

GÜNTHER ANDERS

THE MOLUSSIA FILES



THE MOLUSSIAN CATACOMBS. A NOVEL

together with

Ancestor Murder

and other Molussian pieces

www.beyond-alexanderplatz.com

The two Parts of *The Molussia Files* include all of Anders' main Molussia-related writings. The many offhand references to Molussia scattered through his many other writings are not included here.

PART ONE:

The Molussian Catacombs (written 1930-36) – first German publication
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PART TWO

'Scholarly Commentary' (n.d.) – included in the 2nd edition, pp. 412-20.

'Ancestor Murder' (written 1951-73) – from Günther Anders: *Erzählungen: Fröhliche Philosophie (Tales: Fun with Philosophy)*, © Suhrkamp 1978, pp. 241-295.

'Rigonia' (written 1966) – *ibid*, pp. 228-40

The Molussian Apocrypha (written 1930-36) – included in the 2nd expanded edition © C. H. Beck 2012, pp. 323-411.

PART ONE

THE MOLUSSIAN CATACOMBS

A Novel

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INTRODUCTION¹

Every reader of Anders' philosophical and political writings has come across one of the most mysterious lands in literature: Molussia. Scattered through his theoretical analyses of modern industrial society, tucked away in reflections on the atomic menace, smuggled into his philosophy of technology, we keep finding maxims and little histories, fictive texts and poems from this never more closely identified country, as if to provide serious underpinnings for his theses.²

Here, for the first time in English, is the only novel by the 'philosophical anthropologist of the atomic age' Günther Anders (1902-92). *The Molussian Catacombs* was written largely in 1930-33, with additions and amendments made up until 1936 (while Anders was an exile in Paris) and 1938 (when he was in the USA), in order to lay bare the tricks used by propagandists and other bad-faith actors, and thereby help the German people resist the Nazis.

But it remained unpublished until 1992, a few months before Anders' death. Hence the novel is another of those works that fell victim to the sharp break (unparalleled in English literature) between the tumultuous but evolving culture of the Weimar years, and the post-1933 and post-War situation in German-speaking lands.³

Anders' reasoned that the Germans had had to be rescued by outside forces, so his original motive in writing the novel had turned out to be invalid. Readers today, however, will easily note the relevance of the many stories and discussions to our own over-propagandised times.

Who was Günther Anders?

Günther Stern was born in the German city of Breslau (now Polish Wrocław) in 1902, and died in Vienna in 1992. His parents were pioneer child psychologists; Walter Benjamin was a second cousin. He studied Phenomenology under Husserl, and also attended seminars by Cassirer and Heidegger. He was refused his post-doctoral Habilitation in 1930; his mentors (Wertheimer, Tillich and Mannheim) consoled him with the naïve excuse: 'Let the Nazis come in for a year or so, then once they've been seen off, you can have your degree.'

From the late 1920s Stern lived mainly from his contributions to newspapers. The editor of the *Berlin Börsen-Courier* complained there were too many Sterns writing for him, so he responded: 'Then call me something different (*anders*)!'

From 1929 to 1937 he was married to Hannah Arendt (a fellow student under Heidegger – with whom she had a passionate affair and a continuing infatuation). In 1933 he fled to Paris

¹ This introduction draws heavily on Gerhard Oberschlick's Afterword to the second edition of *Die molussische Katakombe*, Munich, C H Beck 2012, ISBN 978 3 406 60024 1, which records several conversations with Anders shortly before his death.

² K P Liessmann, in *Günther Anders Kontrovers*, Beck 1992, p. 81.

³ The journalist Jürgen Serke in 1977 produced a coffee-table book *Die verbrannten Dichter (The Burned Writers)* ISBN 3-407-80750-3, presenting nearly three dozen Weimar writers almost completely forgotten after the War. Alfred Döblin and Walter Benjamin are among the few names therein whose works and reputations still have some resonance.

on hearing that the Gestapo had seized Berthold Brecht's diary, in which he was frequently mentioned. Hannah stayed in Germany working for a Jewish relief organisation, until she too was held for several days in a Gestapo cell. She fled via Czechoslovakia to join Anders in Paris.

In 1936 Anders sailed to the USA, where his father was now a professor in North Carolina. The authorities, suspicious of his anti-totalitarian views, delayed the naturalisation process; his German citizenship was revoked in 1938. (Despite his divorce from Hannah Arendt, Anders helped her and her new husband to reach the USA.)

During the war years, Anders found work in Hollywood backstage prop and costume lots, and on assembly lines in Los Angeles factories – experiences that helped shape his critiques of media and technology. He lodged for a while in the house of Herbert Marcuse, and socialised with other émigré writers including Brecht, Döblin, Feuchtwanger, the Manns, as well as musicians and film directors. His interest in philosophy continued via seminars by Horkheimer and Adorno.

In 1945 Anders was briefly employed by the US Office of War Information, but resigned rather than draft anti-Japanese propaganda he considered fascistic. The atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945 brought a turning point in Anders' view of the world. After returning to Europe in 1950, he attacked the 'Apocalypse-blindness' of a humanity whose technologies have outgrown human control. Looking back on his US years, he wrote: 'Empty time in the USA. Only after returning to Europe did I find myself again. Back there I would have perished.'⁴

For four post-War decades Anders wrote extensively on violence, the atomic menace, the Vietnam War, pacifism, technological hubris, and cultural trends. His major work of philosophical anthropology *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (*The Obsolescence of Humanity*) appeared as two volumes in 1956 and 1980.⁵

The Molussian Catacombs. 60 years from conception to publication

Anders began writing his fictional response to European totalitarianism in 1930. By early 1933 the MS was complete enough to be submitted (via Brecht) to the Kiepenhauer publishing house, just before the Nazis took over. The Gestapo grabbed the MS from the publisher along with other materials, but soon returned it, believing it to be a collection of South Sea folk tales. (The publisher had wrapped it in a map of Indonesia, with the island of 'Molussia' drawn in.)

Anders was one of the earliest to recognise the menace of totalitarianism. He took *Mein Kampf* seriously,⁶ judging it a 'mean, hatefilled, rhetorically enthralling, indisputably highly intelligent book ... This man says what he means and means what he says. And says it in such a vulgar way that the already-vulgar will find it irresistible, and even the not-vulgar will be vulgarised and enthralled.'⁷

⁴ A note inserted in the MS of his novel, retrieved in 1990 by his executor Gerhard Oberschlick.

⁵ Only a small part of Vol 1 has been formally published in English: the essay 'On Promethean Shame', in C. J. Mueller: *Prometheanism*. ISBN 9781783482399. A PDF of vol. 2 (translated from a Spanish translation!) can be found on the Internet with a little searching.

⁶ Unlike his 'clever friends': Brecht famously mocked Hitler as 'the housepainter'.

⁷ Quoted by K. P. Liessmann, op. cit. p.83.

One of the two MS copies of the novel was left behind when he fled to Paris. Hannah Arendt bravely brought it with her out of Germany, where it had spent a winter, well wrapped in greaseproof paper, in a smokehouse among preserved sausages and hams. Anders later claimed the smell provided a condiment for their frugal Parisian meals of plain baguette.

In Paris, Anders continued adding to the novel. His mythical land of Molussia provided almost endless opportunities for more slogans, proverbs, anecdotes, fables and political reflections, and the writing provided relief from the fears and hardships of exile. 'Molussia was an invented private myth, allowing observations, ideas, insights and reflections in such a way that they lie outside the rules of scientific responsibility, but for that reason can have a more forthright, direct and immediate impact.'⁸ His attempt to have the novel published by the only German-language publishing house in Paris was sabotaged by the firm's Stalinist reader Manès Sperber, who, unhappy with the novel's exposure of conscience-free Machiavellianism from whatever side, branded it a deviation from the Party line. (Sperber denounced Stalin a few years later, and became a lauded anti-Communist. Anders found it distasteful that an earlier lack of morals could so easily be wiped away.)

At the 1939 PEN World Congress in New York, Anders was introduced to a wider public. The pacifist writer Arnold Zweig presented an evening of readings, with the support of a famous actress, Olga Fuchs. But hopes for early publication of the novel were again dashed. Anders then set the MS aside, but carried it with him on his frequent changes of address. Not until 1990, at the urging of his executor Gerhard Oberschlick, did he authorise publication.⁹ As the author explained, he was embarrassed by the contrast between the revolution depicted at the end of the novel, and the failure of the Germans to rise up, thereby leaving their salvation to outsiders.

The first edition appeared in 1992, happily shortly before Anders' death. It had no editorial apparatus. The second edition of 2012 was augmented with almost a hundred pages of 'Molussian Apocrypha', some miscellaneous items, and a long and richly annotated account by his executor of conversations with Anders in 1990-91.

OTHER MOLUSSIAN PIECES

Scholarly Commentary

This little piece, discovered among the posthumous papers, poses the question: were there giants in ancient Molussia – or did the excavated gigantic scrolls serve a nefarious purpose: to set government decrees down in writing, but in such a way that they could never be read? The tyrant's linguistic *reductio ad absurdum*, whereby the one adjective 'Molussian' encompasses every acceptable shade of meaning, resonates with our own experience of buzzwords and slogans whose only purpose is to shut down argument.

Ancestor Murder

This highly entertaining spoof archaeological report (complete with straight-faced scholarly references to conferences and publications) offers fascinating perspectives on the ways archaic and alien cultures are interpreted and understood by 'the experts'.

⁸ A comment by Liessmann, which pleased Anders. *Molussische Katakombe*, 2nd ed., p. 441.

⁹ *Molussischen Katakombe* 2nd ed., p.450.

First, a scientific report (archaeological/anthropological) describes a complex and bizarre Molussian ritual, the underlying purpose of which, it seems, was to make space, in a space-constrained cemetery, for newly deceased elders. But this practical purpose is set about with numerous taboos and commandments. Confident expert interpretations are given.

Then, in the Afterword, new discoveries bring to light a whole new sequence of actions following that ritual night of arduous excavation and bone-shifting. Philological speculations reveal unexpected semantic connections. Finally, four Annexes explore various problems in the interpretation of history and other fields – all with a great deal of tongue-in-cheek fun.

Rigonia

This short story explores popular memory and politically inspired myth-making. The reader will surely relate it to episodes in our own lifetimes where the ‘official version’ and various dissenting versions (a.k.a. ‘conspiracy theories’) collide.

The Molussian Apocrypha

As he worked and reworked the text of the novel, Anders set aside a stack of episodes he considered unsuitable. The first two appeared in the *Berliner Tageblatt* in October 1932 and January 1933; all the others were found posthumously in a file dated 1973 and labelled by Anders as ‘unusable’. The Biblical Apocrypha were said by Luther to be ‘not quite holy scripture and yet good to read.’ The Molussian episodes well deserve a place in this translation.

*

Anders, like Alfred Döblin, has attracted a modest but enthusiastic readership in the English-speaking world; but efforts to interest mainstream publishers have so far been less successful than even the Döblin case. I hope that this translation of Anders’ Molussian works will one day find a proper place in the literature of mid-20th century ideas, still resonant amid the war-trumpets and Great Resets of today.

C. D. Godwin
Stroud, UK
Summer 2025

THE MOLUSSIAN CATACOMBS

INSCRIPTION ON THE STATUE OF TRUTH CLOTHED AS A LIE, ERECTED AFTER THE LIBERATION OF MOLUSSIA

Since every lie cried *Even I am true*,
And only those who lied were heeded – *just not me*,
I left my darkness, painted on my common
Mouth, and started thundering away;
Tried out by day, and practised every night,
Until I knew: no one can lie like me.

Then in among the throng I slipped by night,
Marched with them roaring, arm in arm –
Nameless female dwelling in our town.
And at the end screamed with them (though in disgust,
Soon even more in anger, soon even more
Emboldened by the truth): *Listen: even I am true*.

I stand here in your sight, dressed like this,
So no one, now or later, shall forget.
For only so – with lipstick-smeary lips
And screams of Truth – could I come to your ears.
And only so could wrest it out at last,
My old motto: *The truth shall set you free*.

FOREWORD

The document before you, which dates from the last and most terrible period of the Molussian freedom movement, contains the conversations of two prisoners who, like so many of their comrades, had to spend their lives, and end them, in the dungeons of the Molussian state prison. Olo, the older prisoner, conveys to Yegussa, the younger, the lessons necessary to perpetuate the struggle for freedom – lessons that he himself once learned from an older prisoner, and which Yegussa is one day to pass on to the next generation.

As individuals, the two discussants are random and uninteresting. All that was left of their world was four walls. So nothing more could happen to them. Their lives were merely an opportunity to drill stories and lessons into their successors. What they were apart from this, in their drowsy hours when neither spoke, we know only from hints; but this is hardly relevant to us, even though such hours must have filled almost the entire time. How they maintained their integrity – for thirty years in Olo's case, and not much shorter in Yegussa's – is attested by their conversations. These form the only basis for our judgement.

The wording of the stories, fables and lessons comes not from Olo and Yegussa alone, but from many earlier generations of prisoners who handed down the texts to Olo in, as they put it, a *transferable* format. If we are to believe Olo, the same applies also to many of the dialogues: they are said to flow word for word with no input from him, exactly as he received them. Yegussa, it is true, assumes he is improvising his own questions and demurrals; but in reality, according to Olo, these are often an error-free recitation of existing texts. We can hardly believe that Olo meant this resounding declaration to be taken literally. Probably it was simply another handed-down educational ploy. *Correct arguments*, the lessons repeatedly say, *serve not their own purposes, but emerge from the dictates of the situation*.

Much of the text goes beyond the simple transcription of dialogues. Most of the psychological remarks and situational contexts are probably the work of the first editors who, shortly after the victory of the Molussian freedom struggle, published the *Handbook of Lies*. But the first scene-setting comments come no doubt from another source: the foe. For, remarkable as it may seem, we owe the recovery of these dialogues to functionaries of the Terror: the trustees who were required to overhear day and night every word the prisoners spoke. As they listened at the ventilation shaft to the next cell and wrote down the conversations, they were working for us.

These few words on the origin of *The Molussian Catacombs* should suffice to show that the text can hardly be said to have a literary style. Its similarity to the story-chain of the *1,001 Nights* or the later Platonic dialogues is coincidental. If something like a self-enclosed art form has been created, framed and with unity of space, then we must thank the reality of the four walls that enclosed Olo and Yegussa.

The first Molussian edition titled *Handbook of Truth* was at first intended for *the educated among those who despised the truth*; i.e. for those intellectuals who were accustomed to thinking and had formed a notion of personal and spiritual incorruptibility, which they put into practice in their private life or in the daily grind of their scientific work or even in reality; but also

for those who gave up seeing and thinking where it became in the end impractical or dangerous to look Truth in the eye; and for those cunning enough to know when it was opportune to be naïve.

This intention soon proved too narrow. *Certain stories*, the third Molussian edition stated, *can be used with profit as a basis for discussion within a broader education; and selected passages may even be read together with children.*

Today we can unhesitatingly endorse this guidance for use. For today, in this era of a general scorning of the intellect, of organised dumbing down, of compulsory idolatry, the cause of Reason demands nothing more than a deeper and at the same time broader re-evaluation than the struggle against the Lie. How seldom is anyone an enthusiast for this cause, enthusiastic to uplift oneself – not just feel vaguely *uplifted*; enthusiastic to attain one's own self – and not become oneself an idol. The task of uplift is no theodicy, but a humanistic task. Where we find documents that take on this task with enthusiasm and the almost religious zeal of the heretic, then we must buckle up and lay them before the public.

Today the book is intended for all victims of the Lie. Not only for the intellectuals who must be won over; not only for the exiles who live and die scattered across the Earth for the sake of Truth; but for all those – a larger number – who believed the Lie, for the clueless accomplices. If some of these become thoughtful or even rebellious, then Olo and Yegussa did not live in vain, even today. *The fewer its adherents, the weaker the lie*, as Olo put it.

The Editors

YEGUSSA'S COLD TURKEY

After us no cock will crow
if but one of us should falter,
not watching out for Number Two
and every Two thereafter.

After us no cock will crow
if Number Three goes missing,
or Number Three should dare to go
before Next is in position.

After us no cock will crow,
the chain will surely break,
if fate should land the task a blow,
and Four should never wake.

After us no cock will crow
if through Five it breaks at last,
by causing Six - a clumsy throw -
to bodge the baton-pass.

After us no cock will crow,
O think on our successors,
if but one of us should not avow
the words of his professors -

Then after us no cock will crow.

DAY 1

Kuru is summarily renamed Yegussa

Once through the prison gate, they placed the prisoner Kuru in between them and swept with him up a big flight of outdoor stairs. Coordinating unpredictably, step by step they took in now three stairs, now four, and now a single one, and it seemed to Kuru they were flying, and each wingbeat was of a different strength. There was no time to look around as they dragged him along. Through corridors that descended steeply, then stairs with high steps sometimes up, sometimes down, around galleries that led to more stairs, perhaps the very same stairs they had just climbed, and the longer this rapid flight lasted the darker the spaces became. Kuru felt like asking what they were doing, were they underground or up above, but the flight had taken away his breath. He no longer took his own steps, but hung on the arms of the two sergeants as if on a swing. He had no idea if he was over the city in one of the watch towers, or at ground level, or down in the dungeons.

Finally they opened a door and released him to crawl off into the dark. When he straightened up he bumped into the vaulted ceiling. Unable to see a thing, he lay down and went to sleep. Then he had slept enough. When he awoke, someone told him he'd

slept away half the day. But he couldn't see the man who sat at his side. For the vaulted space knew only words – there was nothing to see. Contented to know this, he went back to sleep. When he awoke the second time, the voice spoke: "I can't see you. But you've been asleep twelve hours now. It's enough. Wake up, talk, and listen. For I am a relay-runner through time, duty bound to pass the baton, starved for knowledge of events. And I don't know how many thousand days and nights I've sat here, or what you may call it."

Now Kuru was shocked, and sat up.

Olo asked: "Are you a Pariah too?"

"What else?" Kuru asked back. "But we weren't allowed to complain. For without work we would die. Then I thought it through: if they see me as an enemy, I can look on them as enemies."

"That thought was not exactly of your own devising."

"So I proposed we call ourselves *The Underlings*. So our owners would see once and for all there's a difference between them and us. Our meekness would make them ashamed of their wicked ways. For whatever is not spoken of in Molussia, whatever no one notices, does not exist. When I proposed this, my best friend betrayed me. He was after my spot. *You aim to create a rift, he said, between the classes of the Molussian population. No one of the people is less than any other, all are essential.* But the judge ranted at me that he and all the owners thought every hour of us, the operatives. He said *operatives*, meaning workers. *We're with you day and night, he said. Molussia without you – we can't imagine it.* So I lost my spot and became a street singer."

"From the first they treated insight as incitement," declared Olo. "The priest Noo, who predicted that a thunderstorm would destroy the royal palace, was put to death when the palace did indeed burst into flames. For only he who had the insight could have done it. They confused the warning and the deed."

"I only warned backwards," said Kuru, "because our misery had gone on a long time, and Bamba the bloodsucker likewise. All I did was give it a *name*." When Kuru said this, Olo began to rock on tiptoe, repeating the name Bamba several times as if committing it to memory. And when Kuru asked what he was doing, he answered that the name was new to him. This shocked Kuru. The other man must be very old.

Now Kuru asked if he too would be staying here for always and grow as old as Olo. "Of course," replied Olo. And when Kuru asked why, Olo began:

"Now there's one more tale I know, since your arrival. One of many. Because I know many stories, from the beginnings of Molussia almost until today. Whether Molussia knows it or not – Molussia above our heads, loud, bright and blind, not more than ten feet above us, but unattainably distant through a strong ten foot of masonry – here in this dungeon the history of Molussia is preserved. What Molussia has long forgotten is passed down here from inmate to inmate, from one despatch rider to the next. You too must listen, for Truth is not there to take pride in hiding away in the dark. You too will carry Truth onward, and maybe in a hundred years or two hundred, she'll be brought to the surface so that the city shall know what relation it bears to her."

"So it's rattling along up there?" asked Kuru, meaning the city of Molussia. As he spoke he strained his ears. And because he perceived something like footsteps and a slight roaring, he thought it was the noise of the city.

"Moles," said Olo.

"And the roaring?"

"The roaring is in your ears. It'll soon fade." Olo's tone was now a bit more insistent. He feared he had landed up with a successor who was far too young.

"But who are we then," cried Kuru, "if the city doesn't know we're here? We can't go to the city, the city can't come to us."

No answer came from Olo. "It does not know," was all he said, "that it rattles along while Truth performs her office here beneath its feet, not letting go the thread. It sends us just a few, a few prisoners. The city's cruelty preserves the heritage."

"So the real Molussia is down here and not up there?" asked Kuru, and he hoped to fashion for himself some consolation for the misery of incarceration. But Olo answered "No," and said, "Molussia is where it is," and lay down to sleep.

But Kuru couldn't bear it, he had to keep the old man awake. "No one will vouch for my being here? No one will know about me, and who I was up there in Molussia?"

"What you were called up there is no use to anyone. Does a shard know if its name is Bowl or Plate or Jug? What name did they call you by, up there? If it comes looking for you it won't find you. It will grow weak, and one day will be lost even among those who miss you. Down here no one was ever called anything. Everyone lost the name that made him the equivalent of himself. This loss was useful for his task, and made it possible for him to survive in the dark."

"But how will you address me if not by name?" asked Kuru. And without thinking, getting ahead of it all in fear of drowning, he yelled at the other, "My name is Kuru."

"If I were to acknowledge that name," said Olo, "it would be no less gone than it is already. For I shall die before you. That is the custom here. Say it again in thirty or forty years, so your successor can pass it on to his successor. Perhaps then it will climb back up with the Last, and live once more in the mouths of Molussians. Is that a consolation?"

Kuru kept silent.

"But maybe they will say: *Glory to the despatch riders. But inglorious was the Eighteenth, for he passed his name on so that today we might be able to speak it out. But his name was not handed down, and we know him no better than the names of the others.*" Olo paused. "It's all the same," he continued, "if you decide not to. You'll lose it in any case. But for me you're the next one, the Eighteenth. And I'm the Seventeenth. The younger here is always called Yegussa. And the older always Olo."

"That's supposed to be *me*?" Kuru flared up again. "Yegussa, that's not a name. And not mine, for sure. My name is Kuru."

Olo took no more notice of him. "We have been here for three hundred years," was all he said now, and settled again on his wall side.

But Kuru was unable to sleep. He sat a long while saying his name to himself. And he tried to hate the old man for refusing to acknowledge his name. But he lacked the

courage to hate. And anyway, Olo was his only protection against Olo. His last confederate, his last refuge. So in the end there was no more hate, only the longing for a human face. So as soon as he was sure his neighbour was asleep, he crawled across and touched Olo to feel his appearance. The hairs of the beard reached deep into the face, almost to the eyes. He could feel them clearly. And yet it was quite impossible for him to imagine what Olo looked like. And as he began to accept that he would never know, the face twitched, and he gave a start. Olo sensed Kuru's fear, and woke up.

"You cannot discover my features with your sense of touch. For he who no longer has a name no longer has a face either. I have no appearance, and nor have you. The despatch riders of the dark do not know each other's face, but trust only in the adage: *We are nothing but a voice, and the servant of the messages we pass on.*"

Now Kuru gave another start, took his hands from the man's face and asked: "So you'll never know what I look like, and I'll never be close to you as long as I live?"

"Not close and not far," replied Olo dismissively, and tried to settle down to sleep.

"So you've gone blind here in the dark?" Kuru tried everything to keep him awake.

"How am I supposed to know that?" the deeper voice answered.

Now it began to dawn on Kuru that before long he too would no longer know if he was blind or sighted. Olo paid him no more attention, his voice had disappeared. "And what did you do when you first came here?" Kuru's voice was anxious, as if the other man might really have vanished along with his voice. "Did you weep, for example?" He said *for example*, it sounded a bit more objective. But no answer came. Then he was ashamed and felt like hiding, a vain wish, for the dark hid him anyway.

"I am here and I am not here," the deeper voice came now. "There's no need to feel embarrassed, because I can't see you. But your despair is nothing, no shadow of it will penetrate to me in the dark, or up into the city. Grow sick with longing, fragile from the darkness, drown in time – if your hearing remains intact for me, and your voice for the Nineteenth, that will be enough."

Now Kuru gave a start for the third time, and realised at last that he was dead and just a bit of him was still alive because someone wanted the use of it: listening, speaking. They both now lay down, believing it was night time.

But ten feet overhead it was noon, Molussia rattled along above them, and the fruit hawker's donkey cart squeaked over those sleeping below.

Note by the transcriber:

From now on the new prisoner is rechristened. Henceforth, as in all earlier transcriptions, in place of his former civilian name we use the new name Yegussa.

NIGHT

Yegussa confuses day and night.
Olo interprets dreaming, not the dream

After his first day in the dark, Yegussa had a great need for daylight. So when he lay down to sleep he awoke to brightness – in his dream world. It was lively and full of incident, and there was much to arouse anxiety, and much of significance to experience. Thus did he confuse day and night.

A great mastiff came up to him, big as a cloud, and he couldn't tell if it was running or swimming. When it came close and darkness fell across his eyes because it blocked out all the light, it stuck its cold muzzle in his face. But it didn't know him and did nothing to him and just kept sniffing around, on him, to the right, to the left, behind him, always circling. He dared not touch it. It hovered silently about him and kept so close that its hairs dragged across his mouth. But he couldn't hear it, and since it blocked out all his light it was actually like nothing. It was no longer a dog, for there was no head or tail to be seen. What circled endlessly about him was more a funnel or an eddy or a shaft with a dark whirlwind. But the shaft was narrow and tall, and it was the rear tenement courtyard where they'd arrested him. Yegussa heaved himself a little way up the shaft, and it was as if someone was pulling him on a rope, so that he climbed and swung and climbed. Someone said *Molussia's up there*. So he hoped to escape. But the shaft was heaving itself up as well, and it was like a vortex in there. Yegussa felt himself whirling like a leaf and beat about him and kept climbing. "My name," he screamed, "I left my name below."

His head hung crooked as if he was diving headlong into water. But something held tight to his legs and pulled him on up. *You are the Nineteenth*, he heard, and he stayed hanging only as the shaft stayed hanging like a big funnel, high over the roofs of Molussia.

"It's a lie," he screamed, "Molussia's down there, I want my name back." But there was no one to hear him. Meanwhile the funnel swung back and forth like a pendulum, and Yegussa swung with it, head down, and saw at the end of the funnel, like a cut-out, like a slide, image after image of Molussia and always a different section of cloud.

Kuru, a voice commanded when he swung left, and *Yegussa* a voice when he swung out to the right, so he tried to hold on to the right but clutched only at air. When he realised there was no hold, he gave up the search for his name and stepped into emptiness as you step into water. But his step took him upwards and his head dangled. *Now we have you*, he heard a voice, but he tumbled down as if he had let go. When he caught himself and was again hanging there, the funnel was again around him and he dangled at the same height as before. Now he kept still and looked down through the funnel. Now the world was sweeping back and forth like a screen, filling the hole at the end of the funnel with pictures of sky and the horizon and Molussian roofs. But for a moment Yegussa saw, in a fraction of a swing's arc between images of many buildings and yards, an image of his own courtyard flying past, dissolving into other buildings and yards, into horizon and clouds, until it flew past again on the reverse swing. And at the wall of the yard, though for only the briefest fraction of a second, he saw, standing like a maybug on its hind legs, his own self; but already he was gone.

You see, he heard a voice.

“What?” Yegussa asked.

You already have another.

“But it was *me*, it really was!”

That’s beside the point.

The next time he flew past his own image, he saw how he waved at the sky and ran to the end of the yard to keep in view as long as possible. But he couldn’t hear himself, for it was a long way down and silent as a picture and was gone already. He knew he should go down, for today he’d earned no more than two cowrie-yen, and he knew he really ought to sing some more this evening to have a few coins to rub together. So he called down that he couldn’t come, and can the one down there sing in his place.

Only for me, he heard a tiny little voice float up towards him. But now Yegussa swung very high, and he felt a prickling as of fine hail. As the air grew more shadowed and colder and Molussia down below was just a dot amid wide horizons, the funnel’s swing lost momentum as if it was starting to freeze, and it squeaked, and someone said *There’s snow in the swivel mechanism*, which made Yegussa afraid even though he had no idea if this was good or bad. Before the funnel came to a complete stop it shuddered and began slowly to descend. Now Yegussa could make out Molussia again under him, clear and wintry, and he saw that his words hadn’t reached his courtyard but were scattered across the city. Several dangled on the veils of smoke over the chimneys of the buildings, palely gleaming like little patches of snow. But the city rose to meet him, and already he could see himself again, dancing up and down the yard and looking up as if signalling to someone to fetch something down. Now he noticed that two of his words were stuck in the roof gutter of his building, but what the words were he couldn’t see. But now he had no more sensation of falling, the city was rising towards him, and he was hanging in the air about to collide with it. *If only your voice lasts*, he heard someone say. And his courtyard hurtled towards him, he was standing in it, and he had no idea what it was that this whole thing was lifting high with such force. As it came nearer and everything became broader and clearer, it was like an enormous wind pushing the rising stuff in front of it, and he closed his eyes, for now it would surely crash into him, and the man in the yard would bang into him, and the screen would once again carry him aloft. But he struck out with not much force and penetrated through the screen, and it was like the surface of a pond rising over him. The city and Kuru’s yard were already making big swings over him, and he thought he was drowning. And his own screams woke him up.

“Stop dreaming,” Olo commanded. But Yegussa kept screaming, and because the screams sounded overdone and crackly in the narrow vaulted space he grew even more scared, as if he was still dreaming. Hardly had he stopped when there beneath him was Molussia again and he was rising again like the first time, and someone said, and he thought he knew the voice, *This is Molussia of the Twentieth Yegussa*.

“Twentieth?” he queried. “I’m the Nineteenth.”

It’s all the same to me, came the deeper voice again. *You are Yegussa. Which one is no concern of mine. Main point: the last one has made it through*. As he listened to this, Molussia rose again wide and clear and inexorable, and again Yegussa broke through, gently and with not much force, and several more times, and started screaming again.

"Quiet," Olo commanded.

"I'm already quiet," Yegussa assured him. And was again hurtling down, and he screamed a third time. "Now I've had enough," Olo decided, and sat up. And because he was in a rage at the incessant disturbances, he wound his arms tight around his knees to prevent himself from letting fly at Yegussa.

Now Yegussa woke up. "Is it day already?" he asked. And he tried in vain to see something in the dark.

"The water jug's not here yet," Olo replied. "So it can't be day yet."

But as Yegussa began to recount his dream, paying no attention to Olo's protests, it seemed to him he was recounting the events of the day just before he'd gone to sleep, for the night had yielded many visions while the day had been dark. "Whatever did it all mean. The butcher's dog and the whirlwind and me myself down in the yard."

"What you dreamt," declared Olo, "is no concern of mine and no concern of yours. Bad enough *that* we dream – that we expend energy on nonsensical images and fears."

"And what does dreaming mean?"

"That you are trying to escape, even though you have noticed escape is impossible. You must break the habit of dreaming."

"Is that possible?" Yegussa asked, astonished.

"You'll have enough to do here," answered Olo, sitting up; and he began to narrate:

DAY 2

The Animal College, or the Competitiveness of the Lie

The most gruelling examination prescribed by the ancient Priestly Codex, the one specifically for the Sixth Degree of priesthood, was the Animal College.

For a whole year the candidate – whose fetters were never to be removed – was required to deliver to a congregation of fattened oxen, calves, boars, turkeys, pheasants and giant tortoises indispensable to the royal kitchens, sermons on Animal Morality and Animal Hygiene. In the course of these 365 lectures no *argument*, no *therefore*, no *inference* was to slip unspoken past these creatures who enjoyed the undeserved right to be tasted by the king's tongue and digested in his most exalted stomach. Every dereliction would be penalised, just as if the lecture were being delivered to a human audience: the candidate would be demoted to the First Degree and would have to work all the way up again, level by level. His back must never be turned on the animal audience, his eye must always be trained on them as if on an audience of reverends. The effort to influence the animals must be sustained to the final second. But the examinee was strictly forbidden any method other than words and the strength of his arguments.

After a few days many an aspirant fell into a state similar to fainting from hunger; he would break off the sermon for a few moments, unable to hear if the one speaking really was he. In outbursts of impatience he would throw stones at the animals; his syntax became confused; he would repeat the same sentence endlessly while the expression on his face showed no sign that he was conscious of it. Many could not

resist the temptation to recite intentional nonsense, and even rules that directly contravened the Codex. Some, in order to avoid a descent into madness, renounced their candidacy. Two even deserted to *the lowest stratum of society* (as the jargon of the time put it), in order to threaten the institution with demonstrations and putsches, and arouse opprobrium against it.

But in the Empire there lived a family of sorcerers, last relicts of a sect once hostile to Molussia's religion. Their magic, diametrically opposed to the Molussian cult of Reason, was handed down only within this family, and incorporated into the institutions of the Molussian religion as the principle of Temptation, as a ready-made Devil. In the examination, just as everywhere else, it would turn up offering the most extreme temptation. For once the candidate had endured for six long months the daily unechoing tedium of his animal sermons, one of these sorcerers would be assigned to him: in play, eschewing all spoken argument, he would tame the animals with trills on his flute and magical arcs described in the air by his whip. They would eat from his hand those nibbles that despite every argument they had rejected for months – nibbles that so greatly enhanced the delicacy of their flavour and the whiteness and digestibility of their flesh. But when the sorcerer spoke, he praised the candour and honesty of his protégé, *who through all the twists and turns of his words and the convolutions of his arguments never allows himself to go astray. And does my flute not sound sweeter than the voice of the unsmiling reverend?* – whose burden it is that the merits of his proofs will be judged only by the sweetness with which he delivers them. And he is in despair, because *Truth carries within it no token of its truthfulness.*

But any aspirant who persevered undaunted was left alone at the railings for six more months, forced to apply tirelessly all his *therefores* and *conclusions* and *arguments* to convince the animals to do what would be good for them. Success eluded him, as before. In the twelfth month the sorcerer appeared a second time. The animals crowded together at the fence. Beside themselves with joy, they leapt at the railings and seemed delighted to touch the sorcerer's hand with snout, mouth or trunk. Almost none of the aspirants, who for twelve long months of untiring urgency and desperate arguments had sought to secure compliance, could cope with such a sight. The sorcerer appears, and Truth becomes jealous of lies.

Each candidate tried in the final moments to compete, each tried to trill like the sorcerer's flute, to spice Truth with the same sweetness that made the sorcerer's tune so irresistible. The contest was an embarrassment, for proofs when sung are merely ridiculous. But the sorcerer, paying no heed to his competitor, killed every animal that came near him, and at each kill tootled for the cook. For every fowl a servant came from the kitchens to carry the carcass to the royal refectory. An ox needed three men, and to carry the giant tortoise as many as seven were required. Finally an old man came to rake over the ground, and essential oils were sprayed to remove lingering animal odours.

If the candidate held out this far, watching in silence or deliberately concealing his jealousy by continuing with casual calm, he was called to the chair of the Sixth Degree.

Three, however, passed the examination and took the chair of the Sixth Degree in ways irregular yet particularly worthy of renown: Ko the Solitary, Nu the Endorser, and Nuashi.

The first of these, Ko the Solitary, promised his Prior to treat the animals as he did his pupils. He introduced his lectures with a strict admonition never to interrupt him with questions or any other kind of disturbance. Speaking was his business; listening theirs. This warning was delivered in a voice so trenchant that every animal at once retreated to the farthest corner of its stall. And so they never came again into his sight. And he was able to serve Truth undisturbed from the total solitude of his pulpit. When the sorcerer appeared at the usual six-month point to tempt the aspirant, Ko ignored his arrival, his presence and his departure; in a calm voice he continued to lecture to his College; Truth was with him. The sorcerer's tootling, too, was in vain; in the corners of the stalls he found naught but the bones and hides of expired animals.

The second, Nu the Endorser, arrived at the zoo with no concept and no texts. He was dressed for summer, and looked like a cavalier. When people pointed this out, he amiably waved them away. Just like Ko, he promised his Prior to treat the animals as he did his pupils; his opinion of people, truth to tell, was not excessively high. He seemed friendly as he mounted the pulpit, he observed the animals with an attentive eye so as to endorse in mellifluous tones the way they slept, drank, leapt, bellowed. Since they were always doing something, one animal this and another that, he always had something to say, and kept up with the times. He found their health a hundred percent good, he endorsed it and praised it. No animal interrupted him, rather he learned from each of them, and advised each in obliging terms to do right now what they were already just about to do regardless. Never, not even later, did he allow his voice to stumble. It actually became politer as time went on, until it found its final expression in ever-recurring courtly clichés. In this way he got to know the animals in every last cranny of their habits, and his words, which coursed along with the course of their day, never broke off until at the usual six-month point the sorcerer appeared. When Nu heard the sorcerer's flute and saw how calves, turkeys and pigs thronged to its trill and tried to touch the sorcerer's hand, he praised their trust and their simple belief that they should follow the one they love. If they had followed him, he explained, the empiricist, the humourless orator, and the difficulties of his expositions, they would for sure have forfeited the originality bequeathed them by their forebears, and would have become melancholy, sick, decadent, tough and indigestible. And for six more months he endorsed at length with amiable imperturbability, and for six more months he learned from them. Until at the sorcerer's touch they lay on their backs. Then he endorsed their choking, their bellowing and their death with the friendly assurance that *It is good that you die, since you knew so little of what was good for you*. With a slight bow he thanked each and every species of animal: the turkeys reddening the sand with their blood, the boars lying on their side, and the calves whose legs scrabbled to stay upright, the giant tortoises who retreated into their shells and whose death arrived unseen. And as he thanked them his words became a eulogy. He gave general thanks, and paid

particular tribute to the patience with which they had instructed him and promoted him to a priest of the Sixth Degree.

After taking his leave no less suavely of the sorcerer and the kitchen boys, he left the scene of his twelve months of labour in order to be received at the portal as the incumbent of the chair of the Sixth Excellence.

But the solution of the third candidate, Nuashi, who was beyond all nicknames, abolished the Animal College tradition. When he died after thirty years of unwavering regard, it was as the last priest of the Sixth Chair. His name is as solid as the bedrock of the Tambi Massif, and were he to become dust along with the dust of the Molussian people, his fame would live on in the memory of animals.

That a few drops of sorcerer blood flowed in him, he admitted often and not without pride. But on top of that he was lauded for having Ko's incorruptibility and Nu's powers of observation. When asked if he intended to treat the animals just like people, he called them to him with an enticing voice, just as earlier he had enticed his pupils. 'If we do not wish to speak Truth into empty air,' he said, 'we must engage in preliminary wooing.' The animals heeded his call, just as his pupils had done, and rubbing snouts and muzzles against the railings they waited for the bait. But when they inhaled the unfamiliar scent of the unknown man, they all, apart from a few, crept grumpily back to their troughs and there slurped as always the fatty scraps from the royal kitchens that made them pious, moral, tender, white and digestible. When he saw that they didn't do what was good for them, that they were making themselves presentable for the Next World of the royal table, he erupted in great anger. But before shouting at them as he would have shouted at his pupils, he pondered on what it was that had distanced them from their natural purpose, and he spoke some casual introductory words in order to dampen his anger and fully comply with the stipulations of the examination – which, as he did not yet know, he would put an end to. The tone of his words remained calm, and since nothing betrayed his agitation, it subsided. But his oratory was nothing but a musical accompaniment to what he thought and what he said, what he did to the animals as if they were human.

'Since you are condemned to an absence of freedom,' he said, 'you cannot have the freedom to think. Whoever cannot think cannot hear arguments. It would have been better to leave you where you were, outside these railings erected by humans, where you have as little need of arguments as of the troughs of the royal kitchens. I cannot lead to think any whom I have already groundlessly punished with slavery, whom I have rendered unused to thinking, and have robbed even of the assurance of tongue and nose.'

As he spoke in this vein he gingerly opened the doors to the cages. 'If you will obey me,' he continued, 'and I would have advised my pupils no differently, you should take the holiday to which you are entitled. Pupils who love the cane need holidays in order to know that they love the forest even more.'

The cage doors now stood wide and the animals gathered timidly, fearing freedom and terrified by the offer of wide plains. By and by a few came doubtfully forward: turtles crawled up to check the gap in the railings for hazards. Others came

behind the protective wall of the great humped shells. And at last a silent procession – turtles to the fore – pulled slowly out through the open gate. Their expressions were anything but triumphant. They seemed rather to say: *your* risk, Nuashi.

Only gradually did the pace pick up, until at last they vanished into the forest on the horizon. After Nuashi had watched the last distant swirls of dust disappear, he turned angrily to those who had stayed behind, the insulted turkeys, resentful pheasants, the calves that had shrunk back as the gates opened, and the oxen who stood doltishly staring.

‘You’re behaving like animals,’ he said, as if speaking to his pupils. ‘I realise that before this you had no idea you were prisoners; tomorrow you will already be of the opinion that it was I who invented cages and the separation of the world into freedom and cages. You failed to understand the argument of the open door. You are lost to your own language which I offered you; for our language you are unripe. I sent the others on holiday. But you are dismissed, as I dismiss pupils who are swots, fat and stupid, who squint upwards and love school rules because they are forced to obey them.’ And because the sorcerer was still nearby he added, ‘I have spoken to you just as I speak to my pupils.’

At this monstrous comparison, a peacock flaunted his huge gorgeous wheel of a tail to demonstrate that he was no pupil but a royal showpiece. Nuashi turned away in disgust, and with a whistle that only sorcerers whistle, summoned the cook. But Nuashi, amid great jubilation and against the wishes of the king, was raised ceremoniously to the last-ever chair of the Sixth Degree.

Now that Olo’s tale was done, he began to help Yegussa learn it. By heart, word for word. “You have thirty years before you,” Olo said, “to let it become inexact. After I am dead. Until *your* Yegussa comes. The foundation must be exact.” But Yegussa was a quick and happy learner; he needed only one night, which of course he found long.

“Do you have any more stories like that?” he asked when he had finished.

DAY 3

Olo tells of foot races, and delivers yet more shocks to Yegussa

“In the beginning,” Olo began next day, “it was a thousand stories we were meant to pass on, but it happened that prisoners sat alone for twenty years, or even fifty. And their life here consisted of two lives; in between the learning and the passing-on they were as good as dead. But there were others who every day told themselves the stories so as not to forget, but have them on hand for every eventuality.

“Among our predecessors there was not one who in his old age did not harbour the hope that perhaps he would at last acquire another comrade of the darkness, to whom he could in some haste pass on the stories. And some even prepared shortened versions, in case they grew too old to hand them down complete. There was not one who did not fear daily that he would die too soon, severing the chain of messengers and leaving only emptiness behind. There was none who was not daily vexed at the thought of being forgotten, or afraid that up in Molussia there were no more successors, that the passion for Truth had vanished from the city and the desire for change had died away. For here

below, how could any guarantee be given that Truth would survive, unless the rulers up there sent witnesses to Truth down here as prisoners? As long as punishments were given, there was always hope. Often your predecessors grew despondent, and I did too; often we thought we were suffering for a cause not any less lost than ourselves; and each of us had to come to terms with it.

“But we all held out – what else to do but hold out? – and every one of us fended off death until his successor was sent down. We are many, we could fill this space, and we could say we and show solidarity and pat each other on the shoulder; but none ever knew more than two: his teacher, and his pupil. Some were prevailed on to keep alive a long while, and by careful breathing to attain an unnatural age. They stopped counting their years. For they knew that the greater the number of years, the fewer the stories they would be able to pass on. But the story-teller of the Third generation died just after the five hundredth tale – the rest are lost; and even the Fifth could make it no farther than three hundred – the rest are lost; I’ve heard only a few, and I suspect that I am very old.

“The time is coming, Yegussa, when soon all may be lost; and it will all have been for nothing that the witnesses to Truth passed on the truth one to another, a whole chain, through the darkness of centuries.”

The thought of this terrified Yegussa.

“Molussia,” the deep voice continued, “will one day be shattered to the ground, and what today lies highest shall lie lowest. For the day of earthquakes and for those who come after, we hand down the heritage of Truth. So that Molussia shall know from this day on what it has been, and so that it shall not perish in its new age without knowing the truth of its former age of deceptions. For as long as it remained deceived it knew little of itself. But I fear it will know even less of what it was, once the age of deceptions is over. It might finally, in the hour of its victory, be the loser.

“Only a few stories remain. But even fifty are a lot, if they have been preserved long enough for all fifty to be passed on, word for word. Just as we had to learn endurance and endless patience, so, should it be necessary, must we learn impatience and the footrace. You must pester me, Yegussa, not to die before I am ready, and to tell stories as if in a footrace” (this Yegussa promised) “and I must pester you, Yegussa; for I cannot move on to the second tale until you have learned the first, word for word, so that it is not changed or passed on in garbled form.” (This too did Yegussa promise.) “And even if you do learn them, Yegussa, the whole cargo must soon spill loose, for soon there will be no more than twenty tales, perhaps no more than three.”

The deep voice paused.

“What are you thinking?” the lighter voice enquired.

“I am thinking,” the other spoke very slowly, “of the last one languishing here, you or your Yegussa or his Yegussa; he is very old and has but one tale left; and no one comes to take it off him. He dies and the next prisoner comes only after he is dead, a prisoner only, and no despatch rider. He dies, and only then is it all spilled and gone, and no one emerges, no last prisoner from the dungeon, in order to pass on what has been passed on a hundred times. That’s all I was thinking of.”

“That cannot be,” cried Yegussa, very shocked.

"I hoped you would say that," answered Olo, highly satisfied to have brought Yegussa to the right frame of mind. And he lay down on his side.

NIGHT

Every lineage is the only one

"Isn't it possible," asked Yegussa in the middle of the night, "that there are other lineages than ours? Other dynasties of despatch riders? Maybe next door, passing on Truth like us? And who know as little of us as we of them? And on the day of spillage they'll emerge, the last of every line, and what one has forgotten the others will know?"

"Do you always look for new exits and alleviations?" growled Olo.

"Don't you hope so?"

"What have my hopes to do with it?" scoffed Olo. He said, with emphasis: "Each lineage must act as if it's the only one." And having spoken, turned over and slept.

In the night Olo began again, though Yegussa had meanwhile fallen asleep. He spoke not too loud, so as not to waken Yegussa. And not too soft, in order to reach Yegussa's ears. This is what the despatch riders called *instilling*.

"We gamble on the improbable," he began. "Who says we may believe a thing efficacious just because we toil away at it? Hope is easier than persistence. To every one of us it was clear that he was almost certainly talking into emptiness, that the line of despatch riders would one day be broken. We are dreadfully the hostages of chance. Attachment to Truth also means acknowledging Chance. But we must exclude chance where we can: without hope, but with all our strength."

This was the bleak moral he instilled into Yegussa, and it found its way to the sleeping man. But what he achieved with it he discovered only next morning.

DAY 4

Relapse: Yegussa has the darkness-willies

Next morning he woke Yegussa by whistling a couple of notes, and was happy to have someone to wake up. "Today you'll hear the story of the despatch rider," he announced.

Yegussa had already plugged fingers into his ears to block him out. "Keep your despatch rider," he whispered menacingly. Olo could hardly believe his ears.

"Do you have the darkness-willies?" he asked after a while.

"I tell you," Yegussa whispered (and Olo held both hands out to ward him off), "you leave the despatch rider where he is."

"Well," said Olo, as if it were just any other night behind him. And while Yegussa played the recalcitrant child, Olo recited: "To your right you have no one, and no one to your left, with whom to establish solidarity. We find solidarity only backwards and forwards. I am the Seventeenth. But all seventeen are *one* prisoner. We spent years waiting, and each one repeated in solitude what it was that he had to pass on. We are *one* memory, come here, I'll show you. So that you too will pass it on, and so that the Last will recall the youth of the First as his own youth; so that he thinks of the lives of

those that will come after as his own life; and so that he may climb up, up into the streets of Molussia, as one who has no need to chide himself for having done nothing all those three hundred years." And after a pause he asked: "So will you do it?"

But Yegussa was not the least bit moved. "Have done with your reciting," he cried, and flailed about himself to prevent any approach. And it seemed they wanted to put him into another body, and it wouldn't be death and wouldn't be going on living, just an illegitimate intermediate concept.

"Everyone has had the darkness-willies here," Olo assured him, "especially at the beginning. I did too. But in the end I listened."

"You, maybe. Not me. You can bet your boots. Just try and start."

"The first despatch rider," Olo began sedately, "was a woman."

"Shame about the words," Yegussa interrupted. "You're speaking to a brick wall."

"Just like the First," Olo declared calmly. "She spoke until she was listened to."

"And even if I did listen, I wouldn't pass it on. And if I did pass it on, it would be totally garbled." There was more despair than menace in Yegussa's whispered warning.

Now Olo gave up. "Do you think to punish *me* with your sabotage?"

"There's nothing to sabotage. We're not fighters. We're sat here in the dark. *We gambled on the improbable.* That's what you said."

With these words Yegussa's nerve broke. He wanted to say more, but all that came out was a weeping with gulps and gasps that filled Olo, for thirty years unused to such, with horror. He tried to make soothing gestures. But his solitude had made him so timorous that the hand he extended was at once withdrawn. He would have to postpone the story of the First.

NIGHT

Dumped down here and packed away

Here we are upon this Earth,
No blighter can dispute it,
Dumped down here, packed away since birth,
Until we kick the bucket.

No one knows why we are here,
No one's ever seen the end.
No one pays the stated fare –
Just we ourselves.
Dumped down here, packed away since birth,
We stand around, here on the Earth.

No one vowed to make life good,
No welfare guarantees
To steer us through the neighbourhood,
Without risk of broken knees.

No one knows why we are here,
No one's ever seen the end.
No one pays the stated fare –
 Just we ourselves.
 Dumped down here, packed away since birth,
 We stand around, here on the Earth.

Whims of legal-seeming chance
 Brought us into being.
 The door that every jailhouse flaunts
 Greets every newborn's crying.

No one knows why we are here,
No one's ever seen the end.
No one pays the stated fare –
 Just we ourselves.
 Dumped down here, packed away since birth,
 We stand around, here on the Earth.

So sang Yegussa, and he sang it with desperate enthusiasm.

"What's all this?" asked Olo, and he seemed annoyed.

"It's what we sang when none of us could find work. And when we stood around, and were simply there."

"The song is unusable," Olo decided. "It *complains*, but doesn't complain *about* anything. Forget it forthwith."

DAY 5

Bingo, or the Dialectical Career

Next morning Olo felt he owed Yegussa some distractions after the recent impositions. "If you like," he said, "you can order up a story. What kind of story would you like?"

Yegussa was flabbergasted. "Well," he said, considering, and tried to compile a recipe that would surely be beyond Olo's powers "The story must be true but like a fable, and scary, but amusing. Off you go."

"If that's all," mused Olo, who as yet probably had no clue what he was going to say, "it fits exactly the story of Bingo, who toiled in a Usalian silver mine, took life by the scruff, declared that the world posed no difficulties, always showed a merry and inviting face, and was loved by his superiors no less than by his comrades."

Yegussa was amazed by the prompt response.

"Unfortunately, Bingo was loved by his superiors so much," improvised Olo, "that one day he became a strike-breaker. And with that, Bingo's fabulous scary amusing career took off." He paused for effect. Yegussa seemed to have lost his tongue. Olo continued, not missing a beat:

When his comrades saw that strike-breaking was more profitable than striking, they quickly came over to his side. He made no objection, but demanded that they place

solidarity above all else, and never break strikes by themselves, only in coordination with him; for none should earn his pay by going solo. They were all fully for solidarity. Whether with strikers or with strike-breakers: solidarity is solidarity. And in the end – as proved by the strike-breaking premium – they also raised the standard Pariah wage.

‘In return for your solidarity,’ declared Bingo when they reached fifteen in number, ‘I declare our list closed. We need strikers. They’re a prerequisite for strike-breaking. The more of the workforce that join us, the lower the rate for strike-breaking. Should the entire workforce be ours? Do you know what that would mean? It would be sabotage, it would be suicide.’ And so they kept to fifteen.

To the strike committee, the exclusivity of Bingo’s group, which at the start they called the Yellow-bellies, was a huge relief, since the danger that more people would go over to the strike-breakers was averted in this surprising manner. So it happened more than once that strikers, in concert with Bingo’s group, brought illegal strike-breakers, so-called Sixteeners, to their senses, and forced them to join the strike.

But Bingo’s power showed itself most clearly in relation to the mine’s management. Whether his group would join the strike or not depended each time on his demands. Weapons posed no problem: management approved their issue. Special bonuses on strike days: management conceded. Permanent higher wages: conceded. And so Bingo, although officially still a worker, after just half a year had formed a business within the business, a new power on the side not of the administration, which he plundered, nor of his comrades, whom he betrayed. *Watch out for Number One* was his motto, and did he watch out!

After a year or so, around the turn of the century, when the great wave of strikes began to sweep over every Usalian enterprise, Bingo called his Fifteen together. ‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘the signs of the times are unmissable. The hour demands that we take by the scruff the opportunities of this new age. Strikes today are a public phenomenon, so we too must become a public institution.’ The Fifteen seemed to differ. ‘Comrades,’ he continued, ‘we’re a narrow, outdated and unprofitable business, paid by a single enterprise. Are we content to be paid by just one, when all have need of us? When all are prepared right now to pay us the same rates?’

‘No,’ they cried, unanimous.

‘Comrades! You are my core troops. I know each of you personally.’ He drew a pouch from his pocket and went from man to man pinning a little badge to each chest. ‘From today your pay is doubled. From today, each of you is an officer. For from tomorrow there will be fifteen *hundred* of us, and each of you will have a hundred privates at your back. We’re the Strike-breaker Brigade, for public deployment. Whoever pays us is insured against strikes. Whoever ignores us will have to pay, and swiftly. Our name is THE EMERGENCY. Emergencies everywhere.’ They bellowed back: ‘Emergencies everywhere!’ And Bingo set to work.

Two weeks later around forty enterprises had subscribed to Bingo’s services, so every other enterprise had to do the same, unless they wanted to risk being the first to suffer a strike emergency. The Brigade was kept busy; the entrepreneurs were satisfied, even though the subscriptions amounted to considerably more than their

tax bill. But the subscriptions reached outrageous sums, when a year later Bingo announced a refinement to his methods. He specified that from now on subscriptions would comprise two elements. Obviously the basic subscription would continue as before. But on top of this he demanded a so-called *abstention fee*, on the basis of which he undertook *not* to break strikes at competing enterprises.

This fee was of course paid by every enterprise. And so Bingo had the opportunity to play each employer off against the others, and increase his rates immensely. The only enterprise that could expect Bingo's help was the one that paid more than the competition. But they never knew in advance if they had paid more. So they competed to bribe Bingo with fantastic sums, in the eternal hope that they were paying more than their competitors. And Bingo's business flourished.

Now that these methods had proved their worth so splendidly, in the fourth year Bingo began, tentatively at first, to extort the workforce. He demanded an abstention fee that committed him to act fairly, and guaranteed that he wouldn't break a strike. The workforce, whose strike fund was far from adequate to come up with his asking price, went off that very day to the management of the competing enterprise, which of course had the biggest interest in the success of their strike. They were promptly given the required sum, and Bingo, in whose hands it lay within the hour, began to implement his principle on a systematic basis. And so everything flowed into Bingo's coffers.

Newspapers close to him, and probably financed by him, declared Bingo the only truly neutral entity between the factory barons and their workers. Ridiculous as it may sound, in this lie there actually lay a kernel of truth. For Bingo was no entrepreneur in the traditional sense. He was a much more modern phenomenon. He exploited the entrepreneurs' exploitation principle just as ruthlessly as he exploited the workers' class struggle. It was not as a member of the ruling class that he became a millionaire, rather he fattened himself on the contradictions in the dominant system. Also, in his mode of working he was totally different from the factory barons. They had to go on working just as hard as before. And the bigger their enterprise, the bigger their burden of toil. Bingo, on the other hand, worked less the more his power grew. His income was drawn from a thousand fantastically high abstention fees. And the members of his strike-breaker brigade, who often had no strike to break for months on end, strutted through the streets of Usalia like army officers in peacetime: figures of intimidation, prestige and display.

He even survived, with little difficulty, the months-long great wave of strikes in Usalia. True, at that time three competing gangs appeared, raised in imitation of Bingo's brigade under foreign names by entrepreneurs facing collapse (*Yellow-belly Bingoists* the workers mocked them). These offered the same services as Bingo's force at much lower cost, and in particular stepped in where Bingo, highly paid not to operate, did not. Their not unreasonable hope that this business would restore them to health went unfulfilled. Bingo, who could pay his men much higher wages than the Yellow-belly chiefs could pay theirs, promptly bought up the competing gangs, formed them into a special brigade, armed them heavily and used them to keep him safe from any further attempts to create a cheaper strike-breaking force.

The big entrepreneurs, victims of Bingo's extortion, weren't too unhappy with this solution. True, most no longer had a clue where they stood in the web spun by Bingo, and never knew who was friend and who was foe, who should be backed and who resisted if they themselves wanted to benefit. But they continued to believe that Bingo's victory kept them safe from dependence on a second extortion organisation, and they wouldn't have been averse to seeing his forces become regular Usalian troops, supported by their taxes. In any case, their dependence on Bingo was much greater than they suspected. For Bingo, using straw men, had invested his enormous earnings in their enterprises, not least in order to keep them solvent; and hence what they gave him was, unbeknownst to them, put back to work in their businesses. As investments belonging to Bingo, of course.

This method of gradually becoming master of his masters had not occurred to him in the earliest stages. Indeed, he went so far to cover his tracks that once, in the fifth year of his career, he even fought on the side of the workers. This was in the end significant, for in Usalia there were not just two hostile forces, the employers and the employed, not just three, for the competing entrepreneurs were no less deadly; but too many to calculate. Anyway, one day a Yellow-belly corps appeared for the third time, seeking to challenge Bingo's monopoly. When this corps tried to break a spinners' strike that he'd promised the director of a competing spinner concern to let go ahead, he sent in his special forces. The Yellow-bellies were trapped between the striking workers and Bingo's brigade, and wiped out. The representatives of the striking workforce couldn't thank Bingo enough for his help, in public. And they too campaigned to have his troops nationalised, as the only force in a position to secure peace and order and safeguard human life. After this event he became the undisputed ruler of Usalia.

Thus spake Olo, and laid him down to sleep.

DAY 6

The Tale of the First Despatch Rider, or 'Speaking to Empty Air'

Next morning Olo started off with no reference to his earlier abortive attempt:

The first despatch rider was a woman. When she'd been brought below by the trusty with not a word said, and the door slammed shut behind her, she was truly alone. She was neither a First nor a Last, none of the long line of many, such as you and I, just a solitary person who was in prison and had no right to hope for anything any more. After a day spent carefully feeling over all the walls, and checking everywhere for signs of knocking, so she was now certain there was no other human in her vicinity, apart perhaps from the trusty himself who might be sitting even now outside her door, she resolved to appoint him her listener, and on the second day of her stay began to narrate her didactic stories.

'Jailer,' she began, speaking into empty air. 'Jailer, you're no less a prisoner than me; imprisoned by my imprisonment, compelled to compel the prisoner. Jailer, listen to me.' And she began her story. She repeated it day after day, and day after day she began a new story with the same formal invitation.

Until after some years – and what really is a year? – the trusty happened to stand outside her door, to bring her away for interrogation or execution. He was amazed to hear the woman murmuring in the cell, and listened outside for half an hour. ‘Who are you talking to there?’ he asked through the door. The murmuring stopped. ‘Who are you talking to?’

‘To you, jailer,’ the woman replied with no surprise in her voice, and at once continued with her usual words: ‘You are no less a prisoner than I; imprisoned by my imprisonment, compelled to compel the prisoner. Listen to me and pass it on.’

‘Do you often talk like this?’ the trusty enquired, and he entered the cell.

‘Every day,’ she answered matter-of-factly, as if he were an old acquaintance.

‘Who to, every day?’ the trusty asked.

‘To you of course, who else.’ The trusty was no brute.

‘Yes, of course,’ he corrected himself, as if it were self-evident she’d been speaking to him every day for years, and as if he’d momentarily forgotten. ‘To me, of course. I shall pass it on.’ And gave her a consoling whack before taking her away.

“How do we know?” asked Yegussa. And he too said nothing of the previous night.

“The trusty was the second despatch rider,” Olo replied, “thirty years later.”

“And the stories she told?” asked Yegussa. Olo tried to remain calm, though he found the slowness of Yegussa’s thoughts hard to bear. “That they are all lost,” he said, “is something you can tell yourself. All we know is that the First told stories. For five years. Into empty air. The Second, too, knew no more than this.”

“And what happened to her can happen to us as well?”

“Why else do you think I’m telling you this?”

Next morning Olo ascertained to his satisfaction that Yegussa, woken from his sleep, could recite the story word for word. So he embarked on the next one.

DAY 7

Each one is the First

“What’s more,” said Olo, “the First was in an interesting condition on arrival.”

“And she gave birth down here?” asked Yegussa, shocked.

“Gave birth, and nursed. And when her milk dried up, she pushed him out through the flap there.”

Yegussa looked into the dark to where he knew the flap was. “How do we know?” he asked.

“From the First,” Olo replied.

“And what became of the babe, up there?”

Olo was expecting this query. “He’ll have become a foundling, up there. Then something or other, maybe a soldier. Of course a soldier, like all of them. Or a slave-catcher. Of course, like all of them. Or a jailer. For example: a jailer down here. Let’s say: a jailer down here.”

"Down here?" Yegussa repeated quite loudly. "A jailer down here? Is it true?"

"Without a doubt," Olo now decided. "Assuming the child lived. And if it was a boy. And if it really was taken away up there."

All Yegussa heard was *without a doubt*. He left all the *ifs* aside. "So that's why she had the child? So he could come back down as a jailer? And that's why it was born."

Olo pretended puzzlement: "Who are these objections aimed at?"

"And that's why she nursed it."

"Oh no," Olo answered, "definitely not for that. But do you think we're a *tribe*? That firm beliefs live in our blood? That decisions can be inherited? That thoughts are innate? That we came branded into the world? And that the son of the First must have known who he was?"

"Still, it's outrageous," said Yegussa firmly. "Each must begin at the beginning," Olo concluded. "Each one is the First."

The Approved Text

"Our previous conversation," Olo began after a while, "was already known to me. If it wasn't so dark here, you'd be able to see: where *I* sit is the seat of the Seventeenth, the older partner. Where *you* sit is my old seat, the seat of the younger partner."

"Was it so much like that other conversation then?" asked Yegussa, rather insulted.

"Then is now," Olo assured him. "The conversation was foreseen, and your answers were nothing but the approved text. It is not *you* who felt outrage that the son of the First might have become a jailer here below; and not *you* who was the first to turn him into a great revolutionary. It was the *younger partner*." (Whether Olo spoke the whole truth, whether the conversation back then and today really did repeat itself – how could he prove it? But he himself had been lied to in just this way and for the same reasons, thirty years before.) "You recited your lines, without a single mistake."

Yegussa had had enough of not being meant to be himself. Being praised for it was too much. "But I never learned those lines," he cried, "and never had them in my hand."

"They reached out to you," declared Olo, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "They are bigger than you."

"And time?" Yegussa asked, incredulous.

"It rolls on up there straight ahead, for there it has room. And every hour is in a new place. But here it swings in circles and can't escape. The Thirteenth likened it to a lioness behind the bars of a cage; she paces about and turns around almost in her own length; in the evening she lies down as if after a long trek; and when the bars one day give way, she won't have forgotten how to walk."

DAY 8

The Earthship

“Exactly midway between Molussia and Grusia,” Olo began, “lies the island of Rapedusa. Plumb in the middle of this island, equidistant from the eastern and the western breakwaters, in the middle of the oldest garden district stands a tall fossilised mast, to which still cling several fragments of rope made hard by age, wind and salt.”

“How did a ship end up in the middle of the land?” asked Yegussa.

“It did not end up inland. It was merely a symbol. Some even called it a fake, renewed time and again. Anyway, it was a famous sight, wrapped in national pride and number-magic. It was said that the original Rapedusans sacrificed it to the demons of the mainland and dug it into the soil to attest to their oath never to abandon the island, but to remain settled there as they have been since ever and ever.”

“Hm,” grunted Yegussa. “And how did the ship come to Rapedusa, actually?”

“It didn’t come. Rapedusa came to it.” And now Olo’s story started for real:

In so-called prehistoric times, there was very vigorous traffic in goods between Molussia and Grusia. The voyage took seven weeks. During the passage the pilots and crew, despite shift changes, grew exhausted negotiating the many perilous shoals, reefs and whirlwinds. The casualties, losses of goods and crew exceeded what the shipping companies had allowed for. And so, as the business grew ever less profitable, they decided that one of their great vessels, the *Rapedusa*, should be stationed exactly midway between Molussia and Grusia, three and a half weeks distant from each port. Anchored on every side, it would to some extent form a refuge in the World Ocean. The Molussian crews aimed for it so they could get some sleep; from there Grusians took over for the voyage to Grusia, where they rested before the return voyage back to the *Rapedusa*. There they were relieved in turn by the first crew, and they in turn awaited the next vessel.

The *Rapedusa*’s anchorage was shallow. Seaweed became attached to the short anchor chains, shellfish became attached to the seaweed, and sand settled in between the seaweed and the shellfish. Creeping plants took root in the sand, and little fishes were caught up in the creepers, and after two years a muddy immobile mound united the sea floor with the body of the ship. The higher the sand climbed, the more things settled on it. Two years later it was possible to disembark occasionally and take a stroll on the belt of sand around the vessel. The sailors began to fish. Every year new layers accumulated, and after five years the captain planted a bush beside the ship. When finally, during an unusually stormy spring, three cutters ran aground broadside on and blocked incoming waves, the first flower-garden in the World Ocean was created. It will have been not too long after this that a few sailors’ brides, Molussian girls along with light brown maidens from Grusia, arrived to settle on the *Rapedusa*, or rather on Rapedusa. They set up little booths from which they sold a selection of inessential but extraordinarily nostalgic items; they imported domestic fowl, brought children into the world. In short ...

“I get it,” said Yegussa, “but – why does nobody know this story?”

“The Rapedusans,” declared Olo, “want to be Rapedusans, not cross-breeds. And their wish is for their land to have been created by the gods of Nature, and not just be the hulk of some ancient bucket.”

“Vanity, then.” Olo gave a little shake of the head. “You might say so,” he said. “But have you ever pondered the eons when you were dead? – the death *before* your birth?”

“No,” admitted Yegussa. “That thought makes me giddy.”

“You see,” Olo concluded.

DAY 9

Back to Nature

“It is quite plausible,” Olo began that evening seemingly à propos of nothing, “that you actually have your origins in the Plain of Penx.” (Yegussa contested this.) “For in the time of the Fourth, there ruled in Molussia a demand for wool that could hardly be met. So sheep meadows were needed. But there were none to be had.”

Yegussa saw no connection between the place of his birth and the demand for wool and the time of the Fourth.

“Then the Magnates – who officially resided in the countryside but in reality lived in their villas in Molussia and Penx – invoked ancient documents proving that the serfs who had for centuries populated the Plain of Penx and grew maize and vegetables for the Magnates on the Magnates’ land had never actually had a formal right of tenancy and for the whole time had simply been tolerated there. And so the Magnates invoked these documents – wool being more profitable than maize – and declared the Plain of Penx to be sheep grazing land.”

“Declared? What does such a declaration look like?”

“They cleared the villages.”

“What provision did they make for the outcasts?”

“They were freed, in compensation for their serfdom.”

“And where did these freed people go?”

“Of course, even then it was already illegal to be a vagrant. And tramping across the Plain was illegal and subject to penalties. Many were arrested. But most found their way unmolested to the big cities, to Penx and Molussia City, where they filled the poor quarters, and being willing to work at any price caused wages to fall, arousing antagonism from the local proletariat, and ended up as weavers in the textile factories of those who just days earlier had been their owners.

“Ten years later, of course, they were local and urban enough to resent every new arrival. Their ailments, needs and habits no longer betrayed anything of the countryside. And their children were such typical city kids they had no idea if their parents had come from the east or the west of the country, or even if they had come from outside the city at all. Penx and Molussia City were collecting-ponds for all those fleeing the land.”

Now Yegussa understood why he too might have originated in the Plain of Penx.

"They might be considered," Olo continued, "the usual yeast of the big city. The ugliness of their speech, cobbled together from numerous village idioms, revealed their *natural plebeianism*. And their poverty attested to their *squalor, gracelessness, vulgarity, absence of a refined class, and total lack of understanding with regard to Nature*. That's what the newspapers said."

"But then I might come from *every* corner of Molussia," Yegussa cried, bewildered.

"That's certainly true. Everyone comes from everywhere. Is that so surprising?"

Yegussa, who had never pondered such matters, found it not just surprising but downright unnatural. "I never heard it said," he said, "that I was put together from so many pieces and come from so many places. So where's my true home supposed to be?"

"Molussia City," Olo answered drily. "Where you were born. Do you think you'd have been born different in the villages? Maybe straight from the soil? Nature's child?"

"Course not," Yegussa's voice mumbled.

"Everyone's a mongrel. And everyone's a bastard. Otherwise they'd all die out."

Yegussa could counter none of this, but his astonishment only grew.

"The many villages from which you were driven," Olo continued, "all fell into dreadful ruin. Dried-up gardens. Roads overgrown. It was rewilding for profit. And where maize still grew, it grew for too long and the cobs were pitiful. Nothing but Nature, actually."

"How you keep on about Nature."

Olo remained unperturbed. "But Nature was simply biding her time. She'd been lying in wait. And she came."

"So Nature can *come*?!"

"Yes she can. And she came decked out in all her poetical attributes: *drab and magnificent*. Those were the catchwords. What else do you know of Nature?"

Yegussa had no idea what Olo was asking him.

"*Filled with true Molussian melancholy*," Olo continued. "What else?"

"*Sparse*," Yegussa ventured.

"*Hard to distinguish*," Olo went on, "*from the earth-coloured flocks of wethers*."

"*To be compared only with the sea*," Yegussa now threw in.

"And there we have it," Olo summed up. "As if it had been lying in wait to undo all that had been, moorland crept grey and magnificent across the ground cultivated for so long and with such care; hard to distinguish from the earth-coloured flocks of wethers and filled with true Molussian melancholy, it soon resembled nothing more than most ancient Nature. No wonder that artists came, took it to their hearts, and found its sparse magnificence comparable only with the sea."

Yegussa was enjoying this.

"Or that the offspring of Magnates came on foot or horseback, noisy, bellicose, half-naked, sunburnt, very *natural* youths and maidens who traversed the wastes, slept all excited and uncomfortable in tents, imagined that no man's foot had ever trod Penx Moor, vandalised the ruins of maize-farming villages, tried to ride sheep, and had so

little clue to whom it was they owed this *Nature* that they called themselves The Youth Movement, and mocked their urbanised parents and all their moral prejudices ...” (“Must have been a fine thing,” opined Yegussa with frank enthusiasm.) “... and returned only as twenty-year-olds to the city, in order to become elegant as quickly as possible, and enter the family wool business.”

Yegussa kept silent a while. “But still, it’s a fine thing,” he said eventually, and he meant *Nature*. “Even if it was made by the wool manufacturers.”

But Olo seemed asleep already.

After a further pause, Yegussa asked: “Did they invent the concept of *Nature*?” Clearly he had been thinking it over.

Olo betrayed nothing of his joy at this success. “That’s beside the point,” he said. “They preserved and applied the concept. Mark well: *the application is more important than the origin*. What’s worth knowing is only who has an interest in its preservation. That it arose in this place or that is irrelevant.” And he lay back down a second time.

NIGHT

Duet in the Catacombs

Here’s what Yegussa sang that evening:

I’m a good Molussian kid,
I earn a bit by busking,
’Cos of our eight hungry mouths
And ’cos our health is heading south,
And ’cos our Mum likes drinking.
I’m a good Molussian kid,
But Mother likes her dram.
And we’re just hoi-polloi.
But, nightly, little orphan I
Went out to catch a man.

Molussian kid, so cute and shy,
Went out to catch a man.
’Hey magnate’s son, fancy a try?
How nice we both just happened by,
And the night drags so, alone.’
‘OK,’ he said, ‘Molussian kid,’
And the night flew by on wings.
He even called me a lady born,
And the harbour breeze blew in till dawn
Smelling of kelp and tar and things.
Now I’m to have a Molussian kid.
Have it. Oh yes. Praise God.
Ere long we’ll be *nine* hungry mouths,
And our health – still heading south.
But all is fine – praise God.

“And what’s all this again?” asked Olo grumpily. Yegussa, instead of answering thusly:

“What’s all this again!?” Up there I had someone, a busker, not even a street singer, more a back-alley girl, *totally* unpolitical, and maybe you don’t think it’s tragic enough, and what has this to do with despatch riders? She was a busker, even if only a back-alley busker, and boy, you’d notice her. One of those who drifted in from the crofts of Penx to sing, when I was traipsing about at the time, and singing. And she wasn’t exactly a good singer, she even sang a tad wrong, but she sang truths instead of lies, and her singing was sad instead of smug, so I came to a stop and looked around to see who it was that sang so wrong and didn’t notice, and sang so sadly without meaning to and sang truths ’cos she knew no better. And who looked a bit mentally subnormal when she sang, like a fish snapping at air, her head held crooked. And who wiggled about hypocritically, I tell you, just like some innocent pleading before a judge. But who looked different later, of that I can assure you, didn’t look at all like ... no one could imagine ... she couldn’t keep still, not for a minute, when she was all done in ... and out of breath ... you couldn’t take your eyes off of her. And who earned nary a copper yen, because she sang wrong. And because she sang sincerely and sang truths and because she sang like a schoolgirl until all the windows in the tenement courtyard shut for the night. And who I sang for, my songs, and who I gave half my earnings to because she sang truths, or because I wanted her; or who I wanted because I’d given her half my earnings; or because she was really amazed at my singing, like it was authentic Art. And was a semi-free like I was a semi-free, which was comforting, as if we came from the same family, and so the tendernesses started. And who had a voice, but only when she’d sung it all out, you’d have pricked up your ears, and who called out Hallo and who linked our arms and ate out of my hand until we moved on to the next courtyard where she began again like a pious schoolgirl with her head crooked on her shoulder. And who was soon singing my songs, and then we sang duets, and who I called my second voice and nothing else, and who I called my first voice and who was always content with everything, worked really hard at being content but she said she wasn’t, not at all, and I ought to have known her before I got to know her. And who in the summer went out to the Plains of Penx and always had stones in her shoes and could hardly walk. And who lived on brambleberries and windfalls, and could never pass an apple by. And who made caves in the cornfields like great big nests and didn’t sing at all there, you can be sure of that because I was there wasn’t I. But we weren’t comfortable, I have to say, if it wasn’t the thorns it was the dust. And if it wasn’t the dust it was the damp. And who was scared when reapers came with their scythes – but they reaped everything except where we were, they left us unreaped, so the corn stood around us like a guard of honour and we were like on an island in the bare field. And who at evening time when we crawled out had to tell the reapers how old she was, better if we crawled out together, for they all thought it wasn’t worth it, she looked too young. And who answered the reapers that we were both young but she’d already had twins, and I don’t know to this day if that was actually a lie. And who’s up there somewhere, maybe, I don’t know, maybe only three feet over our heads, what’s three feet, over your head too, old man, and if you had the slightest understanding it would be an honour for you too. And who’s maybe singing right now, not prettily perhaps, even a bit reedy and all the wrong notes, what do I care, she can stop at any moment: but I’m sitting down here below. And anyone who listened hard enough would maybe hear her singing, don’t snore so, Olo,

I'm trying to listen, she's probably singing sad and sincere and a hundred percent the truth and has forgotten all the words. But maybe it's all still there and she's singing what I brought to her, verses that magicked so much money from the windows that she grew happy and I had to hide myself all the while in the entry ..."

... Yegussa, instead of answering in such manner, ducked out and gave the tersest response: "A beggar girl's song from up there."

"It's of no value," Olo judged. "Learn instead what you hear now." He began to sing:

Overcrowded hovels breed
Casual couplings, dangerous games.
Ask permission? Ah, what need.
Every No is brushed aside.
From close contact coupling comes.
Social rules, see how they play
To hem them in, this young pair.
Stop!

Why?

'A place to stay.'
'We were cold.' 'Just met today.'
'No other choices for us here.'
And see, now they stop at nothing,
Hands already at their work,
Stripping one another's clothing,
And a third is with them writhing –
On the wall, a shadow dark.

Such a melancholy mating,
With no word, no look, no dream.
When they finish consummating,
Severed shadow falls deflating
Back into the room.

But from the lofty window frame
An evil whining: "God is great.
You've created in his name
Out of daddy's fertile semen
And the mummy's womb – Amen –
Me, the Third. It's done! Too late!

'You two summoned me to come.
Can you feed me as and when?
Coal? Nappies? Milk? Crumbs?
Don't think I'll just suck my thumbs!
With blare of trumpets, beating drums,
I begin.'

This did Olo sing. The second time, Yegussa joined in two octaves higher. And their voices rang out, loud and menacing.

DAY 10

Nature as prevention. Nothing is 'simply there'

"But the mountains in Salkia," Yegussa asserted next morning, "they're definitely Nature. For three whole weeks I tramped around over there. Nothing but brambles and lizards. Not another soul. No livestock. No one making use of anything. The mountains are simply there."

"No such thing," replied Olo. "The mountains in Salkia are silver mountains. They belong to the Pem family. The Pems exploit them from morn till night. And they turn a tidier profit than all their other mines."

"That's where you're out of date," Yegussa claimed. But Olo stuck by his assertion:

"For when the silver lode was discovered in the Salkian Mountains, Pem, the great silver-mine entrepreneur, fell into a panic. The quantity of silver found even at the first superficial prospecting was so enormous that the price of silver fell drastically the very evening of the discovery. Pem could foresee how his business would go. At the last moment he resolved to use all his private assets to buy up the entire mountain chain. And he's owned it ever since."

"You mean he's preventing others from owning it."

"That's ownership," said Olo. "Just that. A kind of prevention. Mark well: prevention is at the same time the use. And material that's worth not exploiting is – Nature."

Yegussa kept quiet. He had a hard job processing that thought.

"You're not the first," Olo consoled him, "to face such conundrums. Pem himself faced far worse. After he'd bought up the silver region, he became non compos mentis. *I am accustomed, he said, to make something out of nothing, or out of very little. But to make nothing out of something: what a waste.*

"Every day he threatened to start exploiting the lode, transforming inert property into active. And his family had to keep watch on him from morn till night to make sure he couldn't make good his threat. In the end they took him to a sanatorium and made him a bed on the balcony so he could enjoy the wonderful panorama of his silver mountains. His last words will remind you of what you just said. For as he lay there one evening and his mountains glowed ruddy and majestic before him, he groaned in torment: *I can't feel them. And they can't feel me. They are ... simply ... there.* That's what he said, though the land around him to the far horizon and a hundred meters down belonged to him and no one else!"

NIGHT

Theory causes groans

"Aah," groaned Olo in the middle of the night, and woke himself up.

"What's the matter?" Yegussa asked, sitting up.

"I was just dreaming about our theory."

That Olo could dream about theories seemed not to surprise Yegussa overmuch. "What about our theory?"

"It's extremely well known."

"That's nothing to groan about."

"I mean Prem's theory," Olo now resolved, and he sat up. "Prem's theory, that you can spot in all the stories I tell you. For it's from that theory that we are called Premists, and it's as Premists that we sit here."

As always, Yegussa had the impression that Olo was reluctant to cough it out. "If it's so extremely well known," he needled him, "then people must surely study it, and most probably they make use of it in their lives." He hoped his reasoning would contain errors; no grounds for groaning, to be sure, but Olo might allow himself to be drawn into a discussion.

And Olo did begin to speak: "Its fame is very famous ... but who reads Prem? When he's the extremely famous Prem? Prem, whom everyone knows; who's known because his fame is so famous. Whom no one ever reads, mark you, because everyone must have already read him."

"So he's forgotten?"

"Makes sense," said Olo. "Because of his fame, buried beneath his fame. For the greatest names are the least known writers. They no longer need to make a name for themselves."

"And that's why you're groaning? Because Prem's been forgotten?" He was annoyed that the result had arrived so swiftly and without effort, before the discussion had even got started.

"Forgetting is bad," declared the older man, "but it's much worse when forgetting plays out as a legacy of the thought." (Yegussa made neither head nor tail of this.) "Ten phrases are in every mouth, out of the fifty volumes of his works. So no one notices how he's been forgotten."

"And that's why you're groaning?"

"That for ten phrases they – the poor and the poorest – form parties and fight one another, that's why I groan. For ten phrases they fling themselves into the trenches, for ten phrases they take the gloves off."

"Must be powerful phrases."

"They are. Six of them. But four don't even come from Prem."

"Is what you're trying to say," asked Yegussa, annoyed now by Olo's mystifications, "is that they're forgeries?"

"That remains to be determined. But I dreamed that there's a phrase the Secretary-general of the Molussian Premists obtained from Ursia, where as you know the Premists were victorious. In Ursia it was reported to the Party Central that Premist Gor had read in Sum, the Premist, that Lori, the Premist, had cited that this spoken phrase of which I dreamed had been one of Prem's principles. But I went on to dream that Lori had never

read Prem in Molussian, and that it was only in this way that we learned something of Prem. Hence what we know of Prem. Meaning: back-translated from wrong translations.

"I dreamed that while his books may be available everywhere, they can't compete with rumours about them that made their way in the end, unrecognisable, back to us via extremely honourable ways endorsed by every Premist authority. Anyone who knew more than that about Prem, I dreamed, even those who had seen him in person, was deemed arrogant and even an enemy. But of Prem himself, nothing more survived. That's what I dreamed.

"They reduce him," he continued, "to a prophet, him, who hated authority. In the world they struggle against they see nothing but the world that Prem turned his face against, the world of *his* time. They shoot not with the best weapons, but at best with the best of those from *his* time, with *his* weapons. They make themselves out to be modern, because they defend *his* theories that were so radical and modern in *his* time – long since adopted by his enemies, long since superseded by his enemies.

"They entrench themselves behind his philosophy of reality, and behind a theory that knows how to act: that was Prem's thesis. They don't see that the enemy and all their (as they believe) merely meditative philosophers have long since actually changed the world. They are believers in unbelief, dogmatists of enlightenment, and fanatics of the word *reality*. They sit up there in a hole, just as we sit down here."

"No one dreams that kind of thing," said Yegussa. "Is it really so?"

"And I dreamed," Olo continued, "that some of his famous phrases came from still more curious sources: namely, from outside."

"Meaning what?"

"Not from Premists, but from their enemies. Invented maliciously as *typical Premist formulations* and taken over by Premists themselves. For they are remarkably similar, Premists and their enemies – in their ignorance of Prem. The latter don't read him because he's not one of them; and the former because, at bottom, he's their extremely famous Prem."

