AUCA Summer Reading Assignment for Freshmen

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Jamila

by **Chingiz Aitmatov**
Translated by **Fainna Glagoleva**

Once again I find myself in front of the small painting in a simple frame. Tomorrow morning I leave for the village, and I gaze long and intently at the canvas, as if it can give me a word of advice for the journey ahead.

It has never been exhibited. Moreover, when relatives from home come to visit, I make sure it is out of sight. There is nothing to be ashamed of, though it is not really a work of art. It is as plain as the earth depicted in it.

The background is a patch of bleak autumn sky with the wind chasing fast-moving skewbald clouds over the far mountain range. The russet wormwood-covered steppe, a road black and damp from the recent rains, and the dry broken bushes of needle glass crowding at the roadside form the foreground. The footprints of two travellers follow a washed-out dirt road. Their tracks appear ever fainter as the road dwindles in the distance. It seems that if they were to take another step, they would disappear behind the frame. One of them... . However, I'm forestalling events.

It all happened when I was still a boy. It was the third year of war.

Somewhere far away, at Kursk and Orel, our fathers and brothers battled the enemy, while we, lads of fifteen, worked on the collective

farm. Our skinny young shoulders had to carry the full brunt of a grown man's job. Harvest time was the hardest of all. We were away from home for weeks on end, spending our days and nights in the field, at the threshing-floor, or on the road to the railway station, delivering the grain.

Driving my empty trap back from the station on one such scorching day, when our scythes seemed red-hot from reaping, I decided to stop off at home.

At the very end of the street, on a hillock near the ford, are two houses with a stout adobe wall around them and tall poplars growing beyond the wall. These are our houses. For many years our families have lived side by side. I was from the Big House. I had two brothers, both older than I, both bachelors, both away, at the front, and there had been no word from either for it long time.

My father was an old carpenter. After saying his mourning prayer at dawn he went to work in the carpentry shop in the common yard, where he stayed till late in the evening.

My mother and little sister remained at home.

Our close relatives lived in the neighbouring yard, known to the villagers as the Small House. Our great-grandfathers or great-great-grandfathers were brothers, but I call them close relatives because we lived as one family. It had been so since the time our people had been nomads, when our great-grandfathers used to break camp and round up their cattle together. We kept this tradition alive. When our village was collectivised, our fathers built their houses side by side. Actually, we were all fellowtribesmen--the whole of Aralskaya Street, stretching the length of the village to the river, was inhabited by our kinsfolk.

Soon after we joined the collective farm, the master of the Small House died, leaving a widow and two small sons. According to the old custom of tribal law which was still adhered to in the village at the time, it was forbidden to let a widow who had sons leave the tribe, and it was therefore agreed that my father should marry her. His duty to the spirits of his ancestors compelled him to do this, for he was the deceased man's closest relative.

That is how we came to have a second family. The Small House was considered an independent household with its own grounds and its own cattle, but, actually, we lived together.

The Small House had also sent two sons off to war. The eldest, Sadyk, had left soon after he married. We received letters from them, though they were few and far between.

Thus there remained in the Small House the mother, whom I called *kichine*--younger mother--and her daughter-in-law, Sadyk's wife. Both worked on the collective farm from morning till night. My younger mother was kind, complacent and mild-tempered; she kept up with the younger women in everything, be it in digging the irrigation ditches or in watering the fields. Fate had rewarded her with a hard-working daughter-in-law. Jamila was a good match for her mother-in-law; she was indefatigable and nimble, though of a very different temperament.

I loved Jamila dearly. And she loved me. We were great friends, yet we did not dare call each other by our first names. Had we been from different families, I would have certainly called her Jamila.

However, since she was the wife of my eldest brother, I had to call her *djene,* while she, in turn, called me *kichine bala*--little boy--though I was far from little and there was a very small difference in our ages.

Such was the custom of our villages: daughters-in-law called their husband's younger brothers *kichine bala.*

My mother managed both households. My little sister, a funny girl with braids tied with strings, helped her. I shall never forget how hard she worked during those difficult years. It was she who took the lambs and calves of both houses to pasture; it was she who gathered dung and dry branches, to always have a supply of fuel in the house.

It was she, my snub-nosed little sister, who brightened my mother's days of loneliness, distracting her from the gloomy thoughts of her sons who were missing in action.

Our large family owed the prevailing spirit of concord and plenty to my mother's efforts. She was the full-fledged mistress of both houses, the keeper of the home. She had come into the family of our nomad grandfathers as a young girl and had always revered their memory, ruling the families justly. The wisdom, fairness and efficiency with which she ran her home gave her a position of consequence in the village. At home Mother was in charge of everything. To tell the truth, our fellow-villagers never considered my father the head of the family. They would often say: "Ah, don't go to the *ustaka* (that is our term of respect for a craftsman), all he knows about is his axe. Their Eldest Mother is in charge of everything. You'll make out much better by going to her."

Despite my young years, I had a say in our household affairs, which was admissible only because my elder brothers had gone off to war. More often in jest, but sometimes quite seriously, I was called "the supporter of the two families", the protector and bread-winner. I was proud of this and felt a deep sense of responsibility. Besides, my mother encouraged this feeling of responsibility. She wanted me to become a good farmer, smart and ambitious, not a man like my father, who spent his days planing and sawing away in silence.

Well then, I pulled my trap up in the shade of a willow, loosened the traces and, heading towards the yard, spied Orozmat, our teamleader. He was on horseback with his crutch tied to the saddle as always. My mother stood beside him. They were arguing. As I came closer, I heard my mother say:

"Never! Is there no fear of Allah in you? Who ever heard of a woman delivering sacks of grain in a trap? No, my good man, you leave my daughter-in-law out of this, let her work as she's been working. I never see the light of day as it is. You try to keep house in two houses! It's a good thing my daughter's big enough to help now. I haven't been able to straighten out for a week, my back hurts so. It's as if I've been making felt. And look at the corn, drying on the stalks without water!" she spoke heatedly while tucking the end of her turban under her collar, a sign that she was angry.

"Can't you understand?" Orozmat cried in despair, as he lurched forward. "Do you think I'd ever come to ask you if I had a leg instead of this stump? Why, I'd toss the sacks in the trap myself and whip on the horses like I used to! I know it's not a woman's job, but where am I to get the men? That's why we've decided to ask the soldiers' wives.

You don't want to let your daughter-in-law go, but I can't get the farm chairman off my neck. The soldiers need bread, and we're disrupting the plan. Can't you understand that?"

I came up to them, dragging my whip along the ground. When the teamleader noticed me, he beamed, apparently struck by a thought.

"Well, if you're so concerned about your daughter-in-law, her *kichine bala* here won't let anyone get fresh with her." And he pointed to me happily. "Have no fear! Seit is a fine lad. It's boys like him, our real bread-winners, who always see us through."

My mother did not hear him out.

"My goodness, just look at yourself, you tramp!" she wailed, pointing to me. "And your hair is as long as a mane! Your father's a fine one--he can't even find time to shave his son's head."

"Well, then, let the boy rest at home with his parents today and have his head shaved," Orozmat said in tone with my mother. "Seit, you stay here today, feed your horses, and tomorrow morning we'll give Jamila a trap. You'll work together. But mind, you'll be responsible for her! Now, don't worry, *baibiche,* Seit will take good care of her. What's more, I'll send Daniyar along with them. You know him, he's a harmless fellow, the one who was just demobilised. The three of them can deliver the grain to the station, and then who'll ever dare approach your daughter-in-law? Am I right? What do *you*

say, Seit? We want to make Jamila a driver, but your mother won't hear of it. *You* try to persuade her."

I was flattered by Orozmat's praise and by the fact that he had consulted me as he would a grown man. Besides, I immediately visualised how nice it would be to drive to the station with Jamilla. Putting on a very grave look, I said to my mother:

"Nothing'll happen to her, there are no wolves along the way."

And, casually spitting through my teeth like a regular driver, I sauntered off with an air of importance, dragging the whip behind me.

"Listen to him!" my mother cried in surprise. She seemed somehow pleased, but immediately added in an angry voice: "What do you know about wolves, you wise acre!"

"Well, who should know if not he--he's the supporter of the two families, and you can be proud of him!" Orozmat said, fearing lest my mother turn stubborn again.

But my mother did not object. She suddenly looked tired and said, sighing deeply:

"He's far from that. He's still a child, but even so, he's at work day and night. Allah alone knows where our dear *djigits* are. Our houses have become as empty as forsaken camps.

I was now beyond earshot, so my mother's following words were lost on me. I lashed at the corner of the house, raising a cloud of dust, and strutted towards the door without even returning my sister's smile. She was making dung cakes for fuel in the yard, slapping them against her palms. At the entrance I squatted and slowly washed my hands, pouring the water from a pitcher. Then I entered the room, drank a cup of sour milk and set a second cup on the window-sill, crumbling a chunk of bread into it.

My mother and Orozmat were still in the yard; they were no longer arguing, but were talking calmly in soft voices. They must have been speaking of my brothers. My mother kept wiping her eyes with her sleeve, nodding her head absently at his words. Orozmat was apparently consoling her. My mother looked off into the distance and over the tree-tops, as if her clouded gaze would come upon her sons there.

Preoccupied with her sad thought, she seemed to have finally agreed to Orozmat's suggestion. He was pleased at having achieved his aim, whipped his horse and trotted out of the yard.

Needless to say, neither my mother nor I then knew what all this would lead to.

I had no doubt that Jamila would be able to handle a two-horse trap. She was a good horsewoman, for she was the daughter of a horse- breeder from the mountain village of Bakair. Our Sadyk was also a horse-breeder. It was said that at the spring races he could not overtake Jamila. Perhaps that was so, but they said that after that the insulted Sadyk had kidnapped her. Others, however, said it was a love match.

Be that as it may, they had only been married for four months. Then war broke out and Sadyk was called up.

I don't know why--perhaps it was because Jamila had herded horses with her father from childhood on, for she was his only child, both son and daughter to him--but there was something masculine in her, a sharpness and at times even rudeness, and she worked just as doggedly as a man would. She got along well with the other women, but if they criticised her undeservedly she would never let them get the better of her; there were even times when she had pulled another woman's hair in anger.

The neighbours would come to complain:

"What kind of a daughter-in-law do you have? She's only just come to live with you, and her tongue's already a mile long! No respect and no modesty!"

"I'm glad she's like that!" my mother would answer. "Our daughter- in-law tells a person the truth right to his face. That's better

than being two-faced. Your daughters pretend they're sweet, though their sweetness is like a rotten egg: nice and smooth on the outside, but you have to hold your nose if you look inside."

My father and my younger mother were never as strict and exacting towards Jamila as a mother- and father-in-law should be. They were good to her and loved her and their one wish was that she be faithful to Allah and to her husband.

I understood them. Having seen four sons off to war, they found consolation in Jamila, the only daughter-in-law of the two houses, and that is why they were so concerned with her well-being. But I could not understand my own mother. She was not a person who could simply extend her love to someone. My mother was domineering and harsh by nature. She lived according to her own set of rules and was never untrue to them. For instance, with the coming of spring she never failed to pitch the old nomad's tent my father had made in his youth and to burn juniper branches in it. She brought us up to be hardworking, to respect our elders and demanded absolute obedience from every member of the family.

From the very first Jamila had not been the accepted kind of daughter-in-law. True enough, she respected her elders and obeyed them, but she never shrank before them. True, nor did she whisper maliciously behind their backs, as other young daughters-in-law did. She always said what she thought and was never afraid to express her opinions. My mother often supported her and agreed with her, but she always had the last say.

I believed that she regarded Jamila, with her frankness and fairness, as an equal to herself and secretly dreamed of some day making her as powerful a mistress and *baibiche*--the keeper of the home--as she herself.

"Praise Allah, my daughter, that you have come into such a well-knit and blessed family," my mother would repeat. "That's your luck. A woman's happiness lies in bearing children and living in a house of plenty. Allah be praised, you will have everything that we old people have acquired: we won't take it with us, you know. But happiness is the lot of those who keep their honour and conscience clean. Remember this and take care!"

However, there was something about Jamila that bothered her two mothers-in-law: she was too high-spirited. It was as if she were still a child. She would suddenly burst out laughing loudly and happily for no reason at all. And when she returned from work, instead of walking sedately, she would dash into the yard, leaping over the irrigation ditch. Then, for no apparent reason, she would begin hugging and kissing first one mother-in-law and then the other.

Jamila loved to sing. She was always humming something, unembarrassed by the presence of her elders. Obviously, this was not in keeping with our set village conception of a daughter-in-law's behaviour. But both mothers-in-law consoled themselves by saying that Jamila would settle down in time, for hadn't they all been like that when they were young? As far as I was concerned, there was no one better than Jamila in the whole world. We had lots of fun together, chasing each other round the yard and laughing and laughing.

Jamila was very pretty. She was well built and graceful, with straight hair braided in two tight and heavy plaits; she tied her white kerchief at an angle of her forehead; it was very becoming this way and striking against her dark complexion. When she smiled, her black almond eyes lit up mischievously, and when she suddenly broke into one of the naughty village ditties, her lovely eyes became as naughty.

I often noticed that the young *djigits,* and especially men back from the fighting lines, were much taken by her. Jamila always enjoyed a joke, but she was quick to check anyone who took liberties. Nevertheless, I always resented this. I was jealous of her, as younger brothers are jealous of their sisters, and if I noticed a young

man near her, I did my best to interfere. I would bristle and look at him with hatred, as if to say: "Watch your step. She's my brother's wife, and don't think there's no one to protect her!"

At such moments I would butt into the conversation with exaggerated familiarity in an effort to ridicule her suitors. Failing to do so, I would lose my self-control, ruffle my feathers and retreat in a huff.

The young men would burst out laughing:

"Just look at him! Why, she must be his *djene.* Isn't that something!

Why, we'd never have guessed it!"

I tried to control myself, but would feel my ears burning treacherously, while tears of hurt sprang to my eyes. But Jamila, my *djene*, understood me. Holding back the laughter that was bubbling up inside of her and assuming a serious expression, she would ask saucily:

"And do you think that a *djene* is to be had for the asking? Maybe that's how it is where you come from, but not here! Come on, *kichine bala,* we won't pay any attention to them!" And, showing off before the young men, Jamila would throw back her head arrogantly, shrug in defiance, and smile to herself as we walked off together.

There was both annoyance and pleasure in that smile. Perhaps she was thinking: "Silly boy! If ever I wish, do you think anyone will be able to hold me back? The whole family could spy on me, but I'd still do as I please!" At such times I was contritely silent. Yes, I was jealous of .Jamila, I worshipped her, I was proud that she was my *djene, I* was proud of her beauty and her independent, reckless nature. We were the best of friends and had no secrets from each other.

During the war years there were very few men left in the village.

Taking advantage of this, some youths behaved quite insolently, treating the women with scorn, as if to say: "Why bother with them, if all you have to do is wag a finger to have anyone you want come running?"

Once at haying, Osmon, our distant relative, began to get fresh with Jamila. He was one of those who thought no woman could resist him.

Jamila pushed his hand away angrily and rose from the ground where she had been resting in the shade of a haystack.

"Leave me alone!" she said dismally and turned away. "Though what can one expect from young stallions like you!"

Osmon lay sprawled beneath the haystack, his moist lips curled back scornfully.

"A cat will always scorn the meat that's hanging too high. Why are you playing hard-to-get? I'll bet you're only too eager, so why be high and mighty about it?"

Jamila spun round.

"Maybe I am! But that's our lot, and you're a fool if you can think of nothing better to do than laugh. I'll be a soldier's grass widow for a hundred years and still won't ever want to spit on the likes of you--you sicken me! If not for the war, I'd like to see who'd even look at you!"

"That's what I say! It's wartime, and you're going crazy here without your husband's whip!" Osmon smirked. "Ah, if you were *my* woman, you'd talk differently."

Jamila was about to jump at him, but she said nothing, realising that he was not worth quarrelling with. Her look was full of hatred. Then, spitting in disgust, she picked up her pitchfork and stalked off.

I was on a wagon behind the haystack. When Jamila saw me, she turned away sharply, understanding the state I was in. I felt as though I, and not she, had been insulted, I had been disgraced. I reproached her, distressed.

"Why do you have anything to do with such people? Why do you even talk to them?"

Jamila was as black as a cloud the rest of the day. She did not speak to me and did not laugh as always. When I drove the wagon up to her, she swung her pitchfork into a stack, lifted it and carried it ahead of her, hiding her face in order to prevent me from speaking of the terrible hurt she was concealing. She would thrust the stack into the wagon and hurry back for another. The wagon filled up quickly. As I drove off, I turned back and saw her, lost in thought, leaning dejectedly on the fork handle. Then, with a start, she resumed her work.

After we had loaded the last wagon, Jamila stood looking at the sunset for a long while, seeking to have forgotten everything else in the world. There, beyond the river, at the very edge of the Kazakh steppe, the languid harvest sun blazed like the mouth of a burning *tandyr.* It was sinking slowly beyond the horizon, touching the loose clouds with crimson and casting its last rays on the purple steppe, already shaded in the dells with the blue of early twilight. Jamila looked at the sunset, enraptured, as if she were witnessing a miracle. Her face was aglow with tenderness, her parted lips smiled gently, like a child's. And then, as if in answer to the unspoken reproaches still at the tip of my tongue, she turned and said, continuing our conversation, as it were: "Don't think about him, *kichine bala,* don't pay any attention to

him! He isn't worth it." Jamila fell silent, watching the fading edge of the sun. Then, with a sign, she continued thoughtfully: "How can such as Osmon know what's in a person's soul? No one can know that.

Perhaps there isn't one such a man in the whole world."

While I was turning the horses round, Jamila ran off to a group of women, and I could hear their happy, ringing voices. It is difficult to explain the change that came over her--perhaps the sunset had put her mind at ease, or perhaps she felt happy after the day's work. I sat high on the hay wagon and looked at Jamila. She tore her white kerchief from her head and dashed after her girlfriend across the mowed field, her arms flung far apart, the wind flapping the hem of her dress.

Suddenly I felt sad no longer. "Why think of silly old Osmon!" "Giddyap!" I cried, whipping the horses.

That day I followed the team-leader's advice and waited for my father to come home and shave my head. Meanwhile, I sat down to answer my brother Sadyk's letter. Even in this there were unwritten laws: my brothers addressed their letters to my father, the village postman gave them to my mother, while it was my duty to read and answer them. Before even opening the letter, I knew exactly what Sadyk had written, since his letters were as alike as lambs in a flock. Sadyk always began with wishing good health to all, and then went on to say: "I'm sending this letter by mail to my relatives living in the sweet-smelling, blossoming land of Talas: to my dearly beloved, highly esteemed father Djolchubai " Then he enumerated my mother, his mother and all the rest of us in strict order. There followed the indispensable questions about the health and well-being of all the *aksakals of* our tribe and our close relatives, and only in the very end, as if in haste, Sadyk would add: "And give my regards to my wife Jamila."

Naturally, when one's father and mother are living, when the village is full of *aksakals* and close relatives, it is out of the question and even improper to mention one's wife first, to say nothing of addressing a letter to her. Not only Sadyk, but every self-respecting man was of the same opinion. This was never questioned, it was an established custom, and, far from being a topic for discussion, we never even stopped to wonder whether it was right or not. After all, each letter was such a long-awaited and happy event.

My mother would make me read the letter several times. Then, with pious devotion, she would take the sheet of paper in her work-hardened hands, holding it as awkwardly as if it were a bird ready to

fly away, and with difficulty her stiff fingers would finally fold the letter into a triangle.

"Ah, my dear ones, we shall preserve your letters like a talisman!" she would say in a voice quivering with tears. "He asks how his father and mother and relatives are. What ever can happen to us? *We're* at home, in our native village! But how are you there? Just send us a single word saying that you're alive. That's all, we don't need anything more than that."

My mother would gaze at the triangle for a long while. Then she would put it in a little leather pouch together with the other letters and lock it away in the trunk.

If Jamila happened to be home at the time, she was permitted to read the letter. I noticed that she always blushed as she picked up the triangle. She scanned the lines greedily, but as she read on, her shoulders sagged and the fire slowly drained from her cheeks.

Frowning and leaving the last lines unread, she would return the letter to my mother with such cold indifference that it seemed she was merely returning something she had borrowed.

My mother apparently understood her daughter-in-law in her own way and tried to cheer her:

"What's the matter?" she would say, locking the trunk. "Look how depressed you are, instead of being happy! Do you think your husband's the only one who's gone away to be a soldier? You're not the only one in trouble. The whole nation is bleeding. You should bear up with the rest. Do you think there are girls who aren't lonely and don't miss their husbands? Be lonely if you like, but don't let it show, keep your feelings to yourself."

Jamila said nothing, but her sad and stubborn expression seemed to say: "Oh, Mother, you don't understand a thing!"

This time, as before, Sadyk's letter was postmarked "Saratov". He was in a hospital there. Sadyk wrote that with Allah's help he would be home by autumn. He had written of this before and we were all looking forward eagerly to the coming reunion.

In the end, I did not remain at home that day, but went to the threshing-floor where I usually slept at night. I took the horses to graze in a meadow of lucerne and hobbled them. The chairman of the collective farm did not permit us to let our cattle graze in the lucerne, but I violated this rule, because I wanted my horses to be well-fed. I knew of a secluded spot in the dell and, besides, no one would notice anything at night. This time, when I unhitched the horses and led them to the meadow, I saw that someone had already put four horses out to pasture there. I was indignant. After all, I was the master of a two- horse trap and this gave me the right to be indignant. Without a moment's hesitation, I decided to chase off the strange horses and teach the scoundrel who had infringed upon my territory a lesson. Suddenly, I recognised two of Daniyar's horses. He was the very same fellow whom the team-leader had spoken of that day. Since he and I were to work together beginning next morning, I left his horses alone and returned to the threshing-floor.

I found Daniyar there. He had just finished oiling the wheels of his trap and was now tightening the spokes.

"Daniyar, are those your horses in the dell?" I asked. He turned his head slowly.

"Two are."

"What about the other pair?"

"That's what's-her-name's, Jamila's horses. Who is she, your *djene?"*

"Yes."

"The team-leader himself left them here and asked me to keep an eye on them."

What luck that I hadn't chased them away!

Night fell, and the evening breeze from the mountains settled down. Everything was still at the threshing-floor. Daniyar lay down

beside me under a stack of straw, but a short while later he rose and walked over to the river. He stopped at the edge of the high bank and remained standing there with his back to me, his hands behind him and his head tilted to one side. His long, angular body-jutted out sharply in the soft moonlight, as if roughly-hewn. It was as though he was listening intently to the sounds of the water on the rapids, so clear and distinct in the night. Perhaps he was listening to sounds and whisperings I could not hear. "I bet he's decided to spend the night on the bank again!" I thought and smirked.

Daniyar was a newcomer to our village. One day a boy had come running to the field, shouting that a wounded soldier was in the village but that he did not know who he was or where he was from. The excitement that followed! When someone returned from the front every last person would run to have a look at the new arrival, to shake his hand and ask him if he had seen any relatives, to hear the latest news. This time the shouting was indescribable. Each one wondered: "Perhaps our brother's returned, or maybe an in-law?" The mowers all raced back to the village to see who the man was.

Daniyar, we were to learn, really belonged to our village. They said he had been left an orphan while still a child and had been passed from house to house for about three years until he had finally gone to live with the Kazakhs in the Chakmak Steppe, since his relatives on his mother's side were Kazakhs. The boy had no close relations in our village to claim him, and soon he was forgotten. When they asked him how he had lived after he had left his native village, Daniyar answered evasively, but it was clear he had had his share of sorrow and had drunk full the orphan's bitter cup. Life had chased him like a rolling stone. For a long time he had herded sheep in the Chakmak salt marshes; when he was older he had dug canals in the desert, worked on the new state cotton farms and in the Angren mines near Tashkent, from where he had finally been called up.

The people approved of Daniyar coming back to his native village. They said: "No matter how much he's wandered in strange places, he's finally returned, and that means it's his fate to drink water from his native spring. He hasn't forgotten his language and speaks well, though he uses Kazakh words at times."

"Tulpar will find his own herd even if it's at the other end of the world. A person's native land and people are always closest to his heart. Good for you to have come back. We're pleased, and so are the spirits of your ancestors. With Allah's help, we'll finish off the Germans and live in peace again, and you'll have a family like everyone else, and the smoke will rise from your own hearth, too!" the old *aksakals* said.

In tracing back Daniyar's ancestry, they determined his kin. Thus, a new "relative"--Daniyar--appeared in our village.

Then Orozmat brought this tall, stoop-shouldered, limping soldier to the field. With his greatcoat thrown over his shoulder he walked quickly, trying not to fall behind Orozmat's small paces. Next to tall Daniyar, our short and bouncing team-leader reminded us of a restless river snipe. The boys laughed to see them side by side.

Daniyar's wound had not yet healed and his leg was still stiff; that meant he couldn't be a mower. He was appointed to tend the mowing machines with us boys. To tell the truth, we didn't like him. First of all, we didn't like his reserve. Daniyar said very little, and if he did, one had the feeling that he was thinking of something else that had nothing to do with what he was saying, that he was taken up with his own thoughts. You never knew whether he saw you or not, though he was looking straight at you with his thoughtful, dreamy eyes.

"Poor fellow, he can't come to himself after being at the front!" they said.

Strangest of all, considering this constant state of reverie, Daniyar worked quickly and skilfully, and at first glance one would take him for a genial and frank sort of person. Perhaps his unhappy childhood

had taught him to conceal his thoughts and emotions and had made him so reserved. Quite possibly.

Daniyar's thin lips with the hard lines at the corners of his mouth were always pressed tightly together, his eyes were sad and grave, and only his quick eyebrows gave life to his drawn, tired face. At times he would suddenly grow alert, as though hearing something inaudible to us, and then his eyebrows would shoot up and his eyes would burn with a strange fire. A smile of joy would linger on his face for a long while after. We all thought this very strange; he had other peculiarities as well. In the evenings we would unhitch our horses and gather by the tent, waiting for the cook to prepare our supper, but Daniyar would climb the look-out hill and stay there till dark.

"What's he doing there, standing guard or something?" we'd laugh.

Once, to satisfy my curiosity, I followed him up the hill. There was nothing extraordinary there. The steppe, lilac in the twilight, stretched to the mountain range on the far horizon. The dark, dim fields seemed to be dissolving slowly in the stillness.

Daniyar paid no attention to me. He sat hugging his knees, gazing thoughtfully into the distance. Once again I felt he was listening intently to sounds I could not hear. Now and again he would start and become rigid, his eyes would open wide. Something was bothering him, and I thought that he was about to rise and throw open his soul, but not to me--he didn't even notice me--to something great, vast and unknown to me. But when I looked at him a moment later I did not recognise him: Daniyar sat limply and glumly, as if he were merely resting after the long day's work.

The hayfields of our collective farm lie in the floodlands of the Kurkureu River. Near our village the river escapes from a canyon, rushing down the valley in an unleashed, raging torrent. The time of haying is the flood-time of the mountain rivers. The muddy, foaming water would begin to rise towards evening. At midnight I would awaken in the tent from the river's terrible heaving and see the stars of the blue, calm night peeping in; the wind came in cold, sudden blasts; the earth slept, and the raging river seemed to be advancing on us menacingly. Though we were not too near the bank, I could sense the water's closeness and was gripped by an involuntary fear of suddenly seeing the tent torn down and washed away. My comrades slept the dead sleep of mowers, but I was restless and would go outside.

Night in the Woodlands of the Kurkureu is both beautiful and frightening. The dark shapes of hobbled horses can be seen here and there in the meadows. They have had their fill of the dewy grass and now doze warily, snorting softly. Past them, bending the whipped, wet rose-willows, the Kurkureu rolls its stones along with a hollow sound. The restless river fills the night with weird, fierce sounds.

On nights such as those I always thought of Daniyar. He usually slept in a haystack at the water's edge. Wasn't he afraid? Didn't the noise of the river deafen him? Could he actually sleep there? Why did he spend his nights alone on the river bank? What force drew him there? He was a strange man, a man from another world. Where was he now? I looked around, but could see no one. The banks receded into the distance as sloping hills, and the mountain range loomed in the darkness. There, on the peaks, all was silence and stars.

One would think Daniyar should have made friends in the village by then. But he was alone as before, as if he knew not the meaning of such words as friendship or enmity, sympathy or envy. In the villages to be recognised as a *djigit* one must be able to stand up for himself and his friends, to do good and at times even evil, to take things in hand at a feast or a wake on an equal footing with *aksakals* and then he will be noticed by the women.

But if a person is like Daniyar and keeps to himself, taking no part in the everyday affairs of the village, then people will either ignore him or say condescendingly:

"He does neither good nor evil. The poor fellow just stumbles along, so let him be."

As a rule, such a person is the butt of all jokes or an object of pity.

We youths striving to appear older than we were, to be treated as equals by the true *djigits,* always laughed at Daniyar behind his back, not daring to do so to his face. We even laughed at the fact that he himself washed his army shirt in the river. He would wash it and then put it on while it was still damp, for he had no other.

Strangely, though Daniyar appeared mild and reserved, we never dared to treat him with undue familiarity, and not because he was older than we were--what were three or four years' difference?--and not because he was harsh or conceited, which at times evokes something akin to respect. No, there was something unapproachable in his silent, gloomy thoughtfulness; this held us back, though we were always glad of an opportunity to make fun of someone.

I believe a certain incident was responsible for our restrained attitude towards him. I was a very curious lad and often annoyed people with my endless questions. My great passion was to ask the demobilised soldiers all about the war. When Daniyar came to work with us I kept looking for a chance to find something out from the former soldier.

One evening after work we were sitting around the camp-fire, resting after supper.

"Daniyar, tell us about the war before we go to sleep," I asked.

At first, he said nothing and even seemed to be offended. He gazed long into the fire and finally raised his head to look at us.

"About the war?" he asked. Then, as if answering his own thoughts, he added gruffly: "No, it's best you know nothing of war!"

He turned away, scooped up an armful of dry leaves, threw them on the fire and began blowing on them without looking at us.

Daniyar said no more, but even the few words he did say made us realise that war was not a subject one could talk about so lightly, that it was not a bed-time story. The war had dried in a bloody clot deep in the man's heart and it was not easy for him to speak of it. I was ashamed of myself, and never again did I question him about the war.

However, we quickly forgot that evening, just as quickly as the village lost interest in Daniyar himself.

Early next morning Daniyar and I brought the horses to the threshing-floor. Jamila was soon in coming. Spying us from afar, she shouted:

"Hey, kichine bala, bring my horses over here! Where's the harness?" And she began to inspect the traps closely, as if she had been a driver all her life, kicking the wheels to see if the bushing was in order.

As we drove up she found our appearance to be quite amusing.

Daniyar's long, lanky legs dangled in a pair of enormously wide tarpaulin boots that seemed ready to slip off at any moment, while I urged my horse on by kicking my calloused heels into its sides.

"What a fine pair you make!" she said, tossing her head gaily. The next moment she began ordering us about: "Hurry! We've got to cross the steppe before the heat sets in!

She took a firm hold of the bridles, led the horses to the trap and began hitching them up. She did it too, and only once did she ask me to show her how to adjust the reins. She took no notice of Daniyar, as if he were not there at all.

Daniyar appeared stunned by her resolute, defiant air, by her self-confidence. As he stood there pressing his lips together tightly, his look was unfriendly, yet one of concealed admiration. He lifted a sack of grain from the scales and carried it over to the trap in silence. Jamila began to scold him:

"Do you think we'll all work by ourselves? No, my friend, that won't do. Here, give me your hand! What are you gaping at, *kichine bala?* Get on the trap and arrange the sacks!"

Jamila grabbed Daniyar's hand. When they hoisted a sack on bended arms the poor fellow blushed from embarrassment. And then, each time they carried up a sack, grasping each other's wrists tightly, their heads nearly touching, I saw how terribly ill-at-ease he was, how nervously he bit his lips, how he tried not to look into Jamila's face.

But it didn't bother her a bit. She seemed not to notice her helper and joked with the woman at the scales. Then, when the traps were loaded and we picked up the reins, she winked slyly and said with a laugh.

"Hey, you, what's-your-name! Daniyar? Since you look like a man, you might as well lead the way!"

Daniyar jerked the reins and was off. "You poor soul," I thought. "Why, to top everything--you're bashful!"

The journey ahead was a long one: fifteen miles over the steppe, then through the canyon to the station. The only good thing about it was that the road was a continual downward slope and it was easy on the horses.

Our village was situated along the bank of the Kurkureu, on a slope of the Great Mountains. The village with its dark tree-tops remains in sight all the way to the canyon.

We only made one trip a day. We'd leave early in the morning and reach the station after noon.

The sun beat down mercilessly, and there was such a crush at the station that it was difficult to make your way through: there were traps and wagons piled high with sacks that had come from all over the valley, there were mules and oxen bringing their loads from the far-off mountain collective farms. They were driven in by boys and soldiers' wives, black with sunburn, wearing faded clothes, their, bare feet calloused from the stony roads, their lips cracked till they bled from the heat and the dust.

At the grain elevator was a large slogan: "Every ear of corn to the front!" The commotion, jostling and shouting of the drivers in the yard was indescribable. Close by, behind a low wall, a locomotive was manoeuvring into position, throwing out tight knots of hot steam and giving off a smell of burnt slag. Trains thundered by. Camels reluctant to get up from the ground bellowed desperately, angrily opening wide their saliva-filled months.

The mountains of grain at the receiving station were piled high beneath a red-hot iron roof. The sacks had to be carried along sloping wooden planks right under the roof. The air was heavy with the smell of grain, and the dust was choking.

"Hey, you! Watch your step!" the receiving agent with red-rimmed eyes from lack of sleep shouted from below. "Take them up, way up to the top!" He shook his fist and cursed.

Why was he cursing? We knew where to take them and we'd get them there. After all, we had carried the sacks from the very fields where women, old men and children had planted the wheat and reaped it, and now, at the height of the harvesting season, the combine operator was struggling with the old machine that had long since outlived its usefulness, where the women's backs were always bent over their scorching sickles, where children's hands carefully collected each dropped ear of corn.

I still remember how heavy those sacks were. It was a job for a powerful man. I trudged onwards, balancing on the squeaking, sagging boards, a corner of the sack clamped tightly between my teeth to help me carry it, to keep from dropping it. My throat itched from the dust, my ribs ached from the weight, and fiery circles danced before my eyes. Many were the times when I'd begin to feel dizzy, knowing there was no stopping the sack from slipping; my one thought would be to let go of it and go tumbling down after it. But

there were others behind me. They were also carrying sacks, they were young boys my age or soldiers' wives who had boys like me. If not for the war, who would ever have permitted them to carry such loads? No, I had no right to retreat when women were doing the same work as 1.

There was Jamila ahead of me; her skirt was tucked up above her knees and I could see the muscles strain on her beautiful tan legs, I could see what a great effort it was for her to keep her lithe body steady as she bent under the weight of the sack. She would sometimes halt for a second, as if sensing that I was becoming weaker with each successive step.

"Chin up, *kichine bala,* we're nearly there!" But her own voice sounded hollow and lifeless.

When we had emptied our sacks and turned back, we would see Daniyar coming up. He limped slightly as he walked along the planks in a strong, measured step. As we'd come abreast of him, Daniyar would cast a dark and burning look at Jamila. She would straighten her tired back and pull down her wrinkled dress. Each time he looked at her as if he were seeing her for the first time, Jamila continued to ignore him.

It had become a pattern: depending on her mood, Jamila either laughed at him or ignored him completely. We could be riding along, when she'd suddenly shout to me: "Come on, let's go!" With a whoop and swinging the whip over her head, she'd start the horses at a gallop. I would follow. We would overtake Daniyar, smothering him in a heavy cloud of dust which took long to settle on the road again.

Though this was done in jest, few men would have tolerated it. But Daniyar seemed not to mind. We'd thunder by while he looked with unsmiling admiration at the laughing Jamila, standing erect in the trap. As I turned back, I would see him gazing at her through the dust. There was something kind and all-forgiving in his look, yet I sensed a stubborn, hidden sadness.

Neither by poking fun at him, nor by ignoring him did she ever make him lose his temper. It was as if he had vowed to bear it all. At first I felt sorry for him and often reproached Jamila: "Why do you make fun of him, *djene?* He's so quiet and meek!"

"Oh!" she would laugh and shrug. "It's all in fun, and nothing will ever happen to such a crab!"

Soon I, too, began to make jokes at his expense. His strange, insistent looks worried me. How he stared as she hoisted a sack on her back! True enough, amidst the noise, the jostling and the market-place commotion of the receiving station, with people hoarse from shouting, dashing back and forth, Jamila's confident, calculated movements and light step, attracted attention, making it seem as if she were somewhere beyond the confines of the yard.

It was difficult not to stop and look at her. In order to take a sack from the edge of the trap, Jamila would stretch up and turn, thrusting her shoulders forward and throwing her head back in a way that bared her beautiful neck and made her sun-reddened braids nearly touch the ground. Daniyar would stop, as if to rest, but his eyes followed her to the very door. He surely thought that no one noticed him, but I saw everything and disliked what I saw; I even felt insulted, for I could never consider Daniyar worthy of Jamila.

"Just think of it, even he stares at her--then what can you expect from the others!" I fumed. The childish egoism I had not yet outgrown flared up in terrible jealousy. Children always resent their loved ones paying attention to outsiders. Now, instead of feeling sorry for Daniyar, I disliked him so intensely, I was happy when anyone made fun of him.

However, our jokes once ended quite unfortunately. Among the grain sacks there was a huge 280-pound one, made of coarse, raw wool. We usually carried it together, as it was far too heavy to carry alone. One day at the threshing-floor we decided to play a trick on Daniyar. We dumped this huge sack into his trap and piled other

sacks on top of it. On the way, Jamila and I stopped off in a Russian village and picked some apples in someone's orchard. We laughed all the way and she threw apples at him. Then, as usual, we overtook him, raising a cloud of dust. He caught up with us beyond the canyon at the railroad crossing, for the barrier was down. From there we drove to the station together. We had completely forgotten about the huge sack and did not think about it until we were through unloading. Jamila nudged me mischievously and nodded towards Daniyar. He was standing in the trap, looking at the sack with some concern, apparently trying to decide what to do with it. Then he looked round, and when he noticed Jamila hiding a smile, he blushed, realising what was up.

"Pull your pants up, or you'll lose them on the way!" Jamila shouted.

Daniyar looked at us angrily; then, before we had time to realise what he was doing, he pulled the sack along the bottom of the trap, set it on the edge, jumped down and, steadying it with one hand, lowered it onto his back. He started walking. At first we made believe there was nothing so special about what he was doing. The others certainly noticed nothing: there was a man carrying a sack--but so was everyone else. When Daniyar approached the gangway, Jamila caught up with him.

"Let go of the sack, I was just fooling!"

"Go away!" he muttered and stepped onto the planks.

"Look, he's carrying it!" Jamila cried, as if trying to .justify herself. She was still laughing softly, but her laughter. was strained, it was as if she were forcing herself to laugh.

