

VALERY ALEFF

RITUAL

And feelings. What of them? If you do not feel anything, you are not alive. And yet your skin is alive; so is your brain that feels you are dying and not dying. All is alive as long as life's pulse can be heard here and there; and even outside of all this and that. And you hear what you wish to hear and also something you do not understand. And that is not God because there are many things and beings beyond God, beside Him and by His side. And you are used to speaking nonsense or next to nonsense because you borrow all your notions and even emotions from books and girls and boys next door, who say whatever comes or does not come into their heads or tails or whatever. Such is life and that is what you hear as you go towards this goal and that girl as if there was nothing else, not even beyond the horizon you can see. Yes, you can see something, not necessarily the last thing, or the one before last. And all this does not mean death, for once. And since you fear death more than anything else, you are tempted to say, 'For twice, for thrice.' And you go, go, and your path follows you because you know your way better than your path.

You start to observe a fact and you know for sure it is a face you are observing now. And you get the feeling you have lived with this face and fact for centuries. And nothing has ever been altered either by yourself or anyone else so that you wonder whether there is anyone apart from you, on the surface of the Earth or under her crust. It is easy to conclude there is nothing because there is probably neither this nor that, and if you stick to your nothing, you are right, whatever happens, because you can always say, 'It is nothing, nothing, nothing.' They conveyed you to one prison, another prison. You are always swimming against the tide because you probably do not know in what direction the tide has always been rising and falling. You measure it incessantly, and you also measure your measures, their measures, their yardsticks. But nothing comes of it, and nothing will ever come of anything else. So you do not budge and many unbiased observers affirm you are ensconced somewhere, in one armchair or another, and that is nothing, nothing at all. And everything will be everything until many further notices. You just have to notice these notices, paying attention to them whenever you are allowed to spot them and draw your conclusions from what you see. And once again you ask yourself if your eyes are not leading you astray instead of letting you follow your straight line or any other straight line you are ready to follow, even if you have to *toe* this line. This line leads somewhere and everywhere, and one may ask if the latter is better than the former. And it is better not to come to the inevitable conclusion that all this amounts to the same thing and that that thing is right before one's eyes, your eyes, once, twice, several times in a row. But do not confuse this row either with eternity or even with a moment. There are moments and in those moments you hear the chimes of midnight and many other chimes and charms. What of it?

Continuity and community. You communicate with both and find that nothing is worth nothing and that there is only worse in the world and anywhere else. Worse than better and best, and even worse than whatever has been worst for centuries. That is what they say when they affirm that the worse, whatever it is, will forever go to what may be termed worsisim; in another language, in other times. When all of this comes to the worst, one no longer goes anywhere, as the Chinese put it. And then they say that the dragon takes flight and for once this flight is not controlled by a computer, in spite of our technology, age and wish to control everything, even the flights of dragons, Satan and ordinary demons. They are all in flight, whether controlled or uncontrolled, and we look at them because we need shows and sones. And the world undergoes a change because rivers go on flowing,

according to Heraclites and also to the observations you can make yourself if you stand on a riverbank and look at the river or at the clouds and other clouds. You are fed up with these clouds, with the ones seen and commented upon by Hamlet and Polonius, if I am not mistaken. Whether I am mistaken or not does not really matter because someone somewhere is always looking at the clouds. And the French comment upon this man or woman or baby, saying they all are in the clouds, although they are not. They are standing in the mud, as any pessimist knows and says, day in, day out. One cannot say they really enjoy this mud and that state of affairs. Probably they enjoy nothing, not even what we call 'a lot of money' or 'a lively livelihood'. And even we do not call anything names, whatever these names are, these nameless things or beings exist and ask questions as if eager to be told lies or truth, which do not differ in temperament, as the Chinese affirm in their *Book of Changes and Unchanges*. This book and its changes amount to what some philosophers call the 'unchanging state of the universe'; or just 'unchangement'. According to them, this unchangement forms the basis of whatever we go through when we take the trouble to go this way, that way and no other way.

What is alive is dead and vice versa for only death can give birth to life. You always come to opposites and their encounters of this or that kind. They meet, agree with each other and even with you, whoever you are and whatever you think, say and write. You write, 'These opposites meet and set up an everlasting harmony.' And after a while, after much soul-searching, you write, 'These opposites do not meet and they will never set up anything, not even a provisional harmony or government.' And that is how you live because you have no intention of bringing yourself *um*, as the Germans say and write. In other words, you do not wish to commit suicide because you are in a class of your own, whereas in all other classes people commit suicide all the more frequently since they think they will be happier in the Hereafter – not only on account of the Homers and Platos they are likely to talk to in that otherworldly kingdom. The Japanese have forests allotted to this task, to the transference from the vale of tears to that of joys. Their fellow countrymen go to these forests and draw revolvers from their pockets or attaché cases. Times are changing and not only the Chinese are aware of these changes and the books where they are described, analysed and commented upon. No longer do the Japanese go to their favourite forests with swords and intentions focused upon hara-kiri, seppuku, sepulchre or whatever they call this ritual in their native tongue. They just use one revolver and several bullets – in case the ritual does not work at once. Of course our rituals do not *work*; they *happen*. But sometimes they do not happen *at once*. We have to wait for years and years to grace the accomplishment of a ritual with our presence. But sooner or later every ritual comes to an end and a bullet stops in the middle and muddle of our skulls. In the model of nowhere.

We no longer have an opportunity to die for Christ. We die all the same because death awaits no opportunities and goes his way as if there was a way allotted to death which is everywhere, on every way, as we know in spite of our efforts to try and forget this incontrovertible truth. There are ways and paths, and some of them lead to wisdom; but all of them are steeped in what may be termed 'the law of decay' or any other law that requires no term because it is a law in itself. And if someone asks what this is all about, you just say it is the law and everyone will understand it, even if there are no doors behind which this law may prosper as much as it can. This law governs whatever there is to govern and even governments succumb to its charms and execute its orders. No one can say its orders are charming; yet everyone succumbs to them and it and that. In the long run everyone says, 'How charming, how charming,' and these are the last words uttered by one or two or any man, any spinster. You are on your deathbed

and feel like voicing your gratitude for whatever has happened in your life, be it a series of disasters or love unto death. You express this gratitude and voice it to the best of your abilities, for your voice does not always allow you to voice what you wish to convey to others who do not yet realise how beautiful life is despite the spokes it puts in wheels and meals. So you say to yourself that only these spokes make you feel happy and go beyond yourself, which means you are also a spoke to some extent, to the extent of your body and soul. And any stoic would affirm this is the most impassable obstacle you can meet and overcome on your way to yourself or to your other self. Or to any self, to any, any, any.

And what is done, done and undone; or ondone. And 'on' means you can go forward or backward as far as you wish, and on will always tell you, 'On, on, on,' as long as you say it yourself. You say 'on' and spring to your feet, and you certainly can do so, provided you have a pair of feet or even three of them; the more the better is the motto of go-getters. So you get another foot and also another leg to which you can glue this foot of yours, this new foot or life. Even if you just have a new foot, you may think and say a new life has been breathed into your body. So you cannot help breathing this new life and even its source that continues to breathe this life into your thoughts, hopes and great expectations. You do not expect anything great, for life is just what it is: all the terms and conditions that might allow you to hold out for another week or so. You know you have to breathe and not to insult too many people, otherwise you are bound to be challenged to a duel and any duel is fraught with problems. You are killed or banished for killing your adversary. So you are killed, banished, get back and kill again. Is that what they call a 'vicious circle'? You draw no circles as you go from here to there, killing him or her or it or on. If you kill on, once and for all, you are not likely to survive. But you do survive and go on despite ill omens, prophecies and philosophical conclusions. You go on and they say you are one of the living dead; or a deadly life. Or just something they fear and do not know because they fear everything and everybody, even if they know those bodies and things. Even your best friend can kill you and this happens in Verdi's ball and masquerade. The king's assassin puts on a masque and everyone takes him for the former's best friend. And then the latter kills the former and the late king sings an aria before crossing the threshold that separates him from death; as if there was any threshold of this kind. And I have no idea what number one should attribute to this kind, which is the unkindest kind of all. So the king sings the aria and rounds off thus, 'O-o-o-o-f-f-f-f-f-f.' Undone, ondone. There are many arias in store for him; many performances. Many *temps retrouvés*.

What was taken away can be given back. And you hope that 'back' and 'away' are interchangeable, even if they are not words but deeds. As a matter of fact, even if the 'back' you count upon takes place and comes to you, you cannot help asking yourself if what you got is really an equivalent of what you had lost some time ago. You lost everything – at least that is what you thought at the time when you lost it, everything and everybody. Now you wonder if the quantity of what you got back the day before yesterday has anything to do with the quality you had lost many, many years ago through no fault of your own. You might have no idea of how the whole thing happened in those times, in those days of yore and yoke, but you still wonder if what you got back corresponds in any way to your ideals and hopes; if it is a whole you hold in your hands and mind. Your mind thinks it is the loss regained, but not all losses are regained *entirely*, and if you go back to Paradise you are not likely to find the same state of affairs, even if the trees you lost a long time ago are the same, more or less. And you wonder what 'less' means in this case and you come to the inevitable conclusion that less is always less, however much you can find when you

deal with 'more'. To cut all these mores short, you do not find what you lost because whatever you lose is lost forever on account of time, of light, of darkness and other elements and aspects of life that continue to haunt you. Of course you rebel against life because you aspire to be free and independent, and haunting means you are dependent on ghosts, on words and even on those who just knock at your door in the hope of being admitted to your bedroom where you are used to paying homage to your dreams, be they diurnal or nocturnal. This time they are diurnal and therefore you call them 'daydreams'. You do not have to give them a name – or a bad name, for that matter – because they can survive without names or words. They just come out of the blue and you see them, hoping that everyone will see them in due course. You are *not* recognised. Nor are you Henry VIII and you cannot sleep with anyone – any woman you see in the streets. Well, you sleep alone; you sleep with yourself. And you learn a lot about yourself when this sleep of yours is related only to yourself, not to Ann Boleyn or Marlene Dietrich.

Sleep sound. And even if you do not manage to go to sleep or to go anywhere, even not to death that is always near, at your feet like your dog, you go somewhere – to a sleepless night, to be exact. You sleep and you less, and sounds are everywhere. You sing a mass, a mess. Why should you sing? Everything and everybody sing around you and even inside your body. And everything happens even, even, even if something does not happen. But it is even, even if it is not. It is an eventide, an eventime, an evenright, which means that whatever happens is right and wrong, all this and others, other, which amounts to this and whatever comes into your head. This comes and goes, and you forfeit the right to live in society. And then you ask yourself what society you are estranged from. You are a stranger, a foreigner and you do what happens; and whatever happens is you and nothing else. And else disappears as you go on thinking about what you can do and have already done. You have solved many problems that relate to life and even to the Hereafter; and you have proved the Hereafter is also a sort of life. And you write in your books that this is a life in its own right. And sometimes you write, 'This right is in its own life,' and your own right begins to live its own life which does not always coincide with yours. But you say to yourself that the more lives you have, the better you live; even if this life, the last life, the one which you regard as the best and possible makes you endure all sorts of trials and tribulations; and relations between you and your new or old wife. You endure him or her and then say to yourself you cannot endure anything, any more; and you do not endure them or that.

You have a child and this child of yours is your only son. You go on a holiday and then decide to go home, for the holiday is over. This happens now and then, and you cannot do anything about this sort of 'over'. Your son refuses to keep you company and consequently does not board a bus with you to the airport. You board the bus and are arrested as you prepare to fly home without your only son, the only scion of your wealthy and healthy family. You are questioned by a man who warns you that the crime you are accused of carries a three-year prison sentence. You ask him what crime you are accused of and he says you have abandoned your only child. You explain in plain English that your son is in the habit of peeing all over the places where you stay with him; and you add he also pees at home. You point out that your charwoman changes his sheets every morning. And you do not hide from anyone the fact you set aside two built-in cupboards for his sheets and pyjamas. You also say your son has the knack of drowning kittens. 'If it wasn't for the life jacket, I would have drowned,' you point out, as if you were such a kitten; as if your son's arms were much stronger than your body. But the man keeps on saying, 'You left

domain of hide-and-seek. You seek, you hide, you withdraw into yourself. In days of yore you wished to withdraw into others, but now you are eager to withdraw into your own self, into your body, soul, unconscious and conscious. You withdraw into them and become a subatomic particle, and no one knows where you are. And if someone knows anything about your whereabouts, this someone has no idea *what* you are. Just a ‘what’ perhaps. Or just a ‘W’. AT is not good because it leads You or It somewhere. Just W. Not M, for it means am, I am. Not B, for it means to be. Just W. Not V, for it means *vie*.

Likely, not likely. It is likely to happen, and if you look at it from the outside, you will always say this is likely to happen; and even that. But if you get closer to what is about to happen, in your opinion, you realise that not *everything* happens or *can* happen – likely or unlikely, as the case may be. If you get involved in the process, you realise that nothing really happens, that everything has happened already and what you go through is just a movement, nothing but the motions. You move this way and that, and you may move towards a point you cannot see, for you do not see many points. Oh, you may see and consider as many points as you wish. But what are your wishes in comparison with life that has its own points? And, as many philosophers point out, there is no point in it, in the whole of life so that only other worlds count and can be relied upon. So you rely on another world or even on a series of other worlds; and even on words, although you are aware that only wor/ds can count and emphasise the importance of human life. You can live without uttering a word. You content yourself with playing musical instruments. You play, play, play on, play on. Playing gets you nowhere and you know that better than anyone else. You play and nothing comes of it except this nothing that you hate because you think only in terms of everything. And these everthings are supposed to pay you visits either out of the blue or out of nothing. They come and go, and you are left with your leftovers, and you do not even know if these leftovers are yours or someone else’s. Let us suppose that these leftovers belong to someone else and consequently you have no right to eat or use them. But you could not care less about rights, about lefts and wrongs. But you do care about leftovers. You have to survive, otherwise you will not live tomorrow, let alone throughout next week. So you eat whatever you can lay your hands on. And you lay your hands on the leftovers you noticed as you tried to find a meaning that would have allowed you to understand your life and also that of your fellow creatures, assuming there is such a thing as a fellow creature. There *is* such a thing and there are even fellow creatures, a lot of them, but you do not understand what they mean, if you hear them talk; if you see them move around and about. And if they do nothing of the sort, of any sorts, you do not understand the meaning of these sorts. So you just eat whatever your mouth finds around you, about you, under your very nose. And you are happy because one is supposed to be happy in the world created by the Creator and His images. One of His images is of the leftovers you take advantage of. You go on taking advantage of. Going on, going on. That is what life is about; and around.

The centre must hold; and if it does not, it does not. Yet it must hold, otherwise nothing will ever hold; neither the centre nor anything else. Even the circumference will not hold, if the centre is gone. And no one can hold this centre – or any other centre – apart from us, us, us. So we must hold and uphold this centre; and also downhold it, download it. We download it, even if what we have got is only loads and downs, not the download we are looking for. Buyers can download this text to read on a computer, personal organiser or electronic book, but there are only downs around and above; and also below, it goes without saying. And loads are everywhere and so I say to myself that the maximum load for this elevator is eight persons. I elevate a person and another person, but these persons

ignore their elevations and even their lifts. They just download whatever there is and whatever is the case. And everything is the case and you can download everything because everything is the case. You download the case and listen to it day in, day out. You can also read this case and many other cases unless you think there is only one case in the world and also in other worlds; and in others, in alsos. There is one, One, ONE, and whatever you do or attempt to do, this one makes their appearance and warns you, threatens you or says, ‘Good boy, good girl.’ This One or Other can also say, ‘Good night,’ and if ONE does so, you will sleep wonderfully and beautifully. And you will also have your beauty sleep, even if you do not need it. You are *so* beautiful, *so* beautiful. You are so beautiful that even on your deathbed you will look beautiful and everyone will say, ‘What a beautiful death,’ as Napoleon said upon looking at Andrey Bolkonsky in Tolstoy’s immortal *War and Peace*. What a beautiful death, he said, but Poklonsky (or Polonski, or Polanski) was not dead, far from it. Tolstoy needed him for the novel, for its *suite*, for its deaths and everyday lives. Your everyday life; you go with it. Why should you forsake it? This life of yours is not Ann Boleyn so you do not have to say, ‘Off with her head.’ Your life is a woman; the same goes for men. Your life is a man, a woman, an object, a thing. And you cherish this thing and whatever surrounds it. You put this thing and its surroundings on your favourite chest of drawers; and you admire it, worship it. And then you put it in one of the drawers. You draw it, drawer it.

You are old and you can no longer hide it from yourself. Nor can you hide it from others, from the women you fall in love with. And even if you do not, you desire these women. It is your heart’s desire or rather your body’s desire and dearest wish. But the women you are dreaming about are out of your reach because they think you are old. And they are right to some extent, to many extents, to all of them. Whatever extent you pick up, you realise the women you set your heart and genitals upon are right. On the other hand, you are not as old as all that. Whenever you strip yourself naked in front of your favourite mirror, you are not ashamed of your body. So you show it to your brand new digital camera and send the photograph to one of these women; or to all of them. As a result of your evil deed, you are added to a police intelligence database. And you are told that the record, describing the incident as making and distributing an indecent image, remains active for at least 10 years. You may not remain active over this period: you are already on the threshold of death. Never mind, never mind. You are sure to survive your own body, whether it is handsome or not. Your body, your photograph and the record will live for 10 years at least, notwithstanding your death. Is that what Spinoza means when talking about the knowledge of the third kind? Of eternity, in other words? Millions of old people are being potentially criminalised by laws they do not understand and which are outdated. Apparently the law needs to catch up with social values and technology. What are these social values? They allow old people – and pregnant women – to show their bodies to everyone because the bodies in question seem to triumph over death. And technology helps you keep your body in a good state of repair.

A woman is lying on her deathbed. Of course every bed is a deathbed; the same goes for cots and canopies. Every canopy is a canopy of death; so is every chair. Why should we go any further? I cannot go any further. This sentence is as important as ‘to be or not to be’ because we say ‘be’ and know ‘not’. But not all of us know what ‘not’ means in German – or in the world in general. In general all this means we are lying on our deathbeds. We may walk on them, for all I know; and if we spring on them – a whim may take us this way – we convert this particular bed into a trampoline. We spring on it to our hearts’ content and our hearts are *content*, otherwise we

would not spring on anything, not even on springboards. Whenever we spring, we get the feeling we go to heaven; at least we get nearer and nearer to angels and their God, their All. And that is all we can say about it, for we do not know much and all we do know is next to nothing or almost, almost. To cut a long story short, a woman has not died yet. A man is getting closer and closer to her deathbed, and he does not say to himself – as so many men do – that it is her lifebed, that his mistress or wife will live forever. No, he does not hide the truth from himself; nor does he hide it from his relatives who are weeping in every corner of the room. He goes to his wife and speaks a few comforting words to her which are supposed to help her on her way to the Hereafter. Of course they are unable to ease her pains, but at least they can ease a metaphorical key into the lock; and all those present understand what lock and door are so precious in those moments which witness our journey from this world to the other world; or just to the other. We have no idea what or who this other is or might be, but we know he or she or it will be quite different from what we have known so far. The man says to the woman, ‘I’ll be lying with you in the Other. We’ll never part again.’ Of course he knows all the ins and outs of the matter so he no longer analyses this matter. Why should you spend your time on what you know inside out? Anyway, even if you are allowed to stand in a corner, in the Hereafter, in the company of your beloved, you will be in seventh heaven. Even if you are not allowed either to lie on her or with her, you will be immeasurably happy. Even if you are just permitted to inquire, ‘How are you today?’

All shall be well. And of course one says what one has to say or even think. All is not all and well is just *good* and so there is nothing to write home about. But you do not write home. You write as long as you are at home, in your castle, within the rustle of the things you know so well. You are at home and you do not bother about history which is a succession of kings, queens, mistresses and earls; everybody is slain and somebody says that somebody else is a traitor. And the traitor says he is not, which means he is not a traitor. He is just a narrator: he tells a story that concerns neither him nor his life. But they think – and they always think of something – that he is the hero of the story he tells and so he is a criminal because he murdered kings and also subjects. History is a history book, but when you speak about history or anything else, you had better avoid sweeping generalisations and jumping to conclusions. They sweep and generalise, and you just say that history is a book, nothing else. You write a sentence and a king is poisoned; so is his mistress or even wife. There are so many ‘evens’ in our history. You think it is the end, but someone utters the word ‘even’ and you look at another murder because even God can be murdered, according to many witnesses. They say, ‘God was assassinated or murdered, if you prefer.’ We prefer the word ‘murdered’. Needless to say, we do not prefer anything. In this world one history is as worthless as another. You pick up a history and put it on your writing desk. And nothing comes of it. You look for ‘comes’ and it is *nothing* you see, hear and touch. You can touch this history, if you wish. You no longer wish anything; actually, you said so many times. ‘I don’t wish to touch Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and so on.’ You do not even wish to touch the so on. So you do not touch it; after all, you live in a free country. You are therefore free to touch or not to touch anything. You are tired so you do not touch anything save your moustache. Your moustache is our history. It is also a book and a story; and cock and bull and bullfighters. The story of a moustache. Of a razor.

Wisdom joined with complexity. The world is not simple, whatever they say. And they often talk of simplicity; and they reduce life to a few formulas. But even if you reduce life to God or to one of His angels, it is not simple; neither the life nor the angel are simple. The life you have is not simple because you need your bread and your

wine. And the angels must fly, otherwise they would not be able to say to you, 'You are one of the elect.' They have to go from heaven to our abode, and this journey is not as simple as it seems at first glance. You glance at the sky and say to yourself that you could jump from this height if you were on a star, let alone on a cloud. In point of fact, angels do not measure this distance with their eyes; it is their bodies that do the job. But for their bodies and flights, many bricks would fall on your skull. In other words, you would die every other hour if your guardian angel did not catch this or that brick to protect you from its fall, and from the Fall. So the simplicity you talk about whenever you try to define wisdom is not simplicity; nor is it complexity. It is nothing, according to some philosophers and thinkers. Simplicity, complexity. You believe in God and in your country, your king. You have a sword above your head, and sometimes this sword is just in front of your body. And then you feel this sword *inside* your body. So what? There are no whats, no sos. You are dead, and in the Hereafter there are no whats because everything is clear and no questions mark or mar your life in Paradise or in its suburbs, its regions. There are legions and you do not ask yourself any question about these legions because you know they have nothing to do with demons. Nothing has anything to do with demons. Only truth prevails; it no longer veils itself or others, those who are part of this truth. There are no parts: only wholes prosper in the neighbourhood of Paradise, let alone at its very core. And the core of Paradise is music, apparently and audibly. It is not music; it is not anything. As usual, you cannot define your bliss, for it is indefinable. You just say, 'I am fine, fine, fine, fine.' You can also say, 'I am undefine, undefine, undefine.' Or 'underfine, underfine.'

Our Majesty is much better now. We all are majesties, for better and for worse. And when there is worse, we say that all this is for the better. The worse, the better, and vice versa. And we stay where we are because the Earth is one thing and one thing cannot become another thing. It is just one or the One, and we worship it as if we had nothing else to do. And everybody says, 'We have nothing else to do. Let us do what we can do. And we can worship this and that and the Earth as well.' And we worship everything and even 'as well', especially 'as well'; especially if we put a pair of inverted commas before it and also behind it, and it. We add 'it' not to lose the 'it' we have already. We have only IT and nothing else. But this IT is enough to make us happy, and we go somewhere, and God knows where we go and in what direction we direct our steps. And only God can say where we are. But God does not care either about our steps or about our being or beings – about our children, in other words, in other beings. There are only beings around us and they are called 'Seins'. And these Seins are either *da* or *niet*. *Da* is 'yes' in Russian and so we are either yesSeins or no Seins at all. Perhaps we are just at all; or atoll, or an island. There is His Majesty who reigns over this atoll; so does God. And His Majesty is God's Emissary. And we are just on this Island. We are just; we are just. This island is the Garden of Eden. It is also a multitude of many gardens and Edens. We live among them and pray. We pray to God, for God, for another island. And everything happens as usual, as usual. And even if nothing happens, it does happen. It is not usual, but still we give thanks and worship this still and other stills; and walk on stilts, like Proust's characters who grow older and older, more and more immortal. But his immortals are on stilts, and no one really knows whether they walk or not. Perhaps they just stand on stilts. Is that your eternity? Perhaps it is. Perhaps everything is. Even eternity is; in brackets, in inverted commas.

I am told that one in three children will suffer dementia. I have no children and so I do not know why I am supposed to hear this piece of news that concerns the future and large families. Parents of the latter give birth to nine children

and say to themselves, 'Three of them will spend their last years stricken with illnesses such as Alzheimer's.' They look at their children and strike up a vital conversation with their relatives. They ask them which children should be sacrificed for the sake of six children. 'What are you talking about?' ask their relatives. And the parents begin to explain what this is all about. They say that increasing life expectancy and an ageing population will trigger a worldwide health crisis. And if their relatives touch upon God and His propensity for fair play, the parents point out that the diseases He inflicts are designed to redress the balance between 'the young and the old'. What they mean boils down to the following idea: 'Today's children will live longer than their parents, but at least the latter do not suffer. What is more, the former are bound to be poorer than their aging parents, for the cost of dementia is staggering.' Anyway, any head of a large family should choose two or three or four victims in expectation of the disaster related to memory, speech, concentration and movement. Nowadays most families have two heads so that both heads should tackle the problem of sufferers. How do they proceed? They say to their children, 'Do you wish to learn this long poem by heart?' Some of their children shake their heads. 'Why don't you wish to learn it?' 'M-m-m-m-m,' answer the children, awkwardly moving their arms. And both heads realise that no amount of yoga will ever improve these children's powers of concentration.

You say nay, ney, *niet*. You say 'what' and you say and think and do whatever, whatever. And you are ever, and ever. You are Eve and I am what I am not, for I am not when I am with you. And we exchange this and that, our hearts, our arts. Our art of loving and living; and our others. We love others and we have them. The whole of humanity is at our table and we eat whatever we can eat; and even what we cannot eat because we do not understand our caviar, our aubergines. We do not understand anything and that is what saves us from many utters, many gutters: from the gutter of death, from the utter life that enjoys itself and avails us of everything. All these utters and gutters lead us astray instead of putting us on a tray and serving us at dinner. If you are eaten, you do not think of anything; you are in someone's mouth and the teeth munch you as you meditate upon God and His Creation; or His Uncreation. The point is He creates something and then a few nations wage wars and go to those wars. As a result of this and that, the uncreation sets in and whatever you do comes and goes in the wake of this uncreation so that you uncreate yourself all the time; or just in the course of a few seconds. But these seconds destroy you completely and what can you, what can you? Say nay, say *nein*, say ain, say whatever crosses your mind and ind. You say ind, even if this does not cross your mind because it is nd, just nd that crosses it, your mind or what remains of it. And you say, 'I am, I am ney, I am Thomas, I am Doubting Thomas, Undoubting Thomas. I am Writing Thomas, Unwriting Thomas. I am mas, mas. I am your mass. Say mass. Say you love me. Say you are not. It is easier to live with nots, with have-nots, been-nots, no-nots. It is easier, it is easier. And then something comes. Let it come and you do let it come. It comes and you say to it, 'Do not go.' And it does not; for once, a come does not go as if it was not a come. Perhaps it is not. But whatever it is, it is not a go for it stays wherever and whenever you go. Let us stay with the go; that is what you say and do. And you do, you do, you do. And you go, go, go.

The devil takes many forms and these forms take the devil in their arms. Whenever you see some arms or other, you see the devil and experience a lot of feelings linked to the devil and his or her ways. This is the way of all devils, as they say, and you experience this way and also this flesh; and many other fleshs. You experience, you say, you don't say, you are what and also the devil because your form and also your content are those of the devil.

So you let go your form, you dismiss it so as not to be cursed on account of the devil you bear in your bosom. Your bosom bears the devil and condones its, his deeds. There are many deeds of the devil and you look around you to find out how many devilish deeds there are around you. You begin to count them and you do your best not to lose count of the devils and evils that inhabit your body, your unconscious and conscious mind. You embody the devil and you know it, but you pray as fast as you can and words go through your mind so fast you cannot understand them. They say, 'Lord, Lord, God, help, please, I, not, God, me, yes, mine, deliver, liver, lever.' You realise that what you are speaking of is your liver cancer, not a lever, not any salvation of your soul. There are many salvations and souls. One of your souls is with God; another is situated in between two devils. The latter does not know which devil to choose, for both of them are beautiful and you wish to have all the beauties you can have. And apparently you can have two devils because they are there for the taking; and you take them. And they offer you their forms so that now you have two heads and four arms. And all of them belong to Satan of Whom you know nothing, not even next to nothing. You do not know next, but you can look at yourself in a mirror. You do look at yourself in many mirrors and see many devils. And all of them look at you as if they could not recognise your face, your manners, your numerous substances. They do recognise you and you recognise their recognition. What else could be done? Devil-may-care. Care-may-devil.

You are at a loss to understand what happens in the world; and also inside your body. There are evils everywhere and you have no alternative but to choose between them, for there is nothing else in the world with the exception of virtue, charity and love. But you love cigarettes and junk food, and that is what you say when accused of being too selfish. Sure enough, you are in love with junk food and you think it is better than falling in love with a whore or a gigolo. The former is a receptacle for sexually transmitted diseases and the latter thinks only in terms of your money. So you think it is more prudent to devote your time to junk food. You have just given up smoking – to be on the safe side, as you put it. Yet you will not be on this side as long as you are infatuated with junk food, for junk food kills more people than smoking. Two out of three adults are overweight or obese, and you are one of these two adults; number one or number two. What to do? You are aware of the fact that a Mediterranean diet high in olive oil cuts the risk of breast cancer for older women by more than two thirds. Alas, you are neither a woman nor even an old man. You are also told that preventive strategies represent the most sensible approach against cancer. So you write a letter to the prime minister in which you ask him to impose limits on the standard portion sizes of chocolates, sweets and fizzy drinks. 'Except champagne,' you point out, after much soul-searching. 'Except Belgian chocolate,' you add, after another bout of soul-searching. There is the usual romantic postscript at the end of your letter – PS I adore chocolate cake.

And you do not know; so do I or I do not. And all this takes care of itself and of yourself, even if you do not need any care, any wear and tear. You do not need this day, another day and all the days promised to you by your father; and also by your Father in Heaven. There are many fathers under the Earth and they speak sometimes; and what you hear is important because you hear it. What you hear is life and underlife and what happens in these under and upper realms count, otherwise nothing counts. And you count this nothing because you are in the habit of counting your days, not only your possessions. You count your days and your fingers go this way and that to show the number of the days you have already lived, assuming that you have *lived* them. You *have* lived and that is what counts. And trees, and leaves – the nature you can count upon when in need of strengthening? Nature strengthens

your own nature and you realise there are only natures around you and everything else. This is a nature, and that is also a nature. And all these natures are unnatural, odd as it may seem. These natures know that all may appear odd; and it does from times to time, or all the time. Natures, artifices. You do not care, probably and certainly; and you just live and let live. And others live and let live; and let live, let live. There is a letlive, and there is just live and probably let. You take it and savour every let, every live, every leaf. Every leave-taking, every leave-making. Every.

Wisdom is linked to maturity; so it is maturity and calm and peace and harmony. But then everything goes wrong except for a tiny thing that does not. It goes neither wrong nor right. It does not go, that is how it is; nor is it rooted to the spot. This tiny thing does not do anything, and yet it does not belong to the realm and kingdom of nirvana. It is not like prostration, nor does it look at the heavens after kneeling down; nor before this ritual. It cannot kneel down because it is just a thing; and this thing has no knees, no legs. What does it have? Perhaps nothing. It might have *something* so you cannot say it has nothing at all. Nor does it lack anything because it does not lack anything. It has its name that is not really a name; it is just a thing and a thing is not a name. No one knows what it is except Kant who says something on the subject. And what he says does not mean that our thing – or *his* things, for that matter – means anything or has anything. You can be in yourself, but you have no self nor any thing you can write home about. You are nothing, not even a thing. You are no ‘no’ either and that is what you wish after all, assuming you do wish anything. There is nothing, no thing, no nothing, no anything. And you float in a sort of space that is not a space proper. What is it? This question does not answer itself and is therefore dangerous because answers are embedded in questions. If they are not, they are not; in other words, they are no answers. They are probably dancers and you may say they dance all day long under your windows. You have many windows and under each of them there are many answers. For a while, you feel happy because you have answers and even solutions; and all of them are beyond your windows, within your reach, within your garden. And then you realise they are nothing. They are not even nothing *at all*. They are just *nothing*. So you begin to dance because you are an answer to yourself.

