

VALERY ALEFF

HALL OF MIRRORS

A CASE OF DOUBLE MURDER

DONNA MATHILDA: Imagine, doctor, how frightened we became when we realised he was playing his part in earnest.

L. Pirandello, *Henry IV*

1982, October 30

Today is a day of great celebration. There is a King in Spain. He has been discovered. I am that King, I, I, I, I, I, although it came to my knowledge only this morning.

N. Gogol, *Diary of a Madman*

Et, plus ou moins, la femme est toujours DALILA.

A. de Vigny, *La colère de Samson*

But if one may believe the Pythagoreans, that the same events will recur individually, and I shall be talking to you holding my stick as you sit here, and everything else will be as it is now, then it is reasonable to say that time repeats itself.

Simplicius, *Physics*

Here, on earth, we shall never get along with women—for all the love we might bear them. Perhaps elsewhere...

Louis II of Bavaria, *The Secret Diary*

"We were as if brother and sister of old in the desert land,"
How softly you spake it, how softly "I give but a friendly hand
They sold us in slavery together before this life had begun
But Love bides nobodies bidding being older than moon or sun."

W.B. Yeats, *Cycles Ago*

FERDINAND: Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle: she di'd young.

John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

Comment nous laissons-nous émouvoir à la pitié? En nous transportant hors de nous-mêmes; en nous identifiant avec l'être souffrant. Nous ne souffrons qu'autant que nous jugeons qu'il souffre; ce n'est pas dans nous, c'est dans lui que nous souffrons.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*

FOREWORD

The following work was found inside a castle situated in the north of England. Its author's handwriting was so intricate and disordered that I spent many an hour trying to decipher the manuscript and the meaning it sought to convey—the meaning which was somehow inextricably linked with the author's handwriting.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

I cannot ride a horse and am obliged to take a bus whenever I wish to escape from the reality of my native city. Compared with this reality, any landscape seems unreal, enticing, and one is sure to come across edifices like the House of Usher or castles built during the reign of Louis II of Bavaria. On closer inspection, however, those edifices turn out to be ordinary huts abandoned by their owners for some obscure reason. But a sense of insufferable gloom pervades my spirit if there are a few clouds in the sky, a few oppressive-looking clouds.

So I take a bus, any bus I happen to chance upon—I don't care about my destination—and get off in the middle of nowhere. Then I walk for a while, looking around me in the hope of spotting what might turn out to be the *real* House of Usher, a *real* Bavarian castle. And sometimes I am rewarded for my efforts, although, as I have already pointed out, no effort is required to find something which looks *exactly* like the House of Usher or a castle built during the reign of Louis II of Bavaria—on the King's orders.

A death-like stillness reigned over the mountain and through the air; the moon dilated on a vast platform the shades of the lofty columns, which reached from the terrace almost to the clouds; the gloomy watch-towers, whose number could not be counted, were covered by no roof; and their capitals, of an architecture unknown in the records of the earth,

served as an asylum for the birds of night, which, alarmed at the approach of such visitants, fled away croaking.

The clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens so that I was tempted to touch them with my fingers. But my fingers were already struggling with the padlocked door which hindered my progress to the interior of the gothic castle, to the treasure its owner had left behind. I finally succeeded in wrenching the padlock off, and of its own accord the door opened up onto a vast hall decorated with a dozen multi-dimensional frescoes. As my foot reached the marble floor I heard a familiar crackling sound and immediately stooped to find out what I had trodden upon. A sheet of paper was lying on the floor, but it was not an ordinary sheet of paper—at least not an ordinary-*looking* sheet of paper. Shaped like an arrow, it seemed to indicate the route one had to follow in order to ascertain the whereabouts of something—a diary, a case history, a candle—which would throw light on the history of the house and its occupants. I realised I was unable to read the characters with which the sheet of paper I had trodden upon was covered from top to bottom. So I went in search of a candle and soon found a candelabra, a box of matches and another arrow-shaped sheet of paper on the floor. With the aid of the candelabra I diluted the darkness, creating a number of ominous shadows on my way back to the entrance hall of the building. Once again I stooped down to have a better look at the sheet of paper lying on the floor. This time I was able to read the small, beautifully-lined characters that purported to convey a message to curiosity-devoured passers-by and tourists:

I am a regular stay-at-home: neither alien souls nor fleeting landscapes agree with my Parmenidian stability. Back in my childhood my father considered that any addition to the luggage—a dozen pieces: suitcases, wardrobe trunks and all—might result in surplus airport charges; my mother preferred her dresses and shoes. So I would be left behind with my tutors. Gradually the tutors disappeared as if they also had gone off on a journey, a timeless one.

Needless to say I was disappointed, and my disappointment might have become reflected in my face which is a true mirror of my emotions: I cannot hide anything either from others or myself. But no-one saw my grimace in that entrance hall, in that gothic castle, except the heroes whose impenetrable eyes were staring at me from the frescoes. As I proceeded in the direction shown by the arrow my eyes fell upon the sheet of paper I had seen during my search for light:

What Louis II appreciated most in Wagner's output was *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* on which the frescoes of the Residenz and Hohenschwangau cast their romantic shadows.

Soon I found yet another sheet of paper, a third one:

I made a little go a long way, and that way was my way, my own way. I was myself once more: a middle-aged man wanting his own way and getting his own way.

All those sheets were shaped like arrows and I followed their pictorial instructions in spite of the lassitude that had begun to invade me—the aftermath of three disappointments. Indeed, what I had found so far could only be used as road signs devoid of any personal message, of confessions and suchlike. And I was looking for confessions, for whatever a guilty conscience harbours until its owner decides to come into the open: an illicit passion, an incestuous love affair, a murder.

I held my dagger up to the chandelier as if to make sure it was not worn out by some suicidal maniac, and plunged it into my breast several times as if to make sure I was dead. The blood-lake over which I cast my eyes soaked into the earth and up sprang the white narcissus flower with its red corollary.

The fourth message. This time I was not disappointed; and yet I might have opted for a murder had I been writing the story of *my* House of Usher. But the house I had found myself in was *not* the House of Usher and all I could do under the circumstances was to *read* the messages lying on the floor, the arrow-shaped messages.

I am holding the receiver of someone else's telephone. "Who's speaking?" I am asked every now and then.

If, however, the parts of my many-sided personality happen to drag me in one direction only—straight lines are not common here—the crowd draws aside and lets me through, for I put all my speed into the attempt to reach my destination. But the precarious harmony of my movements is out of tune with the harmony of the spheres. From now onward I should direct my steps in accordance with the "A" of the heavenly tuning fork.

His influence was unswervingly usurping my past, after having pre-empted the lion's share of my future. By force and cunning he arrogated to himself the right to decide what I had been thinking of in my childhood.

A great many of my powers, apt to turn natural laws into my construction set, are due to the Royal mixture of self-assurance, self-discipline and self-control. My subjects worship their King for whom they have a religious veneration. The Royal throne is not the throne of a man, but the throne of God Himself.

By placing the globe on my bedside cabinet I managed to fashion out of it an amenable instrument somewhat similar to a tennis ball "singing" on the racket of a Wimbledon champion. I felt quite detached from the trajectory imposed upon the globe by the flick of my index finger, for the Prince corrects himself (if he chooses) when he knows that he has done evil, but against his authority there is no remedy other than his own authority.

Moved along by the momentum of Louis' bygone thoughts, he failed to realise that the dazzling switches of chronology to which his fantasy was so accustomed were not to be projected into the real tangible world where the past was the past, and the present was the present.

For fraternal sentiments and mutual love and mutual help can be found in their perfect form only among those who are related by their ancestry. Accordingly a single tribe that is united through a common ancestor—even if he is remote—because of this, love one another, help one another, and have pity on one another; and the attainment of these things is the greatest purpose of the Law.

The word "*hesed*" is commonly translated as "love". In the Kabbalah, however, this word is used mainly in connection with those brothers and sisters who renounce "otherness", distance and difference, showing no deference to so-called moral laws. They are racists to the point of excluding all strangers from their lives. *Hesed* thrives on union, identification, intimacy, proximity and resemblance. *Qui se ressemble s'assemble*. To be nothing but what you are. To be or not to be.

We can't do it at home, can we? The objects would preclude our incest...knick-knacks, trinkets, gewgaws...They must be attuned to family life, to legal love. They would get in the way, rolling and skimming around the floor. And we would trip over them. And they would fall on the bed. And stones would drop on the bed from the ceiling, from the sky, from the moon, from Halley's Comet, from Paradise...

Close your eyes and let yourself be carried along by the chamber music of our skins.

My couch is stuck somewhere...somewhere, for I lost my sense of direction in the hustle and bustle and jumble of all senses...the nonsense of my senses...somewhere between seventh heaven and the Moon.

He was spying on me like an enemy satellite. He literally revolved around me. And He stared at me as if the object of our meeting were to engender a four-eyed science-fiction monster. That permanent staring made me aware of innumerable organs of sight that he had evolved over several months.

Of late His Majesty revoked a number of orders to which He had set His signature, replacing them by counter-orders; so that now, to achieve their ends, the ministers await the revocation of the counter-orders.

Forbear the banquet! Not for all the plotters
That ever shook a Kingdom! Let them come,
And do their worst: I shall not blench for them;
Nor rise the sooner; nor forbear the goblet;
Nor crown me with a single rose the less;
Nor lose one joyous hour—I fear them not.

In dribs and drabs they march right onto the stage, shaking their fists, vociferating their curses.

But if it should be so—
If they should sweep me off from earth and empire,
Why, what is earth or empire of the earth?
I have loved, and lived, and multiplied my image;
To die is no less natural than those
Acts of this clay!

Sharp of tooth, unsparing of fang, giant snakes are now entwined around my castle pillars.

I plant my feet firmly on the ground and the next moment my body, unmindful of my will, starts jumping up and down as if I were mad with joy. And no amount of tears can tone down this exaltation of mine; its amplitude remains the same throughout a dozen pages. Not until after five in the morning do I succeed in reducing that pogoing to the image of a gentleman marching with springy steps.

The autumn festival is now in full swing. Prudence is the mother of superstition: all these crashing and dripping sounds make it impossible for me to get out of bed. Luckily I can assuage my morning hunger with the buns and crumpets stocked in my bedside cabinet. But lunch must be postponed until the rain stops drumming on my rooftop which is also exposed to an impressive assortment of ill-fated signs. The weather forecast threatens me with starvation! Slowly the signs descend upon my bed. A malevolent angel seems to have cut one large sign into a thousand bad omens so as to spread them over my castle, depriving me of the rights guaranteed even to ordinary citizens. It is high time I became an unordinary citizen. They would not dare!

Fretting over His prolonged inactivity and unregarded spending, they disinherited Him of all rights to citizenship. They also disinherited Him of what any citizen, ordinary or extraordinary, sane or demented, is entitled to—the right to death—by substituting well-sharpened, serrated-edged knives for blunt, harmless, dessert knives. Knaves!! Knaves!!!

And till that warrant has my signature
It is illegal, and, as now applied,
Rebellious—Hast thou weigh'd well thy life's worth,
That thus you dare assume a lawless action?

Does he have any alternative? Can he remove Louis' mask from his face, from his self, and become W. B. Yeats instead? Can his own personality be dug out alive from the ruins of all the castles that Louis II has built in his conscious and subconscious mind? Does *she* have any alternative?

Instead of closing in upon my brain, torn apart, Space and Time were rolling off in straight parallel waves. Everything was slipping away once more. There are moments when everything tends to slip away.

I stooped, scooped up some water in my hands and doused my chest, my shoulders. Threatening to engulf my body, the lake rose a bit higher but, as if having thought better of it, subsided at last, sinking to its former level.

The lake engulfs you and I run down the path towards the spot where your glittering heels disappeared a moment ago. And yet the swimming lessons I took in my boisterous childhood ended in failure.

So wastes and sinks
Even now, oh, God! The life that kindled mine:
But that no power can fill with vital oil
That broken lamp of flesh. Ha! 'tis the blood
Which fed these veins that ebbs till all is cold:
It is the form that moulded mine that sinks
Into the white and yellow spasms of death.

A thing must be bounded and the boundary constitutes its form. Man's boundary is death and it is open to man to increase the element of death in his nature. Just listen to your outspoken doctor's last judgement. Thus you will gain mastery over Time and Space: "I'll kick the bucket in...bury me at...here's my epitaph..." Have no fear: they will bury you with full military honours.

Never more
Those summer shadows rising from the past
Of a not ill-spent nor inglorious life,
Mellowing the last hours as the night approaches,
Shall soothe me to my moment of long rest.

My fears flourish in the fertile, hot-house atmosphere of my impending death. Something is definitely wrong with this statement, but I'm damned if I know what. I know: it must be formulated the other way round. My impending, imminent, present death flourishes in the

charnel-house atmosphere of my fully justified fears. My death flourishes, thrives and prospers in my body. Is there anything more dreadful than these synonyms which advance upon me in Indian file? The universe is nothing but a comprehensive dictionary pierced through by a skewer where the synonyms of my sinful body roast voluptuously.

But one pang more, the pang of parting from thee,
And I will leave the few last grains of sand,
Which yet remain of the accorded hour,
Still falling—I have done with Time.

I went from room to room, hall to hall, staircase to staircase. Every door would open at my approach. Every staircase was leading down as if upward movements were prohibited inside the castle. Perhaps a lot of what I felt was due to the ominous influence of the dark and tattered curtains which, stirred into motion by otherworldly draughts, swayed to and fro, rustling about various pieces of furniture. I seemed to have penetrated the very entrails of the earth where reprobates flap in the wind of death, their hearts eternally devoured by an inextinguishable fire. I also had the impression that I was walking around someone's soul to the core of which the arrows implacably directed my steps. As a matter of fact they all pointed towards a writing desk where, in one of the drawers, a manuscript awaited me—a case history, a confession, a novel. On the writing desk, on its gloomy, unpolished surface, I found an ordinary-looking, rectangular sheet of paper:

The people gathered in the classroom did not give three cheers for Him as they would have done at the approach of a film-star; their respectful silence was every bit as good as a dozen standing ovations. In contrast to the welcoming silence there was now a stampede for the desks—someone even got knocked down—as if not our newly-appointed teacher but He Himself were going to sit enthroned in front of us. I also noticed that our beauty queen had been forsaken by her suitors. The teacher hesitated to cut in on the inaudible discussion in which everybody had become involved since His

appearance. All the pupils including our beauty queen were airing their grievances and He, after hearing out each one in turn, would lull them with the serene music of His wisdom. That inaudible harmony sounded like a lullaby, and some of the pupils fell asleep, although none ended on the floor. The teacher at last cleared his throat and was about to enter upon the subject but once again lapsed into inertia. I could have sworn the teacher was speaking to Him, as all of us had done. Was he asking permission to begin the lesson? The lesson began. Nobody recognised the teacher's voice as though, in the course of those five or six minutes, he had gone through a score of karmas overloaded with torments. His eyes riveted on our real teacher, he talked about poisonous pleasures and the shortcut of renunciation.

If the catastrophe described in the manuscript came to pass within these walls, its reality might contribute to interesting the reader, making *Hall of Mirrors* a still more poignant story.

HIS NARRATIVE

FOREWORD

The case history I am about to embark upon is neither more picturesque nor less uncanny than any other case history. Why do I write it? Perhaps my lifelong urge to come to grips with my inner chaos is at the root of my present work-in-progress. Perhaps I am merely preening myself in front of a mirror. I do not think so. Besides, what I call chaos might be regarded by others—if they had an opportunity to spy on my stream of consciousness—as a perfect imitation of a French garden, all geometry and neatness.

I am a quiet man and even demonstrations of my fears and longings pass off peacefully. Indeed, if I had neighbours—I have none, thank goodness—I would not be plagued with complaints and visits from uniformed busybodies. Nor would my neighbours be clambering over each other to join the noise-abatement society: nothing ripples the glistening smoothness of night when *I* feel shut in. He danced and laughed; as *I was* his neighbour, my nights were more akin to the Valkyries' wind-dishevelled hair than to Louis XIV's wig. Louis XIV, Wagner. Some of his eccentricities may well have rubbed off onto my comparisons. "Beware of madness," as he wrote in his secret diary.

He was a distant cousin of mine, so distant in fact that the genealogical foliage spreading between us had almost precluded his participation in the drama of my existence. But for his aunt's monarchical views, I might never have crossed his path, let alone looked after him like a registered nurse. One rainy morning we met in Versailles.

For a while we inhaled with reverence the air of the majestic park; the trees and bushes made deep bows as we strolled along the labyrinthine alleys. Near Le Bassin de Neptune the wind blew his hat off.

Was he already a King? Not a single entry in his diary is dated and that time-anonymity cannot but further the vice of hypothesising to which his psychiatrist, my learned predecessor, gave himself over from the very outset of the treatment. I shall limit my hypothesis and hyperbolas to what I saw or read with my own eyes.

He did not walk as other men walk, stroll, march or stride, but took the stage like an actor in a coronation-scene. I entered into the spirit of the game and promptly placed an imaginary crown on his curled hair. I told him that Versailles was an appropriate place for coronations owing to the all-pervading presence of Louis XIV. Hardly could I imagine at the time that the symbolic Royal presence I had spoken of was rather realistic.

He was the only scion of an old aristocratic family into whose veins, back in the eighteenth century, some drops of Royal blood had been introduced. That injection did not entitle him, in our century of democratic reforms, to any crown or throne. Unroyal girls do become Queens, now and then. In our unfastidious century even commoners are allowed to bewitch a Monarch into the cage of marriage. Boys must content themselves with wool-gathering, with theatrical illusions. In nine cases out of ten the lure of the footlights bespeaks an unavowed desire to look on the world from the heights of a throne. In the sixteenth century, when Kings were believed to be on equal footing with God, thrones were perched heaven-high.

He had a great many King-plays performed for him by his coevals whom he seemed to treat like his subjects. Out of esteem for his great learning and numberless talents—he wrote poetry, among other things, and was extremely well-read for his age—they obeyed without a murmur, although acting for an audience of a single spectator is not a rewarding pastime. He would not participate in the performances himself, lest he suffer from stage fright, as he explained later on. "And I am not to be frightened," he added with a lordly shake of his head.

All went splendidly with the performances. There were of course a few little hitches inseparable from amateurism and childishness, but he was satisfied on the whole and manifested no envy, no displeasure until that memorable night when he first attended Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. I still wonder why he had not claimed his property earlier, upon watching his subjects act the parts of other Kings in his Kingly presence. The ill-fated crown lay on Henry IV's pillow; it was his for the taking and take it he did, standing in for both Henry V and the comedian, one of his German-born cousins. He took it or rather wrested it from his cousin's greedy hands, saying something along the lines of: "My due is this imperial crown which derives itself to me." "And put the world's whole strength into one giant arm, it shall not force this honour from me," he might have concluded had

he memorised the soliloquy. Sure enough, neither the psychiatrist nor my poor self have managed to relieve him from its psychological burden.

From that night onward *he* acted the part of Kings; his subjects became his subjects at last. As an actor, he could not hope for much in the way of laurels, but he came into possession of a true Kingdom, though bounded by the stage. He promptly extended its boundaries as far as the walls of the family park. His father, a man of severe disposition, did not let it pass: *he* was still the Sovereign of his estate, if timing and tradition were to be observed. He administered an exemplary spanking to the supercilious brat and kept him under lock and key for almost a fortnight. Was that prison-like seclusion a prelude to the King's chronic claustrophobia? He always lived in a madhouse—even in the open air, even before he was locked away in a madhouse. He saw peepholes everywhere. One day he saw the peephole.

Another hole, the one through which I shall plumb the abyss of his consciousness and subconscious, was first used by the psychiatrist. I am alluding to the secret diary in which he depicted his madness with maximum accuracy and without any glossing over. Much as I dislike quoting the case history rigged up by his psychiatrist, whose methods and conclusions might have driven crazy even those who had never fancied themselves locked away in a madhouse, I feel compelled to do so, if only for the sake of completeness.

A MODEL UPBRINGING

A far-away town, a humdrum town.
 The parish priest's house is a wonderful sight,
 Because of the dog. The blinds are down,
 The tea-cups' music, around midnight,

Drowns the footfalls and the growls.
 In the tower nearby a maiden is imprisoned.
 Beneath her window day and night prowls
 A pack of Russian wolves. Resigned and wizened

She cries no more, she knits no more.
 She spins out time by talking to herself.
 Her confessions—at heart, she is a dreadful whore—
 Are stored by her father on the "chastity-shelf".

The inverted commas are mine. I do not know about you, but I have never seen a chastity-shelf in a furniture store. What was it for, anyway? In my opinion, you cannot tame a wild horse without a whip.

As I mentioned above, he wrote a number of poems. I shall use some of them in my narrative.

In another social atmosphere his infatuation with poetry could have helped him to become Francis I who had been imprisoned in a tower; not in the ivory tower where self-respecting poets hasten to shut themselves away, but in a dismal Spanish tower.

At an early stage of his unfortunate rule my cousin vacillated between various Royal substitutes for his worn-out, unreliable ego, as his reliable and voluble diary testifies: "The visitors filed past my mausoleum: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Friedrich von Hohenstaufen, Louis XIV, Louis XV. Once my fits of impersonation set in I carry on, disregarding outbursts of my own ego." His fiancée, who first hit upon the idea of

confinement, mistook him for Louis XIV. She adored the Sun King and could not help identifying her lovers with her idol.

Despite some points of similarity the two Kings were not interchangeable. My cousin was taller and far more handsome than Louis XIV. Even in his later years, when wine and sin had twisted his features out of proportion, his artificially curled hair and deliberately stylised beard would appeal to the stray fillies that my dogs kept chasing out of my park.

His fiancée did not pay attention to these nuances: she pursued the glorious phantom of her adoration.

Once, around 10 p.m., he stalked into her country house and demanded that she join him for a ride. She obeyed and they headed for a hill that, in the evil glow of sunset, towered over the countryside like a fairy-tale monster. As they struggled up to the top his gesticulation grew more and more meaningful; he was describing to her, with the utmost accuracy and with the aid of his arms, the layout of his new castle's rooms. Borne by the south wind, the music of his narration seemed to resolve itself, far, far away, into the outlines of Walhall.

*Vollendet das ewige Werk:
auf Berges Gipfel
die Götterburg,
prächtig prahlt
der prangende Bau!*

The following day it occurred to her that their twilight sightseeing had taken place almost three centuries earlier. "In 1677 Louis XIV showed one of his relatives round *his* newly-built castle," she declared.

She was tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired and dark-minded. She bore an uncanny resemblance to Maria Mancini with whom Louis XIV had fallen in love, back in 1658. They were both mad about the young man's good looks and old-fashioned romanticism. Was my good-looking cousin in love with *his* Maria Mancini? Anyway he followed the

pattern of history and in summer 1886 became estranged from the once-repudiated candidate for the throne.

*Une lutte éternelle en tout temps, en tout lieu
Se livre sur la terre, en présence de Dieu,
Entre la bonté d'Homme et la ruse de Femme
Car la Femme est un être impur de corps et d'âme.*

These lines were written by a French poet, Alfred de Vigny. And the French are experts on the ways of womankind.

My cousin's true identity might have come to light much earlier had his fiancée turned her attention to his father who, in his educational methods, seems to have been influenced by Maximilian II, King of Bavaria from 1848 to 1864. In addition to flogging he would cut his son's weekly allowance. Many years later Louis counter-attacked by spending as much money as possible. Alas, his father could not appreciate his indomitable spirit: he was already dead.

The intense hatred my cousin nurtured for his father was all the more understandable since Maximilian II did not look like a King. The following description of a dream speaks volumes for my cousin's homicidal impulses:

My father was sitting at the head of the table. He tasted the wine but, instead of setting the glass down with a nod of approval or a glance of disapproval, he tilted it against his chest. I had no wish to avert the disaster by switching the dream to another programme. We were drifting apart. He was swept downstream by the River of Death. My River of Life carried my body upstream—moonward. We were drifting apart, upstream, downstream. His head rested against the broken glass.

Incidentally, when *my* father died, his head also rested against the broken glass, in a pool of champagne. My mother suddenly raised her hand with the fingers clasped around her glass as if to indicate her wish to be buried with her husband in the same tomb, at the same time. Finally she lowered her glass, placing it on the tablecloth, and made an

attempt to leave her chair. Her frail-wristed arms dangled on each side of her black dress. Yet within a month—A model of hypocrisy!

My mother's behaviour may be properly understood in the light of what Louis II's mother, Marie of Prussia, wrote in her diary after *her* husband's demise: "I had the feeling that I was dead too, that I was in the next world. His death is drawing us apart. Our hearts however remain united."

A little month, or ere those shoes were old—

Hypocrites!! Liars!!!

My psychoanalyst describes my hatred of women as follows: "The carefree child went for a stroll in the woods. All of a sudden he heard gasps and moans. He lowered a branch of the nearest tree and, lo! his mother was peeping at him from behind his uncle's glistening back. Twenty years later the traumatised child cold-bloodedly strangled his psychiatrist."

Liar!! I never saw my mother make love with strangers!

Death differs from other evils not only by virtue of His everlastingness, which makes philosophers rank Him with God, but also because of our anticipatory knowledge of His coming. Our life is death-dyed from the very beginning, from the moment our fathers inform us of the final vanishing trick. We are white rabbits, not conjurors!

My cousin made death's acquaintance in the person of his nurse who died when he was approaching his ninth month and, as I was told, the sudden weaning almost caused his own death. "Death was smuggled through our entrance hall in a diplomatic bag," he writes. From then on any disappearance, however temporal and fortuitous, was equated in his sensitive mind with death, with timeless disappearance. His governess, upon the arrival of his tutor, was sent away and therefore died for him; and yet he would write to her till she actually died somewhere in Germany.

His tutor was to inculcate in his mind whatever could be of any use to a Sovereign. He studied chemistry which, useless though it was in the exercise of his Royal Prerogatives, added a mystical touch to the descriptions of his sensual ecstasies:

I slid out of my bedclothes, ripped my pyjamas off and exposed my body to Space.

I acted like an alchemist who identifies with his opus, with lapis. In my hermetic

language identification means *conjugium*, *matrimonium*, *conjunctio*, *coitus*. The united Sun and Moon bring to birth the mystic Asoth: the bird of immortality, sometimes referred to as the universal Mercury, the invisible, eternal fire, the astral light, the measureless spirit of life. By nightfall I was flying about the room—not like a commonplace moth attracted by some bedside lamp but like the Phoenix, a mystical bird.

He was fond of his construction set and that fondness ripened into a consuming passion for building to which a great many Kings, his predecessors, devoted their precious time. He would line up a number of building blocks and imagine himself in Versailles, in the Hall of Mirrors furnished with silver tubs of orange trees, silver tables, chandeliers and candelabras, white damask curtains, savonnerie carpets.

Besides, the hereditary aspect of the problem must not be underestimated. Louis I, to whose creative élan the inhabitants of Munich owe the Ludwigstrasse, the Ludwigskirche, the university, the Alte Pinakothek and the Königsplatz with the Glyptothek, was one of the foremost builders in history.

EMANCIPATION

Gently remove your wig, your Sunday hair
 And hang it outdoors, on the clothes line.
 First thing tomorrow morning
 You should look out of the window to note
 How, in the wind, rid of the tyranny
 Of your good looks, that hair
 Comes into its own.

We are in constant danger of losing our balance. We clutch desperately at stones, at twigs, but we are too proud and prudent—and wary, and circumspect—to seek the help of our friends and relatives.

We may stage our own suicides to persuade our enemies that we are really miserable. Sometimes we act so brilliantly the mock suicide comes off and we regret in the Hereafter our lack of patience, our thespian skills.

Is God a boulder or a thick branch? Can He prevent us from falling?

Wir alle fallen. Diese Hand da fällt.

Und sieh dir andre an: es ist in allen.

Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen

unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält.

Fiddlesticks! Rilke was out of his mind! He ought to have been locked up! The truth is that God lets us slip through His fingers.

We swing to and fro—irregularly, in imitation of Stravinsky's rhythms. We swing widely and hopelessly.

I lose my balance and happiness, my life, Eternity.

Why don't I float in Time, passing through walls and violating the serenity of old castles—like a ghost? Those who float in Time cannot fall.