We noticed that Daniyar was beginning to limp more markedly. Why hadn't we thought of that before? To this day I cannot forgive myself for that foolish prank. It was I, idiot that I was, who had thought of it!

"Come back!" Jamila shouted, her strange laughter a hollow sound.

But Daniyar could not turn back: there were others close behind him.

I can't seem to recall clearly what happened after, that. I saw Daniyar, bent double under the tremendous weight, his head low, his teeth sunk into his lip. He trudged on slowly, moving his wounded leg with care. Each new step apparently caused him such pain that his head jerked back and he would stop for a second. The higher he climbed, the more he swayed. The sack made him stagger. My mouth went dry from fright and shame. Frozen with fear, every fibre of my body felt the weight of his burden and the unbearable pain in his wounded leg. He lurched again, jerked his head back and everything swain before my eyes; everything went black, the earth moved from under my feet.

I came to my senses with a start from a steel-like grip on my hand.

I did not immediately recognise Jamila. She was as white as a sheet, her pupils were dilated, her lips still twitched from her recent laughter. By then everyone else, including the receiving agent, had rushed to the foot of the gangway. Daniyar took two more steps. He tried to adjust the sack, and then suddenly began to sink to one knee. Jamila covered her face.

"Let go! Let go of the sack!" she screamed.

But Daniyar would not let go of it, though he could have certainly let it slip over the side, in order not to fell those behind him. At the sound of Jamila's voice, he lurched forward, straightened his leg, took another step, and began to sway again.

"Let go of it, you son-of-a-bitch!" the receiving agent bellowed. "Let go!" everyone shouted.

Once again Daniyar stood his ground.

"No, he won't let go!" someone whispered with conviction.

Everyone there, both those behind him and those below, realised that he would not let go unless he himself toppled over together with it. There was a dead silence. The locomotive beyond the wall whistled shrilly.

Daniyar trudged onwards, swaying like one in a trance, onwards, towards the red-hot iron roof, up the sagging boards of the gangway. He stopped every two steps to regain his balance; gathering his strength, he continued on up. Those behind fell in step and stopped when he did. This exhausted them, it drained their last ounce of strength, but no one was angry, no one cursed. They trudged onwards with their burdens, as if tied together by an invisible rope, as if they were treading a dangerous, slippery path, where the life of one depended upon the life of another. There was a single heavy rhythm in their silence and monotonous swaying. One step, another step behind Daniyar, and yet another.

There was just a little left to go, but Daniyar swayed again, his wounded leg would no longer obey him. He would certainly fall if he didn't let go of the sack.

"Run! Support it from behind!" Jamila cried to me, stretching forth her arms helplessly, as if this could somehow help him.

I dashed up the gangway. Elbowing my way through people and sacks, I finally reached him. He looked at me from under his arm. The veins throbbed on his dark, wet forehead, his bloodshot eyes burned through me with hate. I wanted to support the sack from behind.

"Go 'way!" he snapped and moved on.

When he finally came panting and limping down, his arms hung loosely by his sides. The people parted to let him pass, but the receiving agent could not control himself and shouted:

"Are you mad? Don't you think I'm human? Don't you think I'd have let you empty the sack down below? Why do you carry such sacks?"

"That's my business," Daniyar answered quietly.

He spat to a side and walked towards the trap. We did not dare raise our eyes and were ashamed and angry at Daniyar for having taken our foolish prank so seriously.

We rode in silence all night long. Since this was Daniyar's natural state, we couldn't tell whether he was still angry at us or whether he had forgotten the entire incident. But we were conscience-stricken and wretched.

Next morning, as we were loading grain at the threshing-floor, Jamila grabbed the ill-fated sack, stepped firmly on one edge, and ripped it apart.

"Here, take your old rag!" she said, tossing it at the surprised weigher's feet. "And tell the team-leader not to slip us any more like it!"

"What's the matter with you? What happened?" "Nothing!"

All the next day Daniyar behaved as quietly and calmly as ever, in no way expressing his feelings, though his limp was more marked, and especially so when he carried a sack. His old wound had apparently re- opened; it was a constant reminder of our guilt. Nevertheless, if he had laughed or joked, it would have put an end to the strain. Jamila, too, pretended that nothing unusual had happened. A proud girl, she laughed as always, but I saw how ill-at-ease she was.

It was late as we journeyed home from the station. Daniyar rode on ahead. The night was magnificent. Who does not know these August nights with their far-off, yet so close, gleaming stars! There was one star: it seemed frozen round the edges, its icy rays sparkled as it looked down from the dark sky in surprise at the earth below. I gazed at it as we rode through the canyon. The horses, eager to be home, trotted briskly and gravel crunched under the wheels. The wind from the steppe brought the bitter smell of flowering wormwood, the faint aroma of cooling ripe wheat, and all this,

mingling with the smell of tar and horses' sweat, made our heads light.

To one side dark briar-covered cliffs hung over the road; to the other, from far below, from the thicket of rose-willow and young poplars, the restless Kurkureu rushed on. Now and then a train would thunder over the far bridge; the clatter of its wheels would trail it long after it had vanished in the distance.

It was good to ride in the coolness, to watch the moving backs of the horses, to listen to the sound of the August night and breathe in its smells. Jamila rode ahead of me. She had let go of the reins and was looking about as she sang softly. I knew our silence hung heavily on her. It was impossible to be silent on such a night--it was a night made for singing.

And she began to sing. Perhaps she sang because she was seeking a way to return the former easy spirit of our relationship and because she wanted to dispel her feeling of guilt. She had a ringing, mischievous voice, and she sang the usual village songs: "I'll wave my kerchief as you pass", and "My beloved has gone far away". She knew many songs and sang them simply and with feeling, making it pleasant to listen to her. Suddenly, she stopped and hailed Daniyar:

"Hey, Daniyar, why don't you sing something? Aren't you a *djigit?"*

"You sing, Jamila," he answered in some confusion, holding back his horses. "I'm listening, I'm all ears."

"Don't you think we have ears, too? Nobody's forcing you, you don't have to if you don't want to!" And Jamila began to sing again.

Who knows why she had asked him to sing! Perhaps it was just a whim, or perhaps she wanted to draw him into a conversation? It was probably the latter, for soon she shouted again:

"Tell me, Daniyar, were you ever in love?" And she laughed. He said nothing. Jamila also fell silent.

"She certainly found the right person to ask for a song!" I thought. The horses slowed down at the little river that crossed the road.

Their hooves clattered over the wet, silvery stones. When we had passed the ford, Daniyar whipped his horses and suddenly began to sing in a strained voice that broke at every bump in the road:

My mountains, my blue-white mountains,
The land of my fathers and grandfathers.

Then he faltered, coughed and sang the next two lines in a deep, slightly hoarse baritone:

My mountains, my blue-white mountains,
My cradle of life. . .

Here he stopped again, as if frightened by something, and fell silent.

I imagined his embarrassment quite vividly. However, there was something deeply moving in this halting, timid singing, and he probably had a very good voice: it was difficult to believe that it was Daniyar.

"Well, well!" I exclaimed.

"Why didn't you ever sing before? Sing! Sing as you *really* can!" Jamila cried.

It was light ahead, there the canyon ended. A breeze was blowing from the valley. Daniyar began to sing again. He began as timidly and uncertainly as before, but gradually his voice gained volume, it filled the canyon, resounding and echoing from the far-off cliffs.

I was most amazed by the passion and fire of the song. I did not know what to call it and do not know now; rather, I cannot determine whether it was the voice alone or something bigger, something that came from the soul, something capable of arousing the same emotion in another, capable of bringing to life one's innermost thoughts.

If I were only able to re-create in some way Daniyar's song! There were hardly any words to it, but without words it revealed a big human heart. Neither before nor after did I ever hear such a song: it

was neither Kirghiz nor Kazakh, but there was something of both in it.

Daniyar had combined the best melodies of the two related peoples and had curiously woven them into a never-to-be-repeated pattern. This was a song of the mountains and steppes, now soaring like the Kirghiz mountains, now vast and rolling like the Kazakh steppes.

As I listened I became more and more amazed:

"So that's what Daniyar is really like! Who would have ever believed it?"

We were crossing the steppe along the soft, beaten road. Daniyar's voice soared, ever new melodies followed one another with astounding grace. Was he so gifted? What had happened to him? It was as if he had been waiting for this day, for this hour to come!

And suddenly I understood his strangeness which made people shrug and smile--his dreaminess, his love of solitude, his silences. I understood why he spent his evenings on the look-out hill and his nights alone on the river bank, why he was constantly listening to sounds inaudible to others, and why his eyes would suddenly sparkle and his usually drawn eyebrows twitch. This was a person who was deeply in love. And I felt that this was not merely love for another person; this was different, it was a tremendous love--of life, of the earth. Yes, he kept this love within himself, in his music--it was his guiding light. An indifferent person could never have sung as he did, no matter how great his voice.

When it seemed that the last note had died away, a new, haunting wave seemed to waken the dozing steppe, and it listened gratefully to the singer whose dear, native melody was like a caress. The ripe, yellow ash-wheat awaiting harvesting rippled like the surface of a lake, and the first shadows of dawn darted over the field. A mighty regiment of old willows at the mill rustled their leaves, beyond tile river tile camp-fires of the field workers were dying down, and a shadowy rider was galloping silently along the river bank towards the village, now disappearing among the orchards, now reappearing again. The wind was heavy with the smell of apples, the warm, milk-like scent of flowering maize and the smell of drying dung bricks.

Daniyar sang on and on, oblivious to everything, while the enchanted August night listened to him in silence. Even the horses had long since changed to a walk, as if afraid to break the spell.

Abruptly, on the highest ringing note, Daniyar broke off his song, whooped, and whipped his horses. I thought Jamila would gallop after him and was ready to follow her, but she did not move. She remained sitting with her head inclined, as if listening to the last tremulous notes drifting in the air. Daniyar rode off. Neither of us said a word until we reached the village. There was no need to talk, for words cannot always express all one feels.

It seemed that from that day on a change came over our lives. It was as if I was forever waiting for something wonderful and much desired to happen. In the mornings we would load our traps at the threshing-floor, ride to the station, and hurry to be off again, in order to listen to Daniyar's singing on the way home. His voice had become a part of me, it followed me everywhere, it was with me in the morning as I ran across the wet dewy lucerne to the hobbled horses, the laughing sun rolling out from behind the mountains to greet me. I heard his voice in the soft rustling of the golden rain of wheat, thrown up to the wind by the old winnowers, and in the graceful circling flight of the lonely hawk high above the steppe--in everything that I saw and heard I imagined Daniyar's singing.

As we rode along the canyon in the evenings I felt I was being transported to another world. I would listen to him with my eyes half- closed, and there would arise before me the strangely familiar scenes I had known from childhood: now the soft, smoky-blue clouds of spring would float high above the tents; now herds of

horses would gallop across the ringing earth to their summer pastures and the young stallions with long forelocks and wild black fire in their eyes would proudly overtake the mares; now flocks of sheep would slowly spread like lava over the hills; now a water-fall would dash down from a cliff, its white foaming water blinding; now the sun would set softly in the thicket of needle grass beyond the river and the lonely rider on the fiery edge of the horizon seemed in pursuit of it--he need only stretch his hand to touch the sun--and then he, too, would vanish in the thicket and the twilight.

Wide is the Kazakh steppe beyond the river. It had spread the mountains apart to make room for itself and lay stark and desolate between them.

That first memorable summer of war, fires had burned across the steppe, herds of army horses obscured it in clouds of hot dust and riders galloped off in all directions. I remember a Kazakh racing by along the opposite bank, shouting in a shepherd's guttural voice: "Kirghizes! Saddle your horses--the enemy has come!" then he disappeared in a cloud of dust and a wave of hot air.

Everyone rose to meet the challenge: a solemn and thundering rumble accompanied our first cavalry divisions as they came down from the mountains and moved across the valleys. Thousands of stirrups jangled, thousands of *djigits* took to the saddle; ahead of them red banners waved on the colour staffs, behind, beyond the dust raised by the horses' hooves, the sorrowful and majestic wail of their mothers and wives throbbed and beat against the ground: "May the steppe protect you! May the spirit of our great warrior Manas protect you!"

Bitter paths remained where the men had gone off to war.

Daniyar's song had opened my eyes to this great world of earthly beauty and suffering. Where had he learned all this? Who had he heard it from? I felt that only a person who had longed for his native land for many years and who had suffered for this love could love it so. As he sang, I visualised him as a small boy, wandering along the roads of the steppe. Perhaps it was then that these songs of his native land had first awakened in his soul? Or was it when he had followed the fiery paths of war?

His song made me want to lie down and embrace the earth, as a son, in gratitude that it was there, that one could love it so. It was then that I felt something new awakening inside of me, something I had no words for, something irresistible, a compulsion to express myself--yes, to express myself, not only to see and sense the world myself, but to make others see my vision, my thoughts and emotions, to tell people of the beauties of our earth as exaltedly as Daniyar could do. I would catch my breath at the fear and joy of something quite unknown, for I did not yet realise my calling in life was painting.

I had always liked to draw. I would copy the illustrations in my textbooks, and the boys all said they were "perfect copies". The teachers praised my drawings for our wall newspaper. But when war broke out, my brothers were called up, I quit school and went to work on the collective farm, as did every other boy my age. I forgot all about paints and brushes and never thought I would think of them again. But Daniyar's songs had stirred my soul. I was in a daze, I looked at the world in bewilderment, as if I were seeing everything for the first time.

As for Jamila, a great change had suddenly come over her. It was as if the lively, sharp-tongued laughing girl had never existed. A shimmering spring sadness clouded her misty eyes. She was constantly lost in thought on our long rides to the station. A vague, dreamy smile would touch her lips, and she would softly rejoice at something she alone was aware of. Many were the times when she'd stand with a heavy sack on her shoulders, suddenly gripped by a strange timidity, as if she were standing on the bank of a rushing

current and did not know whether to cross it or not. She avoided Daniyar and would not look him straight in the face.

Once, at the threshing-floor, Jamila said with a helpless annoyance: "Take off your shirt--I'll wash it for you."

Then, after she had washed it in the river, she spread it out to dry and sat down beside it, smoothing out the wrinkles carefully, holding it up to the sun to see the worn shoulders, shaking her head and then smoothing it again softly and sadly.

Only once did Jamila laugh loudly and infectiously as before, her eyes shining brightly as they used to. One day a noisy crowd of young women, girls and demobilised *djigits* turned in at the threshing-floor on their way home from stacking lucerne.

"Hey, you *bais,* you're not the only ones who want to eat white bread! Give us some, or we'll throw you into the river!" the *djigits* shouted and thrust out their pitchforks jokingly.

"You can't scare us! I'll find something for the girls, but you can fend for yourselves!" Jamila answered merrily.

"If that's the case, we'll toss you all in!"

The youths and girls began to wrestle. Shouting, screaming and laughing, they tried to push each other into the water.

"Catch them! Pull them in!" Jamila laughed, shouting louder than the rest, skilfully evading her opponents.

Strangely, the *djigits* had eyes only for Jamila. Each tried to catch her, to press her close. Suddenly, three youths grabbed her and carried her to the bank.

"Kiss us, or we'll throw you in!" "Come on, let's swing her!"

Jamila writhed and wriggled, she laughed and called to her girl-friends for help, but they were running wildly up and down the bank, fishing their kerchiefs out of the water. Jamila flew into the river to the merry laughter of the *djigits.* She emerged with streaming hair, more beautiful than ever. Her wet cotton dress hugged her body, accentuating her lovely round hips and young breasts, but she noticed nothing and laughed, swaying back and forth while streams of water trickled down her flushed face. "Kiss us!" the *djigits* persisted.

Jamila kissed them, but again she flew into the water, and again she laughed, throwing back the heavy wet strands of hair from her face.

Everyone at the threshing-floor roared with laughter at the young people's pranks. The old winnowers threw down their spades and wiped the tears from their eyes. The wrinkles on their dark faces shone with joy and with tile spirit of youth revived fleetingly. I, too, laughed heartily, forgetting for once my sacred duty to protect Jamila from the *djigits.*

Daniyar alone was silent. I suddenly noticed him and also stopped laughing. He was a solitary figure at the edge of the threshing-floor, standing there with his feet planted far apart. I had a feeling that he wanted to rush forward and snatch Jamila away from the *djigits.* He stared at her, and his look was one of sadness and admiration in which there was both happiness and pain. Yes, Jamila's beauty was a source of happiness and grief to him. When the *djigits* pressed her close and forced her to kiss each in turn, he would lower his head and make as if to leave, but he would not.

Meanwhile, Jamila had also noticed him. She immediately stopped laughing and hung her head.

"That's enough fooling around!" she suddenly checked the boisterous djigits.

One of them tried to embrace her.

"Go away!" she said, shoving him back. She stole a guilty glance at Daniyar, then ran into the bushes to wring out her dress.

There was much I could not understand in their relationship and, to tell the truth, I was afraid to think about it. Yet, I felt uneasy when I noticed Jamila was sad because she herself was avoiding Daniyar. It would have been better if she had laughed and made fun of him as

before. At the same time, however, our trips back to the village at night to the sound of Daniyar's singing inspired me with a strange feeling of happiness for them both.

Jamila rode in the trap when we drove through the canyon, but she would walk alongside it in the steppe. I would, too, for it was nicer to walk along and listen. At first we would each follow our own trap, but soon, without noticing it, a strange force would draw us closer to Daniyar. We wanted to see the expression of his face and eyes--could the singer really be the glum, unsociable Daniyar!

Each time I noticed that Jamila would be both stunned and touched, that she would slowly stretch her hand towards him, yet he would not see it, for he would be looking far off into the distance, his hands behind his head, swaying from side to side; then Jamila's hand would drop helplessly on the edge of the trap. She would start, jerk it back and stop walking. Standing there in the middle of the road, downcast and stunned, she would follow him with her eyes and then begin walking again.

At times I would think that Jamila and I were both troubled by the same and equally unfathomable feeling. Perhaps the hour had struck, bringing to life a feeling that had long been lying latent in our souls?

Jamila was still able to lose herself in her work, but during those rare moments of rest when we waited around at the threshing-floor, she was terribly restless. She would stand about near the winnowers; sometimes, after tossing several shovels full of wheat high up into the wind with an easy, graceful movement, she would suddenly throw down her spade and walk over to the stacks of straw. Here she would sit down in the shade and, as if afraid to be alone with herself, she would call me:

"Come here, *kichine bala!* Let's sit here together for a while."

I always expected her to tell me something important and explain what it was that was worrying her. But she said nothing. Putting my head in her lap silently and looking off into the distance, she would run her fingers through my bristly hair and gently stroke my face with hot, trembling hands. I looked up at her, at her face, so full of vague anxiety and yearning, and seemed to recognise myself in it. Something was tormenting her, something was gathering and ripening in her soul, demanding an outlet, and she was afraid of it. She painfully desired and, just as painfully, did not wish to admit to herself that she was in love, just as I did and did not want her to love Daniyar. After all, she was my parents' daughter-in-law, my brother's wife.

But such thoughts were fleeting, I drove them from my mind. My greatest joy was to see her tender lips, half-parted as a child's, to see her tear-dimmed eyes. How lovely, how beautiful she was, how inspired and passionate was her face! I sensed this, but could not understand it at the time. Even now I often ask myself: perhaps love produces a feeling of inspiration similar to that experienced by an artist or a poet? Gazing at Jamila, I wanted to run into the. steppe and shout to the heavens and earth, asking them what to do to overcome the strange anxiety and joy that was in me. And once, I think, I found the answer.

As usual, we were returning from the station. Night had fallen, the stars were like swarms of bees in the sky, the steppe was dropping off to sleep, and only Daniyar's song, breaking the stillness, rang out and faded in the soft, distant darkness. Jamila and I followed him.

I don't know what came over Daniyar that night--there was such a deep, tender sadness, such loneliness in his voice that it brought tears of sympathy and compassion to our eyes.

Jamila walked beside his trap, holding on to the side tightly, her head inclined. When Daniyar's voice soared again, she tossed her head, jumped into the trap and sat down beside him. She sat there as if made of stone, her hands folded across her chest. I walked alongside, hurrying forward a bit to have a better look at them. Daniyar continued to sing, talking no notice of Jamila. I saw her

arms drop, she leaned towards him and laid her head lightly on his shoulder. For a moment, as a pacer feeling the whip changes his step, his voice wavered, only to resound with greater power than before. He was singing a song of love!

I was astounded. The steppe seemed to blossom, it heaved, drawing apart the darkness, and I saw two lovers in its vast expanse. They did not see me, I did not exist. I walked beside them, watching them sway in rhythm to the song, oblivious to everything in the world. I did not recognise them. It was the same old Daniyar in his shabby soldier's shirt open at the throat, but his eyes seemed to burn in the darkness. It was my own Jamila pressing close to him, so subdued and timid, with teardrops shimmering on her lashes. These were two newly-born people, their happiness was unprecedented. And was this not happiness? Was not Daniyar imparting to her his great love for his native land, one which had created this inspired music? Yes, he was singing for her, he was singing of her.

Once again I was overcome by the strange excitement which Daniyar's singing always aroused in me. Suddenly, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to paint them.

I became frightened at my own thought, but my desire was greater than my fear. I would paint them exactly as they were--lost in happiness! Yes, exactly as they were right then! But would I be able to do it? Fear and joy caught my breath. I walked as one in a trance. I, too, was happy, for I did not yet know how much trouble this rash desire would cause me in the future. I told myself that one should see the earth as Daniyar saw it, that I would use colours to portray his song. I would also have mountains and steppe, people, grasses, clouds and rivers. Then the thought flashed through my mind: but where will I get the paints? They won't give me any in school, because they need them themselves! As if this were the main problem!

Suddenly Daniyar broke off his song. Jamila had impetuously thrown her arms around him, but had drawn back immediately; she froze for a moment, moved away, and jumped down. Daniyar pulled at the reins hesitantly. The horses stopped. Jamila was standing in the road with her back towards him. Then she tossed her head, looked at him sideways, and said through her tears:

"What are you looking at?" After a moment's pause, she added harshly: "Don't look at me, keep on going!" and went over to her own trap. "What are you gaping at?" she shouted at me. "Get in, and pick up your reins! Oh, you make me sick!"

"What came over her?" I wondered, urging on the horses. It was not difficult to guess though: she was greatly distressed, for she was married and her husband was living, he was in a hospital in Saratov. I refused to puzzle it out. I was angry at her and angry at myself; perhaps, I would have really begun to hate her if I had known that Daniyar would sing no more, that I would never hear his voice again.

My whole body ached, I could not wait to get back and fall into the hay. The trotting horses' backs joggled in the dark, the trap rattled unbearably, the reins kept slipping from my hands.

Back at the threshing-floor I barely managed to pull off the harness and throw it under the trap. I collapsed in a heap as soon as I reached the hay. This time Daniyar led the horses out to pasture.

Next morning I awoke with joy. I would paint Jamila and Daniyar. I closed my eyes tight and imagined exactly how I would portray them. All I needed was paint and brushes and I could begin.

I ran to the river, washed and then ran to the hobbled horses. The cold, wet lucerne slapped loudly against my bare legs, it stung the cracked skin of my soles, but I felt wonderful. As I ran, I took note of everything that was going on around me. The sun was emerging from behind the mountains and a sunflower that had somehow taken root near the irrigation ditch stretched towards it. White-topped knapweed crowded round it greedily, but it stood firm, catching the morning

sun, snatching it from them with its yellow tongues and nourishing its tight and heavy cap of seeds. There the water trickled down the wagon tracks where the wheels had churned up the mud at the crossing. There was a lavender island of fragrant, waist-high mint. I was running across my native soil, swallows raced on overhead--ah! If only I had the paints to capture the morning sun, the blue-white mountains, the dew-drenched lucerne, and the lonely sunflower growing at the edge of the ditch.

When I returned to the threshing-floor, my happy mood was immediately clouded. I saw Jamila. She was depressed, her face was pinched, and there were dark rings under her eyes; she had probably spent a sleepless night. She neither smiled nor spoke to me, but when Orozmat appeared, Jamila went up to him and said:

"Take your old trap back! Send me any place you want, but I won't deliver grain to the station any more!"

"What's the matter, child? Did a horsefly bite you?" he asked in a surprised and kindly voice.

"Horseflies bite calves! And don't ask me why! I said I won't go, and that's all there is to it!"

The smile disappeared from Orozmat's face.

"I don't care what you want! You'll do your job all the same!" He banged his crutch on the ground. "If someone's offended you, tell me and I'll break this crutch over his head! But if not, stop playing the fool: it's soldiers' bread you're delivering, and your own husband is out there!" He turned sharply and hobbled away.

Jamila was embarrassed, she blushed and then sighed softly as she looked at Daniyar. He stood off to a side with his back to her, tightening the hame-strap on the horse's collar with jerky movements. He had heard their conversation. For a while Jamila remained standing where she was, fingering her whip. Then she shrugged recklessly and walked towards her trap.

That day we returned earlier than usual. Daniyar raced his horses all the way. Jamila was silent and gloomy, while I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the scorched and blackened steppe before me. Why, only yesterday it had been so different. It was as if I had heard about it in a fairy-tale, and the picture of happiness that had awakened my consciousness would not leave me for a moment. I had grasped the brightest edge of life, recreating it in my imagination in its every detail until it alone enveloped my every thought. I could not rest until I had stolen a piece of heavy white paper from the weigher. I ran off and hid behind a haystack. There, with my heart thumping in my throat, I laid it on the smooth wooden back of a spade which I had picked up on my way.

"Thc blessings of Allah be upon it!" I whispered, as my father had once done when putting me on a horse for the first time. Then I touched the paper with my pencil. These were my first untutored lines.

But when Daniyar's features appeared on the sheet, I forgot everything else. I imagined the August steppe at night, I imagined that I heard his song and saw him with his head thrown back and his throat bare, I saw Jamila leaning against his shoulder. There was the trap and the two of them, there were the reins thrown over the front of the trap, the horses' backs joggling in the darkness, and beyond that, the steppe and the far- away stars.

I was so engrossed in my work that I did not hear a thing and started when I heard someone's voice over me.

"Are you deaf?"

It was Jamila. I was embarrassed and blushed, but was not quick enough in hiding my drawing.

"The traps are all loaded and we've been shooting for you this past hour! What are you doing here? What's this?" she asked, picking up the drawing. "Hm!" she shrugged angrily.

I wished I were dead. She kept looking at the drawing for a long, long time and finally raised her sad, moist eyes to me.

"Give it to me, *kichine bala.* I'll put it away as a remembrance," she said softly. Folding the sheet, she tucked it inside her blouse.

We were already on the road, yet I could not come back to reality. It all seemed a dream. I could not believe that I had drawn something resembling that which I had seen. Yet, somewhere deep in my heart there grew a naive feeling of triumph, even pride, and dreams one more daring than the next, one more enticing than the next, made my head swim. I now wanted to do many more pictures. These would be paintings, not pencil drawings. I paid no attention to our fast pace. It was Daniyar who was racing his horses. Jamila did not fall behind. She kept looking about, at times she would smile in a touching, self-conscious way. I also smiled, for it meant she was no longer angry at us, and if she would ask him to, Daniyar would sing again that evening.

That day we arrived at the station much earlier than usual, and our horses were in a lather. No sooner had we pulled up the traps than Daniyar began unloading. What had come over him? Why was he in such a rush? From time to time he would stop and follow the trains thundering by with a long, thoughtful gaze. Jamila followed his gaze in an effort to understand what he was thinking about.

"Come here, this horse-shoe's loose. Help me pull it off," she called to him.

When Daniyar had pried it off the hoof he was holding between his knees and had straightened up, Jamila looked into his eyes and asked softly:

"What's the matter? Don't you understand? Or am I the only girl in the world?"

Daniyar looked away and did not answer. "Do you think it's easy on me?" she sighed.

Daniyar's eyebrows twitched, he gazed at her with love and sadness and replied so quietly I could not hear his words; then he quickly walked back to his trap, looking rather pleased. He stroked the horse- shoe as he walked.

What consolation could he have found in Jamila's words? And could a person find consolation if one sighed heavily and said: "Do you think it's easy on me?"

We were through with the unloading and were ready to leave, when a gaunt, wounded soldier in a creased greatcoat with a knapsack slung over his shoulder entered the yard of the receiving station. A few minutes before a train had pulled in. The soldier looked round and shouted:

"Is there anyone here from Kurkureu village?"

"I'm from Kurkureu!" I answered, wondering who the man could be.

"Whose boy are you?" the soldier asked, walking towards me.

Suddenly he saw Jamila, and a surprised and happy grin spread over his face.

"Kerim? Is it you?" she cried.

"Jamila, my dear!" he shouted and squeezed her hand tightly in his. He was her fellow-villager.

"What luck! It certainly was lucky that I looked in here!" he said excitedly. "I just left Sadyk, we were in the hospital together, and with Allah to protect him, he'll be out in a month or two. When I was ready to leave I told him to write his wife a letter and promised to deliver it. Here it is, signed and sealed." Kerim handed her a triangular envelope.

Jamila snatched it, blushed, then blanched and looked at Daniyar, cautiously from the corner of her eye. He stood beside the trap. As that day at the threshing-floor, he was a lonely figure standing beside the trap, his eyes full of wild despair as he looked straight at her.

By then people began gathering from all sides; the soldier discovered his friends and relations in the crowd, he was bombarded with questions. Before Jamila had a chance to thank him for the letter, Daniyar's trap clattered by, flew out of the yard and, raising a cloud of dust, went bumping along the rutted road. "He must be crazy!" the people shouted.

The soldier had been led away by the crowd, while Jamila and I remained standing in the middle of the yard, looking at the fast-disappearing cloud of dust.

"Come on, *djene," I* said.

"You go on, leave me alone!" she said bitterly.

Thus, for the first time, each of us rode back alone. The stifling heat burned my parched lips. The cracked, scorched earth that had turned white from the heat of the day seemed to be cooling off and was becoming covered with salty grey flakes. The unsteady, formless sun shimmered in the salty white mist. There, above the dim horizon, orange-red storm clouds were gathering. Blasts of dry wind deposited white dust on the horses' muzzles, it waved their manes and passed on, rippling the clumps of wormwood on the hillocks.

"It looks as though it is going to rain," I thought.

I felt so lonely and anxious! I whipped my horses on, for they kept slowing down to a walk. Skinny, long-legged bustards scampered past into the ravine. Withered burdock leaves were swept along the road; no burdocks grow on our lands, they had been blown over from the Kazakh side. The sun went down. There was not a soul in sight, nothing save the heat-exhausted steppe.

It was dark when I reached the threshing-floor. Thc air was still and windless. I called to Daniyar.

"He's gone to the river," the watchman answered. "It's so close, everyone's gone home. There's nothing to do at a threshing-floor if there's no wind!"

I led the horses out to pasture and decided to go down to the river. I knew Daniyar's favourite place near the Cliff.

He was sitting there, hunched over, his head resting on his knees, and listening to the rushing water below. I wanted to walk up to him, put my arm around him and say something comforting. But what could I say? I stood off to a side and finally turned back. After that I lay for a long time on the straw, looking up at the cloud-darkened sky and wondering why life was so complicated and so difficult to understand.

Jamila had not yet returned. What could have happened to her? I could not fall asleep, though I was dead tired. Lightning flashed in the cloud banks high over the mountains.

When Daniyar came back to the threshing-floor I was still awake.

He wandered about aimlessly, keeping a watchful eye on the road.

Then he slumped down on the straw near by. I was certain he would leave, that he would never remain in the village! But where could he go? Alone and homeless, he had no one waiting for him. As I was dozing off I heard the slow clatter of an approaching trap. It was probably Jamila returning.

I don't know how long I had been sleeping when I felt the straw rustle at my ear. Someone passed, and it seemed as if a wet wing brushed my shoulder. I opened my eyes. It was Jamila. She had come from the river, her dress was cool and damp. She stopped, looked round anxiously, and sat down beside Daniyar.

"Daniyar, I've come, I've come to you myself," she said softly.

All was silence. A bolt of lightning slipped earthward soundlessly. "Are you angry? Are you very angry?"

Silence again. Then came the soft splash of a clump of loosened soil sliding into the water.

"Is it my fault? And it's not your fault, either."

Thunder rolled over the mountains. Jamila's profile was clearly etched in a flash of lightning. She clung to Daniyar. Her shoulders

heaved convulsively within his embrace. Then she stretched out on the straw beside him.

A hot wind blew in from the steppe. It whirled the straw about, it crashed into a dilapidated tent at the edge of the threshing-floor and spun off like a crazy top down the road. Once again there was the dry crack of thunder and blue flashes pierced the clouds. It was both frightening and exciting--a storm was coming, the last storm of summer.

"Did you think I would prefer him to you?" Jamila whispered passionately. "Never, never, never! He never loved me. He even sent me his regards as a postscript. I don't need him or his love that has come too late, and I don't care what people will say! My lonely darling, I'll never let you go! I've loved you for a long time. I loved you and waited for you even before I knew you and you came, as if you knew that I was waiting for you! "

Crooked light-blue flashes of lightning plunged into the river near the cliff. Slanting icy raindrops pattered on the straw.

"Jamila, my beloved Jamila!" Daniyar whispered, calling her by every loving Kazakh and Kirghiz name. "I, too, have loved you for a long time. I dreamed of you in the trenches and I knew that my love was in my native land. It was you, my Jamila! Turn round and let me look into your eyes!"

The storm was upon us.

The felt covering was wrenched off the tent and flapped like a wounded bird. The rain, whipped from below by the wind, came down in torrents and seemed to be kissing the earth. Peals of thunder rolled across the sky like an avalanche. Bright flashes of lightning illuminated the mountains, the wind howled and raged in the ravine.

It was pouring. I lay hidden in the straw, feeling my own heart racing in my breast. I was happy. I felt as one who has come out into the sunshine after a long illness. Both the rain and the flashes of lightning reached me beneath the straw, but I was content and fell asleep with a smile, uncertain of whether the sound I heard was the subsiding rustling in the straw or Daniyar and Jamila whispering.

The rainy season was close at hand. It would soon be autumn.

There was the damp autumn smell of wormwood and wet straw in the air. What awaited us in the autumn? For some reason or other, I did not think about that then.

That autumn, after a two-year break, I went back to school. After lessons were over I often came to the steep river bank and sat beside the now dead and deserted threshing-floor. Here I drew my first sketches. I recall that even then I realised my work was far from good.

"These paints are no good! If only I had *real* paints!" I would say, though I had no idea of what "real" paints should be like. It was not until much later that I discovered the existence of real oil paints in little tubes. Be that as it may, my teachers were right it seemed: I needed tutoring. However, it was only a dream, for there was still no word from my brothers, and my mother would never have let me, her only son and the *djigit* and breadwinner of two families, go away to study. I dared not even bring up the subject. As if to make things harder for me the autumn that year was so beautiful, it cried to be painted.

The icy Kurkureu became shallow, the tops of the stones at the rapids were covered with dark-green and orange moss. The tender, naked stems of the rose-willows appeared red in the early frosts, but the small poplars still retained their firm, short yellow leaves.

The smoky, rain-drenched herdsmen's tents were black spots on the reddish after-grass of the flood-meadow; ribbons of acrid blue smoke curled over the smoke holes. The lean stallions whinnied loudly, the mares were drifting away and it would be difficult to keep them in herds till the spring. Flocks of cattle that had come down from the mountains wandered over the stubble. The dry, darkened steppe was criss-crossed by trampled paths.

Soon the steppe wind began to blow, the sky became muddy and the cold rains, the forerunners of snow, began. One fairly pleasant day I went down to the river, attracted by a fiery bush of mountain ash growing on a sandbar. I sat down among the rose-willows, not far from the ford. Evening was falling. Suddenly I saw two people. They had probably crossed the ford. They were Daniyar and Jamila. I could not tear my eyes from their tense, yet determined faces. Daniyar had a knapsack slung over his shoulder; he walked quickly, and the flaps of his open greatcoat hit against the tops of his worn tarpaulin boots.

Jamila had tied a white kerchief around her head and it had slid back. She wore her best print dress, the one she liked to show off in during Fair days, and a quilted corduroy jacket over it. In one hand she carried a small bundle and hung on to a strap of Daniyar's knapsack with the other. They were talking.

They followed the path across the ravine through the thicket of needle grass. I watched them, not knowing what to do. Should I call to them? But I could not utter a sound.

The last crimson rays slipped over the quick-moving clouds above the mountain range, and it began to get dark fast. Daniyar and Jamila never once turned back as they walked towards the railroad siding.

Their heads bobbed in the thicket once or twice and then disappeared completely.

"Jamila-a-a-a!" I shouted at the top of my voice. "A-a-a!" came the forlorn echo.

"Jamila-a-a-a!" I shouted again and ran after them madly across the river.

Sprays of icy drops hit my face. My clothes were drenched, but I ran on, not seeing the ground beneath my feet. Then I tripped and fell. I lay there without raising my head with the hot tears streaming down my face. The darkness seemed to weigh down upon my shoulders. I could hear the thin stems of needle grass wailing mournfully.

"Jamila! Jamila!" I sobbed.

I was saying good-bye to the two people closest and dearest to me. And as I lay there on the ground I suddenly realised that I loved Jamila. Yes, she was my first love, the love of my childhood.

I lay there for a long time, my head buried in my wet arm. I was saying good-bye to more than Jamila and Daniyar--I was saying good- bye to my childhood.

When I finally straggled home at dark, there was a great commotion in the yard; stirrups jangled, people were saddling their horses, and a drunken Osmon was prancing about on his steed, bellowing at the top of his voice:

"We should've chased that stray mongrel from the village long ago!

It's a disgrace to our whole kin! If I ever lay eyes on him, I'll kill him on the spot! And I don't care if I'm jailed for it--I won't permit every passing tramp to steal our women! Come on, *djigits,* he won't get away, we'll catch him at the station!"

My blood froze: which road would they take? But once I was sure they had taken the highroad to the station and not the one to the siding, I slipped into the house and curled up under my father's sheepskin coat, covering my head so no one could see my tears.

How much talk and gossip there was in the village after that! The women vied with each other in condemning Jamila.

"She's a fool to have left such a family and trampled her happiness!"

"I wonder what attracted her to this pauper?"

"Don't worry, the little beauty will come to her senses, but it'll be too late then."

"That's what I say! And what's wrong with Sadyk? Isn't he a good husband and provider? Why, he's the best *djigit* in the village!"

"And what about her mother-in-law? It's not many who have a mother-in-law like that! You'd have to look far and wide for another such *baibiche!* The little fool has ruined her life for no good reason at all!"

Perhaps I was the only one who did not condemn Jamila, my former *djene.* I, for one, knew that in his soul Daniyar was richer than any of us. No, I could not believe that Jamila would be unhappy with him. But I felt sorry for my mother. It seemed that when Jamila left, her former strength abandoned her also. She looked forlorn and haggard, and, as I now realise, she could not accept the fact that Fate could break all the old patterns so forcefully. If a great tree is uprooted by a storm it will never rise again. Before, my mother's pride would never have permitted her to ask anyone to thread a needle for her. But one day I came home from school and saw that her hands were trembling, that she could not see the needle's eye and was weeping.