If you think in terms of numbers, you are wrong because there are only two numbers. So you are narrow-minded; your mind is too narrow and does not include a lot of items that might broaden your horizons. Your horizons are too narrow too. As a matter of fact there is only one horizon, only two numbers: number one and number zero. The world lies in between these two numbers, constantly going from one one to one zero and vice versa. And whatever is and happens goes from number one to what has nothing to do with it except that it is also a number; some number. Of course there are only numbers and letters, and we know that our Big Bang is full of them; and there is nothing else in it, not one single atom. Numbers and letters are not atoms; nor are they molecules. Nor are they subatomic particles. They are not particles at all. No one knows what they are and what they have ever been. Perhaps they have never been anything and that is why we are so unhappy. If we were ones or even zeroes, we might mean something to ourselves and others. But others are not; so we are. There is no room for all of us in the world because the world is as narrow as any mind except that of God Who is broad-minded. But He is broad-minded only in relation to our narrow-mindedness. So He is also narrow-minded to some extent, for He is not as broad-minded as our idea of broad-mindedness. Our ideas are so broad we cannot live with them. That is why we try to think in terms of numbers and not ideas. We just say to ourselves, ‘One, zero, one, zero.’ And then we go

from number one to that of zero, from the sun to the moon. We do not know why the sun is one; perhaps it is just another zero. So what? We can go from one zero to another, from one sun to another sun; and another moon. Then we forget our planet and we even forget its name. And we also forget that we forget whatever can be forgotten. We just say to ourselves, 'Nothing and no one are forgotten.' And none whatsoever is forgotten.

We know that our planet does not welcome us any more. Of course we can stay on it, but we feel we have overstayed many welcomes. So we had better move to another planet, and such a move can be carried out by means of a rocket that may cross our atmosphere, reaching for other worlds and our happiness. Today we can journey to Jupiter, according to a science-fiction book immortalised by Kubrick. Yet we remain on the surface of the Earth and do not budge as if we could not love each other or eat elsewhere. Our ancestors did know how to go into space. They went to nearby villages, but they faced problems whenever their ideas focused upon other planets and stars. They thought they should install a sort of pump on their 'interstellar tramways', as they called their vessels. What for? They knew there was no air beyond the atmosphere we enjoy on the Earth and even in the air; in the nearby air, so to speak. But there is no air beyond the air we know almost by heart, given that we inhale and exhale it all the time. At least we know this air by lungs; and by life, given that we go on living thanks to this air. Beyond this air and atmosphere – in the Beyond, to some extent – there is no air so that we have to take it with us, if we wish to travel as far as other planets, moons and so on. So we put a lot of air in the aforementioned pump which provides enough air for our propeller. This propeller propels us through space and we are thankful to it for this propulsion. But our pump is not unlimited and therefore we need the air it should supply to the propeller and our rocket. It pumps it in and out; and we fly on. We can also put a figurehead in front of our space rocket. Apparently donkeys go faster if there is a carrot in front of them. After all, we are going to God.

And you and I and everything. You play a game and win; and the game wins you. And perhaps you both lose, which happens very often and the world says you are losers. And even if the world does not say anything, it thinks you are losers, all of you: the games you play and also yourself. The world thinks and says something to this effect; to the effect of what it thinks. And even if the world does not think at all, it says a lot and you hear its words and even other words that, according to you, may come from other worlds. So you speak of UFOs and they speak of you. So everybody speaks about everyone else and that is how it goes on, if it goes on. It does not. It goes but it is not on, so that you wonder what really goes on. Some genes go on and they encounter other genes to which and to whom they say something, if they feel like it. And if they do not, they just communicate with them through particles or invisible genes. But the latter are audible and so other genes – the former ones – hear them and act accordingly; even if they do not act at all. Even if they do not act, they do act accordingly because they cannot do otherwise. They know that the world acts, otherwise one planet would not move around another planet; it would not move at all. And it does move; so does the world, even if you get the feeling it does not. You get this feeling, but the world does move, taking no notice of your feelings which go on on their own. They could go on without the world and they probably do, but you think you cannot live without the world and so you make your feelings follow the world in its footsteps. And if your feelings cannot do anything at your bidding, being on their own once and for all, you go somewhere and throw your feelings away. And someone says to you, 'Don't throw these feelings away – they'll come in handy for the picnic next Sunday.'

Looking for eternity is an eternal occupation or pastime. You kill time and reach eternity that can be appropriated only through the death of time. But time has no wish to die and that is why you are to die in its stead, for someone or something should die from time to time, otherwise life cannot live. Life is brimful of opposites and they create either antonyms or what is called 'dialectic'. And even if you do not call it or them, being weary of callings, names and suchlike, dialectic comes to the fore and joins the opposites it finds on its way in order to create a sort of synthesis or a synthesis of sorts. Any synthesis is a synthesis of sorts because you cannot synthesise anything, even if, in your workshop, you have the most sophisticated synthesiser. You synthesise this or that; or this *and* that. And the result you get is always short of telling you the truth. Instead, it tells you nothing and you continue to look for eternity which, in your opinion, is somehow related to the truth; and yet some affirm it has much more in common with falsehood and any pack of lies. On the other hand, any pack of lies seems to treasure a particle of truth, which means that the truth can be found anywhere, even in slaughterhouses. There is no absolute evil in the world and even outside it. When you say that something lies *beyond* good and evil, you mean that, within the area you are talking about, both good and evil have been reduced to nothing. But nothing is not nothing, properly speaking. It is a word that denotes *something*. And even if this something is nothing, this nothing is something. Perhaps just a little something, as the case may be. But, little by little, this little something can grow, mature and become a big something, a huge something. And then this something turns into a thing. And then something or someone says to you or someone else: 'Don't worry about a thing. I'll take care of it.'

When they speak of heaven, they do not mean the same sky or the same space that one can see overhead, if one takes the trouble to look up. But one does not always take this trouble or any other trouble because this may mean you are looking for trouble. On the other hand, you will only be storing up trouble for the future if you do not look at the sky from time to time. You should not neglect this universal symbol associated in many minds and bodies with a celestial being whose creation of the universe gives anyone an opportunity to enjoy life and its derivatives – on condition that this anyone is in the vale of tears and not in the Elysian fields. Of course, once you take up residence in those fields, you can enjoy yourself even more than in the vale of tears – or in the vale of smiles, as Buddhists put it. Anyway, you look at the sky rather often because you like the stars and even the sun at which you had better not gaze, especially if you happen to witness an eclipse of the sun. Just look at pitch darkness and say to yourself that this blackness has nothing to do with the symbol that used to frighten emperors and warriors. Even now some people cannot see a comet without a shudder; and yet they do not think that this comet will brush against the Earth, razing down skyscrapers and huts. They just think in terms of symbols and even a blade of grass is more than a blade of grass in their minds and hearts. And even when they call a spade a spade, they mean that this spade – or any other spade – is much bigger than just a spade. There are many spades beyond this spade; and those spades are eternal and infinite. The same goes for heaven which is the instrument of the First Cause. It is also the instrument of the Second Cause and so on – on account of its infinity and eternity. All beings are produced by the action of Heaven upon Earth; so are non-beings. Theologians affirm that heaven is a non-being. And whenever they look at it, they use their non-eyes. One might conclude they listen to it with their non-ears, but they do not listen to it.

You do not doubt anything; nor do you think in terms of the future or the past. Something is given and you enjoy what is given to you and perhaps to the whole world. But you do not mind being part of the crowd which you

follow, if you have no alternative but to follow it or anything else: a sign in the sky, an arrow on the road where you found yourself some time ago. You enjoy the beauty of the crowd, of the road, even if they are monstrous and repugnant. You listen to those who say in a restaurant, 'The thought of eating meat fills me with repugnance.' Or rather, you do not listen to them. You eat and enjoy whatever is given to you. You are part of the restaurant where they serve sausages and sauerkraut; you are also part of the sausages you enjoy so much. In a way, you eat yourself: your feelings, your duration, your whereabouts. And you enjoy what you eat and drink. Even if someone gives you a poisoned cup, you drink and enjoy it. And you enjoy the pain you feel in your stomach and elsewhere. You enjoy your death; and yet you are not supposed to feel it. This is the last scene of the play where you have displayed your joy for many years. You are sitting in the same restaurant, and you do not ask yourself whether you have ever been anywhere else. Perhaps not, for this restaurant offers a high standard of comfort and service. So you play your part in the comfort of your own room: you feel at home in the restaurant. Actually, you feel at home everywhere: in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere. People doing yoga benefit from an increased feeling of well-being. You are just drinking the poisoned cup. You do not say to yourself that life is a poison and so it is better to leave humanity high and dry. Forever. You do not say anything to anyone. You are drinking life, death, yourself. You are as ephemeral as your drink, as the restaurant where you have spent so many days and nights. You are neither hungry nor thirsty, but something is given to you and you take it. There has been a lot of give-and-take in your immortality.

Apparently pre-Socratics and the citizens of Ancient Greece, whose lives took place before Socrates' birth – anyway, they were born before his death – lived in accordance with laws and traditions. They did not know that whatever they saw or heard had to cross their minds because we are human beings and, but for our participation in the history of the world, neither the world nor its history would ever have been born and grown to become what they are in this day and age. The world is criss-crossed by our attitude towards it so that so-called universal harmony depends on our facts – the ones we single out as we carry on the good work – and our defects. Those Greeks – not the ones we are dealing with in our modern-day Europe – thought their country was outside them, whereas they were inside it. They had to listen to its demands; their country, on the other hand, cared neither about their sorry plights nor any other plight of theirs. They drank a lot, according to Plato who wrote about their drunken brawls and stupors, pointing out that Socrates had never been drunk, notwithstanding the quantity of bottles consumed by his body and friends. Why did those Greeks drink like the Russians? They were aware of the fact that, by drinking more and more, they subsidised non-drinkers. Oddly enough, they were not a financial burden on taxpayers. (Drunkards pay the cost of dealing with drink-related social problems almost three times over, through tax, every year.) They also knew that taxes on drink could be halved and still leave the government firmly in profit. But post-Socratics let the world go through their minds and the laws they obeyed were subjective to the point of keeping them away from alcohol. They knew that any alcohol was bad for their bodies and souls. (Even a glass of beer is harmful and fatal.) The lack of patriotism is the cause of the decline and fall of Ancient Greece.

We look at two objects and subjects. And we say to ourselves or other visitors, 'These two objects are so utterly disparate I find it hard to adapt from one to the other.' So we walk in the midst of objects and talk to strangers. The good thing about children is that they adapt very easily to new environments, but we are no longer children; nor are we adults, grown-ups or old fools. Yet we know that the Earth is the nexus of whatever one may come

across in the universe. After all, we are the highest species of Creation and no one else understands anything; and even animals have neither faith nor ideas. We believe in ourselves, but our thoughts are different from our bodies and minds: they do not believe in anything or anybody, let alone in God. They just stay where they are as if rooted to the spot. One thought does not join its companions in misfortune and we stop thinking, living and dying. But we are not immortal, whatever we might think if we were able to think, jumping to conclusions. Immortality is a closed book we are trying to open and read as if we were able to read or understand anything. So we just look at two subjects and even at the Holy Trinity. We adapt neither to one member of this Trinity nor to another, let alone to the third one. We wonder who or what is this third member: substance or nonsense. No, no, no. All these members do make sense and we resolve to join the club so as not to feel lonely and forsaken. We think we should become holy ourselves, but we find it hard to adapt from unholiness to holiness, from our solitude to our future membership. We know that A is part of B and even of C, let alone of D and E. But what we really feel comes down to 'let alone'. The Earth is alone; so are her inhabitants and landscapes. Of course we have a very good relationship with the Moon, especially at night when we stand on roofs and dance on gutters that glitter brilliantly, promisingly. Our bodies and minds continually wax, wane and disappear. But our disappearance is never final. We find it hard to adapt from one life to another, from one earth to another moon.

We know only our knowledge, not the object of this knowledge. To make the plural of 'object', you add the plural ending '-s'. What you get as a result of this operation is called 'objects' so that, all of a sudden, you see a great many objects around you. But you cannot say they speak to you either about yourself or about themselves. They are somewhere else, so to speak; and yet you can touch them if you wish. Anyway, you can see them, for they are not yet out of your sight. They are perhaps out of your mind into which they cannot fly because your mind is closed: it is the mind in itself. And you are in yourself; and you have a headache and are rather uncommunicative. This does not mean that objects feel like getting in touch with you; they do not. Nothing gets in touch with you, not even the thought that you are a human being and therefore can walk, talk and even fly, provided you have a pair of wings that Leonardo drew in one of his notebooks. You do have them because you identify with Leonardo or rather with his wings. You fly backwards, forwards, and land in another day and even another age. You do not recognise it because it is unrecognisable. A great many objects lie scattered around this age and day and night, but they refuse to communicate with you. They turn down the chance to have a talk with you, your thoughts and modes. It is as if you had been declared persona non grata and asked to leave the day within 48 hours; whereupon you realise that the day you got into lasts almost a century. And the age you think about is a point of no return. So you are stuck in the country where only the blind moon around, tripping over roots and their own moods; their own moons. They fall, rise gently into the air, land safely and fall again. So does the Roman Empire. Then fall Caesar! Then fly Liberty! Then fall Freedom! Then fly away. Flyaway.

Eternal objects are not to be found, unearthed, unmooned, unnooned. They are neither on the Moon nor within this afternoon. It goes its way and also our ways that do not know their ways, their nays and yeas. They are what they are and we are left alone because we are not what we are, what we have been. There are so many beings inside us that we feel duty bound to make use of them. They turn up and turn down whatever they can turn down and down, down, down. The ice storm has downed trees and power lines all over the region. That is what happens every other day and every day is the other day or just another day. You find yourself in a day, in a night, in a midnight that

lasts only a second or its fraction. You are within this fraction or outside it. Why should anyone worry? A fraction is not a castle that is always yours, whatever happens. And yet even this fraction – or any other fraction, for that matter – is your castle, your air. You breathe this air and live in your castle. And all is well, as the poet says and writes. And then the poet stops talking and you realise that nothing is well. Even this nothing is not well: it has fallen ill. This nothing is ill-advised, ill-assorted, ill-bred, ill-conceived. Even a nothing can be ill-to-death or sound-to-death. Considering its age, its body is quite sound; so is its mind. Nothing, nothing. Let it go. Whatever goes does not come back, not even the prodigal son. He *may* come back but if he does, his father does not recognise him. You come back too. No one recognises you. There might be one person, only one, and that person stares at you as if on the point of saying ‘Hello’. But no hello comes or goes, for only what comes can go and disappear forever. No hello, no hallowed icons. Only hollow crowns and the hollowness of fame, of game, of eternity. One hollow, two hollows. Hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, hollow-eared, hollow-minded, hollow-souled.

Machines, mechanisms, mechanics. They all surround you and come closer to you as if determined to destroy you and your own mechanisms. This is a war in which only machines and mechanisms are engaged and many writers have predicted this war over the last century; over the last and the one-before-last-and-before centuries. They are marching towards you and in the long run they manage to touch your body. Wheels and meals bump into you. They jostle and shove and push your body away, out, up and down. You no longer know where you are. You are up and down, and so are your moods. Your moods are also away and you realise you no longer have any mood either inside or outside you. Sometimes your moods are outside and in such moments you break dishes and slap the faces that happen to hang within your reach. Then you attack a few chairs and break them too as if taking care of the broken dishes that need a few companions in misfortune. You look at the picture your mood has just created and say to yourself, ‘It’s a pity I can’t hang this floor on that wall over there. This picture would go well on the wall in the living room.’ But that is not all: there are other pictures to deal with and they can be found *inside* your body. They do not depend on your moods and even on the food you eat at lunch, at dinner, and so on. They do not depend on your mind either, whatever your mind reads or thinks or suggests. They are molecules or just a number of particles, cells or genes. They run around your body – blindly, blindly. That is why you call them ‘blind mice’. It is easy to deal with three mice, especially if they are blind: one cat is enough for the purpose. But how to deal with a myriad of them? You are not in the habit of letting the cat out of the bag. And you have never let any cat out of your body, needless to say. Nor have you ever *put* any cat into your body. It is little wonder that so many particles run blindly inside your body. They do not even have *to go* on a drinking spree: they are *always* on a spree, whatever they do or plot. What are they up to now? They are up and down and right and left. They shake your body from the inside; they also shake your world or rather your representation of the world. They shake the world to its foundations, as Jesus Christ did. ‘That’s incredible!’ you say, shaking your head in disbelief. With the passing of the years, however, you come to *believe* it. Now you shake your head in belief.

Noteworthy advances in Alzheimer’s research. Alzheimer begins years before memory and confusion symptoms become evident. They are not evident yet, but they are already under way; on the way to evidence. The loss of memory advances; so does Alzheimer’s research. Confusion advances too and one wonders what will win this race. In a way, they are all in a race for promotion. Symptoms aspire to be promoted from symptoms to what is habitually called ‘death in life’ or ‘death-life’ or just ‘death’. The last definition has no respect for sufferers whose

eyes seem to seek your help. Their eyes are open and they seek to convince you they are still alive and therefore may recover. And if the eyes recover from their half-life, the soul can do it as well because our eyes are the mirrors of our souls. And whatever happens in a mirror also happens in reality. Mirrors have no life of their own. Every mirror is a slave to whatever happens in front of it. If you break it, it dies; the same goes for eyes. But the soul as well as our everyday reality remain. And we need this reality in order to live and enjoy every moment of our existence. But Alzheimer's prevents us from doing so and consequently our researchers do their best to quicken the forward march of their research. The need for better ways to both screen for and treat the condition is urgent; otherwise humanity may lose both its past and the space where skyscrapers and huts are located. Now the research has reached the stage where substances in saliva may and must signal the first signs of mild cognitive impairment (MCI); and also those of harsh cognitive impairment (HCI). They often or almost always lead to Alzheimer's. Actually, according to some researchers, they are Alzheimer's itself. Never mind, never mind. Do not pay too much attention to definitions. Just spit out whatever you can and look at your saliva. Do you see the first signs? And what about the second signs? And the third ones? 'Spit it out,' you say to yourself, hoping to get rid of the disease. How easy it is to recover from it! You just spit it out: no need whatsoever to make headway in research. You can even go so far as to retreat and regress: you will recover on account of what you spit out. Even if you spit blood.

Nature is not dead, whatever we might think about its immobility and laziness. If you were a tree, you would grow much quicker, if only out of curiosity: everybody is eager to learn what is stored up in heaven or at least in the nearest cloud. But nature is not curious because, like science, it does not think, even if some say that water remembers everything down to riverbanks and sinks. It does not think when it comes up with this or that idea it borrows from humans, animals and plants. According to Plato, knowledge is nothing but recollection; and mystics affirm that knowledge is nothing unless it is God-oriented, unless it is in the shape of a cross. Not every cross is able to teach you the truth so you look for the only Cross that knows and remembers everything. You build another Tower of Babel and realise it may collapse at any moment. It does collapse at the 666th moment and you look at the ruins you see almost everywhere. Only a few trees in your garden remain; and yet your garden has nothing in common with the Garden of Eden. Nothing is forbidden; anything goes. And the trees you are allowed to look at continue to grow as if nothing had happened. They grow and reach a few clouds, a few stars. They neither fall down nor rot, although it rains and pours every day; and every drop lands on the trees, on their barks and gets in and rots their trunks, branches, twigs and even leaves. Yet the trees do not rot; nor do they grow as decrepit as a number of old men who, weather permitting, sit and sleep on park benches. The trees follow the way of nature and nature follows their ways. That is the way of all trees. They have no flesh, no mind, no consciousness, no unconscious. They neither know nor remember anything. But every tree is a cross to come.

Nature is not a square, a circle; nor is it a photograph. You cannot put it in your family album, saying it is your niece, your dearest child, your grandmother. Nature is nothing of the sort; yet it is as close to you as any of your relatives, however dearest and nearest. One might say you are glued to any spot exhibited by nature. You lean against a tree and walk on the grass, even if you are asked not to walk on it. You lie down and once again you are glued to the spot. You are also glued to the sky as if it were a television screen, a computer screen, a film. The stars come out of the blue or rather the black and you watch them for hours before falling asleep. And your sleep

is as long as the history of humankind. Once again you become the Buddha and Jesus Christ; and you become everybody in the course of your sleep, as Borges might have put it. How easy it is to become everybody, provided you do not suffer from insomnia. Whenever you do suffer from it, you are just yourself and no one else, nothing else. You are not even the grass on which you are lying. You lie down on a divan, but you are still yourself in spite of your wish to become anything or anybody, which might allow you to get rid of yourself, of your terms and trials. You do not say to yourself it is better to be an object than a subject, but you feel it and your unconscious supports this feeling and also your wish to become a chair or even a carpet. Any unconscious is far more conscious than the rest, whatever this rest describes or points to, and it is our unconscious that says to us it is better to be a carpet than Dante. Your intuition agrees with your unconscious and they both persuade you to lie down and implore our heavenly Father and also heavenly hosts to do whatever they like – with your body, your soul and the remains of the day. So you become a carpet and feel a great many shoes, a great many people who walk up and down as if they had nothing else to do or think. They think, ‘Up and down, up and down,’ and accordingly their feet perform this remarkable feat. Walking up and down is no mean feat, you say to yourself. And you continue this line of thinking because you know that carpets feel more comfortable than feet, let alone the rest of anyone’s body. And then, logically, you become a bluebell because in spring the area where you are lying – but not dying – is carpeted with bluebells.

A VITAL BOX

The world has been cut into circles, squares and triangles; in other words, the world is mathematical, mechanical and satanic. Wherever you go, you come across vicious circles, vicious squares and so on. Even the Arctic Circle is vicious. And so are family circles and inner circles. If you x-rayed any inner circle, you would see ‘VICIOUS’ inscribed on it in capital letters. God is in the making; so is the world, which means it has been viciously ill-treated over a score of millennia. Vitalists deplore the lack of vitality they spot everywhere, whenever they take the trouble to look at the world. They touch a leaf and say, ‘Its vitality is gone forever’; and yet this leaf has not died, otherwise it would be lying on the grass, yellow, helpless and submitted to a sudden gust of wind. You gasp as you follow the itinerary of this leaf that goes through lands and beyond the horizon. You cannot help comparing your life to this or that leaf; and yet you say neither to yourself or anybody else, ‘Gone with the wind,’ because you like neither the novel nor the movie. And your likes and dislikes count, especially when you dwell upon death and also upon the plight of the sick and the hungry. You are hungry but not sick, not yet. You swallow a few morsels of fish and continue to dwell upon death: even if you empty your fridge and all food shops situated in the area where you live and look at leaves, you will not remove death either from your thoughts or from your future. Perhaps you have no future, but it is better not to know anything about it; or about the past, for that matter. Anyway, you do not lie on the grass for fear of a sudden gust of wind. You do not even go out because no wind and no gust will ever pay attention to how your body makes the final sacrifice. You may go out with the best of intentions: you wish to save a few leaves from death, from lethal flight. Why not pick some of them? Why not put all of them in a vase, at home, near the hearth? Out of prudence, you look out of the window and think about the past, about last Wednesday. And you say to yourself, ‘It was a windy day, and small white clouds were scudding across the blue sky.’ And you compare two days: that Wednesday and today. And you say to yourself, ‘Today, the weather is gorgeous – in comparison with last Wednesday, last Friday.’ You open the front door and begin to walk in your garden. A sudden gust of wind. A box. You open the box and gasp to see all the treasure inside.

Eternal questions are not eternal; and yet they have no answers. You just do not ask them any more – neither questions nor humans – because, asking them or anything and anybody else, makes no sense. You ask what time it is and you get an answer. And then you realise that no answer can be related to your time, to your relativity, your duration, your patience and your will to live – your will-o'-the wisp, as they say to underline the absurdity of this notion, as applied to life, to human existence or even to his or her non-existence. The French say it is a *feu follet*, which means that it is a sort of fire and many fires are mad, sad and bad. Some say, 'The fire was thought to have been caused by a gas explosion.' Others say, 'Forty people helped to put out the fire.' Both the former and the latter are right. And many individuals say, 'Thirty buildings were badly affected by the fire.' They are right too, but being right or wrong does not mean anything. You may be right here and there, and even everywhere – every time you open your mouth or move your body and especially your hands that give a great deal of money to the poor and to invalids, especially if they are young. You are right everywhere, whether the action is set in time or in space. And yet you have no answers either at home, in your castle, or in the hotels where you stay during your holidays. So you ask uncomplicated questions such as, 'What time is it now?' And you get an answer because this answer depends neither on philosophical investigations nor on science and occultism; nor on the theory of relativity, not this time. But if you ask, 'What is time?' you get no answer, no images. The man or god to whom you put this question does not even shake his head either despondently or otherwise. He just turns his back on you and goes away as if 'away' was the only answer to your question and angst. It is perhaps. Time is away, just away. It is not a way, contrary to what the starving multitudes and communists think, affirm; a way to cornucopia. Away, away, my soul aches.

You have a modest tremor in your right hand. You are not left-handed so you write with your right hand, while the left one takes some rest on your writing desk. Your right hand performs other tasks as well. For instance, you cannot insert your keys into the keyholes you come across both inside and outside your house. Conscientiously, with the utmost concentration, you try to open your gate and also your front door. The keys execute a sort of dance and you end up putting the keys into the palm of your left hand. Even this uncomplicated task is not performed correctly by your right hand: the key ring often joins the grass as if it had to open the Earth. What for? You are not dead yet, if you are not mistaken. Of course all is possible, as a poet put it. Despite your demise, you may live on by momentum – in the mistaken belief that immortality is not a figment of someone's imagination. Well, you are at home now and you realise you should go and see your doctor. He conducts a series of clinical tests and asks you to perform an assortment of motor tasks. Your inner motor swings into action and you start to rotate your hands back and forth. You touch your index finger and thumb together; and tap your foot up and down. You do it as quickly as you can, but you cannot do it very quickly. You do not really deplore this incapacity of yours: you have never dreamed of becoming a tap dancer. The doctor looks at both your hands and feet and says your inner motor is playing up. 'In other words, you have Parkinson's disease,' he adds. At first you are shocked; and you pity yourself so no one can say at that point, 'He faced his illness bravely and without any hint of self-pity.' And you withdraw from the world and its inhabitants. And you make no attempt to reach out to other Parkinson's sufferers. Why should you watch and touch their fragile, bent, trembling figures? After a while, you do reach out to them. You all stand in a circle as you indulge in what is justifiably called a 'tap dance'. You call it '*Totentanz*': you have no wish to use the word 'death' in your native tongue. Your right hand is still in tremor. You calm it by shaking it

vigorously. You call this ritual a 'dance of protest'. And you join a protest march to show solidarity with your fellow sufferers.

We do not know how to deal with illusions because we are not sure they are illusions and not the solutions to our problems. We constantly labour under the illusion that whatever we look at or think of is real. Every other day we think of Paradise, which means it awaits us beyond every horizon we light upon during our rambles over hill and dale. And, according to our thoughts, every beam of light must come from the Garden of Eden, from both Paradises: lost and regained. Thanks to our thoughts, we gain control of nature and also respectability in our society. All of a sudden our society gets rid of us unceremoniously and rather cruelly. And nature spoils our summer holidays with rainstorms and ticks. Our cats are as sick as dogs and the roof of our country house caved in during a recent hurricane. This hurricane was no illusion, no delusion, no vision: we saw neither a demon nor an episode from the Apocalypse. We would not mind watching an episode from the Apocalypse, given that the Apocalypse we are aware of has a happy ending. We are prepared to endure almost everything for the sake of a happy ending and Jerusalem depicted on the final pages of the Bible. But hurricanes come and go, and nothing happens except that hurricane-force winds are expected tonight. In other words, another hurricane is in the offing and we cannot do anything either about its coming or about its departure that we hope for most ardently. We are afraid that one of these hurricanes will stay with us forever. It has not happened so far, otherwise we would not live to tell the tale. But it may happen one of these days because even the sun is sure to let us down in the long run or in the short run: some day it may go down once and for all. In the meantime we focus our thoughts upon the forthcoming hurricane. People living in the path of the hurricane have been advised to leave their homes until it has passed. And what if it does not? Violent squalls have already signalled the approach of the hurricane. We are leaving the house by the back door.

You grasp many problems; at least you grasp the scale of Problem One and Problem Two. And all other problems are nothing but the effects of these two problems. Or they belong to the same series of problems, to the same aspect of life. But they do not belong to you, which means that you do not understand the meaning of all these problems. Besides, they may not belong to the same series and the same department, whatever mathematicians and sociologists say. By the way, for once they do not say anything as if everything had already been said and done. And you know that nothing has been said; at least nothing has been *done*, otherwise you would be neither in a mess nor in a fix. And you are in both, needless to say. And they say you may have grasped three problems, but you still have no idea what on earth they mean. Nor do they mean anything on Jupiter because all our planets – those of the solar system – belong to the same chain that feeds on hydrogen. According to Eastern sages, our world has already reached Number 12 in the esoteric charts. These charts are really too esoteric so you would do better to play cards that can also provide you with the key to the meaning of the universe, especially if you turn your attention to the Tarot and its symbols and forget about bridge and other such nonsense. But nonsense can uncover Absolute Truth or some parts of it. All depends on what nonsense you chance upon as you wander along the shore, stepping over the flotsam that washed up in the night. Flotsam and jetsam. You bend down, pick up a piece of wood and realise that what you have just picked up has nothing in common either with wood, or metal or even jewellery. Actually you do not know what it is but you think you might have come across a piece of nonsense in

the broadest sense of the term. The broadest sense. Such senses and their contents are few and far between. And every sense of this kind contains a particle of Absolute Truth.

Whatever is old or new amounts to the same thing. These things and subjects do not even have to amount to anything or budge from where they are because they are the same and probably belong to what they call 'vanity' or 'insanity'. Up, down below, right-hand sight, left-hand sight, tomorrow, today, yesterday: they are birds of a feather, even if they do not flock together. Crowds of yesterdays flock to ancient Rome, to a sports arena, and watch gladiatorial combats. As for tomorrows, they cling together in terror as the screams grow louder. And our today is not eager to find out what screams it is likely to deal with tomorrow: our night is unable to come to terms with the screams that resound within it. Anyway, all these screams are in the same boat, floating up and down the river of Time. Of course our time or any other time is just a lake in which we come across our own reflections. They say that myths are immortal because they have been engraved in the memory of humankind ever since its birth. A myth is born because a person bends down and looks at his or her reflection. Actually, this person looks at fishes, not at reflections, whoever they belong to today or tomorrow. This man or woman is Japanese and for the Japanese both birds and fishes are more appealing than humans. But the myth is born and mythologists do their best to convince us that the person who walks towards the lake and crouches down is Narcissus and not Sei Shōnagon. And Jung's successors – Lévi-Strauss, among other analysts – affirm that this myth pervades our consciousness and unconscious either as a myth or as an archetype. Of course they amount to the same thing, to the same person or persona, to the same episode in the history of the human psyche. Or rather they do not budge: they are still in our brains, minds, its, deeds, bodies, souls, egos, shadows, superegos, supershadows. So we go to rivers, lakes and oceans. Our new trousers rip when we bend down, but we pay no attention to this everyday occurrence for it does not belong to human mythology. We look down and see ourselves for the first time, for the last time. A Japanese garden; a pond. A big fish in a small pond.

There is what they call the world. But there is nothing neither here nor there. And if there is what they call 'here' and also 'there' – and also 'also' – it is you or it shall be you. Or nothing of the kind. You have your universe from which you spring, but this universe is for you so you do not really have to spring from it. The same goes for the law, the one described by Kafka. There is probably one law only and you do not have to enter it because it is you and it has been you from time immemorial. And this time is a war memorial and no one asks what war it commemorates for there is only one war, one death, one feeling, one funeral. You spring from it and plunge into it headlong. Headlong, headfirst. All this has been created for you and it is little wonder that this state of things predominates everywhere for you are both a creator and a destroyer. You create yourself and your environment, and suddenly you realise you are not you; nor are you us or them. You extrapolate as you go beyond the limits of your perception and understanding, beyond your mind, senses and body. You are beyond and you have no idea what can be done either beyond or below or in an upside-down world. Only one world seems to suit you; one world and one word. This word is 'you' or 'Thou'; or 'Mao' or 'Tao'. You pick up any word you set your heart upon and this word denotes either the universe or just the bed where your body has been lying for almost a millennium, if one takes into consideration your ancestors and genes. But no one takes anything either into consideration or into account. So you have no alternative but to take the law into your own hands. First you make sure your hands are your hands; then you pick up the law. You do not enter it.

