



MARS

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FRITZ ZORN

An amazing book—as complete, as moving, as revealing as one of Freud’s case histories—*Mars* has already become an intellectual event in Europe, not only for its devastating power, but also for its searing and controversial vision of what cancer can be in human life: a symptom of psychic disorder.

Fritz “Zorn” was a young Swiss German who was born in Zurich and died there at the age of thirty-two, in 1976. This astonishing document, written in his last months, is his unsparing account of himself and the world that made him. It is an impassioned indictment of everything that his rigid middle-class society had codified into a “good upbringing,” a horrendously airtight world of puritanism and privilege that destroyed his childhood and made of him an adult so cut off from all real feeling and emotion that existence was a zero. It is a book that shocks and disturbs us as it reveals how for the first time, already in his thirties, Zorn was brought to recognize the emotionless stupor that he had mistaken for living, as he broke into the realms of feeling—how it was only the growth of the cancer in his body that began to move him toward life, how it was only the imminence of his own death that gave him, at last, the surging energy to propel himself out of his paralyzing, neurotic depression

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and come *alive*. Cancer fuels his race toward experiencing, understanding, articulating. With a ferocious clarity he reclaims his lost past: "*I will be dead, and I will have known why,*" he says.

There is no pandering to the reader, no forced intimacy, no sentimentality or longing in his voice. He is furiously dignified, refusing to blur the sharp outlines of the insights he reaches. What he has left us is a work of art, a shaping of pain and terror and rage into a blaze of emotional revelation.

Translated from the German by  
Robert and Rita Kimber

*Jacket design by Sara Eisenman*



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**MARS**



**Fritz Zorn**

**MARS**

AFTERWORD BY ADOLF MUSCHG

Translated from the German by Robert & Rita Kimber



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# I Mars in Exile



I'm young and rich and educated, and I'm unhappy, neurotic, and alone. I come from one of the very best families on the east shore of Lake Zurich, the shore that people call the Gold Coast. My upbringing has been middle-class, and I have been a model of good behavior all my life. My family is somewhat degenerate, and I assume that I am suffering not only from the influences of my environment but also from some genetic damage. And of course I have cancer. That follows logically enough from what I have just said about myself. There are two points I would like to make about my cancer. On the one hand, it is a physical disease from which I will most likely die in the near future, but then again I may win out against it and survive after all. On the other hand, it is a psychic disorder, and I can only regard its onset in an acute physical form as a great stroke of luck. By this I mean that in view of my unfortunate family legacy, getting cancer was by far the cleverest thing I have ever done in my life. No one, of course, is happy to get cancer; but since my life has never been very happy, I feel, after thinking

things over carefully, that I'm better off now than I was before. I do not claim that my situation is a particularly happy one; but, given the choice between an utterly miserable state and a merely miserable one, the latter is preferable.

I have decided to put down my reminiscences in this book. I will not be trying to write memoirs in the usual sense of the term. Instead, I will focus on the history of a neurosis or at least on some aspects of it. This is not an autobiography but only the record of a single aspect of my life. That one aspect, however, related as it is to my disease, has always been and still is today the dominating factor in my life. I will try to recall from my childhood everything that strikes me as typical of my illness and pertinent to it.

In recollecting my childhood, I have to begin by saying that I grew up in the best of all possible worlds. The attuned reader will realize instantly from this remark that my life was bound to go wrong. I gather from what other people have told me that I was a lovable, lively, cheerful—indeed, even a sunny—child. This would seem to suggest that I had a happy childhood. But apropos of happy childhoods, I recall a Dr. Lonelyhearts column I once saw in a magazine. A young man had written in to say that he was at his wits' end and felt totally unable to cope with life. This struck him as all the more astonishing because he had had such a happy childhood. Dr. Lonelyhearts's response was very simple. If the young man felt unable to cope with life now, then his childhood clearly had not been happy. And when I consider how I have managed my life up to this point—or mismanaged it—I can only assume that my childhood wasn't happy, either.

I can't recall any particularly unhappy details from my childhood. On the contrary, almost everything I remember from those years seems quite happy, and I see no point in ascribing more

significance to a few instances of childhood sorrow than they deserve. No, things always went very well for me—too well, actually. That was precisely what was so bad. Everything always went too well. I was spared nearly every little woe; more important still, I was spared all problems. To state that more precisely, I never had problems. I didn't have any problems at all. What I was spared in my early years was not pain or unhappiness but problems; and, consequently, I was also spared the opportunity of learning how to deal with problems. Paradoxically enough, the fact that I lived in the best of all possible worlds was what was so dreadful, and what made this best of all possible worlds so dreadful was that pure joy and harmony and delight always prevailed in it. But a world that is all happiness and harmony is an impossibility, and if the world of my youth was such a world, then it must have been false and hypocritical to the core. Let me put it this way: I didn't grow up in a world of misery but in one of hypocrisy. And if hypocrisy reigns, misery will soon follow.

I'd like to say something here about the form I will be using in these reminiscences. They will be almost completely lacking in chronological structure, for I shall be less concerned with individual experiences (which I could easily organize in a chronological sequence) than in trying to recapture different stages of consciousness. For the most part, I can no longer remember when certain insights came to me as mere inklings, as more or less nebulously developed thoughts, or as certainties. Then, too, in my childhood I was not capable of formulating my impressions and consciously registering my reactions. I will therefore be putting many things into a very different temporal sequence now from the one I would have used to record them when I actually experienced them, and many incidents I can no longer place in the years in which they really occurred.

Harmony, which I have already mentioned, was surely the most dominant factor in the world of my youth. I'll pass over

my earliest childhood here because I want to avoid the danger of projecting something into that period that strikes me as probable and plausible but that I can't recall having actually experienced. The world I'll begin with, then, is the one I knew as a small boy. This was a world so harmonious that it is difficult to conceive of such harmony. I grew up in a world so completely harmonious that it would make even the most dyed-in-the-wool harmonist's hair stand on end. The atmosphere in my parents' house was prohibitively harmonious, which is to say that nothing could be other than harmonious—indeed, that not even the concept or the possibility of the inharmonious was admitted. You may object that total harmony is an impossibility, that light can exist only if there is darkness, and that any light that has nothing to do with darkness and wants nothing to do with it will be in a bad way. And you will be quite right.

The ominous form that Hamlet's question took in my parents' house was: To be harmonious or not to be. Everything had to be harmonious. The existence of anything problematic couldn't be permitted; that would have meant the end of the world. Everything had to be unproblematic, and if it wasn't unproblematic, it had to be made so. On any issue there could be only one point of view. A difference of opinion would have spelled disaster. I can understand now why disagreement would have been catastrophic for our little cosmos. We were unable to argue. We simply didn't know how to do it, just as someone may not know how to play a trumpet or make mayonnaise. Because we lacked the skill of arguing, we didn't argue, just as someone who can't play the trumpet doesn't give trumpet concerts. It was therefore essential for us to avoid any situations in which we might be obliged to argue. The consequences of this were horrendous. We were always of the same opinion. And if it should ever appear that this might not be so, we assumed that there had to be some misunderstanding. We had been wrong to think any difference of opinion existed. The disagreement was not a

real disagreement at all, and once the misunderstanding had been cleared up, it would become obvious to everyone that we had really been of the same opinion all along.

I realize today that in my youth I never learned how to have an opinion of my own. All I learned was how not to have my own opinion. As a boy and a young man I never had an opinion about anything.

I doubt that I learned the word “no” from my parents. (It may have crept into my vocabulary in school at some point.) It was never used in my parents’ house because it was superfluous there. We never felt it to be a burdensome necessity or even a compulsion that we always said yes to everything. Saying yes was a need that was ingrained in our flesh and blood and that we felt to be the most natural thing in the world. It was the outward expression of our total harmony. Saying yes was a necessity for us (even though we didn’t perceive it to be such). How dreadful it would have been if anyone had ever said no. That would have opened our harmonious world to new vistas that it was incapable of handling and that it wanted to keep “out there” at any cost. So we kept on saying yes. Yes-men are probably not born, and I therefore can’t call myself a born yes-man. But this much I can say: I was raised to be the perfect yes-man.

It is difficult for me to judge now to what extent we—or perhaps only I—felt this eternally unexpressed “no” to be a skeleton in the family closet. Somehow, sometime, this skeleton must have stirred now and then, but I can’t recall ever hearing it. It must have stirred very cautiously. My parents didn’t like thinking about skeletons, and they probably wouldn’t have heard anything that they didn’t think about. My own tastes were much more macabre than those of my parents. I may have heard the skeleton when I was a small boy, but I didn’t realize it was a skeleton I was hearing.

Not only were we constitutionally unable to say no, but we



also found it unbearably difficult to make any kind of statement. Anyone who said something had to keep in mind that the others both had to and wanted to respond with yes. Out of consideration for everyone else's feelings, we avoided any statement that might have interfered with the others' natural impulse to say yes. If we had to express any kind of judgment—on whether we had liked a book, for example—we first had to calculate what the others' reactions would be. It was like a card game. You had to think ahead before you played your card if you wanted to avoid the danger of saying something that might not win the approval of everyone else present. Or we held back with our own judgment in the hope that someone else would be bold enough to express his opinion, which we could then applaud and adopt as our own. We waited until somebody finally let the cat out of the bag and said that the book had been "good." The rest of us then agreed that the book was "good," maybe even "very good" or "fantastic." But if the first speaker had said it was "not good," then we would have supported him in this opinion, too, and proclaimed the book "not good at all" or even "dreadful."

I developed the habit of not forming judgments of my own and of accepting the judgments of others. I didn't learn to evaluate things myself but valued only what others valued. I liked whatever other people thought was good, and I withheld my approval from whatever others thought was not good. I read "good books," and I liked them because I knew they were "good." I listened to "good music," and I liked it for the same reason. But it was other people, not I, who determined what was good. I lost the capacity to have spontaneous feelings and preferences. I had learned that classical music was "good," that popular music and jazz were "bad." So I listened to classical music, just the way my parents did; and I thought it good. I scorned jazz because I knew it was bad, even though I had never

heard any jazz and didn't have any idea what jazz was. People had told me it was bad, and that was all I needed to know.

Another of the dubious preferences I had during my youth was for the "higher things." I'll have more to say about this later on in these memoirs. In the question of music, for example, I knew that jazz was bad but noticed that all my classmates at school and just about everyone my age enjoyed jazz, hit tunes, and every other kind of "bad" music. The conclusion I drew was that I had already recognized what was "right" and had already attained to higher things. I had already learned to distinguish between good and bad. My less advanced classmates remained mired down at the level of bad music while I had risen to the heights of good music. It didn't dawn on me that I had never compared the two, that I had not made a conscious choice between them, or that I had blindly accepted the prejudice that defined all classical music as good and all modern music as bad. I had not gotten past the doctrine that in matters of art everything old was, on principle, good and everything modern was bad. Goethe and Michelangelo were good because they were dead, but Brecht and Picasso were bad because they were modern. I thought I had leapt a hurdle and elevated myself to the level of the classical. But in reality, I had never dared even approach that hurdle and had simply walked around it. By that subterfuge, I had appropriated a little of the "higher" realms unto myself and could look down on others who had not yet reached such heights. All this I did without realizing in the least how hollow my attainment to those heights was.

The first record I ever bought with my own money was, of course, something classical and "acceptable"—probably some tedious piece by Mozart or Beethoven—and I was very proud that I had chosen the "right" thing. My brother, who was three years younger than I, bought his first record just a little while later. He picked the "Criminal Tango," a record that was very

popular at the time. My younger brother's choice evoked a condescending smile from me because I knew that the "Criminal Tango" was kitsch. I didn't realize until many years later that my brother had followed his own tastes, that he had not let himself be pressured by the bloodless and theoretical strictures of "correctness" and "good taste," that his choice had been more spontaneous than mine and therefore more correct in the truest sense of that word.

At that point in my life, I formed no independent judgments, had no personal preferences and no individual tastes. On any question, I adopted the one true opinion held by a committee I recognized as representative of society as a whole, a committee made up of those who knew what was right and what was wrong. And whenever I thought I had attained the level of this imaginary committee, I was very pleased with myself and proud of my achievement. My family had taught me that what counted in life was not the opinion of the individual but the opinion of the community as a whole, and only the individual who shared the community's opinion with the fewest possible reservations would be on a firm footing in the community. This constant desire to share in the one true and correct opinion quickly resulted, of course, in great cowardice wherever judgment was called for; and my excessive reluctance to act on personal conviction made any spontaneous taking of sides impossible. I responded to most questions that were put to me by saying I didn't know or I was in no position to judge or I didn't care. I was able to give an answer only when I knew in advance that it would conform to the requirements of the canon. I see my childhood self as an intimidated little Kant who felt he could act only if his actions would conform with universal law.

The upshot of all this was that I inhabited a peculiar world, one I would be inclined to laugh over now if I didn't know how disastrous it turned out to be for me. I read only "good" books; that is, I didn't own any other kind. I didn't have the faintest

idea what "bad" books were. I knew that bad books were "trash," but then I didn't know what trash was. I was astonished when I was forced to realize for the first time that it was possible for somebody not to like a "good" book. I had read Scheffel's *Ekkehard* and found it "good." A girl of my age who saw the book on my shelves asked me once if I had liked it. I thought, "What a stupid question. Everyone knows it's a good book." I naturally said yes. When she said she hadn't liked the book at all, I could hardly overcome my amazement. That somebody might not like a "good" book was more than I could comprehend. I thought the matter over afterward and decided, since that girl hadn't liked Scheffel's *Ekkehard*, that from now on I, too, would consider it "bad."

These reminiscences from my childhood may well seem insignificant and ridiculous, and I admit that in themselves they do not signify a great deal. But I am convinced that the seeds of the catastrophe that would later come down on me are contained in little anecdotes and examples of this kind. They contributed to the annihilation of my small personality, a personality that had been made small, a personality that was not permitted to develop anything uniquely its own because everything in our world had to conform with laws regarded as correct and universally valid. Otherwise, our "harmony" would have been endangered, and that was a risk we could not run. To jeopardize our harmony would have meant to jeopardize our world. As I mentioned before, these early years were not unhappy for me. They were merely "harmonious," and that was much worse.

On the one hand, the knowledge that I was always doing and saying the right thing gave me a certain security. On the other, a field of potential dangers opened up for me if I didn't happen to know what the right thing was and had to depend on my own judgment, that judgment I was struggling so desperately to suppress. I recall, for instance, a conversation with a schoolmate who asked me what I was interested in. I couldn't give

him a satisfactory answer, and he began to ask specifically if I was interested in this or that. I had to say no every time, with great reluctance, of course, because I never liked to say no and I sensed that my schoolmate was in fact interested in those things for which I was expressing no interest. I saw it coming that we were going to be of different opinions, and I was accustomed to avoiding such differences if at all possible. Finally the boy asked me whether I liked animals. Although I was afraid of all animals, I couldn't bear to say no again. I lied and said yes, even though I was trembling inwardly at the dire consequences this yes might have, e.g., an invitation to join this boy in playing with animals. Perhaps because my yes did not sound very convincing, he went on to ask if I was interested in cars. Now I was determined to share his opinion at any cost, and I lied again with still another yes. He replied that he wasn't the least bit interested in cars himself. I had managed to miss the mark twice. He hadn't believed my first lie, which I had told to accommodate him; and my second lie, told for the same reason, backfired because it didn't leave us sharing the same opinion after all. I wanted only to be polite and to have the same opinion he did. I couldn't be honest. But I didn't learn anything from this incident. For years I continued to deprive myself of the friendship of others in this way because I was afraid I might not be of the same opinion as someone else or that something else might not be just "right." I couldn't afford to be honest, or I might break some of the eggs I was always walking on.

It may seem like an exaggeration to say I never had an opinion of my own about anything. Indeed, it seems impossible that I was never thrust into some situations of conflict that forced me to take sides. But I was highly trained in the art of evasion, and if I didn't deal with troublesome questions by simply refusing to take a position, I could resort to a number of other techniques to steer clear of them.

In my family, one of the favorite ways out of situations that called for the courage of one's convictions was to declare the issue "difficult." "Difficult" was the magic formula we invoked to dismiss all thorny problems and thus to ban anything disturbing or inharmonious from our neat little world. Whenever an explosive issue threatened to come up at our house, perhaps in conversation at the dinner table, then someone would immediately declare the question a "difficult" one. That meant that the issue at hand was so complex and so rife with possibilities beyond our ken that there was no point in even attempting to discuss it. The implication was that the problem was simply too vast for human language or the powers of human intelligence to comprehend. The word "difficult" had something of the absolute about it. Just as we human beings find it difficult to talk about infinity because we, as finite creatures, have trouble imagining what infinity is like, so it was in our family with "difficult" issues. They seemed to exist in a realm it was impossible for humans to enter. If a question was once determined to be difficult, it was henceforth taboo. We could say: "Aha, that's a difficult question. Let's put it aside and not talk about it." Then we would not be obliged to discuss that issue anymore. Indeed, we couldn't discuss it. Perhaps we weren't allowed to talk about it anymore because it "wasn't good for people to talk about difficult things." The word "difficult" had almost magical powers in our family. All we needed to do was label something "difficult," and, as if we had said "Abracadabra" over it, that thing would disappear.

Among the things classified as "difficult" were almost all human relationships, politics, religion, money, and, of course, sex. My feeling today is that any subject that was interesting was considered "difficult" in our house and, as a result, was never discussed. If I try to recall now what we actually did talk about at home, I have trouble remembering much at all. We probably talked about food, probably about the weather, no

doubt about school, and of course about culture (though only about classical culture, the culture of people who were already dead).

By contrast, I can still remember the occasion when I first learned that it was possible to talk about interesting and exciting things. The occasion was a school trip on which we spent the night in the dormitory of an Alpine hut. I had been anxious about these sleeping arrangements, probably because I thought my schoolmates would see I was afraid and would torture me with pranks and practical jokes. But the other boys just went on talking about the most interesting things in the world after lights-out, and I, too, was drawn into this conversation. The talk focused on religious problems, in particular on the merits of a rather eccentric Christian sect that one of my schoolmates belonged to. It was a great experience for me suddenly to find myself talking about fascinating subjects, for I had never done anything like this before.

It seems likely to me now that this nighttime conversation in the Alpine hut can't have been the only one in my experience that could be described as fascinating and that I surely must have been exposed to interesting talk on other occasions. But even so, it never occurred to me in my childhood that the poverty of conversation in our house represented any real shortcoming. I knew there were places where things were more interesting than they were at home, but I never regarded the atmosphere in my parents' house as shallow. On the contrary, I thought it a special virtue on my parents' part that they found everything "difficult." That struck me as proof of a higher level of refinement. From my limited perspective, everything looked so simple that it could easily be discussed. But my parents seemed more experienced and intelligent. They had reached a higher level of insight at which things were "not so simple." Things were "difficult," so difficult in fact that we could not speak about them at all. In my misguided desire to attain to this higher under-

standing, I developed the habit of not thinking about anything anymore and of basking in the warm glow that I discovered emanating from the difficulty of all things. I didn't realize that we have to think hard about everything first if we are to reach that Buddha-like state of high spiritual perfection in which we no longer need to rack our brains about anything. (And I should probably add that Buddha would call everything "simple" rather than "difficult.") This higher level my family postulated for itself was extremely comfortable for me and for all of us. We never had to involve ourselves; we never had to take a stand; we never ran the risk of making fools of ourselves. All we had to do was declare everything "difficult."

While my poor mother specialized in ascertaining the "difficulty" of things, my poor father was a master in identifying ones that "simply could not be compared." My mother contented herself with finding things difficult. My father went a step further and disposed of them by wrenching them out of their natural context and declaring them beyond comparison. Time and again he refused to see any relationship between things. By saying, as he habitually did, that two things simply couldn't be compared, he left every issue hanging in empty space. He was so skilled in this art that he could avoid making obvious comparisons that begged to be made. This tactic obviated all discussion about value because value can be determined only by comparison, just as light stands out only in contrast to darkness.