When did he really become a grandson of Louis I, the elder son of Maximilian II from whom he may have inherited a penchant for philosophy? How do Kings become Kings? Mostly through the deaths of their fathers, hence the saying: "*Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi.*"

I wish him dead, I wish him dead. I only hope that my spiritual assassination do not betray itself in a casual outburst, in a telltale sentence. Has it ever come up to the surface of my glance? I should kill him without the slightest remorse. I should kill him without the slightest remorse. The repetition rules out the hypothesis of a slip of the tongue or the pen.

He wished him dead not because his father was his mother's husband, as the psychoanalyst maintains, but because Maximilian II died when Louis II was eighteen years old. And my cousin was already twenty-two at the time.

What did he need to be crowned for? Men can be happy without any outward sign of wealth, health or authority: the mind with its ups and downs is alone responsible for our happiness. And it is in his mind that he found happiness and unhappiness, death and rebirth. He was the King of himself.

In his mind, for his mind, within his mind, he *was* an absolute Monarch, unchallenged and unquestioned: "The universe is my thoughts. My thoughts are *mine*, aren't they? I have locked the universe up in the castle of my brain. I am the ruler of the universe!" A true King, goaded by his love for his people and land, never slackens in his effort to usurp neighbouring regions. "Must I sit there champing at the bit?" my cousin scribbles over and over again. Some years ago, in mid-winter, when he was already Louis II of Bavaria, there appeared in his secret diary a note that may shed some light on the whys and the wherefores of this King-business. Permeated with the bitterness Louis felt in later years, the note is nothing but a farrago of heterogeneous snatches: the Royal bedroom in Neuschwanstein with its palm tree and artificial moon, Lohengrin, Yi-King,

the defence of Neuschwanstein seem to intertwine there in a passionate embrace. What further evidence of the King's insanity could they long for, when seeking to depose him?

I have set out on my journey up the marble column: a palm tree, a ladder propped against the Moon. Rise up to the vault, be a Moon-King! The tips of my wings are like those of a swan. *Mein lieber Schwan! Ach, diese letzte, traur'ge Fahrt, wie gern hätt'ich sie dir erspart!* Wagner's music carries me across my land of Night, across my murmuring forests where dragons are slain by the thousands, where a big ash-tree, furnished with bear-skins, weapons and trophies of the chase, guards my sword.

You are sincere

And are being obstructed. (By my enemies.)

The light has sunk into the earth:

The image of DARKENING OF THE LIGHT. (Kings are Light.)

Thus does the superior man live with the great mass:

He veils his light, yet still shines. (Prudence, secrecy.)

At the tail in retreat. This is dangerous.

One must not wish to undertake anything.

Retreat, retreat. Privacy—a hollow word, a hollow tree inside which lurk conspirators. My privacy. My gates are kept bolted by a posse of police armed with fixed bayonets. My private life arising out of the steppes of the future; out of my past, drowned body. *My* body.

Louis II settled down in the empty shell of my cousin's personality: everything down to names and shames had obsequiously withdrawn. For a while something grovelling persisted in the future King's conduct. He was seen bowing and kissing his own hands

and, at his request, a large oval mirror was installed in his room so he might follow the King's progress with the utmost accuracy.

No longer anchored to my mortal body, my reflection seemed to enjoy an ethereal variety of freedom and, consequently, walked faster and faster.

His reflection walked very fast indeed: two days later my cousin dreamt of Louis' corpse.

A face with no expression on it. A cloaked figure lying prostrate on a black carpet.

Those blank verses of dreams forebode no good.

The fear of death induced him later on to get rid of his corpse-like reflection:

I have committed all my pictures to flames, all of them, from minute tattered snapshots and drawings to blurred negatives. I have also transferred all the mirrors to the attic where they are forgetting me for ever. How many mirrors of mine remember me still?

The split in personality, with the "authentic" part wandering further and further away, began taking shape prior to any decision about future identity. Indecisive and undecided, his train of thought might at that point have steered in the wrong direction, leading not to the Bavarian castles but to the Senate House where Brutus awaited him.

I must admit that my arms have something in common with withered, rotten branches, especially when I hold them out to greet my guests. I hear a sort of crack—a familiar sound in autumn woods. I used to attribute this arboreal music to the ramshackle floorboards in the attic where my cat ambles in the evenings. Why? Because I had no wish to scare myself out of my wits. Then last night I pulled

myself together and rushed headlong into anxiety. I said to myself that my arms were about to detach themselves from my trunk and, but for the dinner jacket, they would already have done so.

I hold the receiver of my telephone. "Who's speaking?" I am asked.

I did not do it on purpose; it was quite unintentional unless my intentions had been emancipated from my power and set free to make their own laws. I should be given a free hand to manipulate my free will as I please. I am not lying on my couch, gagged and garrotted by my free will, am I? My will is free, isn't it? Freedom to my free will!

The investigators of my soul and its history have taken care not to arouse any alarm and have withdrawn for a consultation into some inaccessible attic. No admittance to unauthorised persons. I did not even hear them arrive, depart. Why didn't they say anything?

It flashed across my mind that my bed had not been slept in.

I ably camouflaged my fears with the English idiom "splitting headache". In the course of those headaches my ego splits into several totally different thoughts distributed in spaced-out levels so that I contemplate my body from different angles—for instance, through the foliage of my garden. As if I was sitting on the bench! "Side-splitting"..."pull yourself together".

Whose statue has been erected today on my town-square? I set off towards the statue. Gasping and stumbling, I reach the centre of the square and hastily read the inscription on the pockmarked pedestal softened by the continuous drizzle.

"The false-self," writes the psychiatrist, "lies in wait for anyone who, in moments of danger, when dodging out of sight seems beneficial, does just that, letting a 'robot' act for him. A false-self is, furthermore, likely to engulf us when, in dealing with those on whom our livelihood or our career may depend, we overdo the tuning in and become Zelig—the man with a thousand faces and bodies and souls. We let at least a part, if not the whole, of the others rub off onto our authentic ego. We succumb to the sin of impersonation whose wages are our death and their birth: their birth in us. When a renowned poet, a former patient of mine, had a book coming out, he ingratiated himself with the prospective reviewers—chiefly his sworn enemies—to the extent of adopting their attitude towards his previous books. He positively assured them that the one he had just finished was far better. He ended up writing poems in which he would demolish himself as best he could. By a campaign of furtive vilification directed against his own persona, he dealt a severe blow to his reputation as a citizen."

As usual, the psychiatrist's exposition is full of irrelevancies and digressions: my cousin took no care to promote his poetry and had therefore no need to demolish himself. His was not a poetical death but a Royal one.

It is high time I acquainted you with the psychiatrist's interpretation of *The Importance of Being Rex*:

Apart from the stock prerogatives cited in history books—providing they refer back to the days when Kings were Kings and not mere actors in governmental comedies—one might also mention the spiritual comfort which avails only fake, artificial Kings. During a short stretch of lucidity, Alexander II of Russia confided to me that he felt even more comfortable than a normal King: he was indeed no target for terrorists or revolutionaries.

Another reason for my patient's metamorphosis—the reason which might as well have justified his becoming a beggar—lies in his ardent desire to forget himself. He wished to dodge out of both his own sight and his own mind, smashing the mirror of his memory. Why? He remained silent about it and the shaking of his head, which looked like a further negation of his personality, came as the only answer to my reiterated question.

Despite the protracted silence and occasional shaking of the head, which clearly intimated a negation of the psychiatrist's right to pump scientific data out of his guinea pigs, the answer happens to be provided on the next pages of the official report. No more than guesswork in its purest form it all but invalidates the man's proud claim to be able to fathom *scientifically* the unfathomable ways of insanity. The psychiatrist ventures into the labyrinth at the centre of which Louis II roars with laughter and rolls and waltzes; when typed out on a *normal* sheet of paper the inarticulate moans he manages to draw from my cousin look so articulate and shipshape as to exclude any kinship with insanity's shagginess.

Why did our mutual patient choose to forget himself, to sink into oblivion until what remained on the surface earned him the title of "Louis II of Bavaria"? I, for one, never heard him acknowledge his willingness to bring about that suicidal lapse of memory. On the contrary, from what he wrote during the last period of his confinement, one might assume that all he wished to do was *remember* himself, digging out as much information concerning his past as was consistent with keeping one's ego at hand. We are not ourselves unless we can boast about having lasted for *some* time.

So, at least during "my" period of his existence, he was far more addicted to remembrance and often, in the course of one afternoon, had several bouts of it, leaving himself breathless and pastless. Even the main occupation of his earlier, pre-madhouse years—a search for identity—should be approached in Proustian terms: "*A la recherche des temps et des Rois*." Our unfledged King-hunter was indeed armed with his memory. He rummaged through history in a welter of blood and mud, in a morass of words and creeds and deeds; he ransacked his father's shelves, dipped into a multitude of books, striving to remember, to recognise, to spot. He ploughed through the snow of his soul with amazing perseverance.

Once, when I was out and therefore could not see it, he went down and down until eventually drifting into his childhood:

I had a childhood as far as I can remember. And I can remember very far—as far as the moon, as far as Venus. Had anything happened to me on Venus I would have

remembered it now, knitting times together with the laser beam of my memory. There is an imposing sag in the seat of my armchair, as though it had been laden with a double-body: myself and a little child on my knees. One and a half bodies. I murmur my nickname. The child awakens with a start, stripping off the dead husk of many, many years. He jerks his head up, turns it in the direction of my purposeful glance and I recognise myself, myself; yet I have changed beyond all recognition. He grasps my hand and drags me down. We descend a patriarchal staircase leading to the basement of my life. I recognise my birthplace, my cradle.

MY NARRATIVE

So far so good. Of course I experienced a bizarre feeling as I read these pages one rainy afternoon. I felt somewhat uneasy because I had never seen madness except in the cinema and in works of fiction. And the object my wife had deposited on my desk was not a work of fiction. A document, a case history? The box file was rather huge as if awaiting other sheets of paper, other confessions and manipulations. (My wife awaited them too, as events turned out.) I had no inkling of any sort—no inkling, no foreboding. I seldom have forebodings anyway. I was just sitting at my desk that seemed to look at me in surprise. "What are you doing here?" my desk asked me inaudibly. I seldom sit at my desk: I am not a writer and have no penchant for scientific research or business. "Nothing," I answered, telling the truth and nothing but the truth. I wish my guest and my wife were as truthful and trusty as I am. Perhaps I did have some kind of foreboding or premonition. In her brisk fashion, without knocking, my wife entered my room and put the box file on my writing desk.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The secret diary of my cousin," she answered.

Our dialogue was quite audible—too audible, as a matter of fact, given the Wagnerian amplitude of my wife's voice.

"I'm getting tired of your cousin," I said. "Why don't we send him back—"

"To the mental hospital?"

"It wasn't a mental hospital, was it? Some kind of sanatorium—"

"Sanatorium indeed! They always call them 'sanatoriums', those prisons—"

"I will read his diary," I said.

I kept my promise. I read his diary and realised he was a madman. (I read what my wife had deposited on my desk—a small portion of his confessions.) Anybody would have realised he was a madman. Any normal human being, that is. And I am normal, a normal human being, whatever his writings might suggest or insinuate.

He is not my cousin, not even a "distant" cousin of mine. I would never have met him, but for my wife who hoped to amuse herself by watching a madman at close range—in the same house, under the same roof. Indeed it was she who suggested

bringing him to our country house for a week or two. "Why not—it'll make a change!" What kind of change did she have in mind? Our life was normal—too normal for her taste perhaps. She was badly in need of madness. Yes, she only got her kicks that way.

One day she told me about some distant cousin whose eccentricities used to make her father look up from his tomes of applied mathematics and chuckle self-indulgently. "But I've never seen him, mind you!"

"So you'll see him," I promised.

"I hope they'll let him spend a week among his relatives."

I thought he would leave us at the end of the month. He has been enjoying my hospitality for three months now. What is more, my wife insists that I read his diary.

"Could I at least ask you a few questions?"

"Go ahead," she replied.

"Who is his cousin, the one he's talking about in his secret diary? I know that *you* are his cousin."

"*You* are his cousin," she said. "In his diary."

"But I'm not mad, am I?"

"We are all mad, more or less."

"In that case, I'm less mad than he is."

"Because you're not possessed by the Muses who awaken a virgin soul to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry. No-one can become a poet without their precious gift."

"What gift? Madness?"

"'Gift' means 'poison' in German," she said with an enigmatic smile.

"And what does 'gifted' mean? 'Poisoned'?" I smiled in my turn.

"Have no fear—you're *not* poisoned." She was looking at me triumphantly.

"At least I'm not Louis II of Bavaria, am I?"

"Of course you're not. You don't even speak German." My wife tends to be disdainful of my linguistic capacities. And, to drive the point home, she translated the German quotation from the chapter *A Model Upbringing*:

The eternal work is completed!

On the mountain top

the gods' fortress
gloriously swaggers,
resplendent edifice!

"Your cousin borrowed it from Wagner's *Das Rheingold*," she said. "He adores Wagner."

"So do I."

"All the same, you are not Louis II of Bavaria," she repeated solemnly. "You've built no castles in your life. You can't even buy a modest villa in Italy."

"All right, all right. But why all this talk about *him*, about Louis II?"

"Because he *is* Louis II of Bavaria," my wife whispered, her index finger pressed against her lips.

"Who?"

"Your cousin." Confidently she leant towards my face.

"Why does he say it's his cousin, alias myself—"

"Even normal people tell their secrets in the third person: 'a friend of mine', 'my distant cousin'. Oh, you're hopeless," my wife exclaimed, tossing her hair back and clapping her hands as if to applaud her superiority, her triumph over a man who happens to be her husband. "Why don't you read books?" In a few strides she reached the door and left my room. She soon re-appeared, however, carrying a pocket book above her head. "You should read it," she said as the book joined her cousin's diary on my writing desk as if they were cousins too.

"I will read your book," I assured her.

The book in question was entitled *The Divided Self* by R. D. Laing. To my relief I found, as I opened the book, that I was not supposed to read it from beginning to end: my wife had underlined the passages in which the mystery of my guest's conduct was elucidated. Here is one of them:

Being like everyone else, being someone other than oneself, playing a part, being incognito, anonymous, being nobody (psychotically, pretending to have no body), are defences that are carried through with great thoroughness in certain schizoid and schizophrenic conditions.

Well, my wife's cousin is not like everyone else, I said to myself. Far from it. But he does play a part, according to my wife, so he *is* someone other than himself—Louis II of Bavaria, to be exact. Why does he say that *I* am the Bavarian King? To protect himself? Stalin had six doppelgängers, I'm told. Why doesn't *he* come into the open? Because he wants to remain anonymous or what?

As I leafed through the book I chanced upon another underlined passage:

The "magical" act whereby one may attempt to turn someone else into stone, by "petrifying" him; and, by extension, the act whereby one negates the other person's autonomy, ignores his feelings, regards him as a thing, kills the life in him.

Does he want to turn me into stone? I asked myself.

I put the same question to my wife. "You're Louis II of Bavaria, not a stone," she answered. "In *his* opinion," she added prudently so as not to contradict her earlier remark, her disparaging assessment of my linguistic capacities. "And you're also his psychiatrist. Maybe he does want to kill the life in you," she said all of a sudden.

"In other words, he wants to kill me?" I was astonished at her new remark.

"Coward!" My wife was seething with indignation. "Are you really afraid of an invalid?"

"This invalid reminds me of Medusa," I said.

"At least you know *something*." My wife nodded approvingly. "Did you study the Greek myths at school?"

"Why are there poems at the head of each chapter?" I asked, anxious to change the subject.

"Because your cousin is a poet, a great poet. But he doesn't know it. That's why he has become Louis II of Bavaria. In his heart of hearts he questions his new identity. He suspects he's *not* Louis II of Bavaria. That's why he assigned this role to you—quite inappropriately, I must admit. By the way, it was I who put those poems at the head of every chapter to prove he's a poet. First and foremost! I'm longing to cure him."

My wife had revealed her intentions at last. "How do you intend to cure him?" I inquired.

"I'll let you know in due course," she said enigmatically. "By the way, you might help me. And *him* of course!"

Two days later I received another part of his secret diary, where our encounter is skilfully misrepresented.

HIS NARRATIVE

BEETHOVEN COMPLEX

PATIENT: I can't hear anything.

DOCTOR: Beethoven complex, no doubt.

Why was an eccentric, ill-starred King preferred to Louis XIV of France? Why did he not choose a happy Reign and an easy-going character—a King adored by his ministers and all historians? Why did he not think about longevity, a determining factor in the choice of a suitable self?

One of the patients was so finicky about Kings and thrones that, in retaliation, he was appointed a minister of Justice. That post enabled him to complain *officially* about the injustice of the appointment. Who had wronged him? A King whose candidature he had imprudently rejected.

Louis II, for all his shortcomings, was attractive enough, both physically and morally, to kindle the sentiment of love in many of his subjects; sometimes their admiration took on the most extravagant forms of idolatry, though never going as far as impersonation. It would indeed have been extremely indecorous to duplicate the doings of a *living* King; in any immediate reflection, however devotional, there is an overtone of parody, mockery. Pleasant and almost compulsory within the province of ideas, mimicry, when applied to habits and behaviour, may be mistaken for a sort of Broadway show, detrimental to the imitator and his idol. But once the uniqueness of life has been destroyed by the commonness of the grave, mimicry comes into its own and, dissociated from mockery, becomes a mere manifestation of immortality.

Keenly alive to the peril lurking in Louis II's personality, my cousin may yet have been fascinated by his good looks and the elegance with which he rode his white charger. As I indicated earlier, my cousin's face needed no finishing touches to appeal to both men and women; but its sensual qualities could have deteriorated had he set his heart on Louis XI or Charles V of Spain. Besides, any other Kingship was incompatible with his fondness for Wagner's music.

Any psychiatrist, amateur or not, would treat the following episode as a transfer of power taking place in my cousin's house:

When the hour struck, I rushed to the window, as oversensitive children always do upon awakening to verify whether their dream had altered reality overnight. Gasping for breath, I pulled the curtains aside and, lo and behold, there was the King's carriage upholstered in bright blue, ornamented with gold. Drawn by four richly-caparisoned greys, the carriage neared my window faster than a sports-car might have done. The King got out and looked up with such insistence that our eyes met and our stares merged into one homogeneous crystalline mass. With purposeful steps he went into the entrance hall; I closed all the shutters, anxious to keep voyeurs at bay. I heard the same tonality of steps on the staircase: he had not changed his mind. Neither had I. No-one could make me change my mind. I planted myself on the threshold. Like the particle picture and the wave picture superimposed by Niels Bohr's notion of complementarity, we stood facing each other.

It was our second meeting, the first dating back to the memorable ramble in Versailles. Full of bizarre hints and hoity-toity threats, our conversation tended to shun the restraints of logic so that now, after so many years, I am unable to remember it in detail.

What I do remember is the mock Louis II carriage that I had unearthed from the dust of some local museum and hired for the sole purpose of creating a homely atmosphere in my cousin's mind on our way from the mental hospital to my place: my inherent perfectionism had incited me to heighten the effect of our time-journey. Indeed, my cousin might have been perturbed by feelings of disorientation.

So I bribed the museum director to lend me that antediluvian vehicle and whisked my cousin away from the "mental prison", as he calls it somewhere in his diary.

At first he was reluctant to decipher the identity of his saviour. Whoever I was, I had liberated him from mental servitude.

Three hours later he forgot his freedom.

In the afternoon his eyes clouded with indignation and as the wind drove the rain against the window—wind window, wind window seemed to hum the hearth—he sprang to his feet and suggested we should have a walk in the vicinity of the lake. "No, not yet," I said reflecting that the timing of Louis II's biography was to be observed with inconspicuous care. We did not return to the lake-subject until much later, when it became almost indispensable to his life.

The psychiatrist appreciated neither my sense of humour nor my sense of decorum and assured me it would have been safe enough to fetch Louis by car. I told him that I had my own methods and that, since his Reign over my cousin had at last reached its close, I saw no reason to keep a tight rein on my imagination. He handed me a photocopy of his case history and departed without a word or even a handshake as if afraid of catching something. He could have been a bit more tactful, given my attire, manners and voice.

Though I released my cousin from psychoanalytic thralldom on my own initiative and for my own private ends, I was encouraged in my project by his fiancée, whose conscience was governed by a sense of guilt, and by the psychiatrist himself who hoped thereby to ward off the threat of strangulation. Having other, far more sophisticated Kings at his disposal, he understandably did not wish to imperil his reputation and perhaps his life for the sake of the worthless scraps of information which could indeed be provided by any biography of Louis II of Bavaria.

Her sense of guilt. I wonder. "Human beings are perhaps never more frightening than when they are convinced beyond doubt that they are right," says Laurens Van Der Post; and he is right.

My cousin needed me as much as I needed him: not only were we the budding branches of one family-tree the size of which precluded our encounter in the epoch of cradles and rattles, but even our temperaments belonged to the same solitary type and that was of more importance than likeness of blood and genes. I would not, however, equate the sorry plight of a lunatic cooped up in the hodgepodge of his own brain with the consequences of a normal person's withdrawal from public life. Public life—a tragedy of petty quarrels culminating in the triumph of fools. The wise man hides himself and his glory is invisible.

My real mother and my false father, by which I mean my father-in-law, were fond of travel agencies. And they thought the Titanic was unsinkable. And they hoped their honeymoon would last for ever.

Underwater funeral. Submarine tomb.

My solitude, formerly enlivened by my infrequent and abortive attempts to come to terms with the "outside", could have become impeccably uniform, but for the servants' gloves and floating trays.

Once, when I was on the very brink of a nervous breakdown, our family doctor said I needed a shake-up, an adventure and a friendly heart with its warmth and soothing rhythm. As I have no friends—all my friends are heartless, being books and paintings—I thought of my relatives, of my distant cousins. Gradually my memories converged on Versailles, on my cousin Louis. I made inquiries—an adventure in itself—and found out that he had been living in a mental hospital. I was not surprised: there is no way of putting up with lunatics unless one chooses to enter into the spirit of the game.

To meet the requirements of my high-strung and demanding nature I had to expand the concept of "shake-up" beyond its humdrum limits; and expand it I did by writing a letter to the psychiatrist. I asked him to "let me have my cousin stay with me for a month or two". I diplomatically pointed out that I questioned neither his talent nor his good will and that my request was dictated exclusively by my belief in the beneficent influence of family ties. "Those ties," I wrote, "might indeed be instrumental in untying the Gordian knot of my cousin's reasoning." Five days later I was scouring our county's museums for a suitable, more or less genuine carriage.

An adventure in someone else's subconscious necessitates no travelling, no going out. The fabulous scenery one spirals through during that downward trip is spoiled neither by the chugging of engines nor by calluses on the feet. With a shiver of anticipatory pleasure I imagined my slipping down the slope of his consciousness: down and down and down; past the hollow ring of shallow, dressed-to-the-hilt words; past the nude words stripped of their abstract, dictionary-imprisoned meanings; past the impulses and intentions not yet enveloped in the mist of words; down and down and down and down, through a series of crevices into the cavern of his subconscious painted with the pastoral scenes of former lives and giving off a somewhat fusty smell of past centuries.

Kings, shepherds, dinosaurs, columns, valleys and volcanoes kept flaring up and dissolving into darkness again; I was somehow reminded of Jules Vernes' *Voyage au centre de la terre*.

Those fatamorganas were in no wise destined to remove the mask of the King from my cousin's mind. And if by some unlikely chance I had cured him, raising his true identity from the dead, I would have done my best to "contaminate" him, to graft yet another golden Royal bough onto our family-tree. It is much nicer to have a Royal lodger and live in the atmosphere of an old-fashioned court.

The last chapter of a Louis II biography, which I read while preparing for our exceptional cohabitation, put me on my guard against too much snooping: my snooty lodger abhorred inquisitive eyes. He consequently mistrusted physicians and all the implements and concomitants of their profession down to the whiteness of their coats; and he was likely to grow suspicious when submitted to the psy-ray of my torch. I had to become the King's favourite in order to make my "speleological" excursions as often as I pleased.

Upon our arrival I had two bottles of champagne brought to my room and proposed as many as eleven toasts to His Majesty's health. The box of sleeping pills, which would brush against my thigh whenever I paced up and down the room to tranquillise my vibrating nerves, was intended as a supplement to the dream-energy contained in the champagne, the cognac and the hearty twelve-course dinner *à l'ancienne*—*potage impératrice, soufflé à la Reine, paté chaud de cailles Marie-Louise, ortolans sur canapés cassolettes princesse*, and so on.

About midnight a heavy snoring came from his room. As I bent over one of his notebooks I had opened at random, somewhere in the middle, I saw an entry dealing precisely with the problem of favourites and their struggle for power at the Royal Court:

Throughout the morning a host of different personalities struggled for influence, power, the Kingdom, each of them gaining and losing ground after inflicting heavy casualties on their adversaries. Presently a small group broke away from the rest of the pretenders and began to run. Three runners collapsed and were carried off in a

state of prostration. By eleven o'clock one of the runners was reported to have turned in to a driveway leading to my palace.

As any musician knows, Wagner was the first favourite of our freshly-crowned King. Though unable to compose music, I did not relinquish the opportunity of aping history and purchased a beret. Alas, my cousin mistook Wagner for his psychiatrist. "Asylum, asylum," he repeated over and over again—the word I use under no circumstances. He even addressed me as Doctor von Gudden.

Now and then he took me into custody. Among other things, he accused me of intercepting his letters.

MY NARRATIVE

I did nothing of the sort, needless to say. Why should I intercept the letters of a lunatic? My wife brought them to my room, a bundle of his letters. (They look more like short notes. Or short poems in prose.) Apparently he had been putting the unsealed envelopes into my wife's chest of drawers—instead of asking our servant to post them. Here are some of those so-called letters, for what they are worth:

I am waiting for you, I am waiting. Come, do not let the weather deter you. Oh, come to me, come to me, come to me, come! Like a highwayman I am lying in wait for your carriage.

The crystal champagne breaks into ripples of passion as I raise the glass without taking my eyes off your face. Over and over again the bubbles fly up to the surface and thence to the Moon, to the stars.

*Ein Minnetraum
gemahnt auch mich:
in heissem Sehnen
sah ich dich schon!*

The steering wheel was loose; my Bugatti disobeyed my commands. You kept moving in the opposite direction. I shifted into second gear, hoping to slow down, to make a U-turn, but the car went in circles and the lights were green.

The globe is throbbing with our bliss! Our mother-planet will soon deviate from her course designed by Kepler. It will swerve savagely towards the moon whose ebb-and-flow caresses are our native element, our real motherland where we were born, where we shall melt away like ashes dropped into the Ganges.

Let us fly, my dear, let us fly sunward; and if the solar system proves to be too small for our sins, we shall fly beyond the walls of our wee little house and go for a long galactic ramble. And on that path of sins and suns I shall play the part of a solemn King who relinquishes the protection of the beautifully-arrayed pawns, exposing himself to the threats of a sensually-carved Queen. The black King, who keeps getting in the way, ends up in front of a firing squad. The more my heavy mantle is pierced by checks, the better. Why not drive me back into a corner where checks are particularly juicy? And the mate in a corner is beyond compare. But God preserve us from stale-mate.

Are we playing hide-and-seek or rather hide-and-hide-and-hide-and-hide-and-hide?

"They sound like love letters," I said to my wife.

"They *are* love letters," she answered. And she added as if doubting my knowledge of English, "Billets-doux, billets-doux." And she translated the third letter, after pointing out it had been borrowed from Wagner's *Die Walküre*:

A dream of love
Comes to my mind as well:
Burning with longing
I have seen you before.

"They are love letters," she repeated. A dreamy look came into her eyes.

"But who are they addressed to?" I asked naively.

"Can't you guess?" She shook her head with a soft chuckle.

"Louis II was homosexual, if I remember rightly."

"Yeats was not. A great Irish poet, William Butler Yeats."

"What does Yeats have to do with it?" I asked.

"Your cousin is a poet too. And every poet needs a muse."

"Is he in love with *you*?"

"Of course he is. Don't I deserve it?"

"You deserve his love or anybody's love for that matter," I answered. "But what am I supposed to do in the circumstances?"

The dreamy look departed from her eyes. "You can read his letters. And my books."

Again my wife made a quick about-turn and disappeared beyond the door, beyond the walls. And again she came back, carrying two books above her head. (A kind of ritual? What do freemasons hold over their heads? Swords?) The books were deposited on my guest's diary as if to convey an additional meaning to its contents. *W. B. Yeats* by R. F. Foster. *W. B. Yeats, A Life* by Stephen Coote.

