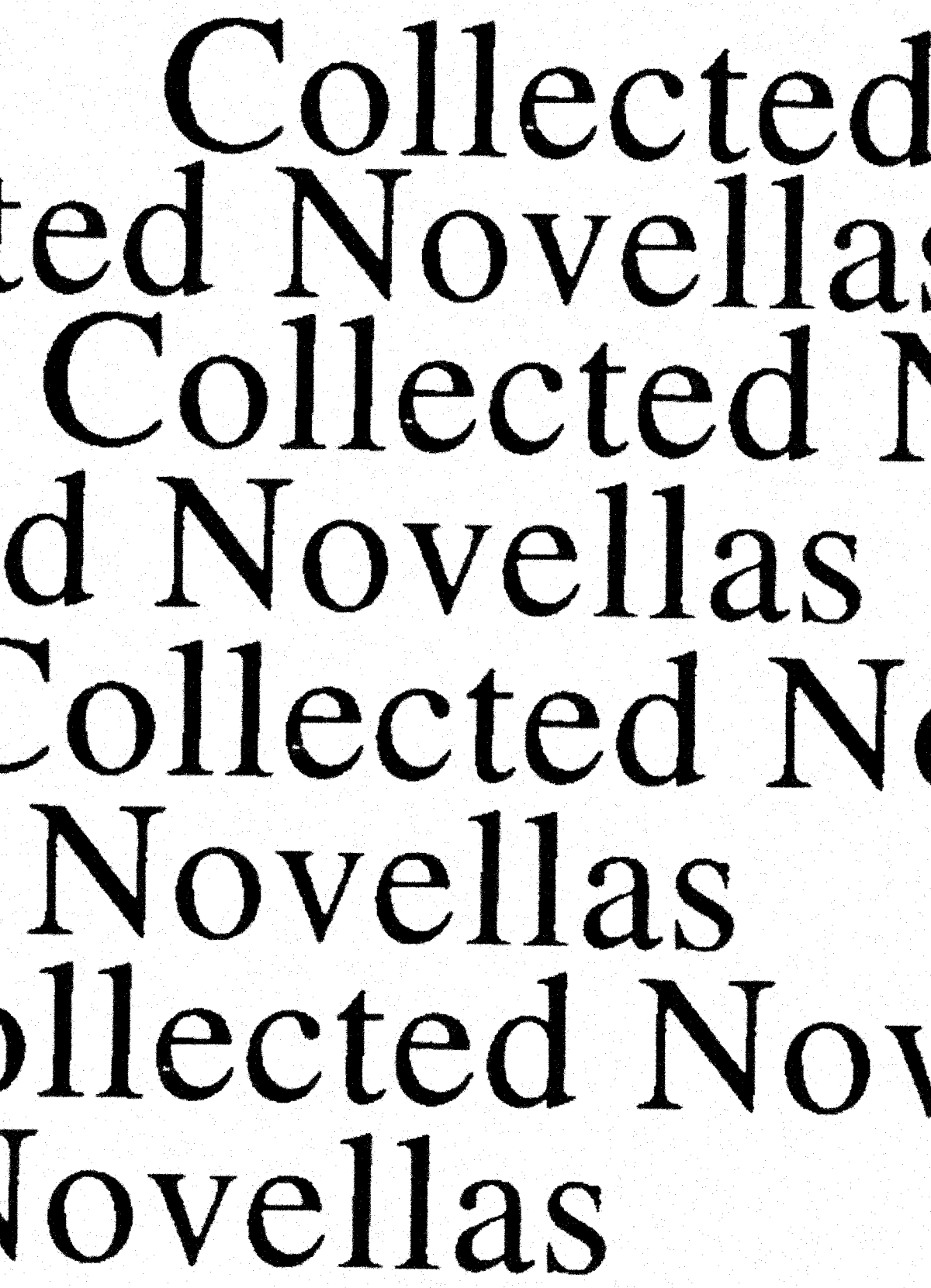
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ISBN 1-56478-066-X $22.95

Arno Schmidt (1914–1979) published over two dozen books of fiction, criticism, and translations in his lifetime; three of his novels have previously appeared in English: *Scenes from the Life of a Faun, The Egghead Republic* (included here in a new translation as *Republica Intelligentsia*), and *Evening Edged in Gold.*

John E. Woods won both the 1981 American Book Award and PEN award for his translation of Schmidt's *Evening Edged in Gold* and recently published a new translation of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks.*

Cover photo by Norbert Barth.

COLLECTED NOVELLAS Arno Schmidt

This is the first in a four-volume edition of the early fiction of one of the most daring and influential writers of postwar Germany, a man often called the German James Joyce due to the linguistic inventiveness of his fiction. The novella was Schmidt's preferred form at the beginning of his writing career, and this volume collects the ten novellas he wrote between *Enthymesis* (1949) and *Republica Intelligentsia* (1957), most of them appearing here in English for the first time. The settings range from ancient Greece to 21st-century America, but all react to the stifling conservatism and cold prudery of Adenauer Germany. Bursting with intellectual and sexual energies, resuscitating the German language after two decades of Nazi subjugation, these novellas revolutionized German literature in the 1950s and retain their power to shock and delight forty years later.

Schmidt has been called "a giant of the modernist tradition, an enormously important talent in the fictional line of cruel comedy that runs from Rabelais through Swift and Joyce" (*New York Review of Books*). This edition of his collected fiction should restore Schmidt to his rightful place at the forefront of 20th-century writing.

MAX EHLERT

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Praise for Arno Schmidt

"By a bitter bit of mistiming, Arno Schmidt, who died in 1979, has now become at least partly accessible in English. On the evidence, he was an enormously important talent in the fictional line of cruel comedy that runs from Rabelais through Swift and Joyce—or to say it straight out: a Major European Novelist. It's a shame that we are learning about his career only now when it's over; all the more reason, then, to blow the untimely trumpet. He was a very good writer; we should have known his work sooner."

—Robert M. Adams, *New York Review of Books*

"The clown prince of contemporary German fiction, Arno Schmidt [was] a satirist who first wrote rather straight, pessimistic, intensely visual allegories of post-Nazi society, with excursions into the time of Alexander the Great and A.D. 541, and then soared into tight, allusive wordplay that translates uncommonly well into English."

—Paul West, *Washington Post Book World*

"When Arno Schmidt died, on Whit-Sunday 1979, modern German prose lost its greatest virtuoso. . . . Reading Arno Schmidt can be addictive. I was first captivated by him in the late 1960s, and know no greater reading pleasure in the whole of postwar German literature."

—Siegbert S. Prawer, *Times Literary Supplement*

"It is appalling that an author of the stature of Arno Schmidt, without a doubt considered one of the great authors of our time, be almost an illustrious unknown outside of Germany."

—Julián Ríos, author of *Larva*

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The Dalkey Archive Edition of

ARNO SCHMIDT

Collected Early Fiction, 1949-1964

Translated by John E. Woods

Volume 1: *Collected Novellas*

Enthymesis (1949) – *Leviathan* (1949) – *Gadir* (1949)
Alexander (1953) – *The Displaced* (1953)
Lake Scenery with Pocahontas (1955) – *Cosmas* (1955) – *Tina* (1956)
Goethe (1957) – *Republica Intelligentsia* (1957)

Volume 2: *Nobodaddy's Children**

Scenes from the Life of a Faun (1953) – *Brand's Heath* (1951)
Dark Mirrors (1951)

Volume 3: *Collected Short Stories**

Tales from Island Street (16 stories, 1955-1962)
Stürenburg Stories (9 stories, 1955-1959) – *Country Matters* (9 stories and the novella *Caliban upon Setebos,* 1960-1964)

Volume 4: *Two Novels**

The Stony Heart (1956) – *Boondocks/Moondocks* (1960)

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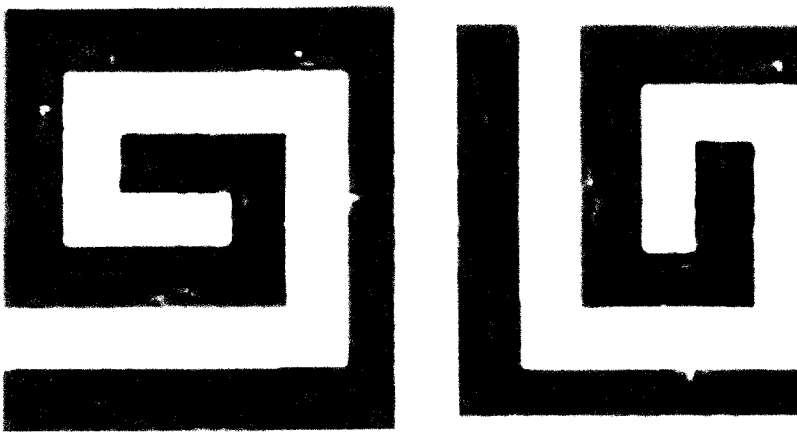
*In preparation

ARNO SCHMIDT

Collected Early Fiction 1949-1964, Volume 1

Translated by John E. Woods



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Introduction © 1994 by John E. Woods

John E. Woods's translations of three of these novellas first appeared in magazines: *Lake Scenery with Pocahontas* in *Southern Humanities Review* (1991), *The Displaced* in *Conjunctions* (1994), and *Enthymesis* in *Grand Street* (1994).

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Translator's Introduction

This is the first of four volumes of the fictional works of Arno Schmidt, "a giant of the modernist tradition, an enormously important talent in the fictional line of cruel comedy that runs from Rabelais through Swift and Joyce—or to say it straight out, a 'Major European Novelist,' . . . a very great writer" (Robert M. Adams, *New York Review of Books,* 3 May 1981). I have no quarrel with that evaluation; indeed, as someone who has spent a major portion of his working hours over the past decade translating Schmidt's prose, I am happy to quote anyone who might support me in my contention that Schmidt belongs on the shelf of major twentieth-century German writers, right next to Mann and Kafka ("brrrr!" he would say) or Brecht ("hmyes, had some talent"). But the task the editors have set me here is not, or not solely, to praise the man and his works, but to introduce them. But which works? Where do we start? At the chronological beginning? Or with a seminal work, a blow-your-mind complex novel like *Boondocks/Moondocks* (volume 4 of the Dalkey Archive edition)? Or maybe a few quick jabs with some seemingly simple *Tales from Island Street,* followed by the brain-curdling blow of "Caliban upon Setebos" from *Country Matters* (volume 3)? No, the editors have instead chosen the "novellas," in Schmidt's hands a most elastic genre, which he tugged and squeezed to suit his fancy. It was his genre of choice in the early years; and for that reason alone, the ten novellas will serve nicely as a door onto his word universe. But before I turn to them, my first obligation is to introduce my literary acquaintance himself—not friend, a translator would be best advised never to make friends with his author (indeed, Schmidt warns explicitly and repeatedly against cozying up to writers in general).

Arno Schmidt, then—he's that tall, big-boned, pensive fellow there in the book-shelved corner. He has turned his back on us now and is myopically peering through lenses as thick as the magnifying glass supplied with the *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (his favorite book next to the *Wake* and the *Britannica* (the 13th edition, of course)), muttering what may well be obscenities (most probably in deft repartee with his psyche), as he furiously fills tiny notecards with cramped microscribbles—the fragments and tatters of his world. Look, he has grabbed his walking stick now and is throwing on that old leather jacket—and stomps out onto

his beloved moors, a cat tumbling behind him. And suddenly he is up to his knees in bloodypoetic fog, while the corpse-green moon, ever vigilant Papa Luna, watches over us all.

Arno Schmidt was a most complex man, a recluse, a solipsist, who has attracted a veritable cult of devoted readers in death, but who had few friends in life. Ultimately what counts are his words—spoken in both gamy vernaculars and cryptogrammic tongues, punctuated by great rumbles of scathing rage and whoops of bawdy laughter. In Schmidt's case, however, the words and the mind stamped upon them are one, so that a quick biogram (his term) is almost a prerequisite.

Who was Arno Schmidt? He was born in Hamburg in 1914, with a splenetic policeman for a father and a doting daydreamer for a mother. After his father's fatal heart attack in 1928, the family (he had one sister) returned to its roots, to Lauban, a small town in Silesia, where he spent his teens and early twenties. He passed his high school exams in 1933, but never attended university. Although he later hawked the story of a year of mathematical studies at the University of Breslau, in reality he went to work almost immediately at a textile factory as an inventory statistician (and spent his off-hours reading the German romantics and devising a ten-place logarithm table). In 1937 he married Alice Murawski, a coworker at the factory. The best description of Arno Schmidt's life until he was drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1939 would be "interior emigration"—perhaps more in a purely intellectual and less in a political sense (although he was no friend of Hitler & Co. and his sister Lucy had in the meantime married a Jew and emigrated for real). The military machine sent him to a flak base in Norway, where he spent the war until early in 1945, when he was posted to the western front. He was captured by the British, who tossed him into a POW camp but soon engaged him as an interpreter, a job he continued to hold with the British auxiliary police during the month of December 1945, when he and his wife found lodging in Cordingen, a nondescript town in Lower Saxony.

There he made his decision to become a writer, full-time; and his first published work, *Leviathan* (1949, and containing the first three novellas in this volume), earned him the reputation of an *enfant terrible*—at the somewhat advanced age of thirty-five—but no steady income. He and his wife survived on the meagerest of rations; they became gatherers of apples, potatoes, acorns!, and mushrooms. They moved to the Saarland as part of a voluntary resettlement program for displaced persons. They rode their tandem bike, they took long walks, he read and wrote (and translated, too, though in those early years little of importance) and was generally ignored

—until 1955 when *Lake Scenery with Pocahontas* almost got him hauled into court for blasphemy and pornography. He first fled to the urban anonymity of Darmstadt, then sought refuge in the less rigorously religious north, landing quite by chance in 1958 in Bargfeld, a village of some three hundred or so souls in the sparsely settled Lüneburg Heath. He went on writing. And died of a stroke in a hospital in nearby Celle on Whitsunday 1979—by then he was a semi-celebrated eccentric and, as Siegbert Prawer once called him, "the greatest virtuoso of modern German prose."

He was his work. And the mound of books lies like an erratic in the German literary landscape. He was a loner and an autodidact—his true friends were Tieck and Poe, Döblin and Joyce, Cooper and Carroll. He gathered them to his cottage in the heath, and there he conversed and laughed and wept with them in his mind and in his work.

His wife, and amanuensis—Lilli he called her—died four years later in 1983; they had no children.

Arno Schmidt's reputation in Germany is based on a prodigious literary output: eight novels, ten novellas (or nine and nine, the borders are porous), two volumes of short stories (some of them of novella length), dozens of critical essays (a good five volumes in toto), a biography of La Motte Fouqué, and a full-length study of Karl May. In his spare time he translated over a score of works, including hefty novels by James Fenimore Cooper, Wilkie Collins, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton. One of his own novels, by the way, is his magnum opus *Zettels Traum* (Bottom's Dream), a fictional romp (or slog, depending on one's literary tastes) through the mind and works of Edgar Allan Poe, which has been compared to *Finnegans Wake* in terms of linguistic density and is twice as long. All of this accomplished between 1946 and 1979.

But what was he up to? What are some of the common elements in this massive literary eruption? Let me name a few (among many).

Reflecting on the literary process (in a series of three essays entitled "Calculations"), Schmidt spoke of his own work, indeed most fiction, as an Extended Mind Game (*Längeres Gedankenspiel*). In the drab confines of a working-class Hamburg apartment, a lonely child dreams his way to other worlds. As a lad he enters the dark magical forests of the German Romantics—Tieck and Fouqué and Hoffmann will be lifelong companions. The inventive mind that chose the "interior emigration" of tedious office work now flees still farther into itself to escape a crude barracks life in Norway, and finds its apotheosis in self-imposed exile in the village of Bargfeld. Schmidt dreamed and wrote of a life lived unto itself inside the mind—human existence as an island, both as rescuing fantasy

and ineluctable doom (cf. the anti-utopia of *Republica Intelligentsia* or the bombed and isolated bridge of *Leviathan*).

Though he was steeped in the German Romantics, Schmidt's sensibility was relentlessly modern. This universe is the plaything of the Leviathan, and if there is any method to his madness, we poor humans shall never discover it. The best we can ever do is to catalogue the small inadvertent beauties and grand indifferent dangers of the world around us. Schmidt's work is an inventory of quotidian reality, from the brand of margarine smeared on his bread to the wistful dance of a falling leaf. Yet every detail catalogued is simultaneously an avenue onto Schmidt's own mind. It is the unhappy fate of the writer, he once said in an essay on Poe, "to be the one writing *and* at the same time the face in the window gazing back with lunar iciness!" In the later work, his meticulous inventory was increasingly devoted to books, to the psyches of the men and women who wrote them, and to his own psyche as he read them—an obsessive task that ballooned to the gargantuan megalomania of *Zettels Traum.*

And then there is his rage at a world that condemns us to mind games and inventories and ignores its "brain beasts," as he liked to categorize himself and those of his ilk. Schmidt loved to strike the pose of the fierce Jacobin. It was his way of countering the stultifying prudery and cold circumspection of Adenauer Germany, where one voice raised above the diligent, self-righteous hum might perhaps call attention to the horrors of Germany's recent past and the terror of an imminent nuclear war with Germany as its battlefield. Rage is seldom pretty, and is certainly no basis for a valid political position. During the turbulence of the late sixties and early seventies, Schmidt disappointed many who had misheard the message of his angry shouts as a call to action, when in fact he was a most apolitical man whose intellectual hauteur bordered on the reactionary. (The opening conversation between Erich and Joachim in *Lake Scenery with Pocahontas* is an excellent example of Schmidt's political fervor—and naïveté). There are, one must admit, many strains to Arno Schmidt that make him the quintessential dwem (dead white European male): an apprehensive ambiguity about women that at times comes close to misogyny, a Eurocentrism that can easily smack of racism, an intellectual elitism that simply takes your breath away. He certainly suffers from all the hubris of the dwem—but, god, what splendid hubris it is!

And nowhere is it better revealed than in his language. Whatever the debits and credits of his neo-romanticism, his modernist sensibility, or his rage, the language alone will keep you coming back to his work. Arno Schmidt represents a revitalization of the German language that is very hard for any translation to reproduce. Back in the early seventies when I

was struggling to learn German, a dear and wise friend pressed a book in my hand with a knowing wink—it was Arno Schmidt's *Aus dem Leben eines Fauns* (*Scenes from the Life of a Faun*). From the first page, I knew this was a voice speaking in a language I had found nowhere else in Germany. It has its roots in Expressionism and on occasion can partake of that movement's excesses. But more often it just slaps you in the face or gently brushes the cheek of memory. Schmidt sweeps up words off the street and culls them from tomes hidden in subterranean stacks—the result is vulgar and arcane, impish and regal. Gnarled syntax, usually the bugbear of German, is cast aside in favor of prose with a swift, knifelike thrust. "Dehydrated" was Schmidt's own term for it. It is difficult for speakers of English to comprehend what Schmidt did for German. Even as a literary language, English is much more open to rambunctious change than German has ever been; literary High German is all too often arthritic, sometimes close to moribund. Worse still, the language had been raped and starved by the Nazis, only to be incarcerated almost immediately by postwar conservatism and amnesia. If Arno Schmidt has left one abiding legacy to his fellow Germans, it is the lively restoration and inventive enrichment of their language.

Last, and not least, there is the humor. (Yes, counter to all our prejudices, there is such a thing as German humor.) Schmidt can evoke guffaws, chortles, titters, smirks, and quiet nods. He is capable of the most ghastly and raunchy puns (for which, unfortunately, he is all too famous) and of deftly tickling an opponent to death with wit. I leave it to the reader to discover such pleasures all on her or his own.

In sum, Arno Schmidt's mind was a vast dreamscape teeming with fierce and gentle words—a mind inquisitive about its immediate world and, more importantly, about itself. Arno Schmidt set about to inventory his human experience and dared to invite the reader to join him, and he described each discovery in words we might never have found without him.

The following passage from *Lake Scenery with Pocahontas* is a favorite of mine and, for me at least, epitomizes much of what I have been trying to say in this short space about the work of Arno Schmidt.

And so alone in the boat : meeting the wavelets head-on; often slapping and thumping below the bow (and Pocahontas always in my eye, my playful one; I managed once to sail right over her, the great flailing girl.) / Think. Don't be content with belief : go further. Once more through the circles of knowledge, friends ! And foes. Don't interpret : learn and describe. Don't futurize : be. And die without ambitions : you were. At best full of curiosity. Eternity is not ours (despite Lessing !) : but this summer lake, this slough of haze, gaily checked shadows, the wasp sting

on your forearm, the printed yellow-plum sack. And there, the long diving maiden-belly. / Another tender snap, and a lacewing vanished within : fish ! : bream, dace, shiner, chub, bleak, sucker, rudd, roach, chevin, loach, tench, gudgeon, ide : D' you speak English ?

Here, then, are ten novellas, written between 1946 and 1957. The earliest of them are almost fifty years old now, and, yes, they have aged somewhat—both Arno Schmidt and the world changed as the century quickly moved beyond immediate postwar concerns. (As a parable of Hitlerism, *Alexander* has lost its wallop, and until the recent outbreak of the Balkan wars, *The Displaced* seemed oddly out of place in modern Europe.) And yet, all ten reveal a brash author eager to tweak noses or rub them in blood-stained reality.

These tales were written during the lean, nomadic years, well before the final move to the humble security of a cottage on the heath. Four of the stories, *Enthymesis, Gadir, Alexander,* and *Cosmas,* are set in antiquity, a Schmidtian playground for mind-gaming since early youth. They are remote in terms not only of time, but also of geography, for each hovers on the farthest edges of empire. (Even *Alexander,* since Babylon is on the rim of the world to Lampon, the young Greek narrator.) The heroes are mind-gaming loners, whether young and naive like Lampon, or ancient and delirious like Pytheas. Each is fleeing (or better, forced to flee) from an ignorant and brutal proto-fascist society around him—Lampon from Alexander's spanking-new and toppling empire, Pytheas in *Gadir* from Carthage's imprisoning power, Philostratos in *Enthymesis* from efficiently rapacious Rome, Lycophron in *Cosmas* from pagan-baiting Christian Byzantium. But in each tale Schmidt is obviously raging against the immediate past and present of Germany—and seeking refuge in the distant cities of the mind.

In *Leviathan,* however, any avenue of escape from the world's insanity has been cut off; the solution it apparently offers to our common human plight is a literal leap into the abyss. The narrator listens to the conversation of two Hitler Youth, Germany's future—"and their eyes shone like the windows of madhouses aflame." His conclusion: "I would welcome it if humanity came to an end; it is my well-founded hope that it will have destroyed itself to a man within – oh – within 500 to 800 years; and that will be good." And in 1949, such a message, however powerfully expressed—and *Leviathan* arrogantly flaunts its verbal prowess—was warily greeted by only a few (among them Hermann Hesse).

Counterposed to the incipient nihilism of *Leviathan* is the bittersweet affirmation of life's most basic pleasures in *The Displaced* from 1952 and

Lake Scenery with Pocahontas from 1953—seven years, that is, into post-war life. At thirty-eight, Schmidt was bursting with the vitality of a robust frame that at last was being fed (almost) enough; his intellectual and sexual energies were running at high tide. *Pocahontas* is pyrotechnic proof that Schmidt is no peevish cerebral ascetic, and that his readers need not be, either.

A pair of quick burlesques included here attests to that fact as well—*Tina, or Immortality* and *Goethe and One of His Admirers.* Each is based on a slight but witty premise. *Tina* is about the artist's longing for undying fame. Schmidt takes the belief that mention by posterity guarantees immortality and turns that fond hope on its head. And the notion of having Goethe reborn for a visit to Darmstadt adds a whimsical twist to an old war-horse premise of science fiction. Neither of these novellas, however, lives up to its promise. But with Schmidt even an unfulfilled promise can be worth the reading.

Mention of science fiction brings us to the final work in this volume, Schmidt's most popular tale, which over the years has become a minor best-seller: *Republica Intelligentsia, a Novella from the Horse Latitudes.* This is not the first time this short novel has appeared in English; another translation has been available for fifteen years now under the title of *The Egghead Republic.* And I would happily have retained that witty title, if only its anachronistic exuberance captured more of the nuances of the original, *Die Gelehrtenrepublik,* a title purloined from a satirical fantasy by Friedrich Gottlob Klopstock (1724–1803)—which brings us to another facet of Schmidt's work. In assembling the mosaic of his prose, Arno Schmidt inserted tile upon tile of quotation, citation, and allusion from his own vast reading. Whole choruses of sedate and raucous voices from the literary past joined in the unremitting conversation inside his head. The search for the whispers and shouts of all these participants supports a whole cottage industry employing scores of Germanists, most of whom apparently find Schmidt's abiding contribution to German literature in his quoting of it. I prefer to see this facet of Schmidt's work as a bonus pleasure, an effervescent delight burbling beneath the surface. Intellectual escapades, sexual highjinks, Jacobin politics—*Republica Intelligentsia* provides thrills for any adventurous reader. The best suggestion I can offer is the one Schmidt generally made when introducing a book he treasured: "*Tolle, lege!*"

A note is in order about the unusual punctuation of these texts, which is sure to look strange to the American eye. It reproduces that found in the German original (i.e., the "Bargfeld Edition" (Haffmans Verlag), the most

accurate to date, although for most early works the texts are based solely on first editions, our only surviving record). But why such slavish faithfulness in a translation? Perhaps Schmidt's own "Calculations III" may help explain:

> We are not dealing with a mania for originality or love of the grand gesture, but with . . . the necessary refinement of the writer's tool. I shall begin with punctuation. – It can be used as stenografy ! When I write : ‹She looked around : ?›, the out=come (with an "=", I despise Websterian rules for compound words : it's not an oútcome, but an oút=cóme !) is that the *colon* becomes the inquiring opened face, the *question mark* the torsion of the body turned to ask, and the *whole* of "The Question" retains its validity – no : is far better ! : the reader is intentionally not force-fed a stale salad of words, à la ‹and she asked : "What is it ?"› . . . Let us retain the lovely=essential freedom to reproduce a hesitation precisely : "well – hm – : Idunno – – : can we *do* that . . . . . ." (Instead of the rigidly prescribed : "Well, I don't know . . ." . . . Perhaps many will wonder why I sometimes place the period *before* the parenthesis; sometimes after; sometimes use none at all : I have my reasons – in almost every case (and with a little thought, anyone could discover them.)

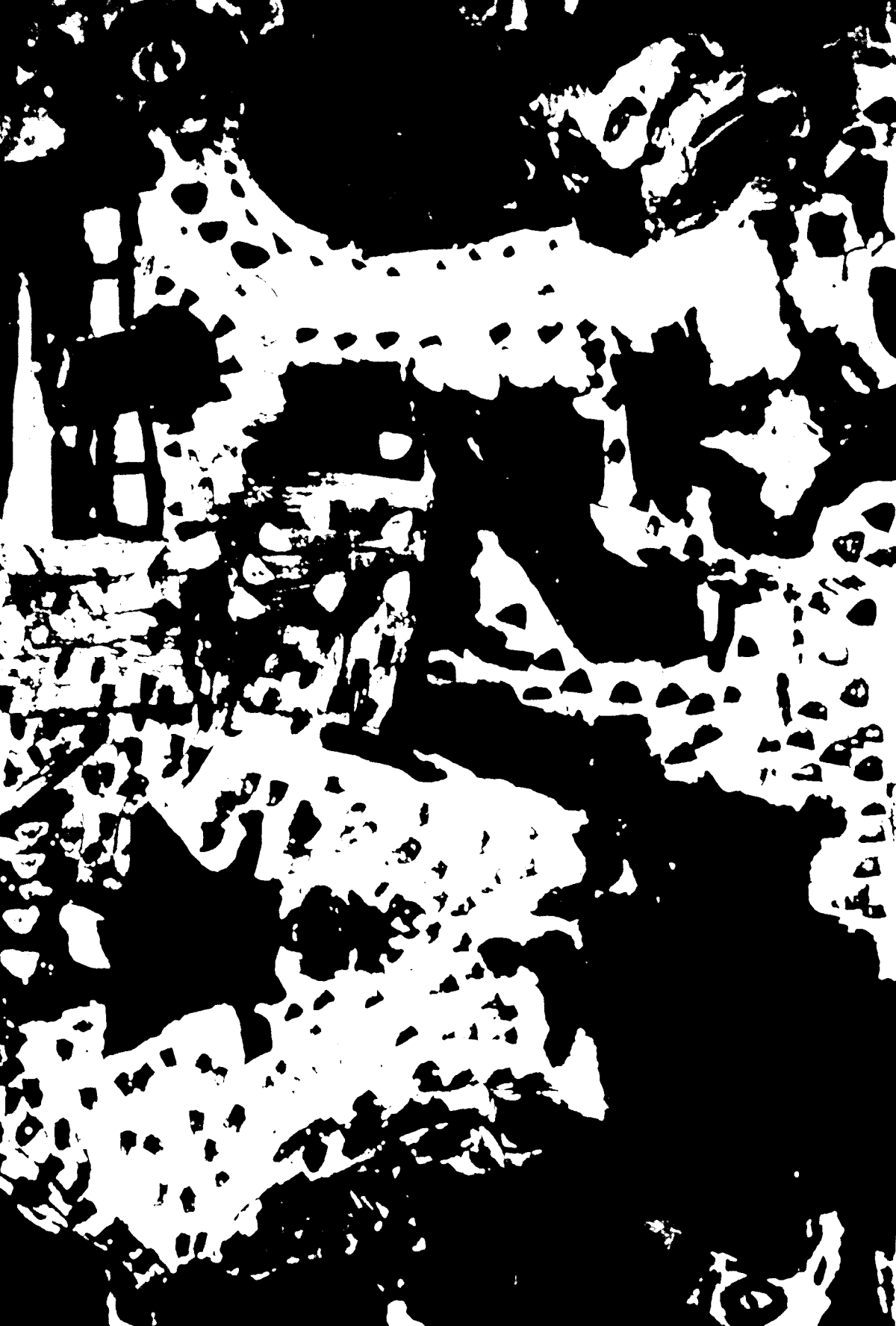
That "almost every" is a hedge—yes, Schmidt usually had his reasons, but sometimes he was careless. Despite his avowals of meticulously orchestrated punctuation, I must admit I often find no real consistency; usage varies from text to text and can even seem out of sync within a given text. But rather than attempt to correct this or that usage or rigorously substitute American conventions, I thought it best simply to preserve the original visual *text*uality.

With that, my introduction is at an end, but please do not skip these final words of gratitude, for any pleasure you may find in reading this English translation of Arno Schmidt is due to the constant support and advice of many people. My thanks, then, to the Arno Schmidt Foundation, to Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Bernd and Petra Rauschenbach, Erika Knop. And especially to Hans Wollschläger, whose spirited, wise, and kindly counsel lives in every word of this translation.

ENTHYMESIS

or

H.I.H.Y.A.



3rd Day

We all had to take extra paces today; the wind came too strong and cold. Besides which, around noon the sand got deeper, and so I had Mabsut lay the stadion in front of us a few times (thus preventing any unprofitable interruptions) : of course the pace-length was reduced still more; a while ago I compared with Aemilianus, and, after all subtractions, his total was smaller than usual as well. On balance, Deinokrates came up with almost the same count as I, that is 196.34 stadia; after discussing the terrain, we all 3 agreed on 195.82 ± 0.41. – Our total, then, is now 623.13 ± 1.04. – When I consider how many sources for error lie buried in our procedures – oh, ye gods ! Are we holding a true north-south line ? In rolling country, are we making the correct allowance for the beeline ? And our pace-lengths ? And aren't we also making mistakes in our count ? Wind ? Sand ? Before the second day was over we had to make a good half-hour detour because a long rib of rock too steep to climb lay across our path (path – why, we're moving like clouds across the blue : no road before us; a gust of wind erases our track behind us. – Better to call it our "direction"; one is always too lazy to think precisely. "One" and "always" i.e., "I" and "now") –

Late evening. Cold. Large smoldering stars (sly as eyes; yawning, blinking. All night). Mabsut came around the fitfully smoking fire and actually massaged my legs. I am the only one who can converse with him, and so sometimes he just appears, and – to the extent his caravan leader's dignity allows – makes a show of whispering an utterance or two, then slowly gathering his wide robes about him, sinks back again. Today he kept silence. Fine.

4th Day

24,998 – 24,999 – 25,000 ! – It's a good feeling each time one finally reaches that point. (For the record, the tally : 827.14 ± 1.85.)

We saw our last cloud this morning; close by on our right a slender coiled column of fog rose up in the fold of a tawny mountainous knot, flexed broad silver shoulders, glad for morning among cool shadows, stretched a lifted golden ruffian's head above the hard peak – ah, and fresh blue dawn wind tugged at us, garments sweeping in short swift arcs around us all. And that bastard Aemilianus stood there cold and assured as marble and waited

politely and disdainfully, until I began to stride southward in silence. – I don't doubt for a moment that the old man assigned him to me on purpose; he would have preferred to have made him the leader, I'm sure, but did not dare go that far, since it would have caused a scandal throughout the school. I have too often proved, in front of everyone, just what a – yes, a shallow mind he has (a marvelous memory and the finest talent for systematization do not a perfect genius make !); and it is interesting that even he, the intellectual tyrant at Alexandria, did not risk sending me out as a menial bematist. But he had to get rid of me because he could take no more of my public criticism, and because he considers me "despite the brilliance, a fantast" (those were his very words to Philippos of Syracuse !), and so, there they still were : the desert and Sirius, a worthy assignment. (And how he sneered as we departed : at last we would have definite measurements for the earth's "sphere" – although he knows that I regard the Ge as a disk –) Well, enough of that. – And then quickly saddled the "hothead" with Aemilianus – oh, Eratosthenes is clever ! And Philopator pays for it all !

I walked into the colorful circle of Nasamons around the second fire, where wizened little Tarfan was telling a tale in his rough dialect; he swayed, and jumped up, and panted as he lifted the burden of invisible golden vessels, from whose shimmering mouths gems tumbled with a clatter; with scrawny talons he swiftly pronged his beard, and puffed himself up venomously, causing an excited murmur to pass through the circle – a shame I heard just the ending; someone threw more brushwood on the wide weaving flame, and I could discuss our route with Mabsut again : in 1 or 2 days the last bushes will vanish as well.

5th Day

When I was a child, all adults seemed worthy of great respect, parents and teachers praisable gods. But when I think back now, I see only the little boy sitting gravely by the fire and playing with the wooden boat. – In his charming, amusing way, Deinokrates told me his memories of growing up (he is still so young, hardly 17); his father is post commander in Kelainai, and the smooth, endless King Street wound itself marvelously into all his boyhood dreams and games; almost black by moonlight, when the untiring messengers of the angarion flew along it. Many memories still of the Great Kings; inscriptions, monuments, halls. (Aemilianus took lots of notes and asked about the city's fortifications, the strength of the garrison etc. – What a cold reptile he is ! But has stamina and muscles; he is as tall as I, but his pace is considerably shorter, a regulation soldier's pace, adapted to uniformed standards). –

Moon flowed onto my sleepy face through the nodding latticing of fragrant

sage : wasn't I stumbling in billowed silk robes through a teeming dream-crowd ? – At one point I stood in front of my childhood home in Pantikapaeon; there were words scratched into the red bricks on the arched entrance, one of them was "Psillos". That was the name of a semibarbarian with whom I stood watch for a few days on the Istros : what was his name doing on that old house ? – The philosophers are guilty of two cardinal errors; their concepts of time and of the self are much too simple (exception : Dacqué ?). Time is at the least a plane, not a line; during the day our mind is like a boatman on a river, and the skiff moves on; in dreams, at night, he can climb out and range across the surface of time's stream – not a bad image (seeing into the future; free will, etc.); well – still much to investigate.

6th Day

(1206.18 ± 2.75) A good thing we had to get accustomed to dates and water and this skimpy bread months ago; and to the desert floor with increasingly lengthy marches. – We made less progress today; because we had to do a 90° turn (to the left) for a well. I have designated tomorrow and the day after for rest; we have to fill all our waterbags; the camels have to eat their fill and recuperate. (The water is sweet, but sets the teeth on edge, I find.) Only 2 families of Nasamons live at this well (although their dialect is considerably different; e.g., Mabsut calls the sun "ogron"; these people call it "ugrnja"). A dirty, taciturn folk; they sold us a few sacks of dates for some bright red cloth. The little ones played with lizards or tortured large groping beetles.

Children still look slender and the most humanlike. But once they are over 14–15, then the dreadful glands in their bodies begin to work; they grow body hair and beards, they become more animal-like on the outside, and the rest of their lives, until old age, is just one unending, teeth-bared, raging rut. –

I still have to come up with some other counting device; every morning Deinokrates piously picks up his chain and lets the variously shaped beads run through his fingers all day long. Aemilianus makes 2500 dots in his wax tablet each day (one for every ten double-paces). So far I have been using my thumb to operate my geared device, and I still believe it to be the best of the three; but there has to be a simpler way; if, for example, one could count every pace by using the obligatory bending of the knee that goes with it ! But how does one transfer that to an automatic counter ? ! –

The evening embered, lovely and green. Peaceful. The early fires. One of the inhabitants told of how one of the copper mountain peaks to the west was hollowed out, a precipice-rimmed abyss, with tall, ancient trees inside. An hour's march from here. I'll go tomorrow around noon and take him

along as my guide; plus one of our own people (Tarfan, the hakavati, wants to go; fine with me !). – This whole area here in the south is still next to unknown really; except for a few occasional ventures into the desert, from which there are hardly any extant reports, nothing is known about it (". . . for then come high mountains like a dividing wall, where it is said people with goatfeet dwell, and beyond them others who sleep for 6 moons, and no man knows what it looks like there . . ." How my heart thumped as a boy when I read such passages in Herodotus; and about Sataspes).

7th Day

At the rim of the crater (blazing noon) : I've been sitting up here for an hour now.

We left early and walked about 35.7 stadia (damned if I can keep from counting !); where we then found ourselves in the middle of the most barren mountain wilderness. The guide pointed to a reddish cliff about 1 stadion high and whispered timidly : "That's it, they say . . ." (So he had never been inside it then.) The wall proved unscalable at that point, so for almost two hours we climbed and searched all around the mountain stump's deeply creviced periphery, but everywhere the steep walls brusqued unassailable, some even hanging out over us, until we finally arrived back at our starting point (the whole thing is surrounded by a jumble of larger and smaller hills and reddish boulders stretching to the west and south, which might well take many hours to cross). Tarfan and I then began the ascent in a narrow chimney, a tight one-man fit, and needed close to an hour for the short distance; we strode across a 2 to 3 stadia broad, uneven, fissured stone-ring, and then quite unexpectedly we were gazing deep, deep into an almost circular valley. At our feet stood massive, all-green tree-tops immobile in the scorching noon heat, far away a pond blue in fragrant, vaporing meadows; I trembled with excitement ! –

All right (calmly describe it !) : It is, I judge, about 12-15 stadia in diameter; the walls fall very steeply into it, and the valley floor itself lies at about the same level (perhaps a bit lower ?) as the desert outside. We climbed along a portion of the old crater rim (it was definitely once a volcano; the interior walls are still partially covered with glassy stripes of lava !), around needles of rock and great boulders, and I was able to get a general view of it all. A whole family of smooth ponds, joined by shimmering, winding canals, lies off in the southern half. Myrrh bushes stand in the silent lush hot meadowed sea; I have never seen such huge, ancient trees. I have to go down in – not far, quietly. (Oh, I know : it is protected from the wind, and rain water cannot seep out through the lava; the plant seeds were probably brought in by bird droppings – everything has an explanation ! – But – ah, no "but"; if you *want* to be a fool, you won't understand me

anyway !) Tarfan is sitting stock-still on a rock, lost somewhere in himself. – Down I go ! –

The floor quite soft; only I am too heavy; the air is like glass. The scent of herbs too strong; it fills my whispering mouth like invisible brews. Soundlessly the plume green fern burns in the moss. And I want to approach the ponds, under the round sky. No fish smacks lips at me; no flower swells a garish cup of color. Only deep and bright green, and near and far the walls of reddish rock, high-blazing and savage-toothed. I groped my flat-footed way back : it is so hot and fixed and lush with narcotic green. Many slender trees wear a clinging dress of scales, rhombic and sandal brown; I glide soundless and slow through their feathery shades. –

Up top

Tarfan, when I went to rouse him, raised his arm dreamily to fend me off and muttered and pointed at one of the golden clearings : and I too saw it, quite clearly : it moved. I crouched down beside him, I asked : "What is it ?" he answered soft as noon : "Aegipans –"

1 hour later

From below came whistling so shrill and raw that we dived to both sides; the leaf capital of the tree column below us opened charily and a masked face of scaly leaves emerged from the herbal depths, a waving mane of green hair, grass-fine; a half-open staring narrow mouth – it dragged me to the edge of the rock, I wanted to know more : ah, it babbles afraid and wooden, the foliage window rustles shut. Tarfan points distractedly to the distant meadows; there feathery leaps and springs continue, forms as if blended of gold air and emeralds. –

In camp, evening

Said nothing about the As.; just small talk about the mountains. (Aemilianus had his tablet at the ready again.) To divert them both, I proposed the following for their consideration : Eratosthenes says that the earth is a sphere, rotating once every 24 hours, about 70,000 stadia in diameter, incidentally; at what fantastic speed, then, must we be moving in every now ? Wouldn't that great speed create such a powerful centrifugal force that the earth would of necessity be pulled out at the equator ? It could then no longer be a sphere. Besides which, geometrically speaking, the sphere occurs as a very rare exception among the countless rotating ellipsoids, so that (if the earth is indeed a plane curved back onto itself – which I would dispute !) it could only be one of the latter. – Deinokrates was as eager and interested as a young hound; Aemilianus stood leaning coolly against a date palm (but jotted it all down !) and asked : "And what is the practical application ?" (If I were Eratosthenes, or if Eratosthenes were a great man – aha : is *that* not a splendid turn of phrase ! ! – I would

a[illegible] student who would ask such a question !) – Practical ! The [illegible] shall have his answer !) – I said with a slightly mocking [illegible] him to notice, and he took cold note of it) : "Hasn't that [illegible] worked out yet in Rome ? – I'm sure you remember my conversation with Eratosthenes, about how if the earth is a ball and we use the formula A = b · tan alpha, we will always calculate a mountain's altitude too low, since its base is always lower than we are." He nodded, eyebrows raised high (presumably recalling how E. had responded with total dumbfounded silence – the great E. !). If, however, the earth's surface is not uniformly curved, i.e., if the magnitude of "being lower", even though mathematically comprehensible, changes according to where I may be standing, indeed, changes according to the direction I am looking, and to the distance of the observed point – Deinokrates laid a hand to his brow in confusion – I drew an ellipse in the sand to make the problem clear. There they sit with pursed lips, ruminating. (Even the practical Emil – I'd stake my life on it : Rome has sent him to spy on us; to collect much "practical" knowledge for the "good of the state"; to be used in surveying, to lay out the fastest possible routes of march and to learn how to draw military maps. Too dull – i.e, "nationalistic" – to do it on their own; makes me sick; the cold powermad bastards should be wiped out. Ugh !

8th Day

(before the sun rises) Using my blanket for cover, I've pulled my bag of personal items over to me to sip from the glassy bright spicy brandy. How wonderful, to drink in the morning; the effect is almost immediate, within 2, 3 minutes; and you need so little. And for an hour lie awake like a god ! – There : here it comes ! Now I have only to look any man right in his bare face, and I can tell at once : You're a bastard ! And you're a swine ! And you're a fool ! Aemilianus is all of those : Deino will become them. Only Tarfan the Motley is different; but he is not perceptive enough – but enough of them, I don't want to waste this hour.

Caressing the ten-digited; I love it like solitude; and why ? Hah – listen closely (Who should listen closely – To what ? !) : infinitely many numbers begin with 6, fewer then with 62, only a few with 62457, and with 6245763016, none that you rabble know; and behind that, emerging from infinite numerical deeps, come more, more, ever more – come, friends ! And therefore, hand held up to alpha Lyrae – ho, who can guess that one ? –

I once remarked to Eratosthenes : the hallmark of the intellect is that it desires infinity; and since a disk is more infinite than a sphere, the earth must be a disk. And impatiently added : did he not also feel how dreadful it would be once the whole surface of the sphere had been discovered ?

Unruffled, he nodded and replied with a smile : "That will be a good while yet." Fine. Here's to your good while. (Naturally, no man can be either a good citizen or personally happy who worries about the affairs of humankind – or of living creatures – a thousand years ago or hence. Or about the psyche and mneme of plants.) But I spoke not a word about the most important thing : where shall one flee if the earth is a sphere ? So that you would finally never have to stare in horror at a human face (toss every mirror away, and close your eyes to drink !). Could not then the bustling, handrubbing mob still press in from all directions around; and though one fled to the pole, would not even that last curvature teem with their hissing, lecherous, paned faces, pointing with mocking, metal-soiled fingers at the solitary man who gathers his robes about him, mouth filled with nausea ! – No, no, I will have it be a disk, and therefore infinite : now follow me, you gawking riffraff, if you can ! And though you may conquer that first hill-strewn forest and the first sea, you'll hang back then at the second or third – and the tenth ? ! – And the hundredth ? ! ! – And with a laugh I scramble over stony desolation and cross the desert without tiring (and may the wind be behind me, drifting over every trace; and I shall wear a fallow robe, so that no one may discern me in the sea of sand) – only Helios above me in his sparked golden ship; and let the demons come now and then. Already a new silver-foamed sea, islands, greet me on the horizon. –

Bloodbrother grass, I do love you. / Your water-sheen floods over me / as would a bowl of dew. / I raise my hands to you, am free / to fondle your sweet gravity, / and yet again once more and more, / oh maid whom I adore. / Blue-basined is the sky / that pours her trumpet-golden light / upon my lowering face; and I / do not resist, nor do I fight / the wind who patches clouds of white, / soft lord who passes gently by. / The cloud stands up and looks at me; / the brook runs blue and silvery / on little shining paws; / now midday comes, and twilight passes, / while evening stands with fiery masses / and blooming with white stars. / I sing aloud and undismayed, / for water blue in ponds has played / the wind's young maid, my savage maid : / I had another long ago. – / Nor does she chat nor laughs she so / entranced as wheels in brooks aturning / in white and whiter waters turning / while I roam high and low. / – Woe is me ! That swine Aemilianus is creeping out from his blankets ! –

9th Day

(1407.34 ± 3.18, i.e. over 200 stadia; well, we were rested, although toward the end it was only sand and rock.)

In the evening directed many words against the exhibition of the unclad body in art. It is a virtual curse that our sculptors and painters (speculating with careful calculation on the concupiscence of the public) smear and

hack away at nothing but naked females. And then give their products names like "Midday" (if she's turned out especially fat and drowsy) or "Melancholy", or they make a "Woman Kneeling" or "Woman Meditating", as if such activities could only be pursued in an unclad state. Emil raised his eyebrows in cool surprise and disparagingly suggested that it was all perfectly ‹natural› (*What* a dunce he is ! – I went on speaking, but only to lightly blushing Deino); 120 years ago F. painted his ‹Maiden by Dawn› (we've seen it often enough in the gallery in Alexandria; and she has turned her back to the observer, and wears a long, high-necked dress, and just barely extends her small hands out from under the wide sleeves); now give *that* subject to a modern artist ! And "natural" – the maddest obscenities have been committed under that trademark since the year one; they pull their ornery mouths into broad grins : "it's all so very human really ! –" And nudge each other with elbows and whinny ! – Nature does not present us with what is perfectly Beautiful or Wise or Good; but rather the human spirit – to break off the conversation, I jokingly asked Mabsut, just then come to tend the fire, his opinion; once he understood, he simply spread his hands with expressive repugnance and stepped backward into the night. I call that an unspoiled sensibility. – It is a continuing object of interest to me how out in the Wild West, in Rome, yet another vulpine state (like Sparta in its day) is brutally devouring its way to greatness. Plato, the icy fool, would have taken real pleasure in that (I have never understood what is supposed to be so great about Plato; true, he does write elegantly at times, but his books are often page upon page full of stylistic and philosophical banalities that one would hardly excuse from a schoolboy. And to crown it all, that insane utopia; with its commune of women and children and naked idolization of the state : "during a war no one shall be allowed to shun the kisses of an honored hero" and a hundred other similar outrageous absurdities. It's a breviary for a fanatical eunuch addicted to his own immortality, sneering in icy amusement at millions of helots sunk in mental torpor). But, to return : Rome ! – The state above all else; ‹sire› (such a noble word, is it not ?) as many children as possible; yes indeed, Moloch needs lots of them (against whom they then wage war in moral indignation; besides which, strategically Sicily belongs to them – "no free nation could continue to permit an invasion of Asian aliens within its lebensraum . . ." And they do mine silver in Sagunto !). Which is the reason for male-only corps from age 5 to 70; they must be hardened; even the "virgins" are rounded up into sacred stud farms. The arts and sciences flourish and blossom as never before, naturally (since beyond the nation's borders live only shopkeepers and lemurs, tolerated at best as house pets), ". . . for today it is Rome that is ours, but tomorrow the whole wide world . . .", is what the

ten-year-olds sing marching in drill. During every quarterly war, the 100-year-olds have to forge arrowheads; and the heroes' mothers cheer lustily when they receive the news that yet another son has fallen in battle. (A fact : Ae. himself proudly told me that one ! Nobody is permitted – as if taken word for word from Plato ! – to weep or go around with a long face. They even have to deck themselves out with wreaths and let joyous battlesongs resound.) And every day specially trained ‹state orators› stand up in public and address them as the ‹freest of nations›; rousing red banners billow, trained choirs jubilate with hurrahs and heils – we have our orders to blaze up in manly wrath – And the maddest part is : 90 of every 100 Romans are convinced there is nothing better or freer or more decent or – what you will, than Rome ! ! – Disgusting, disgusting ! – 2 camels are sick; digestive problems. –

10th Day

(1590.55 ± 4.06; that can't be right; our error has to be much larger than that ! I've lost all interest ! –) This afternoon Mabsut showed me the last landmark he was familiar with; a small stone slab atop a flat rock-ridge to our right. I asked him its name (just for something to say); and he muttered a few of his barbaric gutterals, turned his head indifferently away.

11th Day

(1786.86 ± 5.18) Hideously monotonous and exhausting; we had to walk almost thirteen hours to complete our 50,000 paces. By the end we were all dog-tired; and so during our brief conference on our margin of error I got them to accept 1.12 stadia as the variable in the final count.

Deino had a slight fever and so was very alert and talkative – I had to tell him all about the northern region of Pontos and grew agitated and jangled myself when I thought of the endless Scythian wars and the devastated cities. His world is still solid and dependable; property something good and enduring; Kelainai his refuge. I thought of how I strode out the burning gates of my hometown, 2 little sacks over my shoulder. (Provender in one, alpha Lyrae in the other). – I'll never forget that, how I stood before my books for the last time and looked through all the rooms, lost in thought; luckily there was still some schnapps in the locker, and my body did not torment me, I didn't feel it, nor my light burden, and even the inferior part of the mind, the one that gives orders to this body draped shabbily over it, was separate from me. So that I could stand there, legs spread wide, hands in the pockets of my green coat (for it was white-and-black winter out there, and damp air came in short, rattling bursts). My head floated in the room. It was very silent there. – What is that hissing rustle of sand and the moon's debris among slivered stars ? Steps flee to the everywhere.

12th Day

North wind with sand clouds (sounds like a bill of fare); shadows scurry among the wisps. – I have ordered an error of almost 4 stadia, since for the greater part of the day I couldn't see the sun, and could only guess at due south. And so; we plodded on ahead; in the name of Eratosthenes. –

If only humankind would soon succeed in destroying itself; true, I'm afraid : it will take a long time yet, but they'll manage it for sure. They'll have to learn to fly too, so that it will be easier to toss firebrands into cities (a pretty sight : a portly, bronze boat perhaps, from which a couple of mail-clad warriors contemptuously hurl a few flaming armored logs, while from below they shoot at the scaly beasts with howling arrows. They could also easily pour burning oil out of steel pitchers. Or poison. In the wells. By night). Well, they'll manage it all right (if *I* can come up with that much !). For they pervert all things to evil. The alphabet : it was intended to record timeless poetry or wisdom or memories – but they scrawl myriads of trashy novels and inflammatory pamphlets. What do they deftly make of metals ? Swords and arrow tips. – Fire ? Cities are already smoldering. And in the agora throng the pickpockets and swashbucklers, cutpurses, bawds, quacks and whores. And at best, the rest are simpletons, dandies, and brainless yowlers. And every one of them self-complacent, pretending respectability, bows politely, puffs out coarse cheeks, waves his hands, ogles, jabbers, crows. (They have many words : Experienced : someone who knows plenty of the little underhanded tricks. – Mature : has finally unlearned every ideal. Sophisticated : impertinent and ought to have been hanged long ago.) Those are the small fry; and the ‹great men› : every statesman, politician, orator; prince, general, officer should be throttled on the spot before he has time or opportunity to earn the title ‹great› at humankind's expense. – Who alone can be great ? Artists and scientists ! And no one else ! And the least of them, if an honest man, is a thousand times greater than the great Xerxes. – If the gods would grant me 3 wishes, one of them would be immediately to free the earth of humankind. And of animals, too (they're too wicked for me as well). Plants are better (except for the insectavores) – The wind has picked up.

13th Day

(2152.04 ± 11.12) Our worst performance today; 160 stadia. The gusts veered from all directions, an infernal staggering about. Besides which, the sand gets finer and finer and is quite deep; you tire very quickly. Around noon a few house-sized boulders.

While we were sitting inertly propped against bales this evening (our first time without fire; wood is getting scarce), Mabsut entered our oval and circumspectly pointed out that we did indeed have water for another 8

days, but – pause. Then he started in more emphatically, that one could keep going south for at most 1 to 2 days without danger (he added politely : naturally, if we did find water . . .). I translated and sent him away; for Aemilianus our turning around seemed a matter of course; and he suggested that we begin at once with the tedious final observations; we had to have at least – 2000 stadia – using our former measurements as our base – a difference of a good 4 degrees of latitude – ? I replied coldly : "We're going on." He seemed not to have expected anything else (does he know me that well ?), simply wrinkled his (white !) brow a bit, and began anew (indulgently, as one would speak to a gifted, willful child) to explain our situation. Silence. Wind brushed and soughed across the cold evening sand. I promised the wind : "We're going on." In the northeast a mist of light vaulted up, pressed foggily on, heaped itself into a hill along the clear horizon; the moon would rise soon. After a while, Aemilianus replied coldly : "Well, you're the one who'll have to answer to Eratosthenes for the results." – He gazed at his composed fingers and calmly continued : "In any case, for my part, I'm turning back after the 2 days the Nasamon gave us. Along with the others apparently, am I right ?"

Night

I have made my decision; my baggage is ready. The books, a knife, a piece of bread (and a handful of sweet dates) and the schnapps jug (full !) to hang from a rope over my shoulder. Bow and 3 arrows.

14th Day

(Still at the same place !) Just as we were about to move on, it turned slightly dusty and golden in the west; the camels they rode were swift ! There are only 4 men (and 2 of them old), so no one took fright, but 10 camels (6 for provisions and utensils, which Mabsut at once checked over with envious nods.) They promptly dismounted and strode handsomely and gravely into our semicircle, the eyes were flashing in dark-brown, creased faces; golden-red and black robes. Delighted, I at once clapped my commanding hands and called to Mabsut to unload again, which he did, at first sullenly but then with a sly smile, along with the rest of the gang. – We sit in a circle.

Noon.

So then. Hurriedly ate a bite. – One of them, an old man, is nicknamed ‹Beschar› i.e. ‹The Traveler›, and he knows the desert well enough (when I mentioned the hollow mountain, he whipped his head around in my direction. So we already had something in common to hide. Very good). They come from far to the west, have been underway for 9 days, and are headed for the Ammonium, but first by way of another place, named Ja-lu or something like that. In our direction, he knows only that after 2 days' journey it

is said a barren mountain wilderness begins, with hot, dusky rocks, and then ? he shrugged; the desert goes far into infinity (how in my eagerness I clench my fists : ah, infinite ! And nothing forever but an ocean of sand and black cliffs, like a stairway to hell; infinite and solitude – I thrust my fist into the sand; I promised to infinity : "I'm going on !") –

Afternoon

We held an amusing archery contest. – Wait : something else first ! I kept questioning Beschar, and he said that, once, many moons ago, he had been driven off course into the foothills of those mountains, and that ‹jinns› dwelled there. A few. Jinns. – He (and his companion) had seen tracks; the left foot of a man and next to it the print of a giant bird talon. He smiled a majestic and cunning smile and gazed at me. His silver beard lay on his broad chest, reaching down over his shimmering belt; his robes flowed wide in fiery-hued folds; beneath the hem intertwined with gold, the curled and pointed toe of an openwork shoe. – (He did not take his eye from me; may well be that my face was an open book. I bowed often, and, smiling, he gestured slowly with his richly ringed hand. – Jewelry indeed has its beauty.) – Archery contest : Mabsut drove a stake into the sand (of course, it did not hold; so he heaped rubblestone around it), placed a dark wooden beaker on top, scurried away. Even at 60 paces the strangers hit it only 4 : 2 (Beschar and one of the others with a coal-black, wedge-shaped beard and glowing eyes), Deino (though probably inadvertently) and I. (My old bow was supple and in finest condition and my hand sure – ah !) At 100 paces I hit it with my first arrow, the second stuck a fingerbreadth lower in the stake (the wood split upward from the force, lifting and tilting the beaker), the third pierced the concave rim of the vessel and flew whistling on. – 150 paces : it was too far. (Had the wind been calm it might have been a possibility.) The first two flew past, the third one grazed the beaker and knocked it off. Beschar, however, raised a hand in the wind, then positioned a dark arrow with a slender silver tip, drew and shot, and the noble metal clove the cracked hollow shell like a bolt of lightning. Then he grabbed my hand and spoke kind words; how happy he was such rare archers were roaming the sand-sea (he has given me one of his arrows). His companions had soundlessly unfolded a black tent; inside he asked me what we were doing here; smiled and furrowed his brow. I concealed little from him. This evening I am invited to his tent.

A little while ago

I had lain down for an hour in the clear and windy gold of afternoon under the shade of the tent and fell asleep at once. I opened my dream eyes and found myself on board a ship; as I gazed over the metal railing, a heavy fog covered the darksome water, so that only the little cold waves lapping

against the ship's hull were visible. I stumbled along the gently rolling deck through a tangle of coiled ropes and iron winches, making for the cabin, and through its window saw an old map lying on the table; the captain was leaning over it, measuring with notched brass plates and triangles; I could not take my eyes off him. A clear, mournful voice at my side began to murmur, dwindled, spoke, was silent; I noted only the name of the ship ‹Uatzinta› and turned back to the sea. The fog had lifted somewhat, and I saw that we were floating down narrow canals, through what may have been a flat, murky delta swamp extending far around us (only once did a strip of clean graveled shore slip rapidly by). Now and then we passed tumbledown shacks; massive stone curbs, but slippery green and wet, began to border the deep and languidly gurgling water arteries; isolated houses appeared, gloomy and stained with damp; trash barrels, garbage heaps, and deserted excavations of sooty suburbs; just overhead an ugly flat bridge gave a quick, toneless echo and formed a somber, ratty portal. Among warehouses and damp coal depots, tenements stared vacantly from black windows, children at slow play in the courtyard refuse, women bickering. Sullen and restless, we stood on deck and were led inexorably on; the buildings grew taller, boats slapped against algae-covered moles; then we glided into a medium-sized basin, and the ship drew up unassisted beside the low wall next to a wide square; a single official, his hands shaking with fever, threw us a red hawser, wound it around the flat bollard heads; zigzagged away in a crouch; nothing more. We were now all on deck, anxiously watching the bustle of the great city. A gigantic edifice towered above the empty square across from us; along its entire front billowed a gently floating curtain of fiery silk, printed with man-sized, rusty-brown letters promising lurid pleasures. People streamed busily by, the rainy air drizzled gray; occasionally someone would throw us a glance. Girls in shawls called wantonly to us (yellow rats with glassy, webbed skin shot through the water), they threw things at us too, little boxes of trifles, slips of paper, a thick book with a bloodred binding (and I took that for myself ! A book !). Thumps and rumbles came from the cabin, the captain leapt up the short stairway, laid a hand to his breast, and called in a low voice : "Woe is us ! We are lost; for this is Weilaghiri, the City of Hell ! Let no one leave the ship, for on land you are in horrible danger; and throw away all these gifts." (And from then on two men, one at the bow, the other at the stern, were to hold constant watch and shout : "Remember the gods ! Keep evil thoughts far from you !") And while he hurried back down to search further in his old books for reports and counsel on how to escape, we watched in mute wonder as – it must have been about noon – on the tallest towering house there appeared a brutal giant clad in red, copper hammers

in his fists, with which he struck a booming disk. At that, all the swirling citizens stood still, looked up attentively, and then broke into agonizing, blaring, savage laughter, so that we frowned and shuddered. Was this their form of worship ? – And so we lay for many days, waiting and watching the goings-on, until we ran out of drinking water. And now someone *had* to go into the city, I volunteered. The captain pulled me into his room and gave me a wide cloak, red outside, smoky blue lining within. When I wore the red, I looked like an inhabitant of evil places; reversed, it made the wearer invisible, but not inaudible. I prepared two slender amphoras to hang on cords from my shoulders, and the next night, as the moon gaped greenish through a pale fog, I sprang across. And now every evening I walked the streets and alleys; saw the garish lights of the shop windows and the noisy dives, saw crimes and vices, a thousand faces, ten thousand faces, a hundred thousand. It was always autumn here. The suburbs desolate; crooked fences rotting around gray fields. I shuffled through archways and made desultory small talk with loafing boys and skinny women with shabby shopping bags. A cheap statue squatted in front of a tavern : the god of fever, with his fox face, the bundle of red arrows at his chest. Oily peddlers gawked through greasy shelves; fire came, disease and war, oh Weilaghiri. – I awoke, sank back again in half-sleep and came to the dim realization that one of our crew would have to be sacrificed; before the city hall stood bronze images of beasts of prey, in the jaws of one lay a piece of parchment describing the way back. But the metal maw would crush the brave man's hand, and as the ship pulled out and was driven on by the wind, he would be led off in a humiliating procession, hideously tortured, and slaughtered. Should he rue his sacrifice, the ship would then be devoured by fire falling from the heavens. A young sailor was found; we sailed hastily away; at one point blazing descended in the distance : but we were apparently too far away already – behold, as I jump up the desert sun stands just above the distant horizon. I met Beschar and told it all to him. He listened. Aemilianus came over and asked : "Shall I begin final observations ? It's time I'd say –" I called recklessly over my shoulder : "We're going on." – Now I shall get ready for this evening (get ‹spruced up›).

Now

Curling fire in the clear night; the flames silently bubble. And my heart whirls busily; what still awaits me ? (I have taken a tiny swig and have looked into the stars, head thrown back, oh – when I was young : In white night, clouds swim in the sky, "Hail Luna" the rollicking tipplers cry. The dark narrow streets, they sway before them, made serpentine by the bumper. In dreaming gardens cool lilacs gush, they stroke their beards, they smirk and go astray. They watch as soundless shooting stars whirr

from ebon clouds with silver rims. – Blest argent blue, forever I am yours !) Frown. Shake it off, they're sure to be waiting in the tent by now.
Tent
(Inside it is lined in bright red, embroidered with rich golden tendrils. The lovely air; one dives with a smile into the gold radiance.) Bowings, a hot drink in a supple silver goblet. We rest on circular pillows. Beschar seems in a talking mood, for he spends many words of introduction. Pause. He begins; finally, slowly (something from very long ago, is it not ? – oh : 100 years !) : A prince (good, when one is handsome and supplely young and fairy-tale trim); and a stern, suspicious father, who loses a war (an unjust one, of course !). The enemy invades the country, ten thousand bearded riders burst upon them, robes fluttering; evil eyes menace in every chamber. Stumbling children dodge and scream in the swelling folds of curtains. And whips of flame strike the shattering paneled walls (I swallow gall : did not books burn as well ? And he nodded implacably : books too ! !). Smoke hovers in the basins of wells run dry, and spreading incandescence gapes from every room, grainy red fog creeps in – all this was far away in the west. (*And* in the east, *and* in the north, *and* in the south – oh, I know, I know !) From a hill, the prince stares at the shallow plumed dome of smoke lying over the city, feather gray veined red and black. And his horse bleeds from the neck; mouth agape, distraught, he once more fills his waterbag at a crevice in the rocks, buckles it behind his saddle and ambles his horse into the night. Toward the southeast (Beschar nods to me and hands me the silver goblet : clear and fiery the liquid tumbles into me). – There was nothing but sand and rubble; glass-golden heat fell from the hole of the sun, fire-flaked air panted at his mouth's scorched rim. The second day, he drove off his black steed, threw the half-shrunken waterbag over his shoulder and plodded on into the growing green dusk of evening. Moon, a slim silver swallow, flew up into velvet night; stern astral ghosts danced silently around the shivering man. One morning, just as his water ran out, he saw directly before him the reddish and dark precipice of a high tableland. He finally worked his way on foot to its base through a rock jumble, but to his dismay he saw no end to the wild wall on either side; before him, pebbled slopes bouldered away in kernels; long, wrenched shadows hung in silent fissures; the sky-wall bent low over his reeling figure. He endured the sight for hours, then began his ascent; barefoot in the clefts, so that his feet could clench the stones. He ripped his nails, tore the skin from his hands; hours later he was dangling halfway up the wall. His damp brow fell against the rock. His heart belled hollow and slack beneath him; then he thrust his dagger into the nearest rift in the rock, which ran above him like a delicate hair of a woman, and moved on. Toward evening the shadow people

changed color and stretched cold-blue gliding limbs; the wall blushed with eerie delicacy; cold breathed an alien sigh from inaccessible heights. As darkness fell, he dragged himself over the edge, lay there on his hands and knees. Night's ice-blue dew covered his face with a crystal mask; for hours. When he raised his head again, by the light of a waxing moon that threw his shadow tiny before him, he saw a blank level empty plateau. But far in the distance opposite him, a shimmering stripe seemed to border the horizon. Refreshed by cold and damp, he stood up and strode toward the gleam. Around midnight he neared the city, lying bright and empty before him. Open the silver-barred gates stood, as if on tiptoe he walked the broad beautiful avenues. Silence wafted from the horseshoe arches of shimmering palaces; in empty courtyards, windy courtyards, water fluttered and fell, splashed into fountain basins; above the squares the wind called monotonously under the frozen moon. – I jumped up; I asked in a hoarse but restrained voice: "And he kept going to the southeast ?" Beschar raised his eyebrows, surprised but comprehending, and slowly stroked his robe – "to the southeast –" he said slowly and pensively "– yes –" and smiled, mocking and bemused; I quickly bowed, and begging a moment to myself, ran out of the tent.

Outside everything glistened, even this piece of human – I seemed to be standing in a blue stone : so strange was the night. I ran nimbly to my bag, pulled out the amphora, and raised it with both hands to the seeded stars; the wraith drink smacked dark and resonant, surged coldly in my mouth, silver-black and smooth in the moonlight. I was about to smile, pointless and wise – when someone spoke nearby, and my face froze with disgust at the voice. But when I grudgingly looked toward it, my anger triumphed; because – right : Aemilianus had set up the tripods and cylinders, was making the final observations, with Deinokrates helping him. Oh, you bastards ! They saw me and hesitated hardly at all; then (still lying on his back) the Latin patriot went on speaking in a cold, affected voice : "4 degrees, 2 minutes –" – in a few strides I was beside them. I slammed the cylinders into the reptile's face, bending them, and broke the heavy frame with a blow of my arm. He rolled away and leaped up, his face white, warped into a mask of rage. If only he had jumped me; he would not have lived another minute, although he had a stylus in his hand; but Deinokrates held him by the arm and neck and shouted at him. He calmed down at once, slid the wax tablet under his robe; and said icily to D. : "– you're right of course !" and turned to Mabsut and the others, who had arrived after being awakened by the noise. "Garan ataiji somrok – let us make ourselves ready –" well look at that ! The rascal could speak Nasamon too !

3 hours later (alone)

Very briefly : I wiped my forehead and was headed back (to the tent), when I saw that several of ‹our men› were about to make off with Beschar's goods and were already fumbling at his saddlebags. (There were only 4 of them, right ? !) I called for the strangers to come, banged a fist into Mabsut's shameless, ugly mug, sending the scrawny cat reeling, and helped them load. But our bows never left our hands, and that helped. Just before sunrise, they mounted their lean animals; Beschar's robe spread wide and began to rustle like dark pinions, his eyes glowered at me. Then he threw an arm in the air, let out a deep, echoing cry and sprang to the head of the fleeing surge of dust. – I could still see their robes hemmed with dawn, and there were the others already in their saddles. In a quarter circle around me. 30 paces off. Aemilianus, the new commander, in the middle, with that scoundrel Mabsut and the child Deino behind him (symbolic !). He was leading a camel with no mount by the halter and spoke to me (businesslike, calm) : "We're going back; you know the reasons. Since you are no longer capable of leading the surveying expedition, I am assuming that responsibility from here on. I therefore order you to mount this camel and follow me (‹ME ! !› and not ‹us !›). Thus spake Aemilianus. 30 paces. I thrust my bow between my thighs, slowly bent it, strung it, and tested it with my finger : the sound of a bright warbling bird. And when I raised my head, behold : it was now 50 paces. And I sucked my chest full with air and commanded : "Dismount ! We're going on, to the south !" – Aemilianus laughed and his head jerked over his shoulder to look back at Mabsut, and he, too, grinned in amusement. The new leader contemptuously raised his vigorous Roman hand in the air and called out as he forced his animal's head northward : "Die, you drunken Greek swine !" Slowly the caravan moved off. I chose Beschar's arrow; the wind fell silent. Once more the fellowship halted, leaning back relaxed and enjoying themselves; and it was now 150 paces. I pulled at the bow hard, hard, clear to my chest, hard – and let fly ! He had just turned his head again, forming his mouth I'm sure for some new, apter phrase, wasn't that a smile of derision ? – And his hand clutched his throat; he lurched, swayed in his saddle, and I saw the gleaming silver tip pierce his neck. – Mabsut caught him as he slid down, thrashed at the animals with his free hand; they vanished into the sea of sand. –

Alone (and morning, ah !)

Alone ! Alone ! ! – I could sing a hymn. I am so happy. (Helios, too, is alone, high in the blue silk. How he stands there at the curved beak of his boat, laughing, cocky; and slowly, blissfully cradled. And behind him, on the smooth gold planks, scrolls will lie, for there is no bliss without

books !) And there they are, all 5 in their watertight covers : the numerical table, the subterranean journey, the mournful knight, the rockbound island, and the volume of selections with the water sprite, the scarecrow, the golden amphora, the agathodaemon, and the 4-fold mandragora. Bread; dates; it all makes for a light bag. The jug on its cord; ah, it is almost at full flood. The dagger goes under the belt. –

1 hour later

As I got ready to move on, only the bow was left. I had one last arrow; I spoke a curse over it and sent the whistler northwards, after the dogs. I broke the bow, pieces rammed the ground. Then I walked hastily southward for an hour, so that no one could find me anymore; and after just 100 paces the sand began to ripple lightly under my feet, whirlwinds curled upward, veils fluttered mat yellow and dusty dull. I raised the tip of my robe to my mouth and disappeared from man's sight. Now I am lying beside a boulder; air and sand blend thicker and thicker : – a deep sleep –

Evening

I flung the lovely heavy sand-blanket to one side and leapt up into the silky yellow, clear evening. A cool wind passed near me like a trim lad with stars in his hands; won't the moon be full soon as well ? Now, it is time to wander. Southward.

Morning

I walked all night, and must have put considerable distance behind me. Bright moonlight. Now and then a star spark fell; all flickering blue. – I sense thirst for the first time (but it is still bearable, and since I'm traveling by night, I'll cover more ground yet). – It is hard to estimate how far it still is to the tableland. Beschar only said that the prince came from "far in the west" and traveled "to the southeast". Therefore, I will run into the palisade by pushing southward. All quite clear. – But when. And at what point ? – Sleep. – Around noon I awoke; from thirst. (I had in fact been dreaming that I was vainly trying to drink from an aqueduct –) I furrowed my brow and fell asleep again.

Evening

Cold; I drank a swallow. Lovely. – Easy walking in this cold. Long after midnight the ground turned harder; rock. Echo of steps. High moon. Snaky paths among strewn boulders.

Sunrise

I see it ! I see it ! – About 40 stadia ahead of me begins a jumble of dark hills, reefs and stony crests, knolls, long ridges. Those must be the foothills (should I perhaps hold course more to the southwest ?). – Actually I hoped to make it to the nearest spurs, but I was suddenly overcome by profound, red weakness. And the stone stool rocked me broadly and slowly

like a swing. I suppose I'm hot and foolish; damn. – Have to sleep first.
Noon
No point in that; I'm not going to kid myself : I have a fever ! Definitely the wrong time for it ! I have been awake all the while; hot and icy cold by turns. And this cursed thirst. During the next break in the fever I'm going to get good and drunk, and hope the quantum holds me for the few stadia. – Rock back and forth a bit first. – there – damn ! That's enough ! Off we go ! (To the silver city. Where the cold fountains rustle – ah.)
Darkness approaches
It was apparently farther than I had estimated (or was I already too exhausted ?). – At any rate I painfully made my way for almost 6 hours. At least I'm a good way now into the wild rocky scarping. Strange country; the black walls rise almost vertically (but not very high; 3 to 4 times a man's height at most); form deep passes and corridors, sometimes perfect open circles, and everywhere brightest sand has drifted in. – The night seems not to be cooling off; the air is as hot and clear as before. Want to wait for the moon to arrive.
Moontime
Everything is all brownish and golden. And the black magic streets. – If only I were healthy (that is, my head is quite clear, but somehow isolated from my body. It barely obeys. I have no pain). In any case, I must go on. – I looked a little into the beautiful torrid smoldering light, and took three deep drafts. Ah, how cold and hot it was at the same time (there is not much left in it now; may the silver city come soon). –
In the sand
Suddenly the light grew more beautiful and bright, and the blood rang out merrily in every vein. I sprang easily to my feet and hurried off deep into the curious tangle of passages. – Always to the south, of course, with a small correction now to the west. It was almost bright as daylight, only you could not see quite as far; and the sand crunched in the warm night. I came close to not seeing it at all, but the shadow's trace ran right straight across the empty bright open space. My heart thumped once hard, and then no more; I ran to it swiftly : there was the foot of a man, clearly discernible, wearing a narrow shoe with a delicate scaly sole; but the next print (and my breath came deeper and deeper) was the massive, strong-toed talon of a bird, and so the trail moved on : foot – talon, foot – talon. 10 paces before the cliff the tracks ended as abruptly as they had begun. I walked up and down it several times. – If only the demon appears soon; my senses are still keen and I am full of fire; I spread my arms, I shouted : "Ho !". I waited; I could have danced in the golden light; "Ho !" – (I have sat down beside the rock wall; I still hold my head high on my shoulders) – "Ho !" –

Toward morning
I lost consciousness. I am not well. And the moon stands behind me on the rocks like a copper lamp. It is cold now. Cold. –
There ! !
There he is on the rim ! A pale fixed face ! – Bring the amphora ! –
He is gone
Must. write. fast. The beak remained mute; I greeted him with head and hand (could no longer stand up) and cried out : "How far is it to the silver city ?" He gave a short cluck and eyed me coldly. "And beyond that," I said with an effort, "to the world's edge, void of men ? !" And the fever tossed me this way and that. He cooed an interested laugh and raised himself up further above the black parapet; he wore a blazing-brown robe, a rustling wing flew up and clamped tightly onto the stone. "Where from ?" his raven voice rattled, and it came to me : "Weilaghiri !"; he nodded haughtily, and let his owlishly alert eyes pass rapidly across the zodiac. Cracked nuts. (Quickly. My head was sinking yet again. Keep it high !) He saw the books; flew down in a roar of feathers. He wears a small curled, silver openwork shoe, I've seen it once before. He asked : "Where is my arrow ?" I laughed wickedly and silently (my hands lay in the sand, no longer concerned me). "Aemilianus ?" he asked anxiously, and then nodded in content. He raised his head expectantly : "You hate the Romans ?" I bloated my mouth, I screamed a whisper : "I curse all things human !" At which he barked a laugh and danced, beat his wings till they roared. A tower of sand rose up; he vanished in the tower of sand. –
Must be noon by now
Out of the sun emerges a golden drill. Circulous and empty. All around; empty. There are no traces at all in the sand of hell. I fade.
Midday comes. –
Twilight passes. –
Evening. With fire –
Rustling above me
He asked hurriedly : "You still alive ? !" I looked at him, firm, weary. "Fly", I wanted to. He nodded solemnly in his silver beard, he bent down to me : "You must come on your own – !" he said, hesitantly and sympathetically; strode across the open space, stood still at the corner of the rock and waited. Impenetrable. –
I wanted to lift my fingers; they were inert. My feet : could not feel them. Gasping, I gathered all my will; stars rose, silver swimmers in the evening sea, dived, floated, blissful. And cool. I tugged my right hand to my wheezing chest; the left struck my abdomen like a hollow stone. Get the jug : the urn's murmuring mouth tilted above me, and I drank. Drank. (Man of dirt

and loam; and with me was mixed ice and fire) – He gestured graciously, bobbing. And with ease I rise *on high* . . .

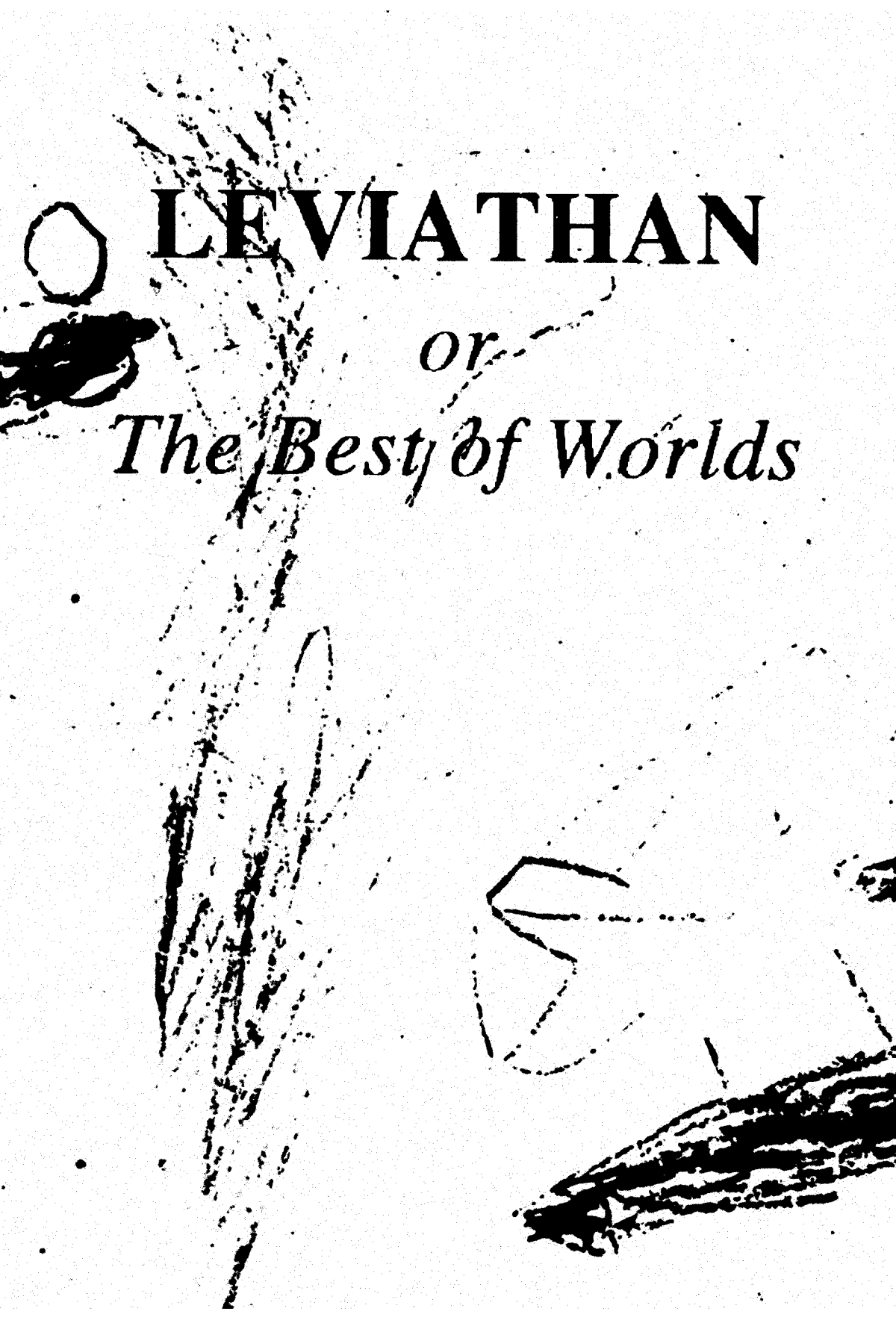
Eratosthenes of Cyrene writes this

Mabsut led the caravan back. Aemilianus died the next day (not all that unwelcome, in light of larger Greek interests). – How right I was in my judgment of Philostratos is amply demonstrated by this diary of his, which I found one month later on the occasion of a renewed general measurement of the earth in that same jumble of hills. – He was a tall, powerful man of middle years, with blue eyes and wavy blond hair. Indicative of the man's general character, he was undeniably of great brilliance and multiple talents and yet remained a fantast and visionary, a type found sometimes among exceptional young men. The best proof of this is his catalog of favorite books. His opinion of me is irrelevant; may posterity decide. – The last feverish dreams of the dying man appear not to lack some basis in reality; as we were examining the shards of the amphora – strangely enough, there was no trace at all of him or his books – two giant birds, passing at a great height, flew over us and away.

LEVIATHAN

or

The Best of Worlds



Berlin
20th May 45

Betty Dear !

I'm in quite a hurry (but always thinking of you and the kids of course). – The town is fearfully smashed, rather like a bad dream. Well, they asked for it and they got it. – The Russians look a jolly good sort and are amiable to deal with. We all expect them to join now against the damned Japs, and that'll settle that too, I'm sure. Hope to see you again quite soon.

JONNY

The watches and bracelets – well, stow them away. I had to throw them into the box absolutely at random, hope they'll not be badly damaged. The German insignia and mss I got from a Russian Lcpl as a souvenir (gave him some cigarettes in return). – 1000 kisses. – J.

14.2.45

Head's throbbing like a bell's loud-surging maw – oh –. I have to bloat my mouth and tug it wide. – Oh ! –.

Later

It hardly made a shallow dimple in my helmet; was definitely an angled shot from over by the tracks. But I can think again and move. – The whole town (and the area around the station here, too) is still under fire; sadistic : one over here, then five there, and back again. The snow is all dirty with the dust of ruin. Most of the shelling is to the east and north (in the direction of Kreuzberg and Kerzdorf); no let-up in the infantry battle there. All I have left is my 11.25 mm pistol(s); loaded, and a few bullets loose in my pocket. – On days like this there's no guessing the time; it's always the same bright gray, the fences always black. (It's 14:16.) I've got to try and get out of here; my travel orders are for Ratzeburg. – Crazy, looking down Bahnhofstrasse like this; you know every corner; I walked it every day; in the clinkling cold winter of 28/29, in spring, bright blue and cold, in the chestnut heat of summer green, the autumnal rustling of the swimming area on the Queis is often in my dreams. Really ought to see if I can't get hold of

a locomotive, the tracks are still in almost perfect shape (games your mind plays; I can't possibly run one of the things. Instead of doing something).
15:00
Up front were three abandoned skips, one with gravel; then a freight car, behind it some special vehicle (steel rig, thick as a man; only glimpsed it as I ran by). In the freight car were already helpless souls enough; night before last, at 22:00 hours, they said, the town had been evacuated. They had still been hoping . . . Two soldiers (one of them with a bloody bandage around his head); a young thing shows sassy eyes; a pastor and his family.
15:10
(Behind the special car) : I recognized her at once ! (At first I saw only the thin, elderly woman, her mother.) She was wearing a full fur coat, brown with black streaks. Until she turned around. Surprised and coolly amused, she instantly raised her left eyebrow again and jutted out her chin; then she swung a large suitcase up into the car. (The repair works took four hits at once; one of them so close that we were swaying with the air blast before we could hit the ground. Fumy mushrooms, big as houses, spouted up in the culm; stones and metal appeared, clumping in the air. Her dark hair in the snow.) Across the way, two men made a ducking leap out of the sundered sheds, collapsed, crouched there looking around, crept over the tracks toward us. Mechanics, judging by the dirty blue-linen overalls ("Greiff outfits millions for work", 232/3/11, oh, grand !) I called to them at once : "Don't you guys still have an engine ? Can you run one ? –" They gasped, waved me off. Inside there were plenty ! But most of them all shot up by strafers. Run one, yes (one of them was a yard mechanic in fact). But there was no more water or coal. She came sauntering up, hands in her pockets, and used head and shoulders to point across, to the other side of the street : "Coal's over there." We negotiated for a long time with the dazed mechanics, but it was better to get something started; we men carried coal in sacks. –
The long twilight. Lugging. Darkness murmured in, the way a painter tentatively mixes a night hue. Lugging. Dusty yellow. Lugging. Smoky red. Lugging. Through a ruin window the first star blinked plumply; fat, cocky yellow, a banker. Lugging. The sky grew clear and promised coming cold.
After 18:00
Night already; but everywhere the copper-town is burning (a while ago the catholic church collapsed in the distance). Each of us gasped his way back and forth a good thirty times (and machine-gun spray clattered across the roofs); a few more have arrived, three old men and two boys in Hitler Youth uniforms (didn't want to help us "flee" at first, naturally). We have, I guess, over 9 tons in the tender. One of them is firing her up now; if we

can get her under the water tower, this might even work. The women and children hauled in old straw from a cattle car, horses; stinks, and guaranteed full of fleas. I am lying far forward in the corner and next to me Anne Wolf; Anne Wolf. She is already running things in the car and so arranged for this, too. In town, things crash and tremble.

20:00

Was back over there again, a little voice ricocheted off a heated face way up in the black sheet-iron : "'nother half hour !"; the pistons pumped. – Washed my hands and eyes in the station; water was still on. In the dark, glasses flickered, the tables upturned, smashed. Waiting rooms : how often I've sat, stood in them, Lauban, Görlitz, Greiffenberg, staring into the human currents; they sat in every chair, gabbed, ate, left; I made note of all and sundry : the soft lamps, the rainbow drinks, the strong red and gold of packs of Salems; murky light of the platforms; bright train windows pearling into the night. –

In any case, drafty as hell in here; out, now.

In the freight car

Actually it's madness for us even to want to pull out; it may be that 500 yards ahead the tracks have been blown up. – Across from me lie the other two soldiers, the girl between them (your vulgarest seamstress type); a seventy-year-old in a post-office uniform (still at the anvil at 108, *and* gives his entire income to the Winter Relief Fund ! at least that's how the newspapers always tell it); next to him Pastor etc. amidst seven children (seven; well, if he didn't want to trust in God, who else should ? Two of them had to lie along the length of the door). On our side, beside me, are Anne, her mother, two half-grown schoolgirls; then our two H.Y. heroes with their half-dozen bazookas (full of bravado, they've made pillows of them, and are having a casual smoke; fine; our youth is our future, n'est-ce pas ?). Then the two other old men and a grandma (definitely from the country; from that corner you keep hearing about the "good soil" – with that repulsive long Silesian "oo" sound : "Yeah, the good, good soil !" Extra Silesiam non est vita).

A while ago

After much shunting about, the locomotive pushed slowly into us; they coupled and cursed. We tried to get rid of the last car, but to no avail, all rusted tight; the engineer shouted : "Just get rid of that tie-buster ! –" Well lookee there, tie-buster ! In Drontheim, I saw it in a newsreel; had "seen action" somewhere in the east. Very simple idea : a steel hook, "functional design" and weighing several tons, hangs from the last car, grabs behind the railroad tie, up front the engine pulls out, and it rips the ties in the middle, one after the other. Easy as can be, just as fast as the train'll move.

A couple of stalwart privates were sitting up there, laughing away ("You're gonna be in the movies"), instead of with faces wrenched by the horror ! I had to hold tight to my seat, eyes agape; thought of Cervantes and Mozart, and of Major Fouqué (lord, is that possible : "Major" and "Undine", "Alethes" !). Kant merely showed that proofs for the existence of a God the "father" are a rotten joke; nowadays we can go ahead and present counterproofs : the tie-buster is a good one (definitely, likewise the commandants of Oeveraas, 21./976, what swine, Zeller out in front; except Dittmann and Georg). – It's jacked up now and tied down onto the car platform with a thick chain. I climbed back in; Anne was rustling in some paper.

21:07

Finally : a gentle rolling began beneath us : we were moving. Slowly.

Later

Up ahead things don't seem to be in such good shape; we'd hardly made it through the three underpasses, and we were standing still again. The door on my side doesn't quite close, and the draft when we're moving is almost unbearably cold (tried to jolt it shut; but it won't budge. Behind us everything in flames). I could just make out the hump of the Steinberg and the Hohwald Road. From the soldiers' corner came giggling and a little sassy squeal, twice; even the wounded one had joined the dallying, languid and lecherous. The pastor prayed repeatedly for strength and proclaimed the range of the goodness of the Lord, which wife and children reverberatingly endorsed; disgusting. The old woman and the stubble-faced codgers cursed "Hitler"; then "Hitler, the no-good bastard !" (the "oo" this time quite short and stressed). An awful jerk; sparkish stuff flew by, silky red; we rolled on for a few more minutes.

Almost midnight

We're still stopped (a little beyond the hospital I'd say). Dozed for about half an hour, till I woke up freezing. The kids whimpered from the cold and had to go relieve themselves. It was suggested that we all should do that at the same time, to keep the door closed as much as possible from here on. Bon.

Outside

Tall, slender stalks quiver in the wind that sighs over the brittle snow; a pine coils regularly back and forth; you scurry and crouch behind a bush. I saw the stars; tiny smoldering faces, chalk white and bright blue; Ursa Major, the little one; Draco between. The veils of light on the horizon grumbled incessantly. Anne, too, came strolling out from behind her bush, hips high. The old postal clerk came politely up to me : "You a friend of the stars, too, sergeant ?" He pointed with his head back to the conflagrancy :

"Good to know there's still an infinity – –." A gaunt, fairly respectable face. But she was listening. I turned slowly (whoa, impressive !); and remarked offhandedly : "You're mistaken; there's not even infinity. – Lucky Homer –." He pursed his naked brow, surprised and scornful, by night's light : "Kant, Schopenhauer," he cheerfully set his course, "how do you picture it : that spot where space comes to an end ?" The pastor likewise let the starred heavens touch his emotions : "God," he declared, "is infinite –." I never debate the pious, I spoke now in the direction of our chartered train : "You're mistaken as well; there was once a demon of fundamentally cruel and diabolical nature, but he too no longer exists." He spoke with emotion : "Blasphemy ! –" Wind. H.Y. struck a match. A scrawny shooting star raised a silver brow above Betelgeuse (my father once got drunk on that angry name, around '22, "Betelgeuse, the Giant Sun", a "Fremdenblatt" article). Anne walked over to me : "Would you give me a boost up," she said; it was done. Ah, happy eyes. We all climbed in. Out of the darkness came the old man's disdainful inquiry : "All right – how do you figure that : with your –" emphasis here : "non-infinite space ?" Anne turned her face to me (you could see only a sallow smudge) and I spoke :
"Unbounded; but not infinite. The surface of a sphere : is also unbounded, but not infinite. We can in fact imagine only three-dimensional figures (as a result of our brain structure), but for an explanation follow me now into two-dimensionality. An ‹infinite› tabletop, on it two cardboard triangles of equal size : thinking triangles. These beings can only jostle around one another in their space; if they wanted to prove their congruence, for example, they would have to measure angles and sides and draw trigonometric conclusions; for our proof we need only lift one of the triangles up into our space, larger by one dimension, and place it atop the fraternally other. – These figures had postulated, among others, the following theses : the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, through a given point there is only one line parallel to it; the theorem of parallels proves that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees." – At this point the whore screeched most unchastely and said : "Not now !" – I spoke : "A wise triangle investigated the surface of a sphere, which although likewise two-dimensional, was bent back into itself, and found that the straight lines (i.e., the lines of shortest distance) were great circles, that there were therefore no parallels, and that the sum of the angles was larger than 180 degrees. Applying the same rules, another triangle found that there were an infinite number of parallels on a pseudosphere (to illustrate with Beltrami's limiting circle), and that the sum of the angles was less than 180 degrees. – Which of these 3 possible two-dimensional spaces was now the ‹true› one; which geometry valid ? (Now apply the same line of reasoning

to all n-dimensional spaces)."
(Heels tapped rhythmically on the floor : "You'll have luck with the ladies if you tickle the keys . . ."; youth finding itself via poetry; ". . . for the tones of a piano can tease with ease . . ." (God knows ! "tease with ease"; our sentence is passed !). The old man asked, unsure of himself now : "It's not all quite clear yet – which one is it then – ?" I spoke : "A triangulation would decide it all (theoretically); but given the restricted space available to us, that's not a viable method. But by applying Doppler's principle, for example, (measuring radial velocity by shifts of wavelengths in the spectrum), it has been proved that as heavenly bodies move away from us, their velocity increases, approaching the constant of the speed of light; which at first seems a fully pointless interdependence. But consider – again in 2-dimensionality – a tangential plane placed against a sphere, and points of light, each moving at roughly the same speed across surface of the sphere, projected onto the plane, and you have something similar. There are other important reasons as well. The upshot is : our brains, simplifying (though in a biologically adequate fashion !), project a 3-dimensional, euclidean, fuzzy-infinite space, a piece of that ‹tangential plane› as it were; in reality, however, this space is bent back into itself and curves into a 4-dimensional one (think of the sphere's surface in our 2-dimensional example); and thus has a finite diameter, expressible in numbers. Unbounded but not infinite. –"
Wind snarled like a vicious beast at the gape and hunted in the straw. Her mother asked sotto voce : "When did Alfred write last ?" She answered indifferently : "What I'd like best is a divorce –". That was a jolt, so she was married (naturally; back then I hadn't dared say so much as a word to her; always just looked at her; back then). The old man answered, his voice quavering : "Then Schopenhauer was wrong in that respect – – and here I thought . . ."; he muttered and pondered. Anne asked while she chewed (still tricky, aren't you !) : "Could you give a number ? – For the diameter ?" – I spoke : "It varies. Space pulses." The car lurched forward and the door shuffled open; we caught it and lay back down. One of God's children began to sing in a strangely high and feverish glass-voice; who knows how long they've been trekking down that road now. And the criminal in Berlin was hounding the entire nation into horror and death, to be ever "greater" and "more unique", a cross between Nero and Savonarola; what a shame that he would escape the justice of his duped nation, more cowardly than any of his soldiers. More than enough of him. – Coat collar up, earflaps down; it's godawful cold.
Still dark
Slept very little; but thought about all sorts of things. Cooper came to mind

(and so, of course, Stifter, "Mountain Forest", too). "– one feels strangely rebuffed by a woman dressed in jewels and a formal gown –"; I turned onto my right side, I spoke soft, a night breeze on an ear : many memories. Sun, wind. The yellow evenings, chatter and laughing arose from the river-pane. Syringas in the rain. Lads knelt shouting by the greenish pond. Night began in the willow's vault beyond the branches. She was breathing regularly and without hurt; asleep. And why not. Hadn't it all become part of some story ? And even back then had not deadly, fat caterpillars loitered among the lilac leaves; and the bleating boys flogged the still water until it hissed ? Wasn't my soul tormented then as well, and existence something that ought not to be ? If only I could have slept. Nietzsche shared much of the blame, too, the power-worshiper; he taught Nazi-tricks, really ("Thou shalt love war more than peace. . ."), the garrulous bastard; he's the father to Breker's professional soldiers, who would starve if you took away their rocks and clubs, because "they just never learned better." He and Plato were grand malefactors (and ignoramuses besides : cf. the natural sciences). Oh, the gold of morn and afternoon in Aristippus. And my beard started to prickle; some warmth could be got it seemed by brutally tensing all the muscles in your body for as long as you could; got your circulation going, but it was damned hard work. Yawns. The three-quarter night was full of stench; schnapps would be just the thing, some rotgut hooch for all I care, but with a lethal kick. Or was that already the gray of dawn ?

8:00

From up front came a whistle (just to make sure we're noticed; the power habit has !); then the engine puffed off slowly, picking up speed, full steam ahead, and we were were rumbling on again. For a fairly long time. Of course everyone woke up and looked around with sleepy, gray faces (yes, yes; have no fear; it's still the same misery). The sick child was blooming dangerously like a rose. There : slower now. Stopped. That's that.

9:30

Hellfire and damnation, that was a close call. –

We had stopped somewhere near Nikolausdorf between high embankments, rimmed with pine. Most of us got out; I trudged up to the engine : they couldn't get up enough steam, not with our limp, soggy coal; it might take hours until we were ready to move again. But they kept on working untiringly. –

I climbed up the south embankment and into the gray, low-lying day (still the same thin and regular clouds, but considerably colder now). In the north, not all that far from us, earthy snow spurted up from the impact of light artillery. I yelled to the fireman : to stop his constant letting off steam, but he only shrugged. Suddenly the muck fountains came closer by leaps;

moved over us, pulled back; the air whistled like a thousand scalawags. Terrified, I bawled them all together (how slowly they moved), and the Russian took aim at the train. I yelled for them to move off to one side, not to run back and forth under the trajectory. Anne came racing up to me at once (supple and athletic as of old) and threw her head down next to mine on the gravel. The soldiers crawled over too, her mother, the old man. Black dots glided out of a distant piece of woods – tanks ! – and suddenly there was a delicate, birdlike twitter above us; I shoved her head down and screamed at the parson balancing slowly our way : "Hit the dirt ! !" 100 yards to our right, where the damned etna was steaming, two man-sized blackish-red flames thrust out of the pine tops; and again "Whooeee – Wooa !" And again. Iron rang below in the defile; heavyweights. I gasped a question : "Do you remember – Görlitz. The cool station. On summer mornings. –" She nodded calmly, and I spread myself flat against a bush and raised my bespectacled eyes above the rim. It cracked and growled and roared and howled. But it wasn't just us, the tanks as well appeared to be under heavy fire (Anne was beside me now and her Marlene-Dietrich profile distracted me again into blissful thralldom). Somebody cracked another hysterical machine-gun salvo into tree trunks, then they turned away and retracked into the woods. Immediately we ran in a crouch back behind the embankment : the ground there was red; red, oh. One of the old farmers sat there in a stupor, holding his dripping, dangling arm. And one of the children had been ripped almost totally apart by two giant fragments, neck and shoulders, everything. Its mother was still holding the head, staring in wonder at the greasy scarlet puddle. The sick thing ate old snow out of hunger and thirst; I chaffed its hands a little; but there was no point, I had nothing to eat either. The old stamp-canceler was close to being sick : "Is this possible –" he whispered and gagged on saliva. The pastor comforted the weeping woman; he suggested : "The Lord hath given; the Lord hath taken away –" and may he rot in hell, the coward and Byzantine added : "Blessed be the name of the Lord !" (And gazed proudly at us poor lost heathens, shameless lackey's soul ! – That guiltless child – Let him tell his ancient corny joke about original sin to people who still have bibs on their overalls : Hasn't it ever occurred to them all that God could be the guilty party ? Have they never heard of Kant and Schopenhauer, and Gauss and Riemann, Darwin, Goethe, Wieland ? Or do they simply not grasp it, and in bovine bliss chaw away at the same trash on through the centuries ? It's the same mentality that rejects damming rivers as a vote of no-confidence in God and an interference with His creation. I once heard a divine render sharp judgment on the appendix : "If it weren't good for something, then it wouldn't be there, that's all !" – Whatever is, is right : so that goes for

infantile paralysis, ravenous nun-moths, sphaerularia bombi Dufour, and Herms Niels; blind subservience always seems to wear a black uniform. – scum).

11:00

He scooped out the grave with his hands, giving them a coquettish, pious look. I saw how he daintily set aside the memory of it : how one day he would be able to lift a mournful voice out of austerest turmoil, to report – : – "and with my bare hands. . ." The fool. –

Noon

I had slung my haversack over my shoulder (in case we had to leave the freight car) and was leaning against a blackish, wet pine. Some of the others were standing around too. Anne had a cigarette in the corner of her mouth; suddenly she asked : "What makes your space pulse – ?" and the old man pressed closer. I was tired; I furrowed my brow impolitely, but said with some effort :

"Matter is sparsely scattered in finite space; its homogeneity is proved by spectral analysis and captured meteorites. Likewise all bits of matter exert their gravity; i.e., a desire to unite all atoms. Both of which point to a common origin. – Think of a child's balloon blown up in a 2-dimensional world : in much the same way, a limited amount of energy has blown up a quantity of gaseous material and with it our finite space. ("Apropos, gaseous material –" said one of the soldiers, and I nodded fervently; how true, my son, how true ! Anne laughed brassily). The former expansion of our ‹universe› may still be reflected in the centrifugal motion of extra-galactic nebulae; perhaps there is some relationship between that expansive power and the speed of light. (Laws of radiation, laws of dispersion : light, sound – and laws of contraction : mass – are both governed by the square of distance). But the rubber skin wants to contract : gravity is the universe's ‹surface tension›, the command for calling the universe's matter home, the proof of its inevitable contraction. The homogeneous ‹final ball›, which possesses no force of gravity and in which no further physical or chemical alterations can occur, and which is therefore without either causality or attributes, will instantaneously vanish for creatures with our current cerebral capabilities, and with it, shrunken, 3-dimensional space, and our time as well. –"

The pastor had listened with pity and indifference, now, however, he asked in childish wonder : "What do you mean ? – Vanish – –", and shook his upholstered hollow head in total surprise. The old man had turned eager as a hound dog; that he understood : he seemed to have his Schopenhauer down fairly well; he nodded attentively and muttered an appropriate quote from the Principle of Reason. The sky had turned blue in several spots; it

would get cold. And the sick little girl no longer recognized anyone, and used a fist to beat at the god of fever (with the face of a fox; the bundle of red arrows at his chest; cf. Weilaghiri). I fear he'll soon be able to praise the power on high.
(For 8 days now I haven't been able to wash properly; we all look brownish and lean (like Kügelgen's grandfather).
Hear, hear
A soldier was chatting with the H.Y. lads (and the maids from the German Maidens' Org. nodded with confidence) : "We've still got the stuff; we're gonna win. The Führer is following a very definite strategy; first he lures them all in, and then come the secret weapons." "Goebbels himself said, and I quote," replied one boy, "‹when I saw the power of the new weapons, my heart stood still›. And in three years it'll all be built back up again – better. The plans are all in the Führer's desk ready to go." And so on. And their eyes shone like the windows of madhouses aflame. I would welcome it if humanity came to an end; it is my well-founded hope that it will have destroyed itself to a man within – oh – within 500 to 800 years; and that will be good.
The sun appeared for a moment between shy clouds. I perched myself on a tree stump; below me Anne was leaning against the red freight car, all in light. My head dropped to my chest, I fell asleep. Wide was the teeming train station, staircases and halls; then I was shouting : "They're coming ! Take cover !"
Ten thousand dream faces turned pale, they hid along all the walls, I threw myself down beside the stone stairway. Up in the clear air, the three planes were looping about; in plain sight the one-inch barrels on their wings. Anne was separated from me at considerable distance, a river of forms washing by between us; I raised my head, calling to her, and suddenly there came a twitching across the stones, and howling. Green flames, long as your arm and slender, thrust up from the floor, tore off table-sized earth-pies, fragments yowled, people bled. They flew in a carousel and fired, jolt and counterjolt; into locomotives; punched fist-sized holes in walls; a treetop came plunging down (Madonna with the gas mask, commission for Old Masters) – there : breaking away ! I ran back to our car (which had suddenly turned into a passenger car), I called in desperation : "Anne ! Anne !", but there she was already at the window. I slowly stepped up onto the footboard, tired, in my old dirty military coat, tired; I grabbed the lowered window with both hands and looked up into her face, looked and looked. Radiant quiet and bliss. Her mouth was about to form a mocking and dainty pucker, astonishment and tender joy, strangeness and inclination. She took one hand from her pocket and passed it across my brow into

my hair. Her face was bright from my eyes; she mused and puzzled. She said : "So much dirt and misery all these years –." Caressing silence. Somber and subtle, the red of her lips bent down once more, smiles and words, dangerous and promising : "And we certainly could use a guardian angel, couldn't we ? –"

I jerked; I awoke; gold sun and blue shade splotched about me. Anne was standing in front of me, regarding me with interest, and asked : "Something the matter ? You called for me with ever so much fervor and intimacy." She made a tiny artistic pause and remarked ironically and knowing : "Dreaming, huh ? !" I stretched my eyebrows : I told it all; word for word. She listened with a mockingly ready ear. "And – c'est tout ?" – she asked, acting disappointed : "– hardly very racy, really. Soldiers are supposed to be much more aggressive, generally speaking –". Daring me. I nodded politely and said : "I know, I haven't changed much. But then neither have you." Breaking into a laugh, then a whistle, she turned her back ("Lady, don't sing the blues alone tonight . . ."), stopped, came back, and inquired : "Does that happen to you often by the way : dreaming about me – ?" I didn't hesitate at all, I replied obligingly : "Yes." She gave an appreciative toss of her head and suggested over her shoulder : "Oh, you have changed a little. You used to just make eyes at me, sunny-side up – well, that's okay." She sauntered back down to her mother. The sick child was just dying; Och orro orro ollalu.

14:13

Cloudwork overran the sky, at first a misty soft, high above the hollow bluish snow; raggedy wind sprang up in the west; the world sank into gray huskiness : it began to snow. Heavy and vile.

In the car below

All crouching morosely together; freezing, coughing, starving. Thirst too. We'd be moving again soon, they said.

16:10

The snow, the snow; hours on end. Anne had thrust her hands in her pockets and sat there immobile. The old man cleared his throat. Once more. (He looked dirty by now and white and scrawny.) He gave me a self-controlled look and asked : "You were saying before that our universe is about to contract after having been previously ‹blown up›. Can you offer a hypothesis for this pulsation ?" He made his face small and wrinkled and listened intensely. The H.Y.s were comparing bazookas (terrifying the old farm woman) : ". . . then you put the two holes together and screw it tight. . .", they played with them so eagerly, true children of the Leviathan (Thou art my beloved son . . .); evil iron and deadly fire; ah yes, they've turned out well. I thought of Breslau, of the insane demagoguery of Gauleiter Hanke's

posters; how with the glib eloquence of madness he called upon the nation's youth : Shovel snow into the rivers and streams till they overflow and hold back the enemy (his very words ! Just as I read them myself on 8.2.45 in Schneider's shop window, Am Graben, in Greiffenberg !) Scaly, surging waters, the dragon aroused; lovely. How he demanded that the expiring elderly slink into enemy-occupied towns to hurl blazing torches, with the scornful logic that you'll have to die soon anyway, so give the Führer the few days you've got left ! – I am firmly convinced that out of pure yowling lunacy and shrieking lust for ruin (not to mention the joys of Herostratos !) they'll let Germany go down in flames and rubble, down to the last doghouse. To quote me : anabaptist airs. Another costume, a larger stage. And the old man shall have his answer. I cleared my pipes; I said gruffly : "You know from your Schopenhauer that the world is will and idea; he stops at that realization, doesn't take the last step; but in the end both of these will be united in a being of frightening power and intelligence." The pastor raised his head, smiling and piously rejoicing : "God," he said nodding, reassured, "you can't get around the fact of him –." I didn't even turn my gaze; I spoke : "The demon. At times he is himself, at other times he exists in universal dispersion. At the moment he no longer exists as an individual, but as a universal. But has left orders for retreat within everything; gravitation is the proof of that in physical matter. (The 80 star clusters far beyond the galactic plane, are they not both preamble and example ? They may well be gradually absorbed into the larger nebulae, but as a whole; for their contraction will presumably take place much more rapidly); the same urges are indicated on the intellectual level by : the fact that each species has a consciousness in common (dreams of flight common to us all, etc.; the sense of time and space demonstrably shared by all living creatures : a common origin), the bondage of the will in our actions (wise Schopenhauer ! With all its consequences : the possibility of foreseeing the future, through dreams for instance – J.W. Dunne. – magic), the disintegration of the individual at death. (We want to be perpetuated as individuals, and that is the campaign slogan of religions – Christians, Muhammadans – which is why they have adherents; a doctrine – again Schopenhauer – that renders probable the disappearance of the individual into a ‹universal will› can never be popular or cherished, not even by those who recognize it as true; there's always something Medusan about it). The accumulation of intelligence into ever greater chunks – e.g. paleontology – is also an argument in favor of this reconstitution of the demon on an intellectual plane (possibility of ‹superhuman› beings : sorcerers, elemental spirits – oh, Hoffmann – again those 80 star clusters).

To make a judgment about the nature of said demon, we have to look both

outside and inside ourselves. We ourselves are part of him : what a real Satan must He then be ? ! And probably only our Herr von Leibniz (‹von› and here I refer you to Klopstock's remarks in his Republica Intelligentsia), can find the world so very beautiful and well-equipped, unable to admire enough how the earth's axis has been so wisely set on a tilt, or our Matthias Claudius, who wanted to wallow and shout the whole day long for pure Christian joy, and other assorted intellectual Swissers. This world is something that ought not be; whoever says otherwise is a liar ! Think of the mechanisms of this world : gluttony and lust. Endlessly excrescencing and suffocating. Now and again a pure sense of form : crystals, Haeckel's radiolaria charts (Boelsche suggested wistfully there must be some as yet undiscovered principle of form in nature, hoho); in essence it's simply a technical problem of buoyancy in salt water – natural selection would have speedily found the best approximation in any case. On the other hand : newts, snakes, spiders, bats, deep-sea fishes, the migrations of salmon and eel. Cesare Borgia appreciated the fine arts, too. Certainly our insights are limited by space and time. But the Leviathan abides, despite everything, delighting now in a concentration of his evil, now in its greatest possible multiplicity and diffusion. –

Nothing justifies us, by the way, in presuming that our Leviathan is the only member of his species. There may be many such creatures of his magnitude, and among them some good ones, white ones, angelic ones. Unfortunately we have ended up with a devil. Si monumentum quaeris, circumspice (it's on Sir Christoper's tomb)."

Dusk, dusk

The snow plunges by soundlessly; at the crack of the door; billions of crystal creatures, born of air, dying in water. (What sort of flakes does iron build, do you suppose, when it smacks down out of the sun's atmosphere onto that frenzied scorching body : dragonish, brittle-barbed. – Or gold –). – From the engine up ahead came the fireman's call, gruff (but thin) : "Watch out ! Here we go !" Fits of steam shot up; jerk and clatter. A tiny advance. A hindrance. And then from behind there erupted an infernal shattering and bursting. Another short yard. And more rips and barks like wood splitting. I leapt up, for the door, and swung out through the opening, caught Anne behind me (a bold furred maiden), and here came the engineer, and we saw, cursing, how the chains had broken (shot apart ?), and the tie-buster – well : was working flawlessly. – We squirmed in between the bumpers, called to the others, and tried once again, with rocking arms, bent low, jimmying, to uncouple the car. Another try. But to no avail; rust had eaten into rust; we were tearing our unprotected hands. And time was of the essence; we had to use those few minutes of built-up steam. So mute

and wet, we climbed back into our rolling shack, (and didn't the crazy coot pull the whistle again !) and away we went. Into the gray yonder with regulation tie-buster. Heil Hitler. The postmaster suddenly went uncontrollably wild; he shook a balled-up fist at those hopeful youths and shouted (louder than the satanic rhythm behind us) : "Aren't you ashamed to wear those damned uniforms ? ! Don't you hear that ? ! Oh, the bastards, the bastards ! !" And up rose Germany's future; they asked in wonder and malice : "What do you mean ? That's super ! Now at least the Russians can't follow !" – One of them, the older one said, threatening quietly : "Watch yourself there. There's more than enough room in concentration camps". And the other one (childish and eager – wasn't this just some kind of modern game ? You only had to push some funny little button –) : "Shoot him down, the damned traitor !" Outside, passing lonely houses, the ugly racket grew to excessive madness. A row of poplars crossed our path. Stars. The snow had vanished out of the air. Rolling, shattering. Roll, roll – whoa : slower. It gently bethrottled another tie. Pausing, savoring : another one. – An – other – – another. We were standing. I pulled out my pistol; I was furious and cold; I barked into the suddenly humming silence : "Whoever says one more word about shooting, gets a bullet in his belly ! Don't we have enough misery on this train already – ?" At the same moment I felt hunger and thirst (till now I'd pretty much been able to think it away); I jostled the door open and hopped down : what the hell : knee-deep ! It had snowed a lot. And Moys; just behind the little train station. Over there the tracks branched off to Kohlfuhrt, Penzig. Shuddering, I ate two handfuls of snow. And cold – had it turned cold. From out of the dark rectangle above, a calm, slightly fragile voice asked : "Well : What's up ? –" You double-star. I replied : "There's heavy fire ahead of us –." "Us –", she repeated with sly indolence and jumped into my arms, without taking her hands from her pockets. I laughed out loud; threw my head back : "Yes. Us !" I said fierce and amused – then the fireman shouted. –

19:30

Out of a distant range of hills a strand of red pearls, AA flak, rose soundlessly. The cold grew ever more severe; although it snowed heavily again, but very fine and hard.

Night in the freight car

Despairing, the farmers have trudged off. The hard snow has almost numbed my stomach; a mad thing to do really. The old man seems to be suffering a lot; he has probably never been knocked around like this in all his life; one of the soldiers gave him a mouthful of schnapps – then they and their skirt guzzled down the rest of the bottle; sittin' and smuttin'. Youth, eager to learn, sniggers approvingly through their noses at each

rude unambiguity. A while ago, when, with the undaunted self-complacency of the pious, the pastor decided yet again to offer up loud and exemplary prayer, he was finally brought up short : the soldier with the bandaged head growled at him menacingly : "Cut the shit –", and the old man raised his head from his chest; he said bitingly : "Go ahead and pray as much as you like, but leave us out of it – pushy –", he muttered in disgust. But then, when he went right on impudently – if somewhat more softly – addressing himself to his fanatical deities, (cf. Libanius, Oration in Defense of the Temple. – To clear matters up once and for all : the truly beautiful, though not original, "Love one another !" if exercised effectively and dynamically, has, as a matter of course, always been approved of and supported by every honest man, and always will be. But not the worthless epistemology so ambitiously promoted by the Christian primer, never; nor the church's apparatus for the totally despotic exercise of power, nor its incomparably gruesome reign of intellectual terror down through the centuries. For the concentration camp was not invented by Stalin or Hitler or in the Boer War, but in the womb of the Holy Inquisition; and in Western culture we owe our first detailed description of a well-equipped concentration camp to the most Christian, perverted fantasy of Dante – please, nothing is left out : the cesspools, the ice-water torture, the forced marches under cracking whips; fiery coffins are at the ready for doubters, and the needlessly curious – Odysseus – are majestically thunderbolted : – for "ultimately those are the truly effective arguments of theological gentlemen; and ever since these have been taken from them, their cause has been slipping drastically !" Let not those now demand tolerance who have failed to show it during the 1500 years when they held the "reins of power" ! Écrasez l'infâme !) he got me embroiled in a conversation concerning the historical sources from which I had gleaned some of my opinions. I wearily scraped together what was still lying about among the ruins of my erudition (some drawings of Piranesi came to mind : Roman ruins by the bright and windy lights of evening. Slender-limbed little trees. A farmer with peaked cap and broad gesticulations drives his burro laden with smooth wineskins. Crisp and fair, evening gold, aurum potabile. Nature – i.e. the Leviathan – shows us nothing perfect; it always requires correction by good spirits. – Cf. Poe's definition of the poetic principle. Unfortunately they are a disappearing minority.) With numbing exhaustion – oh, the cold, the cold – I mentioned the word emanation; to wit : gnostics and cabalists (the darksome God; world = modificatio essentiae divinae = Deus expansus et manifestatus. Doctrine of the mundo contracto et expanso; Oken's rotating God), Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Erigena, Almericus, David de Dinanto. Pause : the drunken soldiers broke loose, panted, threw themselves yap-

ping onto the floozy. – I spoke louder from embarrassment (so that Anne might not hear anything – ah, but she did hear it !), I named the honorable name Giordano Bruno (spatio extramundano); Spinoza, Goethe, Schelling, Poe Trismegistos (Eureka), the modern mathematicians and astronomers, till the old man, marveling and weakly rejoicing, opened his hawthorny mouth to laugh (he seemed to feel better knowing that so many authorities were on his side. Concerning the Nature of Security.) For all I care, even Nietzsche's joke of physics about eternal return : what a shallow mind that sometimes was ! (That his Leviathan of Power was limited and "thus" – isn't that a perfect proof, just as good as in Aristotle ? ! – would itself have to die one day, seems never to have occurred to him). – Religions with their "creations" and "incarnate gods" (despite which they all then make the mistake of letting their God go right on as before without any change). Venerable Buddhism (for the man who finds K. E. Neumann simply too long-stemmed, try as he may with Pilgrim Kamanita); the polytheisms of the ancients (they still knew that the great Pan could die !), the "dismembered gods"; Orpheus, Tammuz, Linos, Adonai. Elemental spirits. – Silence. Weeping from the clergy corner; H.Y. squawks a "battle song" (on the surface their behavior is heroically pure, but the foundations are laid in a bloody swamp of 20 million, fiendishly slaughtered. This past month, in Pirna, I saw a concentration camp on the march : Jewish women and their children, all frightfully emaciated, with unearthly large, dark eyes, beside them cursing, red-cheeked SS executioners mounted and wearing heavy gray-green coats, woe !) – The old man thrust forward; he asked in a shrill voice : "What ? The Leviathan is going to die too ? ! –" But I didn't hear a thing now. I grew stiff with cold and sleep.

(At one point, way off, heavy earthquakelike rumbling. A long time. Like some huge bombing attack. Dresden ? God out for a stroll on bomb carpets).

Around midnight a piece of moon appeared in the sky

Her face was suddenly bright gray and rigid. – The snow approached in rhythmic shrieks; a bang at the door; the fireman. "Get out ! Help shovel !" I stretched myself up on stiff legs, shoved some straw her way and jumped through the door into the nearby silver surface : there they all are, whimpering in the icy night. Now and then the tracks flashed blue; frost clung to the switches. We whacked and shoveled around the wheels, stood gaping in exhaustion into the mother-of-pearl clouds, there it was in large squared-off letters under the shadow of the switch tower.

Freezing cold, freezing. We dug at the rayed iron with marble hands. Stinging snow powder hovered around nose and mouth. I would see Her from beneath silvered eyelids. The old man toppled against my shoulder; I

dragged us into the car.

Late. Late.

The moon, lurid in the hall of poplars. Voices conferred below. I silently held the flat of my face to the crack. The boys were leaning on their bazookas, one of them said : "If we both fire at once, the whole crate'll blow sky high – along with the traitors and pacifists –" (Pacifists, that's the biggest swear word they have, and the populace screams "Heil !" in agreement.) I quickly pulled my pistol, released the safety, and took a position in the doorframe. The other one pondered this; then he replied (oh, the circumspection, the discernment : no, what maturity !) "There are still the two soldiers in there, one of them, wounded." Pause. "But we gotta scare the hell out of those old ninnies," the first one declared. "Listen : let's shoot two rounds at the station ! Man, they'll shit their pants !" The other one was already snorting and nodding in amusement. They took cover; they raised the barrels, snapped the triggers. Blast and wallop came prodigious. Swaggering, they shouldered their utensils, they strode off on lanky legs. The victors. (One fragment of the collapsed facade had knocked in the siding of the car. In that closed space, you were left half deaf.)

6:18

All over. –

We pulled out, only a few hundred yards, there we were on the viaduct. It echoed. Good thing we were moving so slowly. High above the river. Then suddenly the car was wrenched forward. Stood again. The front wall burst open. It all happened so quickly. We scrambled out cautiously : the bridge span in front of us was missing; the engine was hanging atilt over the abyss (and the tie-buster had devoured what was behind us ! !), flames burst from the broken boiler, and at once grenades began to sing in the air (nice target, huh ? !). They groped (screaming in the yowling darkness) back along the unrailed giantess. (There goes one of them; a howling bolted earthwards.) There : a jagged firestorm stood bellowing at the far end. We (Anne and I. We.) crept bleakly (our hearts racing) back into the freight car. The iron demons screeched and exulted around us, above us, below us. Frequent hits kept crashing behind us, and once things quaked as if a mountain were collapsing (and bluster of gurgling waters).