You look at a stone, which does not mean you cannot look at something else. But, as it happens, you look at this stone and this stone does not become either this or that or anything else. And if some modification does take place within it or on the surface of it, it does not really disturb it because it is an occasional modification of some of its qualities. But the stone itself remains unperturbed, even if the sun and its journey through the sky may change its colour or rather a few nuances of this colour. Suddenly a mysterious quantum of energy makes its appearance and you think this energy comes from the recesses of protons or of electrons. But it does not really matter what it comes from: you do not belong to those philosophers who think only in terms of origins and big bangs; or big gods. You just think about what you see in front of you, and you do not even talk about the objects or subjects you might find behind you, if you took the trouble to turn back without closing your eyes. Actually, the only way to keep the stone untouched is to rely entirely on your remembrance of this stone. But you cannot remember it if you see it just in front of you, under your very nose. So you close your eyes and try to recall its shape, its colours; and you exclude both the sun and the quantum energy from your vision. You also exclude from it both protons and electrons – just in case. Oddly enough, your vision does not need any atom to persevere in its being and thus illuminate your life. Of course you look neither at a run-of-the-mill pebble nor even at a precious stone. It is the philosopher's stone you install in your mind with a view to turning your thoughts into gold. And what about women? What about Goethe's eternal femininity they can offer you? You need to complete the collection of your qualities and you cannot accomplish this feat without a woman and her face. Such a woman stands before your very eyes, but you cannot rely on her as long as her true and false colours depend on protons, electrons and their recesses. Of course you might get rid of them in the twinkling of an eye. All you have to do is shut your eyes and enjoy an image created by your memory, love and ecstasy. But your ecstasy often cuts this woman into pieces and as it does so, the vision you rely upon disappears at once. As a result of such libidinous onslaughts, your train of thought is now covered with fragments. You can only rely upon art, upon its omniscience and eternity. You look at a picture and say to yourself that the artist has managed to capture every nuance of the woman's expression.

There are people who go to Speakers' Corner and, weather permitting, share their views with the crowd or just a few individuals. And these individuals go to the same corner to listen to those who yearn to deliver a sermon on the importance of compassion; or of love, which amounts to the same thing, sentiment, feeling and state of mind. Not quite, not quite. But who cares about details? If you love somebody, you love everybody – that is how thinkers and theologians think, and they are right, according to other theologians and thinkers. So all speakers deliver the same sermons: no one speaks of governments any more. We are all weary and wary of politicians, and anyway love is far more important than capital gains tax. So you go to this or that corner and open your mouth. Everyone knows what you are about to say and therefore no one really listens to the words you utter as you open and shut your mouth where your tongue twists and turns and twists again, trying to convey your meaning and innermost thoughts. What counts, however, is something else and everyone is aware of this truth, given that a great many people listen to popes, gurus and mystics. While looking at you, they wonder whether you exude warmth and love for others or not. If you do not, every member of the crowd picks up a stone and hurls it at your body and mind. And if you do not leave the corner where you voice a number of truths, you will be stoned to death in no time at all. But if you do exude the warmth in question, your message, if any, will grow more palatable to Christians, Muslims, and so on. The warmth you are able to exude may even permit you to ask dangerous questions such as,

‘Do you dress immodestly?’ ‘Do you entertain impure desires?’ ‘Do you commit sodomy?’ And the same warmth or love will supply the only answer to these questions, ‘That is our very nature and no law can change it.’

You believe you are the same. You have always being the same in spite of your problems and the poems you have written all your life. These poems seem to have been written by someone else – they are so different from what you are and feel. As soon as you pick up your fountain pen or quill, you become a different substance, for art leads you somewhere, beyond yourself and even beyond the world where you seem to have lived all these years either on Earth or under her, in the London underground. Even if you express your innermost thoughts – this happens all the time – you remove them from your body and soul. It is so hard to remove anything from your soul that you have to visualise your kidneys: they play a vital role in the removal of waste products from the blood. So you identify with your kidneys and say to yourself that whatever you are eager to put in your poems should stay neither in your heart of hearts nor in any other organ of your body, be it your soul or psyche. Why? Because all these loves and the sadness they cause are nothing but the waste products that no kidneys will ever remove from where they are unless you take part in the process. Only you can properly deal with your own worries, your unconscious and woeful passions that destroy you round the clock, even when you do not wish anything and ask the world to leave you alone. The world may leave you alone, but that does not mean anything because there are leftovers here and there. You think you have already had your last supper. But there are leftovers all over the place and, logically enough, you recall your mother whom you loved dearly, tenderly, and you say to yourself, ‘Our mother couldn’t bear waste – she always made us eat everything on our plates.’ But the leftovers are not on your plate: they are everywhere. They are life itself: every leaf, every blade, let alone maids and maidens. Even a dead end you may reach in your attempt to find a solution to all your problems is not really dead. Nor is it an end as such, for there are always beginnings beyond them, as every poet knows. Of course our poets are always mistaken, but there are other poets beyond them: endless poets, endless problems, endless solutions.

What is the definition of ‘mood’? It is not enough to say she is in good mood, whoever she is or was a few minutes ago. Five minutes ago she was in a good mood and she seems to have been in this mood for more than ten minutes. But her mood might change during the course of the conversation. And you are talking to her now. And you know that the drink has put her in an amiable mood. Usually the euphoria created by a glass of champagne wears off after about half an hour. It does wear off and her mood changes dramatically. For almost an hour her mood swings between elation and despair. You put to her the following question, ‘Why are you in such a foul mood this morning?’ But you are wrong because you take into consideration only the seamy side of life. She loved you ten minutes ago and now she hates you, there is no denying it. You do not even try to deny it because you have no wish to waste your time on nonsense. Nor do you deny the fact she does not love you any more. Anyway your denial of responsibility for her metamorphosis would be unconvincing. You have to accept that the relationship has run its course. Rationally, you know she will not go back to you, but emotionally you cannot accept it. You accept this and you do not accept that; and vice versa. In the meantime she drinks another glass of champagne and once more her mood starts swinging to and fro. And then her mood stops once and for all. Now it is in between to and fro, in between elation and despair. What is the definition of this mood? ‘In between’? ‘Nowhere’? Mystics say that life is nowhere; it is neither...nor. Or it is either...or. Or it is just where. Not here, mind you.

Our society has some dimension of order in it. Actually it is an environment that has this, and we call it society, for want of anything better. Anything would be better, given that the world we are living in is rotten to the core. Our gurus shake their heads and say we should not get into a state whenever we think about our lives or our species in general. They say that lizards live in cool, dark places such as rotten logs. Are we better than lizards? That is the question, and they ask this question to which we find no answer. And other gurus say our lives depend on those who ask and answer this question. So it is a matter of life and death, and to begin with, we choose life and decide to live as long as possible – or even impossible, unthinkable. If you decide to live as long as unthinkable, you start thinking about the situation and, with the passing of the years, the unthinkable grows thinkable. And it goes on growing so that, at the end of many years, the thinkable grows possible and feasible. And you say to yourself that, with the extra resources, your scheme now seems feasible. What scheme? There is only one scheme in your life, in anyone's life: immortality. Any human being aspires to achieve immortality, no doubt about that. Apart from Saint Anthony and his followers, human beings are parts of societies. And even Saint Anthony was part of his environment. And his environment was made up of a desert and women or rather demons. There was an element of order in Saint Anthony's life. He sucked his thumb until he was seven. He sucked stones until his death. Women came in dribs and drabs, but they were turned out of the saint's environment. The saint's body showed signs of laceration and bruising; and these signs persisted in spite of days and years that witnessed the temptations to which Saint Anthony was exposed. His life had some element of order in it. His life also had some element of disorder in it, symbolised by women and demons. But for their daily intrusions, there would have been no order in the saint's life.

And sometimes there is nothing, not even a next to nothing or the next to nothing or nexus or nothingus or yesthingus. But these us and gus do not lead you anywhere. Actually there is no need to go anywhere, whatever Dostoyevsky's characters say and think. It does not mean you feel comfortable on the spot where you find yourself. Perhaps it is better not to find either yourself or oneself. All right, you do not find yourself. And you say to yourself that even if you were oneself, you would find neither yourself nor oneself. So there is no point in becoming oneself. You are yourself and it is better to persevere in your being. You have heard this maxim so often you begin to hate it. Your being begins to hate this sort of maxim and other maxims of this sort. What is more, there are other maxims and other sorts. You choose to stick to one maxim only, otherwise you might get lost in the midst of maxims and Marxism; or Marxisms, to be exact. When you say to anyone you are a Marxist, this one or anyone answers, 'What kind of Marxist? Are you a Soviet citizen?' You say you are not, for you know that, in the Soviet Union, Marx's ideas were shamelessly perverted to serve Lenin's and Stalin's propaganda campaign. Then you are asked the following question, 'Are you French?' You say you are not because you have nothing in common with French Marxists or with any other Marxists, for that matter. But that does not matter, as they say. So they continue to ask questions and you say, 'No', 'Yes', 'mess.' There are masses, Masses, messes, missies, misuses. A Japanese man learns the English language within the space of three days. When asked how he achieved this result, he says, 'First day, hundred words. Second day, thousand words. Third day, three thousand words.' Then he points to his head and says, 'They are all here, in my arse.' Sometimes there is nothing, not even a next to nothing. That is what you find at the end of the variations on the theme 'nothing-anything'.

There are ticks everywhere and you know that. You know almost everything. Actually you do know everything, but your modesty forbids you from talking about it. So you do not talk about it. You know everything and it does not really matter whether you talk about it or not. You do not talk about it so your neighbours think you are modest and not arrogant. You have no idea whether your neighbours love you or not, but at least they respect you. You know everything apart from the fact related to your neighbours and their feelings. Of course they respect you because you are modest and your conduct is beyond reproach. Some of your neighbours make such a racket outside you cannot get to sleep, but you are not of their number. You live and let others live, sleep, eat and even go to the cinema. They go to the cinema; you stay at home. You pick up your cat and begin to caress him. As you put your fingers on his neck you realise that a tick has installed itself in it and apparently it has no intention of changing its plans just to fit in with yours. You intend to protect your cat from the harmful effects of life; the tick, on the other hand, is determined to suck your cat's blood until tomorrow morning. You find a pair of pliers, pick it up and try to remove the tick from where it stays; and you partly succeed in your undertaking. But a part of the tick remains inside your cat's body and you cannot do anything about it. Your cat's wound grows and becomes almost as big as the cat himself. You look at your chest of drawers and realise it is wounded as well. The same goes for other pieces of furniture one can admire in your room and elsewhere. Your house is ill; so are you. There are ticks and wounds everywhere; and you know all of them – personally, as it were. They are your neighbours and you do not know whether you love them or not.

A valley, a dolly. Dollies, dolls, valleys, molls. Life goes on because it cannot do otherwise. All right, it does otherwise: it does not go on. So what? The show you are talking about does not go on, whatever they say, do and think. The show does not go on. It does not go and therefore the show stays where it is. Where is it? It does not really matter because our show goes on without going anywhere. All right, it does not go anywhere; it stays where it is. The same goes for life and anything else; or everything else. They and it do not go; they stay where they are and no one wants to know whether they are or not. They are probably are; they are not perhaps. Whether they are or not is none of your concern. You focus your attention on your life, on the dolly your child will always plays with, and also on the valleys where you will wander this afternoon. Yesterday there was snow on the hilltops but not in the valley. Yesterday is different from today because time goes on, as everyone knows and feels. You just look at yourself in the nearest mirror and realise that time goes on. All right, time goes on; so do you and the dolls you take with you as you realise you have to go on and on so as not to lose time forever. In a way, it is better to waste time than to lose it. So you say to yourself that you should not lose your time or any other time because all these times – all the times you can think of – live together, in a mansion or in the garden of Epicurus. Oddly enough, you do not lose anything. You go on or away or off. You go and that is what counts. You go here and there, and you see a lot of valleys and volcanoes. And they say, 'Erupting volcanoes discharge massive quantities of dust into the stratosphere.' But you think neither about dust nor about ashes. You are just in the midst of volcanoes, in the midst of a valley where there are a few lilies.

What is done or said is nothing or next to nothing. What is next to nothing? What is next? Repetition, rehearsal, no news, good news, bad news, no baddy, no daddy. The dead are covered with swarms of flies as if they needed a cover of sorts. Life covers them, for life takes care of us, even if we are no longer alive. As long as life covers us we are alive and kicking. We take this cover and walk around fearlessly and defiantly. We know that life will

never let us down, even if everybody does. Everything might let you down, but life will never do anything like that because life is alive in any shape or form. If it takes the shape of a pond, you realise this pond is alive with frogs. You are about to stand down as leader because of the treachery of your own colleagues. So you are no longer a leader, but life does not forsake you. In this respect, life is even superior to any god: it never forsakes you unless your own burial interferes and life has no alternative but to recede into the distance. But it is always somewhere, even if it happens to be very far from where you are. You go towards life in the hope of finding your meeting point. You have no idea in what shape or form this point may introduce itself to you. And of course there is no point in going anywhere if this point does not exist and consequently life is not about to welcome you with open arms. Nonetheless, you trudge through the snow, hoping to come across a slice of life. What slice? Eternal recurrence, resurrection or just action: someone is making a film about life. In one of your former lives you made your reputation as an actor playing villains. You will play villains once again. Every slice of life is nothing but recollection.

But for projects and desires, our life would be as empty as a bottle in the hands of a drunkard. He picks up a bottle and realises that life is full of wonders. And he holds one of these wonders in both hands, for fear of dropping the bottle, which may happen at any moment, especially if his hands have been trembling for more than a week. You feel dizzy and your legs are trembling too. We can give you drugs to help control the trembling. Until yesterday, this project was just a possibility, but now it has become a real probability. We have the drugs and you are sitting in front of us; only two meters separate us from your mouth. We ask you to open your mouth and you open it after a while. But as soon as you open it, the neck of the bottle sinks into it and we realise that, at this rate, the whole bottle may disappear inside you with the passing of time. But, for once, time does not seem to pass, and you remain on your chair, the neck of the bottle sticking out of your head. The whole bottle has been sticking out of it for almost two minutes. At last you drop the bottle and collapse under the weight of the liquid you have drunk. Once again, our project remains a mere probability: you are fast asleep. It is true that your mouth is wide open, but we cannot put anything into it, be it a drug or another bottle or a cigar. We know you love cigars and women, but neither is welcome in your abode now, given your incapacity to deal with either. You can deal properly only with your sleep. You are a heavy sleeper, but the weight of your sleep is unlikely to push your body through the floor of your flat. So we can leave you to your own devices. You have reached the bottom of the world and of the heap. The actuality of the universe is merely derivative from its solidarity in each actual entity. One entity is asleep on the floor; this entity is at the bottom of the heap. Another entity – the opposite one – is at the top of the heap because it is at the top of its profession. As at the bottom, so at the top. That is what they call ‘*solidarnost*’. What counts is the intrinsic harmony of the heap: its very existence depends on it. And what would we do without the heap?

If you are in love, the ultimate subject of all your thoughts is the one absolute substance you call ‘the woman of my life’. Of course your substance is not absolute because it depends entirely on the woman you love deeply, madly and truly. And if some day you realise your feelings for her are not reciprocated, you are likely to commit suicide. That is why no one dares call you ‘absolute’; no one can really trust you. Sometimes you simply have to trust in the goodness of human nature, and you do trust in it. But you cannot trust a man who thinks only about a woman whom you have never seen in your life; not even in your dreams and books, not even in the *Divina*

Commedia. This man says, 'She is beyond description.' And you say, 'Don't describe her. Just introduce us to her.' 'She is beyond introduction,' he says. 'She is also beyond any comparison so you can't say she is like the Blessed Virgin. She is also beyond any notion,' which means you cannot say she is purity itself. This woman is also beyond any wall: even if she lived in a monastery, she would be beyond that monastery, beyond its walls and roofs. But she is also beyond the sky and beyond the Earth. Of course she has been beyond good and evil for a long, long time: neither Spinoza nor Nietzsche has anything to do with her penchant for this no-no area; or rather no-no-no-no-no-no area. No good, no evil, no God, no Devil, no woman, no man, no hermaphrodite. Is she an androgyne? A handsome young man endowed with a female soul? Is this he-she a symbol of divine unity? Adam and Eve in one? First Adam and the Virgin Mary in one? Second Adam and Goethe's mothers in one? Oh, weep for Adamarias, weep for Adamothias!

A sense of guilt is always embedded somewhere, not always in one's conscience and consciousness, let alone unconscious which, actually, should not be left alone too often. If one does leave one's unconscious in peace, this unconscious and also its own unconscious come to the fore and become another sense of guilt, another sin, another ugliness. One looks at oneself in a mirror and finds that one is ugly; another or the other is ugly too. One's reflection is ugly, one's doppelgänger is ugly; one, two and three are ugly and sinful. One wants to confess one's sins before one dies, but one does not. Many others do but one cannot die for the moment. One can confess one's sins, if necessary, but it is not necessary, apparently. Everyone seems to be in a rush, but one is not; for once, one is not in a rush because one is not dying. On the threshold of death, one has to do many things. One has to take care of one's last will and testament. And then one realises one has not paid enough attention to the will that may be defined as the one-before-last. One says to oneself that one will die in the near future. So one should think in terms of one's death and fortune that, for example, might be distributed to starving peasants. One has no children, no relatives, no wives. So one resolves to distribute one's fortune to starving workers, children and the disabled. On second thoughts, however, one creates the Russian Heart Foundation. On third thoughts, one bequeaths one's fortune to the Russian Lung Foundation. This is what they call 'the one-before-last will and testament'. And what about the very last ones? On half thoughts – that is what is left in one's mind – one just cancels all engagements, arrangements, contracts and orders. One rings up one's banker and asks him or her to bring one's money to one's room. The banker draws this money out of one's account, brings it to one's place and heaps it on one's deathbed, on the blanket under which one goes on dying.

Another case of mistaken identity. But if you have no identity, no one will ever mistake you for anybody, be it an animal or a Martian. No one will ever take notice of you unless you say to yourself it is important to have an identity or a personality, otherwise you might be regarded as nobody – not as the 'nobody' known in the history of humankind under the name of Odysseus. No, in this case of non-mistaken identity, you would be known and unknown as nosoul, noego, nomega, and so on. You may even be regarded as nosuperman, but negative theology is not endless: there are many ends to negations. One of these ends is identity. On the other hand, if you have one, you might be mistaken. (On the other hand, in the other identity.) And if you *are* mistaken, your identity is different from the one you have assumed for some reason or other. Perhaps it is someone else's reason that has assumed this identity, non-identity or all sorts of mistakes. You may assume mistakes if you think it is better to be mistaken than not to be at all. Your identity is mistaken all the time so you become Peter, Paul and even James in the space

of a few hours. You are none of them. You are probably John but you are not sure of what is said about you. All right, nothing is said about you; and if something is said or done or made, it is wrong because once again it is a case of mistaken identity, of mistaken personality. It is a case and you are not a case. You might have some identity or other, but you are not a case, either mistaken or not. But before you decide if you are a case, you must make up your mind as to what all this is or can be and will ever be under the circumstances. But nature alters and now you have other trees and bushes, the ones you have never seen before. And this is not a case of mistaken identity because this nature is different from the one you have known since your childhood. It is another maze, another amazement. Another glory.

You take a walk without giving any thought to doing anything. And then everything starts. You do not know exactly what comes out of the blue, but everything comes out of it and you realise you are helpless. You can neither welcome what comes and salutes you, nor speak at the top of your voice, saying, 'I don't like surprises. Do you mind? I'm trying to have a private conversation here! I'm talking to myself, you know. I often do because I'm a poet. Whenever I'm about to write a poem, I begin talking to myself. And I note down the words I utter. Of course it is my master's voice I hear. If I were you, I'd never interfere between a poet and God.' Instead of leaving you in peace, all these objects and subjects stay in your house and even in your soul. And yet you did not say to them, 'You can stay here if you like.' You said nothing of the sort. A few hours ago you just recited a few of your poems. Nothing doing! So you begin to pray and you pray to your God Who is the best of all the gods you have ever known. And you also pray to other gods who are in their second childhood, which means they are too old to intercede with the authorities on your behalf. But there are no authorities – forget about Kafka and his exegetes. There is only you and you may intercede on your behalf, if you feel like it. All right, you do feel like it. These authorities are yourself. You intercede; you get an answer. You get no answer, which means you are deaf and mute. And even if you are neither deaf nor mute, you do not hear anything; nor do you say this word or any other word. And the word says itself.

A walk, a talk, a knock at the door. It is not fate, for once. Beethoven was wrong: fate never knocks at your door. Why should it? Only four notes knock at your door. They knock and knock and talk to you about death. They say you are on the point of dying and going to another kingdom which is another world. Notes say a lot of things or, according to Stravinsky, they do not say anything. You hear four notes, which have nothing to do with four-letter words, and say you are doomed. Actually you are nooned. People come and say, 'Good afternoon. How are you today? Are you listening to Beethoven's *Fifth*? You are. All right. You seem to like this music. You like music in general. You're a music lover. Do you like Stravinsky?' Perhaps you do not like anybody; and you do not like music, even if it is Mozart you listen to. You do not listen to anything in particular, but you hear this knocking on your door. You do not think about Macbeth because you usually do not think about him or even about Shakespeare's play. But you hear this knocking and you begin to ask yourself all sorts of questions. And these questions do not answer themselves, contrary to what often happens in our world. You ask a question by pushing a button and the question is answered by the machine you resort to. You do not get everything at the push of this button or any other button, as the case may be, but you do get answers to your problems when you trust machines and suchlike. This time you neither push nor pull. And answers do not come. Questions do not come either, but you do not need questions, do you? Actually you do not need anything, either of the sort or just like that. But this

anything comes and you have to deal with it. So you deal with it in this way or another way. And this way – or another way – deals with you. And this way of all flesh and thought is called ‘feedback’. There was a lot of positive feedback which was very encouraging.

Eternal objects, eternal subjects. We say ‘they are’ and they are not or are or be, as the case may be and is often not at all. You play with whatever happens to be at hand and they say life is a play. Holidays, ecologies, landscapes, painters, beauties. They all count and there is nothing else. We meet an old man, a figure in the landscape, and we wonder what this figure does anywhere. It does not do anything here, in here. There is probably no here, no inhere, inanywhere. Meadows, meadows, meadows. A man or a woman stands somewhere and this somewhere counts or counts not. This somewhere does not count eternally and you do not say ‘somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, somewhere’. We say ‘where, where, where, where, where’. We are both happy and clappy. We clap whenever we can do it, that and done. We do done and meadows come into view, into life. This is a meadow; that is a meadow. This is a river; that is a lake. This is no pipe; that is no bird. You are undifferentiated. You cannot differentiate yourself from this and that. So you become a figure in that meadow over there. You are perhaps different from both the figure and the meadow. And you are different from the future, your own future. We are nonentities and entities. And tities perhaps. Perhaps it is better to be perhaps. And then you become haps. And you hap, hap, hap, hap. You hip, you hop. No, no. A meadow. This is a meadow. This is you and I. This is another meadow. There are twenty meadows around us and we count them as long as we can count anything. And we count anything. One anything, two anythings, three meadows, four mountains, five lakes, six trouts, seven Schuberts.

One stage, another one or two. Stages go; so do you. And you do not even know if you are a stage or something. You are your own pilgrim’s progress and if you progress, you do so as a pilgrim and also as a human being. Of course a pilgrim *is* a human being par excellence and you might even be one of the Pilgrims Fathers. If you are, you sailed to North America where you formed Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts, in 1620. It is you who were entrusted with forming and creating something in Massachusetts. You recall the date but you have no idea what you really formed or unformed. You recall some solution and you also know for sure that this solution began to form in your mind. You also remember the fact that your mind had been formed prior to the creation of this solution. But for your mind, no solution would ever visit your head, mind and even body; you know that for sure. And you are sure you know that for sure. Did you have your mind at the time when the aforesaid solution came into your head and tried hard to win your approval? The aforementioned solution might have come on its own and approved everything, by way of compensation. Of course you have no idea what kind of compensation was involved in the process and also in your life, in days of yore. Nor do you have any idea what you where in those days, in those yores. Perhaps you were just a day; or a yore. Or a flower, just a flower. Or you were probably May, the month of May; not necessarily that of Schumann and Heine. You were just the month of May; or just May 1st. Apparently it is the *Fête du Travail*. Well and good. You said to yourself you had to do and make something to celebrate this day and any work that comes your way or any other way. So you picked up a bag, went out and took a walk around the nearest clayey soil. You put a lot of clay into your bag and returned home. You formed the clay into a small bowl, giving it both a shape and a form. And you said to yourself that what you had created was wonderful and you smiled. You sat down and described the Creation in detail.

You are not afraid: your faith protects you from demons and devils. One of them may come at any moment and you are perfectly aware of the danger you run when you stay at home, your doors double-locked. But demons mock both locks and keys: they just walk in and do whatever they feel like doing. And whatever they do or think about, one's soul goes on a long journey and one realises one is damned forever. Tonight you draw a circle in your room and put an armchair in the middle of it. You settle yourself down with a newspaper and wait for a demon to come. You know you are protected by the circle you drew and you count on it, on this fortress of yours. Gogol spoke about it in one of his tales and you admire Gogol for his knowledge of demons and souls. A demon comes and you look at him. It is a he-demon you are dealing with and you say to yourself you will not be afraid of him as long as you are inside the circle you drew on the spur of the moment. The demon takes a couple of steps towards your body and you ask yourself the following question, 'What is the distance between this demon and my soul?' The demon takes another step and you speak to him about your circle. He looks at it and bursts into laughter. For a while, he roars with laughter and you listen to it as if it were a piece of music. Then he takes another step, whereupon you pick up a cross you had put on the floor. You show the cross to the demon and once again he bursts into laughter as he points at a cross that adorns his chest. And he shows you a tin of caviar, saying, 'What else do you need?' 'The Antichrist,' you say to yourself. You have no alternative but to resort to the last weapon. You say to yourself, 'Dear Jesus, You have to help me – You're my last resort.' And you say to the demon, 'After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. Would you mind repeating what I just said?' Next morning you make the following entry in your diary, 'A large worm wriggled in the freshly dug earth.'

One suffers what they call 'the elimination of one's absolute generality of reference'. They call it what they wish, but one continues to suffer. One suffers from one reference, two references; or from their absences. One also suffers the elimination which eliminates something from somewhere. This elimination may also eliminate something from somebody. And this time it is somebody who suffers from this elimination; and many other eliminations, for that matter. One suffers from eliminations and references. One reference refers to one whose number is two. The other reference refers to numbers and none of these numbers refer to human beings. So a lot of humans say, 'These eliminations are none of our concern. Our home is still our castle, and our castle has always been the most beautiful castle in the world. And the world is the best of all worlds. Yet we have no idea what other worlds look like, sound like and so on. We don't even know if they sound the alarm or the absence of it. Perhaps they do something and the sound they produce is the best sound in the world, in the universe, and so on. If it is the best sound, this sound must coincide with our sound, which means that there's only one sound in the universe. And this sound is identical to Adam Kadmon. Anyway, Eve has just gone out with old what-d'you-call-him. You do not call him? Well and good. Let us call him Adam. As we know, there are several Adams. The first one was the first. So he was created out of ashes and also out of God's ribs. And then he was eliminated once and for all. That's why we can achieve our comfortable lives only after years of hard toil. And sometimes we don't achieve them at all. So we lead all sorts of uncomfortable lives despite many years of hard toil. Why? Because we have nothing to do with the oil industry. And every day eliminates something from our lives. We don't mind, actually. But we do mind the elimination

of our absolute generality of reference. We need a reference; two references at least. From our former guardian angel. From our future guardian.'

We have a theory according to which we live happily ever after. The same theory assures us we lived happily even before the event it refers to rather nonchalantly, so we should not regard this event as a turning point. In other words, there are no twists and turns in our history: we have always been happy and often also clappy. But sometimes we wonder if we need empirical evidence to confirm this theory of ours. Of course this theory is sufficiently elegant and explanatory. Happiness is even more elegant than love which may lead one to a dead end and even to death. Happiness, on the other hand, seems to guide us towards eternal life, given that it is eternal itself. Be that as it may, our theory is elegant and beautiful. The beauty we find in it is an incontrovertible proof of its truth and authenticity. At least Keats thought so, which means he was aware of this theory; and yet he died well before the problematical turning point. How are we to determine if a theory is true if it cannot be validated experimentally? It is quite natural to experience a few doubts, when you are told you have always been happy. So we are determined to find out if our theory is true or not. After all, Keats might have been wrong: beauty is not true and vice versa. Scientists talk and write about super-symmetric particles. We do not understand what they mean, but the word 'symmetry' appeals to our sense of beauty all the more justifiably since these particles and whatever they fail to disclose are *super*-symmetric. Anyway, if the upgraded collider discovers them, it will be an astonishing triumph of modern physics. But what about our lives and *their* triumphs? What about our defeats and humiliations? What should we upgrade? What should we downgrade? Overrate? Underrate?

Tolstoy and Swift seem to maintain that horses are far superior to humans. If you had an opportunity to talk to their horses, you might hear the following remark, 'You're a human, so you're a machine.' Of course you are entitled to say that any horse is more akin to our machines than humans: they obey the latter's orders. In this respect they are not different from machines that are full of buttons and levers. You touch them and everything starts moving and getting under way. Of course you cannot expect to get everything you need at the push of a button. This idiom also concerns your relationship with machines. You push the right button but nothing happens; or, worse still, everything goes wrong. Suppose you minimise the consequences of your action by calling it an 'incident', not an 'accident'. Yet there are fears that the aforementioned incident may be a trigger for further violence in the world. Any machine is likely to break down without a warning and some of them go crazy as if determined to identify with humans. That is why our science fiction often depicts automatons that go out of control. Our motorcars skid and go out of control, crashing into oncoming trucks. Our robots betray us during our space odysseys and we fly off into the heart of darkness. And what about horses? Some of them are timid and are easily frightened by traffic. They break into a gallop and we find ourselves on the Russian steppes, on the grass, our legs and arms broken forever. Tolstoy had such an accident in the course of his otherwise enjoyable ride. Humans are likewise easily frightened by traffic. But even at the sound of gunfire they do not break into a gallop.

You open a history book and read the following: 'That also contributes to the growth of the implacable power struggle – and the war of images going with it – to which the Grands give themselves over with the wars of religion in the offing.' You do not need to know what exactly contributes to the struggle for life that may also be called either a power struggle or a will-to-power struggle. Why? Because anything can contribute to it: a bout of insanity,

a drinking bout. Just about any bout you can think of – a bout of flu over Christmas, for instance. You are looking forward to gifts and colours, fairy lights and smiles. All of a sudden, you find yourself in bed and no one seems to be eager to kiss you on your cheeks, let alone on your mouth. Your bugs, microbes and viruses keep everyone at bay as if neither your brothers nor your sisters were among the guests. They all sing, dance and fall in love. As for *your* leisure activities, they are limited to your bed and to an unprecedented exercise of your power. You work on it in stages as is habitually done by both yogis and the disciples of Loyola. First you become aware of your will to power which has little in common with your love for chocolate. When you ask your grandma for a piece of chocolate, your will does not seem to be ambitious enough to go beyond your grandma's generosity and a box of chocolates you see in her lap. But if your grandma suggests you should rather eat some porridge, you get an irresistible urge to kill your grandma and even your mummy who is your grandma's daughter. Moreover, you wish to dispose of all those who bar your way to bars of chocolate and, generally speaking, to all those shops where one can find dark chocolate, milk chocolate, bittersweet chocolate, semisweet chocolate. But you are down with flu and therefore cannot do anything. You have a lot of will but your power provides no outlet for it because your power is non-existent. So you begin to curse God.

I wish I could live in the past or in the future. Not in the present, not in the present. That is what one is likely to hear from time to time. Of course there are people who stick to their guns and their times. Not to their spaces, though: they travel a lot and that is why they worship this day and age. They know that in other days and ages there were only carriages and horses; and one-horse towns. Today we have 30,000,000-car cities and that explains, if only in part, why they prefer this age and not days of yore. And some of these cities enable you to enjoy both war and peace. Take Tokyo, for instance. A few days ago, the British lifestyle magazine *Monocle* declared that Tokyo is the most liveable city in the world. Tokyo earned high marks for its 'paradox of heart-stopping size and concurrent feeling of peace and quiet'. And what would you have done in Tokyo in the wake of the Second World War? Or two centuries ago? Its name was different; everything was different. And what about geishas? Can't you have them today? All you need is a million dollars that you are supposed to spend on their bodies, dances and songs. And you need another million for a dozen kimonos. And you also have to buy them one of those instruments you have seen in Ozu's movies. And if you do not have all these millions and billions, you just stay at home and watch the movies, films and documentaries. You live in several times at once; and in several spaces into the bargain. Your home, alias your castle in Scotland, is located in London; and you enjoy both peace and quiet. What is more, your heart never stops. Instead, it goes pip-a-pap or pip-a-pup. Will you be able to watch Ozu's films in the 23rd century?