Olo groaned again and more lustily, for he thought Yegussa understood him now. But he was gravely mistaken, for Yegussa lay back down, leaving the old man to his nocturnal anguish.

DAY 11

Green meadows. Olo and Yegussa sing in the catacombs

'Have you no shame,' asked a white man of the mulatto Gaga, 'setting yourself up as leader of the dusky folk? Doesn't the white in you rise up in disgust at this role?'

'Did the white in my father,' Gaga asked back, 'rise up in disgust when he fathered a child on the black slave, my mother?'

'So you don't feel the slightest bit different from the others?'

'You're wrong,' Gaga assured him. 'My pale skin attests to their lack of rights. I regard myself as a piece of evidence.'

"And what became of Gaga?"

“He fought for the rights of his brothers. Until he landed up here, where we sit. Down here he found an older prisoner, learned our stories from him, and discovered that the issue of liberation is bigger and more general than he’d realised. After forty years or so a jailer came shining a light. *What’s up?* the older prisoner asked. *The darkie’s to be executed,* the jailer replied, *I’m to take him up.*”

“As he was speaking he looked uncertainly from one face to the other; for Gaga’s beard had been bleached by dungeon air and his face had grown as pale as his friend’s. *Seems there’s no darkie here,* the jailer said. *You’re right,* the older prisoner replied, *there are no darkies down here.* The jailer left and they heard him checking out the other cells. And so Gaga was saved, and with him our story collection and with this the five pieces he added to the collection: the fable of the Piece of Evidence; the tale of the Jailer; the song of the Blacks; his objections to that song; and his counter-song.”

Following this introduction, Olo, as always when he was to recite what he’d learned by heart, drew his knees up to his chin, and began rocking on his toes so the rhythm could summon the words. He cleared his throat a few times, and announced:

The meek song of the Blacks

If you should die before me, brother,
And see Lord Yori on the meadows green,
Then send him, in some unknown manner
And yet sincerely, my warmest greetings.
And then greet all of my old friends,
The whole now almost reunited
Circle of the white-clad family.
Make, if you can, those now contented
Even more content, and those
Now well-consolated more so forever.
And confirm that I before too long
Laden with cakes and cigarillos,
Mouth-organs, photos of the family,
That I too at God’s wise bidding,
Soon shall abide with you forever
On meadows green. O hallelujah.

“Originally,” Olo explained, “Blacks intoned this song at the deathbed of friends and dependents; and as appropriate instead of brother addressed father, mother, sister, nephew, uncle. But the main thing was the Hallelujah. They sang it with astonishing endurance and devotion, sucking the breath in with a sob, breathing out in jubilation; no break allowed until the dying person was well and truly on the other side.

“This was supposed to ease the dying, but it also gave the singers a chance; for as long as they kept singing that one continuous sound of Hallelujah they’d begun before the death of the dying person, they believed he would hear them all along his voyage to

the heavenly spheres. And so in a way they imposed on him, and turned the dying person, whether he would or no, into a messenger, reserving a place for them.”

Yegussa was deeply impressed by this custom.

“What’s more important,” Olo went on, “is how Gaga countered this song.” Again he drew knees to chin, swayed back and forth to summon up the text, and announced:

Gaga’s objection to the song

Your words, my brothers, sung so soft and low,
And with such throaty sweetness, affect me too.
Who could resist – nay, who would ever want to –
Such sweet music? The white man, even he,
Wiped away some tears, as he passed by
While your lamenting Hallelujah sounded!
Undreamt-of honour, you’ll agree, my brothers!

But do you know the motive for his tears?
Your advantageous meekness, that was all.
Your childish faith, and nothing more, that he
For his own purposes bestowed on you.

He alone, who beat our hands and backs
Till they were soft, beat our songs too,
He alone is of our songs the author,
To honour *him* you sing your Hallelujah.

And so, to make sure that we nevermore
Sing *his* texts for *his* benefit, and garner
His so dubious applause no more,
We must take care to strip aside his words,
Bestowed so tenderly and with such blows,
And grace the newly naked melody
With new words of truth, as I shall sing:

Gaga’s counter-song

If you should die before me, brother,
And go wandering in meadows green,
No sweet Lord Yori shall you find there.
Those meadows green were promised to us
By those who stoke down here our living Hell.
That’s sad, my brother, but if we sing
A certain way, we’ll sound as sweet
As any of our former songs.

As you wander in the meadows green
And Lord Yori says to you a friendly word,
A friend in him you will never find.

For that sweet Lord was promised to us
 By those down here who take advantage
 Well and truly of our gentle patience.
 That's sad, my brother, but if we sing
 In practised manner, so much the sweeter.

As you wander in the meadows green
 And see Lord Yori garbed all in white,
 Hemmed in by happy friendly throngs,
 You'll not bestow the slightest greeting.
 Reunion up there's what was promised
 By those down here who sow dissention
 To keep us weak. That sounds sad,
 But good old ways tell us it's sweet.

If you should die before me, brother,
 And hope to see your meadows green,
 And hope Lord Yori's up there waiting
 And reunions, and greetings,
 Ah, you'll find such disappointment!
 Meadows, Yori, friends and greetings
 And the hope were promised all
 By those who hoped so much from us
 Down here. That's so sad, my brother,
 But sweet to sing in good old ways. – Hallelujah.

Olo sang a long and hearty Hallelujah. Whenever he came by detours to the last-but-one syllable he seemed to take fright at the last one and began again with the first. This was consoling, and there was no intrinsic reason why it should ever end.

At the fifth iteration Yegussa joined in two octaves higher, and their singing in the confines of the catacombs rang out fervently and full of deeply felt conviction.

NIGHT

Generations of Unbelief

During the evening Olo had told Yegussa about common points among the contending faiths. Yegussa had shown impatience.

"Those matters are all trivial," Olo conceded, "but not thereby any less important."

"That's not what I meant," said Yegussa. "But you talk about *belief* as if you understand what the word means. And as if it's the most natural thing in the world."

Olo wondered what Yegussa was driving at.

"What I can't understand," declared Yegussa, aroused to a degree that Olo found puzzling, "is that belief is even a thing. Here's this, for example: *Fivefold is Sautra's Being*. That such a proposition, supported by nothing, has its adherents in Molussia, in

Almusia, in Supolia, in Usalia, in every town and every house, in the most remote hamlets ... it's a total mystery."

"We have a great deal of other stuff to get through," Olo prompted.

"That's no explanation."

"Why not?"

"Because what I find surprising is not that so-called *belief* hasn't already been eradicated, but that it could ever have been born."

Olo had never pondered this question.

"So along they came," Yegussa fantasised, "the Knights of Belief, and they taught: Fivefold is Sautra's Being. *What does that mean*, you think the peasant would be sure to ask. *What's that?* the smith. *Why five exactly?* the cobbler. But instead the peasant says *I believe* though he can't see any Fivefold, and *I believe* says the smith and *I believe* says the baker, though he can't see any Fivefold. I say *believe*, but what were they really doing when they *believed* and what on earth did they mean when they said it?"

"That's not how it went," objected Olo.

"And didn't only say *I believe*," Yegussa persisted, still just as worked up, "but taught their children to believe and took up spear and shield and died in defence of the Fivefold and even today thousands are for the Fivefold unto the tenth generation and still haven't forgotten that they believe, people like you and me, cheesemakers and stevedores, think like me, see like me, hear, walk, sleep ... all like you and me, in the same city, at the same time ... so, please, explain to me, what do they mean when they *believe*, and what are they doing when they do it?"

"I never knew," Olo admitted, "that I no longer know it. But really, I don't know."

"It's incredible," Yegussa continued, "like a fairy tale. It would be more plausible like this: someone comes riding up and says: *You must believe in Sautra. And by the way, he's Fivefold*. Wouldn't you be astonished if he really expected you to take it up? Wouldn't you laugh him off the stage? Or pump him to check his credibility? Or ask him for witnesses? And why isn't Sautra visible?"

"And he'd reply," Olo interjected at last, "that not showing himself is Sautra's greatness. His invisibility is a proof. *For who of us is invisible?* That's how he'd argue. And demand that we *prove the contrary*."

"How could he? He's the one with the astonishing assertions, and we're supposed to bear the burden of proof?"

"The burden of proof is always on the weaker party," explained Olo.

"I would have no idea," said Yegussa, "what I was supposed to prove."

"That's a good sign," Olo confirmed. "You've gained greater victories up there than I'd assumed. And your unbelief is no longer unbelief and no rebellion and no heresy."

"The most natural thing in the world, more like. I only realised there were such things as temples after I left home."

"How times have changed!" Olo exclaimed, with all the amazement of the older generation faced with the younger. "You really should have seen us! How we set off to

do battle. And were inhibited a thousand ways in countering the dogmas. You lot had it easier. You climbed into the cosy bed the Enlightenment made.” (Yegussa had no inkling of the battles that had been fought over what seemed to him so natural.) “That’s why we never asked your sort of questions: *What is belief?* People don’t question what they’re breaking free from. *To think people still believe that*, we said with contempt. Your question requires distance.”

“So you really can’t give me an answer?”

“No, really I can’t,” said Olo, “especially as even we still believed that we believed.”

“Afterwards?” Yegussa asked, “after you’d broken free?”

“Afterwards. Of course we didn’t believe in Sautra’s fivefold nature. And didn’t believe the same way as those we’d left behind. But when we bumped into the fact that we hadn’t created ourselves” (“Hm,” Yegussa grunted understanding.) “and when we shrank from the immensity of the Universe, and when someone died – then we called our feelings religion and even believed our belief was better, freer and less prejudiced, and even more pleasing to God than the belief of those who clung to their dogmas.”

“I know that terror well,” Yegussa admitted, “and that insignificant feeling also. And the respect. But why you called it *belief*...”

“Easy for you to be wise,” Olo observed, “on our shoulders.”

“I do beg your pardon,” Yegussa ended the conversation, “I didn’t ask to be the younger.” He said no more. Around them only the darkness of the air, the solidity of dungeon walls. Outside, the hollow world, beneath them the mineshaft of generations: all bigger, more powerful, not created by them – but what about it *should* be believed?

DAY 12

How to trivialise? By eternalising

“Tell me about up there,” Olo began next morning. “But something useful. We need new stories. And if it’s about you, then leave your name out.”

This was a very difficult condition. To Yegussa it was as if Olo allowed him to breathe while at the same time keeping his mouth shut.

“The Third,” Olo clarified, “told for example things about the Second, but we assume they were actually about himself. And the Fourth attributed his own stories to his predecessors. And so on. Maybe you’ll hear mine at some point – but without recognising them as mine.”

“And can you still recognise them as yours?”

“Only with some difficulty,” Olo admitted.

“And why these myriad rituals?” Yegussa went on to ask, abhorring, he knew not why, the mummery of arbitrary custom.

“Only in the third person,” explained Olo, “can they become stories. In the first person they remain only reminiscences. I’ll show you. Tell me something. And then we’ll see who we can hang the tale on.” So Yegussa told this story:

Three years ago they were pulling together a militia to go against the Pariahs, and they really wanted my brother as a militiaman, because he was big and beefy and the best of comrades, and everyone was ready to be proud of him; but my brother wouldn't go along. One morning as we sat there, my father, him, and me, gazing at the crumbs on the table and none of us with a full tum, my brother clapped his hand on mine and said: 'It's not only us who sit like this.' My father nodded and consoled me, saying that in time it wouldn't bother me. He was famous for his patience. 'Don't think about it,' he said, but what else could I think about? He too surely did nothing but think of it as he sat there. 'Of course he must think about it,' my brother contradicted, 'and about nothing else.'

'Nonsense!' my father brushed him off.

'So he won't have to think about it later,' my brother went on. And he took my hand in his and said he'd show me worse things than hunger. 'How my comrades sell out because of hunger,' he announced, 'and *who* they sell out to, because of hunger. Pay attention, for a man must know who his enemies are.' And he wanted to take me off with him.

'Stop that,' my father shouted, this time rather less patiently, but he stayed sitting, hands on his knees. My father went hungry, his father had gone hungry, everyone had always gone hungry. There was hardness in his voice and his outrage, as if my brother had sicked up all over the best family heirloom.

'Is the misery any the less,' my brother retorted as we stood in the doorway, 'just because it's been there forever, up till today?'

At first my father made no reply. 'Believe me,' he said then, with pleading in his voice, and probably he hadn't grasped the import of my brother's question, 'believe me, it was ever so, that comrades betray our cause.' But all it was, he was anxious about me.

'It was ever so?' my brother threw back at him; 'then it's high time.'

'You're no better than them,' my father erupted, 'and just as impatient.' Impatience was the worst vice he knew of.

'And you, maybe?' my brother yelled back rudely. 'You're one of their lickspittles!' With this he dragged me through the doorway, but because I wasn't sure if I wanted to go or stay, my father had time to stand up slowly and take hold of my arm. 'You think he belongs to you?' my brother asked. I looked from him to my father and from my father back to my brother. It seemed important to me that their quarrel suddenly revolved around me, but I couldn't understand. 'He belongs not to you, not to me, and not to himself. But to others.'

'Who then?' I piped up at last. My brother said: 'I shall show you.'

Now my father slowly let go my arm, went without a word back into the room, sat on his chair where he'd been eating, and placed his hands on his knees just as before. But we went on our way.

Now Olo interrupted. "What is patience, anyway?" This *anyway* came too suddenly for Yegussa. He made no reply.

"Silent collaboration," Olo answered for him.

"And the *It-was-ever-so?*" Olo continued.

"Trivialising the misery," Olo replied.

"And eternalising into the past?"

"Eternalising into the future."

"So we went on our way," Yegussa tried to resume. But Olo blocked the attempt.

"Anyway, now the story is no longer yours," he explained, "but ours."

This *anyway*, too, was too sudden for Yegussa. The change of ownership shocked him. It seemed Olo wanted to turn his father against him, when the man was still sitting up there somewhere and for sure even on the same chair. And as if Olo wanted to use his brother for something, even though he had been shot that very evening. Olo had interrupted too soon.

"Start from the beginning," Olo demanded.

"Tell it once more?" asked Yegussa, confused.

"At least once," Olo said.

Yegussa felt ridiculous starting over again. And even more ridiculous the third and fourth times. Altogether he had to tell the story five times, never allowed to progress beyond the point where his father sat back down on his chair, as if at this point Time had once and for all lowered a barrier to further progress. Five times Olo altered and improved the dialogue between father and brother. *That's not how it was*, Yegussa objected every time. And *They never spoke like that in their whole life*, and *You didn't ever know them, did you*. But Olo was unmoved. As Yegussa told the story for the fifth time, in its fifth version, he no longer recognised his father: in his place at the table sat a figurine; and to ask if the brother who was no longer his brother was still alive or not made no sense. Only when Olo determined that the transformation was successful did he allow Yegussa to proceed to the end of his story. But now Yegussa had difficulties, and the two halves of the story didn't match: one half had become a fable, the other remained something about something that had simply happened.

"The story's there now," said Olo with satisfaction. "But who it belongs to is a matter of serious doubt. Who shall we hang it on to?"

"How am I supposed to know?" Yegussa retorted, angered by this theft.

"They'll hang some onto you eventually," Olo consoled him, "even if not this one."

"I would have preferred my own story."

"But the story can't possibly just hang in the air like that. It must have a sponsor. We need to look one out."

Yegussa took no part in this exercise. He knew nothing of the despatch riders and had no idea of their measure. So he withdrew.

"The matter's settled," Olo at last decided. "It fits the Eleventh like a glove."

DAY 13

Nature is suspect. Humm consists of two parts

"At the time before Burru seized power," Olo began next day, "at that time of murders everywhere, when every day one or other of his associates disappeared or was found slain behind some shack, there died, in passably civil circumstances and as if the age were one of deepest peace, the great Pariah leader Humm, of some grave internal malady. The rarity of so banal a manner of passing caused his friends great bewilderment. It seemed incomprehensible that a life could end like that of its own accord, with no stab wounds or mutilations to indicate the natural cause of death. Their daily experience of death had made them totally forget humankind's mortality.

"When suspicion very quickly arose among them that Humm had been poisoned, it was not out of malice or taking pleasure in slander, but because as enlightened people they shied away from belief in an unnatural passing with no visible and externally inflicted cause of death. Among some of his former doctrinaire friends there even emerged something like disgruntlement, as if Humm had fallen on a false front, and as if this exposed in retrospect the possibility that on earlier occasions too he had left them in the lurch. In fact, he lay calm and pristine on his deathbed as if he'd never had anything to do with the revolutionary cause, and had never struggled for the equality of the disenfranchised and those coming after.

"This is the true story of Humm. And in spite of all his achievements, his energy, and his courage, his name was already almost completely forgotten by the time of the first despatch rider. Because of his natural and disconcerting death. Do you think such forgetfulness was justified and in accordance with Truth?"

"It's all fake," Yegussa concluded.

"So we must fake some counter-stories. In the direction of Truth. And that's why we say that Humm fell in the struggle against the Ulian slave-traders."

Now Yegussa was dumbstruck. He drew away from Olo a little.

"The one who really fell in that struggle," explained Olo, "was Kuku, who had contributed nothing else. There being no further need to remember him, one of the despatch riders decided to award Kuku's death to Humm, *put it on him*, as we say. For what could Humm do now about his unnatural illness? And should his memory disappear merely on that account?"

"Definitely not," whispered Yegussa. But he was obviously shocked.

"Would total oblivion be any less fake?"

Yegussa was unsure. "Are there more fakes?" he asked after a while.

"Almost all," Olo confirmed. "Whatever is not falsified by us is falsified by history. In the interests of our enemies. There's no such thing as pristine Truth."

Yegussa sat speechless for a while longer. "I see the point," he said hesitantly. "But I'll never be able to take it in."

"Your second statement is ... unimportant," Olo decided. But his voice, too, was hesitant.

NIGHT

Yegussa should doubt his conscience,
because it's the most refined of deceivers

But in his sleep Yegussa saw neither Party Leader Humm, nor Kuku, the chap who really died, but his own father. He was still sitting on the same old chair, hands in his lap. And sitting there *just like that* he seemed paralysed, or nailed to the chair. For the tale he'd had to concoct this day out of himself, his brother and his father had acquired a conclusion and a framing; and, behind the framing, Time was so dammed up that no one could move now, no one could come free. But it was clear to him that the paralysis was nothing other than his father's discomfiture at being in error.

He told of his dream that same night. "How can error cause so much damage?" he asked. "It sits in the skull. But someone like my father, who has a heart and a natural feeling for what's right, someone like that could never let himself fall into error."

"There are no natural feelings," Olo contradicted, and may very well have believed it in such extreme form. It was the only form he had. "To assume that what proceeds in the heart is incorruptible and incapable of error and never led astray by prejudice – that's the very first error the heart is prone to. And the most consequential. But those who spread this error find it profitable, and inflict on us the direst harm."

"Who spreads it?"

"The circumstances in which you make decisions – does your heart see them, clearly and comprehensively?"

"It feels. It doesn't see."

"The consequences you need to calculate – does your heart calculate them clearly and down to the last detail?"

"It speaks. It doesn't calculate."

"So asking the heart could perhaps mean closing your eyes and your mind?"

Yegussa offered a vigorous defence: "Asking the heart means making yourself independent, listening to yourself, to your very essence."

"...and means," Olo added drily, "depending on the heart as it plays on the swing between Yes and No, offering no reasons. That's what you call your very essence."

Now Yegussa became less sure, and explained that he had learned that his mind could be deceived, but never his heart.

"Who told you that?" Olo enquired. "Those who always deceived you? Or others?"

"The same ones. And shot themselves in the foot as they did so."

"When your teachers corrupted you, telling you all the while how incorruptible you are, they no doubt had just *one* intention. What might that intention have been?" Olo enquired.

"To have me affirm what they say, as if from myself?"

"To have you follow their orders with spontaneous joy, laden with your own responsibility?"

"To have me obey their call by following my feelings?"

“For they call,” Olo summed up emphatically, “through the megaphone of your conscience.”

“It was *them*, was it,” cried Yegussa, “that I heard when I listened to *myself*? But my heart spoke with trembling, it had scruples, I didn’t know if I was coming or going, until the decision came. It was my conscience. And my conscience was nothing but their megaphone?”

“That’s how the decision came that those who made you hesitate wanted, and they did well to make you hesitate, those masters who gave your heart the task of speaking in their place. Your hesitation was useful to them. For whoever hesitates believes himself totally autonomous, unaided by anyone else.”

“So now,” Yegussa said after a while, “there’s nothing I can depend on. I can no longer see, because it’s dark here. I’ve lost my name – Yegussa’s no kind of a name. I no longer have a past, because you alter it. Now you end up assailing my conscience.”

“Would you prefer comfort, or an explanation?”

“An explanation.”

“Visual deceptions are no evidence that the eye is blind,” Olo explained. “Nor deceptions of the conscience that the conscience is a lie. Only where something lives can the lie build its nest: in the eye, and in the conscience. But on its own the lie can do nothing.”

And lay back down to sleep.

Brief conversation about long conversations

“They’re so strange,” Yegussa said a long while later, “these conversations with you. They have momentum. They come to a natural ending. It was never the case up there.”

“I have only the vaguest memory,” Olo confessed, “and it’s really not clear to me what was actually happening when a gathering told itself something, and what it had in common with so-called conversations.”

“When several of us got together,” Yegussa reported to freshen the old man’s memory, “it all went ahead under its own steam: it was like bells ringing. *Three* said one. *For sure, for sure* said another. *Times thirty-seven* a third would chime in. *Minus five* a fourth. *The things you say*, a fifth. *Divided by two*, a sixth. Where they started, how it progressed, and when they stopped reckoning was purely a matter of chance. Usually one had something to do and off he went. And the others would stop and feel quite content.”

“Like yesterday!” Olo cried in deep satisfaction. “I remember it well.”

“When they had to take their leave,” Yegussa concluded, as if Olo’s high praise had not the least effect on him, “they made the most exact and carefully considered arrangements to meet next time, for more reckonings.”

“Must have been nice,” Olo mused, “just reckoning like that.” And they went to sleep more amicably than usual.

DAY 14

The true history of the One and Only

"How about another of your stories, maybe?" asked Olo, after having badgered the young man so the previous evening.

"Only if you won't ruin it." Olo accepted the condition.

"Do you know the story of the *One and Only*, or *Bibi the Commitment*?" Olo had never heard of it.

"A horrible tale, and the hero reminds me a little of myself." (Olo's curiosity was aroused.) "Because they mutilated him," explained Yegussa, "just like you mutilate my stories. And all that was left of him was nothing more than ..."

"Hold on," cried Olo, "are you going to tell the whole story before you've even begun?" So Yegussa began:

Just when Grott was gearing up for his fourth great colonial war, eight men berthed at Quay B. They pointed to their mud-coloured clothing, and claimed to be remnants of the colonial army. They made the worst possible impression on the quarantine master, who had monitored the approach of their disreputable vessel for some time. The suspicious question: 'Which colonial war?' thoroughly baffled them: they claimed to know of only one, and they'd had their fill of it. Which was understandable, since the years of minor warfare against the Scrotts that they'd taken part in had led only to the decimation of the Molussian army, and recognition of the Scrotts by Molussia.

For Grott, who at the time was organising a doubling of the colonial forces, the eight men were just the thing. Since his whole concern was to show the man in the street that he could be sure of the Fatherland's gratitude, even in such a deplorable state and after such a delay, he decided on an unprecedented gesture: he told the port authority to let the men through with no quarantine or other formalities, found them beds in the military hospital, confirmed, without ever having seen them in person, that they were the real thing, and that very evening published the names of the *Seven Survivors from the Time of Iron*. Of the eighth there was, for the moment, no word.

Next evening the Molussian population was surprised with a series of ceremonies, magnificent testimony to Grott's genius at improvising and organising. Each of the twenty ceremonies, all starting at different times, climaxed with a recital of the trials and tribulations, now officially confirmed down to the last detail, of the seven returnees, along with a public showing of their faces and the conferring of medals. They were handed over at the specified moment to the respective master of ceremonies, and under the influence of an injection, hidden under wraps and in an almost stupefied condition, were led on stage, where they revealed themselves amid blaring fanfares, scowled briefly, spoke a few words into the tumultuous hall, and had to endure investiture with the laurel wreaths they'd brought along, only to be escorted at once by coach to the next location at the precisely specified time, where they were handed over to the next MC to endure the same ceremony with the same wreaths.

And in this way, the evening after their arrival, was launched the sacrificial career of their celebrity. From the very next day, unenlightened as to the purpose they were actually serving, they were kept busy from morn till night.

No less egregious was what befell the sailing boat, as disreputable as it was famous, on which they'd crossed the ocean from Scrott to reach their Molussian homeland. That first night it was hauled ashore, stabilised, mounted on wheels, and festooned with garlands. And the very next morning the Seven had to ascend this triumphal chariot and criss-cross the city under the supervision of a discreet MC and the watchful eyes of detectives. The sail played only a symbolic role, for the vessel was hauled along by a team of greys.

They, on the other hand, were kept continually busy: greeting, smiling, climbing down, listening to speeches, reciting speeches in response, picking up wreaths, laying wreaths, expressing thanks for all the enthusiasm, fending off ovations. It went on like this day after day, it seemed their celebrity was to become their profession, and Molussia could never see enough of them and their boat.

They themselves, admittedly, unused to the techniques of celebrity, were incapable of assessing either their personal status or its transience. They'd hoped to make it to Molussia and at long last creep back into private life; instead, they'd landed up with a career. So it wasn't long before they gave the impression of persecuted figures of tragedy. And because for years they'd lost the habit of obeying orders, by the end of a mere five days they were pretty often revealing their discontent. After a week one of them, Pualue, instead of giving his programmed speech, remarked that boats don't belong on wheels, he's had enough, he wants to be back on the open sea or in a kraal, it's better there, and if this is Molussia, thank you very much. Luckily the crowd was already rowdy before Pualue began, so no one heard what he said. With iron discretion the minders were able to hold him back and give him a jab that rendered him loyal again; for he was about to clamber down from the triumphal vessel onto the street and match his words with actions. But the government thought it too risky to continue touring the Seven, and called a temporary halt.

For the next week they were left in peace. They were quartered at state expense at the Molussian Court, the cosiest and most comfortable hostelry on the main square. They ate, slept and bathed at state expense. A solution that would have been fantastic, had their quarters not been sealed off (for their own comfort, they were told), made inaccessible to the usual daily stream of foreign guests, and the occupants prevented from evading their confinement for even a few minutes.

That out there their fame was swelling; that their names crept even into slum courtyards; that pictures purporting to be of them sold like hot cakes on street corners, heroic pictures, bearing what purported to be their own scrawled or florid signatures; that their names were bestowed on infants, pubs and brands of cooking oil; that the real Seven were alive out there, that they themselves, men of flesh and blood, were nothing but superfluous and tawdry duplicates – in short, that during those days while they lived high on the hog, albeit as prisoners, not a single Molussian was running around who didn't celebrate them, not one, apart from themselves – of all this they had not the slightest inkling, and had no way to find

out. But even if they had suspected it, what would it have meant to be all alone at table or in the bath, enjoying fame so far from their adoring public?

And so their greatest success, their success for the general good, remained quite beyond their ken: namely, from the third day of their confinement, the stream of volunteers for the colonial forces had grown several-fold, recruiting offices laid on a night shift, and the government thought that with this supply it could count on a guaranteed victory in the fourth colonial war, even at seventy percent losses.

For the government it was enough. Further use of the Seven was deemed superfluous. It was decided to round off the affair, even give it a fatal blow, with one final gesture. They posted proclamations: the Heroes of a Heroic Time will be ennobled and granted an annual life pension in the respectable sum of fifty gold Pants. Relatives of the seven identified men had already been notified to take these so sorely missed loved ones back into their embrace, and lead them home again. Tomorrow the sons of Molussia would be once again sons of their mothers, husbands of their wives, fathers of their children. This would be an intimate matter, precluding even the most discreet public participation.

As for the Eighth, whose identity was still unconfirmed, an appeal was made for the help of the public, whereby all war widows not summoned by name who were interested in taking delivery of their spouse were to present themselves en masse at the same hour as those summoned by name at the Molussian Court, Entrance B, to view the last hero, and if applicable identify him. No information was provided as to name or appearance.

Thus the proclamation. At eleven next morning, when in newly-awakened love, without much ado and without having viewed the person, each of the women summoned by name had sworn to what the authorities had already proved beyond doubt, only moments later to walk away from the Molussian Court proud and stately and at worst slightly embarrassed by the unfamiliarity of the generously-pensioned man whose arm was now linked to hers – at the very same hour hundreds of women were gathered at Entrance B of the hotel, some with infants, some with parents, some even with a second husband. All displayed the widow's pin that would allow them to gain entry, take a look and lead their blessed prize home. And although some envisioned a thin man and others a stout, a third a clean-shaven face and a fourth a goatee, every one of them could recall him as if it was only yesterday he'd gone away to war: for the Eighth was their One and Only, and who had ever doubted he'd return home one day ennobled and pensioned?

Whoever this Eighth might be, the other Seven had undoubtedly brought him with them. But to them too he was a foundling, and who he was and what he was called they had no idea. Several months before their circuitous voyage back to Molussia they'd come upon him asleep in the Scrottish bush. Scraps of Molussian uniform hung off him. Clearly he was one of theirs, a final straggler. And because in some strange way they each found him familiar, and because compared to him they were all normal, they picked him up and carried him off. For the first four hours of their trek he carried on sleeping. Though he beat about him when he woke up, was known by name to none of them, gave no information about himself and was nothing but a piece of luggage, they had no desire to drop him. A bit more or a bit

less no longer bothered them. They hitched him to their backs by turns, fed him whenever they had something to eat, laid him down when they rested, and were glad to have something to mother. They grew used to him and in time he grew used to them. They called him *Bibi*, *our Commitment* or *The Remnant*; they'd baptised him thus on the first day, and the names stuck. The first is self-explanatory, the second may be overdone but just as logical.

Because the man was sadly incomplete. Not just that he'd lost both his right arm and his right leg (so that when they laid him down on his left side, the right side of his body stuck out like a bay window); what was more astonishing than his torso was his face, which his comrades referred to, with a last gasp at humour, by the indirect phrase: *Where the hair is, that's the back*. In the spot where once a face must have sat, not much was left other than an irregular expanse of surface in which – bizarrely intact and like a knob – stood a single eye. This eye was superfluous and really just an ornament. More importantly, the surface had an opening. The opening sufficed for eating, and assured the man his existence. Of course he couldn't speak, though now and then he uttered isolated words, which they recognised, with some effort though unmistakably, as Molussian. But the question of his name, put to him a hundred times, was simply too much. He reacted either in bewildered horror, lifting his left arm protectively to his face, or began, equally uselessly, to nod obligingly, and kept it up rather like a pendulum swinging itself slowly to a stop.

This, then, was the man they christened Bibi, the Commitment, or The Remnant, who was now offered up to the widows of Molussia.

Next day but one, at around half past ten – when the attendants, having given their man a good bath, dressed him smartly in a uniform and decorated him with a brand new medal, set him on a chair in the middle of the Molussian Court's big dining room and erected a wooden barrier all around to protect him from direct contact with his eventual spouse – the waiting room had already grown unruly. For these forty and fifty year olds were all freshly trimmed, painted, powdered and tidily laced, and they feared their rather bulky charms wouldn't cope with a lengthy wait. Being all possessed by a savage determination to present, when the time came, an appearance that their man would recognise at first glance, they jostled their competitors ruthlessly with outstretched arms, each aiming to be first in. Each was scornful of the others, each jabbed the others out of the way, each acted as if the others were all there by mistake, the authorities having been too open-handed and negligent when issuing invitations, and all felt nothing but disdain for the fake youthfulness and spurious claims of their rivals. So certain were they of their own instincts.

When at long last the first group of ten was admitted – and HE was sat there, like a doll and unlike anyone, and yet resembling each of them to a T, he so mutilated and disfigured – all ten were shocked. But none would admit it. They began to circle around him, hands on the barrier, and jostled and elbowed to see what there was left of him, to smile at him, call out his name, and argue their claim with the others.

'It's him,' they murmured. 'He looks just like me!'

'It's him,' they murmured. 'How he listens!'

‘It’s him,’ they murmured. ‘How he smiles!’

And because they made such an effort, each mistook her horror and her fear of competition for the upwelling of instincts and the first resurgence of long-suppressed love.

‘He used to be dark,’ they murmured. ‘Is it any wonder his hair’s turned white?’

‘He used to be blond,’ they murmured. ‘He looked so handsome.’

Thus did they murmur, these ageing women, and continued their round-dance full of horror and the fear of competition, until the attendant came and explained gently that that was enough for the first group and now it was the turn of the second. So they stomped out, a little offended and a little relieved that they wouldn’t have to state on oath that they had found their long-lost spouse.

The second group was no different. Like the first they began, hands on the barrier, to circle around the resurrected figure, jostling and elbowing, smiling at him, calling his name and trying to work out what actually was left of him. ‘He used to look so valiant,’ they murmured as they circled their One and Only. ‘How the Tropics have drained him.’

‘He used to have such rosy cheeks,’ they sighed. ‘How the years have toyed with him.’

‘He once was a middling sort of man,’ they murmured. ‘Think how much that meant!’

Thus did they murmur, and set up a round-dance under the onslaught of their emotions. And though every one of them was determined to fight for the man in the middle as her very own, and though each was almost convinced he really was hers, not one managed to open her mouth to wish him a clear and simple *Good morning*. And so they kept circling around and were as one in their efforts to postpone the decisive moment as long as possible. Until the attendant came and announced gently it was time for the third group. Which was just like the second.

‘He had a way of walking,’ they murmured as they started their round-dance. ‘They’ve taken that from him.’

‘He had a scar,’ they murmured. ‘To think it’s gone, along with the arm.’

‘He had such a voice, it was so lovely!’

But in this third group was a lady who, with a little flick of the wrist, endangered the further course of the viewings. Not, as it might be, by giving him a *Good morning!* or going up to him and telling him she’d take him home. She kept a decent distance, and like the others respected the barrier that had been placed around her One and Only. But she was incautious enough to withdraw a small medallion from her bosom, ostentatiously compare the picture with the live exhibit, and punctuate this process with sad confirming nods. Within a few seconds, naturally, all the others had retrieved their own medallion. ‘What cheek,’ shrieked one as she saw her neighbour’s picture. ‘*That’s* meant to be *him*?’

‘And *that*?’ Another had spied a full beard on her neighbour’s medallion, and big ears.

‘Oh, fantastic!’ cried a third. ‘That’s meant to be a face?’

‘Excuse me,’ a fourth asked with fake amiability, ‘which is top and which is bottom?’

They all had good reason, for Molussian keepsakes were poorly executed metal engravings, rather than portraits.

‘If you want to know,’ whispered a fifth, ‘what he really looked like’ – *she* kept a beady eye on her neighbour’s engraving. Others gathered more courage. And soon each tried to wrest the medallion from another, chains cut into throats, some ladies even jumped on others and whoever ended underneath was trampled mercilessly. But they all uttered fake laughter, all forgot about the man in the middle, and none would yield an inch in the violence of their ancient newly awakened jealousy.

But *he*, the One and Only, the Unrecognisable, the communal Deceased and the communal Resurrected, he sat like a doll unperturbed, somewhat dreamy, still savouring the pleasures of his first hot bath; and if he didn’t look like anyone, yet he resembled everyone (whatever he might have been: black-haired or brown or blond, valiant, rosy-cheeked or middling, nice walker, tattooed or all complete), resembled everyone to a T who was disfigured like him and mutilated like him, the remnant of all remnants.

Down below at the main entrance to the hotel, those who had accompanied the ladies stood waiting: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children: a great many groups each taking care to avoid contact. For each despised the other groups as passionately as the ladies up in the waiting room despised each other. Each family looked to itself. They kept more or less calm. Until, that is, one woman (partly out of impatience, partly to annoy the others, partly to let her relative upstairs know she was there and give her courage) decided to strike up the well-known *Song of Instinct*. Of course the ladies upstairs were shut off in the waiting room or busy with the viewing, and quite out of hearing range. So the song rang out only over the street, where windows soon opened:

In her bosom deep a woman’s Instinct dwells.
And that is why you trust whatever there upwells.
So hope on without reason until your bosom fill,
And whatever it may tell you is just what fits the bill.

Hardly had this verse rung out when, to the great joy of the public standing around, a second group struck up the next verse. Almost as if they really had rehearsed it. But the second group addressed the Inner Voice in this fashion:

Happy all those waiting till that little voice they hear,
For their keen anticipating good fruit will always bear.
So fie on every reason. To your own instinct stay true.
Any message that it brings is valid through and through.

The third verse followed without a break. This too came from a different part of the street, a fact the public no longer thought worth remarking:

In your most hidden reasons
dwells your surest guide.
And what your guide announces i
Is always bona fide.
So never think to argue,
but trust with all your might,
For if ever it should err,
how could Instinct be right?

The last verse was belted out louder than the others, but the words were barely intelligible. Since no family willingly tolerated the others' singing, they all began different verses at the same time. And even though no verse asserted anything substantially different from the others, they all tried to drown out the rivals, or at least obscure the words. The effect of this battle was that now everyone sang all at once, which after the solo effort at the start must have given the impression of a coronation: the sound was mighty, polyphonic, a congregation singing. Against all intentions the hymn seemed directed not at the ladies upstairs but at the whole assembly. A few refined listeners even determined that this mass choir was no longer folk song but Art Music, for evidently the text was being sung as a canon. One saw that the hostility of the families had found reconciliation, and even aroused delight.

So much for happenings on the street. Upstairs on the other hand, with the ladies themselves, the tumult would have grown dreadfully serious had it not been a case of all against all. So there was lots of noise, but no real fronts formed. Meanwhile the ladies were so engrossed in fighting that they failed to hear when the door opened behind them, and an attendant entered, followed by a gentleman.

The gentleman waved his arms and hoped for calm. They didn't hear. And when they spotted him they just screamed louder. The stranger kept his hands in the air. Then the attendant announced (speaking so softly they had to quieten down to listen) that he needed to clear up a misunderstanding. 'The gentleman beside me,' he began, 'is the Scrottish consul.' He thought this would suffice to restore calm among the ladies. But it wasn't nearly enough.

'So they're the ones who put him in this state,' came a shrill cry from the lady who had unleashed the battle of the medallions. By *they* she meant all Scrotts.

'He represents the interests of the Scrotts in peacetime,' the attendant went on in a warning tone. 'I beg you, ladies, calm down. The gentleman is accredited.' (The consul inclined his head, to confirm the accuracy of this statement.) 'The fact is, that the gentleman has just been advised that on the left arm of the personage concerned there is to be found a mark the size of a hazelnut.'

'On whose arm?' the lady enquired sharply. 'Yes, whose arm?' others chimed in. Yet others feigned innocence, and collected what was left of their medallion. The attendant merely repeated: 'The personage in question.' He cleared his throat. 'A

mark that bears a certain resemblance to the mark applied by the Scrottish military to identify the native-born' ('What impertinence!' the lady said, and was entirely lady) 'which in any case must be checked out. Our relations with Scrott are constrained by the provisions of a treaty. For today at least.'

The consul inclined his head. The attendant approached the personage concerned. For a moment it seemed the ladies were determined to protect their One and Only. They all looked to the lady who up till now had represented their interests. But she made no move. Such a silence fell that the singing from the street could be heard. They were surprised, and lifted their heads. It was sacred music.

Meanwhile the attendant stood over the One and Only, lifted his arm, pulled back the sleeve and invited the consul to approach. He looked, nodded, and stepped modestly back. 'His name is Umba,' the consul said without expression, 'a Scrott.'

'So the personage's name is Umba,' the attendant repeated more loudly, to make the situation officially Molussian as well, 'and, as said, he is a Scrott.'

The ladies exchanged meaningful glances. 'Typical,' said the bold one. Typical of what, she omitted to explain.

'Umba,' the consul called out again. But this time he was not calling out some name, but addressing the man himself. When Umba heard his name, his old name for so long unspoken, something in his face relaxed. Of anyone else you might have said he was smiling. He who had sat unmoving since early morning and whom nobody could imagine doing anything but sit, Umba stirred. He leaned his left hand on the edge of the chair, twisted a little like a child getting down, let his weight fall onto the left foot and hopped towards his master.

'How horrid,' the ladies groaned as they watched him hop. But already they heaved little glad sighs. 'So that's what a Scrott looks like,' said one lady to another.

'Not all,' the consul remarked as he steered the hopping Umba along in front of him. 'And before the war with Molussia, he would not have looked like this.'

The ladies found the consul discourteous. There's another typical Scrott for you. They began to make up for what they'd suppressed so long. As they went down the hotel staircase, they heard the singing again. And when they turned into the corridor that led to the exit, the singing became a roar.

But back home they wept tears of relief.

NIGHT

Olo discusses with Yegussa some secrets of literary composition

Olo heard the whole story without once interrupting Yegussa. "The story unsettles me," he said at last. Yegussa took this as a compliment. "I knew it was a good story."

"That is very much in question," Olo said. "What's good about being unsettled?"

Yegussa felt a bit annoyed. He thought the story sensational.

"It might even be a bad sign," said Olo. "A good fable doesn't unsettle. If it's done right, you know what it means and what you must do. But your story – well, what does it mean?"

"Now you're demanding too much," Yegussa sulked. "It's a *true* story." (Olo was not the slightest bit interested.) "Anyway, how does it unsettle you?"

"I can tell you quite plainly: because it appears somehow to allude to something and to have some meaning; and because we cannot give an unequivocal answer when we ask ourselves *what* it means. Either it's pretending, or it's still very young and not yet fully grown, and only starting down the path to meaning something specific."

"Down the path?"

"I hope so," said Olo. "Maybe it will condense and settle, after three or four despatch-rider generations. And cast off a few bits and pieces. And reveal a few unequivocal stories." Whereupon he fell silent. Probably he was trying to pick up the trail of the story's meaning.

"Your objections totally miss the mark, as far as I'm concerned," Yegussa said after a while, in an unusually haughty tone.

"And why?" asked Olo, seeming to return from somewhere far away.

"Because they're objections to all of our literature. All our great novels, all our dramas, all our short stories. I find myself in the best of company."

"That's true," Olo admitted. "But the objections don't thereby lose their force. They merely become more serious."

Yegussa was soothed. "So you don't find my story especially bad?"

"Quite the opposite," Olo assured him. "But didn't you say it was a *true* story? Good or bad doesn't depend on what you brought to it."

"I may have exaggerated," Yegussa now confessed. "It's not really *that* true."

"And what did you bring to it?"

"I sort of set it on its feet and pointed it in a direction."

"And what direction was it supposed to head off to?"

Yegussa kept silent.

"You see," Olo said. "You have already set it on the path to meaning. And that is the path on which all literary works are wont to be born. But once they've been born, the writer just leaves them there. Halfway along. And are proud never to arrive but only to indicate the direction. And if you wander along in that direction then they say either that they had no particular drift and the story was simply true; or they hold you back and cry that it's forbidden to cross the frontier of Art; and the frontier of even their work of art is sacred. To cut it short, I'll tell you a story."

And Olo began his narrative:

The signpost, or what is Pure Art

When I was looking for work and going hungry, I used to go into the Museum of Purposeless Art to warm up and take a breather in one of the red upholstered armchairs. One day while I was taking another breather, I noticed a signpost standing in the middle of the gallery. The writing on it was not very practical, it consisted of arbitrarily interlaced iron squiggles, very hard to make out. But because

I had nothing better to do and was trying to ignore my belly, I set about discovering what the signpost was pointing to. How great was my astonishment when I managed to pick out the letters SOUP KITCHEN.

My effort has been rewarded, I told myself. I stood up and knocked on the door that the signpost was unmistakably pointing to. A man opened it.

‘Excuse me,’ I asked, ‘is this the soup kitchen?’

The man seemed not to have heard properly. ‘All I’m asking,’ I repeated shyly, ‘is whether this is the soup kitchen. Because of the signpost behind me.’

‘Oh that,’ the man said, his face brightening. ‘A clever piece, no?’ Clearly he’d forgotten my question. I nodded humbly, and asked again about the soup kitchen.

‘No soup kitchen here,’ he said brusquely, gazing at the post and rubbing his hands.

‘So the signpost doesn’t actually belong here?’

‘Oh please,’ he replied, ‘can’t you see the catalogue number?’

The catalogue number did nothing to clear the matter up.

‘But why,’ I asked, ‘did someone move the signpost from its original location?’

‘Move?’ the man asked, eyeing me up and down. ‘From where, do you say?’

‘There must have been a soup kitchen somewhere in the vicinity.’

‘As far as I know,’ he answered vaguely, ‘there are no soup kitchens in Molussia. The wording is a *social subject*.’

I had no idea what he meant. ‘I do so much rushing around,’ I said shyly, ‘that I can hardly keep up to speed.’

The man, who paid this explanation just as little regard, stood there with his head on one side, apparently unable to take his eyes off the signpost. But I had some further thoughts about its function. ‘If it has nothing to do with a real soup kitchen,’ I ventured hesitantly, ‘then maybe its purpose is to encourage people to set up soup kitchens?’ Faintness overcame me, and I had to lean against the wall.

‘Purpose?’ the man asked. ‘I would remind you that we are in the Museum of *Purposeless Art*.’ And after a pause: ‘Just look at that fourth loop. How it dances.’

‘You mean the S in Soup Kitchen?’ I asked, and really it was dancing before my eyes. ‘I couldn’t make it out at all, at first.’

‘Really?’ the man asked back, seeming pleasantly surprised. ‘I had you down for one of the hopeless cases.’

‘Really,’ I said, my voice feeble. The gallery swam before my eyes.

‘Are you forgetting reality?’

‘Yes,’ I breathed.

‘Are you still yourself?’

‘No,’ I breathed.

‘Do you appreciate pure ornament?’

‘Yes,’ I breathed.

‘Congratulations,’ he concluded, ‘so you’re on the right path.’ Whereupon he looked at his watch, started in surprise, and disappeared. It was lunchtime.

Olo, feeling perhaps his fable was not yet sufficient, embarked at once on a new tale:

The tale of the Pointing Table

Some while later, when I’d found a position as a travelling salesman, I had to go all over Molussia. One day, on the road to Penx for the first time, it happened that I spent many hours lost in the Penx forest. For there were no signposts for many miles. At last I heard voices, and was glad to have reached somewhere at last.

There in the middle of the forest, eight or nine men were sat at a long table. They were eating and drinking by the uncertain flickering light of torches, and invited me to join them. Being weary, I gratefully took a seat. But hardly had I sat down when I jumped up again. ‘What’s this?’ I cried; for the table was covered in painted hands pointing inextricably to and away from one another with inscriptions this way and that and my glass was standing on the text: *Penx 75 miles*.

The company burst out laughing. ‘Did you ever see so many pointers all in one place?’ the man at the head of the table asked in a tone of malicious glee. ‘We’ve only just put it together. Take a good look! Doesn’t it contain the whole region?’

I hadn’t the slightest interest in the region. I had to reach Penx.

‘Where did you find this sign?’ I asked as meaningly as I could, tapping the *Penx 75 miles* inlaid in the table. The company broke into even gustier gales of laughter. ‘But I ask you,’ my neighbour snorted, ‘how should we remember where every board came from? We snaffle them here and snaffle them there, nail them and mix them up and use now this one, now that one.’

‘Evidently there’s not enough timber in this forest for you to knock a table together.’ At this remark my neighbour looked at me as if I’d said something really unsophisticated.

‘You mean that stuff?’ he asked, pointing to the dark forest. ‘Raw timber? Does that show destinations, perhaps? Like the signposts? Does that remind one, perhaps, of the pathways of the world?’

I shrugged.

‘Look here now. This is exactly what readers want. They want goals, destinations. And things that remind them. And the richer and more convoluted the typefaces on a table like this, and the more the directions criss-cross and neutralise one another, the more they value it. It’s educational furniture.’

The men lifted their arms from the table. It stood exposed. I had a feeling they’d try to sell it to me. Tears of rage were in my eyes. ‘I’m trying to get to Penx,’ I said with emphasis.

‘Sorry,’ my neighbour said. ‘We’re not supposed to give directions.’

‘And even if it was allowed,’ the man at the head of the table called out, ‘we would no longer be able to.’ He seemed to think it important to show that he himself was already lost. I stared at him incredulously.

‘As far as our laws are concerned,’ he explained, ‘it seems you have a totally false conception. None of us here owns the forest. We’re merely tolerated here. And tolerated only because we remove every signpost in the forest.’

I was speechless.

‘The owner would never allow his trees to be cut down. He wants his forest to be impenetrable. He hates clearings. *If you lot want to make use of the signposts*, he told us, *that’s all right with me. Then no one will trust himself to enter the forest. And whoever does enter will become lost.*’

‘I have a feeling that’s your last word,’ I said.

The man at the head of the table nodded. ‘Thanks for the information,’ I said, and picked up my sample case. They wished me a hearty bon voyage, and warned me about bogs and thickets and sinkholes. But I set off in a random direction and would not be daunted. All night long I stumbled blind through undergrowth and ferns. At dawn I reached the edge of the forest, hands bloody, clothing torn, and even farther from Penx than when I started out.

DAY 15

The inalienable

Next morning Olo thought he had progressed his introduction to literary creation far enough to be able to draw out the consequences with Yegussa. And to make clear to him the difference between theoretical and practical literature.

But Yegussa was up before him. And when Olo awoke he found Yegussa in a panic, talking loudly to himself and searching through his pockets.

‘What’s up?’ Olo asked.

‘I’ve lost ten of my silver Pants. Of the twenty I saved up, up there.’

Olo laughed.

‘D’you think I went short of food for ten years just so’s I could lose my savings?’ At that moment he was ripping the stuffing from his jacket. Olo replied:

Basik, who became poor, towards the end owned only one tin can. A very ordinary one. Because he no longer had a place to live, he carried it around with him.

‘What’s the can for?’ an acquaintance asked.

‘I *have* it,’ Basik answered.

‘What’s that?’ the acquaintance asked, cupping a hand to his ear.

‘You think I should throw it away, maybe?’

The acquaintance shrugged: ‘Is it of any use to you?’

‘I told you, I *have* it,’ the can man reluctantly replied. ‘You never know.’

‘Is it worth anything?’ the acquaintance asked.

‘Of course.’

‘Sell it, then,’ suggested the acquaintance.

‘Who’d give anything for an old can?’

‘So it has no value.’

‘Not so,’ said Basik; ‘it has the value of a can.’

‘For washing, maybe?’ the acquaintance suggested.

‘Washing? You expect me to wash here in the street?’

‘So just leave it somewhere.’

Basik stared at his friend, uncomprehending.

‘Am I to make myself a figure of suspicion? Where am I supposed to lose it? Here in the street maybe? Can anyone believe someone could lose a can? Wouldn’t they all call me back to it, and rightly so? Anyway, it’s just an old can.’

‘So give it away,’ advised his friend, who was untiring.

‘What?’ said Basik, bewildered anew. ‘Give it away? Is a tin can a present? And anyway: who doesn’t already have a can?’

‘Poor man,’ the friend said, ‘soon you must carry it off with you somewhere.’

‘That’s not so bad,’ was Basik’s verdict; ‘but the can? Over which God set me as custodian? What would become of it, if one day I was no longer around?’

A propos of the preceding fable:

Fables are not likenesses, but an apparatus

Although he realised of course that this fable had to do with his hunt for the lost silver Pants, Yegussa didn’t understand. At least he claimed not to understand, and demanded clarification. Olo was reluctant to come out with it all at once. “It’s a pain,” he declared, “to explain fables or proverbs. They are themselves explanations. And a better sort than any other, for at the same time they are warnings. If they have to be interpreted, that only shows their inferior quality. And when they are interpreted they sound commonplace, and lose their impact.”

“But Basik’s possessive mania seems dreadfully overdone,” was Yegussa’s verdict. He had no intention of engaging with Olo’s remarks.

“Because the fable is a microscope,” Olo declared.

“One that changes things and shows them the wrong size.”

“Not at all. Where is it written that the unaided eye sees things their proper size? Can you see bacilli with the naked eye in their *proper* size? The size that corresponds to their importance? But you can see them properly through a microscope.”

Yegussa had never once pondered this. “So you’d also say the microscope doesn’t change and distort reality?”

“What does the altering and distorting,” Olo replied, “is in the first instance the unaided eye. It distorts the dangerous nature of bacilli, and gets in the way of effective means to combat them. The apparatus alters this situation: it presents correctly and makes concretely visible that which we want concretely to deal with, and combat.”

“Is this another of your fables?” asked Yegussa.

"It's the very definition of a fable," Olo said, "for fables are not likenesses, but an apparatus."

After a while Olo asked: "And what will you do with the other ten Pants?" Yegussa sat curled into a ball, freezing in his ripped-up clothing. "I'd like to suggest," Olo said, "that you push them into gaps in the stonework. So deep that you'll never find them again. So you learn that what a person can't *use* he doesn't *have*, either."

Late in the evening Olo said suddenly: "Thanks." Presumably Yegussa had said goodbye to his ten Pants.

NIGHT

Olo gives three teensy warnings

Mrs Lublu stood on the rooftop balcony of the Great Tower, enjoying with her friend from foreign parts the view over Molussia and its environs. Suddenly she spotted far below the unmistakable purple-red trousers of her son and then, seconds later, how he ended up under a car. "I won't go down," she declared to her friend who tried to pull her to the staircase. "Down there I'd be in despair ..."

Now, as little Lublu lay abed badly injured, and just about the only thing he had was that he was not quite dead, Mrs Lublu came creeping on tiptoe into his room.

"As long as the worst hasn't happened ..." she said from the bottom of her heart, and sat for ten minutes beside his sick bed.

"A blessing that he's been released," she said, no less from the bottom of her heart, when ten minutes later she stood and crept on tiptoe from her son's deathbed. "He looks so cheerful." That was Mrs Lublu ...

"Once more," said Mrs Lublu to her friend from foreign parts, once she had laid her little boy to his final rest and was lying blotchy-faced on the sofa, "once more," she sighed, interrupting her headshakes to blow her nose, "enriched by one more loss."

... whereby she offers us three warnings: not to make use of our eyes to form judgements; not to make use of our flexibility to accept the situation; and not to make use of our life to experience it.

DAY 16

You should not embrace random chances

"And where did you obtain your coins?" asked Olo, having spent the whole evening avoiding any mention of Yegussa's possessiveness.

"Earned them," Yegussa replied with pride.

"How?"

"A strike."

Now Olo's curiosity was aroused.

“What happened was, a fire had broken out two years before, and all the shipyards in Taff burned down. From one day to the next our Molussian shipyards received huge new orders. We seized our chance and went on strike. And from one day to the next we secured supplements that even the most radical among us would never have dared ask for. Because our skilled workers couldn’t be replaced, and the orders were huge.”

Yegussa seemed to have retained his pride in this outcome.

“Shipyards can be built up again quickly,” Olo said, “and wage supplements can be withdrawn just as quickly. How did everyone invest their supplements?”

“I think,” Yegussa replied, already losing some of his solidarity, “they waited for the next big fire.”

“But earlier on,” said Olo, “they never expected to receive a supplement, yet they fought for it.” (Yegussa conceded this.) “Next time,” Olo said, “tell them the tale I’m about to tell you.” And he began:

It took Captain Yunda three years to reach the region of the fabulously fertile island of Yoramita, and for two months more he sought in vain for a landing place along the reefy coast. When one day an unusually violent storm cast them ashore and suddenly there he was through no effort of his own, he called on his crew not to rest on the laurels of random chance, but to set to work at once.

‘We’re here at last,’ they shouted back in menacing tones. ‘Let’s catch our breath at least!’

Two hours later he went at them again.

‘Why should we work?’ they retorted more menacing than ever. ‘We’re here, aren’t we?’

‘To reconstruct the vessel,’ the captain calmly explained, ‘so that it becomes the vessel we could have brought ashore through our own efforts.’

They roared back *could have* and *that’s the limit* and *we’ve smelled enough stinking tar* and *you’ll see soon enough how we reconstruct it*. And they torched the ship, and killed Yunda when he tried to stop them.

Next morning they headed across the dunes into the island’s interior. And found neither the rich villages nor the herds of sheep nor the fields of maize they had expected. And the hills were not arranged as on the map. So they realised this wasn’t Yoramita at all, but some unknown worthless little island. They all swallowed their disappointment, and as if they’d made a compact said nothing, and began to adapt to their wretched fate.

Within a short time most forgot they’d spent three years voyaging in search of Yoramita and three months looking for a landing place; and were comfortable with their new life, though the island was worse not just than Yoramita but even their own homeland that they’d abandoned for the fabled place. The few who years later tried to build a ship to leave the island never even reached the reef. They were ridiculed by the others as Utopianists, because they revived a shameful memory.

NIGHT

The positive is invisible.
Materialism as a philosophy of the invisible

“One day,” Olo began, “silver miners sent a spokesman to Prem, to inform him of their decision to strike. Prem was in an excitable mood. *You lot mean no more to me than air!* he screamed at the spokesman, beside himself: *You saboteurs! You negative elements!*

“‘The positive,’ the spokesman responded calmly, ‘is invisible. You don’t feel the air you breathe. Only when it’s denied you do you realise its value. Only when you’ve dispensed with it do you realise its indispensability. *And we ... we are your air!*’

*

“To think the positive is supposed to be invisible,” Yegussa complained after a while, “it makes me dizzy just thinking about it. Because after all we are materialists. What is there is visible. And what is not there is invisible.”

Instead of answering, Olo asked: “How does your health feel?” Yegussa felt himself all over and ascertained to his surprise that he had never felt his body before. It was as if it had been forgotten. “It doesn’t,” he answered slowly.

“But the negative: sickness?”

“It feels that.”

“Peace?”

“Unremarkable.”

“But war is conspicuous. Work ... invisible. But going on strike?”

“Makes us visible.”

“To whose eyes?”

“Others’ eyes.”

“And our own too. But as for materialism – this is it. For when we show ourselves to one another, we show ourselves to be the material precondition of the others.”

Yegussa was totally baffled. But Olo concluded: “For among much else, materialism is a theory of the invisible, and deals with those who have a material interest in the invisible that is over them, and the invisible under them. The former category enjoys enormous prestige among them. But the latter is incomparably more important.”

“I see,” said Yegussa. And the darkness around him grew brighter.

DAY 17

That someone is calling is no proof anyone is listening

Next morning Yegussa jumped in before Olo could say a word. “Didn’t you hear that in the night?” he asked excitedly.

“Are you on about your dreaming again?”

Yegussa was ready for this; he had all the proof at his fingertips. “I sat up,” he explained, “and put my head against the wall. There was the head, there was the wall.”

"That proves nothing," said Olo. He had no desire to let some unforeseen situation come at him down here.

"So, it began with a soft whistling. And it came from up there, through the wall. Through a crack of some kind. And was as if it was asking a question."

"As if," Olo repeated.

"As if it was asking: *Can you hear?* As if it was urging: *Listen, but only you, this is meant for you alone, I've something to confide in you.*"

"Meant for you alone. It always starts with a favour."

"Of course I whistled back. Or tried to. Then the Voice came."

"Old story," Olo said contemptuously. "The Eighth told it just the same way. First the whistling. Then the Voice. You two should be a bit less credulous."

The *you two* were Yegussa and the long-dead Eighth – birds of a feather.

"What did the Eighth tell about it?" asked Yegussa.

"That there was a whistle and he whistled back and then a Voice asked *Can you hear*, or something of the sort, and it quite took his breath away and he answered or at least tried to answer. All these dreams are the same."

Yegussa was baffled: how was the Eighth supposed to have dreamed something he himself had experienced in reality?

"And the Voice said *Be comforted* and *You are not lost* and *What you say, we hear.*"

Now this was too much for Yegussa. He yelled at Olo:

"You're lying! You heard it last night too. You've just repeated it, word for word."

Olo would not let his calm be flustered. "What I repeated was, as I said, merely the dream of the Eighth, the one we call the Opportunist." His tone was so final that it seemed any further word on the matter was doomed.

"Did it say anything else? The Voice of the Eighth?"

"To demoralise us," Olo judged, "that ought to be enough."

Yegussa's breathing seemed somewhat relieved. "It said a lot more, the Voice I heard." And he let loose: "*What you say is heard by us. What we hear we write down at once. What we write down is preserved.*" Yegussa recited this in a ringing voice. "Of course it spoke softer, the Voice; but that was the gist."

Olo was disgusted. "Typical," he said, "the formal repetitions. The hollow ritual. Having such dreams! Are you not ashamed?"

"It said lots more," Yegussa continued, not in the least abashed. "*Always only listening, nothing but listening and writing down and preserving – it's too much. Sooner or later one should be able to announce one's presence.* That's what the Voice said."

Whether Olo was really so convinced that Yegussa was simply the victim of a wish-fulfilling dream is hard to determine. Anyway, he persisted with his contemptuous remarks: "The Voice seems to have the same concerns as you."

"*You are the ones who dictate. You understand? But consider well what you say. And do not let the side down.*"

"The Eighth never dared go that far!"

"So you'll give me credit for what the Voice said?"

"Who else could I give it to?"

What Olo said next seemed not really directed at Yegussa. "There he sits for his pitiful ten, eleven days. And after his pitiful ten, eleven days he has his little religion. It's evil, so it is."

Yegussa continued to defend himself. "You never actually heard the Voice."

"... says everyone of his Voice. For example, the Eighth to the Seventh."

"But you told me yourself about the First. How she called out though no one was there. And how nevertheless in the end she *was* heard. And *did* receive a response."

"Not after ten days, dear boy." Olo's voice showed he found the comparison odious, and regarded a too-rapid success as scandalous and an insult to all those who had had to wait patiently for years. "Then he called out," he continued and again treated Yegussa as if he were not there, "because he couldn't stand it any longer. And listened to his own voice as the voice of the listener. Wherever someone calls out, he thinks, there must be a listener. Wherever there's silence, he thinks, there must be someone lurking. Wherever it's dark, he thinks, there must be a secret. That's how religion talks. But calling out is calling out, and silence is silence, and darkness is darkness, and *he* was the only one calling out. He, who felt all alone and couldn't stand it any longer." (Now Yegussa gave up.) "And if it were there, the Voice, and if we had some way to prove it – we would have to deal with it as if it were nothing and merely a dream and a dream you must break the habit of. Are you looking for a diversion from your task? After ten days? For another task? For whistling in the night? Instead of passing it on – thirty years later?"

Comment by a note-taker at the listening funnel:

One of my colleagues made contact with prisoner Yegussa and betrayed our note-taking. A copy of the relevant conversation was conveyed promptly to the prison administration.

"To think a dream can be so vivid," Yegussa told himself again and again. But he said this not because he truly believed it was just a dream but because he was trying to make himself believe it. But his efforts were altogether in vain. For he simply could not see why Olo should be in the right. "Why should it be better," he asked out loud, "to have a listener after an eternity and not right away today?"

Olo made no reply.

"Do you draw your strength *only* from despair and never from hope?"

Again Olo gave no answer. Then at last Yegussa said: "You're in love with the enormity of your misfortune. And you hate any welcome alleviations." At which Olo stirred, and Yegussa thought now he would answer. But Olo lay back down and even began to snore.

"Sure, I shall learn from you," Yegussa concluded, "what there is to learn. (I know you can hear me.) But at the same time I shall learn to take you yourself as a warning."

What thoughts Olo had regarding this rapid progress by his pupil is unknown. For he continued to feign sleep, and never again mentioned Yegussa's nocturnal suspicion.

DAY 18

Groans about words

"Aah," Olo woke himself up.

"Why are you groaning?" Yegussa asked. "You've been burbling all night long." He was happy to have caught Olo in a brand new dream.

"Burling?" Olo asked back in surprise. "I was giving a speech to a hundred Party secretaries. And explaining the current situation in the same terms that Prem, our spiritual ancestor, would probably have explained them. But I never mentioned Prem by name and never had any of the usual Premist slogans on my tongue. For I suspected there were non-Premists or even spies in the hall, who would stop listening if ever they knew that everything I said was notorious Premism.

"An unusual silence reigned in the hall. Our people listened, because not a single slogan reminded them they actually knew it all already. If any became restless it must only have been because they found the speech threadbare and they were waiting in vain for one of those words they knew so well. The anti-Premists were no less attentive. But in the end they too were never alerted to the fact that they really ought to be opposed to my exposition, and that they had always fought against my views.

"I spoke better than ever, interruptions were insignificant, and when one of the anti-Premists stood up and claimed to have learned something, the dream was almost a happy dream. His endorsement was, I admit, rewarded in the ranks of our people with a menacing *Hear hear*. At which the dream became uglier. But hardly had the anti-Premist finished speaking when a Premist mounted the podium and claimed to speak in the name of the Premists, and the dream couldn't get any uglier. *We are*, he said, *as you ought to know, Premists. It is certainly not by chance that you enjoy success among the explicit anti-Premists. You will understand if, in such circumstances, despite certain obscure similarities between your views and ours, we are compelled to draw a clear line of separation.* That's how he started, and he went on like that for a long time."

"It's *him* I heard babbling," Yegussa concluded.

DAY 19

The point of knowing

"I've seen the house where Mania was born," Yegussa complained, "Ondura's grave, the biggest crocuses in Penx, something new every day. To think that's all over now."

"When Mee heard," Olo answered, "that Dr Simbo had only a week to live, he paid him a visit. *I'd gladly give my life*, Dr Simbo groaned. *if only I could see the Grumbian battlefields before I die.* Mee could hardly believe his ears. *What possible use could the Grumbian battlefields be?* he countered, and left the dying man's room."

Yegussa misunderstood. "What did Mee have against knowing?"

“Most people,” Olo declared, “have no idea what their knowing serves. And believe, as they’ve been taught, that in every case it’s an enrichment. *Enrichment*: listen well into that word, how it dazzles, and how insightful the dazzling is. For it comes from the language of the owners, even when it occurs slyly as *inner enrichment*. When he simply *has* the knowledge, the owner believes he’s already at his goal. So lots of people strut proudly around with this or that bit of knowledge, like Basik with his tin can.”

“I think I understand,” said Yegussa. “You mean he shouldn’t keep it for himself, but must pass it on so that everyone knows it. As you do with me.”

“So that everyone may carry a tin can around with him?”

Yegussa chewed on this. “Or do you mean he should integrate the knowledge in a meaningful way?”

“That’s what the finer Basik types say,” Olo replied. “They sense it can’t be done just with knowledge. And when they’ve integrated some new knowledge they think they’re at their goal.”

“And what’s still missing?” Yegussa asked.

“When an engineer learns a new construction principle, is he content simply to file it in the appropriate place?”

At last Yegussa understood: “No, but he can use his new knowledge to build a bridge that’s needed.”

Although Olo had attained his intended goal, he was uneasy. He waited until Yegussa was safely asleep. Then he narrowed his too-crude result as follows: “What I taught you just now is valid only for the time *before* the revolution. Who knows whether afterwards the great age of free time will arrive, when we may be proud not just to exist in this world, but to know it. How lovely if for once we could be free of purpose, as the ancestors depicted it. But today freedom from purpose is – sabotage.” Having said this he heaved a relieved sigh, and lay down to sleep.

NIGHT

Songs of the Fourth, or Mortality and Destructibility.

The Lament of Grain Stocks in the Silo

Master, but for your kind heart,
All your corn will go to rot,
Unless in every grocery mart
You drum up buyers for the lot.

Every year as acorns fall
You spurn starved men and cattle.
For us alone, grains proud and tall,
You make sure the soil is fertile.

Forwarding us to farthest places,
Over mountains, mighty waters,

For us alone you bring on cases
Of famine dire, and hearty eaters.
How well we'd suit those hungry tums,
We'd calm their pangs full well.
But to them our grainy goodness seems
A torment out of Hell.
With every buyer prices rise
Still higher to the last ripe ears.
Hark! our proud triumphant cries
As bag by bag our stockpile clears.
But now the words we cry are sad,
We cry out from the granary's core.
You'd never let your serving lad
So boldly clarify the score.
See, we rot! You withhold trades!
Grain by grain sinks back to soil.
Do you want us renegades
To revert to elemental spoil?
Does our inertness give you pleasure?
Do you rejoice as goodness drains?
Do you really want no more
Than dust and chaff from once fat grains?
Oh Lord, you've cheated us so low
No longer can we bear to play!
Span the heavens with your rainbow:
Bring buyers to us every day!

This was recited by Olo that evening. Yegussa was fascinated: "What was that?" – "Keep listening:"

Death the Stoker

There is a stoker, name of Death,
He shovels up all excess stock,
Flings it into fire.
Flames glow ever higher.
He rakes out the grate
And now it is your fate,
Into hot coals you must go
Beware, my petal, before you glow.
What waits for buyers in daylight
Is scraped as ashes out by night.
Poor rye, poor wheat,
You'll feel the heat.

Poor beans, poor rice,
 None left for mice.
 All into red hot coals must go,
 Beware, my petal, before you glow.
 Tons and more uncounted tons
 You shovel down to manmade suns,
 Poor vine, poor grape,
 Poor wool, poor crepe,
 Poor silks and laces,
 For you there are no safe spaces.
 All into red hot coals must go.
 Beware, my petal, before you glow.
 For you yourselves, at very last,
 The very same shall come to pass.
 You pines, you beeches
 All await the chainsaw's screeches.
 You too too many coals
 Shall fetch yourselves to the holes
 And into the firebox all must go.
 Beware, my petal, before you glow.

Thus did Olo recite.

"These poems are better than those earlier ones."

"No wonder," declared Olo. "They were written by one of our classical poets. Albeit amended a little."¹⁰

"Amended how?"

"Classical writers lamented the *mortality* of crops. The Fourth, who made some changes, lamented their *destructibility*. For when he was growing up, harvests were abundant, and there should have been enough for everyone. But the bigger the harvest, the lower the prices. So the plantation owners destroyed most of their produce, to shore up the prices, and what was left was not enough to feed everyone. The songs were created in the rhythm of destruction; for the Fourth had earned his daily bread by burning sacks of flour: he got a loaf of bread for every thousand sacks he destroyed."

But later that night Olo taught Yegussa the last of the Fourth's songs, entitled:

The Reckoning

When fifty men will surely do
 To stand in for a hundred, so
 That every night the entire crew
 well-fed and warmed to bed can go –
 The other fifty, starved and cold

¹⁰ The original is ‚Schnitter Tod‘ (Reaper Death), from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

Lie down on lumpy pallets.
For unemployment brings no gold
To fill an empty wallet.

As long as work serves only to
Inflate the bread-lord's riches,
and fifty for a hundred do,
You'll see fifty die in ditches.

When twenty-five will surely do
To stand in for those fifty, so
That every night the entire crew
well-fed and warmed to bed can go –

The other half go starved and cold
to lie on lumpy pallets.
For unemployment brings no gold
To fill those empty wallets.

As long as work serves only to
Inflate the bread-lord's riches,
and five times five for fifty do,
See twenty-five die in ditches.

As long as one man's working strength
Earns just one loaf and one bed,
And of work the only goal and sense
Exists, as I've already said,
To boost the bread-lord's piles of pence –

Then true as true: it all must go
Down the drain as overflow.
Goods, people, engines – no matter what,
All must go to waste and rot.

They line up nicely for the culling:
Employees, products, and the wealth,
Until one night there's nothing stirring,
Save that great mill-wheel in all stealth,
The piston with its age-old pace
Of day and night, time and space,
And all that's left alive by now
Is Nature in her endless flow.

DAY 20

Olo warns against the wrong kind of cleverness

"Bro," Olo began, "for many years was Molussia's chess champion. He was one of the most stupid, vicious and arrogant people ever encountered by anyone in our lineage."

Yegussa was puzzled.

Olo explained: "Bro played all amateurs as if they too were world champions, as if they too must be looking fifteen moves ahead. And so he lost almost every time. And won only when he played against world champions."

Yegussa felt a certain solidarity with Bro: "So he didn't realise there's such a thing as the wrong kind of thinking."

"To reckon on correct thinking, instead of on human thinking without taking into account the degree of stupidity, is itself stupidity."

To Yegussa this was a new perspective. For the first time he realised that the error-free thinking he was learning down here would be quite inadequate up in Molussia.

"In his life," Olo continued, "Bro behaved no differently than when he was playing chess. He played against supposed champions, instead of against the more or less clever, and played an ideal game, instead of foreseeing the opponent's mistakes and in each situation making a false move appropriate to the opponent's mistakes. And mostly lost. And caused us endless harm." (Now Yegussa understood a little better.) "Nothing is harder to learn than falsity in all its guises. But that's cleverness. For cleverness is nothing more than knowing what is stupid."

"Didn't you mention he was arrogant as well?" asked Yegussa, once the last few words had sunk in.

"A natural consequence," Olo answered. "He was arrogant in over-estimating the danger our group posed. What opponent would have needed to field a world champion against us? Or react to us with the most correct of moves? Couldn't they allow themselves to play stupidly or negligently?"

"The game grows ever harder," was Yegussa's view.

"Right," Olo concluded. "But Bro could not adjust to that. *How unfair*, he complained once, *that they don't ever favour us with an error-free opponent. Sometimes I have a great urge to whisper their next move in their ears.* Those words were his downfall. We expelled him. For he considered *playing* more important than *winning*."

DAY 21

Distrust the simple

"How often you talk about Untruth," Yegussa began in the middle of the night, "and its power. Never about Truth. I grew up with Truth. Am I supposed to swear off it?"

"We learned," Yegussa tried to clarify, "that truth will set us free. That we'd never truly understand until we knew who we really were: that only Pariah-consciousness would show us we're no longer many pariahs but *the Pariah*, a solid block of solidarity, choosing to become what the rulers made us into: pariahs. And more true and menacing than the rulers intended. Almost their counterpart: one force against another. And knowledge, I learned, was more than knowledge, it was a revelation of our situation, of a change in us, hence the first step towards true change."

"You learned well!" Olo praised him. "But knowing that knowing was more than just knowing, up there, sadly, that was merely something we just knew. We'd known it for five hundred years. Knowing was a start: we remained at the starting point. This starting

point aligned well with the prevailing conditions, as if the rest would have to come along by itself, because a start had been made. That's how we lied to ourselves – without wanting to lie – but it's how we really did lie to our people. And so we lied about truth – at least, that was the case at the time of the first despatch rider and even at the time of my predecessor. But since we lied with the truth, *they* who lied only with lies scored a complete victory."

"That's what I meant," Yegussa declared. "We believed we'd won when we knew who we were and said it. But they win when they stop people knowing who they are and who we are. So isn't not knowing a strength, and isn't the hand harder-hitting than the head? Won't they always win, for sure?"

"Defeatist," Olo muttered automatically. But Yegussa seemed not to understand: "Will we be forced to stupefy everyone like *they* stupefy? Will we have to smuggle truth in with lies?"

"The ones you stupefy," replied Olo, after long hesitation, "will believe the truth in the same way they now believe lies: they will take the truth for truth in the same mistaken way they now take lies for truth. And the truth will just be one more lie among the rest. And the ones then going along with us will be the ones we struggle against today. Their faces will hardly change, only the colour of their badges ...

"And that notion," he concluded, suddenly quite heated, "about stupefying and smuggling the truth in with lies, you will never mention again. Understood?"

Yegussa hummed and hahed as if not totally convinced. And whether Olo himself was convinced remains doubtful.

NIGHT

Yegussa tries to align speaking and ranting

Olo was clearly not satisfied with the success of his teaching.

"Speaking," he began again that same night, "is normally effortless. And no effort can be seen on the part of the speaker. Because the speaker saves his energy for what he intends to do. But whoever makes a promise, and has no intention of keeping the promise, has to put all his effort into his words. He doesn't need to hold back, and the words seem strong, snappy and full of promise, as if already setting about the business and keeping the promise.

"A rant acts as its own fulfilment. Did you ever see people after a speech by a great rabble-rouser? Weren't they as excited as if he'd not just spoken but actually *done* something? Didn't they look as if they themselves had actually done something? Weren't they in a post-victory state, instead of still pre-victory?"

"But three months later," Yegussa countered with a query, "wasn't the lie exposed? Didn't the liar stand there empty-handed? While the truth was preserved by his *deeds*?"

"Three months later? The rabble-rouser stands there again. And rants the same rant as three months ago. And thereby vindicates his earlier words ..." ("In words," Yegussa said contemptuously) "... and confirms the unity, the infallible unity in every point we have advocated all along, now as in the past, as one man, committed, etc, etc."

Yegussa found it too ridiculous. “Splendid victory,” he scoffed. Olo had a different view: “Now think of an actual deed,” he said, “and compare it with a good lie.”

Yegussa spent a while hunting for a suitable deed. “The price of bread has come down,” he proposed.

“Good,” said Olo. “Is that visible? Audible? Does it have a world-historical form? You buy a loaf, you’re content, you’re almost full, everyone for himself, and from that morning on you believe it’s always been like this.”

“And?” Yegussa asked.

“Which is more noticeable, hunger, or being moderately full?”

“Hunger, of course.”

“But you’re full, you said, and don’t notice you’re full, invisibly full. So there’s your deed.”

“Ye-es,” Yegussa said uncertainly, not seeing yet where Olo was taking this.

But Olo suddenly grew angry: “And this deed, you may suppose, can compete with a well organised lie, and a promise oft-repeated before a hundred thousand people?”

Yegussa was somewhat baffled. “But you’re disparaging the truth,” he said, testing the waters, “and giving lies a boost.”

“I am not boosting lies. I am gauging their power.”

“And finding them strong?”

“Dreadfully strong,” Olo whispered. “The more so, as we ... must never rant.”

At first Yegussa reacted not at all to this strict prohibition. Then he suddenly set up a roar, inarticulate and wordless, it sounded despairing and rattled around the narrow vaulting. When he had no more nonsense syllables he began to scream more comprehensibly: “But we have to rant,” he cried, “rant about those who make promises. However shaming it is, and however detestable to help Truth to victory by ranting.”

But true sentences cannot be ranted. Even Yegussa had to learn this. For when he concluded that “Good manners will come only after the victory,” his voice was still raised, but he already sounded more human.

“What did they rant about, for example?” he asked after a while.

Olo replied as if nothing had happened. “There’s a classic slogan,” he recited, “that conceals an unfathomable nonsense in what is left unsaid. It contains a *for* that entices to a consequence. But this enticement is an empty promise. Even whispered, the slogan is an embarrassment. But as a rant its impact is unimaginably huge.”

Yegussa was curious to learn this slogan. In a low caressing voice Olo whispered: “We *shall* be victorious, for we *must* be victorious.”

“Why must we?” asked Yegussa, who had expected something resonant and extraordinary and now sat facing a paltry nullity. “Why *will* we just because we *must*?”

“You see,” Olo confirmed, as if Yegussa had already said all there was to be said about the slogan. “It must only be roared. Try it.” (Yegussa felt shy about roaring out again.) “But don’t think,” Olo continued, “that this absurdity served its purpose once and for all and was then thrown away. When Burru was building up to his first war, this slogan

drew everyone along, some of their own free will. When the slogan failed to prevent defeat, his people divided into two parties. The Burrists showed their loyalty with the glib assertion that actually they were undefeated; but the other party, who had experienced with their own bodies the falsity of the slogan, began to grow suspicious and mocked Burru – or what passes for mockery in Molussia.”

“So some were teachable, after all.”

“Until the second war. For which Burru employed the same slogan with the same success. The same people who twenty years earlier had cheered him and then spent fifteen years mocking him – those very same ones cheered him a second time.”

“That people forget an error,” said Yegussa, word for word and reflectively, “because they’ve gained insight into it, that’s understandable. But to forget the insight! People like that should feel ashamed of themselves!”

“Feel ashamed?” asked Olo, his tone suggesting that Yegussa was losing himself once again in speculation. “Since when was anyone ever ashamed of himself? Ashamed rather of what the neighbours might think. For your neighbour is more powerful than your own past. Neighbours – they’re a thousand. Your own past – just one. Whoever listens to the neighbours is in the world; whoever listens to his own little bit of past is boycotted. And do you perhaps believe that neighbours – and everyone’s a neighbour – plays with the world for the sake of Truth?”

“Not believe,” said Yegussa, “rather demand, actually.”

DAY 22

Two warnings

“Our predecessors,” Olo declared, “passed down to us two cases intended to show how *not* to perform our task in life: the cases of Simba, and Suki. To both men, it is said, we owe a certain debt of gratitude. For both cases are of such rare insightfulness, they could be used by us without any amendment, even if only as a caution.”

I am not yet ready

Like all commercial vessels dedicated to elegance, the *Molussian* had its exclusive on-board singer: none other than Suki, king of the on-board singers, pride of all the agencies.

One autumn afternoon – the *Molussian* glided gently on, almost as if standing still – Suki gave one of his rare concerts. The mildness of the air and the almost total calm that distinguishes the voyage between Copros and Old Molussia had caused Suki to declare himself ready to make an exception, and sing on deck under the open sky. So there he stood, surrounded by admirers of his fame, and rolled out his broad stream of anthems across the water between Copros and Old Molussia.

The towers of Old Molussia had just appeared on the horizon when a sudden shudder ran through the vessel. Suki paid no attention to the startled looks of his admirers. That the shudder was repeated and became a juddering, that the juddering began again and ended with a jolt, that his admirers jumped up and thronged at the

railings, that the *Molussian* was held fast – Suki seemed oblivious to it all. He stood there singing, rolling out his anthems without a hitch. Beneath his feet the deck began to list sideways.

An officer tried to approach Suki, shouting out that like the others he must look to save himself. And threw him a ring buoy.

‘In mid-song?’ Suki replied, continuing in the richest recitativo, ‘I’m supposed to abandon my songs, perhaps, right in the middle? What impertinence! On the high seas, abandon my songs, perhaps?’

‘If you would be so good,’ the officer interjected hastily.

‘Am I, perhaps,’ the voice continued, ‘to leave behind those notes that vouch for a good continuation? A good continuation vouched for, the notes left behind?’

‘Absolutely, Mr Suki.’

‘Can songs drown?’ asked Suki’s voice, only to provide its own answer. ‘No, no, and again no! For beauty is deathless. And since when did songs ever drown?’

‘Since right now,’ the officer said, ‘if you don’t come this minute.’ He slid across the slanting deck, and had some trouble clinging to the railing.

‘Hold fast, O my song,’ Suki’s voice continued, ‘with stamina, good structure, and no fragility. You shall endure, O my song.’ Thus did the voice reply, rich, conforming to every rule of concert-singing, with many trills and not a trace of umbrage, and in its expression was nought but the solemnity proper to the song.

The officer was at his wits’ end. ‘If no interruption to your song is possible,’ he called, straining his neck awkwardly, for he was on all fours, ‘then might I suggest, Mr Suki, that you take the tempo a little faster?’

‘Faster?’ came Suki’s solemn voice in reply. ‘So am I to be master to the song? It goes at its own proper speed. Master to the song, I??? Faster?’