"Here, thread it for me," she asked and sighed heavily. .Jamila will come to no good end. Ah, what a housekeeper she would have made! But she's gone. She's renounced us. Why did she go? Was she so badly off here?"

I wanted to embrace my mother and reassure her, to tell her what sort of a person Daniyar really was, but I did not dare to, for I would have insulted her terribly.

But one day the innocent part I had played in the whole affair ceased to be a secret.

Soon Sadyk returned. Naturally, he grieved, though when drunk he said to Osmon:

"Good riddance, if she's gone! She'll die in the gutter someplace. There's enough women to go around. Even a golden-haired one isn't worth the puniest of fellows."

"Sure!" Osmon answered. "I'm just sorry I didn't catch him, 'cause I would've killed him on the spot! And as for her, I'd have tied her hair to my horse's tail! They've probably gone south, to the cotton farms, or else to the Kazakhs. It's not the first time he's tramped about! But I just can't get it through my head--how could it have happened in the first place? Nobody knew a thing, and who would have ever suspected it?

The bitch fixed it all up herself! If I could only lay my hands on her!"

I felt like saying: "You can't forget how she slighted you, back in the field. What a mean and petty soul you have!"

One day I was sitting at home, doing a picture for our school newspaper. My mother was fussing about the stove. Suddenly, Sadyk burst into the room, He was pale and his eyes were narrowed viciously as he ran up to me and shoved a piece of paper in my face.

"Did you do this?"

I was struck dumb. It was my first drawing. Daniyar and Jamila seemed alive as they looked at me from the sheet of paper.

"Yes, I did."

"Who's this?" he said, poking the page. "Daniyar."

"Traitor!" Sadyk screamed.

He tore the drawing to bits and stamped out, banging the door behind him.

After a long and depressing silence my mother asked: "Did you know about it?"

"Yes."

She stood there, leaning against the stove, looking at me with dismay and reproach. And when I said: "I'll draw them again!" she shook her head sadly.

I looked at the scraps of paper lying on the floor, a hurt I could not endure choking me. Let them think I was a traitor. Whom had I betrayed? My family? My kin? But I had not betrayed the truth of life, the truth of these two people! I could not say this, for even my own mother would not understand.

Everything swam before my eyes, it seemed that the bits of paper were alive and moving about the floor. The memory of Daniyar and Jamila looking at me from the paper was so vivid that suddenly I seemed to hear Daniyar's song, the one he had sung that memorable August night. Recalling their departure from the village, an irresistible desire to take to the road rose within me. I would go as they had, firmly and courageously, to enter upon the difficult road to happiness.

"I want to go away to study. Tell my father. I want to be an artist!" I said to my mother.

I was certain that she would begin to reproach me and weep, recalling my brothers who had died in the war. But, to my surprise, she did not weep. She said softly and sadly:

"If that's what you want to do. My fledglings have all grown strong and are flying off in their own directions. How are we to know how high you'll fly? Perhaps you're right. Go then. Maybe you'll change your mind when you get there. Drawing and smearing paint is no trade. You'll study and find out if it's so. And don't forget us."

From that day the Small House separated from us. Soon after I left to study. That's all there is to the story.

After I graduated from art school I was recommended for the Academy, and my diploma work was a painting I had dreamed of for many years.

It is not difficult to guess that it was a painting of Daniyar and Jamila. They are seen walking along the autumn road across the steppe. Before them is the vast and bright horizon.

Though my painting is not perfect--for skill does not come all at once--I treasure it, for it is my first truly creative experience.

There are times when I am dissatisfied with my work. There are difficult moments when I lose faith in myself. At such times I am drawn to this painting that has become so dear to me, to Daniyar and Jamila. I gaze at them and each time speak to them.

"Where are you now, what roads are you treading? We have many new roads in the steppe across Kazakhstan, up to the Altai and through Siberia! Many brave people are working there. Perhaps you, too, are there? My Jamila, you left with never a backward glance. Perhaps you are tired, perhaps you have lost faith in yourself? Lean against Daniyar, let him sing you his song of love, of the earth, of life. May the steppe reflect it and blossom in every hue and colour! May you recall that August night! Keep on, Jamila, never regret what you've done, for you have found your difficult happiness!"

As I look at them I hear Daniyar's voice. He is calling to me to set out, and that means it is time for me to prepare for the journey. I will cross the steppe to my native village and will find new colours there.

May my every brush-stroke resound with Daniyar's song! May my every brush-stroke echo the sound of Jamila's beating heart!

1958

ALBERT CAMUS

The Myth of Sisyphus

Albert Camus, son of a working-class family, was born in Algeria in 1913. He spent the early years of his life in North Africa, where he worked at various jobs—at the weather bureau, an automobile-accessory firm, a shipping company—to help pay for his courses at the University of Algiers. He then turned to journalism as a career. His report on the unhappy state of the Muslims of the Kabylie region aroused the Algerian government to action and brought him public notice. From 1935 to 1938, he ran the Théâtre de l'Équipe, a theatrical company that produced plays by Malraux, Gide, Synge, Dostoevsky, and others. During World War II, he was one of the leading writers of the French Resistance and editor of *Combat*, then an important underground newspaper. Camus was always very active in the theater, and several of his plays have been published and produced. His books, including *The Stranger, The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom*, and *The Rebel*, as well as his plays, have assured his preeminent position in modern French letters. In 1957 Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His sudden death on January 4, 1960, cut short the career of one of the most important literary figures of the Western world when he was at the very summit of his powers.

Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien

PREFACE

FOR ME *"The Myth of Sisyphus" marks the beginning of an idea which I was to pursue in* The Rebel. *It attempts to resolve the problem of suicide, as* The Rebel *attempts to resolve that of murder, in both cases without the aid of eternal values which, temporarily perhaps, are absent or distorted in contemporary Europe. The fundamental subject of "The Myth of Sisyphus" is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer, underlying and appearing through the paradoxes which cover it, is this: even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate. Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amid the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction. Although "The Myth of Sisyphus" poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert*.

ALBERT CAMUS
PARIS 1955

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

for PASCAL PIA

O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible. —Pindar, *Pythian* iii

THE PAGES that follow deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in the age—and not with an absurd philosophy which our time, properly speaking, has not known. It is therefore simply fair to point out, at the outset, what these pages owe to certain contemporary thinkers. It is so far from my intention to hide this that they will be found cited and commented upon throughout this work.

But it is useful to note at the same time that the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting-point. In this sense it may be said that there is something

provisional in my commentary: one cannot prejudge the position it entails. There will be found here merely the description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady. No metaphysic, no belief is involved in it for the moment. These are the limits and the only bias of this book. Certain personal experiences urge me to make this clear.

AN ABSURD REASONING

Absurdity and Suicide

THERE is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer. And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of that reply, for it will precede the definitive act. These are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect.

If I ask myself how to judge that this question is more urgent than that, I reply that one judges by the actions it entails. I have never seen anyone die for the ontological argument. Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense, he did right.[*1] That truth was not worth the stake. Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference. To tell the truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions. How to answer it? On all essential problems (I mean thereby those that run the risk of leading to death or those that intensify the passion of living) there are probably but two methods of thought: the method of La Palisse and the method of Don Quixote. Solely the balance between evidence and lyricism can allow us to achieve simultaneously emotion and lucidity. In a subject at once so humble and so heavy with emotion, the learned and classical dialectic must yield, one can see, to a more modest attitude of mind deriving at one and the same time from common sense and understanding.

Suicide has never been dealt with except as a social phenomenon. On the contrary, we are concerned here, at the outset, with the relationship between individual thought and suicide. An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art. The man himself is ignorant of it. One evening he pulls the trigger or jumps. Of an apartment-building manager who had killed himself I was told that he had lost his daughter five years before, that he had changed greatly since, and that that experience had “undermined” him. A more exact word cannot be imagined. Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined. Society has but little connection with such beginnings. The worm is in man’s heart. That is where it must be sought. One must follow and understand this fatal game that leads from lucidity in the face of existence to flight from light.

There are many causes for a suicide, and generally the most obvious ones were not the most powerful. Rarely is suicide committed (yet the hypothesis is not excluded) through reflection. What sets off the crisis is almost always unverifiable. Newspapers often speak of “personal sorrows” or of “incurable illness.” These explanations are plausible. But one would have to know whether a friend of the desperate man had not that very day addressed him indifferently. He

is the guilty one. For that is enough to precipitate all the rancors and all the boredom still in suspension.[*2]

But if it is hard to fix the precise instant, the subtle step when the mind opted for death, it is easier to deduce from the act itself the consequences it implies. In a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it. Let's not go too far in such analogies, however, but rather return to everyday words. It is merely confessing that that "is not worth the trouble." Living, naturally, is never easy. You continue making the gestures commanded by existence for many reasons, the first of which is habit. Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.

What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy men having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death.

The subject of this essay is precisely this relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd. The principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his action. Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct. It is legitimate to wonder, clearly and without false pathos, whether a conclusion of this importance requires forsaking as rapidly as possible an incomprehensible condition. I am speaking, of course, of men inclined to be in harmony with themselves.

Stated clearly, this problem may seem both simple and insoluble. But it is wrongly assumed that simple questions involve answers that are no less simple and that evidence implies evidence. *A priori* and reversing the terms of the problem, just as one does or does not kill oneself, it seems that there are but two philosophical solutions, either yes or no. This would be too easy. But allowance must be made for those who, without concluding, continue questioning. Here I am only slightly indulging in irony: this is the majority. I notice also that those who answer "no" act as if they thought "yes." As a matter of fact, if I accept the Nietzschean criterion, they think "yes" in one way or another. On the other hand, it often happens that those who commit suicide were assured of the meaning of life. These contradictions are constant. It may even be said that they have never been so keen as on this point where, on the contrary, logic seems so desirable. It is a commonplace to compare philosophical theories and the behavior of those who profess them. But it must be said that of the thinkers who refused a meaning to life none except Kirilov who belongs to literature, Peregrinos who is born of legend,[*3] and Jules Lequier who belongs to hypothesis, admitted his logic to the point of refusing that life. Schopenhauer is often cited, as a fit subject for laughter, because he praised suicide while seated at a well-set table. This is no subject for joking. That way of not taking the tragic seriously is not so grievous, but it helps to judge a man.

In the face of such contradictions and obscurities must we conclude that there is no relationship between the opinion one has about life and the act one commits to leave it? Let us not exaggerate in this direction. In a man's attachment to life there is something stronger than all the ills in the world. The body's judgment is as good as the

mind's, and the body shrinks from annihilation. We get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking. In that race which daily hastens us toward death, the body maintains its irreparable lead. In short, the essence of that contradiction lies in what I shall call the act of eluding because it is both less and more than diversion in the Pascalian sense. Eluding is the invariable game. The typical act of eluding, the fatal evasion that constitutes the third theme of this essay, is hope. Hope of another life one must "deserve" or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it.

Thus everything contributes to spreading confusion. Hitherto, and it has not been wasted effort, people have played on words and pretended to believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily leads to declaring that it is not worth living. In truth, there is no necessary common measure between these two judgments. One merely has to refuse to be misled by the confusions, divorces, and inconsistencies previously pointed out. One must brush everything aside and go straight to the real problem. One kills oneself because life is not worth living, that is certainly a truth—yet an unfruitful one because it is a truism. But does that insult to existence, that flat denial in which it is plunged come from the fact that it has no meaning? Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide—this is what must be clarified, hunted down, and elucidated while brushing aside all the rest. Does the Absurd dictate death? This problem must be given priority over others, outside all methods of thought and all exercises of the disinterested mind. Shades of meaning, contradictions, the psychology that an "objective" mind can always introduce into all problems have no place in this pursuit and this passion. It calls simply for an unjust—in other words, logical—thought. That is not easy. It is always easy to be logical. It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end. Men who die by their own hand consequently follow to its conclusion their emotional inclination. Reflection on suicide gives me an opportunity to raise the only problem to interest me: is there a logic to the point of death? I cannot know unless I pursue, without reckless passion, in the sole light of evidence, the reasoning of which I am here suggesting the source. This is what I call an absurd reasoning. Many have begun it. I do not yet know whether or not they kept to it.

When Karl Jaspers, revealing the impossibility of constituting the world as a unity, exclaims: "This limitation leads me to myself, where I can no longer withdraw behind an objective point of view that I am merely representing, where neither I myself nor the existence of others can any longer become an object for me," he is evoking after many others those waterless deserts where thought reaches its confines. After many others, yes indeed, but how eager they were to get out of them! At that last crossroad where thought hesitates, many men have arrived and even some of the humblest. They then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life. Others, princes of the mind, abdicated likewise, but they initiated the suicide of their thought in its purest revolt. The real effort is to stay there, rather, in so far as that is possible, and to examine closely the odd vegetation of those distant regions. Tenacity and acumen are privileged spectators of this inhuman show in which absurdity, hope, and death carry on their dialogue. The mind can then analyze the figures of that elementary yet subtle dance before illustrating them and reliving them itself.

ABSURD WALLS

Like great works, deep feelings always mean more than they are conscious of saying. The regularity of an impulse or a repulsion in a

soul is encountered again in habits of doing or thinking, is reproduced in consequences of which the soul itself knows nothing. Great feelings take with them their own universe, splendid or abject. They light up with their passion an exclusive world in which they recognize their climate. There is a universe of jealousy, of ambition, of selfishness, or of generosity. A universe—in other words, a metaphysic and an attitude of mind. What is true of already specialized feelings will be even more so of emotions basically as indeterminate, simultaneously as vague and as "definite," as remote and as "present" as those furnished us by beauty or aroused by absurdity.

At any streetcorner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face. As it is, in its distressing nudity, in its light without effulgence, it is elusive. But that very difficulty deserves reflection. It is probably true that a man remains forever unknown to us and that there is in him something irreducible that escapes us. But *practically* I know men and recognize them by their behavior, by the totality of their deeds, by the consequences caused in life by their presence. Likewise, all those irrational feelings which offer no purchase to analysis. I can define them *practically*, appreciate them *practically*, by gathering together the sum of their consequences in the domain of the intelligence, by seizing and noting all their aspects, by outlining their universe. It is certain that apparently, though I have seen the same actor a hundred times, I shall not for that reason know him any better personally. Yet if I add up the heroes he has personified and if I say that I know him a little better at the hundredth character counted off, this will be felt to contain an element of truth. For this apparent paradox is also an apologue. There is a moral to it. It teaches that a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses. There is thus a lower key of feelings, inaccessible in the heart but partially disclosed by the acts they imply and the attitudes of mind they assume. It is clear that in this way I am defining a method. But it is also evident that that method is one of analysis and not of knowledge. For methods imply metaphysics; unconsciously they disclose conclusions that they often claim not to know yet. Similarly, the last pages of a book are already contained in the first pages. Such a link is inevitable. The method defined here acknowledges the feeling that all true knowledge is impossible. Solely appearances can be enumerated and the climate make itself felt.

Perhaps we shall be able to overtake that elusive feeling of absurdity in the different but closely related worlds of intelligence, of the art of living, or of art itself. The climate of absurdity is in the beginning. The end is the absurd universe and that attitude of mind which lights the world with its true colors to bring out the privileged and implacable visage which that attitude has discerned in it.

* * *

All great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning. Great works are often born on a streetcorner or in a restaurant's revolving door. So it is with absurdity. The absurd world more than others derives its nobility from that abject birth. In certain situations, replying "nothing" when asked what one is thinking about may be pretense in a man. Those who are loved are well aware of this. But if that reply is sincere, if it symbolizes that odd state of soul in which the void becomes eloquent, in which the chain of daily gestures is broken, in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, then it is as it were the first sign of absurdity.

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed

most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. "Begins"—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery. In itself weariness has something sickening about it. Here, I must conclude that it is good. For everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it. There is nothing original about these remarks. But they are obvious; that is enough for a while, during a sketchy reconnaissance in the origins of the absurd. Mere "anxiety," as Heidegger says, is at the source of everything.

Likewise and during every day of an unillustrious life, time carries us. But a moment always comes when we have to carry it. We live on the future: "tomorrow," "later on," "when you have made your way," "you will understand when you are old enough." Such irrelevancies are wonderful, for, after all, it's a matter of dying. Yet a day comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd.[*4]

A step lower and strangeness creeps in: perceiving that the world is "dense," sensing to what a degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, with what intensity nature or a landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia. For a second we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we had attributed to it beforehand, because henceforth we lack the power to make use of that artifice. The world evades us because it becomes itself again. That stage scenery masked by habit becomes again what it is. It withdraws at a distance from us. Just as there are days when under the familiar face of a woman, we see as a stranger her we had loved months or years ago, perhaps we shall come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone. But the time has not yet come. Just one thing: that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.

Men, too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "nausea," as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd. Likewise the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs is also the absurd.

I come at last to death and to the attitude we have toward it. On this point everything has been said and it is only proper to avoid pathos. Yet one will never be sufficiently surprised that everyone lives as if no one "knew." This is because in reality there is no experience of death. Properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious. Here, it is barely possible to speak of

the experience of others' deaths. It is a substitute, an illusion, and it never quite convinces us. That melancholy convention cannot be persuasive. The horror comes in reality from the mathematical aspect of the event. If time frightens us, this is because it works out the problem and the solution comes afterward. All the pretty speeches about the soul will have their contrary convincingly proved, at least for a time. From this inert body on which a slap makes no mark the soul has disappeared. This elementary and definitive aspect of the adventure constitutes the absurd feeling. Under the fatal lighting of that destiny, its uselessness becomes evident. No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable *a priori* in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition.

Let me repeat: all this has been said over and over. I am limiting myself here to making a rapid classification and to pointing out these obvious themes. They run through all literatures and all philosophies. Everyday conversation feeds on them. There is no question of reinventing them. But it is essential to be sure of these facts in order to be able to question oneself subsequently on the primordial question. I am interested—let me repeat again—not so much in absurd discoveries as in their consequences. If one is assured of these facts, what is one to conclude, how far is one to go to elude nothing? Is one to die voluntarily or to hope in spite of everything? Beforehand, it is necessary to take the same rapid inventory on the plane of the intelligence.

* * *

The mind's first step is to distinguish what is true from what is false. However, as soon as thought reflects on itself, what it first discovers is a contradiction. Useless to strive to be convincing in this case. Over the centuries no one has furnished a clearer and more elegant demonstration of the business than Aristotle: "The often ridiculed consequence of these opinions is that they destroy themselves. For by asserting that all is true we assert the truth of the contrary assertion and consequently the falsity of our own thesis (for the contrary assertion does not admit that it can be true). And if one says that all is false, that assertion is itself false. If we declare that solely the assertion opposed to ours is false or else that solely ours is not false, we are nevertheless forced to admit an infinite number of true or false judgments. For the one who expresses a true assertion proclaims simultaneously that it is true, and so on *ad infinitum*."

This vicious circle is but the first of a series in which the mind that studies itself gets lost in a giddy whirling. The very simplicity of these paradoxes makes them irreducible. Whatever may be the plays on words and the acrobatics of logic, to understand is, above all, to unify. The mind's deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal. The cat's universe is not the universe of the anthill. The truism "All thought is anthropomorphic" has no other meaning. Likewise, the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought. If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled. If thought discovered in the shimmering mirrors of phenomena eternal relations capable of summing them up and summing themselves up in a single principle, then would be seen an intellectual joy of which the myth of the blessed would be but a ridiculous imitation. That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama. But the fact of that nostalgia's existence does not imply that it is to be immediately satisfied. For if, bridging the gulf that separates desire from conquest, we assert with Parmenides the reality of the One (whatever it may be), we fall into the ridiculous contradiction of a

mind that asserts total unity and proves by its very assertion its own difference and the diversity it claimed to resolve. This other vicious circle is enough to stifle our hopes.

These are again truisms. I shall again repeat that they are not interesting in themselves but in the consequences that can be deduced from them. I know another truism: it tells me that man is mortal. One can nevertheless count the minds that have deduced the extreme conclusions from it. It is essential to consider as a constant point of reference in this essay the regular hiatus between what we fancy we know and what we really know, practical assent and simulated ignorance which allows us to live with ideas which, if we truly put them to the test, ought to upset our whole life. Faced with this inextricable contradiction of the mind, we shall fully grasp the divorce separating us from our own creations. So long as the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes, everything is reflected and arranged in the unity of its nostalgia. But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding. We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart. After so many centuries of inquiries, so many abdications among thinkers, we are well aware that this is true for all our knowledge. With the exception of professional rationalists, today people despair of true knowledge. If the only significant history of human thought were to be written, it would have to be the history of its successive regrets and its impotences.

Of whom and of what indeed can I say: “I know that!” This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume, all those likewise that have been attributed to it, this upbringing, this origin, this ardor or these silences, this nobility or this vileness. But aspects cannot be added up. This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. Forever I shall be a stranger to myself. In psychology as in logic, there are truths but no truth. Socrates’ “Know thyself” has as much value as the “Be virtuous” of our confessionals. They reveal a nostalgia at the same time as an ignorance. They are sterile exercises on great subjects. They are legitimate only in precisely so far as they are approximate.

And here are trees and I know their gnarled surface, water and I feel its taste. These scents of grass and stars at night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes—how shall I negate this world whose power and strength I feel? Yet all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multicolored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I the time to become indignant? You have already changed theories. So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these

hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more. I have returned to my beginning. I realize that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them, I cannot, for all that, apprehend the world. Were I to trace its entire relief with my finger, I should not know any more. And you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure. A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults? To will is to stir up paradoxes. Everything is ordered in such a way as to bring into being that poisoned peace produced by thoughtlessness, lack of heart, or fatal renunciations.

Hence the intelligence, too, tells me in its way that this world is absurd. Its contrary, blind reason, may well claim that all is clear; I was waiting for proof and longing for it to be right. But despite so many pretentious centuries and over the heads of so many eloquent and persuasive men, I know that is false. On this plane, at least, there is no happiness if I cannot know. That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh. They have nothing to do with the mind. They negate its profound truth, which is to be enchained. In this unintelligible and limited universe, man's fate henceforth assumes its meaning. A horde of irrationals has sprung up and surrounds him until his ultimate end. In his recovered and now studied lucidity, the feeling of the absurd becomes clear and definite. I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together. It binds them one to the other as only hatred can weld two creatures together. This is all I can discern clearly in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place. Let us pause here. If I hold to be true that absurdity that determines my relationship with life, if I become thoroughly imbued with that sentiment that seizes me in face of the world's scenes, with that lucidity imposed on me by the pursuit of a science, I must sacrifice everything to these certainties and I must see them squarely to be able to maintain them. Above all, I must adapt my behavior to them and pursue them in all their consequences. I am speaking here of decency. But I want to know beforehand if thought can live in those deserts.

* * *

I already know that thought has at least entered those deserts. There it found its bread. There it realized that it had previously been feeding on phantoms. It justified some of the most urgent themes of human reflection.

From the moment absurdity is recognized, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one's passions, whether or not one can accept their law, which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt—that is the whole question. It is not, however, the one we shall ask just yet. It stands at the center of this experience. There will be time to come back to it. Let us recognize rather those themes and those impulses born of the desert. It will suffice to enumerate them. They, too, are known to all today. There have always been men to defend the rights of the irrational. The tradition of what may be called humiliated thought has never ceased to exist. The criticism of rationalism has been made so often that it seems unnecessary to begin again. Yet our epoch is marked by the rebirth of those paradoxical systems that strive to trip up the reason as if truly it had always forged ahead. But that is not so much a proof of the efficacy of the reason as of the intensity of its hopes.

On the plane of history, such a constancy of two attitudes illustrates the essential passion of man torn between his urge toward unity and the clear vision he may have of the walls enclosing him.

But never perhaps at any time has the attack on reason been more violent than in ours. Since Zarathustra's great outburst: "By chance it is the oldest nobility in the world. I conferred it upon all things when I proclaimed that above them no eternal will was exercised," since Kierkegaard's fatal illness, "that malady that leads to death with nothing else following it," the significant and tormenting themes of absurd thought have followed one another. Or at least, and this proviso is of capital importance, the themes of irrational and religious thought. From Jaspers to Heidegger, from Kierkegaard to Chestov, from the phenomenologists to Scheler, on the logical plane and on the moral plane, a whole family of minds related by their nostalgia but opposed by their methods or their aims, have persisted in blocking the royal road of reason and in recovering the direct paths of truth. Here I assume these thoughts to be known and lived. Whatever may be or have been their ambitions, all started out from that indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, anguish, or impotence reigns. And what they have in common is precisely the themes so far disclosed. For them, too, it must be said that what matters above all is the conclusions they have managed to draw from those discoveries. That matters so much that they must be examined separately. But for the moment we are concerned solely with their discoveries and their initial experiments. We are concerned solely with noting their agreement. If it would be presumptuous to try to deal with their philosophies, it is possible and sufficient in any case to bring out the climate that is common to them.

Heidegger considers the human condition coldly and announces that that existence is humiliated. The only reality is "anxiety" in the whole chain of beings. To the man lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, fleeting fear. But if that fear becomes conscious of itself, it becomes anguish, the perpetual climate of the lucid man "in whom existence is concentrated." This professor of philosophy writes without trembling and in the most abstract language in the world that "the finite and limited character of human existence is more primordial than man himself." His interest in Kant extends only to recognizing the restricted character of his "pure Reason." This is to conclude at the end of his analyses that "the world can no longer offer anything to the man filled with anguish." This anxiety seems to him so much more important than all the categories in the world that he thinks and talks only of it. He enumerates its aspects: boredom when the ordinary man strives to quash it in him and benumb it; terror when the mind contemplates death. He too does not separate consciousness from the absurd. The consciousness of death is the call of anxiety and "existence then delivers itself its own summons through the intermediary of consciousness." It is the very voice of anguish and it adjures existence "to return from its loss in the anonymous They." For him, too, one must not sleep, but must keep alert until the consummation. He stands in this absurd world and points out its ephemeral character. He seeks his way amid these ruins.

Jaspers despairs of any ontology because he claims that we have lost "naïveté." He knows that we can achieve nothing that will transcend the fatal game of appearances. He knows that the end of the mind is failure. He tarries over the spiritual adventures revealed by history and pitilessly discloses the flaw in each system, the illusion that saved everything, the preaching that hid nothing. In this ravaged world in which the impossibility of knowledge is established, in which everlasting nothingness seems the only reality and irremediable despair seems the only attitude, he tries to recover the Ariadne's thread that leads to divine secrets.

Chestov, for his part, throughout a wonderfully monotonous work, constantly straining toward the same truths, tirelessly demonstrates that the tightest system, the most universal rationalism always stumbles eventually on the irrational of human thought. None of the ironic facts or ridiculous contradictions that depreciate the reason escapes him. One thing only interests him, and that is the exception, whether in the domain of the heart or of the mind. Through the Dostoevskian experiences of the condemned man, the exacerbated adventures of the Nietzschean mind, Hamlet's imprecations, or the bitter aristocracy of an Ibsen, he tracks down, illuminates, and magnifies the human revolt against the irremediable. He refuses the reason its reasons and begins to advance with some decision only in the middle of that colorless desert where all certainties have become stones.

Of all perhaps the most engaging, Kierkegaard, for a part of his existence at least, does more than discover the absurd, he lives it. The man who writes: "The surest of stubborn silences is not to hold one's tongue but to talk" makes sure in the beginning that no truth is absolute or can render satisfactory an existence that is impossible in itself. Don Juan of the understanding, he multiplies pseudonyms and contradictions, writes his *Discourses of Edification* at the same time as that manual of cynical spiritualism, *The Diary of the Seducer*. He refuses consolations, ethics, reliable principles. As for that thorn he feels in his heart, he is careful not to quiet its pain. On the contrary, he awakens it and, in the desperate joy of a man crucified and happy to be so, he builds up piece by piece—lucidity, refusal, make-believe—a category of the man possessed. That face both tender and sneering, those pirouettes followed by a cry from the heart are the absurd spirit itself grappling with a reality beyond its comprehension. And the spiritual adventure that leads Kierkegaard to his beloved scandals begins likewise in the chaos of an experience divested of its setting and relegated to its original incoherence.

On quite a different plane, that of method, Husserl and the phenomenologists, by their very extravagances, reinstate the world in its diversity and deny the transcendent power of the reason. The spiritual universe becomes incalculably enriched through them. The rose petal, the milestone, or the human hand are as important as love, desire, or the laws of gravity. Thinking ceases to be unifying or making a semblance familiar in the guise of a major principle. Thinking is learning all over again to see, to be attentive, to focus consciousness; it is turning every idea and every image, in the manner of Proust, into a privileged moment. What justifies thought is its extreme consciousness. Though more positive than Kierkegaard's or Chestov's, Husserl's manner of proceeding, in the beginning, nevertheless negates the classic method of the reason, disappoints hope, opens to intuition and to the heart a whole proliferation of phenomena, the wealth of which has about it something inhuman. These paths lead to all sciences or to none. This amounts to saying that in this case the means are more important than the end. All that is involved is "an attitude for understanding" and not a consolation. Let me repeat: in the beginning, at very least.

How can one fail to feel the basic relationship of these minds! How can one fail to see that they take their stand around a privileged and bitter moment in which hope has no further place? I want everything to be explained to me or nothing. And the reason is impotent when it hears this cry from the heart. The mind aroused by this insistence seeks and finds nothing but contradictions and nonsense. What I fail to understand is nonsense. The world is peopled with such irrationals. The world itself, whose single meaning I do not understand, is but a vast irrational. If one could only say just once: "This is clear," all would be saved. But these men vie with one

another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos, that all man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him.

All these experiences agree and confirm one another. The mind, when it reaches its limits, must make a judgment and choose its conclusions. This is where suicide and the reply stand. But I wish to reverse the order of the inquiry and start out from the intelligent adventure and come back to daily acts. The experiences called to mind here were born in the desert that we must not leave behind. At least it is essential to know how far they went. At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. This must not be forgotten. This must be clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it. The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of their encounter—these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable.

Philosophical Suicide

The feeling of the absurd is not, for all that, the notion of the absurd. It lays the foundations for it, and that is all. It is not limited to that notion, except in the brief moment when it passes judgment on the universe. Subsequently it has a chance of going further. It is alive; in other words, it must die or else reverberate. So it is with the themes we have gathered together. But there again what interests me is not works or minds, criticism of which would call for another form and another place, but the discovery of what their conclusions have in common. Never, perhaps, have minds been so different. And yet we recognize as identical the spiritual landscapes in which they get under way. Likewise, despite such dissimilar zones of knowledge, the cry that terminates their itinerary rings out in the same way. It is evident that the thinkers we have just recalled have a common climate. To say that that climate is deadly scarcely amounts to playing on words. Living under that stifling sky forces one to get away or to stay. The important thing is to find out how people get away in the first case and why people stay in the second case. This is how I define the problem of suicide and the possible interest in the conclusions of existential philosophy.

But first I want to detour from the direct path. Up to now we have managed to circumscribe the absurd from the outside. One can, however, wonder how much is clear in that notion and by direct analysis try to discover its meaning on the one hand and, on the other, the consequences it involves.

If I accuse an innocent man of a monstrous crime, if I tell a virtuous man that he has coveted his own sister, he will reply that this is absurd. His indignation has its comical aspect. But it also has its fundamental reason. The virtuous man illustrates by that reply the definitive antinomy existing between the deed I am attributing to him and his lifelong principles. “It’s absurd” means “It’s impossible” but also “It’s contradictory.” If I see a man armed only with a sword attack a group of machine guns, I shall consider his act to be absurd. But it is so solely by virtue of the disproportion between his intention and the reality he will encounter, of the contradiction I notice between his true strength and the aim he has in view. Likewise we shall deem a verdict absurd when we contrast it with the verdict the facts apparently dictated. And, similarly, a demonstration by the absurd is achieved by comparing the consequences of such a reasoning with the logical reality one wants to set up. In all these cases, from the simplest to the most complex, the magnitude of the

absurdity will be in direct ratio to the distance between the two terms of my comparison. There are absurd marriages, challenges, rancors, silences, wars, and even peace treaties. For each of them the absurdity springs from a comparison. I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression, but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.

In this particular case and on the plane of intelligence, I can therefore say that the Absurd is not in man (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world, but in their presence together. For the moment it is the only bond uniting them. If I wish to limit myself to facts, I know what man wants, I know what the world offers him, and now I can say that I also know what links them. I have no need to dig deeper. A single certainty is enough for the seeker. He simply has to derive all the consequences from it.

The immediate consequence is also a rule of method. The odd trinity brought to light in this way is certainly not a startling discovery. But it resembles the data of experience in that it is both infinitely simple and infinitely complicated. Its first distinguishing feature in this regard is that it cannot be divided. To destroy one of its terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death. But there can be no absurd outside this world either. And it is by this elementary criterion that I judge the notion of the absurd to be essential and consider that it can stand as the first of my truths. The rule of method alluded to above appears here. If I judge that a thing is true, I must preserve it. If I attempt to solve a problem, at least I must not by that very solution conjure away one of the terms of the problem. For me the sole datum is the absurd. The first and, after all, the only condition of my inquiry is to preserve the very thing that crushes me, consequently to respect what I consider essential in it. I have just defined it as a confrontation and an unceasing struggle.

And carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). Everything that destroys, conjures away, or exorcises these requirements (and, to begin with, consent which overthrows divorce) ruins the absurd and devaluates the attitude that may then be proposed. The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to.

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There exists an obvious fact that seems utterly moral: namely, that a man is always a prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. One has to pay something. A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future. That is natural. But it is just as natural that he should strive to escape the universe of which he is the creator. All the foregoing has significance only on account of this paradox. Certain men, starting from a critique of rationalism, have admitted the absurd climate. Nothing is more instructive in this regard than to scrutinize the way in which they have elaborated their consequences.

Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them. It deserves attention.

I shall merely analyze here as examples a few themes dear to Chestov and Kierkegaard. But Jaspers will provide us, in caricatural form, a typical example of this attitude. As a result the rest will be clearer. He is left powerless to realize the transcendent, incapable of plumbing the depth of experience, and conscious of that universe upset by failure. Will he advance or at least draw the conclusions from that failure? He contributes nothing new. He has found nothing in experience but the confession of his own impotence and no occasion to infer any satisfactory principle. Yet without justification, as he says to himself, he suddenly asserts all at once the transcendent, the essence of experience, and the superhuman significance of life when he writes: "Does not the failure reveal, beyond any possible explanation and interpretation, not the absence but the existence of transcendence?" That existence which, suddenly and through a blind act of human confidence, explains everything, he defines as "the unthinkable unity of the general and the particular." Thus the absurd becomes god (in the broadest meaning of this word) and that inability to understand becomes the existence that illuminates everything. Nothing logically prepares this reasoning. I can call it a leap. And paradoxically can be understood Jaspers's insistence, his infinite patience devoted to making the experience of the transcendent impossible to realize. For the more fleeting that approximation is, the more empty that definition proves to be, and the more real that transcendent is to him; for the passion he devotes to asserting it is in direct proportion to the gap between his powers of explanation and the irrationality of the world and of experience. It thus appears that the more bitterly Jaspers destroys the reason's preconceptions, the more radically he will explain the world. That apostle of humiliated thought will find at the very end of humiliation the means of regenerating being to its very depth.

Mystical thought has familiarized us with such devices. They are just as legitimate as any attitude of mind. But for the moment I am acting as if I took a certain problem seriously. Without judging beforehand the general value of this attitude or its educative power, I mean simply to consider whether it answers the conditions I set myself, whether it is worthy of the conflict that concerns me. Thus I return to Chestov. A commentator relates a remark of his that deserves interest: "The only true solution," he said, "is precisely where human judgment sees no solution. Otherwise, what need would we have of God? We turn toward God only to obtain the impossible. As for the possible, men suffice." If there is a Chestovian philosophy, I can say that it is altogether summed up in this way. For when, at the conclusion of his passionate analyses, Chestov discovers the fundamental absurdity of all existence, he does not say: "This is the absurd," but rather: "This is God: we must rely on him even if he does not correspond to any of our rational categories." So that confusion may not be possible, the Russian philosopher even hints that this God is perhaps full of hatred and hateful, incomprehensible and contradictory; but the more hideous is his face, the more he asserts his power. His greatness is his incoherence. His proof is his inhumanity. One must spring into him and by this leap free oneself from rational illusions. Thus, for Chestov acceptance of the absurd is contemporaneous with the absurd itself. Being aware of it amounts to accepting it, and the whole logical effort of his thought is to bring it out so that at the same time the tremendous hope it involves may burst forth. Let me repeat that this attitude is legitimate. But I am persisting here in considering a single problem and all its consequences. I do not have to examine the emotion of a thought or of an act of faith. I have a whole lifetime to do that. I know that the rationalist finds Chestov's attitude annoying. But I also feel that Chestov is right rather than the rationalist, and I merely want to know if he remains faithful to the commandments of the absurd.

Now, if it is admitted that the absurd is the contrary of hope, it is seen that existential thought for Chestov presupposes the absurd but proves it only to dispel it. Such subtlety of thought is a conjuror's emotional trick. When Chestov elsewhere sets his absurd in opposition to current morality and reason, he calls it truth and redemption. Hence, there is basically in that definition of the absurd an approbation that Chestov grants it. If it is admitted that all the power of that notion lies in the way it runs counter to our elementary hopes, if it is felt that to remain, the absurd requires not to be consented to, then it can be clearly seen that it has lost its true aspect, its human and relative character in order to enter an eternity that is both incomprehensible and satisfying. If there is an absurd, it is in man's universe. The moment the notion transforms itself into eternity's springboard, it ceases to be linked to human lucidity. The absurd is no longer that evidence that man ascertains without consenting to it. The struggle is eluded. Man integrates the absurd and in that communion causes to disappear its essential character, which is opposition, laceration, and divorce. This leap is an escape. Chestov, who is so fond of quoting Hamlet's remark: "The time is out of joint," writes it down with a sort of savage hope that seems to belong to him in particular. For it is not in this sense that Hamlet says it or Shakespeare writes it. The intoxication of the irrational and the vocation of rapture turn a lucid mind away from the absurd. To Chestov reason is useless but there is something beyond reason. To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason.