As long as it was limited to questions of aesthetics, this game of my father's amounted to no more than a harmless eccentricity. But when it was applied to politics, it produced some grotesque arguments. The national referendum on introducing women's suffrage in Switzerland offers a prime example. My father was able to argue in all seriousness that the existence of women's suffrage in all other countries of the world did not imply that Switzerland was retrograde in this respect. Suffrage in other



countries simply could not be compared with suffrage in Switzerland. It was a mistake to conclude from the example of all the other countries of the world that female suffrage would be a good thing for Switzerland. My poor mother eagerly adopted this theory and became a radical opponent of women's suffrage. And even when women's suffrage was introduced, my mother persisted in her opinion and stressed over and over again how much she disliked this right that had been thrust upon her and how strongly opposed to it she remained.

The Russian and Spanish legal systems could not be compared because the Russians were Communists, and it was obviously evil if they killed dissidents. But since Spain opposed Communism, it was not evil if the Spanish government persecuted its dissidents. Government terror was even a blessing for the Spaniards because it helped them maintain "law and order." (My parents did not choose to extend this line of reasoning to the Soviet Union, where "law and order" probably prevail more than in any other country in the world.) Even a comparison between Spanish concentration camps and Nazi ones was not permitted. We could not conclude from the fact that Hitler's Fascism was bad that Franco's Fascism was bad, too. The two could "simply not be compared."

It seemed as if the things of this world were, by their very nature, not subject to comparison. But things that cannot be compared with others are always without value. They stand isolated in cold, unreal space and cannot be comprehended. They do not move us either to criticism or to approval. They do not demand our attention; they do not affect us. They are simply beyond comparison.

This was the image I had of the world, too. There were no conflicts, nor could there be any. In a system totally devoid of relationships, things slid past each other without any friction at all. And this lack of friction seemed to have positive value, for where there is no friction, there is harmony; and where

there is harmony, everything is as it should be. I assumed that I stood somewhere above this frictionless world, and I did not realize that I was merely one more thing in cold, unreal space. On the contrary, I felt that this incapacity to compare things—like the awareness of the “difficulty” of all questions—was a mark of a higher intellectual level. I had learned that intelligent people did not make comparisons. Obviously, I was lacking in etymological training at that time and still didn’t know that the word “intelligent” goes back to the Latin *inter legere* and means precisely the opposite of what I was beginning to regard as the essence of intelligence.

Whatever could not be disposed of by designating it “difficult” or “beyond comparison” was usually postponed until “tomorrow.” The weak are terribly fond of that day and take great comfort in the fact that “tomorrow” usually means “never.” How many ways we had of substituting the word “tomorrow” for “no”!

“That’s a very interesting question. I’ll give it some thought in the next few days.”

“Your offer is certainly intriguing. We’ll look into it tomorrow or the next day.”

My parents subscribed to the motto Don’t Rush Into Anything. But this not rushing into anything usually amounted to not dealing with things at all.

I don’t know how often I witnessed the following scene. Some suggestion or offer would be made to my parents. I knew very well that they wanted nothing to do with it, but they felt it was impolite to respond with a clear no. So they would bend over backward to express their gratitude for the suggestion and would say they would be delighted to give it their careful consideration. Every decision had to be thought through “carefully,” and the more carefully it had to be thought through, the longer it would be put off, with the result that “long” evolved into “very long” and finally into “never.” I had learned to

respect even this fault in my parents and to make a virtue of it. I honored their dignified skepticism, their constant fear that they might not do the "right" thing after all, and saw it as a superior quality worth far more than the primitive capacity to be able to blurt out yes or no. The word "spontaneous" did not exist in our vocabulary.

I realize that I am touching on a philosophical issue here that goes beyond the narrow scope of my personal reminiscences. For the philosopher, the true intellectual may well be a man who considers every question in all its different aspects and therefore never comes to a decision and never acts. In the purely philosophical realm, that may be appropriate, but it seems equally clear to me that a man who does nothing but think and who is too clever to stoop to anything so gross as action will be a failure in life. The opinions of a man who never does anything but examine issues "thoroughly" and who never takes a stand on them are ultimately useless, and they collapse like a house of cards. But how was I to see that when I lived in a house of cards myself?

The reader may well object that not even my parents' house could have been as devoid of opinions as I have just described it. Someone must have set the tone. And indeed someone did. That someone was my father because it is only "right" that the father determines family opinion. As a rule, it was my father who said how things stood in this world, and we agreed with him because he surely knew better than we did. My mother followed this policy rigidly. She avoided making any direct statement for fear that it might not coincide with my father's view. But if he had already cast his vote, then she could relax and follow his lead without running the risk of disagreement. If this system of reaching agreement should fail to operate smoothly at some point or another, my poor mother was always ready to make the necessary adjustments.

Setting a date for a certain activity or errand can serve as

an illustration of this. My mother may have been so imprudent as to suggest Tuesday. If my father preferred Friday (which, unbeknownst to my father, didn't suit my mother in the least), my mother would suddenly realize that Friday was really much more convenient for her, that it was far preferable to Tuesday in every respect, and that Tuesday was absolutely out of the question. The ridiculous aspect of these scenes was that in most instances some other day, like Wednesday, would have been convenient for both of them. The choice of Wednesday as a compromise solution would have made sacrifice on anyone's part unnecessary. My mother's resignation and her denial of her own feelings were pointless. She wanted to promote harmony, but she did so in a harmful and hypocritical way. My parents were not really in agreement. They had simply shied away from discussion. When I think back on all the useless sacrifices that members of my family made for the sake of harmony, I can only feel that those sacrifices sprang from cowardice, not generosity.

My parents were married for thirty years, but as best I can remember, they had only one argument. The unusual situation of parental disagreement was very painful for us all, but nothing came of it. My parents didn't know how to argue, and after a day of not speaking to each other, they broke the experiment off before it could produce any results. And since my parents had realized that they lacked the skills of argument, they never repeated this experiment.

This reminds me of a truly bizarre scene that can stand as representative of a hundred others. A well-educated aunt of mine was visiting and telling us about an exhibit she had seen by the painter Hans Erni. My parents had their doubts about this painter because they suspected him of being a Communist. That in itself was enough to make his pictures no good. But my aunt said that the exhibit had been wonderful. My mother, who had been busying herself pouring tea, had not heard my aunt

correctly and had understood her to say "dreadful." Since Erni was a Communist, she was expecting my aunt to say "dreadful." So she hastened to agree and to proclaim, for her part, how dreadful she thought Erni was. This only confirmed my aunt in her view, and she now made it perfectly clear to my mother that she had said "wonderful" and not "dreadful," whereupon my mother did a complete about-face and henceforth declared Erni "wonderful," too.

My mother was much given to the word "or." She would make a statement and then immediately retract it: This is so, or that is so. My poor mother used to say things like "I'm going to Zurich next Friday at ten-thirty, or I'm staying home." Or she would say, "We'll have spaghetti for supper tonight, or we'll have wurst salad."

Confronted with that kind of talk, one can't help asking if there is any such thing as reality at all. I'm going out, or I'm staying home. I'm here, or I'm not here. The earth is round, or it is triangular. If someone says "or" too much, his words lose all meaning and value. Language dissolves into an amorphous mass of meaningless fragments. Nothing retains its solidity. Everything becomes unreal.

I'm unable to recall exactly when my reactions to my environment changed. As a small child and as a young boy, I'm sure I was on my parents' side. I was certainly on my poor mother's side, hoping with her that each and every difference of opinion that threatened to disrupt our lives could be avoided as smoothly and gently as possible. As time passed, the hypocrisies of this eternal harmony began to bother me. I can't say just when that happened. I may have had some inkling of them during my childhood, but it wasn't until quite late in my life, horrendously late, that I realized how thoroughly diseased my world was. My mother's hypocritical dodges offended me, but at the same time I had already become so hypocritical and so cowardly and so keen on harmony myself that I didn't dare plunge into the con-

flict I would have stirred up if I had tried to learn what it was that was offending me. I attributed my mother's behavior to a minor and somewhat laughable character weakness, a lovable eccentricity that should be smiled at rather than censured. I had come across the concept of "lovable eccentricity" in a book somewhere and had immediately adopted it. I felt that I would need it to caulk the cracks that might someday appear in my world view. I even began to suspect that I myself had faults and that my whole world was out of whack. But I shrank back from that compromising word "fault" and clung instead to the idea of "lovable eccentricity." I did this because self-knowledge, self-criticism, and the need for change are implicit in the word "fault." But an eccentricity, and particularly a "lovable" one, is something that can be treasured and even cultivated at the same time that we ridicule it.

## II

It may seem from what I have written so far that my only purpose has been to catalogue my poor mother's and father's weaknesses and represent my parents as the evil creatures responsible for my failings and my misery. But I feel that this report goes beyond merely blaming my parents for what I failed to understand and do myself. I don't see my parents as "the guilty ones" but rather as fellow victims of the same wretched situation. They did not invent this misguided way of life, but they did accept it uncritically and were as much betrayed by it as I was. At this point in my recollections, the reader might expect the great moment when I awoke from this shadow world of my parents' home and said to myself: "Hold on! Things can't go on like this anymore."

But that moment didn't come; and the fact that it didn't come—indeed, couldn't come—is precisely what proved so disastrous

for me. My parents' individual weaknesses, both great and small, were not the cause of my difficulties. Nobody is perfect; no upbringing achieves perfect results; probably all parents do things that their children will suffer from later; and the children themselves will not turn out to be perfect, either. That all follows from the obvious proposition that the world is not perfect. My parents were not the cause of my difficulties. They were not bad people, and all I can feel for them now is sympathy. What was bad was the fact that the world in which I grew up *had* to be perfect and that its harmony and perfection were forced on me. *I was not allowed* to see that the world was not perfect. The main goal of my upbringing was to forestall the moment when I might say "Hold on!" I was raised in such a way that I would not notice the world's imperfection. And my education can certainly be termed a great success, for I managed to live for thirty years without noticing a thing. I was taught always to say yes, and I have made good use of what I learned. I have always said yes to everything. The experiment of my education worked. Unfortunately for me.

This report has, however, a significance that goes beyond my individual case. My case—or, more accurately, our case—is not a unique one that can be considered in isolation from everything around it. I can't know with any certainty to what extent my parents are to blame for wrongs done to me and to what extent they themselves were victims of still greater wrongs. From what I know of my parents' past, I gather they did not have good relationships with their parents, certainly not harmonious ones. Perhaps it was this very lack of harmony in their own childhoods that led them to cultivate "harmony" in their later lives. Perhaps they wanted to make up, in a harmonious way, for all the disharmony they had experienced at their own parents' hands. Perhaps their attitude toward life has to be seen as a conscious reaction against their parents' attitude, and now their attitude is evoking an opposite and aggressive one in me. The history

of the generations can be seen as an endless repetition of the same situation: The parents "mean well" with their children but do everything wrong in raising them. The children react by going to the opposite extreme and trying to avoid with their children the mistakes that their parents made with them. They, too, "mean well" with their children, and the same vicious circle goes on and on in perpetuity. Or, to put it differently, no matter what you do, you're wrong. If we pursued this line of thought further, we would soon come to the realization that rearing and educating children is in fact "difficult," and we could then shelve the whole problem, classifying it as one that defies solution.

But I do not want to fall into this trap and get bogged down in the "difficult" aspects of this issue. Instead, I will venture to say that my upbringing was genuinely flawed and that the mistakes my parents made cannot be traced back to opposite kinds of mistakes that my grandparents made. I don't really believe that my family and I occupied some absurd and unreal glass house that would shatter in the next good gale to come along. I believe instead that my parents' house as I have just described it is typical and that a great many other households resembled it rather closely. It may well be that things at our house took a somewhat crasser and more exaggerated form than they did elsewhere, but I doubt that they were fundamentally different in other middle-class homes. One could object here that all this may have been unfortunate for me personally but that my case represents an exception; that the little extra dose of inept education I received was harmful to me alone; that my contemporaries probably endured an upbringing every bit as inept as mine, yet did not come away from it with any special ill effects. Or, to put it more simply, every child is raised badly, but that doesn't matter because most children turn out all right anyhow; if one happens to turn out badly, that's his misfortune, and he can be regarded as an extreme case or as an exception that proves the rule.



But I don't accept this theory. The consequences of the damage I sustained may well be exceptional; after all, not everyone who is raised badly gets cancer. Perhaps the point can be expressed more accurately this way: Extreme instances of improper education (and my own case was an extreme one) can be so harmful that they result in neurotically generated diseases, such as cancer. I don't know if I will survive this illness. If I do die of it, it will be correct to say that death was the ultimate goal of my education.

But viewed from a different perspective my situation is a fortunate one. Having been raised to get cancer, I now have the opportunity to react against the evil in my life. I am probably better off than thousands of others whose past was not so disastrous and who can therefore continue, free of cancer, to vegetate in their traditional frustrations and miseries. Their situation is only a little bit better than mine, but that little bit is just enough to prevent them from confronting the evil in their lives. Every wealthy Zurichier has heart trouble or an ulcer, but he doesn't have sense enough to draw any conclusions from that fact. The illness has to be much worse before anyone seems to realize that there's something rotten in the state of Denmark (and in other European countries as well).

I was brought up believing that all was right with the world, and I have come to see this dogmatic fabrication as the major flaw in my education. I feel sure that this view of the world was served up not just to me alone but to everyone who grew up, as I did, on the "right" shore of Lake Zurich, which is to say in the upper-middle-class society of Zurich, of Switzerland, of Europe, and, if you will, of the so-called free world. I don't want to turn this report into a political treatise. I have neither the desire to do that nor the necessary knowledge. I want to restrict myself to my personal recollections, keeping in mind, however, that my case is probably representative of many others. And in this sense it is a political case.

So far, I have limited myself to describing my family's behavior at home, e.g., at the dinner table, but since I have claimed that my family was not exceptional in our society, I will now have to turn to the mysterious world beyond our four walls to find supporting evidence for that claim.

If I try to recall now what other people were like—for there were other people out there—I can only say that they were ridiculous and respectable. Total ridiculousness was rare. Total respectability was more likely to occur. But most possessed both these qualities side by side, qualities that only appear to be mutually exclusive.

Everyone who occupied a position of respect was, of course, respectable. In this category were teachers, doctors, ministers, managers, professors, military officers, and just about anyone who was rich. It was almost a principle for us at home that anyone who was rich was also good. We avoided the word "good," however, and used "decent" instead, as is customary in this country. "Decent" people were rich people. We didn't say "rich," either. We said someone "had money." People weren't "greedy"; they were "well-to-do." Poor people weren't "poor"; they were "simple." Things were not "expensive"; they were "not cheap." After all, money isn't something you talk about. It's something you have.

One important category of respectable people requires our special attention: politicians. They were basically respectable, too; but their respectability depended on one condition: They had to be conservative. The farther to the Right they stood, the better and more respectable they were. The farther to the Left, the worse they were. The evil Communists provided the standard for making political evaluations. The more anti-Communist a politician was, the better; the stronger the suspicion that he had something to do with Communism, the worse. At our house, the world of politics was perfectly clear. There was good and there was evil, and the line that separated them was unmistakable.

Switzerland, I knew, was "good" because there were no Communists here, or only very few. And even those few were a long way away from us in the canton at the farthest possible remove from my parents' house, i.e., in Geneva, a place that all good Zurichers no doubt pictured as a veritable den of political iniquity.

As a child, of course, I could make no sense of politics at all, but I remember how unwelcome to my parents the timid awakenings of political consciousness in me were when I was a student. On one occasion at the dinner table, my parents were bewailing the fate of an acquaintance whose career was suffering because the nasty Leftists kept dredging up his Nazi past and discrediting him with it. (In Switzerland, of course, we don't use the term "Nazi past" but speak instead of "activity in the Front.") When I cited the case of a teacher who, as a Socialist, was unable to get a job in a politically conservative school, my parents' wrath and disapproval came down on me because the two cases "simply couldn't be compared." I should emphasize that bold political statements like that were the rare exception and not the rule for me and that even as a student I remained true to my upbringing in matters of politics, dutifully finding everything Rightist "good" and everything Leftist "bad." I was the very image of a "sensible" young man.

I was brought up to regard all outsiders as persons commanding respect. I call them "outsiders" because I felt even as a child that these were people who did not belong in our circle. They had to be treated with respect. This did not preclude discreet friendliness, but still the most important thing to maintain in dealing with these people was distance. Courtesy was definitely in order; warmth was definitely not—that was our motto. Other people were to be regarded more as potential enemies than as potential friends. Consequently, we took no pleasure in the impending visit of Dr. or Director or Reverend So-and-So. On the contrary, we braced ourselves to receive a pest whose

unwelcome invasion we tried to make vaguely palatable by sugaring it over with excessive politeness and tact. As a sign of the special and painful situation that was about to befall us, we had to make the house look a little different. The living room had to be even neater than usual, and what was most important in these preparations was that we feel uncomfortable in the house when we were done, because only by making changes that displeased us could we assure ourselves that we were being painfully polite enough. My parents moved differently and talked differently from the way they usually did. They said different things and even adopted different opinions. Above all, they spoke differently to my brother and me when they were in the presence of such notables. The tone between parents and children had to be more forced and unnatural. Everyone had a role to play, and to insure that my brother and I played our roles properly, my parents spoke to us as if we were totally different children.

As a child, I found these ceremonial visits merely unpleasant, and I was glad when the playacting was over and the intruder had left the house. Now I realize that it was precisely the unpleasant aspect of the visits that was most significant. The whole point was to convey both to our respectable visitor and to the entire family that the intruder's presence was unwelcome, that he was an outsider, and that he had nothing to do with us. And since this message could not be conveyed to him by rudeness or insolence, we warded him off with excessive politeness instead. Strangers were the very essence of the unwelcome to us, and the instant one left the house, our world returned to normal. We were among ourselves again. These tactics made a deep impression on me. I learned that the words "visit" and "unwelcome" went together and that "a visit is when you are insincere."

In addition to the category of worthy people who inspired respect because of their positions, their wealth, or some other such virtue, there were many other people who commanded

respect, too, but for just the opposite reasons. These were people who were in some way or another our social inferiors: tradesmen, minor officials, anyone who performed one kind of service or another. My parents addressed all these people with ostentatious and exaggerated displays of respect. With these people, too, it was a sheer impossibility for my parents to meet them on any kind of natural terms. They, too, were strangers to be kept at arm's length by artificial maneuvers. What made my parents' expressions of respect ring false was their exaggeration. My mother's praise and thanks for small services performed for her were couched in such effusive language that both the praise and the thanks sounded hollow, could not be taken seriously, and evaporated away in unreality. My poor mother used to tell the mailman, for example, that it was "splendid," "marvelous," "wonderful" that he had brought the newspaper. She couldn't understand that it was his job—nothing more, nothing less—to bring the newspaper. We could thank him for bringing it, but there wasn't anything "wonderful" about it.

Also, my mother often spoke with subordinates as if they were idiots. She expressed herself with excessive clarity and spoke more slowly than usual so that these unfortunate creatures could grasp her meaning. She didn't notice that these "unfortunate" creatures weren't unfortunate at all, and certainly weren't so dim-witted that they couldn't understand my mother's normal mode of speech. Scenes of unintended comedy resulted whenever these so-called "simple people" proved more intelligent than my mother, telling her about things she knew nothing of and didn't understand while she was struggling to address them in something akin to baby talk. Our social inferiors, the "simple people," were strangers, too. They belonged to a different world from ours. But they weren't just different from us; they were also of a lesser, lower order. And even though my parents never treated them with disrespect but always with the extreme opposite of disrespect—that is, with an exaggerated and

false deference—the disrespect contained in those feigned and hollow words of regard was all the more audible to me than if it had been expressed outright.

