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Was den berühmten "Kampf um's Leben" betrifft, so scheint er mir einstweilen mehr behauptet als bewiesen. Er kommt vor, aber als Ausnahme; der Gesamt-Aspekt des Lebens ist n i c h t die Notlage, die Hungerlage, vielmehr der Reichtum, die Üppigkeit, selbst die absurde Verschwendung,—wo gekämpft wird, kämpft man um M a c h t...Man soll nicht Malthus mit der Natur verwechseln.—Gesetzt aber, es gibt diesen Kampf—und in der Tat, er kommt vor—, so läuft er leider umgekehrt aus als die Schule Darwin's wünscht, als man vielleicht mit ihr wünschen d ü r f e: nämlich zu Ungunsten der Starken, der Bevorrechtigten, der glücklichen Ausnahmen. Die Gattungen wachsen n i c h t in der Vollkommenheit: die Schwachen werden immer wieder über die Starken Herr,—das macht, sie sind die große Zahl, sie sind auch k l ü g e r...

Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*

(As for the famous "struggle for *existence*," so far it seems to me to be asserted rather than proved. It occurs, but as an exception; the total appearance of life is not the extremity, not starvation, but rather riches, profusion, even absurd squandering—and where there is struggle, it is a struggle for *power*. One should not mistake Malthus for nature. Assuming, however, that there is such a struggle for existence—and, indeed, it occurs—its result is unfortunately the opposite of what Darwin's school desires, and of what one might perhaps desire with them—namely, in favor of the strong, the privileged, the fortunate exceptions. The species do *not* grow in perfection: the weak

prevail over the strong again and again, for they are the great majority—and they are also more *intelligent*.

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann)

Part One

But there it began with yong children, male and female, either under the armpits, or in the groine by certaine swellings, in some to the bignesse of an Apple, in others like an Egge, and so in divers greater or lesser, which (in their vulgar Language) they termed to be a Botch or Byle. In very short time after, those two infected parts were growne mortiferous, and would disperse abroad indifferently, to all parts of the body; whereupon, such was the quality of the disease, to shew itselfe by black or blew spottes, which would appeare on the armes of many, others on their thighes, and every part else of the body: in some great and few, in others small and thicke. Now, as the Byle (at the beginning) was an assured sign of neere approaching death; so proved the spots likewise to such as had them: for the curing of which sicknesse it seemed, that the Physitians counsell, the vertue of Medicines, or any application else, could not yield any remedy: but rather it planely appeared, that either the nature of the disease would not endure it, or ignorance in the Physitians could not comprehend from whence the cause proceeded, and so by consequent, no resolution was to be determined.

—for, not onely healthfull persons speaking to the sicke, coming to see them, or ayring cloathes in kindnesse to comfort them, was an occasion of ensuing death: but touching their garments, or any foode whereon the sick person fed, or any thing else used in his service, seemed to transferre the disease from the sicke to the sound, in very rare and miraculous manner.

—some poor ragged cloathes of linnen and wollen, torn from a wretched body dead of that disease, and hurled in the open streete; two Swine going by, and (according to their naturall inclination) seeking for foode on every dung-hill, tossed and tumbled the cloathes with their snouts, rubbing their heads likewise upon them; and immediately, each turning twice or thrice about, they both fell down dead on the saide cloathes, as being fully infected with the contagion of them.

I am not an American. I came over here to enjoy myself. I did. I swear I did, whatever the consequences. I had the time of my life and the consequences are my lives, all of them. My body and soul and spirit are now at the mercy of these consequences. And all around me I see nothing but the consequences of what I have become, of what I have done, of what they have done to me. Passing in Indian file, destroying my life with their hands and lips.

Every now and then I dial his number, just for the heck of it: I cannot alter my voice any longer. He has become acquainted with all my pitches and timbres. Try as I may, I am not likely to hold out, not even for a minute. He knows who I am. They know who I am. I must have noted their phone numbers with invisible ink.

I fetch the directory and leaf through it until I chance upon a "soft" name promising a long-drawn-out, heart-to-heart talk. But the Mozartian harmony of the name is often abolished by the dissonant callousness of my interlocutor. My cold blood ices over as I hear again the dotted line of silence which makes me think about Chinese water torture driving its victims mad by dint of one ever-repeated drop. Makes you think!

Why should I think? Or write? Words are too long, too heavy. Why don't I just slide down, unthinking, into the jaws of Satan?

How to deal with the unthinkable?

Dint, drop, dint, drop, dint, drop. In my case, the Chinese drip happens to be applied to the sense of hearing. Giving rise to visual hallucinations, this sound-drop depicts my abstract anguish, my hyperrealistic agony, my surrealistic suicide—in pointillist style. Dint, drop, dint, drop, dint, drop, dint, drop...

Last month I resolved to select my confidants by adding up the figures of phone numbers. The greater the sum the longer the communication.

In the course of my mathematical exertions I obtain astronomical numbers.

Instead of banging down the receiver he now disregards my calls altogether, relegating them to the realm of background noise. Nor has he vouchsafed to plug in his answering machine whose automatic responsiveness would have enabled me to savor his voice and record my grievances.

Never tell people you are going to die. They ring off, run away, travel to the moon. Your voice is contagious too, let alone your Gorgonian eyes.

My complaint does not sound like a trivial statement about our common destiny, our mass grave awaiting all of us beyond some door—in the corridor of life. They scent something fishy. They perceive my impending doom with their seventh, death-sense, and recoil in horror, protecting their faces, chests and stomachs with outstretched fingers. When confronted with their stares I unconsciously press my hand against my forehead to make sure the taboo-word is not yet engraved on it in capital letters.

Even my doctor, who went around hat in hand to raise funds for my recovery, remains sullenly silent through our ether-perfumed appointments. His spirits have dropped since last summer and neither "the change for the better" in my "health" nor his own immunity to the malady can perk him up. Yesterday he droned out a nonsensical speech that dissolved in my unconquerable apathy as soon as I focused my attention upon it. After the injection he drooled over my sound constitution. His shoulders drooped. Apparently he trusted my resistance to the extent of—

He used to be far more persuasive, if I remember rightly. If I remember rightly. If I remember wrongly. My judgment must be influenced by my failing memory and ugly mood. By my malady.

DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! I leaned out of the window and shouted at the top of my voice, driving away the entire New York population. I made the same speech yesterday. I shall dwell upon the same subject tomorrow afternoon. The leopard cannot change its spots. And humans cannot cure their diseases. DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9! DH-9!

I sounded like an exorcist. I hoped DH-9 would extricate itself from my body and fly away as some carrion crows do at the approach of living figures. "You've overstayed your welcome," I shouted, casting my glance at the mantel-clock.

"I think I'll leave when I said I would—I don't wish to outstay my welcome," said DH-9.

"What did you say? When? I didn't hear anything."

"I said I'd leave you after your death."

In the name of Michaël, may Jehovah command thee, and drive thee hence, DH-9! In the name of Raphaël, begone before Elohim, DH-9! Get hence, get hence, obey His orders!!!
Avast Ye!

In a coaxing voice I called a truce. (This time I sounded like a housewife stroking her cat.) I endeavored to wheedle a promise out of it, the promise of respite. I told DH-9 a sob story about my malady. I sobbed, cross my heart! I sobbed to myself. And I stamped my feet.

Recently I made it a rule to accompany my spasmodic psalms by stamping my feet and pounding on the dinner table, on the walls: I am loath to hear the symphony of my sufferings.

There was a ring at the door. No, I must have tapped my glass bowl with a knife to make it ring. No, no, no. My telephone rang. I did not believe it at first. The telephone was my God and I did not believe in God that afternoon. "What I hear is just another busy signal," I thought. "It sounds different of course, more strident, more present. Nevertheless it's just a busy signal. They are all busy, all of them. Busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. 'Busy' is a buzz word at the moment. They are telling me to buzz off and stop bothering them."

And I amplified my jungle-music. But the ring had a music of its own. *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. I dashed out of the kitchen.

The telephone had been left on the floor after the last "mathematical" communication so that I was compelled to fall upon my knees. Just another prayer. The more you pray the better you feel. Sometimes people pray silently by thinking the words but not actually saying them. No paralysis will ever deprive me of God and His help.

I did not recognize his voice immediately, but any voice was apt to set me back on my feet again. Even the voice of Satan. I was therefore beside myself with excitement. A clownish grin distended the nether half of my face, making it impossible for me to open my mouth.

His voice. Emerging from the receiver like the long-engulfed Titanic. Sumptuous cabins, jewels, chinchilla cloaks. His silent impatience. He was waiting for an answer. I said, "Thank you."

"Forgive me, please, if you can," he said. "I can't, I can't, I can't. Can you hear me? I simply can't."

I heard him all right. I mentally repeated his words. Reluctant to tear myself away from their majestic procession, I listened to them in slow motion, relishing to the utmost their flavor and savor, their bouquet. Why didn't I record his outburst of compassion? His words, the pirate-hidden treasure of his words.

"That's that," he said after a pause. He showered his verbal caresses on me rather sparingly. He *was* waiting for an answer.

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you for—You can't imagine how—"

"I can," he said. "Bye-bye, Christopher. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," I said.

I was not. I am not. Why should I be sorry? I cannot help trailing my rotten body around as if it were my son for whom I had not managed to find a babysitter. I am aware that the people involved, however negligibly, in the trajectory of this corpse of mine may become contaminated. DH-9 is generous to a fault. "It's extremely kind of you to keep me company." I drop a curtsy. Drop, drip, drop, drip. "Shall we ask them to bury us in the same cemetery?"

"*Seid umschlungen Millionen.*" Now and then I have an itch to share my decaying "knowledge" with millions, nay—billions of people. Shall I give them a big bear hug? Shall I insufflate my pestilent breath into the depths of their souls? "Have you forgotten St. Francis of Assisi and the kiss he planted on a leper's pestilent mouth? The saint dismounted his horse and kissed the leper." I should remind them of St. Francis' "material" generosity. "Don't you remember how St. Francis treated a badly-dressed knight of noble aspect? The saint dismounted, took off his rich mantle and clothing and—" You see, I have got nothing that is wearable.

Why not help them catalyze the destruction of cells? Why not present them with the best antidote against social life? Shouldn't you scorn the fumes and tinsel of the loud world? Would to God Satan made them suffer too!

A crowd beneath my windows. Birds of a feather flock together. After spouting my sermon I join my brothers in the street. I am hailed as the corporeal and spiritual guide of the DH-9 revolution.

The remnant of my body is not likely to be carried shoulder-high: my brothers in DH-9 would crumble under its featherweight.

Our triumphs and celebrations unfold themselves silently, almost motionlessly. It is as if someone were looking through our black-and-white photographs, our negatives. Someone. God perhaps.

Where shall we go, where shall we stay overnight? What does it matter? Our death-ridden mother-earth will gradually lull us into sleep while carrying our message all around the solar system. What planet is to be contaminated first? One never can tell. The ways of DH-9 are unfathomable. The ways of DH-9 are unfathomable.

DH-10, DH-11, DH-12, DH-13. Is this the way of DH-9? Its ineluctable path? DH-14, DH-15—

I am neither vengeful nor spiteful, otherwise you would already have become my brothers and sisters. *Mes semblables, mes frères!*

I hope I am not assigned to the first ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell where Dante met those who had been violent against others. (What a sentence! Please admire the size of my thoughts! And that of my hopes!!)

I am not violent against others. The sheets of paper I am writing on must also have a penchant for propagation of the DH-9 virus. But nobody reads them. How kind I am! Nobody will ever read them. *Hypocrite lecteur!!*

I am not vengeful. However, the absence of friends at my deathbed, in this death-apartment...DH-9 apartment...Worse still, their invisible, tantalizing presence beyond my death-walls—

In short, the presence of their absence rankles with me all the more irremediably since I am also deprived of genetic solace which, in periods of distress, is usually bestowed through relatives and their murmurs. Ties of blood undone by the hands of DH-9.

Does DH-9 have a body? A pair of hands? A pair of legs? A penis? A sting? Most certainly. A sting. DH-9 paralyzes its victims with its sting.

Bees do not normally sting without being provoked. Have I provoked DH-9? How?

My parents seem to have dissociated themselves from my dissident interpretation of God-ordained rules. Irrevocably! Not only once, but once and for all. There is always a last time!

My parents. My own flesh and blood and soul.

Are they still alive? Have they got DH-9? Or just DH-0? What is DH-0? Nothing? A fear perhaps. A fear of going out in the dark. A fear of heights. A fear of death. But it is not healthy to be so interested in death.

My parents are not inclined to cross the ocean and clasp their prodigal son to their warm, all-forgiving breasts. And their sobbing, remorseful son is no longer inclined to cross the ocean in the opposite direction for the simple reason that he cannot cross anything larger than a narrow street separating him from his doctor and his daily injection. I cannot even cross this sentence, the previous sentence. I can write it, but I cannot cross it. I cannot even cross it out.

With the best will in the world I cannot, my dear parents, I cannot, I cannot, I cannot. I cannot crawl on all fours toward your shins and kiss your shoes with gusto because I cannot call a taxi and drive over to the airport and fly over to my native city and pick up my luggage (if any) and stagger into another taxi and pay the driver and cross the sidewalk and cross the entrance hall and say something cheerful to the doorman and press the button and wait for the elevator to sink down to my level, down to the third ring of the seventh Circle of Hell—

My parents. I cannot. All my plans went wrong. I was of a mind to pay you an unobtrusive visit at the very end of my Before-Death (BD) epoch—the very beginning of my life-long happiness, as I fondly believed at the time. To err is human. To contract DH-9 is human too.

The inhuman horror of the situation. I wish I could bring it home to you. The horror, the inhuman horror. Not myself. Horrors can travel, can't they? The homecoming of a horror. Horrors can cross oceans, unlike dying humans.

Anyway I am nothing now but horror, the inhuman horror of my own situation. My hair stand on end all the time. I hope I shall soon have no hair left: I cannot bear the sight of my

own hair. If only you had an opportunity to see my hair, to hear my voice, my lapses of memory! More often than not I rely now on the infallible memory of dictionaries. And if I am lucky enough not to forget any word, I stammer as though I had forgotten all languages. I stutter as if in a drunken stupor. I wish I could drink myself to death.

A mild, merciful death. He died a natural death, peacefully at home in the night.

My thoughts seem to have inherited the syncopated rhythm of my speech. They jerk forward, moving along the circular walls of my hell in fits and starts while I sit huddled on the floor. Oh, if only you could hear me think!

You do not even hear me talk. Had I more money in my purse I might long since have plagued the life out of you. How? By ringing you up every quarter of an hour.

To plague the life out of somebody. To DH-9 the life out of somebody.

What does DH-9 mean? "DH" means death, I suppose. And what about "9"? Did they start with DH-1? Was it fatal, that remote disease? Everything is fatal. Every DH-disease is fatal, incurable, otherwise they would not have called it DH. But was it easier to bear? Can you go backward in this series of diseases? They cannot cure me—I am quite certain of that. They are certain of that too. But can they alleviate my pains by making me retrace my steps, so to speak? But those steps have never been mine. As far as I know, I have never caught DH-1 or DH-2. I have caught many other diseases in the course of my existence but not any of the DH-diseases. That is why I am still alive. Am I? I suppose I am. A pure supposition.

Doctors kept him alive on a life-support machine. Where is it? The life-support machine? Under my bed?

DH-9, DH-9. I am not sure the other numbers are better. The lesser numbers, I mean. Is DH-5 really better, more bearable than DH-6? And what about the much-vaunted progress of medical science? DH-8 might turn out to be an improved, *anaesthetic* version of DH-7.

Why am I pondering on other numbers? What I am interested in is "number 9" and nothing else. I am no mathematician. And what do I care about other pains and patients!

I have lost thirty pounds and my heart takes up very little room at present. I have lost thirty pounds. And I am not interested in other numbers and skeletons. Thirty pounds. They are

mine. Or rather they are not mine. They are still mine because *I* have lost them. I, I, I. This loss is a proof of my identity. My identity card. My ID. My DH. I am not concerned with other letters.

I have lost thirty pounds. Shortage of love, housing shortage. My different feelings being lumped together, I confuse love with hatred, hatred with weariness. My declarations of love may sound like a torrent of invective and vice versa. And when, urged by my inherent humanism, I manage to distill some love from the moody ferment of opposite tendencies, I have to be very cautious, very cautious indeed so as not to run short of it before I hand it out in conformity with my wishes. One tenth to James, one twentieth to Leo, one fifteenth to my god-mother, one-eighth to my nephew—

Little do I care whether they need my love or not. They certainly do not, apart from my nephew and aunt perhaps. What counts in this beggarly distribution is the salvation of my soul which, by stretching itself out, might counteract the general process of shrinking. I am still able to reach out my hand not only for a dictionary—to look up the word "love" or "life"—but also for a family-photograph. My aunt, my uncle, my nephew gathered around a stump or a bench. We used to go on a picnic every Saturday.

My venomous malady keeps usurping my past, having preempted a lion's share of my future. My malady is a lion, a dinosaur. Why did dinosaurs become extinct about 70 million years ago? Had they also caught DH-9? Or DH-70?

There is only a small amount of past in my memory, in my ego. Yet I still hear our peals of laughter without coloring them automatically with the grayness, dullness, colorlessness of my apathy. Unfortunately the greater part of my youth and childhood has already been contaminated. The greater part of the day I just cannot bring myself to believe there has been something else in my life. Something beside DH-9. Or DH-70 for that matter. The peals of laughter turn out to be the peals of thunder foreboding no good.

My aunt would give me a peck on the cheek and nudge me toward my sister with whom I was supposed to play some game or other. What game? What games? You mustn't ask too much of me! We played together, I was not ill, I ran, I could run three miles non-stop, I could jump over our neighbor's fence—

In my endeavor to imitate those jumps and flights I execute a sort of *fouetté* and slump to the carpet, utterly exhausted. Is that what they call "atavism"?

They have warned me I might become an ape. I should rather become a dinosaur, to tell the truth. Why an ape? DH-9 is a regression-disease, if you please. This regression, however, has nothing to do with mathematics. It is a *biological* regression—just the opposite of Darwinian evolution. Humans become apes.

Were apes ever humans? 70 million years ago? Was *I* human once? Once upon a time? 70 million years ago?

I am not concerned with apes. I am concerned with humans—myself, to be exact. Let us narrow down the options.

I am human. Today, this afternoon. Or am I just a conceited ape? A conceited old ape. An ape exuding self-confidence. A mature, self-respecting ape.

"Dollo's Law" states that evolution is irreversible!

There is no reason why general trends in evolution should not be reversed. If, for a while, there is a trend toward humans, there can easily be a subsequent trend toward apes again.

Some time ago I recalled my former lives while mounting a staircase. A mountain of a staircase. I wish it had been a molehill. I tumbled all the way down.

After a long or short period of unconsciousness—

I smashed my watch in the course of that horror-movie flight. Anyway I would not have been able to use it. I cannot see time any longer.

So I found myself on a landing which, unlike the staircase, was not devoid of earthlings. There stood before me or, to be accurate, above me, an old man who obviously did not know how to convey my bleeding body to the nearest hospital. He thrust his head upward as though seeking advice from the Almighty. To make sure I was still alive he touched me with his fingers. My soul seemed to have trespassed on Hades' private property, but I was alive and any mirror placed near my mouth would have testified in favor of my statement. I was alive, I was breathing, I felt his fingers trailing over my right shoulder. Unless it was an insect or a bird.

Whatever it was, I felt it. We do not feel anything *after*, do we? No love, no hatred, no desire to fly away.

He bent over the right half of my face—an unflattering imitation of my former profile. He saw my open eye, didn't he? He did, indeed he did. As he was snorting in proximity to my ear his fingers tried in vain to close it. "I'm alive," I murmured. Hard of hearing, he proceeded with his private funeral. I exhorted him at length to leave me in peace: "If you really are concerned about my future, go and tell my doctor I've had an accident."

I closed my eyes myself so as to rid him of the temptation to fiddle with my eyelids, but he went on and on, unmindful of my signs and allusions. Suddenly I realized he was not burying me—far from it. He needed me *alive*. My funereal mood had incited me to read mourning into the meaning of his gestures. He was merely stroking my face. He was fondling me like a baby because he could do so with impunity. At last he had come across a man, a young man who, unable to resist his filthy caresses, made no attempt to call the police. His hand was hot and moist like that of Desdemona but, oddly enough, I enjoyed its itinerary and clammy touch. I also enjoyed the warmth of his breath which spread over my cheek, breathing new life into my frozen veins.

And what about my *old* life, the one I led before being contaminated, destroyed, murdered? I had been happy, quite happy. Why didn't he breathe my old life into my veins?

He finally straightened up, having tampered with me to his heart's content. Did he leave me in peace? No, not at once. He had hunted high and low for someone to bear his touch and was loath now to abandon his prey. Had he been strong enough to carry me as far as his couch, he would have reverted to the halcyon days of his childhood, turning me into a doll, a puppet, a tennis ball. But he was no longer young and sturdy. With a deprecatory grunt he headed for the steps.

"Don't leave me," I moaned as his steps receded into silence. "Don't leave me," I repeated as the silence penetrated my soul. The shuffle of his feet, the rustle of his fingers. I heard them no more. "Don't leave me, for God's sake, for your sake, I don't mind being a doll, I don't mind, a compliant little doll, little doll, little dog—"

My delirium was in full swing. I was strapped to the swing of my delirium. Somebody carried me somewhere, up and down, up and down. I was hunting high and low for death, for an end to torments and tortures. I saw the sky and skyscrapers and the taxis thundered past me and the people stomped in and out and the people stooped down and inquired what I wanted and I implored them to leave me in peace and I entreated them not to leave me and I supplicated them to cherish me like a pet animal. "Let's fix it all up now," I whispered.

One lightless morning I awakened in my own bed.

Karl Jasper was also anti-Darwinian, mind you! Only in mind, not in body. Never mind—welcome to the club! He thought Darwin's achievement implied "the destruction of all authentic life." Those high-brows knew nothing about DH-9 which does more than merely *imply* the destruction of all life, authentic or artificial. DH-9 seeks to out-Darwin Darwin. And Jasper just ran Darwin down. "The ape is a degenerate man," he said. I had rather be a high-brow ape of whom nobody might say, "He's a degenerate young man who's never done a day of honest work."

"Are you getting tired?" asked the disease. "Shall we stop for a while?"

"I'm tired. Do stop for a while. I'm sick and tired of what's been going on in my body. And in my mind. I'm tired of you, DH-9."

"When a man is tired of DH-9, he is tired of life," said the disease.

"Why don't you grow tired of me, I wonder?" I looked the disease straight in the eye. "I'm very boring, am I not? Besides, I find it very tiresome doing the same job day after day."

"But I like my job," answered the disease. "Do you know that joblessness can cause poverty, depression and frustration?"

"All work and no play—"

"I love you," said the disease, giving me a bear hug. "I've loved you ever since I first saw you. I only feel sorry I met you so late."

"Do you think my behavior has degenerated a lot ever since I made your acquaintance?" I asked.

Why do they say "never mind" instead of "never body"? Low-brow brutes! Healthy scoundrels! Don't you realize all bodies should be hanged as traitors?

Once again I tackled the problem of Time, trying to kill it, to fill it up to the brim with my consciousness. The telephone had been laid down on the bedside table by some nurse. "You're surely not so naive as to think that this will change anything," I said. "Even the listeners *par excellence*, who advertise their patience in papers and at pharmacies, do not run the risk of communicating with *us*." But the nurse was no longer within hearing and I stopped talking to

her. I talked to my hands for a while. They were still within hearing, my hands. And within my reach.

Yesterday I found one of those advertisements: "When you have nobody to turn to, just turn to the telephone and dial my number."

I have turned to my telephone so often that my room is spinning round.

Round and round

Merry-go-round

Merry, indeed. Am I facing my telephone?

A mountain of dirty laundry towered over my television set. A motley display of preposterousness. "When did I break it?" I asked myself. "Why did I break it?" There was nobody to laugh at now. Nobody except myself. Thus my laughter backfired on me, on my former bliss and delectations. To update my past, I likened it to the contortions of a white traveler surrounded by naked ogres. They had commanded him to dance—the ritual akin to our saying grace. He danced. I danced too. I danced, I danced, I danced, I danced. I danced until I dropped, dripping with sweat.

I thought it was only a prelude to the fugue of my happiness. I was wrong. To err is human. Do apes ever err?

"And I looked and beheld a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him." I looked at myself in the mirror and beheld a pale face and Death and Hell. I re-read the Apocalypse. "And on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men, and they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions."

I unleashed the demons of my fantasy. My visionary power offered me a score of hitherto unseen places where I was allowed to settle down in order to turn over a new leaf. A new leaf, in a different book. At times I rambled a devil of a long way away from my flat, from my body sprawling over the rumpled, "painful" sheets. Precluded from any *forward* conquest by my imminent death, my only life expended sideways. Sideways, sideways,

sideways, sideways. And I boldly compared my life to the Nile overflowing the oppressive determinism of its banks.

Within the space of ten minutes I would live through several contradictory incarnations. I became, for instance, both Antony and Cleopatra. During their frequent acts of sexual intercourse I was supposed to overlap myself, to coincide with myself, to cram myself into myself. I had the most excruciating cramp in my leg. I had severe stomach cramps. As a result.

My arms twined around my neck, I was having a roll on the carpet where I had landed at the end of my previous, Persian incarnation.

I cannot, I cannot anymore. When did it take place, that festivity of fancy, that metaphor of immortality overextended to breaking point? Where did it take place? In this room, under this blanket? Festooned with kaleidoscopic imagery, my life, my past—

Shorn of all trappings, stripped of all picturesque nuances, I now fit perfectly onto *The Black Square* by Malevich.

I still recall my parents and our house, its nooks and crannies that I would investigate in the hope of finding the Almighty. I believed He was dwelling at our place. I had no fondness for domestic spirits, those interfering busybodies. Nor did I attempt to track down the goblin under whose crooked slippers the dead leaves kept cracking, even in daytime. I aspired to see Him, Him, Him.

One night I slipped out of my bed, tiptoed toward the door and mounted the stairs. I thought I had to move upward, skyward. A summit meeting. I tossed my head upward as well. For a while I contemplated the celestial poetry of the ceiling. The ramshackle staircase creaked perfidiously but none heard my ascension, not even my grandmother who boasted about her infallibly sharp ear and complained about her insomnia. Not once did I stumble on my way, no hesitation rippled through the resolute smoothness of my thoughts. I was pretty certain He would fulfill my three dearest wishes. Oddly enough, immortality was listed first in my petition. I was so overwhelmed with my unstained belief in the supernatural that anything resembling a fish or a serpent might easily have quenched my thirst.

I woke up with a thumping headache and a raging thirst.

My spiritual progress ended in the attic. I crouched down among some broken chairs and began to wait. The day dawned bright and meaningful. An unfledged, almost unreal sunray diffused an appropriate atmosphere for the descent of God's messenger, indeed of God Himself. However, it was the darkest corner of the attic that appealed to my senses.

I related the details of my quest to my uncle whose faith in the Christian God seemed to irradiate from his baldness. He interrupted me right after the word "darkest". "Nephew, you're in danger of falling," he said, wagging his index-finger. I mechanically propped myself against a chair. "You *are* in danger of falling," he repeated, gently removing my hand from the back of the chair. And he pushed me toward the sofa on which I fell with a shriek. "You're not hurt, are you? Anyway physical pain, however excruciating, is nothing compared with the pangs of conscience, with the spiritual torture one's likely to endure in the jaws of Satan. And the jaws of Satan were created by our merciful Lord to give a good lesson to sinners, to those who are constantly led astray by their lustful appetites. What about *your* appetite, my boy?"

"I have a good appetite, that's what mummy says. And mummy never lies," I pointed out, anxious to lend weight to my words on which my puny constitution seemed to throw doubt.

"I bet, she doesn't," he nodded. "That's just too bad for you, my dear boy."

"Why?" I hastily reviewed my mother's smiles saluting my greediness.

"'Put a knife to the throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.' Gluttony is a sin." And my uncle cast a reproving glance toward the kitchen. "What's more, a usurper in essence, appetite doesn't limit its aggressive tendencies to food alone but appropriates chastity, honor, life, money. Oh, if only appetite could content itself with food, with pastries and ice-cream, with sauces and oysters! A few paunches, here and there, instead of Jack the Ripper and Jo the Rapist—what a marvelous metamorphosis! 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness—'"

With growing anticipation I waited for the lunch. 'What will my mother say?' I wondered, underestimating my uncle's breeding. And appetite.

While devouring the succulent *filet de boeuf sauce madère et champignons à la ménagère*, my uncle launched himself into the subject of hunting. By the time the dessert was announced, the imaginary pile of partridges and pheasants had reached a three-digit number.

We had another talk a few days later. At the *beginning* of my Before-Death epoch.

"If I remember rightly—Good Gracious! What's come over me? I do remember rightly. And even if I don't, you should believe I do. I am much older than you are and you owe an

unconditional respect to your elders, especially when they happen to be your relatives. So, to the best of my memory, we dealt in our previous discussion with the problem of sin, with the manifold inextricable problem of sin. And during our discussion you fell on the sofa. How inconsiderate of you! What's more, your fall on the sofa wasn't due to a pardonable loss of balance, as you might have presumed, but to the loss of Paradise, to Adam's gravitational folly. The first man and woman leaped from the greatest height ever and your sedulous imitation of that acrobatic evil indicates an ominous downward trend in your personality. A great many falls have reverberated through our history. Enough's enough! That's the true and only direction!" He pointed up to the chandelier and mopped his brow with an enormous handkerchief. "You fell in the attic."

"I didn't fall in the attic," I murmured.

"Didn't you? And what about God's grace? One *may* fall from God's grace, you know. Figuratively. I mean—literally! According to your recollection, the whole place was literally inundated with the divine light except for that particular corner which might therefore be compared to a hardened atheist refusing to sink into our Lord's arms. And you, you of all little boys, you, my nephew, my sister's son—you were seduced by the serpent into seeking refuge in darkness. 'And men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.'"