This leap can at least enlighten us a little more as to the true nature of the absurd. We know that it is worthless except in an equilibrium, that it is, above all, in the comparison and not in the terms of that comparison. But it so happens that Chestov puts all the emphasis on one of the terms and destroys the equilibrium. Our appetite for understanding, our nostalgia for the absolute are explicable only in so far, precisely, as we can understand and explain many things. It is useless to negate the reason absolutely. It has its order in which it is efficacious. It is properly that of human experience. Whence we wanted to make everything clear. If we cannot do so, if the absurd is born on that occasion, it is born precisely at the very meeting-point of that efficacious but limited reason with the ever resurgent irrational. Now, when Chestov rises up against a Hegelian proposition such as "the motion of the solar system takes place in conformity with immutable laws and those laws are its reason," when he devotes all his passion to upsetting Spinoza's rationalism, he concludes, in effect, in favor of the vanity of all reason. Whence, by a natural and illegitimate reversal, to the pre-eminence of the irrational.[*5] But the transition is not evident. For here may intervene the notion of limit and the notion of level. The laws of nature may be operative up to a certain limit, beyond which they turn against themselves to give birth to the absurd. Or else, they may justify themselves on the level of description without for that reason being true on the level of explanation. Everything is sacrificed here to the irrational, and, the demand for clarity being conjured away, the absurd disappears with one of the terms of its comparison. The absurd man, on the other hand, does not undertake such a leveling process. He recognizes the struggle, does not absolutely scorn reason, and admits the irrational. Thus he again embraces in a single glance all the data of experience and he is little inclined to leap before knowing. He knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope.

What is perceptible in Leo Chestov will be perhaps even more so in Kierkegaard. To be sure, it is hard to outline clear propositions in so elusive a writer. But, despite apparently opposed writings, beyond the pseudonyms, the tricks, and the smiles, can be felt throughout that work, as it were, the presentiment (at the same time as the

apprehension) of a truth which eventually bursts forth in the last works: Kierkegaard likewise takes the leap. His childhood having been so frightened by Christianity, he ultimately returns to its harshest aspect. For him, too, antinomy and paradox become criteria of the religious. Thus, the very thing that led to despair of the meaning and depth of this life now gives it its truth and its clarity. Christianity is the scandal, and what Kierkegaard calls for quite plainly is the third sacrifice required by Ignatius Loyola, the one in which God most rejoices: "The sacrifice of the intellect."[*6] This effect of the "leap" is odd, but must not surprise us any longer. He makes of the absurd the criterion of the other world, whereas it is simply a residue of the experience of this world. "In his failure," says Kierkegaard, "the believer finds his triumph."

It is not for me to wonder to what stirring preaching this attitude is linked. I merely have to wonder if the spectacle of the absurd and its own character justifies it. On this point, I know that it is not so. Upon considering again the content of the absurd, one understands better the method that inspired Kierkegaard. Between the irrational of the world and the insurgent nostalgia of the absurd, he does not maintain the equilibrium. He does not respect the relationship that constitutes, properly speaking, the feeling of absurdity. Sure of being unable to escape the irrational, he wants at least to save himself from that desperate nostalgia that seems to him sterile and devoid of implication. But if he may be right on this point in his judgment, he could not be in his negation. If he substitutes for his cry of revolt a frantic adherence, at once he is led to blind himself to the absurd which hitherto enlightened him and to deify the only certainty he henceforth possesses, the irrational. The important thing, as Abbé Galiani said to Mme d'Epinay, is not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments. Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish, and it runs throughout his whole journal. The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition. An all the more desperate effort since he intermittently perceives its vanity when he speaks of himself, as if neither fear of God nor piety were capable of bringing him to peace. Thus it is that, through a strained subterfuge, he gives the irrational the appearance and God the attributes of the absurd: unjust, incoherent, and incomprehensible. Intelligence alone in him strives to stifle the underlying demands of the human heart. Since nothing is proved, everything can be proved.

Indeed, Kierkegaard himself shows us the path taken. I do not want to suggest anything here, but how can one fail to read in his works the signs of an almost intentional mutilation of the soul to balance the mutilation accepted in regard to the absurd? It is the leitmotiv of the *Journal*. "What I lacked was the animal which *also* belongs to human destiny….But give me a body then." And further on: "Oh! especially in my early youth what should I not have given to be a man, even for six months…what I lack, basically, is a body and the physical conditions of existence." Elsewhere, the same man nevertheless adopts the great cry of hope that has come down through so many centuries and quickened so many hearts, except that of the absurd man. "But for the Christian death is certainly not the end of everything and it implies infinitely more hope than life implies for us, even when that life is overflowing with health and vigor." Reconciliation through scandal is still reconciliation. It allows one perhaps, as can be seen, to derive hope of its contrary, which is death. But even if fellow-feeling inclines one toward that attitude, still it must be said that excess justifies nothing.

That transcends, as the saying goes, the human scale; therefore it must be superhuman. But this "therefore" is superfluous. There is no logical certainty here. There is no experimental probability either. All

I can say is that, in fact, that transcends my scale. If I do not draw a negation from it, at least I do not want to found anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone. I am told again that here the intelligence must sacrifice its pride and the reason bow down. But if I recognize the limits of the reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If that is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up. Nothing more profound, for example, than Kierkegaard's view according to which despair is not a fact but a state: the very state of sin. For sin is what alienates from God. The absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God.[*7] Perhaps this notion will become clearer if I risk this shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God.

It is a matter of living in that state of the absurd. I know on what it is founded, this mind and this world straining against each other without being able to embrace each other. I ask for the rule of life of that state, and what I am offered neglects its basis, negates one of the terms of the painful opposition, demands of me a resignation. I ask what is involved in the condition I recognize as mine; I know it implies obscurity and ignorance; and I am assured that this ignorance explains everything and that this darkness is my light. But there is no reply here to my intent, and this stirring lyricism cannot hide the paradox from me. One must therefore turn away. Kierkegaard may shout in warning: "If man had no eternal consciousness, if, at the bottom of everything, there were merely a wild, seething force producing everything, both large and trifling, in the storm of dark passions, if the bottomless void that nothing can fill underlay all things, what would life be but despair?" This cry is not likely to stop the absurd man. Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable. If in order to elude the anxious question: "What would life be?" one must, like the donkey, feed on the roses of illusion, then the absurd mind, rather than resigning itself to falsehood, prefers to adopt fearlessly Kierkegaard's reply: "despair." Everything considered, a determined soul will always manage.

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I am taking the liberty at this point of calling the existential attitude philosophical suicide. But this does not imply a judgment. It is a convenient way of indicating the movement by which a thought negates itself and tends to transcend itself in its very negation. For the existentials negation is their God. To be precise, that god is maintained only through the negation of human reason.[*8] But, like suicides, gods change with men. There are many ways of leaping, the essential being to leap. Those redeeming negations, those ultimate contradictions which negate the obstacle that has not yet been leaped over, may spring just as well (this is the paradox at which this reasoning aims) from a certain religious inspiration as from the rational order. They always lay claim to the eternal, and it is solely in this that they take the leap.

It must be repeated that the reasoning developed in this essay leaves out altogether the most widespread spiritual attitude of our enlightened age: the one, based on the principle that all is reason, which aims to explain the world. It is natural to give a clear view of the world after accepting the idea that it must be clear. That is even legitimate, but does not concern the reasoning we are following out here. In fact, our aim is to shed light upon the step taken by the mind when, starting from a philosophy of the world's lack of meaning, it ends up by finding a meaning and depth in it. The most touching of those steps is religious in essence; it becomes obvious in the theme of the irrational. But the most paradoxical and most significant is certainly the one that attributes rational reasons to a world it

originally imagined as devoid of any guiding principle. It is impossible in any case to reach the consequences that concern us without having given an idea of this new attainment of the spirit of nostalgia.

I shall examine merely the theme of "the Intention" made fashionable by Husserl and the phenomenologists. I have already alluded to it. Originally Husserl's method negates the classic procedure of the reason. Let me repeat. Thinking is not unifying or making the appearance familiar under the guise of a great principle. Thinking is learning all over again how to see, directing one's consciousness, making of every image a privileged place. In other words, phenomenology declines to explain the world, it wants to be merely a description of actual experience. It confirms absurd thought in its initial assertion that there is no truth, but merely truths. From the evening breeze to this hand on my shoulder, everything has its truth.

Consciousness illuminates it by paying attention to it. Consciousness does not form the object of its understanding, it merely focuses, it is the act of attention, and, to borrow a Bergsonian image, it resembles the projector that suddenly focuses on an image. The difference is that there is no scenario, but a successive and incoherent illustration. In that magic lantern all the pictures are privileged. Consciousness suspends in experience the objects of its attention. Through its miracle it isolates them. Henceforth they are beyond all judgments. This is the "intention" that characterizes consciousness. But the word does not imply any idea of finality; it is taken in its sense of "direction": its only value is topographical.

At first sight, it certainly seems that in this way nothing contradicts the absurd spirit. That apparent modesty of thought that limits itself to describing what it declines to explain, that intentional discipline whence result paradoxically a profound enrichment of experience and the rebirth of the world in its prolixity are absurd procedures. At least at first sight. For methods of thought, in this case as elsewhere, always assume two aspects, one psychological and the other metaphysical.[*9] Thereby they harbor two truths. If the theme of the intentional claims to illustrate merely a psychological attitude, by which reality is drained instead of being explained, nothing in fact separates it from the absurd spirit. It aims to enumerate what it cannot transcend. It affirms solely that without any unifying principle thought can still take delight in describing and understanding every aspect of experience. The truth involved then for each of those aspects is psychological in nature. It simply testifies to the "interest" that reality can offer. It is a way of awaking a sleeping world and of making it vivid to the mind. But if one attempts to extend and give a rational basis to that notion of truth, if one claims to discover in this way the "essence" of each object of knowledge, one restores its depth to experience. For an absurd mind that is incomprehensible. Now, it is this wavering between modesty and assurance that is noticeable in the intentional attitude, and this shimmering of phenomenological thought will illustrate the absurd reasoning better than anything else.

For Husserl speaks likewise of "extra-temporal essences" brought to light by the intention, and he sounds like Plato. All things are not explained by one thing but by all things. I see no difference. To be sure, those ideas or those essences that consciousness "effectuates" at the end of every description are not yet to be considered perfect models. But it is asserted that they are directly present in each datum of perception. There is no longer a single idea explaining everything, but an infinite number of essences giving a meaning to an infinite number of objects. The world comes to a stop, but also lights up. Platonic realism becomes intuitive, but it is still realism. Kierkegaard

was swallowed up in his God; Parmenides plunged thought into the One. But here thought hurls itself into an abstract polytheism. But this is not all: hallucinations and fictions likewise belong to "extra-temporal essences." In the new world of ideas, the species of centaurs collaborates with the more modest species of metropolitan man.

For the absurd man, there was a truth as well as a bitterness in that purely psychological opinion that all aspects of the world are privileged. To say that everything is privileged is tantamount to saying that everything is equivalent. But the metaphysical aspect of that truth is so far-reaching that through an elementary reaction he feels closer perhaps to Plato. He is taught, in fact, that every image presupposes an equally privileged essence. In this ideal world without hierarchy, the formal army is composed solely of generals. To be sure, transcendency had been eliminated. But a sudden shift in thought brings back into the world a sort of fragmentary immanence which restores to the universe its depth.

Am I to fear having carried too far a theme handled with greater circumspection by its creators? I read merely these assertions of Husserl, apparently paradoxical yet rigorously logical if what precedes is accepted: "That which is true is true absolutely, in itself; truth is one, identical with itself, however different the creatures who perceive it, men, monsters, angels or gods." Reason triumphs and trumpets forth with that voice, I cannot deny. What can its assertions mean in the absurd world? The perception of an angel or a god has no meaning for me. That geometrical spot where divine reason ratifies mine will always be incomprehensible to me. There, too, I discern a leap, and though performed in the abstract, it nonetheless means for me forgetting just what I do not want to forget. When farther on Husserl exclaims: "If all masses subject to attraction were to disappear, the law of attraction would not be destroyed but would simply remain without any possible application," I know that I am faced with a metaphysic of consolation. And if I want to discover the point where thought leaves the path of evidence, I have only to reread the parallel reasoning that Husserl voices regarding the mind: "If we could contemplate clearly the exact laws of psychic processes, they would be seen to be likewise eternal and invariable, like the basic laws of theoretical natural science. Hence they would be valid even if there were no psychic process." Even if the mind were not, its laws would be! I see then that of a psychological truth Husserl aims to make a rational rule: after having denied the integrating power of human reason, he leaps by this expedient to eternal Reason.

Husserl's theme of the "concrete universe" cannot then surprise me. If I am told that all essences are not formal but that some are material, that the first are the object of logic and the second of science, this is merely a question of definition. The abstract, I am told, indicates but a part, without consistency in itself, of a concrete universal. But the wavering already noted allows me to throw light on the confusion of these terms. For that may mean that the concrete object of my attention, this sky, the reflection of that water on this coat, alone preserve the prestige of the real that my interest isolates in the world. And I shall not deny it. But that may mean also that this coat itself is universal, has its particular and sufficient essence, belongs to the world of forms. I then realize that merely the order of the procession has been changed. This world has ceased to have its reflection in a higher universe, but the heaven of forms is figured in the host of images of this earth. This changes nothing for me. Rather than encountering here a taste for the concrete, the meaning of the human condition, I find an intellectualism sufficiently unbridled to generalize the concrete itself.

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It is futile to be amazed by the apparent paradox that leads thought to its own negation by the opposite paths of humiliated reason and

triumphal reason. From the abstract god of Husserl to the dazzling god of Kierkegaard the distance is not so great. Reason and the irrational lead to the same preaching. In truth the way matters but little; the will to arrive suffices. The abstract philosopher and the religious philosopher start out from the same disorder and support each other in the same anxiety. But the essential is to explain. Nostalgia is stronger here than knowledge. It is significant that the thought of the epoch is at once one of the most deeply imbued with a philosophy of the non-significance of the world and one of the most divided in its conclusions. It is constantly oscillating between extreme rationalization of reality which tends to break up that thought into standard reasons and its extreme irrationalization which tends to deify it. But this divorce is only apparent. It is a matter of reconciliation, and, in both cases, the leap suffices. It is always wrongly thought that the notion of reason is a one-way notion. To tell the truth, however rigorous it may be in its ambition, this concept is nonetheless just as unstable as others. Reason bears a quite human aspect, but it also is able to turn toward the divine. Since Plotinus, who was the first to reconcile it with the eternal climate, it has learned to turn away from the most cherished of its principles, which is contradiction, in order to integrate into it the strangest, the quite magic one of participation.[*10] It is an instrument of thought and not thought itself. Above all, a man's thought is his nostalgia.

Just as reason was able to soothe the melancholy of Plotinus, it provides modern anguish the means of calming itself in the familiar setting of the eternal. The absurd mind has less luck. For it the world is neither so rational nor so irrational. It is unreasonable and only that. With Husserl the reason eventually has no limits at all. The absurd, on the contrary, establishes its limits since it is powerless to calm its anguish. Kierkegaard independently asserts that a single limit is enough to negate that anguish. But the absurd does not go so far. For it that limit is directed solely at the reason's ambitions. The theme of the irrational, as it is conceived by the existentials, is reason becoming confused and escaping by negating itself. The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits.

Only at the end of this difficult path does the absurd man recognize his true motives. Upon comparing his inner exigence and what is then offered him, he suddenly feels he is going to turn away. In the universe of Husserl the world becomes clear and that longing for familiarity that man's heart harbors becomes useless. In Kierkegaard's apocalypse that desire for clarity must be given up if it wants to be satisfied. Sin is not so much knowing (if it were, everybody would be innocent) as wanting to know. Indeed, it is the only sin of which the absurd man can feel that it constitutes both his guilt and his innocence. He is offered a solution in which all the past contradictions have become merely polemical games. But this is not the way he experienced them. Their truth must be preserved, which consists in not being satisfied. He does not want preaching.

My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. That evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together. Kierkegaard suppresses my nostalgia and Husserl gathers together that universe. That is not what I was expecting. It was a matter of living and thinking with those dislocations, of knowing whether one had to accept or refuse. There can be no question of masking the evidence, of suppressing the absurd by denying one of the terms of its equation. It is essential to know whether one can live with it or whether, on the other hand, logic commands one to die of it. I am not interested in philosophical suicide, but rather in plain suicide. I merely wish to purge it of its emotional content and know its logic

and its integrity. Any other position implies for the absurd mind deceit and the mind's retreat before what the mind itself has brought to light. Husserl claims to obey the desire to escape "the inveterate habit of living and thinking in certain well-known and convenient conditions of existence," but the final leap restores in him the eternal and its comfort. The leap does not represent an extreme danger as Kierkegaard would like it to do. The danger, on the contrary, lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest—that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge. I know also that never has helplessness inspired such striking harmonies as those of Kierkegaard. But if helplessness has its place in the indifferent landscapes of history, it has none in a reasoning whose exigence is now known.

Absurd Freedom

Now the main thing is done, I hold certain facts from which I cannot separate. What I know, what is certain, what I cannot deny, what I cannot reject—this is what counts. I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me—that is what I understand. And these two certainties—my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle—I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition?

If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should *be* this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation. I cannot cross it out with a stroke of the pen. What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support. And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If therefore I want to preserve it, I can through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert. This is what, for the moment, I must remember. At this moment the absurd, so obvious and yet so hard to win, returns to a man's life and finds its home there. At this moment, too, the mind can leave the arid, dried-up path of lucid effort. That path now emerges in daily life. It encounters the world of the anonymous impersonal pronoun "one," but henceforth man enters in with his revolt and his lucidity. He has forgotten how to hope. This hell of the present is his Kingdom at last. All problems recover their sharp edge. Abstract evidence retreats before the poetry of forms and colors. Spiritual conflicts become embodied and return to the abject and magnificent shelter of man's heart. None of them is settled. But all are transfigured. Is one going to die, escape by the leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one's own scale? Is one, on the contrary, going to take up the heart-rending and marvelous wager of the absurd? Let's make a final effort in this regard and draw all our conclusions. The body, affection, creation, action, human nobility will then resume their places in this mad world. At last man will again find there the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference on which he feeds his greatness.

Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting. At a certain point on his path the absurd man is tempted. History is not lacking in either religions or prophets, even without gods. He is asked to leap. All he can reply is that he doesn't fully understand, that it is not obvious. Indeed, he does not want to do anything but what he fully understands. He is assured that this is the sin of pride, but he does not understand the notion of sin; that perhaps hell is in store, but he has not enough imagination to visualize that strange future; that he is losing immortal life, but that seems to him an idle consideration. An attempt is made to get him to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, that is all he feels—his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything. Hence, what he demands of himself is to live *solely* with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is, and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he wants to find out if it is possible to live *without appeal*.

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Now I can broach the notion of suicide. It has already been felt what solution might be given. At this point the problem is reversed. It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate, knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep before him that absurd brought to light by consciousness. Negating one of the terms of the opposition on which he lives amounts to escaping it. To abolish conscious revolt is to elude the problem. The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it. Unlike Eurydice, the absurd dies only when we turn away from it. One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it.

This is where it is seen to what a degree absurd experience is remote from suicide. It may be thought that suicide follows revolt—but wrongly. For it does not represent the logical outcome of revolt. It is just the contrary by the consent it presupposes. Suicide, like the leap, is acceptance at its extreme. Everything is over and man returns to his essential history. His future, his unique and dreadful future—he sees and rushes toward it. In its way, suicide settles the absurd. It engulfs the absurd in the same death. But I know that in order to keep alive, the absurd cannot be settled. It escapes suicide to the extent that it is simultaneously awareness and rejection of death. It is, at the extreme limit of the condemned man's last thought, that shoelace that despite everything he sees a few yards away, on the very brink of his dizzying fall. The contrary of suicide, in fact, is the man condemned to death.

That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of a life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinders, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it. The sight of human pride is unequaled. No disparagement is of any use. That discipline that the mind imposes on itself, that will conjured up out of nothing, that face-to-face struggle have something exceptional about them. To impoverish that reality whose inhumanity constitutes man's majesty is tantamount to

impoverishing him himself. I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life, and yet I must carry it alone. At this juncture, I cannot conceive that a skeptical metaphysics can be joined to an ethics of renunciation.

Consciousness and revolt, these rejections are the contrary of renunciation. Everything that is indomitable and passionate in a human heart quickens them, on the contrary, with its own life. It is essential to die unreconciled and not of one's own free will. Suicide is a repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. This is a first consequence.

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If I remain in that prearranged position which consists in drawing all the conclusions (and nothing else) involved in a newly discovered notion, I am faced with a second paradox. In order to remain faithful to that method, I have nothing to do with the problem of metaphysical liberty. Knowing whether or not man is free doesn't interest me. I can experience only my own freedom. As to it, I can have no general notions, but merely a few clear insights. The problem of "freedom as such" has no meaning. For it is linked in quite a different way with the problem of God. Knowing whether or not man is free involves knowing whether he can have a master. The absurdity peculiar to this problem comes from the fact that the very notion that makes the problem of freedom possible also takes away all its meaning. For in the presence of God there is less a problem of freedom than a problem of evil. You know the alternative: either we are not free and God the all-powerful is responsible for evil. Or we are free and responsible but God is not all- powerful. All the scholastic subtleties have neither added anything to nor subtracted anything from the acuteness of this paradox.

This is why I cannot get lost in the glorification or the mere definition of a notion which eludes me and loses its meaning as soon as it goes beyond the frame of reference of my individual experience. I cannot understand what kind of freedom would be given me by a higher being. I have lost the sense of hierarchy. The only conception of freedom I can have is that of the prisoner or the individual in the midst of the State. The only one I know is freedom of thought and action. Now if the absurd cancels all my chances of eternal freedom, it restores and magnifies, on the other hand, my freedom of action. That privation of hope and future means an increase in man's availability.

Before encountering the absurd, the everyday man lives with aims, a concern for the future or for justification (with regard to whom or what is not the question). He weighs his chances, he counts on "someday," his retirement or the labor of his sons. He still thinks that something in his life can be directed. In truth, he acts as if he were free, even if all the facts make a point of contradicting that liberty. But after the absurd, everything is upset. That idea that "I am," my way of acting as if everything has a meaning (even if, on occasion, I said that nothing has)—all that is given the lie in vertiginous fashion by the absurdity of a possible death. Thinking of the future, establishing aims for oneself, having preferences—all this presupposes a belief in freedom, even if one occasionally ascertains that one doesn't feel it. But at that moment I am well aware that that higher liberty, that freedom *to be*, which alone can serve as basis for a truth, does not exist. Death is there as the only reality. After death the chips are down. I am not even free, either, to perpetuate myself, but a slave, and, above all, a slave without hope of an eternal revolution, without recourse to contempt. And who without

revolution and without contempt can remain a slave? What freedom can exist in the fullest sense without assurance of eternity?

But at the same time the absurd man realizes that hitherto he was bound to that postulate of freedom on the illusion of which he was living. In a certain sense, that hampered him. To the extent to which he imagined a purpose to his life, he adapted himself to the demands of a purpose to be achieved and became the slave of his liberty. Thus I could not act otherwise than as the father (or the engineer or the leader of a nation, or the post-office sub-clerk) that I am preparing to be. I think I can choose to be that rather than something else. I think so unconsciously, to be sure. But at the same time I strengthen my postulate with the beliefs of those around me, with the presumptions of my human environment (others are so sure of being free, and that cheerful mood is so contagious!). However far one may remain from any presumption, moral or social, one is partly influenced by them and even, for the best among them (there are good and bad presumptions), one adapts one's life to them. Thus the absurd man realizes that he was not really free. To speak clearly, to the extent to which I hope, to which I worry about a truth that might be individual to me, about a way of being or creating, to the extent to which I arrange my life and prove thereby that I accept its having a meaning, I create for myself barriers between which I confine my life. I do like so many bureaucrats of the mind and heart who only fill me with disgust and whose only vice, I now see clearly, is to take man's freedom seriously.

The absurd enlightens me on this point: there is no future. Henceforth this is the reason for my inner freedom. I shall use two comparisons here. Mystics, to begin with, find freedom in giving themselves. By losing themselves in their god, by accepting his rules, they become secretly free. In spontaneously accepted slavery they recover a deeper independence. But what does that freedom mean? It may be said, above all, that they *feel* free with regard to themselves, and not so much free as liberated. Likewise, completely turned toward death (taken here as the most obvious absurdity), the absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him. He enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules. It can be seen at this point that the initial themes of existential philosophy keep their entire value. The return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleep represent the first steps of absurd freedom. But it is existential *preaching* that is alluded to, and with it that spiritual leap which basically escapes consciousness. In the same way (this is my second comparison) the slaves of antiquity did not belong to themselves. But they knew that freedom which consists in not feeling responsible.[*11] Death, too, has patrician hands which, while crushing, also liberate.

Losing oneself in that bottomless certainty, feeling henceforth sufficiently remote from one's own life to increase it and take a broad view of it—this involves the principle of a liberation. Such new independence has a definite time limit, like any freedom of action. It does not write a check on eternity. But it takes the place of the illusions of *freedom*, which all stopped with death. The divine availability of the condemned man before whom the prison doors open in a certain early dawn, that unbelievable disinterestedness with regard to everything except for the pure flame of life—it is clear that death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live. This is a second consequence. The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation.

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But what does life mean in such a universe? Nothing else for the moment but indifference to the future and a desire to use up everything that is given. Belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions, teaches the contrary. But this is worth examining.

Knowing whether or not one can live *without appeal* is all that interests me. I do not want to get out of my depth. This aspect of life being given me, can I adapt myself to it? Now, faced with this particular concern, belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the quantity of experiences for the quality. If I convince myself that this life has no other aspect than that of the absurd, if I feel that its whole equilibrium depends on that perpetual opposition between my conscious revolt and the darkness in which it struggles, if I admit that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living. It is not up to me to wonder if this is vulgar or revolting, elegant or deplorable. Once and for all, value judgments are discarded here in favor of factual judgments. I have merely to draw the conclusions from what I can see and to risk nothing that is hypothetical. Supposing that living in this way were not honorable, then true propriety would command me to be dishonorable.

The most living; in the broadest sense, that rule means nothing. It calls for definition. It seems to begin with the fact that the notion of quantity has not been sufficiently explored. For it can account for a large share of human experience. A man's rule of conduct and his scale of values have no meaning except through the quantity and variety of experiences he has been in a position to accumulate. Now, the conditions of modern life impose on the majority of men the same quantity of experiences and consequently the same profound experience. To be sure, there must also be taken into consideration the individual's spontaneous contribution, the "given" element in him. But I cannot judge of that, and let me repeat that my rule here is to get along with the immediate evidence. I see, then, that the individual character of a common code of ethics lies not so much in the ideal importance of its basic principles as in the norm of an experience that it is possible to measure. To stretch a point somewhat, the Greeks had the code of their leisure just as we have the code of our eight-hour day. But already many men among the most tragic cause us to foresee that a longer experience changes this table of values. They make us imagine that adventurer of the everyday who through mere quantity of experiences would break all records (I am purposely using this sports expression) and would thus win his own code of ethics.[*12] Yet let's avoid romanticism and just ask ourselves what such an attitude may mean to a man with his mind made up to take up his bet and to observe strictly what he takes to be the rules of the game.

Breaking all the records is first and foremost being faced with the world as often as possible. How can that be done without contradictions and without playing on words? For on the one hand the absurd teaches that all experiences are unimportant, and on the other it urges toward the greatest quantity of experiences. How, then, can one fail to do as so many of those men I was speaking of earlier— choose the form of life that brings us the most possible of that human matter, thereby introducing a scale of values that on the other hand one claims to reject?

But again it is the absurd and its contradictory life that teaches us. For the mistake is thinking that that quantity of experiences depends on the circumstances of our life when it depends solely on us. Here

we have to be over-simple. To two men living the same number of years, the world always provides the same sum of experiences. It is up to us to be conscious of them. Being aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, and to the maximum. Where lucidity dominates, the scale of values becomes useless. Let's be even more simple. Let us say that the sole obstacle, the sole deficiency to be made good, is constituted by premature death. Thus it is that no depth, no emotion, no passion, and no sacrifice could render equal in the eyes of the absurd man (even if he wished it so) a conscious life of forty years and a lucidity spread over sixty years.[*13] Madness and death are his irreparables. Man does not choose. The absurd and the extra life it involves *therefore do not depend on man's will*, but on its contrary, which is death.[*14] Weighing words carefully, it is altogether a question of luck. One just has to be able to consent to this. There will never be any substitute for twenty years of life and experience.

By what is an odd inconsistency in such an alert race, the Greeks claimed that those who died young were beloved of the gods. And that is true only if you are willing to believe that entering the ridiculous world of the gods is forever losing the purest of joys, which is feeling, and feeling on this earth. The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man. But the word "ideal" rings false in this connection. It is not even his vocation, but merely the third consequence of his reasoning. Having started from an anguished awareness of the inhuman, the meditation on the absurd returns at the end of its itinerary to the very heart of the passionate flames of human revolt.[*15]

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Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and I refuse suicide. I know, to be sure, the dull resonance that vibrates throughout these days. Yet I have but a word to say: that it is necessary. When Nietzsche writes: "It clearly seems that the chief thing in heaven and on earth is to *obey* at length and in a single direction: in the long run there results something for which it is worth the trouble of living on this earth as, for example, virtue, art, music, the dance, reason, the mind—something that transfigures, something delicate, mad, or divine," he elucidates the rule of a really distinguished code of ethics. But he also points the way of the absurd man. Obeying the flame is both the easiest and the hardest thing to do. However, it is good for man to judge himself occasionally. He is alone in being able to do so.

"Prayer," says Alain, "is when night descends over thought." "But the mind must meet the night," reply the mystics and the existentials. Yes, indeed, but not that night that is born under closed eyelids and through the mere will of man—dark, impenetrable night that the mind calls up in order to plunge into it. If it must encounter a night, let it be rather that of despair, which remains lucid—polar night, vigil of the mind, whence will arise perhaps that white and virginal brightness which outlines every object in the light of the intelligence. At that degree, equivalence encounters passionate understanding. Then it is no longer even a question of judging the existential leap. It resumes its place amid the age-old fresco of human attitudes. For the spectator, if he is conscious, that leap is still absurd. In so far as it thinks it solves the paradox, it reinstates it intact. On this score, it is stirring. On this score, everything resumes its place and the absurd world is reborn in all its splendor and diversity.

But it is bad to stop, hard to be satisfied with a single way of seeing, to go without contradiction, perhaps the most subtle of all spiritual

forces. The preceding merely defines a way of thinking. But the point is to live.

*1 From the point of view of the relative value of truth. On the other hand, from the point of view of virile behavior, this scholar's fragility may well make us smile.

*2 Let us not miss this opportunity to point out the relative character of this essay. Suicide may indeed be related to much more honorable considerations—for example, the political suicides of protest, as they were called, during the Chinese revolution.

*3 I have heard of an emulator of Peregrinos, a post-war writer who, after having finished his first book, committed suicide to attract attention to his work. Attention was in fact attracted, but the book was judged no good.

*4 But not in the proper sense. This is not a definition, but rather an *enumeration* of the feelings that may admit of the absurd. Still, the enumeration finished, the absurd has nevertheless not been exhausted.

*5 Apropos of the notion of exception particularly and against Aristotle.

*6 It may be thought that I am neglecting here the essential problem, that of faith. But I am not examining the philosophy of Kierkegaard or of Chestov or, later on, of Husserl (this would call for a different place and a different attitude of mind); I am simply borrowing a theme from them and examining whether its consequences can fit the already established rules. It is merely a matter of persistence.

*7 I did not say "excludes God," which would still amount to asserting.

*8 Let me assert again: it is not the affirmation of God that is questioned here, but rather the logic leading to that affirmation.

*9 Even the most rigorous epistemologies imply metaphysics. And to such a degree that the metaphysic of many contemporary thinkers consists in having nothing but an epistemology.

*10 A.—At that time reason had to adapt itself or die. It adapts itself. With Plotinus, after being logical it becomes æsthetic. Metaphor takes the place of the syllogism.

B.—Moreover, this is not Plotinus' only contribution to phenomenology. This whole attitude is already contained in the concept so dear to the Alexandrian thinker that there is not only an idea of man but also an idea of Socrates.

*11 I am concerned here with a factual comparison, not with an apology of humility. The absurd man is the contrary of the reconciled man.

*12 Quantity sometimes constitutes quality. If I can believe the latest restatements of scientific theory, all matter is constituted by centers of energy. Their greater or lesser quantity makes its specificity more or less remarkable. A billion ions and one ion differ not only in quantity but also in quality. It is easy to find an analogy in human experience.

*13 Same reflection on a notion as different as the idea of eternal nothingness. It neither adds anything to nor subtracts anything from reality. In psychological experience of nothingness, it is by the consideration of what will happen in two thousand years that our own nothingness truly takes on meaning. In one of its aspects, eternal nothingness is made up precisely of the sum of lives to come which will not be ours.

*14 The will is only the agent here: it tends to maintain consciousness. It provides a discipline of life, and that is appreciable.

*15 What matters is coherence. We start out here from acceptance of the world. But Oriental thought teaches that one can indulge in the same effort of logic by choosing *against* the world. That is just as legitimate and gives this essay its perspectives and its limits. But when the negation of the world is pursued just as rigorously, one often achieves (in certain Vedantic schools) similar results regarding, for instance, the indifference of works. In a book of great importance, *Le Choix*, Jean Grenier establishes in this way a veritable "philosophy of indifference."

THE ABSURD MAN

If Stavrogin believes, he does not think he believes. If he does not believe, he does not think he does not believe.
- *The Possessed*

"MY FIELD," said Goethe, "is time." That is indeed the absurd speech. What, in fact, is the absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live *without appeal* and to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, of his revolt devoid of future, and of his mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime. That is his field, that is his action, which he shields from any judgment but his own. A greater life cannot mean for him another life. That would be unfair. I am not even speaking here of that paltry eternity that is called posterity. Mme Roland relied on herself. That rashness was taught a lesson. Posterity is glad to quote her remark, but forgets to judge it. Mme Roland is indifferent to posterity.

There can be no question of holding forth on ethics. I have seen people behave badly with great morality and I note every day that integrity has no need of rules. There is but one moral code that the absurd man can accept, the one that is not separated from God: the one that is dictated. But it so happens that he lives outside that God. As for the others (I mean also immoralism), the absurd man sees

nothing in them but justifications and he has nothing to justify. I start out here from the principle of his innocence.

That innocence is to be feared. “Everything is permitted,” exclaims Ivan Karamazov. That, too, smacks of the absurd. But on condition that it not be taken in the vulgar sense. I don’t know whether or not it has been sufficiently pointed out that it is not an outburst of relief or of joy, but rather a bitter acknowledgment of a fact. The certainty of a God giving a meaning to life far surpasses in attractiveness the ability to behave badly with impunity. The choice would not be hard to make. But there is no choice, and that is where the bitterness comes in. The absurd does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. “Everything is permitted” does not mean that nothing is forbidden.

The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions. It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility. Likewise, if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other. One can be virtuous through a whim.

All systems of morality are based on the idea that an action has consequences that legitimize or cancel it. A mind imbued with the absurd merely judges that those consequences must be considered calmly. It is ready to pay up. In other words, there may be responsible persons, but there are no guilty ones, in its opinion. At very most, such a mind will consent to use past experience as a basis for its future actions. Time will prolong time, and life will serve life. In this field that is both limited and bulging with possibilities, everything in himself, except his lucidity, seems unforeseeable to him. What rule, then, could emanate from that unreasonable order? The only truth that might seem instructive to him is not formal: it comes to life and unfolds in men. The absurd mind cannot so much expect ethical rules at the end of its reasoning as, rather, illustrations and the breath of human lives. The few following images are of this type. They prolong the absurd reasoning by giving it a specific attitude and their warmth.

Do I need to develop the idea that an example is not necessarily an example to be followed (even less so, if possible, in the absurd world) and that these illustrations are not therefore models? Besides the fact that a certain vocation is required for this, one becomes ridiculous, with all due allowance, when drawing from Rousseau the conclusion that one must walk on all fours and from Nietzsche that one must maltreat one’s mother. “It is essential to be absurd,” writes a modern author, “it is not essential to be a dupe.” The attitudes of which I shall treat can assume their whole meaning only through consideration of their contraries. A sub-clerk in the post office is the equal of a conqueror if consciousness is common to them. All experiences are indifferent in this regard. There are some that do either a service or a disservice to man. They do him a service if he is conscious. Otherwise, that has no importance: a man’s failures imply judgment, not of circumstances, but of himself.

I am choosing solely men who aim only to expend themselves or whom I see to be expending themselves. That has no further implications. For the moment I want to speak only of a world in which thoughts, like lives, are devoid of future. Everything that makes man work and get excited utilizes hope. The sole thought that is not mendacious is therefore a sterile thought. In the absurd world the value of a notion or of a life is measured by its sterility.

Don Juanism

If it were sufficient to love, things would be too easy. The more one loves, the stronger the absurd grows. It is not through lack of love that Don Juan goes from woman to woman. It is ridiculous to

represent him as a mystic in quest of total love. But it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and his profound quest. Whence each woman hopes to give him what no one has ever given him. Each time they are utterly wrong and merely manage to make him feel the need of that repetition. “At last,” exclaims one of them, “I have given you love.” Can we be surprised that Don Juan laughs at this? “At last? No,” he says, “but once more.” Why should it be essential to love rarely in order to love much?

* * *

Is Don Juan melancholy? This is not likely. I shall barely have recourse to the legend. That laugh, the conquering insolence, that playfulness and love of the theater are all clear and joyous. Every healthy creature tends to multiply himself. So it is with Don Juan. But, furthermore, melancholy people have two reasons for being so: they don’t know or they hope. Don Juan knows and does not hope. He reminds one of those artists who know their limits, never go beyond them, and in that precarious interval in which they take their spiritual stand enjoy all the wonderful ease of masters. And that is indeed genius: the intelligence that knows its frontiers. Up to the frontier of physical death Don Juan is ignorant of melancholy. The moment he knows, his laugh bursts forth and makes one forgive everything. He was melancholy at the time when he hoped. Today, on the mouth of that woman he recognizes the bitter and comforting taste of the only knowledge. Bitter? Barely: that necessary imperfection that makes happiness perceptible!

It is quite false to try to see in Don Juan a man brought up on Ecclesiastes. For nothing is vanity to him except the hope of another life. He proves this because he gambles that other life against heaven itself. Longing for desire killed by satisfaction, that commonplace of the impotent man, does not belong to him. That is all right for Faust, who believed in God enough to sell himself to the devil. For Don Juan the thing is simpler. Molina’s *Burlador* ever replies to the threats of hell: “What a long respite you give me!” What comes after death is futile, and what a long succession of days for whoever knows how to be alive! Faust craved worldly goods; the poor man had only to stretch out his hand. It already amounted to selling his soul when he was unable to gladden it. As for satiety, Don Juan insists upon it, on the contrary. If he leaves a woman it is not absolutely because he has ceased to desire her. A beautiful woman is always desirable. But he desires another, and no, this is not the same thing.

This life gratifies his every wish, and nothing is worse than losing it. This madman is a great wise man. But men who live on hope do not thrive in this universe where kindness yields to generosity, affection to virile silence, and communion to solitary courage. And all hasten to say: “He was a weakling, an idealist or a saint.” One has to disparage the greatness that insults.