As I look backward it seems to me that she brought into my life in those days—for as yet I saw only what lay upon the surface—the middle of the tint, a sound as of a Burmese gong, an over-powering tumult that had yet many pleasant secondary notes.

Again my wife had underlined a few passages in the books she wanted me to read. And I read them. I could not choose but read them.

Maud Gonne was majestic, unearthly, appealing all at once; and her classic beauty came straight out of epic poetry. Immensely tall, bronze-haired, with a strong profile and beautiful skin, she was a fin de siècle beauty in Valkyrie mode: both her appearance and her character represented tragic passion. He at once saw her as a "goddess", and remembered her standing luminous as "apple-blossom through which the light falls...by a great heap of such blossoms in the window".

HIS NARRATIVE

AN OLD MAID'S DREAM

Closer and closer and closer to my unsullied sheets

Crept he—a regular robber of virgins' pride.

I wish I'd known it was a case of mistaken identity.

"D-do y-you l-love me?" he stammered and went down on

[his knee.

"Actions speak louder than words," I cried at the top

[of my voice.

He kissed my hand, after much hesitation.

Many a time did I demonstrate my whole-souled allegiance to my cousin's cause by suggesting he should use my car which, though not as showy as a Bugatti, could yet assist him in his pursuit of happiness. Having found no driver's licence among his papers—out of scientific pedantry, the psychiatrist preserved even his invalid passport—I decided to enclose this pursuit in the space of my park where no policeman might interfere with my car's itinerary.

My hopes rose high as he settled down comfortably in the driver's seat and took a glance at the rear-view mirror reflecting no cars, no carriages. "Off we go!" I shouted. He shifted his gaze to the speedometer and started to feel the gear lever with his fingertips.

He saw something; he drove me somewhere, though motionlessly. His face kept shuffling smiles and frowns—indeed, the whole pack of contradictory expressions. He pawed about as if the décor of the new set of his hallucinations were more akin to a Turkish bath than to my car and my ingratiating postures. The capacity of a given enclosed space to be at once devalued, demeaned and magical points to an ambiguous poise between reality and fancy, between sanity and insanity, between one individual and another individual. We were sitting in the same car—two cousins united through the chemistry of blood and the pageantry of nobility; but his inveterate tendency—which, as

his madness progressed, became a perfect nuisance—to seek out discrepancy rather than agreement substituted the coolness of distance for a friendly handshake or even, who knows, an embrace *à la Russe*. Alas, his supply of agreements was exclusively reserved for the dead.

As might have been expected, he gradually daydreamt himself into one of his customary nightmarish visions and almost demolished my car by stamping on the brake pedal; he discouraged further offers to commandeer this vehicle of promised happiness. Besides, I thought that playing chess, which was also mentioned in his epistles, matched his cerebrotonia better by far.

Madmen are not to be relied upon: he broke off our first game at the very beginning. "Do you want me to send my subjects to their deaths for the benefit of that Prussian bastard?" I understood that my cousin's offensive remark was aimed at Prussia's King William, the future German Emperor. At that point he may have taken me for no other than Bismark whose part, however, I was not prepared to act, having a scant knowledge of his life: I had somehow presumed that Bismark was the last person Louis II would invite to his palace. Of course I was aware of a few substantial links between those antagonists. I recalled the imperial chancellor's appraisal of the young King's elegance and intelligence, and his reluctance to hand the insane King over to the bloodthirsty conspirators; I furthermore recalled that, with the unification of Germany in view, he gave many political concessions to the southern German states and even bribed Louis II with large sums from his secret fund. It seems to me, retrospectively, that I ought to have made the most of that case of mistaken identity and bribed my cousin with modest sums from my piggy bank.

"Do you want me to wage war against France, of all countries?"

My cousin lifted the chessboard, slammed it down on the table, sprang to his feet and headed for his room. Half an hour later, with deference and diffidence I knocked at his door, as one of his ministers might have done; he refused to let me in, alleging that he had both a raging toothache and a splitting headache.

Whenever an armed conflict was on the agenda—that happened rather often, warmongering being the thing in the age of colonial conquests and industrial revolutions—the contradictory feelings with which Louis II faced his Royal duties would

take the shape of a toothache or an upset stomach. "The title of King confers great prestige on my humble self but, in conformity with the law of diminishing returns, it has its drawbacks, its shortcomings. Politicians are now, more often than not, in my way, whichever way I go or run or glide. My court-inventor, my private Leonardo da Vinci seems to have neglected the experiments with the flying machine lately. If they do come off, however, the governmental inventor's brain will yield a flock of flying carpets large enough to obstruct all airy-roads without exception. Commander-in-Chief, adjutants, important news. As if my outings were less important, or less 'new'."

Not to be diverted from his comfortable, legend-permeated pastime into a senseless political controversy, the King was wont to take refuge beyond his castle walls, under his blankets:

Let us retire to counterfeit deep rest;
I scarcely need to counterfeit it now

The crowd, be it composed of simple folk or ministers, became synonymous with loathsome affairs of state, with battles:

The ungrateful and ungracious slaves! they murmur
Because I have not shed their blood, nor led them
To dry into the desert's dust by myriads,
Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges.

Yet his biographers, whose testimony cannot be disregarded even by those who endeavour to re-write biographies, recorded a few instances of what may be regarded as the King's public triumphs:

True, I can easily dismiss the intruders through the medium of my eyebrows which have already sent so many shivers down my spineless subjects' spines; but the sight of wounded or killed heroes visiting me in the dead of night—even nights are dead when battles rage nearby—are so unpleasant that I am prepared to put up with the

hardships of war-time public appearances. I raise my hand and point my index finger in the supposed direction of the enemy troops, and the crowd assembled beneath my window or my balcony indulges in a long cheering. As long as *Parsifal*!

Now and then, in the dead of night, I saw him standing on the balcony of my house with his right hand raised in an authoritative curve which, for want of enemy troops, seemed to point not to a remote spot of space but to a stretch of time, to a slit of the past, to a recess of history inhabited by an immortal Monarch. I refrained from cheerful shouting and fervid applause, lest he mistake me for his bothersome war-minister.

While steering my course towards his heart I had to avoid impersonating both his ministers and the females he mistrusted and feared as potential candidates for the post of his spouse, the Bavarian Queen. Unable to cope with the unpredictability of his insanity, I oscillated between the poles of existence and non-existence. "The criss-cross sensation is incommunicable," wrote my cousin. Even the most straightforward sensation or wish depicted not in gobbledegook—the language of pseudo-psychiatrists and true mental patients—but in plain English is incomprehensible. A well-wisher's knocking sounds like a summons and his noncommittal statement like a war cry. As I noted down in *my* diary: "I extend myself beyond myself. But on my way to others with whom, considering my good-natured looks, I might establish diplomatic relations, my positive rays undergo all sorts of negative influences. And the Devil intercepts them, from time to time."

I went so far as to keep a diary the style of which reproduced the innermost inflexions and the infinitesimal modulations of his thoughts. I was tuning in to his madness. I slipped a few epistles under his door. "Oh, the foolish chatter of myopic and malevolent persons who believe that we have parted. Parting and meeting, ebb and flow, *yin* and *yang* are the symbols of friendship. The saying: 'They who never part, never meet,' is as indestructible as your castles."

After much hesitation, understandable within the context of our set whose business activities are limited to Church, Army and diplomacy, I stooped to putting on the ever-changing uniform of a comedian—Joseph Kainz, *en l'occurrence*—whom Louis II first saw in Hugo's *Marion de Lorme*, the 21st of April 1880. Having no talent for acting, let

alone double-acting—not an easy task, even for a man accustomed to double-dealing—I needed to back up my claim with a concrete, *material* proof. So I got my servant Willy, a Jack-of-all-trades and a drunkard, to make a brass replica of the "golden chain with a swan" sent by Louis II to Kainz after the second performance of Hugo's drama. And since an illusion, to be faithful to the original, must surpass the original—out-Herod Herod, as often happens in works of art—I recited a monologue from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* that Louis II was yearning to hear on the top of Rütli during his literary trip to Switzerland, and which his would-be long-sought friend, exhausted after an endless climb and sleepless nights, did not recite, refusing to carry out His Majesty's orders.

*Durch der Surennen furchtbares Gebirg,
Auf weit verbreitet öden Eisesfeldern,
Wo nur der heisre Lämmergeier krächzt,
Gelangt' ich zu der Alpentrift, wo sich
Aus Uri und vom Engelberg die Hirten
Anrufend grüssen und gemeinsam weiden,
Den Durst mir stillend mit der Gletscher Milch,
Die in den Runsen schäumend niederquillt.*

The door remained closed like the gate of an enchanted Kingdom impervious to incantations. The only vestige of my exertions to be found in his diary runs as follows:

A black ray of silence picks out here a tirade, here a series of smothered exclamations.

I needed a friend to whom I might open my heart with surgical gore and micro-precision. I needed a friend, a companion in misfortune, a forbearing and resigned confidant of sufferers, a dumping-ground of human grievances—someone who could understand everything and absolve, abolish every crime. Louis was nearer at hand than any other cousin, any haphazard Schubertian *Wanderer*.

I used to knock at his door far into the night and thus, with a woodpecker-like insistence, create a sort of *Waldweben*—an echo of his Wagnerian soul.

I used to knock at *her* door.

She fell upon her knees the instant she picked me out in the chaos of straitjackets and ever since she has been looking up to me, which is quite congruent with my looking down on her. Hardly had I opened my mouth to say something about the rain than she nodded in approval and even recoiled as if to make room for the expansion of my majestic personality. The style of our adult or adulterous relationship was established at once, and as her blushing melted into paleness I thought fit to transfer our discussion to an arbour where, I reflected, it might be sweetened with a pulpy touch of her trembling lips. I recalled Russian wedding ceremonies during which one can hear: "Bitter, bitter," meaning the vodka is bitter—sweeten it with the juice of a kiss!

She smiled. Her smile was on a par with what the most popular figure in the literature of the romantic centuries—the ward—might manifest, when spared a well-deserved punishment.

I don't knock at her door any more. Why does *she* knock at my door? Is this Macbeth's castle? Has she demoted me to the status of a night porter?

What does she need? My body, my soul, my diary?

MY NARRATIVE

At last my wife makes her appearance in the diary that is otherwise devoted to Louis II of Bavaria and his private pursuits. And to affairs of state in which, willy-nilly, he would become involved now and then, lending an ear to his ministers' reports.

"It's not true," my wife shouted angrily. "You don't concentrate on what you're reading. (She was reading *my* diary now.) He showed me around one of his castles." And she pointed to the relevant passage in the chapter *A Model Upbringing*:

Once, around 10 p.m., he stalked into her country house and demanded that she join him for a ride...He was describing to her, with the utmost accuracy and with the aid of his arms, the layout of his new castle's rooms.

"Yes, he showed me around his Castle of Heroes—a place of mystical initiation built in accordance with my instructions. A long time ago I had suggested he should build a little temple of heroes which I might make the centre of the literary and mystical movement...to get the forms and shapes of the gods..."

Again a dreamy look came into her eyes.

"But is he really in love with you?" I asked. "He seems to hate women. In the same chapter he quotes Alfred de Vigny—"

"A typical love-hate relationship," she retorted.

"Be that as it may, I do focus my attention on his writing. And in the chapter I read this morning he denies you access to his Castle of Heroes or to his hamlet of madmen—call it what you will. You knock on the door—"

"It's I who denied him access to my room. In his diary our situations are reversed. He always reverses the charges, metaphorically speaking. I said to him a few weeks ago, 'If you find that an absolutely platonic friendship, which is all I can or ever will be able to give, unsettles you and spoils your work, you must have the strength and courage to give up meeting me. At once!'"

"What about 'the juice of a kiss'?"

"The carton of apple juice he got last night."

"At the end of the chapter he wonders if—"

"I don't need his body, I tell you." Again my wife was seething with indignation.

"And what about his soul?"

"Just another of his Wagnerian reminiscences. You see, I sent him some earth from Newgrange and a white bottle of water from the Boyne gathered while the morning sunlight gleamed on the river—"

"I've no idea what river you're talking about because I'm all at sea—"

"Read my books! And don't interrupt me, please!" My wife's every utterance leapt up at the end into an exclamation mark. "I urged him to touch his lips, eyes, ears and breast with the earth—"

"And with the water, I presume—"

"—so that he should receive occult dreams of the heroic past. And he saw Wagner's operas, strangely enough."

"Again?" I was slightly disappointed.

"He saw *you*, by the way. You were Alberich or Hagen. And he was Wotan of course."

"Of course. And you were Brünnhilde...or Fricka..."

"At least you know Wagner's operas. So you can understand, you'll understand."

"What kind of nonsense—" At that point I lost all patience with my wife and her exegesis. And her protégé.

"As a psychiatrist you must have infinite patience," she said mockingly.

"How many parts am I playing in *your* opera?" I shouted.

"It's a pity you don't understand German," she went on, undisturbed by my ironical outburst. "Well, even Louis II ordered the mobilisation of his army in French—at the outset of the war with France. You do have a smattering of French, don't you?"

By way of an answer, I made for the door and left my study. I left my own study, my den, my harbour of peace. When, a few hours later, I regained my self-control and was in a position to resume my daily routine, I found on my carpet the following text:

As Tillich writes: "Neurosis is the way of avoiding non-being by avoiding being."

The trouble is that the individual may find that the pretence has been in the

pretending and that, in a more real way than he had bargained for, he has actually lapsed into that very state of non-being he has so much dreaded, in which he has become stripped of his sense of autonomy, reality, life, identity, and from which he may not find it possible to regain his foothold "in" life by the simple repetition of his name.

The passage had been cut from R.D.Laing's book. By whom? By my wife. Or by her cousin. Or by one of Wagner's heroes.

I repeated my name—just in case. I grinned and then started to laugh. I'll outlive all others to have the last laugh, I said to myself.

HIS NARRATIVE

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

Darkness blends the sea with the ship:
 Only in anonymity do we reach safe haven.
 The idol of Wagner-lovers (belated worship)
 Goes ashore, a bird on his shoulder, a raven.

"Evermore," says the raven. The man sits down.
 The overture starts. The early bats skitter.
 He opens a hip flask and, with a frown,
 Drinks a toast to she who will share his bitter—

Over so many centuries he has drunk himself stupid.
 His former doctrine of self-reliance gradually shading
 Into alienation, drinking bouts, feelings of solitude,
 He welcomes the final curtain now, house lights fading.

Happy ending? Doesn't rhyme, does it? Happy endings rhyme with nothing. There is neither rhyme nor reason in them.

We are weary of life, yet we fear death. An insoluble problem. Birth is a curse!

Before I had the privilege of being received as Wagner in my cousin's room—among the ruins of Chiemsee, Berg and Nymphenburg—I became his brother Otto.

My cousin had no brothers and, consequently, felt the necessity of improving upon his biography which, he feared, might wander from the subject, stripping him of his borrowed King's mantle. "The King is naked," was one of the sentences I was careful not to utter within his earshot.

The role assigned to Otto by Louis was that of a double-agent, figuratively speaking: Otto was his playmate and confidant to whom, when in no mood to receive his ministers, Louis contemplated offering his crown; on the other hand, Otto was but his

subject who did not always know his place and would laugh heartily when reminded of his step on the social ladder.

"My brother raised himself from the sofa and, attracted by some irrelevant sight, leant against a window-pane. Meanwhile his features had undergone a metamorphosis. 'Madness!' I cried. 'Madness, madness, madness, madness!' This word resounded in my room with such vehemence that, like a boomerang, it returned to its owner. Did I really own it? One can own a car, a castle, but a word? Madness? It is said to be owned if not by the whole of humanity, at least by some of its members. Madness is public property, even though this or that individual may give it, in passing, a personal touch, enriching the general notion of madness. My brother suddenly fell on his knees, imploring my pardon, confessing his sins in a thunderous voice that reminded me of the French Revolution. All the demons inhabiting his substance started their respective soliloquies at one and the same moment. Polyphony instead of monophony. Homophony."

Otto took leave of his senses in Frauenkirche where, during a service, he fell on his knees and related in great detail his sexual intercourse with Jesus Christ. Louis, who paid him a visit at the castle of Fürstenried and attempted to cajole him into recovering his wits, was distraught with anxiety. As he said to his aide-de-camp, "blood is thicker than water".

Blood *is* thicker than water!

The ties of blood.

The golden chains of blood.

For a week or so, the door of my cousin's room remained locked for everyone save my servant Ted who had been given the job of pushing the tea trolley. I roamed around Nymphenburg in expectation of the Royal pardon. I knew that, like the Flying Dutchman, my cousin was searching for a friend. I also knew that he could not live without Wagner, the incomparable creator of *Lohengrin* and the swan. Unlike my cousin, attracted in equal measure by ancient and modern composers, Louis II had no ear for music and the swan-driven boat with Lohengrin standing in it was dearer to his heart than the majestic spread of the *Parsifal* harmony.

My cousin was not unfamiliar with the hushed swish of the swan's flight as reflected in both dance and music. Back in the thirties, he had attended Anna Pavlova's

performance of the *Dying Swan*, and the picture of *her* swan, deprived of its boat and strength, embellished his room in my house. Furthermore, for all his abhorrence of Tchaikovsky's slushiness and the Soviet rulers, he was planning to go to Moscow and see *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoy Theatre. As for Wagner's swans, he preferred the one killed in *Parsifal*, although its appearance on the stage lasts but a few moments. "You shouldn't go by appearances," he used to say, touching his ears and closing his eyes.

To use cinematic terminology, Wagner added sound track to some enchanting German legends and thereby materialised them, outstripping in his élan *createur* the two-dimensional, mute wall-paintings and illustrations Louis was so fond of in his childhood. Moreover, by introducing the notion of music drama, by discarding an artificial, *exterior* entertainment in favour of a quasi-ritual expressing the self-realisation of free humanity, Wagner *interiorised* those legends and their heroes. One day Louis realised that he was *inside* a legend, that he was a hero, a god; he found himself on a stage, in a painting, in the score of *Lohengrin*—hence Lohengrin's costume hidden at the bottom of his linen-chest and exposed, after his death, in one of his castles.

Once he opened a door and walked into the first act of *Walküre*, into the Hunding hut. He was exhausted; his clothes and general appearance indicated that he was on the run. Seeing nobody, he closed the door behind him, walked to the fireplace and threw himself down on a bear rug. He lay back and for some time remained stretched out, motionless. Sieglinde entered from the inner bedroom; her expression changed from seriousness to delight when she spotted her brother by the fireplace. "I looked up and saw my sister. She knelt down at my side like a professional masseuse and, as I struggled to adopt a more decent face-to-face posture, she applied her lips first to my omphalos and then to the Mount Meru of my whole being—to my phallus, in common parlance. Her tenderness forecast the weather of our relationship, prognosticated a linden-blossoming summer and an apple-falling autumn. I kept migrating as the fancy took me from one season to another, from breathtaking ascents to heartbreaking descents. We were below sea-level."

Louis II had no sister; the above excerpt poses therefore a sort of whodunit problem for his biographers who, zealous to please their publishers, bestow an identity upon the "masseuse". Some speak of Louis II's cousin Elisabeth, the Empress of Austria who,

throughout his extravagant Reign, frequently met him both in the open and on the sly; only during the last years did he deny her access to his castles and to his Hunting hut. Others entrust the part to Lila von Bulyovsky on whose shoulder Louis II once rested his head. The King then let his head slide down until it rustled to a stop in Lila von Bulyovsky's lap. This lapse in concentration might have ruined the King's life had he not instantly fled the seductress, white with anger.

Louis ran pretty fast, knocking over the chairs and statues on his way to salvation; Lila caught up with him in no time as if she were a secret member of the German Olympic team. She clutched the lapel of his raincoat and endeavoured to bring him to a halt, which was no easy task on account of his weight-aggravated inertia: by that time, Louis' body had already acquired its ultimate shape. Undaunted and undignified, Lila did not loosen her grip and might have overcome the physical and psychological resistance of her idol, but for an accidental fall. So she gave Louis an opportunity to incarnate Achilles or rather his chariot which, many centuries before, had dragged the jolting corpse of Hector all the way from Troy to the Grecian ships. Savagely torn by stones, her dress and petticoat created in the courtyard the garish mosaic of Royal retribution.

All through the unorthodox ride the vamp recited her monologue, "People can't live alone. Human contact is vital for the preservation of the human species. Give me your hand and you'll forget your worries. You'll never find anybody capable of loving you as much as I do, and without love—" Later on, under the pretext of restoring the inner splendour of her wardrobe and the outer splendour of her skin, Lila squeezed the last penny out of her "torturer", precluding a materialisation of no less than four architectural visions. "If you don't give me the money," she wrote in her amazingly long letter, "I'll have to avail myself of your cousin's generosity." No doubt, she was alluding to the Prussian King William.

That was their first and last rendezvous. After the accidental Grecian striptease, Lila von Bulyovsky never so much as approached the Royal castles. The question thus remains open: Who was Louis' sister?

My personal hypothesis, which I propose to touch upon now, is much nearer to Louis' theatrical *trompe-l'oeil* mentality than whatever was suggested by the psychoanalysts and biographers. I maintain that the young lady he welcomed in his

Hunding hut was no other than Sieglinde, Sigmund's sister; and that his homosexuality, if any, originated in Mark's overprotective attitude towards Tristan and in King Edward II's love for Gaveston, as recorded by Christopher Marlowe. So much of what he did was "untrue", being borrowed from operas and tragedies, that I would clear my throat and even hum a scale, whenever about to enter his room; so many characters did he play within the same minute that the floor of his room seemed to bulge down with the weight of their armours and Kingly bodies. Hypnotised into the reality of unreality, I heard the lances swish over my head and go flying through the door; and my hands depended so entirely on the hands of the characters I was supposed to personify that I was incapable of reaching my glass of champagne.

In his choice of authors my cousin scrupulously followed his model's taste which—a titillating nuance—was not in absolute harmony with his own. Byron was not among his favourite authors; and yet, throughout his secret diary, there crop up snatches from Byron's plays—an obvious concession to Louis. Nor was my cousin a fervent admirer of Schiller's and Hugo's tragedies.

Louis' repertoire was impressive; my cousin's repertoire was more impressive still for, in addition to the parts performed by Louis, he had to perform the part of Louis day and night. My cousin's dreams, too, must have been "conditioned". For all his Royalism, he seemed to live in some communist country, in a highly-evolved bureaucratic state where thought and dream control as well as brainwashing had dissolved all individual freedom.

"Who are you Mr Smith?" As Mr Smith tries to piece together his real identity—in case he vouchsafes to go beyond the simplest and the best answer: "I'm Mr Smith"—he comes to rely more and more on his parents, his grandparents and the trinkets he was surrounded by in his childhood; he also realises his indebtedness to the historic and make-believe figures he has modelled himself upon; so that what is left over of Mr Smith may not even amount to the nether curve of the letter "S".

My cousin knew he was Louis II of Bavaria and that knowledge set him above many thinkers pondering over themselves in the dust of their studies: "Who am I? Whence did I come?" What particularly earned him my respect was his clinging to that "fact" despite the almost complete lack of concomitant circumstances and corroborative

details such as, for instance, the ready-laid table which used to be raised, for Louis' benefit, from the Linderhof basement by means of a trap-door and a double helical gearing.

Yet Louis, apart from being Louis II of Bavaria, was one of those Russian and Chinese Emperors whose absolutism he greatly admired; he was moreover Louis XIV and Louis XVI—hence his fear of revolutions and bombs. And he was Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, Amfortas, Parsifal, Tristan, Mark, the Flying Dutchman and Wotan. With the other gods and heroes he sat in the hall of *Walhall* and watched Brünnhilde hurl the torch on to the pile of logs that quickly burst into flame. He watched the flames set light to the hall: "The fire of Brünnhilde has wrought its havoc. The opera would have lasted my lifetime, but for the criminal, childishly-handled matches."

"The image of fire recurs repeatedly," writes the psychiatrist. "Fire may be the uncertain flickering of the individual's own inner aliveness. It may be a destructive alien power which will devastate him. Some psychotics say in the acute phase that they are on fire, that their bodies are being burned up. A patient describes himself as cold and dry. Yet he dreads any warmth or wet. He will be engulfed by the fire or the water, and either way be destroyed."

Louis II of Bavaria was also that madman—my cousin. And I am my cousin's cousin.

One has one's doubts, however. It is as if one were brought blindfolded into a dark theatre. And all of a sudden one finds oneself on the light-generated stage. Presently the lights are extinguished once more and the voices, coming from different directions, talking of different directions, fill the receptacle of silence. "Straight across...straight through...keep walking...keep walking...straight into...keep going...from here you go down to...follow the main road..." What main road? Is this a main road, the main road? And when one comes back—supposing there was such a thing as homecoming—everything has changed beyond recognition: all the main roads, all the directions, all the faces. You are no longer able to tell a woman from a man, a man from a woman. And if you stumble upon Lohengrin's costume in your attic you are permitted to jump into your boat and, driven by a member of your bestiary, move into another castle.

MY NARRATIVE

His sister. Was my wife his sister? I also felt the urge to bestow an identity upon the "masseuse".

The point is I love my wife. I have no idea why she became my wife seven years ago, for she does not seem to love me at all. I don't think she has ever loved me, frankly speaking, in spite of my powerful physique and easy-going character. Perhaps she was looking for something else, for somebody else, for my antithesis—a man of genius. She is well-read and so her natural choice would be a poet, a novelist. A great poet, a great novelist. Or a great composer. My wife might have married Wagner had she lived in the nineteenth century.

Where could I find answers to my questions? My wife is not outspoken—quite the reverse. (I am loath to talk about her in the past tense. She *might* be alive yet, sharing her joys and sorrows with my antithetical self, to borrow Yeats' terminology.) I had only her books at my disposal. They are still within my reach, lying on my writing desk, in my bed, under my pillow. My wife was never within my reach, even when I held her in my arms.

"Are you his sister?" I asked my wife point-blank. We had run into each other in a corridor leading to her cousin's room.

"I had a dream, and in that dream I *was* his sister," she answered curtly.

"Did you kiss him on the...phallus, as he put it?"

"Just another of his visions, nothing else. Read my books!"

So I had no alternative but to immerse myself in her books, in the biographies of W. B. Yeats. And I found many relevant passages in them—too many perhaps. Why was she so eager to impersonate Maud Gonne and, a few months later, George Hyde-Lee, whom Yeats married on 20 October 1917—on the day when "the revolving planets moved into a position promising stability, inspiration, children, philosophic friendship and public acclaim for creative endeavour"? My wife was a remarkable woman *herself* and thus needed no-one's help to gain prominence and make a lasting impression on her friends, on her contemporaries. Perhaps she had no wish to become a heroine of our time, thinking that our times could not give birth to a real heroine, a woman of Maud Gonne's

stature. Even in *her* times Maud Gonne seemed antiquated, according to Yeats' poems and autobiographies:

What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?

I love my wife dearly. I love her without these "borrow'd robes". I still love her, defying time and common sense. But I am not jealous any longer. I am not jealous.

Did I have any reason to be jealous in those distant days when her cousin was living under my roof? (Why do I continue to say "her *cousin*"?) I would scrutinise my wife's face, trying to work out whether she was lying or telling the truth. I also scrutinised my cousin's face, his glances, his grimaces. Alas, they wore masks on their faces (and on their bodies, as it were) so that no information could be gleaned from a mere analysis of their outward appearances:

Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.

Actually, to all outward appearances, everything was fine, wonderful and entertaining, but under the surface—What was hidden under the surface, I wonder? "In late June 1900, Maud Gonne and W. B. Yeats travelled to Dublin together: he *en route* to Coole, she to preside over her 'Patriotic Children's Treat'. Once more he pursued her romantically." What does "romantically" mean in the context? "Platonically"? "After they parted he wrote her a letter of 'kind sweet things'." What does *that* mean? She replied on 7 July:

As for me you are right in saying I will be always to you as a sister. I have chosen a life which to some might be hard, but which to me is the only one possible. I am not unhappy only supremely indifferent to all that is not my work or my friends.

So my wife was just his sister, nothing more. Now I understood why she had underlined this passage. Was she just his sister? Or was Maud Gonne Louis II's sister? A nice space-time cocktail. I laughed again. In those days I was still capable of laughing and uttering facetious remarks, if only within my *inner* self. When did my outer self laugh for the last time? Did I really outlive them all?