My uncle adroitly drew the curtains. As darkness permeated the air and the tapestries he started to grope toward me, bumping now into a chair, now into a mahogany chest of drawers. "And walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." He veered to the door, then to the sofa again, and eventually knocked his right leg against the radiator which bared its teeth beside the window. He pulled the curtains back again. "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

In his own words, those games were both instructive and amusing. He defined them once as a living strip-cartoon based, unlike other pang-and-pow publications, on pious biblical themes. "The servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves," he used to say.

The dying sun was caressing my forehead as if in token of friendship. Companion in misfortune. Unable to sustain the twilight's beauty, I shut my eyes and the Queen of Night

strutted into my room. I could hear Mozart's music throbbing in the distance; while I was in the throes of determining its whereabouts it ceased and nothing was left for me but to fall back on my memories again. Fall, fall, fall, fall, fall. Ever since my uncle's strip-cartoon sermon I have been riding for a fall. I have been falling apart ever since my birthday. Poetic license. As to the prose of life, I lie now supine on the ground at some cemetery, hoping they will bury me soon, before sunset, before I catch my death of cold. Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold winds. Tom's a-cold. Tom's a-cold.

Come dame or maid, be not afraid,
 Poor Tom will injure nothing.

Have they deprived me of heating?

A telephone call. She got a wrong number. I managed to talk her into talking with me for twelve minutes. I am making progress.

She said: "Peter!"

I said: "Yeah, it's me." She gave the receiver a questioning look which I decided to transform into a grin of recognition by changing my voice. "It's me. I'm glad you're calling—"

"Is it you, Peter?"

"It's me, Helen." Doubting Helen. "Hey, Helen. Are you all right?" I changed my voice once more. How many voices does one have to "try on" in order to sound like a young male staying in New York on the 29th of October? Was he American, or English, or French? Pierre.

"You've got a strange accent today, Peter."

I could not help speaking with a slight French accent which, though filtered through my fingers, was still detectable. "Really? But what do you think of my voice? Is it genuine enough? You see, I've caught a cold, I've shouted myself hoarse, I'm not—"

Twelve minutes. Counting from the moment I let the cat out of the bag. Counting from the moment I let DH-9 out of my mouth. Not out of my body, mind you. Not out of my soul either. Out of my mouth, just out of my mouth.

I told her about my family, my childhood, my uncle's *son et lumière* displays. I told her about my sin and God's punishment. She was rather in a hurry—at least that is what she said. And I believed her, having no intention to bare my innermost thoughts in the presence of a fibber. I therefore modeled my style on telegrams and shorthand notes. I delivered the story of

my childhood in less than three minutes. I could have done much better had not the traitorous stammer slackened my pace, creating now and then the abysses of despair. I omitted from my staccato account our picnics and my sister's custom of breaking my toys and stamping down on their remnants until they would disappear under the surface of our garden. But I disclosed to her the secret of the darkest corner where I economically, telegraphically placed my first amorous meeting. "I'm sorry," she said. My pulse quickened and I moved to the United States of America. Then I found myself in France once again to explain that in my native country— She cleared her throat and I returned to New York, to my flat where I am cooped up now. I gasped for breath, I stopped for breath. I had around eight minutes left. I did not know it. I might have distributed the material more skillfully, doing justice to my struggle for life and for love. But the ghost of the busy-signal was haunting me more than ever. My head buzzed with angry, crazy thoughts. I skipped several chapters and embarked upon the denouement of my story. Suddenly, without suspending my narrative, I began to wonder whether my omitting the Portuguese escapade would not add to the muddle-up of my speech. Sure enough, my short cuts were so abstruse as to befuddle the brains of all but exceptional listeners. Was *she* an exceptional listener? Unfortunately I could not afford to make inquiries about her concentration and intelligence quotient. I was in a hurry too. My last words were unintelligible. Even I did not catch their meaning.

"What are you doing now?" she asked with a note of commiseration.

"Nothing. What *can* I do?" I can speak on the phone, can't I? I can stammer. I can commit suicide in a desperate attempt to free myself from the disease. (My doctor told me I would never be completely free of the disease. Even after my death?)

"Do you want me to call you tomorrow?"

Suffocated with rapture, I forgot to thank her for her large-hearted and large-minded attitude toward a poor invalid.

I wonder how large her heart was at the time. And how large it is now. And how heavy. Has *she* lost any weight of late? And what about her mind?

I also forgot to give her my telephone number. It was a wrong number after all. My number *is* wrong.

Whenever granted an audience, I start from the very beginning of my end—from my childhood. When talking to stray cats and dogs—no housewife permits me to approach her pets—I reach as far back as my cradle probably because my first conscious impression was

provoked by our dog Sindu who died shortly afterwards. He barked me into the world, as it were. What a pity he cannot bark me *out* of it! I should not mention the episode to cats, should I?

I like crowds. (Back to humans.) I used to join them, to mix with them on Broadway, on Fifth Avenue. Humans. But I do not like the way some people stamp on you as soon as you fall. So I did not venture out on Independence Day this year, reining in my gregarious instinct and suicidal mania. "Feet or no feet, what difference does it make?" I thought as I listened to death's rhythm running through my body. And death's melody resounded through my head.

What is the best way to disperse a crowd? Hire me as a policeman!

What is the best way to disperse sorrow?

I snatched my guitar from the hook and played the opening bars of the old Russian song my uncle used to sing in French. Ignorant of the languorous Russian language and landscapes, he claimed, however, while performing some mawkish ballad, to go through the whole range of concomitant, authentic Russian emotions. As proof of what he actually felt, he would point to the tears glimmering in his eyes—the tears which, owing either to my uncle's notion of decorum or to their spectral weightlessness, never overflowed onto his cheeks. Impolitely scornful about the French text concocted by my uncle from an oral translation of the Russian original, my memory supplied only the music that I endeavored to force down into my fingertips. Did *I* go through the whole range of authentic human emotions while fingering the strings of my sentimental companion? I did, whatever and however I played. So did my eyes. My obedient tears outstripped my uncle's both in size and weight. Having gathered the necessary momentum, one by one they trickled down my cheeks and my neck, as far as my collar bone. And I was following their silver itinerary. My tears moved me to pity for my own lot. They kept moving me to tears. I seemed to have hit upon the idea of an aqua perpetuum mobile which might have acted as a new Flood had I taken the trouble to promulgate my invention.

I did not sob. I did not. Not that time. My perpetuum mobile functioned silently as if well-lubricated. My eyes were stinging, my head was swimming. I came to terms with my Russian heredity.

No European can be Russian for more than half an hour without sharing the destiny of Niobe who, wearied with tear-shedding, turned into her own monument. So I damped the twanging, wailing, whimpering strings with my hand in the hope that the ensuing silence would dry my tears. But my Russian sorrow had already got into its stride and for once my memory proved to be worthy of its name. The song reverberated inside me with all the

dubious-sounding intonations I had lavished on my neighbors in the course of my unforgettable performance. I put my fingers in my ears and since, by doing so, I appreciably bettered my inner acoustics, the song grew louder. I laid the guitar down on the floor and headed for the window. I squashed my nose against the window. I paced up and down the room for a quarter of an hour and all but smashed the guitar and the alarm clock. My yells eventually drowned the music and my pounding fists got the upper hand in the competition with the yells. But the tears continued to drip. They were now on their own, no longer needing a musical support.

I recall one exceptional *soirée* during which my uncle entertained his guests by playing his guitar, singing Russian songs and spinning yarns about his father's revels in St. Petersburg. "Barbarians," whispered my aunt, warning me against the potential outbursts of my heredity. My uncle was pulling out all the stops in his attempt to restore the atmosphere of those *tzigane* nights—a chaos of gestures accompanied by his impressive yet un-Russian bass. "O, where are you, where are you, happy days of yore." The champagne glasses vibrated in rhythm with his heart. "Where are you, where are you, my ancient flame—" Casting a telltale glance at my father, he grasped my mother's right wrist and dragged her toward the sofa. In all probability he wished to demonstrate how, in old Russia, an unfaithful wife would forsake her wizened spouse to elope with a young coxcomb. The "elopement" ended in a tango-like dance that was also in keeping with my grandfather's description of St. Petersburg nights. "Champagne, champagne for everybody!" cried my uncle whereupon his best friend, disguised as an old-Russia *garçon*, rushed toward the table on which the bottles had been smartly arrayed. He accomplished his task with gusto and great panache. The tapestry came under fire from an arsenal of corks. My paternal grandfather entered into the spirit of the game: raising his cane up to the ceiling, he exclaimed "Hurrah" as if his regiment were making a surprise attack on a Prussian division. My aunt put up token resistance but was finally enticed into draining three glasses, which drew a smile from her—a sparkling, crooked smile. "I love him and I'll always love him in spite of your mother, your mother, your mother." Her voice undulated like my mother's arms. "Incestuous beasts!" The fourth glass of champagne disintegrated between her ring-burdened fingers. Had it caught DH-9? (Back to square nine.) Can a glass of champagne fall ill? These bugs invade and conquer everybody, everything—even computers.

Even humans. Myself, for instance.

My uncle wrote me a letter. How ridiculous this letter looks from the vantage point of this night illuminated with funeral pyres:

My nephew,

I used to love you, my sister's only son.

You must be wicked, thoroughly wicked, otherwise you would not have caught this immoral, IMMORTAL disease. What sin have you committed, my nephew? Are you still my nephew? I doubt it. But there is no doubt that you have committed a sin. What sin? I do not know, and I do not wish to know.

"The shew of their countenance doth witness against them: and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves." I noticed something vaguely effeminate in your gait and hairstyle but ascribed it to your ill-starred pretensions to elegance. Are you homosexual? I do not wish to know. But the above-mentioned sodomites are sloshing now in the mud of Hell. This much you should know. It is a sin, my nephew, and "the wages of sin is death." My prophetic eyes can already see your death hovering about you, flapping his murderous wings above your pillow. And death is Paradise in relation to what awaits you after death. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to Hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness...

Is Hell cluttered with saucepans and skewers? Does it bear any resemblance to Bosch's visions? Don't forget that Hell is infinite like the goodness of Jesus Christ!

An eternal presentiment of punishment? (Swedenborg.) Timeless solitude? (Sabaeen's theory.) Four halls succeeding each other; filthy water leaking in through the roof; the floor covered by beastly things, all sodden and squashy; cockroaches, spiders borrowed from Dostoevsky's Hell. Plus infinity!

When prowling around those halls "embellished" with pictures of Satan, you shall hear a village-fair orchestra, ill-tuned and lumbering. Do you recall my putting on an old, badly-scratched record of a popular march? Five times in a row!

Before the gates of Hell grow fiery trees where damned souls hung by their feet, hands, tongues, hair, ears and arms.

In the realms of Hell turns a fiery wheel with a thousand spokes. Sinners are attached to it by their genitals. The wheel is struck a thousand times a day by a Tartarean angel, and at each turn a thousand souls are tortured. Now and then only one soul is tortured—a thousand times!

A doctor I know described your disease as Hell on earth.

You have been flayed by devils. They are about to rub salt into your wounds.

A terrible beast looms ahead of you. That beast is greater than any mountain, any Tower of Babel. It has huge, burning eyes, and a gaping mouth so vast that 9,000 armed men could pass through it together. Plus 9,000 cannons! In this maw stand two figures. They stand there like columns, dividing the immeasurable maw into three. One stands upright, the other is upside down. Three demons drive you into the belly of the monster.

You become pregnant with venomous serpents which finally issue forth from all your members, lacerating them with blazing iron beaks and nails. Their nails are so thickly planted in your body that the finest needle in the world could not be inserted without touching one of them.

Plus infinity!! Plus infinity!!!

And our Lord says to you over and over again: "I am against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate." You "live" in fear of a yet greater punishment.

I cannot set aright what has been set awry. I cannot tap you on the shoulder and make you veer off your course by bringing you to my gate, to my house—its wholesome, sinless atmosphere works wonders in cases like yours.

I cannot cure you because I cannot bear the sight of you. I cannot cure you of your sin which is a fatal disease—far more fatal than the one you have caught. But I can pray for you, as I pray for all sinners and for my relatives. I can pray for you three times a day, four times a day. Unmindful of cars and policemen, I will pray for you in the middle of the thoroughfare. I will pray for you, pray for you, pray for you until the traffic, the throng, the whole city comes to a standstill to join me in my prayer. And the bells shall be tolling, and the sirens shall be wailing, and the hooters shall be hooting—in short, God shall hear us.

Your high-principled but otherwise affectionate uncle.

P.S. Before each gate are 70,000 fiery mountains, each squirting 70,000 fiery springs. Those springs engender 70,000 blazing rivers with 70,000 fiery castles on their banks, each having 70,000 fiery rooms. In every room are 70,000 fiery and hideous women who torment the sinners with their embraces.

I wonder whether the wound I inflicted upon this letter by my unprofessional translation did not mutilate it beyond all recognition. Did he ever pray to God on my behalf or did he beseech Him to spare his only son any contact with the venomous apocalyptic beast? Did he adjure Him to destroy me? Was my uncle the progenitor of DH-9?

Did the hooters just notify our pious city of my presence? And the bells were tolling, tolling. 'Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last time.'

Many, many, many, many, many. As many as two thousand, according to the last medical report. The last time. Have they already published the very last medical report listing everyone down to doctors and publishers? The last time. The last will of the last man bequeathing the earth to the Martians. The last night on the empty earth. The wind lashing the sea into a fury. *The Sound and the Fury*, as someone called the last human sea. The sea, our father. Our angry, vengeful, high-principled father. The forest sweeping down to the sea as if nothing had happened. Starless night.

The booming surf preached a sermon on the importance of humility. I drank a glass of whisky at one fell swoop and, with a boldness bordering upon blasphemy, cursed, cursed, cursed everything. My stiffly-extended hand quaked and my lips quavered as my eyes traveled over the room, over the sky. A nightmarish thought flashed through his mind—a flash of inspiration, a stroke of genius: "By God I'll go riding, I will. Who knows but the world may end to-night? Browning? *The Last Ride Together*. Together. With whom could I ride? I am alone. Never mind, never mind." Quoting and misquoting Browning's stormy lines, I tottered downstairs.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds?

And the horseman went riding, riding, riding,

And the horseman went riding

Alone, alone. Booted and spurred, I squeezed through the wicket that had got stuck. Was I too weak, or was the wicket dead? I glanced around. No horse, no horseman. No one. My earth for a horse. I went swooshing through the puddles. I went down to the beach. And the horseman went riding, riding, riding. The wind kept unleashing sea-demons and sky-spirits—the evil spirits of the air. The rain ceased for a while and the world's ultimate image acquired a painful intensity. It was the dawn of another day. What day? Was not yesterday *alone* in the world? Quite alone, abandoned, forsaken? A dusty, forsaken prairie village. Where am I now? In Hell? Is that what Hell looks like? Just a dusty, forsaken village? A prairie village? Why not a desert? A prairie village. And the sea? Where is the sea now? Was the sea identical to

life? Was it the only symbol of life, its very essence? Waves, waves, waves. White horses. Galloping, galloping...

Then I recover my senses once again and listen to the water lapping against the sides of my bathtub.

What a supernatural calm! Even the sirens of fire engines do not obtrude upon my agony this morning or this evening. Perhaps I am not in the bathroom anymore and the water is lapping against the sides of the canoe which carries my semi-conscious being through a new hazy world. Through a new series of passions and diseases. Where are you, my companions in misfortune? Where are my pains, my gaping wounds? Right here.

The waves are lapping on the shore where my beached, bleached body lies as a sort of prehistoric sea-monster doomed to become the first mammal in the universe. After many jerks and quivers I may become a man. In the long run.

Am I an ape now? Not yet, not yet. Long evolution, anti-Darwinian evolution. Anti-clockwise. We are going backward. DH-9 patients. We are crawling backward. I am already in the middle of our century. Not at the end but in the middle. My end does not coincide with our century's end. The twentieth century. DH-20. The very last months of the twentieth century. Yet our ends do not coincide. I am going to die very soon—let there be no mistake about it! I shall not last until the beginning of the new millennium. Yet our ends do not coincide. Am I *so* different from our century, from its inhabitants? From my neighbors and next-of-kin? From my father and my mother?

I swung onto my horse, saluted and galloped off—*down* the road. Down, down, down. Down the road of history. Down time, so to speak. Not downtown. Downtime. Backward. Now I am somewhere in the fifties. Tomorrow I shall be in the twenties, the roaring twenties. Shall I roar with laughter?

And what about Antony and Cleopatra? Am I already in Ancient Egypt? Shall I die tomorrow?

But I am not an ape yet, not yet. I am sure of that. Quite sure.

An antichrist perhaps but not an ape. Are apes better than antichrists? What are their chances of being saved and allowed to dwell in Paradise? There are many trees in Paradise, aren't there? And some animals *must* live on those trees. The Tree of Knowledge makes no sense without apes.

My punishment, my punishment. Why did my uncle speak about it? Why do *I* speak about it? I spoke about it to that girl, on the phone. My punishment. Joseph de Maistre speaks about it as well. *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*. "*S'il n'y avait point de mal moral sur la terre, il n'y aurait point de mal physique.*" "*...toute douleur est un supplice imposé pour quelque crime actuel ou originel.*" "*Si je n'ai fait aucune distinction entre les maladies, c'est qu'elles sont toutes des châtements.*" How to translate it? Why should I translate it? For whom? For myself. One day I shall no longer understand my mother tongue. Apes must speak English, only English. Let me translate it while I am capable of such a feat. Pain is imposed by a crime, present or past. By original sin. Actually my sin is not original. Everybody sins as I have sinned. But not everybody has been punished. Joseph de Maistre makes no distinction between maladies because they all are punishments. And what distinction does he make between punishments, may I ask? Between DH-9 and DH-8? Does he know the difference between DH-9 and DH-8? And DH-6? *Did* he know the difference? He died in the nineteenth century, didn't he? Of what? Of DH-19? Did he become an ape, an ordinary ape? An extraordinary ape? Or an ameba?

Is there really no escape? No loophole in the laws of perspective? And what if they come up to *our* hopes and discover a cure, a new kind of injection or something? Hardly. They will let us die. Healing sinners is a sin.

Have they ever searched for a cure? Perhaps, out of scientific curiosity. Have they discovered the cure? Where could *we* discover it? In what drawer, in what safe? Shall I go and see the eminent safecrackers to make them train me in their craft? Without further ado?

In my heart of hearts I *knew* they had discovered the cure. To put it bluntly, it was now my turn. At first I intended to contact another antichrist who might cover my retreat. "But suppose," I thought, "my potential accomplice is at the beginning of his trials, tribulations, troubles and traumas? Suppose my mythical accomplice is in no rush and can afford to

postpone his convalescence until after the New Year's Eve dinner? And what if the cure is slow to get off the mark?" I was to act on my own.

"My doctor hasn't spoken about any cure so far. Doctor indeed. We should ask him to show us his diploma. His injections, his injunctions. A lot of use *they* are. Might be poison, for all I know. And I know a lot. It's all in the line of human duty. He protects society from the Devil." Thus I reasoned. I thundered forth against my enemies and my friends. DH-9 had gradually abolished the opposites so that my uncle's letter and my mother's blueberry tart had melted into a milky neutral blur. My doctor *was* of great help to me; our caretaker, on the other hand, vowed to have me evicted from my flat. They were one and the same substance now—a milky neutral blur. My way of handling reality. My Milky Way. My corpse embroidering the Milky Way.

2001: A Space Odyssey. An astronaut leaves a flying spacecraft to repair something in Space. What? Our universe? Is our universe in a poor state of repair? It is *beyond* repair, as my doctor put it last week. So the astronaut failed in his mission, glided away and the stars began to whirl round his body in eddies and spirals. A Space burial. A Space funeral—far more beautiful and democratic than our terrestrial ritual. Why don't they send me to Mars?

There was somebody else in the spacecraft. Who? A robot? I don't remember. If I remember rightly, I don't remember what it was. I don't remember its name either. *His* name? They disconnected him. Am I being disconnected? I still remember my name, though. Do I? And I can sing my song. I can.

*Frère Jacques, frère Jacques,
Dormez-vous, dormez-vous?
Sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines,
Ding deng dong, ding deng dong.*

Do you want me to sing an English song? With pleasure, my pleasure.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to min'?

Ibsen forgot the alphabet.

The indifference of death. Is that what they call "Nirvana?"

Death and life. "It's all one to me," I uttered resignedly and contradicted myself in the same breath. "I want to live, I want to live!" I finally chose the struggle for life or, in other words, the struggle for cure. I locked the door and left the house.

One can say without any exaggeration that I was *striding* down the street. My speed was downright phenomenal. My body seemed to have broken the sound barrier. What is more, the velocity of light to which every self-respecting physicist bows without a murmur aroused no admiration in my flying consciousness.

I must confess I did not judge my feverish speed as any unbiased observer would have done, for I kept comparing myself with myself and not with world champions or space rockets. And compared with myself, I zoomed through like a record-breaking 750 c.c. 117 b.h.p. motorbike (*Guinness Book of Records*, 1977). A bit of boasting, ill-founded or well-founded, is not out of place, I believe. Nor is it prejudicial to my health. Nothing can be prejudicial to my health now. Not even death.

Whatever the testimony of chronometers, I overtook two pedestrians as I was *striding* down the street. So satisfied was I with my achievement that twice I stopped *dead* and turned round to cast a triumphant look at their figures. The pharmacy was located three blocks away from my house but, absorbed in my calculations and comparisons, I paid no attention to the panacea-like allure of its windows. *Paradise Lost*. My impetus carried me further on, which was quite a feat in itself. I would have walked as far as California or Alaska had not an altogether unfamiliar cityscape sobered my speedy spirit. I retraced my steps and soon reached the pharmacy. *Paradise Regained*. My purposeful gestures. The western-glorified image of a cowboy returning to the fold in order to settle a hash. The chemist drew back and even laid his hand on the phone. I doubled up with laughter. The laughter died away almost instantly: I could not straighten out, for all my efforts. "I'm rather down today," I told him apologetically. As I resumed my erect posture the chemist lifted the receiver and I distinctly heard the dial tone. I still had good hearing. "I'm not armed," I said. "Just popped in to ask if you had anything for DH-9."

The receiver dropped and started swinging to and fro. I heard once again the busy-signal, the hymn of my loneliness. I rushed toward the phone and banged down the receiver. Silence. He backed away and bumped against the wall. "It looks like I've driven you back

against the wall," I said "but I mean no harm. Take my word for it! Understand, all I ask for is—"

"I don't have any."

"Really?" As he seemed to hesitate I quoted the Bible: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." He lurched sideways and shot a furtive glance at the window. There was no policeman in sight. Unperturbed by that failure, I quoted another passage from the Bible: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick—"

It was clear that he stood unsteadily on his legs, but this unsteadiness was no guarantee of his willingness to sin against society. I am no Peeping Tom of thoughts and *visible* signs only—a tremor of hands, a dance of eyes—can guide me through the labyrinth of human deceitfulness. In the present case I was torn between two equally plausible and mutually exclusive interpretations. Did he wish to save my life or his own? His eyes traveled jerkily over the pharmacy. Was he devising a scheme for escape or was he trying to recall where he had put the pillbox? To make things easier for him, I said, "Just tell me where it is, I'll fetch it myself. And I'll pay of course, unless it costs a fortune." I broke into laughter again but without doubling up this time. I wanted to appear cheerful. I cracked a joke and gave utterance to my desire to spare him the necessity of fumbling for the medicine in the drawers. No longer did I bear any resemblance to a cowboy. Anyway I told him I was not armed. Anyway, had I used a revolver, I would have done so to coerce him, not to kill him. To coerce him by pointing the revolver at his head. Deadly pale, he might have offered me a sack of various medicines. The greater the quantity of objects you can choose from, the greater the probability of your finding what you seek.

"Mary!" he screamed without warning, but Mary had gone out. A car screeched to a halt beyond the window and we both held our breath for a moment. A dignified gentleman opened one of its doors from inside, locked it from outside and moved away crossing the street. "Better luck next time," I said, breathing exuberantly. "Give me some aspirin, I've got a splitting headache."

He handed me a box from which I extracted a tablet. "I'll bring you a glass of water," he said.

I read into his mind at once. "You won't fool me so easily. Give me my medicine first." Sleep was creeping over me and I made a resolution to keep my eyes open. All the same, he had me at a *disadvantage* now. I should not have acknowledged my infirmity by swallowing

the aspirin in his presence. "In spite of my splitting headache," I specified, "I'm sound in wind and limb and can show *de quel bois je me chauffe*." I had no strength left to translate the idiom.

It dawned upon me, as he headed for the telephone, that he understood French far better than English.

A vicious circle? Not really. I was no longer bursting with health. He dialed the number. "Non," I implored. "Non." An appropriate quotation from the Bible might have lent some support to my imploring look, voice and hands. 'We are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised.' Flattery is the strength of the weak. "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind." There was no such thing as DH-9 in the days of the prophets.

"Non," I repeated instead.

"Get out of here, you son of a bitch," he said and submissively I got out of the pharmacy.

My speed was now rather on the *low* side—tortoise-like compared with the Achillean striding I boasted about a few hours ago. "To get through this ordeal," I said out loud, 'I must draw on my inner strength. But I've got no inner strength to speak of. Why should I speak of it anyway? To whom?' Despite the state of utter prostration, which had affected both my gait and my train of thought, I was thinking and walking. Thanks to my unswerving mental activity I soon realized I would not reach my flat. Nor was I to keep pace with my thoughts for a long period of time. "Three minutes at the very best," I said to myself. "What's to be done?" I was still in a position to formulate a question. Leaving that question unanswered, I entered a coffee shop and flopped down in the nearest vacant booth. I extracted a comb from the left pocket of my jacket and smartened myself up. "They doll up corpses," I thought. Prunes and prisms. It was the last thought or perhaps the last but one. I thought about ordering a cup of coffee.

I did not drop off to sleep. It was not a fainting fit either. I was dead and my death resembled death in all but one point: I was raised from the dead. Not my fault. I would not have risen from my tomb of my own accord, perish the thought! I was reasoned out of death. "Life is wonderful. Do not die yet. Drink this. It'll put new life into you," I heard. An old lady was leaning over me, a glass in her hand. She was too old to fear bugs and numbers. DH-10. DH-11. She looked like a bug herself. She must have become one in the course of *her* evolution. Not an ape. Just a bug, a wizened little bug with frizzy gray hair.

Has she contaminated my body? DH-12, DH-13, DH-14. Do I have any of them inside me now—on top of my habitual illnesses? Any of these numbers? The same letters but different numbers? Astronomical numbers. You should have killed me instead! You should have put some arsenic in the drink!

It was a rehearsal, the dress rehearsal of my death. And everything went smoothly, as far as my part was concerned. No stage fright, no lapses of memory. Why then was I still alive and sipping my cocktail—*her* cocktail—like anyone alive or almost? The fault lies with *them*. A nefarious system erected to keep me alive. They did not have my body washed, perfumed and decked with wreaths of flowers. Shall I dismiss them for negligence? Why didn't you carry me to the waterside? Are you chicken? In my last will and testament I asked my companions in misfortune to burn my body—not at the stake but on the ocean coast so that my ashes might be scattered by the wayward wind above the waves and thus conveyed to other continents and countries. My loneliness, my immobility gave me a taste for traveling.

No sooner had I recovered my sense of hearing than the barman motioned me to clear out. I saw the sign and even grasped its ominous meaning. A partial recovery of sight and mind. Why partial? Because I'll never recover my mind *completely*. My mind and my sight. And my hearing. And my joy. And my life.

My life. My life has ended up on a garbage dump. And I have no idea where that garbage dump is located.

My flat certainly looks like a garbage dump, but I cannot find my life in it, inside it. And I am too weary to go out. And I am beginning to weary of sitting still. What am I supposed to do?

I should go on with my story. The longest story I have ever written. My longest walk, my unfinished death. The unfinished symphony of my death.

In a few superman strides the waiter caught up with me. Never, not even in my before-DH-9 existence had I been able to walk so fast. "Who's gonna pay for the drink?" he said.

"I thought it had been paid for," I answered.

"By who?"

"I didn't order it," I retorted. However, he held all the trumps.

"You drank it," he said. Disinclined to part with three dollars, I told him I was ill. "What do I care," he said.

"DH-9," I said.

"What?" he said.

"DH-9," I said articulating every letter as best I could. Contrary to my expectations, he did not cover his face with his hands so as to block all the apertures through which maladies are believed to edge their way into human body. My utmost sincerity remained unrewarded. He did not suggest paying for my drink on the condition that I would never again set foot in his healthy little shop. He told me he would throw away the glass I had touched with my "impure" lips and hands, and that he would palm off my three dollars at once and wash his hands afterward. He was sticking to his guns. Nor did he budge when, with a modest step, I shortened the distance between us, increasing thereby the probability of his becoming a DH-9 candidate and representative. I got the impression, however, that he had stopped breathing. I held out three dollars.

"Drop it on the sidewalk," he said.

"I may do that but," I said, "I wouldn't stoop so low as to part without a proper handshake—a common farewell custom, at least in civilized countries."

"Just drop the money on the sidewalk," he insisted.

I was itching to touch his face, and yet he was an ugly-looking and foul-smelling individual. He would not have struck me, would he?

I went on a fool's errand. And they made a botch of my death-ritual. So I *read* about it—in compensation:

The funeral pile is lighted from the consecrated fire maintained by the deceased; the nearest relation (or the best friend—Manfred) applies the flaming brand to the pile, hung round with flowers, and the attendant priests recite the appropriate invocations: "Fire! thou wast lighted by him; may he therefore be reproduced from thee; may he thus attain regions of celestial bliss. May this offering be auspicious!"

Hindu Pantheon, by Moore. The book belongs to Roland. There is little chance of his getting it back. He is taking no chances. The DH-9 bug is particularly fond of books. Bibliophiles dubbed it "a book worm."

I must not presume too much upon the indulgence and broadmindedness of the Church authorities. Besides, supported by the fastidiousness and firmness of our caretaker, my neighbors will not let them know of my last agony and deliverance. Nor will they inform the funeral parlors of my untimely disappearance, entrusting my corrupt body first to the care of some fire brigade and then to the farthest pauper's grave. My flat will be disinfected and sealed up. My belongings will be burnt. Not on the sea coast, not in front of my friends.