You upend the chessboard halfway through the game because you are losing. Yet you continue to lose, even though you do not really know what you are losing, and how, and why: you have not done anything wrong ever since you were born. So you are supposed to gain a lot of upper hands instead of losing something continuously. As someone says in a Russian fairy tale, 'Go to where I don't know and get what I've no idea of.' Sure enough, you have no idea what you have been losing since your birth and the answer you find in many philosophical works does not satisfy you in the least. Those works say to you that, from the moment of conception, you have been losing life. Actually, during that period of your life, you had no life, strictly speaking; at least you were not a human being yet. Of course any foetus is a human being to some extent and that is why we speak about the protection of the

unborn child. We call him or her a child; yet he or she is just a foetus. And at the moment of conception you do not even know your foetus's sex in spite of the tests, renowned for their perspicacity. And some women do not even regard their foetuses as part of nature. They water their flowers but they are determined to get rid of those 'things' without the slightest hesitation. It is true that some women choose to have an abortion rather than care for a severely disabled child. But other women have an abortion even if they are assured by a panel of doctors that no disabled children are ensconced inside them. On the contrary, the renowned tests seem to prove that their wombs are full of life, of eternal life. Anyway, this life will live to be a hundred. That is what these women hear every day. But they do not hear it every night, for only our guilty conscience speaks to us in the course of our sleepless nights. All over the world, children are eager to find a mother, a father – any protection they can think of. The matter stands differently with you because you are a born loser. In your case, it is better not to be born. Now it is too late, alas. Some poets compare our history to a game of chess played by the gods; and our world to a chessboard. If it were true, you would upend this chessboard without the slightest hesitation. That would be your first and last victory.

Beauty is obviously not the kind of thing we meet with in experience. But there are situations which show us a woman whose appearance might make us think about this thing and word. We say to ourselves, 'This woman is beautiful' and, to some extent, we are right of course; but the idea we hit upon in the heat of the moment habitually turns out to be fraught with consequences. 'She'll be my wife.' We court this woman, marry her, she betrays us and we divorce her after two years of a fierce struggle as a result of which our company goes bankrupt and will soon be put into the hands of the receivers. This woman is an angel – that is what we say to ourselves upon meeting her for the first time. And all angels are beautiful and kind. It does not really matter whether we first think of her beauty or angelic personality. What counts is our thought or the impression we get as we look at her for the first time. And we get the same feeling when we look at her for the second time: you cannot marry a woman – or a man, for that matter – in the twinkling of an eye or even overnight. So this state of mind keeps us company for some time and in the course of this period we are convinced that the woman we are about to marry is beautiful, kind and an angel incarnate. And we are right to some extent, to a degree, but all this happens within the framework of our experience. And our experience is based upon the situations we have got involved in since our birth. For instance, the woman's smile reminds us of our mother, of how she treated us as she bent over our cradle. But the woman in question is not our mother and our cradle is even further from our body than our mother's tombstone. That is how we might have reflected upon our impression and the situation we got involved in that night. 'Love at first sight', they call it. The point is we did not reflect upon it at the right moment – neither that night nor the night after. Where was our mind?

You come up with the idea of dividing the world in half, for evil and good cannot live together. You paint two pictures of the world: black and white. Yes, the world is in black and white like old newsreels, old films. Old people are white; then they become black and their relatives put them in coffins. Black and white. Do you think these two colours match? They do not: some of human beings are bad, others good. Those who are bad may be called non-beings or non-humans, which amounts to the same non-thing. But not to nothing, alas: these baddies do a lot of harm. We would not mind if they limited their exertions to harming a few hairs on our heads. They do not: our hairs do not appeal to their sense of beauty. They are more sensitive to the hair of the Earth, to wit: trees,

forests, foliage. Deforestation is destroying large areas of tropical rain forest. They are responsible for this deforestation. They might think our Mother Earth would be more beautiful if she grew bald. What do we do in response to this barbarism, to this commercialism? We say to our children, 'Each of you should plant a tree. And you should remember that every tree is a tree of life. And the absence of trees is death.' The children plant their trees and look at them. They know they are goodies, not arch-baddies. That is why they water their trees and even the grass that surrounds them. And they water all those birds that fly in the neighbourhood. And even butterflies do not escape the generosity of their watering cans. They also water the Earth and their own heads. And their hair grows alongside the trees. The trees are black; the hair white. For once, these colours match somehow. Nuclear winter.

There are spectators and some of them do not love wine, contrary to what might be assumed upon leafing through the well-known magazine *Wine Spectator*. Some of the spectators we are talking about are beer spectators or whisky spectators. What matters, however, is their attitude towards our life which they reduce to the passive contemplation of an eternal and immutable reality. If you say, 'There's nothing permanent in our world,' they point to one point which, according to them, is the nexus of the universe. World, universe, Earth. You are fed up with these notions and motions. They move outside your head and you ask them to remain where they are. 'Don't bother me any longer with your interrogations, hypotheses, notions and nonsense.' Of course you know you cannot restrict yourself to the role of a spectator unless you do not care about the universe and have no wish to learn anything about it. All right, you are a passive spectator of reality, but you have a lot of doubts about its eternity and immutability. You even have some doubts about its whereabouts. What is reality? You look around you and see a point. After a while, you realise this point represents and even symbolises a glass of whisky. You translate it from English into French, from a sign into a modicum of truth. You say to yourself, 'In whisky *veritas*.' In the twinkling of an eye, you become active and empty this point or rather that glass. Then you find another point of interest – the bottle itself. You grasp the bottle and ask yourself the following question, 'Would you like me to pour you some more whisky?' Without waiting for an answer, you do what your body insists upon and once again you empty the full sign that turns into an empty symbol. What kind of symbol are you facing? The symbol of the universe; the point where all aspects and elements of life embrace fraternally. Borges calls it 'Aleph'; you call it 'Leph', which means 'lion' in Russian. Nevertheless, Borges calls it 'Tiger'. Now you see two points and neither of them is a tiger or a lion. One of them is a swan and the other Saint-Saëns.

Yes, we used to contemplate both trees and rivers because, until recently, we were powerless. Power was only in our thoughts, not in our deeds. And not everything is in the mind, whatever they say; something must be in the body. It is true that inside our thoughts we looked like the gods in whose images we had been created, according to our theories, doctrines and so on. And then we realised these gods were old and decrepit. Of course they could control both thunderbolts and rains, but is that enough? That is the question we used to ask ourselves every other day. And our answer could not be different from the word 'no' and its ramifications. Even *we* were superior to our gods, and no one needs inferior gods and inferior races, for there are no pagans, no racists in our midst. In the long run we came to the conclusion we were *superior* beings. Superior to whom, to what? To the gods we had already assassinated. We crucified some of them and shot the others. Then we decided that the gods were dead, and we were right for once. And we said to ourselves, 'We'd better be right for twice. The oftener we are right, the better.'

We looked at the world and thought the following thought, 'This is clearly the work of a superior artist.' And we realised we had nothing to do with the creation of this world. Had it been up to us, we would not have created anything. We would have remained in our bedrooms, asleep forever. Alas, we had lost not only our gods, but also our beds. We were facing the world and decided to create something out of nothing. We created the artist who had created the world. We created a sculpture and put it in the middle of our tent. Then we realised we needed a body, not a thing: *somebody*, not *something*. Why? Because we wished to *modify* nature that did not seem to suit our purposes – instead of *contemplating* it both passively and stupidly. We created the Almighty in our image: we had no other superior images at hand. First we called Him 'Mighty', but then we realised the mighty might fall. 'How sad,' we said to ourselves. And we added 'Al' to our 'Mighty'. Whenever we feel insecure, however, we add another 'Al' to our 'Mighty'. Now He has as many as 13 Als.

You are a born loner. Freud tries to persuade us that even in our mother's womb we know a lot about our sex; at least our unconscious does. But at that stage of our life, our unconscious does not reveal to us anything about our sex and, generally speaking, about any aspect of life. There are no outbursts of ego or underego unless you count a few outbursts of anger as an early manifestation of your ego that you mistakenly regard as your superego. Your ego is more or less asleep, but your superego dominates this sleepiness, shouting at the top of its voice and crying its fill. Anyway, you have not read Freud, not yet, so you do not know much about egos, unders, its and supers. (But you know something about spiders.) In your childhood you were sociable and your love for humanity knew no bounds. Your aunts stroked your buttocks and your cheeks; so did your mother and father, needless to say. Even your uncle stroked you; and yet your uncle was a peevish old man. As your body matured, however, both your relatives and utter strangers would leave you stranded, whenever they had an opportunity to do so easily, without enduring your scenes and harangues. It is little wonder that now you are used to strapping on a virtual reality headset and logging on to the Internet. Almost every day you watch a number of films with a bunch of strangers. Their avatars all sit in the seats of a virtual cinema, staring at a screen and at you. You are a screen yourself and they watch you as if you were also a film, a cowboy film. You are a boy; and you are also a cow. You are grazing in the meadow and suckling your calf. You have a family now. No uncles, no aunts; just a little boy.

You have something on and you do not know what it is because you do not think in terms of clothing when you say you do not know what you are wearing. You have a neatly folded handkerchief in your jacket pocket. A week ago you purchased a new pair of trousers to go with this jacket. You touch your right knee and realise you are wearing this pair of trousers now. And you touch your left knee to make sure you did not make a mistake when you told yourself this pair of trousers was on. Yes, you were right: you *are* wearing the new pair of trousers and so you can walk up and down your street without being arrested and subjected to torture. But what about your face? Are you wearing a pair of glasses? You touch your face and realise you are wearing a headset you must have put on in the morning or in the evening. Why did you put it on? Aren't you happy within our real reality? You put it on because you were afraid of your fellow citizens. If someone has a headset on and you do not, it is your fault if you get punched, kicked and killed. You do not wish to be killed, and if you do wish to join Socrates and others, you had rather do it on your own, killing yourself with poison or a pistol. You have no wish to be killed by an avatar. So you are wearing a headset to protect yourself from others. God has never worn a headset; yet He can kill you in no time at all, at the earliest opportunity. Be that as it may, you do not think about God as you walk up

and down your street and many other streets and boulevards. The longer you walk, the more you lose track of where pillars and pillars of the community are and so you cannot help bumping into backs, chests, palaces and churches. And occasionally you get punched on the nose in retaliation for your erratic manner of walking. Yet you are reluctant to take your headset off, even when you are at home. Yesterday you got a bruise where you bumped your leg against the corner of the table. This morning you jumped out of the window.

Is it amazing? Is it true? We do not have much time for truth: it is as inaccessible as any god, be it our Christian God or Zeus. Athena paid us a few visits during her short stay on Earth, but that does not really matter and we are deprived of both Athena and Athens. At least we do not see the city where Plato and Aristotle taught us their truths, their lives, their absence of knowledge. And today we read that just a few weeks before a crucial debt payment comes due, weekend talks between Greece and its European creditors broke down as both sides refused to soften their long-held bargaining positions. We know that Greece owes us a lot of money. And we owe to Greece our knowledge of the world; at least our thirst for this knowledge. (Let us discard the East for the sake of argument.) But what talks are they talking about? We know *what* they are talking about: about money, as usual. And what about Aristotle and Plato? The latter pointed to heaven, the former to the Earth. Nor did *they* soften their positions. For months, European creditors have been pushing the leftist government in Athens to back down from some of its demands to ease the terms of its giant bailout programme. Aristotle might have said a lot to this effect, but Plato's Republic was situated beyond the clouds and his guardians lied as much as today's Greek government. At least Plato had a lot of silver linings within his reach. Today's clouds have no silver linings: neither the creditors nor the debtors have any money in their purses. And if you have no money, you just go and teach whatever you have to teach to whoever you can reach. You say that virtue is happiness; and patience is a virtue. So any virtue is both patience and happiness. European creditors' patience is long-lasting. But happiness is short-lived because Socrates is a man.

AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS

1

The sentence 'life exists' does not affirm the existence of life. It just points out that someone thinks that life exists and this someone may be mistaken. He or she has just fallen in love or won the lottery. Winning the lottery has set them up for life – all those who have won the lottery. And what about love? When you ask questions about this feeling, everybody says, 'It's a different kettle of fish.' Somehow love is associated in our mind with suicide and murder. But if you fall in love, for a while you believe that life exists and that life is as beautiful as the creature you have fallen in love with. Then this creature grows old and you realise that life is not beautiful at all. Life is just old, as old as life. You watch a documentary on life and you are told that life began well before the birth of Adam. And some maintain it goes far beyond the Big Bang. According to these scientists, there was a series of small bangs before the Big One. And if you voice your doubts, they talk to you about the small gods. 'Don't they come before the Big One?' they ask. You say the Big God was never born; nor was eternity, in your opinion. 'Nor were *you* born,' they answer. 'You're just eternal nonentities.' But if you say, 'Life does not exist,' you merely deny that life exists. Yet you can represent it to yourself as an idea. If you judge an object – 'life' in this particular instance – you affirm or deny it. But, in a way, you go beyond your judgement, for you cannot help dealing with a sort of representation. You represent life and even the world which is nothing at all outside your representation,

your exaltation. Well, you merely need an object, a subject – something or somebody you can put in front of you. And then you put it all behind you.

2

You deny that love exists. Your act of denial is real enough, for you are sticking to your guns. If someone says to you, ‘Don’t confuse love with life,’ you say they amount to the same thing. And if someone says, ‘Love will continue its existence even if life dies once and for all,’ you answer that everything has died already. You might even go so far as to maintain that nothing has ever existed, not even in one’s dreams. Your refutation of life and its components may be likened to the fire that spreads very rapidly because of the strong wind. In the long run your act of denial fulfils its purpose and becomes a *real* act. And how could a real act have an unreal content? You exist; so does your denial. Both you and your denial are real. How could unreal contents have any reality? This unreal content is in front of you. It is the love you experienced some months ago. This is quite unreal now. It is so unreal you wonder if it had ever been born. The unreality of your love is obvious, and it grows more and more obvious as the object of your love continues to recede into the distance. The painful memories have gradually receded in your mind, as they say. It is much more complex than all that and your predicament has nothing in common with a tear-jerker. But you always manage to cut through the complex theory and get at the facts. What *are* the facts? You deny the existence of love, life and so on. You may go on for hours and hours if no one stops you. No one does; so you go on. You deny the existence of the Moon and Venus. You also deny the existence of Venus flytrap. Why doesn’t this plant exist? Because it feeds on insects, but there are no more insects. And if there were some flies near the Earth, this plant would not be able to catch them, for it has no leaves. You can no longer represent either love or any beloved. You do represent this plant that used to catch a lot of insects by quickly closing its petals when its surface was touched. The insects could not escape.

The number ‘four’ does not exist; yet you speak of it quite often. You have four friends, four desires and four solutions to any problem. (And none of them fits, needless to say.) In passing you mention the four winds and the four corners of the Earth. There is only one wind but it is so strong you are really swept off your feet. This time you are not in love, however. You are lying like a dead leaf and the wind continues to drag you from one continent to another, from the Earth to the Moon. Then the second wind joins in and you embark upon an interstellar journey. But the number two does not exist. You are carried down the universe and up the cosmos by two winds. Where are they? You are not carried along, up and down by sheer numbers because there is no such thing as numbers. There are only winds and your arms flap in these winds; and in other winds as well. Your arms, legs and ideas flap and you count what is left of your life. Three stars, five stars. There are no hotels, no restaurants. You just count stars. Yet since no number has ever been found anywhere, there is only one star: one-star hotel, one-star restaurant. You should not forget, however, that the number ‘one’ cannot be found either. Nor has it ever been lost. It just does not exist. Nor do restaurants and hotels. And what about you? Of course you are number one and you do not care whether this number exists or not. You just travel from one star to another, and whenever you lie on your back and refuse to budge, you contemplate a starry sky. No one counts the stars, for none of us can count them. So we lie on our backs and listen to the winds that continue to sweep a number of dead leaves from here to there and everywhere. There are no leaves, no winds. A number of dead thoughts go through your mind and you have no idea how many of them have already come and gone forever. Zero perhaps. But ‘zero’ is also a number.

You are outside of being. What being are they talking about? Sometimes they talk; sometimes they do not. Their talk is also a being; yet they talk nonsense all the time. Nonsense is a thing, a being, a non-being. What counts is the word and the notion 'being' you attach to nonsense, absurdity and the tragedy of life. Why not disregard them altogether? Yesterday your guru told you to disregard everything you had learnt so far and start again. So you start again and find another kind of nonsense. But the tragedy is always the same as if there were only *King Lear* in the world. No *Hamlet*, no *Macbeth* can you watch from where you are sitting, or lying, or dying. There is only one old man who goes mad before your very eyes. His daughters betray him; so do his sons and sons-in-law. A lot of laws betray him as well and he jumps off a cliff, hoping to end his life. Both the cliff and death betray him in the process and he goes on living because the show must go on. A crowd congregates around the entrance to the theatre, hoping to catch a glimpse of the stars of the show. There is only one star and this star goes on falling down from the cliff. Meanwhile, a few daughters come onto the stage, but they are no stars; they are just traitors. They push the old man towards the cliff and he falls once again. He does not die because they do not want him to vanish from the surface of the Earth. They like playing with him round the clock and obediently the clock goes on. The show goes round in circles. So do the circles engaged in the show. They go round in circles; they go round other circles. And a roundabout goes round a number of swings.

You believe whatever they say about your nature, especially if you talk to so-called gurus. They make you sit down and you are asked to imitate a flower, a bird or even an insect. And if you cannot do it because you suffer from rheumatism, they say you are a machine and therefore belong to the lowest common denominator. This denominator is so common they cannot distinguish you from other human beings. They call you 'Paul'; and yet you have been Peter ever since your childhood. And then they say you are 'John' and you have to answer them, otherwise you do not get anything: neither a morsel of food nor an English lesson. They tell you that you are even worse than an undeveloped robot. You ask these gurus what they mean by the adjective 'undeveloped' as applied to robots, and they say an undeveloped robot can drive a car but cannot get out of it. So you get into a car, drive for a while and then get out of it, proving that you are better than an undeveloped robot. Well and good. They no longer say anything, but their grimaces suggest you are a *developed* robot now. In their learned opinion, an authentic human being does not drive cars, steering clear of technology and accidents. So you sit and lie on the floor. Now you are an insect; now a bird. You do not really know what you are and you are told you are not yet 'who'. Over and over again, you ask yourself the following question, 'Why should I become a human being?' You are already a being and consequently come under the Department of Health and Safety. You are safe and healthy. What does it matter who or what you are? If you are a butterfly, let them catch you, which can be easily done since you seldom if ever leave the floor. You are caught and put on a table. Shortly afterwards you are hung in a museum, on one of its walls. There is nothing healthier and safer than the life of an exhibit. Anyway, no one is tempted to steal you: you are neither a rare nor a beautiful butterfly.

A doctor shows you a bottle and says, 'This detergent is designed to evoke the fresh smell of summer meadows.' He goes on with his story, saying that whatever you see or hear should evoke something in this or that part of your body. 'But let us talk about your brain for a change,' he adds with a meaningful smile. 'Any word I utter should set your brain in motion. Even if I talk to you about colours, you should produce a mental image. Blue. What's

this image of yours?’ ‘Pie in the sky.’ ‘Red.’ ‘Hammer and sickle.’ ‘Gold.’ ‘Alchemy.’ ‘Silver.’ ‘Dinner, wine.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Cutlery, you know.’ ‘Black.’ ‘Death.’ ‘White.’ ‘Truce. Truth.’ And the doctor tries to explain there is no such thing as truth. Of course philosophers often speak of it, but whatever they say is actually related to facts, not to eternal truth, contrary to what they affirm. He reminds you of Descartes’ ‘clarity and distinctness’ and says that whatever you say should be supported by evidence, otherwise your truths – especially eternal ones – might not be regarded as factual. ‘There’s abundant evidence that cars have a harmful effect on the environment – God’s honest truth,’ the doctor points out. He adds, however, that even this truth is not really truthful because the evidence he touched upon only consists of further facts. ‘And how do you recognize that they are facts?’ he asks you. ‘This regress can be avoided only if certain of our judgements carry their own “evidence” with them. Do you think my judgement carries *anything* with it?’ You no longer answer his questions. Let him think whatever he wants. You know the colour white is used to denote reconciliation, acceptance. Your acceptance of death and suffering. *Amor fati*. At least you see this colour as you listen to the last part of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, to the second movement of his *Sonata in C Minor*, op. 111.

Dear Makua,

I was happy to meet you at the Castle of Beaux-Arts. You are as beautiful as ever and once again I recalled our first meeting when I realised I knew nothing about beauty or what is pompously called ‘eternal femininity’. At least that is what Goethe said at the end of *Faust. Ewig-Weibliche*. Yet again, all over again. Well, you are eternally beautiful – you will be beautiful in fifty years’ time – and I admired your beauty throughout the ceremony that took place at the end of the competition which had been rather disappointing. But there is harmony in our world and that is why this world of ours has not yet collapsed in spite of our misfortunes and the tragedies we may witness on TV, on the Internet and in everyday life. So I admired your beauty, every movement of yours: the way you walked to the table and how you saluted the laureates, your hair moving to and fro most gracefully. Your presence made up for all their deficiencies. And what about *my* deficiencies? You must have noticed my clumsiness, my lack of courage; my nothingness, so to speak. Sometimes one realises one is nothing because one is not part of everything or even anything. This any-everything is motionless and you go somewhere. I probably go to Hell without knowing it. Someone might have sent me to Hell some time ago and I go, go, go, go. I ago, ago, ago, ago, ago. If you hear a voice and do not see anyone, you think this voice comes from heaven. Where else can it come from? From your writing desk? From your rug? From a large mug of coffee? There are heavenly armies, battalions and sharpshooters. They shoot and you hear voices. And then you die of course, but you do that after hearing a few voices. Why don’t you call me, my dear Makua? Am I so repulsive? I certainly am. What does it matter? Everybody is repulsive except you and your face, your shoulder blades. The rest can be found in the Castle of Ugly-Arts. Arts are ugly; only life is beautiful. Life is ugly; only you are beautiful. For the sake of your beauty I am prepared to bear the ugliness of life, my own ugliness. And ugliness of eternal recurrence. Again, once again, yet again, all over again.

At some point I thought I had lost everything. Why do I use these words so often? Everything, nothing. They do not mean anything because there is a window beyond which some cars are parked. They have been parked beyond this window from late afternoon and I can see drops of rain on their roofs and bonnets. But there are no drops on their boots, and I wonder why I am allowed to contemplate this phenomenon which unveils the existence of a

parallel world where it has not rained for three weeks. This world is situated somewhere in the South where the rainy season is due only in a month's time or even in a few years. One never knows what can happen in another world because one has no idea what happens in a nearby village, let alone in parallel and perpendicular worlds. Something must happen there all the time, otherwise life would be unable to come to the fore. And if it does not come to the fore, it recedes into the distance and finally grows invisible. What do you need an invisible life for? What about your window-shopping, for instance? No shops, no windows, nothing to look at. What do you need such a life for? And what if you can *touch* this life? You touch it and say to yourself you touch a pair of breasts. And the breasts you touch are very beautiful; at least they are beautiful within your imagination that does all it can to make you visualise these breasts and their beauty. After a while, you find a malignant tumour in one of these breasts. And then you find a malignant tumour in the other breast too. In our world, in this day and age, one in twelve women is likely to develop breast cancer. But in the invisible world you are dealing with every woman develops breast cancer. So you go to another invisible world and realise that, in the world you have come to, there are only silicone breast implants.

You babble, babble, babble. You are a toil but there is no trouble, not for the moment. One keeps you company; you keep one company. Sadly, your feelings for one are not reciprocated. Gladly, one's feelings for you *are* reciprocated. What can be said about reciprocity and non-reciprocity? You give each other help and advantages; you give each other non-help and disadvantages. What is all this about? You do not talk about life in general because you should not be too general. You just wish for a life you can call your own. An ordinary life with someone by your side; a companion in misfortune and fortune. You might share some views and then you utter the expression 'share and share alike', and from that moment on, everything goes wrong. You are not alike; you are not even equal. You are far more intelligent than the one with whom you share your leisure hours. But you do not share them alike: you give him or her only a few moments of your leisure that lasts for hours and hours. And then you realise it is likely to last for centuries. With whom could you share these centuries? And how could you share them alike? Nothing is alike either in this century or in the next one. The twins look alike, but they differ in temperament; the same goes for centuries to come. They are all alike on account of time; and they are different. Napoleon is away; so is Plato. Do we need Napoleon? We need another century, another future, another struggle for life. You pick up a flower and eat it. The flower dies; you go on living because you have eaten the flower.

You feel increasingly dissatisfied with your life as you approach middle age. What is more, you are also dissatisfied with your work and yourself; your brain in particular. So you tell your doctor, 'I'm a congenital idiot, you know.' The doctor explains to you that the word 'idiot' is out of fashion because it is offensive and usually humiliates those to whom it is applied by the light-hearted. You agree with the doctor but point out that you are not looking for the right word because you are neither a writer nor Flaubert. You just yearn for a cure because you are not likely to hold out much longer under this sort of bombardment. 'What bombardment?' asks your doctor, and you say you are constantly bombarded by your own stupid ideas and false conclusions. And you talk to him about chromosomes. You say you are sure your problems stem from chromosomal abnormalities or defects. You go so far as to single out Chromosome 21 and ask the doctor to remove it. But you add you are reluctant to die under the knife so the doctor should accomplish his task by means of laser surgery. 'The tube which carries the laser is introduced into the brain through a small cut in the head,' you point out. The doctor refuses point-blank, arguing

you may die under the laser beam too. So you talk to him about miracle genes, as you call them. According to you, your defective chromosome can be replaced by one of those genes. You suggest that your doctor use Shakespeare's brain for the purpose. The doctor objects to your proposal on ethical grounds: after all, you are neither a writer, nor a playwright, nor a poet. Besides, Shakespeare's genes are not available any longer. After much-soul searching, the doctor says, 'I can switch this chromosome off, if you wish.' 'I've always been afraid of the dark,' you say to him.

And it is not worth our while talking about the word that denotes 'life'. Actually, there are many words that denote it; and yet they do not say anything about life and we know they do not say anything either about life or anything else. They do not say anything about a glass of wine because you have to drink it to understand what it means. And even after drinking it you do not understand what it means because it means something else. And something else means something else, and so on and even so forth, which is unpleasant and even unthinkable to some extent. There is a glass of wine in front of you, on the table at which you are sitting. Is there anything else in the world? Certainly not. Of course there are Bach, Mozart and Wagner. But where are they? Nowhere. If you do not put on a recording of *Parsifal*, Wagner will never turn up. Why should he? Let bygones be bygones; the past is nowhere, not even in history books. There is only the glass of wine you see in front of you. You can touch it of course; you can drink it too. You do drink it and finish the bottle. What remains is of no importance – not because you are drunk; you are not. But the word 'importance' is wrong and you should not utter it too often, even if your life depends on it. What *does* your life depend on? Stop talking about your life. People often talk about life and death. They say that this or that is a matter of life and death and resurrection and rising from tombs. Nothing is the matter. There is no matter as such: no atoms, no molecules. There are only bubbles and you can blow them in your garden or elsewhere. You watched as, one by one, the bubbles popped. Did you? Did you?

Time appears to us as it disappears from the spot where we stand or sit or lie or try to fall asleep. Time appears and disappears. Why should we pay so much attention to it? What is time after all? Only Saint Augustine was capable of bothering God with such questions which are not questions at all. Indeed, you just have to wake up and realise you are no longer in the kingdom of Morpheus. At once you feel time, even if you think about your toothbrush, bath and bath salts. The time you feel should not necessarily remind you of your youth and some time of happiness or other. If you took the trouble to recall every happy moment you have lived through since your birth, you would get stuck in time, duration and a series of associations. You have no time for time or happiness – all the more justifiably since all these moments of happiness are illusory and therefore do not mean anything. And some affirm we are happy only if we do not feel anything: either happiness or unhappiness. And others pretend we cannot be happy if our life has meaning. Any meaning is bound to reveal its meaningless sides as soon as our feeling of intoxication wears off. For a moment or two we become clear-headed and realise that life is meaningless, that happiness is just a word or four words, for instance, 'You are my happiness.' Or four letters. Of course, in those moments of sobriety, we curse whatever and whoever we can curse. And we can curse both everybody and everything. It is better, therefore, to say to ourselves that nothing has any meaning, for life is independent of our thoughts which cannot leave the world alone. We always talk about the world, the universe, but what we see and hear hardly amounts to a fraction of them. The same goes for life and our perception of it. Although sexual and

violent crimes have increased by 10%, they remain only a tiny fraction of the total number of crimes committed each year.

You recall one year of your life and ask yourself, 'What was so remarkable within those 12 months?' You recall one leg and you wonder why you cannot recall the other. Obviously the leg you do recall belongs to a woman with whom you were in love. And this woman was neither one-armed nor one-legged. Yet you recall neither her second leg nor her arms. What does that mean? It means nothing. It just means that only one of her legs got stuck in your memory. If you go on looking for the solution to this enigma, you will not find her second leg; but you may lose the one you keep in your memory. It is a sort of keepsake, and yet this woman did not give you this leg of hers. Actually she did not give you anything, as far as you can remember. On the other hand, you remember what she stole from you as she left you for good. 'She's gone and this time it's for good,' you said to yourself, but you do not remember these words of yours. There is only one hand in your memory of that year – her theft; you do not even remember your reaction to it. On the one hand, you remember one of her legs; on the other, you think of her theft. Luckily for you, there are only two hands in this analysis of your predicament. You do not say to yourself, 'On the third hand, I don't remember the Velasquez exhibition in Brussels.' You do not even recall this fact, let alone its contents. Leg, theft, leg, theft. On the one hand, on the other. And suddenly you say to yourself, 'After her departure I watched a flock of birds fly over the field.' And you see the flock in question. It is true you do not recall the field over which they flew, but you utter the word 'field'; and the birds fly over the word. On the one hand, one of her legs was beautiful; on the other, she was a slut. On the third hand, you can find solace in birds and in the word 'field'. And in Van Gogh.

You are in Siberia. You are a citizen of this vast territory and you are somehow proud of it. You are proud of both this territory and your own pride. Everybody speaks about your region, your motherland. They say, 'They'll send you to Siberia.' But few people are sent to Siberia nowadays because no one actually deserves to live there, with the exception of the Siberians. A lot of people hate living in such an isolated place and long to get back to civilisation. You do not. You have everything one needs: nature, fresh air and access to the Internet. It is true that you have a few problems. For instance, you grasp a stick when you feel like emptying your body of urine or solid waste. You hold this stick in your hand during the entire ritual, otherwise you would be unable to protect your body from wolves. Now and then you wield it, even if there are no wolves in sight. So you grow sad when the Internet talks to you about Japanese high-tech toilets whose seat warmers and pinpoint bidet jets amaze many Europeans and Asians, not only the Siberians. You grow even sadder when you learn that by improving comfort, cleanliness and safety, the quality of work and leisure can improve dramatically. But then you breathe the Siberian air, look at the trees you have known since your babyhood and your happiness comes back to you. Sometimes you get the feeling you are just a tree growing in your native soil. You think about your roots and grow even happier; your confidence cannot be shaken now. And yet a part of your happiness and self-confidence deserts you when you learn about how multimillionaires spend their time in the vale of tears. 'While the wealthy of the past travelled mainly for leisure and climate – the ocean breezes of New England in the summer and the sunny golf greens of Palm Beach in winter – today's rich crisscross the globe almost monthly in search of access, entertainment and intellectual status. Travelling in flocks of private G5 and Citation jets –' You switch the computer off, go out and look at the trees.

You look out of the window and realise that nature is impure – even if it is pure from an ecological point of view. You are aware that the once-azure skies of Athens have been ruined by atmospheric pollution, but you are not in Athens. Actually you have never been to Athens and you regret it. You regret it all the more acutely since, but for Athens, Western philosophy would not have been born. It is true that Plato and Aristotle saw the azure skies that have been ruined by car exhaust and other horrors of our civilisation. And yet you would not mind going to Athens for a couple of weeks. Today, however, you must stay where you are, but no one prevents you from enjoying yourself outdoors, in some park or other; or just in the streets and courtyards where so many beautiful representatives of human species moon around, talk and play hotchpotch. You limit your participation in the city life to the panorama offered by your window. And you say to yourself that both this panorama and nature in general are impure – not on account of pollution, though. You think that even the once-azure skies of Athens were impure too, for all their brightness and blueness. Only mathematics is pure, you say to yourself. And you add that Plato was aware of it, otherwise he would never have come up with the idea of creating ideas and their ideal world independent of contingent empirical facts. But you cannot live with mathematics only. Of course you can if you value your job above your family. The point is you live alone for the moment and you have no wish to marry and beget a lot of children. But what about love? Sure enough, you love mathematics, but you cannot caress its body in your bed or elsewhere. Of course our world has many varieties of bodies and you enjoy most of them: the body of this or that book, for instance. And you may also enjoy the notes at the end of the book. You know that the RSPCA is a body working for animal welfare and you respect this body too, for you love animals. Yet you never touch them because they are also impure. Only your pure theories are pure and simple. ‘Nature is impure’ is one of them.