The following day she put on my writing desk yet another instalment of my cousin's secret diary:

MY SISTER

"We were as if brother and sister of old in the desert land."
 How softly you spake it, how softly. "I give but a friendly hand.
 They sold us in slavery together before this life had begun,
 But Love bides nobodies bidding being older than moon or sun."

What would I say about my sister if I were to write her biography? The problem does not even arise: nobody will ever ask me to undertake such a useless job. And I will not do it on my own initiative. It is indeed not worth wasting my afternoons on her moods and whims. She does not deserve to be discussed by a man of my stature. What *does* she deserve? Just a few sentences—a certain number of words and commas. After all, I owe her some respect. We are of the same flesh and blood. We are of the same flesh: she is rather beautiful. She would be more sophisticated and refined however if my blood flowed through her veins.

I used to like my sister. We were children in those days; neither of us was discriminating and experienced. I have matured a lot since then.

She played near my armchair. I never took part in her games, being far more interested in literature and sculpture. I was also very fond of music, especially of Gesualdo and Schoenberg.

I could not work out the meaning of her movements. In my opinion, she just frisked and gambolled in our garden to no purpose at all. She has no sense of purpose

anyway. It was a game of course—an interminable, childish game. But even childish games must have a purpose, a development, a pattern. Life is too short. If we are stupid enough not to endow Human Time with a pattern and a sense, it falls into pieces. And only God can assemble those pieces. But God is unpredictable and unreliable. And God is remiss in not finishing His work.

My sister does not know why she lives and what she is supposed to do. And she does nothing at all. She does not move, although she is always on the run as if somebody were pursuing her. She has a few suitors who pester me with questions and demands, but they do not pursue her in the literal sense of the word: they wait for her in our garden, while she runs about the city. Should I throw them out? They look strong and determined. Should I call the police and have them arrested for trespassing?

She has no wish to get married, as far as I know. And I know everything about my sister. We are on speaking terms and I make the most of her outspokenness at lunch, whenever our maid goes out of the dining room. My sister confides in me about her intentions and attachments. She does not seem to withhold any information about her feelings. At least she has never taken me by surprise; and yet I still do not understand her movements and some of her thoughts and ideas.

I have deduced from her words and behaviour that she does not love her suitors. And she has no faith in marriages of convenience. So she is not likely to marry in the near future unless a handsome stranger makes his appearance in our garden and, having clutched her hand with an irresistible grip, drags her away from my room. I cannot prevent him from coming to our garden, even if I lock the gate: there is a hole in the fence that surrounds it. Who made this hole? One of the suitors, no doubt. The hole becomes larger every day, no matter how often I board it over. The hole is meant for me, judging from its size. Do they want me to leave the house for ever?

I like my sister's legs and shoulders. I also like the way she walks around the garden. It is a pity she prefers to run, as if she were still a girl—a little girl I used to watch stealthily from where my armchair stood. I pretended to read Heidegger but my eyes actually followed her recondite gestures. What was she thinking about?

What *is* she thinking about? Does she ever muse about our relationship? Do we have any relationship, apart from being brother and sister?

We have our meals together. We sleep in adjacent rooms as if one bed were too narrow for our slim, immature bodies. My bed is broad enough to allow me to fly in my dreams all the way to the South Pole. It is too narrow for the twins who suffer neither from claustrophobia nor from elephantiasis.

Perhaps someone fears we might have an argument and come to blows. Sometimes I do feel like giving her a good spanking, but she runs too fast and jumps too high. And in the night, when she is docile and immobile, I just cannot bring myself to approach her body, let alone raise a whip. What would she say if I suddenly loomed out of the darkness, a whip and a torch in my hands? She might hold her arms out, whispering a term of endearment and pursing her lips.

I seldom approach her bed in the night. I prefer to touch it in the daytime, when my sister does the shopping or goes to the movies. I touch it and lie down on her sheets stark naked. I doze off on her pillow and her suitors close in upon me. They bear candles and murmur insults. I will have them evicted tomorrow!

I think I had better leave her suitors where they are. They serve as a foil to my appearance, intelligence and manners. Sooner or later she will compare us and come to the inevitable conclusion. Should I always stay beside them in her presence to emphasise the contrast? My sister is so short-sighted in these matters! Should I talk to her last suitor about Derrida?

She must already have realised my superiority. Whenever indoors, she shuttles her glance from me to this man who leans against our trees and never sits down on our benches. And she frowns as long as her glistening eyes rest on his figure, on the white feathers he shows whenever I utter the word "lake".

The woman in black. The man in white.

Shall I talk to him about Peter Greenaway and his film *Drowning by Numbers*?

He bows and calls out to her, but she remains at the window, not far from my hands.

Why do I always keep my hands behind my back when she is around?

I seem to hold everything behind my back, as it were, so she sees and hears nothing. No wonder she runs about the city instead of playing cards with me day in day out. And I pace up and down my room, my hands clasped behind my back.

Shall I stay in my sister's bed until her return home? Will she ask me to get up? Will her voice tremble? She has a lovely voice, especially when she is agitated and in high spirits. I will not get up as long as she speaks and trembles.

"Why is he so arrogant? Why does he constantly treat me with disrespect?" I asked my wife.

"Because he is well-read and you are not, I suppose. A highly erudite understanding of literature and philosophy. What matter!"

At least I was reading *her* books—day in day out.

Another underlined passage confirmed what my wife had told me during her recent visit to my study. Once more W. B. Yeats asks Maud Gonne to marry him:

"Willi, are you not tired of asking that question? How often have I told you to thank the gods that I will not marry you. You would not be happy with me."

"I am not happy without you."

"Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry. The world should thank me for not marrying you."

She could not marry him as long as I was her husband. But was I her husband under the circumstances? In the context of his diary, of their relationship? Who was Maud Gonne's husband?

In the summer of 1887, at the French spa of Royat, she had met the much older Boulangist journalist and politician, Lucien Millevoye, already married, and began her long liaison with him. In April 1889, less than three months after meeting W. B. Yeats, she conceived Millevoye's child.

Well, I was *not* Millevoeye—the French journalist with whom Maud Gonne had a liaison. Besides, I was *married* to my wife and therefore our relationship, for all its shortcomings and deficiencies, could not be qualified as a liaison.

Never mind who I am, I told myself as I temporarily abandoned my search for Maud Gonne's husband. Let us see what *they* are doing right now:

"I dreamed this morning," he said, "for the first time in my life that you kissed me." She made no answer and only returned to the subject later that evening. When dinner was over and Yeats was about to leave she said that last night she too had had an astral experience. Dressed in a white gown, she had gone to Yeats and been married to him by Lugh, the spear-wielding god of fire. Then, for the first time with her bodily mouth, Maud had kissed him.

Another dream, another vision. They may kiss each other for hours on end, provided their kisses and caresses remain in the realm of dreams and astral experiences, I told myself. But *did* they remain in that realm, in that distant realm, in those half-forgotten times? And what exactly was stored away in those legendary times? Only astral kisses and caresses?

He wrote to her confidante Ella Young that Gonne's horoscope revealed "a climacteric period about every 14 years—this period is due at opening of next year", and a French astrologer was consulted about Gonne's prospects for 1908, responding in encouraging terms. "Two unions are clearly indicated by your stars: the second seems to me likely to be rather libre than legal. It can take place this very year (I mean to say from the 21 December next to the 20 December 1909)."

And from the tone of his correspondence with Gonne (as well as evidence given by W. B. Yeats' widow long afterwards and hints in his astrological calculations), it seems that now they finally became lovers.

My sister did not underline *these* bits of information.

My arms are like the twisted thorn
And yet there beauty lay

HIS NARRATIVE

IDOLATRY

A tree in the field. Stroking its bark,
 March women, white-dressed and austere.
 As a rule, at dawn they embark
 Upon their ritual. From the rear

They look like gentlemen. The frontal view
 Speaks volumes for their femininity.
 Round and round the tree, with equanimity,
 They march and march, glistening with dew.

They all abandoned their motherland
 And their naughty children. They had to stand
 The cost of the journey. They worship the tree,
 Notwithstanding the trouble and the membership fee.

Idolatry is far from alien to human nature. A common pebble, washed ashore and picked up by a beachcomber, may become a mascot embellishing some hairy chest. One of my tutors, a classic example of the old fogey, needed to prop up his decaying constitution; he would interrupt our lessons at 11.20 a.m., rise from his chair and remain motionless for almost three minutes. He venerated this span of time which, according to him, had miraculous healing powers.

Alongside the veneration of animate (Time) and inanimate (stones) things, there exists the veneration of humans. Unable to surmount their insignificance by themselves, the common people bask in the glory of their idols and repeat the saying: "The speck of dust trembling in a sunbeam radiates like the sun."

Louis II idolised many people, chiefly Kings—the Sun King in particular—or heroes of legends. He used to make the round of their portraits hanging in his room and

he would stop occasionally to give a gracious bow to Louis XV or to kiss Marie Antoinette's hand. The French Kings and Queens were the only persons he regularly saw at his dinner table. "While sampling the first 'note' of my monophonic dinner I suddenly become aware of their presence distributed around the tablecloth. Out of my 'subject' they create a three- or four-voiced soirée. We all belong to the *Kunst der Fuge*."

When meandering around my park, he kept overhearing their conversations. Their voices, like climbing ivy, crept towards his protuberant ears.

Marie Antoinette: Promise that you will see us again.

Louis XVI: I will see you before...I go. At half past six.

He did not need to strain his ears: "The dead are not so fond of whispering as some spurious ghost-stories suggest. On the contrary, they go in for reciting and singing at full throttle, anxious to annoy or 'noise' their host into believing they are alive."

"Louis idolised Versailles to the point of modelling the trysting place wherein he awaited his long-sought lovers upon Marie-Antoinette's grotto situated at the foot of the Montagne de l'Escargot, not far from Belvédère," writes the psychoanalyst. And he quotes his patient's secret diary: "A crack in the wall over the bed of moss opens onto a meadow, bringing to my notice anyone who gets closer to this retreat. At a moment's notice my harpoon-like arm may be extended to whatever shoulder it chooses. A dark stairway leads to the summit of the slope through a close thicket that conceals any object or body or scream."

Almost a century later my cousin was sprawling on the couch in Louis' world-renowned train: "My couch is swinging to and fro. I am surrounded by light draperies of crimson and white satin damask."

Sir Charles Eliot declares solemnly: "Each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object and, in fact, *is* everything else." Thus my ancestral abode is Versailles and I am Louis XIV or François I. I might have become Louis II of Bavaria had my teeth begun to fall out five years ago.

There was nothing wrong with my cousin's teeth; and though his doppelgänger fever helped him overcome his horror of dentists, he was prevented by the psychiatrist

from having a few of his front teeth out. He made up for that uncharacteristic dissimilarity by getting fatter and fatter: his trousers needed to be let out round the waist almost every other week. "His stature gained in vigour what it lost in elegance," wrote Count Dürckheim who, through thick and thin, remained unswervingly loyal to Louis.

My cousin was literally swollen with pride:

Toute justice émane du Roy,

Si veut le Roy, veut la loi:

Une foi, une loi, un Roy.

By order of the King.

Ludwig.

He also signed himself in Spanish "*Yo el Rey*" ("I the King") and once I saw, at the bottom of a page, my cousin's own signature. I promptly erased it. I am a bit on the meticulous side but that is no bad thing.

Ever since I began to read books and distinguish in the sonorous fog what people tried to make me understand, I have erased a great many words, removing them entirely from my life. Whenever I hear a word that jars with my inner music, I reach out for my rubber and brandish it in the air. Then I pick up my pen and blacken books and Space so as to blot the dissonant word out from the entire universe. For ever! Nevermore!

For all my efforts, her mouth is still visible and audible.

"O, falsely, falsely murder'd!"

Stage in darkness but for MOUTH, as Beckett put it in *Not I*.

"Commend me to my kind Lord, O, farewell!"

Not I! Not I!!!

As my cousin put it in his diary: "I've changed all the letters, all the words and idioms. In the beginning was the word, and in the middle was the word, and in the end

was the word, and before the beginning was the word, and after the end will be the word, and the word will be with me, and it will be my word, my word, my word, and the world will be the spitting image of my word."

Most madmen are capable enough of speaking widely-used *sane* languages: English, French, German. Yet, within these languages or outside them, they create a private gibberish, a triple Dutch, comprehensible to no-one but themselves or other madmen who, by osmosis, learn insane languages quicker than the rest of mankind. However, the preposterous chaos may well be turned into scintillating prose, showing the translator—another madman or psychiatrist or solitary relative—to virtuoso advantage.

The snow-discoloured earth looked like a great frozen ocean of milk in the middle of which grew a lotus-flower as large as the Jambudvipa, the southern continent of Indian cosmogony. I was sitting on a throne fixed to the peak of the golden mountain which stood in the centre of that thousand-petalled lotus.

Absolute Monarchy achieved its perfection in Russia and China. Louis II liked to be told the story of a Russian Emperor's journey from Moscow to Petersburg. The road ran between fields and hills covered with dazzling snow that made the Emperor's eyes smart. By raising his mitten-muffled hand, the Emperor brought his sleigh to a halt and presently the peasants of the neighbouring villages were summoned and ordered to lie down along the road, on both sides—to "darken the landscape". And as the journey continued other peasants would be assembled and lined up on the snow to protect the Emperor's sight.

Instructive and significant, the story could not, however, benefit Louis who travelled mostly by night and in the Bavarian woods where the snow looked too demure to dazzle anyone. Besides, the manpower resources of his Kingdom were far inferior to those of Russia. In this respect, he preferred a story about the Chinese Emperor Lin Pang who, in 202 B.C., summoned not a thousand peasants but one, only one of his subjects living in a remote province. The man, upon hearing the ukase, knelt down and, without rising to his feet, set off on his journey. Miles and miles and miles did he crawl on all fours, not daring to straighten up and stop for breath: he knew that the Emperor was

awaiting him. Never once did he look up at heaven, lest his speed be unnecessarily reduced.

One of Louis' servants—his testimony appears in the medical report—complained of being forced to "run" the King's errands on his knees inside the castle as well as in the park—in all weathers. The servant was forbidden to gaze around or to rest, and yet Louis did not care for velocity as such. All he required was to be obeyed with due consideration and concentration. The servant was not on equal *footing* with the King. So he was to crawl—as fast as possible.

Nor did Louis show concern for the passing of Time. He could not help noticing the traces of its passage, if only in his mouth or in his clothes; but the glimpse of eternity he would catch while perusing his numerous pictures was so consistent with his notion of a King's status that he simply paid no attention to Time. He was allergic to the phrases "times have changed" and "gone are the days when—"; and he was conscious of his absolute Monarchy being threatened by the modernisation of customs and mentalities. So he was removing Time from his Space, day by day, round the clock.

Louis is young and handsome. His subjects acclaim him as soon as he steps onto his balcony or draws back his carriage curtains. He is idolised by his ministers, his court, his relatives. Prince von Hohenlohe, the president of the Council, writes about him to Queen Victoria: "There is no point in hiding from you that we have the kindest Monarch imaginable, whose nature is both poetic and noble, whose powers of seduction break hearts all around him. Nor does he lack intelligence."

And in those days, in those bygone days, Louis' enthusiasm for his Royal work knew no limits. He was wont to receive one minister a day, not to mention the secretary of State's report at 9 a.m. When given no work to do, he would sign the blank sheets of paper lying in piles on his secretaire. In his memoir, the minister of Justice von Bomhard enlarges on Louis' willingness to learn "*le métier de Roy*". Yet, a few weeks later, he was to copy in his diary the following excerpt from Henry VI:

O God! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,

To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run

MY NARRATIVE

I was ashamed of myself because I had entered into the spirit of the game. But there were actually two games I had to participate in at that point. One was played by my wife, the other by my cousin. Or my wife might be playing two games at once. Or three games—who knows. Nobody knew what was going on. Not even my wife, I suppose. These things do get out of control, I said to myself. Out of *self*-control.

My cousin continued to write his secret diary where he depicted the life of Louis II of Bavaria—from *my* point of view. My wife kept talking of Yeats and Maud Gonne, his one-time mistress. And I was supposed to read both biographies, blending them in some way or other. What for? What was the purpose of their scheme? Was it a scheme, a machination, a plot? How many plots were being hatched under my roof? Was my cousin hand in glove with my wife? If so, why did he go on writing his insane biography of the Bavarian King? As if nothing had happened?

But what *had* happened actually? My wife had forced me to read three books or rather a few underlined passages from these books. And she had recounted a few episodes from W. B. Yeats' life. That is all. My cousin might have been ignorant of the whole affair. Was he ignorant of their *love* affair as well? Was he ignorant of the kiss my wife had planted on his lips? And of the astrological calculations? And of the *material* consummation of their love?

He went on writing Louis' biography as if nothing had happened. The only unwarranted intrusion into the flow of his narrative took place in the middle of an obscure meditation on words and their meanings. All of a sudden, Beckett made his appearance on Louis' stage, flanked by two quotations from Shakespeare's *Othello*. (I recognised Desdemona's dying words.)

"Why does Desdemona expire in my cousin's diary?" I asked my wife at the very outset of our new discussion. "And why does he have to prove he had no hand in killing her?"

"He thinks you're jealous," she answered.

"Does he think I might strangle you in bed?"

"MacBride was determined to shoot Yeats."

"Ah yes, MacBride." By that time I had already discovered the identity of Maud Gonne's husband.

"He removed Yeats' books from Gonne's Paris house and threatened to shoot their author. And do you know how the author reacted to the threat? 'The only cheerful piece of news I have had in days.' The stuff that heroes are made from."

"Why are you talking about *them*? Don't we have our own lives to live? Are you bored to death in my house, in our house? Do you really have to invent all these stories? Why should I disentangle these knots?" My wife disentangled herself from my arms. "Let us go somewhere. Let us visit Louis II's castles. Or Ireland. Let us visit Yeats' tomb. And Maud Gonne's tomb. They're dead, aren't they?"

"They're immortal," she answered.

"Is that the only way to become immortal? By impersonating immortal people? Do you think your poet will immortalise you? Why does he write about Louis II of Bavaria? He ought to write poems about you or about Maud Gonne. About goddesses, about Helen of Troy."

"He did write a poem about me, a poem in prose," she said, taking a folded sheet of paper out of her décolleté.

THE SUPERWOMAN

"The die is cast," I say to myself once again and straighten up in my armchair to dominate the few sheets of paper lying before me. The fear, which has pestered me over the past two months, seems to be oozing away under the pressure of my resolution. I can actually watch it trickling out of the window into the dampness and darkness.

God guides my hand, but whenever that hand of mine begins to move under God's guidance and protection I am too far away from my study and even from my home. So I merely wave my arms about, occasionally knocking down statuettes and bottles of beer. Sometimes I go on writing in the air for half an hour, which proves that my inspiration is lasting and trustworthy.

Of course, as soon as I reach my study and sit down in my comfortable armchair, my right hand becomes so stiff I cannot even hold a cigar, let alone the fountain pen.

The fear of whiteness. That is what I call it—the fear of whiteness. A blank sheet of paper. I have already written a roman fleuve on the transparency of the air, but the white colour puts me off. Is there any transparent paper on the market?

There is no denying that I have a lovely imagination, otherwise I would not wave my arms about so often. Besides, I am capable of improving upon reality by shifting its elements, its atoms in my head. Even my late father, whose lips were sealed for all but matters of the utmost significance, was in the habit of paying me compliments: 'Gottfried, you have a lovely imagination. I wish I could daydream like you and drive myself away from our unworthy world.' And eventually he left this unworthy world of ours.

My imagination serves a different purpose. I have been called upon to write a book that will change the destiny of our unworthy universe. Our universe will thus become worthy of God's intentions and aspirations. God bestowed upon us the freedom we have so far misunderstood and mishandled. We have waged nonsensical wars, killing our neighbours and brothers, instead of providing them with food and artistic entertainment. The whole structure of our universe is rotten like an old tree or an old woman. Whatever we do ends up in catastrophes that blacken the pages of our history books. We are free to become imbeciles and criminals and we never miss an opportunity to do so, as if there were no other possibilities open to human nature.

In my book I shall speak about those possibilities and their fulfilment in the near future—by the beginning of the twenty-fourth century. My heroine will set things aright. She will help the needy and put the dying on their feet again.

But what if, carried away by my lovely imagination, I distort some details, however trifling and minuscule? Unwillingly, unconsciously, I might give credence to my imagination and communicate to the inhabitants of the five continents what my heroine has neither conceived nor done! The crushing weight of my sin would then destroy my body, sparing me the trouble of committing suicide.

I wish I could write only the truth, the absolute truth!

"For God's sake, let us speak about ourselves," I implored her.

"We have already exhausted this topic, I'm afraid. It's not inexhaustible, is it? Only immortal people can offer us an inexhaustible topic of conversation."

"Let us speak about ourselves,"

"There are other things to speak about, thank God. He thinks I betrayed him by marrying you."

"I'm tired. And I understand neither his truth nor his lies. Anyway it's the diary of a madman. Let us send him back."

"Do you know what they'll do to him there? Do you know what they've *already* done to him?" She began to empty her pockets. A few pieces of paper dropped on the carpet. Soon the whole carpet was strewn with crumpled pieces of paper. "The notes he took during his stay in that madhouse."

Here are some of them:

Footfalls, footfalls, it is the beating of his heart, my blood swinging to and fro between the left ear and the right ear, no polyphony, please, one voice, melody with no accompaniment, Gregorian chant, if only I could limit my enchantment with music to that monodic ritual, and what about the *Tristan-und-Isolde* tempest in my mind, oh that way madness lies, that way...

Confusion is the milestone of madness-progress. And they are trying to confuse me. This could be an elaborate ruse to confuse the enemy. And they regard me as their enemy. At least they treat me as their enemy. By skilful and maddeningly slow degrees they lead me to the desk of madness and pull out its drawers, one by one, one by one, one by one.

Inside these palaces I am sitting and thinking. As if riddled with bullets, the walls are full of holes through which they sift me, sift my fine grains from my coarse ones, remove matter larger than what seems compatible with their notion of a normal human being.

"The King's insanity is just crying out for a medical report. Suffering from this form of disease, which has been gradually developing over a great number of years,

His Majesty must be pronounced incurable and a further decay of His mental faculties is certain." Further decay? I can go no further. I reached the top and "further" might only mean down, down, down. My flag will be hauled down at sunset. Down, down, down, down. And they advised me against using the telephone, alleging that the lines were down. I wanted them to convey my message to Graf Dürckheim by telegraph. "My dear Count, I urgently beseech you to mobilise a body of people who are loyal—" They made a rude and disloyal attempt to wrench the draft from my grasp, but I held my own and went on untroubled "—to me, who will not be intimidated by anything, not even by rudeness and disloyalty, and who—" This time they did wrench the paper away from me, but I faced the music. (What kind of music was that, I wonder? *Götterdämmerung*? The Twilight of the Kings?) Boldly I recited the continuation of the interrupted phrase by heart: "—if the worst comes to the worst and the necessary money does not materialise—" At that moment the worst did come to the worst: they put their hands over my mouth so the words intended for the outside reverberated in my lungs, in my stomach, in my legs. I was vibrating like the diaphragm of a loudspeaker.

"I won't budge an inch," I said when they attempted to drag me out of the room. They kept tugging at my sleeves as if by removing me from the room they could restore some magic order in my mind. I dashed towards the window. They took concerted action to arrest my movement. I imagined a situation in which I would be compelled to flee justice in the jungle of the Amazon. I asked them to let go of me, "or else I'll die". I had noticed already how they feared suicides. I was collecting strength for a new, victorious surge. I was picking up and gathering together the scattered remnants of the strength I used in the first, singularly unhappy effort. Soon I noticed with distress that the left-overs might not have carried me as far as the bedpost had I succeeded in breaking loose, about which I was rather doubtful. I was doomed never to reach the window, "unless they get out of the way," I thought. I was doubtful about that too. What seemed unquestionable, however, was my incapacity to hold myself erect: my legs were giving way under me. I was as inert

as the Newtonian world. They were carrying me through the corridor that looked irremediably dead.

HIS NARRATIVE

A CARRIER PIGEON

Pigeons are a curse in our city.

(From an old chronicle)

Moats and ramparts bristling with cannons:
Some protection from the outside world,
No impediment to the circulation of rumours.
And the circulation of rumours is rather common in
[wartime.

The herald of dawn, a carrier pigeon appears
First as a dot, then as an ill-traced hyphen,
A thick envelope sticking out of his beak.
He gets vicarious pleasure out of its contents.

Yet carrying airmail is not exactly a rest cure.
He's beyond the ramparts. Tears and fears and shouts,
Armour clanging and clanking in the streets, on the square.
It's about time the carrier pigeon left the city.

A sort of alarm clock in medieval times,
Detested by widows, respected by warriors,
Carrier pigeons became the target of pacifists
Who insisted upon their extermination.

Stool pigeons should be throttled!

Perhaps it all began when Louis was forced to put up with the hardship of wartime public appearances. In his first speech from the throne he asserted his wish to preserve

peace at all costs: he was no warmonger. Besides, contrary to regulations he would not have his hair cut; his plumed helmet swung to and fro on his head.

The war with Prussia was ineluctable. The Bavarian army proved to be in poor shape and Prince Charles, the commander-in-Chief, was old and unfit for the job. Reluctant to listen to bad news, Louis would divert the conversation or wear the Minister of Defence out with his quibbling. As the medical report has it: "His Majesty did not listen to his ministers' reports. During the audiences He either contemplated the pictures on the wall or drummed His fingers on the table so loudly that His ministers' words grew unintelligible. He asked his ministers questions far removed from war and politics: 'Is the Trinity one person in three, or three persons in one?' 'Where does my soul dwell when my body is asleep—in my body, on the moon or in a dreamland?' 'Are dreams real?'"

Louis also thought up an altogether different tactic. He would *decode* the bad news, turning it into good news, pleasant to his ears and mind. No longer did the words uttered by the ministers mean what they meant: the shell of their sounds was filled with another, more appropriate content.

Under similar circumstances I might have chosen to replace a bad-news minister by a good-news one, or to have the former learn by heart the optimistic reports dictated, prior to every audience, to a secretary: human languages are not to be treated lightly. Soon it dawned upon Louis that, while changing the stuffing of his ministers' words, he inadvertently changed the stuff his own words were made of; so that now nobody seemed to understand him. And whenever he deigned to explain what he *really* meant his interlocutors looked so utterly puzzled that he wondered whether his explanation was not but another enigma, the code requiring a further explanation. And nothing is more terrifying than *regressus ad infinitum*.

Did Louis join the partisans of the inadequacy-of-language theory? He did the exact opposite by pretending that meaning, however delicate, *could* be conveyed through words and that even the French expression "*se faire comprendre à demi-mot*" was not ill-grounded, when applied to intelligent listeners or intimate friends. He enlarged upon his predicament in his letter to Kunsberg who kept misunderstanding him:

I stubbornly maintain that you could, if you wished, press my heart warmly in the forest of your fingers; you could read my heart and imprint its double in the stream of your consciousness and in the stagnant water of your subconscious. We could merge together into one white flower. I have launched myself into this heartrending verbal adventure in the hope of persuading you that my words express what they are meant to express. The expression of my soul that I contemplate in the mirror of my anxiety corresponds exactly to the tone of my letters. First I contemplate my soul in the mirror, then I look up its equivalent in dictionaries. I go over the chosen words to make sure they are what they pretend to be. If I find out they have pulled my leg so far that it seems to stand on the lakebed, like the turret of an underwater castle; if I notice that words tell me what they do not mean, trying to identify with other words and other souls, I put them in a mental hospital.

The content of Kunsberg's answer may only be inferred from the following entry in Louis' secret diary:

Maybe he understands Rumanian. I have no Rumanian. I have no alternative but to stick it out. In what language? In English, in English. Supposedly 391,000,000 people spoke English in 1951 and 731,000,000 spoke Mandarin. I have no Mandarin. Reportedly 270,000,000 spoke Russian. When? In 1951? In 1998? I have no Russian. *Spaciba. Kharasho.* Is he Japanese? Lead us not into the temptation of becoming entangled in the net of probability-curves!! He must have been born in London because I wrote my letter in English. My native German would have made things easier for me. Things. I remember trying to use English expressions in preference to American ones. Not that I mistrust the erotic power of the American language—I have imbibed sufficient knowledge of everyday life to mistrust language as a cure for all ills, as a quencher of all thirsts—but I did not need it. Consequently, he must have been born in London or Manchester. Am I to conclude that he could have been born in Paris or Biarritz had I addressed him in French? *Mieux vaut tard que jamais.* Shall I translate it into English? Just in case. Better late than never. Shall I switch to German right now? He might settle in

Munich by the end of the week. Shall I pepper my writings with court slang to drag him into my entourage? Shall I resort to my private language? Shall I henceforth speak the language of my couch, of my carpet? One should write one's billets doux in those languages—to avoid misunderstandings. What about the language of my mouth?