Were I Almighty God, I would have the whole building with all its occupants burnt down. And while I am about it, why not reduce the whole of New York city with all its bogus Christs and genuine, purebred antichrists to ashes? "But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many."

Were I Almighty God, I would grant myself an immediate cure and ten hours of non-stop telephone conversation with Manfred.

God, fairies, miracles, mirrors. In that extremely manageable and fluid world my malady is nothing but a footnote in a medical journal. This sort of thing happens to *other* people living on *other* planets, far beyond *my* solar system.

And then I go out and am given another injection, on *this* planet, in *this* city, in the house *opposite*, in my doctor's office. My extramundane extrapolations clash with the tangible reality of the syringe. And the scaffolding-like outline of my bones, as reflected in *my* mirror, puts the finishing touches to the picture of my death. It is high time I bequeathed my skeleton to the *Musée de l'homme*.

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon in the forest, with the sun streaming through the leaves. What afternoon? What forest? Central Park? Never mind, never body, never park, never forest. Never the people who walked around me. "You're just moral degenerates with no sense of decency," I shouted.

Homosexuality is no illness. It is indeed as natural as bisexuality, heterosexuality and the indifference of old age. So I have nothing against homosexuals. And I would not mind becoming one right now. The problem is I cannot become anybody or anything. And I am not just an impotent man—a *normal* impotent man, that is. Impotent men—and apes for that matter—usually *stop* performing the sex act at some point or other. They *stop* having an erection, say, at 6.35 p.m. On Thursday, on Tuesday. I have never had an erection. Neither on Thursday nor Tuesday. Nor even in my youth, in my palmy days, in the prime of life. What kind of illness is it, I wonder? "DH-0"? Or some minus-infection? To cut a long story short, I am a born eunuch. One of the living dead, a stillborn child. I was ashamed of myself—and of my parents, to some degree. So I told them nothing for fear they might question their love, its intensity and productivity.

The blind are renowned for their sense of hearing, for their sense of touch, for their sense of smell. They smell and touch everything. And they hear everything. A blind man I knew in my childhood used to say: "Fish compensate for the current by moving their fins." How do I compensate for my impotence?

I like touching people. Over the years I have evolved a spectacular capacity for friendship.

And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life

Do I live, am I dead? I seem to repel everything as if I had died and been reborn into some minus-world. The people who used to gather around me, especially during rugby matches, are now fleeing in disorder. My friends, my friends. Am I alive, am I dead? If I am dead, why does no one tidy up my tomb, laying cream roses in front of the gravestone?

Soccer, rugby. Ever since my doctor recalled the saying "truth will out" and told me the plain unvarnished truth about my state of health, I have been playing soccer only in my dreams. Fortunately, I dream quite a lot now. Quite a lot, quite a lot. And I sleep much longer, making up for the sleepless nights of happiness. I sleep fourteen hours. And I shall sleep much longer, much, much longer in the near future. Much, much longer.

Was I ever happy? I was, in spite of my impotence. Platonic love is not incompatible with joy and bliss. Friendship is a real source of happiness.

Have I forgotten it? What? My sexual life. My instinct for self-preservation is strong enough to make me lose my memory altogether. My sex life. Was I really born impotent? Happiness, happiness. Could I have been happy without a sex life? And my sleepless nights? What did we talk about? Literature, art in general? Perhaps. I used to write essays on art and literature, on life in general. I do not know. I cannot remember. I do not wish to remember. My former happiness might kill me. Is it another disease? The remembrance of things past? Under what name is it listed in their lexicons of medicalese? "Happy days"? A nice name, isn't it? A nice Beckettian name. Or simply DH-21?

My dreams have gained ground and overlapped into reality, becoming its foundation, its pedestal. Imagination and dreams are often at war with reason and facts. What facts, may I ask? The fact that I am ill? The fact that both my feet have already been sucked down by my grave? The fact that my only outward sign of wealth and health is my torso swinging to and fro above the earth?

I am just acting Winnie's part in *Happy Days*. Soon the curtain will fall and I shall be free.

"You say, you dream about acting in Beckett's plays? Well and good. What other dreams have you had since I saw you last?"

"I played soccer. There was a team, two teams, our team and their team—"

"A regular soccer-game—"

"There was a stadium."

"You couldn't possibly have played on Fifth Avenue, could you?"

"A hundred thousand spectators turned up."

"The tendency toward gigantism is the chief characteristic of DH-9 patients."

"I was left half-back. The whistle blew. I received the ball and passed it to one of my teammates but, to my astonishment, instead of tapping it into the net, he shied off."

"Just an inexperienced and lousy player. I hope he was expelled from your team."

"So I had to run after the ball and stop it before it was out. Our coach was looking daggers at me, as if *I* was to blame."

"Every team needs a scapegoat."

"The pitch was slippery after the rain. First I fumbled the ball and then managed to bring it under control."

"I used to tame horses. In the Mid-West."

"I was going to score, but there were no cries of encouragement."

"Perhaps you were playing an away-match."

"I expected a spectacular dive, but the goalkeeper took to his heels."

"Suppose the ball hit you in the stomach. Very painful."

"I hammered the ball home. I kept pulling in the points for our team. The goal was empty. There was nobody on the pitch either."

"What was the score?"

"I glanced around. The stands were empty too."

"You were at it too long—all night, no doubt. People can't spend the whole night at the stadium, you know."

"I realized I was playing back to front. I was scoring own-goals. I was wandering about the pitch in fear and trembling—"

"Well, to begin with, you shouldn't work yourself up into a state of hysteria because of one lost game. Unless it was the cup-final. If I'm not mistaken, it wasn't. Was it? Now, as everybody knows, balls and balloons represent man's genitals. Your leg kicking the ball stands for your penis. By the way, what did the ball look like? Was it rather limp? And what about your leg? Does it feel like jelly, like cotton wool? I'm sorry, you have a stiff leg, haven't you? Calcium deficiency? Tuberculosis of the bones? Well, let's skip the details. If you could skip, of course. You must excuse my little joke. Well, just keep a stiff upper lip! That's all that counts. And your tapping the ball into the net signifies sexual intercourse. Don't interrupt me, please! You think it has nothing to do with DH-9? It has. It's psychological. It's all in the mind, old boy. 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell.'"

My parents set great store by the mind, neglecting the body and its permanent struggle for equality. In this respect my body has always reminded me of the women's rights movement. Thanks to DH-9, my body got my mind irrevocably under its thumb. I am quite unable now to ascertain the whereabouts of my mind. Everything has become my body, my aching, decaying

body. And yet my body keeps shrinking. It expands and contracts at the same time. It is both everything and nothing. I have lost thirty five pounds. I have lost the greater part of my time and space. Europe is no more than a handful of dust spread beyond the Atlantic which, in turn, is no larger than a pool—an after-effect of some rainstorm. Why then not put on my boots and pay a belated visit to my parents?

The very idea of it! Just thinking of such an enterprise makes me drop from exhaustion. I cannot cover the distance between the toilet and the bed, let alone the oceanic immensity of street puddles.

My mind keeps shrinking. (Do not allow your mind to boil, as you may shrink it.) My ever-narrowing representation of the world is reduced to the limits of my pillow on which my head has come to rest at last. Now the whole universe is lying on my pillow.

I am aching all over.

"Where does it hurt?"

"I've got a pain in my back, in my neck, in my navel, in my nipple, in my armpits, in my nostrils, in my groin, in my glottis, in my skull, in my stomach, in my tongue, in my temple, in my Adam's apple, in my collar bone, in my legs, in my flanks, in my larynx, in my pharynx."

A veritable anatomy lesson put into the mnemonic verses of my pains. And on top of it I have a sore throat and a sore foot. And I am running a high fever.

My fire would long since have ignited my pajamas, the sheets, the blanket and the pillow but for the water I spill as I endeavor to bring the glass into contact with my mouth. At present my fire bears no sexual overtones.

Sexual overtones. What does that mean? I no longer understand what I say. I no longer understand what I write.

I do understand what I write. Sexual overtones.

Whither? say, whither shall I fly,

To slack these flames wherein I fry?

I even understand what other people write in their leisure hours. In his poem *The Frozen Zone: or, Julia Disdainful* Robert Herrick embroidered upon the flames of passion that seemed to devour his heart, his soul, his intestines, his lungs, his liver, and so on. Am I in love with somebody or something? Am I in love with DH-9? With Death? They are both in love with me, no doubt about it. But do *I* love them? No way. Let them write poems on the pain of unrequited love.

Sometimes, weary of the struggle for life, I begin struggling for death. I do not grope for the glass of water; I avoid breaking into a cold sweat. I wait. I feel thirsty. I feel thirsty. I feel thirsty. My train of thought departs from the principle of its own logic and falls prey to hallucinations; surrounded by sands, I hopelessly die of thirst. And on the verge of death, unconsciously, I resume my struggle for life. I drop out of the death-frame and drink, drink, drink, drink, drink, drink until, swollen with water and pride, I once more feel the world that reveals itself to my senses through the wet pillow. According to my psychoanalyst, the DH-9 patient may go in for kicks, court extreme thrills, push himself into extravagant risks so as to "scare some life into himself." I did. Let us hope that death will scare some life into my body.

Do you know what my doctor told me this afternoon? "You pay too much attention to your sufferings. Why don't you follow the example of soldiers, saints and martyrs who think about something less material, more spiritual? The lofty sentiments and ambitions they concentrate on cloud the sense of pain. Religions encourage their martyrs to experience pain in order to purify the spirit."

"I had no idea you were such a purist," I answered. "Anyway my spirit must be as pure as the driven snow by now, judging from the amount of pain I've endured over the last years. No point in suffering martyrdom any longer. Or do the Christians need another symbol of purity? Isn't the Virgin Mary enough for them?"

"Some soldiers don't even ask for morphine in spite of their horrifying wounds. And fakirs often walk across hot coals. Their skin begins to sizzle and spectators can smell burning flesh—"

"Can't you smell my burning flesh, my burning soul? But I don't *walk* on hot coals, contrary to what fakirs accomplish during their working hours."

"Not only fakirs perform this feat of valor. Some well-to-do business people take weekend classes in hot-coal-walking, I hear. In California."

"As a child I liked embedding myself in the sand. Now I'm embedded in hot coals. What's more, these coals are inside me as well. Every nerve of mine is embedded in hot coals."

But my blood is cold. And sometimes it runs icy cold. Out of the frying pan into the ice.

To the treasures shall I go
Of the rain, frost, hail, and snow?

No need to fly to Siberia. All I have to do is bathe in my blood. Or drown in it. Or lay my head on Manfred's breast. The frozen zone.

The hum of distant traffic hung heavy on a deserted street. "Have you a light?" I heard a foreign accent with unmistakable Russian overtones. I saw a pair of epaulettes parted by a beard. I did not have a light. My life had been lightless for quite some time. Lightless and lifeless. "I was promoted to the rank of colonel after the battle at Platovo, in 1916," he said in a raucous voice. I recognized my maternal grandfather. He looked exactly like his picture. "A bullet grazed my lung," he continued without changing his voice. He knew I would hear him out. "Which lung?" A smear of blood slowly made its appearance on the spot to which the officer's fingers were pressed. The blood spread through the uniform with amazing rapidity. "Do you want me to call an ambulance?" "Too late, too late," he answered, pressing his other hand to his chest, to his lungs. He started to walk without turning his eyes away from me. "Come, come," he said. He seemed to be weaving through the traffic, although there were no cars or bicycles in sight. As might have been expected, he fell down and instantly formed a pattern of death on the cobble-stones. I looked at my shirt. There was the same smear of blood over my chest. A car materialized from the vanishing point of the street and pulled in after a while. Prince Golkonsky staggered out of it. He tottered toward the dead man, leaned over him, kneeled down and closed the frozen eyes. Why didn't he feel the dead man's pulse? The prince returned to his taxi. After wrestling with an endless rope and numerous hooks, he hauled one of two coffins down from the roof-rack. He hastened to put it alongside the corpse.

The next part of the ceremony involved the trunk to which Golkonsky now directed his energy. With a matter-of-fact grunt he opened it and pulled out two wreaths. Their fragrance permeated the air. The ribbons displayed their long-distance message with the dignity peculiar to all incomprehensible languages. The second coffin still towered over the street. I was supposed to handle it on my own. Self-service, self-denial. I was my own undertaker and gravedigger. A Texas Homestore Funeral. A few hours later I set up a tombstone over my mortal remains.

On the brink of death many human beings are granted an opportunity to see and even touch some representative of the next world, of the Hereafter: a gardener from Eden or a stoker from Hades. Those visitors mostly belong to the family of the dying person. On the deathbed one is likely to revert to one's past, seeking shelter from the icy cyclone of nothingness in the lap of one's ancestors, in the overtones of one's mother tongue.

I encountered my maternal grandfather whom I was soon to follow into the immeasurable abyss of death belied by the smallness and shallowness of coffins and tombs. I cannot read the description of our otherworldly dialogue without being shaken by sincere stentorian sobs. And I cannot recite the following prophetic poem of mine without being interrupted by the same sobs, by the same emotion and remembrance:

The arrogant spirit of a long-dead warrior
 Haunts my leisure, digs up the treasure
 Of won battles, conjures up the horror
 Of the last lost battle which measured

His valor and his life. Honored, then forgotten
 He dwells now in my fantasy or in my memory.
 I dwell in his death, in his soul, in his body,
 In his pierced armor, in a Jacobean tragedy.

It was worse than any Jacobean tragedy, much, much worse. I dwelt and died not on a page of Webster or Tourneur or Middleton but in New York, in 1999.

I dwelt in Paradise, I meandered around the Garden of Eden, I sampled the fruits of the Tree of Love, I sampled the mellow fruits of the Tree of Lust; they melted in my mouth, trickled down my throat.

Standing in front of the mirror, pasty-faced, dressed all in black, I looked more than ever like a lightning-charred tree. The Tree of DH-9. Sounds awful.

I have no idea how it sounds, come to think of it. I cannot speak anymore.

My limbs are weak, my hearing almost gone.

Shall I put on my make-up? A DH-9-face plastered and painted into a simulacrum of youth.

I clenched my fists and started hammering my reflection into a more presentable shape.

Luckily for me I was too decrepit to smash the mirror into pieces, which might have resulted in several deep cuts and quite a few incurable infections. "The road to infection lies wide open," my doctor says. I inhale what I exhale. The DH-air, the DH-river. The Nile. The DH-9 river will flow into the sea of my blood as long as I stay in my room. I do not air my room for fear of pneumonia and outdoor germs. I contaminate myself endlessly, painstakingly, painlessly yet painfully, irremediably. Another perpetuum mobile. I must keep clear of myself. I must not touch myself, I must not look at myself in the mirror. And given that sperm is a "carrier," I must not overindulge in anything connected with masturbation. However remotely!

I cannot, I cannot. I am impotent. Don't forget you are impotent. Don't forget you have always being impotent.

I must not sleep in my bed, I must not eat with my fork. It sickens me to realize I cannot swallow a morsel of meat without infecting myself through and through. My instinct for self-preservation must have got wind of that fatality: I voluptuously disgorge whatever I consume. Voraciously. At *this* rate, I shall soon be able to do without esophagus, duodenum, gall bladder, liver and other digestive organs.

Digestive problems will thus be resolved. Every cloud has a silver lining.

I am now in Queer Street, no pun intended. I am down to my last dollar.

I was kicked out the moment they learnt about DH-9 or about my fall from God's grace, to use *their* terminology. As usual, someone quoted the Bible: "God shall destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living."

I quelled the speaker with a glance. "Do you mean to say I might be driven out of the holy land of America and deported to some uninhabited taiga? Would I at least be authorized to remain on earth?"

At this point there stepped forward a man whom I had never seen before, our firm being at once large and labyrinthine. He came up to me and held out his hand. "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God," he said as he embraced me heartily. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee—" He did not kiss me. I forgot to ask him his phone number.

My memory, my memory. Why do I forget to ask people their phone numbers? Why do I forget to give them *my* phone number? They might call me day and night, day and night, day and night. But they do not know my phone number. And I am not listed in the phone book because I have not given *them* my phone number. I am very good at explaining such things. I am very good, am I not? And clever too! I am still clever, very clever, despite my memory and its losses. Despite my DH-9. It is mine, isn't it? DH-9. DH-Mine. But what shall I do with it? What shall I do with my new toy? DH-Mine, DH-Mine. Why doesn't my sister break this toy of mine and stamp down on its remnants? Do you no longer have your feet, my sister? Where are your feet? Where are your feet? You could also do it with your fingers. You often did it with your fingers, didn't you? Breaking my toys, breaking my joys. Why don't you break this one, this little toy of mine? A poor thing, but mine own. Go ahead, I beg of you. I won't cry. I will not. I'll laugh instead. I'll roar with laughter.

I am down to my last dollar. Could money be of any use to me? Beyond this curtain there lies a world of appearances where appearances count—to all appearances. But I do not belong in that world anymore.

This curtain, *that* world. I am allowed to touch this curtain. I can even draw it and pull it back again. But I am not allowed to touch that world over there. Shall I pretend I am blind? Will they allow me to touch their world? Out of pity? They are not likely to pity a DH patient. Any DH patient for that matter. Even the one who has only DH-5. Or DH-4. "Thou shalt not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy—that's the law and don't you forget it," say our preachers who are mining a reach seam of fear and prejudice.

At any rate, no laundry would agree to deal with *my* dirt. Nor would anyone agree to deal with my neatness, if any. And considering that my seductive gifts may no longer be set off by leather jackets, I shall cut down on clothes. And granting that, in my case, food is no longer adequate for the purpose, I shall economize on *foie gras*, salmon, oysters and champagne. Unless one can have a slap-up meal by contemplating a row of dainty dishes. And seeing that I am no longer able to watch a film or a play without dozing off every five minutes, I shall forego the arts as well. I shall make an exception for tiny art-galleries and weeny books. Why embark upon a roman fleuve ordinarily intended for healthy minds that have far to go? Besides, some literary works—right off-hand, I can only think of Dante's, Tolstoy's and Joyce's masterpieces—are actually meant for immortals. Their very presence on my shelves is cramping my style. Against the dark background of their immensity my vital force seems less substantial than ever. What a cemetery my library has become! Nothing is left for me but to fall back on short stories, on parables I can go through at one sitting. And if I do not succeed at the first try I redouble my efforts upon awakening.

I am down to my last dollar. But whatever happens, whenever my death-scene is set, I will not let them drag me back to the hospital for all the tea in China. I will not, do you hear me?

"When do you think our gay'll kick the bucket?"

"By putting two and two together I've arrived at the conclusion that our gay's days are numbered, and if he's not dead yet—"

"He's not, not yet, he wasn't ten minutes ago—"

"He won't live through the night."

"Are you kidding? Bertrand bet me a hundred bucks that he would last till the fourth of July."

"Well, he must be confusing DH-9 with flu."

"Our gay made a spectacle of himself this morning. Can't go without a shower, no less."

"I'll bet you anything that as soon as he gets pneumonia—"

"He has no time for pneumonia."

"What's more, he's a dainty eater."

"And he likes to be waited on."

"He must be confusing our hospital with a French restaurant."

"I'll wait on him tonight. Would you care for Russian caviar, Your Excellency?"

"If it wasn't for the virus, I'd smash his face in."

"Why don't you wear your rubber gloves and a carnival mask?"

"He asked for the Bible."

"Damned if I noticed any spiritual upheaval in him."

"Thou has played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord."

"Two hundred bucks."

"Look at our gay first—to make assurance doubly sure."

"He may be fighting his way back again, for all I know."

"By simple deduction and putting two and two—"

"And if he doesn't get pneumonia, what then?"

"He's got a very wide choice of infections, don't you worry."

"Personally I wish him many happy returns of the day."

"Why? Why?"

"My personal research—"

"Can't you find a more presentable guinea-pig?"

"Am I to understand that you don't give a damn about the money I bet Harry yesterday?"

You selfish bastard, you!"

"You needn't ask him to die. He'll die as a matter of course."

"Of course!"

"But when, when? That's the question."

"How much does it work out at?"

"Next time I'll bet five hundred bucks."

"Our gay wilted visibly when I caught his eye this afternoon."

"He feels that you pocketed seven hundred bucks—"

"Can he feel anything at all?"

"He's not paralyzed, is he?"

"He's not, not yet."

"How do you know?"

"He can't feel."

"I bet a hundred and fifty bucks he can."

"I'll give him a poke. Forgive the pun! What?"

"Perhaps we should allow him to take a shower, all things considered. We'll see if he can feel hot water."

"I'd just as soon let him have a cold bath. You're underestimating pneumonia."

"Who'll assist him? His nakedness is an offense to the eye."

"You'll survive. He won't."

"His Majesty indicated to me his desire to go for a stroll."

"Where? In Central Park? Jogging?"

"Just in the corridor, for a breath of fresh air. 'Oh, for some fresh air,' he exclaimed last night."

"We've got some air-freshener in a spray-can."

"Caviar, fresh air. What about riding a horse?"

"He isn't doing his fair share."

"His fairy share, you mean."

"Why not go a hunting?"

But a-hunting we will go,

A-hunting we will go.

"I'm not homosexual!" I shouted. "I'm impotent. I've always been impotent. Don't confuse me with others, whoever they are. Don't confuse me with *them*! I can't have an erection. See for yourself! Even in my childhood I couldn't have an erection. In my youth, I mean. Others boasted about their sexual abilities. I did not. Other boys showed their penises. I never showed my penis to anybody, not even to my mother. I envied my school friends. I had a lot of friends, you know. Fish compensate for the current by moving their fins. I moved my fins, in a manner of speaking. In a manner of writing. To compensate for the current. And I *managed* to compensate for the current, I did. The problem is I cannot swim. Even in my youth I couldn't swim. In my youth, when I was healthy. Sound in body and mind. So I'm still sound in body and mind. Because I cannot swim."

"By putting two and two together." "He'll die as a matter of course." Their voices, their indefatigable, bell-like voices. They were all in good voice, all of them. I was wondering why

they had not yet been engaged for the Bayreuth Festival. Their voices. Lulled to sleep by their bets, I dreamed of diamond necklaces they might purchase for their concubines. "Don't count your diamonds," I shouted, banging an empty glass on the bedside table. I kept them posted about my state of health at a distance. My glass also sounded like a bell. (When I happened to be in the arms of Morpheus, they had to put on the mask, the gloves and go all the way to my pillow in order to take my pulse or pinch my face.) They would repay my kindness with a new couplet of their lullaby. In the arms of Hades.

I was, of course, assured of their daily examination, of the "autopsy," as they called it. Lunchtime was habitually marked by the appearance of a trolley pushed through the doorway by the nurse's foot. Only once did I catch a glimpse of her freckled face distorted, on that occasion, with disgust and wrath. In my professional opinion, she would have made a wretched soccer player. The trolley's trajectory never attained the perfection required by the geometrical pattern of the game. So I had to extricate myself from under the blanket and pull my tepid lunch bedward.

Over and over again I was sick as a dog or a DH-9 patient. (I was not sick as an ape, mind you. Not yet.) The disgust I once saw on the nurse's face must have been stamped on my features in my waking hours and in my sleep. To some extent, I was the mirror of those people disgusted by DH-9. I was disgusted, nauseated, appalled, depressed. I felt what they felt but no mask, no gloves protected myself from myself and from DH-9. (A tautology: I *was* DH-9 by the time.) I could not scuttle out and bet Harry a thousand dollars. In desperation I would hide myself from myself under the pillow.

Last night I talked to Napoleon. I must be living in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century. Going backward. Apeward. I did not see Darwin, though. I might have told him a few home truths. Why didn't he so much as mention DH-9 in his writings? History is not a one-way street, history and evolution. What shall I call it? Devolution, devaluation? No, no. And my dictionary is too far away, beyond the ocean. What counts is the movement itself, not the name we might give it. Let it therefore remain nameless. Anyway, apes have no names, no *personal* names that is. Unless they are caught and put in cages. And I have not been put in a cage, not yet. So I have no name either. Except DH-9. Only species are named in such cases.

A hospital room, a ward. Is it a cage? And what about *my* room? I can't go out, but I see no bars around, only walls. And drapes. No bars, no bars. Are there cages without bars? Barless cages?

The ganglia prove nothing! "So went Sa-tan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes." I got into the habit of quoting these lines to them every other morning.

I have forgotten the blood tests. There was a nurse—a male nurse, judging by the flat-chested smoothness of the uniform—who called on me five times a day. The muteness and stiffness of that anonymous caller belonged even more to the future robot-governed world than the trolley kicked by the squeamish and clumsy slut. On the other hand, that mummy-like figure reminded me of a gangster scurrying through his work amidst petrified bank employees. He/she remained incognito throughout my stay in the "hospitable" house. I am not even sure I was handled by the same man or the same flat-chested woman. The only sign I can rely upon when advancing the one-person hypothesis is the sameness of the muteness and manners. He was always in a rush to get it over with. And yet, despite the incredible velocity that distinguished his test from other similar tests I had undergone in my existence, he would carry away at least one pint of my blood. Did they mistake me for a blood donor?

They *were* hospitable. They would not release me. The importance of my staying within their reach was borne out by the ever-increasing number of punters. The senior hospital lecturer was called in to arbitrate. Their Greek chorus mumbled as I crumbled:

"Two months."

"One month and a half."

"One month."

"Come on!"

"Twenty-five days."

"Pneumonia, you're underrating the destructive power of pneumonia."

"Twenty."

"Seventeen."

"Come on!"

"Fifteen."

"Going at fifteen, going—"

"Ten."

"Wait a minute. I haven't taken his last snapshot."

"You don't have your mittens on."

"His last photograph? Do you also participate in the competition?"

"The best last—"

"Where the hell have I put them?"

"How much is the first prize, the Oscar?"

"To hell with the diving suit!"

"Going at ten—"

"Nine."

"The last flashing of life against the thick veils of the Hereafter—"

"And his rattle, his last rattle?"

"Rattlebrain. There are already three cassette recorders in his room."

"Eight."

"I waited and waited. Is he immortal?"

"Seven."

"Going at seven."

"I've got no camera, no cassette recorder, no—"

"Too late. He won't live through the night."

"Five."

"Five minutes?"

"Buy a video camera. His last movement—"

"His last tremor—"

"His last shiver—"

"I'll buy two video cameras. One at his feet—"

"That'll give him the shivers!"

"That's against the rules!"

"Come on!"

"Four."

"Is there any competition—"

"Rattlepate—"

"Three."

"Going at three—"

"One."

"Wait a minute."

"A minute?"

"Just a second!"

"Going at two seconds—"

"Zero."

"Going at zero, going, going, gone."

My darkened fancies still beguile me into believing that the night they spoke of is not over yet. A zero-zero fog. The thick veils of the Hereafter. Night. Night. What time is it? My Time is different. Their watches are elsewhere. Going, going, going, going. Zero. Zero hour. What does zero hour mean? My hour? Do I have an hour? A minute? A zero minute? A zero second? Two zero seconds? Gone, gone, gone. Did they say that? "He's gone." Do they know exactly where I am? On this side or on the other side? How many sides are there? Is it a many-sided problem? Am I on the third side, whatever *that* is? I'd rather be on the third side, whatever that is. Wherever it is. Or on the fourth side. Whenever it is.

It is daytime now. The light revealing the stigmas of my malady has nothing to do with the softness and indulgence of my bedside lamp which, at a distance, imparts *some* beauty to my face. In nightlight I do not see myself. And if I do, I do not recognize myself. Studying DH-9's frolics on another face provides some comfort to my heart.

Now I see *everything*. I wish I were stricken blind. I wish my skin would be flayed by the Grand Inquisitor. (Incidentally, the unobstructed view of my internal organs might turn out to be more akin to our notion of evil than, for example, the atomic bomb.) I re-read two pages of the magnificent *Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells.

I dialed three telephone numbers. Nobody answered as if it *were* night-time when all insomniacs have their share of loneliness, when even the brave are racked by fear of death. The brave and the healthy.

I went to the Palace to receive my apehood. I have been given an apehood, so I am now Ape Christopher. Well, not quite yet. I am not prepared yet, not mentally. I am prepared physically perhaps. Certainly. But not mentally. "By strictly human criteria chimpanzees are mentally

retarded to an intermediate degree. Their brains are only one-third as large as our own, and their larynx is constructed in the primitive ape form that prevents them from articulating human speech." I chanced upon a relevant book in my library. *On Human Nature*, by Edward O. Wilson. A book on the nature of animals would be more to the point, but I am easily contented. I am fairly content with my life, you know. Apes are also content with their lives, I presume. Of course they are mentally retarded. But I am also mentally retarded, am I not? What is more, I am physically retarded as well. Or advanced—call it what you will! My brain is one-third of its previous size. And that's for sure! Or one-fourth. Is it enough to become an ape? I ought not overdo it. And what about my larynx? What kind of form has it assumed in the course of my devolution? Never mind! What counts is that I am prevented from articulating human speech. By what? Never mind! By my larynx, by my lungs, by my tongue, by my brain, by DH-9, by DH-666. "Yet individuals can be taught to communicate with their human helpers by means of American sign language or the fastening of plastic symbols in sequences on display boards." Well, there are no helpers in my room, neither human nor otherwise. No cats, no dogs. No apes except myself. And I am no helper. No way. I cannot even take care of myself. Helpers, helpers. Shall I communicate with humans? How? By sign language or by plastic symbols? By plastic bombs! "Two hundred English words." How many English words do I still have in my mental lexicon? Two hundred? Three hundred? "Chimpanzees do not remotely approach the human child in the inventiveness and drive of their language." But I have no desire to approach children. Why contaminate them? Why not? "When Gordon G. Gallup, a psychologist, allowed chimps to peer into mirrors for two or three days, they changed from treating their reflection as a stranger to recognizing it as themselves." No mirrors, please! No mirrors. For God's sake! For old times' sake. "They made faces." I don't need to make faces. "The use of sticks and saplings as defensive weapons against leopards." Against humans! My sticks, my saplings. Where are they?

I went to the opera. Not the last night, not the day before, needless to say—some eight months ago, at the very outset of my malady. At the time DH-9 was no more than an overture where the themes of my decomposition, of my disintegration turned out to be skillfully adumbrated. I had already lost ten pounds but was not as yet capable of ascending to heaven like a balloon or a mystic. Without being monumental, my weight was "massive" enough to enable me to stand firmly on the ground, and my legs were holding that weight up with a certain dignity. What was more, they would carry me almost as far as I wished.