07:00

Icy fog roils up, tops the ravine. (Hel, the water hell.) No helm of daylight yet.

07:10

Was outside, stumbling. Leaning on boulders in the icy smoke. Eight baby steps beyond the buster, silently the pool of fog yawned. I picked up two pebbles from the track bed and tossed one over the edge : not even a gulp,

all remained silent and sightless. I flung the other one with a stony fist; whistling feebly, it headed for the far shore. Listening. Nothing. I gave an absurd and secretive nod. Fine, fine. I strolled back; I climbed into the wrecked car; I said to Anne : "It's caved in behind us too. We're alone; in the middle of and high above the river." She gave an indignant snort; she pointed toward the front with a foot : "He's dying –" she said, furrowing her brow. I straddled through the beginning gray; the old man was sitting propped up against the plank wall and his breath rattled; I looked around me : no one else in the car. I took my right hand from my pocket and brought it down on his thin shoulder; his eyes opened : they were still clear. He looked straight at me; with an effort the gray mouth cracked open a bit, his brows grappled : "The Leviathan –" he husked, forced up one corner of his mouth (self-mocking and amused) : "– not eternal – ?" Anne had come over beside me; my coat sensed her furred sleeve. I felt gaunt and drained, hundreds of years old (like Harry Haller), I answered the brave fellow : "His power is immense, but limited. And so too, then, his span of life." I waited; his eyes closed, once, wearily and thankfully : he had understood. I spoke quickly : "Buddha. Teaches a method of escape. Schopenhauer : denial of the will. So they both claim it's possible to set your individual will against the monstrous unified will of the Leviathan, but given the ratio of power involved that seems quite impossible at present, at least on the ‹human level› of sentient beings. But perhaps the Beast will dissolve in ‹diadochi› (a Christian hint of this in Lucifer's rebellion; or the other way around, Jane Leade wants to cooperate with many good people in a magical power and renew nature as a paradise – now that's a goal : the revolt of the good), and those again into ever smaller units, until finally ‹Buddhism› would be possible, undoing the whole structure. – Maybe there are other ways as well –". He gazed at me, at first tormented, laboring; his eyes grew owlish, smoky, ah : a spark. He whispered : "Good." – The upright head slumped, forward; we heard, very composed, very slow : "Good . . ." – Then I straightened up.

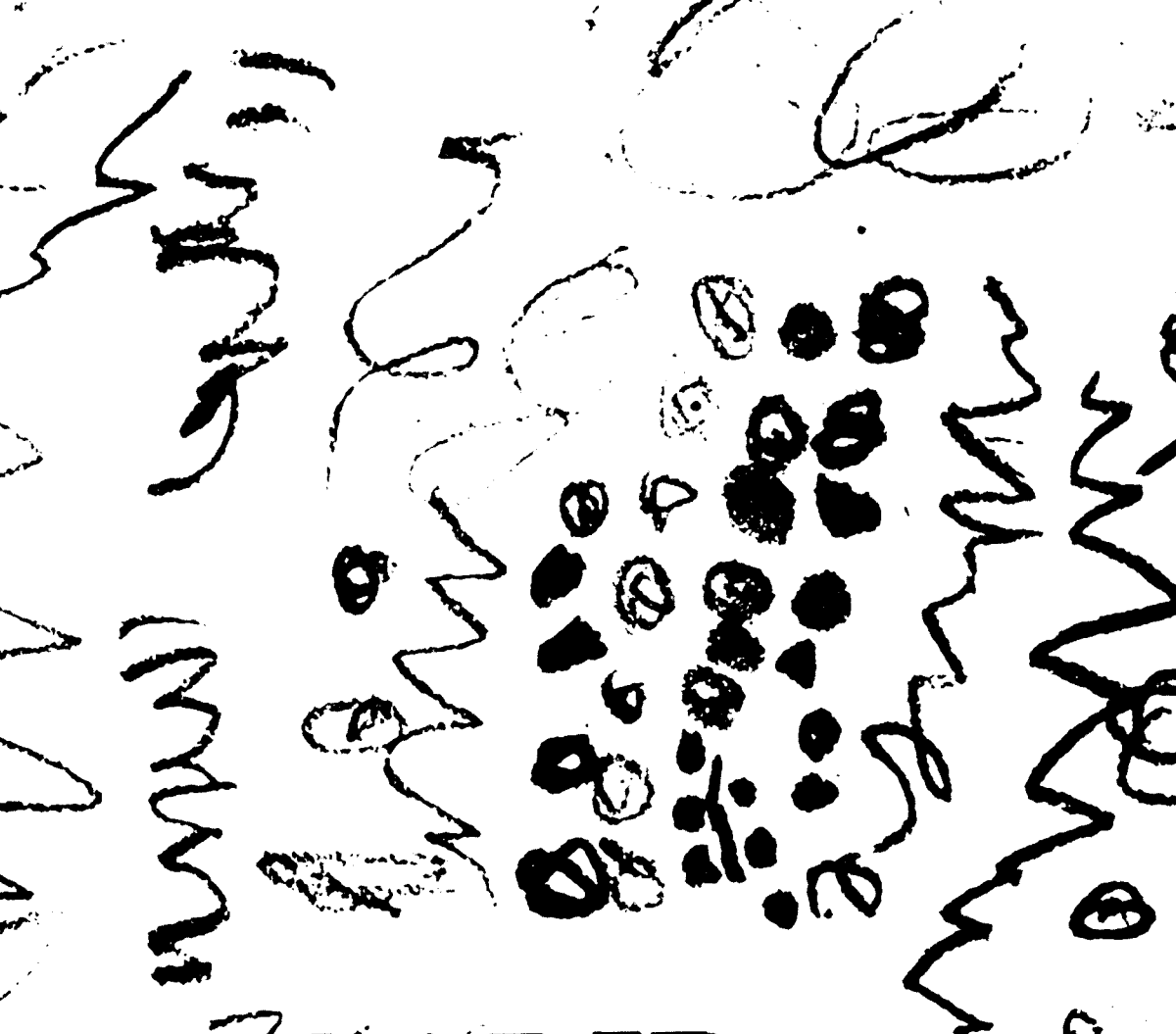
08:20

We blush in the light. Oh, greasy Joan.

The end

We shall step into the coarse red and frosted door. Veiled in golden, the devil's-winter-sun will lurk, white-pink and orb cold. She will jut out her chin and impishly pucker her mouth, raise her hips for momentum. Rigidly I shall lay an arm around her.

The notebook I toss ahead : fly. Tatters.



GADIR

or

Know Thyself

52 years 118 days

First the one fellow whistled. – When they sauntered by the next time, it was the same nasaled song : "Oh, Miss Miriam : when I dance with you – ou, ou, ou, ou . . .", the rest onomatopoeia, smacked lips, and ps ps; the other one, older I'd guess, snarled a laugh. – Beautiful moon; whatever you pick up is made of silver.

The guard was being changed directly below the bars of my window; someone asked : "Any news about the war – ?" (So there's war somewhere); indifferent grunts. –

Later : Carthage and Rome. Rome, Rome, Rome : that was that middling sort of country that Massilia signed commercial treaties with now and again, and that by way of precaution once sent envoys to Alexander, Young Explorer. (And to think intellectuals are forever wildly praising him for wanting to go still farther east, across the Ganges, wanting to go farther – on into infinity, they say, and even hold him up as an emblem of pure scientific aspiration ! When he knew full well from Aristotle that the ecumene ends just behind the Ganges, and had coolly set his realistic, heroic goal in the finite world : to rule over it. He was resolute and brutal, impetuous and therefore popular : knew how to manipulate the masses; a commander and personally brave, why, Zeus' son in fact; but those are third-rate virtues. The Cult of Alexander is pardonable at best in a twenty-year-old; later, it rouses one's suspicion; of a man's judgment or character. Which also holds for the son of Ariston.) – Seems mainly about Sicily; it echoes off the walls so muddled, and standing tiptoe on top of a table is awfully tiring. So did a few quick calisthenics : I still feel right hearty (despite the bread and water and sieved air); I'd still be able to swim to the island; absolutely.

Toward morning

Sicily again; ah, let them jabber.

52, 119

Unhealthy weather, fume off the sea and lagoon. Right into my cell, where I tossed about from the chill. At this time of year, one blanket is not enough.

Later

Mago the paymaster rattled my shutter, gave the order : "Copy these, old

man !" and threw a bundle of bills and letters in : I'm good for that, because my Phoenician hand is so lovely. They routinely take my math and geometry notebooks away from me and send them to Carthage, to see "if there's anything useful in them" – Well at least this way I learn the names of all the villages and farmers in the area, even how many head of livestock they have; that will be very helpful when I escape (the window bars are soft iron; definitely ought to be able to file through them with any nail of steel, though very slowly. And I finally have to get out of here !) – The bastards ! They locked me up in here fifty-two years ago, because twice I managed to smuggle myself as a sailor on board their ships and travel north; Thule, Basilia, Abalus, Mentonomon. – Of course, these knaves of commerce don't give a damn about the earth's spherical shape, since that doesn't make any difference in how many goods they sell – someday I'll toss the swine a few mysterious hints about new ecumenes in the South Ocean; or how by holding course to the west, you could reach the eastern shore of ours : India ! And who doesn't think then of spices, gold, nice profits ? – They are good sailors, brilliant technicians, successful; but technocrats will destroy the world one day – !

All right, fine,

let's copy (as once in Thargelion at Gryphius, Massilia, Uniforms for Work and Sport). Wonder if old Sophron is still alive, and that bull Nikolaos; and Oikandros the director : brutal, cold, every edge filed smooth, and the most soulless and characterless reptile who ever bore the badge of every party in power – when I had to look at him, all that ever came to mind were round, empty rooms, heads of birds nodding sightlessly, and the word haustellum; I've never despised anyone as much since.

Noon

Just finished; but have got two of the copies lying in front of me as camouflage –

It's turned hot; the sea flashes blue and white. What a bellowing beast that must be, up there in the sky, who sets our earth aglow like this; and to think that Eudoxos of Knidos wanted to live close to it, to find out its nature. – If someday someone asks you in what way the Greek spirit excelled that of the barbarians, then tell him that. And that I, Pytheas of Massilia, have been languishing here in Fort Chebar near Gadir for over a half a century because I wanted a peek at earth's northern regions ! And I give you my word : I will see it someday ! I will, if I it takes me five thousand years to outlive you pigs; and I won't pass up a single opportunity to escape; not one opportunity; not one ! ! (Those two crusts of bread are still in my cache – I jumped right up and checked – and if I rip the blanket into ten pieces I've got a rope; all I need is a file, or a – oh, any sort of steel

scrap – damn. –)
It's cold (at least I am; I'm shivering).
Right afterwards
Dozed off (doesn't normally happen to me); naturally, at my desk at Gryphius; Agathon, the clodhopper, was rambling on about a hundred blue scarfs for the emporium, and ‹delivery back-orders›, and I automatically crossed the order off my ledger (was warehouse bookkeeper at the time). – The loveliest part of the dream was the cool morning air of summer; every object clear with a few clean shadows – something you see only as a young man.
Afternoon
Tomorrow is clothing supply day (called in at the door); that means leaving the cell for the first time in three years, the familiar route to the storeroom, ten minutes inspection, and back again. – All the same; maybe I can find something this time. At least some new sights again.
Heaven blazing blue and gruesomely cloudless (rather have my heaven without gods than without clouds !).
Night
Lay awake a long time (probably from excitement about tomorrow). – It ought to be easy enough to measure the distances and sizes in the solar system from the length of eclipses : the longest eclipses of the moon last around three and a half hours; now since the moon falls back roughly twelve degrees a day, that's about one and a half degrees for those three and a half hours, but that means that the earth's shadow at that point is three times the diameter of the full moon. Given the disproportionate distance of the sun, we can assume that the earth's shadow there is about the same size as the earth's diameter (a little bit smaller in fact !), which implies furthermore that the moon's diameter is about a third of the earth's, that is, about two myriad stadia. Since from where we observe it, it appears less than half a degree across, it follows that it is about two hundred fifty myriad stadia distant, etc., etc. – From which we can draw some very strange conclusions about our spatial situation; the sun is at least a hundred times as far away, some of the planets further still; the fixed stars are beyond any estimate. Some of them shine angry red, some hausen blue; Algol in Perseus periodically changes intensity : always in the same rhythm. We still know all too little; but this much is certain : in some unnameable depths of space horrible fire-dragons stand, brandishing flaming tongues, huge as open-sesame (what a word !), fiery paws rage and rumble against blazing breasts – – don't think of it, don't; we are lost. –
Night still
Banal scraps of dreams : A little pointy-eyed man in a light brown, conical

cape, right half of his face glassy with scars, sullenly held out a pair of wooden shoes to me. (Caused, of course, by the announcement); but such things often contain the most truth; it's happened to me before that such trivia turned out to be exactly true. For we definitely can see ahead in dreams; from which it follows that the future is already exactly prescribed, every detail; but that means there is no free will, which means ultimately that there is a limited (though very large) number of factors that can be combined according to exactly prescribed rules, a process which we (one of its little parts) can only ascertain and describe. –
Toward morning a bit of fever; – not good ! –
52, 120
Morning passes; forenoon; restless (understandable if you leave your four walls only once every thousand days, right ?). Around noon a hornet, a flame of garish yellow and brown, stormed through the window bars, swooped about wild and brainless : long as my little finger, the monster ! (Soon beat it to death; chased it, cold and sneaky as a Fate.) I hate insects with a primal hate; as a child, when walking through a grove in June, I would sometimes shake with rage : I'd stop, and from the forbearing treetops I'd hear the whispered gorging of chiliads of maggot jaws, creeping, boring, sawing, sucking; wasps thrust pliant blades into arched caterpillar bodies : and worm munched worm. As boys we once pulled a black fish out of deep reefs off the harbor of Lacydon, it was nothing but a floating maw, fixed with teeth. Since then I've known : the Good is unnatural, undivine (probably unhuman too : a Ligurian mercenary once told me that up in the north, there were tribes who made cuts down both sides of a captured enemy's back, right through the rib cage and, with the fellow still alive, pulled out the lobes of his lungs; they called it ‹carving the bloody eagle› ! – And don't think it's like that only up north. Men and gods can shake hands; they deserve each other).
The guard
No clothes exchanged till tomorrow – – damn ! –
By afternoon clouds move in; from the northwest. –
Herodotus is the best example of how even great, profoundly learned, encyclopedic minds can sometimes make ridiculous errors if they lack training in the natural sciences – particularly mathematics. He gets hold of the notion of the earth's rotundity, as it's been taught and proved for centuries now by Pythagoras, Thales, Anaximandros – and then assumes it applies solely to our ecumene ! He says it means that the circular disk is floating on Okeanos, and then on the basis of his fine and extensive knowledge of topography, he mounts the counterargument, triumphantly proving how false such a notion is, and – proves nothing ! – He understood nothing

about it; it's a woeful spectacle and one we'll meet often yet. What a shame. Brow hot and arid; my hands weak, stagnant, and hot. Get to bed early.

Wind jostles me out of deep night

Goldmoon flares on fortress tower; in elfin deeps a storm in power comes and conjures. I bear the beakers leaved in wine, within, the babbling vine. With hireling stars the moon now rides : the speeding host with rapture hides high in clouds. The clouded island wildly glows with passes, where no human goes, and steepest silver cliffs. The moon descends in jun'per sea; the town sleeps bright and ah ! so wee, high in mountains. With ease I climb, like wind I soar, toward cloud forest, through cloud door; all my traces are no more. And so I wander with the clouds. – –

Sure; that's what you think !

52, 121

Graylight, and all the stars go out like lamps. – Drank a mouthful of water; I feel sick (from the excitement ?)

There

the bolts rattle ! ! – Quickly hide notebook –

Back

I'm shaking all over; I . . .

I have to lie down first (open my hand : it's still there ! Close it again.).

I could run wild as if under the thyrsus; only a week now, nonsense : four days, maybe three – oh ! !

Afternoon

Just repeat the normal, everyday tedium; no changes. I'll be able to work only in the dark; that means sleep during the day. –

Schammai opened up (had got even fatter), groused lazily : "You still alive, old geezer ? The money you cost us . . . !" Waved me on out with hand and head, whistling invitingly. I poked along wearily (so as not to appear too robust); the long gloomy corridor (seventeen paces); the cold vestibule; a 90° turn to the left (eight paces); there was the door. He shoved me inside : a contingent of three gave me the hostile eye; I knew only Mago, the superintendent, sprawled at the table over his ledgers. The tall gaunt one was apparently a doctor; disdainfully reached for my pulse with dainty fingers, then, pressing his bushy brows together, listened, asked curtly : "Age ?"; at my "ninety-eight" cast a glance to Mago, who gave a subdued nod. Hand to my brow (hot, isn't it, my son ?); he walked around me, laid his fat ear between my shoulder blades, and, automatically, I took a deep breath. Mutters with Mago; then he curled his lips in disgust and said : "Doesn't need anything. 'll kick the bucket in eight days." "Uh-huh – pair of clogs –", M. growled his recommendation, and pointed behind him : there before me

stood a spry little man with a light brown, conical cape, he turned his vulpine face – and look at that : the broad shiny scar from ear to ornery mouth. He bent down carefully, officially – – and then I saw it ! Right in front of me on the flagstone floor, a small steel half-moon, the kind soldiers wear on their leather sandals, worn, but shining bright and hard. He tossed me the wooden shoes, I bent down with an elaborate, confusing bow, snatched the one, and with a sweeping circle reached for the other, and felt the cool curve of metal between my fingers, stumbled out – (I didn't count the steps on the way back. – Superfluous remark, by the way).

An hour later

It is still in excellent condition : strong as a knife blade, long as my thumb and splendidly tempered. First I'll file through at the base of both bars and then try to bend them upwards. And only if that doesn't work, at the top as well. – Real fever and my heart is pounding : first I'll have to swim to the island, I estimate that at fifteen to twenty stadia, meaning two to three hours – but I still feel quite robust, have started doing knee-bends. There are two farms there, so there have to be boats too; take one and then on to the mainland, – and so on, and so on. –

The best thing would be if I could get some sleep.

Evening

Cannot sleep, cannot sleep. Endless the dusk !

Images flee across my eyes, all from left to right and in jerky haste : waves of grain, massive and garish gold; trains of rolling wagons, alalagmos from the gaping mouths of soldiers; foaming water racing; the endless green of Brittany's coast glides along on our port side; and weren't we lads shouting "Death to the Timuchi" beneath the burly moon ? –

The skin on my hands felt this way when I was drunk, dull and pleasantly lukewarm, and still not a star in the gray fullness. – Fine : then we'll move along with the fluttering bands of cloud for a while yet.

Night

and iron between my unflagging fingers : it works ! Slow, to be sure; but it works (and I can only file during those few minutes when the night watch is at the far end of its rounds; as soon as I hear the sauntering duet of feet, I have to stop. Thumb and index finger are already raw and blistered, but I'm making progress !).

Below (pausing)

When I was young, the moon seemed to me to hang among tendriled vines like a fruit with frothy, silky peel and jagged silver core. Now a glassy puddle of light lies in the middle of my cell : if only it were round, then I would float about as if on an ice floe in black infinity, shoved here and there with lightning speed, the last human being (or the first : which would

be more disagreeable ?) – Up on the table again and keep working !
Phosphoros appears at the tip of Mount Mathos
One
bar
is
cut –
52, 122
Two hours wrapped up in my blanket; then, so as not to arouse interest, sat at the table. Head in hand (shot-putting). – Going to try to save another piece of bread; hope my mitt is more or less healed and serviceable by this evening (or I'll just have to scratch with my left, but no problem really, right ?).
Quickly scribbled a few formulas in the ‹official› notebooks, about navigation along meridians, etc. (they always want ‹practical› science : another mark of the barbarian mind). – Well, I don't want to be unjust : considering the fate of my book on Periodos –. For one publisher it was too long; too bold for another in its philosophical conclusions (had likewise presented a few arguments against official religion); another was short of papyrus just then; another only wanted to excerpt the passages about the far north as a Milesian fable for readers wanting a thrill (and gushed over : the moon's influence on the motion of the seas ! He had been looking forever for something like that !) – so I let Diagoras make a duplicate, ‹First and only edition of two copies›, and then sought my misfortune in Gadir yet once again. – Probably won't be a big success in future generations, my Periodos; but that's all right; there are already more books than eyes to read them anyway.
Clattering shutter
Ah, water with barley bread. Served up with steady fresh air and free light of day. (Well, not for much longer !) – although, many a man would be happy to have it (my father, for instance, with the strategic forces in Massilia, forever reminding me : most people were a lot worse off ! When he'd see me, a growing boy, eating hungrily, he'd bluster in disgust and outrage : "The day'll come when you can't feed your own brat !" – But he threw away two-thirds of his pay on fifth-class whores in harbor dives. Ah, my parents – parents in general; that's a topic for itself !).
At the moment I feel as if ice-water were beading down my tallowy back; I am much too excited (but that's no wonder). And the guards' tommyrot is annoyingly shrill and loud; a nation of bleaters. I hope the rope holds if I tear the blanket in ten strips; eight would be safer with that thin rag, but from the outer wall to the sea it's at least a thirty-foot drop : if need be I'll just have to tie my tunic onto it too. –

Better eat a little after all; I'll need a lot of energy for what's ahead (above all for the waiting now – and the sun, the swine, wallows sloppily in the dungy slough of clouds ! ! If I could only think of a curse to extinguish you : in Thule, a northern barbarian used the word ‹Skramasax›, a frenzied, heathen screech; should I try it ? – – – There ! Like hands wiped in the haze – gone ! – pff !).

Filled with hate

Appius Claudius Caudex. – Koax, koax, – Consul Appius Claudius. – Shit; I'm as nervous as a novice at the Eleusinia : c'mon, to the window; it can all be important ! !

Exact details

A Cartheginian army, under some Hanno or other, has been defeated by the Romans near Rhegium – or Messana; both names are mentioned. And a consul's approximately the same thing as a suffete (doesn't caudex mean ‹hang that tail out› ? ! – That'd knock the strongest black man flat; although, I really have very little Roman; for all I know it may mean ‹the Heatable›. – Clever, clever, Pytheas !).

Waiting at the window

(note things : instead of resting !) And a heartbeat like a galloping steed; but the sun has clotted behind the fence.

My skin feels like – fungus : as if I could take it in my hands and carefully . . . it to pieces (insert some long-drawn-out verb or other); and my right hand seems warped at the wrist (maybe I'm given to this kind of self-observation simply because I have been my sole object for so long – myself, and a few stars. I hope that's it; because illness – won't even think about it. And here comes wind to the window and mocks –).

The cell behind me is growing slowly indistinguishable – about half an hour yet.

Barques of fog resting on the sea : six (where the cold springs rise !), wide barges loaded with silver stuff. Would like to see one of the ferrymen, convince him to sail north, driven by Notos, wind cradling head, broad floppy hat. – Another quarter hour. –

Prisoner was I from childhood on : crude parents, whose elegant ideals were a dining room and tailor-made clothes; toil-worn mush-pulped teachers; poverty enclosed me like a rough plank fence; semislave in the Gryphiusian bone-crusher; years of forced soldiering for Massilian madness; escaped huggermugger to Phoenician shores, and, a spy's death always in my gut, drudged as a sailor, gasped it, bent under the burden, scouting Brittany with my explorer's gaze – the plank concave at landings –. Unrecognized or ridiculed as a thinker; mocked as Philopseudes by the Greek chorus; a straitened private citizen; and then these last fifty-two

years : "Try it yourself : a life lived for truth ! It's worth it !" – And now, steel, gnaw that bar ! –

Like a hammer

That's how my chin struck my scrawny chest : the rod was chewed through. I collapsed onto the table, a senseless sack of bones baled in rough linen, but with the head hovering just above the surface, still separate, restless, cunning (I've seen adders' heads weave like that – hark, and the old snakes awaken); then it sank too, a sleeping, snow-clad volcano : Pytheas, the young lad, fled headlong in the hue and cry of a dream !

Ahead of pursuers. Through high, echoing halls they fled before haste. Reddish marble walls, veined dull yellow, betrayed no seams; a succession of vase collections stood tall as men, overrun with vines; statues revealed dignified monkey faces; winged bulls, with Assyrian countenances and wedged beards cropped short, their vaulted brows written full of secrets, gave no sign. Only after clanking it against tripods, did I notice a steel key, like the hieroglyph ankh, dangling from my right hand; I pulled the brownish, brittle scroll from my bosom and read the purling antique-gold letters as I ran : in the next hall but one, the Punic brood, hot for blood, was smacking its lips. Robes billowing, I stumbled around the jut of a column, stuck the squared hollow shaft into the eighth rosette of the lotus fillet, turned it, and slid through the crack that opened graciously in the wall : the porphyry closed again soundlessly. I fitted brass hooks and bolts together, and stood breathing in the narrow crevice of the passage; steeply the marble stairway descended, the glow of gray, silky light silently filled the shaft. I read new instructions from the scroll and glided down the stairs; after eighty-three steps, ankh opened the wall yet again. Hugging the ground, I forced my way through a narrow manhole, carefully closed the opening with a stone fitting and crossbar, and stood up in the golden light of the square, doorless chamber. Set into the walls were tall tablets of soft-hued precious stone, covered with characters, Aramaic, Chaldean, Persian, hieroglyphics turned falcon heads, in amazement I read two bright brown lines of Greek :

> ". . . Lamplighted window wafts wide, clouds parade, voices spar;
> Truelove at old market well spends of her cold stone jar"

Then the scroll directed me onward; onward I climbed through luminous empty rooms, pushed behind blocks of hewn stone that silently moved, minutes on end; stairways directed, led, wound deeper; the number of side chambers grew, each filled with strange things that I could spy only through the doors : pictures, scrolls, tools, things wrought, things thought, for lifelong reflection. But I did not veer from the track; I had been fleeing

down the spiral stairs for a long time, tirelessly searching in the mute stone patterns, when at last, on my left at eye-level, I found the skewed square with its inset pin; I fitted the key again, turning six times, and once more walked through marble clouds and found myself on a stone slab beside a wall bordering a narrow canal that extended endless and gloomy. In the water, perfectly still and of dark, yet silky sheen, rested an ebony kayak into which I slipped without delay; the paddle lay light in my hand, a good fit. Excited and overcome with awe, I glided along between the inordinately high walls of black, smoothly polished jasper, only rarely flooded with brightness; the ceiling, too, was closed, straight and remorseless. Hours passed, and more and more I was stirred by the silence and smooth-surfaced solitude; on my left similar canals flowed away at right angles, solemnly endless; wherever I sounded the smooth channel bottom with my oar, I found it hardly deeper than a man is tall. At one point I unlocked a long and narrow niche in the wall to my left, ducked, shoved my boat in; the door slab closed on total darkness, and resting on the thin, gurgling blackwater cushion, I sank through long wearinesses into a second labyrinth, like the first; moved on, pulled aside, was silent, sank; impenetrability surrounded Pytheas, Pytheas, Pytheas . . .

Already afternoon (and therefore 52, 123)

Damned carelessness : I was still lying at the table ! Can only hope no one saw me. – Picked up my notebook as if deep in thought, and walk back and forth, leaning at times in artful speculation against the wall (and as I do, honing the steel to a nice edge again; it has to be good enough to slit the wool blanket quickly – I really think eight strips are sufficient; my tunic will do for the rest, since it would only be in the way for the swim.)

If it just weren't for this blasted trembling; for the first time in my life I feel ‹senile› (but it's really no wonder, if you think of the tensed muscles of these past nights –. Had better sit down again).

Still daylight

Nodded off again right away – was sitting in Massilia with my parents at the wooden table in our narrow dark kitchen; they were arguing, bickering; my father was once again seething swollen orders at me, at the man, menacing with brutal looks, vaulting his mouth for greasy soldier's curses; I walked up to him, and slugged him in his rowdy, rotund face, that shut him up at once, totally dumbfounded, done in, sat there like a spanked little boy, huh ? ! – I awoke, and felt, as I had on similar occasions before, a glorious sense of pride and relief, laughed freely, head thrown back (what a great childhood Pytheas must have had. And's turned out quite the radical, ain't he ? !) –

My hands twitch when I look at those bars : can they be bent ? If they can,

then I shall vanish this very night. I'll drink up the rest of my water now, too (or pour it over my head : it's like a fireball. – That was the name of a tavern in Athens, near the library, ‹The Great Fireball›; and the innkeeper never tired of insisting that Homer had once slept there; from the narrow courtyard you could see the window of the room and the little ‹memorial plaque› underneath !)

I have no patience left to think seriously about anything, no patience left. –

What shallow, illogical minds grammarians have, philosophical boors : they call "I was" the first or imperfect past; "I have been" the second or perfect past ("I had been" is then the third or pluperfect past, which is reasonably correct). When the whole structure can be presented so simply : man has three planes of temporal experience : the vague future ("I shall be"); the intense, but very narrowly limited present ("I am"); and rich with memories, full of images, secure, and thus multileveled, the past ("I was," etc.). This "I was" is the genuine form of a completed past that no longer reaches into the present, the ‹perfect› past. Whereas "I have been" (which the very construction with the present form "I have . . ." demonstrably proves !) represents the most recent past, still having its full effect on the present ! (Example : I burst breathlessly into my friend's room and report : "Just imagine, I have just come from the agora . . ." etc.); this then is the ‹first›, ‹most recent›, still ‹imperfect› past ! But these fatuous grammarians have come to the stupid conclusion that the more complicated formation means greater temporal distance ! ! – And it will probably take a couple of thousand years before such wrong-headed notions disappear from the textbooks.

Long, beautiful twilight

(that just will not end ! it's all a practical joke, how should I know whose !)

Stretched out for a few minutes just now : and suddenly I no longer knew if my right arm was lying on my chest, or beside me, or – every kinesthetic sense was gone.

Stars appear

Yes ! Yes ! ! ! : They bend ! Toward the inside (although the old table gave an awfully loud crack when I set my shoulder to the bar's free end and raised up). Now to slice and knot the blanket and tunic –.

Good; it holds. (Afterward I'll wrap what's left around my head; put the bread in it, the steel wedge, my notebook.) Wound the rope around my waist. I can just crouch in the window well.

Keep calm !

Keep calm ! ! – How long does it take the double guard to make the rounds

today : – four hundred eighteen pulse beats – four hundred seventy the second time (or is it beating more rapidly ?) – Count once again. – The passage below is narrow enough, less than two fathoms; on the other side at almost the same height, the fort's outer wall. I must try to make it across from a crouch in a single leap; then let myself down on the seaward side – Keep calm : they're coming again : – four hundred ninety, ninety-one, ninety-two . . . Fine.

Now wait another hundred; then jump.

– – Warm; the water will be warm. Forty. I could have hacked off my beard too. Will slow me down; soaked with water. Fifty. I'll have to weave the rope around a stone, knot it, sink it, otherwise they'll find – sixty – my track right away. Swim those first two or three stadia without any sound at all – seventy – maybe underwater. Am I hooked onto the end of the bar behind me ? Eighty. Slowly inch my way out; balls of my feet set firmly on the edge. Ninety. – Hands ready for the push-off. Get set. Get set : – hundred ! ! !

Island and midnight

(And freedom ! !) – But weak pulse. Scarred silver ball at the zenith, clouds floating round.

The jump succeeded first try : I lay with half my body across the top of the wall, swung my legs up, reached for the middle of my rope, laid it around the nearest merlon and dangled down, the double rope in my hand : when I reached the gravel, there was a good two feet left. The watch ticked its way by up top – had they not raised their eyes to blink suspiciously above mouths half-open in ambush – I had to cram my fist in my throat : for mad malice ! Because the sweet, sleepy bedroom-falsetto wandered on a-nasaling : "Tonight, tonight, or never . . ." I nodded, choking, brash-eyed, bent over grinning : Now wasn't that apt as hell ! Aptowicz from the fourth phyle ! Then I tugged the free end; the rag rope came rustling down; I wove it in a net around a knob of stone, tucked it under my arm and waded out into the sea up to my chin (just bearable, the water; strange). I dropped the weight, took a sighting for the island, and laid down on the flood, flat as a plank. – It was all right; arms and legs at once found the long-forgotten rhythm (softly, softly at first . . .) Yes, I still had my nice fluid side-stroke. – But it was taking too long; I often had to lie on my back, gasping, spitting (into three thousand grimacing stars); rolled over to resume my spoon-shaped graspings and leg scissorings. Then the black island outline approached, stony bottom, the water no longer bore me, I dragged myself wearily over the strip of sand into the bushes. –

And that was an hour ago; now I have to pull myself up and go in search of a boat.

Brightest moonlight, scaled with clouds
Despite my haste, I had to stop and smell many a shrub (– quite a difference from that stifling cell –). The second farm seems to be the larger, more prosperous; a fenced-in garden, blossoming peas (and onions, wax beans) in the moonlight (just hope they don't have a dog !). In the nocturnal (how perceptive !) orchard the wash is wafting (but it's all women's frippery, nothing for me). A bush-attended path leads down to the shore, let's hope to a dock and a boat. – –
Damn : –
Isn't that somebody whispering; – up ahead ? –
He said
"I've waited forever for this, darling ! Forever ! What else could I have wanted from stolid old Sealthiel if not to see you ! – Your hair, your eyes, your mouth –", he fell silent and shyly raised his hand, touched her locks with touching awkwardness, repeated in a toneless voice : "Your hair," traced her right eyebrow like a delicate sigh : "Your eyes"; then the arm dropped, and you could guess : "Your mouth –". She laughed, roguish and touched, artfully laid her moon-hued face back to one side, and with widened eyes gazed high above him, where fluttering folk moved soundlessly along the marble crossroad. (Yes, and hurry it up a bit, my dears; or go play farther inland – great Axiokersos; I'm standing in the bushes ten paces away and twice as far from the boat in which apparently he had come to court. – And freezing like a puppy ! – Ah, act two – and if only it were the last –)
She passed a hand over her hair
and said abstractedly : "It's getting late, Bostar; you must hurry." (Yes, let's hope so, let's hope so !) Her profile grew bolder and more alert, harder too; she moved up close to him, nonchalantly jutted out her chin and mouth, daring him, drew her brows tight as a bow and smiled maliciously, not even looking at him, waiting, – and finally he made his move ! (And I respectfully lowered my eyes : why shouldn't I be a decent fellow for once –) She took a deep, contented breath, twisted out of his arms : "Till tomorrow –", slid vigorously back up the gravel path, leapt over the old fence with an elegant spring, lifted an enthralling hand yet again and glided into the house. He had laid his hands to his breast, never taking his eyes off the charming vision – then I picked the stone up in my fist – (– the lad is just my build, too –)
I laid my mouth to the fallow fuzz of his beard
("and bearded lips to bearded cheeks whisper of things ne'er heard" – that's not mine, read it somewhere once –). I – okay – I whispered : "I only want your clothes and two gold pieces. Nothing else." – Once again I bent

down over him : "One more thing : Anything beyond a kiss is a wickedness. Do you hear ? You lucky fellow ?" (things ne'er heard after all !) He moaned a little, but managed a nod (and at his age, the bump will be gone in three days).

In the boat

The purple robe looks splendid on me, imposing; and I feel quite hot again. – Look at that : a shining cloth waving from her chamber window – what more can I ask ? ! Honored but with the dignity due my rank, I gestured with my snow white left hand : so all the participants were pacified for now.

And now lay to the oars ! (While sucking on bread)

Izquierda (lair of Turdetanians)

Light from the east, gray and pink. (That makes it 52, 124 – no; No ! ! 0, 1 ! !)

The farms lie scattered along the shore, many higher up the slope. I first have to make for the wilds of the mountain, up that giant bluff, so that they will lose every trace in the forest; then in disguise to the harbor of Gadir – if necessary I'll dye my hair, black; sure ! – and hire on a ship going north; and then desert in Mentonomon, vanish, into the blazing forests, across the glades, like Phaethon the meteoride, my brother (would probably say thanks but no thanks to such a decrepit relative).

Legs are stiff from swimming and sitting; but up, and out.

Changing clothes

I crossed the beach road and quickly strode up a side path to the farthest farm. Dew wobbled in the grass, wretchedly cold, but bright rosey (rusty) and dull green. The bucolic rabble-rousers were already awake of course : an old father with three coarse dairy-lads humbly bowed his head; butter rafting in the torrent of the trough, cheese resting roundly on shelves (and the saliva almost overflowed my mouth – I'll gorge myself till I burst !). In gala garb I approached them, affably frosty, curtly asked their names, made condescending jokes, cast a bored look around (damn ! The sun's rim appeared over the distant hills – quick). I suddenly turned a critical eye on the biggest oaf, gave a deft laugh and decided : "Listen, let's exchange clothes for the day, all right ? !" Flipped him the gold piece and with polite impatience waved him on into the barn. He didn't understand; his father nudged him, muttered something in broad Low Iberian – Well, get a move on ! –

Ready

And the coarse blue linen tunic is tight ! (Outside the old man said softly : "I figure he's a society fellow stayin' down below with the judge – these high-class folk take notions our sort 'll never understand." – Resignedly walked over to the tool shed, rummaged and rattled.) I took the short

dagger with me, lopped off half a farmer's cheese, pasted two handfuls of solid butter on it, and hung the knapsack on a cord over my shoulder. As I came out, smirking and chewing, the flat-headed sun, face bloody and blank, was already sprawling on the far hills (they'll discover it any moment now in Chebar, on the morning rounds –). I called lightly in the direction of the old man's moldy face (how will they describe mine, do you suppose ?) : "Watch my things – I'll have them picked up this afternoon. And –" I made my ugliest, most Phoenician mug : "Not a word ! – No matter who asks ! –" (was the toothless bastard laughing up his sleeve – no; he was just setting the brim of his hat higher, so). Now climb over the fence, slick as a whistle. –

Rest after three hours (stylish in a treetop)

I had gone hardly two hundred paces into the young cork-oaks, when it hit me between the shoulders – Tupp, dupp (from over the sea it came, very clear, thirty stadia away, the alarm drum; but then, it's still morning quiet) lubb – dupp, tupp, tupp. Now they're running down the halls. – And I bounded up the mountain through the crouching, frozen tree shapes. ("Give us good going, ye, gravel, granite and hard stuff . . .") Ten minutes later I looked around : a fine furrow across the sea !

Figure : to Gadir (report in and get the bloodhounds), an hour and a quarter; back to the cell and let them get the scent : an hour; to the island : half hour; find the trail and the man I assaulted : quarter hour; to the mainland : half hour : altogether gives me a lead of four hours. – So that meant up the mountain as fast as I could go for two hours. –

Only now, to throw them off the scent, did I wade into the fresh, racing mountain stream that lay clear as glass on my left. (Fresh ? The swill was cold as ice !) And I stood there, feet freezing, and watched trembling with dread, watched below me – but I had to go on for now. I endured it for an hour; then reached up for the next strong branch above the water, dripped dry, and scooted up further into the treetop. (I've dried my feet off, kneaded, rubbed, let the sun burn them : I can't get any feeling back ! Horrible !)

Looking down

They're still on the move : salmon, millions of them assembled. The water boils (it tastes of fish !). The dorsal fins, the backs themselves, are already out of their element; where the water breaks, they throw themselves over on their flat sides, now right, now left. The fish loses its sheen, grows dark, turns greenish gray, the scales on its belly are rubbed off; the fins, the whole lower half of the body, look bloody, dark blue-red, and finally blue-black, zigzagging up the side of the body, repulsive to watch, like the scurvy, half gangrenous wounds on the carcasses of mistreated animals,

raw, as if teeming with spongy proud meat. Myriads of heads, vaguely angular, maws agape and powerful fangs. Cartloads of corpses in pools – oh, you gods ! –

Oh, you bastards ! !

I renounce everything that calls itself God ! That claims to be Creator or Lord of the world ! (And the tree quakes beneath me, from the rebel's anger raging in me !) Look at that, you swine-fattened and prayer-bloated; is that your final belched reply; that and things like it are possible in your dragon mill ? ! With mouth bursting, thumping, I curse you : I shout the call for your overthrow ! For rebellion of the good against nature and god : I call on the youth of the world ! (And it's already echoing around Olympus : as the slogan for skipping-contests and punching faces ! – – Oh, oh !) –

Autumn fog billows up

in the bright afternoon; warm and thick, greenish from the gloss wiped off plants : you won't find me now. Look alive ! Pytheas !

The mountain's cone tilts monstrously high on my right.

Evening

A storm gathers.

Round the mountain some time ago : below lies Gadir, ordered streets, suburbs fluttered full of pigeons.

Eight ships at anchor in the main harbor, rocking; two out by the island of Erythia; one, black, up front on the left, far below me (an hour's walk) : I'll give it a try. First. Dark early today.

Last tinge of gray

Fog wind, damp, laps like the sea around the mountain, rumbles, rolls across wailing forests. I took a deep breath and rattling, gurgling, inanely happy, let it out again : into freedom ! I shoved my straddle into the haze. Stampings up in the clouds; thundering rain beat on my brow; my heart surged : freedom ! I raised my gray-haired legs to dance : freedom ! freedom ! I serve Gryphius no more; the dungeon lies far behind me ! Pytheas is set free and stamps about up in the clouds ! ! –

With outstretched neck

is how the face beside me emerged from the wall, and clumsily gaped at my screams : I raised and aimed my dagger to it – be gone, you ! Does it conjure with men perhaps ? ! Shove off ! –

Want to roar my way downhill, shoreward (but my legs are like ice ! That damn wading this morning !) Lubb-dupp, Lubb-dupp (this time it's my heart).

On the shore

Cautiously I dragged the crescent blade around my chin, threw the beard away, pulled my cap further down at jaunty angle : young sailor, right ?

(Hope they'll still take me, that I don't look too fragile, damn it all, this will decide it ! – –) Come on, let's go, no point in delay (very black the ship).
"Hey ! Cap'n !"
He came to the railing, tall (and skinny) in his fluttering black cape, with a long pale face (un-Phoenician, really !) I called through the tumult of water : "Are you sailing to Mentonomon ? – – You need another hand maybe ? –" He nodded to each question and pointed mutely to the plank, which I vigorously walked up, and shook his hand hard, convincingly. –
Why are they casting off so soon ?
– Did they just want to capture me ? Suspicious, I hid my dagger in my hand and bowlegged my way forward. – –
Rises and falls
the bow ! And I tumble along to its rhythm. (Totally dark now; have to stop writing.)
What luck ! Pytheas, you child of the waves ! Raises me – lets me fall ! Raises me – –
Night grows still deeper.
See nothing now.

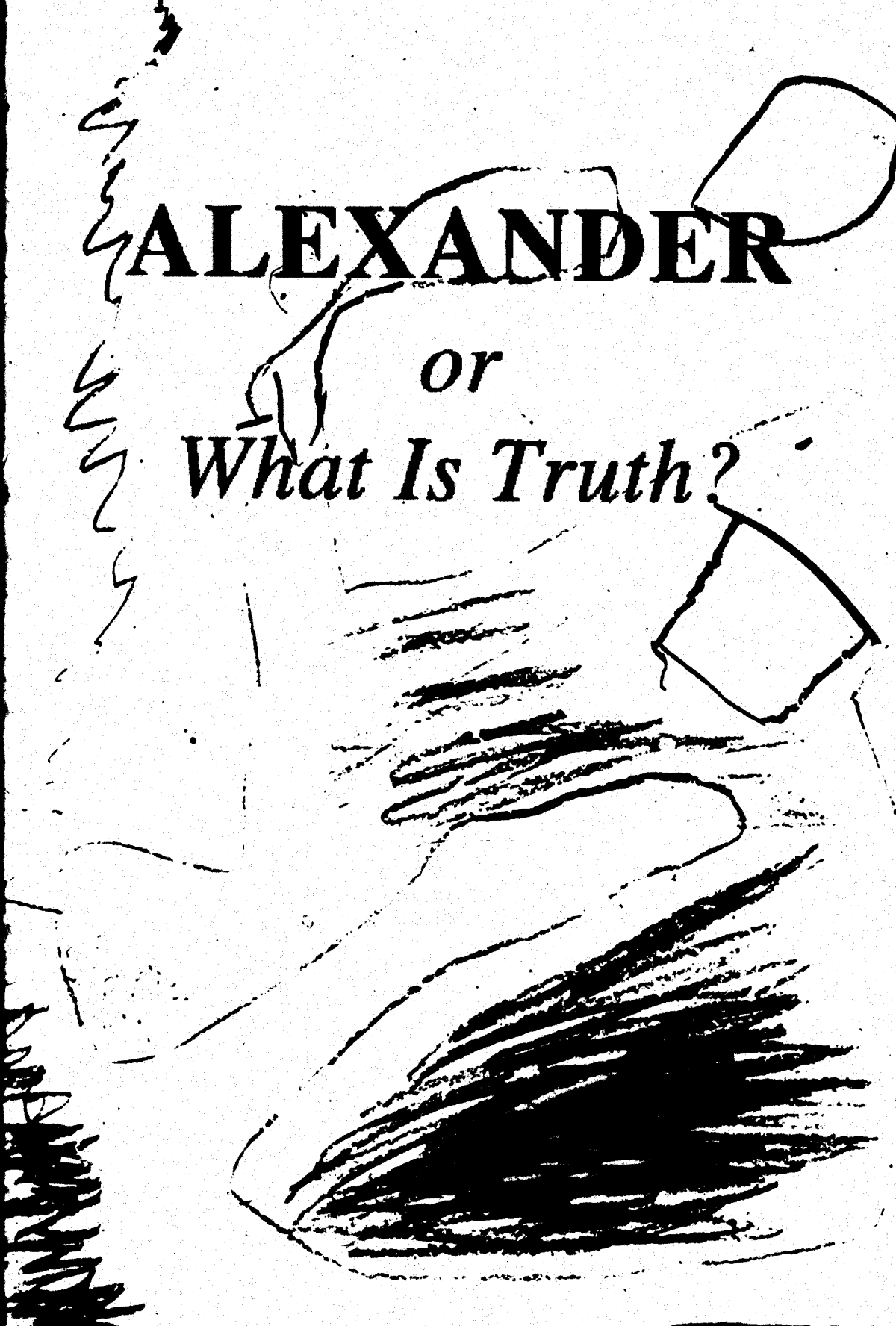
To Giskon, the Great Suffete, the Suffete of the Sea, my Lord, Your servant, Abdichiba, by Your Grace overseer of the fortress of Chebar by Gadir : before Your Feet seven times seven times I fall, wishing only faithfully to carry out Your Commands, to build Your Temple, to execute Your Decisions. May all be well with You, o Lord; with Your House, Your Harem, Your Sons, Your Parents, Your Horses, Your War Chariots, Your Estates – may they all be very well. May Moloch continue to give Power to Your Hand, that as a Rock It may strike against the rapacious Roman dogs.
The Hunt You ordered has been carried out against the lions of the mountains; bread and wine and roast meat were our daily fare, apart from the goats of the highlands that were captured for me and from what my dogs caught.
The tributes of the villagers are regularly received : at Your Disposal lie five hundred shekels of silver, eighty balls of leathern cord and sinews of cattle for the archers. Someone has maligned me before my Lord for not having delivered on time the slingstones for Your Balearians : behold, I lack craftsmen; and yet almost ten thousand were readied. Give me but the Command : and I shall at once send them all to Drepanon, or rather first to Your Arsenal in Carthage ?
Allow me to promote the soldier Hakkadosh; in Your Service he is willing

and talented and ambitious; also it is he whom we have to thank most that last spring we were able to find and capture the robber of Your Herds. He knows how to write a little and in honoring the Gods is exemplary.
Two days ago, there finally died the unclean, uncircumcised, troublesome one, whom for time out of mind and for reasons inexplicable to me we have had to feed. He was still at his table and stank indeed; no wounds were found; deep in his left palm was clutched an old shoe-plate; the dog had torn an expensive blanket to shreds, and his tunic as well; the unbeliever had mutilated his beard : he was a hundred years old. As ever I am sending You what he wrote. Into the sea we threw his carcass. Take no more troops from me, o my Lord; the Territory of my Lord is otherwise no longer His own, for Iberians ravage the whole of it; those we catch we send in chains to the silver mines. Thus writes Abdichiba, slave of slaves before the Feet of the Great Suffete, I strike my lowly brow against the stairs before Your Chair, my back is Your Footstool; do as You will with me and my house, my wives, my daughters and female slaves, my sons, my servants, my cattle, my fortune, rule over it all, o Darling of Moloch, o Delight of the Just, o my Lord ! –

ALEXANDER

or

What Is Truth?



9TH THARGELION : I am curious.

Small, so they say, small and stocky; holds his head a little to the left side.

Wind smooched with the leaves, babbled giddily in the bushwork like an exited drunk, in front of me, behind me, on my left too : where should I listen first ? Hipponax came out of the tent; watched as I turned my head to hearken, and nodded to me with a knowing smile (you get to like him more and more the longer you live with him); invited me to walk along down into town. (Agathyrsus is playing Xerxes again in Kritias's "Sataspes," Monika is Atossa. I saw it yesterday already; exquisite costumes; very impressive the place : where Sataspes, one hand already nailed to the cross, turns and says :

> ". . . who now rides forth in brave contempt,
> to seek out lands unknown and undiscovered . . ."

She quite restrained, virginal, subtle – ah, everything that she probably isn't. And the ivory mask emerging from her collar chalice.)

Unbelievable noise on the square : everything's overcrowded inside Chalybon, some resourceful innkeeper has set up a couple of rows of tents on the hill and is doing a booming business renting them out. (In this good weather it's sure to be more pleasant and airy that way. – "All these soldiers !" he whispered to us in apology, "they say it's against Arabia this time. – Or Carthage !" Amusing, these rumors. But probably significant as well.)

Stroll through the town (just medium-sized); why people have recently begun to call it Beroea was a mystery to Hipponax too (he only comes just up to my shoulder, but broad and taut). The bibliokaplers are now publishing, by the heap, those series of articles on the India campaign by our most popular war correspondents : all lies and bunkum of course, for our dear thrill-seeking polloi; while I was with Aristotle, I read the unbiased-candid chronicles by Nearchos, Onesikritos etc. : looks quite different in those. Racket as inevitable as ever : water vendors, soothsayers (every kind of manteia you want for a couple of

obols), alley ravines, dust-suffused; inside, girders of sunlight so massive you want to lay your hand on them and duck under as you pass.
The shops full of Alexander portraits at every price level and in the three commissioned types : Apelles, Lysippos, Pyrgoteles. Plaster statuettes, intaglios, "belongs in every loyal household", (cunning, the alternative). Likewise the inevitable Alexander temple on the new agora; A. as sun god, the familiar large round relief; done nice and slick; (but it is quite unlike him, Aristotle told me, and "one should never get to know a great man personally", as he gave me the letter, and I said good-bye. – His chin should be more massive and the whole look quite coarse.) Here they had planted "Alexander palms" clear around; in our Greek cities they have sacred olive trees. A shame that they run such dodges with the great man. "But he wants it that way; he's ordered it himself", muttered Hipponax. "Yes," I conceded laughing and sighing "– or rather : the people want it that way. They comprehend greatness only if it's garish and grotesque." "Might it not be better – greater still –", he protested cautiously, "truly to educate them, don't you think – ?" I turned testy; sure, sure, he's right if it comes to that. Naturally.
The garrison was drilling; natives with Macedonian and Greek instructors. Phalangists mostly and dimaches. It's not in the least beautiful or heroic or whatever, your military drill. The bawling, the endless mechanical movements, every gesture has ten-thousand regulations. (Yesterday was "Phalanx Day", Hipponax explained. He hadn't been. All the barracks had been open to the public; big displays, troop reviews.)

Late : (Only then, fresh and cool). We were sitting at a little table outside. The evening air turned yellow and red; word flutterings and laughings everywhere. The moon appeared, in the form of a human eye, between the tents; slaggy gold. Monika, of more elfin mien and words a mistress than lies within the power of our earthen constellation, sat before the entrance (I beside her); we ate some fish, drank a little. I had to tell something about myself; "Oh, 18 years old ! – And an admirer of Aristotle *and* Alexander at one and the same time ! . . ." said Agathyrsus with a stagy voice of approval (I'm recording it because I want to practice not getting angry about such things !). Destinations. They also want to go to Babylon, and via the river, because it's the least taxing way (and probably the quickest as well). I then took heart (it was almost dark now, and I had been struggling with it since yesterday); I asked the pallid savage magic face beside me : whether I might possibly join them; I had business in Babylon, too, the letter. First she

gave a malicious and amused smile, but then at once her eyes grew stone-hard and bold : "Ah, you have a letter from Aristotle ? For Aristodemos, son of Sophron ? The one who's a bodyguard ? – Don't tell me ! ? !". "He's your father's brother ? !" Hipponax asked, interested as well, and they nimbly exchanged astonished glances. "One must always be careful", she said, and shook out her thin gay shoe (sand). Presumably she meant the snakes. Or scorpions.

In the tent : Behind the thin curtain you can see her shadow. We were now lying wrapped in our blankets, and gazing thoughtlessly into the gauze of light. Little jars clinked; a brush harped her hair; the shadow bent down; it asked : "Well then : are you coming with us ?" I raised myself up; lost, breathless, and undone, I said "Yes." And : "Gladly." And : "I thank you !" She seemed content : "Hmm." 14 days.

10TH THARGELION : Got underway very early, Monika and the baggage on a two-wheeled cart, we rode beside it on donkeys (She was completely veiled; "so my skin stays white", she had explained.)

The most splendid blooming ("laughing") landscape; waving fields, prosperous villages set off among them. (On closer inspection, however, you spotted traces of disrepair, or perhaps, rather, of negligence, among the farms). "Parysatis-hamlets" Hipponax explained, who seemed always to be dependably informed. It was never quiet on the highway; farmers, herds of horses, marching soldiers, herds of horses; all despite the glass-hard golden air. Around noon the countryside began to roll; we took more lonely shortcuts, into sparse groves, through strangely twisting meadowlands aglow with green, in one of which our two lackeys unhitched for a little while. We ate some white bread and a sparkling stew of yellow fruit; Monika, in diploidion and red hood, with long white legs, fetched our water from the brook. (I thought of Diagoras's Thessalonian Songs of Noon : ". . . A sleeping Pan, a sweltering glade, / the brook is mute, the stone arrayed / with hush, my heart in silence laid : / who knows what happens now. / A tale, forgotten soon, warns he / shall rave in midday wood who'll see / a nymph beneath a bough. / The brook's agleam with golden sands; / I go to cool my face and hands. / – Who softly steals this way to drain / a jug, with light and gentle strain / of slender silver arms ? / Into the brook she pours a dew / of shells and stones of rainbow hue / including seaweed, fishes too. / It's you I love. Is love returned ? / A sweet sad face, but unconcerned . . ." – What ever became of him ? Agathyrsus knew something about him too; once, while still a very young man, he had seen him at court in Pella. "In Pella – ?" I asked in amazement; and he

replied in a complicated polymutter, so that further inquiries seemed impractical. Working from the ankle of one foot, she loosed a little magic knot into the air, gave a single tap of her red heel, and that finished me !)

Early afternoon found us on lanes through a park, neglected now, but grandly laid out nevertheless. Beautifully shaped trees, austere lawns. Then in a clearing there appeared the roomy villa of Procurator Nikanor, confiscated at present by the military government : paymasters, officers, messengers; countless direction signs : recreation, intelligence, cartography, canteen. A small encampment to one side with perhaps 120 soldiers (probably staff sergeants, grooms and orderlies for the most part).

Agathyrsus and Monika produced their thespian passes, and at least we were given a space to ourselves right away, at the edge of a copse; a sort of park-keeper's hut, used now for storing blankets. Made no difference. The trim quartermaster kept kissing Monika's hand; promised to inform the general at once, arranged a performance for the officers ("a strictly intimate gathering" !), strode off with a bounce. I looked at her, pleading; but she – besavaged, behexed, godless – coolly shook her head : "They all have money", she said, all business and approbation, and even Agathyrsus's eyes were already like grubby silver coins beside his big nose, gesticulating its sneer. And so right away, with Hipponax's assistance, they selected a couple of costumes and cloths; then we went for a short walk through the paradise. An old house-steward, left over from the Persian days, acted as our guide; only a few tame animals left ("Many of them were shot by the gentlemen" he reported impassively; "soused, you mean ?" Hipponax observed coldly, and the old man moved closer to his side). As for the villages roundabout, he said that they served "to endow the cincture of the queen", very much of the old school. A lake emerged, with tranquil borders of trees, our brook flowed into it; he minced his way onto a small wooden dock, and at once lots of pied-scaled fish appeared in the water as he shook breadcrumbs out for them from a pointed metal cone. "They are gods" he murmured reverently, and told an old fairy tale of how a wealthy city had once stood here; the enchanted inhabitants were these fish etc. etc. Idle officers came toward us, snuffling, rattling; eloped, arm in arm, with Monika (Agathyrsus right behind) across the little Darakos bridge.

Back again, near the encampment, I met Hipponax with a sergeant of the Agrianic Rangers (named Lampon, like me; strange : H. seems to have a natural bent for matters military; he's always taking up with

soldiers). The fellow was talking about the Ammonium expedition : first they had marched along the coast as far as Paraetonium (just a very small portion of the Egyptian army by the way), moving southward from there through the desert. Halfway there, the water they had brought began to run low, but the occurrence of a heavy rain, very rare in those parts, helped them out of their predicament. ("Zeus Nephelegereta was patently with his son" he said with full conviction; otherwise he appears to be a rather honed, sophisticated man, though of very ordinary Macedonian extraction. People like us will never comprehend what goes on inside heads like that; but Hipponax knew not to bat an eyelash). And then immediately after the miracle of the rain, two flying dragons appeared as unerring guides along the further direct route. (They were two ravens ! Once, when we were revising the map of the world, Aristotle and I worked through every travel report ! The quite natural phenomenon of birds seeking food from a mob on the move and choosing a route in the direction of the only hospitable region, was of course immediately declared to be a new portent. Yet another example that the common people, even as eye-witnesses, simply cannot give reliable evidence. – "Scholars are the light in the darkness"; how true it is !) Much fuss about the Well of the Sun (which of a morning and evening bubbled over with tepid water, at noon with cold, and at midnight with warm), which they already knew about from Herodotus's report, and therefore found according to directions, because they so much wanted to find it. (Basically it's just a very ordinary freshwater well, that appears extraordinarily cooling in the hot desert noon, but then in the clear frosty night proves warmer than the atmosphere). The only interesting thing was that he claimed to be among the few who had been allowed as far as the curtain, and had distinctly heard how the high priest (whom he described in impressive detail : long beard, hieroglyphs on his cap) said "Hail, thou son of Zeus !" – Signals from the terrace stairs : he excused himself : duty called. – Sky imprinted with white cloud carnations (they held so still that only now and then a plumelet rolled over).

"It was really a stupid move on his part," I said bitterly to Hipponax "in the end he did not achieve his purpose, and embittered his life in the process; because reasonable Macedonians" – "who don't count" Hipponax interjected – "aren't going to be moved to piety by such antics." He nodded with tightly pressed lips : "Certainly not" he said, "and it's likely that even then he had already made a quite conscious decision to distance himself from the Greeks; because their free and open behavior toward him was unbelievably scandalous to Asians

accustomed to quite different ways. So he coldly weighed the power at his disposal, and has since set everything at the ready so that he can at any time rely solely on the orient. I'd like to know . . ."

From all the doors and tents soldiers came at a snappy trot, formed themselves into a short line, six-men deep, dressed ranks. Our acquaintance stood before the troops and held roll call. All sorts of things : about dress, threat of light punishment, "Present arms !", malefactors fall out to the right, mail call, orders were handed out, regulations read off. An order of the day from Alexander personally (we listened eagerly.) : the establishment of the "Life Font" : he assumes the custody of children born by Asian women to "his soldiers". Discreet handling assured. The homefront will know nothing about it. Nothing whatever. – Everyone immediately applied for a pass for the night. (Hipponax gave an ironic laugh; but roused nevertheless, by my outraged face. "How invaluable for you" he said fiercely "to learn what the world is like. Any commentary is surely superfluous –" Yes; was superfluous. I mean, what scoundrels; swine !)

Sunset : They still aren't back. Hipponax returned from the warehouse; he had bought a couple of excellent torches. Good Caspian wine. "They're doing dance pantomimes" he reported laconically "you know : Apollo and Daphne; Amor and Psyche;" he hesitated imperceptibly "Leda, too –" he said compassionately; laughed : "Agathyrsus is magnificent as the swan"; shook his head. "Well, for a little money a man will do many things", I replied, worldly-wise, but with blind eyes. He took me seriously. "Yes, they're throwing a lot of money around here" he added "although Monika goes along for the fun of it too I suppose". (A doctor couldn't have said it more circumspectly.)

Scribblings : They both came back drunk. Sat down with us in front of the house. Around midnight. Her hair combed back straight, held with a broad ribbon over the crown; at the back, summer-spun weft, luxuriating blissfully in all directions. More wine had to be fetched; some new torches. Profane the whistles and words from the small savage thaumamouth. She motioned her head toward me : "I have a message for Alexander too" she said, ducked through the door, and returned with her broad, flat box; inside a picture "From Thais to her adored Alex" written on the back : a nymph, riding on the back of a centaur who has abducted her, and won now, roguishly blows out the moon in her cupped hands; bushwork and meadows in the evening dusk; and painted masterfully (Apelles). Thais is Monika's friend. "Yes, he loves her bathykolpos" she said, pointing a saucy naked slender finger, maliciously describing it to me, and added such immodesties that

Agathyrsus's nose danced its twitching kordax anew (but only because of my blushing indignation not her remarks) "I am not his type" she said slyly, "but when he's drunk, he'll do anything : think of the murder of Kleitos the Black, the torching of Persepolis. Polygamy : Roxane, Stateira, Barsine, Thais". Agathyrsus knew still other new names as well. (Unfortunately; it's true, he has embarrassing weaknesses : he's supposed to have said recently that he's aware he still differs somewhat from the gods because of his insomnia and preference for the opposite sex).

"By the way : they say he's ill" she said, tilting her head, sucked at the brown smooth wine, snorted a laugh : ". . . with that in mind –" I heard her breaths; there were only a few crates separating us.

11TH THARGELION : early farewell to the dandies; one kissed her shamelessly on the palm of her hand. Three teams of horses were being driven to Thapsakos, to fetch clothing; we had lots of room in there. Monika, sleepy and lazy, counted money with Agathyrsus; afterwards a debate about whether we still ought to go to Barbalissus (it's a country palace just above Th. on the river), but Monika objected : "there's just the Mil.Gov. there." (Apparently the avaricious A. is to blame for everything !) – Rather monotone fields out there; someone had once even made the attempt to sow sylphion, interesting. Hypercultivated apples with hectically red cheeks.

Thapsakus : Ancient metropolis, set primarily on the right bank of the river (on the other side is just a small but busy new town). Lovely stone bridge across the Euphrates, very sturdy and commodious, broad.

We found (with difficulty !) poor quarters in the open courtyard of a caravansary; an empty area in the middle; low breast-high barriers extending from the walls partitioned off stalls : we got one of those. (First swept out the manure; Hipponax, bronze and breezy, extorted a plank-bed from the owner; our blankets on top of that; the baggage. (Next to us, 4 camels rasped, wove with their heads, rut blisters on their warty necks; on the other side, against the wall, a couple of Arabs with two veiled women, all wizened as leather – it is of course the great transfer point for their trade from the south, Arabia eudaimon, and for Phoenicians from the west). Hipponax was commissioned to rent the boat (i.e., he was the man for it, no need for discussion), and invited me to come along.

The rounded barges have a strange effect when you see dozens of them together like that; many of them are enormously roomy. After some crude bartering, we finally got one for the day after tomorrow : the two

pilots want to make Babylon in a week ! (Normally you can figure 10 days : well, the river is moving rapidly, the snow has begun to melt up top early this year. But it's expensive too; half my money is gone !)

Major exhibition at Triangle Square : The Fall of Tyre, with relief map, models, etc., Tyrian weapons. Hipponax quickly paid our two drachmas, and we strode through the high points. The machines of siege were frightening, like insect giants with hulky limbs, high as houses, gnashed the walls. He laughed bitterly : "Yes, yes : in a thousand years we'll be to the point where in every agora there'll be an apparatus with a handle and a sign that reads : Pull and You Pulverize the Globe !" "And who's going to pull it" I asked wearied (by innovation). He had folded his broad arms across his chest, and looked mutely through the beamed maze. "Yes : Who –" he replied rapidly and matter-of-factly, shrugged, studied, mocking and pensive : ". . . perhaps a sweet young thing who's received bad marks; or a drunken lance corporal swaggering beside his giggling girlfriend; or a ninety-year-old farmer who's lost a suit over a boundary line –" He nodded, bitterly amused, gave a short laugh : "Or –" but then he caught himself, gave me a sidelong glance and said : "Hmph – you can probably come up with racier visions and formulations – maybe even Lampon of Samos would pull it if Monika wanted him to – ?" (But his laugh was roguish, kind). – Once outside, he added : "He who would live a while yet, must hurry ! – Dreadful wars are coming . . ." In the golden well of this day.

Behind the fire (Monika simply had to have one, only a little one, it's so picturesque). All the others had one too for that matter.

Agathyrsus had run into an old acquaintance, a scribe with a legation (where we've already got a confirmed invitation for tomorrow, me too; they're just on the way back from Alexander. Good.) Both rather animated now. Across the inner area a broad flaming : discharged veterans from Babylon; they boasted and yowled : "Been in for 18 years !"; praised : Alexander's courage, greatness, goodness; showed the chains he had hung around their necks with his own hands; medals. How it all began; the transit across the Hellespont : the sacrifice on the grave mound of Protesilaos; the libation in the middle of the Hellespont; how, still on board ship, he had cast his spear into Asiatic soil, then was the first to leap onto land, and there had an altar erected. The games on the spot where Troy had stood (when you hear it told like that, it leaves an unpleasantly artificial and calculated impression; if it had happened spontaneously : but it was probably all just nasty, cunning theatrics). One of them jumped up, bawling with emotion : "He gave it all away to his friends ! He kept nothing for himself; nothing :

not one thing ! !" And they all waved their arms about; their mouths and goblets gaped hollow : even Agathyrsus drank another, snorted a sneer, muttered : "The s.o.b. was broke; yes indeed ! He had to wage war; otherwise he couldn't have fed that giant army another month ! He lacked the funds simply to administer Macedonia, and so right after the first plunder he had to send large sums to Anipater –" "So in your opinion, they were predatory raids, pure and simple ?" I said disdainfully to him – he was half loaded (he nodded many times; Monika, cautious, interposed, looked at me, with brows like blackbirds' dark pinions).

Was still going on across from us : how he poured out water in the desert. "He wanted to march to infinity : the greatest of all ! – But we were terrified –" he added candidly, "and then we were the first ones to sail the great ocean in ships, down the Indus", and then they told lies about India. – I mean : none of it is true ! ! He didn't want to march to infinity; I had the same geography lessons with Aristotle that he did; and he often told me how he had spoken with Alexander in particular about the borders of the ecumene. Just beyond the Indus in the east, it comes to an end, that's well-known, and he quite consciously set out to rule this ecumene. To start with. And Skylax of Karyanda sailed the South Sea 150 years ago now, and apparently the Arabs do it constantly in trade with India. – These are ignorant men ! –

With a click of his tongue, Agathyrsus said : "They're out luring new recruits. – 20 men are discharged, loaded down with medals and gifts – and in return 20,000 let themselves be seduced : the ribboning methods of the great. And the idiots fall for it . . ." I forced myself to be objective; I reflected : he is right of course; but he sees only one side. Naturally you can call it just a trick, banking on the stupidity of the masses : but it's for a great cause, and besides . . . Hipponax looked straight at me : he said : "The end does not justify the means ! !" – Pause. "What actually do you think is the end ?" softly and as if woolgathering.

In my sleep : What is the end ? Why are they all asleep ? The courtyard hangs from a blue rope of smoke; yes, what is the end ? The empire of permanent peace most likely, is it not – – ? – A world empire; yes, yes. – I keep imagining him, still in Thrace, making the preparations for those Troy theatrics; giving the Order to Erect the Altar, icy cold like that. – Disgusting !

Those damned camels ! (i.e., the real ones next to us !)

12TH THARGELION : Hot day; hot. Spread a blanket across the corner, at the back, so that at least there is one spot in the shade. Dust and thousands a-shout; I felt sorry for Monika, but she just spread a defensive brow : "If nothing worse ever happens in life . . ." she muttered coolly. Agathyrsus, too, slept restlessly, a blanket clump; they all have the indifference to filth found among the polytormented (intellectuals to boot).

Watching quickly gets to be a bore : Hipponax (who is staying with the baggage this evening, "holding position", as he says in the army jargon of the day), sat down next to me, and out of pure uselessness we exchanged riddles and magic tricks. I made a 16-square field for him, filled them at random with the numbers 1-15 and had him use the open field to shift them back into normal order (he'd never seen that one). In return he explained : "The vendor next door has 3 kinds of wine, at 10, 3, and ½ drachmas a jug; here are 100 drachmas : bring me 100 jugs," and added : "It's not the answer that's interesting, that's easy to find. But rather the exact mathematical method for solving it, by way of setting up equations –" Well yes, in this heat you can't always be clever.

Noon : A piece of dubious meat, tough and spicy enough to set you bellowing. ("Good for your thirst this evening" Agathyrsus suggested, "we'll have to wear our drinking boots")

A small salon : (all fiery yellow brightness, magnificent).

The legation is from Tarentum; Agathyrsus knows two of them. He introduced me as "Lampon of Samos – a favorite pupil of Aristotle, and Aristodemos's nephew. Of the bodyguard." "Ah" they said, "Aristodemos, Sophron's son ? ! Good. – Well then, we're among friends here. –" (Seems to be a well-known fellow, my uncle. Well-liked.) 10 names puffed themselves up, bowed, Klinias, Lamprokles, Archytas, Hippodamos, Philostratos, well, makes no difference. (Names like moving vans !)

Pillows of pale yellow, shiny rep. Everything was in a flutter; people drank a lot and quickly (me too). In a half-rounded niche Monika stood in chiton and himation and sang. Lovely old songs, in her somewhat covered soprano. He accompanied her, alternately on the theorbe, syrinx. They were very simple airs of the country sort, cool and bucolic; Hu – a – ho, hu – a – hu – a – ho; pastoral and monotone the sound of Agathyrsus's flute ("Phyllis in her boat agoing, heard the pipe, forgot her rowing . . .") Then she lay on a kline, more or less across from me, and chatted cleverly, all self-assurance and experience.

The goblets grew larger; in each floated a piece of fruit, a poppy petal.

Klinias next to me asked about Aristotle : "They say he's old and frail ? – Right ? – The friendship with Alexander's over too – isn't it ?" He squelched a laugh : "Puts the screws to him, right ? – Yes, yes, he tried to no avail to give the semi-barbarian a veneer of culture. Well, he's gone completely crazy now : had Hephaistion build him a temple in Egypt, as a demigod; saw it myself on the way here : a peripteros with Corinthian columns !" (He emphasized the Corinthian columns, as if they constituted a particularly devious blasphemy). Sniffled, extended his drunken hands wide to me, protesting : "You don't believe it ? You should see the lunatic pomp at court –" He interrupted himself : "Haven't you heard what went on at Hephaistion's death ? Funeral pyre : 180 feet high, worth 12,000 Attic talents, paintings, statues, jewelry piled up : all of it burnt ! ! For weeks nothing but epodes and fumigations – ah, it's –" exhausted, he halted, drank, shook his head, stared toward the wall, his mouth pressed tight with worry. "Just picture it : the tent ! The gigantic reception tent ! !" And they shouted from all sides : "So there in the middle stands a gold throne – massive; behind veils –". "On 100 sofas sit rows of his favorites : a hundred. Yes !" "At every audience –". "No : let me – : 500 Persian satellites in silk and purple robes, on the other side 500 Macedonian silver shields !". "1000 barbarian archers with sable quivers ! 1000 men from the phalanx !". "All inside the tent, mind you ! – Outside, 10,000 Persians standing around, trained elephants scattered about." "Generals, courtiers, servants –", Klinias spat : "– nothing but proskynesis : we literally crept through the hall on our stomachs :" he curled furious lips : "and then we were permitted to whisper to some doddering flunkie, who passed it on to the white-silk curtain –" he laughed spitefully : "Oh, wretched Greece, how foully art thou treated –" (The old taunting song). I too had drunk more than was good for me.

The mood of the night-revelers grew more boisterous : one of the younger ones pestered Monika for another song. "Shall I ? –" she asked me abruptly; I was blissfully startled; I looked into drunken mugs around me "– No –" I said breathlessly : she gave the puppy a shrug of her thin shoulders : "– sorry, just can't do it then – –" (And she had me !)

Political apprehensions about Alexander's next move : "He's arming to take on Arabia, to take on Karchedon, Rome, Tartessus, the Hyperboreans – everybody !" "Oh, Rome would be none the worse for it ! –". Klinias bent my way, as if from behind veils; I could no longer feel my lips when I bit into them : "– but the generals are mutinous –" he whispered cryptically, "it won't be long now – think of all the earlier conspiracies : Philotas, Kallisthenes ! Officers – intellectuals – all

ready to mutiny . . ."; "They say he's ill – that's common knowledge, isn't it ? ? –" he asked loudly and looked at Agathyrsus; who nodded, without putting down his kiathos.

Later we bowed low : on my arm, Monika strode through the walls; faces, hands, all gold-draped.

In the night, in the night : wind whistled a taunting song at me. We walked with a light thievish shuffle out into it. Smoke crept herbally and waxen yellow over a flat roof. Whenever a statue came along, it was tipped on its toes. Words in red- and black-checked jackets.

Hipponax still sat darkly by the dregs of fire; "Did you figure it out ?" I asked him. He took my measure, began to smile. Is a nice guy. (Shortly thereafter, I almost got sick, but I managed).

13TH THARGELION : (In the boat). Grooms tumbled us up; we stood shivering in night's vestige. The hand-baggage given a swift stacking (the awful camel lips smunching above. The four crates were already in the skiff.)

Pushing off : red gray, desolate, dreary frost color, in the east. (As if it could have been in the west !). The river hurtled by, soundless, broad and roiling, chilled by Armenian ice. (i.e. the main floods don't begin until Skirophorion). They (the boatsmen) really want to be down there in a week : so we'll probably often have to travel till late into the night (and by way of precaution toss a trifle Kastor's and Polydeukes' way from time to time !).

Lots of goods in the roundel (these things are really tremendously roomy, once you're standing in one !) : pottery, tiles (lovely bright colors; take a closer look by day), wineskins with a black sweet hippocras (of course one was purchased first thing; Agathyrsus is using it as a pillow : it'd make for pleasant dreams, he contended – eccentric folk).

Tilled land along the river (I glanced just once out from under my blankets); occasionally our leather pod spins rapidly about in the eddies. – Sura : some aboriginal village or other.

Slept late : (the others are still asleep). – Confused and morose, thought back over the last few days, on the one hand, they're right of course. Inhuman practice, this self-divinization. And that disgustingly swinish Life Font order.

Evening : Now it's yellow and red at the other end of the world.

Meshed silver of starworks : moon barb caught in the mussy drapings.

Across the way lies Nikephorium (mouthlet of a river next to it : the Belias); it's an Alexander colony, recently founded, mostly wooden houses still. On the shore was a tall pile of stones; I asked the oldest of

the boatsmen (who shished a passable Greek) : "What's that ?" He smiled an elderly, unpleasant smile, grumbled : "A monument." To whom : "To the Fallen Warriors of the Epeirian Phalanx is what's written on it." Agathyrsus broke in, pretending amazement : "The Fallen Warriors ? ! – How can that be ! – Why, he's never lost over 10 men ? ! – No wait : he did once admit to 115 !" (I know : in fact, on the Granikos, that was the official storm-trooper report) – Hipponax gave him a tap, pulled him off to one side, with the boatsmen, came back : "Yes," he said furrowing his brow, "it's probably better if we land over there, on the other bank. Tie up for the night I mean. Generally speaking, soldiers are no longer as solid on the difference between good and evil as seasoned citizens. – It's safer." We let ourselves drift over on the slant; Monika sat down at the concave edge and dangled her straight legs in the water; twanged a spiffy little song (in pale hoarse voice : from all that drinking, presumably. – "Six or seven kisses from her could kill a horse !" Agath. declares. Mean).

The brazier : (on the far side a barracks was burning; shouts and furor; good thing we're here !). – In connection with Alexander, I thought of something else : if a man must carry a brazier through life, it can indeed happen that sparks are set spraying (flying, spuming). Then I thought, no, that's more a metaphor for a poet, not for a tyrant : he runs like a torch, setting fire to villages and cities. Lay there and quandried. (Poems : protuberances of a soul aglow. But the practical men, but the mouchards; all of them ! –)

Monika beside me : wind quivered about our face; she opened her mouth and took strong breaths. Her hair began to stir slyly at her temples. (Long red sandal thongs, she is wearing).

14TH THARGELION : Awakened; still night. Undauntedly flickering stars : you can only shake your head. Over there the rubbish heap still smoldered; small, clear, dusky red, toxic vapor-blue stumps of smoke weaving.

In the boat it was so cold that we almost automatically went to work on the skins and amphoras (in one of them was some crazy stuff that set even Agathyrsus trembling; he had bought it as "double-aged" : the manufacturer deserves ostrakismos. But uncommonly effective). Monika said resolutely : "Well; we'll wait 5 minutes, and then we start yakking, wild and crazy, if you please !" (Thy will be done !)

Agathyrsus knows it all : (But from where ?) That Philip and Alexander were so at odds, that neither could stand to see the other (primarily because of Olympias, and Philip laid into her like a veritable mule-

driver). Of course he threw in the obligatory catchwords : that the son had had his father murdered (i.e. : let it happen !) "Those are old-wives' tales" I said sternly "for which there is no evidence whatever . . ." "Well, well –" Hipponax replied somewhat mockingly : "that's not a valid objection; they would hardly have gone public and posted it at every crossroad or had heralds cry it through the town. – In a well-ordered tyranny things of a quite different sort go on, and not a soul finds ‹proofs› of them now or later. But there are lots of clues for recognizing hemlock –" he cast a fleeting glance at Agathyrsus, "– in the first 4 months of his government, Alexander had every single close relative – the ones he could get his hands on – murdered : Amyntas . . ." he lifted his brown athlete's hands, crimped the fingers, counting; 14 names. (Agathyrsus grinned : "He couldn't catch the others"; basking with gusto in the morning sun. Now what's that supposed to mean ? !) I lowered my head; it nauseated me too. – That's not at all the way I'd. –. Thought of it. Yes, unfortunately it was the truth. (And the man who'd do that –. There's nothing like a mind-opener).

Then, to make himself popular, he abolished taxes. Awarded the Macedonians "honorary rank" in the army. The master race. "Do you think all Hellas celebrated for no reason when they heard the news of Philip's death ? One grand tyrant was vanquished : that was Something at least ! It was not out of political hate alone that Athens awarded the murderer a laurel wreath. – One wonders if the world will not rejoice as well, when finally Alexander . . ."

Automatically, I quoted Aristotle : "The highest ideal would of course be a harmonious world empire; a united, and thus peaceful ecumene . . ." Hipponax suddenly grew quite irate : "Your Aristotle is an idiot", he shouted "he knows nothing of the world : how can someone drivel on about a world empire composed of 100 nations totally divergent in language, custom, religion ? ! Europe alone can never be united." He got hold of himself again; said coldly, indignantly: "I had considered Aristotle and your kind to be more reasonable; but an isophrene (a line of equal stupidity : clever !) binds all human beings without exception. And nations." Fine, you may well be right ! (He is in fact ! But if Alexander is a scoundrel, what does that make us then ? !) Aristotle is of course no idiot.

(Although : I'm gradually beginning to think everything is possible.)

Sparser : the villages along the bank. Poorer too.

One of the pilots, young, toothless, is fishing; inert, hours on end. Around noon pulled out a fish long as your arm; knife-colored scales; all these greenish preying maws. What do you suppose it's called : –

Alexander fish ? – (They all laughed. Yes, yes; ours is a symbolic mode of transportation : the world has begun to totter.) Crumpled flesh around eyes.

Zenobia.

On the left bank, confluence of a good-sized river; it too has a name, like all proper things in this world : Aborrhos. And tomorrow then, the desert, they say, begins on both sides.

14 relatives : You have to picture that ! ! –

Thebes occurred to me too : it was atomized. "Anyone who stands in my way will be smashed" (that's from his old Hellespont speech; and they all screamed approval ! – Almost all). To win over the Greeks, the literary nation, he flirted with their memory of Pindar. Was probably just another calculated move.

But it is beautiful on the river; you have room.

(Tied up, by the way, once it got dark.)

15TH THARGELION : River journey from the mouth of the Aborrhos. The hills really have a desert-yellow look now, more like dunes. At one point, a solitary log fort on the left bank (must have been damn hard work too, carting the long beams here from days away; the poor farm ponies). The pilots gave us three names at once for it : Nikanor City or Europus, as the Greeks call it; Dura, the natives; bound to have a great future ahead of it.

At least a thousand : it looked marvelous : the reddish hides and the black twisted antlers, gazelles and deer mixed. The first ones leapt over the embankment by the shore, stood there checking, and then the whole host stormed into the river, splashing, swimming, working its way across to the other side. (Later on, too, far in the distance, trotting wild asses and ostriches.)

Toward noon : the heat grew almost unbearable. Only once every few hours, a tangled fret of trees.

The sandy plain was trimmed with absinthe and other aromatic herbs. If you moved not a limb and closed your eyes, it was splendid : as if you were sitting in molten fragrant gold, in transparent gold. Isolated mountain peaks draw nearer sometimes, quarried savage, bouldered; brown with garish-hued veins, marble presumably. (You could build magic palaces out of it, with hollow columns, spiral staircases descending inside; behold : behold !)

Wind moaned in the wicked sky : it had the color of human skin; red cloud welts, thin as thongs, had been flogged into it. The current smacked a few times and jostled the leather; but the boatmen kept

calm; explained : it stormed and spun like that only up there, but never came down. But the fish would be biting. At once they snapped thorny bronze hooks onto their lines, speared them into clumps of their soft gray bread, and hung them in the gushy waves.

Where will we drop anchor today ? "At Chil-Menar." – "What does menar mean in Persian ?" I asked whomever. (Chil is forty); dreamily Monika murmured : "Menar : that's sort of – oh, like pyrgos; menar, the tower, or pillar; menaré : the turret."

Walls, rubble, columns : we docked at a broad stone slab. It was like my dream at noon today. (And extends a long way : a half hour into the interior and to both sides. It's also called : the ruins of Korsote). Everything is still warm from the day : the stones and the ground. –
They have a little fire on the terrace, are heating flat stones, and smearing them with a flour mixture thick as your hand : that's how our bread is baked. (something flitted behind me : very small beings are moving in scurried leaps, they're gone. – Hardly any snakes here; probably some sort of jumping mice).

Have one : we decided "to have one" (i.e. we all felt the same. What a shame it would be to drowse away this night), and the Armenian herb juice goes down sweet, dry and smooth and – ah. Then the double-aged. Ouch !

Monika : It was past midnight now. She waved away the goblet, glided into the boat, and came back with her little copper plate. She pushed aside the white ash in the earthenware brazier, spooned out a little pile of embers, scattered hemp seeds over them (once again crouched in our midst next to a column), and greedily inhaled the vapor : first it swelled up broad and globular, then milk-curled, then spilled, now just a broad blue ribbon, between her smooth teeth.

The moon is in all chambers : The way light and nothing busied themselves so enigmatically there. Gray silver tendrils flowed from latticed branch rufflings; broad leaf surfaces bellied, bent, vanished slowly with a roll. Ancient countenances, their dripping beards run wild, met together in the herbal underwood. Running about me, Agathyrsus and Monika.
Across the way is a room stuffed with pouchy white silk pillows. Good for reverently downing a goblet.

Light froze gray in the east : I blew nasal air, heads fluttering about. Ohmymonika. I banged my fists against a column : old names were written there . . . ph. The drunken man knows the way : I shall drink much. I raised my hand : a white thick square with round 5 finger stumps : I waved with it to Monika ! "We want to find a door. Into these walls –" I whispered fanatically and clever as gold : – "a door ! It

will take us away from everything. From this damn swindle." She approached me with a steely stagger, she spoke sibilant and compliant through her silver teeth : "Where to –" I raised a hand above my head and let it fall again, lightning fast, magical : deep, – far below – through rooms imaged aglow – past the count of almost infinite – 7 drops of blood from Sniöfiäll and the hoot of an owl ! I ran along the walls, pressed at a chiseled bird-eye, tugged pleading at conventional robes, slammed against a steed, brow on brow : they were silent and cold.

I turned to HER. I tensed my face, till it ripped. Stone scrubbed behind in my hair, my heart belled. She walked up to me. And we gazed into each other's eyes. Melaphryene.

Bloody mouthed : a slice of raw flesh, the hunk of sun came across the rag river. And from the scow came bleats : yes, yes, yes, yes, yes . . . ! I took hold of her linen-white arm; awestruck; we went; childish; to bed. (The moon's sting buzzed above us).

16TH THARGELION : 2 hours later, leapt to my feet, vomited all that wine overboard; (No one noticed; the boatsman on watch just laughed). Live or die, I could have cared less. Totally poisoned.

after noon : Stupid dream : where as an eagle I flew around myself, circling. With insipid intermezzi : let young female servants feed me my breakfast bread and lavishly admire me. All bunk. (Shouldn't even have jotted it down). – The others are still dozing away.

The river is beginning to form islands : to wind. Sand banks with fragrant scrub. They must often be quite wide; because you can see the true, high bank only far to the east. Apparently as it is borne along, the sand gathers around the core of a group of rocks; seeds get blown in, come with the flood; for, compared to the land itself, they are much more verdant (sure; given the constant irrigation !) : lots of man-high bushwork, scrubby right now, but already frosted greenish; the grass crop must be luxurious for months on end. To dwell forever on sandbanks like that : slip secretly over the edge of the boat by night, swim over there; with Monika; live in the perfume (live "on" perfume, too, right ? ah, be gone !) : lie in the sand; skin grows brown and yellow like sand and rocks : no one spots us ever again. Look into her eyes; sacrifice fish; sit by night around tiny fires, deep within the grove, oh eternity.

Belesibiblada : (I've not grown childish !) a hamlet on the left bank has that tongue-twister for a name (The smaller the object, the more pompous the title).

Ah, we awake : First (for cleaning the teeth ?) chewed on spicy tasting,

fragrant wooden sticklets (then spat them overboard, ingenious). Whereupon Agathyrsus stumbled against the box with the Thais painting, creating a natural transition to a conversation about contemporary art in general. (It really is painted in a foully sleek style; her girlfriend's thighs were definitely not as unpromising as that, Monika said with disapproval). I could say a thing or two about that (about art I mean, of course); for Aristotle had often asserted rather pointedly (and publicly) that the arts as a whole, but the visual arts in particular, would be irreparably ruined by Alexander's decree that they be united with oriental swank. (To that extent, his death would be a stroke of fortune, at least for culture). "And certainly" Hipponax said obligingly : "the capital cities would be moved closer to the Mediterranean again – because the empire would naturally fall to pieces at once." "The best proof is definitely his own entourage" Monika rattled on spitefully, and then told about a previous visit to the court of Alexander, how he not only granted Choirilos (a notoriously wretched poet !) the privilege of singing his exploits, but also had rewarded the versifier as lavishly as if he were a Homer and certainly in a fashion no good poet has ever been rewarded. I recalled the pronouncement of a witty Athenian man of letters, and quoted him verbatim : "Perhaps at the time simply nothing better was available than this Choirilos; or perhaps the better man tried and could not gain Alexander's ear. Perhaps, too, the verses of Choirilos the Rhapsodist made for pleasant listening, and Alexander, who had no time to attend to whether his court poet's verses were by and large good or bad, found them admirable because his own exploits were lauded therein. (Indeed, he now permits only Zeus Keraunos above him). Had they been good, he presumably would not have found them better." "Quite possibly" said Agathyrsus easily : "but perhaps he also had a sister who pleased one of Alexander's darlings. Perhaps, too, he had written a poem to the lapdog of one of Alexander's lovers, or had taught her magpie to speak. Perhaps Alexander had rendered poetry the honor of writing verses himself, and it was this very Choirilos who had the good luck to be employed as the man to copy it all out nicely for him – and lengthen the five-foot hexameters and shorten the seven-foot. And every one of these "perhaps's" would of itself suffice to make our happy Choirilos – though he were the foremost idiot of his day – a Homer in Alexander's eyes."

So we gossiped : (it was however much more than that; the sum of all these particulars begins to weigh heavily with me). Deinokrates was mentioned; who had suggested to him that Mount Athos ought to be hewn

into an Alexander statue, which would then bear in one hand a town with 10,000 inhabitants and in the other a huge bowl out of which a never-failing river would flow into the sea. His admirers say that he rejected this with a nobly regal reply; but the unfortunate fact is that he made him court architect and assigned to him the management of all edifices in Egyptian Alexandria, (and other cities as well !) : it had to be done, however, in chlamys=form, duplicating the ecumene in miniature : so the damned fat-faced flattery had had its effect all the same – had been trimmed to his character then. Or Anaxarchos, who provided a philosophical basis and justification for all of Alexander's crimes (e.g., the murder of Kleitos, or the ‹Satrap Heads›). "In contrast to Kallisthenes" Hipponax said earnestly "now that was a man !" (The name dared never be mentioned in Aristotle's presence; the break with Alexander can be dated from then). Astrologers, seers; Aristander of Telmissos.

Why are we docking ? : Anatho, a fortress (with many buildings inside) on a Euphrates island. Ah : the boatsmen have a load of Sidonian glass for a merchant in the place. Will take till sunset.

Walk through the town : with Monika, who has disguised herself as a young man in boatman's cap and chlamys (opportunity to show as much of her thighs as she likes). Steep narrow streets; steps mostly; you can climb rather high.

Gawking over the walls : almost a hundred yards straight down to river level. Doves dive circling, slapping. In the citadel the 20-man garrison lazes about. Mountain range over there (But once again, totally desolate as far as the eye can see) "And . ." she asked; we left. The sun retreated into ambush. The boatsmen wanted to travel all night (there are no reefs in the riverbed here); although the current is outrageously rapid, they are afraid of nothing; going unbelievably fast, too, this trip. Too fast.

Finally a sober day.

"Oh, I know" : Monika said, lying in the boat, on my shoulder : "what you're thinking about : the little pale-haired girl on the wooden tub – – right ? !" I had to laugh, really : "No" I replied "that's not the one –". "So what is your type then ? – May one ask – – –"; I gazed at her with desperate decision, directly into her eyes; "Oh, at last a declaration of love today," she said, distracted now, cunningly drawling it out; coolly bedded her hair in my biceps, and fell asleep at once. I did not.

17TH THARGELION : Desolitude of the landscape : not a sand sea, majestic and smooth, but dismally, disturbingly littered with driest rocks.

Arouses sweeping thoughts.

A deserted village floated past : (not burned down or whatever : just simply devoid of humans). "The second since yesterday" Hipponax noted ". . I come not to destroy, but to restore the Greater Persian Monarchy . . .". Agathyrsus grimaced approval : "Sounds good, doesn't it ? ! But he failed to mention, didn't he, that first of all he wanted to put himself on the throne ! – The cleverer Persians saw through it at once of course; which is why the resident magi destroyed Cyrus's tomb, giving Alexander the credit, in order to incite a national uprising." "Yes," I said : "it's still a miracle how, starting from little Macedonia, he could subjugate that gigantic empire. It was a masterpiece of conquest." They laughed impolitely (Hipponax too). "Let me tell you what a masterpiece of conquest is," he declared "it's something that endures and bears fruit, over centuries, especially political and economic fruit : because after long preparation it creates a new, long-overdue unity. – But what happened here was : Persia, a loosely federated state of 100 different peoples, was penetrated here and there along various thin frontiers by a strong, usually victorious, army of good professional soldiers, was systematically plundered, and occupied at several strategic spots. The nations were not conquered at all : countless mountain peoples, in Asia Minor, – ah, everywhere – are free as birds; many isolated fortresses defy him still : who along the Indus or among the Scythians still cares about Alexander ? Partisans everywhere. So, the country has not been ‹organically› conquered; a reasonable, humane commander would never have agreed to such an undertaking for that matter; he would have seen the madness in advance. Had he limited himself to Asia Minor, as Parmenion so urgently recommended to him when Dareios offered peace, Alexander could have become a benefactor of mankind : he could have established a new, wonderfully rich basis for Greece, for Greek culture in general, triumphantly energizing it for well into the future. 200 years later, some wise successor would have known what to do next. But he certainly gave the right answer on that occasion : he would accept the offer, if he were Parmenion ! ! With him it is purely a matter of satisfying the ambition of one demonic individual, of a man insanely favored by fortune; at his death the whole soap bubble will burst, and the true chaotic state of things become palpable. 10 nations will arise, racked by dreadful, century-long spasms as their shape and balance of power change; a hideous aggregate of suffering and misery –" he broke off, trembling, turned a smoldering face toward me : "And Macedonia-Greece ? – Such enterprises can be pursued only at the price of totally ruining a nation's economic

strength and substance, despite all the palaver from a dilettante military – Just look at your homeland : the country has been laid waste, the young men rot in Alexander Deserts; grass thrives in the marketplaces; what's left will be destroyed in the power struggle of the decades ahead. Greece has played out its role, my dear Lampon ! After a few generations only the antique collectors will come to visit; travelers wanting to watch the tournaments in Sparta and take a little Athenian schoolmaster home with them. – Haha !" but he did not laugh, he trembled like a flame; he thrust his hand large before me : "You show me the place where one new blade of grass grows because of Alexander : I can show you for each, 100 where nothing prospers ! ! !" I retreated to boat's edge before these resoundings; I stuttered : ". . but the colonies . . ." He laughed like a lunatic (and went on addressing me familiarly) : "Hey, are you ever swift ! ! – Have you had a look at those hovels ? ! – The ones along the river here for instance ! He's founded about 50 Alexandrias – that is, whenever 1000 half-crippled soldiers had collected to check his eagle's flight ! He stuck them into palisaded villages at the edges of his ‹Empire›, where in 5 years they'll either be slaughtered by barbarians or in 50 become them themselves : but each of them got 50 parasangs of wind round the house, princely, wouldn't you say ? ! –"

Silence : Monika is counting gold; lots of it, a delicate ring : she added and held bright, tipped fingers in bright fingertips as she did. (No one paid her any attention; polite). "Yes, and what are we going to put on in Babylon ?" she asked.

The repertoire : ‹Sataspes› of course, almost a classic by now; then ‹At the Well› (I know : a shallow piece of propaganda, which obligingly celebrates Alexander's melting-pot policies and features at the end : a Macedonian sergeant who marries a Persian farmgirl); the ‹Secrets of Aornos›, a rowdy thriller with fiery spooks, avenging swords, sepulchral vaults and boundless treasures. And ‹Girls at Home›, a farce for soldiers; with unspeakable obscenities, which, to heighten the effect, are placed in the mouth of the (to all appearances) most childish of the comediennes; and in which Monika shines. To distract them, I told the (true !) story of the treasures of Sataspes and the old scandal on Samos; it was new to them, and they listened with curiosity. "Quite a nice sum –" said Agathyrsus with avaricious approval "– wouldn't you say so, too, Monika ? –", and she nodded strong praise, with crinkled mouth and attendant eyes.

In the twilight : we watched a fiery glow on the river; it seemed to float there. "The Is" the old man explained, "– part of the asphalt wells up

and flows unused into the river, and young boatsmen –" (he cast a disapproving glance at his helper) "are foolish enough to set the floating mass on fire; sometimes the whole stream burns –", he went on muttering and puttering indignantly over his pots. "Yes, but what normally happens to the stuff ?" Monika asked, who had started to get bored it seemed, and was hanging way out over the side; "it's used in Babylon as mortar" I was able to inform her. Hail education.

I have learned many details, but thought too little.

18TH THARGELION : Even before arising this morning, an unpleasant penetrating odor from the stinking tar slag; acrid.

At first rows of hills, then a mountain range on the right, sterile and angrily flushed : extend far, far to the west, these mountains, they tell us.

Now for the amphora, the skin of hippocras : this time I was the first in line, resolute, and received astonished applause (but I knew why I was drinking; I needed courage; I now wanted to know still more !) We took our quantum, observed the obligatory 3 minutes of restrained silence (perhaps Hermes was on board; but more likely Bakchos) and I made inquiries of the cheered faces, of the shining eyes : "Oh ye who know all things –" ("Hear, hear –" Monika interrupted triumphantly "a student of the great Aristotle – –"; but Agathyrsus weightily demanded silence : "He doesn't mean you at all : he means me ! !"). I waited, glowering, and then demanded : "Now tell me, haven't there already been several people who wanted to murder him – – Philotas –". "Let Hippo tell you about that." (And so, attentively turned my head to him; there he sat; somewhat too earnest – let's call him Earnest.)

The Conspiracy of Philotas : discontent in the army even then, especially many of the officers (well-known reasons : proskynesis-complex, resentment at the introduction of Persians, etc. etc.; but new to me was that, clear back then, Antipater, having learned of the disquieting mood among the troops, made a secret pact with the Aetolians against Alexander, so he could fight fire with fire if need be). In Drangiana, then, the plan ripened – "seven years ago now" – was accidentally betrayed, the conspirators arrested : people were implicated by the score now, generals (Polemon from the cavalry; Amyntas, Attalos, Simmias, all from the phalanx). The prime mover was perceived to be Philotas, Parmenion's son. "Quite rightly so, by the way", Hipponax added slowly.

Parmenion : (he was warming up). Parmenion, one of the oldest and most distinguished generals, dating back to Philip, and with Antipater the

most respected of all Macedonians, had been at odds with Alexander for some time already. He disapproved most highly of the latter's outrageous, chaotic plans of conquest; he continually advised him to accept Dareios's offers of peace, and the weight of his opinion influenced many. At Arbela Alexander assigned him a rotten position for the battle, so that afterwards he could accuse him of not having done his duty to the full, "first, it was foul play; second, a lie; and third he had indeed done his ‹duty›, and more, a thousand times over – you need only think of Attalos's revolt 12 years before. : Much too loyal, is what he was !" – But Alexander was tired of this drag; of this man in whose eyes he definitely did not appear as an infallible god – well, "such thanks as fits a king's remembrance". At any rate, as punishment Zeus's son dismissed him from the army, i.e. left him behind in Median Ekbatana as his procurator (another thorny post, by the by). The distinguished old man now decided – after a long struggle with his sense of duty, obedience – to put an end to the madness : and if there was one man who still could, it was he, for Antipater was far away. So he then led the action, and, above all, being a man of honor in every way, risked his own son.

Philotas : "He was of course not quite the appropriate man" said Hipponax tensely, "proud; even somewhat vain; talked too much." He made a gesture with his hand that embraced many things. In any case, in order to obtain a confession from Philotas, by which Parmenion could also be implicated, Alexander had him tortured and by such means achieved what he desired. Then he called the army together, got them all hot with a speech ("Just imagine, they wanted to murder the beloved leader, the idol of his soldiers !") and then left it to them to pronounce and carry out the sentence. Stoning. While he tarried discreetly in his tent.

Me : "A legal consideration; – whatever doubts one may have concerning the whole affair, it would seem that one must admit, however, that Alexander did Philotas no wrong. He was charged by witnesses; legalities were not violated in the prosecution and conviction; and if the sentence passed against him was unjust, then one certainly cannot hold Alexander guilty, but rather the selfsame army that passed that sentence – right ?" – ". . the selfsame –" he nodded scornfully : "Oh, you learned pedants ! –" He pressed forward; he bellowed : "Of course he was charged by witnesses : he did not even deny it himself ! Of course the ‹legalities› were observed; even the sentence itself was ‹just› ! ! –" "– But damn it, man," he looked about him, for lightning bolts : "with such punctilious scruples couldn't you then also condemn Theseus for

jumping into the path of a manifold-murderer and slaying him ! – He should have had a monument erected to him ! !" –

Parmenion again : "Oh, that's not the half of it" he said, gratified by anger. "Alexander knew : first, in what high regard Parmenion was held by the army, and then too, there was the added possibility that, having heard of the death of his son and the failure of the plot, he might gather to him the detached troops and dare the limit in open battle with Alexander :", he lifted a scornfully nodding hand : "which is why the great man decided to have his old general foully murdered – oh no : he did after all have the son's confession : ergo, he condemned him to death all on his own. He hastily dispatched a Thracian prince and two Greek captains to Ekbatana; they were commissioned to ask for an ‹audience›. Parmenion, suspecting nothing, had the couriers brought to him, and they murdered – ah no : using your criteria, they carried out a sentence. This time however without interrogating the condemned man ! Mind you ! And without the ‹legalities› of allowing him to speak to the army : that would have been too dangerous ! –" He contemptuously shoved his nose through the air and turned away.

Besechana : city on the right bank. "So by tomorrow noon we'll be in Babylon –" Agathyrsus said with satisfaction, "– though why they've called it ‹Heaven's Gate› of all things – more the precise opposite; given the goings-on in there."

White robes in gold embroidered air : resounding hymns, a procession (there's a famous temple of Atargatis here). Much timpanization.

"Yes, and now tell me, you old Aristotelian," said Hipponax winking and jovial once more, "what you know about Kallisthenes –" and the other two edged closer as well. "Yes, you've come directly from the source", Monika asserted, languidly curious.

Alright then : (I speak about it reluctantly. Reluctantly !) At the time, Aristotle had sent him to Alexander as an – advisor or teacher – ("supervisor" Hipponax interjected with a cold grimace); since he could not go along himself : he was too old. ("His good luck, otherwise he would be gone by now too.") Kallisthenes was a stiff-necked, honest man, who on occasion told everyone the hard truth – even Alexander –, and because of his everlasting moral philosophizing proved no little burden to the court. Then, as Alexander gradually got more and more orientalized ("adopted pasha posturings and an unsavory entourage –"), K. showed such animosity and bitterness that he completely lost all favor. He probably also became loosely involved with the discontent generals, and one day publicly refused proskynesis (". . which would have found some approval all the same !"). Then the famous

speech : first he was supposed to deliver a eulogy to Alexander at a court dinner, and then the monarch allowed himself the booming joke ("was probably more than that; given K.'s character, it was probably a calculated provocation" Agathyrsus grumbled), of demanding a speech of indictment as well. Carried away by something or other, Kallisthenes did just that, and with such force and conviction that all those in attendance turned pale (Hipponax nodded with flaming eyes : "Honest; but also what you may call imprudent. He had courage : a monument for him too : make a note of it, Agathyrsus" – – god knows, he wrote it down in all seriousness !) Alexander, too, was silent for a while in embarrassment; he apparently hadn't even expected that himself : to run up against such opposition ! Finally with a forced smile he said : "that was indeed more an example of Kallisthenes hate than of his talent." ("Could probably not even conceive that someone might seriously have a thing or two against him !") Well, they say he then won a couple of officer candidates over to his side and opinions; once again the same gambit as with Philotas : betrayal, arrest, sentence passed by the army, stoning. Or rather : as a non-Macedonian, Kallisthenes was laid in chains, put in close confinement, and dragged along to the tropics until he was literally eaten alive by vermin ("And so may it be do-hone, to all who don't believe in God and his So-hon !" Agathyrsus said in a schoolboy's singsong).

And Aristotle ? : "Yes, he's fallen out with him since then" I admitted, "we're no longer permitted to mention the names unless he mentions them himself." ("The names, plural" said Hipponax : "so then : both ! Alexander too !"). "Yes, him too" I said truthfully; took a deep breath. "Revolt of the intellectuals" Monika muttered thoughtfully (like the Tarentian).

Pirisabora : large city on the left bank. A great many canals, flowing silently, have begun to branch off from the Euphrates. Docking beside a lovely garden property. Evening; lilac is in bloom. Bathed. (Brief view of her slender, maned belly. My heart.)

19TH THARGELION : In the dark Agathyrsus was now arguing in a low voice with the boatsmen; was determined to go by way of Borsippa : "because of the famous smoked bats – oh, you've just never tried it !" he concluded, reproving; "the linen factories – a new diploidion for you, Moni !" he shouted imploringly; to me : "– and the venerable Chaldean University – ye gods, the manuscripts they have !" But Hipponax cast an energetic vote for the shortest route; I too was seized by that puzzling unrest of a traveler nearing his destination. So then.

Houses, suburban houses : rats in the leaden canals. Under bridges : Monika quickly studied the latest fashions : round yellow caps seemed to be the rage, and rings on the toes again. At once she opened a little chest, carefully washed her feet, trimmed the nails sharp with a tiny bronze knifelet (and as she did, ruthlessly raised and turned her thighs; so that I had to look away in rage); tried on a topaz outfit; held up some yellow fabric ("I can't wear yellow" she said gloomily).

Soldiers drilling : on a large field. The Baktriana Legion (Hipponax explained) under Greek instructors : big rough Persian louts from the mountains, with high chests and broad brows; physical elite ("They all swear an oath to Iskander as they call him". The boom of a marching song : ". . 3 . . 4 . . : with lances high, our phalanx ranks closed tightly . . .") Other boats beside and behind us; small talk and laughter arose above the water's disk.

Bodies : that's the way you select horses and oxen; or breeds of dogs perhaps (but Plato *does call* them the dogs of state !). Robust souls. – Human beings should be judged by that which distinguishes human beings from other living things : by their intelligence. –

"Isn't the army to be fully trusted ?" I asked Hipponax; he shrugged : "You'd best ask your uncle about that. – The Greeks and Macedonians halfway; i.e. they are of course completely addled by his fame, his greatness etc., but they constantly want to be petted, too, and given preference over foreigners, and so they mutiny a little sometimes about that. The forced conscriptions in Peloponnesia have also slackened off considerably." He looked around him, muttered : "People are saying that he wants to jettison all the Macedonians, they've mutinied on him too often. ‹Unreliable and given to rebellion› is what they say he recently called them – after the latest revolt at Opis, not long ago . . ." "Which is why everywhere he is having large units, of locals, trained by trustworthy officers . . ." Preoccupied, I asked : "Is Antipater reliable in Greece then . . ?" He bit his lower lip and laughed, soundlessly.

Bab-ilu : the metropolis. We docked in the midst of the huge buildings, in the freight harbor. (Gondolas of the rich lie at ease, like curved sickles of the moon, ivory-hued, with cinnabar ornaments on the bow, paddles of silkwood). People swarmed; set my head swimming (I have to find Aristodemos too). I ran to my trio, I asked Monika : "Where can I meet you tomorrow ?" They all hesitated a little, but finally She nodded (certain of her influence over me) : "Come toward evening to Eumolpus, the cinnamon vendor; back by the Birs Nimrud –".

Oh, the query-work : (lights were now burning everywhere; one fellow misdirected me out of courtesy). Only after two hours did I arrive at a

huge field, enclosed, an endless tent-city upon it. The guards gave me a cursory check, sent a soldier along with me (well, I definitely won't find my way back out alone !)

In the tent : an oil lamp; a broad-shouldered man of medium build; stands up from a table.

"Lampon ? !" – he cried with joy. (Now he reads the letter).

Alone : (lamp's still burning, he just stepped outside). He looked at me; was delighted at my resemblance to his brother. We ate. Then I had to sleep ("With whom did you travel ?" he asked before I lay down; I told him; he whistled and nodded; at first pleased, then lost in thought. – Tired, tired. – Eumolpus.)

Funny, lying so still; nothing sways.

20TH THARGELION : Soldier's breakfast : bread, butter, marmalade; some hot cheap wine (but with cloves in it, good !) Afterwards, Uncle Aristodemos left for an officer's conference; he has the main guard at the palace for the coming night. – I may come along. I asked : "Isn't Alexander ill ?" He furrowed his tanned brow, slowly, deeply, as if reminded, "Yes, very ill !" he said curtly; asked about Aristotle : he wasn't feeling well either; no wonder at his age. I had to report about our latest geographical conclusions; he was chiefly interested in Pytheas of Massilia's Periplus; he demanded all the details that I could still recall (and there were lots of them; it is in fact most important work) "Think of that," he said, "up there then, it's continually light – constant day and sunshine, right ? And yet it starts snowing the further north you go ? How did you explain that ?" I laid out for him one of the new hypotheses, and he nodded appreciatively : "So the sun's orbit around the fixed globe of the earth is not constantly at the level of the equator (something we've known for a long time now really !) but somewhat above it : which explains the light. (And at the same time explains as well Herodotus's curious report : ‹the Phoenicians had the sun on their right as they sailed around Africa› !) – And since the rays strike at a very shallow angle given the curvature of the earth – about like our mornings, when it's still cold as hell. – Hm. That would explain the chill then –". He pondered this for a moment, shoved critical lips forward and nodded gently : "Quite plausible" he then said in conclusion, "and that's how our knowledge of the mechanics of the universe continually advances." He stood up and stretched his arms, but then immediately planted them back in his hips : "So then ! But according to that – – there's a hood of perpetual night in the south, too – or at least deep twilight ! !" I nodded approvingly. And he shook his head :

"Crazy arrangement" he said, objecting; laughed : "Now all we need is some mythologist to locate Hades there for us." He walked to the entrance of the tent and looked out : fresh, windy morning, its blue bright and high. "Here" he said, without turning to look at me : "– over there is Ptolemaios; – the tall man; yes, the general. Next to him Eumenes of Kardia." They walked over to us; he saluted briefly and smartly, but self-assured and calm (introduced me, the civilian); and they conversed with him for some time. And asked me about Greece once too, I guess.

He brought me to the camp gate : "It's very simple", he said, "the place is laid out at right angles : 5 main streets, 5 perpendicular to them, makes 36 blocks : they are numbered sequentially from left to right; my tent is in block 19; because I'm responsible for 19 through 24. – Where are you headed : to look at the city or do you have something special in mind ? –". "Both" I said coolly; he instructed me then about the best way to get to the Great Marduk Temple, which he recommended I climb : that way you got the best general view of the city. (Almost all the soldiers saluted him, and he returned it to each of them; only once was he the first to raise his hand : "Amyntas is the one on the left, from the Pioneers. Zaleukos on the right, the best man in the map and surveying division. Behind them, Baiton the bematist, and Diognetos – you know his ‹Stathmoi› don't you ?" I saw only their backs and the colorful robes. "We'll pay Zaleukos a visit here soon –", he suggested, "This will interest him, your Thule report. – And acquaintances like that are always useful to you : what do you actually want to be one day – ? – " but he waved that off himself then : "plenty of time for that yet. Tonight. – But be back here shortly before dark; it's quite a piece to walk by the way. – So then : chaire !")

It's approximately one stadion high : Built in eight tiers, and steps all around the outside. Parts of it in good repair; two of the sides have been restored now to their full height; with a little care, the stone core really ought to be indestructible.

May well be 1000 workers. I gave the supervisor a couple of drachmas, and he let me climb it.

Up top; noon : magnificent view !

The city is divided into two halves by the river; in the one, me and the tower (please note the sequence), in the other the royal palace.

Broad, right-angled avenues; all dwellings 3 and 4 stories high for the most part. (some 5 !). In the southeast, right next to the canals, our tent city, aha. A pair of white cloudlets flowed in from the distant sea (i.e. it's not all that distant either); I'll have to ask him for a city map, it

really is too confusing (but that's no wonder, what with millions of inhabitants).

Ate a bite : (am impatient, know why, too.) Slowly it grows later. Dusty in these big cities; was nicer on the river !

Agathyrsus : Was still alone in the old cellar. (All brown in brown, with clear, spent lights and tidylike shadows. Appears to have money, our Eumolpus. At first played the total simpleton.). "Bad times for Us ! Bad times !" he shouted, preoccupied; very softly : "They're all getting out their mourning !". "We're not set up for this sort of thing at all. Apparel-wise."

A man in extravagant clothes walked by, phantasmally, in the direction of the tower : "That indeed is the aforementioned Deinokrates" said A., "the Athos fellow, – quite right. For once, not in lion-skin & club."

Just in general : "Aren't the masses at all aware of the tyranny ? !" I asked. "No, no," he answered, "95 percent are truly for him; blinded by the spectacle, drunk with notions of ruling the world; they all want another one of the countless medals, a promotion up another rung of the ladder. It's particularly evident among the soldiers, you know ! – He's introduced yet another new rank : that makes six or seven of them now; each with its special badges and privileges . . . Well !"

"Not a chance !" he said, and shook his head with conviction : "Reasonable people ? They keep quiet or die. – No, no : nothing from the outside can save us; because there's not a single comparable great power left that could lay him low militarily." "And so – – ?" I put the radical question. He gazed into the street, disinterested : "Perhaps, once he's dead . . ." he finally suggested apathetically : he was too deep for me, far too experienced, and too superior. Shrewd.

Hipponax outside the bar : And Monika; slim and maned. My heart. –

They want to leave for Alexandria : Agathyrsus agreed at once, after H. had unfolded the why in whispered tones. "Right" he said, "first-rate and logical. – There's no point in our remaining here. – – – Right ! !"

Farewell : They want to go pack at once, and extended hands. Monika came with me to the door. (Standing next to us, gigantic, black now, the cragged tower).

The moon turned down like a love-sick pale mouth beneath star eyes : My heart stamped upon her thin pert hand : You, you, you, you, you . . .

(Ran) : "High time" Aristodemos said curtly, "walk ahead of me."

The watch : tramp, tramp, tramp : 250-man strong; Argyraspids; crested helmets with dark-red plumes (Oh, I'm still out of breath). Solemn changing of the guard : that takes over a half hour; what a nice feast for the gawking eyes that find their way here in profusion every day.

Honchos stride importantly back and forth; the protracted Greek word of command.

In the palace : Adjacent, two large halls for the rank and file (of whom 25 mount simultaneous guard, every hour). I am alone with Aristodemos here.

Splendid rooms with walls clad in polished stone; lamps everywhere.

He came; left after brief reflection; came : "He's been unconscious since yesterday evening. Rattling breath. Only Philippos – the physician – with him; and a half dozen of his somatophylakes." "Is he going to die ?" I asked in alarm; he gave me a piercing look; I added, muttering incomprehensibly : ". . . let's hope . . .". "Apparently –" he answered; sat down gruffly. We chatted.

Back out again : (he leaves at prescribed irregular intervals to review the sentries).

"Yes, the India campaign –" : he leaned back contentedly (a storyteller); "to be sure" he said, "for the average man, the appearance of impetuosity, of genius with little or no preparation was cleverly maintained by all sorts of legerdemain. – In reality it had of course all been organized down to the smallest detail. Taxiles, the Indian king, had already sent a large delegation to see him in Sogdiana the year before, inviting him in, promising him aid, and above all sending along every sort of advisor, natives-guides-translators, well informed about road conditions, climate, etc.; he had even had depots set up for us. Zaleukos will explain it to you sometime; the cartographical preparations and such."

The Battle with Porus : "We've been told – i.e., from the reports that got through – that this was a masterpiece of the art of war : one of the most brilliant military achievements of all time : the fording of the river ‹in the face of the enemy› . . ." ?

He laughed cruelly, till tears came : "Yes, yes, Lampon" he said, "because we had a core of a mere 120,000 first-rate well-equipped troops, seasoned and accustomed to victory for years now. And Porus, a hastily scraped-together 35,000 ! Besides, of course, a couple dozen elephants : Well, they were taken care of by the archers and scythe-wielders. – You know, I really had more admiration for that old Indian prince, who went into desperate battle for his country." He was already waving off my objection with one hand : "Spare yourself (and me) the heroic anecdotes; that's what Choirilos and his hangers-on are paid for (or rather, more correctly, will be paid for) : he wrecked bestial havoc in India ! – Ah, rot : securing the empire's eastern borders ! Megalomania; nothing more."

And he told about Massaga, the capital of Assakanus : Alexander was

all the more certain he could take the place with one blow, since the Indians, who had dared an attack, had been easily driven off; but he paid for his cockiness with a wound to the foot, and the loss of a goodly number of men. Even the standard siege brought no success; nor the machines, the high wooden tower and so on. Finally, some of the defenders asked for permission to pull out, which was immediately granted of course, since one then had hopes of conquering the city. So the mercenaries departed, and encamped opposite our army –", he bent down to me, full of scorn, spoke directly into my face : "That night, on Alexander's orders, they were surrounded, and, despite a most courageous defense, were murdered, their women too. 10,000. – The true motive for this unbelievable villainy was purely his private revenge for the wound he had received, and his fury that someone had so much as dared resist him for that long ! This was the ‹New Order› that he was to bring about ! In Sangala, I saw 17,000 slain, and 70,000 driven into slavery. A city of the Brahmans – the native intellectual elite – was treated especially cruelly : because they spoke of freedom and decline, and ‹incited› the Indians against him, as he put it . . ."

"Oh, that was something," he said approvingly : "right, they did not want to go any further ! A few rumors were sown : the advance would last ‹only› a couple more years yet; a mere 14 kings, each with around 250,000 men were still to be conquered. Above all, many of the generals, the older ones, would no long go along. He raged, made speeches, flattered their ambition, their avarice, stormed, removed himself from their gaze for two days; I saw him during that time; (was guarding the tent) : he sat there like a demon, drank, his eyes blazing, biting his fingers : I could see sure as death, that some calamity was coming ! The third day he emerged; spoke benevolently to his army, granted the return home, but laughed too much for me as he did. – – Just a moment. –"

He came back in, gave a chilled shrug of his shoulders : "Brisk out there. –" he protested. Yawned indignantly : "Just 10 drachmas for every night of guard duty : I wouldn't need to work for the rest of my life – !" Yawned sonorously.

"Yes, well then. – Yes, he had 12 monstrous altars built where the camp had stood, and commanded that we leave behind gigantic contraptions built just for the occasion and that looked as if only some race of giants could use them : in his opinion, to serve as a monument to be admired by endless generations to come. For us it was one more proof of how things must look inside a mind like that."

"Oh, don't say that ! : The terrors were known in detail ! Twice before him,

something similar had been tried; in schemes undertaken by Semiramis and then Cyrus, who both lost their entire armies in the same desert ! Besides which, there were the constant warnings of all the natives we interrogated about the region; I was present a couple of times myself. So then, that's not an explanation; nor that he wanted to secure his empire to the south : why, every child knew that it was an uninhabited and uninhabitable desert, so there was no military danger for us. No, no, no, no !"

He bent down closer again, furrowed his brow : "He had been crazy for years", he said softly and calmly, "not just in a figurative sense – that too, of course – but above all in a moral sense. Just like every other grand tyrant. And so I : I, Aristodemos, son of Sophron : am telling you that : in raving, demonic rage he had made the decision to jettison the army that had prevented him from ruling the entire ecumene. – Now listen !

"The army was carefully sorted into three parts : Nearchos received the most reliable men for the fleet, i.e., the Phoenicians, Egyptians, island Greeks (besides, the seamen needed to be saved for later landing attempts); Krateros with those men who might still possibly be useful departed to the north. He himself, in order to guarantee the destruction of the main contingent, and to enjoy the revenge befitting the son of a god, led the condemned into the sea of sand ! And how we went : you cannot conceive of the booty that was plundered ! What satrap manners individual generals had assumed ! ! Perdikkas and Krateros, the sportsmen, had sand and mats carted in wagons behind them, enough to cover eight square stadia ! !"

Footsteps outside : a large figure; almost fat, majestic, all in gold braid. Brief report : he laid a soothing hand on A.'s shoulder; my presence was explained. "Oh, poorly, poorly" he said anxiously (he meant Alexander); departed rolling.

"Leonnatos" he said quickly : "he was another one : He and Meleagros : they always had anchored nets with them, so that they could enclose an area for hunting, the size of a five-hour walk. Just imagine that : five hours ! –" He gave a dry laugh : "Once, he was left behind to requisition provisions for the fleet. Came upon a fishing village of seven huts, immediately named it ‹Alexandreia›, through an interpreter commanded the 40 inhabitants to call it that in the future ! – We did have our jokes sometimes; but that's typical of the whole enterprise."

The great desert : "Thirst. You often came across myrrh trees, with lovelier shapes and decorated with richer secretions of their costly resin than elsewhere. Thirst. A thorny tough creeping vine attracted attention –

would interest you – : could not be ripped apart, even by several men, but easily cut in two with the most miserable 2-drachma knife. Thirst. Here and there aromatic shrubs; fragrance traveled by night across the sand, invisible and inaudible too." (I thought of robes of cinnamon scent; shoes of clove wood : for Monika).

"Yes," he said : "Thirst. The march was set at an average of 500 stadia from the coast, but often reached it. Once an empty rocky ravine was filled with thundering water, swirled foamed for an hour, was empty again : crazy country. – Soon thirst returned."