It would seem that our tranquil domestic world was constantly threatened by hostile aliens who could be kept at bay only by the most polished and heartless of diplomatic wiles. But, in addition to their imaginary enemies, my poor parents also had friends, and I can only hope that these friends were not quite so imaginary as the enemies were. I would also hope for my poor parents that their relations with their friends had not been so dreary from the very beginning as they often seemed to me in later years. As a child, I didn't have a very clear sense of my parents' friends. If my parents had company, my brother and I were not present; but before we went to bed we had to stand inspection for the guests, shake hands with them, and tell them how old we were, that we liked going to school, and which grade we were in. In return for this information, the guests told us that we were much bigger now, at age ten, than we had been when they had seen us at age nine. I hated the whole business. I didn't get a clear impression of my parents' friends until I was older and could be present at my parents' parties.

I have to make allowance for the fact here that I almost always encountered my parents' friends under the same—and no doubt the worst possible—circumstances; that is, at parties. At parties, alas! For at parties there are always hosts and guests, two roles that my parents played so assiduously that I could hardly recognize them. My parents were good hosts, but they were wretched guests. As hosts, they would attend, discreetly and unobtrusively, to the needs of their guests and would be so absorbed in waiting on people that they didn't say anything that went beyond routine civility and the mechanics of hospitality. Perfect courtesy is surely appropriate for a host, and as long as our guests were having a good time, no one needed to realize that my parents were not offering friendship but only anonymous

entertainment. Though seeming to be involved in the party, my parents were, in reality, only playing their roles and stood completely outside the event.

But if they happened to be the guests, this scheme didn't work. As guests, they did not have to meet the obligations of the host's role and could be much more directly involved in the festivities—or should have been. But now, deprived of the host's role, they compensated for this loss by playing the grateful guest to the hilt, praising to the skies everything that was offered them and repeatedly expressing their thanks for it. They often beamed outwardly, proclaiming everything "marvelous," but inwardly felt ill at ease and wished they could go home. They felt they expressed their regard for their host by acting in this unnatural way. As guests, they paid homage to the Penates of the host's home by behaving with ceremonial courtesy and avoiding any action that might draw unfavorable notice. Indeed, preferring not to be noticed at all, they just sat there politely and somewhat uncomfortably and contributed nothing to the conversation. They readily admitted to each other that they did not enjoy going out, and went to parties only reluctantly. But not a trace of this reluctance was ever displayed to anyone else.

One particular trick my parents used was the invitational turnabout. Having just accepted, with feigned delight, an invitation they could not refuse, they would counter with an invitation of their own and ask if the other party wouldn't rather come to our house. The ominous word "or" was often an integral part of this maneuver: "We'd just love to come to your house, or . . . why don't you come over here instead?" My parents—out of pure inertia and because they just plain disliked going to other people's houses—persisted until they had managed to turn an invitation into a counter-invitation. Other people praised this generous impulse in my parents, but I knew they were acting out of indolence, not generosity. Another aspect of this kind of courtesy—and I feel this is true in general, not just

in my family—is that it spares one ever being indebted to others. People who never accept anything never have to be grateful and never put themselves in the position of owing anything to anyone. This kind of politeness amounts to sheer egotism. I have always felt that in overfed societies like ours in which poverty doesn't exist, it is far more blessed to receive than to give. Anyone who is a millionaire can give (and on the Gold Coast millionaires are a dime a dozen), but there are not many people between Zurich and Rapperswil who can receive a gift with gratitude and then not turn around and send back a gift worth the same amount of money the next day. That's a sad commentary on our society. Very sad. (But fortunately the Gold Coast isn't the whole world. There are Chinese and blacks, too; and they, thank God, make up the majority.)

Obviously enough, all the rules that held when my parents were guests were reversed when they gave a party themselves. Whatever they offered when they were hosts had to be played down. It was poor quality, too ordinary, too plain, or, at the very least, there was too little of it. By contrast, anything that was offered them in someone else's house was by definition marvelous, incomparable, and better than they had at home. The real value of things was beside the point. Whether my parents dispensed absolute praise or absolute censure depended on whether they were guests or hosts. As always, things had no inherent value. They were merely pieces to be manipulated in a meaningless social game. An embarrassing and representative example comes to mind here.

When my poor mother was a guest, she would often refuse the offer of a cognac or whiskey (whether out of genuine preference or feigned modesty I cannot say) and would ask for a glass of mineral water instead. Now because her host had poured her this glass of mineral water, she felt obliged to declare how "marvelous" it tasted. She ignored the fact that mineral water is mineral water and tastes just the same whether it comes from



your own or from someone else's refrigerator. The thing itself didn't matter. What mattered was that she was a guest and had to find everything "marvelous." No doubt her host could have scalped her alive; and if he had, my mother probably would have done her best to declare this scalping "marvelous" simply because her host had been kind enough to provide it. Her "marvelous" was worthless. Truth did not count. Politeness was all that mattered.

Later on, when I was no longer living at home, my parents' reluctance to visit other people took on a rather macabre form. The only social events they attended at this point were funerals. They might talk about visiting this friend or that, but out of inertia and indecision they would postpone the visit so long that the person would have died in the meantime. But once he was dead, there was no question about attending the funeral, because that was a matter of good form. Attending a funeral was the polite thing, the "right" thing to do. That the individual honored in this way might have enjoyed a visit more when he was still alive didn't seem to interest my parents much.

Having dealt with all these worthy figures, be they public functionaries or guests or so-called "simple people," I will now turn to a far more important group of people. These are the ridiculous people, all those people who were not quite like us and who were therefore a bit ridiculous. I should point out right away that I am using the term "ridiculous" here very much after the fact. No one in our house would ever have dared, even in his most secret thoughts, to apply the word "ridiculous" to other people. When we labeled other people ridiculous, we did so unconsciously. Or, to put it differently, we did it, but we didn't know we were doing it. I have just said that people were ridiculous because they were different from us. They weren't as "right," not as *comme il faut*, in every respect as we were. But it was too much to expect everybody to be every bit as "right" as we were. It was actually a good thing that they

weren't as "right." It was simply inherent in the laws of nature that only a few aristocrats would achieve absolute "rightness" and that other people would have to fall short. But this was no reason to label these lesser creatures as bad. They were decent, upright people. They did the best they could within their limited horizons. In no way did they deserve censure. They just weren't quite so "right" as we were.

I began to see that other people's imperfection was not a repulsive quality but rather an appealing one. It was amusing; it was ridiculous. I noticed that almost all other people continually did what we tried to avoid at every turn: They went out on a limb, and it amused us to see them do it. Other people were always doing things that were a bit ridiculous. They were always saying things that were a bit ridiculous, and on the whole they acted in ways that were a bit ridiculous. They were people who hadn't noticed that everything was "difficult"; people who compared things because they didn't know that things simply couldn't be compared; people who had, in their primitive fashion, opinions about anything and everything and expressed those opinions freely. I found it amusing when other people let their opinions be known, opinions that could well be wrong and most probably were wrong. For my part, I knew I was much too respectable and intellectually discriminating to have an opinion of my own at all. It seemed there were people who ran the risk of making fools of themselves. That was ridiculous. The world of the not quite *comme il faut* was our theater, and we were the spectators in it, for we never did anything ourselves. All we did was watch.

The people I have been calling "other people" here included just about everybody. Everybody was different from us; nobody was like us. Or, to put that more accurately, it was only our own snobbery, which we would never admit to, that made the rest of humanity appear as "those others" to us. In reality, it was we who were "the others" and who always stood on the outside

looking in. I want to stress again here that this permanent dividing line between us as spectators and the others as actors was so finely drawn as to be practically invisible. My parents were not conscious of it, and they certainly would not have been able to express its existence in words even if they had had some inkling of its existence, for they were totally unaware of the most important point; namely, that they perceived other people as ridiculous. But "ridiculous" is the last word they would have used to describe any aspect of their dealings with others, because for them human relationships amounted to no more than an utterly humorless adherence to the sacred rules of respectability and an icily polite rejection of one's neighbor. Both my parents would heatedly have denied that they found their fellow human beings ridiculous. But the fact is they did. What exactly was this element of the ridiculous in my parents' relationship to other people?

This form of the ridiculous arises, I think, from the gap between perfection and imperfection or, to put it cynically, between the negative and the positive. Nothingness is always perfect. Whatever exists is inevitably flawed. Buddha, in his detachment from the world, finds all its hustle and bustle ridiculous because he has nothing to do with it. A cynic finds the feelings of his fellow human beings ridiculous because he has no feelings himself. Someone who does not play soccer thinks it ridiculous to chase around after a little leather ball for hours at a time. He doesn't bother to ask whether this game might not be a lot of fun. All he sees is the ridiculousness of grown men playing like little boys. People who do anything will no doubt appear ridiculous to people who do nothing. A person who acts can always make a fool of himself. A person who doesn't never runs that risk. We might even say that life is always ridiculous but death is never ridiculous.

In retrospect, I would describe my family's situation like this: We did nothing and said nothing and fought for nothing

and had no opinions and spent our time being amused by other people who were ridiculous enough to do, say, or think something. These clowns in our parlor were quite essential to our lives. Since we never made ourselves ridiculous, we depended on others to make themselves ridiculous and so provide us with amusement. We liked these clowns because they could move us to laughter, something we could not do for ourselves. There was never any shortage of things we found ridiculous, because the more we regarded ourselves as a china shop, the more likely it was that every outsider would seem to be a bull in it. Thus, the things we found ridiculous were ridiculous only in our eyes. Other people would have thought them utterly normal. One of our neighbors, for example, owned a number of extraordinary cars and drove them with immense pleasure. That was a bit ridiculous, a bit *nouveau riche*, because my father was much richer than this neighbor, but he didn't have any car at all and couldn't even drive one. That was much more dignified. This same neighbor also had a lot of model airplanes that he sent flying around over half of Switzerland. That was a bit ridiculous because flying model airplanes was, after all, something that children do. My father played solitaire on weekends. (The only game he knew was Klondike, which is about the most boring solitaire game there is.) That was clearly more dignified.

What I want to illustrate by this example is that there was nothing inherently ridiculous about our neighbor's interests. They only seemed ridiculous to us who had no interests and prided ourselves in being "above" such things. The less you do, the less ridiculous you will be. We adhered to this principle, and it contributed greatly to making me respectable and miserable. Still another example will show how all-pervasive this passivity was in our family. My poor parents were passive members of just about every club and organization one could possibly belong to, because refusing to belong "might have made a poor impression around town." But actually to do gymnastics in the

Gymnastics Club or actually to sing in the Choral Society or actually to go bowling with the Bowling Club—oh, no, that they wouldn't do. My poor mother was so responsive to social pressure that she remained a member of the Women's Club even though she despised the club for advocating the vote for women.

Our attitude toward life was benevolent, very benevolent indeed. We looked at life with the same kind of benevolence one feels toward a rhinoceros or giraffe that one looks at in the zoo. To say that we looked at life is really all I need to say. We looked at it; we didn't live it. That we didn't want to do. We enjoyed life, but we didn't conceive of it as our calling. It was a spectacle we attended. We enjoyed people, street scenes, carnivals, but only as spectators. Nobody could reproach us with being misanthropic. We went among people, but we went among them the way we went to the movies. My parents particularly enjoyed being on the streets, especially in southern countries like Spain or Italy. It was fun to watch life pass by. But that is just the point. Life *passed by* in front of us. It took me years to realize that the streets were interesting. All I knew about them was that they were picturesque and that you could see striking types there. It never occurred to me when I was on the street that I was a type, too. I've often looked at the street as though it were a stage set, and taken in all the people going about their business. But I had no business there besides watching other people go about their business. Some friends asked me once at a carnival what I liked most about it, and I said, as though it were perfectly obvious to anyone, that I liked watching the people. I had to struggle a bit to hide my displeasure when they led me around from one ride and amusement to another because the idea that the amusements were there for me as well as for other people was a new one to me.

I could see interesting types on the street, but they weren't types I wanted to have any contact with. I took in the street the way I took in a film. It flickered past in front of my eyes and

stopped as soon as I left my seat. I saw women who were "elegant" or "good-looking" go by, but it never occurred to me that I, too, could feel desire for them. That is probably the quintessence of the world I was born into and that I would adopt as my own: Life is very good, but we are not life; life is those other people.

My sense of the street as my own private theater had one horrible consequence for me. Because all I did was look people over on the street, not with sympathy but critically and condescendingly, I automatically assumed that they looked at me the same way. Whenever anyone glanced at me on the street, I took for granted that the glance was critical and that the person had seen something objectionable about me. And since I interpreted every glance this way, I began to fear that people must be finding a great deal wrong with me. I was afraid that my clothes were dirty or mussed or that, unbeknownst to me, I was carrying about some kind of public nuisance with me. As a boy, I aptly described this sensation as feeling that I "had a dead crow hanging around my neck." It seemed to me as if everyone could see this dead crow dangling from my neck but as if I were the only person in the world not aware of this scandalous fact. I found it particularly painful when girls glanced at me. Since it had never occurred to me to look at girls admiringly and since I had always kept a lookout only for what was ridiculous in women, I assumed that they did the same with me. I was neither a particularly handsome nor a particularly ugly boy, and I imagine that some of the glances the girls sent in my direction were friendly ones. But I was incapable of interpreting even friendly glances as anything but expressions of criticism and displeasure. Every smile struck me as sarcastic and derisive. I hardly need say that I didn't smile back.

Having just made a comparison between life and the movies and having stated that we looked at life as if it were a film that didn't touch us personally, I should add that it was a

matter of principle not to let any film affect us personally. My parents quite enjoyed going to the movies sometimes, but they placed all films in one of two categories. There were "morose" films and "silly" ones. A film was "morose" if it dealt with sad, hopeless, or unharmonious aspects of life. My parents didn't like this kind of film. They felt that such films shouldn't even be shown because "life just wasn't like that." They went on the assumption that life was nowhere near as gloomy as such a "morose" film portrayed it and that the film was therefore unrealistic and unnecessarily pessimistic. It was no special merit in an author to show only evil, gloom, and sadness.

The other kind of film was the "silly" kind. These films were comic but in just as unrealistic a way as the "morose" films were tragic. Life wasn't the way the "silly" films showed it to be, either. It was characteristic of both kinds of films, then, that they dealt in the unreal and the impossible and that one neither could nor should identify with them. A subcategory of the "morose" film was the "Russian" film. Films of this kind were unrealistic, too, because they dealt with nothing but psychological problems from beginning to end. And life was certainly not like that. Since my parents were not accustomed to talking about psychological distress, it's not surprising that representations of people who did nothing else would strike them as peculiar or even impossible. The "Russians," an exotic people that we in these latitudes could not even begin to imagine, might talk about the psyche and the soul, but in our world this kind of subject was inconceivable.

Only much later did I realize that the films my parents had found "morose," "silly," or "Russian" were not so unrealistic after all. Making use of the mask or style appropriate to each production, the films all reflected those same basic human problems that we subsume under the heading of "Life." Theatrical means were used, of course, to throw the experiences of the

movie figures into bold relief; but everything comic or tragic or, if you will, "Russian" that happened to them was ultimately not the least bit absurd and could happen to anybody. Anybody but us. For us, things like that only happened to people in movies. Love, hate, passion, violence, insanity, vice, murder, not to mention absurdities, embarrassing situations, con games, sucker games, impudence, seduction, charm, weakness, error, bohemianism, bad habits—all those things existed only in the movies. For us, they weren't part of real life. Maybe the "Russians" were like that, but we were not. It didn't really matter whether we were watching a film in a movie theater or the people around us. The end result was the same. What we saw was in no way a reflection of ourselves. We looked at life as though it were a film, but not even in the movies did we want to accept that the film bore any relation to life.

### I I I

Having described a few characteristic aspects of my life as a child, I will now turn to my school years. Because I attended elementary school in K. and therefore remained in the sphere of my parent's influence during those years, I will skip over my elementary-school experience and move on directly to my time at the Gymnasium. This change in schools expanded my horizons somewhat in a purely geographical sense, as well as in other ways, because I now had to go into Zurich every day. It was taken for granted that I would go to the Gymnasium, and before I began preparing for the entrance exams, people told me I was intelligent and belonged in the Gymnasium. As usual, I had no objections.

At the opening ceremony for new students, the rector of the Gymnasium told us, after he had explained the basic structure



and curriculum of the school, that the best thing about our Gymnasium years would be that we would form true friendships there, many of which would last all our lives. I had no idea, as the rector was saying this, just how thoroughly prepared I was to prevent this prophecy from coming true. But if I were asked whether my school years were happy ones or not, I would again have to answer that I don't recall them as unhappy, which is to say that this period, too, was infused with the specious glow of a false and deceptive contentment.

I did not, then, typify the unhappy student, nor was I a bad student. I was, above all else, a dreadfully "good" student, and I imagine I must have been even more dreadfully boring. When I look at my own students now, and compare myself as a student with them, I can only conclude that I must have been a student whose tediousness bordered on the criminal. I was not a particularly interested student, either. I was reasonably diligent in almost all my subjects, but not because what I was learning fascinated me particularly. I was diligent because I was so "good." As a result, my grades were always quite respectable; and it goes without saying that I received the very highest grades in deportment. Since I never pulled any schoolboy pranks, I never had to be punished. It is very possible that without trying, and without even being conscious of it, I was a model student. And I felt more and more confirmed in my opinion that I was intelligent because it was generally assumed in my world—quite erroneously, of course—that a good student was the same thing as an intelligent person.

I never had any of the difficulties in school that most students experience at one point or another. I had no clashes with my teachers. I appreciated them, was sometimes a bit afraid of them, and frequently found them a bit ridiculous. But I never had an open confrontation with any of them. They must have appreciated me, too. I was quiet, courteous, and unproblematic,

and a passably good student to boot. There was no reason for them not to appreciate me.

But there was one subject in which I was not successful at all. That was physical education. It called for qualities not needed in other subjects. It called for strength, courage, and physical élan, all things that I lacked. My body was alien to me, and I didn't know what in the world to do with it. I was quite at home in that dubious world of the "higher things," but I was afraid of the brutality and primitiveness I sensed lurking in the physical world. I didn't enjoy physical activity; I thought myself ugly; and I was ashamed of my body. My body was a given fact. There was no way I could relegate it to the realm of the "difficult" or to some other corner remote from life. It bothered me that I felt no tie between my body and the rest of the physical world, and the outward form this uneasiness took was excessive modesty. Not only did I avoid all physical contact, but I even avoided using words that referred to the body and its sexuality. And it wasn't just the truly crass words that I never allowed to pass my lips. I felt the most harmless physical references to be repulsive and immodest. I found it difficult to use words like "breast," "naked," or "genitals." The Victorian prudishness I had absorbed at home was so strong that I was even reluctant to speak of "legs" or "pants." I banned the word "body" from my vocabulary, refusing to use this word that conceptualized everything I found so frightening. But what embarrassed me more than anything else was my own nakedness. That was reason enough for me to hate physical education at school, for the emphasis there was on gymnastics, the "naked art." In gymnastics, the nakedness I was so determined to hide was put on display. I had, quite literally, to expose myself and reveal a body I felt to be ugly. And of course I didn't dare to shower after gym class because I was too ashamed of my nakedness. The result was that over the course of my

school years I developed a second inferiority complex to go along with the first. I began to realize that my schoolmates were not ashamed of their bodies and had a much more natural relationship to them than I did. In this area, I had fallen behind and was not as good as they were.