* * *

People are sufficiently annoyed (or that smile of complicity that debases what it admires) by Don Juan’s speeches and by that same remark that he uses on all women. But to anyone who seeks quantity in his joys, the only thing that matters is efficacy. What is the use of complicating the passwords that have stood the test? No one, neither the woman nor the man, listens to them, but rather to the voice that pronounces them. They are the rule, the convention, and the courtesy. After they are spoken the most important still remains to be done. Don Juan is already getting ready for it. Why should he give himself a problem in morality? He is not like Milosz’s Mañara, who damns himself through a desire to be a saint. Hell for him is a thing to be provoked. He has but one reply to divine wrath, and that is human

honor: “I have honor,” he says to the Commander, “and I am keeping my promise because I am a knight.” But it would be just as great an error to make an immoralist of him. In this regard, he is “like everyone else”: he has the moral code of his likes and dislikes. Don Juan can be properly understood only by constant reference to what he commonly symbolizes: the ordinary seducer and the sexual athlete. He *is* an ordinary seducer.[*1] Except for the difference that he is conscious, and that is why he is absurd. A seducer who has become lucid will not change for all that. Seducing is his condition in life. Only in novels does one change condition or become better. Yet it can be said that at the same time nothing is changed and everything is transformed. What Don Juan realizes in action is an ethic of quantity, whereas the saint, on the contrary, tends toward quality. Not to believe in the profound meaning of things belongs to the absurd man. As for those cordial or wonder-struck faces, he eyes them, stores them up, and does not pause over them. Time keeps up with him. The absurd man is he who is not apart from time. Don Juan does not think of “collecting” women. He exhausts their number and with them his chances of life. “Collecting” amounts to being capable of living off one’s past. But he rejects regret, that other form of hope. He is incapable of looking at portraits.

* * *

Is he selfish for all that? In his way, probably. But here, too, it is essential to understand one another. There are those who are made for living and those who are made for loving. At least Don Juan would be inclined to say so. But he would do so in a very few words such as he is capable of choosing. For the love we are speaking of here is clothed in illusions of the eternal. As all the specialists in passion teach us, there is no eternal love but what is thwarted. There is scarcely any passion without struggle. Such a love culminates only in the ultimate contradiction of death. One must be Werther or nothing. There, too, there are several ways of committing suicide, one of which is the total gift and forgetfulness of self. Don Juan, as well as anyone else, knows that this can be stirring. But he is one of the very few who know that this is not the important thing. He knows just as well that those who turn away from all personal life through a great love enrich themselves perhaps but certainly impoverish those their love has chosen. A mother or a passionate wife necessarily has a closed heart, for it is turned away from the world. A single emotion, a single creature, a single face, but all is devoured. Quite a different love disturbs Don Juan, and this one is liberating. It brings with it all the faces in the world, and its tremor comes from the fact that it knows itself to be mortal. Don Juan has chosen to be nothing.

For him it is a matter of seeing clearly. We call love what binds us to certain creatures only by reference to a collective way of seeing for which books and legends are responsible. But of love I know only that mixture of desire, affection, and intelligence that binds me to this or that creature. That compound is not the same for another person. I do not have the right to cover all these experiences with the same name. This exempts one from conducting them with the same gestures. The absurd man multiplies here again what he cannot unify. Thus he discovers a new way of being which liberates him at least as much as it liberates those who approach him. There is no noble love but that which recognizes itself to be both short-lived and exceptional. All those deaths and all those rebirths gathered together as in a sheaf make up for Don Juan the flowering of his life. It is his way of giving and of vivifying. I let it be decided whether or not one can speak of selfishness.

* * *

I think at this point of all those who absolutely insist that Don Juan be punished. Not only in another life, but even in this one. I think of

all those tales, legends, and laughs about the aged Don Juan. But Don Juan is already ready. To a conscious man old age and what it portends are not a surprise. Indeed, he is conscious only in so far as he does not conceal its horror from himself. There was in Athens a temple dedicated to old age. Children were taken there. As for Don Juan, the more people laugh at him, the more his figure stands out. Thereby he rejects the one the romantics lent him. No one wants to laugh at that tormented, pitiful Don Juan. He is pitied; heaven itself will redeem him? But that's not it. In the universe of which Don Juan has a glimpse, ridicule *too* is included. He would consider it normal to be chastised. That is the rule of the game. And, indeed, it is typical of his nobility to have accepted all the rules of the game. Yet he knows he is right and that there can be no question of punishment. A fate is not a punishment.

That is his crime, and how easy it is to understand why the men of God call down punishment on his head. He achieves a knowledge without illusions which negates everything they profess. Loving and possessing, conquering and consuming—that is his way of knowing. (There is significance in that favorite Scriptural word that calls the carnal act "knowing.") He is their worst enemy to the extent that he is ignorant of them. A chronicler relates that the true *Burlador* died assassinated by Franciscans who wanted "to put an end to the excesses and blasphemies of Don Juan, whose birth assured him impunity."

Then they proclaimed that heaven had struck him down. No one has proved that strange end. Nor has anyone proved the contrary. But without wondering if it is probable, I can say that it is logical. I want merely to single out at this point the word "birth" and to play on words: it was the fact of living that assured his innocence. It was from death alone that he derived a guilt now become legendary.

What else does that stone Commander signify, that cold statue set in motion to punish the blood and courage that dared to think? All the powers of eternal Reason, of order, of universal morality, all the foreign grandeur of a God open to wrath are summed up in him. That gigantic and soulless stone merely symbolizes the forces that Don Juan negated forever. But the Commander's mission stops there. The thunder and lightning can return to the imitation heaven whence they were called forth. The real tragedy takes place quite apart from them. No, it was not under a stone hand that Don Juan met his death. I am inclined to believe in the legendary bravado, in that mad laughter of the healthy man provoking a non-existent God. But, above all, I believe that on that evening when Don Juan was waiting at Anna's the Commander didn't come, and that after midnight the blasphemer must have felt the dreadful bitterness of those who have been right. I accept even more readily the account of his life that has him eventually burying himself in a monastery. Not that the edifying aspect of the story can be considered probable. What refuge can he go ask of God? But this symbolizes rather the logical outcome of a life completely imbued with the absurd, the grim ending of an existence turned toward short-lived joys. At this point sensual pleasure winds up in asceticism. It is essential to realize that they may be, as it were, the two aspects of the same destitution. What more ghastly image can be called up than that of a man betrayed by his body who, simply because he did not die in time, lives out the comedy while awaiting the end, face to face with that God he does not adore, serving him as he served life, kneeling before a void and arms outstretched toward a heaven without eloquence that he knows to be also without depth?

I see Don Juan in a cell of one of those Spanish monasteries lost on a hilltop. And if he contemplates anything at all, it is not the ghosts of past loves, but perhaps, through a narrow slit in the sun-baked wall, some silent Spanish plain, a noble, soulless land in which he

recognizes himself. Yes, it is on this melancholy and radiant image that the curtain must he rung down. The ultimate end, awaited but never desired, the ultimate end is negligible.

Drama

"The play's the thing," says Hamlet, "wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." "Catch" is indeed the word. For conscience moves swiftly or withdraws within itself. It has to be caught on the wing, at that barely perceptible moment when it glances fleetingly at itself. The everyday man does not enjoy tarrying. Everything, on the contrary, hurries him onward. But at the same time nothing interests him more than himself, especially his potentialities. Whence his interest in the theater, in the show, where so many fates are offered him, where he can accept the poetry without feeling the sorrow. There at least can be recognized the thoughtless man, and he continues to hasten toward some hope or other. The absurd man begins where that one leaves off, where, ceasing to admire the play, the mind wants to enter in. Entering into all these lives, experiencing them in their diversity, amounts to acting them out. I am not saying that actors in general obey that impulse, that they are absurd men, but that their fate is an absurd fate which might charm and attract a lucid heart. It is necessary to establish this in order to grasp without misunderstanding what will follow.

The actor's realm is that of the fleeting. Of all kinds of fame, it is known, his is the most ephemeral. At least, this is said in conversation. But all kinds of fame are ephemeral. From the point of view of Sirius, Goethe's works in ten thousand years will be dust and his name forgotten. Perhaps a handful of archæologists will look for "evidence" as to our era. That idea has always contained a lesson. Seriously meditated upon, it reduces our perturbations to the profound nobility that is found in indifference. Above all, it directs our concerns toward what is most certain—that is, toward the immediate. Of all kinds of fame the least deceptive is the one that is lived.

Hence the actor has chosen multiple fame, the fame that is hallowed and tested. From the fact that everything is to die someday he draws the best conclusion. An actor succeeds or does not succeed. A writer has some hope even if he is not appreciated. He assumes that his works will bear witness to what he was. At best the actor will leave us a photograph, and nothing of what he was himself, his gestures and his silences, his gasping or his panting with love, will come down to us.

For him, not to be known is not to act, and not acting is dying a hundred times with all the creatures he would have brought to life or resuscitated.

* * *

Why should we be surprised to find a fleeting fame built upon the most ephemeral of creations? The actor has three hours to be Iago or Alceste, Phèdre or Gloucester. In that short space of time he makes them come to life and die on fifty square yards of boards. Never has the absurd been so well illustrated or at such length. What more revelatory epitome can be imagined than those marvelous lives, those exceptional and total destinies unfolding for a few hours within a stage set? Off the stage, Sigismundo ceases to count. Two hours later he is seen dining out. Then it is, perhaps, that life is a dream. But after Sigismundo comes another. The hero suffering from uncertainty takes the place of the man roaring for his revenge. By thus sweeping over centuries and minds, by miming man as he can be and as he is, the actor has much in common with that other absurd individual, the traveler. Like him, he drains something and is constantly on the move. He is a traveler in time and, for the best, the hunted traveler, pursued by souls. If ever the ethics of quantity could find sustenance,

it is indeed on that strange stage. To what degree the actor benefits from the characters is hard to say. But that is not the important thing. It is merely a matter of knowing how far he identifies himself with those irreplaceable lives. It often happens that he carries them with him, that they somewhat overflow the time and place in which they were born. They accompany the actor, who cannot very readily separate himself from what he has been. Occasionally when reaching for his glass he resumes Hamlet's gesture of raising his cup. No, the distance separating him from the creatures into whom he infuses life is not so great. He abundantly illustrates every month or every day that so suggestive truth that there is no frontier between what a man wants to be and what he is. Always concerned with better representing, he demonstrates to what a degree appearing creates being. For that is his art—to simulate absolutely, to project himself as deeply as possible into lives that are not his own. At the end of his effort his vocation becomes clear: to apply himself wholeheartedly to being nothing or to being several. The narrower the limits allotted him for creating his character, the more necessary his talent. He will die in three hours under the mask he has assumed today. Within three hours he must experience and express a whole exceptional life. That is called losing oneself to find oneself. In those three hours he travels the whole course of the dead-end path that the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover.

* * *

A mime of the ephemeral, the actor trains and perfects himself only in appearances. The theatrical convention is that the heart expresses itself and communicates itself only through gestures and in the body— or through the voice, which is as much of the soul as of the body. The rule of that art insists that everything be magnified and translated into flesh. If it were essential on the stage to love as people really love, to employ that irreplaceable voice of the heart, to look as people contemplate in life, our speech would be in code. But here silences must make themselves heard. Love speaks up louder, and immobility itself becomes spectacular. The body is king. Not everyone can be "theatrical," and this unjustly maligned word covers a whole æsthetic and a whole ethic. Half a man's life is spent in implying, in turning away, and in keeping silent. Here the actor is the intruder. He breaks the spell chaining that soul, and at last the passions can rush onto their stage. They speak in every gesture; they live only through shouts and cries. Thus the actor creates his characters for display. He outlines or sculptures them and slips into their imaginary form, transfusing his blood into their phantoms. I am of course speaking of great drama, the kind that gives the actor an *opportunity* to fulfill his wholly physical fate. Take Shakespeare, for instance. In that impulsive drama the physical passions lead the dance. They explain everything. Without them all would collapse. Never would King Lear keep the appointment set by madness without the brutal gesture that exiles Cordelia and condemns Edgar. It is just that the unfolding of that tragedy should thenceforth be dominated by madness. Souls are given over to the demons and their saraband. No fewer than four madmen: one by trade, another by intention, and the last two through suffering—four disordered bodies, four unutterable aspects of a single condition.

The very scale of the human body is inadequate. The mask and the buskin, the make-up that reduces and accentuates the face in its essential elements, the costume that exaggerates and simplifies—that universe sacrifices everything to appearance and is made solely for the eye. Through an absurd miracle, it is the body that also brings knowledge. I should never really understand Iago unless I played his part. It is not enough to hear him, for I grasp him only at the moment when I see him. Of the absurd character the actor consequently has the monotony, that single, oppressive silhouette, simultaneously

strange and familiar, that he carries about from hero to hero. There, too, the great dramatic work contributes to this unity of tone.[*2] This is where the actor contradicts himself: the same and yet so various, so many souls summed up in a single body. Yet it is the absurd contradiction itself, that individual who wants to achieve everything and live everything, that useless attempt, that ineffectual persistence. What always contradicts itself nevertheless joins in him. He is at that point where body and mind converge, where the mind, tired of its defeats, turns toward its most faithful ally. "And blest are those," says Hamlet, "whose blood and judgment are so well commingled that they are not a pipe for fortune's finger to sound what stop she please."

* * *

How could the Church have failed to condemn such a practice on the part of the actor? She repudiated in that art the heretical multiplication of souls, the emotional debauch, the scandalous presumption of a mind that objects to living but one life and hurls itself into all forms of excess. She proscribed in them that preference for the present and that triumph of Proteus which are the negation of everything she teaches. Eternity is not a game. A mind foolish enough to prefer a comedy to eternity has lost its salvation. Between "everywhere" and "forever" there is no compromise. Whence that much maligned profession can give rise to a tremendous spiritual conflict. "What matters," said Nietzsche, "is not eternal life but eternal vivacity." All drama is, in fact, in this choice.

Adrienne Lecouvreur on her deathbed was willing to confess and receive communion, but refused to abjure her profession. She thereby lost the benefit of the confession. Did this not amount, in effect, to choosing her absorbing passion in preference to God? And that woman in the death throes refusing in tears to repudiate what she called her art gave evidence of a greatness that she never achieved behind the footlights. This was her finest role and the hardest one to play. Choosing between heaven and a ridiculous fidelity, preferring oneself to eternity or losing oneself in God is the age-old tragedy in which each must play his part.

The actors of the era knew they were excommunicated. Entering the profession amounted to choosing Hell. And the Church discerned in them her worst enemies. A few men of letters protest: "What! Refuse the last rites to Molière!" But that was just, and especially in one who died onstage and finished under the actor's make-up a life entirely devoted to dispersion. In his case genius is invoked, which excuses everything. But genius excuses nothing, just because it refuses to do so.

The actor knew at that time what punishment was in store for him. But what significance could such vague threats have compared to the final punishment that life itself was reserving for him? This was the one that he felt in advance and accepted wholly. To the actor as to the absurd man, a premature death is irreparable. Nothing can make up for the sum of faces and centuries he would otherwise have traversed. But in any case, one has to die. For the actor is doubtless everywhere, but time sweeps him along, too, and makes its impression with him.

It requires but a little imagination to feel what an actor's fate means. It is in time that he makes up and enumerates his characters. It is in time likewise that he learns to dominate them. The greater number of different lives he has lived, the more aloof he can be from them. The time comes when he must die to the stage and for the world. What he has lived faces him. He sees clearly. He feels the harrowing and irreplaceable quality of that adventure. He knows and can now die. There are homes for aged actors.

Conquest

“No,” says the conqueror, “don’t assume that because I love action I have had to forget how to think. On the contrary I can thoroughly define what I believe. For I believe it firmly and I see it surely and clearly. Beware of those who say: ‘I know this too well to be able to express it.’ For if they cannot do so, this is because they don’t know it or because out of laziness they stopped at the outer crust.

“I have not many opinions. At the end of a life man notices that he has spent years becoming sure of a single truth. But a single truth, if it is obvious, is enough to guide an existence. As for me, I decidedly have something to say about the individual. One must speak of him bluntly and, if need be, with the appropriate contempt.

“A man is more a man through the things he keeps to himself than through those he says. There are many that I shall keep to myself. But I firmly believe that all those who have judged the individual have done so with much less experience than we on which to base their judgment. The intelligence, the stirring intelligence perhaps foresaw what it was essential to note. But the era, its ruins, and its blood overwhelm us with facts. It was possible for ancient nations, and even for more recent ones down to our machine age, to weigh one against the other the virtues of society and of the individual, to try to find out which was to serve the other. To begin with, that was possible by virtue of that stubborn aberration in man’s heart according to which human beings were created to serve or be served. In the second place, it was possible because neither society nor the individual had yet revealed all their ability.

“I have seen bright minds express astonishment at the masterpieces of Dutch painters born at the height of the bloody wars in Flanders, be amazed by the prayers of Silesian mystics brought up during the frightful Thirty Years’ War. Eternal values survive secular turmoils before their astonished eyes. But there has been progress since. The painters of today are deprived of such serenity. Even if they have basically the heart the creator needs—I mean the closed heart—it is of no use; for everyone, including the saint himself, is mobilized. This is perhaps what I have felt most deeply. At every form that miscarries in the trenches, at every outline, metaphor, or prayer crushed under steel, the eternal loses a round. Conscious that I cannot stand aloof from my time, I have decided to be an integral part of it. This is why I esteem the individual only because he strikes me as ridiculous and humiliated. Knowing that there are no victorious causes, I have a liking for lost causes: they require an uncontaminated soul, equal to its defeat as to its temporary victories. For anyone who feels bound up with this world’s fate, the clash of civilizations has something agonizing about it. I have made that anguish mine at the same time that I wanted to join in. Between history and the eternal I have chosen history because I like certainties. Of it, at least, I am certain, and how can I deny this force crushing me?

“There always comes a time when one must choose between contemplation and action. This is called becoming a man. Such wrenches are dreadful. But for a proud heart there can be no compromise. There is God or time, that cross or this sword. This world has a higher meaning that transcends its worries, or nothing is true but those worries. One must live with time and die with it, or else elude it for a greater life. I know that one can compromise and live in the world while believing in the eternal. That is called accepting. But I loathe this term and want all or nothing. If I choose action, don’t think that contemplation is like an unknown country to me. But it cannot give me everything, and, deprived of the eternal, I want to ally myself with time. I do not want to put down to my account either nostalgia or bitterness, and I merely want to see clearly. I tell you, tomorrow you will be mobilized. For you and for me that is a liberation. The individual can do nothing and yet he can

do everything. In that wonderful unattached state you understand why I exalt and crush him at one and the same time. It is the world that pulverizes him and I who liberate him. I provide him with all his rights.

* * *

"Conquerors know that action is in itself useless. There is but one useful action, that of remaking man and the earth. I shall never remake men. But one must do as if.' For the path of struggle leads me to the flesh. Even humiliated, the flesh is my only certainty. I can live only on it. The creature is my native land. This is why I have chosen this absurd and ineffectual effort. This is why I am on the side of the struggle. The epoch lends itself to this, as I have said. Hitherto the greatness of a conqueror was geographical. It was measured by the extent of the conquered territories. There is a reason why the word has changed in meaning and has ceased to signify the victorious general. The greatness has changed camp. It lies in protest and the blind-alley sacrifice. There, too, it is not through a preference for defeat. Victory would be desirable. But there is but one victory, and it is eternal. That is the one I shall never have. That is where I stumble and cling. A revolution is always accomplished against the gods, beginning with the revolution of Prometheus, the first of modern conquerors. It is man's demands made against his fate; the demands of the poor are but a pretext. Yet I can seize that spirit only in its historical act, and that is where I make contact with it. Don't assume, however, that I take pleasure in it: opposite the essential contradiction, I maintain my human contradiction. I establish my lucidity in the midst of what negates it. I exalt man before what crushes him, and my freedom, my revolt, and my passion come together then in that tension, that lucidity, and that vast repetition.

"Yes, man is his own end. And he is his only end. If he aims to be something, it is in this life. Now I know it only too well. Conquerors sometimes talk of vanquishing and overcoming. But it is always 'overcoming oneself that they mean. You are well aware of what that means. Every man has felt himself to be the equal of a god at certain moments. At least, this is the way it is expressed. But this comes from the fact that in a flash he felt the amazing grandeur of the human mind. The conquerors are merely those among men who are conscious enough of their strength to be sure of living constantly on those heights and fully aware of that grandeur. It is a question of arithmetic, of more or less. The conquerors are capable of the more. But they are capable of no more than man himself when he wants. This is why they never leave the human crucible, plunging into the seething soul of revolutions.

"There they find the creature mutilated, but they also encounter there the only values they like and admire, man and his silence. This is both their destitution and their wealth. There is but one luxury for them—that of human relations. How can one fail to realize that in this vulnerable universe everything that is human and solely human assumes a more vivid meaning? Taut faces, threatened fraternity, such strong and chaste friendship among men—these are the true riches because they are transitory. In their midst the mind is most aware of its powers and limitations. That is to say, its efficacity. Some have spoken of genius. But genius is easy to say; I prefer the intelligence. It must be said that it can be magnificent then. It lights up this desert and dominates it. It knows its obligations and illustrates them. It will die at the same time as this body. But knowing this constitutes its freedom.

* * *

"We are not ignorant of the fact that all churches are against us. A heart so keyed up eludes the eternal, and all churches, divine or political, lay claim to the eternal. Happiness and courage, retribution or justice are secondary ends for them. It is a doctrine they bring, and one must subscribe to it. But I have no concern with ideas or with the

eternal. The truths that come within my scope can be touched with the hand. I cannot separate from them. This is why you cannot base anything on me: nothing of the conqueror lasts, not even his doctrines.

"At the end of all that, despite everything, is death. We know also that it ends everything. This is why those cemeteries all over Europe, which obsess some among us, are hideous. People beautify only what they love, and death repels us and tires our patience. It, too, is to be conquered. The last Carrara, a prisoner in Padua emptied by the plague and besieged by the Venetians, ran screaming through the halls of his deserted palace: he was calling on the devil and asking him for death. This was a way of overcoming it. And it is likewise a mark of courage characteristic of the Occident to have made so ugly the places where death thinks itself honored. In the rebel's universe, death exalts injustice. It is the supreme abuse.

"Others, without compromising either, have chosen the eternal and denounced the illusion of this world. Their cemeteries smile amid numerous flowers and birds. That suits the conqueror and gives him a clear image of what he has rejected. He has chosen, on the contrary, the black iron fence or the potter's field. The best among the men of God occasionally are seized with fright mingled with consideration and pity for minds that can live with such an image of their death. Yet those minds derive their strength and justification from this. Our fate stands before us and we provoke him. Less out of pride than out of awareness of our ineffectual condition. We, too, sometimes feel pity for ourselves. It is the only compassion that seems acceptable to us: a feeling that perhaps you hardly understand and that seems to you scarcely virile. Yet the most daring among us are the ones who feel it. But we call the lucid ones virile and we do not want a strength that is apart from lucidity."

* * *

Let me repeat that these images do not propose moral codes and involve no judgments: they are sketches. They merely represent a style of life. The lover, the actor, or the adventurer plays the absurd. But equally well, if he wishes, the chaste man, the civil servant, or the president of the Republic. It is enough to know and to mask nothing. In Italian museums are sometimes found little painted screens that the priest used to hold in front of the face of condemned men to hide the scaffold from them. The leap in all its forms, rushing into the divine or the eternal, surrendering to the illusions of the everyday or of the idea—all these screens hide the absurd. But there are civil servants without screens, and they are the ones of whom I mean to speak. I have chosen the most extreme ones. At this level the absurd gives them a royal power. It is true that those princes are without a kingdom.

But they have this advantage over others: they know that all royalties are illusory. They know that is their whole nobility, and it is useless to speak in relation to them of hidden misfortune or the ashes of disillusion. Being deprived of hope is not despairing. The flames of earth are surely worth celestial perfumes. Neither I nor anyone can judge them here. They are not striving to be better; they are attempting to be consistent. If the term "wise man" can be applied to the man who lives on what he has without speculating on what he has not, then they are wise men. One of them, a conqueror but in the realm of mind, a Don Juan but of knowledge, an actor but of the intelligence, knows this better than anyone: "You nowise deserve a privilege on earth and in heaven for having brought to perfection your dear little meek sheep; you nonetheless continue to be at best a ridiculous dear little sheep with horns and nothing more—even supposing that you do not burst with vanity and do not create a scandal by posing as a judge."

In any case, it was essential to restore to the absurd reasoning more cordial examples. The imagination can add many others, inseparable from time and exile, who likewise know how to live in harmony with a universe without future and without weakness. This absurd, godless world is, then, peopled with men who think clearly and have ceased to hope. And I have not yet spoken of the most absurd character, who is the creator.

*1 In the fullest sense and with his faults. A healthy attitude *also* includes faults.

*2 At this point I am thinking of Molière's Alceste. Everything is so simple, so obvious and so coarse. Alceste against Philinte, Célimène against Elianthe, the whole subject in the absurd consequence of a nature carried to its extreme, and the verse itself, the "bad verse," barely accented like the monotony of the character's nature.

ABSURD CREATION

Philosophy and Fiction

ALL THOSE lives maintained in the rarefied air of the absurd could not persevere without some profound and constant thought to infuse its strength into them. Right here, it can be only a strange feeling of fidelity. Conscious men have been seen to fulfill their task amid the most stupid of wars without considering themselves in contradiction. This is because it was essential to elude nothing. There is thus a metaphysical honor in enduring the world's absurdity. Conquest or play-acting, multiple loves, absurd revolt are tributes that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance.

It is merely a matter of being faithful to the rule of the battle. That thought may suffice to sustain a mind; it has supported and still supports whole civilizations. War cannot be negated. One must live it or die of it. So it is with the absurd: it is a question of breathing with it, of recognizing its lessons and recovering their flesh. In this regard the absurd joy par excellence is creation. "Art and nothing but art," said Nietzsche; "we have art in order not to die of the truth."

In the experience that I am attempting to describe and to stress on several modes, it is certain that a new torment arises wherever another dies. The childish chasing after forgetfulness, the appeal of satisfaction are now devoid of echo. But the constant tension that keeps man face to face with the world, the ordered delirium that urges him to be receptive to everything leave him another fever. In this universe the work of art is then the sole chance of keeping his consciousness and of fixing its adventures. Creating is living doubly. The groping, anxious quest of a Proust, his meticulous collecting of flowers, of wallpapers, and of anxieties, signifies nothing else. At the same time, it has no more significance than the continual and imperceptible creation in which the actor, the conqueror, and all absurd men indulge every day of their lives. All try their hands at miming, at repeating, and at re- creating the reality that is theirs. We always end up by having the appearance of our truths. All existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the great mime.

Such men know to begin with, and then their whole effort is to examine, to enlarge, and to enrich the ephemeral island on which they have just landed. But first they must know. For the absurd discovery coincides with a pause in which future passions are prepared and justified. Even men without a gospel have their Mount of Olives. And one must not fall asleep on theirs either. For the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with lucid indifference.

Describing—that is the last ambition of an absurd thought. Science likewise, having reached the end of its paradoxes, ceases to propound

and stops to contemplate and sketch the ever virgin landscape of phenomena. The heart learns thus that the emotion delighting us when we see the world's aspects comes to us not from its depth but from their diversity. Explanation is useless, but the sensation remains and, with it, the constant attractions of a universe inexhaustible in quantity. The place of the work of art can be understood at this point.

It marks both the death of an experience and its multiplication. It is a sort of monotonous and passionate repetition of the themes already orchestrated by the world: the body, inexhaustible image on the pediment of temples, forms or colors, number or grief. It is therefore not indifferent, as a conclusion, to encounter once again the principal themes of this essay in the wonderful and childish world of the creator. It would be wrong to see a symbol in it and to think that the work of art can be considered at last as a refuge for the absurd. It is itself an absurd phenomenon, and we are concerned merely with its description. It does not offer an escape for the intellectual ailment. Rather, it is one of the symptoms of that ailment which reflects it throughout a man's whole thought. But for the first time it makes the mind get outside of itself and places it in opposition to others, not for it to get lost but to show it clearly the blind path that all have entered upon. In the time of the absurd reasoning, creation follows indifference and discovery. It marks the point from which absurd passions spring and where the reasoning stops. Its place in this essay is justified in this way.

It will suffice to bring to light a few themes common to the creator and the thinker in order to find in the work of art all the contradictions of thought involved in the absurd. Indeed, it is not so much identical conclusions that prove minds to be related as the contradictions that are common to them. So it is with thought and creation. I hardly need to say that the same anguish urges man to these two attitudes. This is where they coincide in the beginning. But among all the thoughts that start from the absurd, I have seen that very few remain within it. And through their deviations or infidelities I have best been able to measure what belonged to the absurd. Similarly I must wonder: is an absurd work of art possible?

* * *

It would be impossible to insist too much on the arbitrary nature of the former opposition between art and philosophy. If you insist on taking it in too limited a sense, it is certainly false. If you mean merely that these two disciplines each have their peculiar climate, that is probably true but remains vague. The only acceptable argument used to lie in the contradiction brought up between the philosopher enclosed *within* his system and the artist placed *before* his work. But this was pertinent for a certain form of art and of philosophy which we consider secondary here. The idea of an art detached from its creator is not only outmoded; it is false. In opposition to the artist, it is pointed out that no philosopher ever created several systems. But that is true in so far, indeed, as no artist ever expressed more than one thing under different aspects. The instantaneous perfection of art, the necessity for its renewal—this is true only through a preconceived notion. For the work of art likewise is a construction and everyone knows how monotonous the great creators can be. For the same reason as the thinker, the artist commits himself and becomes himself in his work. That osmosis raises the most important of æsthetic problems. Moreover, to anyone who is convinced of the mind's singleness of purpose, nothing is more futile than these distinctions based on methods and objects. There are no frontiers between the disciplines that man sets himself for understanding and loving. They interlock, and the same anxiety merges them.

It is necessary to state this to begin with. For an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it.

But at the same time thought must not be apparent except as the regulating intelligence. This paradox can be explained according to the absurd. The work of art is born of the intelligence's refusal to reason the concrete. It marks the triumph of the carnal. It is lucid thought that provokes it, but in that very act that thought repudiates itself. It will not yield to the temptation of adding to what is described a deeper meaning that it knows to be illegitimate. The work of art embodies a drama of the intelligence, but it proves this only indirectly. The absurd work requires an artist conscious of these limitations and an art in which the concrete signifies nothing more than itself. It cannot be the end, the meaning, and the consolation of a life. Creating or not creating changes nothing. The absurd creator does not prize his work. He could repudiate it. He does sometimes repudiate it. An Abyssinia suffices for this, as in the case of Rimbaud.

At the same time a rule of æsthetics can be seen in this. The true work of art is always on the human scale. It is essentially the one that says "less." There is a certain relationship between the global experience of the artist and the work that reflects that experience, between *Wilhelm Meister* and Goethe's maturity. That relationship is bad when the work aims to give the whole experience in the lace-paper of an explanatory literature. That relationship is good when the work is but a piece cut out of experience, a facet of the diamond in which the inner luster is epitomized without being limited. In the first case there is overloading and pretension to the eternal. In the second, a fecund work because of a whole implied experience, the wealth of which is suspected. The problem for the absurd artist is to acquire this *savoir- vivre* which transcends *savoir-faire*. And in the end, the great artist under this climate is, above all, a great living being, it being understood that living in this case is just as much experiencing as reflecting. The work then embodies an intellectual drama. The absurd work illustrates thought's renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more than the intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If the world were clear, art would not exist.

I am not speaking here of the arts of form or color in which description alone prevails in its splendid modesty.[*1] Expression begins where thought ends. Those adolescents with empty eyesockets who people temples and museums—their philosophy has been expressed in gestures. For an absurd man it is more educative than all libraries. Under another aspect the same is true for music. If any art is devoid of lessons, it is certainly music. It is too closely related to mathematics not to have borrowed their gratuitousness. That game the mind plays with itself according to set and measured laws takes place in the sonorous compass that belongs to us and beyond which the vibrations nevertheless meet in an inhuman universe. There is no purer sensation. These examples are too easy. The absurd man recognizes as his own these harmonies and these forms.

But I should like to speak here of a work in which the temptation to explain remains greatest, in which illusion offers itself automatically, in which conclusion is almost inevitable. I mean fictional creation. I propose to inquire whether or not the absurd can hold its own there.

* * *

To think is first of all to create a world (or to limit one's own world, which comes to the same thing). It is starting out from the basic disagreement that separates man from his experience in order to find a common ground according to one's nostalgia, a universe hedged with reasons or lighted up with analogies but which, in any case, gives an opportunity to rescind the unbearable divorce. The philosopher, even if he is Kant, is a creator. He has his characters, his

symbols, and his secret action. He has his plot endings. On the contrary, the lead taken by the novel over poetry and the essay merely represents, despite appearances, a greater intellectualization of the art. Let there be no mistake about it; I am speaking of the greatest. The fecundity and the importance of a literary form are often measured by the trash it contains. The number of bad novels must not make us forget the value of the best. These, indeed, carry with them their universe. The novel has its logic, its reasonings, its intuition, and its postulates. It also has its requirements of clarity.[*2]

The classical opposition of which I was speaking above is even less justified in this particular case. It held in the time when it was easy to separate philosophy from its authors. Today when thought has ceased to lay claim to the universal, when its best history would be that of its repentances, we know that the system, when it is worth while, cannot be separated from its author. The *Ethics* itself, in one of its aspects, is but a long and reasoned personal confession. Abstract thought at last returns to its prop of flesh. And, likewise, the fictional activities of the body and of the passions are regulated a little more according to the requirements of a vision of the world. The writer has given up telling "stories" and creates his universe. The great novelists are philosophical novelists—that is, the contrary of thesis-writers. For instance, Balzac, Sade, Melville, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Proust, Malraux, Kafka, to cite but a few.

But in fact the preference they have shown for writing in images rather than in reasoned arguments is revelatory of a certain thought that is common to them all, convinced of the uselessness of any principle of explanation and sure of the educative message of perceptible appearance. They consider the work of art both as an end and a beginning. It is the outcome of an often unexpressed philosophy, its illustration and its consummation. But it is complete only through the implications of that philosophy. It justifies at last that variant of an old theme that a little thought estranges from life whereas much thought reconciles to life. Incapable of refining the real, thought pauses to mimic it. The novel in question is the instrument of that simultaneously relative and inexhaustible knowledge, so like that of love. Of love, fictional creation has the initial wonder and the fecund rumination.

* * *

These at least are the charms I see in it at the outset. But I saw them likewise in those princes of humiliated thought whose suicides I was later able to witness. What interests me, indeed, is knowing and describing the force that leads them back toward the common path of illusion. The same method will consequently help me here. The fact of having already utilized it will allow me to shorten my argument and to sum it up without delay in a particular example. I want to know whether, accepting a life *without appeal*, one can also agree to work and create *without appeal* and what is the way leading to these liberties. I want to liberate my universe of its phantoms and to people it solely with flesh-and-blood truths whose presence I cannot deny. I can perform absurd work, choose the creative attitude rather than another. But an absurd attitude, if it is to remain so, must remain aware of its gratuitousness. So it is with the work of art. If the commandments of the absurd are not respected, if the work does not illustrate divorce and revolt, if it sacrifices to illusions and arouses hope, it ceases to be gratuitous. I can no longer detach myself from it. My life may find a meaning in it, but that is trifling. It ceases to be that exercise in detachment and passion which crowns the splendor and futility of a man's life.

In the creation in which the temptation to explain is the strongest, can one overcome that temptation? In the fictional world in which awareness of the real world is keenest, can I remain faithful to the absurd without sacrificing to the desire to judge? So many questions

to be taken into consideration in a last effort. It must be already clear what they signify. They are the last scruples of an awareness that fears to forsake its initial and difficult lesson in favor of a final illusion. What holds for creation, looked upon as *one* of the possible attitudes for the man conscious of the absurd, holds for all the styles of life open to him. The conqueror or the actor, the creator or Don Juan may forget that their exercise in living could not do without awareness of its mad character. One becomes accustomed so quickly. A man wants to earn money in order to be happy, and his whole effort and the best of a life are devoted to the earning of that money. Happiness is forgotten; the means are taken for the end. Likewise, the whole effort of this conqueror will be diverted to ambition, which was but a way toward a greater life. Don Juan in turn will likewise yield to his fate, be satisfied with that existence whose nobility is of value only through revolt. For one it is awareness and for the other, revolt; in both cases the absurd has disappeared. There is so much stubborn hope in the human heart. The most destitute men often end up by accepting illusion. That approval prompted by the need for peace inwardly parallels the existential consent. There are thus gods of light and idols of mud. But it is essential to find the middle path leading to the faces of man.

So far, the failures of the absurd exigence have best informed us as to what it is. In the same way, if we are to be informed, it will suffice to notice that fictional creation can present the same ambiguity as certain philosophies. Hence I can choose as illustration a work comprising everything that denotes awareness of the absurd, having a clear starting-point and a lucid climate. Its consequences will enlighten us. If the absurd is not respected in it, we shall know by what expedient illusion enters in. A particular example, a theme, a creator's fidelity will suffice, then. This involves the same analysis that has already been made at greater length.

I shall examine a favorite theme of Dostoevsky. I might just as well have studied other works.[*3] But in this work the problem is treated directly, in the sense of nobility and emotion, as for the existential philosophies already discussed. This parallelism serves my purpose.

Kirilov

All of Dostoevsky's heroes question themselves as to the meaning of life. In this they are modern: they do not fear ridicule. What distinguishes modern sensibility from classical sensibility is that the latter thrives on moral problems and the former on metaphysical problems. In Dostoevsky's novels the question is propounded with such intensity that it can only invite extreme solutions. Existence is illusory *or* it is eternal. If Dostoevsky were satisfied with this inquiry, he would be a philosopher. But he illustrates the consequences that such intellectual pastimes may have in a man's life, and in this regard he is an artist. Among those consequences, his attention is arrested particularly by the last one, which he himself calls logical suicide in his *Diary of a Writer*. In the installments for December 1876, indeed, he imagines the reasoning of "logical suicide." Convinced that human existence is an utter absurdity for anyone without faith in immortality, the desperate man comes to the following conclusions:

"Since in reply to my questions about happiness, I am told, through the intermediary of my consciousness, that I cannot be happy except in harmony with the great all, which I cannot conceive and shall never be in a position to conceive, it is evident…"

"Since, finally, in this connection, I assume both the role of the plaintiff and that of the defendant, of the accused and of the judge, and since I consider this comedy perpetrated by nature altogether stupid, and since I even deem it humiliating for me to deign to play it…"

"In my indisputable capacity of plaintiff and defendant, of judge and accused, I condemn that nature which, with such impudent nerve, brought me into being in order to suffer— I condemn it to be annihilated with me."