Perhaps my wishes had already been reduced to nothing. Zero desire, whatever *that* means.

I went to the Met. I used to like opera. I still like it inasmuch as recordings can make my flesh creep. I attended *La Traviata*, that time. Alongside Gesualdo, Ligeti and other composers of the same caliber, whose music is entertainment of the highest aesthetic order to my outer and inner ear, I do not disdain that gut-reaction stuff which may occasionally suit my frivolous disposition.

The more the rake-like progress of DH-9 through my body grew tangible, the more I felt inclined to read about diseases, to see diseases, if only on a television-screen; to touch them, if only on my body; to listen to them. My morbid disposition was matched by *La Traviata* to such perfection that during the performance I all but identified myself with the heroine—a square-shouldered, obese woman who seemed never to have lost a single pound in her life. (DH-9 could have been recommended to her as the most expedient slimming method.)

I knew that, sooner or later, preferably before he had caught my DH-9, I was to relate to Manfred my conversation with the doctor. "There's no happiness for me when I'm away from you. If God *will* shield me from—" It was his father who drove us apart.

I: (*on my knees*) *Non sapete che colpita, d'altro morbo è la mia vita? Che già presso il fin ne vedo? Ch'io mi separi da Manfredo.* (Don't you know that my life is stricken by a terrible illness...and that I already foresee its end? That I should be parted from Manfredo!)

HIS FATHER: (*standing bolt upright*) *E grave il sacrificio ma pur, tranquilla uditemi. Bella voi siete e giovane. Col tempo—*(The sacrifice is great; but now listen to me calmly: you are young and beautiful, in time—)

He alluded to the speedy decay of DH-9-sapped bodies. It was tactless, wasn't it, to call DH-9 'DH-9' in my presence? In sign of protest I rose proudly to my feet.

HIS FATHER: (*maliciously*) *Da un genitor non furono tai nodi benedetti.* (For such a union as this can't be blessed by any parent.)

Oh, here we go again. "Don't bring up that Sodom-and-Gomorra business, you self-righteous prig. Just leave us alone!" That is what *I* might have said under the circumstances. But I deemed it politic to comply with the constraints of both the staging and the libretto. With a lamentable sob I hurled myself down on the divan.

HIS FATHER: (*hypocritically*) *Piangi, piangi, piangi, O misera, piangi, piangi, piangi! Sento nell' anima già, le tue pene.* (Weep, weep, weep, O unhappy one, weep, weep, weep! Now I feel in my soul all the suffering that is yours.)

I: (*turning to him*) *Morro! Morro! La mia memoria non fia ch'ei maledica; se le mie pene orribili. Vi sia chi almen gli dica.* (I shall die, die! Don't let him curse my memory; and let there be someone to tell him of my dreadful suffering.)

I have no alternative but to ask my doctor to flesh out the details of my dreadful suffering to Manfred: I am rather short of go-betweens. He will also notify him of my death unless I am in a position to go and die on Manfred's threshold like a faithful hamster. Just fancy his being precluded from opening the door by my immortal remains. I should pin to my jacket or coat—if I happen to last till frosty days—a large piece of paper with "DH-9" written on it. To hold the cleaning woman at bay. Don't remove my body until *he* stumbles over it!

MANFREDO: (*dragging my body into the apartment*) *Null' uomo o demon, angiol mio, mai più dividermi potrà da te, no no, mai più da te.* (And now neither man nor devil, my angel, can ever make us part. No more, no more...)

I: (*in case I should be still alive and in the mood for singing*) *Ah, s' anco in vita m'hai ritrovata, credi, she uccidere non puo il dolor.* (And since you've found me still alive, you must believe that grief can't kill.)

DH-9 can. Manfred sits down on the divan, lifts my singing and moaning body from the floor and puts it on his lap.

MANFREDO: *Ah, tutto alla speranza non chiudere il tuo cor! Calmati; m'uccide il tuo dolor!* (Ah, do not lock out all hope from your heart! Try to be calm; it kills me to see you suffer!)

I: (*giving a death rattle*) *Ah! gran Dio! Morir si giovine, io, che penato ho tanto! Morir si presso a tergere, il mio si lungo pianto!* (Ah, dear God, to die so young, I, who have suffered so much! To die when, at long last, I can dry all my tears.)

MANFREDO: (*soothing me nervously*) *No, no, non puo da me. Ah, vivi, o solo un feretro m'accoglierà con te.* (Oh! No! Death can't part you from me. Ah, live! Or one single grave will suffice for us both.)

Only the composer and old ladies took his words seriously. I dived into an inside pocket and handed him a snapshot dating back to my DH-9less life.

I: (*with a rueful, other-worldly smile*) *Prendi, quest'è l'immagine de' miei passati giorni, a rammentar ti torni—*(Take this—it is the image of my days gone by. Let it remind you—)

In a moment of aberration I pulled open the bottom left-hand drawer of my desk and fished out the snapshot concerned as if to rehearse the death-scene. I shot only a fleeting glance at the mirror and tore the snapshot to shreds. All the pictures of mine I could lay my hands on during that *entr'acte* between two heavy sleeps underwent the same treatment. Upon

awakening I gazed at myself in the mirror without a shudder. I was myself once more. I had never been otherwise—never, never, never, never, never.

I studied at Cambridge University. What did I study? DH-9? Did I get contaminated in the course of my studies? Did I shake hands with one of my colleagues? My fellow sufferer. DH-9 is said to be transmitted through handshakes. Not through sexual intercourse only. DH-9 is not AIDS, although they have a lot in common. All diseases of this kind have a lot in common. What? What do they have in common? Death. Death and scapegoats. The same scapegoats. The same death.

A handshake. A kiss on a forehead. Our skin is thin. Our skin leaks. And the disease is slowly leaking out. And in.

The doctor lent me fifty dollars. I must have won the world's pain-endurance championship. I enjoy winning awards as much as the next person, but other things are more important to me. Why this amount? A DH-9 patient has a tendency to view every number in terms of his death. Ten days? Five dollars a day? "It'll tide you over until the end...of the month," he said. And what if, to end my month and my life with a flourish, I decide to celebrate my agony in one of the best New York restaurants? Champagne for everybody!

Apart from the professional, guinea-pig considerations, he was inspirited to largesse by the presence of a journalist.

"In my article on DH-9 I'll compare you to St. Francis of Assisi."

I pictured in my mind St. Francis's father, his wonderful shop and the window from which the future saint hurled luxury items of clothing into the mire of the gutter. And there I was, standing in that gutter and trying them on. Alas, it was the gutter of my mind.

"People like you are paving the way for a return to the Christian ideal of life."

Looking at me, pointing at the doctor. To whom was the journalist speaking?

To heighten the effect of his performance and enhance his prestige by self-effacement my doctor lowered his head and mumbled something about duty.

"Why don't you give him another fifty dollars?" The journalist's attention did not deviate from my person, but now he was looking me up and down like a critical tailor. "I might compare you to Jesus Christ Himself." This time both his index finger and his gaze converged on the doctor who, alas, made an unnecessary display of false modesty.

Shall I go to my doctor now? Another fifty dollars. Will he give me anything apart from a customary injection? Or shall I go to the zoo instead? Do they need apes? I am not an ape, not yet. Do they need dying humans?

"The money'll go toward a new pair of shoes?" The journalist pulled a face. Instinctively I leaned against the wall to conceal the back of my jacket. "A hearty meal with a modicum of wine would be in order," he blurted as he gazed at my baggy trousers. I told him I was on a diet, in accordance with the new fashion.

"Baggy trousers are also *à la mode*," I said.

"You are French, aren't you?"

"That was a good guess."

"DH-9 *est très à la mode* too, over the length and breadth of the United States," he continued. His French accent was unbearable.

We reached the sidewalk. He offered to see me home and was rather frustrated when I fixed my blue eyes on the house immediately opposite. He was curious to know how many men had stained my chastity. How many gallons of love are required to create one DH-9 victim? And my parents? Had they psychologically died of my DH-9? He was longing to obtain the necessary information in the open air—in Central Park, for example—fearing that germs enjoy a smoother flight in enclosed spaces.

Due to the same guinea-pig motives, I had a hold over him. He gradually realized he would not drag a word out of me either in Central Park or in a nearby bar. It looked as if both the open air and the unfamiliar air of the bar might enfeeble my vocal cords. By jingling the keys in a pocket of my trousers I brought pressure to bear on him. Like a lamb to the slaughter he was turning this way and that in search of the air propitious to DH-9 confidences. "Saturated with DH-9, my apartment has become a confession." I told him my air was speaking for itself. "I'll lock my door from inside and you'll take the aeolian-harp speech of *my* air down in shorthand." I reminded him that no doctor could provide the pieces forming the puzzle of a DH-9 patient's *everyday* life.

"My bedside table—" I said.

"I know a nice Chinese restaurant," he said.

"You must fill in the background," I said, "otherwise your article will lack the human touch. We're human beings!" I cried all of a sudden. "Don't you dare treat us like guinea-pigs!" He sniffed and consulted his watch. "Don't treat us like corpses either. We think, we read parables, we drink champagne—" He slipped the watch off, shook it and held it up to his

ear like a sea-shell. "And don't tell me, please, you're in a hurry because you're not. You're not. Anyway your article can't be hurried. More haste less speed!"

"My watch is giving out," he said.

"Have you been ordered to write an article on watchmakers?" I asked, stamping my right foot.

I said I used to entertain a lot. I said my intimate friends still looked me up from time to time. "And my best friend Alfred drops in every afternoon to see how I'm getting on."

"Your friend's name is Alfred?" he asked, opening his notebook.

Without batting an eyelid I said, "Yes, yes, Alfred, his first name's Alfred." Manfred, Manfred, my tremulous, pusillanimous friend. I'll keep your name and your betrayal out of papers and weeklies. Till my dying day.

I managed to persuade him that the DH-9 virus is not transmissible. "You can talk with me in my flat and dine with me at my dinner table and even stay with me overnight. What's the title of your article? *One Month with DH-9? One Year—*"

We agreed upon *The DH-9 Lunch* and went shopping in the nearest A&P. I assured him of my culinary experience—"Any self-respecting Frenchman is a born *cuisinier*"—and of my talent for music. I told him I took after my Russian grandfather who had been born in St. Petersburg where "everyone sang and played at least three instruments—piano, guitar and violin." To salve my conscience, which can stomach neither untruth nor any other necessary evil, I added that after the Revolution this aspect of Russian cultural life had undergone a certain change.

As we talked and walked my DH-9 and my fear of death shriveled from a ruthless precision of reality to a vague presentiment. Such is the balmy effect of verbal contact. As we left the A&P, carrying two overladen bags, I began to hope that our lunch and after-lunch talk would make me dismiss this presentiment on the grounds of its utter improbability.

The journalist paid for everything, ice cream included. "Why not compare yourself to my doctor?" I said. "Do you want me to write you a certificate of generosity?"

We stood in front of my flat. I was fumbling for the keys in my garments; he put the bags down on the floor. The keys which had been jingling so gaily an hour ago could not be found in spite or because of my impatience. I cursed my destiny once more. I recalled I was rotting away. As I decided to invite him to the nearest coffee shop my fingers touched the coolness of the key-ring.

I opened the door. My bed seemed to be gaping in wonder at my visitor. On my way to the kitchen I tapped on the mattress.

"Your president partook of this dish in Versailles last spring." When talking to the Americans, I mention the president of the United States as often as possible.

The journalist smiled and told me he was saving money for a vacation in Europe; he was particularly interested in cathedrals and museums. I told him he would have to eat anyway.

I talked, I laughed, I cooked, I found a second glass, we set the table. By way of an appetizer, I sang for him:

Cessarono gli spasimi del dolore,

In me rinasce, rinasce,

M'agita insolito vigor!

Ah! Ma io ritorno a viver!

All my pains are gone.

I feel reborn, reborn...

A new strength is reviving me.

Ah! I'm coming back to life...

I sang it both in English and Italian: one language was not sufficient. I prayed to God that I would not fall asleep before 6 p.m. I recited an Indian imprecation against the demon of nausea. I covered my mouth with my fingers—just in case. I smiled and laughed. I smiled and laughed. I smiled and laughed.

Part Two

He promised to write about me. "I'll send you my article," he said. One day I found the following text in my letter box:

Dear reader! You're already familiar with our publications which you digest with the aid of a post-prandial brandy. Sitting by the fireside, you learn more about life and its often contradictory aspects than globe-trotters and television-viewers; and that on account of my style, the poetical value of which nobody dares to question—not even those who don't read my articles. Poetry penetrates to the remote parts of the human soul like a well-sharpened sword and I have not come to bring peace, but a sword: the hard facts of my article don't make for pleasant reading.

DH-9 is a fatal, incurable disease. The DH-9 bug is transmissible in a variety of ways. Back to apes.

When gathering material on DH-9, I didn't content myself with the kind of glib truisms that other publications traffic in: having turned DH-9 inside out, I made a close study of the "other side of the picture." We ought to take an interest in the human aspect of DH-9 which, unluckily for you and luckily for me, has seldom been treated profoundly.

Can a conscientious investigator get away with a snapshot of some lesion-distorted features accompanied by a neutral commentary "the last picture of Edward"? Even if the reader is offered two pictures of Edward—one taken on the eve of DH-9, the other on the eve of death—the resultant comparison, however striking and terrifying, may give only a rough idea of what the sufferer goes through. What space-time lies in between the healthy, fresh-as-a-daisy face and the mask-like thing that seems to have been abandoned at the scene of the crime by some careless body snatcher? He thumped away for all he was worth on the walls of his prison, alias his apartment, but none heeded him, none gave him assistance. Look at his last picture again. Is it still Edward or has the fatal disease undermined his once large and vigorous frame and self, turning him into an anonymous DH-9 patient—one of two thousand DH-9 patients shouting all over our country? It's high time we organized a pop-concert in aid of those invalids.

Statistics shouldn't be neglected, however much one may mistrust and fear human mathematics. What do statistics say? Every week there spring into existence a half-dozen DH-

9 patients. And statistics suggest that the DH-9 population of the United States of America will be doubled in two months' time. Let's hope that our mathematicians and physicians are wrong.

When in the dead of night I hear a long-drawn-out, blood-chilling scream, I don't attribute it to a murder or rape, as I used to do only two years ago, but I make the Sign of the Cross and pray for a new DH-9 victim. May he die painlessly in the arms of his friends and relatives.

And what do I hear in daytime?

"Tom Springfield died Monday."

"Roger Patterson died Tuesday."

Sounds like they're talking about bowling scores. And those who are still alive?

"What happened to your mustache?"

"Fell off."

"What happened to your hair, to your ears?"

Incidentally, these people may have contracted DH-9 not through gay sexual intercourse, as many of you seem to presume, but because of a dirty hypodermic needle introducing the virus into an innocent man's blood. You might be the next DH-9 patient, my gentle reader. Opponents of safe drug-use programs have long argued that distributing needles and bleach only encourages addiction. They maintain that addicts don't care enough about life to protect themselves from DH-9. While I was doing heroin, I didn't want to die; I wanted to live without pain. Heroin was keeping me from suicide. DH-9 doesn't offer such promise. When you give addicts needles, you're giving them the right message—that someone wants them to stay free of DH-9, even if they continue to use drugs. Dead addicts don't recover.

We are loath to leave this world of ours which is the best of all possible worlds despite viruses and death. But when the loftiness of our purpose makes everything look small and meaningless we tend to disregard our world's allurements. We venture our fortunes, our very life for the cause of freedom and perish in our laboratories. We may even hanker after eternal darkness, for martyrdom remains a favorite weapon of true Christians.

I heeded the call of duty; I recalled our journalistic motto, "Information must be as omnipresent as God." I made the sign of the cross and left my house.

It was as near raining as makes no difference. DH-9 materialized in the shape of a young homosexual man whom, despite a feeling of pity, I couldn't help comparing to Mr. Hyde, the protagonist of Stevenson's famous story dealing with the fashionable problem of good and evil. (Let me remind you that Nietzsche took a further step in this direction, getting

beyond the insuperable dualism in his *Beyond Good and Evil*.) It was an apposite setting: the overcast, somewhat "spongy" sky looked like DH-9; the subject for my psychological dissection looked like DH-9 too. I felt like delving deep into DH-9. Only in terms of theoretical analysis! So everything concurred to bring about an excellent article on the sociological facet of the so-called modern plague. I thanked my lucky stars and began to eye him in a professional manner.

He was a match for Mr. Hyde in personifying evil. (It may be that, through lack of time—another plague of our modern business-suffocated society—some of you haven't read the Stevenson story. In that case, all you have to do is conjure up in your mind the movie featuring Spencer Tracy as Dr. Jekyll *and* Mr. Hyde.) His trousers were hanging on his legs. So were Mr. Hyde's and Spencer Tracy's trousers. His clothes in general were "enormously too large for him," owing to DH-9 victims' propensity to lose as much as fifty pounds of flesh. My first impulse which I easily managed to bridle was to inflate his trousers and his jacket.

"If we take the concept of homosexuality out of its narrow psychopathological setting, we can see that it has positive elements as well." He was holding his head high as if to compensate for the frailty of his voice.

"What positive elements? Do you mind my using a cassette recorder?"

For the sake of posterity he repeated the first sentence word for word and then continued as follows:

"Homosexual man is supremely gifted as a teacher because of his almost feminine insight and tact."

"And what do *you* do? Are you in the art world? Oh, I beg your pardon. I mean, I meant—What did you use to do?"

"I'm tired of being a professional DH-9 patient. I was—"

"But it's not your real profession, is it?" I interrupted somewhat rudely. I was afraid he would never answer my question.

"—filling out a questionnaire the other day. I got to the line marked 'profession' and I caught myself writing down WPA."

WPA. This three-letter word lodged in his throat like a bone. (Whatever it means.) Trying to utter this word seemed to choke off air. And he uttered it many times, many, many times. What's more, he was "living" this word.

For a while he taught history in a European college. One day, for some reason, the father of his favorite student clouted him across the face. In a flurry of fury he tendered his resignation.

"I've never resumed teaching," he said with a heartrending sigh.

"You would have been dismissed because of DH-9 anyway," I said in consoling tones.

He spoke in a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice characterized above as frail. Frailty, thy name is DH-9. Unmindful of my desire to divert the conversation, channeling it toward DH-9 and its consequences, he was stubbornly exculpating himself from an imaginary charge of blasphemy:

"Homosexual man is endowed with a wealth of religious feelings and a spiritual receptivity which makes them responsive to revelation."

"Heterosexual man is also endowed with a wealth of religious ecstasies," I said in defense of *our* species. "I for one believe in God with all my heart and soul. As you put it, I'm particularly responsive to revelation."

"I didn't say that." Obviously he felt like contradicting everybody. I was in no mood for compromising. I picked up my cassette recorder and found the passage in question. We listened to it in silence.

"You did!" I declared triumphantly.

"I was merely quoting Jung."

Unabashed, I complimented him on his memory. "From time to time you forget what you say but, on the whole, your memory is fantastic."

As a token of gratitude or just in order to testify to my statement he recited by heart the conclusion of John Cavanaugh's study of homosexuality:

"Homosexuality represents the individual's reaction to society or society's reaction to the individual."

Like an incurable Marxist, in his commentary on the text he strongly emphasized the link between the individual and society. "Shackles" happened to be the keyword of his speech. While delivering it he kept gazing at the window beyond which roared the New York rush hour. He asked me to neutralize the press-campaign led against him and his companions. He said the present persecution was in many points similar to the one from which gays suffered during the Nazi regime. I heard out yet another quotation—three sentences borrowed from some Nazi manifesto:

"We reject anything that emasculates our people. Life is a fight. Men will never embrace fraternally."

Short of arguments, I fell back on flattery and said there seemed to be no misfires in the smooth functioning of his memory. I was forced to repeat the same compliment—every time shaping it more elaborately—because there was nothing else in his person I could single out for my praise.

"I wish I'd lose my memory," he answered.

"Really? What do you need to forget?"

"I wish I'd lost my memory," he repeated.

I was wondering if I had enough cassettes to record his repetitions and sighs.

"Anyway we must live in hope," I answered. He was gazing into space now. "I understand your friends haven't abandoned you."

"They have, all but one. He's got DH-9 too."

"What prompted you to seek medical advice?"

One summer morning he realized his room wasn't his room and that, moreover, he himself had changed during his sleep. He leapt out of his bed and dashed toward a mirror. He didn't recognize himself.

Instead of enumerating some well-known symptoms of DH-9—thinness, purplish skin lesions of Kerosene's sarcoma—he chose to offer me a package tour in his land of make-believe. As a professional writer I'm accustomed to putting myself on my guard against people who endeavor to put me off guard so I'll buy their phantasmagorias. I did fall for it once or twice and I drew a lesson from my gullibility.

I shot a furtive glance at my cassette recorder and my watch. He had been talking about his "case of mistaken identity" for around a quarter of an hour. Not a word about ganglia or the damaged immune system turning a DH-9-stricken body into a playground for rapacious infectious agents. To illustrate the point, I suggest that you imagine a besieged medieval city and a handful of traitors who, under cover of night, fling its gates wide open. For a few months waves of invaders pillage the city and finally set fire to it, allowing us to liken its remnants to a DH-9 corpse reduced to ashes not by a common incinerator, contrary to the wishes of some misanthropes, but by an august crematorium furnace.

He was still living in his shrunken fantasy world. He talked not to make his meaning clear, but to prove to himself and perhaps to his interviewer that he could talk at all.

He could talk for hours on end. Did I have the heart to intervene and prevent his project from being carried out? I did not. Nor did I dare knock the stuffing out of his arguments. Why shake his belief in his unimpaired intellectual capacities?

Needless to say, it takes the patience of Job to put up with this sort of claptrap, but I am patient by nature and, given the extreme vulnerability of my subject, I had to surpass myself in this respect. Having made sure he wasn't looking in my direction, I shot yet another furtive glance at my watch and propped up my chin on my fists.

I knew for a fact he was ready to drop: the DH-9 drowsiness had already claimed its own. I waited for him to moderate his descriptions to the dimensions of his "benumbed" consciousness and eventually to stop altogether. He struggled for a while. He lost. His heavy head propped safely on his fists, he slept like a child who had not yet learned the word "DH-9". He slept like a happy sinless child. I paid for both drinks (business expenses) and noiselessly left the bar.

That's all, folks!

Was it the same journalist—the one I had met and invited to my flat? Why did I find this article in my letter box?

I am not Edward and I am impotent. I did not tell him I was impotent, but he must have felt it. He must have guessed as much. He saw me, didn't he? Whenever I look at myself in a mirror, I realize I am impotent. And I know I have always been impotent. And I know I am a DH patient. I need no doctors to diagnose my illness and the journalist diagnosed my illness correctly. But he did not *identify* me. And apparently he could not identify with my trouble.

He did not tell his readers I had invited him to my apartment. Okay, I understand his motives. Either he sought to intimate I was not as hospitable as healthy individuals—the readers themselves—or he did not want them to know he was now a DH-9 patient so that they might read his article with no fear of contamination. He wanted them to concentrate on his text: the virtual presence of bugs would have diverted their attention from his literary achievements. Obviously. Obviously. What was he yearning for? Posthumous fame?

What disturbed me even more was his double nature, his double talk. His double tongue—a serpent's tongue. Throughout the article he pretended to pity us. At the same time he despised and hated us. At the same time. Often in the same paragraph. He put on a good show of caring for us. But it was only a show, as a matter of fact, nothing but a show. And I saw what was going on behind the stage, in the wings. Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold winds. And I was cold, I was cold. There were guns in the wings, a multitude of guns. And those guns took aim at our hearts.

His article reminded me of Wagner's opera *Siegfried*. (Things could still remind me of other things in those days.) Mime is planning to murder Siegfried. "*Wozu ich dich brauchte, hast du vollbracht; jetzt will ich nur noch die Beute dir abgewinnen.*" ("What I desired you have done; now all I need is to steal the spoils from you.") Yes, the journalist got from me what he desired. A modern Mime, an American Mime. I gave him some details of my everyday life so that he might fill in the background. Some details, not all of them. I did not give him my pains. I wish I could have given him my pains and my suicidal mania. How? Let us hope I contaminated him. Son of a bitch!

But Siegfried hears Mime's thoughts. "*In Schlafe willst du mich morden?*" ("You want to slay me as I sleep?") Luckily for me, I did not fall asleep in his presence. The Almighty heard my prayer, I suppose. I did not fall asleep. Nor did I throw up. But I would have thrown up had he poisoned me—to get rid of the poison!

I heard his thoughts. I read between his lines, between his gray cells. A few days later I received another text of his:

I am no hero, but those who make history don't always risk their lives for the sake of superfluous information. Besides, they may obtain that information from an accurate source, be it a book or an ordinary onlooker; and, if there are no books, no onlookers to lean upon for help, they invent what they need. Imagination is a mighty tool in the hands of those who can use it effectively. Sometimes I have a feeling that Alexander the Great and Ulysses were invented by some Greek historian, anxious to embellish his work with a garland of supermen.

So let me add something to the famous journalistic motto; let me broaden its scope and meaning. "Imagination must be as omnipresent as information."

So I finally fulfilled my professional obligations by turning in upon myself, by withdrawing into myself, by leaving the outside world where it was—outside. I summoned up all my imagination and linguistic powers.

During my journey through the realm of DH-9 I also benefited from the accumulated knowledge of centuries. I read about Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome; I read about Ancient Egypt where sodomy was inflicted as a punishment upon a defeated male enemy: the Egyptians regarded it as a symbol of domination. In those days, homosexuals advocated unconditional surrender.

The documents issued by the group Dignity were likewise of great help to my work. To put my next subject into a cooperative mood, I memorized a few lines and right after the ceremonious exchange of greetings declared solemnly:

"To be Christian the gay need not deny his homosexuality, but rather he should be fully himself in order to be fully Christian. Gays can express their sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ's teaching."

And I also quoted the Bible: without its wisdom and consolatory force no DH-9 discussion could sound altruistic.

"For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear: Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

He was an atheist. I got off on the wrong foot with him and subsequently he misconstrued whatever I said. Though deadly dull, my first interviewee at least had the capacity to sigh and sleep. The gay sitting opposite me now was so engrossed in his malady, in its progress through his body and soul, that he could scarcely move. He wasn't asleep and didn't even seem to be willing to take a nap, but he wasn't awake either. If the French expression "*entre chien et loup*" (when the shadows are falling) might be applied to human beings he would embody it perfectly.

"Perhaps he doesn't want to go on," I conjectured. "Perhaps he's trying to talk his body—not his soul, God forbid!—into death, into a state of no heartbeat, no respiration, no remorse." I scrutinized his face, looking for the vestiges of such a decision. Contrary to my scientific hypothesis, he expelled his breath, releasing tension and bringing himself back to life.

After a good deal of trial and error I managed to squeeze a few useful sentences out of him. He said, for example, that he could "feel" DH-9 as it progressed from cell to cell, from nerve to nerve. I asked him whether he had felt the DH-9 virus when it had first been "inserted" into his body. He said I was poking fun at him. I said I was not. He lapsed into silence once again.

"Insensitive though he is to the religious status of gays, he can't disregard their social status," I thought as I was seeking after a topic apt to enliven the interview and to demonstrate my good intentions.

"Have you ever read about the Roman Emperors' position on the homosexual problem? You haven't?" I said I was outraged by what they had decreed. Unfortunately, as I hadn't memorized the texts, hoping to break the ice with the Dignity declarations, I had no

alternative but to open my files. I read to him the text of the law put forth by Valentinian II, Theodosious and Arcadius:

"All persons who have the shameful custom of condemning a man's body, acting the part of a woman's, to the sufferance of an alien sex (for they appear not to be different from women) shall expiate a crime of this kind in avenging flames."

"Do you realize I'm dying? My doctor gave me two months to live. One month, considering how kind he is to his patients. I took his generosity into account and deducted one month from the span of life he had promised me. One month to live."

It was my turn to lapse into silence. As God is my witness I meant well and whatever information I furnished him with could by no means cast aspersions either on the gay community or on the gay mentality, for I explicitly *denounced* this information. One shouldn't be held responsible for the laws promulgated sixteen centuries ago! But I never argue with dying individuals. They simply can't be objective.

At times his physical suffering materialized on his lips, as the headlights of a passing car reflect on the walls of one's room. Indeed, despite his stoic determination not to let any pain "leak out," he kept biting his bottom lip that quivered and bled. A tiny trickle of the DH-9 blood was slowly gliding down his chin and although, to all outward appearances, he wasn't paralyzed, he did nothing to remove it, to wipe it off. As I mentioned before, he claimed to feel the DH-9's Progress (I almost wrote "The Rake's Progress"). To my credit I must point out I didn't believe him.

For all his infirmity, he was capable, like Julius Caesar, of doing several things at once. Without slackening the rhythm of his biting he started to produce a noise ordinarily associated with the wind whispering in the pines. At the end of five minutes I realized that the noise consisted of articulated sounds, of words. He was muttering away to himself. His eyes uplifted, he was muttering a sort of prayer which, for want of decibels, failed to weave its way into my microphone. Taking into consideration his atheistic convictions, I can't say to whom this prayer was addressed. Was it his personal God or the goddess of DH-9 or his doctor who promised me his telephone-number on the condition that I would not encroach on his patient's time?

"He has only three weeks to live," he said.

"Just enough to give an interview and to re-read *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, Keats's *Odes* and Dante's *Inferno*," I said. In the discharge of my professional duties I encounter such apocalyptic terrors that, to guard against hysterics and nervous breakdowns, I simply have to crack jokes as often as possible.

"He can't read."

In the discharge of his professional duties, the doctor was sometimes obliged to treat the illiterate.

Much as I wish to enlarge upon the doctor's way of life, doing justice to his wife's old-style beauty, among other things, I must get back to his patient, to my second subject.

"No need to get worked up," I said. "We're all dying. We're all sentenced to death, as some philosopher put it, or, if you like, we're all DH-9 patients, metaphorically speaking, and can die any moment crushed under the wheels of a Chevrolet or disemboweled by any Tom, Dick or Harry."