Like all shy people, I was horribly ashamed of the fact that I blushed so much and thus revealed my inner state for everyone to see. Because I was afraid of blushing, I fought fire with fire by deliberately inducing it. Whenever I realized, either in conversation or in class, that a topic that would make me blush was coming up, I staged a desperate diversionary action with my handkerchief, wiping away imaginary sweat or simulating a sneezing fit. Hypersensitive as I was, these painful incidents could only become more frequent, and I began to blush in situations that needn't have been embarrassing even to someone of my excessive shyness. I responded by avoiding all delicate subjects, with the result that the range of things I could not talk about and that were indeed "difficult" for me became even wider. I have already mentioned how I had cleansed my vocabulary of all questionable terms. This verbal prudishness caused me no end of embarrassment whenever I had to buy pants or, far worse, underpants, and I could hardly bring myself to pronounce these objectionable words in a store. I was well into my university years before I began to overcome this prudishness. I couldn't swear at all, of course, and I didn't learn how until only a few years ago.

My body was a source of still other fears besides those inspired by modesty. I was afraid of pain, too. The doctor had always been the incarnation of pain for me. He had a whole arsenal of pointed and painful instruments at his disposal, and he could use them to stick me, cut me, or hurt me in some other way. A shot was the danger that threatened most often, and I was most afraid of that. The doctor's sharp instrument mustn't stab through my skin. It mustn't penetrate into me. Since I had

shielded myself from life and the outside world in all other things, I could not tolerate any kind of breach in the skin that helped protect me from the outside world. The skin is the physical symbol of the vulnerable inner life's protection against a hostile world, and that is why I could not stand even the slightest scratch.

But I was even more afraid of blood than I was of pain. I couldn't look at it; I couldn't listen to talk about it; I just couldn't bear it. The very thought of it made me ill. I broke out in a cold sweat. Panic seized me. My senses failed me, and I began to black out. I had to get away. I had to get out in the fresh air, away from the place where there was blood or talk of blood or the thought of blood. Since blood represents the essence of life and of physical existence, it was more than I could stand. It was the embodiment of what I wanted nothing to do with, of what I struggled to avoid, of what I had repressed and shoved out of my unproblematic and artificially harmonious world. I couldn't look at blood from the outside and as a spectator. It was inside me, that frightening, terrifying stuff. It lived in me, and I lived from it. I myself was blood. Blood was the truth and, faced with the truth, I faded away to nothing. I was so vulnerable and so afraid of being wounded because I had not been taught how to be vulnerable. All I had been prepared for was to remain eternally inviolate and pure.

All these weaknesses might well have brought down the scorn of my schoolmates on me, but for the most part they reacted to my failings with great good humor. And whenever they did make fun of me, there was never any real malice or disparagement in it. Despite the fact that I was generally regarded as an outsider and a weakling, my classmates still accepted me. They didn't particularly enjoy me, nor did they find me particularly offensive. My place among them was quite clear: I was not a spoilsport, but it was taken for granted that I would not participate in my schoolmates' activities. I wasn't excluded from

what they did. I just didn't take part. I got along well with everyone and didn't have any enemies, but I didn't have any special friends, either. I was a rather nondescript entity that evoked neither strong sympathy nor antipathy from others. That I was a good rather than a bad student earned me some modicum of respect. My amazingly poor performance in gymnastics was generally regarded as an anomaly of nature, no more, no less. No one made fun of me for not being able to play soccer and not wanting to. Soccer was just one more thing in which I simply didn't take part.

In one respect, my existence as an outsider had certain advantages. It was clear that I occupied myself with "higher things." This was primarily evident in the fact that I was more boring than my classmates. But on the other hand it must have given me a certain air of distinction. My classmates found it not only ridiculous but also curious that I never swore, that I kept away from anything gross or impure, and that I remained excessively well-mannered in all circumstances. Even though they couldn't appreciate my individual qualities, my odd combination of qualities inspired some interest in them. They could appreciate that I was different from the rest of them and consequently represented something special—not something especially winning, of course, but rather something especially strange, something no one else could make much sense of. I was different. I was odd. I was unfathomable. No one knew what to make of me. I came from a totally different world. All these curious facts did not make me a despicable creature in my schoolmates' eyes. They saw me instead as some kind of rare beast, some monster. They couldn't quite tell my head from my feet, but of one thing they could be sure: I was utterly harmless and wouldn't bite.

I can't say now exactly when it was that I first became aware of the ambiguity of my situation. This ambiguity had no doubt

been present in me for a long time. I had remained unconscious of it at first, then had gradually begun to take note of it. I had claimed the “higher realms” for myself, yet in many ways I was far inferior to my contemporaries. As I mentioned before, I read only “good” books and heard only “good” music. “Good” meant classical. I had literary interests. I moved on the same cultural level as adults did and could look down a bit on my schoolmates, who were interested “only” in building radios, in sports, movie stars, popular music, and jazz. It was typical of me at the time that I thought all music that wasn’t classical had to be either popular or jazz and that both were “bad.” I hadn’t the faintest idea what jazz was, but I was convinced nonetheless that it was to be condemned as bad. And if adults ever asked me what I thought of jazz, I could reply proudly that I didn’t like it.

I’ve noticed that people usually tend to be much prouder of what they don’t know and don’t want to know than they are of what they do know. “I don’t even want to hear about it. I don’t want to have anything to do with that. We don’t talk about things like that in our house.” These statements are typical of the philistine. It’s more important to most people not to have any vices at all than it is to have a few concrete virtues.

As a student, I was proud of having no interest in a great many interesting things and of already being just like an adult. I was proud of not playing pinball machines or table soccer, of not going to the Café Maroc, which was so popular among my schoolmates, and of not wasting my allowance on modest orgies there. I was proud of not knowing who Elvis Presley was and of not consciously experiencing those famous golden 1960s. Probably no one knew at that time that Elvis Presley would turn out to be about a hundred times more important in world history than the immortal Goethe, whose products I read and found appropriately classical. The crucial point for me was that, once

again, I simply wasn't present while all my schoolmates were. All I did was continue to do what I had learned from my parents: isolate myself from everything and be proud of that isolation.

But I had begun to realize some time before that my false sense of superiority was being eroded by the awareness that I did not stand above all things but among them and that in comparison to my classmates I was beginning to fall behind or already had fallen behind. I had been able to explain away my excessive shyness and timidity by the fact that I was the youngest and least experienced of all the boys, though not the smallest; in a few years, I would have caught up in those areas where I was lacking. I knew that I was still very young and ignorant, and I imagined how things would be when I had "gotten past" this stage and could move about as freely as the other boys did. The feeling that one has to "get past" something is predicated on the assumption that one is held captive by forces one has to escape. It is also predicated on a more or less clear awareness of being unfree. At first I expected that the passage of time alone would free me. As soon as I had outgrown short pants and knickers, I would automatically be free. But I gradually began to realize that it wasn't just my lack of years that was holding me back; I was lacking in other ways as well. My schoolmates could do a great many things that I couldn't. They were able to carry on discussions with their teachers while I could only receive instruction from my teachers. They could spontaneously express their liking or antipathy for teachers, other students, or other people, while I had nothing to offer but my eternal "I really can't say." On a couple of occasions, I drew violent reactions from my classmates merely because I, ever ready to pay respect where respect was due, had said that one teacher or another was "nice." They found the teacher in question not "nice" but hateful, deceitful, mean, stupid, rotten. And even if I tried to defend the teacher in my typical fashion,

making excuses for him and saying he wasn't really so bad, I was left with the painful realization that I had not noticed that a teacher was hateful or deceitful or stupid or rotten. I began to suspect that I simply lacked the ability to recognize if someone was stupid or evil. Or, to put it differently, I gradually began to understand that everyone else knew the difference between good and evil and that I alone did not know what was good and what was evil but only what was "difficult."

I had no concept of the value of money. I suspected that my father was rich despite the fact that my parents didn't like to talk about money and were careful not to behave like other rich people. Many of my parents' rich acquaintances were ostentatious with their money; they were "conceited show-offs." We were rich, too, but we went about it in a much more modest way. Even our wealth was a cause for shame. At our house, the typical Swiss understatement was the rule in money matters, too. You have money but you don't show it. Quality, not flashiness, is what counts. Everything looks like nothing at all but actually costs a lot of money. You don't eat caviar off golden plates. You eat your soup out of bowls that look as if they came from Woolworth's but that cost at least a thousand francs apiece. Everything I owned was priceless. I knew that you were never allowed to know what a gift had cost, and since I had gotten all the things I had as gifts, I never knew what my possessions were worth. My friends always wanted to know what my things had cost, but I never knew. I would answer that I had gotten this or that as a gift and didn't know the price. Here, too, I felt that it was evidence of a "higher" intelligence not to know the price of anything, but at the same time I had to admit to myself that my friends were informed in still another area where I was not yet as far along as they were. Increasingly, I had to block out the unpleasant realization that they were the knowledgeable ones and I the ignorant one.



The struggle to shut out this realization was particularly difficult in one important area. Many of my friends had girl friends. I, of course, did not. That it was perfectly natural for me not to have one could be explained by the fact that, in this respect, too, I was not as far along as my friends. I thought that in time I would have one. Now a long-term struggle between two opposing views began to take place in me: either I did not have a girl friend *yet* or I was *incapable* of having a girl friend. As long as I possibly could, I clung to the hypothesis that I was just not far enough along to have one. But this view became increasingly difficult to maintain. I saw that for a long time now it was not just my classmates and immediate contemporaries who had girl friends but also much younger and smaller boys. With each passing year, younger and younger students in our Gymnasium were successful with girls. Time was advancing, but I, instead of advancing with it, was standing still. The moment had long since come and gone when everyone else had a girl friend and when I should have had one, too. And suddenly I saw that the opportunity I regarded as "not yet come" had in reality "long since passed." I could no longer regard what should have happened long ago as something that might yet happen in the future. No vague possibility of fulfillment lay before me. A past in which I had failed lay behind me. For the first time in my life, I realized that I was guilty, guilty of not having done what I ought to have done. The insight that I was different in this respect, too, crystallized in my mind only very slowly. The fact was not that I didn't have a girl friend yet. The fact was that I didn't have a girl friend. The gap between me and my friends grew larger and larger.

What I did at dancing class illustrates this development perfectly. As everyone knew, a lot of boys had met their girl friends at dancing class. Dancing class was clearly the place to meet girl friends. As long as I didn't attend dancing class, I had a

good excuse for not having a girl friend. I had never been in the place where girl friends could be met. I was completely blameless. I just hadn't had the opportunity yet. But I could not cherish this illusion forever because eventually even I went to dancing class. Once there, I quickly realized that there were boys who knew what to do when they were with girls but that I didn't know what to do, and spent my time sitting around feeling inhibited and embarrassed. Once again, the others were knowledgeable, and I was ignorant. I went to dancing class equipped with hopelessly good manners but without any élan or sense of rhythm. I was a miserable dancer. I was refined but infinitely dreary. I didn't know what to say to girls. I didn't know what to do in their company. While I stood by as a tongue-tied observer, girls who had been anonymous creatures to us all at the beginning of the class evolved into my friends' dancing-class girl friends. The dancing class that up to now had only been a fantasy projected into the future was actually taking place. Things had come this far. Now it was time for me to do my part. But I hadn't come this far; I was not taking place; I didn't do my part. Reality had come to me, but I could not cope with it. I must have sensed somehow even then that it wasn't the dancing class that wasn't working out. It was me who wasn't working out. But in those days I was still able to gloss over anything, and I enrolled in a different dancing class in the vain hope that it would be much better and would give me what I wanted. I didn't have the courage to admit to myself that the fault was all mine when I failed, that neither the dancing class nor any other institution was to blame if I fell behind. I may have had some vague sense that all this was true, but I was unable to bring this truth to full consciousness.

In time, I became somewhat accustomed to this state of affairs. Just as other boys knew a great deal about things I had not the slightest inkling of, so the others had girl friends, too; and I

had not the slightest inkling of that, either. I didn't realize it then, but at that moment I was already standing on the very threshold of the disaster that was waiting for me.

## IV

These last observations lead back to an aspect of my home life that I have not yet described fully. I mentioned before that any topic of conversation that was inherently interesting was taboo in our house, and I want to consider two such topics—religion and sexuality—more closely now. That these subjects are taboo for children is, I suspect, the ordinary state of affairs more often than not. But the great harm that results from this is never ordinary; it is always dreadful. Thousands of people are being tortured to death in Chile these days, but the fact that it is thousands who are suffering and dying by no means makes this an ordinary state of affairs. The sex education that I received, which is to say the anti-sex education, is nothing unusual, either. Thousands of other people have experienced one every bit as bad, and I imagine they have been every bit as unhappy because of it. The only difference between us is that they haven't written any memoirs. Not everyone who does not write memoirs is happy.

As I said, no subjects of any significance were discussed at our house, and I doubt that a religious education comparable to mine exists anywhere. My parents were profoundly a-religious, but they would sooner have bitten off their tongues than admit that. They by no means favored the Christian religion, but they still looked upon it as something good. All of us in my family knew, in other words, that nobody had any Christian feelings but that doubts about the Christian church and its institutions would not be tolerated. Or, to state this principle in the form of a rather dubious categorical imperative, we had to

be against it but had to declare it good anyhow. It was not at home that I made the acquaintance of God and of His peculiar son Jesus (who was really more His stepson). I first learned about these two questionable figures in school. And I soon became aware of a remarkable fact: I mustn't talk about God with my parents. They would not put up with it. My father in particular became downright angry at the mention of the subject. He wouldn't stand for it. The atmosphere became intolerable; disaster threatened; and any further discussion was out of the question. I began to sense that God was a highly equivocal entity. We were supposed to regard Him in a positive light—people addressed Him, after all, as “dear God”—and my parents would not tolerate criticism or ridicule of Him. But, at the same time, my father became unpleasant at the mere mention of Him, and God was therefore not a popular figure at our house. Perhaps I was able to explain this to myself as a child by classifying God as another of the clowns who put on a kind of performance with us as spectators. It was understood in our house that God was all right for other people, and it was probably only politeness and consideration for the feelings of our stupid fellow creatures that kept us from openly expressing our antipathy for God. Now I find it easier to understand—and define—my parents' version of religious faith: God is bad because He insists that we come to terms with Him, one way or another; but the church is good because it is respectable.

My parents never went to church even though they thought it good in principle to go to church. It was presumably good for other people to go to church. And perhaps it was a bit ridiculous to go to church; but we couldn't admit that. My parents didn't allow me to make fun of anything having to do with the church, but I suspected that they secretly made fun of it themselves. Their attitude can perhaps be summed up this way: It was a bit ridiculous for individuals to go to church because an individual who would do that had to be a clown, but it was good

in principle to go to church because the church as such was good. My parents therefore favored going to church in principle; but as individuals they didn't want to make themselves ridiculous by actually going to church.

But they did go to church sometimes despite themselves because they had to attend so many funerals. And when they did deign to go, it was a matter of good form to go in as *comme il faut* a manner as possible. On these occasions, their piety and fervor were enough to bring God's mercy streaming down in torrents. Once they actually went, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. They sang the praises of the church, its architecture, the floral decorations, the minister, the sermon, the organ music, the singing, the atmosphere, and anything and everything else you could possibly sing the praises of if you'd made up your mind, in the name of God, to do some serious praising. They liked the church because the church was good. There was only one thing my father didn't seem to like. Whenever he had to stand up to join in a prayer, a look of rage came over his face at having to stand like everyone else and pretend that he was praying. But once the service was over, he was always in good spirits again and overflowing with praise. He asserted that the minister had given an excellent sermon, had expressed himself very elegantly, and had an impeccable High German pronunciation. It struck me that my father always praised the form of the sermon. He never mentioned whether he liked its content or not. I remember thinking after one of these funeral services that the sermon had been very stupid. But my father commented on how good the sermon had been. (We could have arrived at a compromise here, for it was certainly possible that the sermon had been both very good and very stupid.) As I see it now, my father believed only in the forms of the church, not in its meaning. To believe in the forms of the church was a matter of good taste. To believe in its meaning was ridiculous.

I have already mentioned that it was a matter of good form

for my parents to attend the funerals of all those remote relatives and friends they had failed to visit when the people were still alive. My poor parents had a fundamental aversion for all social events except funerals. They would go to great lengths to avoid attending a party with the living, but no sacrifice was too great when it came to paying their so-called last respects to the dead. This attitude was typical for our family: the deader, the better.

There was another aspect of my poor father's quirky religiosity that I could not understand until later, either. My father was an architect, but he didn't really practice his profession. He worked instead in his father-in-law's business. He had never built buildings but had always worked in the preservation and restoration of historical monuments, particularly of churches. As a consequence, my father knew almost all the churches in Switzerland and was very interested in them. I always found this interest a bit discordant, because all those churches had been built in praise of the God my father could not stand. When he was showing me the construction of the nave and the transept in a church once, I realized that churches had this design because they were meant to remind us of the form of the cross. But the cross was a symbol my father despised. I began to wonder how he had been able to endure working in all these churches that had been consciously designed on a pattern he found objectionable. As an architect, too, he could appreciate only the form of the church but wanted nothing to do with the meaning behind that form.

His interest in churches struck me as a bit odd, just as his pleasure in eloquent sermons did. My father could proclaim every minister's sermon "beautiful" and "marvelous" regardless of its content. Similarly, he found every church "beautiful" and "marvelous" even though, for him, it existed in a vacuum. But the fact is that churches have a meaning. They fulfill a purpose. They bear witness to God, and my father wanted nothing

to do with bearing witness to God. He ignored the entire religious significance of churches. It didn't seem to exist for him. He enjoyed being in churches, in those hollow, hostile, and meaningless structures that conveyed no other tidings to him except that they were, in an abstract and inhuman way, "marvelous."

Those churches strike me now as a symbol for everything that is lifeless and extinct. They were every bit as dead as most other things were in our family.

I did not, then, have what could be called a Christian education, nor did I have an anti-Christian one or one that called religion into question. To recast a famous Bible quotation: He that is not openly *against* Jesus is *with* Him. An abstention won't do here. Whoever remains silent has not put Christianity behind him, and continues to be a Christian. My parents hoped that I, too, would turn out to be un-Christian, but they lacked the courage to express this wish openly. But one aspect of my training certainly conformed to what is at the heart of Christianity even though it may not be consciously articulated. I was taught all the common Christian virtues like abstinence, renunciation, docility, patience, and, most important of all, a clear denial of almost all aspects of life. In other words, I was taught not to enjoy life but to bear it without complaint, not to be sinful but to be frustrated. This leads us directly to that second major topic that was never mentioned during my childhood and youth: to sex. In this area, I am certain that my education was genuinely Christian, for it stood beyond the shadow of a doubt in our family that sex was the source of all evil. I know I am not the only person in the world whose sexual education was a failure, and I realize that I have nothing new to report here. But that makes me want to discuss this subject all the more, because it seems to be one that has still not been aired enough. Probably all middle-class families even today remain hostile to sex, but we should not conclude that this is an unimportant fact simply because it's a prevalent one. My par-

ents' attitude toward sex was the essence and epitome of their basic attitude toward life: No. Or, if it had to be—then yes, but only for other people, not for us.

If we once begin to ask why it is taken for granted in middle-class and Christian circles that sex is the very essence of evil, the answer is not so easy to find; and I cannot presume to answer this two-thousand-year-old question. But a few points that might bring us closer to an answer occur to me when I recall the prevailing atmosphere in my parents' house. A middle-class aspect of the issue that is certainly relevant here is adherence to tradition. Whatever has been the rule in the past should continue to be the rule in the future, whether it's good or bad. Or, to put this in middle-class terms, if something has been the rule long enough, it can't be bad and therefore has to be good. (Begging your leave, I would mention our Swiss Army as an example of this.) If our grandparents and great-grandparents considered sex improper, then traditionally minded younger generations will—without giving the matter much thought—want to consider it improper, too. If a great-grandson makes the same error as his great-grandfather, he will readily accept that error as virtue if only because of its venerability.