There remains a little humor in that position. This suicide kills himself because, on the metaphysical plane, he is *vexed*. In a certain sense he is taking his revenge. This is his way of proving that he "will not be had." It is known, however, that the same theme is embodied, but with the most wonderful generality, in Kirilov of *The Possessed*, likewise an advocate of logical suicide. Kirilov the engineer declares somewhere that he wants to take his own life because it "is his idea." Obviously the word must be taken in its proper sense. It is for an idea, a thought, that he is getting ready for death. This is the superior suicide. Progressively, in a series of scenes in which Kirilov's mask is gradually illuminated, the fatal thought driving him is revealed to us. The engineer, in fact, goes back to the arguments of the *Diary*. He feels that God is necessary and that he must exist. But he knows that he does not and cannot exist. "Why do you not realize," he exclaims, "that this is sufficient reason for killing oneself?" That attitude involves likewise for him some of the absurd consequences. Through indifference he accepts letting his suicide be used to the advantage of a cause he despises. "I decided last night that I didn't care." And finally, he prepares his deed with a mixed feeling of revolt and freedom. "I shall kill myself in order to assert my insubordination, my new and dreadful liberty." It is no longer a question of revenge, but of revolt. Kirilov is consequently an absurd character—yet with this essential reservation: he kills himself. But he himself explains this contradiction, and in such a way that at the same time he reveals the absurd secret in all its purity. In truth, he adds to his fatal logic an extraordinary ambition which gives the character its full perspective: he wants to kill himself to become god. The reasoning is classic in its clarity. If God does not exist, Kirilov is god. If God does not exist, Kirilov must kill himself. Kirilov must therefore kill himself to become god. That logic is absurd, but it is what is needed. The interesting thing, however, is to give a meaning to that divinity brought to earth. That amounts to clarifying the premise: "If God does not exist, I am god," which still remains rather obscure. It is important to note at the outset that the man who flaunts that mad claim is indeed of this world. He performs his gymnastics every morning to preserve his health. He is stirred by the joy of Chatov recovering his wife. On a sheet of paper to be found after his death he wants to draw a face sticking out his tongue at "them." He is childish and irascible, passionate, methodical, and sensitive. Of the superman he has nothing but the logic and the obsession, whereas of man he has the whole catalogue. Yet it is he who speaks calmly of his divinity. He is not mad, or else Dostoevsky is. Consequently, it is not a megalomaniac's illusion that excites him. And taking the words in their specific sense would, in this instance, be ridiculous.

Kirilov himself helps us to understand. In reply to a question from Stavrogin, he makes clear that he is not talking of a god-man. It might be thought that this springs from concern to distinguish himself from Christ. But in reality it is a matter of annexing Christ. Kirilov in fact fancies for a moment that Jesus at his death *did not find himself in Paradise*. He found out then that his torture had been useless. "The laws of nature," says the engineer, "made Christ live in the midst of falsehood and die for a falsehood." Solely in this sense Jesus indeed personifies the whole human drama. He is the complete man, being the one who realized the most absurd condition. He is not the God- man but the man-god. And, like him, each of us can be crucified and victimized—and is to a certain degree.

The divinity in question is therefore altogether terrestrial. "For three years," says Kirilov, "I sought the attribute of my divinity and I have found it. The attribute of my divinity is independence." Now can be seen the meaning of Kirilov's premise: "If God does not exist, I am god." To become god is merely to be free on this earth, not to serve an immortal being. Above all, of course, it is drawing all the inferences from that painful independence. If God exists, all depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us. For Kirilov, as for Nietzsche, to kill God is to become god oneself; it is to realize on this earth the eternal life of which the Gospel speaks.[*4]

But if this metaphysical crime is enough for man's fulfillment, why add suicide? Why kill oneself and leave this world after having won freedom? That is contradictory. Kirilov is well aware of this, for he adds: "If you feel *that*, you are a tsar and, far from killing yourself, you will live covered with glory." But men in general do not know it. They do not feel "that." As in the time of Prometheus, they entertain blind hopes.[*5] They need to be shown the way and cannot do without preaching. Consequently, Kirilov must kill himself out of love for humanity. He must show his brothers a royal and difficult path on which he will be the first. It is a pedagogical suicide. Kirilov sacrifices himself, then. But if he is crucified, he will not be victimized. He remains the man-god, convinced of a death without future, imbued with evangelical melancholy. "I," he says, "am unhappy because I am *obliged* to assert my freedom." But once he is dead and men are at last enlightened, this earth will be peopled with tsars and lighted up with human glory. Kirilov's pistol shot will be the signal for the last revolution. Thus, it is not despair that urges him to death, but love of his neighbor for his own sake. Before terminating in blood an indescribable spiritual adventure, Kirilov makes a remark as old as human suffering: "All is well."

This theme of suicide in Dostoevsky, then, is indeed an absurd theme. Let us merely note before going on that Kirilov reappears in other characters who themselves set in motion additional absurd themes. Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov try out the absurd truths in practical life. They are the ones liberated by Kirilov's death. They try their skill at being tsars. Stavrogin leads an "ironic" life, and it is well known in what regard. He arouses hatred around him. And yet the key to the character is found in his farewell letter: "I have not been able to detest anything." He is a tsar in indifference. Ivan is likewise by refusing to surrender the royal powers of the mind. To those who, like his brother, prove by their lives that it is essential to humiliate oneself in order to believe, he might reply that the condition is shameful. His key word is: "Everything is permitted," with the appropriate shade of melancholy. Of course, like Nietzsche, the most famous of God's assassins, he ends in madness. But this is a risk worth running, and, faced with such tragic ends, the essential impulse of the absurd mind is to ask: "What does that prove?"

* * *

Thus the novels, like the *Diary*, propound the absurd question. They establish logic unto death, exaltation, "dreadful" freedom, the glory of the tsars become human. All is well, everything is permitted, and nothing is hateful—these are absurd judgments. But what an amazing creation in which those creatures of fire and ice seem so familiar to us. The passionate world of indifference that rumbles in their hearts does not seem at all monstrous to us. We recognize in it our everyday anxieties. And probably no one so much as Dostoevsky has managed to give the absurd world such familiar and tormenting charms.

Yet what is his conclusion? Two quotations will show the complete metaphysical reversal that leads the writer to other revelations. The argument of the one who commits logical suicide having provoked

protests from the critics, Dostoevsky in the following installments of the *Diary* amplifies his position and concludes thus: "If faith in immortality is so necessary to the human being (that without it he comes to the point of killing himself), it must therefore be the normal state of humanity. Since this is the case, the immortality of the human soul exists without any doubt." Then again in the last pages of his last novel, at the conclusion of that gigantic combat with God, some children ask Aliocha: "Karamazov, is it true what religion says, that we shall rise from the dead, that we shall see one another again?" And Aliocha answers: "Certainly, we shall see one another again, we shall joyfully tell one another everything that has happened."

Thus Kirilov, Stavrogin, and Ivan are defeated. *The Brothers Karamazov* replies to *The Possessed*. And it is indeed a conclusion. Aliocha's case is not ambiguous, as is that of Prince Muichkin. Ill, the latter lives in a perpetual present, tinged with smiles and indifference, and that blissful state might be the eternal life of which the Prince speaks. On the contrary, Aliocha clearly says: "We shall meet again." There is no longer any question of suicide and of madness. What is the use, for anyone who is sure of immortality and of its joys? Man exchanges his divinity for happiness. "We shall joyfully tell one another everything that has happened." Thus again Kirilov's pistol rang out somewhere in Russia, but the world continued to cherish its blind hopes. Men did not understand "that."

Consequently, it is not an absurd novelist addressing us, but an existential novelist. Here, too, the leap is touching and gives its nobility to the art that inspires it. It is a stirring acquiescence, riddled with doubts, uncertain and ardent. Speaking of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky wrote: "The chief question that will be pursued throughout this book is the very one from which I have suffered consciously or unconsciously all life long: the existence of God." It is hard to believe that a novel sufficed to transform into joyful certainty the suffering of a lifetime. One commentator[*6] correctly pointed out that Dostoevsky is on Ivan's side and that the affirmative chapters took three months of effort whereas what he called "the blasphemies" were written in three weeks in a state of excitement. There is not one of his characters who does not have that thorn in the flesh, who does not aggravate it or seek a remedy for it in sensation or immortality.[*7] In any case, let us remain with this doubt. Here is a work which, in a chiaroscuro more gripping than the light of day, permits us to seize man's struggle against his hopes. Having reached the end, the creator makes his choice against his characters. That contradiction thus allows us to make a distinction. It is not an absurd work that is involved here, but a work that propounds the absurd problem.

Dostoevsky's reply is humiliation, "shame" according to Stavrogin. An absurd work, on the contrary, does not provide a reply; that is the whole difference. Let us note this carefully in conclusion: what contradicts the absurd in that work is not its Christian character, but rather its announcing a future life. It is possible to be Christian and absurd. There are examples of Christians who do not believe in a future life. In regard to the work of art, it should therefore be possible to define one of the directions of the absurd analysis that could have been anticipated in the preceding pages. It leads to propounding "the absurdity of the Gospel." It throws light upon this idea, fertile in repercussions, that convictions do not prevent incredulity. On the contrary, it is easy to see that the author of *The Possessed*, familiar with these paths, in conclusion took a quite different way. The surprising reply of the creator to his characters, of Dostoevsky to Kirilov, can indeed be summed up thus: existence is illusory *and* it is eternal.

Ephemeral Creation

At this point I perceive, therefore, that hope cannot be eluded forever and that it can beset even those who wanted to be free of it. This is the interest I find in the works discussed up to this point. I could, at least in the realm of creation, list some truly absurd works.[*8] But everything must have a beginning. The object of this quest is a certain fidelity. The Church has been so harsh with heretics only because she deemed that there is no worse enemy than a child who has gone astray. But the record of Gnostic effrontеries and the persistence of Manichean currents have contributed more to the construction of orthodox dogma than all the prayers. With due allowance, the same is true of the absurd. One recognizes one's course by discovering the paths that stray from it. At the very conclusion of the absurd reasoning, in one of the attitudes dictated by its logic, it is not a matter of indifference to find hope coming back in under one of its most touching guises. That shows the difficulty of the absurd *ascesis*. Above all, it shows the necessity of unfailing alertness and thus confirms the general plan of this essay.

But if it is still too early to list absurd works, at least a conclusion can be reached as to the creative attitude, one of those which can complete absurd existence. Art can never be so well served as by a negative thought. Its dark and humiliated proceedings are as necessary to the understanding of a great work as black is to white. To work and create "for nothing," to sculpture in clay, to know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that fundamentally this has no more importance than building for centuries —this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void its colors.

This leads to a special conception of the work of art. Too often the work of a creator is looked upon as a series of isolated testimonies. Thus, artist and man of letters are confused. A profound thought is in a constant state of becoming; it adopts the experience of a life and assumes its shape. Likewise, a man's sole creation is strengthened in its successive and multiple aspects: his works. One after another, they complement one another, correct or overtake one another, contradict one another too. If something brings creation to an end, it is not the victorious and illusory cry of the blinded artist: "I have said everything," but the death of the creator which closes his experience and the book of his genius.

That effort, that superhuman consciousness are not necessarily apparent to the reader. There is no mystery in human creation. Will performs this miracle. But at least there is no true creation without a secret. To be sure, a succession of works can be but a series of approximations of the same thought. But it is possible to conceive of another type of creator proceeding by juxtaposition. Their works may seem to be devoid of interrelations. To a certain degree, they are contradictory. But viewed all together, they resume their natural grouping. From death, for instance, they derive their definitive significance. They receive their most obvious light from the very life of their author. At the moment of death, the succession of his works is but a collection of failures. But if those failures all have the same resonance, the creator has managed to repeat the image of his own condition, to make the air echo with the sterile secret he possesses.

The effort to dominate is considerable here. But human intelligence is up to much more. It will merely indicate clearly the voluntary aspect of creation. Elsewhere I have brought out the fact that human will had no other purpose than to maintain awareness. But that could not do without discipline. Of all the schools of patience and lucidity, creation is the most effective. It is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition,

perseverance in an effort considered sterile. It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure, and strength. It constitutes an *ascesis*. All that "for nothing," in order to repeat and mark time. But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.

* * *

Let there be no mistake in æsthetics. It is not patient inquiry, the unceasing, sterile illustration of a thesis that I am calling for here. Quite the contrary, if I have made myself clearly understood. The thesis-novel, the work that proves, the most hateful of all, is the one that most often is inspired by a *smug* thought. You demonstrate the truth you feel sure of possessing. But those are ideas one launches, and ideas are the contrary of thought. Those creators are philosophers, ashamed of themselves. Those I am speaking of or whom I imagine are, on the contrary, lucid thinkers. At a certain point where thought turns back on itself, they raise up the images of their works like the obvious symbols of a limited, mortal, and rebellious thought.

They perhaps prove something. But those proofs are ones that the novelists provide for themselves rather than for the world in general. The essential is that the novelists should triumph in the concrete and that this constitute their nobility. This wholly carnal triumph has been prepared for them by a thought in which abstract powers have been humiliated. When they are completely so, at the same time the flesh makes the creation shine forth in all its absurd luster. After all, ironic philosophies produce passionate works.

Any thought that abandons unity glorifies diversity. And diversity is the home of art. The only thought to liberate the mind is that which leaves it alone, certain of its limits and of its impending end. No doctrine tempts it. It awaits the ripening of the work and of life. Detached from it, the work will once more give a barely muffled voice to a soul forever freed from hope. Or it will give voice to nothing if the creator, tired of his activity, intends to turn away. That is equivalent.

* * *

Thus, I ask of absurd creation what I required from thought—revolt, freedom, and diversity. Later on it will manifest its utter futility. In that daily effort in which intelligence and passion mingle and delight each other, the absurd man discovers a discipline that will make up the greatest of his strengths. The required diligence, the doggedness and lucidity thus resemble the conqueror's attitude. To create is likewise to give a shape to one's fate. For all these characters, their work defines them at least as much as it is defined by them. The actor taught us this: there is no frontier between being and appearing.

Let me repeat. None of all this has any real meaning. On the way to that liberty, there is still a progress to be made. The final effort for these related minds, creator or conqueror, is to manage to free themselves also from their undertakings: succeed in granting that the very work, whether it be conquest, love, or creation, may well not be; consummate thus the utter futility of any individual life. Indeed, that gives them more freedom in the realization of that work, just as becoming aware of the absurdity of life authorized them to plunge into it with every excess.

All that remains is a fate whose outcome alone is fatal. Outside of that single fatality of death, everything, joy or happiness, is liberty. A world remains of which man is the sole master. What bound him was the illusion of another world. The outcome of his thought, ceasing to be renunciatory, flowers in images. It frolics—in myths, to be sure, but myths with no other depth than that of human suffering and, like it, inexhaustible. Not the divine fable that amuses and blinds, but the

terrestrial face, gesture, and drama in which are summed up a difficult wisdom and an ephemeral passion.

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*1 It is curious to note that the most intellectual kind of painting, the one that tries to reduce reality to its essential elements, is ultimately but a visual delight. All it has kept of the world is its color. (This is apparent particularly in Léger.)

*2 If you stop to think of it, this explains the worst novels. Almost everybody considers himself capable of thinking and, to a certain degree, whether right or wrong, really does think. Very few, on the contrary, can fancy themselves poets or artists in words. But from the moment when thought won out over style, the mob invaded the novel. That is not such a great evil as is said. The best are led to make greater demands upon themselves. As for those who succumb, they did not deserve to survive.

*3 Malraux's work, for instance. But it would have been necessary to deal at the same time with the social question which in fact cannot be avoided by absurd thought (even though that thought may put forward several solutions, very different from one another). One must, however, limit oneself.

*4 "Stavrogin: 'Do you believe in eternal life in the other world?' Kirilov: 'No, but in eternal life in this world.'"

*5 "Man simply invented God in order not to kill himself. That is the summary of universal history down to this moment."

*6 Boris de Schloezer.

*7 Gide's curious and penetrating remark: almost all Dostoevsky's heroes are polygamous.

*8 Melville's *Moby Dick*, for instance.

THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

THE GODS had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.

If one believes Homer, Sisyphus was the wisest and most prudent of mortals. According to another tradition, however, he was disposed to practice the profession of highwayman. I see no contradiction in this. Opinions differ as to the reasons why he became the futile laborer of the underworld. To begin with, he is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods. He stole their secrets. Ægina, the daughter of Æsopus, was carried off by Jupiter. The father was shocked by that disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, who knew of the abduction, offered to tell about it on condition that Æsopus would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial thunderbolts he preferred the benediction of water. He was punished for this in the underworld. Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death in chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war, who liberated Death from the hands of her conqueror.

It is said also that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him.

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. Nothing is told us about Sisyphus in the underworld. Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them. As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the

foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

* * *

If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. This word is not too much. Again I fancy Sisyphus returning toward his rock, and the sorrow was in the beginning. When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart: this is the rock's victory, this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. Thus, Œdipus at the outset obeys fate without knowing it. But from the moment he knows, his tragedy begins. Yet at the same moment, blind and desperate, he realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl. Then a tremendous remark rings out: "Despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well." Sophocles' Œdipus, like Dostoevsky's Kirilov, thus gives the recipe for the absurd victory. Ancient wisdom confirms modern heroism.

One does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness. "What! by such narrow ways—?" There is but one world, however. Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be a mistake to say that happiness necessarily springs from the absurd discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness. "I conclude that all is well," says Œdipus, and that remark is sacred. It echoes in the wild and limited universe of man. It teaches that all is not, has not been, exhausted. It drives out of this world a god who had come into it with dissatisfaction and a preference for futile sufferings. It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men.

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up. Unconscious, secret calls, invitations from all the faces, they are the necessary reverse and price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment

when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

APPENDIX:

Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka

THE WHOLE ART of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread. His endings, or his absence of endings, suggest explanations which, however, are not revealed in clear language but, before they seem justified, require that the story be reread from another point of view. Sometimes there is a double possibility of interpretation, whence appears the necessity for two readings. This is what the author wanted. But it would be wrong to try to interpret everything in Kafka in detail. A symbol is always in general and, however precise its translation, an artist can restore to it only its movement: there is no word-for-word rendering. Moreover, nothing is harder to understand than a symbolic work. A symbol always transcends the one who makes use of it and makes him say in reality more than he is aware of expressing. In this regard, the surest means of getting hold of it is not to provoke it, to begin the work without a preconceived attitude and not to look for its hidden currents. For Kafka in particular it is fair to agree to his rules, to approach the drama through its externals and the novel through its form.

At first glance and for a casual reader, they are disturbing adventures that carry off quaking and dogged characters into pursuit of problems they never formulate. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. is accused. But he doesn't know of what. He is doubtless eager to defend himself, but he doesn't know why. The lawyers find his case difficult. Meanwhile, he does not neglect to love, to eat, or to read his paper. Then he is judged. But the courtroom is very dark. He doesn't understand much. He merely assumes that he is condemned, but to what he barely wonders. At times he suspects just the same, and he continues living. Some time later two well-dressed and polite gentlemen come to get him and invite him to follow them. Most courteously they lead him into a wretched suburb, put his head on a stone, and slit his throat. Before dying the condemned man says merely: "Like a dog."

You see that it is hard to speak of a symbol in a tale whose most obvious quality just happens to be naturalness. But naturalness is a hard category to understand. There are works in which the event seems natural to the reader. But there are others (rarer, to be sure) in which the character considers natural what happens to him. By an odd but obvious paradox, the more extraordinary the character's adventures are, the more noticeable will be the naturalness of the story: it is in proportion to the divergence we feel between the strangeness of a man's life and the simplicity with which that man accepts it. It seems that this naturalness is Kafka's. And, precisely, one is well aware what *The Trial* means. People have spoken of an image of the human condition. To be sure. Yet it is both simpler and more complex. I mean that the significance of the novel is more particular and more personal to Kafka. To a certain degree, he is the

one who does the talking, even though it is me he confesses. He lives and he is condemned. He learns this on the first pages of the novel he is pursuing in this world, and if he tries to cope with this, he nonetheless does so without surprise. He will never show sufficient astonishment at this lack of astonishment. It is by such contradictions that the first signs of the absurd work are recognized. The mind projects into the concrete its spiritual tragedy. And it can do so solely by means of a perpetual paradox which confers on colors the power to express the void and on daily gestures the strength to translate eternal ambitions.

Likewise, *The Castle* is perhaps a theology in action, but it is first of all the individual adventure of a soul in quest of its grace, of a man who asks of this world's objects their royal secret and of women the signs of the god that sleeps in them. *Metamorphosis*, in turn, certainly represents the horrible imagery of an ethic of lucidity. But it is also the product of that incalculable amazement man feels at being conscious of the beast he becomes effortlessly. In this fundamental ambiguity lies Kafka's secret. These perpetual oscillations between the natural and the extraordinary, the individual and the universal, the tragic and the everyday, the absurd and the logical, are found throughout his work and give it both its resonance and its meaning. These are the paradoxes that must be enumerated, the contradictions that must be strengthened, in order to understand the absurd work.

A symbol, indeed, assumes two planes, two worlds of ideas and sensations, and a dictionary of correspondences between them. This lexicon is the hardest thing to draw up. But awaking to the two worlds brought face to face is tantamount to getting on the trail of their secret relationships. In Kafka these two worlds are that of everyday life on the one hand and, on the other, that of supernatural anxiety.[*1] It seems that we are witnessing here an interminable exploitation of Nietzsche's remark: "Great problems are in the street."

There is in the human condition (and this is a commonplace of all literatures) a basic absurdity as well as an implacable nobility. The two coincide, as is natural. Both of them are represented, let me repeat, in the ridiculous divorce separating our spiritual excesses and the ephemeral joys of the body. The absurd thing is that it should be the soul of this body which it transcends so inordinately. Whoever would like to represent this absurdity must give it life in a series of parallel contrasts. Thus it is that Kafka expresses tragedy by the everyday and the absurd by the logical.

An actor lends more force to a tragic character the more careful he is not to exaggerate it. If he is moderate, the horror he inspires will be immoderate. In this regard Greek tragedy is rich in lessons. In a tragic work fate always makes itself felt better in the guise of logic and naturalness. Oedipus's fate is announced in advance. It is decided supernaturally that he will commit the murder and the incest. The drama's whole effort is to show the logical system which, from deduction to deduction, will crown the hero's misfortune. Merely to announce to us that uncommon fate is scarcely horrible, because it is improbable. But if its necessity is demonstrated to us in the framework of everyday life, society, state, familiar emotion, then the horror is hallowed. In that revolt that shakes man and makes him say: "That is not possible," there is an element of desperate certainty that "that" can be.

This is the whole secret of Greek tragedy, or at least of one of its aspects. For there is another which, by a reverse method, would help us to understand Kafka better. The human heart has a tiresome tendency to label as fate only what crushes it. But happiness likewise, in its way, is without reason, since it is inevitable. Modern man, however, takes the credit for it himself, when he doesn't fail to recognize it. Much could be said, on the contrary, about the privileged fates of Greek tragedy and those favored in legend who,

like Ulysses, in the midst of the worst adventures are saved from themselves. It was not so easy to return to Ithaca.

What must be remembered in any case is that secret complicity that joins the logical and the everyday to the tragic. This is why Samsa, the hero of *Metamorphosis*, is a traveling salesman. This is why the only thing that disturbs him in the strange adventure that makes a vermin of him is that his boss will be angry at his absence. Legs and feelers grow out on him, his spine arches up, white spots appear on his belly and—I shall not say that this does not astonish him, for the effect would be spoiled—but it causes him a "slight annoyance." The whole art of Kafka is in that distinction. In his central work, *The Castle*, the details of everyday life stand out, and yet in that strange novel in which nothing concludes and everything begins over again, it is the essential adventure of a soul in quest of its grace that is represented. That translation of the problem into action, that coincidence of the general and the particular are recognized likewise in the little artifices that belong to every great creator. In *The Trial* the hero might have been named Schmidt or Franz Kafka. But he is named Joseph K. He is not Kafka and yet he is Kafka. He is an average European. He is like everybody else. But he is also the entity K. who is the *x* of this flesh- and-blood equation.

Likewise, if Kafka wants to express the absurd, he will make use of consistency. You know the story of the crazy man who was fishing in a bathtub. A doctor with ideas as to psychiatric treatments asked him "if they were biting," to which he received the harsh reply: "Of course not, you fool, since this is a bathtub." That story belongs to the baroque type. But in it can be grasped quite clearly to what a degree the absurd effect is linked to an excess of logic. Kafka's world is in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing that nothing will come of it.

Consequently, I recognize here a work that is absurd in its principles. As for *The Trial*, for instance, I can indeed say that it is a complete success. Flesh wins out. Nothing is lacking, neither the unexpressed revolt (but *it* is what is writing), nor lucid and mute despair (but *it* is what is creating), nor that amazing freedom of manner which the characters of the novel exemplify until their ultimate death.

* * *

Yet this world is not so closed as it seems. Into this universe devoid of progress, Kafka is going to introduce hope in a strange form. In this regard *The Trial* and *The Castle* do not follow the same direction. They complement each other. The barely perceptible progression from one to the other represents a tremendous conquest in the realm of evasion. *The Trial* propounds a problem which *The Castle*, to a certain degree, solves. The first describes according to a quasi-scientific method and without concluding. The second, to a certain degree, explains. *The Trial* diagnoses, and *The Castle* imagines a treatment. But the remedy proposed here does not cure. It merely brings the malady back into normal life. It helps to accept it. In a certain sense (let us think of Kierkegaard), it makes people cherish it. The Land Surveyor K. cannot imagine another anxiety than the one that is tormenting him. The very people around him become attached to that void and that nameless pain, as if suffering assumed in this case a privileged aspect. "How I need you," Frieda says to K. "How forsaken I feel, since knowing you, when you are not with me." This subtle remedy that makes us love what crushes us and makes hope spring up in a world without issue, this sudden "leap" through which everything is changed, is the secret of the existential revolution and of *The Castle* itself.

Few works are more rigorous in their development than *The Castle*. K. is named Land Surveyor to the Castle and he arrives in the village. But from the village to the Castle it is impossible to

communicate. For hundreds of pages K. persists in seeking his way, makes every advance, uses trickery and expedients, never gets angry, and with disconcerting good will tries to assume the duties entrusted to him. Each chapter is a new frustration. And also a new beginning. It is not logic, but consistent method. The scope of that insistence constitutes the work's tragic quality. When K. telephones to the Castle, he hears confused, mingled voices, vague laughs, distant invitations. That is enough to feed his hope, like those few signs appearing in summer skies or those evening anticipations which make up our reason for living. Here is found the secret of the melancholy peculiar to Kafka. The same, in truth, that is found in Proust's work or in the landscape of Plotinus: a nostalgia for a lost paradise. "I become very sad," says Olga, "when Barnabas tells me in the morning that he is going to the Castle: that probably futile trip, that probably wasted day, that probably empty hope." "Probably"—on this implication Kafka gambles his entire work. But nothing avails; the quest of the eternal here is meticulous. And those inspired automata, Kafka's characters, provide us with a precise image of what we should be if we were deprived of our distractions[*2] and utterly consigned to the humiliations of the divine.

In *The Castle* that surrender to the everyday becomes an ethic. The great hope of K. is to get the Castle to adopt him. Unable to achieve this alone, his whole effort is to deserve this favor by becoming an inhabitant of the village, by losing the status of foreigner that everyone makes him feel. What he wants is an occupation, a home, the life of a healthy, normal man. He can't stand his madness any longer. He wants to be reasonable. He wants to cast off the peculiar curse that makes him a stranger to the village. The episode of Frieda is significant in this regard. If he takes as his mistress this woman who has known one of the Castle's officials, this is because of her past. He derives from her something that transcends him—while being aware of what makes her forever unworthy of the Castle. This makes one think of Kierkegaard's strange love for Regina Olsen. In certain men, the fire of eternity consuming them is great enough for them to burn in it the very heart of those closest to them. The fatal mistake that consists in giving to God what is not God's is likewise the subject of this episode of *The Castle*. But for Kafka it seems that this is not a mistake. It is a doctrine and a "leap." There is nothing that is not God's.

Even more significant is the fact that the Land Surveyor breaks with Frieda in order to go toward the Barnabas sisters. For the Barnabas family is the only one in the village that is utterly forsaken by the Castle and by the village itself. Amalia, the elder sister, has rejected the shameful propositions made her by one of the Castle's officials. The immoral curse that followed has forever cast her out from the love of God. Being incapable of losing one's honor for God amounts to making oneself unworthy of his grace. You recognize a theme familiar to existential philosophy: truth contrary to morality. At this point things are far-reaching. For the path pursued by Kafka's hero from Frieda to the Barnabas sisters is the very one that leads from trusting love to the deification of the absurd. Here again Kafka's thought runs parallel to Kierkegaard. It is not surprising that the "Barnabas story" is placed at the end of the book. The Land Surveyor's last attempt is to recapture God through what negates him, to recognize him, not according to our categories of goodness and beauty, but behind the empty and hideous aspects of his indifference, of his injustice, and of his hatred. That stranger who asks the Castle to adopt him is at the end of his voyage a little more exiled because this time he is unfaithful to himself, forsaking morality, logic, and intellectual truths in order to try to enter, endowed solely with his mad hope, the desert of divine grace.[*3]

* * *

The word "hope" used here is not ridiculous. On the contrary, the more tragic the condition described by Kafka, the firmer and more

aggressive that hope becomes. The more truly absurd *The Trial* is, the more moving and illegitimate the impassioned "leap" of *The Castle* seems. But we find here again in a pure state the paradox of existential thought as it is expressed, for instance, by Kierkegaard: "Earthly hope must be killed; only then can one be saved by true hope,"[*4] which can be translated: "One has to have written *The Trial* to undertake *The Castle*."

Most of those who have spoken of Kafka have indeed defined his work as a desperate cry with no recourse left to man. But this calls for review. There is hope and hope. To me the optimistic work of Henri Bordeaux seems peculiarly discouraging. This is because it has nothing for the discriminating. Malraux's thought, on the other hand, is always bracing. But in these two cases neither the same hope nor the same despair is at issue. I see merely that the absurd work itself may lead to the infidelity I want to avoid. The work which was but an ineffectual repetition of a sterile condition, a lucid glorification of the ephemeral, becomes here a cradle of illusions. It explains, it gives a shape to hope. The creator can no longer divorce himself from it. It is not the tragic game it was to be. It gives a meaning to the author's life.

It is strange in any case that works of related inspiration like those of Kafka, Kierkegaard, or Chestov—those, in short, of existential novelists and philosophers completely oriented toward the Absurd and its consequences—should in the long run lead to that tremendous cry of hope.

They embrace the God that consumes them. It is through humility that hope enters in. For the absurd of this existence assures them a little more of supernatural reality. If the course of this life leads to God, there is an outcome after all. And the perseverance, the insistence with which Kierkegaard, Chestov, and Kafka's heroes repeat their itineraries are a special warrant of the uplifting power of that certainty.[*5]

Kafka refuses his god moral nobility, evidence, virtue, coherence, but only the better to fall into his arms. The absurd is recognized, accepted, and man is resigned to it, but from then on we know that it has ceased to be the absurd. Within the limits of the human condition, what greater hope than the hope that allows an escape from that condition? As I see once more, existential thought in this regard (and contrary to current opinion) is steeped in a vast hope. The very hope which at the time of early Christianity and the spreading of the good news inflamed the ancient world. But in that leap that characterizes all existential thought, in that insistence, in that surveying of a divinity devoid of surface, how can one fail to see the mark of a lucidity that repudiates itself? It is merely claimed that this is pride abdicating to save itself. Such a repudiation would be fecund. But this does not change that. The moral value of lucidity cannot be diminished in my eyes by calling it sterile like all pride. For a truth also, by its very definition, is sterile. All facts are. In a world where everything is given and nothing is explained, the fecundity of a value or of a metaphysic is a notion devoid of meaning.

In any case, you see here in what tradition of thought Kafka's work takes its place. It would indeed be intelligent to consider as inevitable the progression leading from *The Trial* to *The Castle*. Joseph K. and the Land Surveyor K. are merely two poles that attract Kafka.[*6] I shall speak like him and say that his work is probably not absurd. But that should not deter us from seeing its nobility and universality. They come from the fact that he managed to represent so fully the everyday passage from hope to grief and from desperate wisdom to intentional blindness. His work is universal (a really absurd work is not universal) to the extent to which it represents the emotionally moving face of man fleeing humanity, deriving from his contradictions reasons for believing, reasons for hoping from his fecund despairs, and calling life his terrifying apprenticeship in

death. It is universal because its inspiration is religious. As in all religions, man is freed of the weight of his own life. But if I know that, if I can even admire it, I also know that I am not seeking what is universal, but what is true. The two may well not coincide.

This particular view will be better understood if I say that truly hopeless thought just happens to be defined by the opposite criteria and that the tragic work might be the work that, after all future hope is exiled, describes the life of a happy man. The more exciting life is, the more absurd is the idea of losing it. This is perhaps the secret of that proud aridity felt in Nietzsche's work. In this connection, Nietzsche appears to be the only artist to have derived the extreme consequences of an æsthetic of the Absurd, inasmuch as his final message lies in a sterile and conquering lucidity and an obstinate negation of any supernatural consolation.

The preceding should nevertheless suffice to bring out the capital importance of Kafka in the framework of this essay. Here we are carried to the confines of human thought. In the fullest sense of the word, it can be said that everything in that work is essential. In any case, it propounds the absurd problem altogether. If one wants to compare these conclusions with our initial remarks, the content with the form, the secret meaning of *The Castle* with the natural art in which it is molded, K.'s passionate, proud quest with the everyday setting against which it takes place, then one will realize what may be its greatness. For if nostalgia is the mark of the human, perhaps no one has given such flesh and volume to these phantoms of regret. But at the same time will be sensed what exceptional nobility the absurd work calls for, which is perhaps not found here. If the nature of art is to bind the general to the particular, ephemeral eternity of a drop of water to the play of its lights, it is even truer to judge the greatness of the absurd writer by the distance he is able to introduce between these two worlds. His secret consists in being able to find the exact point where they meet in their greatest disproportion.

And, to tell the truth, this geometrical locus of man and the inhuman is seen everywhere by the pure in heart. If Faust and Don Quixote are eminent creations of art, this is because of the immeasurable nobilities they point out to us with their earthly hands. Yet a moment always comes when the mind negates the truths that those hands can touch. A moment comes when the creation ceases to be taken tragically; it is merely taken seriously. Then man is concerned with hope. But that is not his business. His business is to turn away from subterfuge. Yet this is just what I find at the conclusion of the vehement proceedings Kafka institutes against the whole universe. His unbelievable verdict is this hideous and upsetting world in which the very moles dare to hope.[*7]

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*1 It is worth noting that the works of Kafka can quite as legitimately be interpreted in the sense of a social criticism (for instance in *The Trial*). It is probable, moreover, that there is no need to choose. Both interpretations are good. In absurd terms, as we have seen, revolt against men is *also* directed against God: great revolutions are always metaphysical.

*2 In *The Castle* it seems that "distractions" in the Pascalian sense are represented by the assistants who "distract" K. from his anxiety. If Frieda eventually becomes the mistress of one of the assistants, this is because she prefers the stage setting to truth, everyday life to shared anguish.

*3 This is obviously true only of the unfinished version of *The Castle* that Kafka left us. But it is doubtful that the writer would have destroyed in the last chapters his novel's unity of tone.

*4 Purity of heart.

*5 The only character without hope in *The Castle* is Amalia. She is the one with whom the Land Surveyor is most violently contrasted.

*6 On the two aspects of Kafka's thought, compare "In the Penal Colony," published by the *Cahiers du Sud* (and in America by *Partisan Review*—translator's note): "Guilt ['of man' is understood] is never doubtful" and a fragment of *The Castle* (Momus's report): "The guilt of the Land Surveyor K. is hard to establish."

*7 What is offered above is obviously an interpretation of Kafka's work. But it is only fair to add that nothing prevents its being considered, aside from any interpretation, from a purely æsthetic point of view. For instance, B. Groethuysen in his remarkable preface to *The Trial* limits himself, more wisely than we, to following merely the painful fancies of what he calls, most strikingly, a daydreamer. It is the fate and perhaps the greatness of that work that it offers everything and confirms nothing.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

by **Aldous Leonard Huxley**

One

A SQUAT grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.

The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.

"And this," said the Director opening the door, "is the Fertilizing Room."

Bent over their instruments, three hundred Fertilizers were plunged, as the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning entered the room, in the scarcely breathing silence, the absent-minded, soliloquizing hum or whistle, of absorbed concentration. A troop of newly arrived students, very young, pink and callow, followed nervously, rather abjectly, at the Director's heels. Each of them carried a notebook, in which, whenever the great man spoke, he desperately scribbled. Straight from the horse's mouth. It was a rare privilege. The D. H. C. for Central London always made a point of personally conducting his new students round the various departments.

"Just to give you a general idea," he would explain to them. For of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently- though as little of one, if they were to be good and happy members of society, as possible. For particulars, as every one knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are intellectually necessary evils. Not philosophers but fretsawyers and stamp collectors compose the backbone of society.

"To-morrow," he would add, smiling at them with a slightly menacing geniality, "you'll be settling down to serious work. You won't have time for generalities. Meanwhile ."

Meanwhile, it was a privilege. Straight from the horse's mouth into the notebook. The boys scribbled like mad.

Tall and rather thin but upright, the Director advanced into the room. He had a long chin and big rather prominent teeth, just covered, when he was not talking, by his full, floridly curved lips. Old, young? Thirty? Fifty? Fifty-five? It was hard to say. And anyhow the question didn't arise; in this year of stability, A. F. 632, it didn't occur to you to ask it.

"I shall begin at the beginning," said the D.H.C. and the more zealous students recorded his intention in their notebooks: Begin at the beginning. "These," he waved his hand, "are the incubators." And opening an insulated door he showed them racks upon racks of numbered test-tubes. "The week's supply of ova. Kept," he explained, "at blood heat; whereas the male gametes," and here he opened another door, "they have to be kept at thirty- five instead of thirty-seven. Full blood heat sterilizes." Rams wrapped in theremogene beget no lambs.

Still leaning against the incubators he gave them, while the pencils scurried il- legibly across the pages, a brief description of the modern fertilizing process; spoke first, of course, of its surgical introduction- "the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a bonus amounting to

six months' salary"; continued with some account of the tech- nique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop onto the specially war- med slides of the microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle; how (and he now took them to watch the operation) this receptacle was immersed in a warm bouillon containing free-swimming spermatozoa-at a minimum concentration of one hundred thousand per cubic centimetre, he insisted; and how, after ten minutes, the container was lifted out of the liquor and its contents re-examined; how, if any of the eggs remained unfertilized, it was again immersed, and, if necessary, yet again; how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Del- tas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process.

"Bokanovsky's Process," repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little notebooks.

One egg, one embryo, one adult-normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.

"Essentially," the D.H.C. concluded, "bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. We check the normal growth and, paradoxically enough, the egg responds by budding."

Responds by budding. The pencils were busy.