Dear Makua,

Thank you for your email. I realise that, after what you have gone through over the last ten years, you fear any man whose emails sound ambiguous. Well, let there be no mistake about my intentions and my attitude towards our so-called liaison. I have had a number of liaisons in my life and the same number of women – I am a heterosexual man – have stroked my face and the rest of my body in all the nooks and crannies of my house. But you are not of their number, I must admit, and you know it even better than I do. I am not in the habit of boasting about non-existent triumphs because there are enough triumphs in my life about which I might rightfully boast, if I were inclined to boast about anything. I am not, I am happy to say and, as you certainly know, in spite of your partial ignorance of foreign tongues, a leopard cannot change its spots. So I am not likely to boast either in the near future or in the distant one. I am a naturally shy man who never boasts about his achievements. Yet I am justifiably proud of these achievements of mine. They remain inside me, in my heart of hearts; and in my brain, within my memory. Of course they can also be found in the outside world, otherwise they would boil down to some idle boasts instead of being what they are – an impressive run of successes. Well, let us go back to our muttons, as the French put it. When I write, ‘I have missed you all these years,’ I do not mean to say I am in love with you. It is our friendship I am talking about. Yes, I have missed both your friendship and your beauty. But when I write, ‘You are as beautiful as ever,’ I just pay tribute to your beauty. Try to understand that it is not a declaration of love, far from it. You are beautiful and it is more exciting to speak to a beautiful woman than to an ugly one; even if the former is stupid and the latter intelligent. Well, I hope that this time you do see what I mean.

Please answer me as soon as you can. Just write, 'I see what you mean.' If you do not answer this email of mine, I shall come to the inevitable conclusion that you do not see anything.

You should not play games because they are pernicious and dangerous: you can lose. Of course the most dangerous game is life because you lose both of them anyway. You lose both the game and life, but at some point you may believe you are losing either life or the game, not *both*. And then you realise that everything is lost irrevocably. So you begin to boost both your ego and self-esteem. You do not know the difference between them, but you boost both – just in case. You boost whatever you can lay your thoughts or hands on. You boost your future tomb and it becomes a monument to your achievements and also a legend in your own lifetime. You write this legend down and sit back, resting on your laurels. And then you add a few laurels to your laurel wreath. Then you set about playing another game, a far more dangerous one. The game of laurels is not really dangerous: you buy a number of laurel wreaths and put them on a number of busts: that of Beethoven, that of Dante, that of Hegel, that of Schlegel, that of de Gaulle. So what? You can also put a laurel wreath on your own head; and that is what you did half an hour ago. But you play a game with your soul and it is not likely to win unless it is the soul of a saint you have in your pineal gland. Actually you have no idea whether you have a soul or not. And what about the pineal gland? Well, what you have for sure is the human spirit that is in a position to overcome all problems. You also have a sort of game you constantly attach to this spirit of yours. And whenever you do that, you enter into the spirit of the game and cannot get out of it. You spend hours and hours inside it, saying to yourself that the human spirit is better than the human body. Police had marked off the area where your body was found.

You have a good heart and all those concerned know it. But, for some time, something has been wrong with your heart. Your eyes twinkle as you try to understand what is wrong with it. You think it is enough to have a good heart, and if you do have a good heart, then nothing can go wrong. You need no preachers, no gurus to learn this truth once and for all. Why do doctors tell you your heart is about to give out? They say you have a fatal disease with a prognosis worse than that of most cancers. This means it is better to have cirrhosis than the disease you bury at the bottom of your heart; or at the top of it. You know nothing about the whereabouts of this disease and you ask no questions. But doctors are ready to answer any question of yours, and they will not tell you lies. They utter the name of your disease: severe aortic valve stenosis. You do not understand the word 'stenosis' and they say it is a narrowing of the valve that controls blood flow from the heart. From the heart – that is what you understand. The blood they are talking about is love and it flows from the heart towards the world. You love the world and its inhabitants because your blood keeps flowing from your heart. If your blood flowed only *towards* your heart, you would love yourself, not the whole world. 'I don't need my blood. Let others have it,' you say to the doctors. Open-heart surgery? Will they crack open your ribs and stop your heart? They need to stop it, otherwise they will not be able to cut out your old valve and sew in a new one. 'If my heart stops, I'll die,' you say to yourself. You will not. Recent advances in medical science mean that this illness can now be cured. Your doctors insert a new valve made from the lining of a cow's heart through a catheter; then open it like an umbrella. Cows love the world.

You are turned down; whatever you do is turned down. That is what they call 'continuity'. But then they use other names and things; all of a sudden, you experience the feeling of happiness about which you have read so many

times in newspapers and even in some novels. You do not recall these novels but you do recall the feeling of happiness they convey. Optimists say to everybody, 'Happiness is a law and law is par excellence the thing that wants a reason.' Whenever you think about your happiness, you say to yourself – and even to others – that you are always making unreasonable demands on time and space. You are always making unreasonable demands on your guardian angels: they cannot do *everything*. (Not at the push of a button anyway.) From time to time, they do *something* so that no brick has fallen on your head ever since your birth. Many metaphorical bricks have done that, but you are not interested in metaphors. Sure enough, your life is everything: metaphors, comparisons, metonyms, metronomes and so on. But you are interested in your own life, not in the life of the universe on which your life depends, incidentally. Incidentally, incidents do not interest you either: you are fond of essences, of eternal things – of human mythology where everything happens all the time. There are fathers, mothers, sons, daughters and nephews. They fight and perish for the sake of everything or nothing. And they endure the Last Judgement. And they emerge triumphant from the court after all the charges against them are dropped because of a lack of evidence. So they live once again; so do you. Once again you are turned down. And then, unexpectedly, you are turned up. Sleep, sleep, sleep sound. Is there anything else to do? Sleep, sleep, sleep unsound.

What is continuity? You insist upon it. You say that without continuity your life makes no sense. And what about your senses? Do *they* make any sense? You do not care about your senses; you care only about continuity, be it universal continuity or a private one. You are continuous; that is what you think anyway. You were born and you will die like Aristotle, according to Heidegger. The obstacles you meet in your life are also continuous. 'If you hear a continuous tone, leave the building,' they say to you and others. All others have already left the building; you have not. You do hear the continuous sound, but it is related to your life, not to the universe. You wish your life were as continuous as this sound; it is not. It is interrupted all the time by failures and misunderstandings. Your life goes on uninterruptedly and suddenly someone says, 'You're wrong,' whereupon you realise your life has been interrupted and you cannot do anything about it. What is the continuity you are looking for? You insist upon the necessity of hypotheses involving true continuity. What hypotheses? Even you are not convinced by any of the arguments you put forward some time ago. Anyway, many suggestions have been put forward, but a decision is unlikely until after next year's general election, they say to you. And you say to them you are unlikely to survive till the next year they are talking about. They do not talk any more. You have survived all these talks. Now you have to endure your own interior monologues. You endure them and emerge triumphant. Do you? At least you emerge from the pupa – like any winged adult mosquito.

Your life is an ordinary one; or just an ordinary life. Call it what you wish and you often call it 'it', when you are in a bad mood. And you are in a bad mood quite often, almost all the time: either your wife or your friends point that out. And if there is no one to point that out, you yourself say to yourself your mood is bad, very bad indeed; and among the moods available to human beings, your mood is perhaps the worst. So is your life; and yet you do not starve to death. There are other people who do it in your stead, and now and then you think about these people, saying to yourself they are even more miserable than you; although, only a few minutes ago, you said to yourself you were the most miserable creature in the world. Now you think you are the one before last. There are many last people who are often superior to the first ones. But, as it happens, they are the last ones either because they will die next day or on account of their vulnerability. You say to them they are nonentities and they sob their hearts out

– to such an extent that you can hear their sobs from the next room. This is an isolated impression or sensation. But last people often laugh; everyone laughs from time to time, even if none of these ones and every is really happy and enjoys life to the utmost. But you say to yourself you are every, happy and joys – all of them. Don't you have to believe this nonsense? Would you survive if you did not? You do not survive, for all your efforts. At some point you even became Joyce; but it did not work because you found your interior monologues tedious, mind-numbing. Your mind is numb; so is your life. You are numb with disbelief, belief and everything else. You gaze at your navel and find it beautiful. Yet it is not beautiful; not beautiful at all. Navel-gazing, navel-musing.

This is a senseless war, they say. They mean this particular war makes no sense. Other wars, on the other hand, do make sense because they are fought against evil empires or against evil as such. Often, in the course of these wars, goodies are killed, but that does not really matter because any war is supposed to go on and, as Churchill put it, we shall prevail. So we prevail and another war intrudes into our houses; another father of civilisation and progress. If our wars did not need airplanes, we would not fly. As a matter of fact, our wars need not only airplanes but also bombs. Consequently our technologies progress by leaps and bounds. So we fly and jettison bombs. We do not really need them so we jettison them; and they fall here and there. We say to journalists, 'If our bombs fall here, they make sense. Otherwise they do not. But any war makes sense on account of progress. Besides, only our awareness of evil can help us build a better world. Why should we live in the worst of all worlds? And any world is bad if there are too many baddies around.' And if there is a truce, someone points at the horizon and says, 'There are a lot of baddies over there.' And a journalist writes in his paper, 'The fragile truce between the two sides is not expected to last long.' And another journalist conveys to us the following piece of news, 'Seventeen people were killed this morning by bombers who targeted a shopping centre.' There are many journalists around and all of them are goodies, for they put us in the picture about what is going on in our world created by our Father the War or War the Father. So another journalist writes in *his* paper, 'Terrorist bombers attacked the hotel, causing devastation and loss of life.' So we get into our stealth bombers and switch their engines on. In the meantime Father the War meets Mother the Truce and they give birth to another son; and another daughter.

What is the essence of the ballpoint pen you are holding in your hand? You cannot just show this pen to your colleagues, saying, 'This is the essence of literature.' For a while, you might think, however, that its essence is the pen itself and therefore it is enough to show it to anyone, saying, 'This is the essence of this pen.' But you go further and affirm that any ballpoint pen is far beyond itself and that its essence lies elsewhere – in the domain of poetry, for instance; or in that of philosophy. In short, its essence is hidden in whatever it writes; otherwise, no ballpoint pen has any meaning. Of course if you take a piece of ivory and make a ballpoint pen out of it, you can put your work in a museum and never use it as a pen. In this case, its essence will be ivory or a piece of art or an exhibit or beauty. Anyway, you have to intuit the essence of your act of perception without which there are no ballpoints, no points and no balls. If you do not perceive anything, there is nothing; and you do not wish to live in the middle of some void or other. That is why you perceive as many things as are vital to your health and well-being. So, once again, you focus your attention on an ordinary ballpoint and realise it is running out of ink. In other words, you need a refill and you say to yourself that the essence of your ballpoint pen is ink. Even if a ballpoint pen does not run out of ink, its essence is ink because it is useless without it. Once the pen is ready for another poem, you sit down and, the pen in hand, begin to search for the right words. Unfortunately, you do not find them:

you seem to have run out of inspiration. You need a refill, in other words; and these other words are right. So you write them down and look at them. And then, once again, you look at your ballpoint pen. You love it: it just glides over the paper. And that is its true essence: *glissando*.

You do not see anything except a number of lines drawn outside your territory. You open your gate and walk along the streets, tripping over these lines. And whenever you trip over such a line, you hear a whistle and feel a fist on your nose. You are not really hurt, but you realise that what you feel is just a warning. At any time you might trip over the last line, tripping and falling over; for the last time perhaps. And you have no idea what kind of last time is in store for you. Of course you hope you will be found safe and uninjured, but secretly you fear the worst. And you also fear that, sooner or later, the worst will come to the worst. The same goes for the last: in the long run, it may come to the last. Actually the run you are thinking about is almost sure to turn out to be rather short. So you retrace your steps and find yourself in your garden. You know that even in your garden you are likely to come across a few lines over which you trip in the streets, but, after all, your garden belongs to you and you have every right to walk around it uninjured, unwounded, unharmed, unarmed. And even if you do fall now and then – or for the last time, for that matter – you will just sleep in your garden instead of enjoying sweet dreams in your bedroom. And what about the last sleep, as the Russians put it? What if you *die* in your garden? Well, in this case you will be buried in your garden and not in the streets, in the middle of some thoroughfare or other.

Once again they talk about their climate and a great many threats. They try to reduce carbon emissions by as much as 28 percent. But, according to some experts, this strategy is a waste of money. Worse still, it is entirely wrong. All this violates the Clean Air Act. Of course there is such a thing as the Dirty Air Act and too many people take this act into consideration. What is more, they act in accordance with this act. If asked why they do that, they say they cannot act otherwise. ‘Otherwise we’ll die,’ they answer. They do not die and so the act is still on the agenda. And what about the Clean Air Act? This act will come into effect next year. So you are not duty bound to act in accordance with the precepts of cleanliness. You are aware of the fact that this policy likewise goes against common precepts of decency, but there is nothing you can do about it. Well, it is not a matter of life and death, you say to yourself. Our air can remain dirty for another couple of years. This is also the view of economists from the University of Chicago and the University of California, Berkeley. They say that burning biomass – wood, mainly – for power produces 50 percent more CO² than burning coal. Last night you said to yourself, ‘Well, I’ll no longer burn coal.’ Today, you think it is time to adopt a different strategy in your dealings with our air. So you decide to go on burning coal. You have to burn *something*, otherwise you may die at any moment. And you realise that burning biomass is worse than anything else. Even if new forest growth were to suck all of it out of the atmosphere, it would take decades – perhaps more than a century – to make up the difference and break even with coal. So you go on asking the same question, ‘How much coal was mined here?’ And no one asks, ‘How much coal was burnt there?’

You do not know exactly what kind of variety you are facing at this moment. Besides, there are many varieties behind your back so one might think you turn your back on them, which is not strictly true. You just do not know there is something behind your back. People might talk behind your back but you do not care about people and their talk. You do care about varieties because you wish to be a chooser, not a beggar. The latter sees two objects

and grasps them immediately as if they were going to vanish into thin air at the earliest opportunity. Sometimes they do but their inconstancy should not frighten you to the point of making you forget your manners. Nothing doing. Even if you see only one object, you rush towards it as if you were sure that nothing will ever appear in front of you, not again; not even in the distant future. So you are likely to starve to death and another fearsome and wearisome life – they call this resurrection ‘karma’ – if you do not grasp immediately what you see in front of you; or behind you, for that matter. So you grasp this and even that and so enter into a variety of external relations with other things and others. But do you really exist? Do you have a past and a future? Your karma does not mean anything except that it is a sort of karma, nothing else. It is therefore neither a past nor a future. Suppose you are hauled over the coals for coming in late for work. You might think that, on this occasion, you enter into two external relations. One of them is related to your work; thanks to the other, you become too emotionally involved with the coals. But there is a third variety you have no wish to think about. Yet you do think about it, for you cannot help it. By whom are you hauled over the coals? Or by what?

He does a lot of work for charities, but his modesty forbids him from talking about it. So he does not talk about it; no one does. No one knows he does a lot of work; everyone thinks he does nothing at all. He spends hours and hours in bed and when he does get up, he just doodles here and there – all over his textbooks, his clothes, his napkins, his tablecloths. He even doodles over his windows. Usually the winter does it, especially in Russia. But he does it also in summertime. That is what everyone thinks, whereas he writes out checks and sends them to those who take care of the poor. And people say, ‘An anonymous businesswoman donated one million dollars to the charity.’ This is not true. In the first place, we are dealing with a man, not with a woman. *Secundo*, he donated *seven* million dollars to the charity. And right now he is writing out another check. So tomorrow we shall have to say, ‘Over the last eight years he’s donated nine million dollars to the charity.’ We do not speak about this charity; or any other charity, come to think of it. We just speak about his laziness and his fondness for doodling. We know a man when we can apply to him a description that ‘fits’ him. If you describe this man by saying he doodles all over his windows, your description might fit some windows and glasshouses, but certainly not the man whose generosity has already saved the poor and a lot of lunatics from starvation. You pick up a piece of chalk, walk towards the nearest window and begin doodling all over it. You write the following text, ‘Doodle, doodle, doodle, doodling.’ What you do may be called a ‘double doodling’. Instead of sending checks to the poor, you motion them in. They join you and your doodling ritual – all over ceilings and walls; all over their lives. Poor doodle, poor doodle.

If you have nothing to say, you say whatever comes into your head. And if nothing comes either into your head or into your mind, brain and soul, you say, ‘Yes, no, yes, no.’ Sometimes you are wrong; sometimes you are not. You are often wide of the mark or you miss it altogether. But at times you are just within the mark. Of course you cannot prove it; you just feel it and your intuition confirms your feelings and their testimony. But what are you doing inside this mark? You wonder what mark you are in and you find no answer to your wondering. So you stop wondering and say to yourself it is better to be inside the mark, whatever it is, than to miss it. Most of the time, however, you are wide of the mark and therefore you wish to get closer to it. You do get closer to it, once in a while; and then you get further from it. Your relationship with the mark brings out some aspect of the way in which our life has to cope with life. Life copes with life and you say to the former, ‘Get a good night’s sleep and you’ll

feel better able to cope.’ Your life follows the instruction to the letter, but you spend a sleepless night. You do not feel better and consequently cannot cope either with your first life or with the second one or two. It depends on how many lives you have at your disposal. Perhaps none: you never can tell. So you do not say anything. That is what they call a stalemate; or they do not call it at all. It reminds me of the beginning of Mozart’s *Requiem*; and of Dante’s *Commedia*. Going somewhere, through something. A dark forest; you are lost and found. By what? By whom? By Virgil and Beatrice. Just by D Minor. Is that enough? Is the latter enough?

There is a country and a tyrant who terrifies its inhabitants. They are arrested and sent to concentration camps. No other country can tolerate such a situation. So other countries vow to liberate the undemocratic country from the tyrant; otherwise, as they put it, the world order will not be in order. During a war, they drop a huge number of bombs on the tyrant and his country which goes by the name of D. The operation is called ‘Earthquake.’ Soon newspapers announce the fact that the former undemocratic country wants to rebuild from the devastating earthquake that killed more than 9,000 people and made millions homeless. The biggest donation comes from U., its neighbour, which pledges assistance of \$1 billion during a one-day donors’ conference in O. ‘We are neighbours and we love each other,’ says a minister of U. ‘And after the death of the tyrant, we love each other even more because the sentiment of love can’t help blooming in free countries. We just fall into each other’s arms. We can’t do otherwise. While we remain in each other’s arms, we coordinate our disaster response and help each other in the wake of such calamities.’ Foreign minister W. B. of C. said his country would provide \$700 million. The World Bank had already announced \$600 million for D. Yet you read in newspapers the following piece of news, ‘Earthquake relief falls short of what country says it needs to recover.’ You talk to the inhabitants of D., and they say to you, ‘Yes, we need more, much, much more. If you don’t give us money, we won’t recover and our illness will last for centuries. Do you want us to contaminate you? We have another tyrant in our midst. He is the former tyrant’s son and yesterday he vowed he would avenge his father and his ignominious death.’ The country does not recover and the democratic government is overthrown. Like father, like son. Once again D. falls into the clutches of a dictator and you hear the following piece of news, ‘The magnitude 8.3 earthquake was followed by a magnitude 8.1 quake.’

Principles have been laid down once and for all. Our school is based on the fundamental principle that each child should develop its full potential. But our children’s potentials come in all shapes and sizes. These children of ours go to the same school and hear the same teachers who talk to them every day with the exception of Saturday and Sunday. Our children listen carefully to our teachers and note down whatever the latter say and point out. And each child develops its full potential. But one child’s full potential is much smaller than another child’s full potential so that one might say the former’s potential is not full or unfulfilled. One might even blame a few teachers for their neglect in regard to the former boy and teachers guilty of neglect are liable to prosecution. Of course the teachers may retort that a bit of healthy neglect is good for children. Oddly enough, they say nothing of the kind. They say they have not neglected the former boy. And one of them says that both boys’ potentials are really filled to the brim with knowledge. ‘But the former boy’s potential is smaller than the latter’s,’ he adds with a frown and a groan. This explanation is of course unacceptable. And even if it is acceptable, it is intolerable: after all, we are committed to the ideal of equality between the sexes, potentials and genes. Anyway, there should be no discrimination on the grounds of potentials and gifts for sciences, art and crafts, and so on. Suppose we accept the

latter teacher's remark related to the inequality of potentials. Well, in this case we should put an additional amount of knowledge into the small potential with a view to making it look as big as the big potential. And what if, under pressure, the small potential bursts and the knowledge falls out?

We have a lot of bacteria and all these bugs are inside us. They are also outside, no doubt about it; but we are concerned only with what is within our body and mind. According to our mystics, gurus and ordinary psychologists, everything can be found inside our selves and they often call it microcosm, which is none of our concern. We do not call it at all: our substances might remain nameless because the lack of names does not harm either our substances or our senses. They function perfectly without names – but not without games, mind you. Even if we play a game of cops and robbers, our health and mood improve dramatically. We think that our moods largely depend on games, cosiness and so on. And what about bacteria? Our guts are swarming with bugs and we do not seem to care about them, whereas they do care about us, otherwise we would have no moods at all. Bacteria in the gut produce vitamins; their presence or absence has been linked to obesity, inflammatory bowel disease and the toxic side effects of prescription drugs. Biologists now believe that much of what makes us human depends on microbial activity. The same goes for our *inhuman* sides and minds. In short, everything depends on bugs. We buy books and read them, but our bugs are dead set against this idea. Bugs do not like books and so we do not understand what we read, no matter how often we open our books and close them. And of course our microbial activity takes care of our moods, loves, friendships and revelations. An angel pays us a visit and we take his visit at face value: we do not think he might be trying to trick us. He does; he or she tricks us under the influence of bugs that cannot leave us alone, not for a second. Actually, the angel we see and talk to is a bug in disguise. And what about love? Do we fall in love with bugs? Is love just a bug?

It seems paradoxical to me, but if you drink a cup of hot tea it seems to cool you down. And if you drink a cup of cold tea it warms you up. You are getting cold and warm; so does the tea you drink. You do not know anything about other teas and coffees drunk by others. They also drink a great deal of tea and, after drinking a few cups, they fly amidst a dozen clouds and drink the rain because they are always thirsty. I just look at paradoxes and go through them to find a situation which is not paradoxical. What can that be? You drink a cup of hot tea and it heats you up. And after drinking a cup of cold tea you lie down and ask your friends to bring you a coffin. That is how our life should be so as not to deceive us all the time; so as not to disappoint us. We cannot adjust to it. We drink a bottle of wine and we fall in love with everybody; or we begin to hate everyone, especially men. We also hate women if there are some representatives of their species around us or even in the neighbourhood, within a one-mile radius of our houses. Now and then we ask somebody, 'Tell us what to do because we are lost.' And somebody answers, 'You're not lost. You're in heaven.' This somebody – or another somebody – can also say, 'You're on the seashore, on a beach. Enjoy yourself.' We enjoy ourselves for a while. And we do so after having witnessed the most appalling scenes of human misery. I am a miserable old trout who complains about everything. I am a happy young lobster who enjoys everything. That is what life is about. It seems paradoxical to me, but if you are an old trout, you cannot be a young lobster; at the same time. Can you? Yes, you can. Yes, you can, provided you live in the sea and have a long body covered with a hard shell, two large claws and eight legs.

And what happens if there is nothing either after or before? Nothing at all? Nothing happens: it is better to give a lot of simple answers to some big questions. You see a big question and say, 'Nothing. Nothing happens. Nothing has ever happened. What you are talking about?' As a result, no one talks any more about anything. And even things keep silent as if they were in themselves. They are not: they are right here, in front of you, under your very eyes. But they do not talk and you accept this state of affairs because you are not a lively, talkative person. You are rather an unlively and untalkative person or thing. And that is what it is all about. Perhaps not *all* of it, of them, of anything and everybody. You just go somewhere and they say to you, 'No, you can't.' And you say to yourself you cannot go any further. You say it to yourself and probably to others, to some of them. And they answer you, if they happen to be within hearing distance. They say, 'No, you can't.' And that is how all matters go. It is true that, whatever is the matter or no-matter, this whatever and whoever go somewhere. So they say – and you say so as well – that something or somebody goes somewhere. And no one knows where all this directs eternally one's or two's steps. We are talking about mice because we are all mice and may be eaten at any moment by cats and even by other mice who struggle for life in some laboratory or other. You are fed a white solution of *Campylobacter jejuni* – a bacterium that can cause food poisoning in humans but generally does not prompt an immune response in mice. A lot of scientists look at you to find out if you are a human or just a mouse. They do not see any sign of food poisoning, as far as your body is concerned. So they declare you are a mouse.

In 1965 Gordon E. Moore said that computing power and complexity would double every two years. Today the time limit between doublings is more like 18 months. In the domain of technology there are only leaps and bounds. Our technology cannot enjoy a leisurely picnic lunch on the lawn in spite of our cuisine and the beauty of our parks. Leaps and bounds, bounds and leaps. And even if we put our technology in an enclosed garden, saying, 'Don't tense your shoulders, just relax,' this technology of ours will leap over the gate into the field. And scientists begin to talk about the endpoint. What do they mean by the word 'end'? If we are told, for instance, 'Diplomacy has so far failed to bring an end to the fighting,' we know what this sentence means because the fighting still goes on in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America and elsewhere – perhaps even on the sun. So we say to ourselves than no amount of diplomatic effort will ever put an end to wars and annihilation. But, according to scientists, there are other ends in the universe. The same goes for endpoints which are not limited to thoughts and the sentence: if we say 'full stop' or 'period,' we do not always think about computers. Of course there are people who say, 'In this day and age, whatever we say or do is related to computers and virtual worlds.' It is not quite true; nevertheless, this statement contains a particle of truth. Here is the particle: 'The endpoint – say, 2040 – is supposed to be the point at which computers outstrip us and become entirely self-replicating.' Some theologians affirm that, at the beginning of the Bible, God was speaking about computers: they were supposed to replenish the Earth. And what about humans? We were supposed to pave the way to computers and their 1,000-year reign. They believe that the entire content of the human brain should be uploaded onto a separate hard drive, thus rendering a real mortal body – and a real human – obsolete. Humans became obsolete when the computer was invented. Our new end-point puts an end to the struggle for life. No point in struggling for it: computers are vastly superior to other species. They are on top of Creation. Actually, our human world was created by a malignant demiurge. Computers are our Messiahs.

The military are not fond of twiddling their thumbs. A general stands in front of a blackboard and twiddles a piece of chalk instead. He knows that if he stops twiddling this piece of chalk, he will start twiddling his thumbs, doing nothing or listening to a load of old twaddle. The President talks to him about peace talks and a peace initiative, but the general continues to twiddle the piece of chalk. All of a sudden he writes 'Moscow' on the blackboard. Then he draws an arrow; its sharp point wounds the word 'Moscow' and stays in the middle of it, covering the letters 's' and 'c'. The President shakes his head, but the conflict is already under way. The military's beliefs hold sway over a lot of countries, ensuring the popularity of generals and top-ranking officers. But the world's population is divided into two distinct camps over this and other conflicts. They follow the atom bomb's itinerary closely, with unflagging concentration. They send an email to the Security Council, saying, 'Our pilot is in his cockpit and he can see a bomb flying in the direction of Moscow.' The Security Council calls the President who, in turn, gets in touch with the general whose fingers are no longer twiddling the piece of chalk. The President talks to him about the bomb and the general looks at his mobile phone with surprise – to be on the safe side. Of course he knows that the President cannot see him, but the general thinks about hidden cameras and goes on pretending he is surprised. 'Their pilot saw the bomb,' says the President three times in a row. 'What kind of bomb?' asks the general. 'There's only one bomb,' says the President. The general sends a few images to the President. They prove that there are no bombs in the sky, no bombs whatsoever. But last month the President received a set of satellite images, indicating that the general's images had been digitally altered. The general no longer responds to telephone or email requests. They come from both the President and a bunch of journalists itching to know more about the bomb. By way of an answer, the military flood the web with huge amounts of misinformation, raising new questions and making any truth seem unattainable. What is truth? The bomb.

I am conscious of myself and this myself of mine includes my consciousness. And whenever I think along these lines I find myself and my consciousness in a morass of rules and regulations, which delays the start of my projects, of my survival scheme. Myself as well as the mere I cannot survive either the turn of the century or any turn of the screw. And something should be done, otherwise there will be no selves and only 'my, my, my'. What if I erase all these 'my, my, my' on purpose? What will I do with these selves that are not mine? And what about the loss of *my* selves? Are they not a rich seam for me to mine? I do not need them any more; *mymymy* is better, although I have no idea why it is better than myself. No reason, no mind. Something comes along and I follow – not this something, mind you. I follow the along wherever it takes me. It takes me from 'm' and 'y'. I had better get rid of the latter before it is too late. Of course it is too late already because all letters are here and I can only get rid of them by means of other letters or inverted commas. I invert commas and something disappears from the Library of Congress and all other libraries. Something also disappears from the 'oneself' which belongs to my genes, means and meanings. I begin to dance. This is the dance of seven letters; I shed them one by one. And here is the dance of seven meanings. Once again I am almost naked. Just a tee shirt, nothing else. A mere nobody. I dance as long as the sun continues to display its power over the horizon. Then I die like the sun and travel through the Earth. My own SELF. S crouches at the bottom of a volcano. E follows a mole. L stays in the middle of the ocean. F nibbles a hole in a corpse. Once again I am on the surface of the Earth. I am D. I am DI, which means 'give' in Russian.

What is consciousness? You hold a human brain in one hand. You think about Hamlet, Yorik and Lawrence Olivier; and John Gielgud. You also think about consciousness as such; you do not see it. Neither your mental eye nor your physical one supply any picture of it as if it were a disembodied body; or just a disembodied something. Yes, you are sure there is nobody in consciousness; what is more, there is no consciousness in it. It is just some disembodied property that floats free. Free country, isn't it? Even your consciousness is free, let alone your body, your embodied body. You go outdoors and join the crowd. The crowd is walking at a very quick pace and you have to jog to keep up with it. The crowd is as full-bodied as the wines you like so much. But you cannot drink the crowd, can you? You look up and see your consciousness. You have no idea whether it still belongs to you or not. You should not think you have become everybody in the course of your jogging ritual. Nor are you anybody, nobody, body. You are just your own consciousness floating above you; you have to jump to catch it. You do catch it and become conscious of everything: yourself, the crowd, the misery of life, the approach of death. You look at your consciousness, kiss it on the mouth and let it go. Once again it floats under the sky. Soon afterwards it joins a flock of birds. What kind of birds? Penguins and ostriches are flightless birds: your consciousness is neither of them. Sea birds? Wading birds? At least your consciousness is not a *caged* bird: it is not inside your ribcage. Never mind, never mind. You were woken early by the sound of the birds singing.

To understand the world of today and tomorrow, pick it up and hold it up to the world that is no more because you are talking about the past, about days of yore. Where is this yore of yours? You have no idea, as usual. You have other ideas but not the ones which could talk to you about yore and yourself. So you do not know yourself either, which is logical, given that there is nothing harder in the world – know thyself – and in the brain. Your brain cannot understand itself. It cannot see itself from the outside and only what is outside can be known by your insides. The dead man's insides were spread all over the snow. That is how they spoke about death and tombs; in days of yore. Your tomb was in the snow because no one had enough time to bury you. Everyone looked at both the sun and corpses. The sun pointed out there was no time for anything except the struggle for life. And this struggle does not include burials and suchlike. So people were lying in the streets and fields; no one cared. There were other cares to care for and survivors cared for those cares and carried food, engravings and sutras. And then, on top of everything, a great plague broke out and people realised they were to die, notwithstanding their efforts which, under other circumstances, might have brought them fame and money, glory and crowns, kingdoms and eternities. (You should not trust one eternity only: it is as fragile and short-lived as time.) The year that knew the beginning of the plague – it might have been its source – drew to a close. Another year got under way; in its turn, this way got under another way. So time and years went on as if nothing had happened. Yet so many bodies of the starved lay scattered in the streets you could hardly count them. Yet you could not help counting them – for argument's sake, as it were. One thousand, nine million. The essence of this argument was that life should go on throughout life; in spite of death.