So sang Suki, imperturbably, and it was already most gracious of him to set such impertinent words to the sacred melody of his anthem. But during Suki’s response the officer lost his hold, and overboard he went, half jumping, half falling.

People on the rescue boat report the last sighting of Suki. On the slanting deck, singing aslant up into the heavens, as if nailed to the planks, his left leg looped around a chair leg. Until his eternal hymn really was over. Then they made one final attempt: rowing close to the sinking *Molussian* they called out and waved, hoping he would at last come to his senses. For a moment Suki hesitated, shading his eyes with a hand as he pondered. They were not actually sure he saw them. Then he began once again to sing, as if to spite them, nailed to the deck, aslant into the sky. What finally brought their patience to an end: he wasn’t even singing a different song, but the same one he’d just finished. Of this there can be no doubt. ‘So serve him right,’ they said. And rowed away, ten strokes, away from the perilous vicinity of the sinking ship. And then waited.

The text Suki now sang seemed clearly aimed at them. ‘My voice is required,’ he sang, ‘following a *da capo*. With no *da capo*, my song would lose all balance. Following a *da capo*, my voice is required.’ As he sang this his stance was neither brave nor defiant, he looked exactly as he always did when fulfilling the professional

duty of his art. There he stood yet, as if nailed to the deck, but now looming almost horizontally into space. His voice, aimed directly at the glittering surface of the sea, was still lovely and carried just as well as before. Finally a wave washed right over him, and the backwash swept both him and the song overboard. They were convinced they'd heard a few notes, three slowly ascending notes, even as he tumbled into the sea. Perhaps with these three notes Suki really had reached the end of his anthem. For his sake they hoped so, though he didn't deserve their kind sentiment. But it was more likely that Nature proved disloyal: that Suki drowned too soon, forever robbed of the chance to complete the *da capo* he had begun. Amen.

But during the night Olo narrated another tale:

Become what you are

Once Simba had saved enough up over ten long years to devote the rest of his life to his writings – writings of which only he was capable, and which were to make him useful and famous beyond his lifetime – in all good conscience he took ship for Blandi, silent forested Blandi, that Blandi created expressly for the composing of writings. As he approached Blandi – the voyage stormier and more strenuous than he'd expected – he was astonished to find that Blandi was a huge port city, and no forests fringed the coastline.

When he landed it was hotter and noisier than the Molussia he had left behind. But he was glad to find a lodging, for he felt ill.

'Am I really in Blandi?' he asked the maid who brought him tea.

'Of course,' she replied, 'can't you tell by the din?'

'I'd heard that Blandi was quiet,' he said hesitantly, 'and forested.'

She regarded him suspiciously: 'Maybe the other Blandi. But the other one has no harbour, and no marketplace. The other Blandi.'

But since he was unwell he stayed in the wrong Blandi and got used to the maid, who thought he was a well to do businessman who could malingering or feel better at will. 'By next week,' she encouraged him, 'you'll be able to go about your money-making again. Business won't run away. There's always something doing in Blandi.'

So he stayed ill and kept to his bed. The prospect of setting about some unexpected money-making in a city where he had no business frightened him.

He seldom thought of his writings. All that belonged with the other Blandi.

It occurred to him one day that the maid's eyes were red-rimmed, that she was looking at him as if awaiting rescue but didn't dare start. 'I'm pregnant,' she confessed at last, and swore she'd never have said a word if he hadn't pressed her, and the father is over the hills and far away. 'And I'll lose my character and my job, and they'll take my boy away because I'm not married, and that'll be that for the both of us.'

Now he thought wisely how much a person's life hinges on nothing much, and found her attractive in her misfortune, and consoled her.

When she came next time with red-rimmed eyes, she was already more relaxed. 'They tease me,' she reported. 'They say the boy is yours, sir, and so it'll be rich.' He smirked.

On the third occasion she confided that the boy was already kicking inside her. 'What could be better,' he told her, and was happy to think the child was his. And because he still intended to move on to Blandi, the other Blandi, once he was well again of course, he said that if she wished, the child could be born within wedlock. All she had to do was allow him to move on whenever he wanted. She promised, and full of tears and gratitude she flung her arms around his neck. He took her to him, married her, and thought: let her have the child first.

A few months later things were so far on that her labour pains began, but within an hour she was dead after one lone cry, and there he was with a baby that wasn't his, by a woman he hadn't loved, in a city that only had the same name. And the baby was a girl.

And so he raised the daughter and for that purpose used up the money he had saved for the writings that were to be his life's work, and secretly called her *my life's work*. And he followed the advice of the dead woman he had married on account of the son that was only hers and that was now a daughter that was only his, and set about money-making. For the child's education cost a lot, and as was the custom in Blandi she had to learn fencing and riding and smiting the catalatch, and he had his work cut out to keep up with her demands. But she treated him as if he was nothing, because he was foreign, and knew nothing of fencing, and admired her posture on horseback, and because one day she found a note in his handwriting: *Don't forget to write your life's work*. And she persuaded him, as was only natural for a rich daughter of the port city of Blandi, to engage tutors and servants and seamstresses on five-year contracts.

But when the first year of the contracts was up, she died from a wound sustained during fencing, and suddenly he felt how indispensable her contempt had become and how devoted he had become to her, so he arranged a costly funeral and cremated her saddle horse in her honour, and engaged a female choir as befitted a dead daughter of the port city of Blandi. And moved out of the city to a shabby suburb, and he had lost a wife and lost his child and even lost the city whose heat and noise he had come to love, and was a lonely man of little means.

But hardly had he sat down to think about the title of the great work he had always meant to write, when the tutors and seamstresses and servants descended on him demanding salaries for the remaining four years of their contracts. He was now an old man, he hated quarrels, and gave them all he had for the years when they would no longer serve his daughter, that daughter who should have been a son, by the woman he had never touched, in the city that had only the name in common.

Now he said 'Enough's enough' and headed back to Molussia. For he hoped that there he could reinvent the system he had meant to develop as his life's work. But two hours later his legs were heavy, and he was glad to sit in a tavern in Sarumoi, a glass of wine before him, and Death seemed an easy thing and unremarkable. He

thought he had recovered the title of his life's work; it was probably *Become What You Are*. But as for the contents, he couldn't recall the slightest detail.

"What lesson is to be learned by those two stories?" Olo demanded.

Yegussa couldn't see how they were connected.

"Both," Olo declared, "failed to understand the most important point: how to link principles with reality. Suki defied reality, believing it could wait until his duty was done. And Simba defied reality, believing it could wait until he could begin. Principles are simple. But maturity shows itself first of all in compromise."

"Up there we despised that word."

"So call it tactics," Olo suggested. And lay back down.

NIGHT

Necessary practice in abstracting.

Where we are now sitting

"Do you know, I wonder, what happened here, where we are now sitting, three hundred years ago? Nothing is harder than to imagine that where something is now was once something else: that where a wall stands now, maybe air once wafted; where air now wafts, was maybe once a wall; and that where you yourself are sitting was maybe once a tree or its roots or soil. The thought causes a kind of asphyxia."

"So tell me," Yegussa began hastily, to put the matter behind him, "where am I sitting. Is there a wall going straight through me? A staircase? Worms? Moles?"

"Bad," was Olo's verdict. "So you too find it hard. For you'll need practice in this kind of imagining: a wall, where none exists? Do you have one? No roots where there are roots. Do you have some? Someone else where you are? Is there? Same place, something different. Isn't it? For nothing lasts forever. The only one who can effect change," he said with great emphasis, "is the one who is practised in so doing."

"As if two things were in the same place," Yegussa complained, "all intertwined."

"We call that," Olo explained, "the *technique of replacement*. We down here have more need of it than others do. Because otherwise we go rusty, we believe the world to be stable, forget there's such a thing as action. And we've been practising this technique for generations. In a modest way, it's a substitute for action ...

"It is a technique," Olo went on, ignoring Yegussa's attempted objections, "against the conservative in us. For one who is conservative, and leaves the world as it is – do you think he does so because he finds it good? Rather it's because he believes it has been waiting for him all along. When all's said and done, there it is already."

"Does the game work at once?" asked Yegussa.

"You see," Olo replied, "it's different from wishing, because anyone can wish."

"Does it work easier for others?" Clearly it wasn't working at all for Yegussa.

"Well now, the way it ought to work," Olo admitted, "doesn't happen often. And never right away. For most people never at all. They are not people of action. Stubborn, at best. They are unable to lie what is out of existence. They are unable to abstract. But

the revolutionary is a person of abstractions: he can disregard the fact that the world is as it is. And our game practises denial, disregarding; in short, it practises freedom.”

“So what do I have to imagine gone?” asked Yegussa a while later, showing good faith.

“This very dungeon.”

“Difficult,” was Yegussa’s opinion.

“If you want to claim at some point that it’s been destroyed, you must be able to imagine it gone.” (To this, Yegussa had nothing to say.) “Demolish it. Stone by stone. Once it was not. Once it will no longer be. And what is left, is the *place*.”

Now Yegussa really did try to make the effort. Olo left him to it for a while ...: “So, what do you see now? At the place where we’re sitting?”

“Nothing,” Yegussa whispered, no doubt afraid that loud words would send what he had achieved back to the starting line. “The dungeon’s been cleared away. You too. I’m speaking into space. I’m gone too. What’s there, is the place. Bare and empty, and nothing but place.”

“Good, good,” Olo praised. “But try to be a bit less formal. You’re not a clairvoyant.”

“Be quick,” Yegussa urged, paying not the least attention to Olo’s suggestion. “I’m holding on to it.” He meant the place. “Fill it in. What was, where we’re sitting?”

“That’s good enough,” Olo brushed him off. “Say: where we’re sitting – will be something else. That’s enough for a start.”

Yegussa let himself drop. And not dissatisfied to have this excursion into nothingness behind him, he turned onto his other side, and after feeling over the wall that was there just like yesterday, solid and indisputable, he fell into a peaceful sleep.

Olo’s monologue on the boundaries of destruction

“The ones that are best at foreseeing,” Olo began in the middle of the night, as if to himself, “they’re not the best.”

Yegussa slept on.

“Because there are some who just can’t help it. Who are suspicious of reality, lock stock and barrel. As if it was a plot woven against them. Who are suspicious of anything at all that simply *is*. As if existence is defective, because it always simply *is*. As if permanence is a scandal. With those, we have nothing in common.”

Yegussa slept peacefully on. Hard to say if what Olo was saying penetrated to him.

“They are the ones who’ve never listened, never looked about; the ignoramuses, the faithless, the irreverent. When they make changes, they never know what they’re giving up. And one day, as soon as we’ve brought the world around to what we want of it, they will rebel because they can’t stand the idea that this *is*, and that it is what it is. These people can do it in a jiffy, can always make any one thing into something else.”

Yegussa slept on.

“You’re surprised,” Olo continued, “to hear me speak like this about irreverence. And that we must somehow come to terms with reverence ... We must do so with

understanding, at least," he replied to himself, "and not *wish* anything away that we cannot *actually* clear away. And not wish anything away that it would make no sense to clear away. For the world is not a trap. Merely full of traps ... So, regarding reverence," he insisted on taking his own words seriously, "you'll want to know what that is exactly? ... It's hard," he replied to himself, "to adopt that word. All our enemies use it ... against us." He paused. "Is it not nonetheless a fine state of affairs: things that can endure? Things that are still there after a thousand years? That endure on past us, aslant to history? For example, the Molussian language?"

Yegussa kept sleeping on.

"You'll ask: is age the same as authority? Is existence a proof, endurance perhaps eternity?"

Yegussa hadn't a clue as to what Olo was meant to be asking. He was fast asleep.

"You're quite right," was Olo's hasty response, as if he had already revealed too much. "Nothing's eternal. But some things survive beyond us, things a little less mortal than us; a little less frail. And that's sufficient. For reverence, I mean. And some things that may for sure not have been created by God were not created by any of us either. And are older than we can ever be. That's sufficient. Wishing them away is futile. And transforming them in the mind in the hope of some revolution is a task for ignoramuses. Sufficient only for little minds.

"A bad yesterday must be destroyed. But the world is not of yesterday. And not everything to be found in yesterday is yesterday's to the same degree. Not everything is expressly there just to annoy us, just to be swept off the table. Ancient palaces alongside the latest tariffs."

Yegussa slept on. And that was good. For he would have felt bewildered by so much appreciation of the world.

"You think," Olo concluded his curious lecture, "that I appreciate, that I'm authoritative. Wrong. Do I perhaps revere tariffs to the same degree as ancient palaces? And everything from yesterday as if it goes back to the year dot?" And he continued after a while with this –

Olo continues his monologue.

Preserving is as important as replacing

There are two kinds of bad inheritor: those who falsely claim to be heirs – that's the enemy; and those who won't accept the inheritance – that's us. Let's not make ourselves poorer than we need.

All the creations of others, before we came along, discoveries, tools, poems, philosophies, and the myriad things of human refinement: do you think all were created out of personal animosity and covert malice against us, today's Pariahs?

Do you think our personal foes lurked down there in the depths of past centuries and millennia? That they had nothing better to do than act spitefully against unknown foes in the far future? And bring forth their most astonishing achievements ... to spite us? And think their best thoughts ... with a posthumous barb? What arrogance!

What they created, all those discoveries, tools, poems, philosophies, the myriad things of human refinement, they achieved through their freedom. They put it to good use, and exploited it. And if they mostly had no idea at whose cost their freedom was bought, no idea at whose cost their best achievements came to be, and even if they can be faulted for their ignorance – still, much of what they achieved deserves to live on. Should we deprive ourselves, willingly deprive ourselves, we who struggle for nothing other than a similar chance to be free? Let us not impoverish ourselves more than we need. Not everything that we did not make was made to spite us. Not everything that has been used by the enemy, not everything that he claims as his, was made just for him. Let us not simply struggle against what he has; let us also make what he has a bone of contention. Should such a mode of struggle simply be forgotten?

And even if it really were *his* past that created tools and poems and philosophies – well then, we'll take the best from his past and make it ours. *Preserving* is just as necessary as *replacing*.

DAY 23

The side of the better, and the better side

"When the Fifth spoke about the Pariahs," Olo started off next day, "it sounded as if he was talking of a separate race of people, of course distinguished from all others, and far superior to all others in goodness and virtue. *They are simply the best people*, he would say with embarrassing glibness."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Why exactly should the oppressed be the better? And the sons of the oppressed, and their grandsons? I'll tell you what kind of fellow the Fifth was."

"Not only did he live in the Pariah quarter, as was fitting; not only did he make their cause his own, as was fitting; not only was he one with them together, as was fitting; not only was he their teacher, as was fitting; not only was he their pupil, as was fitting. But he felt flattered that he could engage with them, although, as he constantly reminded himself and them, he was no born Pariah. He *too readily* esteemed the Pariahs."

"Too readily?"

"Like the doctor who loves not just his patients, but their ailments too. He esteemed them to the point that he even approved qualities for whose abolition a revolution was called for. He esteemed them to the point that, for all his disgust, he felt a certain love for their misery and their poverty – as if misery was a monopoly and a noble title that basically they should never be allowed to lose. He esteemed them to the point that he felt duty bound to flatter the lack of education that was no fault of their own, and never mentioned an intellectual without adding the epithet *so-called*. In short: he was a downwards-striver, with many victims."

"It never occurred to him that he was treated as such by the Pariahs, that they merely tolerated him. His sympathies were so comprehensive and cockeyed that he would never by himself have lit on the notion of an unhappy love. If anyone drew his attention to his unhappy situation, he would reply that it was fine by him, for as said he was not

a born Pariah, and he had no claim to anything better. So that, as I said, was the Fifth: an enthusiast, and worthless.”

“He’s a poor witness,” Yegussa judged. “He discredits what’s right. But doesn’t his inferiority actually indicate the opposite? That we stand on the side of the bad?”

“It’s all so cockeyed,” Olo judged.

“But if we don’t stand on the side of the better,” Yegussa pursued his cockeyed argument, “what were all our sacrifices for? What are we sitting here for?”

“We sit not on the side of the Good,” Olo replied, “but on the *good side*. Learn it.” (Yegussa learned it.)

“We struggle not against the Bad, but against the *bad side*. Learn this too.” (Yegussa learned this too.)

“And we’re not of a different race from those up there. If, for example, we have to feel more or quicker or deeper for someone or other from the good side than for someone or other from the other side – what an error of the heart! What calculation! As if anyone could do anything about which side he was born on!”

“And why?” asked Yegussa. “If we’re not already the Better, why are we the better side? Aren’t we just struggling for our own survival? As the other side is for theirs?”

Olo shook his head. “It’s to learn this that you’re sitting down here. Or why actually did you land up down here?”

NIGHT

Unendingness equals impotence

Before they went to sleep, Olo invited Yegussa to tell a story. Yegussa had no idea how to start.

“Things that happened to me always happened in the midst of endless other things. And had endless causes. Unpredictable consequences. And any ending would be random. So they don’t exist, self-contained stories like the ones you tell. Or only in the work of comic writers.”

“Then let us learn from them,” Olo declared.

“But the world is endless.”

Olo conceded this: “But if we were to take our stand on its endlessness, we might as well fold our hands in our lap.” He seemed for a moment to forget where he was, and that his hands had long remained folded in his lap. “Comic writers have much to teach us. They prepare the action that they want, they are ‘statesmen without hands’.¹¹ They do not surrender to the world’s boundlessness; they give us another, bounded, world. They experiment with the world, and ask what will become of it and what kind of world would it be under this condition or that – *finite* conditions. The world is endless only for *those who do not act*. And for the powerless who are not even authorised to call ‘Halt!’ But we struggle not for the endless sequence of generations, but for the generations just ahead of us.”

¹¹ Cf. Grimm #31 *The Girl without Hands*.

Yegussa disagreed. "The story I wanted to tell must still be happening today. It's the story of the consequences of a machinery collapse at the shipyard in Molussia. How the workers suspected of having caused it squabbled and did themselves harm and appealed to the magistrates and got into debt with the magistrate class and sold their children in order to pursue the legal case that had been initiated ..."

"Stop!" cried Olo.

"It's not finished yet."

"It is for us," Olo asserted. "Can you not see on whose shoulders the discomfort of endlessness is loaded? Into what riverbeds it is channelled? And who ends up profiting when the final account is rendered? And whose interests are served by throwing others into the waters of endlessness? The story you embarked on has infinite consequences. But the unending consequences, the quarrels of the inferior beneath them, were highly favourable for a certain third party whose hands were free, while the rest found no end and were crippled by it. If *he* were to tell the story, it would end at the point where he was certain that for everyone else it would be unending."

DAY 24

Looking for links

"So how should I begin my story?" Yegussa asked next morning, "if everything is all so connected, and a beginning already a sham."

"When a tile falls from a roof, was it thrown down by all things of every age? Should we trace the causes?"

"Right oh," said Yegussa, wondering how far back you had to trace them.

"It is enough," Olo asserted, "to know just so much of the causes that we can make the fall of a second tile unlikely."

"How many causes would that be?"

"It's never the most immediate, and never the most remote. The most immediate differ between this person and that, and people rage about who's to blame. But rage is a waste of energy. The most remote lie so far back that we can never trace them, and learned men take pride in that fact. But in between we have what are called *links*." (Yegussa made a mental note.)

"We find ourselves placed between the scallywags and the astronomers. Some call us rogues, others call us stargazers. But anyone mindful only of his own case, and his own personal abjectness, stops too soon. And circumstances clash together over his head, because he's an exception, and solitary. But anyone who tracks causes as far back as the day the World Mothers baked the world, or even farther back to the day when demons created the World Mothers, then he has no turning back, he's forgotten where he started out, and so never arrives." (Yegussa imbibed the lesson.)

"Links," Olo concluded, "are just immediate enough that they can be altered, but cannot be assailed by outbursts of rage or blows of the hand. They are already at the point where to reach them you need the technique of *generalisation* and the suppression

of *personal irritability*. But you cannot engage with them in silent submission, like an astronomer with his planets and moon-mists. It is there that we can locate the links.”

The story of collapsed machinery at the Molussian shipyard was now totally forgotten.

NIGHT

Half-humans

“I’ve been working on you in various ways,” Olo began in the middle of the night, “as you lie there nameless, your past amputated, without a conscience, without money, actually only a residue – you won’t be a pretty sight in that state, bearing only a distant likeness to a human, no longer at all young, to say nothing of our renowned *wholly human*. Really, my boy, it pains me horribly to have made you so incomplete.”

Following this apology he broke off, to make sure the young fellow really was asleep. Reassured by Yegussa’s usual sleeping noises, he went on: “Really, I am not to blame. Just imagine you’d stayed where you were, up in Molussia, working for the enemy, sustained by the enemy. What would have become of you by now, up there? A *wholly human* man, perhaps? A man working fifteen hours a day? But those fifteen hours would have been you – the man a mere appendage. And what would have been nourished there? The man, perhaps? No, the working hours – the man merely their appendage.

“But if down here you’re only half-human, it’s a consolation. For in this state you’re preparing the way. For those on whose behalf we work will one day look quite different from you and me. We are only pioneers, blinded by dust and deafened by stone-breaking. And dying by the wayside. But they shall come along and see and hear and be wholly human.”

Such was the pathos with which Olo spoke, and no doubt he said it more to himself than to Yegussa. Then he laid himself back down, and slept.

DAY 25

Will the wholly human person be as big as the half?

The nocturnal phrases *half human* and *wholly human* certainly reached Yegussa. “I know the half-humans,” he began, “I’ve seen them up there. All of us were disabled, oppressed, exploited – we were all halves.” (Olo was glad his influence had penetrated.) “That he’s big I can imagine easily enough. Because he prepares the way. Because he sacrifices himself for the unknown future whole human. But will it all be worth while? Will the wholly human person be as big as the half?”

“People are oppressed,” was Olo’s simple reply. “And *that* must be swept away.”

“But the fact that they’re oppressed – is that proof enough that they’re worthy? Does suffering injustice already confer credit?”

“Not at all,” Olo conceded. “Be that as it may, we’re still far from being absolved from sweeping away oppression.”

“So is being oppressed their only defect? Will there be no other defects after oppression is swept away? Only beauty and dignity and greatness and naturalness and I don’t know what? That were already *there* and will now be free? And were waiting only to be unshackled?”

“That cannot be known in advance.”

“You can lock an empty cupboard,” said Yegussa. “The lock doesn’t prove there’s treasure inside.”

Olo was taken aback to hear Yegussa utter such useful words. After a pause, he said: “You could place the treasure in it later.”

But Yegussa was in full flow: “Or perhaps the only thing freed will be mediocrity? Which will simply be mediocrity liberated instead of oppressed? And we’re the mighty warriors for mediocre happiness and the happiness of the mediocre?”

Olo was becoming impatient. “You seem to think we shall just go up to people and say: Now we mean to change you. And make of you what you *really* are. We shall not. We are more discreet, and our approach is slower-burning. We provide *opportunity*, the rest is up to them.”

“And you believe they’re up to taking that opportunity?”

Olo drew himself together to find a formula that would bring Yegussa to heel.

“Abolishing abolishable unhappiness is more urgent than arguing about happiness. The perils of happiness lie farther off. They are almost imaginary. But unhappiness is here and now. And has been for ages, and is perilous enough. Do you really want to pin down today’s unhappiness for fear of what tomorrow’s happiness might bring?”

“No,” Yegussa said, abashed. “You misunderstand. I certainly don’t want to sit on my hands. Of course we must set out on our *path*. The path is our *greatness*.”

Now all was clear to Olo. But he was apparently more shocked than ever. “Are you one of those *eternal* revolutionaries?”

Yegussa didn’t understand.

“For such there were,” Olo continued, “who were afraid that their own efforts and the efforts of us all might one day come to an end. As if human greatness could only be assured when one strives, when one heads breathless and battle-weary down the path, with the goal always just in front. And they were afraid of losing their disquiet, their better part, and growing small whenever they might *arrive*, arrive for God’s sake, and then no longer have the goal just before their eyes. They not only make it harder for themselves, these aficionados of unrest, but easier as well. For fighting is a better self-affirmation than having. And running is better than arriving. And the one always striving for a house appears more remarkable than the one sitting at last under his very own roof. But we all want to sit under our very own roof. And enjoy what we have achieved. And take a rest. And if not us, then our grandchildren. For the goal is not there to make us good runners, but the running is there to *bring us to the goal*.”

* * *

THE VOICE OF TERROR

DAY 26

The Day of Reckoning

“The day before Summerstart,” Olo began, “also called the Day of Reckoning, was celebrated in ancient Molussia as one of the biggest national festivals: – ”

On this day every Pariah, every debtor, everyone with some kind of disadvantage was allowed to transgress the boundaries of custom, to speak truth to his creditors, even give them a beating, in order that – as the official wording stated with no doubt calculated candour: *On one day of the year, the phoney peace of Molussian society and the struggle of all against all shall blaze out in the open.* What truths they utter, now and then! Every solid citizen, every Magnate, every slave-owner, every owner of a plantation or a mine had to leave his house at the crack of dawn and from sunup to sundown spend all day out on the streets to be available for abuse or a thrashing from his debtors. The entire population of Molussia would throng the streets, for there was no one who during the year gone by had not either inflicted injustice, or suffered injustice.

The festival began with a jolly ritual, a large-scale procession called the Equalisation Parade. When the districts of the different castes were unbarred at sunrise, Magnates headed into the city to the poor quarter, the poor headed out to the expansive garden suburbs of the high-ups, and both processions sang the same songs. On the broad treeless boulevards of the middle castes, where the two processions passed each other by, they looked like two rivers flowing side by side, Magnates on the left, Pariahs on the right. The former, which the Pariahs dubbed The Caterpillar, had a visible beginning and end, and wasn't a patch on the Pariah procession. But the ancient Molussian Rule of Fairness, according to which mere numerical superiority was never to be used to advantage, was upheld by the Pariahs with firm discipline. On the Day of Reckoning, all vengeance must be solely one on one. And so even the shouts flying back and forth between the processions contained no malice; they were greetings from one riverbank to the other, the actors to some extent happy to meet again, mutually asserting their existence on this festive day. For their paths had not crossed for a whole year. And for the Pariahs at least, it was an unfamiliar experience to encounter their foe drawn up in formation.

A couple of hours later, in the Time of Happy Equilibrium, both processions had reached their goal. The smaller procession of overlords halted in the narrow lanes of the Pariah quarter, the Pariah procession spread out across the wide suburban spaces of the quality. High society, which given the spaciousness of its own residential area hardly ever had a chance to greet a neighbour, was now assembled in its totality in the narrow lanes all by itself. It strolled through the moribund quarter, admired the dried-up wells, discovered ancient artefacts here and unsuspected rarities there, and behaved like tourists in a totally unknown and surprisingly rewarding foreign town. The artistically inclined began to sketch,

collectors to gather old pottery or wooden artefacts, and everyone eventually unpacked a picnic basket. The simpler the fare they had brought along, the more it was judged befitting to their milieu and class status.

Meanwhile the Pariahs had scattered across the streets of villas, the gardens and parks. They too were filled with wonder for this unknown region, they too seemed to have come on a foreign tour, and they too unpacked their cold breakfast, which was better and more ample than the Magnates', since they had spent days preparing for the excursion. Though they had also brought strong drink along, there were hardly any cases of a mansion being invaded. For the Reckoning, as the Codex stated, was with living owners, not dead property – a rule stronger than drink. Anyone grabbing another's property received the opprobrium of Unfairness.

Only as the processions headed back, in much looser order and singing the wildest songs, did the Day of Reckoning proper begin. Both mobs occupied the full width of the boulevards, like two rivers churning in the same riverbed. As soon as each spied the other, loud yells went up from both sides, much like the warcries of prehistoric Molussia, and the Pariah procession picked up speed. At the moment of impact, when traditionally several people were trampled, bells began to peal from every tower. Because the Pariah current was so much stronger, it overwhelmed the Overlord current to some extent, and when at last it came to a stop the ranks of the overlords had broken apart and each individual found himself abandoned in a swirl of Pariahs. The pealing bells fell silent, there came a dreadful moment of deepest silence during which every pursuer spied out his personal enemy, and every victim his likely pursuer. Then a dreadful tumult broke out, chasing and fleeing, punches thrown, and even those who had not yet found their victim or their pursuer ran hither and thither; many seemed to be dancing.

Given the enormous significance of this day, it is no surprise that in the course of the year certain unofficial customs had become embedded, without which the course of the festival would barely make sense to either side. Many buildings, courtyards, barracks in the side streets of the middle class quarter were opened to provide hiding places. Petty-bourgeois citizens went about offering sanctuary to those needing help, in return for payment. Others sold discreet items of disguise: moustaches, Pariah-markings, spectacles.

But the Pariahs too had helpers. Almost all children of the quarter helped the pursuers. A few paid helpers betrayed their protégés, so as to create another chance to offer shelter. Astonishing as it may sound, even some Magnates offered aid to those pursuing their own kind. The reasons for so strange a volte-face were various: some were glad to have a private enemy beaten by Pariahs as a public enemy; others hoped that acting like a pursuer would allay suspicion that they themselves were being pursued. At first any such fake pursuers were persecuted mercilessly. But eventually they even joined in the hunt, and the urgent need to slip undetected through this web of dangers, remaining always bold and cool-headed yet invisible, made the sport even more fun and fitting to their status.

The four gates of the city were of course watched with utmost vigilance during the festivities. Anyone trying to evade his duty by fleeing was arrested, a stripe was daubed slantwise across his face, he was chased back into the city as a so-called

maggot and publicly proclaimed *fair game* and a personal debtor to the whole city. Fair game was of course was a purely symbolic term. Any really dangerous acts of violence in such cases were understandably taboo. But mockery was allowed to go a little farther than usual, and any somewhat heavier blow was not immediately penalised. A festival day without maggots was deemed a damp squib. There was malicious gossip that the magistrates now and then seized debt-free individuals to fill a supposed shortage of debtors, daubing their faces to seek favour with the populace. There were even rumours of paid maggots.

In late afternoon as darkness began to fall, when the deadline for pursuit drew near and the chance of finding a victim became ever smaller, the popular frenzy reached its apogee. Interactions became random, yells and blows were aimed without regard to the person, until at the moment the sun went down the bells in the four corner towers began to peal again to announce an end to festivities.

At that moment, all were to break off and betake themselves back home as if merely returning from work with no idea at all of what had just happened. For a whole year the Day of Reckoning was never to be mentioned by any Molussian. It had *no existence*, save on the very day itself. So it seldom happened that anyone bought himself free of debts, or removed a threat by intimidation. Accusations and assaults the day after the festival were equally rare, and overall no consequences of any kind were to be drawn.

NIGHT

“Fairness” as a tactic

“The festival,” Olo declared, “was a manoeuvre. It was simply advantageous to put up with twenty-four hours of licence in order to gain complete security for the existing order. Allowing political passions to let off steam once a year hindered and postponed from year to year any serious uprising. The pressure of disgust had to be built up again from scratch, and never exceeded a precisely calculable maximum before being discharged at the next festival.

“Even the confrontation between the two armies at the start of festivities is a pretence. For the daily menace of the Magnates and their principle of hegemony consists precisely in remaining invisible. They *dress up* as a visible army: they venture into visibility to *hide behind their visibility*. And their visibility is particularly handy, since they are such a small army.”

Yegussa learned this formula, though he couldn’t quite figure it out.

“So on the one hand the Magnates formed themselves into a *bloc*, to hide the fact they’re a *concept*. On the other hand they exposed themselves to the Reckoning as individuals, because hitting out at an individual is hitting out at the wrong thing. At each festival, against all odds the Pariahs seemed to set eyes on their enemy as if for the first time. That the Magnates had faces and looked just like them didn’t exactly make the Pariahs lose courage, but it agitated them and crippled their disgust. Their disgust shifted rather to the shame of their relationship, which they couldn’t reconcile with the procession of their overlords.

“So the festival actually suspended the daily struggle, instead of *bringing it into the open*, as the official line had it. The operatic ritual seduced the Pariahs from all memory of yesterday and the day before and the year gone by. The supposedly fair rules of engagement that permitted an altercation only between individuals reduced political enmity to the level of a private transaction. But the Pariahs had basically no private enmity towards the Magnates: the enemy of one is the enemy of all Pariahs, and enmity towards *one* Magnate is enmity towards all. The one-on-one altercation prescribed by the Codex had nothing to do with a Reckoning. For in the procession of Magnates only Magnates marched; but the cause of their hatefulness was invisible and unreachable by blows: namely *exploitation*. The Pariahs were forced into the wrong battle offering only a victory of the criminal: random and inconsequential.”

DAY 27

Warning against the ‘nothing but ...’

“The famous uprising,” Olo declared next morning, “linked for centuries with the name of Burru, began when entrepreneurs pressed enormous sums into the hands of their stooge Burru and sent him out to unite the victims of their domination and dress the prevailing relationships in bloodstained clothing as a revolution against those relationships, the better to secure them. Some members of that class even sacrificed themselves on the first day, to make the lie more believable by a half-truth. And declared through Burru’s mouth that the decisive battle had already been fought, and those who had ruled up till then must never again be allowed to take the tiller. Among themselves they whispered: *The only protection against the mob is the mob*. Learn it!”

Yegussa learned the formula.

Olo gave Yegussa 12 hours to imprint the lesson on his memory, or else falsify it.

“Can you repeat to me,” he asked that evening, “what the Burrian revolution was?”

Yegussa had to tread carefully. “Nothing but a means for the ruling class to stay in power,” he stated. “The ones who would rather declare themselves dead in order to go on ruling, albeit under an alien flag, instead of really being annihilated.”

Olo seemed satisfied: “So it was *nothing but* a pretend revolution? And everything remained as of old?” (Yegussa sensed that Olo was leading him onto thin ice.) “*Nothing but ...* That was the goal,” Olo declared. “But not the result. For if you bring in a thousand novelties in order to keep everything as it was, you really have brought in a thousand novelties. Anyone who *pretends* to build a house in order not to have to *really* build one inadvertently ends up with a house. Anyone who pays to buy his way out really has handed the money over. Whoever goes on ruling behind the stooge is really only the ruler behind the stooge. All remained as of old? What nonsense! What balderdash!

“That the rulers had to hide themselves *was* a change. Their self-denial *was* a change. Not for the better, certainly not. On the contrary. Under Burru it was more terrible than ever, and I shall not prettify what happened. But you cannot disavow it. Admittedly the exiles who returned home – boldly or covertly or deeply homesick – felt aggrieved, for they no longer recognised Molussia. Molussia really had changed. And the Molussians as well.”

Yegussa was quite bewildered. "You speak as if you're defending it."

"That too."

"What?"

"I defend reality against being undervalued. And warn against the *nothing but*, and against sugar-coated words. Is poison innocuous because it's nothing but plant juice, is the sword innocuous because it does nothing but symbolise the defencelessness of the human body? And is Burru innocuous because he's *nothing but*...? *Nothing but* is there to *do business*, it signifies unambiguous willpower and decisiveness. It also provides a passable explanation. As if what is *explained* is already *expunged*, having been explained. But that's farthest from its thoughts."

Thus he spake, and laid himself down to sleep.

DAY 28

Thoughts are free, or the free expression of unfree opinions

Yegussa simply couldn't understand how Burru was able to seize power just like that. "When it comes down to it, they still had freedom of expression in Molussia back then."

"For sure," Olo replied. "So there she sat, some woman, a middling Molussian, and was free to express her opinion. *Her* opinion. But do you think her opinion was really *her* opinion? Was her opinion free? Was she free to have her own opinion? But she was allowed to *express* it."

"Slow down," Yegussa demanded as he began to see the point.

"Did she not have this or that opinion because someone else had the freedom, i.e. the means, to express *his* opinion? Express it cheaply?"

"So her free opinion-expressing," Yegussa summed up cautiously, in order to reassure himself, "consisted of the freedom to pass on freely the opinions of others?"

"Let's assume she had a coat. Was the coat *hers*? I mean, did she make it herself?"

"She bought it."

"And with that, permission to wear it as she went about. Had something on her *to express her irreplaceable personality*. And her opinion?"

"Also bought," suggested Yegussa. "And with that, she could take it about with her."

"So the error in your objection," Olo summed up, "lies in your assumption that everyone has his own opinions. That the only thing that could be suppressed would be its expression. But this assumption is itself a bought opinion, bought from those who manufacture opinions. For what is usually suppressed is not the expression of an opinion, but rather the formation of one's own opinion. As long as any such *own opinion* does not exist, there is naturally no need to suppress its expression. So to that extent we have – freedom of expression."

Yegussa was deeply astonished.

"Every dewy-eyed lover of democratic principles was just as astonished as you. That Burru and the Magnates, those mortal enemies of democratic principles, were able to

seize power to themselves by pedantic and unassailable adherence to democratic principles, seemed to most democrats, insofar as they did not welcome the undemocratic consequences of their democratic principles, to be a total miracle. But since the Burrists were true to their principles, they didn't dare protest against the consequences of what they themselves had defended. They considered the principles more important than the consequences. And the consequences innocuous, because they had arisen on the basis of long-treasured principles."

Yegussa understood very well, and not a single link in the chain of inferences went awol. But still, he shook his head. For his soul limped a bit behind his understanding.

NIGHT

The single word, or the renewal of the Molussian language

"Sentences are unimportant. The virtue of language lies in the single word," Olo began to recite that night.

"What's that?" Yegussa asked. Olo continued:

Burru's edict on the renewal of the Molussian language, *The Single Word*, is incontestable, because it asserts nothing:

The single word is more than affirmation: for it is a charm. The single word is more than a charm: for it can be learned by anyone. It is intoxicating in its brevity and the way it concentrates power in the smallest space ...

(*signed*) Burru

The most important part comes in the Implementing Regulations. For prohibitions are always more important than commands. It says there:

Traitors to the nation are those who speak; who speak no matter what, and whose sentences demand more than the instance of the single great word. For their sentences, pretentious and many-limbed, easily spotted in the way they use the words *hence* and *consequently* – their sentences pretend quite simply to a universal validity, beyond the frontiers, independent of Molussia, enjoying their own freedom, and immune to being banned by us. But what we are unable to ban, what boasts of its own freedom, what is not dependent on Molussia – the separate, separateness, the alien, the alien principle – this they call *objectivity*. Hence those Molussians who speak in complete sentences or even link multiple sentences together shall be closely monitored.

(*signed*) Burru

A later clause states:

Nouns, or what until now have been presented as the nouns of a language, are not worth mentioning. On their own they are nothing, as a horse is nothing without its rider, the wife nothing without her husband, the material without the spiritual. On their own they are nothing but an instance. Therefore it is ordered that words hitherto called *adjectives* in complete misapprehension of the situation, from now on shall be called *strongwords* or *guardwords*, for they lend strength to the words they are attached to, and protect them.

They shall be called strongwords or guard-words, in honour of the most powerful Molussian strongword, viz. MOLUSSIAN.

These are the virtues of the word *Molussian*: that it has no fear of any word or noun; that it can grace every word as a splendour, a blessing, or a terror; that it renders superfluous the knowledge of any who utter it; that it renders all other adjectives superfluous; that it makes any inconspicuous thing conspicuous and colourful; that it permits bitterness and sweetens the already-bitter that it causes the recalcitrant who flout it to tremble; that it consoles the wretched on whom it is bestowed; that it protects the decree to which it is superordinate; that it connects up all the things of Molussia as Molussian in general; that whoever has perfect knowledge of it has perfect knowledge of all things Molussian; for what could be better to know of a Molussian thing than that it is by its very nature and purpose Molussian? And in nothing are Molussians of every Molussian stripe in the one Molussian Empire so united, and in no quality do they so discover their communal power and their powerful community, as in their being Molussian.

(signed) Burru

The letters in which Burru's edicts were composed were no less 'great' than the spoken words: they were of such unmanageable size that they must without exaggeration be termed unreadable. In order to decipher a single sentence, one had to pace out several yards of document. Should the last word of the sentence be reached – and this applies most of all to the pigskin *Catalogue of Promises* – the first word is already several yards behind, and by then usually forgotten. A calculation has been made that a complete reading in many cases would, all things considered, require a trek of some ten to twelve hours. Hence it was almost impossible to gain an overview of the whole text, without the risk of being caught up in the vigorously rewinding scroll. Banti had the idea of copying these texts at normal script size in order to denounce them. *Such a transcription*, he said to justify his idea, *if it is full and complete, in a certain sense already represents an unmasking; for an essential feature of the texts as produced by Burru is their giganticness. Even with all proportions preserved, my miniaturised transcription will constitute a different text, because it will be legible without further ado, and hence its absurdities will be laid bare. And so I mean to transpose it into Truth.*

He broke into the Hall of Words and there attempted, with utmost physical exertion using every hand and foot simultaneously, to hold open the scroll of government promises so as to view the first and the last sentences at the same time,

and compare them. But the starting point kept curling back like an unwound spiral, with such vehemence that its power seemed to reside precisely in this self-concealment. In the end it hit Banti in the face, rolled up tight and stood erect like a pillar. Banti was wrapped so tight that only his hand poked out. He was apprehended without difficulty. The charge sheet said he had been overtaken by Fate because he doubted the gigantic scroll of codified promises and had trampled it and besmeared it with his feet. Let his incarceration be a warning. Molussia must never again regress to a raw state of mistrust.¹²

“And where you sit, Yegussa,” Olo concluded, “is where Banti once sat.”

DAY 29

The strongest word

When Burru had been in power a little while, he thought to acquire power a second time, as it were. He wanted to be given as a present that which he indisputably already possessed – to be elected by those whom he had subjugated. This wish was anything but meaningless. On the back of it, once elected, unanimously elected, he would acquire a patina of democracy both at home and abroad. *You don't vote for the one you love*, is how he justified a popular election to his colleagues; *rather you love the one you vote for*. Some among his cronies disagreed. The background to the election, they suggested, and the coercions applied, would never be forgotten; every voter would remember to his grave the coercion that forced his vote. Burru was not in the least put out: *The how and why*, he said, *are invisible. But the impact of the vote will be visible. And only the visible stays in memory. As for just how visible it will be, you can leave that to me.*

Burru's authority in techniques of manipulation was unquestioned, and even we have to marvel, though filled with disgust.

‘And what choice are we supposed to offer?’ they asked.

‘Choice is out of the question.’

‘But the vote must offer an Or.’

‘Must?’ Burru asked. ‘Does Burru acknowledge a Must?’

Abashed, they kept quiet. He explained: ‘Or shall be replaced by And, for AND is the strongest word. And synthesis the most reliable accomplice of terror.’

The next day, election posters appeared on every wall and fence in the city. The biggest and fattest word on them was AND. But four slogans predominated:

For Burru AND for peace

For Burru AND for Molussia

For Burru AND for the Pariah

For Burru AND for freedom

Thus did Burru merge the alternatives into the object of the election itself. Anyone voting against Burru would be voting against peace. Anyone speaking out against

¹² The ‘Scholarly Commentary’ in Part Two expands on this topic.

Burru would be speaking out against freedom. A vote against Burru would be a vote against Molussia. A vote against Burru would be a vote against the Pariah. But whoever opted for the Pariah, for Molussia, for freedom and for peace had to include in his choice, whether he would or no – Burru. Small wonder the number of votes cast for Burru almost exactly matched the number of Molussians entitled to vote.

As always where understanding a direct lie was concerned, Yegussa totally rejected it. “Were none of them aware,” he asked, “of the coercion put on them to vote for Burru?”

“I wouldn’t say that. Maybe even a majority. But when the results were made known, even they were impressed by Burru’s overwhelming victory.”

“First impressions,” Yegussa suggested, “how significant are they?”

“If only the second and later impressions didn’t depend so much on the first! Only a month later, Burru was proved right. They’d forgotten the conditions under which they voted, for only the *effect* is visible and only the *visible* stays in memory.”

Yegussa wouldn’t let go. “But abroad? Where the coercion didn’t apply? Where people saw through the ruse? Where the conscience of the world can strike?”

To this Olo responded with a “Hah!” and promised to resume the discussion later.

NIGHT

Simsim speaks at the wrong polling station

“You have now heard a great deal about the misuse of language,” Olo began that evening. “But the meanest and most hopeless story is still to come. Listen:”

As you know, three centuries ago Molussians were split between two parties, two parties that had not the slightest connection to the actual schisms and hostilities within the population, the only reason they were created being to persuade the population that they were all set to deal with those hostilities. It was seldom clear why some Molussians should belong to the Colds and others to the Hots, all the more so as the programmes of both parties were almost identical. Before an election, artificially stirred hostility between the two sides was artificially brought to a boil. Each delivered the bare minimum of fatalities needed to present itself as the Party of Martyrs, and some hundreds of Molussians, victims of this nonsense, hobbled about as cripples to their dying day.

Simsim was one of many speakers sent by the Colds around the country to address pre-election meetings. The kind who sleep all day, the better to enthrall at night.

‘Comrades,’ Simsim would yell, as one evening like all the other evenings he stood before thousands, banging his fist on the table to drum up the excitement he had to place at the service of the Cold cause. ‘Comrades,’ he screamed ‘where is the enemy? Abroad, perhaps? No! In our own country.’ (*Bah!*) ‘Comrades. We know what we want.’ (*I’ll say!*) ‘And we have no reason to conceal our demands from anyone.’ (*Bravo!*) ‘Or conceal from any of that lot over there that we are *serious*.’ (*Applause.*) ‘If any of that lot over there want something, they need only bestir

themselves and come to us.' (*Laughter.*) 'We'll show them right enough how we pay back slanders!' (*Bah!*) 'But comrades! Where are they? I can't see a single one.' (*General merriment.*) 'Is there nothing more they want?' (*Prolonged merriment.*) 'All the better, comrades! We are among our own!' (*Loud applause.*) 'Among our own, comrades, the day shall one day come!' (*Audience rises to its feet.*) 'I know, comrades, that on that day I can rely on you, as you can rely on me!' (*Vast enthusiasm.*)

Simsim sat back down and wiped his brow. He'd done well. They were more enthused than ever. Suddenly, amid the general tumult, he heard cries that sounded like *Hots forever!* and not, as he had expected, *Cold all the way!* But he calmed down at once: of course he'd misheard. But when Hot cries came clear and often and he realised he'd carelessly delivered a speech at an enemy polling stations, he sat as if paralysed. If he didn't join in he'd arouse suspicion. Slink away? – impossible. So it happened that Simsim, before he knew what he was doing, instead of his usual warcry *Ice cold all the way!* uttered the cry that until then had contained all that was hateful. He cried out: *Hots forever!*

After the first cry he was sure something dreadful would happen. After the second cry he felt ashamed. But neither fear nor shame brought any consequences, so casting aside all inhibition he let loose a third cry, and then another. *These people have warm hearts*, he told himself as Hots surrounded him, shook his hand, congratulated him, thanked him, and eventually invited him to fire them up more often, and in bigger halls.

Needless to say, Simsim was fully converted by the time he reached home. And became a representative Hot, who as he often said with pride, made no secret of the fact that he'd found his way from the wrong side to the right, or rather: to the *only* side. And when the Hots won the election, he took no small pride in having read the signs in good time.

Enmity comes with killing

"Shortly before the Burrian Revolution," Olo continued the story:

when impoverished Molussian middle class youths and the most wretched of the Pariah, who for years had been without work, went for each other with Burru's express permission – to flush out the enemy, to beat and kill – they did indeed feel generalised hatred, but why this or that individual should be their enemy, no one could explain. But as soon as they began beating someone, their hatred became clearer. Nobody can inflict a beating without shouting out. So as they beat they laid the most dreadful names on their victims, called them murderers, thieves, loan sharks, or whatever. The words had hardly left their lips when they actually believed them. And carried on because it was murderers and thieves and loan sharks they were beating. But their hatred came fully in view when the victim defended himself and hit back. For when two people hit each other, their enmity no longer admits of doubt.

Once Burru had allowed his people ten bloody days, he had no need of a revolution. For his enemies had become their enemies. *In fighting*, said one of Burru's secret edicts, *one recognises enmity, and enmity comes with killing.*

“Learn this!”

“What am I supposed to learn it as?” asked Yegussa.

“As the profoundest life-wisdom of depravity,” Olo replied.

A person can only be killed once

“But why?” Yegussa asked after a while. “Why did they inflict such tortures on their victims? It’s still remembered even today.”

“They resented the fact,” Olo replied, “that their enemies could be killed only once. That they were dead before they could become real enemies. That they died faster than the vengefulness could dissipate. That being dead they were out of reach. Completely out of reach because they hadn’t resisted enough. A corpse is a challenge for the enraged. And that’s why they delayed the death, patched up and refreshed the half-dead, that’s why each one was killed several times over – almost. Because a dead man can’t be killed again, only a living man.”

“But didn’t they mutilate the corpses too?” Yegussa asked in horror. “As they say up there.”

“They mutilated them as if it would resurrect them. They mutilated them as if they were still alive, as if they could still feel pain. *I torture you, therefore you are*, one of them quipped, in a despicable variation on a profound classical saying, for there were educated people among them. But none of them could come to grips with the notion that the victim might be dead, once and for all.”

“Couldn’t come to grips? What does that mean, couldn’t come to grips? Such lack of objectivity. Such sentimentality.”

“Violence and sentimentality are siblings,” Olo assured him. “Both earn interest from the suffering of others. Violence earns it on its own account – for its own sentimental use.”

And with that the problem was settled. But Yegussa would have to dig into it a little more.

DAY 30

Twofold Yakuth

When the slaves at Tadd’s granite quarries returned to work the morning after the call for a national revolution, three teenagers were standing in the street, seemingly drunk. They had bloody hands, and their jackets were torn. They stood there freezing, with no idea what to do. They had just come from murdering the foreign granite mogul Yakuth; they’d done away with him – in the interests of *national purity* as they tried to convince themselves – at four that morning, at elaborate length, every limb attended to; the whole business had taken three hours. But now they’d had enough, and felt sick, and there was nothing left to destroy – for even a human body comes to an end at some point – so they puffed themselves up to conceal their nausea, and off they went to strut before their comrades. The comrades were annoyed and wouldn’t speak to them, and neither praised nor condemned them; for

speaking out would be too risky. No wonder the trio became impatient with the workers heading back to the quarries with clean hands, just like yesterday. Most of the crew had already walked past in silence, but Su came to a halt face to face with them, regarded them as if they were sober and just the same as normal, and asked in an offhand way: 'Why'd you do it, actually?'

The first lad toyed with his belt and suggested it was a bit late to come along with a Why. 'I just meant,' Su explained, in as casual and naïve a manner as he could, 'all I wanted to know, really, was whether what you chaps did there was aimed at the *slave-owner* Yakuth, or the *foreigner* Yakuth. Are you,' he hastened to add, hoping to stave off violence as long as he kept talking, 'are you slaves because Yakuth was *un-Molussian*, or because Yakuth was an *exploiter*?'

The trio would brook no argument, and shoved Su aside as if he was trying to bring their Yakuth back from the dead.

'I don't dispute in the slightest that he's dead,' said Su. And now he addressed not the trio but his own comrades who were gathering around him. 'But what it comes down to is, was he killed correctly?'

'You can bet your boots on that,' the first lad brayed. 'We made a good job of it,' said the second. He looked into his hollowed hand, spat, and rubbed the spit around. 'You'll have a hard job finding him,' said the third, a little titch.

'That's he's simply dead is quite irrelevant,' said Su, 'and Yakuth would have died one day anyway. But what did he die *as*? *As what* did you whack him?'

'Dead is dead,' someone interjected.

'That's exactly the question,' said Su. 'Is he so dead, for example, that even Tadd will have to believe it?'

'Tadd's a Molussian,' the titch of the trio said.

'And a competitor of Yakuth's,' said Su. 'Hence his enemy. You've whacked an enemy of Tadd's. How does that help you?'

The murderer standing closest to Su examined his fingertips, still stained with flecks of Yakuth's blood, and seemed about to urge them on to further work – to murder anyone seeking to invalidate the murder they had committed.

'Yakuth was our enemy,' said the titch. 'And it's none of your damn business!'

'There were *two* Yakuths,' Su insisted.

'He's got double vision!' – 'You can pickle the other one if you like!'

'Did you kill both of them?' Su asked again patiently

'Put a sock in it, chum!' the titch threatened. 'Were you there when we did the job? I was. The man was *one man*.'

'If only he'd said there was three of him, we could have killed him five times!'

'At least!' the titch brayed again, 'and we checked him from outside and inside. *One* neck and *one* head. And there was nothing on him we don't have too, except more hair, and this here.' He pulled a watch from his pocket and held it high so all could see his loot, but no one would take this memento of the revolutionary morn.

And the watch really did seem like evidence. When the other two lads confirmed it really was Yakuth's watch, many were already convinced in some vague way – though they'd have been hard put to explain what exactly had convinced them. But here was something in plain sight, and the thing was irrefutable. 'You see,' said the titch, tucking the watch back in his pocket. And he turned to Su: 'So, you still want to know how we whacked him?'

'That's it exactly,' Su replied. 'Did you whack Yakuth the *foreigner*? That's what Tadd called him – the Tadd who exploits *you*, the Tadd who was Yakuth's *competitor*, in order to divert your hatred away from himself ... If it was *him* you whacked, then Yakuth the exploiter will stand up and hide behind Tadd's back and be his good friend whispering in his ear: *Lower their wages*, he'll whisper, *because I'm no longer here, I who paid better than you, and enticed away your workers*. That's what he'll whisper, and they'll join forces: Tadd & Yakuth, United Granite Works. And they'll come down on you with redoubled force. Killing is simple,' he concluded. 'Even killing the right people. But ensuring it has an impact – that's hard, but it's the most important point.'

'Dead is dead,' said the titch, as if Su had explained exactly nothing.

'That has no impact,' said Su. 'His blood trickles away in the sand. Because killing him over his supposedly disreputable race serves only to enhance Tadd's reputation.'

As he was saying this, Mr Tadd came by, big, ruddy, escorted by four of his workers, who though dressed like the others were a notch more strapping and well-groomed. 'Good morning!' cried Mr Tadd, and 'Good morning, comrades' and 'Are you happy now?'

A few called 'Not half!' A few, more hesitantly, 'Yes'. Most kept quiet.

'I hear,' cried Mr Tadd, 'that you've taught your enemy a lesson.'

The titch stepped forward: 'If he's up to learning anything now!' Mr Tadd laughed, winked his left eye, and the two of them were united in their merriment.

'You may laugh, Mr Tadd,' Su interjected. He stood a little aside, his lack of solidarity was obvious.

'So who's *this* then?' Mr Tadd asked.

'It's Su,' the littlest said. 'He's always like that.'

'Looks a real spoilsport,' Mr Tadd opined.

'I just proved to you,' Su began (but the word *proved* fell like a malignancy into the general air of innocence and good cheer). 'I just now proved that all of you, the murderers and the ones laughing, are acting *against* your own interest.'

'Stupid git,' said one of the murderers. Mr Tadd studied Su from top to toe. The look of complicity he then cast at his people seemed to provide relief.

'What he said,' the titch butted in, 'was, there's two Yakuths. Yakuth the foreigner and Yakuth the businessman.' Mr Tadd was entirely unsympathetic to this distinction. At first he pretended he hadn't heard properly. But then he shouted 'Two Yakuths' and 'Two Yakuths – that's good', as if the titch had said something dazzlingly witty, and he gave a fake laugh and entered into the laugh and started to

wave himself away as if he was no longer master of his laugh and as if he was trying to calm it down and he started coughing and as he coughed waved the people away, they should all stop laughing now because he couldn't stop as long as they kept on like that. But the others were only now starting to laugh, most just stood there astonished, and only a few were smirking. But when Mr Tadd's laugh showed no sign of ending, other lips began to quiver (because it's hard for innocence not to laugh along with vice, and for underdogs not to join in when their superior laughs). And the more that laughed the more became infected, and Mr Tadd's fake laugh even infected their genuine laughter and now became credible and natural – so in the end everyone sounded loud and echoing and totally smug. Mr Tadd had intended nothing less, and his success pleased him. So he tried to wind his laughter down gradually, and once he'd regained his breath he said Mr Yakuth, thank God, came in only *one* edition, and as far as I'm concerned that was quite enough.

Su, standing apart in his unsolidarity, at first reacted to this artificially staged scene with disgust. When his comrades began to laugh along, he felt abandoned. When even Mr Tadd's laugh, infected by the laugh Mr Tadd himself had initiated, sounded true and natural, Su's face flushed in shame. But once the laughter ebbed away, and those who'd laughed began to separate and look over their shoulders, they saw that the titch, under cover of the laughter, had set about his work. They'd heard not the least little scream. But there in the sand lay Su. And the titch, bending over him, was unfastening Su's watch.

'After all, a revolution doesn't come every day,' said Mr Tadd, meaning to take the titch under his wing. 'Are you done now?' The titch wiped his hands on his trousers. 'Done', he cried, it sounded like a command. He stepped close to Tadd.

'Well then, to work!' Tadd ordered in a similar tone as he shouldered his walking stick and marched off. His employees marched victoriously behind him. Up ahead, his quarries shone pink in the morning light.

NIGHT

The competition

At a time of widespread murder, the labour leader Itt, who knew too much about Burru, managed to flee Molussia. Burru at once despatched a plain-clothesman to kill Itt. The agent, unknown to Itt, had boarded the same sailing ship. On the third night, in the midst of a storm, the prow shattered. When the agent saw that the vessel was lost, and everyone aboard with it, he burst his way rudely into Itt's cabin.

'Doesn't it suit you just fine,' he shouted against the roaring of the storm, clinging to the doorframe, 'getting away from me like this!'

'What's your problem?' Itt asked calmly. How he died was all the same to him.

'That you're off to the competition, to die over there,' the agent screamed, and he threw himself at Itt and beat him to death.

Whereas the agent was able to go under without a mark on him.

DAY 31

Burru makes himself presentable in polite society,
or, when the conscience of the world is roused

Olo began the day with this:

His Excellency Ili, ambassador of the Usalian Federation, allowed himself all sorts of liberties with Burru. Federation recognition and economic support for Burru's regime of violence depended in large degree on him, and Burru well knew how to appreciate it.

'In our western lands,' His Excellency mentioned to Burru just in passing, for their audience was almost at an end, 'in certain circles of our western lands, the activities of your colleagues, the ministers Sim and Soma, do not always meet with complete sympathy. Not that anyone has said anything specific against them. We too know how to act against those emigrants with whom they have linked certain major incidents. But to some extent they are regarded as *not presentable in polite society*.'

As Ili spoke the last few words, his fingers indicated he was only quoting, he reserved his own opinion fully, and laid all responsibility at other doors.

Burru was always *imperturbable*. Vouching for shifty friends he was imperturbably loyal. Relieving himself of compromised friends, imperturbably severe. This adjective, which he'd propagated for years to characterise himself, allowed him a totally free hand and guaranteed, in advance, unanimous admiration. So having listened imperturbably to what the Usalian Federation appeared to be suggesting, he assured Ili that his own thinking aligned perfectly with Ili's. Sem and Soma had recently been recalled, and were no longer ministers. And he can show him the brothers right away. As he announced this he pressed on a bell, and two sentries, best exemplars from his personal guard, asked who they should bring in. 'Sem and Soma,' said Burru, and the two sentries repeated the names without surprise, for as far as they were concerned, anyone would do.

Sem and Soma, Burru's accomplices, were actually sitting outside in the lobby. Burru had asked them to come by to discuss an action against some mutual *yesterday's friends*.

When the pair appeared in Burru's audience chamber, escorted left and right, they realised it was their turn now: they were now yesterday's friends. That there was nothing specific against them, nothing that had not been hashed out and acted on together with Burru; that Burru was consigning them to their doom only out of courtesy to Ili from the Usalian Federation – of all this, of course they had no inkling. But being all three – Sem, Soma and Burru – made of the same stuff, Sem had already betrayed Soma and Soma Sem, before they even opened their mouths.

Burru kept them standing there a while. Then he gazed at them, imperturbably, if not into their eyes. Ili fiddled with his collar, which suddenly seemed too tight.

'You know what this is about?' Burru began at last, steely and unspecific.

'I confess,' Soma declared at once, to forestall whatever it was. He had no idea.

‘It was all his doing,’ Sem added, taking a no less clueless shot. ‘I’ve been watching his every step for two months.’

This disconcerted Burru, who had no more idea what they were talking about than they had of his question. But his gaze was as imperturbable as ever. ‘My house,’ he yelled then, for in a moment of emotion he could never find words that would not fit the mouth of the most rabid Philistine, ‘my house will remain clean.’

No one in the room could fail to understand what was going on. Ili from the Usalian Federation had gradually learned what Burru meant by ‘clean’, and saw that a cleansing was to take place now, for his benefit.

When the door closed behind Sem, Soma and the two sentries, Burru assured his guest that the business would be settled – he hoped, to everyone’s satisfaction. It would be settled very shortly. To some extent was already settled.

Ili found it hard to formulate his expression of gratitude in the prescribed diplomatic format. For within a few seconds noises could be heard through the wall, low and muffled; noises in which the voices of Sem and Soma were indistinguishable; noises that were maybe only noises, but in any case noises that Ili had no wish to go on hearing. Burru, observing Ili’s darting glances and interpreting them aright, became at once loud and voluble, for he too was a diplomat, albeit in the modern sense; and he boomed away louder than ever thanking His Excellency for the information His Excellency had passed to him. But Burru gave no more thought to what he was saying than Ili, in full complicity, gave to what he was hearing.

‘He knows more than I do,’ Burru said to himself. *‘What’s he still hiding?’*

‘Those two have been executed,’ thought Ili, while appearing to lend an ear to Burru. *‘And I am their murderer.’*

Both were disagreeably affected by the intermittent noises coming through the wall.

‘I shall have him watched,’ thought Burru, straining to hear if Sem and Soma had really been silenced now, so swiftly and without a trial.

‘I shall apply for transfer,’ thought Ili, hoping a scream would allay his suspicion.

Both were disagreeably affected by the perfect silence that now reigned in the building. And so, as they spoke and bent an ear while preoccupied with quite other matters, they were actually four persons, these two persons Ili and Burru. And once the four of them had spent a few decorous minutes in each other’s company exchanging some of those cordial words unfailingly required by the codex of diplomatic courtesy in force at that time, they bowed ready to part. And were not two persons again until Ili had descended the stairs and Burru was back in the audience chamber, pacing up and down.

“And that’s how Burru thought to make himself presentable in polite society?” Yegussa cried, proving he had understood not one iota of what Olo was steering him towards.

“*Thought?*” Olo asked back, with an astonishment greater than he actually felt, and it lightened his mood to see how well he had directed the conversation towards its target. “And what polite society might that be?”

“The ... conscience of the world?” It sounded a bit tentative.

“Now I really don’t understand you,” declared Olo. “Were Sem and Soma *only* executed? Were they not *also* rendered harmless, exactly as Ili wanted? Was Usalia merely outraged? Was it not *also* satisfied? As for the conscience of the world – that only comes into play and sets to work when it is both outraged *and* dissatisfied, outraged *because* it is dissatisfied. In every other case the appeal is ignored.”

“And Ili’s own feelings?”

“That sort of thing never lasts long. What lasts is Sem and Soma, the ones his government instructed him to mention because they were harming Usalia’s interests; Sem and Soma were the ones he mentioned. With success. They were no longer there. Really no longer there.”

“And he never had himself transferred?”

“On the contrary. He became a Sympathiser, insofar as that was possible for any Usalian. With, as they said, *appreciation for Burru’s personality and Molussia’s special exigencies*. Did it prevent him from working with Burru? Would Burru’s cruelty reflect back on him for his skilful diplomacy? His promptness? His success? Burru had done what he wanted. How Burru did what Ili wanted, which local customs he followed – was that any concern of a foreign diplomat, I wonder?”

“No,” Yegussa muttered. Olo, vehement now:

“If you know anyone who was ever outraged at being found a useful tool, who was outraged for a long time and could never forget his outrage, but no doubt forgot about being a useful tool – then tell me his name!”

Yegussa could not find a name.

“For only the *effect* is visible,” Olo concluded. “Only the *visible* stays in the mind.”

And he laid him down to sleep.

NIGHT

A legacy brings groans

“Aah,” Olo groaned, and woke up. Yegussa asked: “Why are you groaning?”. –

When Dil the sailor left his home port to spend a decade crossing all the world’s seas and visiting every one of the world’s ports, he promised his old mother that from every place, however remote, he would send her a token that he was still alive. For two whole years she received a postcard every month, reminding her according to the season to tar the boats, repair the chimney, paint the fence or prop up the pear tree. For two whole years she received regular news of him, and could imagine he was quite close by. But when two years had passed, Dil lay sick in a distant port, and saw that it was all up with him.

‘Why should my mother know,’ he said to his captain, ‘that it’s all up with me.’ And he had a packet of postcards brought to him, and in those still remaining hours of life began to write the cards that his mother was to receive over the remaining eight years. Each bore a different date, each the name of a different port, and on each he wrote as best he could that he had received her card and she should tar the boats

or prop up the pear tree. Once he had completed his correspondence for the coming eight years, he gave the packet to the captain with a plea to send off one postcard every month. And died.

For three years his mother received regular news of her son. She was glad his period of absence was shrinking, and was proud of him, and lived from one postcard to the next.

Five years after his departure, she lay down and died.

But the captain, who had no idea the mother of his dead sailor had died, fulfilled his duty with absolute regularity. Every month he sent off a card from the long-dead sailor to the dead woman. And so the news made its way from no one to no one. The boats needed tarring, the pear tree needed propping. But no one tarred, and no one propped.

“That’s why I was groaning.”

DAY 32

Pualue the Blessed, or Repetition

Next morning Olo started up with this: “As you know, one of the slogans of the moderate Pariah party, the Aspedees, called for a War on War. Really it was one of the Aspedees’ main activities (not only of the party in Molussia, but of Aspedees in other countries too) to explain to the Pariahs the real motivation for every war presented to them from above as a war for national honour. They were tireless – in times of peace. But most tireless of all was Pualue ...”

Their campaign would have rolled along steadily, had it not been interrupted by a totally unexpected chance event. What happened was, one day the leaders of the Aspedees were startled (for their propaganda activities left them no time to keep up to date on political matters) by news that Molussia had declared war on Glorilia, Ulia, Usalia and Ursia. As soon as Pualue, out on the propaganda trail, had wrapped up his speaking engagements quick as he could, he called his staff together. And together they published their *Manifesto for a Political Truce*:

Let us show every peace-minded citizen that we know how to show our mettle as well as anyone. So that the cause of the peace-minded shall not be mocked. Should our love of peace be a cause of war between them and us? All things have their season. Internal differences can be argued about in calmer times. Pacifism in times of calm. To tie hands today would be cowardly and unfair. The tolerance we insist on in our own actions we must extend to them as well. So whoever loves peace, including internal peace, let him join with his brethren: so that there shall be *one enemy less*. With victory achieved, we shall harvest the fruits of our loyalty.

That was Pualue’s manifesto; and no sooner had he published it than he placed himself at the disposal of the army, in self-explanatory fulfilment of his duty and as an example to his members. Given the tight discipline in the Aspedee party, of course

they all fell in with Pualue's argument. So they all joined up, the older, more mature, more moderate Pariahs, no longer distinguishable in the mass of soldiers, and when they crossed the Glorilian frontier and Glorilia's army advanced towards them, they nourished hopes of reward after victory – for their loyalty.

“So what did their loyalty gain for them?” Yegussa asked.

The war, as you know, went very badly. It lasted so long no one could rightly remember why he'd joined up – anyone who spends four years shooting forgets why he became a soldier. But when the war was finished, Molussia too was almost finished. And it would have seemed quite inappropriate to demand a reward for such an unrewarding business. Pualue, knowing now the real face of war, hurried back to the Fatherland to resume his propaganda role. And he was more convincing than ever, with scars on his brow to prove to the war-weary populace how right he'd been before the war to campaign against the senselessness of war. His speaking tours looked like a victory parade.

His activity could have continued peacefully on if Burru, twenty years later, with Molussia in his iron grip, had not drummed up a national war. Pualue, just then out on a propaganda tour, wrapped up his speaking engagements as quick as he could, this time as well – true to his old principle of a truce among the parties – to urge the Aspedees to show their mettle this time too, and in *a time of iron* to put their cares behind them. And this time too he assured them that after the war they would harvest the fruits of their loyalty. And rallied to the banner, in self-evident fulfilment of his duty and as an example to his party. Albeit this time only in the Reserve. For Pualue was now sixty years old.

In the course of this campaign, Pualue happened to find himself in the same region as back then. Happened, indeed, one evening on the very same southern Glorilian valley where he'd arrived twenty years before (with high hopes for the Aspedees) and where he had been forced to learn patience through several summers and winters. Suddenly – how, he couldn't say; the clump of trees on the right, gorge on the left – he recognised the path where they'd been ambushed, and when they entered the wood it was the same wood where back then they'd undertaken a kettling action that brought them some fame.

‘All in all,’ he said to the two rookies he had with him, ‘all in all, what a *splendid show* that was.’ And couldn't have enough of the sights and the exploring and the recognising and *this is where so and so fell* and *that's where so and so was wounded* and he really seemed to be back home. The two rookies, try as they might, saw nothing special about this clump of trees that was no better than any other, or this locality that was just a locality; and their growing impatience and desire to go back totally ruined Pualue's mood.

When they came to a big clearing, Pualue stood still. He couldn't for the life of him recall what this place was like earlier, but he knew at once that the clearing looked different twenty years ago. ‘This is new,’ he said, as if he'd be able to tell them something more sensible soon enough.

The terrain was covered with big stones side by side in dense rows one behind the other.

‘Graves,’ one of the rookies said. ‘Better than nothing at all,’ said the other. Only now did Pualue realise he was in a cemetery.

For the rookies it was the real deal. Dead people and epitaphs interest everyone, especially those with nothing to lose. So they moved in and inspected every stone and read off every name, even though all were unknown to them. Pualue did the same, went from grave to grave, read every name, many the names of comrades from back then, of course. When, among all the others, he read the name Pualue, he paid no particular attention. After all, he’d been a member of that company.

So he was standing by the nearest row scratching languidly in the gravel with his cane, when his comrades whistled and called out *Better come and look, see what we’ve found, here’s a stunner*. Pualue grew alarmed, and suddenly knew what the others had found. ‘Leave it,’ he gestured, but approached nonetheless. As he weaved his way between headstones, the lads looked at him as if he was a laughing stock. One shouted: ‘This ’un won’t get away!’ On the gravestone stood:

PUALUE
b. on 3rd Sardwin in the year of the Moonharvest
III.9; Mc. Kopla. 3.3
In the prime of life at 40 years of age
fallen for the Fatherland
on 7th Lemia in the year of the Sandalwood Tower
One of Us.
R.I.P.

That’s how it read. In its main points it was unarguable He’d been the only one called Pualue, there had been no other Pualues in Molussia after him, and the date of birth was his, and the unit designation no less. And if there was any inaccuracy, it was only on one point that could not negate the validity of the rest. There it stood, almost weathered away. The wreath on the grave had withered long ago.

‘What d’you say to that?’ asked the more flippant rookie.

Pualue said not a word. Having read the inscription over and over (actually it only needed a moment to take it all in) a vertical furrow appeared between his brows.

‘Here is proof,’ he told himself, ‘that I really was here.’ And he read the inscription again. ‘If I’d found this somewhere else,’ he continued, ‘somewhere I had never been, that really would be another matter.’ And he began, as is fitting at a graveside, to ponder on the deceased, and imagine what he had been like.

Wiped out, he thought. *Such a young blighter*, he thought. And *How people put their dead out of mind*. And *Not even twenty years*. And *Hard to recall what he looked like back then*. Pualue, 60 years old, dwelt on these and similar thoughts. But all ended in one and the same thought, as accurate as it was futile: that he, Pualue, the forty year old, was really gone and could never be summoned back, but, as the inscription made crystal clear, must be regarded as properly dead.

‘Chin up,’ the more serious rookie tried to encourage him, watching him stand there mourning himself. ‘Chin up! Don’t take it to heart.’ And gave him a friendly

nudge in the ribs. 'Are you here or are you not here? Well then. That must be for *them* to decide.' By *them* he meant every superior authority in general.

But this very sound argument, instead of bringing Pualue to his senses, simply cast him into deeper musing. 'For them?' he asked, and said nothing more.

But the flippant rookie grew lively. After making sure they were unobserved, he unhooked the shovel on his back and told Pualue he was going to dig him up a little. Pualue tapped him on the arm, it wouldn't really be proper, but the tap was absent-minded and lacked vigour. He was pondering more important matters.

'Them?' he asked, '*them*, precisely? For them I've been left lying on the field of honour. In their service. Frontline soldier on active duty.'

'And the years between?' the more serious rookie wondered. 'When you were back in Molussia? For us? Struggling to improve the Pariahs' lot? For eternal peace? Those twenty years, didn't they happen?'

Now all became clear to Pualue. 'No,' he said, 'they did not happen. If they had happened, then I wouldn't be standing here now. Nor would you.' The flippant one tapped his brow. The serious one had a bit more patience.

'The people,' Pualue explained, 'sent me here for the second time in twenty years. Twenty years of making speeches against the first campaign. Were they not right to see my twenty years as null and void? And see me as if I'd never stirred – from *down there*?' The flippant one was not the least interested in this insight. He was all ready to dig up the gravestone, and the serious one lent a hand.

After rolling the stone aside they began to dig cautiously in the depths, inspecting every handful in case anything came to light. Pualu, now unresisting, for several minutes watched in silence. Then he unclipped the shovel from his kitbag and began to show them the proper way to go about it. He was in charge. Minute by minute they stood lower in the dirt, and soon only heads showed. But however deep they dug, all they brought out was dirt and nothing but dirt, without the least significant bone or the smallest uniform button.

As they dug – Pualue couldn't give up now, he wanted to get to the bottom of his death – guns began to boom in the distance. They thought it was probably thunder, for the day was sultry. But a few minutes later a shell landed quite close. 'Take cover!' cried Pualue. They lay flat on their stomachs in the grave, side by side.

They lay like that for several minutes, not daring to breathe. The second shell sounded like falling rocks. Pualue, cautiously turning his head, saw that the gravestone had tumbled in and was slanted across his two comrades. He tried to lift it. It was far too heavy. *One of us*, he read as he heaved, and *R.I.P.* Then came a third shell that flung onto him the stone that once announced his presence from up above. And soil collapsed in on him.

NIGHT

The day after tomorrow. Change in order to preserve

After Olo had explained the measures Burru took following his seizure of power, how he splintered the army of the unemployed into columns that he sent out all across Molussia and forced them to work for the lowest pay – building a bridge here for twenty years in the future, a road there for fifty years in the future, or a canal for maybe a hundred years in the future – never for today, hence unquestionably forward planning – Yegussa still had a problem.

“Only for warmaking?” he asked. “And to have roads to march out along, against those who built the roads?”

“Not only.”

“I heard,” Yegussa persisted, “that in Ursia, where the revolution was successful, *our* revolution, exactly the same thing happened: the Ursian workers had to build bridges and highways and canals for twenty years in the future, at the lowest pay, badly fed and shabbily clothed to boot. Or else suffer even worse oppression. The similarity baffles me. What’s the difference?”

“Correct,” Olo said. “Both were making plans. For a counter-revolutionary Molussia, and a revolutionary Ursia. But what was Burru planning with his plan?”

Yegussa didn’t understand.

“Burru was planning. For the day after tomorrow. And he too put his plan into effect. Miles of highway construction, population transfers, turning the northern provinces upside down: Burru might almost have made a revolution – by accident – so many changes he made in the interest of counter-revolution. He made changes for no other purpose than to make sure today’s *relations of ownership* remain the same.”

Yegussa was annoyed. Olo’s distinction was a sheer trick.

“When he had the unemployed build roads and turn the land upside down, it had nothing to do with the day after tomorrow. The disruptions were irrelevant to the day after tomorrow, and most of the roads were superfluous for the day after tomorrow – three roads were actually torn up immediately after their inauguration, by other columns of unemployed, of course.”

“Is that true?” Yegussa asked incredulously. “None of it was necessary?”

“On the contrary,” Olo replied. “The *day after tomorrow* was necessary. Burru needed the day after tomorrow to find tasks; provide work for his workers; stop the mouths of the workers, for just having work was to them a good fortune. To choke off the workers’ demands, and so preserve himself and the principle of the relations of ownership. And so Burru made changes in order to preserve. He yoked the future to the service of the present. He planned distant goals to keep everyone busy now. And so highways for the day after tomorrow were only there to provide work for today.”

Yegussa was not going to be put off by all those *and so*’s. “Can you really make changes in order to preserve, in the long run, I mean?”

“Longer than we would like.” Olo waited for Yegussa to digest Burru’s principles.

“And in Ursia?” Yegussa asked after a while. “Where the revolution was victorious, our revolution?”

“It’s very simple. In Ursia the future was the future. The present, the present. So there was no planning for today to benefit the distant future. Rather today for the day after tomorrow. And where they stuck first and foremost to the present – inadequate food, shabby clothing, contempt for human life – it was all for the sake of the future. For what the Ursian workers crafted in their shabby clothes became weaving looms, and what they built on their bad rations became roads for corn transport, and what they achieved under inhuman conditions they achieved for a more human future. So they did what was most urgent and did it for themselves. What’s more, in my time they were already more warmly clothed and better fed, and they would have given any counter-revolutionary a dressing down, in the interest of the revolution.”

“Those are differences of principle,” Yegussa carped again. “Because only success is memorable. The roads will be there all over the place. No one will ask what principle they were built on. They won’t be labelled with the prescribed purpose. And the provinces will look more like every other province.”

“But only,” Olo improved, “if we take over tomorrow what Burru builds today. And if we value it as if we had built it for our own future, and not to secure Burru’s present.”

“You talk as if he’s still alive,” Yegussa realised.

“Burrus are interchangeable,” Olo declared. “And if today’s Burru has a different name, that’s simply a matter of names. Only if we take over tomorrow what we built today will the bridges of Ursia and Molussia be sister bridges.”

“So they’re not toiling away up there for nothing. But maybe, in the end, for us?” Yegussa felt somewhat liberated.

“Don’t say that. It’s not a matter of work crews. Of course many bridges and roads will be useful to us. What we have to change is not the principles of bridge-building, but the *relations of ownership*. Who knows how many bridges will simply hang there over the river, and how many canals will lie dormant between the poplars. Why should the demand for bridges the day after tomorrow exactly match the Burrists’ current demand for make-work projects?”

“Revolution is harder than I’d thought,” Yegussa admitted.

“Because it begins *one day after the victory of the revolution*.”

* * *

LESSONS IN LYING

Day 33

Proving proves nothing

“When Mee was still young,” Olo began, “he was one of our best theoreticians. His name quickly spread beyond the bounds of the Pariah quarter, and he was soon famous in the garden suburbs of Molussia for his confident and brilliant oratory. There it was said of him that he could prove anything *just like that*, and they called him the Proof-giver. What’s more (they would whisper), he’s organised successful strikes here and there. – ”

At the tables of sons of the rich, of officers and law students, this gave him a certain aura, for never before had they been joined at dinner by a strike leader. And because there was only one of him and he seemed harmless and they had no concept of the mass of Pariahs behind him, they were pleased to invite him.

At first he held back, but then reasoned that if he told them nothing but the truth and could prove it was true, he would have nothing to reproach himself for. But he kept finding – and he never worked out why – that they couldn’t understand what constitutes a proof.

On warm summer evenings, full of the truths that had assembled in him during the day, he strolled beneath the lanterns of the open-air tavern gardens of Molussia, looking for anyone at all; his new friends would call to him as they sat there bored, looking out onto the ever-placid lake, and they’d ask if he had anything to prove just now. Mee of course always had something. And although they called to him exactly as they called to the candy-hawker among the garden tables, in tones no less peremptory and with no less contempt, he would at once sit down with them.

That evening Mee sat with his table of friends beneath the leafy trees of a tavern garden, and *proved*. On this occasion he proved to them that the Pariahs were always in the wrong because they had no rights, not even the right to have rights. His proof was so pretty, so complete, and so surprising in its arc, that they sat there for a few moments open-mouthed, as if watching fireworks.

‘What does it prove that this Mee fellow, or whatever his name is, has proved this?’ asked a young officer at last.

‘What do you mean?’ Mee asked back, trying in vain to understand the question.

‘Neatly done, his proof,’ someone else interjected. ‘A model of dialectic, a logical trick. But what do his proof and his model have to do with the object of the proof, with the object itself? Mee spouts here, the law is over there, and the Pariahs are somewhere down below.’ He waved at various directions in the darkness.

‘Quite right,’ the officer affirmed, and this time seemed not to be joking. ‘Does the object perhaps know of the proof offered here by whojamajig ... this Mee fellow?’

‘What object?’ Mee was puzzled.

‘Look here,’ a third interrupted. His tone suggested he had something to impart, his face radiated goodwill. ‘You prove it *this* way, we counter it *that* way, and the third chap has a third opinion.’

‘Opinion?’ Mee asked in despair. ‘But I prove my thesis in order to show that it is *not merely an opinion*.’

‘All subjective, my dear,’ the tanned Molussian lady at the officer’s side now joined in. ‘What more do you want? We already know none of us can prove half so well as you.’

Even the young officer had to concede this: ‘But why so hard-nosed. Be a bit more tolerant. Is anyone trying to convince *you* of anything? Well then!’ Said it, took a honeyed nut, and added: ‘And that’s the truth.’

Mee was far too immature to understand that they had failed to understand what constitutes a proof. And because he failed to grasp that they actually attributed the cogency of his chain of proof to his skill at proving, he started quite discourteously to reel off once again the proof he had laid out the first time.

As he did so the company began to talk among themselves, as if he were not there at the table. They chatted about favourite actors, referring to them by their forenames. Mee, on the other hand, went on developing his proof.

‘Really,’ the girl said, jiggling her foot, ‘it gains nothing by repetition.’

Mee, unshaken, continued his proving.

The company moved on to the ballet.

Mee proved.

‘Really,’ said the officer, ‘we’ve heard it already.’ He meant the proof.

Now Mee fell silent.

‘At last,’ someone said, and the conversation lapsed, as if the only thing holding it together had been Mee’s proving.

‘I was done anyway,’ Mee declared. He stood up without ceremony and stomped out of the tavern garden, overturning chairs and bumping into tables.

And he muttered: ‘Pariahs believe my truths without me having to prove them. And I prove them to that lot, who don’t believe. So who are proofs actually for?’

A waiter came chasing after him. For as usual he had forgotten to pay.

‘I too have no right to have rights with that lot,’ he went on, stomping through the dark. ‘If only they’d claimed I was wrong. But they said truth is just *opinion*! What an insult!’ He wandered on a long while in such vein, and when he was back home he promised himself never to visit that tavern ever again.

“Did Mee draw any consequences?” Yegussa asked.

“Oh yes,” Olo said. “Later. He avenged himself on truth, because it repaid his services so poorly. And because his friends had no love of truth, and he couldn’t leave off proving, he turned to proving untruths. So he was still an intellectual, very useful to *them*, and later on Gey even found him indispensable. He was much cleverer than most of us, we had to admit.”