Kunsberg's letters have not been preserved in Louis' archives for the simple reason that, mad with rage and disappointment, Louis burnt them all, counting perhaps on the cleansing powers of fire. Brooding over linguistic grievances made him, in the long run, suspicious of everyone's motives; for words were above suspicion. He simply could not bring himself to mistrust the texture, the substance of Wagner's librettos and the tragedies of Goethe, Racine, Calderone. The fault lay with those who misunderstood him, twisting his words out of shape and sense. "They are inclined to read the most improbable meanings into my crystal-clear assertions such as 'the weather is fine today'. They read between my letters that obediently break loose and let in all sorts of insidious murmurs. My words begin to hiss. I am writing a diary; in their minds my diary sounds as if it had an unexpected twist to it. In reality, they give my words an imperceptible twist here and there to make me seem insane."

In moments of lucidity, however, Louis would level his criticism at himself, at his own words which, in spite of successive decryptments or purifications, were not up to standard. "Stop it! I have had enough of this nonsense. It is not my handwriting anyway. Has it changed overnight? I have just toiled through the last thirteen pages. Awful! Weary with reading between the lines, I limit my wanderings to the surface of the text from which no meaning whatsoever emerges except O, A, H, P, and occasionally S, M, Y. I have been writing a lot lately. The drawers of my desk creak and shriek under the burden of my thoughts and commas. And comas."

Incidentally, Louis' handwriting did change, though not overnight, as he had presumed: it took years. Late in life, he could neither recognise it nor make out what he had written. As to his addressees, they wondered how he had managed to mutilate the Roman alphabet so irremediably.

Small, beautifully-lined characters. The pride of my tutor's heart.

She would not decipher my handwriting anyway. At this rate, only God will read me in a month's time. Only God will read me in my eternity. And my thoughts? What does *their* handwriting look like? Thoughtwriting.

Louis II was constantly misunderstood because, as the Empress of Austria wrote to his mother, he did not wish to be understood. His aim was to remain an enigma and his melancholy—a logical aftermath of misunderstandings—was dearer to him than life. He rebuked severely Elisabeth Ney who claimed to have fathomed his dreams. As she went on to declare that she understood his mentality, he pushed her out of the way. "Do you mean to say," he cried, "that you are in a position to understand your King? Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass—"

Is it so easy to unfold the course of my hidden thoughts?

She was a sculptor and conceived the idea of making a life-size statue of her King. Once the statue was finished Louis relegated it to the attic: he did not recognise himself. The statue bore a strong resemblance to his brother Otto.

Why draw a hard-and-fast line of distinction between fancy and reality? Sweet, soft, perfumed, hot dreams will come true! My coruscating, once-in-a-blue-moon reality.

As Louis quits the humdrum, daily reality he starts to neglect his Royal duties and to flout every convention. With no regrets does he turn his back on the world that fails to mirror his ideas. "They don't recognise me!" he shouts. "What's more, I don't recognise myself!"

I recognise myself only in books—the largest peepholes indeed! They are also telescopes (I saw Eternity the other night...and round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years...) and microscopes that enable a zealous researcher to see the world in a grain of sand, to see a man in a speck of dust.

He leaves the world because legend-born Kings are better off than Bavarian Kings. He feels somewhat like an astronaut projected into space, cut off from the earth's gravitational field:

Every now and then I happen to overlook a line, a dot, a plant growing on my terrace, a leaf rustling under my slippers, a pain revelling in my stomach. I am regularly faced with the prospect of correcting my glaring mistakes, of adding the missing lines, plants and pains to my picture, of appending postscripts to my letters. Neither French nor English offers me a foothold. Wagner is of no help either. Is it wise to rely on him anyway? Musical sounds have no affinities with words that are related to something one can touch or understand literally. And metaphorically, and symbolically. But musical sounds make no sense outside the scores where some notes dance on tightropes and others perpetually hang themselves. Forget about footholds!

In one of his early letters to the Duchess Sophie of Bavaria, his cousin and fiancée, Louis writes:

Have you ever read the delightful science-fiction novels from the illustrious pen of H. G. Wells, an English modern writer? If not, have them ordered for you at once. May the following quotation from his novel *The First Men in the Moon* come as a foretaste of your impending literary transports: "It was the strangest sensation conceivable, floating thus loosely in space, at first indeed horribly strange, and when the horror passed, not disagreeable at all, exceedingly restful! Indeed the nearest thing in earthly experience to it that I know is lying on a very thick soft feather bed. But the quality of utter detachment and independence!" But the quality of utter detachment and independence, dear Sophie! I must confess that at the dawn of my life *dans les nuages* I found it difficult to reconcile heaven and earth—my world and theirs. My uncle Charles and my grandfather, having torn me away from my dreams and woods and huts and mountains, would drag me to Munich so I could attend the boring military parades and Corpus-Christi processions. But now, now, my dear loveable Sophie, I lie on the soft feather bed, alias my couch, and read, read, read, read until my eyes, weary with spying on my favourite authors,

shut me off from all light. I wish I could become an invisible man, like another of the H. G. Wells heroes: they would never run me to earth.

Once, as Louis went on his habitual cockle-boat trip around the lake, his ministers lumbered into his castle to discuss the participation of Bavaria in the Franco-Prussian conflict.

The same ministers desecrated his attachment to Wagner and required the latter's banishment from Munich. Louis resisted: he was indebted to Wagner not only for musical swans and trees but, as he told Gackle, for ninety per cent of his soul. So they staged, with the aid of a few professional whistlers, a miniature revolution.

One night, as Louis was busy drawing the façade of his new castle, a well-aimed cobblestone landed on the pedestal case, smashing a statuette of Jeanne d'Arc. The spectre of the French Revolution reappeared with all its fires and pandemonium.

Slowly, as if procrastinating on the outskirts of Jeanne d'Arc's ordeal, the sheet of paper yielded to the flames. The sound swelled to the gigantic black volume of Mahler's *Sixth*. The heavy doomsday bells began to boom just East of the University. They were answered by the peal of St Anthony's over the river, by the tocsins of St John and St Gervase. The crowd was chanting and holding up banners. "We'll kill the King! We'll kill the King!" *Oportet unum mori pro populo*. The crowd burst in. A powdered head thrust upon a pike appeared in the window. Should I beg for their voices, as Roman consuls were wont to do before being nominated?

I do beseech you,
Let me o'erleap that custom; for I cannot
Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them
For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage.

It must be the wrong play, though. Consuls held office for only a year and shared the office with a colleague of equal power. Share and share alike, so to speak. Consular authority was further limited after the establishment of other magistrates, especially the censorship and the tribuneship. Being limited is not my glass of champagne. Moreover, a King cannot debase himself by accepting the title of consul.

The crowd is not mute—far from it—but the crowd is dumb.

Nietzsche also warned him against the author of *Parsifal*.

Bulldozed by public opinion, terrified by the noise and allusions, Louis wrote his idol a farewell letter:

Tis true, sweet Richard—O! were it false!
 Thou must hence, or I shall be deposed.
 But I will reign to be revenged of them;
 And therefore, sweet friend, take it patiently.
 Live where thou wilt, I'll send thee gold enough;
 And long thou shalt not stay, or if thou dost,
 I'll come to thee; my love shall ne'er decline.

Many years afterwards, when the news of Wagner's death reached Germany, Louis sang the *Liebestod* while cradling Wagner's bust in his arms; now, having sealed the letter, he merely sank lifeless to the ground, as Elsa von Brabant had done during Lohengrin's departure.

Reassured, the ministers even complied for some time with Louis' urge to withdraw into himself by withdrawing from the bustle of Munich. "The louder the applause grows, the longer you must dally in the wings," is a golden rule of theatrical life. Only by playing hard-to-get can an actor manage to keep about him an aura of mystery—the main prop, the loveliest scenery of any play. Kings are public figures and public figures are actors, to a greater or lesser degree: the ministers understood *that*. But they did not

understand that Louis needed no female partner; no pas-de-deux enlivened his *Swan Lake*.

MY NARRATIVE

My mind began drifting vaguely towards that doctrine of "the Mask" which has convinced me that every passionate man (I have nothing to do with the mechanist, or philanthropist, or the man whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy.

It is not Yeats' narrative, is it? Nor does my mind drift towards the doctrine of "the Mask".

"I understand now why your cousin desires to impersonate a historical character. Why not Louis II after all? By the way, I've noticed that I no longer play a role in this gruesome adventure. He doesn't mention me in the last chapter."

"You're right. His secret diary has grown more personal. The self retreats into more and more exclusive fantasy relationships—"

"Why don't you interfere? Your cousin himself is 'keenly alive to the peril lurking in Louis II's personality'. Why don't you replace Louis II by Yeats or Shakespeare—by anybody?"

"By you?"

"It's no joking matter," I retorted.

"It is not," she agreed. And she showed me yet another excerpt from her cousin's diary:

RED DANCING FIGURES

I saw only grins instead of smiles. Grins, bared teeth. The teeth I saw around me, the sparkling teeth, glinting in the sunlight. They would flash all their teeth as they stared at me for hours and hours. I wondered what dentists they had, all those people. Now at least they need no dentists, I thought. And they were eating day in day out.

They ate whatever happened to lie within their reach. And they were prepared to travel very far to devour an additional piece of food. Everything was just food to them. And they cleaned their teeth regularly with toothpaste containing fluoride.

They let you die in slow motion. They can lynch you of course, at once. They prefer to let you die in slow motion. They just strike a match and singe your hair at first. You feel no pain, but your hair is singed. Never mind, you don't really need your hair. It is decorative, nothing more. It has no other function. Just decorative. God is good at head decoration.

They strike another match. This time they hold it up to your nose. You scream. "Why are you screaming? You're not a child any more. It's just your nose. You can breathe, can't you? And that's the chief thing, isn't it? As long as you breathe you'll be alive. Actually your nose is merely decorative as well. What other functions does it perform? You can breathe through your mouth. Open your mouth and breathe. But don't eat too much, or else you won't be able to breathe through your mouth. Anyway you'd better not eat hearty meals. You might lose your figure. And you should watch your figure. And while we're about it, we'll burn your legs. Do you really need them? Where would you go? There's nowhere to go. And if you venture outdoors you'll be eaten alive. So you'd better stay indoors and meditate on your sins. Unfortunately we can't burn your sins. A special box of matches is required for the destruction of sins. Besides, such boxes are too expensive. So we'll burn your fingers instead. You don't really need them, do you? You don't play a musical instrument, as far as we know. And you'll stop smoking, once your fingers are reduced to ashes. And you'll avoid lung cancer thanks to our matches. You'll be burnt alive, there's no denying that. But it's far better to be burnt alive than to die of lung cancer. So we'll spare you unbearable torments and severe pains in your chest. We'll burn your body first. Plato affirms that the body hampers meditation and philosophical reasoning. Deprived of your body, you'll meditate and reason like an angel. By the way, angels have no bodies, only minds. We'll turn you into an angel before your death. You'll be an angel on earth—an enviable destiny. You'll become a spiritual substance. And you'll counteract the decline of spirituality in our time. You'll go against the stream. You'll teach a lesson to humanity. People pursue

material ends to the neglect of their spiritual needs. They're heading for ruin because of their bodies. It's their bodies that demand food and money, girls and drinks, cigarettes and drugs. Left to its own devices, the mind is bound to devote itself to meditation and contemplation of platonic ideas. You'll show them an example. You'll teach them a lesson. That's your mission. And we'll help you to carry it out."

They burn you. And they watch you burn. And they burn your mind too. Thought by thought, impulse by impulse. And your sentiments, and your memories. They leave only one memory in your mind—the image of the fire. You watch yourself being burnt alive. Twenty times, thirty times. And you see them watch you. They like it. They get a big kick out of seeing a man being burnt to death. And when you die at last a minister says in a church, "It is better to be forgiven." "Forgiven and forgotten," chimes in another member of the clergy. "Forgiven and forgotten," whisper the crowd. Forgiven and forgotten, forgiven and forgotten...

"Did he write it in the asylum?" I asked.

"He wrote it yesterday. That's what I'm worried about. Vivekananda also reached this stage during his meditation practices. Everything was wreathed in flames, even the grains of rice in his bowl. Everything he looked at was burning. His Master, Sri Ramakrishna, drew him out of this state of consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna explained that there was work for him to do in the world, so he had to return from this level of awareness or he would die within three weeks, consumed by the energies pouring through him. Nijinsky was less fortunate—he had no spiritual guide. Do you know how he ended his days? By writing repeatedly in his diary, 'God is fire in the head. God is fire in the head.' I intend to let him drown. For his own good. Yes, drowning will do wonders in his case."

"Are you speaking about an *astral* drowning? Just another vision?"

"Louis II drowned, as you must know. So it's the easiest way. He's already on the right track, on the right path—on the path leading to the lake."

"Is there such a thing as astral therapy?" I insisted.

My wife gazed pensively at the bottle of mineral water that stood on a tray. Then she made a slow about-turn and left the room.

I found an answer to my question in *W. B. Yeats, A Life* by Stephen Cootie:

A bookkeeper whom George had saved from drink was appointed to manage his accounts, but some time after Yeats' arrival in Sligo his hypochondriac uncle had other worries on his mind. There were rumours of smallpox in the mountains and George resolved to have himself reinoculated. Yeats, although indifferent to stories he did not believe, also agreed to be immunised. Both men caught some sort of poisoning as a result and, while Yeats himself merely felt poorly, his uncle became delirious. Two doctors were called, but when his uncle's fever reached its height Yeats had to attend to him alone. Uncle George thought the sickroom was visited by what he described as "red dancing figures", and Yeats, without telling the deluded man what he was doing, conjured up the kabbalistic names and symbols of water and the moon. Soon George reported that he saw a river flowing through the room and sweeping away the red dancers in its current.

And she, his faithful wife, must fall asleep too, or
[else...

Upon realising his spouse has dropped off to sleep
The old man creeps silently towards the door,
Tugs at the handle, kneels in prayer.

He must have lost the key. He is locked in. Or locked up. Or locked out. A home-made madhouse. He is the jailer and the jailbird.

I keep, and pass, and turn again. They reckon ill who leave me out.

The ministers wanted, through a Queen, to enter into an alliance with a hostile country. They enlisted the support of Louis' mother who wanted to become a grandmother. Louis quailed at the prospect as she pressed the point further and further home.

MOTHER: Why repudiate and repulse any suggestion I make for your double future, my son? Marriage brings the fulfilment of man's desires and the attainment of perfect happiness. Women are the very root of happiness and well being. Why pull out that root, why weed the garden where only roses grow and smell? Have you really asked the Royal Physician to give you a certificate stating that you are unfit to marry? Remember: two crowns are better than one.

SON: No crown is better than one crown, mother. I adhere to the line of conduct designated by my name. In my sleigh, in my cockle-boat, in my train, I have glided through lives by the thousand. Again and again have I fallen victim to the delusion of existence and always through the taking of a wife. Always, always, always, always, always! Anyway this talk is purposeless. I've already thrown her out of the window. Her mortal remains are lying scattered about my stone-paved courtyard.

Louis' horrified mother was relieved to find that the mortal remains her son had touched upon were nothing but the multiform pieces of his fiancée's bust. The only alarming

detail was that he had ordered that bust to be made for the sole purpose of hurling it out of the window. "I'm pretty sure," he said to the sculptor, "that any symbol might solidify my intention, endowing it with a tangible shape."

Sophie, the last daughter of the Duke Max, Wittelsbach of the younger branch of the family, was not as beautiful as her sister Elisabeth, the wife of the Emperor of Austria; but she was pretty enough to be mistaken for one of Wagner's heroines—Elsa, Eva—although she had no ear for music. In the course of the eleven months that elapsed between the sentences: "I just thought I'd like to get things straight with you, mother: Sophie and I are going to be married," and "I hope to live down the scandal caused by the breaking off," she tried as best she could not to mar, by a sudden lapse of memory, her performances. Among other things, she had to remember she was not Louis' fiancée but a fashion model intended to set off wedding dresses and crowns. She was also a pretext for constructing a wedding berlin which Louis needed for his private staging of *Lohengrin*. It can be admired nowadays in the Marstall Museum, *dans l'ancien manège Royal*, where Otto and Louis took their first riding lessons. It is decorated with the paintings depicting the life of Louis XIV and the throng pressing round Wagner and pushing to get into the theatre where one of his operas is being performed.

Louis' biographers are grateful to Sophie for a few entries in the secret diary:

Her lips were not as pulpy and juicy as I had imagined but, given my overall superiority—my own lips are as soft as silk—I could afford to be lenient. I said: "It's not your fault," and she smiled. I could not help longing for her smiles the value of which increased in proportion to their rarity: she was offered no opportunity to brighten up. Of course, my presence at her side was a treat in itself which needed no accompaniment; to use musical language, my Bach's suite for violin solo did not need to be propped up harmonically. I told her so, expecting to see a sample of her moonlight smile. She burst into tears.

Is she beautiful? I suppose she is, judging from the envious murmur I hear all around me; a murmur and a gnashing of masculine teeth.

I mentally carried my conjugal scheme through and was, for while, burdened with the implements of marriage: marriage partner, marriage certificate, marriage vows, marriage bonds, marriage bed, marriage customs.

My mother, whom I made privy to our union, fell victim to the charms of my *compagne* during a tea party. Usually quite indifferent to *what* people say but very attentive to *how* things are said or done, she probably let herself be impregnated by her voice which, though marred by the hubbub of big receptions, sounded, in an empty room, like the bird's song from *Siegfried*. She blessed us somewhat ceremoniously. In the evening, on our way to the opera house, she told me in a soft voice: "It's your last chance. Don't miss it, I implore you." My mother's words continued to resound in my ears not only throughout the opera—*Manon* or *Lulu*—but even afterwards, when she left for Italy. "Why the last chance?" I kept asking myself and, unable to resolve the problem, hammered away on the piano which was going out of tune. I was not old at the time, nor am I old now, after many many years; so that no "last", whatever it may be applied to, is conceivable within my personal borders. I wondered whether my mother had not been alluding to someone else, absent in our car but present in her mind, as often happens with absent-minded people. I was moved to anger, and my *compagne's* awareness of my anger only added to my anger. When reading anger in my eyes, and in my brain, and in my soul, she looked like a spy hiding a telescope and a revolver beneath the courteous exterior.

Every day she would trespass on my land. "It's not a public path!" I shouted. She paid no heed to my warnings. She was living on my land, and yet I felt somewhat like a hostess who is compelled, about midnight, to rustle up some food for an unexpected guest. And the food I provided for her was my thoughts, my intentions, my life. I was Prometheus, she the eagle.

I am determined to wait until my negative emotions have settled down so as not to disarrange my logically arrayed arguments by too violent a phrasing.

I waited patiently but my fury, instead of dwindling away to a speck of equanimity, flowed into another fury, far greater in volume; and I was carried on and on by its current in my *bateau courroucé*.

The never-never land of our married life was, during the initial part of our journey, far more "present" than the countries we were driving through.

Yesterday I got rid of Sophie, *bon débarras*! The dismal image of marriage faded, eroded away in growing up.

Jamais Carmen ne cédera !

Libre elle est née et libre elle mourra !

Like Carmen did I struggle for freedom! I am free now!

"His Majesty's decision," explains Doctor von Gudden in the medical report, "did not surprise those women who, ever since His Majesty's ascension to the throne, had been longing to adorn themselves with the Bavarian crown. A misfortune befell Miss Schefsky who, when singing the aria of Brünnhilde, overstepped the bounds of the libretto and started to unbutton His Majesty's suit. She was immediately flung into the lake and left on her own, notwithstanding her inability to swim. Following that incident, Miss Schefsky brought a suit against His Majesty and was awarded compensatory damages of 150,000 dollars. Other women were flogged in the Royal stables by His Majesty's groom, assigned specifically for the job. His Majesty has never taken an active part in the floggings; nor is His Majesty used to attending them as a spectator. We are not of the opinion that His Majesty's forbearing to do so may be considered a point in His Majesty's

favour; for, by flogging the women personally or by contemplating their wriggling bodies His Majesty would at least have manifested *some* interest in females—for the nonce, a sadistic interest not deprived of a sexual nuance. It is obvious that one cannot read any sexual meaning into His Majesty's descriptions of different actresses, professional or unprofessional, whom He does not so much as approach, revelling in their talents and dresses from afar—from His box or couch. Called 'vamp' in common parlance or 'Kundry' in theatrical jargon, the woman, according to His Majesty, is to be kept at bay, 'lest she plant a sinful kiss on Parsifal's virginal lips'. His Majesty can be heard screaming '*Die Wunde, die Wunde*' whenever a woman purses up her lips or moves in His Majesty's direction. The explanation of His Majesty's sexless attitude towards women—which of late has become even more pronounced, actors replacing actresses in His Majesty's grotto—lies in His Majesty's having lingered too long at the auto-erotic stage of His sexual development. 'My reflection did not go unnoticed,' wrote His Majesty at the age of nineteen. 'I touched the mirror; I stroked it twice; I huddled up against it; I cuddled up to its frigid coolness. I cried my fill once again; my tears eventually succeeded in warming it up.' His Majesty seems to attach an overriding importance to male genitals."

Doctor von Hofmanstufen, who some years later collaborated on the medical report, prescribed cold baths. Louis followed the quack's advice:

The cold water rising higher and higher like the first snow. Dullness of bluntness, bluntness of apathy—"the dull apathy of despair", as Oscar Wilde put it. This apathy is the Stoic counterpart of Epicurean warmth. I shall catch pneumonia.

"His Majesty's true self," writes the psychoanalyst, "rears its ugly head again, exonerating Him from His ordinary moral duties. Let me quote an entry from His Majesty's secret diary. Please note that this entry is signed 'Tannhäuser': 'Could the evidence of that Puritan in me, of that Walter von der Vogelweide, of that despicable Biterolf, notorious for his hatred of pleasure and sensual love, be considered impartial?' His Majesty chooses His love-objects not only among the noblemen of the court but *everywhere*: deep in the woods, up in the mountains."

Louis was fond of simple folk. Caught in a sudden blizzard, he would spend an hour or two in a lumberman's hut, drinking ale and dancing with the host.

And I am fond of her. *Je fonds*—my heart melts in her presence. And in her absence. My wound, my incurable wound. Caught in the headlights of my unquenched fluorescent desire, I eventually resorted to an old wives' remedy. I recited loudly and dramatically:

As the best of the plants thou art reputed, O herb:
 Turn this man for me today into a eunuch
 That wears his hair dressed.
 Turn him into a eunuch that wears his hair dressed,
 And into one that wears a hood!

But I did not know what kind of herb I was supposed to swallow or to boil or to inhale.

I wish I had her bust!

How many photographs of hers have I already torn to shreds? Strewn around my room, they compose now the puzzle of my love, of my desire, of my death.

Last week I became clearly aware that the Order of Things imperatively demanded my Klingsor-like emasculation, whether I personally liked it or not.

I squeezed the testicles up with two paperweights.
 I jammed the testicles in the door.
 I broke them with a bludgeon.

As women break reeds for a mattress with a stone, thus do I break my member. To strike while the heart is cold.

Why don't I step onto the air? Why don't I fall, smashing the golden statues of love—her statue, her monument? For ever and ever and ever! Today, tomorrow.

Our bodies used to undulate like a Chinese fan. The main thing is not to let that undulatory memory splash about the heart.

He drank more and more: ale, champagne, whisky. "I draw a line on the floor and note in my diary that I am forbidden to approach this line closer than two paces."

If one line proved insufficient, Louis drew three, four, five or even six lines on the floor of his bedroom. A racetrack, forsooth!

If six lines proved insufficient, he would enclose himself within a circle—the procedure dubbed "locking oneself into a rigid code of ethics".

The struggle of Louis' self against his conscience went on for years, the final victory hanging in the balance till the day of his drowning.

A moat will do. One, two, three moats. Seven moats!

All the active volcanoes of my passion may now be written off as extinct.

Just as copper becomes pure gold if covered with miraculous paint, so, for one who knows, the passions become so many aids to salvation.

Yesterday, I let my love and desire follow their course unimpeded. I walked into the next room and suddenly saw the walls slip away. The doors kept opening, drawing aside; I counted as many as seventy-three doors in the course of my ramble. One of them came off its hinges as if I had tried to dislodge it; I knew I had not touched it. Its fall produced no sound. I endowed my Time with a semblance of rhythm. I was reminded somehow of the water dripping from an icicle. Those life-and-death-begetting drops burst into a multitude of iridescent soap bubbles as they landed on my marble floor.

MY NARRATIVE

"And how do you account for *this* marriage? It's not *our* marriage he described in his diary, is it?"

"It's *our* marriage," she said quietly. "Our mystic marriage."

"Not the one you celebrated with Yeats, I hope!" I was fed up with the whole business and I was determined to put my foot down.

"Of course not. I impersonate his *real* wife now, for his own good. I'm longing to cure him."

"Whose wife? You're *my* wife until further notice. Or are you talking about this astral mumbo-jumbo again?"

"He asked mentally 'when shall I have peace of mind' and my hand wrote 'you will neither regret nor repine'. Do you know what Yeats told Lady Gregory? 'The strange thing was that within half an hour after writing this message my rheumatic pains and my neuralgia and my fatigue had gone and I was very happy. From being more miserable than ever I remember being since Maud Gonne's marriage I became extremely happy. That sense of happiness has lasted ever since.' The presence of his wife allowed him to find his psychological integrity and wholeness. He was no longer a man in whom blocked and frustrated parts of the psyche created disharmony and pain."

"But, according to his diary, they broke off their engagement. And why does he continue to harp on the theme of sin and wounds? What's so sinful about a kiss or a marriage?"

"Good women have always saved sinful men in stories," my wife declared. Her dark eyes glittered.

"Who does he think he is? Parsifal?"

"Yeats made love to a woman for the first time at the age of thirty. He had been a virgin before."

"But why does he systematically repulse the advances of women?"

"Because he loves the most beautiful woman in the world." There was no dreamy look in her eyes as she uttered these words. No more time for idle dreams, her

countenance seemed to intimate. Dreams were to become active, efficient, *real*. "Come with me," she said. "You must help me. You'll be the control."

"What's a control?"

"The person who speaks to you in your trance."

"And what shall I say to him?" I realised of course who was the object of her preoccupations, the target of her astral aspirations.

"I've prepared some notes for you," she said. "All you have to do is read them out." Already we stood before the door of his room. "Just a second." She entered the room and shortly afterwards came out, handing me a few sheets of paper. The first sentence ran thus: "End of enmity in your evil influences."

"Shall I read it out?" I asked.

"Yes. Several times."

"End of enmity in your evil influences." Silence. I repeated the sentence. Silence. I repeated the sentence again.

"Who are you?" His voice, her cousin's voice.

Submissively I passed on to the second line: "I am Thomas of Dorlowicz. I am here for a purpose and must go when that is done."

"Is clearing the subconscious the principle element in your ethic?" Her cousin's voice.

"Yes, because to clear the subconscious is the basis of the realisation of good and evil forgiveness and understanding and of all moral or ethical virtues." My voice.

"Does clearing the subconscious involve getting rid of memory?" His voice.

"Nothing can ever be forgotten in one incarnation. It is the anodyne of memory. But you have already forgotten who you are. You think you are Louis II of Bavaria. Well and good. You are also a great poet. You are W. B. Yeats." My voice.

"What action most clears the subconscious?" His voice.

"You must drown Louis II of Bavaria. You must be re-born as the greatest European poet of the twentieth century." My voice.

"What form of life most clears the subconscious?" His voice.

"A life of intimacy with a friend who trusts and is trusted." My voice.

"Who is this friend, may I ask?" My voice again. But the words were addressed to my sister. In a whisper.

"The séance is over," she said.