The ichthyophagi : Their bodies were shaggy, their nails unclipped, so that they could catch and spear fish with them. For clothing they apparently made do with the skin of a large fish; mostly they went naked, male and female; breeding as do the beasts of the woods, every female the common property of every male. Individual bands lived in bays rendered inaccessible at the back and flanks by sheer rock walls : The front was embraced by open sea. When all things were made, nature must have allowed them to spring from the earth itself on the spot. Mysterious. – Here they sat, without a single tool for their survival or comfort, and free of all care, waited for the largess of nature, their only effort being to lay rows of stones at the narrow entrances of the hollows along the coast. The oncoming tide filled these basins twice daily, and as it ebbed through the stones, left behind fish and the mute sorts of sea-beasts. And now the joyous pack hurried to their plunder; threw the smaller fish to one side, onto a rocky ledge in the sun; they did battle with the larger ones with stones and heavy fish bones. After a while the half-cooked fish were turned over on the stones, and finally grabbed by the tail and shaken; the tender flesh fell off, was kneaded atop a smooth rock into a dough, along with crushed mussels, jellyfish; and, without any distribution, devoured in common : each took from the mass as much as he was capable of eating. Normally the feasting went on for four days; only on the fifth did they feel the need to drink. Painfully, communally, the whole band climbed up into the ravines, searching for hollows in the rocks where they might find some deposit of moisture. Stretched out on all fours, each now slurped up as much as his body could hold. The horde clumsily beat its retreat, to lie for a whole day evaporating the immoderate volume of water : then the fish banquet began anew; and so they spent their days without any other pursuit, without care or concern for any human enterprise.

He made a gesture with his hand, raised his eyebrows : "Don't ask how we marched on ! Only by night now, by the way. Our captured guides, of course, no longer knew the way either." He passed his fist across his

face, yawned again (brutally wide-open by the by; not even a thought of holding his hand in front of it !) "In any case, about a quarter of the army was left in the end. – And now came the carousing : thousands literally staggered down the highway ! Alexander himself rode as Dionysius-God on a golden wagon; propped upon a rollicking, laughing Hephaistion. – – If you've seen that, my dear Lampon, you've seen enough. And what had come before and came after."

Getting toward morning : His greatness as a commander. He wrinkled his nose : "Well, well ! He had unprecedented luck, and incompetent foes. Someone, e.g. who was quite capable of stopping him – Memnon of Rhodes – died unexpectedly, and as a foreigner had also constantly been held in check by the mistrustful Persian cabinet. Antipater and Parmenion could have done it too." He held his hand out to me as if to make a bet : "Put a capable man – Eumenes of Kardia if you like – at the head of good troops, exclusively Asian if you like, and for once you'll see the Macedonians on the run. Then only chance will decide it." He grew thoughtful; he asked more softly : "I've heard Antipater has already made a pact with the Aetolians ? Hm ! Safety first. Will that ever be a bloody shambles; for generations." He considered; puffed contempt : "Most of them are just wolves who want to despoil thrones; not a one has the right – nor any sort of an ideal, either."

Someone called from outside : "Guards !" He swept his crested helmet on, exited rapidly. Returned with eyes asparkle : "It's almost over !" he said hastily. "Right now." I sat up straight, propped against the table : "Are you quite sure ?" I whispered, pleading half insane, "– absolutely no chance – ! !" He stroked it with his hand : "Not the least ! Aristotle did a masterful job of dosing it." He gave a short laugh at the way I gaped at him : "Didn't you know that ? You've just come from him : – an old fox ! ! – He gave the poisoned liquid to Antipater, who gave it to his son Kassandros, who, exactly eight days ago, slipped it into his goblet. Was calculated precisely. He's dying, all the signs of high fever; broken by ever deepening fits of unconsciousness."

Footsteps; Many footsteps. Many : Noise in the inner chambers. The marshals come out : six, eight, twelve : "Alexander is dead ! !" (Depart waving their arms, arguing : already ! And I had come to see a hero !).

Someone (an officer) relieved us : Aristodemos stretched; handed over the post. Spoke about sentry strength. They murmured. Earnestly; as befits men.

Want to freshen up with an early bath.

I walked to the edge of the canal : yellow and matutinal green flowed the water. The sun swelled rustily up out of the reed patch. I looked across,

mindlessly, chilled. Empty was I; spare and senseless. Aristodemos grandly dried himself off. (Shameless, these soldier types !) He blew water from his crinkled nose. Sneezed; : "Cheers, Uncle !".
"Yesyes."

THE DISPLACED

i

The precocious moon slipped, rickety skewed, over the railroad embankment; just once flesh sated. Bushes still adorned with some fresh rain; and able to take up smoking again. A fat cloud floozy stretched gray shoulders behind the evening woods; macaroni and the hard wedge of swiss grated in. Two whirly-winds ran up to me, with gentle dusty manes, transparent yellow bodies; strayed closer abashed, quivering gathered their veils, turned and sighed ravishing (but then here came the Trempenau delivery van, and they had to follow, dragged, with long maenadically wrenched back : the guy with the car always has a better chance !)

The sunken sun left the red of blotting paper behind for a long time, with the inks of night seeping down into it from above. Then rain flowed aslant about the bony trees; wind gave hunched refugees pokes in hair and eyes, get a move on, the weathercocks chackled on the rooftops. Gray development roofed with slate; for the damnteenth time my rounds around Benefeld, forever circling outside. In the bald sky the wind echoed much; radio waltzed off past all the bleak dormers : there they sat with furious facial panes by 25 watts; my clayey feet drove me down the trickle path, till heart was scraped bare as my coat, vapid, vapid. No compensation payment, household aid, revaluation of east-savings (a curse upon that cabinet !). The stars appeared like thieves in trenchcoats, in furtive cloud alleys. But, for all that, three men to every room; but, for all that, rearmament, hi-ho : what oxen they must be who choose the butcher for their king ! The black wind carried on like a lunatic, jostled and shouted; he thrust the next branch through my brow, whistled to a pal and spat rain : he came howling up from behind, pushed my hat up and strangled at my scarf. But, for all that, the resettlement still was no go : no matter the occupation, at 65 a man's shunted onto a sidetrack; but the statesman, senilissimus, apparently is just getting nice and mature at 75, ice cold, totally inhuman, gritty gruesome grouchy grim graves. Three gray bat-folk crossed me in long tumbling cloaks, and now there appeared the black roof-peak of the

Lower Saxon farmer : No one who was not a tiller of the soil has a right to speak of the horrors of war : the everlasting regulations, my good man ! May Ol' Scratch himself ! A lean silver owl hangs immobile in the piny woof; at the pond : tree-fellows alurk in foggy rags, arms like cudgels, held up knotty high. Indoors, table-curse over slices with syrup; moldy walls, who can heat this hole; and on into Wetzel's Belphegor (thankgod Beier wasn't here yet); and this is existing, so-called, what we're doing here. (The wind brawl went right on raging outside.)

ii

> He was regarding the third crate with such disparagement that his face rolled up; then he motioned to Müller with his shoulder : "Block. . . . ?" "head," the latter answered gloomily and likewise vaulted his back : "Block ? . . . . head !", till the jampack in the corner overburdened. "The bed first !" and from below District-Refugee-Welfare-Officer Schulz admonished into all the red freight cars : "Always load 'em clear to the top. – Tight." And to us : "Always clear to the top !" At his shoulder, Lepke said cautiously : "Block –" and Müller carewornly : "head." Even the wind was much too cold, in the end, prob'ly just the sweeper-outer, the bouncer, and then Schulz lifted himself up on his toes, looked at his list, and with chalk inscribed our car ALZEY.

I bought one crate (without a lid) from Lepke, Vehlow brought the other for free from the Waldorf school. First the books, it was like playing building blocks. In the long one, newspapers laid along the bottom, and then the few wearables – baloney ! the tarp has to go at the bottom of course; so then : take it all out again. Excelsior in and around the two cups, those then into the large pot; the loving-cup has its own little box, and the liqueur glasses fit in the corners. Needs to be labeled too, so I painted hand-high india ink and entered it as per regulation in the transport list, triplicate. I took my farewell at twelve midnight, so at least I didn't see any more of their asinine faces. Intensive village stroll, for the last time once more, only rarely a house still shed light, I'll not weep a tear for you : hadn't the ‹German Parties of the Right› once again ‹gained› 24% of the vote their first modest time out ? ! Wind whistled at my ear and fumbled hastily at my coat; and I knew then, I was to join them once more, even the sharp-edged star pointed into the woods, march. The heath roads lay beautiful and empty at midnight : soft gray-polished asphalt, above the pond of light in

the coarse cloud-moor, the gust shoved me forward and I froze away happily, flowed along roads, ran down more lukelost ways, a distant motorcycle plunged sniveling after its smudge of light, water babbled succubusly beneath my leap and filled my shoes with drowsily icy caresses; and the chauffeur just laughed, as we shoved our few crates onto the truck next morning (here, for the first time, the bed planks fell apart, and I had to search for rusty wire on the mocking slope). (By way of precaution, one last trip to the bushes, and my puddle ring-snaked under the bilberry bush; crazy biological world !) They each got a cigarette, since in any case Müller and Lepke were headed into Fallingbostel for their unemployment; I thought my roundhouse farewell curses again, so, and now get a move on, coachman ! The Lower Saxon sun beamed from the windy blue-smashed November sky; it too was happy that once again there were a couple of refugees fewer. Many were already standing there, tipping cupboards up and in, others came rattling up, the guy with a trailer, and one even had two live goats in his latticed crate. The District-Refugee-Welfare-Officer piloted us to the freight car; we nimbly piled my gimcrackery up in the corner : goodbye, Herr Müller : even from the curve they were still waving homespunly, one hand cramped on the side-rail. A neat little truck trotted our way (. . . . .) I was still restraining a leap off (. . . . .) made a nastily elegant curve, and the girl's ductile voice asked : "Here's where we board !". She pleased me so, that I spontaneously lent a hand and helped the driver, o you menjou moustache, heave her stuff up : many solid crates ("Careful : radio's in that one !"), cupboards tables chairs with wrapped legs, and she smiled mightily at me in payment.

iii

> The sun brushed across her plaid skirt (behind her : heavy frost in bilberry bush, and frozen yellow sand, that you could still crumble quite easily). Among suitcases : "Shall we walk to the Purse ?". A dust-fellow rose up, middle-sized, waltzed broadly down the street toward us, ran over us, narrow backs. Trains appeared in earnest, halted, un- and loaded scurriers, smoked, snaked slowly-quickly away, blue cloudlets flew swiftly above sunny tracks : desolate. Eyes like bright bird shouts. "Shall we go ?" Now they were deftly astonished beneath the relaxed brow. – "Yes, let's !"

Her suitcase was absurdly heavy; but now, her hands in her coat, just a wide modern hunter's pouch over her subtle shoulder, she had to stroll

slowly along beside me (our furniture, too, was standing back there, abandoned cunningly close together !). The Purse's two taprooms; only half full; at the window a tiny round table tempted. I shoved my shoe-tip to the edge of the nearest sun-spot and asked : "Are you alone too ? !" She considered, just as one ought; then gracefully cradled the chalice of her lips : "Uh-huh." Watched appreciatively as I spread the two chairs full and barricaded our corner of the world with the suitcases. Sit a while. "Katrin," she declared glumly : "and a poor widow." (Her husband killed in '44 after six months of marriage; and she's not catholic either.) She then ate two chic cold-cut sandwiches and thick Edam with fiery red waxen rind, drank loamy thermos coffee. An extended family moved into the adjoining long rectangle : father, mother, six grown sons and daughters; over by the stove Borck, small and hunchbacked and making possessive noises, arrived with his Högfeldt series of twelves, and driveled with his fangs. "You know him ?" Katrin asked outside, as we headed off heathwards. "I was an interpreter at the auxiliary police academy, and he was the quartermaster". "And now you translate books." The sun came down the path again, shadows escaped over fields, the forests echoed still more with wind. I stretched my army coat, Sir Walter Raleigh, across the tree stump, and the Queen took a seat. Perused the atlas, Marburg, Westerburg, Alzey, beyond. Out of the blue : "You're not cold !" Black voice, face hunnish pale, heart huntress of the Lüneburg Heath, sauvage et non convertie, with eyebrow whips and mouth for a bow. Wind bowled us over with soughing glass burdens, branches beat gentle bony flurries, in the grass accompanying rattles. The booty beside it, slain in the weeds. Her yellow hands flickered around the angular book, the broad gray thonged sandal lifted gingerly at times and drummed bushmanlike signals. Oh skirt and blouse ! Katrin smiled, sly and lazy, on past me, abstracted, right through me, for me, on over me and away. Oh skirt. Blue-white, the chessboard sky churned with treetops. And blouse.

iv

> Sky already striped red-blue like a carter's smock, and the wind blew such cold dust against our cheeks that Katrin energetically said "Holy Danube !" to him; nevertheless we watched this last evening, until it grew desert red, utterly vacant, and altogether excessive. Then we walked, one behind the other, through the stony vestibule back to the big taproom, where it swarmed terribly with children, lynched coats all about; and voice goulash in yellow light gravy. "Shall we have a bite too !"; I gazed meanwhile submissively through the panes at the angular night : for the rotating god so loved the world; ahyes. (Soda 30, bouillon 30, coffee 50).

Overstuffed laughter : "Unn aygg" (that's Borck, naturally); the gaunt woman girds her apron about her and makes sandwiches for many children : they banged against each other around the room and chirped themselves breathless; (one poured over the atlas in learned wonder, what strange names countries have : ‹ire,› ‹nether,› even ‹fin›); young man with squint-yellow maid, velvety bottomless Slavic face : naturally : and now from the baby carriage, too, came soft and drunken squints; across from us the old man in formal, dark-striped trousers, his silken-gray in-her-fifties : a cyclops couple grazed imposingly beneath roses (?). The innkeeper seemed to find things unusually quiet; he made but one grab for the knob behind him : "and the fellah's – darkened windah – closes softly – not a whispah" came the supple exultations, violin whistled bowing ever higher, and the yahoos grinned and blew moorish fog from their cheek pouches. Lots of retirees. "As far as possible, they've picked out people who won't take someone else's job," Katrin, the more observant, whispered. "Why did you sign up actually ?". "Oh," she said (recalling it only with reluctance) : "I was rooming with a gruesome old woman, you know, one of your ‹genteel› olladies, with a totally addlepated daughter. She was forever enthusing about ‹our glorious Bismarck›, and wanted 2 pence and a psalm for every pail of water –" she delicately pleated mouth and nose, as she was forced to move past the ugly memories : "and you ?" "About the same : a mildewed cellar for two – together with a grocer –" I hastened to add when I saw how her eyes had begun to crackle (but it really had been the case !), "He's decided to get married now, and for three – and/or four, five, i.i. – it was really way too small. – And so as a gentleman I simply signed up to move out." In the midst of it all, Refugee-Welfare-Officer Schulz entered, all enterprise and riding breeches, with two attendants in tow : "I shall now read the lists", he began with such zeal and perfidy, and made a grab for

one of them as if the monolog from Faust awaited us. Did it twice in fact, just to make things more interesting. Each time, at ‹Katharina Loeben›, she raised 3 fingers and looked about her, attentive and amused ("I'd like to take a little tri-hip with you" : departure's set for 4 in the morning, i.e., if we're lucky, about 6 !). Outside briefly : moon pushed his way, all stiff and colonel-general, through the rank and file of pallid stars; the wind murmured and experimented with scrambled clouds; a locomotive dawdled sedately around the station and let out a whistle : it's all ‹medicine›. "And now you're going to lie down," I ordained, "and you'll use my coat. – I'll stay awake and keep watch." "I have a blanket, really –" she acted amazed. "Then put it under your head. – I want at least one souvenir. – Please." "And there you'll sit and freeze," she said, wild and happy and proud, stood up, yawned discreetly with her shoulders, and meanwhile I made her a bed on the floor under the window. (Uptop, the silver ermine slipped smoothly through cloud cracks, greedy, ever in pursuit of that quivering blue star).

v

A freezing man, covering himself with both hands; on the floor the female head in black coats; sad solitary flame in the stove niche, large and red-locked. "Abeer" for the mangy 1-mark bill and he slides me pennies still minted yellow : where you headed ? Don't know. Outside : hollow-honed moon lies on dark velvet cushion, part of some dangerous cutlery. Stand with dreary head or for all I care ten steps further on. Moon light; fir candlesticks; nightcloud roof : three cheers for us, right ?

The last Silesian nook is going to sleep ("Git some rest y'self. / Ah, claims he's an 'nspector. / Whether he really is, I can't say; tanyrate always signs his name that way.") The brain-damaged fellow, and drunk to boot, babbled lecherously (or as the old Gessner would say : exceeding vnchaste) : well, he's got his feeble-minded license, so no need to get excited, one finds oneself in any case a lifer in intellectual solitary. I once knew a man who would go to the attic whenever his gorge rose, and pound nails in a board for half an hour, straight and crooked, whichever, in gloomy sport. And did he feel any easier then ? Emptier, yes. And life went on for a couple of weeks. What was on my day's (or, rather, night's) schedule ? The gulp from the canteen : judging by color and taste, the coffee had been drawn directly from the Acheron. (Poverty of language : a man who hears nothing is called ‹deaf›; who sees nothing, ‹blind›. But what do you call

him if he smells nothing ? ‹Lucky› maybe, my lazy brain suggested to me : but in any case, what ? And if he tastes nothing, and I gazed with greater nausea into the screw-threaded aluminum hole). Moon, eavesdropper at the cloud wall, shoved his bald leprous skull, wrapped in bluish rags, into the window above Katrin; large-pored, lovesickly, 'veyouheardthefactsoflife, brassy as wisdom. Soft the tavern radio with "Variations on La Paloma" : these consisted of their alternately playing the thing an octave higher or lower and finally so stutteringly fast that it gave you complete jitters. Then a mixed duet praised Kadum lanolin soap in such an asinine way that I once again impatiently demanded the next white dove, for which indeed, in hasty Northwestern German Radio fashion, they did not keep me waiting long : and they consider themselves the lofty cultural bastion of our time ! May God forbid and our Lady of Guadaloupe ! The old fur-cap snored like a zipper pulled up and slowly back with a whistle. (A modern danse macabre; as bus driver; as graduate chemist; as chancellor; as bobsled steerer; as refugee-welfare-officer.) Sleepless lightbulb in the hall; news whispering from door ajar. Outside : sky inscribed with the star marks of astronomers; and the moon, too, still loitered through the night; (among hunlike clouds; and again I swept my way through the thick tarry air).

vi

There was a dreadful jolt, sparkish flew by silky red, and we rolled again a piece. The light split through the compartment with honed axes, jagged bundles of swords charged up us, the great bronze saw was still gliding through Everyone's face; no end of blusters, and we sat as if in a dark tapered magic shell. Each other. In the valley's paunchy bowl, fog roiled; thick willow heads blushed. Beside me the thick humanimal was rattling again in three-quarter time, his thick thigh swayed and twitched, and I was glad that I alone sat next to him. Katrin gave a haggard laugh, but merrily blew on her little harmonica "Sweet homeland, adé", with aigu.

Morning's broad bleak was tacked to the fleeing night with flat moon pin. Then : sky red-etched with migrating clouds; her face turned very red and yellow as well; we laughed at each other, and tormented our insensate hands. I dug the book out of my pocket : ". . . He brought her there, unto a silver cloud, / unto an isle, beneath eternal clouds / and thus forever hid from sailors' gaze." "– Lovely –" she stretched and leaned back harder against our rumpled dirt cloud. ". . . You are the selfsame one, / for whom

I've often wept in depths of night ! / And seeing you, my wishes all fell mute, / while from your eyes flowed peace and earthly lust." (Wieland : earthly lust : yes.) "Ah ha," she said, amazed. The sun's fire grazed its way higher into the strawy morning; the gray hawmoon vanished in some moor or other : farewell Lower Saxony : it's your own fault that I've meant nothing to you ! Katrin again brought out the hot-water bottle of Red Cross coffee, and we each ate a well-intentioned bread-and-honey. The old lady in the compartment explained : "All I want's a church right in town where I can hear the blessed mass read every mornin'," and cast a blessedish look about her, white hair like puffs of fog in her ears. Ah yes, "How late's it getting to be ?". "Well –" I was guessing, "departure at 5:52 – Eickeloh – Schwarmstedt – Burgwedel – well : nine ?" The Leine meandered around muscular hills; next to us someone was playing the ancient American patented zither with insertable polka-dotted page (oh, I dunno, something of the intrepid sort, and ending suspiciously like Ohgermanyhighinhonor). A Silesian cobbler from Volkersdorf knew Katrin's Greiffenberg : "How 'bout that !" And the names somersaulted : Prenzel Park, Kienberg, Reservoir, Munko-Müller, "Rietcher on Sechshäusern"; and she turned to me and explained it breathlessly : the house on Gerberstrasse. "I was forever making dancing puppets," she described the cardboard figures exactly, you pulled the thread and the little guy gave a charming twist of hands and feet. I paid in kind and mentioned the matchboxes I was forever stuffing as a child : with tiny writing utensils, thin sharpened pencil stubs, short-staffed steel pens, and stacks of paper cut to box size, plus needle and thread, a folded map of the world in Mercator projection. (Even then I had a sense of how dubious all possessions are that can't be stuffed into a matchbox !) And the zithering carpenter began to enthuse religiously about Loretto, and I made a note for later pondering ‹Should carpenters believe in God ?›. I at any rate would prefer one who did not require such hypotheses for his framework.

vii

My godfather, the stench ! Of the three doors, one was missing entirely; urine slopped yellow on each'n'every tile; brown piles coiled like ropes, smeary pies or teocallical tiers; squishy pulp, dreadfully drenched, help, light from book-sized panes of filth. Whispering balancing with disgust, I pulled down my pants, out of here, and legs astraddle, still with paper under my chin to the scarred stone threshold. Wind bustled iron-hard and everywhere trains jerked. Exhausted. The platforms fit donkey-gray beneath their lean roofing, tight against the drab apartment houses : this then is Göttingen Central Station.

Of all times, while we were eating – pea soup with a slim sinewy Indian-red wiener – came the announcement that we now had to change cars : Alzey to the rear, Westerburg to the front. Since naturally we were up front, we first scalded and besmeared ourselves quickly, and then stormed with our baggage far, far to the rear – – as empty a one as possible – – : here ! the young girl made quite a nasty face, as if she could just barely stand up in this throng; I cracked the door, and correct : she was alone with her mother, both brown and woolly ("handknit" Katrin, the expertess, rasped). Within a minute she was already conversing with both. Weber was their name, the husband also soon arrived out of the chunky wind; in the inventory of their furniture, the centerpiece was "the handmade wrought-iron clothes tree" : "I'm a master smith." he said confiding, "was a lovely house : two stories. And some farmin' with it. We picked up 'nd left in '45, when Ivan arrived, into Thuringia. And in Hanover, then, I worked in the machine works. But all we had was a livin'room 'nd alcove, and our little gal here's got too big now." We nodded : got the picture ! "We want to better ourselves". "You can never better yourself," I decided, shaking my head, based on a wealth of moving-about experience in a long and ill-applied life – a glance at Katrin : "Especially when it starts so awfully well." She searched through her purse with satisfaction. (Then I went, as noted, to find a toilet, and clambered again up over cement ligaments and black iron tendons). The raining queen sobbed unconsolably and flailed her hair against the panes; the dusk of the compartment grew deeper, and gathering wool now, we spelled out the ads; wind cursed choppily; they shunted us here, there. "Yes, they're good folks," (were alone for once), but : "has One of them ever sobbed over Ludwig Tieck, at so much beauty ? Or let themselves be adopted by Hoffmann ?" I first had to explain what I wanted : across the way the battery-powered postal carts hummed from one light funnel to another; like us, a trainload of English half-tracks waited in a stupor; they

can do anything with soldiers and refugees ! At one point Weber told about how they had rammed a tree with their car (aha, just had to mention that !), and his broad head turned slowly hither and back again. "Was the tree hurt ?" I automatically asked, and they laughed, and thought it was a joke. Next to us dozed an old maid, before whom the Webers had already fled once : "Good thing you're here," they confided to us, and we gradually grew more intimate, as far as it goes. Then finally, here came the wooden punch at our backs, everyone sat up, checked if the luggage was falling, and for a quarter hour I closed my eyes. Then the town was gone; much romping of the air, damp lights traveled along the horizon; shadow horses chasing back after trees; the disk of dusk fogged over grayer still. Each station gallowed us with arc lamps, hacked hands off, hastily coffined the striped torsos in planks of light too short for the job; so that's how Katrin looked with no head.

viii

Backs like wood, and night in the large train station, desolate and light-rimmed; Gütermann's Thread swaggered above wall smudges; the yellowest arc lamps obliquely blasted our compartment. Hoo-ey sang the locomotive into the brindled night, setting Katrin suppling, and the old smith bungling. Some fellow banged a hammer desperately against the wheel below us and yelled a monotone "aeh-eeh !" The cone of light pressed deeper into the yielding benches, between my legs, swept up onto the worn-out wall through the baggage-net lattice. In the ensuing black, Katrin banged her teeth into my mouth; the train groaned and surged night-blindly about us.

In the next compartment, the elderly lady was now lying beneath her desiccated dress; so mother and daughter joined her there. Katrin had three blankets (one mutely for me), I laid out the foundation for her, nary-a-wrinkle smooth, then the coated maiden on top, and the last one stretched out over feet and shoulders : "You comfortable ?". So then, top right, Katrin; behind at my back the master smith. "Can I get you anything else ?" Two dark eye ponds, stiff lash reeds; I took one quivering breath, and from the north came a silver draught, lids froze over the mirrored circles. The uncouth floor poked me all over; the gauzy lamp glimmered black; the daughter groped by once more into the naked john and stayed a long time. The doors mutinied in their frames, balls of light met small and insane, the smith strode and cursed at the same time in his heavy handworker's dream.

The ice melted from the ponds; I quickly propped myself on one arm and our faces whispered very dense words. "The way they all can sleep," she, with cautious amazement,"I was such a restless spirit even as a little girl, my grandfather was a cobbler, and the old folks worked dreadfully long hours, so that I always lay awake nights and listened to the pounding," her mouth fumbled sweetly and undifferentiatedly through the memories, above me, on soft lip shoes, red velvet slippers : there was a grandmother sewing for an apron factory; Pastor Hein on his bicycle with scandalously billowing robe; once, near Wiesa, she had almost rolled over the barrier into the Queis, and even today, I impatiently held fast. "Me ? I don't need their beggary, period !" she replied disparagingly : "I get my pension, you know : 180 marks !". "That much ?" I asked astonished, "I thought the state valued dead husbands at a mere 60 ?". "That's true," she answered, cooling off, "and mine wasn't even worth that much : just imagine : married during the war, 8 days to ourselves; and then when he came on leave for the first time in six months, no more than three days into it we caught him with a neighbor woman, his mother and I did !", she curtly pulled her hands from mine, shifted her shoulders away, and turned onto her back. Then all you can do is simply lie down and go to sleep too. The great bony fellow had his red scarf and tommy shirt around him and said out loud : "The govinment's not gonna help us, so we'll just strike out on our own." And we reloaded the wagons and flowed all over those roads; the wind beat folds into our blanket coats; the buckets clattered at the rear around the inflamed tail-lights. Atop one of them sat a woman, katrin-slim, the withered child in her amputated arm, and she blew a dangerous song on a Jew's harp, terrifying the fat locals on their farms till they whispered long-distance for police. Come evening, the guide distributed nothing but matches, and we crept in every direction away from the multi-armed roadsign. – Toward morning our journey grew more impetuous. Fir cripples emerged from white moors; puddles ran by on snaky paths; many birches floated back through the heath. At a crossroad, a stranger held his rigid bike with both gloves; rimed plank fences galloped with us for another little way; then the forest again cried havoc above us.

ix

"Take a look : all the others are already shaving !". "You mean you're absolutely sure you don't like a man with a beard ?" – she crinkled her chin in disgust, and I groaned a little more, but then went to stand in line at the tap. "With cold water !"; such a mighty reproach was therein, that in alarm she petted me (until she got used to the stage voice). "Hey, what's that over there ? !" Exasperated, I turned my soaphead and complained through my nose : okay, either I shave, wee thing, or I explain the Ehrenbreitstein, choose ! As I was drying myself off, there stood opposite me a ruined row of buildings; the refugee fed his goat; and from the rear came the Red Cross with noodles and horsemeat (but mostly innards and gristle !)

I declined without hesitation, because there would be no point in it, but the Webers didn't want to miss out on anything; so we gave them our breakfast chits to bring ours back, while we guarded the baggage. (6) said the Limburger Station clock as we shoved off onto a side-track for a half hour : there we were all alone in the old wooden bower and whispered and groped. Wind had raked stars loose too, and we watched for quite a while, as the Webers searched for the compartment ("But the blindest of them are sons of gods !" I quoted Hölderlin, bird of morning song, and as proof passed my strong minus cylinders to Katrin : so there ! "Oh, 'd give you a headache !" she said demurring "your eyes are that bad ? !"). The children, of course, were boarding the train as it rolled, the head conductor screeched, parents galloped; as always, nothing happened to the dear little angels, but the adults practically broke their legs in imperial leaps. Well, and the cocoa : so who was right ? ! "Looks like rain," Old Weber said, cozily warming his hands on his coffee crockery; I left to Katrin the now inevitable "Tastes like it too", and looked out the window into the Lahn Valley gushing past : gray silken hills, and it was not raining, and the stream shot and rolled with us around the curves. (Amusing notion : what if, in the course of centuries, the angle of light's refraction from air into water were to change ? Likewise the angle of the ecliptic : after all, animals and plants evolve ! It's well known that the atmosphere is slowly escaping and so keeps getting thinner : therefore as the density of the refractory medium changes, so too the aforesaid angle ! ! I know No One who can be right as often as I !). "Push the window up all the way," Katrin said, sneezing the command ! once more (just as Father Aristotle maintains : for each nostril !); wellnow : once more, and it really looked so charming that, very much to her irritation, I enthused over it greatly almost to Koblenz. Yes,

that is the Rhine : over there the Mosel slowly flowed along out of lovelier valley coils; I had to fork over the name of every castle ruin, while fabricating tribal sagas that would have made a genealogist hug me (nevertheless : whether it could last as far as Bingen was uncertain, given that much unused capacity for absorption and that many grimy vestigial walls). Viewed from the left bank of the Rhine, Germany looked quite unwonted (what a role the map image plays !); one belongs in some sense "to the West". It was, however, downright cold here between river odor and sleep deprivation, and shaving a major torment. There we stood and stood; the Weber ladies staunchly pulled out their giant needles and wool again and began mechanically to knit, purl two, knit two, and that would give the sweaters a caterpillar pattern, Katrin merrily explained.

x

The long wrinkled stream, hollow and muddy, swung lazily along beside us; flooded islets; mourning groups of trees; sour facades like "Lorelei", as if a car had just driven away; docks and stench of black tugs; hatched by drizzle (and the freight train on the other side of the Rhine : "If it has 60 cars, everything will turn out alright !" – – – : "58 – ?". She beamed nevertheless in all directions : "Well then : minor difficulties." Eye spell, lip witch, chin magic, leg conjury, Katrin la sorcière. Her fingers danced for joy across the purse on her lap and snapped it my way). The vineyards looked dismal, like their map symbol.

"And now he shoved an armed chair nearer and bade the Electour Prince to seat himself in it and under no circumstance to rise up from it nor speak a word – else would he behold his certain Death with his own eyes. With the same warning, the Chamberlain was placed behind the chair. Thereupon the Hungarian wrapped about the heathen-headed goblet a wire, which he led into the furnace. Next, all the while speaking softly, he drew three circles about the Electour Prince and finally, from the outermost circle, drew a straight line to the furnace. The lights were placed in the form of a triangulum about the plate. The Hungarian knelt down now immediately before the oven and continued softly to pray (?). From time to time he took some simple from a pot standing near him and threw it into the flames, whereupon a mighty cracking arose each time in the oven and the blaze did increase exceedingly. This perchance continued for an hour and the Chamberlain observed how the wire leading from oven to goblet began to glow, how thick drops formed on the goblet, but that within, it did flash and play

with the most beautiful colours, much as he had ofttimes seen in the silver forge. He perceived how by degrees the goblet was expanding and stretching, did glare and increase in height, how the heathen heads as well seemed visibly to grow. The Hungarian muttered ever more zealously and the goblet swelled ever higher until its rims almost thrust against the ceiling. Then a thundering clap resounded and up sprang the heathen heads as men with long coats and beards, truly awful to look upon. They formed a circle about the Electour Prince; one of the men fell upon his knees before the man standing nearest the Electour Prince, pointed to the Electour Prince and called out : That is he who seeketh to deliver the Empire to the Gauls ! Whereupon the men put their heads together as if in secret Counsel. At last he who stood most far away brought a broadsword out from under his coat and cried aloud : Thus doth the Law reward the Traitor ! At the same moment he took several steps forward, as if he would strike the Electour Prince. Whereupon the Prince called out with stifled voice : Help, help, Michael – and at once all was vanished . . ." She gave a nod of approval; and another : "and all that took place at Ehrenbreitstein ? !" Pfeeewit : a tunnel (Wonderful !) Still breathless : "And when did this happen ?". Once again, I was unprepared for such great craving for knowledge with no transition, but said firmly : "on the second of June sixteen hundred thirty-two."

xi

A blue-nosed farmer squatted lumpishly in front of his long wine barrel, (cows with vacant airs), out of which at every step the green sullage algaed. Brick besmirchment of houses, Gobi yellow, and we so deep in muck that that stony Nepomuc of theirs clutched his skirt in sympathy. The brook (regulated of course) shriveled civil servilely through the flat bridge. "Well, it is the worst time of the year," waded the courageous voice beside me; but when I took a look at the cloddish faces, their dung-heap cult, and their equally carefully ironed Meadow Hill –. The sky was veined gray, a dripping beggar's bag, and we refugees bore it on our shoulders as far as the Rummer.

When, at Bingen, we turned away from the Rhine, the faces grew flat and long like the fertile bleakness all around; sometimes the flat earthen belly forced up round humpbacked villages, crouched, warty with roofs, toadish : here then is where the expression ‹flatland› arose. At first, when in Gau-Bockenheim they yelled along the length of the train, we didn't even want to get off : too lonely a station; drizzle weather, nobody weather;

but the committee was already standing there to receive us. A district commissioner, Someone from the Housing Administration, a mayor, and the iridescent word-bubbles rose and burst : ". . . always find my door open !" (that was the commissioner; for now only the door to his car stood open, he wriggled into it : rrr rrr rrr, gone; job done); ". . . a reg'ler cathlick town; . . . all good cathlick fokes . . ." that emerged from between the loden coat and chamois-tufted hat of the town honcho, and we gave each other one swift corner of the eye. For the heavier baggage there was the field wagon behind the tractor, diesel throbbings : a ship crosses the Atlantic in 12 days, how long do four ships take : cast off. Then begins the march into town, 135 souls, led unbidden by the male youth of the village. The roads skidded with muck and moisture; houses propped against each other in their affliction; one evening bell : though there was nothing at all soothing about it, just tinny hash and one bim after the other landed hither and yon. (Twice in his life, my father was in a church : when he was baptized, and in 1926 in a downpour). Colder than hell, too; Katrin's free hand was white and blue like potato blossoms, the other one held doughtily onto my arm : that's how I should be painted : a book in one hand, Katrin in the other, and we intend to do nothing. Alackandalas the dung-heaps : "It is indeed true that it can no longer be determined with certainty in what region of the earth paradise was located, but this sure ain't it." "Look at the figurines on the houses" : 'sindeed : in little niches stood gaudy Marias and Jesuses, plaster of Paris and enamels : three marks a kitsch, said sometimes to remain unconsumed in conflagrations, regrettably. "Bunn the Baker", yellowish brick, but a remarkable weathercock above the roof's ridge : the first positivum. "Until Monday, the men'll be put up in the ‹Rummer›; the ladies in the ‹Crown›"; what bastards ! Well, suit- and briefcases flung up to lie flat (quickly fix the coordinates of the bed; ah, Weber got in right below), and back to Katrin, who was waiting, brave and proud-eyed, beside her baggage clump. "Separating us !", and her face was like a wild white flower above the purple handbag; her mouth disintegrated into fiery-hued curses, soft ones. – ‹Crown› : "Corner bed, whatsay ? By the window." (that way at least you have neighbors on only one side !). "I'll be right right back to get you" she promised.

xii

If you would live, then serve; if you would be free, then die ! – "Someday Germany's mark in world history will be that of a stone over which mankind frequently stumbled", I darkly replied to Him, who spoke to me in praise of the strength and beauty of the imminent new Wehrmacht, and we at once turned our butts on each other. Had apparently once been a dance hall with the usual droll accessories : jerseyed black scratched the banjo at his belly; the spirals of a lasso tap-danced above the ecstatically stomping gaucho; the tall girl, every hand full with her own hips, cavorted above a miniature Hessia : the river emerged just right from her. At first, the coal-pit light on the ceiling hardly allowed you to make out the bed fissures and tunnels.

I went back downstairs first; the moon had also blundered into the courtyard and was rummaging sulkily in the trash. Just before eight, most of them returned : inhabitants 1500; purely agricultural; industry none. "Oh yes there is," a youngster said maliciously : "uptop, near the church : a malt factory with ten men." "Work in the vineyards pays real bad : two marks a day 'nd free ‹house wine›." – ? – Shrugs : "Prob'ly water, with a jigger a wine added." "Two marks !", and it seemed to grow darker again in the room. "Seen from Russia's angle, it's a policy of strangulation. Throttle 'em. Quite clear ! : Europe's to be America's continental dagger, that's why they're pushin' so hard. Call a spade a spade !" "D' you think so much a the Russians ? !". "Me – nah ! : but not much a the others, 'ncluding our own gover'ment, neither !". One of them claimed that today, just now, he had ‹kicked in the basement window› of the fat broad down below, they hardly let him finish his demonstration of ‹widened stance›, the applause was almost too great : so you think that just 'cause we're refugees ? ! A despondent Weber was sitting below on his bed as I pulled on my coat : "There's three smiths a'ready" he whispered and tried to smile. I cheered him up with "Let's go get something to eat first," and lots of women were down there. Womanity. I strode into the circle of waiting schoolchildren, who were supposed to lead us; the nervous little girl read, gibbered a little, but then walked on ahead of us : back to the little square (center-city one presumes); a wide street; she pointed down into the mouth of a dark crooked alley; 'tsrait 'nthrait dun thetaweh (another barbaric dialect !); well, it was written on the scrap of paper too, Beck, 224. Tapping on stone skulls, hard as farmers'; "Watch out, a street roller !"; the moon had stretched tight tarps across the old field wagons, globes of light propped

everywhere, so that at first we couldn't even find the house number in the bright jumble. "Is this your husband ? Your real husband ?" : a mistrustful household of women, quartet, and a little boy, Karl, Don Carlos. "We're engaged", Katrin said with such pride and bridal slowness, what an old hand at it, that they believed her at once; and the potatoes were big and hot, and the speckled country brawn spicy and juicy. We then told a long tale of our trek and misery, until, touched, they brought us wine (they truly are good folk !). Then came the news : big demonstration in West Berlin, "held on the border of the Soviet sector" : just like little kids sticking out their tongues at each other over the fence. "And each claims his is longer." "Goo'night !" : the darkened Malayan face of the moon regarded us like some boxer, arrogant, bong the last round, mocking, from where it was setting.

xiii

Morning in the Crown seraglio : there is No Goddess but Katrin ! Lightning eyes flashed from poodles of hair, brown necks, and a timbering of white arms lifted with pure silken clouds above. I walked, heart apounding, to my blanket bulge and cautiously laid hands on the metal edge. Smiles beneath the betousled mannish hairdo, to set my heart eddying. Eye depths like the Guam trench, the mouth spoke airily of the "Good morning"; (everywhere feminizings in the oaten straw); a white hand-bangle fibulaed blanket edges. Hair time; ivory time.

Shadows ran across her eyes, the lip heavens were darkened; I let go of my hand, which was immediately received into the blanket warmth. "Listen, I –" her mouth morseled, her head rang out wild, once, her nose moaned briefly – "do you know that I only have one foot ? !", and she abruptly stuck it out down below : the clean hard prosthesis up to midcalf. On the left leg. "During an air raid." Much red panties brightened roundabout, cheery, broad harem's braziers. Foot was no longer there. She gave a coarse and hopeless curse. "But otherwise I'm in great shape" a brittle contralto whispered. Red mouth ravine, flooded with torrents, out of which flowed gentle gusts of wind. I now uncoupled the other hand, and it leaped to the back of her head through the dark hair meadow. Sobbing, she set her teeth in my forearm, once, and then said proudly : "I can even wear bright-colored knee-stockings. You know : the real sturdy kind, sporty." Her eyes made a single leap like young meteors through the hall vortex; she stretched out her yellow arm crop and commanded : "Hand me the stock-

ings – there !" The blanket puffed out large and ceremonious; once again. She knelt, opened the front to me, and propped her hands on my shoulders, with shimmering lights. Everywhere. Then out of the crude folds came the long dark silken legs, I caught them both, and placed the no-nonsense girl beside me between bed and window. A slip lianaed and fit. A suit-skirt slipped down over. A long mouth chatted : "Listen, I've got a beautiful big radio." "Katrin : !" Whirring and a hornéd millipede ran through the hair jungling. "The 180 marks come in the mail the first of every month"; accompanied by a mollifying handcuff around my forearm. Five minutes alone : the sun had grown sandier, calmer. (How gloriously awful she would treat me in just a little while, my slow proud one !) Then through the high grid of rows a slender ambling approached : "Becks'll be waiting for us." Fold blankets; arrange suitcases. There she leaned, plaid, against the bedpost. Frenzy of lip and hexing of brow. From closed mouth : "Darling." From closed mouth : "Darling !" Then imperious and anxious : "Oh definitely." – (Express the diameter of a wash basin in parsecs).

xiv

"Imagine : the pastor has 5 rooms and a kitchen for himself and his housekeeper !". She laughed fire and water : "and then there's a ‹Bishop's Room› besides, that stands ceremoniously empty all year long : he comes here just once, you see, for one night ! And to think there are people like that ! !". Wind drew the wrinkled sky of clouds tighter together; a light motorcycle stuttered past : the hasty monkey sat atop it with back all hunched over. From the church wall : a choir of hypocrites sang of naught but love and charity, and again her rebel face flickered white out of coat coals : "Set the place on fire over the heads of everybody sitting inside, and then barefoot to Lower Saxony ! : damn, if only the Russians 'd come !"

"And did you see how the floor gave underneath you ?". "Just imagine : you've got to run clear across the street for every bucket of water : now, in winter !" She gave a genuine shudder and moved her shoulders : "The worst part is the john, god ! You wouldn't even go in there. And I'm supposed to get it clean somehow – ?" Nope, that hole was truly uninhabitable for human beings. "And did you take a good look at those faces ?" she let her cheeks hang low, flatulated her mouth, and looked strikingly like the idiot pair of siblings that camped across the hallway, Stone-Age types. (Oh, we had found out on the sly; through the Webers, who ate at the

mayor's brother-in-law's house !) : "You see, and that's why that bastard from the Housing Authority in Alzey didn't tell anyone ahead of time where they'd end up ! That way they don't have any trouble whatever; that way no one can mutiny or complain. That way, tomorrow morning they can simply set people's furniture out on the street, in front of these holes : okay, do it or else ! – Oh what arrogant swine !" And I too savagely hacked my head : "Out-of-the-question !" I swore grimly : "If They think they can simply run right over us ! – He'll be back here again with them tomorrow morning – that's a Big Man in a hurry, with a face like ham and eggs : he'll get to hear a thing or two." The organ growled conciliatorily from the church, bovine warm, trusty old Christianity with its double sole and more spiritual calf-leather than would ever be necessary : "Western Christian Civilization ! ?" If things had gone their way, we would still believe today that the earth is a disk with Rome or Jerusalem in the center : they would have used Kant and Schopenhauer for a bonfire, then tossed on Goethe and Wieland for good measure, and torched it all with Darwin and Nietzsche ! "No no, Katrin : Christianity ain't got nothing to do with civilization !" (I admit I come from a breed that considered someone ‹dopey› who attended church at Christmas). Are clergy educated men ? "Where do you get that ?" I asked dumbfounded : "do you call that education when instead of God someone can also say deus, theos and elohim ? Because that's what it amounts to." (Never mind : the fear of the Lord hampers the beginning of wisdom). But Katrin was already energetically providing proof herself, inside her gloves her pretty fists had grown round and firm with anger : "Just give a listen : –" Wind ran down the street, setting it dusting, and played soccer with leaves : my father would have slapped me one if I had abused shoes that way ! – : "Love, love, love everlasting" it came, dragging broadly out of the clay-colored folding doors. "And those are the same s.o.b.s that want to stick us in these holes ? ! Oh go to heaven : words, words everlasting !" She was flying now, coat and all, she blindly gave my foot a kick, she yelled at me : "Don't the bastards think at all when they sing that sort of stuff ? !"

XV

"Poets who agonize mightily looking for new material could write Pindaric odes to our Olympic champions, Jesse Owens and Birger Rüd, look at this !" : Twenty-three muscular figures bolted and leapt over the frowzy lawn, beheaded the callused clouds, balls rose with Magnus effect into the howl of wind. I pressed my chin against the crude post and knotted my fingers disdainfully through cold pockets : bleak faces, turnip dispositions, stepped mentalities, tundraed souls. : "Southwest Broadcasting didn't air the awarding of the Literature Prize of the Academy of Mainz : but the father of Walters the soccer player got interviewed for half an hour."

The crowd : ace marksmen with sturdy bellies, women either force-fed or pregnant, children, torturing grass and bawling. Hate, haste, race, rest. Godknows, you ought to keep a map of the world hanging on the wall so that you can engrain the image of Europe as just a fissured NW cape of Asia; and for Western-Christian civilization, a soccer photo, where for a finale they club the referee to death. There are indeed traits that reveal a man's character for good and all and place him under eternal suspicion : taking pleasure in giving or obeying orders; being a politician. On the other hand there are stupidities and errors that compromise you if you have *not* committed them at least once. "And those would be ?". Well, for example, as a young person, around 25 or so, believing Nietzsche to be a demigod; or loving ‹humanity› for just as long. She nodded responsively, and took another disparaging glance back at the crowd : "Well, we won't grow old in this backwater anyhow !" she determined. We stepped behind the massive loading ramp : her teeth burned in my throat, nails nested in my nape, the wind came barking its outrage from around the corner and sprang at our coats. "Compensation payments, Katrin, ha ha ? – When what they want is immediate rearmament ? ! 've got no quarrel if Somebody votes for it : but then get him down off his laboratory stool at once, out of his workshop, his cabinet post, his narcoleptic rectory and send him off to the Wehrmacht : 2 years scrubbing latrines; ‹Hit the ground !› ‹On your feet, march, march› and keep yelling the whole time : I'm crazy, until the petty tyrant graciously dismisses you; rousted out for drill with a pin; and have 4 men fetch matches one by one and lay 'em on the table for the sergeant, sir, who then tosses 'em out, fifty times, from the 4th floor till the matchbox is empty : saw that in Sprottau, in 1937, strike me dead ! ! : O thou glorious German nation ! And thou School for Manhood, the barracks ! But our government consists exclusively of the sort who no longer have to do their duty; not a

one under 60 : who needs old-folks' homes when we've got parliaments ! – No one who is unaffected by such issues ought to be allowed to cast a vote on them" (switch topics; my bile runneth over). "Hear how they're bleating ? Clear over here ? And afterwards they'll go to church" (Modern prayer book : "To be sung in airplane emergencies"; "Prayer with drunken chauffeur"; "Lord, let not the subway be delayed". I can't help how I am : the stuff sets certain of my organs twitching, and at once I went on to tell her about "The Book of Mormon", which already knew in the year 420 that Joseph Smith of Vermont would retrieve it on 22. 9. 1823.) : "There's nothing so absurd that believers won't believe it. Or bureaucrats do it." "Only too true, in the case of bureaucrats," she said wisely and bitterly, and we walked another couple of gray versts in the direction of Sprendlingen. (Further topics of conversation were : "Do you love me ? !"; "Do you have friends ?"; "Is world history a matter of chance or pure absurdity ?"; "Can you play chess ?" – and I indignantly told her how at one time I had laid low the Silesian regional master, with b 2 – b 4 : 'sineed !).

xvi

> and here we wended our steps onto a broad lane that led to a village up ahead; sky began gloomily to overcast and rained; Two, passing in constant in flight above our heads, wanting to be our escort : the narrow cemetery contained within untidily laid stone walls; church with stubby shingled steeple; in the thick wall of each side just a single little window; the door as if half-sunken in the earth; high grave-mounds pressed tightly together and overgrown with nettles (human sileage). The horizon was already darkened, in the murky twilight the sky seemed to be laid out thickly on all sides.

Behind us the primal cries of ball-kicking humanity; on the left gaunt-bodied corn mummies, rattlings, dry, disagreeable; and up front, the blood-rounded scourge of sun sank through wrought-iron cloudwalls. Squabbling : "Eaters of roasts, costumed in their Sunday suits. Buxom perfumed Graces." But Katrin explained with sympathy : "The poor things would just smell of stall otherwise. 'ts a fact." And the small firm forearm deflected me to the little signal hut : two-storied, tidy bricks, twenty by twenty-five, flat roof, strong metal doors, dark green. We circumloitered all sides of it, without purpose but full of thought. "Downstairs 'd be the kitchen and a storage room. Large one." "Upstairs a large living room with an alcove for a bed". Breathe deeper, nod heavier. (If only one were

something other than tribal buffoon; horde's clown, before whose breast the boss pithecanthropus sometimes graciously dangles a little chunk of mammoth loin.) Dusk slunk with heavy baskets across the fields; I grasped into Katrin again, more impertinent too, and she hardly flinched. "No curtains at all those windows, upstairs. A great big room, whaddya say !". "Sure," she spoke between her teeth, and drew half her eyes closed : out of hate for this filthy burg. "Maybe take another look again later." The footbridge swayed grayly above the brook, (flat cloud mask assembling there above yon Meadow Hill), wind swung its grass-rattle, briskly, without life. "Do you see a tree anywhere ?" and she pointed with disgust down the main road to Bingen. "But a tree'd just use up the ‹good soil› y' know", I said in ironic exasperation, "right where turnips could be growin' !" and immediately cut off all deliberation : "Everyone should have two children less ! That'd make room right off for woodlands, and put a stop to hunger too ! No war, no more misery ! My vote goes to the party that's against rearmament and for birth control !". "So no party ?" "So no party." The lane ended futilely at a field of crudely wounded soil : drudged earth, flayed of its plant skin, hacked to pieces, suspiciously encompassed with thorny wire. So, back again, sick of it : "These honchos don't have enough sense to set off their ‹prop'ty› with humane hedges !" We pressed together faces gone wild. Our Hades began to steam indolently; mist spread an icy cover over the blanching paths; Katrin doesn't dare let her stump take a chill. A broad silver tusk swelled up out of a drooping cloud maw : munching, codgerlike, closed again.

xvii

> the bony moon gaped from its witches' ring; ashen wisps hurried straight across; wind slunk from the lilac bush and groped languidly and impudently through all my pockets, cold pickpocket and deft homosex : if you'd beat away at that heavenly puffball with your club, and I raised it, burst the yellow leather bulb and the black green stifling cloud came whooshing out : and He saw

Between crucifix and war memorial (leftover from Mars-la-Tour, one of the little, fussy ones, where Victoria puts a full nelson on Kaiser Wilhelm); Rabbi Jeshua probably hadn't heard so many curses and well-bred heresies in a long time. "Lord : ha ! Put a table in here – : The end !" used two hands to show Wachlinger the smallness of the room on Schweinemarkt : "If the sun shines in, I'll have to move out ! – If y' laugh, your cheeks'll bang on

the walls." But there were muttered curses from every little group : "Nothing but garrets and sheds that the bastards emptied out real quick." "In the bedroom, just above the window, you can stick your hand outside." "You wou'nt s' much as fit 'nside that thing," said Borck to my 6' 2", "them's cubbids, tain't rooms at all; I'm not movin' in, even if I have t' go see the minister in Mainz t'morrow." The brain-damaged fellow (yet once more full of vin tendre) told a loud and sad tale : "At the front, where my shop was, I had a view right down into the valley, to gramps's; upstairs is where the kids 'n gramma slept . . .", here someone demurred, but he shook his green-billed cap with determination : "There was eight acres, maybe a bit more, and good soil." Aha. "And y' could get along with them Czechs, too : just had t' keep your big mouth shut sometimes –" I gently pulled Katrin away. "He's from Troppau; from the Sudetenland," I explained wearily, "c'mon; we'll go back round again." Up Schulstrasse. Beneath the malt chimney, the flat barrel-vaulting glowed and bellowed, it was downright warm around your legs. I looked to one side into the rigid flaming face, and brought her slowly into the darker street : "We're moving in together no matter what. Listen ! That's allowed if you're engaged !" "Katrin !" She pushed me firmly into the entrance gate and breathed with her teeth. "Katrin." She rent me with fingers and bored her brow into my breast : "Katrinkatrinkatrin." "Hey, it'll work out," she said brokenly into my mouth, tasting everywhere, firm and cold, and shoved her chin against mine till we wobbled. In front of the Crown : "But listen, marriage is no way applicable", she warned with a clever glance over my face : "just remember : 180 marks pension, that'd be lunacy." Stood in the door under the red-lettered milky sphere. Gave one young and sovereign toss of her head : "Till tomorrow, then !", and rejoiced, and trembled athletically. Upstairs, at the window in the room, I heard her say menacingly to Marga in the next bed : "Just let them try to make trouble for me and my fiance !" The conversation seemed to grow softer and more animated.

xviii

"An American has calculated that 800 hugs are ended every second". "Must be worse'n a machine gun !", he shouted with delight : "did he figger up the energy too ? What all could y' run with it ?". "Surement" I said with gusto : "Run the ‹Queen Mary› constantly across the Atlantic. If you set the combined energies against the direction of the earth's rotation, within a year, the day would be lengthened by 6 seconds." "So it's always keep your head aimed west then," he conscientiously abstracted this new maxim for life, "just the opposite of the Muhammadans." – and via such ethnographic references we gradually left the gaya scienza to return to more worthy, more long-bearded realms.

My, but the schnapps was lovely, toxic, clairaudient, strong. The light grew blotchier still, and the sludge of words seeped nonstop from the sewer mouths; I paid an unobtrusive visit to each group in the room; it was way after 10 o'clock; all the boys pretended to be asleep. Politics (this was the little fellow with the little head again) : "Unification of Europe ? Not these days, not from the West ! Just look at these here peewee states and then at Russia !" I gave him a bitter nod and floated on; there were but three chairs : alright then, we'll stand ! Here no one lacks anything that the others don't need as well : thus are we all refugees ! (I can keep this up for a long time : sleep on the floor and use the chamber door for a blanket !). The wind crumpled in the taffeta of night; ‹Drink wine and make merry› stood circumflowered above the beds; two tipsy fellows bowing, doubled over with laughter, the third arrived and was introduced : "Herr Schönert – hangs right." "Pleased to meecha." The lecherous old man said : "Stickitinsky." Carbonados and wiping out old scores. (Wonder if carbonado comes from carboniferous ? That would mean there are devanados and permesan cheese, too). On the right, someone read nationalistics aloud and gave me a grand thunder-steeling stare : ahyes, let us then think collectively, and "Ain't it the truth : crazy", I said with underhanded warmth : ohmy, how they revived and joined in the affirmation. One of them even came up with the great Hans Dominik, and for a while they approvingly raised and lowered their broad yellowish brows, ah, the cannibal warmth, the swinish warmth, I was condescending with all my might (but that's not all that much; have little patience with such firemen. Even the loveliest object can become insufferable through the praise of a fool, not to mention through popular editions). Back in the courtyard; this john was almost unusable as well, it's really no wonder : one contraption for 65 men – the bastards have locked up the other one. From there, first to

the door for fresh air : across the way the parsonage with its bishop's room, and no lightning strikes. Landscape ? : Nothing; so then, the airscape (overworld) : silver buoy, anchored atilt in the cloud current; wind wanted to report something in the primal tongue, but instead hissed too hurriedly this time, and we parted. Beneath my bed sat Weber, very alone in his glooms; he raised his head and gave me a nod : "I *can't* move in there," he said, exhausted : "I took a look this evenin'; the house was all dark, first y' go up one flight a stairs, then another, then *another* – and those rooms were pitch-black, all with slopin' ceilin's, and there's only two anyhow" he shook himself helplessly : "Does have an inside tap and a sink; but we made this move for jist one reason, 'cause our gal finally has t' have a room of her own ! Marga's gonna be twenty-five, it jist has to be !" He kept smoothing the blanket with his horny hand : "I gotta tell 'em in the mornin' : I can't move in there." Once more he unburdened his mouth : "Right across from where you eat, they had a cop clear the attic rooms, he was jist gonna hack it all up." Hess was the noble fellow's name. (The smith really must have heart trouble, because every inch of his fat body was trembling) : "I won't sleep a wink t'night" and wrapped himself up (and up in Lower Saxony he'd even had a job !) The little tailor, who looked like Heinz Rühmann, rolled his limp hands out of the blankets; at the back they were still wallowing, endlessly, homo germanicus : no reason for them to brag, the old Germans used poisoned arrows just like all the other hottentotts !

xix

"Yeah, if only so many of the ceilings didn't slope –" (until Hess started boiling again and downstaired abellying); then we hurriedly whispered about : "Hey, they're really not all that small : – square footage – say : eighteen by thirteen". "And then add the kitchen." "And running water." "All to ourselves up here". "And only 11 marks rent; of course just skylights and no view." – "Can you climb those damned stairs with your leg ?" Face thunderclouded. "I can". Brief rancorage of ire. "We can set up only one bed –" I immediately apologized. "All-the-better !" she growled, resolutely irreconcilable, I had to go right over and borrow the little dolly from Becks.

And the gentleman from Alzey was all lovely ears as I outlined my standpoint in resonant fluent High German, while rolling my eyes for the commonweal (and the others were standing behind me now !) : "I've never

been put through such a trip before." : "Then it's high time !" Weber, however, only whispered beneath the weight of the authority that had power over him, instituted by God. I will be brief : and he saw at once that if he could eliminate me, the loudmouth of the pack, but I was strong enough – "Ah, this is your fiancée ? !" – and triumphantly went with us to Hess. Now he started in : unmarried; respectable house (had recently been restuccoed too !). "Don't get upset," Katrin said to me imperturbably, "they aren't really people. They're just farmers." From her pretty bundle she pulled a violet-colored fifty-mark bill, and smiling graciously, paid three months in advance, embittering his possession of it, however, with the innocent question : "Aren't any rats, are there ?". "And you'll give me a receipt later, right ?" True, the toilet was in the courtyard, but it flushed, and was thus a star attraction for the town. I looked about me sourly : honest whitewashed hearts, brains as per usual, splendidly suitable for work with the soil. "Need those too", she soothed me, but I laughed only briefly : "'course," I admitted, "but in the slogan ‹Workers of Brow and Fist› the ‹and› is pure impudence. – Fortunately the low opinion is mutual. Forget it". Then with Josef (the son) I fetched our furniture; and the day passed with ripping crates, shouldering furniture, tearing skin, freezing, nailing; by the time it was dark we had only laid the planks in the bed; I sent Katrin out of the chaos to the Crown once again : "just for tonight." Wild and difficult farewell. 34° and cloudy. I towered lonely and stiff in the crateland; the skeletons of constellations wrenched in the sky, oh what funny concoctions we are : wonder if God (as he himself has put it in black and white) actually bears a resemblance to old Hess downstairs ? More like yep than nope ! Shudder, sneeze, sneeze, well : l'empereur ne soit autre maladie que la mort. Sit, stand, sit, lie, stand. Comradeship, comradeship : I have no use for groups of middling feelings ! To perfect or semiperfect strangers, politely indifferent; for the rest, love or hate (skoteinos). I groped along cube edges : had been a frontline soldier for six years after all, plus POW, (for my bit of stuff the digs were too big anyhow), but all I have ever known is aversion, at best tolerance. Light fermented around three, murky yellow gray, from clouds; from my dormer on the universe I horrorized the frozen roofs, with high protective coat collar, like those way out there, ariel-umbriel, planetary cold, me, white-limbed, silky haired : nah, I have no purpose. Hit the sack. – Katrin stepped to the bed, I stood up, just as I lay, my hands in my pockets, she looked up, frightened, adoring, sympathetic : then she laid her hand on my chest and turned my heart back on. (Was still very early; orange slices of the moon against bright-red).

XX

"You see", Katrin said triumphantly and pulled the drawer open and shut several times, "the middlest is for cutlery." The ample surface was covered with marbled hard linoleum; wood, pale yellow and nastily shiny; the back wall sonorous plywood, was perfectly adequate ! Nickel keys pliantly cracked the doors : inside the cross-shelf was a bit narrower, and I looked at Katrin questioningly : ?. "That's great," she said pleased, "that way the real tall stuff fits up front, bottles and such." We nodded practically into the flapped opening, ran a hand several times over the rounded edges, and then we shoved the lower part of the kitchen cupboard against the wall, beside the door to the living room.

Pick up our emergency-aid at the mayor's : 20 marks for men, 10 for women; and Katrin was outraged : always the same old arrogance ! She muttered incredulously, and I gallantly changed the topic to ‹Does the female have a soul ?› (naturally not; but in its place other very special devices). "Yes; and the male is just a wandering youknowwhat !", and sullen, came no more, only later, and was obstinate for a long time, then, however, I did receive a rueful slap : "Well be off : has to be picked up in any case !" A greasy mayor, a thin reigning clerk (I knew that relationship; in the military I was I-a in my day, too). Back ‹home› I found her crouching slimly above a humble little furry : "Just imagine : it doesn't have a name ! – Now how can that be ?" she lamented, large-eyed. Most trustingly : "Hey quick : what's its name." I shoved my mouth forward critically and nodded Lichtenbergishly, as it effervesced under Katrin's ruffling hand, modest and with blackish stripes. "The kitty GURNEMANZ." (The forward part of the name purrs; the rear bears that little tail high enough). She nodded, relieved and reverent : good man ! But then she wrinkled her brow again mistrustfully : "Haven't I heard that name somewhere before – ?". "Beg your pardon." I said, hurt : "if it doesn't please you, we can always call it Prschemislottokar, à la Prince Lobkowitz", and she jiggled me enthusiastically with her eyes. Come on up and come on. "Have you already filled out the registration forms ?" and the ballpoint pressed; "Apply for the household allowance", and the ballpoint. "He wants one mark a month for water." "Okay." Then came the half kitchen cupboard. And a simple but sturdy table. "Come here, Katrin !" We entangled us for relaxation (from arranging furniture) in eyes, mouth and arms : "Hey you!". "Hey you." "– Ah, you –" On the wall then : ‹Otto Kühl : Path through the Heath›. "Great !" "The longer you look at it." It was just a simple crate, and I had fitted boards across it : the bookcase : eighty of 'em. ("After the next war

there'll be only ten."). Next to the desk. "Katri-in." Arm around her shoulders : "Our house has received its soul". (= Books. Cicero). She bent down and fingered and read : Cooper, Wieland, Jean Paul : Moritz-cervantestieckandsoforth. Schopenhauerlogarithmtables. "Why those ?"

xxi

> A very small, black iron stove, a crumple of Blue Bonnet paper, a printed sack, an oatmeal carton, a fist full of chips, one and a half dull briquettes, six gleaming pieces of coal, a dirty hand carefully at the match, the green pot of water passing the eye, while a hand hovers the shoulders, two shoes float back and forth, one hand kittycats in my hair, the flame climbs into the parchment, a chip cracks and grows fat and yellow, a knife case first clanks unsentimentally, then a maiden's voice gruffs along with it : "Lord, am I happy !"

(What a good thing we don't have an organ for detecting currents of air : just think of how the turmoil and spirals would twist out of your heated stove, broad glassy reptilian bodies, protuberances big as a man, cellophane wheels : you'd have chaos in your winter parlor ! And yet another reason for being horrified.). Accept the coal coupons : 3 hundredweights of briquettes, 3 hundredweights of coal; in actuality there was of course only just one of each to start with : "You have no idea how dark it was in that shed; and if he had had baskets full of nothing but night and dumped them in, I couldn't 've seen that either, I mean these women ! – why don't you start your diary !" She came and considered (a while ago, she had promised out of pure happiness) : "What all gets into it ?". "First of all, the weather", I instructed, "temperature, barometer, wind; clouds, precipitation, celestial phenomena". "O what a soulless machine you are !" she rebelled; twitched with anger, then felinely soft : "Anything else besides that – – ?"."Well : unusual events", I said loftily; with emphasis : "And, of course, that's everything between true lovers !"; calmer again : "for example ‹Katrin was good-tempered today.›" "Or ‹He shaved voluntarily›", the apt pupil suggested, but I remained unshakable : a monk, a female and an officer can give no man offense; then it occurred to me : "And if we've quarreled – ("Often, my love !" she promised enthusiastically) – then we'll write each other : little notes. And they will read . . . . ." "‹Dinner's ready›", she said archinsolently and closed her snubbing eyes, "or ‹Are you going to apologize at once ? !›. Or ‹I'm going to bed.›". "And wish to be disturbed, twice"

I added dryly. She held contented breath, watched as I put the rings on the bed curtains and hung them, and then began the meal consultation (actually, Becks had invited us again, but she had turned it down : cooking would be fun for us, and one day wouldn't make any difference !); so then : "What're we having ?". Well, it probably did deserve praise, and she rummaged most critically in white sacks and yellow cubes : "Just ask me . . .", she muttered profoundly, walked off and pondered, and I stood there curious, waiting, just ask, wild, what would come now : and nothing came, absolutely nothing : read a recipe, and gave me a sweet and daydreamy look : none of them 're any good ! (And afterwards we ended up with boiled potatoes and liverwurst anyway). "Have you seen my nail clippers ?" : on the second day of moving in, when even objects approaching chair-size could disappear ! So I closed the door energetically (which, however, was pointless, since its glass pane was missing, and Katrin was already standing there with green dove-eyes, and meowed for a kiss). Washing up : "Can you help with the drying ?" (that means in Female-German ‹dry› !). "Just the flatware *and* the really essential stuff –"; I knew of course it was wrong, and that it would now occur more regularly than necessary, but. "At least enter this in your diary," I demanded darkly. And so we jingled mightily in the endless silvery swollen dusk, and cleaned everything up nicely.

xxii

stylish zigzag quilted robe, white-green background with dusty red flowers; she was determined to decorate the bookcase with the alarm. "There is no way that clock is going there, Katrin : divvying up time, how long we may do this or that !" "Or the other" she supplemented pertly and gave me a superfluous sort of look as well; then she commanded herself worthily : "And now please blush just a bit, Katie." "What ?" I asked, still irritated, "and why now ?". And : "Did God blush do you suppose when he created this world ? ! ". "Well then –" she confirmed stoically, and had nothing underneath, and tasted elastic and clean and had sturdy hair all over, and we tumbled together over one another.

Under the greenwood tree : who loves to lie with me ? / No question there, is there, Katrin ? / And turn his merry note unto the sweet bird's throat. / And how she can pipe if need be ! – She did many floor gymnastics below, just in nylons, waved with legs and light-headed dumbbells, twisted white-

barked and let entrancing hair mourn, hand foliage reel. (Is the bed ever high ! : I feel like the old man of the mountain !) / Come hither, come hither, come hither / "Come, birch, come !" and similar diacopes. She came cautiously and let her tummy musculature be kissed several times over, but then ran away again at once in a circle : "to say nothing of you : I don't trust me for a moment !" (Alright, let's go on : As you like it :) Here shall he see no enemy but winter and rough weather / : "And for that we'll buy coal and a lot of wood !" A comb harped her hair, until it sat tight as a cap. Once more her face began to scramble around on me, teeth crocheted and grabbed, heiress of sharks, into my shoulder, brown-hair meadow, beneath my chin. Then we washed in the kitchen, out of two shimmering aluminum basins, each other, downstairs old Hess fingered the new choral-society number on his piano, fixed heavens hot water, "what an expanse of back, my boy !", we disposed in the dark gray pond light like great smooth silver fish, "You can build a little nightstand for the corner by the bed –", the powder box dusted in white and careful, "that's where I'll put my sewing things –", two hands beat and stroked themselves clean on hips, : "and you can read aloud the whole evening !", we covered ourselves slowly with clothes, blissful : "No one ever read aloud to me; and I've always liked it so much. If it's you." We quickly set the little Weymouth pines I had brought along on the windowsill. "Next spring I'll plant a birch and a chestnut" said Katrin musing, "look there : down in the courtyard." And we gazed down at Becks, how in the viscous twilight they both stood at the washtub, Martha and Pauline, in one hand the newspaper, the other pumping evenly at the hand pump. "There's a laundry in Wöllstein, we'll send ours there"; separated herself absentmindedly from my side and went into the kitchen.

xxiii

> The typewriter minced along beneath her thin fingers, as if in high-heels, always at my ear : "I'm writing Frenzel-Heidelberg, while I'm at it; four dozen for now; p.o. box five-three-two." I lifted her sly pale face from her shoulders with both hands and devoured it. The rat ran once round the gable; her hands plucked out my hair; then she sank back to her footstool. Down from the loamy sky, ropes of smoke hung at every chimney, cold and still. Frost was in the air behind the naked panes, high above the roof desert, and without thinking, I pulled my scarf tighter.

First, from over there, she tooted a little on her harmonica (wanted to roost in her couch) delicate and buzzing : the little town is off to bed / When tolls

the evening bell / Ol'Man River; and she played it so you could hear how happy we now were. Then she came, slender-legged, placed the typewriter on a chair and herself on a footstool before it : "Writing postcards. Sending relatives the new address." Murmurs and tippitytapp. Once she fetched her abridged Brockhaus, 1941, the dugout among lexicons, and paged sulkily and desperate for foreign words; only after I proved to her what a piece of crap it was, did she get happier again (Room in just one most frugal volume ! And then such items in it as "Building : result of building"; or here "bit : a little"; "chaste"; or the illustration of an ax : you can't even imagine it !). Tippitytapp : "Turn on the radio –"; and I didn't do it : "I'll not surrender my ears to just any broadcast", I replied resolutely. "Write your sister about that big Webster's, too"; because I had searched long and impatiently for the meaning of "tent-stitch"; wasn't in the Cassel's either. Tippitytapp : her eyes danced in ten-fingered touch about my face : "Do you know what we're going to read this evening ? !". "English or some Wieland or the Invisible Lodge or the Littlepage Manuscripts". "Hey, I've been practicing every day, – And you can dictate anything to me" she concluded, deep and stormy; the rat tap-danced in the beamwork (now it came to me, how I could shove the little shelves of cactus into the slanted dormers); "Anything, you say ? !". Dusk leaked out of the grayest of pitchers over the earthenware village bowl; the bell flung away its tinny yaps at random; at every running thing; no thought of moon again before Christmas; I allowed myself to tremble with happiness. She turned out the finished postcards, fetched Berlin blues from the old box, licked and pasted, wrist on it. Leapt into her topper and commanded : "Come with me to the post office. We'll poke about a bit". "And come spring we'll buy us a tandem !". (Downstairs, Gurnemanz, Gurr, Gurr, Gurrnemanz was being heavily cranked.)

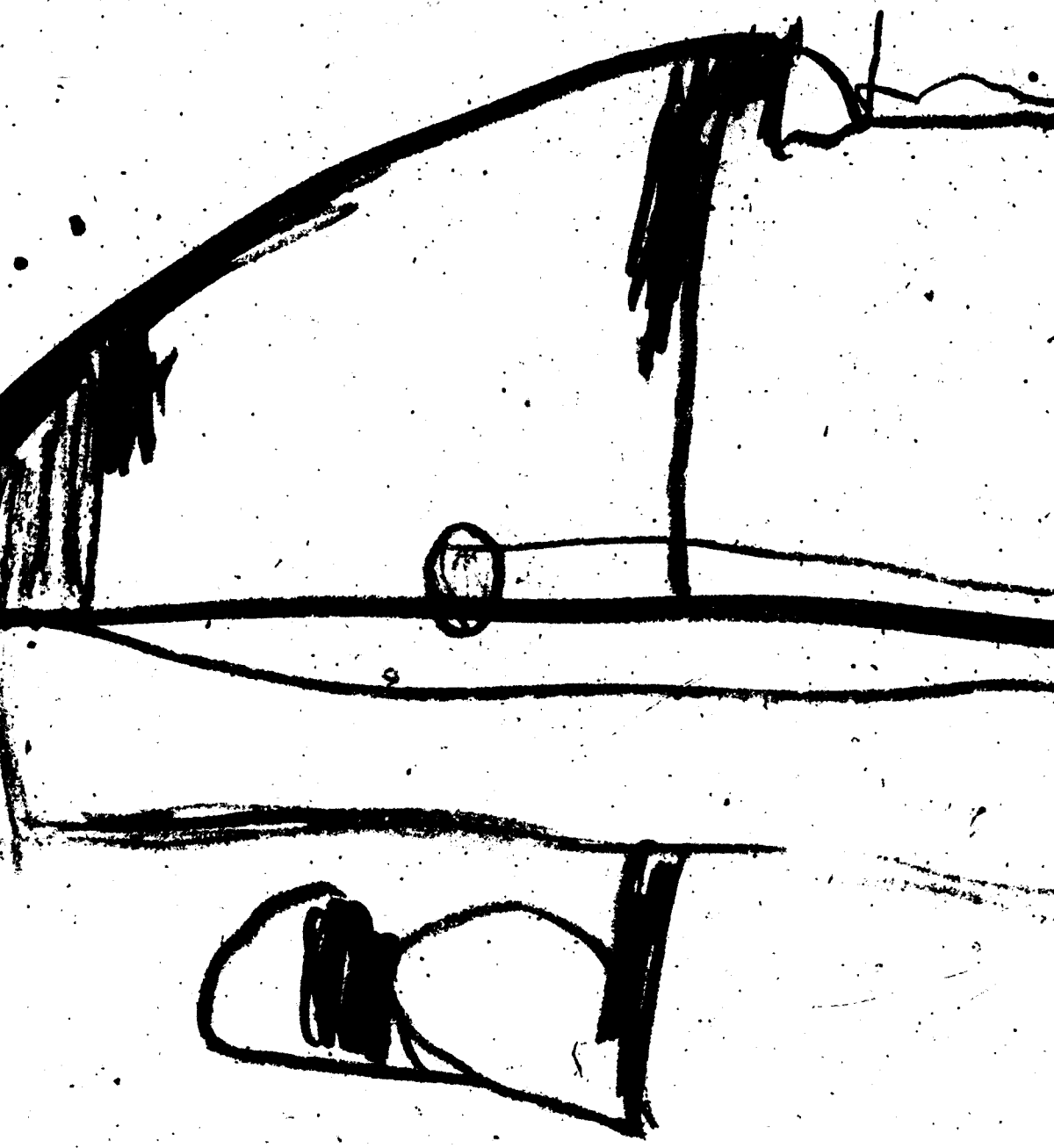
xxiv

> THE RED CAR. With its smooth panes, its bright handles, long-quilted cushions, the baggage trunk swelling up, cul de Mercedes, how the lacquer-light rolleth above wheeled vaults. It sways toward us, snarling, swifter than the normal wind, and presses the earth with its strong tires; its voice is like the cry of the cassowary; across its thick ribbed chest the bumper bolt zags. THE RED CAR. Thou spitting tin mandrill, leer not so randily out of cuttle-button eyes at Katrin through her skirt, covet me not so supplely in thy bubble soft with rut. Yowling sham-animal, thou slayest the evening, thy bluish toxic fart slinketh down all ways, numbers on thy glowing monkey-smooth butt art thy name, a dreary salesman thy grousing soul. THE RED CAR.

The high cloud bow thrust through the sun surf like a red breaker; wind melted icily over my hand, our hair fluttered. At the station we did envy the world of bureaucrat, their solid beautifully bordered forms; the limpid fiery-hued cap (as artificial horizon); the yellow angled lamplight in the waiting room, that he could switch on whenever he wished : right-angled world, line-framed, wine-framed. A four-engine job crept arumbling Mainzward; Katrin fitted less easily into my armwork : we were indeed together, my bed is your bed. Slowly the memories promenaded again, youth and maid in Silesia, memories : green; gray; black; red. "Where do I fit in ?". "Red". Wind flew past a few times; the yellowed moon leaned out through the window of cloud ruins for a while. From closed shops the same steady Rhine broadcast with its can of music. Before the Weights & Measures cottage, the handbell of the crier, and we listened, earnest and perplexed, as he chewed earthwards through the bicycle frame : ". . . ; . . . ; . . . c'mwun c'mall." Oh my comrades in tongue ! The writer : once the poor wretch, franc-tireur of the intellect, is dead, a hundred years later, they would most like to scrape him out of the earth with their germanists' fingernails. And then brazenly claim him as "German poet", volk-communal property : how he'd love to spit on you, most honored comrades in tongue ! The rigid silver machete of the moon hacked through the cloud jungle; the stars formed their crazy circles. And the big car cowered beside the stony balk, tepid slaver still at its radiator : "Would you like to have one ?" Katrin asked, peeking unobtrusively inside. "Listen here : before I'd buy you one !" (I searched in shock for the grandest comparison) : "I'd vote for the CDU ! So there". ". . . buy me one –", she muttered in echo, purring happily, wifily dreamily. And the owner came up very broadly, in naked leather jacket at a knickerbocker gait, dark sure all-

business wonderful, only the forehead eye was missing; before he pried himself in, he looked up to survey heaven's canopy, Sir Henry Thrilled, and I quickly got the snapshot in. "We'll get a pail of syrup tomorrow : it only costs 10 marks here." (14 in Lower Saxony !) "And potatoes are just half the price, too." We laughed at each other, rejoicing at such inexpense, poor merry destitootles, couple with no draught, the attic society : a crazed cock crowed each night at three : he's often to blame for it. – So we live together for now; how it goes from here, I don't know yet.

LAKE SCENERY WITH PO
NERY WITH POCAHONTAS



i

Rattatá Rattatá Rattatá. / For a while all girls had black circles stead of eyes, mondaine owl faces, with ornery fiery-red slits inside : Rattatá. / Pastures in the Kyll Valley. A black dog swung its woolen arms out there and unflaggingly menaced a cow. Thoughts from all sides : with flames for faces; in black coats, with long white legs walking below; thoughts like empty sunny chaises longues : rattatá. / Smoke circumkindled face and hair : this time flowing from a perky blond nose, 2 spiraling jets, half a yard long, down onto a chemistry compendium (but catnapped and vapid, so no tunnel-thoughts). / Rattatá : on the brightly embroidered sky tablecloth, rustic, blued by wind, an invisible plate edged in gold. The perennial kid at close quarters was the first to see the white-spotlighted hi-rise in Cologne : "Ma, lookathat !"

"Tickets please" (and he also wanted to check my refugee pass to see if I was worthy of the latest discount). The Saar had adorned itself with a long fog canopy; children bathing and screaming behind the dams; across from Serrig ("Half-hour wait for customs !") a Saxon Switzerland loomed. / Trier : men ran beside galloping suitcases; eye-bubbles suspectioned every window : a nun with her excursional girls climbed in with me, out on some holy weekend or other, figures cast skewed waxy Jesus glances, crosses wagged and tangled, the Dreft-white belt rope (with several knots : wonder if that's some sort of badge of rank ?). / The bible : for me it's an untidy book with 50,000 textual variants. Old and motley, sure – love poems, anecdotes, he is the Anah who found hot springs in the wilderness, political dispensary; and of course forever remarkable for the influence it's enjoyed thanks to clever, unscrupulous propaganda and above all to ugliest coercion, compelle intrare. The ‹Lord›, without whose willing it no sparrow falls from the roof and no 10 million are gassed in concentration camps : would have to be one curious fellow – that's if he existed ! / But this Kyll Valley was lovely and lonely. In Gerolstein, town of Siegfriedian festival stage, swashbucklers hung by one hand from their spears, likewise a

railroad inspector asleep at his shield, doubled over, you could just still see .... lste .... / "Elle est" : "Elle est" : banged the pistons of the locomotive yonder. / Magic squares (where all sides and diagonals give the same sum, fine and good !) : but are there ‹magic cubes› as well ? (Interesting; research it later). – The prospectus from Cooperstown : home of baseball *and* James Fenimore Cooper (what a sequence ! And they never mention anything but Deerslayer and Pioneers. Mum as the grave about the third in the trio, Home as Found, its description of the Yankees so blunt it still holds true today, and set most splendidly on the Otsego, too : if only he could rise from the grave, the things he'd tell you buffoons !) / The bigoted Rhineland : even the wind gets a move on coming through Cologne. But I made my connection : fat lads strode in mestizo-bright smocks along the train platforms; painstaking kiss of a cosmeticized couple; in the adjacent compartment they unfolded a novella : ‹Oh, Fritz, not here ! – Oh, Fritz, no ! – Oh, Fritz ! – Oh !› / The Ruhr : glowing men danced surefootedly among spurting loops of wire; bein' able to sleep while riding a train 's a gift from God (so course I don't have it !). And again (she rode with me as far as Münster) braids of smoke dangling from her nostrils, down her openwork blouse, into the dark lap, from head to queynte (bringing us to Heinrich von dem Türlîn, Diu Crône; just as good as unknown, but of equal rank, I find, with much-vaunted Middle High German classics, splendidly realistic at times, lewd and large). / A sign ‹Ibbenbüren› shooting by : armored flamethrowers appeared among silken red walls, and I was back in the thick of it as forward-observer for the artillery : battle in the Teutoburger Forest, 1945 after Christie. Light rafted away on high, in longclouds. / Clairvoyance, prophetic dreams, second sight, and the misinterpretation of such incontrovertible phenomena : the basic error lies in the fact that time is seen simply as a numerical line along which things can occur only in succession. ‹In truth› it ought to be viewed as a plane on which everything is ‹simultaneously› present; that way the future, too, has been ‹here› all along (the past ‹still is›) and in the aforementioned exceptional states (which are ‹natural› nonetheless !) simply fully perceivable now. And should pious expounders start dreaming again of ‹conclusive proof for an immortal soul›, they should be reminded that they would do better to restrict themselves to the observation that space and time are of an intrinsically more complex construction than our simplifying (biologically adequate) senses and brains comprehend. / Walls tapestried with brownish yellow light : the artist's sole choice is whether he wants to exist as a human or as his work; in the latter case, it's best not to contemplate the defective residue : you hectocotylize one book chunk after the other, and slowly dissipate. / Better move on up front with my suitcase now ! : fogginesses humming past, dark

gray shadow stuff; only the stations knew light now. (And the display coins in the night sky-case.)

ii

1st hour of the bat, (evening's the 2nd) and the smudgeographs of the trees. The moon's pale cat-eye still winking behind the smokestack, otherwise splendidly clear and empty. Despite fatigue, my mood was quite jaunty and akimbo, and I began, but in considerate middle-class fashion and audible only to me, to pipe Girl of the Golden West, cantabit vacuus, the idle stroller has an easy whistle; as silhouette with briefcase in a scissor-cut world. So this is Diepholz (critical before the town map) : Lange Strasse, Bahnhof Strasse, castle, ahá. Two bosom buddettes high-heeled it home from the dance and tipsily warbled the hits. Most edificial beauties : naught but quadratic half-timber and ‹God Bless This House›, but very neat, you have to admit, plus first-rate brick paving. An office of the Socialist Reich's Party and I gravely distorted my cold facial skin : not for 1000 millibars ! (fingering : waxy, with ears, my throat already sandpapering again). By gray, the barely decipherable book titles, despite paned nose and magnifying eye : ? – ? – ah, Schmidtbonn, Furriers, great ! : Zerkaulen, oh my and ugh ! The burly moated castle, barnishly doughty, duckweed along the ditches, all weathercocks gazing anxiously eastward : ever and again, times past ! First noises (and I squinted enviously) : a sleepy country lass, encircled by brawling milk cans; the worker, running an eye over his bike, checked pedal bearings and gearshift; far to the north loose weft of sound : a train (pocketwatch : on principle : 10 after 4). Looked as if the large lake was dispatching tender damps and cloud buds; but the sky was having no part of it.

Bats appeared with black shopping bags for a last quick haggle between Venus and Jupiter, so close you could hear cracking as they slaughtered their hard insects. And finally they opened up the wooden waiting roomlet, too (after I'd really got to know that Tour Europe poster ! : "Right, a draft."). / The early train for Osnabrück collected dark blue workers and high-school kids; and in the midst of it, the motorcycle babbled outside at last : ? : ! : "Erich ! !" : master house-painter Erich Kendziak : a remnant of red hair on his nape, otherwise bald as your ol' pal; at any rate it was he, unmistakable, and we grinned, 6 feet above ground, ripping off each

other's hands in good old Teuton fashion : "Waiter 2 brews !", and then gave each other a closer once-over, first time in a good 8 years : – – : "Say, you're turnin' gray now too !", and I promptly parried the compliment : "You still sufferin' so bad from the crepitations ?"; we clinked glasses more cheerily, and in honor of the reunion he now burned some tobacco : "Y' still haven't gone back t' smokin' ?" (And I had to bow my head : nope, still too short : "Someday when I've got 200 spondulics a month !") Then very swiftly the earliest recollections of war : the nimble-fingered Poles; flea-blessed Hagenau; Norway with its godless granite cushions : "You heard anything more from Whoosis ?"; in half of Europe there wasn't a place where silver-rimmers hadn't bellowed us into formation : "Waiter !". / He was sweating now behind his goggles, in his leather jacket : "Really looks fantastic !" I said in praise, and he nodded loftily : "Forces folks who wanna kick you in the butt to admit you're standin' ahead of 'em ! : 've got fifteen journeymen workin' for me at the moment, specialize in larger surfaces, sure brings in a bundle !" (more troubled) : "But when it comes down to politics, y' gotta be real careful these days – well, I don't disagree with nobody : 'nd anyway I vote howsomever I please !" (and confidential-curious, just like in the old days, in the whisper tones of the Third Reich) : "What d' you think ?". I shrugged; no reason to conceal it from him : "On the national ticket, the All-German People's Party; locally the Social Democrats : whoever proletarianizes me, has to figure I'll vote for the commune !" and in delight he slammed his hand flat on the table : "Socialists ain't what they used t' be neither : they're all for ‹rearmin'› now too : Jesus, where'd the days go when they voted down every military project in the Reichstag ? ! But y' ain' got no other choice; Christian Democrats – I'll eat my hat first, after it's spent 7 years where the sun don't shine" : "Why Herr Kendziak !" I admonished affectedly, and flattered, he bared his teeth : "Waiter" !. / "The East Zone ? : My sis 's over there," he reported : "'nd my little niece : you oughtta read their letters ! : they ain't got it so bad ! She's a secretary : bought all new furn'cher last year; *and* a bit of land with a weekend place on it – jist a cabin for Sundays. But never believe all they say : lie 'bout fifty-percent of the time over yonder : our side takes care of the rest ! Beats all when of an evenin' y' listen to Northwest German Broadcasting babblin' ‹This is Berlin› !" / (Superior culture of the West ? ? : Wellnow ! ! : Where did Goethe settle down in the end : in the Federal Republic or in the GDR, huh ? ! And from whence to whither did Schiller flee ? And Kant liked it so well in Kaliningrad, he never left it his whole life long !) / Marital status : "My Wölfel ? ! : Hey listen, every 2 weeks he strops 'nother paira shoes off playin' soccer !" (Was Erich's son by his dead wife). – Git married again ? He threw me a

pious look : "Why then I wouldn't be worth God's havin' took my first ! : you never got married wunst : it's yóur turn ! – Waiter !" And then as the check was being figured out, he recalled : "What was it you always said back then ? : ‹Ain't natural for a poet to pay for his own Cokes› – nono : this is fine : but write me up a li'l receipt : for ‹breakfast›" and the waiter nodded wisely, smiled graciously : speak peace to the humble cottages, war to the tax palaces ! / Outside : bright as paper and empty : heaven's drawing board. On it tools of transparent mist : 1 red ruler, 1 gray protractor; below left, the glittering thumbtack : "An NSU, ol' buddy : just like in the old days !" and waved me aside, the expert : "but then you don't know nothin' 'bout such like." Brumm, brummbrumm : a proud glance back at me, champion in the thumb-jump, : brumm well ? ! ! / This early, only long-haul trucks were underway, and we rolled ahead round corners with reasonable civility. Broad imperial highway 51 was undergoing major repairs, however, and three quarters of the pavement was blocked ten times by red-white hurdles; bellowing : "High-ly-remarkable ! !" (by his own confession, his wife had trained him : to say this in lieu of his formerly all-too familiar ‹Holy shit›; but initiates knew what he meant !). Pretty, this fully level country, grass and moor, very skillfully trimmed with fogs of every sort, broad silent ditches, Soviet-red cloud banners in the east, as far as milestone 26.8 at the crossroad : "Hmmm ? . . .". We stood there. / Another motorcycle howled past from behind (but significantly less smooth than we'd been, and Erich disdainfully regarded the make) : "Well, let's first take a gander at Lembruch" and we rattled ahead again. / Lembruch : the new spa hotel, modern with streamline and flat roof : "The things're gettin' to look more'n'more like fillin' stations !" : " 't's what they are." – A meadow with numberless tents (of course they were all still sacking out the defenseless earth; high-class monkeys with cars, low-class with bicycles : "Can't get enough of seein' each other's ugly mugs !"). But from the yellow-green dike, our first glimpse of the lake : bright blue and quivering with freshness; in the southwest you couldn't see shore, thallitty, thallitty (Gettin' foolish in 'r oldage !). And Erich pointed proudly toward it too : well, who discovered it and invited you along ? ! Unfortunately the benches were still dripping wet with dew (and this time I blew the 10 pfennigs for the telescope). / Another large meadow, a restaurant beyond it, and the owner tried to encourage us to stay on : there'd be another 200 tents here by evening ! That of course tipped the scale : "Let's get outta here, Erich ! The far side, y' say ?". He stood very much there, irresolute, naught but scruple on his face : on the one hand, we wanted a little peace and quiet; on the other, in his mind's eye he saw endless rows of tents full of glistening maids groveling and ogling him, old moneybags : "So here we stand

like Charley the Nekkid ! Highly remarkable !" and we middle-classed along more testily, back to the motorcycle : 7:50 A.M. – "There is one possibility yonder, but nothin's happenin' there !" / Even the road looked really crazy now : its asphalt pavement barrel-vaulted : ? : " 't's from the moor base," he explained, still peeved : "sinks off to both sides : makes for some very peculiar drivin' !" In the distance, a train flowed nimbly through lechairy and fieldshine, hung back shying at a curve, gave an astonished whistle and, muttering reservations, disappeared into itself. Erich turned 160 degrees onto the warty village lane, the sun shone in our faces now, the sign dyed in linseed-oil ‹Dümmerlohausen›, brumm-brumm : stop : an attractive, fairly new building, large and proper : ‹Holkenbrink's Pension Hotel›, flowers round the windows, a garden : "Doesn't look all that foolish ? !" (hopeful). "I know the place," Erich said curtly : "spent a night here wunst on a business trip. – You stay put; I'll go ask," and went inside. Look around : all farmhouses; aphorisms on the beam, and names like Enneking, Schockemöhle, Kuhlmann; out of the house came a fat brown dog at a wild frisk straight toward me : "Will you git in heah, Tell ? !" and Erich likewise reappeared in the same door. "Well, que tal ? : They have a vacancy ? –" (They had a vacancy !).

iii

The one : 6 feet tall; skinny as a rail in her wasp-waisted dress banded white-yellow, ‹The way Old Masters painted death›; endless dark-tanned armsticks knelt before her on the table; ostensible engagement ring; bust undetectable, at least for now. The nose hooked buzzardlike out of the Iroquois profile; the unwieldy, almost lipless mouth; frameless spectacle lenses rode before pop-round eyes : ‹Hachoo !› (and did it ever look bleak and tottery-stiff, as if a pile of Gothic bricks or a power pylon had sneezed). / The other : short and country buxom; red-stitched mouth in tallowy yellow Slavic face; round her cup lay disorderly fingers, pale and ragged as woodchips; and out of the lardy drawl of her vowels the hard ‹r› burbled merrily : "Ah, Pieronje prett-neart Gleiwitz" Erich buoyantly pinpointed her nationality. The maid of hellish hue bent her body's slender stem our way, eyes illumined us briefly, the short one whispered pertinently; and likewise, under the rubric of ‹Upper Silesian Love Coos›, Erich came up with a superfluous : "Why use y' fingerr ? : Use THIS !"

Everything inside was tidy too; all toilets flush models (plus the magazine : Professor Baade had discovered that Miss Leavitt had been in error in regard to the distance of δ=Cepheids; and, another torn-off corner the wiser, I grabbed for the little brass-plated chain). / Downstairs now the promo breakfast : potato salad and franks; real good butter with the bread. And genuine coffee ? : 'Zounds the knock-, poppycock-, blood- and liverwurst ! (Laid out extra for us, two-week guests, but all the same !). "Noonoo; vittles here're okay !" Erich declared with vigor : "Full board at 8 marks a head a day – – nahf'gettit : I'm payin' –" (‹Tis more blessed to give than to receive›) " 'nd I can always deduct it !" he confided to me. / The dialect in Oldenburg as in days of old (the innkeeper's family converged, steadily taking over for one another) : these people could not get their final ‹er's› and ‹a's› straight ! Either they said buttah and cheddah, or vaniller and soder. "Y' can take a peek at the bird collection later. – But get a loada that !" and motioned inconspicuously with his brow : / : so then, portraits of the other vacationers : a drizzly, gaunt in-his-fifties (but with an oddly frivolous red-tasseled cap !); a married couple : war-disabled arm, she short and all brindled cow. "Noo, not her !" : / She was truly amazingly ugly. At first. And Erich had no scruples putting words to his shock : "At most out of anatomical curiosity" he proposed despondently and gave me an imploring look : ? But I'd already got hold of myself again, and

obstinately looked for the attractions : – – hm – – : hm ! Erich, already messing over his buxom Marushka with his eyes, pavillon and culasse, wasn't about to falter now : "So you take the banshee ? –" : "Sure, what else ? !" and was said so sincerely that for a moment he wasn't sure and made a disconcerted reappraisal – – : "How old would y' guess ? – 'proximately !". Shrugs : "Mid 20s ? –" (was difficult; could also have been late. I would liked to have had my trousers pressed : and though 'twas but a modest wish, once again fate did not fulfill it). "You're the one who should show some spunk : you were the noncom after all !" Erich said, happy to ratify the division of spheres of interest; then he cleared his throat vigorously and went to work, the old pro (and the capers he cut matched his butt nicely, as usual) : loud conversation with the innkeeper's wife, warm manly laughter : "Oh money's no object ! !" (with 1000 watts their way, and our two sleeping beauties crackled softly to themselves). And curious, the old man brought out the guest register, and for starters we read cozily away, with long meaningful expert glances toward the ladies, who graciously blushed and feigned indifference, but it was disappointingly easy; place-of-birth Rybnik, Up. Sil. : "Y' see : Annemarie Waniek : Me give you rradio –" to Erich. (Ergo, my stroke of luck was named Selma. Wientge, born in 1930, both employed over by Osnabrück; just then got an awful good look at her plank back, and deep doubt was painted on my face I guess, because even Erich noticed and laughed with glee like a frog). / "Aliases ? ? – : What else ! Case one of 'em gets knockt up ! Nobody's gonna demand an ID here." So we retained first names only; so – – – ("Listen : I'm a surveyor !" : "I'm still a master painter !"). Then we let the book lie irresistibly open on the edge of the desk; raised ourselves to full height, barreled our chests 'ndsoforth, bowed an obliging Good Morning; smiles, with deep looks into the respective pair of assigned eyes : ladylike sidelong glances and adroit nonchalant thanks, right on through us – – (ah : a wee banner of the eye, however, waved after us ! : "Get a move on; they're off to the lake too !"). / "Don't forget your camera !". But the tap water tasted rotten, as it only can in flatlands, swampy. ‹Confessions of a Hotel Washbasin›. The inevitable wardrobe vintage 1890 : "Used to see stuff like that only in the grand duke's parlor !". At the window : a flat roof in front, to our right a curtain was still wafting, and Erich, old pro at scaffold-scaling, betook himself hither and peered brazenly inside : ?, nodded his delight : " 't's where they're stayin' !". Came back : "Jesus : it's like havin' a private entrance !" and stared more joyfully at his new flatfoot inserts. (Once downstairs, he touched the innkeeper up for a giant straw hat, warning to no avail : "You'll soon think of me !", and having donned it, looked as sly and respectable as a Connecticut farmer).

iv

"Your name's Selma : I checked that first !" I confessed. The water, strong as blue fabric, clung to us like a sarong. "In the guest book, when we registered"; her shoulders too were very spare. She awkwardly opened her large mouth, gave a shrill laugh, turning an even brickier hue, and confided to the lake : "We did too. And you're Joachim, right ? !" and breathed satisfaction. The clouds were lady's-smock. I took in so much air that she gazed in fascination at my chest, which she could walk past as if along a yellow wall : "We'll go for a paddle !" I asserted, and she nodded, hesitant and eager (but also gave a sulky pro forma toss). Ducks took off like airline clippers. Both without swimcaps. We laughed foolishly, and played in embarrassment with the water. I also noticed : seaweed ribbons in her hair; the figure sad and stiff; blackish sickle-shaped fins; in the left one, an aquatic plant; delicate salmon-lamellaed gills as a flower behind each ear : looked very pretty and ukelely. "We needed a vacation" she, too, confided innocently.

So mild was the air, you could've filled cream puffs with it; pollen of faraway lay upon the Damm Hills ("Aha ! You checked the map beforehand !" Erich; and gave a malcontent grumble : these lousy pedants !); a chestnut pensively rocked its powdered wig. – The houses : "Could stand a coata paint sometime" Erich the Incorruptible opined; only two won his approval : one snow white, and one with silicate : " 't's 'xpensive I grant, but rugged." Thatch-roofed : "Poor fire insurance comp'ny !". / "Praise Jesus : where y' headed ?" : "Fetchin' buttermilk f'rever'n'amen" (two children, refugees apparently; I once knew a fellow who routinely answered every catholic's ‹God bless› with ‹If I ever see him›; was a fine man). Ahyes, Münsterland is rock-ribbed catholic, result of history, (and Immermann's ‹Oberhof› a bad joke for anyone knowledgeable about social conditions. 'nother topic.) / : A lapwing with black breastplate and feather tiara ran straight ahead screaming. A scrawny ol'lady dwarfed down the path, crooked as a fiddlestick, white fuzz at one end, bawling and gesticulating before a crucifix : "And her vote is just as good as yours, counts for just as much as, say, Ollenhauer's : can that be right ? !" : "Adenauer'd say, sure." (But let's get serious : universal and equal suffrage is nonsense : at the least, everyone ought to have to take a historical-geographical test; and at age 65 lose all rights to elect or be elected, period !). / Wind leapt snorting down the splendid poplared road and braggadocioed grimaces of dust. A Maycomobile : "Looks right spiffy so far, don't it ?" Intrepid struttings at

the youth hostel, beneath Boy Scout hats : haháha : we Christians too are merry ! / At the lake : first a baker (also had ice cream and soda); you could see white cloud coral reefs now; young lads assumed all sorts of heroic poses, before teenage sweethearts; codgers lugged at overweening lard-bellies; mustachioed matrons stomped on bowling-pin legs – but really very few, maybe 10 in all, and 6 of those under the sunbrellas of Schomaker Jr.'s Beach Café. Me : "We can cope with this"; Erich : "Nothin' happenin' here". / "C'monc'mon : fork over the pesetas !" 20 marks for weekly boat rental, and Erich looked more intently at it : ? ! – : "Well, we'll come to terms !" he asserted boldly. Then, total nonswimmer, he anxiously studied the map at the entrance : ‹Danger : People have drowned here !›, the wild-life preserves, and urgent red squares : "Here ! : take a good look y'self : when they built the dam they dredged the lake, a good 15 feet deep : just be careful !" (And more anxious yet : "Highly remarkable !"; and I actually had to step up and memorize the sites in earnest; just so he wouldn't quiz me !). / The canoe : white, with snazzy chalkblue streamline and cinnabar inside; removable back supports; a wooden planklet as sporty, scant seat ("Tomorrow I'm bringin' a cushion along !"). / "Those islands of rushes 're int'restin' though, ain't they ? !" Water lilies white and yellow. "Burnish the barrel 'nd it won't gleam in the sun !" he added, old frontline soldier, and pulled his swim trunks lower, apparently so as to leave no doubt that he was of male gender. "Quiet a sec !" : a jet plane yowled our way, far ahead of its sound : a terrified duck call, the rushes wobbled, and gone was the thin neck taking the gaudy short-cropped head with it : crested grebe ! : "Didja see that ? !" / "Say, what's that ? !" : – a cry across the water : "Lord, it's them ! –". But then it looked as if – – well, first I called over in reassuring, boatswainy tones and spread my arms : !, !, !, ! / "Annemie's taken sick !" and her eyes roamed about worriedly in her haggard scholar's face – : – At once I was at her side in the water, and relieved her of the fat, wobbly shorty : "You hold the boat still. – : Erich !" and unbidden he grabbed yet deeper under her broad arms, while I, commander-in-chief, took an exuberant demi-butt in each hand, congrats Erich, and boosted her up with a gasp : ! – : ! Selma, having shoved her friend's sturdy feet over the edge of the boat, now helped me push, (which meant our shoulders pressed together in businesslike fashion) : "Take her in, Erich, then tow another boat back with you ! Avanti !" / We turned backs in concord to the sun (standing in the water, and the water swayed) and her Klopstockian first name didn't suit her at all. "How long you been here ?" 8 days now. "And how much longer ?" : "Till Friday morning." : "Ah ! ! : That doesn't leave us much time !" (Rueful : "Right !" and looking). "I don't believe it", she said glumly : "I've got

the looks of – an owl ? !" and waited, desperate for contradiction, hopeless, with awkwardly distorted mouth and bachelored eyes. I grabbed her hands underwater and forbade her with my head : not one more word against – "Pocahontas" I said softly (and she hearkened to those alien syllables with blissful mistrust; explanation sotto voce). / We swam on our sides mostly : leg slats scissored, fin feet, arms grappling in complicated medley (but one always ahead, spurring on) : "Wanna swim a little in their direction ?" / Me in the boat, she in the water (still leery ?) : "HowlongcanIstayúnnnder ? !" (so check my watch on the spot : she bravely stuck her head, with its black prickly thatch roof) into the water, her legs mostly half angling in the air, still at it – – snorted hippoly, peeped : "Well ? !" – actually 27 seconds, the cavalier adds five : "32 !", nodding impressed approval; (and she rejoiced, breathed gloriously deep, and took another look around for some new impertinence : 'sindeed : I had to pull her along behind the boat !). / "Don't look at my back ! : My bones stick out everywhere !" and pleading : "Let me sit behind !" (murmured some more; but out of the question : ancient law of the sea !). The delicate lean legs; the nape of her neck shorn nice and fresh; a sweet kid (if only her face were set on backwards from time to time !). Watch Erich's boat with my starboard eye : They were just vanishing off to the left with a laugh : "C'mon, you : suntan lotion !" : she shyly dipped a long-nailed finger in my darkblue Nivea tin, rubbed some on her left biceps, and then sat there in embarrassment : "More !". / But, no : "I wanna paddle now !" : "Just a sec !", and first I took better cover – okay ! – : now she could throw her daring moulinets above the boat, with ambidexterity (and we actually moved slowly past the reedy backdrop, eppoi si muove !). / A crested grebe with two youngsters : she froze, hands on the paddle-shaft, pointed with a vigorous thrust of her shoulders : quiet ! : soundlessly we forged nearer – – a whistle : they all dived simultaneously. Her hands and apparatus sank slowly onto the boat; whisper languish : " 't's so sweeeet !" / At times our paddles bumped together, and embarrassed, she returned my laugh and went at it more zealously, until finally I was able to convince her, and the thing lay in reserve on the left. / The bird of prey screamed ablazing, and snatched the water's disk with talons and teeth. "With teeth – ?" she objected in amazement. It circled back up corsairily, and still watching, I petulantly waved aside the unpoetical female; but then did admit it : "Well, yes, few birds have teeth." : "Few – ?" she repeated unrelenting and incredulous (did not know me, then, by a long shot, but I wasn't about to deliver any lectures at the moment, so simply summarized : "Yes. Few.").

V

A meadow of voices (above it threefold teachers' mooing, à la ‹Now if anyone still has a question›) : ". . . and this heah's the jack-snipe. Oah the nanny-buhd : 'cause it's alliz ableatin' " : Holkenbrink the Elder, with a rod in his tough hand; blessed are the hobbyists, for they shall – – weeell : be blessed ! Up front a bright spindle-shaped hand ventured into the air, began to fidget, fingersnap, with excitement : "Sheldrake !" : "Right !" Little boys, resolute roundheads, with scalawagging longlegs. The girls meowed with pleasure, plus their thin wash dresses, 'gomery-wardish, the whole collection. Crane, heron, white-tailed eagle. Hair colors from white to black, including the rare sandy yellow and red. Jackdawscrowsmagpies. ("Won't there be some grub to shovel soon ? !" : Erich; but the landlady, bundles of knives in hand, simply pointed in resignation at the final bus) : a whole pack of appetizing fifteen-year-olds, most of whom immediately headed for the john. All flesh-tones, pimply chalk to marbled aspic; bosoms for beginners, breaded a lovely light brown with Dümmer sand : "Nah. – : Nah – – : Wrong aggin ! – – – : The black tuhn ! !". (Corruption of minors : exacerbating circumstances given as : nighttime (why's that ?); disguising oneself; false information as to name and address, ahá; flight; repeat offense; perpetration by three or more persons in collaboration – and here I faltered; refusal to turn over one's tools . . . ? ? – Only then did I discover that I had stumbled into forestry and poaching, and crestfallen, put the volume back : just let somebody find his way through our criminal code sometime !). Finally, the flies on parlor duty started their motors again.

"We're havin' cowllyflaurrr f' lunch !" Annemie announced beaming, and my sea-marvel, overhearing this with satisfaction, built a red wigwam of her hands, and supplied a few attractive motions : finest purl of gold holding on behind the whorled ear-funnels, above the root of the nose rode a broad gold saddle. / Then came the three buses with the school classes, and we waited for our food. Erich humbly offered cigarettes, good Luckies : first to his czarevna : and Selma took one, too, so as not to take a backseat in elegance; they choked daintily on the smoke and at once put on appropriate lady-of-the-world faces. "Nah. Not now !" and he lent an interested ear : "Y' know : my dad was always crazy about birds : was a workin' man but went out and bought himself some binox so he could watch 'em better !" The glass-case in the corner with its Stone Age tools. / "Why do

teachers seem so awfully silly to me now ?" : "Because you now have an impartial overview of how stilted and conceitful they really are." / The wife of the tax inspector across the room fanned an offhand score of crude crosses over herself, the pimply bulge of brow, the blue apoplectic dress (and did she ever smack her lips, may her God have mercy ! Erich, through his gag of potatoes : "Think it taste's better to her ?"). / Old man Holkenbrink, mid 70s, with his pointer still in hand : Yes, the Dümmer had recently been dammed up, and the water level hardly varied; yes, you can also walk clear across : "we did it wunst : with two boats alongsides." And in winter it froze over : "Y' say I should write up my rem'niscences ?" (I had suggested this) : "Oh, that'd take me nigh onto – pooh : 14 days !" : "Put it at : that many months and you'd be closer to the truth !" and he marveled incredulously, full of venerable impatience. – The weather ? : "Ah nah ! Wuh'nt no fog 'tall s'mornin' : summat's wrong theah !" and wagged disapproval. "Well, maybe the fog'll roll in yet," I said offhandedly to oblige; but he gave me a shahp'n'piuhcin' look : don't work with me nomore, gramps ! Anybody who takes his bit of shit that serious just comes across as funny to me ! / "We're gonna lie down for a bit !" Annemie divulged. "Well look alive : hup, hup, off to the patchwork !" / Upstairs gazing in the mirror : wrench of mouth, rumple of nose, helpless eye-teeth mockery (on the back of a book jacket : 12 faces pulled by the poet himself). Once again : nah ! nothing more going for me ! Stubbly, rattlely, rumplely, unruly : what a fellow I'd been at 18, handlebar handstands and expressionism, blazing body and song (and now : all the gaskets leaky : "Hey, Erich ?" : "Hmm ? !" : "Do you already feel old sometimes, Erich ?" : "Nah.". He whittled giant steps in the loaf of bread, wolfing with military haste : pineapple, tinned sausage, Edam; confidentially : "Y'know, once you've had to go hungry as a kid, and then a second time round : you're an animal when it comes to fodder !"). / A pillow like an erratic : thus for a long dozy time I stood in the bed beside my shirt (ohgodno : th' other way round; my time really has come !). He too bedded his pensive head; we turned striped backs to one another, Erich had to fart aloud naturally, "Careful : enemy's always list'nin' !" (and it kept on clattering out of him, endless, like a wet chain). – "Do whales suffer from gas, d'y' s'pose ?" (with the commonfolk's gargantuan lust for monumental physical feats). "Well you've got no reason to complain either !" I suggested; and he giggled proudly. (But between us : I really did not know whether fish in general. Course there was nothing about it in Brehm; ask a specialist sometime. – But was quite a grim picture : 3000 feet deep, the blue-pitiless giant, and the room-sized bubble of gas wriggling up !). / In the toothbrush glass a pulsing hum arose, rasping fading, from the water

pitcher the indignent reply of a second jamming station : flies. (Stoopid dream salad). / Wind-skewed clouds ? Sultry ? (And so void once more; wash hands; fill with fresh water). The trees were signaling among themselves with gray branches, look sharp, because of the yellow luster above the horizon : "Well ? Shall we risk it, Miss Wientge ? !"

vi

In the leaden cloud colosseum (golden cracks showing everywhere) : over gentle-green plates of meadows, farmers panted, running forks into the gibbous aftergrass, lifting it with a stumble above their bluff straw hats, broadlegged and as nervous as their very brown horses : Rum rum rumpum ! We dodged beneath the katabatic wind's blows to the neck, long dust pennants at our feet. At my side, billowy wrestling began in Selma's blouse; her skirt slipped in from behind between her legs, her stormy butt grooved ravishingly; her hair toppled forward trying to wind-sock. Tarumtumtum ! : the poplars turned pale gray with bodies all atremble. A handcart rattled toward us on frilly wheels of dust : "Run a little ?" : at once her sepia calves were strung with tauter tendons, the twosome on her slanting torso galloped to the fore a wee, and I had to work at just keeping up : "Just to the corner – those trees !" And what's more, milk cans, too, sprawled beneath the amputated Jesus, but we kept up a brisk pace, and she had a mere 2 drops on her arm once we made the inn : "Great scottt !". It ripped right across the shrieking blackness, all flowers threw themselves pathwards on their faces. Water gushed from the slit, silver needles bounced off the pavement, stabbing hand-high : "Greheat-scottt ! !"

Horses grazed along in front of restive tails, farmwomen biked in white-starched ‹reed-bonnets›, and the horsefly bit me too : whap ! fell softly off : "The beast !". The foliage hung limply along the branches, like old garlands; the leap of yellow flame on one, we froze, and a hard high voice shouted something about coming bolts, turned back around, and vanished again in the sultry upper world : ? ? : "An oriole. Rarely see 'em !". / A sting-nettle : but it could just as easily 've been one of her normal steps. She looked proudly about her : ? ! and we rewarded bold us with eyes. / Our boat : number S 5 : "And please include a can, for bailing ! – Yes't'sright : the one the gentleman with the curly red hair paid for this morning !" The wavelets leapt up onto the wood, clownish, like little gray cats. "The

schoolkids're all here too !". / Out we go. Farther still. (And turn in the lee of the last rush island : okay !). Then scramble into the water (I jumped out boldly) and we circled the empty wooden hull, guarding it well. – "Let's see how close we can get" : to the crested grebe, and soundlessly we struck out, 50 yards, 30, twen-ty – well – – : and was gone with a squeaky cry; breathless : "We should 've got a snapshot !". / I stepped in front of her and drew her more deeply into the flood (over at the dock the children were about to set sail); "Pocahontas !" She understood at once, hesitated allround, – – –, pointed, surprisingly tricksy : – ! – (and then we submerged, and shared our first kiss underwater : "Get in the boat"). / The sun branded our thighs scarlet (the fine web of hair around mine looked tow-blond now). All the same : old hirsute cloud-manikins weltered languidly on the horizon and belched monochromatic. But seldom. – : "Hold it ! !" : a bumblebee drifted helplessly in the water, waving feeble leglets; she carefully ‹rescued› it and set it up front on the wood : "Now it can dry out !". / "And now your head goes here !" and she obeyed precipitately and did it all wrong, tipping a paddle into the lake, clambering awhile; until she lay on her back before me, her heavy head on my blue shorts. Arms caressing, eyes kissing (but suddenly raised anxiously again, dubious whether it was all satisfactory), wandering in her hair, "I'm getting you all wet," and brought her temple round to lie on something harder (eyes closed at once !) and trembled with self-control : : and we pasted lips together till we almost grew faint. / The mudfishes snapped restively : "One last time, way out !" / "A c'nooooo ! !" : kid shouts, and countless hands paddled in the lake; the boatswain's jaunty white cap fell in and he bellowed embarrassment. The clouds grumbled in the southeast and put lazy hunchbacks to the wind nudging from behind. The water grayed. "Better head for home'n'hearth !" "Oh, just a wee bit further !". (But the man at the wheel was also starting to look around him, and gingerly came about : at our back, the cloud barrel rolled a little bit closer : rushes reached for their panicles and reeled a quick ringaround the boat : "Nono. Come on !"). / The trees hooted and carried on as if longing to melt into dust, wind dived headfirst, and the bushes tucked in corners, dancing a wilder contorted jive. A burly cloud bag dragged straight across the sky, kept ripping open, unraveling the coarse jute and letting sheets of brass slither out : "Hey, get a move on !"

vii

World of symbols : one in sandstone, the moon's; the corresponding triangles of the gables; the lane strode millipedately; lanterns obscured the pure blackness, crickets honed, a dog followed us with renewed curses. Annemie sang away, on soft large-leafed sloven-lips, wantoned arithmetics : 1 night in May, 2 guitars by the sea, 3 musketeers; and so the jazzified creature vanished sordino in the slippery dusk, before us, on her Erich arm. World of symbols : our spectacled panes rested on one another, her beak nose hooked tight, her hands knotted around me (moon plying as fire-ship among cloud frigates), her teeth pinched mightily : – – and then we groped ahead across the white conic sections. Return. Black-skinned houses; a car murmured by; "Didja notice that red cloud serpent a while ago ?"

"Oh coupla days ago they had sumpin' reeeally nice, little bowls like, for eatin' your slipes with : salad !" and the sleek eyes swayed with delights in her face; Annemie; had also stubbed her toe this morning, was grabbing it with guttural lament : !. I suggested a trial following old Salic law : toss that piece of bruised bone at a scutcheon across the king's highway; if it was of real significance it would ping brightly; but was rejected indignantly by the whole party. I heard her say in revenge to Erich under her breath : "Selma's engaged and hów ! gonna inherrrit 20 acres a land someday, so th' inspector screwed up his courrrage 'nd went for it !" and gave a gloating laugh. / "Oh : real northern lights ? !" (Selma reverently); but we just brushed it gloomily aside : one mark per northern light, listen, we could stay 2 weeks longer on that ! (And for hors d'oeuvres there'd been the usual hit-the-ground-up-march-march and toes frozen at the edges : "Get outahere with your northern lights !"; we grimly drank at our beer, and raised irate brows : *that* series of memories could've been left out ! But we will go for a little walk, 'sindeed !). / "The Dümmah pushes thundahstohms away !" the old man lectured momentously : "most all of 'em pass us t' the right uh left !" (And Tell quivered much at the distant sheet lightning : "He was bohn in Hambuhg. Durin' the bombin' 'nd he can't tol'rate it !" So even animals !). / She folded hands behind her head, elbows making a large chic winged bonnet. / "Why ‹Pocahontas› ? ?" : "An Indian princess !" ever so nonchalant; but chubby's jealous wrinkles were showing, she whispered to Erich, and both brayed laughter, crumpling pudgy eyes : "Ah, that's okay" he declared genially : "‹Annemie› 'sgood enough for us, ain't it ?" imprinted a condescending hand on the floraled fat of her back, and I perfunctorily noted how, nimbler folk as always, they

entangled their eyes; so we fell back somewhat, too, and I took her in my hands, her, reddish and fragrant of crunching evening, and of damper lower earth, of root stuff and sweet pot-herbs, a buzz saw rang out in the distance, and we suffocated ourselves several times, till she took shelter in the light. / "Aaahh ! !" and she was in fact the first to spot the stork nest on the roofridge : inert silhouetted ciconid, on one leg pole, and I had to wait until he'd let out one pensive rattle : "Just think : 2 young ones flew into a hi-tension line last year : dead ! !" and pleaded much for sympathy. (On the tree here, a notice, which Erich, business first, had also studied : why should I be wiser ? ‹Sale of Foals at Baron Frydag's› : always in the wrong !). / Indoors, first the evening news (and Erich provided gratis commentary) : The Americans were going right ahead merrily closing in, whereas the Western Powers were still puzzling over what Moscow might mean by its latest note : "'t's clear enough : either NATO or reunification; can't have both !". Theodor Blank had allowed a peek at some discreet details, charming interiors, of our dapper new army : "‹Your German's mis'rable when he don't feel the rod on his rear›, my father always said !" Election hubbub : one guy came on with God; another cautiously with swastika; another extolled Russia : "But o'course the unions are Social Democratic : they s'posed to be for Krupp ? !". German Evangelical Convention (and this time I darkened o'er); already turning out ‹lusty› military farces again : come lads, let's sing a gladsome song of freedom in the tavern : "Well the Russians'll help us out !" (Oh, Erich : be ye not fooled ! And even if it does come to that : ain't it sad that we're none the wiser ?). (Then just sports news; and verbose surmises were dared as to who would soon be fastest sliding down the mountain on his butt, or some such; shun the right and e'er do naught). / But now Erich rose to very best form : good landlady come, the king doth call : – (and Annemie, she of glistening sweet-toothings, at once garnered for herself the gilded champagne cork : to show it off; later, at work, where it could escape from her handbag, in front of envious colleagues : that's how we lived it up on vacation ! – silly baggage.). "Well ? : nice juice, huh ? !". / Odds'n'ends : "Why, for 200 years now : 't's a fact !". She got so excited she started pointing with her arm : stretched it far, and Annemie testily shoved it away from her nose : "Oh, beg pardon." So I took the oldest of them, ‹Hanoverian Court and State Handbook›, from the year 1839. "Well, should I ? : you've still got time to . . . ." : "No, look it up !" so then, leafing : . . . ., ... : page 386 : yes indeed : J. H. Wientge, Copyist & Beadle of the Consistory Court, Osnabrück ! (So you can trust the 80 other years as well !) And she laughed with uncouth mouth (but refined tones ! !). "Now my forebearrrs . . ." Annemie started in swankily now, too, but Erich waved her off with a

yawn : "Sturdy drinkers and lazy workers, right. And always hankrin' ‹forr love› !". We laughed obligingly : Selma, comradely and forthright, Annemie, canny and country-lewd, ladies first, then I with light, demurring amusement, Erich (as initiator) all crockery and goatery. / Surveyor ? Sure. "Map specialist : Prussian double-image !" Erich knew to add, grand and not unwitty; but I gladly explained to my interested listeners : "Well-surveyed ? On the whole globe, only : Germany (does that make me a patriot ? !) and England; the little ones too : Hollandbelgiumaustria : that's it ! The proud USA first needs to learn what a 25,000:1 map is." / "Knows all 'bout the sky too !", nuntius sidereus, and demanded some impressive fenomenon or other. "Tomorrow evening there's an uncommonly long occultation of Venus," I replied flegmatically. "Herr Bo Mann, really !" Erich, giving a prissy virignal squeal; general laughter; fate of learned men; so at least scholarship is good for something; Gundling. (Both girls worked in the steno pool at the same work-uniform factory) : "Time for bed now : after all, t'morrow is another day !"

viii

She ran, pursued by her shambling clothes, cricket slim, my brown cicada. Came at me in preying mantess pose, laid her sharp forelegs over my shoulders, and tried long to devour me. With hands; with teeth. Then the portfolios swayed out there beside us. Marigolds made smolt eyes through fences, at first just two, then they stood in a regular trellis of curiosity, one now stuck its head up Selma's skirt, making me huff with umbrage : be kind enough to leave that to me in the future, my good Luteolus ! She asked at once, and then nodded several times highly satisfied at such jealousy : as it should be ! – "Looka that white house !". That ? : a villa no less, my child ! And it was elegantly simple, portly and topped with grizzled rushes, elaborately scarred stucco, fronted by three arches as a loggia, large windows with meshes of yellow bull's-eye panes; hedge, small lawn, a dream-born outhouse – : "Well, what d'y' say ? – : Thirty thousand for sure !". And dahlias, georgians, tinted, banded, bizarres; that sobered her profoundly : ahyes, to own a place like that, my girl ! ! (Turned out it belonged, how just, to an industrialist in Bielefeld, and stood empty, of course, 350 days in the year ! As you're headed toward the lake on the left, just before the poplared lane begins).