No one knows what you were a million years ago. You yourself do not know that. You might have been a mere bone. A dog lay under the table, gnawing on a bone; you see this image whenever you endeavour to recall your former lives. All right, you cannot get any further; you might have had a *series* of former lives, but that is the only life you can remember right now. So you focus your attention on this life of yours, hoping you were a dog, not a bone. You like dogs and other animals. You even like cats, although cats do not usually hit it off with dogs. So

you think, 'Well, I was a dog in one of my former lives. I loved humans and lived in one of their houses. And they gave me bones and also morsels of Japanese beef. I seem to recall the taste of this beef. Actually it is all the easier to recall since I ate a few morsels of Kobe beef last night.' Well, you are deluding yourself if you think you were a dog in the last of your former lives. You were a mere bone and eventually you come to this conclusion, in spite of your ardent desire to identify with the dog lying under the table. All right, you are lying under the same table, but that does not seem to matter as you go on with your ritual, with your remembrance of things past. What matters is not the table and its beauty – it was a 19th-century table – but your identity. You were a bone and you admit it after a while; after much soul-searching, as a matter of fact. You say to yourself you were a bone. What bone? Whose bone? A human bone no doubt. Yes, you remember now; you remember this episode from your last former life. You broke your hip bone and left it under a dinner table. And two doctors replaced it with a metal sphere. Where is this metal sphere?

You shake the Earth. Yes, you get this feeling which allows you to feel more or less comfortable during an earthquake. It is your thoughts that shake the Earth and you can stop the process at any time: you just have to think of something else. For instance, you sing a lullaby to the Earth and she falls asleep; no more earthquakes, no more tsunamis. You look out of your window and everything appeals to you as if beauty were born once again, once and for all. Your thoughts come up to the word 'beauty' and begin to caress it. What else do you need? Meanwhile the earthquake goes on; it has been carrying on all day. You jump and your head knocks against the ceiling and even against the sky. Your dust and ashes rise like smoke or something else. You do not know what rises and falls. You do both and the Earth does even more than whatever you can do as a human being. The Earth rises, falls, travels somewhere and lands on the stars you have never heard about. Why should you hear anything, about anything? You are mute, dumb and blind. You just live somewhere and this somewhere of yours is more important than the Earth and her doings. You listen to Dvorak, to some of his quartets and trios. You do not listen to anything. You just live. You do not live. You are just; or you just. Is that enough? No, it is not. Yet there is yet; and this yet is not alone. And even alone is not alone: something hides behind this yet, that yet. Something is beyond all of them. There are many beyonds beyond those yet, stills and stilts. You walk on stilts and touch many stars. That is what happens now and then. Now, now, now; then, then, then. All this happens all the time. And nothing does not happen. And that is you. And thou. And mou.

You go out and see a man. You follow him, in spite of the fact you do not know in what direction this man directs his steps. His steps are directed and even guided, according to our theologians, but you listen neither to them nor your own heart because you know you should follow something or rather someone. You follow this man, for want of anything or anyone better. For the moment you see nothing better in the street where you are walking behind this man. You follow him because only the multitude is always right; one man is always wrong. You are this one man; the man you are following is not one and you can feel it. The man you follow belongs in the multitude which is not far; not beyond the horizon anyway. Sure enough, you see this multitude you should join as soon as you can, otherwise all hell will break loose. If you hesitate, if only for a second, all hell does break loose and you walk through the crowd, determined to install yourself in the middle of it. You are in the middle of the crowd and you follow it and them. According to a Japanese writer, the world has already bound you hand and foot; and also head and soul. You do not wish to become another Prometheus Bound so you become a Prometheus Unbound: you

leave the crowd and sit down on a boulder. You begin to think and even hum a tune. This tune comes from one of Schubert's works. And it goes to the stars, for you continue to hum it in the middle of the street where you are sitting on the boulder. And passers-by think you are mad because you no longer follow the crowd. But you follow the melody you are humming.

Where should we live? Perhaps on Earth. If we decide to live elsewhere, we shall have to pack our things and this ritual – let us call it a 'ritual' – might take a lot of time. Of course we are used to packing and unpacking our pyjamas and shirts. And once we just packed our bags and walked out on our wives and children. But leaving the Earth is different from whatever we have done so far. So we say to whoever questions us about our past and future whereabouts, 'We were born on our Mother Earth and whatever happens –' And even if nothing happens, we stay on this Earth of ours. Nothing happens: we are still poor, miserable and death is not far away. It is true that death is always close to wherever we stand, lie or walk. It is also close to whenever we live, work and enjoy ourselves. We enjoy ourselves in the 21st century; so does death. So does life, come to think of it. Everyone comes to think of it and this one and other ones begin to enjoy many lives. If lives enjoy themselves, you should follow the crowd of lives. Why should you go against the stream of lives? You enjoy yourself; and you also enjoy others, for you are a humanist and consequently take care of your neighbours and even of those who live on other continents. Everybody enjoys himself, herself and oneself. And bowls of cherries are everywhere; so are bowls of strawberries and raspberries. And a bottle of raspberry liquor is also in your garden. And there are also other gardens and other liquors – in the neighbourhood. There are blueberries, blackberries and what not. There are many whats and nots. And Nicky seems a lot happier since she met Steve. Nicky is your neighbour; so is Steve. You love them dearly; this goes without saying. So you are a lot happier since Nicky met Steve.

What is red copper? It is red copper. If you happen to see copper, you say to yourself, 'It's copper, a piece of copper.' And then you add, 'It's a piece of red copper because it's neither blue nor white.' And even if you do not add anything to what you have just said, you know that what you see is a piece of red copper and not a piece of blue or pink copper. So you see this piece and you know it is a piece of red copper. And you say to yourself, 'It's a piece of red copper,' and you do not add anything to this statement of yours. But they say to you, 'Red copper plays a leading role in the symbolic cosmogony of the Dogon of Mali.' You have never met any of the Dogon they speak about; nor have you ever visited Mali or whatever it is. You think you know that Mali is a country and that one may visit it if one feels like it; but you are not sure. Of course you are not sure of anything, but this example of unassuredness concerns Mali and not Dali about whom you can talk for one hour at least: you saw a few exhibitions devoted and even dedicated to his works. What next? They say that red copper represents the fundamental element. What element? Water. Red copper, water. All right, all right. And water is the vital principle of all things. You are not surprised because you know that the greater part of your body is made of water. Alas, the quantity of water shrinks as you grow older and older; you know that too. You know too many things and you do not think you have to learn anything else to survive and see the dawn of another day. But they go on talking to you and, out of politeness, you listen to them. They say red copper is also light that radiates from the copper helix wrapped round the sun. It is also speech, another channel of fertility. It is also sperm that covers the walls of the womb. And what about you? Don't you cover the walls of the womb? Of every woman?

The only reality we can grasp is the result of some creation or other. You create something and then you grasp it. You look at it and say, 'This is the reality I've just created in order to enjoy myself. "Have fun," I said to myself and I have fun as I look at my creation.' You grasp this reality and put it in your pocket. You do not realise that your creation – or any creation, for that matter – overflows the bounds of time. What can be created within the bounds of time and space? A tower, an ordinary tower. If you need to create something, you build the Tower of Babel that goes beyond any bound, any mount. Even the Mount of Purgatory is too small in comparison with your creation. Even the Mount of Paradise is too small and insignificant. You look at your creation and say to yourself it is more than any creation; it is bigger than itself, himself, herself. It goes beyond and over and above. It goes down as well so it might be compared to the Mount of Hell, to the Pit of Damnation and Destruction. Yet it is bigger than any pit, however piteous, pitiful and full of miseries. Any creation is more than itself and anything else. You are overwhelmed and frightened. You frighten the life out of yourself. And then you frighten the death out of yourself, out of your creation, out of whatever has been uncreated over million years. And then you sit down somewhere and look at an ant. You study the behaviour of ants; they study your behaviour. You look at each other; each other look at you. And the creation – there is only one creation in the whole world – breaks into a song. For a while everyone sang hymns praising creation and a multitude of creators; or one creator only. Then everyone broke into a run. Into a run, into a run, into a run, into a run.

If you ask any passer-by, 'Do you think the Japanese are more polite than Europeans?' this passer-by – alongside many other passers-by – is likely to answer, 'Yes, they are.' And if, out of curiosity, you ask him or her why they think the Japanese are more polite, the passer-by in question might, by way of an answer, execute a few bows. Sure enough, the Japanese bow a lot. And they do not bow any old how: their books on etiquette include a guide to the angle of the bow for different occasions. The angle of the most formal bow is 45°. If you meet someone for the first time – and you are Japanese, not a European – your bow should execute an angle equivalent to 35°. So, if you take the trouble to measure the body of a Japanese man or a woman, you will find out that, whenever this man or woman meets somebody for the first time, their body shows this angle and not any other angle or curve. But if you greet a colleague, you may limit your display of politeness to 15°. Understandably enough, some Europeans are fed up with being told the Japanese are far more polite than them. And they end up rising to the challenge. The English increase all the angles touched upon in Japanese books. For instance, the angle of their most formal bow is 50°. The French go further: the angle of *their* most formal bow is 55°. As for the Russians, they resolve to outstrip both the Japanese and Westerners alike. Their bodies reach the 85° angle. As a result of this virtuoso show of politeness, they fall down and remain motionless for several minutes. They think that lying on the floor demonstrates the utmost degree of politeness. Of course you are not supposed to fall asleep in the course of the ritual: that would be most impolite.

If you are Japanese and live in Japan, you grow like an ordinary human being. And time flows or flies as it does in Europe and even in the United States of America. On the day of your birth, you are already prepared for death, as philosophers put it. Of course you are not really *prepared* for him; besides, you do not know the first thing about death. Incidentally, it is not dangerous to know the first thing about him; or even the second thing. But you should do your best to shun the *complete* knowledge of this baleful phenomenon. In other words, you had better not know the *last* thing about death. It is even better not to know too much about whatever can be found in the *middle* of this

phenomenon, notion or thing. Let this thing remain in itself – that is what every human being should know by heart, learning it once and for all. But suppose you grow in Japan and you know that some of your fellow citizens commit suicide in the wood situated in the neighbourhood of Mount Fuji. You wonder why they do it and suddenly you realise they know too much about death; and about life, needless to say. They know last things about both life and death. And if you know last things, there are no things beyond or after them. So you ask yourself the following question, ‘What am I doing in this vale of tears?’ For all your awareness of security risks, however, you continue to grow and mature – in the vale of tears, not far from Mount Fuji. At the age of 15, you are allowed to make your own will. You make it, leaving everything to your nephew. From 18 you can get a driving license. What for? To drive to this wood, to the very last thing? At the age of 20 you are given the right to vote. So you vote for the Flood and write in your notebook, ‘*Après moi le deluge.*’ You are allowed to drink and smoke. You take each day as it comes. This afternoon you see the world through a haze of cigarette smoke. Tomorrow morning you will drink four bottles of sake, leave your flat and stand for a while in the middle of a thoroughfare.

There is a poem by Du Fu; I might have read it in my youth when I was fond of Oriental poetry. I am still very fond of it and one might even say that, on account of this love, I am young and all my feelings are linked to the freshness one might feel upon awakening and seeing the world. Aromas also play an important part in your perception of the world, if you decide to call it a world. It is nothing of the kind. Actually no one knows what it is, but poets speak about it and the world performs a few simple tasks; so do humans who belong to the world, in the world, in the word they utter as they try to come to terms with the world and death. Du Fu says, ‘Men seldom live to be 70’ and he is probably right. Modern translators do not agree with this point of view because they take into consideration the progress of science and point out that life expectancy in Asia has increased in the 20th century. So their translations look thus, ‘Men often live to be 70’ or ‘Men often live to be 80’ or ‘Men often live to be 90’. There are other translations of the same poem. They confide to us the following truth, ‘Men seldom live to be 100’, ‘Women often live to be 95’. In their commentaries on Du Fu’s poem, translators say that women live longer than men because they are less addicted to alcohol, cigarettes and heroin. Besides, men are also addicted to heroic deeds and acts, and so they die in battles, on battlefields. Women stay at home and quietly reach the age of 95. I might have read this poem in my youth but I am not sure Du Fu’s name was the same in those days. I read him in translation and even his name sounded different in my native tongue. I read a poet by the name of Tu Fu. Anyway, in Russia men seldom live to be 60.

It is much easier to marry if you find a go-between who walks around, looking for a suitable woman or man. This go-between is often your boss or a cooperative neighbour who says, ‘I understand’ and goes out. Shortly afterwards he comes back; this time he is not alone. Sometimes he holds a cat, sometimes a dog. Animals are not what you asked for upon meeting your boss or your neighbour. So you say, ‘Thank you very much but I’d like to marry, you know.’ Your go-between says to you, ‘The average age upon marriage in 1970 was 27.6 for men and 24.6 for women, but in 2009 it was 32.4 and 30.1 respectively. You’re too young for this ritual.’ So you wait for another three years, but at the end of this trial period you realise you no longer wish to marry anybody. Actually you would like to divorce either a man or a woman. An unfulfilled dream: you are not married and so cannot divorce anybody. For want of anything better, you divorce yourself, your better half, and become a good-for-nothing. For all these divorce proceedings, your dream remains unfulfilled. So you divorce yourself from good, from the better third of

your worse half. You are a for-nothing now. And then you become nothing. Once again, you feel an overwhelming urge to marry. Why? Because you seem unable to control your sexual urges. This time you appoint a come, not a go-between. Your come leaves you and soon comes back, holding a cat or a dog. Your second attempt comes to nothing too. Why does all this happen only in Japan? Because in Japan all marriage rituals are linked to words. Let us take betrothal gifts. They are based on auspicious wordplay. For example, dried bonito is *katsuo-bushi*, a homophone for a set of hieroglyphs that signals man's dependability. Kelp is *konbu*, a homophone for another set of hieroglyphs: a desire for numerous offspring.

Backsliding is a widespread ritual. You do something and then you begin to backslide. You go back and apparently nothing can stop you except a move forward. You go forward and back instead of staying where you are. Why? Because you are probably not satisfied with the spot where you might become rooted. So you are not rooted to any spot, however beautiful and comfortable. You are constantly uprooted and, like most human beings, have your ups and downs. But life is like that and you have known that ever since your birth. Death is not like that. You are lying on your deathbed and your family summons a priest who either chants sutras or says prayers. Or just asks you how many times you have sinned in your life that is about to forsake you for good. You say you have sinned a lot. According to your confession, you have sinned three times every day and night. The priest says a few prayers and sings one sutra. Then he asks you if you have something to add to your confession. And you say you have always sinned and so are likely to go to hell. The priest says it is not up to you to take decisions in this domain. It is just another up; and another down. Not the last one, as a matter of fact. You think your body has come to rest at last. You listen to another sutra and recall a car accident. Many years ago your car hit the kerb, rolled over and came to rest in a ditch. You compare yourself to this car of yours, to this accident. Until recently you had been moving up and down, hither and thither. Then you fell ill – or hit the kerb, in other words. You rolled over and came to rest on your deathbed. According to you, you have reached the end of the road. Have you? After a while your body is cleansed and placed in the coffin. Your immediate family holds a wake, keeping incense burning through the night. Then you are put down and go up.

You have your question-and-answer logic. This procedure is logical because you might put your hand into the middle of a bonfire, if you did not know that bonfires are unbearably hot. So you ask yourself, 'Shall I put my hand into this bonfire?' And you answer this question thus, 'No, I shouldn't do that. If I do, I'll scorch my hand. Why? Because the flames I see in front of me are very hot. They're as hot as the iron I used in my youth. The iron was too hot and I scorched the shirt I wished to wear at the Summer Ball. But my hands are even more precious than any shirt, however costly and beautiful. If I scorch my right hand, I won't be able to drive the wheelchair I need to get from one bonfire to another. I don't like nature. If deprived of bonfires, I'll never go outdoors. Anyway I'm fed up with my wheelchair – it knocks too often against roots and stones. Of course it also knocks against walls and furniture. Even at home I can't manipulate it properly. I often knock holes in my walls and I don't like draughts. And I can't deal with the armchairs I knock over as I travel from my room to the kitchen. I don't mind the mess I've been living in ever since the accident. But I'm dead set against starvation. I can't even bear a starvation diet, even if my doctor allows me to eat both pastries and chocolate. So I have to drive my wheelchair all the way to the kitchen. So I need my wheelchair and my hands, both of them. I shouldn't put my right hand into this bonfire, otherwise I'll starve to death or another life. But I know nothing about either another life or the

Hereafter. So I'll put neither my right hand nor my left one into the bonfire. Nor will I put my head into it. I like my thoughts very much. I think I should reject the traditional doctrine that seems to declare out loud, "Metaphysics is a theory of 'pure being'." Nothing is really *pure* in our world. Or any other world.'

We often have to choose between saviours and murderers. The former save us from death, the latter do what they can to save us from life. Is it more democratic to hold a referendum, rather than let the Almighty alone decide? Or fate? Or destiny? All right, it is more democratic to hold a referendum. Civil rights include freedom, equality in law and in employment, and the right to vote; so do divine rights, by the way. So we are supposed to vote on Sunday because most of our elections take place on Sundays and not Mondays. And yet we are always yearning to sleep on Sundays. We would be yawning on Monday, if we could not get enough sleep on Sunday. We are likely to yawn the whole week, if deprived of sleep during weekends. But tomorrow we are supposed to vote either for saviours or for murderers. We usually agree to go to church on Sundays because we can sleep in the church and also after the mass. But if the country goes to the polls, we can sleep neither before nor after our participation in this ritual. Before going to our polling station, we think about our decision; and others' decisions, needless to say. And then we ask ourselves if we have made the right decision. Of course we say to ourselves that there are no right decisions in our life, for nothing is right in it after all. So we decide to stop thinking about the referendum and go to bed upon coming home. But many people walk through our streets, shouting either 'yes' or 'no'. Two hours ago we said to ourselves, 'Voters appear to be leaning towards rejecting murderers. They wish to be saved and spend the rest of their eternities in Paradise.' Now we are thinking just the opposite. We hear 'no, no, no, no' and even if we shut our windows, we shall hear this 'no' and no 'yeses'. Of course we do not know to whom this 'no' is related – to saviours or murderers. But we feel somehow that saviours will be turned down once and for all. We switch on our TV sets and hear our speakers, 'While official results are not expected for many hours, early returns, buttressed by telephone polls, suggest that the no vote is quite likely to prevail.' We say 'no' to life, to death, to 'yes', to 'no'.

In days of yore, in England and other civilised countries, schoolmasters used to punish their pupils by hurling things at them. Some schoolmasters had blocks of wood, others metal bars. Often they explained the law of gravity by letting one of these objects fall on their pupils' heads: the latter could not fail to understand what the law was about. Some pupils were conveyed to hospital. They were a bit dizzy and confused so their mothers thought they were suffering from concussion. Others died on the spot, but before dying they thanked their teachers profusely: but for the law of gravity and its consequences, they would have known neither themselves nor the world. And if you know both yourself and the world, you also know God; this goes without saying. So you go to Paradise instead of living in Hell where the law of gravity has always been in force. In this day and age we also come across schoolmasters and pupils, but their situations are reversed. If anyone is allowed to throw blocks of wood in class nowadays, it is much more likely to be pupils chucking them at terrified teachers than the other way round. But the new ritual makes no sense: schoolmasters know everything about the law of gravity. They know that sooner or later all apples will fall from their respective trees, and they can also write essays about falling stars. Actually one might think no one needs to suffer from concussion to understand the laws of gravity. 'I don't think you understand the gravity of the situation,' said an old schoolmaster to a panel of young tutors. 'We used to teach the laws of life. Nowadays very few people understand the gravity of these laws.'

You do not seem to understand me, my dear. I have no idea whether I can call you my dear or not. I call you, I appeal to you, but you do not come. And you might think it is logical and that is what everyday life is about. I live in my den of iniquity and you drink champagne in your castle. And you are not alone, I suppose. Of course you are not alone, otherwise you might have felt lonely many years ago. And if one feels lonely, one goes out and joins other people, one's fellow creatures. I am your fellow creature, you know. No, you do not seem to know that. What *do* you know, I wonder? Of course you must know you are beautiful and you might think you have every right to ill-treat those who are not as beautiful as you are. All right, I am not a handsome young man. I am probably an ugly old man. Actually I do not know who I am and my predicament is shared by many people, you know. Do *you* know who you are? All right, you are a beautiful young woman and this piece of knowledge does not seem to escape your notice. That is not enough, you know. Beauty is just one of the ingredients of the world. There are other ingredients and components, and you know nothing about them, as far as I know. You know nothing about love, for instance. Nor do you know anything about ideal thoughts. Of course beauty is the ideal towards which all human thinking strives. That is not enough; that is not all. Do you know what Saint Paul has always said to us? To you in particular? You are beautiful, but if there is no love in your heart, you are nothing. Love is the ideal to which all human hearts aspire because love is music and music is love, life and death. Well, I am weary of talking to a brick wall. *Au revoir*. I always take a couple of aspirins when I've got a splitting headache.

You resist everything because you are fed up with being bullied and pushed around. 'If you think you can push me around like that, you're mistaken,' you say from time to time, but this strategy does not work: no one listens to you. 'It's going to be an uphill struggle to get your ideas accepted,' your mother told you many years ago and you realise at last that she was right. And it is not too late, contrary to what you might think. So you do not think along these lines and decide to act; and acting means resistance. You are surrounded by enemies who push you around and do not understand your words and their meanings. One of these bullies comes up to you and you speak to him about peace, harmony, communication and collaboration. He is unable to catch the meaning of your words and once again you are being pushed around. So you pick up your only child, walk to the nearest cliff, climb to the top and fling your child off the cliff. A few seconds later you too end up at the bottom of the cliff. Why does all this happen? Instead of letting others bully you, you commit suicide – out of defiance, as they say. It is true that deep in your psyche is the idea of glorious resistance against all odds. The odds are always against you and you resist as much as you can. You speak to humanity and hurl stones at the police and other representatives of autocracy. And then you blow yourself up instead of submitting to captivity. You are not at all convinced that setting fire to your body will aid the situation, but it is time to fight back; and anyway it is too late to go back on your decision. So you do not go back on it; nor do you go back to life. 'It was a matter of pride,' you say to yourself as you look at your charred ankles and knees. Then you hear another tirade of abuse, another order. Nothing has changed; just another day of resistance, of defiance.

You are one of the richest men of Russia. In your country house you have a private dental suite, an indoor-outdoor swimming pool, a cinema, a 16-car garage. Your dining table seats 22 but you have hardly seen anyone over the last two years. Your friends and partners disappoint you more and more as if determined to disappoint you once and for all in the near future. All of a sudden you realise this future has already come. The longer you live, the

more enthusiastic you grow about the future. You are no longer fond of your past stuffed with money: there is nothing else in it. Of course there are yachts in your past, and Bentleys, Ferraris. You do not need them any more; nor do you feel relaxed in your country house. You wish to enjoy snow-covered fields, but your friends talk about ski resorts. They do not know you have already turned your back on winter sports, on Courchevel. There is no snow in your garden; and yet it is the biggest private garden in Russia. The ambient heat vaporises the snow as soon as it lands within your property; even your fir trees are bare or *stark naked*, as you usually put it whenever you talk to yourself. And you talk to yourself rather often now – not only when you go to the nearest field. You plod through the snow and talk to yourself. You say to yourself it is better to *plod* through the snow than to *ski down* steep slopes either in Courchevel or Gstaad. ‘Russian peasants are happier than I am,’ you say to yourself. And you add broodingly, ‘Tolstoy was right.’ Then you think for a while about scythes and say to yourself you might use one in one of those fields over there; in summertime. But summertime is far away and you have an irresistible urge to do something today; or tomorrow at the latest. Once again you remember Tolstoy or rather one of his questions, ‘What does one need?’ You go home and walk around your 9-bedroom, 15-bathroom, 84,000-square-foot family home. And you say to yourself you do not need it. Nor would you need it if you had a wife and seven sons. According to Tolstoy, you need only a grave or rather a coffin. You buy one and lay your body into it.

Deconstruction, *Abbau*. There was a turning point in the history of philosophy. For many centuries we dealt with systems and constructions. Metaphysics used to reassure us, constantly alluding to the deep-seated harmony of the universe that nowadays we associate only with Mozart’s music. Even Haydn makes a complete and utter mess of our thoughts and states of mind; and also of our moods. There are too many unexpected switches in his works so we are even tempted to talk about switches on switches as if watching a comedy where Audrey Hepburn parades her beauty to the detriment of all those switches and tales-within-tales. Metaphysics has been falling to pieces for more than a century; the same goes for life. Many artists seem to have contributed to this pernicious trend. Nietzsche did it through his works. Tolstoy did not think much of art but he respected human life – when dealing with his peasants in particular. The Russians knew he was deconstructing his family. Intellectuals thought they might help him by composing songs in his honour. One of these songs began thus, ‘In the estate Yasnaya Poliana lived Count Leo writer Tolstoy.’ Every literal translation deconstructs our texts. But the text of this song needs neither translators nor bad singers: it deconstructs itself. We have come across a perfect specimen of self-deconstruction or self-destruction. Later on the song informs us that Tolstoy ate neither fish nor meat and that he walked around his village barefoot. The anonymous author also enlarges upon Tolstoy’s wife who ate both meat and fish. According to the song, she did it ‘in reverse’: in other words, she did just the opposite of what her husband was doing on a regular basis. Such is the meaning of this deconstructive verse. In the United States of America lived and taught Count Jacques de philosopher Rrida.

You are too sick and you know that. Of course both your doctor and your wife do their best to hide from you how you feel: they tell you you feel better and better. ‘You’re going from strength to strength,’ they say smiling broadly. You do not smile at all, which means you smile neither broadly nor narrowly. And you say to them, ‘No, I’m going from weakness to weakness, from sickness to sickness. From death to death, you know.’ They say they know nothing of the kind. They say, ‘You might be going from angst to angst, but you’re wrong, utterly wrong. You should go from hope to hope, from God to God.’ You remind them there is only God, but this God is not Allah, as

far as *you* are concerned. Of course you have nothing against Muslims and they know that; and they say so as they nod their heads. 'This God will help you anyway,' they say as they nod their heads and shrug their shoulders. You look at their shoulders and begin to cry. In spite of your tears, the doctor continues to talk because he is supposed to have conversations with his patients about the weather and how they want to be kept alive if they become too sick to speak for themselves. You do speak for yourself but both your doctor and your wife are aware of the fact that, from now on, you will remain silent over the issue. The issue is your death and the doctor goes on speaking about life. He says life is beautiful and he is probably right; at least your wife seems to agree with him, for she continues to nod, smile and chuckle. Both your doctor and your wife are at one with the world that thinks one should live to be a hundred – a rough estimate, a conservative estimate. Your doctor goes on talking and you understand why he does not go out: Medicare has proposed to reimburse doctors for having conversations with dying patients. But why do your wife and children smile the smile of those who know victory is within reach?

Reason neither dies nor lives. It is eternal perhaps, and what is eternal is neither born nor dies, as we all know: we read mystics and theologians every day. And every day they say to us, 'Inborn, unborn, undying, eternal, omni, ni, ni.' What about love? Love was born, is born, unborn and so on. You ask me if I got your email or not. I did get it but I did not thank you for it in the email I sent you several days afterwards. Anyway, I was so sad I had missed you once again that I could not answer you at once. Are you surprised, astonished, overwhelmed? I spend hours reasoning out the solution to the puzzle of life and love. It is the same puzzle, isn't it? Our institutions are based on nothing more substantial than a passing fancy. And love is one of our institutions, I am sorry to say. We say to each other we should love our neighbour. You are not my neighbour; yet I love you deeply, eternally and probably madly. I do not know what madness is and means, but I think I am half-mad, eternally mad because my love is as hopeless as my life. One does not honour Man by decrying his most substantial and most stable creations – his social institutions. That is what Santayana thinks. But love is not an institution; it is an *intuition*. And I do not decry human intuitions. I do not know what I decry and what I do not. I know I am likely to cry in a few moments. Well, I am crying now. So what? I do hope we shall meet very soon. Could you please let me know when you intend to stay in Paris next? Anyway, there are many meeting places in the world and I hope one of them will welcome us with open arms, as they say. Are your arms open? From the point of view of logic, they are not. But I have already abandoned the formality of logic. In the construction of the future, none but formal considerations are relevant. And my age is irrelevant.

You have a sweet dream in the course of which you enjoy a series of female bodies. In your opinion, they are ideal and you start looking for them in the streets and parks: you look for ideals everywhere. You are a perfectionist and it is no easy task to satisfy your tastes, but your parents have a lot of money and they make sure you do not go short of anything or anybody. You go for a walk, meet a beautiful woman, come up to her and ask, 'Who are you?' Oddly enough, she is a tennis player. You look at her clothes and realise she does her best to cover her arms and even the rest of her body. Her dress is beautiful, but you are not looking for a dress: you can buy any item of clothing you wish. And you do not wish to buy a dress. All you ask for at the moment is an ideal woman you can marry. Living happily ever after and even after this ever and that after. You say to yourself this woman must have large biceps and a mould-breaking muscular frame. You also say to yourself that, if you marry her and go with her to the Seychelles or any European beach, people will think she is a body builder. Of course you might tell them

she has won as many as 17 Grand Slams. But someone is likely to say to you, ‘Your wife should avoid weights in her training. She’d better focus on stretching and preventive exercises. They’re more beneficial for both tennis and life.’ You say to yourself that your wife may grow thinner. But if she does, her results are sure to fall off. So she is likely to say to herself that a visible increase in strength is certainly welcome. And she might say to journalists, ‘I hope to gain more muscle.’ You like tennis, but you do not like muscles whenever they happen to ‘adorn’ a female body. So you have a sweet dream in the course of which you enjoy a series of *male* bodies. You go to Wimbledon, marry a champion – in the tennis world he goes by the name of John Jones – and adopt a child.

It is not always easy to die. Sometimes it is even easier to live, strange as it may appear in the light of what we go through round the clock. In Japan it is even harder to survive than to live. Suppose you survive a member of your family, which happens rather often, especially if you belong to a large family. You burn this member and hold services for him or her at certain intervals forever. On the 49th day the deceased’s soul goes to the Pure Land where the Buddha and Buddhists reside. But you are still in the Impure Land and you should not forget that. So you inter the deceased’s ashes and put a memorial tablet on the family altar. And then you are supposed to pay a visit to the grave and dine with your relatives, even if they are distant and virtually unknown to you. You have dinner with them and drink a lot of sake, otherwise the spirit of the deceased will haunt you day and night. But you are allowed to hold a ‘free funeral’ and a non-religious service for the deceased, even if the latter is your father. Your late father thought you would inter his ashes and put a memorial tablet on the family altar, but you just scatter his ashes and keep the number of subsequent mourning dates to a minimum – to one or two. You invite your relatives to dinner and say, ‘This is the first and last time we’re meeting at the dinner table.’ They say to you it is not the done thing. So you agree to invite them once again. But you point out that the French saying ‘*jamais deux sans trois*’ does not apply to Japanese citizens. To make things easier for your relatives, you translate the French words into Japanese and they nod in agreement. Never two without three. Two without three. ‘*Deux sans trois*’, you say to them. And you ask them to memorise these words in French. ‘To make things easier for you,’ you point out, ‘I removed one word from this saying. Instead of memorising four words, you’ll consequently deal with three words only. Easier, isn’t it?’ Once again your relatives nod in agreement. And they mutter to themselves as they leave your house, ‘*Deux sans trois, deux sans trois.*’

The 18th century produced the steam engine and thereby ushered in a new era of civilisation. But some of us think that any new era, whatever its achievements, is bad, evil, fatal and Apocalypse-like; or Apocalypse-oriented. We say such people are diehard conservatives, but we do not kill them; so they go on living. And they replace the steam engine with horses. Horses come and go; and there are a few steam engines in between them. You pull a grape off the bunch and pop it into your mouth. You pull another grape off the bunch and pop it into your mouth. And this procedure reminds you of days of yore. But there are machines that can replace your hands in the course of this procedure or ritual; in the course of the rite of autumn. And you can see one of these machines in a Charlie Chaplin film. The machine pulls a grape off the bunch and pops it into your mouth. Then it pulls another grape off the bunch and pops it into the same mouth of yours. And one of these machines stands in your vineyard. This machine pulls a grape off the bunch and pops it into another machine. And the latter pops it into a barrel or a cask. And either the cask or the barrel pours some wine into your glass. And your glass is picked up by another machine. This machine brings it level with your mouth. And then the table tips and all your drinks fall on the floor. The

same machine or robot picks up all your drinks and pops them into your mouth. The machine has been taking part in this ritual for years and years. As a result of this rite of springs, summers, autumns and winters, you have become an inveterate drunkard. So you destroy your machine, buy a horse and go for a ride. You climb onto your horse and set off at a relaxed trot down the lane. You come back home and go to your garden. You pull a grape off the bunch and pop it into your mouth. You pull another grape off the bunch and pop it into your mouth.

