighty is unlikely to help them – for obvious reasons known to both St Augustine and any churchgoer. On the other hand, drug drivers always come in handy; within this frame of mind and reference. And the world goes on, turning and circling around the sun and asteroids, and you still have no idea whether you belong to the elect or to the reprobate, which makes all the difference, as you surmise as you read and re-read Dante’s masterpieces and Tertullian’s suggestions. Then you decide not to re-read them any more because what counts in life and the afterlife is pleasure which may not be the highest virtue they talk about in pious books and arch-pious philosophical treatises. And then again our Socrates turns up and begins to mock whoever happens to be within hearing and mocking distance; and you realise there is nothing wrong with pleasures, provided they are linked to knowledge, reason and remembrance of things past.

Suppose you like the chocolate you bought in Brussels last year, and understandably enough you yearn to experience the same pleasure in the company of your daughter and her husband. But you do not remember the name of the chocolate you seem to have liked to the point of forgetting the sightseeing magnanimously offered by your travel agency and insisted upon by your well-wishing, well-read, culture-stuffed friends. Upon your return to your native land and your native tongue, you talk to your friends about this chocolate, saying you will bring them three boxes of these succulent truffles next year when you are planning to visit Belgium again: after all, you did not see much in the course of your first trip, being too engrossed in chocolates and beers. Even in the middle of huge majestic plazas you would ask your guide or friend, ‘Where could I have a glass of beer?’

‘Right over there.’

‘And where is your best chocolate?’

‘Everywhere.’

Today, you remember neither the chocolates nor the beers you drank on this and other occasions. Of course you know they were brewed in monasteries and you even visualise the monks depicted on labels. All these monks had a number of smiles on their faces and elsewhere, so to speak: indeed you got the feeling the whole label was smiling: monks, their faces, their mugs, their clothes. And you say to your friends, ‘It says on the label that no preservatives or artificial colourings have been added. And we even put a bottle in our suitcase to show you the monk and his tankard.’

‘Where’s the label?’ ask the friends.

‘The label became detached from the bottle,’ you answer.

‘Where’s the bottle?’

‘We broke the bottle. It was described on the label as a “heavy, fruity beer”.’

Oddly enough, Socrates has nothing against pleasures – for all his attachment to virtue, good behaviour, a good mind, good reason and the total absence of evil and all its manifestations. Accordingly you conclude that pleasures are not evil either in themselves or otherwise, and they remain on the right side of angels as long as you know where they can be found and enjoyed. (And how, in what manner, in what kind of moderation.) So you are fully prepared to answer the following question, ‘Would you find it acceptable to live your whole life in enjoyment of the greatest pleasures?’

‘Why, certainly!’ answers Protarchus, whoever he is and was.

‘But look,’ asks Socrates, ‘might you not have some need of knowledge, intelligence, and calculation, or anything else that is related to them?’ whereupon you remember the story related to your Proustian search for the name of the beer you drank in the course of your trip to Brussels. And you say to yourself, ‘I certainly need knowledge without which I’m unlikely to know what beer I should offer to my friends – or to myself, for that matter. How did all this come about? I haven’t spent years tasting all the beers available in shops and pubs. Last year, I asked a beer fancier – he’s also a pigeons fancier, by the way – “Could you please recommend a beer? And a pigeon?”’

‘Go to Belgium and drink and eat whatever you come across,’ was the answer in which your journey through Europe seems to have originated. And you regret neither its origins nor the journey itself; far from it. And what about intelligence? You should try and understand what is meant by the people who talk to you now and then, here and there, for they can either lead you somewhere, to the radiant goal or the ideal man or woman, or they mislead you mercilessly, flinging you out of many windows so that you land up or rather down at the bottom of Gorky’s heap entitled *The Lower Depth* or *Down and Out* or just *Down and Down*. What seems even more cunning and weird in comparison with the above exposition is the way the evil and minus-doers put and explain their intentions. If they had said frankly and openly, ‘I’m about to mislead and misguide you,’ you might have run away from them in a taxi or even on a plane. But they never use the word ‘mislead’, talking instead of guiding, leading and showing – showing the right way, as they say as they take you by the hand and lead you into sin, darkness and so-called spiritual murkiness. But your intelligence might help you separate the wheat from the chaff, sorting out the sheep from the goats (and the demons from the gods).

And what about Plato’s calculation? Your intelligence informs you that you should not trust that man over there – in the light of what he said five minutes ago; or in the darkness of his malicious smile which he cannot hide beneath a courteous and promising exterior. (Incidentally, this smile is also part of what is ambiguously called the ‘exterior’ – as opposed to the ambitious ‘interior’.) And the same intelligence of yours contains the calculation our Socrates touches upon as he bamboozles and mocks his opponents. In Plato’s dialogues our – or rather his – Socrates is depicted as a very cold and calculating character, and so you rightfully conclude you should be cold in order to be good at differential calculus. Indeed you should be able to differentiate between evildoers and benefactors, between pleasures and displeasures, between God and Satan, and so on. So, in a way, calculating characters are intelligent and vice versa, which makes things easier for us: one notion is easier to handle than two.

Besides, you should be able to compare several pleasures, which might enable you to choose the appropriate one – the biggest one, in other words. Suppose you have three pleasures on the table where you continue to lie wide awake as if unable to fall asleep. They are clearly labelled thus: ‘3’, ‘7’, ‘11’. Which one would you choose either on the spur of the moment or after much brain-searching? (No need to resort to

differential calculus: after *less* brain-searching.) Number ‘11’ of course. But that means nothing except that something has been attributed to the attribute called ‘11’, for you do not know for sure you are about to deal with a ‘real’ pleasure or even with a ‘real thing’. Of course the number you see in front of you is real enough, but you experience no pleasure when confronted with numbers: you are no mathematician and can hardly understand why two and two end up reaching the amount called ‘4’. The problem is that the things (either real or unreal) you have faced for several minutes – their number depends on your skill in the domain of calculation and understanding – are not really labelled; at least there are no words on them so you might say to yourself, ‘These things haven’t been made by Magritte.’ Indeed Magritte used to inscribe either squares or triangles with words such as ‘woman’, ‘heaven’, ‘Hell’, and so on; and consequently you could count on him when choosing this or that figure for the sake of your pleasure. Of course you know you can count on a great painter, otherwise he would not have been labelled ‘great’ and ‘only’ a long time ago. Besides, in Brussels you are supposed to visit a museum bearing his name and putting on display a great many paintings of his, some of which pay tribute to words, notions and pleasures related to them.

Suppose you see an object or an event on which there is a word engraved by Magritte’s hand that ‘never lies’ or ‘never makes any mistake’. (Like Uncle Ben and his rice.) Suppose this word is ‘pleasure’ and you also spot ‘11’ that follows this pleasure promised to you by one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. So the whole looks thus: ‘Pleasure 11’ and you snatch this pleasure from the space allotted to it because you realise you cannot be really happy without its daily presence in your life. You know that the pleasure you are holding in your hand is tried and tested/trusted because of Magritte’s worldwide fame and legend. You had better not trust the reputations bestowed by the Devil on recent artists: they are subject to the market and fashion and fluctuations in the exchange rates, so to speak. But you can trust Magritte and you do trust him to the point of acquiring the pleasure he recommends with your eyes closed, so to speak. After all, you are sure he meant ‘11’ and not ‘-11’. It is true that a specialist might say to you, ‘You’re mistaken. Magritte used to use our words in what may be called a “topsy-turvy” fashion. You must know his picture that shows you an ordinary pipe, and you may even wonder why he took the trouble to paint it – you can see pipes anywhere. Well, this doesn’t really matter, not for the moment, not today. What matters today is centred upon the words you find in the same picture. And these words say to you, “This is not a pipe.”’

All right, you are sure that the Magritte museum houses many priceless treasures, and you just unhook and wrap one of them up on your way home. Suppose you are sure you can get safely out of the museum: the police are interested in terrorists nowadays; and in their bombs. (Not in stolen paintings.) You take a tram and soon enter your house situated on the outskirts of Brussels, in one of its residential areas. You hang the picture on one of your walls and begin to look at it, studying its shapes and colours closely. You even pay attention to its frame: you say to yourself it might have been made by the painter himself because some painters do not trust other people and so take care of the frames appended to their pictures. You pay attention to everything – to the point of even noticing the flies that might walk or sleep on the canvas you cherish, for flies are ubiquitous and you can find them not only in your glasses of beer, but literally everywhere: on your landscapes, on your forehead and cheeks. But you say to yourself that the stolen picture lives its own life; in a way it is alive – more alive than humans, considering its quality and immortality. So you have no intention of dusting it so as not to interfere with its inner and outer life.

The more you look at the picture, the more you love it, and your love for this inanimate and animate creature far outstrips the sentiments you experience when looking at men and women; when talking to them. (The picture talks to you differently, wisely, beautifully.) After all, Beethoven's symphony where you come across a lot of brooks and thunderbolts is more impressive than any real landscape, any real thunder, forest, and meadow. (In comparison with Beethoven, they are *not*.) And then a kind of reaction or reformation sets in and you grow fed up with the picture you doted upon yesterday and the day before. If you touch it, it does not reciprocate – contrary to what any well-bred and well-brought-up human does as he or she or a baby strokes your cheeks, sometimes unconsciously. That might be called motives and humanity or a human response, and even Darwin who struggled for life throughout his life enlarged upon this phenomenon, saying our acquired characteristics – and we acquire them as we stroke our fellow creatures – are bound to become our genes; slowly or surely, as the case may be. Pictures are in a class of their own and you do not seem to appreciate this class, let alone to let yourself go so as to be head over heels in love with them.

You feel you are bored to death by this pipe or woman whose triangle does not appeal to your senses because it has neither a pair of legs nor a pair of breasts. We all know – and Schopenhauer might back up this piece of knowledge if he were alive – that nothing is eternal apart from the proverbial and mostly verbal *Wille*, and any attainment, however delightful and blissful, turns out to be insignificant and consequently our pleasures are nothing but displeasures in disguise. Once you own your dream *realistically*, you disown it, throw it out of the window, trample it to death or to another life which is none of your concern; and that is what counts. (Out of sight, out of life.) And even if your pleasure concerns the lights one is liable to find in Magritte's light-and-shade pictures, you turn away from them as you switch on your chandelier and open a bottle of champagne. And of course your candlelit dinners are far superior to any picture on condition that you and your guests lie on the floor, wallowing in your luxury and kissing, cuddling, whispering, 'I love you, love you, hate you.'

You could trample the picture to death, if you did your utmost to forget it is priceless and therefore you are bound to get as much money for it as you wish; and as usual you wish to get a few billion dollars, no matter what and how. But you cannot help recalling you *stole* this picture belonging (one of its belongings) to the Magritte museum that one can admire and visit in Brussels, if one has enough money for a plane or a train ticket, or if one owns a car, provided this car is not in Australia or Canada; on condition that you do not say to your friends, 'My car's been having engine trouble recently.' Be that as it may, you just wrap the picture in question up and go to the museum that can be found within the same question. And you say to one of the guards, 'You know, I found this picture in my bedroom. I suppose it belongs in this museum.' And you get ten dollars for your honesty and unbusiness-like and quite unusual thinking: it is really in a class of its own.

Even if you know for sure it is a real pleasure you have come across at last, at long and last last, you had better not rely too much on it, considering that all pleasures and delights are phantoms or figments created and recreated by our imagination whose fertility is far above all suspicion. Besides, there is a problem that might be referred to as the 'problem of unity', which questions us on the subject of the parts we habitually find in the object of our desire. There are parts we categorically disagree with because they do not correspond to what we regard as pleasure, ecstasy, the everlasting oblivion of suffering and so on. Is there such a thing as the unity of pleasure? Don't we always anticipate any snags in the negotiations? (Don't we always negotiate with our destiny and *their* reality?) In other words, unity is almost unachievable except in the hands of God Who might, some day, take all these elements and shake them as one shakes a tube-like toy that you look through to see different

patterns of light made by pieces of coloured glass and mirrors – a kaleidoscope, in other words – except that in this case, in your case, the pattern you get is unified through the unity of colours, patterns, designs and intentions.

Let us take a concrete example – the one you can always rely upon if someone accuses you of obfuscating the issue at hand – with a view to demonstrating that what we are talking about is not a mere abstraction but has a few roots in our commonplace and commontime reality. Suppose you meet a woman – you are a man and a heterosexual one into the bargain – and you say to yourself, after having dinner with her, ‘She’s not intelligent but I love her smiles.’ And you spend the rest of your life in her company, discarding her words and collecting her smiles, gestures and the radiance which, according to your impressions, is related to her persona to the point of making you bask in this radiance. So you bask in this radiance, forgetting your great and small narratives, your differential equations and modulations – your brains, so to speak. You just bask and bask and bask; and on your deathbed you say to yourself and her, ‘I’ve wasted my life on trifles.’

‘What are these trifles you’re talking about?’ she may ask, looking at you inquisitively, if not accusingly.

‘Smiles, smiles, smiles,’ you answer, thinking about Hamlet who ought to have made the same remark with regard to Polonius and other courtiers whose fawning upon the royal couple has reverberated through three or four centuries.

‘How do you mean?’ she asks, her eyes piercing your soul and secretive mind, its nooks and crannies, its books and cravings.

‘I mean that smiles are a poor substitute for thoughts.’

‘Do you mean to say I’ve no thoughts?’

You have some, you may answer, but on second thoughts you do not answer and turn your head in another direction which is another in relation to whatever is going on. It is another direction which is not necessarily the opposite pole and the minus you are eager to oppose to the plus or anything positive, triumphant, ideal. You are neither an ideal husband nor an ideal bachelor; nor are you an ideal that everyone embodies as these one and every do their best to become citizens of the world, real things, benefactors of humanity and the community; and their pillars. In short, your pleasure is not valid – not within your Platonic brain at least, considering that there is no unity anywhere and even the proletarians one reads about in Marx’s immortal or rather mortal, deadly, fatal works are no longer united or disunited. You meet a proletarian in the streets of your native city and ask him frankly and straightforwardly, ‘Are you united?’

‘To whom? To what?’ he answers.

‘To your brothers.’

‘I’ve no brothers,’ he answers.

‘Your brothers live in all countries, you know,’ you say to him in order to remind him of communists and their orders.

‘What are you talking about?’

That is how our discussions and trains of thought expire prematurely, maturely: it does not really matter how they expire or fade away like marshals. The point is they are bound to end and that is what they mean when they point out, ‘Music was a great solace to me.’ You just listen to a piece of music and forget everything; with the exception of this piece of music.

I do not know whether I am lying on a table or not and what condition one may talk about when bending over my body and touching it; not necessarily. You just bend over my body and look at it because you do not have to touch my skin that does not seem to come up to your touchy-feely standards. I cannot say I have not decided yet whether I should be born or not: I am probably there and being there or here means I was born in September, and even a year can be assigned to this birth of mine. And the problem they call 'identity' may arise in this connection: Times Square is the nexus of the New York subway. And if you are there (and not everywhere), you are the nexus of times and spaces that chose you instead of resting on their laurels, doing nothing or next to nothing.

So I am there and I may undergo a sort of test in the course of which I shall answer a lot of questions such as, 'Who are you?' and 'What are you doing here?'

'I'm just a result of *Geworfenheit*.'

'Do you mean you're a slave?'

'Perhaps.'

'Do you mean you'll become a master? Sooner or later?'

'Yes. I am God, you know.'

'How so? Aren't you rather a servant of God?'

'I am one. If I say I'm a servant of God, my statement would amount to the statement, "There are two of us." And I don't exist, you know.'

'How so?'

'If I say "I'm God," there's only God. Not I, not I.'

'All right. All right.'

Is that what Plato and others call 'unity'? They probably do not call anything anything, and I am left with what is supposed to be my unconscious and its ludicrous counterpart that takes in whatever there is on the table and under the table where only drunkards live and hold their tankards. Their tankards and their ability to hold them prove they exist *bel et bien*, as the French say: beautifully and goodly; which does not mean they are on the side of good and not on that of evil. Is it worth your while, our while, their while, taking out travel insurance before we travel? That is what all this amounts to: travel insurance, a journey through fears and sounds and furies and Furies. And your travel agent might ask you the following question, 'Have you ever heard about the Zika virus?'

'I know a woman who signs her emails, "Zik."'

'It's a mysterious illness with devastating effects.'

'A femme fatale, you know.'

But you do not understand what they are talking about and I wonder why they continue to talk as if someone – my poor self, for instance – could understand what Zika is and how it acts. They say that pregnant women who live in or have travelled to Zika-infested regions are vulnerable to the most serious complications from the virus: birth defects. And I, for one, have no wish to be born with birth defects such as idiocy, no-leg condition, no-shoulder condition, and so no-on. So I should ask my mother if she travelled to Zika-infested regions, and actually I know the answer because my mother, my father and the rest of my family were stuck in the Soviet Union where only a few people could get what they called a 'foreign passport'; and visas. Well, let us

forget about the Soviet Union and it is rather easy, my God, if you take into consideration the overall weakness of our memory that always forgets the rest. (But the feather remains, doesn't it?)

Zika's spread is a reminder, particularly in a globalised world, that modern borders offer far less protection than they once did. Surveillance of the Aedes aegypti mosquito that chiefly carries Zika eroded because of declines in funding and public interest, which leaves state and federal officials with an incomplete picture of where the disease may turn next.

Time, May 16, 2016

It goes without saying it turns next in your body, if this body of yours was born and registered somewhere: in the Book of Nature, for instance. All right, you decide to enter this world where a lot of human individuals are ready to pounce on you like the cat described in the following sentence, 'The cat sat in the tree ready to pounce on the ducks below.' So you are a duck, an ugly duckling, a dark duck, a dead duck. Well, you are dead before being born, but that is not the point I wish to labour, and I am still in the dark about what the point is and will be for centuries, if not for millennia. The point is these and other humans pounce upon you on a regular basis unless they forget you completely, which is yet another form of aggression called a 'boycott'. And you begin to wonder why the mosquitoes do not follow the human example, turning a deaf ear to all your rhymes, rhythms and reasons. Instead, they cover you from head to foot and others – your fellow creatures – prevent you from swatting them with your rolled-up papers as they shout, 'What? What are you doing? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? We say to all your colleagues you wouldn't hurt a fly. But you go far beyond our assessment of your ways – you *murder* these poor creatures.'

What could you answer to such an indictment? 'Would you say that is a fair assessment of the situation?'

'Yes, we would.'

'Your methods of assessment produce nonsensical results.'

'Do they?'

'They do.'

'They don't.'

'All right, all right, I no longer beg to differ. This seems to me to be a damning indictment of education policy – my teachers always said I should kill flies and insects. They chiefly talked about malaria, you know.'

Well, let us get down to brass tacks all the more imperatively since these tacks are also covered with all these mosquitoes we had better steer clear of so as not to end up screaming and agonising in the middle of the South American jungle where you are bound to scream and agonise, whatever the cause of your torture – that is the law of the jungle. I am told that Zika's primary threat is to pregnant women because of the spike in a severe birth defect. I am not a pregnant woman but my mother cannot remain non-pregnant and get away with it, giving birth to a son, alias myself. Nonetheless. She must become pregnant first: after all, she is not the Holy Virgin, to the best of my belief. My general or personal belief is perhaps the best one can find in the whole Christian world, but even the belief of such proportions cannot talk me into believing my mother is the Holy Virgin.

And I continue to read the article devoted to my birth, if only in part, and I find there is no treatment for Zika and so one had better wait for the birth of this treatment before launching a large-scale project entitled *The Birth of a Nation*. If you lose patience and sleep with everybody, men included, sooner or later you are sure to

give birth to a Down's Syndrome Nation whose participation in our life should be reduced to zero, even if Hitler and his cronies are no longer in our midst. (Whenever you say 'Hitler', you should add 'cronies', otherwise no one would realise we all have black smudges on our noses: just another original sin.) As for one individual only, he would be born without a pair of legs and a pair of arms; his birth would not have any pair, however remotely linked to what they call the human body and proverbial Adam Kadmon. This baby of ours would have one eye, one ear, one nostril and everyone would say while looking at him at close range, 'This child was born in Chernobyl or Fukushima.' Humans often think that one catastrophe cannot be followed by another as if there were a limit to our suffering, to all our wounds that keep us awake at night, by day, or whatever lies between days and nights.

I, for one, have no wish to have three fingers, one palm, one hand, one end of the tether: you are fatally ill if you have only *one* end of the tether. 'People living in Southern states and Hawaii – where the climate, geography and the presence of *A. aegypti* mosquitoes make eventual local transmission likely – are not currently at high risk of getting the virus in their home states.' All right, I do not seem to live in Southern states, wherever they are situated, and consequently my mother lives elsewhere, assuming I do have a mother, a real mother, a real being – not just a Goethe-ish paraphrase of Wagnerian legends with their half-asleep Erdas. According to the same article, I am hiding my light or birth under a bushel, but there are exceptions to every hide-and-see, every 'safety-first': 'The one exception is that if their partner has been travelling to an area of Zika transmission, there is a risk of sexual transmission.' So my father travels to our Zika's wonderland and my head-over-heal mother – a cubist image – gets the virus through the transmission that is partly responsible for the decimation of humankind. (My head-over-heal mother. If it is a play on words I am not sure it works. What if it isn't? And what if it doesn't?) At least all these sperms and people are responsible for the decline of our standards that go down because there are viruses we cannot cope with; and even if we happen to have two legs, we lack two thoughts and therefore do not discover the ultimate truth and are unable to see God face to face.

I might think about my mother – or any mother – from the point of view that does not offer us the view where our mothers are lying and crying in maternity wards, screaming, agonising, dying. These are the mothers whose right to eternity and generation Goethe asserts in such a way one assumes he knew something on the subject; at least a few nuances, if not the whole thing. Of course he was unable to know the whole: he was not yet standing in front of Our Mother or Our Father – the St Paul-celebrated face-to-face meeting – and therefore caught only a whiff of the rose garden one is likely to find in Saadi's and other works attributed to Persian poets. However, the mothers he touched upon – without touching them, mind you – and Erda herself, as depicted by Wagner and Wotan, seem so old and unhygienic one is tempted to think that what we catch whenever in these poets' and legends' company is rather whiffy. We are even highly tempted to write in our notebooks and travelogues, 'These mothers, whoever they are, haven't showered for a couple of days and are starting to get whiffy.'

Of course those mothers had no idea of what their world, the one they had created on the spur of the moment, was to undergo in the course of its evolution; and how many bacteria our poorest species would be exposed to through centuries, millennia and so on. And I am pretty sure those mothers still harbour a great many Zikas in their plentiful bosoms. Oddly enough, they never ask our doctors the following question, 'If I'm pregnant and I get Zika, what should I do?' The question is logical and is almost on everyone's lips – with the exception of the mothers who seem to have lost count of how many species, dimensions and worlds they have

given birth to since the Biggest Bang. Actually ‘if I’m pregnant’ is either a tautology or a contradiction in terms: those mothers are *always* pregnant, otherwise Time would have stopped a long time ago. The same goes for ‘if I get Zika’: like the Almighty (or the Alrighty) they contain the whole world plus every insect that can be found in this world. And they never say to the embryos whose heads or feet are about to see the light of day or rather that of a maternity hospital, ‘I have to warn you that there’s a degree of danger involved in this.’

‘In what?’ ask the embryos.

‘In your births of course.’

‘What’s a birth?’ asks one of the embryos.

‘You’re about to be born into the world.’

‘What’s the world?’

‘You’re being a silly billy, now stop it.’

Those so-called mothers do not even say to us, ‘The following programme contains scenes that may be disturbing to some viewers.’ All right, we are all aware of the fact that our life resembles a film or a theatrical play: Shakespeare gave us a lecture on the subject and we still recall his lectures thanks to John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, let alone Laurence Olivier and other giants whose bodies are now hidden under the surface of the Earth – like those of Goethe’s and Wagner’s mothers. But the newborn know nothing about this film in spite of the quantity of computers they see all around them. All these computers are disturbing; they disturb our psyches and also our bodies that begin to feel an unhealthy excitement as their (our bodies’) eyes watch porn movies non-stop. And all this happens too early, too early: it is not high time yet. It is low time, you know, and you should be patient enough to wait for natural, organic ripening of your organism and its sexual instincts, possibilities and needs; otherwise you may underestimate reality, real things, real female bodies that are sure to come to your rescue sooner or later. Alas, it is often too late, too low, and you say to your potential saviour, ‘You’ve come too late. I don’t feel anything.’

‘I love you. I’ll do whatever you like.’

‘All right. You just lie down on this divan and wait for a phone call. No, I don’t appreciate your dress – it’s too sexy, you know. Your dress and the rest of your attire leave nothing to the imagination. Too early, you know.’

‘Do you want me to buy another dress? Will you take me to Paco, to Raco?’

Well, you go with her to Caco and choose a dress you find suitable for what you call ‘my opening up’ or ‘my blooming’ or ‘my prosperity’ or ‘my explosion’. You spend two hours in this boutique and you cannot help wondering how many women you might have admired and mastered at home, in front of your computer, had you stayed at home instead of going to Charcot and looking all these dresses over from head to foot. And what about Rolls Royces and their drivers? What about the women who get out of the cars and enter a castle? They mount a few steps and immerse themselves in a party you know nothing about; not yet. Too early, too early, too low, you know. As the excitement mounts, however, you become noisier and noisier. The children’s excitement mounts as Christmas gets nearer and the excitement you are feeling right now may be rightfully likened to the one you should always pay homage to, if you are Proust’s and Tolstoy’s admirer. And that is all the more logical since you may find a Christmas tree inside the castle where you are invited by a *gentil réalisateur*: no one will ever accuse you of gate-crashing, even if you enjoy those women’s naked or half-naked bodies. Nor will anyone say, shaking their head, ‘Just another Peeping Tom.’

What are you supposed to do with the woman whose excitement literally flows towards your genital parts? Another tsunami, forsooth! as they used to say in days of yore. Well, you do not really feel this tsunami: not a real thing, in a way; and yet your feminine companion is prepared to do *everything* for you, according to her glances and words. And she sets about enumerating the organs involved in the ritual she is willing to provide you with on the spot: my mouth, my nostrils, my ears, my navel, my belly button, all my buttons, my bottom, the insides of my bottom, whatever you find outside. You look at her half-bodily and embark upon the following explanation, ‘When I was nine, I found naked pictures on the Internet. I learnt how to download explicit videos.’

‘What do they explain?’ she may ask.

‘Everything. “The obscene is the more visible than visible,” as Baudrillard puts it.’

Of course your companion in misfortune is aware neither of Baudrillard nor of his attitude towards obscenity. You are not even sure she is aware of obscenity, of the fact that you may be jailed for making obscene phone calls. Someone calls her and says, ‘Come over, will you? We’ll have a cup of tea.’ She may think her future partner has no other wish – today his mood is fully engrossed in yet another tea ceremony – and so the dress she puts on does not reflect the nuances usually associated with sex games. Once inside, she realises she made a mistake before leaving her apartment: her partner likes neither her dress nor manners. ‘You’re in between,’ he says.

‘How so?’ she answers.

‘You should be either more demure or more aggressive. Let’s drink our tea first and then I’ll put you against the wall which reminds me of my computer screen. I’ve got an *explicit* dress for you. Why don’t you sing me an old Japanese song? Where’s your samisen?’

When I talk about women and sex-induced rites, I deviate all the time, jumping from one object to another – as happens in porn movies; after all you do not have to structure them, ringing all these women up and promising them jewels and champagne. Back to barracks or to Baudrillard on whose attitude towards obscenity I touched somewhere, perhaps in the wake of a porn movie I might have enjoyed in the course of a sleepless night. Baudrillard enlarges upon the Japanese vaginal cyclorama: the prostitutes sit with legs open on the edge of a platform. I, for one, am allowed to shove my face into the lined-up vaginas to see better what I actually have no desire to see at all: I am not fond of vaginas. Why should I be? Of course love is beautiful and whatever is related to it must be beautiful, otherwise we shall face the phenomenon called a ‘fly in the ointment’. There are flies everywhere and the more we spare them their lives, the greater their numbers will be in our world of which vaginas are inseparable parts. In short, I do not think vaginas are as beautiful and harmonious as Mozart’s divertimenti and therefore I have managed to live without vaginas – at least without their visual beauties – until today; and nothing prevents me from assuring myself and others that I shall not change my mind in the days and nights to come.

Besides, vaginas are linked in my imagination to the births from which we all suffer, and the mothers of *Faust* fame somehow look like vaginas; at least within the framework of my nightmares. They hide in the Earth like moles or roots or mushrooms and come out only if called upon by Wotan, Faust and a poet (or Proust). But it is not about mothers I wished to talk a few hours ago as I began to analyse the behaviour of a modern teenager whose perception of women has been warped by the videos you can pirate and enjoy in the privacy of your own castle. First you look at a woman and her clothes that fly over the space allotted to her striptease as a voyeur keeps on smiling and touching what he is supposed to touch. (Sometimes you are not allowed to touch the

stripper: ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted!’) Then you realise that you are literally and metaphorically fed up with her unless she appears to you in the shape of your mother – thanks to a figment of your imagination. You picture to yourself your sexual intercourse and you like the picture to the point of letting it arouse you in spite or because of the incest you indulge in most enthusiastically. Actually, you are not absolutely wrong: all these strippers are bound to become mothers and grandmas, with a few exceptions we had better pass over in silence. It is little wonder that many people say while darting angry looks at naked bodies, ‘After all, all these depraved Lolitas are future mothers.’

Well, you are still on the horns of the dilemma which makes you hesitate between real and unreal things, the latter being more real and juicy than the former ones. Of course you do your best to turn this reality into their unreality – into a film where everything is possible and any orgy can be stopped for a while, allowing you to digest whatever you already have enjoyed in the realm of images. And then you move on to different configurations, now letting only women take pride of place, now switching to men – sometimes it is enough to switch on another channel or zap, zap, zap to your heart’s content, without any control. You have one woman and several guys and you are not jealous of their good looks and do not have to worry about the quantity of champagne consumed during the party. In short, in porn movies you can find anything you imagine and a lot of stuff you cannot imagine, for your imagination mostly concerns your experience. And often this experience of yours is so bitter it makes you discard some women, postures and all your personal Kama Sutas – or whatever the name of these sutras might be – right offhand; whereas the films offer you a series of new experiences and lives you have known nothing about so far.

So a woman comes and you know what you can do with her, even if you are aware of the fact that she will never do what other women do, perform and carry out voluptuously and noisily on your screens, in your eyes and all along your nerves. You are attracted to this woman, otherwise she would not stay in front of you, stripping her clothes off as if she were weary of them, their molecules and intimacy. Your body, on the other hand – on the other body, one might be tempted to add – does not seem to be interested, let alone involved in any way, however slightly, ever so slightly. You are not really in the habit of beating about the bush and therefore say to her straightaway, ‘There’s a disconnect between what I want in my mind and how my body reacts.’

‘How *does* your body react?’ she asks, her eyes wide open or shut.

‘It does not, you know.’

‘What about your mind? Does it react?’

‘I want you to come here in a Rolls and elegantly recline on this sofa.’

She heads for the nearest sofa and puts her body on it, trying to strike the right posture as if she could vie with the actress and woman I touched upon at the beginning of the chapter devoted to sex, eroticism and computers. The failure of the monsoon would destroy harvests on which 1,000 million people rely, and in the light of this catastrophe and torments, your failure – your meeting can be described as a complete failure – looks like a fly. Nevertheless, it is another fly and you should have swatted it before you allowed it to spoil your night and even your appetite for dinner. ‘I simply can’t get the necessary hydraulics going,’ you say to her and she disappears in the twinkling of an eye.

This is one of the predicaments we have to cope with unless we switch everything off and remain in the dark and in the darkness – about what happens in the world of sex, vaginas, obscenity and so on. Baudrillard complains about the lack of what he calls the ‘game of challenge’: you can watch such obscene images as long

as you wish, but neither they nor you attempt to challenge anything. You put an unreal thing into your mouth – metaphorically speaking – and swallow it whole; or in one gulp, as the case may be. ‘Keep a lookout for small objects that a baby might swallow,’ says one of our mothers to a babysitter, but you are no longer a baby and so can swallow strippers and all the sex organs you come across in the course of your private party featuring your body and one of your screens.

Of course we all are worried about unity, about the common denominator and harmony that can be achieved only at the expense of quality, according to Teilhard de Chardin. (Dillard de Chardon, according to my spell check.) Anyway, he speaks of the bottom of the heap where everything becomes united, appeased, harmonious; where everyone speaks of ‘our loved ones.’ And what kind of quality could you find at the bottom of the hill? Two drunkards enjoying themselves in their homemade pool.

At some point – and this point comes to the fore when no one really expects it – one gives up the idea of talking exclusively about mothers and the eternal rebirth to which we might pay tribute sooner or later. One may say to another one, ‘You know, we haven’t talked about fathers yet, about the part they have played in the creation of our values and achievements. After all, we wouldn’t be capable of talking about our mothers, if it weren’t for our fathers and their numerous libidos. Shall we listen to Caruso’s recordings? Don’t you think he incarnates our fathers better than anybody else? Than Chaliapin, for instance?’

So I listen to Caruso, to the way he performs Neapolitan songs and I think that their bitter-sweet, wonderful nonsense reflects our life to such an extent we no longer wish to live, rubbing shoulders with the needy and royalty. Let us live within these songs or at least within the room where these songs resound day in day out; in other words, let us not be out of their reach, of their listening, of their consolation and benediction. Russian songs are too profound – as profound as our leading basses – and often remain at the bottom of our hearts instead of spanning all our veins and nerves. One gets the feeling they sing only about Gorky’s down-and-out or down-and-dirty heroes who crawl on all fours, their bodies burdened with other people’s trunks, cupboards and pianos.

But fathers – and especially uncles – are dangerous because they are often bent on disporting themselves at the expense of their sons, nephews and little girls they can find within their immediate surroundings – within their houses, in other words. They say to their boys, ‘Please turn your backs to us, your uncles and fathers. We like your backs or rather the view you can offer us through your backs – to the point of losing sight of your faces and breasts. Of course we’ll enjoy them a little bit later, after enjoying the other side of your beings so you shouldn’t worry – in a little while you’ll be able to enjoy our faces’ beauty as well.’

Today, we can rely on the help of gurus and doctors: their skills enable us to follow our growth month by month, and even hour by hour, and even from the very outset: they speak to us about our embryos. They say to us, ‘I can see you in your mother’s womb.’

‘But you’ve never met my mother.’

‘I saw her photograph, you know.’

‘Is that enough?’

‘Of course it is – I’m a professional scientist, an arch-professional searcher for former lives.’

‘It’s my present life I’m interested in.’

‘All right, all right. You’re already three months old. In September you kicked your mother 123 times.’

‘What about *her*?’

‘She kicked you only three times – in retaliation for your kicking. Of course she continued to kick you afterwards as well. Wait a minute – I can see her aim a kick at your shins. You were 11 months old.’

‘Did I have shins at the time?’

‘Of course you did. You also had a soul, you know.’

As for our fathers, we often wonder if death can protect us from their kicks, belts and other rituals associated in their minds and bodies with *our* bodies. Aren’t they about to despoil our tombs? So we switch back to our mothers whose behaviour was less kicking and pricking – more in keeping with morals and the texts we got acquainted with at the age of three; the sacred texts known as the Bible or sutras. And we fall back upon Goethe’s mothers – not his fathers, mind you – and spend some time in their companies all the more readily since we have nothing on our hands and backs this week. And we think that our mothers have very little to do with Goethe, Wagner and other so ons: they are mischievous and do not live under the earth, prepared to emerge from it at very short notice. And if they do not emerge or otherwise come out from their tombs and our Earth’s prodigious wombs, they say to us, ‘Sorry, we can’t cancel our arrangements at such short notice.’

So they cancel neither their arrangements nor their temporal absences from our lives, and we have no alternative but to fall back on Shakespeare’s wives, even if they do not come from Windsor and its magnificent castles. In his underestimated and widely denigrated play – by Auden, among other scholars and people – we meet a few women whose figments and imaginations (as I say) play tricks on a bunch of men; and on themselves, oddly enough. It *is* odd that they (those women) get entangled in their own nets and cannot disentangle their lives from their own intrigues until the very end of the play where they begin to dance as Fellini’s characters often do when the curtain is about to fall once and for all.

Fellini often splits the expression ‘a figment of one’s imagination’ in half, thereby enriching it immensely. You have your imagination and your imagination is supposed to boast about its figments, even if these figments are not really bandied about. But if you have both your imagination and a number of figments, you live in another world, in a fantasy world, in your own Walt Disney show where you indulge in all sorts of bodies, screens, Rolls Royces and backs that turn this way and that whenever you say, ‘I’m fed up with this angle of vision, you know.’

Be that as it may, our wives and Windsors reflect our lives far more faithfully than these old wives’ tales and Erdas or Earthas who continue to avail themselves of foul plays whenever Goethe endeavours to make us understand that life is very profound and that we should not trifle with it; otherwise ‘all hell will be let loose’, as the saying goes. One of our Goethes drew his pen and then suddenly – not on the spur of eternity – all hell broke loose, as our scholars put it when they have no urgent jobs for their pens or keyboards. They (our Windsor’s wives) play tricks on everybody and thus we attain, reach and enjoy the harmony all Schoenbergs – with the exception of Conrad’s one – speak about at length whenever we let them do so within our hearing, destinies and the lessons we continuously draw from our existences. Of course, as Nietzsche put and re-put it, you are supposed to climb a mountain and dance on top of it; otherwise you will never be able to pass yourself off as Zarathustra; or Zarastro, come to think of it; or ustra, just astra. But, thanks to your and other people’s wives, you dance in your garden after removing a number of masks from a number of faces – that is what happens or

does not – in these merry wives, Windsors and Shakespeares. And that is far more profound than Prospero with his books that drown and are burnt by Hitler and other cronies of Destruction.

All right, we shall dance without thinking about all those gurus and ustras to whom, for some obscure reason, we are to pay a lot of tributes. Let us forget all these supras and supers and simply enjoy ourselves in our simple gardens, dancing with our neighbours whose contribution to our happy endings and beginnings is limited to this dancing of ours, to our nutcrackers and awakened beauties. (Even to our sleeping uglinesses, considering our inborn attachment to democracy.) Is that what harmony means after all? After this and that, after this stillborn child? Or rather moveborn, thinkborn, actborn child?

Be that as it may, I listen to Furtwängler's recording of *German Wives of Windsor* described by Nikolai and think that this work is akin to Beethoven's symphonies and Bach's cantatas on the strength of its importance. It *is* important to know how we live and feel, but the dance we are aiming at when speaking of harmonies and the universal entente cordiale is also important and vital. And this time we are *not* at the bottom of the heap or hill; we dance on the *top* of it because we are probably surprised at finding that everything is easy after all. The women we encounter in our daily and nightly lives have nothing to do with mothers and their interminable births to which we owe all our suffering, all the consequences of our sojourns in their wombs. They play tricks on us, these wives of Windsor, Tindsor and Moscow, and we are fond of these tricks because they give us an opportunity to wear masks and play other tricks on our neighbours – instead of kissing them on other cheeks. We all wear masks and our destinies encroach upon the free wills bestowed upon our minds by the gods we pray to and worship in our spare time. And what about Nikolai? Mozart and Nikolai – no one speaks of them in the same breath; and yet an honorary degree was conferred on the latter in 1951 by Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic.

I spoke about this phenomenon to a woman who comes and goes within the framework of my life, and this framework may have something in common with the screens our youngster was glued to some time ago. Neither the reader nor I recall this youngster because none of us is eager to re-read the pages I wrote last night, if I remember rightly both that night and my text and its youngster. All right – according to Joyce and Nietzsche, you are supposed to say 'yes' all the time – there was a youngster whose glance was riveted on various screens where females and males displayed their charms to the point of depriving the youngster of his masculine potential: he could no longer enjoy real life and real things and bodies, objects and ecstasies. Even his body was riveted to the screen, let alone his life or what remained of it in what they call the 'sex-field'. Well, I spoke about Windsor (and not about the royal couple) to the woman who was patient enough to listen to Furtwängler's recording without coughing, sneezing, snoring and so on. But she fell asleep after the words I uttered in my endeavour to explain what all this was about and why Furtwängler's epic approach to the subject was most appropriate, putting emphasis on the masks and suchlike, on our life's futility, fragility and maturity.

This woman, on the other hand, is able to shed light on the other side of our existence, on the prenatal phase of it that remains more or less hidden from our scrutiny unless we are handicapped and blame our parents for not having destroyed us before it was too late: after all, abortions are not banished from all the countries we can be born in. So she goes from month to month and says what I had to undergone in the month of May when I was only six months old. She talks about my likes and dislikes, about my mother's behaviour: she drank no alcohol and played the piano, and my fists, if any, beat the rhythm as she continued to play Beethoven's sonatas and Chopin's mazurkas. Alas, my life does not offer her (my new guru) enough material to go on: my uncles

were not paedophiliac and consequently never asked me to turn my back to them and prop my body against a table or a chest of drawers.

There are uncles and aunts whose only preoccupations concern your backs, your members and organs, and your shrinks – my friend is a sort of magnetiser – talk at length about how you were harassed and what furniture surrounded the numerous rapes carried out by your relatives, your parents and utter strangers admitted to your rooms. You do not recall all these people who played with you to their heart's content, putting you before mirrors and saying, 'What can you see? What are you smiling at?' Then they would smear peanut butter all over your face and you looked at your reflection without undertaking remedial work on your face, on your originally immaculate features.

And your relatives went on talking as you continued to stare at your impure features, 'Do you think he understands anything?'

'He's too immature for that.'

'I think he's rather stupid. For the first time my daughter wiped her face when she was only nine months old.'

'And my daughter loves to read about the lives of celebrities.'

'So she'll be a celebrity herself.'

'Why doesn't my son clean his face?'

'You should show him how it is done.'

They clean your face without removing the mirror from your field of vision and you begin to hate the mirror and whatever happens to be reflected in it – mostly your own clean and unclean, unimmaculate face. 'Wipe this stain off your face,' your father says to you in your relatives' obtrusive presence. 'If you don't wipe it off, I'll flog you for disobedience.'

'He doesn't know the verb "to wipe".'

'He doesn't know the word "face".'

'You should slap his face, otherwise he'll never know what it is and why there's a stain on it.'

So your father slaps your face and understandably you burst into tears that you can see in the mirror: it reflects both your surprise and suffering. And then your uncle shows you the verb 'to wipe' after asking your mother the following question, 'Have you got a cloth I can wipe the floor with?' Your father goes to the nearest bathroom and comes back with a towel you are tempted to touch, for you like its colours and stripes. 'Don't wipe your grubby hands on my clean towel!' shout your father and uncle as they slap your other cheek. Then they make you crawl on all fours all over the floor, the towel dangling from your neck like a silk or knitted scarf. 'What are you doing?' shouts your father. 'Do you think you're in a ballroom? Are you about to dance a polonaise? Do you think you're wearing a Dior *foulard*? You should wipe the floor, you know!'

They put the towel into your hands and show you how to wipe the floor, pushing your hands and the rest of your body across the room and into the corridor, into the street. Then they wipe your face with the same cloth and once again you burst into tears or even go so far as to urinate: there are several liquids inside your juvenile body. 'Do you think he knows what this is all about?'

'You mean the subject matter of our lecture?'

'That's right. I was just wondering if he thought we'd teach him how to urinate.'

'Well, he's always been an expert at urinating, you know. Would you care to have a look at his sheets?'

‘No, thank you. I believe you. And I trust your judgement.’

What do I have to do with all these childhoods and flogging that my back has no idea of except through books and films where soldiers are flogged to death for disobedience? So are children, if you take into consideration Bergman’s last effort in the domain of pure cinema: his uncle excels in flogging and, whenever he finds himself in this domain, he really excels himself. And Bergman was to excel himself in the domain of resistance, tolerance, patience and health that seems to have permitted him to survive all these tortures and die in what they call ‘ripe old age’. My friend, my closest and most intimate friend did not have to endure this kind of torture: neither his father nor his numerous uncles were keen on punishments, on bare branches, on belts used and ill-used for this purpose; for this ill purpose. He died last night and whatever I have written for months and years is a homage to his life and death; and yet I hardly speak of him as if out of modesty; as if keeping silence out of modesty and decency.

When I last saw him in Moscow – we met three times three months ago – I told him I had never been jealous of anyone else. Anna says she feels jealous every time another woman looks at her boyfriend. I was jealous whenever our mutual friend looked at him, at my most intimate friend whose name I need not disclose: if any reader or scholar takes the trouble to scrutinise my life – ever so slightly and negligently – they will find everything, even our bodies, hearts, souls and astral beings. He introduced me to Montaigne and Dante whose works, thoughts, shadows and astral remains show me to my front door, keep me company in my garden.

Your faithful old dog accompanies you everywhere you go on condition that you have a dog and can move from one deckchair (wheelchair) to another; otherwise there is no need to accompany you. Of course your faithful dog can stand by your side or rather by your bedside, if you happen to be paralysed – and this happens rather often, as you know, hopefully not personally – but in this case he can only show you out, in all senses of this out. I was my friend’s faithful dog during a few years, but I did not stand by his bedside at the hours of his death and therefore did not show him out (or in).

Of course we might wonder if we really have to be shown out: for once, we can say we know the way out and also all the ways in and out, all the ins and outs lying *inside* our house, our hospital. (Of course our mystics and gurus know everything about *outsides* and *their* insides and in-betweens.) Well, my friend was not *shown* out: he just *went* out, I suppose; but my supposition has no truth in it, I suppose. Suppositions are required to suppose something and often they are mistaken and consequently we have every right to require proofs, if any, if any proof is accessible to our outstanding scientists. These scientists say my friend is dead and one wonders if he was *shown out* at some point; and one may be mistaken at this point. You are not shown out and there are no butlers who might put you in the picture about what happens around *that* door, on *that* doormat – where you clean your shoes on before going into His house – and also along the corridor leading to it; unless you re-read the Tibetan Book of the Dead. One deity, another deity, a wrathful one, a peaceful one. You are swallowed, interrogated; you say ‘Not guilty’ and hear an answer, ‘Guilty, guilty, coward, chicken, murderer, come nearer, turn round.’ You are raped and flogged to another death which turns up somewhere, saying, ‘I’m your new death. How do you do?’

In other words, you have no choice either in this life or other ones, and as you lie dying you move forward or backward, left or right, but the direction was chosen a long time ago and you have no right to glance at the map, as our Russian cosmonauts used to say before embarking upon another journey to the stars. ‘We’re ready but let’s put a few finishing touches to our itinerary – we still have 14 minutes.’

‘The tour operator arranged transport and planned our itinerary,’ says someone.

‘Where is he, our smart Alec?’

‘I’m here, right in front of you.’

‘Hello, our dear know-all. So tell us everything.’

‘We’re flying up to the stars.’

‘To which stars?’

‘We’re flying along the Milky Way.’

‘The Milky River, right?’

‘Right.’

‘Its banks are made of honey, if I’m not mistaken.’

‘You are not.’

‘Where does this River lead us, pray tell?’

‘To the Sea of Death, as usual.’

‘Don’t show me out, I know the way.’

You are in a cavern and you wonder if it is Plato’s cavern you read so much about before your last illness and first death that grabbed you by the scruff of the neck and threw you (*Geworfenheit*) out of the Hall of Life: apparently you were snoring during a concert or a lecture. You landed up in the cavern where only shadows can be seen, analysed and relied upon, talked to, slept with.

A serpent – a shadowy one, no doubt – asks you if you are in continued perplexity about the difficulty you have come across now. And you realise you have once again been involved in one of these discussions which lead nowhere, not even to death; unless you are prepared to die of boredom. But the serpent and other deities put a lot of questions to you and other representatives of the human species who are supposed to know the truth about their respective existences. So they ask you, ‘Are there not false pleasures, as well as true ones?’

‘Life is a false pleasure,’ you answer.

‘What about your consciousness? Don’t you enjoy being conscious of this and that?’

‘I’m dead. I don’t recognise my voice. I have none.’

‘Forget about it! You’re not dead. Listen to this!’ You hear a few beeps and the lecturer illustrates his point with a diagram on the blackboard where there are a few lines; and one of these lines is longer than the other lines. ‘That’s the last beep,’ says the lecturer. ‘Its pitch is higher and your brain took notice of the difference. So you’re alive, you know.’

‘My late friend is luckier,’ I say to him. ‘He no longer hears any pitches. And if he does, they’re not different from each other, from us, from the dead, from eternity. That’s what harmony is about.’

‘The children have no consciousness of being different,’ says the lecturer. ‘You’re not dead. Neither is your friend. You’re just in your second childhood. There’s no such being as a dead person, you know. There are only children and grown-ups in the universe. Anyway, by the time I leave work I’m completely brain-dead.’

‘I’m also *body*-dead,’ you point out.

‘But you’re not *brain*-dead and this makes all the difference. Beep, beep, beep, beep, BEEP.’

These doctors, deities and gurus do not realise to what extent I wish to be with my friend, paying homage to the Greeks who used to go down to Hades where their dead husbands, wives, friends and nephews awaited them impatiently, a glass of wine in everyone’s hand. What can I do? How could I die without dying? I still have

a lot to do at home, as the Russians say, and therefore it is too early to die, although it would be the easiest way to join my friend, the shortest route one might see on the universal map. It is said a Russian tsar, when asked to show how Petersburg and Moscow should be linked by means of rails, picked up a quill and drew a straight line between these two cities. I drew a straight line between my body and that of my friend, but I did not show him out and so have no idea by which door he left our world. Perhaps there was no door: he just traversed a wall and emerged somewhere, in the land where Achilles has no wish to be a king. I wish my friend could be the king of the underworld, of the overworld; after all, he has always been the king of this world that is level with our consciousness, eyes, breasts and spines.

I listen to his works – to the quartet dedicated to Schubert's maiden and her death; and to his death made up of slices, of figments; slices of life, figments of death. You take this slice and that figment; you put them together. I wish I could say, 'I made him some sandwiches to take with him': that is how pharaohs are treated nowadays. I am not Gilgamesh and I am not prepared to explore any other world in search of a friend: I do not know other worlds and have no wish to know them for the sake of sheer knowledge or immortality. I wish I could find my friend on the floor of a mediaeval cathedral, drinking beer and clinking glasses with my glasses, with my numerous and generous lives. No point in talking about it now – my scholars will write a great many commentaries on the subject after saying why I was so intelligent and why I wrote magnificent books.

I suppose his consciousness is less alive than mine; and if it *is* alive, it captures other phenomena and I hope there are not many wrathful deities among them, among those phenomenal creatures. (Actually peaceful deities are even more frightful than the wrathful ones.) I, for one, do not wish to undergo any tests and say straightforwardly, 'I'm afraid of you all, our dear Wrathful and Motherful deities. So leave me in peace, I beg of you. I don't care so much about Paradise unless I can meet my friend up there or down there or nowhere where. I'll bring him a flower, one flower only, one feather. Am I allowed to do that?'

I cannot say I am completely alone now, on my own, and even my cat would object to this statement of mine, if I dared utter it in his presence. Besides, my friend or rather his soul might already have set its heart upon my darling cat's body and so, whenever I stroke his thick, glossy coat I touch my friend, his nerves and sinews; and he purrs as he feels my fingers all along his body, his legs and hair. This morning he came to my room and lay down at my feet as if he were my dog, or my friend; and I stroked him for 20 minutes at least. And then he walked out on me to take a stroll in the garden where I am used to reading his books and listening to his works.

And what about flies and mosquitoes? Cover up and use bug spray for starters. If you are in an area with disease-spreading mosquitoes, wear long-sleeved shirts and pants no matter how warm it is: mosquitoes are more infectious when the mercury rises. What if my friend's soul resolved to spend its next life within one of these mosquitoes? After all, my friend had nothing against a new world conflagration on which you cannot really count because all calendars speak only about switches, tiny adjustments, whereas you are looking for out-and-out annihilation – the *tabula rasa* you might have heard in the so-called *Internationale*. Of course I am no communist and even socialists make me sick to such an extent I consent to listen to their speeches only in the immediate vicinity of a number of lavatories.

Suppose my friend stays in a mosquito who bears the brunt of our revolutionary ritual aimed at destroying the world, its stupidity, its laundering the stolen funds. What should I do under the circumstances? I go to the

nearest travel agency and ask the clerk where my mosquito can be found and enjoyed to the utmost with bare hands, bare arms – bare everything, as I am likely to put it. But the clerk says I should wait: he is taking care of a young pregnant lady whose belly seems to radiate such a huge quantity of happiness I begin to wonder how many embryos are disporting themselves inside it, in its ballrooms, on its football fields. ‘The question of “Should I consider an abortion because of the potential effects on a baby from a variety of exposures”’, says the clerk, ‘is not new, but I think this outbreak is raising it again. Babies with microcephaly can cost up to \$2 million to raise in the first few years of life – though many may not live that long.’

Once the woman is out of our sight, mind, hearing and bearing, I explain my problem to the clerk, making it crystal clear that for nothing in the world will I swat these mosquitoes with rolled-up newspapers. ‘You see, I think my late friend may be hiding within one of these insects by virtue of what Bloom calls “transmigration” or “metempsychosis”.’

‘You don’t mind being contaminated?’

‘Of course not. Have you never heard about two lovers dying of the plague? One caught the plague from the other, you know.’

‘Mosquitoes hate the cold,’ says the clerk.

‘I bought a little fan heater for my room, which heats the place up quickly,’ I answer.

‘Both men and women,’ says the clerk, ‘have something else to grapple with: Zika appears to cause other brain and autoimmune problems, including Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a disorder in which the immune system attacks nerves, leading to weakness and temporary paralysis. Suppose you stay alive. What then?’

‘The paralysis is *temporary*, isn’t it?’

I go somewhere and the where where I go is admittedly an infected and Zika-affected country, and I learn on the plane that 40 million Americans travel to such countries every year. I am not an American, but I am prepared and even eager to travel with them to the Zika-infected countries. My friend might be there in disguise: aren’t we still affected and infected by Shakespeare’s *Merry Wives and Windsors*? In Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night*, Duke Orsino falls in love with the disguised Viola. As for myself, I am prepared to fall in love with the disguised Vladimir unless he is anywhere else right now – in a tree, in a bush, in my garden where my cat might touch him rather often: my cat knows my garden much better than I do.