Selma then, as noted quite in bloomeried organdy, amid sunny glaredom, grasping me stiffly by both hands; we internested our fingers, and to my surprise my heart, too, went trotting off, and finally we put aside all oghams and futharks, and candidly told us : how pretty we were, and so on. Her skirt was already frisking ahead and deftly fanned, as it were, its tail, and in general appeared ever so adventuresome, her skirt. / Long slender barking swung in arcs; and then a bright dog danced out the gate, always just ahead of the heavily trotting team. Everywhere the farmers were chaining horses to wagons, and in weary and noble resignation they let it happen : "They'll not lose a thing by dying out !". Hip roofs above, kittycat doors below, black Oldenburg swine grunted excitedly, and I was reminded of Count Anton Günther, the great studfarm owner, and his dapple-gray, ‹Crane› : "The tail was 9 ells long, the mane 7," and she criticized this as impractical : granted; in any case our voices leapt cheerfully ahead of us. / "What d' you do at that factory ?" : "Welll –" she weighed thoughtfully "oohh – write up orders; with patterns." In Osnabrück then; had trained there as well. "What d'y' like to read ?" She glanced across mistrustfully, visibly searching for the weightiest; hesitated – – : "Gustav Freytag, Lost Manuscript." Hmm. Not bad. But she was determined to make a deeper

impression : "One of our guys is always reading Kant !" she reported with reverence. "Then he must be crazy !" I declared : "Y' don't believe it ? ! Pay attention : . . . ." (and at once I ran the old test : which quote is from Kant, and which is bullshit ? : a.) ‹A unity of the idea must serve a natural law of causality as the a priori ground of determination of a (certain) form of combination›; or b.) ‹The causality of a (certain) form of combination must serve a form of natural law a priori as determinating ground of the unity of the idea› ? She lowered her brow and answered no more). / 2 mandolins giggled nervously on the terrace. Two bright ice cream cones, with fresh nor'easter topping, and at once her skirt showed an impetuous desire to pull round behind me, good skirt; but the checkered waffle-dough burst now under her large teeth, and from over the top, she hugged me with her eyes, holding her peace, her mouth full of icy sweetness. / No saddle : and Pocahontas rode the bow, with clinging thin hair and blue slit of lips. Splashed it with both hands, steadied herself, and kept on laughing at me from the water. Madreporic cloudwork. / To scramble aboard : breathing deeply, she stood beside me at the end of the boat (me inside), so that we could comfortably adore one another : – – but now I gave critical instructions : "Move up front." "Two arms round the boat now !"; she obeyed blindly. "Legupoverthedge – –" it appeared infinitely smooth and watercoated : "Still standing on one leg ? . . ." Nodding, violently; her eyes hung on my mouth (hers open, almost whispering along). Now I leaned further to port – still further – the paddle likewise at the ready – – : damn : the canoe was turning again anyway ! So : "Leggoagain !" : pull round to the left most energetically, once more – hold it, a touch to the right – : okay; now the waves were coming head-on again : "Once more now !". / There she sat beaming and dripping before me : "Dry off right away. And pull on a sweater; that wind's too fresh." She nodded gratefully and caressed her arms on the towel; face, neck; pause. Legs, legs; pause. She let her eyes travel hit-and-run over me, but I remained implacable. – "And nobody can see us, y'sure ?" she plaintively begged once more. Takealook : rushes roundabout, blue above blue below, only a bird skimming off to the left under more raucous protest : then she reached at last for the button on her shoulder, slowly, and long the road, Count Isolan – – but the other towel had to be kept within reach : "Heycareful !" : a rush-cutter with heavily laden boat, way over there : he regarded us, majesty and yokeldumb – until she lounged there flat, breathless in the blue sweater, curried and most eager for exploration. / A finger pointer shot forward : "Lookathat !" – – : I saw only the distant tines of the poplared lane to Lembruch – maybe those rushes, where the short green tops interlaced tongues ? "No : the clouds there !", ah, the clouds; and we paid them lengthy tribute for morning hues

and forms : a fuzzy one, a billowy, a swell-head, a balloon Annemie, a thin attenuated one : fluttering gaily, cloud maidens, your hydrogen ribbons ! She pouted a little at first (because the linen form was so very endless), but was most easily mollified, with eyes, mouth and hands, struggling some more, because it was so very lovely; kept on – gave two gasps, and contentedly caught my fingers (while the boat circled and slip-slopped on its own). / On her biceps the delicate bas-relief of her pockmark : – : at once she looked for mine now and kissed it eagerly too. / Two long-necked birds danced together in the light above; the rushes shuddered forward; I nonchalantly lifted the paddle again and slowly ground glistening water. "Grab a bite, and then back here, okay ? !". The lake waved after us with a thousand little blue hands.

ix

Tuckatuckatuckatucka : "They say there's a motorboat on Dümmer Lake." (disparagingly). She looped the gray water a couple of times around her wrist, before murmuring, like a voice from the lake; and also let her fingers dangle long beside her, each leaving its delicate wake. – – On our right something like a coast agleam : trees of blown smoke; the vapor trapezoid of a roof; shadows trying to slip under gaseous fountains : hot gray air hinting at a shore. Lake scenery with Pocahontas. – – "Hey you !" – – She threw the mahogany rope up and back, round my neck : "Yes ! Faster !" she lashed tighter : ! – sat up straight and began to paddle in wild distraction, unflaggingly gawkish, toward the glass haze. : Toward the glass haze ! !

Slightly overcast aaahmy : our blazing hides had a little peace (but it still zapped us at times). / The water sprite, both hands on the edge of the boat, swam upright alongside, and looked into it sad and unreflecting (sucking the while on two pounds of yellow plums I had to insert one by one : long body, canalized by plumbing, valves rattled, bright juices ran round inside her, purple flesh inlaid with ivory and stiff black awn : "You're gonna dive ? Y' sure ? ! Probably expect to find some ‹treasure›, huh ? !" But there was no stopping her). / She brought up the items (dredging with one arm, pushing off and down from the boat), offering it all to me : one glob of gritty green aquatic plants; one warped heavy plank (so heavy it no longer floated, what next ? !); one handful of silky black muck – but with two freshwater clams in it : the first dead, so toss it. The second struggled mightily against opening and curiosity : "Looka this !" and biology

lessons : mantle, byssus, beard : "Climb aboard now.". / Drifting : her fingers restlessly wrote my name in the water, around the whole boat, and another drip=dotted i, so some kind of Undine trick, until I forbade her such suspicious practices. The sole result being that she wanted to hear the watery tale (presumably to learn more tricks, right ? !); murmured her sympathy at the catastrophe, firmly convinced, oh you men ! : "Whereas in reality Undine was named was Elizabeth von Breitenbauch, born in Minden on 7 May 1780, married a Herr von Witzleben on 14 May 1800, had 3 children by him, and after years of widowhood, finally died in Halle on 27 May 1832. Fouqué's great love. The whole thing takes place, by the way, on Steinhuder Lake down the road" I hastily concluded : wasn't the busy body scratching on the starboard again ? ! "Mirror writing !" she declared, cold and merry as a witch, and I closed my eyes by way of precaution (and when I opened them again, the whole lake was full of curlicues and underlines : reprovingly : "Y' see !"). But the gaudy creature merely laughed callously, and told me to paddle; joined in again herself with newly awakened desire : "Let's see how long it takes to get to the other side !". / (Half an hour by the way) and poor Lembruch : still nothing but tents, boats aswarm, sluggish, German and British Yacht Club, bustle at the spa hotel, and as prearranged, Annemie and Erich on the dock. "Well, you two ?" he asked, benign and sanctimonious, whistled a snatch of ‹Row, row, row your boat›; I threatened him with eyes, he gave a lecherous and stupid smile, gin with juice, as only he could, and bent down to me : ". . . . . !", I flinched in annoyance : all you could understand was ‹lex› ? (Ah, likewise the sign for fending off malvagiocchi : enough said !). Then he called back over his shoulder : "We won't be back till mornin' : Lembruch by night !", and Annemie also knew all about a dance contest : "Have fun !" : "You too !". / She had silently paddled a blister on the inside of her thumb, and was now paid high tribute : "You'll have to put your thumb *over* the shaft now : promise ? !" : "Mm-hm" her bony fingers tempted my ear. / On the platter of water. Gray heat. I stopped and laid it diagonally in front of me, for as long as the boat coasted. The horizon held us in its shallow box. Before me, she leaned red, mum, yards-long, her bony knees even with her head, chin on chest. Great swallows swept by, so close it was as if our spot were vacant and we no longer existed.

x

Once again shadows flashed from our leaden chamber : thin naked tubes over the chair arms, the triangle and a small pink double-basin. I didn't budge till her two tiny stockings also lay on the seat, with the brown sandals underneath : "What size y' wear ?" She groaned in despair : "Don't ask . . . ."; then so crushed : "Nines !", that I hurried over at once and offered caressing consolation : "Pocahontas ! – !". (Emerge from dark green forests with only a red fringe at her hips. She has to. She searched her suitcase a little : – –, pulled out a headscarf and shyly tried it out : – –, tied the final knot on one side : – – ?. Stood there arms dangling : staked out, earnest and lean, her endless hip to the right from amid harlequin tongues of fabric, i.e. her left side, and waited, docile and yearning, until I named and rescued her : "Pocahontas !" – A red velvet patch emerged from her lips, grew whittle sharp, prodded clumsily, and then slipped deep into my mouth . . .).

Waiting. A rustle nextdoor. I gave the soundproof walls a dull whistle : my pipe tone bounced shallow, and there I stood more foolish in the yellow. Than before. Empty corridored brain, wooden eyes, hinges on them. In the leather paneling of minutes. – – – (Then several taps and she threw herself hastily through the window). / I also kissed at the concave yellow-plum belly. Our whispers strayed in confusion; our hands coupled : copulated ! I first had to break through the red lattice of arms, bend back finger twiggery, before my lips grasped the tomato by its thin short stem, causing her to mutiny greatly, mickel greet misleden, and then swallowed it whole, so that in sweet indignation she tried to rise up (but indeed could not); so she screamed but once weak and wanton; then the mighty thigh pliers clamped tight again. (We rode off atop one another, hurtling : through hairy elfin forests, fingers grazing, arms in adder, hands aflying red road-agents, (nails aripping thorny traces), heels adrumming flicker signals under shrubbery toes, eyes in languish at each foottramp, rosy velvet mussels lipping at the floor, with ivory streaks and squeezing lustrous letters, whispers suckling, juices pearling, taking turns, top and bottom.) / Puncture a can of milk and take turns sucking. Lying on our backs : it tasted like condensed moonlight, plus fig pudding from those little US cans. / Sunburn : arms and legs, mine, were nothing but rosy red fire hoses with singed nerve endings. We whimpered as we washed, and trembled with fever when our down touched. Meaning : lotion ! / Putting on lotion (and ever so lightly massaging with fine fragrant oils) : the finger fabric, the bony arms,

"hchchc-hcareful !", the curved harp of ribs, two soft copper tubers, copper tubers; copper – tubers – –. The belly bowl with its high pelvic rim, the stiff leg shafts : "whwhwh-ooohh !". (Then turn her on her face, PTO, God was that long bundle heavy !) : nape wadis, shoulder boards, bottom burls, the spare hollows of the knees; sit up : once again shoulders and clavicle parts : –; finally brow and nose ridge : "Aaahh !". (And sudden threat : "So : now its yóur turn !"). / Pulling on her blouse : she stood there broad-gestured, like Orion (the thin pink nebula in her hands, however, high above the eagle head) : my red alpha-giantess ! She noticed I was thinking, and I had to tell her at once. Grumbled almost in a sulk : soundlessly the constellation wrenched on its way.

xi

The trucker ate very fast, deftly scalping sausage tips with hideous Huronic technique, flipping the pale skin trophies, as per regs, to the beltline; the mouth maligned state and rough weather : here came the catastrophe, where the mightiest king was named Eisenchower, after him his Dullest ruled, taking turns (above, three Kalaharian fluffs, yellow, Orange & Transvaal; on the left greenish shoulder a rain shine, window glistening and sad). / Moon bacillus, cloud yeast, and Pocahontas hummed a bright husky song to the noise of the night. (Behind the housedoor she then made unnecessary squeaks like a medley of rooster and hen. But was quick to apologize : it had happened so suddenly. So let's do practice drills : ! – – ? but she kept well-schooled silence now. : ! ! – – ? deep-breathing does it. : ! ! ! – – : "See, y' can do anything if y' just bring a little good will to the task !". No danger near, sans every care, across the courtyard came the pair).

Tell, unleashed, raced blissfully after every breeze and cat, snorting with pleasure, and she pppressed timidly closer : "Think it'll rain ?". Well now : crooked moon rode on yellow waves of light (at the rear, however, clouds bulwarking, and it had to work hard to rend one silver breach after another. She simply held her hand in front, draping her upper face in shadows, and I was allowed to kiss around in there a little). / A traveling textile salesman, circumspect, black oily-parted hair, fallow face, peaked brain : "That's all the truck-driver in there needed !" (And squeezed his f's out of such self-confident bellows that you could only spell them with a ph; his hat : a Matterhorn, surrounded by a kind of Nürburg racetrack). They were

offering accounts, as salesmen do, of the eccentricities of their stomachs : "After 10 o'clock of an evening : not-an-oth-er-bite !" : "Prophessor Berger – phrom Bonn – told me : in phour months you're a dead man !", looked about proudly to see if we, too, were listening breathlessly, and used his finger-shears to stroke the stogie from his pink muzzle : "‹pear-shaped› he claimed; the head surgeon called it ‹conical› –", he assertively held out his belly, in which said intestinal tumor had been located, using both hands (smoke looping from one of them. – Then it was time for smut, until the landlady heythere-ed and fled lilac. – But I did learn one thing from him – from a good distance, y' understand ! – : tailors around Oldenburg call the dampening cloths used for pressing ‹hogskins›; and the tiresome driver, thankgod, was also doing his barking over by the bar.) / Bacon pie and sweet malt beer (I bought it; : "Lord !"). But what bacon pie ! : "Well it's too fat for me ! !". So frugal Selma ate it all herself, despite my shakings of the head (and here came the news, the announcer, taxidermied voice and syllables rumbling like bricks, began as always in toady Teutonic fashion with ‹Chancellor Doctor Adenauer›, how he had slept, and what a tragic joke it was, the way the stupid protestants let themselves get yoked into his counter-Reformation. Then ‹Editorial of the Week›, Doctor Walter Maria Guggenheimer, and I nodded my applause : sharp mind ! And truly refreshing after all these other Jesuit disciples. "Me ? : atheist, but of course ! : Like any decent person ! :". / "Gotta write a few quick postcards," she groaned, despairing at time lost, cast the ceiling a pleading look, at most scratched an angular ‹Best, Selma› on each, and looked at me elated : "'m done !" "Take 'em over rightaway." : an office rigged out like in Debits and Credits : "I been postmastah these 25 yeahs !". A cat with chauvinist face, blackwhitered : "Youah tricolahs ahr the best !" the old man swore, an expert : "Catches rats 'most ev'ry day : can't ev'ry cat do that !" (and let herself be petted, too). "Yup; they say the ‹lake suhface› 's still Prussian ? !" (with rustic cunning; mysterious) : "Mibbe wunst Oldenbuhg's indepennent agin . . . . .". Proudly showed off his newspaper clippings : one of them even had a picture of him, amid his bird collection. A book ‹Günther Schmieder, God Knows the Way› : "story's bout the Dümmah : 'tain't wuhth a *damn* !," and I opened it mistrustfully : ‹. . . like minnowed gills a-breathing . . . . .› ouchouchouch ! (You can truly get to know maybe 100 authors in one lifetime, that's all the time you've got; so you simply cannot allow yourself linguistic numbskulls like this guy here, get thee hence !). / But here were the prehistoric finds, quite interesting, despite the knock-kneed cross on the cover and ‹Reich Supervisor› Reinerth : "Hey, we'll have ourselves a look tomorrow !". (The old man's ravings about lake-dwellers were sheer nonsense, though the flint dagger in

the showcase lay there prettily enough). / Weather ? : the moon was still showing only blurred tattoos. "Come over to my room. – Through the window." / We moaned, red glowing figures from the umpteenth circle of hell; simply washing was its own torment : each splash of cold water made you want to squirm with smarting laughter. She, pleading : "But no lookin' glassin' !" (meaning I assume : looking in the mirror) : "it always scares me so !". But nonetheless shyly tried out her black arts : with hair, with eyes. Then her red ones, and I set an arm-trap for her; but she saw right through it and made a warlike dive, meaning I first had to tame her tough ottery limbs one by one before they bent to my pleasure (and even then at every moment kept writhing about Laocoönic me : "You asked for it !"). / "D'you bring everything over with you ?" : a case for glasses, leather, red-scarred; a handbag, and I held it high in accusation : so this is what took so long ? ! But she was right here and snapped it from my hand : "That's tabóó !", and just to spite me pulled out her steno pad then and there, grandly took a lengthy memo, and shoved it back in : "Bah !" More agitated : "And they say : women are nosy . . . . ! !" : "Yes – : but if I hadn't taken a look . . . . ?" I challenged in bewilderment. She looked haughtily about : "Then I would've accused you of indifference. And known that you don't care the least thing for me !". (A long time refuting these outrageous charges. Then she tore herself away once more, quickly dragged her white anklets through the water, "For tomorrow !", and hung them over the casement to dry). / "Hitthelite ! !" : hey, what's up ? distraught, I flipped the switch : she keeled out of bed, button-eyed, flung open the doorlet below and vomited everything into the handled pot : "Orrrrrr", upchucked, pumping pale and tinctured slime. Perplexed, I went to her and held her brow, gave good ooh-ooh words : as if that's all she needed ! Scurried to the washstand during a pause and prepared a toothbrushful : she washed out her wobbly mouth, gargled sonambulantly, came and fell face down on the bed, "Ohh", bounced up halfway and onto her back (double the pillow quick and thrust it behind her head; : "You're so good to me !"). Belched once more, and lay quieter and quieter, only her nose still crinkling. (Check it : but was probably just purest bacon pie ! No wonder. Carry it out to the jakes). Her feet, 2 long clinkers, stood straight up. / Here came the nocturnal thunderstorm after all, one that would've gladdened Summanus's heart (dogs crucified alive on elderberry trees; the Arval Brothers sacrifice only black lambs). (Toward morning, noises rumbling up the stairs : ? : ! and she glided out the window in a sleepwalk : "See y' soon !").

xii

". . . . . and then the caveman made a grab for his Selma : . . . . . ." she gave a high squeal, in her long dark red velvet ensemble with little white collar, in which was planted the smooth bronze tube of her neck; breathless : "First off, you shouldn't say Selma ! . . ." (I shrank conscience-stricken) : " 'nd then : what're our real names ? !" Welll – : "Me Uthutza ?" (she nodded approval, all round owl face) : "and you Pultuka !"; a word like chocolate pudding, and we tried out how it tasted : "Pultuka : iz lynx tender ?"; and she grunted a grim reply : "No yet !" so it works. The lone highway tree beside the pit clapped a flurry in its leaves and hissed; I came up with ‹snake-toothed arrows› as a weapon (‹arrow-toothed snakes›, sounded grisly that way too; in nasty crevices). No sooner had she muttered the wish, and I applied the brakes : "Could you tan bearskins soft as butter ?" She could not; but would not admit it, and parried instead : "You catch a ton of elk barehanded ?" Perhaps. "Pff !" (caustic and unbelieving). "Or make slow mincemeat of your sworn enemy ?" : here her glances pierced like agate daggers into Osnabrück's corner, apparently she had someone particular in mind. But still she would not give in, moved her mouth, considering – : eager : "Hey, I'll make you slippers of wolf's hide : and line 'em !", and came seductively nearer, luring tall and neolithic. "And rings of bright hartshorn for you !" (cavalier). Grateful : "Ah yes !" For a mirror ? "Listen here : a bowl of Dümmer water ! These women !" and at once she was content. "But where'll we get soap ?" and hung there worriedly before me : ?. Soapsoap – hm – – – (aha : my Pliny ! : "From wood ashes and goat fat !". Her vacant gaze betrayed no enthusiasm whatever; more like final marks of ‹barely passing in Stone Age›, and more despondent we dabbed faces together).

"You g'won ahead : we'll folla with the cycle !" Erich whined from pillows (which we vastly preferred in any case !). / In the garden the blackbird rang out. "You still feelin' punk ? !" Beaming and shaking me by hand and mouth; we wine-pressed one another – – and breaking loose, off we went : ! ! / Screaming and puffing, cars spun round their corners; our caps sat smartly, above babbling mouths and bubbling ears, merry as if we were biking. Her dress flickered youthful signals, her mouth burst to gigantic laughs; the buxom farmer's wife watched us through a bundle of brushwood (later, her jagged voice would chop away at her maid). The alders surged light gray, bobbined green (and sure enough, the wind was already

making another run for Selma's flared skirt !). / Help yourselves : this is what immortality looks like ! You Struldbrugs. : At the bogpit, right beside the Hunte, and she bumblebeed in great disappointment, until I began to explain. "It's all a muchness. Some people use hammers to crack pebbles in two to see, so they say, how the world was made." / But very serious now, the bigger Ice Age Dümmer : it was three times as long ! How can we know that ? : by drilling lots of holes : at the time, the lake left a deposit of white chalky mud : if you run into it at a certain depth, that's where the water was back then. Circled by sparse stands of birch and hazel bushes : we know that by pollen in layers of moor from the same period. "And around it were these solitary log cabins ?"; certainement, even though the residents weren't even close to being Teutons yet, as regulations required Herr Reinerth to picture it. Hmm. Barley sparkled; brown-green potatoes rowed to wood's edge; white cloud fire, and lounging languidly about, wind blew in now and then. "Whysure ! : And then night comes on : the fog shoves indolent fingers through chinks in the house" (and she gave the impudent fellows a quick slap) "or the wind rattles at the nonexistent door, the better for you to hear the wolves . . .", and she hearkened intently : right : 'xcept it wasn't the wind : and a motorcycle was chattering afar : ! / Annemie with wide open blouse; eating sour cherries and flicking the stones, from quite a distance, too : "Well, where're your N'anderthals ?" (Erich; pulling on his medium-sized flagon of ‹Blessed Soil›, for snakebite, so his pious avowal, a fellow like satin and silk, a shame he drank). / "Aeh, virgin virgin; back then" (in the Stone Age; according to Erich) "there was none o' that ! An invention of monopolistic capitalism : and d' you know how often one of those cave ladies . . . ?" Annemie wanted precise data on the spot : ? – but merely screwed up a disparaging mouth, "We won't let that stand in the way !"; smiling wide and wicked : "Hey ! : d' you know how often cave man . . . ?" and whispered such apparently shameless numbers that Erich cringed at the mere mention. / "Y' know, viewed from the rear : you two make quite a pair ! !". Now that was just too wacky : I needed *that* from flatfooted Erich ? ! : "D'y' s'pose you look like Harry Liedtke ? Just take your little Buttinska in tow & be gone !" (outraged !). "Well then c'mon !" and smote her lightly on the rear cheek, which she accepted with no further ado, swung up onto the buddy seat, gave a nifty hike to her skirt, the born motor-bride. Grandly over her shoulder : "We're headin' back t' the spa hotel !" And released, we : "Fine !". Brumm, brumm. Erich bent my way once more : "By the way, I suggest : for simplicity's sake, that the lady 'nd gent move in together. Us too." Awaited no answer and stenched on his way. / (First get over being caught). / In the blinding melee of the leaves : "You know your mushrooms ?", and I peevishly wrinkled my brow : are we

here to botanize ? ! By way of comfort, explained to her how squirrels skewer mushrooms onto branches, all at once growing up there in the tree, looks very droll. Ants bore their little plunders past us. I dug out her eyes again with my mouth, caressing eyes, undressing eyes. / "After the next war things'll 've progressed to where we'll be livin' in residential holes again; one every 100 miles : you'll live to see it" (gloomier) "let's hope y' find a tolerable Uthutza." / She let it out savagely, "How's that ?", stopped still, her back to me, her head lowered : "I want you ! A while longer.", and we walked on, aggrieved. But sternly shook off the fantasies : "Sure, if only we were rich" (to the point) "then it'd work maybe. If I could always just be your Pocahontas. And we had no worries; 'fraid of havin' children and such. – But then you'd pick somebody different anyway. Different from –" she looked around at the branches for the scraggiest words : "– a scarecrow like me !", and gazed full of hate and pleading : ? Exasperated, I tugged at her shoulder : are you coming along into the bushes right now ? ! – – – / "Ohdearboy" she gasped, totally exhausted and still wincing; "Oh"; and : "Maybe we'll find that wallet yet !"

xiii

My head in her lap (in the tall grass of her fingers) : and she had green smudges on her thigh, blue-black edged in yellow, all from scrambling into the boat, around several you even saw arcs of teeth, and I wagged in specious sympathy. In cobwebs of whispered words, in sheen of water and lead. / A sail quietly plying, at the mast the figure in two-piece bathing suit, green like an indoor pool; raised black binox to her brow, very elegant, ogled us over several times too : : (later, however, she looked as wrinkly as the mother of the Gracchi, scandalmongering eyes, and manworn). / Her head in my lap : my hands dwelt there for ages, beetles, her black hair grass. Excursions across temples and shoulders; for ages. A smooth copper plain; variegated sandstone desert with rib reefs. Rolling country : Thyle I, Thyle II. For ages. A high-peaked Yumari in the south.

So we drifted along, alone across the empty lake, Monos and Una, girl of all hues, alone in the giant mussel of firmament and Dümmer. : "In the boat, what d'y' say ? Just slip into the rushes somewhere ? !". She raised a prudent head and looked about : – – "Nah. Never work. Rock too much, too." Laid back again. (Except as we walked home, she was peeved with herself; growled : "Shoulda tried it anyway : a body's always too lazy !",

and I had to promise her that in the future I'd not take so long asking). / Swimming together : she captured me in blue water arms, intelligent and supple, and we drew a couple of Cassini arcs. – "Lord'reyoustrong" she spluttered through the oily water, and : "I'm staying in !" / And so alone in the boat : meeting the wavelets head-on; often slapping and thumping below the bow (and Pocahontas always in my eye, my playful one; I managed once to sail right over her, the great flailing girl.) / Think. Don't be content with belief : go further. Once more through the circles of knowledge, friends ! And foes. Don't interpret : learn and describe. Don't futurize : be. And die without ambitions : you were. At best full of curiosity. Eternity is not ours (despite Lessing !) : but this summer lake, this slough of haze, gaily checked shadows, the wasp sting on your forearm, the printed yellow-plum sack. And there, the long diving maiden-belly. / Another tender snap, and a lacewing vanished within : fish ! : bream, dace, shiner, chub, bleak, sucker, rudd, roach, chevin, loach, tench, gudgeon, ide : D' you speak English ? – – "Rudd ?" she dreamily asked in reply after a while : "once had a chemistry teacher by that name . . . ." : faithless woman ! I said it to her face, too, and she admitted that back then, had occasion arisen – – : "But, hey, not 'ny more !" and looked up loyally : her only thanks were growls and venomous glances; may every open confession be treated thus ! / Gray faces appeared in the sky and regarded us sternly; she lay there, the great mahogany combs of her hands tucked fashionably in her hair; and I jiggled her beseeching : "Pocahontas !". (As soon as another boat drew closer than ½ mile : a towel ! And each time I personally laid it over !). / Again and again to the middle of the lake, then let it drift back in (so a southeast current). Out – – back in. Otherwise calm : the sailing gents poled themselves sullenly about (once I raced along close-by at high speed : we'll show you. Was the towel . . . ?). Their sails blasting white : so up with the camera : 1/100th; stop 16, infinity : ! : "Shall I send you a coupla prints ?" She played with the lake for ages and did not answer. / Sky full of great gray barrels : tumbling wind wallowed closer, meaning our obligatory afternoon thunderstorm; "Really a crazy place !" "C'mon !". "If only there weren't so many people !", and we raced across the leaden crumple, heading directly for the dock : to be alone, lake-owner, and all the land for 5 miles around ours : woods, moor, and just our white villa ! She considered for an impish moment, then she shouted back stoutly : "10" (miles she means : fine ! For all I care leagues, and Spanish ones at that !). (Notify the boat man : "We'll be back today again : this evening; late !").

xiv

Help unpack : a silver crewet in which some 4711 chinked; gaunt curved shears; lewd bloodred bite of mouthwash; 2 trusty old slippers (which I set right beside my bed : "Imagine : when I got those I was 14 !"); a giant Roland of a raincoat, a golden clasp for its forearm; a footlong comb, black as a deep-sea fish and with ditto rows of teeth. Each time I passed with an item, I got snared in her brown tendrilwork, Selmajoachim tangled, and she gave me sharp blows with her eyelashes. A small sewing kit with rare yarns and buttons. Green toothpaste : "Here; try mine – – ?" : "Hmm dandy !" (from foamy peppermint lips). Suddenly she wrinkled her brow, grabbed at her shin and pulled off a gray-silky piece of skin, narrow as a finger, moaning : "My beautiful tan !"; and had started here now too : "Where ? !" and ran to the mirror in disappointment, wailed : "Get my suitcase !" And up with the lid, curious : a crackerjack pair of tabby pajamas sprawled across used maiden underwear; a little box ‹o.b. tampons› (looked embarrassed at first, then muttered something about day-after-tomorrow, pushing it energetically into her modern hand-firkin : of brown velvet with leather loops, and we then promptly grabbed for each other, carpe diem ! : her fingers climbed about on me; filching at all points, grooming us, crumpling my ear; also invented a brandnew susurrous language with lots of ‹u› and head thrusts, and practiced 1000 godly things. Above us, too, far off in the house, a bed had begun to thump : she made her hands quite soft, like heating pads, while speaking many things in Neolithic, gave a dying lament and, sadly amazed, banged her feet together, Ochone de traitor, pushed off, scold without end, and away, ever more alluring – – until her body, too, bruised me, unrelenting, and all we knew now were a few vowels).

Soupstarter : ‹a white caseous precipitate› was what they always called it in chemistry class, ah well. Then the real main course : potato slush and 1 cutlet per; butter sauce and a pile of green fodder : we were now getting more set before us than were the abstemious retirees at the next table : "You gonna eat ? !" (for, finicky and unhappy, Selma was sawing at her consignment again, swallowing listlessly. Not until the pudding did she get handier, "Just like a little girl !", and by way of protest she had to join in spooning mine; gave a flustered grin amid many whispers and circumglances, weren't the others watching too : "how we're sharin' everything !" she husked happily). / Then she moved in with me, and we laid

out her gaudy oddments : bobby pins, Caloderma gel, "I submit you can tell all about a family's wanderings and migrations from their clothes hangers", a shoehorn slipped through little rolls of ny- and perlon : "Careful !". A maid did an extra gallop in the corridor – – a long plop-plop down the stairs : "Just pass the rest in by the window !". "Y' can't imagine the trouble I have sometimes," confiding her affliction to me : "With my size ! ! Everything's too short, on principle !", and held out limb and sheath to me as proof – : !, comparative anatomy, and I had much to measure and extol : use Schopenhauer to prove what value long female legs have, "He was a ph'losopher, right ? . . .". / A tiny travel-iron : she teased it now and then with a wet fingertip, till it hissed, then jauntily let it sleighride : over a bottle-green bolero with stiff military collar and gold fillets : "Put it on !" She did so nonchalantly, and the odd color went well with her brown hide, also held up the skirt before her : ? – "You got 'ny ties t' be ironed ?". / How many different ways can you sew on a four-holed button ? : I was now given instruction, on the edge of the bed : "Is that how you behave with your teacher ? ! : I've got a needle, fella !", and her arm, long coral snake, was creeping toward me, the hand rose up hypnotically, tongue darted imperceptibly – – and struck – "Now I've torn a nail !" plaintive, but the damage was soon made good; she sighed in relief and continued her lecture : clear around it ("Giving you a square"). Or like this, a Saint Andrew's cross. Or 2 parallel lines; a Z; a U; a – – "Well ? Well ?" – – Hmm; godknows I didn't see any more possibilities : "No way, I'd say !" : "Haha !" : till she condescended to demonstrate : "A goose foot ! ! – : √ !" and at once triumphantly sewed hers on that way : 'sindeed; y' never stop learnin' ! / On my nightstand ‹Nigel's Fortunes› : she opened it without further ado and squatted with it on the bed; her feet respectfully laid themselves one beside the other, her mouth dumplinged mutely at chunklets of English, her glasses did not move. Now a small finger-stick pointed in great doubt at a polysyllable : ? I obligingly slid in next to her and took up my assisting position (i.e. first the left arm around the shoulder angles, right hand on the right handle, and kissed the highschool-clever mouth, setting our glasses softly clattering. She thriftily removed them for us, turned to me more innocently, more ready for handling, and we investigated systematically; (after all, ‹linguistic› does mean ‹with the tongue› ?). / I drifted, breast to breast, in her reddish pond; white stumps protruded on all our shores, her skewed crest was pasted over my left shoulder : in the seaweed eye-mussels gaped; a set of teeth swam my way and took devouring root : ! making my body raise ever higher-peaked waves : the enamel rings vanished over my head; violet brown panting fragments slowly coiled in great curls, at your side. / Woven into my towel was the word ABOAND,

and she puzzled long : ? : "‹Army Barracks Operations, Andalsnes› : the compensation of the German Reich for 6 of the best years of my life and one furnished house in Silesia" I insubordinately elucidated the faded inscription, and she shuddered, naked and artless. / Evening meal : fried potatoes with slices of brawn, homespun; celery salad as vegetrimmings, huge portions : really quite nice, quite attentive, our landlady ! / The sky, larded with stars; a salmon-pink egg stood on the horizon, left edge washed-out, a black ornamental band along the bottom : moonrise behind poplars. "Y' know, I've never done this before !" (Selma, delighted by the witching hour ! But nodded, immediately convinced : otherwise you know only half the world ! The mazed silver cordlet of the seven sisters).

XV

Journey through fog tunnels : black puddled floor, dull silken vaults (once countless saber tips menaced from the wall; an odd piercing beam thrust into our layered world). Her foot appeared beside me, large, smooth, cold; tried to slip into me, under me, pressing, begging with long toes for asylumed warmth : I pulled over a useless corner of blanket, fondled swiftly, and wrapped it sumptuously (but had to be very careful, for fear we'd be smashed against the pallid wall : turnabout ! – The fondle-foot thanked me one more time. As if astray in the nebula of Orion : brilliant concept : a girl as baggage, a bottle of schnapps, the Hanoverian State Handbook of 1839 : and here goes : into the nebula of Orion with a wobbly boat. On the bow, S 5, just like ours !). – A great hall, out of which all these corridors seemed to lead : and so down a new marble hallway : back ! ! – : a fog boat, right in front of me, passed straight through the walls : the hunchback dwarf at the wheel turned back toward us again : – – and I applied my paddle somewhat less jauntily !

In the bluing of the wash, red hooks for clouds; before us the moon with green seasick face. "Don't speak disrespectful of the stars !" she warned. A gray walleyed dowager still roiled about, before us, among the Dümmer's vapors, shadow figures. (Contra Jean Paul, volume 32, page 14, and passim : ‹As is well-known, the earth appears 64 times larger to the moon than it to us, and the trundling rise of such a heavenly body must have its appeal.› First, the earth's diameter is only four times greater, and the confused titan simply said to himself : solid ? quick, cube it ! And second : by way of experiment, imagine a star 64 times larger than Frau Luna,

appeal ? ? ! ! : appall, that'd be our reaction to a Gaurisankar menacing on high ! Rare mix of the superficial and profound !). "Right here on the dike !" / Together : we debuttoned our still semistiff beatitudes, and our bodies smooched in concert for a good while. In this creamy tart of night. Her mouth, too, tasted large and juicy again : where her hair stopped lyme grass started : but where was that ? Where her fingers ended straw began : with no break. The stems of her legs; three mossy angles. In our bundled faces, eyes and whispers rotated slowly. / "Don't forget the stone !" (our anchor !). The fog tasted fresh and cold and good with the schnapps; Pocahontas aft in the blanket vault. (Just like in ‹Oak Openings›; from that whole mediocre book one image has stayed with me : journey by night through the rushy wildernesses of the Kalamazoo). In the great halls of fog, we soon lost all direction. Rushworlds reefworlds drifted closer; certainly took all your skill to avoid jolts, and I started to sweat. / It sailed over us once, pulled in its wings, and plummeted with a smack among the stalks, startling even schnapps-weary Selma : "Ooprump : Ooprumpuprump !". Like oxen bellowing and quite nearby : "Bitterns, 't's all !", and aggrieved, she sank back again into her blanket labyrinths. Culs-de-sac and rafts-de-mist. / Toward 3 o'clock I finally found the moon amid the wet, just as it sank, apoplectic and bleak, into its fog swamps. – Gray morn entered : while on land all things floated along; trees plying meadows; christ treading fog and deftly ducking in and out; our feet croaked. / The gaunt cicada : sat stiff in the sofa, rotating its wrist in slow-motion; the jaw clattered dryly, unwieldy, too large (not yet used to language again), disproportionate : whimsied briefly, and drifted back off with open ebon eye. From me : wolfish words, protracted; and again her thin, whistling whirresques, rib-cagey, from the soundless dusk mouse, in her flitter sleep. I quickly built us a bed igloo, placed watch and notebook, last look around, wait the house-shoes yet, and led the lack-o'-will inside, the phantom, limb-bestial, the way the infirm larva groped along ahead of me. Now she lay shivering against me, babbling somnolences, shoving her big feet between mine and adding her knee, hung hand hooks over my shoulders, already half unconscious; but then her back was freezing again, and turning with a shudder, she arched all of herself into me, from heels to shoulders, and I laid my arms slant across, my hot palms on her belly, she took one poppy breath, sobbing and thankful; until the long creature quivered no more. / (Train afar : its sound-rod was stoically horizontal; milled a grove into our demisleep; retreated, pistons rodding). / ((Rooster screaming shark-sized triangles on the wall of sleep; those further off hung kauri threads from them)). / (((When ? Roofs had begun to whisper stone-gray))).

xvi

The four of us alone in the taproom : rain briskly prattling impotent hairdresser tales of Mrs. Neighbor and how she'd mumbled away her prop'ty, and how Paulpaulpaul was no longer getting his Robling; and so ease into magazines : on the cover ‹Salto mortale at 10,000 Feet› : "Should sentence him to five years in the workhouse !" : "But wha'for ? !". Tour de France : "They could put *those* legs to better use 'n that !". A zebroid had been born somewhere, and the charlatan in question described it as ‹extremely rare› (when nothin' could be easier !). / Wind mechanickled at the window, the innkeeper's daughter cleaned picture frames behind us; soon she'd cut the flowers suckling silently outside. ‹Prussian Crown Jewels Stolen; 9 Years without a Mother; Coronation of the Queen› : "Should use the money for refugee shelters instead," Erich suggested scornfully. "And give the painting contract to E. Coughcoughcough, right ?" (Almost !). After the laughter then, explain the real sense of it : put a quick stop to America's pre-sumptuousness and -ponderance ! : "Check out that face !" ‹Mr.› Manasty, of Kiel, had banished his acne and flatulence with Mother Superior's Dyno Powder, and we shook grinning cheeks at the moron. ‹You Too Are in Danger›, ergo, gas pistol for 11 marks 45; ‹Beautiful Forma-Breasts in 20 Days›; crossword puzzles and chess problems : "Ain't there nothin' on the radio ? !". The rain harp tinkled feebly, but died away under the bursting march (and Erich knew the words to the trio, too : "I wish I had a sack as big as Miller's salesman had.").

Playing chess (with Erich, who'd learned how from me during the war, whose highly developed nose for business made him a dangerous opponent) and she followed with interest the casual thronging of wooden figurines, pressing forward, leapfrogging and kidnapping each other, metamorphosing (and a weary Erich : "Highlyremarkable !", when, despite a carelessly sacrificed rook, I forced one of the most brilliant draws of my career : "Ol'fox ! !"). / Good cartoons, merry little fellas, by ‹Bu›, and with a wistful laugh I gave it a try : bushbusbybunkerbuckinghamburckhardt ? (But it turned out the name was H. J. Bundfuss; very good. Just like Sir Oaky Doaks, Fuller's comic strip in the New York Post : the latest variation on Don Quixote; and a new art form, part form, these cartoons; i.e. : could be made into one !) / A longish article : the pope had finally beruminated a similarity between the new cosmogony and his vulgate, all from his very own painfully won ignorance, and unabashedly had his

thoughtlets printed up : what must it look like inside those heads ! / "Religious sense ? : Ain't got one ! !" (Erich) : "'ve enough to do with my new buildings : give us a quote, Jo'chim : – ?" This world speaks volumes to the competent; and : Let's leave the heavens over us to angels and to sparrows. / Erich again, old pinko : "What would we say nowadays if Joseph the carpenter's boy from 'cross the road, just outa grammar school mind you, wanted to explain the whole shootin' match to us ? He hasn't learned a damn thing ! Can't speak any other language, thinks the world's a pancake, knows nothin' but local gossip. Art 'nd science, math'matics, you name it : not the vaguest ! Hasn't held a job nor seen anything of life, I mean, nary a single human experience the wiser; not one hard knock –" (a large gulp of beer) : "what's he got to say to me that's so important ? !". / Radio news; 25th, ergo Homer's birthday : Swiss Cheese Federation, Inc. : there really is such a thing !. For reasons unknown, a man had driven a car into a railroad gate : what sorta ‹reason› is he s'posed to 've had ? ! (And if they don't know Schopenhauer, they should at least learn the little word ‹cause›). / Alfred Döblin, 75 years old : messieurs, on your feet ! How can people ever imagine that a poet is ‹theirs› ! : not as long as they abuse him while he's still alive ! What good does it do the fellow once he's dead and lying under yonder hill, and who probably could've accomplished even greater things if people had encouraged him while he was alive – bah, encourage, hell : if they'd simply given him his due ! ! No no : get outa here with your ‹people›. / Now house-painting anecdotes : How for the third coat Erich had used plain old water from the Oder to paint Breslau U. : "What d'y' s'pose they were thinkin' : more 'n two coats on toppa each other is bonkers !". How he repainted just the front door and entry for his own mother : " 'cause somebody might get that far sometime, salesmen, y' see ? But nobody ever got further inside than that !" (L'Avare : but that's the sort that gets somewhere !) : "Like : poisons the place !" (charm, to be spoken upon finishing a job). "When They stand'n'stand there down below" (customers) "never takin' their eyes off y' : you know, olladies of both sexes : there's a certain flick o' the brush that splatters 'em from head to foot : ev'ry 'prentice who works for me learns that one !". / And the bedrizzle knew no end, no matter how many peeks we took out the door, her long limbs always rising obediently with mine, Nehalennia, in flowing robes : "But come 2:30 we're takin' that bus-drive out to the moors !". Disbelieving grimaces : "We're gonna lay down for an hour 'nstead," Erich yawned with meaningful glances at Annemie; and she gave a sloppy and ascidian (tunicate) smirk. Several anecdotes about Moe and Joe rounded out the morning for Her, Erich was a good student (and we simply broke up that much faster : sad to say, I've heard it all : . . . . "the goats

at least 'll get used to it ! . . . ."). The gutterspouts were still gobbledy-gooking.

xvii

> Sift the empirical into words, the unempirical – go ahead, ridicule it : A tree buckled in the barrens; all leaves got twisted round; black birds emerged from the branches, screaming; at heaven's steady gush. She was always at my side, mute and eumenid enough : strides like a man's, oblique arms sticking out of her mackintosh pockets, in the red-leather face a nut-cracking chink occasionally snapped at the mélange of rain and tears : "Pocahontas –"; turning slowly to me, the blank-look howled the louder : – – till with a jerk the whole face crumbled, into clumps, into red angles, ear ellipses, the washboard brow – then it tore in half, with a ravenish call, so that, overwhelmed, I laid the tragic mask to my cheek, pressed, rocked, and still her black-jagged lament lurched about our heads : "Darling Pocahontas !". A signpost stumbled woodenly toward us, spread three rouged, pandering arms : DAMME, OSTERFEINE, HUNTEBURG : for each of which the rain politely handed us a gray silken thread. Ah, the heavy swells of air. A fog-boat slooped in the meadow harbor for a while, and then irresolutely ran aground under trees. Her hands joined her labored tears falling into the black water, her voice dragged along the ground; you could pull the shoulders to you, but not the face, not yet.

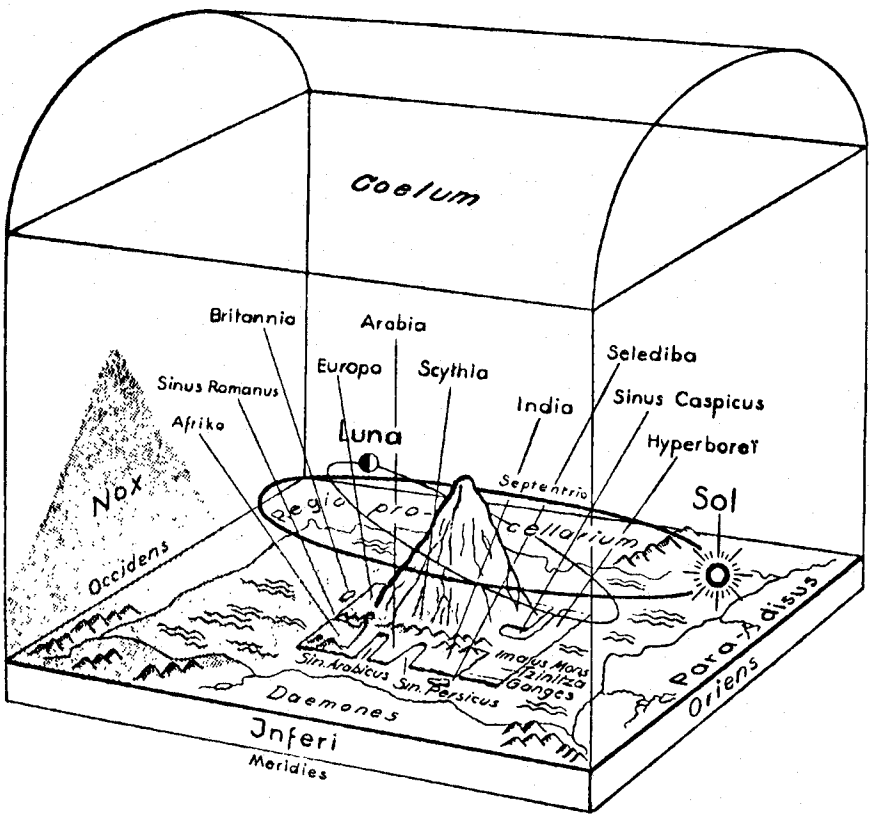
"Jist keep straight on !" the ollady's husky voice rasped once more : apron-blue, granny pattern, displaying a rake handle that merged nicely with the arm bone. "Well, c'mon." Into the gray. / Coffee-black ditches invited the leap, setting her hand jangling in mine; puddles of iridescent hue : brown-green and nut-violet (take a look at yours sometime !). For all the big red slugs, she carefully found a safe spot (?) to one side. Each. And stood there badly shaken by one that had been run over. / "Nooo. : when I was 15, a teacher. But just that one time. And ‹myfiancé› risked it once : in hopes of the ‹farm› !" Full of heavy forlorn surfeit. Laughed an eerie squawk : "And you ! : I keep runnin' it over in my mind, why. : At the plant they call me ‹rabbit-ears›." / A black horse sprang out of fog and roared at us, as the wind picked up : suddenly green and pewter moths were whirring around the trees, whole cloudfuls; and settled again on the branches, resting from exhaustion. Slowly her hair tore open, the rain fingered our tumbledown heads now, haunted palaces – : "There's a couple trees over there". /

feasts . . . ." and went on thinking via gestures, helplessly disgusted : "Darling Pocahontas ! !". / "The names you got for everything : what d' you call Errrich ?"; I looked at the two of them : he chalky white and of salesmanlike deport – – : "Well; for today ‹Sodom› maybe ?" I suggested grimly. She gurgled a laugh in agreement, rendered lard, from that massive Slavic breast; then curious : " 'nd meee ? !" (Too much for me !) / "Brother so dear : brother so fine" : that too ! From the scene where ‹youth› departs. I looked at Pocahontas : ? nope, she was the only one who noticed, but I forcibly shoved all thoughts down to sea bothom, and instead reached again surreptitiously along her lusty thigh : "Let's go upstairs, okay ? !". / She sewed another button on for me, all the while conversing softly with my jacket. / The first alarm clock we borrowed immediately went on the fritz, and the landlady pulled a sour face (but I really hadn't wound it !); a second had to be fetched from the baker. / Packing, packing : it all went into the suitcase, into the handbag, with difficulty. She scurried and swore in a monotone, sending time off at a trot. / "Oh déar ! –" she gave a soft cry, looking first at the corner of the towel, then at herself, commanded breathlessly : "Don't look !" – – When I was allowed to take my hands from my eyes again, she was wearing a fancy triangle. Was blushing too and visibly relieved. And proud : "Oh my !" And pondered. And mourning again : "Oh my." Came to me ardently and pressed close; sighed with gallows humor : "Well then, s'long."; and pulled her feet up, giving a swift kick to an invisible rearend (of fate ?). / "Hit the light, please." I took another look at a tall Indian maid. At the switch. And the invisible one walked silently about me. (Right afterwards, cramp in the calf, another kind of souvenir d'amour, and I groaned and hissed and massaged : diabolical notion : maybe she thinks I'm sobbing !). / Right afterward, the alarm was going crazy; we arose meekly. She held herself out for a last bite : – "In both" : "Harder !"; solidly imprinted her rows of teeth as well. (Annemie was knocking now just to be sure : ? : "Yes we're awake !". And hurrying silence). / "Don't look at me that way, or I can never say good-bye !" / Erich, indefatigable, was already praising the bus's conductor : "Didja catch her ? !" : Coffee-brown coat, yellow scarf, black money-pouch aslant, a fake pearl in her right ear, pale funny face; I admitted it all. / Cloud maggots, lumpish yellow-bodied, crept slowly toward the bloody cherry of the sun. Erich gave an athletic clearing of his throat : "Well then, first of all we wanna. . . . ." and we marched back, "grab some more shut-eye : damn puddles !". My head was still hung full of her clothes and I did not answer.

COSMAS

or

Concerning the Mountain of the North


Coelum
Britannia
Arabia
Europa
Scythia
Seledіba
Sinus Romanus
India
Sinus Caspicus
Afriko
Luna
Hyperboreī
Septentrio
Nox
regio
pro-
cellarium
Sol
Occidens
Sin. Arabicus
Sin. Persicus
Daemones
Jnferi
Meridies
Oriens
Para-disus

Twisted around to look high : a crude lump of lime was still skidding in the fat cloud silt. Presaging gray teeming. Wind drizzled everywhere (= rustlings groused). So go on sleeping.

Go on dreaming ! : Rowing for days (but without indication : of whether you're making progress ! And the cloud cover was a uniform dark gray, dhu glas, so that most likely I was sailing in circles a lot; of course : you automatically follow through harder with your right : so I would be making wide circles to the left.) / An empty jar in the boot, gleaming mindlessly; a matte epigraph ran around it ‹$^{3}/_{5}$ Genius; $^{2}/_{5}$ Bombast› : is probably the same for everyone. (And absolutely right ! : feign even missing perfections, making the gap all the more impressive !) A writing slate, made in Laodiceia : wonder if it knows Thracian ? I made a cautious attempt, and out it came ‹Dendritic. Silver tree. Arbor Dianae.› / My oars floated lazily alongside. Mine. I got to thinking what the name of the skiff might be. Certainly not ‹Phobos & Deimos› or something of similar pathos, that was fine for the days of Aeschylus; I had a hunch it was a number, field-gray perhaps and double-digited. Indolently peering down the side : ? – ? – : Nothing ! 'fcourse. (Except there was a scoured-off spot on the left, as if something had once stood there). / And froze in shagreen skin : a monster; stadia wide ! Hundred feet of high chimney neck (with long flabby skin jabot); bared teeth in its giant-gilled horsehead (topped out by a helical butt-horn). For a long time it watched the sullen sea around it, the shaving-mirror eyes turned on lazy axes (while flotsam me budged not an oar). / From below came a joggling of the skiff; – ; and I waited, coldly, any moment now, to slide into a maw : – – well ? – – now ! – – – : nothing. (Except for a warning knock, measured, 4 times, directly under me, at my rectal pipe, which was mouthing cramps. Interesting.) / Thirst : bottle still half full (I rejected ‹already half empty›; but nevertheless tasted the sea, careful and disgusted : ? – nope ! Can't be done ! The usual ghastly mix of bitter salts; dump it out, ‹$^{3}/_{5}$ Genius›, nodding). / Complicated, relieving yourself : I fumbled a little at the soft, the cool; banged the head against the edge : too cold. (Skin back over and gone : too cold !). / Conversation with the siren : just

head (with silver comb) and neck. (Had surfaced). "You're pretty," she declared. "You too !" I hastened, and she wrinkled her nose contentedly : "Well ?" and : "Feel it !" Her skin was indeed like soft sandpaper, but not unpleasant, and I said that right off : "If you were like that all over – –". "Yes, if ! . . . . ." she growled low (sea-leonine) and embittered (but soon composed herself again). Except : from the leaden water emerged 2 horrible clawed fists, fathom-wide red, trimmed with rows of blue daggers. And gently hooked onto my gunwale. (Better hold my peace). / "Oh, storm, no !" (so they swear by storms). / "We bode evil of course" (bored) : "but not till later !" she added soothingly, "in 3, 4 days or so." / "Wanta see it ?" : 10 paces away the dragonish stringray tail with its poisonous barb. And here it came, periscoping, almost on board. I bent down over the hard thumb-thick trivalve : honed to a point at the ossified end, bony needle ("Don't touch it !"); the swaying dart vanished, and we looked at each other more sadly. / "That way : – Bye !") and I moved infusorially, with flickering oar flange, away from her, in my ciliate skiff, the Atlantean gaze following me. (Then she submerged to her nostrils; her hair spread wide about the calotte; the last jerk : ! and the heavy water splashed several dells there). / Thin cold rain : I kept letting my blanket soak through, and then squeezed it out into the bottle. (But before it dries out again ! Will be pretty damn unpleasant come night !). / (To sail a boat full of snow : must be a special pleasure too. Or better yet : the thinnest snow cover, granular, so that frozen wood can emerge, gray through the glaze : scratchingly beautiful. And a paper-thin layer of ice on the water ? ? – : nah, 't's too crinkly !). / (At last the frost islands she promised), and I scuffled along toward the silver plumage, through rustling halls of rush. A white beetle, coin-sized, froze to mimicry, and I supplied it with the inscription ‹PEYΘ› (no more room. But underneath it looked nasty; the usual shell of swarming white legs). A soft wind, and sometimes snowflakes brushed past. Nor did the slate offer further comfort. (Sitting up quite stiff ! . .)

Still lying flat : sparelight. (And so, hypolampouses hemeras).

The courtyard : filled up with soundprints : steps threaded button rows. Past my window. Nags rammed bursting bundles onto the pavement. (Squeaks hopskipped; shouts swayed off and across).

Quick look outside : the woeful image of the moon, one that hangs fretfully by its egg head, microcephalic, shuffled through cloud nightgowns; shot-in-the-neck.

Breakfast in silence (We pray to neither old nor new gods. Eutocius already in his sheepskin; my father worried and abstracted as always).

"So you're going over later, Lycophron – – " and I had to show my branch right then : nut dates, in the prescribed arrangement, alternate foamed layers of gold and silver. "Good." – – "That of all people he has to show up here in person is really *too* awkward !" my father confided to us yet again, and we just grunted : we remarked on that often enough yesterday !

"Yes, ‹Celsitudo› is indeed the precise form of address – – God, he is, after all, Comes domorum per Thraciam." "The fellow's got the wiles of a widow-consoler !" Eutocius said caustically : "Just be careful they haven't caught the plague, and that that's why they had to get out of the city; they say there's already another 100 cases in Pelusium !"

Alone with Eutocius (The blue eye of heaven, red-veined, without pupil). (Next month he'll be 70; I'm giving him a work on measuring distance over the surface of water from high vantage points). He rubbed his lean hands, made his mouth narrower, and did mischievous variations with all facial features : "Just be quick about it so we can continue our work on Apollonius later ! – You should never know writers personally !" he added with a grumble (who knows whom he especially had in mind this time; but he's right more than likely : he's almost always right !).

"Yes – I'm on my way now !"

On the iron gray morn, the rust patch of the sun. Cows croaked. A naked tree, sweat standing out on all its wrenched negro limbs. (People have white bones, trees black, some fish green; jellyfish none at all).

Hashishlike bushes crouch on the path (already gaunt, sharp-limbed); poke : ? – – : didn't budge. (Or wait : this one here : its branches hissed and beat weak green fins in my wake. On the ground, beautiful all about, pasqueflowers, arnica, arnoglosson, earth-galls, henbane).

It's a good half hour all the same ! (and the sun made a hunnish grin from its scarf of red cloud froth).

Finally around the curve : after a while an old villicus peered from the portal. "Well, Amiantus ? !" He at once stuttered an archipelago of apologies, while accompanying me past the curses of the dogs. (In the inner courtyard still several heavy vehicles – "– arrived day before yesterday –" – he rasped. Carts, litters, a buxom coach).

He looked cautiously over his fat shoulder (as slaves indeed must do) : "He's brought Abascian eunuchs with him : thlibiae, pueri minuti; meretrices en masse : he wants to breed ‹spotted slaves›; by crossing with Ethiopians !" "Ohyes : ecclesiastics too". "His daughter as well : *and* a private tutor !"

He pointed to a couple of tenant farmers still waiting, mostly coarse Odrysians. And Beryllos the atrienses, one of those with a 50-degree

scope of face, was nosily hanging about in the background, and grinned impertinently when he saw me. They had also set the window panes in place everywhere. "Yes, I've got to finish giving out rations : 'xcuse me . . ." and I mindlessly watched him go, as he shuffled across and filled each slave's tin bowl full with his demensum. (Flour, figs, olives, vinegar, wine, for today. And the line was endless).

Portieres with rods and rings at the interior doors. I made a point of being last, and the farmers politely made way for me. (From within, the barrel voice of the nomenclator, who called out the names of the visitors to his overlord).

High on the thronelike solium, and waved affably in our direction : so that's what a real live tax man looks like !

Anatolius of Berytus : well, he was 60 for sure. White and fat. Bald and well-groomed. (In the room still more occupied armchairs, one of which, at the far side, also emitted a pious, rounded-off voice).

I stepped forward (don't forget the bow !), laid my ornamental branch on the pile with the others, and wished the Lord Celsitudo happiness, long life (in prison), and-so-on-and-so-forth (he certainly isn't my lord ! : on account of that 100 heredia of meadow that we were still renting from before ! – Well, so what, soon be all over !) :

and so one last resounding ‹Salve› (and the nomenclator was still mumbling on : let's hope the old man says quick thanks, and then clear out !).

"But it can't be ! – – –" : and now he was affably striding down the three steps, practiced widespread hands of the orator : "– son of clarissimus Marcellus ? ! : but you truly needn't have come *like this* ! – " (but ‹needed to› in some fashion, huh ? !) "So this is Lycophron." "Yes indeed : the son of our neighbor !" (the others tried to look obliging, as if they knew everything now : what a gasbag !).

"This is our universally revered Gabriel of Thisoa : – –" (a well-bred bow, the house padre apparently. And perhaps the tutor to boot.) –

"– and this is my daughter Agraule : – – "

Dark hair hung about her face. Pale, chlorotic, pointy nosed, with black glances (in fact, human eyes form the symbols of infinity; here a rigid formula). Young yet. (Which is to say, between 14 and 25; you can't tell for sure with these city gals right off).

(But a pretty name : ‹Agraule› : stressed ‹au›; then a long open ‹e›. Then there was the invitation to dine – which unfortunately I did have to accept. So we smiled much).

And we were already heading into the more intimate inner rooms ('m honored, 'm honored ! – In the antechamber the customary god of winter

stood chilled : long wet hair, at his feet the upended amphora with hailstones and sleet; in his outstretched arms – "Saint Ianuarius" Gabriel suavely explained, having presumably taken note of my glance : a fact ! : hadn't they tucked in a cross – naturally much too unwieldy ? ! Among us, it's quite logically a wild goose striving to escape his embrace ! – But keep up the courtesy : "Ah !").

Sitting around in our midst (and at regular intervals politely displaying our teeth) –

"Yes'tsright ! : clear over along the sea – –" and he (Anatolius) nodded dreamily, loopholingly, "beyond the ditches and lagoons, yeess. – – And we still have those old ‹water rights› there – –" (he spoke the words so ingenuously, as if he had never heard of such a thing, and took childish delight in the solemn sound : whereas he is the shrewdest lawyer and tax expert in Orient and Illyricum put together !) : "and are allowed to pass through a part of the property. On horseback, in vehicles, litters : even drive our cattle through – –" (meaning he knew the most trivial details; and was still smiling cheerily, then awakening) : "How large is your estate actually ?"

"3 salti, 1 centuria, 22 heredia, 2 iugera. And so on" (why should I enumerate all the unciae and siciliquiae for these strangers ? There was resounding laughter enough, threefold and fatuous !). "We've surveyed it ourselves" I explained (too ?) coldly : "plus another 40 stadia of shoreline : roughly !" (1 saltus is forest; none of your business).

But Anatolius was already the emending man-of-the-world : "The born agrimensor !" he politely lauded : "You will excuse us laymen, won't you ? ! – Uh – You're the only child ?" Yes. "Might I ask : how old ?" 20. (Roughly : you want everything roughly !).

"Do you know how large our estate here is ?". "6 salti" I answered frostily; and he nodded, considering (in reality it's exactly $6^1/_2$; but it raised my hackles as it was . . . . . .).

He snapped his fingers, a secretary entered (the cashbox under his arm), and Anatolius, outraged as only a host can be, begged for 2 minutes : !. Now had the documents and slates handed to him (limewood and ivory, in princely alloy) – and began at once, all country squire with nothing to hide, to dictate with buoyant candor : "So then : ‹In the 15th year of the Emperor . .›" (and we all looked away politely).

The large slumber-vase : half, black figures on red, the other side red on black background: wonderful old craftsmanship :

a youth with crossed arms; musing; the poppy stem in one hand; leaning against the trunk of a fir; at his feet furtive things : lizards and rabbits; a slumbering butterfly in his hair. / Behind him the night itself : a cap

pulled over its head; (for the rest, Telesphorus garb); a finger to his ear; a little owl on his light prowler's shoe. (The cameos set in along the upper edge were tasteless, however, and definitely a recent addition. At least they didn't fit).

3 small inkwells stood before him : normal black atramentum; but also your green batracheion; and red cinnabaris : imperial ink (meaning he's allowed to sign certain papers himself in Justinian's name ! Sure : he is the chief financial officer after all ! – Which means take care ! !).

Gold chinked : all thick solidi (and the pale eyes lay scattered over the table for some time afterward).

"Didn't you also have a bishop in your family at one time ?" he asked wistfully. "For God's sake !" and it was blurted so spontaneously that even Gabriel puckered a smile to himself : "Nono : always just mathematicians, a comes formarum, architects. Physicians too : on my mother's side we're distantly related to Alexander of Tralles !" (But no prophets or the like ! Had all been simple honest folk !).

"Aah, of course : of course ! !" (and for some inexplicable reason appeared deeply satisfied. Then they had their traveling libraries brought in : presumably wanted to overwhelm me with all the splendor).

Despite which my eyes were ripped open wide : the two large shallow cedar chests. Even had a removable partitioned tray ! Reverently : "Beautiful !" (and he winked in amusement at my small praise).

"Indeed in Gabriel's implacable eyes I am of course naught but a sinful-foolish creature", he explained serenely : , : , : , : Scrolls and modern flat codices. All rubbed with cedar oil, to prevent beetles gnawing. (Purple cases for the most part. The capping cylinder of ivory, without exception : they must have some money !).

The Synekdemos of Hierocles, the ‹Traveling Companion through Thrace› lay on top; quite understandably.

Poets : many moderns : Christodorus, Leontius, Paulus Silentiarius; (on the other hand, the idiotic Iliad by Nestor of Laranda as well, who in each canto omitted the corresponding letter of the alphabet). Then the crème of elegant Neoplatonists, the whole golden chain.

"Yes it's my great passion !" he confided to me with tender eyes : all the geoponici : Virgil, Columella, Palladius, Cassianus Bassus, every last halieutic; even the veterinary treatises of Apsyrtus of Prusa ! (There are people like that ! Particularly among urbanites, who use these things to create a sort of ersatz nature. It made him somewhat more human to me).

"Oh, that I'd like to read sometime !" : because I had already heard a great deal about it, the 9 books of the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris. ("Why

then do so, please !" he invited at once. – Noonoo !).

– *"Oh the bastards !* – You'll forgive me, Gabriel !" for the ianitor had burst in with the announcement that the two ‹students›, who were trying to sell tracts a while ago, had just been caught stealing laundry ? ! – : "Well then 20 on each back !" Anatolius swiftly decided : "and I mean hard ones : and there's no harm in your starting the count at 15. – And then have them shown the street. – "

But now the divine Gabriel opened his box (and smiling compassionately the while. Well, I'm curious : ‹This is your sort of thing›, Anatolius had said ever so graciously !) :

Church fathers : Ambrose, Lactantius, Augustine. (Well, not so far !) :

The book by Zacharias Scholasticus contra the eternity of creation. Concerning the duties of a Christian ruler. Surfeit of metaphrasts. (And so still nothing for me. But one really ought to live closer to a great library; Alexandria has 700,000, Byzantium 300,000 volumes : that's simply an advantage of urban life. Just about the only one however !).

‹*Concerning the Festivals* of the Christian Year› and ‹On Celestial Signs› : aha, that was the guy from Philadelphia, the one Eutocius was always making jokes about. (But smartly illustrated; look at that !).

"With whom did you actually study mathematics ? With your father, was it ?". "With Eutocius of Ascalon" I answered automatically (was still leafing through. But then I took it all in : –)

What's that mean ? ! : the two globes flinched together, as if pulled by a string (And at once I was wide-awake and suspicious : ‹Never trust a Christian !› was still a working proverb. This Agraule held out her facial di-angle to me, yellow, immobile).

"Ah !" (and that priestly voice sounded false enough after the pause) : "is Eutocius still alive then ? !".

(Think quick now : I had made some mistake or other; leaf some more, as if one hadn't heard a thing, let's hope it doesn't seem too much a sham : , : but now I was really quite annoyed and cold, while I ingenuoused into those round eyes there) :

"I do hope so –" I said so firmly and elaborately concerned. (And hope it *still !* : something can have happened to him in the meantime ! And he immediately smashed back : "So you don't know for sure ? !" : "No !" – after all, haven't seen him for 2 hours now; sincere : "No !").

"So it was with him then that you learned your Persian too ! – He had the finest opportunity for perfecting his at one time !" (and the cocky ass grinned as he said it ! "Yes, he is a great man !" in malicious confirmation, as if he had said the same thing himself !).

(But the facts are : in the second year of his reign, Justinian the bigot

closed for good and all the last Academy of Athens ! – No, no exclamation point : period ! I shall be objective ! – they still had 7 instructors at the time : Diogenes, Hermias, Eutalius, Priscian, Damascius, Isidore, Simplicius : to a man, averse to this Christianity, they emigrated to Persia, to the great Chosroes Nushirvan, the protector of the sciences; who then also made it possible, *in a special clause of his peace treaty with East Rome,* for them to return to their homeland without risk. They ended their lives in peace and obscurity. – Warned by the example of the Athens Seven, throngs of scholars eluded the intellectual terror of the new religion at that point; Eutocius had also been one of them – but was not included in the subsequent amnesty : and that was what this giaour was alluding to !).

"Oh no ! : the whole field : including conic sections, evolutes and diophantine equations !" (that is, highest mathematics). Whereupon, toothily arrogant, he muttered something about ‹vanities›. "Unfortunately, one needs such vanities in my profession" I informed him dryly (and Anatolius appeared to be divinely amused. – Calling diophantine equations ‹vanities› : when they are probably one road to a theory of functions, a whole new branch of our science !).

But crap like this was apparently what he avidly read : and I gave a ceremonial wrinkle of the nose to the universal chronicle of Johannes Malalas : written in barbaric dialect, its point of view that of the most hidebound and philistine monk, with no solid knowledge nor any historical=critical sense : "he never knows which of 2 contemporaneous witnesses is the more dependable, or why ! – And then there's Procopius of Caesarea, quite a different fellow !" (and in rebuttal he can't say much of anything, since Procopius, as Belisarius's secretary, is for the moment in high esteem at court again !).

" *'fcourse"* he then added, but only with a grimace (without going into any details of the issue at hand) : "regrettably it is still so very chic nowadays among those who term themselves intellectuals to assume a frosty attitude over against the eternal truths : God will see they're punished ! – But –" and he skewed his smooth preacher's mouth in triumph : "we are nevertheless just a *little* bit ahead of the gentlemen of the natural sciences : – –" reached myopically into his box, opened a special compartment of honor, and carefully lifted out a thick tome, on which could be read in purple letters ‹Kosma Aigyptiu Monachu Christianike Topographia› : he held it away with outstretched arm, gazing in delight and reverence : !

(‹Christianike Topographia› ? ! : the title alone is a curiosity : about the same as if I wanted to write a ‹Thracian Mathematics› ! But that sort of

thing is typical for the whole movement : I'll have to tell Eutocius this evening right off ! – – Yes ? : ah, the cellarius was calling us to the board, finally).

Anatolius at once struck his large silver acetabulum with the little rod (‹The ring of metal is the voice of its indwelling demon›); the servants and house musicians arrived in double time; the banquet table seemed to set itself; the progeustes presampled gracefully (and in time to the music). – (And a fourth scurried to an empty place halfway behind the host :

the meretrix on duty : big and well-built; a latticed comb in her yellow curly waves; inked eyebrows; at her neck the inevitable splenium : a tiny black arrow, pointing directly into the scenic bosom. Coral bracelet and gold-bronzed fingernails. The perfume was apparently crocus water, which Anatolius also had sprayed casually about the room several times during the meal. "Well, my thesaurus ? !" he remarked reproachfully over his shoulder – for her tardiness most likely).

"Yesyes : I'm even planning to put together a statistical handbook on Hæmimontus –" he sighed coquettishly : "out of pure boredom – –" (although this was only his third day here. Plans to stay on longer, then ?). Across from me, Agraule reached her spike fingers into the salad; spooned at an egg : whoosh, shot a very black glance my way. ("Not so much salt –" the courtesan advised her, muttering obsequiously : indeed it jeopardizes chastity 'tis said; she ought to know !).

Proudly and with his own hands, the cellarius carried the mullet in : still alive, in a great glass container; displayed it around the circle : – , – and then gave the animals to the women (the gourmand Anatolius demanded the largest one !), who held them till they lay dead in their hands, so that they might delight in the splendid play of color. Immediately after ensuing death, he shot back into the kitchen with them – and scarcely 5 minutes later the delicate fish were served. ("One ought to have a split tongue, like a snake : the greedy beasts can take double delight in the joys of their meal !" Anatolius sighed; stuck an amethyst on his finger, and then guzzled like Bacchus in person).

Rinsing off hands and drying them on the tablecloth : Gabriel pulled his hygienic toothpick of mastic wood (monogrammed silver handle !) out of the pit of his mouth, and replied (boring with his tongue one more time) : "Just half for now !" and to me : "a little discourse on the human sacrifices of the pagans . . ."

Achilles : sacrifices 12 Trojan youths to the shade of Patroclus. / Depontani : in the days of the Roman Republic whoever was a useless 60 was tossed from the bridge into the Tiber. / Julius Caesar had 2 men

sacrificed on the Campus Martius. / Even Augustus, after the capture of Perusia had 300 of the vanquished ceremonially slaughtered. / And so on : persecutions of Christians ! – (He bored and smiled with devastating benevolence, sure of himself; and I first lowered my head, which he observed with satisfaction. While Anatolius had his concubine hand him the crowning dose of hippomanes, dried and pulverized. – Then blithely began a heated debate about how to shatter bladder stones; as seems indispensable among defective oldsters).

As the lamps slowly burnt low, a curtain in the wall opened (was in fact a charming little private theater !). Pretty bushy backdrops, among which the pantomimes performed the epilenius (in which are displayed all the labors attendant to the grape harvest and wine press) : the women as naked as possible, of course. The men in masks; a particularly admirable portrayal of Hapalus. A thunderstorm arose elegantly, with no sparing of lycopodium powder and bronteion (and constantly interspersed with the biography of the great bladder stone of 4 June 541 !).

"Though certainly can't be compared with Theodora and Chrysomattus" Anatolius casually concluded : "but I like it !" Challenging. And I nodded politely for as long as it took him to seem content.

"– Old folks ! – – –" he pleaded irresistibly : "but while we rest for an hour or so, Agraule must show you house and grounds : !" She rose, in lean, angelic silence : "My father's will is law to me" she said softly. "How's that ? ! : well it would certainly be for the first time !" Anatolius cried out so dumbfounded that we all had to grin, even the reverent little daughter, who twinkled one as we turned to slip out the door.

Sigh of relief ! (Out in the vestibule. Magnificent the stairs and walls : sea green marble from Karystos, white with broad black veins, the gigantic column in the center bright with fiery red specks). Here she came again, had quickly thrown a palla about her. (Ah : other shoes too. With wings behind, to augment the impression of a floating gait).

"You're 20 ? : I'll be 17 soon," she said sweet-toothed, "was born on leap year's day in fact !" (daring me; when she knows full well it's considered fatidic !).

"I've learned Persian too : – 'n case I marry a Persian someday; y' never know !" (self-assured. Certainly, it does happen : Chosroe had a Christian among his lesser wives). But Thracian she couldn't speak. "What for really ?" she asked disparagingly : "y' might need it out in the country maybe" shrugging : "for the farmers 'nd such . . ."

"And what if it's a Thracian you marry ?" (Gallant, huh ? ! But she

remained unshakable : "Then I'll learn it.").

A giant armarium, veneered with citrus, showy vases in it. Old curious weapons. "Y' int'rested in this stuff ?" she asked, curious, and kept on eyeing me nimbly (until I did it back, and we both had to laugh). "One of the bathrooms –" (Goes without saying, with steam heat and shower; the circular labarium had a diameter of at least 10 shoes. "I'll grant you, things aren't so refined at our place", I admitted good-naturedly, "but we've got water for flushing too !").

And so on (at least 50 rooms just in the villa alone !).

She pulled out a three-tined key : from somewhere on her person; but I stopped her first, and together we examined the intarsia of the door : a flighty figure in white robes (over black ! : top-notch work ! !); dark pinions – and naturally the cross again : simply glued on top of the hands ! "A guardian angel" she came nimbly to my aid; but I fended with my head in outrage : "Take a very good look at it – there !" and she too descried the original ebony cornucopia : "that was once a Morpheus, friend ! – I mean, how tasteless ! !" (She just calmly lifted her thin shoulders : "Well what of it – – : this is my suite : !").

My suite : (the coquette beast !) : First the dressing room : a large, frameless, sliding silver mirror. The wardrobes in open disorder. Rows of shoes : sandals of fine green felt with thick cork soles (to make her look taller); even white hetaera shoes. (A small plump woman with saucy eyes; the servant=nurse then).

"What makes you smell so good actually ? !" : she smiled, flattered, and led me to her dressing table : "Here ! – 'ts called ‹Cinnamomum›. Costs heaps of money : a gift from Comito !". "Yes that's right : the empress's sister; the one who married the Dux of Armenia. – Theodora likes using it herself," and she let me sniff at her little box once more; interesting !

But otherwise everything lay in a wild jumble : a trilinum of pearls. A calamis for curling her hair. ("You really oughtn't do that !" and she nodded back her agreement). A tympanum. Old Etruscan bronze-drops for ear bangles; myrtle salve for hand-care; dactylioi and sphragidai. (Plus a strophium; and she watched, wicked and intent, as I turned quite red against my will).

"May I have a look ? – " : and of course she read the Aethiopica; your Achilles Tatius; ‹Hisminias and Hismine›. "Yes, I saw !" (as she obligingly rummaged out the erotic letters of Aristaenetus for me; while with her foot she unhurriedly pushed a wonderfully crafted brass chamber pot under the wardrobe).

From all sides : gold leaf, out of which saints executed orthodox and

embarrassed grins. (And was merely the result of the pious=primitive technique of the reigning school of painters; but the bottomless gaiety of these people – especially since all had an iron-clad family resemblance, like single-egg hundredlets – was no less bizarre on that account : they really do idolize one another !)

"Beautiful pictures, aren't they ? !" (slowly and testing). We gazed briefly at each other : ? – Hmph, what should one say now ? Perhaps a curt : "Lots of them." And she nodded importantly : lots of them !

"This is where I sleep : " : and pointed with lewdly tapering finger at the flat colorful nest. The gilded nook. A round carpet smudge : violet. Slippers tongued. (And the finger pointed implacably : ! – – until she heard me breathing and purred a contented hm. "Well, c'mon !").

Again before her door ("I mean, you simply must take down that cross !" : "Now listen here . . ." she replied with frugal annoyance). Directly opposite again the columned giantess, that passed through the whole house, from bottom to top : "That's quite a thing ! : must weigh something incredible ! – Hey, that would interest me : wouldn't the architect have had to lay an extra foundation for that ?". She gave me a peculiar look, almost confounded, but remained mute and settled instead on a just few mocking angelical steps (so she doesn't know. No seriousness whatever among these little spoiled fruits).

"But it stinks so ! – Well, if it interests you that much ? – –" she suggested dubiously, and wrinkling her nose, kicked the door open, and I bent down excitedly over the large flat tables : ? – – : "Yes, those are mulberry leaves" I was forced to say in disappointment (really didn't see much at first; was too new at it). "It's actually some sort of spider then ?" : "Hm-mm : somethin' *quite* different ! : Look over here : !" and now I saw the tiny worms as well, there and there. "Someone has to feed 'em day 'nd night. And it has to be very dry too : then they go into cocoons – yes I suppose like our butterflies do too." (What does she mean ‹suppose› ? : "Haven't you ever seen any ?" but the instructress drummed impatiently with her heels): "and then the web from the cocoon is what produces the threads of silk !" and looked at me in conclusion, à la ‹does anyone else have a question ?›.

"Well isochrysos it's not, not any more. – Nevertheless – theoretically-theoretically" (she added conciliatorily) "80 percent of the raw silk harvest has to be turned over : on papa's orders" and she used her head to indicate the intellectual backwoods. "If you'd like a couple of eggs perhaps – ? : I'll show you –" (all magnanimity : amazin', ain't it, tiller of the soil ? !).

"2 Nestorian monks brought the first ones with 'em : via Persia, in their

hollow walking staffs. – – Ohh – must be 6, 8 years ago now".

Outside between immense shed forms (the fructuaries were massive as well; but a sort of light whiff of dilapidation over everything. Out of the underlings' infirmary, a physician-slave came striding importantly, buckled over however and passed hence, frightened off by the cold glance of his young mistress). – "That one's mine !" (a high, two-wheeled luxury cart, excellent suspension, it bounced at a mere touch) : "with white mules and gilded harness. Your farm roads here 're really *so* muddy : that's why the wheels have to be so high, my girlfriends gave me the suggestion."

"Oh do leave the poor fellow in peace !" : because she was just about to gather up a stone for the poor gecko sunning on the wall. "Gabriel says : ‹they're so evil that after molting they eat their own skin just so such a splendid medicine for epilepsy may not be at man's disposal› !" and looked expectantly at me. "We hire them on as fly catchers. – Don't believe all that pious nonsense !" but she rocked back and forth, doubting greatly : God is still God, my dear !

Over the paving stones they tugged their boxwood tops, ripping high flogging gestures, little lightning-fast screams puncturing the air; froze gaping as they caught sight of us, yelled to each other in street-urchin, flitted away : both infibulated, boys and girls. Ten-year-olds maybe; pueri minuti; rats. "Oikotribes" she said in disapproval=apology, when she noticed my indignation : "They're getting bolder and bolder. – We have lots : you too ?" (I had to admit to one. "From my father").

There they were again, out of breath, and with mocking monkey faces presented us the flat leather case : I brushed them away with the usual wave of a hand; but the grinning lad had already open the lid : olisboi ! : from supple little rods small as your finger on up to octodactyloi, rubbed a raw, artificial leathery red ! So I pulled my arm still further back, and gave the smart-aleck such a slap that he toppled over and lay there motionless and open-mouthed (while the squeaky girl was already on the run). "He had it coming !" Agraule said, profoundly satisfied : "finally !"

"Belonged to the fat lady inside by the way." (ohIsee).

Prefer the rare black-haired hyacinths in the greenhouse; and red and white lyreflowers were still blooming here. Gilliflowers. Pomegranate trees in pails . . .

A stinging pain next to me : as the wasp hung at my wrist, devouring me with rage (while the gardener stuttered his apologies, and she dragged me out in agitation : "Ohmy ! ! ").

"Here, Thymus ! : Getoverhere !" because the Byzantine greyhound they

had brought with them had challenged my old sturdy molossian, took a brutal beating of course (although Parpax was bleeding too !) and was now – although for no good reason – shown pity : "Oh, I'm gonna tell papa : 'll have the beast shot ! !" (impassioned). "Hey : if you dare do that ! ! –" : "What *then* ? : *What* then ? !" she baited nastily, but I already had myself under control again : "You're simply not going to do it." I declared : "you promise ?". "Wouldn't think of it !" she pouted, still outraged, but did come closer again, and merely grumbled now and then (stuck, while I petted and "Good Parpax"ed, her tongue out at him too. It occurred to me : "Have you actually ever seen one of the silk butterflies ?" : "Wouldn't think of it !"). –

In the middle of the garden a large pool : life-savers and -belts, of rushes thickly woven. "Much too cold now : can you swim ?" I smiled just on the right side : "Once during an invasion of Bulgars, I swam across the Delkos in full gear. Was September besides." (She looked so uncomprehending, that I first had to explain it to her, what it is, where, and how large the lake is : "You folks perfume the water of course – and before and after, lie dreaming on the hemikyklion" : "But of course !".)

Playing ball in the sphairisterion : the white courts were possessed by her slender voice : "I'm Basileiaaa ! ! !" (Which made me the Onos again; but with the phaininda it's really the daily training that counts : she put the slickest spin on it I'd ever seen ! – And a little trigon with the Aya, but she left again right away).

Urania : the air around us was full of hands and laughter. She stretched and tossed it high, hung at the ball for a moment, and looked – especially in her talaria – as if she were about to fly off with it ! "Am I an angel then in your eyes ?" (coquette); but I obstinately dismissed this : Unfamiliar with 'em ! : "More like a nymph". : "Were they pretty ?" : "Well, as pretty as your angels for sure !" : "What do you mean ‹your› ? : Are you folks pagans in disguise ? !" (So then, back to keeping my distance !).

"You don't know about these either ? – You don't know much at all !" (disdainfully); but I was bent too far down over the cushion-padded box, in which the new animals lay, 3 large and 3 very small ones. "Nope, they don't get 'ny bigger than that !"; she took one of them out, arranged its little limbs in her arm, tickled along its fur (and inside the animal a peculiar humming began, while it closed its green eyes to half-slit, and contentedly opened one little paw : look at that : a clawed fan appeared !).

"And they're better than weasels ?" : "Much better !" she replied emphatically, "only yesterday, the villicus said again : he soon wouldn't

know what a mouse looked like 'nymore !" – "And you call them ‹cats› – ?" : "Uh huh : 're still very rare ! – Although : we have 2 more back in Byzantium : snow white. – They have lots of babies : ask papa sometime; maybe you can even have a grown one." –

"Ahh the country life ! – " and touched, held his bald globe to the left (also fervidly quoted Corydon the shepherd, who grilled himself a pretty herring. Behind the two of them, the personal slave with 2 folding chairs : if the old salon Thracian wasn't wearing nailed sandals ! But with gold tacks ! ! ‹Ah the country life› ! – And Agraule was said to be so fond of animals that she would gladly bury the shadow of a gnat ? That's not the impression I got just a while ago).

And then the shrew garden ! : (if you ignored the acrid musk odor among the nut-bearing shrubs) : twittering greedily, tussled with a lizard over a large insect. Duellists rolled in the shade. 6 little ones had bitten onto each other's tails and with their mother in the lead, the row groped cautiously to the water-trough (swallow like little birds !). "Normally they're more afraid of the light. But the weather seems to be turning nice; they come out then –" he affably lured them with hazel nuts and grabbed himself a handful of velvet fur : especially in the light, they shimmered like the purple bloom on egg-plums; from the sprightliest auburn to the shiniest black. – (Then came the snail beds with the overhead spraying system; if you've got the money, y' can do whatever !).

"We have a large nessotropheion : father's an expert on duck breeding," and he listened attentively, nodded, with lower lip tucked in, seeking details, nodded : "Ahyes, one should have that *as well* !" (actually I ought to have invited him right then I suppose; but I wanted to ask at home first . . .).

Heading home : and clouds pursued by clouds. A covey of partridges rushed up from the field. The clumsy twilight; mongrel of day and night. (And after all the delicacies, the gruel would suit me fine; and this peculiar ‹cat› here, too, that full of fear and serenity let itself be borne in the basket).

Behind gray cloud-grate, the silent evening fire : well, they aren't all algedonai ophthalmon ! And starting tomorrow I'm supposed to take the ‹Cosmas=course› ? : Agraule was having it as part of her lessons anyway, they had said : it's just what my collection lacks ! !

The courtyard lantern, yellow, concurred with me; the linden bent over me, rustling.

"Well ? ? " – – –

"Yes but why are they really here ? !" (The cat had already been bedded down in the hayloft – having first escaped from its basket of course –

after I had impressed on the head dairyman to set out a plump bowl of milk at the same spot morning and evening). "I can't tell you : but I'll ask the little one first thing tomorrow !"; he pursed his big old-man's face and pushed at his jaw for a long while : "The little one ? – oh, the daughter –" he explained to himself, preoccupied.

"*Go on !* You're always thinking too highly of those fellows !" (and then Eutocius went at it again, against throne and altar : Have their smocks tailored so they can look like God. Or at least like Fate. / Speak in a tone of voice halfway between the whining of a beggar and the slamming of a steel trap. / That must be one nasty fellow who needs Christianity to turn good ! / Whoever reads the Christian scriptures has lost as much time as he spent doing it. / Haven't they yet proved to their satisfaction that a nonbeliever has to be a good-for-nothing too ?).

"*Yes, that's obvious,* you'll have to invite them *again* tomorrow" (my father, while Eutocius hissed atop his stool).

"*Don't let yourself* be impressed by that tax vulture : even the thieves call him ‹thief› ! / He's just like his emperor : avaricious, lecherous, of low cunning, devoid of feeling or conscience ! / Justinian's predecessor : could neither read nor write ! Used a stencil cutout to sign his name : *and* someone had to guide his hand while he did it ! ! : education at court ! / The father-in-law was in fact a bear-feeder for the Prasini; and what the empress was, that you know yourself !" (Eutocius).

"*Gabriel of Thisoa ? !" :* at that he swayed and grew long and thin. Whistled rustily. (My father, too, turned very pale). "Did you mention that I live here with you ?" and I reported briefly : nonetheless both shook worried heads : they didn't like this at all !

"*Yesyes, we know one another.*" (dry laughter) : "from school days in fact." (Was he already 70 then too ? He looked a lot younger – ah-well : parsons have no problems, well-regulated life with no worries about the next meal; makes a big difference).

Before the window, the bulge of night; the lights were going out one after the other (we never extinguish ours) : "He's currently writing about heathen human sacrifice ? : Should have countered him with Hypatia, who was stoned in Alexandria 100 years ago by the Christian rabble at the instigation of Cyril the Fanatic. Or Sopater of Apamea, whom Constantine expressly had executed as a heathen. The perennial laws of heresy. Or have asked if the Vandals wrecked more ghastly havoc before or after their conversion."

"*Ah persecutionsofChristianspersecutionsof Christians ! :* there were almost always other grounds than religious ones. The ancients knew no laws whatever against someone who *thought* differently : that was left

for his church to invent ! But there were indeed laws which forbade under pain of severe penalty all mob assemblies, particularly at night : ‹Si quis in urbe coitus nocturnus agitaverit . . . › : and the police enforced them, and quite rightly so; and when the Christians violated them, they were in fact punished : *not because of their Christianity, but as a forbidden underground organization, with the openly admitted purpose of world revolution !* – Besides which, their stubbornness in the matter had not the least basis – in their gospels or whatever : those state, quoting roughly : ‹Where 2 or 3 of them are gathered in my name . . . . ›. But even if such nocturnal hetæries had been prescribed for them, they needed only to have officially petitioned the magistrate for permission : that is what the Jews had to do too, for example, and they promptly received exemption for their services ! – but the Christians *wanted* a ruckus ! They didn't want *toleration of their religion* – they could have had that just by applying for it ! – but rather *domination of the world,* which of course they knew how to represent ever so cleverly as ‹the kingdom of God› !"

"Noo my boy : there's no possibility of coming to terms with anyone who regards the earth as a disk *because* a 1000-year-old muddled chronicle demands it ! The simple fact *that* someone believes in the existence of an infallible tome dictated by God is where I draw the line ! Nothing is infallible, and God, most certainly not : the sad condition of a world in which all living things subsist by devouring one another, surely only in some jokebook can that be termed a masterpiece of omni=potence, =science, and =benevolence rolled into one !"

"Y'see : that too is typical ! But it has the unintended advantage, that a knowledgeable person can immediately judge the content from the title : go right ahead and take notes on his ‹Christian topography›; I've heard about it before this; but it seems only now to be making its first appearance as a closed system. Just be prepared for some knobby hypotheses : most assuredly, the sun has been created solely as a light for mother earth; so then of course he's not allowed to know that less that 1 billionth of its total radiation is of any benefit !" giggled; but also folded away nervously at his hands.

Outside : moon in a rampart of clouds; sprained limbs of light lay everywhere; the wind bolted like a stallion.

Inside : I heard my father ask : "Think maybe we ought to inform all the servants ? : not to tell anyone that you're here ?" : "Not on any account ! That *would* cause a stir !" Pause. "One ought to be able to emigrate; but where to ? If only England were still Britannia ! – All that's left now is Persia again." And I listened in horror : *my*

teacher ! ! : Am I to lose him on account of them-over-there ? ! The house walls puffed out; a gray light; contracted again.

"‹Me› ? : that, once you're past 40, is just an assortment of whims and bad habits. – Yes, go to bed, Lyco : 'nightmyboy !"

Sad and absurd at the same time : a human being who prays ! : Things'll never get that bad with me ! (The moon was still jumping through its iron hoops).

Midnight : a draft. A draft through the moon chimney.

Morning : like a poppy petal he was just gliding into the bushes. –

"He – to – the – o : Kai arnio : esphagmeno eulogii – a / : doxakaieucharistiii – aaa !" (‹Bright as the star beams forth at the dawning hour of milking›; and Amiantus lifted his hands in apology : "Supposed to be done every morning now : devotions –" departed, with face of a diplomat).

(I mean, pretty she isn't, not by a long shot !) : "Duhr-i särät bigär där !" and she answered Persian=politely : "Muhäbbät-i-tu käm nä shäväd."

"Just one brief moment yet – " (Gabriel in his robes) : "only the Justinian hymn left . . ." (Composed and introduced by the emperor himself; I intentionally did not know it, was therefore excused from singing along, but obligingly interlaced my fingers – and away it went – and defiantly loud as well) : "Homogenes huios / kai logos tou theou . . . ." (one thousand seventy-two, one thousand seventy-three. Or maybe guess the distance to the pulpit).

A bright, businesslike room : he at the lectern, one who exalted himself; we, with emphasis, at the dainty little table beside him : so close to one another that he stared at Agraule for a while with disapproval (she, however, was thick-skinned too; and my thoughts were gathering like a band of rascals). (But what was that beside him there ? : a head-sized scruffy structure, roundish and robust brown).

He placed his fingertips together : – –

"I can still see him before me – – : a stocky man, almost short. Quiet. Introspective eyes –" (‹skewed, waxy Jesus look› as Eutocius once expressed it) : "I was allowed near the master for many a moon – even to participate a little in his imperishable work – and therefore know details that to some extent are not even in his book –"

Well-traveled man, our Cosmas was, granted !; ". . . India and Selediba" (so it's no longer Taprobane; that's probably just the Persian name, where ‹dib› means ‹island› : ". . . then in the first years of the reign of the Emperor Justinus" (the one from yesterday with the signature stencil, the uncle of the current one, nothing but Istock and Biglniza)

"in the Axumite Kingdom." (Fine, I'll take that as his legitimization). "Not to mention his commentaries on the Song of Solomon and the Psalms !" (Right, a geographer, however, ought to keep quiet about works like that ! Probably had bible in hand checking whether the earth was still correct ? – In any case a businessman as well : so maybe he didn't ‹experience God› until after he retired; well, let's wait and see !).

(But now it was gettin' int'resting !) : "The sewn barques of Rhapta; without a nail, with no iron at all : the flexible planks bound together with coconut threads" (ah, is this some giant nut ? : and fascinated, I weighed the argellia in my hand : would like to plant it sometime, and be able to see the tree. Seems to be liquid sloshing around inside. – And I can believe that those ships are practical : dent when they bump into something, without ripping; can then be mended quite easily –). / "They travel with them to the island of Menuthias, take on turtles, which they catch there in enormous nets woven of osier – –" (and truly so large that it's said 12 men have a hard time subduing and carrying one ! Doubtless : where there are nuts likes these – – – ? ?). / ". . . the priceless monument at Adulis . . ." (Yesyes : where the start and finish don't match. But nonetheless, it was quite a scientific feat for him and Menas to have copied the thing !). / Wondrous Indian fishes : that shoot parlous drops of clear liquid from their mouths and into men's eyes. Sharksuckers, tied to strings and used like dogs for the hunt. "Cosmas assured me that many of these fish climb into palm trees, there intoxicate themselves on palm wine, and then return to their element !" (the last sentence was spoken in a loud and reproachful voice, because Agraule had been impatiently swinging her legs. And, strengthened by the thought that his censure would be divided between 2 today, she discreetly went on doing it).

And now the veritable edifice of learning : great Whoever, in the truest sense of the word : I just kept staring at the monstrous drawing. And he graciously rejoiced in the impression made on me by Moses' tabernacle as a model of the earth –

"The inhabited earth is a rectangle, twice as long as it is wide – a journey of 400 days, or 200, respectively. Or" (he was escalating, arrogantly funny, trundle-cheeked, for minimathematician me) "to be exact 11,790 millia on a line Tzinitza – Gades; 6,300 from the Hyperboreans to Ethiopia." (Measurements are roughly correct). / "All around it flows the Ocean, which makes its way into the Inner Earth by 4 entrances" (and he pointed : Mediterranean and Caspian Seas; Arabian and Persian : quite right : but where does that leave Sinus Gangeticus

and Magnus ?). / "Beyond the Ocean and opposite all regions of the earth, is found a second, contiguous, terra firma, no longer accessible to men, although they did at one time dwell there : for Paradise was located on the eastern side, and even now the 4 great rivers that once watered Eden flow through subterranean channels into our continent – by God's everflowing grace ! – After the Fall, Adam did indeed have to leave the garden, but he and all his descendants were still permitted to dwell along the shore : until the Flood brought the Ark with Noah to our world." (He may well have noticed my skepticism, for he was now beaming as he added his ‹proof›) : "Flotsam from Paradise still drifts to the peoples of Cattigara : our spices, cloves, cinnamon : a fact, is it not ? ?" (That's probably what the sly Arabian traders of Inner India, in Hejaz and Yemen, talked you into believing, isn't it ? Has Agraule got Paradise perfume upstairs then ? It does smell good ! – Her fingers tongued thin flames. Eddied soundless points under the table, whole rows. Rolled into balls, white snakelets. The Rha was drawn with its modern name ‹Atel›; in India beyond Imaum, ‹White Huns›. On the northeast corner, Hippophagites : apparently some horse-riding peoples).

(And in fact : on the eastern edge they had written in ‹Paradisus›). "Here in the north, the Regio Procellarum, workshop for clouds and the residence of storms. In the west, a silent twilit land; flat; willows, never stirred by a wind, weep along gray brooks. Fogs grope with blind silver brow through the valleys; crows and fine cold rain." (Suresure : but how do you know ?) : "In the south, a desert : where fiery-hued demons ceaselessly rove : the tips of their several horns, poisonous, with scourges for tails and fat cinnabar breasts" (automatically, I first had to look over at Agraule; and only then at their group portrait, which he likewise possessed : aha, carried a sort of manure fork in their hooked mitts; most of them also with charming red bat wings).

"Why the Outer Sea isn't navigable ? –" (and now it came in steady permutation : mire, seaweed, monsters of heroic proportions; calms alternating with hurricanes, darknesses; ice bulwarks manned by fogs; agressi sunt mare tenebrarum quid in eo esset exploraturi) : "Nowhere deeper than 10 – 15 stadia".

Beneath it all, in rocky chambers and vaprous arenas, the Inferi : old gods, heathens and the damned, in murky fire and smoky whirlpools, sociable gatherings, groans and convulsions : "such subterranean fires are of course abundantly proved by the Italian volcanoes – probably a sort of flue for these hells. – Certainly : naturally : also by numerous hot springs, yes !"

(A respectable man would have used a dotted line for the outline of this outer continent, to suggest its uncertainty ! By his own admission no one had ever been there : and here I saw river estuaries mapped, mountain ranges and other details : if we wanted to apply such methods to assessing church property : they would raise robust complaints ! – And so, that I reject !).

I was just about to open my mouth on the matter, when he bent forward smiling and covered the map with splayed hands : "Enough for today." (You can say that again !) : "We'll meet here again tomorrow morning." (and then I extended my invitation. To which Agraule listened with greater interest than she had shown for anything since this morning : "Yes gladly ! – But of *course* !").

(What a shame : I still would have liked to ask about the giant mountain. Well, tomorrow then !).

Back in the park with Agraule (Anatolius had also accepted with refined enthusiasm, and laid his thickest slate at the ready ‹with hasty hands› : notes for duck breeding ! ! – on the one hand it's touchingly nice of the old man to make such a fuss over me !) : an almond-colored double chiton with rainbow hem ("my favorite color" she had said, introducing it); red hair-net; behind her right ear a golden adder flicked out its tongue.

(Ah, yes, before I forget !) : "Why have you come here in the winter of all times ? Normally, just on principle, the rich move in the opposite direction, into the city ? !" She gave an unruffled sniff : "Ah, y' see, it's like this : Papa's the emperor's chancellor of the exchequer as you know. Yes, the first chartophylax, too, and all sortsa things. With the rank of consul –" (aha : that's why he always wears a purple-trimmed toga !) : "but his main job is in fact, to bring in the money. And now he's apparently turned the tax screws somewhat too tight, so that too many protests have been lodged, and Justinian has been forced to make a pro forma example of him : and so he exiled him to his estates for six months ! Even though he's thoroughly satisfied with him : he's going right on handling all the business from here." (Therefore, religatio ad tempus). "'nd a couple new cases of the plague have turned up too; which fit in quite well."

"Ah, it doesn't mean 'nything ! : Next May, Justinian 'll turn 60, so there'll definitely be a broad amnesty, and we'll be able to return. – It is boring here, don't y' think ? !" (but left me no time to protest and refute; it was her turn now) :

"Haven't you got any brothers or sisters then ?" : sure; I did have one sister in Cherson; but she's been dead for 2 years now. (Agraule is the

youngest of 5 children : 2 sisters, "married long ago"; 2 brothers in their early 30s. Her mother, like mine too, had died years ago : "Papa's got around 3 dozen fat planipedes, who he keeps changing off with").

"You got lots of kids ?" : I turned my head, flabbergasted by such a wild suggestion; but decided for variety's sake not to be outraged, so simply lifted my eyebrows and avouched : "You're impossible !" "But you've got some ? !" (imperturbable). "I mean ! . . . : Of course not ! !" : "There's no reason to shout", she replied well-pleased : "So what ! : my brothers aren't married either, and they have – oh, *umpteen* of 'em !". "But already have their full share of the inheritance : someday I'll be getting this estate here".

"Pah : just about everywhere !" and she bent her fingers, counting : "I was born in Berytus. Hierosolyma. Alexandreia." (3 fingers were gone now; she hesitated; a sidelong glance; then relieved) : "Athens !" and grandly clamped both fists tight : "'ve you traveled at all ? – I can take shorthand !" (The logic of these people ! But I did understand her intention !).

Yes, was in Cherson for six months. And environs : Pantikapeion. That is, with my sister at the time. The large shallow Maeotian Sea, with its mudflats and sandbanks : "y' don't dare sail there without a pilot !"; the endless swamps and rush thickets : "in winter it all freezes over, so that y' can drive across it with a fully loaded wagon. They say that a battle even took place there once". Then details about the fur trade, and that greatly interested my maid of fashion.

But what a large park here ! : reed-banks in which pelicans were bobbing; far off in the haze the tile roof; a herd of sheep murmured past; in the arbustum grapevines, thick as your arm, throttled their tree supports.

On the meadow, the lonely gnomon of the sundial; on a marble slab, a bronze arrow; the family of curves carefully engraved; likewise the inscription ‹6 hours devote to work; for the rest : live !› ("As a surveyor, you need to carry a regulation prostahistorumenon ! – Is that a temple over there ?").

She wrinkled her brow; she said feebly : "A little chapel of course. Mama's buried in there".

The funeral lamp still burned inside (was ignited, as prescribed in the will, every calends, ides and nones); the relief panels of the sarcophagus alternately showed scenes of the old and new testaments and the seasons. Otherwise, like a churchlet in miniature, with narthex and a life-size ‹Good Shepherd› in the apse at the rear. "In the Hagia Sophia, the thysiasterion alone cost 40,000 pounds of silver !" (That's where our taxes go ! !). "You burn your dead ? ! : Oh ugh ! !" and she strode

ahead indignantly, and back.

The yellow autumn leaves of her hands lay softly on the gray marble of the curved bench. "Plants are likewise endowed with reason and comprehension : even Aristotle taught that !" but she sighed her objection : "If we went by that, we wouldn't dare eat anything 'nymore : 'nd I'm already *so* hungry !" (Thus a gentle hint that she could do without my presence; resulting in our walking somewhat faster. But she held me idly by the hand-brake.)

"So y' learn it by heart, 'nd rattle it back !" : "Why sure !" she said impatiently, "he is my teacher after all ! – How can it matter a fig if the earth's an egg or not ?". I tried, indulgently, to explain to her why – – but she listened mistrustfully and decided much too quickly : "– I mean for a coupla hundred years it'll make absolutely no difference : what *do* you want really ? !" (and, now quite out-of-grace) : "If you were a cavalier, you'd be much more interested in my shape than in the earth's ! !"

"So you're not coming along to our place this afternoon then ?" I asked, the melancholy hypocrite; but received just a haughty glance : "There's truly not such a teeming proliferation of amusements among you here in Thrace, my dear, that one can casually omit even the shabbiest of them !" – –

"And leave the lychnuchus in there : just imagine how that will make Gabriel's blood boil ! –" (with this final bit of advice, Eutocius departed at last, and was invisible for the rest of the afternoon). "What do the Christians have against such lamp stands ? : they're quite marvelously crafted ! – I'd love to see all 360 burning at one time !" : they hung on delicate chains from the branches of the bronze tree, apple-shaped, engraved all over with maxims and mythological scenes; little round wick-ed mouths enticed kisses; but my father shook his head regretfully : "Just think what that would cost ! – We've only lit it twice before, down in the hall : at my wedding. And when you were born. – But it stays right here, no question of that !".

Is that them already ? ! : I was just picking up my room a little. (Not extra for them though !).

The meal (Right, delicacies you don't get here !) : alica barley; red cabbage; fish in oxygaron. Homemade bread in farmer's loaves, so crisp it sprayed beneath the large knife (Anatolius enthusiastic : wasn't that how Virgil put it ? – But our pistor was good; for simple cakes too !); with it bitter, local honey ("Just like in Sardinia !" Anatolius politely; although Eutocius had suggested poisonous Pontian honey for him, not our lovely acapnon !). For dessert then, roasted poppy seeds with fresh

butter. The others sampled our thick blackish wines; in well-bred fashion, we both drank melicraton, honey in new must, 1 to 9, (she first resignedly dunked the pucker of her lips into her ivy-wreathed goblet, but then went ahead drinking valiantly).

"Day of fasting" Gabriel had sonorously announced, while reaching frequently for the beaver-tailed ladle in the apostle sauce (they want to chow down despite it all !). – Ah-ha : the brant-goose too ? ! : "They-uh are engendered, as is well known, from barnacles, and are therefore permissible" he informed Anatolius, (who impartially flourished his hands. And my father – old duck expert, as mentioned – took no little fright at such a specimen of clerical learning and casuistry : are wily people !).

"It's Phasis water" my father said in praise of his crotchet : "just arrived on the latest ship. – It's really much lighter and sweeter than the local ! I admit a little leaden in tint; but once it's stood a while, absolutely pure and healthy : keeps for several years without spoiling ! A water of the gods, and I never run out of it !" –

"Ah, here is the duck enclosure ! !" : Everyone in front of it : the 20-foot-high wall ("plastered smooth inside and out and whitewashed" Anatolius muttered between upper teeth and lower lip, hast-i-ly-jotting : "50 paces square ? ? – – Forty-eight !") Then we entered : nets stretched over the top; in the middle a reservoir with water plants and rushes; 20-foot-wide swathes of lawn around the pond. (To his complete horror, Gabriel discovered our weather vane : a mobile Triton, with his threatening trident against the wind). Anatolius was over investigating the countless, rectangular covered stone chambers (". . . . plastered as well . . . .") for nesting; most of them half-hidden in shrubwork and little shadows : "Yes, I simply *must* have one of these !" (fervently; meanwhile Gabriel, as if quite casually, evaded our old tattooed duck-keeper – – came back : "Yet another pagan, right ?" : "Hmm – partly !" I objected (and he was about to wince : partly ? ? ! !) : "admittedly, Bendis and the Aloaedae are still worshiped now and again as well. – : Otus and Ephialtes, 2 demons of the tilled earth –" I explained with relish to the inquisitorial face : "sometimes drink their beer out at the stones by night; that's all." : "Ah ? : That's all ? !" (he asked, mottled with rage and employing so-called cutting irony).

At the damp spots you set out rushes ? : "Yes, that's how we do it too." / "Ah, you hang wasp branches among the fig trees ? Does that really help all that much ? !"; and my father patiently explained to him the fruit is irritated by the boring of their ovipositors, more juices flow in,

they end up larger and tenderer. – "Do you suppose it could be done by hand as well ? . . ."

But at this point Anatolius had some first-rate advice (we had shown him our beautiful dapple-gray, and complained about his constant ‹weaving› : and it *was* pitiful to watch, how the frightened animal stood there with widespread forelegs, and compulsively swung head and upper body back and forth !) : "We'll take care of that at once ! : Do you have – uh – some tar; or a bucket of soot ? !" He clambered up onto the low stall barrier himself, and carefully painted the vertical beam, a hand-breadth wide, on the wall : right in front of the horse's face ! We watched incredulously (while he washed his hands in a watering bucket). – – "Well if that doesn't beat all ! –" : the dapple-gray still shied; halted its movements; turned its head questioningly to us : ? wanted to go on weaving – it was no go ! It laid its ears forward, snorted, pawed : the tail high : pfff, it was still no go ! ! (And Anatolius stood proudly nearby, his arms imperially crossed : ? : ! – I wouldn't have believed it : he is good for something !).

Alone with Agraule (on the ‹house tour›). "We should be wearing wreaths of ivy or selinon !" but she grunted disparagingly : "I can't stand the smell of selinon !"

The mosaic floor of the hall : ". . . . needs some polishing too . . . . ." she sulked; but grew more cheerful while examining the heavy wooden staircase : "great hiding places under there !"

"And this is where you live ?" : first she fell under the spell of Ptolemy's giant map of the world (done to exact specifications, with curved meridians !), overpowering everything, in this very strong light, with its abstract multicolors, 10 by 6 feet, I had drawn it together with Eutocius : "Say, pretty ! !" (all you can do is arc your mouth : if all it was was pretty ? !).

"Who's this here ? !" (peevish, and I blushed slightly) : life-sized in the corner, an agile slender girl, lightly gliding away on tip-toe, her green garment clutched in her left hand. Long free hair; lily and pomegranate blossoms in the pendant hand; in the skirt's hem a pattern of ‹unweighed› anchors : "Elpis ? – – : She looks like *me*," she said curtly. (What I'd like to know is, how !).

The floor strewn with dyed and aromatic sawdust; with large wine-red circles as a rough pattern : "Had it done just for us, right ? !" she suggested ironically, but at once I insolently admitted it : "But of course. Normally there's no such foolishness here !" Pause. "My father wanted it, that's all."

Be that as it may : "In any case, it's obvious the woman's touch is miss-

ing," she asserted importantly (yes, indulgently : where did she pick up *that* old cliché !). "All looks too orderly for you, is that it ? !" I asked to taunt her. She dug with the point of her shoe, elegant and discontent, and then placed herself, splendid isolation, in a red ring of her own. It occurred to me besides : "I'm never getting married," and, well-chosen words : "my life's plan excludes such-the-like (sic !)." : "Mine too, for ages now !" she replied saucily : "we do make a great match !"

Candles ? : of wax and tallow, a reed for a wick. "May I explain it to you ? – –" and she yawned me her ill-tempered permission.

Surveyor's instruments in the corner : groma; decempedator; a bubble-tube for leveling work; a wooden caliper tall as a man (span of exactly one double-pace) for rough measurement of fields (a skilled hand swings it alongside on a taut line as you pace off). "I already *know* what an abacus is !" (still mildly petulant).

"You wash with that ? ! : you poor thing !" : pumice stone; and she was honestly horrified : "Just my hands; whenever they get terribly dirty –" I mollified, "otherwise for sharpening styluses. Or for erasing used sheets of parchment." – "What is pumice actually ?" (profound. – "Lava foam" : "Ahá").

"Can you sing ? – I can't !" and so reproachfully turned the tortoiseshell lute in one hand; then it struck her : ". . . as a child I had *such* a big bathtub : !"

"Yes, a pack for emergencies is something we always have to have at the ready !" (in case of Bulgar raids; the border life. And she grew ever more pensive.)

"And these are your books ?" : she began to page politely in the formulas : Heron's Geodaesia; the 60 books of the Ethnika by Stephanus of Byzantium ("listen, that's a rarity, complete like that !"); Sergius of Zeugma; the Megale Syntaxis naturally; a computus paschalis; Priscianus's (the Lydian) essay on the senses; finally, hesitantly, the cryptic anonymous books of Dionysius the Areopagite (but she thought nothing whatever about it; all the while, to annoy me properly, humming the latest hits out of tune : ‹Byzanteeheen – ni – hights / you'll never fo-horget'em . . .›)

"This is a bed ? ?" : she tacked her head about sportively, and forced me to take it almost totally apart : straps; a thin blanket; the sheepskin on top ? My coarse nightgownlet was wantonly taken by both sleeves (in both arms; and I stood beside her darkly : there was always something new to mock !). "This's your entire wardrobe ? !". On 2 hooks, yes. But she liked the laena : like the winter himation of the locals, one side thick tufted wool; sighing, she cozily snuggled her lean face in it (and

apparently no longer gave a thought to getting up from my bed !). –

"And who lives here ? ?" (embarrassed; for beside the door to Eutocius's room stood his Insomnia, goddess of sleeplessness : longish, unhappy smile; face with a morbidly high brow; her peplon printed with a motley of numbers and perverted word fragments; the hands nervously plucking and bending mutilated stalks; leaning against the sloppily laced shoe, a round chessboard with triangular fields, a mouse running in a circle : "– does that ever look weird ! ! – : an old man ? ? !" (genuinely shocked).

"Overrun with demons around here, aren't y' ?" (sullen). "Nocturnal divinities is all." (me, cool). Then, since she was still in rebellion : "You sure have good reason to get so upset !" : "How's that ? !"; and I explained to her, in malicious detail, who Agraule had actually been : until quite recently humans were sacrificed to her in Salamis on Cyprus : the priest would run some young lad through with a lance on the altar ! Was in fact the wildest, fiercest sister of the three. She listened eagerly, and kept nodding in agreement; licked her lips : young lads : "I really never knew that ! – Sorta like this maybe ? !" : making white gnashing fangs and yellow taloned hooks; the eyes of this lad-devourer rolled from her face in all directions, quiverings in her hair : – "Well ? !" (Just like that !).

Soft reddish air outside : the court was teeming now with about 20 slaves, who dipped their besoms in the ditch beyond, and sprinkled the court and paths with water before they swept. Surrounded by bright, boisterous laughter, they swirled everything clean, chattering sundry variants on thieves' cant, and we watched as masters are wont to do.

"Goths, you've got Goth women here too ? !" : "Yes, 2; an old and a young one : ‹skapjan matjan jach drinkan›" I laughed uneasily (the young one had once made some attempts at advances); and she marveled : "Goths 're held in esteem at the moment in Byzantium : lotsa marriages with 'em ! There are after all scads of hostages and émigrées there : Witiges, the ex-king, lives with his wife Matasuntha in a villa, out by Regio : do they ever ! – She's been carrying on for a long time now with Germanus, the emperor's nephew."

And burst into blaring laughter : "Y' should see that bunch up close sometime !" (then copious court gossip : how Belisarius was constantly cheated on by Antonia, who's 18 years older : "With Theodosius, a semi-monk : who since has died from it". Tricky. She gave a quick gurgle, like water running out of a little bottle. Squabbles between Narses and the clerics. (Well, the ‹White Czar› isn't any better either : a vain boy, just off the farm, who had to have a Slavic

princely family tree invented for him !)).

Gaudy air fabric : yes, the country life ! "Looks funny !" (the Dakians with their long trousers; call themselves ‹Arborigenes = born of trees›).

Catenates : "We have lots too" she said offhandedly : "our ergastulum is always filled to the brim." (lascivious) : "What d' you folks do with your female criminals ? Ours are sent to the salt mines; when they get back from there, they eat outa your hand. – They can't be used for breeding after all; bad traits 're too easily inherited." (Connoisseuse).

Tintinnabulation : the herds were coming home; us, among harvested peach trees, apricot, pear, apple; the dusk watched us through slit-eyes.

"‹Men› : apparently for you that simply means : intemperate drinkers, bellowers, indefatigable patrons of harems – – ?" she nodded amiable approval my way, "Quite right", and : "Whatever possible need can you have for so much of *that* stuff ? : !", teasing, and chewed, eyes crossed dreamily, the tip of the branch (juniperus sabina; a creeping shrub; rhomboid leaves with an oil gland on the back, and blue-black, pendulous berries in cones). "God, it just happens to grow here !" I said, caught totally off-guard by this attack : she can drive you to distraction ! (By the way, Aristotle explicitly recommends planting it, and amblosis as well; to subvert the effects of immoderate fertility. Even if, in statute 22/16, Justinian has now imposed penalties of exile and salt-mines for that !).

Her hands anemoneed slowly in the shrubwork, poison to poison; bear's breech and arachis, a vetch. Cooler. Cracklings in the earth; moon thrust its crooked beggar's hand out of smudged rags; her shoulders gave a single chatter from the chill.

"Here : You see !" : there he stood by the ditch, in limp reeds : no cross in his hands, but simply the wild goose (and she admitted fretfully, that it looked better, more ‹organic›; but all the while pressing her long nose into her bouquet of corpse flowers).

"Really, Agraule !" (me; outraged) : "That's *it* precisely ! : A religion that slanders art and science as ‹vanities› simply *can't* produce any artistic achievements ! Just recut and refit our old masters ! – Yes, at best, international kitsch, like your woolly ‹Good Shepherd› over there !"

Listen, listennn ! : Proofs enough : "Don't you know that there are whole strings of factories in Byzantium – and elsewhere, too : Athens, Rome, Pergamum – where antique statues are revamped in mass-production ? Since Constantine, winged Nikes are made into angels on principle; the shiftless apostle Peter gets slapped on top of Theodosius columns; triumphal arches put together from Trajanian materials. ‹Unusable› stuff incinerated in lime-kilns : the whole Severusian museum ! – – –

Here : this is a statue of ‹Eirene›" (the youthful woman with cornucopia, olive branch, bouquet of eared grain) : "chisel out her attributes, and put your holy suckling in her arm : and there you have it, the ‹Virgin Mary› !"; she derisively sniffed it up into her nose; sauntering ahead, also muttered something about ‹sins of the tongue›.

"Poetry ? : have a good laugh ! ! : have y' ever read the ‹Christos Paschon› by Gregory of Nazianzus ?" (she had seen it, yes !) : "from alpha to omega, the drama is patched together out of verses by Attic tragedians : 10 original lines ! – Or the cento of Eudocia on the ‹Life of Christ› : the philologists have identified 2343 half or whole Homeric verses in it ! Christianity and Culture ? : that's like water and fire !"

"But here, right : this is Cultura ? !" : she was standing squarely in front of it, pointing most jeerfully : a god of the fields, as usual painted with red lead, its apron full of fruits, stood tall in the green; grinning down over his enormous mobile phallus : "Yes, *that* is culture ! !"; and purposefully swam off, victoress, behind the mocking perispomenon of her mouth, through the blooming asters, toward the nearby house behind the trees.

There they were waiting, congenial, in lively conversation : "– ah, here comes our little couple ! –". He had brought 2 lampadarii along; we gave him yet a third; the lights in the hand-lanterns were shivering now behind their decorated panes of horn; the anaboleus was allowed to withdraw : they had come in litters. –

My ears : caught farewell steps; my eyes gaped; hands froze marble patterns; feet stood : where was I ? Hair lived, finger scratched, heart gurgled : all at once. (Skin stank sure. Below. From wrinkles.)

"– Well ? ! –" : Eutocius with naked grinning head.

"Honest souls ? !" (the Christian priests) : "yes, if they weren't such fanatics at the same time ! Obtuse is what they are : from tenderest childhood on, fantastical hypotheses are so systematically drummed into them that they later consider their ‹awareness of God› to be literally some inborn axiom of the human spirit; and are simply incapable of imagining how anyone not wicked or mad could reject such a notion !"

"‹Mythology›, ‹faith› ? : those are working hypotheses ! Which might have sufficed for a hundred thousand years."

"Ah, look here ! : Justinian has decreed that December 25th is officially to be considered Christ's birthday from now on, and must be celebrated in all churches ? : you see, once again the old natalis solis invicti is being used most cleverly ! What methods ! – – Noo; no point in setting up observations today. It's still too cloudy."

Wind : a story (in through the window. My fingers fumbled all over me; while breathing wrench-mouthed : m'andering legs; hair tailing along; stubby bouncebuds; bouncing; in arm burlies : ah enough ! – The moon's swim bladder in sargasso clouds).

And there in the east again : bright wool crocheting; green fluffs, yellow loops, red threads, (the skein still lay beneath the horizon), blue scarves. "It'll be clear this evening : so come up to the observatory, alright ? !" : "Gladly, master !" (and pleased, he gave a gaunt and puckered smile).

In pink shoes before a heldentenor of a rooster : the hand aslant holding her chiton together, which the wind was trying to leaf open. "He's still dusting off his relics" she informed me light as a feather.

Relics : the customary chip off the redeemer's cross; a flaskletful of saint Hilda, who had oil wells in her breasts; Peter's upper left eyetooth; well, everyone has his hobbies to ‹bless› his life : he spread his round arms, radiant collector, and de-tonated his chant (to which Agraule virtuously – and with a sly wink my way – responded : just pick up the tempo !).

(And more of the sublime disclosures) : "At the furthest limits of the outer earth (the uninhabited one !) there rises an enormous, extraordinarily high wall on all 4 sides : supported by it, heaven is thrust out as a vault above both earths. Above this – nono : a barrel-vault ! – God has his true seat. In heaven are found the elect – –" (who's interested in that ! I want to hear his astronomical system : mathematics rules the world, my dear holy man !).

"So then" (and he looked at me with a doltish cleverness beyond description) : "the stars simply *cannot* revolve vertically about the earth ! !"

The Mountain of the North : "On the northern side of the inner earth is located an enormously high – uh 12,000 millia : same as the earth's length – cone-shaped mountain : around which moon and sun follow their circular but eccentric orbits" (Pause. His lecturing indexfinger towered high, bright, fat, ring-adorned – I was totally confused, you have to first find your way around in this; and so the sketch closer and my fist to my chin –).