The term 'potential difference' is as old as the hills; at least within the domain of physical science. There are unpotential differences, impotential differences and real differences. There are differences everywhere. Every human being is in a class of his or her own. When you are down, they say to you, 'Don't commit suicide. You're unique. There's no human being like you in the whole world.' You might think the world is happy on account of your uniqueness: there are no other human beings of your kind and therefore no one feels as miserable as you do and are and will be till doomsday. But they seem to imply that without you the world would be incomplete, unfinished. You say you do not care. Anyway, you cannot finish the world. You could destroy it in the heat of the moment or on the spur of it, but you can neither finish nor terminate it. You must have a sort of terminator gene and so you cannot go on. You are probably unique in this respect: everybody seems to go on except a few Japanese who go to their suicide-oriented wood – you can see Mount Fuji from it – and do what they are supposed to do: hara or sepu. More often than not you are unable to memorise Japanese words. And yet you adore Japanese civilisation and wish to live in Japan for the rest of your life. You also wish to die in Japan. But whenever you think about this country, you say Ja. You say, 'England, France, Germany, Italy.' Whenever you deal with Japan, you see and hear only Ja, which means you do not understand the whole of Japan. You understand only part of it. So you carry out 'hara' and do not go any further. 'Kiri' remains beyond your ken and life. Being half-alive is the worst state and stage one can reach. (This reminds us of Pushkin's duel, his wound and agony.) That is why Socrates says, 'Either you know yourself or you know you don't know anything.' He means you had better not know your 'your', just *your*. Either you know *yourself* or you know .

Another strike. This time you are facing a strike on the public transport system. You are an optimist and collect silver linings only. So you say to yourself, 'This strike is good for me because it's likely to snap me out of my normal rush-hour routine and force me to find alternative ways to work.' So you set off down the road on your new bike: you bought it a week ago in expectation of today's strike. You feel better and better as you ride past a field of ripening wheat and cross a forest where there are many mushrooms and butterflies. You prop your bike against a tree and pick up a few mushrooms. Then you catch a butterfly and look at it for a while. After putting it in a box, you resume your journey or rather your search for an alternative way or path. Last night your mistress sent you a series of text messages. One of them enlarged upon your forthcoming dinner. 'I can recommend the chicken in mushroom sauce – it's delicious,' your mistress pointed out. You stop, dismount your bike and get down on your knees: you have just realised you do not have enough mushrooms for the sauce recommended by your mistress. Then you realise you are late for your work and return home after several hours of riding through woods and meadows. Your dinner proves a complete success and your mistress says she will marry you at once. Your future wife is a Texan oil heiress and so you resign from your company. An alternative way, isn't it? And what if you have a similar problem with your brain? What if a part of it goes on strike? You look for an alternative way and end up making a scientific discovery. 'The main gain comes from the disruption itself,' you say to your

wife. ‘A decent proportion of people and their thoughts are not optimising their journeys at the moment,’ you add solicitously. ‘And what if your whole body goes on strike?’ your former mistress asks. ‘In that case you’ll spoon-feed me,’ you answer. ‘Don’t forget to use exclusively silver spoons.’

If you are attached to something or someone, you suffer from what Eastern sages call ‘strong attachment’. You have an irresistible urge to grasp what you happen to be attached to; you lose self-control and other forms of control as well. Any dignified man owns a sort of remote control that enables him to organise both the future and the past. Neither his unconscious nor his conscious mind play tricks on him. He is not attached to his mother to the point of planning to kill his father. He just loves her and no one says he is an ungrateful son. Actually no one says anything about him and that is how one should live and die, according to Eastern sages. No one knows whether you live or not. No one knows your name so sometimes you wonder if you have one or not. If you die, no one takes any notice of your corpse which remains where it is until further notice. Even vultures do not eat you because they have never heard of you in your lifetime. Even now they do not hear anything of you, of your death and corpse. What is the difference between your life and your death? Is there any? In your lifetime you met a lot of women, but whenever you met a beautiful woman you recalled the danger one runs on account of strong attachments and you said to yourself and to her, ‘I’m a monk.’ And she went her way; so did you. You went her way, his way, or its own way. You were everyone and no one, as someone put it; no one and nothing. You left no traces and a multitude of traces left you forever. You used to be a monk; at least you said so to beautiful women. Now you are a corpse. What is the difference between a corpse and a monk? A corpse is not likely to meet a woman, let alone a beautiful woman. And if it does meet one, it says, ‘Woman, pass by.’

Referendums may not be the best way to resolve complex political and financial problems, but the democratic deficit only worsens when voters feel shut out of the debate. Some politicians say referendums are a necessary evil; others agree with them to some extent. For a while they nod in agreement, but then they stop nodding their heads and begin to shake them instead, saying that referendums are an *unnecessary* evil. ‘The outcome of any referendum is evil,’ they point out. ‘People just like to say “no”, and any referendum, however immaterial, offers them an opportunity to do so with impunity.’ But other politicians say they do not believe that human beings are innately evil. So they cannot say ‘no’ for the sake of saying ‘no’. They say it for argument’s sake. They reflect on the problem they are asked to solve and they say ‘not at all’ only if convinced that the problem in question – or question in problem – *cannot* be solved at all. But the other group of politicians say, ‘They’re evil, evil, evil,’ which brings a smile to the other politicians’ faces. ‘If you’re afraid of our voters, we can give you a magic charm to ward off evil spirits,’ they say, winking at the other politicians. Nevertheless, the voters say ‘no’. So some politicians say ‘no’ in their turn, whereas the others start looking for the middle ground. This procedure is called ‘the quest for the middle ground’. ‘We no longer look for the Grail,’ say the middle-ground seekers, ‘but the middle ground is within our reach.’ Once the middle ground is found and secured, the politicians put it to a popular vote which says ‘no’ three times in a row. ‘At last, in this world of scandal, we have someone who takes risks,’ says a foreign journalist. ‘The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages,’ says one diplomat. ‘The disadvantages far outweigh the advantages,’ says another diplomat or politician. They install a pair of scales in some park or other and put the advantages in one container and the disadvantages in the other. The scales fall down.

We look at reality and get the feeling it looks like a sphere; and it also sounds like one, if we take the trouble to listen to it. And if we do not, it sounds like a piece of concrete music which was quite in vogue in the Sixties of the last century. Perhaps even in the 19th century it was the very thing our intellectuals were looking for. They thought that real music of the kind they listened to in Japan, especially in Japanese gardens, was quite superior to Beethoven, Schubert and even Mozart. Mozart does all he can to make us feel comfortable in the garden where the Countess, Figaro and Suzanne are playing a trick on the Count. The music is beautiful but the garden is more beautiful still, and no music can hold a candle to this garden, in spite of its being European and not Japanese. There are people who like only the music of nature. They do not call it 'concrete' and they are right of course: concrete music is mainly performed in cities where we hear either a squealing of brakes or the screams of a child. Of course we can hear the same screams in a garden, but we worship children, and we permit them to do whatever they like. A loud clap of thunder makes our children stampede and nothing remains either of our flowers or of our flowerbeds. But we do not mind and our only boy continues to run and scream to his heart's content. His heart is delighted; so are we. If you have no children and happen to look at the world on a cloudless and windless day, you might think it looks and sounds like a sphere. You recall Parmenides and, muttering to yourself a few words – to this effect no doubt – you lie back in a deckchair. For a while you look at the sky and realise it is not deprived of clouds; not altogether. There are several clouds in it and they move towards the limit of the sky. Sometimes they join each other; sometimes they flow apart. And then you realise that, inherent in the very character of what is real, comes to the fore the transition of things. You go from despair to joy. You take care of your last will and testament – in the presence of your lawyer. And then you have a game of bridge with your lawyer, your wife, your son, and your mistress. You do not seem to be the man who signed a few sheets of paper half an hour ago. Last night some nervous disorder produced paralysis in your legs. This afternoon a tear is rolling down your face; another homage to Heraclitus. When it reaches your neck you realise this tear is not what it used to be.

You are told there is a crisis. It is pointless to ask what kind of crisis we are facing this time. We know that it is either our health or our purse that might be affected as a result of this crisis; or both, needless to say. Our bosses always say to us, 'Both, both', meaning that if our health suffers a lot, so does our purse because one cannot help relying on doctors in the course of one's illness, be it a nervous breakdown or any of the cancers known to doctors and their patients. Well, there is a crisis but it does not concern the whole surface of our planet. One country suffers more than its neighbour and all other countries say to the neighbour, 'You should help your neighbour, otherwise we'll have no alternative but to conclude you're not a Christian country.' So the neighbour lends money to its neighbour; the latter does not pay its debt either in due time or after several deadlines. The former neighbour's finance minister says his fellow citizens are not honest dupes. His counterpart says his fellow citizens are not dishonest smart guys. 'All right,' says the former. 'You're corrupt, unreliable and incompetent.' And the latter asks him whether he knows how his fellow citizens live their lives. 'They don't live *your* lives, mind you,' he says. He adds that, had his counterpart paid a visit to his native land, he would see hungry old people rummaging in dustbins, rubbish bins and even around rubbish dumps. By way of an answer, the former shakes his head. 'You don't seem to believe what I've just said,' says the latter. 'All right.' He motions to the man at the door, who quietly leaves the hall. Shortly afterwards, the assembly watch two rubbish bins move through the hall. They are put in front of the rostrum, on either side of it. An old man opens one rubbish bin and begin to rummage in it. After a while, he lifts his eyes from the bin and shouts, 'Helen!', whereupon his old wife joins him.

‘The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth,’ says Pope Francis. What is to be done? You can say whatever you wish about the Earth and its inhabitants, using such words as ‘hell’, ‘muck’, ‘dirt’, ‘bastard’, ‘schmuck’, and so on. You can also pull a face or make a grimace of disgust; or lie down and shut your eyes for good. Yet the question remains and as long as you are on the surface of the Earth or rather on the top of this pile of filth, you will do your best to answer it. What is to be done? Luckily for you, you are at home and not on the top of the aforementioned pile. And you say to yourself that if you want to carry on living here, you must have to change your ways and learn to be a bit tidier. When you say ‘here’, you know you are speaking about your place and not about the Earth that nothing can change or save – not even scores of popes. So you resolve to change your ways and thereby save your life: you are on the point of committing suicide. What else are you supposed to do after reading the pope’s description of the Earth? You look around and realise your house too looks like a pile of filth. This time you do not lie down: your bed looks like a pile of filth. You just put your hands over your eyes because you cannot bear to watch the life of your room and furniture. How to change your ways? Cleanliness should become your keyword. And do not say to yourself or others, ‘I feel like a real drudge – I’ve done nothing but clean all day!’ And you have to get down on all fours to clean behind the toilet. Now your house is spick and span. You put on your shoes, go out and see a small pile of filth. You walk down the street and see another pile of filth. This pile is bigger than the first one. Yet you continue your walk and come across another pile of filth. And then you realise you are on the top of a pile of filth.

This moment does not seem to be welcome either by time or by space or even by the formless void about which they talked abundantly before the advent of Einstein’s theory. But relativity takes no notice of it either as if everyone and everything could skip it without further ado and pass on to other portions of space-time. But this moment is an achievement for its own sake and we should not disregard it on the grounds that nothing will ever happen inside it. This moment is already in the past but, whatever we might think and conjecture, it is not a thing of the past. Nor is it a thing of the present or of the future. It is a thing in itself. This moment is a gift of God. But for this moment and its contribution to our history, this history of ours would have stopped once and for all. The sun would have come to a standstill, had this moment failed to see the light of day; and yet no decisive battles are being fought on our Earth, on Mars and other planets of the solar system. The moment we are talking about picked up a few elements and put them together for its own sake, for our sake, for the sake of history that should not stop on account of the atrocities we are living through this afternoon. And we know that these atrocities will stop neither tonight nor tomorrow morning. Even if the sun comes to a standstill, our atrocities will carry on as if nothing had happened. And we say to each other, ‘Let’s carry on with what we agreed for now,’ and yet we know we shall never come to any agreement, however temporal and fragile. Carry on with your work. Carry on with your rest. Carry on with your sleep. Carry on with your sun and moon. Carry on playing on your computers. Carry on mooning around the Earth.

My dear friend,

You have not answered my email. You might think I am in love with you. I understand the youngsters who fall in love with you at first sight, even if this first sight is related to the Internet where one can find your photographs, your smiles, and so on. You are no doubt afraid of the feelings you attribute to my heart and even to my body. You

might think I am head over heels in love. Let me tell you that, at this stage, my head is far more important than my heels. Even ten years ago I was capable of running after a woman – in the streets, in my dreams, and so on. Now I am too old for this sort of exercise – I can no longer run, in other words. Even if I see the proverbial carrot, I do not budge from where I am. And I am in my rocking chair, if you must know. Well, now you know everything. You know I am not in love with you. Of course I understand all those youngsters who crawl either in front of you or behind you. Anyway, crawling is their favourite pastime. I no longer crawl, you know. I am just sitting in this chair of mine. I thought you might come and spend a few hours in my company. I thought we might drink a few bottles of champagne. Alas, we shall never drink anything together. We shall not drink this cup down to the dregs, if you see what I mean. You do not. All right, all right. The cup I am talking about is life. Actually Claudius speaks of this cup in *Hamlet*. He says this cup is filled with poison and he is right for once. We are often right on our deathbed, even if we die somewhere else. We say a few words before giving up the ghost and these words are right. *Les mots justes*, you know. That is what Flaubert meant when he spoke about these words. If you say about this life of ours, ‘This cup is full of arsenic,’ you are right, absolutely right. And you put some potassium in the cup of my life. Never mind, never mind. I wish you every success in the future and the life they speak of when they say something along the lines of ‘happily ever after’.

You are a highly intelligent young man. Or you are a middle-aged man: young people continue to grow and sooner or later they are bound to become middle-aged – without losing an inch of their intelligence. Of course you cannot and should not measure intelligence by inches, but that does not really matter, given that the subject matter of our discussion is not intelligence as such. Actually it is not intelligence at all – for the simple reason that intelligence does not really count. What counts is love and we all know that. You can be intelligent and generous to a fault. You *are* intelligent and generous to a fault. To begin with, over many years you have been very generous with your time. You have talked to stupid jerks, to the illiterate, to idiots, to madmen and madwomen, to babies and nurslings. You are an urbane, kindly and generous scholar – no doubt about that. And people do not fail to take advantage of your generosity. The poor settle in your castle and pitch their tents in your garden, all around your lake. And every day a lot of female representatives – you have no idea what they represent – come to you and say something along the lines of: ‘The charity will go under unless a generous donor can be found within the next few weeks,’ whereupon you open your safe and become the generous donor they have just told you about. There is no denying you are an exemplary gentleman and a wonderful man. But you do not love people. In other words, there is no room for love in your heart. So you are a bad guy and you should consider yourself as one of life’s rejects because that is what you really are. Parents warn their children to keep clear of you and they are right. But the Church will never forsake you so you can fully rely on a priest who comes to your room and talks about love. He says among other things, ‘Love is everywhere. Look at the photograph of Pluto taken by NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft. Can you see this heart-shaped patch on its surface? It is 1,000 miles wide, you know.’

There are no things of the past. There might be what we call the past, but everything is present: Julius Caesar and his wounds, and Brutus and any other brutal force which is always eager to alter this and sacrifice that. And sacrifices are always better than the rest. The rest is not sacrificed and therefore not sacred; yet some of us pick it up. We pick all of them up to rescue them from a fishing boat in distress off the Cornish coast. Then we realise they are not of our number. No one is of our number because our number belongs to a mathematics of its own. But

this mathematics does not exist; at least it is not owned by anybody. If you talk of this mathematics, they say to you, 'What is it? Where did you hear about it? In some university or other? Where? In California?' You answer, 'Yes, in California, in the Sixties.' Your life becomes a work of art, otherwise you do not think it is worth your while living on this Earth. There are workers and their unions, reunions. You join them from time to time; you dislodge them after a while. No more working classes. Anything can happen after a while and it does happen; and you have no idea what to do with it. For a while you wonder if something has really happened. And then you realise something *has* happened. So what? is your favourite question. You are a sceptic and it is hard to convince the sceptics. So no one tries to convince you. Why should one strain every nerve to make you understand that life is wonderful, as Capra put it? Mapra put it as well. Mantra joined the ranks. You are Tantra or your own aunt you loved so much in your childhood. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. You cannot beat anybody, but anybody beats you either physically or metaphysically. So you join your aunts, your uncles and a lot of hooligans. And you take off your shoes and socks and walk barefoot along some beach or other. You take off men and women; and you continue to walk barefoot, barebody, baresoul along the beach. A lot of naked dinners.

A drunkard is sitting in front of an empty bottle. There is nothing sadder than the image he contemplates as he recalls the number of bottles he has drunk over the last week. Of course he cannot buy another bottle of vodka, otherwise he would already have done so many times, in the same shop. But the shop is closed and anyway he has no money in his purse or elsewhere – in his safe, for instance. Actually he has no safe and he is happy to realise once again that owing a safe might land you in deep water. He usually watches the early evening news. Every day he says to himself, 'I'll watch the news tonight. In a few hours' time, I'll know everything about the world, provided I don't fall asleep.' Last night he did watch the news and saw a safe or rather a hole – the remains of the safe. Apparently two thieves broke into the safe and stole everything in it. The neighbours heard an explosion and called the police. Once more the drunkard says to himself that he is happy on account of his safe. 'Conspicuous by its absence,' he adds with a smile. But the image of the empty bottle wipes the smile off his face. What to do? How to fill the bottle up? 'A volume is a mere multiplicity of non-voluminous elements, of points,' he says to himself. He picks the bottle up, studies its bottom for a while and shakes it. He shakes both the bottle and its bottom, and as he does so he sees a drop at the bottom of the bottle. This drop moves from one side of the bottle to another. It draws either zigzags or circles on its bottom. 'The ultimate fact of experience,' the drunkard points out, 'is the unity of volume.' He gets down on all fours and picks up a bottle lying on the floor. He shakes it and finds another non-voluminous element, another point – another drop, in other words. He crawls across the floor and picks up the bottles he has drunk over the last week. As he examines them closely he realises that every bottle contains some points, some non-voluminous elements. He struggles to his feet, picks up the bottle he has contemplated for more than an hour, gets down on his knees again and sets about creating the unity of volume or the multiplicity of non-voluminous elements.

If you go to pieces, which happens from time to time, you do not die but dissolve into light waves; and you do not care about their frequency. Why should you? The flood they talk about so often takes place after your demise. And whatever happens after this demise of yours has no bearing on the subject or rather on your life. It is true that your life might exert considerable pressure on your death or rather on your life after death. But for the moment you give no thought to your afterlife because you have to make ends meet and they do not meet, for all your efforts. For all

one's efforts. This is a key factor in tackling the problem of life. Or rather it is a key notion, a key direction: you should make efforts all the time, otherwise you will not survive. There are many keys to your life and you are quite aware of that. Thanks to some of these keys, you open the doors beyond which your riches lie and wait for you. You make another effort and another million makes its way to your pocket. But there are other keys and you think about them now and then. For instance, you say to yourself, 'I think there's one key fact I've overlooked.' What is this key fact? God no doubt. You have overlooked God – and humanity, as a matter of fact. And this is another key fact you have overlooked while thinking only in terms of your personal prosperity. There is no denying that you prosper. A lot of microchip manufacturing companies prospered at that time, in days of yore. In those days you took advantage of this prosperity and prospered yourself. Now you are a rich man and you live in a prosperous country: there are many multimillionaires in this country of yours. But there are other people, and these people are keys and factors. In a prosperous country like this, no one should go hungry. These people do go hungry and you say to them, 'You won't die of starvation. You'll dissolve into light waves, into sound waves. You'll be da Vincis and Mozarts.'

There is such a thing as the objective world: it is everywhere. This world is in front of you and also behind you, even if you do not take the trouble to look back. Why should you take this trouble or any other trouble? You know the objective world is behind your back and it does all sorts of things behind this back of yours; but for the life of you, you do not see why you should look back. Of course you had better look back from time to time, otherwise others may stab you in the back either literally or metaphorically. But if you turn back in time to see their daggers or swords, you can dodge them, thereby thwarting their attempts to murder you. Anyway, you know there is such a thing as the objective world and you need no proof to this effect, if you may say so. You do say so and no proofs bother you either in this respect or any other respect or disrespect. Well and good. There is also such a thing as the *subjective* world and you need no concrete proof in this domain either. But you have to deal with these worlds, even if you are reluctant to turn back or even move from where you are lying this afternoon. You know you are used to thinking in terms of physical notions – within the objective world. You think in terms of miles, inches, and so on. As for the subjective world, you always call on your mentality that gauges your moods, attitudes and élan. Two hours ago your mentality let you know you have a certain élan; as a man. And as a woman? you ask yourself. Apparently you are supposed to be both a man and a woman, otherwise you will never be complete. You strip your clothes off and look at yourself. The objective world and physical notions inform you that you are a man; but your mentality contradicts them. According to your mentality, you are a woman because you are tender and love nature, swans and so on. You are not a go-getter; you are a *know-better*. So you purchase a lipstick and go to your bathroom.

You wish to become a work of art. This does not mean you are longing to stay in a museum for a month or so, standing in a corner or in the middle of a hall. You think in terms of your life which, according to your views on the matter, should become a work of art. To achieve this laudable result, you have to say goodbye to consumer society. So you say goodbye to it and say hello to frugality. It is no easy task to say hello to frugality and the Greeks can testify to this state of affairs or mind. But you think about the Japanese, about their traditional lifestyle. Of course you continue to read Heraclitus or rather the fragments you light upon in a book on philosophy, but first and foremost you think about the Japanese because they succeed in today's world and also in the property world.

And you say to yourself as you go on thinking about the Japanese, ‘Their society makes a virtue of simplicity and economy. The Japanese never buy unnecessary items and take care of those they have, repairing them when they break and using them for different purposes to get the utmost out of them.’ You take your cue from the Japanese and repair a few items. And then you repair yourself. And while doing so, you build a better future for yourself (futurebuilding) and become a work of art. You also become a total man and a total woman. Upon awakening you write a poem and spend the afternoon pruning roses in your garden. You do not go to your office because you do not have an office: you neither own one nor have to work at one. So you do not work at all, which gives you a lot of opportunities to display much emotion in public and elsewhere. You say to the public, ‘I am a work of art.’ And you sing a few songs; and you dance to the beat of your own drums. And you die happily ever after. Or you do not.

Our substance is not hollow. You can say, for instance, ‘the hollow crown’, pointing at a king or a queen, at a portrait or a living creature. Be that as it may, you cannot say your own substance is hollow. You may be a *shallow* character, for all we know, but your body is not devoid of internal organs such as the heart and a pair of lungs. What is more, there are several egos within your substance; or several substances within your ego. One of your men is Andrew; another’s name is Paul. Paul and Andrew are on speaking terms; Peter and Hans are not. This morning you are Nicholas because he is used to spending a lot of time in bed – after listening carefully to his alarm clock. Andrew also listens to it every morning or rather he does not listen to it. As soon as the alarm clock goes off, he jumps up and runs out of the room, muttering to himself, ‘The way to be successful in business is always to stay one jump ahead of your competitors.’ He stops in his tracks, stands for a while in the middle of the dining room and then jumps as if training himself to be more assertive at work. But you are widely thought to be an indecisive leader and you are aware of that. There are too many people inside you and that is why you cannot always, if ever, make up your mind on the spot. It is as if you were rooted to this spot, no matter what kind of spot it is and how long you have been trying to budge from it, jumping ahead. Nicholas’ jumps do not stand you in good stead because Nicholas is not alone: there are too many minds in your mind. Actually, whenever you face a problem, you have to make up several minds at the same time; otherwise no decision can be taken. Any decision, however negligible, is supposed to unify in itself a multiplicity of relationships. Any decision is a king in its own right. (Henry VIII, for instance.) But you believe in democracy.

Nietzsche said, ‘God is dead.’ Even those who have no idea who Nietzsche was and what he did in the 19th century seem to be aware of the fact; otherwise they would shout upon hearing this piece of news, ‘No, He isn’t, He isn’t! God forbid!’ They do not turn a hair. After much-soul searching, they might say something along the lines of, ‘I don’t think so. Are you sure? Did you watch His funeral on the Internet?’ In my childhood, I did not know God was dead. Yes, my parents wished to hide from me the fact that the Almighty had died in the 1880s. He might have died even earlier: I do not recall the date when Nietzsche hit at last upon this idea. He must have fallen asleep on the lap of death which has both knees and arms, otherwise no one would ever say, ‘Death held Him in his arms.’ People give utterance to whatever crosses their minds and this phrase may be just a figure of speech; but you believe in it and you are likely to be frightened if your parents say to you, ‘Death held the Almighty in his or its arms.’ So my parents did not say anything on the subject. They talked about Beethoven and Stravinsky, about Giordano Bruno and Paul Klee, but they did not say a word about God’s death and His funeral. One day I read

about His death, but I have never seen His funeral. Whenever I think about this event, I picture to myself an old man and a throne. And then the ceremony gets underway. His body is embalmed and placed in the coffin. A few angels hang the throne room with gold-brocaded satin and put the effigy of the deceased – as large as life – on a bed of roses. For two centuries archangels are supposed to put dishes around the coffin – meals on wings, as it were. In a way, the ritual is larger than life because even inveterate, diehard Christians might be taken aback at seeing the same daily routine being carried on in spite of the undeniable presence of death.

If you think in terms of time, nothing will ever happen. You think about the day you must have lived through. You are not sure you have, whatever they say – those who saw you here and there this afternoon or even tonight. But what you are going through now is neither tonight nor any afternoon you can think of. It is something unpredictable, incredible; or probably credible after all. It is hard to credit some of the stories you see and hear within this stretch of time or just within this stretch, whatever it is. It is probably nothing because everything is probably, probability; but not always relativity, whatever they might think or do. This love has nothing to do with relativity: it is in your heart and even if you reach the speed of light during your journey through your life or any other life you can light upon, this love will remain in your heart – whatever happens, as you say. You do not even have to say it because it is as clear as a bell or hell; or as clear as day or May or even October that is not always clear on account of fogs and Dickens who is eager to describe this fog or any other fog. And a child dies somewhere, not necessarily in the suburbs of London. Some children die in the centre of this big industrial city. So do some adults; or many adults, as a matter of fact. What else could they do? Of course they can trudge through the snow or some text they do not understand. They understand neither this text nor the snow they are trudging through. So they think in terms of Paradise instead of devoting their time to time. And they think about children. The latter go on dying somewhere: in London, in Saint Petersburg. But all this happened in the 19th century. Nowadays children do not die; nor are they beaten. Sometimes they are harassed either sexually or otherwise, but on the whole they are much happier than in the days of Dickens and Dostoevsky. So finally Ivan Karamazov is given a ticket to Paradise; and he sets off on his journey instead of talking to the Devil on Earth.

You write a love letter to a beautiful Japanese woman. Writing a letter to a beautiful woman sounds like a redundant statement. Why should you write a letter to an ugly woman? Of course, if you are a masochist or an aesthetic pervert, you can write letters to monsters of all kinds. But you belong to neither of these categories of humans. So you write a letter to a beautiful Japanese woman. Of course some may point out that ‘beautiful Japanese woman’ also sounds like a tautology. Actually there is such a creature as an ugly Japanese woman and we should take this phenomenon into consideration, otherwise we run the risk of never writing the right letter to the right person. Well, you write a beautiful letter and send it to a beautiful Japanese lady. You wait for an answer and you get none, contrary to your expectations. Once more your great expectations lead you nowhere. So, after a while, you switch to *small* expectations – to no avail. The result of this reduction of your expectations is the same, which means you will get no results, whatever you do. The result of your sending the love letter to a beautiful Japanese woman seems to be a foregone conclusion. In the first place, she does not love you. *Secundo*, you have no idea when to send love letters; and to whom. All right, you are in love with this lady and so you do not wish to send your love letter to anyone else. But you remain blissfully ignorant of Japan and Japanese customs. For instance, you are surprisingly ignorant of the cycle of six lucky and unlucky days known as *rokuyō*. So, inadvertently, you send your

letter on an unlucky day. And even if, purposely, you send it on a lucky day, the lady in question receives it on an unlucky one and you get no answer to your declaration. You do not even know that weddings should be held on *taian* days. How do you dare propose *anything* to Japanese beauties? Actually, *taian* is the luckiest day, but good luck can easily change to bad luck.

You love everybody, otherwise it is hard to live on Earth, under it and even above it. It is a wonderful life, but if you do not love everybody and everything – every insect and grain of sand – your life becomes unbearable. If you do not love criminals, your life is not worth living. And, logically enough, you do not live it. You die it somewhere and you do not even know where you have been dying it for the last 40 years; or 50 years. You do not even know how many years you have been dying somewhere. And you do not even know when this somewhere came into existence. Perhaps it is non-existent and so you live on a non-existent thing or substance. Perhaps you live on someone's body: this kind of thing *may* happen from time to time. Suddenly you hear, 'Get off my back,' but you do not budge because you do not know to whom this back belongs. Well, you know it is a back and consequently it must be part of someone's body – of some substance, in other words; otherwise it would not be called 'back'. It would be called a 'sugar lump' or a 'lump of coal'. Back, back, back. Perhaps you should go forward instead of looking back all the time. No, no; you are mistaken once more. There is a lump of something: your reason has already imparted this truth to your head. And your reason also spoke to you about someone's back or lump or hump. Today, your instinct does not say anything either to you or to your head, but your reason continues to work; and it is working rather hard. So you draw a conclusion that seems to coincide with what your reason has said to you in confidence: you have a lump on your head the size of an egg. And your reason adds that after 14 days the eggs hatch, meaning you will write a beautiful poem. But what are you supposed to do in the course of these days? Nothing. Waiting for inspiration is an act that speaks louder than words and poems.

I do not recall how many women, men and animals I have been in love with ever since I kissed a dog, a cat and a little girl. At that point I knew I was in love and I am probably inside the same love after so many years and winters and hopes and frustrations. It is surprising I am the same even after the few seconds that have elapsed since the last interference of bells in my life. There are bells and knells and Nells who were born in Dickens' creative imagination, mind and pride. Or he just thought about Nell and she died somewhere because all his children die somewhere or other. They die of tuberculosis and we hear knells that toll for Nells and that is enough to realise life is not very beautiful. It is not really ugly because both life and humans are created in the image of Paradise that is supposed to be good – much better than Disneyland. The weather is beautiful today; not quite, not quite. Now it is beautiful, now ugly. That is what our life looks and sounds like. You hear an ugly sound and think, 'This is our life.' But then you change your mind and say, 'Life can't be as ugly as this sound because it's beautiful and wonderful.' In the twinkling of an eye life becomes wonderful and you hear a beautiful sound. And then you see a picture and you do not understand what it says to you or anybody else. Perhaps it does not say anything. It is in front of you and you have to take it in; or out, for that matter. So you say almost mechanically, 'Out, out, out.' But the picture does not go out; so you have to do it yourself. You go out, away and say goodbye. Perhaps you do not say anything; you just sing a zigzag, Schubert's zigzag: 'Tararararara, rara – ra. Rara – ra.' An organ grinder. A time-grinder. Rara – ra. This hyphen is time, life, eternity. And *not* eternity.

I wake up. I suppose I do, otherwise I would not open my eyes. Of course I see a great deal in the course of my night-time wanderings and wonderings, as Nabokov might have said. You say you wonder and you do not: you just stay in bed and sleep, if you are lucky enough to fall asleep purely out of tiredness and not under the influence of alcohol. Well, you fall asleep and it is better than to fall and sleep afterwards; not necessarily forever. We often use the word 'forever' and the word seems to use us as well. But nothing is forever; or everything is forever. You just go somewhere and you go forever, even if your destination is not Kafka's castle; or any other castle. Your destination may be an ideal poem, the one that speaks of eternity and beauty. You wish to say, 'Beauty is music and music eternity and eternity is the Blessed Virgin and the Blessed Virgin is Her Son and Her Son is the Blessed Virgin.' Sooner or later you stop and your personal vicious circle comes to the same standstill. You are still and stand; or you lie in your bed. You open your eyes and say to yourself, 'Here we go again.' Of course you can say to yourself and your room, '*There* we go again.' If this or that does not work, you can always say, 'There *I* go again.' But *again* is important. One should repeat it as often as one can, otherwise one may die and not come back, in spite of our common resurrection. Even if our resurrection is uncommon, we *must* come back to life. At least *I* must do this sort of thing. So I come back to life in my tomb. At first no one – not even myself – takes me seriously. I mean I open my eyes, but everyone thinks I am dead; so do I, by the way. And then I re-open my eyes and say to myself, 'I've come back.' I do not say, 'Here we go again.' I do not say anything.