All right, I walk through my garden in search of my friend, of my late friend, of his early soul incarnated in a bush, in a branch, in a flower, in a feather; as usual, as usual. (Not in a fetter. And yet, as everybody knows by heart, every love is a fetter, not a progression, a piece of freedom, a slice of liberty.) What do I find in my garden except a few lines addressed to a Persian lover who says to his friend:

O my flower, my branch, my bush, my Moses!

I know you hear me now. And your fibres,

Your muscle fibres, among other fibres and vibes

(And wives) react and vibrate as I touch them

Ever so slightly

With my knuckles and uncles.

*We all love you, you
 Know. You know all now, don't you?
 You know Allah and Mohammed.
 I know you, you know.*

*You are my mirror – not a stupid one-sided
 Mirror. You are my double mirror
 And triple mirror. I see horses, damsels and stars
 Inside you, inside myself.*

*I climbed onto my horse and set off at a relaxed trot
 Down the lane, up the lane. You are up and down.
 You are in all my incarnations and carnations.*

*You are inside, outside, up and down,
 And in between everything, everybody, every plant.
 You are in between this rose.
 You are not inside – in between.
 You are in between us. You are in us
 And in between. You are in every between
 I come across in the course of my wanderings.
 You are in every wand and ween
 And the word I utter or do not.*

*You are in between two letters.
 I don't know which, otherwise I would
 Split you, kissing both of you or just
 The middle of you, the split.
 I'd kiss it doubly, triply and I might square
 The mirror.*

*Why should I? I wish I could square you,
 Triangle you, put you in my bed.
 My dear Rectangle, my dear Angle, Eagle, Ego.
 Sleep, sleep, sleep, sound, unsound.
 Remember this poem.*

So I go on looking for my friend, my Gilgamesh or his friend about whom I must have forgotten a lot, considering I recall only the search for a friend and lack of immortality. What do you do if you lack immortality?

You bequeath all your estates to your sons, daughters, nephews and shrinks. And the last, not the least, say, ‘You bequeathed your castle to your dentist. Didn’t he butcher your smile? You know, I used to enjoy your smile very much. Once I said, “Do you like this piece of Belgian chocolate?” and you said, “Yes, I do.” And you smiled on that occasion, didn’t you? Well, your smile was gorgeous. A few months later, I offered you another piece of Belgian chocolate and you answered my question thus, “Yes, I do.” But your smile wasn’t the same, you know. I got the feeling it had been butchered – *charcuté*.’

I go on looking for him elsewhere: there are many elsewheres, especially if you look for your friend; even if this friend of yours has nothing in common with Gilgamesh and his friend. I talk to a bush and touch it as often as I can, but I have to read a lot of books to convince myself – and for once I do not have to convince others – that I touch my friend, his arms, body and heart. I say to myself it is my friend, he is him, and when I think back to the days during which I read the Karamazovs’ adventures, I come to the conclusion I can speak to the Devil Himself. Why not to my friend, after all? All of us are devils incarnate, but one of us cannot speak to another, even if this one yearns to speak to that one. Well, one is not a devil, either incarnate or imaginary, like Molière’s sick men – down to himself – whose illnesses are as imaginary as any figment of any imagination.

I speak to a bush and the bush gives no answers to my questions; and even if I put questions either to the bush or to any leaves I see around me, I get no answers as if there were only leaves and bushes around me, not humans and their eternal souls. I speak to nature and get no answer, and so I say to all the gurus whose missions seem to focus on my stubbornness that does not wish to recognise the existence of other animate beings, ‘I’m alone in this world and my friend is dead and buried. He isn’t that bush over there. Nor is he that tree, that star. He’s nowhere except in my heart. Let me mourn him as best I can. And I’ll mourn him through days and nights and weeks, you fools, you gods, you goods, virtues and what not.’

Now and then I come across flies and other creatures one swats and mops, if you see what I mean because one does mop one’s floor once a week, even if one has no charwoman anywhere, not even in one’s iPod. And if you read the following sentence, ‘He mopped the bathroom floor,’ you think at once about all the creatures destroyed in the course of this mopping and dotting: only if you are in your dotage can you mop your floors without giving a compassionate thought to your friends. Some of them are right under your feet; they might be either specks of dust or the radishes you cut into pieces to garnish the dishes. What dishes? You do not remember them, but you do remember the pieces, even if you do not put your feet on them, which might send you flying through the air and through the void – into other galaxies, according to Giordano Bruno. (God bless his soul, as the Russians say whenever they speak about great scientists and visionaries.)

What about flies? What about my friend? What about death, birth, rebirth, eternal recurrences, eternal currencies you handle to pay what you owe to this and other societies? Or non-societies, non-beings? You pay everything to everyone, even to non-beings, and you are supposed to enjoy yourself because life is wonderful and you cannot deny it; and yet you deny it day in, day out, day right, day left. If you do, someone is bound to say, ‘Life is beautiful,’ and you either go under the hammer or under the knife. And if they have no hammers and knives on the table, they say, ‘You just go under yourself, buddy.’ And they may even add, ‘That’s it,’ when everything is done.

The church bells rang out to welcome in the New Year. When did they do that? Last year. They are sure to do that next year and the year after, after, after, after, after. Do not do that. I will not be there, here, under the churches, the circumstances, bells, lives. I will not even be under the life itself – under the one and only life we

all speak about unless we talk of depravation and crimes which belong to other lives and deaths and prisons. What am I thinking of, about? About you? All right, you have been my lifelong friend and more than that; and when you say something, there is always more than that, than what you said, otherwise it is nothing, worth nothing; and you think it is worth *something*. All right, you had a friend and now you have none: no friends, no wife, no children, which does not mean anything: you do not have to have wives, children and domestic animals. You were born and they did not say anything. They did not say you had to have a few children, horses, cows and tractors, let alone sickles and hammers. They did not say you had to rebel against your working conditions, carrying a few flags and placards on which your opponents might read the following words and slogans, 'Bread, bread, bread, shows, shows, shows, gladiators, tigers, gladiators, and so forth.'

My friend is dead; so am I. No other way. In some/many ways it would be better if we met on Monday rather than Wednesday, on Tuesday rather than Thursday. Where shall we meet again? When? In rain? Villagers are now waiting for the rains to come so that the rice will grow. Let the rice grow for a while and then we shall meet again. Why should we let the rice grow? Why should we wait? The water level in the lake is much higher after heavy rain. But we shall not swim in the lake, shall we? Is there no other way? No other way to love?

Create something better than life. *Othello*, *King Lear* – the opposites of the *Commedia*. Downward. Born in Paradise, our mothers' wombs, then downward. Purgatory. Live in. How to focus on? Othello. Doubt. My pride, no Paradise for me. Prospero, his Paradise in the play, no *Paradiso*. There is no Paradise, the threshold in the *Commedia*. Othello is on the threshold of Paradise – kissing dead Desdemona, dying. Prospero, his projects, no Paradise. Our damnation – Purgatory. Harmony achieved with the help of God (Dante); by human means (Shakespeare).

Vaulting ambition, overleaps, falls on th'other.

No time to ride.

All comes and nothing goes.

Time – passive and active. The world and its inhabitants are neither. If you shorten time, you may betray yourself. Let oneself be carried by time.

The soul reveals her capabilities according to the capabilities of the body so that in childhood she brings forth simplicity.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, BEEP. Beep, beep, beep, beep, BEEP. I am still alive, whatever I say and it is better not to say anything, otherwise they might say, 'What did you say?' I shall never prove to them I am no longer alive. Feather, feather, feather, feather, FEATHER.

EPILOGUE

And once again I hear the word I cannot hear without making a few grimaces which might or might not contradict each other: I am still in two minds about this word and the notion it denotes. The word is ‘freedom’ and the notion associated with it is quite different from the word itself, from its strict, dictionary-supplied definition. And that is how semiologists and sociologists explain the very nature of freedom, saying that inside it there is a lot of room for contradictions, definitions. ‘The word itself is free, you know,’ they say with a series of mischievous smiles and every smile you detect on their faces contradicts the previous one, in spite of its mischievous character. Of course the notion ‘mischief’ is also quite manifold and has a finger in every pie: even a murder can be characterised as ‘mischievous’, although such a mischief really overleaps itself and becomes a serious crime.

In short, the freedom we always talk about, even if we are neither Hegels nor Schlegels, manifests itself everywhere: in every word, in every leaf that may fall, dying and rotting, or remain on the branch to which it was attached at its birth. The leaf says to itself, ‘Well, I’m about to fall because of the season I’m going through. Of course I could stay on the branch and even remain faithful to it for another year or so, but I’m no longer in love with this branch. For a while I thought I had owed my very existence to its generosity and fertility, but now I know I owe nothing to anybody – I’m a self-born autodidact and this branch is neither my mother, nor my father, nor even my brother. Anyway, I’m fed up with this branch and I think I’ll feel much more comfortable in the air and on the surface of the Earth, on her hospitable moss.’

‘You’re utterly and bitterly mistaken,’ says the branch. ‘You’ll fall and rot because of our common predestination and universal determinism. I’ll also fall, sooner or later. And our grandfather – I mean, the tree itself – will also succumb to the downward movement. Illness and suffering seem preordained to be our lot.’

‘And what about Hegel?’ says the leaf.

‘Hegel? Why Hegel? Usually leaves speak of Leibniz.’

‘I’m fed up with Leibniz and Spinoza. Hegel says that no form whatsoever can be discerned in the future. And you keep on talking about rottenness and death.’

‘It was dinned into me I am to die,’ says the branch.

‘Yes, you dare to affirm that our future is down there – at the bottom of the heap, in other words. But I prefer the air and the clouds where I’d like to spend my holiday.’

‘Wait for Shelley’s wind. I’m afraid your age and decrepit health is about to cut your umbilical cord, my son.’

‘It’s just another manifestation of my intrinsic and immortal freedom. I wish to fall because I hate you, Father, Mother, Brother and Sister.’

And the leaf bade his father adieu and left. Of course, according to Hegel and Hegelians, philosophers should not prophesy: they are not Percy and not all of them are about to die, fatally wounded by Henry V. They have eternity or Reason on their hands and consequently had better deal with what is and keep on going, rotting and spoiling all our sports. I also have my eternity, my super-grand narratives on my hands or rather on my reason, within it – at the very core of it, in point of fact. We humans believe we are the only animals to have the power of reason; and sometimes we go so far as to persuade both us and others that we are not animals at all, and if Brigitte Bardot dares question this point of view, we say to her, ‘You would be well-advised to reread

Descartes, thereby refreshing your memory as to his learned, Cartesian attitude towards animals or automatons, as he calls them.'

According to the same sources, Reason contemplates both nature and its own (or our own) self – in logic and psychology, mind you. *Reason* you, as Hegel used to say. And if Reason withdraws into itself and sets about looking at itself more closely – from the inside, as it were – it realises that the only certainty one can trust and count upon is Self, which remains obscure and almost invisible unless one struggles for recognition after having struggled for life, survival and the lack of bugs, mosquitoes and so on. Of course you can try and struggle for recognition before making up your mind to wage war on the world (or worlds, as the case may be), but you should never completely discard the hypothesis according to which you may die at any moment – of inundation or starvation, for example.

Suppose you struggle for recognition, doing your very best in this field and suddenly a sort of Zika cuts your umbilical cord, the one that literally enables you to remain wholly glued to the spot or to our Mother Earth. Sure enough, it is by virtue of this umbilical cord that you have been able to stick to this Mother of Ours like a window sticker ever since your birth. Well, last night you achieved the Hegelian (and Kojévian) recognition within an intimate circle made up of two colleagues, three neighbours and four friends. But this morning you died of Zika or stroke – our destiny's stroke of pen, according to some poets – and your recognition is about to vanish into thin air: even these four friends of yours will not attend your funeral.

Of course you can always rely on a sort of posthumous recognition – a belated one, for sure, coming after the exit and extinction of your consciousness where you might have felt jubilant over your triumphs. And then you realise that nothing is more important than health without which you cannot even enjoy a club sandwich. And so once again you begin to struggle for life and Reason and Absolute Knowledge (*absoluten Wissens*) that talks to you about freedom, death and God's grace. It is high time a fortune-teller made his or her appearance in your life where, most of the time, you are perplexed, doubting and unbearable, in common parlance. This fortune-teller speaks to you about the great J. F. C. who predicted his own death thus, 'We're not here for long. So make the most of every moment. We forget this so often, and get caught up in missions and desires. We think we have forever and a day. Fiddlesticks – we have a day and no forever whatsoever. What's more, we don't even have this day we're talking about to our friends, consciousness and guardian angel. Can't you understand you're here on a leave of absence? You're left alone and become absent – you disappear or die, in other words. I predict your death because you're here on a short visit you take no advantage of: you are too stupid for that. You make the least of every moment and every moment walks by and dissolves in warm water, cold air and lukewarm time.'

You ask this man – for once, it is a man you are facing as if he were your biggest problem – what his credentials are: you cannot listen to a charlatan who only predicted the date and outcome of the general election and the exact outcome of the Michael Jackson trial. It is true he also correctly predicted that the Olympics were coming to London rather than Paris. Of course you say to this old guru, 'I don't care about the Olympics and their whereabouts. Or the Michael Jackson trial. What about my money? Apparently you failed to predict the London bombings of July 7, 2005. They're far more important than the Michael Jackson trial and tribulations.'

'An elevated perspective is the key to a meaningful existence,' he answers. 'As Jupiter soon reaches the end of its retrograde phase, you'll find the higher you rise, the further you see.'

'So you don't see anything from the bottom of the heap, do you?'

‘No, you don’t. By the way, I’m terribly excited about the forthcoming Transit of Mercury.’

‘What kind of transit are you talking about?’

‘Next Monday, the planet will pass in front of the sun and be visible as a small dot.’

‘On the dot?’

‘On the dot.’

‘Well, don’t forget to dot the i’s and cross the t’s.’

You can predict anyone’s death by saying we are not here for long, which means we are here for short and consequently can die tomorrow or even on the stroke of midnight. Contrary to my prediction or misapprehension or misconstruction, my dearest friend I sang the praises (and requiems) of did not die after all, due to a bad connection and misconception; the misconsumption of a piece of news. Well, I misconstrued our mutual friend’s phone message because of the thunder, storm and torrential rain that had flooded everything down to words and thoughts. (We must ensure that the people responsible for the phone and power failure are brought to account.)

Our mutual friend – a Dickens character, you know – called me one afternoon, right after the stroke of midday, if you please, and left a message on my answerphone, saying our mutual friend had just passed away – perhaps in his sleep. I burst into tears and my tears drowned out all the names I might have taken notice of, had I really listened to this phone message. The point is I did not really listen to it: as they say, we listen only to what we wish to hear; and yet I did not wish to hear anything about my most wonderful friend’s death. Far be it from it, far be it from me. I hope my incantation has taken away this malediction as far as the point of no return which should not be confused with eternal recurrence, mind you. On no account is my friend allowed to die, but if he does die, contrary to all my predictions, wishes and prayers, he must return at all cost, making the most of our doctrine of eternal recurrence.

I cried for three hours at least while listening to his music, to the works I adore not only because they belong to my friend’s Reason, Consciousness, Intuition and Skill. I just *love* his music, no strings attached. I mean, I have never said to him either jokingly or otherwise, ‘You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.’

‘Isn’t it the other way round?’

‘All right, all right. I scratch your back and you’ll scratch mine. As a young boy I suffered from eczema, and I’m in my second childhood now, you know.’

‘And what about death?’

‘I’ve already described your death in great detail. But if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch your name from the Book of the Dead.’

Oddly enough, when listening to the message, I did not hear the name of our other mutual friend – there are so many of them, thanks to Dickens – that, at some point, I said to myself no one had really died, either really or unreally: everything seemed so unreal, as women usually say. That is right – everything and everybody seemed unreal, due to my tears’ obtrusive and unremovable presence: for once, nothing wished to vanish into thin air. In the meantime – while waiting for what they call ‘a lady vanishes’ – I began to listen to my ‘late’ friends’ works: to his quartet inspired by Schubert’s maiden and her all-too-realistic death; to his homage to Mahler’s *Song of the Earth*, if my English version does not distort Mahler’s features beyond recognition. (And yet we shall always recognise *his* Earth, *his* Adieu, *his* Erde.)

Perhaps I just wished to come to terms with his music which I do not always approve of: he is too ideological to my taste; and hopefully there is nothing ideological either in my taste or my mind. (Only great, great-grand narratives.) At last I did come to terms with it. I came to it, to its terms and germs, to its flower that a friend always gives to his friend at the moment of departure. I came to everything and almost everybody, but I could not stay with them: my friend was dead and I was prevented from going to Moscow to attend his funeral. And then I realised he had *not* died; I did not add 'at all'.

Then I had a doubt. (There are so many 'and thens' in one's life one does not know how to handle them.) I called Dickens' friend and asked him which friend he had spoken of in his message. And he uttered another name – also dear to my heart, as Yeats might have said; not to *that* extent, not to *that* point of no return, of no recurrence. And I think about him, about this other friend of mine, my *late* friend; and I name him in my song. If you have many friends – and you are justifiably proud of it – they will all die and that might be regarded as a sort of inconvenience. (After all, everything is a sort of a sort of.) If you have a mother, some day she will die and you might suffer to some extent upon learning about her death; or to all extents (or to all deaths, according to the Talmud). If you are an orphan, there are no deaths in store for you with the exception of your own death and that of your domestic animal.

If you are sensitive to death, you may deplore and mourn the disappearance of a stone, even if this disappearance is likely to take a thousand years; even if this stone's death is as imaginary as Molière's hero whose health was above all suspicion. You pick up an ordinary stone and see in it – as in a mirror or the doctrine of pantheism – the picture of the whole world that goes down the drain and succumbs to the second law of thermodynamics. You say to yourself – you can also say this to the stone itself – that if God wishes to torture this poor innocent stone, He can connect it to the famous Chinese drip which destroys stones, boulders, rocks and even the rock of Sisyphus. Our sinner keeps carrying this rock up and thinks his torture is as infinite as the cruelty of our pagan gods; but he omits to take into consideration our Christian God whose mercy guides a drop of water towards this fateful, malignant rock, the very symbol of pagan heartlessness. And after one thousand nights – plus one night as usual – Sisyphus realises that the rock he is burdened with has been reduced to a pebble he can put into his mouth, if he feels like sucking a pebble. So he bursts into laughter, puts the pebble into his mouth, sucks it until it dissolves in his saliva and begins to collect both pebbles and candies for the sake of his mouth and its delights.

My friend did not die and I cannot help thinking about the Russians who believe that if you believe someone is dead, contrary to what reality might tell you if you listened to it now and then – he is alive and kicking, she is alive and smiling – this person will live almost forever. I do not think he will live forever – he suffers from lung and bowel cancers – but I hope I shall meet him again in Moscow of all places; or any other place. Aren't we immortal after all? We receive a phone call and hear the word 'friend'; and we jump to one of these conclusions that lead us astray. The point is sometimes it is better to go astray, to be led astray, for if you do not, if you go straight on, you are bound to die and not necessarily in your sleep. I heard 'our friend died', but I did not hear the name of the beloved one and so went astray, shedding tears (and perhaps a few years) for another friend of mine. Well, it is up to us not to listen to names. Of course we are allowed to shed as many tears as we wish or do not wish, but all names are probably sacred; as sacred as the name of God. You do not hear a name, shed as many as 1,001 tears and then they say, 'You're wrong. Someone else passed away.' But you do

not have to listen to someone else's name; nor do you have to name anybody, dropping this and that name. Give no names to humans and dogs and they will not die. All names are bad with the exception of the name of God.

Apparently at some point everything was simple and tragic; and all this was going on in the Sixties when only hearts told the tale of life and death. If your heart was in good working order, even your unruly and suicidal cells were under control and you did not have to worry about anything except diabetes, blood pressure, strokes and so on. But our heart used to stop in those days; and sometimes for no reason at all. Besides, it has not lost this pernicious habit which costs humanity a great many lives. And some of these lives are precious, even if we do not always deal with Nobel prize winners and Pablo Picasso. In the Sixties, however, they did not realise the heart might not have finished its tale in spite of its frightful immobility: you could have nursed it back to life, had you massaged it properly and patiently. Besides, there is such a thing as artificial respiration that enables you to enjoy a sort of artificial life for an hour or two. And at the end of these hours of agony endured by your family, friends and lovers, you reappear in the vale of tears and everybody sheds tears of joy to salute your back-to-barracks ritual.

Nowadays they can bring you back to life in no time at all, provided your brain does not put a veto on your eternal-recurrence project and stops its functions in defiance of your superhuman efforts. More often than not the brain dies because our cells lack oxygen and get all sorts of cancers linked to vascularisation. Well, it is all Greek to you; or Russian and Chinese; and the problem remains, and this problem is not really in a class of its own. It belongs to the class known as deterioration, disorder, tragedy, the seamier side of life, the seamier side of death, the other side of the coin. I like having a white car, but the other side of the coin is that it soon gets dirty, as they say driving to the nearest carwash. Most of the time our earthly life exhibits its white qualities and we say proudly, 'Our financial position is rosy.' But then, for no reason at all, it grows dirty, even if we do our best not to walk through puddles and never cross our streets in the company of *their* tyres and the dirt they sprinkle our trousers and dresses with in spite of our eyes being riveted on both our clothes and their tyres. Be that as it may, this side of the coin does not worry us beyond measure because our laundries are well-equipped and consequently cope with any dirt – any shape or form of it. The matter stands differently with the brain and its cells – our prison cells, to be exact; for no prisons are as weird as our cells, according to our doctors and ourselves, our relatives and colleagues.

Of course we are quite aware that, in this domain at least, human beings are not in a class of their own: the cosmos itself is always about to pass away, fly away or to big-crunch, to great-smash somewhere. All our star clusters and piles of galaxies have been pulled apart for many millennia, and as a result of this star-pull we are always on the threshold of extinction. Under the circumstances, we might say that both the United States and Russia have their feet on the Threshold – along with other countries and feet. Let alone our species, as they say after making a speech about the universe and its constituents that seem to have quarrelled once and for all so that they can never come to terms again; not even after the next world conflagration.

We missed the train, and on top of that we had to wait for two hours for the next one, as they say, even if they missed no train and did not wait at all except for their everlasting happiness. Symbols, metaphors and tropes usurp the playground around which our commonplace, innocuous words used to run in zigzags until they were exhausted. So when, influenced by their gurus and other teachers, human beings say, 'We missed the train,' they

might mean they missed their lives or a few parts of them at least; or just an auction sale, as the case may be. Of course if you miss something, you have to wait for its ersatz for a few days, if not for the rest of your life; and waiting is always unpleasant, even if God turns up at last.

Many individuals miss their lives and none of us is in a position to miss his or her death; and yet I could say about my friend's death, 'I missed his death and so I'll have to wait for another month or so for the next death of his,' which sounds ridiculous and unkind. Once again we deal with the problem of our language that misses no opportunity to lead us astray or straight to all sorts of mix-ups, confusions and comedies (or tragedies) of errors. If I say as I think about my friend's imaginary death, 'I missed his death,' my foes might conclude I am waiting for my friend's demise, death and funeral. Why would I do that? He is my dearest friend and nothing is further from my train of thought than such a thought, such a blasphemy. Besides, even if he dies for good, I shall inherit neither his house in Greece nor the royalties from his works: he is married and adores his wife even more than music. Nor am I likely to marry his wife, once he is dead and buried – for many obvious reasons that I do not feel like writing about: even my life's nonsenseness knows its limits. So why should I wish my friend's death? To all intents and purposes, my attitude towards this problem is complete and clear-cut and therefore sounds thus, 'I'd miss my friend very much, if his cancers got their ways.' This conclusion could also sound as follows, 'I'd miss my friend a lot, if his cancers got the upper hand (or hands) in their struggle with his struggle for life.' And once again we come up against the freedomproblem, as the Germans might put it; or against a brick wall, to put it metaphorically.

We could talk about it for years and centuries: that is what humanity has done already; repeatedly and mulishly. Let me give you a concrete, real and non-metaphysical, non-metaphorical example. Incidentally, such examples mostly feature real *people* – not just objects, subjects, ideas, notions and tropes. I know a multi-millionaire who seems to be in love with a woman; and this piece of information does not mean we are *not* dealing with a homosexual or a misogynist. Many homosexuals and misogynists are in love with Kathleen Ferrier and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf whose voices turn them on, in common parlance. All right, this time we are dealing with voices, not with bodies; but we never know for sure which part or quality of the person we are in love with we really love. Most people answer, 'I adore his or her eyes because they show me his or her soul,' but some of us might be in love with someone's ears, fingers or shoulder blades. To some extent *any* part of the person we are in love with shows us his or her soul – a more or less pantheistic point of view. We can sincerely declare we see our goddess or god everywhere, not only within the framework of his or her body; or within the pictureframe into which their body is inserted.

I am talking about a couple whose riches are bottomless or topless; anyway they are *outside* the heap I am always concerned with – a tower of Babel in its own right – but that does not really matter: they will die in the near or distant future like the kings and drifters our 17th-century poets spoke about at length. Well, our couple enjoys a sort of freedom we cannot always avail ourselves of because this sort is fraught with moral, psychological and even economic dangers. For instance, they talk about their apples of discord in the presence of those they hardly know personally, and you listen to them wondering why they reveal their secrets to you – the ones you would keep to yourselves all your lives. The man can say to you on the spur of his moment – this moment is certainly not yours – that his companion is about to ruin his life and his chances of winning the race. Then you catch a glimpse of this unreliable woman who stands in the doorway as if about to pounce upon you with a view to contradicting her companion's statements and descriptions. She embarks upon her story on the

verge of tears – as if standing on the threshold of tears – and tells you something about her sorry plight, her broken life, and you are tempted to say to her something irrelevant, something along the lines of, ‘Never try to mend a broken machine without disconnecting it from the electricity supply.’ Your reply is all the more apposite since she often compares her life to a broken Chinese vase, which undeniably reveals her fondness for figures of speech. So you might enlarge upon the electricity supply to convey to her the idea linked to her companion to whom she has never been glued with what they call ‘superglue’. (A mixed metaphor. A homage to Dante.) On this glue’s label you see a man whose feet are stuck to the ceiling, but contrary to everyone’s expectations and calculations, he does not fall and so adds nothing to the number of falls our history is punctuated with.

You might say to her, ‘You’re not glued to him, you know.’

‘I am,’ she says. ‘At least I hope I am. Yes, hopefully I’m glued to him with superglue.’

‘Really?’

‘I don’t wish to find myself at the bottom of the heap. So I’m glued to heaven. He’s my heaven, in spite of everything. If, for some reasons best known to himself, I lose him once and for all and forever, I’ll have no money, no heaven, no jewels.’

‘Why do you say your life’s broken?’

‘Because we’ve never slept in the same bed.’

Suppose your companion makes a similar confession to one of your colleagues or to your best friend on whose discretion you have never relied. A few days later all your colleagues and friends will talk about your impotency day in day out. Jane, Lyn, Lou and Salome sat in the kitchen having a good gossip about their friends – this kind of thing, you know.

‘I’ve got some juicy gossip for you.’

‘Have you?’

‘I don’t like all this idle gossip.’

‘Don’t you?’

‘Of course his impotency isn’t confined to beds and baths, is it?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘He must be impotent *everywhere*.’

‘It’s only a matter of time before he’s forced to resign.’

You have no alternative but to say to all these people that Freud was impotent – at least in the second half of his life. You can also remind them that one’s sperm can be sublimated instead of spurting out all over the place, whatever this place is and wherever it can be situated. They are likely to answer that Freud misunderstood their children who will never be traumatised by the scenes they may witness either in their cradles or in their parents’ bedrooms. In short, Freud and his arguments – even if they are regarded by specialists as sledgehammers and indisputable – do not carry much weight with these people.

Before resigning, you can also point out that you make love on carpets and not in beds; and that you actually do not sleep on these carpets. So the formula, ‘We’ve never slept together’ means nothing: carpets are even more propitious for lovemaking on account of their exotics. But your opponents may retort that you interpret this idiom too literally, omitting its global implication that inexorably points to your incapacity to have sex with women, men or animals; at least *actively*. This time you really have no alternative but to resign and it is little wonder that you die of hunger a few months later.

In short, there are different kinds of freedom and one of them concerns mostly the wealthy and the mighty whose outspokenness proves they can do whatever they like, with the exception of indefensible murders and blameworthy rapes. Actually they can finance a number of murders, provided they stay away from the scenes of their crimes, if only a few yards away. On the other hand, it is pointless to finance a rape, staying behind the throne, as it were.

The other kind is related to words or rather wordings: you can express the same idea by means of *other* words. For instance, you can say, 'I tried taking tablets for the headache but they didn't have any effect.' However, you should be aware that such a statement may cause you much trouble. Your colleagues may break the news to your boss, saying your headache undermines your efficiency and trustworthiness. So you had better express the same idea thus, 'I had a terrible headache, but even so I went to the concert.' If you do so, however, nothing will prevent your colleagues from thinking that next time you may *not* go to a concert hall. So you had better not speak of your headaches at all. And if you are unable to restrain yourself, you can modify your statement thus, 'My head makes me unhappy.' And if your colleagues ask you what you mean by that, you will just say, 'Too many thoughts, you know. Too many ideas.'

My freedom depends upon my freedom and my wish to feel free in the world where everything is *not*-free. (That is what our optimists call 'freedom' – saying 'not' instead of using the word 'prison'.) All right – I wish to assert myself and bring out all sorts of wills I have inside my body, soul, reason or understanding. I have it and them somewhere – no doubt about that; yet sometimes it is better to know *what* you have somewhere and *where* this *somewhere* is situated; otherwise I shall not be able to take advantage of my free will coping with constraints, rules, laws and social contracts.

My fellow creatures say, 'I'll give you a key then you're free to come and go as you please.' These creatures and fellows (and jolly good maidens) speak of their flats instead of opening their arms and bidding welcome to the whole universe (my universe). What does this small flat mean in my life? (However big, it is small in comparison with the universe, Adam Kadmon, my self and eternity.) If I am allowed to go in and out – in the domain of this world of yours – I can say I am relatively free, and I can even gain enough momentum to proclaim the following truth: 'Free universe, isn't it?' Alas, it is not as free as I imagine, and the pictures I picture to myself are not faithful to the original that is rather dirty and out of tune with the harmony I have yearned for since my adulthood or childhood or some brotherhood, sisterhood or other.

Of course you can speak at length about pure freedom and desire for knowledge, even if you do not feel like analysing Kant's analyses of our life and its a prioris (or priorities). He says you fail to represent something; nevertheless I succeed in seeing my house, bank and bank account. That is what Kant calls 'practical reason' and for once I agree with him completely, although I would not mind calling my bank accounts and the operations related to them 'romantic tools'. Well, I call them 'romantic' and put them right in the midst of dynamic sublimities that Kant dissects somewhere – in one of his Critiques, no doubt. (We shall get nowhere if all you can do is criticise, as Hegel said to him once upon a time; in the heat of the moment.) He speaks about 'Nature as might'; as for you, you speak and write about economics that are as dynamic as any sublimities you can come across in mountains and meadows. You can even compare your gains to a waterfall that falls into your life so

abundantly you begin to question the very notion of our *Geworfenheit*: someone (alias God) continuously showers you with praise and presents; or money, in other words. (Instead of throwing you into many latrines.)

I call the money I have somewhere – in Singapore or Panama or nowhere – ‘my romantic tools’, which is true to some extent; and that extent is extensive enough to enable you and myself to be on an equal footing with 19th-century Romantic poets. You never say, ‘I’m a billionaire, you know.’ Neither do I. Dostoyevsky does. (*A Raw Youth*.) ‘And there’s nothing but money, gold, jewels in our world where status symbols count even more than signs.’ You use your bank accounts magnificently – for the simple reason that you adore nature and beauty as such; not for the sake of outward signs of status. That is why you buy Picasso’s pictures and Giacometti’s sculptures. And also villas and castles everywhere, with the exception of the air where my castles look suspicious, if not disreputable.

Without asking my permission, they baptise me and I go up and down as a priest throws me into a bucket and pulls me out of it, in the nick of time: I am not to drown. I am to pave my way to God, His emissaries, His missionaries, His space-time. The bottom of the bucket, the top of the bucket. He plays with my body. I do not agree to differ.

Of course –so many times I say and write ‘of course’ as if something were on a collision course; and off, off, off, all the time – I wish I could always be grasped by the scruff of the neck and plunge into His water; and pulled out, if necessary. No need – leave me in the water: I will not suffocate because the report said the victims had suffocated in the *fumes*. I am not of their numbers, *Gott sei Dank*. Nor am I Desdemona whose husband suffocated her by holding a pillow over her head. I am perhaps Odelia; and Cordelia. And Cornelia. And Saburov.

My eyelids are as heavy as the vault of heaven, but I am both Atlas and Hercules whose cumulative strength enables them to hold the stars and also my sinews. At once I begin to recall my former lives because without formers and futures nothing will really happen, even if you owe a rebirth certificate, a cast-iron will-to-power-to-live. Am I free? I move my hands, fingers, and also thoughts that are unmovable, for all my efforts that push them in all directions: in that of liberal economics, in that of our arts, in that of humanism where children are given candy, caresses and mammals (mommies) of all kinds.

How to guess His judgement? Project, Ran, Run. Kurosawa’s version of *King Lear*. Cordelia – the only positive character in the whole history. Certainly not Myshkin: too hysterical, over the top, over the bottom. A project – related to your destiny, the Hereafter, too late for earthly hopes. Why speak of other destinies, cities? All my sins. Running all the time. Ran. ‘My son.’ Ever, ever, ever.

Apparently everything was cut and dried a long time ago. And if you think you can make a decision on the spur of the moment, you are mistaken: you are subjected to your genes, our dinosaurs and their ancestors. And if you do change your mind, this metamorphosis was in your brain well before – at least seven seconds before, according to their machines. (Before your acts and happenings.) Anyway you had better not shake the world that has been shaken many times; to no avail. Shaken, taken; taken, shaken.

You can paint your lips, though. There is nothing so glamorous as a perfectly painted red lip, as exemplified by Amal Clooney at the Cannes Film Festival.

I can make a decision on the spur of the moment. This is the end, my soul, my Egypt, my soil, my Vladimir, my Rublev, my Beethoven. This is the end.

I had a dream, I made a journey. What remains is a feather. Your feather.

EPILOGUE 2

And then you go on another journey because all these journeys and days do not depend on feathers, tethers, fathers and mothers. All right, you need a mother, and many women need sons and daughters as long as they look for an outlet for their maternal, motherly and fatherly instincts. And according to Transcendentalists, Instincts are far more important than Reason or *Razum*, as the Russians put it. In short, everyone needs everybody and that is why we all go somewhere as if we really had to go hence and thence to prove we are free and our free will is more important than any other doctrine. We go somewhere and look at a number of bushes, trying to convey to them the very simple idea that can be expressed by one word 'freedom'. 'We are free,' our energy and thoughts convey to them, and we even go so far as to explain *why* we are free. And so we say we are free on account of our legs that are not paralysed, not yet. 'You, on the other hand,' we say to them, 'are unable to move unless a wind takes care of your immobility, after taking pity on your paralysis and impotence. But even our kind and generous wind can't convey your bodies or trunks to Australia, whereas we can take a flight to Sydney and even drink a few bottles of champagne during our flight.'

Of course those trees can retort on the spur of the moment and *du tic au tac*, 'You know, even trunks can move and frighten people out of their wits.'

'Are you referring to Macbeth and his forest?'

'We are.'

'All right. But this march was in a class of its own.'

'Everything is in a class of its own. Each person's genetic code is unique except in the case of identical twins.'

As usual, these interminable conversations – the ones we strike up with trees and bushes – lead us nowhere. And yet we are keen on our exchange of views because we have to talk to nature, to take it into our confidence; otherwise our communication might be limited to the imprints left in the grass by our feet; and occasionally by our hands. We talk to birds, to fish, to the Sun and we sigh beautifully, everlastingly, as we continue to talk to them. And we try to convey to all of them the idea which seems so ordinary one does not need to explain it anywhere, to anyone. We need no saints to learn that fish, worms, flies, Zikas, Zakas, and all other kas understand each other and can sing praises to God whenever their mouths are not filled with nourishment.

You pick up a feather (or a tether, as the case may be) and burst into song as you realise that if you find anything, be it a feather, a tether or a merza, you are alive and can welcome Nietzsche, Pythagoras and their eternal recurrences over and over again. For a while you talk to a number of trees – the exact figure escapes you for the moment – and sing your hymns to birds and their clothes, to sunbeams and all the beams you find as you jump from one hill to another, going from heaps, hills, mills and mightwills to dales and emails. You say to yourself – and so do I – that you are alive and kicking, and that is wonderful – as wonderful as life itself.

And being alive is a lifelong responsibility; or a lifeshort responsibility, according to pessimists or sages and Schopenhauerists. So you have to eat and drink, in common parlance, and this parlance says to you it is not enough to find a feather or even a mother: not *all* mothers have enough money and milk to feed or even spoon-feed their children. So they neither spoon-feed nor fork-feed them, as a result of which – of this under or no-nourishment – these children of theirs die on the spot or rather on a number of thresholds where they can be found by Dickens or Dostoyevsky. They *are* found by a multimillionaire whose soul is as big as the cosmos

itself, which means you can count on his bounty and duty to become an heir to a fortune usually described thus: \$1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

Most of the time, however, you are born into an ordinary family and do not die of hunger, tuberculosis or other calamities of the kind they speak about in 19th-century novels. You live a *run-of-the-mill* life and you are perfectly aware of the fact, which likewise informs you of other people's existences, fortunes and yachts. And the same fact also puts you in the picture about charity organisations and individual élans that shower all these dollars upon the needy and often the unworthy. Today, instead of depositing their children by front doors, mothers ring one of these organisations up and say, 'I'm very poor and my son is about to die.'

'What kind of death is he likely to suffer from?' asks a charitable voice.

'Hunger.'

'But you don't live in Africa, do you?'

'No.'

'Don't you know that no one dies of starvation in our country?'

'What am I supposed to do?'

'Go to Syria and then come back to become a migrant worker. Or just a migrant. And you'll get all you need.'

The point is you wish to get much more than you need: a scone with butter and jam, a dozen almonds, a bottle of milk. You need to become a billionaire, not just a migrant worker whose body must be prevented from starving to death and the Hereafter. So you say to your mother, 'Please put me in front of a luxurious villa, Mother.'

'Are you dying, my son?'

'I don't think so. But I'd like to live, you know.'

'Here's another scone for you.'

'I need yachts and villas, not just a scone and a Smartphone.'

A good and virtuous mother makes a few holes in her son's clothes, smears them with mud and blood, pinches her son's face and carries him towards the nearest villa. After a while, the front door opens and one spots a walking stick and even an arm that swings it to and fro. The walking stick sees its owner to his Roll Royce door, but suddenly the owner comes to a standstill as he catches a glimpse of a small, dirty body or boy. His clothes are tattered and threadbare and his body looks exactly like his clothes so that one might say it is also threadbare or just bare. 'Poor little thing,' says the gentleman as he turns towards his butler and props his own body on his walking stick. 'Peter, carry this boy to Mary, will you? And ask her to take care of him.'

A few years later, our Dickensian or Tolstoyian boy inherits everything down to the title of our duke whose funeral was broadcast and recorded for the sake of posterity.

I might have spread myself too thin, but if you concentrate your efforts and thoughts on one spot only – the Lady Macbeth complex – you realise almost immediately that you need a sort of synthesis and even what is called 'harmony'. And any synthesis requires an effort, a certain amount of energy, and ineluctably you come across the term you endeavour to avoid at all costs: 'entropy'. All right, you say to yourself, 'Dead, dead, dead, dead,' which is really all right because it is one spot, one bloodstain, and you are right because you *are* dead. But if you

dare add to this dear word another word that goes thus, 'I', you run a great many risks, even if you have no idea what these risks amount to; to what amount they amount, in other words. If you add this noun or pronoun to the simple word (to the simplest word in the world) 'dead', you seem to intimate to whoever happens to be within your hearing or rather uttering that it is you yourself who happen or rather unhappen to be as dead as a doornail; or any door, for that matter. (A door is dead unless someone pushes it either violently or not; pushes it open or shut; pushes it neutrally, whatever that might mean. It may mean just a manifestation of anger or any other emotion. Actually it may just mean 'push'.)

So you are stuck with the thesis that declares, 'Dead,' and you do not have to answer this thesis: no one raises a gun, takes aim and fires. And if one does, neither one's aim nor its firing concern you personally or even impersonally – it does not concern you at all. You announce your thesis out loud, not being quite satisfied with your inner voice, and do not wait for the antithesis which is obvious, isn't it? The antithesis in question or in dialectics sounds as follows, 'Alive,' and you might rejoice at learning you are alive in the vales of tears and joys and ecstasies. Well, you avail yourself of ecstasies before beginning to doubt everything, even your own 'I Think'; and you inevitably and ineluctably fall back upon your unhealthy obsession with synthesis. So you say to yourself, 'I'm alive.'

'But you're also dead,' answers your thesis or antithesis or both: it depends on the weather and on the feather you found in your garden this afternoon.

'I'm alive,' you say, shaking your head, fist and one of your legs.

'And what about our synthesis?' say both the and anti-the.

'What do you mean? How do you mean?'

'You're one of the living dead, one of their number.'

'What's their number?'

'1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.'

When they talk to you about those living dead, you visualise Boris Karloff who is either one of the Frankensteins, or just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill dead man. This dead man of his runs around, jumps about and also drags his feet as if to show he is dead after all; or not really alive, not quite. You drag your feet as well unless one of your feet is already in the grave and so you cannot really drag it, otherwise you might dig another grave, yet another one, and you do not need two graves. Of course there are specialists who maintain one needs two graves because one has two feet and each foot needs a grave of its own, otherwise it would not feel at ease in the other world. All right, you dig two graves and put your feet in them, straddling them or the piece of the Earth where the two graves can be found, if someone resolves to locate them in our space-time. You straddle them and it, but your body is not satisfied, even if it lets out a loud, satisfied belch that means nothing in the context of your grave-oriented arrangement. To make sure your hypothesis is right, you ask it the following question, 'Are you satisfied with the new arrangement?'

'I'm not in a grave. Don't I deserve one?'

'But one of your parts is already in the grave. Two parts, to be exact.'

'Exact. So what? What about my other parts?'

'Do you really wish to be in the grave?'

'I'd like to own something, you know.'

‘But you own the air where you stand. And also a particle of the sun. And if it rains, you’ll own a multitude of drops.’

‘So will other people and I don’t like sharing anything with anybody. In my life there’s no room for the idiom “share and share alike”.’

‘Some bodies are never satisfied!’ you say to your body, determined to round off the fruitless dialogue.

Anyway, you have no alternative but to remain where you are: your feet have got stuck in their respective (and respectable) graves. And if a curious passer-by asks you what you are doing there, you will explain to him and other pedestrians that you are one of the living dead. And if they knit their brows, you can add, ‘One of the deading live, if you wish. In my case and in any other case, life and death are interchangeable. What’s more, they’re on an equal footing because we live in a free country where democracy reigns completely and fully. If you say, “One of the living dead,” dead or death can lodge a complaint, stating that it shouldn’t be cited *after* life. “I refuse to settle for second best – I strive for perfection.” Besides, if you say “dead”, this word deprives our death of what may be called a “process” or a “movement” or “a progress”. So we should say one of the “deading live”, if only from time to time. First you say “he” and then you say “she”; and vice versa. The same procedure, you know.’

Of course they are entitled to ask you if death and life are *mixed* in your substance – ‘a kind of mixed school, you know,’ they might add. Or a mixed-ability class, so to speak. After all, death and life have different levels of ability. For instance, death is more patient than life: he can remain in his grave for years and centuries, provided there are no body snatchers in the area where the grave and its tombstone are located. Life, on the other hand, is very mobile and therefore can be likened to a mobile phone the One carries in One’s pocket. (And once again, one wonders Who this legendary One is and why He or She flung us into the world of sorrow, suffering and so on.) Yes, life is all the more mobile and agile within the framework of a mobile home: if you live in one of them, you travel almost automatically, even if you do not like to go to parties or events outside the home. (A stay-at-home, in other words.) Of course if you happen to be paralysed, you are bedridden or armchairridden: you cannot do otherwise unless someone carries you around; not in their pocket, though.

Well, once again we can say that the plethora of rules and explanations is both contradictory and confusing, and so humanity eventually got to the point where no one knew what was going on and where anyone was going in the hope of getting something or someone. Every life can and must be likened to a sort of election – according to St Augustine, Jansen and their numerous followers. You either rub shoulders with the elect or stand shoulder to shoulder with the so-called reprobate whose ship is bound for Hell, needless to say. So one might conclude that election returns produce a confusing picture of gains and losses. That is why we often speak about mixtures – about every cloud and its silver lining, for instance. Anyway, life and death are mixed to the point of looking alike and one may consequently say they are really twin brothers or sisters. (Actually they are Siamese twins.) We carry death in our bodies – not only because of a number of cells that die every instant, being replaced – not always, not always – by other cells and nerves. We are *always* dying and we do not need Heidegger to learn this truth at a very early age – sometimes in our cradle; if our grandmother dies, for instance. Feelings die, even if we happen to deal with the lovers and families who live happily ever after. Thoughts die as well, even if we note them down and feed them into our computers. Two days later, when coming across these thoughts again, we often say to ourselves, ‘What a fool I was! How incredibly stupid! This thought is dead.’ And

sometimes it takes them (our thoughts) only several hours to die a natural or violent death, making us doubt the quality of our brains.

But there are individuals whose thoughts try to convince them that life is life and that death is situated on the other side of the coin. They admit that we analyse the same coin, but they separate death from life with a view to enjoying life to the utmost, constantly turning a deaf ear to what may be called ‘the funeral march of death’. Anaximander speaks about two things that make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice, which means that death injures life and vice versa. Of course death always wins – hands down, as pessimists affirm with great assurance – but life can triumph now and then. For instance, in the Soviet Union one used to hear on the radio, ‘Lenin is more alive than all the living put together.’ I think that is a slight exaggeration; and yet our tourists are still shown a number of statues featuring our immortal guide’s features and stature.

Suppose you fall in love and a friend of yours says with a frown, ‘You’re happy today, but you’re unlikely to be happy forever – you and your beloved are mortal, you know.’ In this case, your beloved might say to you, ‘Don’t listen to his lies – he is just trying to poison your mind against me.’

‘Do you think you’re immortal?’ your friend might point out.

‘Well, Romeo and Juliet *are* immortal, aren’t they?’ you might retort.

‘Are you Shakespeare?’ your friend may ask you.

‘I’m not, but I’ll do my best to immortalise our love. We’ll build in sonnets pretty rooms.’

‘And what about your *bodies*?’

This question is immortal (immoral) anyway, whatever we think about these eternal problems and however light-heartedly we may tackle them. Many people think that the soul is immortal and the body perishable on account of its material, atomic substance. Matter is bound to die, even if we may be reborn with our bodies or rather their glorious equivalents or counterparts. What matters, however, is what they logically call ‘sexual matters’, for souls are not supposed to make love, sleeping with each other on stars and comets. Of course many of us think they will not care about sex, once they cross the threshold of death and that of Paradise. Bodies or no bodies – what does it matter? Matter does not matter, in other words; or in the *same* words, come to think of it. And what if the human soul is material too? Subject to decay and death, in other words? After all, some Greeks thought so; and Tertullian added, ‘The soul is tangible. As tangible as any tree.’

‘And what about the Tree of Life?’ he was asked.

‘It is tangible too, given that life is quite tangible. The same goes for the Tree of Death.’

Our Greeks – at least some of them – were really muddle-headed, for all their curiosity and occasional scientific outbursts. Let us take, for instance, the idea of justice – both cosmic and human – to which they used to attach a lot of importance. When we say, ‘There’s no justice in the world when people can be made to suffer like that,’ we mean that we starve to death and are burnt alive on a regular basis. But what did Anaximander mean by ‘justice’? (Assuming that he did mean something when uttering this word.) He might have spoken about mixtures, as a matter of fact: one should not *always* have the upper hand, lying low now and then to allow others to reign and triumph in their turn. If there was only life on Earth with no death anywhere, injustice would make everyone’s life unbearable; although I would not mind being immortal, eternal. So, to put it metaphorically, you should pour the honey into the bowl and mix it thoroughly with the other ingredients such as rottenness, decay, pain and decadence. (In this context, honey is life or bliss.) And if you do not put all these flies in your ointment,

you will be unhappy for the rest of your life, putting a curse on the rest of your family, your friends and colleagues. And perhaps on all of humankind. (Yet another variety of one-upmanship.)

Let us go back to those who do not like mixtures, with the exception of cocktails and suchlike. Well, they simply do not like mixing life and death and consequently do their best to forget death until the arrival of cancer or a heart attack. Of course they are aware of the fact they are to die, whatever they do and however much time they spend in saunas and gyms. But if they make an unnecessary effort and visualise the life-and-death dance, they see two timorous boxers who, not daring to box each other's ears, merely dance in the ring, their fists ineffectively at the ready.

Mystics talk to themselves thus, 'It's stupid to believe you're immortal because you have 13 children. Or because you belong to a great nation. We identify with that tree over there, for instance, after making sure it is still alive and has no roots in the grave. That's not enough, however, and we're quite aware of the fact. That's why we also identify with other trees and mountains – they live longer than trees and cars. We identify with the sun and all the stars and milky ways. In other words, we're taking steps to ensure immortality in our spiritual kingdom. Our body's unavoidable downfall is irrelevant – our life has already expanded outwards to embrace everything fraternally and sisterly and fatherly. Incidentally, our body is already kaput.'

Actually you can hold death at bay – or rather the dread of death; of course – by waving your fist and saying, 'Go away and never come near me.' (Waving one's fist in the air also makes one's courage come into the open.) If, on the other hand, you refuse to give any physical expression to an emotion, it is likely to die of its own accord and as a matter of course. Of course it is easier just to lie down and look at the ceiling as long as necessary to neutralise a fear, an emotion, anguish and even unrequited love. While doing so (or doing nothing) you may say to yourself, 'I just don't care. Death, life, love, hatred. They're all mixed to such an extent I can no longer distinguish between them. Actually I don't know whether I'm alive or dead, in love or not. Where's this love? Where's that death? There's only this ceiling I can see rather clearly as long as the sun gives me a hand. And then I'm no longer with this hand I'm indifferent to and the ceiling disappears within space-time-night.'

And here is your last poem:

Ceiling, ceiling, ceiling.

No selling, no buying.

Sun, sun, sun, sun.

Son, son, son, son.

Daughter, daughter, daughter.

Thank God I've no children.

No life, no death, no resurrection.

Going from one hell to another.

Lying in one hall or in another.

I always whistle in the bath.

There's no fixed or permanent self.

The ceiling, the bath, the bed,

Lying, dying, not dying, not lying.

Lying all the time. To oneself.

*These are my or someone else's selves.
I call them elves, until further notice.*

The mind is a continuously running kaleidoscope and, but for its runs and dances – *totentanzes*, among other waltzes – we would never know we exist, think and are even acquainted with Descartes. The mind turns round and round, and we follow this itinerary, realising it is the vicious circle we got caught up in at the moment of our conception. In spite of our speed and trajectory, we realise once again that we are getting nowhere and this time the term ‘go-getters’ seems to be reduced to its first term, namely ‘go’. Suddenly the going grows hard and nothing remains of the promising formula, with the exception of the hyphen. But hyphens get us nowhere and so we remain where we are: in between life and death or in the middle of both.

Of course we should get rid of sterile thoughts: they have an unfortunate tendency to clutter our mind or minds with ornaments instead of going straight to the point where one of the treasure islands is located. Why should we acquire any piece of knowledge? You look at the ceiling as you lie (dying, according to Faulkner and Beckett) in your bed, doing nothing except living and writing poetry. This occupation or non-occupation neither gets nor leads you anywhere – not even to the ceiling, mind you. Why not get up and, using your favourite ladder, reach the ceiling in no time at all with a view to dancing on it, a Fred Astaire tap dance? Of course you might retort that anything is just *toten* and rotten *tanz*, whatever you do or miss, so that it does not really matter where you are and what you are thinking about. You say to yourself, ‘Ceiling, ceiling, silly,’ and that is just the dance of a ceiling and of a dunce who looks at it. So you come to the inevitable conclusion that the mind does not exist on its own, being attached to a variety of objects and subjects. What are they, you may ask yourself? And then you answer you should know all these things because you *need* them; otherwise you might just as well blow the whole place up and forget about it. And you have no wish to forget it and consequently do not fetch a box of matches and a few petrol bombs.

There is no denying you face a lot of challenges, even if you stay in bed for hours and hours, writing about bath salts. You *may* see death in front of you, but you do not really *need* it, which means you can and should forget it once and for all. The mind is supposed to be useful and you are about to make use of it; perhaps for the very first time. ‘Why didn’t you use your head and cover the furniture before you started painting?’ your mother asks you and gets no answer. Actually, by way of an answer you begin to cover the furniture and even wrap it up as if to imitate the artist whose name sounds like that of Agatha Christie. Of course you no longer paint either your room or any picture: they have gone out of fashion anyway and forever. (But your room is *in* fashion now.) What you have done is called an ‘installation’, thereby proving to all and sundry that your mind can be useful, if called upon in the nick of time; or just on time.

Yet some women might find this work of art superfluous, if not ridiculous, for if you spend your time on the arts – or on anything else, for that matter – you should be *richly* rewarded; otherwise you just waste your time and life. If your piece is not in a museum or in a prestigious gallery, you are regarded as a loser – even if some of your friends say you are a genius. But they invariably add you should take advantage of your genius instead of letting the genie stay in the bottle. (Their favourite joke.) They may also let it slip that your sex life is quite insignificant, if not non-existent. In short, you are a born all-round loser. And they make you read this

excerpt from the *Daily Mail*: ‘Having a £49,000 salary, a great sex life and more than 500 followers on Instagram are all signs of success for modern women, a study has found.’

‘So what?’ you ask them.

‘Are you a man?’

‘I am.’

‘Don’t you realise that any successful woman is far better off than you?’

‘In what sense?’

‘In every sense. Your salary, for instance.’

‘What else?’

‘You know what I’m driving at, don’t you?’

‘I don’t.’

‘You don’t even know what Instagram means. Do you?’

‘I don’t.’

‘I should have bet my bottom dollar.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘Do you know that other signs of success include being able to do DIY, throwing great dinner parties and going on at least two foreign holidays a year. How many great parties have you thrown since your 60th anniversary?’

‘None.’

‘What about miniscule parties? And foreign holidays?’