The Mountain of the North : "Its shadow cast on the inner earth is therefore what we call ‹night›; in summer it (the sun) moves higher, the mountain is smaller at the top : it follows then that the nights are shorter, the extent of evening and morning longer – because it cannot remain hidden long behind the peak ! The closer wintertime approaches, the *deeper* it sinks : the mountain gets broader, ergo the nights longer !" (Just the opposite with the moon; which moves up

in winter while the sun creeps shallowly along above the southern forest).

The Mountain of the North : (and I couldn't pull my eyes away from the monstrous image : what a notion ! !) : "During solar eclipses, the moon, which has the inner orbit, moves in front of the day star –" (a ‹being of purest light and fire› he called it; a lot he knows : 6 years ago it shone for 14 months at only half-strength, that's how black its rash was !) "– during lunar eclipses, the moon moves through the conical shadow of the mountain : explaining their varying duration." (Both orbits lightly tilted toward each other, so that ‹knots› occur ? : I would also have suggested that to you, folks !).

"Yes quite clear ! : the peoples along the southern edge of the earth, who live shadowless beneath the sun's course are called Ascii; without exception our shadows fall to the north : but when the sun climbs higher in the summer, their length is automatically shortened !" (Sol hibernus and sol aestivus).

The Mountain of the North : "It's angels who direct the stars around it ! – They are exceedingly weary, by the way, of this job of unceasingly providing the consolations of light for sin-smirched man, the ingrate : having indeed to forgo a blessed existence at the throne of the Eternal – but duty, duty – –" (he smacked his lips regretfully and ‹wove› a little while). "Sun and moon – both relatively small bodies – are moved along closely above the earth's surface."

In the north and northwest as noted, the abode of the illumined phenomena of the air, meteors and boreal auroras, of clouds and other heavenly bodies, everything up to 40 stadia high. Hairy and bearded stars as warning prognostics, rods and scourges, grounds for commencing war – – I soon couldn't write it all down fast enough, gad, will Eutocius ever have fun with this ! – ". . . and the moon is very, very close." (I.e., in winter, on the north side) : "Naturally, the hottest lands produce, as a result of the sun's blaze, the most splendid gemstones, the brightest birds, the strongest four-footed animals." (‹The most poisonous snakes, the most numerous and pernicious insects, the foulest pestilences› he could have added informally as well; but he'll hear no ill of the sun !)

The whole box stands upon nothing by the way : ". . . for although the bodies are heavy and yearn for the depths, contrariwise fire's desire is for height. The earth would fall into infinity, the ethereal portions rise to infinity : but *the wall* indissolubly joins both strivings; the forces counteract one another equally, and everything remains in cemented order." (Doesn't he perhaps mean in ‹demented› order ? And grew

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stern, sinister, his eyes puffed up deputatively) : "At the Last Judgment" (impressive pause; I impatiently drummed with my stylus, I Lycophron beside Agraule : hell, whoever's heard the Bulgars whistling no longer trembles before the gods !) : "the Lux infinitum will devour the earth *whole* –" (Hey, what emphasis !) : "hell will plummet downward into ever gloomier redder abysses, an eternal falling" (s equals one-half g times t squared; v equals g times t) : "eternal heaven will take form; the angels, movers of stars, be freed of their service –" (Hallelujah, and then your eternal gala songfest will begin, I know : but count me out ! I find Dicaearchus and Marinus of Tyre more interesting !).

That's it, then ? ? : Nope, first ridicule Ptolemy a little; scoff at the alleged rotundity of the earth : there's nothing about that in his bible either : may God preserve your terrarium for you ! We brandished hands so politely, myohmy : yes, the scruples for the day after tomorrow, and he smiled superciliously and confident of victory – : "Tomorrow we're all going to the fair – mmmnyess –".

Whispers : "Noo, you'd better wait here, Agraule !"

"You keep your estate in wonderful shape" Anatolius said in preoccupied praise, clicked his tongue and apparently had ever such deep thoughts : "Yeeeess – –"; then, awakening : "Yes *of course* Agraule may go along !". Since Gabriel made ready to look with disapproval : "– in the country : one can surely loosen up somewhat on the etiquette !" (muttered something besides about ‹solid family›, ‹solid young man› : means me I suppose ! Had asked if Agraule could come along to the sea this afternoon, to inspect the mussel trees).

She was already loitering hungrily not far from the door : "?" and : "Greaaat ! !" : "Put on some sturdy shoes though. – And-warm-er-clothes !" –

Cloud shadows : the sun absconded every which way; she was already lamenting how heavy her beat-up old shoes were !

"And : how's your cat doing ?" At which I had to laugh, and I described for her how our menials had reacted : we'd been overrun by *kobolds* ! ‹ghosts in the house› ! :

You have to set out bowls of milk for them (a whole edifice of mythology had emerged in just a couple of days; the young Goth maid had reported it to me with a shudder). If they – and they showed themselves only very seldom as ‹little grayish men› – are treated well, they do many a good turn : spin whole spindles full in the night (the purring !); help the maids in the barn and kitchen (because during milking they follow lickerishily from stall to stall; or come begging for leftovers !);

carry grain to the granaries (accurate in the negative : because they keep the mice away from the cereal stores !). But bad treatment makes them spiteful : they bump in the night, waking people up with all sorts of mischief (as unmitigated nocturnals !); slink about as voices behind smoldering eyes; plague the maids as nightmares (because they like to sleep close to people in the hay, and lie down soundlessly against leg and breast; once she had also joined me briefly toward morning !) : so that's the way ‹the commonfolk› observes and draws its conclusions : how many such witnesses are outweighed by one keen-eyed scholar ? ! (We'll have to have cat-doors sawn out all around the place; make a note !).

But what odd voices they do have, granted : "D' yours have proper names ?". She lowered her head; she scrupled for a while – – : "‹Mew & Murmel›" she admitted in embarrassment. So the one is Mew; the other – – ? : "No : *One* of them is named that – the tabby." (and was relieved when I slowly nodded my praise : not bad at all, given those voices ! – In a coppice of dwarf almonds; red-haired willows angling at the brook; the yellow doormats of grasses).

On the country lane : "Want to bet they're *not* driving to Byzantium ? ! – : Well, where y' headed, old Chronos ? !" – the driver-slave cautiously raised his head, but apparently recognized me and pointed with his whip : "Es tan polin."; the wheels whined and rattled. "Watch out : in 100 years that'll be its *only* name !"

The sky leered from its raging tiger's pupil (and the scruffy lashes of the woods. At once I was seized with uneasiness by the metaphor, and I had to shake it off with my head. : "Sure is hot again today." : "Yes, 'nd I had t' bring along palla and hood !" she flared : "besides, mussels make me break out in a rash !" : "You're not gonna be eating 'em today anyhow.").

Now the solitary dunes began : cloud albinos and Agraule questions; she took uncommon delight in the flat coastland : swamps, lagoons, the endless tangle of sand fields with channels between them, that sometimes broadened out, Sinus Iridum, pools, lymegrass and lonely birds.

"Nah : there's no tidal ebb 'nd flow in the Pontus either. But there's a current comes down the coast from the north that deposits all this sand and silt : that's what creates the haff." – "Nono : shipping doesn't stop until November, with the setting of the Pleiades". (But of course she had to complain about something; and so : "Not much doin' here !").

"Hey looka that ! : 'ts that ? !"; in front of the old stone, tall as a man, and tapped the middle of the crudely hewn triangle. "That ? ? : The salvage rights marker for Horkys." She had never heard of anything like that :

when ships run aground here on stormy nights, the village communities hurry to the beach, and try to salvage as much as possible : and so that no one poaches on the territory of the neighboring town, these stones are placed here; so that there're hardly any serious quarrels : just like in the Aethiopica, right ? "Outdated ? ! : Oh, anything but that ! Come winter there'll be plenty of action : we once picked up 500 of the finest cattlehides for a song ourselves ! And the locals heat all year long with planking from the ships – not to mention the smuggling." "But not a word to your father !" : "Pf !".

On the crest of the highest dune : way out there the Axeinus glistened restlessly : "Y' see : it's from *this* angle here that it gets its old inhospitable name !" : "What's it actually look like around here in winter ? !" she asked, contemplating.

In winter ? : Thick masses of fog. Terrible gales from the northeast. Rivers frozen stiff beneath blankets of ice. ("All the result of the mountain of the north" she muttered learnedly). In the trackless white barrens the occasional farm, barely visible from its smoke : "You should have seen the storks here 4, 6 weeks ago : hundreds of 'em ! For days ! And then all the acorns this year : it's going to be a mean winter, they say, even Eu . . ." (damned cough !) : "Eucrates says so". ("A slave, knowledgeable old codger –" I hastily explained; by way of precaution. Once more impressively a-hemm !).

She was trembling now in dismay : "Oh do stop : makes me cold just listening ! – And of all things, the one winter we have to be here is going to be such a hard one ? ? : Well, once and once only !" More sharply : "And then your gloomy old house yesterday : that Insomnia could come visiting in your sleep ! Brrr. And your bed : had to think of it while lying in mine last evening. – – – Ah, don't even want t' hear about your ‹halcyon days›, I'm no kingfisher !"

In the fishing village : they all knew me, laughed and nodded. (The sardine catch was right poor, of course : they disappear from September on as a rule. Atherines in baskets; rays with their stings removed; in this unusually warm weather divers had gathered sponges once more, stinkings and seminudities).

"Hey, what's that ? !" : she gave me a clandestine poke; but old Krates, rough and bearded as only a Triton can be, had heard it and smirked : "Git a closer look, young miss ! :" (at first, offended by the appellation, she wanted away; then gave a snort; then her mouth went roguish, and she linked a nonchalant arm in mine – naturally all eyes for the aged seaman) : he lifted up a footlong squid by its slender arms, a deft prick with the tip of his knife – : ! like lightning a cloudwork of color, yellow

and violet, spread over the pale, finely speckled skin : malakia ! (With one cut, he loosed the shiny white cuttlebone from the back of another one, simply turning the animal inside-out like a sack, removed entrails and ink sac, and reached for the next one). ("You knew of course that Homer's Scylla was a giant octopus ? !" She was still shuddering; only after a pause, bewildered : "Yes, sure.").

With a trident ? : they spear polyps and sea cucumbers, all sortsa stuff. But she wasn't about to take a back seat, and told about how once in the Bosporus she had seen them catch palamydes tuna : "in net frames *this* huge !"

"The dolphins, in troops, cooperate with the fishermen in the hunt; close off the mouths of rivers in a half-circle, and drive the mullets toward the men. Get their share of the booty, too, for their work, *and* come back and demand more if it's too little !"

But now they had even me : "What've you caught there ? !"; they were standing around it sullenly, and regarding it –

On 3 October 541, a fish about 15 feet long had stranded on the coast near Salmydessus, one that until now none of the local fishermen had ever seen : narrow as a ribbon, 2 spans tall, 3 fingers wide, weighed about 50 pounds. Its fringed body white as death (with putrid yellow border of fins; a few black slanting stripes); a scraggly crown of bone on its head (that was supported on a high peaked fin; the toothless maw split vertically : they shook more dubious heads : they didn't like this pale strap at all ! "A dealfish then !" I resolutely suggested – first give it a name, and then it's as good as familiar ! and : "We'll have to examine it : send it over to us tomorrow : you'll get paid for it !" They went on jibberjabbing, relieved to be rid of the beast. "Ugh ugh !" = the ‹young miss› !).

Above, the blue jellyfish sky with gray billowing border (and it had trapped us beneath it ! Dealfish of clouds).

"Do we absolutely have to go inside ? !" : she stamped crossly and brawled sotto voce objections; but it was our tenant after all, even if there was a very strong smell of onion pie ! (Black beans on the threshold; presumably for lemurs of some sort.).

"What a racket ! !" (hissing in vexation; because someone was wailing away inside and howling ‹ai, ai› and ‹eleloiloi› : the son and heir was already here then) : "Well, Gelon ? !" and he, the spittin' image of a free man (leased just a stretch of beach) : "A boy !". (Sketchily explain to Agraule that in these parts they lament the newborn; while the dead, who have all the drudgery behind them, are sent off with laughter).

At the bed of the mother : the large rattle-stone I had sent as a gift weeks before lay prudently in its place of honor. The baby was just being washed in a kettle : that's to give him a bright clear voice ! His father lifted him out with his own hands, and with threats supervised the swaddling : "– would y' mind what you're doin' ! . . . ." (namely, that he not be laid on his left side : otherwise he'll end up left-handed ! – I slipped the golden double solidus I'd brought into its little fist : "The first of a million !", and the parents grinned with delight; meanwhile Agraule beşeechingly declined the bowl of sea hare : 1 pound of bumpy giant-snail lying in vinegar. "The depilatory on your dressing table is its tinted secretion !"; despite which she wanted none of it).

So then : "Meibomeinos foskomeiton ! – Gelon : we'll meet tomorrow noon at the watchtower : check the weapons ! But only very briefly, make sure they're all there – you'll be back home within an hour !". (The cabbage in the garden had black spots of mourning it was true; but he methodically trod the one head under !).

The patchwork ollady sailed her wreck straight for it, spread yardarms, and foundered on a sunspot : "Come t' gramma !"; the smoked box of her mouth; snapping her one tooth closed : gone ! (Laundry behind the house : togas made giant waves; sleeves gesticulated; they puffed lewd bellies; underpants kicked themselves in the rear, soccered and punched; shirts declaimed and did an impressive headstand for a finale; aprons buxomed, bosomed; etc.).

"Now let 'em go right ahead 'nd pay their respects to Glaucus Pontius and the Alexikakoi : it's exactly the same thing you people do !"

How's that ? ! : All right : "Aren't your saints and angels ministers with their own departments just like them ? : we're simply watching the formation of a government ! All by himself, God (or whatever you call the thing) simply can't be everywhere at once : which is why his top civil servants manage fire and toothache, moonlight and artillery. What an impudence on the part of uppity god-fearing Christians to maintain that their crabbed and crinkly mythology is something totally new, or different from that of ancient folk ! : people just get Graeco-Semitic names drummed into them to replace the ancient caboodle ! : Do *you* see anything other than a phonetic difference, whether I call upon Saint Erasmus or Hera for my tummy-ache ? ! I don't ! !" and, holding our mutual outraged peace, we marched through the frames for drying cod, down to the sandbanks. "In the autumn, he catches screech-owls !", grumpy host, I accounted for the bird-catcher in the rushes; and she, as if sputtering out heavy abuse : "Y' don't say !".

We traced our animal tracks across the sand : little golden-bright tones were still croaking around a pond; ("newts !"); it grew stiller and greasier; yellow and green.

Boats of venerable form : flat floor, steep-walled sides; with spade-shaped oars. Plus a totally directionless wind, a different one from every channel : "Must not be any clouds to scrounge up at the moment." –

"Now don't be such a fraidy-cat, girl !" : for she almost refused to climb aboard ‹a thing like that› : "And what if Porphyrio comes along ? Or if it capsizes ? !" : "I believe you *can* swim ? !" : "Certainly", she replied with dignity : "but I still wouldn't enjoy falling in like *that*" (ambushing) : "would you fetch me out ? –" (with shoulder flirt). "No one from the village here would even touch you !" I cleverly sidestepped any binding declaration : "y' see, they believe it's bad luck to rescue someone who's drowning – – –" :

"Look : I'm bleeding now !" (sorry for herself, and showed her damaged finger in profound reproach : ! : "Shall I blow on it ?" : "Brute !"; but looked about her with curiosity, stretching her feet now; grabbed both sides, and reclined on the blanket I had folded for her; while turning back to give it a ladylike fluff, it occurred to her : "Can you do backbends ?").

Her slow fingers beat white vortices; slip down deeper; we glided and tacked; she hung the tassels of her hands in the water.

(Apropos : hands !) : "Do y' see that mussel there ? !" : "Where ? –" (she had thought it was a large stone) : "You can use the byssus to weave all sorts of things : would y' like a paira sea gloves ? As a memento ? – Of me ?" (God, one does have to be gallant once in a while !). She considered ingenuously and long. – "Inside the mussel lives a small crab, the pinnophylax, that pinches it when in danger; so that it closes abruptly. – – No : we first have to check a coupla trees !"

The wind grew slowly stronger; at every turn it hissed and spat at us : "– Oh, don't be so sensitive, Agraule ! You should go through a real nor'easter sometime : the kind that blows your ears off" (she huffily held on tight to them now) "and slams your nose up against your cheeks : takes 3 men to hold the hair onto your head : 4 for you in fact !" : "Oh, you humbug, you !".

"Whatcha doin' now ?"; because I had taken my little diopter to hand, sighted and maundered – so, 1 stadium ahead on the left; about – : "I'm gauging the approximate direction so that I know where the things 're to be found in this big basin –"

Aha here ! : I took the pole and drove it into the ground with my wooden hammer (so we could tie up to it !). In the calm water – there were still

5 rows of sandbanks between us and the open sea – you could see them clearly,

the mussel trees : alders, cleared of their thinnest branches, sharpened, the year carved large below, had been placed, using prong and rope, at the level of the seaweeds. "They're not ‹pulled› until winter, directly from the ice; that's when the mussels taste best, and 're completely harmless : you could eat them then *too* : they're poisonous only at times ! – – Well : how many are on there ? !" – – She shoved her lower lip way, way out, and marveled at the black, hunchbacked stem encrusted layer upon layer : "– Oh – : a thousand ? ?" : "You could safely say : 30,000 ! Old ones ! and double that many tiny young ones – 'll be a good harvest this time : there're pearls in many of 'em !" and the questions pearled now as I let the tree down again into the shallows, ("Oh, we're not gonna capsize ! !") – there – : "We have about 500; yield several wagon loads : sent to ‹Estanpolin›".

In channels (we were standing almost still) : dark red kelp, chartreuse sea lettuce, paler ulva leaves. Rag worms out of tunnels and tubes; pink-colored roe in little sacks; leathery puffy cadaver hands settled over the sand : everywhere lashes swirled, whips cracked, fleshy threads meant to lure into spiked maws (and she grew very excited at so many violetnesses).

One above the other : a stack of glass bowls with lobed rim; the uppermost full of fragrant autumn leaves and soft curly ribbons, pleated arm curtains billowed : "Baby jellyfish". "The best way to cure goiter is to eat the feeler of the bath sponge."

Sponges in general : I fished the yellow finger-long shaftlets out for her : each spot where it had been touched at once turned green in the air : "Noo, wait a bit !" : slowly the whole colony mimicked them ! (While the fingered smudges were already a bold blue – and here, too, the rest followed. – Toss it back in).

A snail plied along in the shade of water plants, compulsively, always just along the edge of the imaged tendrils : "Until night falls, they're incapable of freeing themselves from the path drawn for them !" (No will of their own; a plaything of external influences; gnothi seauton; without ‹purpose›; she sullenly twirled her toes).

A large glassy scar on her knee : "I fell when I was a kid" (inveighing) "did it *ever* bleed !" and nodded at the spot. – "Nah : I never sunburn : I'm too dark complexioned."

Sea urchin : best never to step on one if possible : "the spines are brittle as glass; 've got barbs on 'em besides, 'nd you have to cut very deep into the wound !" (Yes, corals sting too; if only rather weakly).

Bream too have poison stingers : in the fall they come on shore to spawn : "They have a special attraction for goats; when they hear their bleats or the shepherds' songs, they arrive in troops, jumping merrily along the shore, tickle and lick the animals, and grieve when their playmates are driven to the stalls : which is why shepherds wrap themselves in goatskins, and jump and leap all about on the shore so they can catch the infatuees."

She stretched her thin pointer-arms to the pale blond clouds. Yawned : "Have you ever eaten moray ?" (made savory signs; but admitted that generally speaking it didn't taste all that illustrious). Little nymph packets and sea mice entwined in tendrilings : you could now make out the fish formlets inside and see them move. ("Ah !" amazed; then, uncertain : "Sweet."; then questions : a): do they get big ?, b): can you eat them ?. – Very white dry meat; but it's no great delight either). 3 pointed fish heads peered out of sea cucumbers : one slipped, frail as jelly, out, around, back in again. Sea horses stood vertically before their water plants. "They're said to be a good medicine to use if your bitten by a rabid dog. – Rubbish of course ! – Inside a large sheatfish they found a woman's right hand with 2 gold rings !"

"Hey, very, very quiet !" – we froze in the boat (and now *you*'ve got a tale of wondrous fish for Gabriel !) : I took hold of her head by the hair and pulled her back ("Ouch !" : "I said quiet !"), until one of her ears lay on the water – – :

quite clearly, a soft music ! ! : Now higher, now lower, now distant, now near : reed-pipy tones; bell-like too, and singsong; you could easily differentiate the various voices harmonizing. At times so loud, you thought the boat was trembling; gradually grew considerably stronger, and finally spread out over the entire bottom and up the sides of the vehicle. ("The best way's to submerge your head backwards clear up over your ears – I'll hold you –"; and you could also look into her eyes at the same time : drum fish). – – "Strange enough –" she said hesitantly : "like frogs croaking, I'd say. Or harp sounds –"; and, moved : "Looovely ! !".

Or here : a gigantic electric ray, big as she, lay lurking in the mud ("Let's move on !" she fidgeted anxiously.) "That's the oddest animal there is – : that *I know of*" I added, a will for accuracy, brought up respectably : "you so much as touch it, and the part of you that did begins to quiver, then falls asleep with a jerk, grows cold and insensitive. Even if you just touch it from a distance with a long stick. Or get it in your net. But then again, only as long as they're alive : if you brush against them with your fishing line, your frozen hand flops right into your lap –" She

sprang up in a frenzy : "You lie ! – Or" (what seemed more probable to her) : "only because you didn't set the power of prayer against it : nothing can resist that !", and at once sank down, challenge and triumph, onto one knee, all concentration and pater hemon : "That conquers all magic !". I was already obligingly handing her the pole, as ‹proof of the power› : she tappeddddd . . . . .

Well, I rubbed her little arm, for a long time and with pleasure; and she was shaken to her foundations : so great is the power of Satan ! (Or so weak the Christian magic : how would that be ? !) But then did give a laugh : "The old man oughta have that happen to him sometime !" : "And he could have a dozen crosses dangling around him, his whole bone collection along, and have rubbed himself from top to bottom with holy water – – : even strapping men can be as good as paralyzed, and drown when swimming : not just that old codger !"

Sea anemones ("How do you ever find your way around here ? !" she marveled; and I explained to her that every spring, as soon as the winter storms were over, I survey the terrain anew; just for practice. But, the sea anemones) :

Out of one gushed white smoke; followed by a second, and finally, all the male specimens were exuding such clouds of sperm that the depression was turned to a milky murk – – I was cautious in my explanation, and she listened quite knowledgeably : sperm must be ! (Also how octopuses shed an arm that then becomes the hectocotylus worm, approaches the female and fertilizes it – seemed neither to please nor peeve her).

The hut : we made a short jump onto the sand, and I showed her the shed : "For staying the night during the hunt for wild geese. – Or just in general." (bashful, impatient; she gazed attentively at me; and at the simple tools, the roof of thatched reed, at me again : freedom, sure !).

The evening dissembled a dozen pure colors together; foliage whittled black clouds : "Agrau – leeeee !" : "Lyyyy-cophron –" my echo answered (in the wraith wood : the dune had once wandered across here for 100 years; we crept through the corpse limbs, with wide eyes, on hand chains, sand in our toes, crouching down and staring wide. In tree nets).

Broken through : way across, far off in the fog mountains, 2 lights : she gave a restrained shiver and contemplated them.

"Nope : my father studied in Athens !" : "Meaning an undependable heretic" she summarized coldly. (An angel immediately threw 1 star at a demon !).

"‹Freedom of thought› ? : Think they can't get it out of you ? ? – : They'd

simply give you achaimenidon ! !" (Then the description : an amber-colored leafless magical herb from India, whose roots, rolled into balls and administered by day, force criminals, with torments and visions of gods, to unrestrained confession by night – – she looked my way with concern and sympathy).

Carnival of the night : the waxen nose of the moon between papery coils of clouds. Confetti of stars spun stiffly past us : "Well, nice time ?" (When delivering her at the door. "Weeeell –" she sighed importantly; suddenly illumined : "Well, you get used to it !". Yes, good night. – Wait : "Give my best regards to Mew & Murmel !" : "And mine to Miss Elpis – : Pick me up in the morning ! : Bye !").

Way home : ‹Night is like a tranquil sea› ? ? – so here we go : glittering star roe. Wind raised waves. The horned shark egg of the moon, hung up everywhere in black coral trees. Cloud tadpoles, tails on. A spotted ray was just gliding off, flapped slimy hem of fins, made itself flat, and lay down skulking on the horizon. (Then up the stairs to Eutocius).

He had Tharops in (our old servant, who could see Venus as a crescent !) to question him, and had him redraw the spots on the moon. Once he had lumbered downstairs : "Well, correct again ?" (Correct).

Bios brachys, techne makra : so yet again I measured, impatiently today, the diameter of the moon by letting it wander past a vertically stretched thread and comparing this with the hourglass : 98 sections; so close to us now (it could vary between 100 and about 87. Eutocius had himself learned this method from *his* teacher, Isidore the Mechanic; we measured and chatted).

"Whoever loves truth, must hate God – a reciprocal relationship of course. / For such gentlemen other trivialities are determinative : for instance, what ‹sharp-witted› Augustine, the ‹great› Cosmas, or even ‹Jesus himself› has said – they know as much about Ptolemy as if he had lived 100 years after them ! / If I have nothing but mathematics on my side, I'll gladly let my opponent have the church, its fathers and both testaments ! Yes : and all the apocrypha and antilegomena besides, including Nicodemus and the Shepherd of Hermas ! / Prayer doesn't influence God, but the one who's praying : each gives himself the shot he needs. / When will it get better ? ! : When every person has to attend school till age 20, and instruction in religion is dropped ! / – Nothing excites my imagination more keenly than numbers, dates, indexes of names, statistics, local registries, maps."

A glass drum (above; and the wasps of the stars buzzed) : bush skeletons tried to duck; perplexed trees rubbed their bones (meaning ‹a gust of wind› and overfed clouds again slid their hind quarters a bit further).

"My dear boy –" he stopped short and rocked his broad brow : "that is the foundation of life : landscape, intellect; eros ! – In old age one can, wearily but confidently, add good food : what physical exercise is for you. – Never let anyone defame it !"

(And at once returned, chastely, to the sciences) : we had a long laugh over Cosmas's system, and put together the most trenchant counterarguments for the day after tomorrow. For : / meteors : are perhaps the products of moon volcanoes ! / "Ah, Lyco : you can't imagine the cosmogonies I've already survived ! – At one time, one side of the sun was supposed to be blue and iridescent and to shine only very weakly ! At another it was said : the two halves of earth's sphere did not fit precisely together, which was why a 100-foot-high waterfall formed at the equator, impassable for every ship ! – At one time, I knew a fellow" (and grew ever so somber : eclipse of thought by imagination; it *is* a danger !) : "Who wanted to maintain that we live inside a hollow world. Some 75,000 stadia in diameter : *a bubble in the massive stone universe,* within which sun and stars ran about : just picture that ! !" / (I can picture it; unfortunately).

Before falling asleep : Eutocius : the man must have a soul like a lunar landscape ! –

My thoughts agrauled a while longer. –

But straying through the massive universe : groaning infinity; stone tunnels sucked me along; grope and steady; only gradually did steps tap more firmly.

A silver flame thick as your arm : chest-high, rose up motionless in the middle of the passage. Standing before it. Stammered with high whistling voice; at every spoken click it opened a wreath of stumps. Chest-high. (Afterward, the walls grew moist and naked. Water scraped. – Turn around : as if from some whale's maw, I saw the flame; it was still whispering through swift silver baleen !)

A clump of gold, big as a head, lay like a footstool at the fork in the path : so sit down. – (The mass was so soft that I=you could stick the point of a knife into it. But carved nothing on it. No name starting with ‹A›. Not me).

From a cleft on my right hung colorless fog : I cautiously shoved the tender shadow to one side with my hand : inside was cloudwork, thicker still and padded white. (Thoughts swam in the fog. Thought sponges. In the fog. Wearily propped against rocky sills. Sleep beneath rocky sills. Dreamgetup'n'runalot).

If you held quite still (mouth just ajar, brows slightly knitted : like this –) – – you heard in the distance, from spatial depths, the muffled soughing.

Spraying. Gurgling. Roaring. Rolling. Thundering : still 1000 feet away, the gusts tossed me back and forth !

But very carefully : I pushed myself tough-fingeredly toward the jagged stony gorge, out of which the storm thrusts hurtled, and saw the rapids racing by directly below me; they glistened like bundles of arrows in flight. Bellowing. A flurry blew me away, rolled me here and there in cloths (and wrangling in my terror, I crept further along on all fours, through tubes of sound, till the yowling died away again).

The light faded curiously : feet, below, mine, grinding black sand, a long time; and coaly dust; a long time. Only after many days did a metallic green thread inscribe its wizard's loops on the wall. : Nodding. Going on.

On the wall, the tree prints began : limbs splayed for war; cudgel stuff duelled; scimitars branched out; fibers shredded; sometimes clear across the whole ceiling. Fans dreamt ocher; bushes sat up on hindlegs. Out of grass guilloches.

Shadows of birds were frozen in the fossiled air. Seldom bestial limbs cave-beared. Behind leafy portières. Things hairy sole-padded; squamicones; a mouth taloned. In fish offal.

First the outline of a man = 2 footprints. Then the oak openings ran for a long time, empty but unwearied. On moors, stones made butts. Brown frost flowers eozooed. Buy feelered ammonites.

Out of creepers and capsules : thus the herbarial maid came for the choice; with only a thin belt at her hips. I=you. In her disarranged face, frond entwined, the flourish of a nose-mouth. Her belly patterned with petrified kisses : I bent down, and carefully added a new tattoo, the ironstone sward tasted of rust (and of ink; until content, she faded behind her curtain).

Toxic green and 1000 paces in diameter : a pocket world ! – Boulders (dribbled over with countless rough dimples; meaning occasional cave-rains !); a couple hundred trees, gaunt tall beings (with sacks long as your hand instead of leaves, elastic to the touch, apparently filled with very soft liquid. It stuck to my hand, and I laid it in the jade bowl).

But the lurking light came obliquely from above. And so climb up ! –

Beside the searchlight : cold luminescence from some kind of large gem disk; mineral-mineral. When I arrayed myself before it, my coat wider still, there was a solar eclipse below ! Head shakings. Downward hand-over-hand. Into the new passage. (At first, a few black-green fingers still came streaming in behind me).

The new passage's cross section was totally irregular. Gasping. Forcing through rock intestines. Rattled press. Among stone roots. – –

1000 later the lantern appeared in the passage. I pinched myself into a basalt navel and polyped eyes over the edge : the old man seemed totally confused (not me, yet ! !) : babbled and sang. In front of his little handcart, laden with objects, from far away, Neundorf= Gräflich, the creased mouth chattered and lilled (apparently was much on the move ! – I gave him a long enough time to pass by, and then crept ahead, tense : not me yet ! !).

(Then came the ‹City of the Revelers›; but that is a story unto itself). – –

Gasping upwards : the moon swam, already half dissolved, in brews of yellow light. A troop of drunken night winds were rampaging over in the orchard, scuffled with branches and whistled like pimps : let's hope it stays nice tomorrow ! (Turn over : a tall being made of moonlight now lay on the blanket beside me !).

At her gate : we hung our bread-bags more at an angle (with cheese and grapes in them), the leathern canteen at one side, took knobby walking sticks in hand, and regarded one another with satisfaction. (The old folks wanted to have themselves carried after us later. – A cat made a cautious appearance; it wiped its face with the dewy earth, rubbed its head, purring, in the grass : " 'll be a change in the weather !").

A sky of muddled white cloud rays : No, olive trees no longer flourished here, and we didn't need aqueducts ! "Yes, I once saw the Hadrianic : my uhh – my great grandfather was its technical supervisor for a while". Mills on the brooks : just like in the torrents of the Bosporus, yes indeed !

On the low wall of an old puteal, sitting there : while I lectured, she gaily swung her 2 thin legs : "I mean, it's *not* a well but simply a circle of stones set in the earth, that much even I can see !"

So then : "At one time, wherever a bolt of lightning struck the earth, a bidentalis was called in – a specialist, a priest – who gathered the dust the earth had thrown open, and amid religious mutterings buried it in the same spot of ground. If a person had been struck at the same time, he could not be lifted above knee-height, or interred elsewhere : belonging now to the ignis, he was buried on the spot. Then came sacrifices – of a bidens in fact : which is where the name comes from – and the place circled with a wall : but it could not be furnished with a roof ! It was then not to be trod upon, nec intueri nec calcari, and whoever destroyed it would be punished by the gods –" (she made zealot's eyes and was visibly playing with a theatrical thought : consider the electric ray !) : "Wine struck by lightning drives people mad. – Nah; there's no body buried in this one" I cheered her : "We like to bury our

dead beside wells : so that those seeking refreshment will read the name, and thus the memory is kept alive."

"You see ! : in the old days, no maiden would have dared do that : the black fig's definitely an arbor infelix !"; but she broke off an unpropitious branch anyway, bent the shoot, and placed it in her hair with a firm hand : "Do you really believe in such humbug ?" : "Of course not ! : But I don't believe in any at all, whereas you . . . . ."

An old farmer with a foxskin cap, the superannuated Thracian in person, showed us the snake he'd killed : slit open, and out of it there now crept a toad : *its hindlegs already totally digested ! ! !* "‹And behold, every thing was good› : oh the rascal, the rascal ! ! !"

"Agraule !" I grabbed her hard by both shoulders : "is that a *loving* God ? ! – – In that regard, the ancients were wiser than you folks !" : "Well you've certainly got some shitty customs around here too !" she grumbled, and pulled away to her right, her mouth gliding angrily about in her face, she had almost had to vomit; and then I laughed out loud : "Is that any way for a minister's daughter to talk ?" : "It's certainly no environment for a minister's daughter either !"

A lizard : at one time you could flatter Demeter, by killing it.

A column : ‹76 millia› (that is, measuring from the milliareum aureum, the geodetic center in Byzantium : the surveyor purifies the world; of confusions, of false prospects, of the merely mythological. But now her catchword had fallen) :

Byzantium the Golden (she even said ‹goldacious›) : had over 1 million inhabitants / The Spanish silver fleet docks in its harbor. / The Hagia Sophia was half a stadium long, wide and high; in the great square before it, the statue of a mounted Justinian. ! / Apropos : mounted : the Hippodrome ! ! ! – – :

The Hippodrome : sport rules the world, and not just since the days of the Nika riots. The 4 parties : Albati, Russati, Prasini, Veneti (said to correspond to the seasons of the year : winter, summer, spring, and blue-shadowed autumn : ". . . and do they raise hell ! !" I can well believe that : "I don't go to such things on principle !" : "That's stupid of you !"). / Midnight already, and you hurry to the circus just to besqueeze yourself a place to sit; bookmakers, program vendors, lemonades and sweetmeats. / The chariots : "Listen, they're so light : you can dent the body with your finger !" / At the start, the aphesis : all the grilled double doors ("In front of the garages at the rear, y' see ?") automatically spring open at once; and the quadrigas, lined up next to each other, roll up to the starting line painted white with lime ("the moratores have to pay eagle-eyed attention that none of the drivers

cheats !"). / A tuba blast : – – and the 200,000 are on their feet, roaring, flailing each other with their arms (*and* legs), have beaten a couple of line judges to death too / : and then really go at it, at the twentieth or thirtieth race, the one for the Grand Prize of Byzantium – and there's oil on the north curve : *the smash-ups* on the meta ! ! (Where the monuments of famous horses stand, Aura and Parthenia : black ones are unpopular, and are hissed and booed. : "Though they're really quite practical in battle !". / Or the famous drivers : Clanis, who's the four-time champion at the Antiochia=Ring. Or Eubulus, who's unbeatable on his home track in Sinope : ". . . and do they ever have to train hard ! . . . .". / And so : training : auxiliary personnel en masse : gymnasts, hypokosmetes, aleiptes; anointers, trainers, masseurs, athletic instructors. At night they lay lead plates on their chests to push their lungs and breathing muscles to even greater capacity. Weight-lifting; ditch-digging; tossing the korykus and catching it again; long-distance running and rope-skipping. – "Uh-refraining from love" she added slyly. / Special weight-loss diets, carefully supervised by sport physicians : fresh cheese, poppy-seed bread, dried figs, scant amounts of goatmeat; absolutely forbidden are pastries and alcohol : ". . . and do the women ever chase them ! !" / "Oh, there're scads of 'em," women's clubs, that is, and female athletes who compete in public and love athlete's diets. – "Piffle : what a lot lunacy, *isn't* it ? !"; but, with fully calculated noncomprehension, she puckered her lips : "Makes for great fun !".

We turned off to the left, onto a country lane (actually a limes actuarius and a regulation 12 feet wide). Pointy cloud skulls, egg-headed gerontians, watched us from every rim of the sky as we liliputianed about in our bowl of a world. Shared the while a mushroom, raw, and the cold blotting-paper meat didn't nip us much. Still spoiling for a fight, she decided to go on about Daniel the Stylite, who sat 36 yards up in the air, shat over the edge, and had a passion for getting mixed up in every council and orthodox fracas. "Apparitions of Mary ? ? : How often d' you suppose Athena used to appear to the ancients ! / God's son ? ? : Used to happen in antiquity at least once in every decent family with a little self-respect ! : Think of Hercules, Helen, the Dioscuri etcetera ! / Communion of saints ? ? : y' should 've taken part in a Dionysus festival sometime ! Or in Eleusis ! : *None* of that stuff is anything new ! !"

Over on the main highway soldiers : Noric archers on horseback, Roxolanian cavalry in leather armor, even cataphracti. (Then the express mail from Hadrianopolis, ten in a row : "They do over a hundred millia a day !").

At the watchtower : "Yes indeed : you all live behind our Long Walls here ! – After all, it's held up now through over 2 dozen sieges ! – Nah; I've only been in on 2 so far; I have half the artillery, on the far side of the road."

"Hupp hupp, c'mon ! : dimples in your voice won't help you anymore here. Nothing for it but ad clipeum and up !"; because she was making mondaine difficulties on account of the narrow ladder : "Your father is constantly worried about earthquakes and you carry on just because of a little climb . . . ." : the dark cloudwork of her hairline; eyed lightning bolts; the nonstop mouth borborygmused on vexifications – ". . . and when it looks so trim and elegant ! . . ." (me, conciliatory : she, throwing a haphazard kick my way as I climbed hot on her trail).

"Well at last !" : Gelon also came toddling over the fields and ditches, emphatically clumsy, a bull-bladder for a cap over his hedgehog hair, and could speak only Thracian on purpose. ("Y' see, next thing we know, they'll be checking on us from Heraclea=Perinthus" I explained to Agraule).

Quick inspection : figwood shields covered with leather ? : "45". Whetstones for sharpening the swords ? : "Correct." : "Tell every one of 'em not to forget them again at the next alarm drill !" Frames for our backpacks (in my opinion that's crap of course, for us here; but regulations).

Lassos; a throwing-cloth with balls at each corner : "Alanic specialties : that wraps around your head and suffocates you, and blinds – while the balls batter away at your head –; we have one guy who knows how to use it. – Nah, I can't master it either !". / Slings, and the sealed box with 10,000 lead shots in it : "That'll make you sit up 'nd take notice ! : Gelon can demonstrate for you later, how he can hit a circle small as your hand at 50 paces : 'nd with such force that the point is pressed flat ! : I once saw a man shot through with one, fore to aft ! – – The stamp on it ? : means that the munitions come from the big armament factories in Hadrianapolis". / The provisions : "On one occasion we were besieged here for 30 days; without any water at the end : *what* we did look like ! !" : grain in ration bags; bucellatum, the iron zwieback rations; "Fill the leather pails with water again, so that they're tight for the drill"; wine, medicine, bandages, blankets : "Yes, sometimes women and children flee here too; those that can no longer make it by land or sea to the receiving camps in Philias". / On the top floor the semeia : smoke and fire signals. 2 large, flat shields polished concave for flashing in the sun : "We pass the agreed-upon signals on to the south, to the mountains – yes, from the roof : while the siege troops

take aim at you ! – And then from there on to the Macra Teiche." / Then finally my artillery : "Over there, the battery toward the woods, is commanded by my father." : a tormentum with mortar trajectory; 2 catapults, giant crossbows for level shots; an aerotonium, which flings its arrows using air-pressure. "Range ? ? – Well, that large ballista there throws one of these stones here about 5 stadia : yes indeed ! !". – Incendiary missiles in the sealed stone crocks.

"‹*With the advent of the Christian religion,* the anger of the gods has come upon mankind›" I obligingly translated Gelon's views for her : "barbarian tribes, who come from the dark wilderness of the north (Teutons and Huns; it's *one and the same* operation !) and from the red wildernesses of the South (means the Persians !), are blockading us on all sides : it didn't used to be that way !" : she passed over the history of the last 200 years : something to it, huh ? !, and then we climbed back into the sunshine.

(Gelon poked me, with rustic cunning and in Thracian : ? ?; but irked, I hushed his mouth : what's this about ‹your intended› ? ! : "Mind your own business !". "Done that already !" he grinned, and : "welll, just as soon take care of it today, right off" (filling them with water) "won't have no time later." (muttering and as moronic as possible) : "Tomorrow evenin' a smugglin' boat 'll be passin' by; a coastal tramp : I'm goin' aboard, as a pilot as far as the mouth of the Istrus – " – –

Now from a distance : a squat tavern, cheery windows blinking out of its apoplectic brick profile. A trumpet shrilled away in ever more virulent blisses, verdigris with spit – : and then the aggregate brass band burst loose, setting the hills chewing on echoes again for a while.

On the meadow : jugglers, neurobats walking thin, eunambuli thick ropes; ("I know : in Byzantium they don't use any at all !"); thaumatopoioi ! Boxers with dreadfully inviting cauliflower noses and frayed ears. A neurospastic set his supplejacks twitching in the marionette theater. The balladeer had allegedly lost his entire fortune in a shipwreck, and was now touring the countryside with his painted tale of horror.

But she liked this one here : ‹a little› : the bumpkin farce of Dionysus. Clodonea and Mimallona, wrapped in fawn-skins, beating little hand drums, swinging the thyrsus. Now and then a lackey would join in, roaring like a bull. Girls dressed in crocus-hued gowns (representing the she-bears of Artemis, who towered in their midst, lanky and gaunt, definitely the tallest virago in Europe). Little boys, pine wreaths in their hair, romped; gesticulated wildly, and slammed lightning blows to their eyes with their fists. Then they asked for a donation. "Oh God, can he ever bellow ! – Ah well : Stentor was probably a Thracian too,"

she added in resignation).

The little town : (I had to go to the money-changer, who deducted a monstrous collybus today. She marveled at the coin struck in Bizye : Artemis, casting an arrow to the earth; in her left hand a long torch, before her, archaically frozen, her rigid stag – "Oh !"; I gave her one ‹as a souvenir of the days among the savages in Thrace›, and touched, she held onto me, memory, tightly). (Then slipped off up a blind alley for 10 seconds to the nearest urine amphora).

"C'mon : let's eat a sausage !" at first she played coy, then took a long time choosing between allas and physke; but finally there we stood laughing and biting around each other, left the slice of bread, right the blood pudding. ("Yes, they stink mightily of garlic, whether peasants or fishermen ! – *I* can't stand the smell either !"). – I lost three times at the dicing booth, canis damnosus as a matter of course; the fourth time Agraule resolutely intervened, thunk, dumped the beaker over : iactus veneris ! ! (That is, 3 sixes, and she critically selected one of the elaborate crinales made of cane. "But only married women are allowed to wear that kind of hairpin !" I admonished – she languidly waved this aside, and hid it in her purse).

Aha : many feet licking and smacking our way (centipeding) : the lecticarii (12 men in all in burnt red livery). Besides their big four-poster, they had brought another small, light-framed one for Agraule. Anatolius tapped me jovially on the shoulder (while Gabriel unctuously ogled a fat cloudess : vanities all round !) :

a bush opened at the top (back on the fairground) : at once its dancer slithered out of the green quaking mouth; another one fell down to her from the sky : they made rings of their arms and spun deliriously beneath them. / A somber fellow : became nothing but eyes and hands. Circumhaired spark eyes; pointed marble hand – : and for a long time his arrow quivered in the swinging squash over there : not all that bad ! / 2 fishermen, volunteers to the fore, lustily twined up the little silent man; guffawing, a third one examined him for hidden knives, lifted his tongue – opened the submissive fellow up at the rear : ? – (then they shoved him into the sack and rolled it off to the side). / A tall girl, thin as a thong, slid circling down a tree; she rolled herself into a laughing ball, so that her limbs lay completely ajumble : her head in the middle looked at us slyly (surrounded by fingers and feet that threw rhythmic kisses. – Anatolius waved her genially over to his litter, out of which she slipped merrily fifteen minutes later). / 2 female athletes wrestled themselves to a greasy giant ball; hooped with broad biceps. Legs levered between them, muscles bruised, breasts buckled, they wielded

each other like sacks. One slowly grew out of the mat, thick pieces of her bebulged opponent over her shoulder, in her arm, between her legs : ! : amid the thundering applause of the populace, their tights – finally – ripped – they let go, gasping, and bowed several times, elaborately confused and ever more prodigal. / : Across the way, the sack came alive : creased inward, lumped and crouched – – in a short time it fell apart, and the laughing fellow stepped out serenely : ? ? (He showed us later, for a sum, where he hid the knife : the little finger on his left hand only went to the first knuckle; the small razor-sharp knife had been strapped to the stump, an artificial finger jammed over it).

Even the municipal council appeared in its entirety toward evening; at once Anatolius had them led bowing and scraping before him, and began endless statistical conversations. (They all, including saint Gabriel, looked our way diverse times : well, if they raise our taxes next year, I'll know where it started !).

Immobile against reddish plumage, the moon hovered above the silent rows of bushes; the angels were lashing their silver and golden tops around the mountain.

Beside Agraule's litter (my hand on the edge : just as she had resolutely demanded. Behind us the last 2 torch-bearers : one a winestock coated with pitch; one of most expiatory hawthorn. – Her mouth winked my way : the flirty muzzlet prattled; now and then, at some particularly important point, her fingers gnawed mine).

Before us swayed the large lectica : whoa, things were getting lively there ! (They were debating inside, setting the curtains rocking, Gabriel's theological bass aquaking, and the more muted hiss of her father; we were left still further behind).

Astronomy exam : "The 7 threshing oxen," she said proudly, "and there's Orion !" More uncertain : "The Pleiades –"; I was gazed upon expectantly –

"Name the planets !" : 7 lean little fingers appreared most dubiously, disappearing one after the other : "Selene, Stilbon, Eosphorus. – : Helios ! – Pyroeis. : Phaeton Phainon !" and "Did y' see the big comet last year ? !" (Yes indeed; for 40 days; in Sagitarius).

Made of white cloudstones, a path was laid clear across the sky; we walked with tarnished faces and long fingers; our shadows took on a point ("Oh-my, here already ? ? : Ohmy !" and she patted me much in farewell).

Anatolius (Gabriel had already dashed inside in chubby-cheeked robes; have quarreled apparently !) : but even this one here seemed uneasy : "Ahyes : to be sure –" gave cautious patriarchal coughs, and scrubbed his nose : "Pfffyess – –"

Suddenly, however, his face brightened; he seemed to have decided something; nodded and pounded unrelentingly on my shoulder; likewise rubbed his all-business hand warm on my toga : "Well then, till tomorrow ! – And you are *definitely* coming Lycophron, right ? ! !". Sure, gladly (and he was pleased with me, unmistakably so : !).

In the county-fair sky : glowing and frozen stones flew slowly in confusion there, or for all I care, blocks of metal and splinters of ice. (Or, as that Christian back there would have it : pastel-colored balls, with which the angels played golf !). – –

Gray painted morning (with black abstract splotches) : the sluggish voices of the servants scolded dark and gray; steers grumbled; the cock neighed implacably.

Beneath a bare boulevard (or : sky fully devoured by black corridors. Above, parallel, the current of fog : a pale shallow within).

Well-now ? ! ! : Agraule trapped extra-stiffly in a kind of pew. Gabriel frost=soft, his hands in his sleeves : "Yesss ?" (proceed, for all I care !) :

Objections to Cosmas :

First : The sailors in the seas around the Prasum Promontorium (below 15 degrees latitude *south* !) unanimously report that they spotted a new ‹polar star› in the southern sky, around which that sphere there circles : which means a second center of rotation ! And Dioscorus was a reliable man ! – "Those reports are still really somewhat uncertain", he answered, unmoved : "it's not for nothing after all, that Cosmas carries the surname of ‹Indicopleustes› !". Fine; it remains to be explained then (just as do the reports that in the far north the sun never sets in summer, right ?).

(Agraule's face, snow-white, black and white, rent open once so quickly that I was about to stand up and go to her aid – but she nervously admonished me by shaking her eyes – silently formed one word : ? : ‹Shov-el –› : ? ? I briefly lifted my shoulders : Idonunerstan !).

Second : during lunar eclipses, Selene passes through the mountain's shadow, right ? Obviousment. Way at the bottom, the mountain is broader : they last longer. Up top shorter. If it just brushes the peak, the eclipse is a partial one. (He nodded, loftily irritated). "But : there are eclipses – observed hundreds of times – where the *upper* part of the moon's disk goes dark ! The lower part illumined by the sun ! . . . . . : ?"

He (clearly to win time !) said with hasty frown : "I did not understand – – ?" (Alright, the pretty game one more time !).

He was done for ! (and I knew who was right, Cosmas or Eutocius !). He swallowed. Choked : "– there's – uh – : a cave in the mountain ! Through which sunlight can fall. –" (saved ! Except : a cave like that would have to be a long tube in the stone, and at the slightest shift of the bodies involved, no sunlight could ever reach the moon at all ! : "besides which, it's not even in the sketch !" I concluded in triumph).

When he saw what I saw : namely, that he was making a note of it, he growled something about ‹have to ask Cosmas directly sometime›. (Who would then work in his new ingenious correction ‹with God's help› !).

(She wasn't laughing ! Neither as a partisan nor otherwise. Nor did she bat her eyes in agreement !).

Third : at half-moon, earth-sun-moon build a right triangle (with the right angle at the moon; he conceded it) : if you then measure, from our standpoint, the angle of the moon with the sun, – given your presumption of approximately equal orbital diameters – it would always have to be just slightly less than 45 degrees. It is, however, (measured thousands of times since Aristotle's day) so small, that it's practically beyond our current ability to measure precisely : and as a result, the radii of the orbits of sun and moon must stand in a ratio of *at least* 60 to 1 ! (Right, jot it down, sweetheart ! Though with contemptuously pursed discountenance !).

(With broadest mouth : she formed in dismay ‹Cha› : ‹Pel› ! ! ! I didn't understand at first; in order to be quite sure, I meditated, as if in viscous thought : ". . . . . yes, and then there's this tabernacle *or chapel* . . . . ." – a broad transcendent glance at the wall between us two – : ? : she let her head drop in affirmation).

Fourth : (just some details : for whomever 1 to 3 isn't sufficient ! –) :

a) The ‹purity› of the uranian bodies : the splotchy moon ! (why even Plutarch concluded they were mountain ranges, given the irregular line of shadows !).

b) Likewise of ‹purest fire› ? : it's got a pretty syphilitic face, the sun does ! : When rising in a thin cloud-cover (or using glasses to darken it) you can recognize the varying spots with the naked eye ! One group appeared day after day for 18 months : and wandered around the ball of flame ! First on the sun's western edge, then on the eastern : *imperfection of the heavenly bodies ! !*

c) What gets illumined first : the base or the peak of a mountain ? ! / Or : what part of the ship does one see first at sea : the tip of the mast, right ? ! / Why is Phosphorus occasionally three times brighter than usual ? (Oh dear : that had never been a problem for him !). /

"How does Cosmas explain the planets' occasional retrograde movement ? : just some whim of the seraph in charge perhaps, giving some back= spin ? !" (he slew me several times over with baneful orthodox glances).

"*Could one* – as a compromise – not regard this whole ‹inner earth› along with its ‹Mountain of the North› as Ptolemy's northern hemisphere, very badly sketched and lopped off at the top ?" – He winced; he furiously went to work restraining himself (Why didn't he spit right in my blasphemer's face ? : wasn't it you fellows' easiest and most popular method of refutation ? ! If you can't think of another counterargument, there's always the stake !). "Yes, that's what those exothen maintain" he said, having cooled down again. (Judging by that, must be clever people, these ‹Unchristians›.) "So you believe the bible more than your own eyes ?" : "I am calling a halt to this conversation !" (viciously pious).

But then he really could not help himself : Concerning the outer earth : "Toward the end of his 7th book, even your Ptolemy has to admit that land extends further to the south from Cattigara, and then turns straight west, so that it forms a whole with the continent of Africa; making the ocean lying in between a very large enclosed sea. And further : that land extends toward the west from the southern point of Africa ! Now simply separate Africa off – according to Herodotus it's been circumnavigated ! – and you have the southern part of the external earth !" (And victoriously ‹proved› to me further, from ‹my own authorities› : "At the time that Quintus Metellus Celer was proconsul in Gaul, the corpses of red-skinned demons were washed ashore several times onto the coast of Armorica : with beaks for noses and eagle feathers instead of hair !" – I knew the passage in Pomponius Mela well enough : but what an imagination these people have ! !). / Also : "Did not Eratosthenes confirm that the Mare Caspium is a bay of the Northern Ocean ?" / Then the old jokes directed at the Antipodes. – (Instead of realizing that the material world allows for various naive explanations to begin with; but gradually, the greater the space investigated grows, certain phenomena appear which no longer permit such dreams !).

"*You concocted all these* objections – some of them not all that crude – *yourself* ? ?" : "No. With my father" : "I see : *with your father ! !*" he repeated with distorted face (while also biting back his lower lip, which was just about to blab).

And the blows fell, setting our tongues rattling : the heathens have an irreverent opinion of the gods ? : go concern yourselves with the eroticism of the Song of Songs, and the old testament whores. / The contradictions

of ancient mythologies ? : First get your gospels straightened out ! / The gods a conceited lot ? : But when uneducated carpenter's boys get their hair and beards anointed and curled, it's okay ? / After all : "Isn't Cosmas actually a Nestorian ? !" (presumably harmless; but *that* knife stuck, the way the pious old hermaphrodite reared up : "Scientifically, that has nothing to do with the matter ! – There are indeed a great many worse heretics ! !" and stammering with anger pointed in my general direction : ! – Had *his* blasphemies of eternal Olympus been the least bit objective ? : "Well just so his picture isn't tossed in the copron someday by Justinian : it happens very fast among you folks !").

"I regret, moreover, that I must call a halt to these lectures for good and all ! Some most important tasks in the service of our Mother Church – –" (and gloating, rolled his big mouth : for my part, gladly ! I've known enough about your culture for a long time now : for whomever *this* sample wasn't sufficient ! – Formal bow to Agraule : who hastily dipped her head : ‹Cha-pel› !). –

Blunt Mongol faces – the sun forming them from the fog; watery light pooled about; across the way dustings from the thrashing floor in rhythmical thumps (I'm quite curious about what's up !).

In front of the chapel : standing in the shallow puddle, as if in molten time; from the rim of her hat one milky drop hung silently (doubtfully I grabbed at the spongy air, and then looked about indecisively : there'll be more fog yet !) :

: she threw herself at me, wheezing, buckled with the strain, glances sliding off all objects : "Ahhhh ! ! !"

The icy gust wanted to scalp us both. It grabbed Agraule by the hair, making her clench the skin of her brow together and cower against me; guillotined from the rear – and she fled before us in terror, heavy black flames around her whole face : "Come inside with me ! : 't's safer !"

"Where did you come from exactly ? !" : the ‹Good Shepherd› was suddenly standing sideways in the room ! And behind it a dark chasm, into which I was hustled without further ado : "– Close it behind you !" –

With the flats of her hands she had fallen against the wall : in the broad leathery band at her brow gleamed a small clay lamp; her tongue beat about blindly, her words bounced off me :

"This passage ?" (came the breathing whistle) : "goes all the way to the villa : listen, the column is *hollow*, y'see. With a spiral staircase inside. – – Nah : family secret; Gabriel hasn't the vaguest !". The one-eyed girl's whole body was gasping :

"Gabriel : somehow found out yesterday from the town council in Salmydessus : that an infamous super-heretic they've long been

looking for is living with you. Against whom there's an old sentence that's still to be carried out ! : And you lied to him too ! He dispatched an express courier to Byzantium last night : the police 'll be here by this evening !"

"It's all over for your father too : for knowingly harboring a criminal. He's also proposing ‹confiscation of all property for alleged polytheism› –" the small chest gasped more slowly :

"No ! : they both have to flee at once ! – Wait : Lyco ! !" :

"Papa wants me to tell you : you have to stay here ! But your father should sign this at once –" and while she spoke, pushed open the stone, and shoved the little ivory cylinder into my hand like a relay baton. In fleeting haste flung, reparations, a dozen caressing fingers in my face. Then admonishing=loyal hisses : "Will y' get a move on, nihilist ! !"

Cloud grotesques galloped roundabout : gnawed away by the wind, gray swill slavered : go roundabout to hell, ye gods and heav'nly apparitions ! (But the ragtag pack stayed and went on drooling).

Full of brown glistening slime : the road flew before me, and I drummed upon it, racing along (even if my calves burst; above pale damp, the dangling snail belly pulled its slimy trail further along, amoebaed and shambled : 25 stadia in 15 minutes !) :

"Where's Eutocius ! !" ("Yes, or my father, I don't care !")

They were still listening : – their arms rose up above the tabletop – then he turned away sharply – "Where to ? : master ! !" – the aged émigrée was no longer looking my way : "Let's pack !" (pitiless).

"In the rowboat ? Now, in October ? !" – Or through the ravines of the Haemus ? : "Their dogs would find us there right off !" –

Wait ! : That's it ! ! : Bowled me over ! ! ! : The smuggler's boat ! This evening ! ! – – And soon my father was nodding : good, to his former son-in-law in Cherson. To start with. (Some underwear and a box of books. "Get going now, Lyco, and arrange it ! – In case it's no go !").

The sun made slimy pools for itself; tatter fish scurried; squishsquish : everything on the move up there. (And me below; the rain washed and black and green and fences and scraggles).

In the shadow of barrels hurrying past : one could, Diogenes, reside; lying snoring; lurking christian; move your bowels; (for that matter, forge dithyrambs too or do ‹knees-abend›; behind barrels. The kitchen rivulet wailed softly out of the wall).

"Gee – lonn ! ! –" : he listened with mistrust and at first wavered for quite a while : this was riskier than a bit of smuggling ! (And I did not conceal any of the dangers !).

"So then, at the north channel, the third entrance on the right ?" (Third counting from the sea !) "We'll pick you folks up with the longboat : but *very* little baggage, y' hear ! And blackened faces, 'f y' please ! – Yes, if y' like, hoods with eye-slits too : and be on time ! We'll sail back and forth only twice !"

"One more thing, Gelon ! : There's a custom's man in his retinue, his most vicious bloodhound : disguised as a priest ! With the special assignment of checking up on *you people here* ! If you see him slinking around in the area, you'll know what's what : pass it on !" he had already balled up his fists, the size of a baby's head.

A fence in the fog ? : Skias onar anthropos; umbrae somnium homo : a border. So I vaulted recklessly over the foggy law.

I rowed the boat, endlessly through ditches growing ever narrower, a good thing I knew each bend, as close as possible to the house : still leaves a good 1000 paces (if not more; and the fog was getting thicker !).

Pegs and lines ! : I drove them in a bit, and stretched them – the night was wet enough – quite loosely. Bushes had huddled together in the murk about me : now where was the exit ? (As a contingency, fix some angle or other ? –).

Last conversations (among cupboards flung wide and paltry little sacks. My father gloomy and bent ! Eutocius cold and erect; almost the joy of someone moving ? ?) :

"Signing this, is there any point in it ?" – inside the richly carved cylinder, the calligraphic page : ostensibly my father had already transferred the estate to me 3 years before ! With notary seal and 2 signatures of witnesses (sure, all done by Anatolius's personnel). / "It's really meaningless !" (Eutocius) : "he's out to *get rich* off of us : what a wonderful consolidation he's getting !" / Me (a remark of Agraule's struck me) : "No ! : his greatest concern – for the moment at least – is to appear to have no property at all : that way he can refute all his accusers !"

And how carefully everything was tied up : "– this is no notion out of the blue : it had to take him hours to prepare this – : once more, Lycophron : *what* did the girl say, exactly ? ! –" / "Yes : why did they have us warned *at all* ? ! !"

"Hmm – then there's probably just *one* possibility ! : – –" fell silent, his face went bitter; he threw me one fleeting glance; calculated anew : – – and laughed aloud, short and barking : "Pfff : it's clear ! damn ! ! ! – Leave us for a moment, Lyco –". –

: "Apparently you are supposed to marry Agraule –" (Eutocius, all business; he was already thrusting a demurring hand forward : IknowIknow) : "You have to sacrifice yourself ! : that's the only way

our financial basis, the estate – *apparently, I don't know quite how* – can be kept intact !" / "By her own avowal, she was given the mission by her father of warning you – that is, us –" (and the resulting corollaries; he searched me with ponderous eyes, sharp, more ironic, grew quieter; sad; nodded (already packing again). / "Oh go on ! : he gets a straightforward innocent lad for a son-in-law such as he'll never find again in all Byzantium : he knows those characters in ‹his own circles› only too well !"

"Gabriel of Thisoa ? : If I hated him, then maybe he could love me as per regulation – but the way *he* hates *me* – that goes beyond even a Christian's powers !" / "And don't forget the lunar eclipse on the seventeenth/ eighteenth of the eleventh !"

"Us ? ? : We'll go via the Caspian Sea to Persia !" (From Tanais a long system of sea and river lanes, 3500 stadia, leads through reed-laden swamps, bifurcations and moor meadows on into the Mare Hyrcanium : half the trade with India regularly uses this northern waterway ! Seleucus himself made the journey with a camara fleet. – Even the great Oxanius Lacus, still further to the east, is bound up with it, so that the Jaxartes is often called the "Eastern Tanais" : in his day, Alexander once sent ambassadors *by water* from Bactria to the Black Sea just for fun : they left in the fall, and were back again in winter; as proof they brought with them merchants from Kerch).

And from there ? : "Well, first to the island of Talca, near the south coast." (Fire worshipers : on a promontory there, is a little temple, and on its altar, emerging from a large pipe, is a perpetual blue flame that doesn't hurt your hand. With a high singing tone. (Just like in the massif the other night; but it was silver !)). / "Then on to the University of Madain via Zadracarta; I have acquaintances enough there among the faculty : from the old days !". (Fire worshipers ? Purest service ? : "Yes; at night the flame bursts up out of the dome of the building : looks fantastic ! – On the other hand, they also perform ritual baths with cow urine, and engage in piracy with a passion – as I'm always telling you : we simply cannot imagine what it looks like inside pious heads : somehow there's a barrier there, leaves you shrugging –") / "Oh, we'll need to make haste ! : November to April everything is frozen over up there !" (and packing, packing, packing; meanwhile I pried open the bricked-over wall safe for money).

"At least try to hold onto the estate for now ! : If worse should come to worse, you must follow us someway. We'll leave our address with – no : don't make a note of it ! Nothing in writing ! – with ‹Ssalal-ad-Din; rector of Madain›. And for any moneys you may send our way, sure."

6 o'clock in the evening : We left the mangled rooms (in light gray coats : dark branchings painted with pitch, for camouflage).

For the last time through the courtyard gate : my father ! He had to stop at the doorposts for a moment to get hold of himself again, and twisted his mouth and spat the snot of tears (while Eutocius thought up curses) – – : "Don't I hear – –" : the clattering of horses ? ? –

The fog : was cruel and crept. Rolled and surged and crept. Across the sand – "Wait a sec !" / Graywhitegray fumbled slowly. A tin disk, water gall, sloshed ups downs. Skull-likeness gouged : cursed ? : barking ? ? ! ! (Freeze or be struck dead) –

But it was Parpax, old fellow ! : with hasty fingers I plucked at the ham and hushed his softly drumming mouth, ‹yes, gooood boy : suresuuure› – he nodded, made a couple of friendly gestures and paled away again – – "No, pull out the pegs ! !" (And Eutocius : "Goood, Lyco ! !" – when *he* says so, then I *am* good !).

Mix of three elements : in the thick evening morass. A tree groped creakily toward us, we stumbled ourselves into the branches, water ran from us – beat us back trembling : damn, pull y'self together !

"No : on the slant ! – The sack of provisions has to go port !" (lean into it, chest forward, the black fluttering beast of night hovered above us; at one point we had heard a hey=voice).

An entrance on the left : wind pressed across my face with cold soft hands; second left (and now there must be one off to the right : ? – – : good !); let's hope they have black sails on the boat; the third left : and follow through with the oar ! – –

"Damn : mooove it !" : Gelon hissed in a steam whistle, in the bow of the twenty-oared longboat. ("Bull : the sacks first of course !").

Eutocius said : "Once again those eternally past curing have won. Who can't conceive that the 100,000 years of metaphysics are over, and those of physics have begun : We, Lycophron, know where we belong !" – He swung his bony hand up, with dignity, a space curve – and I whipped my head around : there we stood : menhirs in christian night ! – (Wind shoved between at once; our boats puled; stupidity of noises; a curse slit open my mouth : bring forth paradise : but without me ! ! (May the Christian priests go through the same thing someday ! Confident of the future, our avengers are drinking their koumiss in Imaus !) – – –

In the dream swamp, fog newted about (I'd only interrupt the house search at home : so on to the hut. – Or wait a little longer – –)

Wait : the fog grew thindense, thindense. – – Waiting – –

There ! ! : a star described a parabola in the sky : red, the sign that they

were secure on board ! – (and I flowed slowly, right=left, through the slough) –

I crawled inaudibly up onto the sandbank : – – : "Agraule !" (and my hand before her mouth ! Wind was knocking around too, so that the tatters of air smacked about our ears : "Lyco ! !")

(*"Hush, dammit :* the litter guys're just 20 paces off ! –")

"Over on the corner 2 fishermen were still there just now" (standing lookout !) : "when they saw us, they asked Gabriel, as a holy man, to come along with them : said that someone lay dying in a shed, 5 minutes inland. – ? : Yes, he went right off with them !" (and she took fright at my hysterical guttural).

"Oh, what an adversary you are !" : she said feebly – and came along; bravely crammed her little fist into my hand, and clambered around behind timidly – until she finally slid full up against me, and held tight, content.

Wind rattle in the rushes; a ‹where are we really› (at the hunting cottage of course ! She groped her way in, on the railing of my arms. "But no lights : the fog is lifting now in any case !").

On blankets : she took my left arm and wrapped herself up in it :

"Tomorrow morning we're getting married : you come to our place at 11. – Nah, some strange chaplain !" / "Right after the wedding you'll have our estate handed over to you : we'll be living here ! Papa thinks too that court life wouldn't be for you, lickspittling and nepotism, those have to be learned : you'll gradually be put in charge of all the surveying in the province !"

Her hand melted once across my face; her voice grinned : "Hey, what a riot yesterday ! : Papa gave Gabriel the lamest horse and the dumbest messenger – 'nd then sent his best man chasing after them 1 hour later : he also had the Patriarch transfer Gabriel to some filthy part of the world or other : you'll never have to see him again ! – Sure ! : if he (Gabriel) shows up here again, give him a good one in the kisser : one for me too ! : Papa's officially been named a minister, he can't do anything more now – otherwise he'll have him declared a heretic, and sent to the Thebian deserts." (When she yawned, she put *my* hand to her mouth ! !).

Couldn't they have simply confiscated my estate ? : she just snorted indulgently : "Then it would've gone to the state ! : This way you keep it, and mine gets added to it – – that's how Papa has always ‹sacrificed his fortune in service›; and can, if he likes, live with ‹his children›." –

Pause. Our breathings swayed.

"Is it really so awful, having to touch me ? ? ! !" she shouted bitterly – "That'll sure make everything just peachy ! !" and gave one brief sob.

Alright : clutchings : we entangled ourselves somberly, we were beginners, with faces; wind meddled; fingers throttled and bored, my hand knew more than I – until she gave a grackle and pleaded ingenuously : "I don't know how yet either. : But tomorrow evening we'll do it right : with light ! Ah !" / "We'll do assembly-line abortions, y' hear" she vowed with determination "even if I have to chew whole juniper *forests* !". / "You can teach me to be a surveyoress – I'm gonna do *everything* with you !" and her large mouth began to surge happily – so I politely took hold of her again, lock, stock and barrel; me, invaded by yellow finger snakes.

"So now I'll be a country lady – – " I heard her murmur wistfully. Sighing cozily. – –

Her body slowly rolled up around me; hands lay white planks; her face fell asleep on me, flat, with eyes glued tight, black tufted triangles sawed her low brow.

The oil-drop of the moon freed itself gingerly from its cloud hose, elongated itself, plop, and floated downwards. (Agraule in her sleep : driveled in a high, impotent voice and laughed, snatching and reluctant. Her hands moled down deeper around me and took me away; I shoved her back into the blanket etui, but, tough proprietess, she held tight).

Ruthlessly : I'll make money off this new double estate ! And send three-quarters of it to them : she had green shoes enough ! (In her sleepy-face, left-side, whimperings began : from her mouth groove crept a whisper filature; then the gray linen surface pressed itself smooth again).

‹*In 10 years* grass will've grown over it all› she had declared : ‹and then I could bring them back, *if I really* wanted to› ! ! : Oh Captain, my Captain ! ! ! –

Her nose decided to snivel delicately; first sweet and monotone; there coarser – : and all at once started bagpiping lustily : so that's what I'll be hearing now for many a night ! – –

TINA

or

Concerning Immortality

Night. Stony bank of the sidewalk. Among boulders of artificial light (one had fallen on my shoe, and I decided to pull it out from under).

Then schoolgirls gushed by : black tight slacks; pointed breasts full of unweal. / Eddied voices : she held out to her a wicked number of debating fingers. / My arm met an armette : in the lower third of all faces a foxy red smiling slot.

Here they were on the way back from second-shift instruction (what a term ! : Rainer M. Gerhardt pray for us !) : the shiny paired worms of all their lips kept ends tucked tight; P'fesser Eschborn said so too ! (2 high school juniors cunningly declaimed Chamisso : "Ah, now that I have seen HIM, / blind I faith must be." : "Where'er my glance doth wander / HIM alone I see !"; sidesplit giggling). / (Right behind, a spurned punk teased desire : "Get lost; I'm having my period !". And then smashed a half-eaten chocolate kiss against the display cases of the local paper : !).

A fount of sparks appeared in the vacant new building. Beside it, a belated hammer, humbly bowing, drove stars (new shape for nails; have the ironmonger show you some). A great while ago the world began / with hey ho the wind and the rain.

At the pharmacy : beside me the familiar man in his green loden coat; he too asked for Cyclopal and gave me a sharp once-over. Once again, the dispenser fought long and hard with himself before handing over something on the basis of the old prescription; "There's barbiturates in it, y' know !"; all in a pique; above him the question mark, ‹Cough Drops›, gave a nonchalant snap of its tail; but then finally added a new tugra beside the old stamp-mark. (He knows I'm a bachelor : shall I give him an added shock today by demanding a box of Kotex ? As a writer, you're already a permanent suspect for the middle-class with its bordello fantasies. – Ah, forget it; not worth it).

"Writer ?" : the fellow in loden green had obligingly held the door open for me. I didn't reply; just gave him a mistrustful glance; either a windbag or a colleague, six of the Devil, half-dozen of Satan. Accordingly, I muttered a curt snub. But he stuck valiantly to my side.

"Right : I know the name. – Ah, happy is all that bears no name." He

observed gloomily (but a decided trace too supercilious; apparently he too considered himself a great man).

Drivelingdriveling : publish books with no title pages, would be ‹progress›; the author of the Nibelungenlied had been ‹a sly dog›; and so he went on lulling impotently at my side, block after block.

"Some advice : write less; or, better yet, don't write at all ! Then you shall live unmolested on earth, nor need to drudge further after death." (A Christian, then : spared nothing ! – To get rid of him, I told him about his Catholics : every November 27th they venerate Buddha Gautama as a saint of the Church; because the tale of Barlaam is nothing more than a translation of the Lalitavistara. But he merely bleated excitedly : noo, now that he hadn't known . . . . "Ah yes, the saints have it rough too !" The fellow was totally Erewhonic).

"Greatest joy earth's child can know ?" he asked hatefully : "Name me *one* respectable writer who would have wanted to write : better to shovel shit all your life ! – : Haven't you ever grown tired of your individuality ?" I lowered my head; I nodded; it was none of his business, but : yes. About twice a day. "So you see," he said, placated.

(The autobeasts : they slipped round each other, with piercing glances; with impatient voices. Once the front-runner had outfoxed another, he cast an extra yellow-red blink behind him. The deep stroke of the steeple clock stuck out its oxen tongue, twice : I had just eaten lentils for the third day in a row; giant potful, cooked 'em myself : dreadful consequences !).

"You don't believe in a continuation of life after death ? You're an atheist ? : So am I," he calmly declared : "But you will have to grant me that at the least : *Everyone* lives on for a little while at first ! Deceased parents and grandparents in the memory of their children, spouses, grandchildren, acquaintances – defining ‹life› rather broadly here. The matter gets considerably more eerie however with, say, poets : they have deposited such large portions of their personalities in their books, that for as long as they are read, people . . . . . : Right ?" Me, with a shrug : "Yes, if you put it *that* way – –." (But otherwise : The dead they cannot rise, / and you'd better dry your eyes, / and you'd best go look for a new love !).

"M=mmyes" he said cautiously. Brief silence. The diaphragm of the moon, lo the flat pig-bladder beside the Wedding Tower. / Down the hill : a wagon shoved its old woman before it. / The green man sidestepped an Isetta; and I was attempting to escape across the street, when he caught up with me again.

"I could show it to you sometime – ?" (offhandedly; then muttering=

thoughtfully) : "I've got an extra entrance pass. –" (Affable=loud) : "We do that sometimes : wouldn't it interest you to have a look at the ‹continuation of life after death›, in natura ?"

"I think that's enough for now !" I snarled angrily at him. ("Your skepticism does you honor" he interposed mechanically). I wanted to punch him one; but I'm 6 feet tall and unintentional bodily injury may ensue all too easily. So I simply observed : "You've escaped from a madhouse," and looked around for the police.

"Nah, from Elysium," he said gloomily; "and didn't escape either, but just on a perfectly official shopping tour. – Wouldn't you be at all interested in learning some details about Jansen ? Or Wildenhayn : after all you once wrote a biography of Fouqué . . . . ."

I spun around : Wildenhayn ? ? : No one knew about that but me ! ! Was some bastard trying to cheat me out of my priority again ? ! But he was already raising mollifying hand and brows : take it easy : "It'd be a lesson for you; and it can only be useful for us," he said : "Once every 10 years, we're allowed to bring someone down with us : haven't you ever noticed how sundry poets fall so strangely ‹silent› in their later years ? : they have, in fact, seen the misery with their own eyes !" he concluded more grimly.

"What misery ?" I asked uncomprehendingly : "your ‹immortality› stuff ?". I shook my head : me go along ? (Was the fellow trying to rob me maybe ? After all, I did have – a rare occasion for a writer ! – 60 marks cash in my pocket : recently an American soldier had stabbed to death a taxi driver for 16. Sure, damn : he'd got a look at my wallet at the pharmacy ! !).

(Or a fehme sentence ? ! : I was not a welcome author – ‹not totally unimportant› an imp of vanity flattered up at once – and given current trends . . . . .).

Beneath the streetlamps, on Beck Strasse : by the cone of chlorine gaslight he gave me a brief glimpse into his wallet : did *this* guy ever have the simoleons ! One thousand; two thousand, my god; and in a separate pocket the blue-and-white tens ! – – : "And you're trusting *me,* a total stranger ?". He gave a fleeting grin off to his right : "By chance I happen to know several of your books : Castum esse decet pium poetam / ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est." "Que las costumbres de un autor sean puras y castas" I muttered, caught red-handed; and he added an expert's nod : "I was in fact a similar sort . . . ."

"Why of course not ! : You can leave whenever you like; name your hour. Has a time limit in any case." (My stay. Consider it briefly : would anything spoil up in my place ? : Blue Bonnet keeps; Cream o' Wheat

too; at most the milk – : "Can I go upstairs for 1 minute ?" (If only for those diabolical lentils !). "But don't bring any writing materials along; that's strictly forbidden," he called vigorously after me.)

"And here you have the memento ever before your eyes," he noted as I emerged from my front door and walked back to him. How's that ? : he pointed with his chin at the kiosk column on the corner, where a woman ran a newsstand. (We had flashed facial disks at each other often enough; me from my window upstairs, she from over her counter : short, long : short; long : long ! She was still open).

He bent down and said a few words (no ‹alien tongue›; plain German); yet it appeared to be an exchange in some prearranged code, for she shoved her little window up, took a searching look : ?, and then seemed to recognize my guide. At any rate, it started right up with ‹'vning, Jan› : ‹Howar'ya, Tina› (a pretty name to be sure; but she's on a first-name basis with this old fop ? !).

Even has a present, does he ? (And *how* she beamed !). "Three copies" he said laconically. She made a lightning grab for the package, unwrapped the books in old-fashioned boards : !; sighed happily; and looked regretfully at her cold and tiny iron stove : "Well, I'll get a roarin' fire going come day after tomorrow" she declared (Mainz dialect; unmistakable) : "And in they go right off. And once again, my deepest thanks !" Irksome man-of-the-world, he waved this off, bent down to her again, and they carried on quite a whispered exchange, disgusting. (About me ? – ? – No; couldn't understand).

"Ohsure : by sight that is, we know each other !" She laughed, and gave me her large, cunningly slender hand (and let it rest in mine for as long as I liked : !). "Yes, come on in. – : Just a moment, I'll pull the shades !" She lowered the window. Hooked it shut. Pulled a cylindrical iron screen across (more than excessive, given the few magazines and packs of Chesterfields !). Hearing several locks sliding on the far side of the hollow column, we walked around, and my companion (no; vice versa : I'm his I suppose !) first peered cautiously in all directions before conducting me through the narrow cement crack. (One last time-check by light of the streetlamp : it was 6:40 P.M., Central European Time). –

Groping far ahead into the dark : –, –, – : Ah, lovely ! (and she purred in amusement for a good long while, before she coyly said : "Ohdotakecare – a little"). Was a lot bigger than I'd guessed, and our faces must have been very close together. "I'll flip on the light" – my unnamed chum, giving us time to prepare, and went on looking for

the switch with sly magnanimity : "Now where is it ? – – " :

Click ! : lovely, very dark red light. We were standing in the narrow space, breast to breast; when she lifted her eyes, they made a very gentle noise (or was that an illusion ?). Her long black mouth swam immobile before me.

"Move back from the walls –" (his voice) : he must have pushed another button or something, because we descended a few feet, as if in an elevator; stopped again. "First roll the ceiling shut up there –" he muttered, describing his next move; and I watched a massive steel plate slowly edge over us. (What a dandy trap ! – She may have noticed how anxious I was getting; for she batted her eyes a few times, smacking encouragement; then lifted herself up on her tiptoes as well; "Going down" came the expressionless=discreet announcement behind us : the swift jerk automatically caused my face to press against hers, and she ingeniously held hers there).

Very slow at one point ("Difficult spot" he growled from behind) : above the soft hum of the elevator you could hear a distant roar, like cascading water. She slowly pulled her mouth away from mine; extracted a notepad from the soft leather bag at her hip, and scribbled. (Also slipped the scrap of paper between my fingers : ! – ‹You can spend the night at my place› I deciphered my palm; turn over ? : ah, the address : ‹Tina Halein / Island Street 42›. To seal it, at once a new, even longer, even blacker kiss. While we fell again more rapidly; s equals one-half g times t squared).

Stop. Door open. And out : a kind of police station. (Didn't that one fellow, the tall one, look strikingly like Eggleston ? And all of the other officers, too, seemed to be wearing character masks, nothin' but Sherman and Grant. – "‹Masks› is good" my guide remarked).

"Can't I learn your name ? – It's so inconvenient always to have to say ‹Herr›, and then stop short helplessly – –". "Well yes –" he conceded, rattled : "It's=uh : Althing." "Althing" I repeated obediently. (Then, however, it struck me : "Althing ? !" suspicious; but quickly recovered myself. Althing then, fine. He countered with pained gestures; had to sign several forms at the same time, mostly about me I suppose. I likewise signed off in a book, and received the apparently ubiquitous and indispensable stamped card. Tina was already waiting, impatiently dangling her leather bag in both hands, below her belly).

A vespertine street, teeming with people. (But apparently covered by vaults; at least the hue of night hung dully above the housetops. At the corner, Tina said good-bye, using the fashionable ‹Ciao›. I received

a meaningful squeeze of the hand : maid-in-waiting !). –

The monument : a man, draped in the customary timeless bedsheets, pointed imperiously before his feet : a cowering slave, armed with a match, took up his position before a pile of marble books. No inscription. : ?. : "A man who'll never be honored enough, Omar, who long ago put the torch to the library of Alexandria." "Aha" I said uncomprehendingly. (On the right, the large display windows ‹Furniture / E. A. Poe›. Next to that ‹Hardware / Bell, Macfarquhar and Smellie›. For a while we exchanged silent, and strange, glances).

A gigantic building : the ‹Commission House› : "You'll excuse me for a moment, won't you ?" he asked, and ran over to the large illuminated display cases (with me close behind of course); and we jointly studied the endless lists, typed up in a tiny typewriter face (would I *ever* love to have a ‹Lilliput=Face› like that ! But I suppose I'll never get that far ahead.). He looked under ‹A›. But then, strangely enough, under ‹F› as well. My eyes were caught by the name ‹Goethe›, and I read :

24 Nov. 1955 :
141 citations in newspapers
46 citations in books
81 citations in radio broadcasts
93 citations on bulletin boards
(extension-course lectures)
1411 occurrences in school essays
804 occurrences in private letters
529 mentions in conversations
460 quotations of lines of poetry without attribution
(458 of them incorrect).

"Right, he doesn't stand a chance !" my companion remarked disparagingly when he noticed to which column I had directed my gaze : "But wouldn't you know, they've nabbed me again too : some old geezer in Hamburg has bought a first edition of the ‹Bell› from 1800 ! – Well, the title page is said to be damaged; that's *some* comfort." Hateful; breathing heavily, and had made 2 fists. (It's all too lofty for me. – But I'd join him in a cup of coffee; gladly).

"2 espressos, please – yes; large. – 6 promesses ? : Here you are !" he snapped his fingers as he said it, and she snapped the message along to the cashier with a large ledger, who hastily entered it. (And add the milk – as a precautionary measure, the bastards always bored just 1 hole in the can, so you couldn't get anything out of it ! To get even,

a pile of sugar; Althing marked a number 6 on a yellow-checkered card).

"You don't use money ? ! – I'll grant you; our bills are just symbols of money too; but you – –". Here they simply had ‹promesses›; and he explained to me this latest bit of progress in matters of currency :

Everyone receives an announcement on the first of the month that he is entitled to a salary of a given number of units – and he simply has to make do with it ! : "Assuming a nation has abandoned the gold standard in the first place and has worked its citizenry over for as long as necessary to make them seriously believe the government can turn any piece of paper into a veritable thousand-mark bill – why not then, as with us, perfect such a system with a coup de main : allow oral promises, that is ‹promesses› to take the place of money. I need no wallet and yet I can have 1 million in cash on me. The money can't be counterfeited, nor stolen, nor burned, nor devalued – at least not any more easily than it is up top with you !"

"All purely oral ?" I asked dazed : "Yes, but – doesn't anyone cheat ?" He just gave an ironic and melancholy smile : "No; no one cheats. In the end, you can't do more than eat your fill and sleep in *one* bed. The production of goods is absolutely guaranteed, since existence without something to do would be simply intolerable. Besides, keeping accounts is added fun and helps pass the time. – You received a card as well." Right ! I pulled my burgundy-checkered card out : 1,000 – in words one thousand – promesses were mine (and the corners of his mouth bent down in approbation : quite handsome ! – Quick computation : that came to 3 promesses per cup; so that one was worth – roughly – : 20 of our pfennigs. And the coffee was good besides ! – 7:30 P.M.).

Back out on the street. Suddenly his head tucked low : he grabbed spasmodically for my hand; he jerked us down behind the massive arms of a semicircular stone bench : "Ssshhh !" – (Peeking cautiously around the corner : 2 men passed by, tall and with unconcernedly loud voices; the first, the sturdier, his jacket buttoned high, a full, bold head of hair, his diphthongs broadly American – : ? – : ! : I wanted to get up; I tugged at his hands till they stretched far out from his cuffs – –) :

"Be careful, damn it !" he gasped : "that's an irascible man ! – You in particular are the last person who – –"; we kept struggling circumspectly for a bit, till I gave in.

"Why of course, Cooper, who else ? ! – – Sure, sure : William Branford Shubrick in person and your James Fenimore Cooper : just be glad he's gone !" Stammering; answering; stammering; answering : he bent

forward, he clapped me on the shoulder : "But, my good man, haven't you realized yet that you're in Elysium ? !"

Sank back onto the aforementioned stone bench; he explained it all, several times over, indulgently (and was allegedly *the* Christian August Fischer, who had edited the first large-scale edition of Cooper for Sauerländer in Frankfurt – the same one that Stifter plagiarized for his ‹Mountain Forest›; I owned a couple of the enchanting=inadequate little volumes myself. And now it struck me : Of course ! : Althing ? : that had been the pseudonym under which he had published his ‹Erotic Novellas›, the ‹Tale of the 7 Sacks› or ‹The Man Loved by 11,000 Maids› ? He gave a peevish nod. Then, savage : "Jean Paul did me the most harm, by quoting me in his ‹Primer› ! If it weren't for *that* passage – : I'd be able to turn in my chips 500 years earlier !" He balled his fists together again, gnashed a few, and cursed). / ("Yesyes of course : and Grabbe; and the ‹Isis›; and Zach's ‹Monthly Correspondence›; and Johannes v. Müller, 23, 107; and A. G. Eberhard 18, 3ff. : the scoundrels !").

"But in 1829 you . . . ? : "Certainly," he confirmed bitterly, "my clinical death occurred in Mainz on April 14th of that year – but what good does that do me ? You can see for yourself – !" and with a loden-green gesture cast an arc of several sectors before him :

"Everyone is damned to life here below for as long as his name still appears, acoustically or optically, on the earth above. Or, to put it more plainly : until he is neither mentioned, nor exists anywhere in print or writing – at which point every possibility for a reconstruction vanishes." (Sit there dazed and ponder).

Writers ? : "As long as even 1 copy of one of their books exists, they haven't any chance whatever : and when someone gets the official news from the Commission that none of his writings still exist – can you imagine the rounds of drinks he treats ? !" (And is allowed to wear a reddish gold pin). "Or when the last history of literature that mentions him has rotted away ! Then maybe the name still stands in parish registers – the 30-yearer made a wonderful clean sweep of things back then; and the latest Hitlerish war too."

"Well, just try living a few hundred years ! – Nietzsche has sure sworn off his ‹Eternal Return› : had a snoot full long ago !" / "Ah, you can't imagine the possibilities ! Quite apart from palimpsests or textual conjectures : we have cases where upon some dire hour a reckless fellow simply wrote his name at the front of a book, boldly proclaiming ownership, à la Manesse – and he's done for, as long as that rare volume

is nursed and nurtured. And if his luck is rotten, it even gets photocopied : just be very careful about such things !" / "Once there was a fellow in Pompeii who proudly scratched on the wall of a toilet : ‹Hic ego nunc futui formosam forma puellam› and added his name : he's still running around down here !" / "The ancestors of ‹great men› are in bad shape – they never made so much as a slip themselves, and now here they are being mercilessly dug up by biographers. – Sure, the Gotha too." / "Or an even more gruesome example : a farmer is named Meier; and so in the village dialect, his field is called the ‹Meierkamp›. One day a surveyor appears; he enters the name onto his ordnance map : it gets printed : that's that ! – Alright, and now along comes an author as well – one of your totally crazy ones who have to have everything just so : yesyes : *like you* ! – who uses the setting for his novel, his hero disappears behind a hedge with his heroine, right into the aforementioned ‹Meierkamp› – : the poor fellow is as good as ruined ! Dodders helplessly around down here; runs from office to office, and will never ever comprehend why he's not allowed to be dead in peace : and what a shoving match it can be sometimes, once the poet arrives down here !"

He nudged me, and indicated inconspicuously with his eyebrows : "Robin Hood. – – Nah; the one next to him; the little burly one." And for a while I mutely let my eyes follow the stocky gentleman in a mackintosh : couldn't that just as easily be Odysseus ? But he just testily shook his head : "I suppose you think he'd still be running around in lincoln green, with a bow hanging over his butt ? – No no : Everyone dresses in as normal a middle-class fashion as possible."

Animals too ? : a massive black tomcat sullenly shoved his way out of a ground-floor window across the way; sat down and looped his tail around his feet. "Here, Dinahdinah, c'mere !"; but he didn't come. "Ah well; they're not all that aware of it – but they do miss the deathless mice."

"The saints ? : 're they ever spiteful ! Especially if they've got some special area of competence, stomachaches or such : every he-man up top who's balled more than he can handle" (scared me to death, the way he said it so broad & loud) : "bellows their name, or even writes it down on a slip of paper – no sir, they've really got it tough !". "Could you be just a little less cynical ?" I asked, shocked; but he just gave his head a dignified negative shake : "First of all, it's always been my nature to call things by their exact names – even in matters fecal and urogenital, which to date have been so neglected and/or lied about –; and second, everyone gets this way down here in a very short time :

more realistic, more sensible. You should hear Lanier sometime, or Johanna Spyri with her Heidi –" he grinned till his loden coat bounced. "Well, c'mon; let's get something to eat."

"*A kind of cafeteria;* cheerily lit from above : behind glass and nickel, the long rows of plates with – yes with what ? (On each, nothing but a little pile of delicate glass-skinned bars, cubes, ribbed sticks; of various merry hues : the whole scale of yellows; black grained gray; and, though more seldom, a rather obnoxious bonbon green). He had the server with her varnished smile hand out 2 plates; she added some sort of nickel-plated tongs to each : "34 promesses, please." "Thirty-four ? !" Althing=Fischer asked worriedly; and was about to write them down on his card with a sigh, when I managed to persuade him – gaining at last something like a guest's clear head – : "What am I going to do with mine otherwise ?" and : "It would really be a shame for them to expire !". "That's true," he conceded very quickly.

"*Tempered air* – with a little flavor added" : right; my rubber bonbons with a touch of ginger. (Only gaseous defecation by the way; he also pointed out to me the row of stalls, where the differentiation ‹For Women› had been eliminated. – And my lentils ? ! I decided to torture myself for as long as ‹bearable›).

"*The streets are never named for people* – just perfectly neutral names like ‹Walk Lane› or ‹Sluice Street›." (At one point a ‹Fish Tub›). / "They're doing an enormous amount of building at the edge of town; there were 12,000 new titles at the last Frankfurt Book Fair alone." / "The non-famous – the vast majority –, who only appear in public records, are quartered in camps with vast barracks, where they spend the 100, 200 years until their definitive death. They're in good spirits for the most part, in ‹village communities›, and even ‹enjoy› the time to some extent. And there's an enormous number of daily admissions and releases. – A lot of us eternals have positions in camp administration."

The fog : it abruptly began to seep down from above, in fine threads, in spiraled streaks. And from the floor, too, came gray foot-high gasings, and Fischer began to curse : "That damn stuff again ! –" (nasty, then more submissive) : "Oh well, it is autumn . . ." And explained to my facial question :

The weather is designed by a special committee, they regulate temperature, humidity, precipitation. Long vertical ‹wind cracks› in the streetlamp poles, in corner houses (with an especially desolate whistle at lonely excavation sites). "During the day, bright diffused light comes from the ceiling; it's night at the moment." (added an appropriate yawn. And so I asked : "Where can I spend the night ?". "Oh, in any hotel –" he

said obligingly : right, left, straight ahead. "And tomorrow morning don't hesitate to give me a call right away. – Felicissima notte !") –

Alone, wandering the city by night : 9:56 P.M. ! : "Could you tell me the best way to Island Street ? –. –. : Ah, thanks !"

Almost run over ! ! : Despite his double-pointed beard, the fellow darted like a weasel; doubled back; through front yards; the ten with clubs right behind him ! Scurried through house shadows, leaped like a practiced hurdler over one last leg stretched out to trip him, scooted around the kiosk, and disappeared, his long swallowtails billowing, into a pretty little park. – The two cops, however, definitely took their time. The one stopped close by, and ostensibly ‹cordoned› off the intersection (while his subaltern had to toddle a little further down the street). Even pulled a out a stogie and took a couple of drags. "The kings of the Goths" he calmly explained in answer to my question : "Are back in hot pursuit of Felix Dahn again – well after all, he was given adequate official warning when he was granted his entry permit –" pff=pff : "Island Street ? : the second right." (Pff : damn, was that a vile weed he was smoking ! The very air refused to accept the fumes; choking : "Thabks –").

Second right : a ‹Bachelor Girls' Residence› : I gazed helplessly at the enormous checkerboard facade of light and dark windows – –

Stopping at the concierge : a fat creature who cast barely a glance at the verso of my slip of paper; then, to the key-board (a niagara of mini-steel !) : "Yes, she's in : room two two six –" her full gaudy arm pointed in the direction of the elevators. (One had just arrived here below; people got off. Then the bright archangelic face of the tall elevator girl announced its ‹Going up›. – "226 ? : Fifth floor". –. –. –. –. –. : "Here you are" : "Thank you !". –, –, –, : ‹Tina Halein› ! :

"Yes what it is ? : !" : Tina ! – I took her in my arms at once, her, with hair splayed by sleep (had lain down for an hour, ‹so she could be nice and fresh for me !›; her, low black flame about a pale face). 10:12 P.M. –

11:12 P.M. : "Damn !" she gaspered. Another pint of air. Arose, my foam at her belly; and made coffee first thing : "7 minutes to brew –". (She put out slim porcelain mugs).

Meanwhile, behind the plastic curtain of her shower : gymnastics in the soap bubble. "Nah; nothing ever ever happens down here." Snorting and shaking of brow. – The water had a distinct iron taste, or, even more precisely : "Ink ?". : "Hmm could be – comes directly out of hot subterranean wells," the stranded face spouted; crouched in the basin, and teased herself with 2 pointed fingers; sat down and

looped her thighs loosely=firmly around my feet.

Through clang of water and clap of hands below : "But you won't quote me, will you ? ! – ‹Tina› okay; that doesn't count, doesn't mean anything, that you can do." She played nimbly with her toes, and wove fingers among them; knelt, and admired me with ‹Ah !› : "You're really quite indestructible : don't you have a steady girlfriend, poor lad ? – But first let's have a quick cup of coffee –."

In armchairs, each before his phantom of Congo coffee. She in her yellow kimono with large black bacteria colonies, the kind she-devils love. Slippers fiery red; her hair elaborately uncombed : the way she-devils love.

"Fischer's explained ? – – Ah, not at all; the whole thing goes about like this. – You are born up top, and live – : no; 1801 to 1877; 't's unimportant ! –. Then you ‹die›; that's pretty unpleasant; apprehensions, you know, and lack of air : ahhhh ! heart stops. But consciousness is usually suspended very quickly –" she gave the air a nonchalant little slap : "In any case, you wake up again. Dusky lights and murmuring voices. In a gigantic hall – sort of like a riding school – in a long line of people. When you get up to the counter, they fill out your registration cards; you get your ID; move on ahead; get stamped again; are confronted with acquaintances from earlier – at least 2 enemies among them ! –. A bus drives you to the train station; you board the appropriate train, get whatever you need for the trip and such – and end up at the place they've assigned you to."

Choose ? : "Hmm – not really ! – You're allowed to say you'd like to live with this person or that; and if it can at all be justified, nothing prevents that. But certain considerations do have to be made after all : you could never ever lock up Goethe and Bielschowsky together. No, they're pretty strict down here, but never unnecessarily cruel. – Or you with Fouqué someday –" she added slyly, and, seeing my face, swung her legs back and forth with pleasure for a good while (now *that* she ought not to have done !) –

: *"I mean that length* is downright felonious !" she declared enraptured= enraged. (In the thousand-hour glass the glittering bottled imps wriggled with glee. She said something into a hole in the wall; closed the invisible wall-papered flap. And from a kind of mail-box slit immediately extracted 2 prewarmed towels).

"And now let's get some sleep : tomorrow's another day. – Sunday; I don't have to go up top." / Later : "Nope, haven't got any pajamas for you."

Beside each other in the dark. Just the usual streetlamp abstractions came through the thin curtain. The artificial wind yowled impeccably. The

fog outside had disappeared again too. She gave a cozy, empty yawn. *"Welll – your body is a matter* of choice : almost everyone selects their corporality from the period of their early twenties, when they were in good shape. Some men even take 17 : on account of the shaving. – Ooaah." She laid a smooth, lazy rope of arm across my rib-cage; at the end it unraveled into limp fingers. Out of drowsiness came the last answer : "The first 10 years are mostly spent just scr . . ." (and giggled, as I clapped a hand over her mouth) : "After that, people usually go off as hermits – there are special variegated sandstone deserts with salt lakes; petrifications and such –" (She tried in vain to bore her fist deeper into my armpit; but then couldn't find a good place for her arm and gave up with a grumble) : "Then they generally start in drinking; raging and swearing : at immortality; at the whole set-up down here. After that they fall into obstinate dozing; do that for several years too – and then gradually they return to normal. Take jobs. Worry about their work. And console themselves with the notion that ultimately nothing lasts ‹eternally› : even two-thousand-year-olds aren't all that frequent among us." She made a peevish move, gave a soporific snort ‹hmf›. Added her left knee to mine; brushed her head once against my neck (and slumbered off. And I decided to put off the wondering until tomorrow).

Morning. Shyest light of dawn : no ! : she didn't feel like a 154-year-old at all ! Not here. And not there. And definitely not there ! : Had my companions just been lying to me perhaps ? ! Had I not perhaps accidentally landed in one (they've existed for years of course) of the subterranean cities that politicians and the upper ten have built in case of nuclear war ? On occasion, the Assassins would give their adherents a shot that sent them into a paradis artificiel ! – I got up; I looked softly and wildly about – – (first turn up the heat; was only 60 degrees).

Naked before the wall : first I couldn't get the flap to release (and almost ripped it off with impatience ! – Wait : that's how it works) : "Hello operator ? – : Am I really here in Elysium, or just in some atom-bomb-proof cave settlement ? !". "Justamomentplease" came the official= emotionless voice : "I'll connect you with Information Central. . . ." (look her way : ? : no. Tinkatinakatharina was regularly puffing time away : with every breath 1 Chinese dies. And 2 are born !).

"Go ahead please !" – – : "Yes, this in Information – : ? : No; You are in Elysium. – – No ! – – Nono : we keep an exact file on *your* books as well : how often you've referred to Hauff, or to Bismarck . . . ."

"Bismarck ? ? ! !" (exultant and wild : now I've caught the fakers !) :

"Bismarck ? : I'll be damned if I've so much as mentioned the scoundrel in my books !" (The phonies !). Pause. I was about to rap a triumphant fist against the flap when the androgynous voice moved in closer again : "To date you've used the name ‹Bismarck› three times in your works : Faun page 79; Brand's Heath 110; Displaced 14 . . . .". I ducked my head; on my right, my damaged knee began to wobble; I stammered : "That is – – a damned shameless . . . .". Cool, statistical, Enyclopaedia Britannical, the hole-in-the-wall continued : "The last of the above citations reads, verbatim – : ‹She was forever enthusing about – single angle brackets – our glorious Bismarck› – : ?"

I blanched; I propped my brow against the wall : right ! Now I remembered : in Lower Saxony ! Saw below me the manly=sparse tract of hair on my belly; the optically boldly foreshortened legs. Also feet. – – "Thanks," I said hoarsely to the wall after a while. It no longer answered.

In bed again, the turntable of thoughts in my head : now didn't that beat all ! . . . . . (Tieck allegedly a cabinet maker; Hoffmann a wine wholesaler. And now I was actually considering what I might do here someday . . . . . : it's a quirk of mine that I immediately get caught up in things like this ! But good thing my books have sold so poorly : take the showpiece, my Leviathan, 902 so far ! . . . . .)

But then I turned resolutely back to her : what madness this all is ! : The firm pretty rear end; powerful silk of thighs; a waist –, – : she was slowly waking – the hot breasts slightly softened by sleep : and now the snakes of her arms were looping about my neck; she flowed about me, and I vanished into her for a while.

Tempered air for breakfast ? : Noo. But a solid cup of coffee, that I'll take. (And it had turned cold outside, ‹shift in the weather›, a very fine, hard snow, spare and dry – how do you suppose they mass-produce *that* : and already my imagination was off again in *that* direction ! Cleverly sporadic gusts of wind draggled it in protoplasmic streaks across the frost-bound streets.)

"Mon Dieu, the mailman !" : she buried her five-digited forceps almost painfully in my hand, and intuitively snorted her annoyance as the black-uniformed man turned in at the concierge's. (And explained : the dark ones bring bad news; good news is delivered in green. Further explanation : bad news = notification of quotation or even of a new printing; joyful news = vanished copies, deleted mention of one's name and so forth).

Something halfway between a ring and a buzz : began softly at first, fawned its way into your consciousness, suddenly became louder – and then

broke off demandingly all at once : ! (so that you simply *had* to get up and see what he had brought) : a black-rimmed letter ! She hastily probed one corner with a finger, and burst the envelope open; ripped the note out of the jagged paper maw and skimmed it : ‹Kathinka Zitz; name cited in a local column of the Mainzer Freiheit› – "Thank God; only a newspaper." She noted her relief.

"*Ohyousee : at one point* I married a fellow named Zitz, but then got divorced right away. – Nono, my name is really Tina Halein : my maiden name." She planted herself defiantly on an arm of a chair and dangled her shins; puffed irked air through her nose. Sighed once : "Well, 90 percent of my novels have already been pulped – take the plunge and read one of them why don't you ! – The worst damage was done to me by the article in the General German Biography : wouldn't I love to have *that* bastard here !" And stood up resolutely : "I haven't even cursed yet today – just a moment !" She went over to the cupboard, stretched, placed atop it the little upended hour-glass with its lively lacquer job – and began to swear; and with an intensity; what a vocabulary the woman had; even some lovely French curses : names, hatefully broad, received sobriquets of contempt; fist balls; with several of them her mouth meandered frighteningly and overflowed; once she even stamped for rage : ! : ! ! ! –

Then the sand ran out. In sympathy, I took hold of her arm, helped her push her breasts back in their bra, and accompanied her to the couch, her, with tear-worn face. "The sons o' bitches !" she wearily said once more; but then cheered up soon enough, and demanded more intensive consoling and petting.

(The quarter-hour curse : everyone has to curse his biographer for 15 minutes daily; reviewers; the Goedeke bibliography; all editions of the Brockhaus encyclopedia, the first really large edition of the Meyer, readers and local historians, I love a good hater).

Gutenberg ? : hides in desolate forests, in ravines of prime loneliness; always on the run, sleeps in a different spot every night (like Cromwell). Spends the great majority of his current existence in casts. – "Yes, but you've also got books here ?" I looked up at the shelf suspended above the head of her bed. (Books of fiction are allowed then; the sort where no real persons are named. And the title page has to go, aha.) Lots of chess gets played; there are movies; fashions change appropriately. "No cars : people have time to spare. And for the rest, people do an honest day's work; and an honest night's love – ‹It'll all be over in a thousand years› : that's what we always say to cheer ourselves up."

The wall-flap opened askew : "Hey ! Is it broke ? !" Tina cried in dismay; hopped off my lap, and gave the hinge a cautious twist (while the operator was now announcing : "Call from a Herr Fischer – are you at home for him ?"). She looked over at me; we nodded briefly; I took over with a ‹Hello !›. And then we made a date for – : ? – : "No, not right away. For lunch : we still have some things to do before that." She grinned her approval, lower lip between her teeth; and I arranged the time and place in businesslike fashion. –

Time : noon; Place : Mexican restaurant : today my piece of gelatin tasted like chili con carne. (I generously paid the paltry 80 promesses; leaving me – : 586. I had given Tina 300 for a more elastic spring mattress). But it was a good thing that I met with Fischer; we whispered and chuckled (that is : I did so painfully; he laughed for glee like a frog, sub aqua sub aqua. – : "Just a moment, Tina : we'll be there in a sec !").

Outside : you could see his brain at work. : "Damn ! – Marvelous ! !" he gasped above an enthusiastically splayed paw : "Can you last another 100 yards ? –" and gave me tender=headlong support, like a father : "Steady, steady now – – : Here : In here !"

Twenty yards distant, behind a row of bushes : the lentils ! (While he kept an eye out : mygod, what a racket I was making. And from afar he whinnied his delight at the way my stomach-press was working. – Now scram !). (At the gate to the villa *quite* a bronze plate too : ‹Maximilian Emanuel Franz Freiherr von Lerchenfeld› : ?. : "Got me confined to a fortress for 3 years at one point : this'll make him so happy !" and leaned against a house wall to fight for air in greater comfort. – "But please don't say anything to Tina !" : " 'course not, 'course not.")

Nevertheless, his first move : they immediately put their heads together, subterranean pals – and her mouth was drawing wide apart now; the nostrils nozzled larger and larger; she bit into her handkerchief, water tumbled from her button-holes (while I sucked icily at my straw : apparently that's how they excrete the liquids they take in; through their eyes. His hands kept forming the giant pile : "And colors, Tina, they've never seen the like at hizzoner's place before !" Threw his head back, the swine, and gurgled scythically).

And so think up additional questions (no point in acting offended !)

1.) Romans à clef ? : He shook a negating muzzle : "Don't count as a reference as such; but the persons-in-question have usually been nailed down umpteen times elsewhere."

2.) ‹How brightly beams the morning star› ? (as is well known, the first letters of each of the 7 verses spell out a name). : "Counts as a

reference !" he confirmed.

3.) Plagiarize ?. : "You can do it as often as you like. : On the contrary ! We take that to be a good sign that someone's beginning to be forgotten, becoming a rarity – and it's heartily welcomed !"

4.) Punishments ?. : "That happens relatively seldom. Thrashings are, of course, the order of the day – and usually quite justified : new arrivals, unsuspecting=proud editors of anthologies, often get frightfully lambasted; or biographers by their poets. The heaviest punishment of all, and one very seldom meted out – roughly comparable to your death sentence up top – is for sending ‹inspirations› up to the earth's surface. That's when some scribbler grubbing in a library (or even dreaming) suddenly has an ‹inspiration› : Someone or other would really be a very interesting person to do an evening radio program about." (At first I smiled right along with him; but suddenly ceased, and recalled).

The landlord, in Mexican costume, looking woefully uninspired in his sombrero, accompanied us to the door; and we were just about to walk out onto the street when a special announcement came over the radio, with attentionattention and fiery beams of blaring fanfares before and after. At first I couldn't understand my companions' enthusiasm : they stood there as if electrified, their faces shining and tense : ? – – –

(I didn't quite understand the technical terms. At any rate they nodded excitedly to one another, and kept up a lively debate around me meandering in the middle).

"Tomorrow noon someone will be able to dissipate : has he ever had the luck ! Has been here only 400 years; and official confirmation just came in from the Commission that the last record of his name has disappeared : a child was playing with fire in an attic among all the junk and papers – the bill of sale in question, everything in fact, including the house, burned !" They each took deep and happy breaths. (I was going to ask about the child; but refrained, since people here obviously had other cares).

"Nono – you're not allowed to be present ! These are our most solemn rites ! – Besides, you'll be leaving for the top with Tina and me early tomorrow morning; your 36 hours will have run out."

"Describe it; that I can do : Alright. When a name is finally extinct up above, the owner down here is allowed to ‹dissipate› : can you imagine how he whoops it up ? How he follows it all expectantly on television as the moment nears when his last reader claps the book closed with ‹What a load of bullshit !›; and rips it up to build a fire with the next morning ! Then the Commission checks – that's right : the large

building you saw yesterday – all the records one last time; and informs him that on such and such a date, at such and such time, down to the exact minute, he may enter the void. He puts on his best suit. In front of the void, the administrative official stands waiting. The audience stands formed in a disciplined square, all in gay colors; friends and acquaintances crowd in with congratulations (and envy). A charcoal fire glows in a bronze tripod; he is handed all his registration cards and he may sow them across the flames with his own hands. Then he is led through a high door into a hall where a few marble steps lead down from the entrance into the void – I've seen it for myself; have been present as an official witness twice now !" –

: *"And then : he jumps* in and is gone ! Poof ! Vanished forever !"

"What becomes of him ? Energy ?" (it occurred to me). "Energy shit !" he said in outrage : "Nothing. Nothing at all ! They've pulled it off, my dear fellow !"

"Doesn't the ‹Commission› already know beforehand the exact point of time for everyone ?" (profound, huh ?). "The Commission knows diddlysquat !" he snarled, still indignant : "No one is omniscient !". God ? : "Oh Godpff" he said disdainfully after a while; and I asked no more.

Suggestions from both sides (and my head moved fervently back and forth between them, as it had in the days when I was an interpreter at the police academy) :

1.) "Destroy all your author's copies !" (and if possible buy up the others : "It'll be worth the money someday.") "Don't write any more letters."

2.) "Don't leave any ‹memoirs› behind. Don't entrust anything to archives !" ("Oh god : I sent 1 copy to Marbach !" I groaned in horror. "There you are ! !" he congratulated me grimly).

3.) "Have yourself cremated after death : then there'll be none of the mess like with ‹The Neanderthal› : they almost got their clutches on that poor bastard !"

4.) "How we greeted the invention of the radio at first : nothing but vain clangor and smoke ! – But then here came the tape recorders : don't ever record anything ! : Beware of collectors !" – – – "Well, let's go on over to Tina's; have a cuppa coffee." –

Tea at Tina's : behind his back she pulled an impatient face; but (to our relief) he didn't even take off his coat (had to stop at Trollope & Mount's, the pharmacy : pick up orders for tomorrow's earthly procurements). Silence; postmeridially drowsy.

"Couldn't you –" (he; ingratiatingly) : "destroy your few volumes of the Sauerländer Cooper edition ? Where I appear as the editor at the front ?". – "Destroy – no" I begged, hesitating; but : "Wouldn't it suffice for me to cut out the title pages, replace them with typewritten ones : and simply leave your name off ?" He beamed : "– Very good ! That'd work too; yes." (relieved and already rubbing his hands) : "And my best thanks too. – We'll see you then tomorrow morning at 7:30 in front of Precinct III : and please be punctual ! – Well, of course Tina'll be coming along too : byebye."

The cheval-de-frise of her arms=legs; nails and teeth provided barbwire enough.

And so in the white jungle of her limbs : sometimes eyes flashed round below; in warm crevices words sloshed; gasp shackles sundered, room full of ‹u›. The thorny shrub of two hands above me now : she beat her sweaty mouth against me; she strangled me midway with legs; the white cable of her arms on the horizon grew rough and stiff : ‹u !›.

Felled, one atop the other. Her hair hung from my head. Our breath pistons pumped on past more expansively. Glued : "Ohhhsay".

"It'll just make a cup – for two !" : so we drank our cup of tea communally, man and wife. (The silk-screen on the wall : signed, a genuine Eberhard Schlotter, e. s., and we nodded in admiration : painstaking technique !).

"Sure, but on the other hand !" it occurred to me : "What if I write the names of my enemies on a piece of paper – or, even better : engrave them on silver plate ? – : Roll that up; insert it in a glass tube; melt it shut ! : Then put that in a lead chest, a real time=box, you see, that will last for eternity and a weekend – and then bury it in some desolate spot I've located – deep in the Hümmling or in the Sahara : now *that* would be an act of revenge ! Since someone could, theoretically, come across it accidentally again sometime ? !". My fantasy combusted spontaneously : what possibilities !

"Or even several copies, see : and toss one in the ocean ! It would slumber at 15000 feet until the next triassic=jurassic=cretaceous !". She listened with glittering eyes; she nodded; increasingly won over : "Listen, if you could do *that* – !" (a deep gaze, full of promise) : "Do me a favor, would you ? ! : write ‹Ludwig Fränkel› on it too : Eff, arr, ay with an umlaut . . . . That's the son-of-a-bitch who put me in the GGB !". She laughed at her deliverance : "Listen, if you promise to do *that* for me : I'll come up to see you every noon; and – –". I already had her in punishing arms : "You'll do that, if you please, in any case ! – and every night as well –" I added, though not without some uneasiness : I was now of a consular age after all. ("Not allowed to at night,"

she interposed, more modest now as well : "I have to close up every evening at 7 on the dot, and come back down.") I went on, gallantly : "Actually I should be grateful to Herr Fränkel, otherwise I would perhaps never have made your acquaintance !" But she just pulled a wry face at this (under the circumstances) inappropriate compliment; and we chose to go on talking about this time=box (it was indeed a devilish inspiration !).

"But am I not perhaps risking too much with this ?" : she first shoved her lower lip out – ? – but then shook her bangs decisively : "You've already got so much on your conscience anyway : what hopes Pape had, for instance, before you came along. Or Brandt, Guthe, Bode, or whatever those guys are called. – And then just a couple of names ! : For simple justice's sake, the Commission *can't* count your personal enemies against you – and my one little Fränkel –" she waved her chin disdainfully, and we made a firm agreement : "But listen, every noon, for sure !". "Oh, it won't flop on my account," she promised slyly; but then begged as well : "And *you*'ll take care to round up printed matter about me, and then burn it before my eyes, alright ? – Ah, grand !"

The afternoon slipped away. The wind began to howl more violently. The bachelor girls walked more rapidly across the white-spraying courtyards. (How nice there were almost no children down here : it was so much quieter). / Every city thus had a giant cave unto itself; a few hundred miles distant from the next one, sparely connected to one another by long underground railroads. For reasons of language, the ancients off to themselves; Asians; the Russians, too, of course. – Well, she can illumine me about all that later on, at noontimes of the future).

Wait; this too : "So then, Holberg (Niels Klim) or Jules Verne (Voyage au Centre de la terre) were hinting that . . . . ?". She nodded her confirmation : "They were all here once. – Ah noo : even before that. All those sagas about ‹gnomes›, ‹hollow mountains›, it all goes back to us." Hephaestus, Orpheus & Eurydice, Nekyia, even Empedocles. And Tieck too (Journey into the Blue) : "He gave almost *too* much away ! Or a certain Steinhäuser, 1817 –" (but then dismissed it as she noticed my opening, questioning hand : that would take too long. So look it up under ‹Steinhäuser› sometime).

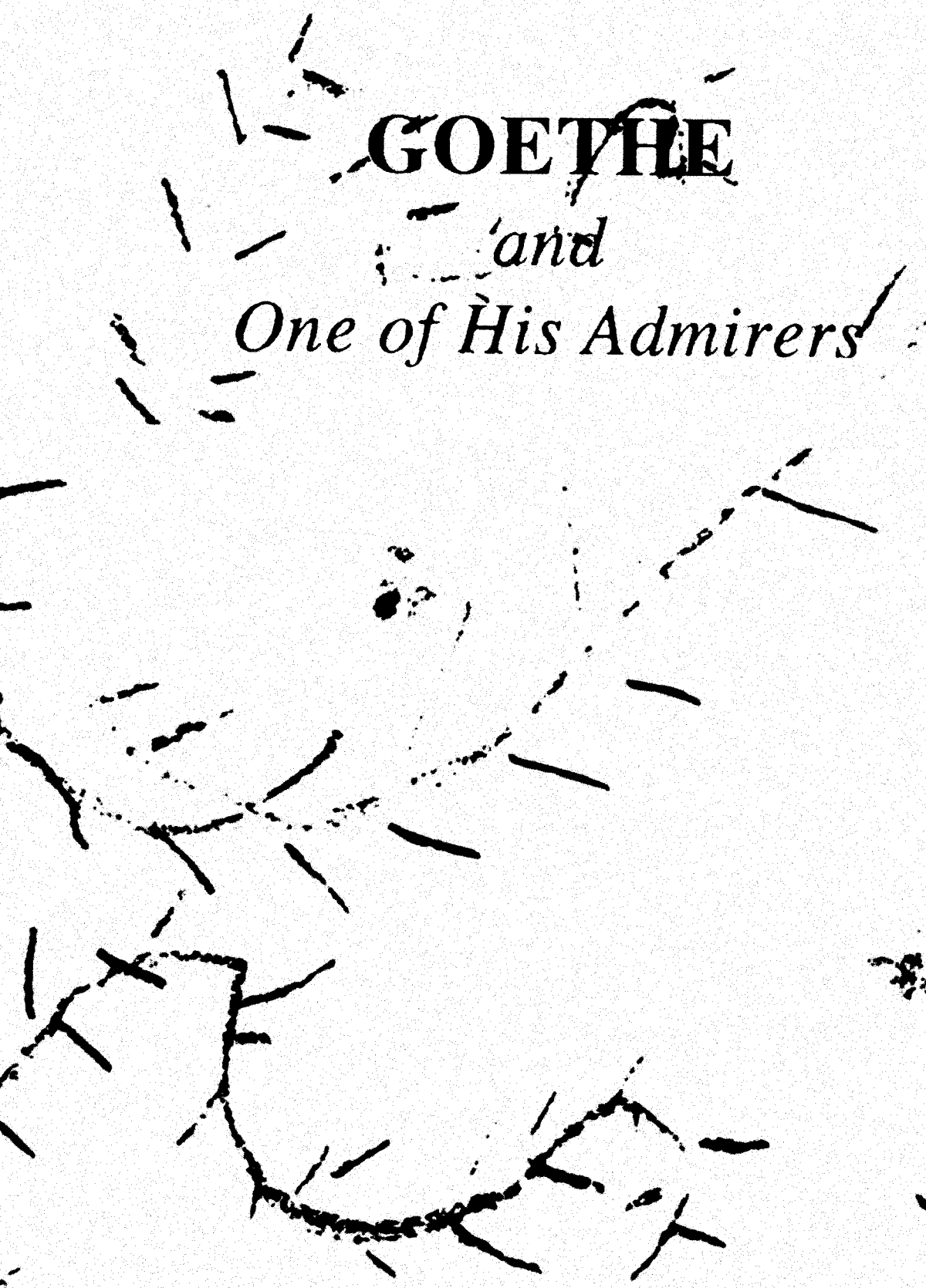
Given all this, what is the best recipe for earthly life in general, above and below ? : "Move to a village. Act stupid. Screw. Keep your mouth shut. Go to church. If some great man shows up in the vicinity, disappear into a stall : he's hardly going to follow you there ! Vote *against*

teaching reading and writing; *for* rearmament : atom bombs !".
"‹*History, its Uses and Drawbacks* in Daily Life›" I muttered. "*Quite* right !" she replied emphatically : "mainly drawbacks !". –

GOETHE

and

One of His Admirers



He is a greedyguts !
—Jean Paul

At last they had succeeded in bringing the dead back to life; or, to put it more precisely : in calling back, for a limited time, people who had undergone their first life and first death (IknowIknow; to be exact I ought to say : their nth life; and now they find themselves in n plus 1. – Naturally, this had not the least to do with the immortality theories of Christianity; once again, things turned out *quite* different).

But why these lengthy explanations; after all, every child knows about the matter, especially since Knaur has now published a popularized version (not to mention ‹Bonjour immortalité› by that eleven-year-old Parisian girl. And the Penguin=pocketbook).

Of course, 15 hours aren't much, I'll grant you; but it is something after all to be able to converse with Hannibal ante portas. (Although that immediately led to the first disputes : Walther von der Vogelweide had complained bitterly that the Germanists pronounced Middle High German so queerly. And with Theodora of Byzantium, they had stood before *this* desperate dilemma : the professors of Greek could no longer manage it, and those who were good at it hadn't the vaguest about Greek !).

That was the point : every revenant had to be ‹guided›, that stood to reason ! (‹To countervail the civilization gap›, as the fashionable= official phrase has it; that is, in plain German : to avoid their being all too frequently run over or arrested; true, not all that much could happen to ‹the oldster›, but it meant the loss of valuable time; for the ‹guides›, they took out special 24-hour life insurance policies – which, however, were of questionable value : in a language compounded of ‹The Critique of Pure Reason› and ‹Finnegans Wake›, §811 b of the ‹policy› stated in no uncertain terms that Antitrinitarians, particularly if their tonsils had been removed, even if only in part, were to be excluded from ‹compensation as defined by civil law› until such time as ‹the distributive standard of experiential usage, being the acme of possibility for all things, has provided the real terms for its general determination› !).

So then, painters if possible by painters (that way you get the same general character defects); poets by poets, nothin' but Fugger & Welser.