I returned to my study. I was waiting for the next instalment of her cousin's diary. I was waiting for my sister to pay me a visit in my study. She did not come. Not on that day, Not on the following day. Not at the weekend. Not during the next week. I was reading her books, but that was not enough. I had to read *his* book—his confessions and intentions. "A life of intimacy with a friend who trusts and is trusted." Jealousy, jealousy.

But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life,
The fountain, from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up, to be discarded thence,
Or keep it as a cistern, for foul toads
To knot and gender in!

I *was* jealous. And they increased the volume of my jealousy by keeping me in the dark about their relationship, about the growth of their mutual attachment. At that point I could already *feel* my jealousy—a foreign body ravaging my body and soul. And I could *see* it as well. The green-ey'd monster. Sometimes it was the dark-ey'd monster: my wife was impersonating jealousy in those moments. And her dark eyes glittered behind the door of his room. And, beyond my window, the sky was pink with the first, far-off glimmer of the dawn.

I had no alternative but to spy on them. I would steal along the corridors leading to his room. I would listen at his door in the hope of eavesdropping on the music of their love, on their production of *Tristan und Isolde*. I would also listen at the door of *her* room, going so far as to look through their respective keyholes. Nothing. I heard nothing, saw nothing. Was their lovemaking confined to astral beds?

One day I trespassed into his room. I just pushed the door and went in. And I began to search his room, an astral search warrant sticking out of my jacket pocket. I searched

through his drawers and eventually found a few sheets of paper I had not seen before. Shortly afterwards they were lying on my writing desk.

HIS NARRATIVE

HAPPINESS

It was an endless timeless day
 Composed of many a spring,
 And all our words and com(m)as lay
 In a jewel-box of sin.

And all our movements tenderly wove
 The pattern of a multiple star
 That men call love, Erlkönig's grove,
 Gordian knot, mandragora.

We boldly swallowed the fruits of happiness
 And thus transgressed the law of sorrow.
 And now alas I am sentenced to loneliness
 Whenever I live: today, tomorrow.

Happiness, if attainable at all, lies rather in the pursuit of happiness. Philosophers assure us that outbreaks of longings are bound to outshine performances of reality: achievement is always a defeat in comparison with the euphoria of expectation.

Louis' first letter to Wagner, written before the two men actually met, is an epistolary incarnation of hope, worthy of being reproduced in the *Encyclopaedia of Happiness* I am planning to compile. "Why?" asks Doctor von Gudden.

"To raise my spirits!"

Dear Friend

When rain is to be expected, the dragons take a deep breath, detach the nether lip from the upper one and scream, scream, scream, scream, mingling their breaths.

Things that accord in tone vibrate together.

They mingle their perfumed warmth as two rivers mingle their waters. Their song soars up, higher and higher and higher.

You should remain aloof from the baseness of the world. I shall bear you high above all earthly cares—high above!!

Yours for ever,

Ludwig.

P.S. I hear a song coming from your Island of the Sirens: "O my Dear One, my Odysseus, hither! hither!! Resign the throne and its empty splendour!!!" I see your swan, I feel the rustling glissando of his feathers. Bewitched I lie gazing into the lake. Thither! Thither!! O adored one for whom alone I live, for whom alone I would die. There could be no more beautiful or desirable death.

L.

P.P.S. The day following my coronation, at dawn, I woke and went to the throne room. "It's wonderful how everything has been speeded up," I thought. "My father's death was so sudden." I really thought it. I did not say it to myself: the thought had brushed against my cranium. "I should write to Wagner." My thought containing your name was outlined in emerald green. Emboldened by the utter submissiveness of space and colours, I pronounced your name, pervading the room with a purplish blue happiness.

L.

A few days later Louis received Wagner at the Residentz. There stood before him a man of small stature, whose head was abnormally large and whose legs were disproportionately small. Wagner resembled neither Lohengrin nor a great composer. Louis was under the impression that the man was not Wagner; his Wagner was elsewhere, in another room, in another castle. "I walked across several castles that seemed uninhabited. A dog leapt up at me and bit my upper arm. A streak of blood ran down my sleeve."

The excellence of Louis' architectural dreams was also given a rough handling by reality. Once, when verifying the authenticity of his Versailles, he dug his umbrella into groups of marble only to find they were plaster—a symbol of destitution. Another time

he plucked an orange from a tree in the Hall of Mirrors, baring the wire by which the roots and branches were attached to both the trunk and floor. "Bloody hell," he thought, "I've come all this way for nothing, for a Hell of Mirrors."

Oh, men! ye must be ruled with scythes, not sceptres.
And mow'd down like the grass, else all we reap
Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest.

Louis pursued his dreamy goals relentlessly, and judging from the span of time he devoted to happiness-hunting he was an optimist. By connecting his disappointments with human beings, by ascribing his failures to the fundamental deficiency of humanity, he discovered a loophole in the spoliatory law of our universe—inanimate nature. He was weary of seeing his long-sought friends turn into unreliable nodding acquaintances. "Snoring statues," he would comment bitterly as they nodded off in his Royal presence. He came to prefer objects, things: their eternal slumber was no offence to the sensitivity of a Sovereign.

"Inanimate nature accommodates itself to us with amazing rapidity. As you clutch to your breast its cold skin a wave of human warmth begins to lap against your heart. You may be struck by an armchair's resemblance to a friend whom you have not heard from since the French Revolution. 'My goodness, if it isn't Alexander! After all these years! You recognise me, don't you?' And presently it recognises you."

Quantum theory has debunked the classical concept of solid objects which, interlocked and interlaced with the observer, do not look so distant nowadays. The Cartesian partition between us and our cushions is no longer valid.

Silent and submissive, inanimate creatures disappoint us less often than animate ones who talk instead of being mute with admiration and generally do everything the other way round. A statuette placed by our hand on a mahogany chest of drawers will remain there till Doomsday unless some hurricane-like draughts interpose and abolish the acting of our will.

No human is so malleable as to remain, say, in my armchair without having the fidgets; and that in spite of my orders.

Inanimate creatures do not betray us.

Delilah! Delilah!

I have no memory for sounds and only by means of a few records—*Salome, Tristan und Isolde*—can I remember her voice in the hour of temptation.

Ja! Diese Stimme! So rief sie ihm

Yet her singing was awful. And her speech was undermined by the triviality of her thoughts.

*Achtest du rühmlich
der Ehe Bruch,
so prahle nun weiter
und preis es heilig,
dass Blutschande entblüht
dem Bund eines Zwillingspaars!*

I used to strip her words of their content and her voice of her words. A semantic striptease, if you please!

*Mir schaudert das Herz,
es schwindelt mein Hirn:
bräutlich umfing
die Schwester der Bruder!*

Female voices are undeniably pleasant to masculine ears; those melodies and timbres, replete as they are with poisonous, murderous words, have largely contributed to the downfall of many Kings and civilisations. Women despise the musical form elaborated and brought to perfection by Mendelssohn: *Lieder ohne Worte*. Though ignorant of Shakespeare's poetic stunts, they imitate *Les Joyeuses commères de Windsor*—not only in terms of verbal quantity.

In the hour of temptation her image turns into a blur by which a puritan film-director might veil and thereby spoil the climax of a love-scene. The blur condenses to a blot that suddenly swells into a gigantic stain. She covers up the sky, spreading her wings over the Kingdoms of gods and devils; and there comes a long-drawn-out eclipse of the sun submerging the whole room in a subaquatic darkness where I stand like the mast of a Spanish galleon.

Un autre est son époux!

LOUIS II OF BAVARIA:

*C'était un rêve
Que le ciel n'avait fait durable,
Que pour un instant, pour un jour!
Ah! perfide Manon!*

MANON:

*Oui! je fus cruelle!
Si je me repentais...*

LOUIS II OF BAVARIA:

Ah! perfide! perfide!

When reading anger in my eyes, and in my brain, and in my soul, she looks like a spy hiding a telescope beneath the cloak of charm and sexual allure.

One windy night, fleeing my muggy, foggy room I went with her for a stroll in the field. Her hair was straggling over her face; she resembled a Norn weaving my life.

"Do you remember our walk in Versailles?" I asked her. "Near Le Bassin de Neptune the wind blew your hat off. Your wind-dishevelled hair! They took you away from me."

She agreed that we were happy in our childhood. For once I did not leave her words aside—far off from her voice. I was wrong. Presently she spoiled everything. "We're not children any longer," she said, whereupon I separated her voice from her words. What did she say next? "I love you!"

Within this world of appearances and disappearances we constantly find ourselves in the midst of a web of double-entendres so that words, especially unheard ones, stand for other words and nothing is to be understood, seen in its true perspective. We lack perspective altogether. If only we could walk as far as another world, another sky—as far as the Hereafter, for instance! Endowed with the power of third sight and fourth mind we would clear up our mysteries and undo the knots of our misunderstandings. We might, for all I know, undo the past with its imbroglios and errors and thus, in a sense, undo the future: hauling up the net in which I am already entangled nauseates me and deprives my free will of its impetus.

So I was angered and kept a lookout for an opportunity to give her a piece of my mind; and it was not a piece of cake. She was always beautifully turned-out; the ugliness of my harangue would have been out of tune with the music of her garments. A Queen is not to be treated like a whore, even if she is a whore.

Nothing altered in our relationship: I did not wish her to believe she had deciphered the code of my mood. No details as to the when and the how of the punishment filtered through my non-committal motions—I am sure of that!

I am not denying that my policy of tolerance and postponement was a failure; my numerous defeats, known only to myself, brought my reputation, my self-repute to its lowest ebb. I looked at the mirrors with a disapproving frown: the evil I had done not to others but to my own ego was turning my reflection into *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which I had to hide in the attic. From the pages of my journal I emerged as anything but a self-assured man wanting his own way and getting his own way. In despair I denounced my writings as a forgery.

I was myself once more. But I was no longer young and handsome. I had aged ten years in a few months. During the period of our "second mystic marriage" I lived as many as four lives: the life of a man who was in love and happy, the life of a man who was humbled and downtrodden, the life of a man who was patient and rancorous, the life of a man who was singularly unhappy and miserable.

MY NARRATIVE

If you grant respectability
 to adultery,
 then brag further,
 and sanctify
 the incestuous progeny
 of this liaison between twins.
 My heart stops beating,
 My brain reels:
 Marital intercourse
 Between brother and sister!

They thought I would not understand the quotations in German. But I know Wagner. And Shakespeare. (At least I know *Othello* pretty well.) And I have got the libretti of Wagner's operas in German *and* in English. My guest, my wife's cousin. Her cousin indeed! After strenuous research I found out that the most shameful secret his diary harboured had been culled from *Die Walküre*. His sin was reflected in the mirror of Wagner's opera. His sin, his sister. My wife was his sister. And his mistress. And W. B. Yeats was just a red herring.

"So you're his sister," I said to my wife.

"And you're a spy. And a thief."

"You *are* his sister, aren't you?"

"Is it forbidden to have a brother?"

"No. But it *is* forbidden to make love with one's brother."

As usual, she recited a stanza from a Yeats poem:

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,
 Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
 Laugh, heart, again in the grey twilight,
 Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

"It's just a poem," I said. "Yeats never made love to his sister Lily."

"And my cousin never touched my body sinfully, whatever he writes in his diary. It's also a poem, by the way. A diary of every madman is a poem. Take Gogol's short story. Isn't it a poem in its own right? And Nabokov's *Pale Fire*?"

"So he is *not* your brother, is he?"

"Of course not. Just a poem, I tell you."

"But many Yeats' poems are inspired by real facts and real people," I objected.

"Not this one, I can assure you. Well, let us leave astral planes and get down to earth."

"And what's going on down here, may I ask?"

"You're in danger of losing your life," she said, raising her index finger.

"The only cheerful piece of news I have had in days. By whom am I to be murdered, pray? By MacBride?"

"By my cousin. I would study Louis II's biography, if I were you. The story of the medical report, in particular."

"I'm fed up with other people and their biographies. And their psychiatrists."

"It's a question of life and death. Your life is at stake, you know. My cousin made a few photocopies. His secret diary *is* inspired by real events and real people."

This time I was spared the necessity of rummaging in her cousin's drawers.

My dear councillor member Doctor von Ziegler,

As you know, the manifest illness of His Majesty the King has plunged the country into so appalling a situation that I feel duty bound to take emergency measures which, in conformity with the constitution, would guarantee the continuity of the government. With this end in view, it is absolutely essential to have a report as reliable as possible on the mental deficiency of His Majesty the King. As you have long since been in the immediate entourage of His Majesty, you must be now in a position to relate the patent facts which would go to constitute a valuable psychological testimony. I therefore request you to send me whatever you think fit to record to this effect. *Avec l'assurance de mon estime, je suis,*

Votre gracieux,

LUITPOLD

Prince de Bavière

The following testimony gave rise to a passionate comment on the part of my guest, of my wife's "cousin":

On the 9th of June, at 1.30 a.m., I was summoned by a gendarme to His Majesty's presence, to the castle of Neuschwanstein. I was accompanied by the chief of the district and eight gendarmes, but I alone was admitted to see His Majesty who said: "I need your advice. What am I to do? A delegation has just arrived to depose me, alleging that I am insane and can't govern the country. They purpose to bury me alive, like my brother Otto. I wouldn't bear it. I'm poorer than beggars: they are allowed to bring their cases before the courts, I am not—I, the King." I suggested His Majesty should go to Munich and convene the Diet. The King answered: "No, I'm within my rights and have no intention of leaving my room. I wonder how they intend to proceed, those who think I am insane. I order you to arrest the whole delegation and to lock its members up in this castle." Having left behind six men, for the sake of His Majesty's security, I went with the rest of the group to the castle of Hohenschwangau where the members of the delegation had set themselves up. I first addressed Doctor von Gudden who, upon hearing the order I was to carry out, rose to his feet and said: "What? You've been ordered to arrest me? It will cost you dearly. Don't you know His Majesty's mad?"

Mouthpiece of mutiny!

Thou at the least shalt learn the penalty

Of treason, though its proxy only. Pania!

Let his head be thrown from our walls within

The rebels' lines, his carcass down the river.

I shall have them conducted to the servants' quarters and locked up one by one, so my free will might bring pressure to bear on them more easily. Even their visits to the lavatory should be made by authorisation and under armed escort. They will be denied the exercise of free will. For it was not merely that he might live the natural life that God had produced man, but that he should live virtuously, that is, in relation to God and to His law.

I was initiated into the plans of the government which was about to place the unfortunate Monarch under supervision, and I later on witnessed the events of Hohenschwangau. The people designated to announce to the King his deposition were sentenced to death. I was awakened at Starnberg as soon as the King and Gudden had been found dead in the lake. I shall never forget the feeling I experienced while crossing the lake, alone with my rower, in the morning fog. The calm of death spread over the castle of Berg. The lackeys were standing in the corridors, pale as corpses, paralysed, unable to utter a word. I headed, my heart beating, for the room where the body of the King had been laid. He had an insane smile on His pale lips; his black locks tumbled onto his forehead. In the adjacent room I was shown the body of Doctor von Gudden. His face was full of irrepressible energy. I saw a scar on his forehead, the marks of strangulation on his thick neck. The King had throttled him.

HIS NARRATIVE

THE WINTER CASTLE

A winter castle, in a winter dale.
Migratory birds are put up for a night or two
In its spacious halls, in its basement. Old birds,
Difficult-to-budge, uncared-for birds live there.

No season do they know now, save winter.
 Their plumage disintegrated, their eyes dried.
 Luckily, in the attic to which they've been pensioned off
 Round the clock a recording of *Waldweben* is played.

Summer time. Their beards—they still have their beards—
Twine round the trunks and boughs. Their moustaches—
Or what passes as such—waver in the ventilator-wind.
They are all several years behind with their rent.

Old birds. Grandfathers, grandmothers. They are alive,
Otherwise, in the chimney they would long have been buried.
They live in the winter castle, not too comfortable
Yet reminiscent of former flights and falls, of summer
[finery.

A bird fluttered up, circled above me and flew towards Neuschwanstein. I ran after it through the giant portal, up and down a spiral staircase.

The faience stove painted with the legend of Tannhäuser, the grotto of stalactites with coloured lighting, Elsa questioning Lohengrin on the wall of the large drawing room were all within reach and out of reach.

I saw a bed and threw myself down on it. I was awakened by a noise that had originated somewhere beyond the window. "Have they arrived *already*?" I asked myself. I answered "yes" and sprang out of bed in my dressing gown. I chased the darkness by pacing up and down the room, a candelabra in each hand. Half an hour later I ventured to peep out: from above and below a number of people were ascending the stairs, descending the stairs, advancing towards the door to cut off my retreat. They moved like automatons who had enacted the same drama thousands of times and who, if wound up, might repeat it again for the benefit of one onlooker. I heard all sorts of queer remarks such as: "This knife won't slice", or "Give him enough rope and he'll hang himself". "He's taken on more than he bargained for," said a man in a white coat, pointing his pencil at my forehead. "Still, I'm not happy about the plan," said another, wearing a military uniform. "No happy ending then," commented an invisible man. "Be prepared for anything to happen." I felt a hand on my right shoulder.

"I am on the same wavelength as those people," I thought, "otherwise I would have been in no position to hear them. Dreams are marked off from real life by the fact that they don't fit into the continuity of experience. Yet this dream does fit into everything and furthermore it lasts as long as waking experience can last, unfolding itself into the flower of Time."

My laissez-faire attitude was therefore out of place. So I reasoned myself into being an automaton in order to safeguard my true identity—which was no automaton—by its removal. I had to hide it somewhere. (Where did I hide it, I wonder? Is it in my sister's safekeeping?) I was to gain my victory over the conspirators by becoming disembodied—never to be trapped, possessed, shut off from the world. "And were they to win by force of numbers I should escape uninjured, leaving behind a mere marionette, capable of repeating the same scene, if wound up."

Their voices are much louder now, as if I had turned up the sound of my tape-recorder.

"Have we enough evidence to go by?"

"I'll go by what I'm told."

"These bills are all overdue."

"He's been behaving in a pretty unbalanced way for some years now."

"I don't think he's actually unbalanced, but he should be locked up."

"He's a moral bankrupt who'll do anything for money."

"And his friend, the great composer, lives in the lap of luxury."

"This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof."

"He's got a maddening way of pretending to be interested, but afterwards you find he wasn't listening at all."

"He has no sense of duty. He's duty-free."

"His daydreaming and night-wanderings are his greatest vices."

"All the damnable degrees of drinking have you staggered through. One citizen called you master only for caviar."

"The monkey did a lot of mischief before it was caught and put back in its cage."

"Now he's docile and malleable like an automaton. He's just a child."

"To what cage shall we transfer the monkey?"

"Money's tight at the moment. I'm afraid the bank can't lend you any just now."

At that point I began to recognise those persons as though I had unconsciously managed to sharpen the picture on my television. "You're terribly long-winded and I suggest you become short and sweet as you used to be when I was young and handsome." By dint of fawning on those rascals I hoped if not to quash their verdict altogether, at least to defer my doom. A man sidled towards me, stopped and, peering at me over his spectacles, asked in a rash voice, "How do we pay?" "By selling Bavaria," I answered light-heartedly. My voice was not mine.

What must be, must be.

"What you say doesn't stand up," observed the man as he backed out of my view.

"Your behaviour is contrary to good military order and discipline," said an officer.

"Do have your hair cut."

"We have our orders," said Doctor von Gudden.

Memory is a quality which is not highly developed in most animals but the matter stands differently with humans: for all our lapses of memory, we can remember ourselves. And if we cannot, our identity may be restored from an infinitesimal detail, providing our logical reasoning is not impaired. "If I knew," wrote Laplace, "at one instant the position and the velocity of every particle of the universe, I would be able to

calculate anything that will ever happen, the entire future." I knew my position, my velocity and therefore easily calculated my past, my ego depending solely on Time, on continuity: I am not what I am if I was someone else the day before yesterday.

I recalled the whereabouts of my house—when aided by logical reasoning, memory is a wonder-worker—and my parents with their customs and whims. I finally calculated the sum of my ego, for my parents could have given birth to no other male child than myself.

And Louis II? I have never forgotten him, not for an instant.

So I recalled who I was or, in other words, I brought down my fractions to a common dominator and, like demons fleeing the sign of the Cross, doctors and officers scattered, helter-skelter.

Once my life had been locked in the jewel-box of my house, I composed a poem:

AN AMNESIAC ON TRIAL

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE:

He lived, he loved. In compensation
For the irrevocable past,
He can remember
The future.
Yesterday he told me:
"They'll lock me up."

Engrossed in the future, prophets map out the itinerary of mankind, building the castles of unheard-of catastrophes. I remembered the things to come. No longer diverted by the Punch and Judy show of the six senses I floated away, an Ophelia-like mermaid, talking, singing, sinking deeper and deeper into my couch. I would give a start whenever my memory was forced to negotiate a weird episode of my future existence.

I remembered how I would die.

Have I any chance of outstaying myself? I am sitting in an armchair perched on the very brink of Time.

I composed two more poems:

FEAR

Three ghosts were striding across a square.
 A monument appealed to their sense of beauty.
 But the stony-faced, ever-frowning general
 And the frothy-mouthed rearing horse
 Scared them to death.

MYSTERY

There are mysteries in everyday life.
 These mysteries leave me cold.
 But their multifarious side effects contrive
 To make matters worse in my world.

Long tunnels, crawling saucers,
 A bluish light upon a wall...
 I have to mobilise all my diplomacy
 To reach agreement with my hall.

My Hall of Mirrors!

I had a bottle of champagne opened to celebrate my return and the birth of three poetic masterpieces. No sooner had I touched with my lips the coolness of the crystal and bubbles than there turned up my sister. Her lips, her babble. Luckily, she turned up *outside* my room. As my servant knocked at the door I ordered him not to let her approach my walls. "Say I'm away, visiting Linderhof and Herrenchiemsee," I cried.

The next morning she paid me a visit. As I heard Alfonso's footsteps getting closer and closer to my double-locked door I ordered him to tell her I had moved to Southern Bavaria "*pour de bon* and for good". Judging from the same uncalled-for footsteps, she dropped in again around tea-time. "Chase her away with a bayonet," I shouted.

My sister kept swallowing her pride; she wrote me a letter. I did not read it—that would have been totally against my principles—but I admired her handwriting that somehow reminded me of her voice's modulations.

She came once more, and once more Alfonso carried out my order.

I tore up a letter I wrote her in days of yore:

My darling,

My passion contemplates you somewhere in between the secretaire and the chest of drawers. The air acquires a throbbing beauty. I write the book of my happiness by transforming every hyphen, every comma into the sapphire you used to wear.

Even at that microscopic age when excursions into the outer world are limited to the itinerary of a pram, I was already weaving my way towards you. I remember everything: our forest where, astride my steed, I rescued you from kidnappers; the quarrels we used to stage so as to roll endlessly, laboriously on the beach under the auspices of occasional waves and stationary stars. Never once did we see a shooting star – the entire firmament was glued to the spot in wonder and admiration. An old-fashioned, "gothic" hero dismounted from his steed and pinned his adversary to the ground with a thrust of his sword. Its blade, incidentally, reflected the criss-cross inspiration of Alexandre Dumas and Mayne Reid whose glamour was not yet overshadowed by the gloomy Freud's beard.

In his effort to make amends for the discourtesy I showed towards the King of psychoanalysis, Doctor von Gudden raises this ordinary toy-sword to the status of the sword of Damocles. Let him think I am homosexual.

The thrust of the sword, applied not to women but to men, points to the budding homosexuality which cast a shadow over my patient's turbulent life owing to his puritan upbringing. The vague premonition, confined at first to childish games, crystallised into the indisputable outlines of an 'ideal' during a ramble in the mountains when he saw a naked lumberman. Those country rambles, not infrequently beautified with sun-dappled nudeness, became quite a profession with

him, much more so in fact than his true profession—his kingship. He would doubtless have hit upon this pastime earlier, well before his coronation-day, had he not been escorted wherever he went and not necessarily by Paul or his cousin Charles, named Gackle. His fully-dressed tutors found themselves assigned the office of keeping an eye on him. And that omnipresent obtrusion upon his privacy led, with the passing of the years, to his exceptional loneliness. He might be said to have ruined his life by counter-attacking.

Only *you* accompanied me during those country rambles. Only *your* sun-dappled nudity did I relish "on hill, in dale, forest or mead, by paved fountain, or by rushy brook, or in the beached margent of the sea—" And then you would put on a masculine attire. Our games, our games.

Now, good Cesario, but that piece of song,
That old and antic song we heard last night

And you would sing for me that old antic song. Again and again was I slain by a fair cruel maid, by my sister. Nevermore!

*Je sais tous les tourments où ce dessein me livre;
Je sens bien que sans vous je ne saurais plus vivre,
Que mon cœur de moi-même est prêt à s'éloigner;
Mais il ne s'agit plus de vivre, il faut régner.*

"To fill," I write in my secret diary. For an hour or two I go on filling pages with the optimistic, thirst-quenching verb "to fill"—to fill the need, to fill the heart—until you fill the whole room, from the glass of champagne to the chink between the shutters. Clad in veils of flowery hues—

Our double flower has already burst into bloom, radiating the warm light of a new nebula. Our flower, one flower.

As long as I write about you I shall be myself. I shall describe you eternally: death will never grab me by the throat.

Grab *her* by the throat!

She will try hard to unclasp my fingers, but I shall hold her tight. I will! Thus a rope holds in its breathtaking, breathless embrace a precious parcel, a priceless pearl.

A black diamond.

THE BEAST OF PRUDENCE

With no more sound than a gentle hiccup
 A crooked beast meanders in the woods.
 Now he stops dead, his ears stick up;
 Now he runs away, jumping over roots.

Lo and behold! screened by two boughs
 He lurks in a hickory, champing his jaws.
 Then plummets down, looks around, bows
 To the inevitable and lifts his paws.

Unconditional surrender. False alert.
 He carries on in his own sweet way:
 Instead of laundering her blood-stained skirt
 He imitates a flower to end another day.

His burrow is so narrow
 That none, not even himself
 Can ever get indoors.
 Zoologists dubbed him "beast of prudence".

The opposite wall has undergone an impressionistic change. The palette of my windows.
 My palette. I am the Painter of Time, am I not?

The turns taken by colours, seasons and temperature hinge upon my mood. I am the
 Emperor of Nature, am I not?

And since my moods with all their mountains and fountains are located within His
 moods, I am trying not to let it be known where I am and how my thoughts sound. I vow
 to myself not to let them wrest from me my most precious possession—Louis II of
 Bavaria.

I glide on my sleigh through the whole spectrum of crepuscular shades. I am already on my way to the initial night.

At times the window becomes illumined as if by fireworks; at times the black colour surpasses itself in the thickness of its blackness and in the dullness of its evenness.

Of course it's a secret and you mustn't pass it on (I am addressing myself). No trespassing on my inner conflicts (I am addressing psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and *tutti quanti*).

They infringe upon the liberties of a man who has never done them any injury. Jet lag—that is the word. They lag behind by more than half a century; but they catch up with me as soon as I forego the protection of my house and venture beyond the gates.

How can I manage to deceive those doctors, spies, biographers? I deceive them into the belief I *am* my former self. How? By a chance resemblance to my former self. I am an ordinary, unimportant citizen. Leave me alone.

An ordinary citizen. How dreadful! Anything less than a King is nothing, a mere nobody.

The calm radiance of my eyes belies the dimness of my mind even when I am in, on my own—far from their shades and shapes. I have to put on an air of innocence. I am innocent like a lake in the rippling labyrinth of which no woman has yet drowned.

I pace up and down my room, smiling at myself in the mirrors with which I have covered the walls to verify the radiance of my mask, of my trompe-l'oeil manoeuvres. I pace up and down my room, going ahead when I itch to go back, and going back when I itch to go ahead; for *that* way, *my* way madness lies. I deceive myself for the sake of my mental health. It is a health-giving deceitfulness, as my psychiatrist might put it.

That corner is a real death trap.

I was debating with myself whether to have a chat with my servant or not. And, if not, for what reason? Do I suspect him of being a spy assigned to the post of my servant? I have known him for many years, but they may have known him for many years as well, for more than half-a-century!

My debate ended up in a compromise: I summoned him and fixed him with my angry glare without saying a word. He was standing before me bolt upright, like a guard on duty and, keeping him at arm's length, I asked: "Why, what art thou?"

"Your servant, my lord, your true and loyal servant."

I (*enthusiastically*):

Come, swear it, damn thyself,
Lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee, therefore be double-damned,
Swear thou art honest.