You buy erotic films; so do I, by the way. It does not really matter whether I buy them or not. I watch them, from time to time. One might say there is only one woman in these films. But this one – and many others – are wrong for once and forever because only one one is right: yourself. You watch a film like that and if you hear what the stars say to each other, you hear, 'Yes, yes, fuck me.' Sometimes they repeat 'fuck me' just for the sake of repeating it; or for the sake of the movie. There is no argument to speak of. There is a Slav woman who knows only two words in English or any other foreign language. Actually she knows two words in English and she utters these words all the time, although she does not need to remind her partners of what they have to do. She does not talk through her hat: what she says does make sense. But this is also life and pleasure; and delight and death; and existence and non-existence. Under the regime her parents knew by heart, this girl might have become a secretary to the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Prague. Now she says, 'Yes, fuck me, fuck me.' Now she might also say, 'Fuck you.' She does not say that because she is working very hard; or dying very hard. You look at her legs, her style of doing this and that. And she does this and many other things that cannot be defined as easily as all that. You cannot say, 'She does just that.' Perhaps she does nothing; or something in the middle. From time to time you do everything in the middle. So what? This middle of yours – and of everyone's – is neither at the beginning nor at the end. That is what it is. And you can repeat this word as often as you wish, 'Fuck the middle, fuck the middle.' Do talk through your bed.

You do not even have to open your eyes. You see the world and the underworld, even with your eyes shut forever. You see all those people and say to yourself you cannot bear their sight. And what about *them*? Maybe they cannot bear your sight either, but that does not matter; that is what we say when determined to win at all costs and just the costs: the global amount paid by participants. They all take part in life or rather in whatever is lucrative – in the lucrative part of life – and they never refuse lucrative Hollywood offers. You refuse one offer, two offers with a view to preserving your integrity. Your integrity has been preserved: you can feel it. You feel your integrity all

over your body and in the central part of your mind that takes care of your integrity. But what about lucrative offers? How could you preserve your integrity without them? You need French cheese to preserve your integrity. But this cheese is rather expensive, you know. And you know it *is* expensive. And whenever you buy this cheese, you inflate your integrity by feeding it. You watch your integrity slowly inflate and you say to yourself you have what they call ‘personality’. And even if they do not call it either ‘personality’ or ‘impersonality’, you have it and that is what counts. So your personality opens its eyes and sees another day. You correct yourself at once: your personality is not ‘it’. It deserves either ‘he’ or ‘she’ or even ‘everybody’, if you wish to play the part of Adam Kadmon or the Universe. And what about money? Doesn’t the Universe need it badly? Well, you do not know the first thing about money except that one needs a lot of it to buy a house with a swimming pool. It is relatively easy for newcomers to pick off the most lucrative business and ignore the rest. You follow this advice and ignore the rest. Shortly afterwards you come across another piece of advice. A middle-aged woman advises you to look abroad for more lucrative business ventures. You take her advice and become Adam Abroad.

Everyone you meet might be smarter and more capable than you – that is what you think when walking down the street or up a staircase, as the case may be. Why do you think thus and not otherwise? Because everyone looks smarter than you. You look at people and see a lot of intelligence in their eyes. There is nothing but intelligence in them, whereas in your eyes there are both intelligence and stupidity. Actually you have no idea whether stupidity lords it over intelligence or vice versa. Whenever you do not look at yourself either in a mirror or a nearby lake, you think you are intelligent and wise. Sometimes you even get the feeling you are wiser than Solomon, Socrates and the Buddha put together. Then you put them together and realise that this mass grave is much more intelligent than you are. So you let all these sages go and submissively they go back to their respective graves. Yet you are very intelligent. Of course you look and sound stupid, if compared with the sages of the past, especially if they come from days of yore; but in the midst of your colleagues or passers-by you become a centrepiece of wisdom. There is such a thing as the kingdom of wisdom and you are a centrepiece of this kingdom – of this empire, rather. That is what you think at home. But once you find yourself in the streets, you say to yourself, ‘I should lie low until they disappear, all of them. Otherwise they’re sure to notice how stupid I am.’ So you lie down and lie low for a while. Then you realise your body’s whereabouts are not low enough: others still judge you unfavourably. You lie lower and lower until you reach the lowest point in the universe. And you say to yourself, ‘I’ve sunk so low.’ It is better not to speak to yourself. You *have* sunk very low but you should not admit it either to yourself or to others. You are the only one struggling; there is no question about it. Others are born with silver spoons in their mouths and die with golden ones. You do have a few spoons at home; they never reach your mouth.

What is the ‘zone of absolute discomfort’? You eat poisonous food and go to the toilet every 20 minutes. You no longer need a watch: your visits to the toilet may be regarded as a ‘measure of time’. As we all know, the inhabitants of Königsberg needed no watches because they kept on watching Kant as he left his house and returned to it every day. His walks were as regular as clockwork so that his neighbours, both distant and near, looked at him saying, ‘It’s already 4 p.m.’ And if Kant was not within their fields of vision, they said, ‘It’s 8 p.m. because Kant finished his walk three hours ago.’ So you go to the toilet because you had better not go outdoors where temperatures can dip below -45° . So you may freeze to death and therefore you had better go to the toilet where temperatures vary between -5 and -10 . Sometimes it is better to stay in the lavatory on account of what you may encounter outside

it: in your living room temperatures dip below -12. They are in the habit of dipping lower and lower; you never know what temperature is likely to greet you as you leave the toilet for another span of 20 minutes. It is better not to leave the lavatory at all. But there is just one small snag: you do not get much exercise sitting in the toilet all day. You cannot say these comings and goings of yours are your favourite form of exercise, but you have no choice. In this respect you are not better than a beggar. Actually the same goes for all other respects except that you do not beg. You just go to the toilet and out of it. You are aware of the fact that a good diet and plenty of exercise will help you keep your body healthy. But your house smells like a rubbish bin: it is full of rotten food. So you can rely only on your exercise, on your frequent visits to the toilet. Well, your body is half-healthy. So you live in a 'zone of moderate discomfort'.

You follow in Saint Francis' footsteps. He is no longer there, but you continue to follow him; or his shadow. It is true that the dead are no longer in this world in the flesh: only their shadows walk in our midst and guide us towards sanctity. You and your companion in misfortune have just got caught in the pouring rain without either raincoats or umbrellas. Anyway, whenever it rains and pours, you wear no raincoat; nor do you have an umbrella in your attaché case. If you do have either one or the other or both, the sun climbs higher and higher in the sky. That is what we usually call 'destiny' and we are right for once. Whatever happens happens the other way round and we shall never get round this problem. So you continue to walk in spite of the rain: you cannot do otherwise. Incidentally, you can never do *otherwise* so it is pointless to point it out once again. So you do not do otherwise and go on going towards the end of your journey. You reach the end, but the gate is closed and locked. You shout and someone answers your shouts saying, 'Go to hell. That's where you belong.' Actually, you do not have to go to hell because you are already at the very core of it. Whoever is speaking to you does not know that. This individual is indoors; you are locked out. You are soaked through; you are catching your death of cold. You are afraid you have no alternative but to remain outdoors – in hell, in other words. You hold no grudge against the individual who is loath to open the gate and let you in. You shout, 'Thank you very much indeed,' and lie down. You bless both the rain and the temperature that is killing you slowly but surely. Then you begin to bless the Earth on which your body is lying. Shortly afterwards, your soul flies off, blessing the sun, your brother.

What is a human egg? We are not talking about the eggs one can buy in shops. Actually I have no idea whether the egg I am talking about can be bought in shops or not. Nowadays everything is done in laboratories, in vitro. They put an egg in a retort and a few minutes later one can see a baby leaving this retort for good or for worse. Well, we are talking about a single cell full of liquid, less than half the size of this comma. How many eggs are we talking about? ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, One egg is quite enough, actually. So let us take one egg and put it in the body of a woman – not in a laboratory, for once. This egg or half-comma contains the DNA of your parents and also human knowledge: it is not at school that you get acquainted with this knowledge, according to Plato. You *recall* it so that when people ask you, ‘Do you know anything about quantum mechanics?’ you answer, ‘Let me recall it.’ So this tiny egg of yours or rather of your mother’s also contains both Newton and Leibniz, let alone Spinoza; unless the egg in question is old. Egg quality deteriorates with age. Besides it is vulnerable to attacks on the body. That is why a great many women choose to put their eggs in laboratories where they are fully protected and taken care of round the clock. But if they stay in the body, gradually they lose their knowledge, their Socratic dialogues. First these dialogues dwindle to the size associated with monologues: you no longer hear Socrates. So you have to make

do with the nonsense mouthed by his opponents. Then you lose Newton, which is not a great loss, given that you still remember Einstein. Then you lose both Einstein and Eisenstein and say to yourself it is not worth your while seeing the light of day. What would you do in this world without Bach? That is how our human eggs pass away.

They talk about cancer. Whenever they do that, many people go out, away and disappear forever because they are loath to listen to the proverbial and poetical bells that toll for you and the people you are in love with. Whenever the bells begin to toll, you fetch a pair of earplugs and plug your ears and your nostrils with them. The bells' discourse upon the nature of life after death smells fishy and your nose is particularly sensitive to this kind of smell. But they say, 'Don't be afraid of these bells – they're not tolling for you, whatever they say. We'll give you detailed information about the state of your cancer, which is sure to double your recovery rate. We mean you'll be cured.' And they speak to you about your cancer's treatment and its likely impact on your body, soul and mind. And you do not mind listening to them because they say over and over again, 'Well-informed patients are likely to beat cancer in no time at all.' What you are really frightened of is uncertainty. You know you feel under the weather; you both know and feel it. You know you feel ill, but you have no idea what kind of illness you are suffering from. For a while, you think you are suffering from the common cold. It is true that you do not cough; nor do you have sore throat and blocked nose. But for some obscure reason you think you are suffering from the common cold; or rather you *hope* you are suffering from it. Of course people usually hope to be the picture of health instead of pinning all their hopes on the common cold. But if you have to choose between the common cold and cancer, you invariably choose the former because, unlike cancer, however slight, it is a *slight* illness. All of a sudden, your doctor utters a few words as he looks at you, his eyes full of tears, 'By the way, you have cancer, you know.' You say to him you know nothing about it. And then you realise that your certainty is struggling with your stress. This stress of yours came with not knowing what to expect. Now you know what to expect and you expect it. You end up coming to terms with death. You have beaten cancer so you do not really have to say to it, 'It is you that is dead.' You just say, 'I am dead.' That is enough.

You are old and ill. You can no longer live on your own and so you go to the nearest care home where they are sure to lavish a lot of care on your body and mind. After all, it is a care home – or rather a cure home – you are looking for; not a despair home, whatever Kierkegaard might say on the subject. You knock on the door and they let you in. They can see you are old and ill. They look at your feet and realise that one of them is already in the grave. So they do not say, 'We're sorry but you're too young for our establishment. Please go back and live in your own home until you grow decrepit. As soon as you begin to refer to yourself in the following terms: "A decrepit old man," you can come back to us and *our* home. For instance, you recall your last walk in the nearest park and say to yourself, "A decrepit old man sat on a park bench." If that is what you say to yourself, we'll welcome you with open arms and open doors.' One day you say to yourself, 'A decrepit old man is sitting in a rocking chair.' And you add after a while, 'It's high time I went to the nearest care home.' You see a lot of open doors; you go in, in, in and settle down in the care home where you are taken care of. Charwomen, waiters and nurses seem to suggest you are their master; and they are your slaves, no doubt about it. That is the conclusion you draw after spending a fortnight in the company of these slaves of yours. But they call you 'love', 'darling', 'sweetie', 'handsome', and you know you are no longer handsome. What is more, you have never been handsome, not even in your prime. Doesn't all this sound patronising? Aren't you demeaned by your slaves' behaviour? Of

course you realise they want you to feel at ease. They utter these words with the aim of increasing your confidence and wellbeing. Instead, they *decrease* both your wellbeing and confidence. ‘The other way round,’ you say to yourself. ‘They’re my masters.’ Suddenly you recall Hegel. Thanks to your masters, once again – for the last time perhaps – your memory comes to the surface.

You are fatally ill and for some time you have been on your deathbed. And you do not think you will ever be able to leave this bed of yours. So you must prepare yourself for a journey through death and fear. If asked where you wish to go after your demise, you would say at once, ‘To Paradise.’ But you are quite aware of the fact that you have sinned a lot in the course of your life. You know nothing about your former lives, but you are convinced you sinned throughout them as well. All this means you are not likely to go to Paradise after your funeral, let alone before it. You ask yourself what action of yours could obliterate all your sins, providing you with a ticket to Paradise. All of a sudden, you recall a parable that features the Buddha and a guardian. This guardian takes care of the gate to Paradise, not of the door leading to the Law. As soon as the Buddha reaches the highest spheres of Paradise, which correspond to the end of his journey, the guard says, ‘You’re most welcome, Sir.’ The Buddha answers, ‘Thank you very much, but I must wait. According to my calculations, there are a lot of unhappy people on Earth. They’re not in Paradise yet. I’ll wait for them. I’ll be the last one to cross this beautiful threshold, your magnificent gate.’ ‘I’ll wait, I’ll wait,’ you say to yourself. The Buddha is praised for his magnanimity and compassion. So you decide to be even more magnanimous and compassionate than the Buddha. If you prove to God you are superior to the Buddha in this respect, He will allow you to reside in Paradise for good. What better proof can one think of? You are prepared to wait until all of humanity finds itself in Paradise. You are even prepared to let the Buddha settle in it *before* you. So you say, ‘I’ll wait, I’ll wait. I’ll be the last to cross the threshold of Paradise. Please, let me wait for this unutterable joy on my deathbed. I want a cup of tea.’

They always speak of cancer and Alzheimer’s – as if there were no other subjects or matters. Of course they also speak of aerobics, but when talking about exercise in general, they think about illnesses that your gymnastics can keep at bay or forestall. When thinking about life and death, they also give thoughts to terrorists, earthquakes and proverbial bricks that fall at the wrong time and at the wrong place. But nothing prevents you from dying otherwise, for death has a very vivid imagination. In the history of the West and that of the East we find a few individuals who were able to send their souls on errands; their souls often set off on journeys – not necessarily at night and not always in the direction of Paradise. These individuals used to say to their souls, ‘You’ve been cooped up in your body for more than a week. Aren’t you eager to fly for a while? The mountain air is wonderfully pure. You can also pay a visit to some archangel or other. Or to Krishna.’ The point is you are not alone in the world. And whoever does live on his or her own – in some desert or other – has enemies everywhere. And if your enemies learn that you often distance yourself from your soul, they might take advantage of this fact. Some of them constantly spy on you by pressing their eyes against your keyholes. They are on the lookout for your soul, for its departure from your body. They see a white sphere floating around your body and say to themselves, ‘Let us wait for another minute. If his soul is too far away, it won’t be able to return to his body at a very short notice. The body will be lying on the bed, looking as dead as any corpse. And we’ll bury it.’ That is what they often did in days of yore. The soul would come back, hoping to find the body on the same sheet, under the same blanket, but

the body was already under the Earth. Whatever the soul said or sang on such occasions could be interpreted as a lament for the lost body. 'Where has my body gone? Where has my soul gone?'

Apparently Big Ben has become 'temperamental' on account of its age and probably for other reasons. We strive to be punctual, but punctuality involves us in the situations where nothing can be done except duty, business and so on. We no longer look for duration, superfluity, no-money's lands. Sometimes it is enough to deviate from the path of life, from its pattern, to find oneself in between this and that. Both this and that turn us into machines, but what happens or does not happen in between reminds us of our substance and essence, nature and eternity. Does not Big Ben drop a hint that we should stop talking about schedules and appointments? Shouldn't we rather have appointments with ourselves? Let us however shun trivialities and wise aphorisms; and this concerns both our inner and outer selves. Why should we meet ourselves and talk to each other for hours? Don't we learn about our selves through living and dying, dining and imagining things? Let us follow in Big Ben's footsteps and hands. For the past fortnight, the chimes and bongs which signify the passing of the hour and one's life have been fast. They might have been slow, though. What counts is drawing aside. You are just off the mark; not *way* off the mark, mind you. Let them call you 'temperamental' or 'whimsical' or 'fish out of water'. Of course others do their best to get you right. They talk you into going back into the water and say over and over again, 'You're a fish, you're a fish.' Instead of following their advice, you take off your shoes and socks and walk barefoot along the beach.

Do we need a centre? Of course we do, otherwise we may find ourselves on edge in every sense of the term. And even if, once and for all, we relinquish the games we have always played with words, we are bound to realise it is hard to teeter on the edge of this or that. It is much better to become a centrepiece and retain this status until doomsday. It is easier said than done because, in this case, we should do our utmost to last until doomsday, to live as long as necessary to reach this day and bow before our judges and superiors. And if we allow our numerous constituents to indulge in solitary pastimes, we shall run the danger of dislocation. A gradual paralysis will invade our body, for only the centre can hold all these pieces together, even if the centre itself cannot hold. What could our solitary finger do on its own? Without our brain and will? Without our consent? Our centre manifests a sort of consent inside our brain and then this consent is sent to the numerous constituents of our body. That is how our human machine or apparatus functions and we hope it will perform the function of controlling our organs and arteries until doomsday. But apart from the chief and principal centre, there are millions of centres of life in each animal body. They react to what happens and control the data they receive in the process. And they cannot always be identified with the centre of experience about which we are worried for the sake of our immortality. At some point we begin to wonder if we really need this all-embracing centre. Jellyfish are made up of harmonised cells; they are attuned to each other and hardly need any control. When cut in two, jellyfish – or rather their parts – go on performing their functions independently. There are many creatures inside us. Why not let them go? Why not give them their independence? A centralised body may perish on account of a one single brick. How many bricks are needed to destroy *all* our constituents? Let them go; let them enjoy life on their own. One of them may survive until doomsday.

When talking about order, we often have no idea what the subject matter of whatever we say, think and suppose might be. There are such things as alphabetical order and chronological order. When we recall last week, we do

not say, 'This happened next week'; and yet, according to some people, we do recall the future if we turn our attention to it instead of deploring our former mistakes. In a way, we may deplore our *future* mistakes: we are bound to make them sooner or later, even if everything seems to be in order. There is no point in deploring anything, for sad feelings are likely to poison our lives forever. Of course this would make things easier for us: if the entire future is nothing but poison, there is nothing else in it; or to it, for that matter. But we yearn for something, for something else: only masochists are fond of poisons. There is also such a thing as ascending order. Here is one of the examples of this order: worms, dogs, humans, angels, God. This is a definite, specific order to which we cling in the hope of getting rid of disorders. However, some put dogs above humans so they say, 'Worms, humans, dogs.' Some of them go so far as to say, 'Humans, worms, dogs.' They affirm that a worm eating a corpse is far above the corpse. (Are we dead?) In the first place, it is alive. In the second place, it eats, whereas corpses do not eat. They are *eaten*, but having lunch is another kettle of fish. In the third place, worms can crawl from one corpse to another: from a starter to a main dish, in other words. Corpses are unable to move either from starters to deserts or, generally speaking, from anything to anything – or *anyone*, as the case may be. On the other hand, corpses embody order much more successfully than any living body, be it a dog or a fish; let alone humans.

Our intellect must feel something, otherwise we would be unable to assign to it the task of guiding us through this existence. Of course every intellect is supposed to think and conclude what should be concluded on the basis of the data it gets as it looks around in search of data. If it does not look around, we may fall into a well or trip over a root. In a way, it looks at this well and feels it. And this feeling helps it realise how miserable we would feel at the bottom of this well. It is true that whenever we think about wells, our thoughts reach for the stars: ever since Thales' legendary fall, these two phenomena are linked in human imagination. We look at the stars and think about wells; and vice versa. And whenever we look into a well, we see a reflection of the stars. We see the opposites and they meet in both our eyes and our intellect that feels the beauty and harmony of life. These opposites coincide; so do other opposites. We take another step and realise that everything contains its own opposite. What about us and others? We hold the opposite view to our brothers and sisters. Then we realise that our intellect is full of those brothers and sisters we talk about whenever resolved to demonstrate how different they are from our views, customs and ways of life. So we try and come to terms with our brothers and sisters, but the ultimate harmony eludes us constantly. The point is our intellect does not want us to reconcile ourselves to the idea that we are not alone in the world, that there are others who are entitled to their own views and decisions. And our intellect feels all these decisions and views as if they were its own children. It is fond of a so-called touchy-feely approach. This intellect of ours is scorched and our opposite intellect comes to the conclusion that the world is on fire. So it stays away from the world, insensitive towards the feeling of others, to pain and noise.

There are no exceptions to any rule. Suppose there is a rule; you look at it and say, 'This is the rule I should model my life upon.' You fall ill and can no longer follow this rule or any other rule, with the exception of that dictated by your illness. This is the rule of death and there are no exceptions to this rule, and even your illness makes no difference. And if it does make one, it is certainly not a *world* of difference. You *may* get better and even *recover*, which is hardly imaginable. On the other hand, anything can happen in real and mainly in unreal life; one may recover unexpectedly and sometimes one can see a one-legged individual dance with others in a disco. And such a show is not always a fiasco, contrary to what some may suppose or conjecture. So anything happens; and yet one

cannot say that *everything* happens all the time. Not even from time to time does everything happen, otherwise we might see the light of day – or the light of night – and die at the same time, simultaneously. Anyway, there are no exceptions and if you stumble upon an exception to the rule, you immediately spot a rule behind this exception. The point is you cannot know all the rules there are in the world that is infinite, boundless and timeless. So far the world has spent an almost infinite amount of time collecting rules. But exceptions are not its cup of tea. And if someone says, ‘This man is exceptional. He’s in a class of his own,’ you may answer, ‘John is also like that. These two men are like two peas in a pod. In one pod, mind you. Not in *two* pods – make no mistake about it.’ And you realise that what you call ‘a class of his own’ is ‘the class of the world’ or ‘the class of all flesh’. Someone suggests you kill a woman. You react to this suggestion thus, ‘I wouldn’t normally agree but I’ll make an exception in this case.’ And you become Jack the Ripper.

We have always dealt with the abstractions of life; only with its abstractions, our calculations and notions. We say to ourselves, ‘Nature is beautiful,’ and we touch a tree or a few leaves we find on this tree and on a rosebush. We can even find a bud in a rosebud. So what? What do we know about this bud or any other bud? It is springtime and the fruit trees are in bud. We touch some of these buds and contemplate them from different angles. We smell and eat them. Yet we know nothing about buds and nature in general. We might know something about some of our buddies, but whatever we know about them does not amount to much. Our knowledge amounts to another piece of abstract knowledge. We speak of goodies and baddies. And we say to ourselves, ‘Nature is beautiful because our Lord has always taken care of it.’ All right, we may admit we do not know anything about God except that He or She or It or Zero is not, not, not, not. Neither this nor that, in other words. But within the same notion. ‘God is Not’ resounded throughout the Middle Ages. So what? We say, ‘God is not’ and we do that over and over again. Then we say, ‘God is Is,’ and once again we repeat this notion over and over again. We touch it and smell it. We buy a few sheets of paper in Japan and note this notion down on one of them. We smell this notion and say that God is beautiful and great. Then we find out what this sheet of paper smells of and we add that this or that flower is great and beautiful. Yet we know nothing either about this sheet of paper or about the flower it smells of. Neither this flower nor the sheet of paper we are talking about are things in themselves. They are just over there and we shall never reach them, whatever we do and however much we admire them. We say to each other, ‘The marketplace is filled with delightful smells,’ and we think we know something about the market as such: after all, it is *our* creation. We estimate the potential market for the new phones to be around one million people in this country alone. And then we realise that only three phones have been sold worldwide over two years.

How to attract attention to yourself? You think, ‘I wish I could go to this ball. That might give me the opportunity to rub shoulders with royalty. And of course I’d be treated like royalty myself. But the hall is too small.’ You are reluctant to admit to yourself that you are not likely to get an invitation to this ball because you are neither related to royalty nor are you the owner of an oilfield. All of a sudden you do get an invitation to the ball – by mistake no doubt. Just a case of mistaken identity, as they say. So you go to this ball under false pretences and no one takes notice of you. This fact drives you to despair and, taking your cue from a Hearst guest, you go to the lavatory and slash your face with a razor. Then you turn up again in the ballroom, your face dripping blood. The guests cannot help paying attention to you on account of your blood: they cannot bear the sight of it, especially if the action is set in a ballroom. You claim to have been attacked in the lavatory. Your face is bandaged and once again you

vanish into thin air. Actually you do not, but no one except God takes notice of you. And you are reluctant to slash your face again. Well, this ruse is unlikely to work for the simple reason that the members of high society know what took place at one of Hearst parties. If you did such a thing, someone would say, 'You're pulling my leg. No one attacked you in the lavatory. You just want us to notice you. I, for one, will never do such a thing. You're an invisible man, full stop!' Even if you hang yourself in some barn or other, someone is bound to laugh at you, saying, 'A shark would look nicer under this ceiling.' And what if you jump out of your window? Or any other window, for that matter? They might notice you for a second. They would not *stare* at your corpse, though: they cannot bear the sight of blood either in ballrooms or in the streets.

You open your eyes and realise you have slept nine hours, otherwise you would not have such a splitting headache. A headache of such intensity comes only after a nine-hour sleep. If you sleep eight hours, you rise and shine, going immediately to some lake or other to contemplate the beauty of nature. You jump into a rowing boat and row for an hour or so. Rowing is your favourite form of exercise and regular exercise reduces the risk of coronary heart disease. That is what your doctor says, and you listen to your doctor's recommendations, for you know how unpleasant it is to spend one's time in a hospital or on a deathbed or in a coffin. The most beautiful tomb cannot compete with the beauty of nature, even if there are no lakes in the neighbourhood or within a 30-kilometre radius of your property. But you wake up and realise you have a splitting headache, whereupon your mind splits into two groups. One group of cells prompts you to resume your daily exercise; the other says it is not worth your while spending another day in our vale of tears and fears; and splitting headaches. You also realise the uselessness of any undertaking and a number of lakes recede into the distance until you finally forget the beauty of nature and poetry written by Wordsworth and others. Life is absurd and you are not even permitted to gauge the size of its absurdity. Sometimes you think it is so small you can cope with it rather easily; sometimes it is as infinite as the universe. Well, to put it in a nutshell, you do not know anything. Suppose a postman brings you a box. At first you think it is a present you have been waiting for over the last three months. You try to gauge the weight of the box. After a slight hesitation, you put it on your bathroom scales and say to yourself, 'It is either a gift or a bomb.' You dash straight downstairs and rush to the nearest lake.

More haste, less speed. So you make no haste; you make nothing, to tell the truth. You are afraid of making a fatal mistake, the one that might destroy your army and humanity. Every soldier will be a general, as the Russians point out, and any general can destroy humanity by pressing a few buttons either in the Kremlin or in the Pentagon. So you neither marry in haste nor repent at leisure. You do nothing of the kind; you do nothing at all. But 'less speed' means speed, whatever it really means. It means you set off on a round-the-world cruise and make no haste, in accordance with your principles. You just go from one segment to another. It is a segment-the-world cruise you seem to have embarked upon. And if you are a general, your army procrastinates somewhere because you ponder the next move in the game. You know that any war and life itself are games. So some time ago you sat back for a minute to ponder your next move in the game. This minute has already lasted more than two hours. But the game is going on and your army will suffer losses if you postpone your decision until further notice. Where could this notice come from? From God no doubt. There are many notices in the world and some of them are called 'further' and others 'past'. You do not call them names because there is no point in doing so: you have to *act* instead of *playing* with words, notions, notices and God. But it is too late and all your officers say so as they come to you

one by one. The information has been released in dribs and drabs. What information? You have been defeated. So you quote Virgil in Latin, '*Maturate fugam*' and go to the latrine. And your officers repeat this order in English: 'Get ready to fly. Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly. Not too fast, though – let Macbeth's cronies murder you.'

We are so fresh we cannot believe it. Of course we believe in God and in eternal life. We also believe in uneternal life and in life itself. And that is enough, we say to ourselves. We believe in life. What else do we need? Life itself? We think that only our beliefs count and we are right to some extent; and that extent is so large we feel happy, satisfied and delighted, for life is an extent of something: of our breath and inspiration. And we have both, so we write a poem that says to everybody we breathe and exist either as human beings or some other entities. Suppose we are just entities and nothing else – nothing else in the whole world. And then we find out we are just particles, nothing else. We would like to be *everything* else; we have no alternative but to accept the verdict of our destiny or the destiny of our verdict. We accept all of them and find out we cannot do anything. Why should we do anything? We feel comfortable in our bed and even in our tomb. What should we do right now or right after? We might have done something right before, but we missed this opportunity and so we do nothing right now; and the right now does nothing either, as if taking its cue from our irresponsible behaviour. Well, we go on a spree and drink five bottles of vodka; every member of the group drinks five bottles of vodka. Every group and bottle feel happy. The bottles are inside human bodies and the latter play cards in Paradise. That is the only way to do so, so you put some vodka in your body and play cards, a great many cards. And you are a king or a queen of spades.

You need a guru; everybody does. One cannot find the way on one's own. But for a number of gurus, no saint would ever have become a saint. You find one guru; he leads you towards a second guru. You find a third guru by yourself because you are already on the way. In a way, you can go on alone: that way will bring you to your aim. Actually you should not look for an aim: it is the way that counts. All right, so you are on your way now and your salvation is already underway. You come somewhere and see someone. And this someone says, 'You think you need no one. You are bitterly mistaken because you need me, your umpteenth guru. I'll bring you to a stop where you'll learn almost everything. Of course no one can learn everything. If one does, one dies. One can't see the Almighty, you know. Not even in a bush, as a matter of fact. And if one happens to see the Almighty in a lake, it is one's own reflection one sees on this occasion. Come with me and you'll know almost everything and everything of the almost.' You follow your umpteenth guru and find a group of dancers. They dance away and you are told it is a sacred dance they dance. 'No point in dancing *Swan Lake*,' your umpteenth guru points out. Then you see a lake and a number of swans; they seem to dance as well. You look at your guru and he shakes his head saying, 'This is not *Swan Lake*, whatever you might think on the subject. Let there be no mistake about it – it's our Eternal Life's Lake.' And then you see a man whose face seems to be going away. 'Is he?' you ask your guru. 'Yes,' he answers. 'He's dying. But he's looking at the lake, isn't he?'

My dear friend,

I hope you are still my friend, although you will never become my mistress, let alone my wife. Why haven't you answered my email? I know that the Japanese never say 'no'. But you might at least have written, 'Yes-no-yes-no-no-no-no-no.' Do you think I would not have got the meaning of your message? What do you take me for? You might think stupidity is beyond belief sometimes. Or always perhaps. I can assure you I am not stupid; neither

sometimes nor always nor even occasionally. At least I am clever enough to distinguish between a woman in love and the one who is not. You might have written, 'Thank you very much indeed for your kind email. I have been so weary of late. I hope you do not mind listening to one of my tales of woe. Perhaps I am dressed too warmly for the time of the year. To tell the truth, I am feeling a bit under the weather – I think I have caught a cold. Do you wish to know why? I am snowed under with work.' Had I received such a contradictory message, I would have come to the conclusion that you are not in love either with my soul or with my body. You would have made me go through the whole rigmarole of following your argument for the sake of the simplest answer one can conceive of: NO. The Japanese are fond of letter-writing and they master this art to perfection. Even today Japanese women are their usual evasive selves, skilfully dodging their devotees' questions about love and its derivatives. Why haven't you dodged my questions? Why haven't you said NO? No one's gonna pull that kind of trick on me!

You deny the denial of the flesh. Then you deny the flesh itself, for life is a series of denials. Someone says to you, 'Deny this.' 'If I did what you ask,' you answer, 'it would be a denial of *everything* I stand for.' And suddenly you realise you do not stand for anything. You do not even know if you are standing or lying or flying like a balloon: birds fly far more beautifully. You deny the assertion that your flight is inferior to that of birds. But they continue to fly and you fall badly and break your leg. Then you fall under a bus and break everything. You stubbornly deny the wreckage of your body. You say this word cannot be applied to a human. 'I'm not a car,' you say. Yet the wreckage of your body has been scattered all over the roadside. And what can you do with this wreckage? You can raise it from the wreckage or resurrect it once and for all. The doctrine of eternal recurrence or Christ resurrects you and you become what you have always been. And you begin to wonder whether all this is necessary and if you cannot spend your time more fruitfully in your tomb which, after all, is comfortable enough, even if you are not lying under the protection of your family vault. And your deep sleep is comfortable too; and beautiful into the bargain, being surrounded by birch trees. You might love the restful sound of the wind in the trees, if you could hear it. You do not. Instead, you listen to the restful sound of death; or to silence. As a matter of fact, you do not listen to anything, for there is nothing to listen to, given that you are in your tomb and they did not bury you alive last year. And you have not come back so far despite all the promises and doctrines you came across in your youth. Then you forgot them, living or dying through sheer momentum; getting ready.

In the world,
and the best, not,
an end, a small
one,
smaller than
any beginning
or any middle, any way.

Any way is just this
and another beginning, inning.
There, where, in there, in

Not out.