And some very interesting combinations had already been undertaken ! General Dr., the supreme commander of NATO, had received Aetius (rightright : 451, the battle of the Catalaunian Plains – one collateral result was finding out *where* they actually lay) for a guided tour of West Germany. (His comments are said to have been *very* skeptical; the minutes were, of course, kept secret, despite a motion for ‹general debate› by the Socialists; it was merely noted that : he had said . . . . . well, I don't recall exactly; at any rate the term ‹Christian civilization of the West› occurred twice in the communiqué).

((It was even rumored that the Americans had already consulted Hitler – most revealing, by the by, how many millions of German applicants, simply on the basis of mere rumor, volunteered as guides in *that* particular case ! Apparently they finally enlisted R., that grand & aged politician, for the task – but I don't want to be held to that, it might also have been the Other Guy !)).

In any case it had gradually come around to my turn. After a rainy night. Streets honed dull. Crinkled crepe above, Spandex below (aka clouds & legs; ‹And when night darkens the streets . . . .›). Or just as good : below, grass hatchings; above, rosettes of gingerly fidgeting foliage. I betook myself – on foot naturally; I do not own a locomobile – to the Academy.

Academy : where all was still and cool. I climbed my way up the elegant hill, on circumshrubbed legs; pushed in doors – – : "Ah yes. – Uh=this way." (The secretary : did the woman ever have bi=ceps ! From the rear too : post-office yellow scarf; the black bobbed ball; pieces of tractor tire underfoot, the foppette; butt like the Emperor's right-hand woman; I let my eyes slip in a piece : ? : ! – she didn't notice; stayed still and cool, the skirt; ahwell, she doesn't have to guide anyone !).

And here were the lists : quaint, quaint. (*And* typical : my colleagues, the cowards ! !). Naturally, the pussyfooters had, on principle, selected people like Hölty; of notoriously gentle character and minuscule ‹Collected Works› : for that they don't need to know much. / Schulze from Celle. / (Recently found, while paging-through-Uhland : ‹Tell's Plate›; well, better than no teeth at all; but what a topic for a poet !). / How are you supposed to know with writers, whether it's a pre= or ex=nova ?

They had all become very cautious since Johann Christian Günther, bawling with booze and rage, had given the young man from the Group 47 a kick in the rear before noon (and spent the rest of his fifteen hours in a

whorehouse; embarrassing, but I can't help it !). And ETA Hoffmann had become extremely abusive as well; had asked if not one single soul had gone on to build formally from his ‹Princess Brambilla› – his ‹guide› hadn't even known the ‹Asian Banise› ! / The most dreadful fiasco happened with Wieland : who had sat himself down that evening at a press conference to level the nastiest protest against that megalomaniacal idiot, Professor M., who had dared to try and ‹orientate› him ! (By the way, on that occasion the most interesting things, which people hadn't known before or had at best only suspected, came to light; for instance, Wieland had provided testy=nonchalant confirmation that Goethe had often rolled about on the carpet before the ducal= mother of Weimar, "and attempted to get her to laugh by contorting his hands and feet" : now just try to picture that sometime ! !).

Alright, moving on, paging through – – the lists – – : Here ! : a classical scholar, who ‹also› wrote poetry, had taken Johann Heinrich Voss : now wouldn't *that* have made our colleague sit up and take notice ! I grinned with gusto; and pictured to myself the old low-German warrior at the side of this delicate, asthmatically flatulent mannikin : when it comes to a sense of language, these guys have all got phimosis ! (And are therefore to be regarded as impotent !). / Now with Heinse you could play a solid game of chess.

By rights, I ought to have taken Fouqué; but that would have led only to beastly rows and disputes between us, about biographical details (besides which, someone from RIAS had got there before me. – Which is to say : Fouqué would have rejected me in any case, since I'm not even noble by letters-patent !). / Brockes ? : one of Hamburg's local nabobs had snapped him up (and here I was the author of the famous, frequently rebroadcast evening radio program, bitterbitter ! – Renewed shakings of the head).

"Can't I get Pape ? – Samuel, Christian, P a p e ?" – They pulled long faces; they checked their files : Pa; Pa; (Papageno ?) – – : he hadn't even been *scheduled* ! I called to mind that I was at an Academy, and held my peace (was unfair to put the question to such people). (‹Artist› ? : for them that's obviously simple license to save the money for the hairdresser).

Fingering down through the columns of the unchosen. The morning sun, aided by leaves aflutter, had disks of light doing handsprings on the desk (and outside the moped driver : the paper had been blown off, and in submission=anger, he pointed the glistening chop in the next direction : ! – These men laden with care had not noticed; but they don't want to be realists anyway.).

Damn ! : Here ! ! (And I automatically stuck my hand in my pants' pocket. Smirked. I was feeling uncommonly reprobate and akimbo in spirit today, too). I shoved the tip of my tongue across a molar (to give the pronunciation an even *more* slovenly shape !) and pointed with chin and pencil-extender; adding a ‹here› in English ! (Very coldly. And waiting).

They stared, crowbobbing. Took fright. Mutterprotested. Mollified in relief. Smiled helplessly. Stroked their hawthorny leathern masks with many fingers : "Pff : Oh !".

On the one hand : "No !" : "Never ! !". (On the other hand, however, *quite; "Yes indeed !").* Of course, the 1st chairman actually should . . . . . (but he had been struck down by severe laryngitis for weeks now; a most puzzling and still totally unfathomed ailment. Wellnow). – "Hmmm." –

Yes, a lot of things did fit, of course, to be sure. (I had maliciously mentioned ‹blasphemy› !). "Ah – right," he murmured abstractedly; a glance to his good colleagues : ? : and they too nodded with strongly pursed lips : not half bad; after all he wasn't so flawless either; Venet. Epigr. Nr. 67. (‹Atheist› ? : no one wanted to be called that given the ‹current state of affairs›. Nor in general for that matter. And had been the primary reason why with a heavy heart, Kr. had had to refuse in the end – who hadn't the least notion about natural science either, by the way).

"Ah, and besides." : I was irreverent enough; they knew that for certain. Understood more about mathematics than Coachman Kronos. And the old panjandrum wouldn't melt my heart all that easily. (One or t'other was giggling agreeably now).

"M=uh : In confidence –" : my buttonhole was boarded (one of the few possessions which I may boldly claim; buttons themselves being quite another matter !) – : "Uh=you also know a few things that can be held *against* him ?". I simply pursed up my own fresh-shaven lips : "You shoulda heard my radio-essay on Wieland !" / "I'll fill him in on spectral analysis until he's sick of his own color theory !" / "What a dirty trick, the decisive role he played in getting Oken's ‹Isis› banned – one of the best magazines of the century !" / ("Oken's ‹Isis›", the fellow muttered approvingly, the one I'll guarantee hadn't the vaguest; and an insane desire seized me to hold a match to his goatee; maybe later, when giving him a light, we'll see).

Brief official exam : "Who is Crugantino ?". I answered coolly : "Cross out that ‹C›." (They correctly inferred from my answer that I knew even the sundry variants of his Claudine, and proceeded to more

important details). To wit :

the expenses ! : "For Schiller they squandered fifty-eight D=marks in Marbach by the time they were done !". I, cool : "Easy as pie : Schiller !"; they, renewed outrage, and once again : "Squandered !". / After long and anxious whispered conferences, including in particular the treasurer whom they had telephoned to join them, approval was finally given for 63 marks 50 (to which the speechless 1st chairman – visibly relieved that *he* didn't have to take on *this* guided tour ! – added with a grand flourish another 2 marks 50; from some slush fund or other; and then alluded several times to my ‹66 marks›). / Someone rang; clappings oriental style – a slim, well-made-up girl appeared, her stiff black locks like burnt matches, I'll make a deposit of one eye ! – : upon the sly hand 3 twenty-mark bills (the rest in fifty-pfennig pieces; I didn't do bad tickling the tender surface as I removed them, responsibly=slowly; and she smiled at me, checking out the capitalist, overandover : what naïveté to hand it over *to me today already*, I mean nuttin' but white Bordeaux ! The secretary was now suggesting something about a ‹blue plate› at the department store : "*Very* filling and tasty : inexpensive !" (Well, you'll see a thing or two !)).

Yes and what then ? ! : ‹I would kiss : would kiss I say ! !› ? – The only sturdiness came from K.E., Chidher the Eternal Youth, who in farewell thrust a slip of paper between my fingers, with the the address of a ‹fine lass› – the city is simply making a fool of itself : instead of keeping on hand 3 well-grown girls, high-school seniors, of various sizes and shades; given the appropriate inflammatory appeal, 50 volunteers would have signed up for sure ! No spirit left in this folk ! !

"When ? ! – Ohwhenever !". – ("Nono : the press will only be informed once he's gone again; uh=the public."). –

On the way home : about 30 Opel Captains and Borgwards parked in front of the pub over there; and so presumably a conventicle of Sudenten-German refugees (I was from the East myself; but no one can match them).

(Boat owners christen their rowboats ‹Erna› and ‹Lilo› : *why* aren't similar names painted on the right bow of cars ? ! (On the tanks of motorcycles). Purely at the owner's fancy, ‹Lorelore›. / Cath'licks can choose saints. / I myself – – hmmm, that wasn't quite – – what would I – – ? / At the least, send the idea off to Opel first thing : once propagated by sundry film stars, Fritz Walter, Onassis, the fashion would spread overnight, creating whole new alphabet industries, ‹Mucedorus & Angostura›. / Shy lovers could use it to announce their love, driving clockwise circles around the unapproachably adored : causing more

accidents, more hit-and-runs, trials, shift into reverse and aching heart, full employment, very good ! / Now mine struck me as well : ‹Nicolay Ivanovich Lobachevsky from Kazan›. / And, naturally ! : additional security against thieves : whoever doesn't have one, is immediately cold-shouldered, suspect : so write to Rüsselsheim right away !).

(I'll have to convert everything for him : prices in thalers; distances in miles (at 7.5 kilometers per). And I was 6 feet tall; although that varies too; both I, and the length of the foot. And cursed myself inwardly for already preparing myself this way – still had eight days after all, right ? !). –

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 :

(and I got up at 4:20 A.M. anyway, that nervous; shit ! I would have been 5 minutes *late* for Klopstock; for Schiller no sho period, without the ‹w› : shit !)

And toast it with Dujardin !

And to the Academy : "The curtain has already rustled !" the secretary confessed breathlessly, and with a puff-cheeked husk : "– Difficulties ! –"; disappeared, too, on hasty crepe soles; and I just sniffed : Marlborough s'en va=t=en guerre / ne sait quand reviendra : Come on !

Come on ? : considerably smaller than I. I gave a nod. (Fresh complexion; so definitely ‹lasses› !); and here we were walking down the Schlossberg side by side. –

‹Mythological figure› ? ? : good joke ! : female above, motor-scooter below / habitat ? : streets and empty moonlit crossroads. / Sucks the marrow out of the unwary, no doubt of it ! / When pictured on vases, often in front of gas stations; slurping at gas pumps; with short hair blowing; behind her, kidnapped youths, beefy and bullock-eyed. / We complemented one another, blow for blow, till he grunted contentedly for the first time (not that I was trying to toot my own horn : *I* have no need of that !).

Everything had to be explained to him (he knew steamboats; although he pictured them as rather like Papin's pressure=cooker, but so what).

"Meteors right – ?" : he had spotted 3 jet fighters; and I gave him a digest of the developments in aeronautical navigation since Blanchard (he only knew the term ‹fighter› – bare-chested, dukes up before his ornery mouth; and perhaps the Leipzig volunteers of heptaty=heptaty-one – we grinned in agreement at such enterprises, and came another little bit closer together : bon !). / Lead him on : "Yes. Of course we can make clouds whenever we like." "Dye them *too* !" the notion struck me.

"No : houses can be bought by the slice nowadays."

"No : the shirt is now worn *out*side men's trousers, not *inside."*

"No : telephone booths !" (his knowledge of ancient languages facilitated my explanations immeasurably !).

East Train Station : I couldn't drag him away from the tracks, not a foot, not an inch, not a shathmont; nothing but ‹steam-dome› and ‹connecting-rod›; and even gave olympian nods all round. I lured him away with

Women's fashions : now that really pleased him ! He moved his lower jaw inside its limp skin coverlet at the sight of a tall platinum (‹strapless›); sidled closer to a hyperbuxom raven-locks in a leotard and obviously sans falsies (and I thought in disgust ‹You old lecher !› – though to be sure, at 70 I'll probably be just like him. Transformed it therefore into ‹old connoisseur›; and gloomily pinched my mouth tight. He spontaneously recalled ‹Faust›, and ‹Götz› and ‹Werther› too; but apparently not until I mentioned the names did he recall ‹Iffyjenny› and such).

(And it was int'resting ! : exactly in accord with Henry Miller's theory, ‹heighten the sense of reality with obscenity› : bypassing to what cultivated literary historians always term ‹his female figures›, he grew visibly more alert, disons le mot : ‹more alive› ! I constantly= discreetly reminded him, however, of ‹the trace of his earthly days› : *another* motor-scooterette ! –

Interpolation : from which can best be recognized that this is indeed a factual report; otherwise, as a shrewd constructor of concise literary forms, I guarantee I would have avoided such an embarrassing repetition of motif ! But that's the theory of other people, the ‹traveling talesmen›; on principle, nothing happens in my stuff – not that I could be said to be averse to catastrophes, o no – well, no matter;)

this time a cleaning lady, her broom over her shoulder, on the left steering horn, bucket-gray shopping-bagations; short old hair; within the twilly smock rested the might of bosom; the selenium eye-panes spotted traffic signs long before they needed to be obeyed : Blocksberg candidate, the skull (inside) full of transistors. "Our wizened Baubo comes alone" we muttered, on the banks of the street; it clattered beneath the broad hams, the calf columns stood hard by her; and she laid calmly, sovereignly, into this curve : ‹a woman› doesn't always have to be 17; au contraire !

"Our libraries ? : were destroyed. – I'll get back to that; I'm following a carefullypreparedplan" came to mind (which obviously flattered him; although he simply nodded worthily, à la ‹as is only meet and proper›). / He knew cranes in their simpler forms; but at once showed his approval when I called his attention to the empty iron webbing high

above construction sites *plus* the molded blond locks of some lady-dare-I or other, who Farbelowright Overthestones, there's a street in Aschersleben named that, ... ed by : yes, what ‹. . . . . ed by› ? ! / We conferred long : . . . trailed, . . . drifted, . . . floated, oh shit !, . . walked (he, with grand force), : . . . circulegged ! (me !); so strangely did the maiden's yellow hide blend with our word supply and the Schlotteresque background : . . . wandered; humboldt-currenting; . . . pastured (? : no; she was moving too fast for that, her head too high). Sad to say, she was already around the corner; nor did I know where she resided sweet and lean. In any case, we gazed at one another after this showdown, not without mistrust, and each gave a curt teeter of the brow.

Further along, just before the ‹Red Tower› : damn, wasn't that . . . ? ! . . . : ! ! : despite low-slung cap, blue overall=over-all, and pasted-on beard circumflex, our 1st chairman ? ? ! ! Is *he* ever curious ! (Or had he perhaps been secretly directed by ‹the committee› to spy on me because of those 66 marks ? They were capable of anything !). He was holding awkwardly (you noticed at once that he did *not* belong here) onto a scaffold, and attempted a craftsmanly grin; in his hand, the milky little body of a dead light bulb (death was apparent from the lateral gray splotch of rot); by way of precaution, he used his babbler's tongue to press his false teeth against his gums; setting them righter . . . . .

"Writers ? : Oh go on !" – so we were agreed on that as well : "Barefaced cowards, that's what they are !" (they can stick their dotdotdots up their dotdotdots ! He nodded and asked about the deleted words, and got the details with no hesitation : when we geniuses are by ourselves, I'm candid, as is only proper.)

In the ‹Monkey Wards› : (once, they hadn't had my books at ‹Sears›; since them I've unflinchingly gone to the competition; who will cast the first stone ?).

Under panties, above brassiers : nix pornography : the display counters ! – He recognized them at once; the way a man should. / He observed both the familiar salesgirl, who smiled at me, and her halo of neon-tubes (You dotdotdotted flower-girls too, you know : nix pornography !). / Yes, the escalators grew large and lovely in these parts; those yes; (and an officer of the new German Army was just stepping onto the tumescing metal cataract, and let himself be borne upward, between passing banks of gold and fire. Goethe gazed benevolently at Mr. Good & Slenderful – parallel formation to ‹Good & Beautiful› : "The best advantages in life are enjoyed by the educated soldier !"; and I nodded

at him bittersweetly : My 6 years of war plus imprisonment wouldn't have hurt you none neither, mon vieux; then you wouldn't drivel such foolishness !)

"Those are at any rate our two main products in the Federal Republic : escalators, and=uh . . . . . : ? : no that over there is ‹herring in aspic›" (and wandering among obelisks of toilet paper and condensed milk, ‹happy land where every citrus / grows to ripe and perfect fitness› : those yes ! !).

Third floor : now let's have a quick bite ! I immediately took 20 marks from my official pocket and stuck them into my private one, and invited him to join me in a giant knackwurst – he preferred fish filet *with* remoulade *and* fried potatoes. / Conversation, standing, eating at the counter : "Nah !" A visit to the Goethe House in Frankfurt ? : he shook a disparaging headpiece to that as well (distressingly ‹red cheeks›, be it noted by the way) : "It never looked like that !" (Since I neither *was* nor *wanted* to be a Goethe=specialist, I paid no notice to his objections; my successor 100 years from now can do that – if there's a successor; if there's 100 years). / (Annoying accent too : Hessian garblage; well, I had once lived in Darmstadt for a year, and could understand him).

"May I ? : this gentleman is interested in the military." In front of the toy counter; on my palm the litho-green tank with white star : "Speed of ten=fifteen miles per hour. Canon caliber, 7.5 centimeters : about 3 inches : we just spent 4 billion for some old ones."

"The Americans have occupied Europe ? !" (in his day it was still the other way around). / "Are there perhaps maps of Mars for sale yet, one to one hundred thousand ?" (cheerful; ministerial; rumbling amusement). I answered with a flat "No". But then reconsidered, we all can have weak moments, and repeated, more softly, : "No." (He hadn't even expected an answer). / At the sight of a bald head wandering among the aquarial display cases, it hit us both at once : "Sanshaira" (as pun and pooh-pooh to the serious=minded).

At the exit : held the door open for him – he strode stiffly on through, hands at his back. Beside the ‹Zoo› pet shop; up ahead an archway blocked the churchy view. Turned to me – (and Satan promptly insinuated the portrait into my mind again; Karl Josef Stieler had been the ninny's name : I spat a Dujardinic glop) – : "Who are *you* actually ?"

Who was I actually ? : my fist fell down along my trouser seam. Then crossed; the arms crossed (if only I knew better how to make use of the stock of inadequate punctuation marks) : that made me 6 inches taller than he. (And the advantage was definitely on *my* side ! : *I* knew it all :

‹Are you filling wood and vale›; ‹In thicket's shower›; ‹islands vaulting, islands whisp'ring›; ‹I cast myself upon the earth› : ‹What see we now so far away / realms where gliding waves hold sway ?›). / He knew nothing about me : so you're the one at a disadvantage; at least psychologically : saikollójicklee ! / Slender figures flowed about us; girls in such gay fabric; and fellows allowed to wrap an arm around them; ‹None but the poet deserves the fair !›. / At the five-point intersection, the statue; so cleverly fashioned you couldn't say if it was a representation of Bismarck or the Virgin Mary : suits the times nicely ! A crafty mind, that young sculptor; I knew him personally; will go far someday : "No; a ‹Germania›".

"At least not a coward : a coward would not have served as your guide !" (He can have a look at the rest later; from ‹Leviathan› on through the still unfinished ‹Schröter› – : ? – : "Yesthat'sright; the old astronomer".) / "Of course even *nowadays* the poet's barque sails most safely on the trade-wind of public opinion."

To the toilet ? – Wellyes, he was considerably older. Besides which, weaned from earthly viands. Out of curiosity, I entered the adjoining public stall – I do have to submit a report after all ! – and with puckered mouth, cautiously peered across . . . . . :

There he sat now; flooring of little tiles, mix of bright gray and black : he was ‹observing› it through the tube of the toilet-paper roll (ah : the aforementioned Schröter was to blame; presumably imagining himself as some sort of astronomer; had, after all, once tracked a complete lunation; in small soundless movements, his mouth described the silent, sad pattern of tiles by number and placement); while from the rear wall, back & butt, came lowings and rattlings – seemed, on the one hand, to find it unpleasant; while on the other, it visibly refreshed his ties to ‹earthly life›. Characteristic for us motley of shit and moonshine. / Hope my wife's cooked a decent meal. Something cheap : they're *not* going to see their 66 marks again ! As sure as my name's Grundy ! / (Friend : ‹Sassafras›.)

Waiting outside; quickly jot the catchwords down : Short story. (‹Apoettheosis›, hero=worship : rapturous young man; immediately goes to the toilet after it's been used by his adored poet; rises up with the clap. Submit it to some periodical or other ‹for Christian culture›).

"Streetcars." / I asked an elegant fellow to open up his ‹Isabella› briefly; and explained it all as best I could (although I don't drive : ‹the spark plugs flashed their ashen light across the pavement›).

"An ice cream ? : why certainly !" (the salesgirl really was just *too* cute; all apron fabric, and taxed fifteen-year-old diligence !). / On past new

buildings : "Ohyes ! : As a rule the scaffold builders carry little expensive cameras with them; and possess the most intimate and fetching collections" : racy=racy !

"Ah, before I forget : . . . . ." (I avoided titles; he had been so awfully proud of ‹Minister› in his day) : "?" / Nnnoo, he hadn't. But the Stolbergs had been acquainted with Johann Gottfried Schnabel. Which was to say : primarily their parents had ! (And I listened with greater mistrust; more and more sweeping Central European turns-of-phrase; in undulatory prose – instead of admitting to a simple "No." : never mind !). –

Bläschke's Rare Books : the ‹Stevenson›, 31 volumes for 64 marks, had been sold, Rottenrotten ! What with the ‹squanderings› in my pocket, *and* an additional 8 days of rigorous starving, it would almost have been possible ! So I could only manage my customary envious pout (my face will freeze like that some day. The way Kr.'s has) : *just once* to own an old General German Biography ! ! (While he excitedly gazed upon his ‹Collected Works› in 40 volumes. Then the ‹Selected› as well, up on the right, for 8 marks 50). (But the bookshops had *def*initely been tipped off by the Academy ! You don't normally see that many cords of Goethe stacked up in the windows !)

Pyrker ? ? : we both grinned, enough to put our mouths out of joint; ‹Tunisia› and ‹Pearls of Yore›; "should give that to Dr. Adenauer for his 80th birthday !" (Briefly explain who that was. "I'll come back to him several times." – "To Pyrker, 'course : who else ? !").

Heinrich Strasse : now and then I called his attention to a piece of sculpture. "Here : ‹Mother with Child› : that's the most beautiful in the whole city !" / ? / ! / He snorted for a long while before admitting it.

The long avenues, flood of cars; girls stalked the far side, a mailman pedaled his blue & yellow way along (symbol of the modern messenger of the gods : a bike like that, and a money pouch slung over) filled with telegrams and nasty CODs. The streets were cleaner than ‹in his day› . / Drew nearer : the air-hammers wrested (with a ‹w›), till our dentures wobbled ! Plus a deaf neighbor who had learned the violin sans instructor. "And you live here of all places ? !" Yes, sad to say; ‹Poets and their Fellows›. (While climbing the stairs further discourse on my ‹sad to say› : Lüneburger Heath; friend of barometric lows; of junipers. *He* was more for humpbacked uplandishness, you know, those ambiguous sorts of landscapes).

"Meow ! !" (and the mannikin hung back behind the frosted-glass wall) : "Upstart." He gave the visitor a mistrustful eye and one curt fanning with the tip of his tail : *something* was wrong here ! Proceeded into our one=room, living=, bed=, dining=room, likewise torture chamber (one

can also call it a ‹study›; or, *most* elegantly, ‹studio›). / Gloomy corridor : beyond the curve the gentle racket of a small vacuum cleaner, which I had given my wife for her birthday; corrupted by the ad ‹más tiempo para el amor›, which had proved to be brazen deception :

"Lilli ? ! Coffee !". The introduction. (And now and then she quite unabashedly took pictures of us – he hadn't an inkling, of course, what it was she was casually peeking through there and snapping and clicking – "Uh=the doctor prescribed it : for her eyes" I explained with furrowed brow). (Afterwards, however, nothing was visible on the film; *most* remarkable. How I sat there conversing with Nothing; demonstratively displaying my teeth chisels to an empty armchair. / – : ? : Yesofcourse I put the film and developing on my bill ! – / Just once, something indistinct, like Cartesian vortices, glassy, stacks of biffins, medusa colony, chorus of smokers, whatever).

"Ah, now that's interesting !" : the little Torpedo M 20. My wife, despite my having forbidden her to wear that low-cut blouse, was making a copy of my radio program on Karl May; he bent lower : nice typeface !

"Here, pleeease." (She'd just finished the page; she fed it an empty sheet) : he majestically erectioned his index finger, and typed, car tel est notre plaisir : ? : ? : ‹G› !. "‹o› is here, up on the right" I assisted (but all he did was say : "Ah.").

"Karl May ? : Emm, ay, wigh. – Well, grand symbolic novels; autobiographical ‹In the Realm of the Silver Lion›, vol. 3 and 4; Pilgrim's Progress in ‹Ardistan and Jinnistan› – all the rest trash : lots of trash ! Evening radio program."

(Explain what that was. And examples, shown and quoted : Cooper, Fouqué, Schnabel, Brockes, Pape, Wieland, Dya-Na-Sore. (Planned : V., M., S., T., M., Z., L., K., H. : camouflaged; there are too many nimble-fingered folk; just to be on the safe side)).

"Goethe no; nooo." (and by way of explanation the polite addendum) : "I don't feel I'm ripe for that yet. – About like q2 – q4 in chess." (Gallant. But he was obviously considering if that was a compliment).

My library meager ? : "That's purely a question of money these days ! I lost everything in Silesia once already; any such innuendo is quite out of place." (Pure, hard High Command=style, huh ? : ‹Dissent would be insult. Advice would be pain. Words are superfluous. Silence alone is fitting : bang !›).

Because he apparently was looking for his works and hadn't found them (I had hidden the greater part of my middling edition). Once he had extracted the monotone binding, he gave the nod to ‹Collector and

His Own›; ‹Émigrés›; ‹Rameau's Nephew› : brilliantly translated! (‹Benvenuto Cellini› boring as hell in comparison.) I first explained to him the others, one by one :

A complete Scott : "Very good !". He was sincerely pleased, and I was happy to agree with him : the fellow *did* have talent. That too. / Cooper : he had just finished the ‹Pioneers› at that time. / Schopenhauer ? : "Not that young man who said of my theory of color that= uh . . . ?" "Yesindeed; that's the one," I told him; and he thrust his lips into a surprised pout. / Frequently thinking up elaborate lies. / My encyclopedia was from 1910 : it *is* a scandal; granted; but what writer can afford a new one ? Who earns that much ? "Besides, I wouldn't have one of the recent ones if you gave it to me ! : What we lack is something like the ‹Bayle› : – but that sort of work is impossible in Germany. Neither in the Holy Roman West, nor in the Red-Guarded East." (Although more likely there. Centum=Federal Republic; Satem=GDR).

"Who earns that much ? : why, every really good writer ! – The man who can't count on 1 million readers shouldn't even begin to write," he declared, all mean-spirited triumph and Eckermann. / And I gazed at him for a while; likewise brushed my right hand along my chin : shall I kick him out ? – But then they'd inevitably demand their 66 marks back ! So let him be. / But a curt rebuttal all the same : "With your so characteristic fuzziness, you've failed to add a second proviso : for a ‹really good› writer, those ‹1 million readers› will have to be evenly distributed over the first 500 years after publication of his book. And a third, no less important : Your ‹1 million› must be comprised peu à peu of the nation's best; not its children, uniformed youth, senile cattle, or other assholes." (Got it ? ! – My ‹tone› did not please him at all; that was clearly noticeable : Ah well, his didn't do much for me either ! But I ask you : Which of us two was right ?).

The best German-speaking authors since thy first death ? : the question I had feared ! (Had of course prepared myself briefly, *very* briefly for it. But I had to groan all the same, as always, at the mere thought of the topic ! – He leaned back, the audience, and enjoyed it all, ‹Vice President and Deputy Director, Retired›, as a fellow recently introduced himself).

(But first an interruption : fine ! : at the open window an enthusiastic blond head (or was it a blonde head ?) marionetted and sang jazz : ‹Allthenativesdanst : Pánama : áaa : O^{u} !›. Oh bright & shiny face, how many good slaps would suit you ! So I got up, and closed the pane. To his interrogative open hand : "I didn't understand it *either*." : "Yes, but

it was in German, whatever it was she was singing !" (he, outraged; determined to know. And instinctively ‹she›? – well, let's just call it ‹vital› this time around.)).

Avanti ! : "Heine". – He wrinkled his Zeus-like brow ever so slightly : now *that* impudent name, too, he knew he'd . . . . . : "And so he *really* had some talent ?". He did. / And Schopenhauer also, 'sineed. / Stifter, Raabe. / (The devil goosed me, and I added Gustav Freytag). / Gottfried Keller : "Swiss. But all the same." / Storm : and may no priest approach my grave ! / Nietzsche, Hauptmann, Stramm. Däubler. Brecht. Albert Ehrenstein. Döblin, Jahnn, Kreuder. / Otto Babendiek equals David Copperfield. / Werfel. Musil. Edschmid. / Pause. / Shrug : "On the basis of the material, perhaps Fallada as well, sullen and honest." / Pause. Pause. / : "Schmidt."

"Schmidt ? ? – – : ah, I see" he said graciously, when I mutely pointed to myself, and smirked knowingly : "Good. – – : *very* good really !" (And had to gruffly fetch the handful, too.) / The dust jacket of ‹Faun› : and did that tongue-tip ever make a tour around the hole of lips ! But then obligingly opened it up all the same (and hit on a fast passage : *another* advantage of my technique : even if you're holding the book upside down, you immediately recognize the page's tempo !); around 90 here; he nodded, held at an approving tilt; but then began to shudder and laid it aside, discomfited (judging from which, the explosion, ensanglanter la scène; he simply couldn't bear it. And yet it was one of his recurring perversities : he once asked an acquaintance, Baron Rutern, to tell him about the amputation of his right arm, and also how his right big toe had been chopped off; Rutern, who knew his man well enough, considerately did so as mildly and gently as possible; "and yet it was quite remarkable to watch the contortions of this dear, serene man's handsome face" !) / Then ‹Lake Scenery› as well, photo IX – one *more time* ('mhonored, 'mhonored !) and tapped out the rhythm with thumb and index finger. Plus its accompanying ‹text›. Lifting eyebrows ? (too long). Ah : eyebrows, eyebrows let them fall. Me, by way of explanation : "*My* ‹Venetian Epigrams›." (His lower lip remonstrated against the comparison; his brow nodded agreement).

Concluding with the gracious question : "What are you working on at the moment ?" (At the ‹Moment› ? : to my regret, it had just suspended publication : wasn't he aware of that ? ! – But then I thought better of it) : I pointed with my chin to the blowup on the wall : ‹Telescopium Neutonianum XXVII pedum, constructum Lilienthalii 1793› (Soothingly appreciative, the technician's gaze he bestowed on it; while I

drank ‹Münsterländer›; and consoled myself somewhat with thoughts of ‹machine 2› : here's to that !).

"Do my works still live among the people ?" : Actually I should have laughed, laughed and countered : Have the works of an important poet ever lived among ‹his people› ? ! – Well, you can explain it to him *this* way too :

"Mais certainement !" I readily confirmed : "in educated circles one is sure to hear an occasional ‹working hand over Faust like Gretchen›; and that other quote, that ‹you can kiss my›, has become splendidly common usage !" / (What a shame I didn't own a hidden tape recorder ! – But afterwards, you probably could have heard only *my* voice on that too; like a chess game with the white pieces missing). / (What a notion : a poet ‹living among the people›. We can rejoice, godknows, if even the *intellectuals* know us !)

"Whom do you consider the greatest German writer ever ?" – I did hesitate a bit; Wieland; Jean Paul (shall I exasperate him with that ? – A motorcyclist thighed past atop miniexplosions, with white-lacquered helmet : a life-preserver strapped to his back ! ! That restored me to consciousness, me, Long Michael Grinsnout) : "I'll write it down for you," I promised. (And pull out one of those famous little slips of paper of mine. And scribble . . . . . : !).

(He couldn't even read my barbed Gothic hand at first; so I transcribed it for him into rounded italic as well : !).

He folded an offended old-man's mouth. Drummed his long little finger as well, I suppose. Tilted his head very energetically by way of introduction. (But then spared himself a reply after all, and stuck the paper in his breast pocket. – I had merely written : ‹The young Goethe before he left Frankfurt for good›.) (Later, equally averse to both icebergs and volcanoes. Carpet-roller, dubbed noble.)

"How's that ? ! : Here ! : Please ! ! ! : ‹To Coachman Kronos› !" – and so I read it aloud to him, with rattling wheelwright voice, Cerberus-drawn jalopy (and at the end, weak-kneed ninny that I am, couldn't help it : picked over his fingers, and pressed an enraged=shamefaced grimaced kiss to the back of his hands. He grinned; and I immediately regretted the smooch too; he crossed those Old Master's feet in delight; and at once I held his portrait beneath his face : the one with the letter from King Ludwig of Bavariable in his hand : and people must be able to read the Royal Name, he had strictly enjoined Stieler ! *That* was another real monkeyshine ! He wagged his head, gave a sullen sigh. And admitted it. "And afterwards the scene with Eckermann, the poor dumb bastard; when you gave him your answer to read ‹so that he

might learn how that sort of thing is done›, right ? !" – Well; wipe the slate clean; we're all heinies.).

How late is it ? : Right, a clock ? ? – – My dear friend – – I bescratched my cullions in indecision (to employ a less commonly used word) – – (and then, softly in the kitchen, asked my wife, if she wouldn't go next door and . . . . . ? / She was most unwilling; wanted ‹to have something of Goethe *too*›. / "You don't have to stay long you know." / : "Then why don't *you* go; I'll entertain him in the meantime !" (Can believe that)). / But then a solution occurred to me. I went back to him, and coolly said : "Quarter till four". (Made not one damn bit of difference anyway). / (Then the doorbell rang : a salesman with shoelaces; cunningly clad as a mailman, with commensurate cap – so that people would think he was delivering a telegram, and open their door to him. Tossed him out right now !).

Paleontology ? : yes; that was very important to him ! So then, triassic=jurassic=cretaceous. He at once jotted down the name ‹Darwin› on the back of the slip of paper from before. And I nodded approval : "Dee, ay, arr . . . . ."

"Ahyes, the Teasers & Shakers; large & small !" : we came effortlessly to agreement; by words, by signs. (He had made the acquaintance ‹up top› of the second female epiphany, one Anna Lee; and he knew some very charming details : "But Joan Southcott is *much* the more interesting : tough sixty-year-old !" / "And Eva von Buttlar ?" : he gave several=slow nods; lost in thought; the visionary's gaze directed right through me, at some invisible portal : !). – "Ahyestheshakers" (and much wagging of the head) : "Large & small." – (But was, and would always be, of the old school, who consider teasers & shakers indispensable for restraining the common folk, for upholding law & order). / "And in your opinion, then, *always* will be ? !" *"Always* !" – So decided I'd tell him a few things about the German Democratic Republic *after all* ! : " 't's a shame we can't fly over there for a couple of hours : my niece is just about to be initiated as a Young Pioneer : and that *really* is quite different from our bankrupt swindlers !". He let each and every facial feature droop in disbelief, and rocked his head in thought : "I prefer to have nothing to do with tradesmen and farmers, unless I'm giving them orders." (Aha : Elective Affinities; Part the First, with ‹the›, and chapter 6).

History ? Fate ? : Politics are our fate ! (Though I felt like using anything but exclamation marks : it really is *too* sad what all has once again been done to us recently in that regard ! The muggers and tuggers of our democratic freedoms ! / Or in South=Korea, how the front-running

front-running opposition candidates have a way of dying 10 days before elections !).*

Abstract of history; from 1832 until the reintroduction of the military draft 1956 : how the world was gradually set on plumb; that is : "The artificial=unnatural preponderance of little Europe – actually just the fissured northwest cape of Asia ! – has already been two-thirds eliminated; after the next war *it* will finally be for the world what ‹Hellas› is for Europe : touchingly=archaeologically embraced as the cradle of culture. We'll cut our capers then between stumps of columns : ‹this then is my cottage / : the rubble of a temple !›. For baksheesh from bespectacled Tartar professors. Or tall men from Oklahoma." / He didn't think much of Germany either, ‹yes, rattle your chains, rattle›; and we were growing, excellent, your Excellency, ever closer together. Followed with burning interest Russia's ascendancy, England's decline as a world power. And America's. Bring on the atlas : a sharp mind that !

Instead of Australia being systematically populated with 300 million whites ! ! We tapped our brows eloquently; and I uncorked a fourth bottle (wonder if they'll allow for that much later ? Which is to say : *I* am well-known for my wooden leg; and of him, his duke wrote with resignation, "Goethe could guzzle something terrible !" Well then, Vogue la galère : cheers !). (‹One Germany inadmissable› : *quite* right !).

So then : Russia, USA, China, India : cheers !

I gazed at the Grand Old Man from boiled Bordeaux eyes; saluting him occasionally; and we issued the following joint communiqué :

> Napoleon : was Europe's last chance ! ‹Massenbach.› Wrecked by German-speaking peoples : the Prussian=Germans are big . . . . . (a holey explicit plural followed; bisyllablic; we nodded undaunted; from my own resources I added ‹dangerous fools› as well; and, giving a ministerial imprimatur, he raised the stubby wedge of his right fist : "That too. Yes."). / End of communiqué.

I bent forward somewhat : pater familias (Lilli & Upstart !); I whispinquired : "Do you perhaps know – for the imminent Third World War – – : of some safe little corner ? ?"

He blew air through his (not-insignificant) nose. Chewed hesitantly on his mouth's mucus membrane. He spoke frankly : "If you mean between Rhine & Weichsel, nah. Here in the ‹Federal Republic› . . . . . ?" (sympathetic=scornful; his drooping mouth said quite enough about these meridians).

* *Addendum : on 17 Feb. 1960, for the 2nd time !*

"Well then – I mean – I really ought *not* let you know – –" (I had merely asked about the date for the outbreak of the next world war) "– but recently, – – up there – –" (he pointed with a fabulously intriguing corkscrew of the shoulder toward the fourth dimension) "– I chanced to speak with *him* – – : that is, roughly with what you'd call ‹Frederick the Great›. And even now he's still uncommonly interested in the squabbles down here – –" (he rocked his head indecisively – "to be sure, a solid young man" I heard him reflect; and : "practically my only connection with down here . . ." – (*Me* : in my mid-forties ! I mean, if there's *anything* I cannot bear, it's this ‹young man› stuff : a man gets frayed enough, that's for sure !)).

"So . . . . ." he gave himself the push; he bent forward; he whispered the date : ! / : ? ? / : ! ! !

"Oh damn !" I said exhausted : "That soon ? ! – And with the very first atom bomb they manufacture here in Bonnonia ?" (And another heartfelt curse : at that bum, at that bum ! : *what* a swine ! !)

And : "Nah; I can't move there !"; I shook my head in resignation : "Just think of : the expenses alone; for two; plus a cat !" I cuffed all suitable places within reach with the palm of my hand. "Nono; even if the consul *were* to grant the visa – – – : Oh shit ! – – – Uh=beg your pardon," I added, exhausted. But he just moved his head in protest : "You're absolutely right." With dignity : "And now I've just made things more difficult for you."

Long=short pause. –

"Well then, let's die : cheers !". I pulled the cork out of the next bottle : ‹Having no more regard to thine : than Schmidt !› (And here I recently just missed becoming a *sexton* by 1 hair : for the splendid official residence ! – And drink; two glassy flashing pairs of eyes.)

"If you were to write nowadays : here in this place; your ‹Werther›; the Epigrams and Elegies; Prometheus on his Italian Journey : you would long ago have been hauled into court ! As a defeatist; as an eroticist; for blasphemy; slandering political personages !" / ‹But 'tis always the selfsame sun that sets of an evening› ? : this one here grinned like red blazes, out of a high collar of stiff taffeta clouds, into our faces. I spoke it out bare-faced; and after brief consideration, he approved the metaphor.

Attacking him artistically : for his prose forms : "The wretched way the anecdotes of his ‹Meister› are glued together : when he runs out of material, just goes right ahead and inserts a novella written 20 years before. / And then the chapter transitions ! – I beg you :

‹Apprenticeship, V, 9 : . . . and so they discussed many other subjects. We (sic ! : ‹WE›) shall not enter into them any further, but shall perhaps in the future present this new adaptation of Hamlet to that portion of our readership who may possibly find interest in such matters› : and that right smack in the middle of the tale ! !

‹Apprenticeship, V, 14 : . . . . . and carried on with him a most wonderful conversation, in regard to which, however, we prefer silence to a discussion of its details, thereby sparing our readers the torment of disconnected ideas and alarming sentiments.› : the typical carelessness=laziness of someone giving dictation; who's had enough, and wants to call it a day !

Now our hero departs; but wait, there's 1 page of the manuscript book still empty ? – : let's quickly fetch an old poem out of the drawer (and one can hardly imagine anything stiffer, more privy-councilorish !); and just tie it onto the coarse main thread : ‹Apprenticeship, V, 16 : . . . . . and so we shall let our friend commence his journey amidst 1000 thoughts and emotions, and in conclusion record a poem which Mignon had on several occasions recited with great feeling, but which we were earlier prevented from disclosing by the press of so many peculiar events : . . . . .› : I mean, a writer of prose can hardly sink *any* further than that ! If someone were to risk that nowadays : they'd stone the lazybones : *and rightly so !*"

"Until the last moment, Wilhelm is a young man foolish in action, clever only in speech. Lothario disreputable, boring, vacuous : of what then does the excellence for which he is constantly praised consist ? Jarno highly offensive; Abbé ridiculously pedantic; the Duchess a wax doll; Natalie cold-blooded; Therese quite unbearable; Friedrich a spoiled brat in need of a good thrashing. The harpist and Mignon qualmish and unnatural, yet deeply tragic and wonderfully romantic. Tower at the castle preposterous; not one person of character. Entanglements as unnatural as they are boring. The entire thing a failure; although in detail, ex ungue leonem on every page. The style magically beautiful." (Whoever can identify the author of this passage – I'm not usually fond of him; but in this case he's right – will receive, if desired, an autographed copy of my ‹Displaced›).

"Ah, sibling love, sibling love : Frank Thiess did that much better in his ‹Damned› !" / "Aw go on ! : After ‹Werther› it would have been better if ‹we› hadn't written any more prose – and it's a formal botch besides !" / "Poetry & Truth of course ! When a man has lived and seen as much as you have, he owes us his autobiography !" (Just as A. owes us

his pattern of a life ! : During the early Weimar years, veer to the left : like me. During Hitler, went underground in the goddam industrial complex : like me. Soldier and prisoner of war : like me ! After '45, German writer : like me ! After '57 . . . hahaha !)

He, of course, kept his composure and dodged (as I would have done too). / Diverted to sciences ending in ‹y› : biology; astronomy; philosophy. To his precise questions he received my precise answers, so that it all went quickly.

The evening ? : dissembled a few tidy hues together. Martins forayed (not ‹Martins Ferry› : that's a different kind of Wheeling !) in short= screeching arrows across the sky. The teacher upstairs was eavesdropping again to learn what sort of visitor we had.

Bicycles : the loveliest machines ! : "What are the greatest – and thus likewise *least harmful* – inventions since my first death ?" : Typewriter & aspirin; light bulb & Trojans ! *And* indeed bicycles ! ! : I expounded for him on the slim-legged young girl atop the frame; he saw the black bony slacks; but understood the translation. / "Just imagine how my ‹photo-album› ‹Tandem Rides› will sparkle ? !" / (But first of course ‹Lilienthal›; ‹Flak Base›; ‹Police School› : a man needs 4 heads; and 8 hands; well, perhaps our grandchildren; from atomized chromosomes, quien sabe). –

Taking our seats : What might be humankind's one salvation ? – We, neither of us a shallow mind, pingponging, invented the remedy : ‹Pantex›.

‹Pantex› : – : the combination space=time=light yields a mixed energy source emitting gentle rays; which – similar to gravity – is always ‹there› : and these rays have been made ‹useful›; as ‹Pantex›, ‹omnivision› !

"All seeing ?" : "Yes well, it probably had its limits : range of vision roughly that of shortwave and television : as soon as the earth's convexity gets shoved in the way, that's it. But that's easy to compensate for with a denser network of transmitters." / "Look here : when I push *this* button –" (his finger depressed the imaginary spot) "– I can *hear* everything too ! – Noo : not taste and smell ! Not that thanks !". / (And we shuddered for a while. At the very thought.).

"If you darkened the room, there'd be nothing anyone could do ?". / With Pantex, with omnivision; the selenium plate aimed exactly; germanium crystals; electrical core; 3 scales : angle of elevation phi; distance e; automatically coupled with magnification n (up to life-size – and of course you could go at it then with the magnifying glass besides : lip-licking : ‹magnifying› !).

"Nono : marital intercourse can only be undertaken at 13 degrees of twilight – or below." (The officially normed lightmeter must therefore hang on every wall : new industries ! – – "No : even tying a mask over the face would not exempt you from punishment !").

In the halflight (below 13 degrees Schmidt) crude sinning goes on of course : but then that went merrily on in the christian era by broad daylight. (They claimed : ‹God sees all›; but that was purely hypothesis. / But nowadays the phrase is : ‹Mrs. Grundy sees all› : and that would be a fact ! And would have a quite different effect : because practically no one bothered about God : but everybody about Mrs. Grundy ! !).

So that : what religions have only promised for so long now, would be maintained by these simple machines : long live technology ! / "Long may it live," he muttered; lost in thought.

Quickly the details : Every home must have ‹Pantex› ! (Without it, permission to establish a household would not be granted; fee, 4 marks 50 a month). / Marriages are happier now : everyone knows his partner corporally – from the bathtub or whatever . . . . . : "No, *that's* allowed – and happens everywhere too – : lying naked in the sun ! The frighteningly ugly refrain all on their own. So that every man=woman is forced to keep him=herself in good shape : in the hedged-in yard or out on the balcony. All well-trained. The men always clean-shaven. – And in general one has had time to observe HER sufficiently : whether she likes to squabble and trample about; slaps her siblings; smacks her lips, gorges herself, masturbates; her face when asleep."

(Once your secret love is sitting there quietly, you can photograph her to your heart's content – though all the while you're being watched in turn by a third party ! So the colleagues at the office can maliciously talk about it the next morning. / Adultery ? : is made colossally difficult ! / No more of the old inhuman abuse in the military. / The voter can check at which nightclub his representative blows his expense account. / At least the illumined half of life would for all practical purposes be excluded from sin ! / "Just imagine the benefits for biology : observation of animals !" (But that was not the most interesting part at the moment.))

Nono, we'll become ‹better› ! : Dirty jokes and obscene gestures would disappear. / Swindling, forgery, thievery, murder : are no longer profitable jobs. / Privacy of correspondence ? – "Important things must of course be written in the dark with nyktographs." / "And when you're observing a poet : there he would sit at his desk hard at work; looking things up; wrinkling his brow to great effect, scanning lines, and debat-

ing with his writing hand; 'zounds the dittography & homoioteleuton. Would no longer tipple like Old Scratch – at least not more than he can handle : since it would immediately have a disruptive effect on the sales of his books if the word was out : ‹He doesn't do a lick ! Just stumbles round the room, belching like a pig : have a look yourself !›" / Tender : people can tune in on one another : shy lovers converse aquiver (when their parents are at the sinamuh (= Cinema)) : "Loosen your hair, darling !" – she makes the touching gesture; and he : "Ohhhhhahhhh ! !"

Worth noting, too, the purely external realignments : in all buildings, the apartments would be at the *bottom* : because less observable; the range of vision would be smaller ! The shops, contrariwise, as *high up* as possible : people could, in fact, saunter through department stores on their screens. / Check whether the shoemaker is carefully regenerating my old clodhoppers (or just going at them sullen and slipshod). / The average *vocabulary* would grow per year and person by about 0.3 percent : since one never knew for sure who was watching=listening at the moment : to a man, civil servants would be hardworking and polite (someone might be taking pictures and taping right now : Cave !). / The butchers and pastrycooks scrupulously clean. / No one would sit there anymore, picking his nose. / Or letting revolting farts : everyone would go to the darkened toilet. / Everyone would take pains to dress neatly; move gracefully; speak as sonorously and eloquently as possible.

The curious ? : old women & retirees ! : who would sit at the things day & night of course; reporting every piece of dirt; denouncing (whole bureaucracies would arise, to evaluate and file the material : in ‹Leitz› binders, here, like these).

And then the governments : at first they had inveighed : ghastly ! Intolerable invasion of individual privacy ! (And many followed suit : those of dark financial deportment; one could never really know if at this very moment Someone might not be tuning me in just as the postman delivers the registered letter of payment ! – Schäffer, Minister of Finance, was immediately in favor, by the way.) / "Yes, 't's clear : the policy is to locate all observation posts atop high towers !"

And so governments & parliaments at first raged liked madmen (which they are) : nothing would be secret anymore; foreign affairs jeopardized; not to speak of those ever famous, never in stock, ‹new weapons›. It would take years before they ingeniously yielded ! (i.e., for as long : as it took for them to properly stage the coming spectacle; for members to visit film schools; what a Reinhardtesque delight such a plenary session would be : their entrance, sturdy, stylish, stubborn,

like knights of the Grail, resolute for every virtuous deed; the faces sparkling with intelligence & responsibility . . . . .) / Deep melancholy overcame us; for

the closed sessions ? : would of course take place in darkness; so that a special trill language had to be invented; each with the tips of his fingers in the palm of his partner's hand (and at once I showed him the standard work ‹International Trilling / according to Dr. Lou Clitoris / or / How to Trill Successfully› : They are making *us systematically* dumber !).

Made dumber : the evening news. – The dial glowed mysteriously (how cleverly they've paired the ideas of ‹light› and ‹truth›. "Just like in ‹La Lumière›" he confirmed. But waved this away when ‹Freedom's Station 904› came in : gentle children's voices sang ‹Strike down those who rattle their swords›. No no ! Better if I explain wave bands) :

Waves ? ! : he first made a wry face and then undissemblingly goose-bumped his whole body : constantly swaddled and tickled by crystal networks ? ? (Another shuddered display of the shoulders : brrr ! / Right : he had always had the feeling that by merely touching a copy of ‹Poor Heinrich› he would contract leprosy ! (But he *is* right : in the summer cottages near the first Hamburg transmitter, in 1924, our screwed-in light bulbs burned *without* current ! : really is pretty crazy !)) / Here the volume dial : and now it came again sprightly and trochaic : ‹Cling not to your worldly cares : dare the new and dare the bold / : that the sun renewed may shine / o'er German shore / : may shine. O'er German. Shore.›

At the window, dusk, but still with a very wide hem of red attached below. / "Yes, that's a colleague who lives across the way – famous man." And we regarded the gently glimmering rectangle : red curtains, stiff house front; the maple's silent artful foliage before it : ‹She whose nightly lamp illumes this earthly globe› (and I leaned back with greater grace : just in case we *too* were being watched from over there).

Sunset red (genuine homemade. We had found sufficient restaurant receipts from earlier trips – so cleverly scribbled by waiters on pads provided by breweries; on one of them the date was even correct (though not the year) within 2 days : fine !). And he ladled away for three, nuttin' but sago and tapioca; his jowls moved like castanets (critically eyeing Up-start, who was wandering behind books along the top shelf.)

Between bites, he : "Well, you haven't made all *that* terribly much ‹progress› ! – You've continued to develop the *balloon* – as was to be expected. / Electricity. / *And* you still don't know if Venus rotates in 1 day or 200 . . . . ." / To an objection I raised : "Dear friend : the

knowledge that light rays bend around centers of gravity was old-hat in my day !" (I at once made a note of the name : damn, will that ever put Einstein in a huff !)

This too : "Freer morals ? ! : Well, you should have lived in Weimar !" Tapered his tongue and licked his lips with relish : for ‹lassies›. (There are many things that one cannot become, despite the most unflagging zeal; e.g. virgin).

"Ohenoughofart ! : Let's just talk about poetry" he held out to me 2 formal, most interrogatory hands, and I drummed testily on the leg of my chair. "You yourself admitted a while ago that ‹Coachman Kronos› . . . . ." : "I mean, that's utterly unfair !" I said angrily "just because in a moment of weakness . . .". He gave a dignified=innocent grin and admitted it offhandedly. / "Just for that, you can take my ‹Calculations I› along with you : my ‹Lake Scenery› is included at the front : that way you'll have something good=new to read up top, too !" He at once stuck the blue-black pamphlet in his frock coat, surtout, gracious and armed for critique, all Mephisto and his pupil and nous verrons. –

"Madame ? – : A Dieu !" Upstart dodged behind my uncollected works, raising a hostile fan of claws in the air. And by way of precaution, I interrupted the over-lengthy handkiss : "We don't say ‹dieu› around here; I've had too many difficulties with the fellow."

"What is that ? !" : in the corridor. Fascinated. – : ? "Song of the meter." – : "At night, around 2 or 3 is best, when everything's very still, the electric meter sings. You can stand there beside it for minutes on end, mouth closed, eyes squinted : ee – oh – ah : oh – mmm – ee". / (A conductor who dislocates his arm while directing : victim of his labor.) / I'll have them skeletonize me – after I'm dead – and display me in the stairwell of Görlitz High School : the name attached (a label on the ankle); plus ‹A former pupil of our institution›. / Once again : "Adieu, madame" (Eyed threat : !). –

Island Street by evening's gray : 3 silvery crosses above, grumbling blissfully. "The church's ?" he asked disparagingly. I nodded violently, my eyes still on the things : how true, how true ! (Then explain : why it is that churches are so good at canonizing. – The cars, right & left, stuck out their fiery tonguelets).

Our city's ‹Goethe=Strasse› ? – : "Yesyes; we do have one . . ." (but I didn't dare show it to him : a short crooked thing; way the hell out; and the signs read ‹German Poet, 1749–1832›; art blooms in Podunk ! / He saw my embarrassment, and full of presentiment, did without.)

‹Look, there steps a tall fair maid / moving off with long full stride !› : gray skirt; murk of tiny polka-dots in the weft; black blouse with sewn-on

cowl. He saw only defects : skinny leg frame, the unripe arms like white sticks. Sandy hair, a pelt at the nape; blue, bold eyes; the mouth, however, already painted red. (Right : *he* had loved only the ‹fuller breast›). Entered the building; before it a blue-gray Volkswagen H 71–4222. –

Crackling of invisible high-tension lines : and I watched him attentively : What does Goethe think ? / (Nothing. He suspected nothing whatever behind the noise at first. Especially since the lower air was awhir with model airplanes.)

Or, there : that row of trees toward Rotenburg ! I pondered my way between splayed and pointing fingers; I soldered the words together :

‹Black freight train. (On stilts). Unevenly laden with cable drums; close curtained tanks; stood over there; bombed to hell; and waited. To continue the journey with me.›

"But what would you say to that ? You, who have known neither freight trains, cable drums, nor tanks ? !" / He was too lazy to consider mundane matters; but understood quite well what I meant : this was the fence between us; Gadir. (I nibbled off a nail meanwhile, and spat it out; quite ungentlemanlike; the broad meadow was silent, as in his day. – (Am *I* the only one who's constantly reminded of tanks; and that for this public 1 single brawny bandshell concert by the Army effortlessly offsets the effect of 100 of the best issues of the ‹Alternative›.)).

Chorus of Laughers : "Here, so they say, Matthias Claudius wrote his ‹Are you filling wood & vale› – oh : I beg your pardon ! : ‹The moon is newly risen›, of course !" – he understood my vindictive affront well enough, and we shared a jointer smirk (‹and now that which is mine is miner than ever›; Hermann & Dorothea) : You would bring them both Error *and* Truth now, Herald of Wandsbek / : Truth ? : proved too hard for you then. – – Error ? : you took that away ! ! : charmingcharming ! / Or this : "Gods of old Greece you did slander aloud, Apollo then cast you / from his Parnassus : thus you entered the kingdom of heav'n !" : To all those who made asses of themselves with my ‹Pocahontas› ! / (And I – not wishing to draw up the rear ! – provided accompaniment with the motto for my ‹Displaced› : "Loneliest wretch you dare to spurn your fatherland's blessing ? / : Yesbyheaven and I've paid with enough of my tears !"

The athletic field across the way : an entrance like the Brandenburg Gate ! / : "The center-forward owns a Captain of course." : And we stood there opposite one another abashed as aborigines :

a) What is a center-forward ?

b) What does he own, ‹a captain› ? (he imagined them as some kind of ‹white slaves›; supercargo; and rightly so : the way I described for him

the historical development via Billy, Hitler, & Sons).

(Street lights ? : "No : it's *not* an illumination in your honor ! !")

(It is not always praise if one celebrates a nation for having been the cradle of great men. Also necessary, at the least, is proof that it was their *grave* as well; and even that has a less than satisfactory effect when the pilgrims seeking to honor them are constantly given directions to some Beech=Wood or other : all too soon, this play of words will have become and/or will have been made sadly=incomprehensible; for which reason I will therefore now add : the name of the nation referred to here is ‹Germany› !). –

The telephone booth on Paulus Platz : just yellow framework and plates of frosted plate. A girl inside : the receiver at ear one, her ring hand at ear two. Turned, wooden doll, little red-skirting; danced, and conjured HIM ! Laughed, too, with haughty red head at us addicts; gave us (inaudible) lip : Mmm !; listed lasciviously; pouted lips and shook ear-hands. Raised her red brows : ? : Puckered her mouth – did a trick with her shoulder blade, setting her right breast bopping : ? : 'sindeed, we were still watching ! / Sensed the church silhouettes too. In the left side of my back, the ‹bank›. The grassy suburban street; beyond, the flat bungalow facade. (She trampled with pleasure, and kept up her starling chatter).

‹Wandering› on : streetcars; mandolin music in the afterdusk : ‹Sugarbush I love you so !› : Why, o maiden, are you turning red & yellow ? / "You'd like to ride on one of those things ?"

"Garçon : two tickets for the train station, please !" : he liked the specific blue-green light; the thronging of people; once more : "No : not an illumination !"; we glided through the city on our tin raft : the world had become one great big department store. / With black faces and silver hair they curtsied in the shop windows, hover high, hover low, bending, bowing : a witches' coven (if you lift up one of their skirts, just wire, a fluorescent tube in the spine, a jar of Nescafé for a heart).

And into the leaden black concourse ! : well I suppose I can manage one platform ticket. / We strode experimentally across gray cement bridges (under which the giant serpents lurked everywhere : now & then a humanling ventured closer : the iron gills opened up, and it vanished. I watched him greedily from one side : are you still not filled with dread ? Ought to be able to talk about the war : ‹For Sun- & holidays I know of nothing better›; but he had managed to write about *refugees in hexameters*, the soulless automaton ! I was once again so full of antagonisms, that . . . . . He noticed that I held something against him, and inquired : was also a strong fellow !). / (A timetable for

the six months of winter 56/57, take one along with me right now : "Just a moment, please !").

Standing before black benches. (Downstairs; in the iron body of the station). And slowly he began to sense the eeriness; the windowpanes lifting on metal belts; trains flowing out; faces drifting by (that one would *never* see *again* ! And all so fast : ain't no post-coach !). / We bought ourselves a beer at the stand; he exchanged a few double entendres with the serving wench, the weary, distended female; she saw at once that we had no ‹money›. / Masks peered over newspapers (from their express=trains; Orion nebula of cigarette smoke; the vertical fluorescent tubes overhead this time). Torsos slept stiffly in coats : he'd never seen it like this ! Beneath iron zeniths.

Back upstairs. He was obviously pondering. He muttered : "I'm sorry for you." (In English – ragtag accent; I wanted to show him how it's done : 1 year as interpreter at the police school in B., my good man !).

In the station restaurant : "Oh ! It's almost time for me !". (Fifteen minutes yet). ("Nono : *no* pilsner ! the baba 'll be quite enough !").

He nodded slowly. Solemn. Pensive. All Truth & Poetry. Gaze at him a little longer : my blasphemouth hung open. "I am a big asshole" I proposed. He kept on nodding (moderated somewhat by the puckered mouth; the rocking head – : alright, just a little one, bon !).

The clock hand on the facing wall made a mechanical swipe : across the 12. He raised a hand and himself; nodding and thought-full : "Hm – : Hm=m=m=m !"

: "Well then . . . . . !" :

Before my dilated pupils there arose an eddy of yellow and wall; I cut through it once with the edge of my hand : it just grew paler. . . . . Once more ? : there stood a waiter (presumably upset by the disappearance of one of his guests) : black trousers; white jacket; "4 marks 80" : 't'sallyours : there ! (Clicketyclack).

I stood up alone : alone : without Goethe. I shoved my chair up to the table : order comes first. "Mission accomplished !" I reported military fashion to the empty seat : brushed with blank sheen. Blank. Blank office. –

(And tomorrow tote up the bill.) –

((All in all : he didn't kick me in the butt. Not exactly.)).

After the delivery of this report, a press conference was scheduled (everyone had a hectographed copy before him); I recall only the following points – (in order to mollify, to some extent at least, the conviction, broadly expressed on all their faces, that my guided tour had produced no results whatever, many of my answers had to be – something contrary to my nature since childhood ! – pure invention) :

Nr. Question	Asked by	Answer
1. His voice ?	P., essayist, gay	Normal elderly; for emphasis – weak, sodden thunder.
2. His laugh ?	Ditto	Benevolent=toothless; vaulted=haughty (the latter more often than necessary).
3. His hands; his hair ?	K., poetette, who chanced to be present.	Hands : short, yellow, wrinkled. Hair : combed high for effect à la Gerhart Hauptmann (quite obviously because so sparse !). / Light gray. / "Hand-hacked" occurred to me as well; it was eagerly jotted down.
4. His opinion of my work ?	The poets HD, TR, V, WSch, GH, KK – even H-W S (sic !); as well as : the poetettes LK, EM, (former Naziette), IB, MH – in short, half the Kürschner Guide.	All of it humbug !
5. Whom did he praise ?	Ditto; with altered manner in putting the question.	D, J, AA, MB (the filosofer), me (general murmur and laughter).
6. Does he want to become a member of the academy ?	Its secretary	No.

Nr. Question	Asked by	Answer
7. Its honorary chairman ?	Ditto; after consulting with the 1st chairman	No ! / "Why not ? !" many outraged voices in confusion . / Answer : too many dubious members (leading politicians who ‹also› write); prize often goes to gasbags.
8. What does he think of a) our Chancellor's foreign policy	Journalist, Christian Democrat; obviously looking for propaganda	a) Nothing.
b) the introduction of the 49 % clause ?		b) Nothing.
c) the Hungarian uprising ?		c) Nothing.
9. What about codetermination ?	Journalist ‹World of Work›	Wasn't mentioned. (Now I'm on the wrong side of the unions. But I assume – all things considered – he'd be against it !).
10. How judge he reelect Eisenhower ?	Director of the F'er ‹America House›	*Very* unfavorable ! : Generals in politics !
11. What are, in his opinion, the most significant German newspapers ?	The gentleman from the ‹Rheinischer Merkur› ; triumphant.	Studentenkurier, Hamburg/AZ / Hannoversche Presse / Nürnberger Nachrichten / Neues Deutschland. (Several minutes of steady whistles; "Bunk !" "Lies !" / Booming, scornful bass : "Sure it was all nicely laid out for him !", couldn't miss the military tone, probably from one of the veterans' papers. / No one bothered to ask about significant magazines now).

Nr. Question	Asked by	Answer
12. Does Goethe think a war is likely ? And when ?	Unknown man; all in black.	Yes. / Soon.
13. Was he impressed by the most recent raise in pensions?	Civilian; question put so naively, presumably a member of the government.	No ! (15 marks at Christmas; and no guarantee you won't be crushed to death when you go to pick it up).
14. Does he approve of an Adenauer visit to New=Delhi or Tel=Aviv ?	Prof. K., member of the European Council	To Pankow.
15. Why ??!! : – in your list of the most important post-Goethe poets, didn't you include Hermann Löns ? ! Hans Grimm ! Dietrich Eckart; Herms Niel; Blunck ! Horst Wessel !	Ponderous. In a brief foreword, acknowledged himself as a member of a tiny, but promising right-wing party and briefly presented its political goals. (Nods on all sides and approving murmurs).	Right, why not do you suppose?
16. The John affair?	My, did all those faces grow curious!	‹It's a mess !› / (And now they were just as wise as before ! Then, each added his own, according to conviction : the sentence / John's behavior / the whole proceedings / etc.).

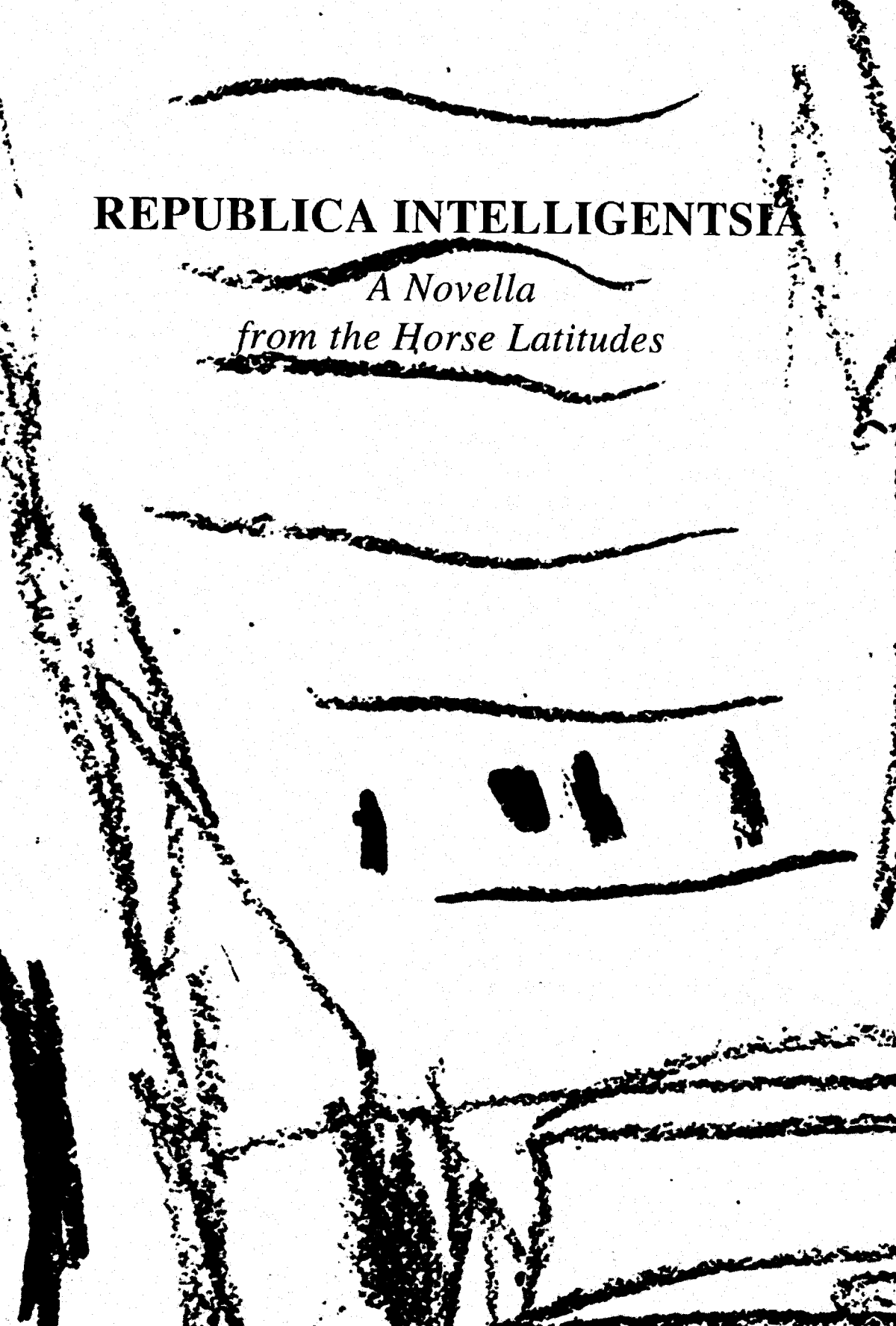
The next day, every single newspaper in Federal territory *and* in the GDR (5 lines, under ‹Cultural News›) reported Goethe's visit. Without exception, it was determined that the ‹guided tour› (surely one of the ‹important› ones) had obviously been entrusted to the most unsuitable person possible. (Variants : an incomprehensible=, enigmatic=, unbelievable=decision). – Many of them demanded – in connection with the ‹6600 marks› – to spice things up, many omitted the period before the zeroes – ‹stern measures›, (variants : ‹fraud›, ‹tax-money›.) / Most of them used the occasion to tie in an offhand review of ‹Stony Heart›; in which such lovely formulations occurred as : ‹the devil's inverted rectum›, (‹gravedigger of German morals›, ‹where's the public prosecutor in all this ?›, ‹fehme, why dost thou delay ?›). / X was ‹absolutely and solely› responsible for this. (‹X› stands for about 170 different names between aleph and taw) – by ‹this› they were referring once again to the Goethe=visit.

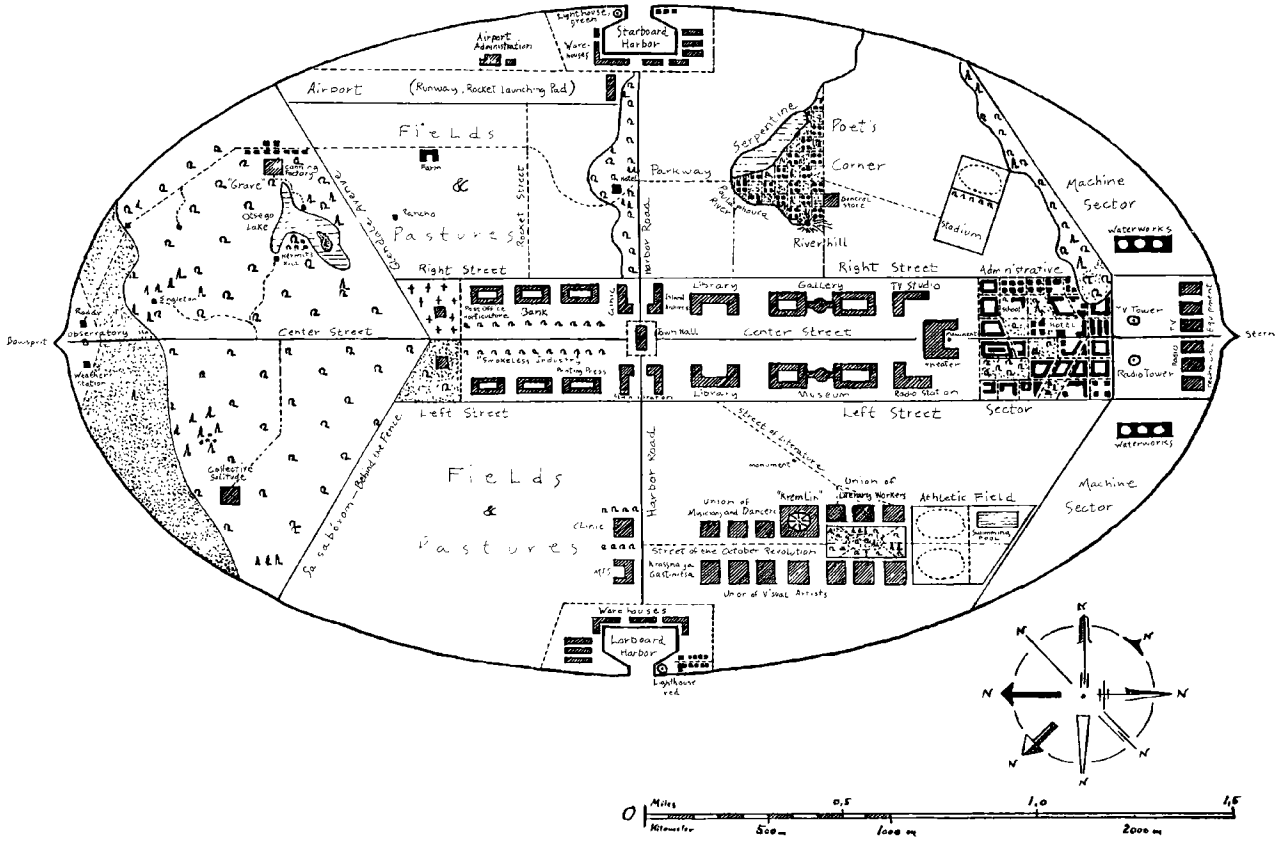
In my own defense : I categorically deny, here and now, the crude assertion made by several persons that the above report refers to the Academy of *Mainz* : where does one find a ‹Red Tower› in Mainz ? Or a ‹Schlossberg› ? I do indeed know of a ‹president› there, but no ‹1st chairman› ! And there is most assuredly a ‹Heinrich Strasse› everywhere, the list must run as long as John Silver himself ! Should I get wind of another such rumor, I shall ruthlessly proceed against the person in question – not in a court of law, that is not my way. But I shall dedicate my next book to him ! : the economic and social consequences will teach him a lesson for the rest of his life !

ARNO SCHMIDT

REPUBLICA INTELLIGENTSIA

A Novella
from the Horse Latitudes




Starboard Harbor
Airport Administration
Airport
(Runway, Rocket launching Pad)
Fields
&
Pastures
Poet's
Corner
Serpentine
Parkway
Harbor Road
Right Street
Center Street
Left Street
Machine Sector
Waterworks
Stadium
Gallery
TV Studio
Library
Museum
Radio Station
Theater
Bank
Clinic
Town Hall
Observatory
Weather station
Collective Settlers
Cemetery
Grave
Farm
Ranch
Quarry
Lake
Power station
Smokeless Industry
Printing Press
Union of Writers
Union of Dancers
"Kremlin"
Union of Literary Workers
Athletic Field
Union of Visual Artists
Street of the October Revolution
Street of Literature
Ware houses
Larboard Harbor
Lighthouse
Lighthouse, green
Airport Administration
Water towers
Radio Tower
TV Tower
Waterworks
Machine Sector
Bowsprit
Stern
N
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Miles
0,5
1,0
1,5
Kilometer
500 m
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2000 m

(In accordance with Interworld=Law No. 187, dated 4/4/1996, ‹Re : Scurrilous Texts› – Paragraph 11a of which provides that, as commensurate with both reasons of state and certain other literary purposes, tracts of a political or otherwise offensive character can be published if rendered in a dead language – and under permission granted by Interworld License No. 46, the following has been translated into German from the American original of Charles Henry Winer.)

Data:

Status: 1/1/2009	Author	Translator
Age	30.8	67.3
Height	6' ½"	5' 3"
Weight	175 lb.	175 lb.
State of Health	+ 3.0	- 1.6
Erotic Drive	8.1	0.04
Temperament	sanguine	melancholic= choleric
Profession	reporter	headmaster (emeritus)
Income for 2008 (dollars, gold)	45,000	2484.37
Vocabulary		
American	8,600	3,200
German	1,400	8,580 (of which 3,000 are MHG)

Translator's Preface

If the Commission has deemed this text worthy of fixed form and preservation in print, that is perhaps due above all to materials which are hereby made – dare I say – ‹accessible›. Since 1982, when Audubon published his ‹Intimations of Hominids› (and with *what* circumspect convolution I need not remind the specialist. And at the time there was as yet no constraint of Interworld=Law; he could have chosen to report in quite another fashion.), we have to all intents and purposes lived in ignorance of biological developments in both gammannihilated Europe on the one hand and in the American Corridor on the other. Every contribution is of value here; particularly since a remarkable stabilization in terms of hexapodia appears indeed to have taken place.

As to the ‹Republica Intelligentsia› proper, the description found in the second half of the volume in hand may indeed give rise among unbiased readers to the impression that here too – be it by radio, be it by television – we have received only selected information. What, for over thirty years now, they have sought to convince us is a ‹Floating Parnassus›, a ‹Helicon in the Sargasso Sea›, has in the interim become for many – at the very least since the publication of the candid and, for certain parties, embarrassing letter of the Algerian Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Abd el Fadl – a dubious matter. Here, then, though the form be tendentious and the tone frivolous, access is provided to additional data. –

I would request that one personal difficulty not be underestimated : the translation proceeded from the American language into a *dead* one. Ever since the gammannihilation of the Motherland, ensuing as it did so early on, German has been unable to keep spirited pace with technological and sociological developments – with the result that certain implements, apparatuses, manipulations, as well as intentions and patterns of thought, can be rendered only by circumlocution. Quite apart from the, to put it mildly, very frank and all-too-amply detailed ‹sexual intercourse› of the author – the German language has, happily, been unable in this respect to develop further modes of expression that would simultaneously be both commonplace and impertinent enough to allow for the rendering of such processes as, for example, ‹urtication› with all their consequences. – Footnotes will, as occasion arises, attempt to fill in such gaps.

As regards the author's unremitting, telling aversion to all things German – though, ultimately, of German descent himself – as well as regards his, to use a nicer term, eccentric mentality, I can only give my assurance that I have taken pains to provide an accurate translation even for such passages. –

The original text of ‹Republica Intelligentsia› is to be found in the manuscript collection of the Douglas/Kalamazoo Public Library; the 8 microfilms reproduced from it are located at officially designated international depositories. The German translation was made using copy No. 5 (Valparaiso).

Chubut, Argentina, 24 December 2008
Chr. M. Stadion

22.6.2008 : On daddy-long-stilts of light, the sun's tight-laced paunch above the landscape.

Late afternoon in the car[1] *: another groping* – ? – Yes : notebook, telescope, green shades; credents, those especially. / And the road rattled : sun & cactus fusion. My digitensils lay lazy before me. Flanked by the captain, who smoked (and sang; constant refrain of ‹oon› : moon and noon and June and raccoon – do you suppose by now there are human clans whose only vocabulary is restricted to certain vowel colorations ?).

"Bad road !" – But he shrugged just one shoulder : heads straight for the wall here. / We had left Prescott, Arizona at 4 P.M., and you sat in this heat as in amber; (people in blocks of synthetic resin, that's old hat. For passing fashions and stuff on to posterity. As a boy, it was No. 238, in the Detroit Museum, who had been my great love (although ridiculously old-fashioned nowadays of course; back then, I used to offer her every one of my teen erections. Haven't seen her for eleven years : away my thoughts trotted.)).

That dusty streak on the horizon ? : "Yep. 't's the wall." (And slowed down; the motor quieter still. We drove right up to it.)

Then turn to the north; keeping alongside it : "Nono : 8 yards high !" / Which is nothing to sneeze at, come to think of it : two concrete walls, each 4000 miles long, cutting off our American atomic corridor on both sides ! (Itching to know what it looks like inside the Sector : it's claimed they've sighted whole troops of centaurs in Nevada ! Quite apart from the other wild rumors. After all, I was the first person in 11 years to be granted a transit visa !).

And holding course along that endless=ashen concrete wall (jointed 2 x 2-yd. plates). / Behind us, the two khakified guys, sprawling their combined 13 feet over the mailbags. Now and then Leftie cigaretted; at one point one of 'em stuck the radio in his ear, and heard silliness (you can usually tell by the look on their faces what they're getting a tootleful

[1]Ultraquiet, nuclear-powered; I have selected the closest approximation from the obsolete terminology.

of !). / "Do you know what the wall's cross section's like ? Thickness and such ?". – He first carefully took the curve, and then puckered a demurring indifferent mouth; shook his head, too, and splayed his shoulder tips : "What for ?" (Li'l' info here).

5:20 P.M. : "The guard house." (Well, finally !). / We traced a delicate quarter turn and stopped : at once, on the white walls, in the black apertures, heads of the garrison emerged. / (Thermometer by the door : 95° in the shade. And warmer weather forecast; this could get outa hand).

"Winer ? – : What the ? !" : and I had to present him my credents first thing : ID with photo, thumbprint, dental chart, penis group. Then the permit to visit Republica Intelligentsia, stamped in octuplicate (i.e., by every Great Power) – he'd never run into anything like that before ! / Then USA=Permit, printed on special guilloched paper, for transit across the Hominid Sector. (Picked it up several times, did the Colonel-Sir, while his lurking brow rugulosed. Thought was occurring behind those West Point brow-ramparts. He adjourned, with my precious pass, into a back office. Spoke long-distance there too; at length. – When he returned, there was some sort of smiling at the bottom of his unpleasant soldier's puss : you could see that just now, inside, he had been nodding his head off.) And went on nodding :

"Right. – : Well. – : You'll have to be examined first of course. And I'll see that you're given a special advisor : there's an east wind; that's helpful." –

In a white courtyard (and my single-handed bag stood pathetic & wee beside me). Across the way, a sergeant was checking whether my pocket telescope had the regulation 20-fold magnification (civilians are forbidden anything greater; as per Interworld such-and-such : might spot too much up on the moon, huh ?). But the plastic lenses measured 19.74 exactly; could've told him that ahead of time; had been checked by Caltech. And he reluctantly handed it back. / Then the doctor was ready to go :

"Heave up onto here, please !" : so I heaved; and the Geiger counter glided along over me, around me, into me. Over there the – superlavish – blood sample was getting centrifuged : a spiffy assistant peered through the microscope with her left eye (while her right appraised naked me like some figure on a tapestry); her mouth fired salvos of numbers. / : "Why's your hormone pressure so sky high ? – Had a fallin'-out with your girlfriend ? Okay." (Whereas in fact, on the advice of my avuncular friend – who, by the by, was the fellow they'd let visit Republica Intelligentsia 8 years before ! – I'd been saving up

on purpose for 4 weeks. He had given me broad enough hints, a word to the wise is sufficient, that they ‹lived it up› on Turboprop Island; to make sure reporters were ever so adequately impressed, they assigned them choice secretaries, ‹for dictation›; and I, although only 30, figured I had to do my share.) / "You don't say ? : one hundred forty-three ? ! – You'd better take it again." So she took it again : ? : same result ! (And now the WAC risked both circumshadowed eyes !)

Sundry injections : a white 1; 'nother white 1. / "Pale green ?" : "Yeahwell ! Case you=uh *should* get stung by a spider or whatever !" he snarled disconcerted. (And cryptic=peeved addendamutter : ". . . brand new . . . for whatachamajiggers (?) . . . : That way it's not quite so . . . . ."). –

"Major Bancroft : Mr. Winer." / Now this guy was actually nice, the ‹special advisor› assigned to me ! About my age; small and wiry; we regarded one other with several satisfied nods. / Even helped me suit up. (All the items I'd packed for the trip – few as they were ! – were carefully disinfected; and then shot by rocket-mail across the Sector to Eureka). All they gave me to wear here were some rough linen shorts, ditto a coarse jacket. Uptop a broad straw hat; beneath my feet rawhide sandals. Plus walking-spear, compass, sunglasses (‹by mistake› they'd ‹forwarded› my scope along with my luggage). The canteen filled with water; ration-concentrate for 3 days in the knapsack. / "We'll take off together in a hot-air balloon : yes, we're very old-fashioned when it comes to moving back and forth !"; laughed like a big kid; and we were getting along better again.

"Hmm=yeees – one more thing, Mr. Winer : you'll have an east wind to fly into the Sector this evening. As far as possible. The rest you'll have to negotiate on foot – Major Bancroft can explain that to you as well. *– I –*" (and this ‹I› received emphatic=thoughtful stress) "*– I* would keep to the shade of the large cactus thickets as much as possible on the march : it's really a lot cooler in there – : uh=justasec ! !" (because Bancroft had raised an astonished hand for permission to speak – but let it fall again, bewildered by the way the colonel had disarranged his already uncongenial face ! Poor WACs.) / "Uh=justasec, – beg your pardon, Mr. Winer." (Took my major off to one side, and I mean *way* off; and vigorously gave various orders; presented said major with a finger fan of at least 5 reasons held up to his rascal face; even made a fist of them (at which point his carnassials were set in layered rows !) – the major put his left hand to his throat, and pulled it past : on the one side 4 fingertips, on the other 1 thumb. / Finally he shrugged and set his heels together : he had understood.).

"I'm giving you another document to take along."; and the Colonel-Sir

jovially held out to me the black-sealed rod, long as a finger : "As soon as you meet someone, hand this over : you want to see *Pluvus* !". (And disappeared, before I could even ask : first, *whom* I might be meeting ? And then, who said ‹Pluvus› might be ? (Not a pretty name; I wouldn't want to be called that)). / "You know anything about this ?"; but Bancroft had buttoned up a lot more buttons in the meantime, just shrugged, and stalled.

Sunset at 7:30 ? : "No; we'll have to wait a while yet; has to get darker. That way we avoid causing any alarm." – I wisely omitted all questions, à la *who* might possibly take alarm. For the meantime, we sat down on the stone bench in front of the guard house, and watched the garrison play baseball (a black man stood directly before the disk of the sun; kept raising his bat, and slugging away, as if to send our diurnal star out of the park : !).

Guardroom Conversation : "How many wall stations are there in fact ?" : "One every 30 miles." / Garrisoned by ? : "The small ones, like us, 50 men." / "What's the actual shape of the wall ?" – He used his swagger-stick to draw me a cross section in the sand : 1 yard thick at the base (anchored by that much into the earth, by the way); then up 8 vertical yards on the far side; uptop 3 yards wide : "So that we can travel on 'em like streets with our scooters; when we're in a hurry." – So it's 8 yards high on the inside too, but with a slight overhang ? : "Yes." – With duralumin struts inserted for support. : "Yes."

The sun sank : the ribbon of haze in its horizoned arc turned bloody; yellow piled high in wagonloads. (Soon it would be green; then something even colder. Gusts of wind came from the east, from across the Nevada desert, setting our shoulders ashudder.) / But still waiting. (And first you had to get used to these sandals. Although they all wore them here).

And so, Guardroom Conversation II : "Ah, you were in Europe during the war, *too* ? !"; he set his excited face in my direction, and warmed up again. It turned out that in 1990, as twelve-year-olds, we had not only been in the same division, but even in the same regiment – although he had been in the frogman unit in the Caspian Sea (which, once the Weather Corps had forecast a south wind, they turned into atomic drizzle and sent wafting across western Russia : his description was very interesting : how they'd camped there for weeks on end in a plastic dome at the bottom of the sea : the giant fish, the sturgeon; battles with submaritime Russians. How, with 20 seconds ‹to go›, they'd been airlifted across neutral Arab territory (and had come that close to being shot down !. And got all excited again in the telling !). / I had been just

a lowly cryptographer; but knew every name and detail all the same, too. We shook hands several times; laughed; and nodded frequently. (Granted, he seemed – especially when it came to the things we had most in common – embarrassed and anxious : now why was that ? !)

The stars in antiquated panoply. And I Lance=corporal, his hand to his cap : ! / Our hour had come round. / Major Bancroft stood up with a sigh; strangely indecisive. And we walked, one behind the other, onto the patio where our balloon was being inflated : that's going to be a weird feeling floating along in an old-fashioned ball like that ! (7 yards in diameter; can lift 475 lbs : we were weighed in full gear –, –, – : declared too light. With a mutter, Bancroft fetched another little sack of whatever : still too light ! So throw another even hundredweight of sand ballast on : ? – okay; that does it ! / We lay bellydown in the very shallow straw bowl of the gondola. Side by side. 6 lackadaisical privates held the ropes. I made one last obligatory bow (lying there; must have looked cute, too !) in the direction of the colonel's illumined face : which stood strangely askew in the night (or were we hanging askew ?), and emitted a military= polite growl : "Aeh=don'tmentionit. – Just be careful, Bancroft !". / Then the 6 faces suddenly grew much smaller ! My stomach cramped with the shock – – : ! –

At first, nothing (my eyes had to get used to the gloom first). But heard Bancroft next to me muttering confidently : he had the glowing numbers of the compass in front of his nose; then the watch too – and it must have ‹added up› one way or another; because he grumbled satisfaction. / "Nope : we can relax for the first 6 hours : the sun rises at 04:30 hours. And the wind's still picking up : we'll make our 3 to 400 miles easy – if need be, I can take us up a little." / "Nah : no way you can ever make it *clear* across the Sector; there'd have to be a real gale blowin' from the east for that ! – And you can't fly by daylight; we're not supposed to make the centies skittish unnecessarily." / Which brought us right to the topic at hand ! :

"The Centies ?" – : "Ahyes, the centaurs." – But had already turned nervous again : "Best thing'd be for you to get some shut-eye now; you've got some rough days ahead of you," he dodged (apparently wanted to think something over, and ‹be alone› so to speak.) / So I politely crossed my forearms in front of me : set forehead atop 'em; and tried to doze; (at least the hour and a half until the moon would rise; as it is, can't see a thing anyhow). / He kept on breathing, loud and uneasy.

And must have nodded off after all; for when he nudged me and muttered "Buckle up", everything below now lay in slumberous yellow light, and the two-thirds of a moon was lingering on the left, at the same level

with us. We were lying horizontally atilt, our feet slightly raised, head somewhat lower; and he explained it to me, while I threaded my arm in the loop : from the behavior of a couple of cloudettes of the night, he had determined that further up a wind channel was running hard toward the west, had at once let some sand trickle off, and had moved safely into it. And now we were "really making some headway" (which was confirmed by the rattling of the ropeworks, and likewise by the occasional flispering round the silk globe above us).

On our right a couple of busted constellations : "Is the radioactivity down there still especially high ?" : "Hh=mm; not worth mentioning. – Generally lower than for the rest of the earth : aren't any reactors in the Sector after all; no power plants, no engines, nothing : and no nuclear waste of any sort . . . . ." and he jerked his shoulders forward.

"Say, can you ever see the ‹Red Spot› nice and clear !" – and he shifted his head onto its chin peg, muttered something about "considerable libration"; and joined me in a long gaze across to the moon. (Both nations, the USA and the USSR, had allegedly shot all their ‹fissionable material› – 2,000 bombs each to be precise – into Crater Wargentin, in the south, and the result had been a riproarin' Halemaumau inside its rimmed plain, visible even at new moon. Ah well, it was in fact ‹under control›, as we were assured every time we farted (even though any child that knew his ass from his elbow could see they'd just transferred their atomic tests to interplanetary space : where else did all these unusually bright shooting stars come from ? ! (And it was a sure bet you didn't even see most of them; because they took place behind the lunar scutcheon.))).

"I was up there once," he said pensively, "as a courier."

: ? ? ?

"Notatall ! : The trip itself you're not even aware of : they put you to sleep – and all at once there you are !" / But this was new : he had seen maps with the sectioned off ‹spheres of interest› and ‹demarcation lines› : the Russians were sitting on the northern edge of Serenitatis; the Americans had their stations in Bianchini, on the Sea of Rainbows[2]. The Chinese, ever so cautious, among the crags of Picard, dead center in the dusty ring of Mare Crisium. / "No : you don't *see* a thing ! Like you're stuck inside a glass bottle : it's a dreadful disappointment, the whole deal."

As he spoke, the hair at the back of his head grew blonder; yellower. And

[2]Sinus Iridum, as per our standard nomenclature.

he, too, cast a disgruntled eye behind him; uneasily puffed his mouth wide : "In 50 minutes the sun'll come up. Best start our descent."

Slowly descending : in one hand he held the line for the valve catch (out of which, up top, at the northpole of our balloon, came gassy rustlings). We lay there like old serpents, and his face restlessly searched the plain, atilt-ahead-adown : sandflats; vegepeligoes; "The dark green ones are cactus thickets"; ("Ah : the ones I'm supposed to keep close to" I joined in, apt student) : he did not shift his gaze from his bird's-eye view; opened his mouth to boot, in order to scout that much sharper . . . . .)

Then suddenly his hand-on-arm made a grab upwards : ! : At once the noise intensified; and we plunged rather unpleasantly downward : !. (But these guys sure knew their business : he let it snap shut again so adeptly that we came to a halt about 20 yards above the sand – down here, there was almost dead calm –; then one last tug of the finger-tips – : – and our straw-bowl touched down unnoticeably).

"No : just lie low !" (right; he first had to let off more gas; otherwise, if I had stood up, the gizmo would lift right back up into the breeze with him !).

"Okay now : Grab hold, please, right along with me, of this sandsack – Heave : Hó !" – :

Like an eagle the lightened balloon husk shot into the blue ! (And within ten seconds could only be identified as a tiny disklet; if you didn't know where it was, you couldn't have seen it at all. And he nodded in satisfaction : one more task accomplished as per army reg !). / Then shake out the sandsack; slapdash burial of its wrapping : . . . . .; : . . . . .

"So : here's your stuff – " (his eye accidentally fell on the traveling compass they'd given me – and glazed over : "What's this ?" : ?)

He laid his own alongside it a few times; and once again, turn it *this* way : ? Placed his hands on his hips; thought; and muttered something that ended in "fuck-up". / "Your compass's poles 've been reversed ! : The needle is pointing south instead of north ! – Now what d'y' suppose . . . . ."

And suddenly grew very emphatic : "Hand me your gourd-bottle there !". So I held the chartreuse-clad half-gallon out to him. He pulled the stopper; sniffed : ,,,,, ?; poured some out in his hand as well, and sampled it with the tip of his tongue : "Damn, why that's – : gin !". "Hey; ain't that great," I said gleefully; but he turned a somber profile my way : "You're in for a surprise : what with the heat in these parts !" he offered for my reflection. "That damned mess sergeant ! ! !". (Pulled a

folding map out of a breast pocket, took a look and compared).

(On the straight-edge horizon, the solar vase : water-yellow; tugged to vast girth. / 5 minutes later : its edges now began fraying to virtual sunflowers ! Storm ?).

"As a backup, take mine here too; there's water in it." (He hung it on me, without asking. And I let him have his way; I had the feeling he had my best interests at heart). / "And my compass : I'll use my wristwatch in the meantime." / "Your walking-spear's supposed to have a cross-piece : take mine. – And this zap-stick here as well : just press the button, and give a light tap with the point; that'll up-end the sturdiest centie, beard and all !" / And so I hung it onto my wide leather shoulder-belt.

Honest beamings : "Much obliged, major !" – His jaw nodded a hard-bitten good-bye (his job was to head northeast; to make some ‹ranger rounds›. I still had a good 35 miles; always holding to the west-northwest : "Bye=bye !").

And so a tug at my knapsack; and turn my back on this loathsome sun ! – Wasn't especially easy going in the sand; but that was supposed to get better by evening.

"Uh=Halloo ! – Mr. Winer ? !" – : What's up ? Back again ? (And of very stern countenance; the doughty profile almost averted; he spoke sort of circumspectly considered) :

"I !" (and with what stress on that ‹I› !) : *"I : never* walk through cactus groves !". / Slowly let his expressively tapered right hand fall. Grimly tucked his head between rebuffing shoulders. Stalked off (I could tell from his back that I didn't dare ask any more questions). –. –

Stand there and use my walking-spear to draw figures in the sand. Then a shake of the head and forward march : strange lot, soldiers; you never see through them. (Each of 'em 's got some piece of crap he thinks is ‹secret›; I know what it's like myself.)

But damn decent, to leave me here alone like this in the Sector, totally uninfluenced, no supervision whatever : that way you can form your own subjective=objective opinion. (And once you know the ‹personal equation›, as good as purely objective : the filologists 've finally learned that much, how to subtract a writer's individuality from the text.)[3] / And below, my feet lustily traversed yellow and brown.

Interesting flora ! (Although of course I was not sufficiently well-trained to recognize what might be classic forms, and what new mutations. It's

[3]In the case of our author, the reader is particularly advised to do so.

really not my métier at all; a man has more than enough to do trying to gain tolerable command of just 1 field. Not like my great-great-uncle, the infamous polymath – must 've been quite a crazy coot too !)

For example, this here, tsk=tsk ! : shooting straight up from the sand, the dark brown quadratic, hollow-ground rods. Thorns as long as my little finger. But no leaves whatever. And in steady alternation, five-petaled blossoms and lemonlike fruit : wonder if they're edible ? (Better not; probably an aftertaste bitter as gall. Or, even worse, none whatever; so that you start imagining all sorts of things; and end up with the runs. And vomiting : Nope !)[4]

On a tiny pile of sand, standing and looking around : ? : The sun at my back, still of unlovely hue (just like the Colonel-Sir yesterday evening). / A circle of horizon as if ground smooth. / Off in the right foreground, a group of cactus columns : their candelabranches had to be at least 20 yards high ! – More to the left, more in my direction, another shallow packet of haze : probably one of those empty gallery forests they'd also mentioned. / Well, up and head that way !

Walking; and ceaselessly shaking my head at thoughts : of the extent of the damage done by the last two wars ! / Europe lay gammannihilated. This wide corridor here. / The pope relocated in Nueva Roma. (Near Bahia Blanca; where they had immediately erected a new Saint Peter's : claimed they'd rescued all the holy relics.). / Jerusalem gone (an Egyptian, so they said . . . . . Whereupon an Israeli had, of course, promptly set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca : Hadjoo !). / And lustily striding ever onward.

Before the dusty forest facade : now that I like ! Grandly vacant and void : silent. / I took my bearings again from the sun, and then walked in among the solitary trunks.

In the dustwood : the floor of finest hourglass sand. (Only rarely a larger patch of grain-yellow grass, sparse and low-lying : very sharp edges, those strawy blades !). / Every 30 yards a slim fair-barked trunklet (although panthered with regular dark splotches; the bark). 3 yards above the floor its umbrellaed crown went rigid. Only here and there a thicker stand of them, about 3 paces apart. / No underbrush at all : very much to my taste ! / At one point a bright scarlet mushroom (or more precisely : a thing with a cap : and then checking beneath it, or examining the waxen stake of its twisted stem – hm hm hm.)

[4]To judge from the description, this could well have been an Acanthosicyos horrida. Or perhaps indeed some new species.

I cast no shadow; nothing cast one : like a gray shallow sea with kelp and algae (but then what did that make me ?). / A thicket appeared in the distance; and so I decided I'd do better to hang my zap-stick around my wrist.

Or maybe I'm s'pposed to get wasted ? ! – So there I stood, right beneath the foliage-patterned sky. / And suddenly it all settled into a new understanding : 93-proof schnapps instead of water. A compass that's screwed up. Plus the frequent=officious hint about those lovely shady cactus groves ? ! / But Bancroft had been a gentleman : *and* a shrewd one ! : If they tried to sound him out under hypnosis (as they'd come to do for every diddly-crap) : he had never *directly warned* me, à la "Don't go in there !". No; he had merely observed : "*I never* walk through cacti !" / Well, I've got the picture at any rate !

Striding off more briskly; my organ-bearer scoping more rapidly=cautiously. (And a check to the rear : ? – : no; all's still quiet. Above, the gray part in tree tresses).

So there was something in there ! ! : That can do a man in ! / And decided I'd better unshoulder my lance, too : could it be those ‹centies› of theirs ? Must be some wild critters ! / Can I do 35 miles in one day ? : on this sandy ground probably n. . . . .

and stared at each other ! My mouth flew open; my left thumb was smarter than I and pressed the little button, my right hand aligned the lance's blade . . . . .

: "Oh-no" she said drowsily (It had been a long time since I'd heard anyone speak that slowly !). And went on chewing on her grass spikes. – : Damn, what was a naked girl doing lying here ? And atop a (bagged ?) deer ? !

She pulled a new stalk out of the coarse-fibered bag beside her; eyed it critically; took a test bite. – Then said (and always with the same slow-motion inflection; many consonants were plainly awkward; the voice, too, was very powerful; funny) : "You're no ranger."[5] she observed. A few more bites. Got up : – ! :

And the bagged deer along with her ! ! ! : I had to press my hand to my brow (and my fingers gaped wide, totally perplexed; to say nothing of my mouth) : so this. : Was a centauress ? ? – –

So this was a centauress ! : she let me walk around her several times, while she watched me, amused and bryllcreamy. – :

[5]So the original; for reasons that will be evident later, I have chosen to translate this term with the German ‹Förster›.

A marvelous flaxen erect mane, that just above her brow became a sassy tuft, which she could wear to the front or back as the mood struck her : then amid the sweet furrow of the nape, down between the shoulder blades; hand-high along the spine; until it finally merged into the black tassled tail.

Hindquarters, something like a Grant's gazelle : all short-cropped taut coat; on the back and on the outside of the thighs, a pale tawny hue. Belly and the insides of the legs white : 4 slender legs.

And right there, stuck onto the front, a naked girl; with arms ! – I stood in front of her now, and she laid her small high head to one side and gave me a laugh : ? / Her nose : with wide bridge fixed firmly to her brow. A long red mouth. Neck. Ivory shoulders, most smooth. Teenette breastlets. Narrow hipworks. Long maidenly legs (just hooves on them : sort as if a modern, solid woman's shoe had grown into place below).

Back to the face (wait : she had large, pointed, brown-velvet ears besides, adjustable to the wind). (About 5' 5" tall[6] : suits her). / She smiled patiently; and slyly. Also made a tour of her lips with her tongue : it was significantly larger than mine; probably explains the heavier inflection !).

"What's your name ?" I thought to ask. : "Thalja"[7] her face said. And, insistent : "You're no ranger." / No; that I wasn't. But just stood there as if bewitched. (Which I doubtless was, too ! : Her tail gave one whip to her flank).

Bewitched : "You are pretty !" – And I meant it in all honesty. (And just looking at her peared breasts gave me an erection easy to spot in those loose pants; she blushed with childlike delight.) / And soon we were practicing names ! One moment she was turning coquettishly away – : "Thalja !" – the next, there she was, wheeling on her hindhand and curvetting ever so charmingly my way; so close, her nipples almost touched mine. (Now it was up to me to turn away, all disdain; which at once elicited a "Char=ley" – and when I came back, there she stood expectantly, all coy maiden, the pompom of her tail in her left hand.)

"Want to come along partway ?". (And I asked most purposefully, conscious of the perpetrated deed : in her company I would be – at least when it came to all centaurs – much the safer ! Besides, I could expect our conversation to yield very valuable information on the dangers here in the Hominid Sector.)

[6]Equals 1.65 meters in old German measure.

[7]Not ‹Tahl-ya› as in classic German pronunciation, but with an initial semi-lisped American ‹th› and medial double-consonantal ‹dzh›.

She at once nodded eagerly and at length : "Oh; sure." And here she was about to buckle her front legs and dunk her flaxen thatch grasswards – but I gallantly anticipated her, and handed her things up to her : a spear like mine. A leather belt, that she draped across her, from one shoulder to the far hip (a canteen and her nose-bag attached). Plus a sun-hat with wide flappy brim (which she set on the back of her head à la morbleu; in old Florentine style – : "Chic !"). –

Beside each other : our 6 feet rustled in the shallow oozy sand. Very softly. The sotto voce of our small words. Above, the silent foliage. (If you held your spear out, you could touch it easily). / Once we crossed a broad clearing with a stand of mimosa shrubs, and as we looked around, from beneath a couple of spindly legged trees now, we could easily make out our path from the endless wake of dog-eared pinnulate leaflets. (Setting us beaming at one other. – At one point, I laid, as if by accident, my hand on the spot where girl met gazelle – you could burrow your fingers marvelously deep into the rather stiff, erect comb of the mane : ! – and she held still for it.).

How do you make conversation with a young centauress ? – Best thing is simply wade in, right ? / : "How old're you ?". – "Oh", she said, "today's my birthday : 24 gow-chrómms already." – "‹Gow= chrómms› ?"; she first had to circumlocute what that was : it shines askance at night; always a different round. (Indubitably the moon then !). / And further explanation : at 20 moons they get outfitted (she tapped her nose-bag) including weapons. At 40 they have to become mothers. / Drinking water ? : all rivers ended in salt marshes; they knew of several warm springs.

The cactus groves ? ! : She at once furrowed her brow, and angrily bared her strong teeth : "There are Never=Nevers in some of 'em, y' know !" / And already my imagination was picturing it : house-high praying mantisesses, articulata, green-skinned ? – She could see from my hands that I really hadn't the vaguest; and gave me the explanation for what that swine of a colonel had in mind for me :

Never=Never ! : The mutational leap caused by radioactive megadoses had, putting it roughly, evolved in the direction of hexapodia.[8] That is to say : combinations, manifold in fact, of human forms on the one hand and insects and ungulates on the other. Out of all that ephemeral mishmash, these centaurs here had, so it seemed, proved to be fairly stable. As had the aforementioned Never=Nevers. (And a third species

[8]In plain German : six-footedness.

as well, though based on her muddled description, I could make no clear picture of them; but were apparently relatively harmless. If I understood correctly, likewise with human countenance ?).

And so the Never=Nevers : those were giant spiders ! The soft, toxic=gray body about a half yard in diameter. Up front a human head (with all sorts of new knobby organs : ocelli for instance, whereas the ears had been eliminated); with proboscises for sucking. On two forelegs, venomous claws; and that double dose was so strong that it took only two to anesthetize the strongest centaur. Four were lethal !

Which was the reason for the ‹spider spear› with crosspiece; and she demonstrated : how the beast was spitted with it; rammed into the sand; and then finally clubbed to death. / But never voluntarily left the moist shade of their cactus thickets. Where they spun their nets, made of almost unbreakable thread thick as wire. And that was how they captured imprudent, very young centies (or older, sick ones as well, or dazed by plant toxins). – Or indeed, the ‹third species›; which, as I was gradually coming to understand, came in 2 different forms. / At any rate, mortal enmity had been sown. (And I gave a little shudder, as I pictured to myself : how, all unsuspecting, I would have sought out that cooling shade. Maybe even have risked a little nap at the foot of one of those hairy columns – : what an s.o.b. the commandant was ! ! / The whole damn military police for that matter : didn't want any info to get out; and had in fact issued me a permit only under the perfidious assumption that I would never ever come back again !)

(Which meant I had to be – in the future as well – veryvery cautious ! Forbidding me to publish would probably be the least of it. That's if I get through alive. (And to manage that, I had first better start making a play for my Thalja here; and I mean hot and heavy !)).

"Thalja ? !" : She jutted out her jaw, and put together a deep, voluptuous "Hmmm ?". I placed myself before her. Took hold of both her smooth shoulders; (she pulled them back only the least bit; just enough to give her breasts some prominence : clever !). She set the outer tips of her very long eyebrows slanting upwards. Began to breathe more powerfully. Her white flank, hoof to shoulder, pressed sideling closer. Her tail whipped excitedly rightleftright : Leftrightleft. / (And then the first well-executed kiss !)

With clumsily raging fingers, she had a go at my coarse jacket hide : ? – which I then cast off. Also dared to take a breast in each grasp : (grandly firm; like white leathern pears. The entire front third an unbroken pink rough nipple). / She could stand it no longer. Her breath gasped sweetly; she threw her sinewy arms over my shoulders,

and pressed our breasts against one another. Eyesclosed. Put a superduper serving of tongue into my mouth (and tasted good and warm; like grass seed; I thought of spelt & awn, mouth of grain, threshing combines . . . ? – : ! – :

was that a fine high barking from underground ? ! – But she did not loosen our touch; only her large ears pricked up alert (until it occurred to me that it might just be prairie dogs. And I grabbed hold more vigorously).). –

Make a run for a denser spot (and I was indeed seized by great and numerous scruples !). / But the shadow of her hat brim, floppy and lemon-hued, hung so agile above her cheek. And she held my hand so diligently. And admitted :

"*Shilbit – my girlfriend* – went with a ranger for 14 days one time. And told me *everything* : woooowww !". She snorted and threw back her upper body : "You can do that too ? We're allowed to, from 20 on : *everything* I mean !"

In the thicket then (and she stood adverse; her first time; snoring with bliss). / And I really gave it all I had (but it was a damn funny situation : I kept having to close my eyes ! That is, except when she would bend her face back, a highly dangerous maneuver, straight toward me; it didn't quite reach, but at least we kissed the air in front of our faces. And that way you could fantasize a girl.) Until I started to get a crick in my back. From her smacking frenching.[9]

Still panting from the labor of love; her flanks still pounding; we lay side by side. / Her forelegs buckled under. All her warmnesses. Now and then her blond tail cometing across us : both. Her high head began to nod; to mutter : "That tasted good back there !" (fervent nodding : the breastlets nodded right along; I snatched one each time; with my lips; till she smiled drowsily. And finally laid the yellow grass bundle of her head against mine. (And lazy kissulations. And grassy respirations.)).

(How many ‹moons› was I weighted down with actually ? Just in case she should ask. : 30 times 12 (‹won't go; borrow one›). Plus the remainder of the orbit of 29.5; and then add an extra 4 or 5 . . . comes to about . . . . . well : 375. So I'll tell her 100. (Or 80 ?). – In case she asks.) –. –.

Just dropped off for a little sleep ! (But still midday : first I thought I'd

[9]Incomprehensible. – As is incontestably evident from the foregoing – and passim throughout –, the language of the centaur species in those regions is a slightly corrupted American. But one must accustom oneself to such imprecision, given the journeyman haste – an occupational hazard perhaps – of the author.

dreamed ‹*everything*›. Until I took several looks at her; she was already awake).

Lowered her head, deep in thought; pulled it to her, and nibbled at the tip. Wrapped her long, muscular tongue around it (so rough it felt hairy !); yanked it out full length, and swallowed it whole[10] : that's what's I call a siesta ! . . . . .

As we walked along again, 'bout this & that : each of them had a pair of little nickel tweezers to snip the spines off succulents, so they could then slurp the syrupy flesh. (While I took a look at the rust-free gadget, she sort of wandered off; discreetly dropped apples; carefully wiped herself several times too (with lots of leaves). And came at a lazy amble back to my side.) / Replying to my question ? : Yes. They could vary it just as they pleased. And did so, especially on longer marches, to even the load on various muscle groups : now an amble, now normal.

"*Sure is mighty hot !*" But she just gave a doleful shrug : "If you want to make World's End by morning . . .". (So that's what they call the great wall. Perfectly logical of course : no one's seen the other side ! – Or have they ? Hardly likely.)

Then we found ourselves on a wide sandy plain. With one of those damned cactus islands scattered every 2 to 3 miles : hundred paces in diameter, tall as a house and bristling with thorns. (And just imagine the Sleeping Beauties that might be living in there !) – And at regular intervals she would rear up : making herself three hands higher than I ! – And scouted . . . . . : ? . . . . .

And suddenly began to tremble; her nostrils flared, but not with fear; her jaw edged forward . . . . . : "Quick !" she commanded (and this time in a most rumbling contralto, as if from inside a barrel). And took 50 springy bounds toward something, leaving me to catch up (and knelt lickety-split in the sand ?) :

A dead centaur calf ! ! : she passed hasty hands over it; lifted the limp little legs – and then showed me the swollen red punctures : "Never= Never !" she whinnied. Took hold of it again : ? : "Still barely alive maybe ?". Pondered, with angry jaw agrinding, and bounced back up like a steel spring :

A circus pirouette on her hindlegs, clear around the horizon : *there* was the sun, aha. There *this* stone; there that solitary tree ? : "Wait here !" she shouted : "Oh pooh, nothing's gonna happen ! – And after ten minutes

[10]The author, if I understand him correctly, means a stalk of buffalo grass, Buchloë dactyloides Engelm.

set your hat on the tip of the spear and hold it high as you can : I'll fetch the others !". Tilted her torso forward, crossed her arms over her chest, so that each hand held the other shoulder – and took off with dust flying, ventre à terre, kicking sand up around my nose !

: Damn, could she ever move ! ! : by now she was racing off between 2 clumps of woods out there; bounded, all fours in the air, and took a leap like a bird in flight across some great hurdle or other; stormed over the farthest wave of earth – : and had vanished. / So I set me down in confusion on the stone.

(Or maybe I'd better stand ! : In case some such beast comes swinging in hand over hand somewhere !). (But now that I thought back over the whole thing, I'd hardly be able to nail the bastard ! : He had just driveled on about *his personal preference for shade* ! – What a swine !) / Two minutes, approximately.

And this poor little thing here ! : in compassion, I laid my jacket over it; that way it'd at least have some kind of shade. / Three minutes.

Or should I try a sip of schnapps ? – I knelt – wait; first take another look around ? – Nah : air & earth looked ‹clear›. – beside the pale small head in the sand; uncorked the flask; and then wavered appropriately. / Think about it first : five minutes ! : the effect was presumably about the same as with snake venom. (What's with the ‹presumably› ? It was pure hypothesis on my part !). But let's assume so. For which the books always read : ‹large doses of alcohol›. / Or did they perhaps know some special herbs ? – But homeopathetic veggies like that are usually much too diffuse, weak, ineffectual, against strong poison : otherwise, in the old days, not a ‹noble savage› would've died of snakebite : six minutes !

So down the hatch, right ? ! : Ergo I pried his jaw open; poured the hollow cork nice and full; and let him have a double – he was just a child after all – dose. / Seven minutes. (Or was it eight by now ? Nah; closer to six; because I was feeling a little creepy : and it's been my experience that that's when you tend to count fast ! Especially when your awaiting succor. So more like seven again : okay : seven !).

Weren't the kid's eyelashes starting to flutter ? ! Or had my eyes deceived me, eight ? / No ! : Even the tuft of his tail beat one quivering pulselet : charming !

But to be on the safe side, get the signal ready now; to act as a fix; the beacon : ‹Siehst, Vater, Du den Hut dort auf der Stange ?›[11] (That was

[11]German citation in the original.

German. One of the jokes, and/or curses, that I still knew in the language of my forebears : and not one of them would have dreamed that someday their descendant would do it with a centauress). / Yes; just wag that little tail of yours ! – But it really had to be about time by now. / (Good thing I had my sun glasses along; even with them, things flickered before my eyes (and I itched all over; like when social conversation turns to fleas, and all and sundry start scratching discreetly.)[12] (Or lice.) / Or Never=Nevers : hadn't something rustled just now ? ! – – : No; had only been my stripling here again.

There ! Wasn't it trembling ? The ground ? ! Very faintly ? – I went as loose as possible, uncramped – : – and now clearly sensed a vibration : so, higher with the hat ! In the same direction that Thalja had vanished : ! –. – :

And here it came thundering at me, like a convoy of semis ! ! : Two hundred centaurs with hooves of cast steel !. / Up ahead (and along the side, for defense of the flanks) athletic figures : raising their own low dusty background (out of which new ones kept riding !). (Lord, more fun than Sitting Bull !).[13] / I had been brandishing my sombrero with such abandon that I took it down now in embarrassment (and had long since been encircled).

Every vein thick as clotheslines for rage ! : Thalja approached beside a shoulder-broad paladin (did the fellow ever have a black beard; *and* on his head one single ditto-hued corkscrew horn : wouldn't y' know !). He gave a curt salute, his spear in his sinewy right hand. And then lowered himself in the sand next to us.

"*Is he still alive ? If only he* could still tell us *which* thicket !" – And, in reply to my sympathetic question : "Yesyes; he's going to die : has been stung three times; no remedy for that." / Whereupon I resolutely brought out the gin again : that being so, it couldn't make things any worse. (And might even help; so once more : down the hatch !).

Down the hatch ! : Alcohol in large doses : okay then ! / The leader first called a couple of guards to secure the perimeter, toujours en vendette. Then he shot me a curious look; (and Thalja gazed proudly round the circle : ! (And it looked as if they were quite well-acquainted with humans in the form of ‹rangers›)).

[12]Typical of the ‹society› the author apparently frequents; noscitur ex socio.

[13]I assume that yet again what we have here is one of author's customary, intimate=indecent confessions (interbraccal practices ?); in any case incontestably ‹Sitting Bull› in the original !

There you are ! ! It opened the lad's eyes wide; first he started to whimper piteously – and at once his mother shoved her way to his side; excited; caressed and hummed him a bass recitative. He ate a snack from her breast. Grew more alert (although I could spot the schnapps in the glimmer of the eyes : must have a wicked effect if they have nothing of the sort !). / The leader intervened; raised a warning index finger (his single horn sinking aslant in parallel : what a hulk !)

"*There : Over there.*" : *the little tad* pointed feebly to the wiry-stiff rotunda of horror herbage : "All I did was eat a coupla plants. And then I felt sick. And the light went funny . . . . ." the peep of his wee voice fretted off again; he let his head droop onto his mother's arm (who looked at me in alarm : ?. – Okay then. – : She was to pour two corkfuls down him every half hour; to stimulate the heart. With quarterback gestures I handed over The Big Bottle. But made sure to warn against any abuse of it : ! !. – And then turned back again to the others.)

They were sure gabbling excitedly. (And now casually look around : most of them had reddish=white coats. (One, however, decidedly burgundy, with mighty lyre-shaped horn; and oddly built in general (as if I were the one to be judge of that, right ? !))). / All heavily armed : spider spear; bow & arrow. Cudgels of every variety and weight-class. The 5-man team around the leader (6 in all, then) seemed to be the only ones who also had heavy machetes hanging on their shoulder-straps.

"*Thalja ? !*" : *she was already beside me,* ready with any excited info. / No : that hadn't been the case for a long while now, that Never=Nevers had dared so far south ! Up north, near the border, there yes; they systematically slaughtered spiders up there, driving the creatures further and further off; as much as possible.

"*Yes, but what happens now ?*" : *Now* the leaders would rub some fire, that took about an hour. Then the thicket there would be set aflame, until the Never=Nevers couldn't take it any more, and had to come out : then they would be skewered; their eggs destroyed. / Already ten strapping males with scythes were off at a gallop : "They'll mow off that tongue of grass, on the right there; so the fire has no way to feed any further." (Others, children and women, were hauling sand now, and pouring it on top as well).

But one whole hour ? ! : I turned to the chieftain. I said brusquely : "If you're gonna need fire ? : I can do that quick as a wink !". Showed my box of matches. He nodded with respect and delight; and immediately called his archers together. They skillfully wrapped the tips of their arrows with sere grass.

"*Everyone ready ?*" – :

I held the tiny flame to the pile of thorns, sticks, leaf & stalk, crackle-'n'snap : there you are ! / One after the other, they dipped their wooden shafts into it; drew up a line opposite the cactus thicket, and fired away : off it flew in a high arc, fanned into bright flame by the breezing air : a good half landed as planned behind the dark green wall.

"*Hold your distance at ten paces : yes, that's it !*" : we formed a giant circle allround (as smoke issued from the middle; plus pops, loud as pistol shots, when the desiccated balloon bodies of opuntias burst). / "You never know where they're going to come out." –. –

By now the smoke was tower-high !(And the noise infernal : a flamette ran her way up a saguaro, whirled, caught her balance, wove herself a smoke kimono (flinging it open now and then, teasing : and the whole facade now grew pale gray and turbid) . . . . .

: "*Attention !*" – –

: "*There ! !*" : For from under the billowing hem of smoke it emerged, low and swift, joints ajangle. A trim fellow dashed off with a bound toward it, his spear jerked : ! And now he was racing back out, driving it deep into the sand; grabbed a spare from the hand of a waiting yeowoman and came scampering fleetly back.

The chieftain beside me raised his boxer's arm, took a high forward leap (to increase the force of his thrust as he dropped !) – and there it was, writhing gray and broad on his lance : made a downward stab with his left : no less a stake in the sand.

"*They're trying to get through here ! : C'mooooon ! ! !*" : *Thalja* had thrown her torso forward, horizontal, on a line with the ridge of her back; peered into the smoky curtain and let out a low shriek : "Heeeeyah ! !" / – : ! : ! ! :

She impaled one; trampled another : One had clamped onto her foreleg and was about to dig in its claws, when I ripped it off with my own two hands, disgusting as it was, and rammed my spear through the squishy beast : ! – I lifted the rock I'd been sitting on high over my head, and slammed it down on the next one with all the strength in my arms : and did the juice squirt ! / And here four new jousters came atilting from right and left, scrambled lightning-swift into our circle : and from every spear point there hung a heaving lardy pillow, the gruesomes ! –

"*Quiet ! ! – Everybody back* to position : in case more of 'em come out !" : the chieftain, with a sheaf of spears in each hand. He handed me one and Thalja two. And shoved his way backward to his old spot.

Waiting : the smoke was sucked up by its own flame. Above the blazing hearth the heated air rose; from all sides cold air came streaming in below : you could get a clearer view now. / And the cactus thicket had

virtually disappeared ! : A couple of especially thick rumps were still glowing; but then they too dissolved rapidly in fumes and ashes. Now you could see right through, clear across, to the cordon on the far side.

"Yes. – 't's over, looks like," commented the businesslike bass of the chieftain on my right. / And scared me to death, he bellowed so loud (do these guys ever have a set of lungs ! Well, to be expected.) : "Everybody come here : bring 'em along !"

The victims : sixteen in toto ! Most of them still alive on their lance skewers and wriggling with rage; slashing in all directions; you had to be careful they didn't land a final whack !"