He must have interpreted my statement too literally. His metaphorical thinking was greatly impaired, no doubt. He took me for his companion in misfortune, for his brother—for another DH-9 patient. His right hand began to grope its way across the table in search of my flesh, of my heart. I withdrew both my hands and thrust my head out of the nearest window. His hand interrupted its inexorable movement.

Emboldened by the utter stillness—he had ceased his biting, muttering and stirring—I continued along the same lines:

"Why kick up a fuss about your being exhausted and sleepy? I'm sleepy too." I yawned without pressing a hand against my gap-toothed mouth so that the authenticity of my drowsiness wouldn't come under suspicion. "And I'm exhausted at that. I've got bags under my eyes, can't you see? I wish I could sprawl out on my bed right now. But I must finish the interview first. You may or may not answer my questions—there's no obligation on your part. To make my living, I'm forced to write the article, whether you answer me or not. So I'm handicapped under the present circumstances. I'm ill and you're sound in wind and limb."

Gradually, with an effort, he got up. "It's not worth the effort, I've some more questions to ask you. It was so hard to set the ball rolling that now I'd better make the most of your sudden outspokenness. The only snag is my microphone can't 'hear' your muttering. Would you be so kind as to keep your mouth closer to the microphone and to speak a little bit louder, not to the extent though of doing a disservice to your inner concentration." He grasped the microphone and brought it level with his eyes. "That's nearer the thing," I said. He let it drop. Notwithstanding his fury, he had no strength left to fling it against the wall or to smash it against the table. He tottered out.

I picked up the microphone. I said, "One, two, three, testing, one, two, three, testing—" and, though I spoke rather loudly, the volume needle didn't stir. The microphone was broken. His fury alone had damaged it.

The interview was finished before I had been able to gather sufficient material for the present chapter of my work. But I wasn't upset. Nor did I start to rack my brain so as to fill in the gap with some phantasmal suffering: I didn't try to Think Sero-positive.

I intend to profit from my subject's "shortness of breath" and answer in print the invectives I have been enduring for almost two years.

Can you, my reader, doubt my goodwill, kindness and patience after what you have read in my article? It's therefore hard to believe that I have often been attacked in print by stone-cold bigots and so-called benefactors of humanity. I have often been insulted, but never so dishonestly as by Piotr Barlitzky, that pseudo-scientist. By the time I finished reading his inventions, I recognized the familiar eerie tone of conspiracy theorists. For instance, the image of me hovering over the typewriter...

Barlitzky, like those deniers of equal protection under the law who cultivate Manichaeic fantasies, says that I show "fear and loathing of the other." Well, as a columnist, I am not subject to his control, and by butting into his turf, I became the "other" who had to be cut down. I will, nonetheless, soon resume my series on DH-9.

In the last section of Barlitzky's recent manipulative article, which was intended to expose my "misanthropy," he slunk back to a 1982 Individuals and Society Seminar on public television, orchestrated by Edward Alexander. It was about DH-9 and I was part of it. As usual, there was a hypothetical situation along with hypothetical characters.

For those on the panel, the idea is to act as the character would. Often you have more than one role during a broadcast—for instance, a homosexual and then a heterosexual. On this one I began as a coffee-shop owner. Having known a number of coffee-shop owners, I tried to figure out how they would respond to the questions.

The core of the first hypothetical was Christopher, a waiter in my coffee shop. Barlitzky writes that the moderator asked me what I would do if I discovered Christopher had DH-9. Barlitzky characteristically omits what had preceded that question. We had been informed by the moderator of reports all over town to the effect that this waiter did indeed have DH-9 and that business in my place was falling off rapidly because of it. I, as a coffee-shop owner, said I would consult the local public officials. As Barlitzky notes, the camera then moved to an official of the New York Health Department, who said Christopher posed no actual threat to the customers.

The official grinned at me because he knew his answer would have been quite different had we met outside the camera's field of vision; for instance, in some coffee shop, with two or three DH-9 waiters around.

I knew that too. But I decided to act as if I had noticed neither his grin nor his lie. So I said I'd try to find Christopher the best physicians and treatment and give him full salary for as long as it took. The official grinned at me again. He realized of course that no coffee-shop owner would ever pay a full salary to a DH-9 patient, however short the hypothetical treatment might have been. And we both knew that there was little to choose between the best and the worst physicians. I was then asked if I'd get Christopher out of the dining room. And I—Barlitzky gleefully notes—said "yes." I wonder what he would have said had he been in my shoes.

I said "yes" because, although Christopher posed no risk to the customers, they would keep yielding to rumor rather than fact. And, thinking like a coffee-shop owner, I figured that if Christopher stayed, the place would probably close for want of customers and there'd be no salaries for anybody, including Christopher. And he needed it badly to end his life with a flourish. I remember thinking I could come off as a decent guy to the television audience if I said instead that Christopher would stay, no matter what. But that's not what the coffee-shop owner would have said or done. Not even on television! And this piece of fiction was used by Barlitzky to expose my "misanthropy."

That's all, folks!

"He has only three weeks to live," he said. Who said it? My doctor? About whom did he say it? Not I! Not I! I *can* read. And I am not illiterate—quite the reverse! I am highly literate. And I am a child of highly literate parents. I was born literate. And impotent.

Why didn't I show him my essays? And my poems? The journalist. Was it the same journalist? And who is Barlitzky? Another DH-9 patient? Christopher, Christopher. The name sounds familiar. My name! It is my name! But I am not a barman. I have never been a barman. Never in my life have I dreamed of becoming a barman. What a profession! But I agree that I pose no actual threat to anyone. Even if I kiss everybody and make love to everybody. Why don't you let me come near you? *Millionen, millionen*. Let me touch you at least: your faces, your bodies, your hearts, your hands. I would content myself with your hands: your hearts are too far away. And I cannot cross oceans. Your hands, only your hands. I might wear gloves on this occasion and gloves are thick. Gloves are thicker than skin, much thicker. Impervious, impermeable. You are in no danger whatsoever. Cigarette smoking is a danger to health, but shaking hands with a gloved DH-9 hand is not dangerous, I can assure you. Don't you believe me? Why don't you believe me? Even journalists admit I am not

contagious. Have you read this article? You should read it. Besides, I am not Sero-positive. And I do not even try to Think Sero-positive or to Feel Sero-positive. It is a different illness, a different journalist. But even that journalist knows I am not contagious. Who is contagious then? Somebody must be contagious, otherwise nobody would ever have spoken about diseases, about DH-9. Or even about AIDS. I wish I had AIDS. At least I would not become an ape. AIDS, ape. These two words sound alike, but they are different: AIDS patients do not become apes. They just become corpses, ordinary corpses. Is it better? What is better, an ape or a corpse? Apes have some sort of life, don't they? They can jump, they can see the world. What do they actually see? Other apes? Landscapes? Can they see the beauty of the world? I have no idea, not yet. In a few years perhaps. Or in a few months. Kafka wrote something about it. Just a moment, I have to look it up in one of my dictionaries. *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*. The autobiography of an ape. Shall I ever write such a report? Why not, why not. Let me become an ape first. And then we shall see. We shall see what happens.

Can apes come down with DH-9? I might get cured, once I become an ape. In the shape of an ape. Why not? Only humans are liable to get these inhuman diseases. May I become an ape as soon as possible! What era am I living in now? The Pleistocene. Great Ice Age. I am cold. I am cold.

At the very outset of my DH-9 enterprise I promised my readers to unfold for them the panorama of an inside view of the fatal disease. It's partly done and I thank with all my heart those two homosexuals—my friends and priceless collaborators—who commented on the thorny subject of DH-9 and death with such eagerness and exactitude. I thank them for their comprehension and cooperation.

I'm speaking of course about my abortive yet relevant attempts to interview the gays to whom I have devoted the beginning of my gloomy article. My faithful description of their behavior—which some call "misbehavior" or even "crime"—enabled you to notice how different they were. (They were. How sad this sentence sounds! Have they already gone to a better world?) Though both DH-9-stricken and dying, they displayed for your and my sake two characters, two sets of reactions not yet leveled out by the evenness of the grave. When saying about two different people: "He's got one foot in the grave," we don't refer to the same foot, do we?

Why did he put this article in my letterbox? I am not likely to bring him posthumous glory, immortality. I am sure to die before him, given my puny constitution, my impotence and my long-standing faithfulness to the illness. How long have I been faithful to it? I do not remember. A few years. Ten years perhaps. I am faithful to my DH-9, to my dear wife. I never betray her with any human. I do betray her with other illnesses, though—her derivatives, her cousins. But she only rejoices at those betrayals of mine. She applauds them. She actually instigates them. Pneumonia, her favorite cousin, her dearest brother. And let us not leave out her sister Death.

How did I meet my wife? Where? I do not know. I might have shaken hands with somebody. Somebody might have looked at me. The DH-9 bug is transmissible in a variety of ways. Through a glance, a human glance, for instance. That is how I met this woman, my future wife, my wife-to-be. We became engaged first. And then we married, on the same day, within the same minute. I do not count the incubation period. I discount it, to tell the truth. Yes, I know, I know—there is a long incubation period where nothing appears to be wrong. Yet I do not agree with this medical statement: everything is wrong from the very start. Everything. And everything *appears* to be wrong: on your face, on your hands, in your mirror. *Everywhere*. And in your brain of course, mainly in your brain. Inside your every thought, inside your every idea. You have no more ideas—that is the point. There is nothing inside, nothing except the disease. My dear wife, how I love you! I think of nothing else, I feel nothing else. I do not count your cousins. They are you. They are your shadows.

So we got married at once. My uncle would be happy if he learned about the wedding ceremony, my married life. He thought I might be cured through marriage. Well, I am cured, my dear uncle. My dear wife, my dear uncle. You are so dear to me now, both of you. Now that I am cured, thanks to your efforts and your kindness.

Our wedding ceremony. I met her relatives on that occasion—in the church, I suppose. Or was it a civil marriage? I do not remember. What does it matter? What matters is I met her numerous cousins, her numerous brothers. And her sister, her only sister.

We met during a ball. We danced, danced, danced. They all invited me to various dances: the Dance of Fever, the Dance of Cough, the Dance of Pain, the Dance of Shame, the Dance of Ganglia, the Dance of Ugliness, the Dance of Sleep, the Dance of Sour Dreams, the Dance of Nightmares, tThe Dance of Daymares, the Dance of Loneliness, the Dance of Journalists.

He wrote again. Not a letter. An article, an assignment. A death-assignment. I have no idea what it means. But there must be death somewhere, either in his articles or in his mind.

Or in his employer's mind. Those healthy individuals. They still have ideas and plans. And duties. To all outward and inward appearances.

One afternoon I found another article of his in my letterbox. At first I had an urge to burn it, but the whole procedure was so laborious that I preferred to keep it alive. Let it outlast me! What was more, I read it. Not at one sitting, needless to say. Besides, I could no longer sit. At that stage of my disease, in those days. In days of yore. I could only lie in my bed or on the floor. Could I crawl, on the floor? Yes, I could! And I would have swum had they thrown me into a puddle. Or into the ocean—in the Atlantic. Crawl. A way of swimming *fast* by moving the legs as if walking and raising first one arm then the other out of the water to move yourself *forward*. Fast, forward. Not *backward*. Forward. I would have swum toward my parents, not toward apes and their like. My parents, my motherland. My happiness. My resurrection.

Yesterday I watched a caterpillar crawl up the leg of a chair. And I envied that caterpillar: I cannot crawl *up*, not even along the leg of a chair. That is why I do not sit anymore.

I cannot crawl at all. At present. What *can* I do? I can sleep and read his articles.

THE DOCTORS. THEIR PATIENTS AND WIVES

"I do think illness, if not too painful, unseals the mental eye, and renders the talents more acute, in the study of fine arts at least," wrote Sir Walter Scott. I wonder whether he wouldn't have gone back over the whole problem had he lived in the age of DH-9. Pain or no pain, this illness may at best unseal our religious eye: even mulish atheists are obliged to look upward on their deathbeds. Unless they sleep in the fetal position.

The doctor on whom I called two days ago told me that St. Francis of Assisi enjoyed great popularity among his DH-9 patients. Once, in his hospital, he was flabbergasted at hearing one of them complain about the heartlessness of a nurse who had declined to provide him with a death certificate. "But you, doctor, you see I'm dead, don't you?" Notwithstanding appearances, the doctor confirmed the nurse's diagnosis. "You're alive, my boy," he said, his rubber glove tapping on the patient's right cheek.

"That's a lie! I'm dead, dead, dead!"

As it later transpired, the patient had misunderstood the following passage from St. Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*:

When once it was inquired of him (St. Francis) what man should be esteemed truly obedient, he set before them as an example the similitude of a dead body. "Lift up," said he, "a dead body, and place it where thou wilt. Thou shalt see it will not murmur at being moved, it will not complain of where it is set, it will not cry out if left there. If it be set in a lofty seat, it will look not up, but down. If it be clad in purple it but redoubleth its pallor.

"You're expected to play games," said the doctor as we settled down on his couch. "And if you do, they accuse you of playing about with them. I told my patient jokingly that, to pass himself off as a dead man, he shouldn't have uttered a word. He shut his eyes and, with tears in his voice, admonished me for being upright and truthful: 'You should never put your patients in the picture,' he said. 'There's such a thing as a professional, white lie. And your truth is black. Do you remember the doctor who looked after Violetta Valery in the last act of *La Traviata*? Do you know Italian? Never mind, I'll translate it for you.' I let him do as he wished, too pleased by that sudden outburst of energy. And he sang out of tune, '*Coraggio adunque...la convalescenza non è lontana*, which means: Courage, then...your convalescence isn't far off. And only when he was out of earshot did he confide in her servant Annina: *La tisi non le accorda che poche ore*. She has only a few hours left to live.'"

"Callas dies half-an-hour later," I told the doctor. "Of course she might have died five minutes earlier under Toscanini's direction. So much depends on the singer and the conductor. And on the illness. And on the doctor. When did your patient die?"

"That patient of mine has been blowing hot and cold with me ever since he entered the hospital," the doctor continued.

"So he's still alive, is he? Congratulations! You've improved on *La Traviata*."

"DH-9 has afflicted his mental faculties. As he's manifestly aware of the fact, he speaks very carefully, very correctly for fear of making an error. His memory is impaired so he makes it a rule to recite aloud and ham up the Old Testament, the New Testament, or a few idioms from his dictionary—to persuade us he's all right. I call this a 'healthiness complex.' When questioned about his childhood he loses the thread so frequently that we've begun to doubt whether he was ever born at all. He drops his tales and seldom takes them up. And if he does, he forces upon his mother a musical career instead of letting her get back to her kitchen. And he lives in seven or eight countries at once."

If I were to lecture on "comparative memory" in an American university, I would liken DH-9 memory to an ordinary fridge where frozen food may be kept for only twenty-four

hours. By comparison, the memory of the women who have been unfaithful to me ever since my hour of puberty is the ice box of an ordinary household fridge. On the other hand, to understand the successive parts of my article properly, the reader must be endowed with a household-deep-freeze memory. I should be only too pleased to learn, some day, that the way I have to solve moral problems is liable to help the reader out of the labyrinth of good and evil. It was with this philanthropic aim in view that I launched myself into my Herculean task.

A tray with an English-looking tea-pot, cups and saucers was brought in by a tall, New-England-born woman: the doctor's wife. The hostess and the tea things were a good match and contrasted strongly with the host's preoccupations and my DH-9 assignment. We had no right to discard our life-or-death topic and chortle over the miscellaneous items in a local rag; nevertheless we were allowed to have a bit of social talk, doing justice to both the magnificent weather and the biscuits I bit into the very moment they were put within my reach. I was famished and, however insubstantial and "vegetarian," the biscuits appeased my hunger, if only for half-an-hour.

We spoke about the weather and a recent TV show and the coziness of their apartment which, in the hostess's words, would be all the better for a spattering of paint here and there. She continued in this vein and shortly afterwards touched on the subject of overwork from which her husband was presumably suffering. "He's rather pale, isn't he?" As she mentioned his brain fatigue and was about to pass on to ski resorts I asked her, "Do you think your husband has fallen into bad company?" She was utterly nonplused by my question. I reminded her that she was a stickler for social conventions. The dime dropped.

"You do me wrong in thinking—" she began.

"Far be it from me—" I began.

"I don't look down on people with different mentalities," she protested.

"But—" I said with expectation in my voice.

She finally acknowledged that she used to feel somewhat embarrassed in the presence of "homosexual people." She was troubled by the streak of madness that seemed to run in their world. (This madness is defined by specialists, if not as a serious and debilitating mental illness, at least as a psychiatric abnormality.) It was hard for her to imagine a group of discreet, reliable, law-abiding, Bible-reading, socially-acceptable homosexual men.

"Images of sexuality often portray the homosexual as effeminate, poncey and vain," I chimed in.

"I thought they spent hours before their mirrors, fiddling with lipstick and powder puffs."

"What about you, honey?" The doctor put a hand on his wife's shoulder. She ignored his question and his hand.

"But now—" she went on.

Now she maintained that homosexuals were normal people—on the strength of the vote which had taken place on December 15, 1974, during the meeting of the Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association.

"They agreed that homosexuality should no longer be listed as a 'mental disorder' in the official nomenclature of mental disorders," she declared. "So homosexuals are martyrs persecuted by our selfish, hypocritical society."

"The category of homosexuality, my darling, is now replaced by 'sexual orientation disturbance,'" said the doctor, taking her hands in his hands.

"At all events, they're normal and that horrible attitude of racial discrimination our society has adopted toward them is perfectly scandalous." She cast an angry look at her husband.

I asked whether she couldn't be swayed by some antihomosexual preachers in whose sermons DH-9 victims were alluded to slightly as "the gang of antichrists justly punished by Our Lord." (Last month I wrote that American preachers had "closed themselves off from the world of flesh and blood" by their obtuse pronouncement that the only real way to end the DH-9 epidemic is chastity and the extermination of gays. And I condemned their opposition to the use of condoms.) She tackled my question in a roundabout way.

Acting on her husband's advice, she read *Fiorreti (The Little Flowers)* and was deeply moved by chapter XXV: *How St. Francis Miraculously Healed a Leper*.

"I was healed too. I'll have you know that St. Francis enjoined the friars of his order, as they went about the world, to serve lepers for love of Christ. I must admit that when my husband first told me he was going to look after homosexual men I was frightened. And when he told me those homosexuals had contracted a terrible disease, even worse than blennorrhea, much, much worse, I almost fainted. As soon as I recovered my breath I asked him if it was contagious. He said, 'No, no, not at all.' He even made a joke about his relationship with his patients. It was very sweet of him to try to cheer me up. I was still in a state of shock, you know. He said that since he wasn't planning to have sexual intercourse with them, there was no danger of his being contaminated. Shortly afterwards I learned more about the illness from *Newsweek*, and I was so shattered that I forbade my husband to touch them or even get close to their beds. I also suggested he should take time off until the epidemic was over. He gave me *Fiorreti* as a present and advised me to read it. While leafing through the book I found out

that chapter XXV was underscored in red. I couldn't hold back my tears and embraced my husband. I said I was proud of him and asked if I could do something to prove I was fit to be his wife. He assured me that I was an excellent cook and even repeated his own saying, 'A delicious meal is half the battle.' But it wasn't enough. You see, I had great ambitions. Joseph, Joseph! Why must he bang the door when I'm talking about *Fiorreti*! I had great projects, I was burning to make my contribution to my husband's mission. Do you know what I did? I decided to speak to his 'lepers.' But, unlike St. Francis, I don't have the gift of gab, as they say, especially when I'm not on intimate terms with my listeners. So I memorized the words St. Francis addressed to the leper and announced my decision to my husband. 'I won't hear of your going near the hospital,' he said. Finally he gave in on the condition that I would wear a mask and gloves and remain in the doorway. Actually the door was only left slightly open and I spoke at the top of my voice. I couldn't see the patient to whom St. Francis's words were addressed. I said, 'God give thee peace, my dearest brother.' I waited for an answer but there was none. So I continued, 'My son, have patience, for the infirmities of the body are given to us by God in this world for the salvation of souls; inasmuch as they are of great merit when they are endured patiently.' I paused again and listened. There was no answer. What's more, the patient didn't even seem to breathe. I have sharp ears and can, for example, hear in my bed the water dripping from a faucet in our son's bathroom. Our little boy is very much remiss in his duty and seldom turns the faucets off. Some day, I'm sure, the entire apartment will be flooded. As I was saying, there was no answer. I dared not go against my husband's wishes, so I didn't open the door to see whether my dear brother was still breathing. All of a sudden, I realized he was dead. I rushed toward my husband's office, pulling off my mask and shouting, 'He's dead, he's dead.'"

He was not. As the doctor confessed later on, he had done all he could to safeguard his wife from exposure to airborne DH-9. "My wife's good-heartedness might have pushed her to come into the room and brave death by making conversation with the patient. I chose one who was in a coma."

That's all, folks!

They must be talking about humans, but I am not a human anymore. Whatever they say or write does not concern *my* body. I am not dying, I am not dead. I am an ape now, and no woman will ever stay by my door, reading something out for my benefit. They do not know I understand their languages and meanings. Somehow they know I can read their articles. Well,

I am an educated ape, a highly literate ape. And although I do not understand what humans say, I do understand what humans write and print. I understand the *written* word. And when nobler examples of the written word are not to hand I read these articles. For want of anything better. For want of anything worse.

I am sure I would understand the spoken word as well, but for the lack of practice. I do not hear humans anymore: they do not speak in my presence. They must speak in my absence, though. Behind my back, so to speak. I do not hear what happens behind my back, so I do not hear humans. My sense of hearing is getting increasingly impaired and atrophied. I mean this particular sense of hearing—the human-oriented sense of hearing. Yes, this particular sense of hearing is in a state of atrophy. Who is to blame? Humans of course. I would not mind listening to their voices. Nor would I mind listening to their words. But I do not even hear their screams. And they must scream, they must, from time to time. Not all of them, just my fellow sufferers. My companions in misfortune. Why don't I hear them, their screams, their complaints? Have they been put in prison, all of them? Have they been killed by journalists and doctors? I am sorry. I seem to have disregarded the obvious fact that they are apes by now. All of them. Apes, apes, apes. Do I hear apes' voices? Yes, I think I hear something. And this something does sound like apes' voices. And these voices do not scream, nor complain. They talk for hours and hours. And I listen to them.

I am an ape inside. I think like an ape. I feel like an ape. I sleep like an ape. But I am not an ape *outside*. I cannot jump, nor can I run. When shall I become a real ape, through and through? I cannot wait to become a real ape. As soon as I become one they will convey me to a zoo. And I shall be fed, spoon-fed. And I shall be looked after. And I shall be given an opportunity to see humans. At close range, as often as I wish. And I shall listen to human voices. And I shall learn the language of humans.

THE DOCTORS. THEIR PATIENTS

We talked on about this and that. He said, among other things, that his neighbors were not in the know. Neither were the friends of the family: however eager his wife might be to proclaim her feat of valor from the rooftops, she had no wish to become a recluse. So she contented herself with distributing the photocopies of chapter XXV among her relatives.

We returned once more to our main topic. I asked if the patients were in the know or not.

"Some of them, by reading about DH-9, have come to identify their symptoms with its symbols. Others think that nowadays nobody dies from pneumonia."

"What other opportunistic infections can they suffer from?" I took out a new cassette from my pocket.

"Candida esophagitis, aspergillosis, disseminated cryptococcosis, FL-3, central-nervous-system toxoplasmosis, cryptosporidiosis, ML-5, pulmonary tuberculosis, AX-7, miliary tuberculosis, ZW-11, tuberculosis lymphadenitis, ZZ-13, herpes infection." At my request, he wrote them down in my notebook. "Those conscious of their state are hoping in God or hoping against hope. One of them, a former writer, set out to explain his outlook in a sort of essay. He was blind and had no alternative but to dictate it. Our nurse agreed to help him out, but demanded to be paid in advance. She was right. The patient got no further than the second paragraph. The first one was also quite short: 'I am happy.'"

"I beg your pardon?" I said, unconsciously touching my ears.

"I am happy."

"You are happy?" I asked. I saw no reason why this particular doctor should be so elated. (I could only think of one reason: he must be immune to the disease. But who is immune to DH-9? Who?)

"No, I'm not," he acknowledged with appealing frankness.

"Who is happy then?" I insisted rather awkwardly.

"He wasn't happy either. He'd talked himself into boldness and happiness." And after a momentary aphasia, the doctor diagnosed the disease of his charge: "A classical case of self-assertion."

"But nobody dies of self-assertion," I objected.

"He died," said the doctor in mournful tones. "And he'd just begun his new masterpiece: 'I am happy. My birth inaugurated the shadow-play of my life; my DH-9 awakened me from the nightmare of my life. I glide inexorably toward the disclosure of the reality beyond. I am dying.'"

"I am dying," I repeated thoughtfully. "The unfinished novel might have become an invaluable contribution to realism."

At that point I recalled I hadn't obtained an interview with a renowned DH-9 specialist to discuss literature and theology. I leafed through my notebook to find the last question I had put to him. Suddenly I lighted upon his handwriting: "Candida esophagitis, aspergillosis, herpes infection, FL-3, FL-4, FL-5, FL-6..." The infinite series of deaths sent a shiver down my spine. "Greek tragedies, Webster's dramas, Dostoevsky, the Apocalypse are nothing

compared with that new Latin dictionary," I said to myself. But I didn't say anything to the doctor. Perhaps he was still unconscious of the danger he ran in his clinic. Perhaps he had already been contaminated. But he didn't know it, like many others. Do you recall what Othello said to Iago in the famous Shakespeare tragedy (and in the Verdi opera):

He that is robb'd, not wanting what is stol'n,
Let him not know't, and he's not robb'd at all.

Perhaps he had already been robbed of his health and consequently of his life. Unlike Othello he was unaware of it. So he went on talking about other people's agonies:

"The virus dominates their lives. Everything they do, everything they're involved in turns into DH-9. DH-9, the whole DH-9 and nothing but the DH-9, in juridical parlance. They're no longer in control of their own lives and they act accordingly, whatever the consequences. What we do is to change the emphasis. I tell my patients that DH-9 is just a part of them—a huge part no doubt, but only a part. 'You can't prefer what the Russians have to the liberty we enjoy in our country, can you? Why tolerate a dictatorship in your mind? Let's work toward democracy.' In other words, I advise them to turn round and say to the virus: 'No, you're not in charge of me. I'm going to be in charge of you.'"

"Wouldn't it be more sensible to *discharge* the virus?" I asked him.

Turning a deaf ear to my joke, he passed on to hemophiliacs who, unlike homosexuals and intravenous drug addicts, have no option of changing their DH-9-oriented existence. Without regular infusion of the blood products known as "factor-22" and "factor-666", many patients face an inescapable threat to their well-being.

"Homosexuals, bisexuals and intravenous drug addicts have been asked not to donate," sighed the doctor, "but not giving blood may be harder than it seems. A large proportion of donors have been coming to us with their workmates and with their friends for many years. So, if you suddenly drop out, your companions begin to suspect you of being gay, or at least a bisexual. You're just forced to donate. Our service is tackling this problem by offering donors the privacy in which to answer a confidential questionnaire. If they say on the form that they belong to the high-risk group their blood will be taken as usual, but later transferred to hermetically-sealed receptacles and thrown away. No friend or relative who attends the clinic with them will be any the wiser."

"Where do you dump these DH-9 receptacles? Just to be on the safe side, you know."

"We dump them into huge barges—"

"Where do you sink these barges?"

As usual the doctor turned a deaf ear to my entreaties, dodging my geographical questions as best he could.

"It's a professional secret," he said eventually. Just another professional lie.

"Does wearing a mask make you feel uneasy? I mean—ethically? Do your patients recognize you?"

"We all wear masks, in a manner of speaking. My daily examination could be mistaken for a masked ball." The doctor smiled sadly. "Their eyes seem closed. I move about on tiptoe but keep TV sets on until midnight."

"TV is the plague of our times," I said in reproachful tones. "They'd much better read Kafka or go to a picture gallery. Art elevates the soul, which is particularly important on the brink of death. As we make preparations for the forthcoming meeting with Our Gracious Lord, Our Savior, Our Redeemer, we should clothe our souls in the best intellectual and cultural attire."

"They're bound to become apes," said the doctor all of a sudden.

"What do you have against apes?" I asked indignantly. "Apes are intelligent animals and are more closely related to man than any other living primates. They're popular zoo and circus animals and are widely used in biomedical and psychological studies. They've also figured widely in the legends and folktales of many countries. Of course it's not easy to get along with them. I mean it's rather difficult to share one's lodgings with apes and monkeys. Although apes and monkeys can be kept successfully as house pets, these primates are in general unsuitable for this purpose. With rare exceptions, they can't be house-trained. They require a great deal of time and attention, and they are potentially dangerous because of their erratic temperament. Take that patient of yours—the one who's been blowing hot and cold with you ever since he entered the hospital. What's more, their pungent scent, used for marking territory, makes them generally unsuitable as house pets. It's a pity your patients don't become flying squirrels instead. Flying squirrels are among the most attractive rodents. They can do well in pairs in a cage kept indoors. Some enjoy being handled and having occasional freedom of the house so that they may climb and glide."

"They'll never become squirrels," said the doctor. "They can neither climb nor glide."

It was high time we switched to a more cheerful aspect of DH-9. I shut my notebook.

"And now, doctor, to boost the morale of our readers, let's talk about the progress of medical science. Surely you must be full of optimism about the future of DH-9. You don't believe we all are going to die, do you? Since the virus is much more likely to be transmitted

during anal than during vaginal intercourse, women seem to be less at risk—a theory borne out by the extremely low figures for DH-9 among women. The virus will never run through the general population in the way we have seen it spread through the gay community. Our readers have consequently little to worry about, providing you increase the safety of your blood-products."

"The diffusion of the virus," said the doctor, "depends on what exposure the population not belonging to the high-risk groups have to those who belong to them. If you're bisexual, theoretically you can transmit the virus on to the populace through vaginal intercourse."

"Let's not concern ourselves with the bisexual community," I cut in warningly. "Anyway Foucault was totally against the notion that through sex you could discover the 'true self.'"