“And did he ever go back to the tavern garden?”

“The very next evening, at the same time.”

NIGHT

What cleverness is

‘You only tolerate me,’ Mee said next evening, ‘because you enjoy my cleverness.’

‘If it doesn’t suit you,’ someone answered, taking another mouthful, ‘you should keep away. I’d be sorry.’

But Mee stayed. And spoke. ‘That a chap should think *correctly*,’ he said, ‘if he *can* actually think – what’s so great about that?’

‘Enough with the false modesty.’

‘Really I am not clever,’ said Mee. ‘For what is it actually, cleverness? If not that which is *correct from the perspective of the stupid*?’

“So say the stupid,” said Olo. “And one of them found it marvellous.”

DAY 34

Table talk about possessive pronouns

“Of course, Mee could never have lived just on the strong drink his friends ordered for him every day,” Olo pointed out. “So it was lucky that Mr Gollo, father of his pupil, a staunch corn merchant and democrat, loved nothing better than a hothead – ”

Mee was able to eat his fill at their house once a week. Mrs Gollo served double helpings, Gollo junior, proud of his extraordinary friend, sat in silent admiration. Mr Gollo felt *a breath of fresh air*. ‘A conversation with Mee,’ he often said, ‘cheers one up better than the strongest Yeera. After him the work goes twice as well. For me it’s like a holiday.’

So Mee subsisted on his harmless opposition, and his contradictions so eagerly heeded earned him a modicum of protein, fat and sugar.

‘After all,’ Mr Gollo began, to provoke with an example, ‘every Molussian has an equal right to express his opinion.’

‘Everyone,’ Mee took the bait, ‘has an equal right to finance a newspaper and spread opinions.’

‘That excesses exist,’ Mr Gollo conceded with the greatest liberality, ‘no one disputes.’ (Mrs Gollo filled Mee’s plate with a second helping.) ‘But no one is prevented from staying independent – inwardly. Everyone is allowed to express an opinion. Even Pariahs.’

‘Because that opinion is always a *second* opinion, an opinion read somewhere, never his *own* opinion.’

‘You treat the populace,’ Mr Gollo objected, speaking as a staunch democrat, ‘and the opinions of the populace, as if they are juvenile and immature. If certain circles

that set great store on honour were to call you out for impugning honour, I would not be in the least surprised.'

Mee shook his head and tried to swallow as quickly as he could. 'The situation of the Pariahs,' he said, 'consists in having no opinions, none of their own. Can this evil be redressed by the expression of these purported opinions?'

Gollo junior, proud of every response from his friend, gazed at his father sure of victory. Father rose from the table, to give the conversation more elbow room.

'The food's getting cold,' said Mrs Gollo in dismay.

Mr Gollo shook his head with a smirk, as if he had caught Mee in a logical blooper. 'Is it not,' he asked, 'for you must surely concede as much, that everyone must harbour a personal opinion of some kind? Well then: what is the authentic opinion of the Pariahs?' He pulled his chair up and calmly resumed eating.

'What is the authentic house of the Pariahs?' asked Mee. 'They live in yours. What is an authentic lifestyle? Your cast-off. Their authentic opinion? Yours.'

'The mind is not a house,' Mr Gollo said, bravely defending the Pariah cause. They heard the cook's approaching footsteps, and Mrs Gollo said 'ssh'. 'The mind is really not a house,' he repeated mildly, as if discussing an apolitical topic.

Mee had learned to wait until the cook had left. '*Mine*, is what the cook says too,' he declared. (Mrs Gollo listened for footsteps in the corridor.) '*My domain*, she says. *My kitchen, my hours of work, my loyalty, my sobriety.* But is her domain *her* domain? Does the domain belong to her? Do *you* belong to her, Mrs Gollo?' (Mrs Gollo had no idea why Mee was talking about the cook.) '*My opinion*, says the Pariah. But does the opinion belong to him?'

'You see!' young Gollo exulted.

'The qualities of those who belong to you,' Mee concluded, 'are *your* qualities. The freedom of these people is *your* freedom – proclaimed by *their* mouths.'

'You're dashed presumptuous!' said Mr Gollo, lighting a cigar. 'So, next Sunday then.'

"That's how they would converse at table. Mr Gollo would be in a much better mood than usual. Mee would eat enough to last him all week. So both benefited."

NIGHT

Truth as an escort for lies. Mee lets himself be co-opted

'What good are your unmaskings and arguments against idols?' asked Seng one evening with a shrug – he was Mee's cleverest and most dangerous friend. 'Your truth is not colourful. It is not arousing. Maybe it enthuses now and then when caparisoned as an attack on lies. Otherwise it's boring and prosaic. Unthinkable that you should one day be victorious and have no enemies left. An appalling drought would set in.' He downed his mug of Yeera in one swig. 'And you'd all become sentimental! About every least little idol that you recall from before.'

The response to Seng needed careful consideration. 'Who told you we would ever achieve a definitive victory?'

'I thought that's what you're hoping for.'

'Of course,' Mee cautiously agreed. 'But do I have a *right* to hope for it?'

Seng gazed guileless at his friend.

'While lies can perish, individual lies,' declared Mee, 'what about The Lie? *The Lie*?' (Seng poured Mee a glassful.) 'For *The Lie* is productive. And will soon enough give us work to do. As soon as one is rebutted, along comes another. And we ... we are nothing but its escort: we run alongside, keep in the loop, set it right.'

'That's all I wanted to know,' said Seng, as if he had aimed at no other response.

'What?'

'That you can't live without lies. If ever there were no more lies ...'

'Your *if ever* is meaningless.'

'I do believe so,' Seng conceded calmly. 'That's why I swim with the current.'

Mee let himself in for it: 'You know that's out of the question for me.'

Seng shook his head sadly: 'But surely you're not inconsequential in other respects.'

Mee felt his honour impugned: 'Inconsequential?'

'When you go along with it now, running after every lie, falling in love with it, ripping the mask from every face; and when you rely on it in order to keep running and calling out No! and setting it right; and when you fear it might one day die.' (Mee just shook his head.) 'Seriously,' Seng said, speaking quite calmly as if to a defendant who would at any moment abandon his denials: 'if lying is everywhere – and lies are always being told – then isn't the *lying* world the *real* world? From which you exclude yourself? Are you not the false face? The outsider? The busybody calling from the wings?' It sounded like a proposal.

'Maybe,' said Mee.

'Seriously,' Seng concluded, 'I think it's a shame. For in the end you have intelligence. You're wasting it. But if that's what you want ...' With that he stood up.

"This and many similar discussions surely had to wear Mee down. The suspicion that the renowned Mee, Mee the Old Man of the Mountain, Gey's adviser, was nothing more than an aged version of the young Mee, seems thoroughly vindicated."

DAY 35

Demand what's happening anyway

Before Prince Gey attained his majority he was very unsound in his behaviour: he showed clear tendencies towards incorruptibility. To do away with his scruples, he often made the climb to see the astronomer Mee, to learn how he should comport himself as king. At that time Mee dwelt on Mount Sam, Molussia's highest peak, and was especially esteemed by those circles from which he himself did not stem. Even nobility and kings were proud to be affirmed and served by one not of their class.

As Gey ascended the first foothills of Mount Sam, the day was very sultry. When he was halfway up, a wall of cloud loomed over the horizon. When he reached the top, the cloud had overtaken him, and the sky was leaden.

He found Mee sitting beneath a tree, extremely alert. The youngest pupils stood in a semicircle around him, keeping a timorous eye on their master, for he had a strange aspect. He had closed one eye, while the other monitored the second wall of cloud climbing white and seething over the horizon beneath the sky's dark vault.

'Wait,' ordered Mee, darting a glance at Gey. 'I am issuing demands.'

Before Gey could ask what Mee was demanding and whom he was commanding and why he neglected to greet him as befitted his station, lightning flickered on the horizon.

'Thunder,' demanded Gey. 'You don't want to thunder? Thunder!'

And out of the distance came a reluctant rumble. Hardly had the rumbling faded when the sky grew very dark.

'Rain,' demanded Mee. A heavy drop fell. 'Lightning.' – A flash. 'Thunder.' – A more obedient rumble. And the faster his demands came, the faster the flashes, the more constant the rain, the nearer the thunder rumbling around the mountain. The weather went full pelt, obeying every demand.

Only then did Mee turn his face. 'Now they obey, and perform their drill,' he said, wringing his beard. Gey was soaked through.

'That's enough,' Mee continued, and Gey had no idea if he was addressing him or the weather. But it was growing lighter, the thunder receding.

Light,' Mee commanded, and a ray of afternoon sun slanted through the first gap to reveal a clear blue sky.

Follow me,' called Mee, his index finger describing a circle in the air. A rainbow emerged from the Oyar Valley, followed him across the Mountains of Ten, traversed the swamps around Fong, the vineyards of Gadu, the three main cities of Molussia – Molussia, Penx and Didid – at last to sink down in the farthest maritime region of Borilia.

With a gesture that seemed to lay the drama at Gey's feet, he finally greeted the dripping prince. 'Prince Gey,' he said, 'will accept my belated greeting, for he understands the demands of the hour.'

Gey, who was freezing, ungraciously made no response. But Mee stood, wiped his brow, and said: 'That was a hard battle, Prince Gey. I dared not let the reins of mastery slip from my hands. A tricky business, ruling. But fine work.' He looked pale from his exertions, for he was a monstrous charlatan.

'What work?' Gey asked sulkily.

Mee dismissed his pupils. 'I demanded what was going to happen anyway. Commanded what I couldn't prevent. Do as I do, and your authority will be unassailable.'

NIGHT

There are no dead; or,
baptism is more important than birth

'I've made an embarrassing error,' said Gey on his next visit. 'It will haunt me forever. I must shake it off.'

'And you'd like to know if you can cancel what's already happened?'

'Where there can be no turning back of time.'

'If there could ... then you would certainly be in difficulties.'

'If ...?' asked Gey.

'All you need do is vouch for what you've done.'

Gey had not expected this of Mee. 'Regrets, then?' he asked hesitantly. 'Can regrets make things better?'

'What do you think I am?' Mee responded peevishly, annoyed by Gey's false notions. 'Have I ever taught *virtue*?' (Gey: 'I just thought ...') 'I teach *comportment*. And I teach *tactics*. What do you think I am? And what opinion do you think I have of a prince?'

Gey hinted that in Mee's case it was always hard to tell.

'Regrets,' Mee resumed, 'belong to the inferior sort. Regrets are a tool of the inferior for undoing what has been done and cancelling what has happened in order never to do it again. A good resolution that reaches back into the past. A tool provided to the inferior by the superior.'

Gey nodded, not because he agreed, but more to show his goodwill.

'Regret? That's what the insolent peon does. And with the regret his peonage grows, and grows backwards into the past and the misdeeds of the past until those acts become improbable and invisible and out of the question, they never happened and they're gone. And the peon is now the most peonic and the best of peons. For regretting has only one purpose: retrospectively to set free even bygone moments. Is that the case with you?'

It was not the case. 'But isn't there some other way?' Gey asked with a troubled look. 'What did you mean, I should vouch for what I've done?'

'When does a babe in Molussia receive its name?'

Gey was alert by now to Mee's seemingly unmotivated questions. 'After baptism,' he replied. 'Even the babe's noble rank means nothing until then.'

'Because it's just an embarrassing little dollop of humanity,' Mee amplified. He waited to see if Gey would twig the analogy all by himself. But he waited in vain.

'You made an embarrassing error. What it was I don't care. Is it baptised yet?'

'No.'

'Then you've no need to worry,' Mee consoled him. 'Because then it never happened at all. For what is done really only happens *after baptism*. Status, tradition, virtue, fame, disgrace – valid only after baptism. Up until baptism day they're

crippled and without effect. The history of deeds is nothing but the history of their baptism. What you did is not yet baptised. It does not yet figure in the annals of the deeds of the House of Gey.'

This seemed to Gey at once both plausible and incredible. 'So, take for example,' he began cautiously, having already learned to clothe realities in the form of examples, 'take for example that the Pariahs are discontented, for obscure reasons. As happened during the reign of my great-uncle.'

'Nice.'

'And I ordered my Uhlans to ride into the crowd and a hundred and four lay dead on the plaza.'

'And how many were Uhlans?'

'Seventeen,' replied Gey.

'The incident hasn't been baptised yet,' Mee assured him. 'So it didn't happen at all. How do you propose to baptise it?'

But Gey was not yet so far advanced. 'Won't they say Gey's peace is a very bloody peace? How can the deaths of the dead be revoked, and what happened made unhappened?'

'Such superstition!' – 'What superstition!?'

'That there are dead people.' (Gey gawped at Mee.) 'What we have are Uhlans, hurling their lives happily into the fray; sons of Molussia: they fall, police dying in the most loyal performance of their duty. And subversive elements, despatched by the long arm of justice, and truly they deserved no better. And so on. That it looks so much like death is pure coincidence. For it has little in common with that. And what about your seventeen Uhlans? And the hundred and four Pariahs? They cry out for baptism. Don't leave them lying in the street. Any corpse can claim that much.' (Gey wrestled with this.) 'And where did you get the notion it was a time of peace, when you had your Uhlans ride in amongst the Pariahs?'

'Oh please. Between ourselves: it happened yesterday.'

'And this yesterday – have you explicitly baptised it yet?'

'Not explicitly.'

'Have you not adopted a simple baptismal name for the event? A preliminary baptismal suggestion?'

'Not that I know of.'

Now Mee became the epitome of brooding. He seemed to be searching his memories and waiting for the right one to appear. 'Was it not rather,' he fantasized at last, hesitant, as if he could not quite remember, 'was it not, if I recall correctly, your *revolution for the renewal of the monarchy* that you spoke of?' (Gey said neither yea or nay.) 'A *spontaneous emanation* from those who are the true strength behind Molussian monarchical sentiment? Was it not that?'

'Maybe.'

Mee was content. 'You see,' he said. 'And once again: what are a hundred and four Pariahs? And seventeen new Uhlands?' (Gey strained for an answer.) 'Such a bloodless revolution!' cried Mee. 'Was there ever such a bloodless revolution?'

'Never!' Gey conceded with a great deal of conviction and total admiration. He probably had no idea what it was he was admiring – his revolution, the absence of blood, or Mee's advice.

'Hundred and four? Not worth a mention. A nothing. Unless they're *something*?'

Mee did not wait for Gey's response. He answered instead. 'Unless they are the *symbol of true Molussian discipline*. Do you see?'

'For who could say,' Gey gave it a go, 'that there mightn't have been a thousand dead?'

'Correct,' said Mee, amazed that Gey at last understood. 'But it would sound better as: *a thousand despatched by the arm of justice*.'

Gey stood, and began to pace up and down. To grasp something was a new and exciting departure for him; it set him in motion.

'In such affairs,' Mee declared, 'neither usage nor custom actually applies. And there are no experts to decide whether a thousand is *only* a thousand or *a full* thousand.' And he ended the audience.

Next day, the sound of victory celebrations boomed faintly up to Mee's eyrie.

DAY 36

Simulate what you are

'I'm too shy,' Gey complained the next time he stood before Mee, 'to appear before the Magnates and explain my government's policies. Even to think of it makes me ill. And the Magnates will see.'

'Can't you simulate?'

'That's just it. Whenever I simulate manliness or courage, I break out in a sweat. When I tense my muscles, everyone can see there aren't any. And when I act swiftly to seize something, I come up short.'

Mee simulated total bafflement. 'You want to simulate manliness? But you are not at all manly. As for courage, there's not a trace in you.'

'That's why,' responded Gey, defenceless against Mee's paradoxes.

'That's no use at all,' Mee declared. 'So better show some real courage. For showing real courage is easier, and easier to sustain, than simulating it.'

'So what sort of things should I simulate?'

'If you're shy, you should simulate being shy.' (Gey gawped at him.) 'Do as if you were doing what is not within your comfort zone,' Mee clarified. '*Simulate what you are*.' And he packed Gey off home ...

"Gey took Mee's hint to heart, despite his mistrust of the man. True, he trembled no less than usual when giving a speech, but since he pretended to be acting his trembling, no

one believed it real. All believed he was holding something in reserve, something unshy, manly and proud. And his prestige rose from that hour on."

NIGHT

Cripples guarantee a posthumous fame

That autumn, when Gey feared the Molussians would blame him for the failed harvest, he wended his way to Mee.

As he climbed, he heard ahead of him a whimpering, and recognised a group of Mee's pupils hauling something on a litter of branches. Their task seemed very arduous. When he caught up they explained they had climbed in the tops of coconut trees, one of their number had fallen, and they were taking him home.

'It was over thirty feet high,' said the injured man, holding back his whimpers. When Gey offered to help they waved him back. They were proud to have a victim with them.

'What will you do with the nut?' asked Gey, pointing to the strange fruit big as a child's head, clutched tight in the injured man's arms.

'Mee is great,' he replied. 'He is exalted above any state of famine. Nature, which does his bidding, can never do him harm!'

When Gey at last reached the summit, he found Mee sitting in silence, relishing his solitude. He seemed to be dreaming with his eyes open. The clear air of evening betrayed nothing of a state of famine. Spills of smoke rising smooth and steady from the valleys into the windless heights indicated a world fully at peace. To the right of Mee's head a sickle moon floated in space, emitting no light. It looked like the moon on a flag.

'What are you up to?' Gey asked suspiciously, for Mee seemed to be adorning himself in the calm of an evening not made by him. Gey felt an urge to disturb that calm. 'Are you commanding what will happen anyway? The lack of breezes? The advancing evening that will advance anyway without you?'

'Nothing of the sort,' Mee answered equably. 'For whom should I command what will happen anyway? The gang's not here, they're away on my business.'

'So you don't actually believe in yourself and your magic?'

'I believe in nothing,' Mee replied, with an equanimity that enraged Gey; 'in nothing but the honesty of the deceived, the honesty of those I have deceived. Their pure and stupid hearts reflect back what I have simulated to them. Their hearts are venal and immaculate. I believe in them. That belief sustains the world. It will sustain Molussia too.'

Gey grew impatient. But the more impatient his listener, the more silent and calm did Mee become.

'I lie to them,' he said softly, 'and they take my lies for truths. They turn lies into truths. Purified by the innocence of their hearts, the lies are returned as obedience, reverence, and sacrifice. *No famine shall reach unto me*, I tell them, so off they go hunting, and risk their lives to care for me. *I am unforgettable*, I tell them, so they

suffer wounds in battle for me, the scars remain, and cripples guarantee my posthumous fame. *You can believe in me*, I tell them, and they provide proof in the sweat of their brow. *I am exalted*, I say, and they raise me on their shoulders. I lie to them: they belie my lies and make them true; I tell them what is not, and to the non-existent they give existence.'

Gey was bemused by Mee's sacral tone. It was unclear if he was mocking, or if this revelation of the lie and its purest representation perhaps required such solemnity.

'And what brings you here?' Mee asked suddenly in a businesslike voice.

'You've already answered all my questions,' Gey replied, unsure if he should go or stay.

'I'm glad,' said Mee. 'And I hope you have no more questions.' Gey had none.

'So I shall ask one on your behalf,' said Mee. '*Do you need those who disgust you (you might ask)? Their stupidity seems to be a lesson to you, and keeps you on your toes.*'

'I couldn't do without them,' Mee admitted, and his tone again became solemn. 'Ask me another ... *Why do you, Mee, (you might go on to ask) want to be revered by those you deceive? Are you not receiving back a dish you yourself cooked? What use is the echo of a shout you yourself shouted?* That's what you would ask, and really you understand me down to my very heartstrings.'

During this act, Gey stood helpless and silent. He was totally superfluous. 'I shall now confess to you,' Mee continued, 'I confess to you: this is the little heart.' As he spoke he looked into Gey's eyes like one confessing to a priest.

Gey grew nervous. Meanwhile someone had approached, and as it was now dark they couldn't at first see who it was. He placed a basket between Mee and Gey, and vanished swiftly back into the darkness. In the basket lay the coconut, big as a child's head.

'The things they bring me,' Mee continued, speaking now as himself and not as Gey, 'pure in heart and pure in mind – better than my own cooking. Their food sustains me longer than what I could cook for myself. And their hymns of praise shall spread my fame long after I am dead.'

'You love yourself so much?' the real Gey now asked.

'Oh no,' Mee replied, almost plausibly, 'How could I love myself? All I care about is my posthumous fame. My whole life is a concern for posthumous fame. There are no preparations one can make for immortality, other than one's own mortal life. In every living minute, one can prepare a year's worth of continued life after death. To the lads I call this eternity. But a concern for eternity is nothing but the smallness of the heart: it cannot tolerate its smallness.'

Gey felt dizzy.

'You will ask me,' Mee concluded, 'if I am a wise man. Yes I am. But why should one be wise only to be snuffed out? What use is insight when it will be just as dead as the smallness that contains the insight? It has no fame. Is my smallness overcome when I perceive it? Is an illness cured by acknowledging it? I am not accustomed to

deceive myself, Gey, as the so-called truly wise do, those who use their wisdom only as an abdication. They misuse their insight as if it were already fame. They deceive themselves. And they are unwise if they are not wise in the service of fame as confederates of the little heart.' Thus did Mee reveal himself.

"Gey never again ascended Mount Sam. Maybe he was unsettled by Mee's tremendous wickedness. But it's more likely that during the years that followed, as he applied Mee's slogan that *cripples guarantee posthumous fame*, his reign was so carefree and glorious he simply forgot who his benefactor had been."

* * *

THE TEMPTATIONS OF YAMYAM

Day 37

First temptation.

Yamyam is tempted by his brothers

For two whole years Yamyam, leader of the Pariahs, managed to keep changing his hiding place, continue his work and evade the police of the Burrian Terror. But in the end the Pariahs themselves demanded that he seek safety. So he was at home for the last time making himself unrecognisable when his two sympathetic brothers came to say their goodbyes and hear once again his opinions, which they had always thought too radical but were reluctant to disavow. But this time they were quite giddy; even as they came in they were saying *Lies have short legs* and *Sooner or later, truth always comes to light*. Thus did they reinforce each other's faith in the power of Truth and their doubts about Burru's power, and sat down composed but optimistic. There stood Yamyam, shaving and saying not a word. His brothers looked in silence at his reflection, and seeing him so altered – beardless, even more elegant than they – the gravity of the times shook them.

'Looks like you're going overboard again,' said Lanky the idealist, alluding to Yamyam's altered appearance. Yamyam knew that time would stand still for them if he only kept his beard. He stayed at the mirror, and began to make faces.

'What are you up to?' Lanky asked.

'I must reach the frontier today,' he explained. 'I need to practise mimicking the ruling class.' And he gave his brother a sloppy Magnate salute.

'You're taking it all too seriously,' Lanky continued. 'In the end ...'

'What a fine phrase that is,' Yamyam interrupted. 'It sounds so fundamental, and kicks everything into the long grass.'

His brother waved this aside. 'In the end you can't sit for ever on bayonets, as Burru does, and forever destroy justice based only on power.'

'Totally false,' was Yamyam's view. 'Power never destroys justice. Power only destroys power. Our justice that you consider destroyed is only collateral damage of our destroyed power. Or do you advocate some wispy eternal Justice just because you've been defeated?'

'Of course not,' Lanky replied, giving it no thought. 'But *he*,' and he meant Burru, the master of terror, 'in the end he'll never be able to keep up this state of injustice. Just wait for the first winter.'

'That too I cannot believe,' said Yamyam, 'that he can endure without justice. Power will bring justice in its train. Power is simply the vanguard.'

'A bit too late,' Lanky suggested, still not understanding. 'All the injustice that has happened, has happened. It can't be made good retrospectively.'

Yamyam refused to see this. 'Of course it can be made good. What's the purpose of justice? Why should power let justice come along in its train? Whether an upheaval is *just* or *unjust* depends on its success: whether it prospers to the extent that it can let justice follow along, and can climb aboard that justice.'

'You mean, whatever *is*, is *justified*?'

'That's the language of the subjugated. Cooptation metaphysics. But I think we should not go hunting for our own justice. Better prepare for power that will guarantee justice.'

Now this was much too direct for his brother, who shook his head. 'Anything built on lies will eventually fail, all by itself.'

'*Eventually*,' Yamyam repeated. 'And when might that be?' He applied a curling tong to his obligatory Magnate locks. He knew the argument would develop.

Lanky thought the question ridiculous. He followed Yamyam's toilet with fascination.

'That's not an adequate position,' said Yamyam. His curls lay as if poured from a mould. 'Would you like to know what you mean by *eventually*? That moment when the first bit of good appears, after the bad has rampaged long enough.'

'Times of transition,' Lanky waved him away as if Yamyam asked too much of Time.

Yamyam pulled on a mail shirt. 'What do you mean by *times of transition*?'

Lanky found this question just as ridiculous.

'That's not an adequate position,' Yamyam reiterated. 'Would you like to know what *times of transition* are? Times you ignore as insignificant *because they ignore you*. Hence, the enemy's hegemony.'

Hegemony is always built on lies

'But it's all built on lies,' Lanky began after a while. He knew Yamyam's weakness for Truth.

'And what is the lie built upon?' Yamyam retorted as he pulled a Magnate vest of unimpeachable tailoring over his mail shirt.

'On nothing but naked power,' Lanky said contemptuously.

'I'm not sure I understand your contempt. *Is there power, or is there not?*'

'Nonsensical question.'

Yamyam placed a ruff about his neck, which put paid to the head's freedom of movement. 'Is hegemony powerful enough to sustain itself?' (Lanky assented brusquely.) 'So it can sustain its lies as well. Wouldn't it be a nothing if it was simply naked power?' (Lanky made no reply.) 'But it's more than naked power. The nakedness is clad in lies.'

'Sophistry,' Lanky opined.

'Are these lies free-floating, or are they caught up in power?'

‘Nice one. Caught up.’

‘But anything not free-floating, anything caught up, never needs to fall.’ Yamyam turned to face him, stiff and unusually smart. His toilet was almost done.

Actually he could have brought the conversation to an end at this point. Yamyam took a fake pass from his pocket, stepped again to the mirror, and compared his appearance with the fake description. ‘So the lie is built upon power,’ he began all of a sudden. ‘And is powerful alongside power. And what might truth be built on?’

Lanky’s face took on a cunning look. ‘Truth needs no such support, thank God,’ he said. ‘Truth is self-sufficient.’ (He was a staunch idealist.) Shorty yawned. He knew the arguments Lanky would come out with now.

‘Truths *exist*,’ Lanky declared, ‘like stars, or the laws of Nature. Whether we see them or not, whether we know them or not. They’ve better things to do than bother with that.’

Yamyam took a dagger from a drawer, breathed on it, wiped it, and tucked it away. ‘And who protects them?’ he asked.

‘Protect?’ Lanky was in despair. ‘Who from? Can you rob Nature of its laws? Well then, truths can’t be robbed.’

Yamyam gave his brother a suspicious look. ‘Do you know really why truths can’t be robbed? If truths wore armour cladding, it could be ripped away. If truths had a dagger, it could be taken. But Truth has nothing of the kind,’ he said with emphasis. ‘It is naked. And that’s why it can’t be robbed.’

Lanky was somewhat overawed. Probably he was unsure whether Yamyam had just agreed with him or contradicted him. Yamyam made use of his confusion. ‘Moreover,’ he stepped closer to his brother, ‘it’s totally irrelevant whether Truth can be robbed or not.’

‘Why?’ Lanky whispered, pushing his chair a little behind him. But the chair was already against the wall. Yamyam took another step. His mail shirt tinkled gently.

‘Because Truth itself can be stolen.’ Yamyam took another step: ‘And because nothing can be stolen more easily than Truth.’ A fourth step: ‘And because not only *can* it be stolen, but it is *constantly* being stolen.’ A final step: ‘And because it is being stolen today, and lives only as a stolen thing.’

Now Yamyam was standing directly in front of his brother. The steps of Truth had attained their goal. Evasion seemed no longer possible.

‘Is it not the lie of all lies when it says: I am the truth?’ Yamyam demanded staring down at him.

‘Why are you hustling me?’ Lanky asked from below.

‘Has the Lie not robbed Truth of its claims, its appearance, its enthusiasm, and in the most cunning cases even its splendid coating of improbability?’

Lanky lifted his head awkwardly. He could neither affirm nor deny.

‘Don’t they both look the same?’

Now Shorty tugged at Yamyam's sleeve. 'It's not fair, you're so overbearing. It's no longer a discussion. It's almost war!'

'Seems you've learned something,' Yamyam replied, and sat clanking on a chair.

Truth is nothing more than veridicality

Shorty, the Existential philosopher, was glad to have a chance to speak. Not wishing to be driven into a corner like his lanky brother, he stood up and began circling around Yamyam's chair. 'In all honesty ...' he began. ('I don't doubt it,' Yamyam retorted.) '... this whole discussion is not to my liking. And I can't for the life of me understand why you're so agitated.' He circled. Yamyam paid no attention. '*The* truth,' Shorty continued, '*the* lie ... What are these actually? Such abstractions! And all this excitement?'

Lanky yawned. He knew the arguments Shorty would come out with now.

'What is,' Shorty continued, 'is the living person. Truth? It's the veridical person. Lies? It's the mendacious person.' He had the air of a victor as he circled, for he was proud of his concreteness.

'That takes us not one step farther,' said Yamyam, looking straight ahead as if Shorty was sitting in front of him.

'You see,' said Lanky, who dismissed Shorty's human philosophy as Modernism.

'I know,' Yamyam said, 'how proud you are to replace dead truth with living veridicality.' Shorty passed in front and kept circling. 'But let your liar stay in his lies. And your veridical person stay in his truth. For your living persons are spectres, abstractions dangling in a vacuum. They simply *are*, but nothing happens to them.'

'How do you mean?' Shorty asked, coming to a halt for a moment.

'You left out the most important thing,' Yamyam declared. 'The actual *process*. And that's what we're talking about: the process by which the veridical is transformed into a lie, and by which the lie is taken to be truth.'

Shorty came to a halt, for he felt a little dizzy. But because he was accustomed to view real things as antinomical and unclean admixtures of his types, he said: 'What you speak of must be a dialectical contrempe.' And he made a few turns about himself, and began to circle around Yamyam in the contrary direction.

'No dialectics,' Yamyam protested; he couldn't bear the cheap uses made of this term. 'I'm speaking of quite simple matters: of those led astray by Burru; of the deceived, who take his lies for truth. And who sacrifice themselves to the lies not just in words but truly believing, with all their heart and soul.'

Shorty stood again facing Yamyam, swaying a little. His response, given his position, would be not without consequence. In practice, when it comes down to it, he had adapted somewhat to life under Burru's terror. But apart from that, he was a rascal. 'As long as *they* are around,' he declared (and he meant those ready for death, devout victims of deception, rather than their cold-hearted deceivers), 'as long as *they* are still around, all is not yet lost.' And he made a few turns about himself, and began again to circle around Yamyam.

For the first time, Yamyam followed him with his eyes. For he would never have believed his own brother could be so despicable.

‘What is required of humanity,’ the circling Shorty declared, ‘is that it believes. Believes that it *exists* in truth. Whoever becomes the victim of lies in the belief that they are true – that person *is* true. But the lie is then, so to speak, deceived about itself. Because the deceived person believes it as a truth and not as a lie. The best part of Truth is Veridicality. And even the deceived and the credulous are veridical.’

‘In short – our enemies,’ Yamyam summed up, speaking straight ahead.

His brother started circling again. ‘Fine, our enemies, if you like,’ he conceded. ‘Consequence is consequence. Some of their adherents are more authentic and open-hearted in their lies than some of us when we speak the truth. In the interest of Truth, Yamyam, you must admit this.’ He made a few turns about himself, and began to circle around Yamyam in the contrary direction. His steps were slower and shakier than before.

Yamyam looked straight ahead.

‘How mean-spirited you are,’ Shorty went on, and trilled something. ‘How intolerant, how unjust. You won’t accept how enthusiastic the deceived are. It’s true, my dear chap. And in authenticity we find truth.’ He was standing once more facing Yamyam.

‘So deep in lies are you, that even in their falsity they are authentic. And that is what we are fighting.’ Yamyam spoke these words looking straight ahead.

‘Oh,’ Shorty trilled, ‘but it makes them feel happy.’

‘What have their feelings to do with it? Aren’t they entitled to feel unhappy when they are mired in unhappiness? Your generous heart and your tolerance will make you just as suspect there as you are suspect here. What you give them credit for, their belief and their lovely enthusiasm, will not be enough for them. And they’ll kick you out as a know-all and a bystander.’

‘Standing in the middle,’ trilled Shorty, ‘is what the righteous are skilled at.’ He waved a hand aimlessly about the room.

Yamyam ignored it. ‘Whoever does as much justice to the Lie as to Truth,’ he said, ‘is on the side of the Lie. He applies to both the same pretty measure of veridical passion. But the veridicality of a lie is stolen property. Is the victim of a theft the victor because the thief acknowledges the value of the stolen goods?’

Shorty had totally lost the thread.

‘The deceived must be saved,’ Yamyam continued. ‘But any who value the deceived for the beauty of their blind faith, and who see truth in them – they shall not be saved.’

Shorty raised both arms in the air and looked for something to hold on to. But he missed, and landed on the floor at Yamyam’s feet. He looked grey and drunk.

Yamyam was disgusted. The three sat there in silence ...

‘Our truths,’ said Yamyam, and he composed his insights more for himself than for his miserable interlocutors, ‘our truths are neither entities existing over and

above the human, nor are they lovely feelings in the bosom of the human. Any who sit around trusting in truths because they're there anyway – they have already thrown in their hand. Your faith in the power of truth is Truth's first lie. It draws a false estimation of the lie along in its wake. And the lie has no greater concern than that it should be wrongly estimated, meaning underestimated.

'Since it does not relish having its power recognised, it asserts that it is true by virtue of itself, and of the power of Truth. Talk about the power of Truth is the lie of all lies. For truly the force of the lie resides in the *power of the liar*. The lie has a firm foundation. Lying means holding fast; means being able to sustain itself; means being able to generate more liars. More liars, who, overwhelmed by power, perpetuate the lie against their own interests. If we had the right to speak power to Truth, its seizure of power would be superfluous. A second victory would mean nothing since it is already victorious, and has been even since before the victory.'

He went to the window and looked for the vehicle that was to fetch him away.

'It is immaterial,' he said to the window, 'whether someone defends blind faith in good conscience, or in a conscious lie. If truth and lies are all the same to him – under the rubric of lovely passion – then for us an evil intent and a lack of intent are all the same under the rubric of the effect they bring about. Murder? or manslaughter? – nice distinctions for the *perpetrator*, but not for the *victim*. Our truths,' Yamyam concluded, 'are neither entities nor feelings, but *claims*. Claims are nothing in themselves. And nothing when they are merely believed. Our truths must be *made* and *proclaimed*.'

'Made?' a dispirited Shorty asked. 'And proclaimed?' Lanky asked.

Then the door opened, and in stepped brother number three.

An enemy like that is not worth fighting

'Thank God,' he gasped, approaching Yamyam. He was flushed and sweaty. 'I feared I was too late. I'm so sorry you have to leave. But in the end you're only *evading violence*.'

Lanky and Shorty looked relieved.

'Being a victim of power,' the third brother went on, wiping sweat from his brow, 'does not besmirch one's honour.'

'Not even the honour of one who claimed he wanted to seize power?'

His brother stopped wiping. He had expected thanks for his consoling words.

'Are we so thoroughly beaten,' asked Yamyam, standing again at the window, 'that we must persuade ourselves we never set any store on victory?'

Third brother scowled contempt: 'When victory looks like this victory of theirs!'

'Then you *are* thoroughly beaten,' Yamyam confirmed. 'For you have accepted your disengagement from the struggle. You endorse the victor.'

'Fighting that kind of enemy is truly not much of an honour.'

'*That kind?* Do we not struggle against him precisely *because* he is *that kind*? Since when could we choose our enemies? Do you believe you're entitled to a *fair* enemy, one that you can fight with *your* fairness? Or to a *veridical* enemy, that you can fight with *your* truth? If you come along now, just after the defeat, and grumble about the adversary's inferiority, and pretend you're superior and insulted and deceived and taken in – who exactly is supposed to believe you?'

The rumble of an approaching vehicle could be heard.

'Who'll believe us?' the third brother responded. 'The educated, the discerning, who feel the same shame we do for having associated with us even with only sympathy and verbal support.' He assumed the air of one who acknowledges his errors and draws the consequences therefrom. 'But now – that's all over.'

Yamyam stepped back from the window, put on his Magnate hat and picked up his travel bag. 'You're doing exactly what the enemy expects. Whether you give up the struggle because you're too respectable to fight such an enemy, or whether it's because in the end you agree with him, it makes no difference to him.'

'Have you no parting word for us?' Shorty asked, seeing that Yamyam really was leaving; the sudden silence indicated that the vehicle was now at the corner.

'I have,' Yamyam replied. 'Stay here for two hours talking loudly and dogmatically, so they all think I'm still here.'

'Gladly,' said Lanky, who realised suddenly that he loved his brother; for absence makes the heart grow fonder. 'Of course,' said the other two.

'Thanks,' said Yamyam, and with that was done with his brothers. He would not weaken all of a sudden. His sympathies were not untouched by his convictions. He opened the door and went down the back stairs.

But in Glorilia, which he reached without difficulty, he told how Truth had fled before all the lies, and the lies would only reluctantly have caught up with Truth, for the lies were unhappily in love with Truth.

Those left behind called Yamyam a dialectician. When after a few days they perceived they were too innocuous to merit personal harassment, they set about resuming their duties, and (as they said) *making the best* of the bad and the worst now happening in Molussia, and discovering the least grain of truth in every lie. But Yamyam lived in Glorilian obscurity, and at first was recognised by no one.

NIGHT

Second temptation. Yamyam is tempted by ghosts

One winter evening Yamyam entered a soup kitchen provided for exiles by charitable Glorilians, where he overheard the following conversation:

'We're ghosts,' a voice said. He couldn't see the face. 'Each his own doppelganger. We're left with nothing but trivial irrelevancies: our appearance, our physical body, the sound of our voice, our gestures, our talents, our deficiencies, clothes from back there, and names from way back. We carry them around still, and wear them out. People who look like us and bear names that we once bore – are they *us*?'

‘No,’ the exiles answered, spooning their soup. Yamyam thought he saw in the faces of his neighbours at table something like a consensus of despair. ‘A company of ghosts interacting,’ the voice continues. ‘Ghostly enmities, ghostly jealousies. We’ve been ghosts for three years already. We can all tell who the ghost of the person beside us is impersonating. Are they *us*?’

‘No,’ came again from every table. Spoons clacked anew. Yamyam could not hold back. ‘That’s all nonsense,’ he said into the gloom.

‘Who said that?’ they asked, as if they feared intruders and wanted to be left alone.

‘If one of us here were to die,’ said Yamyam into the gloom, ‘is it the ghost that dies, or is it not rather himself?’

‘If one of us dies,’ came a response from the rear, ‘the death is only apparent and provisional. Later he must provide proof, and die once again in Molussia. No one believes a ghost can die.’

‘That’s right,’ said the ghosts, spooning away.

‘Shipwrecked sailors,’ the voice declared, ‘cast away on an island – but before that they’d been accountant and chief temple beadle and only the bodies lived on – they are ghosts. And when one of those bodies dies, what does it have to do with chief temple beadles? Only in Molussia do you find chief temple beadles.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Yamyam again. ‘We are not castaways. We are defeated and exiled. And have more work to do. If you were to become ghosts, it would prove only that you were unprepared, and ignorant. For ghosts are those who cannot grasp the consequences of the risks, and brush them aside and set them up as something alien, and are alien to themselves when they fall victim to their freely chosen ventures. To be a ghost means rendering guilt illusory, means acting like castaways when you are merely exiles. This spookiness is a pretext. A pretext for being neutralised, being taken by surprise, being unprepared. The only ones who can become ghosts are those who should have been ready for anything, but instead were much too comfortable with something.’

After what had gone before, Yamyam expected no substantive response. But the argument that now came was even shabbier than he could have imagined.

‘Who are you anyway?’ the voice from the rear demanded. ‘We’re all accounted for here.’

‘*All accounted for?*’ a puzzled Yamyam responded.

‘For sure,’ the ghosts echoed menacingly, scraping spoons against bowls.

‘Could be,’ said Yamyam, rising to his feet at this whiff of danger. ‘You’re all accounted for here. Like the lost strongbox in which the coins lie all together, but the box itself has been stolen, its whereabouts unknown. But not *all accounted for* are those who were defeated in Molussia and find themselves gathered here in Glorilia. The only ones who are *all accounted for* are those who would never have felt a need to gather all together in defeat. And if you lot are *all accounted for*, it shows only you were never *all accounted for* back in Molussia.’

Thus he spake, and quit the soup kitchen. And stood outside in the falling snow of the foreign city of Glorilia. And was in despair.

DAY 38

Third temptation. Yamyam is tempted by clerics

In the time of confusion, when Yamyam neglected his work in the cause of Molussian freedom, he had to scrape along with the bare necessities of life. It was hard in a foreign land, all the harder when every Glorilian saw every Molussian as his born enemy. But however grim Yamyam's misery, it's not worth mentioning.

One day, relief seemed to arrive from a most unexpected quarter. Glorilian theologians offered their support: he was a refugee deserving of succour; enemy of their enemy, a man of the spirit to boot. Yamyam declined: he preferred to work for a living. A week later he still had no work despite showing his face everywhere, so the theologians – who monitored his efforts closely – apologised for the directness of their first invitation, and suggested he might defend his atheistic stance in their presence and introduce them to the foundations of his unbelief. They will dispute, and practice the art of refutation. There'll be nothing in the way of accepting an honorarium for the task, which in the end is spiritual work, and more fitting than the kinds of work he's been seeking.

The invitation letter did not lack tact. The prior, who signed as 'Bunatiram', seemed neither a missionary nor someone out to exploit misfortune – simply a generous person accustomed to helping out wherever the need might arise, and one who loved his enemies, so long as they were educated and innocuous.

Even Yamyam was tempted for a moment to interrupt his daily traipsing through the streets of the city, and put an end to his constant waiting and pleading. He knew he'd be able to converse easily with the prior; he could count on their understanding when he spoke in allusions and half-quotes; he would relish the erudition and classical learning he encountered so seldom (of course) among his own people; and a meeting of educated minds would do him good. He pictured all this to himself, recognised it as temptation, and decided to decline as firmly as when he declined the prior's direct offer of money. He had just overcome the inclination to accept the temptation when some old friends turned up.

'You're in contact with Glorilian clergy,' they said. 'What's that about?' They kept a close eye on old friends, and wouldn't let them slide all at once.

Yamyam explained that he was known in Glorilia as a philosopher and a God-denier, that the theologians wanted to invite, refute and pay him as their devil, and that he was on the point of declining.

Having heard him out, the friends whispered among themselves, and declared that a decision whether to accept or decline was not his private business. If the monks wanted to win him over or use him as a classical opponent, he had an opportunity to turn the tables, talk them out of their superstition and win them for the great cause of atheism. If on top of that the Holy Joes wanted to hand over money

to their own disadvantage and give him the means to survive, that was now three advantages in one.

Yamyam disagreed. 'You don't know the enemy,' he said. 'So long as we are powerless compared to them, and are willing to engage with them, and the engagement is not yet a decisive battle leading to destruction – so long as this is so, we should not be of coarser timber than they. I would have to utter very complicated and theological propositions, for theology can only be nullified by theology – unless by force of arms. But then you would say: he's gone over to the other side. And you would say: he was always Mr Clever Dick and we sent him over there and Mr Clever Dick fell for their peasant cunning.'

'Whether or not we would say that,' the friends said, 'depends on the outcome.'

'Which won't be evident immediately. For I should have to confuse them with their own arguments and they would put it about that I'm a religious atheist and at bottom well-disposed towards God. I already hear such things today. Do you want to hear it from their own mouths later on?'

'If they're more cunning than you,' someone interjected, 'they would be right to say so. Don't make it more complicated than it is. Tell them how ignorant, harmful, superstitious and mendacious they are.'

'Accusing them of superstition,' said Yamyam, 'wouldn't take me very far. Our doctrine, which is simple, would seem to them fatuous. And whatever is obvious they would declare superficial. They hide in their lies. But do not underestimate how deep and firm their foothold is in the foundation of lies. Against the strength of their weatherproof cathedrals, our words would be no more than a wafting breeze. Their bells promise a false peace. But they ring out across millennia.'

The friends regarded him suspiciously.

'The *rebutter* always seems inferior to the *liar*,' Yamyam declared.

'Only at the start,' suggested one of the friends.

'The start was long ago, said Yamyam. 'We've been in the midst of battle for centuries. But the cathedrals are still there, and *faith* knows all the devices that *truth* deploys.'

'So you're saying we should give up the struggle?' one of the cleverer ones asked.

'How you misunderstand me,' replied Yamyam. 'Yet you expect from me a decisive victory. You would mistrust my initial steps. If I were to complicate our simplest precept, in order to open the prior's ears – you'd accuse me of treason. And if I were to pour out our rebuttals in words of suitable modesty, you'd say I've gone over to them.'

This ended the conversation. 'Anyway, it would do no harm,' they whispered among themselves. 'Bad as our reputation is among the clergy, it couldn't get any worse.' And they told Yamyam he was just beating about the bush and he had to accept, so there ...

... Standing at the monastery gate with a new cravat, he looked smartly turned out, if hungry. The porter received him with respect, and informed him dinner was

waiting. Yamyam said he'd eaten already, and apologised for putting him to unnecessary trouble.

'I suspect,' he began once he had been presented to the prior, 'that the way the Burrian terror system makes use of the name of God is arousing displeasure. Really it's an abuse. Even worse, indeed: a heresy.'

The clerical gentlemen exchanged puzzled looks, and nodded. 'You, Mr Yamyam, are a victim of that system. Believe me, our sympathies are with you. The sympathy of our hearts, and the sympathy that binds the truly spiritual to one another.'

Yamyam did not demur, but thanked him.

'You're a victim of abuses,' the prior continued, 'and such abuses are our enemy. The enemy of my enemy is my friend.'

He approached Mr Yamyam intending to give him a long hearty handshake that would set aside all differences of opinion. Yamyam remained courteous, and if he shook the prior's hand unreservedly, it was only to be polite. But when this uninhibited ceremony was over, Yamyam said: 'You are the enemy of *abuses*. But I am the enemy of *uses*.'

The gentlemen emitted a murmur of incomprehension.

'Abuses seem to me to expose uses,' Yamyam explained.

'You understand,' the prior responded hesitantly, 'that we cannot endorse this notion.'

'When I was driven out by abuses,' he declared, 'I vowed never to lose sight of the fact that my struggle was always against uses, never against abuses. Am I perhaps to become an advocate of uses, having suffered the curse of abuses?' And because he had often been in the temples of Molussia, for politeness' sake he made the gesture that wards off the devil. 'How tempting!' he cried.

The gentlemen were puzzled all over again. What Yamyam was saying sounded, if you failed to hear it clearly, completely theological. They waited.

'Would it,' Yamyam continued humbly, 'not be a monstrous blasphemy if I, the unbeliever, were to serve as witness to the Holy Gospel? That cannot be your intention.'

'His piety is blasphemy,' one whispered. 'He's a portent,' whispered another. 'And his denial of God affirms God.'

'Neither the one nor the other,' said Yamyam. 'Burru has destroyed the last freedoms of humanity in Molussia. Including your religion. For he desires, alone and all by himself, to hold freedom down.'

'Of course,' said the prior, not yet realising where Yamyam would take this.

'Your religion never inscribed the freedom of humanity on its banners,' Yamyam went on. 'That the human being might exalt himself instead of God was condemned by your religion as arrogance, much to the disadvantage of those enslaved by your accomplices, and much in the interest of those who now exalt themselves, and enjoy your support.'

The prior shook his head. 'Our religion,' said the prior, 'finds its believers among the rich no less than among the poor.'

'That's the whole point,' said Yamyam. 'You keep the oppressed in your religion in order that they stay poor. And the rich belong to you because no religion is more useful than one that presents the oppressed with the lesson that their feebleness is God-given.'

The prior smacked his lips, as if relishing the arguments being advanced. 'You see,' he said to his priests, 'that's what I wanted to present to you. Is he not a classical foe? Now for the refutation.'

The priests began whispering among themselves.

Yamyam had difficulty controlling his ire. 'We are diverting from the main point,' he declared.

'Of course,' the priests said, absolved from having to refute.

'Human freedom and tolerance,' Yamyam went on, 'were never inscribed on your banners, and the only freedom promoted was the one that guaranteed the practice and representation of your faith. It has been taken from you by Burru. And suddenly you are advocates for freedom and tolerance.'

'Second point,' the prior said, looking very content. 'Note it.'

'It is right,' continued Yamyam, 'that Burru should fight your faith in the same way he fought our lack of faith. And that he is hated by both of us.'

'Preserve me from that,' said the prior.

'But what would you do if I had the power, and were not standing here before you as a defeated man?'

'Third point,' said the prior.

'I think that's enough points for today,' said Yamyam. 'May I request that we move on to a discussion?'

The priests readied themselves.

'May I add that if belief and unbelief are to be discussion partners, then until we arrive at an outcome, they shall be merely *opinions*. Let *belief* be suspended just for so long.'

'How could it be?' the prior asked.

'That's what I'd like to know,' said Yamyam. 'For surely you're not prepared to accept a truth, if by chance it should fall on my side?'

'How could we?' asked the prior. And this time he made a gesture that seemed to take in the whole monastery and its occupants. The meaning was clear: 'What would become of all of this?'

'Exactly,' said Yamyam. 'So I assume that you have brought me here only to sharpen your knives on me. At my expense.'

The prior pretended to be a bit shocked. 'We have nothing to hide from you,' he said, now taking control of the conversation. 'All we are interested in is the human being; the human background to your unbelief; your personal disillusionments.'

‘Very friendly of you,’ said Yamyam. ‘But the human background to the truth does not make the truth any more false.’ He made a deep bow and stepped, in the prescribed monastery manner, backwards to the door.

The exile is no herald

But among the brethren was one who seemed to feel a certain attraction for unbelief, and could not bear to see Yamyam dismissed once and for all. He slipped along behind the visitor, and placed a finger to his lips. Yamyam was now on the other side of the heavy barred gate.

‘I have a proposal for conciliation,’ he whispered from inside.

Yamyam pulled the gate firmly shut.

‘Introduce us,’ the monk whispered, ‘to the multi-storey theoretical edifice of the Molussian philosopher Regedie.’¹³ That Regedie and his philosophy were both once great, awe-inspiring and objective I’m sure you’ll deny to the very last. And of course the Regedians have recently gone over to the Burrians. We know you are well versed in his philosophy.’

Yamyam politely declined. ‘But why?’ the astonished monk asked, having believed his proposal innocuous.

‘I’d be afraid of being too objective.’

The monk thought he had misheard.

‘Should the exile become the herald of his enemies?’ asked Yamyam in return, ‘and the expellee their propagator?’

‘Was it *he* who expelled you? I mean, personally?’

‘His theoretical edifice has back doors,’ Yamyam replied, ‘which I failed to spot earlier. And which allowed him to move across directly to Burru. And to draw others after him.’

The monk had a quizzical look. ‘You could leave out the back doors,’ he suggested.

Yamyam shook his head. ‘If I were to hand over to you the entire theoretical edifice without the back doors – the back doors would appear all by themselves. They emerge from the specific layout of the whole edifice.’

‘Ah,’ said the monk, who had never heard of such a layout. ‘But I wouldn’t use any of the back doors.’

‘No such thing,’ said Yamyam, ‘– doors that no one uses. And just imagine: the whole edifice rests today entirely on its back doors.’

‘Ah,’ the monk said again.

‘And for intellectuals, the entire edifice has become one great big back door that leads them over to Burru without having to abandon their education.’

The monk was speechless. ‘You intrigue me more and more,’ he said finally.

¹³ Say it backwards, with an ‘H’ initial! [Tr.]

‘Sorry about that,’ Yamyam concluded, walking away with a polite farewell wave. “But when asked by friends what had come out from the discussion, he said: ‘Me.’ And embarked all over again and much invigorated on his work for the cause of freedom.”

NIGHT

Caution against the singular.
Offspring of rape

“So who was Regedie?” Yegussa asked that evening.

“I’d have to reach a long way back. Do you know what Silo was?” Yegussa had never heard the name.

Around a hundred years ago it often happened that the supply of slaves and demand for them became unbalanced, and big consignments of fresh imports could not be sold off all at once. So they decided to build a big village-type slave transfer facility near the harbour, where they could be stored until the opportunity came to offload them. The place was called Silo. There they were kept, men, women, children, fed not just to keep them alive but to enhance their market value. In fact in the early years, when slaves never needed to be stored for more than two or three months, Silo was seen as a kind of repair station, high quality and profitable. Even undernourished items could be reconditioned and sold at a good price. But when the time of crisis came and whole batches of slaves spent years and years in Silo, quality went rapidly downhill. Their vast numbers and lack of occupation rendered them sluggish, melancholy and anaemic. But more of that another time.

Among the long-term residents of Silo was a man called Regedie. He played the spokesman, and though he was the smallest was regarded as a spiritual leader; for he was impressively cunning, and it’s even possible he was a deep thinker. For what he offered his comrades was not just occasional advice, but an entire philosophy. He must have been Mee’s double, down to a T.

The trick he used in his propositions was this: he spoke of Humankind in general when he should have been speaking of slaves, or better still of Silo slaves in particular. So in his mouth their own life became nothing more than one instance among others, no better but also no worse than any other instance of life.

That they’d drawn the short straw he did not deny. But the short straw was drawn by *the Human*, the human being *as such*. What they suffered happened to *the Human*, and was ascribed to *Life*. To life *as such*.

“To the Human,” Yegussa repeated, “to Life.” – “Beware,” Olo warned him, “of the *Philosopher’s Singular*. It’s camouflage.” He went on:

But whatever was good, whatever brought happiness and the good life that was beyond their reach – this he simply denied, or dismissed it as *one-off* and *mere chance*. At bottom only one thing brought happiness, and that was – to live. That was something they did as well, inarguably – or did they?

‘A better or a worse life?’ he asked once. ‘A fuller or an emptier? Worthwhile or worthless? Sophistry! Compared to Death – or maybe you know a better yardstick?’

– compared to Death one life is like any other. Life is life. Ours as good as yours. Or perhaps you're not alive? Well then. Cut and dried. Leave them the illusion that they had more. *For even they can do no more than live.*' There they stood, his acolytes, in whose name he spoke and who laboriously took down every word and were meant to come up at once with a better yardstick. Finding none, for they had absolutely no idea where and how they were supposed to find a yardstick, they cast their eyes shyly down and said: 'Yes, of course.'

When the inexhaustible supply of Massui slaves was discovered, the global price of slaves plummeted so rapidly that maintaining the Silo operation and the expensive slave-transport business would have become a sheer lossmaker. So no fresh slaves were brought into Silo, and the daily feeding of the ever less profitable inhabitants became more and more notional. In the end the camp management began loading up a weekly consignment onto a big transport vessel. A day's voyage away, about two nautical miles to the west of Rapedusa Island, the transport containers would all of a sudden be hauled up from the hold and dumped into the ocean. Before they could realise their mortal peril, the slaves would all be drowned. Given the enormous numbers of Silo slaves, the operation lasted months. Only after such drownings had taken place every other day for two months did vague rumours filter back to Silo. But all culminated in the proposition: *their time in camp is but a preparation for death.*

At that moment Regedie found a kind of salvatory doctrine. Life, he taught, is the only opportunity to prepare for one's own death, indeed to take ownership of one's death. Any who neglect to take ownership ignore the purpose of life.

An astonishing number of slaves fell victim to this doctrine. After work they would sit in the yard, neither dejected nor agitated, seemingly focused on themselves, faces rather stupid-looking, and tried to think without interruption about their own death. The stupidest proclaimed the most exalted concentration; immersed in their tedium, claimed they were having a foretaste of death. Regedie himself seems to have doubted whether they could actually distinguish between that state and their normal state. 'When they think of death,' he said, 'they think, as usual, of nothing.'

Another group, to which the more courageous and sceptical belonged – but even they were no doubt inspired by Regedie – asserted they had always known it would one day be all about death. The sudden earnestness with which others spoke of death was simply proof that earlier it had slipped their mind. The point was to render not life, but rather death, irrelevant. Even the enemy could do no more than kill, and nothing worse than death could happen to anyone.

Once the two parties began to quarrel over differences in their theories, Regedie announced that the two theories were identical. Bothering yourself about death is in every case cowardice. Whoever is persuaded to regard life lightly or view death as harmless lacks audacity and decisiveness. True courage requires neither belief nor preparation. The truly courageous love life, so that death will be actually unwished-for death. And they love death, because in it they find a courage found nowhere else in life. This, said Regedie, is the positivity of the courageous, proof of their grandeur and wholesomeness.

When he talked like this, Regedie their orator, they stood about him feeling a certain pride, and because he ended every proposition with 'Is it not so?' they felt constrained to nod or say 'yes' or 'that's just how it is' or 'you do know we don't understand any of this'. So it was easy to persuade them he was needed in the camp, indeed indispensable, and he would have to be the last to leave the ship. 'That's what every captain does,' he said. So as Silo emptied out, he remained *on board*. And as others were being drowned, he spoke to those remaining, in the name of all.

At last only thirty were left. And when it was the turn of these thirty who had too much space and too much memory, Regedie saw no possibility of pushing a substitute into the lineup for the ship, and he would have to find some other way to evade death. So he left the lineup and reported to the camp commandant. In the manly tone he had adopted, he announced that he knew the ship would be sunk. He had known it for a year. But had never betrayed the secret.

'Why not?' asked the commandant in great surprise.

'Could I have prevented it?' Regedie asked back. 'But I was able to prevent panic. I was able to stifle mutinies.' And he bowed and took a couple of steps back as if all he had wanted was to make his report and now he had to resume his place in the lineup. But the commandant called him back in, and made him his gofer.

"I have long doubted," Olo said, "whether Regedie's propositions actually came from him. Especially since his fame had slowly spread beyond the walls of the camp, and his theory of the *sameness of life* had taken root among the wider intelligentsia and even in fashionable business circles. These circles could hardly have asked for a more practical theory.

"The despatch riders took it as given that he was a stoolie of the camp management, paid handsomely to develop and promote comforting theories. Some even named the amounts he was paid. My predecessor was prepared to identify Regedie with Mee. All these conjectures seem to me not just unproven, but misleading. The ruling class doesn't need to drum each theory favourable to it one by one into the dominated population. Their true dominance consists in making the dominated capable of producing such theories all by themselves. Even the most suicidal theories of the subjugated class are no secretly sequestered infants. They are their natural children: born of them, nourished by them. Even if they are the offspring of rape."

DAY 39

Emigrant conversations.

The defeated take the long view

Olo said: "As Burru's victory went from strength to strength and became undeniable even to the most doctrinaire emigrants, they met to sing the praises of the long view –"

'We must become accustomed,' they told one another, 'to see our so-called setback in its secular context, in its world-historical breadth. The overlords will have yet another occasion to be greatly surprised.' And so, as they expanded the perspective in order to minimise their defeat, they seemed like demigods, careless whether victory came to themselves or to their great-grandchildren.

‘The defeated do like the long view,’ was Yamyam’s response.

‘You can say *that*?’ they retorted. ‘Wasn’t that what you always preached to us?’

Yamyam admitted it. ‘But the timing of your insight is dubious. The long view should not be too long. At the moment you’re incapable. But one day you could find yourselves superfluous. Do you think conditions in Molussia will *wait* for you, and *stay the same* so that it’s *you* who will change them? I hope not. If you don’t set about it before long, but go home after ten years and say *We’re here to save you*, maybe you won’t find any Pariahs and no one will know who you are and they’ll ask *who* exactly did you come to save, from *what*? But you’ll stand there with bread for yesterday’s hunger, and tools for long forgotten tasks.’

‘So you think it possible that they’ll have freed themselves, the Pariahs, *before* we return?’ Great anxiety lay beneath this question.

‘I hope so,’ said Yamyam. ‘Do you think Molussia’s history will not roll on without your sayso? Even contrary to your programme?’

“Then Yamyam told them the following story,” said Olo –

Why the island of Old Molussia is called Old Molussia

Fifteen years after the first colonial war ended, when two hundred POWs long given up for lost – men long since declared dead – arrived back in Molussia, last remnants of the old colonial army, ragged figures who had acquired rude and highly un-Molussian manners, who ate unspeakable things in unspeakable ways – they thought a new day had dawned. They stood on the quayside causing traffic holdups. And though they really were back and though they had nothing to do, they stayed all in a bunch until evening, simply unable to imagine going their separate ways. When a representative of the authorities came along around five in the afternoon – their arrival having developed into a scandal – they grew lively. When he asked for ID, they spat contemptuously and called him a city slicker. He reddened, said he was unaccustomed to such tones in the course of his official duties. They demanded to speak with Sem instead of him, but the official had no knowledge of a Sem, and it eventually turned out Sem had been dead these eight years. This infuriated them, as if their Sem had been unlawfully torn from their arms. They showed by their loud disorderly speech that they thought they’d returned to the old Molussia, where you were treated man to man, and your past conferred certain rights. For they assumed that *what’s absent never changes*.

‘We fought for Molussia!’ they cried, showing scarred hands, and stumps of arms.

‘We thank you,’ said the official, looking away. ‘Let’s see your thanks,’ someone shouted. Others: ‘When you sent us off you made big promises.’ (The official gave a languid shrug.) ‘That we would become masters of Molussia. And we would make Molussia anew. When we came back.’ Others: ‘So here we are.’

The official waved a hand that encompassed the entire city. ‘Alas,’ he said, ‘Molussia has already seen many changes. What’s more, I myself neither sent you off to fight the colonial war, nor made you any promises before doing so.’ And to

forestall any misapprehensions: 'I was still very young when you set off, my predecessors from ten and twenty years ago loved to make promises.'

The arrivals were struck dumb by this explanation. They resented any reminder of the fifteen wasted years. The official took the opportunity to call forward trucks laden with food that were waiting in the wings. This had an immediate effect. Encircled by large numbers of rather nervous citizenry, the two hundred men flung themselves at the trucks. They must have had extraordinary table manners, for even today there are old samplers showing so-called *colonial eaters*.

The officials did not let these hours of open-air dining go to waste. They hunted down former spouses of the POWs. But these once-young women had meanwhile acquired lovers or a second husband or children or had settled down to fifteen years of widowhood. They were outraged. That their officially dead husbands from back then should turn out not to be dead – they regarded it as cheating; of course you can't just revoke the fifteen years of life we worked so hard to build up after the loss of our first husband. They called documents in aid, produced death certificates and pointed to official stamps. When the first group of women was brought to the quay to identify their husbands, they refused unanimously. But the men too reacted strangely to the sight of these elderly women, and grew mocking and hostile. For whenever they thought of their spouse during that dead interval, it was always her image from back then they had before their eyes. They assumed that *what's absent never changes*.

'We'll find the right one,' they assured each other, gazing around the crowd of gawping onlookers, 'and right smartly, all by ourselves.' It sounded a bit ominous, and wives and daughters quickly worked their way to the back of the crowd.

As night fell, they attempted, as they had during the colonial war, to venture in groups of three or four into the city centre. Shopkeepers lowered their shutters; civilians vanished from sight. Now the officials decided to put an end to the scandal, sent in the police, and a hundred and eighty (twenty having fallen victim to the cleanup) were herded aboard two vessels and banished to the Senka Islands. For it is said: *misfortune begs for punishment*.

While still aboard ship they preached to one another: *We're the true Molussians* and suchlike. The three-week voyage provided lots of time to absorb the notion.

So in the end they found their landing in Senka nothing to worry about. They waited for the vessels to disappear over the horizon, then went looking about. Three days later they discovered countryside that reminded them wonderfully of Molussia. There they settled, and before they'd even cobbled together the first shacks they named it *Old* or *True* Molussia, to signal an unmistakable difference from the new, corrupt, ungrateful Molussia.

So they had the countryside, and the name. All that was missing was the city. When they began to build it, they marked out streets exactly like those in Molussia, built copies of buildings that had stood in Molussia before they left for war, and proudly introduced changes to which they felt entitled by old promises. The result was more toytownish than the original, cruder and less modern, something intermediate between an oversized model and an undersized city. But they toiled

away in fanatical earnest. Some specialised in reproductions of buildings already ripe for demolition in the Molussia of memory – no small technical challenge. Even the old graveyard between the Temple of Nature and 'Change Street was not forgotten, and on the annual Day of the Beloved Dead they placed wreaths on artificially weathered headstones. 'Molussia is a project,' they told themselves. 'Yeah, the past itself is a project.'

Understandably, several of them never married – for the island women available to them were decidedly un-Molussian. All the more fanatical was the attitude instilled by the married men in their rather foreign-looking children. They reared them on a savage hatred for the *false Molussia* that claimed to be fifteen years ahead of them – the fifteen years of incarceration they had expunged from their timelines.

The pride of *Old Molussia* endured a good while. But the language gradually went wild, and exotic blood was in the end stronger than Molussian. The race is not unattractive. Today Old Molussia is a blooming spa resort, a favourite destination for Molussian yachtsmen, and a centre for folk art products ...

'And what does this story signify?' Yamyam asked.

'That reality doesn't work on the long view. Rather from hand to mouth. And short of breath. Isn't it dangerous, having a longer breath than reality itself?'

The question seemed to contradict classical theory. 'You love plans,' Yamyam explained. 'And plans are certainly better than mutinies. For mutinies see only tomorrow. But does your plan even see *today*? The everyday today? Does it not act for you as a windbreak against daily surprises? As if you've forbidden the enemy to embark on any action, any unexpected action, until that distant day when your plan will be fulfilled? There are *obsolete futures*, futures from some time ago, planned some time ago in ignorance of today. Your plans made some time ago for some time in the future may guide *your* actions, but do they guide *theirs*? Do you think *they* will stick to *your* plans? *They* have changed. But here you sit, imagining the yesterday that is the target of your constant struggle, and you are far more constant than yesterday has turned out to be. The ruling class finds it easy to make plans, rigid plans with a ten year time horizon. For the enemy can prescribe. But the plans of the defeated should be more flexible. They should adapt to the enemy's tempo; if they don't track him closely, they'll miss the mark. Or do you actually *want* to distance yourselves from the enemy, with your plans? What if your plan of campaign is just a most subtle – and least acknowledged – means of escape?'

"Yamyam really said that?" demanded Yegussa in an inquisitorial tone. "That, or something like it," Olo replied, as if accuracy were no big deal.

"It reminds me powerfully of my story of the One and Only!"

Olo wasn't in the least bothered by the fact that this story originated not from Yamyam but from himself, and that he'd given Yegussa's original tale a thorough working over. "Did I not tell you your story's only a story? Now it's a fable. Useful and transportable. So pass it on."

Thus he spake, and lay him down to sleep.

NIGHT

The exile's nightly reckoning

Ah, what heart that steady beats
 Could cherish constantly *your* voice?
 For memory sustains great loss
 in foreign hostelrys and streets.
 Before sleep can tired eyes find
 In foreign beds, and memories slide,
 Let us first have, cut and dried,
 The reckoning for what's left behind.

This was recited by Olo. "What's that?" Yegussa wondered.

"A verse Yamyam wrote in exile. Every evening before he slept he thought of the comrades left behind in the Molussian Terror. And every evening he heard them as they whispered from so far away, demanding to be remembered and accounted for."

Voices of the voiceless

What's that you say? No word, no greeting?
 Nothing? All that myriad-fold outreach
 Of Nothing – is our enforced muting,
 And the muteness of our speech.
 Nothing? Thus we suffer, mute in chorus.
 Nothing? Out from graves and prison cells,
 So count us now. And prove to us
 If you might dare to mute yourself.
Me: By endless waiting maddened.
Me: Crippled. *Me:* Ill-used and grey.
Me: Buried in some forlorn garden.
Me: Still not found today.
Us: Hundreds trampled in the mire.
Us: Thousands shot in coldest blood.
Us: Myriads packed behind barbed wire
 Cut off from everything that's good.
 So. Here we are. Now make a count
 Of every one. Be sure your bill
 Omits not one in the full account,
 Not one whose death *your* place did fill.
 Ready? Can you pay it out?
 Show you've earned your living breaths,
 Until our mute choirs say it out:
 That *the dead* are not just *deaths*.

The day shall come when we implore you
 'Rise up from your cushioned chair!
 And dire regrets begin to floor you
 For all those pious prayers.
 And then we'll fly across the sea
 To find out if it is all true:
 That we have been as loyal as thee,
 And to book us in for trials anew.

Thus did Olo recite. "His friends in exile," he went on after a while, "exhorted Yamyam in the following terms – "

Show humility

Since back then, five years ago,
 We all left our duties lying,
 We can't tomorrow simply try
 To start again, as if there'd happened
 Nothing much. And if one day
 you should return, pray bear
 In mind that much meanwhile
 Has happened in your native place.
 Much, for sure, was false and wicked,
 But mostly *us* it left untouched.
 For sure the friends we parted from
 Back then (is this or that one still around?)
 Are greatly changed. So: show humility.
 Much time has passed. And much
 Time, especially in the enemy's hands,
 should never simply be brushed off.
 So, be prepared to listen, learn,
 Don't be doctrinaire, but show
 Humility.

DAY 40

Fourth temptation.

Yamyam is tempted by his enemies

"Nothing much," Olo began next morning, "has come down to us about Yamyam's activities in exile. All we can be sure of is he couldn't bear to keep away for long. When the illegal Pariah factions continued to splinter even under Burru, and every attempt to unite them came to nought, Yamyam disguised himself once more as a Magnate, and set off back into the Terror – "

Within half a year the hostile factions had learned that nuances could be set aside. Burru, who had not only relished the earlier discord among the Pariahs, but had

stoked it using straw men, took great care to scupper their growing unity. He had no doubt at all that Yamyam, who had campaigned so passionately for unity of the Pariah parties, was a member of both umbrella committees. If Yamyam came into his hands, and with him the names of all the other members, then the Pariah factions would once again be blown apart. Eighteen months later Yamyam did indeed come into his hands. And efforts began to force Yamyam to betray the names of his friends.

The first temptation consisted entirely of physical tortures. They were horrible, words fail, but even so they're not worth mentioning. In the pauses Yamyam himself exhorted the torturers to be more careful: 'If you kill me with your carelessness,' he threatened, 'you'll have killed the names along with me. And I'll *still* be the victor.'

The second method was promises. Every little comfort was withdrawn: pallet, window, spoon. 'The comfort of your cell,' they told him, 'depends entirely on you. One name – and here's your spoon. One name – you can have light. One name – you'll have your pallet.'

'The room would be overfilled,' Yamyam retorted. 'For at my back are the names of all Pariahs.'

"What they tried at the third attempt," said Olo, "is unknown. Freedom, maybe. But the way Yamyam parried the temptation before they even knew it, this has come down to us and is worth passing on – "

A senior police official entered his cell.

'Please excuse the rather primitive spaciousness,' Yamyam greeted him, squatting on the bare floor.

'Oh, not at all,' replied the official, somewhat embarrassed, and before he knew it he was the guest, in no position to make demands.

'Perhaps you'd like to take a seat,' Yamyam went on, taking in the whole floor with an inviting sweep of his arm. The official shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

'So, what can I do for you?' Yamyam asked, as if receiving a client.

'It's like this ...' the official began. But his tone was uncertain. Was he a guest? Was he a supplicant? Or was he an official?

Yamyam waited indulgently, his face that of a human judge who well understands that the accused is not sure what to say. 'Next time, perhaps!' he said consolingly, and even stretched a hand up to him. The official automatically bent down to take it. As he left the cell, Yamyam drummed his fingers on the floor, as if awaiting the next client.

But he had a long wait. In the months that followed he was left almost entirely unmolested. Every couple of weeks he'd have a flogging; but in a distracted and seemingly almost symbolic form. The flogger asked him, merely as a formality, for the names the flogging was supposed to reveal. When at last the flogger made no more appearances, a bad time began for Yamyam. 'It seems they no longer need me,' he told himself. 'Either they already have the names, or they've given up their fight.' Day by day he hoped the floggings would resume, so he could be sure the fight was still going on out there ...

Five years Yamyam had to wait before he heard in the passage the footsteps he'd expected daily. For a moment he felt himself weakening. 'So my friends are still alive,' he told himself. The door opened. His eyes were dazzled by the light, he had to shade them.

'Good day, Mr Yamyam,' said the visitor, with astonishing courtesy. Yamyam studied him carefully through the gaps between his fingers. The man didn't look like a trusty, more like a butler. And what the butler did was totally bewildering to Yamyam: he set a chair down on the floor, and on it an oil lamp.

'Have our lot won, up there?' Yamyam asked himself. He had to sit back down on the floor. But he chased away the notion.

The butler meanwhile had gone out and come back, this time with a big bath towel on his right arm, underwear in his left hand. He hung both on the back of the chair, and went out. Yamyam turned round and inspected his cell. It was unfamiliar, unrecognisable, even though he'd spent five years there. It *appeared* to be.

Now the butler had come back in. This time he had a suit of clothes on his right arm, and with his left he dragged along a steaming wooden tub. 'Have a wash, Mr Yamyam,' he urged gently. 'The underwear's for you, and the suit. The change will do you good.'

'May I ask ...?' Yamyam enquired.

'We shall have to see,' the butler replied. 'As before, it all depends on you. But this time ... we're in bitter earnest.' Thus he spake, and left Yamyam alone.

Whether Yamyam realised what they intended with him is hard to say. He enjoyed a good wash, fumbled with the clothes, and found that the suit fitted like a glove. 'Gentlemen's fashions seem not to have changed,' he observed. When the butler returned an hour later and invited Yamyam out into the passage, Yamyam seemed a bit small and bent yet still the master, so the servant had no problem addressing him as Mr Yamyam.

He was led to a nearby room, almost next to his cell, and Yamyam had never realised in all those years of darkness how near the world was. The room was pleasantly warm, spacious and clean. And there Yamyam found all the items he had missed all those years, not just from his time in prison, not just from his time in exile, but from years earlier. When he saw the carpets, cushions and curtains that gave the room the appearance of a huge ridiculously overdressed and decorated bed, he was shocked to think that such things still existed, was shocked by every item and was afraid to step closer and touch the things, for he'd been hurled back to an earlier time that was no longer there, and it must have seemed to him a mockery to stay in the room, a denial of all his later years.

The butler, meanwhile, had positioned himself by the wall awaiting his master's instructions, and said nothing until Yamyam, uncertain what he was meant to do, asked again what it all meant.

'Mr Yamyam is at present,' the butler said, 'as if arrived at a hostelry, free as a bird. He can, for example, look out of the window at the trees, just like a traveller who has no wish to go out again this evening.'

Yamyam felt a shock. It was years since he'd seen a tree, but he decided to let himself in for as little as possible. 'If they still need me,' he said to himself, 'then they still need the names. I must be on guard.' And did indeed let himself in for so little that he took not one more step, and just stood there on the spot, even though he was sleepy from the bath. He closed his eyes to keep at bay the soft annihilation they were tempting him with, and noted with horror that the five years of imprisonment had compressed themselves into a tangled spiral, and confronted with this dreadful pretend reality had become one single night; and this night had no duration and was not any longer than any night in his memory used to be; and his five times twelve months of endurance threatened to become all in vain; and the days, each of which had seemed an eternity, now seemed just one day.

'Five years I sat here, for you,' he said, and he meant his friends. 'Five times twelve months. They cannot have been all in vain.' To the butler's astonishment, he began to count off each of the days he had spent in the dark, and so unwound the convoluted spiral.

As he counted, the butler went out and returned with a tray of fourteen dishes fit for a duke, and drinks and little glasses. Mr Yamyam stood there counting. The butler suggested he make a start, for the Director of the establishment would shortly take the liberty of paying him a visit, to enquire after his wellbeing.

So Yamyam sat down and ate to build up his strength, like a gentleman who's ordered room service; he's used only to the best, and has other things to think about than the food in front of him. After sampling three of the dishes he lay on the divan, an elderly gentleman allowing himself a moment's relaxation after dinner, and he was determined to put to the test, as he had done for five years, those who put him to the test.

When the Director of the prison – Yamyam's unknown master for the past five years – entered, they exchanged introductions with the fullest formalities, for they hadn't previously met. And the Director found Yamyam in splendid form, and Yamyam returned the compliment, and they conversed as equals as if in a fashionable club. Each concealed from the other the knowledge that Yamyam might well be executed in the morning. Both were scrupulously polite, though not excessively so, for they were of the same caste, and the visitor even allowed himself a smile of complicity that he hoped would distance Mr Yamyam from a certain Yamyam to the same extent that *he* was distanced from said Yamyam. They spoke of things that lay five years and more back, of mutual acquaintances from even farther back, when Yamyam was not yet even in the Movement, and the visitor mentioned that so-and-so had died, and so-and-so had gone bankrupt, as if Yamyam was just back from an extended business trip, hungry for information. As if by oversight they said nothing of today or tomorrow, and nowhere in their conversation was anything to signal that not all was quite right with their club chat. They made no mention of things they could well remember – where they happened to be, in what year; all was undated.

Their complicity functioned wonderfully, as if rehearsed, though the visitor had originally another game in mind. He'd hoped to exploit the atmosphere to the point where Yamyam, constrained by politeness and their mutual complicity, would be

forced to answer all his questions, even those trick questions he planned to throw in using the same tone of voice. For he'd noticed that the force of convention was stronger than the force of torture or the expectation of reward; that a person comports himself quite differently in other clothing, other rooms and other company, and that information withheld under a flogging would be impossible to withhold seated in a club armchair. But Yamyam knew it just as well, and now that he understood why they were treating him so nicely there followed, in the guise of a suave and dignified conversation, a sustained and desperate battle of courtesies.

They tussled with smiles on their faces, each watching the other for the next false move, and it was a contest to see who could deceive with the most delicate finesse. Yamyam actually succeeded in holding down his opponent, for he began discoursing on porcelain and horses, he knew his stuff, and when the name Shiba came up he smiled about the fellow's parvenu origins and his purchased title, such smiling dismissal being usual among the nobility. Minute by minute it became ever less thinkable to assume that Yamyam would mention, even as hearsay, anything about Yamyam the revolutionary, and so the Director, as he took his leave, felt truly uncomfortable at the thought of Yamyam's execution, for Mr Yamyam was a gentleman, and a not unpleasant acquaintance.

So now Yamyam had the last test behind him. He knew his friends were still at work; his own work was at an end; and death loomed. So now he really did play the traveller with time to relax, and he stepped to the window. It had grown dark outside. A pale light came from below: a few snow patches. To right and left the walls of the prison. He could see no more of Molussia.

He opened the window, hoping to hear something of Molussia, even if only a distant roar. He stood a long while, but heard not the least noise. At last there came a muffled sound, hard to identify. Maybe an animal being slaughtered, he thought at first. But as he thought it, he knew at once that he had heard such a sound before. And at last he knew where he'd heard it. He turned around, and the butler was behind him. But now he looked like a trusty.

'Did I cry out like that?' asked Yamyam.

'None of that now,' the trusty replied, already less polite than before.

He held out Yamyam's old prison garb. Yamyam knew the play was nearing its end. He began to change clothes.

'Quick now,' the trusty prodded, as the beastly noise came again. He shut the window.

'It doesn't bother me,' said Yamyam, dressing as neatly as he could.

'You lot are all the same,' the trusty declared. 'That one claims he's forgot the names.' Whether this was meant as praise or complaint could not be discerned from his tone.

'That's nice,' said Yamyam. 'Thanks for the info.'

The noise came again. The trusty began to whistle.

'Thank goodness,' Yamyam said calmly. 'Now I am myself again.'

'Goes for me too,' said the trusty, who had felt ill at ease in the presence of the well-dressed Yamyam. 'March.'

To his surprise he was not taken back to the old cell, but to another, roomier and more comfortable. 'Death row?' asked Yamyam, stretching out on the sofa.

The trusty made no reply. Once across the threshold he had changed again. Now he was the sentimentalist.

'When?' asked Yamyam.

'Around four,' the sentimentalist answered, seeming to inspect something on the ceiling. So Yamyam made himself snug, for he had another six hours.

'You know of course,' he said, 'that in killing me you kill all the names.'

'I'm amazed at your ... cynicism,' the sentimentalist hesitantly replied.

'Any of my brothers might have said the same,' Yamyam thought. He said: 'Where did that phrase come from? Who drilled it into you?'

The sentimentalist seemed not to understand.

'If the fellow's scared, you call him repentant. If he's cocky, you call him a cynic.'

The sentimentalist still failed to understand. 'All I meant was,' he said, 'you're near to dying. It's the same as holy.'

Yamyam sat up. And as he began to speak he knew the last hours of his life would be well occupied. 'Much is holy to me,' he said quite persuasively, 'but in Heaven's name what's holy about bumping me off?'

'D-death,' said the sentimentalist, cowed.

'We're not talking about death,' Yamyam declared, 'but about killers and the killed. Who is the cynic: the killer, or the killed?'

The sentimentalist made no answer.

'Am I to stand now hat in hand, because I won't be able to take part tomorrow early? Where does Death get its holiness from, if *neither the killers nor the killed are holy*?'

The sentimentalist shrugged. 'I speak from experience,' he said. 'All the others tried to pull themselves together beforehand.'

'Why?'

'Could have been ... an inward victory,' the sentimentalist suggested.

'Over the prison?'

The sentimentalist shook his head. 'Wouldn't it be an inward victory to give the prison its due, like Socrates did? Ten years ago?'

'I always admired him,' said Yamyam. 'But I never understood his death.'

'In the end he acknowledged that his judges were right.'

'Oh please,' said Yamyam. 'I acknowledge my judges. Do I have the freedom not to acknowledge them?'

'Inwardly,' the sentimentalist added.

‘So you think one can take revenge by an excess of noble character and a limbering up of the inner life? Revenge for the ignoble deed to be carried out in the courtyard at four tomorrow morning? This nobility of character will no longer be of any account tomorrow morning, and will be done away with like myself, and be of no use to anyone, not to me or to my friends, and not to you.’

The sentimentalist was unused to conversations with a logical structure. Maybe the frequent references to death discomfited him. ‘But that won’t be till tomorrow,’ he said with a dismissive gesture.

‘Who’s actually about to die here?’ Yamyam asked in exasperation, for like all of us there was nothing he understood less than the possibility of false thinking. ‘I’m sure *you’ll* get over it soon enough.’

‘All human feeling is wasted on you,’ said the insulted sentimentalist. His face showed he was well used to humanity’s ingratitude.

‘I wasn’t treated here for five years as *a human*, but as Yamyam, and today as a lord,’ Yamyam corrected him. He lay back on the bed and made himself comfortable.

‘And after all this, nothing’s been achieved,’ said the sentimentalist. And as he said these words he changed yet again, but this time with no particular change to his features. Now he was the blackhearted villain ...