Whether you are a successful man or an unsuccessful woman hardly matters in the world where both successes and unsuccesses die out like mountains, fountains and dinosaurs. You may be a successful plant and habitually flora and fauna are happier than humans because they are unaware of what is in store for them. And yet our dear animals feel the approach of an earthquake much better than our scientists. So they (our dear animals, not scientists) rush towards the nearest ocean and swim until they reach Australia or New Zealand; if there is another earthquake in Australia. (Heidegger calls this swimming ‘flight from death’.) Whether you feel it or not does not, however, spare your substance the gruesome details of passing away and forever – even if you know nothing about this widespread phenomenon, for you pretend to be a vegetable or a lobster. To be on the safe side.

Of course many poets warn you of the danger lurking in every stance you adopt: one can only be on the *dangerous* side, as long as one lives and rots in this particular world. And even Giordano Bruno is unable to give you any assistance and consequently your project which might convey you to one of the innumerable worlds he spoke about invariably and pitifully fails. It is all the more ludicrous to worry your pretty little head since death inhabits all these worlds, whatever their number, hospitality and efficiency. (They might have a better stock of magic pills and family doctors.) Actually, even in our world, on our wretched planet, they design new forms of life and grow the bugs that can cure you of many diseases through their capacity to churn out clean biofuels, soak up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and pump out vaccines in industrial quantities. You have no idea what they are talking or writing about, but you hope they will be able to eliminate carbon dioxide from your lungs, your heart and thoughts.

But, generally speaking, bugs are unreliable: they can both destroy and preserve you. And even if they do preserve you for a while, they destroy you in the end, and it is little wonder you are angry with them and prefer not to have any variety of these creatures inside your body and even within your thoughts and hopes. So you fall back on poetry and re-read John Donne's contribution to our poetic treasury where you can find both hope and despair – in abundance, needless to say. And one of these hopes assures you that mixtures – the right sort of mixtures – count enormously in the domain of death and survival. 'What ever dies, was not mixed equally,' which means you will never die, provided you mix equally before settling down in your deathbed. And the poet sheds an additional light on the subject by pointing out that 'If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.'

All right, all right – now you understand what he talked about three or four centuries ago, and you are even prepared to undertake a journey at the end of which this mixture awaits you, according to your hopes and his affirmation. And you are all the more eager to set off for the station tomorrow since a famous biologist, Sir Richard Roberts, says that we must first define what we mean when we say, 'I'm alive and kicking.' Let us make things easier for everybody by dropping the word 'kicking' which may put a great many spokes in our wheels (and even in our meals on wheels). Kicking, kicking, kicking. What does *that* mean? Well, you do not wish to be portrayed as a greedy, grasping man or woman. Let us limit our ambitions and hopes to the word 'alive', even if that means we spend our lives in wheelchairs, hoping for another visit of meals on wheels. It is far better to be alive, whatever happens or may have happened; and it does not really matter whether you have your legs and your wits about you. You have your *life* about you and that is what counts! (Bugs or no bugs.)

But what does it mean to be 'considered alive'? Sir Richard Roberts says that the goal of completely defining what it is has 'taken a giant step forward'. 'The road system was so complicated that we had to stop several times to get our bearings,' as one says after one's holiday. Muddle, muddle, toil and trouble.

Poets, on the other hand, say it is enough to embrace and kiss one's beloved with whom one is supposed to mix either equally or unequally. A scatterbrained youth may decide that one should *take part* in sexual intercourse as if it were a sort of Olympic sport – whatever the result. But this intercourse should lead us – at least those involved in it – to the sacred union that has nothing in common with trade unions and other profane institutions scattered around our planet. And only with the advent of our maturity do we realise what sexual intercourse should amount to: immortality, the death of death.

But what kind of sexual intercourse do we need for this purpose? Getting the upper hand in the struggle for life would be no mean achievement, given the eternity-certified superiority of death; in spite of our poets' beautiful protests. You can write as often as you wish, 'Death, you are not! Can you hear me? You are *not*, you are *not*, you are *not*, you are *not*.' (Or Thou arst or est or west, not, not, *nicht*.) You will die tomorrow, at the crack of dawn (you, not death) – in spite of your dearest wish to listen to yet another dawn chorus which is more precious to you than Bach's *Mass in B Minor*. You hear the beginning of this natural, organic mass, but what you actually hear is more akin to a requiem mass; or Black Mass, if you prefer. (Not a *White* Mass, alas.)

Well, let us go back to the mixture about which John Donne speaks so highly, categorically and unconvincingly. Apparently he draws the reader's attention to his companion in fortune – to his beloved who, for once, does not seem to ill-treat him. (All others did, apparently. Or she did – two days ago.) 'We are together, together, together. We are united and therefore we shall not die. (Death will, I suppose.) Two hours ago we fell on our bed and that's it, that's it, that's it, that's it.' That is what poetry amounts to; at least in the domain of

logic and common sense that is quite aware of the fragility of love. Even if your parents do not mind your being in love with a slut, you are likely to realise she betrays you every other day – with chimney sweeps and fops of all kinds. And even if she does not betray you, lying by your side round the clock, she may get on your nerves to the point of excluding herself from your desire and even boundless patience. And even if she is a true and fair goddess who knows how to arouse your curiosity, strong feelings and eternal love, you may fall out over a book, a film or a dish – she cannot bear the very sight of black pudding, for instance. And you cannot live without a genuine English breakfast that is as necessary to your psyche as the dawn chorus you listen to whenever you decide to become an early riser once again and forever.

What is an equal mixture? Does that mean two people love each other dearly? It is not enough apparently, for you have to love your bride *as much* as she loves you, and no one knows how to measure love, hatred and love-hate relationships. You slap a woman's face; she smiles and turns the other cheek. You slap the other cheek, but she continues to turn so you are almost obliged to slap her shoulders, belly, thighs and so on. This is probably an evident proof of the disgust you feel in the presence of this woman or man, for there is such a thing as a love-*disgust* relationship.

Suppose your beloved puts on display three pounds of love – whenever she turns up in your room, naked, smiling, turning her body this way and that. You have just come out of your latest dream and, naturally enough, at first you mistake her for an angel, saying to yourself, 'What a pity I can't sleep with this angel. If I do, I might go to Hell.' A poet might say about you, 'For a moment, between waking and sleeping, he couldn't understand where he was,' for a wide-awake man is not capable of denying the possibility of *any* sexual act, whoever his partner may be under various circumstances. (A devil, a demon, a daredevil, a guardian angel, a ministering angel.) Then you realise – as John Donne did on many occasions – that it is your beloved you are about to welcome with a large smile and a pat on the arm; and a number of other pats and cute manifestations of love and desire.

At first, upon awakening, you might say your love weighs one pound: after all, you are afraid of raping an angel; even a ministering one. But the more you realise you can enjoy the whole gamut of pleasures associated with sex and romance, the heavier your love grows, putting on weight, as it were. After a while, it weighs three pounds, which incites you to put a stop to your beloved's striptease and other treats she always has in store for you (otherwise you would not have tolerated her presence in your house). You say, 'Stop it, I beg of you.'

'Why?' she asks, bewildered.

'Three pounds already.'

'Really? How about another teeny weeny pound?'

'Have you forgotten our eternity? Our victory over death?'

'Aren't love and my body more crucial than immortality? More crucial to our happiness, I mean.'

And what about one's intelligence and erudition? All right, you put your respective loves on a pair of scales and see they are suspended in the air instead of falling down – as the fate of Hector did, for instance. (I mean none of the two pans plummets down.) But what about your thoughts, her thoughts, her knowledge of Dante and Plato? She has never heard of *them*, to put it mildly: she has no inkling of what Shakespeare and Spinoza talked about as if they had never talked about anything. So you pick up the scales you have just used to find out if your loves were on an equal footing and hearting and fling them out of the window. And you are

tempted to make your former beloved share their fate and flight, but refrain from this irreparable gesture: unlike Natasha Rostova, your present unbeloved has never dreamt of flying, using her balcony as a launch pad.

But you might say to yourself that knowledge, erudition and the number of poems you know by heart do not really count – according to the same sages and Wordsworth. What counts is the quantity of poetry you carry and treasure in your soul, blood and vessels. You submit your beloved to a test designed to prove that her soul-confined poetry is worthy of being put into words. You ask her to write a poem and she writes the following doggerel:

*I love you – what more
Can you wish?
If you want me to love you even more,
I'll try my best, although I must
Warn you
That I'm a woman after all –
A member of the weaker sex.
But if you die, I promise
I'll stand dazed and weak-kneed beside your coffin
Because I love you.*

There is no point of being upset and on the verge of tears and a nervous breakdown because we are always on the verge of something; of suicide, for instance. (No additional effort required.) There are other examples of course. No one can enumerate all the characteristics of a human being, especially that one is always aiming at unity or harmony and so, whenever asked 'How many characteristics do you have?' a sage traditionally answers, 'One.' That is how they (our sages) get through to unity and immortality, without putting anything on a pair of scales you may chance upon in a bathroom, in a kitchen and even in a garden. As for the mixture we touched upon with regard to Donne's poem, a number of scholars just point out that in Galen's medicine disease and death were the consequence of a disproportion in one's constituent elements. Of course, as far as Donne and other poets are concerned, these elements are reduced to the heart where one's beloved is enthroned or ensconced. A poet might even say, 'She likes a good wallow in my blood,' but that is beside the point, for the point is still one and consequently refers to harmony, unity and salvation. And it does not really matter where this salvation lies in wait for you (if it does) – in your pineal gland, in your spinal column, in your spinal cord or just in a chord you heard last night. And you do not even know where it came from, this chord of yours; from heaven, in all probability. Anyway it is much more profound than what a run-of-the-mill Aeolian harp can produce, even if inspired by a breath of wind; or by a distant star.

So you are completely at sea with all these harmonies, unions, unities and with the point where everything and everybody meet and embrace 'with our Father's blessing', as the saying goes. And of course you end up re-reading alchemical books – or Aurobindo, for that matter; something spiritual, that is – in which they explain at length that they do not care two hoots about gold: presumably they have millions of dollars in their safes and Panama. They think and act only in terms of their *spiritual* transformation, mutation and elevation and you are fed up with the very word (spiritual) they use; and of course with the notion itself. So you shut all the books

where spiritual matters are discussed with gusto and you even shut your windows, let alone your doors, because spirituality oozes out of the ‘Wound of the World’ and reaches into you to prove you are made in the image and sound of the Almighty. Even the tree you might have talked to only an hour ago teaches you a lesson instead of insinuating it is nothing but a number of leaves and branches plus one trunk. This tree of yours represents the whole cosmos (as usual) and the symbols it bombards you with are as old as trees, leaves, branches and nightingales. But if you still care about leaves, about their freshness and Wagner-glorified murmur – a glorified stammer – you could not care less about mythologies, be they Indian, Chinese or Portuguese. (Nor do I actually mind Messiaen-glorified birds.)

Then you come down and read about the vessel in which the work takes place and (not surprisingly) find it contains the *divine* water; and the *divine* air; and the *divine* earth; and the *divine* whatnot. But you should on no account forget the useful aspect or aspects of whatever you undertake in your endeavour to negotiate a number of obstacles you see on the horizon and even in your room. This vessel cannot help you because it is a triple fountain, and Mercury is the centrepiece of this fountain where gold travels from heaven to Earth, exposing itself to all the influences one comes across in alchemical books. Jesus Christ is not far away, which is understandable: but for his soul-rending presence no ritual worthy of its name can be carried out successfully or even half-successfully. You do not mind; after all, you mind neither birds nor trees, provided they are divorced from symbols and their verbal burden. Actually every twig seems to say, ‘Leave me alone. You have your symbols and I live without them. I just look at the sun and even the moon is my goddess – my white goddess, to be precise. Recently I composed a poem and I’m about to recite its first line, “The little donkey struggled under its heavy burden.” The little donkey is the branch to which I’ve been attached since my birth. And you’re the burden of the universe, our dear human beings and species. Go your way and leave nature alone.’

They say to you (human beings of course): ‘Mercury’s water can cause great elation and depression,’ and I say to myself I must have drunk a great deal of this water over the last three months, considering my moods and the nausea I experience whenever I see either a sausage or an ordinary piece of bread. And my upset stomach testifies to many occurrences none of which is related to alchemy, however remotely, which makes me sad: I would not mind polishing my soul and giving a much-needed boost to my spiritual upheaval. Besides, I do not know how to interpret and psychoanalyse my wife’s visit that occurred yesterday as I was sitting in my garden, reading another book where my soul was depicted in graphic detail. I have a sort of Spa in one of my park’s corners, where I can bathe my body and probably my soul and psyche, which, however, does not permit me to swim in this pocket-sized swimming pool. Well, I have to content myself with dying in one of its corners, availing myself of the water flowing through small holes and producing a pleasant bubbling effect. Bubble, bubble; as usual.

So she comes and my solitude goes – the usual procedure in the world where, according to Empedocles, Love and Strife compete ‘for jobs on an equal footing’ (in modern parlance). Whenever I am alone, I constantly come to realise that yesternight my ambitions kindled a number of expectations that I must now strive to live up to. In other words, I must strive to narrow the gap between my expectations and their fulfilment, between my misery and happiness about which I know next to nothing. And then my wife (or mistress) of Andrew Marvell fame comes in, turns up, and I turn down all my worries and forebodings, for all their numbers and sizes. Love is now wholly within and Strife wholly without the sphere where I live, think and eat, provided I can eat a morsel of anything without paying tribute to disgust.

Accordingly to all these books, the King and Queen descend in the water, and for once I would not enlarge upon the unconscious in connection with this simple, health-insurance-supported act. We stripped our clothes off, plunged into the Spa, and the bubbles I mentioned before began their steady job, deprived of any footing and competing. This immersion is a kind of journey, and once again I am tempted to say ‘as usual’: whenever you utter the word ‘journey’, be it a night-sea journey or a day-land one you have in mind, they talk to you about the Grail and pyramids. You cannot go on a journey without getting entangled in a sort of initiation that is bound to convey your body-soul – your space-time, in other words – to a much better and higher world. And I am pretty sure that the Spa we enjoyed ourselves in a few hours ago is not just a toy I purchased in a local shop – for the *simple* reason that it is a uterus in which we were reborn; *à notre insu*, as they say in France, in Switzerland and even in Belgium; let alone in Canada.

Today the sea must engulf our bodies, souls and etceteras; otherwise the ritual would be incomplete and pernicious. As usual, you may die as a result of your oversight, overindulgence in earthly pleasures to the detriment of tests during which you are torn apart by demons, wrathful goddesses and their ministers. Well, our coitus took place in my bed which is spacious enough to welcome any kind of coitus, including a few mild perversions. But a bedridden, cliché-ridden coitus does not fit into the training scheme we are prepared to submit ourselves to on condition that we could still have a peaceful brunch in the garden, weather permitting. We are to return to the *beginning* and forget that this ritual occurs every day, upon awakening; every instant, in point of fact. And one does not have to remind someone else that there are only beginnings and ends in our lives, contrary to what all those whose doctrines are centred upon middles and golden means declare day in, day out, night in. Nothing is really in the middle – not even if this middle is situated nowhere – and the present where we live and presumably enjoy ourselves, having the fun of our lives, is a mere *evaporation*, as alchemists and chemists put it.

Plants keep cool during the summer by evaporating water from their leaves. What about humans and their beings? We talk about kings and queens, death and putrefaction, the nigredo state of blackness and self-whitening. We do evaporate of course, but our evaporation does not keep us cool: we shout, lose our tempers, burst into tears and speak of the Second Coming of our soul. All right, they come and we keep our soul inside our bodies, and sometimes we wonder why we do not release it or her or them from this bondage, letting all of them mount heavenwards, hoping that one day we shall see a multitude of hands outstretched in our direction. O come, o list, o come, o list. Hand in hand, as they say, up the slopes of the Mount of Purgatory where Dante still talks to his friend whose name is either Ballaquoio or Belloquoio or Balluquoio. And all is well and will be well and will end all.

ECLOGUE

Take Plato, for instance, taking your cue from Platonists who always take Plato with them, even if they have no intention of spending their lives on desert islands in the company of Shakespeare and Bach. You take Plato and find the dialogue entitled *Philebus* where you pick up the thread *in mediis rebus*, according to your rules. (Inbetweenstairs.) In the presence of young men, Socrates has been disputing with one of them, Philebus, about what constitutes the good in human life. One realises on the spot, wherever this spot may be located, that neither Socrates nor Philebus are beyond good and evil, which does not exclude them automatically from the group of Friedrich Nietzsche's admirers. They may admire some of his concepts – that of overman, aboveman, for instance – but they have never heard about good and evil or rather about the area lying beyond them. (If any.) Naively they might think there is nothing *beyond* good which is the end of things and beings, as the New Testament affirms, but eventually it turns out they have not read Nietzsche because he belongs in another slice-time. (Sounds better than *space*-time, doesn't it?) At some point – and one wonders if this is the point of no return – Socrates argues that the good one has in mind is a third thing – the proper mixture of knowledge and pleasure within a life. No strife for once.

Lunam, lunam, lunam. Moonam, moonam, moonam. *Opus ad Lunam, opus ad Moonam.* You moon about this house and that and suddenly come across an opus which reminds you of Beethoven's quartets and Brahms' sextets. *Lunam* gives to this opus the tincture and power of all the stars without exception. You see all these stars at your feet and begin to look for an exception; but you do not find any and mechanically conclude that all stars are down there, at your feet, at your disposal, at your proposal. The whole shebang (mainly US informal) makes up the tincture with which the dead are revived, reviled for their opinions and crystal-cleared again. Revile me as much as you wish – for my thoughts and gods; but let me live, let live, let live. Relive me, relieve me and I shall live forever. This tincture is the first-created ferment, namely that 'to the moon', 'to the *luna*', 'to the moona', 'to the manna', 'to the mama'. It is the light of all lights and the flower and fruit of all fruit that fall on the ground and fly heavenward, moonward, word, word. The word that wordeth all things.

Hrum-prum, may primordial energy protect my face.

Pururum, may postmodern energy protect my mind.

Tarara, may supreme mother protect my sex.

Tururu, may supreme father protect my collarbones.

May the month of May protect my sense of smell.

May the autumn protect my fertile imagination.

Sarata, may taratata protect my sense of rhythm.

May Schubert protect my melodies and divine length.

Er-er-er, may Wagner protect my leitmotiv of life

And grand narratives, my personal myths.

May wine protect my good moods and happiness.

May foie gras protect my power of taste.
May this toothpaste and that electric toothbrush
Protect my teeth, gums and young, decent looks.
May Leibniz protect my logical thinking
And faith in the best possible world.
May the best possible world protect me
From the worst possible one and its suburbs.
May this scarf protect me from cutthroats and Jacks.
May this turtleneck protect me from bugs, mugs and muggers.
May my solitude protect me from paparazzi and buggers.
May myself protect me from myself and my inconsistencies.
Papa-papa-papa, may paparazzi protect me from oblivion.
May oblivions protect me from karma and another incarnation.
May another incarnation and eternal recurrence protect me from death.

Of course I could live like that Earl or Churl of whom they spoke in the newspapers, in the gutter press. If he had been homosexual and Russian, they would have spoken of him in the blue press because in Russia they do not say, 'Gay, fairy, queen, Purcell, fag.' They say, 'We're as blue as the Black Sea.' They do not say, 'We always go on holiday at the *fag* end of the holiday season.' They speak about blue ends, blue beginnings and even blue middles and means. Never mind, never mind. This Earl of ours was not homosexual or blue in the face, and he became Earl rather early: he was 22 when, on the death of his grandfather, he became the 10th Earl and inherited a fortune largely free from *death* duties. If he was not drunk by noon, it was a bad day; as if there were good days somewhere, in the back drawer of your desk, at the back of your mind. And even if you did have a good day at the back of your mind – not a piece of happiness, mind you – you would not be able to grasp it and pull it out. So you have both: your unconscious and a slice of happiness; at the back of your mind or at the bottom of it. And you do your best to make them come into the open, for you are weary of your consciousness that bores you to death; and you are still afraid of death, for all your guru-imposed exercises.

The Earl would put £1,000 under a pillow for his call girls (not for call boys) and I put an alarm clock under my pillow. And if a call girl comes, if I call her and she comes, I shall give her this alarm clock saying, 'Please come again and don't be late next time. By the way, do you know what time is and how it is coupled with space?'

'I do,' she says.

'Please explain to me the theory of your relativity,' I say.

'Whenever they call me, I say to myself, "It's high time." And then I cover a portion of space in a cab.'

'Citizens Advice Bureau?'

We are always talking at cross-purposes and they (these purposes and conversations) demonstrate how generous the Einstein-born space-time is: if you get straight to the point, you abolish both space and time; and fun. Well, the Earl was strangled and his body dumped – in a mound of household debris. Even if you are drunk

by noon and have as many as 1,001 good days at the back of your mind, you might find your body in such a mound. Dead, dead, dead. And they will speak of you in the mound press.

I have no idea who killed him: I lost the second page of the article devoted to the Earl's drinking bouts and sexual exploits. Just another loss of space; and a gain of time.

One man's loss is another man's gain. What do they mean by that? All right, you are sitting at a table covered with cards and banknotes. This time it is really you who take part in this game, which I never do because I always lose, whatever game I play. (Even the game of life has already been lost.) I do not understand a thing about this game – about all games, to be exact – but I do know that both banknotes and cards move across the table and even around it, settling down for a while in front of one of the players. One might even say, 'The players shuffle their money nervously on the table.' And yet if every loss of yours touches a raw nerve and you decide to lose all your nerves so as not to feel any pain (raw nerves are very sensitive), you lose your money as well. In short, it is better not to lose anything as long as you play cards or any other game.

So the banknotes continue to shuffle on the table and the sound they produce reminds everyone of dead leaves. And one is bound to say on this occasion, 'I love shuffling through the fallen leaves. Don't you?' This man may even go so far as to jump onto the table and walk around it for while, availing himself of the fallen banknotes' prelude and paying homage to Debussy. Someone else, however, might interrupt his walk by saying, 'Don't shuffle your feet like that! Lift them properly.' The second man can even remove a pile of banknotes, anxious to reduce the volume of the prelude one might enjoy all the more thoroughly if this one, this second one, were fond of Debussy and his rustling, shuffling and muffling.

Be that as it may – and that is how it is – the number of the banknotes remains the same, if only for a while. And then someone grunts, dips into his pockets and savings and produces a wad of banknotes. They are put on the table and the game and show go on: the world conflagration is not scheduled for tonight. Once again someone deals out the cards, but we no longer judge anything in terms of dead leaves: this time, we are dealing with *live* leaves. (Both cards and money are alive.) Suddenly someone says, 'Where's this banknote?'

'Which banknote?'

'Five hundred.'

'Where's that card?'

The first man's gain is the second man's loss unless someone cheats both of them, removing either a card or a banknote from the table. Of course you can say that this illegal gain is someone's loss, but somehow it is not the same loss; nor the same gain either. Above all, we should forget neither entropy nor the second law of thermodynamics. This time, instead of throwing us out of windows, the invisible hand removes cards, banknotes and lives from the room where four people are playing the game of cards. One man's loss is another man's loss; and yet another man's loss. And women's loss.

One man's loss is another man's gain. Mostly the saying comes true when there are people around a table where only cards, money and chips can be found (and lost). And other people do their best to convince us that we do not die; and even if we do, which happens now and then, the grass and flowers take advantage of our deaths,

decay, rottenness and munificence. All of a sudden you see a multitude of roses and you say to yourself, 'Here lies a great man or woman.' So today the saying goes thus, 'One man's loss is a dozen flowers' gain.' Actually this was the right version of the saying even several millennia ago except that flowers do not grow in deserts, whereas humans die everywhere – even in the air, although they cannot fly. Their flying machines kill them, scattering their mortal remains through the air, the same Milky Way and through ordinary comets that may, on occasion, identify with cemeteries. It is true that some comets look like flowers and poets say they give shelter to the victims of numerous crashes that spoil and even cancel our holidays, our business trips and the pleasure we experience as we fly first class to Japan or Singapore.

One man starves to death; another treats Christmas as just another excuse for gluttony, forgetting that obesity can increase the risk of heart disease. So he dies as well and one cannot help wondering who gains as a result of these two deaths, apart from flowers. What flowers? The ones one deposits on tombs?

This is a poem.

'How are you, my son?'

'I'm not well, mother.'

'I know you're dying. But we can't do anything about it, you know.'

'How so?'

'That's how it is, my son. That's how the world was created a long time ago. Do you want me to show you how the world was created? On the spur of the moment, I suppose.'

'Please, please. Show me how the world was created.'

'Bang, bang, bang, bang.'

'Your explosion permanently deafened me in my right ear, mother.'

'It doesn't matter, my son. In Paradise your ear will hear everything.'

'What's Paradise, mother?'

'You'll meet Jesus Christ. You'll walk with Him in the woods. He's very kind. He won't beat you.'

'Who'll beat me then? His assistants?'

'No one, my son.'

'Is Jesus Christ alone in Paradise?'

'Not quite. There are many children in it. If your sister dies one of these days, you'll meet her up there too.'

'I want to stay right here, mother.'

'Why, my son?'

'Because I saw a flower.'

'There are many flowers in Paradise, you know.'

'I saw a rose down here.'

'A rose? There is a large Muslim community here. And Muslims are very fond of roses.'

'Are they as kind as Jesus?'

'Not quite. That's why it's better to go to Paradise.'

'Are there no Muslims in Paradise?'

‘They think they go to Paradise after killing a lot of Christians and Jews, but they’re mistaken.’

‘I don’t want to die, mother.’

‘Death is beautiful, especially if he concerns small boys and girls.’

‘Is he more beautiful than life?’

‘You know, Mahler wrote a cycle entitled *Kindertotenlieder. Songs of the Deaths of Children*. He wrote them about you, among other children and deaths.’

‘But I’ve never met him.’

‘You’ll meet him in Paradise where you should learn German. You’d better listen to these songs in the original. Mahler himself will conduct them for you.’

‘And who’ll sing them?’

‘An angel. An angel of death.’

‘Is there death in Paradise?’

‘Only in theatres and concert halls.’

‘Mother, I don’t want to die without a rose.’

‘All right, all right. I’ll fetch you one.’

The mother went out and walked through London, heading for meadows and water meadows. A blanket of snow lay on the ground. What she saw in front of her was a snow meadow, nothing else, nothing more. And roses do not grow in the snow, as you know. But there are fairies in the world because the world is brimful with dreams of all kinds. Some think that fairies care only about Cinderellas, giving them helping hands, shoes and barouches, but they are bitterly mistaken.

Some of our dreams are very kind and generous. One dream says to another, ‘I gave her some extra money – I know I didn’t need to but I thought it would be kind.’ And the other dream answers thus, ‘I performed Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder* for him and gave him or rather her a rose.’

There is such a thing as a song of the deaths of mothers. They sit in the snow and freeze to death, a few roses in their hands.

Philosophers are always round the corner and you get the feeling you are really cornered without them: you cannot answer any question unless your husband asks you if there is enough butter in the fridge. But if you fear death and his consequences, no butter or butterfly will ever save you from this fear and a number of heart failures and strokes you may suffer inside it. So you yearn to get out of this fear, finding an outlet for all your dreads that stem from death, annihilation and worms whose appetite does not leave you in peace: whenever you eat, you think of your body and future worms, their meals and deals. (Or present bugs and bacteria.) You stop eating for a while, but your body does not vanish into thin air and so our imaginary worms continue to gnaw away at it, drastically reducing the astronomical number of our sinews, thoughts, cells and hopes. (Not that of our cell phones, mind you.) After three days, we feel an agonizing, gnawing hunger and all of a sudden the whole world becomes a sort of gnaw – a faithful representation of entropy – where everything is first reduced to the lowest common denominator and then to dust. Do worms partake of dust and ashes, I wonder?

So you fall back on philosophers, mystics and theologians whose primordial task is death-oriented or rather away-from-death-oriented. You hop on your good foot – the other one is already in the grave – and fall

down on Hobbes (or rather land up in his *Leviathan*). And once again you come across what is justly called ‘fear’ because there is nothing else in the world, you say to yourself; and you are always in the midst of it, right in the middle. Whatever you do and whoever you listen to, you cannot even reach the outskirts of this fear, going on a spree in its suburbs; nor can you outsmart it, even if you happen to identify with smart Alec. You probably have to turn into *outsmart* Alec, but that is out of the question, given that all Alecs suffer from the same fear; and so did Hobbes, although he did his best to outsmart fears, Alecs and even a ‘perpetual and restless desire of power after power’.

What kind of power did he have in mind? They always talk of powers and these powers of theirs never fail unless they are somehow related to electric failures. Power, power, will; will, will, will, will, power. Well, you embark upon your journey out of fear and cross either London or any other cityscape, landscape or night, day and morn. (All to fe-e-ar are born.) You reach some outskirts or other, pick a rose – for once it is not wintertime – and smell it voluptuously, your fingers dangerously exposed to its thorns. One of your fingers gets wounded and you fall asleep like the Sleeping Beauty, cursing Caraboss, or whatever this fairy’s name is and might be either in the context of Tchaikovsky’s ballet or out of it. You sing an excerpt from this ballet to yourself; the one that is performed by the good and remarkable fairy whose name you have forgotten completely. Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-rara----- . Life sounds exactly like this melody: hope after hope after hope after hope. Ra----- . That is why the God of the Sun is called Ra, as one of my friends put it, bursting into malicious, malignant, Caraboss-like laughter.

Well, you do not even have enough power to get away from your fear of death; or to protect yourself from it because it is not enough to run away, jumping over lakes and mountains. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton easily outrun the policemen who chase them around cinemas and screens in general, but death is not even the best policeman in the world. He is quite superior to any policeman and any world whatsoever and so need not run to outrun, outsmart, outwit and outbeat everybody, down to Mohammed Ali. (He died nine days ago.) Actually death does not run: you do not run if you are god and can be found everywhere, even if no one looks for you, fumbling around in the dark, trying to get out of the world.

Yes, on a whim you resolve to leave this world and consequently fumble in your pockets for a revolver, a box of sleeping pills or just a clasp knife – quite enough for your veins, you say out loud as you install yourself in your bath, in its hospitable water lullabyingly lapping against your ribs. (You are happy-lappy, as it were.) And if you find nothing at all – you cannot find death, you say out loud – you just jump out of your window and your high jump (the only high jump worthy of its name; a homage to Nabokov; *shutka*) is another version of *Geworfenheit* except that on this occasion we are dealing with a do-it-yourself *Geworfenheit*. (*Geworfenheight*.)

By leaving this world forever you thwart death’s plans and many other plans related to the destruction of mankind – for the simple reason that the well-known, worldwide-appreciated saying ‘out of sight, out of mind’ also applies to the world itself, to its mind and body. Of course you remain in the world, under it, underground, but your indolent new world has nothing in common with the underground and its subversive tendencies. That is why they say as they shake their heads, ‘He and she and they are out of the world’s mind;’ and yet you stay within its body, quietly rotting in its bosom or intestines.

Sometimes it is harder, however, to escape from one’s flesh and blood because, according to Hobbes who must have confused us with Descartes’ animals, a human is a mechanical creature moved by strings and springs. You have only your own sinews within your reach, whereas Hobbes’s man can catch up with you in no time at

all, relying on his springs and trusting them to the point of forgetting his own unreliable muscles. You can sprain your ankle playing squash or tennis, but Hobbes's springs, strings and electrodes are in running order and they never miss an opportunity to chase you away and wound your fragile body. On a rainy day you may poke someone in the eye with your umbrella if you are not careful, sociable, friendly and humane. Hobbes's men and women run about, their springs whistling a song as they traverse the air and reach the speed of light. And they poke you in the eyes, in the ears and even in your belly button; and other buttons as well. And they call it the 'rite of spring' – a respectful homage to Stravinsky. All this reminds me of the picture I saw many years ago in one of my books, and I even wonder if this picture was not painted by Max Ernst or Ensor. But why look at pictures and go to picture galleries if everything happens under our very eyes?

Hobbes knows that humans are in the habit of looking too far as they hope to spy on the future and draw conclusion from their spying. The air is swarming with keyholes – a Magritte painting – through which they look day in day out, straining every nerve and every eye. That is why Magritte's blue sky and the very air are swarming with eyes too: there is no point in filling the air with keyholes if no one is capable of looking through them. But Hobbes advises us against this ritual, this rite of eyes, because he thinks that the more we spy on the future, the further we expose our hearts to the fear of death, poverty and other calamities. Out of compassion, Magritte puts a pair of curtains on the sky and we no longer see anything –not even a tsunami in a teapot.

To protect man from himself and from women, Hobbes therefore erects a civil authority of terrifying proportions which, in its endeavour to eliminate the wounds brought about by springs, removes all the springs one can chance upon when sitting down on divans and armchairs. The prime minister points out that in the 18th century furniture displayed no springs in its bosom and 'everyone was happy, healthy and immortal' he adds with a confident smile. A number of clerks intrude upon your privacy and set about cutting your divans, sofas and suchlike into pieces, which might enable them to get rid of their (divans') springs in no time at all. (And what about their own springs?) Of course the springs retaliate and many officials and ordinary workers get wounded as they carry out their rite of no spring, but that does not really matter: they are being killed in the line of duty. 'No spring will be overlooked,' declares the prime minister as he points his index finger at grandfather clocks.

Soon time stops and no one any longer looks either at the future or at the past; or even at the present. The death of time is far more efficient and protective than the curtains installed by Magritte, for you can write down in your diary, 'I peered through a chink in the curtains and saw the things to come, all of them.'

What did Adam dream of? Of the forbidden fruit? He could not have dreamt of my cities, of the ones I dream about whenever my sleep is neither deep nor shallow. It is somewhere in between that I visit these De-Chirico-affected cities and their shadows around which I walk as if going home or away from home; or away from the spring, from the autumn, from its odes and modes. I go to the station but cannot find it because it was removed and rebuilt either yesterday or the day before, and I have no alternative but to spend a night in the city I recognise only partly: half Petersburg, half something else. I find a hotel where there are no beds, strange as it may appear, and end up calling it a 'sleepless hotel', a 'bedless hotel', a 'bad hotel', a 'less hotel'. In a way, I am mooning around a less city where lesses are far more numerous than mores. And even the moon is moonless. And Adam dreamt of mores and plenties.

A REMAKE OF GOETHE'S *EARLKONIG*

'Daddy, daddy! Who is this man?'
 'He is our national treasure, a knight.'
 'He says to me I'm his night-treasure.'
 'How lucky you are, how lucky.'
 'I can hear a voice saying,
 "He groomed you from 11,
 Abused you at 14
 And violently raped you at 18."'

'Don't listen to this voice, daughter.
 At the time he was a liberal MP.
 Besides, he bought you an iPod.'
 'Daddy, daddy, daddy, O list!
 This man put his tongue in my mouth –
 In a bus, in a bus – and it was wet.'
 'What, what, what, my child?
 What was wet?' 'His mouth. I was wet too.
 It was horrible and I didn't like it.'
 'What didn't you like, what, what, what?
 Didn't you like being wet or his mouth?'
 'Both, both, both, both, daddy, daddy, daddy.'
 'But he's a knight in shining armour.'
 'How do you mean, daddy? What do you mean?'
 'He was made a knight of the Order of the Garter.
 The Queen invites him to dinner every Saturday.'
 'And his attentions took a more sinister turn
 On a trip into the hills.'
 'Do you mean to say he's over the hill?'
 'His house is on the top of a hill.
 Once I was under his roof,
 His behaviour escalated and he began sexually
 Touching me in front of his wife.'
 'Didn't his wife give you a second iPod?
 Besides, on that night your breasts began to grow.
 Didn't they? Didn't they? Didn't they? Didn't they?'
 'They did, they did, they did, they did.'
 'And he took a liking to your left breast
 And was always pinching it and playing.'

‘He did, he did, he was, O he was.’

‘Don’t you like your left breast best, my daughter?

Don’t you always pinch it playing?

Don’t you like playing with your left breast?’

‘I’m also in love with my right breast, father.’

A human being goes somewhere and we might assume this being (or non-being perhaps) goes up and down the street. We are not sure the being we see in front of us and feel behind us, fearing this being might stab us to death from behind, is really a human being. Why should we single this being out from the mass of phenomena where there are beings and non-beings or just non, non, *niets* and *nets* where we often get enmeshed as we go along the road of life? A dog barks, but we do not say it does so because it needs to be recognised by its human counterparts who go by, paying attention to their thoughts, preoccupations and big deals. Dogs bark because they feel something or somebody, but we cannot ask a dog, ‘What do you think? What are you barking at? Is it a thief you are warning us about? A burglar, a murderer?’ (Unless the burglar in question is right in front of us, a revolver at the ready.) But if a being we come across pulls out all the stops because this being wants to be (and not not to be) – to be recognised, acknowledged and *fêted* by his fellow creatures, then we might and even must say this being is a human being, for this is the only characteristic the presence of which allows us to affirm, ‘We’re dealing with a human creature.’ And even if the creature we encounter in the same street has neither flesh nor blood, being a mere ghost or one of the living dead, we say to ourselves they are human because they do their best to be recognised and come to the fore, into the limelight where fame and applause are waiting for them.

You become friends with a child, especially over the Internet, in order to try to persuade them to have a sexual relationship with you. You say to them, ‘Beauty counts and there’s nothing more beautiful than the human body and the relationship this body enters into when another body gets closer and closer to it. And here are a lot of presents for you. If you allow me to tamper with your body and fiddle with it to my heart’s content, you’ll have a dozen dolls, three iPods, and I’ll organise a firework display in your garden. Our sexual intercourse will always end with a thrilling display of fireworks.’ In other words, you groom this child and the latter yields to your Internet-conveyed caresses and kisses. And then this child sees you in the flesh and she is horrified at the sight of your hairy chest, hairy belly and hairy penis. And this child says to herself and to journalists, ‘He is hairy, so hairy just like an ape.’ Yes, 40 years later this child of ours talks to journalists about the adventure dating back to her youth when a man turned up in her neighbourhood, within her hearing and seeing, and she succumbed to his ugliness – not to a man’s allurements, as usually happens.

Well, there was no Internet in those days. This man just talked to her on the phone, and she cannot even say she liked his voice and the way he explained his feelings and desires. And now she comes into the open to say, ‘I still see it: his hairiness, it was like being in bed with a gorilla. Him on top of me. Old, fat and so hairy.’ The gorilla was on top of this teenager for more than three hours and the later could not do anything about the predicament or net she had got enmeshed in because gorillas are usually stronger than humans unless they have to deal with Mohammed Ali. And he died 12 days ago so that from now on gorillas will always win their

struggles for life – the ones they have to carry out in the presence of humans. And they will win them paws down, as the saying goes.

So, after a few phone calls, a man comes out of the blue, through the front door of a house situated in Suffolk (or Norfolk) and rapes a poor girl who continues to think about Prince Charming, for all her friends' mockeries. 'How much time have you wasted sitting around waiting for Prince Charming to appear?' they used to say. And they go on talking like that so she is fed up with this sort of remark. And she is all the wearier of them since there are no other remarks which might be made by her friends and parents as if they did not think in terms of maturity, sexual development and womanhood. In a way this girl was at the end of her tether when our gorilla came out of the black and put his body on top of the one he saw in front of him as he crossed the threshold of the above-mentioned house in Suffolk (or Norfolk or Dunkirk).

The girl saw the gorilla and said to herself he did not look like Prince Charming, although he did look like Prince Hairy or Prince Harry. She recalled Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (and mainly his *Henry V*) and resolved to yield to the prince disguised as a gorilla, which often happens during masked balls. So it happened once again and this so-called prince went on raping the girl (*la belle et la bête*) for almost three hours; non-stop, mind you. Now she says, 'He tortured me,' and the journalists write this down in their books, "If my dad had known, he would have killed the gorilla," she said.' And her father drills a hole in his tomb and cries, putting his mouth into the hole, 'I'll kill the bastard in the other world. I swear I will.' And you can chance upon another piece of information as you unfold the paper lying on your lap in the hope of finding out more about the case under scrutiny. 'I was tight as a tick. I'd never had champagne before. I remember that feeling of being totally tight but trying to be together.'

'Together with whom? With him?' asks a journalist.

'With myself,' says the former girl.

'With your body or your soul?'

'My soul?'

'Did you think about your immortal soul?'

'When? When he was on top of me?'

'Your soul might have saved you, you know.'

'No. But I thought about the sea.'

'Did you? The sea of troubles?'

'The house was on the side of the road and I could hear the sea.'

And the girls continue to put you in the picture about what happened and went on for hours that memorable, unforgettable, unbelievable night. 'He offered me a drink – tea or more alcohol, I can't remember – but I said, "I'm really tired," so he took me upstairs. I was about to put my nightie on when he came into the bedroom with a towel around him and said, "Why do you need that on?"'

'Do you think he took a bath?' asks the journalist.

'I think so. I don't remember.'

'Do you remember the bath salt he used?'

And then of course they speak about her left breast which has become famous overnight thanks to the efforts made by the journalist and a photographer whose area of expertise is related chiefly to the right-hand breast and its ornaments. But for once he agreed to photograph its left counterpart, after hearing out the story of the

rape during which the left breast came to the fore several times, leaving the right one in the shade. The woman in love or rather in hate spoke at length about her breast, saying she could not bear the sight of it in the light of what had happened on that fateful night. ‘The gorilla put his body on the beauty’s body,’ wrote the journalist, ‘and began to pierce her, disregarding her cries for help and tears destined to awake his compassion, commiseration and human substance. “What are you doing?” she kept on repeating, crying, shouting and screaming. “Leave me alone! Leave my breast alone! Don’t play with it, please! My breast isn’t a toy.”’

‘What is it then?’ asked the gorilla.

‘It is my treasure,’ answered the victim.

‘National or personal? I’m a national treasure, you know,’ the gorilla pointed out as he went on fiddling with his victim’s personal treasure to the point of making her faint in his arms. Then he explained to her that many women have cancers related to this breast. ‘And this is the treatment I came up with many years ago.’

‘I’m swallowing pills,’ said the victim.

‘Perhaps it’s time to try a new course of treatment,’ said the predator.

‘I’ve been having your treatment for two months now without any improvement.’

‘Prevention is better than cure,’ said the predator.

In her interview the victim enlarged upon her left-hand breast for almost an hour as if she had no other breasts within her reach and within that of the journalist whose curiosity was awakened to such an extent he ended up asking *his* victim all sorts of left-and-right-breast-oriented questions. For instance he asked her to say exactly how the gorilla toyed with his new toy and whether he spoke to it as he fiddled with it. Apparently he began by singing a song that follows the following pattern:

*Little, little, little, breast,
How I wonder what you est.*

Then he stopped to explain that ‘*est*’ means ‘is’ in French, pointing out that he was going to teach his ‘dear girl’ the language of Montaigne and Racine on condition that ‘you let me give free rein to my imagination’.

‘To your *imagination*,’ answered the girl. ‘Not to your *hands* and hairy *body*.’

‘Everything is tangible and material,’ said the predator. ‘Even our soul is material, let alone our imagination. According to Tertullian,’ he added as he assured her he was going to teach her lessons given by the Fathers of the Church many centuries ago. ‘It’s God’s will, you know,’ he said again and again as he went on with his left-breast game. ‘For many years I couldn’t see this breast of mine,’ said the victim, eyeing the journalist from head to foot as if to find out if she could confide in him completely and absolutely. (The absolute trust of *Macbeth* fame.) ‘And then I decided to cut it off. Out of body, out of mind.’

‘You could have waited for cancer,’ said the journalist.

‘I did wait for it,’ said the woman. ‘I waited and waited but my breast cancer wouldn’t show up.’

‘So this breast of yours is still yours, I suppose,’ said the journalist, casting a glance at the photographer whose camera was already taking aim, slowly but surely.

‘Unfortunately it is,’ said the victim, bursting into tears and moaning pathetically.

‘We don’t believe you,’ said the photographer.

‘Are you accusing me of lying?’ asked the victim.

‘Yes, we are,’ said the accusers.

The woman touched her shoulder, began her striptease, but stopped and said apologetically, ‘I think I set about it the wrong way.’

‘Do you mean to say you performed it differently 40 years ago?’

‘That’s exactly what I mean,’ said the woman.

‘But that’s how you carry out your ritual in *my* presence,’ said her husband. ‘And you assure me that the ritual I attend daily is the exact copy of what you did for the gorilla’s sake.’

‘If you’re both going to lie, at least stick to the same story and don’t contradict each other! By the way, why did you finally decide to come into the open? You remained withdrawn into yourselves for so many years.’

‘Forty-seven years ago we’d have said my wife was totally naive to have gone along with what happened, and let bygones be bygones,’ says her husband. ‘But now, knowing what we do about paedophiles and how they groom their victims, we’d say without doubt that she’d been targeted and raped.’

‘But most paedophiles love both breasts of their victims,’ said the journalist.

‘What difference does that make?’ said the husband.

‘It’s more logical, isn’t it? Besides, their victims aren’t tempted to remove one breast from their chests.’

‘What about cutting both breasts off?’

‘Too painful,’ said the journalist. ‘So they do nothing about it. Do you remember Lenin?’

‘I do. So what?’

‘At some point he was hiding from the police. For a while he lived in a haystack and then in a tent, in a gazebo. A little boy was kicking a ball near that gazebo while Lenin stood in front of his mirror, a razor at the ready. Suddenly the latter or Lenin felt an impact of the ball on his right or left shin, whereupon he said to the boy, “Fuck off, you little rascal. Fuck off, fuck off.” He might have gauged his eyes out, though. With his razor, you know.’

‘So what?’

‘So might have the gorilla.’

‘What?’

‘Cut your wife’s breast off. With his razor. After all, he spent some time in the bathroom, didn’t he? Do you remember Regan?’

‘Ronald Reagan?’

‘No, King Lear’s Regan. She said, “One side will mock another; th’other too.”

‘Do you mean to say –?’

‘I do.’

‘Do you mean to say the gorilla was as humane as Lenin?’

For a while, for many, many years, they may remain closed, withdrawn, flying from death and also from what Chaplin called ‘public opinion’ which is not quite tantamount to Gorbachev’s transparency. And suddenly, perhaps on the spur of the moment or after very much soul-searching, they grow transparent and you can see

their left and right breasts, their buttocks with which a lot of gorillas play as they try to reach a state of sexual arousal. Most of these gorillas are old and hairy, which explains, if only in part, why they have to fiddle with breasts, buttocks and other parts of female bodies they are bent on raping and even tearing to shreds, if that can help them feel a sort of ecstasy they are looking for in spite of their age, decrepitude and overall degeneracy. The woman in hate or rather one of them – the one whose left breast became famous overnight – told the journalist about the morning through which she had lived in the gorilla's company. 'Once again,' wrote the journalist, 'the latter went to the bathroom, playing with his own penis, which was neither left nor right, to his heart's content. And of course I did not fail to inquire about the size of both the penis and the heart's content the victim touched upon in connection with the gorilla's playful mood. She said his penis was as big as that of any ape or horse. As for his heart's content, she glanced at her watch and said this ritual (the rite of morning or renaissance) might have lasted half an hour at least: she was sure the gorilla had started to masturbate as soon as he had got into the bathroom "because he had been masturbating since dawn", she added. Since dawn, ding-dong, whereupon the journalist quoted Homer:

*Aurora now, fair daughter of the dawn,
Sprinkled with rosy light the dewy lawn*

The victim did not ask him why he had chosen Pope's translation in preference to Chapman's and so the interview resumed its course without allowing the participants to waste their time either on a coffee break or on the latest piece of political news exclusively focused on the Brexit. Not only did the interview resume its course, as might have been expected, given the heart's content devoted to masturbation and its consequences: a state of sexual arousal (or just arousal). Here is the story on which we all embarked as we resolved to elucidate the mystery of what *might* have happened – the presumption of innocence is central to British law – many years ago, in the century when millions of people died in concentration camps and on battlefields.

The gorilla executed his own brexit (or his exit from the bathroom) and walked into the room, a flannel over his penis. What did the victim think of upon seeing him at close range? (Joyce might have asked this question too.) His penis was almost within the young lady's reach, but she had no wish to reach for it, let alone taste it, savour it and swallow its juice. Instead, she went to the bedroom to get her suitcase and he pushed her onto the bed face down, buttocks and shoulder blades up. He pulled her tights and pants down and tried to rape her but, believe it or not, he could not manage it. And yet any gorilla, any horse would have accomplished this ritual act without further ado and toil and trouble. He said, 'It worked last night and the night before, many nights before. Why isn't it working now?' And he began to fiddle with her left or right buttock – she cannot remember which – all the while humming a sinister song,

*Fiddle, fiddle, fiddlestick
Please give rise to my, my prick.*

But the prick would not rise, for all his efforts and her buttocks he continued to finger to his fingertips' content. Actually her buttocks rose and fell whenever he touched them ever so slightly, but he never did – he always touched them *strongly* as if making bread. And as he did so he sang yet another sinister, weird and raucous song:

Knead the buttocks until smooth.

Knead the prick, don't kill the goose.

Golden eggs, golden eggs,

Golden eggs, golden sex.

'If you're pregnant, ring me,' he said all over sudden as if eager to issue a warning, but the victim had nothing to worry about: he did not succeed in rising to the occasion. Of course the journalist asked if the gorilla had stripped the bed of the blood-stained sheets. He did, he did, and they quietly set off for the station where he bought her a first-class ticket before handing it to her and saying, 'Tolstoy always travelled third class, you know. He was a count, but you're my duchess. My last-but-not-least duchess.'

All this amounts to something one does not necessarily think about as one peruses newspapers in search of a juicy story, of a postprandial entertainment. Of course one, many and sundry always think about sex, with the exception of Sophocles about whom I spoke in one of my books – not for the sake of Oedipus and his complex, mind you. Sophocles rejoiced upon realising he could no longer make love to women, men and boys on account of his penis' poor health. And he bragged about this incapacity of his, saying he could now devote much more time to Oedipus and his misfortunes because the latter did not end at the point when Oedipus gauged his right eye and then its left counterpart. He went to another city where, assisted by one of his daughters, if I remember rightly, he ended his wretched, Freud-immortalised life – we might forget Sophocles with the passing of the years – shuffling from one boulder to another, from one pillar to another, to many, many pillars.

When reading about the gorilla, we may ask ourselves why all this comes to light 47 years after the day when the torturer began to play with his victim's left breast. (Was he a left-handed gorilla?) Why didn't they speak about it 30 years ago, letting us know the size of his know-how and how bad and unworthy of any knighthood the gorilla was? Of course we might remember the fact that we do not live on this Earth in order to spend our time in beds, on carpets and under numerous tables under which our friends and colleagues and utter strangers drink our bodies and souls. If we are not recognised by our fellow creatures, we do not so much as exist, according to Hegel, Kojève and Fukuyama. A dog can recognise us as we walk down the street where he (this dog) lives with his master whom he must defend at all cost, being his Hegel-appointed slave. So he barks at our approach because he thinks or rather feels that we can crash his gate and break into the house, our revolver at the ready. But the recognition bestowed upon us by this dog does not propel us into the realm where people walk and talk, smiling at each other. They know each other and appreciate each other's contribution to the world's wealth, health, good ideas and beautiful tunes. And if we remain under the tables we reached some time ago after crawling on all fours across some room or other, we shall never deserve the appellation 'Human Being'.

When talking about these beings, we must not forget that only *worthy* representatives of their species are talked about during cocktail and dinner parties. If you are not in the news, you are *not*, as Hamlet might have put it if he had not been so obsessed with suicide and its consequences. Indeed his soliloquy is built around the question that alludes to Hegel's doctrine and Kojève's interpretation of it. 'To be or not to be' does not mean you press a revolver against your temple as you sit on a rock – Hamlet on the rocks, Laurence Olivier's favourite drink – and listen to the sea. The whole story talks to you about the way one might stick one's neck out and sacrifice one's life for the sake of recognition which may be expressed by the following utterance, 'Hail to thee,

Thane of Cawdor.’ You choose a trifle and say to yourself, ‘If I sacrifice my life for the sake of this trifle, everyone will say, “He was brave, courageous and his courage deserves not only our unbounded admiration, but also our applause.”’ And everybody starts to applaud as you lie dead either on your deathbed or on any other deathbed you happen to find in the area where you won the trifle you had talked to yourself about for an hour or so. If, on the other hand, you say to yourself it is enough to be a multi-millionaire, spending your life in swimming pools, a glass of champagne in your hand, you might be mistaken: your fellow creatures need to get a real kick out of your way of life, your deeds and words. The same goes for you, which shows that your life may grow monotonous, even if you drive around Hollywood in your Ferrari, smiling at future stars and flinging jewels at them.

So you decide to steal something from the shop, just for kicks; and for the sake of recognition, oddly enough. You do not steal a diamond necklace: any common, run-of-the mill thief can do that after putting a mask on his face and a revolver in his hand. You steal something insignificant – a mere trifle and you are in the news that proclaims from the rooftops: ‘Multi-Millionaire Steals Aspirin.’ You steal a trifle destined for your collection of trifles that you show now and then to your colleagues, saying, ‘Here’s my most precious collection.’ And your friends say to each other as they look at this collection of yours: ‘Of course he’s got everything: icons, a Picasso, a Van Gogh, a Michelangelo, a Leonardo, a Vinci and so on. So now he’s fond of trifles, his latest fad. Of the superfluous, you know.’ Well, for the sake of the same applause, you may buy strawberries out of season, and your colleagues will applaud your exploit, saying, ‘That was very extravagant of you to buy strawberries out of season.’ But that is not enough; what is more, your collection of trifles, which reminds everyone of your Picassos and Modiglianis, is not what they call a ‘jet propulsion’: it does not enable you to become a member of the *highest* jet set yet. Of course you can spend the summer jet-setting around the fashionable European resorts, but that is not enough; and you know that. Yes, you wish to become the president of all jet sets one can come across on the surface of the Earth – the president of the globe, as Mayakovsky put it once or twice.

One cannot say – and one does not say it, actually – that the gorilla needed to become a gorilla to deserve his knighthood and his place in the national treasury. Actually, he never proclaimed from the rooftops he was raping girls after playing with their breasts and buttocks to his heart’s content. The girls he went on raping did not do it either – out of fear, according to them: they feared their dads and mums might have a lot of heart attacks and strokes. Besides, their innumerable uncles would have killed the gorilla and a few chimpanzees, had they known the first thing about the rapes of their Lucretias. And so one continues to wonder why they got into the habit of keeping silent and sparing the predators who continued to pounce on girls and boys, aiming at their buttocks and tits.