"The point is the virus will gradually diffuse into people who are young and sexually active." His last words made me gasp and wince. "And from them to others." On hearing this prophecy, my sexual partners would have winced and gasped in their turn. Luckily I hadn't invited them to accompany me on that unpleasant, almost perilous mission. "It's not going to be an epidemic, certainly not, but there'll be a gradual diffusion of this virus into the human species, from mother to infant—"

I interrupted him and switched the cassette recorder off.

"We can't prevent death from accomplishing its mission," he continued, paying no attention to my interruptions and technological maneuvers.

"You might as well be talking to a brick wall," I said to myself. But again I said nothing to the doctor. Had he noticed the absence of the mike, of the cassettes? It was time for me to get out into the open air, into the healthy air of Central Park.

However, I resolved to be polite to the bitter end. "What can you do?" I asked him, pausing before the door of his study, which had remained slightly ajar throughout our conversation.

"We alleviate unbearable pains," was the short, verdict-like answer. I opened the door.

As I was shown out I saw the photograph of a masked figure standing by a bedpost.

That's all, folks!

They do not touch upon the main problem. What is the main problem? Handshakes. People greet each other. Two gentlemen greet each other. "How do you do!" Or "How are you?" Or just "Hello!" And they are taken ill.

Sex, sexual intercourse. Well, I can abstain from making love to humans. But what if they hold out their hands? I am a well-mannered ape. And I desire to be well-thought-of by my neighbors and contemporaries. When I see a hand I shake it. I do not turn away. I have to be polite to the bitter end.

"A combination of two well-tried antibiotics may well help DH-9 sufferers," said my doctor. Everybody knows that prevention is better than cure so I have no desire to get DH-9 through a handshake or a kiss. Nobody is likely to kiss an ape. Not even another ape, not even a squirrel. But a playful human may have an insane urge to shake hands with a caged animal—just for the fun of it. What shall I do if one of those individuals thrusts his hand in between the bars of my cage? What if my door squeaks? What if the floor creaks? Do I have to be polite to the bitter end?

Should I wear gloves? Do apes wear gloves? Are they allowed to wear gloves? Is it fashionable in their milieu? In *our* milieu? Gloves are nothing but condoms. And everybody is allowed to wear condoms nowadays, as a protection against catching and spreading diseases such as AIDS, DH-1, DH-2, DH-3, DH-4 and so on. But is it fashionable? Would I look beautiful in gloves? In condoms? Wouldn't they call me "the black sheep of the family"? Black ape of the family. White ape of the family.

I read something about Tolstoy the other day. (The other day—when I had an aptitude for reading. Now I only have an aptitude for repeating what I read back in those literate days. Aptitudes, appetitudes. An appetite for aping.) Tolstoy was walking with his brother down the street. Suddenly he said: "That man over there is a cad." "Why?" asked his brother. "Because he's not wearing gloves." But Tolstoy said nothing about apes—about gloves in connection with apes. About apes in connection with gloves. So I still do not know whether I am a cad or not.

I shall be polite at all cost. I shall remove my gloves—my condoms—before shaking hands with humans. I shall be polite to the bitter end.

THE END

Savage wolves roamed about in packs at night and howled round the walls of the towns. In the villages they did not slake their thirst for human blood by lurking in secret places, as was otherwise their wont, but boldly entered the open houses and tore the little ones from their mothers' sides; indeed they did not

only attack children, but even armed men and overcame them. To the contemporaries they seemed no longer wild animals but demons. Other quadrupeds forsook their woods, and in herds approached the vicinity of human habitations, as if aware of the extraordinary conditions. Ravens in innumerable flocks flew over the towns with loud croaking. The kite and the vulture were heard in the air, and other unusual migratory birds appeared. But on the houses the cuckoos and owls alighted and filled the night with their mournful lament. The field-mice had lost all fear and took up their abode among human beings.

"We alleviate unbearable pains. We alleviate unbearable pains." The doctor's words still reverberate in my ears. So many DH-9 people are on the loose across the land, swarming all over ravines and prairies, urban thoroughfares and coastal resorts, that I cannot sleep. And there will be no end to it. More and more and more. In every nook and every cranny of every village, in every land. On the loose and never to be contained. Why? For many reasons.

However alluring the hospital-provided anesthesia, some homosexuals procrastinate and, unrelieved and uninformed, let death come creeping upon them at home. And death doesn't always come at once. He often procrastinates as if in parody of his future children.

Our birth in death. According to Christianity, we all are death's children. Without death there is no resurrection.

They procrastinate and moon around our city, our country, our globe. More and more. More and more. And we shall never hear the end of the matter.

There are exceptions, of course. The exception proves the rule and thus consolidates the rule.

Self-destruction. Suicide, in common parlance. Some of them opt for self-destruction, for total anesthesia. Such a solution to the insoluble problem doubles the dose of their damnation because our hospitals are not located in the Gulag area, although some of them may be found within the circles of Dante's Hell. You'll judge for yourself while reading the following excerpt from a DH-9 patient diary that was formally refuted by medical authorities:

"When dawn breaks you hear the sick attendant arrive and say, 'Lift up you shirts.' You are all drawn up in a row. The surgeons look at you; in their hands they bear plasters and instruments. They pass you like a gust of wind. What cries, what moans. 'Oh, how my boils burn.' 'The pain in my thigh is intolerable.' 'I've pains higher up.' The nurses busy themselves with disconnecting their patients' heart monitors. Now you see the corpse-bearers coming, and that is an evil sign. Roughly they seize the corpses by the head or by the legs, and cruelly drag

them through the ward. They bear you to the grave. You are shoveled in without ceremony, like a dead ass thrown upon a field."

"A pack of lies!" retorted one of the surgeons. "They can't scream. Not with those tubes in their mouths!"

The patients are supposed to have a clipboard on their chests and a pencil in their hand. With the oxygen tubes threaded through their vocal cords, writing is the only way to communicate with doctors and nurses.

And what about the nurses who disconnect their patients' heart monitors? I was shown a documentary where a group of nurses swabbed a quantity of bare arms with alcohol and guided as many needles into a labyrinth of DH-9-veins. What did their syringes contain? I don't know, nor do I wish to know. Anyway I needn't go to their hospitals—not now! Not even for a checkup or an interview.

But, as a journalist, I was obliged to go somewhere. Where? With an unfinished article on my hands, I had a rather limited choice. Another doctor or another patient? X or Y? The formulas of my calculations were riddled with bugs and pneumonias.

A doctor. At any rate, to complete my dossier, I had to interview a private doctor—someone who looks after the allergic-to-hospital type of DH-9 patients.

The one I set my heart upon lived alone in a small apartment on 39th Street. Whether he still lives there or not, I can't tell: his neighbors are in the know.

"It's a beastly business," he said and signaled to a long-haired patient to roll up a sleeve.

Once his neighbors descended upon him in the early afternoon; they wore masks, gloves and boots. Carrying clipboards and taking extensive notes, they opened closets and drawers in his office, examining the contents, reading the documents. They grilled the host about his credentials. They stared. This occurred amid startled patients who were otherwise mingling and getting to know one another.

"It's a beastly business," repeated the doctor. He seemed to enjoy the word "beastly." Obviously there remained only linguistic pleasures in his life. Beastly. DH-9, suicide. He uttered these words over and over again. Yet he was no masochist.

I asked him about his patients. Am I a masochist? Perhaps. Bad money drives out good. I often forget this maxim.

"They're quite inconstant. One day they may be eager to have an injection, as if it could deliver them from death and from Hell. They all believe they'll be bundled off to Hell. To indicate their submission, they may turn up in short-sleeved shirts. And the day after they refuse point-blank to follow the treatment."

"Not without reason," I said.

"I often go to the next room and spy on them through a hole in the wall, hidden behind my father's portrait. In a great percentage of cases they immediately start digging about in my medicine chest."

"A nice test of their will to live. Are they looking for a magic pill?"

"They hope to find a painless poison."

"Oh, I see. You're testing their will to die."

"I don't have any."

Their disorderly fumbling was doomed to failure. How to die? I cast a glance at the window.

"I've had it bolted," said the doctor.

"So your patients...they..." Once again I was struck speechless with horror.

For all his knowledge of DH-9-psychology, the doctor miscalculated their will-to-die impetus which prompted one of his most compliant guinea-pigs to smash the window with the bust of Lafayette.

The doctor's personal life was a fiasco. A born family man, he had no wife, no children. "What education could they have got in this apartment? Every cloud has a silver—" I couldn't help speculating about his unborn progeny as he lavished upon me his complaints and plans for the future. And I reflected on the anonymous women whom he had spared the sight of his dead body: he was feverishly talking about his suicide. His will to live had finally lost its fine edge:

"Now I wonder whether I've really had my windows bolted only for the sake of my patients."

The star-like breach, which bore a faint resemblance to General Lafayette, was beckoning him into the realm of death, of pure spirituality, where the lack of family is countervailed by throngs of angels. He was convinced that God would overlook his illicit audacity on the grounds of his nursing DH-9 patients at home.

"That job of yours is in itself a noble acceptance of suicide," I said. "Forget your plans. Just let things be."

Did he follow my advice? I'm not sure. Much fatter than his patients, he probably enlarged the breach with the aid of some bust and—Incidentally, he had a fear of heights.

"And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jo-nah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live, it is better for me to die than to live."

Have all those people read Jonah? Have they read my article? Do they know that I pray for them day and night, even in my dreams? Do *they* pray?

They should pray with desperate intensity, the number of decibels and saints augmenting in direct proportion to the number of their friends stricken by the disease. They must seek help from the Holy Martyr Sebastian, from the Holy Pilgrim and confessor Rochus:

"O holy Rochus, thou who wert born of noble blood, and who didst distribute among the poor thy goods, and clad as pilgrim didst proceed to Rome and in Italy hast delivered multitudes of people from the plague, and hast thyself been healed of it: I supplicate thee that thou mayest obtain from God that I may find protection against the foul air empoisoned by DH-9 and against eternal death! Amen."

In the times of plague Jesuits would give Francis Xavier preference over St. Cailletan. DH-9 patients shouldn't be too fastidious, considering the number of saints that have already fallen into disuse. Buggers can't be choosers, can they?

The sick are cut off from the rest of mankind to the extent of becoming imperceptible. The only sign by which those still living may be distinguished from the dead is the growth of garbage-piles in front of their houses.

Having lost their confidence in saints and guardian angels, a good many homosexuals turn to their doctors for help as though there existed a treatment or a medicine liable to set them back on their feet in no time.

How to die? To lie down and wait till the bell starts tolling for you? Or, after a long grumbling, to let yourself be conveyed to a hospital where, thanks to talkative nurses and loud-voiced doctors, one can hear the death-clock mark out the seconds?

Some, taking their cue from plague-victims, throw themselves out of the windows; others, wrapped in their bed-clothes, rush to the nearest cemetery in order to "bury themselves." I was told that, demented from pain and fear, two DH-9 patients climbed onto the roof of their house and executed a rock-and-fall.

A little kindness goes a long way. Let us never forget this maxim—the golden rule of human existence. I'm not asking you to hold your sick brothers in a tender embrace. All I am asking you to do is lend financial assistance to the Bostonian Medical Center that bears the brunt of DH-9 research.

Can the mind be so clouded by prejudice as to neglect the simple words which, twenty centuries ago, modified the course of human history:

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And I might add, for my part, that all true Christians act as if the notion of friend could be applied not only to their friends but to the entire population of the earth, including the animal kingdom. Instead of being repelled by some appalling aspects of human existence such as putrefaction they, on the contrary, seem to favor the people in whose bodies death has become most conspicuous, almost visible.

They are dying, they are dying. Whatever the pangs of flesh and conscience, their inner state pales into insignificance beside the setting in which they spend their last hours. They are usually very cramped, having being cast out from where healthy individuals indulge in spare-time activities and work off their frustrations; and whatever small space still remains at their disposal is so impregnated with their disease that they seem to be moving inside themselves. Their apartments become a shambles and the situation is much aggravated by the garbage-collectors' refusal to touch DH-9-garbage.

The expression "DH-9-garbage" is also very popular with gravediggers who deem it unworthy to handle the God-punished humans. "Birds will take care of the gays," said one of them in accents of ire. "And what if their windows happen to be shut?" I objected.

"Paul Mitchell died Wednesday."

"Anton Lindsay died Thursday."

As one of my colleagues put it, "The work of removing the dead bodies by carts was now grown so very odious and dangerous that it was complained of that the bearers did not take care to clear such houses where all the inhabitants were dead, but that sometimes the bodies lay several days unburied, till the neighboring families were offended with the stench, and consequently infected."

Death comes at the appointed hour whether gravediggers number us among their clients or not.

Part Three

I'll drive the birds away! I'll speak to them thus: "Why are you eating the body you yourselves did not beget? Perhaps you have greater need of it than I. If God has given you permission, then do as He bade you. If not, be off with you, stop damaging other people's property."

Lives of the Saints. I know their methods and I apply them. A Christmas present. The book was wrapped in beautiful shiny paper and tied with a big ribbon. Will *he* ever write anything about me? Should I rely on his guilty conscience and literary talent? I cannot even trust myself, let alone my pen and my fingers. Whose hand is this? Has Manfred's arm repudiated and abandoned his disloyal body? Will they read *his* memoirs?

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

Now that Christopher is dead and gone and his telephone-intrusions upon my privacy are no longer liable to make me feel my conscience as a living, gnawing thing, I begin to assess the whole extent of my loss. In his lifetime or, shall I say, in his DH-time—in his deathtime, in other words—his versatile repertoire of voices failed to lure me into calling on him; his doctor, whose dynamic range and pitch were far more conventional, fared no better in his attempt to talk me into following Christopher's coffin to the cemetery. I was scared like a woman taking to her heels at the sight of a mouse. I am still scared. I still take to my heels upon hearing his name and yet, as far back as my adolescence, I lost belief in rancorous ghosts haunting their former friends to pay them back for their unkindness. I actually wish he could become a ghost—a disinfected, all-forgiving specter or spook—and visit me now and then in my boudoir, defying the imperviousness of coffins and walls. Fain would I welcome him on my couch! We might chat about his life in the Hereafter and even about his long-drawn-out death on our earth, in spite of the fact that I habitually show more inclination for intellectual, philosophical topics. We might partake of some petits gateaux in my room where his picture keeps gazing at my existence with too understandable a melancholy. I know that, for the sake of my psychic equilibrium, it is incumbent upon me to write off my dead past and lead as dissolute a life as possible. Nevertheless the picture must remain where it is, namely on my desk, for another two years by the end of which I may allow myself to relegate it to a less conspicuous spot. A shorter lapse of time would be unworthy of my newly-discovered

vocation for martyrdom; it might also detract from the ritual-like solemnity of my self-imposed, self-inflicted punishment.

The effect produced by the picture is all the more painful since it reminds me somehow of the TV program in the course of which Christopher was introduced as a DH-9 hero putting a bold face on things and upsetting his doctors' calculations. "Just a small one to buck you up. Your health!" said the presenter, handing him a glass of whisky which he instantly gulped down. No doubt he was keen to controvert the general opinion that DH-9 patients throw up whatever they swallow. Once again the presenter came into view; for a while Christopher happened to be off camera. Smartly the presenter explained to the television viewers that Christopher would need a lot of guts to struggle for life in front of millions of people. "Like any regular DH-9 victim, he's used to grappling with his mortal enemy—DH-9 or death—at home," he added confidentially, "but there's no comparison between—"

Watching my late friend's unrecognizable features could not but intensify my feeling of discomfort which, I feared, might result in an emesis—as if he had contaminated me from the screen. So I turned the program off and cast my glance instead at his picture, at his pristine face as yet untouched by DH-9's terrifying alchemy.

The memoirs I am about to embark upon has been planned as another aspect of the same self-punishment—very much like being given lines at school for bad behavior. It is my duty to pay a belated tribute to my friend whose last hours were far more dreadful than any prefectorial punishment, however merciless and exhausting. My task is, luckily, facilitated by my being in possession of my friend's writings—essays and poems for the most part—on which I am intending to base my narrative. Some of them were offered to me in the days of our flesh-and-uncontaminated-blood contact; others were sent by mail at the very outset of his illness: he was still in a position to post his letters. What renders the former even more poignant and profound now is the way they have come true through DH-9 which, at the time he wrote them, did not so much as exist. Those who saw Christopher both on television and on my desk will get the point when reading his essay Beauty.

He is sure to simplify and shorten his task by using my words: my essays, poems and letters. The pangs of his conscience will be alleviated through *my* writings. My hand will touch his forehead and the blank sheets of paper piled up in front of him. I shall console him for his loss.

What else will he write? What else will he describe?

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

Never to my dying day shall I forget the moment when, resignedly, he broke the news to me. The word "DH-9" seemed to grow visible as it spread over my room and then away along the corridor leading to my father's study. The word was blood-red and its resonance acquired, in my mind, the overtones of a tolling bell. And we did not need to ask for whom that bell was tolling.

"It can't be!" I exclaimed. I might have said something even more stupid, seeing how thunderstruck I was. I dashed to the door and shut it. Alas, I ought to have taken precautions before my friend had uttered the fateful truth: attracted by the unusual sound, my father was already striding along the corridor.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" he asked as I opened the door again and let him in.

"He's ill." I shifted my gaze toward my friend's downcast eyes.

Curiosity killed the cat. My father seems to model his behavior on this feline proverb (paradoxically, my father resembles a bulldog). In spite of the unusual brusqueness of his appearance in my room, he might have been disposed of quite easily—by means of some casual, not necessarily plausible explanation. But, judging from the utter sincerity of my reply, my mental faculties were still too benumbed with bewilderment to think up that implausible explanation.

"Ill? Seriously ill?" My father's face gradually adjusted itself to the gravity of my words and Christopher's mien of settled woe; for a little while, we all looked as though someone had already died, somewhere. My father extracted his glasses from their case and, after perching them very much askew on his nose, came up to Christopher. He grasped his hand with the obvious intention of feeling his pulse and asked in Extreme-Uncion tones: "Are you running a temperature?"

"Don't touch him!" I shouted. "Keep away from him!"

"How do you mean?" My father sounded outraged. "Is he a leper?"

My father's lack of curiosity, which goes hand in hand with his discretion, was to preclude his staying in my room longer than a span of time required for a polite exchange of niceties. However, my exclamations, both by their content and their intensity, were out of tune with what he was accustomed to hearing in our apartment. For once, he did not quite manage to keep within the bounds.

"You must have lost all sense of shame!" he yelled. "A friend in need is a friend indeed." This time he addressed Christopher who wavered between two options. Should he express his gratitude orally, at the risk of contaminating my father with the exhaled air, or preserve a judicious silence which might be construed as a discourtesy? He eventually chose a middle course by removing my father's hand, pressed now against his forehead, and by giving him a respectful bow.

"Don't touch him!" I shouted, fixing my eyes on Christopher's hand.

"What's wrong?" repeated my father: his severe estimation of my new attitude toward Christopher had come to be weakened by the utter irrationality of my behavior.

"Everything!" I answered, eluding the fateful word. I had by then recovered my composure and, to recover lost ground as well, was determined not to "tell" on Christopher. I did not want him to think ill of me for the rest of his life. "I'll have no other opportunity to redeem my honor," I said to myself. It was up to him to reveal the plain unvarnished truth for the second time in the same evening.

He did. Without so much as moving his body, lest he should stand with his back to my father, he directed his mouth toward the opposite wall—which was in no danger of contracting any disease—and said or rather murmured: "I've got DH-9."

"So what? You shouldn't use this word as an excuse for my son's callousness," my father told him.

I tried to reason him out of his folly. In a few words I related all I knew about the calamity. As my condensed account was not unsavory enough, I resorted to the file DH-9 II.

"I won't look at them," said my father as I began to sort the press cuttings I had collected. Indeed, their titles alone were so eloquent as to make him contravene the law of hospitality. I reassured him, promising to put the entire file on his desk so that he could read its contents quietly, undisturbed and unembarrassed. I unwittingly let the cuttings slip through my fingers; the DH-9 rustle thus generated impressed my father far more than my commentaries. So many articles were devoted to a disease of which he had heard nothing or next to nothing! (My father was snowed under with work and had no time to watch television.)

"You know," said Christopher, "all things considered, death must be a pleasant adventure, a sort of package tour in the Hereafter, at least in some of its regions."

"In Paradise," said my father encouragingly, without tapping the object of his pity on the shoulder. Nor did he ask that object to stay for dinner. (The dead are mere objects, aren't they? And what about the dying? Are they half-objects?)

"Or in Hell," said Christopher with a pensive smile.

"There's no other choice," I cut in, feeling it was my duty to address my former friend once more before his departure. A similar wave of philanthropy inveigled me yesterday into purchasing a wreath which is to be propped against his gravestone, if any.

"How so?" My father snatched off his glasses. "And what about Purgatory? Have you never read Dante? Take no notice of my ignoramus," he put his glasses on again. "His reading includes more newspapers than masterpieces of the past."

"There's precious little information on DH-9 to be gleaned from Dante's works," I retorted. Would my mother have spoken of Gehenna had she lived long enough to hear Christopher's confession?

Tossing and turning in my bed that night I thought back to the period when, so it seemed to me retrospectively, my friend began to get thinner. Was his tremulous and incurable addiction to steam-bathing the only cause of that withering? "However, it does him great credit not to have pestered me for a month. The probability of contamination would have increased enormously," I told myself. "He might have limited our farewell ritual to a phone call or a telegram." And once more I "acquitted" my friend: he had spared me the infected air of his apartment.

The following morning my father paid me a visit in my room. As he deposited the DH-9 articles on my desk, his hands trembling more than usual, he acknowledged himself beaten.

"Your relationship must end immediately," he said.

"I'll never speak to Christopher again," I told him.

"But will you see him?" inquired my father anxiously.

And my letters? Did you receive my letters? This one, for instance:

It is true that even those who never listen to classical music may occasionally shed a tear during broadcasts of Purcell's works. (I wonder whether we shed the same tears on those occasions.) In this respect he may be likened to Beethoven whose *Pathétique* was admired even by such a narrow-minded and narrow-hearted individual as Vladimir Ilich Lenin. On the other hand Purcell's works resemble nothing and nobody. And I am not sure they are mirrored by the expression "Music of the Spheres". Perhaps "Music of the Souls" would be a better definition.

You must have received this letter, Manfred. Did you read it? I'm sure you did, I'm sure! What will you write about this letter in your memoirs?

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

It was a nice memory, nothing but a memory. I looked like a middle-aged man leafing through a family album. My shoes remained where they were and my right slipper, as I crossed my legs, got even closer to the fire. And I wedged myself more deeply into my armchair. I had made up my mind to spend a peaceful evening at home.

Nor did I react to his missive the next morning. The telephone ring informed me of my friend's impatience: in the pattern of the repeated calls I recognized the impulsiveness of his wounded pride. Ah, that protean voice of his whose numerous inflections—a slip of the pen, I mean inflections—were intended to keep me on the phone for as long as possible. Why did I not wish to speak with him? Cruelty is alien to my nature. Of course I could have devoted to my friend's grievances three or four hours a day had it not been so painful to hear him, yet not to see him; to hear and to "see" the monstrous disease at the end of every sentence.

Don't come. Please don't come. I forbid you to come. Never get close to my place. I don't ask you to come. I don't even ask you to call me. Remember me, as often as you can. Don't go to any trouble on my account. Don't interrupt your occupations. Remember me in your leisure moments. Your memories will be my only companions. It's very hard. You know, it's very hard.

He is not likely to come. I have nothing to worry about.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

He had nothing to worry about. "You have nothing to worry about," I said as if he could hear me. Alas, there was little chance of my setting his mind at rest: he had strictly forbidden me to approach his house. And I had no intention of being thrown out: I am neither a mangy dog nor a scabby potato. Besides, I was determined to obey his order to the letter without waiting

to be argued into it—as a memorial to our former friendship and mutual liking. Nobody will read my memoirs if I catch DH-9!

I wish he could hear my reassuring voice from where he lies now, snugly ensconced in his cozy little tomb where no bugs, no afflictions will ever mar his eternal rest. Do you hear me? I am fine. I am sound in wind and limb. I have not come. I will never come. Sleep on, as Housman put it. Sleep on.

One might wonder how I deal with the sheets of paper on which my friend was typing out his stuff. Do I ever touch them? How many times do I wash my hands afterward? Is it a regular soap I use on these occasions or is it a pint of bleach? Did we have our apartment spring-cleaned from top to bottom after my friend's farewell visit? We did, after two days of shilly-shallying. Incidentally, the letter boxes in our tower must be in poor sanitary condition.

So, armed with a pair of forceps, I handle his epistles as I would handle the DH-9 virus itself: with the utmost adroitness and prudence. My short-sightedness, however, goes against me and had I not of late ordered a pair of particularly strong glasses—the "DH-9 glasses," as I now call them—the distance between my face and the text would have diminished alarmingly.

I keep my friend's heritage in the metallic DH-9 coffer which is buried under a pile of old magazines. Every reading session is succeeded by a ten-minute shower.

I have nothing to worry about: he will never catch DH-9. Nor will he catch DH-10, providing he keeps the letters of his future friends in a DH-10 coffer. In a DH-10 coffin. The cemetery of letters. Take a half-hour bath! Better still—don't read those future letters! Ask the doorman to burn them!

My last dream. Some ruins looking mainly like Ionic columns. At close range, however, the columns turn out to be human figures towering over a desert which was once a populous city. Through the negligence of its inhabitants, who preferred immortality to the comfort and intensity of human existence, the city disintegrated, bequeathing to tourists the living human monuments. Enchanted by the unnaturalness of the landscape, I ramble around for quite a while, hoping to find vestiges of the vanished civilization. As I pass between two middle-aged women my eyes alight upon a glass door that appears to be misty. I push the door open. What looms ahead of me out of the fog is a bathtub barely recognizable on account of its unusual shape. I stoop over it and attempt to turn the faucets on, whereupon there emerges out of the

aperture a tiny drop which, as if forsaken by gravitational forces and Time, soon stops and remains suspended in midair.

That sort of dream may have been behind the following passage from the *Ta-ch'eng chih-kuan fa-men* (*The Method of Concentration and Insight*) ascribed to Hui-ssu (514-577): "Not only is an instant of thought equivalent to the three ages; we may say that it *is* the full span of the three ages. Not only is a particle of dust equivalent to the ten cardinal directions; we may say that it *is* the world of ten directions. Why? Because all dharmas (elements of existence) are but one mind."

In the light of these conclusions the difference between the runner breasting a tape and a motionless smiling figure seems negligible indeed. We will never lose sight of the railway station in spite of the station-master's flag and the steam curling upward.

Please note the following telltale sentence: "I stoop over it and *attempt* to turn the faucets on." In the last period of my ordeal I was unable to turn on any faucet in my apartment. Thus, to my habitual afflictions, those of thirst and dirtiness were added.

How will *you* comment on my essays, Manfred? Go on with your work! You've grown very slack.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

As I must already have mentioned, I feel duty bound not only to quote in full my late friend's works, but to comment upon them for the following reason: I suspect that my leaving them as they are might cast a shadow over my friend's extraordinary intellectual genius, making it appear too obscure and contrived. Sure enough, those not apprised of the minutest circumstances of his existence would be puzzled and deterred by certain passages, easily illuminated through an appropriate commentary or story. His boundless erudition and unquestionable inclination to logical games can only benefit from the human touch that our posthumous co-authorship is adding to his manuscripts. (And, as all experienced readers know, the lack of the human touch—a common occurrence in our age of robots and skyscrapers—is compensated neither by a computer-like brain nor by preciousness of style.) I am, as it were, clasping my friend's works to my breast. I am warming them in the living heat of my heart.

How will you comment on my essays? Give me an example!

ONENESS

From a distance all people look alike, whatever their age or social status. The further we go the more they acquire the homogeneous indifference of the air. Every cat in the twilight is gray; every man in the distance is both superman and nobody.

Two tennis-players or two fighting armies gradually become one dot as we fly away from the earth, approaching the vantage point from which God contemplates our existence. Spinoza maintains that the mirage of evil arises through viewing parts of the universe as though they were self-subsistent.

Distance absolves deadly sins, provided one has an opportunity to be looked at from afar. On the other hand, the people who daily indulge in exposing their selves to the arrows of their guilty consciences—the St. Sebastian complex—had better not leave their houses. Short-sighted masochists should beware of large halls decorated with mirrors.

My uncle had a horror of the open air. He told me once that space dissolved the kaleidoscopic diversity of his ideas, turning them into a gelatinous mass of meaningless letters.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

"Every man in the distance is both superman and nobody." "Distance absolves deadly sins, provided one has an opportunity to be looked at from afar." "A gelatinous mass of meaningless letters." I am no spoilsport and never read ominous meanings into neutral texts, but I know that my friend looked normal in the distance; I know that, on the brink of death, he sought to obliterate his sins by fair means or foul; and I recall his last message—a mass of meaningless syllables.

Not even in the distance do I look normal, my friend.

Another comment, please! Another essay. A voluntary gesture of penance for abuses committed in the course of my agony. I haven't forgiven you yet. Neither has God. Write, my dear! Write, write, write!

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

The silence, which descended upon Christopher at the beginning of the last stage of his DH-9 agony, is pathetically described in the essay Justification of Mutism. Handicapped by his inability to communicate orally with his fellow creatures, my friend, in his mental distraction, recommends paralysis as the surest means of securing the equanimity of the soul.

JUSTIFICATION OF MUTISM

Angelus Silesius maintains that God has uttered only one word. Unable to reproduce it, we should thoroughly avail ourselves of the right to remain silent. We had better, moreover, to shun whatever sounds we might give rise to either consciously or involuntarily. Even the faintest footfall or crack of joints ought to be regarded as blasphemous. It is vitally important to ensure that our nightmares provoke no unconscious movements in our limbs.

"I'm a human being," my friend shouts for all he is worth, "even though I can neither speak nor move." His essays speak for themselves now. They prove to us that infirmity and death are vanquished by the vigor of the human spirit.

Words can speak, but they cannot get up from the page and walk as far as my doctor's apartment.

My mind dutifully skimmed over my former duels with the stairs. The remnants of my mind compared the energy required for such an exploit with my debility. My potential movements could have been housed in the empty matchbox I had in one of my pockets. I still had a box of matches, empty though it was. I still had some pockets. So I must have had a pair of trousers or a jacket or both.