Here, this one was already done for ! : So they're gray. And fat. And wrapped in thin pliable keratin. The scorpion people. Attached upfront a nasty European face : the eyes small; hanging vertically, long feeler whiskers; all of it specialized for a nocturnal=erinnic life. The mouth a puckerable proboscis, perfect for lethal sucking. On the forestilts, the venomed claws, long as your finger and hooked like buzzards' beaks : revolting !

And I turned around nervously at the sound : ? : the centaur calves, of both male and female gender, had gathered up the flabby egg sacs; I walked over and had a look : 6 to 8 eggs in each; white and big as Ping-Pong balls : they laid them on a stone and used their hooves to squash the things like caps, here a pop; there : a pop ! (And enjoyed themselves and laughed. Well; understandable, in a way).

But really : what fiends ! I gave my disgust manifest expression, and from all sides came delighted nods. / The fire had died with acrid perfume. Smoke drizzling there. (They used spade blades to chop the rest into pieces; which were then buried). / "We've had up to a hundred ninety at a time !" / "But for some to be left round here, that happens – pah – once every ten gow= chrómms." (All the same : once a year !). / We slowly made our way in the direction of the tribal pasturelands, and talked : about them, about me, about them. (Thalja always at my side. A giant, green-eyed semi-virgin came prancing up at one point, "my girlfriend"; and then made such big=moist eyes. And kept edging mutely ever closer, –; until an outraged Thalja chased her off !).

"Oh, you've got 1, 2 hours yet : World's End is really quite close." : "Sure, for people like you !" (The reply obviously pleased him; he stroked the massive block of his beard and took a proud leap forward).

Names like earthquakes ! : one piece of terrain we passed was called ‹Tatarakáll› (and their hooves boomed just that hollowly across it !). –

In the – hmmm, can you say ‹village› ? : a couple of bowers made of snapped-off branches (some of them grazed bare by the real hungry,

and/or lazy, sorts !). / All of them were already back at perfectly peaceful activities : in the meadows, bearded centaurs stood mowing with scythes. (One of them, all silhouette, lifted his flask to drink; (and I decided to give my leg another pinch : had I perhaps fallen asleep over a textbook on Greek mythology, Preller=Robert ?)).

No ! : No way, none ! : A centauress with spectacles was definitely something new (and older besides : an iron bucket pulled her arm long : when galloping they preferred to hold those oversize breasts with both hands, the older ones. – A brassier factory. Now that could be one helluva business !).

And all these names, like thunderstorms, like Throttle Thighs, like Air on Fire; like Naked Earth, Scorching Pots, Crushed Gold[14] (and what a flute the chieftain had, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin; I mean, a ranger didn't have a chance !)[15]

There : a zebraess ! : a black stripe divided her narrow, saucy face right down the middle, from her brow down to her Adam's apple; (but then it slanted off to the right : one breast white, the other black as coal : damn, did that look sharp ! And her mane of very coarse silver hair !).

Ohbytheway : "Is your name Pluvus perhaps ? !". But he just shook his head. Furrowed his brow, too (and Thalja, beside me, did no less.) / Why ? : That was one nasty desperado; barely tolerated ! Mean and cunning as could be : notorious enemy of rangers ! – / Oh ? : and it was to *him* that *I* was supposed to deliver a note ? Your basic Uriah-uriah-scamscamscam ? : No sir, colonel-sir ! Not me ! (And right off, playfully dug my hand into the sand, and scuttled the letter cylinder as deep as possible beside me : rest in peace !).

Craftsmen, the old ones; clumsy statues, sluggish of both standing and trailing leg, : one of them was whittling whip handles from hackberry wood (and when he had lots of time, even little flutes, he confided to me). And was that crap ever hard, too; tough; hard to split. / A second fellow was manufacturing back-scratchers from pieces of cactus : snipped the spines off down to rasp-size; below, at the handle, clear off : voilà ! (Too rough for me. But, damn, as a curry-comb ?). The next one was making lances. – "Where do you get these 10-yard-long poles ? !". And so they led me to the

[14]I do not know to what the author is alluding; perhaps it is meant to be poesie. In any case, I have reproduced the syllables verbatim.

[15]Any thoughtful man would surely consider players of pipes to be thoroughly, bucolically appropriate. Granted, such a simple, classical little instrument might seem primitive to our good ‹foresters›.

Agave field : The blue-green leaves grew to ten feet (my my, you couldn't call them ‹leaves› anymore, could you !), and ten inches thick : for fodder; for roofing, "Whenever we set up permanent lodgings – for a coupla months." / Thorns ? : were used for arrowheads. (And nails, too, if need be). / The fibers, the sisal hemp ? : canvas, ropes, coarse cloth. (The roots were medicinal as well; laxative : "And how !").

Yes, and at the appropriate time the veg-giantess sprouted this two-inch by ten-yard flower-stalk ! (Though they cunningly waited till datelike fruits had formed at the top, and harvested those as well).

Here : you can do this, too. Curious, I bent down over the hip-high, two-foot-wide caldron of foliage. "As soon as the flower-stalk appears, you cut the top bud out : then for months, the cavity fills up with sap every day." (And had to take a sip then & there – ? – sort of insipid sweet, huh ? : "But definitely rich in sugar and nourishment. Especially for the kids." : "Oh, everybody likes to drink it !". / And then another idea hit me : that's how you make pulque ! If you let it ferment. – But they didn't appear to know about that here (and far be it from me to instruct them; life is considerably happier sans schnapps ! Theoretically.).

Apropos schnapps ? : "How's the little guy doing ? The one that got stung a while ago ?". / He wasn't quite back to top form yet, but was feeling a good deal friskier. I solemnly impounded the gin=bottle.

(*And that hornwork* really looks like it wants to evolve into a male secondary sex characteristic ! Although no uniform style had yet taken shape : many fellows had nothing more than a pair of crude knoblets that made them look as if they had a premature widow's peak. Others faunlike spirals, the heath-ram model. But most frequently you saw the pitch-black corkscrew unicorn, 2 feet tall (which, ah-ha, only develops at the onset of puberty : no doubt about it !).

Their tools were periodically handed out by rangers : the leather bandoliers measured for fit; the youths given their nickel tweezers : by firm custom, a rite of the full moon. / (But didn't appear to be regarded as fabulous beneficent divinities, these lords and masters; because the leader intimated, laconic=cryptically : countless fatalities immediately afterwards every time (and there was pleading in his glance : ? – But I knew to keep my counsel, and simply pointed at our gin=nipper, already tottering about on his legs again : ? ! – But he just shook his troubled head : the rangers apparently provided medical assistance sometimes too.)

Tall chromocouples were hanging around in the sky; actually only 2, in red and yellow. (And way in the background one recumbent, widow-gray and mute, along the arc of view). / "Thalja ? !"

She was already trim and travel-ready : two red stars on her bosom, one on the left, one on the right, as befits a lady ! / The chieftain swung himself up as well : "I'll come along until dawn. Just in case there's some more never=nevering." / Causing Thalja to pull a face *that* long : was this to be our night ? ! (While our leader buckled on a few packs of his own : I didn't find it all that unwelcome ! Quite apart from the spiders : Thalja was nice, *very* nice; but taxing too. And besides

I could ride ! ! : ‹Sitz auf, so kannstu nach Belieben fragen !›).[16]

And so I queried to my heart's content (and sidesaddle all the way. Thalja sulked at a toddle alongside at first, and gave a mulish toss of her head when I gave her a pat of consolation. But then grew a tad merrier when I managed to whisper a "Tomorrow; all very you !" And frisked along in higher spirits).

Countless caves here in Nevada ? : Whole sets of them sometimes, in a row, with thin brittle walls ? – : must be godforsaken settlements I suppose ! / They would whiff water : pulled to a stop sometimes; made their faces broad and atilt, and sniffed in the clear darkness : then move on. (Plus fabulations, fables, fabliaux : of ‹laughing springs› : whoever drinks of them is seized by involuntary laughter; and can only stop once he has drunk of the other one beside it).

"*Fire on the horizon ? !" : but* it was just stars, enlarged like that by the haze and flimmer. / Right : very distinct halo around Venus; you could easily distinguish rings of hue : purple, orange; violet.

"*The air is full of music sometimes.* And voices." (Theirs at once grew superstitiously softer). / And took turns explaining in eager disorder (since Thalja, although much younger, likewise knew about the matter) : at one point the whole tribe had heard singsong and heartless whistles coming from a cleft in the rocks for days on end. And strident tones, like angry men : they bickered; gave orders; a big bang, followed immediately by someone screaming (so loud that a stampede almost broke out among those camped about !). Then, after anxious weeks for the tribe, it had grown ever fainter : except, if you held your large tapered ear up very close, there was sweet breathing, monotone rippling, like maiden's mouth. / (Judging by which, some joker of a ranger had apparently hidden a portable in the cleft : let us make a myth. / But a risky undertaking; crude, irresponsible meddling; *I* was not about to risk anything of the sort ! / Or had I already done so perhaps ? With my magic bottle ? – Just be carecarecareful !).

: and jutted stiffened legs aslant before them ! His withers went rigid, and

[16]German in the original as well. (Goethe, ‹Classical Walpurgis Night›).

quivered so, that I would have jumped off in any case : by way of precaution I placed myself between them; okay; and held them both by the mane along their spines as well, for they were snorting and looking as if they'd bolt like as not (the tuft of hair above their brows was standing on bristly end as well : ergo, the external signal of fear. Or, to put it better and more judiciously : of a certain state of excitement; interesting.).

For over there, in that hollow hardly worth the name, a weak glow had begun ! Got brighter. And redder. Taller than a man, and of corresponding slimness. / "Keep calm !". / Stood perfectly still (shape roughly that of a juniper; but pale red, as noted, and soundless) : "Justkeepcalm : *I'm* right here with you !". (And as stupid as that sounded : their quivering subsided. In some weird sort of way you could after all depend on a ‹ranger› ! But I kept patting unflaggingly at croup and flank, too. (I threw one arm firmly around Thalja : those things really felt just *too* special !).).

"*No ! Don't go over there !*" she whispleaded with a shudder. And consequently I saved myself some steps; because doing so wouldn't have been taken for bravery, but solely as proof of my being in nefarious cahoots with that beelzebubble. / Were will-o'-the-wisps of course. Our indigenous variety, where natural gas ignites on contact with the air, and often burns for hours on end.

And the chieftain, too, shook his jock's head : "You never find a crack in the ground; not a hole, not a pore." / (If several were gathered together, and they had the time, afterwards they would hastily set a low stone ring around the spot.

So we stood there for a long while, gazing at each other. We, Brothers Three : contra one burning bush. (Which stood, Loki there, stock still; locks of red. It moved only once, briefly, testily, tipping its pointed head to one side (which we took as a hint that he could do without our presence)).

"*The soul of Fósterdall the Tyrant !*" (before I could explain to them what was burning there). / And, for my information : "The evil spirit who made us." – "You were made by an *Evil* Spirit ?" I asked with interest; and they looked about them in astonishment : "Yes : do you think a *good* one made you folks ?". (To which – he was not Chieftain, Paladin & Thinker for nothing – he added ponderously : : "*Is* there such a thing as a Good Spirit ?". –. –.[17] I chose not to answer; did not feel at home – have never felt at home ! – inside my pink hide).

[17]If I am correct in my interpretation of the author's ‹neo-punctuation›, which has unfortunately become common usage in West=USA, this concatenation of dashes and periods is presumably meant to symbolize a ‹thoughtful pause›. – I would like to observe that I oppose his cult, especially of the semicolon !

Trotting on : the moon (and even I was already using their ‹gow= chrómm› !) lifted its head and peered over the rim : and soon we were riding drowsier in more yellow worlds.

Bed down for the night ? : "Just ahead. There's a brood of caves." – I jumped down, and took to my feet (although my heart was pumping mightily : a while ago, heading uphill, I should have dismounted !) between them through the dewless night. After many semi-idle words, there appeared on the horizon :

the steep gables, high in the duskygray. At the edge of town, the tin sign still in place : ‹Candelaria›. / He gave me a british look[18] : "What does that say ?". And I was happy to share the nomenclangor with him; it fit right in, it seemed to me, with their other neologisms.

So we walked into the deserted town; we, faces besinistered in twilites. The streets were covered with drifted sand, muting the pound of our hooves (often blown yard-high against the walls, laterally : when walking down a street, one must differentiate between the long ‹frontal› and the pictorapid ‹lateral›). Soundlessly the vacant visage of gow=chrómm downstared us. In the distance one muted rattle solo (wind-in-the-windowframe ? – "Candelaria, Candelaria" came the steady murmur : the chief memorizing the name). / We entered a hot parlor level with the ground. Where we camped on the sanded floor.

"Nah, never-ever here ! : they've got to guzzle constantly." (The Never= Nevers) : "Blood or plant juice by the gallon; otherwise they dry out real quick." – They pulled large ears of grain from their bags and began to chew : the kernels rasped softly between their molars. Thalja played her way imperceptibly closer to my side (crispily nibbling on a halophyte : for dessert). / In the shallow hot sand. / ‹Shadow of Unicorn on Yellow of Moon› : as a title for a picture (or just ‹Shadow of Unicorn›. – Except that ‹unicorn› was all wrong !).

"Why : Don't you set up winter quarters here ? In these deserted towns ?" / And they : "The white ?" (Was that their swear word for winter ?). They coordinated their views (which is to say, the chieftain dictated; while Thalja used the occasion to inch closer) : "The white ? Oh, that's nogood !" / Slow proof : "There's peculiar voices. The trees grow bloody uptop and tremble. Gow-chrómm walks hunched and shivering; and lies on his pitted back. No grass, or only what's weary-hard to scratch up – noonoo : we'd rather move on, toward midday."

[18]NB the meaning which has accrued to the word ‹british› in those far regions since 1988. It is, to paraphrase, a blend of mistrust, arrogance, reserve, confidence : etc.

End of browze. He took a look outside the door again, checking the weather : ? : No; no fear of duststorms. / The moonlit rhombi felt warm (and tasted bitter too, when I nibbled at them, borax sand). The ‹Red Spot› like a gangrenous dimple on its chin : Thalja really couldn't get *any* closer now !

The lambent pubilability of slow=low dry chat[19] : up front, up to multi-mischief. In the gentle blacksilky moanment. / The chieftain had laid his noggin in the corner, and was snoring vigorously (but lifted that brow at every nuance of sound. – : "No way we can *do* it now, Thalja !" – (A single horn like that has to be a lot of trouble : when you're sleeping. – Or putting on a hat ! : Tomorrow morning check to see if they make a hole in it.)). / Out of the moon's spinning jet streamed threads of light, polyestrous. And slunk further and further across his yellow-tinged sky. Until my brow, too, stupefied. (‹Evening kisses, restless sleep› : right on the button !).

–.–.–.–.–.–.–.–

: *a heavy rufous scent roundabout* as if coming from their nostrils, 'twas their mode of respiration. / (Was up in a jiff, for the purpose of one – no, more like two ! – calls of nature (smokeswamphotfogthicketdamp-heatdung)).

"Bye=bye !" : as we left town; and a cactus raised its hirsute hand to join in the oath ? and so the chieftain trotted off : fine fellow, absolutely ! (And a gang of echoes bounced off the bright red houses, expansive of tone.). (Turning for a last look, I spotted one more crooked tree, painfully working its way out of the barren soil : wants its mention too).

And : "Well, Thalja ? What's this ? : Morning's first fresh glance is not for me ? ! : Nowgitoverhere !" : which set her to forgetting her morning graze; came instead abounding my way; we made a scramble of ourselves, "Othalja !", (at one point I almost did a headstand !).

(But likewise : ‹At last the restless rolling carriage stops› ![20] – She scrutinized me, disappointed; but after all I was not Herr Cules. / Then the saving stroke of genius came to her it seemed : "Hey, there's bound to be some a little further out!:). –

Further out; the far side of town well behind us now. / Intermezzo : she embraced me hyperrandily : "Couldn't you stay here ? With me as your wife : You climb aboard; and off we ride : anywhere !"

[19]Presumably this phrase (verbatim from the original) is meant to describe the grotesqueries of amorous conversation.

[20]Quotation from a source unknown to me; in the margin, decipherable in large part with a magnifying glass, in the author's own hand ‹Member› (?), ‹Momber(t)› (?), ‹Mambrin› (?).

The morning thunderstorm extricated me from my dilemma; even her mind turned to other things, and we watched the spare sparring of bolts. / Willows along the creek, sheaves of sabers above their tousled heads, ever awaiting the launch of thunder : a gaping of the air ! (Now frozen numb : now a red thrustation of the tree-shaft ! Even she hesitated, before she recognized it, waved it aside).

No ! no riding atop her ! Preferred to bekiss her, from here to her Ohó; and then it came to her again (ostensibly an ancient centaur trick; secret of chieftains' wives; (and of chieftains' daughters, of course, and promptly passed on to girlfriends !)).

The plain was sown with herbs, 4 to 5 feet high. Aroma reigned. Sage & Sundry. With shiny leaves of green leather. / At one spot, sprang together over a crevasse. (Practice first : I held on by her withers-mane; we took a running start – at least 12 feet wide : whoopsydóo !). / "And there's loads of it there !"

"So take your pick !" : Thalja in a nettle-field (and from the front it looked enchanting : the white hard creature in hip-high green !). (Ah, from the side too, to be honest. But she was trampling with impatience) :

And I had ‹the choice› : the stuff here on the left provided a stimulus that quickly passed. / The other kind : permanent, every time you got wet. / (And the hellish=third a lifelong maddening itch : now choose !).

And so I chose the one that passed quickly : with a deft hand she gathered the tops of the appropriate nettle (her hand shielded by the fabric of her nose-bag – let's hope she doesn't get the varieties mixed up !).

"No : have to stand with your back against the tree !" (Peppery smiles. And I had to put my hands around behind, too – "And hook your fingers together real tight !" / Came around to the front. Weighed it in her palm. Pulled back, savoring this – : Androlledrubbeditallin leafbuds-andstem : ! ! ! ! ! :

"Fffffffff : stop ! !" : as if I were dunked in fire ! And stomp : "Stop-itwoman !" Only now did I think to bring my hands forward; she tossed it hastily away, herbage and stemmage. Presented herself (and I worked like a lunatic ! Just to relieve the burning !). / (She was enthusiastic in her praise, and renewed her proposal to abduct me.)

But for starters I was thirsty as hell ! (And staggered apace behind her, through piney scrub and hardwood) . . . . . :

"Oh : a geyser !" : I planted myself beside it, a beaker in each hand, half paralyzed, for an ambidextrous binge. Until I noticed how bitter the stuff was ! : "Your spring, I'd say, is not *world-famous,* Thalja !". And she, calm'n'cool : "Nope. World-famous it's not." Every 5 minutes the sinterpot farted its fountain; higher every third time : high and hot and

bitter as gall : "C'mon, let's split !"

And took the long way, seemed to me; for the sun observed us from an amazing number of angles : ? ! / "Yes. – Otherwise we'd be there in an hour !" (Laid her little head on my chest. And bawled. Among willow, poplar, elm and hackberry : "You're the first ever to do the feeling for me !" / "No : I'll always think of this !" / "You comin' back soon ?" /. –. / And then I did say "Yes."; but gave a doubtful tuck to my mouth (she appeared to expect nothing else from the gods. And with resolute rue, Great Expectations[21], wiped her face on mine.)

"There" : I gave her my sunglasses as a present at least (My original plan had been to do this beside the wall; but she was picklepussing so inconsolably; we gave us *such* a hug – that I held them out to her then and there : !)

Setting her stylishly beaming : "You shóuldn't've !" / Pause. (Tried them on, over and over : they were undeniably good for the eyes.) / "Nobody's got anything like it ! !" (Foolish, owlish; wanted unceasing admiration. And bounded loops of gratitude : "You shóuldn't've ! !"). / But here came another flutteration behind me ! :

"What's that ? ! " – "That ? : Flying heads." / "So *that* was the mysterious ‹Third Form› from yesterday ! Likewise hexapodial, yes : but via butterflies ! (What an ass of a German that must have been who could come up with the hammerheaded word ‹Schmetterling› for such wee wizards ![22] Probably some advocate of re=armory.)

"Wanna see one close up ?" : All of a sudden she was on her hindlegs, larger than life – : – : and snatched one out of its leafy nook : here !

And me, decapitee in hand, (or to be more precise : detorsoee. At any rate an undeniably human countenance. And so light in your hand !)

"Hi there ? !" : It rolled anxious eyes. Gave a sweet dainty bleat (and as it did, stuck out a hollow tongue long as my hand : "Wheeeah . . ."). / Grandsilent beating of pinions. At the outermost tips single-clawed hooks (for hanging on thin branches ? At night, for sleeping ?). And under the chin two more short perching footsies : had used them to watch us, curious, from its twig just now.

Ever so soft and elastic, this globe : I tested it with a little squeeze of my fingertips – and the featherlight creature whooshed again with discomfort : "Whee."

[21]Novel by Charles Dickens, 1861.

[22]As if the American word ‹butter› : ‹fly› were notably more poetic ! Let us hope that at some point our immature author manages to disabuse himself of wholesale polemics directed at entire nations.

(But sweet faces ! : What a mouth, of elegant length, plus her wanton nose – I'd never seen the like ! (Why did I assume it had to be a ‹*s*-he› ? At any rate I somehow knew it was.) Charmed, I drew the Italian=yellow mask up to me; fondling it – of course ever so lightly, gently – along the top; and the balloonweight sphere pressed itself with a flutter-suckle, against me : mmmmmmm !)

"I mean : Thalja !" : because, spitting with jealousy, she had ripped the phantom from me; hauled back, and burst it between her fists as a child does a sack : bang ! / "I mean, Thalja ! ! !" / But there she was kneeling in front of me like *that* – (just picture it : a deer lying before you !) – and took me with *such* addicted pleading down that raspberry gorge; gulping, little mitts begging : *so* ! Raged with gentle howls : "Mine !" (fill in the blank : You are) – that you had no choice but to forgive her (and meanwhile, above us, around the crown of cactus, that constant sweet monotone bleating : awfully distracting !).

But seams of fury still on her face : further explanations for her jealousy : they were said to suck women dry of their milk, these flying heads ! Boys of their first semen (while they slept). / "No; with their tongues : the females have pink tubes, long as your hand" (those are the dreaded suckerettes !). The males a penis that puffs up to like size (legend has it, they sometimes take a lecherous seat on centaur=lassy rears – : the way these country beauties can come up with the alibis ! (Besides, it was patent nonsense; they couldn't manage that for love or money !)). / She angrily tore off a large petaled face; wrapped her hand around its blue throat, and gave a sadistic squeeze : set the sack's mouth gaping wide : air ! (And I almost expected this time to hear a ‹nyaa=nyaa›, too : "Thalja ! : Please !").

"Why sure !" : the Never=Nevers just loved to catch them in their nets. And extracted their ‹Other Form› from the insides of cacti (meaning insectlike metamorphosis, right ? With a larval form ? – But she could make nothing of my highfalutin terminology). / "The prairie owls chase them. And our lads like to shoot at them with their toy arrows." : "I mean, Thalja !" / But she just shook her woeful cheeks : "There." – : A grayer streak on the horizon : the World's End !

(And weighty farewell in an underbrush : she half tore me in pieces. Clasped me with white arms; with forelegs; behind : now all six at once ! (She weighed at least 200 pounds ! : "Oh Thalja !")).

A last kiss : ! : ! ! : ! ! !

(The like of which in all my earthly sojourn, during a long and misspent life, I had never tasted till then ! / "Ooooo=oo=o : Oo !" and bawled until it ran out from under her sunglasses).

Then the waving : she was already way over there. Lifted arms one more time : they sagged on her. Her hindquarters trotted off with her. (And I stared after her too; my arms crossed helplessly. It was all a little too much at once; for a simple journalist : bakerbaker : what is the Moor & what shall become of him !). –

Then on to the Great Wall (which is to say : to ‹World's End›; how quickly one could get used to this terminology of theirs ! (And away my fantasy went, dazzling me with a wild life out upon such plains; with centie-bow and arrow; by night atop Thalja at the feast of tabernacles, above my cap naught but stars . . . . . But that was all pointless; one human simply can't do it all. Best trudge on !). –).

A stone flung at the low tower ? : That awakened the guard up there, who was in love with his machine=gun[23]. Displayed a face suffering from totally dumbfounded sleepitis (and reported in; and directed me northwards, to the next main Wall Station). –

The Main Wall Station (but first through the semidarkness of a reverberating tunnel of stone; then I was on the outside of the wall) / : "Oh; it's *you* ? !" (and obviously *what* an unpleasant surprise !). /. – . / "Oh, just a moment : would you like to take a bath first ?". / Sure; love to.

In the pineneedlegreen enamel (and It was still truly prodigious : had Thalja secretly used the lifelong variety after all ? !). / But careful now; most probably I would be gotten rid of somehow. Or, much the same thing, forced to swear another solemn oath . . . / – Knocking ? ? – : "Yees'm coming !"

"Okay." (and the Doctor=Director=Sir was visibly relieved) : "Orders to have you sworn in have come from Washington : Raise your right hand . . . . ." (and called into the waiting-room : "Uh=Flushing ? : C'min here for a moment. So you can sign as a witness afterwards." / And here the tall girl came ashuffling, with exhausted profile; made it clear she wasn't listening; but signed everything then without objection. (And that damned urtication took effect again right off, even with this wall=flower; this could get hairy !).).

But now, having administered the oath – (to uphold Interworld 187 by the by : publication only in dead languages; remarkably lenient !) – he was downright genial. One (= we) smoked and drank Bora=Bora.[24]

And with no further ado provided answers to all my questions. / : "Yes that's right. ‹Hexapodia› is indeed the term. – That is, on the one hand among insects; on the other among ungulates : with retention – and/or

[23]Quotation from the well-known play, ‹The Soldier's Progress›, by William O'Nail.

[24]The new nonalcoholic fruit drink; best described as similar in taste to the old Seven=Up.

a corresponding transformation – of the arms, right." (Arm*less* throwbacks were "constantly being eradicated – uh=painlessly of course." : dainty expression !). (And I pictured the generalized consequences : stags, tapirs, elefantesses. Rhinocerettes, hippos, musk deerlets. : Or something giraffy, way uptop a silly=sadsack human head. (Or just maybe it was horned'n'haughty; with a little pince-nez; and feeling smug as a bug). / In the north, shaggier pony forms. With coarse tufts of hair between the breasts.)

"Wolves as enemies ? !" : he just laughed : "Well, I'll tell y' : I wouldn't want to be a wolf and end up in the middle of a pack of centaurs ! They'd soon take the fun outa things ! Just imagine it : hooves pounding like sledgehammers, fore & rear. Bows, arrows in their hands, machetes, lances, cudgels, clubs. That unicorn on the head ? : merci beaucoup ! !"

"No, unfortunately not ! : Way to the south some nomad negroid forms. – Originally there were *three* races : derived from whites, negroes, indians. The whites and indians, however, have more or less merged. / – ? : Yes; quite right : the result of some *very* successful combinations – at first accidental, then controlled – with Grant=gazelles !" / And bent forward from his overstuffed yellow deskchair : "What ? : You saw a zebroid half-breed ? : We'll have to get rid of that right away !". (Jotted a note with a flourish of the hand : DamnwasIgonna . . . . : be to blame for that splendid creature's death ? ! He was quick to take notice, and zealous to mitigate) / : "Ah but you *must* understand ! We provide medical supervision for all herds : the grossly malformed; vicious males; those with oversized horns – which might cause difficulties at birth – are shot down, we *show=no=mercy* !" (By means of blowguns : a tiny glass dart, filled with poison) : "We really are trying to do our best to maintain them for humanity ! – Just take that heavy single horn – which eventually *might* result in an involution of the brain –; or the – inevitable, I grant you – large prehensile tongue, which impedes speech, indeed has already altered it : those are *great* causes of concern !" / : "You must understand that."

Suresure; understand yes, but.

Further details : gestation period ? : "On the average, 174 days. They're able to propagate at about age 3." / Average life expectancy ? : "12 to 20. The very old ones become downright ‹wise› – in the true Socratic sense, really – and occasionally, though veryvery seldom, learn to read and write." / How many ? : "Well, our rangers know almost every head, and estimate the total number at=uh – 6,000. Including 700 blacks." (Radical separation of the races. Census and supervision

carried out partly from the air, discreetly, as I'd observed; some work on the ground : "Ah, but you're familiar with that." Yes.).

"Oh, yes, director, one more thing, what's the status ? : is it actually regarded as sodomy ? – I mean : in case a ranger *should* happen at some point to=uh fall in love with a centauress ?" / He stroked his chin thoughtfully (and also used the same index finger to push down on his medium-sized nose) : "Hmmmyesss." / : "Hmyes you've touched on a problem there of course : there *is* a loophole in our legislation there. – And it's further complicated by the fact that : *Human* males & centaur *females* : are an infertile combination; that's been adequately proved. *Buuuuut* ! : Centaur *males* & human *females* : that can lead to something, no doubt of it ! How many elderly=salacious millionairesses have already got themselves smuggled into the Hominid Sector on the sly – by bribing some guard or other – and have had themselves covered by centaurs ! : And I needn't tell you how *well* they're built !"

"NonoImeanreally; the problem you've referred to has actually only become acute among our patrol guards here. And – as a matter of common-law, though nothing's been codified – the rule is : it is *not* sodomy. And so *not* punishable by law." (Which eased my mind considerably. Although I merely uttered an unruffled "Uh=hmm").

"Quite right : the breasts of the females are getting smaller. We breed for it : that way there's less of a hindrance when galloping. The covering epidermis is firmer too : quite right." / "They address one another as ‹cousin› – to be on the safe side I suppose : the sexual alliances are relatively unstable you see."

And dry laughwork, chopped into little pieces : "Yes=yes ! – Well; I can tell you I suppose; you've taken the oath." (But all the same, a diffident smoker's pause) : "Hmmyess ‹Fósterdall› : there was a secretary of state, about 50 years ago, who was a firm advocate of continued testing of nuclear weapons . . . . ." / And I interrupted, it was clear to me now : "Ohsothaaat'sit ? ! : the ‹John› dropped, and ‹Dal› was the shortened form of ? ! – : Sothaaat'sit. Now I'm starting to understand a few things." (But that really was a humdinger; will wonders never !). / He couldn't say about ‹gow›. ‹Chromm› was Celtic for ‹crooked› – just how Gaelic managed to find its way here was unknown : "Probably by accident. Presumably some ranger of Irish background got mixed up with them."

"Yes the ethnologists have found fertile ground here of course. They're pleased as Punch whenever they've got some new custom to record : and it really *is* interesting ! / For example, did you know *this* : that the old and infirm specimens retire to predesignated spots to die ? Into

welwitschia valleys, where regular boneyards have formed by now ? : ‹Centie cemeteries› our people call 'em. Or water. Crucially important to them, that's only logical : where brooks flow off in different directions, at bifurcations or watersheds, they set up cairns, and forbid all camping at the spot. / Nono; in the winter they wander off to the south : Arizona, California, Sonora. Just stop and think ! : we have – *right here, on this very spot !*" (he thrust his index finger at his blotter; very convincing) : "January temperatures of up to 38 below !" (In the summer we've recorded as high as 106). / "Oh sure : if need be we'd set out water tanks. But actually that's only happened just once, when a curious band in search of new pastures ventured too far out into the Ralston Desert. On the whole, they move so well in their territory – know it so well – that they can always find their way to the next spring : 150 miles in 24 hours, a healthy centie can manage that if he wants to."

He gave a confirmatory nod of the head : "The snakes and stinging insects have been eradicated; with insecticides; and some use of radiation : we first had to create favorable conditions for development. It's difficult enough as it is." / "There's one problem above all : they tend – like our herds; genes from their equine half – to stampedes. Touched off generally by sounds, explosions. Desperation seizes them then : the whole tribe, a hundred and more, dash off as if in a frenzy; can't be stopped, do what you will; run full tilt into cliffs, or are dashed to pieces in ravines – and at the very least we end up with broken legs of the most unpleasant sort !" (and shook his face in disapproval, as if personally suffering from one himself).

"Yes, that we do as well ! : Do you suppose we guard and tend them to no effect ? !" / And taking the bait (just as I had intended !), described their ‹tasks› : "At first; when we were getting started; we tried to disguise 2 of us as a centie. – Sure, go ahead and laugh, that's what we *did* : just like two unemployed fellows 'll make 1 circus pony; or at a costume ball. And the front-man does the work : gives inoculations; makes plaster casts; removes skin parasites; gives *one* kind of hormone shot here; *another* there. / Until we got them used to the look of us. Now they call us ‹rangers› – although personally I don't appreciate that asinine term at *all* ! – receive the tools as godsends . . . . . : Beg your pardon ?" / I had muttered "Table scraps to us, gifts of ‹God› to the cat." He applied this to himself, did our Ranger in Chief; and merrily dipped his nose, once.

The ‹Religion of the Centaurs› ? : he first turned his mouth into a funnel-shaft, and then waved said item in disapproval : "They have none. With

the exception of an inevitable, given historical development, animism. Totally sublimated of course : our presence, to be sure, contributes enormously to the formation of their concept of divinity. I mean, the development is not proceeding free of *all* constraint : it *dare* not !" / Ponderous. Placed both hands on the plate-glass before him, and was about to push himself up. But then stayed sitting down after all, and listened, his face intent : . . . ? . . . ? : "*That* is to be sure – – *most* important : Mr. Winer !"

(I had, you see, told him about the Battle of the Spiders; and how I had cured the little fellow who'd been bitten : he hung tightly to my words by the scrolls of his earwork; nodded at certain details; and at times silently moved his lips with mine : "Really ? – I see !"). / And began to explain : "You should know in fact – we're well aware of the matter of course ! Have already autopsied enough dead specimens; but have always arrived too late : before the news can be brought to the wall by a courier, and we can fire somebody over there, it's all over, that stuff takes effect in about fifteen minutes or so ! – Tell me : *might* you still have some of it left over ?" / I obligingly fetched the whole jeroboam from my baggage. He pulled the cork; poured into a watchcase face, was about to dunk in the tip of his tongue . . . . then, however, he was apparently struck with an idea (and *what* a droll sight it was : the way his goateed face, right across from me, hovered just on the tip of its beard above the plate-glass, the tongue hanging out (retraction forgotten in the thick of his brainstorm); the concentrated grayish brows; the strained forehead; the eyes, staring at something or other in the middle of the desk . . . . .).

Slowly the lingual meat retreated. The mouth snapped shut over it. The face rose again to normal height (and gazed ahead with such candor, it was almost impossible to reconcile it with the aura of a Director=Sir) : "Uh=Flushing ! – Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Winer – would you have Dr. Fielding come in here. – Yes : P=D=Q ! – Get a move on !" (Muttered something, too, about "thorough analysis. Ingredients. Extraordinary significance.")

"Mm-hmm ? I see. And that – as far as you could observe – was of some help ? – Hm.", attempting to bridge the ongoing lull in conversation. (Seeing as how I had already told him a good five times now, with a different turn of the phrase each time; *and* confirmed it; *re*confirmed it; and nodded yes *one more time* – and the medico=chemist still hadn't arrived – and finally he made up his mind, put on an earnest face, and began to write himself a longish memo (wouldn't have wanted to see what he was scribbling; little gasps of prayer, I'll bet. Or, more likely,

incomprehensible doodlegraphic scrawls. – Well, I did him a favor, and discreetly gazed out the window).

Heythosewere – : "Centaurs ? " : was I seeing things ? – But, grateful for the distraction, he confirmed that I dared trust my own eyes : "We'll be going down there shortly. – Yesplease : yes ? !"

"Dr. Fielding – Mr. Winer of the ‹Kalamazoo Herald›. – Have a look at this bottle, Doc : there's gin in it. Could you analyze it precisely for me – and I mean as meticulously as possible, with every trick in your bag ! – determine each separate ingredient ? You see, the point is *that* : . . . . . ? "

But Dr. Fielding, tall wan and skinny, had long since pulled the stopper; sniffed; poured some into his left palm, and bedded his coated tongue down in it (with concentrated eyes closed : therefore did not notice his director's excited finger semaphore; but rather spoke, the drawl nicely practiced, across his moldy organ of taste) : "– C_2H_5OH=derivative." – He tasted and mused; all his features concerted about his mouth; the brow threatening immense, smooth : "Aconitumdigitalisbelladonna" he said very rapidly; opened eyes pregnant with meaning : "And all sorts of other things – I'm off now to analyze : when must you have the results, sir ?". But he just waved him off, suppressing his anger with some effort : "Thanksthanks ! – Uh=tomorrow morning : please !". (The head atop the white tube jerked another dutiful bow, while striding wide below, off ‹to analyze›; and as the door was closing again behind the automaton, I allowed myself the paltry joke of memorizing sotto voce : "Wolfsbane; foxglove : nightshade.". But he too had regained control of himself : "Traces," he said curtly : "Probably unavoidable in the distillation process. Besides which, the fellow suffers periodically from Korsakoff's syndrome. – Please, come with me, won't you."

Down many corridors, white stairs : "Yeswell unfortunately we know almost nothing about : how far the Russians are ! They've got all of Europe as a Hominid Research Zone, clear back to the Urals."

Well, that the Japanese & Germans are gone is certainly 1 blessing for us !"[25] I said energetically : "The folks without whose participation

[25]I do not scruple to translate this passage verbatim : quite apart from my duty as a certified translator, and my personal feeling as a vestigial German – 1 of 124 remaining ! – it is indeed of historical importance that such a view, certainly not an uncommon or infrequent one in the North and East, be preserved in print. Future centuries may judge between Goethe and ‹Fósterdall› ! I shall refrain from any commentary that might be interpreted as representing touchiness on my part.

something would have been missing, so to speak, from every world war !". And he turned to me amid enthusiastic bows : "My view *precisely* ! – Nono : this last, uh=simplification=uh, was, in the final analysis, quite welcome : what *has*n't it contributed to the spread of reason in the rest of world ! – Well, they *do* say – I know nothing certain, I'm just passing on rumors : which one should not do as a scientist, to be sure – that the gentlemen in Semipalatinsk have taken a fancy to *aquatic* forms . . . . ." lifted the sheaf of fingers to shoulder level, and let his head bobble back and forth. / "In any case, it's wide open ! Everything is in transition ! : We haven't seen *anything* yet !" he concluded, eyes ashining, and gave an excited shove to the bridge of his glasses.

"Oh your basic aviary !" : We had stopped in front of a wire cage, as tall and long as a big-city apartment house. Iron railing set 6 feet back; allround. And puzzled, I sprawled my elbows on it (and head in handprop : I felt like I was at the zoo !)

The aviary : "No. We call them ‹Flying Masks› : there are, you see, certain recurring stable forms." (Differing according to whether male or female; among the former, around a half dozen ‹facial expressions›; among the latter considerably more : "Using selective breeding, we're certain we can vary & stabilize them as we please – in point of hairdo, feminine beauty and the like : the voice in particular ! : some varieties, when kept in small cages, already produce a kind of warbling; ahyess." And we let our eyes sweep across the broad latticework.

Had planted the trees in there ? : "No. Transplanted; would have taken too long the other way." / Primarily giant saguaro ? : "There's a good reason for that : let's go on over to the lab, okay ?"

In the lab : oh good Fósterdall ! – Now, for the first time, I got some idea of what metamorphosis really means !

And the assistant explained and demonstrated in her glib and smocking fashion : In this succulent here – ("You have to see it against the direct light !") – I crouched and made out a silent dark kernel. "Yes quite right." / Here the photoflourogram. / "And this is how they look in natura." (‹in natura› was good; she meant ‹in spirits›; partial atrophy of the soul, an occupational hazard). – Length and thickness of a standard cucumber. Deadly white : result of life inside plants – and what sort of an ‹interior life› *that* must be for the invaded specimen, worse than a tapeworm ! – Dark spots, but only at the tracheal orifices. With pale embryonic face; a translucent skin covering the eyeballs : nasty sucker ! / "This form lives like this for 2 years in succulents – the only variety that can accommodate them adequately. – Pardon ? – : No; the

host plant isn't destroyed, not at *all* ! Usually an entasis forms at the infected spot. Or sometimes a cyst : no." / "The eggs ? : just as with insects, are produced by the pairing of the winged forms. And inserted into the flesh of the plant by means of an ovipositor that quickly forms and then atrophies." (Where the ‹commensurate development› then began).

"Here : here you can see several examples."; and led me to another cactus stump : one spiraled limb had burst (the wound, however, almost yellow=dry again, patient, scarred : good.); and in the angle of a fork hung the immobile, pale yellow cocoon, 2 spans long. / "One can, of course, kill the pupa by boiling it and transforming the thread into fabric; each of them produces more than a half pound of thin, very strong yarn : here, my straps are made of it" : she innocently pushed the shoulder of her lab smock to one side; and with a shudder I examined the broad band of her bra, mon dieu (and wear nothing else underneath. No big deal, in this heat !). – : "Ohyeah : your trousers, sir : are made of the same material." (and he nodded, patting his thigh with imperturbable hand).

"How long do the" (I gave myself a talking to, and resigned myself; and used the heinous term at last, Landgrave, steel thyself) : "the ‹Flying Masks› live in fact ?" / That depended; they were hard at work extending their life expectancy : "At present 2 to 3 months. – That is : here with *us;* in captivity. Out there, in the preserve, they have too many enemies : owls; the few small bird-of-prey species that are left : and above all, of course, those damned arachnids !" / People here simply could not *stand* them, the spiders (and right they were, judging by my own experience) : they captured the larval forms as well, by boring with their proboscis into the cactus trunks – something they did in any case – and driving ever deeper once they scented something, down to the larval mass, which they then greedily sucked up. Even devoured the pupae. They snared the flying forms with their nets. : "And they really are *so* stupid – or better : lecherous & ineducable – so that, although they have excellent eyesight, they simply fly straight for the male; whether there's an arachnid net in the way or not."

"So you've got to exterminate the Never=Nevers !". And they grimly nodded their heads : "Wouldn't we love to : if only we knew the magic formula ! – But it isn't quite that simple; they're tough. With the help of the centies in fact – we've had some very pretty success, and have been able to push the beasts back up north. But they already appear to be adapting themselves to the cold Canadian forest primeval : developing red-furry forms, with special hard proboscises for boring the

plumbing of the trees . . . . ." (Both of them breathed a sigh, in team= sync) :"There's scads and scads of work for us yet in any case."

And back out the other door : there we stood on the broad oval of the station athletic field. And immediately fascinated, I set my hands on my hips : damn, could they move ![26] (And he too was nodding excitedly beside me, all his director's face beaming : "Just let somebody try to match that, huh ? !")

The centies were running races ! ! : Four abreast, they were just swooping over the last hurdle, into our end zone. The heads stretched way forward; in the right hand the short whip (with which they began to lash their own haunches ! Suddenly the huge bay on the inside lane, Man of War, lurched forward, as if a giant hand were shoving from behind : 10 yards, 20, 30 ! ! – : (and ripped the ribbon with the tip of his single horn !)) !

Away we go, to the man with the stopwatch ! : And he, too, was pleasantly excited : "The mile in thirty-one point fourteen ! And that's just in training : can you *imagine* what kinds of times we'll get for the meet !" / "Ye=eees : let me tell y', that's not an easy trick to learn, taking the tape with the *horn* instead of the breast. That takes at least three-hundredths of a second off the time !" / But there was no getting them used to sulkies, for harness-racing : "The centie suffers not the yoke !" one chieftain had declared : proud would I have my centie ! – (And permit only those for whom they have great love or respect to ride them : that's me !)

As we walk along : "Oh, we have a number of contests, and all with strong teams. – Of course we don't have any chance when it comes to running races; those are kept strictly separate. Same goes for the broad jump." / And what did they do together ? : "Welll=uh : shot put for instance; it's wide open who wins that. On one precondition, of course : standing position only ! Because if a centie – no matter how small you draw the circle – could use the spring-power of all 4 legs : dear oh dear !" (And so the various throwing contests held jointly; javelin, discus, stone).

"Or here" : and this time I had to prop up my face with *both* hands : the B=teams were holding a soccer scrimmage together ! / (First get used to all those legs . . . . .) / An Assyrian-bearded centaur was just stopping a ball with his chest : it slid obediently to his feet. Quick as lightning he put a hoof to it – survey all round – : and kicked it far downfield (where his forward immediately relayed it with his right

[26]The following scenes are true-blue American ! We denigrated Germans would presumably have made sure that they learned Greek, and simply remained in their natural state.

hindhoof (sic !) – but here came the human defender, a good 7 feet tall, leaping in the path of the ball, headed it back to his goalie (who took the ball to his paternal arms; adroitly avoided a dapple-gray, who was attempting a fair block, and kicked it far down into the opponents' territory : !)).

"Yes, but don't you have to take the same factor into account : that they can sprint so much faster ?" But he was already waving that off : "That's more than compensated for : by the fact that their goalie is more awkward !" (and, pondering) : "a centaur team with a human goalie : that would be – theoretically speaking – invincible ! Can those fellows shoot penalty kicks ? ! : Recently ripped the skin right open on the chest of one of our goalies !" / (Wait; one more thing : "What about headers ? : the advantage of the horn !" : "Naturally that's awfully hard on balls.").

"When ?" (the games) : "Oh, you'll be long gone. Not for 14 days. It's purely intramural."

"Prizes ?" – : "Varies. – Mostly the sort of thing where the victor's whole tribe gets some benefit : a shiny aluminum bucket; 3 steel speartips : we not only breed good physical traits this way, but also mental ones at the same time : quick reflexes; quick decisions; fighting spirit – which then works in our favor, in the war against the arachnids for instance : Andsoforthandsoforth." (Man proposes, Fósterdall disposes).

Blue glassy evening edged in gold : the centaurs shook proper hands with their opponents (and afterwards were piloted through the gate, back into their own territory). / "Goes without saying : 8 in all." (That is, traffic tunnels clear under the Hominid Sector; which connected the halves of the USA with one another, from Mazatlan to Fort Churchill. Only ultra-stratospheric flights were permitted, 10 miles up; precisely because of their panicky fear).

And lent an ear to the smart young soldier – : ? – : "Ah, good. : your baggage has just arrived with the mail-rocket. I'll have it brought to your room." And further, your total magnanimous booming host (there was, after all, an embarrassingly bad impression to rectify; you can say that again !) : "Oh my no, you *must* lie down for a few hours ! Take a rest. The machine for Eureka won't be leaving before three thirty tomorrow morning. And eat a good meal first : please do !"

Please : the mess-hall : He dined, the compleat patriarch, amid his assistants and GIs. Indeed, tossed a cordial wave in the direction of some distant table as well. Or laughed at a subservient=lame joke : in my realm wit shall not go unrewarded ! / (What's on the menu ? Let's hope not rattlesnake in hemlock gravy again; gammon of rabid dog, larded

with scorpions . . . . .) / But no : the food was really good. Simple; sturdy; lots of meat : you just had to spear it with your fork, and there was another meat boulette on it. (And the WAC=waitresses, in their new milkglass-hued schiller uniforms,[27] their arms like slender rainbows, their smiles untiring : Let us make merry, within the century the heathen are upon us !).

"And this is your room !" : he opened the door (enameled white on the outside) for me with his very own hand; and nimbly followed me inside, too (as a responsible hotel manager, accustomed to making sure with his very own eyes that his honored guests lack for nothing. – "Right. – : Well.").

"I've had them pack a – quite simple, plain – blanket of ‹mask=linen›[28] in with your baggage" (and at the same time in the informalest of fashions checked out my belongings, right ? ! But on a trip like this I would have to be prepared for numerous further instances of that, I suppose). (And I shuddered at the thought of his present, too; but I forced an obligatory fletching of the teeth, until he seemed satisfied). / "For the connoisseur the value lies in the material, not in the manufacture. – And here :" : he handed me, two-handed, beaming, the massive oblong folio : ! Proudly he raised the tawny spur of his goatee (and I had to admit, against my will, that it didn't look that unattractive, with the twirl of variegated eyebrows, and what was left of his wiry iron hair), as he declared : "We employ diverse draftsmen here as well; painters. And so we have had them produce – in a limited edition; for those very few interested parties : the prints signed and numbered, to be sure – these color lithographs : a complete collection of relatively stable mask types ! Plus some photographic enlargements of a few particularly interesting, but unfortunately evanescent hybrids :".

Politely I flipped through a few pages – : – : and they really were done by a master hand. Very clean and distinctive. Portraits with unmistakable likenesses. / "Wellyes; with *one* qualification : that such a portrait in fact always looks like several thousand faces" he corrected; his arms cozily intertwined.

(And striking faces among them, granted : the mask of a grim Timon; peevish wrinkles on the brow, a bitterly wrenched mouth, medium

[27]Which has nothing whatever to do with our dear departed German; but is rather to be understood in the sense of ‹iridescent›.

[28]‹Mask-linen› : judging by which, the established technical term for textiles made of the threads from the ‹flying-mask› cocoons.

gray hair. / Of course I examined – far be it from me to deny my own sex ! – a great many more females !) :

"Nefertiti ? ! : "Yes. Quite deliberate hybrid," he confirmed : "unfortunately it's turned out to be an ombrophobous[29] form; you can't keep it indoors." / (You ‹can't keep it indoors› ? : what nerve they've got ! Or better : totally devoid of feelings. / He looked at me – ‹cunningly› I thought; or was I mistaken ? – : "Which of them do *you* like best ?").

No choice then but to hold the odious tome up to my nose again – (wisest course, imagine : it was a ‹Gallery of American Beauties›. Useful later on as well.)

"Hmmmmm." : a floozy-cheeked face, with crumpled smiler and disgustingly plump brow ("Our ‹Gioconda› : definitely a look-alike, don't y' think ? !") – Yes; sad to say. They could have bound me to her as a lad, and I still wouldn't have wanted to ! (Hope these guys haven't imitated more paintings, too : what sort of mind does that take ! !).). / Or then again, maybe *not* : it is after all the ideal beauty for a good many folk; and working from it, these guys have systematically bred a whole strain ! Which was the case with Nefertiti, too. – And so, like everything under the moon, the matter could be viewed from at least 2 sides. Neither of which, however, appealed to me !).

(Ah, who cares; just get it over and done with. So this guy moves on, and I can hit the sack) : "*This* one here. Guess I'd say." (She looked deceptively like the Shub=ad, Queen of Sumeria, whom I had had a crush on for a while as a schoolboy. – And it really was her : let's hope that satisfies him !).

"Glad to do it !" : strode buoyantly to the nightstand and made a phone call : "Uh=Flushing ? – Yesd'y'hearme ? : Number 18 : Eight : Teen. / That's right ! / – Why all the better !"; and, turning back to me, obligatory smile on his lips : "May I take the liberty of having her placed in here with you for the night ?"

I must have had a totally dumbfounded look on my face; because he rubbed his hands in delight : "Ahyes, you *never* would've thought we could work that fast, right ? ! I paid close attention to the way you took your time; and ever so coolly selected a tricky form . . . . . Ah=nono=no !" (I had raised my hands in protest) : "No, it's quite alright by me that you've put us – with absolutely no pressure : you must admit ! – to the test. A good thing the public 'll learn for once what reliable work we do here ! There's the most godawful hogwash going around, in lay circles;

[29]Afraid of shadows

certain biased cliques have put such horror stories in circulation : but for a long time now, *I've* wanted some level-headed fellow, with an open mind" (that was me then : why all you could do was lay hand to heart for that deep-felt bow. / So bring on your bird : I'm taking a sleeping tablet, so I won't hear or see nuttin').

Miss Flushing : in her hand a tiny cage (just big enough for its inmate to hop one perch up, one perch down. And a little feeding bowl with perfumed, honey-enriched water).

"Best wishes for a good night's sleep, Mr. Winer. – And now I'm afraid I have to say good-bye –" (I haven't pumped paws that heartily in a long time !) – You *shall* be awakened in time : at 3 on the dot – you'll see to that, uh=Flushing." (And with grave countenance she jotted a note on the steno-pad that hung from her belt).

Sitting on the edge of the bed. Gawking at Queen Shub=ad. (They had even hung those elegant double earrings on her. Though made of some yellow, feathery-light stuff; didn't look like the appendages bothered her.)

Then the humor of the situation became clear. I propped my chin in the fork of thumb and indexfinger, ready for a long chat. And asked : "Well, your majesty ? How's tricks ?". / No answer. Except that in the fixed sensual face, the eyes began to flicker – and only then did it occur to me the poor thing was probably frightened out of its wits ! (Which is normally not the first thing you think of with such a charming wench. (If you're a man !)).

So gave her a smile, as soothing as I knew how; and as proper a nod as I could manage. (But the devil gave me a poke all the same; and I cautiously stuck my little finger in through the bars : ?).

"Wheehh !" : very high and excited. Jumped for safety onto her upper perch, further back. Waited. Her eyes grew calmer; and bolder; the mouth fuller (I mean, the Sumerian shiksa to a tee !). / Came back down. Took a sniff (giving her nostrils an abandoned flair !). Carefully opened her mouth, and slowly let the pink hollow tongue tumesce a bit : around my fingertip . . . (it was slightly rough on the inside, and you could feel a weak sucking – ah, getting stronger. But not unpleasant).

Asked my watch : "What's the time ?"[30] : "Twenty-two hours : sixteen." muttered the lazy alto voice that I had recently had installed (really

[30]The item in question is the ‹Talking Watch›, in use for some time now up north, though people here do not hold it in much regard. The latest version, as is well known, only replies when ‹the master› speaks to it; it has likewise become customary for men to favor those with female voices. And vice versa.

should have taken the soprano; this one here sounded so damned carnal). / That late already ? So I retracted my finger from my Queen of the Night – "Wheehhh !" she went, vexed, annoyed. – And stood up.

Over to the shower stall; undress; I tossed my clothes over the stool (and stretched my weary bones. And set fists behind my ears) . . . . .

: But now she went absolutely wild, seeing me like that ! ! Jumped back and forth; clung to the bars : "Wheehhhh !" (and the sound got throatier, deeper : "Wheehhhh !"). Stuck out, as far as it would go, further even, the sheath of her tongue, offering herself : "Wheehh : Whoo : Whoo : Whoo !". / Which, weary as I was, set me pondering. While I shifted the spray nozzle around my body; felt the thin silver snake on my skin, and kept varying the water temperature : now that really would be a decisive case of sodomy ! (Or did they regard that as an exception, *too* ? And had systematically enlarged upon it : so that, let's assume, every soldier ‹in the ranks› had his ‹flying mask› in his room ? (Because there weren't enough WAC's to go round. Definitely not enough.). "Was'n Da=Sein !"[31] my great-great-uncle would have muttered no doubt. And now it occurred to me that at one time there had been an obscure German author, around 1790 more or less, who had fantied[32] about ‹flying heads› : ‹Aristippus› was the title; not all that clumsily constructed. And – psychologically *very* nicely turned – the old guy (right : Wieland was the name !) had let a *woman*, a high-class hooker, spin that particular extended mind=game.)).

But all the same, this wasn't how he'd imagined it, back then, in the Happy Teens[33] : woulda made some king-size bug-eyes too, right now ! –

Dark & in bed : she was still wailing (but had calmed down; all melancholy and soft (and my sleeping pill was already doing its job. I was slipping back now (like some lazy dawdling wind, when digging potatoes : wonder if she wants out ? : hold to the window, and let 'er fly out into the night ? (But sure to cause problems. (With the director= sir . . . . .))))). – –

"Yes ? ! – : OhIsee – : yes." : to wit : the discreet ‹Hello : Charley ? !›= call of the telephone. (By several alluring maidens' voices, prerecorded : must have taped it yesterday evening, just for me; *very* considerate;

[31]Likewise in German in the original.

[32]Neologism constructed from ‹fantasy›, and more pejorative than the usual ‹fantasize›.

[33]Perfectly common usage, collective noun for the centuries before 2000 (= Twenty=hundreds !). Intended – half disparaging; half envious and nostalgic – as an allusion to our planet's ‹adolescent years›. Whereby it is still open to question – to retain the metaphor – whether its ‹mature years› will be any happier !

just like at mother's.) / And again, how nice, the customary reminder by a female voice, all young tender=lovingcare wife : We have to get going. : "Three o'clock, Charley. You'll have to rise. And breakfast is already=ready downstairs : C'mon, please !". (And more of the same babble; and more; and more; each time set just a hair louder; the wife more urgent=energetic – the real slugabeds even had curses built in, xanthippoidal).

The mask awoke too (she had had her wings folded forward for sleep; over her eyes, so that only nose mouth & chin remained visible). Peevishly rubbed her eyes on her pinions (the little claw hooks at the tips were used as grooming-paws; to comb with for example : once again, how wisely God had arranged *that* ! (And/or Fósterdall : I'll probably never be able to boast of a ‹soul that thrills to terror› as the pithy adage of the general has it.)). / And the mask shoved her nose forward in a bewitching=unregal pout; like a film star doing her surprised=well-practiced "Oow !" – and abruptly broke into a morning warble, covering the octave from top to bottom, "Whoorrr=llll !" : lord, that *too* ! –

Outside the long stride of a male. A soldierly knock : ? ! / "Yes, sir ! : Com=ming !"

Another one a good half=head taller than I (they've all been handpicked, these fellows !) : the sergeant. / I cast a final glance back into the room : one more of those many scenes I have to drag around with me (and this one guaranteed unforgettable !) – Well, at some point there'll be an end to that too : that's *one* consolation !).

"Ye=ess. – Tell me – –" (deliberately; so that he doesn't take it the wrong way) : "Isn't there anything I can do for her ?" (and pointing with chin across to Queen Shub=ad) : "She really went to a lot of trouble – sang me to sleep with a wonderful lullaby – y' know ?". / He gave a barely=knowing smile. But was immediately all-business again : "Hardly. – Cela ne sent rien : ces papillons là. – : We *do* feed them . . ." and shrugged his wide, uniformed shoulders. / (Alright, Queen : Farewell. – And she gazed mistrustfully at us from her little perch.).

Through the corridors : "Ah, you're French then ?" : "Canadian : Raoul Mercier." (From Rivière du Loup; on the Saint Laurent. And we chatted away merrily in French, getting acquainted, all the way to the canteen).

Yesterday's mess-hall : one table had been set again. / "Please join me, help yourself, M'sieur Mercier !" (And slow but sure, he too reached for the crispy rolls, the tasty sandwiches. I did have a little notion in the back of my mind with that invitation : just in case they had slipped a shot of monkshood into my coffee !) / And there was a platinum blonde

beaming at the serving window. Came out, too; steered her torso through the table floes. Handed me a bundle of sandwiches, *that* big : "Tide y' ovah on yoah trip !" – made a more naked display of her bite : in steady alternation, one tooth gold, one white (and exactly reversed in the lowers[34]. But I only gave my most absentminded seated bow : No use, my child; Thalja's blonde was much more beguiling !). –

The sea of concrete looked endless in the nocturnal arena. Surrounding our cone of light : ten yards wide, twenty high, there stood the motionless yellow funnel of mist. (Way at the back, on the left, a second just like it, but very small from here; to see it, you had to walk through this wall of ours). / Mercier was already at the controls; and I first handed in my valeaze (which he laid behind him). Then ducked moi=même in through the low ogival of poles and plexiglass (and at once arrange my limbs : to the front, and the right; so as not to obstruct him; okay.)

Just the two of us alone ? : and he gave a proud nod : "Just secret missives and medicine" (in the baggage compartment behind us were only 2 medium-sized attaché cases). / The seat was springy, red leather and white steel – and was already rocking me backwards : so pulling out. / And vibrating less. / And away we softly shot.

"Ah, the few miles to Eureka ? : We'll be there before sunrise !" The steering wheel began to turn in his mighty mitts; gently; and just as ponderously=minutely back again : there we were in a torrent of asphalt (and it raced away beneath us; above, to the left, the constant half moon : bludgeoned by black branches, skewered by notched scimitars, the Invulnerable : bounced off ebony columns, ripped foliage nets, licorice loops, melanisms – : and here he was again at the same altitude with us : running great time, old crookshanks was !).

And Mercier, although anything but a blabbermouth, obviously had something on his sergeant's heart : "You'll be paying a visit to the ‹Republica Intelligentsia›[35], M'sieur ? – By accident I heard Miss Flushing speak of it yesterday –" (was this ‹his girl› ? Well, as we all know, tastes do vary an awful lot; maybe when not on duty her face blossomed like a rose) – : "I=uh : have a brother there, y' see. Has a three-year fellowship, for painting."

[34]It would appear that this has finally been accepted as a cosmotological advance up north; with a full range of colors; gold, black, red, however, seem to be the predominant choices.

[35]Instead of ‹IRAS› (= International Republic for Artists and Scientists) of the original. I've chosen the term (German : ‹Gelehrten Republik›) as a way of memorializing the popular – at least it was at one time – work of the great Klopstock.

"Oh, you can't mean the Louis Sébastian Mercier ! ? : The one who did ‹White Rising Slabs› and ‹Prow World› ?" / He nodded proudly into the dead-ahead night : that's the one ! / "Why how interesting ! – Of course I'll pass your greetings on to him : what all should I tell him ?". (And was the touchingly simple, usual stuff : he was doing fine. Mother was still alive, ailing as usual – but that didn't mean anything; after 35 years, her children had got used to her dark hints : she probably wouldn't live to see another spring.). / "Ahyes, if you could do *that*, m'sieur : that'd be lovely !" (I had offered to take his most recent photograph along with me. If – as might be expected – I was questioned during the frisking ? : surely I ought to be allowed to carry my brother's picture with me ? ! : "Nono; y' can depend on it : I'll get it through. *And* deliver it !"). / "Nah. No chance for *that* one !" (The snapshot of him boxing with a centaur; *and* had managed a draw : "If he hadn't had that full beard cushioning all the uppercuts : I probably could 've knocked him out ! – Oh they're strong enough ! What they lack is human agility : no legwork. But if they can put their bounce in a straight-on blow, you've got to have your feet firmly planted : not to be sneezed at !").

Which got us back on the subject : Haven't you ever, Aren't you, Do you know perhaps ? – He had, He was, He knew. / The things that went on at the wall stations : "At one time, when they were still careless, they thought they could assign really raw recruits, twelve= to fifteen=year-olds." / Many a lad had scaled the wall, on moonlit nights : "Never heard from again !" / And some were driven into a frenzy by the drill and desert loneliness; and had mowed down whole herds of centaurs with a machine gun ! (Well then it's no wonder, really, if they feel a little creepy around their ranger masters. And ‹panicky fear› breaks out at the sound of shots !). / "One kid fell in love with a papillon ! practically crazy : spent all his free time with it; chatting away with it, sleeping with it at night; running off at every training-break, even during rifle=drill – and in=point=of=fact it looked ! : as if it had a certain fondness for him ! Something that had never been observed before. Sat on his finger. Apparently learned to react to various calls, so long as there were major differences in vowel sounds : if the command was ‹Venez !› – damn if it didn't come fluttering up; sometimes we'd sit up there in his room and watch." (So he had been one of Raoul's fellow countrymen). / But the anecdote soon took a turn toward dreadful schmaltz : how after 3 months, the beloved mask grew wrinkly; shriveled inside of 2 days; let out one last monotone "Boohhh" – and then collapsed, a rag of rubber : youthful tears; despair; tentative de suicide;

loss of weight and other intriguing symptoms. (At which point, thankgod, it became a point of honor for all the WACs : could not an upstanding signal-corps lass compete with a painted toy balloon ? ! With the not inelegant result, that the cunning lad, quickly enlightened, had soon provided the entire female auxiliary forces that sense of superiority that had been put to such a serious challenge. (And was given an awful dressing-down by his outraged superiors ! And to clear his mind, was transferred to a *very* lonely radar station on the bounding main; one of those ten=by=ten platforms, on 6 tall iron stilts. And is said to have turned pretty damned introspective.) – Ahyes; that's what happened.)

"And there's the phare d'Eureka. – I'll drop you off at customs. – No; I've got to proceed at once to Portland." Looked all about him with a chauffeurian glance; forced his facial features into an intense squeeze (and played with almost every knob – : pop, that one too !).

Handshakes beside the custom-house wall; (above us the thick head of the lighthouse : it had just been turned off; for the sun was bursting now out of the giant silo's roof, as if yet another nuclear reactor were exploding (the only thing missing was a tuba, gruesome=omniscient, for this local Last Judgment !)). / : "Well then : bon voyage, sergeant ! And you'll see in the next letter from your brother that things have been taken care of. – Nono : it's *me* who should thank you : au revoir !". –

And now his spot was empty. I took the attaché case in my left hand (plus the picture book, was it ever heavy, 'Zounds Vellum & Parchment !), my knapsack in my right (and in there, by the by, was that piece of mask=linen; wrapped in blue silk ribbon, I'd noticed ! : ‹Geblüht im Sommerwinde, / gebleicht auf grüner Au', / ruht still es jetzt im Spinde, / als Stolz der Deutschen Frau !›[36] : those were my great-great-uncle's truculent, mocking words for the laundry-days of his childhood – and that sure hadn't been hominid cloth back then !)

For lack of a hand, use the foot to knock : at once one gray-smocked, one white-smocked runt opened up. And admitted right off : "We've been expecting you." (*And* watching; I can believe that). / Augmented all of a sudden by several more whites and grays : "We have to hurry; the ship is leaving in a half hour." : the gray ones took charge of my luggage; the whites led me into a glass parlor.

"The original plan was for the examination to be done on board . . . . ." (while he held my tongue down with his spatula, so I couldn't let out

[36]An old washday rhyme for the housewife; German in the original as well

a peep. And peered into my mouth (straining as if it were a ninety-feet-deep hole : here came his right hand groping for a tweak of the tonsil) . . . . .) : "– but really we've got . . . there's still plenty – quite enough – – : time !" (and synchronized that final word with an emphatic daub of iodine on the uvula, making me let out a mortified hic-cough : that's really all these hide-patchers want ! : to make the poor miserable patient give a helpless=vulgarissimo belch; fart; an idiotic ‹Aaaaa›; make you snap your legs at their whim : with them dressed to the nines, and you defenseless and naked !) / This one as well, pulling out spatula and brush up front, his face academically illumined, as if he had just managed some inimitable feat of renown, brows drawn up flippantly (and hammerlet pounding all over me. On my back the circles of four stethoscopes. An assistant torque-wrenched the strap around my artery (turning my fingertips thick and red). Then, of course, I had to lie down again on the white-sheeted standard-icecold leather couch. And, while someone strangled my genitals with his(her?) hand; someone else zealously counted toes and fingers; a third one ripped sample hair from allover me; another pulled with might & main at my leg; I was already feeling skewered at more points of my topography than I could count : serum=sera spurted.) / Then : "Stand up, please !" : here came a ‹sister› – (deep irony lies in that term somewhere : but where ?) – of barbarian scowl carrying a special syringe of loathsome length : and now, as compensation, they wanted fluid from me ! (Sensation ? – : about like jabbing through a playing card. As they tapped spinal fluid for diagnosing my liqueur : "Just a tiny bit; you won't have any dizzy spells; the lumbar sac stays full." / So I've got one a those inside me too : a lumbar sac !).

Dressed again; alone with the sen.-med. officer : "Tell me=uh – otherwise everything's fine; we've given you shots for the minor damage; not radioactive either : I would suggest you see a *dentist* sometime – yes, what is that rash you've got on your glans ? Benign blisters, to be sure, we've analyzed the fluid from one, but . . . ." and gazed at me demanding info : ? / So I told him about the affair I'd had, with 1 loose girl, and the frolicsome lashing with a bunch of nettles. / "Aha !" he went, satisfied mouth closed. Nodded too, as if he'd figured that out long ago. But then gave another cautionary wrinkle of the brow; and I indeed had to return with him again to the examining room; lie down on a Lysolized glass plate . . . . . until chemists and microscopists had confirmed my statement : "You must excuse us; but it is our duty after all . . . ." (Well, at least it's your something ! – And to conclude our seramoanies, they quietly scrubbed me down a second time; just in case).

Alone again with my luggage – it too reeking of hospital. / (What time is it ? : "Mmmmm : five fifteen . . . ." the alto voice lavendered : *really* should've picked that matter-of-fact soprano !).

Up : and there in the doorframe, darkblue and gold-edged, the Captain, Sir. Medium build, ramrod, most trustworthily uniformed (living allegory of competence : indeed the very crews of commuter ships were – as countless television programs had informed us – put together with an eye to the most impressive photogeniality : first step on the trip to perfection, to the land of intellect and the summation of ideals, ‹Voyage de Zulma dans les pay des Fées›[37]). / And the pins and needles had started pricking : it really *was* quite something for me to be allowed in as a reporter ! The first in a good dozen years ? : it could, if suitably exploited, yield a hecatomb : fortune=honor=fame, a long'n'healthy life ! – I decided to pull myself together as best I could ![38]

At the warehouse wharf : "My, it's quite a fine complex !" (me; in obligatory awe. And he, brusque): "Better than 10 acres." / In response to my cool=challenging inquiry (I am after all an honored guest. And people would find it downright ‹unnatural› – and discourteous – if I didn't exhibit curiosity of the most callous water; always just one step over the line of propriety, eliciting amused umbrage; a dash of youth and candor to inspire confidence, fresh wind from Canada. Nothing superficial – always give them a flash of certain fundamental knowledge – not too profound though : otherwise, the experts (and the Island's population consisted of nothing but ‹pertest› sorts) will start in shoptalking gobbledygook. And under said disguise always collecting material, as much as my notebook could hold, bon. (Although I wasn't sure I could pull it off : I was basically too impulsive and innocent for missions of this sort ! Likewise, held great men in much too deferential respect; too strong a feeling for works of art[39] – but first let's get the job done right here.)

To wit, the warehouses : "Certainly. Mr. Fitzsimmons can give you a tour; we still have a good 8 minutes left : after you." / And so guided by the quicksilvery Irishman through the nearest oversize shed : crates ("zinc-lined") with books from all nations great & small (every publishing

[37]I am unfamiliar with any text with this title. Nor do French literary histories provide any clues.

[38]Something every serious reader would long ago have wished our author (a congenital defect ? by which I am referring to the apostrophized great-great-uncle !).

[39]Cf. pertinent passages further on : to be sure, one would have *wished* the author such qualities.

house had to submit 1 copy of each new title. Pushed open the door to the packing room, too : bundles of newspapers, down to the smallest local rag, were rolling in the paws of the aproned workers !) / "Here's the most urgent ‹optimail› : 'sindeed, that'll be going along with you now. – Well, medicines and such. Whatever the Islanders have ordered. From Beltane to Samhain[40] that includes fresh fruit in freezer chests . . ." : here came the interruption from the entrance : "Mr. Winer ? : !" – and I shook the redhead's hand chop-chop : they were just showing me what they wanted me to see anyway ! / And along the wharf, and across the gangplank.

On board : my ‹caseworker› was introduced to me (who was likewise my shadow. Maybe to protect me too, from falling through hatches too often : "Ensign Wilmington."). / The cranes were heaving diverse steel drums aboard : "The liquid atomic fuel; for driving our half of the Island." (Which didn't exactly increase the charms of the cruise; with gray-streaked eyes I followed the hovering columns). / "No. All commuter ships have the exact same displacement : one thousand tons. Anything larger can't enter the Island harbors." : "‹. . . harbors› ? : plural ?" : "Indubitably; two. – No : I can't give you a map of the Island, that's outside my authority." (but softened this with the addendum) : "It wouldn't be of any help to you; we have only nautical maps showing the outline. But you're sure to have one handed to you there." (And in case I didn't, I'd demand one; make a note of that).

Around the stern, the broad simmering water; in the hand-fitting a wart of iron (you could slip your fingertips into the next one up) : "We have several strong engines that reach a maximum of 35 knots; average speed for the trip is around 30." And in reply to my organically integrated question about the duration of the crossing : "Oh not that long : at *most* it will take us no more than 12 hours; the position has just been cabled." / He had never been on the Island himself; only peeked out over its rim from the top of the mast. (So nothing of note to be learned here. – : "Would it be possible to lie down somewhere for an hour or so ? I wasn't able to catch much sleep last night." I've seldom seen a human countenance *so* relieved as was this one of Ensign Wilmington ! (Understandable : first of all, he still had duties to perform; no one was going to do the work that was waiting for him. And besides, a bothersome civil=observer was removing himself from underfoot : very good !)).

[40]Gaelic : 1 May through 31 October.

First off, to the head (and pulling the chain, carefully stepping back : in Uruguay, in a backwater hotel one gave me a blast in the face; I'm not a man who lets that sort of thing happen twice !). / And was truly in advanced need of sleep : so my bones did a stretch inside me, and dilated my jaw joint. There was nothing to see on board, not on this little etna burner here, practically nothing (I'd have no trouble inventing the thrilling description of the crossing : my powers of imagination are still sufficiently, spontaneously, intact to produce a trip on a tuglet with no discomfort ! And was forced to grin glumly all the same, when I pictured the dust I'd be throwing in my readers' eyes : how I had excitedly stridden the planks, to and fro – would I not soon be standing face-to-face with the immortals ? ! The most important artists that our generation had been kind enough to grant us ? A virtual expedition to Elysium; naught but conversations with gods and heroes ! – And my write-up's importance as a historical document would abide ‹eternal› (in-common-transit-fixed) – and I gave another grim shake : oh, to have a respectable profession !).[41] –. –. –

And bracing my torso up with a groan : mine : I will dream no more ! ! / Stood up, and brushed my teeth, handwork flying (no; not ‹flying›, otherwise all that stuff will come back to me again ! : in my dream I had entered a country lodge. Instead of the customary=barbaric antlered deer= and stag heads, in this corridor there were *human heads* on the walls ! : you hung your hat on them; tossed your scarf around the stump of a neck; for your coat, a ring had been set between the teeth, with hook and hanger (and woe to the one that let them fall ! : he immediately got his ears boxed, so hard his eyes would roll and scud !). / A sophomoric lass came running up and snapped her fingers in command : and the red needle of a tongue appeared in the man's face above her; deflected slowly (until it struck, in the right corner of his mouth) – while she wiped her postage stamp across it; forcing him to lick, it seemed; and then glued it onto her little pink triangular letter : 't will make a holiday in hell, I will sleep no more ! !).

Breeze on deck; my "Ah" (not of ‹deliverance›, there's no such thing; but rather of ‹diversion›). / And still more yawning. – What time is it ? : "Oh, that's not right, Mr. Winer; your watch is wrong ! You've

[41]Quite apart from the misuse of the quotation from Goethe, this entire passage allows one to draw not unimportant conclusions as to the credibility of the author in respect to minutia and adiaphora : surely he could have felt emotions of reverence, et cetera, which he treats ironically here, without compromising himself in any way. But one must – given our total lack of information from other sources – make the best of even such a report as this.

forgotten to turn it back for the difference in longitude : which have you got ? Central or Eastern ?" (Eastern. / And ‹Mountain› had been done away with entirely; the Hominid Sector ran right through it; the few areas along its borders were reassigned to Central or Pacific Time. / And so I let my alto lady babble a couple in rapid succession . . . : okay. / "Which means that the time zone is constantly changing on the Island, right ?". He merely lifted dismissive brows : "Indubitably, as with any ship on a long voyage. Which, in the last analysis, it is." (judging by which, he always said ‹indubitably› instead of ‹yes›; and I tried it out on him a few times.)

"Oh, we entered the restricted zone long ago ! The ‹IRAS› should come into view any moment now." / It measured 380 sea miles (or 660 versts[42]) in diameter : so no alien vessel, by sea or air, was allowed to come within half that distance of the holy of holies ! / Just now, the signal from the ‹crow's nest› – and ever *so* indulgent, his smirk at the land-rat's intentional=obliging use of the term : always sense your own superiority ! – : "Then we'll see it from the forecastle in fifteen minutes."

From the forecastle : ? – : ! / : ? ? : ! ! ! : and then I saw it, too, the grayer piece in the ribbon of haze on the horizon (and at once, profoundly moved, crossed my arms against my billowing mackintosh; and gazed at it with visionary eye : search out the Hellenes' land with heart and soul. / He honored my silence for so long that I got bored.)

Ever closer : now a sailor had constantly to follow behind me, carrying my baggage (and they grinned happily : Well, quite a different world here, cub reporter, wouldn't you say; with its ‹own laws› ? ! – Are they in for a surprise with my report ! That is, if they ever get to see the original.)

Now filled thirty degrees of the round of vision and had turned iron black; with my pocket telescope I could already make out – though the rolling of the deck presented difficulties – towers; and large buildings. / "Trees too ?"; and he nodded in affirmation : "Indubitably."

"What are they doing there along the edge ?" : Human figures scrambled along the side, very like a wall now; one of them slid slowly down it (kept going; into the gray flood – where he vanished ? ! : "Divers : removing barnacles; applying new paint." Sternly crossed his arms, and pressed strange and haughty lips together : "Not all that simple a job : we fished out a dead frogman not long ago." / But turned aside my still questioning glance : "You'll see it for yourself. More than any of *us* knows.").

[42]Equals 700 Old German kilometers.

And the iron facade now, high as a house, along which our tiny ship glided : not too close; for the waves were breaking with deep murmuring against the adamant; glided upward a bit; and sank, ashamed of the futile attempt, back down again : iron=bound ! / From the radio-room mad and incessant morsing; but, although as a newspaperman I'm a master of that craft too, I understood not a word; apparently all in code. –

"Now !" : for our bow here was turning in, ineluctably, toward the Iron Front. / Where I spotted a gap : a chink ! : it was a gateway, a good hundred yards wide ! (On the right, large pale green lettering – probably illuminated at night) – :

IRAS
Starboard Harbor

Gliding through; between channeled shores : into a broad, crannied basin. / The water began to whip-lace about us we were breaking so hard. Slower *still.* The deck sloped noticeably as, with rudder and screw, we were pressed against the wharf (where already enough dockworkers stood to moor us to the bollards. / Cranes drew in, turned about, flaunting stiff weight-lifter arms, and slowly dropped their respective loads : !).

Why was he still holding me back with a motion of the hand ? His face void of all expression; his eyes directed far into the heavens ? (Full of white cloud ellipsoids, to be sure; but . . . . . / : ah, that's it : the fellow waving on the bridge !)

Waver on the bridge : all in navy blue, with wide carpenter's pants. Atop, the foppish plate, from which dangled ribbons even more childish than elsewhere. The arms thrust out stiffly to both sides; with bannered extensions, right white=red, left black=gold. Tilted forward, lurking the more . . . . . ?

: and suddenly began to go partially mad (id est, his arms ! : Each in business for itself; each flapped and snapped in a different lunacy; semaphore would have been downright soulful in comparison. There ! : soon they would hectocotylize and fly away; each on its banner, one to the right and up into the blue, the other to the left and down, waterward. / Wilmington, to be sure, regarded the unfortunate with benumbed satisfaction, as if watching the goal of human development unhinging before his eyes. When, contrary to all expectation, the arms stayed attached, I indignantly asked : "What's wrong with him ? Does it have anything to do with our arrival ?" "Indubitably," he muttered

with a frown, "he's signaling for the car with the reception committee to drive up and stop right here at the dock." – And for that he has to wave jumping-jack arms for 5 whole minutes ? All the while using up my precious time ? ! And I couldn't resist putting the question : "Couldn't he have managed it more simply – more quickly ! – by just *shouting* it ?" / He looked at me, first as if I were a traitor, then an enemy; an idiot; finally, a child : "We are still on board !". With forbearance, because he was dealing with a guest of the Island. (Yet another one of your enigmatic reasons; noble simplicity, silent grandeur. – Or was it really profound, and *I* simply didn't understand ? – Sobered, I climbed up a so-called gangway : should I oblige him by weaving an ‹indubitably› into my words of farewell ? But it was almost dead certain he was impervious to irony. / At most one could give him a military salute, with both hands at once, (*and* bow several times as well and wear a frightened=foolish smile : *that* combination would rankle exceedingly ! – ah, let him be.))).

But ‹stride› slowly ! Gain some time; so that the head rises with dignity above the rim of the dock. And I get an easy-does-it look at *where* the reception committee has organized . . . . ? . . . : ah there; very good.)

The Reception Committee : 5 men in all ! : Brown and skinny as a rail, an Arab sheik; brown & gentle (and white-haired) an Indian. In black tails, the Chinee : Just keep smiling. Austere and medium-sized (no bigger; but enormous wide shoulders, and a correspondingly sullen face) : Comrade Uspenskii. – Towering over them all by a head and a half, my Yankee; happy-go-lucky in his summer suit, his hand in his pants pocket.

The Indian stepped forward; looked me over, dignified and serenely cheerful; the others slipped together behind without ceremony to form a family portrait. (As I later learned, we were also being televised and described, from the nearby lighthouse, : if I had known *that*, I would have left my coat with my baggage. Which the sailor had to carry for me in any case : this way it hung foolishly over my arm !)

"Mr. Winer ? – : In the name of the ‹IRAS› : We welcome you !". And with a curiously broad (yet easy and lovely) gesture, gave me his thin brown=hand. (He kept it short. That's fine : at least wasn't gassing away the 50 hours I'd been granted : *very* sensible !).

Then down the row, the rest of the polyhued hands : Each murmured his welcome. The comrade was the only one to speak at normal volume (but it sounded much louder here) : "Pogálovat'" My countryman just grinned, gave me a Kentucky handshake, and gawkily stalked to the rear, to the waiting minivan.

As we pulled away (the Indian sat next to me; so is he the one who's ‹in charge› of me ?) : "First to the Town Hall. Where the president of the Island will greet you : you'll have to sign the ‹Golden Book› of course !" (and smiled encouragement : nice fellow). / "Then we've planned 2 *very* brief lectures, only the – as you'll say yourself afterward – most essential introductory information. As for the rest of the day – it really is still quite early – we'll plan the program together, just as *you* like : I'm sure you've brought along a good many wishes & questions; and others will present themselves."

Very slowly down ‹Harbor Road› : 90 feet wide (each lane forty; in the middle an attractive green median, a runner of fat-cheeked flowers, wedding color and scent. / And he puckered his little mouth in amusement : "No. The cars ‹in these parts› *cannot* drive faster than 20 miles an hour : the motors are built that way. – Except for the ambulances of course; and so forth." / Make a note of this ‹and so forth› for questions later.)

"Two of these gentlemen – Mr. Inglefield and Mr. Uspenskii – will serve as your guides in their respective=uh districts." (Two women on bikes fluttering by over there atop their skirts. They threw us a curious glance. And another back over their bebloused shoulders.) / On the right, a long wood (but very open : in many places you could see through the trunks to the white air beyond.) / On the left, meadow and open field (Faust & Mephisto sweeping by on black horses) : after what I'd guess to be – well, it might easily be a good third of a mile – a town began. My head moved back and forth. I was keeping track, all Argus as we drove.

Stop ? : Get out : After little more than a half mile we had turned right into a small tranquil parking lot, all within green (just as in general, medium-sized but stocky trees seemed pleased to accompany the roads and squares). / "Yes. In the ‹Mall› only pedestrian traffic."

Trafficking pedestrian : We strode through the tree backdrop –, –, and stood before a facade of massive buildings stretching out of sight to the right and left ! / : ? / "Directly before us is the clinic – we're sensitive sorts, and take ill often and happily –" (gave a kindly smile, wisdom of age – or was it roguishness ? Couldn't figure it just now). – "Next to it the Island Historical Archives." We walked on through between them, to an even more central building; towering above it, a slender but very high tower : "Our Town Hall."

Up the cascading stairway; the high vault of the portal – I couldn't take in any more than that at the moment; for he was already waiting at the top, wearing a short official cape and wide, shimmering chain of

office, the current president : Calistus Munbar. / (And bow deeply as we shake hands : the guy's got on red shoes ! And ditto the aldermen behind him. – Straighten up again, so frank & free. And let my eyes shine : at last in the Holy Abode of Humankind : home at last !).

"Vallerí, vallerá; valleráaa !"[43] : and opened his mouth gruesomely wide (the hot-potato drawl of the erstwhile Australian; I really had to pull myself together just to understand him ? ! – ? – (On the other hand : what would he have to tender ? ‹Howdy› and ‹I'm sure you'll know to appreciate›, right ?). / So I made another bow after the last ‹vallerá !›; and for my part, made known, in carefully unaccented Anglo-Saxon[44], every what-honor, what-joy expected of me. Yet another totally non-committal stage handshake : it's all yours : vallerá ! / But I can't keep up this polite gawking much longer; let's hope we get on with this real quick !)).

And on through the high vaulting, drafty, into the interior : heavy carpets running the stairs here. (From up top, one floor above, an employee was about to ballerina her way down; braked – boring her shoe-tip into the carpet moss, thrusting her torso backward – and disappeared again, soundlessly, so it goes.)[45]

In the ‹Lesser Hall› : a modest side table (what I am I saying ‹modest› ? : the massive mosaic top alone must have been worth ten thousand dollars !) : from which we ate our ‹Welcome› : a stick-pretzel from a golden beaker (also salt-free, for the dieters); a teeny nip of cape wine. (The glass – of silver; with the Island's coat-of-arms : the Irish harp on the loose,[46] in a zodiac formed by the initials of all other participating nations of the globe – I could take that with me). / (The Russian, I chanced to notice, had flipped his uneaten pretzel up his sleeve; let the liquid run into his mouth, and right back out again ! !). / Everyone, except the Indian, excused himself at once.

Around the gigantic square desktop (bronze rascals, having trouble keeping their own pants up, supporting it at the corners)[47] : there lay the

[43]Yet another manifestation – so unsettling for a European – of American=journalistic frivolity. In answer to a written query, the author provided the following reply (and I quote) : "I am ‹by nature› incapable of taking officialdom seriously."

[44]?

[45]In the margin of the original, the author had interpolated ‹a shame› – later crossed out; that applies equally to his description of the lady in question.

[46]The painful levity of this formulation fades upon closer historical reflection. Although the author's slovenly manners cannot be denied in this case either.

[47]The author means the famous brass grouping ‹Four Carpenters›, by Don Pedro de Zapoteca y Rincón, specially sculpted for the purpose.

Island's ‹Golden Book›; more like a piece of furniture; in folio. On its very own hand-carved lectern. / And as he opened the inkwell for me : *"Tell me, Mr. Winer* – one question ? : That old German writer, the one who, after all, first outlined – though purely as a joke – the project of an island such as we now have : just how are you related to him actually ?" / So flip him the credents; and a brief summary of the family tree (he pretended to decline the funny-papers; but all the same, took a good look at each one !) :

I, Charles Henry Winer, born 1978 in Bangor in the state of Maine. / My father : David Michael, born 1955. / His mother, Eve Kiesler, 1932. (And he nodded attentively with the count). / : Her mother then, Lucy Schmidt, born 1911 : "He was her brother !". (Common father, Friedrich Otto, born 1883).

"Ahh=that way," he muttered, pleased by all the bureaucratic stamps on the photocopies of the originals (which, as per plan, I gave to him as a present : it was, after all, simply a milder version of passport control). / "He *was* therefore your=uh . . . . . : great-great-uncle." And I nodded assent : "My grandmother had known him personally. And told me many an anecdote about him." (I held my peace about what *sort*; most had ended with ‹fogging›. Was not your ‹fine-gentleman›, my great-great-uncle; though perhaps of medium-sized importance.). / "Ah; this will interest the director of archives. You see, he's working on an Island chronicle; and this is terribly fascinating for the early history." –

Here, however, his ‹Golden Book› : and he coughed uneasily, as I – all meditative candor – began to leaf through. (‹Let-it-be, let-it-be, let-it-be !› his fingers drummed nervously; but I wouldn't think of it : whatever is not directly forbidden – of which there'll be a plenty ! – is permitted). / And, lookie, all sorts of things were in there ! : they had been stupid enough to decree that every inhabitant or visitor to the Island had to make *two* entries : on arrival, the upper half of his or her numbered page; on departure, the lower.

And yes indeedy, one of the departing artists had in fact given free-and-easy vent to his feelings (and the contradiction between the chaste=upper entry and the unruly smearings below was a scream ! Up top, fiery affirmation : "Delighted . . . . . honor . . . . . selflessly to commit . . . . . all my energies . . . . . for the good of humankind." Below, drunken scribble : "It's all junk : Yours, Kilroy !".) / Or here, the same entries, in privy-councilorish : Above : "Indeed, 'twill be good to dwell here . . . . .". Below : "Honest man : flee this land !". / He gave such a long-suffering sigh at my side, that I did him the favor,

and opened it back to the page set aside for me. / "Yesyes; some are just like little boys." –

Okay ! – And he nodded in delight, at the clean hand (uptop I had been brief and honest : Reason for my visit = great-great-uncle, and purpose = journalist's report). / "Yes, and so the day after tomorrow you'll have to – be leaving, hmyes. – I suggest : first thing, you join our municipal architect for a trip up the tower elevator, so that you can get a grand overview. You can leave whenever you like, and then come down to me in the Statistics Office : where I would consider it a pleasure to provide you with any materials you would like in regard to population and such. – Agreed ?" (Pressed a button under the desktop. At once the municipal architect appeared (he must have been waiting just behind the door); a portfolio of stiff cardboard under his crooked arm.) –

Just below the tip of the tower a narrow gallery ran clear around : "Ahhh !" /. –. : ! ! / For the whole Island lay like a relief map below us ! One impatient circumambulation (something's bound to make an eidetic impression); then to him, who opened up his portfolio, and held it out to me in a pique : a precise plan of the Island; 3 inches to the mile (so about=uh one to twenty thousand, fine). / And in steady alternation, the view of the panorama. He spoke in the customary banter of tour-guidese :

"The IRAS measures, from bowsprit to stern, exactly 3 miles;[48] it's width is 1.7 . . ." But I had already interrupted him (first, on principle : I'm not about to be run over by some litany ! / And second, I had real questions that were more important to me at the moment than his decimals – the cliffs against which such people eagerly crash : I can measure all that from his map with a calipers !).

"So that they couldn't, as originally planned, keep the measurements proportional to the earth's – and thus preserve in every detail a ‹World in Miniature› ?" – : "No; that would have proved impossible because of the inordinate water resistance; a more slender form had to be chosen : the numerical eccentricity of the ellipsoid is . . . . ." (and purred happily along for a while, during which time I took an intensive look allround : and I can figure out your eccentricity on my own later ! (Should it interest me.)).

Before and behind us, the double row of huge buildings. (Just a trace more sensitive than I had thought, he followed my eyes; let's hope he's also

[48]4827 meters, using Old German measurements. In all such cases in the future, where it seems suitable – i.e., with complicated or largish numerical formulations –, I shall convert to the metric system. (Which at the same time will further the sort of encoding desired of me).

caught on; let's hope he realizes that he's to tell me the *things* that *I* am eager to know : no lectures, my friend, just succinct and accurate info !). / And so, now, he doggedly named the buildings I pointed to – "Everyone has his own way of orienting himself." – I obligingly interposed; but he just scornfully pursed his lips tighter (purse all you like !).

To the rear : "The first ones, the two libraries : correct; right and left." / "Behind them, likewise facing one another : the Reynolds Gallery and the Pushkin Museum." / At the end of the row ? : "The theater." (Behind it the residential area for administrative employees – : "Where I'm to sleep tonight ?". But then he gave it to me : "I don't know !" : door slam ! – / Finally, in the direction of the stern, 2 mast giants; for radio & television.).

Turning forward : on the right, hospital, bank, post office. On the left (all seen along the line of the major axis), the so-called ‹smokeless industry› : the Island's printing press, bookbindery, photo processing : "And so forth" (Damn the phrase !). / Then came an attractive bit of woods, as far as the two – yes, let's go ahead and call them ‹coasts›. And way up front, at the furthest point – the ‹bowsprit› once again : the two terms ‹ship› and ‹island› constantly get jumbled ! – : "Observatory; radar; meteorological station" : door slam !

"Ah, that's the road I came in on : from the harbor ?" : "From *which* harbor ? ! " / And then I took a nonplussed-er look around : indeed; the thing did have (just as I had heard on the steamer that brought me) *two* harbors ? And finally he came around all on his own to speaking about the basic division of the Island :

"On both sides of the Major Axis then, in toto 500 meters broad, the so-called ‹Neutral Mall›; with the administration buildings, the joint museums." (‹And so forth›; yes, I know.) "Further neutral ground, the ‹Sylvan Solitude› ‹Before the Gates›. Likewise the airport and the rocket launching pad; although even there . . . on your far right : over there. Just above my hand."

"The rest of the starboard side is occupied by the Free World . . . . ." – In reply to my surprised splay of hands : "Oh, excuse me; just a term we use." : "Who is ‹we› ?" (but he avoided an answer and went on, full-speed mouth, explaining) :

"On the larboard side, the East Block States : there : the complex of those=mmnyes : high-rises." / "What do we call the jumbo=whatsit there with the dome ?" I asked (ever so casually and with no particular stress, so that he immediately fell for it, and replied with a bleat : "The ‹Kremlin›." But, seeing me make a note of it, he at once grew earnest as the

grave; and corrected himself stiffly : "The Main Department Store of the Larboard Side.").

And each side has its own harbor ? : With its own warehouses, serviceable looking sheds, and its own lighthouse : the light on the right, green-white; left – that fit, it was the larboard ! – red. / Was the division that strict ? !

Yes indeed ! : "You see, there, at both sides of the ‹stern› those machine sectors ? – Yes; 800 meters long, half as wide. – Those are the propeller screws for the Island, on the left under Russian, on the right, under American=uh : care."

Each with its own large athletic field; each with its parks and farmland. / For their artists, the Americans had a charming little town (though of course on their damned grid pattern !) : "Poet's Corner; yes." / On the Russian side, approximately a dozen gigantic (and, in particular, wide; each facade might measure a good hundred meters !) high-rises.

Hm. – – –

"A couple more questions" I said : "The Island consists, of course, of individual steel compartments : how large, how many ?" : Each 16 meters high; 10 by 10 at the top. And about 123,000 of them; welded together inside of 5 years. / "The construction expenses defrayed by ?" : "Originally by $^{1}/_{100}$ of the defense budget of the participating nations : for the course of said 5 years." ? "That was – if I recall correctly – in 1980 ?". : "Yes, the Island was completed then. In 2030 it will be entirely rebuilt : an exact copy of the older model here – at most the propulsion system will be updated." (For one whole year, small freighters had transported nothing but soil. And humus; before it was all decently clad.)

The course ? : was made public one month in advance. "We avoid stormy seas whenever possible, and prefer the horse latitudes : Sargasso Sea and doldrums. At the moment we're heading for those here in our North Pacific area." (The one in the mid-Atlantic is well known. But also southeast of New Zealand is another smaller area : everywhere, still and yellow-green; seaweed, kelp, neither currents nor waterspouts; charming.)

"And you dock, to my knowledge, only at predetermined free harbors; for replenishing supplies, and so on ?" / 'sindeed : I had boarded at Eureka myself. For South America, Valparaiso; in Africa, Cape Town. For Russia, China, India and adjacent localities, the Indian harbor at Perth (erstwhile Australia). At those 4 depots, all nations stored all their accumulated art treasures, the canned goods; in fact, everything ordered. –

(And it's already 5 o'clock !) : "Thanks ! That will do for now." (intentionally supercilious : because dealing with a bureaucrat.[49]). / He controlled himself. And, whadya know, didn't shove me off the platform. Led me instead to the elevator. / Even opened its door for me at the 3rd floor : "Statistics Office is on your right; around the corner. – No ! : Official duties call !". (And sank into the floor).

On red cocomat runners (that grew coarser and coarser the further you got from the reception rooms). (But, commendable, how they were leaving me all to myself : that way at least, I could take a candid look at the pictures on the walls. (I.e., perhaps I was being watched through some sort of peepholes : how can you prevent that these days ? !). Naturally, all originals : piece of cake, with the best painters sitting around here en masse ! Here a medallion from which a full-bearded fellow gazed cheerfully at me : ‹Jules Verne› ? – Never heard of him ! – (But he must have invented something of note, because underneath was something about ‹whose creative spirit›; an MDCCC (and then a tail of numbers just as long, XXVIII, yikes : how nice'n'easy ‹1828› reads; and the way they have to gussy things up around here !)). / Now & then a small sculpture. (The inventor of the typewriter maybe ? : 1800=andsuch-andsuch, would fit.)[50] / Here & there, elastic of stride, a stenotypist; shorn pate in Indian style; or here a coal-black one, with a face that looked like it had been built to catch meteors rather than the kisses of earthly men : I asked each, and I mean each, for the Statistics Office, as they tried to pass me demurely by (and each of them pointed to the same, steadily approaching, dark oaken lintels : the tidbits were just *too* tasty !).

Number two, five : eight ! : twofiveeight, right; so this is it : ? ? "Come in !" – (Oh, was I interrupting ? : he had his large file for signature lying before him; read and signed. But now raised his hand, still reading : "Not at all ! I've –" (here he turned a page; his pencil scanning more rapidly) – "just. –. –. : finished." Gave the file to a waiting, equally subtropic beauty. Pushed his chair back. Led me to the leather-armchaired corner. – (And cross my legs; and out with the notebook !).).

"Ask whatever you like. – You knew nothing about the Island's topography, then ?" : "Well, who does ?" I rejoined : "At most there are those

[49]Sic !

[50]Naturally, the French writer of popular literature, very well known in his day; from whose ‹Journey to the Center of the Earth› our German author Theodor Storm took his ‹Regentrude›. (Cf. my gymnasial lecture, Bonn 1966).

idiotic ‹Greetings-from-IRAS› ashtrays shaped like the Island; and that frieze by Aguirre : pure Claude Lorrain plus William Turner ! – And the rest are room-interiors with poets reading or debating away profoundly; speed artists in their ateliers : whatever the television folks think is appropriate to show. – May I ask, first-off, what is the population ?". / (Under the table, the index box stood at the precautionary ready. He carefully raised the dark green steel guard; impressively unlocked it (as if the most confidential of matters would be revealed to me anon : what a show !) : and I saw many earnest index cards – looking, to a card, eager to provide me answers) :

"*The population of IRAS* is at present – : five thousand and ninety-six." / Breakdown : "Actual artists & scientists, 811." – "So, for about every 5 human millions, 1 genius" I said gravely : "pretty damned depressing, isn't it ? – Ahwell. – And the rest . . . . . ?". / The rest, all administrative staff; commercial, industrial, professional personnel. – "How do you define ‹professional› ?" (Commercial and technical were clear to me : for machines and offices,) – "Well," he said nonchalantly, "Shopkeepers; mail carriers; dentists. Cleaning ladies especially : cooks. And so forth." (And I nodded fatalistically : earth, planet of and-so-forth.). / Ahyes, *that* was important : "May I know the breakdown of : men / women / children ?". He was breathing more heavily now; but already had a second index card in hand and read : "Children – naturally we have the fewest of those – 26 head. Mostly those of top-level executives. Men ? : 2007. / The rest women." (Diplomatic; but I was capable of doing the subtraction : so over 3000 women).

But now I would have to tread piano : "Can you tell me how many geniuses live on the starboard ?" – He didn't look at me as he told his index card : "392 living geniuses on the right." / Witty question (just to relax the situation) : "And how many dead ones ?" (and smile : I've got to keep him in a good mood after all). He likewise tugged his mouth wide; nodded; took an astonishingly long time to savor my wisecrack; and finally replied : "Yesyes, we make a few differentiations here." / Did that mean that the ‹split› actually reached clear to the *cemeteries*; and had I unconsciously touched another sore spot ? For the topic obviously distressed him. – So quickly something else, something inoffensive let's hope ! :

"*The official languages ?*" : Hindi, Chinese; American, Russian; Arabic, Spanish. / The neo=dead languages ? : 1 Frenchman from Abidjan; 1 exile Pole : "Not one German was left, not directly; at best a few who happened to have been traveling abroad : until a few years ago, we employed 1 fellow from the small, ever-dwindling Argentinian colony

as a translator in our library. – There are, however, sufficient tape recordings of all the former European micro-languages. / Yes, quite right : the core was formed from the faculty of the ‹School of Design› which had opportunely relocated in Chubut, hmmyes."

Concerning the IRAS=Prize : "Now, the grant of a stipend and/or residency permit is awarded by a jury, right ?" He gave a ruminative massage to his buddhistic=fat earlobe; "Hmmwell," he said hesitantly : "That's a=uh touchy subject. Involving a great many difficulties. *And* complications. The particulars of the process are as follows :". / To begin with, every country was allotted its fellowships, as per the current quota of 1:5,000,000. And each of them nominated its people. – "*But !*" (and even he, the mediating=neutral, raised stern brows) : "it's been our experience that about three-quarters of them have been rejected by our local Admissions Committee ! It really is *so* sad : sometimes in their home countries even the political parties, bent on revenge, bar the advancement of troublesome geniuses. Or if the hero of a novel accidentally bears the name of some personal enemy of a major critic – he can reject him for that ! You have to know all that; and neutralize it : which is *very* difficult." (In one case, however, a country – "I will not name names" – had nominated every one of its dissident writers, down to the third-raters, for its quota of 53 fellowships. The not uncunning idea in the back of their minds being : that a) they're out of the way (with the additional bonus that the populace fumes : "Yes, they've saved their skins !"); and b) within 2 years, they are no longer knowledgeable enough to describe the nuances of change : no longer have ‹their finger on the nation's pulse› : which is, by the way, another reason why all the rejected candidates were happy to tell the press : a responsible artist really must share the joy & sorrow of ‹his› people !).

"And so you created, as the last court-of-appeal, a local ‹Admissions Committee› for a buffer ?". Yes. / And they were, all of them, experts and Great Old Men in their own right, *very* cautious; it would be all too easy to make an ass of oneself for all eternity ! They'd all been put very much on their guard, ever since that American fanatic had rejected the Russian novel ‹Spichki›[51], and become the laughingstock of the whole civilized world. / The Island commission could present nominees of its own, for which it took full responsibility : important for the Great Unsung; and in case an undeniabull surplus of geniuses

[51]The famous ‹Matches› of Alexei Konstantinovitch Chubinov (1939–2002).

occurred in a given country : "So that, ultimately, the goal of the Island *has* been accomplished : objective selection; and the crucial advancement of great artists ! Quite apart from guaranteeing the safety of important works of art." / It took quite a while before he said, "Hmmyes."

"Aging or worn-out geniuses ?" : the Russians had pushed through a regulation that whoever did not present a significant work of art (or the promising rudiments of the same) could be expelled again. / Yes, and then this too : "Does it ever happen that an artist voluntarily leaves the Island ?" : "Yes, that is : aging geniuses, or those no longer capable of producing and/or itching to produce, have theoretical priority for jobs in the administration. On the jury. Also employment as teachers, librarians" (‹and so forth› ? : no : this time it was) : "and the like, all provided for in the Island's charter."

"Does that often occur ? : Transfer to administration, I mean; or voluntary departure from the Island ?" – He gulped; he turned his head, painful to watch; and in his embarrassment pulled out some card or other (blank : naturally !). Muttered : "I don't have the exact count – at the moment – – : uh=two !". (I didn't want to give the old boy any trouble, and obligingly made a note of his wee number (although I did not know to which it applied : to the voluntary departures – had I then, purely by chance, perhaps nabbed the two black sheep in the Golden Book ? ! Have the magic touch, huh ? : A journalist *has* too ! – or to those who had been transferred into administration ? Well, maybe that will turn up later on at some point. Somehow.)).

Six Island presidents, taking turns daily (out of courtesy they had had the American welcome me), corresponding to the current Great Empires : 1 Russian, 1 Chinese, 1 Indian, 1 Arab (for all of l'Afrique Noire), 1 Spaniard (South America); and, yes, my Calistus Munbar. (For all decisions, at least a two-thirds majority was required : to their genuine astonishment, the Americans found themselves almost always outvoted !).

The supervision of the so-called ‹halves› had been taken over by the two Richest & Biggest : starboard the US-Americans; left, the Russians (who likewise were responsible for the engines, etc. : the ‹Island› was a version of a ‹double-screwed steamer›, with 2 independent propeller systems set fairly far apart.)

Disputes : Oh my ! : and he at once fetched the files from his desk : "The latest in that regard : the larboard side has termed the bell-ringing of the 2 tiny western chapels ‹a disturbance of the peace› whose noise interferes with serious work – ‹thought assassin› is a term

they use for the innocent tolling sexton; ‹crippler of ideas›, ‹butcher of crucial insight› – and demands they be shut down immediately : ‹the question is whether 25% of the earth's population – meaning the Christians – should be allowed to tyrannize the remaining 75 ? !›". / "Yes, and what will happen ?". He puckered his mouth noncommitally : "I would assume," he declared, "that in the future, a recording of the bells will be broadcast into the living quarters of the interested parties : likewise, loudspeakers can be deployed inside the chapels, so that as good as no sound carries outside. – It is, I admit, *indeed* a disruption at times," he also confided to me. (Ahwell, he was an Indian.)

Visitors ? : he read me the relevant paragraphs from the Island charter : / Admittance is to be granted to temporary visitors, above all creative intellectuals – permission for such visits of 50 hours each, at the discretion of the presidium, on a case by case basis. Never, however, politicians; professional soldiers, film stars, boxing champions (all weight divisions); publishers, book reviewers; persons who have been consecrated priests in any religion whatever . . . . . / Then a conversation about the subsequent fine-tuning of the nomenclature. For example, they had added an amendment to ‹professional soldier› : "or auxiliary organizations, whether on active duty or retired." – and then the real argument had started over the term ‹auxiliary organizations› ! / For boxers, a marginal gloss of ‹and wrestlers› had been added. / Rich gawkers, *very* rich ones, sometimes had to be permitted unfortunately; but first they had to pay vast sums into ‹Patron Accounts›; (and got to see only a few things.)

"Who do you think ? ! : During periods when war threatens; when multimillionaires make desperate attempts to smuggle their way into this, our sacred asylum, which all parties respect : some have even arrived camouflaged as *statues* !" (When they went to lift the upper torso of Cooper for easier transportation – something that proved possible by mere chance; the seam was ever so cleverly hidden by a broad sash round the hips – inside they found the sleeping widow of Horsemixer, the American newspaper king !). / (But he was obviously getting uneasy about all this. So I took my leave) : "I would like to restrict myself for today – but quite systematically – to the Neutral Mall. The half, back toward the stern I'll see automatically when I walk to my hotel : *would* it possible for me to take a little drive now toward the bow, to the observatory ?". – (It *was* possible, but of course. Besides the chauffeur, an Indian came along, and the Arab from earlier, at the dock : he still hadn't put on any weight.)[52]

In the open car : "And please, nice and slow, alright ?". (Normally only in very great emergencies were *cars* permitted in the Neutral Mall : everyone, even the greatest geniuses, had to go on foot. "The exercise is good for them," said the sheik sullenly, and pulled his haik more tightly about him. (And "Lard-asses" ? : Had I misheard ? !)

Like an enormously broad boulevard. / : "No; that's the IRAS=Bank." (A solid structure : the moneys the administration took in were known to be – quite apart from the governmental grants – enormous ! : The monopoly for radio and television broadcasts of all VIPs ! The donations of barons of industry hot for publicity. The stamps; the products of the Island print shops : "Over there, yes."). / A few shops : stationery stores; carpenters (bookcase makers ?); ‹Typewriter and Calculator Repair›. Lingerie; clothes; lingerie (but of course : 3000 women !). A small hangar ? : "The fire department. Have more to do than you'd imagine," the mummy replied cold and savage : "The guys simply *don't* think !"

Damnwasn'tthat – : Bense ? : Sure ! : The equestrian statue there : "Couldn't you stop for a moment ? !". / (On its base, the chiseled titles of his works. (Name and dates, goes without saying). At the rear, the ‹Young Talent› he had fostered so resolutely. On the right, of shining countenance, his patrons and discoverers, pointing up at him with joy, à la ‹Well, what did I say ! ?›. On the left panel, in decorative chains, malicious reviewers, atop each an asymmetrically gagged face of envy : very fine !) / "But why on *horseback* ? !" The Indian explained :

In matters of monuments, difficulties had arisen very early on. That monuments had to be erected, to a man they had been of one accord on that. After protracted and tough discussions, they finally fell back on a scale of measurement : the lowest would be a memorial plaque. Then, the next step up, a relief : round medallion with head. Followed by a bust (set up as a herm). Then a statue, life-sized. Then, on a higher pedestal, seated in a chair. ("Like this one here – wha'shisname ? : ‹Gerhart

[52]What purpose is intended by such a remark ? Is the reader supposed to laugh ? Or does the author wish to document his own superiority ? Or does he belong to that unfortunate class of people who must painfully secure their objectivity and freedom of judgment by constant displays of cheek (because otherwise they would succumb to most any influence) ? Or are there in fact, as Winer has characterized them in his previous books, "people who are by nature irreverent" ? : If the remark included above truly struck the author at just that moment, that is, if it arose spontaneously – then the facts in the case seem to be, as incomprehensible as that may appear, at any rate established. Unless : the gentleman in question was in reality startlingly, singularly and conspicuously lean !

Hauptmann› ?" : "Quite right." / Now that was a finesse : he could stretch out, while Alfred Döblin, next to him, had to go on foot : "You should have done those two the other way around !" / They chose not to hear my meddlesome remark; we had apparently stumbled onto the ‹German Corner›). / As the acme, then, an equestrian statue.

"*Since the consent of both halves of the Island* is needed for a monument to be erected, it generally takes place ‹tit for tat›. – Which means : we neutrals wait until one is due from each side, and then discreetly introduce *both* nominations at once. Whereby we can also figure : 2 memorial plaques equals 1 relief : there's a fixed going rate." / "And what if you determine that a monument has been planted all too hastily ? Or that the person in question was overrated at one time, and then, decades later, it turns out that the rider ‹is unworthy of his mount› ?" : "The heads of all figures are detachable; they can be changed back anytime." (I cast a long and dull gaze to one side : ‹detachable heads› : now *there* was a memory that was missing in my collection ! : head depots, head cellars; charnel house, flying heads, mask=linen . . . . .). / "What happens actually : if you don't know what the great man in question looked like ? Homer or Schnabel ?". The response was surprisingly simple : "I don't know." / And from here on we had to go by foot.

Through the cemetery gate : the genius with the lowered torch held a warning indexfinger to his lips. The gravel crunched beneath our soles. (Important note : it was *forbidden* – and not just for technical reasons (generation of oscillation) – for more than 10 people to walk in step together at once !). / Silence : the hop-step-jump of a bird. Above the lawn sprinkler, at its top, stood a man-sized sack of water-powder. A gardener was measuring in the beds with a green staff (wonder if he uses a green handkerchief as well ?[53]). Above the grave of James Joyce sat a blackbird lamenting : Eleu loro : soft be his pillow. / ("For him they should have erected a whole *brigade* !" And we did have to laugh as we pictured the cavalcade : all with the profile of James Joyce. – But it's really true ! !).

In the crematorium : a small intimate edificette. (The heat is generated by nuclear power : it pulverizes the corpse in 3 minutes !). / And the cemetery inspector – having turned up in the meantime – cautiously explained : the bodies of the ‹nongeniuses› were flown off-island. The ‹others› buried here; cremated, mummified, whatever was wished.

[53]It appears this is indeed how things transpire in the author's head : even to this – otherwise unimpeachable – passage he has to attach a curlicue tail.

"Or transported back home as well." / "How many ?" He pulled the black book from his black attaché case (wait : no ! : on the inside it was *white* leather : for Chinese burials); I had asked about the number of cremations. – "Uh=m – : artists 0.4%; scientists 88." (Remarkable ratio; judging by which, hardly one of the real geniuses lets himself be cremated ? Too much imagination presumably; in the final analysis they're all superstitious in some fashion. Except for said 0.4%.). / On the mainland, of course, it had in the meantime become evident that urn cemeteries take up much less space : otherwise the dead would gradually crowd out the living. And, accordingly, propagandized : on the first poster the dear departed flew, smiling & totally befeenixed, upward from the flames. On the other, a foul skeleton, blood & slime, from which grisly worms cast amiable=disgusting sidelong glances at their audience. And arguments can also be culled from the Bible – what arguments can't be ? ! – Elija & his fiery chariot ![54]

Then we came – ever further on foot; out here beyond the cemetery, in the ‹Solitude›, a vehicle could be used only in truly life-and-death cases – to a lovely wood (granted, most of it more like a park; in a meadow an elderly couple was playing silent badminton; a black poodle lay in the quaking grass, and glanced our way : yes; you've got a pretty yellow collar !).[55]

Chitchat : picking it up as we wandered : minted coins of their own currency (of aluminum bronze); not only to prevent the gentlefolk from becoming *totally* inhuman and losing every contact with human misery; but also, and above all, because *everything was definitely not* free. "I had always thought it was till now !" : "Then you were mistaken" he rebuked me in his sere voice. / Details : living quarters were free. Meals, laundry. Every 2 years a new typewriter; paper & pencils as needed. (If some ever so prissy soul could only poeticize on *handmade* paper, however : he had to pay for *that* out of his own pocket ! / Quite

[54]I am familiar with the fact that during the period of transition, well-meaning protestant theologians used this example to reconcile their parishioners to cremation – to be sure unimpeachable testimony of an irenic spirit. In general, however, cremation can be justified by neither testament. (Much less ‹everything›, as our – atheistic ? – author feels compelled to append !).

[55]Should one not have introduced more important details rather than this sort of unnecessary punctiliousness ? In reply to my question, the author wrote back : "Quite apart from the fact that atmospherics, the ‹milieu› of life, are the essential thing : every conscientious author likewise makes provision for his own individuality – be it good or bad : so that the reader may know *the color of the glass through which he has to look.*" – I shall leave the question open.

right : I wish my life had always been wood-free !). / Then there was another freebie, in case he wasn't married, for which I choose to use the euphemism ‹secretary› (to which, it must be granted – we were after all in the most republican setup of all time – said secretary had to give her placet. (Which they did almost without exception : it automatically made them famous; and when it was over, they'd turn writer themselves – usually a biography of the boss, in which then the most thought-provoking interiors were brought to paper, hmyess) – Afterward, have them give me a set of Island money : the coins were veritable works of art. Could have it handed to me when we say goodbye, that way I won't bring any disorder into the Island's budget. I expressed my wish to the Indian; and he obligingly made a call from the observatory, first thing.)

The observatory (or more precisely : atop it; on its observation platform. – At first I had taken one of these friendly gentlemen to be incredibly arrogant; because, no matter what I might say, ask, politely request – : he just gave an indulgent smile, plus a nod, and a pensive "Hm-yesye=es." / Until I discovered the little button in his ear, and thundered at him from the appropriate side : "Where are we at the moment ! !" (In order to win his heart : although I jotted it down, it interested me not a bloody whit that we were located at 138°16′24.2" longitude west, and at 40°16′58.4" latitude north. : "16 minutes for both ? !" – And he smiled in delight : "Hm-yesye=es !" : He was mine now ! – Average speed by the way, 8 nautical miles an hour.) / Under the rotunda, a Schmidt mirror with a 20-inch aperture : these Schmidts !).

"What's the weather for tomorrow ?" : in the adjoining meteorological institute; and, all seriousness, he read me the latest bulletin; it was still quite fresh, they had just wound it up, not five minutes before. So : "In the morning, no precipitation. Overcast toward evening; and the wind will pick up. / Extended forecast ? : Weather turning bad." "Well, I'll see for myself if it's right." "It's right !". / The amount of rainfall didn't begin to make up for the water they used; as a result, in both machine sectors at the rear there were large-scale humidifiers and distilleries (enhanced with fluoride, to prevent tooth decay). / In every building, the walls facing the bow were stronger than the others : protection against storms when the head of the Island had to be aimed into the gusts. Likewise, set into the floor throughout, steel walls that could be raised to break the wind : "It's been a long time since we had a storm : we can pick and choose, you know." (Happy land, this !).

Stairs down to the sea ? : "Only in the harbors. Otherwise, this sturdy, high railing goes clear around the Island." (Here a bony voice muttered something about "drunken giaours"; but the ill will was all too obvious : in order to produce above-average creations, every artist must put himself in the requisite above-average state of mind; and with what sort of stimulants is *his* business ! / Whispering to the Indian : "What does *He* do around here ?" : the nitpicking Arab. And he, ditto : "Linguist : fellowship for Coptic." (Meaning, specialist for Egyptian obscurantism and similar vital items.)[56]

"Is it still possible to visit the library ?". It was after all 7 P.M. by now, and the sun was standing hard above the sea. (But they were open until 8 o'clock. "Every day ?" : "Monday through Friday. Only till noon on Saturday. Sundays on request."). / Back through the grove. In the cemetery the gardener was still measuring his beds. Then in the open convertible back toward the stern; I felt all ‹Unter den Linden› (were, accordingly, lots of ‹beauties› too !). Round the Town Hall. / "But *which* library ?" : "Makes no diff – : let's say this one on the left !" (Which in actuality was the ‹right› one – reckoning by Island coordinates.)

Doors & stairs as per : c'monc'mon ! (One's life is spent going through far too many doors.)

And on in, soundlessly, into the reading room – overcrowded I s'pose : I had no desire to expose me to the reproachful=disturbed glances of 811 geniuses. (But no : divide by 2 : there were in fact 2 libraries. – All the same : they'll just let her rip, and turn you into a bumbling interloper in the next book ! So nice & tippy=toe !) . . . . .

. . . . . *: ? . . . . . (and hand to chin) :*

it was empty ! ! As if swept clean ! ! – (Wellyess; it was simply too late. Suppertime perhaps.) / And you can bet my arrival had been announced : all the same : I'm gonna check you guys out !

Over to the check-out : "Could you let me have . . . . ." (older; but with the mightiest charms, stretched to bursting, gray-silken, vinum pro sapientibus; and no small serving either, despite her 55. And I automatically broke into a flirting smile : ? – She promptly smiled back : ! : "Oh, I'll have to get the head librarian for *that* !". (A pair of thighs : to the right, Thusnelda, to the left Messalina. And then the view from the rear ! !).).

[56]Coptic : the language of ancient Abyssinia, to which humankind – in particular church history – is indebted for many a beautiful treasure.

Sir Head Librarian; and was genuinely touched : "To think I'd live to see it ! : That someone would have me bring out Happel's ‹Insular Mandorell› ? ! – : *One* moment please . . . . ." / Glance at the clock-drum : 20 seconds (that always interests newspaper readers, when you say : "And in 2 minutes 20 seconds it lay before me." And why not really : that way at least they see that – at least some part – of their taxes hasn't been wasted !). / Wonderful decor in the reading room : polished lecterns of precious woods; comfortable armchairs before them : 40 seconds. Around the walls, thousands of reference books; another gallery above, so double it, at least 20,000 ! : 60. (And here Sir Librarian appeared at a door again : "Right away : just a moment !". / Meanwhile cock an ear : "Must be used to the hilt ? They've got a lot of work, right ?". He simply lifted 2 parrying hands : "Not at all !" (Very polite, the man; when here he was, waiting to relax for the evening). But he stammered; he had something else on his mind : "You're the first in days now who . . . . ." / "The first ? In days ?" I asked with furrowed brow. And he gazed about him in embarrassment : and now the Arab sheik was adding his coal-black nods : Do it ! Pull that tooth !

"The library is=uh relatively little used. – By the scientists, yes. But our poetical gentlemen . . . . . At the moment we have actually only 4 steady users : 2 of them have me bring out some medieval editions now and then – with magic symbols and such – and then stare at them as if hypnotized for a half hour : to increase their powers of imagination perhaps; I don't know. / The third one is trying to=uh pilfer small-format Elzevirs. / But the fourth one – no, I really must admit ! – he is actually doing very honest work ! It's such fun to bring out an ‹Annuaire du Républicain› from 1793; or to advise him : does some fine reading, that gentleman !"

"Ah, here comes the ‹Happel› : Here you are !" 2 minutes 20 seconds ! / And so I accepted the old parchment volume with both hands . . . . . (the endpaper read : ‹This antiquary copy was presented to IRAS by Mister Richard Odoardo Grimer (1921–84) and at own his expense.› : another way for the Island to pull in the dough; clever. Or at least not unclever.) / Paged, then, through the rare (?) item – "Ohindeed ! : There are, to my knowledge, only five copies of it left. – Plus, perhaps, a few in private libraries," the librarian assured me) – concerning which my great-paragenitor had written an hour-long radio essay : the things he fabricated to put bread on the table ! ("You speak German ?" : "Yes"; he meant me.) / Cimelia of incalculable worth. / And excerpts from parish registries were available within about 10 hours

(key-tapping telegraphers, scurrying pastors' wives : "Guess what, dear : IRAS just called : Write, my good man, write, so you can keep your pastorate !").

Question (and this was indeed a momentous one; struck at the whole purpose of the Island !) : "I take it then that – given the unique opportunity of having all the world's books at their disposal ! – the poets : don't use it ? ?"

: No : Not at all ! : "Those guys are not used to doing any serious work !" / Me, furrowing my brow again : "Those *guys* ? !". (But here Ali Muhammed Ben Jussuf, Bensoandso, Ben=Zine, Ben=Zol, interrupted : "It's a custom of speech of *ours*, to call them simply ‹The Guys›.")