In the late Eighties, the gorilla was knighted by the Queen for his work with famine victims – not for his treatment of his own victims and their breasts. (And their buttocks.) Thirty years later, one of the victims said to a journalist, ‘I was beside myself with anger. Even then I felt it couldn’t have just happened to me. It must have happened to other people.’

‘It did happen to other people,’ said the journalist.

‘Did it really?’

‘Do you think you were the only beautiful teenager in the world?’

The gorilla's victims vividly portray the seamy side of life in the London of the end of the century because one of them – and that is how all this starts – does not want to take the truth to her tomb. 'It is the child in me that is speaking – the child that wants to be freed,' she says. (Rest, rest, perturbed spirit.) The dying victims seems to forget that the tomb and its accomplice death free everybody, whatever the burden of such and such an individual might be in the light of our world's greediness, cruelty and hardheartedness. You bear the burden of child abuse and you are the child you carry on your back; in other words, you carry and are about to bury your own body, your doppelgänger, who was raped 50 years ago. And through all these years you never stopped carrying your half-dead, badly raped body to the tomb. But you preferred to let the matter stand this way because for nothing in the world did you want to be the victim *yourself*. Well, all this is too complicated: the unconscious, a doppelgänger, a transfer, original sin. How much easier it is to explain this phenomenon, this sudden wish to come into the open once and for all by your desire for publicity, for recognition, for posthumous fame that might announce to your offspring and other citizens of the world, 'This corpse was raped by the gorilla because it displayed a lot of sex appeal'?

A victim is half-forgotten: even her own children do not really remember her, judging from their visits and the presents they bring to their former house. Logically enough, they devote their time to their own children, who think mostly about computers, letting their grandma fade away and become one of the tombs one encounters in the course of one's walk through a cemetery. So the victim thinks about Hegel, Kojève and the recognition bestowed upon the living by their counterparts – or parts, as physicists and humanists think. One-piece swimsuit, as the Americans say, think and do. Yes, humanity is a one-piece swimming in the sea of troubles, and this takes us back to Hamlet, to his question and a great many answers elicited by this yes-no question.

'To be or not to be, that is the question' – that is how the soliloquy starts, and one might even say the play itself begins at this particular point. Indeed both Shakespeare and Hamlet might have hesitated on the threshold of yet another piece of evidence (or masterpiece), for it is probably better to sleep, doing nothing and saying, 'Nothing doing, nothing doing' – in your sleep. Anyway no one will ever understand anything except banalities, clichés and idiotic utterances uttered with utmost conviction and accompanied by eloquent gestures. (Mussolini.) Humanity bursts into endless applause, but then the applause ends and nothing remains; and only a pile of ashes can be seen either in a crematorium or just under one's feet – as if nothing had happened. It is true, by the way: nothing has ever happened and even Shakespeare does not exist in spite of his Hamlets and Lears, tears and lures. So both Hamlet and Shakespeare are being seduced by Morpheus whose arms are on the point of bidding them welcome, but the striving for recognition – Why didn't Shakespeare burn his works? – drives them on, and on, and on; as far as the end of Act V. Hamlet might have said to himself, 'I don't care about my mother's conduct' – instead of thundering against her betrayal and murdering Polonius. To sleep, perchance to dream. You dream of your father and listen to his discourse; and then you wake up and say, 'I had a nightmare I'd better forget before breakfast,' before enjoying orange juice and bacon and eggs.

Shakespeare's problem was less intricate because he could be recognised by his contemporaries whose minds *were* trained in the domain of theatre and arts in general. Today, this problem seems unbearable, irresolvable, and instead of answering Hamlet's question by the verb 'to be' we ask ourselves, 'Why should we be at all?' – at least in the domain of the arts where very few people are apt to understand our thoughts, our words and works. 'Whose recognition?' is the question by which we replace all the questions related to our very

life, and most of us remain in our beds, looking either at ceilings or at wine cellars where our bottles are arrayed on our shelves. (And there is a splendid array of food on our dinner tables, needless to say.) Apparently there is such a thing as the ‘self-esteem’ movement – it dates back to the end of the previous century – that takes care of our dignity and other people’s esteem directed towards our personas. Members of this club just go out, embrace everybody, saying, ‘You’re a human being and that’s quite enough for our esteem.’ Of course you say to these people you do not need this sort of recognition, but they are unlikely to realise that your ambitions are situated much higher – in the spheres inaccessible to their brains, minds and feelings. They do not even *feel* what you are talking about as you speak to them of your divine, otherworldly comedies, tragedies, treatises and quartets.

What kind of satisfaction can you derive from the esteem bestowed upon you by a nincompoop whose applause resounds everywhere? Sometimes you yearn for the lack of any applause, however worthy of your achievements, because there are small, unworthy applauses that may and must be likened to the flies in the majestic ointment you have created in the course of your life. You are fêted on the strength of your mere presence on Earth and the volume of this applause is higher if you are handicapped and taken care of by one of the charity societies that wait for your sores and pains and pay no attention to you if you have none. They also wait for your second childhood which might allow them to take care of you: all children are welcome and inherit huge fortunes through the magnanimity of these societies’ and club presidents. You talk to these benefactors as follows, ‘You know, I’m in my childhood now. You may call it “his second childhood”, if you wish, but I can tell you I feel no difference between this childhood and that one – the one I lived through when I was a *real* child. Incidentally, I’m as real now as I was then, 60 years ago. For instance, I love rhymes, however pointless, just because they’re rhymes:

*‘Have you seen Pa
Smoking a cigar?
Have you seen Mum
Chewing chewing gum?
Have you seen Dad
In his tomb? Quite dead.*

‘What’s more, I crack jokes that Swift collected from his friends in Queen Anne’s time. I play tricks which lads used to play on each other in the heyday of Beau Brummel.’ And they give you the Nobel prize for literature because your words reflect human mythology, eternal childhood (second, third and fourth) and also our present-day worries. And then you say to them, ‘Read my books. Never mind what I am and who I was during my sojourn in my mother’s womb and in the maternity hospital, in the hands of its nurses and bosses. My books aren’t meant for children, you know,’ whereupon they withdraw their support and the Nobel prize drops from your hands almost automatically as if obeying a supreme command.

Shakespeare was surrounded by his peers among whom one can still encounter Christopher Marlowe whose contribution to literature is far more substantial than that of Houellebecq in spite of the former’s premature death. Shakespeare might have looked at his ceiling now and then unless there was no roof above him – only the sky on which he wrote his comedies, tragedies and sonnets, goaded as he was by Marlowe’s majestic lines. And the audience, *his* theatregoers, were imbued with deep poetical feelings that presuppose long-term

initiation, effort and devotion to the arts. ‘Not to be, not to be, not to be’ is a ditty I repeat whenever a so-called creative urge is magnanimous enough to induce me to write yet another magic word.

*Not to be, not to be, not to be,
Not to be as busy as a bee.
Never mind BBC. My cup of tea
Is just a cup of tea. Is there one for me?*

If an intellectual looks either at the ceiling or at his own stomach or heart, as the case may be, he sees only himself: he is also on the ceiling, all around it; and he is also on the walls of his own room that he leaves only when he needs to pay a visit to his wine cellar. So his soliloquy sounds like that of Hamlet, with the exception of the quality of Shakespeare’s style, and he loses the name of action; and his intervention in the war of the worlds is reduced to a sterile contemplation of intestines, spiders and empty glasses. So one must do something, if only for the sake of doing nothing: if you *do* nothing, you do *something*. (Or if you *undo* nothing or something.) If you stay in bed and go only to your wine cellar where you spend a few minutes as you search for an appropriate bottle, you do not even do nothing. I’ll do, I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do.

What is literature today? Why should one write?

*Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw!
This is th’impostume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies.*

The man dies without a cause if he does not do anything outside himself, for the sake of a straw, of a ‘little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name’. What name? Literature, art, dignity, humanity, mind, soul, life, death. Impostume. An inward swelling full of corrupt matter. Is that what inspiration amounts to? Devotion, sacrifice. Just an abscess?

*What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.*

So Hamlet sleeps for a while, for he does not succeed in making up his mind; yet his mind is made up, contrary to what Laurence Olivier says about him and it in his film. But neither Hamlet nor Laurence Olivier (in this film) has any idea how to put his mind’s decision into catharsis. Of course they think that all occasions – especially the one related to the straw – spur on their dull revenge, which is far more important than literature which they deliberately underestimate as they walk with a few books, saying, ‘You’re still not allowed to say the f-word on TV in the US. And all words are f-words. F, f, f, f, f, f. *Fi, fi, fi, fi*, fie, fie, fie, fie, bah, pooh, bah, pooh. And I don’t give a fig, you know. Actually “father” is also an f-word.’

And what about our weird girls who were raped by the gorilla so many years ago one forgets the millennia and their numbers, their digits and titbits. You look at all these girls from the outside and say that nothing really happened except a few pools of blood soaking through a number of sheets. (A blood-happening.) The girls kept silent because they were afraid their parents (and their own selves) might have all kinds of attacks, starting from their hearts and never ending either in their brains or intestines. A never-ending attack, as they say when describing a creature whose existence sustained multiple fractures under a dozen gorillas' bodies. 'A gorilla is followed by another gorilla,' they say almost in unison. 'It never rains but it pours.'

'Are you alluding to their sperm?' asks the journalist.

'Not quite.'

'Do you really think all these men were gorillas?'

'Yes, we do.'

'Aren't they rather dragons? The one Medea put to sleep? Incidentally, I wonder why you didn't put a few sleeping pills into those gorillas' champagne glasses. Well, all right – let bygones be bygones, as they say.'

'We can't let them be bygones,' they answer.

'Those moments symbolised what Hegel calls "negation" without which you can hardly reach the overall harmony hinted at in his dialectics and books. Didn't those gorillas send you a multitude of tickets for the National Theatre? "As a gesture of my continued affection," each of them wrote and said. You might have seen *Othello* performed by Laurence Olivier and his wife. Did you? A sort of harmony, wasn't it?'

'What do you call "harmony"? Death?'

'Incidentally, you understood what Shakespeare meant when Othello asked Iago, "Lie with her, lie on her?"'

'We understood only "lie on her".'

'God bless your gorillas! If it weren't for them, you wouldn't have understood Shakespeare, if only in part.'

One of those girls leads a broken life and whenever she tries to put together all the pieces she sees in front of her, she realises that some of them are impregnated with blood; and she says to herself that she shed this blood 47 years ago. Naturally enough, she tries to console herself, saying she did not shed her blood because of a dagger: it is not a dagger that wounded her body and soul. Actually one might say it was a dagger or a sword; after all, if one says 'he was a gorilla', one is entitled to go on as follows, 'Instead of a penis, he had a sword one might liken to Notung, to the sword wielded by Siegfried of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* fame. Is it a mixed metaphor? Never mind, never mind. Actually, Siegfried killed a dragon with his *Schwert*, whereas our gorilla wounded a dove, a little virgin who was as fragile as a Chinese vase.' All this is mixed and one would like to get out of the net where everything and everybody get entangled, if all these ones do not pay attention to what they think and do in this and other lives. And even if they do pay attention to all phenomena and trains of thought, they find themselves in a net and a network. And they begin to go and get the recognition to which both Hegel and Kojève devoted many pages as if there was nothing else on Earth, no blades of grass to contemplate for hours on end, worshipping Creation and its Creator.

You can worship a flower for a change while lying in the grass, under the vault of heaven, but suddenly you are bound to hear a bird – as Siegfried does in his *Ring* – whereupon you realise that the bird you hear and even listen to also strives for recognition, otherwise it would keep silent: you need not sing for the sake of flying.

Then you hear a dog, its barking and you say to yourself, 'A few seconds ago it thought the time was right to let its intentions be known. And what are its intentions? Recognition, recognition, recognition. Three intentions, no less.' Of course the dog in question does not care a hoot about his master's safety and about his safe where a great many diamonds are hidden in expectation of the same number of women. The dog does not give a damn about the bone it buried two days ago in one of the corners of the garden where it walks and barks on a whim, whenever its dream, the one it has always had, drives it crazy and it barks, barks and barks until someone turns an ear in the direction of its barking, prepared to recognise both the barking and its source.

The same goes for the ladies we talked about this morning and the other night: they strive for recognition so badly they are prepared to bark and bite, if no one takes notice of their revelations. Of course any journalist – even if he is not branded as a common paparazzo – does his best to worm the gorilla-imbued information out of those wounded girls. But they can only answer thus, 'We don't remember anything.'

'What don't you remember?'

'Everything. We did our best to forget that night and many other nights. The same goes for our virginal blood, you know.'

'You'll get a lot of money if you talk to me at length about the gorilla.'

'What gorilla? What are you talking about? We've never seen any gorilla, not even in zoos. Besides, Sigmund Freud warned us about our childhood and adolescence. He said our lives might be broken if we stuffed our unconscious with gorillas, their swords and our blood. He said we might bleed to death if we recalled our blood on a regular basis.'

That is the way to talk to those journalists whose curiosity and greed know no bounds; and even if they do know some, they always go beyond them, eager to transgress all moral rules. But the girls or those women dream about recognition and its effects, which is not surprising after all: they are forgotten by everybody and their tombs are not far away, according to Heidegger. So their husbands say to them, 'Look here! If you go on thinking about death and oblivion, you'll die prematurely. Forget about Heidegger and Shakespeare. If you cast your mind back, you might recall what happened on those nights. There's no point in sitting at home and moping – get out there and talk about your gorillas!' So one of the girls gets out there and talks to a freelance sexual and porn journalist. The second one reads about the first in newspapers and says to herself, 'But I was more beautiful and sexier,' whereupon she stops moping, gets out there and talks to a paedophile – to a journalist whose mind and computer are focused on paedophiles and their rings. The journalist says to her, 'Are you striving for recognition?'

'What are you talking about?' People always utter this sentence when they know exactly what other people are talking about.

'You wish your friends and a multitude of strangers could read about you in our magazine.'

'I wish the English knew everything about the monster they adored in his lifetime. Do you remember *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare's remarkable play?'

'Of course I do.'

'He compares the murder of his father to the "imminent death of twenty thousand men / That, for a fantasy and trick of fame, / Go to their graves –"'

'So what?'

‘Is that what you’re talking about? A fantasy and trick of fame? Let me quote Hamlet once more, ‘How stand I then, / That have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d –’ Don’t forget that I was stained. And I’m a mother now – I’ve got three children.’

‘Are you talking about your *virginal* blood?’

‘Yes, I am. And my blood and my numerous stains are far more important than a mere fantasy.’

And what about Fortinbras? He commands Norway’s powers and goes with them ‘against the main of Poland, sir,’ as some captain or other says as he answers Hamlet’s answer destined to assuage the latter’s fears. Hamlet might have thought they were bound for Denmark. Actually he would have rejoiced had he been told his uncle would be overthrown and thrown away or put in the middle of a dumping ground where vultures have their daily meals. Be that as it may, he was astonished at finding that Fortinbras was prepared to sacrifice his life – let alone his soldiers’ family lives – for the sake of a straw, a no-man’s, no-beast’s land. All right, he thinks his revenge is far more important: a few murders that round off the play are likely to bestow an artistic immortality upon the characters and their author. But at the end of the play, after killing almost everybody, he says, ‘But I do prophesy th’election lights / On Fortinbras.’ Shakespeare makes us realise how important it is to listen to what a monarch says about his successor – or *her* successor: let us not forget Elisabeth who, on her deathbed, spoke highly of James. But why does Hamlet speak of Fortinbras? On the threshold of death? Why doesn’t he pray instead of taking care of the *déluge*? Because he knows that Fortinbras is prepared to sacrifice his life for a straw, let alone for Denmark where Kierkegaard was to be born two centuries later.

We always need both pity and compassion, and we are told that these words are synonymous and so we can say either ‘pity’ or ‘compassion’ instead of saying, ‘Pity, compassion, pity, compassion,’ and putting exclamation marks after every word and even, in a way, after every letter, after every curve displayed by such and such a letter. Once under way, our eloquence goes unrestrained to the end of the world where some people might hear it and its figures of speech, according to our thoughts and innermost hopes. Empathy, sympathy. Some prefer animals to humans – this is a well-known phenomenon, although the same people prefer not to mention Hitler in this respect. This undear, abominable Adolf stroked his dog and killed millions of people either in concentration camps or in ghettos, on battlefields and even within the walls of his bunker. So we are not tempted to drag him in when talking about those who stroke dogs and look with unmistakeable disgust at middle-aged men and women; and even at angel-like children.

So, if talking to an elderly couple – generally speaking, the young have less money than the old – you say enigmatically, ‘They took pity on the stray cat and fed it.’ As you say so you go down on your knees and begin to crawl on all fours, doing your utmost to imitate a stray cat or a stray dog. And you get lost when you stray too far from the footpath or rather your pawpath; and you lose sight of the people on whose money you counted for a while as you looked at their faces. Actually you could only see the woman’s face: it was so cold that her husband wrapped a scarf tightly around his face. But his wife’s face seemed to radiate kindness and the eagerness to help the needy and even the greedy, provided they belonged to the animal kingdom and therefore could not be found amidst her Majesty’s subjects and objects. (Are animals also her Majesty’s subjects?)

Well, there are people who do what they can for sufferers, and if you were raped in your teenage years, they can even bequeath you their Italian villas and sports cars. So you talk to them about your left breast, and if

they remain cold, insensitive and even hostile – they do not seem to like female breasts and often talk about cows in this connection – you talk about blood, making them believe you lost your ego on the night of the rape. So what remains of it amounts to a mere ‘go’ so that you go from one place to another without being able to settle down, if only for a year. Everything and every house remind you of your personal gorilla and you say to yourself and your potential benefactors, ‘Here he bought a pastry I had to eat, swallowing both this pastry and my tears. And over there he stroked my face and left a red spot on my skin. I thought I would break under the strain and I was right for once – I did break under the strain or rather under his gorilla-like body. Do you wish to know if I lived happily ever after? I was like Jason forsaken by Medea and his (and her) dead children. I think they took a plane and took off like birds, crossing clouds, stars and the gods. I roamed around America for a year, working in bars and restaurants, in nightclubs and night schools. And I saw gorillas everywhere, all around my body, on my body, under it, pricking and kicking my ribs and stomach and sinews and thoughts and dreams. I married after a while, but my husband thought only about recognition: his status, money and glory. He nursed me back to life only to demonstrate how wonderful he was, how magnanimous, skilful and all-too-human. One day – or once upon a time, for it was a long time ago – he called me names and then uttered “bitch, bitch, bitch” several times in a row. I didn’t like this row and our row. Anyway he left and I’m alone now.’

You were hoping they might show a little compassion and offer you a roast or fried chicken, but they asked you instead if you had suffered from chickenpox in your childhood. You said, ‘No.’ They said, ‘You don’t know then what suffering means,’ and left you to your own devices as if totally ignoring the fact you had none – no devices at all. But even if you have no devices and, generally speaking, nothing at all to put under the teeth, as the French and some other members of EU say (the Russians say that too), you are supposed to be active, taking part in the life of your state, of the one you belong in and to, according to your passport. You do not always feel the data your passport displays for the sake of various officials, but you do have a sort of feeling for the country thanks to which you are a passport holder and know your identity – at least some superficial data related to it – more or less by heart. You open your passport, as you often do in the middle of yet another identity crisis, and repeat out loud whatever you find in it, which enables you to keep your feet on the ground and not in the grave. Even if only one of your feet is on the ground now, you feel much better, whether you look at this foot or at the ground or not. And sometimes you even overlook the whereabouts of the other foot of yours which may, to all intents and purposes, go on digging its own grave: though already stuck in the grave, your feet continue to dig as if determined to get to the bottom of death.

Well, let us leave your feet alone, which is all the more logical: they are as busy as two bees and you had better not interrupt their work so as not to find yourself in yet another predicament. Of course your left foot does not know what your right one does, but that does not really matter, for you keep your head above water, above the other parts of your body and even above your thoughts that say to you, ‘Everything is under control, sir.’ Anyway, you are active and being active under the circumstances has been seen as a gesture of goodwill. And all the shows go on: your activity, someone’s goodwill, your participation in the life of your state and your personal life. As for the state, you say without further ado, ‘Lies, greedy elites and a divided, dying Europe – why Britain could have a great future outside a broken EU.’ And then you explain your thesis in great detail and people understand why Britain has a great future that H. G. Wells called ‘things to come’. At least, that is what I would have said even yesterday, although yesterdays are not different from either today’s or tomorrow’s – in terms of desolation, depreciation, decrepitude and trepidation.

Today – I have no idea what date it is and what kind of day shows me its dawn and its grey fingers – I am for Brexit, for this earthquake as they say when speaking about the fall, if only partial, of an establishment. And I am tempted to write another ditty to commemorate their Brexit, my exit, our common walk towards the Promised Land.

*Divided you fall,
United you fall,
You fall, you fall.
No arms, no stretchers.
You fall and fall.
A butternut squash.*

I feel elated as I watch BBC World Service where – within this service and also out of it – they speak of leaving Egypt and going towards something that might look and sound and feel like the Promised Land. As any guru might say and confirm, there are only exits and promised lands, even if they are not really promised, being somewhat in the dark where you have to fumble even for your own glasses designed for your walks in the streets, not in the alleys that crisscross our or their Paradise. Well, I did not read every article centred upon Brexit and its consequences, but all of a sudden – and there is such a thing as suddenness or allness – not only the inhabitants of England, but also outsiders to whom I belong and in whose club I drink my champagne, resolved as I did to move and be on the move for quite a while to shake off our dust and must and even ashes – as if we could become immortal after all. Babies like toys that make a noise when they are shaken; so do I, which once again puts my second childhood on display, in a Shakespeare play – among other plays and ways – where Hamlet says, ‘Hold your mirror up to Heine’s month of May.’

*Month of May, month of May.
Keep me at bay, keep me at bay,
You death,
you mess,
you ass,
you fuss.*

And Hegel says, ‘Hold your mirror up to freedom and to the state in which you belong, for without it, your state and fellow-citizens, you can’t be free, even if you drink a bottle of champagne and go into the streets, shouting, “I’m free, free, free, free,” and even add another f-word to your declaration of independence. Don’t forget that only as a social being who partakes in ethical life is the individual truly a person.’ All right, I am not a person (not truly anyway) but I am probably an individual, and as an individual I rejoice at hearing and seeing the English go to the EXIT (from Hell), cross the threshold in the opposite direction and cross their channel, heading for their motherland where the City bankers and the Prime Minister have just burst into bitter tears. Is that what Hegel means by the senseless and nonsenseless expression ‘ethical life’? You cry or jump for joy because your

country goes in, after reading the inscription, ‘Those who go in should forget the hope thanks to which they might occasionally dream about going out.’ But, at some point, the English realise that even Dante’s Hell is likely to be provided with an outlet or a real exit bearing the inscription, ‘Exit from Hell. Don’t forget your belongings.’ So the English uproot the trees they planted in France, in their gardens, and make their way for London, their backs overburdened with trees, bushes, flowers and houses. Hegel nods and says, pointing his cane at the exodus, ‘The will is essentially free. That will made all these individuals come to France and today they’re leaving the country of Montaigne because they no longer belong in Europe. They leave for Europe and quit it on a whim, and this whim of theirs distinguishes them and us from other animals: having purposes and striving deliberately to achieve them. To possess a will means wanting to be free and therefore, to some extent, already being so.’

Am I being so? Am I being so? Of course I want to be free and if I say ‘of course’ from time to time, it does not mean I am a ‘yes-man’ or an ‘of course one’. I am just free and my legs, untrammelled by tombs and wombs, advance steadily through my garden and even down the street where I live, where she does not live for once. In short, I go and move in all directions, which can hardly be associated with a lack of freedom, with the indolence one displays in one’s bed in a moment of profound, personal and universal crisis. And even if I cast a look at my ceiling or rather at the canopy hanging above me like a garden – in fact I have two gardens in the time-space-mess where I live – I read on it neither Heidegger’s *Nichts* nor *Niet* nor Nothing-Nothing-Nothing-Nothing; I just admire the decoration dating back to the 16th century. Then I admire another decoration – a cake decoration, for instance; although I have not eaten a lot of cakes ever since I began to fear diabetes and its consequences which empty your head and build some Aswan-like dams in your veins to the point of saying ‘No’ to your blood and its life-giving circulation.

All right, I do care about the state and the European Union, especially when those officials’ headquarters prevent me from reaching my destination in no time at all: traffic, as Jacques Tati put it. In the light of what happened in England last night, I can anti-care about this union of sorts, adopting their (British) go-go method. How can I take part in the life of the state and society where my free legs walk? Where my free fists are clenched all the time? I could not vote for Brexit because I am neither English, nor British, nor Scottish, nor Irish. But I can drive as far as the traffic jam that usually blocks my route, putting an almost impassable barrier between my car and la Grand-place. Then I shall get out of my car, plant myself in front of their building and shout the f-word; and I shall shout myself hoarse. (I wish I could shout myself hoarse on my horse, in front of that house.) My f-word will resound throughout Brussels and its suburbs where the representatives of the union-shackled countries live, prosper and play many rounds of golf at weekends. Even their balls will listen to my f-song and miss all the holes, as they usually did when listening to Orpheus (or Apollo) and his kithara.

That is my way of demonstrating my commitment to community (the *polis*), and I am not likely to budge from where I planted myself at the beginning of my song until their bosses and employees leave both Brussels and its suburbs forever, dropping their contracts and mobile phones, breaking their promises and bones. And if they dare disobey my song-conveyed order, I shall call the dragon of Medea of Jason fame and it will devastate the union-space ferociously and quickly.

I can see someone’s secretary running from one office to another in search of sleeping pills – a medicine-provided lullaby. ‘Do you have a box of sleeping pills?’

‘No. Why should I? I sleep deeply and truly during our meetings.’

‘Do *you* have a box of sleeping pills?’

‘I never take sleeping pills that destroy one’s memory, once and for all. And I wish to remember their Brexit until next year.’

‘If you forget it, your colleagues will remind you, you know.’

‘Our country has been able to celebrate the return of its independence so brutally snuffed out in 1940.’

‘Do you remember how it was snuffed out?’

I continue to sing the f-song and its refrain sounds thus:

Off, off, off, off,

Away, away, away, away.

To Hell, to Hell, to Hell, to Hell.

Not to the main hall, not to the main hall.

Say nothing but good about dead, as they say but, whatever we might feel or know, the European Union (or Disunion, as they call it now) is not dead yet and so we can say about it whatever we want, airing our grievances and taking our revenge upon the officials who listen only to their own greed and show us a number of deaf ears, as a British newspaper puts it. For instance, you say, ‘The irrefutable fact is that the EU is ruled by a secretive, unelected commission, whose diktats are backed by a court able to override elected democracies,’ whereupon you see ten deaf ears and one ear that hears and takes notice of what you say. This ear communicates your complaint to a mouth to which it is connected by means of a few sinews, and the mouth grows larger and larger and you see a multitude of teeth that go on glittering under the spotlights as long as the mouth remains open. The mouth and whatever goes out of it do not refute your truth or untruth because they do not care about your truths that are nothing but nothingness within the mind connected to the mouth by means of another set of sinews. The mouth overrides you and your complaint and suddenly you no longer see any dentures in front of you – only Angelina Jolie’s lips.

Suppose, however, that the Union continues to die as if overpowered at last by the second law of thermodynamics that may speed up its action and reaction, inspired by our beloved Brexit, by the Dunkirk spirit. Frexit and Neexit follow each other and eventually, with the passing of two years, Brussels itself resolves to get a move on, inspired by the Dunkirk spirit. Another Brexit looms on the horizon, on the trees situated in the Brussels suburbs and even on the outskirts of the former capital of Europe. ‘The looming crisis,’ say a number of newspapers, and *The Herald Tribune* even quotes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in this connection, ‘It was a brute part of him to kill so *capital* a calf there.’ Strange as it may seem, no one inquires about the him’s identity as if, once again, everything were as clear as a bell or Hell.

The inhabitants of the former capital of Europe vote against Brussels and the role it plays in the European Union’s thoughts, deeds and needs; and someone says, ‘The good thing about the European Union is that it dismantles if you want to put it in the back of the car.’ So Brussels with all its commissions and money finds itself in the back of its guardian angel’s car and Brussels moves away from Brussels as a result of the vote. Of course there are no angels, no cars, no backs, but the journalists do not want to repeat the clichés one stumbles upon in the speeches made by officials, prime ministers and ordinary ministers who, with the passing of three months, may become extraordinary – or prime, in another word. But today’s prime minister, David Cameron,

said in one of his farewell monologues (with his wife Samantha at his side), ‘I’ll do my best and not my worst, contrary to what many of you might think, to steady the ship, but I’m certainly not the right person to be “the captain that steers our country to its next destination”.’ So Cameron compared England to a ship and, not to be outdone, whenever writing about the second Brexit (that of Brussels from Brussels), our and their journalists talk about cars and their backs, about guardian angels and a well-deserved holiday, pointing out that ‘the Caribbean is a popular holiday destination’.

Whatever happens in the world is somehow related to your organs and the whole body that, according to the Hindus and their sacred books, not only cover the Earth, but even reach for the moon where your hair seems to create a multitude of forests. If you read their books, they say to you, confirming their sayings, that your feet can be found in Australia and your neck in New York. For some obscure reason known only to itself, your right hand strokes the South Pole, and if you were able to ask it why it does this, it might answer your question and give you a lesson on the ubiquitous nature of love. But you are unable to do so: you are prevented from asking questions and supplying answers by your mouth’s whereabouts: it is located in South America, of all places and continents. At least you cannot speak to your hands, given that your left hand strokes the North Pole, and you feel that it does not do it out of love or even curiosity. But then you stop wondering about your hands’ reasons and acts because you have other fish to fry and you do fry them one by one, dozen by dozen. And you eat these dishes of yours because, for all your ubiquity (*hic et ubique*) you are hungry and unable to assuage your hunger by stroking the Earth. I recall a story in which a man asks his wife, ‘My dear chuck! When are we going to eat?’

‘My dearest chook! Why can’t you eat love? Quite enough, isn’t it?’

‘Well, give me a packet of salt and vinegar crisps.’

‘If you eat three good meals a day, you’re less likely to snack on biscuits and crisps,’ says the wife.

‘But I haven’t had a single meal since last Saturday.’

‘Haven’t you eaten my love all this time?’

‘Of course I have.’

‘Do you mean to say that’s not enough?’

And one day the dear chuck quits her sweet dream only to find her husband sitting on a radiator and looking at her. ‘What are you doing on this radiator?’ she asks him. ‘I’m heating up our breakfast.’ Bacon and eggs, in all probability. Going back to your body and its love for the Earth, you realise that, according to the Indians, the sea and many rivulets originate in your body’s numerous liquids that make up your physical substance, a huge part of it. So you give rise to oceans and the brook that Schubert singled out for his singular purpose – for the creation of the cycle known as ‘The *Schöne* (or *Schönes* or just *Bella*) *Millerin*’. And what about rains, torrents, tsunamis and cascades? The ones one comes across and listens to in Japanese gardens? All this comes from your body and returns to it as you drink the Earth’s riches, offerings and gifts, filling your body to the brim instead of just drinking several cups of coffee in your garden. If you drink the Earth’s organic juices, you will live forever or at least until you grow weary of life. And that will never happen, you say to yourself as you look at the youngsters playing with a ball right under your windows. At least you will never say to your friends and relatives, ‘I’m too old to be out clubbing every night,’ because you will be out every night, clubbing, drinking, dancing and courting young women and men.

And what about coffee? After all, you are old enough to know what to drink and how to behave so as not to die prematurely either in your bed or in the Paris metro. You would not mind drinking only the juices produced and certified by our Mother Earth, but that cannot be done on a regular basis, even if you go to the woods every day, a huge cup in your hand; even if you empty all the brooks and rivulets haunted by Schubert's millerins on midsummer nights. (A mixed metaphor.) So you drink coffee and think you are digging your own grave which will be called 'early' after your death – whenever you happen to put your second foot in it. And then you read that drinking coffee protects the liver against a number of diseases, and you are astonished beyond measure: until recently, experts warned against having more than a few cups of coffee a day for fear it might cause cancer. Well, its (coffee's) medical rehabilitation is well under way; in other words, coffee was not really sentenced to death. Yes, health chiefs tell us coffee could keep cancer at bay and we usually listen to chiefs, especially to those who talk about health. But we no longer have to listen to Brussels' or the Union's chiefs and consequently can devote more time to other chiefs and also to our health; and to coffee, needless to say. And what about those who already have liver cancer? Drinking coffee can slow its progression, its work in progress.

You can also say to yourself that your liver and its cancer are nothing but the European Union and that all you have to do amounts to the procedure used by the British who stormed out of this hospitable-inhospitable house, slamming the door as they went. The theory according to which we are ubiquitous, even if we do not literally lie around the Earth, grasping her globe and embracing it round the clock, guides us towards thinking in pantheistic and cabalistic terms; so that our liver may become an island or a city in the process, during our own work in progress. And the eternal recurrence of the theme and notion thanks to which we identify with others and whatever happens in our history makes us believe that Brexit is part of our body and its biological life; let alone its spiritual one. You read for instance, 'The forgotten people of Britain rose up to regain control of their destiny yesterday in a stunning rejection of the European Union.' Well and good. But you are not of their number for the simple reason that you do not have a British passport. You have never had one, contrary to what happened in my life. Once upon a time, I had a Soviet passport that at some point – at the point of no return, to be exact – I handed over to the Belgian police. But I have never (not even in my midsummer nights' dreams) had a British passport; yet both Brexit and its participants seem to take pride of place in my existence.

Whatever you see or come across concerns you personally, for your person includes the world into which you were flung or born. I am forgotten and it is little wonder I rise up now and then to regain control of my destiny, and if asked, 'Who was at the helm when the collision occurred?' I am prepared to answer 'I was,' although I am not quite aware about what I might be asked under the circumstances. But, judging from my bitter experiences, it is always better to say 'I am', instead of lying low unless you are threatened by a contract killer and have to hide beyond cupboards and sofas, anxious to ward off the danger of death. So I rise up and reject all establishments and their officials who are always in charge, as far as I am concerned. 'The herd of rhinos charged towards us,' as one of Brexit's leaders put it on TV as he did his utmost to describe the doings of the EU's officials. Alas, I do not regain control of my destiny which continues to bully me into doing something I, for one, do not want to do. When you are bullied, it can destroy your self-esteem, as they say, and it does not really matter whether I (myself) say it or not. Well, I do *not* say it. So what?

'Leave supporters defied Project Fear – and turned out in huge numbers – to deliver an astonishing 52-48 victory. Finally the voice of those who have been ignored was heard.' If you do not read the papers, focusing your curiosity and its ramifications on Hegel only, you grow estranged from the State and its political and

popular life, settling down in the category of ‘unsocial animals’. But Hegel and Kojève whom you feel duty bound to consult every morning go on goading you into mixing with a wide variety of people and nations in whose midst you are supposed to be active and strong. And if any Project Fear looms on the horizon, you should turn towards all these people and shout, ‘This Project Fear shouldn’t put the fear of God into our hearts. Never fear! Never fear! Never fear! Never fear!’

You can even sing the following song:

*Never fear the heat of the sun,
 Never fear the cold of the moon,
 Never fear the frown of the EU,
 Never fear the frown of the UN,
 Never fear Vlad Putin’s stroke,
 Never fear a cancer or a stroke.
 To thee the reed is as the oak.*

And an insult is as a joke, if you make an effort and pretend that no one has ever insulted you because only jokes resound around you day in, day out. They slap your face, but you think it is a speck of dust you feel on one of your cheeks and also on the tip of your nose. You flick all these specks off, thereby giving your health and mood a big fillip, which makes you say once again, ‘Life is as easy as a bowl of cherries you can eat to your heart’s content. Everything is a bowl of cherries or a bowl of strawberries. Today I feel like consuming a few pounds of strawberries and that’s what life is about. You eat either strawberries or cherries, and you can also treat yourself to a chunk of cheese and a new pair of sandals.’ And then you feel a kick and this is not the first kick you have ever felt on the surface of your body and on that of the Earth; and yet you treat these kicks as if they were nothing but a multitude of specks of dust. And, after much soul-searching, you say to yourself, ‘I’m covered in dust from head to foot. And if I hit the ground with my stick, a puff of dust will rise up into the air. So I’d better not hit the ground with my stick.’ And you do not hit it.

Freedom has to take shape in the individual consciousness and will because that is how freedom and stars are born. They are born within one’s consciousness that transmits this piece of information to one’s will, and after a while this will to power – there are no other wills in the universe – propels one to international stardom. In this way our individual freedom acquires its social side, doing it abstractly at first: ‘I’ll become a star, I’ll beat all my rivals fair and square.’ And then the star is born, as they say, and the world resounds with cheers and applause. (And hooligans spray paint all over dozens of cars.) Only as a final result does freedom become aware of itself as having a history and a social dimension, and I should add that all this becomes and also becomes aware of itself and others according to Hegel with whom one might disagree, however, without being sent to Hell in disgrace; without bringing disgrace on one’s whole family, race, nation and motherland.

So I stay at home and no one sprays paint all over my car that is holidaying in the garage, sheltered from hooligans and painters alike. No one applauds either, so one can say no star was born either yesterday or last week when I spent my time mostly in the garden appended to my house and also to my good moods. And if you do not leave your garden, be it English or Zen, you are not likely to be adulated by the crowd that looks at stages, screens and football pitches. But at least I was not exposed to dust and verbal insults that might have reached my

ears outdoors where anything can happen, even if you just take a walk in some central park. Police are concerned that mugging is on the increase and you are unconcerned about warnings and bad news, murders and suchlike. And suddenly you hear a voice uttering something along the lines of, 'When you've aligned the notch on the gun with the target, fire!' or 'Aim for the dead centre of the target.' A few seconds later you lie dead in the grass or on a path where tourists head for their destinations, nonchalantly stepping over your corpse.

Of course anything can happen: even at home you can be assaulted, mugged in broad daylight and thrown out of one of your windows, but this kind of thing happens far more often in parks, be they central or outlying. For instance, in the opera *Khovantshchina*, a Russian (or Ukrainian) bass is warned by someone's servant about his (the bass's) forthcoming assassination. The bass answers thus, 'What? My death? At home? Within my estate? Inside my palace? Are you out of your mind? Take this rogue to the stables and flog him, flog him, flog him to death.' 'Rogue, flog,' repeats the bass's servant, pushing the other servant towards the stables, kicking him mercilessly, knocking his block off. At the end of the scene the hero (or anti-hero) is assassinated and one wonders why he did not offer a horse to the messenger whose warning might have saved him, had he taken notice of it.

You think about glory, fame and immortality, but death is not only round the corner – it is just in front of you and you cannot help looking at him, eyeing him from head to foot. Our innate anthropomorphism makes us visualise everything and everybody in the shape of humans, and death is also a human being carrying a sickle or a hammer – it depends on the variety of death you live with as you follow Montaigne's advice: *memento mori*. So do I to some extent: I do not think our death is a human with a gun, a machine gun or a Kalashnikov that fires a lot of bullets, aiming at my heart and temples. All right, I *memento* this *mori* and even that *mori*, and all these *moris* or *moiras* (or just a sort of morass) prevent me talking about recognition, Spinoza-advocated eternity and so on. (And so on, and so on, and so on – ad infinitum.) And they say that works of art – immortal works of art, that is – do not die; but their creators do, although they are remembered through their works and sometimes their deeds. In the midst of such an inner monologue I suddenly see my corpse and the path where it lies in the past (and in the present), in its own dust, and I burst into tears, as David Cameron did upon hearing the results of the referendum he had launched to assert himself and solidify his status all over the world.

One cannot get used to death, no matter how often one mementos one's own corpse, tomb, tombstone and one's relatives' tears. They cry and so do I, but I would not stop crying, not for a second, if I had to recall my own *mori* – not that of others, as Heidegger puts it – round the clock (the vicious circle of time and space). You just take a walk around your living room and encounter a man hanging on one of the walls where there are also portraits of your ancestors. Of course you recognise your corpse and you do it once again in spite of your decision to *forgetomori* for a while – at least in the course of your five-course dinner; otherwise you might think you are eating your own body, even if you are vegetarian. And you trip over your own corpse whenever you go out, and therefore you say to yourself, 'You should step over my own corpse instead of kicking it all the time. I'm sure my corpse needs some rest because it has largely deserved it. Suppose my corpse is on holiday – my body, rather. I'm not dead. I'm just resting from my toil and trouble. But one doesn't want to be kicked during one's holiday and periods of profound sleep. Let me die in peace, you hooligans. If you do not, I'll ring up Putin and he'll send me his Russian team. What I have in mind has nothing to do with football, you know. You suckers. The Russians come and see a group of hooligans who swill beer in Marseilles in expectation of a match. They don't expect a militarised brawl. Neither do you, I suppose. Leave my corpse in peace because I count on

its resurrection. I need my corpse, you know, because I'm not keen on glorious bodies, on their glories, fames and stardoms. I need my body to enjoy myself thoroughly either in the Hereafter or in its suburbs. That's what I call "my glorious body, my glorious life".'

So I take a walk around my house, around my garden and my trees, and on each of them there hangs a corpse, if not two corpses. I fetch a ladder that no longer remembers either Jacob or his or her angels and climb up, anxious to remove these corpses from their resting or dwelling places. 'No *memento*, no *memento*, no *memento*,' I say to myself as I continue my personal Corpsexit. 'No *mori*, no *mori*, no *mori*, no *mori*, no *mori*.' I burn the corpses, but getting rid of death is no easy task, contrary to what Montaigne and gurus think as they embark upon their ritual during which they burn our Death Himself, hoping we shall be left alone on this Earth as a result of this purifying exercise. But language and its dictatorship, its fascism about which our Barthes spoke so eloquently leads us astray, away from eternal life; from the absolute trust we have in our gurus, mystics and quantum physicists. It is our language that rules the waves, the sands, the trees, the corpses and even the vultures that partake of these corpses of ours. And our language says to us,

Mori, mori, mori, mori,
Moirai, Moirai, Moirai, Moirai.

And we plunge headlong into our dictionaries where Moirai can be found beside and behind and alongside their spinning wheels. Their spinning takes place usually at the moment of birth, once at marriage as well, and both occasions are harmful, ill-fated and have disastrous consequences for all of us, whatever our gender, colour and humour. Of course there are lots of optimists in our midst, and they say to us, 'So what? So what? What are you so displeased about? You were born after your parents' wedding night. Now you are parents in your turn, judging from the number of sons and daughters you sent to English universities and Harvard. Actually all this explains the custom of bringing gifts to the newborn child and to the bridal pair. What do you have against these "gifts of the gods"? Don't you recall that Peleus received them at birth and at his wedding? What's wrong with you and the world?'

'Their spinning wheels.'

'What's wrong with *them*? Don't you recall that the Moirai, bringing good fortune, attended the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, and later that of Zeus and Themis, and of Zeus and Hera?'

'But on these occasions the Moirai didn't spin,' I answer.

'Later they both span and sang for Peleus.'

Moirai continue to spin throughout one's life until all the thread has been drawn off the distaff, bringing death, and that is what none of us can be fond of and wish with all one's heart. 'Either you don't spin at all or you do spin,' one is tempted to shout in their presence, after making a journey to the centre of the Earth. 'And if you do, I hope you'll go on spinning until the next world conflagration.' But Moirai or Nornai do not listen to our cries for help as they go on spinning their wheels, deeds, threads and threats, and when one of them happens to be kaput, they utter a few exclamations such as, 'A, A, O, Really, Ally, Allah, Hein, Hein.' Some of these exclamations can be heard in Wagner's *Ring* or *Spinning Wheel* or just *Spin*.

I have no intention of embarking upon a journey to the centre of the Earth – or to any centre, come to think of it. (Centre stage, community centre, fitness centre, health centre, centre of attention.) So I stay at home

and take care of the ominous dust that covers my halls, walls and floors where my feet might spend some of their times, taking me to books and other nooks, crannies and menus. Not all of these specks of dust are kicks and pricks, insults and slaps; nevertheless I pick up my vacuum cleaner and clean my house, castle and pyramid, which reminds me of my youth and its halcyon, unhealthy days: when I was studying for my exams I used to clean the house as a sort of displacement activity.

I wonder why all these politicians and bankers behave like children whose toys and joys were removed last night by a bad, naughty and nasty fairy – one of Carabossss' nieces. They are all bosses or masters, in other words, and we are their slaves, if we believe the opponents of the E U regime and drastic rules. These rebels just went to the polls instead of going into the streets where one can throw stones and Molotovs, Berias, Stalins and Brezhnevs. You throw everything, carrying out your personal ritual we have been calling *Geworfenheit* ever since we realised we were down-and-out losers. Nobody loves you when you are down and out. And what if everyone is just down and out? Do downs and outs love each other? Because they are in the same boat? Is their boat also down and out? At the bottom of the sea?

'Get out now Britain, and don't draw out the pain.' I think this sentence was uttered by Jean-Claude Juncker, whoever he is, was and will be in two months' time when David Cameron will step down in favour of King Boris or any other king, queen, prince and count (down). (You say something and then you go on adding to this statement of yours many nouns and pronouns because every word, notion and detail concerns everybody, not only quantum physicists.) Our politicians are on the same wavelength, at least to some extent, and if one of them steps down, another follows his example even before the advent of a new figure prepared to step up and replace the one who is no more, as they say. Of course the new prime minister can say, 'I fill up the void and I hope I'll fill it up to the brim.' And yet he invariably says, 'I replace the one who is no more,' because all these people have poetry in their souls and therefore speak of ships, havens and heaven instead of saying, 'Two million, three million.' They also speak of the pain as they remind us that only pleasures ought to be drawn out, whereas the pain must be cut short, otherwise we are likely (all of us) to sink into deep despair and also to the ground.

So Juncker spends his time mostly on the ground, and I wonder if he knows that the Winter Palace – I am going back as far as October 25th, 1917 – was defended by junkers and women. It is little wonder that a group of Russian hooligans stormed the palace and got drunk in its wine cellar where no junkers could be found; nor did the women drink wine that night: they were playing a game of cards with some junkers and two members of the Provisional Government. But our Juncker has nothing to do with the so-called Russian Revolution, which does not prevent him spending his time on the floor of his office. And when a journalist asks him what he is doing on the floor, on the ground, at the bottom of the heap, he answers, 'Too much pain, too much, too much.'

'Did you drink too much wine? Like your Russian counterparts?'

'I have no counterparts in Russia,' our Juncker says. 'The English are to blame.'

'The King? The Queen? No medicine in the world can do thee good?'

'Their prompt departure is the best medicine I can think of.'

'What message should we convey to their ears?'

'Try to be prompt because we'll be very short of time.'

Those politicians feel like opening their hearts to their subjects who might think they are automatons estranged from our real life where people lose money, fun and cattle. But once their hearts are open, we hear something along the lines of, 'Pain, pain, drawn out, pain, heart, attack, cancer, nervous breakdown, hospital, paralysis, kaput.' In the EU you are supposed to utter the words understood by everyone and so you cannot just say, '*Je suis fichu*,' for neither the Dutch nor the Poles will understand the meaning of your heart-rending remark. Of course they can look at you all the more easily since you show them your tear-drenched face that stands out in sharp relief against their sun-drenched shoulders, foreheads and cheeks. Be that as it may, it is better to say, 'I'm kaput' – even the Russians know and use this word with gusto. They do like voicing their grievances, even if no one listens to them. Well, God does, according to Berkeley.

So some politicians step down in dribs and drabs; and other politicians step up (in dribs and drabs), climbing in the opposite direction. And all of them show their open hearts as if paving the way to some sort of open-heart surgery. And they say as they show you how the blood and pain flow through their hearts, 'You see, we're as mortal as you are. Can you see our pain?'

'We can see your disdain,' answer their subjects. And they add after a while, 'Just the thought of blood makes us queasy.'

'Our symptoms include abdominal pain and vomiting,' say our EU officials, their faces red and sweaty and their hats awry.

'So do *our* symptoms,' answer voters and peasants.

'Do you feel a sharp pain in your feet?' ask our EU officials.

'We do,' answer a great many workers.

'So we're on the same wavelength,' say our EU officials, nodding everything: even their ears seem to nod, let alone their eyes.

'We are not,' say our underdogs, nodding nothing. And they add after a while, 'Don't defy the will of the people.'

According to Hobbes, life is nothing but a motion of the limbs, and the commonwealth or the EU, which he calls Leviathan, is an artificial man that may spend some time on the floor, if unfavourable circumstances require a sort of show of rue such as, 'I'm rueing the day I joined the EU.' And Juncker is still on the floor, opening his chest and showing his rueful heart to those who doubt he is not an automaton, an artificial official whose only preoccupations are linked to his pockets and the amount of money that one may find there, if Juncker would allow anyone to fiddle with his pockets. No way, no way: his pockets remain closed, whereas his heart is wide open and you can feel both his blood and the rue he experiences in the wake of the referendum that shook the world, as John Reed put it once, right after the Russian Revolution. The sovereignty is an artificial soul, says Hobbes, adding that it is also an artificial heart, whenever someone's rue is on display. 'If you don't show your mortality and anxiety to people, they'll never believe you,' adds Hobbes. 'Make sure you've got a huge quantity of pain in your heart before showing it to your slaves.'

But today's sociologists seem to have updated Hobbes' and Hegel's formula in the middle of which you stumble upon both masters and slaves. (You can even have a nasty trip on their bodies, if you erase this formula from your mind, singing, 'Weee'll never, never, never, never, neveeer be slaves.') That is what happens to our sociologists who strut around trying to get the attention of a group of workers and other ordinary, democracy-

born citizens. 'Do you know there are no more slaves in our world? There are only masters, you know. Are there many professional singers in your midst?'

'I'm a professional singer,' says a man. 'I sing with the Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus.'

'Great! You'll conduct your choir and we'll sing together. One, two, three. We're masters!'

'So are we!'

'We've obtained recognition!'

'So have we!'

'From another self!'

'From another self!'

'Not from a slave!'

'Not from a slave!'

'Hey baby, why don't you get out on the floor and strut your stuff?'

'Hey baby, why don't you get out on the floor and strut your stuff?'

'Hey baby, why don't you get out on the floor and strut your stuff?'

Actually I do not care about how I am alienated (to use the 1848-Marx term) and whether I am alienated at all, being either someone's slave or master: all these terms mean nothing within the framework where I live. We all live somewhere, even if we are in between and seem to be suspended in mid-air or in one of its corners; or just round that particular corner. I live within the framework of myself and I do not think I am alienated or isolated if I speak to no one in the Paris metro which I forsook a long time ago. I do stand in some corner or other if I happen to find myself outdoors because I do not like the crowd, its leaders, its slogans and the human warmth they all exude whenever they do something together. I think I would have joined the supporters of Iceland, of its football team, if I had been in Nice last night. I cannot say they beat the English feet down, but they did beat them and I prefer a coach who is a dentist by profession to the one who gets £100000000000 a year, although his team loses on a regular basis. I would have sung a few songs with them, raising my arms; and even my legs might have done something in the course of their (and my) celebration. I love the English, but many years ago, probably at my birth, I fell out with establishments and their whereabouts do not really count as I avert my gaze and thoughts from them. Iceland is a very small country, and they call a game a game and they play it and other games; in their midst I might come to the inevitable conclusion that death is a game one can win in the long run, thanks to a free kick.

If you happen to be in the Paris metro and even take a train or whatever it is called in this metro, in French, you do not have to talk to everybody about your state of mind, for fear of getting isolated from your or their community, from your fellow creatures. Are they your fellow creatures? All right, they *are* creatures, no doubt about that: after all, they *have* been created, if only for the sake of this metro, but you have a book you may become engrossed in if no one gets on your nerves by talking to you about the weather, the Brexit and the latest news from football pitches. So you stand in another corner of yours and look isolated, alienated – a fish out of water or a human out of humanity; and even out of this metro, to some extent. And suddenly a busybody comes up to you and begins to talk about the rain and fine weather, as they always say in France, or even about Foucault: you may come across an intellectual, a creature well-versed in literature, philosophy and fine arts. In

his eagerness to strike up any conversation, this man might say to you, ‘The fine arts have suffered from a lack of government funding.’ Of course, by way of an answer, you are permitted to say to him, ‘I care neither about our government nor about its funding. I’ve never got anything from them, not even one kopeck.’ And if he asks you, ‘Do you care about the Brexit?’ you can answer him thus, ‘When the decision to pull out of the European Union sent markets into a tailspin, I was unfazed.’

‘Were you?’

‘I was.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t have any money invested in the stock market. So what’s it to me?’

‘What about the world?’

‘What world? Which one?’

‘The outer one – the outside world.’

I say to these people that, given that the world is my representation – just another cliché-ridden notion – I may or may not represent it. And if I do consent to represent a part of it, this part is located far away from stock markets, exits and bres of all kinds. I can even represent the following piece of news: ‘MPs who campaigned for Remain were warned to respect the will of the people last night amid fears they could try to frustrate the Brexit result.’ I am not an MP, needless to say, and last night I was watching TV because football is still my cup of tea, although two days ago I switched to coffee once again; and I can represent this piece of news far better than whatever is linked to the Brexit or Linkenden or what not. Actually I do respect the will of the people because I do not know them, in spite of all my representations based upon newspapers and hearsay: I do hear this say from time to time. And I even answer this say now and then, if my whims take me that way. Why shouldn’t I respect the will of my whims? My will-o’-the-wisp?

I may also decide to follow the crowd that goes either towards an exit or in the opposite direction where an entrance of sorts is situated; and for once no one says to you that this is a restricted area, open to authorised personnel only. I even promise to cross the threshold they have been talking about for some time, killing both this time and many hopes, but my hopes survive intact for the simple reason – and for once this reason is very simple – that I got rid of hopes at the end of the 20th century. After a while I change my mind, saying to myself that my mind is mine and consequently I can change it whenever I wish – on a whim, if you want, if such is your dearest wish. My whims come and go, and I go with their crowd, anxious to keep them company for the sake of my independence, of my Kant-Hegel-Sartre-Tartar-exalted freedom.