He swore he was honest. That was not the kind of chat I had been looking for: I had wished to find out whether he believed in metempsychosis.

I motioned him out and began talking to myself—in compensation for the hush-hush disposition I manifest whenever within my servants' earshot. My soliloquy was so compressed, so pruned and cut, chopped off so short, that I, for one, could not catch the meaning of what I had said. Had I succeeded in unravelling my own mysteries, I might have given myself up without waiting for their straitjackets and injections. "Know thyself" is a dangerous counsel.

I must have blurted out dreadful secrets, judging from the way my statuettes shuddered. They were not merely quivering in the breeze of my breath—they shuddered with horror.

"If a judgement were to be pronounced," I thought, "I would order proceedings to be held in camera—not even in my room but within the boundaries of my own consciousness. I would come out with all I have on my conscience without running the danger of being overheard and recorded on tape."

where shall I

Find the disguise to hide me from myself,
As now I skulk from every other eye?

In the heaven of Indra I discovered a network of pearls; as I looked at one I saw all the others reflected in it.

Footfalls, footfalls. They won't break into the house! Over my dead body!!!

Look to the portals;
 And with your best speed to the walls without
 Your arms! To arms! The King's in danger.

The footfalls ceased as though they had understood that I would not open anything, not even my diary—for fear of contaminating the "closeness".

If I open something, however unrelated to the gates and the door, the "openness" produced by the movement of my fingers will become reflected in all the mirror-like monads of the universe; the secret diary of God—the universe—will thus be opened. By opening my diary or my dresser I might do scientists a good turn unless they prefer to indulge in the self-sufficient process of constructing theories.

After much hesitation I opened the door and almost knocked down my servant who, his eyes bulging with fright, let go of the tray. The bottle of champagne which, he maintained, I had ordered to be brought into my room was doubtless a pretext. "You won't fool me so easily!" I screamed and had the servants' quarters searched by my honest cook whom I had nicknamed "honest Jago". Here is the content of the scraps of paper he discovered under my servants' pillows:

His Majesty kept bouncing up and down on his Royal bed.

When pacing up and down the room His Majesty seems to move in all directions as if He were at sea, at the mercy of wind and weather.

"Joining the enemy was an act of treason; he'll be hanged if I catch him," said His Majesty about a servant who had remained in the wine-cellar longer than necessary.

The door in the wall is disguised as a cupboard so that His Majesty could leave His room at short notice, in case the socialists should skulk into the garden with their bomb.

His Majesty did not like my face when He first saw me. His Majesty said on that occasion: "I don't know yet whether to give your ugliness a political slant or not, whether it is a part of their conspiracy or not." Ever since I have been wearing a mask.

Last night His Majesty explained to me that in some contexts "mad" means "foolish", in some "angry" and in others "insane". His Majesty then pointed out that He was merely angry.

My patient's lapse of memory and his persistently mistaken attitude indicates not only a breach in his personal time but also a new time running obliquely to the previous one.

His Majesty told me yesterday as I entered His room, "If you had a grain of common sense you'd put your coat on before going out in the rain."

"Though I live here now," His Majesty confided to me about 2 a.m., "I still have many links with the country where I was born and educated."

His Majesty spends the greater part of the day in His bath, taking swimming lessons from the cook.

His Majesty tore the flesh of His legs climbing up a tree from which He intended to jump down.

When left alone, His Majesty holds on firmly to the arm of His rocking-chair so as not to be swept along by the current of His mental life.

Once I opened the door, expecting to see another tray and all but ran into my sister who, having bribed my Ulrich, had reached the adjacent corridor. Ulrich's behaviour is plainly subversion; he will cause his fellow-servants to mutiny if I let him continue! With the money he received from my sister I shall build another castle.

*Madame, on n'entre pas ici facilement!
 Les bastilles d'état sont nuit et jour gardées,
 Les portes sont de fer, les murs ont vingt coudées.
 Pour que devant vos pas la prison s'ouvre ainsi,
 A qui vous êtes-vous prostituée ici?*

Dryly I asked my sister what her intentions were; she was not forthcoming about them. In her turn she inquired about my health. I said I was sound in body and mind. "Really!" she exclaimed. And she put her hand on my forehead to gauge the temperature of my "inner atmosphere".

Her conduct was beyond the pale and I took two paces back, getting beyond her reach. I have no head for heights; yet I pictured myself standing on top of the Tower of Babel, looking down at her—a speck of dust which might be easily flicked off. Unfortunately my own arms are much shorter than the arm of my law. I moved closer to her and raised my hand. She opened her mouth, like the heroine of a silent movie, and sank down behind an armchair. "I'm very good at hide-and-seek," I told her, "and since I *already* know where you're hiding—Can you hear me?" Apparently she could not. I moved closer to the armchair. "Can you hear me now?" Silence.

Was she afraid? I asked her, "Are you afraid of me?" and received no answer, which corroborated my hypothesis that she was afraid, alarmed, apprehensive. Had she got wind of the news that women were flogged in my attic? "If you break the law," I said, "you must be ready to suffer the full penalty." Or was it my mind that had scared her out of her wits? My eyes were the holes through which she had been sifting my grey cells for at least half an hour. Women have a thousand eyes! She was covered with eyes from head to foot as if she had inadvertently stepped in a pool of eyes; and those eyes glistened, glistened, glistened as they revolved around me like the starry firmament.

With a hypocritical smile I invited her to take a seat beside me on the sofa. What would a *normal* man do while sitting with his sister on a sofa? Sitting, sister. Would *he* reminisce about the old days?

"Do you remember the lake? Do you remember the drifting boat surrounded by swans, about thirty yards from where we were standing motionless, enchanted by the purest of visions? Do you remember my cockle-boat?"

"Oh, do stop playing this childish game!" she exclaimed and threw herself into my arms.

"You're such fair game, my dear."

"Why are you doing that?"

"What else can we do? Great men and women of the past! Hero figures! I'd hate to be a hero of our time because there are no heroes in our time. Only normal people—*they* are heroes of our time. Normal, ordinary, common, coarse, vulgar—"

"But why Louis II of Bavaria? Even in terms of longevity—."

"What?" I interrupted. She dared touch upon the problem of Time in my presence.

"Louis XIV lived much longer, not to mention Queen Victoria and—"

"I'm not Queen Victoria, am I?"

She began to expound *her* views on Louis II the Builder. It sounded like a private lesson given by a world-acclaimed authority on the subject to a slow-witted schoolboy. She proclaimed that one should distinguish between Louis' copies such as Herrenchiemsee, which in her opinion had only sentimental value, and his Gothic creation Neuschwanstein owing its appeal to the surrounding landscape. She also taught me that the keyword of Louis' life was "pseudo": "Neuschwanstein is a pseudo thirteenth-century fortress," said she, "and its suites are done in the pseudo-medieval style of the 'Burgen' built in the nineteenth century along the banks of the Rhine. Linderhof is a pseudo-Trianon and Louis himself was a pseudo-King, considering how little he cared about his Royal duties."

"Was the money he put up for Wagner's projects pseudo-money?" I asked in a pseudo-gallant tone. I added that Linderhof nestling amid the fountains, statues and flowerbeds might be more justifiably likened to the summerhouses of Russian noblemen;

and that the Herrenchiemsee Hall of Mirrors was slightly longer than the Versailles original.

"And his bad taste, my goodness!" she exclaimed suddenly.

I asserted that the notion of taste was alterable, depending exclusively on the vagaries of fashion. "What is considered bad taste now," I told her, "may become a specimen of good taste in a few years."

She dilated on her aversion to frills and furbelows. "What can be condoned in the decoration of a cake or a dress is an offence to the eye in architecture," she said pompously.

"I really am learning a lot today," said I.

"Besides, the more spiritual the inspiration, the balder its expression," she went on, unmindful of my irony. "Don't forget you're a great poet."

"W. B. Yeats?"

"Yes. And you're also yourself."

"I really am learning a lot today!" I overemphasised the ironic element in my tone. There was a hint of self-parody in my answers. Was I poking fun at myself?

She lapsed into silence. The break proved to my advantage, enabling me to muster my intellectual energy, to collect my scattered ideas. I launched into a magnificent-resounding praise of Louis' architectural style commingling the frivolity of fantasy with the austerity of mimicry. "I disagree with theosophists who set the benefits of religion above the benefits of art or secular love," I said. "I think that the output of poets or the rustle of lovers' clothes need no elevation, no ennoblement, no nimbus. Bach composed *Die Kunst der Fuge* not in praise of God but in praise of the fugue. No angelic vision assisted Shakespeare in his creation of Ariel. The angels that hovered around Fra-Angelico were the embodiment of his inspiration. *Dépouillement* plus faith equals spirituality in art—you must be joking. I suppose you're tempted to drag in the Romanesque marked by indigence, ignorance and ideology. But don't tell me you prefer Gregorian chant to Gesualdo or Beethoven. In this respect let me remind you of Tolstoy who looked with favour on the 'purity and modesty' of peasants' songs and frowned upon the 'impure abstruseness' of Beethoven's late piano sonatas. *C'est d'un ridicule achevé, voyons*. Let me also remind you of an old lady who refused to acknowledge Beethoven's

genius because he lacked, she thought, the simplicity and sincerity of Mozart the Divine. Isn't art above all an ambiguous, infinite thing, a gigantic *mille-feuille* which we savour gradually, removing layer after layer, each of them having a slightly different aroma? Remember, *l'appétit vient en mangeant*! And let me tell you: the denser the woman's apparel, the greater the excitement one gets while snatching away frills and flounces, laces and petticoats."

I was going to meet her on her own ground, even though cakes and dresses do not seem to be a comfortable foundation for an artistic discussion; but as I cleared my throat she started to speak again.

"The paranoiac has specific persecutors," she said. "There's a plot on foot to steal his brains. A machine is concealed in the wall of his bedroom, which emits mind rays to soften his brain or to send electric shocks through him while he's asleep."

"Whose brain?" I asked ingenuously.

"The paranoiac is persecuted by reality itself."

By changing the subject she aspired to ward off my wrath. And that sealed her fate, for the only mitigating circumstances I had so far been able to offer in her defence were connected with her blindness to my inner preparations for action. Indeed I all but sounded action stations; and yet I am no warmonger.

There was a witness for the defence in my court, but hardly had she resumed her reading of the deep-hidden scrolls of my mind than the situation changed completely.

The new situation reminded me of an Agatha Christie novel. A woman maintains that her husband is a madman. She points out that her husband is a lunatic and points towards a lunatic asylum. And they believe her. She is out of her wits, but they believe her. They always believe women. They are all gentlemen. All!

Mental espionage is punished by death. "Capital punishment can be performed by hanging or drowning or—" I knew I had forgotten something. The electric chair. "You risk being deported to America too."

"I've nothing against it," she said insolently. "The Americans are open-minded. They adopt new ideas quicker than Europeans." Just another quotation.

"We constantly refer to our traditions," I answered, pointing at a swan. "We seek to insert a new idea into our history books. We let a new plant insinuate its roots into the

fissures of our ancestors' tombstones. The process may take a long time, but we don't write our history on scraps of paper whose final destination is a huge wastepaper basket. The United States will always be a young country, even in the thirty-fifth century. And we'll grow older and older. Like Louis II of Bavaria."

My sister got up from the sofa.

"Do drop in next Sunday," I suggested.

"I will," she said and departed.

I've fooled her, haven't I? She thinks I'll strangle her husband. In her opinion he is Doctor von Gudden. I would certainly give his neck a hearty squeeze, but for the shortness of my arms. My arms aren't a hundred years long, are they? Doctor von Gudden died a century ago, but there are many doctors von guddens; she is one of them. And she is the best doctor von gudden I am aware of—even better than the individual she modelled herself upon.

She trusts the biographies of Louis II where no woman has ever been strangled or drowned or both.

I hate hide-and-seek. So many people have tried to ferret me out. I have ended up under the translucent yet impenetrable cover of water.

There are no walls in this world, only doors. And these doors always let people in, in, in, in, in, in, never out, in, in, in, in, in...

Hark! was there not
A murmur as of distant voices, and
The tramp of feet in martial unison?

They all lumber in and settle down on my settee, on my bed, on my carpets; they crouch behind my armchairs and the only sign testifying to their intrusion is their ears cocked up in expectation. And they take my soliloquies down in shorthand or on dictating machines; and they transcribe them on typewriters, on computers.

There are quite a few people that talk, sleep and write under the shelter of my roof. And you can take my word for it—they are all fond of writing medical reports. The whole place is cluttered with writing desks, and the writing desks are littered with writing

paper, and the scratching sound of pens, wiggling somewhere below as I push my way through the army of scribblers, reverberates in the air so loudly, with such a density, that I seem to be supervising from the inside the construction of a three-storied, empire-style termitarium.

His Majesty's thoughts tend to bounce around and ricochet until we drown them in the lake.

His Majesty suffers from uncontrolled movements of the limbs that propel Him along his favourite zigzag itinerary. In the interest of mental hygiene He had better stay where He is standing now. He prances round and round the room, wringing His hands, shaking His head violently as if to deny the accusation of murder. Then His Majesty stops dead or flings Himself in a chair that immediately starts to rock even if it is not a rocking chair. If it is one, it starts gliding through the castle.

The medical report. Yesterday I glided through a dozen pages, occasionally hurling myself onto the margins.

Eventually my chain of reasoning ricocheted off the medical report towards my ministers and valets. Linked by the trajectory of my logic they (the medical report and my valets) turned out to have originated in the same word—conspiracy. I looked up the definition of this word in my dictionary to make sure I was not wrong in my conclusions. "A combination of persons for an evil or unlawful end, an agreement between two or more to do something criminal, illegal, and reprehensible." According to my dictionary, there was a conspiracy to keep me out of the throne room. According to my biography, I tried, pathetically and unsuccessfully, to confound my enemies' plans.

According to history, my downfall was a question of time.

THE POSTHUMOUS FUNERAL

My face. A description of my mirror
 In his diary. How handsome I was!
 Now I am faceless, I am dead.
 I am rubbing the description out.

"His Majesty is beginning to show marked signs of the mental instability which is soon to reduce Him to complete insanity."

Sounds like a death sentence. How does it smell? *I* can only smell danger.

Reduced to insanity. Sentenced to insanity would have sounded better in the context because of the alliteration. Reduced. On the downgrade, downhearted, downcast.

He should come
 And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix
 His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!
 Even though dead,
 Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,
 And work, for me and mine still the same ruin,
 Scorn, pain, despair?

Straitjacket. "Keep to the straight and narrow! Keep to the straight and narrow!!" I don't take orders from you!!! I don't take orders from anyone!!!!

I won by only a few exclamation marks but I won.

Downtrodden.

They loosed a rakshasa weapon upon me, and its golden shafts with fiery faces vomiting flames poured over my body from every side, changing to venomous serpents. I took a Garuda weapon and loosed a flight of golden arrows changing to vultures and devouring all the serpents. Hands off! *Bas les pattes!!*

Twenty arms and ten heads had Gudden. He sat on his golden throne like a flaming fire fed with sacrificial offerings. The arrogant dragon will have cause to repent!!

Going downhill.

With my eyes still cast down, I tried to raise myself upon my elbow. My vale of tears decorated with wet pillows, wet sheets and wet carpets. I must have been crying for a fortnight. The air feels damp; so do the walls, the chandelier. An Indian blanket humps up its back on my shoulders. I sit in this human aquarium and my armchair, to quote my own poem, "is drifting downstream into a new darkness, towards the dark side of the moon".

Come, obscure Death,
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms!
Like a fond mother hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which none wake!

Darkness, darkness, darkness, darkness—the best hiding place within my Kingdom.

I go blackberrying, I regale myself with blackcurrants, I blacken my face, my veins, I read Othello's monologues, sipping after every line my black velvet, my Royal cocktail. I am black, I am black, I have no room to let whiteness enter under my wings.

I let myself go, hoping to get lost, to disappear in a star-cluster of alien words. The best hiding place is "everywhere". I was everybody and everything. My night swelled to a pitch that nobody, not even the God of Malebranche, was able to endure.

Mirror-furniture, mirror-ceilings, mirror-landscapes, mirror-castles. The only hand I can clasp is my hand. My thoughts, my gestures wander endlessly around the Mirror-universe, spanning a series of developments and consequences. Assembled in groups, my reflections crush down upon my head. I open my eyes and the waves of darkness knock me over.

Am I impersonating all the victims of persecution? Have I been impersonating them throughout the history of mankind? What about mangy dogs and drowned cats? Do I coincide with the universe that is disconsolate, woebegone, oppressed, suppressed? Now and here and everywhere? And always?

At the appointed hour Dürckheim arrived from Munich and begged me to show myself to my people.

"This time I dispatched you no telegram," I said. "Did you come because you were fated to come? Didn't you know I would reject your counsel, even though I am willing now to follow it? Wouldn't I run my head against a glass-wall if I decided to save myself in spite of the long-standing tradition, in spite of my folklore drowning?"

The happiness of thinking nothing and doing nothing—so we were before birth, and so we shall be after death.

Not to waste time which grows unbearably precious in the vicinity of the lake!

"The other day I asked you to get me some poison. Do you remember? You refused, didn't you? But, after so many years, you *must* have changed your mind. My watery death *must* induce you to help me. You're my friend, aren't you? Aren't you? You are? Run then—run, run, run over to the nearest chemist's!

"Has thou the pretty worm of Nilus there,
That kills and pains not?

"Death by drowning is horrible, believe me!

DÜRCKHEIM: Why did you say to Weber, "Drowning is a fine death: there's no mutilation. But to jump from a height—"

LOUIS II OF BAVARIA: I was wrong. I was completely off the track. I'd rather jump from a height, or swallow arsenic, or blow my brains out.

Can God undo the past? Of course. Otherwise He wouldn't be God but a mere human—a man.

I *must* drown. This cup may *not* pass away from me!

MYSELF: Can I give you a piece of advice, my dear Dürckheim? You must go back or your career and your future will be ruined. You must leave immediately, in obedience to my free will. I must drown. I must go to Berg.

A storm, with thunder and lightning. Sumantra urges on the goodly horses, swift as King Lear's wind. Men and beasts are stricken dumb with sorrow and, bereft of wit, rush headlong after the carriage into which the King has been grossly pushed.

Hold on, I am still the King! It is but The First Act.

Scene I.-[A State Room in King Lear's Palace.]

Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age.

It *must* be the wrong play, by Jove. I am not old and for nothing in the world, not even for a horse, shall I give up my Kingdom! No pastime within our earthly dial has more dignity and beauty than a Royal pastime. I have no daughters either. But "my wits begin to turn", and no mistake!

O! let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven;
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!

What a dangerous place, that hovel. This is the wrong play and the wrong place. Where do I go, now? There is a world elsewhere.

*Wohin nun Tristan scheidet,
willst du, Isold', ihm folgen?
Dem Land, das Tristan meint
der Sonne Licht nicht scheint*

Isolda plays the part of Delilah.

She came before Sunday, before her Doomsday. Before my Last Judgement. Liar!
Traitor!

She entered my room and glided over to the breakfast tray on which I had laid my lukewarm cup of tea. She voluptuously applied her lips to the spot where my lips had left their barely visible sign and sipped the liquid, and tapped gently on the blanket with her knuckles as if beating time. Was she playing one of Chopin's waltzes? Her hand looked like a sea anemone, a lake anemone.

thou wert made
For better fortunes than to share in mine,
Now darkling in their close toward the deep vale
Where Death sits robed in his all-sweeping shadow.

I was St Antony. I was resting on my laurels after a daily visit from the many-headed, many-voiced, many-legged Tempter. My room seemed to be full to overflowing. The remains of my desires were gathering around me like thunderclouds. Not again! Not again!

Unruffled they waited resignedly, the pencils stuck behind their ears. Presently they seized them and started writing, writing, writing the same text, as if in the whole world there were nothing else to write. "As a result of this disease, free volition on His Majesty's part is completely impossible. His Majesty must be considered as incapable of exercising government; and this incapacity will last not merely for a full year, but for the rest of his life."

I perceive no perceivers in my room. I see no household spies under my skies. My blindness does not denote their absence in God's infinite mind: He may have distributed them all round the place in case *He* should need medical evidence of my insanity.

They were carrying me through the corridor. The rectangular eyes of my doors were watching our funeral procession. The ceiling also kept a watchful eye on my corpse.

My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting wormy ground!
To be nailed down into a narrow place;

To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more
 Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again
 Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost—
 How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be...
 What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go mad!

I am strolling around the tropical snake-infested garden of my mind.

Dagger, dagger, my Kingdom for a dagger. They have substituted small gold fruit knives for my daggers. I am still the King within the boundaries of my own body! Why have you blotted the windows of my bird-like suicide with your ridiculous iron bars? I wish to slip from the sleeping Vishnu's mouth and tumble into the pitch-black timeless sea. I prefer the colour of the cosmic night to that of your hypocritical doctor's coats.

Self-murder...no, that might be no escape,
 For Thy decree yawns like a Hell between
 Our will and it.

Upon perusing a few pages torn out of an old magazine one suddenly learns about one's own death. In minute detail! Astounding, isn't it? Dead and gone, dead and gone. Just listen to the tolling bell—dead and gone. An ordinary mortal, a journalist gives you a detailed rundown of your last days on earth and all you can do is wait, wait, wait, unless you question the authenticity of the document. Dead and gone, dead and gone. Mad and gone. Maud Gonne. Just you keep out of it!!

I have come to suspect that death fitted Louis II only from a one-sided point of view—*their* point of view. And journalists as well as biographers may have been bribed by the conspirators, by Luitpold's myrmidons. To attain a pure aesthetic beauty of truth, unsullied by falsehood, is indeed a difficult task for biographers who, more often than not, have at their disposal only second-hand information. Even the Encyclopaedia Britannica garbles the story of my Reign and history of my Kingdom:

A German patriot, Louis resisted the overtures of Napoleon III for a Franco-Austrian-Bavarian alliance and immediately joined Prussia in the war of 1870-71 against France...Disappointed with the empire, alarmed by the Bavarian population's Pan-German enthusiasm, and weary of feuding with his ministers over his moves to strengthen the church, he retired more and more from politics, devoting himself increasingly to his private pursuits.

I did not *immediately* join Prussia in the war against France; and when I did so, set upon by my ministers, I ordered the mobilisation of the army in French as if training the cameras of future film directors, fascinated by my personality, on the Gallic, Sun-King side of my soul. Nor do I agree with the expression "private pursuits" which ought to be replaced by the "common good": opened to the public a few months after my death, my castles have always provided the state with revenue. Tourism is Bavaria's biggest industry.

I am none the worse for that linguistic inaccuracy and can even correct it myself by deleting the defamatory words. But what about Luitpold becoming regent?

In the early 1880s the King withdrew from society almost completely. Finally, on June 10, 1886, he was declared insane by a panel of doctors. His Uncle Prince Luitpold became regent.

I deleted the passage of course. I rubbed it out, crumpling and ripping the paper. (A ripple of applause ran through the crowd.) Was it enough? If the author of the article were now in my room, having mingled with the crowd of conspirators, I would sentence him to a prolonged term of penal servitude in my basement. As it is, he must be numbered among the *future* conspirators sapping my authority from afar. Standing a respectful distance ahead of me, they write about Luitpold's regency, about my death by drowning and I am not even allowed to slap them:

The extravagant growth in Royal expenditure finally led the ministry to intern Louis II of Bavaria. Removed to Starnberger See by the psychiatrist Bernhard von Gudden, he drowned himself there on June 13. Gudden also perished.

In announcing my suicide to the world they affect my life, my health—which has already been impaired by heavy drinking—for most people are so gullible as to believe them. And public opinion counts, especially in these matters.

I am still alive in the illiterate milieu, among those who have read no biography of Louis II of Bavaria. They may have seen some photographs, though; or Visconti's and Syberberg's films. Should I move to the Country of the Blind?

To move to the stars...to die...to die. To get lost amidst suspension points.

To die? Have my attempts been reduced to nothing? A nice verb it would be—to nothing. *Nichten*. To die, to nothing, to die.

Have my attempts fallen through? To fall through. Like a parachutist. For all those crashes, I am still hanging on some rusty, rotten hook doomed to break like an icicle.

Dead and gone, dead and gone. It would be easier for me to die if I had never lived. If I were to stagnate in Moscow without ever being authorised to go on a spree to Paris, I would much rather not have heard about *la vie parisienne*.

One should never be born. One should never be conceived, not even in somebody's mind. Out of mind, out of life. One should set fire to the house in which one's parents are to be introduced to each other at the beginning of a ball. If the house proves to be non-flammable, one should blow out the candles and disperse the light through a prism so that one's mother appears to one's father as a number of coloured rays. I suggest a draconian birth control: the "death of birth".

Does not death fit in with Darwinian "survival" far more logically than any strong biological organism? Up to now death has survived all the cataclysms listed by scientists and prophets in the *Book of Life*: droughts, the Flood, innumerable world conflagrations.

And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them dead with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his

kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them dead. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed dead upon the face of all the earth.

MY NARRATIVE

I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:

- 1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
- 2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
- 3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.

The ending of the previous chapter echoed (or mirrored) the following stanza:

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;

Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked into the eye of day;

The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.

(From *Oedipus at Colonus*—Yeats' mirror in which Sophocles is reflected)

If you don't manage to make your cousin change his mind and become W. B. Yeats instead of impersonating a doomed, drink-besotted Monarch, I will do it myself, on my own. My pleasure!

Oh sorry, I forget. You want him to drown in order to get rid of the red dancers, of Brünnhilde's matches or whatever causes a world's conflagration in your astral realms, in your crazy worlds. All right, let him drown. I will play along with you. Or am *I* supposed to drown in the context of your game? No, I've got it all wrong. I am to be throttled by Louis II of Bavaria, for you assigned me the part of Doctor von Gudden. All right, all right. But what about the following sentences I lighted upon in the chapter *The Beast of Prudence*: "I've fooled her, haven't I? She thinks I'll strangle Doctor von Gudden, alias her husband. I would certainly give his neck a hearty squeeze, but for the shortness of my arms." And at the end of the chapter *The Winter Castle* he divulges his real (not astral) intention: to grab *her* by the throat. To grab my wife by the throat, to throttle my wife. His *real* intention. Maybe it is just another antithesis, another antithetical self, another

antithetical intention. Maybe he is determined to strangle her husband, alias myself. Maybe I *am* Doctor von Gudden in his antithetical world. Let us play this game, his game, their game. So I am Doctor von Gudden. What shall I do to "ward off evil spirits", to use *their* terminology? How to escape the punishment? How to avert death? How to undo the past? *Unmöglich*. The only word I know in German—*unmöglich*. Impossible, unreal, unreasonable. I would rather play *my* game. I am bound to win this game of mine because it is my game and I know its rules better than anybody else. Who shall I become? Louis II of Bavaria—the most natural choice under the circumstances. Besides, it was her cousin who put this mask on my face. He is slowly and agonisingly being hoisted with his own petard.

I'll go for a stroll, as Louis did. But I'll throttle no-one. Why should I? I am not a murderer, am I? Not at all, not at all. Not even an astral murderer. And I won't drown. Why should I? No-one threatens to lock me up. No-one, not even my wife. So let us go for a stroll. It is raining already.

HIS NARRATIVE

THE FISH

Alas, she was sadly in need of repair,
 The fish that glided past shelving sands.
 Frayed and flayed by nets and hands,
 She still adored the word "everywhere".

Liberty, thy lure is a delusion!
 No pill can mend her sieve-like skin.
 Pain and pride instead of death and tin
 And calm. Is it a wise solution?

She never wanders away from the beach,
 Hoping to become something else on earth.
Vita nuova...my Kingdom for a mirth...
 Castles in the air...out of reach...

I am going to drown: painted in watercolours, the picture of this evening is located below the watermark. Is there any suitable lake or river in the neighbourhood? Not within a ten km radius. What does it matter? I need no water to die by drowning. All this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

I need no water to drag her to the bottom of the lake.

Whit Sunday, June 13. It is raining already. I talked in my dream, last night. I woke about two in the morning and indicated my wish to get up. They persuaded me to stay in bed until six. I had no choice but to strangle time, so I began to meditate. "However long one's history may be kept impenetrable to the particles of light," I told myself, "sooner or later the creation starts anew and one finds oneself sitting in front of a mirror. I am immortal and my death, if any, is just a coffee break."