I think this must have been the way it was for my parents to some extent. They did not count themselves among those revolutionaries who suddenly develop an attitude toward sex different from the one all the generations before them had held. Another—and thoroughly Christian—aspect is obvious, too. If, in good Christian style, we seek our salvation in the “higher” and spiritual realms, then we will want to have something at the other end of the scale to symbolize the lower order. And if we picture this lower order as the opposite of the spiritual—that is, as the physical—then we will no doubt find it best exemplified in sexuality and in physical love. (That sexuality is as much spiritual as it is physical, and that body and spirit constitute a unity rather than a pair of opposites, is an insight that has, I



fear, been altogether lost on Christian dogma and its simple-minded imperviousness to new ideas.) Anyone who is out to pursue the higher things will inevitably find something he can regard as a lower thing. If we are going to raise something to the heavens, we apparently have to send something else to hell at the same time.

Now, the "higher things" were always welcome guests at our house. And very easy guests to have, because you can do just about anything you want with them. You can put on your slippers and settle down on your couch at home and still cultivate the "higher things," all without exerting yourself too much. Wallowing about in the so-called morass of life or devoting yourself to outright sin takes much more effort. You have to put yourself out a bit to do those things. I've come to feel that so-called virtue is genuine only when it has been achieved through struggle. If virtue is achieved by following the path of least resistance, it's a thing of the devil. And our much-touted "higher things" can easily represent a path of least resistance. In terms of the erotic life, that can mean that middle-class marriage and fidelity amount to no more than the most comfortable solution. Infidelities and scandals are much more troublesome and uncomfortable. Sexuality itself can surely be described as something that creates discomfort because it brings up problems and challenges us. And if a person prefers comfort to discomfort, then he will tend to avoid anything problematic right from the start. This brings us to the fable about the fox and the grapes. Anyone who finds it too much trouble to get something will be quick to say he didn't want it in the first place. To do without something is usually very easy. To want something is often very difficult. Or, as one of my friends put it, it's only natural that sex is and always has been sinful; what's forbidden, you don't have to trouble yourself to get.

Another facet of the problem is, however, that our sexuality is at the heart of our being. It is the most vital thing in us, the

focal point of our energies. It means business. But all these things were in disfavor at our house. We detested the essence of things; we never wanted to get to the heart of a matter and always preferred to declare it "difficult." We never wanted to do anything ourselves. We preferred to smile at what other people did. We didn't want to pit our energies against each other. We preferred to live harmoniously and smooth over all disagreements so that we could go on living in that rose-tinted vapidness we substituted for happiness. And, of course, we never meant business. Meaning business was all right for everyone else, but we were above such things. But there was even more we objected to about sex. Sex, by necessity, had to do with the body we felt so ashamed of, the body that inspired other, lower human creatures not to shame but to desire. We did not find the body desirable. Then, too, there was no getting around the fact that sex strips you naked, exposes you in every way possible. And that was the very last thing we wanted. Stay Covered at All Costs. That was our motto.

We were like hermit crabs. The hermit crab carries a lot of armor plate up front, but his backside is naked. He deals with this problem by sticking his vulnerable rear end into empty snail shells and exposing only his protected forequarters to the world. But as the hermit crab grows, his rented home gradually becomes too small for him, and he is forced to move to a larger one. What agonies of anxiety a hermit crab must endure when he finally sets out to look for a new house, thereby exposing his naked hindquarters to a host of ravenous enemies. How terrifying that interval of time must be when he has bid his old shelter a final and irrevocable farewell but cannot yet know where he will find a new home that will accommodate his present dimensions. We bore a strong resemblance to the hermit crab. We carried adequate armor plate in front, but we were exposed to the rear. Our trouble was that we weren't very courageous hermit crabs, and we chose to languish painfully in a house

that was too small for us. Our upper bodies caused us no problems, but we preferred to let our lower bodies atrophy in their unhealthy confinement rather than rescue them at the risk of exposing their nakedness to public view. It makes sense that these creatures are called hermit crabs, because refusal to expose oneself is an asocial trait.

Or, to use the words that every middle-class child has heard, "Sex is a subject we don't talk about." In the mathematics of frustration, the equation goes something like this: "Sex is a subject we don't talk about; therefore it doesn't exist" equals "Sex doesn't exist; therefore we don't talk about it." The situation in our house was the same as in any other middle-class home. We didn't talk about sex. The word had been struck from our vocabulary.

This brings me to another fascinating subject, one that inspires grief and woe in every parent and one whose very appellation borders on the grotesque: enlightenment. Why children can have everything else in the world *explained* to them without suffering permanent damage to their souls but have to be *enlightened* about conception and birth—and why adults are frightened to death that their children's souls will in fact suffer permanent damage from such enlightenment—this remains a mystery to me to this very day. I learned as a child that the Communists were bad and the anti-Communists good. I was able to grasp the theologically subtle point that religion and the church were good even though God was bad. But I didn't know what a man and a woman were because I had not been "enlightened" about that. When I finally discovered the world of sexuality, I was left to deal with it according to my own lights, and I must say I came up with some rather impressive results. I knew that children got born because a man and a woman had "been together," and I knew that babies "came out of their mothers." I imagined that the whole business worked

something like this. A man put out a masculine emanation and a woman a feminine one. If a man touched a woman, the man's sweat entered her through her skin, and then a baby formed inside the woman's body. Now, since this baby had to come out somehow and since I had heard the navel described as the "center of the world," it seemed logical that babies left their mothers' bodies through the opening at the navel. I also learned later that there were illegitimate children whose conception had "happened by mistake." All that could mean was that a man had not been watching his step and had touched a woman at an inopportune time, perhaps when he was sweating a lot. "Despite all precautions," a little of the man's sweat had then penetrated into the woman's body—through her wrist, for example—and then it had "happened."

But I kept this knowledge to myself, for I knew that it wasn't good to talk about such things. I once came across the word "chaste" in my reading and was unable to figure out its meaning. When I asked my mother what it meant, she became incredibly flustered. It wasn't clear to me whether she just didn't know what chaste meant or whether she was unable to tell me or didn't want to tell me. But it was perfectly clear that it made her most uncomfortable to find herself obliged, by my question, to explain what chaste meant. It was as if I had raised the subject of God with my father. That was a very, very bad subject that went better unmentioned, a subject that ought not to be discussed and that was always dropped from conversation with inward sighs of relief. Unfortunately, I let my mother off the hook by innocently offering my own theory. From the context in which it occurred, "chaste" seemed to me to suggest something like "decent" or "respectable"; and I told my mother that's what I had guessed it meant. The pained expression instantly left her face, and she said with obvious relief: "Yes, yes, yes, that's exactly what it means." And so an unsettling subject was avoided

once again. Later, when I found out what "chaste" really meant, I realized that it was no fit topic of conversation. It belonged to the realm of the "difficult."

Sexuality was obviously a discordant element. It was classed among all those other unmentionable things that found no place within the narrow scope of our familial harmony. I thus came to see anything that had to do with sex as hostile; it was bad, and I was afraid of it. I always blushed whenever sex came up in a conversation; and I was afraid of such conversations because my blushing embarrassed me. When I finally learned the truth about reproduction and rid myself of my illusions about sweaty wrists, I pictured the reproductive act as horrible and repulsive and felt I would probably never be capable of anything so dreadful. But even after I had overcome my initial fears, I still remained excessively modest; and as late as my last few years in the Gymnasium, unwelcome fits of blushing still continued to plague me during classroom discussions that all my classmates took part in with the greatest composure.

School was the place where, however belatedly, the dirty job of sexual enlightenment was to be accomplished (or so my parents—and probably not just mine—devoutly hoped, for then they themselves would be spared this onerous task). Sex education at our school consisted primarily of a medical lecture designed to scare already quite mature students away from sexual intercourse. Using a slide projector, the school doctor showed us several schematic drawings of the human sexual organs, then topped the whole show off with a huge and grotesquely colored picture of the female organs. In a voice betraying deep emotion, he said: "Just look at that, boys. That's what a woman really looks like. None of you would want to get into something like *that*, now, would you?" Next, he showed us photos of syphilitics in various stages of degeneration. Such, clearly, were the consequences of love. At the end of his talk, the doctor told us a

curious fact. A statistical study made in America had shown that many boys apparently satisfied their sexual needs by masturbating. But the doctor was mentioning this only by the way because, statistically speaking, the percentage of boys who masturbated was infinitesimally small; hence, it would be incorrect to represent this as a problem of any great significance. (And furthermore, these statistics applied only to America.) That was the extent of our sexual enlightenment.

The lecture did not change my view of the world in any important way. It only confirmed my old belief that sex was evil, not good. The two words "good" and "evil" were not used much in this connection, of course. These days nobody dares, as a medieval monk might have done, to brand sexuality as the very incarnation of evil. On the contrary, everyone wants to appear "enlightened" and is willing to concede that sexuality is "really very important" and of "enormous significance." We "couldn't manage without it." It is "essential to life and to the continuation of the species." In short, everyone readily admits that "this side of life" in fact exists and that we have long since given up the idea that sexuality is the incarnation of the devil himself. But no one would publicly declare that sexuality is the very best thing there is in the world.

The hippie slogan "Make love, not war" still strikes the middle-class ear as obscene. No one will come right out and say that war is a good thing, though people may argue that it is—alas!—sometimes necessary. Exactly why it is necessary they usually will not be able to say. Similarly, no one is ready to come right out and say that love is bad; but to go so far as to say unequivocally that love is not only good but also much better than war—that is a truth too bold for middle-class society to handle, a truth that still seems obscene. We are, after all, not lovers but soldiers, especially we Swiss! The view of the world that the cinema conveys reflects this attitude. Even today,

sex films are banned outright or meet with censorship and public disapproval. But a film about war, murder, and violence has nothing to fear from the censors.

I hardly need say that in this respect, too, my parents were no revolutionaries and went along with majority opinion. The sex education that I got from my parents—or, more exactly, did not get—is surely the rule and not the exception in middle-class circles. It is obvious that my parents completely accepted the general taboo on sex, because the essence of a taboo subject is that no one ever talks about it and what my parents most excelled in was not talking about things. Another thing I would like to mention about the attitude toward sex that my parents adopted with my brother and me is that it went through two different phases. In the first of these, sex didn't exist at all. In the second, it was ridiculous. What this meant in practical terms is that sex was never mentioned at all as long as we were young children and my parents could shirk the responsibility of telling us about it. But as soon as they could hope that someone else had relieved them of the unpleasant duty of enlightening us, sex was then categorized among all those things that "other people" did, those other people who amused us and always struck us as a bit ridiculous. I can't say that this sequence of events was very fortunate for me. On the contrary, it was extremely unfortunate. In the first phase, I was supposed to be a child who was not allowed to know anything about sex at all. In the second, when it could be assumed that I knew something about it, I was supposed to have risen above it completely and to be like an old man who didn't want to have anything more to do with it. Now sex wasn't so much bad as it was ridiculous or boring. My father was often surprised that people could be so keen on sex films and magazines when sex was such a tiresome thing. He never would have thought of banning porno films or literature because he couldn't see how they could possibly be of interest to anyone. That is, there were people who were interested in such

things, but they were "other people." Other people did all sorts of absurd things, so it was no wonder that, in addition to all the other follies they had, they were sexual as well.

I always say here that "we" did or did not do something. I mean to indicate with this plural that, having been shaped by my parents' outlook, I followed their example in every respect. Their ways struck me as essentially right. I might differ with them over certain details, but I never seriously called their behavior or ideas into question. I felt I was in good hands in my parents' house, and I was in basic agreement with them because I was like them. Consequently, I had no problems with my parents but felt harmoniously at one with them. My exemplary behavior and my reluctance to go against my parents' wishes were simply further expressions of the correctness that held sway in our house. To behave as correctly as possible in all life's situations, even if our behavior was excessively correct, seemed to us to be the best protection. Protection against what? one might ask. We probably wouldn't have been able to put the answer to this question in words, but I think now that we needed protection against the whole world. We could not tolerate the slightest flaw in ourselves. We had to be pure and unblemished in all things. Absolute correctness seemed to us to be the best route through life—or the best detour around it. If we behaved correctly, we might come through the by no means flawless workings of this world with a minimum of damage. As the saying goes, if you play with tar, you'll get dirty hands. Our family's version of it was more like: If you don't play with anything, your hands will stay clean. Or, since we never broke any eggs, we never made any omelettes. I therefore strove to be utterly correct and pure in every way, developing what amounted to an obsession for cleanliness. Just as I was correct to the extreme in everything I did, so, too, I was excessively clean and orderly. I couldn't bear a speck of dust on me; not a hair could be out of place.



I remained pure, never got dirty, touched nothing, and had no contact with anything or anyone. I had no friends, and I had no love affairs. I was totally incapable of contact with girls, and I was just as incapable of talking about my difficulties in making contact with them. An additional problem cropped up here. Everyone automatically assumes that after a certain age boys will have girl friends; and people often asked me whether I had a girl friend, too. Since I knew that I had to answer yes if I didn't want to look ridiculous, I consistently lied and claimed I did have a girl friend. To cover myself in case I was asked further questions, I always had a certain girl in mind, one whom I had taken to the theater a few times but who was not, of course, my girl friend. If I should be asked for additional information about my imaginary girl friend, the pertinent facts of this girl's life would supply me with ready answers. By not hesitating in answering any detailed question, I would not betray that I had lied in answering the basic question. After my fashion, I did the "correct" thing: I supplied just the answer that the person who asked the question wanted to hear.

My fear of girls, however, was only the most extreme manifestation in me of a fear of people in general. I was unable to approach them, and I could force myself to do it only when it was absolutely necessary. I preferred to say nothing to people I didn't know or with whom I was only slightly acquainted, and my fear of people often prevented me from speaking to someone even when I was longing to do so and had, perhaps, only the most innocuous of remarks to make.

This fear was so extreme that it even kept me from greeting people on the street. My mother's family had lived in K. for generations, and it was only natural that everyone in town knew my family and me as well. All these people said hello to me on the street because they knew who I was. But to me they were all strangers I knew nothing about except that I ought to know their names. My parents impressed on me that it was

only right and proper that I greet these people by name. I did endless battle with those names, constantly forgetting them and mixing them up so much that I was never sure who was Mr. Müller and who Mr. Meier in this multitude of people I was obliged to call by name. The realization that I should know not only the man's name but also who he was (after all, he knew who I was) only increased my discomfort vis-à-vis someone whom I presumed to be Mr. Meier and whom, *mea culpa*, I could not positively identify as "that delightful chap from the house on the corner" or "that utterly charming tradesman who lives on Seestrasse." My confusion was often so great that I began to doubt whether someone I knew was called Müller was in fact Müller or was really someone else after all. I usually managed to address the right people with the right names, but I suffered untold agonies at the very thought of using a wrong one. Sometimes I would swallow a name as I spoke it or mash it into an incomprehensible muddle of sound, and sometimes I omitted a name altogether for fear I might make a mistake, even when I knew the name perfectly well.

I kept telling myself that people would think badly of me if I couldn't remember their names when they were always able to produce mine without fail. How unfounded these fears were didn't dawn on me until years later when I became a teacher. It is obvious that all twenty students in a class will know their new teacher's name after the very first meeting but that the teacher cannot know the names of all twenty students after the first class. It is just as obvious to me now that everyone in our town who had known my mother and my grandmother for years and years would also know that I was the son and grandson of these two women. But it was much more difficult for me to know the names of all the people who knew my family. I had not hit upon this insight at the time, so I made a habit of greeting everyone, especially older people, with particular cordiality. I was always afraid that they might be friends of my

grandmother who would surely be hurt if I walked past them without saying hello. Obviously, no human contact was established by these greetings; the people I greeted were utter strangers. All that counted was doing the "right" thing. If I could manage to greet my enemy correctly, then I had warded off the danger, and the other person could not think badly of me. My contact with the people of K. was limited, then, to this kind of painful greeting. I can't remember ever having actually spoken with anyone.

It's clear that the girl friend I imagined having would never become a reality because I couldn't even manage to speak to a girl, much less ask her if she would be my girl friend. The reason I did not have a girl friend was not, as I tried to convince myself, that I was still one of the "younger" students. Nor was it that the expected chance meeting with a girl at dancing class had failed to materialize. The real reason was what had failed to materialize in me. For behind the superficial image I had of my imaginary girl friend lurked still another image of which I had not yet become fully aware: an image of woman, of sexuality, of love, of life itself. (I do not want to become involved here in discussing whether love or sexuality is the correct term to use. Freud once remarked that he would use the word "love" instead of sexuality so that no one need be troubled by his constant use of the term "sexuality." I will follow him in this, using the two interchangeably and thus reducing the difference between them to a purely stylistic one.) But sexuality had no place in my world because sexuality is the embodiment of life. I had grown up in a house where life was not a welcome guest. We would rather be correct than alive. But all life is sex, for life consists of loving, desiring, and interacting with another human being. The entire life process can be compared to the act of sexual union. All life strives constantly to merge with other life, to penetrate it, unite with it; and any dividing, holding apart, splitting off, or separat-

ing always means death. Those who unite with others live; those who keep themselves apart die. But that was the very motto we lived by in my parents' house: Isolate Yourself and Die! The logic of this motto, of this commandment, is flawless because the dead are the least likely people of all to draw attention to themselves by a *faux pas*.

We could put it this way: I was too correct to be capable of love. I wasn't even really myself. All I was was correct, for if my real self had shown its face anywhere in that world of politeness and empty formalities, it would immediately have been felt as a disturbing element. My sole function was to keep myself in a harmonious relationship with what I took to be the world. I was not a self, an individual who was separate and distinct from his environment. I was a conforming particle within that environment. I wasn't even a useful member of human society; I was a well-mannered one, and that was all.

My romantic ideas about love derived from movie scenes of love at first sight. I dreamed about how I, too (at some indeterminate time in the future when I would finally be "old" enough), would meet a girl and would feel, the moment I saw her, that she was my one true love (and of course the girl would feel exactly the same thing about me at exactly the same moment). In this way and with this ideal person, I would be spared all those irksome struggles usually involved in getting to know and coming to love another person. There would be nothing problematic about her; I would have no problems with her; our relationship would be one of instant and total harmony. I would not have to approach her, say hello to her. I would not have to blush and screw up my courage to ask her if she wanted to be my girl friend. Everything would be clear, unproblematic, and harmonious from the start. She would be as lifeless and boring as I, and would go to just as much trouble to see that neither of us was ever wounded, or even slightly nicked, by the other. Poor woman.

I was surely not the only person in the world with such ideas, but it is obvious that I would be particularly drawn to them, given the view of the world I was unfortunate enough to have. A woman as I imagined her was nothing but another stage property in my infantile world. She had no personality, and it would have been to my disadvantage if she had, because I had none myself. Such was the picture of love I developed in my conscious mind, imagining all the while that it was "a very beautiful thing." But unconsciously and in my heart of hearts, I feared and hated love, for it consisted of the very things that were most unacceptable and alien to me.

All these thoughts and daydreams suited the general tenor of my Gymnasium years quite well. True, I went to school in Zurich and spent the best part of my workday away from home; but as far as my inner life was concerned, I learned nothing at school. Psychologically, I remained completely subject to the influence of my parents. I put in my time at school, then took the train back to K. and to my parents' house, where I felt at home and felt I belonged. I learned Latin and mathematics and modern languages, but these studies did not expand my horizons. They were nothing but tiresome tasks I had to do because that's what was expected of me. Doing my homework was the correct thing to do; therefore I did it. Furthermore, my father wanted me to do my schoolwork, and I knew he would not tolerate any rebellion from me on this point. It cost me nothing to bend to my father's will, because I had no will of my own. I often found my work at the Gymnasium burdensome, but that was beside the point because I couldn't imagine what I would have done if I had quit the Gymnasium.