Yamyam lay there calmly, and probably thought the conversation at an end. But the villain didn’t leave. He must have had some reason to stay. First he pulled a pack of cards from his pocket, and tried to provoke Yamyam by shuffling it noisily. This failed to draw a reaction. ‘It’s because my profession is so stressful,’ he began at last, as if the *because* explained his continued presence.

‘I’m sorry for that,’ said Yamyam.

‘Even so, I will not allow myself to appear inhumane. Maybe you have friends or relatives I can contact, who can bring you things. Honestly, that’s the best I can do.’

‘Greetings would be fatal,’ Yamyam replied, gazing at the ceiling. ‘Do you think I kept mum for five years, only to spill the beans just before I depart?’

The villain did indeed think this. He had no idea there might be an alternative. ‘How can it possibly matter to you?’ he asked disingenuously. ‘When it’ll all be over in five hours?’

‘Not all,’ said Yamyam. ‘Just me. And the names of my friends.’

The villain shook his head. ‘If you were to speak now, and tomorrow afternoon something were to happen to your friends, you couldn’t blame yourself at all.’

‘Is the bad only bad because you can blame yourself?’

The villain didn’t understand. He adopted a sly look. But Yamyam sat up again. ‘Now,’ he said in a loud voice, thumping his knee for emphasis, ‘*now* I am still alive. And what matters to me *now* is that nothing should happen *tomorrow*. And it matters to *me*, because *that* is the matter. The reason it matters is not because it matters to me.’

‘You won’t get past me with that kind of ruse,’ was the villain’s meaningless response. ‘Is that your last word?’

But Yamyam said he wanted to play cards, and they played in silence until day began to dawn.

“So how did Yamyam die?” Yegussa asked. “A long long story,” Olo replied a little shiftily. “And the ending’s a disappointment. In the end the names Yamyam kept concealed for five years were more important to the officials than his death. Maybe they used the threat of death only as a means of persuasion – ”

When they saw that even imminent death failed to loosen his tongue, they postponed the execution, at first by twenty-four hours. And promised they’d see him safely abroad if he would only oblige them. When the twenty-four hours were up, they postponed again, and made bigger promises. So the day of death receded day by day. His life over the years that followed was nothing but a constantly postponed execution. ‘My silence,’ he declared to the guard, ‘offers the greatest security not just for my friends. For me too, alas. If I were to talk, what grounds would you have for keeping me alive?’

And so he lived on only to preserve his silence, for he yearned for nothing so much as his own death. Some years later he’d already forgotten those names, one after the other. ‘Probably,’ he told himself, ‘the men I’ve been protecting died a natural death long ago.’ And no doubt he too was eventually forgotten. For in his last years he was left unmolested. He died eventually at a great age. The guard who found him said his face showed a *smile of complicity*.

NIGHT

Rehabilitating pride

“I’m proud of Yamyam,” Yegussa began after a pause. “Are you?”

It was a long while before Olo answered. “Proud?” he asked in an unusually sharp tone, as if everything to do with pride was suspect. “Did you *create* Yamyam?”

“Can you only feel proud of your own stuff?”

“Even that is totally superfluous,” Olo declared, his tone still annoyed. But Yegussa would not be robbed so easily of his pride.

“Aren’t you proud of the First, who kept talking for years and years? And of Yamyam, who kept silent all his livelong days? And the others who held out? You included?”

Olo felt inwardly gratified that at least his own lengthy patience was appreciated. But all he said was: “Leave it.”

“When I get out of here,” Yegussa continued, “people will be able to behold my pride. And they’ll ask what makes me feel proud. *Yamyam, for example*, I shall say. *Do you know who Yamyam was?* Not because I created him but because *he* created *me*, that’s why I’d be proud of him. And because it’s a good thing he took part in and taught me how to take part. That’s why.”

“That’s nice,” said Olo. His tone seemed not unhappy.

“I know you haven’t been sitting here waiting to be thanked,” Yegussa concluded, and his tone was rather more confiding, as if he were trying to coax the older man.

“Thanks are a bonus. Anyone who rejects thanks robs only himself and nobody else. Well then.”

Whether he realised he was talking to Yamyam himself is unknown. But next morning he already had his suspicions.

THE DISTRACTION

DAY 41

A day without stories

Next morning Yegussa waited in vain for a story. “Are you still asleep?” he whispered when half the day had gone by.

Olo made no reply. And stirred only a good while later. And as if Yegussa’s question had needed to traverse a vast distance and had only just reached him, he asked back: “Did you say something?”

“It’s late already,” said Yegussa. “Won’t you make a start?”

“I’m tired. Yamyam’s dialogues went on too long.”

“That’s what I thought too,” said Yegussa. “How come you know them all by heart?”

“Invented,” Olo deflected him, and lapsed again into silence ...

There they sat the whole day. Olo immersed in memories of the time when he was still called Yamyam. And Yegussa filled with suspicion, but keeping respectfully silent. Only when evening came did he dare speak again: “Shall I distract you a little?”

“Did you say something?”

“Shall I make something up for you?” asked Yegussa. And without waiting for Olo’s response he began – half inventing, half telling the truth – to recount his life.

NIGHT

The story of the Man of Integrity, or, Time sold

In Bamba’s screw works were two foremen named Gru and Koro, who’d been there for thirty years. They weren’t friends, and never socialised outside of work. But having worked side by side every day for thirty years, twelve hours a day, and neither had ever missed a shift, Gru couldn’t imagine being there without Koro, nor Koro without Gru. But neither man was worth a mention, any more than their lives for a long while already. They were no more diligent, no more skilled or stupid or ambitious or mistrustful or embittered than anyone else, and they were hardly two anymore, rather one identical with the other, and everything would have gone steadily on and been not worth a mention, if only they hadn’t been found one day hanging in the toolshed with a note that read *I’ve finally had enough, Gru and Me too, Koro*, and if everyone, now they were dead, hadn’t realised that Gru and Koro for thirty years had kept more to themselves than most.

The first day when their two work stations were unattended, their absence was hard to credit. Koro’s spot without Gru and Gru’s without Koro were simply unimaginable. But the second day when the pair failed to turn up, and their spots remained empty even at ten in the morning, and everyone had stopped looking

around to see if they were on their way in – when the control levers of their machines were disconnected, and even the neighbouring machines were set to half speed; on the second day, when all of a sudden Mrs Gru arrived at the works wanting her husband back, right now if you please, and they hid the truth from her, which had never happened before in thirty years; on the second day, when Mrs Koro turned up as well and yelled just as loud and Mrs Gru yelled back that she shouldn't yell like that just give me back my husband, and each blamed the other; but they couldn't interrupt the work, for everyone had to keep an eye on the control levers and the women squabbled all by themselves among the thousand men who all kept quiet and felt guilty; on the second day when they all went out together during morning break, Mrs Gru, who had spent those same thirty years at her husband's side, and Mrs Koro, who had spent her thirty years with Koro, and the workers, who had stood alongside the pair for thirty years; on the second day, as they ran in and out of storerooms and in between the barracks searching, and already knew Gru must be dead and Koro likewise, and the workers kept searching only because the women kept yelling, and meanwhile they wolfed down their breakfast because of course we won't have another break, and what use is it to a dead man if we go hungry? – so, on the second day, when they found Gru and Koro hanging in the toolshed, and they were cut down because you can't just do nothing; because the women kept up their bossy manner even in the presence of the dead and wouldn't hear what was written on the note lying there between them and screamed *He never ever had enough, not really, and Koro too neither*; on the second day at five in the afternoon they finally decided that the incident that had already cost the works so dearly these two days could no longer be hushed up, and they nominated Kaf, oldest of the technicians, Aspedee shop steward, the only one wearing the badge of the moderate Pariahs, to wind a white scarf around his neck and go and inform management.

Olo heaved a deep breath, as if he and not Yegussa had been narrating. And though he was no doubt full of admiration for the length of that sentence, all he said was: "It's not dry enough, it's too full. It smacks too much of reality." But Yegussa would not be interrupted.

Two hours he had to wait outside the door. Which he found very pleasant. Because being able to sit for two hours with a good conscience on serious business (for two dead men aren't nothing) and be paid for it into the bargain, it was like knocking-off time in broad daylight. But the man sitting there and feeling pleased was my father. But I won't call him by his proper name, but something else, let's say *the Man of Integrity*. Because the story is tragic and so's his character and I really don't want to feel ashamed every time I mention him. So when they eventually let the Man of Integrity in and it was dark by then and he heard from across the yard how they were turning off their machines, Bamba was all courtesy and all ears and said *We have time* and spoke only of *we* and *Now we'd better fetch the Reckoner*. Once the Man of Integrity had fetched the Reckoner he began his report:

'So what this is, it's to report a loss, because Gru and Koro went missing for two days, to be exact they're dead, and not a one of us would ever have thought anything like it could happen with those two. We had to leave their machines running for a day because we expected them back any moment, but they were left running with

no productive purpose and now they've been turned off. But the capacity of their machines and how much was lost by leaving them running free and then turning them off, that's not within *my* remit.' That's what the Man of Integrity said, and he took a step back.

'A kind of sabotage then,' Bamba suggested with a smile, while the Reckoner totted up the lost production.

'In a way,' the Man of Integrity agreed.

'Three hundred and seventy-six Imperial Pants,' said the Reckoner.

All three stayed calm, and Bamba didn't even bang his fist on the table. He even promised that the loss would be made up, and gave the Reckoner a soothing look. When he asked how much Gru had earned in a year, by the way, and how much Koro, it sounded like an aside.

'Both together 17 pants less in a year than the calculated loss,' the Reckoner replied. And the Man of Integrity added: 'To the last copper penny.'

'Which only goes to show yet again,' Bamba remarked, 'how honourable and unconditionally great is the responsibility bestowed on your relatively modest position.'

'We try to show ourselves worthy of it,' the Man of Integrity assured him.

But the Reckoner suggested that in view of this kind of risk, the average wage could without difficulty be a little reduced.

The Man of Integrity couldn't quite see the link between Gru's death and reduced wages; he suggested that he'd done his duty, and staying longer than necessary in the Director's office made him as uneasy as it had been honourable to stay up till now.

'And what did they die of?' Bamba asked. Now the conversation grew serious.

'Gru had had enough,' the Man of Integrity quoted, 'and Koro likewise.' And shrugged to show he was only quoting and took no responsibility for the explanation.

'And what do *you* think of that?' Bamba asked, with a gesture to show he needn't make a big deal of it.

'Haven't a clue,' the Man of Integrity replied. 'They were no different than us. They had no reason.'

'That doesn't satisfy me,' said Bamba.

To the Man of Integrity it seemed like a cross examination. 'Maybe at the moment of the deed they were *not responsible for their actions*,' he amplified, with a bad conscience.

'Do you have any reason to believe that?'

Whenever the Man of Integrity was asked this question, he always stared at the floor as if looking in vain for an alibi. Of course he couldn't find a reason. 'That conjecture is no more plausible than any other,' he admitted. 'Moreover, they didn't

do it during working hours, but afterwards, during their evening leisure time. They were always reliable.'

'My machines,' said Bamba, 'are at night no less responsible for their actions than during the day when they are doing their duty. And no less reliable when they stand idle. Then they are simply good machines, standing idle.'

'Good machines, standing idle,' the Reckoner repeated, and the Man of Integrity repeated it several times.

'Whereby they by no means obey only me, these machines,' Bamba continued. 'Or am I perhaps omnipotent? By and large they have their freedom, and what's more they obey various others: the laws of Nature, of which they are components of wood and iron; the laws of gravity, which were not decreed by me.'

The Reckoner nodded. And then so did the Man of Integrity. 'You see,' Bamba went on, 'we know very well we are not the masters of Nature, and that things have their freedom beyond the scope of our powers. But they sold one part to me: their function. What they do with their freedom is not my concern. Provided they do not withdraw the part that belongs by right of purchase to me and to no one else.'

Bamba glared at the Man of Integrity as if he considered him an opponent of this view. 'Do you understand?' The Man of Integrity nodded, though not totally convinced.

'So, that's settled,' said Bamba.

'You're right,' said the Man of Integrity. 'A machine doesn't sabotage itself.'

'But - ?'

'If it was up to me, I wouldn't have said anything about the machines.'

'But - ?'

'But when it comes down to it, they're all old and decrepit.'

'That's the answer I expected.'

'They should be replaced, but buying new ones costs more than keeping the old ones running. But where new workers are concerned, they cost the same as the present workforce. That shows the superiority of human beings.'

'Totally wrong,' said Bamba. 'It's clear you do not like the machines; or you only like your own, which you keep it as shiny as a tin jug; and think it's yours.'

'I clean it every day,' the Man of Integrity confirmed.

'That's praiseworthy, but completely useless. You clean it for your own benefit, not for mine. It will be scrapped, to make way for a better more modern model. And every new machine is worth two old ones. So: more expensive, or cheaper?'

The Man of Integrity thought about it, and affirmed: 'Cheaper, in that respect.'

'But as for new workers, first you, then your son, then your grandson, every time it's like a newborn child, as if none of you had ever been. Always you are all the same, and one new one replaces at best one old one. The production of human beings *never makes progress*, the type *remains always obsolete*. The progress that is so much

praised is a progress of things; *they* make history. What is left behind – immutable and sluggish relic in the victory parade of technology – is the human.'

"He said that?" Olo interrupted Yegussa's fantasies. "Isn't that what *I* told you?"

"I'm hanging it on Bamba," Yegussa replied. 'I learned that from you too.'

Olo could not object. 'And how do you know all this? Were you there during the discussion with Bamba?'

'You think I'm telling the story for you? I'm just trying it out. For the next, my successor. And if he should ask *Where did you get it from?* I shall reply: *I heard it from the Twelfth.*'

"You're a quick learner," said Olo. "Go on." Yegussa went on, speaking with the assurance of an eye witness –

The Man of Integrity now had a guilty look on his face, as if he'd been accused of something. 'Director sir has of course progressed along with the things, grown greater with the growing greatness of the machines, and has kept pace with the pace of technology.'

Bamba shook his head. 'We grow older,' he lamented, 'but not wiser.'

'People grow old,' said the Man of Integrity, looking down at himself. *He* was used up, and Bamba was used up. Even the Reckoner made a gesture indicating that he already had the gout or some other respectable age-specific ailment.

'Are we not made of the poorest material? Are our flywheels not faster? Our drive belts more durable?' As the Reckoner posed these questions his gaze into the Man of Integrity's eyes was deep and confiding. The Man of Integrity knew now they were all *one* flesh and blood, and Bamba was made of no better stuff than him. He felt honoured by this solidarity, and nodded eagerly, and felt all warm inside.

'My dear man,' Bamba continued, 'is it possible for us to compete? Compete with the achievements of our things? Are they not worth more than us?'

The Man of Integrity nodded. But the Reckoner supplemented: 'What a machine produces in an hour is a hundred and three times the hourly wage. It is monstrous how Gru and Koro abused the responsibility entrusted to them.'

So there were Gru and Koro, back again. And the Man of Integrity, who had meanwhile experienced so much – shame, and guilt, and solidarity with Bamba – he now suddenly remembered why he was here in the Director's office. 'Most of us,' he said, 'are not irresponsible.'

'Of course not,' Bamba conceded, 'and yet your freedom is not less than the freedom of things that are free, that are more than simply components belonging to my works. *By and large* you people too are free.'

'I know, Director sir,' said the Man of Integrity with a look of gratitude. 'You leave us our humanity.'

'One hundred percent,' Bamba conceded with an expansive gesture. 'What you are as human beings, what Gru and Koro did as human beings, is entirely your own affair, was entirely their own affair. Nobody would seek to interfere in those affairs, in your most human aspects, and in decisions concerning those aspects. You are

master in your own house. If I were to come calling, you would have the right to throw me out.'

'But Director sir,' the Man of Integrity said with a smirk and a blush.

'I suppose Gru and Koro were nice fellows?' Bamba asked sympathetically. The Man of Integrity nodded.

'And married?' The Man of Integrity wiped his brow, polished his steel-rimmed spectacles, and confirmed that they had been married. As far as he knew, they even had children. As did everyone. He as well. Two of them.

'And no doubt loved their children,' Bamba went on. '*But they stole from me.*'

Now the Man of Integrity looked up, he was shocked, totally unprepared for this. He put his spectacles back on, for he had to look squarely at this new situation. He was a man of unusual integrity, and stealing was stealing.

'I never knew that,' he said. 'So they took their own lives fearing you'd found out about their stealing?'

'Not exactly,' said Bamba. 'But almost.' Since he was chewing something and transferring it from one cheek to the other, his words sounded simultaneously both dignified and dangerous.

'We never knew anything about that business with the stealing,' the Man of Integrity responded. 'And not a one of us would ever show solidarity with it.'

'That would be even better,' Bamba replied. 'Morality is of course always self-evident.'

'No such possibility,' the Man of Integrity blurted out, still shaking his head. He meant the thieving.

'It is the cornerstone of our freedom. I mean, morality is,' the Reckoner made his voice heard, not to be left out.

The Man of Integrity polished his spectacles and knew he would remain uneducated his whole life long.

'You people are free,' Bamba continued. 'No less free than things that do not belong entirely to me and in part even belong to others than me. But what the things sell to me, they deliver, they don't steal, they don't misappropriate.'

'Never,' the Reckoner confirmed.

'If I may allow myself a question,' the Man of Integrity at last screwed up his courage, 'what exactly did Gru and Koro steal?'

'They stole what they had sold to me, a fraction of themselves, albeit a very minor fraction. For they *sold me their time.*'

'To be delivered pro rata over the next two years,' the Reckoner supplemented.

'At twenty yen per day, as far as I know, maybe even twenty-one.'

'You know what that means?' asked the Reckoner. (The Man of Integrity did not know.) 'Twenty yen a day for nothing more than their time? Something that every mortal has? It's inborn. Nobody has to learn it. Anyone alive has it, free of charge, unearned, as Bly already pointed out in Chapter 27 of his Collected Sayings: *And the*

supply is endless. For this Time, which everyone has, which is unearned, and the supply is endless, for this Time, management paid out twenty yen per day.'

'I never looked at it like that,' the Man of Integrity admitted.

'Hence they belonged to me,' Bamba affirmed.

'Logical,' said the Reckoner.

'And where is it now, the time?' asked Bamba. 'Gru's time and Koro's time?'

Now the Man of Integrity was thoroughly disconcerted, and couldn't understand how a thing could be gone just like that. Even Gru and Koro, when it came down to it, were still there, dead to be sure, but in the end they were still there. But where had their time got to?

'They stole it from me, took it off me, just as if they had stolen one of the workpieces they were milling, or some item of equipment. They took it off me, and I know how to get it back.' Bamba made a gesture as if the Man of Integrity was about to make an objection. 'No, no,' he went on, 'whether they did it intentionally, or were merely negligent, does not concern me. I have no wish to involve myself – for only you people have a right to do so. I see only the legal standpoint, which is best for both components. Gru sold and Koro sold and I bought. We are partners. They failed to deliver a portion of their wares.'

The Man of Integrity was so bewildered that he said he understood already. Every explanation plunged him ever deeper into the undergrowth.

'You are rather shocked by your partners in crime,' opined Bamba, raising himself to his whole massive greatness.

'I can't deny it,' the Man of Integrity stuttered. But before he could say more, Bamba had grabbed him by one of the buttons on his smock, pulled him close, put a hand under his chin and lifted it as one lifts the chin of a schoolboy.

'So your 376 Pants will be made good?'

The Man of Integrity tried to reply, but could not.

'You lot show such solidarity on other occasions, won't you show it now?'

The Man of Integrity tried to nod. But his head was held fast in Bamba's hand.

'Till tomorrow then, same time,' Bamba concluded. It was no longer a question, but a foregone certainty. Then he took away his hand, and the Man of Integrity's head said yes as it dropped.

The Man of Integrity was out of the door before he'd even made his bow. There was no time to rehearse the arguments once again. The task required haste. As he dashed along the passage he practised what he would tell his comrades.

'Comrades,' he tried out, 'we've often enough paid lip service to our renowned solidarity. Opportunities to put it into practice have been thin on the ground. Now an opportunity stands before you. If you want to prevent big troubles, prove it. Bamba will know how to acknowledge it. And he'll show his gratitude.'

That is what he tried out. But what he was thinking as he did so was rather different. 'At bottom,' he thought, 'such a lengthy audience was an exceptional

honour. I'll show him he can rely on me.' Thus trying out and thus thinking, he arrived at the packing rooms and machine halls. But hardly had he set eyes on his comrades when he realised he couldn't just burst in. In his haste he couldn't think up a new speech. Going from one workstation to the next holding out his empty lunch box, he could think of nothing better to say than: 'I'm making a collection.'

'Who for then?' his comrades asked.

'For the widows and orphans of Gru and Koro,' he declared, to his own surprise. 'Who else?'

'He's collecting for the widows and orphans,' the news ran through the building. 'For the widows and orphans of Gru and Koro!' cried the Man of Integrity, and they dug deep in their pockets. Not a bad start, he thought. But after combing half the hall, he realised his lunch box held not much over four Pants in small change. He looked a picture of dejection.

'What's up?' asked a lad as he presented his little contribution. Instead of answering, the Man of Integrity placed a hand over the lunch box.

'What's up?' the lad asked again, trying impatiently to push away the hand. Now the Man of Integrity gave a highly dangerous reply: 'It's not enough,' he said, pulling the box closer.

'Not enough?' the lad asked menacingly. He turned to the others: 'He's only taking big donations.'

The workers began to laugh.

'What's needed is 376 Pants,' explained the Man of Integrity.

'Exact amount?' they wondered.

'A bit less isn't exactly nothing.'

'Never seen that much all in one place.'

Saying this and more they threatened him and his collection and it was small solace to recall the solidarity Bamba had shown him and how much he resembled Bamba.

'As I said, it's for Gru's and Koro's widows,' he repeated desperately, 'Gru and Koro had debts with Bamba, 376 Pants. We have to prove our solidarity with our workmates. Even if they're dead. And pay him back what they owed him.'

Before he reached the end of this little speech, the lunch box had been knocked from his hands. Coins rolled across the floor. He bent down to pick them up. 'It's not your money,' he jabbered.

'It's Bamba's and yours,' they replied, and trod on his fingers.

But they couldn't find it all, and as the Man of Integrity headed slowly back to his machine – what else was he to do? – he owed his comrades almost 1.50 Pants.

Next morning he brought along his own savings: 27 Pants he'd managed to put by over the past few years for family emergencies. Donating the whole amount no doubt seemed even to him a bit overdone. But he thought it as well to have a good

starting sum on hand, and the fact that money already there attracts more money had become vaguely clear to him through Bamba's business.

After paying back the 1.50 Pants he owed his comrades, he began to crawl across the floor to the jeers of his workmates, hunting for the missing coins. He failed to find them all, but still there were thirty or forty copper yens that he put together with his Pants in a cooking pot ready to try his luck in the other machine halls. But the events of the day before had of course spread to the whole works, causing lively discussion. Before he could open his mouth several men helped out by crying like market hawkers: 'Who'll donate the last 300 Imperial Pants? Collection for Gru's and Koro's widows? Going once. Going twice. Third time.'

'You think you're hurting *me*?' the Man of Integrity boldly asked.

'Take a look at this! Where did this come from?' one of them asked, holding up a 20 Pant note with which the Man of Integrity had baited the cooking pot.

'My machine hall showed more solidarity,' the Man of Integrity lied. He felt a bit dizzy as he spoke, foreseeing the consequences. They quickly surrounded him.

'Out of the question,' the worker said, holding the banknote high. 'These 20 Pants are confiscated.'

'Out of the question,' said the Man of Integrity, jumping up in an attempt to retrieve the banknote. But the worker had already passed the note to the next man, who passed it to the next.

'You're going to cut it up!' was the Man of Integrity's idiotic response.

'Oh, don't cry!' someone mocked, chucking him under the chin. 'Ten Pants'll go direct to Mrs Gru, and ten to Mrs Koro.'

The Man of Integrity stood still for a few moments. The test was proving too hard. 'To think you think you're hurting *me*,' he said again, exerting the utmost self control. But they no longer bothered to reply. He wiped his brow, took what was left from the cooking pot, six Pants of the 26 he'd brought with him, and the forty copper yens retrieved from under machines, and left the hall to deliver the first instalment of Gru's and Koro's debts.

'It's not much,' he drummed up his courage as he went slowly across the yard and up the steps to the administration offices. 'But the best can be the enemy of the good, and six Pants forty's more useful than 376. They come from me and from no one else. You just need to know how to look at it. Serves them all right.'

Thus exhorting himself he came with every step farther from Gru and Koro and his own comrades. By the time he stood at the door of the administration suite he had thoroughly betrayed them all.

He knocked. And when he had to wait no longer than one turn back and forth, it seemed quite normal. A shout came, he went in like someone who goes in and out every day. 'To wit,' he said, 'first instalment.' There was nothing to reproach himself with.

A clerk came up so directly he had to step swiftly back out into the corridor.

'Name?' the clerk asked through the gap in the doorway.

The Man of Integrity stated his name, and spelled it out in case of need. 'As spoken, it's the first instalment.'

The clerk inspected him from top to bottom, through the gap in the doorway.

'Isn't Director Bamba in?'

'Of course he's in,' the clerk replied. 'Where do you think he is?'

'Because it's on account of the instalment,' the Man of Integrity repeated nervous and cautious at the same time, and pushed his 6.40 Pants through the gap.

'Instalment for what?' the clerk asked, taking the money. Then he closed the door without waiting for an answer, and the Man of Integrity was once again on the outside. Now he had to wait a whole hour. The machine halls had already started work, he could hear the roar coming up from below.

At last the gap reappeared. 'What's your name?' a new voice shouted. And the Man of Integrity, who was a little distance from the door at the time, hastened to answer and to demonstrate that while others might not show much solidarity, he wouldn't give up on it so easily. 'Not much of an instalment,' the other clerk said through the gap. 'My colleague was disinclined to accept it. But I managed to squeeze it in.'

'Thank you,' said the Man of Integrity.

'If you'd brought the whole amount,' the clerk declared, 'you wouldn't have wasted your working hours. Accounting for that wasted time in terms of production loss is complicated. Same goes for the total loss that must be assigned to Gru and Koro.'

'Of course,' said the Man of Integrity.

'You're in luck. The debt hasn't increased.'

'Of course not,' said the Man of Integrity.

The clerk handed him a sheet of paper, said 'Tomorrow then,' and closed the door.

This was written on the sheet of paper:

INVOICE

Item	Imperial Pants
Debts	376.00
Working Hours Wasted	4.90
<u>Time Wasted converted to Production Loss</u>	<u>1.50</u>
TOTAL	382.40
Less Instalment Received	<u>6.40</u>
Debt Outstanding	376.00

The Man of Integrity read it through several times, his head empty. Until he felt a certain satisfaction that the debt owed by the others was undiminished, while he had done his bit. 'Serves them right,' he concluded. 'The invoice is correct, credible,

and there's nothing to delete. The firm is bona fide. They won't be surprised.' And he tucked the invoice away in his pocket as if was his own personal legitimization.

When he came out into the yard, he noticed Mrs Gru walking across within calling distance. 'A nice kettle of fish you two have stirred up!' he called.

'Us two?' Mrs Gru asked.

'Or maybe you can lay out the 376 Pants just like that? On your kitchen table?'

'I'm Mrs Gru,' said Mrs Gru timidly, as if she suspected a mistaken identity.

'Stuff and nonsense! You should both go off and pawn yourselves.'

'What's that about 376 Pants?' she asked at last.

'Debts,' said the Man of Integrity. He tapped his chest with an index finger. 'On other people's account.'

'Debts?... 376 Pants?' she asked, very hesitant.

The Man of Integrity was somewhat mollified. The scare tactics were just an initial ploy. 'You see,' he said in a tone of moral complacency, 'what kind of man he was.'

'Who did he owe it to?' she asked dispiritedly. Coming a little closer to the Man of Integrity she seemed a bit more trusting. She'd done enough running about on account of Gru's death. All she needed now was these debts! 'Kind of man,' she said.

'He did a runner,' was the Man of Integrity's verdict.

'But we never had that much!' she assured him. 'Three hundred and seventy-six!'

'That's as maybe,' he conceded mildly. He nodded sagely: 'Never *had*. But *owed*.'

Mrs Gru looked at him bemused: 'Without ever having had it?'

'Right. It's very simple and totally in order. Gru worked at the Works.'

'Thirty years without a blemish.'

'Of course, before,' the Man of Integrity conceded. 'As long as he was there. But when he was no longer there – that's another story.'

Mrs Gru looked at him open-mouthed.

'It's simple,' he declared. 'We all bear an extraordinary responsibility.'

One of his comrades came across the yard towards them.

'Our work encounters objects,' the Man of Integrity went on, 'of extraordinary value and even greater profitability. What trust they show in us! We achieve profits for the business we could never earn for ourselves. To say nothing of supplanting them – for example if we were ever to sabotage the profits.'

The worker shoved the Man of Integrity aside. 'You're Mrs Gru?' he asked. She confirmed it. 'We've got a little something for you.'

'For me?' Mrs Gru asked. 'Who's it from?'

'Donor totally anonymous,' the worker said, his tone so cutting that the Man of Integrity kept his mouth shut.

'Thank you very much,' said Mrs Gru, a little embarrassed. Off she went.

The worker turned round, the Man of Integrity followed him. Back at his work spot he held conversations with himself. An hour went by, and he stuck his hand in the machine. 'You see,' he said when they'd freed him. His right arm was missing.

That night he lay fantasizing. And talked of two officers sent to distrain his property, he showed them all he had, invited them to take it all: the two half-full boxes of rice, the jug, the holiday suit for Molussian festival days, the two pictures of the holy Snake Sisters, the prayer book, three dishes, two letters to Bamba, two letters about improvements in working conditions, the lamp for the rainy months, the table, two chairs, and finally himself, to whom it all belonged. And he was to pack it up, himself on top, and cart it away in settlement.

Two months later, when the stump had healed, he presented himself in a humbled state to Bamba for a job. He tried to hide the empty sleeve behind his back.

'Now, how's our arm coming along?' Bamba asked, very comradely.

The Man of Integrity hadn't expected him to remember. 'Good so far,' he said.

'I'm sorry for it,' Bamba went on.

'No need,' said the Man of Integrity.

'I'm glad to have the opportunity to tell you that I never had a moment's doubt about your willingness to pay.'

The Man of Integrity's face lit up for a moment. Then he shook his head.

'What's wrong?' Bamba asked.

'Where's the benefit to you?' the Man of Integrity asked. By the look on his face he had manoeuvred Bamba's business into the gravest difficulties, and he and he alone was the one who must keep it afloat.

'Even if, all by yourself,' Bamba flattered him, 'you did show evidence of your renowned solidarity.'

'As far as was within my modest powers.'

'And now you're probably in difficulties.'

'Nothing worth mentioning.'

'And have come for an advance.'

'Advance?' The empty sleeve waved it away.

Bamba ignored the gesture. 'I think we can make use of it,' he said, and placed a brown banknote on the desk.

It could only be a 50 Pant note. The empty sleeve began to flutter. The Man of Integrity gripped it firmly with his left hand.

'I still owe you, Mr Bamba sir,' he said, ashamed about his arm.

'That's another story.'

'Three hundred and seventy-six Imperial Pants, Mr Bamba sir. Not including losses to your enterprise accrued during my convalescence.'

'Which are not nothing,' Bamba conceded.

'Can't just write them off,' the Man of Integrity insisted.

‘Good,’ said Bamba. ‘So let’s settle the matter here and now.’ He pulled out his wallet.

The Man of Integrity gave him an imploring look. They sat like this for two, three minutes. The roar of the machine halls floated up from below.

At last Bamba broke the silence. ‘Three hundred and seventy-six, you said?’

‘Not including ...’ the Man of Integrity repeated.

‘Good,’ said Bamba, ‘so let’s round it up to 400.’ He opened the wallet, extracted a bundle of green banknotes, and began to count forty times ten Pants from his right hand into his left.

‘What’s this about?’ asked the Man of Integrity, stepping closer.

‘If you’d like to count along as well,’ Bamba invited, and counted the four hundred Pants back into the wallet. The Man of Integrity confirmed the sum.

‘Would you like a receipt?’ Bamba said, replacing the wallet in his jacket pocket. It was all too much for the Man of Integrity. There was nothing left to say. He had to sit down. His sleeve began fluttering again. The lenses of his spectacles misted up. He could take them off with his left hand, but he wasn’t yet used to cleaning them with the left.

‘I wear spectacles as well,’ said Bamba, taking them from him, ‘and I know how to clean them.’

‘Not these ones,’ the Man of Integrity sobbed, wiping his eyes with the empty sleeve. Without the spectacles he was a lost man.

Meanwhile Bamba breathed on the lenses and took out a chamois cloth.

‘I really have no idea,’ sobbed the Man of Integrity, ‘how I can ever thank you.’

‘A way can be found,’ Bamba said, his own voice trembling a little. Then he stood, and paced up and down the office. He too dabbed surreptitiously at his eyes.

‘Are we done?’ asked Bamba, when the Man of Integrity at last stopped blubbing. The Man of Integrity was done.

‘If you would stand up now,’ invited Bamba. The Man of Integrity stood up.

‘Listen very closely now.’ He whispered a few barely audible words. ‘Did you hear?’

‘I’m – not sure.’

‘And what did I say?’ The Man of Integrity hesitated.

‘If ‘m not mistaken,’ he stuttered, his face already excusing a ridiculous mishearing, ‘then what I understood was: *Pariahs of every land, unite.*’

‘Very good so far,’ said Bamba. ‘Your hearing is serviceable. You may approach.’ The Man of Integrity approached cautiously.

‘By the way, can you recall the first words I said to you this morning?’

The Man of Integrity began to worry his lower lip with his left hand. Then suddenly he raised an index finger: ‘Now, how’s our arm coming along?’ he quoted.

‘Good,’ said Bamba, ‘excellent. Sit down.’ He handed the spectacles back.

The Man of Integrity was a man again. He looked quizzically at Bamba.

‘We are by no means on the scrap heap,’ Bamba declared.

The Man of Integrity stared, he couldn’t believe it.

‘If, for example, we were to have a kind of porter in the machine hall ...’

‘Machine hall?’ the Man of Integrity asked, incredulous and overjoyed. To be back among his old levers and old comrades was, despite all that had happened, the summit of his hopes.

‘... if we had a kind of overseer there ...’

The Man of Integrity shook his head. ‘How it’s all turned out for the best in the end.’

‘... and could have a report delivered every weekend ...’

‘Of course, Mr Bamba sir.’

‘And here’s your advance,’ Mr Bamba concluded, pressing the 50 Pants into his left hand. He clapped him on the shoulder, and sent him away.

‘Everything comes right in the end,’ said the Man of Integrity when he reached home. ‘I managed to make it up with Bamba. I’ll make it up with the machine hall as well, just wait and see.’ He was impatient for the next day, when he would see the dear old faces of his comrades again.

But the son quit his father’s house that very day.

Bamba destroys a slave trader, or, Is the whole more than its parts?

That evening Olo sat waiting for more distraction. ‘Are you still asleep?’ he whispered. Yegussa kept him waiting a good while. ‘It’s evening again. Won’t you begin?’ So Yegussa began.

Over the years Bamba had modernised his works to a remarkable extent. He had introduced hydraulic drives for his borers, flywheels and hammers. And where the machines couldn’t manage quite everything by themselves, they needed only the touch of a finger here, or a foot on a pedal there. But never a whole human being.

That’s the first character. The second is Mr Glu. Mr Glu was the proprietor of an upscale slave trading business. It had gone on for more than a hundred years, and from the outside was nothing but an elegant little country mansion - its elegance was modern once, seventy years ago. But that was only the respectable façade. Behind the mansion, mature parkland stretched almost to the water, with benches and leafy walks. The park was the jewel in the crown of Glu’s properties. For on its wide well-tended lawns, framed by rhododendrons and box hedges, there rose countless plinths and pediments that had never, Mr Glu was proud to announce, been unoccupied – except once, thirty years ago, in the summer of the great crisis. Mounted on them were noble white-chalked park statues – Glu’s slaves, to delight the casual visitor and maybe find a buyer. None betrayed by sound or gesture the ugliness of their real life. No wonder then that Mr Glu, when he held his nocturnal garden parties, had them assume the posture of classical sculptures, thus mixing art

and business in the most refined way possible. The carefully coiffed appearance of the already white-haired Mr Glu likewise seemed to unite the two spheres.

That's the second character. The third is a lad whose name I am not at liberty to say whilst recounting this story. I refer to the son of the Man of Integrity, the factory worker promoted by Bamba in consolation for his missing arm to become an informer on his comrades. I think I mentioned yesterday about the son departing his father's house on the very evening of that promotion. In the meantime he'd knocked about a great deal, and at the time of this story he was one of the statues in Glu's park. The other statues called him *the Miniature*. So that's what I'll call him here.

Well then, one day Mr Bamba turns up. The Miniature saw the two gents walking up and down the gravel paths. At first they seemed to be enjoying a purely social encounter, of the kind commonly seen in Molussian high society. Only after protracted courtesies did Mr Glu ask the crossover question: whether Mr Bamba thought it right to combine the pleasant with the useful. Mr Bamba, without a moment's umming or aahing, said Yes. So Mr Glu indicated the latest consignment of statues they were strolling past. On each plinth was a little plaque detailing price, age, size, origin, chest measurement, and muscular strength. Some were exceptionally lovely pieces, and all were attractively priced. Mr Glu tapped one on the shoulder, another on the knee, and was delighted with the quality of the material. 'One should not look upon a slave as a slave,' he said, 'that's the traditional artistic principle of our firm.'

Bamba inclined his head slightly, and studied the prices.

'Could you not say of this one,' Mr Glu pointed out a lovely piece – a female slave in a seemingly relaxed pose yet standing absolutely still alongside the Miniature, water jug on her shoulder, eyes closed, shoulders and breasts seeming finely chiselled – 'a piece of statuary so true to life it's almost ideal?'

'She's a little stiff,' was Bamba's verdict. 'She'd have more artistic charm if she were a little livelier.'

'They've only just been graded,' Mr Glu explained, as they walked down another leafy walk and viewed more items.

'Number 35 is pretty good,' said Bamba. This was a rather forlorn statue, near the Miniature.

Mr Glu was astonished that Bamba should find pleasure in precisely this reduced offer from his current stock. But he said: 'Number 35 is fresh in. From the last of the February consignments. And because it's you, Mr Bamba, for a dozen big ones I'll throw this little one in for free.' He took out a notebook, and acted as if it was a done deal.

But Mr Bamba seemed not to be drawn by the offer. He walked on in silence, and the lovelier and stronger the item he passed by, the more determined he became. He tried to open the particularly large fists of two small rather misshapen males and a pretty female, it took an effort, they were clenched tight and always snapped shut again as if on a strong spring. Mr Glu politely requested that he not touch the stock.

‘Numbers 30 to 60,’ he declared, ‘had better not be teased. They have their own concept of honour, so to speak. They are (it’s obvious, allegorically speaking), like Mr Bamba and myself, individualities,. They want to be taken as a whole. In the wholeness of their quality. That’s their number one concern, and I can vouch for it. Any particular attention to hand, head or leg brings a reaction as violent as if one were trying to interfere with the freedom of their private life.’

Bamba regarded him with astonishment.

‘You will appreciate,’ Mr Glu continued, ‘that the last expression was of course to be understood *mutatis mutandis*. Language is so confining, and one is always coming up against the ineffable.’

Bamba, who had meanwhile resumed his strolling back and forth, muttered that that was not at all his opinion. They reached the end of the path, which culminated in a chapel-like niche of box hedges. The pediment, with its plaque showing that a statue of the good old times had stood there, was empty.

‘The good old times,’ Mr Glu explained, pointing to a pair of delicate incised footprints in the pediment. ‘Sold at once.’

‘How much?’

‘Twenty-five gold yen.’

‘Tidy sum,’ Bamba said. ‘I wouldn’t pay a third of that for a girl in my business.’

‘We have never, Mr Bamba, sold a girl to a business like yours. Are we to deliver up women created for beauty only so they may be ruined by work? I know it’s the thing these days. A shameful trade, and immoral. Even a slave girl is a woman, so to speak. Do you want to fetter her in the chains of human labour?’

He pointed Bamba to the bench set by the hedges for the use of interested parties.

‘Please speak your mind,’ he invited, and he sat, somewhat squeezed but still punctilious, beside Bamba’s fuller frame, which threatened to expand slowly and inexorably along the whole bench. ‘You’re holding something back, Mr Bamba. You wish to utter a criticism. The prices – no, Mr Bamba, you don’t even believe it yourself. Quite unnecessary to point you to the price lists of the other trading houses. Nor can the consigned goods be of any concern. The collection comes straight from the Yak Mountains, where they lived hardy and virtuous lives. I’d stake my life on it. She is multi-faceted. She’ll slave away contentedly. She’s made of the best Molussian material.’

‘To be sure, to be sure,’ Bamba assured him, trying to stand up. But Mr Glu, who sensed something bad coming, insisted (leaving business aside and in all friendship) that he mustn’t leave fundamental matters unsaid.

‘It’s almost evening,’ he said. ‘The latest consignment is already on display. You’ll have no less need than I of the evening’s calm, Mr Bamba.’

So Bamba decided to stay. The skies faded to dark. A cool breeze blew in from the sea. The statues began to feel chilled.

‘By the way,’ asked Bamba, ‘does the collection spend the whole night outside?’

‘Unless there’s hail.’

‘Splendid!’ said Bamba. Then, after another pause: ‘You see, my dear friend, the point is that *I don’t need the people as a whole.*’

‘As a whole?’ Glu asked incredulously. ‘Not all of them, you mean?’

‘I could certainly make good use of all. My enterprise grows by the day. But I don’t need any of them *entirely*. There’s too much of the superfluous that must also be paid for. But I haven’t the slightest reason to pay for it. It’s as if I needed nuts, and you weigh out a whole nut tree. That’s no way to do business. In short: your people are too good for me, too strong, too multi-faceted, too eager for work.’ He kept saying *people*. The word *slave* never passed his lips.

‘You’re joking.’

‘No, no,’ Bamba said. ‘Not in the slightest. I shall wait until your goods are a little worse and a little less complete. I don’t need the whole thing, I don’t need them strong, all I need is a hundred hands and around a hundred feet. I’d prefer to save on the rest.’

Mr Glu shook his head. ‘Smaller factories than yours buy nuts in the shell. A larger enterprise can’t muster the price? You have some criticism to level against my goods, Mr Bamba. Please, out with it.’

‘Smaller factories don’t need feet and hands, but a certain combination: people as a whole, with lips, eyes, legs and feet. They buy the whole thing and make the whole thing unfree. I need just one finger, one foot. That’s all I’ll pay for. Anything above that is free.’

‘But I can’t hand over less than one,’ Mr Glu replied, without taking up Bamba’s remark about freedom. ‘Even if you need just one hand for a handle, one thumb to press a switch, you really have to take the whole person. The person along with the hand, the person along with the thumb. What use to you are scraps? And even if you could use the scraps, I can’t saw my pieces up. The business was founded by my grandfather. He caught the slaves himself. I really couldn’t change course to suit your new ideas.’

It was now quite dark. Not one of the statues missed a word of the conversation passing by their feet, and even as consideration was given to sawing them up they stood sturdy and demure on their pediments.

‘How you go about it,’ said Bamba, ‘is of course your affair. You’ll understand that I have no wish to interfere in your freedom to conduct your business. But at the same time you should understand that for me it’s entirely a matter of price, for which I am answerable to my own business. Unprofitable equals immoral.’

Mr Glu conceded this. ‘And I concede, Mr Glu,’ said Bamba, ‘that I’ll have to buy a whole piece when all I need is a finger. But if the *demand* is for a *finger only*, then the *whole piece* must be priced as a *finger*.’

Mr Glu felt horribly nauseous. Despite the calm way in which Bamba pursued the argument, he couldn’t suppress the notion that the whole thing was a joke. And he had no idea how best to respond. ‘So far,’ he said, ‘my pieces are worth more, thank goodness. And as said, I cannot saw them up.’ He said *saw* in a muted tone, and with a bad conscience. He glanced about to see if anything betrayed

understanding. Nothing stirred. The man to Glu's right even seemed asleep. But now and then a superficial twitch ran across shoulder blade and back, as when a horse flicks away flies. Mr Glu threw a pebble. When the man stirred, a ripple passed through all the statues. But none changed position to any degree. Only one young woman facing them was unable at first to regain her balance. 'She hasn't learned to stand properly yet,' Glu explained in a whisper. 'Any who can stand for a long time can work for a long time. The method was handed down by my grandfather. It generates eagerness for work, and a curious conception of freedom. Any who have to stand still a long time feel free when allowed to work again.'

'How long do your people stand around for, usually?' asked Bamba, keen to learn if Glu's goods still found a ready market.

'Most stock,' Glu declared, 'is sold as soon as it arrives, for the more demanding clientele reserve their items while they're still aboard ship. The auctions that take place there push the price of some items up to astonishing heights, more than making up for the five or six unsold items.'

'In that case,' Bamba decided, 'the prices for the rejects you have standing here are much too high. How long do you leave them standing, these leftovers?'

'Seldom more than half a year. Any longer and they're out of date, and uncompetitive.'

'What happens to these remnants?'

'Dealers from the provinces. Resellers.'

'Then I shall take a look around in the provinces. I need rejects.'

'There'll be no profit in it,' warned Mr Glu.

'I can wait,' said Bamba. 'In a few months I can pick up in the provinces the ones standing here for a fifth the price. That wouldn't bring any profit your way, Mr Glu. But I'd take them today for a third of the advertised price.'

Mr Glu was aghast. 'These?' he asked. 'You know what this is, Mr Bamba? It's a collection from Yak, top quality items, all curated, I tell you, as if they were one person. You'll look in vain for such a collection anywhere else in Molussia.'

Bamba made it plain that he set no store by such matters.

'One must have a flair for such things,' Mr Glu went on. 'Flair, that's what's needed. And honestly, I'm not too happy about letting these ones go; did you not notice how *all* of them twitched when I woke *one* of them up?'

'So I'm expected to pay extra for such solidarity, I suppose? So they can *all* rebel when *one* rebels? I'll pass, thank you, Mr Glu. And I can assure you, Mr Glu, that in the shortest time there'll no longer be a demand for your top quality pieces.'

Mr Glu kept silent.

'So, one third of the advertised price? I actually need fifty.' Fifty was an abnormally large quantity.

'The prices are fixed,' Mr Glu insisted. 'I shall stick with the connoisseurs, and the regular customers who recruit not so much for strength, but who wear them out quickly and change frequently.'

‘And what happens to the worn-out items?’

‘Some come back on the market,’ said Mr Glu, almost in disgust. ‘But an enterprise such as yours can only be advised to steer well clear of junk dealers.’

Bamba, who seemed to be waiting undeterred for the addresses of such dealers, swayed back and forth on his heels as if rocking respectability to sleep. ‘Must one not crunch the numbers, Mr Glu? Junk dealers have to crunch their numbers. I have to crunch mine. And look here, just between ourselves, you too will in the end have to crunch yours.’

‘Everyone must,’ Glu conceded. An all-embracing solidarity seemed to have materialised. All men were brothers. And the world, seemingly so complicated, suddenly seemed dreadfully simple.

‘One must only show a bit of understanding, Mr Glu. Then it all becomes easy.’

In general Mr Glu was ready to concede everything. But in particular he said: ‘I shall have to stick to the retail trade.’

‘Retail trade,’ said Bamba contemptuously. ‘Please don’t set all your hopes on the retail trade. The small must turn its eyes to the big. *We* shall set the prices. And do you think the small retailers, whom we shall make even smaller, will pay higher prices than we will?’

‘That’s true,’ admitted Mr Glu. It was the voice of a defeated man.

‘So you see,’ Bamba resumed his attack, ‘I have made a fundamental adjustment. There can be no talk of slaves where I am concerned. My slaves are promoted to workers. To buy a human being *as a whole*, make him unfree *as a whole*, goes against the grain. We buy something off him. Some very particular thing. Something incidental to him. For gripping. For pressing. A hand. A foot. In all other respects we set him free. He’s his own master, like you and me, provided he delivers his contribution. Just you wait, Mr Glu, you too will adopt our principles for freeing the slaves. And that soon enough.’

‘Freeing the slaves?’ Mr Glu asked in bewilderment.

‘Freeing the slaves and rediscovering the human,’ Bamba affirmed. ‘What half a year ago had to be produced by whole human beings with the sweat of their brow can now be produced by my machines. The only thing the machines can take away from the human is what makes the human a thing: all that is inhuman, ignoble. This has been taken from him. But a remnant remains, that cannot be dealt with by the thing itself, cannot be regulated by the machine itself: everything that is imponderable, and human. Dealing with this is the proper task of the human being. You can surely see it, Mr Glu.’

All Mr Glu did was groan and have no idea what Bamba was actually talking about – slaves at reduced prices? or their liberation? The last twilight had faded, and the darker it grew the more triumphant Bamba’s arguments seemed to sound, he being settled so comfortably on the bench that Mr Glu barely had the last bit of a corner to himself.

‘It’s cooler now, so extraordinarily pleasant,’ said Bamba, taking a deep breath. He looked like a permanent fixture on the bench. ‘In the good old days it was

certainly a grand business, the slave trade. One is always glad to know one's father's business, as one knows the Fatherland.'

Mr Glu sighed a confirmatory sigh.

'Nothing is harder to grasp,' Bamba continued, 'than the idea that the things we possess shall one day no longer be in our possession. The owner of statues, Mr Glu, does not grasp that daily life goes on – sun rising, sun setting – even when he no longer owns the statues. It's like dying.' (Mr Glu groaned.) 'Your situation, Mr Glu, I understand only too well. Your firm was like royalty. The silhouette of your Tritons stood out against the evening sky, like the best pieces in the Royal Park. Your Naiads were no less classical than the Ladies of the Well in the Queen's Garden. You had a wonderful business, Mr Glu.' His voice was complacent and melancholy.

'You said *had*, Mr Bamba.'

'You must not believe, Mr Glu, that I regret any less than you the end of all that has been our life, and our love. To live is to inherit. Who today cares about elegance and breeding? Who reads these days, Mr Glu, I say who reads anything these days? I have heard, Mr Glu, that you play the flute. That speaks volumes. Nowadays they play the catalatch. You will not want to believe this, Mr Glu, but do you know what my darling daughter asked for last year? A catalatch. *Child*, I said to her, *a Bamba, smiting a catalatch?* – Yes, she said, *but you don't smite a catalatch, you kick it*. One must kick it, Mr Glu! A musical instrument! *Next you will ask to go dancing*, I said, just to exaggerate. So she did a little two-step. Now she has already passed the catalatch on to someone else, and now she goes dancing, my lovely daughter, a Bamba.' He paused painfully. 'We all of us must suffer, Mr Glu. And neither of us is well suited to the times.'

Before Mr Glu could respond, a tiny shadow came flitting among the statues. Mr Glu seemed to wake up and stir all afresh, with no transition, inscrutable. He began to whisper hastily, tripping over himself, it's the wife come to fetch me, Yontu by birth, from Ma and Yontu, temple company, Mr Bamba will know them. 'I beg you' (the *beg* came out a bit fierce) – 'I beg you not to talk business in her presence, don't mention slaves, she knows nothing, my wife, absolutely nothing, she's a wife of the old school, loves art, loves nature, loves animals, business is a man's affair, she thinks it's a wholesale art operation, I said wholesale art, statuary, only the best at Art House Glu, broadly speaking totally neutral.'

'Word of honour,' said Bamba, no doubt having failed to catch all the details exactly. But this much was clear: Mr Glu had skidded from the terror that had just been instilled in him into a different, more dreadful yet more familiar terror, and there could be benefit in keeping him exposed to both at the same time. So Bamba was already contemplating a joint action with Mrs Glu before they'd even been introduced. This calculation slid gently inside him in the short time it took to say *word of honour*. But Mr Glu, all eagerness, was already presenting the wife.

Mrs Glu was at once so pleased, she bade them keep their seats, she's just passing by, of course she's already heard lots about Mr Bamba over the years, he'd know this of course, she congratulated him on his, as she's been told, promotion of the art of goldsmithing (for Mr Bamba's assurance that he was actually in the screw-making

business was of course sheer modesty), she saw right through him, art was art and would always be art and art was half of life, the art of marble or the art of gold, it was all the same in the end, she personally preferred marble, obviously, marble was cooler, and in a way was her second home so to speak, although in many respects of course gold was somehow more noble and perhaps warmer, still, art is art, in her younger days she used to paint, only an amateur of course (she laughed, and Mr Glu dutifully laughed along), it's good practice and useful for lots of things, quite apart from the fact that nothing is more essential than the superfluous, the imponderable, the truly priceless, who could weigh the beauty of a little statue against a serenade on the carabynt, no one could possibly compare them, and in the end no one is a crass materialist, and she's an idealist, has always given a helping hand to the imponderables, meaning the artistic gentlemen, not too much obviously, even though it lies beyond any estimation, really beyond, and without the Beyond – she's not ashamed to say it out loud – without the Beyond she has no idea at all what life would be, how would she fill her time from morn till night, well, she's always helped a lame dog over a stile, meaning the Imponderables, even if only within the framework of understanding and without causing the artistic gentlemen any embarrassment, and when you think of the well-known and priceless childlike nature of the artistic gentleman where even the trivial becomes infinite (Bamba nodded) but as far as our dear guest is concerned he really mustn't be coy, in every one of his words one recognises the true artist and expert on art, she hopes she's not interrupting, no, no, she can't believe their assurances, she sees right through his courtesy, of course she's interrupting, most certainly she is, as her father used to say, the late Yontu, of Ma and Yontu the temple business, Mr Bamba will know of them, nothing, he said, is more pleasant after the turmoil of the working day than to sit calmly with a business friend, speaking of business.

Yegussa tried in vain to regain his breath. Even Olo said "Phew." But while Yegussa tried to recover – for this performance of stupidity had tired him out – it occurred to Olo that the night must be well advanced, if not already early morning, and he was annoyed. "What sort of a life is settling in here, nattering away the whole night. Are you nearly done?"

"Right away," Yegussa lied, eager to resume the tale. But he was so dead tired he couldn't take the story forward an inch, so he simply reported more of Mrs Glu's stupid chatter, word for word. Strangely enough, Olo raised no objection. Perhaps he found Mrs Glu's stupidity remarkable, but more probably he had meanwhile fallen asleep.

"We came to a stop with Mrs Glu," he resumed. "Bamba reacted to her endless gushing as you did: he never once laughed. He seemed only bemused by Mrs Glu's performance –"

Mr Glu stood up and reminded his wife of the cool night air. She was in fact a little croaky. She said it was nothing to worry about, and sat down at Bamba's side, he making a somewhat imaginary space for her. Glu paced up and down in front of the bench, and seemed afflicted by the thought of being seen by all the statues in his present rather unimpressive situation.

'You were discussing art, or business, Mr Bamba. Please don't let me interrupt. What do you think of the ambiance here in our park? Ambiance is the main thing, I always tell my husband.'

'The ambiance is not of the best,' said Bamba.

'But Mr Bamba!' Mrs Glu went on in an amiably threatening manner. 'How can you say such a thing? And even if the actual ambiance is a little mediocre – still it keeps on making a profit. Is it not always a new experience? Does it not bring fresh problems, fresh tasks? Tasks, I always tell my husband, are the main thing.'

'Of course, my love,' her husband tried to intervene, 'but ...'

'No, no, Mr Glu,' Bamba broke in, and seemed to fulfill the duty of a natural ally of long acquaintance: 'No, no, Mr Glu. I think there can be no *but* here. It is my opinion too that the word *tasks* encompasses all of life's wisdom. What is superior to the task, I ask you, Mr Glu? Mrs Glu clearly has the right instinct for business, her intuition ...'

'You hear that?' came half-threatening, half-triumphant from Mrs Glu.

'What in this respect I owe to my wife,' continued Bamba, 'who was not modern but who had the right intuitive feelings ...'

'She's dead?' Mr Glu enquired with concern. 'You see!' came simultaneously from the lips of Mrs Glu. She found Mr Bamba's views exhilaratingly correct. And in irresistible fluting tones she informed him he was a flatterer. 'I never learned anything, Mr Bamba, anything positive like the girls of today. I rely solely and squarely only on my intuition.'

'Solely and squarely, my dear lady? What do you have against the intuition of book learning, which the girls of today call positive?'

'You are speaking my very own mind, Mr Bamba. He's speaking my own mind, Glu.' And turning again to Bamba: 'Intuition is the main thing, I always tell my husband.'

'I have no complaints,' Mr Glu wished to make known.

And thus did an alliance form between Bamba and Mrs Glu. Mrs Glu was beside herself with delight at having found a soulmate.

'Just look at the moon!' she cried. 'How it shines down on us! So artistic!' Bamba and Glu glanced up for a moment, out of politeness.

'We've already looked at it,' said Mr Glu. His sudden isolation put him in a funk.

'What's up with you?' his wife asked, 'when we were so relishing the ambiance.'

'Worries,' said Mr Glu.

'It's about the statuary,' Bamba explained. 'Art is art and shall always be art, as you so rightly said, dear lady. It is only too true. But the market just now is alas focused on smaller items.' With these words, the ambiance was totally destroyed.

'Smaller items?' came an ear-splitting yelp, as if she had not heard correctly. 'Miniatures? Bric à brac? Really, fashions come and go like the weather. This too shall pass.'

'Like the weather, of course, but it threatens the harvest, dear lady. Prices for full-size statues will drop. Your husband will be affected.'

Mrs Glu was deeply moved. 'Life is a struggle,' she said, and her husband said for him too, whereat she asked Bamba if they've had a quarrel to make her husband so combative, and isn't he just always like this.

'I advised your consort to adjust,' Bamba explained, 'and reject all the old stock.'

'You can be relied on, Mr Bamba. My husband will surely ponder your advice.'

'Prices today are already abnormally low, and I have to fear that your consort could suffer great losses unless he unloads the stock immediately.'

'My husband is ultra-cautious,' she said. 'You may be sure of my support, Mr Bamba.'

'But Mr Bamba actually wants to buy statuary,' Mr Glu now declared.

'True, it's a risk,' Bamba conceded, 'and maybe not properly thought through.'

'We can't accept this,' Mr Glu tried to explain to his wife. 'We have immense debts. Mr Bamba would be taking on a risk while relieving us of it. Why is that, do you think?'

'You're interested in large statuary?' Mrs Glu asked.

'From my earliest years,' Bamba assured her.

'What he wants to do is saw the statues into pieces,' Mr Glu declared, drawing on all his reserves of strength. 'He loves specifics, the pretty foot. The pretty arm. The pretty hand. The higher unity, the individual, the organic, the harmonious is not to his taste.'

Mrs Glu was astounded. 'Taste is subjective,' she said, just to make a start. Then: 'That talk of sawing to pieces will be meant only metaphorically; and to think you have no love for the harmonious whole! You especially, Mr Bamba. No, I tell you, no. You must not say such a thing, Mr Bamba.'

'I do love it, dear lady. But I have no use for it.'

'When I was four years old, and my sister who died was seven,' Mrs Glu related in response, 'our dear late father set up piggy banks for us, I recall it as if it was yesterday. He had them engraved with the words: *The Whole is Greater than its Parts*. And believe me, Mr Bamba, he was right, thrice right he was, and that goes for today as much as fifty years ago, and for art no less than for other things. You love details, Mr Bamba. For sure you have the connoisseur's eye for refinement. But never forget the great Whole.'

She seemed really upset. 'Just think, Mr Bamba, what is left when you cut up an asset or a living being, a dog or a mountain pine? Where then would be the loyalty in its eyes, or next year's pine-nut harvest? Are not works of art in a certain sense also living beings?' Mr Glu gave his wife an imploring look. He seemed to be stoking up new hope.

'Promise me,' said Mrs Glu, placing her hand almost on Bamba's hand, 'that you will not saw the statues to pieces.'

‘My dear lady,’ replied Bamba, ‘I value your confidence greatly. But are there not harmonies that we ourselves compose? With our creative powers? Is it not precisely our greatness that we can reunite and bind together? Parts, that as parts are worth nothing?’

‘Synthesis is the main thing, as I always tell my husband,’ Mrs Glu affirmed. ‘Analysis is corrosive, and the curse of the age.’

Now Mrs Glu gave Bamba’s hand an impulsive squeeze, and received a gentle squeeze in response. The moon disappeared behind clouds. Mr Glu slipped past the bench and stood where he had stood before.

‘Seriously, Mrs Glu,’ Bamba went on, ‘is the pudding not a whole, even though your cook composes it from Brazil nuts, maize meal, pine juice, from gnu cream and sultanas?’

‘You could be a cook yourself!’ Mrs Glu praised him, with a toss of the head. ‘He never even notices what he’s eating.’

‘A singular gift,’ Bamba said modestly, as if it were nothing. ‘Is it not a whole, the thing he cooks? The Brazil nut is closed up tight, and is a whole. He bashed it. The maize was grains, and whole. He ground them. The sultana was a whole. He dried it. The mountain pine stood proud and was a whole. He crushed it.’

Mr Glu circled the bench once more, only to stand again where he’d stood earlier.

‘Do you blame your cook for the parts?’ – ‘No.’

‘Do you reproach him for the nuts?’ – ‘No.’

‘The pine nuts and sultanas?’

‘No, no, no,’ she cried, and was excited, for the deliciousness of insight was to her surprising, and an experience.

‘He needs the parts,’ Bamba summarised, ‘because he is building a whole.’

‘Only you could have stated it so clearly again, Mr Bamba.’

Bamba shrugged. ‘Nothing to write home about.’

‘Don’t be so modest, Mr Bamba, it’s art like any other art, and art is art and remains art.’ In Mrs Glu’s eyes, Bamba was so completely right that any further queries would seem like evidence of disbelief. She’d probably not realised that the conversation – measured by the yardstick of masculine conversations – was not yet anywhere near its end.

‘My husband must have misunderstood, Mr Bamba,’ she said apologetically, and this too was accompanied by one of those tosses of the head that were the trigger for Mr Glu’s circumambulations. The scorn in her words gave Bamba secret delight.

‘So what I wish for,’ she said, ‘is a good deal, swiftly struck.’ She stood on the wings of this wish and vanished into the darkness with the words ‘God, what a night.’ The men stayed behind, silent, until her footsteps could no longer be heard.

‘Where did we get to?’ Bamba asked, with a gesture as if brushing something away. ‘What happens when the excellence of your statuary is no longer excellence? When you have to sell them for scrap, as a job lot of hands and feet?’

The moon emerged again from behind clouds to reveal Mr Glu's dreadfully tormented face. 'We've already discussed that,' he said.

'Then it's high time to make one last effort. How would it be if the multi-faceted nature of your slaves was only a bothersome and incidental quality? And their strength and size merely uneconomical?'

Mr Glu really did try to reason the matter through clearly, but his cognitive organ seemed to have acquired a sprain. 'I would much rather,' he said absent-mindedly, 'know who it is I'm dealing with and go ten or fifteen percent lower, than sell my material to the first and best.' Having undermined the foundations of a well-founded business with these appalling words that he had never ever contemplated before, he gestured a few times with his right hand, which was no longer under his control, and waited for something like the immediate collapse of the firm he himself had just described as rocky. But Bamba waved him off, and Glu hoped for a fleeting moment his own words might still lose their effect.

'As always you give a false impression of the situation, Mr Glu. The approach is utterly without purpose. Am I to buy 85% of a man, when all I need is 5% of his actual capacity?'

'Of course one could not demand that of anyone,' Glu admitted with a horrid smile. Clearly he understood nothing now. '85 for 5 would be madness.'

'Phew,' Bamba said, relieved. 'So what payment conditions would you propose?'

'Can you use females as well?' Glu asked. – 'Why not?'

'And children?' – Bamba nodded.

'I shall open up my depot and my reserves,' Glu said slowly. 'Families will be able to stay together if you take the women and children as well.'

'The horrors of the slave trade would be diminished,' Bamba conceded. 'So what do you ask for the whole lot?'

'The price for one hundred males. You can take their appendages as a rebate.'

They gave each other a formal jab in the ribs to signify the done deal and murmured the ritual: *May both sides find profit in this*. As they stood up, Glu had to lean on Bamba's arm because his knees were knocking. And so they strolled like two friends through the midnight slave park between chalked figures that stood like statues and seemed to sleep as they stood.

Suddenly Glu came to a stop. 'Psh,' he hissed, 'did you hear that?'

Bamba listened into the silence of the park. Suddenly he heard footsteps behind the hedge. Then silence again. 'What could it be?' he asked.

'It's never happened before,' said Glu, trembling. More footsteps came. But now it sounded like several.

'Was that pediment over there unoccupied earlier?' Bamba asked, pointing.

Mr Glu put a hand over his eyes. 'None were,' he whispered, 'apart from the pediment for the *Good Old Times*.'

'There's another empty one over there.'

Footsteps now seemed to come from every direction.

‘Quick,’ said Bamba, ‘where’s the exit?’ He prodded Glu in the ribs. Mr Glu seemed paralysed.

So Bamba left him on his own and ran, if one can use such an expression of a man of his girth, down the gravel path that ended up at the last corner. The gate was blocked by two giant statues and a miniature. They gleamed chalkily in the moonlight. But the eyes were open, and glinting with unnatural hardness.

‘Like some hands?’ the first statue asked deliberately. His fists were in a boxing stance.

‘Like some feet?’ the second asked, no less deliberately. His right leg lifted for a kick.

‘Like some freed slaves?’ asked the Miniature, stepping close to Bamba. Bamba made a gesture as if giving himself up.

‘I only need your hands,’ said the first. ‘I only need your feet,’ said the second. ‘And I only need your clothes,’ said the Miniature.

Bamba screamed for help.

All three flung themselves at him, held his mouth shut, stripped off his three stately vestments, and set him on one of the empty pediments. There he sat like a heavy, somewhat airily clad divinity with legs tucked in, shivering in the night chill. The trio divvied up the stately garments, and disappeared in the direction of the Pariah quarter.

Thus did Yegussa fantasize into the early morning. “Thanks,” said Olo. And both slept the whole day through.

Duet in the Catacombs

Gleaming porcelain’s the thing
For sumptuous dinner courses.
(I’ll gladly take whatever’s left
Off dirty broken saucers.)

There you sit all day in style,
In reach of your own jug.
(But for me it’s good enough
At doors to take a chug.)

How wonderful to stretch right out
In your own comfy bed.
(If only I a pillow had
To stick behind my head.)

Much bigger than those words of song
That give your name a shine
Is the chasm that intrudes so
Between your class and mine.

That's why to do it reverence
You donate rags and tatters.
Don't mock the power of charity:
The rags are all that matters.
There's nothing else you worship
To which such fame adheres.
When you donate deep down below,
You soar among the spheres.

This Yegussa sang loudly, and with religious fervour. "What's that?" Olo asked.

"It's what we used to sing in the Zoolo."

"Never heard it. Who sang it?"

"Us house-beggars."

Olo was quite lost. He had no more heard of house-beggars than he had of a Zoolo. Yegussa explained:

By *house-beggars* is what the Molussian Magnates understood as beggars who lived in their parks in authentic replicas of shacks or Pariah barracks. The arrangement came into its own about ten years ago, when the wholesale people began acquiring building plots in areas around Molussia with lots of lakes, to build their villas far from the city centre. They disliked having to go back into the city in the evening, so apart from their private house-tutors, house-dogs, house-gardeners and house-musicians, they also had house-beggars, so as to fulfil their social duties and satisfy their spiritual and moral needs to the same extent as the aesthetic and intellectual. But where their personal needs ended, and where social norms and obligations began, is hard to determine. I suspect that even common obligations sprang from common needs. So highly demanding villa owners, like mine, who nurtured innate distaste for the inauthentic, and whose social standing forbade the making of copies, had actual Pariah houses demolished and transported from the Pariah quarter and rebuilt in their parks. Needless to say, they kept a sharp eye open to ensure that house-beggars didn't eat any better or wear better clothing than they did in nature. Actually I sometimes went hungrier as a house-beggar and suffered more from the cold than I ever did before.

Keeping just one house-beggar was as rare as keeping just one pet dog. Two was the minimum. So the mercies of random acts of charity were tempered by the fact that besides the recipient there was always at least one other who came up short in the same random event. Empathy with the recipient's joy was one of those feelings that people were most proud of, as if it was an accomplishment of the modern age. Because earlier on no one ever felt empathy or showed understanding – they just tossed a coin at the beggar and sent him on his way without a word. When, as sometimes happened, house-beggars who depended on charitable donations just faded away, or had already faded before they could provide the joy that comes from giving, all it proved was that you really were keeping them in their natural state and you couldn't simply force unfamiliar living conditions on them. But when it became a matter of domestic harmony that house-beggars should creep about the park at

night on a regular basis in order to startle the master or provide an object for possible outbursts of emotion, such fading-away incidents never happened.

The really well-off never limited themselves to two or three beggars, because such a tiny number would already represent a falsification of the state of nature. They had Zoolos erected, developments as big as a whole Pariah alley where whole Pariah families could live completely true to nature. They were made available for study purposes to artists, sociologists and medics. If a patron should go bust, the development would grow wild, and proliferate into an actual Pariah quarter. This was all the more disconcerting as the Pariahs in such cases would fetch furniture, pictures and utensils from the patron's villa, to the grave detriment of the Zoolo's natural character. Because these sites were scattered across fake environments, a long way from the main concentrations of Pariahs, they would slowly fade away, and whatever the inhabitants still had was carried back to the home district. None of those slaves could hold out more than five or six years.

Olo felt great satisfaction hearing all this, as he did with everything meaningful. "Now sing your song again."

"Wouldn't you rather hear what the masters sang?" Olo was glad of any song from up there. So Yegussa launched into:

Prayer for Beggars

When we get our wind back
After tedious business sessions,
Grant Thou a little impetus
To our idealist passions.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Ah, the daily dash and hustle
Mocks our worldly wealth.
Lord, we pray for offerings
That boost our spirit's health.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Send to us cripples and the like,
Beggar folk, not to touch,
Some thing to soothe the heart,
Some one to pity much.
Give us this day our daily bread.

For only acts of charity
And well-earned tears, we find,
Can bless our nightly slumber
For the morrow's daily grind.
Give us this day our daily bread.

That's what Yegussa sang. Olo repeated every word as if he wanted to learn it by heart. He even joined in the last verse, two octaves lower. And the duet rang out loud and full of religious fervour.

The story of Stone-arm; or,
The bill for acts of charity

During the night Yegussa began shouting out loud, like a newspaper boy:

Statuary ensemble desecrated by youth!

Where is Bamba's stone arm?

Barbarians in Central Park!

Panic in the Beautification League!

Where is Bamba's stone arm?

"What's going on?" asked Olo, starting up. "Just headlines," Yegussa replied. "So, what's the story?"

The popular 4000 Pant art display of the famous philanthropist Bamba in the 'Hedge of Charity' in Central Park was desecrated last night by yobbish vandals.

Last night at around 2 a.m. two park wardens found a statue toppled from its pediment and lying on its back on the ground smeared with dirt as if it had rolled over. The right arm was missing, the upward reach it had lent the statue now ended tragically in a stump.

The perpetrators, two quarrymen from Penx and a Molussian tramp, were overpowered not far from the scene. They put up no resistance. But after giving their names they remained completely silent.

Why they were carrying a hammer in the park at midnight was clear enough from their deed. But the perpetrators have refused to provide information about their motives or who put them up to it.

The plaintiff will most likely be the city of Molussia, with Mr Bamba as co-plaintiff.

All will remember what the statue looked like before its barbaric mutilation. Bamba's right arm was raised to emulate his charitable works. For the left hand, the *Nusakaraji*, the *Hand that does not calculate*, the traditional hand of almsgiving, poured soothing oil from a little jug onto the back of a child crouching at his feet chewing a hunk of bread: a pretty water feature that was normally in operation from May to September.

Older park visitors will recall how water flowed not only from the jug but also, welcomed by visitors every time with amazement, swelled at specific time intervals as tears of emotion from the eyes of the two figures represented. Alas, the small holes drilled into the corners of the eyes later became clogged.

From an artistic point of view the figures formed a single ensemble. The problem with sculpture in the round, as was previously assumed, whereby

impossible and stylistically unpleasing group representations are composed by placing the figures over each other rather than side by side, was here solved in a manner both simple and ingenuous.

The inscription on the pediment: *The law of sympathy is not a law, it comes from the heart* was taken from Bamba's speech at the consecration of Children's Chapel.

It is perhaps intriguing to recall that the statuary was installed in Central Park for viewing free of charge at the instigation of the Aspedee Party, *in order to enable everyone, not just the well to do, to enjoy our national cultural treasures*. This proposal was loudly opposed by authoritative voices, not least in our pages. But when Mr Bamba, with his famous call for *Art for the People*, personally lent support to the proposal, it was finally acceded to. Such generosity has now been most bitterly repaid.

Shortly before going to press we learned that the Aspedee Party claims *to distance itself most emphatically from those sinister elements, who have so outrageously disfigured this unique example of group statuary with no understanding of its organic composition, and who appear minded to extend to defenceless works of art the cowardly crudity of their use of violence*.

"Two weeks later," said Yegussa,, "the trio who'd been caught redhanded appeared chained together before the judge. The Molussian, in the middle between the two quarrymen, was a lanky 17 year old who, like many unemployed, often slept in Central Park. If you looked closely at his defiant face, you would no doubt recognise the 'Miniature' from Mr Glu's slave park.

"But the youth had meanwhile grown a bit, he'd knocked around a lot, had sung his way across Molussia for a whole year, had spent a year as a Zoolo resident, had learned to know people and to love girls, and if despite his 17 years his speech sounded wild and challenging it was only because his wildness was nothing but a zeal for justice, and his insolence was replete with amazingly true insights. I suppose I hardly need to stress that he had nothing whatsoever to do with the damage to the statuary. Whether the other two, whom he'd never set eyes on before that night, had more to do with it, he very much doubted. He would never find out.

"Because an hour after he stood accused before the judge, he landed down here in the dark. So let's call him ... Yegussa."

The three of them stood chained together, Yegussa in the middle, in front of the table where Jank the judge sat along with Mr Bamba, a representative of Molussia City, and a gentleman from the Beautification League. White and huge on the table in front of them lay the broken-off arm from Bamba's statue; it took up the whole length of the desk from the first dignitary to the fourth, for the statue had been at least three times life size. All four gentlemen seemed embarrassed by the item; they all avoided contact with it. Judge Jank began, shuffling through his papers: 'Which of you is the Molussian?'

Yegussa stepped forward, as far the chains allowed.

'Name?'

Yegussa raised his left hand, the back of which bore a Pariah tattoo.

‘How did you come to know the other two?’

‘I never saw them before.’

The other two confirmed this. The chains chinked slightly.

‘Of course,’ said Jank, still shuffling through his papers. ‘And of course you had never seen the statue.’

The two Penxers had probably never even heard of the statue. But Yegussa admitted that he was quite familiar with the exhibit. Judge Jank looked up and beamed a kindly look.

‘So you see, my boy,’ he said, as if Yegussa had taken the first step towards a confession. ‘And since you have such good knowledge of the monument, why do you think could anyone break off the arm?’

Yegussa shrugged.

‘Now, why, do you think?’

Yegussa should have been content with the shrug. But since, as I’ve told you, he was immature and loved to offer up his insights in the most unsuitable venues, he supplemented it with: ‘How’m I supposed to know? I consider the act childish and useless.’

The word *useless* made a remarkable impression on the four dignitaries behind the table. All four changed their demeanour. Bamba looked up. ‘We don’t find the act *useless* at all,’ said Judge Jank in a very altered tone. ‘We find it *criminal*.’

The two Penxers on either side of Yegussa nodded vigorously. Clearly they agreed totally with Judge Jank. And to distance themselves visibly from Yegussa, they stepped back as far as their chains allowed. Yegussa’s arms were jerked behind him by the chains.

‘Why then?’ the judge appealed again to Yegussa, and his tone was anything but friendly. ‘Why, do you think, did they break off the arm?’

The two other defendants swiftly transformed themselves into plaintiffs. The chains bit into Yegussa’s wrists. He’d better answer.

‘Actually,’ said Bamba, ‘the youth should be released from the chains.’

The judge waved this away. ‘Why was the arm broken off?’

Yegussa stood now like a crucified figure. The scene was truly out of the ordinary. Some in the courtroom stood on their chairs. The judge was by no means unhappy to have gingered up the proceedings with such effect and success. But he called the court to order. And he did order Yegussa’s chains removed.

Yegussa stood free, rubbing his chafed wrists. ‘I guess,’ he replied slowly, ‘*because it was a beating arm*.’

‘An astonishing declaration,’ the judge said, turning to Bamba. But Bamba seemed unwilling to take part. He scratched at the stone arm, and examined what he had scratched off.

‘And who was beaten by the beating arm?’ asked the judge. Bamba felt the stone arm’s biceps, as if to test its strength. He seemed to have forgotten where he was.

‘The one being oiled by the left arm,’ Yegussa replied.

At this peculiar explanation the judge allowed himself a teensy smile at the spectators.

Meanwhile Bamba had begun to raise his right arm. Yegussa indicated to the court reporters that they should make an accurate note.

‘Why should he beat the one he oils?’ asked the judge.

The position of Bamba’s arm was now quite remarkable: the upper arm leaned half back; the underarm formed almost a right angle with it; the hand was bent back, the fingers curled a little inwards. Now the arm was an exact replica of the stone arm, but when compared with the enormous marble original it also looked pathetic and shameful: – it was quite clearly an arm raised for a beating.

‘Yes!’ said Yegussa, pointing triumphantly at Bamba as if to an item of evidence. Bamba seemed to wake up. He lowered the arm and made a few camouflaging motions. Everyone must have observed the curious scene. But no one clambered onto a chair, and the gentlemen at the table acted as if they had seen nothing.

‘Well then,’ asked the judge, ‘why does he beat the one he oils?’

‘*Why does he oil the one he beats?*’ Yegussa corrected Jank’s formulation.

‘Get on with it!’ Judge Jank urged, not noticing how far Yegussa’s question differed from his own.

Now Yegussa had burned all his boats. And although he’d landed up in this situation only through lack of cleverness, he was now transformed from a falsely accused to an actual accuser.

‘Why does he oil the one he beats?’ the judge repeated Yegussa’s question.

‘Calculated scheming.’

‘The boy’s out of his mind,’ Bamba said, looking very pale.

Judge Jank waved him away. ‘The law of sympathy,’ he quoted Bamba’s motto very cuttingly, ‘is no law. It comes from the heart.’

Bamba rocked gently in his seat to show how insignificant his motto was.

‘What does Mr Bamba’s motto mean?’

‘It means: sympathy comes *only* from the heart.’

‘*Only?*’ Bamba gave Yegussa a glance full of regret.

‘It seems you set little store by the heart, young man,’ Judge Jank decided.

‘Sometimes,’ Yegussa conceded. ‘The heart cannot calculate. That’s exactly Bamba’s calculation. That’s why he gives only from the heart. For the heart only gives gifts that do not calculate. That the *heart* should never calculate is his whole ethos. That his *gifts* should never calculate is a matter of economic efficiency. That’s why Bamba gives only from the heart. Out of calculated scheming. Calculated charity.’

"You actually said that?" Olo asked, filled with admiration. "More or less," said Yegussa, as if exactitude with no loose ends was beside the point here. "In any case, it's more useful in that form."

"And more praiseworthy," Olo added. "Go on."

The *sympathy calculation* succeeded in very different ways. There was some giggling in the public gallery. Someone shouted: 'Scrottish nitpicking.' The gentry sat staring at one another, baffled. Bamba, who seemed to have followed the logic of the argument, began dispiritedly to regard Yegussa as a totally unprecedented phenomenon.

'We Molussians are somewhat simpler,' the judge spoke at last. He still didn't understand, and gave the public in the gallery a complicitous wink. Clearly he was out to brand Yegussa a foreigner.

'You're not simpler in your *dealings*,' Yegussa contradicted. 'Only in the *presentation*.'

'So what answer did you come to?'

'The figures tallied. But understanding them or not is not a matter of intelligence.'

'But of ...?'

'Goodwill.'

'I have the very best,' the judge informed the public.

'That wouldn't be under your control.' (Laughter from the public.)

'So who would prevent me?'

'You yourself.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that Bamba's sympathy awakens only at close of work. Never during the day.'

'He's not entirely wrong,' Bamba interjected. The judge looked at him in surprise.

'What objection do you have to his evenings?'

'I condemn his evenings because I condemn his days. And I condemn his days because during the day he inflicts the wounds that he's so proud of soothing in the evenings.'

Bamba's face said *shame about the boy*.

'The lad shows some insight,' he said slowly in a complacent tone. 'But of course he sees it all in a totally distorted way.' ('Oil in the left hand,' Yegussa explained, turning to the public.) 'Anyone who acts,' Bamba went on, 'incriminates himself. There the lad is quite right. That's the tragedy of action. One who wants the harvest must cut down. One who walks squashes the worm. One who lives uses up himself, and maybe others too. But you see, my dear boy, it's an iron law. Not to be withstood. Sentimental, anyone who just because of that sits on his hands. Leaving undone is also doing. Anyone who overlooks the victims he leaves by the wayside, anyone who

does not seek to smooth over that which he has made rough – such a one would certainly be heartless.’ And turning to the judge: ‘Shame about the boy.’

Yegussa shook his head. ‘I’m not talking about that kind of generalised and unavoidable guilt. It has mighty broad shoulders. How nice to take refuge behind them with your avoidable guilt.’

The judge tried to speak.

‘So where is my personal guilt?’ asked Bamba, making as if to bare his bosom.

Yegussa shook his head again. ‘I’m not even talking about your personal guilt.’

The judge tried politely to dissuade Yegussa from further interjections.

But Bamba was enjoying this interaction with his already defeated enemy. ‘So if it’s not general and not personal, what is it?’

‘Class guilt.’

With that the judge had had enough. ‘Your emotion does you credit,’ he turned very vigorously to Bamba. ‘It attests once again to your generosity and your unshakable sympathy. Which extends even to your enemies. But should we be merciful to those who destroy the symbols of our mercy?’

The court reporters underlined this question. Clearly they were convinced they’d witnessed the birth of a saying that would be famous come morning.

‘Is justice not the truest mercy? Would leniency towards those who use violence not be a premium paid by us to violence? That is far from our purpose.’ And he concluded, glancing towards the public: ‘This case is political. The complaint must be reformulated. There must be a retrial. The public are to be excluded.’ And he sat back down.

Yegussa was unable to see if the two quarrymen were released at once, for he was the first to be dragged from the courtroom. As for the retrial, he’s still waiting.

“Anyway,” Olo whispered after a while, “it was of course you who damaged the statue.”

“Who’s going to pass the story along?” Yegussa asked. “You or me?” And he lay down to sleep.

CHANGING PLACES

DAY 42

A dangerous social game.
Olo and Yegussa exchange roles

"Will it be enough," Yegussa began late that evening, "for me to learn what you teach me? Shouldn't I also learn *how to teach*?"