"No," I said to myself. And I heard myself. "No, no, no, no, no. I won't run up the stairs. I'll stay right here." To be at rest, to lay to rest. I have gone to my final rest. However, my longing to get an injection still struggled with my lassitude. My lassitude was invincible, the fortress of DH-9 impregnable. Even a smooth horizontal surface was too steep for me. "I'd better rest here a minute," I said, after making three attempts to regain my apartment. Eventually the air drew aside like an awe-struck crowd and let me in.

Or was it Manfred's apartment I tried to reach on foot?

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

And the elevator? Or did our doorman forbid him to use it on account of its capacity for keeping microbes during a considerable stretch of time? Our elevator is not very big and has no holes, no ventilators.

Anyway it was my duty to put our doorman in the picture. The safety of my numerous neighbors and their countless visitors was at stake.

So he sank to the ground, I presume, and was carried home by some naïve onlookers, by some suicidal loafers. Why? Was he better off in his apartment, in the midst of his claustrophobic fancies?

I was not. I am not. Nothing new under the blanket. Is that what eternity means?

While groping my way toward the divan I tumble over a great many armchairs. They swarm into my room, swelling the number of things over which I might tumble and stumble. I am crawling on my hands and knees over the armchairs, and those armchairs become bathtubs in the depths of which I endeavor to drown forever. Forever. No kiss of life, please! No kiss of life.

In point of fact there is only one armchair in my room and this armchair's propensity to turn into a Hindu divinity with hundreds of arms and legs and bodies seems to reflect our Oriental discussions, our admiration for the *Bhagavadgita*.

Aren't you my umbilical cord, my spinal cord, my Tristan's chord? Listen, oh listen to my silly maudlin song for once. *Mir dies? Dies, Tristan, Mir?—Wohin nun Treue, da Tristan mich betrog?* Death whisked me across the border while you were here, on earth—you, the bearer of my breath. How could I die without you? Were you with me? The same question, the first and the last question. Were you with me in that hut? They had built it especially for me. Or for us? I was laid down. My head rested on the lap of a virgin. But they did not lay me out. They walled up the door of the hut and departed, leaving no forwarding addresses.

Was it a dream? Why did I dream it? What strata of archetypal memory did my dream disturb? Or did I just remember *Aida*, the final scene, the last *duetto*?

Was it another torture chamber?

Come on, Manfred! Let me hear your voice! The very last aria.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

As you have probably gathered by now, my friend was a sciolist. He dabbled in everything: philosophy, literature, Oriental lore—you name it. He was also an opera-lover, as the fragment above eloquently proves. In his Cambridge years he memorized several operas and would occasionally supplement my musical culture by a few snatches from Verdi, Wagner or Debussy which, furthermore, were not chosen at random, but in order to adorn specific everyday occurrences. He was much like a Greek chorus commenting upon our acts and destinies. He often went from a low to a high pitch, substituting the wickedness of a bass for a soprano's mincing ways.

Chaotic and illogical though it is, his dream lends itself to Freudian analysis. The wooden hut stands for the coffin or the tomb into which my friend was led by DH-9; the walling up signifies our fear of contamination: "They walled up the door of the hut."

The German text quoted in the fragment was previously used by Wagner in his Tristan und Isolde. It is sung by an old, wizened king. The English translation of the text runs thus: "Must you do this to me? Who shall be loyal, if Tristan can betray?" Obviously he could not resist a dig at his one-time companion but, bewildered by his having identified with the old Mark, I hardly paid attention to it. In the good old days his hackles would rise at the very idea of decrepitude—so beautiful and fresh everything looked.

"DH-9 has greatly accelerated his time," I thought. "Instead of moving at a snail's pace, he is racing forward, jet-propelled."

The modification of speed might also be detected in his style growing hazier and hazier and hence incomprehensible. Conscious of the incredible velocity of his life, he was now hurrying pell-mell to materialize and immortalize his pains, complaints and ideas, without being in the least preoccupied by the problem of communication. Who but his one-time companion could ever have succeeded in deciphering, if only imperfectly and incompletely, his recondite works?

Thank you, Manfred. Thank you very much.

How many minutes do I still have in my possession? One, two, three, four. How cosmic these minutes are! And I shall fill them with myself, I shall inflate them like zeppelins. My last minutes will open out onto a Milky Way of Eternity.

THE ABOLITION OF TIME

Plato deplored the "barbaric invention" of writing because of its propensity to weaken memory by disuse. In his days, the Rhapsodists of Athens could allegedly recite any passage from Homer.

In his renowned treatise *Things to Come*, the mediaeval Platonist Z. von Bubra writes about readers: "The more they read, the more they forget. In the long run they are bound to forget the pages they have not read, the unwritten pages—the future."

Apparently, before the invention of writing everybody was in a position to "remember" the future which, as it were, lay before humanity like an open book. As a matter of fact books were useless, for everybody read Time and simply had no time to read other things.

I know I would be frightened out of my skin if my memory offered me in the future the weird episode I am living through now. I must lose my memory. I must lose my future.

One has no need to bring up Einstein's theory of relativity to prove that velocity shortens space: a plane flying from Madrid to Munich is bound to reach its destination earlier than a train leaving Madrid at the same moment and following the same itinerary. My space kept shrinking and shrinking so that our extensive walks in Central Park were now equivalent to my solitary comings and goings between the bedroom and the lavatory; and my ambitious dream of writing a novel could only be externalized into a handful of unfinished missives. I was obstinately searching for a "shorthand" way of self-expression. But for the sleep which, in the last stages of the disease, would usurp three-quarters of my precious time, I might have discovered it.

VELEMIR KHLEBNIKOV

Khlebnikov's contribution to our mutual understanding is less appreciated than the exertions of his predecessors. Perhaps, as usual, the remoteness and fundamental impenetrability of Russia are to bear the blame. Among Khlebnikov's fantastic ideas, those dealing with numbers deserve our special consideration. He suggests, for instance, that all the thoughts of our globe (they are but few) should be numbered like houses and pages. We may thus give

numbers to speeches of Cicero, Cato, Othello and Demosthenes—a procedure that would spare us the necessity of hearing out imitative statements in courts and other institutions. Written on a small plank or a card, numbers, on the other hand, happen to be in full agreement with the rules promulgated by the noise-abatement society. When applied to books, they might considerably reduce the dimensions of our public and private libraries.

My old essays. I have no ideas now. I am short of new ideas. I can only comment on my old thoughts and dreams.

SUBTRACTION

The statement: "The series of proper fractions has no first term," may lead us to the obliteration of God and, as some believe, to carelessness and hideous crimes. It has, however, nothing to do with the statement: "I wish I had never been born."

In his cheerful essay *The Superannuated Man*, Charles Lamb strongly advises his readers to deduct from their lives the hours they "lived to other people." "For that is the only true Time, which a man can properly call his own, that which he has all to himself." The more we talk to others the greater span of Time we may deduct from our wretched existence.

Fifteen months ago I made the acquaintance of a young man who settled in the pedestrian precinct so as to deduct his whole life from his life. He hoped to reach his birth at the end of three years. In the night, when the street looked and "felt" deserted, he would get indoors and impose his presence upon some family which, unwilling to violate the law of hospitality, had to put up with him till dawn. They entertained him in turn—the procedure enabling both the old and young members of the family to recover their breaths during a few hours of sleep. To his credit we must point out that he never spent two successive nights in one family.

He used to visit me too; and yet he knew I had nobody to stand in for me. Did he make the most of my capacity to secure my listeners' attention? How many years did I deduct from his life? Rumor has it that our sociable man disappeared last week. By my reckoning, the three years have not elapsed yet.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

I am certain that, on the brink of death and subsequent nothingness, my friend wished to add another life to his life instead of deducting anything from the number of seconds he still had at his disposal; even though his seconds were far poorer than my seconds, your seconds. But addition and multiplication are excluded from DH-9 mathematics except for the calculation of pain, loneliness and misery.

I cannot even *comment* on my old masterpieces. But for Manfred and his ever-moving, munificent, magnificent hand, I would have stopped writing a long time ago.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

DETERMINISM

In my childhood I entertained a strange belief that the number of words allotted to man was somehow limited and, therefore, one had to speak as seldom as possible in order not to exhaust too soon one's word-ration. The image of a barman pouring the determined quantity of liquors into a cocktail-glass would accompany my meditation. Later on, I realized that my childish idea might be shaped into other forms.

"In every individual the measure of the pain essential to him has been determined once and for all by his nature, a measure that could not remain empty or be filled to excess," says Schopenhauer in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung. In his commentary Dr. Grapius compares Schopenhauer to an exemplary housewife who never lets milk boil over. Emerson writes that our memory is "bound to lose something for everything it gains." One must, therefore, think twice before memorizing a new poem or a useless face. We do not know what episode of our past will be sacrificed for the sake of a new memory; nor can we always pick the worthy-of-being-memorized material. Now and then, when following our train of thought, we come across such rubbish that no explanation of its presence in our minds seems satisfactory.

In a letter to Arnauld, Leibniz ventures the opinion that every predicate, necessary or contingent, past, present, or future, is comprised in the notion of the subject. Consequently, "the individual notion of each person involves once and for all everything that will ever happen to him." The barman tossing his cocktail glass from one hand to the other without so

much as spilling one precious drop of his mixture has been engraved on my mind since the Creation.

I have come across many other expressions of my verbal claustrophobia which, in the final analysis, may be reduced to the doctrine of Predestination, to the Gnostic fate heimarmene dispensed by the stars—those mythical exponents of the inexorable and merciless laws of the universe. My melancholy, which must be logically counterbalanced by a guffaw, has lately been on the increase. I wonder whether there is a way of arresting its progress; whether it is bounded or boundless in contradiction to the law of quantity. I wonder whether I shall still be able to write when I have stopped speaking.

He stopped speaking and his memory, judging from what could be deciphered in his notebook, kept losing its acquisitions as does a roulette-player on his black day in the garish splendor of a salle de jeu.

I should be the last to hark back to my friend's agony in the presence of those who, being yet spared by DH-9, get a kick out of eating and drinking and walking and weighing themselves and looking at themselves in mirrors. But every rose has its thorn and there have been so many thorns on our path ever since the most intelligent chimpanzee passed a major turning point by becoming the first man, that the history of humanity resembles rather a cactus than a rose. And someone must speak about the thorns so that people will not forget. The last days of Christopher may fit the bill well enough, so far as my personal duty is concerned.

Suicidal nuances, not infrequent in my friend's early pieces of prose, take on particular significance in what he created under a load of anguish, pain and remorse—under medical sentence of death. With the aid of Romeo he must have enacted the self-destruction innumerable times, but he had no guts to do it under the name of Christopher. His suicide, as it were, existed in name alone. He was no Romeo, no Tristan, no Anna Karenina and, therefore, went on living.

SUICIDE

A composer whom I have lost sight of since my departure from Europe sought to create so-called "lethal harmony" which would have enabled him to murder his wife's lover without being subjected to cross-examinations and other unnecessary evils. The unheard-of destructiveness of the future work seemed to present my friend with some thorny problems. Indeed he did not even know whether he was immune to the fatal effect himself: in the light of

Tolstoy's late moralizing works, he assumed that his malicious scheme might backfire. "If a Claw is Caught, the Whole Bird is Lost."

Distance and time drew a veil over the development of his research. It is rumored that a number of crows are circling over my friend's piano. Is it a good omen? Somehow the scheme reminds me of the advice I gave him at the very outset of his labor: "Compose at a cemetery."

Any meditation focused upon the other world and its enigmas is apt to drive us out of this world; to our down-to-earth relatives we might, at such moments, appear half-dead. My otherworldly countenance is further emphasized by my dealing with a distant, isolated memory that does not fall within the scope of my present life. Despite the great liking I have for my friend, it is an altogether other world for me now. Accordingly, I must resemble an antique bust.

My friend's paralysis precluded him from manipulating poisons and daggers. Did he hope to hear something mortal, not necessarily a harmony? Did he hope to chance upon the mortal thought, upon the mot juste?

I heard him crying and screaming from pain and even on the phone it sounded monstrous. It looks monstrous too:

(UNTITLED)

"When she knew that she would cry, she kept it in as long as she might, and did all she could to withstand it or put it away, till she waxed as livid as any lead, and ever it would labor in her mind more and more till the time it broke out." Thus are depicted by Margery Kempe the sufferings provoked by the vision of the Cross.

The woman did not cry because of her relatives' death, nor did she lament her own misfortunes. The question is whether this information might be deduced solely from the sound.

Would I cry differently if granted the vision of the Cross?

The lack of title seems to square with the idiom "unutterable torments."

He cried a lot. He was crying day and night unless I have made an unpardonable mistake in my physiological calculations based upon his telephone soliloquies. And let me remind you that those airy, ethereal soliloquies date back to the early period of his publicly acknowledged illness. That period started on the stormy evening when he ruthlessly broke the news to me and my father; its end coincided with the end of my patience.

Would I have cried as much if I had been in his shoes? I don't know. O Lord, grant that I be spared this fateful knowledge. May I never be in Christopher's shoes, not even after the global contamination. I wouldn't mind living alone on this tempestuous earth of ours. Robinson Crusoe did.

I know that Christopher was aching all over: he did not spare me the knowledge of his agony. He was not in the habit of pandering to the sensitivity of his friends and did not need much encouraging to unbosom himself. In the middle and final phases of his illness he was screaming and shedding tears like a child. He had utterly forgotten the words "dignity," "decency," "propriety," "pride," "etiquette," "honor," "stoicism," "Buddhism." "Trees die standing up," says a Russian proverb. It was he who told me that. Why didn't I quote Spinoza before putting down the receiver for the last time? "Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari—sed intelligere." "Don't cry, don't curse—understand!" He had a smattering of Latin. He would have understood.

I understand. Adieu, Manfred. Adieu, adieu, adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

Who was he? The ghost of Hamlet's father? The late king of Denmark? To whom did he address his last letter?

He was a ghost of himself—the trickiest part to play for the living.

Part Four

1

"Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

I'm addressing God on your behalf today. And He, in His goodness and divine mercy, will accede to my supplication. He knows—we are not wicked. We are *not* and our cry for help and protection will *not* fall on deaf ears, providing you join your voices to my voice and demand our Lord to spare us the horrors of DH-9. Have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon our souls! We do *not* descend from the libidinous inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah and Babylon. Whatever our sins, *that* sin, the one You're punishing gays for is not *our* sin.

Silence, brothers! It seems to me I can hear a voice: "I *am* with thee to save thee." Your prayer was heard, brothers.

But to be heard you must speak, speak, speak, speak, speak. Open your mouths up to the Lord. Let His light shine in. Not only when in doubt or distress must you speak to the Lord. Keep in touch with Him while watching TV or listening to your boss's bawling and bellowing! Don't say, I've a gap in my schedule so I'll speak with God, but do it round the clock, in your sleep as well—dream about God and your dreams will come true. And if He doesn't answer you immediately, lavishing His attention and loving kindness on another perishing soul, be patient, brethren, and repeat your prayer a bit louder. And if, after your second attempt, all you hear is the water dripping from a faucet, say this: "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Harken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God." No answer? Keep it up! "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee." You must call Him *every* day, twenty four hours a day; and it will cost you nothing—it's not a long distance call, folks, for God is here, here, here. God is standing beside you. You're hand in hand. God is you!

Don't accuse God of stubbornness if He doesn't answer you, but indict gays and those who condone such wrongdoings as homosexuality. Maddened by their irreverence, God has chastised you and your relatives. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth," said God and some heeded his will; others did not. Do gays multiply? Do they replenish the earth? They do not and we're left holding the baby. We shouldn't allow God to get the idea we also condone the abominable sterility, the criminal squandering of semen meant for the procreation of Christians on earth. That's why I implored you last Sunday to tell Him: "No, we don't," and

I can assure you if God hears your "No" and gives credence to your "No", He'll speak to you tonight or tomorrow at the latest. Just tell Him: "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent," and He'll answer you because He carries a torch for the people who speak to Him round the clock. Do you remember Him saying: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not?"

Let's not impose upon God's kindness and encroach on His time. If we dare to take time out of His busy schedule we must limit our request to one or two things at most. Let's today ask only two favors of Him: to protect *us* from DH-9 and to castigate *them*, gays and their sympathizers, into repentance through DH-9. Tit for tat! You're gay so you've got DH-9. And DH-10, and DH-11. We can't do otherwise than get rid of them—the sooner the better!

"And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree: but only those men which have not the seal of God in their forehead." Sounds like a description of the DH-9 bug, doesn't it? Neither the grass was infected, nor any plant, nor tree—only the men who now have the seal of Satan in their bodies. I'm talking about DH-9 lesions. In His omniscience God predicted DH-9 and through the Apocalypse cautioned us against any contact with carriers and spreaders of the bug: "And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions." He also designated their sexual organ as the channel by which the DH-9 bug would be transmitted: "And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men." Watch your step, dear brothers. Watch your step!

The stings in the tails are also hypodermic needles that squirt the disease into the veins of healthy heterosexuals. Beware, brothers, of alien blood which is sure to contain some drops of gay blood, of DH-9 blood. As you know, a half-drop of that accursed blood can kill an elephant. The best precaution is to begin storing your own pure blood. No sinful germs! And if while storing it you have the misfortune to overstep the mark by letting too much blood out, it's better for you to die like Romans than to die of DH-9 and be reckoned among homosexual criminals.

In the face of this threat, we must keep a strict eye on whatever comes from outside to go inside—I'm speaking in particular about food which is constantly handled by gays on its way to our kitchens. It *can't* be helped—there are so many gay fingers in this filthy world of ours. But we must do what we *can* do. We must wash fruit and vegetables in soapy water and

content ourselves with boiled meat until we're delivered from DH-9 and gays. And forbear eating in restaurants! God forbid!

Granted that with the Lord's help we manage to protect ourselves against gay blood and gay food, there still remains gay malice which is far more perilous, being invisible. Do you remember what our Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Exodus? "Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man—" Unluckily for us DH-9 can be artificially produced and what Moses did to free his people from bondage is now done by gays just for the fun of it. Guided by Satan who often uses divine weapons to further his own purposes, gays strew powders productive of DH-9; they smear our doors and walls and water pipes and what not. One hundred and seventy of them have already been arrested and sentenced to imprisonment which is too merciful a punishment compared with what torture people were put to, for a similar crime, in seventeenth-century Spain: "First they were placed upon a cart and driven to the place of execution. They were pinched with glowing tongs at every place where poison had been smeared; before their own houses they had their right hands cut off and subsequently they all were broken on the wheel, being placed living on the wheel and strangled after six hours."

Let our water be poisoned, let our front doors be smeared with DH-9—no use washing your hands—but as long as we are in communion with God, our souls will remain DH-9less.

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink." And Jesus Christ mentions the fowls of the air who sow not. "Neither do they reap, nor gather into barns." Had you been as near to God as birds are, you'd have been fed three times a day plus tea with cheesecake and pancakes. You'd have been fed from the hands of God and not from the hands of gays. But you've turned a deaf ear to my criticism and "the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, even that man shall die."

And you've not been praying enough; you've traded God for sex, for business, for money; you've sold Him once again for thirty pieces of silver. "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me."

You've deserted Him and any person found guilty of desertion shall be punished by death if the offense is committed in time of war. And it *is* wartime now. We're at war with gays, we're at war with Satan. We've been at war with Satan ever since God created man.

I talked with God last night. "Those disobedient little devils mean well, but they know not what they do," I told Him. His wrath didn't subside, for you'd infuriated Him. You'd have

driven Him crazy if God had been a human. He accused you of arrogance and obstinacy. He told me you'd die from your wounds: "And thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them."

"For Heaven's sake," I exclaimed kneeling down, "though light-headed and flippant, my little brothers can't be lumped together with gays, with those avowed enemies of the Lord."

I added that a great number of gays wore a medal bearing the inscription "Enemy of God, all charity, and mercy," and that I personally heard one of them shouting in the streets: "O thou thoroughly wicked God, if I could but lay hands on Thee! Truly I would tear Thee to pieces. He is a fool who puts his confidence in Thee!"

"What a difference!" I concluded. I also said you had to work double time to provide for yourselves and your families. It was pretty lame, wasn't it? You don't work that much, do you? Turning your eyes away, aren't you? Look up and tell Him how often you have a rave-up instead of praying and meditating on the basic issues of human life?

Do you think you've time on your hands and can pray tomorrow or in a week or in a year and get results? Why not enjoy myself today? God will wait, God is in no hurry. Okay, God is *not*, but your death *is*. He's in a great hurry, your death, you know. "My days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they flee away. They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle that hasteth to the prey." So you must run very fast to outstrip time. Some preachers say: "Come, come," as though you had enough time to saunter around the streets, to loiter in bars and tittle-tattle with bartenders. But I say: "Run, run, run, run, run; not to land in Hell, you must run like Hell. No need to make an appointment—God is waiting for you. Whatever the season or hour, He can spare you a minute or even more, providing you're not crabs. You don't run backward, do you? If you're not crabs or lobsters God will welcome you with open arms, take my word for it. And you'll see for yourselves—God keeps open house. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; my cup runneth over." In the presence of mine enemies. Gays haven't been exterminated by DH-9. Not yet.

So don't spend your evenings watching TV programs and your nights billing and cooing, but run, run, run until you get away from all that. Do run away until there are no more buildings like that around you, no more cities like that, no more cars, no more computers, no more TV sets, no more washing machines. Run away from our civilization where material values have supplanted spiritual needs, where a hundred bucks outweigh the Holy Bible and the Cross. Just as though nothing had happened; as though no star had appeared; as though nobody had said to Joseph: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost;" as though nobody had been

born in that stable twenty centuries ago; as though nobody had died on the Cross, on that same Cross I'm kissing. As though nobody had died for *you* and for *you* and for *you* and for *you* and for *you* and for *you*. Perhaps you've really never come across the name of Jesus Christ in your existence. You've come across hamburgers, Cadillacs, candy, Coca-Cola, but you haven't yet come across a certain Jesus Christ the Savior who atoned for your sins with his own blood. Can it be that you see those skyscrapers over there and don't see God? Can it be that your ear is more adapted to pop music than to the voice of God? Is it too late? Is it too late? It's never too late to repent. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Be zealous, therefore, and repent. Shut your eyes and try to see God—in order to see God you first have to go blind. Repeat with me: "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net." Do you see Him? I'm asking you whether you see Him or not?!

"You're wasting your breath." That's what our Lord God told me last night. "Son of man," He continued, "thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house."

"They do," I replied, "but what they see and hear is the Devil."

Look, our world is a pigsty. You're immersed in it to the point of becoming oblivious to salvation. Salvation! Get that, now: your so-called everyday life keeps interposing between you and your salvation. Going to movies, enjoying sauces in some French restaurant, leading young girls astray—that's what stands in your way just as the Lord's emissary, his sword drawn in his hand, stood once in the way of Balaam's ass. An engrossing book may seize your *whole* attention and yet modern literature is a load of rubbish and bunkum—the whims and whirls of writers' fantasy. A true book is the mirror where we can contemplate the Lord and ourselves. A true book depicts reality. The Book of Life—that's what everyone really needs.

Tempted to visit a picture gallery? Your communion with the Lord has given you a pain in the neck so you'd sooner entertain yourself now. Okay. Only, what are our picture galleries cluttered with, nowadays? Splotches, splotches, splotches everywhere—canvases splotched with sharp colors. Do you recognize yourself? Is it indeed you created by God in His own image? Looks rather like a DH-9 patient to me. Is it nature? Lakes and forests and mountains and cattle grazing peacefully in the fields? Splotches, splotches, nothing but splotches. Or else you're confronted with misshapen human beings—men and women wearing heads upon their bellies, wings on their thighs. Run away, brethren, run away and may your dreams not be pestered with those nightmarish creatures, with those hordes of Hell! Such dreams are little short of DH-9: "Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions—"

Do you really think God will continue to endure your comings and goings with smiling patience? You must *stay* with Him, I'm warning you. Don't you trifle with God! I tell you, His attitude toward your pranks and capers was at first one of amused tolerance, then of stoic forbearance and finally of irritation and wrath. You flow into a white rage when opposed or contradicted; you kick up your heels and roar like lions. Remember: God created you in His own image.

I've no intention of beating around the bush. Neither does God. One of these fine days He'll tell you some home truths. He'll tell you: "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: you have forsaken the Lord." What will you do then? Ring up your lawyer? "I refuse to make any comment until I get hold of my lawyer." Is *that* what you'll say to your heavenly Father? Go ahead! Do call your lawyer! Lodge an appeal! It is time, now, for the Last Judgment is taking place today—here and everywhere. And your lawyer needs a lawyer as much as you do. Trumpets!!

2

So you've survived, haven't you? I gather you've outlasted the Last Judgment, folks? Okay, watch it! Next time you won't pull through so easily. Just to give you a picture of what you'll be faced with next time: "The streams shall be turned into pitch, and the dust into brimstone, and the land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke shall go up forever—"

I knew a youngster who heard a voice and that voice seemed to come from behind a wall. To drown the voice he sang arias from operas and operettas, with the result that he sang himself hoarse. He bought earplugs in the nearest pharmacy. Finally he took refuge in his bathroom.

The youngster was gay. He died from DH-9 about two months ago. The voice was that of our Lord to whom he didn't vouchsafe to hearken. He heard the voice of our Lord but didn't hearken to it.

"Because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord." Gays *have* sinned against our Lord. They perpetuate their sin in gay baths and in those buildings over there—despite DH-9. How irresistible the allurements of sin are! How solid is the net in which the sinners have become entangled! Keep your eyes peeled, brothers!! "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." How powerful is the Devil.

I tell you, it's a sin, it's a sin: homosexuality is a sin condemned and damned by God. In *De Abrahamo* Philo traces all the evils of first-century Alexandria back to Sodom: "Men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive, and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. They accustomed those who were by nature men to play the part of women. They saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease. For not only did they emasculate their bodies, but they worked a further degeneration in their souls, and, so far as in them lay, were corrupting the whole of mankind."

John Chrysostom, in a homily to the people of Antioch, writes: "Even as the Sodomites devised a barren coitus, so did God bring on them such a punishment as made the womb of the land forever barren and destitute of all fruit."

Bareness of the land, corruption of mankind. Gays are rapists. Yes, they rape you—indirectly, insidiously. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. You all have been deflowered by

gays. Your virgin heterosexual souls have been deflowered. Take a look at your once divine souls, brethren—nothing but splotches, splotches, splotches. And gays are making deeper and deeper inroads into your egos because they're contagious, pestilential.

However, dear brothers, however, however—one wonders how there may be any "however" in so evident a case—however, little brothers, some people tell us that "societal interests are infringed only when a solicitation to engage in a homosexual act creates a reasonable risk of offending public decency." Quite something, isn't it? Don't gays *always* offend public decency and morals? That's not all, brothers. "The incidence of such solicitations is statistically insignificant." Statistically insignificant, eh? They ought to have fixed their computers. "These solicitations are ordinarily accomplished by quiet conversation and the use of gestures and signals having significance only to other homosexuals." Makes you think! Quiet conversations, signs. You just don't get it, not at all. It's all Greek to you and then, whoops! one fine morning you wake, remove your pajamas and discover DH-9 lesions all over your body. "Such unobtrusive solicitations do not justify the commitment of police resources." That's right, just you carry on. Let gays multiply. Let them settle on the moon.

It's only too easy to put a wrong foot forward and fall from God's grace. But no sinner is more irredeemably cursed than a pigheaded sinner—the sinner who knows he sins and yet perseveres in his disloyalty to God. Such a sinner goes into his sin with his eyes wide-open. All gays belong precisely to that pigheaded, mulish category of sinners, otherwise they would already have become heterosexuals or, at least, bisexuals.

Do they try to cure themselves? Do they make any attempt to reverse their sexual drive? Do they make any effort to stop or, at least, to slow down that drive? Do they cut their hands off? And what about their eyes? Do they pluck them out? They don't. And they still go to their baths and bars on foot. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee. If thine eye offend thee—" Shall we help them, my dear colleagues? All their members, all their extremities should be cut off, cast away, burnt up. Because they offend us. Every homosexual molecule offends us. Their houses should be destroyed; the trees growing in their gardens should be felled; the lakes reflecting their faces and their bodies should be vaporized. Let us disinfect our earth!

Who are they? Who are these people repudiating everything we stand for: normal life, normal love, normal family, children, chastity, morals? Who are these people disdaining the laws and rules of our society? Who are these undesirable neighbors of ours sowing a terror here, a scuffle there? Who are these men depraving and debauching our children? Who are these youngsters contaminating our population and devastating our country? Who are they?

Who are they? Are they merely gays and nothing more? Are they DH-9 victims and nothing else? Some say they're sick people, others say they've got a screw loose. What shall *we* say, brothers? How shall *we* define them, sisters? Who are those haughty people? They set their law above His law.

We believe in Jesus Christ and in His Cross and in His Blood and His Resurrection. We know that the Second Coming is at hand, the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—bloodless and timeless appearance He'll make on earth. Soon, soon, soon He'll come and heal our wounds and conciliate and amalgamate all nations, all souls. Soon He'll come and destroy Satan and raze his cities to make room for the City of God. Soon that day will come, soon, soon, soon, soon, soon. But let no man deceive you by any means: for "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming."

Who is this man of sin, son of perdition, brethren? Who is he? Do you know him? You do. Have you met him? I submit to you that you have. Where, how, in what circumstances?

There are two beasts in the Apocalypse. And so there are two beasts in human history. The first beast is a sea-born beast, the second, an earth-born beast. "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And I beheld another beast coming out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon."

Look, all it comes down to is this: there are two beasts that St. John saw and that we see and hear almost every day. But these two beasts are actually one. The thing is so simple, you know, it just tears up all that complicated machinery in the heads of the sophisticates. As the Trinity is the mystery of one becoming three and then one again, so the beasts are one and two at the same time. The first beast came out of the sea, we're told. That's gays, for life on earth began in the sea and humanity came out of the sea in the shape of some dinosaur or other. And gays turned up at the very beginning, at the dawn of human history—remember Greece. The second beast is said to have come out of earth. That's DH-9, for at the moment the epidemic broke out men were already here, on the surface of the earth. "And he (the second beast) causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads." That squares, doesn't it? DH-9 leaves marks on the

forehead, the arms and under the armpits—all over the body, in fact. "And he (the first beast—gays) opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them (with the help of the second beast—DH-9); and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." As you see, DH-9 is foretold in the Apocalypse. And our dead bodies shall lie all over Babylon!