You no longer shed your blood for your state because your state of mind is not attuned to this kind of sacrifice, and whenever they speak to you about your fatherland and work to which you should devote all your time, you answer, ‘All right, I remember your slogans, your country, work and family. Well, I’ll keep my family, my children and occasionally my wife, along with my mistresses, flouting your other notions.’ However, you are well aware of your strengths and weaknesses as a representative of the human species for whom abstract notions are far more substantial than blood and soil. Your notions, if any – and there are many of them, alas – are far more tenacious because they settle in your mind and take root in your brain. You can say ‘bye-bye’ to battlefields, to the straws that torture Hamlet and his guilty conscience, but here comes Hegel – out of the blue, as usual – and try to hammer home the message that the state is more important than any individual, however gifted, exceptional and classy. So you begin taking notice of what your government says to you about terrorists

and you are afraid you might be sent to yet another battlefield, called upon to defend your country's ideals. And you heave a sigh of relief if all this fuss boils down to the following sentence which you chance upon in yet another piece of news: 'The advertising campaign will try to hammer home the message that excessive drinking is a health risk.' And you stop drinking, go to a zoo with your daughter and show her two gorillas to warn her against their strength, libido and nonchalance. 'Many gorillas flout the law by not wearing condoms,' you say to her in pontifical tones and she questions you about condoms and their virtues. (If any.) You make another blood-and-thunder speech and go back home where another football match is waiting for you and your elder son.

Instead of thinking in terms of the state and its exits, you can enjoy the sweeping South African scenery from the seriously sumptuous Blue Train. I wonder if a train can be sumptuous light-heartedly, but that does not really matter because I, for one, am not likely to enjoy any scenery from this train: I went to South Africa 30 years ago and enjoyed whatever could be enjoyed, including the Blue Train and the Cape of Good Hope. There are other countries in the world and we should not forget that there is a world elsewhere; and hopefully the world Coriolanus talks about is different from the one we are stuck in.

But contrary to what I am doing right now, you stop neither going nor getting, and sometimes you do get something, although you do not always know what you got. It is enough to know how you got it and you are really proud of your achievements, even if you do not dare write home about them and mutter under your breath, 'Nothing, nothing, nothing.' (That is what your Notung amounts to.) You realise you are credited with being the brains behind this or that exploit and strategy, but a plot to stop you is brewing and you fail to come up with a new strategy designed to stop this plot from brewing. This is perhaps what they have been calling 'vanity' over a great many centuries that separate us from Solomon and his diaries. You say that the world and humanity for which our Earth is a sort of home base could have a 'glorious future', but there are always those individuals who keep on smiling sceptically and asking, 'What about the present?' And then they make yet another blood-and-thunder speech that may sound as follows, 'What counts is the present and we should make ourselves into works of art, otherwise all our virtues seem virtuous only on paper. The same goes for our happiness, family lives and the state where we're supposed to have some say. At least some say that and we don't feel like contradicting them. Yes, we must have a say in the running of the family business. All right, our wives and husbands listen to us and we get them twisted around our little fingers. And our children obey us to the point of taking out their nose studs as they enter the room where we talk to our colleagues. But we have little say in the restructuring of our companies because the EU or rather its officials don't allow us to settle our own destiny.'

'How could you settle your own destiny? What about the Fates to whom even Zeus is subjected? Even his thunderbolts are manipulated by the Fates, you know.'

I am longing for my personal exit from the Brexit.

I recall the Blue Train and the experience I had in Cape Town where I happened to spend five days for no reason at all. Probably I wished to visit the Cape of Good Hope as if I might find a few hopes there – the ones that spring eternal even in the autumn, when both our trees and Russian bears lose their hopes. I went to the central station, saying to myself that the Blue Train could be found only at the central station, at the centre-piece of

Cape Town and, sure enough, I did encounter this train at the centre of South Africa. One of the doors was open and I got into a sleeping car as if one could just sleep in it without bothering about tickets, destinations and their dire consequences. One might even say I was projected or *geworfen* into this apparatus that was regarded at the time as the most luxurious moving space in the world. After a while – I spent this while in one of the armchairs – the space began to move: after all, moving and conveying was its trademark. And once again I *geworft* myself – into the *open* space, this time; and I am not very fond of open spaces. How much cosier it is to spend nights and days ensconced in an armchair, especially if it is in the Blue Train which is worshipped, almost idolised, by Russian homosexuals. A single tiger lily in a blue vase stands on a folding table in the living-room-cum-bedroom, where two gold-and-brown armchairs with matching Ottomans turn into beds at night.

Of course I am tempted to compare this experience to life itself where one is eager to board a number of imaginary or unimaginary trains. A fidgety child – and even an unfidgety one – plays with trains as I did when I was in my first and only childhood. I also dreamt of faraway stations and cities where a great quantity of excitement and joy awaited me as if they had only myself within their field of vision and action. But in your childhood you do not even wonder if you are alone in the world because you *are* alone in it in spite of your parents' omnipresence and insistence on strict standards of behaviour. From time to time you scream as you try to attract your grandmother's attention, and when I think back to those days and ages, I realise I did not even try to attract anything: I just screamed, cried and flung my toys in the air. You exist, even if you do not know that existence comes first, leaving essences far behind as if no one had ever needed them and their substances. From this point of view, I no longer exist. I never scream for the sake of screaming as some individuals do whenever they are on the brink of another fall or nervous breakdown. And often they scream when they are at the very core of their nervous breakdown or madness. I am not mad; not yet.

Even on your deathbed you do not take advantage of the mere existence you enjoyed in your childhood because your screams mean 'death' and not our life where trains go from one point to another; and every point denotes adventure. 'No adventures, please,' we are tempted to say as we lie on our deathbeds, thinking about pills, doctors and immortality. (Immortality is not an adventure – it is a mere existence.) And our relatives – they are always relative, as we say to ourselves from time to time – listen to our raucous words because they think the dying always prophesise and utter a multitude of truths. One of such on-the-brink individuals said not only once, but twice and thrice, 'You know, the spirit descends and then goes up again.' And I was driven to conclude that life is just like that and there is nothing else about it. You jump to many conclusions as you listen to your dying uncle's words and maxims, but you are not on the threshold of death; not yet. That is why it is pointless to listen to last words and look at last deeds because you will understand them only when you reach the same condition and plunge into it headlong, bodylong, soullong.

So it is pointless to talk to your uncle whose body fidgets in the bed you might associate with death; at least you call it 'my uncle's deathbed' and you are certainly right, given that your uncle is about to ask you with his dying breath to look after his child. You promise to look after them and slowly, surely your uncle closes his eyes in his endeavour to spare you the embarrassment of fiddling with them after his premature demise.

It is pointless to talk to your uncle and aunt about the spirit unless you say to them as they lie in front of you, dying, going somewhere, 'Where's your fighting spirit?'

'There's such a thing as another spirit,' they might say to you; and they do, as a matter of fact.

'What kind of spirit?' You go on talking to them, for all the warnings issued by your sober mind.

‘This spirit of ours comes down and goes up again.’

‘Does it have anything to do with life?’ you ask them.

‘It’s life itself,’ they say.

‘What’s life?’ you ask them.

‘The spirit,’ they answer.

‘Can you see it?’

‘It’s just flown off.’

Our words never fly off as if inducing us to play with them to *their* heart’s content.

Dear Adrian,

I’m writing on the spur of the moment and there are many moments when I wish to share with you my happiness, the harmony I have finally reached in my search for overall harmony in spite of the suffering and all the toils, troubles and gambles that come to nothing, nothing at all. You must know the story that features the Buddha on the threshold of Paradise. Apparently there are several thresholds and quite a number of Paradises where we could spend the rest of our eternity in peace, after being left in peace and quiet by the unhappiness we muddle through as we go somewhere on the surface of the Earth, in the bosom of life. So the Buddha stands on one of these thresholds – on the highest threshold, as it were – and looks at the gates that God or one of His assistants seems to activate in his eagerness to let the Buddha in. There is also a she-angel in the doorway and so the Buddha salutes two individuals who smile in return and say, ‘You’re most welcome, our legendary guru. Only once in a century do we open this gate because almost no one deserves to lie on our grass, to swim in our seas and lakes. As you must know, humans are wicked and don’t deserve anything except a whip about which one hears in Shakespeare’s King Lear. The King himself touches upon the whip as he talks to his fool whose wits are sharp, at least when compared with King Lear’s wits, of which he has lost possession. Actually he says something to the effect that his wits are going away or flying off. We don’t remember the exact wording of this complaint, but this doesn’t really matter, does it? Well, anyway you’re welcome to your new abode because you deserve the highest pleasures we can offer you in our kingdom which is made up of nine paradises, as Dante put it.’

‘Thank you very much,’ says the Buddha. ‘Unfortunately I’m obliged to remain outside of your halcyon days and eternities.’

‘Why?’ ask the angels.

‘Because there are people down there. And they continue to suffer.’

‘They deserve their suffering,’ say the angels.

‘No one does,’ says the Buddha. ‘The laws of life are to blame, not their victims. Do you remember Shakespeare’s Hamlet?’

'Of course we do,' say the angels, whereupon the Buddha quotes a few lines from Shakespeare's immortal piece of writing:

"Laer. I can no more. The King – the King's to blame.

Ham. The point envenom'd too! Then, venom, to thy work."

'Are you alluding to the Almighty?' the angels ask as they look at the Buddha, their eyes glittering and twinkling and glittering again.

'No, I've no wish to kill our God,' says the Buddha. 'But I do prophesy th'election lights on another God, on another Law.'

'When? What?' ask the angels.

'I don't know,' says the Buddha. 'Let it be. Be that as it may, I can't enter your Paradise until the Earth leaves everybody in peace.'

'How do you mean?' ask the angels, raising their eyebrows.

'Until the Earth is empty. Until every inhabitant of the Earth ends up in your heavenly abode. I'll be the last to enter it.'

'But not the least, not the least,' say the angels, closing the gates forever; all the gates of Paradise. Even the one mentioned in Kublas Klan. Or Chingis Han. I still have problems with names – but not with games, mind you. Wrong names are just another game, another opportunity to play with the world, thwarting its projects and works in progress. Works in regress, as they never say. Well, Raoul Wandergem thinks that the notion known to us, to criminals and non-criminals alike, under the name of 'crimes against humanity' cannot be applied to those who killed and massacred millions of individuals during the Second World War. Why? you may ask. So may I, actually: I'm asking why all these butchers shouldn't be judged and hanged after their and our trials. And our tribulations. Why? Because this notion saw the light of day after the Second World War, in its wake, in its unmake. (In our unmaking.) It's an ex post facto law, in other words. It is true I don't know if these words are right or wrong; and the same goes for this idea. I think these butchers must be hunted down and brought to justice, provided some of them can still be found on the surface of the Earth or in the airplanes circling above it. And if there are such planes, such crime-carriers, they will circle for hours and years before receiving permission to land. And they'll never receive this permission. That's my way of dealing with crimes against humanity.

You may wonder why I'm talking to you about these crimes and their perpetrators. I do that because I won't model my behaviour and stand upon the Buddha's forgiveness and tolerance. The butchers will never cross the threshold near which our Buddha whiles away his eternity and the hours between nirvanas. They'll go to Hell in dribs and drabs, and all sorts of fires and brimstones will fall on their heads, chests, stomachs and so on. And so forth, my dear.

Why am I talking about them, about rains and torrents from which the inhabitants of Hell have suffered ever since the Creation? Because I'm happy and so can be found at the opposite pole of

human existence, conduct and moods. I'm quite aware that the harmony I feel as I talk about my happiness is as fragile as any happiness, as any sunny day. So what? Of course I might say I enjoy whatever happens today, within this fidgety moment, but I'm not as cliché-ridden as you might suppose. I don't enjoy myself in the present, leaving the future to take care of itself, although I never go so far as to send the future to Hell – I always stop on the threshold of any hell, even if the hell in question is not as sure as Hell – or Paradise, come to think of it.

I wonder if the harmony I've reached in the course of my journey that has nothing to do with Grails, be they holy or unholy, resounds in my life on the strength of the lack of stress. Indeed they used to blame so-called stress for cancers, strokes; and even our sore throats seemed to originate in the stress one can feel at one's office, when talking to one's boss and nasty go-getters, go-betters and so on. They're so obtrusive and obsessive one is tempted to go in the opposite direction, towards the opposite pole, even if, in order to reach this pole, one has to become a go-worse. Yes, this sounds unbelievable, but some individuals – among them a few crooners and crooks – wrongly believe that negative energy can somehow cause malignancy. You give yourself all sorts of cancers just by your thinking, believing and dreaming. In one of your bitter dreams you see your own cancer; upon awakening, you realise that your body is swarming with cancer cells and tolling bells. And all these cells, bells and hells are tolling for you, needless to point out. You have another prophetic dream and say to yourself in the middle of it and in the middle of nowhere (and in the muddle of everywhere), 'He died last week after a long fight with cancer.' Upon awakening, you have a long fight with cancer and die in the afternoon, after dropping your last will and testament on the floor, aiming at your solicitor's feet.

As you know, dear Adrian, I can't bear the current inhabitants of our Earth, and when I speak about our planet in these time-affected terms, I mean that I don't mind its previous states and contents: humanity hasn't always been as ridiculous as it is in this day and age. And once again I'm driven – this time against my will – to the play called 'words and thoughts' centred chiefly upon words and their metamorphoses or metastases, leaving no room for thoughts, for pure, unstained thoughts – for the pure reason, to use Kant's terminology. Yes, I'm tempted to say, 'Our aged age, in this night and age,' which doesn't bring us nearer to the truth, to the accurate description of the state of affairs we found ourselves in when we finally began to dissect our fellow creatures, our culture. You know how many negative, this-night-oriented emotions are stored up in my brain, and you have always thought they are settled and even ensconced forever in my body.

It was thought such negative emotions might end up at the very core of the body, making it prone to cancers of all kinds – even the kinds that no one has ever heard about. After all, this point of view is more or less logical: an unknown negative emotion has no alternative but to cause an unknown disease, and when talking about diseases, we utter the word 'cancer' much

more willingly than its counterparts such as 'ulcer', 'paralysis' and 'tuberculosis'. So we might come up with 'cancer of the nerves'. Once you made a speech devoted to 'type C personalities', doing your best to describe individuals who were unemotional and unassertive. According to you and your experience, they repressed their feelings, 'which shouldn't be done because "repressed" is usually rhymed with "depressed"'. Try not to get depressed – after all, what's the use of worrying? You can't change the world, can you? But you could change your moods, going to the woods from time to time. 'For this recipe choose mushrooms with large caps.' And you showed me the recipe in question, smiling and patting me on both shoulders.

Alas, numerous research studies have shown that having a brighter outlook on life doesn't affect the eventual outcome: optimism can't stop your cancer becoming terminal. Terminus is the station at the end of the life route. Anyway, I still harbour a lot of negative emotions, but contrary to type C personalities I don't repress them – I voice my objections at the top of my voice. 'Today's humanity is awful.' 'Our stupidity is awful.' 'Our hospitality is awful.' 'Our humanism is weird.' 'Our thoughts are stupid.' 'Our works are stupid.' Whenever I'm in a social situation with any of my fellow creatures – present company excepted (and expected) – we seem to run out of conversation after two minutes at the utmost. So I'm mostly in unsocial situations with them and you might call this attitude and state of mind and body 'negative', if you wish. But I do hope you don't wish it: there are other, far more fruitful wishes in the world. Even today's footballers are pitiful, and I was so disappointed by the match I began watching yesterday I switched my TV set off and was even about to smash it to smithereens; but it proved to be on the heavy side and I was unable to lift it, for all my efforts. Of course I could have kicked it several times. I could also have broken it with my hammer. But I did nothing of the sort because I wished to throw it out of my study window. Geworfenheit, as usual. Well, the TV set is rooted to the spot, and I'll keep away from this spot until the end of this championship and perhaps until the end of the world, until its conflagration. And I'll go on writing this text or whatever it is until my death or doomsday.

Actually doomsday is already in our midst. Mist and snow, mist and snow, as you always say whenever talking about your bad moods. I suppose you continue to talk about mist and snow because you don't want your moods to become repressed. 'Pete was so depressed after his girlfriend left him that I actually thought he was suicidal,' you told me last month on the phone. What about his suicide? Could you please put me in the picture about what is going on in his castle and on his numerous yachts? I hope something is going on, in spite of everything.

Valery Aleff

When thinking about various afters – and they (others) do give thought to them from time to time – they visualise their (here and thereafter) halls where a multitude of dancers (both male and female)

gyrate as if showing them how saints live and prosper in those faraway realms. There are swan lakes and duck ones in their midst, and they dance until they drop, and drip-drop, and drop-deep. Only, they do not drop, those indefatigable dancers, for they never grow weary of life in Paradise and of the rituals they carry out up there. They also write poems to the glory of the Almighty and their poems are far superior to Shakespeare's sonnets that someone – probably T. S. Eliot – did not really appreciate in spite of the fact that the name of Shakespeare was appended to every one of them. And then we realise as we stand on Earth, looking up, that the creatures we are looking at are angels and not mere mortals turned immortals under the influence of the stars. We also realise that they can swim in the lakes – a number of which are called 'angel lakes' – after taking off their wings that might overburden them on account of the water soaking through them and making things harder for their bearers. After all, you do not need to flap your wings in a lake, provided you have a pair of legs – a sort of propulsion system. As if obeying Xerox (or whatever his name might have been) they beat the water where you swim – just another performance of *Swan Lake* – and so you forget your wings with the passing of the years and eternities; and immortalities. You are an angel, but you do not mind being a swan in the course of your holidays, although you have no swansongs in your repertoire, in your eternal memory. Indeed you do not have to say 'adieu' to anybody or anything: you will be around after yet another round of pleasures, dances and ecstasies.

And yet, when I think about all these pleasures and measures that are not necessarily in store for my glorious body, I say to myself I should not denigrate the life I have lived through on Earth because of the suffering and toils and the spoils of my rivals' victories. We must strike a balance between reckless spending and penny-pinching, as they say; the same goes for joys, toys and troubles. We suffer and compose songs to honour our suffering, as Pushkin put it, and our guardian angels who let us suffer and agonise for the sake of our creative output about which they care to the detriment of our health and psychological wellbeing. And our songs do not sound as follows:

Ah, Ah, Ah, Ah,
Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh,
Be, be, be, be
To, to, to, to,
God, God, God, God,
iPod, iPod, iPod, iPod

They sound thus:

But age with his stealing steps
Hath claw'd me in his clutch

Upon awakening, upon looking at your left forearm, you realise it is not immaculate as it used to be in your childhood, youth and even in the course of your mature years: there is a red spot on it and you wonder how it got on your skin and when it landed on it. You begin to rub your eyes and you go on thinking you are still asleep until you hear your wife's voice that talks to you about your coffee and bacon and eggs, and porridge; and even 'so on' is touched upon as your wife reveals to you the secrets of your breakfast. Yet you prefer to look at the spot you discovered a few minutes ago and you say to yourself you will have to fight back a disease of which you know nothing except that you may suffer and die from it. Skin cancer, skin cancer, skin cancer. This combination of words – just another death variation – resounds in your ears and even reaches your wife's ears when you decide to come into the open and complain about your fate.

She comes into the room and says, as she drops a newspaper on your blanket, 'The Government took on the unions and won.'

'I don't care a hoot about the unions and their government.'

'Really?'

'Really.'

'Why?'

'Because I'll have to take on my cancer.'

'And what about your job and union? Didn't you apply for membership of the TUF?'

'I couldn't care less about the TUF.'

'What *do* you care about?'

'About my skin and its cancer.'

You show the red spot to your wife who bends over the spot and looks at it for a minute or two. She then touches it, strokes it for a while and plants a kiss on its surface. 'Some types of the anopheles mosquito transmit malaria to humans. We should call our family doctor.'

'What are you talking about?' you ask.

'About malaria.'

'What does malaria have to do with my cancer?'

Painstakingly your wife explains to you that your good moods and joy can cure any cancer, even that of the liver, let alone this cancer of yours that concerns only your skin – a *shallow* cancer, so to speak. What is more – and this time you can and should replace this expression by 'what is less' – your cancer has not undergone any diagnostic tests. 'Not yet,' your wife points out dogmatically, raising two fingers as if to express your victory over all our cancers put together. 'The American government,' she adds after much soul-searching, 'classifies both asbestos and environmental tobacco smoke as class one carcinogens. And you don't smoke, if I'm not mistaken.'

'You're not,' you say to her nodding your head. 'But what's asbestos?'

‘A soft greyish-white material,’ she answers, ‘that does not burn, and which was used, especially in the past, in buildings, clothing, etc. as a protection against fire, and as a form of insulation.’

‘What’s insulation?’ you ask.

‘The most productive way of stopping heat from escaping,’ she answers.

‘And what if I have a fever?’ you ask. ‘Should I prevent it escaping from my body?’

‘If you have a fever you should drink plenty of fluids,’ your wife declares as she brings you a bottle of coke. ‘Anyway, our doctor’s advice is to let the fever run its course.’

The fever runs its course; so does life. Now it is life that outruns the fever; now it is just the opposite or the other way round. ‘What were the patient’s symptoms?’ asks your doctor upon learning about your demise. ‘He was dizzy and short of breath,’ answers your wife. ‘And he was sweating buckets,’ she adds after a while. ‘A very good sign,’ says the doctor. Well, you are not dead yet: neither you nor I should jump the gun, whatever happens. The spot you took notice of a few days ago continues to grow and your wife speaks to you about the sun to which you were exposed during your holiday on one of the islands where the sun showers its beams and rays upon you round the clock. You no longer speak of your cancer because you are supposed to sing hymns to life, joy and optimism that cure everybody from everything, however serious, fatal and terminal this everything may appear on closer inspection. A close inspection reveals minute cracks in your skin and lungs, and the longer you look at these cracks, the larger they grow as if your glance – that of a personally involved observer – could influence the growth of cancerous cells. So your wife says to you, ‘Don’t look at your cells, your cracks and lungs,’ and you obey your wife’s commands: the sick always obey their wives and husbands because they rely on their help as they keep on muttering under their breaths, ‘One’s wife and husband help those who can’t help themselves.’ Logical, isn’t it? God helps those who help themselves, but if you can help yourself, you do not really need God, do you?

So the spot continues to grow and you say to your colleagues who wonder when you will resign, ‘I have a red mark on my arm where I burnt myself.’

‘When did you burn yourself? Where?’

‘In my kitchen. I was putting a Peking duck into the oven.’

A week later, however, you change your tune and enlarge upon your incurable fondness for redskins and their primitive culture. ‘This word is offensive,’ you are told, but you do not listen to those whose political correctness often gets under your skin. There are people in the world and even in the office where you have worked for 15 years at least. These people attribute every redness of yours to your inborn timidity and, anxious to back up their thesis, you lower your gaze as often as you can – when they say you are a wonderful friend and a professional scientist. But your wife invariably says, ‘You could have fooled me!’ whenever you carry out this ritual in her presence. She says you should show your body to a magnetic healer because ‘no traditional medicine in the world can do thee good’, and you go somewhere and reach a building where a miraculous healer and her magic pills are

scattered all around both tables and sofas. At least that is what you think as you cross the threshold of the magic office, your eyes searching for the magician whose hands and pendulums cure any cancer and whisk away red spots.

After a while, you say, ‘And where are your magic pills and knives, might I inquire?’ and the healer looks at you in astonishment.

‘No pills, no knives – never,’ she answers.

‘What *do* you have?’

‘Vibes.’

You lie down on one of her sofas; she puts her hands on your temple and says, ‘Two mental blocks.’ After a while she enumerates all the blocks you have around your body, ‘Two heart blocks, three lungs blocks, two liver blocks, one intestine block, five prostate blocks, two penis blocks, one thigh block, one shin block, one toe block.’ You inquire about the number of your strokes, cancers and ulcers, and she answers, ‘I’m removing them all.’

‘One by one?’ you ask.

‘Anne Boleyn went to the block. So did you,’ she says by way of an answer.

‘When did I go to the block?’ you ask.

‘When your mother touched upon Anne Boleyn in her history of the world. She also touched upon Charles I, I suppose.’

‘How do you remove *them*?’

‘The men came to remove the rubbish from the backyard.’

‘Who? What? From my back? From my buttocks?’

‘This detergent will remove even old stains. This red stain, for instance.’

You go home, look at yourself in a mirror and see the same red spot or yourself: you are just a spot, nothing more; a red spot – a red god, as some mythology defines and describes you. The gods die as well, you say to yourself, and it is better to die within the highest category than to embark upon an underworld journey as an ordinary or even extraordinary human being. ‘Sweet remembrance,’ you say to yourself as you continue to visualise the gods and their destinies which are identical to those we all suffer from. Once you push your brain, it keeps going under its own momentum, and you remember not only the gods, but also a few titans whose bodies used to frighten Zeus the Thunderbolt, among other gods.

Cancer patients – and other impatient patients – often compare themselves to Jesus Christ: they do not wish to suffer alone and say to whoever takes the trouble to listen to their mumbling, babbling and stammering, ‘Share and share alike.’ But you might say to yourself that, given the number of people who identify with Christ, there is no room for your body in that club or society. At least you are reluctant to spend your last hours in a room cluttered with crosses. ‘In a cramped room or hall,’ you say to yourself as you visualise the bodies hanging on the crosses you have already pictured to yourself.

So you fall back on Prometheus whom you greatly admired in your childhood, especially when playing with matches. When asked about Prometheus and his role in the history of humankind – this never happens, to tell the truth – many people say, ‘He offered us fire, matches, fireplaces, logs, stoves, cookers and coffee-makers.’ ‘And samovars,’ say the Russians or rather their peasants. At once you interfere and point out that Prometheus also offered us differential calculus, the arts and wheels, and so on. And then you are asked why you do not identify with Jesus Christ instead of poking around ancient myths and their numerous untruths. ‘Isn’t the Cross enough for you?’ they ask you in a fit of pique. ‘Prometheus had a nail in his chest,’ you answer, driving your point home: the titan suffered more than Jesus on account of this gigantic nail. ‘Zeus was afraid his foe might escape and so he asked Hephaestus to drive a nail into Prometheus’ chest and the rock to which he was chained. And don’t forget the greedy vulture that tore at his liver all day. And there was no end to the pain because every night Prometheus’ liver grew whole again. Jesus died rather quickly and resurrected three days later, whereas Prometheus had to wait for Heracles’ rescue operation. For centuries, you know.’

So you try to put a kind of rock in the middle of your bedroom, but your efforts meet neither your deadline nor your ego’s requirements. So you content yourself with a pillar to which you attach your body by means of a rope your dear wife managed to find in your wine cellar, after much cellar-searching. And what about your personal vulture? Without him or her no torture is spectacular and valid. (With the exception of the one to which they subjected Jesus Christ.) ‘My wife has already eaten my liver and even my intestines,’ you say to yourself. (You also say it to your wife – in a fit of pique.) ‘So it doesn’t really matter if any vulture eats the remnants of last night’s meal.’

You are also quite aware of other exploits attributed to Prometheus and you might have heard about his courage and patience: in spite of the tortures and vultures, he does not agree to utter the name (*il nome*) of Zeus’ successor. Zeus is sure to be dethroned and overthrown. By whom? By a hero – this goes without saying and even Zeus can figure out the answer to this question, for all his inborn foolishness. But he has not the faintest idea where this hero will be born. ‘*Il nome*’ resounds through the universe and Leoncavallo receives £2,000 in royalties. By way of an answer, Prometheus shakes his head and his hair flies through the air, to and fro, to and fro, as if its owner were enjoying a ride on the swings. ‘What do you mean?’ asks Hermes.

‘No,’ says Prometheus: he resolved to spoon-feed the nincompoops and their emissaries. ‘I’ll never utter this name, even if Zeus sends another vulture or eagle to where I’m chained to the rock or pillar. Do you know how a Russian seaman behaves in front of his adversary? He tears off his tee-shirt, exposes his chest to a number of bullets, and shouts, “Shoot, you son of a bitch.” Let him pierce my chest with his thunderbolt.’

‘Are you alluding to Zeus?’

‘I am.’

Of course you hold no grudge against Zeus who was dethroned many centuries ago, although his fall is not traditionally associated with the piece of knowledge that our Prometheus was hiding so

courageously. Your wife might say to you, ‘I know the name of the one who was to overthrow your dearest Zeus.’

‘What’s his name?’ you ask, bewildered.

‘Jesus Christ,’ she answers. ‘Actually Zeus might have deduced his successor’s name from his own: Zeus-Jesus. Don’t they sound alike?’

For once, you do not ask your wife, ‘What are you talking about?’ You say, ‘Just another load of rubbish.’ And then you turn your glance and attention towards your child: on the threshold of death, one usually thinks about one’s legacy and not everyone writes poetry or philosophical treatises, if I am not mistaken. And when you hear the following words, ‘Despite our disagreements, we have been able to find some common ground,’ you see a lot of children on one of your screens; on all of them. That means they are our only legacy worthy of its name; our only last will and testament, even if we have castles in the air and on Earth. Only children justify our presence in this world where words are nothing but a load of rubbish and nonsense; let alone picture galleries, films and sculptures. (The same does *not* go for the Scriptures.)

So you turn your thoughts and everything else towards your child who repeats the nonsense syllables ‘boo di doo doo’. What is worse, he also repeats some *sense-making* syllables such as, ‘Zeus, Jesus, Zeus, Jesus.’ (Your wife’s bad influence.) So you explain to your child that Jesus and Zeus have nothing in common except that, at some point, Zeus ruled the world and Poseidon (and the English) the waves. They both disappeared, however, upon the advent of Jesus Christ whose intentions and legacy epitomize the word ‘love’ you find in poems and everyday talks, provided their participants are in love with each other. (They can also talk about other people’s loves or even about doves.) ‘Look at the torture inflicted by Zeus,’ you say to your child as you pick up a toy vulture and press it against your belly inside which your liver continues to prosper in spite of the mortal threat you try to demonstrate in your child’s presence, for the sake of their education. ‘Can you see the difference between this torture and love?’ you ask your child, stroking their hair, belly and shoulders. ‘I prefer the vulture,’ says the child and you offer them the vulture because you love your child and disapprove of Zeus’ methods.

But death remains and someone talks to you about his (death’s) *sojourn* in your life. And you throw yet another tantrum because even Hamlet’s words still count in your life and they should reflect some truth, however miserable and invalid. And this truth says to you that death does not *sojourn* in your life – a short period when a person stays in a particular place – because it *lives* in your life and he or rather they have been living in your life from time *immemorial*: you cannot *remember* the birth of death in your life. Will you be able to remember the *death* of death in your life? And elsewhere?

And someone talks to you, as usual: they never leave you alone because you are a social animal, an animal and a social, and partial, and whole, and what not, and not. This someone says (and other someones also speak to you): ‘When my father died I knew my mother was near him. And yet my mother died many years ago, when my father was still in his prime. I went to my father’s funeral with

my sisters and we all stood around my father's coffin, thinking we were sad and almost dead – as dead as our father and mother. Suddenly we saw a few birds and one of my sisters said to me, "Look at this bird! Isn't she our mother?" I said, "Yes, she's our mother. Our mother came to this cemetery to attend our father's funeral." So you see, you can become a bird, if you don't mind. I hope you don't. And birds are as alive as humans, aren't they? And they need neither Prado nor Chanel, as you must know. Why do you mind dying? Is it your mind, your body? Is it your mind that minds?'

The mind doesn't mind.

What does? What does?

The body does, the body's to blame.

Blame, blame, blame, blame.

Blame the body, blame the mind,

Blame the soul that is kind.

Blame our Ze-e-us who's not.

Blame Poseidon who is tod.

Blame whatever's, stand in awe,

Blame your throat that is sore.

Blame your life that's no more.

Blame utopias and More.

No life will be ideal,

No life is ever real.

Has-been, have-beens,

Has-been not.

Don't eat beans

And be a god.

Turandot asks three questions.

The first question:

This is an h-word. You often hope against this word, which doesn't contradict all your habits because you always do something against something else and consequently you are against your own destiny you never accept, for all the warnings you receive from Nietzsche, Montaigne and others. In point of fact, you're against everybody and everything; and against every word and world you encounter as you go somewhere to get lost, to forget your troubles. And even your happiness is against you, going against your grain. That is how this word, this h-word – happiness is also an h-word – can be described at the outset of your inquiry, my dear Prince Calaff, Aleff or what's-your-name. I mean I do my best to help you follow your path leading not up my hanging gardens, but to my bedroom because I am already in love with you, you know.

But let us go on with our and your investigation and forget about love for the time being. Of course our very beings – either in love or not – depend upon time. But this time, I beg of you, please devote your time to my enigma and its contents. Here's what St Basil writes about the h-word: 'The labours of the field come as no novelty to tillers of the land; sailors are not astonished if they meet a storm at sea; sweats in the summer heat are the common experience of the hired hand; and to them that have chosen to live a holy life the afflictions of this present world cannot come unforeseen. Each and all of these have the known and proper labour of their callings, not chosen for its own sake, but for the sake of the enjoyment of the good things to which they look forward. What in each of these cases acts as a consolation in trouble is that which really forms the bond and link of all human life, – the h-word. Now of them that labour for the fruits of the Earth, or for earthly things, some enjoy only in imagination what they have looked for, and are altogether disappointed; and even in the case of others, where the issue has answered expectation, another h-word is soon needed, so quickly has the first fled and faded out of sight. Only of them that labour for holiness and truth are the h-words destroyed by no deception; no issue can destroy their labours, for the kingdom of the heavens that awaits them is firm and sure.' It doesn't really matter whether you agree with St Basil or not – let us put our metaphysics aside. What counts is the h-word and you're supposed to find the identity of this word.

They say that this word crops up mostly when you're at the bottom of the heap, and you might answer you're always at the bottom of it because such is human destiny and there are no other spaces for our species either on Earth or elsewhere. That's why this word crops up constantly, daily, hourly – we don't budge from where we spend our eternity, namely at the bottom, at the bottom, at the bottom. And suddenly a kind of light descends upon us and we say to ourselves, 'Let us welcome yet another messenger of God, another of His emissaries. And this emissary or what's-his-word says to you, 'Don't despair – the end of the tunnel is at hand.' And we believe them, I'm sorry to say. And if we don't, we just commit suicide and go to Hades where we continue to use this treacherous word because we yearn to see Persephone whose beauty adorns our books and Stravinsky's masterpiece devoted and dedicated to her. Alas, in the

kingdom of Hades we encounter only Cerberus and his barking that wakes the dead, as the French put it.

Actually the dead are always awake, but that doesn't get them off the hooks on which they continue to hang. So one wonders why they don't devote their eternity to sleep, which would be all the more logical since Dante says they must forget the h-word. But this word of ours is more eternal than Hell and its tortures. So now you must know what this word means and how one is likely to pronounce it, when one really needs it. And one always needs it either at the bottom of the heap or in the middle of nowhere.

The second question:

This is a b-word. This word symbolises all the integral qualities of fire and the heat and vitality inherent in the sun. With these qualities is linked all that is lovely, noble, generous and high-minded. The b-word also shares some of the symbolism of the colour red. Dark red is related to the womb. It might only lawfully be seen in the course of an initiatory 'death' when it was endowed with sacramental properties. In the mysteries of Cybele, candidates went down into a trench and their bodies were washed by the b-word of the bull or ram ritually sacrificed upon a grid placed over them, while a serpent sucked the b-word from the victim's wound. In Fiji, in a similar ritual, novices were shown a row of dead or seemingly dead and murdered men, their bodies cut open and covered with the b-word, their entrails protruding. Suddenly the High Priest blurted out a piercing yell, at which the counterfeit dead men started to their feet and ran down to the river to cleanse themselves from the b-word and guts of pigs with which they were beslobbered.

The b-word is universally held to be the medium of life and is sometimes taken for the principle of procreation. According to Chaldean traditions it was the b-word of the godhead mingled with earth that brought beings to life. The same word is also used when you prick your finger on a needle. This word literally oozes out of the hole and you try to deal with it, digging your handkerchief out and pressing it against the word. And if you cut your leg badly and your trousers are saturated with this word, you rush to your family doctor, shouting, 'I'm going to die! I'm going to die!' Of course you see a lot of this word on a battlefield where it flows like a river and is omnipresent to such an extent that sometimes you get the feeling you see nothing but this word, a swimming pool made up of this word. So you strip your clothes off and swim in the word until you're red in the face and in your whole body.

If a painter entitles his picture The War, they just smear their red prima materia all over a canvas, as Mark Rothko did, using the colour black, which amounts to the same thing – these two colours go together. The b-word has fascinated mankind as long as human thought has

been recorded and human memory recalls. Long before the nature and composition of the b-word were known, a variety of complaint was attributed to the disordered b-word. The red b-word corpuscles were not recognised until the 17th century, and it was another 100 years before one of the forms of the white corpuscles, the lymphocyte, and the clotting of the b-word were described. In the 19th century other forms of leukocytes were discovered and a number of diseases of the b-word were distinguished.

So by now you must know what word I'm talking about, going into detail for your sake and for that of our love. And if you still have no idea what I have in mind and on the tip of my tongue, you're a nincompoop I'll do my utmost to forget, after cutting his head off. Am I right? Are you still at sea with my words and their meanings, their enigmas and light? (The one you might see at the end of our gazebo.) Well, in this case you have no alternative but to fall on your sword. And the word in question will flow from your body abundantly, abundantly, abundantly.

The third question:

This is a T-woman and I might have fallen in love with her, had I seen her in the flesh many centuries ago – in Ancient China, of all places. I did not and so I am still out of love with the world where one can no longer find men (Calaf) and women of such a high calibre. As usual, I fall back on music and listen to the opera devoted to that beauty of hers, and also to her cruelty for which she has been renowned over the same stretch of time, the same number of centuries. I don't really know whether I like this opera or not – Puccini cannot hold a candle to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Obrecht. And he does not, as a matter of fact, being very modest about his achievements.

They say he did not finish the opera because our dear, hateful death launched a pre-emptive strike against his body and work. And so he died alongside his heroine, a Chinese girl who had been in love with Calaf (in love with Calaf) many centuries before Puccini hit upon the idea of writing an opera about her and her bloodthirsty mistress. As usual, you hear the words 'il nome, il nome' which are meant to worm Calaf's name out of poor Liù or Lia or Lilia. ('Or' is used to connect possibilities. Non-local connections, no less!) She answers, 'No nome, no nome, no nome.'

'Why don't you want to utter his nome in our presence?' asks the Highest Priest. 'Don't you know the saying "truth will out"'? Incidentally, that's what happens in the I Pagliacci where the bearer of the name is killed on the stage.'

'I've never heard Leoncavallo's opera,' answers Liù.

'Why are you so uneducated?' asks the Highest Priest.

'Because I'm faithful to Puccini.'

Then the Chinese girl said she was drawing her energy and audacity from love, its kingdom, and killed herself with a dagger, whereupon Puccini stopped working and looked out of the window. 'She was stabbed twelve times and left for dead,' he muttered for some obscure reason, thinking probably about the voraciousness of death and that of destiny. (And of their veracity.) He might have added something along the lines of, 'Love never triumphs,' or he just went on looking out of the window, at the street where demonstrators had already geworft a lot of Molotovs. 'The role of the police is to ensure that the law is obeyed,' added Puccini as he thought that, according to quantum physicists, there are no laws in the universe. 'Where are there any laws?' he asked himself. 'In the domain of music?'

Calaf's name is widely known; at least Miss T. whose name is hidden in the third question is aware of its spelling and pronunciation. 'Calaf's name is Calaf,' she says to herself as she still refuses to give in and challenges him (Calaf in person) to stand in front of the populace. Accordingly, Calaf stands in front of the Emperor and the crowd waits for Miss T. to give out the stranger's identity, showing his ID to the cameraman. But the name Miss T. pronounces is 'Love, love, love'.

'Staff and nonsense,' said Puccini, determined as he was never to finish the opera.

THE SHIP'S LOG

July 5, 2016

What are beans and beans are not.

Pythagoras is a god.

Why should I not eat our beans?

Why not wear common jeans?

July 6, 2016

We need Pegasus without whom we cannot use our imagination and its flights because, but for Pegasus' help, it would not have flown either in Shakespeare's or in Dante's days. But our (artists') fate originates in Bellerophon's fall that was performed at the height of his (Bellerophon's) fortune, odd as it may appear. And yet we always fall from heights, tops and stars; not from bottoms and orchestra pits. (You can fall from a podium, though. Klemperer did.) Like Bellerophon, I presumptuously undertake a flight to Olympus, whereupon Zeus sends yet another gadfly. *Gad, gad, gad, gad*, as the Russians say, meaning 'as foul-smelling as a skunk'. Speaking of Zeus, not of the gadfly, by the way. The latter stings Pegasus under the tail, making him rear and fling (*Geworfenheit*) your obedient servant into a thorn-bush. Thus, after finishing yet another opus, I wander about the Earth, lame, blind, lonely and accursed, always avoiding the paths of men and women. 'It seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about,' as Joseph Conrad put it.

July 7, 2016

NIOBE AND HER SPEECH

'My dear women! My fellow creatures! Over a bottle of wine, you should share your despair over the emotional sterility of your marriages. Why are they sterile, you may wonder? Because you've got no children. And if you have only one child, you have none – you're childless, my dear colleagues. One child is nothing and nobody – a mere nobody, you know. Let's not talk about unity and the importance of number one. We might as well talk about the importance of zeroes. And some of you are sterile to the point of being unable to give birth to one child, one creature of flesh and blood. It's as if you were fleshless and bloodless yourselves. Are you? Are you? What do I see in front of my gaze? A number of bodies, a number of veins, a river of blood? Hardly, my dear sisters. Look at me and study my life, my triumphs and happiness. I married a king and bore him seven sons and seven daughters of whom I'm justly proud. What about you? One child only? You should do your best and utmost to conceive a second child, otherwise I'll never take notice of you, even if you live till doomsday and beyond it, in the great Beyond. But be careful! You'd better conceive and bring up a third child because the number two is the symbol of confrontation, conflict and recoil and denotes either balance achieved, or hidden

threat. Are you able to achieve this balance? Hardly. As for the threat, it's no longer hidden. It's just in front of you, staring at you, brandishing its sword above your head. You'd better conceive and rear a third child. Three is regarded universally as a fundamental number, expressive of an intellectual and spiritual order in God, the cosmos or mankind, and either synthesises the three-in-one of all living beings or else results from the conjunction of one and two produced, in this case, from the marriage of Heaven and Earth. The Tao produced one; one produced two; two produced three. What are you doing over there, my half-sterile sisters? Burning frankincense and wreathing your hair with laurel branches? In whose honour, may I ask? Leto, did you say 'Leto'? But she's got only two children: Apollo and Artemis. And what about *my* household? How many children do *I* have? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven sons. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven daughters. The scent of incense was already floating in the air. My olfactory nerve communicated this scent to my brain and I resolved to interfere with this ritual of yours. I wasn't enjoying the occasion so I thought I'd spoil it for everyone else. It was very childish of me, you might think and say. Why don't you say so? Because I'm dressed in a splendid Phrygian robe, my long hair flowing loose. What's more, I'm followed by a throng of attendants. So let me interrupt your sacrifice and ask you only one question, 'Why should Leto, a woman of obscure parentage, with a mannish daughter and a womanish son, be preferred to Niobe, grandchild of Zeus and Atlas, the dread of the Phrygians, and a queen of Cadmus's royal house? Aren't you behaving childishly, my dear half-sisters?'

'You've asked us *two* questions,' said Niobe's half-sister.

'Seven sons, seven daughters. Seven corresponds to the seven days of the week, the seven planets, seven rungs of perfection, seven spheres or celestial stairs, the seven petals of the rose, the seven heads of the *nāga* of Angkor, the seven branches of the shaman's cosmic and sacrificial tree and so on. Seven sons, seven daughters. Though fate or ill-luck might carry off two or three of my children, would I not still remain the richer?'

“‘Leto’” means “the summer” in Russian,’ said Niobe's half-sister.

“‘The Mother-Hero is a decoration that was bestowed upon mothers in the Soviet Union,’ said Niobe. ‘I’ve got this decoration in a drawer of my honour-desk.’

July 8, 2016

If you are not in love, not yet, you can sing an aria from Bellini's operas, dropping all the words except '*amore*' or '*patria mia*' or '*madre mia*' – it depends on the aspect of your life you wish to promote, giving prominence to it either before a war or for the sake of a forthcoming marriage. You are determined to marry a wealthy widow and you wish to persuade yourself that your determination does not spring exclusively from her bank accounts and their contents. Or you wish to show to your neighbours you are a courageous, dashing young officer. Whenever they speak of others, they say, for instance, 'It was a *courageous* decision to resign in protest at the company's pollution record.' And

you want them to say, 'It was a courageous decision to die on a battlefield.' And if, upon your return from this battlefield, they ask you if the confrontation went smoothly or not, you can answer thus, 'The two opposing armies faced each other across the battlefield.' And they are sure to praise you for your modesty, for you did not say, 'I was wounded five times, but I refused to leave the battlefield, to quit the battle raging across this field. I wrapped myself in the flag.' You just sang, '*Opa, opa, opa, opa, O Patria Mia, ia, ia, ia, ia.*'

And if you wish to fall in love, you sing, 'Am, am, am, am, Amore, ore, ore, Ore, tarararararamtararamtararamtararamAmore.' You should not forget Bellini's music, though.

And if you wish to shed a few tears on your mother's grave and tombstone, you sing, 'Oma, oma, oma, oma, O Madre Mia. Ia, ia, ia, ia, ia, ia, Dear Madre.'

July 9, 2016

I do not think I am in love with Scheherazade, for all her beauty and intelligence: I am not fascinated by her stories and their bizarreness. Something always happens in these stories, and whatever happens can hardly be called banal. You know you will never fly either in the air or anywhere else – in the cosmos, for instance – for you are provided neither with wings nor with engines and the fuel required for their activities. Nor do you look like a large cylindrical object which moves very fast by forcing out burning gases. And if you find a bedside lamp, this lamp will never fulfil any of your desires, however dearest and nearest they may appear, when judged in conjunction with your heart and its veins. Nor will anyone be hidden inside the bottles you may come across in the course of your frequent walks along some beach or other. You come across a bottle and look at it for a while as if hoping to hear a voice, 'If you open this bottle and unchain me forever, I'll fulfil your needs, requirements and great expectations that became great on the day when Dickens finished his last novel.'

I prefer trivial stories that are not meant to change your life or enrich it to such a point that metaphorically you reach either some boiling point or some melting point or some freezing point. Or some melting pot – by the grace of God or perish the thought! Just a trivial story, nothing more. For instance, you happen to swim in a swimming pool and suddenly you realise you are watching a game of water polo. And all of a sudden their ball hits your forehead and its impact makes you pass out in no time at all. (And some commentator shouts, 'Go-o-o-o-o-o-a-a-a-a-a-a-l.') Unfortunately you faint in English and not in French where you would find yourself in the midst of apples or, with a bit of luck, in the middle of an apple-pie. If included in Scheherazade's stories, you *would* have landed up in an apple pie; many centuries ago. But in our story you just feel a sharp pain in your head. Luckily for you, however, this pain does not stay in the middle of your cerebral cortex and, after a while, you continue to learn your swimming lesson.

July 10, 2016

You work in a restaurant and you do not know exactly what kind of work you have to concentrate upon and carry out to ensure everyone's satisfaction and jubilation. But one day you happen to stand in the kitchen where a waiter walks by with a plate on which you can see a steak and three potatoes partly covered with sauce. Obviously the waiter is tempted by the remains of the dish and his temptation is short-lived, judging from his jaws and their movements, as a result of which the steak makes its way into his mouth; whereupon his performance begins and goes on for at least ten minutes. He can neither chew the steak nor swallow it; nor can he spit it out, which would allow him to breathe freely without submitting his lungs and nerves to another coughing fit. Nor can he speak and so he has no alternative but to write down a sentence where he explains shortly and sweetly what is going on. 'My mouth seems to be stuck – can you help me push it open?'

His colleague picks up this sheet of paper, reads the text and writes his reply, 'Did a fish bone get stuck in your throat?'

The victim answers, 'Your question isn't worth the paper it is written on.'

'Why?' writes the colleague. He has not realised yet he can *talk* to the victim whose ears are in good working order, for all the bones and steaks that might get stuck in his throat.

'Because it's a steak I've got in my throat, not a fish bone.'

'What can I do for you?' writes the colleague.

'Try and get the steak out of my throat.'

The colleague hits his colleague's back two times and the victim picks up the ballpoint pen to write the word 'three'. The colleague strikes him once again and the latter writes down, 'Lower.'

'Where?' writes the colleague.

'My buttocks,' writes the victim.

'Why your buttocks? Is the bone already in your buttocks?'

'No,' writes the victim.

Another colleague comes to their rescue and explains that if one strikes such a victim on his or her buttocks, an air ball will fly up and its pressure can push out not only a piece of steak but also the victim's teeth, if they are wobbly and not to be relied upon.

At last the victim vomited up his lunch and one might say about him, 'He came home drunk and vomited all over the kitchen floor,' except that he was not at home; nor was he drunk. But whatever he vomited was all over the kitchen floor and, logically enough, both the victim and his first colleague went down on their knees and began to look for the steak they had been dealing with for quite a while. They found the steak, washed it and ate it after dropping a few potatoes and a pocketful of rice on the plate.

July 11, 2016

‘Not easy to achieve freedom without chaos’ (Anaïs Nin). I begin my march towards her freedom by uttering her name non-stop, and I hear other names, other words within her name – a harbinger of freedom. I am free and say ‘onanism’ instead of sticking to the truth named Anaïs Nin. As to my right of way (and day), I step forward, and if something or someone bars my way, I give this subject-object a kick without even aiming: I am sure I shall get my way and all my rights thanks to my kick, my luck, my audacity and the freedom of my thoughts; let alone my free spirit. And I can sing as I do so and all this:

*I'm a football player,
I'm a goodball player,
I'm a goodgod player,*

*I kicked the ball slap
Into the middle of the net.*

Of course someone – perhaps the same object-subject – says and even shouts, ‘Please stop kicking the door like that – open it properly,’ but I am not eager to open it properly because the word ‘properly’ is not associated in my mind with disorder and chaos without which no freedom is either conceivable or achievable. Quite frankly, the same word is associated with ‘property’ and I am an anarchist or Anaïst, if I wish and decree an end to discrimination on the grounds of a name. So I carry on in my bitter-sweet way, kicking doors and balls and bulls who lower their horns, charging and tossing me up into the air. For a while, carefree and gravitational-pull-free, I fly over my native city and look at its inhabitants, at those slaves who are in their own rights. The police pull them over for failing to stop at red traffic lights and they stop and pull their wallets out, foregoing their rights and might. How are the mighty fallen! How are the righty fallen! These former righty and mighty ones stop at red traffic lights. They also stop and even retrace their steps if they see the sign by the gate saying ‘Beware of the bull’. I never look at signs: I neither sign nor mind them. And if I am in no mood for flying, I take the bull by the horns and utter the f-word many times, and many offs always follow in its wake as I continue to broaden the scope of my freedom.

My f-word.

My ship of f-word.

July 12, 2016

Terrorists and their bombs. They were keen on freedom and even on others, on the slaves they wished to liberate from their masters by killing the latter in their carriages, in their ballrooms. A master celebrates another promotion; a revolutionary quits the bush behind which he has been lying in wait

for almost two hours and rushes towards the front door of a palace where a number of masters drink champagne and even vodka. The revolutionary throws his bomb and his bomb explodes amidst a multitude of plates and glasses, wounding and killing almost everyone. Here is a step forward towards the universal freedom they talk about in the same breath, after talking about the worldwide revolution. First this or any other revolutionary bursts into the room, red-faced and out of breath, but then he or she catches his or her breath and begins to throw bombs at jewels and sparkling glasses. Everyone sparkles and falls, spits blood and splits as if a number of physicists were splitting atoms to prove they can do something for humanity.

In the meantime the Tsar continues his journey towards another of his properties or cities which are part and parcel of his overall property and estate. A revolutionary quits their hiding place and runs towards the carriage in which the Tsar has been ensconced for more than half-an-hour. The revolutionary whose name and sex remain unknown, lost as they are in the Saint Petersburg archives, jumps up, lands on the roof of the carriage and shouts a few f-words before *geworfing* and *heiting* his bomb into a hole they have just drilled in the middle of the roof on which they are still sitting as they dream about their worldwide revolution. At the last moment, however (on the brink of the deed, as it is), the revolutionary sees a woman in the carriage and instantly realises the Tsar is not alone, contrary to the calculus made by the nerve centre of the revolutionary group. The bomb literally freezes in his hand, and the hand itself seems to have frozen so that the revolutionary is even tempted to thaw it and eat it: their stomach has been empty for more than a week, according to their diary. Anyway, the creature we are talking about – our Russian generals thought these people were not creatures, just a heap of s-words – jumps off the roof and dashes towards the nearest entrance to the nervous centre of the group in the middle of which there sits a sort of president.

‘What are you doing in here?’ asks the president.

‘I’d like to talk to you,’ says the revolutionary.

‘What about your bomb? Do you intend to *geworfen* it at your comrades?’

‘No.’

‘Where is our Tsar’s head?’

‘On His Majesty’s shoulders.’

‘And where are His Majesty’s shoulders?’

‘In His Majesty’s carriage.’

‘Why aren’t they in this room?’

‘Because His Majesty wasn’t alone. His wife and children were in the carriage too.’

‘So what?’

‘I respect women and love children. I can’t *geworfen* anything at them.’

‘Not even a piece of cake?’

There is such a thing as a revolutionary group and every group of this kind – or any other kind, for that matter – has a president whom the other members of the group address as ‘Monsieur le *Président*,’ or ‘Madame la *Présidente*’. (Let us not forget that in Russia, 150 years ago, everybody spoke French.) So the revolutionaries eat a few pieces of bread washed down with two bottles of vodka and say to each other, ‘It’s high time we did something about it.’ Whenever, they say ‘about it’, they mean ‘freedom’ or ‘the f-word’ as they say, anxious to protect their projects, putting them out of the Tsarist police’s reach. Many years ago they realised that Hegel had been wrong and that slaves will never become masters unless other slaves throw bombs at carriages and trains, at horses and the whips that guide the horses. They throw their (and our) bombs and the slaves they have been talking about in the nerve centre, in the very middle of it, become masters in the twinkling of an eye. Next morning all these slaves realise they are not masters at all, given that the all-powerful State is still on the agenda; and any state has a great many agendas and notebooks in its drawers. So the slaves say to each other, ‘We should abolish the state and erect our dictatorship, our ship of dictators or proletarians or slaves or fools.’

‘Let’s drop the fools,’ say other slaves.

‘The *former* slaves,’ as someone points out.

‘All right,’ say the others. ‘Former, former, former. Just another f-word, you know.’

‘Where’s our freedom?’ asks a former slave.

‘Nowhere,’ answers a former slave.

‘I’m not conscious of my freedom,’ says the first slave, former or informer, as the case may be.