"The poets ?" : "The poets !" – "The painters & musicians ?" : "The painters and musicians; !" / And – after a quick survey of the reading room : we were the only people present; plus one bust of Tieck and the secretary (I mean, does that woman ever have a chassis : as if built by the Romans !). – :

"Mostly they go totally to pot ! And are as good as done-for by the end of their first 2 trial years – but of course not done with a single book ! – Haven't worked a lick, just sit around on their genial duffs . . . . ." (the Copt mercilessly read off the whole alphabet : a=, b=, c=ded : f=ed most of all !) . . . . . "and then they leave and badmouth *us* !". Make no use of the incomparable resources here ? : "None at all ! : Anybody who so much as sets a foot in here – they no longer consider him a ‹real poet›; and probably slander him as a plagiarist as well. : If our bookstore had to depend on them, it would go bankrupt !" / Flabby bodies (here the secretary gave valkyrian nods) : "Booze like the Emperor's right-hand men ! Fritter away all their pocket money on alchozens . . . ."[57]) / "No : only those much defamed ‹cold intellects› get on on well here with us : read, produce the finest things; are diligent; live quietly to themselves . . . . ."; he nodded and was content with his single aforementioned individual. / "But that's really dreadful ? ! That means the whole purpose of the Island is . . . . .". Pause. Until the Son of the Desert, Secret of the Sahara, completed my sentence, rigid of mouth : "A total failure." –

[57]Arabic for ‹overcoat›. Although – from my humble point of view – nothing could be more understandable than that a poor artist would use the opportunity to clothe himself in new and fashionable garb : how deep must that man have sunk who covets a genius, his fellow citizen, the very coat that protects him !

(And with all these tools & resources ! : microfilms with projection screens in the form of reading desks : you could easily read the text enlarged to 8 by 12 on the milkglass screen ! Orders for books were filled within a few hours by radio. All the rare-book stores on earth delivered their catalogues here first, so that these Parnassians could take their pick at their leisure : "Pointless : Nobody ! (always excepting the aforesaid one individual, and the library administrators) ever buys a thing !"

"We're becoming more and more of a warehouse." – : "Well, that would be extremely important, too," I said gloomily. "Yesnodoubt !" he happily assented; and, more confidential, the Happel had worked like magic) : "Just between us : *I*'ve seen that as our real task for a *long* time now !". / Think of it : every book imaginable – including many that are no longer available anywhere on the rest of the earth ! – is there within 2 minutes 20 seconds : *and the guys make no use of the opportunity !* (I was calling them ‹the guys› now myself !).

"What's the situation in the galleries ? : Aren't the artists diligently at work copying ? Studying the techniques of the Old Masters ?" – Naught but doleful smiles; on my left, on my right, straight ahead. From the rear, like some garlicky simoom : "Only if someone wants to steal a motif." (Damn that croaking toad !).

"So book theft does occur." : he gave a business-like nod : "As it does everywhere. But we know who's got them. And packages must first be checked at customs; all packing done under supervision : otherwise the Gutenberg Bible or the Rembrandt miniatures here would have passed on long ago." ? And the inevitable neo=destur phrase : "Those guys are all ‹criminal› types."

"No; the holograph department is unfortunately already closed. – By the way : ‹Gottfried Bennet› ! ? : Do you mean *Gordon* Bennet; or Gottfried *Benn* ?" (Now I had really put my foot in it ! : No, not Samuel Beckett either : "Just forget it, if it's already closed. If I have a chance I'll stop by again.").

Here, wait, I did have to see this ! : "The partially – uh=the biggest part – unprinted manuscript of your ancestor." / "Oh, no question : what with the world premiere being presented at the theater this evening, especially in your honor : haven't you héard !" (Meaning, godknows, I'll have to go to the theater later. And I couldn't decipher the cuneiform scribblings of the old man, either; at most the title : ‹Massenbach Fights for Europe›. – I had no idea that such a thing existed. – But I ought to have known : No One was going to invite me here for the sake of my *own* pretty blue eyes !).

"Well, my sincerest thanks : really : You have given me much food for thought." (You can say that again : *I* sure would have liked to spend a year here in carefree work ! – Or were these librarians lying ? Exaggerating, piqued because not Everybody came creeping to them for some old busted potboiler every day ? So, first let's hear the other side.) / They took me, past the theater, into the administrative downtown; to my hotel.

And a pretty, intimate pension, it was : 2 rooms with bath ! My luggage was already there. / Bath no; but I'd have to put on a fresh shirt. (Best thing would be just to lay out my few things, otherwise I'll hunt myself silly; I've never been able to find anything I've lost. / And I'd been given 2 books as gifts, too. If you want to count the portfolio with the map of the Island as one.)

Oh, look at that ! : In the handsome little mahogany box, when I opened it up out of curiosity, a complete set of Island money on yellow velvet. And, even though time pressed, I spent a few seconds on it : fantastic work ! To give it its full due, you'd need a handy magnifying glass. (The largest piece, a good 3 inches in diameter, very light and hard. Tempered a strawy yellow.) / But I had to tear myself away : damn, was I ever going to show off at home with my souvenirs ! (If I – as was to be expected – made good money with my series of articles and the book version to follow : they'd tear them right out of my hand; for sure ! And then a little house; put one large library inside; 2, 3 original paintings on the walls . . . . .)

(That's where items like these belonged : in a house like that !). –

And to this point haven't seen a single famous man ! – Well, in the theater I'll surely meet up with all the ‹high flyers›.[58]

Notebook into my pocket, and down the stairs : hustle, Charleshenry ! . . . . .

"Straight ahead down Center Street ? No more than 100 farsakhs, can't miss it ? : Thanks !" (And now fast-forward, in the direction they'd pointed : let's hope those ‹farsakhs› of his aren't all too long ![59]). / (Half to the left, in the upper air, a very bright star ? ? – : Ohyes; the new supernova in the Lynx. And then there's the current generally accepted explanation for such novae : that the inhabitants had set off too many nuclear tests, and that we were dealing, therefore, with a perfectly natural stage in any star's development. *Oh here it is, and*

[58]Clumsy translation of ‹haute volée›.

[59]Farsakh, a Persian linear measure, varying between 6.401 and 6.720 kilometers : the ancient ‹parasang›. – In this case, probably used by the person providing the information in the jocularly proverbial sense of ‹very near›.

certainly unmistakable : the theatron ! / (Where, in the open space at the rear created by the two wings, stood the equestrian statue of Shakespeare : my kingdom for a horse !). (But now briskly round the outside, to the front, to the main entrance !).

A good hundred meters of columnar hedge (and up the correspondingly inconvenient stairs; change your stride every second step : to hell with all palaces !). / And here came my Yankee from this morning, loosing himself from one of the groups : "Hello, Mr. Inglefield" : "Howdy : Winer !" – And provided me a gum-chewing explanation of the edifice. / In the side wings were 2 movie theaters. Plus a hall for chamber music on the right, one for dance on the left. (Now several grouplets were sidling closer to us; and he – nonchalantly loud – chewed the names into my ear : / names ! ! : Now I saw them all with the eyes nature gave me ! And tried methodically to imprint details on my mind : the general look, the interesting gestures, the way he cleared his throat and the way he hawked : a wavy gray hairdo; the brooding blonde head of a prominent septuagenarian; there one fellow thrust a dramatic chin; beside him by the column the next one, arms crossed sullenly : were they in fact still so vain ? ! Still wanting to be described, praised, filmed, gushed over ? (For someone who has yet to make it, it's understandable : the paying public, as is well known, never wants its artists to look like human beings. But these people here were absolutely home free, both financially and ideally : they should have given me, the nosey journalist, a good kick in the rear instead !). / My, what ‹figures› ? ! : One fellow had grown a fox-red barbe à collier, and now, at age 25, looked a full-grown idiot ! ("He's going off next spring", my guide declared.) / A sculptress, tall as a tree, with smooth black bangs and an endless spindly neck (around the lower part of which she wore a tight ivory ring thick as your thumb), came astriding toward us; was Inglefield's girlfriend; and helped do the explanations. – "It's time we made our way inside."

Through the foyer; splendid promenades; a cold buffet, which at the moment I would have preferred to any theater piece on the globe : to the right of it, a debauched wine god held his goatskin above his lips; as companion-piece, the ‹Goddess of Fine Dining›, made a sensual grab for her platter of marble coldcuts : you could see that it ‹stuck to her ribs›.

Interior decor : armchairs upholstered in red velvet in the orchestra; only one balcony tier. / My two giant protectors led me down one of the customary convoluted paths and into the proscenium box of honor (but then discreetly withdrew at once : "So No One gets upset."

– What a glove-size the sculptress had ! –)

Bong ! – : And gaped uncomprehending into the sumptuosity of topboots that my great-great-uncle had deemed appropriate for making his ‹Massenbach› intelligible[60] : from the very first scene (where the author transforms himself into his hero); to the last, by lightning & thunder, in the Forest of Bialokoscz. / All the same : many scenes were not unimpressive : the one with the night-coach (its titantic wheels rotating in different directions : the burgomasters of the towns, through which it was ‹being driven› as it were, kept appearing, just from the waist up, out of the floor, bowing and scraping, as if seen in ‹fly-by› from above : not clumsily done !). / And many of the prophetical=salty utterances of the ‹little fat man› (so the description of Massenbach in the program) were sufficiently striking. If *in fact* he did say, well before 1800 : "Europe will become a desert and America will take its place." : "Germany will be divided, as Poland once was." (that is, between the West and Russia : if he *did* indeed say such things at the time . . . . . ? !). / And then the interpolated moskovitizing voices : "Let every man speak my piece !" : "Not one of us lacks what the other does not lack as well : making brothers of us all !". / But nevertheless : too many long-gone names. Too much, the 16 muddled scenes; you could no longer find your way through. (At most, reading it perhaps; check and see if they'll permit me a photocopy. – If that doesn't prove too expensive.)

And finally at the buffet : the poets, ranks closed, dug in ! Never had I seen people eat and drink with such gusto; their chin-cheeks moving like castanets : from the bas-relief on the wall, the confident leonine head of some Theodor Däubler or other watched benevolently. / Even I managed, flanked by my two giants, to break through to the counter. Then, laboriously, weighed-down, back again, into the doldrums next to the rosy-nosed goddess :

"Did you like it ?" : and I rocked my chewing head in indecision – nah; not really. : "Did you ?"; and he too moved his face in rebuff : "Too much old=fashioned brass." / "And you ?" / : "Yes, I did", the sculptress said unexpectedly : "it gave me several good ideas – for a ‹Divided Europe› : each half riding off in a different direction : on the halves of a stylized bull ! : ! !" – she swallowed wrong; she pressed her plate into my hand; used her now free right hand to clutch at the

[60]A biased glorification of the forgotten traitor of 1806; on whose autobiography (published by Brockhaus in 1809) the piece – a surfeit of narrative detail, the complete text of which has, thank god, never appeared in print – is based.

ivory ring; and whispered hastily – constantly interrupted by light= nervous burps – fragments of words : –, –, –, – ! : "Off to my atelier !" – / And o'ertopping, the Eumenide stalked away, black through the crowd, her thinker's hand still hanging from her ring. "Wow; she's *soo* impulsive" he confided, chewing; adding, his mouth full of caviar : "and really full of genius : what a woman !". / "No. I'd like to make the acquaintance of individual poets – each in the setting of his own home – tomorrow, if that's possible. As to what they look like, I'm generally familiar with that." / But he did walk me to my hotel : "I'll pick y' up t'morrow mornin' : byebye." –

Alone in my neutral hotel room : about 11 o'clock (leaving out the centimes) : and now it was time to try the trick my old friend had suggested. By telephone . . . / : "Yes, administration, please ?" –; – : "Winer here : Just today I . . . . . ah, you know ? – Yes : would it still be possible, I know it's late, to get a stenotypist – for a few minutes ? Just some quick dictation . . ." / Whom ? ! Oh my – yes whom on the spur of the moment ? Maybe the plump one from the library ? (Rather rich diet). Or . . . nono; better to be all business=astonishment : "Oh, whoever might be available : whatever is the least trouble for *you*. – Yes; here at the hotel; in the administration sector : room 33." / (And full of expectation. / (Meanwhile a brief chitchat with my conscience : "Was that brazen ?" "It was brazen." Hmmm. – "But it's only ‹natural› ?" "It's ‹natural›." That's something at least. – "But *might* she not muddle one's faculties, that leathern jerkin, crystal button, nott=pated, agate= ring, puke=stocking, caddis=garter, smooth=tongue . . ." : "Oh Lord, sir, who do you mean ? !" – And now I had totally muddled my conscience; it fell, confounded, into silence; and I could proceed to examine my coins at my ease.)).

Ah ! : Very soft, I knock ? – : So I walked over, and opened the door myself : an Indian in straw yellow silk ! (Small and dainty, yellow-brown; and with typewriter). Which I gallantly took from her; and placed on the little round table in the corner by the chairs. / Pro forma, business first :

"Yes; stamps too," she confirmed; then pulled out a whole sheet of 100 : she gave me the tasteful little album with its complete set (all Island edifices) as a gift : "As commissioned." (Mysterious way of expressing herself. And clever : makes you curious as hell ! Who do you suppose commissioned this lotus=girl to give gifts ? Brahma or the Main Post Office ?). / The stinging vacancy of a glance. And lowered the lambent-black pate over the keyboard again. ("Well, good conscience ? !" – But it, too, only made big eyes, and fell, sheepish, into silence.). / And so

quickly through the addresses of my dear relatives and acquaintances; all with the same stereotypical text ‹Hi : Charleshenry. / Hi : Charleshenry.› / Two bundles of digital rice=stuff, hulled; at the tip of each twig hung a broad red drop. As deft transition I dictated a new page for the passing=strange creature : "The lily pale, that's for fear; the lemon tree for things impossible; the violet for hopes all dashed – : the rose is yóu !"[61] – : ? – She lifted her head; made another appraisal; m; and smiled (though wearily); and considered. And nodded : yes.

On her brassiere (inside the upper edge) a little pocket for holding aromatic=withered herbs : she stood up to her ankles in the wine red pool of carpet. / I was lying now. / Soft as grass, the hissing around her tender dirty feet as she ran toward me : my arms made a cincture for her. My mouth, a brooch that I pinned again and again to her breast.

Above me : her brow had the expanse of a cloud. / (Over her shoulder : the moon rutted in red-flecked rhythm.) –

Pause. / A tender pale tantrum arose beneath her sternum : she had eaten too much sattapadavitihárena : that sounded alien and Gandharan, like soft dark green shoots, monsoon salads, down the Indus, river journey of Iskander, ‹sattapadavitihárena› : very good ![62] / In a voice hoarse with night's dew; twenty delights lay in tight tangle here. / (But could it be that Thalja had grabbed the wrong stuff ? Toweled me down with some more insidious variety ? : Why, even one of the church fathers maintained that God had manufactured the upper body, Satan the lower half : team=work; iunctim. / So here's another small libation for Satan.)

She rinsed my sweat from the wattlings of her breast : had had a future corpse as overlay (good thing we don't know exactly how much we bore and disgust women.[63] / I kissed her into silence; and she left, typewriter in hook of hand, the room.

Naked before the mirror : Who was this guy I had to thank for the fact that I, a journalist, was the beneficiary of one helluva windfall, both now and in the near future ?[64] : a total stranger really ! : If I met the fellow

[61]Provenance of this quotation not ascertainable. (Perhaps from one of those lunatic encyclopedias of that everlasting ‹great-great-uncle› ?).

[62]Pali : cottage cheese.

[63]The German reader will note how after such performances – for which it has become the custom in new America to provide overample space, for ostensibly ‹natural› reasons – the inevitable reaction sets in : ‹Persians call it Bidamag buden . . .›

[64]Of which occurrence we've had a bellyful in the meantime. I shall return several times as occasion arises, to call attention to the discrepancies between the original text before me and the series of articles familiar to the general public – and quite different they are in their formulation.

on the street, I wouldn't know him ! (Nor would have my father). / Gazing down over my sleeping body : it goes round and round, to pain me. (Stop it and think analogous thoughts).

So brightly was the moon shining on my feet, that I folded them. / A gnat flew in, slay it with mine eye : one bat of the lid. I do so often. (I did not create this world ! And should one day Some One want to ‹call me to account›, I'll punch him in the nose ! (Of course, if he has ‹the authority›, he can do it anyway; but I'll give him a piece of my mind !)). / You quickly get used to the gentle vibration of the ‹ground›; at first it felt as if my legs were constantly falling asleep. / In the window, immobile the moon; the red spot almost at the edge of the blackened part : 50 years ago, had a young lad dreamed of the mouths of his lady loves, that's ‹loves› in the plural, it would have been irreproachable; but had he dreamed in the singular, ‹pornography› : good thing these mendacious=prudish Europeans are gone ! ‹Cradle of civilization›, as they were wont to curse themselves ? Well, cheers ! (And once you're grown up, you don't need a cradle : that's what Napoleon said just this evening : *another* great man ! / : Good night.).

(And the hirsute circumosculation of the camelhair blanket : if only the next war would break out right now ! . . . . .[65]. –. –. –. –

(Got up once : around the besinuated room with groping hands; my feet helped search; the plumbline of breath . . . . . Sooooo. (I had already dreamed about going to the toilet, and each time I squeezed was interrupted by Greifflings[66] : that always means it's hightime.) And back into the patchwork ! . . . . .).

The curtains dancing their dance of the veils; the vestigial moon had turned chalky white : each morning one is transformed by means of chemicals, water & soap, from a shockhaired greasy troll into a smooth-pated=cool creature of thought. / And down we go – I have no time to lose – to the breakfast room. – :

And there sat my Inglefield, with toothpick and a whiskey and soda, to receive me.

And he spoke / from the smoke / in his mouth : Of the incomparable ‹Starboard Chronicle› – had brought the morning edition with him : the ‹Left Truth›, likewise appearing twice daily, yonder, could not even be compared with it ! / While I gorged lucullanly : scampi in aspic;

[65]For the article intended for public dissemination, this passage was rewritten as follows : "Ah, if only all the world could share my good fortune !". – Truly, the author's egoism is both repulsive and boundless !

[66]The meaning here cannot be ascertained; my query concerning it received an evasive reply.

herring salad; I've always been a fish-lover (now that pulls you up short : does one ‹love› what one devours ? How imprecise our language is !). – Liverwurst topped with Swiss cheese. Black currant juice. 6 eggs fried up with slices of jack cheese. 1 steak. (And then some of the ‹country breakfast›, too : hodgepodge of macaroni & home fries; little pieces of sautéed kidney mixed in, threads of egg and various grated cheeses). / Unperturbed, he watched me go at it : there are people who can consume a radish without ever thinking of Andreas Hartknopf.[67]

"Island police ?" : he had used the expression, and I inquired further. / Tough job, subduing drunken poets ! "Anybody who breaks window-panes at night, is a habitual rowdy, is removed from the Island." (But very wholesome regulations : slap repaid by slap. And since most of police were 6 foot 6, the poets however, 5 foot 5 on the average, it proved *most* instructive for disorderly wordsmiths : they were here, after all, to *work*, not, to play the Big Man : "*Quite* right. Mr. Inglefield.").

But Each evidently slandered the Other : there was simply no talking to Inglefield about the larboard side ! (As if it weren't enough for the nations to cross swords out there : did they have to keep it up here too ? !). / So I interrupted him in cold blood; and announced my list :

"I still want to visit the workshop of Mercier, the painter." – He nodded, lower-lipped; it presumably could be done. / "Then to see Bob Singleton." (The notorious prose-stylist and freethinker. And he took visible alarm : he'd have to make a call first ! "Great man, without doubt." But for years now, had thrown Everybody out; always with the same excuse : new novella. – "Well; I'll try."). / And finally, Humphrey Seneca Groatsworth as well. But he gave a pensive shake of his head : "I think, he's still sleepin'. – But I'm not a hundred p'cent sure." : "Sleeping ?" (me; not comprehending). (What a limp excuse ! : If he's still sleeping at 10, then we'll visit him at 11 !) : "He's got to wake up again sometime !". – "I hope so," the unflappable head before me stated. (Did he follow that with a muttered "Maybe not" ? Davus sum, non Oedipus !).

Get up. (An athletic teenager picked up my baggage and took it off to the Starboard=Hotel, run by the Americans, where I was to have lunch.) / "I'll take you for a quick look at the machine sector."

[67]‹Andreas Hartknopf› : old German novella of the 18th century; unobtainable for me – *I* wasn't on the Island.

That broad naked plain ? : I'd guess about 1 kilometer long, half as wide ? – And he nodded : "Right." / Only one solitary building anchored on the iron sea (for here before our shoes the Island floor lay exposed and waffle-ironed. I took inner alarm : that's how it had looked, between terrifying, solitary apartment cliffs, in the barren echoing suburb where I grew up !). / "The waterworks." (Where sea was simmered and distilled. We approached one windowless side; and climbed down through a manhole).

Below : at first I saw only a wheel of dreadful height. / (It stomped away in the greased darkness : so regular !). / A face joined us; and examined me disdainfully through the wiry mesh of its brows. (Because I still couldn't see very well yet : out of sympathy, he removed the can of lubricant from my planked path.)

"Nuclear powered ?" (I had heard that was the case on the ship; but) : "wasn't it originally declared absolutely forbidden for the Island ? To bring in nuclear material ?" The chief machinist just wrinkled his right cheeks into a non=guffaw : "D'y' think the bolshies[68] held to that ? – At one point we noticed how a Russian woman traveling back='n'= forth as a courier was wearin' outrageously large earrings : hot on her trail with the Geiger : ? : ! !". – And the chief machinist nodded grimly : No false modesty, please, not when it came to the ‹friendly atoms› ![69]

(And what weren't the Russians allegedly up to across the way ! : Employed only ‹snug› people as responsible technicians. Me, skeptical : "Do they even exist ?". And he : "Suredo ! : They apparently have a colony in Siberia – not another living soul for miles and miles – where they speak a language invented for just that purpose. With a very small special=vocabulary, one normal Russians can't so much as understand. Marry only among themselves. Won't divulge a thing. Are totally spy= and drug=proof : we've tried ! Don't even have a name for a lot of things : when we asked about the current state of Russian nuclear research, the fellow we'd hypnotized stood up, crossed his arms over his chest, and danced a kind of cracoviak." "How many atom

[68]Slang for ‹Bolsheviks›.

[69]Allusion to the well-known book ‹The Friendly Atoms›, by Thomas L. Fox, who, 1 year before war broke out promised – with irresistible optimism – every man his single-family house, amid swaying shrubs and two-legged children flourishing and dancing about. – As was revealed after the war, the author had been bought by the allied ‹Western Powers› of the day (through whose influence he also managed to secure himself a fellowship for the Island, and thus survive).

bombs do you have here on the Island ?" : same result; but there must be more than just a few, because he jigged for a good thirty seconds ! / "Yesyes : things sure look different here on our side, in the Free World, don't they ? !" – I took a look around : was that my impression ? (Were these stratagems *ever* hypercerebral ! – Even if it turned out *not* to be true !).).

"Oh but of course we'll drive !" : he swung in behind the wheel of the mini=Cadillac; and we glided back out through the Iron Gate. ("Kekulé ?" was the sentry's question; and was given "Wire Street" for an answer. And some other whisperings.) / "Nice athletic field !". Not used much, however; only a few trim WACs dangling from the rings in the air, tipping, rotating, and spreading their legs : "And the poets ?" But he calmly dismissed the question : "A poet doesn't run."; and gingerly parked at the edge of town.

First of all the ‹Serpentine› : "Beautiful !" : Murmuring water of the Poulaphouca River slid our way, around the shrubbed corner. ("Oparoke", "Oparoke", said a couple of bona fide frogs to the matutinal silence); from the bridge, above which a weeping willow leaned, the ‹Poet's Corner› looked wonderfully somnolent : "Charming !". / Laid out in checkerboard style : As if the white squares were the green yards; the black ones occupied at each corner by 1 single-family house ? : "Exactly so." / How many houses in the town at present ? : "67". – "*Plus* the general store : there." –

Through the still deserted streets : granted, it was only eight thirty, and artists sleep late. But he shook his head skeptically : "*Lazy* artists, yes." / The diligent ones get up at 4 in the morning instead, to make full use of the precious quiet for their work; and then by 10, when the others are unwinding from bed with a yawn, are just getting tired, but have accomplished something, too. – "And does that happen often ?" : "Lazy ones ? : Yes." (I had meant it the other way around; but his info sufficed as well.)

Streets named after – dead ! – artists : ‹Coleridge Road›; ‹Keats Drive›; ‹Brontë Square› (and there they stood, too, the Sisters Three, reading & writing : Charlotte erect, her right breast in her own hand (so that, how artful, it swelled a bit between the individual fingers : searching out the Land of Love with heart and soul. / Emily seated, with furrowed brow, her bronze heel thrust into the bronze of the pedestal. / (And then Anne; all shy and childlike; a quill pressed to her lips). / : "Lovely !".)

Pets ? : Were permitted : monkeys, dogs, cats, songbirds. Marine aquariums. (Naturally, checked carefully before imported, disinfected;

and-so-forth.) / Wild animals that had been set free : crows, rabbits, lizards; moles. / Domestic animals, out in ‹Fields & Pastures› : horses, cattle; swine, sheep; goats, chickens, ducks.

Lovely plants : young poplars of enchanting figure ! I was happy to stand there in the little garden : 2 bush-sized treelets held each other shyly by the foliage, a copper beech, and a double-leafed maple : "Looks nice !". And he gave a filosofical nod : "The gardeners are on the ball !"

Besides which – and cold-blooded, he stirred in his pocket with one hand – this was where ‹my Mercier› lived. (In the neighboring house, someone was getting started, and knew how to handle his piano with downright barbaric virtuosity). Inglefield shrugged dubious shoulders; but then, when I wouldn't give up, said phlegmatically : "Try him." / And I rang, despite the warning of his misanthropy (and inconspicuously removed something from my wallet).

The door flew open : he raised his palette, ready to wallop me ! But instead, with admirable restraint for an artist, used his right to pull the bouquet of brushes from his mouth, and bellowed : "I don't have time to show any pictures ! !" / To which, lightning-quick, I bellowed my reply : "But maybe to see some ? !" and in sync shoved the snapshot of his brother under his nose. / (He first had to collect himself. It had come as too much of a surprise. Gradually, however, he began to smile. – "Très bien," he grumbled pleasantly. And : "Come on in."). / (Inglefield asked, discreetly, if he might use the phone : he wanted to inquire how his heartthrob's half-and-half Europa was coming.)

"You've seen mon très cher frère ? !" : and so a hasty and brief report, our most fleeting acquaintance; but he was truly glad all the same : "I haven't seen him for 2 years : He's become a sergeant ?" : "Has he ever !" I replied (really *was* a prize specimen, that tall Canadian !). / But :

"No ! : I have to be on my way : I'm a journalist on a 50-hour pass; and of those – pff, mygod ! – 18 are gone already : *I* really couldn't tell you anything more; and *you* are right in the middle of your work; I just wanted to keep my promise !" Shook his least paint-splattered elbow. And then back behind Inglefield into the residential neighborhood.

"His setup was really super !" : "You may well say so : they have everything heart desires, these poets ! : Three hot squares a day; and all the cold snacks they want. A new suit every year; as many tailor-made casual clothes as they want. If the doctor permits, free Nescafé : if the doctor prescribes, lowered barometric pressure in the study, so there your are !" / "Wellnow," I said considering : "1 suit a year – :

that's really not all *that* much . . . . ." But he was quick to set me to rights : ! / And, it's true : when you added *that* into the equation, the ‹guys› didn't even need that allowance. Because : "You haven't any idea how the major corporations scramble to be allowed to donate *free* stuff ! So they can advertise afterward : ‹What are they wearing on IRAS ? : Eagle=Shoes !› – : Could *you* resist a commercial where Frederick Nelson lifts that snowy mane, slams a ponderous hand down on the keyboard beside him, and announces : ‹1 drama more a year thanks to my Remington !› ?" / (Right; for a whole month I had bought dextrose : just because these White Gods here allegedly savored nothing else – or little else; unless it was Bigtails Wheat Germ Oil). / "You can't imagine the packages most of them send back home : whole *bales* of clothes !"

And furniture too ? : Yes; everything, everything free ! – Plus the gigantic Phono=Video=Box ? : That too. / Beds of truly unchristian elasticity. Secretaries at any time of the night or day, for dictation : "If a man's never written a poem before, he'll have to take up the practice here – so we thought." –

Now and then the poets would get that well-known bee in their bonnets to ‹live simply› : and a log-cabin on Otsego=Lake was promptly put at their disposal. : "Couldn't I have a look at *one* ? !". (That would make an article all by itself ! Something for your classy Abderites ![70] – But he had to phone ahead to one of the ‹solitaries› first; and to that end, drove me to his girlfriend's) – :

who was all white today, as if powdered ! : she opened the door with distracted limbs; and did not recognize us; at most Inglefield's voice; then gave me a hug by mistake (and her gypsum tasted ghastly !). And stumbled off ahead of us, on through Afro= and Sardino=sculpturizings (which most modern artists use to ‹fortify their eyes›); into her atelier –

: ? : ! – – – : But, damn, : it was really something ! / The knotted-up bull was slogging off, all Altimira and lecherous red sidelong glances (and a tool like a soldier who hasn't been home on leave for 22 months; I know about that). From his shadow – deftly employing it, mimicking it as a continuation of its own outline – grew a second black bull : more slender, more malevolent=supple, its hornwork more craftily contorted. / : And each with ‹his› Europa aboard : at the front, stiff and

[70]It is remarkable – and I choose a mild word ! – with what nonchalance the author makes fun of the solid citizens in his readership; : yet on the other hand displays no disdain for the income that their credulity provides him !

thin and noble gray : at the rear, arched, thin, licorice-sticked ! (So that's what Miss Sutton looked like naked; in her haste had had no other model at hand. Or hadn't wanted one : poor Inglefield !). / (But for now, just say something scintillating. – And, until an idea hit, keep up the ecstatic murmurs; marvel & circle . . . . .)

Aha; there : it comes ! : "You are a Manichaean ! !" (In the booming tone of most abandoned admiration – and that really *was* one helluva an inspiration the lass had had !)

There she stood; her whole body gray; the stony maw flapped a few times – then she let out a cry of joy, thin as a cricket's, but with piercing energy : "Oh really ! That's me !". (And as one, we explained to our expectant Inglefield the requisite dichotomies : Ormuzd & Ahriman; Day & Night; Starboard & Larboard. / Then an even more elegant phrase came to me, ‹Black & White›. She hugged me several times, again I felt the lattice of her ribs. And together we fetched the sweetly conjured brand of whiskey from her kitchen, untidy as her genius.) Inglefield just nipped, and then anxiously climbed the stairs, to make a phone call.

Alone with the pale articulata : she was a total mess (‹un=strung› after a hard work's night; leached; plus those 2 tumblers of alcohol !); her arms scarecrowed : we sprang to our feet again, and becircled her new group : the thrust of the black partners was magnificent ! : "Precarious balance : Black is the coming thing : Cave nigrum !" : "Quite so : it's a success," she said happily. And rehung her arms down over my shoulders (the instinct of those pumped dry : grab hold ! With my nose at about the level of her breasts, out of purely scientific interest, using it to check once more – ? – : no : not a trace. And behind, no trouble holding her backbone in your hand, like a gnarled walking stick. Waist ? – well; about 24 inches (and 7 feet 2 inches tall : poor Inglefield !). / Exhausted, she fell onto the broad-leathern convertible couch. Wanted another drink; but I energetically held my hand over it, and in high C she thanked me for the solicitude : "You're right : I need someone to watch over me."). / Inglefield's footfall down the stairs; he seemed easier of mind :

"Alright. We can visit them both. – In a quarter of an hour : so first I'll give you a quick look at our harbor and the airport. – Bertie ? : Good-bye ! And get some sleep." / He wrapped her carefully with 2 blankets (just one would have been too short) – : and that pale bony face looked up ever so nutcrackerish out of the garish plaids. The mouth was still open and waged whisperings; gawking of eyes. (But calm descending in gossamers now; all lineaments ironing themselves out. The first deep

gulp of breath. We stood at more circumspect distances. Yet another. – Then a shrill voice, of bone-whistling energy, said : "The foot ! – The black female's foot : has to be *smaller* !" / Easing off in cushy sighings, like whistling wind withdrawing through a palisade. Then it turned over, stretched all 1000 joints at once . . . . . And we tiptoed, sharing meaningful nods, through diverse doors : "What a woman !").

Up Harbor Road : "There, behind those trees, the hotel : where we'll have lunch." / "Not too much harbor, please," I requested, "I paid sufficient tribute to that on arrival; there are more interesting things here." (But had to come along, to one of the warehouses at least, where they stored provisions : "Could you have them open a tin for me ?". / He merely smiled at my mistrust; and I could take my pick. – "Let's say=uh –, – : here; this one !". (‹Extra fancy veal pâté› : I was suddenly hungry in fact, but hesitated to demand further fodder !). / So sampled, my brow critically pursed; kept on sampling, and with a soup spoon : down to the spicy jellied bottom, three-quarters of a boneless pound. (And they watched : sure of themselves at first. Then, as I delved deeper, not so sure. At the halfway point, amused. Then perplexed= dubious. Knitted=burdened by thought. And finally, upon hearing the painstaking scratches of the spoon, nodded in dumbfounded approval : the guy doesn't spare himself ! : You can't fool him ! (And spreading proud hands, pâtetically announced : "Impeccable !" (making immediate written note of the fact with earnest mien as well), : Let the eagle scream !). / Inconspicuously loosen my belt by 2 notches.)).

So this is the airport : on the runways USAmerican personnel was bestirring itself (considered neutral territory, however !). : "We had to cede the rocket-launching pad to the bolshies in exchange." / Right : there were some of them slinking around up that way. / Or wait : always correct ! : They weren't ‹slinking› at all; but were indeed *walking*, squat and sure of themselves, in each hand a full-grown wrench. / And moving on, back a ways on ‹Harbor Road›, with lots of confusing curves (partly unnecessary ? : Looked that way on my map. / The feeling of being on board a ship, no sense of that at all. !). –

A visit with modern eremites : "I want to be a loner," he had informed the Island administrators 8 days ago, somber and monosyllabic; and had moved to the country. / The rough, artfully longhaired=unkempt, suit looked good on him. (Had a telephone; in the entry closet. I gave his toilet a thorough going-over : spiffy toilet paper ! : two-ply; the outside firm and grip-grained; inside silky fibered and soft : ‹Your family will be impressed – your guests will rave about it›, of unrivaled absorbency. And in 4 weeks, if Island-certified, some very different matter

would be printed on it; just don't think about that !). / Charming, the acerbic discourtesy with which he played host to us. And had his misanthropic turns-of-phrase down to a ravishing T, and spared us nary a one – one of which, given its length, I failed to take in all at once and he was kind enough to repeat for me a second time, so I could get it in writing. / (What enormous vitality the man had ! : He had to be well into his 80s – sure : he was born in 1921, wasn't he ? – and still *no* white hair; not a tooth missing; he had ordered a secretary for ten thirty ? – Ahwell; they simply hadn't a care here. And artists, gonads of cast-iron anyway : didn't Titian live to be 100, and still liked to do it ? And then Fontenell, with his ‹secretaire perpetuel›.). / All the same, he seemed uncommonly glad for the visit (although he kept tossing off the very finest rude eremetical remarks anent the ‹disturbance›. We, however, acted *so* conscience=reverence-stricken !). / Was, at heart, a delightful old man. And his books – *when* he wrote one – not so bad. Although, not in my line; but that doesn't mean anything. / Right on time, the secretary took over for us : enchantingly peevish, he shoved us to the door; gave one thunderstormy nod – (and demonstratively locked it behind him : !).

"Yes; exactly so." (Inglefield, phlegmatic) : "In 8 days at the outside, he'll be back." / There were some, however, who lived perpetually ‹Before the Gates› : "They are *highly* respected." Quiet, hardworking people. Come into town every 4, 5 days, to shop; make intensive use of the bibliothesauri; and put out that volume like clockwork : "Like your Bob Singleton whom we're going to see now." / And I was truly, honestly anxious to meet him, the notorious Atheist and Shocker !

Wait; just one thing : "He's really amazingly well-preserved, your Mr. Hermit there : he's seen his 87 summers at least, and that's a kindly estimate !" / His eyes began to sparkle behind the cornea; he giggled sublimely through his nose; he seemed some mysterious=other : "Yes. – And no," he said to the steering wheel. (Till I lost my bearings. Which, however, was probably inappropriate and uselessly= abstruse ? : ‹Yes›, that meant, he was 87. ‹No› : he had kept himself up : the end; right ?).

Through ‹Fields & Pastures› :[71] the nourishing shuffle of farmers at cultivation : they scrabble and whinny, scrabble and whinny, scrabble and whinny : a watchmaker could have made better ! / (A span of oxen : the black bull with the white cravat was rather clerical; the

[71]The following apostrophe merely documents the asphalt literati's lack of ties to the rural populace; and is informative only in that it demonstrates yet another limitation of the author.

athletic virago drawing up the rear, a raggy-tag knotted round her greasy head, the slovenly tarp of her dress : I come up 99 cents short on the dollar whenever I hear the rural population praised as the ‹backbone of the nation› ! Or similar ding-a-ling phrases.). / Explanation : they were there not merely to animate the landscape (window dressing); but also to produce potatoes and grain in extreme emergency. Radiated and berainable fields; stalls for the gentle beasts : and twice now, the honest peasantry had been so brazen as to demand ‹a share in the administration of the Island›. Both times they were immediately banished from the Island; the last time, however, the ringleader – a Russian, as the autopsy proved – had to be shot : "Instead of being overjoyed just to be living here, free from war !" / Verily : the impudence of these clodhoppers knows no bounds ! : All over the world, they prevent the importation of cheaper food : if they can't produce that cheap, let them take up another trade ! / Vote on principle for the chauvinistic right – an intimate corollary to their always making the‹best soldiers› : ‹making *them* the oxen who choose the butcher to be king !›[72] / Inglefield nodded assent to such observations; but modified this at once with 1 shrug : "We need them." – To which I heatedly protested : "Haven't the Russians and Chinese transformed theirs, with great success, into ‹workers of the field› ? Where foodstuffs are produced, indeed, manufactured en gross ? That *is* in fact the concept that makes it possible for their products to be a good third cheaper than ours : why don't we take that fake dung-heap nimbus away from the farmers, *too*; all that mystimuddling claptrap about ‹Blood & Soil› . . . . ." / But he interrupted me; soft and insistent, as I'd never heard him speak before :

"*Mr. Winer : some good advice : Beware of* admiring the Russians : that could get you in terrible trouble ! – I have been instructed – I won't say ‹officially› exactly; but pretty close to it – to dissuade you from an all too lengthy visit on the larboard side. And above all do not spend – as I presume you originally planned – your *last* day there in particular. And don't depart via Sovrock."[73] (and, once again more nonchalant=ingratiating) : "Why don't you spend your last hours with

[72]Quotation taken from the great-great-uncle, a man equally reluctant to bear arms : It is surely well known that intellectuals have always made the ‹worst soldiers›. Unfortunately, also able to appeal to the greatest authorities for substantiation : even among our esteemed German classical authors, 2 – Klopstock and Herder – were in fact manifestly conscientious objectors.

[73]Short form for ‹Soviet Rocket Passenger Service›.

us tomorrow : we have lots to show you yet. – You'll be given a vertical take-off plane; and you'll be back on the old millstream banks of the Kalamazoo by evening." –

(Now that means, watch out ! : If this rascal was supposed to pass this on to me on orders from General Coffin – and there was no reason whatever to doubt the legitimacy of his innuendo – then I had just better. Change my plans. / But at the same time maintain my independence and dignity[74] : how to combine the two ? . . . . . / . . . . . / Ah, that's it. Like this, maybe ? (And all man-behind-the-wheel, he had not=noticed my struggles) : "We can't let them – I mean the Easterners and especially the Neutrals – accuse me of being un=objective, no sir ! : which would, however, be the case if didn't divide what scant time I have into three equal – or at least something like equal – parts ! And so 17 hours *have* to go to the backboard side : let's say 16; I *am* an American after all, and on one can blame me if I prefer to be where I can make myself" (and a very brief pause slipped up on me before I could get it out "without constraint" !) – "uh=understood. / So that if you could bring me back from the larboard tomorrow morning at about 9 . . . ?")

He gave it businesslike consideration; but otherwise seemed to agree with my lines of thought : he could pass that on to Coffin, yes. / "But that means I'll have to be over there by 3, or at the latest 4 o'clock this afternoon : and spend the evening there, and the night." (Although sure as shootin' they'd set up some beauty queen for me here on the right side. – Well, that kind of stuff runs around all pudenda=powdered and =lacquered by the dozen back home. Whereas I was unfamiliar with Russianesses.).

He digested, gnawing his gum, my presentation. And, pregnant seconds later, began to nod his approval : "Right. Well : we do have to be objective." / And, followed up at once : "Good. – I'll see if I can't pick you up at their ‹Krassnaya Gastinitsa› tomorrow morning. Or, you can get across that little piece on foot : good."

Here's where his house lived (the grass in front – Inglefield was so brazen about using it as a shoe-brush, that I would have liked to slap him – was substantially inclined to do so in any case : consider it done !). / (And once again, knew the most important details, the bastard : It was well known that Bob Singleton, this horror of a man – best comparable to Edgar Poe – was fully capable of eating 1 pound of nougat at one sitting every day ! *Very* remarkable !).

[74]Sic ! Every reader, I presume, wishes the author would have thought of that some hundred pages ago.

(I inconspicuously felt for my heart : what a moment ! ! : I would now stand, brow to brow, opposite the man who had been the very=god of my youth ! Discounting his idées fixes=littéraires – I knew them too well. For a second, the dumpling bobbed up in my throat : At that moment – I would have laid every penny I'd saved in the Grand= Rapids=Bank at his, or Poe's, feet. It's a curse for us applesauce folk to have to stand face to face with living literary history ! The title= perplex of his books was too great within me.)

Me, ready to perform any act of worship : HIM ? : Fiery sparks spurted from his shag pipe as if from the Heckelsberg ! Broad he was, in his high-collared thin-red sweater, proud as Lucifer : "Ah. – So you're the heralded journalissimo ?"

(Concentrate : concentrate ! : Never again ! !) : And I was all-round eyes, all-round ears. / Sped my gaze in wild adoration through his reference library ? : Curiosities of all sorts, just like you see with any autodidact. On his desk, ready at hand, what else but the French Revolution of 1789 : "Lamartine ! ?"; and he gave an all-business nod : "Useful only in conjunction with Kropotkin." – "Carlyle ?"; he took his pipe from his mouth all the more energetically to say : "Is *he* ever a gasbag !". (But ‹is› all the same : that's the beautiful thing about these members of the Republica Intelligentsia, that the noble dead are dealt with, argued over, feuded with, attacked, celebrated as if they were still to be counted among the living ! – Which, in a certain sense, they still are. – Forgod's, if only my brain had functioned a little faster !)

Then we sat, stuck grinning, to our chairs. (Along the wall an endless stripe of Tieck : so he knew German !). / "Weary of loneliness within my circle of friends . . . pigeon-livered and lion-mouthed . . . who are of the opinion that Apollo could just as well be fitted out in wig and false teeth : Holy twilight, what a bunch ! . . ." (I could imprint only half of it on my mind; and probably 50% of that wrong – I did what I could).

Fragments (the stuff he just tossed off) : "Tradition ? Is the mind=set of the lazy; who let puddles lie because they might possibly have come from the Deluge." / "Upon request I'll ferret out heresies in the Lord's Prayer, too !". And enthusiastically followed it up with this anecdote :

"In the land of the Swiss, where, under the best of circumstances, the most pious wend their way to church once a year come Eastertide, an octo-genarian sent his son at age twenty-five for his first visit to the valley below. And upon the latter's return home, he catechized him as to what he had heard and seen there ? To which the son replied : there had been one fellow who told, and was long in the telling, of another fellow : who had been betrayed & sold, captured & bound, dragged & beaten,

and finally even nailed to a cross. "Yes, father," he said : "They treated him so dreadful, that I felt powerfully sorry for him." / "Good Lord, Good Lord !" the old man replied : "Haven't they settled that business *yet* ? ! It's been a good 20 years since I was last in a church : they were hashing out the same affair back then ! What amazes me is that the gov'ment doesn't see to it that they get it talked out for good and all !" / (And laughed right heartily).

"So you have no so-called ‹religious sensibility› whatever ?" : Nonewhatever. Not even as a child ! (The phenomenon definitely exists : Voltaire, Diderot; Reimarus; Lessing, too, most likely; Kantschopenhauernietzsche; David Friedrich Strauss – no shabby string of pearly names ! : Goethe above all ! / And Bob nodded too, with sanctimony : "The Lord sendeth syphilis, the Lord also sendeth Salvarsan !"). / And the muse had indisputably kissed him, frequently and intensively. And most important – Hail Us ! – not just consecretorily on the brow, but further to the south as well. In the copy of his ‹Tandem Tours› that he gave me, he wrote, in reference to these same matters : ‹Fari quae sentias : Speak what You think›.[75]

Warning : "Think it over twenty times before you buy any ‹collected works› ! You'll grow more cautious all on your own, once you know that every one of them will weigh you down with one entire strange life, with a super-destiny : more, than you can handle. – The man who owns more than 1 dozen ‹collected works› is a charlatan ! – Or : he hasn't read them." / And he had no particularly pleasant words for his colleagues : "If the total of new ideas is zip, then his fiction is of ‹classical austerity›. / It's always better – as far as I'm concerned – to be asked : ‹Why isn't he here ?› than ‹What's he doing here ?› !" / "The Island ? ? ! ! : If you'd stretch a tent over it, it'd be the world's biggest circus !". (Accompanied by the pointed remark : "*I* don't shirk from using my time !"; and, when Inglefield flapped an indignant hand : "Yesyes, I know : I've ‹sworn› an oath : be silent, oh my heart !").

Outside his door : he had come with us (having first made a call : he wasn't writing, the cleaning lady could get started). / Compressed his brows

[75]Which the author has indeed made bold to do in the report at hand – the result of his observation of said splendid maxim being his confused and lewd style : it is one thing to think, another to write ! / And it is well known that Mr. Bob Singleton, whose fête is celebrated here, is one of the worst of the so-called ‹eroticists›, whose books a Christian had best handle with tongs : the author is wisely silent about the high probability that encounters with People's Democratic writers have taken place in his Island home ! As well as the fact that he was admitted only because of votes from East Bloc nations – and, admittedly, from the Neutrals.

and sent a threat on high : "Well, most illustrious sun ? !" (It was obscuring itself somewhat now too, as forecasted. / ‹Fog powder› dispensed only to adults. Diverse sorts; areas where it thrives best : Lappland, Lüneburg Heath, Maine. Fog by mail order. Perhaps even fog *breeders* ? : very good !). –

Lunch; in the hotel on the far side of Harbor Road : 1 pale gray jacket-and-skirt ate with us, with bloody red mitts (and shoes of commensurable length; unmistakably ‹Miss Alabama›; 5 red daggers on each hand). / And, across the mussel salad, cast me one oeillade after the other. Her vixen-red lips, a pair of worms, kept curling gracefully over across their white field. (‹I'll have three whores a day, to keep love out of my head.› Otway, if I remember correctly.)[76]

The dance band ? : they changed it every month. / "Are many artists vegetarians actually ?" – Their mouths wrenched automatically into as many smiles : "Almost never." / And the sociological explanation : all of them had suffered so from hunger at the start that on principle they gluttonized like the prodigal son. (And we do indeed wolf it all down : the berries of plants : slurp ! The hide of animals : yum ! We suckle at every teat; stick every tube in our maws; raw mussels from the Seven Seas : just so we can groan and fart again for 10 more hours !). / "I'm to leave my baggage here then ?". He gave a businesslike nod.

An ethereal young man, all gentle and sinuous, entered the restaurant; ordered himself 40 ounces of raw hamburger;[77] and then dully stared at the wall opposite; 2 raw eyes in his vivacious face. Since nothing else came to mind, he began to use his lovely long knife as a drumstick – humming obediently and flexing the noble blade (and, as he began to warble the International with interpolated bel canto trills, I couldn't help myself : I rose up out of respect, and made a deep bow, eyes cast down, as befits a poor=average soul when he comes in contact with the Absolute. He looked at me in dismay; his mouth formed some inaudible vulgarity (you could tell by the expression of his chinworks); and I bowed once again : for to be enjoined to *such*, by Great Men, is beautiful. (By Great Women must be more beautiful still !)).

For it was Stephen Graham Gregson ! : the poet who penned ‹Police Academy›, ‹Papa Luna›, and the incomparable ‹Falk=Works Inc.› (upon the publication of which, he was attacked 23 times by hit squads hired by the textile kings; sued 485 times for libel : been forced to live, hidden by a courageous friend, in forests for 11 months – until the IRAS here

[76]Thomas Otway, ‹The Soldier's Fortune›; act I, scene 3.

[77]Equals 1134.52 grams.

finally intervened ! In open session (broadcast on television from the Great Auditorium to all the world) all 800 geniuses of the day united behind Gregson. And simultaneously, one of their sacred snow white Island planes took off from the swamps of Carolina, where the unfortunate, gnashing his teeth and penning works in hot frenzy, was in hiding – at first he thought it was some new trick of his persecutors and refused to climb on board (constantly supported by his little band of fanatical hangers-on; it was awfully difficult to lay gentle hands on him !). / And public indignation was making waves, big ones ! : where only 1 hour before he had been universally branded as an anarchist and blasphemer, pornographer and lunatic – nice sound, ‹pornographer›; like a real profession : stenographer ! – now, after the Island's solemn manifesto, the public promptly turned against the instigators of such a scandalous fiasco. A boycott of textiles was approved (and carried out for days); so that the bewildered industrialists had their collective hands full mollifying consumers and wooing them with free samples. Their campaign succeeded easily, particularly among women (for whom they moved up the fashion-gimmick season); although the men were harder to appease : literary historians (good memory for names !) refused for years afterward to buy their new frock-coats from ‹Falk› ! / Another consequence was that no firms would hire apprentices with more than a grade-school education; only relatively simple young folk (carefully checked by cunning pre-testing for their ability to be tyrannized and for a trustworthy limited vocabulary). And in their standard contracts there appeared a fine-print clause – drawn up on the sly by members of the bar and inserted nationwide : to wit, said apprentice would never, either now or in the future, be permitted to report about his apprenticeship in any form whatever : ‹to prevent industrial sabotage›. – Meaning, in plain language : the government had sold out yet once again,[78] protecting the white-slave dealers – child labor, as in the good old Charles=Dickens=days !

Inglefield pulled me, mid-bow, back down; made preparations to speak; shook his head; (and a well-drilled Miss Alabama withdrew to the potty); he seemed to have turned very thoughtful, indeed gloomy. / "Curious case : doesn't write a line anymore ! – When he first came to

[78]This entire diatribe by the author is ‹yet once again› fully uncalled for. Mr. Gregson is – let posterity judge – an undeniably fine talent, but he mildewed in the swamp : the swamp of unchecked passion ! The novel concerning the American textile industry alluded to here proves nothing more than that he is by nature the sort of person who cannot reconcile himself to plain, orderly work : an apprenticeship and military service have never hurt anyone !

the Island, one piece after another emerged form his workshop, each more beautiful and wicked than the one before. Then –" (he bent deeper over his plate; he murmured more urgently) : "– all production ceased in one fell swoop ! In fact, immediately subsequent to the following events :" (he snorted grimly, and bit himself in the mouth (which I wouldn't have done for big bucks !)) : "At a sports event, ‹Larboard vs. Starboard›, Gregson fell for a Russian girl – one of your built-like-a types, who can do a mount and forward roll on the horizontal bar with just one hand." (I stared across : he was holding his head just above the improbable mound of meat, and digging in with wolfish appetite) : "Maybe just because opposites attract ?" I suggested : "because he's so thin ?. Sure : projected love ! : he feeds like that because he wants to be like her !". But Inglefield shook his head in disbelief) : "You don't know the whole story; hold off on your guesses. – At first they would meet ‹Before the Gates›. The saucy-shady creature lured him ever further on. Until he was visiting her in the Left Library, where of course he met more Russians. And in the end, he announced : he would have to spend 6 to 8 weeks over there in preparation for a new novella – there's nothing you can do; we're officially powerless in that case." / Pause; he chewed resentment.

"And=uh : inofficially ?" I dared to ask. "Hah – inofficially=inofficially !" he snarled angrily : "inofficially of course we tried everything possible : tactful suggestions by acquaintances. Honorific invitations to a lecture tour in the States – his constant lame excuse : they weren't worthy of him ! / The entire WAC corps was given orders to have a go at him : whoever succeeded in driving off the Russian woman would have her salary doubled, her contract renewed – to no avail ! : And some of those girls are that out of the ordinary . . . . . !" clamped mouth shut (obviously thinking of a sculptress, Bertha Sutton by name, what a woman. And I couldn't entirely fault Gregson in that regard. (But then again; because in a certain sense, Bertie certainly was ‹out of the ordinary›. Very much so. Although she lacked just about everything a woman could. Except for one thing perhaps.)).

"So he crossed over : 4 weeks; 6 weeks : 8 weeks ! – Then he came back, in the state you see him now. – / He doesn't write anymore; he doesn't work. And if he's asked, repeats his stereotypical dictum : the whole of Western literature is – well, you know what."

He bent to my ear; he whispered in a gravy voice : "It goes without saying that we put him through his paces under hypnosis : *he is not the same man ! !* His vocabulary has shrunk in some inexplicable fashion; and the American he has lost has definitely not been replaced by new

learned Russian; no ! He has the mentality of a plow-jockey !"

Sated, he sat up, taller; he crossed his gawky arms over his chest; he gave me a piercing look :

"And therefore, Mr. Winer : I am officially asking you now, once you're over there, to keep your eyes open – as wide as you can : *something has happened ! /* And his is not the only case of this sort : Miss Jane Cappelman" (he read from my frankly reverential face that I knew the lyric poetess, and forewent the elucidations) : "she, too, is running around Poet's Corner in a similarly ‹mindless› state. She, too, fell for an irresistibly baldheaded Russian, from Tula; she, too, had to study the life and mores of the people's republics – she, too, has fallen silent : we've taken a measurement of her vocabulary; at present it totals 380 !". / On our way. (Miss Alabama stuck out her polished right, wrinkled her noselet : because I had not unconditionally surrendered to her charms). –

Outside : sky crammed with somber cloud rubble; the aerophilia of the foliage had increased. / We stood beside each other, and waited for the Russian car that was to pick me up. / The innkeeper's giant Siberian wolfhound joined us wanting to play, wagging its tail. Inglefield now picked up a piece of gravel and threw it : *but right at the animal !* – "Hey ? ! Why'd you do that ? !" I shouted in outrage (and now I could pay the bastard back on several accounts : ‹Prevention of Cruelty to Animals›); and coaxing : "Ohhhc'mon – yeees; c'm here to me ! – Thaaat's it . . . . ." (and he came, too, trustingly to my side; I tossed him a stick : he bayed merrily, and raced after it (at a tilt as if he were hot on the heels of a fractious bull !). Brought the stick back, too, very proud, and laid it at my feet. Sat down beside me, setting up the hair on his back like thorns (he was so large that I had to crook my elbow to put my hand on his head !). I scratched; and he precociously joined us in looking down the road. / Inglefield had offered a nervous apology : couldn't stand the breed anymore. / Presented his version of a reason : a similar wolfhound – "maybe *even* bigger" – a stray, had found a home with Bertie Sutton; and, sculptors being what they are, she was delighted with her stunning model (and for 4 weeks did nothing but dogs; one of the results, her well-known ‹Reading› – a gaunt virgin has received her 1st love letter, and reads it, touchingly, blissfully happy, to her erstwhile giant playmate : and he listens ever so attentively= dejectedly, as if in his jealousy he understood every word ! – had turned into a real middlebrow hit; and Springfield, the city, had bought it at once and put it in the city park : the virgins there turn out looking pretty much the same !). / She had also dragged the animal around

with her everywhere, "To my place, too, and=uh –" I just nodded; he continued nervously : "The next morning I was missing a couple of – not-all-that important, but all the same=uh confidential – instructions from our side's administration. Never found them again, either." / "Bertie didn't have them of course; although I had to agree to her being ‹screened› –" (meaning hypnosis); his eyes shimmered radiantly : "It was really rather shocking, because=uh : you know . . ." (and I gave another nod : I know) : "but her sole and immediate confession was : Ooh, Senecy : I love you sooo ! – Lovely, isn't it ?". (So his name's ‹Seneca› : all I needed !). He continued more soberly : "Well. The next morning 4 friends, who had been at the theater the evening before, offered statements : as they were walking past the gallery and library and just turning down Poulaphouca Street, by broad moonlight, they had seen a gigantic doglike object running toward them with something white in its mouth; and then trotting straight across the Neutral Mall, along the ‹Street of Literature›, and into the East Sector ! – Admittedly, they were all a little ‹high› –" he added with a sigh . . . . .

He gazed, his tubular extremities loosely joint-fitted, into space; he began to speak : "Hardly anyone dies over there. At most by accident. The ‹red› mortality figure for the last 10 years comes to a total of 4 !" (Shooed off everything I was about to babble, like a silly fly; he had more important things to say) : "Which means you're *not* going there on a totally private mission . . . . ." (down the way, where Right Street and Harbor Road crossed, a massive black limousine was just making its turn. The dog heaved a deep rumbling tone. Inglefield spoke more softly, and more rapidly) : "And in case anyone *should* – if only by hinting – make you some sort of offer – *: ‹Yessir ! : We might have something to swap ! !›.* – Do you understand me ? !"

"Ye=es – sure –" I stammered, stunned. Then I plucked up my courage; I cried : "Mr. Inglefield : Who are you ? !" – Unruffled, he replied : "Head of United Western Island Intelligence." / But here was the alien auto, pulling to a halt before us.

Icily touching the rims of their hats to one other, the way you handle a dagger, Mr. Inglefield and Comrade Uspenskii (who first thing gave the dog a kick that set it running off with a howl – making me love the animal all the more). / Then I was sitting in the backseat between 2 figures of the sort I had known only from propaganda films till now (and back up Harbor Road at breakneck speed, whipped around the Town Hall : across the border at ‹Left Street› – and now they slowed down; took deeper breaths; and cocked their hats on the safe side). / "Yes, please : nice and slow." (I was still in a daze : so that guy,

Inglefield, had been shadowing me all this time. Would do it tomorrow, too. (And it was giving me the creeps : what monster's scaly tail might I have been treading on here ! Had thought it was a harmless lizard that you toyed with, that you wrote bewitching sweet nothings about. – : What was I supposed to say if it came to that ? : Inglefield had something to *swap* ? !).). –

"What's that there ?" : Though deep in thought, I couldn't miss the huge monument towering right beside the ‹Street of Literature› : "Might I have a look ?". And he smiled, broadly and broad of shoulder : "Bod aff coorrrse !"

‹Monuments of the Russians› ? : I circumstrode the pedestal, 3 meters high : warriors, banners, riders in armor, riders on armored tanks ? – : "It celebrates the military victories of our Great Soviet Union."

"Could you perhaps translate some of it ?". (Because the inscriptions were in Cyrillic, and my little Greek was of no help to me. I pointed at random to one; and he read it aloud) :

"Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili rose up on a snorting bay steed; swelled beneath the shimmer of a high-plumed helmet; weighed the prodigious burden of a spear in his right hand – : after 1200 days Germany was named GDR." / (Had landed once again in a ‹German Corner›, my kismet apparently; here, this one) : "From Conrad to Adenauer the Germans undertook 10 campaigns against Russia : 4 against their cottages; 2 for show; 2 in retreat; 2 to conquer; none victorious; the last with no return." / (Downright lapidary, ain't it ? And now the third) : "Stalingrad : They came, saw; fled." / (And elephantine clouds, guts dangling everywhere, thrust themselves against heaven : if there had still been any Germans, they sure would have made awfully frugal peepers !).[79] / Standing next to the car and looking around. (My wrist at my ear wantoned : "Four o'clock." : And so, thankgod, impartially=punctual !). / But : "Who's that *there* ?" :

In step : groups heading for us, marching ! Nine in each (right : more than 10 is forbidden on the Island – and not just for technical reasons !); all in blouse uniform; defiant heads bared; many wearing jackboots ? . . .

But again waved off the answer : the flankman there – – – : "Why that's – : Buslayev ?". And Comrade Uspenskii nodded proudly : "Da." (So they *do* have a word for ‹yes› !). / And the added explanation :

[79]Yet further evidence of the author's almost morbid antipathy for the Germany of yore. Unfortunately, in this particular instance, he can plead that this passage applies to the peculiarity of ‹Hitler's Germany› – an alibi behind which unpatriotic types among us were likewise only too happy to hide in days past.

"Those are our poets. Every morning and after the noonday nap, they march in closed ranks to the library." / (Indeed they did : the first troop had just reached it : left face ! – and now they vanished ramrodding through the swinging door.) / (And the grand bookeries of the West stood empty : if theirs here was funny; ours was sad !).

The ‹Union of Literary Workers› : 3 giant blocks; hundred meters of facade, thirty high : "Cohm thiz vay pliz ?". –

Downstairs, first a printing press ? And he nodded serenely : "For inhouze uze : intuhrrrnul metterz." / For all else, of course, the mammoth press in the Neutral Mall was theirs to use as well; where each book appeared in a printing of 500,000, and promptly a sellout in the eagerly waiting outside-world : one of the Island's *biggest* sources of income. No wonder it ‹carried its own financial weight› – presumably a good deal more than that !).

"Here is the secretariat – one moment : I'll just go get the interpreter who's been assigned to you for the duration of your stay – whom you can also use at any time for private dictation : endsofoorrth." / And came right back again; beside him said Lily of Kamchatka : of small stature, but with wrestling arms, and 5 inches wider at the shoulders than I : "Comrade Yelena Kovalevna : Mr. Vinerrr, who will be writing a report about us –" and smiled clear across the breadth of his face : "Led us striffe to do ourr besd, Comrade !". / She came mutely to my side (and only then did I really notice : my, did the woman have a pair ! If those were genuine ? ! – Comrade Uspenskii had followed my eyes, and nodded proudly : "Gooot.").

And a very tidily equipped office ! Lacked for nothing. (The calculator was even larger than the type we used; I counted them with my chin; and now Comrade Yelena spoke (or did you say Kovalevna ?) for the first time : "Fifteen Places,"[80] she confirmed. / Uspenskii disappeared for now.

In echoing labyrinths, of corridors and railed staircases. She strolled along close beside me; hands, whose mere welcoming press had given me much food for thought, on my back. (Wonder if it wouldn't be better after all to spend the night yonder, among our folks ? No; couldn't be done; no help for it : I would be forced to prove myself a worthy representative of the vigor of the Free West to Fair Helena here as well. Victim of my own objectivity.)

Murmuration of voices here ? : She nodded : "Work Unit 8 is fulfilling its novel quota." And, somewhat softer : "They've fallen behind.

[80]I.e., fifteen decimal places.

Nyeblagonadyezhni." / I didn't ask what that cold clangor meant;[81] but did ask : "Could we have a look inside ?"

"I'll ask." – She disappeared. (For a brief space it was quiet in there. – Then that voice started up again, interrupted anew by loud remarks; and Yelena waved from the open door) :

In the conference room (that's about what it looked like : a long horseshoe-shaped table. At the head, next to a lady speedwriter, a powerful goateed gentleman. Along each outer edge, 4 poets straining their ears; equals 8, 3 of them women). / We remained standing demurely at the door; I bent my ear down to Yelena, and she whispered the translation robustly out of her broad chest. (In such cases, intentional deception is almost impossible : hardly anyone can lie *that* fast off the cuff; especially in a foreign language.) / Interpolated with hasty explanations of questions : the novel was set in a department store : which, toward the end, and symbolically enough, catches fire ! – The goatee up ahead balled his fist – (he was the essential man, responsible for construction) – and read aloud :

‹*He stumbled through the door,* and remarked . . . . .› : "Wait ! Nyet ! No ! Nonsense !" came weltering at once from all sides. The young lady with the black bangs leapt up, she shouted : "Impossible ! : If he's ‹stumbling› it's a dog-day-afternoon absurdity to talk about a ‹remark› ! He ‹shouts› perhaps : ‹gasps›, ‹roars› uh= . . ." (her fingers prestidigitated in the air for other possibilities.) / "Rasped ?" someone suggested; and his neighbor gave it a wistful try : "Raaa-sspt –". / "*What* is he about to remark ?" one prudent soul asked; but the bangs bounced back up : "No ! I can't stand to hear that word !" "Bod vhy nad ?" interrupted the calm, amazed questioner. – And then she apparently told him : it wasn't as if they weren't being watched. Even if it was by a dumb dog, who did not have ‹the word› ! (This latter I could only guess at of course, from her gesturelets and 1 enraged look : !). / "Let's go; I certainly don't want to disturb them." / (Back in the corydon; inside, the battle of verbs raged on. And all of the literature work units were having a go at ‹macro-house worlds› these days : "Those are the two fatefull forms of human housing : the single-family home – and the ‹macro-house› : the latter being the site of communal production – the former, after one's quota is fulfilled, the place for individuality." They were doing their best to describe the ‹macro-house world› of a bank; a central post office; department store, bar-

[81]Undependable.

racks, school; all sorts of factories; broadcasting station, court house, carnival. One of them had even included ‹parliament› in the program, but that had been struck down by the union leadership.)

"So you actually believe that a work of art can be produced collectively ?" – : "Bod aff cóorrrse !" she replied in amazement. / And was refuted, so that I had all I could do to keep my ears held high : Beaumont & Fletcher. ‹Xenias› by Goethe & Schiller ! Claude Lorrain ? : other people painted in the figures. / "Plagiarism : what is that ultimately other than self-knowledge ? That the person in question is lacking that which he borrows ? There *are* after all – justforexample – great minds who have no sensibility at all for natural beauty : must the landscape of their books therefore remain inadequate ? : How foolish !". / "And the completed novel appears under whose authorship ?" : "Work Unit 8" she confirmed cheerfully. / "But ultimately isn't there something missing from a work of art pieced together like that – : a unity ? The integration of its world of ideas ?" : "You mean ‹the narrow world of the individual› ?" she at once reformulated in reverse : "The limidation of his talend ? – One individual is never complete : we try to complement his deficiencies. Carefully selecting and combining minds that are kindred, yet otherwise gifted : an aggregative effect !" / (And provided several other interesting details concerning the way in which such artistic combos were put together : it was most certainly not done par hasard ! They all had to have the same – for example, phlegmatic – temperament; the same blood type; a similarity of childhood impressions and environmental experiences. Differentiated, however, by their particular talents : one with a knack for grand-gestured action; another for aphorisms of the most sublime profundity. A third with a whiz of a memory for vivid vocabulary. The young lady with bangs, ‹specialist for erodicks›, as she confided – with an athletic blush.)

What an opening for my sales pitch for fancy-goods ! : "How does one say ‹I love you› in Russian actually ?" I asked, musing. She furrowed her muscular brow; but then recalled, it seemed, her duty, and replied with dark coquetry : "Yah tyebyá lyooblyóo." (And I yahtyebyalyooblyooted till I could do it).

"Could you tell me what this means here ?" : the little framed item on the wall of the corridor had a splendidly tasteful look about it, with its black tinged paper and flourishified orthography. Slowly, but effortlessly, she translated the angular curlicutsie :

‹Any Russian poet who commits murder,
is subject to a fine, for each slain Yank,
of 10 rubles / for each South American,
of 20 / for an Arab, Indian, Chinese,
of 500 rubles / – or 3 typewriters
including ribbon, two erasers,
and a thousand sheets of 8½ x 11 bond.›

My face wanted to betray my terror; for she gave a curt and athletic laugh, and an amiable coo : "A choke. – : *You* are our guest; our honored guest." (All the same : cute maxim ! But she) : "From an old novel – middle of the century – by Comrade Ivan Mikhaelovitch Afanasyev." (Those sturdy names emerged from her jaw easy as pie.)

Top floor; right off a sign demanded silence ! : "Chess !" (The semifinals for the world championship. We crept in soundlessly. This time, out of reverence, she simply *wrote* the names on her pad, and pointed then with the tip of her pencil at the appropriate person : !). / And there they all sat : Galachov and Kareyev; Fortunatov and Velyaninov=Sernov; Spassovitch and Slavatinsky; a pearled strand of most illustrious names ! (Although I had imagined Comrade Fortunatov to be much= much older : He would soon be five score, and still was runner-up in every tournament ! They certainly are a robust bunch, these Russians : broad-built, with silver-gray beard; I would have guessed 60 *at the most.*) / And here the standings : the first 34 places held by Soviet Russians. Then 2 erstwhile Yugoslavs (who must have been pretty well up in years themselves; I couldn't make out the faces they were bent down so low over the board.) Then came 1 Czech and 4 Argentinians. / The only Amerikanski was in 42nd place (and was losing once again; he was already down by three pawns. I mutely shook his compatriotic hand in sympathy.) / He stood up and pulled me over to the window : "We're being swindled !" he hissed : "I'm playing against some sort of twelve-year-old : who's supposed to be Stasyulevitch ! But I know him from before : that isn't him ! Although he plays just like him : the same favorite opening, the same damned tricks. And he knew me right off, too; and handed me some hogwash about ‹rejuvenation treatments› !"). / Yelena, nonchalant=proud : "We've petitioned for the admission of 4 more grand=masters to the Island : gooot." / Then, however, with a fully lethal glance : "Although our two finest players are missing ! . . ." And I looked dumbfounded at the man at the first board : ? : No doubt of it ! It was not the World Runner-up Voveykoy. And the World Champion himself was nowhere to be seen : "He doesn't have to

compete though." – She came close to screaming at me. She reconsidered in light of where we were; she hissed : "Do I have to tell you twice ? ! : The great Ryleyev and Voveykoy are . . .". She caught herself; she concluded contemptuously : ". . . nod bressend." / Out & down. –

In the open : now the cloud cover had gotten quite thick. / And I presented my planlet : "I would really have liked to make the personal acquaintance of A.F. Stupin – if only to see him just once." (I had always loved his ‹Quiet Flows the Ob›.) / And really unreal luck : here came the other work units marching back out of the library ! – "He's with them. I'll call him over."

And a tall fresh-faced maid, the blond banner merry atop her head, leapt from the last rank. Over to us. Words were trundled – then she gave me a jolly clap on the shoulder, and offered me her hand : ! (I was disappointed; but bowed to her all the same, and replied politely : "Very pleased to meet you, Madame Stupin." (Had my translatoress ever misunderstood me ! – Well, no matter : I can always write about the ‹buoyant blossoming spouse of the aged titan›[82]; or some such claptrap. – They were still laughing; the jaunty good=furry lass gave me the adventurous eye again; and another farewell thwack on my left biceps – then lightfooted it to close ranks with her work unit.)). / "Madame Stupin is a writer, too ?"; but Yelena just gave an amused gurgle; and kept shaking that short thick hair of hers (until it proved catching; I laughed along; raised my indexfinger, and repeated meaningfully : "Yah / tyebyá / : lyooblyóo !". And she, full-throated : "Gooot.").

Those the Red Chinese over there ? – I hesitated : We still hadn't recognized China. – (But on the other hand, I've got to sham objectivity !). / But she made it easy for me, with surprising tact; she suggested : "Let's go to the Dancers' Union : lots of them there."

And smack through the middle of the ‹Kremlin›, the monstrous domed department store : crystal vodka bottles. Black dunes of caviar. – Rapture : the ladies' shimmy-chemise ! : very teeny slumber panties; a light bellshaped mini-smock to be worn over them. (‹Saving on fabric› a skeptical sprite of the West nitpicked in my ear; and there was just the one pattern. She noticed that I found the getup most elucidative.) / "May I purchase items now and then ?" : "Zhust take your bick ! – : Whatever you like. You are our guest !"

[82]‹The stately youthful spouse of the Siberian titan› is the phrase in the article trimmed for the mass audience.

So here I picked up a grimly checked notebook. There a brown=red typewriter ribbon. / Here : this was an interesting item ! (And highly recommended ! She described the reference works for me. – All of them one volume : this was the basic speller. The Popular Encyclopedia. The Super Encyclopedia (with supplements for intellectuals : to be sure, the article on ‹Napoleon› read differently here from that in the former ! Whereas it had teemed with expressions like ‹yoke of the Corsican›, this one was a compendium, line after line, of names, dates, statistics : I've never found *such* cleverly researched biograms anywhere on our side !). (Admittedly, the ‹average Joe› wouldn't have been able to get much out of it : but that's exactly the difference ! : Which we unfortunately don't make. Or put another way, don't accept. – She sensed my involuntary praise, and proudly lifted her bullish neck : Little Mother Russia !)).

(But be modest in my choices ! : otherwise they'll think – which most probably they're led to believe in any case – that we don't have any pencils on our side.) / A bite to eat at the deli stand. – The hot dog was – ? : 'sindeed; quite respectable. / The fish filet ? – : crisp and large. / Chinese tea & apricots from Turkestan ? : the Mute Dog found it tasty, huh ? ! –

Dancers' Union : at first the hall was all black; except up on the stage backdrops were bustling. We sat down, side by side, in the first row (I gave, up close, my only Russian sentence a try; and she nodded, all business : it'll work). / House walls stood in a jumble (one, topsy=turvy : now that looked mean). A garish artificial tree lay across its erratic : no problem for Prince Igor to sit himself down on that, once the curtain rises. / Directors cursed (one of them invisibly); workers hung in the looped ropes; a poodle sat up at intensive beg; the spotlight man gave it everything he had.

With eyes closed : is how the Chinese girl drifted on stage ! Yellow grew her arms; her legs in tight rotation round one another. She effaced herself, and tittered, virginal=asinine (but her long back had precisely the opposite effect; she apparently knew that too, and showed it as rarely as possible) : Nah ! / On the left ? : ‹Pa=da=linn : Pa=da=linn› the balalaika plunked; and weight lifteresses, disguised as Komsomol lasses, stepped their round dance : in my somber honor. (All had the same figure; to wit, that of my guide : "Wonderful"; I groaned, as thrilled as possible; and she nodded all mollified.)

Rattlings behind us : Comrade Uspenskii reappeared. Watched with us for a moment; and had only a smile for American girls : "Experienced they are; but not broad like the women of our steppes." (You can say that

again : Yelena had a backside that – I'll be walking with my tail between my legs afterwards. What the hell : Vogue la Galère !). –

What would I get out of their machine room ? – But he seemed so eager to show it off to me (and I called to mind Inglefield's hints from this morning), that I did him the favor. –

Through the little park : the trees were obviously taller than ours on the other side ! (Had they better methods for radiating them here ? Or was it simply transplanting ? I grumpily banged the toe of my shoe against a brazenly well-formed piece of gravel.) / Or this here, the athletic field : "Considerably larger than on the starboard." And he replied, with charming matter-of-factness : "Dou=bull." / At the harbor, he said, the neon sign is in red, to match the red lighthouse. In contrast to the white=green of the capitalists. (The way they are forever differentiating between nalyevo and napravo.)[83]

The same machine section as before; the same pachydermic rotating. Piston rods advanced toward me : very close ! Gear-teethed me black'n'yellow; cooling hoses hissed; one cone of light after the other was tipped over me. (And always those muscles !) / Hundred-worders : for that was the way Uspenskii described, and quite frankly, these herculean lemurs to me : was I in fact then considered some sort of tale-bearer ? Mediator, without knowing it or wanting to ? Go= between, broker, parlayer, middleman, ratatöskr ? (Backlighted, a constellation of oil drops in one fellow's stubbled hair; but had never seen the light of day. Mine ponies. (but they had been blind more than likely; which these guys here couldn't be.).).

"Yelena : Slooschai !".[84] They gibbered for a short while : what if they ever got the notion to overpower the whole Island ? ! (But then I thought of Inglefield the Cold-blooded. What had he said ? : He had something to swap ? – There was power behind me ! (And before me too ! : My flesh began to creep. It was with utter relief that I heard her speak a word I knew, ‹Stupin›; and immediately interposed) : –) :

"We'll show it to him. – : Uh=come with us. –"

Back again. Down the ‹Street of the October=Revolution›. That over there was the MTS, the ‹Machine=Tractor=Station›, which served as the base for cultivating the left ‹Fields & Pastures›. / "Oh, ve haff too !" : That is in the greenbelt, ‹Before the Gates›, the ‹Collective Solitude› (where their side's Great Men recreated in the rural air; drank the wines of Crimea and the milks of Kazakhstan. Took spartan Eurotas=

[83]Russian for ‹left› and ‹right›.

[84]‹Listen !›

baths; relaxed as per regulation, and grew young again.)

"Krowink youngh," he repeated, rejoicing in the catchword (and *such* an inviting conjuration of hand) : "Our clinic." : / (and all the way round the building, delicate murk of evening now : twilight invites me, fog summons me.)

On the wall, right next to the entrance, the life-sized relief of a gigantic Siberian wolfhound (beneath it 3 columns for names; 2 of them already full – intended, maybe, as the sort of thing once done for Saint Gotthards=Bernards ? Who saved human life in icy tundras ?). –

In a laboratory : Uspenskii spoke to a small white-armored vassal who was supposed to be our guide (and apparently was raising objections; tough and tough again; until Uspenskii finally snatched written-matter from his breast pocket, and landed a nasty certification. The attending lab technician signed as a witness (and I noticed he was holding a pencil-thin brown stick of dough in his left hand : wasn't that . . . . . : damn, sure ! : the ‹welcome› from yesterday ! They were doing a suspicious and chemical analysis of it here.) / (But it was as worrisome as it was funny : so this is life on the ‹Holy Isle of Humankind› ? ! And as far as the word ‹holy› goes – and I've always mistrusted it – I'm close to never wanting to hear it again !).

"Professor Shukovsky." : we bowed before each other, in fulfillment of the law. Once again he questioned, with a mute sidelong glance : once again Uspenskii's hands swang and followed through. The other fellow gave a final shrug of stolid shoulders, and preceded us.

Into the hospital room : just 2 beds, in which a couple of very pale people lay. The professor explained; Yelena translated (more haltingly; because of the many termini technici used).

And so it was true, what was rumored in the rest of the world : the Russians were implanting new organs ! Here were 2 aging administration bureaucrats who had had their abraded hearts replaced by new, fresh ones ! / "Taken from whom ?" (I affected a manly businesslike manner. And they were ostensibly robust youths, fatally injured in traffic accidents, "and the like." (Yesyes, precisely : ‹And the like› ! But did not inquire further.)). / "And you are thus able to lengthen the lifespan of your patients by how much ?". 30 years. – "And the operation succeeds ?" : in 90% of the cases.

Outside Uspenskii supplemented suavely : that as a matter of course they were also practicing systematic selective breeding : Poet upon poetess; sculptor on -tress : "300 years from now they will look upon us as we now look upon gorillas." / My disbelief : "But does poet plus poetess really yield poet squared ?". But Professor Shukovsky interjected :

"The center of speech enlarges measurably each time." (And I was defeated yet again. – "But what if the appropriate environment is lacking, for these wunderkinder ?" – They just smiled : "We see to that."

Then I got smocked, white as the snows of Verkhoyansk; a stiff sterilized baker's cap on top; at my mouth the carbolicked napkin. Even on Uspenskii the only thing smiling was his brow segment; one eye of Yelena focused deep, the other shallow. (Masks all about, yet here the only feeling breast.)

In the operating room : knew it well, as good as inured, from former reportorial tours. / But things were proceeding jauntily and differently apace here ! : on the double-slumber operating table the two demi-corpses – beside which lay, each to one side up top, the hirsute skull-case. 2 white demons snipped like crazy around in the cavities; uttered incomprehensible monosyllables from muslin mouths . . . . . : and then each had a greasy gray brain in his red rubber gloves : they traded places . . . . . : and back in it goes ! / (And knotted and shouted for fresh artery couplings, for more blood and catgut – Uspenskii took me by one elbow, the professor by the other; Yelena shoved from behind) – – –

and then we were standing outside again : I ripped off the sterilized ragtags; I cried : "Can that work ? !". (The transplanting of brains, I meant. I knew well enough what all our doctors managed with lobotomies; but whole brains . . . ?): "Surely that's impossible !" : "For Soviet people is no ‹Immmbozzibull›," he corrected sternly. / And it worked : whenever an important Russian poet or scientist started aging, around 60 say, his priceless brain was planted into a young athlete of 20 : "What do you think ? : he blossoms ! Writes poems – o, av lufff !". (And worked for another 40, 50 years; experienced more; his vocabulary ever expanding . . . . . – : "But he must look totally different ? !". (Although of course that presented no serious objection to the procedure as such; he invalidated it further by adding : "We use fellows that look as alike as possible." (Make a note of it right now : short story : ‹He Looked Too Much Like Him› !). – Then Satan stuck it to me : "But most alike would be sons, right ?"[85] And he nodded, factual, thoughtful, tightlipped. Fathers & Sons !).

And had to prop myself against the wall right then and there : they semicircled me, expectant; and Yelena translated, her mouth still

[85]This the tone of the modern desperado, typical for the author and others of his profession : trains of thought that would never have occurred to previous generations, are not merely thought, but boldly uttered outright – with no thought to the consequences.

tulle-ified : "What's wrong ?" / I took several gulps. I got it out : "Yelena ! – : That means that just now that was . . . . . Stupin *afterall* ? !"./ With a laugh, she explained the anecdote to the others, how I had called her ‹Madame Stupin›. Uspenskii smirked "gooot."; and specialist Shukovsky : "No propplem : you can also transplant the brain of a man into the body of a girl. Comrade Stupin needed lots of ‹feminine sensibility› for his new hexalogy, and, upon careful consideration, chose a female body." / (So *that's where* he got those brilliant descriptions of virginal trains of thought ! That's where he got the unprecedented power of empathy, his understanding for a young woman's zigzag=graceful caprices : and, last but not least, that's where he got the thrilling description of the grand defloration in volume 4, which even our grudge-guts had to term inimitable : piece of cake, when the guy was personally both in person, strapping lad *and* strapped lass !).

(Tiresias : and still against the wall : The problem of Tiresias ! He was alleged to have been both too (and had offered as deposition : it was even *more* fun as a woman !). / Or Thorne Smith, with his ‹Turn-about› !).

"Come along now : to zupperrr." the : nerve ! / – "Can I take a breath of fresh air first ?". – They spread their hands in equanmity : but of course. (The professor took his leave : until tomorrow morning.)

Between clinic and MTS : Woe is me ! : because now *this* struck me as well ! (And the broad meadows lay so peaceful in the redolent fog. From ripe fields the snarl of the scarecrows rang out : nessun dorma.) And it was this :

"What do you do then – if I may ask – with the gray matter of the ‹young people› ? Whose bodies have been transbrained ?". And provided myself, sighing heavily, with the answer : "Just toss 'em out." "Oh zertainlee nod," Uspenskii cheerfully pacified me : "They aren't wasted : tomorrow morning; before you go. We still have *much* to show you." (And those black cherry-seeds were laughing again : there's too much Asian blood in these rascals; you can't see through them.) / But lovely that wide view across the meadows : the rim of woods was almost 1 mile away. Probably needed it, as ersatz for steppes; on our side trees stood mixed in everywhere, parklike. ‹I feel, as after rain the park before my house must feel›. (That is to say : not what *I'm* feeling at the moment !).

Back down the ‹Street of the October Revolution› : "Meaning that one could – theoretically – rig up a superbrain, too ? : The unerring eye of the painter; the speech center of the poet; the ear of the composer ?".

(Or, more universal still : combined with the shoulders of the boxer, the stomach of an ostrich, the etcetera of the tigress ?). He lifted his high shoulders higher : "That *is* propplem. – But you'll have to ask comrade Shukovsky tomorrow : I don't know this."

At the reserved table in the corner of the ‹Krassnaya Gastinitsa› : "The comrade was a Stachanovka in stenography and American." (Yelena he meant; we three sat down together.) (And I preferred some other topic; you could color it as dinner-speechy as you liked, it didn't go with the divinely=raw roast beef and the brain-sized heap of mashed potatoes.)

Table-talk : About ‹Russki Film›, the good stuff. / About the rotting West : "Many of your artists voluntarily return home : there's ‹too little going on› here !" (And I had grudgingly to concede the point; it had happened.) / How they, the Russians, had carried the day, either the West's law on ‹blasphemy› was to be countered with one against ‹defamation of atheism›, or both misdemeanors be set aside as fiddle-faddle : "They *were* rescinded." (Since then, the Island=churches and =temples were to be regarded simply like any other buildings; the christian ones, for example, with one quite inconspicuous little cross in the pediment, ‹inoffensive to the eye›. – "Yes; I've heard about the problem with the ringing of the bells." And they gurgled with pleasure : "Cheerrrs !".) / But I drank only very circumspectly from their good vodka; I still had some other plans for today. / (Although I had suffered a serious loss of appetite ! I turned to our Fair Helena; I asked with some emphasis : "Are you you ?" – She understood me at once, nodded earnestly, and replied : "I am still me." (All the same : ‹still› !). / "Cheers, Mr. Uspenskii !" (He suffered the foreign title with a smile. Beamed even more broadly. ‹And his wife Thusnelda drank also like to an ostler›, that is, Yelena : "Cheerrrs !". / Then renewed accusations of the Wild West : hadn't the old NATO in its day attempted to hold its conferences on the Island ? ! Because, ostensibly, ‹the facilities there were so ideal› ? : they were voted down by the East Bloc and the neutrals. (And that was, if true – and I didn't doubt it : the old NATO had the gall to try it ! – just one more wretched example of how the West could never ever get enough of making an ass of itself. In the East & Center, people were clever enough always to let us make the first stupid move, until the Neutrals felt like vomiting at the mention of our name – and the Reds made hay. – Inglefield could say what he liked : we were powerful, true, but dumb ! – And if you will, intelligent, athletic, brilliant technocrats; the most talented sculptors, like Bertie Sutton : but dumb, too ! : "Cheerrrs, Grazhdanin

Vinerrr !" – (I was getting my ‹mister› of a while ago right back !)).

But always cautious; for the Genghis-Khanical barbarism kept breaking through. In the harsh vinegar. In the peppery seal-liver from Lake Baikal. : "Sakarrr ? : be nice !" she admonished when the cube wouldn't melt in her cup right off. (In semi-Russian : so their word comes from ‹saccharine›. And I stood up : would that someone might offurrr me a bet !). –

Suite with bed : her wide lids. / She first thoughtfully showed it to me : "Vánnaya : Oobórnaya."[86] (with emphasis. And I, laboriously : "Yah. Tyebya. Lyooblyoo.").

Little=dapple=roundle kisses : that bosom was genuine ! The sekretarscha's, and perevotschitsa's, shimmy=chemise tugged up over her head (*and* what's more, ‹Distinguished Mistress of Sport›, ah, we poor things !). / Her mouth tasted of smoky vodka. She pinched me with yellow fingers, and I heard her mumbling. (Something about ‹korottki› and ‹tonnki›; through a hole in her mongol disc).

In the White Mountains of her breasts (Tale of the Ragged Mountains). / Her tundra of a belly (I was ‹lenivy› she mumbled : ‹skorréye !›.[87] (And those brains kept butting in; pure pleasure it wasn't !)).

Scalding hot rum with butter : 'twas thus she served me the confortatif (along with an aphrodisiacally=spiced foot bath : see above : da capo !) :

In the cucumber garden of her breast (‹a lodge in a garden of cucumbers› : now where had I managed to get that from ?)[88]. The honey-hued maiden's butt (presumably unwashed; me : swimming the crawl across wriggly wheezy transplantable flesh : and with *that* inspiration it was all over of course then and there !). / She left me shaking her head.

At night black rain falls. Trees wag negroid (with negro leaves ?) by night I am a black man !

And this night ? ! – : There is an etching by my particular friend Hogarth, where in the technoid hell of operating rooms the viscera of an evildoer are being extracted (squatting on the floor, a horned & sprightly devilkin, and into a keg they go) : his ribs are sticking out; a hole is

[86]Bath and toilet.

[87]To translate these Russian expressions would run counter to my sense of moral responsibility; thank God it is not necessary in this case – these bits of ‹local color› of which the author is so fond are better left as they stand.

[88]Isaiah 1:8 / This – totally superfluous ! – passage, quoted from the King James, is in error here; the correct translation should be ‹raised platform in a cucumber field› : thus depriving the author of any basis for his lewd association of ideas, including a philological one.

being bored in his brain : why didst thou so bully thy fellowman ? ! / And that's just how I felt : creatures like I never want to see again pressed in upon me : flabby-titted broads, thorns around the appropriate apertures; two-headed dog-men. Seals that sang motets (and you shoulda had a photo of *those* mournfull faces !). / Until finally one of my recurring dreams saved me, more or less : forests, in which lillyandi wandered lost. (And probably a thieves' den too, with knives; from which, however, we escaped.) The landscape turned more lovely; more herbal and lonely. We lifted our feet and floated over a crater lake : gone. The woodland turned hotter and sunnier, more youthful, more reservoired, blue boats and yellow water (to which was mated Cooper's ‹glimmer glass› : I've always considered him a great man). Blue & yellow. / (Then, however, once again the ‹wall of the universe› – I'll have to describe that someday; it is not for Everyone. Though not absolutely unpleasant.) –

"Dóbroye óotro !"[89] while all amazed I held my hand in the clothing shrubbery, in the closet corner : did they think I'd take one of their uniform blouses ? (But then : why not actually ? Could show it off at home ! – Sure : just keep cramming my rucksack full !). / And almost 9 already : I'm sleeping away too much of an opportunity ne'er to return again ! – : "Raining hard out there, Yelena ?"

Yelena – she was ready as such. But not I. I had arisen with the desolate feeling that today nothing on earth, in air, water or fire, would please me.

"Khotesh li ty myenya pravadits ? : Which means ?" / ‹Do you want to accompany me ?› allegedly : what choice did I have ultimately ? / Down below, in front of the gastinitsa, the two others were already waiting in raincoats; our greetings were undisguisedly grim : !.

Here : o thou gray earth ! : They were making no allowances now; it was late morning; business called :

The wolfhounds : "You asked yesterday what happens to the brains of our young volunteers ? – : Pasvóltye !"[90] – – :

The Siberian wolfhounds. They bounded. They gave you looks, so clever, so human. / Was what they were too : when I asked one of them : "Pythagoras ?" – it scratched in the sand with its taloned paw : $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$! / "Some of them know Russian – *and* American !" and cast me a meaningful look : I had become an important man : the umbilical cord that held 2 worlds together : oh, had I but remained on my

[89]Good morning.

[90]If you please.

heaths ! / : *So this is who stole Inglefield's secret documents ! !* – (And yet even now felt deep sympathy for the innkeeper's reckless wolfhound, who had pressed against my petting hand. We (i.e., of the West) are lost ! (‹If the centaurs don't save us›) it dribbled way back in one of my shallows.) Wasn't Uspenskii raising his hand ? – What was he saying ? : "Wait a moment yet." –

A paddock : where 2 horses grazed. And his mouth folded more officially. In the clockmaker-shop of the rain. / 1 mare : 1 stallion : hengist & horsa. / He grabbed my forearm. He said sternly : "Call them yourself. – No : zhall ve zay=uh : ‹Chane› for one; ‹Steffenn› for the other : Call them."

I crossed my arms over my chest (just to hold onto something : things were slowly starting to whirl !). – He gave me a stony glance. : "Yelena ? !" she looked at me impassive, translatoresque, big-boobed. (I suddenly felt the Island vibrating again.) / But : you are cold, so am I. (Give it a try) – :

"JANE ? ! : STEPHEN !" : with a jerk they lifted their horseheads : ? : ! : They came over : first walk, then trot, then gallop (then ventre à terre – how should I know the name for that last mad dash ? !) –

And trembling at the fence; and quivering. / And let themselves be petted. And hooves scraping. (Plus the fat belly of the mare ! Which Uspenskii confirmed : "Steffenn has covered Chane." Countless times. They turned embarrassed heads aside, and let out a spiritus asper.) / And more petting and whispering : they snorted desperation (but probably hampered, too, by those mad=fat glands : half horse : half human : horse latitudes !). –

Carried away; me; before me the two brain-filchers. (Had kidnapped 2 master=minds from us, the Free West, : Oh, you bastards ! ! / But Uspenskii, very grave) :

"Tell your Mister Inglefield : We *haff* something to svopp ! – Because –" (and now in dreadful earnest) : "we're missing our two top chess players, *too* : World Champion Ryleyev; and Voveykoy."

"We'll hold their brains in safekeeping : until October 1st : Tell Mr. Inglefield that !". / And although I enjoyed diplomatic immunity (besides which, it would hardly pay to filch mine !) I once again grabbed onto the wooden fence : Apuleius of Madaurus was *no* practical joker ! Make strange stuff of me, should I refuse. / They accompanied me back up their part of Harbor Road. The dropdropping punctulated my brain.

But – (I really am a born reporter I suppose; because questions came to me : questions ? !) : "What will most likely be the result ?" (with the

horses; overwhelmed by his glands, Gregson had had Cappelman. – He shrugged : "Centaurs maybe. – Comrade Shukovsky ?". But he didn't know either, "Wait and see" : "Gooot."

"Does a wolfhound recognize its ‹own body› afterwards ?" : I.e., does the brain planted in the dog recognize its rebrained peripatetic body ? – They rocked their broad brows more uneasily : "There *seems* to be some – as yet not fully examined – relationship. Often the two like being together." (Then the dog slept in his master's quarters; whimpered if left behind. But there were also cases, where he bit him – they simply weren't quite sure yet.)

The ‹Zone Border› : on the wet wall, the red poster wailed : ‹You are now leaving the Peace Camp !›. / Turn around once more. I struggled to ask – it was really too much for one man – : "Mr. Uspenskii ? : Who are you really ? !" / He bowed, his black bowler peacefully in hand : "The Director of United Eastern Intelligence." And then, officially via Yelena : "I shall expect Mr. Inglefield at 11 o'clock in the Neutral Mall : Let us negotiate !" (And a ceremonial "Dozvidanya." On all sides. : "Good-bye, sir.").

Between 2 wet high-rises (before the Town Hall), stood there : Why hadn't anyone met me ? (Aha; we hadn't arranged a specific time. / So I walked around the pencil-like tower (how long is a new pencil ? Hold one up against it.)[91] Past the archive (where an Indian, sour and beturbaned, reading of bokes at the open window : that's how strict their customs are). / Then up the starboard stretch of Harbor Road, toward the hotel (and keeping it pretty slow : get my thoughts in order. – No, damn it ! : run ! : they want out of their equine cage ! !) –

Puffing, rain still sobbing down my cheeks; the doorman stood around me looking helpless. / Until I could show my ID : there ! : "Mr. Inglefield !". / Till then, sink down into an armchair. (And bounced right back up : given recent developments, you could in fact, theoretically, take a seat in a chair upholstered in your former skin ! With a book in your hand, bound in your own leather; around your chest a warm vest lined with your personal leather : I-napa, you-napa. Could slurp vodka from your cranial chalice : pass the cup, Rosamunde ! Giggle as you inspect your own skull : reverently set up your genuine skeleton in your study. – : You *could* . . . . . / Sure : no problem ! : If a buxom thirty-year-old had herself rebrained as a young man, she could then spend a night, or two, with her other-brained body. Finally be able to

[91]As everyone knows, a new pencil is 7 inches long; it therefore truly does not need to be laid against a ruler.

observe herself, circling round herself critically : Pythagoras couldn't hold a candle, since he had never done it simultaneously, but always just successively !). – / "Yes ? : Yes, I'll take it ! !". – –

: *"Mr. Inglefield ? – : Could you get over* here at=once ? / Ah, you've been waiting ? / Yes, quickly : matter of life & death doesn't come close !"

And staring again at all this mural splendor : means we Westerners really are better people ! ? Some variation on kidnapping that was ! : Send us back the bodies; they've got the part that counts ! Keep it in storage in large animals; hide it in horses : what would Uspenskii & Co do if there was no agreement by October ? – Toss 'em out ? Destroy them ? (After Gregson had had to play stud for a whole Tartar stable – which he had even enjoyed perhaps; I should have asked). (Or out of malice, replant it in a shark with all those grisly teeth ? : "For Soviet perzon, nodding is immmbozzibull."). / And then there's *this* cold consideration – and let that be the end of it ! – take one of those ever so clever wolfhounds : is he *really* any unhappier than in the days of his humanity ? There are personalities, leather-stockinged all-round, who voluntarily isolate themselves even as humans : restlessly roam the forests, by wind and storm; go wild like wolves, and devour; their bed old leaves, pallid in beauty, their lamp the moon, if they're wearing a hat, their roof is thatched. Now and then, into the bushes with something red-leathered Indian : might it not also be perfectly possible for a type like that voluntarily – indeed blissfully ! – to greet his external transformation into one helluva wolfhound ? That way he could effortlessly scour, instead of 60, 200 kilometers a day ! And a chic she-wolf, silver-gray, each hair black-tipped, would surely be preferable, in wolf circles, to the lady from Milo. / (Some very witty wrinkles to it : the way said Tyras must have growled a laugh as he lifted the secret documents off Inglefield. Or the one yesterday, who immediately passed along to Uspenskii the phrase about ‹swapping› ! – Nope; most people – at least given the current state of intelligence – could probably care less whether they ran around as a wolf, or a human being capable of speech.) / . . . . . / : If only Ing . . . . :

"Ah, Mr. Inglefield !" and was just about to boil over; but he stopped me by means of a tall black gentleman : "General Coffin : our half's commander." / I stared at this new being. I asked (good sense having totally deserted me; for at least 3 days now) : "I thought – : professional soldiers were not allowed on the Island ? !" : "General Coffin is *not* a professional soldier : on our side, even the common recruit has a marshal's staff in his duffel bag !". / Just one more damn subterfuge by the West ! : even if the Island's charter unfortunately contained merely

the term ‹professional soldier› : what they *meant*, beyond all question, was that ‹militarism› as such was not wanted here ! Were we *once again* the first to play such damnable tricks ? – : "Who is in fact the commandant of the half yonder ?" : "A certain Ochlovsky, a pianist," Inglefield replied coolly (and inside me all teeth were gnashing : meaning, *yes*, once again we were the ones picking the fight !)).

"No; please : only once we're in the car !" (in the soundproof, shell-proof, earthquake-proof, radiation-proof, and who knows what-all-proof car). / And report. / They listened. Interrogated. (Commander-of-hosts curt; I automatically answered in turn, in my old GI-style; until I finally took courage again, and got an occasional jump on them.). / "Mr. Inglefield ? : Take this down !" (And little round hard orders came tumbling out : all large dogs – "large animals per se" – to be tested, and/or done away with. Warning issued to entire Free Island-World.: "Wait ! Do this first : Inglefield ? !" : / And I was made to take an oath on a very black book, the one nobody still believes in; and had to sign a little notebook, without being permitted to read it in any detail first, let alone discuss it – "You've got the picture, Mr. Winer ? !" (In point of fact, of course *not*; but what was I to do ? : I had, after all, been made to swear an oath a good dozen times – meaning 11 times too often (if not 12 !); sworn neither to sing nor speak. (And had, at last, arranged a little drawer way back in my brain, where I put all those oaths away – and so stick this new one here in too, it'll fit okay; and slam the drawer !). / And you folks, before you call me ‹shameless› or some phrase or other beginning with ‹lack of . . .› – you know, ‹=patriotism, =morals, =principles› – : first you'd better beat your own oath-inventor breasts, and I mean bang away, until you too shuffle off this mortal coil ! Held up next to yours, my hands are still cherry-blossom white : go to Uspenskii !)))).[92]

And so now things could take their slam-bang course : "And so at 11 o'clock Island time, the=uh gentleman says ?" (As the soundproof vehicle whisked us along toward the grave : not simply in the stupid metaphorical sense of ‹to-live-is-to-die›, ‹to-walk-is-to-stumble›; but he had actually shouted to the (robot ?) chauffeur : "The Grave.

[92]Unbelievable ! Given an attitude like that of the author, what is the point of oaths at all ? The making of such solemn commitments, before God Himself, has most certainly stood us in good stead in all wars, as I'm sure every drill sergeant will corroborate. Not to speak of the multiple advantages of civil oaths – though I grant that each individual must be certified, beyond the shadow of doubt, as supremely and legally qualified to take such oaths ! / Any comment concerning the orthographical ugliness of four sequential parentheses would be superfluous.

Quick."). / And why not really ? Sooner or later that's where you end up. I have done some living after all. And done my share of mischief in this life. (Particularly in this flea circus here ! What had Bob Singleton said ? : "If you'd stretch a tent over it, you'd have the world's biggest circus !" – And was close to being of the same opinion myself !).

Standing beside the car (on whose smooth herbage=green roof the muttering rain at once started to sort its change : 2 separate buildings behind us; a half-dozen ones like them up ahead. We strode between them : toward the Grave.)

"*‹Grave› is of course merely* an abbreviation for our internal use – some people call it the ‹canning factory› – the correct terminology would be, as is customary in official correspondence : ‹Institute for Hibernetics›" / As we walked through the surrounding=dripping greensward. (‹Hibernia› ? : If I knew my Ptolemaeus, the ancient name for ‹Ireland› : was whoever showed up here made an instant Irishman ? Stocky red-haired mendacious fairy-tale-telling whiskey-sodden to the grave ? (Pugnacious, too, right).). / Gusts gamboled howling in the forest; and we came up to the portal : the shiny black tomcat, cursing dolefully at the weather, snuggling against the doorposts, asking to be let in too, and Inglefield bellowed at it : "No !". Gave it a second thought, and latched hard onto the astonished critter : "What's your name ? !" (shrill; inquisitorial; and didn't let go until, after a bristling pause, it confessed : "Meow." -- And the two military types nodded yet more grimly to one another : aha, a Chinaman in disguise : Mao ! : "Keep your eyes on him, Inglefield !").

In an entry hall : mausolean paintings on the walls. (Mostly resurrection scenes : pious Yankees, striving upward between skyscrapers, little star-spangled banners in their suppliant hands). In the middle of the hall, a female Angel of Silence in a tight pharmacist's smock : she gazed gravely at me, her gloved finger held urgent=vertical at her two enticing=officious lips. (The odor was intensely antiseptic as well.)

"*Inglefield ? : 10:50* A.M. : You had best make for the rendezvous spot. – You are fully informed as to our conditions. – No : I shall remain here; and can be reached at any time." / And so he disappeared. While we entered a regular conference room, where 2 white-smocks were already waiting for us (*and* a goddess in nurse's uniform : enchantingly pale from countless all-night vigils (many of them indeed at patients' bedsides); nunlike sacrifice, alabastered, spotless, ‹I must remain a virgin until the head of medical staff takes me.› / Only a single abandoned skyblue flash from those eyes.)

The brief lecture. / During which they cast me in sweet snowy bonds, literally : helped me into a smock (just like yesterday !); crowned me with a white beret : Then you'll be the Kaiser of my Soul. Then another pillow, reeking of purity, to my mouth. And the final web of muslin tape in which she captured me : round and round countless times. / Plus an inoculation : she pulled back the white-linen foreskin at my wrist, cunningly stimulated it with her ether pad – and shoved in the syringe (inverted world). Also gazed absent=present=mindedly into my eyes as she emptied its contents into me. / And behind us, the doctor in attendance explained : that, rather, it came from ‹hibernus› :

"We"; had discovered early on that vital functions could be slowed down by cold – "to the point of death by freezing." At a given level of refrigeration the heart beat only once every 1 minute : the wear'n'tear on organs was practically neutralized ! "After many and multiple" – (what fine distinctions they could make !) – "experiments along these lines, by 1980 we had advanced to the point where we could absolutely guarantee a safe twenty-year hibernation – during which time, an organism so treated aged approximately 15 weeks." / (So that if the fellow laid himself down in 1980 at age 60 : he awakened in 2000 – and was still only 60 ! Lived another 5 years, and lustily as possible : rolled over : sawed logs again . . . ?)

Please, this way : first a two-inch door-sized glass plate; an assistant used a bronze blade to free the ribbon of putty all-round : "We're about to undertake an ‹awakening›; you will be an eyewitness." / And – while the other fellow let the glass slab be tipped up against him, and then disappeared with it – all sorts of puzzlements from yesterday occurred to me, which now provided their own solutions : the hermit, that old fop, was in fact only 60, and had simply lain down ‹in the grave› ? *That's why*, when I suggested, innocent lamb that I am, that he had to wake up sometime, Inglefield had . . . . . : aha ! (Without being any happier for my new knowledge ! And now the steel door separated).

Another glass plate ! – This time, however, you could see through it. / The assistant applied the point of his knife anew; the doctor went on talking :

"Our plan – our long-range plan you can of course object" – (Me ? : I can't object to nothin' nohow, with this muslin gag at my gullet ! Though I did have some questions . . .) – : "is periodically to submerge all humankind into hibernation : so that, in the near future, we will differentiate between a ‹generation of wakers› and a ‹generation of sleepers›. A small portion of those awake will tend the sleepers, who are quartered in great edifices a hundred stories high. Life expectancy of 3 to 400 years will again be the norm; quite apart from the fact

that – given corresponding further advances in ‹storage technology› – the Free World will have room for double its current population." / My white spook swayed forward along with 4 similar (but not identical, please !) ones; forward into the Newest Holy of Holies : there were getting to be too many of 'em for me ! –

Step up to the glass bell : –. –. –. : Hell's bells ! (Eyes closed : first just close your eyes ! : This was worse than Jane's pregnant mare !). / The air stank : of disinfectant. –

The mountains of hair ! ! ! : At the back it had grown through the pillow; yards of clacking nails on the fingerworks. / And he explained the phenomenon – one can grow accustomed even to hell itself : hadn't some German once said that, ‹I bet› ? They had, after all, produced some great men.[93] And without hibernation. –

Fluid nourishments tipped into them, through cannulas that once a week squirted into the stomach : and at the same time soft rubber bulbs sucked at them from below to empty the stool-toxins, and the bladder. Black and toxic (and stinking), the stool-tube was pulled out of her body now by the assistant, hand over hand. Who also gave her one helluva bobbing job topside. I requested – in an attack of mad whimsy – one of her nails : *and was benevolently presented with it : souvenirs, oh souvenirs ! !).*

Stiff joints. Atrophy of the muscles : Thin as paper, the soles of her feet (sensitive; a prescribed course of athletic therapy). The twenty-year-old punctures healed only with difficulty : cover 'em with beauty patches, right ? ! / Meanwhile clocks hummed away on every wall. / Turning now to the great poet (whose name I will no longer be able to read without a shudder : I had paid dearly for my Island trip !) : and his nails, too, had fallen across one another, like the bones of a giant fish. He too lay in skeletal obstetrical languor, and was fasting his way into garbage.

And now the awakening : ? – : He himself, lui même, el mismo, took a syringe of dreadful proportions in his hand. Filled with crystal-clearness : these days it could be whiskey, digitalis, glassy coffin, belladonna : So squirt it ! ! – Pulled back – : and thrust it deep : deep ! : into the skeleton maid : twenty-one; twenty-two : twenty-three : what I do know; I'm just a poor peon named Winer from Douglas on the Kalamazoo ! . . . . . .

[93]Finally ! (Grabbe, ‹Gothland›). – Although the author, if challenged, would once again try to talk his way way out of it *by claiming* : only in Germany had there been any reason to come up with such maxims.

(And wait : the doctor, the general, me; and the wanton in white. Among human preserves. In the Grave. And all the clocks ticked very . . . . .) :

And wait . . . . . / Outside it was getting noisy. People fighting : voice with voice; determinant with cause : the cause won : ! / The general furrowed his brow (while studying the piece of paper held in his unquivering hand : mine would have tottered. But they were apparently used to these bobbed jobs.) – "Tell Inglefield : we'd be willing to offer them that too !" (And whispered then about the ‹that›. I turned away; none of it was my business !).

And wait : now the good doctor furrowed his smooth brow . . . . . / : "Ahhhh !"

Lift, oh lift, thy lash-fringed curtain ! : the tall girl obviously saw nothing. (The way the simpleton-bangs hatched her brow ! – Closed again; she didn't want to just yet. (Live that is.).) The clocks hurdy-gurdied. / And the great poet apparently didn't either : I was mightily amused at how he couldn't get an eye open ! (They squirted, and mumbled in their tulle.)

In the corridor : on one door there it stood, in delicate curlicued contortion, ‹R & V› (beneath it sensible hammer & sickle and 1 chessboard). I looked at my companions : ?. And they confirmed it with terse nodding : "Ryleyev and Voveykoy." (‹For swapping›).

Off with this bandage at my mouth; my notebook in hand (now that's something you can get a nice grip on ! Particularly in a well-furnished room. And have them describe the details of the ‹awakening›) :

First the stinging pain next to them (i.e. in the wrist, from the wake-up shot.) / Very slowly at first ; very slowly a thumb moved ‹down there› when ‹I› ‹up here› commanded. / Warped dozing. – : "But over time they sleep for briefer and briefer periods : at first 6 days; 5, 4, 3; then repeat 2 several times ; finally 1 night : normal." / "Stool like pitch and tar, true : the diet is definitely the most difficult part in the first month." / Celebrate orgies out of the pure fear of living ? : "That does occur. Customary in fact; for both men and women." (The moment a partner forms out of the bas-relief of first impressions; that way they make very rapid, effective connections.)

They had laid out all sorts of things for them, here in the ‹well-furnished room›, for the resurrectees : a large illustrated book concerning the 20 years they had slept away, technology, visual arts, literature : *He* had become a great man; *he* had died of boozing – the ‹Memory=Crash› – they had terminology for everything already ! – was not a treat for everyone. / "Who writes the textbooks for these seven sleepers ?" : A committee. (Naturally, who else.) "It isn't all that simple !" (she said;

emphatically; because I had shown too little surprise : but I hadn't much left to show !).

(But the poet had dried up, the old coward ! ! : I would have loved to leap in the air, dance, bang my fists together (all the while warble=whistling the Bergamask dance from ‹Tiefland›) : serves him right ! For he didn't have a bit of feeling left for us, the rest of humanity ! He slept and enjoyed what he could : we wore ourselves out with a vengeance – while he went on living ‹forever› : Well, just look at you now ! / "That is really only the eighth time that we've . . . . .".)

A new courier ? : General Coffin thrust out his jaw. Way out ! Crossed his arms on his chest. Weighed opposing responsibilities (but what if his needle was out of kilter ? !); slowly his hand found its way to his breast pocket (slowly; that much anyway; at least it looked as if he might be giving it some thought – although from my military days I knew that wasn't the custom.) / Slowly he pulled out his most covert notebook. Put pencil to paper, and pressed : . . . . . ! . . . . . : ! ! . . . . . : ! ! ! / And – after one last=iron pause – his name below : COFFIN ! / (Had the negotiations broken down ? Or was he signing the treaty ? Was this his last offer ? Or had Inglefield kidnapped Uspenskii perhaps ? Or contrariwise, the latter turned the former into a Siberian husky ? Or each sent the other off to slumber : for 20 years ? !).

Then the last sly question : "What if something=uh happens during those 20 years of sleep ?" (War, of course. ‹Andsoforth› ? – He understood me at once; although he played dumb) :

"It's not our mission to include that in our calculations." Also : "It's not even to be considered." (And I nodded with an obliging smile : if you'd given me any different answer, I'd 've had to call you a feenix ! Or a suicide. – I wouldn't have wanted to have Coffin's puss for a ton of money : not for Fort Knox ! (No wait : for that yes; then I wouldn't give a damn !).). / The awakened poetette had just taken three deep breaths, the nun reported : so it was all going well (and the doctors hurried out. In case she took another breath.)

(Fifteen minutes yet, paging through the textbooks, and bantering with the Lady in White : only once before had I met something that debauched ! She used – always under the banner of medical solicitude – expressions that were enough to drive you mad right there ! Her kiss tasted like a blend of pure Lysol and penicillin – but I didn't give a damn now either !).

Outside, on past Otsego=Lake : "Abdallá ! : Abdallá !" the Island crows screeched for my trip back : for the human form had become a joke ! (The branch of every tree is dearer to me than Stupin's face ! – In the

future I'll disguise myself even more in vegetal=hues and =forms, that way I won't have to think so much about myself. / I was downright dizzy. Like on a turntable.)

Turntable ? : My general, too, took an old-saltier stance. We swayed our torsos at each other : I didn't feel good ! (Presumably it was just me that had the totters – : that *can* really spoil your appetite !). –

Damn ! : Was this just subjective ? Or objective ? : It was really turning my stomach ! : ? ! / Coffin belched. Coffin pressed a hand to his mouth. He said : "This Mr.=uh Uspenskii : has not taken kindly to our conditions. As a result I have given the machine=section an order : to set the propellers at full speed *reverse* : have to get back into USAmerican territorial waters ! Get out of these insane horse latitudes : then we'll show the bolshies what's what !" / And driven back on a serpentine course by the (robot ?) chauffeur. / "No : drive on. To the TV studio."

(1300 hundred hours : high time I figured out the farewell words I was going to enter in the Golden Book ! Hope I come up with some lingual stew or other. / And, as the =proof car waltzed us belchers over the asphalt, went on memorizing the clichés : ‹granted; surprise; unforgettable hours : well-tended; farewell; lovely days.› (No wait : put the ‹lovely days› more up front, the ‹farewell› at the end : wonder if I should mention ‹lar= and star=board› ? – Oh my, if only I could keep it all together !).).

No, he was not a robot : the chauffeur ! He steered us down the Neutral Mall in unmitigated meanders and burped the while : are we all drunk ? ! (Although : with me it could be the shot that pale semen=pirate had planted; who knows what was in it.) / What sort of meeting was being held ? : The Island Commission ? Just for li'l ol' *me* ? ! –

Yes indeed ! ! (So get solemn now, Winer ! : the ceremony was being broadcast round the world via the moon ! – I.e., round the *half*=world; above whose horizon it was standing at the moment !)

: "Mr. Winer !" : all at 17.892 on your dial. I tried to put on a more enthusiastic face; because up front, the white-haired Indian of yore was speaking; and an usher murmured in my ear : that this was all being done on *my* account ! ("For me ? Winer ?" : "Yes, for you ! : pssst !").

And, in solemn plenary session, I was dubbed ‹Doctor IRAS, honoris causis› ! Me : Charleshenry ! ![94] (Mygod, I'd have to revise my Golden Book entry once again ! Our hands, those extending and/or receiving

[94]Distressing, the feckless manner in which academic degrees can be awarded. A man of responsibility would have declined the honor in this case : Domine, non sum dignus ! Such modest self-knowledge is, to be sure, alien to Mr. – pardon : Dr. ! – Winer.

the diploma, trembled; our faces were probably still solemn enough; but chalk-white as well, both; both gulped : "My pleasure : hick." : "Hickthanks !").

And in procession, in cap and gown, back to the Town Hall again : gruesome serenity, sardonic, on all attendant=faces : this was all out of whack ! / And the old Indian's mouth whispered at one of my ears – I could no longer differentiate between them – : "The Americans have ordered ‹full speed reverse›; the Russians ‹full speed ahead as before›." / "And the result ?").

The result ? : "We're spinning ! : in place !" / The outer rim of the Island had already reached a speed of 15 feet per second (which, once everything was in ‹full gear›, would accelerate to 30 ! At which point it would be turning on its axis once every 25 minutes. At 150° longitude, and 38° latitude : in the middle of the Pacific sargasso, in the doldrums, the horse latitudes . . . . .). / "Is my plane ready do you know ?"

"Oh not yet : first there's the Golden Book !" (Can a person live on a turntable ? Love ? And if yes : with what result ? The usual, or do you keep slipping off ? / ‹The circling moon› : a muttonhead of a poet had once driveled, and it had been a total mess of a metaphor even then : now it was upon us ! Now it was circling ! / I stalked.)

At my right, an Arab, at my left a lotus-person supporting me; up the Town Hall stairs : nor would let me go except I sign ! / (What were all those words ? : ‹Farewelltended-lovelyandgranted› – my my, if only I don't upchuck all over their pretty book ! . . . . .)

A hall, ahall : had I really been here once before ? / I fell onto the chair – it helped a little at first; but not for long : just the opposite ! Movement & fresh air ! – and gaped vacantly into the tumultings : the way the lectern here stood askew ! I gave one speaker an idiotic laugh : Hey fellow, you're not feelin' kosher neither ! / Groped for the antique quill – the lines on the lovely paper tangled slowly before my eyes, osweetspiralo'mine. I forced my Russian breakfast back down with a swallow : ‹Surprisegrantedunforgettableandhours›. / And they obviously wanted to get it over with too. I aimed at the paper; held onto the edge of the desk with my unoccupied left. And wrote (my gullet full of caviar again !) : What ? :

‹I grant the Island administration a surprising farewell. / Seldom have I been so relieved by beauty, never so well-tended by backboarders : every turn will remain unforgettable !› / (And hasty as possible my Johnhenry under it : !).

On the road to the airport : they were obviously in a hurry to get me out of

the way. (And me too : just jet me home ! Brrr !). / They were still negotiating. The Indians were trying to halt the rotation via yoga – they might just as well have tried yogurt ! : "This is not quite how your great-great uncle envisioned it, I suppose ?" (This turning ? : "No; definitely not !").

Airport; 2 trees groaning to one another : the rain stoned us with glass bonbons. –

Island farewell : a tiny yellow hand in mine. / Before I vomit : "What do you think, Pandit Jagannath : what's going to happen ?" / He gave a long shrug : "A matter of which machines hold out longer; backboard or larboard. – Maybe it will tear open lengthwise down the middle : the long-term effect of this sort of push'n'pull wasn't included in the calculations, the engineers tell me . . . . ." (and another of his touching shoulder motions). –

Vertical it stood, and spread its jetted fists in power : just climb in ! ! ! – –. – : – ! – – : ! ! – – – : ! ! ! – – – – : ! ! – – – – – – ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !

"Well, captain ?" : and he gave a flummoxed motion of his head : highly remarkable ! / (But it did gladden my heart when he said ‹Doc› : vanity, thy name is Winer !). –

Screwing higher above the waltzing Island : from up here it looked passably peaceful. / "Ah, 5000 kilometers to Detroit ! : We'll be there in 3 hours !" / (At around 7 o'clock then. Then with the next flight to Grand Rapids : that'll make it 8. Or 9 at the most. Give Frederick a call from there : he can pick me up in his car : bon. I moved my shoulders inside the belts.)

And an educated man, my pilot ! : ‹Once I lived as did the gods, and have no need of more›, he quoted with a laugh (and envious of me : for being allowed to see ‹All That›. / "Wellyes," I said dodging, and provided a few petty details : read my article, if you please !). –

(And what was my most significant image from these crazy days ? / – (Alright, first go totally limp. Rub it all out. Then slip into ‹before›= gear : *what* had made the biggest impression on me ? / I knew me : I only needed to wait it out; then somewhere it would flash very bright, a snapshot, from the reservoir of pictures . . . . .) . . . . . .) : There ! :

The curtain went into a flutter : parted : to the right, to the left . . . . . : Over the sandy plain came a woman on horseback ! On past me, without stopping : only turned her face, and gazed steadily at me through one oversized golden ear of grain : ! :

"Thalja ! !" / (On past me, without stopping : not the Indian girl, not the

Russian girl, not the nurse, and not the tall sculptress. (Better Queen Shub=ad than that.)) / Thalja.

I banged my hand on my buckled-up knee : and come first thing tomorrow morning, into the reed islands of the Kalamazoo with my canoe ! –. –

(Now was that ever an idea : ‹Once I lived as did the gods› ! ! !). –

A Note on the Texts

Enthymesis, or H.I.H.Y.A. (*Enthymesis oder W.I.E.H.*): written February 1946, published in *Leviathan.* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1949.

Leviathan, or The Best of Worlds (*Leviathan oder Die Beste der Welten*): written October 1946, published in *Leviathan.* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1949.

Gadir, or Know Thyself (*Gadir oder Erkenne dich selbst*): written July 1948, published in *Leviathan.* Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1949.

Alexander, or What Is Truth? (*Alexander oder Was ist Wahrheit?*): written in February 1949, published in *Die Umsiedler. 2 Prosastudien.* Frankfurt on the Main: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1953.

The Displaced (*Die Umsiedler*): written May 1952, published in *Die Umsiedler. 2 Prosastudien.* Frankfurt on the Main: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1953.

Lake Scenery with Pocahontas (*Seelandschaft mit Pocahontas*): written October 1953, published in *Texte und Zeichen* 1 (1955).

Cosmas, or Concerning the Mountain of the North (*Kosmas oder Vom Berge des Nordens*): written January 1954, published Krefeld: Agis, 1955.

Tina, or Concerning Immortality (*Tina oder über die Unsterblichkeit*): written November 1955, published in *Augenblick* 4 (1956).

Goethe and One of His Admirers (*Goethe und Einer seiner Bewunderer*): written July 1956, published in *Texte und Zeichen* 13 (1957).

Republica Intelligentsia: A Novella from the Horse Latitudes (*Die Gelehrtenrepublik: Kurzroman aus den Roßbreiten*): written August 1957, published Karsruhe: Stahlberg, 1957.

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