He pointed. On a very slowly moving band a rack-full of test-tubes was entering a large metal box, another, rack-full was emerging. Machinery faintly purred. It took eight minutes for the tubes to go through, he told them. Eight minutes of hard X-rays being about as much as an egg can stand. A few died; of the rest, the least susceptible divided into two; most put out four buds; some eight; all were returned to the incubators, where the buds began to develop; then, after two days, were suddenly chilled, chilled and checked. Two, four, eight, the buds in their turn budded; and having budded were dosed almost to death with alcohol; consequently burgeoned again and having budded - bud out of bud out of bud-were thereafter-further arrest being generally fatal-left to develop in peace. By which time the original egg was in a fair way to becoming anything from eight to ninety-six embryos- a prodigious improvement, you will agree, on nature. Identical twins - but not in piddling twos and threes as in the old viviparous days, when an egg would sometimes accidentally divide; actually by dozens, by scores at a time.

"Scores," the Director repeated and flung out his arms, as though he were distributing largesse. "Scores."

But one of the students was fool enough to ask where the advantage lay.

"My good boy!" The Director wheeled sharply round on him. "Can't you see? Can't you see?" He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. "Bokanovsky's Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!"

Major instruments of social stability.

Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.

"Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!" The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. "You

really know where you are. For the first time in history." He quoted the planetary motto. "Community, Identity, Stability." Grand words. "If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved."

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology.

"But, alas," the Director shook his head, "we can't bokanovskify indefinitely."

Ninety-six seemed to be the limit; seventy-two a good average. From the same ovary and with gametes of the same male to manufacture as many batches of identical twins as possible-that was the best (sadly a second best) that they could do. And even that was difficult.

"For in nature it takes thirty years for two hundred eggs to reach maturity. But our business is to stabilize the population at this moment, here and now. Dribbling out twins over a quarter of a century-what would be the use of that?"

Obviously, no use at all. But Podsnap's Technique had immensely accelerated the process of ripening. They could make sure of at least a hundred and fifty mature eggs within two years. Fertilize and bokanovskify - in other words, multiply by seventy-two - and you get an average of nearly eleven thousand brothers and sisters in a hundred and fifty batches of identical twins, all within two years of the same age.

"And in exceptional cases we can make one ovary yield us over fifteen thousand adult individuals."

Beckoning to a fair-haired, ruddy young man who happened to be passing at the moment. "Mr. Foster," he called. The ruddy young man approached. "Can you tell us the record for a single ovary, Mr. Foster?"

"Sixteen thousand and twelve in this Centre," Mr. Foster replied without hesitation. He spoke very quickly, had a vivacious blue eye, and took an evident pleasure in quoting figures. "Sixteen thousand and twelve; in one hundred and eighty-nine batches of identicals. But of course they've done much better," he rattled on, "in some of the tropical Centres. Singapore has often produced over sixteen thousand five hundred; and Mombasa has actually touched the seventeen thousand mark. But then they have unfair advantages. You should see the way a negro ovary responds to pituitary! It's quite astonishing, when you're used to working with European material. Still," he added, with a laugh (but the light of combat was in his eyes and the lift of his chin was challenging), "still, we mean to beat them if we can. I'm working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary at this moment. Only just eighteen months old. Over twelve thousand seven hundred children already, either decanted or in embryo. And still going strong. We'll beat them yet."

"That's the spirit I like!" cried the Director, and clapped Mr. Foster on the shouder. "Come along with us, and give these boys the benefit of your expert knowledge."

Mr. Foster smiled modestly. "With pleasure." They went.

In the Bottling Room all was harmonious bustle and ordered activity. Flaps of fresh sow's peritoneum ready cut to the proper size came shooting up in little lifts from the Organ Store in the sub-basement. Whizz and then, click! the lift- hatches hew open; the bottle-liner had only to reach out a hand, take the flap, insert, smooth-down, and before the lined bottle had had time to travel out of reach along the endless band, whizz, click! another flap of peritoneum had shot up from the depths, ready to be slipped into yet another bottle, the next of that slow interminable procession on the band.

Next to the Liners stood the Matriculators. The procession advanced; one by one the eggs were transferred from their test-tubes

to the larger containers; deftly the peritoneal lining was slit, the morula dropped into place, the saline solution poured in. and already the bottle had passed, and it was the turn of the labellers. Heredity, date of fertilization, membership of Bokanovsky Group - details were transferred from test-tube to bottle. No longer anonymous, but named, identified, the procession marched slowly on; on through an opening in the wall, slowly on into the Social Predestination Room.

"Eighty-eight cubic metres of card-index," said Mr. Foster with relish, as they entered.

"Containing all the relevant information," added the Director. "Brought up to date every morning."

"And co-ordinated every afternoon."

"On the basis of which they make their calculations."

"So many individuals, of such and such quality," said Mr. Foster. "Distributed in such and such quantities."

"The optimum Decanting Rate at any given moment." "Unforeseen wastages promptly made good."

"Promptly," repeated Mr. Foster. "If you knew the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake!" He laughed goodhumouredly and shook his head.

"The Predestinators send in their figures to the Fertilizers." "Who give them the embryos they ask for."

"And the bottles come in here to be predestined in detail."

"After which they are sent down to the Embryo Store." "Where we now proceed ourselves."

And opening a door Mr. Foster led the way down a staircase into the basement.

The temperature was still tropical. They descended into a thickening twilight. Two doors and a passage with a double turn insured the cellar against any possible infiltration of the day. "Embryos are like photograph film," said Mr. Foster waggishly, as he pushed open the second door. "They can only stand red light."

And in effect the sultry darkness into which the students now followed him was visible and crimson, like the darkness of closed eyes on a summer's afternoon. The bulging flanks of row on receding row and tier above tier of bottles glinted with innumerable rubies, and among the rubies moved the dim red spectres of men and women with purple eyes and all the symptoms of lupus. The hum and rattle of machinery faintly stirred the air.

"Give them a few figures, Mr. Foster," said the Director, who was tired of talking.

Mr. Foster was only too happy to give them a few figures.

Two hundred and twenty metres long, two hundred wide, ten high. He pointed upwards. Like chickens drinking, the students lifted their eyes towards the distant ceiling.

Three tiers of racks: ground floor level, first gallery, second gallery.

The spidery steel-work of gallery above gallery faded away in all directions into the dark. Near them three red ghosts were busily unloading demijohns from a moving staircase.

The escalator from the Social Predestination Room.

Each bottle could be placed on one of fifteen racks, each rack, though you couldn't see it, was a conveyor traveling at the rate of thirty-three and a third centimetres an hour. Two hundred and sixty-seven days at eight metres a day. Two thousand one hundred and thirty-six metres in all. One circuit of the cellar at ground level, one on the first gallery, half on the second, and on the two hun- dred and sixty-seventh morning, daylight in the Decanting Room. Independent existence - so called.

"But in the interval," Mr. Foster concluded, "we've managed to do a lot to them. Oh, a very great deal." His laugh was knowing and triumphant.

“That’s the spirit I like,” said the Director once more. “Let’s walk around. You tell them everything, Mr. Foster.” Mr. Foster duly told them.

Told them of the growing embryo on its bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood surrogate on which it fed. Explained why it had to be stimulated with placentin and thyroxin. Told them of the corpus luteum extract. Showed them the jets through which at every twelfth metre from zero to 2040 it was automatically injected. Spoke of those gradually increasing doses of pituitary administered during the final ninety-six metres of their course. Described the artificial maternal circulation installed in every bottle at Metre 112; showed them the resevoir of blood- surrogate, the centrifugal pump that kept the liquid moving over the placenta and drove it through the synthetic lung and waste product filter. Referred to the embryo’s troublesome tendency to anæmia, to the massive doses of hog’s stomach extract and foetal foal’s liver with which, in consequence, it had to be supplied.

Showed them the simple mechanism by means of which, during the last two metres out of every eight, all the embryos were simultaneously shaken into familiarity with movement. Hinted at the gravity of the so-called “trauma of decanting,” and enumerated the precautions taken to minimize, by a suitable training of the bottled embryo, that dangerous shock. Told them of the test for sex carried out in the neighborhood of Metre 200. Explained the system of labelling-a T for the males, a circle for the females and for those who were destined to become freemartins a question mark, black on a white ground.

“For of course,” said Mr. Foster, “in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred - that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always have an enormous margin of safety. So we allow as many as thirty per cent of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they’re decanted as freemartins-structurally quite normal (except,” he had to admit, “that they do have the slightest tendency to grow beards), but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last,” continued Mr. Foster, “out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention.”

He rubbed his hands. For of course, they didn’t content themselves with merely hatching out embryos: any cow could do that.

“We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future .” He was going to say “future World controllers,” but correcting himself, said “future Directors of Hatcheries,” instead.

The D.H.C. acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

They were passing Metre 320 on Rack 11. A young Beta-Minus mechanic was busy with screw-driver and spanner on the blood-surrogate pump of a passing bottle. The hum of the electric motor deepened by fractions of a tone as he turned the nuts. Down, down. A final twist, a glance at the revolution counter, and he was done. He moved two paces down the line and began the same process on the next pump.

“Reducing the number of revolutions per minute,” Mr. Foster explained. “The surrogate goes round slower; therefore passes through the lung at longer intervals; therefore gives the embryo less oxygen. Nothing like oxygen- shortage for keeping an embryo below par.” Again he rubbed his hands.

“But why do you want to keep the embryo below par?” asked an ingenuous student.

“Ass!” said the Director, breaking a long silence. “Hasn’t it occurred to you that an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity?” It evidently hadn’t occurred to him. He was covered with confusion.

“The lower the caste,” said Mr. Foster, “the shorter the oxygen.” The first organ affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy per cent of normal oxygen you got dwarfs. At less than seventy eyeless monsters.

“Who are no use at all,” concluded Mr. Foster.

Whereas (his voice became confidential and eager), if they could discover a technique for shortening the period of maturation what a triumph, what a benefaction to Society!

“Consider the horse.” They considered it.

Mature at six; the elephant at ten. While at thirteen a man is not yet sexually mature; and is only full-grown at twenty. Hence, of course, that fruit of delayed development, the human intelligence.

“But in Epsilons,” said Mr. Foster very justly, “we don’t need human intelligence.”

Didn’t need and didn’t get it. But though the Epsilon mind was mature at ten, the Epsilon body was not fit to work till eighteen. Long years of superfluous and wasted immaturity. If the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow’s, what an enormous saving to the Community!

“Enormous!” murmured the students. Mr. Foster’s enthusiasm was infectious. He became rather technical; spoke of the abnormal endocrine coordination which made men grow so slowly; postulated a germinal mutation to account for it. Could the effects of this germinal mutation be undone? Could the individual Epsilon embryo be made a revert, by a suitable technique, to the normality of dogs and cows? That was the problem. And it was all but solved.

Pilkington, at Mombasa, had produced individuals who were sexually mature at four and full-grown at six and a half. A scientific triumph. But socially useless. Six-year-old men and women were too stupid to do even Epsilon work. And the process was an all-or-nothing one; either you failed to modify at all, or else you modified the whole way. They were still trying to find the ideal compromise between adults of twenty and adults of six. So far without success. Mr. Foster sighed and shook his head.

Their wanderings through the crimson twilight had brought them to the neighborhood of Metre 170 on Rack 9. From this point onwards Rack 9 was enclosed and the bottle performed the remainder of their journey in a kind of tunnel, interrupted here and there by openings two or three metres wide.

“Heat conditioning,” said Mr. Foster.

Hot tunnels alternated with cool tunnels. Coolness was wedded to discomfort in the form of hard X-rays. By the time they were decanted the embryos had a horror of cold. They were predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miner and acetate silk spinners and steel workers. Later on their minds would be made to endorse the judgment of their bodies. “We condition them to thrive on heat,” concluded Mr. Foster. “Our colleagues upstairs will teach them to love it.”

“And that,” put in the Director sententiously, “that is the secret of happiness and virtue-liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny.”

In a gap between two tunnels, a nurse was delicately probing with a long fine syringe into the gelatinous contents of a passing bottle. The students and their guides stood watching her for a few moments in silence.

“Well, Lenina,” said Mr. Foster, when at last she withdrew the syringe and straightened herself up.

The girl turned with a start. One could see that, for all the lupus and the purple eyes, she was uncommonly pretty.

“Henry!” Her smile flashed redly at him - a row of coral teeth.

"Charming, charming," murmured the Director and, giving her two or three little pats, received in exchange a rather deferential smile for himself.

"What are you giving them?" asked Mr. Foster, making his tone very professional.

"Oh, the usual typhoid and sleeping sickness."

"Tropical workers start being inoculated at Metre 150," Mr. Foster explained to the students. "The embryos still have gills. We immunize the fish against the future man's diseases." Then, turning back to Lenina, "Ten to five on the roof this afternoon," he said, "as usual."

"Charming," said the Director once more, and, with a final pat, moved away after the others.

On Rack 10 rows of next generation's chemical workers were being trained in the toleration of lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine. The first of a batch of two hundred and fifty embryonic rocket-plane engineers was just passing the eleven hundred metre mark on Rack 3. A special mechanism kept their containers in constant rotation. "To improve their sense of balance," Mr. Foster explained. "Doing repairs on the outside of a rocket in mid-air is a ticklish job. We slacken off the circulation when they're right way up, so that they're half starved, and double the flow of surrogate when they're upside down. They learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being; in fact, they're only truly happy when they're standing on their heads.

"And now," Mr. Foster went on, "I'd like to show you some very interesting conditioning for Alpha Plus Intellectuals. We have a big batch of them on Rack 5. First Gallery level," he called to two boys who had started to go down to the ground floor.

"They're round about Metre 900," he explained. "You can't really do any useful intellectual conditioning till the foetuses have lost their tails. Follow me."

But the Director had looked at his watch. "Ten to three," he said. "No time for the intellectual embryos, I'm afraid. We must go up to the Nurseries before the children have finished their afternoon sleep."

Mr. Foster was disappointed. "At least one glance at the Decanting Room," he pleaded.

"Very well then." The Director smiled indulgently. "Just one glance."

Two

MR. FOSTER was left in the Decanting Room. The D.H.C. and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor.

INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom. Thousands of petals, ripe-blown and silkily smooth, like the cheeks of innumerable little cherubs, but of cherubs, in that bright light, not exclusively pink and Aryan, but also luminously Chinese, also Mexican, also apoplectic with too much blowing of celestial trumpets, also pale as death, pale with the posthumous whiteness of marble.

The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in. "Set out the books," he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out-a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

"Now bring in the children."

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight- month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

"Put them down on the floor." The infants were unloaded.

"Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books."

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. "Excellent!" he said. "It might almost have been done on purpose."

The swiftest crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, "Watch carefully," he said. And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded. The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

"And now," the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), "now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock."

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

"We can electrify that whole strip of floor," bawled the Director in explanation. "But that's enough," he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

"Offer them the flowers and the books again."

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror, the volume of their howling suddenly increased.

"Observe," said the Director triumphantly, "observe."

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks-already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

"They'll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an 'instinctive' hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They'll be safe from books and botany all their lives." The Director turned to his nurses. "Take them away again."

Still yelling, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand; and though he could see quite well why you couldn't have lower-cast people wasting the Community's time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one

of their reflexes, yet. well, he couldn't understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers-flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

"And didn't they consume transport?" asked the student. "Quite a lot," the D.H.C. replied. "But nothing else."

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature, but not the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.

"We condition the masses to hate the country," concluded the Director. "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks."

"I see," said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

There was a silence; then, clearing his throat, "Once upon a time," the Director began, "while our Ford was still on earth, there was a little boy called Reuben Rabinovitch. Reuben was the child of Polish-speaking parents."

The Director interrupted himself. "You know what Polish is, I suppose?" "A dead language."

"Like French and German," added another student, officiously showing off his learning.

"And 'parent'?" questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

"Human beings used to be." he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well, they used to be viviparous." "Quite right." The Director nodded approvingly. "And when the babies were decanted ." "'Born,"' came the correction.

"Well, then they were the parents-I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones." The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

"In brief," the Director summed up, "the parents were the father and the mother." The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys' eye- avoiding silence. "Mother," he repeated loudly rubbing in the science; and, leaning back in his chair, "These," he said gravely, "are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts are unpleasant."

He returned to Little Reuben-to Little Reuben, in whose room, one evening, by an oversight, his father and mother (crash, crash!) happened to leave the radio turned on. ("For you must remember that in those days of gross viviparous reproduction, children were always brought up by their parents and not in State Conditioning Centres.")

While the child was asleep, a broadcast programme from London suddenly started to come through; and the next morning, to the astonishment of his crash and crash (the more daring of the boys ventured to grin at one another), Little Reuben woke up repeating

word for word a long lecture by that curious old writer (“one of the very few whose works have been permitted to come down to us”), George Bernard Shaw, who was speaking, according to a well-authenticated tradition, about his own genius. To Little Reuben’s wink and snigger, this lecture was, of course, perfectly incomprehensible and, imagining that their child had suddenly gone mad, they sent for a doctor. He, fortunately, understood English, recognized the discourse as that which Shaw had broadcasted the previous evening, realized the significance of what had happened, and sent a letter to the medical press about it.

“The principle of sleep-teaching, or hypnopædia, had been discovered.”

The D.H.C. made an impressive pause.

The principle had been discovered; but many, many years were to elapse before that principle was usefully applied.

“The case of Little Reuben occurred only twenty-three years after Our Ford’s first T-Model was put on the market.” (Here the Director made a sign of the T on his stomach and all the students reverently followed suit.) “And yet .”

Furiously the students scribbled. “Hypnopædia, first used officially in A.F. 214. Why not before? Two reasons. (a) .” “These early experimenters,” the D.H.C. was saying, “were on the wrong track. They thought that hypnopædia could be made an instrument of intellectual education .”

(A small boy asleep on his right side, the right arm stuck out, the right hand hanging limp over the edge of the bed. Through a round grating in the side of a box a voice speaks softly.

“The Nile is the longest river in Africa and the second in length of all the rivers of the globe. Although falling short of the length of the Mississippi-Missouri, the Nile is at the head of all rivers as regards the length of its basin, which extends through 35 degrees of latitude.”

At breakfast the next morning, “Tommy,” some one says, “do you know which is the longest river in Africa?” A shaking of the head. “But don’t you remember something that begins: The Nile is the.”

“The - Nile - is - the - longest - river - in - Africa - and - the - second - in - length - of - all - the - rivers - of - the - globe.” The words come rushing out. “Although - falling - short - of.” “Well now, which is the longest river in Africa?” The eyes are blank. “I don’t know.”

“But the Nile, Tommy.”

“The - Nile - is - the - longest - river - in - Africa - and - second.” “Then which river is the longest, Tommy?”

Tommy burst into tears. “I don’t know,” he howls.)

That howl, the Director made it plain, discouraged the earliest investigators. The experiments were abandoned. No further attempt was made to teach children the length of the Nile in their sleep. Quite rightly. You can’t learn a science unless you know what it’s all about.

“Whereas, if they’d only started on moral education,” said the Director, leading the way towards the door. The students followed him, desperately scribbling as they walked and all the way up in the lift. “Moral education, which ought never, in any circumstances, to be rational.”

“Silence, silence,” whispered a loud speaker as they stepped out at the fourteenth floor, and “Silence, silence,” the trumpet mouths indefatigably repeated at intervals down every corridor. The students and even the Director himself rose automatically to the tips of their toes. They were Alphas, of course, but even Alphas have been well-conditioned. “Silence, silence.” All the air of the fourteenth floor was sibilant with the categorical imperative.

Fifty yards of tiptoeing brought them to a door which the Director cautiously opened. They stepped over the threshold into

the twilight of a shuttered dormitory. Eighty cots stood in a row against the wall. There was a sound of light regular breathing and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering.

A nurse rose as they entered and came to attention before the Director. “What’s the lesson this afternoon?” he asked. “We had Elementary Sex for the first forty minutes,” she answered. “But now it’s switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness.”

The Director walked slowly down the long line of cots. Rosy and relaxed with sleep, eighty little boys and girls lay softly breathing. There was a whisper under every pillow. The D.H.C. halted and, bending over one of the little beds, listened attentively.

“Elementary Class Consciousness, did you say? Let’s have it repeated a little louder by the trumpet.”

At the end of the room a loud speaker projected from the wall. The Director walked up to it and pressed a switch.

“. all wear green,” said a soft but very distinct voice, beginning in the middle of a sentence, “and Delta Children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I’m so glad I’m a Beta.”

There was a pause; then the voice began again.

“Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they’re so frightfully clever. I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able”.

The Director pushed back the switch. The voice was silent. Only its thin ghost continued to mutter from beneath the eighty pillows.

“They’ll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake; then again on Thursday, and again on Saturday. A hundred and twenty times three times a week for thirty months. After which they go on to a more advanced lesson.”

Roses and electric shocks, the khaki of Deltas and a whiff of asaftida-wedded indissolubly before the child can speak. But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopædia.

“The greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time.”

The students took it down in their little books. Straight from the horse’s mouth. Once more the Director touched the switch.

“. so frightfully clever,” the soft, insinuating, indefatigable voice was saying, “I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because .”

Not so much like drops of water, though water, it is true, can wear holes in the hardest granite; rather, drops of liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob.

“Till at last the child’s mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child’s mind. And not the child’s mind only. The adult’s mind too-all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides - made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are our suggestions!” The Director almost shouted in his triumph. “Suggestions from the State.” He banged the nearest table. “It therefore follows.”

A noise made him turn round.

“Oh, Ford!” he said in another tone, “I’ve gone and woken the children.”

THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES by Plato

Translated by **Henry Cary**
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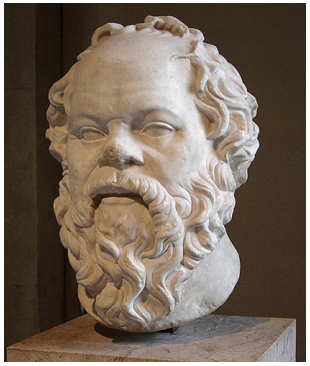

FIGURE 1 PORTRAIT OF SOCRATES. MARBLE, ROMAN ARTWORK (1ST CENTURY), PERHAPS A COPY OF A LOST BRONZE STATUE MADE BY LYSIPPOS.

"The Apology" is Plato's account of the three speeches that Socrates gave at his trial for false teaching and heresy in 399 B.C.E. At the age of 71, Socrates fought at his trial not for his life, but for the truth. He urged his fellow Athenians to examine their own lives, to question their leaders, and to pursue wisdom. He warned the judges that they could not avoid the truth or silence their critics by killing him, but he also promised his friends and students that death was nothing to fear. Plato, Socrates' faithful student, was an attendant at both his trial and his subsequent execution. It was up to Socrates' students to record for posterity his teachings and to bear witness to his trial, because the great teacher himself would never have bothered; Socrates did not trust the written word. Thankfully, Plato had no such reservations, and he gifted to us "The Apology" which stands over two millennia later as a monument to freedom and justice and truth. *–RLK*

THE DEFENSE[1]
I AM NOT ELOQUENT

I know not, O Athenians![2] how far you have been influenced by my accusers[3] for my part, in listening to them I almost forgot myself, so plausible were their arguments however, so to speak, they have said nothing true. But of the many falsehoods which they uttered I wondered at one of them especially, that in which they said that you ought to be on your guard lest you should be deceived by me, as being eloquent in speech. For that they are not ashamed of being forthwith convicted by me in fact, when I shall show that I am not by any means eloquent, this seemed to me the most shameless thing in them, unless indeed they call him eloquent who speaks the truth. For, if they mean this, then I would allow that I am an orator, but not after their fashion[4] for they, as I affirm, have said nothing true, but from me you shall hear the whole truth. Not indeed, Athenians, arguments highly wrought, as theirs were, with choice phrases and expressions, nor adorned, but you shall hear a speech uttered without premeditation in such words as first present themselves[5]. For I am confident that what I say will be just, and let none of you expect otherwise, for surely it would not become my time of life to come before you like a youth with a got up[6] speech. Above all things, therefore, I beg and implore this of you, O Athenians! if you hear me defending myself in the same language as that in which I am accustomed to speak both in the forum[7] at the counters, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, not to be surprised or disturbed[8] on this account. For the case is this: I now for the first time come before a court of justice, though more than seventy years old; I am therefore utterly a stranger to the language here. As, then, if I were really a stranger, you would have pardoned me if I spoke in the language and the manner in which I had been educated, so now I ask this of you as an act of justice, as it appears to me, to disregard the manner of my speech, for perhaps it may be somewhat worse, and perhaps better, and to consider this only, and to

give your attention to this, whether I speak what is just or not; for this is the virtue of a judge, but of an orator to speak the truth.

“MY FIRST ACCUSERS”

2. First, then, O Athenians! I am right in defending myself against the first false accusations alleged against me, and my first accusers, and then against the latest accusations, and the latest accusers. For many have been accusers of me to you, and for many years, who have asserted nothing true, of whom I am more afraid than of Anytus[9] and his party, although they too are formidable; but those are still more formidable, Athenians, who, laying hold of many of you from childhood, have persuaded you, and accused me of what is not true: “that there is one Socrates, a wise man, who occupies himself about celestial matters, and has explored everything under the earth[10], and makes the worse appear the better reason[11]” Those, O Athenians! who have spread abroad this report are my formidable accusers; for they who hear them think that such as search into these things do not believe that there are gods. In the next place, these accusers are numerous, and have accused me now for a long time; moreover, they said these things to you at that time of life in which you were most credulous, when you were boys and some of you youths, and they accused me altogether in my absence, when there was no one to defend me. But the most unreasonable thing of all is, that it is not possible to learn and mention their names, except that one of them happens to be a comic poet[12]. Such, however, as, influenced by envy and calumny, have persuaded you, and those who, being themselves persuaded, have persuaded others, all these are most difficult to deal with; for it is not possible to bring any of them forward here, nor to confute any[13]; but it is altogether necessary to fight, as it were with a shadow, in making my defense, and to convict when there is no one to answer. Consider, therefore, as I have said, that my accusers are twofold, some who have lately accused me, and others long since, whom I have made mention of; and believe that I ought to defend myself against these first; for you heard them accusing me first, and much more than these last.

Well. I must make my defense, then, O Athenians! and endeavor in this so short a space of time to remove from your minds the calumny which you have long entertained. I wish, indeed, it might be so, if it were at all better both for you and me, and that in making my defense I could affect something more advantageous still: I think, however, that it will be difficult, and I am not entirely ignorant what the difficulty is. Nevertheless, let this turn out as may be pleasing to God, I must obey the law and make my defense.

3. Let us, then, repeat from the beginning what the accusation is from which the calumny against me has arisen, and relying on which Meletus has preferred this indictment against me. Well. What, then, do they[14] who charge me say in their charge? For it is necessary to read their deposition as of public accusers. “Socrates acts wickedly, and is criminally curious in searching into things under the earth, and in the heavens[15], and in making the worse appear the better cause[16], and in teaching these same things to others[17].” Such is the accusation: for such things you have yourselves seen in the comedy of Aristophanes [18], one Socrates there carried about, saying that he walks in the air[19], and acting many other buffooneries, of which I understand nothing whatever. Nor do I say this as disparaging such a science, if there be any one skilled in such things, only let me not be prosecuted by Meletus on a charge of this kind; but I say it, O Athenians! because I have nothing to do with such matters. And I call upon most of you as witnesses of this, and require you to inform and tell each other, as many of you as have ever heard me conversing; and there are many such among you[20]. Therefore tell each other, if any one of you has ever heard me conversing little or much on such subjects[21]. And from this you will know that other things also, which the multitude assert of me, are of a similar nature.

4. However not one of these things is true; nor, if you have heard from any one that I attempt to teach men, and require payment[22], is this true. Though this, indeed, appears to me to be an honorable thing, if one should be able to instruct men, like Gorgias of Leontium[23], and Prodicus of Ceos[24], and Hippias of Elis[25]. For each of these, O Athenians! is able, by going through the several cities, to persuade the young men, who can attach themselves gratuitously to such of their own fellow-citizens as they please, to abandon their fellow-citizens and associate with them, giving them money and thanks besides. There is also another wise man here, a Parian, who, I hear, is staying in the city. For I happened to visit a person who spends more money on the sophists than all others together: I mean Callias, son of Hipponicus. I therefore asked him, for he has two sons, "Callias," I said, "if your two sons were colts or calves, we should have had to choose a master for them, and hire a person who would make them excel in such qualities as belong to their nature; and he would have been a groom or an agricultural laborer. But now, since your sons are men, what master do you intend to choose for them? Who is there skilled in the qualities that become a man and a citizen? For I suppose you must have considered this, since you have sons. Is there any one," I said, "or not?" "Certainly," he answered. "Who is he?" said I, "and whence does he come? and on what terms does he teach?" He replied, "Evenus the Parian, Socrates, for five minæ[26]." And I deemed Evenus happy, if he really possesses this art, and teaches admirably[27]. And I too should think highly of myself, and be very proud, if I possessed this knowledge, but I possess it not, O Athenians.

"WHY I AM CALLED WISE"

5. Perhaps, one of you may now object: "But, Socrates, what have you done, then? Whence have these calumnies[28] against you arisen? For surely if you had not busied yourself more than others, such a report and story would never have got abroad, unless you had done something different from what most men do. Tell us, therefore, what it is, that we may not pass a hasty judgment on you." He who speaks thus appears to me to speak justly, and I will endeavor to show you what it is that has occasioned me this character and imputation. Listen, then: to some of you perhaps I shall appear to jest, yet be assured that I shall tell you the whole truth. For I, O Athenians! have acquired this character through nothing else than a certain wisdom. Of what kind, then, is this wisdom? Perhaps it is merely human wisdom. For in this, in truth, I appear to be wise. They probably, whom I have just now mentioned, possessed a wisdom more than human, otherwise I know not what to say about it; for I am not acquainted with it, and whosoever says I am, speaks falsely, and for the purpose of calumniating[29] me. But, O Athenians! do not cry out against me, even though I should seem to you to speak somewhat arrogantly. For the account which I am going to give you is not my own; but I shall refer to an authority whom you will deem worthy of credit. For I shall adduce to you the god at Delphi[30] as a witness of my wisdom, if I have any, and of what it is. You doubtless know Chærepho: he was my associate from youth, and the associate of most of you; he accompanied you in your late exile, and returned with you.[31] You know, then, what kind of a man Chærepho was, how earnest in whatever he undertook. Having once gone to Delphi, he ventured to make the following inquiry of the oracle (and, as I said, O Athenians! do not cry out), for he asked if there was any one wiser than I. The Pythian [oracle] thereupon answered that there was not one wiser; and of this, his brother here will give you proofs, since he himself is dead.

"THE ORIGINS OF MY METHOD"

6. Consider, then, why I mention these things: it is because I am going to show you whence the calumny against me arose. For when I heard this, I reasoned thus with myself, What does the god mean? What enigma is this? For I am not conscious to myself that I am wise, either much or little. What, then, does he[32] mean by saying that I am the wisest? For assuredly he does not speak falsely: that he could not do. And for a long

time I was in doubt what he meant; afterward, with considerable difficulty, I had recourse to the following method of searching out his meaning. I went to one of those who have the character of being wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I should confute [33] the oracle, and show in answer to the response that this man is wiser than I, though you[34] affirmed that I was the wisest. Having, then, examined this man (for there is no occasion to mention his name; he was, however, one of our great politicians, in examining whom I felt as I proceed to describe, O Athenians!), having fallen into conversation with him, this man appeared to be wise in the opinion of most other men, and especially in his own opinion, though in fact he was not so. I thereupon endeavored to show him that he fancied himself to be wise, but really was not. Hence I became odious,[35] both to him and to many others who were present. When I left him, I reasoned thus with myself: I am wiser than this man, for neither of us appears to know anything great and good; but he fancies he knows something, although he knows nothing; whereas I, as I do not know anything, so I do not fancy I do. In this trifling particular, then, I appear to be wiser than he, because I do not fancy I know what I do not know. After that I went to another who was thought to be wiser than the former, and formed the very same opinion. Hence I became odious to him and to many others.

7. After this I went to others in turn, perceiving indeed, and grieving and alarmed, that I was making myself odious; however, it appeared necessary to regard the oracle of the god as of the greatest moment, and that, in order to discover its meaning, I must go to all who had the reputation of possessing any knowledge. And by the god, O Athenians! for I must tell you the truth, I came to some such conclusion as this: those who bore the highest reputation appeared to me to be most deficient, in my researches in obedience to the god, and others who were considered inferior more nearly approaching to the possession of understanding. But I must relate to you my wandering, and the labors which I underwent, in order that the oracle might prove incontrovertible. For after the politicians I went to the poets, as well the tragic as the dithyrambic and others, expecting that here I should in very fact find myself more ignorant than they. Taking up, therefore, some of their poems, which appeared to me most elaborately finished, I questioned them as to their meaning, that at the same time I might learn something from them. I am ashamed, O Athenians! to tell you the truth; however, it must be told. For, in a word, almost all who were present could have given a better account of them than those by whom they had been composed. I soon discovered this, therefore, with regard to the poets, that they do not affect their object by wisdom, but by a certain natural inspiration, and under the influence of enthusiasm, like prophets and seers; for these also say many fine things, but they understand nothing that they say. The poets appeared to me to be affected in a similar manner; and at the same time I perceived that they considered themselves, on account of their poetry, to be the wisest of men in other things, in which they were not. I left them, therefore, under the persuasion that I was superior to them, in the same way that I was to the politicians.

8. At last, therefore, I went to the artisans.[36] For I was conscious to myself that I knew scarcely anything, but I was sure that I should find them possessed of much beautiful knowledge. And in this I was not deceived; for they knew things which I did not, and in this respect they were wiser than I. But, O Athenians! even the best workmen appeared to me to have fallen into the same error as the poets; for each, because he excelled in the practice of his art, thought that he was very wise in other most important matters, and this mistake of theirs obscured the wisdom that they really possessed. I therefore asked myself, in behalf of the oracle, whether I should prefer to continue as I am, possessing none, either of their wisdom or their ignorance, or to have both as they have. I

answered, therefore, to myself and to the oracle, that it was better for me to continue as I am.

9. From this investigation, then, O Athenians! many enmities have arisen against me, and those the most grievous and severe, so that many calumnies have sprung from them, and among them this appellation of being wise; for those who are from time to time present think that I am wise in those things, with respect to which I expose the ignorance of others. The god, however, O Athenians! appears to be really wise, and to mean this by his oracle: that human wisdom is worth little or nothing; and it is clear that he did not say this to Socrates, but made use of my name, putting me forward as an example, as if he had said, that man is the wisest among you, who, like Socrates, knows that he is in reality worth nothing with respect to wisdom. Still, therefore, I go about and search and inquire into these things, in obedience to the god, both among citizens and strangers, if I think any one of them is wise; and when he appears to me not to be so, I take the part of the god, and show that he is not wise. And, in consequence of this occupation, I have no leisure to attend in any considerable degree to the affairs of the state or my own; but I am in the greatest poverty through my devotion to the service of the god.

10. In addition to this, young men, who have much leisure and belong to the wealthiest families, following me of their own accord, take great delight in hearing men put to the test, and often imitate me, and themselves attempt to put others to the test; and then, I think, they find a great abundance of men who fancy they know something, although they know little or nothing. Hence those who are put to the test by them are angry with me, and not with them, and say that "there is one Socrates, a most pestilent fellow, who corrupts the youth." And when any one asks them by doing or teaching what, they have nothing to say, for they do not know; but, that they may not seem to be at a loss, they say such things as are ready at hand against all philosophers: "that he searches into things in heaven and things under the earth, that he does not believe there are gods, and that he makes the worse appear the better reason." For they would not, I think, be willing to tell the truth that they have been detected in pretending to possess knowledge, whereas they know nothing. Therefore, I think, being ambitious and vehement and numerous, and speaking systematically and persuasively about me, they have filled your ears, for a long time and diligently calumniating me. From among these, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon[37] have attacked me; Meletus being angry on account of the poets, Anytus on account of the artisans and politicians, and Lycon on account of the rhetoricians.[38] So that, as I said in the beginning, I should wonder if I were able in so short a time to remove from your minds a calumny that has prevailed so long. This, O Athenians! is the truth; and I speak it without concealing or disguising anything from you, much or little; though I very well know that by so doing I shall expose myself to odium. This, however, is a proof that I speak the truth, and that this is the nature of the calumny against me, and that these are its causes. And if you will investigate the matter, either now or hereafter, you will find it to be so.

"TELL ME MELETUS"

11. With respect, then, to the charges which my first accusers have alleged against me, let this be a sufficient apology[39] to you. To Meletus, that good and patriotic man, as he says, and to my later accusers, I will next endeavor to give an answer; and here, again, as there are different accusers, let us take up their deposition. It is pretty much as follows: "Socrates," it says, "acts unjustly in corrupting the youth, and in not believing in those gods in whom the city believes, but in other strange divinities."[40] Such is the accusation; let us examine each particular of it. It says that I act unjustly in corrupting the youth. But I, O Athenians! say that Meletus[41] acts unjustly, because he jests on serious subjects, rashly putting men upon trial, under pretense of being zealous and solicitous

about things in which he never at any time took any concern. But that this is the case I will endeavor to prove to you.

12. Come, then, Meletus, tell me, do you not consider it of the greatest importance that the youth should be made as virtuous as possible?

Mel. I do.
Socr. Well, now, tell the judges who it is that makes them better, for it is evident that you know, since it concerns you so much; for, having detected me in corrupting them, as you say, you have cited me here, and accused me: come, then, say, and inform the judges who it is that makes them better.

[Meletus does not answer.]
Do you see, Meletus, that you are silent, and have nothing to say? But does it not appear to you to be disgraceful, and a sufficient proof of what I say, that you never took any concern about the matter? But tell me, friend, who makes them better?

Mel. The laws.
Socr. I do not ask this, most excellent sir, but what man, who surely must first know this very thing, the laws?

Mel. These, Socrates, the judges.[42]
Socr. How say you, Meletus? Are these able to instruct the youth, and make them better?

Mel. Certainly.
Socr. All [of the judges], or some of them, and others not?

Mel. All.
Socr. You say well, by Juno! and have found a great abundance of those that confer benefit. But what further? Can these hearers[43] make them better, or not?

Mel. They, too, can.
Socr. And what of the senators?

Mel. The senators, also.
Socr. But, Meletus, do those who attend the public assemblies corrupt the younger men? or do they all make them better?

Mel. They too.
Socr. All the Athenians, therefore, as it seems, make them honorable and good, except me; but I alone corrupt them. Do you say so?

Mel. I do assert this very thing.
Socr. You charge me with great ill-fortune. But answer me: does it appear to you to be the same, with respect to horses? Do all men make them better, and is there only some one that spoils them? or does quite the contrary of this take place? Is there some one person who can make them better, or very few; that is, the trainers? But if the generality of men should meddle with and make use of horses, do they spoil them? Is not this the case, Meletus, both with respect to horses and all other animals? It certainly is so, whether you and Anytus deny it or not. For it would be a great good-fortune for the youth if only one person corrupted, and the rest benefited them.
However, Meletus, you have sufficiently shown that you never bestowed any care upon youth; and you clearly evince your own negligence, in that you have never paid any attention to the things with respect to which you accuse me.