To plant seeds you must prepare the ground first. What am I to become, next time? Just another Monarch? Hardly. I would not make much headway with Him. Forward march! How about the Second Coming, a messianic mission? As my court-poet, a prophet in his own right, wrote yesterday:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

That is a step in the right direction. That is a step up in my career. (In our time we are agreed that we "make our souls" out of some one of the great poets of ancient times.)

I shall write His biography. I shall write as long as I can until the water soaks through my notebook. The damp in the air makes my old bones hurt.

I shall write His biography in a different handwriting, otherwise nobody would believe me; nobody would believe *in* me. (Did they believe in my cousin? Can they read what I write in parenthesis?)

The humidity has been measured and found higher than ever.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

He strove to make His meaning clear. He sometimes had the urge to clasp feeble-minded listeners to His breast and, if necessary, to kiss them on their foreheads. His lips were encircled by a glimmering halo. "There need be no words uttered," Andrew told Him. He gave Andrew a smile, whereupon His lips literally came into blossom and grew so radiant that even His kiss might at that moment have been less harmful to Andrew's serenity. And yet His kisses were remarkable in more than one respect. Suffice to say that the people to whom this particular honour was granted—they were mostly feeble-minded and simple-hearted men and women—would discreetly begin rubbing their foreheads as though stung by a wasp or a bee. Philip used to glance round so as to detect the presence of the insect before it was too late, until one day he understood everything.

I have no time, my time is numbered. My time is no longer the wasteland where a step may be equated with the little finger and four yards with one inch but a succession of cubes equal in length, height and volume. And they are numbered. And I number now thirty cubes and now twenty-nine cubes. And now twenty-seven cubes.

I disregard commonplace, human Time and create my Free-Will Eternity. Five o'clock tea is to become seven o'clock tea, or four o'clock coffee, or nine o'clock dinner.

We are surrounded by mountains; we climb up, higher and higher, higher and higher until, aged and exhausted, we throw ourselves into the lake of obliteration. Brothers! You must *remove* those mountains with your own hands! You must dig away the earth. You must turn the mountains into pure horizontality!

And, on the synchronous sand of history, in the City of the King—alias, the City of God—my humanity will play multi-dimensional games.

Diverge, steer away from the vicious circle of dials!!

I stride around the room with my cane. Little by little my rage degenerates into a headache that is usually accompanied by stomach trouble. With resignation my cane is floating along the walls.

Pah! I am choked! There creeps
 A clinging, black, contaminating mist
 About me...'tis substantial, heavy, thick,
 I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
 My fingers and my limbs to one another,
 And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
 My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
 The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!

None, none, none, none, none would dare call the Walhall an asylum. I am to perish within its tapestries that close in on me like an army of psychostalinists.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

He was scarcely in contact with the gravel as He walked along an alley to meet His disciples. Oblivious of the laws imprisoning earthly existence in a straitjacket, He seemed to be fluid, insubstantial. He flowed into his disciples as a brook flows into a river, as the river flows into an ocean. The life-begetting elixir of His teaching kept watering their roots.

What did my court mystic proclaim at our Last Supper?

Can there be anything so important as to cry out that what we call romance, poetry, intellectual beauty, is the only signal that the supreme Enchanter, or some one in His councils, is speaking of what has been, and shall be again, in the consummation of Time?

The melancholic, irrevocable "once upon a time" was obliterated. Here is the new motto: "twice upon a time". Or "thrice upon a time". There are lots of good kings in the earth. There are lots of good gods in Heaven.

Lakes are replaced by forests, forests are replaced by meadows. This is a case to follow up. Lives will succeed one another as the blind men do in the illustrious Breughel painting *The Parable of the Blind*.

What do they say?

That Lugaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chess-board, waiting for their end.

Already? However, I suspect, nay, I am certain—it is but the second act. Of what play? I do not care: the Monarch must be still alive in the second act. Monarchs are the mainspring of plots. Before their souls are wafted away among the moonlit phantoms of their ancestors, they have plenty of time to build castles and to skim on their sleighs through their lands of night.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

He spoke to Peter about the hostility to which His sermons had long since been exposing Him. "My sincerity is rapidly reaching its climax. The whole Truth cannot be withheld from the world." He laid His hand on Peter's shoulder. Caught unawares, Peter shrank away from His fraternal fingers. "Are you afraid of me?" He asked with wonderment. Peter shook his head. "Are you afraid of them?" He smiled. It was a bitter smile. "Double-tongued are the snakes and the malicious," He went on. "Their cruel mouths are the source of many an evil to man, especially to the Man Who is no longer a man."

All those people staring at me, peeping at me, peeking at me, cheering me, jeering at me—are they all regular members of the audience? No applause, please!

They hammer me into some shape—"some" has an overtone of decomposition when applied to something definite, and something has an overtone of decomposition when applied to me—and they are going at it hammer and tongs.

The rain is rhythmically lashing me into a fury.

I was conveyed successively to the mental hospital, to the family vault, to the moon, to the dark side of the moon. Death is a long-distance haulage company.

God does not move chessmen—human beings—from one square to another. He drives ambulances, carries stretchers.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

The luminosity of His skin left no doubt as to His true origins. The fireworks of His pupils set off by the dark background of night were far more eloquent and persuasive than any word. Some day, when the sneers of the silly-clever, who suppose that my biography can belong but to the distant past, to the era of prophets and miracles, have faded away, His light will enable humanity to save a lot of electricity.

During their nocturnal talks He would carry the joke a bit too far by extinguishing all the lights and suggesting John should read a book. His room would be permeated with

a sort of polar-night atmosphere, owing to the fluorescent activity of His body; even sunbathing was not excluded.

Once He sat down at the piano. John recognised the nocturnal harmonies of the Moonlight Sonata. A few tears were trickling down His cheeks and neck. Unashamed about that unexpected manifestation of weakness, He was looking straight ahead—at the photograph of His father driving a car. Presently, for no reason at all, he knelt down and clasped His hands; His blood-red lips were moving faster and faster.

Always inclined to soliloquise, after death, in the absence of interlocutors, memory is sure to become more garrulous than ever.

I spread my past throughout the solar system and project in this magnificent fly-in cinema our stroll in Versailles.

Why did we not build they-lived-happily-ever-after castles? My time-car must have skipped off the road onto the hard shoulder, for the Dark Ages closed in upon my life.

I indicated my wish to go to Mass and, as was to be expected, they put up fierce resistance to my free will. Setting my calmness against their insults, I yielded to their "authority". I could have confessed my future deadly sin. I did not.

Life deleted by the cross-hatchings of a slanting rain. Yet the blossoming light of my triumph has glazed over the surface of the world. And all that glitters is pure gold!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

Under favourable atmospheric conditions His brain would grow almost transparent and one could easily have a feast of thought-reading, provided He was not opposed to it. His disciples used to indulge in contemplating the intricacies of that living painting by Pollock: an expressionist image of Truth.

It is hard to be a Messiah in our unresponsive, irreverent world. Hardly had I climbed onto the soapbox than the people, who had been clustering around it as if attracted by

itinerant comedians, started to walk off in different directions, now and then stumbling against empty bird-cages and crates. The crowd which I had been relying upon dispersed, broke up; yet there was no policeman in sight and the firemen had not yet fitted their hoses onto the taps.

To be removed from all the copies of the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "During the later years of his nephew Louis II's Reign, Luitpold served as the King's deputy, and, when it became clear that Louis was mentally unbalanced, Luitpold acted as regent, a post he continued to hold under Otto, his insane younger nephew. The Regent's patriarchal rule soon won the public's approval." Or else, for the sake of making-up, the article might remain where it is, but, in that case, my name and my title are to be substituted for Luitpold and prince regent. Example: instead of "Munich, the capital, flourished under Luitpold and came to be regarded as a centre of culture" print, "Munich, the capital, flourished under Louis II and came to be regarded as a centre of culture. The King, a friend of many artists, spent large sums for cultural and artistic purpose."

It is highly advisable to complete the article as follows: "The King invited to His court many a great poet of His time: Mallarmé, Trakl, Browning, Yeats. He sponsored *Les Ballets Russes* and was among the first to recognise Stravinsky's genius. Thanks to the King's financial support Mahler devoted much more time to composition, cancelling his lucrative yet tiresome concert engagements and thus was able not only to finish the *Tenth Symphony*, but to compose the eleventh and the twelfth dedicated, in token of gratitude, to the King. Thanks to the King's financial support Kafka retired as early as 1909, although he was to hold his post at the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia until 1922. Joyce's epistolary remarks about his financial problems are nothing but exercises de style."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

One of His primordial aims was to encourage His disciples to use their ears as funnels rather than as filters in order to pick up all sonic phenomena, even down to inaudible, unutterable things. He claimed to listen permanently to the screaming of souls. However much His ears were overburdened with this polyphonic lamento, he was fond of music

and the only way to get him out of a concert hall was to pull his body out forcibly—long after the last note had sounded. The pulls broadened His sleeves, turning His jacket into a sail that seemed to carry its owner in pursuit of the dissolved melodies. Out of sight, out of life. He would slide off His armchair and crumple in a heap on the floor. It was incumbent upon James to undo that foetus-posture and to dissipate the musical mist still hanging like a theatrical curtain between Him and action.

His aunt, to whose care His musical gift was entrusted, led Him straight away into the temple of Harmony without lingering over scales and other sterile preliminaries. She played for Him the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. Some keys bobbed up and down while others, though no less beautiful, remained untouched. The well-meaning hands drew the movement to a close, but no sooner had His aunt turned towards Him with expectation in her eyes than He fiercely pressed the "untouchable" keys in. He released them and straightened up only when His thirst for justice had been quenched. His passion for music was not incompatible with perceiving piano-playing in terms of social injustice.

My mind is not always mine—a robot in revolt against its maker. This thought induces me, now and then, to put on St. Francis' threadbare garment and preach to my mind instead of birds. "My brother the mind, much ought thee to praise the Master, Who keepeth thee running."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

He never questioned, perhaps out of sheer concern for decorum, the identity of His father. On the contrary, He used to embrace His father heartily, more often than necessary. "But for you and mother I couldn't have been what I am," He said once. Unwilling to contradict the Saviour, Simon left the room.

He would have become what He became even if the honour of His incarnation had fallen to the lot of a pair of wolves roving up and down some corner of Siberia.

"Are you a son of God?" an out-going journalist asked Him once. He restricted the potential amplitude of His answer to a smile and habitual upward toss of His head.

At 8 a.m. Gudden asked to be received, but I granted him an audience only a quarter of an hour later: I had to finish a paragraph. He was also authorised to present Grashey, another psychiatrist, who, though ranked second, was in every way superior to Gudden. I resolved to spare his life. Spare the rod and spoil the doctor.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

At the age of four He already declared His wish to enhance His knowledge of Sacred Books. As no myth has yet been concocted to the effect that He learnt to read in His cradle, I am now under the necessity of offering a plausible explanation as to when and how He first became acquainted with the rudiments of the Sacred Lore. Was it conveyed to His mind through an innocent-looking sunbeam? Much of this problem, which has beset His disciples for years, stems from His being tight-lipped about what might elucidate the mystery of His link with the supernatural. He would gaze at the ceiling or at the stars and say nothing.

Thirsty for knowledge and enlightenment, He would eagerly have excluded from His space-time any frivolous entertainment, but for His parents who, mindful of their child's nervous system, took every opportunity to distract Him and direct His tender mind towards more cheerful subjects. To comply with their wishes He overcame His aversion to toys and made it His duty to fiddle around with them from three to four in the afternoon. The patterns of the toy-outlined images could be likened to Buddhist mandalas.

At 10 a.m. Gudden suggested that we should go out for a breath of fresh air. He said it in French: *"prendre l'air"*. Does he take me for Louis XVI?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

The family doctor advised Him to take more exercise. On the afternoon of January 2nd, he tobogganed down His favourite hill—three times, four times, five times. But His eyes remained imprudently fixed on heaven. In vain, prompted by his down-to-earth considerations, did Judas warn Him against the boulders strewn all over the slope; in vain did he endeavour to remove those boulders from His path: they seemed to have taken root and, anyway, Judas was no weightlifter. Bewildered in equal measure by His stiff-necked attitude, His attachment to symbols and His sense of balance, Judas finally resigned himself to accompanying Him on skis in these perilous descents. Judas knew only too well that neither their velocity nor his own dexterity would allow him to ward off the disaster.

He found Himself confined to His room for a comparatively long stretch of time. His accident made Him suspicious about the harmony of the world's foundations.

The wounds which are inflicted upon the gods by themselves, or by the powers of evil, no matter how many times repeated, are not permanent; for Thoth, the God of knowledge, is always at hand to heal them.

Thy heart is to Thee, Osiris
 Thy feet are to Thee, Osiris
 Thy shoulders are to Thee, Osiris
 Thy head is to Thee, Osiris
 Thou hast received Thy head
 Thou hast embraced Thy bones

Heavy drops of rain were falling lower, lower and lower—to dissolve finally in the generosity of the lake. "The play *The Last Stroll* is in rehearsal," I told my companion in misfortune.

Electroconvulsive therapy. Is that what you've got in store for me? I am as sound in body and mind as any Monarch!

Is that what you call love?

I plunged into myself. I sank to the bottom of my soul, darkened by seaweed and sea anemones, and tenderly my mother leaned over my pillow. Her lips began to move. Mother, save me from that bitch! Shield me from those infinite fingers that are dragging me into the white Kingdom of madness! Help your child, mummy! Help your poor, lonely child!

I am buried beneath a heap of star-rubble for hundreds of years.

The spade of a new Delilah bumps against my skeleton.

Are we born for the sole purpose of being betrayed? Is that the supreme goal of life?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LOUIS

I remember the afternoon when at last He was allowed to leave His bed. He was walking down the alley towards the classroom where His classmates and most of the teachers awaited Him. As usual, Judas saw Him first and went to greet Him in the courtyard.

It is too late now. Besides, the doctrine of determinism puts a brake on the ribaldry of my desires that are all focused upon her body, upon her lips.

We plodded along the road for another hour. The vultures were circling over our umbrella.

I twine my arms round her neck and drag her, swimming backwards, to the bottom. My little girl, my little girl.

Weia! Waga!

Woge, du Welle!

walle zur Wiege! Wagalaweia!

Wallala weiala weia!

C'est toujours la même chanson.

Our struggle churned up the water, destroying the transparency of the lake.

Presently I smoothed the enigmatic creases out and saw my submarine capital and the profound, eternal truths growing in clumps within the town-square. Atlantis.

Suddenly a divine, unhoped-for serenity wrapped me up in its translucent, transcendental dressing gown.

God is there

As here, and with His shadow ever clothes

The innocent, the injured and the weak.

The path leading to peace was no longer effaced from my maps. I contemplated the cherry tree that had come into blossom within my soul.

I looked up, stood up, skirted the edge of a huge boulder and finally reached the body of my beloved. As I was stretching out my fingers I caught sight of her glazed eyes staring up from where she lay on the lakebed through the water.

We were part of the same Japanese poem and there was nothing to worry about.

We were united at last. Underwater nuptials, submarine wedding party.

MY SECRET DIARY

I went for a stroll. I had not forgotten my umbrella, thank God. Cats and dogs, Kings and doctors. After a while I retraced my steps. The house was empty except for the servants. My wife and my cousin were gone. (Dead and gone or alive and gone?) At first I was neither surprised nor vexed. It is not forbidden to go for a stroll, is it? I had no alternative but to wait for them. And I began to wait for my wife and her cousin. (Her brother.) And I continued to wait for them until an idea crossed my mind, a suspicion. Suspicions do not cross one's mind. They get stuck in it, sometimes for ever. Suspicion, apprehension, uneasiness, anxiety.

I went for another stroll, scouring the woods for their bodies. (There is no lake in the vicinity of my house.) There were no bodies in the woods. I called the police. No bodies, nothing. I continued to wait for them.

What happened? I asked myself. Did he kill *her*? Did he take my wife to the Castle of Heroes? Did they drown in a distant lake, in an astral sea? He might have just strangled her. (Nobody, I myself—) Or are they living happily somewhere? Ever after, in the Hereafter? Maybe they are living under other names now, under false pretences. They are accustomed to other names, to other times, to other minds.

What kind of game did they play? Was he Louis II or W. B. Yeats? Was he my wife's brother or her lover? Or both? He could not be my wife's brother *and* cousin, not at the same time. Not in the same incarnation. But I did not care about his identity; nor did I really care about the nature of their relationship. (Was it natural or unnatural?) I was merely distressed by my loss.

Did she betray me? Did they want to get "the husband" out of the way by making me believe I was the intended victim of the self-appointed King? Doctor von Gudden. "I saw a scar on his forehead, the marks of strangulation on his thick neck." I looked at myself in a mirror. There was no scar on my forehead, nor did my neck bear any mark of strangulation. I was alive and my body lay sprawled on the same sofa—on the sofa where I used to drift from one daydream into another in my childhood, in my youth. And nothing can ever be forgotten in one incarnation.

I was myself and I thought about my wife. Oddly enough, I had not gone mad, for all my efforts.

I hoped that madness would make me forget what had happened in my house. Madness *is* another incarnation, isn't it? "Let me go mad! Let me go mad!" I repeated out loud. Many, many times did I pore over the pages of my guest's secret diary—my pillow book, my object of pillory—hoping it might contaminate my mind, corrupt my soul, consume my life. Nothing doing.

MacBride was executed. An enviable death, a hero of the past. He refused a blindfold, saying he had stared down British guns before.

Was she playing that game to add piquancy to our relationship, awakening me to my responsibilities, stirring my blood? I saw a film where a woman would strip her clothes off before strangers to keep herself in good shape: she loved only her husband. She wished to be sexy for *his* sake. In porn movies women often make love to strangers in the presence of their husbands—at their husbands' request!

He might have drowned her in a bath. They do it in horror movies.

I cannot remember her voice. Even records are of no help: *Salome*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal*. I cannot remember her face. I have no memory for faces. Even Maud Gonne's photographs are inefficient, even Yeats' poems ineffective. (As if I were blindfolded. Why don't they execute me?) She remains beyond my room, beyond my house, and nothing, nothing can bring her in—neither astral winds, nor the breeze of my breath, nor the otherworldly draughts that rush through my room around midnight and at the ungodly hour when Shakespeare's cock crows. No visions whatsoever. What's the trick?

At one-thirty the following morning he had a vision. Maud came to him in a red dress, its skirt full of flowers. She bent over him and they shared their first kiss.

Yeats' hatred of what he called "the barren plain of democracy": "Instead of hierarchical society where all men are different, came democracy—"

And his doppelgängers. "Hallo, William." He tipped his soft felt sombrero. "He's the ghost of my indigestion," he explained to his bewildered companion. (Hallo, William! Hallo, Butler!)

The ancient round tower near Glendalough. "In the tower nearby a maiden is imprisoned," as my guest put it in one of *his* poems. He will always be my guest—as long as I live. He is a part of her now. A part of her life or a part of her death.

And they both dreamt of a golden King and a silver lady.

That golden king and that wild lady
Sang till stars began to fade

Her cousin. He cannot be her husband, not yet. And I will never divorce her for infidelity.

He is the Moon, I am the Sun. He is a subjective man, I am an objective man. He is antithetical man, I am primary man. He is my Daimon. And my black diamond. Was I the ghost of his indigestion? Is he the ghost of my indigestion?

I had a vision last night.

An aged, unrecognisable creature entered the hall. I stood up and sank down again on the couch that heaved a sigh, two sighs, three sighs. She shuffled wearily through the hall and I stood up again, successfully keeping my balance this time. I kissed her hand. Her lips were still beyond the frontier of Time. Influenced by Salvador Dali and Buñuel, she had left her lips behind, together with her charms, her magnificent hair, her impeccable teeth. Mary Magdalene. I kissed her other hand and we headed for my room—a terrible blunder. Why didn't I run away? Did I fear she would pursue me, hunt me down? Anyway there was no staircase in sight, no fire escape, no windows. I opened the door. Why hadn't I lost the key? Did we sit down on the bed, on the slightly crumpled sheet? Luckily there were two armchairs in my room. I had no desire to touch anything except a glass of brandy or armagnac.

"I'm not sleepy," I told her.

"Neither am I. It's stuffy in here. Shall I open the window?"

"Please don't." Lead us not into temptation. "Do you care for a drink?" I was at a loss for words and topics. She was at a loss for answers. Silence descended upon us like a stray parachute. All we could do was attune ourselves to that silence. A momentary urge to press her to my heart after so many years. I went to sleep sooner than I had expected.

But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain
Time can but make her beauty over again
Because of that great nobleness of hers

I found a few sheets of paper in his drawers. There was a poem in prose:

LOVE UNTO DEATH

The void lures me out of my room in order to embrace my body with the fervour of a lust-consumed, long-suffering sister.

It is the other way round: I seduce the void. She is too shy and hides her lust beyond banisters, railings and other contraptions designed to protect earthlings from flying to the bottom of the world.

I step onto the air and the void sucks me in.

The void looks like a woman, a featureless woman. Her body assumes the countless shapes of my lascivious dreams that project themselves into the air and mould it, creating volatile sculptures.

How submissive my women are! And how sexy!

The void is an invisible brothel. And a conjugal home. And also the corridors and alleys that witnessed my first erotic kisses and caresses. The void is my present and my past. And my future.

I kiss and caress the void. And I make love to the void that wriggles and pants for breath and whirls after me. Whirlwinds are the aftermath of our lovemaking.

I shall never be disappointed with the void. She will never betray me! She will never marry another man!

Her love is disinterested. Our love is not incestuous.

She does not grow old and wrinkled. And she still loves me, judging from her embraces and hot, almost scorching kisses.

Her kisses are scorching, especially in summer time. Or when we come too close to the sun. And this happens quite often, for we are fed up with the earth. Besides, there is so much light in my heart and in my soul I would suffocate in the darkness of earthly caverns.

Is the bottom of the world drawing nigh? I wonder. I cannot see it yet. I never look in the direction of the bottom. I only look upward. Always. Those who fall should always look upward.

There was a short poem:

They took me to a dry cleaner's.
 I am clean now, clean and dry.
 But who will profit from my cleanness
 And from my dryness? From my thoughts?
 My thoughts are clear now. Yesterday
 My doctor said to his assistant:
 "The night was dry and clear."
 I am as dark as night, my God.
 Only my tears glimmer in the sky.

And yet another short poem:

Oh, miracle cure!
 When administered for the first time
 It heals, as Time does, all sorrows.
 When administered for the second time
 It heals of Time and renders immortal.
 When administered for the third time

It heals of immortality.

I found a short exposé of Chatterjee's doctrine: "Life is a stream which flows on out of human control, one action or thought leading to another; we ourselves are nothing but a mirror; deliverance consists of turning the mirror away so that it reflects nothing."

Well, you turn the mirror away. But there are other mirrors in your room, in your Hall of Mirrors. (Every room is a Hall of Mirrors.) And you cannot turn *all* of them away.

And I found two versions of the same poem. As if one version were a cousin of the other. Or a brother. Or a sister. Not a twin sister, though.

(THE FIRST VERSION)

Blind black cats, on their own, on a carpet.
No friendly guide, no dog, no stick.
They have a hangdog look, those puppets,
With no hand to handle them—a shabby trick.

They know not what light is or may be
(Attacked by darkness, light sounds the retreat).
Nor will they solve the riddle: "What on earth
Rustles beneath our feet, around our furs?"

Though unguided, they are regularly fed
By a deaf-and-dumb man in his nineties.
He can see, however, and so, it is said,
He sets the bowl fair and square on the carpet.

They get closer and closer to the bowl.
Their fabulous sense of smell comes in handy.
The bowl overflows with milk—cat's candy.
Yet the music of their dinner has no soul.

(THE SECOND VERSION)

Blind cats meander around a carpet, drawing
 Some arabesques on it—a mandala.
 They stop but seldom:
 Their momentum
 Is obstinate enough to carry them along.

They don't believe in dawn, these night owls.
 When darkness throws a tantrum light goes out.
 They encounter only Time wherein
 They descend incessantly, even in their sleep.

The Time-door is wide-open.
 An old man enters,
 Strokes a cat with his slipper
 And lays down a bowl.

The cats describe an elliptical orbit
 Around the bowl—their sun.
 They fly along their Milky Way.

One of these versions is mine. Which one?

I became trigger-*happy*. What kind of happiness was this? A real happiness or a word-drunk one? I switched neither to French nor German. I dreamt neither in Greek nor Chinese. I was happy, very happy.

Should I have killed only her lover? He was not her brother. A distant cousin perhaps, a poet. I am not acquainted with his works. An ordinary betrayal, an extraordinary *crime passionnel*.

Do I need an alibi? Here it is:

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse.

He killed her, she killed him. I am innocent of the crime.

Nobody will ever find me out. A star-cluster of alien words. One alien handwriting.

Her brother spent two weeks in this house. Last June. They loved each other but not to the point of having an incestuous liaison. I have got a notebook of his in a chest of drawers. And Freud's *Die Traumdeutung*, translated by James Strachey:

Identification is a highly important factor in the mechanism of hysterical symptoms. It enables patients to express in their symptoms not only their own experiences but those of a large number of other people; it enables them, as it were, to suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play single-handed.

AUTUMN

Trees are squeaking and swaying
As if drunk or weary of seasons.

Why did I become Louis II? The first explanation: My disloyal spouse idolised the author of *Tristan* and I would have done anything to win her love. The second explanation: I stood gazing with pity at the monkey in the cage. Besides, there are explanatory notes in some parts of the book.

Am I standing on the threshold of a new castle built beyond the lake?

Hegel was in love with his sister. In her turn Christiane nursed a fierce attachment to her brother. After his marriage she resigned from her post as a governess and was committed to an asylum. Troubled by bitterness over alleged wrongs, she gave vent to her jealousy of Hegel's young wife. Two weeks after her brother's death Christiane wrote a courteous, formal letter to his widow, including a brief memoir of his childhood. Shortly afterwards she went out for a walk and drowned herself. How does their story relate to ours?

My sister. Her husband. I have never found it easy to forgive and forget. But sooner or later my murder is sure to bring about a reconciliation between the two sides. She is no longer unfaithful, is she? I am waiting for my anger to subside. He is no longer her husband.

We are to be united at last. Underwater nuptials, submarine wedding party.

My novel includes a schizophrenic principle of self-division, negation, contradiction, but its ultimate aim is one of reconciliation and harmony.

An "individual" is a web of self-maintained relations, comparisons and differences.

Each of my parts is a philosophical whole, a circle rounded and complete in itself. I am a circle of circles.

I embody the memory of humanity.

The eternal life of God is to find himself, become aware of himself, coincide with himself. In this ascent there is an alienation, a disunion, but it is the nature of the spirit, of the Idea, to alienate itself in order to find itself again.

I can no longer sift my time-sand through my fingers.

No—but I feel, and shall do to the last,
I cannot quench a glorious life at once,
Nor dwindle to the thing I now must be.

My memory, my memory. Sitting in a rocking chair, twisting her white hair in her yellow fingers, talking wistfully about everything under the sun, under the moon. She leans against the window, rests a hand on the back of my armchair, stares at me as if to suggest a performance of an old, very old trick that keeps slipping my mind.

To grow old before one's time, to grow young after one's time. After time, between times. To live between times as one lives between lunchtime and dinnertime.

Allah has created a tree under the Divine Throne (the Arsh) and every person is assigned a leaf thereof. The Angel of Death keeps a vigil over the leaves of the tree and notes the drying up of them. He takes out the soul of the person immediately after his leaf has fallen down.

How many leaves have I lost in my garden? Carried along by the withering rhythm of nature, trees themselves cover the earth as if to protect it from a fatal comet. Why should they protect it?

Are dead leaves alive?

There floats out there
The shape that I shall take when I am dead,

My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape

Life is but a figure of speech.

And even memories, lingering on after everything has left, fail to regulate themselves into the reliable pulse of a heart.

Does water have memory?

I dream of clear water...then come erotic dreams. Then for weeks perhaps I write poetry with sex for theme. Then comes the reversal—it came when I was young with some dream...with a flame in it.

To sing, to spin a yarn.

Only a poet can be the Messiah.

Spinning and singing. And sighing.

Come, I will sing you some low, sleepy tune,
Not cheerful, nor yet sad; some dull old thing,
Some outworn and unused monotony,
Such as our country gossips sing and spin,
Till they almost forget they live.

Did I ever live?

The mirror crack'd from side to side.

Did I ever die?

To sit by the fire spinning, singing.