"That wouldn't be a waste of time."

"So wouldn't it be practical for me to try playing the teacher?"

"While I play naïvety, you mean?"

"Just so as I can see how to impose on them." He meant the pupils.

Olo couldn't accede right away to such impertinence. But Yegussa, eager to make a start, said "Aah," the same Aah he had heard so often from Olo's lips, that so often marked the starting point of their conversations.

"Why are you groaning?" Olo asked, according to protocol.

"I was just thinking about hope," Yegussa replied.

"No reason to groan."

"Reason enough."

"What was it you were hoping for?"

"Nothing, for myself. I was groaning about the fact that other people hope."

So there they sat now: Olo, relegated to thirty years ago, the former pupil, and Yegussa, advanced by another thirty years and already a teacher; there they sat, the pupil as a teacher of his teacher, and the teacher as the pupil of his pupil, each on one edge of the chasm of twice thirty years that separated them; there they sat, separated by decades, but both in the dark, near to giving up hope, calling out questions to themselves and spouting answers to themselves on the old theme of hope.

"Hope," Yegussa said drily, imitating Olo's voice. "Hope is the activity of inactivity. It is no better than praying. And no better than despairing: it's simply an opinion."

"I shall learn this," Olo promised diligently. He was completely on board.

"So you should not hope," Yegussa lectured, "but should act always as if you're hoping. And most importantly: you must not hope based only on the fact that you're doing something."

("Will that do?" he whispered. "Not quite literally," whispered Olo, "but it's a start.")

"But what difference would it make," asked Olo in the pupil-voice, "if I hoped anyway?"

"Answer that yourself," demanded Yegussa the teacher.

"The *actual* message," Olo responded in Yegussa's voice.

“Good,” said Yegussa. “The message *we have to pass along*. For the message says: do not hope and do not pray, just *act*. Anyone who hopes leaves the task to someone else, and to the enemy; and praying means worshipping.”

(“Couldn’t have put it better myself,” whispered Olo, as himself. “It’s all there, complete.” “They’re your words,” Yegussa the pupil clarified, *sotto voce*.)

“But these words,” Yegussa the teacher continued, “are *incomplete*. For no one has the strength to live without hope. If we can’t give hope to the ones the adversary gives hope to, we’ll never be able to find the followers who are the ones we’re fighting for. And those who do come will swiftly abandon us.”

This proposition contradicted all Olo’s teaching. “Heresy!” he shouted. “To the best of my knowledge, truth fares badly in competition with lies. I admit of no half measures!” Hard to say if Olo’s excitement was an act, or if he had fallen out of his role.

“That’s what I once thought,” replied Yegussa, loftily above all excitement, and he too did not betray whether he was rebuking his pupil or his teacher. “A necessary stage, this intransigence. But you must overcome it.”

“What does that mean?”

“If you allow no half-measures, you actually let nothing in. Is a path only *half* because it’s not yet *at the end*? Must the pupil already *know* how to write so he can *learn* to write at school? Must victory already be there, so you can have a victory?”

Olo the pupil kept silent. So did Olo the teacher.

“Who makes the ignorant ignorant? Do they know who makes them ignorant and keeps them in their ignorance? They don’t know. And they keep on not knowing for as long as the rulers hold them back. Liberation is necessary because they don’t know they need to be liberated. Their ignorance is not only the main obstacle to revolution, but also a reason why it’s necessary. Could we do it by ourselves? Us few who know? No, because the ignorant stand on the side of their enemy; that’s their ignorance. So we’d have to struggle against our enemy *and* the mass of their confederates, even though our struggle is *on behalf of* that mass.

“We *need* them. We *need* the ignorant. And if all they listen to is beguiling lies, then *we too* must beguile them. So that after the revolution they see that they themselves could have done it, if they’d only been able to see the necessity. So that they understand *why* they could never see the necessity. If they were as far ahead as you want them to be, what more would they have needed? For their ignorance and their hopefulness come only from the devious charlatans who rule over them.

“Only victory will enable the ignorant to know. Let us use their hope, even if it’s the same hope they were given by the seducer’s promises. Let us use their enthusiasm, even if the trust they give us is the same as they gave to the false prophets. Tell them *you* are the truth, even if they believe your truths no differently than they believed the lies. For truth carries no label. But Truth’s reticence is no virtue, its good breeding is complacency. It shows its mettle when it can set itself down among lies as if emerging from the masses. Deceiving them – for the sake of those lied to and for the sake of Truth.” ...

Olo remained silent a long time after all this heresy. "Should Truth perhaps come out in a rant?" he asked at last, as if it amused him to provoke the unbearable response.

"A very apposite question," Yegussa the teacher acknowledged.

"Because I learned that only wrong things can be roared."

"Then anyone who has right on his side must roar it out the right way. Silent truth is easily shouted down. But a loud lie can only prevail with rants and roars. However distasteful it may be for truth to summon drums and trumpets to its aid – we must roar. *Only after the victory can we become more genteel.*"

NIGHT

Olo is annoyed by redundancy

"My deep voice is you. And my high voice is me."

Olo raised no objections.

"You know Yamyam of course," Yegussa began in a deep voice. "But we've forgotten his most important conversation. Yamyam's still in Molussia before fleeing abroad. Tol the Tedious has delivered an extraordinarily complicated lecture on Pariah class consciousness –"

'Your theory,' Yamyam chided him (they were known to be friends), 'was far too convoluted. Pariahs won't understand it.'

'No point getting worked up,' said Tol. 'We are always being misunderstood.'

'And they say you're arrogant,' Yamyam went on.

'My theory,' Tol replied, with an obnoxious patient expression on his face, 'my theory is not a whit more complicated than the relationships with which it deals. It is neither easy nor difficult, merely appropriate.'

'Not appropriate for Pariahs. Or who exactly are you talking to?'

Now Tol began to show irritation. 'That they're uneducated,' he replied, getting personal, 'I don't need to learn from you. I think I've explained clearly enough who has an interest in keeping them uneducated. Should I perhaps flatter their lack of education and start every sentence with the words: *As you yourselves know?* I think perhaps you should engage someone else to be your demagogue.'

Not for the first time, Yamyam wondered if he might dispense with Tol's collaboration. 'I think you forget the main point,' he said in a humble tone. Because he still had the highest regard for Tol's scholarly abilities.

'Now you'll have a go at me with *synthesis*,' Tol predicted, and he gulped, as if the predictability of every word made him nauseous. 'I can hear it already: between science and demagogy there is always a third. I know; but synthesis means compromise, and compromises are compromises.'

This kind of radicalism was hard to counter. Especially as Yamyam had meant to bring up something similar. He chewed it over a long while. He would have to meet Tol on the man's own ground. 'Your explication of the Pariah's situation,' he conceded, 'is of course correct. But it is so tedious that it can't hope to change the

Pariah's situation. It's tailored neither for *use*, nor for the *user*.' (The Tedious raised no objections.) 'For example, if you provide an astronomer with a telescope, it's tailored to the human eye. Otherwise it's useless. If you find a mathematical proof, it's tailored to human understanding. Otherwise it's useless. In principle, that which has been proved can stand *even without the proof*. Is the telescope a compromise? Is the proof a compromise? Is popularisation a compromise? They are *methods*.'

Tol sought in vain for a hole in Yamyam's argument. Finding none, his face took on a sympathetic look. But Yamyam would be overawed no longer. He had found the nub of the matter. 'Is eating perhaps a compromise – between hunger and satiety? Is learning a compromise – between knowing and not knowing? Is teaching a compromise – between not knowing and knowing? Is action a compromise – between non-existence and existence? Is the path a compromise, because it is not yet at its end?' At this point, Yamyam turned on his heel to leave Tol standing. Only now, having found a clear formulation for Tol's fake radicalism, did he feel real disgust.

Tol went about grumpily for several days telling all who would listen that Yamyam was a typical example of the politics of the lesser evil. And he offered a bombastic defence of half-measures. A few days later he bumped into Yamyam.

'I've been thinking it over,' said Yamyam. 'You're actually *against* the Pariahs.'

Tol's face at once took on its sympathetic look.

'And *for* the demagogues - don't look so surprised – if they're ready to flatter you, you with your puritanical hokum and your scholarly conceit.'

'I'm on my guard against that,' came the mocking response from Tedious. 'Even though up till now they haven't felt fully able to accept my theories.'

'Because they're too complicated! And they accept that you scare your pupils. And you hand your pupils over to them.'

Tol shrugged. 'Everyone deserves the truth he accepts,' he said in a snotty tone.

'That we shall never allow,' Yamyam declared with great energy, 'any more than we can ever allow your theories to simply be forgotten.' He still venerated Tol the scholar.

From then on, for quite a while, Yamyam did nothing but popularise what had been formulated without compromise by his dangerous friend Tol. Naturally Tol, who heard about Yamyam's lectures, at first felt aggrieved to know how his theories were being vulgarised. If he gave in too quickly it would be a bad sign. But when Yamyam one day was able to pass on to him as a colleague his most advanced pupil – most were trained only to be instructors of the Pariah – Tol was delighted to retain this connection with the movement. And when he saw with his very own eyes that they were slowly beginning to adapt to his ideas, he forgave Yamyam for everything. That's how far the teacher got. What the pupil thought is unknown. For he said not a word.

DAY 43

Olo becomes insightful.

Yegussa declares slogans to be words of the sloggers,
for use against the slogged

“Carry on with your game,” Olo began next morning, at around the time he usually began. Though Yegussa was glad the silence was at last broken, he couldn’t believe Olo’s challenge to go on with the game by himself. “Will you play too?”

“I’ll just listen.”

“What would you like to hear?” Olo thought for a moment: “Something about slogans.” So Yegussa the teacher began.

‘What we represent here is the great enterprise of the Enlightenment. Do you know what that is, the Enlightenment?’

‘Well, you know,’ replied Yegussa the Pupil, ‘it’s all basically sort of nothing but ...’

‘Stop,’ Yegussa the Teacher interrupted. ‘*Nothing but* ... Who could say such a thing?’

Pupil played the clueless innocent.

‘Only the active person. Only the decisive person. Who wants *nothing but*. *Nothing but* is a term of praxis, not theory. What is *nothing but* in theory?’

Once again Pupil could not find an answer.

‘Parochialism. Pigheadedness. Now then, what was the business of the Enlightenment?’

Pupil played sheepish: ‘Reason versus emotion,’ he quoted. ‘Human dignity versus slavery. Rationalism versus mysticism. Materialism versus idealism, etcetera.’

‘Etcetera indeed,’ Teacher repeated. ‘And meaning something *real* versus mere rote learning. That’s enlightenment.’

‘Yes,’ Pupil conceded, rather abjectly.

‘Well, can you apply it in some way what you’ve quoted here? Those slogans? Do they actually *mean* something to you? Or are they merely little flags hanging from your mouth? As a sign that you belong to us?’

‘I’ve never thought about it.’

Teacher had to reflect on this for a moment. ‘That our enemies have their emotion-stirring words, it’s part of what they are. For nothing is of less concern to them than *meaning* something. But it’s not part of us. That we have some such words – we, the enlightened – and can’t do without them, is already bad enough. Use them! But if you use them as if everything is hunky-dory, then you must not use them.’

‘So what’s the difference between *their* slogans and ours?’ Pupil asked.

‘Basically, we made up our own. For our own use. Slogans for slogging away at *them*. They’re vulgarisations of the truth. But we’ve never devised a slogan with the intent of deceiving ourselves. The reason is simply because we could never go into battle with only the burden of the *perfect theory* around our necks.’

‘So they’re merely provisional?’ Pupil asked.

‘That’s what we must keep a sharp eye on. Nothing becomes autonomous more easily than a slogan. We have to watch it all the time. So we can always find a way back from it. Back to what we actually meant. To what lies behind the vulgarised meaning. If we can no longer do that, if we can no longer verify it, then we’re no better than our enemies. Worse even – merely *parrots* of Enlightenment.’

Pupil was impressed by this expression.

‘But true verification comes later. Because we vulgarise truth in order to make truth a reality, and so make slogans superfluous. They’re there *in order that one day they can abdicate*.’

‘And *their* slogans?’ Pupil asked. He meant the enemy’s.

‘Words concocted by the sloggers to be used by the slogged. They’re vulgar, but not vulgarised. They simply conceal. They’re lies.’

After a pause he added in a soft voice: ‘Mark well this formulation. Not so you can rattle it off by heart. But so you can continually refer to it and reflect on it. Because we also use slogans, there’s a danger that we’ll come to resemble the enemy. A clear difference must be maintained.’

Thus spake Yegussa the elder to Yegussa the younger. And in the speaking learned much, and much that was new.

“We too are here,” came a sudden whisper, “in order that we may abdicate.”

Yegussa was startled to hear Olo’s voice again: “What do you mean?”

Olo made no reply.

“Olo.” Olo made no reply.

Yegussa became uneasy. He crawled in Olo’s direction. He stopped in between their two spots. “What did you mean by abdicate?” he asked in dread.

Olo seemed to have no interest in clarifying his statement. So Yegussa decided to crawl closer. He arrived at Olo’s beard. “Olo!” he cried, right in the old man’s face. Now Olo emitted his good old “Aah.”

“Why are you groaning?” Yegussa asked the good old question.

“I forgot a couple of stories,” Olo whispered.

“I’ll make them up,” Yegussa comforted him.

“And they’ll be usable?”

“For sure,” Yegussa promised.

“And do a good job.”

“For sure.”

“And say hello up there.”

“To all Molussia.”

“And in an emergency ...”

“To trustworthy hands.”

"Thank you," Olo whispered. The weight on Yegussa's arm grew heavier.

"And I thank you!" the young man cried into Olo's ear. "I do! I do!" And he let the weight slide slowly to the floor.

Note by the transcriber

Alerted by prolonged shouting of the younger prisoner, we instructed the turnkey to investigate maniac cell 734. He found the older prisoner dead.

"Now I've caught you out," the younger prisoner said as the turnkey busied himself in the cell. "How did you know he's dead?"

The turnkey made no reply.

"I knew someone was listening."

He made no reply.

"So you must know the story of the First?"

He made no reply.

"She said: Jailer, *listen. You are a prisoner of the prisoners. Compelled to compel.* Think about it."

"No more listening from today on," said the turnkey, heaving the corpse onto his shoulders. And he left the young prisoner all alone.

DAY 44

Yegussa dies, too

Next morning Yegussa was in a dreadful state. He couldn't sit in his own spot. He sat in Olo's spot and practised Olo's role and cleared his throat and acted as if he was preparing to tell a story. But the hollow in the wall didn't fit his back, so he staggered back to his own spot. There he played the old Yegussa as if Olo was still there, but this game too was not amusing. So he changed places a few times until at last he decided on the wall in between Olo and Yegussa. There he sat, right in the middle, with thirty or forty years ahead of him and his right leg pointed to the old man and his left leg to the younger. But the old man wasn't there, and neither was the young man, and it was as if both had died ...

So there he sat, and was no longer called Yegussa, and had nothing more to learn, and had only to keep control. It's easy to say: *control*, when you're all alone and you need to speak but no one hears you and you yourself are the only judge. Yegussa could tell you about it. How often did he begin – the beginnings of stories, fables, poems he wanted to speak out; how often did he ask himself what *the long view* meant and tested himself to see if he could still master the story of the Animal College. But he could never ever get beyond an attempt. What he had to say, he alone knew. Speaking aloud seemed to frighten him. But if just one word stumbled, he at once began to choke, as if what he spoke was not just meaningless but actually impossible. Recovered from the choking he would begin to curse – it seemed to loosen up his voice. But even cursing quickly lost

its allure. Then usually complete silence would descend. From the very first, these outbursts followed a fixed and unchangeable pattern, and on the very first day were repeated no less than ten or eleven times.

On the fifth day he tried one of the stories about Gey.

“When Prince Gey ascended Mount Sam,” he began. He came no farther. “When Prince Gey ascended,” he tried the runup once more. But again he came no farther. “When Prince Gey,” he arrived voiceless at third attempt.

Then silence fell.

* * *

EPITAPH

Up there, life rolls blithely on
like waves upon the sea.
The world's forgot that you're down here,
and Time has thrown away the key.

It might be long enough before
your lips speak out again.
And long before the four cell walls
pick up the old refrain.

Longer still before you pass
your baton to the novice,
and you, as now the older link,
fill Olo's constant office.

But the longest wait and hardest
is till the word can see day's light.
Ah, till then you're still entrapped
in the first quarter of your night.

APPENDIX: YEGUSSA IS HONOURED

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MINUTE OF THE FREEDOM COMMITTEE

Agenda: the government threat to treat as hostages the 115 comrades sent to the catacombs thirty years ago, and execute them unless the announced General Strike is cancelled.

Lo: It is hard to grasp the thought that these one hundred and fifteen, of whom we have heard nothing since their arrest thirty years or more ago, may still be alive. We long believed them dead. To some of us they are but a hazy memory. The youngest among us probably know nothing at all about those in question. The government has pulled them from the dark in order that we should push them back down.

(Unrest among the committee members)

We might persuade ourselves that the government is lying. That they need a ruse. That the one hundred and fifteen are indeed long since dead. And that they threaten us with the execution of ghosts.

(More unrest)

But we have no proof. So let us assume that the one hundred and fifteen are still alive.

(Assent)

Comrades! You would have been ready and willing to take over a hundred functions from the prisoners, since they would no longer be able to undertake them. You would care for their children. You would settle their debts.

(Assent)

So take over as well what they committed to take over, if they had freedom of choice.

(Silence)

Comrades! One who sacrifices himself does so not because he can take on the responsibility, but because he believes it is right. And because he believes the cause is more valuable than himself. Based on the same insight, we must learn to sacrifice others as well. Where you would offer yourself up because you could be replaced, you must be equally willing to offer up those whom you could replace. *Sacrifice thy neighbour as thyself.*

(Silence)

But who is to be replaced? Nobody. The men we must sacrifice for the cause – great though their qualities be – no longer count. They sacrificed themselves. Thirty years ago. They sit in darkness. Are as good as dead. In abandoning them, we merely confirm what is already done. And if they die, they fall from darkness into darkness.

(Lo's speech is followed by a long silence. Some comrades indicate that they wish to speak, but decline when called upon)

I know your torment. And I share it. But I do not allow it. If you fail to sacrifice the prisoners, you will be sacrificing thousands who are to be saved by this long-prepared

blow against the government. *To forebear is also to act. Choose your preferred sacrifice.*

(Slowly, and in silence, Lo's proposal to sacrifice the old comrades is adopted)

Our right to make this sacrifice is now clear to us all. But what inward inhibitions did we – and I include myself – have to sweep aside before being prepared to acknowledge the argument as correct? To justify this sacrifice clearly to our comrades and followers, in the few days left to us before the decisive act, is impossible. But the government will exploit our sacrificial deed to the full. It will flood the streets with leaflets: “So these are your leaders. This is how they show loyalty. Take a good look at them. Their principles are dearer to them than the lives of those who suffered for you, etc, etc.” That’s what the leaflets will say.

(Assent)

So it is our duty to present an appearance that the prisoners decided to sacrifice themselves. We must declare that we have in our hands a smuggled message signed by prisoners. The smuggled message must read: “WE KNOW THE GOVERNMENT’S CONDITIONS. OUR LIVES ARE WORTHLESS. DEMAND STRIKE.”

(Unrest)

I know your torment, and I share it. But I do not allow it. Thousands with a life before them await your signal. And they are ready to follow. If you give up on your strike action out of disgust for lies, you belie those to whom you made a promise. *To forebear is also to act. Choose your preferred sacrifice.*

(With these words the second proposal is silently but unanimously adopted. The smuggled message is drafted and signed by Lo with the first best name we found in the list of prisoners. That name is Kuru. The Committee disperses in silence.)

OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE MOLUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

... The inmate Kuru responsible for the smuggled message was at once subjected to interrogation. He confessed to drafting the text; the message was only one of many. When informed that his action had sent 114 of his comrades to their deaths, he showed no emotion. “Any one of them,” he replied, “would have smuggled out that message, given the chance.” Kuru was executed immediately following the interrogation.

FINAL PRE-REVOLUTIONARY MINUTE OF THE FREEDOM COMMITTEE

Lo: Comrades, you have read what our friend Kuru has done for us. The burden we placed upon him, he accepted. The signature we forged he has acknowledged as his own. The lie we told has been turned by him into Truth. The deception is expiated. Let us stand in honour of our late friend Kuru. And in honour of the one hundred and fourteen who would have done the same.

(The comrades stand)

Comrades, our friend Kuru has declared the General Strike. Let’s go!

THE END

PART TWO

ANCESTOR MURDER AND OTHER MOLUSSIAN PIECES

CONTENTS

Scholarly Commentary

Found posthumously, undated, among Anders' papers.
Included in the 2nd German edition, © C. H. Beck 2012,
pp. 412-20.

Ancestor Murder

Written mostly in 1951, with additions in 1973). Included in
Erzählungen: Fröhliche Philosophie (Tales: Fun with Philosophy),
© Suhrkamp 1978, pp. 241-295.

Rigonia

Written 1966. Included in *Erzählungen: Fröhliche Philosophie*
(*Tales: Fun with Philosophy*), © Suhrkamp 1978, pp. 228-40

The Molussian Apocrypha

Written 1930-36. Included in the 2nd German edition
© C. H. Beck 2012, pp. 323-411.

SCHOLARLY COMMENTARY

Since the originals of the files published here are located in far-off Germany (in the storerooms of the Museum of Ethnology), no attempt has been made to establish an authoritative final text. The enormous toil involved in such textual comparisons is in any case well known. Apart from the files presented here, we know of all those other sources – the official documents cited in our manuscripts, the decrees, chronicles, tables of prohibitions, catalogues of promises inscribed in immensely gargantuan (hence unreadable) lettering. A fact which is the basis for the rather implausible so-called “reverential hypothesis”, regurgitated uncritically by a thousand unscientific mouths as scientific truth: that the Molussians were giants. In our opinion such a hypothesis can be neither fundamentally proven nor discarded, given the paucity of Molussian cultural relics that have come down to us.

Not even the finds of improbably colossal Molussian weaponry offer decisive evidence. Mee himself, Director of the Meteorological Office under Gey XII, Mee himself, whose infamously scurrilous and *faux*-wise sayings we may consider credible, repeatedly asserts that the Molussians could never live up to themselves, or more particularly live up to their products, indeed that the history of Molussia is not a history of the Molussians; rather it consists, in the context of a fairly constant Molussian people, of a madly progressing and ever-accumulating development of Molussian products and inventions.

Be that as it may – and the implications of Mee’s philosophy of history seem to us dubious and unsound – Molussian documents are inscribed in lettering of such unmanageable size that they must without any exaggeration be termed unreadable. In order to decipher a single sentence, one must pace out several metres of the document. Should the last word of the sentence be reached – and this applies most of all to the pigskin *Catalogue of Promises* – the first word is already several metres behind, and by then usually forgotten. A calculation has been made that in many cases a complete reading would, all things considered, require a trek of some 20 kilometres, a fact which certainly served the interest of the scribe, since inability to envisage the functioning of an intellectual without associating some athletic achievement was considered glorious.

If an inscribed object were to be unrolled in its entirety, then, as indicated by the proverb “The underlay of a slogan is Power”, the already-read starting point curls back on itself like an unwound spring, and the scroll rolls up with such vehemence that its power seems to lie wholly in this self-concealment. It acknowledges no hindrance to its power. It hits the reader in the face, and at last stands upright, like a pillar, or a rolled-up carpet.

So it is almost impossible to gain an overview of any larger context without risking a rebuff from the unrolling parchment, or even becoming trapped in it. The story of Piu is well known. Everyone who has been obliged even once to work with these scrolls finds the tale totally unsymbolic and frankly plausible: how he made his way into the “Hall of Words” and attempted with extreme physical exertions and the application of every hand and foot to hold open the scroll containing the government’s promises, merely to compare the first and last lines of the law. “It’s almost unbelievable,” he declared to the

accomplices who had lifted him in through the window, “how the material underlay seems to be the only thing that links together this cornucopia of individual promises.” When Piu became caught up in the tightening scroll and the parchment wrapped him up so that only his hands poked out and his own muffled voice called for the watchman and he was captured without difficulty and taken away, the official report stated that Piu had been overtaken by Fate because “he doubted the gigantic scroll of codified promises, trampled it with his feet and besmirched it. Let his death be a warning. Molussia must never succumb to a raw state of mistrust.”

That the scrolls are actually inscribed with letters is, as said, not to be asserted without further evidence. For centuries, as long as no one touched them or tried to unroll them, they served as heavy ballistic weapons. They are mounted as such in the Bangkok museum, as the label attests. Later they were used as works of pure surface-covering art, mostly as carpets, and most no doubt went missing through such use. They became scattered across the islands of the Ba archipelago, which had no indigenous carpet industry. It would be unreasonable to deplore the ignorance of uneducated islanders as they stepped daily through their carpeted rooms. Quite understandably they had no inkling that there was more here than just content-free decoration. For the patterns on the scrolls were now just as deprived of context, of just such mediocre contrivance and exuberance of line as any other carpet with which they were familiar.

It was, then, an act of almost sensational boldness to propose that the scrolls are neither ballistic weapons nor carpets, and that with each of these gigantic graphic designs we are dealing rather with an actual thing whose purpose (perhaps magical) remains unknown to us, unless at least to terrify and intimidate; it might have been a banner, a torch, an outstretched arm, an open mouth, etc. These technically advanced designs had, perhaps paradoxically, a Palaeolithic meaning and function; in short, we had here various individual words of a pictorial writing system. Expert opinions that were sought claimed that, while such a paradox might exist in the imagination, history showed no actual examples of this kind, for history is rational, every culture reaches its own predetermined apex and no other, and anyone who can write cannot at the same time use magic ...

The proposition that these gargantuan graphical designs convey meaning and that each image is a word is today half proven, in particular by the “Secret document on the renewal of language”, whose ruthless import Olo cited to his pupil Yegussa, declaring, so the file reads:

“Sentences are unimportant; they say something, and thereby forego the best virtues of language. Music may make connections, but what does it say? Music is innocuous. The virtue of language, on the other hand, consists in the single word hoisted like a banner and carried about like a thing; in the single word that cannot be false because a thing cannot be false, for it says nothing, just as music says nothing, and yet it is like a picture that is fixed and singular, but can be repeated by all, because the word is language despite everything, and all can speak it out. And so this, the single word, is the consolidation of every art, and the gathering of all power within the smallest space. It is irrefutable, because it asserts nothing. It is more than affirmation, for it is magic. It is more than magic, for it is available to all. Within a few days we shall pass to the word-

leaders the list of our favoured words – which mean more than all the hymns, maledictions and long-winded declarations of loyalty. There will be no more than twenty-four, since the Molussian race is terse and modest, even when aroused. And instead of a dainty five-course sentence he will find the judgement seat of the single word sufficient for the salvation of himself, and others.”

In the implementing regulations conveyed at the same time by Olo to his pupil, we find the most important part, for a prohibition is more important than a command. It says there:

“Traitors to the country are those who *say* something, say anything *no matter what*, and who want more from what they say than is offered by the single great word; rather like the menace of a crowd that wants more than is offered by the moment and the folly of a single great man. For the sacral force of the constantly-repeated word wrecks the bloviating multi-limbed sentence, which augmented by the banned word ‘hence’ pretends to universal validity, hence even beyond the frontiers, hence independent of Molussia, hence enjoying its own freedom, hence impossible for us to ban. But what we are unable to ban, what boasts of its own freedom, what is independent of Molussia: the separate, separateness, the alien, the alien principle they call ‘objectivity’. Hence those Molussians who speak in complete sentences must be closely monitored. But those who link multiple sentences together – who are much worse than the first lot – in order once and for all to extinguish the magic of the single word and who make themselves guilty of sacrilege against the divinity of the individual elements by demeaning them in their chains of many words, those Molussians are to be called out by name and denounced by the crowd: so that they learn it is the single word and the single name that conjures up impact. So that they experience this to their shame, and our salvation.”

Still not enough. The documents are legion. “Just”, for example, in the venerable ancient Molussian codex *The Revaluation of Speech*: “‘Just’ in the Molussian justice system refers not to the fact that it is just, but to the fact that it is Molussian. And that is why this justice is just.” A later part of the same codex says:

Nouns, or what until now have been presented as the ‘nouns’ of a language, are not worth mentioning. On their own they are nothing, as a horse is nothing without its rider, the wife nothing without her husband, the material without the spiritual. On their own they are nothing but an instance. Therefore it is ordered that words called ‘adjectives’ up until now, in complete misapprehension of the situation, from now on shall be called ‘strongwords’ or ‘guardwords’, for they lend strength to the words they are attached to, and protect them. They shall be called strongwords or guardwords in honour of the most powerful Molussian strongword, namely MOLUSSIAN, and MOLUSSIAN shall as here always be written in capital letters, to signify its power.

But if any should ask – and this question could be posed only by Unmolussians – ‘What is the greatness of the word MOLUSSIAN that it must be written in capitals?’ – here is the answer:

that it has no fear of any word or noun;
 that it can grace every word as a splendour, a blessing, or a terror;
 that it renders superfluous the knowledge of any who utter it;
 that it renders all other adjectives superfluous;
 that it makes any inconspicuous thing conspicuous and colourful;
 that it sanctions bitterness and sweetens the already-sanctioned;
 that it causes the recalcitrant who flout it to tremble;
 that it consoles the wretched on whom it is bestowed; that it protects the
 decree to which it is superordinate;
 that it connects up all the things of Molussia as MOLUSSIAN in general, for
 what could be better to know of a MOLUSSIAN thing than that it is by its very
 nature and purpose MOLUSSIAN?

This makes for Power, Empire and Glory. And in nothing are Molussians of
 every MOLUSSIAN stripe in the one MOLUSSIAN empire so united, and in no
 quality do they discover their communal power and their powerful community,
 as in their being MOLUSSIAN. But when used in the language of barbarians as
 a loan-word, it borrows from what is MOLUSSIAN to the greater honour of the
 MOLUSSIAN language.”

To be sure, these citations provide extensive support for the thesis that the
 Molussian files contain at best single words rather than texts. On the other hand we
 have the fact that these citations can actually be cited and deciphered, a counter-
 argument not to be dismissed lightly. Otto and Theodor Rax put forward the well-
 known thesis that even terms devoid of meaning (like *insanity*, *carpet*, *dreams*, *music* in
 the documents) “imply” something without in the strictest sense expressing anything;
 and that a much more penetrating interpretation is required than for typical objects of
 interpretation, e.g. already mainly unambiguous texts; that in the end the Humanities
 must occupy themselves not with the human spirit in a narrow sense, but precisely with
 its “mysterious and pre-spiritual preliminary phases”.

This thesis for the first time brought the Molussian scrolls within the fertile field of
 hermeneutics. The first photographic reproduction of an entire unrolled scroll,
 extremely miniaturised and made for purely art-historical purposes, gave a convincing
 impression overall of a page of text. “Whoever suspects that these phantasmagoric
 images form a text,” the Brothers Rax wrote, “is a rationalist of the oldest school. He
 might just as well take a lunatic’s scribbles for a floor plan. Here speaks more than Spirit:
 here speaks Existence.” And so pathbreakers became true reactionaries.

Old-style philologists on the other hand were unperturbed. Their detailed work –
 e.g. grapheme-counting, calligraphic comparisons – was unimaginably painstaking. And
 only after every one of these self-sacrificing scholars was provided with reverse
 binoculars did the work proceed somewhat faster and less laboriously. The letters
 became smaller, the texts that had been too close up for anyone to gain perspective now
 receded, and exotic antiquity began to speak, Molussia emerged as a complex of decrees
 and prohibitions. Any translation, however complete, of course presents in some sense
 a diminished image, for their incalculable immensity is no doubt an intrinsic feature of

these texts. Even when proportions are preserved the text becomes something else, for now it can be read without further ado. It becomes, to use an expression of Mee's, "distorted into truth".

It is regrettable that the recorded conversations of Olo and Yegussa offer so little overview of Molussia as a city and a nation. This deficiency has several causes. Firstly the public for whom the post-revolutionary Molussian Control Commission undertook publication knew the city of Molussia as thoroughly as we know our own city. Secondly, neither Olo nor Yegussa had any interest in providing a sketch of the city. To hope for the possibility of being read and perhaps even understood a thousand years later in another hemisphere, in a non-Molussian world, would have seemed absurd. Their hope for an impact was specific to one time and place, a hope founded not on empirical data but on morality. "This is our minimal theory," Olo declared one day: "anything not impossible must not be discarded. Our theory is only a small distance removed from mysticism, we discover the very last possibilities, in order not to land up in the quandary of hoping for the impossible." So the conversations of the two men were at best stories to aid understanding of what might turn out to be important for their successors. Providing us with data and descriptions of Molussia lay quite outside their intent. "Descriptions are always reactionary," Olo asserted, "because they preserve a living thing in its stock of qualities." Little as we may claim to understand such a blunt formulation, we also consider it sufficient when scenes of Molussian times or glimpses of Molussian territory emerge like islands. Olo also said:

"Typical descriptions of land, people, especially of buildings, usually of ones that stand around on our streets and in our squares from earlier times and claim to present the face of the city, feign a false concreteness. True reality is invisible for two reasons. Firstly, because it consists not of *things* but of *functions*. A reduction in Pariah wages caused by a barely visible perturbation in the markets of distant lands – this function has more reality than the paving stones that we call concrete; but it is invisible. Paving stones are only concrete because they also pave over that kind of supposedly abstract relationship. For sure we must try to translate these invisible relationships into visibility, to translate them so that we can read them correctly, can read the 'natural' as the work of human hands, and then deal with them in the proper way – as the work of human hands that we can change for that very reason."

The second wonderfully illuminating place where Olo talks of the world's invisibility reads:

"We do not see *things*, but rather *functions*. But neither do we see with the eyes, but rather with *opinions* – with opinions that others give us so that we see what they want us to see. Such opinions are power, hence reality. And because they first determine *how* we see, they themselves are invisible."

ANCESTOR MURDER

(1951)

The necropolis beneath Molussia exhibits the following peculiarity: the cemetery, scarcely a thousand feet square, occupied a ridiculously small space for the hundreds of thousands populating the upper city. The massive wall enclosing this precinct was said to have stood forever, had never been constructed, and merited no less reverence than the cemetery itself. True, the population of Molussia over the centuries increased only marginally. But the number of dead must, as a matter of course, always have increased. Since time immemorial bodies had always lain tight-packed, more so even than among the poorest in the slums of the upper city. From one enclosing wall to the other they almost seemed bundled ready for shipping out, rather than in their final resting place.¹⁴ Nevertheless, and despite the starkest pressure on burial spaces, the living were forbidden to tamper with the wall in order to extend the necropolis. No second cemetery was available to relieve the pressure on the first, and (a second taboo) would have been just as unthinkable as an extension. And as for private burial in a garden or elsewhere, no one would have dared even think of it, just as no one at all, despite the galling annoyances of so many taboos, would regard any breach as other than inexpiable sacrilege. Hence the obstacles were total, and the situation would have proved intractable had not a counter-custom arisen. This counter-custom, the ritual *Murder of the Ancestors*, is the focus of the present report, based on the latest finds.¹⁵

Before we begin, we wish to preempt one question. The reader may wonder who imposed these conflicting taboos, and what the originators had in mind. We offer no answer. But even this lacuna is instructive. It seems to indicate that in the age when the taboos were in effect, there were no answers to questions of *whence* or *why*. To which I would add that taboos were viewed as facts as undeniable as air or the seasons, and so like these (and the supposedly eternal cemetery walls) were deemed to be not of human origin. The only pointer one might cite is the one on the cemetery portal, quoted in every source.¹⁶ The inscription, decreeing that *The number of ancestors shall remain immutable*, seems in fact to explain the wall-taboo. But this decree of constancy cannot be its own justification – for in the end the principle of a constant number of ancestors represents no *a priori* moral axiom – and so provides little headway. Who could decide whether the rule laid down in the inscription caused the taboo, or the taboo prompted the inscription? So we can only assume that the Molussians gave no thought at all to the origin of taboos. For them, taboos were simply *valid*. And by valid I mean (for such is validity) valid without foundation. Which brings us back to our theme. For if the Molussians, as distinct from ourselves, accepted the prohibitions and from time to time

¹⁴ *Molussic Excavations, Tablets A – D. Preliminary report* by Sir Allen J Godefroy, Calcutta U. P. 1932.

¹⁵ *Molussic Studies, a Symposium*. Princeton 1952.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 422 ff.

even 'loved' them, repellent as it may seem,¹⁷ it was because they had a custom which responded to the taboo by continually restoring the continually disturbed equilibrium in the number of graves and the number of dead. This was 'ancestor murder', or as the euphemistic Molussian term expressed it: the *Ritual of the Second Death*. On this we report in the following pages.

*

The ritual proceeded step by step as follows: if a father gave up the ghost, the family at once brought up from the cellar three lifesize figurines made of clay, handed down from one generation to the next and supposedly representing (or substituting for) the deceased and the two eldest sons. Possibly the two sons believed that their souls had now entered these crude simulacra. Whether they had or not, the sons now retired, and with the help of masks (also kept in every family's cellar)¹⁸ transformed themselves into rhinoceri, and in this disguise left the house, exiting via the back door so as not under any circumstances to be spotted by the ancestors. While they were going, armed with hammers, rakes and buckets, down into the realm of the dead to prepare for the burial of their deceased father, the rest of the family, in order to provide an alibi for the brothers' absence, sat the clay figurines on benches at the threshold of the house, and took places facing them, so that the entire family seemed to be assembled: a stratagem designed above all to deceive the souls of the ancestors, in case these might succeed during the night in slipping away to check whether the family were all present, or whether the father and the two eldest sons were missing.

Unconcerned for their neighbours' nocturnal tranquillity, the family would then begin to talk to the figurines loudly and with exaggerated laughter, and even skylark with them. It cannot have been easy for the family to sustain this apparent, and apparently boisterous, domestic conversation from sunset to sunrise, while the father's corpse lay on its bier in the house just a few paces distant. And the ruse would have been hard to keep up, were not ready-made conversation topics and texts apparently available. In any case, pauses in the conversation were never to arise, or else the dreaded ancestral spirits would find a way in. And it was equally strictly forbidden to break off the performance before the two sons returned safe and sound from the Lower City. It is easy to imagine how glad the family must have been, after such a night, to put the figurines back into storage and resume normal life. All four sources emphasise these facts with impressive unanimity. But we are running ahead of ourselves.

*

With regard to the costumes worn by the sons, especially the enormous rhinoceros horns, we find behind this custom a desire to remain totally unrecognisable to the deceased ancestors. Of course the role of a mask is never limited to disguise; in every culture, as here, masking also has a positive significance. The mask-wearers in their ghostly guise might hope to encounter ghosts, and arouse in them utmost horror. This hope was founded on the fact that the rhinoceros mask was no randomly selected

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁸ Well preserved pieces in the Aberdeen Museum and the Ethnographic Collection, Bombay. Since all figures show the same archaic stereotypical smile and all look alike, there is clearly no question here of portraiture. Perhaps nothing of the kind was felt to be necessary.

instrument of terror. Rather the rhinoceros was the sacred totem animal of the Molussians, identified with the primal all-powerful progenitors of the entire nation, hence figures beside whom even ancestors mouldering in crypt niches remained mere children.¹⁹ The great-great-grandchildren who transformed themselves by means of the masks into the most archaic beings did so in order to fool the ancestors, hoax them into believing they were being visited not by their descendants but on the contrary by their own more distant ancestors, thus paralysing any resistance. Moreover, the great-great-grandchildren were, as already said, themselves fooled by the masks – meaning they would never have carried through their sacrilegious enterprise without the masks. Godefroy goes so far as to assert²⁰ that in the course of their ceremonial activity the two sons not only no longer *felt* themselves to be themselves, but in fact *were* not themselves: not the grand- and great-grandchildren of that ancestor into whose state of decease they were intruding, but on the contrary its great-grandfathers. Be that as it may, the two intruders must have remained as good as immune to any notion that what they were up to with their ancestor might be wrong or sacrilegious.

*

And so the two sons headed down the deserted alleyways and steps of the Old Town, in silence so as not to be recognised even by voice. Their accoutrements clattered warnings on the paving. Any who heard the approach slipped aside. Windows slammed shut as they passed. Even to see or hear the pair was deemed unlucky. The best one could do was pretend to ignore them completely. For they were no less taboo than their assigned task. Any who came into contact with them were deemed polluted.

At the portal of the Realm of the Dead – down there called simply *The City*, as if the upper world meant nothing – they gave the name of the deceased to the similarly masked gatekeeper, to be recorded: time of arrival, phase of the moon, and expected time of sunrise were ascertained, and the pair stepped into the subterranean city. They pushed goose-stepping along the narrow gullies searching for the abode of their ancestors. This was anything but simple, because the ghosts of the dead were believed to strive tirelessly to break free and seek an exit to the upper world. Such attempts had of course to be frustrated, and so every niche was massively bricked up and accessible only by demolishing the big nameplate. In addition, lighting in the lanes between the graves was purposely kept dim, and since the graves were in no wise distinguishable one from another, with row after row of name slabs stretching away, and the entire layout, despite its objectively modest area, being somewhat maze-like, it was almost impossible not to go astray, partly because of the ingenious design, and partly because of the general murk. In fact it often happened that brothers would lose one another and wander for hours, or they would both cast about for hours, perhaps passing by their goal several times before finding the correct ‘abode’. To the fear that they might not complete

¹⁹ It remains so even today. This may sound strange, since the rhinoceros is known to be considered impure in today’s Molussia. But this fact speaks not against but for the original sacredness of the creature, under the rubric: untouchable. Any holy thing is a *noli me tangere*. But when the grounds for untouchability are forgotten, but by tradition still respected, then the holy is transformed into the equally untouchable impure.

²⁰ *The Reality of Feeling*, Manchester 1950.

their task in time – for the task was laborious, and had unfailingly to be finished by sunrise – was added another: that they might light on the wrong grave and interfere with the wrong ancestor, the ancestor of a fellow citizen. For this reason no one would dare raise his hammer before spending at least an hour in the Realm of the Dead, and assuring himself repeatedly of the inmate's identity.²¹

It is no wonder, therefore, that even the route to their place of work instilled anxiety. And when Tablet B asserts that they were overcome during their search by 'an ambivalent excitement mounting to an almost fatal passion', we may find it credible, even while rejecting as the cause of this unwanted passion 'the scorn and powers of resistance of the ancestors'.

And so they strayed through the alleys of the dead, nudging one another on and next moment holding one another back. Their exaggerated scrupulosity went so far that they would play a game: they would maintain the appearance of searching even after they were sure they had reached their goal but had not yet put in the prescribed minimum duration of the search. The story of the unfortunate pair who by lucky chance located their family's grave at once and with no effort, but then, forced by ritual to go properly on their quest, lost sight of the location and spent all night until sunrise – in the end not really seeking but merely demonstrating that they were seeking (demonstrating to whom we can hardly say) – whatever, this story of the two brothers racing like madmen through the narrow alleys might well have sprung from Kafka's imagination.²² At any event, the long-delayed work now began in earnest, and at the most hectic pace. For, as said, the allotted work had to be completed by sunrise, and a second task awaited them after this first.

²¹ Remarkably, no chronicler found it necessary to mention what threat the masked men faced if they failed to complete the task, or the frequency of such failures. General ethnological evidence shows that transgression against the most powerful taboos is met with the most extreme penalties, so we may assume that in this task, lives were at stake.

²² A literary-philosophical digression may be permitted here. The striking similarity of a Kafkaesque scene with these events steered by a purely magical conception seems to show unambiguously that even Kafka, now and then at least, depicted magical events, and that it is an error to regard his world as religious. Kafka was the child of an age whose irreligiosity brought a fascination with the magical. When more or less irreligious ethnologists and anthropologists like Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, Malinowski and Cassirer acknowledge magic (made more accessible by commercial and colonial contact with native populations) as a mode of living, thinking and worldview-formation *sui generis*, it was precisely because they were no longer religious; i.e. the magical was no longer measured against the yardstick of a (religious or progressive) dogma and thereby judged 'untrue' or 'primitive'. Growing interest in the exotic is likewise linked to the decline of religious faith. For absence of faith allows the possibility of being realised not only as unbelief but also as regression into a pre-religious state that appears to the regressor, especially when faced with the folly of unbelief, as still a 'religious' state: i.e. one that is magical. And in Kafka this regression found a magnificent embodiment – of a monstrous and uncanny kind. For he could represent our everyday reality as magical, even though he had no knowledge of ethnological materials. He had – and probably no higher praise can be bestowed on a writer – *no need for empiricism*: 'true' is for him the 'magical' depiction of social being insofar as, however it may be determined by what happens within, it encounters its victims (i.e. most of us) really as the playthings of anonymous powers and super-powers that inflict spiteful torments. And this seeming is really a part, and a decisive part, of our social reality.

But once again we are inexcusably getting ahead of ourselves. First we must describe the first phase.

So, a start has been made on the task. To gain access to the remains of their oldest ancestor, they are faced first of all with the name slab that bricks the niche in. This must be removed. It would have been hard enough in the best of circumstances to dismantle this stout wall of masonry. But in this narrow space – which inhibits the use of the chisel, prevents any swing of the elbow, and poses a constant risk of the one with the hammer striking himself in the face – here the work presents an indescribable trial of patience. And even when the name slab is loosened and lies on the ground, no more than the initial step has been achieved. For the name slab is not merely a physical obstacle, not merely a hunk of masonry blocking access to the dead, but is itself also a powerful part of the deceased. Simply loosening the slab is not enough. More importantly, the living power of the name residing in the inscription must be enfeebled. But no one can say what power might inhabit any fragment of the plate, or even a particular letter; hence the ritual requires each and every fragment to be hammered there and then until all that is left is formless and nameless dust. So the two men squat on the ground, hammering fussily away for hours, and but for the animal masks one might take them for nocturnal road-menders.

Surprising as it may sound, this clearly laborious, but in our eyes not especially repellent, phase of the task, the so-called *Murder of the Name*, was no less odious to the brothers than the ensuing phase, directed at the corpse itself; or more precisely at the mouldering pile that was all that remained. But the inscription was intact, it had not yet forfeited any of its living force, *the name knew who it was*,²³ which could not be said of the pathetic remains of the deceased, however menacing they might be.

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So they have now demolished the name slab and pounded it to dust. They pause, leaning against the wall, before embarking on the second, decisive phase of their task. In the flickering half-light, the horned heads have a gruesome appearance, That they enjoyed the first few minutes of their respite cannot be doubted. So, for example, the scribe of Tablet D, taking an unmistakable and frankly unmagical delight in realistic detail, depicts them ‘arms dangling and legs stretched out, happy as quarrymen on lunch break’. And the assertion on Tablet A, that ‘time for them has stood still’, is equally unambiguous. For timeless is perhaps only one who, like a dreamless sleeper, has nothing in mind and nothing to do, and is for that reason happy.

It is not clear how long this happy respite lasted, or was supposed to last.²⁴ We must assume only a very short space of time. It is significant that the pair ‘spoke not a word to one another’ (Tablet C), indicating a certain unease arising naturally from the now

²³ *Molussic Proverbs*, London 1949, p.307.

²⁴ The question (see *Molussic Studies*, p.200) whether this pause between the frantic pretend-work and the forthcoming horrors was merely allowed or rather prescribed, is of course ethnologically naïve. For it is generally acknowledged that in magical societies, interruptions to a ceremony never occur unless ceremonially required. Hence this pause too had a fixed name: *Windcalm*. And no better term than this (found on all four tablets) could be coined even today for the ambivalent state in which the two brothers now found themselves.

undeniable close proximity of the ancestors, as well as from the difficulty of recognising a brother in the monstrous being sat alongside.²⁵

But within a few minutes, more positive symptoms appear: 'repeatedly they look in fear up to the heights' (Tablet C), possibly to see through gaps in the vaulting whether dawn is already breaking. Their unease increases: soon they 'resemble beasts deprived of sleep, that keep shifting the position of their limbs' (ibid.). It is however unlikely that any sign of day would appear at this hour. But their eyes are adapted to the night, dust from the crushed name slab shimmers palely, and since cold cellar air penetrates even beneath their disguise and fear of missing the deadline is ever with them, 'none there were who did not become convinced that time had advanced farther than it really had.' (Tablet C). Hence fundamental enjoyment of this break in the work can hardly be assumed. True, Tablet A asserts that 'during Windcalm, no loss of freedom of any kind occurred', that 'no demand was made' of the resting figures, and even that 'the utterance of magical incantations was not obligatory'. But such assurances are unconvincing, for of course it is precisely the freedom that ruins their repose. In this situation and these surroundings, even the most detestable activity, provided it consists of prescribed steps, is preferable to inactivity. In short: 'Windcalm' was an ingeniously predetermined step. We may readily conclude: the break had no other purpose than to render the two men eager to set about the horrid task that faced them, and drive them on to it.

So no wonder they now bestir themselves and take up their tools 'long before the allotted period is over' (Tablet C).

And so they set about their work again. This time, the real task. For now they must break through the wall that still separates them from their distant ancestor. They are not silent as they do so. Rather, their blows are accompanied by a constantly repeated shout, a shout whose meaning is at first glance hugely surprising, for it sounds as if they are embarking on a particularly innocuous phase of the work. At frequent intervals they shout in the direction of the ancestor the formula '*You're a Nobody, you're a Nothing!*' However, innocuous as the shout may sound, it is anything but. If one listens for the true meaning, one hears not so much an assertion as an incantation, an attempt to convince the greatly feared ancestor's spirit that it no longer possesses the slightest power, and to convince themselves that they are many times stronger than the spirit.

Accompanied by these shouts they dig through the wall of the tomb. Of course, it is not possible to assert that they do so with especial vigour. They would be unable to do so, even if they had the will. For their worksite has not so far grown any bigger; now as before they are constrained to limit their hammer blows to a degree quite incommensurate with their zeal, their strength and their goal. In fact there is a ceremonial rule pertaining to this phase: *Do not toil, but simulate toil!* Meaning: the toiling men are deceived even about their own activity, and must thereby seem to themselves rather pathetic.²⁶ The remark on Tablet B that some were driven 'near to fury' by these hours of niggling toil, while others 'would have let their hammers drop as

²⁵ Charles Lawrence, 'Some remarks on techniques of mutual depersonalisation', in *Psyche* XXII, Denver, 1950.

²⁶ Note the artless and unrefined effect of the Greek myth of Sisyphus when compared with this rule. For Sisyphus was deceived only about the outcome of his toil, not about his toil as an activity.

if in a sudden attack of weakness', has a plausible ring to it. But it is no longer possible to conclude that they ascribed this frustration and torment, not to the rule, but to resistance by the ancestor.

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Gradually, however, their labours provide them with a certain satisfaction. In place of the far too small pick, ill-fitted to a male hand, there comes at last a heftier long-handled sledgehammer, a joy to wield since it requires exertion; its menacing blows reverberate into the upper city. The hammer-blows fall, splinters fly. And if the two men could continue like this, they would do so with pleasure.²⁷

'Moreover', says Tablet A, 'during this phase, now and then those left at home become aware of those toiling underground.' It cannot have been easy for the family chattering away up above to maintain the farce with the 'images' while distant thuds echo up to them. For the thuds are to them a signal that the 'real thing', the Ancestor Murder, will soon take place. One suspects they had to exercise iron discipline in order that, instead of concentrating on the nonsense which was their duty, their attention should not be diverted to their relatives who would soon arrive at the 'maw of the departed', i.e. the niche that they will have to grope around in or even climb into. With this their masquerade becomes truly urgent, for the wider the breach down below, the more acute the danger that the spirit of the late ancestor will slip away and come looking for them to demand satisfaction for the spoliation of his resting place.

The time when those above seemed linked to those below evidently did not last very long. The laboriousness with which the initial hole had been hacked was matched now by the speed (much faster than the toilers would wish) with which the breach was enlarged many times. Those above, no longer hearing sounds from below, are again cut off, and those below are once again cheated of any satisfaction in their work. Before their joy in the work reaches its apogee, the breach has already reached a dimension that allows (which in this case means 'requires') a start on the main business. But at this point we are stymied. The Tablet texts leave us in the lurch. Not one devotes even a syllable to the Ancestor Murder itself.²⁸ And if there were no other sources, if other supporting materials were not available, then here we would have to leap over the most important part (which would be pointless) and leave our actual theme in the dust, by turning at once to the return of the brothers to the Overworld, and there calling a halt.

But this, of course, is not necessary. Of course there is another source. I repeat the words 'of course' because if this were not the case, we would naturally be in no position to mention Ancestor Murder, as we have done from the start; indeed, we would not even be able to use or understand the term Ancestor Murder. What do we glean from this other source?

²⁷ In fact only one sledgehammer was used. As Tablet B states, the narrow confines preclude the wielding of two hammers at the same time. Tablet C nicely complements this with a careful description of how one stands parallel to the wall, hammering away at the edges of the breach, while the other shouts into the widening gap his *A Nobody are you, you are a Nothing!*, and how they frequently change places.

²⁸ See Annex 1.

It concerns a text discovered only ten years or so ago, which in a certain sense is even more recent than that, since its decipherment and translation by the former missionary Andreas Elliot was published only very recently.²⁹ The contents make it very probable that the great stone inscription belonged to the cemetery wall, even if not to the portal itself. In actual fact, further excavations are being undertaken under the expert direction of Elliot at the location of the find, which have already brought to light some pieces of an equally sensational nature. Of which more later.

As for the language of the almost intact texts, it represents a highly archaic stage of Molussian; hence the slowness with which the hardly more than one hundred and eighty hieroglyphs have been deciphered. But the very antiquity of the linguistic form proves that with these finds we have a piece of 'Molussia in the flesh' (Elliot). We follow Elliot's readings:³⁰

1. Open (the) jaws (of that which) has been
2. Every arrival (is) sweet
3. Call within: 'A nobody (that's what) you are, you are a nothing!'
4. Jump in, be swallowed up!
5. Your ancestors' ancestors
6. Your teeth ...³¹
7. The oldest one (must) yield
8. Gather his (remains) in your bowls
9. Lead (him) to (the) valley (of those who are) no longer separated
10. Pour (him) out
11. (that he may) die once more
12. for the last time
13. (And that) he go under in the dust of his fathers
14. Return (to) his chamber
15. (Proceed) from there to his son's chamber
16. Move him (from) his bed (to) his father's bed
17. (thereby) promoting him
18. (And) move the son's son (from) his bed (to) his father's bed
19. (thereby) promoting him
20. (And the) next one (to) his father's bed
21. (thereby) promoting him
22. (And the) next one to his father's bed
23. (thereby) promoting him
24. bustling about (like) puppies
25. Promote them, promote them, (that they may)
26. gather honours the older (ones and that) finally
27. (an) empty bed be ready
28. (for the) youngest one

²⁹ *The Cipher*, XXXVI, p.253, London.

³⁰ Words in brackets were inserted by Elliot to make the readings completely lucid. [GA provides these readings in English, with German translation. – *Tr.*]

³¹ A break; the stone is damaged here.

- 29. (who is) your father
- 30. Cleanse (yourself), cleanse (yourself)
- 31. (that) the *gory*³² (be) over and
- 32. (that) you emerge spotlessly from (the) darkness
- 33. to (the) day (that is) yours.³³

This, then, was *The Challenge*. While it conceals some obscurities in need of elucidation (to be pursued in our commentary) its very bluntness leaves nothing to be desired. The document must convince the most obstinate sceptic that any further doubt will make him the laughing stock of future developments.

COMMENTARY

.1. The first line requires no explanation. Clearly it refers to the breaking open of the bone-niche. On the other hand the 2nd line –

.2. *Every arrival is sweet* poses a problem. It seems remarkable that reaching the disgusting remains of the earliest ancestor should be considered joyous. But the meaning is psychologically totally correct. For it is incontestable that the achievement of any goal towards which we strive – even one that in itself is detestable – fills us with satisfaction the moment it is achieved. When I try mentally to recreate this phase down to the details of the physical state, I imagine the pair now heaving a sigh of relief, stretching their limbs, and savouring the gradual slackening of the nervous tension: - as said, regardless of the fact that their task means entry into the Underworld, emptying the niche, actual sacrilege. In other words, the moment of horror should for them at the same time be a moment of satisfaction. Evidently the pair have been deceived about their situation. For they are cheated now of their utmost dread. Or in other words: the dreadful is not so very bad, because it marks an end to another evil, more precisely an evil of a different kind: their uncomfortable hacking away at the masonry.

.3. *Call within*: ... This call, as pointed out earlier, is an *apotropaion*: a means by which the caller protects himself from the peril latent in the ancestor's remains. But the call is perhaps no mere auto-suggestion, but is also addressed to the ancestor himself. In order to deter him from applying the terrible powers immanent within him, he is being advised that those powers have long since flown, that he has long since forfeited all existence.

.4. *Jump in ...*: A blunt invitation to step into the niche. And – however obvious to us the notion of entering the niche may seem – this compared to the contents of the Tablets is something new. As for the metaphor *swallowed up*, this seems to speak directly even to us. But according to Elliot, it contains such an important mythological association that we cannot simply gloss over it. It alludes to the father who devours the son. For the

³² See Annex 2.

³³ Their follows a graphical symbol with an irrefutably taboo role – Elliot considers it a phallic horn-symbol – but we cannot know whether it had a semantic or only phonetic referent.

Molussians too had their myth of Tantalus, or of Kronos.³⁴ In their version, unlike the Greek, the devouring god never assumed human features; in place of the god was the totem animal, namely the Ur-rhinoceros. But possibly the original figure was animalistic for the Greeks too. And a more convincing embodiment of the Ur-father than this beast equipped with the menacing phallic horn could not even have been *invented*. Be that as it may, the idea of a Father-god who devours his children – one of the foundational ideas of Molussian myth – should be kept in view, according to Elliot, if one intends to act upon the first and fourth lines of the ‘challenge’: *Open (the) jaws (of that which) has been*, and *Jump in*. For in a certain sense the *ancestor murder* represents a most singular recapitulation of the *child murder*, albeit with significant divergences. The motifs of similarity and divergence are so intertwined that they can be untangled only with considerable effort.

An exoteric comparison of the two situations shows that in the ancestor murder situation the sons are not *devoured*, but pretend to place themselves in the jaws. This nuance, which I have designated elsewhere the ‘Isaac Complex’, is hence (Elliot again) a kind of deceptive manoeuvre. Precisely because the sons in the ancestor murder situation wish to avenge the cannibalistic injustice wrought on them in the distant past, they must present themselves as voluntary sacrifices, or at the very least persuade themselves and the ancestors of their readiness. Where authenticity ends and dissembling begins is now impossible to decide, for like every true ceremony – it is the very criterion of a ceremony’s genuineness – this one too was ambiguous. For sure, this offering of oneself as a sacrifice was not pure dissembling. Breaking into the niche was in fact dangerous. We have already stressed the severe penalty to be paid if the task was not completed on time, i.e. if the ‘mouth’ was not carried away before sunrise. In a certain sense the sons were in reality repeating the mortal danger of being devoured, by their audacity in meddling with the ancestor and thereby laying themselves open to punishment – the harshest possible. In this light, they behave like terrified sons. But precisely because they are terrified sons, they dare not acknowledge themselves as sons during their vengeful enterprise. Here the fifth line is relevant –

.5. *Your ancestor’s ancestors*. Hence they themselves step forth as rhinoceroses, meaning: possessors of life and the phallic horn that embodies the right to life. Thus they confront their forefathers as the latter’s forefathers, dishonouring them as children were dishonoured by child murder.

.6. *Your teeth* - : This incomplete line on the one hand continues the anthropophage motif, but at the same time denotes a quite concrete operation. Because the Molussian word for ‘tooth’ means also ‘rake’, and because all four Tablets mention an iron rake to be taken along, this line enjoins the use of these ‘teeth’ to rake the *yielding* remains (line 7) out from the niche. The word *yielding* for such a sacrilegious step is certainly very feeble. But it is commonly the most frightful things that are designated by ‘portentous-

³⁴ This is no doubt still alive today, albeit underground. It is known that the Molussians celebrated the son’s rite of puberty on the same day they sacrificed their first harvest offerings. (*Molussia Today*, p. 82) No one truly familiar with rituals will believe this a mere calendrical coincidence. Mere coincidences occur nowhere in the world’s rituals. The obvious inference is that originally the sacrifice of the first fruits of the field and the stables was accompanied by the murder of first-born sons.

innocuous circumlocutions' (Elliot) or euphemisms. More direct, of course, is the injunction in line 8 to gather the remains of the ancestors in a *bowl*. The word *bowl* is rather neutral, but we know from descriptions in Tablets A – C that a quite ordinary bucket is meant.

Likewise relatively harmless, even celebratory, is the purport of the decisive 9th line: *Lead (him) to (the) valley (of those who are) no longer separated!* The phrase 'no longer separated' designates those who are definitively robbed of their name, their own billet, in short, their *principium individuationis*, who are hardly deceased humans any more but rather spend their time of being dead alongside and within one another as a 'poured out' (line 10) mass of 'generalised dead material' (Elliot). This is the meaning in lines 11–13 of the expressions 'die once more', die 'for the last time', and 'go under in the dust of his fathers'. Not quite literally, but conveying the meaning perfectly, Elliot adopts the phrase 'the blurred ones', i.e. those obliterated in each other's intermingled dust. But if the dead are intermingled, this can of course only mean that they spend their second and last time of being dead in a mass grave. The phrase 'lead (him)' in line 9 represents the high point of euphemism, for we need not repeat that the 'leading' consists of filling the bucket and emptying it in a mass grave.

If we view the opening of the niche as the first phase of the ceremony, and the dumping of the ancestors in the mass grave as the second, then lines 14–29 show us the third phase: the transfer (line 16) of the second-oldest to the billet hitherto occupied by the oldest, the transfer of the third-oldest (line 18) to his ancestor's billet, and so on, until the last billet – the one for the latest deceased – is free (line 20). To be sure, the technical methodology used by the two sons during this transfer operation remains unclear. That it consisted – as Elliot suggests – only in 'shoving coffins about' seems to me a trivialising hypothesis. As far as we know, coffins were not found in Molussia. I suspect, rather, that the two sons engaged in a much less trivial task: forced to busy themselves with bones or mould or dust and actually to reposition these remains. Be that as it may, in so doing the two men must go 'bustling about (like) puppies' (line 24). This simile at first seems incomprehensible, but once the actual activity of the two men is made clear, the obscurity is illuminated. What is meant is that the two men hasten from the discarded clan progenitor to its future, i.e. to its son so that the latter can be placed farther back in the past, 'promoting' it (lines 17, 19, 21, 23, 25) to the billet where its father has hitherto rested; and that once they have achieved this they again run back (or rather ahead) to the 'nearer future' of the antepenultimate ancestor, to fetch it away to deposit it in the deeper past. The first time they run back and forth in one stage in order to promote the fourth to the fifth billet, but from billet five they must run to billet three and then back to billet four, i.e. two stages ahead and one back. This they do three times, until the First Ancestor lies in the original billet of the second – a back and forth (not only in space, but to some extent also in time) which is convincingly conveyed by the word 'bustling'. Moreover, Elliot considers – and I think he is right – that the comparison with tumbling puppies refers not just to the back and forth, but also to the suite of rooms in which the two sons must accomplish the transfers: they must creep on all fours as the space does not allow them to stand upright. The overcrowding of the City of the Dead emphasised by all the Tablets, and the fact that the billets were piled four storeys high on top of one another, makes Elliot's thesis entirely plausible.

As a translation of the Molussian vocable <wan>, the English word ‘promoting’ in lines 17 etc might equally well be ‘moving’ – an issue which does not arise with the German ‘befördern’, which encompasses both senses. Elliot felt compelled to switch between both verbs (lines 16 ff.). The Molussian <wan> conveys not merely a change of position, but at the same time a rise in status – such as the elevation of the penultimate to the status of clan father, of the antepenultimate to the penultimate, and so forth.³⁵

Moreover, Elliot provides as evidence for the change of location a striking observation from present-day Molussia. In itself this observation would not suffice as evidence, but as a reinforcement to the certain facts found in the texts, it is highly amusing. It happened that during his excavations in a remote Molussian valley, Elliot encountered a children’s game that reproduces with a truly incontestable exactitude the ceremonial scheme of the Ancestor Murder. We emphasise: a game that is still played today. ‘The children,’ Elliot writes,

draw a field system in the sand, which at first glance resembles in a most striking way the famous hopscotch game of Heaven and Hell that I played as a child in Ireland. That Heaven and Hell, with its heaven, its earth, its limbo, and its hell, represents the Christian world view is obvious. In exactly the same sense the Molussian hopscotch is an innocent representation of an originally deeply serious concept. The children hop from field to field, at a competitive pace. Each pushes a stone along ahead, which in the first field is called ‘grandfather’, in the second ‘great-grandfather’, until in the final field it is called ‘clan father’. The last to arrive at the final field (meaning: has failed to complete the ceremony in the allotted time) is called ‘dead’, and drops out from the next round. It goes without saying that certain elements of the ceremony have not made their way into the game, or have not been preserved. No rhinoceros associations are apparent. And I cannot deny that the girls play as eagerly and as often as the boys.

AFTERWORD

(1973)³⁶

With this Commentary on the ‘Challenge’ (more accurately, with the ‘Return Scene’ that at that time directly followed the Commentary), I concluded in 1952 my depiction of the *Ancestor Murder*. The Return Scene, based on the Tablets, is still provided unaltered here as the coda to my depiction. But between the commentary and the coda we need to insert an extensive piece of text based on finds previously unknown, which prove that our previous assumption that the ‘brothers’, having accomplished their ‘ancestor murder’, now put it behind them, quit the City of the Dead without delay and return to the bosom of their family, is incontestably false.

One might of course argue that at that time we had no reason to reach a different assumption. For neither the Tablets (apart from ten obscure words on Tablet D) nor the

³⁵ See Annex III below.

³⁶ See Annex IV below.

‘challenge’ (apart from line 30) contain anything to indicate explicitly that between the ceremony and the homecoming something more takes place – something relevant. And yet. This fact actually offers us Molussiologists, ethnologists and linguists no excuse. For every one of us should have possessed the minimal psychological intuition to suspect that people having such a stressful task behind them (regardless of whether the stress is real or merely artificial), and who are as begrimed as this pair after their activities with the remains of their forefathers, might have needed a *transitional phase* of some kind before re-entering everyday life. I regret that we all failed to have such an intuition. And that today we have to catch up with what was left out.

Now if we know today that a separate ceremony intervened between the ancestor murder and the return home, this tells us not only that our knowledge has been extended, but that this second ceremony presents proof beyond all doubt that the brothers did not play-act the first ceremony, but took it in deadly earnest. In fact, the second ceremony would have been completely meaningless and superfluous if its function had not been to remedy the mental disturbance caused by the first ceremony and wash away the physical and mental besmirching consequent upon their interaction with the dead. But let us look first at what kind of documents we call in aid.

If I emphasise that we are not dealing here with texts, this may at first glance seem to assert a negative. The opposite is the case. What we have at our disposal is a quantity of images, more than sixty, each of which shows an exact depiction of one phase of the proceeding. Mutatis mutandis, this being a series of pictures (in this case, bas-reliefs) that narrate a story, we might speak here of ‘cartoons’. But once again we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us stick to a chronological ordering.

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The first clue was provided, once again, by one of the Tablets, in this case Tablet D, which contains a brief allusion, hitherto completely obscure, to a transitional stage, a phrase to which, for some inexplicable reason, no Molussiologist ever paid attention. There it says: ‘After they had completed their task, the two landed in the Mill (<ram>) where they subjected themselves to the necessary in order to return to their family meek and shining like angels’.

Not exactly an enlightening description. If we are now able to clarify what is meant by <ram> and offer a detailed description of what happened in the <ram>, it is because of the successful labours (one might almost speak of teamwork) of two Mussoliologists (one of whom, to be sure, had not the slightest idea he was working with the other) in lifting the fog that hung over this portion of text.

The first pointer was provided by the author (the unsuspecting scholar mentioned above) of a philological paper, as unpretentious as it was scholarly, on the syllable <ram>.³⁷ It transpired that this syllable occurred in words for the following: *flog*; *music*; *educate*; *grind maize*; *initiation* and other rituals; *the act of love*, especially *orgies*; *baths*; *festive banquets*; *medicinal cures*; and *disguise*. As listed by Löwy, these seemed nothing more than a random pile of meanings. He never knew what a key he had provided for

³⁷ Fritz Löwy: ‘A contribution to the study of the semantic field of the root syllable <ram> in Neomolussian’. *Acta Philologica Helvetica*, Bern 1941, No. 4.

ethnologists and philosophers. Years before his pedantic effort was properly evaluated, he died an emigrant, in miserable circumstances.

Once again it was Professor Elliot who took the decisive step, by smelting Löwy's neglected trove into a key. As he tackled the material, he was guided by this statement of the problem: what the diverse procedures adduced by Löwy had in common seems so obvious that one fails to comprehend why Löwy himself did not see it, and why a man of Elliot's calibre was required to identify the common denominator. Elliot recognised, as it were, that what the actions enumerated by Löwy had in common was that they 'retune' the holistic condition, the 'tone' of the person. From this he adduced the once hypothetical conclusion that the 'mill' (<ram>) mentioned in Tablet D represented in his words a 'Transformatorium', an institution in which by various means such as propitiatory bathing, music, sexual intercourse, meals, massages, disguises, or by all these means together, the tension arising from the ancestor murders would be totally transformed or (since it has already been transformed by the previous ceremonial work) would in a very broad sense be 'restored' or 'reformed'. 'The over-excitement and disequilibrium,' Elliot writes,³⁸

in which the sons found themselves following the ancestor murder ceremony was probably so extreme that they could not at the drop of a hat overcome their abnormal condition and re-adapt to everyday life. Hence we must suspect that the task of normalisation was lifted by first of all transforming their agitation into another kind of agitation, as heat is transformed into electricity.

He goes on to explicate this kind of procedure:

I recall in my student days, when for reasons I no longer remember I had fallen into a state of utter despair, I was hauled off by friends to a symphony concert. The music did not dispel my agitation, but rather *revaluated* it, lending it a form of bliss purer than any I had ever experienced; my despair became unrecognisable. I suspect a similar 'revaluation' might have occurred, albeit in no such chance manner, but rather by way of a methodical procedure, in the two 'visitors' to the 'transformatorium'. As a working hypothesis I therefore propose to assume that the Molussians, or more precisely the spiritual officials appointed for the task, transformed the complex of actions and arrangements identified by Löwy in the root word <ram> (floggings, concerts, baths, hierodules, meals, etc) into a catering business in order to flick the switch on the over-excited ancestor-murderers, and that the latter gave themselves over to everyday life again only after successful completion of this procedure.³⁹

And in another place:

It would be just as futile to seek a single modern English word for the multi-faceted complex <ram> as it would be to transcribe Molussian music using our notation. Hence it was necessary to concoct the new word 'transformatorium'. If I now advance my hypothesis – or better, my firm conviction – that the Transformatorium provided at the same time a sanctuary, a dining hall, and

³⁸ <Ram> or the Transformatory. London 1949.

³⁹ Ibid., p.58.

apartments for lovemaking and sleep, I do not imply that it might have been a *post hoc* combination of previously separate facilities – a synthesis of overnight accommodation, restaurant, baths, brothel, church and concert hall such as certain fashionable hotels offer these days. Rather the Transformatorium was from the start an integral entity which only *post hoc* fanned out into various departments. But we must bear in mind that even the most profane facilities, such as meals and the possibly obligatory orgies, fulfilled a ceremonial function, while what looks to our eyes to be a purely ritual procedure, such as propitiatory bathing, also served for cleaning up, or at least had that result.

So much for the Elliot Hypothesis, of which its author could no more let go than the astronomer could let go of the heavenly body whose existence he has confirmed by calculation. It was the grand old man's last wish that his hypothesis, which at first found no echo among his professional colleagues, should find empirical support. And in this he succeeded admirably. At an advanced age (he was already approaching 80), for the fourth time in his life, accompanied only by his daughter Myrtle, he actually undertook the laborious voyage to Molussia – feasible only by rickety fishing boat from Madras – in order at his own cost (he actually used all his resources on this enterprise) to conduct excavations in the necropolis. And two years later he found what he was looking for. The Transformatorium was unearthed, and has recently been made accessible to the public much like the buildings in Pompeii.⁴⁰

While the roof is missing, the walls still stand, and with them those items of concern here – items we have already mentioned: the almost completely preserved relief friezes that clarify, and in the most striking way confirm, Elliot's hypothesis that in this establishment various methods were implemented serially to effect the transformation. No question: we latecomers can see more, and at greater leisure, than could any Ancient Molussian; for at most once in a lifetime – just after the ancestor murder, and in a most unfavourable state of mind! – could he have the opportunity to visit the Transformatorium.

It is not only the well-preserved friezes that indicate the characteristics of this facility, but also to some extent the rooms themselves. In them are found what can still be recognised as items of furniture, shards of eating utensils, and other objects that confirm the activities so astutely predicted by Elliot. In short, we may without hesitation assert that we are today in a position to reconstruct in broad strokes the events that once took place in the Transformatorium.

Let us turn at once to the frieze in Room A. This picture series, comprising sixteen panels starting on the left hand wall of the entrance lobby, presents a scene of pummelling: two men, collapsing screaming under the blows, are clearly discernible. Although the figures wielding the clubs remain out of sight – only their muscular arms can be seen – we may take it that the pummellers, if not the insulted ancestors themselves, are at least creatures of these, exacting vengeance for the crime in lieu of the Great Ancestor. Clearly it was unthinkable to leave unpunished the breach of taboo committed by the sons. The sons, although in a guiltless manner, had made themselves guilty (as they would, if asked, have freely conceded). As impossible (in the sense of

⁴⁰ 'A Pompeii of the South Seas III'. *The Green Traveller's Guide*, vol. 261, London, 1954.

‘impermissible’) as it was on the one hand to leave undone the murder of the oldest and debasement of the more recent ancestors – these deeds were categorically and undeniably *commanded* – it was on the other hand just as impossible that deeds done in obedience to those commands should remain unexpiated. In other words – and we ask that this paradox not be laid at the door of us, the later interpreters – *what was commanded was at the same time forbidden*, and fulfilment of the command had unambiguously to be avenged in order that the insulted ancestors not be robbed of a modicum of justice. And it is this avenging that we see on the first eight panels. They clearly show eight stations of a beating down. The other eight show nothing but enlarged faces, and these almost all masked with wide-open, hence yelling, mouths. Out of these ascend little rhinoceros-like figures, not dissimilar to Greek depictions of the dying yielding up their *ker* of death – the only detail that Elliot, as he admitted, never interpreted (to say nothing of lesser Molussiologists such as myself).

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Room B, which we enter over the still recognisable threshold, also displays a frieze running around all four walls. A first glance shows that the pummelling has ceased. While the two figures on the first four panels are not yet free, let alone happy, but rather disoriented and bewildered as the unspeakable torment is suddenly lifted from them, now they seem to hover helplessly in a void reaching out for a handhold.

These helpless beings are depicted on panels 1 – 4. But from the fifth panel on, we can follow ever more clearly what once occurred in this space. The seekers have now found something, their hands land up amidst hair, breasts, faces and thighs, whatever they touch they clutch at and pull close. Just now they were dazed from lack of sleep, blind, deaf, incapable of discerning what was going on. From panel 5 we see unambiguously that their bodies and those of the strangers have found each other, a savage amatory tussle is in train. In fact the depictions of couplings in various positions (panels 5–16) are of such magnificent shamelessness⁴¹ that they leave all similar attempts in the history of European art in the dust, as timid and ridiculous botches.⁴²

The fact that no less than twelve panels of ever more novel, ever more licentiously entangled, ever more ornamental and complex configurations were felt necessary to illustrate this orgiastic phase is evidence not so much of its duration (of that we know nothing) but rather of the importance accorded to it, and the insatiability of the two men’s craving to procreate themselves in the tangle of body parts, and the consolation, following their visit to the realm of the dead and the pummelling that avenged the visit, in finding themselves reconciled and reaffirmed back in the world of the living.⁴³

⁴¹ Photographic reproductions of the friezes may be obtained from the Pictorial Archive of the so-called Transformatory, Molussia, off Madras, Asia.

⁴² Not without a chuckle, we note that Elliot called several of the positions ‘most instructive, indeed’, which allows the surmise that they were unfamiliar to him, or else he had forgotten them. The idea of the old man surveying and describing these reliefs frame by frame alongside his daughter is ‘most amusing, indeed’. But we cannot claim that the accuracy of his depictions suffered from any probable prejudices or ignorance on his part. In this case the professor triumphed over the puritan – no small achievement.

⁴³ The fact that the Molussian language knows only one and the same verb for ‘love’ and ‘affirm’ is more fruitful philosophically than many a fat volume on the metaphysics of love.

I use the word ‘consolation’ in full knowledge of how surprising, implausible and feeble it must sound after all that has happened, and is happening at the moment – it sounds inapt even in my ears. But the last two panels show indisputably the two sons in a state of calm content. In addition we must clearly appreciate that having passed through the nadir of the ceremony, the life-trajectory of the two men now trends slowly back upwards, the first stirrings of joy are felt, and they are already restored to the realm of the living. Of course that realm is still a dark, rank and subterranean one, but there is no doubt they are ‘back in the world’. ‘And anyway,’ the possibly naïve, but possibly also not so clueless daughter of Professor Elliot says, ‘what could be sweeter and more consoling than the beginning of such a return?’⁴⁴

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Before we set foot in Room C (as said, we rely here in general on the *Green Travellers’ Guide*, for I myself have never been to Molussia) we must pose a question – a question, note, and not an insight, for our answer will remain quite general. What niggles at me, and no doubt not just at me, is the fact that on this journey from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living, the principle of the Feminine plays such an important role. The salvational and redeeming function attributed to Woman in the 19th century (e.g. in *Faust II*, and by Wagner) cannot possibly have existed in the Molussia of the second millennium before our era. Does not the role played here by hierodules contradict the fact that the ritual of ancestor murder applied solely to male ancestors? Room A posed no such question, for the reliefs showed males taking revenge on the two brothers who had dishonoured them. But women, in this context? This is our question, a question that Elliot, as he often acknowledged, was unable to answer.

All I can tentatively offer is the notion that the two men are actually in danger, or have been in danger, of falling victim to the ancestors they desecrated in such a cursed manner. Perhaps the fundamental notion behind the Molussian orgy is that salvation from the perilous revenge of the ancestors and their envy of the lives of their great-grandchildren can be ended only by a countervailing power, namely the chthonic power of the maternal and the feminine. In fact, if one considers valid the matriarchal primacy hypothesis, this power represents an older authority than that of the fathers, and even apart from this remains a constant presence as an eternally proliferating power. In other words, what the reliefs show is that only when the two men hide in the darkness of an embrace can they make themselves unattainable and untraceable by the (long since impotent) vengeful spirits of the forefathers. Only when they let themselves be seduced by the ‘eternal Feminine’ can they return from the sterile darkness of Hades to the light of Life. This explanation is, as said, a quite tentative hypothesis, mentioned neither by Elliot nor by his daughter in her *Green Travellers’ Guide*. Both investigators restrict themselves to a plain description of the reliefs, laying emphasis of the fact that the successive panels reveal a complete change in the *tone* of the two brothers. Which is true, but it hardly satisfies our thirst for knowledge.

A door leads directly from Room B to Room C, a bathroom in which even today there stands undamaged the almost swimming-pool sized tub hewn from stone, the tub in which the two men find calm after the wild orgy that now lies behind them, and in

⁴⁴ *Green Travellers’ Guide*, p.167.

which they can wash off the impurities that have besmirched them since they first entered the Underworld. The wall panels show that they did not attend alone to their cleansing, but were seen to by old women whom we Europeans might designate as 'conductresses'; pail after pail of steaming water was poured over them; and having climbed from the tub they were laid out on the flagstones to be massaged by beefy males kneeling over them.

The question of how long this stage lasted remains, as usual, unanswerable. But what happens next is known: they are carried by the masseurs into the adjoining Room D and laid down on prepared cots, on the two rug-covered beds that stand even today in this room. No doubt the two men have now reached the uttermost nadir of exhaustion, a state of total relaxation, for on the first three panels we see them with eyes closed. No doubt they are allowed to sleep here; at the very least nothing more is demanded of them for the moment, and clearly they are left unmolested, or almost so. Of course, if the room was so well lighted then as now, it would have promoted not so much deep sleep as a doze, an assumption supported by panels 4–8, which show two female musicians, a flautist and a lyre-player (both girls, dressed very modestly compared to the women in Room B) who entertain the two men with their playing. The plinth, three steps high, on which the girls sat still exists, as well-preserved as the six holes in the clay floor that clearly result from the two tripods on which they sat.

But we may doubt whether the two men paid great attention to the music being played for them, for as said, all panels show them with eyes closed; which allows the inference that the musicians produced mere *background music*, that genre of which we are supposed to remain unconscious and whose existence only becomes noticed the moment it ceases. This is no theoretical hypothesis, for panel 9 shows the simultaneous cessation of the performance and the awakening of the two men: the girls lay down their instruments and the two men sit up rubbing their eyes. In panel 10 the musicians have left, only the two men are seen standing, each holding a *peplos*, obviously a clean gown, preparing to put it on. In panel 11 the girls are back, this time not to play music but to place little tables by the bed. In panel 12 the girls, their duties clearly not limited to music-making, are again missing; they return in panel 13 to place trays on the tables. We see baskets of fruit, jugs (the contents of course unidentifiable), and bowls filled with little objects that according to Elliot resemble *krosa*, a shortbread delicacy still to be found in Molussian cake shops.

We naturally expect the next panel 14 to show the men eating, but are disappointed: this panel, for some unknown reason perhaps connected with a taboo, is simply omitted, and the final panel 15 shows us a back view of the men leaving the room hand in hand, clearly setting out on their homeward journey. The girls, meanwhile, have retrieved their instruments, apparently to play a couple of farewell themes, though this is not certain: they might just as likely be welcoming the entry of more clients, the next fraternal pair, with the same melodies with which they welcomed 'our' brothers. For let us not forget that our pair are but two of an uncountable multitude, the stream of brothers never lets up, preceded by a myriad of brothers who have trodden the depicted path, to be followed by a myriad more. But we are not concerned with these newcomers; we shall stay with 'our' pair, accompanying them on the final stretch back home.

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The two returnees from the Underworld now climb the steep alleyway back to the city, hardly identifiable as the two fearsomely masked creatures who twelve hours before had headed down the alley, dragging buckets and hammers noisily over the paving. The two young men now step out carefree and debonair. Clearly they give no thought to the heavy masks and tools they left behind underground, and Molussian citizens seem to have just as little notion that these are the same two men a merest glimpse of whom they had avoided like the plague yesterday evening. In any case, wherever the two men are seen or heard approaching, or when they are merely rumoured to be about to pass by (for news of their return speeds ahead of them), windows fly open, men, women and children crowd at the sills, and shout and wave greetings. And although the words of greeting are formulaic and are to some extent part of the ceremonial proceedings, they are nevertheless enthused and happy, presaging the completion of the ceremony.