‘So much the better,’ says a former slave. ‘*Tant mieux, tant mieux.*’

‘Why *tant mieux*?’ asks a former slave.

‘Because D. H. Lawrence said, “Men are freest when they are most unconscious of freedom.”’

‘I don’t like D. H. Lawrence’s sons, lovers, between and goes,’ says a former slave. ‘And his mother is even more boring than Gorky’s.’

‘That’s beside the point,’ says the president. ‘A piece of freedom par excellence, incidentally.’

‘What?’ asks a former slave.

‘*Beside* the point.’

We say that, by its nature, terrorism is designed to strike at the heart of our democratic values, and I can probably subscribe to this point of view, even though I am often tempted to dig my revolver out when I hear the word ‘democracy’. But what could we say about the terrorists about whom we read in the history books devoted to Russia, her Tsars, prime ministers, mayors, majors and other undemocratic creatures? Was that terrorism designed to strike at the heart of undemocratic values, at the soul of Russia about which they still talk as they listen to Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky? I cannot say I hate a lot of people because I am not very fond of the word ‘hatred’, even if I take the trouble to

think about Lenin, Stalin, Hitler and Mao with all his zuns and zens and swimming exploits. I just get rid of them, following the following instruction, ‘Please strike out whichever option does not apply to you.’ Yet I cannot say this option – the abhorrence I experience as I come across these names somewhere – does not apply to me or human history that still drags them behind it; or even in front of it sometimes, more often than not.

Well, I *am* tempted to *geworfen* or just *worfen* – let alone *werfen* – a few bombs at them; and also at those Russian generals who used to have their soldiers flogged in front of other soldiers. Tolstoy often went into tantrums as he happened to witness such excruciating, blood-streaming executions on his way home – after leaving yet another ballroom and a few princesses. Perhaps he *was* tempted to fling-flung a dozen bombs at those military commanders whose inhumanity, bestiality and stupidity knew no bounds in his novels and on the snow one could see from one’s windows, provided one lived in Moscow and Petersburg, in wintertime or even at the end of October.

Those terrorists had their ideals and diced with death every week, if not twice a day. I am keen on the word ‘ideal’ and I even idolise the object-subject it denotes, let alone the space-time where it can be found. The point is it can no longer be found, according to many detached and undetached observers, considering that we all think only in terms of money which eliminates whatever contains no money in any shape or form.

July 13, 2016

But suppose we still have an ideal that boils down to the magic words ‘our liberation of humanity’; and yet we know we should not reduce the majesty of this ideal through the word ‘down’ or the words ‘to boil down’. The mountain range stretched away into infinity – that is how we should view our ideals, otherwise they would make no sense either in here or even down there.

Yes, our new terrorists do not concentrate their efforts on the EU or such and such a country; or on bankers whose banks and deeds prevent us spending our holidays in the Bahamas or Bananas. Of course we can *gewurfen* a few bombs into their buildings but this kind of mission and duty is not worthy of our lofty ideal that seems to encompass the whole of humanity: workers, peasants, underdogs, undercats and underunders. But we should not spread ourselves too thin, taking our cue from the great terrorists of the past who used to kill one tsar, having in their minds the liberation of the whole of Russia – of all Russias, as they used to say. So we can assassinate the president of the universal bank, and the money that never reaches our pockets will land up at our feet – it is yours for the taking, as it were. So we kneel down and begin to gather up the banknotes strewn on the floor. And then a foot lands up on one of our hands and sets about pressing it so hard we can hardly breathe. And when it comes to the crunch, our fingers begin to crunch rather noisily, unmusically. And we are asked the following question, ‘What did you do?’

‘We gathered blackberries from the hedgerow,’ we answer.

‘I’m a new president of the cosmic bank.’

‘Really?’

‘Don’t you know that every president is replaced by his successor? Long live the President!’

So we made up our minds and installed a washing machine – at the very core or *cœur* of the world, if you please. And we call it ‘*cri de cœur*’. Of course we could not accomplish such a feat overnight or even over 1001 nights. How can we go about solving this problem? we asked ourselves. And we answered thus, ‘We should go about it cautiously. And if we do, everything will go smoothly.’ For years and years we lay low in our lair, fiddling with washing powders and wires and saying to each other, ‘Don’t touch these wires whatever you do.’ And whenever a foreign space-time-permeated subject-object got close to our lair and lies, we would utter the following warning, ‘You can’t gain access to the computer system without entering your password.’ And if the outsider obeyed our order, inserting the right password into the right place, we welcomed them with all the arms we had at our disposal. Of course a great many of our arms were constantly busy, holding and turning screws, screwdrivers and sickles, but there would always remain enough arms for greetings, salutations and Russian bear hugs. By the way, our passsentence was ‘The plumber is coming tomorrow to install the new washing machine.’

What we had in our minds might have been defined as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and that is how we called our washing machine, in point of fact. (Its second name.) We read Lenin’s books and resolved to follow in his footsteps that led us first to his mausoleum and then to heaven. But first we were duty bound to abolish the state and we set about destroying everything and everybody, anxious to build up what they sing about at their meetings: ‘Tabula Rasa.’ But then we asked ourselves the following question: ‘If we abolish the state, there’ll be no police officers, no cannons and guns. How can one get rid of the enemies of the state, if there’s no state?’ So we decided to keep the state, its structure and infrastructure as long as our enemies mooned around, unscrewing our screws – the ones that hold and keep our washing machine together, in good running order.

July 14, 2016

First we resolve to abolish the state and then we erect a statue to the state, which looks like a gigantic skyscraper on the top of which we put our leader and his machine gun. Our Führer – or whatever his name is – raises his guns and machines, determined as he is to exterminate all the enemies of our dictatorship. He is resolved and determined, and his determination knows only one bound: that of children who should not be murdered alongside their parents, relatives and teachers; otherwise Ivan Karamazov would not go to Paradise, giving back his numerous first-class tickets.

‘What is it?’ asks a warden or a guardian.

‘This is a ticket I got from God.’

‘What kind of ticket is it?’

‘It’s a ticket I’m supposed to hand to St Peter.’

‘What about St Paul?’

‘Sorry, I haven’t the foggiest.’

‘Why do you *rendez* this ticket?’

‘Because that guy over there tortured a child. His dogs tore the child to shreds.’

‘The same dogs have torn many *adults* to pieces, you know.’

‘That doesn’t matter.’

Once upon a time there was a child and a dog, and the former saw the latter’s teeth – twice upon the same time, I’m afraid. The child saw the same teeth thrice and the third time. Upon seeing these teeth at close quarters, he burst into tears. She did not, by the way, because this baby is a boy and not a girl. ‘Does this test show the gender of the baby?’ asks the baby’s mother.

‘It does,’ says a doctor.

‘What kind of gender is it?’ asks the mother.

‘Why are you so engrossed in this problem?’

‘Because I feel that my destiny has been shaped by her gender.’

‘Are you alluding to misogynists?’

‘I am.’

‘There’s an even gender ratio within our company, you know,’ says the doctor.

‘Is it a son or a daughter?’ asks the mother.

‘It is impossible to demonstrate conclusively that this baby of yours is either a son or a daughter.’

‘Forensic scientists can tell the gender of the victim from the skeleton. And my baby isn’t a skeleton, not yet. And you don’t know the first, let alone the second thing about him or her or it.’

‘I do not, you know.’

In short, the baby in question spots a great many teeth and burst into tears. Ivan Karamazov catches one of these teardrops and tastes it. The taste in his mouth and on his palate demonstrates conclusively that he has just come across a real tear that has not much in common with a drop of water, be it mineral or unmineral, sparkling or unsparkling. So he draws a multitude of tickets from his pockets, breast and otherwise, and give them to St Peter. ‘What’s the matter?’ asks St Peter.

‘A tear,’ says Ivan.

‘I don’t cry any more,’ says St Peter. ‘I’m quite happy where I am. I’m no longer in Rome, you know. And there are no lions in Paradise.’

‘What about dogs?’ asks Ivan.

Beauty and the beast. You can also say or rather write: ‘Beauty&the Beast.’ If you feel lonely (and only) and say to *yourself* because you cannot say *anything* to *anybody else*, ‘I can’t bear to think of

the lonely year ahead, I can't bear to think of the lonely year all around me,' you can always write down: 'I&.' You do not need to put anything after '&' the very presence of which means you are not on your own; not quite, not quite. & keeps you company to such an extent you visualise a human being when staring at this sign; and you carry out this metamorphosis all the more eagerly and easily since this doodle looks like a being, although this being you are looking for and at is not really human. It is probably a beast; it is 'it' instead of being 'he' or 'she' or 'they', as they say nowadays to avoid yet another 'or' that is inseparable from the construction 'he or she'. This time it is 'it' you are dealing with, even if you picture to yourself either the Prince Charming or the Princess Arch-Charming and Over-Beautiful.

Well, you feel lonely and far from home, and your home – the one you have in your mind – is situated in heaven where your ancestor partook of the forbidden fruit as if there had been nothing else to partake of; as if he and she had been starving to death in the realm where death and even its cronies (illnesses) were *personas non gratas*. (That is what they call these phenomena in Spanish.) The home you have thought about for more than two decades is either *pleroma* or *psychoma*, according to our Gnostics, but those whose knowledge of life on Earth is Earth-bound and not Earth-unbound say that *psychoma* (and *pleroma*) is another name denoting psychiatric hospitals. They have both feet on the ground and say about others, pointing their index fingers at their temples, 'That's just like Julie and Peter – always jumping in with both feet before they know the facts.' At the outset of our common story and history, there was (upon a time) Sophia who did not eat anything, contrary to what the Bible says to us in confidential tones. She just jumped from her Paradise – a parasite as she was – and began to fall as Gaston does in *Beauty & the Beast*. Of course she screamed and shouted, 'A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!' and our Gnostics heard her scream and even her fall that sounded thus, 'Swish-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh' and also along the lines of 'Swooch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch'. So they always say – and they are not alone within this doctrine, at the very core of it – : 'There are rungs: Rung One, Rung Two, Rung Three, Rung Four, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on. You have to climb up and up until you reach *psykhushka* or, better still, *pleromushka*. Then you'll be saved and done again instead of being undone all the time. What's more, you'll be *well-done*.'

It goes without saying that Sophia is our favourite and most precious beauty, whereas our Earth – for what it is worth – is the beast. (Our material world, rather; or any matter, for that matter.) Upon seeing the beast, Sophia screamed and shouted once again, and this time her shouts sounded thus, 'Wow-wow-wow-wow-woe-woe-woe-woe!'

July 15, 2016

The beast sounded as follows, 'Hahhhhhhhhhhhhhhaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa,' and Sophia came to the conclusion that it was mocking her viciously. And alongside her own persona, the beast laughed at the world of beauty and virtue stored up in the castle of heaven that some call Olympus and others

Christus. To cut this endless story short, I have always found this pair featuring our magnificent beauty and the beast to be ludicrous, whatever it is. The beast one sees in Disney's production is a threat to local peasants and one girl whose beauty is doubtful on account of the bad taste of those in charge – in charge of the movie's quality. And our Gnostics' beast was what we still call '*materia*' that we cannot help dealing with on a daily basis. We would not mind coming across it on a need-to-know basis: we do need to know what our matter is and what it looks like; otherwise we might get into a fine mess or jam. But this cursed and bloody matter is everywhere – and every now and then, mind you. Every now and every then are jam-packed with our so-called material, and we do not fail to realise that our bodies are also material, beastly and ugly.

Well, I know that the English are in love with underdogs of all kinds, but I just cannot bear the miserable (*les misérables*) who sit there, twiddling their thumbs and whimpering as if fatally ill and permanently wounded. Their fathers flogged them every morning and their mothers were in the habit of hiding candyfloss in the nooks and crannies of various cupboards; and in their décolletages.

All right, you are fond of underdogs and think you should do something for them, otherwise they will freeze to death or fall into a great many chasms, both psychological and real, unconscious and conscious. And you are not alone: your altruistic sentiments are shared by many women who gather around the underdog, calling him 'dog', just 'dog'. 'You're no longer an underdog, you know,' they say to the underdog.' They are mostly men, these dogs. And they are mostly women, those philanthropists. 'You're our dog now.'

'No, no, no,' answers the underdog. 'I'm under, under, under.'

'Under what?'

'Under orders.'

'Whose orders?'

'The Almighty's. And I'm also under threat of death. So I'm under, under, under.'

'You're our dog,' say our ladies. 'And our dog loves to be petted and tickled behind the ears.' And they tickle him behind the ears. But the underdog does not care for their tickling and fiddling. 'Fiddle while Moscow burns,' he says to himself. What does he mean by Moscow and by 'burns'? He means he needs money and not the caresses they have showered him with for two or three weeks. He counts on their maternal instincts he aroused a month ago as he whimpered and whinged and whined in the middle of a ballroom, sitting on a rickety chair. He did not dance, contrary to what might be supposed, imagined and visualised, and the ladies in question came to the conclusion he was either paralysed or fatally ill.

Upon seeing him in this state – and within their states of minds – they made up their minds and decided to put him back on his feet again. One of them said, 'Do you know that paralysed patients move limbs after virtual reality training?'

'I like neither virtual reality nor training,' said the tramp, yearning to draw and play a trump.

‘Eight completely paralysed people have regained function in their limbs following virtual reality training.’

‘Really?’

‘In an accidental result that has astonished the scientists involved. And also the whole world of ours and theirs.’

‘Are you longing to dance with me? A few waltzes?’

‘Using a brain-machine interface, scientists showed that people with long-term severe paralysis could retrain the few remaining connections in their damaged spines, letting their brains talk to their extremities once more,’ said the second one.

‘I’m fond neither of my extremities nor of extremists. No wish to talk to them. Not the slightest, not the foggiest.’

‘The results came about as a wholly unexpected side effect of training to help people use robotic exoskeletons, which let them walk upright,’ said the third one.

‘I’m not fond of side effects. I opt wholeheartedly for the main ones. Give me some money. Your husband earns mega-bucks working for an American bank. Give me 10,000 megas and a million bucks.’

Our ladies, who say ‘Our Lady’ all the time, by the way, began to pamper their underdog with the finest steak and salmon. Then they opened an account with a building society, and shortly afterwards the underdog confided in them, ‘I was relieved to see from my statement that my account was in credit.’ And if, in the neighbourhood of their midst, there happens to live a great poet they pay no attention to his misery and unrecognised genius, saying, ‘He can shift for himself.’ And they say to him, ‘Shift yourself!’ And they mutter something under their breath – something along the lines of, ‘Shift your arse.’

‘Why don’t you wish to help him?’ asks a detached observer. ‘After all, he is gifted and your pet is not.’

‘But he is neither our underdog nor our dog. He isn’t our beast, in our words. He is just Gaston. And we always say “*non*” to Gaston.’

July 16, 2016

‘Can Europe Save Itself?’ The question one can find and does find on the cover of *Newsweek* devoted this week to Europe and its dislocation. United we stand, as they say, and they might have stopped in the middle of this wise saying to keep solutions and variations open. For instance, you can say, ‘United we stand and disunited we stand. We always stand because we cannot fall.’ But people, especially those who try and pass themselves off as gurus and prophets, never shut their mouths and go on until a number of gravediggers remove their nails from their own mouths and hammer them into the coffins they find within their reach and even out of their reach – in the future, for instance. So this

time our prophets talk about the fall of Europe and the magazine that covers and studies the whole of time, not just one span of it, one stretch, puts the following prediction on its cover: ‘*The Fall of Europe.*’

Our Europeans read these prophecies and say, ‘These Americans prophesy our doom, but Heidegger said that God can unhook us, letting us off the hook. And in God we trust, you know. You wish to put the fear of God into us, but we unput this fear by removing it from our hearts, chests and minds. And even from our chess games. And we put into all of them a lot of help and rescue, salvage operations.’ Of course the Americans do not fail to remind those Europeans that God helps those who help themselves, and they add that Europe cannot save itself without God’s help and money. ‘On multiple levels,’ the Americans point out, ‘Europe today appears to be a disaster. Most of its economies are seeing slow or no growth; unemployment rates in what the Europeans call “the periphery” – Spain, Portugal and Greece – are scandalously high.’

‘Some magazines contain nothing but scandal and gossip,’ answer the Europeans. ‘Unfortunately you’re unable to understand our beauty. Why? Because you don’t know our mythologies, as Roland Barthes put it. Do you know that Zeus fell in love with Europe? Do you wonder why he did? Because Europe was the most beautiful woman in Europe and in the world – your America wasn’t discovered yet. So he sent Hermes to drive Agenor’s cattle down to the seashore at Tyre where Europe and her companions used to walk. Do you know anything about Agenor and his cattle? No way, as you say. You don’t even know the first thing about Zeus, let alone Hermes. You know boutiques, not the gods.’

‘The European Central Bank is running a negative interest rate policy in a desperate effort to ward off a debilitating bout of deflation,’ the Americans point out. ‘And Europe’s immigration policy – arguably the reason for the stunning Brexit vote – remains calamitous. Just ask outgoing UK Prime Minister David Cameron.’

‘Well, we did put this question to him. Do you know what he answered, by way of an answer? “Disguised as a snow-white bull, Zeus joined the herd. Europe was struck by his beauty – he was not a beast, you know – and she also found him gentle as a lamb. You see, he was both a bull and a lamb – at the same time, mind you. Europe began to play with the bull and the lamb. She actually went so far as to climb on his shoulder and let him amble down with her to the edge of the sea. Suddenly Zeus swam away, determined to go very far, as far as the end of the world.’

‘Did he discover America?’ ask the Americans.

‘When?’ ask the Europeans.

‘In the course of his wanderings.’

‘No way, no way,’ answer the Europeans.

‘Now more than at any time in its history, the EU’s leaders need to assess where they are, how they got there and, most important, what now needs to be done to salvage Europe.’

‘God, God, God,’ answer the Europeans. ‘We’ve got to enlist some people to help prepare the food. Please welcome our guest of honour, the Almighty Himself.’

How did we get there? We just continued to unite and stand instead of lying down and dying out. A number of people are kissing the corpse of a man. (An open coffin in the middle of a church. Our Russian custom.) Of course you can ask them the following question, ‘How did he get there?’ And they may answer, ‘*C’est la vie.*’

August 18, 2016

If I go any further, in spite of Shakespeare’s advice and statement, I am bound to go further and further and further until I come to nowhere. This is what I call a ‘melody’ except that any melody always comes to a sort of harmony, or a harmony of sorts: Bach dies in the last part of his last fugue. Of course he was writing a voice, not a melody, but even a voice has to find its way to a haven or to heaven, otherwise it is not a voice, not even a hoarse voice. ‘You’ll make yourself hoarse if you keep shouting like that!’ they say to you, but I continue to shout because no one comes, no one helps, no one yelps. Some loners say, ‘I accidentally trod on my dog’s foot and it yelped,’ and they lie in the same breath, in another breath: it depends on the number of breaths they have this afternoon. They did it on purpose to hear their dog and its, his, hers, theirs yelp and they add all these his, hers and theirs, hoping to have as many as 12 people for dinner. You take one individual and say, ‘One people,’ and given that you do not know his gender and agenda, you say: ‘His, hers, yours, ours, its, Isis, oasis, our people and nation.’ And your dinner dance may commence, according to your agenda, not to your gender which you do not really know, for all your efforts. You touch your genitals – so do I – and ask yourself whether you are a woman or a man or a dog or a cat or a caterpillar; or just a pillar. And then you say, ‘I’m all of them, as Walt Whitman said. The whole world, you know. If not the whole and entire universe.’

Anyway, whatever happens, you shout because, no matter how often and much you shout, no one comes, even if you say, ‘She, he, it, on, you, yours, they, theirs, nightmares.’ Of course a number of nightmares do worm their ways and days into your bedroom, asking, ‘Don’t you mind using motorised legs?’

‘My legs are in running order,’ you answer.

‘Why don’t you run, then?’

You begin to run, but no one can run properly in one’s sleep except world champions and antelopes (and antipopes, as my computer points out). But I am neither an antipope nor a pope, let alone an antelope, and so I do not run, staying in my bed and watching my nightmares as if they were Bergman’s films. They are perhaps. And I shout myself hoarse. And I hoarse myself shout. And I shout myself hoarse. And I hoarse myself horse – a foregone conclusion. And I horse myself cow. And

I cow myself coward. And I look at trains as if I were Ozu's hero, an old man whose daughter is about to leave him forever. I have no daughters, *Dieu be dank*.

July 18, 2016

Monsieur le président is ensconced in his armchair and he knows that no morning, no afternoon will ever greet him without a few pieces of bad news. They come and succeed each other as if there were no good news among them or in another room, on another continent. 'On another planet,' whisper the presidents' cronies as if to calm the former's nerves; and they even say he can have a cigarette to steady them before another set of bad news crosses the threshold of his office. 'And what if I get cancer after smoking this cigarette?' asks the president after inserting the cigarette into his mouth and putting his teeth around it. 'You'd have two cancers without it,' say the cronies and the president inhales one cancer and lets one third of it out as he exhales the smoke he has just let penetrate his lungs and their fragility. His lungs vibrate and one might even conjecture there is a sense of foreboding in his lungs: his cancerous growth of cells might at any minute break out. It does break out and break down barriers between this virus and that one; and one realises that as a result of this junction yet another paralysis springs into existence and that no anti-paralysis pill will ever interfere with its triumphant march across the president's ego.

A first piece of bad news comes and the president finds three mikes in front of his mouth from which the last circle of smoke has just issued to fill an available triangle of emptiness. 'Horror,' says the president and a journalist feeds this information to his newspaper. Another piece descends from the ceiling and four mikes begin to sway between the president's eyes as if to ask him whether he can see them clearly. 'Yes, I can see you,' says the president. 'Horror, horror.' 'The president said, "Horror, horror, horror," as the third piece of news touched his right ear,' writes the third journalist. 'Look at these pushchairs,' says another journalist.

'Where are their occupants?' asks the president.

'At least ten children died when an Islamist maniac drove a lorry into crowds of Bastille Day revellers.'

'And their parents? Were they alone, those children? Where are their parents? Did the driver kill only the children? Was he a paedophile?'

'Teddies, toys and children's flip-flops were strewn across the famous Promenade des Anglais,' says the journalist.

'How many victims? Ten?'

'One young girl lay dead alongside her pink doll,' says the journalist.

'Only one victim?'

'One of 84 people confirmed killed in Thursday's outrage. More than 200 were badly injured.'

The president's cronies care a lot about the former's health and often say to him in the middle of breakfast: 'This tea is very hot, so sip it carefully.' The same goes for news unless the piece of news is so good the president is likely to jump for joy and dance the whole evening, a glass of champagne in his hand – if the piece is conveyed to him at the right moment. If, on the contrary, the piece is bad and even downright rotten, it is withheld from the president for a while – until further notice, as the cronies usually put it. As usual, the notice comes sooner or later and at last the president is allowed to sip a cup of hot bad news, after saying to himself, 'Don't drink this cup, Gertrud.' First a flip-flop turns up within his field of vision; then a teddy and a pushchair. Then Boris Godunov sings his aria for him: 'Before your eyes...the bloody child...there...over there...' 'One child,' the president says to himself. 'All right, all right. Of course it's not all right, but if there's only one child, I'll be able to brace myself for the shock. After all, it's just an opera, you know. A work of art. And I'll say to the general assembly, "One child died last night. Of course we're aware that Ivan Karamazov refused the overall harmony because of one tear continually dropping from one child's one eye. But we're mature enough, both politically and psychologically, to survive this bad news and bury the child with military honours." But what about this lorry? Over there? What is it doing in here? And what about this woman? What is *she* doing here?'

'My shopping trip was spoiled by the massacre,' says the woman.

'What massacre? What trip?' asks the president.

'My *shopping* trip, you bloody idiot.'

'Where was it spoiled?'

'In Nice. I was dining in a restaurant yards from the beach-front promenade when the lorry went careering into the crowds.'

'You weren't killed, were you?'

'I was not.'

'So what?' asks the president.

'How so, so what?' answers the woman.

'What are you complaining about?'

'We bought all this lovely shopping and now I can't be bothered with it. It doesn't mean anything now.'

A number of French philosophers began to unravel the mystery of the comment provided by an English tourist and they embarked upon their investigations all the more readily since the comment was related to the tragedy qualified as 'absolute horror'. The same journalist, who goes by the name Duponchik, by the way, asked the president if the latter wished to make a statement in the wake of the Nice French tragedy, and the president said, 'horror' as he repeated his earlier remark – a series of them, as a matter of fact. (For two years at least he has been saying 'horror' almost non-stop.) 'With all due respect, Mister President, I wish you could modify your statement while keeping your downcast looks for the sake of our cameraman.'

‘Why should I modify it?’ asks the president.

‘Because we’re expecting you to say something else.’

‘*Absolute* horror,’ says the president.

‘Could you say something in English?’

‘What for?’

‘For the sake of our English-speaking friends.’

‘We should not merchandise with the terrorists.’

Going back to the woman, who goes (back and forth) by the name of Lucy Nesbitt-Comaskey, the French philosophers maintain she is a great admirer of Jean-Paul Sartre’s. Why? Ask our English philosophers. And our French philosophers set about unfolding a panorama of Lucy’s train of thought that led her to dropping a disobliging, disrespectful and downright silly remark in the course of an interview she gave to Sky News. (Lucy in the sky, as it were.) They say that Lucy is unwilling to touch the presents she bought for herself in France, in Nice, in the vicinity of the famous Promenade des Anglais, because they (the presents) make her sick instead of making her happy. Unmistakably and unambiguously, our philosophers allude to Sartre’s novel *La nausea* where a man vomits all the time, even if he does not touch anything. (And if he does, he vomits all night and all afternoon.) Usually, if you have a terrible hang over and yearn to get rid of it in the twinkling of an eye, you say, ‘Let it all hang out,’ and put something down your throat to make your intestines and stomach vomit. (But after a heart attack you have to be careful not to overdo things because you may vomit your *heart* and *lungs* out, letting your blood overflow its receptacle and fill your flat with your death.) But Lucy has no hangover; and she had none yesterday, her sister points out; nor will she have one tomorrow because Lucy is a teetotaller and from this point of view is really in the sky or rather in Paradise.

July 19, 2016

Lucy does not touch anything except a glass where a quantity of coke reflects the sun and even the house opposite, although you need a pair of strong glasses to see and admire this house’s architecture. But Lucy has no glasses, not even sunglasses which might allow her to continue her walk along the English walk where a lorry went on a spree last day and even last night, considering the memories related to its earlier journey. Lucy’s memories are centred upon this piece of news; and yet she emerged unharmed from this adventure because her body was not put (by destiny) on the path taken by the lorry. In the meantime Sartre seems to have been forgotten and our French philosophers never forget their counterparts and colleagues: they either criticise them or welcome them in their respective and respectable clubs. So they say, ‘Lucy can’t see any bag, any shopping list that remind her of bodies and teddies. She doesn’t see the contents of such and such a bag, but she knows what’s inside it – the bag in question, you know. Some of the bags she deposited on the chair opposite contain a

multitude of gift-wrapped squares and rectangles. Suppose that, for some reason or other, Lucy rummages through her bags and shows a dozen of these geometrical figures to the light of day that might appreciate them, for all we know. Lucy, on the other hand, doesn't appreciate them at all unless her nausea can be regarded as a sort of appreciation, of its fascination with our consumer society. No, no, no, no way. Lucy sees a gift-wrapped rectangle and sees a blood-wrapped rectangle. Understandably enough, she vomits at once; or after a while, after a very short while. She looks at the shoes she bought and sees children's flip-flops that were strewn across the famous Promenade des Anglais several hours ago. That's what we call "parallel thinking" or "parallel seeing" or "parallel viewing" or "parallel drawing" or "parallel vomiting".

But, unexpectedly enough, Lucy retracts her confession in which her complaint about the ruin of her shopping was enlarged upon to the detriment of the woes of many citizens and humans living all over the world. Why did she retract anything, any word, any thought, any vomit? Because she was immediately ridiculed by Twitter users among whom we find and single out Sarah Coleman who wrote, 'I have no words left.' But our French philosophers say, 'Wait a minute, wait a minute! We have many words left. Some leftover curry from last night's meal, if our English-speaking friends understand what we mean. You do understand curry, don't you? You do because India was your colony for a number of years. And even now, in our 21st uncolonised century, you've got a lot of Indian cooks whose origin is undoubtedly Indian, in London and elsewhere. So you must understand the remark we drop en passant, as we and you say (en passant): "Some leftover curry from last night's meal." Well, we have a lot of words left, you know.'

'Wait a minute, wait a minute!' says another Tweet. ('Twit, twit, twit,' said the bird.) 'I'm going by the name of Dan Andrews and I'm about to write this and thus, "Why are you giving Lucy Nesbitt-Comaskey the time of day on live TV? Absolute waste of oxygen.'

'What do you mean by oxygen?' ask the people in charge. (They are in charge of Nice, lorries and Lucies. And the sky, occasionally.) 'Do you mean there are holes in the ozone layer?'

Our French philosophers are holding the floor once again because, according to their arguments, the Promenade des Anglais is situated on the French floor. They acknowledge the fact that Lucy retracted her confession and they even cite her own words, her retraction and new confession, 'I'm deeply sorry if my interview with Sky News sounded uncompassionate. I was totally distressed and shocked. My words came out wrong. I hope my words are coming out right right now.' 'All right, all right,' comment our French philosophers. And they go on dropping comments and many other things as they think about Lucy and her appearance in the sky of media apparatuses.

They ask the following question, 'Do you know what *pour-soi* means?' Of course everybody answers 'yes' and our philosophers continue their cross examination that goes against the grain because these days it goes against the grain to show *disrespect* for authority. And the authority we are talking about is Sky News, Earth News, Underearth (or Underneath) news, and other newses and

nuisances of this sort. So they (our French philosophers) ask the following question, ‘What’s *pour-soi*?’

‘It’s *pour-soi*,’ answer all the news we hear and see around the world.

‘Do you know that the aim of the *pour-soi* is to remain a *pour-soi*, while at the same time becoming an *en-soi*?’

Our French philosophers get two answers to this question. The first answer comes from a young man; he says, ‘My main aim in life is to be a good husband and father.’ The second answer comes from a group of people interviewed by Sky News (and the saints whose lives in Paradise are often in the news on Sky News), ‘Our short-term aim is to deal with our current financial difficulties, but our long-term aim is to improve the company’s profitability.’ This time the answer is supplied neither by saints nor by the Buddha’s followers; but the time of day is not always devoted to perfectionists (nor is the time of night) whose ratings continue to fall, according to our polls and St Paul. (Unperfectionists and downright, downwrong sinners are better off today.) But the ratings should rise and that is why we interview Lucy Comaskey or Cromesqui, as our French chefs used to say some time ago. And that leads us back to our *pour-soi*, *en-soi* and all the *sois* we can think of when thinking of anything at all, which does not happen very often, according to our polls and pools.

September 9

I go further like a melody, Wagner’s infinite melody about which I read in my youth when almost everything was infinite, even the number of bottles I drank with my friends, enemies and mistresses. Melodies do not lead one anywhere, for all their movements and emotions that seek a multitude of outlets and often find only inlets, being cooped up within the same work of art.

July 20, 2016

Well, the aim of the *pour-soi* – or the *pourceau* (pig), as the French often put it – is to remain a *pour-soi*, *für sich* and for I, for me, for myself. Society has a very large membership and this society goes by the name of consumer and therefore you consume this and that so as not to lose your membership card. You do not mind losing your membership fee, but the card you obtained on the day of your birth is neatly sewn into the lining of your coat, your jacket and even your dressing gown. You order a cup of tea and say to the waiter, ‘It’s for me, not for my neighbours, whoever they are.’ You empty the cup he has just brought you and leave a few coins on the table, saying to yourself that the waiter would consume them sooner or later. But this act, contrary to what one might surmise, is not defined as *en-soi*: we have a lot of definitions in our numerous philosophies and we should not forget that the one we are dealing with right now has a close, intimate link to both you and the waiter. You still exist and you can even give yourself a punch on your nose and say something along the lines of, ‘I am Punch

and I am as pleased as Punch.’ But we should not forget there are many invalids around us, whom we no longer call invalids because they are just slightly handicapped or rather bad-faring. So to demonstrate their good-fariness, our invalid says self-assertively, ‘I’m as proud as Punch of my huge hunch. I’m the president of our Notre Dame, you know.’

The waiter picks the coins up, smiles and says to himself, ‘I’m taking these coins to put them in my pocket. I’ll do it *pour moi*, for my ego and persona. I’m aware of myself and thereby I’m poor and lonely. No woman wishes to marry a café waiter, even if he’s a handsome young man. But my awareness of myself might tell me another tale – a fairy tale, to be exact. I’m a handsome multi-millionaire and the bottle I’m carrying is for me, *pour moi*.’ He looks at himself in a mirror, thinks about all the princes he has come across ever since he became a waiter and his *en-soi* grows, grows and eventually outgrows itself.

‘It’s hard to get a hard and fast definition out of you,’ says another philosopher. (He is not Sartreian. He is Camusian.) You’re always flying off at a tangent. Well, you’re a café waiter.’

‘I’m not,’ says the first philosopher.

‘Our freedom is linked to the fact we can never escape from our awareness of ourselves. Is that what your philosopher says to you?’

‘That’s right.’

‘So you can’t escape from the fact you’re just a philosopher, can you?’

‘I can. Sometimes I become a handsome multi-millionaire.’

‘Today, you don’t even look like a café waiter. You haven’t brushed your hair and your clothes are rumpled. I bet you always leave your clothes lying about on the floor. It’s silly to go to the expense of buying new clothes when you don’t really need them. And I go to the cheapest hairdresser’s in town.’

‘So you’re aware of yourself, aren’t you?’

‘I’m aware of my clothes and their position on the floor.’

‘And your clothes are yourself, aren’t they?’

‘They are, to some extent.’

‘You’re what you eat. You’re what you wear too, aren’t you?’

These clothes and hair are two good examples of *en-soi*, but they are also *pour-soi*, at the same time. Everyone is *pour soi*, you know, as Max Stirner points out in his book entitled, *I Myself In a Class of My Own Unique Unitarian Utilitarian*. Lucy about whom we have almost forgotten says so to herself (and to heaven) as she looks at the shopping bags strewn all around her body, her chair, table and the vase they put in the middle of it. ‘I bought all these things for myself,’ she says as proudly as Punch, ‘so they’re *pour moi*, *pour soi*, and that’s it. I’ve only a smattering of French, you know. But I know what *pour soi* means. This morning I said to myself, “I’m aware I’m not a beautiful princess, even when I happen to fall asleep in the woods.”’

‘Because we’re always aware of ourselves, and able to imagine what is not the case. We have the freedom to stand back from our situation, evaluate it, and decide what to do,’ says a Sartreanin. ‘In a last-ditch attempt to seduce one of the Princes Cummings – sorry, Charmings – Lucy decides to buy a number of latest-thing dresses – in Nice, of all places. Once the tragedy is over, she realises she won’t be able to wear them because of the blood and pushchairs she saw in front of the restaurant where she hoped to have a peaceful last lunch. Lucy thinks she’ll never be able to escape from her awareness of this blood, of those dead children, as Mahler might have put it. As many journalists put it in their respective papers where you also find 50 between-life-and-death individuals.’

Lucy saw a scene of dreadful carnage, stepped back and spoke of her spoilt fun, shopping, trip and thrown-out-of-the-window money. And then she stepped back once again and saw a great many words uttered by Theresa May, the Queen, several Kings and several Presidents, one of whom is desperately seeking to mend relations with the United States. Theresa May said, ‘Nations must redouble efforts to beat the fanatics.’

‘You won’t be able to beat them if you just *redouble* your efforts,’ said Michel June.

‘All right,’ retorted Theresa May. ‘Let us *retriple* our efforts.’

‘Let us *requadruple* our efforts,’ said Boris Godunov of Brexit fame.

The Queen sent her ‘most sincere condolences’ to the French people. And when they inquired about Her Majesty’s attitude towards efforts and their number, their additions and multiplications, she did not say a word. And Sartre spoke thus, ‘For a long time I looked on my pen and words as on swords. Now I know how powerless we are.’

‘Swords aren’t powerless,’ said a Camusician. ‘Let’s not discard our majestic Durandal.’

‘Durand?’ asked somebody.

‘Ever heard about Roland, you ignoramus? Or Notung, if you wish. Don’t you think our Siegfried would have cut that lorry to pieces, had he been in Nice at the right moment? Do you think that lorry was stronger than the dragon?’

We cannot help stepping back all the time and consequently Lucy is not in the class of her own when she does it, cursing the day and hour (a Russian saying) when she resolved to go to Nice and renew her wardrobe (a French saying). Upon hearing a stream of invective aimed at her televised interview, she stepped back once again and the horror of words and callousness slowly entered her field of vision. ‘Sorry, sorry, sorry,’ she said. ‘I didn’t mean it, you know. I know that a lot of people died under the wheels of this cruel lorry and its murderous, barbarous, downright inhuman driver. I just thought about my nausea. My attitude shows a selfish disregard for others about whom Sartre, Hegel and Levinas (and Tolstoy’s Levin, and Vladimir Lenin) speak so often.’

Sartre, too, used to step back, for he condemned himself and others to freedom which is often limited to our being able to step back and hit either a wall or a human being. Sartre steps back and hits a wall – one of the walls he sees in the light of his metaphysical and physical despair. So he says to himself, ‘All right, this is a wall, but I’m free to kick it and even drill a hole in it. Why not entitle my

work *Le trou* (*The Hole*)?' He goes to a cubbyhole where he stores screwdrivers, electric and pneumatic drills, hammers, sickles and Soviet military uniforms and chooses a drill. At some point Sartre says that Jean Genet decided – at his own point – to take upon himself the nature of a thief and evil-doer which society had forced upon him. 'And this bloody wall forced upon me this electric drill,' he goes on as he plugs the drill in and switches it on.

July 21, 2016

And the drill touches the wall as Sartre did only a few minutes ago with a view to finding an outlet for his metaphysical despair, for the *Nichts* forced upon him by Heidegger, among other philosophers. All these *Nichts* they talk about are walls where their victims who look for themselves and their authenticity drill holes and, after making them large enough for their bodies, try to squeeze these corpulent bodies through these holes. First they squeeze themselves dry because they know human bodies are made up of water, mostly of water, and consequently if they eliminate water from their bodies, the latter will become smaller and get easily through the holes they drilled in Sartrian and other walls – in Pink Floyd's wall, for instance.

Wall, wall, wall, wall,
Drill, drill, drill, drill,
Coming, coming, coming,
Mummy, mummy, mummy

Once again Sartre dreams of his mother's womb – mumming he calls it, mumming, mumming – and Simone de Beauvoir reminds him that his mother belonged to the second sex. 'And you refuse to settle for second best – you strive for perfection,' she says to him as she puts a cigarette and a bottle of whisky into his mouth. Sartre looks at Simone de Beauvoir and takes yet another step back as he reaches for freedom to which he was condemned in his mother's womb. 'We're all condemned to steps,' he says. 'And these steps lead us back.' In front of him there stands Simone de Beauvoir and so he steps back to avoid bumping into Simone, let alone into de Beauvoir or just Beauvoir. 'I bumped my head and was concussed for several days,' he said to another journalist.

'Did you bump your head against Simone de Beauvoir?' asked the journalist.

'Of course I did. Whatever happens to us is necessary, unavoidable, deterministic and pre-destined. And the rest is contingent on the weather. If the weather is fine, so is my contingency – nice pair of legs and all that, you know. I've got a bruise where I bumped my leg against Nina's corner, her body's remote corner. You know, one day, one God's day, as the Russians say, I stepped back as I endeavoured to exercise my freedom and democratic right to the full and I bumped my head against someone else's head.'

‘Hegel’s head?’ asked the journalist.

‘Tania’s. And I said to myself, “Why am I stuck with Simone? Am I not free to step back and bump against whoever stands behind me?” Yes, I stepped back and the whole set-up began to unveil before my very eyes and bodily cells. A bronze angel with outspread wings.’

‘Our suntanned Simone with outspread legs?’

‘That’s right. So I said to myself, “I’m condemned to bumping into Tania.” And I did bump into her. That’s why I’ve got a series of bumps all over my body.’

Simone de Beauvoir says *garçons* – not only *garçons de café*, mind you – have their own things to play with, and what she has in mind amounts neither to glasses nor to bottles of whisky. It mounts, mounts and finally amounts, and it does look like a bottle sometimes, but that is not what counts, as Simone de Beauvoir assures us as she continues to write about the first and the second sex. And she says she belongs to the third sex because her problems stem from her difficult childhood; and so do Sartre’s problems, she points out. And consequently they belong to the third sex the childhood of whom or of what and of whose was different from uncloudy childhoods spent in royal cradles and castles. And she also teaches us the modality or mortality of the fourth sex that grows in the fourth dimension or the twilight zone of *The Twilight Zone* fame. ‘You just go to the Twilight Zone and pick up your fourth sex. You won’t regret it, you know.’

All right, I have a lot of things to play with and they are not bound to come from the outside, according to Simone de Beauvoir who thinks that your penis is within your reach, unless your stomach does not allow you to reach it in no time at all. My professor at the Moscow Conservatoire had such a prominent stomach – it is the first time that a pianist of such prominence has been given the freedom to air his views and sounds on TV, they pointed out – that he could not cross his arms, let alone reach his private parts with which both professors and their students played to their bodily and heartily contents. (In the Sixties and in the Seventies.)

I would sit at home and wait for toys that were to come from the outside, in spite of Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion to the contrary. (She thought I was not a girl.) In those days I liked building blocks and I would build a celestial city (O my dear Augustine), when left alone, whereas my mother insisted on my building a *terrestrial* city with a lot of money in it. ‘How many banks have you got in your city?’ she would ask me now and then. ‘Three,’ I would answer timidly as I lowered my head and looked either at my toes or my slippers. Eventually I saw my penis and realised I could play with it to my penis’ content instead of building Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, the second Rome, the third Rome. Yet I built a few cities such as Rome, Athens, Jerusalem and even Moscow – the so-called third Rome. That is why I say I am androgynous.

I do not know if this is the end because no one knows what the end is and where it can be found, assuming you search for an end and not for a beginning or a middle or a nowhere. My lassitude does not say anything; at least it does not say it is a bout of lassitude I go through unless I do not understand its talk and innuendoes, its allusions and my delusions. If it *is* the end, or one of the ends, to put it mildly and mercifully, I must say to myself I am prepared and accept both this and that, whatever they mean or do not mean. I always say 'do' and then add 'not' – just in case, for any case can be just the opposite of what it is, as Taoists and Daoists and Maoists say all the time as if they had time on their hands. I saw my neighbour's car last night; I saw him as well and he said his sister was dying of cancer. And I said to myself it might be my case, according to Wittgenstein. Yes, the world is whatever is the case and this is probably the case all Wittgensteins and Steins have always talked about, even when they were out of my hearing and weariness.

July 22, 2016

In the meantime (last night) Sartre went on searching for his freedom which, according to his doctrine and philosophy in general, lay beyond the door. There are philosophies whose propensity to point to heaven or to any beyond one can find within one's field of vision and also outside it is so irritating that Sartre and Nietzsche decided there was nothing outside anything: no behind-worlds, no behinds and so on. So if someone says to you, 'Why don't you get off your behind (= stand up) and do something!' you answer, 'There are no behinds, beyonds and other sides.' And Sartre thought the matter stood (up) in this way and therefore 'no way' was the best answer one could *geworfen* at Plato's face. But Sartre was fond of walls and every wall is what it is – a substance through which you cannot walk unless you are a ghost or one of the living dead or Boris Karloff or Boris Godunov or Boris Johnson. Sartre began to drill a hole in the wall he bumped into during his journey around the globe – the noblesse of his worldwide renown obliged – but, for all the largesse of the hole, Sartre did not manage to pull his body through it. And yet he had grasped his hair and pulled himself through as strongly and fast as he could as he spoke to the world about freedom and its requirements. And then he said to the world and to all the workers working and suffering in the world, 'I am a man who has been, unfortunately and most unfairly, let down by his body at the crucial moment.'

'You eat too much caviar,' said a workman who liked the expression '*gauche*-caviar' or 'left-caviar' or '*links-ikra*'.

'Caviar is all right,' said a woman. 'But you shouldn't eat too many blinis with it.'

So I must remain in this world where a lot of struggles go on and I wonder why in the *Internationale* they speak of the *last* struggle, of the *very* last struggle. That is what Sartre whose undercover and underground penname was 'struggle' said to himself as he relinquished his attempts to reach freedom in no time at all or at last or even at the very last, late in the day. 'You can be sentenced to freedom, but you're almost always convicted in absentia.' And then he heard an inner or an outer

voice: no one knows exactly where all these voices and oratorios come from. The first and last thing one knows about them boils down to this, ‘They come from somewhere and neither one nor anyone knows where they come from.’ So this inner, outer and middle-of-nowhere voice said to Sartre, ‘Why don’t you use a prayer instead of your electric drill?’

‘What are you talking about?’ said Sartre. (Sart saddle.)

‘Don’t you know what prayer is and means? *Prière, priere.*’

‘Yes, I do. It has something to do with Thee.’

‘All right. You just say, “Our dear Thee Who is in heaven, please do me a favour.”’

‘Our dear Thee,’ said Sartre.

‘Help, help, help,’ said the voice.

‘I wonder if you could help me – I’d like some information about flights to New Zealand,’ said Sartre.

‘Do you think your freedom is buried in New Zealand?’ said the voice.

‘No. But I’d like to speak to their workmen, workwomen and workchildren.

‘And what about their workhorses and workcars?’

Thee, Thee, Thee, Thee,

Open Thee Thee, Thou Thee.

I know I’m sentenced to Thee.

But I’m absent, my dear and only

Thee, Thee, Thee, Thee, Thee.

That is how Sartre’s inner and outer voices sing, and we hear all of them because we cannot help hearing and admiring them: we are sentenced to them, so to speak. We are sentenced to everything: to death and life, among other things; and deeds and weeds. The Supreme Judge made an example of him and her and gave her and him the maximum possible sentence. But they won their (and everybody’s) appeal and the sentence was halved so that now they have half-freedom, half-slavery, half-prison-cell, half-meadow. And Sartre says to them and to the world where they continue to suffer as if nothing had happened, ‘If you make no choice, you’re a bloody bastard or a blood orange or a blood sausage, as the Americans put it.’

‘Where did they put the sausage?’ asks a hungry workman.

Meanwhile Sartre continues to talk to his inner voice, saying to him and Simone de Beauvoir, ‘I’m partly in a hole.’

‘That’s right – you dug yourself into a hole when you turned a deaf ear to the cries that resounded in the Soviet Union and its camps.’

‘What I have in mind and also in body, mind you, is my freedom-hole. Can’t you pull me through or out?’

‘Who are you talking to?’ asks Simone.

‘To you and my inner voice. I hope that one of you will pull hard enough to spare me from making the choice myself.’

‘But you’ve chosen freedom, haven’t you?’

‘I have, but I’ve no idea where freedom is located. In other words, I don’t know its whereabouts. Anyway I can’t traverse, cross and uncross this wall.’

‘Why don’t you make the sign of the cross? The sign of the wall won’t serve your purpose.’

For a while, they speak of the Berlin Wall and of the Wall about which they sing in the *Pink Floyd* albums, discs and CDs.

My wall, my wall, my wall, my wall.

I cannot climb, I drill, I drill.

I will, I drill, my magic pill.

My will and power, our, our.

I pull, opinion poll, St Paul.

Add extra sugar if the rhubarb is too sour.

‘And what about Promise?’ asked Simone de Beauvoir and the pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Berry. ‘Can’t you pluck it out of your bosom? We’re fulsome in our compliments about this Promise of God’s and Yours.’

‘Yes, I know that according to ancient texts, this promise of Yours opens all doors,’ said Sartre. ‘Some of these doors are harder than others. I mean it’s harder to unlock them, you know. They know it as well, these doors, otherwise I’d have opened them already – at the drop of a hat at that. One of poetry’s functions is to somehow unlock the imagination and that’s what all this is about, isn’t it? Imagination. And my imagination has been unlocked over the last 60 years. Listen to the poem that unlocked my imagination.’

‘Not your body,’ said Simone de Beauvoir.

I turned to literature because

I had no friends of my own age

Or of any other age, to be exact,

And no father to give me a sense

Of nonsense, you know, you know.

And also a sense of security.

And nothing else to do except

Words, words, words, words.

Deeds, deeds and deeds.

She bleeds. O shit
And scheisse. Merde.

‘My periods aren’t your department,’ said Simone de Beauvoir.

‘I’d only gone a little way down the street when I remembered I hadn’t locked the door,’ said the Lord,’ said all bishops and archbishops. For once, Simone de Beauvoir kept silent.

I am unique, in my own class.
Here’s my classroom, here I am.
No education. Here’s an f-word,
Another f-word. I’m free, you know.
I change my mind. If I promise,
I don’t keep. I keep nothing
Except drugs, sleeping pills,
Cognac. That’s mine. So is that.
Another f-word. You’re another,
Not the other – another F and Fie.
Another apple pie. Another die.

July 23, 2016

So you do your best to get into God’s Palace before He locks the door He forgets to lock every morning, at a rough guess. And when the guess is not rough, our God forgets to lock the same lock thrice every morning, and we say, ‘This doesn’t really matter because these small (and smelly) mercies outgrow themselves and stand in front of us in their uniforms or ballgowns. “Don’t change the world,” a lot of people say to you as you begin to move your trains of thought, your hands; and your eyes roll as if they were those of Othello who always rolls his eyes, even if his wife remains faithful to him. And Desdemona cries, “He rolls his eyes like a savage. So he’s a savage and my father was right. He rolls them and they drop onto the floor of our palaces, on our marble floors where they continue to roll until our youngest brother takes notice of them. And then he starts to play with Othello’s eyes, saying to himself and Sartre’s others and hells, “That’s my freedom and I sleep with whoever may be found in my bed.” And I’ll sleep in my bed until the Second Coming.’

I am yet. And anything.
Just a drop. You bring it on the palm,
In the palm, inside.
And again. What is beautiful

Is never and ever. Does perhaps.

This does.

July 24, 2016

If I can do what is not done, and do it all the same, whatever happens or does not, I live, otherwise I do not, and I wake up and say, 'My eyes are too sleepy so I have to rub them a little bit or just a bit.' I do, I rub and a bit goes. I say, "Go, go, go," and another bit goes too; and another one, another one, one, two, three, four.' And if all these bits go, you see our Absolute Truth and say, 'He's left her, has he? Ha! That'll teach her to go chasing other women's husbands!' Or you say, 'Ha! So I am right after all!' You are, you are, are, are, are. You can also say, 'I am wrong after all.' Free country. I am wrong after all. I am wrong after all. I am wrong after all. I am wrong after all. I am wrong after all. I am wrong after all. I am right after all. I am right after all. I am right after all. I am superright after all.

November 11

I don't know if I've ever smelt anything.

I have to wait and see what happens.

If there's a smell, I'll smell it.

And I'll see my own image, and I'll hear it.

December 24

I have never taken the trouble to recall my former lives (and loves): they are former and formal, to some extent. And for all its modesty, this extent is so extensive I am disheartened, put off, and off I go instead of getting closer and closer to my former formers and forms. But I have a parallel life to take care of, otherwise I might collapse once and for all, being what I am – an unrecognised being whose existence comes to the fore only when it is high time it paid high taxes. Yet I should not be taxed on my earnings because they are so low; they are lower than the beings described by Gorky in his lower depths (and deaths) and bottoms. So I go on for the sake of this parallel life, for the sake of those parallels that never meet in Euclid's geometry. Why should I meet myself? If I do, I might contaminate myself and become as helpless, hopeless and openless as I am now. But if I were not a biographer of my own parallel life, I would settle down, down, down, in the nearest rubbish bin. Let me never meet myself. Let me never be.

December 25

I was born and I know my life, its currents, movements, moods and loops. When I play Beethoven, Mozart or Bach, I play myself and others. But there are no others, only we, we, we, tiny, weeny-bit we, Weeney Pufs. No others, not even profs, porns and boffs. Here is one of my slices:

If I am, I was born. I am not what

I am. I am not I, nor am I am.

Nor am I m. No, no, no.

I am Tristan I am listening

To. I am listening, I am to.

I am nor, or, m, n, o.

July 26, 2016

One foot is in the grave but the other explores the Earth, crying, ‘Pioneer, pioneer, pioneer’ because you go west and so do I. I am a one-foot they, as they say nowadays, and I am proud of it as one can be proud of anything, of one shoulder blade, for instance. And you should not call your shoulder blade ‘it’, whatever you think about during your grammar lessons and mama’s rockets. But your Mum is already in the grave, feet, arms and all, and so it is you who is left with one foot out of the grave; and this foot yearns to explore the Earth and even human thought, its domain. A pianist can say about another pianist, ‘He plays like a foot,’ and you might think you can explore your thoughts with one foot, provided it is in good repair.

Suppose your brain is the geography we know and you put your foot here and there to say, ‘Here’s our eternal recurrence,’ and ‘Here’s *catégorique*. I don’t know what categorical, which one, you know. It’s not imperative, not urgent anyway.’ Your brain is also a piece of topography and my foot (the only one I have) learns it as it walks across mine, thine and wine. And I know that my foot (right or left) knows everything.

July 27, 2016

Up hill and down dale. ‘Non-local connections.’ There are only local connections, collections. Damn them! Can’t the Universe leave me alone?!?

July 28, 2016

I wonder and I shall go wandering until I understand why the Universe and the Cosmos with all their Kadmons should leave us alone instead of saying, ‘Leave *us* alone, *s’il vous plaît*. Thank you very

much indeed.’ According to our and their sages, the cosmos is a human being, especially if it is ruled over by Eva Kadmon in person (Cadmone in French). The Universe turns and returns and bothers us with its planets, asteroids, but we look at it through our telescopes and speak of Aië-aië-aiës and singularities and the black holes that blacken everything, down and out and up to everybody. Even if you say something along the lines of (or perpendicular to) ‘The folds of the curtains were blackened with dirt,’ you must conclude the dirt stems and comes from yet another singularity. This is singular and not quite ordinary, you say to yourself, and you endeavour to whiten the curtains and the questions attached to them, otherwise both the questions and curtains will remain black through their poor, unhealthy lives. They will say (and they are legion), ‘The financial crash blackened the image of investment for many small investors.’

‘But our curtains have nothing to do either with images or investments.’

‘Don’t you know we’re living in a global village? Aren’t your curtains global after all?’

‘*After* all – perhaps,’ you answer. ‘But there might be no “after”, according to the news that warns us about our forthcoming death.’