13. Tell us further, Meletus, in the name of Zeus, whether is it better to dwell with good or bad citizens? [Meletus does not respond.]
Answer, my friend; for I ask you nothing difficult. Do not the bad work some evil to those that are continually near them, but the good some good?

Mel. Certainly.
Socr. Is there any one that wishes to be injured rather than benefited by his associates?

[Meletus does not respond.]
Answer, good man; for the law requires you to answer. Is there any one who wishes to be injured?

Mel. No, surely.
Socr. Come, then, whether do you accuse me here, as one that corrupts the youth, and makes them more depraved, designedly or undesignedly?[44]

Mel. Designedly, I say.
Socr. What, then, Meletus, are you at your time of life so much wiser than I at my time of life, as to know that the evil are always working some evil to those that are most near to them, and the good some good; but I have arrived at such a pitch of ignorance as not to know that if I make any one of my associates depraved, I shall be in danger of receiving some evil from him; and yet I designedly bring about this so great evil, as you say? In this I cannot believe you, Meletus, nor do I think would any other man in the world. But either I do not corrupt the youth, or, if I do corrupt them, I do it undesignedly: so that in both cases you speak falsely. But if I corrupt them undesignedly, for such involuntary offenses it is not usual to accuse one here, but to take one apart, and teach and admonish one. For it is evident that if I am taught, I shall cease doing what I do undesignedly. But you shunned me, and were not willing to associate with and instruct me; but you accuse me here, where it is usual to accuse those who need punishment, and not instruction.[45]

14. Thus, then, O Athenians! this now is clear that I have said; that Meletus never paid any attention to these matters, much or little. However, tell us, Meletus, how you say I corrupt the youth? Is it not evidently, according to the indictment which you have preferred, by teaching them not to believe in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other strange deities? Do you not say that, by teaching these things, I corrupt the youth?

Mel. Certainly I do say so.
Socr. By those very gods, therefore, Meletus, of whom the discussion now is, speak still more clearly both to me and to these men. For I cannot understand whether you say that I teach them to believe that there are certain gods (and in that case I do believe that there are gods, and am not altogether an atheist, nor in this respect to blame), not, however, those which the city believes in, but others; and this it is that you accuse me of, that I introduce others. Or do you say outright that I do not myself believe that there are gods, and that I teach others the same?

Mel. I say this: that you do not believe in any gods at all.
Socr. O wonderful Meletus, how come you to say this? Do I not, then, like the rest of mankind, believe that the sun and moon are gods?

Mel. No, by Zeus, O judges! for he says that the sun is a stone, and the moon an earth.[46]
Socr. You fancy that you are accusing Anaxagoras,47 my dear Meletus, and thus you put a slight on48 these men, and suppose them to be so illiterate as not to know that the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomene are full of such assertions. And the young, moreover, learn these things from me? Things which they might purchase for a drachma, at most, in the orchestra, and so ridicule Socrates, if he pretended they were his own, especially since they are so absurd? I ask then, by Zeus, do I appear to you to believe that there is no god?
Mel. No, by Zeus, none whatever.
Socr. You say what is incredible, Meletus, and that, as appears to me, even to yourself. For this man, O Athenians! appears to me to be very

insolent and intemperate and to have preferred this indictment through downright insolence, intemperance, and wantonness. For he seems, as it were, to have composed an enigma for the purpose of making an experiment: "Will Socrates the Wise know that I am jesting, and contradict myself, or shall I deceive him and all who hear me?" For, in my opinion, he clearly contradicts himself in the indictment, as if he should say, "Socrates is guilty of wrong in not believing that there are gods, and in believing that there are gods." And this, surely, is the act of one who is trifling.

15. Consider with me now, Athenians, in what respect he appears to me to say so. And do you, Meletus, answer me; and do ye,[49] as I besought you at the outset, remember not to make an uproar if I speak after my usual manner.
Is there any man, Meletus, who believes that there are human affairs, but does not believe that there are men? Let him answer, judges, and not make so much noise.[50] Is there any one who does not believe that there are horses, but that there are things pertaining to horses? or who does not believe that there are pipers, but that there are things pertaining to pipes?

[Meletus does not respond.]
There is not, O best of men! for since you are not willing to answer, I say it to you and to all here present. But answer to this at least: is there any one who believes that there are things relating to daimons,[51] but does not believe that there are daimons?
Mel. There is not.
Socr. How obliging you are in having hardly answered; though compelled by these judges! You assert, then, that I do believe and teach things relating to daimons, whether they be new or old;[52] therefore, according to your admission, I do believe in things relating to daimons, and this you have sworn in the bill of indictment. If, then, I believe in things relating to daimons, there is surely an absolute necessity that I should believe that there are daimons. Is it not so?

[Meletus does not respond.]
It is. For I suppose you to assent, since you do not answer. But with respect to daimons, do we not allow that they are gods, or the children of gods? Do you admit this or not?

Mel. Certainly.
Socr. Since, then, I allow that there are daimons, as you admit, if daimons are a kind of gods, this is the point in which I say you speak enigmatically and divert yourself in saying that I do not allow there are gods, and again that I do allow there are, since I allow that there are daimons? But if daimons are the children of gods, spurious ones, either from nymphs or any others, of whom they are reported to be, what man can think that there are sons of gods, and yet that there are not gods? For it would be just as absurd as if any one should think that there are mules, the offspring of horses and asses, but should not think there are horses and asses. However, Meletus, it cannot be otherwise than that you have preferred this indictment for the purpose of trying me, or because you were at a loss what real crime to allege against me; for that you should persuade any man who has the smallest degree of sense that the same person can think that there are things relating to daimons and to gods, and yet that there are neither daimons, nor gods, nor heroes, is utterly impossible.

"I CANNOT ABANDON MY POST"

16. That I am not guilty, then, O Athenians! according to the indictment of Meletus, appears to me not to require a lengthened defense; but what I have said is sufficient. And as to what I said at the beginning, that there is a great enmity toward me among the multitude, be assured it is true. And this it is which will condemn me, if I am condemned, not Meletus,

nor Anytus, but the calumny and envy of the multitude, which have already condemned many others, and those good men, and will, I think, condemn others also; for there is no danger that it will stop with me. Perhaps, however, someone may say, “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have pursued a study from which you are now in danger of dying?” To such a person I should answer with good reason, you do not say well, friend, if you think that a man, who is even of the least value, ought to take into the account the risk of life or death, and ought not to consider that he is alone when he performs any action, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, and the part of a good man or bad man. For, according to your reasoning, all those demi-gods[53] that died at Troy[54] would be vile characters, as well as the son of Thetis,[55] who so far despised danger in comparison of submitting to disgrace, that when his mother, who was a goddess, spoke to him, in his impatience to kill Hector, something to this effect, as I think, ”My son, if you revenge the death of your friend Patroclus, and slay Hector, you will yourself die, for,” she said, “death awaits you immediately after Hector;” but he, on hearing this, despised death and danger, and dreading much more to live as a coward, and not avenge his friend, said, “May I die immediately when I have inflicted punishment on the guilty, that I may not stay here an object of ridicule, by the curved ships, a burden to the ground?” Do you think that he cared for death and danger? For thus it is, O Athenians! in truth: wherever any one has posted himself, either thinking it to be better, or has been posted by his chief, there, as it appears to me, he ought to remain and meet danger, taking no account either of death or anything else in comparison with disgrace.

17. I then should be acting strangely, O Athenians! if, when the generals whom you chose to command me assigned me my post at Potidaea, at Amphipolis, and at Delium,[56] I then remained where they posted me, like any other person, and encountered the danger of death; but when the deity,[57] as I thought and believed, assigned it as my duty to pass my life in the study of philosophy, and examining myself and others, I should on that occasion, through fear of death or anything else whatsoever, desert my post, strange indeed would it be; and then, in truth, any one might justly bring me to trial, and accuse me of not believing in the gods, from disobeying the oracle, fearing death, and thinking myself to be wise when I am not. For to fear death, O Athenians! is nothing else than to appear to be wise, without being so; for it is to appear to know what one does not know. For no one knows but that death is the greatest of all good to man; but men fear it, as if they well knew that it is the greatest of evils. And how is not this the most reprehensible ignorance, to think that one knows what one does not know? But I, O Athenians! in this, perhaps, differ from most men; and if I should say that I am in anything wiser than another, it would be in this, that not having a competent knowledge of the things in Hades,[58] I also think that I have not such knowledge. But to act unjustly, and to disobey my superior, whether God or man, I know is evil and base. I shall never, therefore, fear or shun things which, for aught I know, maybe good, before evils which I know to be evils. So that, even if you should now dismiss me, not yielding to the instances of Anytus, who said that either I should not appear here at all, or that, if I did appear, it was impossible not to put me to death, telling you that if I escaped, your sons, studying what Socrates teaches, would all be utterly corrupted; if you should address me thus, “Socrates, we shall not now yield to Anytus, but dismiss you, on this condition, however, that you no longer persevere in your researches nor study philosophy; and if hereafter you are detected in so doing, you shall die”—if, as I said, you should dismiss, me on these terms, I should say to you, “O Athenians! I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you; and so long as I breathe and am able, I shall not cease studying philosophy, and exhorting you and warning any one of you I may happen to meet, saying, as I have been accustomed to do: 'O best of men! seeing you are an Athenian, of a city the most powerful and most renowned for wisdom and strength, are you not ashamed of being careful for riches, how you

may acquire them in greatest abundance, and for glory, and honor, but care not nor take any thought for wisdom and truth, and for your soul, how it maybe made most perfect?"“ And if any one of you should question my assertion, and affirm that he does care for these things, I shall not at once let him go, nor depart, but I shall question him, sift and prove him. And if he should appear to me not to possess virtue, but to pretend that he does, I shall reproach him for that he sets the least value on things of the greatest worth, but the highest on things that are worthless. Thus I shall act to all whom I meet, both young and old, stranger and citizen, but rather to you, my fellow-citizens, because ye are more nearly allied to me. For be well assured, this the deity commands. And I think that no greater good has ever befallen you in the city than my zeal for the service of the god. For I go about doing nothing else than persuading you, both young and old, to take no care either for the body, or for riches, prior to or so much as for the soul, how it may be made most perfect, telling you that virtue does not spring from riches, but riches and all other human blessings, both private and public, from virtue. If, then, by saying these things, I corrupt the youth, these things must be mischievous; but if any one says that I speak other things than these, he misleads you. Therefore I must say, O Athenians! either yield to Anytus, or do not, either dismiss me or not, since I shall not act otherwise, even though I must die many deaths.

“I AM GOD’S GIFT TO ATHENS”

18. Murmur not, O Athenians! but continue to attend to my request, not to murmur at what I say, but to listen, for, as I think, you will derive benefit from listening. For I am going to say other things to you, at which, perhaps, you will raise a clamor; but on no account do so. Be well assured, then, if you put me to death, being such a man as I say I am, you will not injure me more than yourselves. For neither will Meletus nor Anytus harm me; nor have they the power; for I do not think that it is possible for a better man to be injured by a worse. He may perhaps have me condemned to death, or banished, or deprived of civil rights; and he or others may perhaps consider these as mighty evils; I, however, do not consider them so, but that it is much more so to do what he is now doing, to endeavor to put a man to death unjustly. Now, therefore, O Athenians! I am far from making a defense on my behalf, as any one might think, but I do so on your own behalf, lest by condemning me you should offend at all with respect to the gift of the deity to you. For, if you should put me to death, you will not easily find such another, though it may be ridiculous to say so, altogether attached by the deity to this city as to a powerful and generous horse, somewhat sluggish from his size, and requiring to be roused by a gad-fly; so the deity appears to have united me, being such a person as I am, to the city, that I may rouse you, and persuade and reprove every one of you, nor ever cease besetting you throughout the whole day. Such another man, O Athenians! will not easily be found; therefore, if you will take my advice, you will spare me. But you, perhaps, being irritated like drowsy persons who are roused from sleep, will strike me, and, yielding to Anytus, will unthinkingly condemn me to death; and then you will pass the rest of your life in sleep, unless the deity, caring for you, should send someone else to you. But that I am a person who has been given by the deity to this city, you may discern from hence; for it is not like the ordinary conduct of men, that I should have neglected all my own affairs, and suffered my private interest to be neglected for so many years, and that I should constantly attend to your concerns, addressing myself to each of you separately, like a father, or elder brother, persuading you to the pursuit of virtue. And if I had derived any profit from this course, and had received pay for my exhortations, there would have been some reason for my conduct; but now you see yourselves that my accusers, who have so shamelessly calumniated me in everything else, have not had the impudence to charge me with this, and to bring witnesses to prove that I ever either exacted or demanded any reward. And I think I produce a sufficient proof that I speak the truth, namely, my poverty.

“WHY I TEACH BUT DO NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICAL LIFE”

19. Perhaps, however, it may appear absurd that I, going about, thus advise you in private and make myself busy, but never venture to present myself in public before your assemblies and give advice to the city. The cause of this is that which you have often and in many places heard me mention; because I am moved by a certain divine and spiritual influence, which also Meletus, through mockery, has set out in the indictment. This began with me from childhood, being a kind of voice which, when present, always diverts me from what I am about to do, but never urges me on.[59] This it is which opposed my meddling in public politics; and it appears to me to have opposed me very properly. For be well assured, O Athenians! if I had long since attempted to intermeddle with politics, I should have perished long ago, and should not have at all benefited you or myself. And be not angry with me for speaking the truth. For it is not possible that any man should be safe who sincerely opposes either you, or any other multitude, and who prevents many unjust and illegal actions from being committed in a city; but it is necessary that he who in earnest contends for justice, if he will be safe for but a short time, should live privately, and take no part in public affairs.

20. I will give you strong proofs of this, not words, but what you value, facts. Hear, then, what has happened to me, that you may know that I would not yield to any one contrary to what is just, through fear of death, at the same time by not yielding I must perish. I shall tell you what will be displeasing and wearisome, yet true. For I, O Athenians! never bore any other magisterial office in the city, but have been a senator,[60] and our Antiochean tribe happened to supply the Prytanes when you chose to condemn in a body the ten generals who had not taken off those that perished in the sea-fight, in violation of the law, as you afterward all thought. At that time I alone of the Prytanes opposed your doing anything contrary to the laws, and I voted against you; and when the orators were ready to denounce me, and to carry me before a magistrate, and you urged and cheered them on, I thought I ought rather to meet the danger with law and justice on my side, than through fear of imprisonment or death, to take part with you in your unjust designs. And this happened while the city was governed by a democracy. But when it became an oligarchy, the Thirty,[61] having sent for me with four others to the Tholus, ordered us to bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis, that he might be put to death; and they gave many similar orders to many others, wishing to involve as many as they could in guilt. Then, however, I showed, not in word but in deed, that I did not care for death, if the expression be not too rude, in the smallest degree; but that all my care was to do nothing unjust or unholy. For that government, strong as it was, did not so overawe me as to make me commit an unjust action; but when we came out from the Tholus, the four went to Salamis, and brought back Leon; but I went away home. And perhaps for this I should have been put to death, if that government had not been speedily broken up. And of this you can have many witnesses.

21. Do you think, then, that I should have survived so many years if I had engaged in public affairs, and, acting as becomes a good man, had aided the cause of justice, and, as I ought, had deemed this of the highest importance? Far from it, O Athenians! nor would any other man have done so. But I, through the whole of my life, if I have done anything in public, shall be found to be a man, and the very same in private, who has never made a concession to any one contrary to justice, neither to any other, nor to any one of these whom my calumniators say are my disciples. I, however, was never the preceptor of any one; but if any one desired to hear me speaking, and to see me busied about my own mission, whether he were young or old, I never refused him. Nor do I discourse when I receive money, and not when I do not receive any, but I allow both rich and poor alike to question me, and, if any one wishes it, to answer me and hear what I have to say. And for these, whether any one proves to be a good man or not, I cannot justly be responsible,

because I never either promised them any instruction or taught them at all. But if any one says that he has ever learned or heard anything from me in private which all others have not, be well assured that he does not speak the truth.

22. But why do some delight to spend so long a time with me? Ye have heard, O Athenians! I have told you the whole truth, that they delight to hear those closely questioned who think that they are wise but are not; for this is by no means disagreeable. But this duty, as I say, has been enjoined me by the deity, by oracles, by dreams, and by every mode by which any other divine decree has ever enjoined anything to man to do. These things, O Athenians! are both true, and easily confuted if not true. For if I am now corrupting some of the youths, and have already corrupted others, it were fitting, surely, that if any of them, having become advanced in life, had discovered that I gave them bad advice when they were young, they should now rise up against me, accuse me, and have me punished; or if they were themselves unwilling to do this, some of their kindred, their fathers, or brothers, or other relatives, if their kinsman have ever sustained any damage from me, should now call it to mind. Many of them, however, are here present, whom I see: first, Crito, my contemporary and fellow- burgher,[62] father of this Critobulus; then Lysanias of Sphettus, father of this Æschines; again, Antiphon of Cephisus, father of Epigenes. There are those others, too, whose brothers maintained the same intimacy with me, namely, Nicostratus, son of Theodotus, brother of Theodotus (Theodotus indeed is dead, so that he could not deprecate his brother's proceedings), and Paralus here, son of Demodocus, whose brother was Theages; and Adimantus, son of Ariston, whose brother is this Plato;[63] and Æantodorus, whose brother is this Apollodorus.[64] I could also mention many others to you, some one of whom certainly Meletus ought to have adduced in his speech as a witness. If, however, he then forgot to do so, let him now adduce them; I give him leave to do so, and let him say it, if he has anything of the kind to allege. But, quite contrary to this, you will find, O Athenians! all ready to assist me, who have corrupted and injured their relatives,[65] as Meletus and Anytus say. For those who have been themselves corrupted might perhaps have some reason for assisting me; but those who have not been corrupted, men now advanced in life, their relatives, what other reason can they have for assisting me, except that right and just one, that they know that Meletus speaks falsely, and that I speak the truth.

“WHY WILL I NOT BEG FOR MERCY”

23. Well, then, Athenians, these are pretty much the things I have to say in my defense, and others perhaps of the same kind. Perhaps, however, some among you will be indignant on recollecting his own case, if he, when engaged in a cause far less than this, implored and besought the judges with many tears, bringing forward his children in order that he might excite their utmost compassion, and many others of his relatives and friends, whereas I do none of these things, although I may appear to be incurring the extremity of danger. Perhaps, therefore, someone, taking notice of this, may become more determined against me, and, being enraged at this very conduct of mine, may give his vote under the influence of anger. If, then, any one of you is thus affected (I do not, however, suppose that there is, but if there should be), I think I may reasonably say to him: “I, too, O best of men, have relatives; for, to make use of that saying of Homer, I am not sprung from an oak, nor from a rock, but from men,[66] so that I, too, O Athenians! have relatives, and three sons, one now grown up, and two boys: I shall not, however, bring any one of them forward and implore you to acquit me.” Why, then, shall I not do this? Not from contumacy,[67] O Athenians! nor disrespect toward you. Whether or not I am undaunted at the prospect of death is another question; but, out of regard to my own character, and yours, and that of the whole city, it does not appear to me to be honorable that I should do anything of this kind at my age, and with the reputation I have, whether true or false. For it is commonly agreed that Socrates in some respects

excels the generality of men. If, then, those among you who appear to excel either in wisdom, or fortitude, or any other virtue whatsoever, should act in such a manner as I have often seen some when they have been brought to trial, it would be shameful, who appearing indeed to be something, have conducted themselves in a surprising manner, as thinking they should suffer something dreadful by dying, and as if they would be immortal if you did not put them to death. Such men appear to me to bring disgrace on the city, so that any stranger might suppose that such of the Athenians as excel in virtue, and whom they themselves choose in preference to themselves for magistracies and other honors, are in no respect superior to women. For these things, O Athenians! neither ought we to do who have attained to any height of reputation, nor, should we do them, ought you to suffer us; but you should make this manifest, that you will much rather condemn him who introduces these piteous dramas, and makes the city ridiculous, than him who quietly awaits your decision.

24. But, reputation apart, O Athenians! it does not appear to me to be right to entreat a judge, or to escape by entreaty; but one ought to inform and persuade him. For a judge does not sit for the purpose of administering justice out of favor, but that he may judge rightly, and he is sworn not to show favor to whom he pleases, but that he will decide according to the laws. It is, therefore, right that neither should we accustom you, nor should you accustom yourselves, to violate your oaths; for in so doing neither of us would act righteously. Think not then, O Athenians! that I ought to adopt such a course toward you as I neither consider honorable, nor just, nor holy, as well, by Zeus! on any other occasion, and now especially when I am accused of impiety by this Meletus. For clearly, if I should persuade you, and by my entreaties should put a constraint on you who are bound by an oath, I should teach you to think that there are no gods, and in reality, while making my defense, should accuse myself of not believing in the gods. This, however, is far from being the case; for I believe, O Athenians! as none of my accusers do, and I leave it to you and to the deity to judge concerning me in such way as will be best both for me and for you.[68]

THE PENALTY PHASE
"A CLOSE VOTE"

25. That I should not be grieved, O Athenians! at what has happened (namely, that you have condemned me) as well many other circumstances concur in bringing to pass; and, moreover this, that what has happened has not happened contrary to my expectation; but I much rather wonder at the number of votes on either side. For I did not expect that I should be condemned by so small a number, but by a large majority; but now, as it seems, if only thirty more votes had changed sides, I should have been acquitted. So far as Meletus is concerned, as it appears to me, I have been already acquitted; and not only have I been acquitted, but it is clear to everyone that had not Anytus and Lycon come forward to accuse me, he would have been fined a thousand drachmas, for not having obtained a fifth part of the votes.

"WHAT DO I DESERVE?"

26. The man, then, awards me the penalty of death. Well. But what shall I, on my part, O Athenians! award myself? Is it not clear that it will be such as I deserve? What, then, is that? Do I deserve to suffer, or to pay a fine? for that I have purposely during my life not remained quiet, but neglecting what most men seek after, money-making, domestic concerns, military command, popular oratory, and, moreover, all the magistracies, conspiracies, and cabals that are met with in the city, thinking that I was in reality too upright a man to be safe if I took part in such things, I therefore did not apply myself to those pursuits, by attending to which I should have been of no service either to you or to myself; but in order to confer the greatest benefit on each of you privately, as I affirm, I thereupon applied myself to that object, endeavoring to persuade every one of you not to take any care of his own affairs before he had taken

care of himself in what way he may become the best and wisest, nor of the affairs of the city before he took care of the city itself; and that he should attend to other things in the same manner. What treatment, then, do I deserve, seeing I am such a man? Some reward, O Athenians! if, at least, I am to be estimated according to my real deserts; and, moreover, such a reward as would be suitable to me. What, then, is suitable to a poor man, a benefactor, and who has need of leisure in order to give you good advice? There is nothing so suitable, O Athenians! as that such a man should be maintained in the Prytaneum,[69] and this much more than if one of you had been victorious at the Olympic games in a horserace, or in the two or four horsed chariot race: for such a one makes you appear to be happy, but I, to be so; and he does not need support, but I do. If, therefore, I must award a sentence according to my just deserts, I award this, maintenance in the Prytaneum.

27. Perhaps, however, in speaking to you thus, I appear to you to speak in the same presumptuous manner as I did respecting commiseration and entreaties; but such is not the case, O Athenians! it is rather this: I am persuaded that I never designedly injured any man, though I cannot persuade you of this, for we have conversed with each other but for a short time. For if there were the same law with you as with other men,[70] that in capital cases the trial should list not only one day, but many, I think you would be persuaded; but it is not easy in a short time to do away with, great calumnies. Being persuaded, then, that I have injured no one, I am far from intending to injure myself, and of pronouncing against myself that I am deserving of punishment, and from awarding myself anything of the kind. Through fear of what? Lest I should suffer that which Meletus awards me,[71] of which I say I know not whether it be good or evil? Instead of this, shall I choose what I well know to be evil, and award that? Shall I choose imprisonment? And why should I live in prison, a slave to the established magistracy, the Eleven?[72] Shall I choose a fine, and to be imprisoned until I have paid it? But this is the same as that which I just now mentioned, for I have not money to pay it. Shall I, then, award myself exile? For perhaps you would consent to this award. I should indeed be very fond of life, O Athenians! if I were so devoid of reason as not to be able to reflect that you, who are my fellow-citizens, have been unable to endure my manner of life and discourses, but they have become so burdensome and odious to you that you now seek to be rid of them: others, however, will easily bear them. Far from it, O Athenians! A fine life it would be for me at my age to go out wandering, and driven from city to city, and so to live. For I well know that, wherever I may go, the youth will listen to me when I speak, as they do here. And if I repulse them, they will themselves drive me out, persuading the elders; and if I do not repulse them, their fathers and kindred will banish me on their account.

28. Perhaps, however, someone will say, “Can you not, Socrates, when you have gone from us, live a silent and quiet life?” This is the most difficult thing of all to persuade some of you. For if I say that that would be to disobey the deity, and that, therefore, it is impossible for me to live quietly, you would not believe me, thinking I spoke ironically. If, on the other hand, I say that this is the greatest good to man, to discourse daily on virtue, and other things which you have heard me discussing, examining both myself and others, but that a life without investigation is not worth living for, still less would you believe me if I said this. Such, however, is the case, as I affirm, O Athenians! though it is not easy to persuade you. And at the same time I am not accustomed to think myself deserving of any ill. If, indeed, I were rich, I would amerce[73] myself in such a sum as I should be able to pay; for then I should have suffered no harm, but now—for I cannot, unless you are willing to amerce me in such a sum as I am able to pay. But perhaps I could pay you a mina of silver: in that sum, then, I amerce myself. But Plato[74] here, O Athenians! and Crito Critobulus, and Apollodorus bid me amerce myself in thirty

minæ, and they offer to be sureties. I amerce myself, then, to you in that sum; and they will be sufficient sureties for the money.[75]

FAREWELL TO ATHENS
"YOU HAVE CONDEMNED YOURSELVES"

29. For the sake of no long space of time, O Athenians! you will incur the character and reproach at the hands of those who wish to defame the city, of having put that wise man, Socrates, to death. For those who wish to defame you will assert that I am wise, though I am not. If, then, you had waited for a short time, this would have happened of its own accord; for observe my age, that it is far advanced in life, and near death. But I say this not to you all, but to those only who have condemned me to die. And I say this, too, to the same persons. Perhaps you think, O Athenians! that I have been convicted through the want of arguments, by which I might have persuaded you, had I thought it right to do and say anything, so that I might escape punishment. Far otherwise: I have been convicted through want indeed, yet not of arguments, but of audacity and impudence, and of the inclination to say such things to you as would have been most agreeable for you to hear, had I lamented and bewailed and done and said many other things unworthy of me, as I affirm, but such as you are accustomed to hear from others. But neither did I then think that I ought, for the sake of avoiding danger, to do anything unworthy of a freeman, nor do I now repent of having so defended myself; but I should much rather choose to die, having so defended myself, than to live in that way. For neither in a trial nor in battle is it right that I or any one else should employ every possible means whereby he may avoid death; for in battle it is frequently evident that a man might escape death by laying down his arms, and throwing himself on the mercy of his pursuers. And there are many other devices in every danger, by which to avoid death, if a man dares to do and say everything. But this is not difficult, O Athenians! to escape death; but it is much more difficult to avoid depravity, for it runs swifter than death. And now I, being slow and aged, am overtaken by the slower of the two; but my accusers, being strong and active, have been overtaken by the swifter, wickedness. And now I depart, condemned by you to death; but they condemned by truth, as guilty of iniquity and injustice: and I abide my sentence, and so do they. These things, perhaps, ought so to be, and I think that they are for the best.

30. In the next place, I desire to predict to you who have condemned me, what will be your fate; for I am now in that condition in which men most frequently prophesy, namely, when they are about to die. I say, then, to you, O Athenians! who have condemned me to death, that immediately after my death a punishment will overtake you, far more severe, by Zeus! than that which you have inflicted on me. For you have done this, thinking you should be freed from the necessity of giving an account of your lives. The very contrary, however, as I affirm, will happen to you. Your accusers will be more numerous, whom I have now restrained, though you did not perceive it; and they will be more severe, inasmuch as they are younger, and you will be more indignant. For if you think that by putting men to death you will restrain any one from upbraiding you because you do not live well, you are much mistaken; for this method of escape is neither possible nor honorable; but that other is most honorable and most easy, not to put a check upon others, but for a man to take heed to himself how he may be most perfect. Having predicted thus much to those of you who have condemned me, I take my leave of you.

"DEATH IS A BLESSING"

31. But with you who have voted for my acquittal I would gladly hold converse on what has now taken place, while the magistrates are busy, and I am not yet carried to the place where I must die. Stay with me, then, so long, O Athenians! for nothing hinders our conversing with each other, while we are permitted to do so; for I wish to make known to you, as being my friends, the meaning of that which has just now befallen me. To me, then, O my judges! (and in calling you judges I call you rightly),

a strange thing has happened. For the wonted prophetic voice of my guardian deity on every former occasion, even in the most trifling affairs, opposed me if I was about to do anything wrong; but now that has befallen me which ye yourselves behold, and which any one would think, and which is supposed to be the extremity of evil; yet neither when I departed from home in the morning did the warning of the god oppose me, nor when I came up here to the place of trial, nor in my address when I was about to say anything; yet on other occasions it has frequently restrained me in the midst of speaking. But now it has never, throughout this proceeding, opposed me, either in what I did or said. What, then, do I suppose to be the cause of this? I will tell you: what has befallen me appears to be a blessing; and it is impossible that we think rightly who suppose that death is an evil. A great proof of this to me is the fact that it is impossible but that the accustomed signal should have opposed me, unless I had been about to meet with some good.

32. Moreover, we may hence conclude that there is great hope that death is a blessing. For to die is one of two things: for either the dead may be annihilated, and have no sensation of anything whatever; or, as it is said, there are a certain change and passage of the soul from one place to another. And if it is a privation of all sensation, as it were a sleep in which the sleeper has no dream, death would be a wonderful gain. For I think that if any one, having selected a night in which he slept so soundly as not to have had a dream, and having compared this night with all the other nights and days of his life, should be required, on consideration, to say how many days and nights he had passed better and more pleasantly than this night throughout his life, I think that not only a private person, but even the great king himself, would find them easy to number, in comparison with other days and nights. If, therefore, death is a thing of this kind, I say it is a gain; for thus all futurity appears to be nothing more than one night. But if, on the other hand, death is a removal from hence to another place, and what is said be true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing can there be than this, my judges? For if, on arriving at Hades,[76] released from these who pretend to be judges, one shall find those who are true judges, and who are said to judge there, Minos and Rhadamanthus,[77] Æacus[78] and Triptolemus[79], and such others of the demi-gods as were just during their own life, would this be a sad removal? At what price would you not estimate a conference with Orpheus[80] and Musæus,[81] Hesiod[82] and Homer?[83] I indeed should be willing to die often, if this be true. For to me the sojourn there would be admirable, when I should meet with Palamedes, and Ajax, son of Telamon,[84] and any other of the ancients who has died by an unjust sentence. The comparing my sufferings with theirs would, I think, be no unpleasing occupation. But the greatest pleasure would be to spend my time in questioning and examining the people there as I have done those here, and discovering who among them is wise, and who fancies himself to be so, but is not. At what price, my judges, would not any one estimate the opportunity of questioning him who led that mighty army against Troy, or Ulysses [85], or Sisyphus, or ten thousand others whom one might mention both men and women, with whom to converse and associate, and to question them, would be an inconceivable happiness? Surely for that the judges there do not condemn to death; for in other respects those who live there are more happy than those who are here, and are henceforth immortal, if, at least, what is said be true.

33. You, therefore, O my judges! ought to entertain good hopes with respect to death, and to meditate on this one truth, that to a good man nothing is evil, neither while living nor when dead, nor are his concerns neglected by the gods. And what has befallen me is not the effect of chance; but this is clear to me, that now to die, and be freed from my cares is better for me. On this account the warning[86] in no way turned me aside; and I bear no resentment toward those who condemned me, or against my accusers, although they did not condemn and accuse me with

this intention, but thinking to injure me: in this they deserve to be blamed.

“GOODBYE”

Thus much, however, I beg of them. Punish my sons when they grow up, O judges! paining them as I have pained you, if they appear to you to care for riches or anything else before virtue; and if they think themselves to be something when they are nothing, reproach them as I have done you, for not attending to what they ought, and for conceiving themselves to be something when they are worth nothing. If ye do this, both I and my sons shall have met with just treatment at your hands. But it is now time to depart—for me to die, for you to live. But which of us is going to a better state is unknown to everyone but God.

FIGURE 2 JACQUES LOUIS DAVID (1748–1825), THE DEATH OF SOCRATES IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK, NY. 1787 OIL ON CANVAS.

1 “Apology” means “defense”. The trial of Socrates took place in 399 BC. Whether this speech represents the exact or nearly exact words of Socrates offered in his own defense or is Plato’s posthumous defense of his master put in his master’s mouth is unknowable.
2 The 500 jurors/judges who will decide the fate of Socrates are Athenian men required to serve on the Heliaia.
3 Anytus and Meletus, the prosecutors or presenters of the case against Socrates.
4 Planned, pre-written speeches with rhetorical flourishes, which Socrates sees as essentially dishonest.
5 Extempore; Socrates’ refusal to plan a defense or even speak in defense of himself could be seen as arrogant, dismissive of authority, and contemptuous of Athenian justice. In fact, that is likely how the jurors who found him guilty and sentenced him to death took his informal approach.
6 Pre-planned.
7 The agora or the assembly place; an outdoor communal space.
8 Apparently, it was common for the dikasts (the jurors) to interrupt witnesses (in fact, questioning witnesses was one of the duties of the dikasts), but as you will see these jurors interrupt Socrates with angry interjections or erupt into arguing amongst themselves during his defense.
9 The prosecutor.
10 Philosophical materialism: that reality is composed of matter (particles or atoms) and that all phenomena have a natural, scientific explanation; philosophical materialism is essentially atheistic as it rejects the possibility of a spiritual reality.
11 Sophistry: as Aristophanes’ depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds* attests, many believed Socrates was a sophist, a teacher who made money teaching young men how to make specious and morally unsound arguments.
12 Aristophanes.
13 Examine them as a witnesses; in other words Socrates asserts that he is being denied the ability to confront witnesses and these first accusers, as was his natural and civil right.
14 That is the slanderers, his first accusers.
15 Philosophical materialism or natural philosophy.
16 Sophistry.
17 Corruption of the youth of Athens (one of the official charges against Socrates).
18 Aristophanes’ The Clouds (423 BC) is a comedic and satirical examination of the conflict of ideas, old and new; Socrates is parodied as the worst kind of sophist who, at his school The Thinkery, turns an athletic young man into a weak nerd who attacks his own father and threatens his mother.
19 In *The Clouds*, Socrates is introduced in a hanging basket trying to use the height to help him better investigate the sky.
20 Socrates has friends on the jury.
21 Socrates pauses so that his friends and students can respond.
22 Sophists famously grew wealthy off of their students.
23 The Nihilist and Father of Sophistry: “Nothing exists and even if it does it can be proven to exist.”
24 A sophist and natural philosopher who taught ethics and was a friend of Socrates.
25 Regarded by many to be an expert on everything.
26 A mina is the equivalent of about 100 drachmae, and was an exorbitant sum of money.
27 Socrates is not being facetious; he seems to be saying that knowledge is quite valuable and should be valued.

28 Slanders.
29 Slandering.
30 Apollo; Delphi was a famed temple where the Oracle (a prophetic priestess) would channel the words of Apollo.
31 Unlike Socrates, Chaerephon and other supporters of the democracy suffered a temporary exile from Athens following its defeat by Sparta.
32 The god Apollo.
33 Disprove.
34 The oracle.
35 Hated.
36 Craftsmen and fine artists.
37 A third prosecutor.
38 Persuasive speakers or debaters.
39 Again, in the sense of "defense" and not "regretful acknowledgement of guilt".
40 These are the official charges against Socrates, levied by the three prosecutors.
41 Of the three prosecutors, Socrates singles out Meletus, who is the youngest of the three, a poet, and a religious zealot. It appears that Meletus is the softest of the three targets, making him an interesting choice.
42 The 500 dikasts.
43 The audience
44 Intentionally or unintentionally.
45 Socrates is erroneously and perhaps cynically equating ignorance (in the moral sense) with innocence (in the legal sense). He is, in other words, employing a common (and infuriating) sophistic method.
46 Philosophical materialist speculation.
47 Anaxagoras (510 – 428 BC) was a philosophical materialist and teacher of Pericles.
48 Insult.
49 The dikasts and the audience who are now in an uproar thanks to Socrates' courtroom dramatics.
50 The audience is still not settled, or it erupts again. The latter would make sense as Socrates asks a seemingly unrelated question.
51 Nature spirits or spirit guides.
52 These daimons are the unapproved gods referenced in the indictment; Socrates claimed to be under the guidance of daimons who would prevent him from doing evil things.
53 Heroes.
54 The Trojan War.
55 Achilles.
56 Famous battles of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) where Socrates fought with distinction.
57 Apollo.
58 The Greek afterlife.
59 The daemons.
60 He was the head (Epistates) of his tribal council (Boule) in 406 BC.
61 The Thirty Tyrants. Despite Socrates' principled stand against the Thirty, the fact that their leader, Critias, was his student was arguably the real reason for the Athenians' persecution of the Socrates.
62 Crito was Socrates' life-long friend; both men were from the deme Alopece.
63 One of only three references to himself in the *Dialogues*.
64 Apollodorus is the narrator of the *Symposium* and a Socrates' fan-boy.
65 This phrase is dripping with sarcasm; Socrates asserts that had he corrupted the relatives of these men surely they would have the best reason to testify against him, and yet they rally to his defense.
66 *Odyssey* 19.
67 Contempt, in the legal sense.
68 The dikasts find Socrates guilty 280 to 220. Meletus followed the guilty verdict with the recommendation of the death penalty. It was expected that Socrates would request exile.
69 Socrates believes he deserves to be treated to free meals and shelter at the communal hearth.
70 Namely, the Spartans who, in the interest of justice and in recognition of the gravity of a capital case, refused to try capital crimes in a single day as the Athenians did. This negative comparison to their arch-rivals cannot have sat well with the Athenian dikasts.
71 Death, which as an unknown, should not be feared.
72 Prison officials.
73 Assign a fine.
74 The second time Plato refers to himself in the *Apology*.
75 The dikasts vote for the death penalty 360 to 140.
76 The Greek afterlife.
77 Minos and Rhadamanthus were brothers from Crete and were both judges of the dead, assigning them their place (and sometimes punishment) in the Underworld.
78 The third judge of the dead.
79 The cult of Triptolemus offered hope of a happy afterlife.
80 Legendary musician.
81 Legendary polymath.
82 Poet, author of the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.
83 Poet, author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.
84 Palamedes and Ajax are Trojan War heroes.
85 Odysseus.
86 Of the daemons.