And when the two men at last approach their own home, the giant clay figurines that spent the night in the open in lieu of themselves and their late father have already been cleared away. The family members are formed up expectantly in front of the house. All, even the widowed mother, bow deeply to the pair as they come to a halt, and they in turn bow to the family. And one and all cry out – we take no responsibility for the vapidness of the words; they are taken once again from the Tablets, which depict the Return Scene with great gusto – they all cry out: *Now the family's whole again!* Yes, they cry 'whole', this is the word specified for the occasion. The fact that the body of their father lies a few yards off awaiting burial clearly conflicts not in the least with their sense of wholeness. Not by chance do we find even in today's Molussia the abhorrent proverb *Families are always whole*. The link is obvious between this proverb, and the strict taboo on remembering the departed any longer than strictly necessary. Regardless, the complementary demonstrations of reverence and the cry *Now we're whole again* are the concluding fixed phases of the Ancestor Murder ceremony. A few minutes later the two groups are mixing, they hug and kiss and all set off to perform their daily duties; and the play is finally over.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Every reader of our text must surely be amazed that we deal not in the slightest with the father's funeral, of which we know only that it was to take place on the same day. But what we omit is only what was omitted from the tablets and the Challenge. It cannot be by mere chance that not one of the documents depicts the proceeding, and three make absolutely no mention of it. Clearly the funeral, in contrast to the depicted scenes, was a quite trivial matter. The neglect of what for us would be the most important phase of the ceremony can only be noted; we are as little able as Elliot to explain it.

ANNEX 1

Of course an explanation is needed of this sudden halt to the information – what Elliot termed a *negative explosion*, which must appear incomprehensible to those who are not professional anthropologists or ethnologists. How is it possible, most readers will ask, that all four reporters go on strike at the decisive moment?

But the question is naïve, for two reasons.

First, the authors of the Tablets were not reporters as we understand the term today, and maybe not even story-tellers writing for a thrill-seeking public. The intended readers and purpose of the depictions of the ceremony can only be guessed at. But surprise at finding ourselves left in the lurch at the climax of the events is truly naïve, not least when we consider that the approach of our European novelists until well into the modern period was not at all so fundamentally different from that of their archaic colleagues, for at the very moment when the breach of a taboo should have been depicted, a total nullity was trotted out. If we ignore the literature of the last two decades: what romantic novel, otherwise so explicit, ever failed to leave blank the climax towards which they steered us, i.e. coitus? The Lucians, de Sades, the Lawrences can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Have most not fobbed us off with generalities, or with three dots hinting at something unspeakable now taking place? And have they not picked up the thread of their narrative at the moment when the rays of a rising sun show the world restored to decent order?⁴⁶

What we find in reports A to D is in principle no different. Since the uttermost taboo, or the ritual breach of the uttermost taboo, commences with the reaching or climbing into the niche and since representation of the Forbidden is hardly less strictly forbidden than the Forbidden itself, the report writers leave us in the lurch. There is no denying that a contradiction exists between the detailed depiction of preparations for the breach of the taboo, and the total renunciation of any description of that breach. If it is true, as Franz Müller suspects,⁴⁷ that the authors of the Tablets were also concerned to rescue a ritual, already beginning to lapse in their day, by fixing it in writing, then by omitting the climax of the rescue operation, they themselves sabotaged it. Of course there is nothing exceptional in that. For in the breast of every conservator a battle plays out between the desire to eternalise tradition, and the fear of falling foul of even a single taboo or esoteric principle; a battle that belongs in essence to the dialectic of every tradition. Inevitably one or other of the two desires always comes up short, and this applies no less to the four Tablets than to most documents in the histories of magic, religion, and in particular the Mysteries. One may with a grain of salt assert that

⁴⁶ Of course for a long time now, latterly in the beloved ‘Life Philosophy’ of the past half century, the Unspoken was taken to be the Inaccessible, not the Unspeakable; something that *cannot* be attained by language, not something that *may not* be so attained. But are not modern Irrationalist theories that dispute the competences of language in the end no more than shamefaced versions of taboo anxiety, meaning: evidence of anxiety about taboo anxiety, and proof that admitting to being *unable* to do something is more tolerable, and less prejudicial to honour, than not being *allowed* to do it?

⁴⁷ *Writing as Rescue*, Frankfurt, 1950, p.37.

Tradition mostly downplays what is most important, and even to some extent views it with suspicion, while what has entered into the treasury of traditions is of second or third degree importance. Even Plato's famous mention of the "unwritten doctrine" in the Seventh Letter seems to point in this direction.⁴⁸ History has hampered its self-knowledge not only out of forgetfulness, but also out of shame, fear, pride, and other motives for silence and concealment.

ANNEX II

What is <gory>? This term appears already on Tablet D, exactly in a place where other versions use the Molussian equivalents of 'work', 'ritual' or the like. It means in Molussian (in fact is still normally so used today) 'song' or 'piece of music'. At first glance it cannot have this meaning here. On the other hand, a slip of the pen or a misspelling are equally out of the question. Numerous stonemasons laboriously hammering their texts into granite cannot possibly have allowed one and the same error to 'slip into their chisel', not once but again and again. What's more, Tablets A and C also employ the same expression, albeit only once. What can this peculiar Molussian word be up to?

The only scholar to have taken a stance on this perplexing problem is McObreen.⁴⁹ While he did not solve it, he at least pointed in the right direction. "For is it not the case," he asks (based solely on the Tablets, before the discovery of our new documents), "that cultic events were always clad in music, and in such a manner that it remains unclear whether it was the sequencing of the event that articulated the progress of the music, or whether the sacred music lent its articulation to the sequencing of the event? And," he asks, referring to Max Wertheimer's work on Gestalt psychology, "were not ceremonies accompanied by music always experienced as a whole – where once again it is unclear whether it was the wholeness of the ceremony that made the accompanying music into a whole, or whether on the contrary the wholeness of the music lent its character to the ceremony?"

McObreen's terms 'wholeness' and 'articulation' are in fact the key. If we were to pursue his thoughts farther, we would have to ask: must the word <gory> apply solely to 'a piece of music'? Might it not denote any sequence of convincingly articulated events that is perceived as a whole? And one that is not primarily concerned with the acoustic? Might not the word acquire a breadth of connotations like, for example, our word 'rhythm', which can be used in all kinds of non-musical contexts, even though its core meaning lies in music? Is it not conceivable that in the richly articulated ritual process of the Ancestor Murder the tempi, changes of tempo, mutual balancing of elements, tensions, surprise effects and the like were similarly arranged and composed to form a whole, as in a musical sequence? This conjecture seems to me all the more justified in that from time to time, as I read reports of the ritual, I had a sense that its style, its syntax, its contrasts were infected by the 'musical' life they were informing us about. As, for example on Tablet B, the half presto, half ritardando entry of the two

⁴⁸ The doctrine states that nothing of importance should ever be committed to writing. [Tr.]

⁴⁹ In *Molussian Studies*, p.409 ff.

rhinoceroses passes stylistically into the ostinato of the hammering, and this in turn, at once oppressive and liberating, makes a pause that corresponds to the caesura following the removal of the name slab. Hence with a modicum of goodwill one can sense that inherent in the text too is something convincingly musical. Anyway, what stands out for me is that to my mind the sons were in a position to conceive the course of the various elements of the articulated ritual work as a whole, much as a musician can keep in view as a whole a symphony with all its changes of themes and tempi, its surprises, its numerous phrases long and short, retain them in memory and be able to reproduce them all. If this hypothesis is correct, then it is possible that the two men can endure the entirety of the dreadful ceremony only because, for them, all the separate elements taking their course represent a convincing Whole; they can imagine it as a Whole, and are able to reproduce it.

What I have in view here is not so much that the thing we call a 'work of art' emerged from (often shocking or even dreadful) ritual events – which is pertinent, but merely a truism. What is important in this connection is rather the fact that we can endure, and even enjoy, something shocking (for example, an overpowering piece of music) insofar as we perceive it as an orderly Whole. It reaches a point where, expressly in order to enjoy it, we intentionally subject ourselves to the shock, and even produce symphonies and tragedies, for example, explicitly to generate enjoyment through overpowering and unbearable stimuli.

Now, we have no indication that, at the dawn of history of which we are reporting, people went so far as to find the overpowering enjoyable. But I do think nevertheless that the Molussians aimed to make the truly shocking *tolerable* – by lending it a psychologically convincing and articulated form. When, 'disdaining' to allow ourselves to be 'destroyed by terror',⁵⁰ we accompany a funeral with music, we are doing something quite similar. Of course, in the Molussian usage the music was not separate, no mere garnish to the ceremony. Rather it made of the ceremony itself a <gory>, meaning a fully articulated and (for them) perceptible Whole, and thereby in a certain sense something that can be mastered. Let one inwardly digest this word 'mastered'. For do we not also speak of 'mastering' a piece of music or some such other thing that overwhelms us? But as we do so, we master not only the musical work of art alone, but also the superior power invested in it. More precisely: through Art we master, in reality or apparently, that which masters us – and that 'mastering' is called 'Art'. The necessity, and the drive, somehow to overcome what threatens to overcome ourselves is the wellspring of Art, which in its earliest days had no 'art objects' of its own but worked directly on the unbearable. In fact, the root of aesthetic enjoyment is the enjoyment of the (real or apparent) liberation achieved by this overcoming.

But these thoughts lead us far astray from our theme. What we have here, at least as a hypothesis, is primarily that the Ancestor Murder ritual with its successive steps and modulations would have presented to the Molussians an articulated, holistically graspable and manageable event. Which is not to say that we would be able to perceive what the Molussians perceived. We are in fact seldom capable of achieving an overall grasp. The transition from one point to the next in a ceremony may be obvious – and here too our representation seeks to trace the inner plausibility of the ritual. But

⁵⁰ Rilke, *Duino Elegies* #1.

mentally to master or even to ‘enjoy’ the Whole is beyond our own capacities. I emphasise this, because in the course of reading the sources and writing this text I repeatedly felt frustrated at continuing to be ‘unmusical’, meaning that I did not understand the musical qualities of the ceremony I was reconstructing, that the tempi, the caesuras and the segues seemed unconvincing, to the point where my fingers would itch to intervene editorially in the sequence of events presented in the sources, to correct a tempo or remodel unattractive proportions – temptations to which as a scientist I could of course never give in. But now and then during my reconstruction, I felt as a musician would feel if tasked with performing in public a long piece of exotic music to which he was unable to feel any inward connection. I do not see why my audience or readers should be any more ‘musical’ than I. And so I must ask that, if they should come upon places that seem to them ugly, they blame not me but the Molussians, or rather, that they ascribe responsibility to the great distance that separates them from Molussian culture.

ANNEX III

Some comments on the apparent artistic qualities of the document are called for. Not only have the international mass media pontificated freely on these qualities – who can say how many times the words ‘musical’ and ‘Orphic’ have flown through the aether! – but so has Elliot himself. Let no one brand us disrespectful when we assert that he, no less than the journalists, fell victim to an illusion. I too fared no better initially: at first reading I too was unable to resist the urge to experience deep emotions. For days I believed that the text spoke in primal tones, by means of which collective Antiquity resounded across the millennia directly to *me*; and that for centuries whatever had presented itself as ‘poetry’ was, compared to this document, no better than a bloodless, non-committal and implausible concoction by individual latecomers. At the risk of being regarded as a disrespectful and hardened philistine, I must confess that these initial emotions now seem to me suspect, and I resist with all my strength the temptations of this first impression. With good reason: for nobody can deny that the peculiar beauty of such linguistic documents (insofar as they really are beautiful, which is debatable) – their peculiar beauty can only be recognised and evaluated by those conversant with the *profane idiom* to which this document is a counterpoint. Only knowledge of the gulf between everyday and elevated diction – such as sacral speech – would equip us to sense and appropriately evaluate the document’s solemnity, ‘profundity’, or beauty.

But since none of us is conversant with the Molussian Everyday and its idiom, and since none of us (including Elliot) knows anything of the gulf between the two modes of speech, it follows that nobody (including Elliot) can orient himself and grasp the ‘artistic’ qualities of such strophes. Moreover, the language of the document is no doubt extremely *archaic*. But the Archaic is not amenable to interpretation, and whoever claims to interpret and find delight in it is (without any clear notion of the fact) delighting in something quite other, namely the shock that earliest times produce in us by their refusal to manifest themselves. Whatever we don’t understand we interpret as

transcending ourselves, as sublime. In short, when we believe ourselves overwhelmed, this is nothing but a misprision of our own ignorance, our own inadequacy.⁵¹

It may be objected that it would be no great task to remedy our ignorance of the distant Everyday through other historical methods, by turning our focus to a 'history of the Everyday'. There can be no objection to such a goal, and if it should be possible to tack in that direction and write a *History of the History that History has covered up*, then the attempt should of course be made. But it seems naïve to place too great a hope on such attempts. The very formulation 'History of the History that History has covered up' suggests that the past does not on the whole offer new perspectives. The 'past' handed down to us by History has already been 'passed' through many layers of sieves – material already selected and sorted by the historical process, including that which lies closest to our hearts. The history of the – for the most part unhistorical – Everyday has for the most part been destroyed, by History itself. Without question, History is a process of continual self-liquidation, a kind of endless 'ancestor murder'. And we, the grandchildren toiling away at History, seeking to summon up what has been, must come to terms willy-nilly with the fact that this Ancestor Murder is almost totally beyond recall.⁵²

Our ignorance of History is thus not merely 'ignorance' (of something actually knowable), and not merely the consequence of a deficient selection of historical pointers (which might be substituted ad nauseam by better ones), nor, finally, merely a random historical fact (which might equally well be another). Rather, since History as a transmission process is already a process of sifting and discarding, it necessarily condemns us to an absence of knowledge of what has been sifted away. In other words, *our ignorance of History belongs to the essence of History itself*. That which transmission passes on to the next and later epochs as 'permanent fact' is always only that which, in its own eyes, is prominent. This is what we are allowed to know, in contrast to the Everyday, not to mention the gulf between the two which constitutes the acme of every historical situation.

In a certain sense, this sieving and selecting that condemns us to ignorance can be termed 'falsification'. And because the prominent fact selected by History does not necessarily represent, for example, a moral or spiritual optimum, but at best that which comes to the fore on the basis of its dominion over what is ephemeral, anonymous, monotonous, powerless, the blame for this falsification (if we may speak here of 'blame') falls not so much on 'History' (for who is that?) as on the respective *power-holder*. How far such power-holders may have falsified, or falsify, or act in bad faith – it matters not

⁵¹ The same applies, of course, not only to Molussian documents. The everyday life and everyday speech of other defunct cultures, even those (e.g. Mediterranean) with which we have the closest connections because without them we would not be who we are, are unknown to us. And yet we never tire of expounding on the beauty of their artistic and literary products. More skew than true.

⁵² Ridiculous as it may sound, it is only where a culture comes down to us, not through History but as the result of a natural catastrophe seizing hold of one historical day and fixing it forever (as in the case of Pompeii), that we have by chance a comprehensive image of the Everyday. For just as Nature in its blind cruelty destroys the sublime along with the Everyday, so in certain circumstances does its blindness graciously preserve the Everyday along with the sublime.

to us. For in every case it is they who give rise to the deception, since it belongs to the mechanism of power that the possessor thereof can himself seek to conserve the justice of his claims and the glories of his dominion. It is this mechanism that determines the criteria for sieving and discarding. In other words: the decision as to what we may or may not know of History was made in the power struggles of bygone days. Only History's victories enter into History, only those who were once subjects of History have survived as its objects, as components of History (whether tradition or science). The utterly defeated, on the other hand, the exterminated, no longer belong in History. They are not even missing from History. Those who once were oppressed, defeated, driven out, or ignored are now once again oppressed, defeated, driven out, or ignored – by History.⁵³

But however dubious we may find all these falsification processes and actions that play out in History, it remains a fact that, without such falsifications, transmission would not be true transmission, and History not true history. If History wants to continue on, it is fundamentally impractical to carry with it all the baggage of its past. On the other hand, every now and then, in order to proceed with confidence, History has to load up with an invented past. So it is necessarily a history of its own creation and own forgetting, and from time to time even a history of its own retrospective garbled self-production.

This places the intentions of historians, even our own, in a highly peculiar light. For in their efforts to unveil History, to conserve or even refute its ongoing Ancestor Murder, they operate counter to the living fundamental principles of History. In a way, they too falsify – for a second time – as they struggle against and try to refute the falsifications that comprise History.

But this refuting, this second falsification, is not simply one contingent historical event among others. By inaugurating a new epoch, indeed a new kind of historicity, it becomes the essence of History. For History is not only a sequence of various events and epochs, it is also a sequence of various *kinds of History*. The emergence of the first historians whose successors we are, brought a new kind of History into existence – just as a person who pursues his own history or even sets it down in autobiographical writings is creating a new kind of historical existence that colours the actual past. Once you internalise this seemingly paradoxical thought, it becomes crystal clear that the

⁵³ There is in fact no such thing as 'Slave History' – not only in the secondary sense that there is no such formal scholarly theme, but in the more fundamental and tragic sense that without a minimum of freedom (embodied in a minimum of power) no history can arise, and so it is intrinsic to the situation of the Unfree, as one of their Unfreedoms, that they are denied any opportunity to pass their existence down to posterity, unless as 'co-historical' bit-players in the history of the power that they serve. If anyone wanted to write a 'History of the Unfree' – and to a large extent a History of the Everyday would tend to become a history of those condemned to anonymity – there would be no documents of their own to refer back to, rather only those of the ruling powers that extol and eternalise *their* names. If anyone did succeed in writing such a history, it might be asserted that the formerly 'unhistorical' (or merely co-historical) have entered History now only as an afterthought. There have been some such re-historicisings, when formerly unfree groups have attained a certain measure of autonomy and power – and hence become history-competent and history-justified – and so are able to construct a pseudo-mythological version of their past.

object of our investigation is not just any old historical subject. Since, as historians, we strive against the self-liquidation of History, even while the principle of self-liquidation is incarnate in the Ancestor Murder, this becomes not only our theme, but its polar opposite.

ANNEX IV

It would of course be pleasing to close with this interpretation of the ‘challenge’. It is irksome that we scientists cannot allow ourselves such conclusive pleasure. There remains a suspicion (which I do not share, or only half-heartedly) that cannot simply be brushed aside as a *quantité négligible*, especially as it stems from the work of Karl Andres.⁵⁴ Until now I have refrained from addressing Andres’ arguments, for fear they might prejudicially weaken Elliot’s and my own. Now that I have laid out the task and Elliot’s and my arguments, I can no longer justify holding back. The concern is as follows.

Andres suspects (I say ‘suspects’ rather than ‘knows’ or ‘proves’) that the actual performance of the ceremony by our two ancestor murderers did not seem to them nearly as serious or disgusting as Elliot’s and my descriptions may have suggested. How does Andres come by this suspicion?

We respond as Devil’s Advocate, i.e. with the arguments that Andres himself adduces.

Andres begins by considering what we too have considered, namely the vocable <gory>. The astonishing fact that Tablets A and C and especially D designate the ritual as <gory> led even me to expand the narrower meaning of the word (‘song’) and include under <gory> every artistically configured production, every performance perceived as a whole. Andres, as said, mentions this point.

Secondly, Andres continues, and here we have his decisive argument: we cannot simply overlook the fact that the ancestor murderers, when they vanish into the Realm of the Dead, betray not the slightest apprehension about the task before them. The hesitations mentioned in the Tablets must have been nothing but suspense-enhancing *ritardandi* specified in the ceremonial script itself. But when we consider, says Andres, that, by the very nature of the operation, each ancestor murderer engages in the ceremony only once in a lifetime, their assurance as they set about the task seems remarkable. The suspicion must therefore arise that the two of them knew the ceremonial <gory> by heart before embarking on it; that they had already ‘mastered’ it as soon as they set about it in earnest. We must therefore conclude, he continues, that they had undergone regular practice and rehearsals, much as we might rehearse the role we are to ‘play’ in an actual performance. While we have no evidence of such rehearsals, he says, this is not surprising, for ‘who would be interested in handing down such evidence?’ The selection of what is handed down is never random, but depends always

⁵⁴ Karl Andres: *Tractate on Earnestness*. Tübingen, 1950.

and entirely on whether some power-centre felt some benefit in transmitting and ensuring continued knowledge of a fact, or not.⁵⁵

But if the hesitations and suspense-building that permeated the ceremony were detailed and prescribed and hence, being detailed and prescribed, belonged to the category <gory>, then the thought arises that the real function of the prescribed emotions was to take the wind out of the sails of any 'authentic' emotions. It is quite conceivable that the actualising of such commanded or preset fears was meant to have a similar effect to the fulfilment of every other commandment, and that the obligatory experience of pretended emotion effectively suppressed the emergence of real emotion.

This train of thought, in particular the probability that the <gory> of the Ancestor Murder was rehearsed, puts the attitude displayed by the pair during the 'gorious' ceremony in a new light: they were to some extent merely *acting* the ceremony. Whoever rehearses a piece of music a hundred times ('in play' so to speak, perhaps under conditions that mimic more and more those of an actual concert) no longer finds the actual performance threatening. For the goal of rehearsal consists in removing the distinction between the possible and the actual, between practice and the real thing, making the real thing simply one of many occasions, a repetition of many repetitions. Meaning: to render it so innocuous that the player, when the real thing comes along, need only do once again what he has been doing during rehearsals. If he fully attains the goal of practice, then he can come through the real thing in a *spirit of play*. Every note comes right, every prestissimo is perfectly achieved, the external world has lost its power to disturb. In short: nothing can happen.

What applies to musical rehearsals applies *mutatis mutandis* to ceremonial rehearsals, hence also to rehearsals of the Ancestor Murder. The state which such practice is supposed to induce, and for which alone it has been undertaken, is probably a state of play, of being able to play; hence an attitude that we (not without reason) customarily distinguish from a 'serious' attitude towards reality.

The only questionable aspect of this hypothesis, according to Andres, is whether our formulation 'what goes for musical rehearsals goes also for ceremonial rehearsals' might be putting the cart before the horse (and vice versa); whether the inference from artistic rehearsal might be invalid in the case of a ritual rehearsal; whether on the contrary the playful character familiar to us in artistic contexts must have been derived from ritual itself. It may, he says, in fact be presumption to see in 'pretending' and the play situation home-grown features specific to art. The transcendental question of the 'conditions of possibility' (rather: 'of necessity') of pretend-activity and pretend emotions in the 'realm of appearance' is merely postponed by pointing to the existence of the artistic realm. Nothing is gained, says Andres, by asserting that playfulness is 'a specific characteristic of Art'. Rather we should see art as the product of a compulsion to pretend, and should acknowledge that Life develops 'unreal' attitudes based on very real grounds: namely in the cunning intent to master excessively serious situations, which are in fact beyond one's capability, by rendering them unreal. The Molussian, accustomed to singing during play-fights, and now drawn singing into battle as if it were but another play-fight, by reproducing the ceremonial text converts the real battle into a play-fight, and

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.63.

hence renders it tolerable and survivable. One may suppose without exaggeration that any such play-actor who falls in battle does not actually conceive of his death in all seriousness, that to some extent he suffers only a pretend- or stage-death, and when the end comes, all it means is the end of a game.

Supposedly purely aesthetic performances and phenomena such as ‘rehearsal’, ‘play’, ‘shutting out the world’, ‘dexterity’, and even prescribed affects and emotions (Andres continues) originate in the action-sphere of ceremony. If we find them today only in the arts, it is purely because they have survived only there. Humanity has constructed for itself a ‘play room’ that it calls ‘art’, which has acquired for itself such a degree of autonomy, is so taken for granted, that the question of why and how it was constructed has grown dormant. But it was not by allowing serious ceremonial motifs to degenerate to mere play that art distinguished itself from ceremony; rather, by forgetting the play-motivations of ceremony.

The first game (says Andres) had its ‘what for’, and was motivated. When the Ancestor Murder ceremony – however perilous and horrifying the situation in which it was performed – proceeded with long-rehearsed pedantry, always obeying the same reliable and undeviating rules of the game, when every motion, even every emotion (as with a piece of music) followed a fixed template, it was precisely *because* the situation had become so perilous and incalculable. Or rather: *in order that* the actors in the ceremony could ward off their fear of the unpredictable, and could gloss over the horror of the situation. And if the actors took their game so seriously, it was *in order to* make the unforeseeable foreseeable, the incalculable calculable, and the unpredictable predictable; and in order to master or keep at bay what was overwhelming in the violence of their own actions. In short, the serious situation that the actors had to face was to be stripped of its absolute seriousness.

I have now conveyed Andres’ theory. His suspicion that the ancestor murderers did not actually suffer so terribly under the terrors we have depicted is based on the premise that they might, must and were able to play away the terrors they had to act out. And that they were able to do so with such facility that they were not only spared the need to confront the occasion for the ceremony (the death of their father), but were able also to avoid actually living through the horror of their activity. And the dangers they were facing would have required just as little of their attention.

And anyone today who parrots the platitudinous old formula that ‘Ritual gave birth to the Aesthetic’, and that present day culture is merely a watered-down play-form of our ancestors’ more earnest and committed activities, sweeps under the carpet the decisive fact that ceremony itself is a play-format, that it already bears within it the aesthetisizing ingredient, that it owes its very existence to escapist motives, and that its executants are merely ‘reproducing’ their motions and emotions. And when such a person (Andres insists) has at his fingertips, in his very pen, the expression ‘reproduce’, which is likewise taken from artistic practice, from music and the theatre, then he may tick this off as further confirmation of his approach.

And yet it would be an inadmissible simplification to assert that the executants of a ceremony, having only ‘reproduced’ the prescribed feelings, actually felt nothing, that their unease, their fear, their horror were mere simulations. The crude alternative ‘either real or pretended’ brings us no nearer to the difficult phenomenon of reproduction and

play. Even those who reproduce music and its moods cannot be said, simply because they are playing, to be emotionally alienated. That the pianist who plays a cycle of Schumann's mood pieces is free from the moods 'rueful' or 'skittish' or however the score is annotated is no more true than that he actually feels rueful or skittish.

Imagine, Andres concludes with a very witty conceit, a musicologist from the year 5000, who discovers these Schumann pieces during an excavation. His temporal distance from the composer is roughly similar to our temporal distance from the ancestor murderers. Naturally the exact notations of emotion would for this investigator be a find of first importance. And he would have little reason to ascribe to performers from 1850 or 1950 emotions any different to those prescribed by the composer. But if anyone were to ask him how far these emotions really existed, or how far they were only reproduced or performed, or how far the reproductions or performances themselves were meant 'seriously', the musicologist, insofar as he might understand the questions, would probably be unable to answer them.

"The situation in which this Schumann archaeologist finds himself," Andres concludes, "is our situation today when we are confronted with Molussian documents relating to Ancestor Murder. We are unable to pronounce a final verdict on the dosage of seriousness and play in these emotions. Everything hangs in the balance."

RIGONIA

(1966)

One morning – why exactly that day and not months or even years earlier I have no idea, and even the Molussians seemed totally uninterested in the question – one morning, then, news spread in the business quarter of Molussia that Rigo, the so-called ‘popular’ commodore and seasoned expedition leader who, as every adult could no doubt remember, had set off to sea ten years earlier at the head of a hundred-strong contingent in three big sailing ships – that Rigo, even though his return was already long overdue, and he had never sent back any word – that no one could even be sure if he and his hundred men had not suffered shipwreck soon after leaving port – or that he might have perished in some distant region discovered by him for the Fatherland

This latter possibility was clearly the more likely, and anyway, as thousands of conversations piped up on every city street corner, ever more details were brought to light. What kept coming up – it could not have been purely by chance – was a southern isle, discovered by Rigo himself, soon expanding to an entire continent, verdant, smothered in treasures, and all but undermined by precious metals. But just as often it was said that Rigo, venturing into this new continent and attempting to acquaint himself with the blessings of the local culture, might have met with certain setbacks: maybe he and his band died of thirst in a desert, or maybe – for similar instances were alas common knowledge – he was slain by primitive or ungrateful natives; again, nothing conclusive could be asserted. But on the other hand – and this ‘other hand’ never failed – there was no absolute proof of Rigo’s death and the fate of his expedition, so there was still a possibility that these proud sons of Molussia might yet be rescued. Maybe, really.

But ten years are a long time. Between then and now lay plagues, wars and earthquakes. So no surprise if among the good citizens of Molussia there were not many who could at once attach any clear details to the name Rigo, or recall any precise image of the flotilla as it set sail that evening across the darkening bay; and, let us be blunt, some, in fact, could had no recollection whatever.

We should be even less surprised, being aware that memory often requires a certain arousal time before it swings fully into action; it needs, so to speak, to warm up. And this was the case with untold thousands back then. In fact, the chances of recovered memory were never more favourable: the resurrection of the old names and images could not have been better promoted than by that atmosphere of collective anxiety and collective hope that swept suddenly through Molussia and engulfed everybody all at once. I do not mean to state or imply any suspicion that for some individuals it might have been too big a task, maybe even a spiritual imposition, to recuse themselves from the collective concern about the possibly lost expedition, or the collective hope of possible rescue, or that such an act of desolidarity might have come simply from being more than any individual could be expected to shoulder. Nothing of the sort. Rather I wish to state up front and quite unambiguously that solidarity here was an actual positive, an actual strength: namely an instrument that helped thousands who had meanwhile forgotten or suppressed the old days to regain the capacity to remember

Rigo, and once again visualise the flotilla as it sailed across the darkening bay. In other words, images that when the news first broke were in many cases mist-shrouded and only vaguely outlined soon acquired a sharper focus; names that had in the meantime been forgotten soon acquired a familiar ring, evoking the good old days.

And so, by the evening of the day when the first spark of news flared (heaven knows where, why, and from whom) and wildfire began to race up and down every street – on the evening of that first day, the population of Molussia comprised once again hundreds of thousands with vivid memories of the expedition, and many more ready to swear to having been eye witnesses as the flotilla sailed away ten years ago.

Now, no less assured than the Molussian population – honour to whom honour is due – was the stance of the Molussian government. It reacted with truly exemplary promptitude to this outbreak of rumours.

Ignoring the incalculable chances of success, and despite the enormous financial risk posed by such an impromptu enterprise, it pulled together within a matter of days (in itself a respectable feat of organisation) a second expeditionary corps, this time of five thousand men, its vast size suggesting one task only: to find Rigo and his men, rescue them, and bring them home in triumph. In fact this improvised corps, which from the quantity of beasts of burden, wagons, armaments, tents, provisions and medicines, not to mention scientists and their equipment, demonstrated how committed the government was to effect a rescue. Within just three days, this corps assembled ready for deployment at the harbour, where already – everything came together perfectly – a fleet comprised this time of ten warships and freighters awaited them. That very evening the fleet set sail, under the command of Rigo's younger brother, who as admiral and leader of the expedition achieved during those three days a popularity scarcely less than that enjoyed by his brother back in the day. Once again, this expedition, like its predecessor, headed due south. The thousands who attended the ceremonial sendoff with prayers, cries and waving arms – many were nostalgic, having attended the first sendoff and feeling suddenly transported back to the old days – they stood on the dark quayside long after the last of the sails vanished over the horizon, proud to be Molussian and incapable of going back home, simply going home as if this evening was like any other. An emotion not just reasonable, but noteworthy.

*

Now – we too have left the harbour of Molussia some days behind us – the voyage of these ten sailing ships extended over a long stretch of time, several weeks in fact, and apart from the loss of four soldiers (but what are four among five thousand?) and a case of scurvy among the mules it proceeded, despite the southern heat, remarkably free of accidents and diversions.

To those risking this extraordinary rescue mission, and those who had brought it together in such a rapid and well-organised fashion, success seemed to prove its rightness. At any event, one morning a cry came from the crow's nest high above the deck of the admiral's vessel: "Land ahoy!" And Rigo's brother descried with his telescope (later made famous among philatelists by the well-known series of postage stamps) an island marked on none of his numerous charts. And not just some ephemeral atoll, but an actual solid island, its extent giving substance in the most convincing manner to

those rumours of a new continent. The crew, summoned at once on deck, stood open-mouthed: they gazed on a rapidly growing richly verdant coast that seemed to promise all the world's delights, a line whose eastern and western ends extended beyond the range of vision. To the south as far as the eye could see, a hinterland seemed to stretch out behind it – distant volcanoes and shining golden mountains offered proof. In short, they had arrived, they really were there, and every other possibility weighed in the balance before they took the matter in hand like men and pulled it all together – the possibility that Rigo had drowned on his outward voyage or that he had never made it so far south or that he had landed not here but on some other island – all such foolish hypotheses were now, for obvious reasons, not worth a mention.

They went ashore, the landscape was lush and exuberant, the earth smelled now fruity, now metallic, and so they really were in their sought-after land. The very next morning they set off, in such good order they might almost have been rehearsing an opera, armed men in the van, mules behind, then wagons, behind these the scientists, and – thanks naturally and exclusively to the genius of their leader – with such a self-evident nose for the direction they should head in if they were to rescue Rigo and his men, that no one, on the first day at least (since they encountered no natives and met with no resistance), harboured the slightest doubt, and every manjack was convinced that (as they put it) they would soon “trim Death's sails”.

Now, the matter was not actually so simple. Talk of “trimming” was misplaced. The adventure they had committed to, alas, proved from Day Two on to be bigger and somewhat bloodier than expected, not least of course because of certain primitive, ungrateful and legally ignorant native tribes, whose presence on precisely this island was no more justified than their very existence on this Earth. And the hope of finding Rigo and his men was not to be fulfilled so soon. Yet, when we look back on what they achieved in just a couple of months – on the extent of territory they traversed – on the maps they drew – on the metals they assayed and found good – on the provinces they cleared of pestilential forests, animal species and human tribes, thereby opening them up to cultivation: beside the grandeur – or let us say, with no false modesty, beside the spectacular world-historical scope of this cultural achievement, the few setbacks were naught but minor and isolated blemishes.

Nowadays everyone in Molussia knows that the political and cultural upswing and the economic boom that our Fatherland has enjoyed since those days were due solely to the discovery of the island by the daredevil pioneer Rigo, and to its laborious conquest by his brother Rigo the Second. There cannot be a schoolboy in Molussia who does not feel a frisson of awe at the sound of the island's name, for it betokens sacred ground. Yes indeed: sacred. Perhaps the word at first seems excessive to the ears of the uninformed. But if in explanation I add (having been unable to do so earlier, given the abundance of information to be imparted) that thanks to the thorough combing of the entire island, the search for Rigo and his men proved in the end not entirely fruitless – that the vanished expedition was in fact found, albeit only in the lamentable condition of smashed bones, in a narrow pass that the heroes had clearly defended to the utmost against the cowardly superiority of cunning natives – and that now those smashed bones lie beneath the simple block of granite (famous from a thousand reproductions) which in the meantime has become the National Molussian Shrine. Having added all this, I

hope the reader will concede that the expression “sacred ground” is by no means overblown pathos, and that the shiver of the *numinous* experienced even by children at the sound of the name RIGONIA (as the island is known these days, of course) needs no explanation. One may well assert that the majority of our people (which happily also means the best), when they hear the name Rigonia, actually see the two heroes there before them, and think of them with pride, with humility, with both gratitude and grief. Yes, grief, given that Rigo the Younger is meanwhile no longer among us, but, being no less of a mortal, has found his eternal rest at his brother’s side beneath the granite slab.

*

This then is the tale I wanted to tell. And I should not need to emphasize how happy I was to conclude with those solemn words. If I now replace them with a highly contradictory Afterword, the fault is not mine. On the contrary: I would render myself guilty of lies and self-deception were I to lay down my pen and act as if we might gaze carefree and with confidence into the future. Why can we not?

*

There is an old Molussian saying: “When great events occur, ordure falls never far behind”. This not exactly golden rule applies, unfortunately, to this case. Hardly had the great event “Rigonia” – truly not unworthy of a future heroic saga – been acclaimed and inwardly appropriated by the Molussian populace, with the same understanding that the simple person instinctively and with no need for study brings to any solemn affair, than ordure was already whirling, spattering this mythopoeic event like lumps of carrion. What I refer to by the term “ordure” is probably clear enough; there are similar phenomena in every country. Anyway: I mean our “intellectuals”, some of them, an inferior sort, some even employed in our higher education institutions (hence, *nota bene*, supported by tax funds), whose occupation appears to consist of nothing but poking their noses into matters that do not concern them, casting aspersions on splendid enterprises, and besmirching every nest – preferably their own.

Naturally these intellectuals would not endorse my depiction of their profession. On the contrary: they always have expressions at the ready for their activities, mostly very high-sounding and of course always totally negative, e.g. the expressions “clarify” or “unmask” or “get to the bottom of” and so on; this type never lacks for words and rhetoric.

Well then: our island, only just explored and ploughed over by Rigo the Second, had not yet even acquired its name Rigonia when these gentlemen stretched their grimy hands towards it in order to tear it away from us. I don’t mean that they had any desire to take ownership of this treasure for themselves, or that they possessed the manly urge to head there in person – that would have been worthy of a man, and perfectly reasonable. No, they simply begrudged possession of Rigonia by our Fatherland Molussia (i.e. by ourselves); if indeed a grudge was the actual linchpin of their spirit, which perversely is not (at least not primarily) interested in the target of its busyness – in effect to lay a hand and claim “this is mine”. No, that is not at all what this type wants.

To be specific: what these intellectuals did was to perpetrate under the rubric *The Rigonia Affair* (just imagine: the trashy term “affair” for a matter sacred to the Fatherland!), to invent under this insolent title the most outrageous lies about Rigonia,

and not be shy about publishing them. For example, that the first expedition ten years earlier was never undertaken – this, despite the thousands and thousands of eye witnesses, and many hundreds even today who had viewed the flotilla's departure with deepest emotion. Truly inexplicable. Conclusive is the principle that evidence can ever only be grounded and attested in perception and feeling, as expounded both by the profoundest thinkers and by ourselves, who invoke nothing more than the public spirit. For those types, on the other hand, for our flat-headed hollow-chested intellectuals – for them this principle seems not to apply.

The fact that an entire people had seen and attested to an event that could never fade from memory – in their eyes this deserved not the slightest credence. Rather, they “established” that what millions had perceived with their own eyes was a sheer phantom; and of course since each of these vain literati put forward his own personal caprice and insisted on his own personal favourite account, each had his own approach to deconstruction. Thus, for example, one asserted that Rigo the First never lived, and so never stepped ashore on Rigonia and so could not have met his end there. That consequently the so-called “Rescue Expedition”, insofar as it made sense to speak of such a thing, was a fictitious construct; that the motives and interests behind such a fiction must be subjected to “the utmost scepticism” and “the most ruthless scientific scrutiny”. This, I feel, approaches the mystical. At the very least, it is puzzling that anyone can be bold enough to dispute the existence of an ancestor, even when the ancestor's presence in history is attested not only by the perceptions of his contemporaries but also by the gratitude of succeeding generations, and, not least, by the consequences for which we all owe our thanks: in this case, the almost breathtaking prosperity of Rigonia, and of Molussia with it.

Now, this version is, as said, but one among many, for other “scholars” (as some would call themselves) concede the reality of the *first* expedition. But they tolerate this concession only in order to slander the *second* (which, as we recall, was improvised in great haste as soon as news about Rigo first began to circulate). They malign the latter by depicting it as having in fact been prepared by the government, industry, the navy and the army quite systematically over many months and years, while the government released the news about Rigo (the news with which our report began) only at the very last moment, when preparations for the second expedition were already complete.

Now this version exists also in a less provocative form, put forward by a “historian”, which asserts that there is no basis at all for talk of two Rigos, that the existence of two brothers is supported by no eye witnesses or documents at all. That possibly the one Rigo who did exist, and who really does seem to have been an uncommonly capable and enterprising captain, discovered the island by accident, correctly adjudged its profitability, and after a brief sojourn there returned posthaste to Molussia to alert the political class there, and eventually, after many years of preparation by the government and the power groupings supposedly supporting it, was entrusted with a second stab at the island in order (I cite our favourite historian) “in the most physical sense to conquer it and prepare it for systematic exploitation”. A version that, when one thinks it through to the end, actually proves even more shameless and insulting than the previous one. For it implies that Rigo the Second, when he embarked on his second expedition ostensibly to come to Rigo's rescue, was actually engaged in a hunt for *his own* mortal

remains, or that alternatively, despite the existence of the ponderous, massive and truly evidential monumental shrine mentioned above, any remains of Rigo the First that might have been discoverable in fact never existed.

But why should I speak of matters that were only “implied”, when among our “historians” and “interpreters” there is even one in whose shoddy but not unskilfully composed confection we can read in black and white that Rigo’s supposed remains were actually from the thousands of baggage animals conveyed to Rigonia by the second expedition; but this case involved one particular piece of baggage *sui generis*, one piece imported specifically *in order* for it to be found there. Which our historian admittedly views as no isolated case, rather as one expressly characteristic of present-day trends, for we (as he declares in a head-exploding thesis which even to rebut would grant too much honour to this “theoretician”) – for we “live in an epoch that basically invents and produces by itself whatever it wishes to be discovered”.

To whom the mortal remains at rest beneath our National Shrine belong, to what man of flesh and blood who once trod our Earth they belong is, according to this author, unknown but also insignificant; for one fact only is certain, one fact only matters: that under no circumstances can it have anything to do with Rigo’s bones, since the supposedly lost leader either never existed, or was identical to the leader of the second expedition.

I must confess: the diverse trains of thought outlined above seem to me less than lucid. I have a feeling that I should perhaps apologise for this – although it would be otiose to declare that I bear no blame for the views I have pilloried. But there is one point to which I have a duty to respond, for everyone has a right to know why I consider it imperative to report so extensively on this tiny, and certainly ineffectual, little clique, or rather worthless gaggle. The question is all the more appropriate given that (a point on which we have not yet touched) these intellectuals are at the same time very cautious chaps, meaning that they as good as never have the courage to leap into the broad public forum, into the truly democratic mass media, in order to pour out their scorn in an obvious, mainstream and comprehensive manner, giving full vent to their lies. Why they won’t do it (and we invite them most heartily to join in) these brethren know full well. I mean they are no less aware than we are of the steadfastness of our national Molussian virtues, and they have a quite realistic picture of the echoes that their infamy would call forth, were they to shout it out too loudly. That is why, in contradiction to all our democratic Molussian customs, they hide away in tiny specialist and gutter-press publications where they can remain among themselves, to some extent beyond the reach of hostile fire.

And with that, the question of why I take these men so seriously is answered.

What makes them so dangerous is precisely their tactic of playing hide-and-seek, their preference for darkness, which allows them to be obscurantists whose influence cannot be evaluated and hence cannot be monitored. The situation is graver than ever. It is beyond imagining how many, how many thousands, of clandestine little sheets may be circulating in which this rabble spreads its rat poison, and which we cannot confront because they can nowhere be seized and closed down. Indeed, there is no truer saying, one we should take constantly to heart, than that old trusty democratic maxim: *nothing*

is more dangerous than a minority. And the threat, and our duty to liquidate it, increases the smaller and less visible that minority is.

It is not what remains hidden that is sinister, but rather what has the ability to remain totally asymptomatic. Precisely because those “intellectuals”, samples of whose detestable notions we have explored above, are not encountered at every turn is why we must hold ourselves constantly alert to their existence. And this is why my conclusion – and probably no one could coin a more lapidary warning – is the incomparable warcry that as we know originates from one of the two Rigos, but from which of the two matters not, for either one could be just as good an author as the other:

“Stay alert!”

THE MOLUSSIAN APOCRYPHA

From YEGUSSA'S COLD TURKEY

Bamba

Bamba, the Fat Man, was a Molussian legend. He was the shining example invoked by gentlefolk who anathematised as demeaning every task and every activity, and assigned the true quality of human beings to their weight and their merely physical existence. He was celebrated and sold on the streets of Molussia in a thousand varieties of small varnished images and statuettes. But his fame was founded on the following story:

*

Bamba, who weighed not less than 150 bants, worked in the Kri's diamond quarry. Being as sly as he was fat and lazy, he applied for a position at the big sand-scales. He caused great astonishment when he explained the role he wanted to bring to the scales; namely, to be nothing other than his weight.

He managed to demonstrate to the Kri by calculation that he would cost less than metal, and would render redundant the purchase of weighing-pans and the employment of a weight-placer, possessing as he did the advantage of self-mobility. Once he convinced the Kri that he could deflect onto his own person, his own heavy weight, the hatred the workers directed at her, his point became obvious. The pans of the Kri's sand-scales were cleared for Bamba, and now he had the spot he had coveted his whole life.

Bamba's 150 bants exactly matched the weight of a big bag of sand, for each of which the Kri's sand-diggers were owed one cowrie-yan. Ensuring that his body never gained weight was the task of shovellers who stole his rice, cheerfully making use of him to spare themselves three shovelfuls. Ensuring that he never lost weight was a matter for the Kri: the overseer was to feed him figs and all manner of sweet and fatty things to fatten him up. For she'd gladly pay the sand-diggers the same amount for a heavier bag.

The overseer prodded him to see if his ribs showed; workers measured his neck and belly to see if he was fattening. And so everyone was concerned with Bamba's belly, and every day the Kri had to attend as much to his corporeal well-being as to her Pariahs. But Bamba let it happen, and all he did was sit in the pan of the great scales and be as heavy as one bag of sand paid at the rate of one cowrie-yan.

When the Kri came past one day on one of her inspections, she stopped by Bamba and was pleased with his unaltered amplitude, which guaranteed the cheapness of her bags of sand. When she saw him sitting there heavy, coppery and motionless, she spoke to him from her extraordinary graciousness: 'What are you doing, Bamba, what are you thinking about?'

'Nothing, and about nothing,' Bamba replied.

'Why nothing and about nothing?'

‘Because you pay me a salary to give a true account for the weight of a bag of sand, morn till night. If the responsibility you have assigned me left me the leisure to move the little finger of my hand, or dwell on the tiniest thought, you’d be overpaying me, Kri. I am rising in my profession, which is no disgrace, and it suits me down to the ground.’

‘You’re my man,’ Kri praised her favourite.

*

‘It is incomprehensible,’ concludes, somewhat didactically, the report in a chronicle, ‘that not only Bamba, but Kri herself, the entrepreneur, should live on among the Molussian people as a figure of myth, having even a saintly aura. According to the myth, she called for an end to the ignoble repression of human beings by means of inanimate objects, and so saved Humanity.’

‘When stupid people’ (this is the chronicle’s final sentence) ‘are made fearful by the wicked, they seek refuge in hero-worship.’

But the scepticism expressed here made no dents in the robustness of Bamba’s fame. For arguments cannot prevail against images; and the corpulent form of Bamba, the man of weight, persisted as incomprehensibly ironclad as when he lived.

The Brothers

Hannkao lived in Kao, in the Valley of Cliffs. He lived alone, took full responsibility for himself, stood guarantor for risks to his clan, hated the levelling down of human beings, and was an individual. There was no harder granite than his, and none that polished so readily. But in order to fulfil all the orders for battleaxes that came to him from the island of Rapedusa, he needed handles made from the timber of his twin brother Hannki.

Hannki lived in Ki, in the Valley of Forests, He lived alone, took full responsibility for himself, stood guarantor for risks to his clan, hated the levelling down of human beings, and was an individual. The heartwood for his axe handles was unsurpassed. But in order to fulfil all the orders for battleaxes that came to him from the island of Rapedusa, he needed good granite from the quarries of his twin brother Hannkao.

So the two of them met halfway between Ki and Kao in the forest of their parents, and with soothing words gave assurances of their love for peace. But they agreed the following deal: the number of handles delivered by Hannki to his brother would be matched equally by the number of blades he would receive from Hannkao, and they should each charge not less than three silver yan per weapon. With glances by no means friendly they drank to this supplementary contract and to their shared Hann blood. And after they had drunk they each gave the other a loud mistrustful clap on the shoulder.

Next morning Hannki set off back to the Valley of Forests and Hannkao to the Valley of Cliffs. Once they were far enough apart, each spied on the other making his solitary way.

The contract came into effect, and each supplied the other, though reluctantly. Hannkao was gnawed by a feeling that he had made himself dependent on Hannki, and Hannki was no less annoyed by the fact that their rivalry was so futile. For they each

produced the same number of axes, and the axes all resembled the twins in being identical.

So Hannki sent his brother the most defective handles, to drive him out of business; and Hannkao sent his brother chipped blades, so he wouldn't have to share the fame of his weapons, for which there was no substitute. Now the axes were in fact different. But their value remained identical, just like the value of the twin brothers Hannki and Hannkao. But the worse the quality of their battleaxes, the more their mutual hatred grew. And each thought day and night of nothing but the other, and how best to ruin him.

Now Hannki decided to underbid his twin by one silver yan, and sell his axes to the dealer from the island of Rapedusa at a loss. He hoped this would steer the dealer away from his brother Hannkao. But when the dealer heard of Hannki's offer, he insisted with a thousand affirmations that he could not accept a price of two silver yan per axe: 'Your brother Hannkao,' he said, 'asked no more than one silver yan for any axe, and his axes had better blades. But he made me an offer of stone blocks for fortifications that would make him rich.' When Hannki heard this, he resolved to outbid his brother in every respect. He made a present of his axes, and assured the dealer of the deep respect he had always harboured for the warlike island of Rapedusa. And he recommended his wooden spears, the straightest and longest-range of any within a circumference of six days travel. The dealer wished him luck with his offer, and promised to respond within a month with an urgent order for spears.

When the month was up, Hannkao had his cargo of fortification stones ready for loading, and Hannki had a warehouse full of spears. But when there was no sign of the dealer, Hannkao blamed his brother Hannki for the wasted work, and Hannki blamed his brother Hannkao for his wasted work. They set out, each intent on murder. They met halfway in the valley of their parents, each with a battleaxe in his right hand. They were as identical as a reflection in a mirror. When they set to, it is said that the sight was as if someone shattered his mirror image; and neither of them came away. Their stock was sold off cheap, and even today the island of Rapedusa honours the Hann brothers as the epitome of a sleazy merchant family.

Running dialogue, or why Mr Basik wants to be immortal

"When I think," Yegussa began one night, "how much time we lose down here." Olo replied:

*

When Basik, the company rep, reached the age of 60, his family doctor forbade him to continue in his profession. But Basik was unable to give up old habits.

'What's the hurry?' asked Mr Bo when they met.

Mr Basik made it clear he could speak only on the move.

'Business?' asked Bo, alongside.

'I'm walking,' Basik replied.

'That's as may be,' Bo declared. 'But I am *also* going for a stroll.'

‘A stroll?’ Basik asked in a tone of the most solemn duty. ‘*Stroll? In broad daylight?*’ And he quickened his pace.

‘Oh I see,’ said Bo a while later, already a bit out of breath. ‘You’re in a walking race.’

‘*Walking race?*’ Basik responded still more sharply, ‘*Walking race? In broad daylight?*’ And stepped up the pace even more. And so they strode on side by side, and passers-by envied them the urgency of their business.

After a while Mr Bo made his friend stop. Mr Basik jogged from one foot to the other.

‘You’re not in a hurry for business. And not for pleasure, and not for exercise.’

Mr Basik looked about anxiously, in case someone saw him standing so unforgivably neglectful of his duty. ‘Come,’ he said, and off he went again.

‘I don’t want to interfere,’ Mr Bo assured him. ‘But isn’t it a shame, when you could be having a nice time?’

‘Am I to laze about at home, perhaps?’

‘Who said that? But what about a good novel, for example?’

Mr Basik’s outburst lost no time in coming: ‘*A novel? Did you say a novel? In broad daylight?*’

‘A novel,’ Mr Bo confirmed as he ran alongside, and passers-by envied them the urgency of their business.

Mr Basik’s anger seemed unwilling to subside. ‘So what exactly is your opinion of my time?’ he cried after a while.

‘That’s easy,’ Mr Bo replied. ‘I think you’ve wasted your time these past forty years, Mr Basik. Day after day.’

Mr Basik dropped his little sample case. It sprang open, and was empty. Mr Bo bent to pick it up, but Mr Basik was there before him, with unexpected alacrity. When he straightened his face was bright red. ‘Ridiculous!’ he said. ‘All gone. I’ve fulfilled the lot!’

‘That’s just the point,’ was Mr Bo’s verdict. ‘Nothing but fulfilling. With unnecessary rep work. Year after year. So that with every new year you can *fulfil* your time with yet more rep work. Or did you maybe *find yourself* in your rep work? You see. That was your life. And that’s what you lost it for, your time. Or did you perhaps *have it*?’ (There came no answer from Mr Basik.) ‘You see. And now you *do* have your time. And you might be able to find yourself. And enjoy it. Instead, you’re afraid to *lose* it because you *have* it. And that’s how you lose it.’

Once again Mr Bo received no response. When he looked up, Mr Basik was already twenty paces ahead. And passers-by envied him the urgency of his business.

Half a year later Mr Bo encountered his friend again. Although Mr Basik still carried his sample case, he seemed to have given up his walking-race. His gaze was fixed resolutely upwards. To the face of a big town clock, Mr Bo ascertained as he approached.

‘So, how’s things?’ he asked in an offhand way. He was tactful enough not to start lecturing all at once.

Mr Basik never took his eyes off the clock. 'Standing around like this,' he replied almost inaudibly, 'is not the worst. One does what one can. Now and then one even completes some modest task. Then the time is not entirely lost. *But when I think of all the time after I am dead. Year after year. How it will all be wasted. A man should be immortal.*'

This was too much for Mr Bo. When Basik looked around, Mr Bo was already twenty paces ahead. 'What's the hurry!' Basik called, and ran after him.

'I'm walking,' Bo replied. But passers-by envied them the urgency of their business.

*

Yegussa had no idea what to make of this tale. Not even whether Bo was in the right, or Basik.

"It's not so simple," Olo replied to Yegussa's question. "Bo seems to come out on top. For he seems to realise that spare time means freedom. But when one loses his own time in order to gain it *for himself*, this he doesn't seem to have thought about. Basik seems the more rigorous. He knows that time is an opportunity for duties. But when it comes to the test: are those duties worthwhile – there he seems not so rigorous.

"So you see," concluded Olo, "truth and untruth are apportioned between both men. So we must sort them out afresh. The time we lose for the situation that put us down here is lost time. But our situation is: to bring about the time in which our nearest and dearest up there don't even have to sell their time anymore."

The child's coffin

Shouldering a child's coffin, Basik stepped to the kerb to let an oncoming carriage pass.

'I never knew you had a child,' the coachman began as he stopped beside Basik. 'My sincere condolences.'

To the extent that his burden allowed, Basik shook his head.

'You mean, it wasn't yours that died?'

'I have no children.'

'Well then,' said the coachman. 'And where did the accident happen?'

Basik tried to shake his head more vigorously. 'I've just come from an auction,' he declared, implying that this explained everything.

'And?'

'How much do you think this coffin is worth?'

The coachman wiped his moustache. 'Could be worth 150.'

'Could be? What does *could be* mean? It *is* worth 150.'

'So... whose kid is it that died?'

Basik wasn't listening. 'And how much do you think it cost me?'

'A hundred. And whose kid is it that died?'

'A hundred?' cried Basik with fiery contempt. 'Is that what you think? – Two and a half.'

'That's not much at all. And whose kid is it that died?'

'It was a present, my dear man,' Basik informed him.

'I had no idea you had kids in your village,' the coachman said now.

'Kids? No, we have none. What would we do with kids?'

'So why do you need the coffin?'

Basik gave the coachman a puzzled stare. 'But I ask you: a hundred and forty-seven and a half pure profit. Should I perhaps have passed up the chance?'

'Not at all,' the coachman conceded with a somewhat dubious look. 'Well then,' he said after a while, 'you'll wait for someone to die and then sell it.'

'I don't think so,' said Basik. 'I fear I'd never recoup the hundred and fifty that it's worth. And am I to sell it at a loss?'

Learning to bet without believing.

'I have faith in the Chillers,' said the Usalian.

'What are you talking about,' his friend scoffed. 'What are you risking with your faith? If the Chillers go down?'

'They? Go down?' the Chiller mocked. 'What do you know about it? Do have inside info? Regular? First class? About the state of all things Chiller?'

'Exactly,' the sceptic replied. 'That's why I don't believe. My sources aren't first class enough. And yours wouldn't be enough for me either. But I've *placed my bet*.'

'Sorry?'

'I've placed a bet on the Chillers,' the sceptic explained. 'A thousand gold Bants. And if the Chillers go down, I'll lose the thousand I staked.'

'Is that so?' the Chiller drawled. Such daring turned him pale. 'That so? A thousand Bants? You bet that much on us?'

'Don't you expect that much if the Chillers win?' the sceptic asked naively. But the Chiller shook his head. All he could see was the risk and not the opportunity, and he showed no irritation. 'You know,' he whispered as he put the initial surprise behind him, and he gave the sceptic a deep look, 'let me tell you something.'

'I'm all ears,' the sceptic offered.

'You're already a proper Chiller. In secret. You just don't know it.' (The sceptic brushed this aside.) 'But believe me, they are the best.'

This confidence was too much for the sceptic. 'Leave it,' he said rudely. 'Just tell me how much you've bet.'

The Chiller was taken aback, not knowing where to begin with the confidence he had offered so generously and the other had so insultingly rejected.

'Believing is betting without risk,' the sceptic summed up, turned heel, and left.

*

"And why did you tell that story?" asked Yegussa.

“Because we must learn to bet without believing; and because we should not believe just because we laid a bet.”

People are only half-finished

“The World-bakers, or whoever it was that created us, they made us sociable, admittedly – it’s in the Instructions for Use they included with us, that say they made us unable to survive alone, without cooperation – but *what* our society should look like, whether like a swarm or like a state or like a club – by what rules the society should be run, by what morals – matters that had already been sorted out for animals, but in the Instructions for Use of human beings there was nothing! Before they set down the rules, the World-bakers (or whoever it was), forgetting their duty, or from a desire to experiment, or pride or boredom – they drew back.

“There they sat, the first Molussians, with their *sociability in the abstract*, and scratched their heads. And grew dissatisfied with the world as it is, and felt a pressing need to live in a different one more attuned to them. But what the style of this world to be constructed over the existing world should be – about this the Instructions for Use were silent. The wasp had been prescribed its very specific hexagon, the snail its specific shell, the ant its heap and its behaviour down to the smallest detail – but the only advice to humanity was that it should feel the utmost dissatisfaction with the world as it is! In short: because there was no prescribed morality for humanity, it had to find all by itself the specificity that the World-bakers, or Nature, had neglected to hand down.”

“What kind of specificity?” Yegussa asked.

“All kinds. But each in its very fixed way. So they themselves had to complete what Nature had neglected, shape what had been left shapeless. But because there’s an endless number of possible societies and styles and rules and arrangements, each is specified *by chance*. And it *must* be specified, for whatever is not *what it is* in a specific and fixed way cannot survive. But because the specificity is always a matter of chance, it carries with it to some extent the odium that it *might have been otherwise*, that other rules would have been possible, equally possible, maybe even more possible – but, as said, of necessity the rules were *specific*, and so always had to be carried through with dreadful rigour and cruelty. And all the more cruelly when the task – which consists in *filling the gap* of an incompletely created society, of making specific what is thoroughly unspecific – must be carried out not once and for all by *one* monstrous act of change, but must be renewed and monitored each and every day.”

“And in your opinion,” Yegussa enquired hesitantly, for this myth was quite new to him, “this chasing after what was left out at the beginning – is *morality*?”

“Precisely.”

“Then there’d be no cause for pride,” Yegussa ventured, “in having our manners and morals. I mean in contrast to animals. All we do is acquire what they have anyway.”

“That seems true at first glance,” Olo conceded, “but only at first.”

“And why not at second glance?”

“Because we had the capacity, we the uncompleted, to complete ourselves, because we could perhaps measure up to our deficiency.”

“Measure up?”

"Yes. For that's the definition of freedom. ... Who knows," Olo continued, "maybe there were countless other life forms that the World-bakers (or whoever created the world) laid out on the grass in the same way as us, half-finished and unspecific, and with deceiving Instructions for Use, and these moved in generalities. And they sat down beside them to observe, to see what this half-finished, unspecific creature would choose. But the choice couldn't come from itself, for it had no key to this specific form or that specific form, and it expired miserably having exhausted the little bit of life force it was endowed with. You might think it was all for the amusement of the Bakers."

"And you mean," Yegussa interrupted, in an attempt to pull Olo back from his theological games to more serious problems, "you mean the morals of human beings are the methods they invented to make specific what was not specific?"

Olo nodded.

"How come I've never heard of this lack of specificity before?"

"Because you were usually led astray by two other concepts."

"Which were?"

"Freedom, and the Fall of Man."

Yegussa couldn't see the connection.

"The human being is free: free of specific forms just as water is formless and can take on the form of every shape it is poured into. It always *has* a form, even if only by chance."

"And that's freedom?" asked Yegussa in consternation. What he (quite rightly) associated with this word resembled Olo's definition not in the slightest.

"Only the most modest beginnings," Olo conceded. "Freedom means that unlike water, our lack of form allows us to give *ourselves* a form ever and again; we who were born without fixed morals can give *ourselves* morality."

"We?" Yegussa asked, puzzled again.

"By we, I mean we humans," Olo explained. "And that we, though created without a fixed morality, without a specific form, we could give ourselves morality and form, ways of acting, paths of conduct – obstacles and regulations ..."

"Strings," Yegussa added.

"Right, strings – that comes closer to what we term *freedom*."

Yegussa found this deeply disconcerting. "If strings mean freedom, then unfreedom is freedom. And so we're also enjoying freedom *down here*!"

"In a certain sense, yes."

"*Our* sense?"

"Good question. Yes and no."

"And that's the nub of it?" asked Yegussa, who felt they'd hit on the salient point.

"Correct. For *people* and *we people* are deeply problematic plurals. For *the* people and *we* people don't actually exist."

"That's really astonishing."

"What is?"

"What you just said."

“Why?”

“Because I learned that at school. From our enemies. From the Burrists. ‘Humans in general’ they taught us ‘no longer exist. Only Molussians and non-Molussians.’ And because they stoked up hostility towards all non-Molussians, since they wanted to conquer and rule over them, no non-Molussian could share common characteristics with Molussians. And that’s why they labelled treasonous every religion and every science that claimed *general truths* and truths that applied *to everyone*. But to hear it from *your mouth!*”

“And what does your false teaching prove?”

“Nothing, if it’s false.” Yegussa’s thinking couldn’t stretch that far.

“There again it’s not so simple. That false teaching does indeed prove something. Not so much by what it says, as by the fact that people say it.”

This logical conversation was not at all easy for Yegussa. In the dark his face screwed up to a pout, as if he was being imposed upon.

“For what they say proves that it’s not *the* people or *we* people who complete the incompletely created humans, not *the* people or *we* people who introduce customs and morality, but always one group only: the powerful! The freedom of people to give specificity to those born unspecified attains reality only with power. The same goes for a group that presumes to take away the freedom of others, to enslave them. That’s where law begins – and with it, too, morality, compared with the state of being unspecified.

Yegussa’s mouth hung open. “*Morality begins with slavery?!?*”

“*Begins*. When everyone knows his function in life, knows what’s demanded of him, he knows where he stands with respect to all others. He can take precautions and make plans. And can therefore survive in society.”

“I always thought rule by force was immoral.”

“Correct. But we haven’t reached that bit yet. If you have to remain patient for years and decades before you leave here and go up there again – and who knows *whether* you’ll go up there again – then you might still have enough patience to follow along from one thought to the next. He who learns to think, learns more than thinking.”

“And you think that what we call *morals* are just bye-laws of the powerful?

“Prettied up with the patina of time and the comforts of custom. And they are a comfort. ... One knows in advance what others will do, the way of the world in a group with moral norms is transparent, everyone is a prophet.”

“Pleasant for those giving the orders.”

Olo shook his head. “That’s the fly in the ointment. Pleasant for those who obey, as well. For they too know what tomorrow will bring, and how the world will roll on – quite apart from the fact that those who give the orders take cover and claim they too are just following orders.”

Nature leaps forward

“Whatever is sudden,” Olo wakened Yegussa with a voice of thunder, “overturning with no transition – whatever has not grown naturally and organically, can never last.”

“What?” Yegussa asked, emerging from sleep. “What won’t last?” Olo began again at the beginning, and concluded with: “Be warned!”

“What?” Yegussa asked again. “And why are you shouting?”

“That’s how a speech aimed at the Pariahs ended, proclaimed in the streets by government parties and moderate Aspedee groups. Because they were afraid the Pariahs might be carried away, and hinder Burru’s slow and unstoppable march to power by fomenting a revolution. What would you like to pronounce on this topic?”

Yegussa was far too sleepy to pronounce on anything.

“The Pariah leader Bo at once distributed a counter-flier. ‘Aspedee mothers!’ it said, ‘Don’t give birth! Nine months pregnancy is organic – but birth is sudden. Nine months in the dark is organic – but coming into the world is sudden! Nine months not breathing is organic – but needing at once to breathe is sudden! Nothing sudden can last. Aspedee mothers, be warned!’

“But he added the following clarification: ‘Nature too takes great leaps. And we, who want change, could just as well appeal to leaping as you do to stasis. Are you for Nature when you build a house? Houses don’t grow. But, Aspedees, is this actually *about* Nature?’”

Why Olo laughs. The too-distant stars

Yegussa couldn’t believe his ears. He sat up. Olo was laughing. Olo was laughing out loud, and echoing into the darkness. He listened eagerly for a while. “Are you dreaming?” he asked doubtfully. And repeated almost in a shout: “Are you dreaming?” so as to wake the old man up if he was actually laughing in his sleep.

“Hard to say,” Olo replied with no trace of surprise. “How is anyone down here supposed to know if he’s gazing on nonsense, or dreaming the truth?”

Now Yegussa realised that Olo had laughed in order to wake him up. “So what were you laughing about?”

“About those who came too late. How they shuffled about.”

“Who came too late?”

“The thing is,” Olo said placatingly, “that after an earthquake there’ll be islands where people go on living as they always used to. There’ll be people who go on living in the rubble as if nothing happened. The kind of people who are too stupid to notice changes, and who punish world history with their contempt. Women who wash tureens for soups they’ll never again cook. Men who fight one another for customers who’ve long since gone broke. Children who learn languages to interact with people who vanished long ago.”

“That’s what you were dreaming about?”

“That’s what I was dreaming about. But a great star stood over the writers of Molussia. And although I knew the star had died a long time ago, it still shone with its golden power, for when it still existed, its course was millions of light years from Earth. And because it shone so bright, Molussians thought it the richest in gold of all the stars in the firmament, and they all got enormously busy: some made calculations, some tinkered about, some did experiments. But all of them gambled that an apparatus could

be invented to fly to the star, because they all lusted for the gold it contained. ... But I couldn't bear to see them caught up in such error. I tried to explain: 'The star is very white', I began modestly.

"The things you say,' someone responded, tinkering away and not looking up.

"If it can shine so bright,' said another, wiping his face, 'it must contain an enormous quantity of gold.' And he kept tinkering away.

"Could it not also be,' I tried patiently, 'that the only reason for the brightness of its shining is that it shines so brightly *here* just *because* it is so far away?"

Another raised his head and looked at me as if I were mad. And kept tinkering away.

"Could it not be,' I persisted unabashed, 'that it would grow dimmer the closer you approach? And that when you reach it ..."

But they wouldn't let me arrive at this last consequence. Someone dragged me aside, and another stood up and began to threaten me, as if I were a saboteur or a traitor.

But as I wandered on the ridge of hills that encloses Molussia, the city below looking like a termite mound, and when I realised that those with nothing in their thoughts but reaching that long-dead star numbered in their millions, I was seized by laughter."

But Yegussa was so disgusted, that every attempt to laugh along choked in his throat. He sat in the dark, mouth open.

"What was most scandalous," Olo concluded once his laughter had finally put itself to rest, "what was most scandalous was that the astronomical methods and instruments used by the Molussians sufficed to prove that the star was nothing more than an after-image. But ... what can I say ... even the astronomers kept tinkering away."

From THE VOICE OF TERROR

Reading Wheels

"Among the most important innovations that the dictator Burru brought in," Olo reported, "were the so-called *political reading-wheels*.

"These wheels – texts produced in the form of a wheel or roller – looked from the outside like a grindstone, and were equipped like one, turned at first by a hand-crank, later on powered by pedals. But their function could not have had less to do with sharpening. What Burru intended was to instil a dulled sleepwalker mood: the reader, once the text on the wheel had passed before his eyes long enough, fell into a state no different from that of the savage somnambulist trance of a monotonously chanting savage. The revolving text always brought the unheeding reader back to where he had started, and took him just as unheeding to the paragraph he had already read – if paragraph is the correct term, for the texts were so dense, undivided, lacking numbers, that given the absence of full stops and commas you hardly knew where to find beginning, middle or end. The only regular punctuation was the exclamation mark, used at regular intervals at least once in every line.

"When reading wheels were made such that the hand crank or pedals at the same time set off a glockenspiel, this coupling was far more than just a decorative frill. The associational psychologists brought in by Burru to advise on the design knew very well that when beloved melodies and political texts occur frequently together, they quickly

become merged stimuli. The melodies bestow something of their charm on the texts; and finally, after a certain time, the melodies alone are enough to induce in Molussians a mindset favourable to the Programme – to slavery, death, and killing. It goes without saying that the melodies too were endless, i.e. they contained within them a forced *da capo*. It was not by chance that the devices were deemed *a synthesis of all the arts*, for this ancient term conveyed that the person was to be attacked from all sides as a *totality*, that the person was to have no emergency exit from the artwork's spell."

"I'll make a note of that," said Yegussa, the younger cellmate.

"Yes, mark it well," admonished Olo the elder. "No man was ever more revered by Burru than the man who converted a total loss of freedom into one of life's pleasures. For he was the progenitor of the reading wheel."

Yegussa imprinted on his heart this often observed but never understood relationship.

"The first text," Olo resumed, "the first to be published in this novelty format, copied onto hundreds of wheels, was a version of Burru's world-famous quasi-holy book, in which he glorified himself and his coming regime even before he seized power. A few days after his installation, wheels were turning on every Molussian street corner, in schools and in parks. Only rarely was one left idle. Soon, acquiring a wheel was a precondition for staying politically above suspicion. In rear courtyards of tenement buildings it became a blatant piece of virtue-signalling furniture. Any who weren't seen by neighbours turning the handle on at least two evenings a week risked being subjected to disgusting indignities, and soon the gravest peril.

"*It is almost superfluous to describe the spiritual and political benefits the reading wheel has brought with it*, read one of the professorial testimonies, for Molussia's intellectuals were loyal enough to place their powers at the service of the struggle against the spirit:

It is clear that each single wheel can replace any number of books. Since wheels never come to an end, one can fundamentally never reach the end of a reading wheel; no reader can ever fall into the temptation of dipping into other reading matter; breaking off somewhere causes torments; the reader is always 'in the thick of it'

"Elsewhere the testimonial says:

Whither the text leads as if down a one-way street can never be descried in advance. Books normally lead on and then stop; at the end the reader even wishes for conclusions to be drawn, i.e. to obtain distance from the contents of the book, to engage with it. The traditional type of book can never hold the reader; even the most engrossing book sets him free on the last page: he can have the last word. This possibility, this freedom, this last word is now guided by the reading wheel. It can never happen that the reader emerges from the confines of the text, none can break through to a spiritual realm in which criticism becomes possible. *There is no more last page.*

"The testimonial concluded:

The format of discourse in traditional books corresponds not in the least to Burru's rule. The totality of his dominion knows no more of a beginning than of

a middle or an end. To translate the finality, well-roundedness and totality of his dominion into the one-thing-after-another of a typical book – to do that, is to falsify.

“And since no Molussian heritage was too sacred to exploit in support of Burru, he ended with these splendid words from a Molussian classic:

Thy song is changeful as yon starry frame,
End and beginning evermore the same;
And what the middle bringeth, but contains
What was at first, and what at last remains.”⁵⁶

All this did Olo relate. And he too was unable to quote this sublime verse about Eternity without lending it a solemn tone.

Yegussa waited with bated breath. The vaulted dungeon seemed too small for such lovely poetry. “Wonderful,” he whispered at last. The beauty had entered into his very marrow.

“It is wonderful,” Olo contradicted, as if he found Yegussa’s enthusiasm totally inadequate. “And this wonderful image,” he continued – trying to strike a dry note to break the magic spell – “this image of the circling universe with no beginning or end, this image of the universe that is simply there, devoid of history, progress and decay, but the very epitome of existence and the eternal return – this image was invoked by the learned Molussian in order to bless the reading wheel, to justify the manufacture of ubiquitous bigotry, and place his solemn professorial seal on the final and irrevocable Burrian terror regime. Wicked are the destroyers of the spirit,” he concluded, “but more wicked are their intellectual henchmen.”

And with these words Olo was truly done. But Yegussa – feeble, young, impressionable, enthusiastic – Yegussa, instead of dreaming about reading wheels and Olo’s disgust, dreamed only of the four sublime lines. And because he was lying on hard flagstones in the confines of his subterranean grot, there before his eyes was the vast shell of the heavenly vault, circling slow and gleaming and majestic – filling him with beauty, wonder and terror.

***Self-denial is profitable.
Making yourself bad improves you***

Olo explained:

The Molussian legal system was set up in such a way that – as Magnates reasoned at the time of its codification – every instance of tax evasion and every breach of common duty, where not expressly prohibited, was still automatically penalised. It was the duty of every citizen – and here was the surprisingly simple principle of their system of justice – to pay exactly the same number of gold yans in tax as the number of voting tokens cast at elections. ‘The advantage of the right to cast multiple votes must bring with it a multiple tax obligation,’ said the first clause of the Election Ordinance. ‘Tax obligations and the right to vote are *one and the same*.’

⁵⁶ From Goethe: ‘The Unlimited’, in the *West-Östlicher Divan*. Tr. E. A. Bowring. [Tr.]

The Magnates, who were in any case masters of Mollussia, hoped with this to gain sanction for their powerful status, rendering it credible and frictionless by means of a legal stipulation. The stipulation even said somewhere that the wealthy should obviously be represented in the government by a proportionately higher number of votes. Yet greater wealth – indeed, the almost half of the nation they already owned – was at risk. On the other hand, any who had no ownership of the nation should be given no responsibility over its government. Of course in reality the principle of equity looked like this: for a second time the Magnates bought themselves the master-status they in any case already possessed, through the ploy of public taxes. The ploy: no one apart from themselves was to decide how the taxes everyone paid should be applied for national and communal benefit; for they were the masters. The stream of taxes, swollen by the huge number of small payments, flowed by devious routes back to themselves, to their mines and in particular to the plantations of Mollussia's eastern provinces. Their taxes were gifts they gave to themselves, augmented by what the poor gave. A typical application of their taxes was the public works project of the Big Bridge, which was made palatable to the population by the opportunities it provided for work, sightseeing and boosting national pride. But it facilitated the import of already cheap foreign workers. For the poorer part of the population the benefit of the bridge was a one-off: their wages during construction; the harm was permanent: Mollussian workers lost their jobs. But within a year the Magnates had recouped expenditure on the bridge through the benefits it brought. For them the expenditure was one-off, the benefits permanent.

Not until the unhappy end of the war were the relations of dominance put in a tricky position. The poorer population, especially the unemployed, had paid an excessive tax in the form of those crippled and killed. They now demanded to be compensated for their sacrifice with enhanced rights. Every Mollussian wanted his own personal vote, equivalent in weight to any Magnate's multiple votes, placed on the scales of the Mollussian scales of fortune. To be sure, the spirit of Democracy fluttered but feebly overhead. Their demands were timid, and it was almost only by chance they were put into effect, even though remaining merely demands – which they were almost prepared to retract. For Gog, the senior Magnate, vehemently denounced any materialistic comparison of purely material taxes with the sacrifice of lives, and any notion of a mutual offsetting, and demonstrated so conclusively that it was precisely those who had given their lives who now no longer had any claim on rights, that the clear conscience and energy needed for a radical change suffered an extraordinary collapse among those whom Gog called *hyenas of the battlefield*.

Although the Magnates stood by their moral arguments, they were actually not averse to introducing a new mode of voting, indeed were quite content to do so. *Those who volunteered to die for us will volunteer to live for us*, they said among themselves. The populace celebrated their victory, just as they had prematurely celebrated their victories before setting off to war.

Now that the Magnates no longer used their wealth for electoral advantage, they henceforth paid only minimal taxes. The withheld taxes were twice or three times as much as was needed to pay for posters, street-corner orators, itinerant agitators and whatever else to inject into the population favourable opinions of the Magnates, and

cause the suspicions raised against the Magnates after the war to be forgotten. Indeed, not merely opinions, but whole networks of opinions were draped over the populace, so that they thought the net was the world. And the opinions of themselves that the Magnates spread were by no means only the most favourable – but rather those most useful to them. Often bad was more useful than good.

And so the history of Molussia continued to be the history of its Magnates. There is no break between the times before the victory of democratic principles, and after. Funds that had earlier flowed by complicated detours to the Magnates' enterprises, augmented by the huge number of small tax payments, now simply stayed with the enterprises, with a small proportion used for the big propaganda campaign. Equitable rights has merely sanctioned the status quo ante, and entrenched the differences in wealth. Elections no longer gave advantage to the rich. But since their advantage was already assured by their withheld taxes, true elections were a duty solely for underlings: tenants, shoppers, and the workers drawn over to their side. There was no freedom of opinion, because they manufactured the opinions. But their propaganda was facilitated by the slogan *free expression of opinion* – a slogan of their democratic enemies. No one noticed that the slogan could be corrupted without penalty, and was in fact corrupted to the *free expression of unfree opinions*. Everyone could say what he thought was his *own* opinion. And everyone said it, because only the tiniest proportion of the population had more than one opinion; but the one opinion they had came from outside. The fact that this opinion once again succeeded at elections in giving mastery to the Magnates in an indisputable and legal manner – that a plundering of the democratic principle had once again enabled the enemies of the principle to prevail – this seemed even to democrats something miraculous; and because they were principled people, they dared not protest the consequences of what they had advocated. They loved principles more than facts. And they considered facts innocuous if they emerged from principles long loved and long defended. The democrats never possessed the means to create mass opinions, as the Magnates were now doing. And so the Magnates, after a few years' pause, were once again the official masters of Molussia.

The edict of silence

This is the famous Emergency Edict against the decay of language, which Ko, Priest of the See of the Sixth Excellence, caused to be proclaimed in the streets of Molussia on the eve of the eleventh year of his holy office, in the month of Hymnic Calumnies:

Language, Molussia's most ancient and honourable possession, is becoming dissipated and vulgarised. The appointed government, unappointed prophets, and with them the entire populace misuse it at every turn for the most unworthy purposes: arguing over infinitesimal differences, praising lucky charms, indulging in flattery, self-adulation, ostracism of others, filling in empty time. Commencing tomorrow, Time is now a closed season for language. Commencing tomorrow, language is deemed the ultimate weapon to be deployed only in the most extreme circumstances. Use of the sacred reservoir of words will be permitted only in cases of defence of the self and of others, and only for those final moments of discord once the multifarious means of physical violence or disparagement, of simple beating all the way to the language-like

art of fencing have, without success, been attempted and exhausted. Your speech is a brawl – so show your brawling. Only one who cannot be reached with blows, who grows leathery beneath your fists, who is armoured against your kicks, who is immune to your disparagements, only such a one is to be threatened with the ultimate weapon, with the terror of words held back, with the irresistibility of true arguments, with the uttering of the name that exposes him. Mode and severity of punishment for overstepping of the Edict now promulgated is reserved.

Ko, Priest of the See of the Sixth Excellence

The following morning started off in complete calm. The streets were no less crowded than on other anniversaries of Ko's accession as ruler. But the Edict was adhered to with the most appalling exactitude. You could hear the scrape of your own steps and the indistinct susurrations of a myriad garments brushing against one another. Not a word was to be heard. People spied, trailed, evaded. No one said a thing. And as more silent hours passed, the more impossible it became to speak into the general silence, which seemed to have become the irrevocable condition of the world. Foreigners, who as every year had come from peaceful islands with their wives to watch the famous spectacle of the Molussians from the balconies of their lodgings, declared that they had been lured to Molussia under false pretences. But their annoyance gradually turned to fear. They retreated to their rooms and awaited catastrophe. Some, outraged, quit the city without seeking the help of any Molussian, and only when the four towers were far behind them dared to utter isolated words to themselves. They were afraid they might have lost their own power of speech amid the general silence.

The city, however, was in the grip of a monstrous dumb seething. But the hand was as paralysed as the tongue. Until the onset of darkness not a single altercation occurred. Every Molussian walked past his enemies, to whom he said nothing, and sought his own home. But the hostility of people jammed together, men, women and children, was more acute. There was pushing, touching, irritation at each other's most trivial habits. And here, indoors, lights extinguished, people began to fulfil the second part of Ko's Edict: they hit out. Noises penetrated the walls of tenement blocks. Thud of falling bodies, horrid pitter-patter of smacks and blows, rapid footsteps that must be those of fleeing victims. The already sleeping awoke with a start and listened through walls. Not a cry could be heard: everyone adhered to Ko's Edict. And even the weariest, who would gladly have renounced their hatreds, could not bear to give up what was now dictatorially permitted. When they saw how close the sleeping person lay, the one hated for so many years, up they got and started swinging. In silence, joyless, like labourers. By midnight, apartment blocks were filled with a myriad fights. But no one knew of the dreadful battles in other buildings, in bed, on the floor, in the corners of rooms, of silent tusslers acquitting themselves of the duties set out by Ko. It all happened as if nothing was happening. Night-watchmen in the streets had a quiet watch. Hundreds died as if only seeming to die – without a groan, without a cry. For even the dying feared to tumble into speech with a cry that Ko had forbidden at the same time as he gave free rein to violence.