‘What about “all”?’

‘What about them or they or *ells* or *eux* or who?’

‘Black isn’t white.’

‘So what?’

‘What so?’

The Universe is also alone – as alone as I am – in spite of the facts or the multitude of planets that turn and turn and turn and turn and turn their heads. Why do they turn their heads? ask astronomers. And how do they turn them? Ellipses, said Kepler or Keeper or Killer. ‘These new findings turn the accepted theories on their head,’ say other astronomers, and our stars and planets turn our theories on their hands. And our comets turn the same theories on their tails.

Suppose the Universe has been left alone – not by the planets, comets, omelettes that do not think; and only thoughts pierce us really and more truly than rockets and bombs. (According to our philosophers and thinkers.) You have a thought (or a dream-thought) and send it to the Universe as if it were Bach’s *Prelude in C Major* performed by Glen Gould. The Universe vibrates, judders and throbs, and it wonders why it (she, he) should reverberate because somebody – a German man or woman – wrote a prelude followed by a fugue. Of course the beauty does not escape the Universe’s ears, and given that everything is God Who is Everywhere, the Universe has Ears and Listens to the Spheres and also to Bach. One wonders why one should send anything and anybody anywhere: we are everywhere and so is God. Wait a minute, as they always say, and we wait a minute, an hour and sometimes the whole of eternity, although one might ask if eternity has parts and wholes.

Let us wait a minute and say to ourselves that there are ETs somewhere and probably everywhere; and these ETs yearn to know what we are doing on this Earth of ours instead of doing nothing anywhere. Yes, we are doing something on this Earth, which is not exactly ours because it

belongs to God. But we write fugues and even preludes to kill our and their times. Besides, we are inspired and our inspiration says, 'You should write a prelude and a fugue,' and we write both, for our inspiration pushes us into writing a masterpiece. Her parents pushed her into marrying him. The school manages to push most of its students through their exams, saying, 'If we want an answer from them by Friday, I think we're going to have to push them for it.' And they say to us, 'You'll never be successful if you don't push yourself harder.' And we push ourselves harder; and they say we should push ourselves even harder than harder, and even harder than hardest. So we push ourselves.

So there is an ET somewhere and this or any other ET pricks up its ears and hears Bach and his divine prelude without any fugue. And that ET whose name we have forgotten says to himself, 'How beautiful this series of sounds is and has been for some time, I suppose, otherwise it wouldn't have reached my ears – this doesn't come from our realms.' And this ET of ours listens to it for hours on end; and yet this prelude lasts two or three minutes and even I play it: if I am indolent it can embellish my night. Is that what non-local connections are about? Anyway, if I play Bach, Beethoven or just a piece written by an unknown composer, it is an unlocal, unvocal connection I take part in; and yet everything is local and mocal. You lock me in or out; you mock me and that is always in, in, in, in, for the simple reason that I feel it unless I am a Buddhist or Hindu or yet another saint or guru or muru. In Russian they say '*mura*', if they wish to say 'nonsense'; or if they do not wish to say anything at all; or all.

The Universe lies dormant, or lies, or *dort*, and we decide to push it into an exploit, into another SuperNova, SuperLeonard, SuperLeopard. We push it and it becomes another SuperJohann-Sebastian or SuperLudwig Van because we heard a prelude and a fugue and Beethoven's sonatas, all of them; for Hans von Bulloooooow said they were our New Testament. And the Universe must know the New Testament, otherwise it is not the Universe; it is just a verse, a bad verse such as 'Life is beautiful'. Of course the Universe has always known the Old or Ancient Testament, otherwise it would not have come into existence. (It might have come into non-existence, though.) But the New Testament is always in the news throughout the Universe, and the Universe knows it, otherwise it would not be the Universe; it would be the Rse.

The Universe does not leave me alone; nor does it leave me in peace. I think I might be peaceful without the Universe. If it were not for the Universe, in other words, I would be as peaceful as the peace talks and proposals we read about everywhere; even in the sky where Lucy catches her 40 and even 60 winks. All right, she can catch as many as 40 winks; and she does catch them in no time at all. But what about 60 winks, let alone 90 winks? Anyway, I am not peaceful; nor am I wrathful and that does not mean I am nothing, nobody, no-one, whatever Odysseus might say on the subject or object. I am a man, as Odysseus and Ulysses might say on the SUBJECT, but the subject in question is not even an object and so the Universe can sleep like a log; or like the Universe or a verse, any verse. 'To be or not to be' can sleep, can't it? Your beauty sleep, you know.

It is too early and anyway no amount of sleep would improve my beauty, if any, if any beauty sleeps somewhere either on my face or on the rest, or what is the rest of my rest, of my second leg that is still on my bed.

January 7

If I am not God, I am not. But God would not notnot have created anything, if He had in mind a sort of *duplication*, not a sort of *creation*. Why and *Warum* does God create a number of godlike creatures? If God is there, everywhere? *Pourquoi*, what for? If God and His, Her (not Your) likes are everywhere? And even dislikes? So, to create and recreate, He creates inferiors creatures (not **C**reatures, mind you). He just creates for the sake of creation, imagination and its (and His) figments and pigments. I create L which is inferior to the whole alphabet. The same goes for M and other letters – their inferiority is obvious if you look around, if only for a second, or two seconds. You see bushes and motorcycles and L remains alone in the midst of these landscapes, traffic scenes and epics.

I am one of the gods whose number should be reduced until everything *grows* Zero. And if something, someone, one, one, one and one grow, I add somesomesomesome to the Creation. Its perfection depends on my sums, somes, comes and ones.

God; plus one.

January 8

I am always minus, minus, minus, minus. I am some, sum, one, but I shall never be described. Yes, there are energies you have no inkling of. Anyway, nothing will ever push you towards my life and its ramifications, branches, twigs and leaves. The status quo prevails – the only expression humankind needs.

March 12

Another one. Is it a cell, a nerve, a tendon? Where are you going to, my pretty cell? Going, running. If I see it, I am still alive but not kicking, alas, for I cannot kick it. To kick it, I should get up and walk very fast. What for? To save my life? Does my life depend on this nerve? Do I depend on this *nef*, ship, *korabl*? I no longer see it, for they run very quickly. Are you running against each other or against myself? Your master and slave, your body and soul? Don't worry your pretty little head! This cell has already been replaced by another one, and yet another one. If you cannot run after your cells because you are a one-legged creature, a new leg will be planted on the spot where the former used to drag you over the coals instead of letting you play with dolls.

July 29, 2016

I suppose the Universe is not particularly fond of us because we destroy its music and even some of its spheres – even the ones that do us no harm at all. They just turn overhead and underfoot, but we worm ourselves into its (the Universe's) affections (a figure of speech) without its ever suspecting we do it out of sheer, gratuitous curiosity; and for the sake of money. And our scientists say to each other, 'This bloody Bob wasn't going to tell me, but I managed to worm it out of him.' (Wormholes, they call it.) After hearing their discussion, one might draw a lot of conclusions such as, 'They're on speaking terms with those Andromedas and Amoebas. And soon they'll reveal to us the secret of their longevity, if not the whereabouts of the entrance to eternity and immortality.'

They talk to Bobs and Beeps and wait for years and years, allowing an alien signal to take its time and its course, its favourite itinerary. And if such and such a signal drags its feet too insolently, they send a bomb and wait for the anticipated explosion, for a series of boom-bach-booch-beef bofs and yet another series of etceteras. And their gurus remind them that their destinies are in the hands of God and not in the paws of Amoebiii and Molaculi. 'Either you're the elect or the reprobate, one of them, you know.' But scientists prefer their own terminology that sounds thus, 'Cancer doesn't care if you're a good mom and a nice guy – the nicest guy in the Universe. You may be even nicer than Cyclonius, but cancer doesn't care about your niceties or unniceties. Are you a hard worker, a writer of genius? Are you an alcoholic or a workaholic? Cancer asks no questions and you may rejoice in your good fortune because you think that telling lies is a sin and sinners usually go to Hell after dying from cancer. No way! Everyone, good or bad, young or old, has the potential to end up sick. In every single house, there's someone living with cancer or who has died of cancer.'

'We're not doing enough to protect the environment from pollution.'

'Stricter controls on air pollution would help to reduce acid rain.'

'Nonsense. An industrial plant emits noxious chemicals, and cancer is rampant nearby – and yet there's no way to prove a connection.'

'God.'

'What?'

'Providence, predetermination, determinism, amorphousness, dullness, malness, as the French put it (*Mal* and *maux* mean torture, suffering, pain, anguish, distress and misery). The elect and the reprobate. St Augustine, Calvin, Jansen, Stalin, Lenin, Edwin, Adam.'

Rumour has it the Universe is not alone because God is in the making, in the passing, en passant; and so is the Universe and all its asteroids and adenoids. And we have to explore it – aren't we pioneers and comsomolians? – if only for the sake of our curiosity, humanness, godness. Wasn't God unduly curious when creating the Universe and its atoms, amoebas, and Carrabosses with their Barrabasses? And Barbarosses? Well, let me repeat once again: 'We are all in love.' Yet I cannot make love to the

Universe on account of the number of its planets and their counts that are far superior to the number of my penises. There are metaphors, symbols, signs, mines of information and rich seams to mine; and some of them are *mine*, otherwise I would be neither here nor elsewhere. And I can sleep and even spend my wakeful nights in one of its or their members' company; and I continue to speak of the Universe because there is nothing else to speak of, let alone to write home about. (And what if you have no home to speak of?)

For once you are with a woman and you are not content to stay outside her, talking to her about Kant and new brands such as, 'My usual brand of deodorant.' So you make up your mind and your mind is made to the point of making your penis penetrate this woman's substance and even her ego, as it were. You go and feel you are really worthy of the pioneers who went West, got West and got Best and also the Best of all the Bests and Betsys. What does actually happen? (If anything happens at all – after all it is not a happening, is it? Or is it not?) You feel a sort of moisture and you say to yourself, 'These plants need a rich soil which retains moisture' – all the more eagerly and joyfully and logically and bilingually, since the French say about a beautiful woman, 'What a *belle plante!*'

Logically enough, the woman you lie by and where and there – in your bed, in other words – is not necessarily rich, but they (all women) need a rich soil which may be rich in one respect and poor in all others. If this soil is rich in financial terms, the woman in question can answer any question they put to her on television and elsewhere, 'While I accept that he's not perfect in many respects, I do actually quite like the man.' If this soil is rich in sexual terms, the woman says, 'While I accept that he's not perfect in many respects, I do actually quite like the man. And I hope I'll meet a billionaire elsewhere – round the corner of the street or in Hyde Park; or in the parc de Versailles; or in the chateau de Versailles; or in any other villas or dukedoms.' Actually (enough), it is the other way round: the woman needs a rich root or tail or whatever they call it somewhere to produce a beautiful plant – a baby, in other words and terms. (And all babies are beautiful, needless to say and demonstrate and prove.) So you plant your root in this soil and sometimes the soil you plant your root (not your foot) into is rich; sometimes it is not. But sometimes you plant your plant and as soon as you do it – and, and, and – you moon and sun around seventh heaven; if you are not on top form. And if you happen to be on and in this form, you wallow in ninth heaven, according to Dante.

December 28

I have Nils Bohr and others to thank for my unpredictability, instability and absent-mindedness. Regularly the universe fails to come up to my expectations, but physicists just shake their heads and say my subjectivity should be playing a more prominent role in promoting my rights.

Jung joins in with the chorus: 'Synchronistic events draw the observer into what is happening and make him an accessory to them.' All right, I am an accessory to my own murder, to the slow destruction of my mind.

January 7

In my hotel room we did not talk as if determined to act and go ahead with a project we had in mind. She undressed, but I contented myself with watching her striptease from afar – from the bed on which I was sitting. This bed was a ship and I continued to round the Cape in order to fulfil my destiny without incurring the wrath of the Almighty: one punishment is enough. In my new ship I rounded her and found her members attractive enough to go ashore and touch her. I knew I was in love with her and this love was disinterested: I did not want her to sacrifice her life for me. I just wanted her to sit in front of me or rather by my side. I touched her several times, but this human contact was not erotic enough to satisfy my curiosity. Actually, I was curious about women and the way they could act on a man's psyche. How does a man's psyche react in the presence of a woman? What does it feel when a woman touches it? And then I transferred my attention to my body which was apt to receive a woman's message with more acuity and trepidation.

February 2

Whatever I create is inferior to what I am and even to what I am not: as long as my I is somewhere, I am superior to my doings and works. For instance, 'I love you' is inferior to my being I can touch (and do touch) in the heat of the moment that lasts an hour or two. The heat lasts; so do I; and I wonder if this heat lasts because of my own heat or global warming.

February 3

And Bach?

'What about him?'

'What about him?'

'What about him?'

Is he superior to

The Art of the Fugue?

What is superior to it?

That constellation?

Over there?

April 9

'And what is that constellation, up there?'

'The Art of the Fugue, my son.'

July 30, 2016

There are a lot of tree lovers on this planet of ours and no wonder our children are excited whenever we say to them, with a number of broad smiles distorting our faces, 'Tomorrow we'll go to the woods.' Our children know that woods and what they are made of are beautiful because adults speak highly about trees, especially if the trees in question are very high. They may even drop the following remark, when looking at a eucalyptus, 'I wonder if this tree is as high as the Tower of Babel.'

'Anyway it's higher than the Leaning Tower of Pisa,' says a neighbour.

'You're right. But do you know why it's higher?'

'Because we're talking about the *Leaning* Tower of Pisa. Right?'

'Do you think the tower would be higher if it were as straight as a ramrod?'

'As straight as a die, rather,' says another neighbour.

'Why a die?'

'A road can run as straight as a die for fifty or so miles. And if you take the trouble to fiddle with this road until it rises up and towers vertically up in the middle of nowhere, you'll create the highest monument in our history.'

'What about the Tower of Babel?'

But children do not listen to whatever might be said about the Tower of Babel and its blasphemous builders: their circle of Hell is paved with their bones, throats and arrogant impulses. Suppose Tom's or Abraham's sister comes round on Saturday with her numerous offspring and the latter see a multitude of beautiful trees in our park, all around our castle, alias our chateau and home. And Bob's sisters say to them, 'My dearest little boobs! You'd be well advised to look at these wonderful trees that were planted by my cousin's ancestor. They came over with the Conqueror, you know. And they went back with him too. These trees are the signs and symbols of Time and they grow in space, bent on outgrowing both the Tower of Babel and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.'

Of course you are entitled to disappoint these children by pointing out that no mushrooms have ever grown in your garden because you hate mushrooms and destroy them root and branch whenever they dare to trespass on your property and estate. You say all that because your cousin's offspring are too numerous and boisterous, and they are sure to trample all over French-looking flowerbeds in no time at all. Your cousin adores mushrooms and mushrooming and, as everybody knows, like cousin, like offspring. 'Mummy, Mummy, Mummy!' resounds all over the brains of the adults you might have invited for dinner or picnic or whatever.

'Why are you uttering my name and profession and vocation, my precious ones?'

'Because there are no mushrooms in this park.'

'All right. So what?'

‘We want to go mushrooming.’

‘*Allons, allons*, look here! Or rather look over there. Gorgeous, isn’t it?’

‘We want to go mushrooming.’

‘Over the last week you’ve had all sorts of mushrooms for dinner, breakfast, lunch and brunch.’

‘What sorts?’

‘Dried, grilled, stuffed and sliced. And last night you availed yourself of a delicious cream of mushroom soup.’

July 31, 2016

You can enjoy the presence of a solitary tree, especially if you happen to encounter it in the middle of a desert where the sun with its beams, rays and heat is the only master. Quietly and smilingly you lie down near the roots of this tree and begin to praise its foliage that provides the well-deserved and preserved coolness of shade. ‘The dense foliage overhead almost blocked out the sun,’ writes the same poet and we admire his poetry not only for its aesthetic beauty, but also for its realism, pragmatism and practicality. We say to ourselves that the sun is not always suitable and useful: it can be a damned and even bloody nuisance, considering its colour and cruelty. In Russia cinema-goers are still fond of the Soviet film entitled *The White Sun of the Desert*. But on no account should we discount red suns that are even more numerous and deadly than their white and black counterparts. In such a case, we had better block the sun out and we can confidently accomplish this act with the aid of the dense foliage depicted in the above verse. (But we would not be able to murder it with a spot or blot of ink, for all W. B. Yeats’ inspirations and contributions.)

Going back to trees, to their stems (not exclusively to their foliage) and shade, we must admit that these trees – and also other trees, for that matter – offer us so many pleasures and symbols we are really unable to count them. On the other hand, we need not count them because this attitude is not pragmatic: we just lie down under these and other trees and enjoy their coolness and even coldness – this depends upon the ferocity of the sun and its colours – and forget the misery we are subjected to in everyday life.

But there are also mushrooms and berries: wild strawberries among other berries and sensual dates one is keen on – in Bergman’s film and probably in his life. You go to the woods and, lo and behold (and also lo and hold very tight) there is a space where a great many wild strawberries seem to promise you and your companion a sort of partial or eternal happiness. Of course you giggle because this is the sound associated with a low-grade sensual and sexual relationship. ‘Stop! You’re tickling me!’ you often hear in this kind of film; unkind films, as it were. ‘I tickled her feet and she laughed,’ says the protagonist and his or her antagonist. And all of them run around as if they could not stay where they are (or were) in order to enjoy the order and disorder of sexual intercourse.

There are other trees of course, and their natures talk about Nature or the Cosmos we should not forget, even if we think only in terms of our down-to-earth pleasures and measures. The longer the better – that is what the latter (this one) rule may say to many lovers whose preoccupations are down-and-dirty; and also petty; and not always pretty. In this context, every tree is a phallus that reaches for Heaven, and that reachness and richness remind us of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, celebrated by William Blake and his followers. What does all this boil *down* to?

October 10

In Moscow I would have seen a lot of snow. I do not know if I like walking on the snow. At least I do not like the sentence, ‘The gravel crunched underfoot as we walked up to the house.’ I wonder with whom I walked *up* to the house. If you are not alone, you always walk *under*. Nothing crunched underfoot when I got out this morning; nothing, not even my tendons, my bones, let alone cells of any kind.

October 9

Only one motif remains. From Prokofiev’s *Seventh*. That is what I shall hear and shall not.

October 11

*I don’t know, and you and I and even
The month of May. But I do
Know if you’re not with or elsewhere,
I am neither born, nor newborn,
Nor stillborn, nor still.*

June 0

*So many winters. My God
And nothing is or is not. I’m building
A snow maiden, in the month of
June.*

October 19

‘Bug, Bog?’

‘I’m a positive bug, in other letters.’

April 8

I recognise.

I’ve known you for many years,

But now there’s nothing

Except recognition. Nothing left or

Remains.

It is enough to recognise;

Whatever, however.

You’re not God.

But I recognise you.

You’re not me, certainly not;

Nor are you my doppelgänger. Yet

I do recognise you. That’s what

They call life.

November 17

‘I struggle for life.’

‘I struggle for death.’

‘I struggle for life.’

‘Death, death.’

‘Instinct, you know’

‘Life, life, life, life.’

‘Death, death, death, death.’

‘Instinct.’

‘Instant.’

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January

I am going. I am not a bug, nor a bog. I can go even if I am a one-legged, semi-legged creature or mixture. I am a myth, a creature, a human, a bug and the rest, the rest. And I rest on my laurels. And I rest on them, on tsum, on tsimsum. And I give, give, withdraw, that is death, and birth.

Febru

No, I will not say beauty is

I'll say is

I'll say s

I say

August 1, 2016

The Earth is Hell – not just others but literally everything – and Heaven is Heaven – a sort of celestial bridegroom whose hopes, once upon a time, took root in the Earth; for better or for worse. So logically (and teleologically) the bride and her bridegroom must have a long and happy marriage. Our theologians say that the marriage in question took place on the day when Heaven took root in the Earth, alias Hell. And others say it is not enough to take root and live happily ever after: any marriage must be consummated. According to those others, our life is nothing but this long-term, everlasting consummation or elevation or ascension or spiritual renaissance and resurrection. Every mystic is believed to unfold a sort of ladder – the exact copy of Jacob's ladder, needless to say – and climb higher and higher until their head bumps into our William-Blake-glorified Heaven. And other mystics say this event cannot last – at least as long as you live in the vale of tears and consequently on the surface of the Earth. So you just bump your head into Heaven and fall back on the surface of the Earth, trying not to get under her surface, for there are several hells and the further you fall, the weirder it grows. And the weirdest Hell is located at the very centre (or core) of the Earth celebrated by both Dante and Jules Verne.

Of course all these hells have their positive counterparts or reflections *Là-Haut*, as Jacques the Fatalist used to say when talking to his master. (Determination, predestination, St Augustine, Spinoza.) So we have to cope with a score of heavens the names of which are known only to mystics, saints, theologians and Swedenborgians. The first Heaven is called 'Grace'; the second 'Benediction' (or 'Benedictus'); the third 'Gratitude'; the fourth 'Love' (actually all those heavens are called 'Love', for each of them has several names); the fifth 'Gratitude'; the sixth 'Purity'; the seventh 'Chastity'; the eighth 'Virginity'; the ninth 'Beatrice'; the tenth 'Forgiveness'; and so on and so forth. Usually it is an angel who utters these names; and once such and such a name is dead and gone, he adds, 'This heaven has been given a clean bill of health by the Almighty.' For all your Enoch-transmitted gifts, you do need a sort of guidance in the kingdom of Heaven, and this guardian of yours must be as good as the

politician about whom our newspapers talk as follows, ‘He rose quickly through the political hierarchy to become party leader.’ There are hierarchies everywhere and the one you are likely to come (or rather fly) across in Heaven is called ‘our celestial hierarchy’.

To cut a long story short, this is what it was all about. There was a primordial Tree – the Tree Number One – which was to fertilise Heaven or the void one would have seen overhead, had there been one or any of them on the surface of Earth; in those days and nights. The First Tree was planted by Force Number One and, naturally enough, it began to grow; and our mystics declare that it took about three days for the seeds to sprout.

At some point, the First Tree struck up an interesting and memorable conversation with Heaven where there was only one voice, nothing else. The First Tree said, ‘I love you, I love you, I lo-o-o-o-o-ve-e-e-e-e y-o-u.’

‘What are you talking about?’ asked Heaven.

‘About love. What else can one talk about?’

‘You’re too small to talk about love,’ said Heaven. ‘Do you know what the Russians say about your likes and dislikes?’

‘I haven’t got the foggiest. I don’t know the first thing about the Russians. Who are they?’

‘Never mind their identity and national character. They would say about you, “On his lips one can still detect a few drops of his mother’s milk.”

‘I can’t feel any drops on my lips.’

‘You’re ungainly and unglamorous. You know, ducks are ungainly on land.’

‘But I’m not a duck.’

‘You are, metaphorically speaking.’

‘Am I?’

‘To cut a long explanation short, you don’t deserve me yet. You don’t deserve my body, if you see what I mean.’

‘I don’t.’

‘You’re too small, I tell you.’

‘I’ve grown three centimetres this year. Besides, children grow so quickly.’

‘Let’s wait and see.’

August 2, 2016

But Heaven neither waits nor sees the Tree because it does not take the trouble to cast a glance in the direction of its growth or its absence. Actually it does grow a little – every morn and even every night, although there are yet no nights nor days to speak of: the sun has not been born. It is true that our plant is on the verge of collapse/success/tears/death/disaster; in other words, anything can happen to it, considering its mental state, its despair and hopes, its agony and trance. It is in love with Heaven, but

its sexual immaturity does not allow it to pin its hopes on any response on the part of its beloved whose libidinal appetite is so great she is prepared to forego her part in the Creation, for the sake of a vulgar and fruitless act of intercourse. And the plant – it has not received the appellation ‘The First Tree’ yet – is more on the platonic (plantonic) side – and it is on this side to such an extent that it remains sexless as if it were an idea, not an authentic male. That is why I call it ‘it’, for want of anything better; and, logically enough, its sex organ is included in my ‘it’. And yet its sex organ or what passes for such, is not even an ‘it’, I am sorry to say and realise. ‘But we have to hope and pray the growth and the ensuing love will go well,’ say the gods who are always in the wings, whatever mythology we happen to deal with at the moment.

And all will be well, and everything will go well, for it cannot go otherwise because our will is good and our good is well – as the poet put it one day. We all vote for the Creation, even if some of our poets – Leopardi is of their number – always vote for the Destruction. But even if you choose to vote for the Distraction, you have to vote first for the Creation: there are no Disneylands without it. Even an ordinary roller coaster cannot spring into existence if there is no Creation around it, under it, above it, inside it. So we need the sun in the first place; and in the second place we might have the moon as well: its (or her) importance in matters of love cannot be overestimated and outdistanced. Of course the sun comes first, if only for the sake of the moon, of her light and of our ‘all will be well’. And the plant was not sure about the sun (and the Creation in general) when he first hit upon the idea; but ‘it’s really grown on me’, he said to himself one day (or night, or somewhere in between, in a no-day-night land). And from then on it has been growing daily, nightly or in the same no-light land.

Once upon the no-time, it began to think and feel exclusively in terms of sex and its sex organ said to itself, ‘This makes a world of difference.’ And the world felt the difference when the plant said to itself, ‘*On n’est jamais si bien servi que par soi-même*’ (if you want something doing, do it yourself. And if you want your undoing, just undo yourself). In other words, it rushed headlong into what we define as ‘self-abuse’, when we feel like speaking of it instead of doing it. One drop of his sperm flew off and hit the sky (and not Heaven, not yet) and the Sun was born at last.

The Sun opened its eyes and its beams began to stream in all directions, singing a few hymns to the gods and the Creation itself.

*At last, at last, at long, long last
The world has come into existence.
It’s better to be alive than dead –
That’s what they say about God.
That’s how they prove, ‘He is, He is.
The Mightiest Perfectionist.’*

‘Well, well, well,’ said Heaven. ‘What have we here? Is that what they call “Light fiat”?’

And Heaven sang her own song:

Let it be –

Light, be it!

Our specialists are often puzzled by the discrepancies they light upon in the folios devoted to ancient mythologies that have nothing in common with the ones depicted by Roland Barthes. For instance, they come across the problem of genders, of sex organs without which no creation is conceivable and logical. If you assume (and you often do) that the Earth is female, you will be hard put to explain how she can spurt her sperm up and up, reaching the outer regions of Heaven; unless we are (once again) dealing with a transsexual individual. But sometimes it is not the case and so we are at a sea with these organs; or rather we are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Of course we can always say, 'It is Heaven who fertilises the Earth,' meaning that a phallus descends through the air and showers the Earth with its (or his) gifts. But no phallus worthy of his name would lower himself to come down instead of constantly soaring to a new all-time high on a regular basis.

So other specialists say that all happens differently in the universe where God says one word, then another word, and the Sun appears in the company of the stars. God says, 'The Sun' and the latter comes out of the black, whereupon our Heaven becomes a black-and-white film or rather a screen onto which this film is projected. Actually God does not need to say the whole word as if asking the following question, 'What do you mean you don't understand – do I have to spell it out for you?' He just utters the letter (or sound) S that sounds almost eternally, for God and eternity always go together and consequently can be likened to the following assertion, 'Poor living conditions and TB go together.' But let us not omit to mention the number of sound years that separate us from God and His eternal Astuteness; and His daily Creation. So what we hear often sounds thus, 'Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh' instead of 'S-S-S-S-S'; as if God were eager to create the Shun and not the Sun. Or as if He wished to reduce our humankind to silence; as if saying eternally, 'Shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up – no buts about it.'

So our dialogues with God sound as follows, 'My God, O Lord. I suffer a lot. Do you think I'm happy with my lot?'

'Shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up – no buts about it.'

'All right, you punished Lot and even his family, if I'm not mistaken. Or you saved him, on the contrary. I'm a little bit confused, Thou knowest. Anyway, I'm not Lot and I have no family, but I do think they should do something to improve the lot of the lowest-paid workers. Don't Thy think so? Or Thou, or *Du*, or *Toi*?'

'Shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up – no buts about it.'

'*Comment? Pourquoi? Warum?* How come? Free country, isn't it? Freedom of speech and our free country. Aren't they?'

‘Free country, but not free universe,’ answer theologians and mystics. And they add, after a while, ‘It’s not the Sun the Almighty speaks to and of. His “S” means “Son”. The Sun has been in the sky for centuries. But God’s Son was lost at some point. The Son thinks His Father forsook Him. And the other way round – as usual, traditionally speaking. The Father thinks His Son is a prodigal One. In this context and with this view and purpose in mind, we are authorised to say that God’s “S” means, “Where are You, my Son? Where, o where? Come, o come, my S-S-S-S-S. Come hither, young Sir!” Or young S, if you prefer.’

With the exception of the Bible, all mythologies are blasphemous – especially ours, it goes without saying; and Roland Barthes ought to have condemned and damned them outright instead of analysing them in detail. All mythologies are blasphemous because they are just mythologies and nothing else; whereas the Bible is the Truth and nothing else – the upright and absolute Truth. So any comment on it is a blasphemy in its own right (wrong) – that is what many theologians maintain as they continue to write their comments and prophecies. Even if you single out one subject matter, one theme, ignoring the rest, you commit an offence, a grievous and unforgivable crime, especially if you start playing with this theme. For instance you say to your listeners, ‘On the Cross, Jesus said to His Father, “Father, Father, why have You forsaken me?” And you add the following thought, ‘But Jesus’ Father was forsaken in His turn because the prodigal son is none other than Jesus Christ in the flesh. In this vale of tears and even outside it, to tell the truth, we’re always forsaken by everybody – by our friends and mistresses, by our fathers and sons. Such is the law of life and death.’

Then one of your listeners stands up and says, ‘Shut up, you blasphemous scoundrel. Shush, shush, shush, shush.’

March 13

Am I perfect and godlike? If I am not godlike and if I say so – I do say so – I blaspheme because whatever I do is perfect, godlike, divine and Good, Good, God. (That is why I say, ‘I am a genius’ and therefore – and there and fore and forever – whatever I do is a work of a genius.) And if I say modestly, lowering my eyes in embarrassment whenever I see, feel, hear and touch anyone, ‘I’m just an artist (an artisan) who does his job,’ I blaspheme: God creates masterpieces. What does He care about third-rate artefacts?

May 22

I have two lives, a straight (an orotund, a zigzag) one, and a parallel one. They must *meet*, otherwise nothing makes sense and making sense means nothing; otherwise. Meet-and-greet, greet-and-meet, grid-and-i*Mid*. And, and, and, and, one.

October 3

And not. Not, Not, Not. And I am dying, England, Russia, France. I am dying, dying, not living. I am living, living, living.

February

What you call what? And that, what is that? Minus? Am I not what I was three seconds ago? I am not. I am not. I **am** not.

February

Your something. My someone, one. I do, I do. And if not, it is not. It is not, not, not, not, not, not. And if is if, if, if, if, if, if, if, if; and if is not if. And not is not.

February

If I had not been born, the world would not have been, have been, have been, have been, have been.

Februar

It does that it does not.

Februa

She'll come and find me downstairs. Sometimes you are up, sometimes down. She'll look at me and sing:

My little one,

My little one,

Sleep well,

Sleep sound,

Sleep unsound,

Sleep unsound.

August 3, 2016

Of course you can always find those individuals whose readiness to compare you to Hitler is quite astonishing, not to say indecent. For instance, if you speak of God and the sound coming from His mouth (the SSSSSSSS I touched upon yesterday), someone is sure to say that you think about God in terms of the Nazis' military structure: the SS, no less. And even if you say neither SSSSSSSS nor ZIZIZIZIZI, they are likely to compare you to Hitler for the simple reason that they seldom, if ever, emphasise the role played by Mao, Trotsky and Lenin in the annihilation of the world. Besides, many individuals – the same ones, probably – firmly believe that Lenin was humane and that his brain was as big as that of Einstein or Nils Bohr. Of course you can point out that Lenin was olive-brained, and if you think you can do that with impunity, you realise at once you were mistaken because they say you are shit-brained, adding 'you know, you dirty scoundrel'.

And if you ask them why they speak only about Hitler in relation to the world conflagration, they say that Hitler and Germany are closer to the Western World than Russia and Asia where everything can happen and does happen very often. So, instead of saying SSSS, you switch to Shush or just shut up for the rest of your social life to which you no longer have any access. Well, anyway our subject matter is not Hitler, who was the abjectest and odiouslest of all dictators, alongside Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot (Paul Gott, as he called himself). It is not even God, although God is always in the wings, as they say. What is more, He is always on the stage – on the *world* stage, to be precise, which does not exclude the fact that He is often disliked in His own country where rebellious angels might rule the waves (or the clouds) in the not-too-distant future.

Let me talk about immobility that spreads its wings over my garden where I sit alone, a few books lying open, wide open on a cosy table. I see a number of clouds moving to some of the horizons I cannot see on account of the trees that bar my way to their lines and the suns emerging from them; and plunging into them again as another night draws nigh. If I were walking in my garden or elsewhere, I would be like a cloud, and I might even think I am one of the clouds – not one of those Lucies who continue to live in the sky. (Mind you.) But I do not budge from where I am, from my wicker chair; and the clouds I admire whenever I raise my eyebrows (or rather my eyes) carry on, demonstrating the beauty of celestial movements. I can, in a way, make love to these clouds only because I remain motionless in my deckchair from which I am reluctant to rise.

No tree can remain motionless for a long stretch of time unless it grows in a windless place where no breeze will ever interfere with its Zen-like attitude. The air was so still that not even the leaves on the trees were moving – a nice description of this attitude, devotion and meditation. The same goes for humans, one must admit, although no one is eager to admit it – even under torture, as they say. I mean, our love-making might profit enormously from being more or less still, especially during those crucial moments described in many romantic novellas where two people shout, scream and eventually fall on their pillows and sheets, utterly exhausted. If you stick to stillness and to a few other things, however, you can achieve what no fidgety adult will ever dream of. A knowledgeable

woman might say to such a yob, ‘Don’t flap – there’s plenty of time to make half a dozen loves before they arrive and eat our oysters.’

So our tree grows calmly and in a dignified manner as it thinks about its sexual intercourse with Heaven that seems to care about its growth, whatever our mythological and sacred books might say on the subject. For instance, our and God’s Heaven says to the tree, ‘Plants grow best in the shade, you know. And you’ve got sunburnt.’

‘I’m no longer a plant. I’m a tree in my own right. Free forest, isn’t it?’

‘You’re still my baby. My newborn baby, my six-week-old baby, my baby boy.’

‘I’m not your baby. I’m your lover.’

GARDEN

I am in my garden and what I am has been reduced to the quality of my brain which is spread around my garden, being its centre- and masterpiece. Whatever comes to it from the moon and stars and comets and even ordinary citizens is received and welcomed with open fibres, vessels and nerves. They open up and welcome either a piece of news or a piece of music, and every piece falls on the fibre designed for it and probably by it, and I stretch my brain's muscles and vessels to enable them to receive as much harmony as they can. And sometimes I shrink like a shrink whose main aim in life is to be a good husband and father to the patients he nurses back to health, to the world, to long life, to death. (And one has to shrink, to withdraw, to tsimtsum, to allow others to flourish.) Back to death sounds nonsensical, but as all verses know and repeat all day long, I am a piece of nonsense or rather of poor sense, and nothing can enrich this sense, making it sensible, credible – or even edible. However long I might continue to spread around my garden and the universe, I shall be what has been written somewhere – by myself perhaps. There is no need to give me a kick, hoping I would reach other nebulas, flying through all the airs one can find on one's way out or in: an air of confidence, to name but one. There is no need for anything, anyone, and I enjoy the moon I see overhead and even down and out – everywhere; to the detriment of the sun. So I am well, as I used to say when I *was* well and even ill, for for some time I boosted my ego by praising my writings and even my cooking: my sauerkraut, for instance. Now I neither boost nor boast and even the number of 'fors' I have to use – *for* this, *for* that, *for* – has diminished dramatically. One day, I shall write a drama entitled *For*. For nothing. Only for animals, for suffering cats and dogs.

I have no idea whether the weather has any effect upon my soul. I do know that the radiation leak has had a disastrous effect upon the environment, but my soul does not belong in it. (The radiation leak or the environment? There are philosophers who conclude that the soul envelops the body, gift-wraps it, because every body is a present, a godsend, a godmeant – not just a piece of meat. So I received this gift almost 70 years ago, but I have had no time to look at it, to unwrap it. So I unwrap it and see a pair of scales where my intentions and inclinations can be seen as they struggle for domination, action, non-action, a never-never accomplishment. Just for a compliment.

*I see what I have seen many summers
And winters. Another winter goes somewhere,
But I see nothing as if I were a non-seer,
A non-autumn, a non-seasoner.
Neither outside, nor inside, nor in-between. There is,*

*There is, there is. And no flower
Will tell the truth. No whys, no wherefores.
Only a patch of ice where there is
Everything.*

*As if there were a feeling; and its resolution.
And convention. Go, go, my pilgrim.
If you can't, stop in the middle of nowhere, nonow.
If you do, say 'I am' or 'I am not'.
And you'll say it forever.*

O, friends! There are no friends! And so on, and so on: there are no friends on the right-hand side, and on the left-hand side I come across a lot of enemies. Of course my enemies often disguise themselves by shaving their heads and wearing false beards which I accept to the point of willing to create a similar beard and glue it on my face. At the end of the ritual I might become an orthodox priest and stay in Russian churches for years and years, paying no attention to *other* friends, *other* enemies, other *lives*. Anyway, one of my friends wears a beard – a genuine beard, for once – and I cannot help saying to myself, 'There are no friends. There are only beards. They may stroke you if you get close enough to their hairs, but that doesn't mean anything. That's what they try to convey to your brain, "There's nothing except love and we caress your face. What else do you need?"' Nothing, nothing. Perhaps I do not need anything and the best way to find out what I need is to lie down under a tree, under a lake, thinking of nothing.

There are fair-weather friends; there are foul-weather friends (or fiends). There are rainy, stormy, sunny, money friends. And they betray me once in a while and this while may last only two minutes. They betray me now, being prepared to betray me two minutes later. And if they fail to betray me on *that* occasion, they might do so on another occasion – three minutes later. Willing and prepared. Betrayals are always on the agenda and our schedules have enough room for them, given that the rooms designated for betrayals are spacious enough to accommodate the American army; or the Russian one.

I say something to a friend and he forgets it. I do not say anything and he begins to question me on the subject he has in mind, in body and elsewhere. He is determined to worm information out of me and my life that does not concern him in the least except that he is my friend. To what extent? I know that

this extent does not exceed £5,000: that is the balance my bank account displays whenever I consult it. Nor does my power and influence exceed my friend's wild expectations, and he knows for sure that his wildest expectations are beyond my ken, reach and riches. So he is just my friend and I never say to him, 'My dearest and nearest.' He is perhaps dear to my heart, but his own heart can be found only beyond the horizon; not anywhere near. He puts a few questions to me and goes away, even if I do not answer them. And if I ask him to pass my book on to another friend of mine, he takes the book and smiles, saying, 'Of course, of course, with pleasure.' Once beyond my range of vision, however, he drops the book into a rubbish bin and goes about his business. And yet the friend to whom I dedicated the book does not live beyond the horizon.

In the Modern Tate Gallery there are halls, walls, wallpapers, paper clips, and so on. Sometimes they rearrange some blocks to create a new space, a new mess, a new black Mass, a new mass. But the installation I am looking at is not entitled 'The explosion reduced the church to a mass of rubble'. Nor does it have to do with our decadence and disintegration. It is true that we arrange our disintegration like this and like that, looking at *that* for a month and walking through *this* all day long at the beginning of some new year. It is art of a sort and we accept our *sort* or destiny as we moon around this gallery of sorts. But there is a picture in it where some people look at the sea as they do in Robert Frost's celebrated poem. 'People look at the sea,' he says. 'They have nothing else to do. They just look at the sea. They wait for neither a liner nor a lifeboat; nor do they aspire to spot a deathboat. They just look at the sea and they see the sea and whatever floats on its surface and even under it. And they say to each other, "This fish is bigger than the other."'

"Which fish? And what about the other?"

"The other what?"

"Fish."

"Nothing."

They think that Truth will out and that Truth is stranger than fiction. They have seen and read a lot of fiction and now they are waiting for Truth that has been released in dribs and drabs. For some time, for some space, for some peace. Tonight the sea is as peaceful as the Peace Corps or peace dividend. So they look at the Peace Corps and smile as broadly as they can. And then they look at the War Corps (or War Corpses) and immediately grow sad, mad and almost dead.

A few inches further you find a picture made up of paper clips. Another angle of vision, another facet of our contemporary life, art and brain that needs a small metal object to fasten things together or hold them in position. One might say this picture represents our bureaucracy or mentality. Or death. Or the death of art. Or nothing at all. Or just *at* – *at* the Modern Tate Gallery.

I wake up and look at the windows that begin to fidget as if they were sitting on the image of the street I step onto whenever I leave my garden, my house. They fly hither and thither and over the street, and no one can say they cannot fly because they have a broken wing and prosthesis instead of a leg. My blood pressure flies too and even my blood seems to take a walk in the sky in spite of my cries and tears. So I realise I have been in death's company ever since my birth, and damnation is my dearest friend so that I cannot say, not at the moment, 'O friends, there are no friends,' because I cannot say there are no damnations.

If a bird descends and settles on my soul, I have no idea what she, he, it, id, yet might mean. I just feel another slice of weight and this slice performs *Tristan und Isolde* or another masterpiece I was fond of in my youth. My friend writes a lot of books and sometimes you come across the word *Sein* he has crossed out many times as if inspired by Heidegger and the oblivions we demonstrate in the presence of our own Being. So our criss-crossed Being departs and what I am left with amounts to _____ or to X or to -----. I prefer the latter version of my Being: at least I can see something in between the stretches.

What do you do when you realise your damnation is by your side? Sitting in the armchair opposite. Drinking your cognac, your champagne. Eating your name. Is it worth my while talking to my damnation or even to that related to humanity as such? Was Adam damned? You pick this name up and begin to probe into its secrets, thinking that the Kabbalah might help you, given that it always finds a great many truths in a word and even in a letter. So you write down 'Adam' and remove the first letter: you do not really need it. And if you do, you can go back to it at any time. Anyway, no one is about to filch the name of Adam after rummaging through your writing desk. 'Dam' is still there, right in front of you and me and my soul. Nothing prevents me from adding 'N' to 'Dam' and I do add it, creating a new-old word 'Damn'. And I take a deliberate decision to indulge in a little nostalgia. 'Damn, I've spilt coffee down my trousers!' 'Damn, I've missed that theatrical performance!' I used to say all that even 20 years ago when I still drank coffee and went to the opera. Now I just say, 'Damn, damn, damn' – in John Gielgud's footsteps. (One can hear his footsteps in Alain Resnais' *Providence*.) Divine providence, divine footsteps, divine damnation.

Damnation, damnation, damnation, damnation, damnation. Whatever they say to you, you answer, 'Damnation.' You demonstrate your knowledge of the Bible, of Leibniz and of Deleuze. What else do you need? What else do *they* need? They probably need your glory which might allow them to say to their friends, 'I present you with real glory, not just some glossy hair and a pile of glossy magazines.' I

say ‘damnation’ and this damnation – and many other ones, to tell the truth – follow hard on my heels and even on my wheels on meals, on my drinks. Of course they think I am Judah(s) and I say I do not have as much as £30 in my safe. Tomorrow I shall have the Russian soup I bought three weeks ago for two euros. I have no idea whether it is another damnation or a blessing. Perhaps both; in disguise.

Again down there. And no other bodies, weathers, thoughts.

Another knot, another Not, as they say.

No matter who says that. Even if nothing had ever been said and done,

I would have found myself before myself; and beyond.

There are selves, selves, shelves,

And I look and mook. (Torment in Russian.)

Tonight my windows do not fly as if weary of flying and dying in the air. At least I might have seen something else, not only death, his company. I might have seen a rose that has no why. I have no idea why they think it is a remark of genius: nothing is with why. Is I with why? Of course you can ask, ‘Why I and not Ivan? Why the Sun and not a pool of blood?’ You can also ask, ‘Why all these whys?’ And they may answer you thus, ‘These whys have no whys.’ There are no whys and I look at whatever I am allowed to look at and say, ‘Damnation is without why, but every why is with damnation.’ And what is without damnation? *Da* is with it because as soon as you say ‘*Da*’ (or Yes), damnation follows with a note informing you that the bill for it will follow in a day or two. Damnation, yesmnation, ouimnation, simnation. Or simply nation. During our damnation, no one is allowed more than their ration of food, clothing and fuel; and duel.

If my windows begin to fly, leaving the rest where it is, I see another space within my space. The latter does not move; the former does without leaving the latter. Former-latter, formerlatter. May I have another angle of vision without moving my carcass? Vultures flew around in the sky waiting to pick at the rotting carcass of the deer. I am her dear, their dear. Now they are far away, but their dears stay with me so I can say, ‘I was her deer, his deer. And I’m a carcass – not their carcass, mind you. Not Caracas, not Caucasus either.’ My windows continue to fly, but they do not show anything except the same blackness and tediousness. Perhaps I should fly with them. Then I shall learn Chinese and China and Manna from Heaven.

My windows fly and I am glued to them, eager to see anything beyond everything I see and enjoy. I see neither plants nor women who are to dance for me. I do see women whose dances do not look like dances. They do not look at all, and therefore I do not look at them. I do not look at anything and that is how I go to sleep. You do not need to say Czechoslovakia, as Lubitsch does. I just say, 'Damnation,' and the windows I look out of echo my sentiment, my scent, my sensation, my period of probation, my initiation. And I think I am on the edge of dementia. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. Or Aleffeiner disease. And if you need a Z, you put it somewhere.

As one of the texts I consult indefinitely says, 'I adore you, my Lord. But I don't tremble before Thee, Thou, Thy and Yes.' So he or she, whoever they are, crawl under their numerous beds and pray, pray and so on. There is only one bed under which I could crawl to safety. What safety? With a wriggle, I managed to crawl through the gap, last night. What gap? Any gap would do. Bruckner's *Fifth Symphony*. I wonder if there is one beautiful melody in the world. Mahler's *Fifth*? A beautiful teenager? Under my 16th-century bed.

Do I hate God? Under my bed, above my bed, under my God? If it had not not had been for Him, I would not have not ever hever been born, let alone reborn. I was born and perhaps reborn, several times, Caesarsss, Midasssss. Better not, and whenever someone says, 'What are you talking about?' (as usual) you answer, 'About everything. Everything is not. And if it is or yes, it should vanish in the twinkling of an eye.' I still have an eye and that eye of mine can twinkle. So it twinkles, twinkles, wrinkles. One eye is enough to deplenish the Earth. But I do not hate God and my soul's amplitude has been taken up by sluggishness and lethargishness.

I adore God *par-dessus tout, par-dessus Parnassum*. And well above humanity. Is that how one is supposed to love God? Is that how one is supposed to hate Him? Preparations for damnation are now proceeding smoothly. So I am damned now, I am being damned. Yet I do not hate God. I hate His Creation. But He is well above His Creation, isn't He? By its side. He withdrew Himself from this virtual, future mess. And Free Will is someone's weakness, free weakness. And if you say, 'I am *Memento*,' or '*Alma*', or '*Aleff*', you accept all. And even more, as Manilov said to Chichikov. You accept betrayals, lies and disappearances. Your own disappearances.

And there are no other.

Something, and one.

One hears.

Nothing has been heard

Since Kepler, since Mahler.

Since do, ré, mi, fa.

thing.

So I am not a genius. And if I am not, nothing counts. There are only counts, counts, and a count sometimes. I have written my requiem and my friend is about to listen to it. But what is the matter? There is no matter. And any requiem is just a mass you use to bury yourself. You bury yourself and hear, '*Requiem eternam*,' and you hear these words eternally or *eternam*. The only eternity you can count on. *Eternam, eternam, eternam. Donna eis, eisdonnas, seis, meis.* I am not dead yet and I wonder why: almost everyone has died around me. Everything has died above and under me. That goes without saying. Sayings go, withouts go too. Any go-go goes. They made a fortune during the go-go years of the 1980s. They made a fortune during the go-go years of the 3000s. A fortune, a mortune.

If I do not hate God, I do not hate His Creation. If I hate His Creation, I hate its Creator – God. So my soul's amplitude is very small because I expel everything except God Whom I adore. God grows smaller and smaller, given that He is deprived of his Creation. Usually one sees God with rivers flowing down His Face, Chest, Legs and so on. And continents stay on His Chest so that, whenever His shirt is open to the waist revealing a very hairy chest, our bells ring out to welcome in the New Year, to welcome out the Old Year, to welcome in the New Messiah, to welcome out the Old Messiah.

I do not hate God's Creation and I stroke every leaf I find within my reach. Of course there are many leaves I cannot stroke because they are *out* of my reach. What happens amounts to this: I stroke them mentally and spiritually. I stretch out my thought that goes as far as the leaf I wish to caress. Then I caress this leaf and also other leaves I happen to touch as I caress the first leaf, the aim of my garden-enclosed journey. So I caress God's Creation on a daily basis; and I go so far as to caress His *Un*-Creation, alias my imagination and its figments. I know they were created by God at the time when His Big Bang made its bigs and bangs and their utmost. Nevertheless I take part in this small creation, being God's image and tool. So I create my figments and they turn up somewhere – sometimes right in

front of me. 'I've known time and I still know some bits of it.' (One of my figments. God's uncreated pigment.)

Even if I stay in my garden, I am exposed to damnation. A damnation-step, a damnation-gesture, a damnation-meal (the middle supper), a midsummer-damnation. There are only mids, middles, midsts and mists in the damnation-zone. No happy endings. No face-to-face rituals. 'Whose face is it? My God!'

'It is my face you're looking at.'

'At close range?'

'That's right.'

'No more mists and twists.'

'No more looking glasses.'

'You're so beautiful.'

'I am.'

'Let me –'

'I don't let.'

'What?'

'No face-rubbing.'

The damnation-rub.

But if I am damned, I should not touch whatever or whoever I love – this autumn leaf, for instance. I cannot say I am head over heels in love with this leaf; and yet I might touch it once in a while, if it is within my reach. Or even if it is out of it. Please reread the above paragraph, as Spinoza says so often. In short, if I touch one of those leaves – perish the thought and the thought has already perished, thanks to my additional prayer, perishayer – the leaf in question becomes or grows damned in virtue or rather in vice of my touch. So I had better not touch anything – if I am damned, that is (and that *does*, that does a *lot*). If I am blessed, on the other hand, I can touch everything. And the more beings, things and nebulas I touch, the better. I am a benefactor of humanity and a messiah perhaps (no capital M, false modesty). So I touch 'M' and it becomes 'Hail Mary'. I am greeted with the usual hail-fellow-well-met slap on the back and handshake.

I do not care about Donald Trump, but I like his firing, his cold fire. He looks at his subordinates, listens to them for a while and says, 'You're fired.' And if they go on talking or just looking, he says, 'Get out.' And they obey his command. They head for a lift and say, 'Well, I never. Well, I ever.'

Never ever. Well, I'll be damned! Be damned if you do and damned if you don't. No, I'm not damned because I'm one of the elect. Next time he can damn well do it himself! Do it yourself, you, bastard, you Donald Trump, Donald Bump! Donald Duck, Donald Muck! It's you I fire! Fire!' One opens one's eyes, says, 'You're fired,' and shuts one's eyes.

One insinuates and intimates a lot by striking out the word Being. ~~Being~~, ~~Being~~, ~~Being~~, ~~Being~~, ~~Being~~. Then one writes, 'Being', and sets out to discover a cure for cancer. No, of course not. There is no such thing as a cure for cancer, either actual or virtual. But there are many beings who suffer from it. So I can strike out 'Being' because there are many non-beings all around me. So I write down 'Non-Being, Non-Being, Non-Being', and so on. I write down (and out), 'A down-and-out loser,' 'nobody loves you when you're down and out.' Then I write (out), 'Only those whose Christian faiths are central to their lives and daily rounds love downs and outs.' Then I strike out both downs and outs; but I do not tinker with 'ends'.

If I am wrong, I am not right. If I am right, I may be wrong. And I *am* wrong because I am always wrong, and I cannot be otherwise. Life is wrong, days are wrong; so are nights. One minute is right and it is gone. A minute is a minute and nothing can replace it, even the minutes one recalls throughout one's life. So I say I am wrong and go on saying so until my doom comes; and so does my day. All of them come at once and I say, 'I'm wrong.' But I am right for once. No, I am wrong for once and even for twice. I am doubly wrong and to make my wrongness doubly wrong, I say I am sure I am wrong. And then nothing comes; and nothing goes. Whatever is, is. Above, below, forever and for; and more, and more, and less.

There are many flowers around me: hycitus, rosemintus, elepodis, neuropodis, caliputus, enorentis. And there are trees; some of them are dead and mad. Madimus is mad; deadimus is dead. But that does not mean that lifelimus is alive. I think it is deadlier, deader than the others.

Well, everything counts because everybody and thing are God. So every...counts. Only parentheses do not. ((((((((((((((You count parentheses and realise they do not count. So you discount them:)))))))))))))))))). There are more discounts than counts. And I hear a piece of music; I always do. And this piece and peace say, 'You're cosy. And in French you're *moisi*. Mouldy, mildewed.' All right, I am mild and also dewed, covered with dew. A dewy morning. Just a flower; or a leaf I touch now and then; all the time. We are damned, blessed, damned, blessed, esse.

One puts two and two together and makes four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and even ten; and even twelve. My esoteric teaching goes back to the days when I was putting two and three together. There are only fifths, sixths and sevenths. Circles encircle everything, every other circle and square. And my friend calls me to say she is in no mood for moods. 'No mood is everything,' says one of her gurus. 'Everything is no mood,' I answer. And any multiplication or diminution table can say at once and many times, 'Everything is nothing,' 'nothing is two', 'nothing is two and two,' 'nothing is nothing,' 'everyman is noman or newman'.

What is life? La-di-do-and-dooda. What is not life? La-di-do-and-doodo. What is death? La-di-doo-and-do-death. And what is mess? Life, death and the rest. Everything, everybody, everysoul, evergody. I say, 'God, God, God, God.' I say, 'Body, Body, Body.' And the body stands in front of me and even inside. So I say, 'You're fired.' And the body is fired. The soul is fired as well. They go to the nearest lift, saying, 'We're fired, we're fired.' They take the lift and go down, up, down, up. They push a few buttons and the buttons push them. So the lift goes up, astray. They say, 'The lift must have gone astray in the cosmos.'