So there I was: a moderately good but also a moderately uninterested student. I had the world's best manners and never gave cause for offense or censure at school. The only subject in which I was inadequate beyond all belief was physical education. My schoolmates neither hated me nor tormented me, but

I did not have any friends. I attended several dancing classes to learn how to get along with girls, but I couldn't learn how to dance at all, and I learned how to get along with girls even less. I was intelligent, but I didn't know how to do anything. Outwardly, I seemed to be almost repulsively normal, but I was anything but a normal, healthy young man. To the rest of the world, I was known as someone who busied himself with the "higher things," but inwardly I realized that I had fallen way behind and really belonged among the very youngest boys in our school. I had no problems, and I sensed that it was better that I had none because I wouldn't have been able to cope with any if I had had them. In short, I had all the prerequisites for becoming a very unhappy person.

No sooner said than done. I got sick. I didn't know at the time that I had a disease, nor did I even know the name of the disease. It's one of the most widespread diseases of our time. It's called depression. I would guess now that it began when I was about seventeen or eighteen. It hasn't left me since. I'm thirty-two now, and if I want to take the trouble to calculate the duration of my illness, I come up with fifteen years. That isn't to say that I felt the disease with the same acuteness during all those fifteen years. Sometimes it grew worse, and sometimes it abated. There were times when my affliction subsided so dramatically that I could move about almost like a normal human being. On one or two occasions, it seemed to have abated so much that I began to hope I had overcome it altogether. But aside from these periods of respite, depression has been my constant companion through this whole period. I will not attempt a new description of the phenomenon here. It has been adequately described before, and everyone knows what depression is. Everything seems gray and cold and empty. Nothing gives you any pleasure, and everything painful is felt to be excessively painful. You have no hope left and can't see beyond an unhappy and meaningless present. All the so-called delights of

life inspire no delight. The company of others only aggravates your sense of aloneness. All amusements leave you cold. Vacations provide no real change and weigh more heavily on you than the rest of the year. All the plans you make to get out of your depression you eventually abandon "because nothing does any good anyhow." The two most prominent features of depression are hopelessness and loneliness.

Depression caught up with me about a year before I graduated from the Gymnasium. It reached its first two points of greatest intensity during my last school holidays, which I spent in England, and at the time of my graduation. I was supposed to be having a good time during that vacation, but I couldn't. I felt for the first time the pain of finally escaping from all my everyday worries (in this case release from school) only to find myself more painfully self-preoccupied in this free time, which was just waiting there for me to enjoy it, than I had been when school was in session. My second low point was my graduation. While everyone else was celebrating my success and declaring me an adult from this day on, I had to admit to myself that I had learned nothing in school except my vocabulary words and my formulas and that I was no less a child now than I had been seven years before, when I entered the school.

## v

The world stood gray and hostile before me, and now I was obliged to embark on the carefree life of a university student. It had been taken for granted from the outset that I would go to the university. This suited me just fine because I had no idea what line of work I wanted to take up. If I went to the university, the irksome decision about my working life could be postponed for several years. Since I had done well in languages in school, it seemed logical for me to continue in this field at the university.

Which language I would choose to concentrate on was my decision, but it was a decision I didn't really make myself. There were only two of my classmates at school who were planning to study modern languages, too, and since they had decided to major in Germanic languages, I followed their lead and settled on this same major. Thus, because there was nothing else for me to do and because I couldn't think of anything more original than to follow my classmates' example, I became a student of Germanic languages.

I was a very dapper student. I always wore black slacks, a white shirt, a dark blue jacket, and a black tie. My outfit was very dignified and looked like an elegant uniform. But I knew even then that these clothes, absurdly inappropriate as they were for a young man, were the visible sign of my depression. My inner self insisted on my displaying these symbols of mourning.

I was not, of course, a revolutionary student, either. I could afford to laugh condescendingly about those bad Leftists and their crazy ideas because it never occurred to me that I, too, might be free to make a political choice and, possibly, after studying the issues, to join the Leftists. Instead, I made no political choice at all and automatically huddled with the good, well-behaved types who, in this instance, also turned out to be the conservatives. I had not examined the Leftists' arguments before I rejected them. I simply knew from the word go that the Leftists were ridiculous creatures who couldn't but be mistaken in their views. It was clear to me that the Leftists couldn't be right. Therefore, if I wanted to be right, I had to keep to the Right. This bogus decision, which was of course no decision at all but only the avoidance of a decision, was a source of great pleasure to my parents. Once again their son had proved "sensible" and chosen the straight and narrow path.

There were obvious parallels between my political life and my relationships with women at the university. I didn't have any



amours or affairs. I produced neither scandals nor illegitimate children. That, too, was praiseworthy. I had no problems with women. I was a good and unproblematic student. Love affairs had no place in our harmonious world, and by not having any I spared my parents much worry and grief. In other words, things were just dandy in this respect, too.

In point of fact, things were not dandy. I was depressed and caught in a deepening conflict between my inner and outer life. I seemed to have no problems at all, but I was obviously finding it more and more difficult to make this image of an unproblematic life jibe with the real sense I had of myself and the world. I was determined to see myself as an unproblematic type, and I resorted to all kinds of self-deceptive maneuvers so that I could appear in my own eyes as this ideal figure. One of my main supports in this effort had, however, collapsed under me. While I was at the Gymnasium, I had cultivated the image of a literary oddball. Everybody else played soccer. I was the only one who read "good" books. This was a special quality of mine that was clearly linked to my penchant for the "higher things." But at the university all the other students read serious literature, too; they played soccer only occasionally, and just for fun. I was thus stripped of this apparently positive attribute and was now, even more than during my last years at the Gymnasium, simply one more young man among many others like me, a young man who could no longer cite any valid reason why he lacked what should have taken visible form in the person of a girl friend. The term "girl friend," of course, assumed quite a different meaning at the university. The male students, one of which I had suddenly become, didn't just take their girl friends to the movies. These women were their lovers. I was old enough and was in the right circles and had the opportunity now to have a woman myself. Nothing kept me from it except myself. Something happened here that was similar to what had happened to me once before. My parents had expected me to

remain a totally ignorant and asexual child for a long time; then, immediately after my so-called enlightenment, they expected me to be a totally detached and "sensible," i.e., asexual, man. I was expected to be free of sexual problems both before and after I learned about sex, first because I still knew nothing about it, and second because I was expected to "rise above" it the instant I did learn about it. In my parents' world, people were not, as a matter of principle, allowed to have any problems with sex. The result for me was that at the university I failed to go through the second—and the most important—of three phases of development. At the Gymnasium, I had classified myself among the smaller boys who were still too young to be permitted any sexual problems. At the university, I took just the opposite route. The university was not populated solely by attractive young women and fiery young men. There were also large numbers of dried-up old maids and wizened bachelors who busied themselves with one obscure facet of scholarship or another and shuffled around in shabby old gray clothes. They didn't have any lovers. If, in my own mind, I wanted to belong to some existing group or another, I would have to make do with this professorial army of erudite and infertile scarecrows. Before, I had been too "little" to be myself. Now I was too "old" to be myself. I was unable to be the age that I in fact was. And once again I found a way to rationalize this: I must be completely normal—or at least fall within the limits of normality—because there were other students at the university like me. This rationalization, too, can be seen as "harmonious" or at least as an attempt to achieve harmony. I didn't want to see myself as the only one who was failing while everyone else was succeeding. I wanted to think there were other people in the same boat as I. I didn't want to think of myself as a failure, but as a thoroughly respectable member of a group of people who happened to be just like me.

This became one of my major problems during my student

years. In my heart I knew I was a failure, but I didn't want to admit it to myself. I also knew that the basic reason I was a failure was that I didn't have a woman, for "woman" was the symbol and essence of everything I was lacking. But I hid this knowledge from myself and invented all sorts of other reasons why I was so depressed all the time.

I always acted cheerful and composed. I always had things under control and never had any problems. I was an easygoing type who lacked for nothing. Nothing bothered me and nothing got me down. I always had a smile on my lips because I wanted to create the impression that I was not frustrated. The more depressed I was in my innermost self, the more I smiled at the outside world. The blacker on the inside, the brighter on the outside. The split within me opened wider and wider. My eternal playacting became a more deeply ingrained habit, and the force of habit made my euphemistic mask so much a part of me that I began to see it more and more as my true self. I wanted to be like my mask, and I consequently wanted to believe I was in fact like this role I played. Friends who were having troubles of one sort or another sometimes told me how lucky I was that I could always keep my spirits up. I liked to hear that, and I liked to believe it. My mask was pretty convincing. People believed that I actually was the way I thought myself to be. The people around me confirmed and encouraged me in my masquerade, and whenever I began to question my own feigned cheerfulness, I permitted myself the dishonesty of thinking that it just seemed to me that I was depressed. Everyone else said I wasn't. They couldn't all be wrong. That's how I made other people my accomplices. Whenever my mask threatened to crumble, I could always depend on other people, who were still deceived by it, to patch it up for me. I spent the greatest part of my energy in shoring up the collapsing façade of my pretended self. I always managed to explain away my constantly recurring depressions as mere passing moods. If it happened

to be raining and someone remarked that rain always depressed him, I would jump on that and say to myself: "But of course! It's the rain that's getting me down." Sometimes I had a cold; sometimes I had slept too long or not long enough; sometimes I'd gotten up on the wrong side of the bed; sometimes I was just in a rotten mood; and sometimes I could blame it all on the wretched lecture I had just attended. Sometimes I'd had a wretched lunch, and sometimes I'd had too much for lunch and was therefore drowsy. In short, I always found a way to convince myself that "nothing at all" was really amiss. I know now that a bad meal doesn't bother me. Obviously, I prefer good food to bad, but if a meal is poor, it doesn't particularly upset me. And the weather doesn't affect my moods, either. I prefer fair weather, and I wouldn't mind if it never rained again. But weeks on end of bad weather don't crush my spirits. In this respect, I seem to have a fortunate temperament. Lots of people do get depressed in a spell of rainy weather. I don't. All my excuses about its being "just the weather" were lies. My depression was rooted much deeper, and all the bad weather in the world could not obliterate that fact.

I was a liar and a hypocrite through and through, but I had manners it would be hard to equal anywhere in this hemisphere. The trouble was that manners were the only art I had learned. The upbringing I received from my parents had been a success.

If we accept the definition of a neurotic as a person who can never live in the present and always seeks refuge either in the future or in the past, then I fulfilled all the requirements by the time I was a university student. On the one hand, I still saw myself as a "little boy" who had fallen behind and was still not capable of doing anything. On the other hand, I kept hoping constantly that at some far and indeterminate point in the future I would find the fulfillment I could not find in the present. I kept telling myself that I just couldn't get in the swing of things here in Zurich, where it rained all the time, but

that I would really start living on my summer vacation in Spain, where the sun always shines. I was constantly in the company of women at the university, but I imagined that on that same legendary and nebulous vacation in Spain I would surely meet my ideal woman. I was incapable of seeing that circumstances were not responsible for my failure but that I was the failure myself.

I was psychically ill and didn't want to accept that fact. My way out was to find prototypes of myself in the world around me. If I could establish myself as some kind of typical case, I thought, then I could feel sure that I was like other people and therefore normal. This line of thought was erroneous, of course, because the typical can be far from normal. There are typical symptoms of a disease, for example. The fact that all the patients in a TB sanatorium are suffering from the same disease does not mean they are in a state of normal health. But I still kept a lookout for cases that resembled mine and could provide me with an excuse. I found such cases in literature. Books offered me figure upon figure I could identify with. What happened to a literary figure (and what very likely happened to the author and creator of this figure) could just as easily happen to me, and I took it as a rule and a norm.

Of all the literary figures I knew who had desired a woman but had not had her, who had wanted to live in the thick of life but had languished instead on its fringes, the figure of Tonio Kröger had always preoccupied me the most. Indeed, I could even say that the hero of this melancholy novella by Thomas Mann had been my constant companion from my Gymnasium years on. Tonio Kröger, too, found no proper place in life and was always depressed. He, too, cultivated the "higher things" and therefore had to do without the "joy of the commonplace." Tonio Kröger was an artist, and as such it was his job to describe life, not to experience it. As an artist, he could survey the whole of life. If he had been caught up in the midst of it like a normal

person, he would have lost that overview and, with it, the ability to describe. So far, so good. But there were all sorts of things about Tonio Kröger's life that had disturbed me from very early on. On the one hand, Tonio Kröger had to be different from ordinary people because that was his calling. But on the other hand, he *couldn't* be like ordinary people if he tried, and that's just what was wrong with him. We could say, of course, that it was only natural for him to withdraw from the company of ordinary people because he was an artist. But then we cannot dismiss the suspicion that he was fundamentally incapable of behaving like other people and that art was about the only option he had. He became an artist *volens volens* because he wasn't good for anything else. On the one hand, Herr Mann has his Tonio say that his isolation from ordinary people was indeed painful for him but that he had to put up with it, like it or not, as a condition of being born for higher things. On the other hand, I was always convinced that Tonio Kröger was *nothing but* an artist and that his artist's existence was not a blessing but rather a curse that Tonio Kröger had to learn to live with. The primary thing in his life was his inability to be like other people; his artist's career was a secondary factor, proceeding logically from that inability as a by-product of it.

Such were my first inklings that art should probably be regarded merely as a symptom for a low level of vitality, and I began to suspect (without knowing much more of Sigmund Freud than his name) that the impulse behind poetry was quite simple. If a person was only frustrated enough, he would automatically begin to write poems. That was bad news for me, for I realized that my vitality was not in the best of shape, and I also wrote. As a rule, I didn't write poetry, but from my earliest childhood I had written plays for puppet shows, and now, as a student, I was experimenting with short stories. Everyone assured me that I had talent, and people had jokingly called me an artist for a long time. I had always been pleased with the

artist's image, and it was possible that I really was an artist. But during my first years at the university, I came to see this status as artist in a different light. Perhaps the artist was never anything more than an artist, an outsider, a pariah; and as proof of his inferiority, he offered his works to society so that everyone could say: "What a pity. Things have gone badly for him in life, and he has therefore become an artist."

For the first time, my own products began to disgust me. It was beside the point whether I liked some of these things and whether they had any artistic value or not. Their literary merit was irrelevant. To me they conveyed only one message: I had written them because I was frustrated and a failure. Several of these pieces, especially some of the plays, struck me as quite good indeed, and I felt that they could stand on their literary merit. But all that became meaningless to me when I considered that my literary production was ultimately nothing but a by-product of my frustration and a confession of my defeat. I decided it would be better not to write anything more, and to bury my shame in eternal silence. I don't know how many times I resolved from this moment forward never to write again and to repress all desire to write. Time and again I swore I would put an end to this business for good and all, and I usually underscored these resolves by destroying all my works to date. The preferred method was burning so that the purifying flame might forever cleanse me of the stigma of art. But my repeated resolutions and *autos-da-fé* came to naught. The desire to write could not be burned, and shortly after each *auto-da-fé* I would usually feel inspired to write down something new. I was soon back at it again, yielding to the urge to write because there was simply "no resisting it." Then the whole cycle would start over again. I found what I had written abhorrent, and I would destroy it. Once again I would burn everything I had done because I could not tolerate its existence any more now than I had been able to resist producing it in the first place. The more I liked my work,

the more painful it was for me to destroy it. But at each *auto-da-fé* I was utterly convinced that the quality of the work did not matter. The point was that writing in itself was a bad thing. It expressed, revealed, and symbolized my inferior existence as an artist and nothing but an artist.

At the same time, I found my image as artist quite flattering, and I did all I could to enhance it. But this image remained utterly superficial. Just as I put on a cheerful and satisfied mien for the rest of the world, I also put on the airs of an artist, knowing all along, however, that I could push the masquerade only so far. I was aware that there were artist types who saw life itself as an art, who invested great energy in enjoying *la vie bohémienne*, and who often succeeded in enjoying it. I was all too painfully aware that I was not this kind of artist. For me the artist's life consisted of nothing but melancholy, depression, and frustration. For me it was a source of sadness and shame. The happy-go-lucky artist's pose that I tried to assume was part of my mask.

Two key points emerge from this issue of the artistic life and my relation to it. The first is that by claiming the "higher realm" embodied in art as my own, I could go on cultivating those "higher things" that had been so important in my home life. All the other people in the world are ordinary. Those precious individuals who stand outside life are the "higher" beings. Or, to put it differently, anyone who is normal is ordinary; a neurotic is something special. The second point is that my fatalistic view of the artistic character was the very thing that kept me locked in the prison I so desperately wanted to escape from. I saw it as a matter of destiny: All artists were neurotic. I remain convinced today that many artists are in fact neurotic, but bakers and gardeners are often neurotic, too, not to mention bank clerks and businessmen. I resisted the idea that an artist might well be neurotic but didn't necessarily have to be. I preferred to believe with devastating certainty that all



artists simply had to be neurotic. This conviction, too, allowed me to follow the path of least resistance. There's no point in working for change in a world where everything is in the hands of fate and nothing can be changed anyhow. My view of the artist's nature was completely in keeping with other views I had picked up at home: The world is the way it is, and it can't be any other way. Rebellion is pointless in a world that "is the way it is"; revolution can happen only in a world that can become different from the way it is.

From now on, I will present the further course of my illness in a more schematic form than it actually took. In order to focus on the general development, I will disregard all the many ups and downs I experienced over a period of more than ten years. I will not describe the many little relapses that occurred during my general improvement, nor will I mention the many apparent recoveries in the course of my overall decline. I will not go into any detail, either, about the first two times I underwent extended psychotherapy, because both these attempts were no more than initial steps toward my third, last, and only genuine psychotherapeutic treatment.

I do want to mention, though, that it was my parents who sent me to a psychotherapist for the first time. They were worried about my depressive state, and wanted to help me. During my whole upbringing, they had, of course, only wanted to help me and do their best for me. They had no way of knowing they had done their worst for me. I feel certain that before consulting a psychotherapist, they had asked themselves the traditional question: Where did we go wrong? And I am just as certain that they could not imagine where they had gone wrong, for what they valued above all else in life was precisely what had been wrong for me. I doubt they could even admit the possibility that their son might not be normal. It must have seemed incomprehensible to them that such normal parents might produce an abnormal child. It takes something akin to a cosmic

sense of humor to see that the child of such perfect parents can't be anything but abnormal. Of a cosmic sense of humor they had not a jot. They must have thought I had an "inferiority complex" and the psychiatrist would cure me of it. The thought that I might indeed be inferior in some respects was more than they could bear. What my parents regarded as a "complex" or delusion on my part was not a misapprehension of my own worth but a more or less suppressed awareness of my actual condition. The dentist does not cure the sensations of a toothache. He repairs the carious tooth, and that automatically puts an end to the toothache. Similarly, it's not the psychiatrist's job to cure an inferiority complex. He should cure the inferiority and make the complex superfluous. My depression was like a toothache, and it is the function of both depression and toothache to call attention to an illness by means of pain. But my parents could never have accepted the idea that their beloved and talented and intelligent son might be ill, and psychically ill at that. Having an abnormal son didn't fit into their picture of the world. I couldn't accept the idea very well, either; and I did my best to convince myself that I was perfectly normal.

I clung to this view, with the result that my first two attempts at psychotherapy were of no help to me. Looking back on them now, I see them as only two more of those many ups and downs that worked no fundamental change in my condition.