The next day people tried to continue their beatings in the street. Shopkeepers fell on customers, traders on competitors. But none took any joy in the beatings. It

caused melancholy to have to lash out with no reinforcing sequel of curses and threats, unable to affirm for oneself the depravity of the opponent with the usual sweeping insults. Enmities that people were now free to act upon seemed more irrational and incomprehensible by the hour. Boundaries and gradations vanished. A momentary nuisance was thrashed no differently than a longtime object of hate. With all thrashings equal, every distinction among the occasions for them dissolved. But revenge was always in vain: the victim of the thrashing uttered no complaint to indicate the success of the blows. Even before the first fist was raised, they would deceive the attacker by playing dead before he came too close, they were like wooden toys that can be broken open and taken apart, their wordless defence was like the workings of a clock. But as blows were struck, the attacker too became a marionette, bored even in the act of killing and never able to see clearly whether what they were doing was real. Adversaries parted unsatisfied, and it often happened that they suddenly separated as if strength failed them all at once – so far had the intent and the cause of the fight and the viciousness of their fury been forgotten. For weeks the Mollussians acted upon what Ko had advertised to them as freedom – as a laborious, gloomy and monotonous chore.⁵⁷

Meanwhile Ko's agents and spies monitored the Mollussians every day, and he welcomed the general melancholy as evidence that language was beginning to heal. But Mollussians were losing their memory, as if the tongue had once served that function. Enmities turned into sport and habit. The longer they remained silent, the harder it became to recall the cause of the enmity, how it might be made good, and what part one's own actions might have played. The situation became just as lawless as language once was. Trade and commerce jogged along in anarchic fashion, everyone adopted foreign goods and foreign lifestyles as unthinkingly as they once adopted the thoughts and turns of phrase of other people. Every day brought a ridiculous number of random deaths. Only the substitution of melancholy violence for the pathos of chatter distinguished the brutishness of those first weeks from previous times. Ko's advisers expected the revocation any day of the clearly futile Emergency Edict. But Ko believed time was on his side. ...

The enormous attrition became more and more obvious. Before three months were up, the city seemed to its inhabitants to have grown too big, like an overly spacious house. It became brighter, and gradually offered less space for hostilities and fighting. Now there emerged the first approaches to a new culture. The tedium of thrashings and immediate deaths had become intolerable. Acts of violence gradually became differentiated. In any case, assault with the bare fist was deemed vulgar. The germs of the *Syntax of Violence* and the *Grammar of Destruction*, still in use today, sprouted in the fifth month. By the seventh month, the twenty-five kinds of precision killing devices that we take for granted today were already known. Extensive workshops now designed and produced nothing else. Anonymous trysts led to their rapid adoption. Now wounds were inflicted by the most varied instruments. Each instrument had its own significance, each accorded with a specific

⁵⁷ A much later very partisan chronicle claims that Mollussia at that time lay under the curse of the Town God Ma, who made everything available in order to begrudge it: giving food to the hungry in order to steal their appetite; giving bondsmen their freedom in order to cloud their zest for life. The chronicle takes it for granted that Ko was secretly a priest of Ma's.

distance from the enemy, and even with a specific kind of enmity. The silent assignations that respected *fair killing* were universally observed. And so a new kind of language arose, and the restored order seemed to lighten Molussia's mood. At the end of the year, training establishments blossomed, as did public exhibitions of swordplay, the beauty of which aroused the same admiration as poems and dramas. Acts of violence had acquired a wealth of shades that left the speech of yesterday far behind. The city offered the spectacle of a monstrous pantomime. But any who had not lived through the history of the silence understood nothing of the variety and delicacy of the expressive gestures.

And so as the first year elapsed and Ko saw that his fatal decree had lifted morals and reawoken Molussian subtlety and powers of discrimination, he stood up at his twelfth anniversary, and spoke. But the speech caused him grief. What he said has not been handed down. The mere fact of speaking is said to have so agitated the Molussians that they were unable to listen. Perhaps they had already completely lost their language. But the avant garde of the new culture, proud that their instruments exceeded any poem and any claim to delicacy and precision many times over, took aim at Ko and killed him in the name of culture. None doubted this proof of their superiority. Only decades later, when a new generation of the decimated population once again took up a folksy lifestyle, with a love of simplicity and a return to roots, did anyone reach back to the crude remnants of Molussian vocabulary.

From LESSONS IN LYING

Freedom

One day, when he was totally down and out, Mee went to an old clothes dealer to wheedle a pair of trousers from him. The dealer rummaged around and couldn't decide. Because he wasn't at all sure which pair was his worst. At last he flung a rather shameful red-checked pair at Mee. 'Yes indeed,' said Mee, taking the item. 'I shall choose this pair. They exactly suit my style.'

'What?!' the dealer asked.

'That's how my father chose his profession,' Mee explained as he headed for the shop door. 'And my mother her husband. And how I chose my existence. We're used to such choices.' And then he was away and gone.

Who or what makes progress?

I.

'Why is it,' little Gollo asked his teacher Mee, 'why is it that you always talk so disdainfully about the undoubted heights reached by humanity? The progress we've made in the last hundred years, it's absolutely incredible.'

'Actually,' Mee replied, 'your opinion is not so different from that of our grandparents. We make the same thing they did: i.e. novelty. Our progress? It's the progress of our inventions. They've piled up ever so high. But we ourselves? Have we perhaps grown to keep match with our inventions and our products? *No one differs*

from his parents to a greater degree than a present-day machine differs from an older one.'

Gollo was unable to challenge this. Yet he was astonished, all the same. 'So human beings are inferior to their achievements?'

'Maybe that's their greatness, that they can make more than they are themselves.'

'*That's* our history?' little Gollo persisted, incredulous. 'The history of our products?'

Mee shook his head. 'No', he said, 'it's just progress.'

II.

'Because what I'd always thought,' little Gollo admitted after a while, 'is that humanity is always ascending.'

'You probably learned that during Religious Instruction,' Mee replied. 'Ascending to Heaven. And the here and now is the path to it.'

Little Gollo argued strenuously against this. 'It was my father. And you won't deny that my father's enlightened.'

Mee did not in the least deny it. 'But enlightened people learned it during their Religious Instruction.'

This was all new to little Gollo.

'For when the enlightened appeared, our forefathers, brave enough to commit sacrilege and to doubt Heaven, and assure themselves that they were autonomous adults and their own person and had grown out of all the patronising, they had no other thought than that the world had made another step forward. They had done away with Heaven. But first and foremost they stuck with the notion that the here and now is the path to it.'

III.

'Father,' little Gollo asked at dinner, 'why do you believe in progress?'

'Yes,' Mr Gollo replied, striking himself optimistically on the breast. Little Gollo didn't understand.

'Higher education? Out of the question. Speaking Ulian? No chance. Factory? A tiny workshop. We're a bit farther on now.'

Mee asked: 'Who's we? Ourselves? Or the Gollos? Or Molussia? Or the whole world?'

Mr Gollo brushed the question aside. 'You see,' he said to his son, ending the conversation. 'But, for example, I'm able to hire a house tutor. For your higher education. And for progress. And when I'm no longer around – you'll inherit seven factories.'

'It's hard,' little Gollo decided, 'not believing in progress.'

IV.

"And us?" asked Yegussa, "must we believe in progress?"

"Neither believe nor disbelieve," Olo replied. "We have to create it."

Mee and his friends

"We have become unreal, one of them said," Olo related, "when one evening they sat together and talked of business and business people and the fact that their products weren't moving. The one who said this had an exhausted, haunted look, almost incorporeal, the way uncertainties in business usually bring on. Mee, as always when he spent an evening with his friends, was in a prickly mood. For though he needed them to fuel his arguing and pay for what he ate and drank, still he couldn't stand them."

*

'Neither real not unreal,' Mee objected.

'But if I assure you,' the other man said wearily, tapping the crook of his cane against his breast, 'if I assure you that even I am no longer ethical?'

'There you go, always looking for the mote in your own eye,' Mee perked up, 'and always looking for guilt in the human breast. The beam lies elsewhere.'

His friends didn't understand. But it was for this kind of saying they kept treating Mee.

'Self-accusations,' Mee continued, 'are easy, and cost nothing. *In point of fact*, you used to mumble as you recalled better market conditions, *in point of fact we shall have to become real again some time*. And with *point of fact* you are content.'

'Would one have to, in point of fact,' someone mumbled.

'When it comes down to it,' the weary one said, 'you can't demand any more of us than self-condemnation.' The others agreed.

'Not demand,' said Mee. 'That would be foolish. But your condemnation misses the mark. The mark you should aim for is much more sensitive. More sensitive than your consciences. And you will never accuse it as lightly as you accuse yourselves.'

Mee's friends felt refreshed to be a little bit accused out there under the evening sky.

'You convinced yourselves,' Mee explained, 'that your business principles promised you something:- permanent continuity, permanent upward trend and the like. But now, now you don't have something that you never promised yourselves.'

His friends had no idea what Mee was leading up to.

'And now you persist in your own dishonesty. ... Of course,' he continued when they once again offered no protest, 'of course you have become unreal to yourselves. And you engage in dubious practices. But only so you can reap what you claim was sown by the principles whose honour you preserve, whose holes you cover over, and that you keep safe from all comers. But however bad each of you would like to believe himself, not one of you is even half so bad.'

It was embarrassing to be defended by Mee. They wanted him to level accusations. 'Since when did you ever defend us?' the weary one asked.

'Do you think I would have dealings with you otherwise?'

It had never entered the head of anyone at the table that they *had dealings* with Mee.

‘Each of you,’ Mee continued, ‘is quite serviceable. Neither good nor bad, neither sound nor unsound.’

None of his insults had ever hurt like this. They stared blindly ahead, saying nothing.

‘But as for your principles – I would of course never have dealings with those.’

‘Principles,’ the weary one said as he settled up with the waiter, ‘won’t pay your bills.’

The Common

Prince Gey was famous in Molussia under the nickname The Chaste. For he regarded anything he had in common with the middle caste or the Pariahs as an indignity. When he reached the conventional marriageable age of twenty, his doctors recommended a liaison. He declined. He found the court ladies available to him repulsive. The thought that he would find with them, or with any other consorts eligible to be chosen, pleasures no greater or more varied than those enjoyed by a merchant in his bed or a Pariah on his heap of rags, seemed a scandalous insult to his privileges. So he refused to take part in *commonalities*, which he called *the Common*. Filled with resentment, he branded as iniquitous the pleasures he denied himself. He banned any public display of anything that would remind him of his sacrifice, and remained unmarried.

For a long time Gey’s celibacy was regarded as a mere foible. But when it showed no sign of ending, his ministers grew anxious about the dynasty’s continuance. And they sent him up to see Mee.

Having listened to his arguments, Mee shook his head. ‘Pariahs and pleasure,’ he said, ‘cannot be spoken of in the same sentence. Don’t let yourself be put off by words. Don’t the constantly increasing numbers of soldiers delivered by Pariah women for your use prove that their so-called love is simply the performance of a duty owed to you? No Pariah woman would time and again take on the tiresome burden of pregnancy and childbirth purely for its own sake. The congruence of their output with the organic growth of your royal wealth is sufficient proof that Pariah women toil for you in exactly the same way as the moneys invested in your enterprises.’

Gey exercised the utmost self-control as he listened to Mee’s arguments. But when Mee proposed a union with Princess Clumse, he burst out: ‘If you wish to persuade me to take part in any way in this utterly joyless institution, it is no more and no less than an attempt to lower me to the status of a common functionary in my own service. Next you’ll want me to be an errand boy in the Royal Mail, or a fisherman for the royal kitchens.’ He wiped the sweat from his face with a look of disgust.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mee, and Gey could hardly believe his ears. ‘Errands that for the post-boy are a daily heart-straining duty, that enfeeble the long remainder of his fifty asthmatic years, are for you, the prince, an evening stroll and a delicious recreation. The fishing that so wearies the man who supplies the royal dinner table, and every day curses him with yet more annoying tests of his patience, is for you, the prince,

even in winter, a calming hobby, relaxation in the countryside, and a symbol of carefree atavistic joys. You, Prince Gey, cannot in whatever you do make yourself common. What for the Pariah is a duty, for you is freedom. What for the Pariah is a burden, for you is a pleasure. Even the common remains kingly, when you do it – otherwise you would be no king. Shame the Pariah with the gracefulness of a progeny conceived swiftly and in ecstasy, just as you shame them with the unattainable weight of the golden carp that you like to hook in the interval between royal decrees; and with the unsurpassable number of tines on the antlers of the deer you bagged after such a brief hunt in your otherwise lamentably overgrown forests.'

Gey was unable to extricate himself from this argument. Thanks to it he renounced his principle of celibacy, and saved the ancient lineage of the Geys from certain extinction.

The dessert proves the menu

When Gey came up once again to see Mee, as always in the greatest quandary, he found him at dinner. 'I don't know if I'm coming or going. I've made the Pariah all sorts of promises. If I were to keep them all it would be a veritable revolution. Which promises should I keep? And which should I break?'

Mee remained seated at his last course. 'Have you eaten yet?' he asked. 'I can't alas offer you soup, roast or fish. But there's plenty of dessert.' He waved to one of his pupils and whispered in his ear. The pupil returned after a while with a tray of desserts for two: cheeses white and matured; seven kinds of fruit; two kinds of tobacco, light brown and black; two pipes each, one short, one long; and a whole array of strong drinks.

Mee, the consummate host, invited him to tuck in. He named each cheese, specified its age and its valley of origin, uncorked the bottles, explained which fruit went well with which cheeses, and which liqueurs with which fruit; and once they had both taken a taste of everything, he stuffed a long pipe with brown tobacco for his guest; and when Gey sat there contented he at last asked, oblivious of the occasion for this visit, leaning back a little amid a cloud of smoke: 'Are you full, too?'

'Totally,' Gey replied, not only out of courtesy. And as was the custom in Molussia he loosened his body-belt to signal to his host the quality of his kitchen.

'*That's* how to fill your subjects' expectations,' Mee commenced his lesson. '*That's* how you keep your promises. With the aid of desserts. For desserts are proof of the menu.'

'So which promises should I keep?' Gey pulled a long scroll from his breast pocket, and a pen. 'It's the list of promises I made,' he explained with a guilty look.

'Keep?' Mee asked back. 'The point is, to *have kept* them.'

'But I haven't kept any of them.' Gey was crestfallen, seeing how as always Mee would lead him around in circles.

'The last course is the most important. It proves in reverse. *I've eaten this*, the stomach says, *and so I've already eaten roast, fish and soup as well.*'

'And so ...?'

‘And so the torchlight parade is the most crucial item,’ Mee concluded. *‘We’re celebrating, the subject says. And so we have something to celebrate. And so Gey has kept his promises. And so the revolution has happened. Or else why would we be celebrating?’*

‘And this?’ Gey asked, tapping the bulge in his pocket that was the list of his promises.

‘From now on it’s the list of promises kept,’ Mee replied. And sent him off back down into the valley.

Mee teaches how to turn pushes into pulls

‘How can I set the hoi polloi to work, when they consist entirely of my enemies?’ Prince Gey asked.

‘Back in our old Penx,’ Mee began to relate, ‘the royal treadmills that water your rice fields are driven not by oxen, but only by steers. Penxers refrain from castrating their steers, and we always respect trivial local customs. So one of these huge beasts is tethered to each spoke, a hundred in all. Each stares at the backside of its lead beast. To set the treadmill in motion, we need only a single stimulus, and a symbolic one at that.’

Prince Gey squinted dubiously at Mee.

‘Even before dawn,’ Mee went on, ‘as colours emerge from the twilight, they jump to their feet, give themselves a shake, and look for the hindquarters of their respective lead beast, snort, and without any goading start on the first circuit.’ (Prince Gey squinted even more dubiously.) ‘Only when evening comes, and colours sink back again into the twilight, do they lose their extraordinary zeal for work. They go down on their knees, all together, and fall asleep at once, even though the chains still cut into their throat.’

‘And they do all this, you say, without being driven.’

‘Of course. Because the steers do not actually pull.’

Prince Gey detested this method. ‘So just say what it is they do!’

‘They push.’

Prince Gey wiped his brow. If he didn’t know that eventually something always leaped out of Mee’s stories, he’d have given him a kick. ‘Doesn’t that boil down to the same thing?’

‘True enough,’ Mee conceded. ‘But only in respect of the result. Because the steers don’t actually like one another.’

‘*Actually,*’ said Gey, wiping his brow. ‘Yet they go on working so well together?’

‘That’s why.’

‘But they are all there at the same treadmill. Why the hate?’

‘Because it’s useful to us. We create it.’

With this explanation Gey calmed down, though he still understood none of it. But he felt a result was on the way. ‘Get on,’ he urged.

'If you were to look from the front at the hundred beasts trotting along, their snow-white beauty would bring nothing but joy to your connoisseur's eye. Immaculate purebred Penxian draught animals. But from the rear – from the rear it's all blood-red.

'Naturally?'

'On the contrary,' Mee admitted. 'But for the benefit of nature. We paint the hindquarters. Each is a red rag to the one behind. It stirs up their nature. Of course, good care is taken that while they keep following, they never catch up. That's what the spokes are for. That's what transforms their pull into a push.'

Prince Gey, unaccustomed to thinking, was always a little taken aback by the suddenness of a result. So on this occasion too it took him a little while to ask: 'And it all functions without incident?'

'Now and then,' Mee admitted, 'their anger seems to fade. Although they still trot, they seem only to let the rotation carry them along. Sometimes it may also happen that one or other of the beasts, totally misunderstanding the situation, tries to brace itself against the motion, just for a moment, as if it realises how vain the eternal pursuit of its lead is. Just for a moment, of course – because the impetus drags the recalcitrant beast along with it, for a few seconds it staggers over the ground, but before the beast knows it, it's already trotting with the rest. And once it does so, it's as if it had never been struck by the ray of insight. For doing provides its own justification.

'The overseers are fully prepared for this and other kinds of incident. Every day, as a precaution, maybe a quite superfluous precaution, the stockman comes to them and what he whispers – the same words every day – seems always to gladden them anew. *Look at him*, he whispers (and every beast feels personally addressed); *look at him, the wretch, trying to get away from you*. And every beast raises its bloodshot eyes and stares at the backside of the beast in front. *Thinks it's the spitting image of God*, the stockman goes on, and they respond with a subterranean rumble. *It rests on your shoulders*, the text continues, *that your kind remain the crowning glory of Creation. And not that kind, the disgrace of the species*. That's what the stockman whispers, same words every day, but they circle around full of enthusiasm. When the stockman stands dreamily chewing the end of his whip and twice, three times murmurs *It's you I mean, and you, and you* – he's no longer cheering on, more like declaring his love, exactly as you might give a well-running cart an affectionate shove.

'Very seldom it happens that the animals all sink to their knees at once. How monstrous the terror they must feel – now sailing through the air impelled by their own self-generated motion, just like carousel ponies; blown crookedly along they start to bellow, to void bladder and bowel, and tread the air as if they find even the appearance of freedom horrible, and the security of their habitual circuit is the joy of their lives. And as soon as their hooves find the ground again, they storm ahead as if an eternity has gone by since they last enjoyed the feel of firm dirt.'

Mee related all this with a dreamy smile. Down in the valley, shadows were already gathering. 'What are you thinking about?' the prince asked after a while.

Mee seemed to return from far away. 'I was thinking: even I started out as a pusher.'

'So you're one of them as well?'

'I?' Mee shook his head vigorously. 'I turned my own pushes into pulls.' Thus he spake, and headed off valleywards.

***You see with the mouth because you see with your ears.
An aphorism that enables the making of revolution, in order to
forestall revolution***

When Gey went up a third time to see Mee, he was in more of a sweat than ever. Every step he took in the forest undergrowth caused a rustling that every time startled him and filled him with fear, for down in Molussia people had looked askance at him, and his counsellors had even told him they had heard from the valets that the door guards were passing on tittle-tattle about rumours in the city that there was going to be a revolution.

But Gey had never learned how he was to comport himself during a revolution, and what rights he could rely on if a revolution really did break out. So he cursed his lofty status, lamenting that he must always take responsibility and be the king and nothing else and, what's more, in a revolutionary age. Every three steps he came to a halt, to fumble under the metal collar that was lined with fur as a sign of his majesty, and that he never took off so he always had to hold himself stiffly upright, as befitted his majesty. And as usual he found he was moist under the collar, and the heat seemed in league with, and made expressly for, the woodcutters he came across in hot clearings, toiling stark naked to strike bark from the trunks with their naked blades and who stayed dry despite their exertions – and every one of them stronger than he.

'The centre of a circle,' he told himself, for consolation and to remember how dignified was his insignificance, 'the centre of a circle is a nothing and has no extension. But without it the circle wouldn't be a circle, its insignificance is its dignity, and if it had extension and was Something, it would merely be one part of the circle among all the others.' This and similar declamations he made when he encountered the huge bark-strippers and tree-fellers who slid great trunks down into the valley, tearing up vegetation and setting rocks loose after them. But his insight was of little help, however doggedly he repeated it to himself. And it seemed he needed new aphorisms, and maybe something quite other than aphorisms. He meant to share these concerns with Mee, and this time even Mee wouldn't have a clue – the super-brain!

When Gey attained the summit and started complaining, Mee asked: 'You're afraid of revolution, Gey? Then make one, that's the best remedy.'

'But, but what I want,' Gey jabbered, 'is for everything to stay the same as it ever was.' He dared not furnish particulars of his royal entitlements, for fear it would leave him no comeback.

'Precisely because you want everything to stay the same,' Mee responded, 'is why you must make a revolution. The best tactic of the ruling class would be to declare

its own death. That would eliminate the danger of its being killed off, and so it would survive.'

'So what am I supposed to change?' Gey asked, already totting up all he had, for he couldn't bear to part with anything. And he regretted coming up here, for even Mee seemed to be a revolutionary, and one of the sharpest.

'Change?' Mee retorted, seriously offended. 'It's exactly to stop anything changing that you must make revolution.'

'But I don't *want* to make revolution,' Gey sulked.

'We are both on the same page,' Mee mollified him. 'And in order that no revolution happens, you must change the belief that none *has* happened.'

'How's that possible?' Gey asked, sensing the dizzying relief of a glacier climber who believes the greatest danger lies ahead but now learns that the fatal crevasse lies behind him, an hour back already.

'It's an enormous change,' Mee continued. 'It involves many words, and the re-baptising of all things, all decrees, and all executive actions.'

'Are things *baptised*?' Gey asked.

'That thing around your neck,' Mee responded. 'Do you call it *throatchoker* or do you call it *ruff of royal dignity*?'

'*That's* what it is,' said Gey, meaning ruff etc., and he tugged at it to give himself more air.

'A successful baptism then,' Mee confirmed. 'You've proved it to me.'

'But you can see,' Gey cried, for he was still blind, 'you can see that nothing's changed, you can see it with your own eyes, for goodness sake!'

'Since when did people see with their eyes?' Mee asked in return. 'That really would be a novelty.'

Now Gey lost control and yelled excitedly at the old man: he was *an old snob* and his arguments *a dungheap of paradoxes*.

'People have been persuaded,' Mee continued calmly, 'that they see with their own eyes in order that they believe they are their own person and have their own opinion and are free of all prejudice. So when did you start thinking of your royal ruff as a *throatchoker*? No doubt not too far in the past.'

Gey hopped from one leg to the other. He didn't dare put a hand to his collar, which always became too tight when anyone mentioned it. For the word triggers the perception. 'So what do people see with? Do tell,' he muttered grumpily. 'With the belly maybe? One never knows, with you.'

'Belly – there's an idea,' Mee pondered, annoying Gey by taking him seriously. 'The belly? I'd never considered it. But my first choice would be: the mouth.'

'It's all one to you. And now you'll prove it in your usual unscrupulous fashion. Because you always talk in riddles, and my father paid you handsomely for the sangfroid with which you delivered your lunacies. But the untroubled conscience that radiates from your brow whenever you serve up proofs – it's a disgrace.'

'I am deeply saddened by this,' Mee regretted. 'But I am not at fault if I arouse such emotions in my prince. I beg him to be mindful of that. The world is askew. If one wishes to capture it and interpret it in words, Prince Gey, then one must not speak more simply than is appropriate. I am not at fault either for the skewness, or for language. The fault lies with the things we are speaking of.'

'I don't understand,' Gey admitted, calmer now that he sensed Mee was in earnest.

'People see with the mouth,' said Mee.

'That's awful,' Gey whispered, 'Why with the mouth?'

'Because people repeat via the mouth what they have seen with their ears. For people see with the ears.'

'That's horrible,' the prince groaned. 'And why with the ears?'

'Because people listen with the ears, and *listen to authority* with the ears. And because people summon a thing to the surface of the roaring sea of anonymity only when they call out its name. Philosophers labelled this fact Nominalism, and some were beheaded for revealing the secret. And because people call out the name they have heard. But the thing that comes is the thing they have called, and seldom anything else, and they come according to the name. For in the beginning was the Word.'

'I see,' Gey conceded, 'and that bit about the Word reminds me of something.' But he gazed at Mee as if at a sorcerer. 'What you mean is,' he said very slowly, 'is that a tree does not know it's called Tree. Maybe it isn't. Because it's only others who know it. So what might it be? Maybe nothing at all?' A darkness fell upon his eyes.

'That's right, that's right!' Mee shouted, clapping his hands. 'You're on the right path, young man, you see clearly. If only it lasts. But it's *you* who can choose the names of things, and then people will see what you want them to see. *You* know what it is, really is. Because you will be king.' But Prince Gey sat down, feeling really quite ill. He no longer knew if Mee's crowing was a voice, or if he himself, despite Mee's flattery, was the prince.

'Labels have been torn up,' Mee affirmed in a schoolmasterly tone. 'That would be the first phase of the operation, the unpleasant part, and it lies behind you. Now gather them all together, the labels, and for each thing place at its mouth the label that seems right to you. It's fun, and amazing, it makes sport of freedom, however strange it seems, and needs practice. Just set to, young man, set to.'

But Gey sat there downcast, and only with difficulty did he decide to pick out just one word from the hundreds of thousands available, and apply it to the wrong thing. '*Koprote* – it means something like *old Pariah filth*,' he offered at last, shyly and tentatively, and he turned to Mee partly to show that the word applied to him, and partly to spy with his somewhat anxious eyes whether what he had just done was sort of all right. But he felt thoroughly ashamed and seemed to have fallen into a trap, and he explained that of course it wasn't meant like that, and was only a bit of practice.

But Mee leaped up, cried: '*Koprote!*', clapped his hands and shouted 'Splendid!' and danced like a dervish. But when he came to a stop to catch his breath (he swayed

as he stood, for whirling didn't suit him) and laughed all the while to see Truth dressed in a suit, really, he even clapped Gey on the back, and called the prince his Model Pupil. But Gey eyed him anxiously and had no idea if this title was part of the game, or a *gaucherie*, or maybe even *lèse majesté*.

'More, more,' Mee cried, giving Gey an encouraging shove. Gey gulped, and gulped again, and then yelled out 'Molussian!'

'Molussian – that's splendid!' crowed Mee, and he began to whirl again, pointing an index finger at his chest to affirm – whether he meant to himself or to his pupil Gey is not quite clear – that Molussian no doubt meant himself and no one else. He kept whirling and uttered a rhythmic: 'Molussian! Excellent! Says nothing. Goes with anything. Swells my own breast. Means whatever you like.' And he took up a stance and tried hard not to stagger and threw back his head so his beard lay horizontally in the air like a white cloud.

Gey, now no longer the spoilsport, returned the serve filled with delight and cleansed of every inhibition. He stretched out his arms. 'National comrades!' he shouted, loud enough to make Mee wince. But the valley rang with the shouts, and the mountains of Boril returned the sounds after considerable delay, so that Mee's pupils crawled out of their byres to find out who it was at close of day exchanging from one end of Molussia to the other shouted affirmations that they were Molussian. But through the hedge they saw no shouting people, merely their teacher Mee in an extremely solemn pose, and Gey, standing there with arms outstretched.

'National comrades!' Mee too now echoed, and his voice would have been the feeblest if the young men had not joined in from their place of concealment. But Mee, all a-tremble, quickly grabbed Gey's outstretched hands and would have liked to say something, something truly laudatory, if only his breath were not heaving and his heroic stance did not inhibit speech.

There they both stood on the mountain top, holding hands: the charlatan Mee with the long beard, embodiment of perfidy, cunning and wisdom – somewhat disordered at present, it is true, but impressive as ever; and Gey, the prince, normally so shy, holding the old rogue's hands in a manly fashion, and his arm was strong now, and his chin was lifted at an assertive angle. But Mee's pupils, watching the pair's antics from behind the hedge, could not agree what had occasioned this peculiar scene. 'They quarrelled, and are making up,' one of them whispered. 'Nonsense,' another hissed, 'they've sworn to do something.' 'Sworn is good,' said another, 'and now they're wrestling.' And the eyes started from their heads. None suspected that the pair had simply been practising the art of lying. But when nothing else out of the ordinary happened, and the two men sat down to have a chat like two men who have business to discuss, the disappointed pupils crept forth on all fours from the hedge that had served to cover their backs.

'Good, I shall do it,' said Gey.

He let go of Mee's hands, shook himself like a wet poodle, as was customary in Molussia after prayers – it relieved cramp and helped in finding the way back to the everyday. 'You were raised piously, my boy,' Mee rejoiced, 'and that shudder was not unworthy of a priest.'

'It's not a very nice game,' Gey felt, still seized with the shudders.

'You needn't make an effort on my account.'

'It takes more effort than being serious, I find.'

'When were you ever more deadly serious than the seriousness you showed just now?'

'When I hadn't started playing what I'm playing now,' Gey replied.

'How naïve you are. How hopelessly unteachable.'

'What would happen if I'd never played this game?'

Mee waved a hand in disgust. He thought it was excessive, having to explain when the lesson was over what it was the lesson had taught. 'If perchance you haven't yet noticed: I'm teaching you the arts of your father.' Gey's face showed total incomprehension.

'Because when you were still serious, because, as you put it, you *hadn't started playing*, your course was not the course of Nature, god-given, in the first and natural order of things. What rolled along then was still the game your father played.'

'So it wasn't just the world?' Gey asked, after sitting with his mouth open, and every word came out separately. 'It too was artificial?'

Mee shrugged. 'Naturally artificial,' he said. 'It was the world. That's how the world is. Made, as it has always been; made by common consent, but self-evident; artificial, but as if natural. Impositions become customs. Decrees – beloved habits. Agreements – laws of Nature. Because we are a second nature, my boy, and a bed is more natural to us than a mossy bank.'

'Sure, sure,' Gey conceded, 'and what has that to do with my father?'

Mee scrutinised the prince slowly from top to toe and stepped around him to observe him from behind as well, and came back and stared him straight in the eye as if looking for something. And he was serious, this time irreproachably so. 'What are you up to now?' Gey asked, for the procedure, the reason for which was quite beyond him, was annoying, and gave him a bad conscience.

But Mee shook his head. 'I couldn't find anything,' he declared. (Gey's expression showed he hadn't the faintest notion what Mee had been looking for.) 'I have been unable to find anything that looks like a natural authority and foundation for your claims to princely status. How actually will you fill the great role, the princely role, that you play? It might well be artificial. But should it be merely *played*?'

'I cannot believe,' replied a rather pale Prince Gey, true son of Gey I, expected by the Molussian court for many a long year, born of Clumse, the one true consort of Gey I, who, as every Molussian knew, never ever took a mistress, raised in the palace with the greatest care, safe from every risk of substitution, from childhood on a confidant of Mee, Gey I's counsellor, in short: legitimate, unassailably so beyond any human doubting. 'I cannot believe,' said this so manifoldly secured personage, 'that you suggest I am a false prince?'

'Whatever are you thinking?' cried Mee, appalled, 'That anyone would dare such an assertion. You've been playing your role with complete propriety.'

'*I am the prince*,' Gey stressed, on his dignity. 'There can be no talk of any role.'

‘Everyone is a role,’ Mee quoted, like a phrase from a schoolbook, and he was as far from irony as he was from jesting. ‘Everyone is what he pretends to be, what he wants others to take him as. That’s what he played, did Gey, but the game is still reality and very natural, a long way from a swindle, and an object lesson for sceptics. But what reality lobs at us is the chance to lie. Stretch a sceptic and find a sophist.’

Never was Mee so plausible as when he talked about lying. And Gey’s tone became humbler, for he was now treated as a pupil. ‘Do you mean to say,’ enquired the prince, ‘that everyone has a role to play? The King must play the King, and the Pariah the Pariah. Is it an iron law?’

‘I never said that,’ Mee screamed, ‘and this is already sophism and a blatant abuse of sceptical truth!’ But his love of truth had been torn from him. ‘Nobody can be nothing,’ he continued, and his voice was sober and a finger tapped out the rhythm of his speech. ‘Nobody can be nothing. It makes sense. It’s true. But that is all it is. But as for who exactly is king, or prince, or who has to be king or prince, that’s never crystal clear and is untrue and cannot be proven. What is horribly true is that nobody can be nothing. For whoever goes hungry or endures a beating still starves as someone, and is still beaten as someone.’

These words made the prince nauseous, and all he heard was that he was not the prince. He was seized by mistrust of Mee, and felt defenceless. Through the undignified scene he had exposed himself to he seemed to have thrown everything away. Even if Mee had enticed him on. He would gladly have known what Mee looked like now, and whether perhaps he was only joking. But it had meanwhile grown quite dark, and his opposite number was nothing but an indeterminate shape.

‘You’re plotting against me,’ he said softly, hoping for contradiction. ‘You want to steal my princely identity, like those down there. You’re no better than them.’ He fetched again the word he had earlier pulled out of himself with a myriad hesitations: ‘Koprote!’

‘You’re right,’ Mee admitted. ‘For we have in writing only what needed to be written down; what is more than simple truth; what is yet more, and beyond truth’s boundaries. *The princely shall remain ever princely*. That’s in writing, and that’s why I talk to you.’ (Gey waited expectantly, alert for the starting gun.) ‘Because everyone lives like someone,’ Mee went on, using his didactic voice again, ‘like *someone*, and not simply like a hill or a tree or a stone or darkness, that’s what we can lie about. Because we are already there as a role, we’re able to play a role that we are not. I play mine. A very free one, much improvised, with no prompts. And in between to speak regardless. Deny myself your regard, steer well clear of how you size me up, play no particular role – that’s my role. Now you play yours.’

Gey shivered horribly outside all these catchwords, sizings-up and specific phrasings. ‘Mine – the one you impose?’ he asked peevishly. Mee found it funny: ‘One who comes to seek advice should not feel insulted when he receives it. Especially when there’s some urgency. Hear the din down there?’

Gey bent an ear to the valley, frowning. He could hear a roaring deep in the city. It barely made its way up to him. But when he strained, he thought he could perceive some particular cry or other shooting up out of the mass. And they were cries, despite their distance and tiny volume. But the direction of the roar was so uncertain

it could hardly be proven that the whole thing was real and not proceeding in Gey's own breast. 'So you can hear it too,' he said fearfully to the figure he could hardly see. 'Then what should I do now?'

'Go down and make revolution, before it breaks out, so that it does not break out. There's little time to lose.'

'No time at all,' Gey picked up Mee's phrase, and rose to his feet.

'Re-baptise, re-baptise,' Mee urged. 'Baptise the counterstrike, and label it with a name that sounds rebellious. So that it's there as something, and plays a role favourable to you. And tell them it's high time for an overturning. For now is the moment to suppress it.'

Gey was already on his way down, trying to find the path between rocks and tree trunks, when he heard Mee's voice close by: 'But don't say anything to them about me, for I am one of them.' The words orbited around Gey, and it seemed that Mee was creeping around him. And Gey wanted to let fly, but his cane hit out only at air and bare rock and mountain herbiage. 'Because I don't like it,' the voice said behind him; 'sharing victories with others.'

'You like it well enough with me,' Gey retorted listlessly. He hit out at the ground just for show. He had given up on locating Mee, and continued his descent. And even when the voice came: 'You've never asked yourself: who are you?' he didn't turn around and go back up but climbed ever downwards. Halfway down the cries from below came more distinctly, they sounded like a surging flood. So Gey spent the night halfway up the mountain, and it wasn't exactly pleasant. Next morning he came down from the mountain and defeated the revolution, in the name of the revolution that had been so necessary.

Threefold hatred

For protection against the unending demands of the Pariah class, the National Bloc had put together a special troop of guards, composed of Pariahs whom they spoiled rotten with clothing and good food. King Gey, exceedingly dubious of this troop, again found sleep hard to come by. Having lain awake for three nights, he invited the generals of the Pariah Guard to see him, so he could lay out his concerns.

'Your Majesty can rely on the Guard,' the first general assured him. 'Because when it comes down to it' – his tone was that of a reader of the human soul – '*who is more hated than the one who has been betrayed?*'

'Of course, of course,' King Gey agreed somewhat hesitantly. 'Before the fighting. But *during* the fighting?'

'That would be a first for me,' said the second general in a convincing daredevil tone, 'a man having to hate *before* the fighting. Whenever did anyone fight because of his hatred? Your Majesty can rest easy. Because *hatred arises only in the fighting.*'

'Yes, yes,' the king agreed, chewing his lower lip. 'But will they be reliable, I mean *after* the fighting?'

'It would be a question extraordinarily open to controversy,' the third general rode to the rescue; he sounded like an expert, 'that a man would have to feel hatred *during* the fighting. Who benefits from hatred, your majesty?'

‘Yes, who benefits, I wonder,’ King Gey repeated, his expression miserable.

‘Yesterday’s enemy,’ the third continued. ‘Who has already been fought. The one who did this and did that to you. *For hatred arises after the fighting.*’

‘Sure, sure,’ Gey conceded. ‘But on our side too there’ll be men killed, and even wounded.’ He was shivering.

‘A wounded man will be your man, sire,’ the third insisted. ‘Together for better or for worse, no? And so, your majesty, what does he have to look forward to but better things?’

After this totally dependable warranty of threefold hatred, the king visibly drew back into himself. The generals waited in silence. ‘It seems to me,’ the king began slowly, as if pulling his head in from a window, ‘it seems to me my inner person has been calmed.’

‘Quite right,’ all three said. ‘And the people will find out what for, if they’re not prepared to hate.’

‘That is music to my ears,’ said the king, already starting to smile again. ‘Thank you.’ But the three of them wished him happy dreams.

From THE TEMPTATIONS OF YAMYAM

The Chimera (from the story of Silo)

Share and mouldboard show
That this object is a plough
But the front is not enough
To let you call its bluff.
See that lump behind:
a heavy basalt roller;
It gives a clumsy kind
of look that can’t be droller.
The ploughshare at the front
Throws up dirt and rubble,
Only for busy roller’s stunt
to smooth down all its trouble.
Then another furrow rips
The damaged soil once more,
and smooths again and strips
the Earth’s wound as before.
This double role ensures
That no speck rest in peace,
And that the days and hours
Should roll on without cease,
and that happenings must seem
as if unhappened in life’s stream.

Thus did Olo recite in the middle of the night. 'What's that?' Yegussa asked.

'Public relief works in Silo.' (Yegussa had no idea what Silo was.) 'In the eighth century,' Olo began his tale –

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– when the demand for foreign slaves became ever more pressing, the small peasants of the country were expropriated and driven together into Silo, the warehousing and transfer port next to Molussia City, preparatory to being sold. There they were held, men, women and children, and fattened up, not just to keep them fresh but to enhance their value as well. The depot expanded, and within a few years an unusual community had developed. It was called Fibrak, meaning Stud Farm. To keep down the number of slaves born in the lands where they were marketed, and to ensure a goodly supply and demand for later generations, only males were traded. Women were kept permanently in the internment depot as guaranteed breeding stock. At first, as far as the males were concerned, the depot was merely a transfer station; they just hadn't been taken off yet. For the demand for slaves exceeded what Molussia could supply. There was a shortage of ships. But they never had to stay more than two or three months in Fibrak, and later, once shipbuilding had caught up with the need for transport, not more than two or three weeks. Boys born in captivity were kept there until their fifteenth year.

The role of males delivered to Fibrak to await the next vessel out was a demeaning one. In common parlance they were referred to simply as *golen*; the term clearly had a purely sexual connotation. To the women, who maintained the cohesion and traditions of the village, they were *lowgrade*, *penniless*, *disposable*. New arrivals never knew what awaited them, even decades after the practice started; for no slave ever came back. Once the males passed through the gate under escort, they had to display themselves along the walls for the women to make their selection. The healthiest women, the most reliable breeders, were given first choice. The men could offer no resistance. This all took place under the watch of sentries in the towers that rose from the walls, who kept a sharp lookout to ensure that women's rights and good business discipline were upheld. The women's dominion was dominion by grace of the wholesalers. It was for them the stock of slaves was increased, and merely by existing they became more, and were worth more, than before. They were seen as a race far superior to the males. No woman could ever doubt her racial superiority. They were called *Bijojo*, meaning 'interest-bearing', or *Bi* for short, which means 'capital'. The prettiest among them are believed to have received unusual favours. 'Even the father's pleasure,' so ran a wholesalers' proverb, 'fills the camp with sons.'

It is true that incoming males were kept well fed, because they had to reach the country where they were marketed in a tolerable condition. But they slept in the open when not commandeered by a woman, and were not permitted to undertake the slightest task that might have made their stay in the depot useful. Of course they couldn't work outside, as it would have caused unemployment among Molussians. And through this privilege in matters of employment, the workers actually felt solidarity with their masters as fellow citizens. As an emblem of their fellowship they wore a striped neckerchief, which no slave was allowed to wear. But slave women loved the striped cloth, and called men arriving at the camp *goli*, meaning 'naked'.

At first these Naked had nothing to contribute during their stay other than their raw male potency, which they had to keep at the ready always and without question for the vacuous business of fertility. But inactivity soon became a problem: it made some slave consignments melancholy and weak, reducing their value by a third. A remedy was needed.

The impassive plough

One day the wholesalers held a conference to discuss what form the necessary slave work might take. They invited a few of the women from Fibrak, to test their loyalty and do them the honour of co-responsibility.

Bo, the gourmet renowned throughout the city, stressed that any work done by the slaves must remain as invisible as the work they would do for their prospective buyers. For their efforts were to be known only by their fruits.

Peluto the tireless, honorary president of several cultural organisations, considered it inadmissible to induct slaves into the virtues of a pure enjoyment of work or leave them the freedom to busy themselves heedless of the *commonality of immediate purposes*. They were all used from earliest childhood to toil for themselves and only for themselves.

Cojuta, the socialite, suggested putting them in competition with the workers, for as long as the workers had work, they were useful and innocuous fellow citizens.

Bo the democrat said that there must be some kind of work that required workers as overseers, because giving them a bit of authority would make them even more devoted.

Wei the pious, who financed the World Conservers sect, asserted that it should be drummed into them that their work conserved the world in its unalterable daily condition.

Guru, whose business skills were indisputable, but who annoyed everyone by having his hands in hostile and competing concerns, considered it indispensable to accustom the slaves to the kind of work that destroys or outstrips other men; e.g. today it was the work of one man to pluck, then leave things lying for the other man; to clean, so that the other becomes dirty; to run, so that the other overtakes him.

But Go, representing the women, insisted that the work of the males should remain as inconsequential as gossip, and silly as a child's game.

All, however, confirmed by numerous protestations their mutual meeting of minds, and all had said the same thing. So they summoned Iegor the engineer, to propose the mode of work and the form of the tools required. And when he proposed his notion of the *impassive plough*, everyone was in accord.

Ten days later the slaves were divided into groups of twelve. Each group was hitched to a yoke, by means of which they were slowly and laboriously to haul a machine along. The path was always the same. They hauled it along the walls of the gigantic depot village and so kept circling the whole area – a path that would take a pedestrian ten minutes but which they, hitched to the yoke, needed six hours to complete. Three paces behind the first machine crept the next one, and three paces behind that came the third. There was no beginning and no end, and no group was

in the lead, and no group was last. The whole scene resembled a slowly turning carousel, whose parts – unconnected to any centre – at their slow tempo kept the starry heavens revolving. The yard was soon known as The Big Mill. But the overseers had learned that the slaves' toil kept the world moving.

Any relationship to a machine was aberrant. The front part was a plough; the share dug deep into the dirt and turned it over, as if it was a field. But the rear part comprised a stone roller high as a man, such as was used in Molussia for building roads. This at once smoothed over the broken ground. Iegor's invention, in a manner simple as it was ingenious, combined two familiar implements. The virtue of these devices was to leave the yard exactly as it was. The ground behind each machine looked just like the ground before it. What was done beneath the machinery housing remained invisible. And so, year after year, for as long as the *impassive plough* crawled around the perimeter of the yard, the ground was in constant motion, the topsoil never at rest. Year after year it presented the same appearance of total solidity.

But the slaves, their days divided between the vacuous business of fertility and the sterile business of the plough, retained their strength. And so immersed were they in the meaningless, that when they arrived in the land of their buyer, they greatly surpassed slaves from other regions in lack of emotion, in docility and steadiness. They attracted extraordinary prices. And when people in the lands of slavery wanted to designate something as exemplary, they called it *strong and mellow as a man from Silo*.

***The Pariahs in Silo declared they could not do more than die,
and their enemies could not do more than kill them***

'The Fibrak internment depot,' Olo continued, 'was almost completely cut off from the world. Anything not passed on to the inmates had never happened. And what happened to them was so sudden, it happened before they became aware of it. Their life was always retrospective.'

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Before they arrived at Fibrak they had never dreamt of its existence. Before starting on their institutionalised manly duties, they had never heard of this establishment, which had already been operating for many years. Of what was intended for them – the weeks-long voyage, a slave's life in a foreign country – they knew nothing until already on the high seas, until already toiling in a Usalian or Sekelian plantation. They knew nothing but the present. What the future might bring was of no interest to them. For in Fibrak they had not the slightest hint of what was coming. They were incapacitated. They never questioned their circumstances in any way. And the Fibrak women took the doltishness of new arrivals that set in after a few days as natural male inferiority. Domineering over the men was a natural prerogative. For in Fibrak there was only what was natural. Nevertheless, some news did penetrate into the camp. Partly via threats from guards, partly from hints by women whose intimate relations with the traders enabled them to keep in the know. Of course the little that penetrated was so out of date and distorted as to be misleading, and reinforced rather than endangered Fibrak's isolation.

When the inexhaustible source of Massui slaves was discovered, the global price of slaves dropped so much that maintaining the Fibrak operation and the expensive ocean transport represented not just a plain loss, but a betrayal of the entire Molussian national economy. So no more slaves were brought into Fibrak. But the stock was loaded every two days, regular as clockwork, onto big transport vessels, and one day's voyage away, two miles west of the island of Rapedusa, the containers suspended in the hold were suddenly lifted over the side and emptied into the sea. The slaves were drowned before they knew their death had come. The mass of Fibrak slaves, abnormally swollen by the crisis, was cleared by this method only after several months. Adapting more than one vessel for the dumping operation proved unprofitable. Only after regular shipments had proceeded for two months did the first rumours trickle back to Fibrak. All concluded with the phrase: *your stay in the camp is preparation for your death*.

Now the most outlandish creeds were proclaimed, and each found its adherents. One declared that life meant living towards one's death. For death could occur at any moment. Life (*Yaru*) was anyway already *Yaruzani* (having-lived). There was nothing but death-in-life; nothing but death that experienced itself before it entered in.; nothing but the possibility, the only possibility, for mortals to truly adapt themselves to their mortality. An astonishing number of slaves became fascinated by this doctrine. In hours when they were not needed for their manly duties, especially late in the evening with their toil at the *impassive plough* behind them, they sat in the yard, neither sad nor agitated, apparently concentrating on themselves with a rather idiotic expression, trying to think thoughts of death uninterrupted. It is doubtful that their state during this meditation differed essentially from their normal state. Even the founder of the sect doubted it and – not without reason – despised his disciples. Thinking of death meant thinking of nothing. So it came about that the dumbest minds claimed the most exalted concentration, and the stupidest, sunk in boredom, were able to say they had had a foretaste of their own death.

The bolder among the slaves, and the sceptics, asserted they had always known death would arrive one day, and the sudden gravity with which others spoke of death merely revealed an earlier loss of memory. What they should ridicule was not living, but dying. Owners can't do more than kill, which is not much and a farce because it lacks nuance. And nothing more than dying can happen to any of us. None of it is of any significance, pointless talking about it, for those who die would anyway have died some time later.

A gradual hatred fermented between the two parties, who failed to note how similar they were. But the similarity arose from their similar measures: for neither side had any. When the cleverest of the first party declared that the cynicism of the other side was nothing but *shamefaced earnestness*, he was just as accurate as the spokesman for the opponents, who labelled the earnestness of the others *overdone cynicism*.

A third clique was composed of arrant cowards. They were despised by the first two groups, who accorded each other the right to despise. The third group, however, believed they comprised a mature and unshakeable minority. 'Actually there's no danger', they claimed, as they trembled with fear. 'A minor danger is not worth

mentioning. But a major danger cannot last long; it has no durability; once it's over, everything returns to normal.'

Among the slaves were some so gigantic as to be almost a different species. One, all by himself, could set in motion the *impassive plough*, which normally needed twelve pullers. That his pulling was as meaningless as the *impassive plough* itself occurred to no one. They worshipped him as a master. That this master was a slave, a slave of women who in turn were the slaves of guards, and the guards slaves of the owners, this too occurred to no one.

The smaller among them – who were still big enough – measured their chests to see whose was biggest. Before they measured, they seemed not to know that one of them would have to have the biggest chest. In one respect, however, all were winners, and their physical training, competitions and the bets they placed occupied all their free time.

But one among them was smaller than the rest. His name was Yyt, and he didn't actually belong with them. He was tough and resilient enough, his body was compact and thickset, but his physical accomplishments were unnatural. For he was clever, and his muscles were only proofs of his ambition. His real goal was to be acknowledged among those who were acknowledged, indeed to lord it over them with his cleverness. He calculated for them, he was their wordmaker and advocate. Yyt was the first to give the giants their own opinion, one tailored to them: the first to give them a programme. With great vigour he represented a position of barefaced power, and did so as representative of the giants; and he declared that no proofs were needed apart from the giants. Any other proof was contrived, unrealistic and impotent. But the giants clustered around him, somewhat abject and awkward, and they didn't exactly say no, because what he said was supposed to be their own opinion. They were humble enough to truly believe in Yyt because he had already surpassed them in activities they were able to witness with their own eyes, the results of which they had him to thank for. For they almost always needed to be helped, and their strength was well matched by their awkwardness. Most things were too small for their enormous hands, their food rations were inadequate, and Yyt was their intermediary with the guards in efforts to obtain a double ration. Just as they were used to Yyt doing the thinking for them, so Yyt was used to using his mind to make the mind contemptible, opening his mouth to make clever combinations of the words of the Molussian language in praise of the wonderful size of a strong chest. And he proved with many arguments that no stronger arguments were needed because he himself was an argument, and anyone who needed proofs exposed himself to ridicule, for anything that needs a proof clearly can't speak for itself.

As the three cliques developed their three different theories of death, Yyt did not stand idle. In the name of the giants he declared that all three theories were identical. Thinking about death was in every case cowardice. Those impelled to despise life or render death innocuous in order to stave off dying – they lacked true courage. True courage had no opinions and needed no preparation. The truly courageous love life, so that death might be the real and unwished-for death. And he loves death because it proves his courage like nothing else in all his life. Such is the positivity of courage, proving its greatness and healthy nature.

Walking and riding start from the same point

“The Fifth, who had been an interpreter,” Olo related, “reports a scene that occurred when he came by chance upon a slave transport made up of some marching and other riding on carts –”

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Camped out at the assembly point Bax, halfway between the coast and the interior of the colonial realm, was a column of fifty Wodites, escorted by five Molussian corporals and an interpreter, on the march towards the port and garrison town of Beni where they were to be shipped aboard a Silo transport. The column lay on the highway that climbed alongside the Pepo River. But on the other bank, deep in the reedbed that extended far into the country, stood three wagons whose destination was the town of Sono. The wagons, whose zebu teams were being changed over, were filled with excited chattering forest people enjoying their first ride in a wheeled vehicle; each wagon held at least fifty Pygmies. They followed the unyoking and yoking with extravagant commentary.

Neither the resting column nor the Pygmies had the least notion they were to be sold as slaves. The former found it amazing to be marched along in orderly rank and file, the latter to be hauled by zebus. And tomorrow was unknown to them, because it was not known there would be a tomorrow. The two transports ogled each other back and forth across the river with the greatest curiosity, pointing and exchanging shouts. But since the two transports came from different regions of the colony, they understood one another not at all, and each found the other ridiculous.

‘Look at them,’ said the marching column’s interpreter, ‘look at them, the jabberers! In Molussia that’s how we transport calves, taking them to the slaughterhouse. That lot don’t trust their own legs. They are unfree, just goods.’

The resting column laughed out loud, thinking themselves pretty smart, and they threw tufts of grass across, and some bleated to mock the other transport, and they were already proud of Molussia before they had even landed there.

‘Look at them,’ said the interpreter on the other side, ‘look at them, the bleating ninnies. That’s how we fool oxen. I’ll let you into a secret, because you’re riding and not like that lot, having to trot along on their own two feet, and where to? To the slaughterhouse. For us it’s a lousy trick, but they have no idea where they’re headed. And they stay smug and happy to the very last moment. For us, riding in a wagon is naturally a prerogative of the higher castes. No slave ever rides, only knights and merchants and our kind and your kind.’ A jabbering cloud of excitement surged up like a swarm of ants, and some bleated to mock those across the river, and only the zebus showed no interest at all.

While their flocks exchanged bleats, the interpreters expressed by signs the inner satisfaction they gained from their little game. (The river was too wide to communicate by voice.) But there they sat, each on his riverbank, whip in hand, and both grinned, though they couldn’t make out each other’s face. But they knew what they were doing.

Towards evening, as it grew cooler and the time drew near for the two transports to set off once more, along came the Molussian gunboat gliding slowly downriver. The huge sails cast big wandering shadows on the banks. In its wake came sixteen

merchant vessels heading for the east coast, where the Pepo entered the sea. 'One day you'll ride like that,' each interpreter announced to his flock as they stood there aghast, and the overseers gave the call to move off. So both transports went on their way, the marchers towards Beni, the wagons towards Sono, drinking in new sights and eager to see where the Earth comes to an end and everything is water. But neither party, marchers or riders, could see the other, for the line of sailing vessels lay between them a long while, and finally the roads diverged away from the river in different directions.

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"Didn't they meet up again in Silo?" Yegussa asked. "That's where it must have all come out."

"Don't be so naïve!" Olo retorted. "Of course they met up again. But do you think they'd forgotten their mocking contempt? The little ones called the big ones oxen, the big ones called the little ones calves. But both sides were sure of the special uses they'd be put to in Molussia."

***Olo explains why there have to be Pygmies, and
why there can never be Pygmies***

"But now I'd really like to know," said Yegussa, "why the Pygmies were being taken away by wagon, and what they would be used for. I have my suspicions."

"They were taken by wagon," Olo replied, "because their legs were short, and a march would waste too much time. People used them because they lived on almost nothing, less than any other slaves, and were visible proof that claims of the others for a supposed minimum living ration were mendacious. Apart from that, even the biggest Pygmy could clamber around in the framework of machinery like a monkey, and their fingers seemed fine-honed for the most sensitive precision tools. Because their cheap maintenance caused high demand, their sale price could be ratcheted ever up. Because they lowered the wages and living standard of Molussian workers, they were hated by them – and the theory that the Pygmies were not actually human, put about by Molussian entrepreneurs to support their unscrupulous exploitation of the colonies, found the most fertile soil among Molussia's Pariahs.

"I've never seen a Pygmy," said Yegussa. "Aren't they fairytale creatures, like giants?"

"Wherever did you get that idea?"

"The doctrine of *supernatural* powers, the powers of Djungas and Djangus, is useful to the ruling class. It keeps the common folk meek, which in turn helps rulers maintain their authority. The doctrine of *subhuman* powers arouses pride and self-confidence among the common person: what he is at bottom, in the end: something apart from the happenstance of position; in the end: on Sundays, in his best suit; the Pariah first realises this when he realises there are subhuman Pygmies; compared to them he's noble, Molussian and a warranty of the best family tree. And fighting his imaginary enemies he's in league with all his real enemies. And what being in league means is actually: tying your own limbs."

"Bravo!" Olo praised him, clapping his hands. "But I think there really were Pygmies."

“Could be,” Yegussa replied. “Because it’s more practical to link something unreal to something real, so that the reality of the unreal will be more easily believed. The real is camouflage for the unreal, it legitimises and protects it. Every lie has some truth to which it attaches itself. So there really were Pygmies – but what does that prove? If they didn’t exist they’d have to be invented.”

“But that’s just what happened,” said Olo, astonished.

“Where did they end up, the Pygmies?” Yegussa went on to ask, for he took Olo’s reference to inventing just as literally as he meant his own to be taken.

“Their abundance and their high value brought about collapse,” Olo replied. “It was always inherent in the economic system that abundance was a risk, because it meant lower prices. But you can’t destroy cheapness without destroying the cheap item. So in various regions Pygmies were hunted like wild beasts, systematically and to the last victim, in order that the few remaining would maintain their value. For the hunt they used Pariahs whose wages had been lowered by the Pygmies, and who now had a duty to give free rein to their rage against the enemy. The truth of the ‘subhuman Pygmy’ theory was proved a thousand times in the most ghastly way: often human bones were found in a Pygmy’s stomach, especially in the Knogia region. Other Pygmy tribes were herded into big Nature Reserves, ostensibly to preserve what remained of their natural state, but in fact to deter other big powers from exploiting the forests, for it would have been a tedious business to sweep them all for Pygmies. For what they called ‘Nature’ was any district considered unprofitable by one interest, but potentially profitable by another; so their inviolable virginity was defended to the last.”

“So what did the other great powers do?”

“They were even more progressive. They discovered with the help of their medical people how to turn normal people into Pygmies. The culture was already advanced enough to transform human beings by means of non-lethal hormonal therapies. The therapies were cheaper than transporting ‘natural Pygmies’. And because the production of artificial Pygmies drastically reduced unemployment – for Artificials were just as content as the real sort with the barely life-sustaining rations that many enterprises were only too happy to provide – Molussia even imported the artificial sort. The few natural Pygmies still found here and there in old-fashioned enterprises run by snobbish worthies now had no value, basically as a result of their high value. But the Artificial syndicate mounted an expedition to extirpate the remnants of the barbarians, the natural Pygmies in their Nature Reserves; the Artificials feared that Nature could still suddenly become competitive again. The colonial war, pursued under the rubric ‘Exterminate the Subhuman’, was well remembered by the Sixth, one of the few who returned. In the Nature Reserve the two sorts found it impossible to distinguish real from artificial, friend from foe, so the bloodbath was total. Only a few, later much feted, came back to Molussia, the Sixth among them. What’s more, the Sixth implied that he was not artificial, so he was probably the last proper Pygmy. And here he died.”

The Peace Bell

“To render hopeless any attempt to escape from the slave depot,” Olo began –

around the neck of every male inmate was hung a chain with many heavy bells. Newcomers as soon as they arrived; boys born in the depot when they reached their

tenth year. I clearly recall how proud I was to perform this ritual, to bend my neck and suddenly assume the burden of a grown adult. And how I never grew weary of the jangling every time I moved, or spoke, or ate, or walked about. And I was by no means alone in my delight. It was widespread, and for understandable reasons. For the tone of the bells was not random. The depot administration had tuned them to a particular unresolved dreadfully thrilling chord, in order to keep us all expectant, mobile and fresh. The chord seemed to promise a different, deeply satisfying final chord. That this promised final chord never actually arrived was a hard lesson to learn. But we never spoke of it. Probably each of us hoped that by constant jingling we might finally bring it about.

Counter-intuitive though it may seem, we all gradually grew accustomed to the bells. But the heavy weight was basically a part of our own body, and the jingling a part of our own movements. Weight and jingle were to some extent lasting and indispensable proof of our own existence. Actually no punishment was more feared among us than 'bell deprivation', when for some hours or even days we had to live without bells. The deprivation led to feelings of dizziness, deafness and non-existence. And we heaved a great sigh when the bells, our penance completed, were once again hung about our neck, and we shook them all around to hear the sound and sense the weight and feel that we were once again fully ourselves. Some found this restoration so pleasurable that it more than compensated for the punishment. I can recall that some even deliberately provoked the deprivation.

Whether this institution was really aimed at the stated end, whether it was really to protect us from lethargy and keep us in constant motion and a state of freshness, is highly doubtful. In any case, after a certain time the depot management voiced the suspicion that the unresolved chord was damaging the slaves physically and mentally and lowering their export value. I can still remember how we were called to assembly and told that our bells would be exchanged for new ones, tuned to the long yearned-for satisfying final chord. You might think we'd be happy to hear this. But the opposite happened. When we were ordered to bend our necks and one by one the old familiar chain of bells was removed, we became more recalcitrant than ever before.

'Really you don't deserve them,' the guard shouted as we stood there weightless with bare throats. 'But even your grandchildren will remember this day as a landmark in the history of Molussian humanitarianism. Bend your necks!' For a second time we bent our necks, to be yoked to the new chain of bells.

'Make 'em ring!' the guard ordered when the investiture was over. We made a quiet, cautious test. The sound was calming and pure. The guard nodded: 'Such harmony in Silo!'

At once we made no sound.

'Don't play scaredy-cats! Move! Faster!' We jingled our Peace Bells a second time. No less cautious than the first.

The guard shook his head. 'Company, march!' he cried, and he set off at the double.

To disobey was impossible. We started off. We jingled like a herd of cows stampeding out of the stalls onto summer meadows. After we had run all around the

yard three times, the guard allowed us to stop. And we were left to deal with the new bells on our own.

We wiped the sweat from our brows. The whole thing was too new. And we were unanimous that these Peace Bells would make us sick. As long as we kept still, we felt a little better. But as soon as we made the last movement, it was all up with our illusions.

It was a totally natural reaction to limit our movements to the minimum. In the beginning it was only our fear that dictated this parsimony. But within a few days a kind of sporting competition emerged among us, to see who could go about the depot without the slightest jingling. Of course this required practice, and time. We began to do without all sorts of gestures and hand movements. We walked stiff-necked, our tread slow and measured, and through this minutely-governed self-restraint acquired an undeniably dignified bearing. Anyone who jingled as he walked was considered ridiculous. But whoever lived with totally silent bells enjoyed our unchallenged respect. To this dignified sport some of us owed our salvation. They dared to pass through the main gate of Silo in broad daylight. Since they never emitted the least jingle, the sentry never looked up.

“And I was one of them” Olo said.

From CHANGING PLACES

On the injustice of the Föhn winds

“The tenth year of Gey’s regime,” Olo began, “saw the start of the nocturnal activity that became famous as the *Insurrection of the Ghosts of Justice*. –”

There came the Föhn wind. Warm air masses from the southern archipelago swept across rooftops, descended suddenly on different parts of the city as if from some monstrous wind-tunnel, only in other places, for some obscure reason, to whirl in place around an invisible fulcrum sucking up roof tiles, people, bushes as it whirled. The sky was dark, though the wind washed it clear for moments. But the clouds it brought had swept away the moon. Meanders in the bed of the gale, the tenacity of currents and sudden calms, were incomprehensible. Incomprehensible why one spot remained calm, cool and as if forgotten right beside another where it was impossible to take a breath or call for help. The city seemed subdivided into channels, streets, passages, spaces and air-chambers that totally ignored the old natural city plan and the organic concentricity of its divisions by social class. Where the old plan resisted the new sinister plan, it was overturned, and when the whirlwind all of a sudden vanished as if summoned away, the debris it had swept up fell to earth like looted stuff flung down in contempt. Next morning there it was, neatly laid out as witness to the orderly nocturnal track.

The gusts that hurled themselves at the windows of the royal bedchamber awoke King Gey, and he could catch his breath no more easily than any Pariah or citizen. To hold off the roaring, the buffeting, the screams that penetrated into his chamber, he buried himself under blankets that bathed him in sweat. Only when the Föhn

subsided did he dare step onto the dripping balcony, where to his astonishment he saw that the storm had been as unsparing of the glass of his greenhouses, his peach trees and his rhododendrons as of the barracks of his lifeguard slaves, which had lost its roof and lay in a confusion of ruin with no inside or outside. Gazing further about, he saw courtiers sprawled in the open window frames of the side wings, and in the windows of neighbouring buildings were middle-caste purveyors to the palace: they suffered like himself, and his own sleeplessness was merely one part of a general whole. He stepped back inside, for commonality disgusted him, and he was irritated and annoyed by them all. He believed they were all friends of the Föhn, and persuaded himself that they took pleasure at the sight of him, even him, standing sleepless and haggard on his balcony.

Next day exhausted and agitated Pariahs gathered in the marketplace. Their residential districts lay in total ruin; many of them were injured, many brought the bodies of wives and children along, and almost everyone was carrying randomly salvaged scraps of their possessions. But when they began to treat the square as a camping ground, they were restored to order by the royal gendarmerie: the Föhn had already wreaked enough disorder in the city, and Gey would take strictest action against any who used the catastrophe as yet another opportunity to sabotage the orderliness of Molussian life; they were to leave the marketplace forthwith and report to their daily place of work. Some obeyed at once, in order to be able to set the wage level in view of the urgency of clearing-up operations and lack of competition for their labour power. But most offered resistance, not knowing where to find a place to settle with the bodies of their loved ones and their worldly goods. But being unarmed they soon had to retreat to their ruined districts, leaving behind corpses and possessions, and thirty lay slain on the square.

But now they were thirty fewer than before – and no one could have totted up their losses during the night – the Föhn and Gey became for them one single enemy. And they thought they had a right to take revenge on Gey for the Föhn. One among them, Jarra, stood up to make a speech:

‘Pariahs,’ he declaimed, ‘the Föhn is partisan. It gives to all their due: to the poor, greater poverty; to the rich, yet more riches. The gulf between us and the overlords is wider than ever: we shall soon have made good the minor damage to their big palaces. But the overlords won’t release us from restoring their palaces before we have extended them to three times the height of our own tenement barracks. And *they* will set the wages, not us. For with whose help and with whose money shall we rebuild our own utterly ruined districts? Who will bring our wives and children back to life? Who will remunerate us to rebuild our own dwellings? We ourselves, maybe?’

‘No one,’ the Pariahs answered him.

‘Who are the victims of the Föhn?’ asked Jarra.

‘Only us.’

‘Only us. For we have nothing with which to make good our losses. But *they* have so much they can pay for their own repairs from their own resources. And they need us more than ever. We are at their disposal. Pariahs! We are property of the overlords, we do not belong to ourselves. But the tenements we inhabited they called our own property, and our dominion. Pariahs! For the ownership of their property

the overlords accepted no responsibility. The Pariah, who neglects himself and who does not conserve his energies, wastes his strength on the property of the overlords. How should we conserve our strength, Pariahs? We buy from the overlords. And they earn from us, so that we may expend our strength on them.

‘Pariahs! Who shall we buy from, in order to rebuild our tenements in the most frugal way? From them. In their factories we shall make the wooden roof frames that they will sell to us for three times the amount they paid us in wages to make them. Because *they* own the wood and the cutting tools. But we must sell ourselves for years to produce the roofs we need today. They will grow rich from the calamity that befell us. Nothing better than the Föhn could have happened to them.

‘Pariahs!’ he screamed again. ‘Did Gey forestall the calamity?’

‘No!’ screamed the Pariahs.

‘Whose strength made their houses sturdier than ours?’

‘Our strength!’

‘Who form the basis of their safety?’

‘We do!’

‘Just let them come, the royal assessors. Their only task is to assess our losses lower than the king’s. Pariahs, we do not ask the value of what was destroyed, we ask about our purchasing power; we ask about the value of what was spared; we ask: who delivers? Gey’s vineyards and avenues of marble statues that the Föhn has battered are sturdier and more artistic than our tenements that lie in ruins. *But what lies ruined is for us the essential, for them a frippery.* Pariahs, it is a deception to call the storm “natural” and “blindly raging”. And “no respecter of persons”. Don’t trust Nature: she knows where wealth lies, and detours around it in the slyest way. But the ramshackle she seeks out, and she carries the wretched away. She is no better than taxes.’

Some foremen were there, who had no love of demagoguery and who asserted that the Föhn had struck indiscriminately; such a national disaster would narrow the gulf that Jarra was seeking to make even wider. It was wickedness to exploit a shared calamity for one’s own benefit. The rich were hit just as badly as the poor. For their cultural goods, their vineyards and marble alleys were to them as essential to life as their tenements were to the Pariahs. Everyone had lost what was his, everyone should contribute his own little mite to the general calamity. Indeed, without his dwelling the Pariah was still a Pariah, while without his cultural goods the master was no longer a master. So the rich were out on a limb, while the Pariah, when it came down to it, were indestructible.

And they handed Jarra over to the gendarmes.

When Gey heard about Jarra’s speech he was outraged, and ordered the stupid rebel’s immediate execution of. But the following day he issued the

Decree against the Injustice of the Föhn Wind

‘The Föhn,’ it read, ‘misprises the natural inequality of humankind. It ignores caste, the socially sanctioned foundation of Molussian society. It insults traditional

authority. It damages the property of the Royal House no less than Pariah trash and the movable property of the middle castes. It fails to render unto the king what is the king's, but mocks him with the fate of being equated with Magnates, with the middle castes, even Pariahs. The Föhn avoids the locations that wise foresight made ready for misery: among the miserable. And made ready for misfortune: among the misfortunate. It avoids the drain which keeps the whole of society clean while leading the unclean to its proper place, and which is essential to the harmony of all positions in Molussian society. The Föhn gives to no one his due, neither riches to the rich nor poverty to the poor, but to everyone the same. It is the opposite of just, it is the enemy of the natural order of things, it is in league with those who despoil our principles and the naturally developed privileges of dominion.

'The Föhn is partisan,' it goes on. 'It loves the Pariahs, and the Pariahs welcome it as one of their own. Its injustice provides opportunity for the injustices they scheme up. And they cling wilfully to the weight that has upset the balance of Molussian society. Föhn and rebellion are *one* enemy, the rebel welcomes the approach of Nature as the approach of his own accomplices

'Misery,' the decree concludes, 'among the miserable is a just misery, that guarantees the happiness of the commonality. But misery that worms its way into the wrong place is unjust, and must be rectified. It is necessary to restore the natural order of things and the correct balance of Molussian society. I have ordered the conscription of all Pariahs. They are to work on the restoration of my parks, my palaces, my forests and meadows, all without pay. So that the unfairness of their supplementary misery may make good the calamity.'

So the Pariahs toiled without pay, and the faces in the work gangs changed daily. They fell ill and broke down, because they had no subsistence and no roof over their heads. Sons took the place of fathers, and brothers filled gaps, and the mass of Pariahs melted away. But they were overseen by royal assessors, so that no more died than was desirable. For Gey wanted to reduce them to a tolerable number. They were to be so weakened as never again to present a danger, but there should still be more of them than there were employment opportunities in Molussia. *For even in the calmest of times, more Pariah were needed than were needed.* Thus was the flame of competition kept burning among the Pariahs, and wage levels were set without any influence from them. Once the Pariahs had achieved their optimum number, they were released. What the Föhn had left of their homes was sufficient for the survivors. And they were not displeased when normal work started up again, this time for the good of the commonality; work that guaranteed a wage and ongoing life and a constant level of their strength. Thus did the Föhn turn out fortunate for Gey. But for the motto of his regime he chose the words: *Asa by moschira*.⁵⁸

How to construct a fable. Truth smuggled in by lies.

And: The Föhn is partisan (1933)

"So, how do you construct a fable?" Yegussa asked. Olo asked him for an example.

⁵⁸ The meaning is not quite clear, but may resemble the French expression *corriger la fortune* ('give Fortune a helping hand').

“Let’s assume,” Yegussa began, “that a shipping company shuffles off responsibility for the sinking of its shoddily built pilgrim vessel, calling it a *natural catastrophe*.”

“That’s easy,” said Olo. The fable would go: *Natural catastrophes are acts of inexcusable negligence*.

“That smacks Truth right in the face,” Yegussa objected.

“Good,” said Olo. “Quite right. And not only Truth. The listener as well.”

“Who’ll smack back,” Yegussa carped.

“Excellent,” Olo judged. “That’s what the fable aims at. The listener will be on his guard.”

“And he’ll even be in the right,” Yegussa jeered.

“Wonderful,” said Olo. “That’s the key point. He’ll be in the right. And with his objection he’ll be making the very concession you’re steering him towards.”

Yegussa pricked up his ears.

“*The Föhn’s supposed to be an act of negligence?* he’ll say. *Try saying that about a shipwreck. That would be a different kettle of fish.*”

“*Exactly my point*, you’d reply. *Exactly what I meant to say*. But there he sits, and he’s pinned himself down.”

“Seems to me,” Yegussa said in a subdued tone, “that I’ve been pinned down. I admit it. I’ll give it a try.”

So Yegussa started off: “The morning after the Föhn, the Pariah leader Gem gave the following speech –”

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‘Pariahs! The royal assessors are on their way. They will determine that the damage to our ruined residential quarter is less than the damage to the Magnates’ pleasure gardens. Pariahs! We do not ask the value of what was destroyed, but of what is left over. Nothing of ours has been left over; while they have their essentials and most of their fripperies. Even their avenues of marble statues were sturdier than our tenements. Pariahs! The Föhn is partisan! It’s a deception to call the storm *nature* and *blindly raging* and *no respecter of persons*. Don’t trust the storm: it knows where wealth lies, and detours around it in the slyest way. But the ramshackle it seeks out, and carries the wretched away. It’s no better than taxes.’

‘That’s what Gem said. But among the audience were some Aspedees, who abhorred anything vehement. “The calamity is universal,” they objected. “The Föhn hit everyone. And it’s wicked to use the general calamity to push yourselves forward as the biggest victims. The Magnates were hit just as hard as you. Their cultural goods, their pergolas and yachts are no less essential to them than our tenements were to us. *Everyone lost what was his*. Everyone must contribute his own little mite. For even without our most essential possessions, Pariahs are still Pariahs. You could say we’re indestructible. But without their fripperies, Magnates are no longer Magnates. They’re much more exposed than ...’

Here Yegussa stumbled to a halt.

‘What’s up?’ asked Olo.

'I think,' Yegussa conceded in a dumbfounded tone, 'that the Föhn *really* is partisan.'

Olo began to laugh. To laugh as one laughs only when unpractised: clumsily, barking, and the narrowness of the vaulted cell rendered the barking even ghastlier.

'Beginner,' he mocked between bursts of laughter. 'Now you've pinned yourself down.' And laughed again.

But Yegussa crawled back into his corner and kept his mouth shut.

Truth is hauled away

"The Third," said Olo, "who denied that ideas are eternal and who reduced ideas to propaganda phrases of the powerful and who asserted that truths change and move around and will have to be overthrown along with the powerful – this Third is supposed to have been very jubilant as he was delivered down here. 'We'll show you who's right,' the bailiffs said when they came to arrest him. 'But don't you see,' he retorted as two of them quickly grabbed his legs, 'that even you,' and two more grasped him by the armpits, 'despite your convictions,' and they were already dragging him away at a trot, and the speaker was hauled away and the voice was hauled away and the truth along with it – 'you must admit that I'm right?' – and they were already out of the house and carrying him down the street to the amusement of the populace.

"Shut your mouth,' said one of the bailiffs when they paused to catch their breath. 'One bit of what you're saying was left hanging in your room, one was dropped on the tiles in your hallway, and the third was left three houses behind us.'

"That's irrelevant,' said the Third. 'Truth stands firm. What does movement have to do with it?'

"The Third," Olo remarked, "was so true to his convictions. And the bailiffs looked foolish for trying to refute the Theory of Power by using their power."

"Who thought they looked foolish?" Yegussa asked.

"Nobody in particular. But he really did make them look foolish."

"That doesn't happen," Yegussa shook his head. "The only fool there was the Third. He came down here on account of his theory, not the Cause. He thought his idea was stronger than the power he tried to convince. So in sacrificing himself he betrayed everything. That sort can't achieve the revolution."

"Think you can lecture me," Olo, annoyed, brought the conversation to an end.

What one lives for

In the middle of the night, Olo said:

There was a man in Molussia who for twenty years turned the treadmill in Glu's factory. A doctor made his rounds. 'Why do you toil?' he asked the man on the treadmill.

'Oh, come on, doctor,' he replied.

'Well?'

'To eat.'

‘And why do you eat?’

‘Cos I can’t work on an empty stomach.’

‘Do you benefit at all from your free time?’

‘And how!’ The man seemed suddenly to come alive. ‘I’m happy the whole day long.’

‘That’s something, at least,’ the doctor said to himself.

‘Because I’m knocking together a little miniature treadmill at home. It’s an almost perfect model, down to the last screw.’

The doctor felt dizzy.

‘Doctor, will you be able to make me better? I still need half a year. Then the little mill will be ready.’

‘Of course,’ the doctor assured him. But he hurried away out of the dust, and when he recounted the conversation to his wife, he felt the dizziness mounting in him again.

‘And why do you work?’ the wife asked her husband, the doctor.

‘Oh please,’ he replied.

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“What is that little story supposed to prove?” asked Yegussa.

Olo didn’t feel strong enough just then to give vent to his hopelessness outright.

“We’re always saying,” Yegussa said, to give Olo a push, “that we should have the opportunity to find ourselves.”

“We don’t just say it,” said Olo. “We fight for it too. And that’s why we’re sitting here. *So that the human being can find himself.*”

“And what do you understand by *find oneself*?” asked Yegussa.

“That normally we’re there for someone else. So that we ourselves are not there at all. So we’d much rather lose ourselves in work that has nothing to do with us.”

“And if in spite of that we were to find ourselves, that would be the freedom on behalf of which we’re sitting down here?”

Olo confirmed it.

“So just tell me,” Yegussa demanded, “how you imagine to yourself this *finding yourself*.”

“Just imagine,” Olo suggested instead, “that someone going in his spare time listens to a lovely symphony. Is that really so much better? Twenty-three hours of toiling and sleeping and eating, in order for just one hour *not* to be himself?”

“But you said people lose themselves in their work. Now you say they lose themselves in idleness.”

“Correct.”

“But where does it say that someone is there in order to be himself?”

“Nowhere. But when you are there for others, where does it say the others should be there too?”

Olo said this in a whisper. Though he knew these words were more indisputable than anything he had ever said, he was embarrassed by them. ...

And he had lain in his embarrassment a good long time when out of the dark a smack hit his mouth.

Olo did not stir.

"Yes indeed," there came, after an even longer pause, Yegussa's voice. "The smack came from me. Such questions can never be answered. But only beaten to death."

Olo did not stir.

"Trying to teach you," Yegussa started up again after a third pause, surprised even himself at how assured his voice sounded, "would be pointless. You've done what you could. And I'm grateful."

Olo omitted an indistinct sound.

"But now I have to take over your role. From now on I'm both teacher and pupil." And he began:

"We are here. The question *For what purpose?* is forbidden. Anyone asking that acts as if someone sent us down here, I mean into the world, with some special task to perform. If someone had sent us down here with a special task, we would be employees, hence not ourselves, hence even more unhappy. Anyone asking that has forgotten about happiness. Happiness – that's what we're here for, but it can be there for us only when we take hold of it for ourselves." ...

"That sounds all well and good," said Olo deep in the night. "But what you teach is not truth, but a veto. A veto on asking true questions." And turned onto his other side. ...

Next morning Yegussa responded. "Whoever asks why he is alive and then goes on living has answered his own question. Because he has a desire for life. Call it quits, or keep the question to yourself."

But Olo was no longer listening. His death was not an honourable one. But he had done his duty. And if shortly before the end he rashly allowed himself to fall once more into despair – then we would be the last to condemn him.

Last day: the temptation

Yegussa was astonished next morning when the old man cleared his throat before speaking again. He had no idea that the end really had come and that he himself had delivered the fatal blow. Finding Olo's provocative noises tedious, he told himself the old man would soon enough start off without any help.

"Any single rule," Olo said, but apparently not directed at Yegussa, "might be completely right. *But.*"

"What *but?*" Yegussa allowed himself to be needled.

"*In the end you only live once. And then on the outside? And then against the current?*"

This formula was the most concentrated betrayal. Yegussa was struck dumb.

"What else did you say, just recently?" asked Olo, shoving all the guilt of the betrayal onto the younger man.

Yegussa could not recall saying anything of the sort.

"In the end I am old," Olo continued, drily. "Sop for me the question is inconsequential, but you're going to be sitting here all your lifelong days."

For Yegussa it was as if Olo was not speaking. All he heard was the refrain: *You live only once. And then – against the current?* It sounded like a pendulum swinging. But the pendulum was enormous and he dared not grab at it and try to bring it to a stop.

"The world won't miss us," said Olo. ("You only live once" was what Yegussa heard. The pendulum swung to the other side.)

"But we miss the *world*."

("And then – against the current?")

"The world rolls on," said Olo. ("You only live once," Yegussa heard.)

"Even without us," said Olo.

("And then – against the current?" the question rang in Yegussa's ear.)

"And so we're no longer in existence," said Olo. ("You only live once.")

"And so we struggled for example against privilege and against nonsensical customs." ("You only live once," Yegussa heard.)

"But where is it written that the world is *meant* to be sensible? That it is meant to be? It just *is*." (Yegussa stuck fingers in his ears, but it was no use.)

"So we struggled for example against theologians. But where is it written that you cannot live with errors and illusions, and with what they call faith? And live happily, even?"

"Will you shut up, right now!" Yegussa screamed.

But Olo would not be put off. "And struggled for Pariah self-consciousness. And fair shares."

("And then – against the current," Yegussa heard, humming louder than before. He leant against the wall feeling seasick.

"And where is it written that you have to know who you really are? And what your destiny is? And that justice must prevail? And that no one should exploit anyone else? Must. Should. Should. Must. You could always just play along. It's there, the world. It's big. And sound. And asks no questions."

And with that, Olo's darkness willies were at an end. Only when Yegussa heard Olo settle down and make the few movements that signalled: night is beginning – only then was he far enough recovered to say more, and trap him.

"You can't escape," he declared. "And sleeping won't protect you."

Olo did not stir.

"Was that a lesson, just now? That bit about *you only live once* and *against the current*?"

Olo softened. "What do you mean, a lesson?"

"What you said, was it your conviction, your own? Which in the end broke through in the gaps between the stories the others told? Or was it just a test? To scare me?"

"I said nothing about my convictions. All I did was pose questions."

Yegussa kept worrying away. "Real questions? Or questions set to test me?"

"I really don't know," Olo concluded. And this time it was the truest truth.

Both now lay down, each turned to his wall. But Yegussa woke up several times, he had dreamed for the first time in a long while, and in his dreams he even spoke. "Are you in earnest?" he asked into the dark. But Olo made no comment.

"Are you just testing me?" he whispered an hour later. But Olo was not testing at all. "I keep hearing that refrain," he complained after another attempt at sleep. "It keeps humming on and on." But Olo was not in the least interested in the humming and lay facing his wall. When yet another hour had passed, Yegussa woke himself up screaming, and it was clear he must have woken Olo. He had a distinct memory of having screamed. "And then – against the current?" But Olo was just as uninterested this time. Now Yegussa held his breath. This lack of interest was taking things too far. He crawled over to the old man, felt cautiously and arrived at his beard. It was just like the first moments of his incarceration, when he wanted to find out what the man he had to share the darkness with looked like. It was not that long ago, but long enough. "Wake up," Yegussa whispered. "You owe me an answer." But Olo was still completely uninterested. So Yegussa began to shake the old man. "Hey," he called, "you owe me an answer." But the old man allowed himself to be shaken and he was still uninterested in giving an answer. Now Yegussa understood, but he still kept calling out for quite a while. Then he crawled back to his corner and slept. ...

THE END