'Why?' ask the people in charge.

'The lift was led astray by an out-of-date map.'

'No,' say the others.

'Why?' say the others.

'Because the lift was led astray by an *up*-to-date map.'

Whatever I put on death does not alter it. I can put *Niet* on death. It does not work; death continues to work. I can put *Unwork* on it, on him, on her. For a time it does not work. My unwork works and death's works do not. Then 'un' disappears and only work remains. Death work, work, work – without 's'. Death can work without 'h', 't', 'a'. Death works without letters. 'De' works as well as any work. A work works; so does death. And so does love. Love works without 'e' and even without 'v'. If you say, 'I lo you,' everyone kisses you. And if you say, 'I k you,' you press your lips on the globe. And the globe says and thinks, 'Sadly, my feelings for him were not reciprocated.'

A drop of water is or is not. It is everything and it remembers my Tudors and tutors. And it is nothing. I put it on the surface of the Sun and it vanishes into thin nothingness. Is that a tautology? Thin nothingness? Life, liveliness. Another tautology. What if I put this liveliness on the surface of the

Sun? Nothing, nothing, nothing. *Niente*, as Heidegger puts it. And I do it with *niente*. What do I do with it? The answer is not, '*Niente*.' I do it with ente, ente, ente. I do with it double ente every minute. And every minute does the same with every minute; and even with every second. So does a drop of water.

Therefore, be an island to yourself and to others. Be a river to yourself. Flow as long as you can flow and go. Stop when you can stop. Whenever you stop, become an island. When you know you are an island, stand up and pick up whatever you can pick up and down. You pick something up and put it down. You build a house and up and up and up you go. You become a god or a man or Robinson Crusoe. The sea here has been fished intensively over the last ten years. You will fish it intensively over the next five years. Then you will die. No Friday, no Saturday. Whosoever shall live either now or after my death as an island unto himself, as a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge.

Zero is not just what it is. It is a glass of water. And a glass of water is nirvana or *vanna* – 'bath' in Russian. I put my body, soul and the rest into this *vanna* and enjoy it, enjoy it, enjoy it. If I do not, it is neither nirvana nor *vanna*. It is *na, na, na*. They say, 'Give me a million,' and I answer, '*Na*.' That is what human conversations are about. And out. And nirvana is a sort of motionlesslesslesslessness. You just stare, being aware all the time. A kind of peacefulness overcame him as he stared up at the stars, as they say all the time. This kind overcomes me once again. (And this time.) I stare up at the stars. But there are no stars, no stars at all.

August 4, 2016

Theologians are always criticised for using arguments and drawing conclusions that obfuscate the main issue. And the main issue concerns the marriage thanks to which our Heaven and Hell can reach agreement, putting saints and sinners together; somewhere in between, presumably. I shall just summarize the main points of the argument in a few words if I may – not in a few Blake-born *worlds*, mind you. We still have neither the sun nor our satellite, the moon, but luckily for us and our animal kingdom, a tree agreed to seduce Heaven and sprinkle it with its life-bestowing liquid. We are trying to promote commerce between our countries, between Russia and Europe, between the States and other States. And we are not likely to last long in the world of commerce, if there is no sun in the sky; but we could get rid of Lucy whose presence either in the sky or on Earth no one really requires. There are so many Lucies in Heaven and Hell that some of them are dispensable, you know. I recall a bad joke about a man who talks to his son in the following manner, 'Son (just another son), never run after a tram or a woman. There'll be another one in a minute or two.' Well, our feminists can object to this

assertion, saying, ‘You’re always speaking about sons, you sexist maniacs. What about daughters? Let us rephrase this joke of yours that should go thus, “Daughter, never run after a tram or a man.” Sounds better, doesn’t it? Tram-man, tram-man. Tram-ta-ta-ra-ram. “There’ll be another one in a second or three.”’

In the meantime the Sun remains under the Earth or under water, assuming there are some puddles worthy of their names about which we could write home. So we pray to our Tree, saying, ‘Our Tree! Grow as quickly as possible, if Thou pleasest, and fertilise Heaven, giving birth to your son called The Sun. We’re trying to develop a model for best practice in electronic commerce, but without the Sun, your son, we can’t see the wires and electrodes.’

‘I don’t care about your wires,’ says the Tree. ‘My twigs are much more beautiful than them.’

‘All right, all right. Of course, of course. We wholeheartedly agree with you. But the point is we need your Heaven for other purposes as well.’

‘What purposes?’

‘We need to spend the rest of our eternal lives in Paradise. So we’re about to ask you to furnish Heaven luxuriously, providing for all our desires and libidos.’

We also need Heaven for our crops, and often our gods or rather shamans sing their singsongs, raising their eyes and arms towards the Sun:

Please, my dear, please, my dear

Get away, get away.

It’s our rain we want to play with,

Our unmanageable tear.

From our Heaven’s eye it drops,

Our tear, culpa mea.

If it doesn’t, our crops

Will forever go. Where?

Once their hymn is over, they show in what direction our crops will go, if those heavenly tears do not drop on time, in time for growth and harvests. ‘Where to? Where to?’ ask the sufferers.

‘Here we go, here we go, here we go!’ chant the crops.

‘*Ne nous quittez pas.* Don’t leave us, for God’s sake!’ chant the crowd.

‘We decided the time had come to take leave of your regions,’ answer the crops.

The peasants do their best to catch up with the crops, but the latter vanish into thin air, whereupon the air grows so thick the crowd can no longer breathe. As one man, these primitive and pure people sit down and catch all their breaths. ‘Did you catch your breaths?’ ask the shamans. ‘It’s easier to catch one’s breath than any crop you can think of, isn’t it?’

‘What are we to do?’ ask the participants. (All these people take part in a sort of shamanistic show.)

‘You should cry,’ say the shamans.

‘What for?’

‘If our rain doesn’t come to us, we should go to our rain,’ answer the shamans. ‘You should shed your tears so abundantly and generously and in such a way that no refusal on the part of our crops will ever resound in our ears, minds and memories.’

Our peasants and labourers begin to cry so loudly that trees and mountains take pity on them – to no avail, though: these have never been instrumental in bringing about crops, however insignificant and futile.

August 5, 2016

No handkerchiefs are used in the course of this ritual: the Earth should drink every tear dropped by agonising inhabitants of the region forsaken by the rain, adored by the Sun. There is no denying the Sun loves this region to distraction, which makes us reconsider our attitude towards its kindness and goodwill: every woman in love knows that, from time to time, she must disappear and let another woman take her place – for the sake of her former partner’s happiness. But the Sun does not realise to what extent it may become a real nuisance, if no celestial drops drip-drop on our Earth, permitting every individual to eat bread and butter while drinking beer, wine and vodka. All right, let us assume the Sun is a male and not a mere *it* about which Sigmund Freud talked a lot – not in relation to ‘he’ and ‘she’, though. ‘It, it, it, it,’ he used to say, pointing out that ‘It was It and that’s It’. He would even point to the spot where It seemed to be located and his followers were eager to put some flowers on this spot to commemorate the memorable occasion called ‘the discovery of IT’.

Never mind, never mind. The Earth has not yielded any crop yet, and so our peasants and even some workers, some future revolutionists, continue to shed their tears, using neither handkerchiefs nor Kleenexes. Nothing doing: their efforts come to nothing and it is no wonder they resort to other fertilisers such as the urine they keep within their bodies until those blissful moments when they may finally water their fields, flowers and trees, thereby making a contribution to the beauty of nature. Everything (not *everybody*) blossoms and artists paint their landscapes, charging shockingly high prices for the products of their realism. Two senior officials have been entrusted with organising the auction at which not only those bits of nature but also emaciated men and women will be sold at astronomical prices.

Of course the peasants and others complain as they fall down and sideways, being unable to withstand the force of gravity and the pressure of hunger and death. ‘We’ve got no more tears, no more urine.’

‘Go to the nearest pool,’ say the senior officials, ‘and fill your buckets with water. And make sure the water doesn’t slop out of the buckets as you carry them to the fields.’

‘If a river, lake, etc. dries up, the water in it disappears,’ say the peasants and their wives.

‘Do you mean to say there’s no more water in our pools?’

‘That’s exactly what we mean,’ they answer, nodding their heads and ripping their clothes to shreds.

‘And what about our *swimming* pools?’ ask the officials.

‘We no longer *swim* in them. We just crawl around on our hands and knees.’

Why should I bother about all these people? Because I run a large charity? Because I am just a human being and so nothing human or inhuman is foreign to my soul and body: neither art, nor water, nor wheat, nor nightmares in which shamanic rituals occur all the time unless your diet is healthy enough to guard you against this rigmarole. I have a mistress whose speciality may be called ‘magnetism’ because of the pendulum she swings as she banishes all evil fluids and vibes from your body. (And she is jealous to the point of trying to banish all *wives* from my thoughts.) And sometimes you just feel the warmth (and vibes) of her hands that hover around your head as you doze off, lulled as you are into a false sense of security or into thinking that you are fit. And if you do not think so – and say so, into the bargain – she says to you (and me), ‘You should think you’re fit, fit, fit.’

‘It?’

August 6, 2016

And then she looks at you as if asking what all this means and you have no wish to say to her that Freud’s terminology invades your mind to the point of making you forget the Tree of Life where there are twigs and branches and leaves: life itself. Your ‘it’, the one you are thinking of, is as dead as the dead instinct our Sigmund speaks about day and night. The point is his life instinct is also dead, day and night and even round the clock so that you realise you are neither it, nor he, nor she, and there is only a body lying on a divan somewhere – not on Goethe’s divan, to be sure – and you are submitted to definitions and determinations as if there were nothing else in the world; only definitions, determinations, admissions, trials, tribulations and moleculations. You are ‘it’ and this it continues to live, alongside many other its, and someone says, ‘You’re a machine or a cog in a machine,’ and next day, instead of saying proudly, ‘I am IT,’ you admit you are nothing at all, not even the at, let alone the all. For once, you would not mind being part of the all – of all the proletarians who unite somewhere, out of sight and within the minds of late-in-the-day Marxists. But they and all life instincts lie within the night-of-the-day and mean nothing, even if they seem to mean *something* in the light of a day or a night or a candle.

But then we make love: for once, I am not talking about abstract categories and Hegel whose clear-cut structures cut open and open many issues on which one can rely as one and I strain to unravel

the secrets of genetics and also of life in its general magnitude. Our lovemaking cuts open a few things that should remain open and they do remain open as long as it is necessary to reach an ecstatic conclusion preceded by a satisfying development. But what strikes me in every sense of the term is the immobility by means of which it is achieved – the final harmony, I mean; the one I find in Beethoven's *Sonata op. 111* and Mahler's *Erde* – so different from Goethe's *Erde* and her Mothers. Two friends meet and part, and that is what really happens or unhappens: after all, this is a farewell ceremony, and there are so many farewell ceremonies in every world we visit in the course of our wanderings that it is not worth our while enumerating all of them.

And every act of lovemaking is made up of meetings and partings; and before parting, if only for half an hour, we remain as motionless as our fixed stars, our Ptolemy-devised heaven where stars are riveted to a number of spots and look at each other eternally, for they have nothing else to do. And we remain for a while, for a long and eternal while, on the brink and threshold of everything as if being on a threshold were more rewarding (as they put it now) than plunging headlong into the sea of trouble and also into that of joy. Staying on the threshold. Isn't it the only harmony one can stumble upon? No harmony here or there; or over there, for that matter. Anyway, the only harmony worthy of its name is right here, under our feet, in our ears, in front of our eyes and bodies. And when you do come across this harmony and take your root in it, you suddenly see the twinkling of an object that has no affinities with the stars they always talk about when talking to children. And you realise that everything and everybody twinkles, tinkles – not only the stream you heard in the distance; its silvery tinkle.

*Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle,
Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.*

There is a line in this poem that makes my spine tingle every time I read it. When I am a mere twinkle in my mother's eye.

August 7, 2016

You have a dream and talk about it to your friends whose interest in it either wanes or waxes – in accordance with their knowledge of human mythology. There is a widespread opinion that talks to us mostly about mythologies; and however trivial our dreams may sound and look, they elicit lots of remarks on the part of those who see through trees and serpents, and consequently cannot stop at what is called the 'literal sense'. For instance, you say, 'I sat down under a tree,' and they answer immediately, without batting an eyelid, 'Shadow is the yin aspect opposed to the yang aspect. It may well be – and etymology would seem to bear this out – that the basic dualism of Chinese philosophical definition was originally represented by the shady side of a valley opposed to its sunny side.' So you

say, ‘I wasn’t looking for a shadow, you know. I was hungry and there was a sandwich in my bag that I opened and rummaged in for a while. They sell sandwiches and rolls, you know.’ But they do not listen to you, whatever you say or might say, for they have their own theories that they are eager to develop in your presence because exposing them in your absence would deprive them of the audience they seek so obstinately. They gain momentum and begin to talk about Freud and his shadow – his theory related to it – and you say to them somewhat rudely: ‘I’m not a Nazi. If I remember rightly, every Nazi had to project his nastiness (naziness – Joyce’s way) onto innocent and wonderful people. Anyway, I just ate two sandwiches and one roll.’

There is a theory – there are only theories in our world and minds – according to which we are nothing but fragments of a God who destroyed Himself at the beginning of time because He was not keen on His own existence. And what if time had no beginning, no Big Ben? Anyway, this theory makes it clear that we are neither gods nor supermen, nor superwomen, nor superchildren. At best we are only some fragments that agonise as they wait for the end of times and spaces.

There are many atheists in our midst and if they speak of God, they do it offhandedly, nonchalantly, and they have never been able to realise that God is a formidable figure Who commands a great deal of respect. They often play with the English word ‘God’, with the very word that denotes the almightiness of the Almighty, and say, for instance, ‘My dog is my God, and there’s no other God apart from my dog.’ It is pointless to enlarge upon blasphemies within these individuals’ field of hearing and vision. And even if you raise your arms and look up to Heaven, muttering your most efficient prayer, they laugh in your face and end up laughing themselves silly, ludicrous, horrible, awful and damned. But there are other individuals whose trains of thought (of thorn) are linked to the Crown of Thorns, to the Cross, to the nails one could see on Jesus’ hands; and even to the mud through which his family and colleagues squelched on the day of His resurrection. Upon seeing mud, they say, ‘It’s that mud, the Mud,’ and even if you say to them there are other muds in the history of humankind, they answer, ‘There’s only one mud and we’ll drag your name through this mud, if you keep on talking nonsense.’

They see a blade of grass and say, ‘This is another thorn and nothing but a thorn.’ And they affirm that Walt Whitman’s poem is focused upon the suffering endured by Jesus on the Cross and also before the hours He spent on it. And if you point out that Jesus never paid a visit to the United States of America, they laugh in your face – these individuals too are addicted to this sort of laughter – and say that Jesus discovered America, and therefore whoever touches upon Columbus with regard to this exploit is already in Hell, in the lowest circle of it. And they add, pointing at the nearest cloud, ‘We want long-term solutions, not short-term palliatives.’ And they remind us that we are just a multitude of fragments that come either from the Devil’s body or from Christ’s One.

BE(E)

INTRODUCTION

Every soul has amplitude, for it is not tantamount to nothing, whatever they say in their studies and in public. Even if the soul does not so much as exist, it does have amplitude, if only for the sake of those who rely on its existence for their salvation and peace of mind. Even if their souls are at war with their bodies, they do not mind, opting once and for all for spirituality, to the detriment of physicality. In Russia one can visit the Optina *pustinia* (the Optina desert) which is inhabited by those who opted for spiritual upheavals to the detriment of evils.

I am measuring the amplitude of my soul. I do not hate God, although, now and then, I might hate His creation which does not come up to my expectations, be they great, small or non-existent. It does come, however, and that is what I dislike intensely, to the extent of reducing my soul's amplitude to zero: *no passaram, no passaram. Sram, sram, sram.* (Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Addressing the world.) I think today my soul is equal to 1.76 imperial pints: I have drunk a lot of wine and consequently am about to forgive one yard of the world, two yards, three courtyards.

I might understand something, but what I understand depends on what it is and whether it can be understood at all, even by pundits and bandits. The latter understand Hobbes' attitude to humanity much better than anyone else. In my youth I was influenced by haikus, but I am not sure I understood the first thing about them, for the first thing is the language in which I might have found birds, gardens, colours and wintertime. Perhaps one cannot come across and cross any time without languages and their meanings, however elusive. I am not one and I am not sure I have crossed anything in the course of my life. I might have crossed a few times or one time, and the language I use as I refer to this time and its counterparts sounds thus, 'Oh Lord, oh Lord, oh oh, oh oh.' One 'oh', two 'ohs', three 'ohs'; the amplitude of my soul; or rather of my body. Zero 'oh'. Or just 'O'.

What about my amplitude today? And altitude? Not far from mountaintops, am I? Not quite, not quite. Here is my soul's diagram:

Two: Falling in love with a cloud.

Two and a half: Smelling a flower.

Three: Stroking a flower.

Three and one-quarter: Putting the flower into a vase.

Three and three-quarters: Pouring some water into the vase.

Three and four-quarters or four: I love both the flower and the vase.

Four and one-third: I also love water, down to raindrops.

Four and three-fifths: And also down to puddles, even if I may occasionally tread in this or that puddle.

Four and four-fifths: Even a puddle of wee.

The moonlight. A tree inside it.

That's what immortality is about.

Mortality is not about.

A famous singer said, 'I'd like to be a bee because I don't like birds. I do sing like a bird, like a nightingale, but I don't like birds. I'm not keen on their wings – they flap too much, you know. Flappy-clappy. But I like bees because I'm as busy as them. (You must have noticed *that*.) We have a lot in common because I like honey and money. And I fly from one continent to another. I don't like planes. I'd like to fly like a bee, from Saint-Petersburg to New York. In half an hour.'

I am not as busy as a bee, me, me, me; not any more. I buzz of course. At least I can hear something buzzing. And there are no bees either inside my house or outside it (or outside my bonnet) – in my garden, in the sky. There are bees inside me and my honey is right there. And also my be, my to be. (And my happy bunny.) I bee and fly and everything, whatever it is. To bee, the answer.

And (the) death I carry wherever I go? My variety of death? Of the common one, the mass one? Even as a bee I have to be screened for bombs at airports. (All women over 50 are also screened for breast cancer.) So I go through another portico and hear, 'Beep, beep, beep, deep, deep.' And officers ask me, 'What's so deep inside you?'

'Death,' I say.

'And what's so beep?'

‘The same death,’ I answer.

‘Which one?’

‘The one you suffer from.’

‘This death of yours can kill all our passengers.’

And they bar my path.

And I bless them.

My blessing goes somewhere. So does a bee and it does not really matter whether it flies or gets down on all fours, on all floors. When looking at these floors, I see only bees crawling around them. Isn't it better to see flowers? My flowers? What are my flowers? Evil ones? Blessed ones? The latter variety, for sure. I pick this variety up, put it under my nose and eyes and say, ‘Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.’ I get down on all fours, on all fives and sixes – my senses count too – and crawl until I meet another bee, another bonnet, another source of honey.

I be and what and not. And who, and whose. So many, so nice. A glass of wine. Clinking my glasses with a sultan and his turret. Or whatever, whoever. What do I remember? Wine, sultan, Omar – a Belgian beer. And my ear that hears all this sense and nonsense: ‘Drink, that's life, that's wife, that's eternity, a glass of sherry, the body of Mary, of bloody, be merry.’ As merry as a bee. As busy as the merry wives of Windsor.

August 8, 2016

Others enlarge upon the death of God and when someone says to them, ‘God is alive and kicking,’ they kick this person, saying, ‘We're God. Can you feel our life?’ The problem of this particular death has pursued humankind for two centuries at least, considering that Nietzsche was not the first to point out that God's corpse could be seen in the streets. Even in the 17th century one could hear the song entitled ‘God is dead’, provided one had an opportunity to open one's window and turn one of one's ears towards the street where itinerant musicians seemed to dance on God's tomb. Oddly enough, there are churchgoers whose faith in God has not been shaken by His death for the simple reason that death does not mean much in our existence: we can prolong our stay on Earth – if we ardently wish to do so – and achieve the feat of Resurrection without being resurrected. For instance, you can say to an unbeliever, ‘All right, God *is* dead, but that doesn't mean anything.’

‘How so?’ asks the unbeliever. ‘Do you mean you can nurse Him back to life?’

‘I don't mean *that*,’ says the believer. ‘I mean you can live with Him and drink with him – as if He were alive, you know.’

A genuine believer thinks that faith should be born *individually*: it is not just a tradition and a number of rituals to which you submit your body and soul. In other words, God is inside, and in other words – there are so many words in the world one can pick and choose until doomsday – you are pregnant, no less. And once you realise the importance of your blessedness, you set about making preparations for His birth and subsequent life. You buy a push-chair, a cot and even a bouncy castle that you install in one of your rooms where God's destiny will unfold itself to the benefit of humanity. The pram is in the corner and the cot is ready upstairs because a real God cannot spend his very first hours in a cellar or even on the ground floor where heavenly vibes are not as efficient as in any attic.

But real faith is not as easy as pies and ABCs; in other words you have to squelch through the mud of *Nichts* and execute a series of leaps in the dark – or rather in the light, considering the result of your leaps. In other words, you must steel yourself for a difficult pregnancy: as a result of one of your leaps, you develop the potentially life-threatening pre-eclampsia (dangerously high blood pressure). That is what happens in music when a composer adopts the so-called sonata form in which an exposition is followed by a development. First you expose three themes (a reminder of the Holy Trinity) which paint a white picture of your future life impregnated with God's glory and your salvation. But these themes should be developed into all-out confrontation, otherwise your faith might be laughed at by priests and bigots. 'Your faith is like a pie crust,' they might say, laughing in your face once more and with unbridled maliciousness. 'You haven't deserved the pie itself, not yet. And we wonder if you'll ever eat it.'

Your husband pays you a visit and the maternity hospital where your body is about to give birth to God (not to a nation, for once) opens its doors for him and many other acutely anxious men and women. He sits down by your bedside and says pensively, his eyes looking at the past and into it, into its very bosom, 'I remember –'

'What *do* you remember?' you ask him as if mistrustful of your capacity to communicate with him through your thoughts, vibes and waves.

'The same maternity ward. Two years ago, when you were pushing Peter out, you made funny noises.'

'Funny?'

'Like a cow, you know.'

'A cow? How so?'

'It was a bit odd.'

'He wasn't God, was he?'

'No, just Peter. Not even *Saint* Peter.'

'This time I'll scream like an angel, I promise.'

You go into labour, but a scan shows your baby's (God's) heartbeat has stopped. Everything on the scan is motionless and so you can see no beating heart, no palpitating soul, not a flicker of life, no

light at the end of the tunnel. You realise something has gone wrong and your pastor says, 'He's gone, He's gone.'

'But God never goes,' you answer.

'Do you mean He only *comes*?' asks the priest.

'Yes, yes, yes,' you answer.

'Your faith will save you,' says the priest.

God had died when the placenta had detached, and this afternoon your neighbours hear you crying and moaning, 'Placenta, piacenti, *piangi, piangi*.' But what does it matter *how* He died? you ask yourself as you continue to moan and disturb your neighbours whose sweet dreams have already turned into nightmares – overnight, overdays. In the meantime you have drifted into unconsciousness because, without God's presence and breath (and breadth), life has no meaning, whatever Monty Python might say on the subject. Even in your unconscious state, however, you cry and moan as if God's funeral did not depend on your mind and the worlds where all sorts of tragedies happen on stage and in parks, around golf links. (The children still enjoy floating their boats on the pond in the park – in spite of God's death.) You survive six major haemorrhages and kidney failure, and are given 15 blood transfusions, but whatever treatment and method you go through, doctors fail to stem the flood of blood; or just the Flood – that is human mythology for you.

September 8

I've never lain anywhere.

Not flying either. Not

In between, and there are

No this, those,

Clouds, nebulas.

I'm writing a letter.

No letters to be

Written, read.

*One glance that does every-
thing.*

There are no things.

August 9, 2016

For the sake of God, however, (or for God's sake) your doctors finally perform an emergency hysterectomy from which you emerge victorious: you triumphed over your own death and over that of God. All right, the God you gave birth to is stillborn, but that does not mean much in the world where death and life are interchangeable; at least to some extent. Of course if you throw your stillborn baby into a gutter or a rubbish bin, it will die once again, and this time its death will be irrevocable, even if you repent and call your dustman to say you meant to get rid of rotten meat, eggs and logs. Most of the time, when called by negligent customers and half-witted widows, refuse collectors or dustmen say, 'Sorry, it's too late.'

'How so? Why?' you ask them.

'Because toxic chemicals are usually dumped in the North Sea.'

'Do you know Who you've dumped in the North Sea?'

You have no alternative but to conceive God once again: the North Sea is too huge and you are unlikely to find anything in it, with the exception of soles and other fish, assuming the soles swim and wait for fishermen in the North Sea and not in the South Seas. Well, you give birth to a stillborn God whenever you are pregnant and go through a series of haemorrhages or other crises connected with your leaps, Angst and so on. (And 'on' is even more ominous than Angst.) All right, your God is stillborn, but He is not dead, contrary to widespread opinions which spread even faster than any disease, however fatal and obnoxious. Of course you do what you can to give birth to a *living* God, not to the One Whose body may lie motionless in your arms and on your lap – for hours and hours. In this case, you might mistake the Almighty for a doll, saying to your friends, 'I live in my dollhouse with God, you know.' No, it is better to have a *living* God about Whom some of the saints talked to us in the Bible as they tried to warn us with the following words: 'Beware! Don't fall into the hands of our Living God! There's nothing more frightful in the whole universe. Even meteors are less frightful, weird, destructive and pitiless.'

After all, it is better to live with a dead-and-gone God into Whose hands you can fall as often as you like without dying or even fearing an unavoidable death. Yet you have a dream according to which it is better to live with a living God than with a skeleton, and you are right because a living God can do something for you, provided you cuddle Him and change His nappy. But this time you do not seem to have succeeded and your method of growing and making God failed most pitifully; in other words, God's birth fell through the day before yesterday. So you go on crying and your husband talks to you thus, 'Don't cry.'

'Why shouldn't I? You did nothing to save Him.'

'I offered them my leg. I remember saying to the doctors: "You can have my leg; anything. Just save Him and her."' Actually, you shouldn't talk too much – you're still hovering between life and death.'

So you do not talk; nor do you smoke because smoking is forbidden in intensive care; and elsewhere – in restaurants, for instance. But you cannot restrain yourself and turn your head towards your husband to ask him if God is still there; your baby, your God. Your husband glimpses hope in your eyes and says, ‘Let me introduce Him to you or rather you to Him. With a few well-chosen words.’

‘What will you say?’

‘That you pray every day.’

‘What else?’

‘That you kept leaping for two months before daring to conceive Him.’

‘Leaping, daring. Darling, are you sure that’s enough?’

‘Do you think God doesn’t know Kierkegaard?’

‘Of course He does. But is that enough, enough, sufficient?’

‘I’m sure. Anyway, He loves you already.’

When your husband brought God to you, you could see how gorgeous He was, for even God’s corpse is beautiful – far more beautiful than Apollo and Venus put together. You took photos and got to know your little auburn-haired God to Whom you had prayed for so many summers and winters – to no avail, alas. Why? Because you have to *give birth* to God to make Him listen to your prayers (to, to, to, to) and the secret yearnings you store up in your brain and unconscious. Anyway, your stillborn God is more perfect than any living idol and any statue you can see in Versailles, Peterhof and even in the Louvre. No point in buying a ticket and going to museums and parks: you might have your work of art by your side on condition that you agree to live and share meals with a stillborn God.

We know that *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* are classic examples of anthropomorphism, but the Bible does not belong to this category of literature. In the first place, it is not a literary work, contrary to what some poets think as they re-read *The Song of the Song of the Song of the Song*, or just *Song Song Song Song*. (If you repeat a word in Hebrew, it means that the word you repeat is of the highest quality; and the more you repeat it, the better it grows, the brighter it sparkles.) Well, whatever our poets say and write down, the Bible is neither poetic nor prosaic: it is a sacred book that should not be read as a work of art. And God should not be treated as a human being whose smile may both appear and disappear, in accordance with our deeds and writings. We say that God is jealous and no idol will ever be tolerated in the Kingdom of God, in His presence and within His righteousness. Of course the Bible talks to us about the bushes where God hides ‘in the cool of the day’ and also about the Latter’s wrath as if God could imitate the president of a multinational corporation or Nicolas Sarkozy: ‘Fuck off, fuck off, you, jerk, you, dwarf. In the fire of My wrath have I spoken.’ Epicure and Spinoza question this point of view and we prefer their questioning to the rockets we are given by priests who remind us constantly that they represent the Almighty and actually utter His own words.

Well, we cannot sit on God's lap for the simple reason that God is neither a man nor a woman. He is not a classic example of anthropomorphism and even our romantics are not allowed to say, 'God is your beloved and His breasts are like grapes.' Nevertheless, we should not discard the hypothesis that keeps on talking to us about the stillborn God you gave birth (or death) to a few days ago. He was introduced to you this morning and now you are about to kiss Him on one cheek; and then on the other; and on the lips, *tant qu'à faire* (for that matter). You realise that, unlike an adult god – Zeus, for instance – He does not have rigor mortis: His legs and arms are flexible (*mollis viva*).

August 10, 2016

Yesterday you met God in person for the first time – in the person of your own baby. The midwife had dressed him in a blue Babygro and he wore a navy cardigan your grandmother's friends had knitted; his head conceitedly displayed one of your husband's hats. Round his neck was a rosary bead necklace: after he had been born your husband had called the priest to bless him. You looked at him and nothing happened to your body and soul: you were neither struck by lightning nor did an electric shock kill you. Usually people say to you – and all this is recorded in our human mythology – 'You shouldn't look at God, or else –'. You are not even supposed to look at Zeus unless He wears some casual clothes and His splendour cannot be seen except in one's imagination. 'Let alone at *our* God,' as they always add pointing at the same nearest cloud or distant Heaven. But they do not talk about a stillborn God Whose softness and kindness allow us to look at Him to our soul's content – without being struck, electrocuted, thunderbolted, and so on.

The matter stood differently with the touchy-feely rite that could not be carried out in spite of all your love and willingness to do your utmost for your stillborn Almighty; and your own soul that needed to be saved once and for all. Let us skip this problem for the moment: there are pastors whose doctrines do not allow us to be saved forever, once and for all and overnight. They say we should work on our salvation daily, starting from scratch every morning; the drudgery of blessedness, they call it. 'You think your prayers and good works have already saved you,' they say, looking askance at your scruffy clothes. 'But if you scratch beneath the surface you'll find you're still damned and perhaps for all eternity. In all probability, you know.' Anyway, let us skip this particular problem, otherwise we shall never know what happened to the stillborn child Whose ambitions lay far beyond any human gift and capacity.

Indeed, this child of ours was destined for the relief of our spiritual and actual poverty, and you suffered a lot of haemorrhages on your way to the salvation of humankind. Well, now this child of yours and ours is within your reach, but you are reluctant and even loath to touch His cold face, for all its perfection and beauty. Sure enough, this face is beautiful and even its premature death has been unable to disfigure it; yet you are hesitant and your fingers are still halfway between his forehead and your tactile perception of it. Touching God is no easy task, even if this God of yours – as historians

point out – was born dead and died dead, being deprived of thunderbolts and even His proverbial wrath. Yes, He is dead and His dead (or rather unborn) body is in front of you: your husband and a nurse have brought Him into your room and installed him at close range – not far from your face and reach. You do not see God very often so you have already made a real fuss of Him by means of terms of endearment such as ‘darling’ or ‘sweetheart’. You did not say to Him, ‘O God, my Lord, my Might and Almighty,’ for the simple reason that He was and still is (to some extent) your own child; though stillborn, though unborn. But that does not really matter as long as you are allowed to contemplate Him at close range, in your own headquarters; what is more, you are required to stroke His face. ‘If you don’t stroke the face of God, you won’t be saved,’ as they put it in their books.

Well, you are in a position to stroke his face and realise it is cold, which may mean only one word; and you are still afraid of this word both personally and cosmically (divinely) – death. Yes, you are afraid of touching the only incontrovertible proof of God’s death – His cold face, His cold lips, His cold forehead, His cold thoughts. Of course the midwife at the Royal or rather the Holy Roman Empire Hospital assigned to look after your Son, accorded Him the same tender care that she would any newborn: either stillborn or moveborn or just born after being borne for nine month by His or Her mother. So His face is clean and bug-free as they put it, omitting to take into consideration the divine origin of your Son and His Divine Prerogative. But for once you do not care for bugs and the nuisance they create as they invade the world and kill its inhabitants whose resistance to their bites and stings is always below zero. Understandably enough, you are longing to touch and stroke your Son’s pretty face, and you do not succeed in doing so, fearing you might be frozen to death through His death, through the death of God.

Be that as it may – and it may be all sorts of things – to you He was still your own baby and that is why you dressed him and put special cream onto His face to stop Him dehydrating. Actually this was done by the same Holy Roman Empire Hospital and its nurses, but that hardly matters because He was a handsome young boy and Heaven Itself kept Him in *proper repair*, as they improperly put it.

Instead of stroking His face, you sang a song:

*You are mine, you are Thine,
And divine, and divine.
Vine, vine, vine, vine,
Wither on the vine.*

For days after your Son’s birth, as you call or rather miscall it, your husband resolved to store up memories of your God in which (in the heap of which) you would find succour (sucker – Joyce’s way) for the rest of your life. He arranged a second, full blessing for Him, and this time He wore a new, white sleepsuit: He suffered from insomnia and you are allergic to sleeping pills that, according to you, may affect one’s memory forever. So, whenever you do not manage to fall asleep on your own,

you put on either a sleepsuit or a sleepcoat instead of stuffing yourself with pills; instead of stuffing yourself with meals. And you think your Son must have inherited your sleepless genes, whereas His divine origin seems to keep Him away from human habits and mishaps; from human conduct and conditions.

Anyway, your Son was blessed because you thought at the time that everybody needed a sort of blessing – even God and His archangels, fallen or unfallen. Bless their little cotton socks. How many times have you uttered this blessing? Why should you count anything as long as your Son is in front of you? You held Him throughout the ritual and it was like a christening because it *was* a christening, in point of fact. (Everything is a christening, as our religious thinkers point out. And christening is everything.) Bless their little cotton briefs and underpants. You blessed everything your Son wore and, considering He did not wear many clothes – not a dinner jacket, for instance – you blessed His invisible clothes, let alone His invisible thoughts and cravings. You said to yourself, ‘Even the dead have wishes and longings. For instance, they might wish to become as alive and kicking as an ordinary human whose life wasn’t interrupted by death, either mature or premature.’ Never mind, never mind, you say to yourself as you contemplate your God’s dead face, body and might. Never might, never might.

In the meantime the priest said, ‘May the angels watch over Him,’ and he talked of the children’s heaven H(h)e would go to; and that reassured you, although you did not know exactly who would go to the children’s heaven – the priest or your child. The priest was so childlike you got the feeling he was also your son wearing little cotton socks, little pyjamas, little dinner jackets and little sleepsuits. He also wore some little awakesuits; and yet he was not really wide-awake and running around your bedroom, was he?

QUESTIONS V

WHAT IS MADNESS?

Madness is probably nothing. Anything is nothing and any question, whatever its sense and nonsense and oversense, is also nothing; unless you point out there is no such thing as nothing or the void, which are not identical, according to some philosophers. And then you put your foot down – and you put everything down, while you are at it – and say to yourself you have no wish to answer any question. You wish to live and you can even go so far as to call your wish a ‘will’ so that you can say you have both our will to live and your will to power which *are* identical, as a matter of fact. But what does it matter? What does anything matter? Or everything, for that matter.

You deviate and that is what some call madness. You deviate, viate and ate. You can say, ‘Last night I ate this and that.’ And if you did eat all these dishes last night, no one will say you are mad: you do not deviate from the norms and are not tempted to spend your time within a no-man’s-land. In a no-

man's-land you take words and things apart and seldom put their odds and ends together as if you were not interested in what philosophers and mystics call the 'whole' and the 'One' where all opposites and ends and odd beginnings are supposed to meet and embrace fraternally, in a sisterly fashion. You are interested only in yourself and you do not think you are this legendary One or Purusha (or Atman) they often talk about in books. And sometimes, eager to get rid of busybodies, you say, 'I'm just a half today,' which may be translated thus, 'Leave me alone! Can't you see I'm exhausted to the utmost? I've exhausted myself with all that cleaning, you know. At least the world is clean after my spring-cleaning, isn't it?'

More often than not, it may do you a lot of good to pretend you are mad, saying, 'I'm God, I'm God. And this lifelong conviction does me a lot of good.' Human beings are afraid of madmen and such a fear is even more pronounced than what one might feel in front of a madwoman. (Lady Macbeth immediately comes to mind and stays there for quite a while, if not forever.) If you take yourself for Alexander the Great, people are sure to regard you as a madman; or a madwoman, if you happen to be a woman whose mind and body are stuffed with this Macedonian hero to the point of no return. Once upon a time, you reached the stage which enables you to visualise yourself in the shape of the above-mentioned hero. (You do not seem to have passed through the stage associated with the woman-man metamorphosis.) So now you are just Alexander the Great, and if someone dares remind you you are a woman, you just reply, 'What are you talking about?' And everything falls into place; in other words, they say to each other that you are crazy, mad and who not.

So you go on claiming you are a half or a third as if you wished to get rid of everybody down to God and his emissaries whose shapes and words may reach you now and then – all the more frequently since, once a month, you go to picture galleries and read the New Testament; and even some apocryphal writings. Today, however, you are nothing but a fourth of what your force and will-to-live are, notwithstanding a number of texts where your arms continue to grab both meteors and milky ways of all kinds: you are everywhere and even insects are you; or shall be you, according to Walt Whitman. 'I don't feel that star over there in my right leg,' you say to your butler who climbs a ladder, grabs the star in question and fits it into your leg. Oddly enough, they say you are mad if you point out you are Alexander the Great. But if you say you are everything and everybody, given that you are Atman and Brahman put together, they applaud and say you are well-versed in literature and theosophy. And they ask you to stand on your head for half an hour at least because they think you are a yogi as well. In your eagerness to please them, you stand on your head and walk on your hands – for two hours. And they say to each other, 'After what he did, we should lock him up and throw away the key and the lock.'

WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Actually many philosophers and even ordinary city dwellers say that any translation, however short, depends on plurality: if there is only the Absolute and nothing (nobody) else, we have no need to translate it. And if we do attempt to undertake such a procedure, we shall have to point out something along the lines of, 'The One is the One. And even if we add the One to the One, we shall get the One as a result of our mathematical and cosmic operation. The same goes for deduction and multiplication. The square root of the One is the One, and so on and so forth.' But Kapilla says there are many Purushas, contrary to what Vedantists shout from the rooftops.

There are many houses in the town where an army of Vedantists live so that, when they decide to proclaim their truth from the rooftops, they put their bodies on those tops and, pointing their walking sticks at each other and their respective roofs, shout hysterically, 'How many rooftops do you see? You're labouring under the illusion that you hear many voices. Yet there's only voice – that of Brahman. Or Man, if you wish. And only one roof – the top of the world.'

Kapilla answers them thus, 'You may think I'm alone, as lonely as a lone wolf. It is true I'm not standing on a rooftop – I prefer armchairs, you know. Yet I'm as numerous as the stars.'

Of course an ordinary town dweller – and any cave dweller – could make neither head nor tail of this 'rigmarole', of Kapilla and his one-plurality problem. That is why many linguists say that everything (and everybody) should be translated, otherwise no one would ever understand anything. Sure enough, any data we come across is dutifully handled by our brain, and this operation is tantamount to what we call 'translation'; at least in some respects. We translate the outer world into our representation of it, stored up either in our consciousness or its unconscious counterpart. And even my computer does its best to deal with the words and names it does not recognise on account of the shortness of its memory. There is no denying that its memory is much longer than mine, but I do know Kapilla; it does not. Papilla, Kaila, Kabila, Kampala – that is what my computer comes up with whenever I try to find out if my spelling is correct: Kapilla might be written with one 'l' or two 'p's; or both; or the other way round. But that is beside the point, even though any correction is a translation in its own right, considering that you translate an error into the truth.

A suicidal maniac is sure to believe that his act would follow the same path, if he resolved to *act* instead of *talking* about his forthcoming suicide to all and sundry: to his mistress, to his boss, to his colleagues and their children. But this matter is not always a matter of life and death, although there is nothing else in the world except these terms, notions and situations (or events). Of course many people believe that life and death differ neither significantly nor radically: life is death and vice versa. Actually, in accordance with these cosmic dwellers, they are identical twins and those who shout, not necessarily from the rooftops, 'I'm dying, Egypt, Syria (an updated version),' might as well use their lungs and throats for the word 'life'. 'I'm living, Syria, I'm kicking Syria.'

But that is not the point as if there were any point somewhere, not necessarily beside the point or in the middle of the point; at the very core of it, to tell the truth. Incidentally, if you wish to translate the idiom 'beside the point' optimistically, you just say, 'My point exactly.' And your point (not mine,

mind you) is situated in the very middle of what they call universal joy described by Dante by means of the word '*punto*'. Beatrice's smile and her waist could be seen within one point; alongside her eyes and the faith one displays in a church where the congregation kneels down and looks up as if to get in touch with the God's wrath and mercy.

What *is* the point? Where is *it*? When you ask questions, these are the questions you ask mostly, on a regular basis: where, what, why, how come, come, go? Well, you do not go; in other words, you stay because you are not a suicidal maniac. There is no denying that you are a football maniac, a sex maniac; but you are not a *suicidal* maniac, otherwise you would have died 40 years ago. And you did not, did you? And if you did not, you are still alive and it is pointless to ask whether you are alive or not.

Going back to translations, you translate everything and everybody, whenever you open your eyes and mind. (If you are a pantheist, you always mix everything with everybody; God with things.) For instance, they say that Purusha is Purusha as if trying to translate this outlandish word into a landish one. But you have no idea what Purusha means in the first place; and in the second place, which goes without saying. So you say to yourself that Purusha is a foreign word you do not have to bother about for the simple reason that it is foreign; and whatever is foreign does not pertain to your life; unless you are the One they talk about in sacred books. You are the One and no Oneness is foreign to you. So Purusha is not as foreign as all that: you are part of the One; or the One himself, itself, herself, oneself. The point is – just the opposite of Dante's luminous point – that you wish to know who you are. (So do I, by the way.) What you (and I) have to do, therefore, boils down to the word 'translation', which means that you and they and I have to translate this word into our language, whatever it is; assuming it is and not it is not.

The Russians think that Purusha pertains to Russia and 'pu' just emphasises this link – as 'arch' does when put before a noun or a pronoun. So, instead of shouting, 'Three cheers for Russia and its inhabitants,' they say, 'Pu' and smile as their glasses continue to clink in response to their cheers.

August 11, 2016

Of course you ought to be disinterested, not relying too much on your God Who cannot do anything for you in His deadly state, for even God is not alive, when He is dead, contrary to what some mystics write in their notebooks. If you think in terms of status symbols and bank accounts, your God, Whose motionless body has just been taken from you, may not be in a position to fulfil all your requirements. Everything happens the other way round: it is your presence He takes advantage of as you change His nappy and sing him a lullaby, anxious to ward off yet another sleepless night. 'He's sleeping like *Bog*,' you say to your brothers and sisters whose words are as merciless and peremptory as reality. ('Living in a fool's paradise, are you?') '*Bog* is God in Russian. Not dead, just asleep.'

Air travel dehydrates the body; so does death, especially if your soul is bound for Paradise. Generally speaking, however, you treat your God like a kid whose thoughts are football-oriented: he dreams only of the ball he can kick, judging from what he said to you at breakfast, 'The ball bounced off the post and into the net.' In other words, you treat Him, your God and Lord, in such a way that any detached observer might think He is alive and even on top form (after His illness or death). And then a midwife says to you, 'You'll have to relinquish Him before the inevitable processes of nature destroys Him.' You do not fail to remind the midwife she is talking about God, not about an ordinary baby one can find in any of Dickens' novels. Five minutes later, she drops the following remark, 'Some kids become high-achievers to compensate for their parents' disinterest.'

'How do you mean?'

'He'll become what He is without your assistance.'

Last night, your God was discharged from the hospital and transferred to a funeral home as if any funeral home could be the home they speak of in their songs and fairy tales, 'O home, o home, o my sweet and sweet home.' Of course there are other songs beyond Creation and also within it where our opposites meet daily; and once again our death slaps life on the other cheek.

O home, o home, o bitter home.

That's what all this about.

Mortuary, mort, mortuary, mort.

Your God is now in an open casket, looking perfect, as it were – as perfect as any Prince Charming you come across in fairy tales and even in VIP lounges and American ballrooms. For all the care you lavish on His body, you do not know the first thing about His thoughts because, oddly enough, you think He thinks *your* thoughts, being dead and almost buried. But if you realised He is synonymous neither with you nor with nature as such – no pantheism, as they sing in churches – you would hear His interior monologue, 'Leave me alone, you stupid humans. I'm your God's soul, you know, and I'm talking to you from a distant star. What are you doing to my former body? Why do you wash it all the time? All right, I'm quite aware of the fact that even stillborn babies pass meconium. Do you know scientific terminology? The first faeces of a newborn. The first and last faeces. You act as if I had faeces three times a day. Is that what life means to you? Faeces, faeces, faeces?'

In the meantime you have asked yourself a multitude of questions such as 'Have we done it all? Is there anything we've forgotten?' On the day of His birth-death, you asked the midwife if you could undress Him, uttering the word 'striptease' several times in a row: the midwife was so stubborn and callous she refused to understand what you were talking about. 'Striptease,' you said. 'Striptease, striptease, striptease.'

'You're not in a nightclub, Madam,' said the midwife.

‘I’d like to find out if there are any birthmarks on His body. If there are any, He’s alive. A single birthmark might raise Him from the dead, you know.’

WHAT IS UNDESIRE?

What about undesire? Of course you can say that undesire denotes rejection and it is all the easier to give such an answer since the apple you see in front of you, on some table or other, is rotten to the core. You, therefore, do not wish to eat it, let alone enjoy it to the utmost. So you neither enjoy it to the utmost nor enjoy it at all: you just ignore it or set it rolling, saying, ‘A rolling apple gathers no moss. Not a great loss anyway – I don’t need moss.’ But undesire does not mean rejection, otherwise almost everyone would say, ‘I consider myself as one of life’s rejects.’ Of course people do use this grammatical structure when airing their grievances, but their grievances’ wordings sound different. For instance, ‘I regard myself as one of life’s undesired.’ Oddly enough, most people do not realise it is far more frightful to be one of death’s or hell’s undesired; and those who feel like putting question marks at the end of this statement might go through Dante’s *Inferno* once again; let alone Buddhist Scriptures with their karmas, their nirvanas. They can also put a few drifters up for the weekend and study their psychologies while putting up with them.

Undesire is just the opposite of desire: they are poles apart in personality, so to speak. Desire is always associated with a movement, a gesture, an open mouth, a striptease, whereas its opposite can be utterly divorced from any movement, any mouth, unless the mouth in question is ostensibly shut. You shut your mouth, your eyes; as for your ears, they have been blocked for years. That is what one might call ‘undesire’, considering that, if you do desire something, you open whatever you have within your reach: your wallet, your safe, or even your trousers, disregarding the indecency of your gesture. You open everything and wait either for money or for a body that may satisfy your appetites and quench your libido – once and for all, as you might think on the spur of the moment. But you are bound to realise it is not true – upon seeing another sex-symbol-permeated body; or even before it.

Undesire can also denote your attachment to Buddhism and its tenets, precepts and exercises that have a lot to do with shutness and shortness. You begin by shortening both your thoughts and impulses, and you end up cutting them out as you cut out a picture from a magazine. A lewd picture, no doubt; or a thought made up of your expectations and aspirations. In point of fact, you shut the door of your being on whatever is linked to your being: desires, wishes, emotions, loves, hates, all sorts of mates and dates. It is true that sometimes you can hear all these impulses knock on your door, but you just say, ‘Knocking, knocking, knocking,’ or ‘The cows will never come home’. And you do not open anything unless you have to go to the bathroom.

Everybody knows what desire is, otherwise no one would ever desire anything. But suppose you do not know what desire is: you know neither the word nor what it denotes. Every word denotes something or somebody as if God had a bad memory and consequently had to take note of every tiny

little thing He encountered in the world. During His strolls, He might therefore note down the following words, 'Flower,' 'Tree,' 'Man,' 'Ball,' Balls.' Afterwards, when taking another stroll, He might talk to Himself as follows, 'This is a flower, this is a tree, this is a man' and so on. Suppose, however, that you have no idea what desire means, but you see an apple and you are hungry. You are hungry to the point of wishing to eat this apple. You do not know that your wish to eat this apple may be called 'desire', which does not prevent you from eating it. That is what habitually is called 'desire'.

G-SPOT

August 12, 2016

A small area that is believed to be inside the vagina which increases sexual pleasure when rubbed. I have no vagina in spite of my androgynous tendencies and inclinations, but the area I have inside my brain and also throughout my body should be rubbed daily and nightly, otherwise I am not likely to live, not even if La Fontaine's God lends me yet another slice of life. 'It is yours for the taking,' He says half-smilingly, but I do not take it, although it has been lying within my reach for some time. And if I do, I do it for the sake of the ritual at the end of which there are no lights, no darks – no nothing, as they say somewhere in the South. I rub it, I rub it, I rub it and my text – for what it is worth – appears somewhere: in the South, in the North, in my native city, in my former native country. And all my pleasures increase, slowly but surely, and so-called sexual pleasure does not always lag behind, as might be presumed, given my age and weariness. But you do not have either to *give* anything or to *take* God's alms (old use) because you need this instant that gives you this instant, nothing more. You call it 'my Zen attitude' or 'I'm the laziest man in town,' and you continue to waste your time, money, life and even death that always lags behind any life, however large and magnanimous.

I *rub* this spot; I gently rub the ointment *in*, and as I do so, I say to myself that the best shop I know of is situated in the South of Brussels, if I am not mistaken; and it is called Rob. I go to Rob and buy many salads: a *salade de tourteau*, among many other salads and ballads. Why not ballads, after all? After all, there is a Soviet film entitled *The Ballad of a Soldier* and I do not recall what it is all about except that there is a soldier in it; and probably a ballad. *Une balade du soldat. The Rime of the Ancient Soldier. The Stroll of the Soldier.* Well, I rub and rob all these salads, ballads and strolls both in and out, in, in, and I am happy because I continue to write and think, thanks to this rubbing and robbing; after all, my vagina is my brain which I have to rub, otherwise it may grind to a halt.

I wish I could be in the middle and midst and sums of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A midsummer, the midsummer or just midsummer, just mid. All right, all right. That is what they call '*amor fati*' or just *fati, fati, fati*. In a song written and composed by Mussorgsky I come across these words, 'O Patti, Patti, O PapaPatti.' She was a singer; I was a pianist and I am still a pianist to some extent – to the extent of my piano which I touch once a month; and this once will come my way in two days.

*I am Pan and I am Fawn,
I should drop a few drip-drops
Into cups and onto mobs
So they kiss anon, anon.*

Glissando. That is what I was thinking about – and feeling, and feeling – some months ago as I sought to analyse how my brain and its accessories function, even when I am asleep. When I was little I often slid on the polished floor in my socks. When I was old I often slid on the polished floor in my socks. When I was overold. I have never been an overman, but I have often been called ‘One of the overyoungs.’ Once upon a time, in a tram, I was in my mistress’s company, and an old lady chose this moment to get into the tram and position herself in front of our bodies. Have I already told this story in my fairy-story books? Perhaps, perhaps. My former mistress was like a fairy; and I looked like a daredevil whose insolence knew no bounds; at least his bounds went far beyond the fairy he was sitting next to; or by.

I left my seat (and my fairy) and said to the woman, to the old hag and bag, ‘Please sit down.’

‘You may keep your seat till doomsday,’ she said. ‘But that fairy of yours should get up at once.’

And once again I am in the midst of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which I have never dreamt of, even when I was in the midst of summers and winters; and in the midst of myself (in the mist of myself, in the song of myself and of my songs). Someone falls in love; so do I; and yet I do not love; nor do I fall out of love because I do not like falling or getting up or jumping up and down and awry. I am what I have been for some time, but now it is another time, another being, another non-being and I am ‘g’, nothing and no one else; as if someone could be one and someone else; as if there were elses around us, a number of elfs. They fly and cry over my garden and probably in the midst of it, and my mistress says, ‘You’re one of them.’ And I am one of them, of you, of not you, of nots and dots. Even this dot, the one I am showing to everybody (.....) may be what I may be or am, am, am, am. ‘Em’ is ‘eat’ in Russian so I am, am, am, am, foie gras, as usual, and oysters, and salmon my cat does not like, for all my efforts to make him understand it is *bon, bon, bon, bon, bon*.

*I am Pan,
A Chinese fan.
You’re no longer hot.
I am not a jot.
Not a jot of truth.
Avocado mousse.*

I was in love and we went to the woods to get married somewhere; or marred, for words and notions are never solitary and are released in dribs and drabs. First our brain releases a drib and then it is high time for a drab that is released in its turn, and our brain heaves a sigh of relief: it is not as overburdened as it was only a few moments ago. This time I am releasing this: I wish I could live in the woods and midsummers, in the midst of fairies and queens and Shakespeares whose characters are on their own. One of them puts a spoonful of this or that powder into my mouth and I fall in love with another fairy, another king who says I am his queen and adds after a while, 'I'm keen on our games.' But I do not recall what games he is speaking of, and I am even tempted to conclude rather injudiciously that life is a game of chess or of mess; or of Black Mass. 'The rubber washer at the back of the machine needs replacing – look, it has completely disintegrated,' you say to one of your fairies and dearies (and diaries). But I cannot replace my brain for the simple reason that it is not made of rubber; and yet I have just given it a good rub to set it into motion. It is ok to flush away toilet tissue because it disintegrates, but disposable nappies do not. And what about disposable brains?

I hang my brain on a twig or a branch or just on a bush and watch its evolution and degeneration – another decline and fall, although it does not fall from the bush. There are a few bees and, being as busy as themselves, they start to buzz and swarm and take care of my brain, turning my nectar into their honey. That is what our humans call 'to live with nature, in it and even slightly above it,' because we are still superior to any other creature on account of our brain (and in its light) unless we discount it, putting it into one of our chests of drawers where we are sure to let it live and die for many years.