The essence of my development during this period can be summed up this way: On the one hand, things were going better and better for me all the time, and on the other, they were going worse and worse, and the better they went, the more I relegated to my unconscious the fact that they were going worse. The upshot was that my depression became more and more inexplicable and unmotivated. The turn for the better supplied my false persona with a flood of new impulses and so made it easier for me to keep my façade intact. But the concurrent turn for the worse made the gap between my true self and my masquerading

self all the larger and all the more unbridgeable. The difficulty I had in revealing my true nature had always been massive. Now it took on overwhelming proportions.

## VI

My first years at the university brought a change for the worse. At the Gymnasium, I had been able to come up with all sorts of excuses for why I kept life at arm's length, and I remained completely under the influence of my parents. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else but at home. But nothing happened at home, and therefore nothing could happen to me, either. At the university, all these external constraints fell away. I didn't have to defer to my teachers anymore. I usually spent my day at the university in Zurich and ate my meals in the student dining hall there. My parents' house in K. evolved more and more into a place where I did nothing but sleep. My real life went on in Zurich. But this freedom, which was in itself very welcome, brought some very painful insights with it. The plain fact was that I didn't know what to do with my new freedom. The so-called carefree life of a student was not turning out to be all peaches and cream. First of all, I began to see how dreary life at home was and that Saturday and Sunday, which I usually spent in K., were becoming my worst days. Second, I realized that the only choice I had on weekends was to go home because I couldn't think of anything else to do. And, third, I had to admit that even the pleasant part of my week wasn't always much fun and that I often felt terribly bored and lonely at the university, too. The evening was always the worst part of the day there. Whenever I found myself alone and didn't know what to do with myself, I would hang around in the inner courtyard at the university and wait for some company to turn up. I was faced with two equally dismal alternatives. I could leave

my post, call it a day, and make my dreary way home. Or I could persist, hoping devoutly that somebody would come along and put an end to my loneliness. More often than not, somebody would come along after I had waited there for hours, but all this person would have to say was goodbye. Whoever it was would say something like "So you're still here, too, hmm?" And then he would take his leave, saying he had to go now because he had plans for the evening. Two things are worth noting about this futile exercise. It was always just "someone" and never a specific individual I was waiting for. If it had been a certain person, I might well have arranged to meet him or her at such and such a time and not been obliged to wait indefinitely with no real prospects in sight. Or I would have known that this certain person would not come by because he didn't have any classes on this particular day or was never at the university at this hour or never had any free time in the evenings. But the imaginary somebody I was waiting for was always at liberty and without other obligations (just as I was). He was probably feeling bored and lonesome himself and would therefore be delighted to find another fellow sufferer still at this otherwise deserted university at seven in the evening. But that somebody usually did not turn up. The courtyard became more and more deserted until, finally, I was the only person left and the somebody I had been waiting for had become no one at all. I was alone; and with the greatest reluctance I would force myself to go home to K., knowing there was nothing more to be hoped for from this day.

The second point I want to make about my fruitless waiting is that all my fellow students who said goodbye to me always had something to do. They didn't choose to leave because, like me, they didn't have anything else to do. They couldn't stay precisely because they did have something else to do. I had no plans at all. My only plan was to put off going home and to hang around the university as long as I could. I was downright de-

spondent over the fact that the other students always had other plans because the minute they acted on these plans they left the university and me as well. Friday was always the worst day of the week for me. Lots of students lived in Zurich only during the week and went home on weekends. Since there was nothing to keep them at the university, they would leave town right after their last class on Friday afternoon. The exodus on Friday evenings was therefore much more drastic than on other days, and I felt even more abandoned than usual with nothing but my vapid weekend to look forward to.

I've already mentioned how depressing I found it that the other students were always too busy to want to join me in killing time. But there was more to it than that. I realized that these students who were always pursuing their activities were more interesting than I was and knew more than I did. At the Gymnasium, I had been the mysterious idler. Now I was suddenly just a poor abandoned soul when all the others said goodbye and went about their business. In one sense, though, nothing had changed in my transition from the Gymnasium to the university. I knew a lot of people and was surrounded by a large number of fellow students, but they were not anything more than that to me. At the Gymnasium, I had had schoolmates with whom I had gotten on well enough, but I had not had any friends. Now, at the university, I had a lot of acquaintances and "colleagues," but I knew them only superficially. We shared the same work; we often attended the same classes and had the same kinds of problems with books and exams. I had lots of contact with my fellow students, but I had no real friends. Groups took the place of friends for me. These groups were usually made up of students who, for one set of reasons or another, met regularly; and any member of such a group automatically gravitated to tables where others of this group were sitting. The people in these groups were not necessarily friends. It could happen that members of such a group would become friends, but that

was not obligatory. The group was a kind of collective in which individuals could take part without forming any particular ties. Needless to say, I was among those who belonged to such a group without forming any personal ties in it. The only bond I felt was to the collective itself, to the Department of Romance Languages en masse. All the students in my field taken as a whole—those were the people I waited for in the courtyard. But they weren't my friends. I was fond of them, but I was fond of them as a collective. If I ask myself now just who those students of Romance languages were, I realize that they were the sum of innumerable somebodies, none of whom meant much to me personally. The people I waited for in the courtyard were just such somebodies. Every one of the people who might just come along was "somebody in my department," nothing more than a representative of the collective; and it was therefore a matter of utter indifference to me who kept me company because I liked everybody in the collective. Or, nobody meant enough to me that I would have preferred him to anyone else.

It struck me later that after leaving the university I suddenly stopped seeing many of my fellow students whom I had seen almost every day during our studies together. Not only did I stop seeing them all of a sudden, but I never saw them again, and I never felt the need to see them again. I had gotten used to seeing them every day in our group and to talking with them, but once our daily contact ceased, I found I didn't miss it. I have to admit now that a great many of the people I would have to regard as major figures of my student years really meant nothing to me. They were all just "students of Romance languages," nothing else. Conversely, many of the real friends I have now were my contemporaries at the university; but at that time we saw very little of each other, perhaps because these friends had personal reasons for not taking part in student social life at that time or because their schedules and particular courses of study prevented frequent contact between us.

I had changed my major from Germanic to Romance languages after a few semesters. I liked my new major and felt at ease in it. In a certain sense, it became a new home for me. The university was my home now. But in many respects it was a home that closely resembled the one I had grown up in. I had taken along just about everything from my old home and kept it with me in my new one. I was at home in the university now, but I didn't live any differently there than I had in my parents' house. The university was my new home and my new shelter from the world, and I was as unwilling to leave it as any of us at home had been to leave the protective shell of our family circle. Most of the time, I quite literally did not leave the university. I attended my classes, read and wrote in the departmental study rooms, and spent the rest of my time more or less idly, drinking coffee in the aforementioned courtyard. I never took advantage of my free time to go and do something in the city. I felt no need to break out of those eternally unchanging walls; and, busy or idle, though mostly idle, I never left them. In this respect the university differed not one iota from my parents' house, where I now no longer enjoyed being: I was bored there, didn't know what to do there, but I was also afraid of leaving this tiresome place because everything would only be much worse "outside." Perhaps the way to put it is that I was at home at the university pretty much out of necessity. It had replaced my parents' house as the shell I crawled into out of fear and a need for protection. It was the place I turned to for refuge, even though nothing particularly enjoyable was waiting for me there.

And, more often than not, nothing was waiting for me at the university. At the Gymnasium, I had been a reasonably diligent student because this had proved to be the path of least resistance. At the university, no one cared whether I was diligent or not, and I became a thoroughly lazy student. I had often heard the pious theory that the Gymnasium taught you good work habits

so that you would then be able to profit from the freedom the university allowed you. I feel, though, that the only thing I internalized about work at the Gymnasium was the pressure on me to do it, not its meaning. The result was that I couldn't make any rational use of the much-touted freedom of university life. All I could do was misuse that freedom and rejoice in the fact that nobody was forcing me to work. I soon found appropriate rationalizations for my idleness. Everyone knows that a student's life should proceed at an enjoyable and leisurely pace and not be misspent in excessive application to work, and whoever makes the best possible use of this time of leisure in his life has every reason to be proud of that accomplishment. I thus made a virtue of my vice (as indeed people always do, for almost all virtues are ultimately nothing but unconfessed or disguised vices), never letting anything interfere with my happy-go-lucky pursuit of leisure and looking down scornfully on those bloodless grinds who never did anything but work. My definition of a grind took in a vast territory, and the slightest bit of diligence I could detect in another student was enough to make him a grind in my eyes. Most of the time it was I who asked other people to interrupt their work and go have coffee with me, but if it happened the other way around, I never refused and was always ready to abandon my own work and join someone else for coffee. The upshot was that I spent more of my time at coffee breaks than at work. I was careful to arrange innumerable breaks myself, and then if I happened to have an hour ahead of me in which I could not justify another break, good (or bad) luck would have it that someone else would want coffee just then and would invite me along. I, of course, did not have willpower enough to refuse his invitation and stick at my work. Hence, my life consisted primarily of work breaks—my own and other people's.

I did not really enjoy these breaks. My behavior might have created the impression that I was a scandalously lazy and de-



generate student. But no one was more aware than I that this was not so. I was instead the model of the gentleman student, and I conformed to that role so well that I even adopted a traditionally cavalier attitude toward my work. I didn't have the courage to be a truly reprobate student. I didn't spend my days in bars. I didn't get drunk. I didn't hang out in gambling casinos and bordellos. I didn't spend all my time seducing pretty coeds. (This would have been a real option, and by no means the worst.) I did none of those things because, at heart, I was a good boy. I cut plenty of classes, but I didn't make use of the time I gained this way to do something more fun. All I did was sit around in the courtyard and drink my hundredth cup of coffee. (Significantly enough, there is no alcohol to be had at the university. Zurich is not called Zwingli's city for nothing.) Today, I see that hundredth cup of coffee as the perfect symbol of the pseudo-gaiety of my student years. I was not a diligent student, but I couldn't think of anything better to do in my laziness than to drink still another cup of coffee (which, incidentally, tasted pretty terrible). And after I had drunk my last cup, I left my daytime home and went back to my parents' house in K., where I was even more profoundly and disastrously "at home."

In this way, I belonged among the other students of Romance languages and was one of them. I took shelter in this group and spent most of my time within the sheltering walls of the university. But my main function there was to subordinate myself to my new home rather than to assume a new and active role in it. The kind of relationship I had had with my schoolmates at the Gymnasium repeated itself here: I had a great many acquaintances. I even had a reputation as a carefree, jolly sort, for everyone knew I was the fellow who spent his whole day drinking coffee. No one particularly disliked me for that, but I can't imagine that anyone particularly admired me for drinking coffee all the time, either. A lot of chatting went on at these

innumerable coffee klatches, but nothing ever got done. My fellow students, as I mentioned before, always had "something to do." They were going away for the weekend or going skiing or going to their girl friends, or they were involved in one sport or another, or they played the piano. In any event, whatever they were going to do was far more interesting than drinking bad coffee at the university. The students who had interests apart from their studies naturally tried to make the best use of their work hours so they would have more time left over for their other pursuits. It's not surprising that they had little use for coffee klatches in the courtyard. But I had no interests beyond the university. It was all I had, and drinking coffee had to take up the slack that some genuine interest should have taken up. Once the last coffee klatch of the day was over, I had nothing but boredom to look forward to. But the most important feature of the other students' activities was that they did things together with their friends. They went skiing together or played tennis together or went to an art exhibit in Basel together. But I, who found myself alone, felt no urge to do those same things in gloomy isolation. So I didn't go skiing or play tennis or go to an exhibit in Basel. I went home to my parents. Most of life's amusements—with the exception of solitaire, in which my father was a master (even though, as I've mentioned, Klondike was the only game he knew)—require company. To be merry, you have to be together with other people; and since I was always alone, there was no merriment in my life.

There is still another aspect of this issue I should mention. Not all the other students spent their free time doing nothing but amuse themselves (even though that's what I, envying them, imagined they did). Lots of them had to earn money. This was something completely foreign to me. I didn't understand anything about money, and I hadn't wasted much thought on the relationship between money and work. I didn't need to earn money because I already had it. An allowance, of course. For-

tunately and unfortunately for me, my father was very generous in this regard. He gave me an ample allowance and took care of all the major expenses, like holidays and trips abroad, that my allowance didn't cover. Since money was a subject almost unfit for polite conversation, it was not customary to talk about it at our house and I therefore had no idea of the value of money. I always had enough of it and could spend it for anything I liked. My parents provided me with all the essentials. I lived at their house and could eat there as often as I wanted to. If I didn't eat at home, the only reason was that it was less boring to eat at the university. And if I was still hungry later, I could always help myself to a snack from the refrigerator at home. I didn't have to save money for my vacations because my father gave me the money I needed for them anyway.

My indulgent parents did not begrudge me my trips and vacations, and they were happy to pay for them. This financial dependence was basically unproblematic for me because it represented only one facet of a much larger and all-encompassing dependence. I shared my parents' way of life. I shared their opinions and convictions. I shared their negative attitude toward life. Why shouldn't I share their money as well? I was thus spared a conflict that many students experience who are financially dependent on their parents but do not share their parents' outlook. These students inevitably suffer from the fact that they cannot realize their own ideals as long as they are supported by parents whose ideals clash with theirs. I had the same views as my father did, and I could therefore accept his money without any difficulty. It goes without saying that I was not enterprising enough to hit on the idea of earning my own money.

In this respect, too, I was inactive. And I didn't put any more effort into my studies than I did into earning money. All I did was drink coffee and talk. I can hardly imagine now what in the world I managed to talk about all day long. Most subjects were "difficult" for me, and any subject that wasn't

I had come to regard as ridiculous. Thus it was easy for me to say either nothing at all or only something ironic about most subjects. And if I did have to come up with an opinion on something, I always resorted to the one I had picked up at home, i.e., my father's opinion. I have to assume now that if I ever managed to speak seriously about anything, I must, on those rare occasions of seriousness, always have presented an old man's point of view. But under normal circumstances, when I was not being serious and was not talking like my father, I could not be anything but superficial, ironic, and unserious.

Unserious. If there is any one word that sums up my student years, that is surely it. I wasn't serious in my studies, and I wasn't serious in those coffee-break conversations that I let assume priority over my work. But this lack of seriousness was not joyous or carefree; it was colored instead by a profound sadness. Lack of seriousness and melancholy went hand in hand.

I felt lonely all the time and couldn't bear my loneliness. I fled to the society of others, but those others were never my real friends. They were always just "other people," and since I could not handle human relationships any better than I could loneliness, I usually felt even more alone in the company of others than I did apart from it. The result was that I was torn between utterly contrary feelings. If I was alone, I felt I couldn't bear my isolation any longer, and had to seek out company no matter what. Or I would often simply wait, perhaps in vain, for company to come my way. But when I was with other people, I realized again how far away I was from them and how unbridgeable the gap between us was. In these situations, I was more conscious than ever of myself as an outsider and wanted to get away from others so that I could also escape my feelings of being an outsider among them.

This state of mind began to affect my work at the university. I often attended classes for no other reason than to escape my loneliness. I frequently had a last lecture late in the evening

and would wait to go to it. But when I was actually there, I was unable to focus on it. The reason was not that the lecture was so dreadfully boring but that I could not concentrate. I often found I could not concentrate even when the subject was of great interest to me. I tried to follow the professor's lecture, but involuntarily my mind drifted away and toyed instead with the thought that this lecture was not very important and that I should be attending to much more pressing matters instead. That was true, of course; for on an unconscious level, I had long since realized that I had gotten myself into an untenable situation at the university and that the most important thing I had to do was reach some clarity on my depressive and hopeless condition. But I was unable to get to the bottom of that condition. Indeed, I didn't want to and didn't dare to. What remained, then, was the oppressive feeling that I had unfinished business to attend to, business that was much more important than all of literature and linguistics put together, business that sapped my interest away from my studies but did not let me focus my energies on the large and difficult task at hand. Thus, even in as simple a situation as this I often fell between two stools: I couldn't be genuinely present in a lecture I may have waited three hours to attend. I had whiled away my day waiting for the lecture to take place, and then when it did in fact take place, it proved to have been a phantom goal. If I had any energies left after such a fiasco, I would go back to the courtyard once again to look for someone to talk to or, if necessary, to wait for someone to come along. By then, all I had left was a desperate hope that this day might still bring some small measure of enjoyment.

Just as my workday consisted mainly of breaks, the course of my life consisted mainly of waiting. It had been my habit for years to keep hoping for imaginary "better days" that would release me from my suffering. But, at the same time, I remained utterly passive and did nothing but hope that the future would

“bring” me happiness. The thought that I could make something out of the present myself never occurred to me. I must have had a vast capacity for hope. Hope can offer us a new opening on life, but in some circumstances despair may well be the better response. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” Precisely because I did not despair and because I let my affliction rend at me inwardly without my taking conscious note of it and accepting the reality of it—that is why I could still maintain the fiction that everything was basically all right with me and that my little eccentricities did not fall outside the limits of normality. As long as I could tell myself that I was normal, I didn’t think I had much to worry about. But the only normality I could conceive of was middle-class normality; and in terms of that old, familiar norm, I was in fact tolerably normal.

So I didn’t complain about my psychic distress, and I chose to interpret the fact that I didn’t complain as an indication that it didn’t exist. I was even more reluctant to talk about my sexual distress; to have done so would have taken an act of will I was incapable of. Instead of dealing with the problem head on, I would sometimes adopt the attitude that most frustrated people adopt. I resisted the idea that sex is what makes everything in life worthwhile and claimed, in my despair, that sex was indeed important but that there were other satisfactions in life as well, and so on and so forth. It’s true, of course, that there are other satisfactions, but it is equally true that if one’s sex life is not in order then nothing else will be in order, either, and those other satisfactions just mentioned above will not be the least bit satisfying. But to admit this would have meant admitting that absolutely nothing in my life was in order, and I was determined to maintain, at any cost, the illusion that everything was just fine.

Another point I should mention about my life during this period was my hostility toward psychiatrists. Like all neurotics who are locked inside their neuroses yet who would like to be normal or at least appear to be normal, I felt a strong antipathy

against this profession whose job it was to tell me that I was anything but normal. I liked to fall back on that tidbit of standard wisdom that says you'll get crazier yet if you go to a psychiatrist. And in many cases that is certainly true. Anyone who deceives himself into thinking he is normal will surely become crazier once a psychiatrist has shown him that his normality is only a sham. I'm convinced that many people sense, on an unconscious level, that psychiatrists know the truth about them, and this is why they feel compelled to run psychiatrists down all the time. (It goes without saying that there are incompetent psychiatrists. But there are incompetent butchers, too, yet I have never seen anyone with a fundamental aversion for butchers. A still more telling example is stationers. They are all idiots, yet there is no generally prevailing prejudice against them.) As far as this whole issue is concerned, I feel I was just one more case among many similar ones. I had my personal reasons for being against psychiatrists, but I was also against them because the entire world I came from was against them. Middle-class parents raise their children to think it's better not to go to psychiatrists because if the children do go, then they won't be middle-class afterward.

In this respect, I behaved like someone who has a toothache but is afraid to go to the dentist. To avoid going to the dentist, he learns to live with the toothache. The great masters in this art have developed it to such a high level of perfection that they can pretend they don't even have a toothache, and when they bite down on the bad tooth and don't want to scream with pain, they only grimace and claim they have just stubbed a toe on the table leg.

I was a master in this art. Because I wanted to be normal and to seem happy at all costs, I turned all my pain inward and denied that I had any problems. I sensed that if I once admitted the existence of my problems they would break over me with a ferocity I could hardly imagine. Since my psychic state

was steadily deteriorating, it follows that my situation at the university would deteriorate, too, as I have described above. But at the same time all this was happening, a different and contrary development set in; and I remain uncertain to this day about whether I should call this development a fortunate or unfortunate one. What happened was that, in many respects, my life at the university kept getting better and better. I can illustrate this with a few examples.