I said the two beasts are really one and the name of that single beast is the Antichrist—the fiercest and most treacherous of foes. "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast (or the Antichrist): for it is the number of man (or gay), and his number is six hundred threescore and six," in other words six hundred and sixty six—six, six, six. The number's believed to be derived from the Greek word *anathema*, I deny—I deny God.

What's his personality? Like many gays he is intelligent and gifted. And he also knows the Scriptures. What does he look like?

You must all have seen DH-9-wracked gays, if not at your dinner table, at least on television. The prophet Daniel supplements the picture with new details: "And I behold a beast, dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it had ten horns (the seven deadly sins plus the sin of homosexuality which is equivalent to three regular sins). I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things." The little horn is a phallus in between two erections—gays don't make love all the time. They make love at the drop of a hat, but not all the time. And gays are here symbolized by the phallus. And don't forget that I identify them with the beast in the Apocalypse, for they're beastly sex maniacs. They've sold their souls to their libido.

And then there starts the erection of the horn. "The little horn waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land (the pleasant land—both the partner in the sexual intercourse and our happiness annihilated through DH-9). And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them."

The history of mankind is nothing but a struggle between good and evil, God and Devil. Now, too, good and evil are contending on nearly equal terms in the arena of life. Someone is fighting against the Antichrist twenty-four hours a day, even in his dreams. Who is this man? Does he repel the Antichrist's onslaughts single-handed, unaided? Is he alone? Yes, he is.

"And I will give power unto my two witnesses," says our Lord, "and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed." Do you recall the man who, once, cursed my sermon and left in a hurry? Do you know what happened to his father, mother, brother, uncle, nephew, wife and children? They all died in rapid succession, all of them. Do you know what happened to the man? He got DH-9. Do moderate your language, little brothers. Do be careful.

So, as you see, the two witnesses are actually one—one witness, one fighter, one defender. And antichrists are many, they're legion. There are more than two thousand antichrists in this country at the present moment. How long can one man hold out against such an army, against the Antichrist? Not long, little children, not long, especially since I'm having kidney troubles. Not to mention my sciatica.

What's to become of me? A black sky and a sudden squall are the usual forerunners of a thunderstorm—cause and effect are linked implacably in our existence. The Holy Scriptures say: "only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way," or, in other words, "the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way" and, therefore, I'll be taken out of the way. I'll perish of my wounds. "And when he shall have finished his testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against him, and shall overcome him, and kill him." And many of you, little brothers, will be killed as well, for "then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Let's hope, brothers, that those days will be shortened and some of you will remain in this world after all the gays have expired.

3

I saw a man last week. He came out of Le Pierre, took a few steps toward the Metropolitan Museum, halted and rushed back into the hotel as if he'd forgotten something in his room. He then came out once more, caught up with a heavily made-up prostitute, changed his mind and returned to the hotel. He, however, didn't manage to reach the front door—his legs dragged him toward a taxi sliding alongside the sidewalk. His arms, meanwhile, were waving desperately to attract the attention of some youngster who was about to enter a shop on Fifth Avenue. The taxi stopped, the man shook his head and yet scrambled inside. The taxi shot forward, slowed down at the nearest intersection, made a U-turn, drove to the nearest intersection, made another U-turn—

Do you understand the meaning of this parable? The man simply doesn't know what he wants. He keeps oscillating between such poles as going and staying, driving and walking, heterosexuality and homosexuality. "Either...or..." seems to be the motto of his life. He doesn't know what to do, he doesn't know who he is, because there's no pivot in his life—no pivot, no foundation, no goal. He's constantly tossed between a dozen conflicting feelings. He shunts from his main interest to a profitable sideline and then back to the main interest again because there's no main interest in his life, because there can't be any main interest in human life without God. Without God and immortality there's no purpose in our muddling around on this globe. Without God and eternal life and Paradise this sermon is utterly purposeless. I'd better go home and give my wife a big kiss if there's no God and no Garden of Eden and no Hell swarming with gays and other antichrists. If there's no God, there's nothing, nothing at all. Neither you nor I are here, if there's no God. There are no trees, no birds, no gays. And gays there certainly are. No New York, no Chicago, no presidents, no Satan. Am I speaking to you? Are you listening to me? That's the sort of problem one's likely to tackle if there's no God.

So God is, God is, God is, even though you're not listening to me, you happy-go-lucky folks. God is, even though you're not listening to Him, my deaf brothers. Wait and see what happens next: DH-9 makes you listen to Him; DH-9 turns you into one immense ear, but to no profit. It's too late, too late. Many of you've already contracted the disease which is now rotting their guts. And the fear churns your stomach. But even now, now when the end is drawing nigh, you've no desire to pray. You just don't feel like praying, my mute brothers. However, you do feel like having a ball, thinking it might save you from DH-9. "Others

avouched that there was no other physicke more certaine, for a disease so desperate, than to drinke hard, be merry among themselves, singing continually, walking everywhere, and satisfying their appetites with whatever they desired—" That's what the Scriptures say about you.

Okay. Try and pick up girls, do enjoy yourself. Today. And tomorrow God will tell you: "Come here, ye worldly apes, come with me to several places in New York where huge trenches have been filled with corpses. All is now a stinking mass, a confused heap, a conglomeration of filth, a bait for worms, a repulsive heap of matter. Take but one handkerchief full of this stench home with you and meditate what it means for such an abomination to suffer for all eternity. O, for all eternity, eternity, eternity! O eternity, eternally forever, eternally never, never to escape for all eternity!"

Do you know what eternity is? Eternity in Hell? Suppose you have an awful pain in your stomach and you can't sleep. You toss and turn in your bed, you count up to two thousand, up to three thousand, up to four thousand, but you just can't sleep. And you have an awful pain in your stomach, don't forget that! So you say to your wife the next morning: "I didn't sleep a wink all night." The same happens the following night. You have toothache and earache and you can't sleep. Suppose your life is a succession of sleepless nights. And you have toothache and earache and an awful pain in your stomach from beginning to end. And you have rheumatic pains into the bargain. Now, suppose your life is one sleepless night and you're in constant pain. Do you see this sword? Suppose it's being driven through your body. Suppose your life is composed of sleepless nights, each of them lasting a normal human life, say, seventy-five years. And the twinges of pain in your back and legs and arms are just unendurable. But compared with eternity in Hell, that life is nothing, not even one second, not even a fraction of a second. And if you had a billion teeth, instead of thirty-two, and if all those teeth were to be extracted at one and the same moment, the pain wouldn't be comparable with *that* pain. "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." Touch your forehead. Touch your forehead, I tell you!

The Devil is everywhere! He can impersonate as many beings as there are in the world. And in these troubled times everybody is the Devil. Can't you hear the satanic chant: "I cleave

to thee, Black Prince, and in thee I believe." Can't you hear it? It's you who are singing it twenty-four hours a day. It keeps me awake at night, your satanic singing. Get thee hence, Satan! Get thee hence, Satan!

I can hardly speak, brethren. Can you still hear me? Can you understand what I'm saying? I'm too exhausted to articulate. The problem is to articulate ideas. I'm dangerously ill. My doctors smile. Their prescriptions look too rosy compared with the black nebula staining the X-ray photos of my chest. Their voices betray them. If only you could hear that "bye-bye, see you tomorrow afternoon," said in farewell, Extreme-Uncion tones. If only you could watch them wiping their feet in the garden, *after* their visits. I'm ill, brethren. But, as John Donne says: "Affliction is a treasure and scarce any man has enough of it. No man has affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by it and made fit for God by that affliction. We get nearer and nearer our home—heaven—by it." Should we all contract DH-9 to be nearer God?

I once called DH-9 a slow-fuse bomb that leaves us time for praying. We know we're dying and so pray God to wash away our sins. And we've got plenty of time to do that. We don't go to our offices—we've been kicked out of our offices. We don't go jogging in Central Park—we're too weak to go jogging even on our landings. We go neither to the pictures nor to restaurants—we're too sleepy to enjoy movies and we throw up everything. And so we pray, pray, pray. The more we suffer the louder we pray. The only snag is that we sleep too much. And we stammer. And we lose our memory. May we not forget the words of our prayer, my Lord! May we not forget Thee, my Lord!

"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Let us not discover a cure, my Lord. Let us not discover a cure, for that would be a great temptation. My Lord, lead us not into temptation, for cure is a true disease and our disease is a true cure—the cure-all. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. Soon you'll be saved, brethren. Soon, soon, very soon.

He which testifies these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Part Five

They invited me to represent the DH-9 species on television. Am I supposed to hold out till then? "It was disgraceful of him to die before the show." That is what they accuse me of in their magazines and books. They accuse me of being dead. I am not and I will not die. Not before the show. And the show will last forever. The show must go on. It would be unwise to miss so unexpected an opportunity. I'll tell them everything. Dear television viewers, I'll tell you everything. I am a man. There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man. Man proposes, God disposes. A drowning man will clutch at a straw. Every man for himself. All men must die. A man can only die once. You see, my vocabulary is large enough. My memory is not—where is my dictionary?—impaired! As the presenter said a few moments ago, I belong to the DH-9 society. Low society, I'll grant you that. But there's such a thing as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I'm not criticizing, not at all. I'm merely making a statement that cruelty is unworthy of you, whoever you are. You don't whip an old mare. You don't flog a dead horse, do you? You do? In that case I might as well be alive.

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? What have I done? Are they innocent, all these people? The elect? Are they immortal?

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

In my literary childhood I read a science-fiction novel the plot of which revolved around a head deprived of its fleshy pedestal. To treat a fatal malady they had amputated the body. The

head subsisted on pump-conveyed blood and biscuits. The head spoke when supplied with air through a blue-colored pump. The head meditated when supplied with thoughts swarming in a black tube. The head recalled when supplied with Time and Space spurting from a rose syringe. That lonely head inspirits me to struggle for life, even though the struggle for life, in its turn, may inspirit me to struggle for death.

Born by night art thou, O plant, dark, black, sable. Do thou, that art rich in color, stain this leprosy, and the gray spots! Sable is thy hiding-place, sable thy dwelling-place, sable art thou, O plant—

I shall not be able to gather myself up to my full height. I shall no more sprawl on the couch. But I shall get along. I shall go on writing my diary with some tube protruding from my mouth.

My tears will be collected in a basin, in a bathtub, in a swimming pool and exhibited with a view to raising the temperature of public sympathy. Provided they leave the faucets running. I shall receive a great many warm letters; my head will be surrounded by sympathizers to whom I shall bow in gratitude for their comprehension and cooperation. I shall revolve on my pivot, bowing *à la ronde*. I shall grate rhythmically, melodiously. I would give my all. What can I give? Anyway, I would give my all to be granted the right to grate, imitating my former footsteps on the gravel, to squeak, to chirp, to tell my adventures in a voice choked with sobs, to hear a far-away train clunk, chug along. On, on, on, on. To live. To bow on and on for weeks. To say: "I'm on to something."

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In a letter to Ludwig Ficker, Wittgenstein writes about his *Tractatus* as follows: "My work consists of two parts, the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part which is the important one." Obviously influenced by this statement, a man whose lifelong ambition was to become a great writer abstained from actualizing his works. He, moreover, eluded any epistolary contact with his friends, preferring to ring them up.

"How frightful it would be to leave behind something unimportant," he used to say. The perfectionist was immune to the immortality complex.

After the beheading of the Duke of Monmouth (1685), it transpired that no portrait of his had been preserved either in national archives or in private collections; whereupon the corpse was unearthed and the head sewed on again. An anonymous painter accomplished his task without undue commentaries. A nice example of the will to live.

O Lord, fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.

Brothers and sisters, look at me! It's all too clear I'm a fish out of water among the other participants. And the cameramen are eyeing me with marked disapproval. And our distinguished host didn't shake hands with me. Can't you see he's keeping me at arm's length? At soul's length? DH-9 has just about done me in. Done me out. Out! Away! As far as the Hereafter! Yesterday my doctor gave me only five bucks, which means that I won't survive till next Thursday. I've survived to tell the tale. Everyone has some tale to tell about the very cold winter. And I'll survive to tell the same tale to new generations that are as yet ignorant of human cruelty and stupidity. I'll outlive you, dear television viewers. I'll even outlive my usefulness.

Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: lest they tear my soul like lions, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.

The leprosy which has originated in the bones, in the body and upon the skin, the white mark begotten of corruption, I have destroyed with my charm. Even as a young boy I knew how to turn on the charm when I wanted something.

I will survive, I will survive. I have, like a general, to dispose my forces so as to counteract "the natural flow of things," which is the most unnatural thing in the universe. The natural flow of things: I have contracted DH-9, so I must die. To dispose of Time and Space in the reverse order—that is the crux of the matter. To reverse minutes and inches! And to change handedness, of course! I mean, to manipulate the right hand as if it were the left one and vice versa. The first step toward emancipation from my DH-9 space! Then I shall bend down and look upward. The upside-down world will clash with the established laws and dogmas of my present world, and, caught in the whirlpool of conflicting gravitational fields, I shall rearrange the monads and dictate peace-terms to the vanquished virus. I have contracted DH-9, so I shall live forever.

O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee...

I have survived. I? My hereditary intolerance paralyses my hand whenever I am about to write the syllable "I". Once written down my "I" buckles into the skeptical curve of a question mark instead of standing bolt upright on the page. If my mother had known what would befall me, she would not have consented to marry my father. Had she been apprised of this dismal eventuality by a well-placed nightmare, she would never have looked twice at my father or even a distant relative of his. She would have commissioned the Chinese to build another Great Wall to separate the components of that baleful love. My father would have been snowed under with anonymous letters exhorting him not to scale the wall.

Do you think I am at odds with my Time? Do you think I had better publish an abridged edition? Bang!

My right hand falls instead of soaring up. And I have no strength to press the cold moist Browning barrel against one of the parts of the body which are traditionally-reserved targets in cases of suicide. My hand continues to fall. What is the good of shooting oneself in the

thigh? I am standing now. Reclining postures are hardly suitable for a respectable, conventional suicide. They are, on the contrary, linked in our imagination to pleasures of love and reveal a down-to-earth attitude toward the supreme inside-out act. To blow one's brains out.

Not yet, not yet. Why do I repeat that all the time? Why does my life repeat it? Not yet.

Why don't they sell suicides in shops, in supermarkets? A free gift. A free pass.

There was a promotion in the supermarket and they were giving away free suicides. This is an offer never to be repeated. Last few days.

They slew their predecessors at the octennial festivals of Delphi and Thebes. The thieves of lives. The priestly kings slew their predecessors in the guise of dragons and reigned for a time in their stead.

When consciousness is in the vicinity of the body, and the dog and bird go forth for the dismemberment of the body—

The kings of Cnossus disguised themselves as bulls.

The relatives of a deceased person are no longer allowed to watch, from the basement of the Moscow crematorium, the St Vitus's dance of the beloved corpse. The twists and turns of the fiery road leading to eternal bliss—

My past. My personal history. I am too proud to question my relatives. Besides, any inquiry, however neutral, would inevitably reveal my estrangement from that history and lead to a kind of dispossession, re-christening, metempsychosis.

My neighbor saw his name engraved on an X-ray photograph of his lungs. Several months later he died of cancer. He might have been cured, however, had his too European a doctor advised him to change his name, evoking the Esquimaux who, when about to expire, have themselves re-christened in order to get a new lease of life.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

Did Christopher really consider getting rid of his name and thus being cured, like the old Esquimaux? Was it not too late? Was he not already liberated from his name? Had he become, say, Edward in the course of his illness or was he now nameless, unnamable, deprived of what any pet is entitled to? Romeo would have envied him.

Be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me.

Hell had been inflamed continuously for one thousand years. Consequently, its fire became red. Again, it had been burning for one thousand years and its red color became white. Still again it had been kindled for one thousand years, and its white-colored flames turned into black. So, the existing color of the fire of Hell is black—as black as a dark night.

Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth—

I have ensconced myself in the sharpest corner of the pain. I see it from the inside, I feel it from the inside, I know it inside out. It is too large, too large, as if I were rolling a string of pain into a ball. As if the whole body were to go gangrenous. Judging from the volume of the pain, I have got three bodies, five, six, standing on each other's shoulders—a human pyramid, a human skyscraper from which I jump, jump, jump, jump. I crash to the ground to ensure a safe transition from the thickness of pain to the flatness of oblivion. It is all over now, it is all

over. It is not. I jump down, crash to the ground, look up, jump again. And as soon as one Tower of Babel crumbles to dust, another appears in the distance.

The grave says, "Your arrival is evil. I am displeased to meet you. Of all the men who passed by me, I disliked you most. I will show you how I treat you." After saying so, the grave becomes narrow to such an extent that my bones and ribs of one side pierce into those of the other side.

A sword sticks up out of my head. I am under the impression that it oscillates between one wall and the other as I walk along the corridor, hoping to reach the bathroom and douse my face and temples. Why not pull it out immediately? I risk being stuck in the doorway because of this Durandal! But, if I wrenched it out, like the young King Arthur, I might possibly open something that must be kept shut at all costs. The blood would then flow out of control like the Nile and ruin my carpets, my tapestries. Besides, I have a mortal fear of drowning.

"It must disappear of its own accord," I said to myself, "just the way it has appeared." I delivered several speeches to keep myself busy. Interior monologues are not believed to provoke eddies in the atmosphere.

It suddenly occurred to me that, being a phantasmagoric object, the sword belonged to the realm of my fantasies. All I had to do was not to dwell upon it. So I hastily embarked on a new topic apt to smuggle me into a distant future.

Swords are forgotten to the extent of being banished from museums. Needless to say, I avoid any accidental visual contact with specimens of that prehistoric weapon while studying microfilms in public libraries. I no longer sing *La Chanson de Roland*.

The sword was going deeper and deeper into the subject. And so was I. (The association with an iceberg cropped up in some remote, intact corner of my mind.) "The bottom is drawing nigh," I thought, referring either to the nether limit of my skull or to the end of my sufferings.

Jumping higher and higher I might precipitate the launching of Time's winged chariot which, at the moment, seemed as flightless as a dodo. Wake up, Charon. Have you also got DH-9?!

Did the sword retain sufficient impetus to complete its course? I risked getting the *short* end of the stick. "A Kafkaesque situation indeed," I wrote once again, whereupon I recalled a tale in which Kafka had described a similar sword plunged to the hilt into someone's back. Did that story cast a sharp shadow upon my life? Kafka rounds it off with some casual remarks about the light-headedness of Crusaders who thrust their swords into peaceful dreamers. I used to be a Crusader. Now I am a dreamer.

My friends pulled it out. I had friends at the time. They pulled the sword out of my back and thrust it into my skull, shouting, "The right thing in the right place, the right thing in the right place." I felt at once that it had not reached the bottom, so I cried, "Go on, I don't want a lot of loose ends left about. I do agree with you that my back is the wrong place for such a spiritual thing, so give me a hand. Keep going...keep going..."

The right manner for the carriage of the dead body to the graveyard is this: four men holding the four legs of the cot upon their shoulders should walk forward. They should change their shoulders at ten steps—

When a visitor came to a village inhabited by a leopard society, he was invited to partake of food which was mixed with a small quantity of human flesh. The guest would enjoy the meal and join the society. And the leopard cannot change its spots.

You have come. My goodness, you have come! Why? It's very kind of you. I'm happy now. You've been a good friend to me, both in joy and in sorrow. I'm dancing for joy. I'm jumping for joy. Higher and higher. I can die peacefully, as one is supposed to do on earth. But what about you? Are you also dying?

I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

La mort dans l'âme, I reconciled myself to the idea that our rendezvous will not take place in my life-time. But will it take place in my death-time? Won't you come and violate my tomb? Don't forget pincers, pliers, hammer, spade, hacksaw, shovel, rake, chisel, chopper, hoe, four handkerchiefs. Oh, I'm sorry, it slipped my mind that my mortal remains—don't labor under the delusion that you'll find anything more than the bones of the bones—are having a good night's rest in our family vault. No need to load yourself up with mountains of tools: I've bequeathed you the key. One pair of pincers, one pair of pliers, one hammer and two handkerchiefs. You'll have to re-nail the lid on the coffin. Don't throw my corpse to the vultures! Are they still circling over our family vault? You should bring a dozen stones with you if you're not allowed to use a hunting gun. Or else hire a sharpshooter. Fetch a directory, look up the telephone number of a sharpshooter's office and ring him up. But first go and see me alone. Tell me frankly, how do you find me? Do you recognize me at all? You don't? Have I changed since our last telephone discussion? Remember Donne's poem: "Death, be not proud, Death, thou shalt be dead," or something along those lines.

Ah, these birds, these brazen-beaked, brazen-clawed, brazen-winged birds! Only Heracles can drive them away. Not with his arrows, though—with a pair of brazen castanets!

The magic pill, the magic pill. I scoured the coppices and woods. I scoured them in wintertime, I staggered through autumnal rainy veils. In my fury and despair I even ferreted out a number of vampires who, being far more humane than humans, brought a note of tenderness into my wanderings. I accuse the government of ignoring international agreements on the humane treatment of DH-9 patients!

Give me a hand! Give me a hand! Give me a hand! Help me, I beg of you! Where are you?
Where are they? Shall I pull down my walls?

I understand now that we cannot foretell the ways of swords. Whatever the strength of our friends, whatever our interpretations of the phenomenon, they (swords and friends) continue to move in full accordance with some zigzag of the zodiac. There are men whose karma is in the shape of a sword which keeps them company even though they do not feel it and, therefore, enter their bathrooms without a hitch. Nevertheless, sword-people stop under chandeliers and shake their heads as if protesting vigorously against injustice. They are prone to nods, misleading their guests who, annoyed and puzzled, respond in kind to such false salutations.

And the Oriental dances during which their hands describe arabesques above their heads prove that the intangible air may occasionally acquire the properties of metal objects such as swords, daggers, lances. Why do they brandish their pens or glasses as they talk for hours on end about ancient prophecies?

Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.

He bore the name of Shark, that king of Dahomey on whom the French made war. In art he was represented with a shark's body and a human head. Or with a human body and the head of a shark. A shark has sharp teeth. Shark! Sharp! Shark! Sharp! I will have my enemies by the short hairs! And I am in favor of the short sharp shock treatment. I am in favor of shark treatment. I will shark, shock and shoot my enemies!

Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they mark my steps, they wait for my soul.

It is hard to guess what sign is branded upon your soul. You may be surreptitiously enticed into the sphere of fire and decide that your sign is nothing else but a fireplace. From your armchair you will never notice the icicles hanging from the eaves of your roof. Some think that the signs have a beneficent influence on their existence and do whatever they can to protect the signs, to increase their size and weight. Others, however, take to their heels, whenever their sign comes into view. They run and run and their silhouettes, weaving from side to side, enliven the impassivity of a landscape.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

My friend could not run. And even if he had finally taken to his heels, weary of himself and of the earth, his silhouette would not have enlivened anything. His running figure might have deadened our sounds, our landscapes, our wines, our feelings.

Landscapes. The earth. The moon. Images, images, images, images. The created world. Did my disease create it? Or did the world create my disease? Is my disease a purpose or a consequence? I don't know. It *is*. The world is my disease and my disease is the world. That's all I know and all I need to know. And I see it. I don't need to see it. I see it with my right eye, a pale blue eye with a film over it; a dull blue spot, a hideous aperture reflecting my malady. "Eyes are the mirror of the soul," as someone put it. Who?

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

What did his right eye reflect? What sign was stored at the bottom of that hideous aperture?

There is no denying that Christopher's confession has a biblical ring to it. A sign branded upon the soul! Sounds like St. Paul's harangue.

But I found no clue to the conundrum in the Saint's instructive epistles. Anyway, Christopher was not likely to read them: now he harkened only to his eschatological symphonies while settling and hurrying his earthly affairs. In the course of those last days and hours he was learning how to die without losing his dignity and honor and was more than ever insensitive to the Christian way of living. So he must have read the Apocalypse.

I read it too. And I easily found the sign in question.

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've told you fifty times already. What's the use? Now I understand why Ibsen kept on drawing men and women in the shape of animals. Take care, bye-bye.

"The actual animals that have lived on Earth are a tiny subset of the theoretical animals that *could* exist. These real animals are the products of a very small number of evolutionary trajectories through genetic space. The vast majority of theoretical trajectories through animal space give rise to impossible monsters." Nonsense. All monsters are possible. All theoretical monsters do exist in our midst.

Go ye forth of Bab-y-lon, flee ye from the Chal-de-ans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant.

THE SHADOWLESS TRAVELER

He has forgotten everything.

A strange malady

Dissolved his memory

In its alembic.

He walks bewildered
 Through an alien dale,
 Looking for his own reflections.
 The ancient chain of associations
 Is broken, like a fairy-tale
 Fallen into the hands of adults.

Dust floats in the air
 Instead of castles.

MANFRED'S MEMOIRS

At that stage of the "strange malady" he could of course neither write poetry nor even recall the word "memory." And no castles floated in the air of his apartment—only dust and the echoes of moans and groans. And he did not look for his own reflections. Not at that stage of the malady.

Fly forth, ye scrofulous sores, as an eagle from the nest! The sun shall prepare a remedy, the moon shall shine you away!

BEAUTY

"The mathematician's patterns, like the painter's or the poet's must be beautiful...Beauty is the first test: there is no permanent place in the world for ugly mathematics," wrote G.H. Hardy in his book *A Mathematician's Apology*. H. Poincaré held the same view. On many occasions Hardy questioned the utility of mathematics: "The 'real' mathematics of the 'real' mathematicians," he wrote, "is almost wholly useless." Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, maintained that there was no beauty but in utility. "This coffee-cup would still perform its functions without its painting." "Yet the painting was beautiful," comments Boswell. It might as well have been ugly, though. What is the difference between the beauty praised by Hardy and Poincaré and the one disparaged by Johnson?

Upon writing or saying or hearing the iridescent word "beauty" some picture to themselves Helen of Troy and vainly endeavor to summon Mephistopheles; others shut themselves up in a monastery. These acknowledge only spiritual beauty, ignoring its sensual counterpart altogether; to them, Helen of Troy appears "as ugly as sin." Shall we, from now on, say "Sleeping Ugliness" or Philip the Foul? Shakespeare's witches would have approved of this substitution:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair;
 Hover through the fog and filthy air.

So would have Crazy Jane, Yeats's poetic witch:

"Fair and foul are near of kin,
 And fair needs foul," I cried.

Moreover, the Polish equivalent of the Russian word "beauty" has the opposite meaning in Russian: "ugliness."

We touch beauty now and then. We can also smell it. A cousin of mine affirms that the word "beauty" conjures up in his mind his grandmother's perfume. Judging from the photographs he showed me last week, she was no beauty.

I am dying, dying, dying, dying, dying, dying, dying, dying, and no medicine in the world, no medicine, help, help, I've just knocked, no one, knocking, knocking, knocking, knocking, you mustn't flinch from an unpleasant duty, you mustn't, they've worked out a method of sending a spacecraft to Mars, perhaps in some canals there are sentient beings who can—

The pictures made from several hundred kilometers above the surface of Mars by the Mariner 6 and 7 spacecraft in 1969 showed many craters and other features but nothing resembling a network of channels.

Have I ever lived on this planet, in this universe? Why does nobody recognize me?

"The newborn kitten is blind, barely able to crawl on its stomach." I am almost blind. This magnifying glass is my guide dog, my Seeing-Eye dog. Can I crawl on my stomach?

I can. "Using smell alone, it learns in less than one day to crawl short distances to the spot where it can expect to find the nursing mother." How many days do I have at my disposal? One day is enough. But I cannot expect to find my nursing mother.

I can. I'll find my nursing mother. I'll find my mother, my parents. "With the aid of either odor or touch the kitten memorizes the route along the mother's belly to its own preferred nipple." Any nipple will do! Beggars can't be choosers. Can I be a chooser?

The book is entitled *On Human Nature*. Am I still human?

I am not even a *Seeing-Eye* dog.

When I was in Jerusalem, one afternoon I joined a guided tour around the New Jewish Quarter. By my side walked an old American lady. She was garrulous and stupid. "Looks like a rainbow," she said, pointing to the only original arch of the Hurva Synagogue destroyed by the Jordanians in 1948. The arch had been reconstructed as a monument to this former symbol of the Jewish Quarter. Rainbow indeed. There are no rainbows in our universe. Only memorials. And amidst these memorials, these visible and invisible ruins, there saunter a myriad earthlings who have no memory.

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

Where am I now? No one knows.

A cloud floated through my mind.

Time was murky. A tombstone rose
 Into the air. God is very kind.

I stretched out my hand for the glass of gin and my upper and lower eyelashes intermeshed as the liquid reached the surface of my soul. The soul is to remain unchanged until the next world-conflagration. And as long as my soul lasts the image of *my* earth will be engraved in its texture, on its inner side, all round the core resembling the smooth elongated flattened seed of a plum.

Be Thou praised, my Lord, of our Sister Mother Earth—

He came at last. He came. I opened the door and let him in.

"My son, I will serve thee, even I, since thou art not content with the others."

"So be it," I said.

"Whatsoever thou wilt, that will I do."

"I will that thou wash me all over, for I stink so foully that I cannot abide myself."

Wherever he touched me with his holy hands the DH-9 lesions disappeared. I began to weep, so that while the body was outwardly cleansed of DH-9 by the washing with water, the soul within was cleansed of sin by tears.

I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
 While I have my being, my non-being.

Be Thou praised, my Lord, of our Sister Bodily Death
 from whom no man living can escape—

What about a standing ovation? I've played my part beautifully.

To go somewhere. There is a world elsewhere. Where? Even the draft in my room has acquired plaintive tones over several months, over several months, over several years. Sounds like the wails of a newborn child. What personality of my personality springs into activity between waking and sleeping, between night and day, between winter and summer, between life and death? What insect may be born of a weary man?

Lasse enfin d'elle-même et du jour qui l'éclaire.