One of the weak points I had carried over from the Gymnasium to the university was my lack of athletic ability, but now I began to show some improvement in this area. I can't recall anymore when I first hit on the revolutionary idea of participating in sports, but I acted on it and began doing calisthenics. At first I did them only in the privacy of my room at home, but after a while I overcame my earlier hatred for gyms, went to training sessions of my own free will, and became an active member of a physical-fitness club. Not only did I prove to be quite adept at athletics, but I also found that I liked them. I noticed, too, that this was obviously not so for a lot of students. While I was enjoying myself in the gym, many others regarded their workout as just another irksome obligation that had to be met. They may have recognized the physical benefits of exercise, but they derived no pleasure from it. They didn't seem to have any awareness of their bodies but regarded them instead as troublesome machines that they were obliged to keep in running order. I realized all at once that it was I who was much less inhibited and much more physically aware than the others. And at about this same time I suddenly discovered, after years of unsuccessful attempts in the past, that I was able to dance.

But this progress proved a mixed blessing, for it only served to aggravate the inner conflict I had carried with me for so many years. True, I no longer saw myself as an ugly duckling who was poorly endowed by nature. All of a sudden, I had become



an elegant and attractive young man who was much less inhibited in his movements and who looked much more normal than he had only a few years before. But this only made it all the more astounding to me that I still could not find a girl friend. The more I had been able to convince myself that I was ugly and physically unprepossessing, the easier it had been for me to ascribe my failure with women to those causes. But now, the more obvious it became that I was in my prime years and had reached the peak of my physical development, the more inexcusable I found it that I could not form any relationship with women. It became increasingly difficult for me to maintain the myth of my psychic health now that I was the very incarnation of physical well-being.

It sounds paradoxical, but it isn't. The better off I was, the worse off I was. The less I was plagued by concrete, comprehensible problems, the more inexplicable and mysterious my secret conviction became that everything about me was still totally awry. The closer I came to fulfilling the ideal of what a normal young man was, the fewer reasons I had to explain why I was not in fact a normal young man. The less I could blame this discrepancy on this or that failing in me, the more of a presence it became. The discrepancy was "just the way things were." There was no reason for it. It was my destiny, laid upon me by an unkind fate.

These external improvements were obvious in many other areas of my life, too. As time went on, I evolved from that anonymous student of Romance languages who usually didn't do any work and was always drinking coffee into a well-known figure at the university. I began to realize that I enjoyed considerable popularity. At first this surprised and amazed me because I couldn't cite any reasons for it. But I gradually got accustomed to it and simply accepted the fact that my fellow students liked me. It happened less frequently now that I had to wait for hours for an indeterminate someone to come along

and keep me company. I knew lots of people, and a great number of students enjoyed knowing me or getting to know me. The times when I was really alone became fewer. I don't think this gradual change reduced my basic sense of isolation in any significant way, but not having to suffer so much from sheer physical loneliness as I had before, I found it easier to gloss over my psychic loneliness and to avoid dealing with it. I was still not capable of forming real personal ties with other people, and not one of all those students in my department whom I counted as my "friends" was a real friend.

I have to admit that I wasn't altogether pleased with the qualities that earned me my popularity. One of my genuine or alleged good points was my originality, but I had never been able to see this quality as entirely positive. It was true that I had a certain originality and that the artistic pose I continued to cultivate, *nolens volens*, contributed to that image. But this originality that my colleagues valued so much in me had some highly objectionable features from my point of view. My originality was an expression of my differentness, and I had long felt that this differentness did not make me better than other people but worse. I was different in all those areas where I had fallen behind and had to say of myself that I wasn't "far enough along yet" (and perhaps never would be). Being different meant feeling lonely and rejected. Being different meant a constantly recurring awareness that my whole life was going wrong. As I saw it, my originality had something pathological, melancholy, and abnormal about it.

But I stumbled on a way to gloss over this conflict, too. Word got around, more by chance than through any special efforts of mine, that I wrote scripts for puppet shows (this surprised no one because I obviously had an artistic streak), and I was commissioned to write and direct a play for a departmental party. Everybody liked the play, and the production was a great success. A few years later, when I was again berating myself for

the worthlessness and morbidity of my artistic gifts, I burned this text along with all my other literary productions. But that did not get me off the hook: I was and would remain the author and director of a play that practically every student of Romance languages had seen and that had proved to be a great success.

From this point on, it was taken for granted that I would organize our departmental parties. I wrote new plays and directed new productions. I was elected president of the student body in our department and planned its festive events. My plays were never attended by anyone outside our department and were usually put on only once for this limited audience, but they always represented personal triumphs for me. This modest yet brilliant career as departmental playwright soon became the dominant interest of my student years, but it did not interfere with my work in any appreciable way. I did a very good job on a number of the different reports and papers assigned to me, and they represented successes I could be justly proud of. In short, things went well for me as a student, but then again they went from bad to worse. I would be hard pressed now to say whether my last years at the university were good or bad for me. Objectively speaking, it was surely not a bad thing that I wrote good papers, that I produced a successful dissertation, and that I passed my doctoral exams calmly, confidently, and with high standing. Nor was it a bad thing, either, that I produced plays that found applause in all quarters and that were a lot of fun both for the actors who performed them and for the spectators who saw them. But all these small pleasures did nothing but pull me back, time and again, from the edge of that yawning chasm where all my pain, despair, and fear were waiting to overwhelm me. Every time I did something I could be proud of, I told myself that things were going better now, that I had made some more progress, and that I would "soon" reach that blessed, imaginary state that still remained beyond my grasp.

I had not shaken off my depression. All I had done was learn to live with it now that it had become chronic. My many successes made it easy for me to weigh the positive factors in my life against the negative ones and to conclude that the two pretty much balanced each other out. In other words, now that so many pleasant things were hiding the basic gloom of my life from me, I was less able than ever to see that my cheerful façade was still no more than a façade.

If someone has a toothache but tries to console himself with the fact that the flowers in his garden are doing beautifully, we immediately see that these two things have nothing to do with each other. Whether the flowers do well or not has no bearing at all on the toothache. The beauty of the flowers can't be seen as compensation for the pain of the tooth. The tooth would hurt just as badly if all the flowers had been destroyed by hail, and the flowers would bloom no less beautifully if the tooth were cured. In the latter case, the patient's pleasure would be doubled. He would be rid of his toothache and have his flowers as well. For a flower enthusiast with a toothache there is only one solution: the dentist.

That's the kind of patient I was. I persuaded myself that everything else in my life was just fine even though I was depressed. I may have been lonely, but as compensation for that I was intelligent. I may have been unhappy, but I had a lot of acquaintances, even a lot of friends. I was frustrated, but I had a Ph.D., and not everybody could say that. In short, I was desperate, but I couldn't allow myself to admit it. How pointless it was to see my depression as the price I had to pay for intelligence or my plays as compensation for my loneliness, as if a stupid person couldn't be depressed or an intelligent one happy, as if a playwright, by definition, couldn't be in love, or a lover, by definition, couldn't have talent for the theater. I couldn't understand that at all, and by not understanding it I only made myself more miserable.

Another aspect of my illness was the endless comparing I did between my own situation and the unhappy situations my fellow students found themselves in. As always, I was unable to think who and what I was as an individual but wanted to see myself only as a part that did not deviate too much from the normal whole. I knew that many students had to cope with a lot of concrete problems that did not affect me. Some of them were at odds with their parents and complained that there was no place where they felt at home. Some didn't have any money and had to live very frugally. What time I had left over from my studies I could use to amuse myself, but these students had to use that time to earn money to finance their education. Others didn't know anyone at the university, were unpopular and lonely, and spent their evenings in ugly furnished rooms they rented from ill-tempered landladies. Still others had trouble with their course work. Either they didn't understand the material at all, or they could grasp it only with great effort. Unlike them, I could breeze through my work without panic, without sleepless nights, without pep pills or tranquilizers.

I didn't understand that there were different kinds of problems. My colleagues would sometimes be depressed because they had failed an exam. I would be depressed even though I had passed the same exam with distinction. All I could see was the common factor, i.e., that we were both depressed; but I didn't see the important difference: Their sadness was justified; mine was not. It's normal to be depressed if you fail an exam you have invested a lot of time and effort in preparing for. But it is not normal to derive no pleasure from passing the exam very well and to spend the evening after the exam sitting around as dejectedly as someone who has failed. It is a sad thing to have no money, but all you can do with money is buy things. I could buy anything I wanted, but my purchases didn't give me any pleasure. I wasn't sad because I lacked something I wanted. I was sad even though I lacked nothing—or seemed

to lack nothing. Unlike many other people who were sad, I had no reason to be sad. But that was precisely what was different about my sadness. That was precisely what was abnormal about it.

I took a lot of vacation trips and visited all sorts of foreign countries. These countries differed from Switzerland in some respects; and, dutiful tourist that I was, I was able to determine what the specific differences were. But in one respect all my touristic stations were alike: Not one of the foreign countries or foreign cities I visited cheered me up. True, the sun is much hotter in Spain than it is in Switzerland, but the icy cold of my depression was no less biting in Spain than it had been at home.

This is why I often found rainy days more tolerable than bright ones. Wretched weather provided obvious justification for feeling rotten and for complaining, freely, openly, and with the concurrence of others. I found it difficult to nod cheerful agreement if someone called out to me that it was a gorgeous summer day, but it was easy for me to agree with someone who remarked in gloomy tones that this horrible rainy spell was getting on his nerves. When everyone was complaining about the rain and the cold and the winter, I seemed less alone in my misery. That was, of course, an illusion that melted away the moment spring came. The change of season consoled and cheered the multitudes who had been downcast by cold and dampness, but it left me behind, still as alone and unconsolated as ever.

This reminds me of a brief period when just such dubious and self-deceiving measures provided some real relief from my misery. I had contracted hepatitis in Lisbon, and for weeks before it actually broke out, I had felt tired and miserable. I had no energy at all, and shied away from the slightest exertion. Things were too much for me; I was sunk in melancholy. This unhappy condition did not in itself make me suspect I was coming down with something because I felt more or less like

this most of the time. It was only after the disease actually broke out that I suddenly realized how tired and wretched I had been feeling for a long time.

My case was not a serious one. I spent ten days in the hospital in Lisbon; then, following the customary rule in hepatitis cases, the doctors prescribed as many weeks of limited activity and special diet. I flew home from Lisbon and began my ten weeks of convalescence in Switzerland. I learned from a friend that all liver disorders tend to make the patient melancholy, and I already knew that in classical antiquity the liver was regarded as the seat of melancholia. What this all meant for me was that I had ten weeks off from the arduous task of pretending to be normal. Now and for the next three months, I would be able to blame all my unhappiness on my liver. Life was no better and no worse for me during this time than during any other. But what did make this period pleasantly different from others was that I had a good reason for my depression and could tell myself that "it was just my liver." I had an alibi that was good for a long time, and as long as it lasted, nobody could pin any suspicions of depression on me. By virtue of my illness, I had a valid permit and the unquestioned right to be as melancholy as I pleased—and all from physical causes.

There was, of course, a lot of hypocrisy tied up with this alibi, hypocrisy that I refused to acknowledge. I should have known—and I did know in some part of myself that wanted to remain unnamed—that my hepatitis summer didn't differ in the slightest from any other summer and that my spirits had not been any better or any worse before I got sick than they were after. The lie prompted by my case of hepatitis was only a colossally enlarged version of the routine lie I told when I claimed that rainy weather depressed me. I need hardly describe what happened after the term of convalescence was up and the doctor sent me back into the rough-and-tumble world

of the healthy: I was not one jot less melancholy after this melancholia-inspiring disease had left me than I had been during it.

What I retained from my bout of hepatitis, though, was an instinctive penchant for the gloomy, for I sensed that gloomy things were useful in my psychic maneuverings. And at the same time I tried, with considerable tact and discretion, to keep cheerful things at a safe distance. I quietly accepted the fact that the great high festivals of student life, like the Polytech Ball and the University Ball, were not my cup of tea, and I was happy not to attend them.

But that isn't to say that I had the reputation of being averse to parties. On the contrary, I had even acquired some measure of fame for giving parties myself. This, too, came about by chance. I had been invited to a party that then could not be held for one reason or another. I made so bold as to suggest that we have the party at my house—that is, at my parents' house. To my amazement, my suggestion met with enthusiastic approval on all sides. One reason I was surprised was that I had no clear sense of myself as a partygoer. While I was at the Gymnasium, my presence at parties was by no means taken for granted. And now unfortunate—or fortunate—circumstances had thrust the role of host upon me, and I wondered if I would be able to pass this difficult test to everyone's satisfaction. I did pass, and the party at my parents' house was a great success. Indeed, in response to popular demand, the experiment was even repeated. So it came about that I began to invite people to my house occasionally—that is, to my parents' house—and was able to develop into an accomplished host but nothing more than a host. Since I had only my parents' example to follow in my newly acquired function, I attended solicitously to the welfare of my guests, supplying them with food and drink and seeing to it that all their needs were met. I was a perfect host



in the good old family tradition; which is to say that I was more a servant than a companion to my guests and I was always a bit on the fringe of the party.

## VII

The time was gradually approaching when I would have to leave my new home that was not quite a home, the university, and take up a teaching career. I had often feared it would be terribly difficult for me to leave the sheltering walls of my alma mater, but the parting was not difficult at all. During the last few semesters that preceded my final departure from the university, I experienced still another modest emancipation from my old ways. I got a job teaching a few hours of Spanish each week at the cantonal school of a small town nearby and so earned a small income of my own for the first time. I gave up permanent residence in my parents' house in K. and lived during the week in a hideous old house in Zurich that about a dozen students shared. This hideous old house, lacking in all the comforts I was accustomed to in my parents' house, pleased me no end. It was dilapidated, filthy, and in desperate need of repair. It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer, and the noise from the streets was overpowering. Most of the inhabitants were unfriendly, asocial drug addicts who had nothing to say to each other and didn't hesitate to steal from each other when they had the chance. It was not a particularly charming environment, but I quite liked it, and I still look back fondly on the year I spent there. It was not the worst period in my life.

Leaving the university brought a general improvement in my condition. The completion of my studies meant a change in status from student to doctor of philosophy and took me, as far as my external circumstances were concerned, into a new sphere of activity. The step from university to professional life made

me financially independent of my parents. Now I was earning my own money and could do as I liked with it without having to ask myself whether I was misusing my parents' money for purposes they would disapprove of. I gave up my routine as a weekend commuter and moved into a small apartment in the old part of Zurich. The business of setting up my new apartment fascinated me. I spent a lot of time at it, and the results were most gratifying. I found that my tastes in everything differed from my parents' and that I was living now, all at once, in a home that reflected my personal preferences.

I had everything I wanted. I had completed my studies successfully. I had a profession. I had an attractive home. By sheer chance, it turned out that the apartment was located in the most desirable section of all Zurich and had untold advantages: romantic surroundings in the Old City, a handsome view of the old roofs, perfect quiet, and a number of other amenities. All this I had simply hit upon without even looking for it. Here I could live a delightful and happy life, and in a certain sense I was quite content in these new surroundings.

My first years in these attractive new quarters brought my previous development to its peak and its fulfillment, a development characterized by constant and simultaneous improvement on the one hand and deterioration on the other. My new mode of life was proof enough of how much better off I was, and at the same time I was doing all I could, more or less unconsciously, to keep myself from seeing how much worse off I was.

The general drift of my life showed more in small details than in any dramatically obvious symptoms. At first it seemed only "nice" and praiseworthy that I prepared all my own meals myself and did my own cooking. Obviously, anyone would prefer to eat in my charming apartment rather than in some "unpleasant" restaurant. But it wasn't just my meals I had at home. I drank my every cup of coffee, my every beer, my every glass of wine at home, too. In other words, I never went out. It never

occurred to me to have a coffee or a beer in a public restaurant just for the sake of being among other people at mealtime. It was "much nicer" in my apartment. This home, too, had become a shell for me, and I left its protective walls only reluctantly.

I would spend hours sitting at my table after meals (very good and expensive meals, by the way). I was particularly given to this after my evening meal, and I would sit at my table watching the sunset. This habit was a carryover from when I had lived in the old ruin. I watched as the rays of the setting sun fell on a picture hanging on the wall opposite me, slowly playing over it until the sun had sunk below the horizon and the picture was again in shadow. Every time I watched this process, a great sadness overcame me and my heart grew heavy. One could argue, of course, that a sunset is, by nature, a melancholy occurrence and that anybody will feel sad when he sees daylight fade and darkness set in. But this explanation does not hold in the situation I have just described. The sunset was only an external event that triggered a sadness much greater than anyone normally feels at the end of a day; and I would often involuntarily express this sadness in words, reciting the same lines of poetry nearly every time. The lines come from Jorge Manrique's lamentation for the dead:

*¿Qué se hizo el rey don Juan?  
Los infantes de Aragón,  
¿qué se hicieron?*

(What has become of King Juan?  
The princes of Aragón,  
What has become of them?)

Because of all the arranging and rearranging I did both when I moved into the apartment and later on, it turned out that the sun's rays fell on different kinds of pictures during this ritual; for every six months I would have a different picture hanging in the place where the light of the setting sun could play over it.

But varied as the pictures were, they were all basically cheerful and did not portray anything sad. Nonetheless, each of them inspired sadness in me when it was struck by the last rays of the sun. A photograph of a forest or, oddly enough, a theater poster with a clown on it could make me equally sad, even though the subject matter in neither picture gave cause for sadness. There was no reason for this sadness, but it seized me powerfully, regularly, and persistently. These attacks gradually became separated from the sunset ritual that had inspired them at first, and they became more frequent and more unmotivated than ever. And as time passed I would more and more often substitute a complaint over my loneliness for the lines of Manrique's lamentation. Here again the words came to me automatically and intuitively, and I usually recited two lines by the Portuguese minnesinger Martin Codax:

*Ai, Deus, se sabe ora meu amigo,  
Como eu senheira estou em Vigo?*

(Oh, God, if only my friend knew  
How lonely I am here in Vigo.)

These lines were no mere empty declamation but expressed, over and over again, the burden of my sadness, pain, and loneliness. I can't say that I thought about making these declamations. They emerged of their own accord. I think sadness itself was speaking through me. I didn't need to do anything at all. I was the passive instrument sadness used to express itself. And that's why there was nothing for me to think about. That I articulated words of grief was something that simply happened to me. My attitude could best be summed up in the irksome and familiar phrase: "That's just the way it is." And indeed that's just the way it was. It happened more and more often that I sat at my desk or on my bed and spoke those mournful words:

*Ai, Deus, se sabe ora meu amigo,  
Como eu senheira estou em Vigo?*

Other things of a similar nature were “just that way,” too. It was just the way it was that I couldn’t sleep even though I was dead tired. It was just the way it was that all the sleeping potions in the world were useless and that I was more likely to come down with alcohol poisoning from all my sleeping draughts than I was to fall asleep. My problem couldn’t be solved medically. It was a “nervous disorder.” That’s just the way it was.

I had gradually gone back to wearing black again. I didn’t wear black because I was particularly sad but because I suddenly found I “liked” black best. No other color pleased me anymore, and I automatically chose black for all my clothes: black pants, black shirt, black sweaters, black jackets—everything black. The link between black and mourning is obvious, but I chose to think I preferred black because of its elegance, not because it symbolized mourning. In this matter, too, I was completely passive: I had not consciously chosen the color of mourning as my color; it just happened that I began to dislike all other colors. By way of this detour, I was again made aware that black was destined to be my color.

I didn’t take vacation trips anymore, either. That’s just the way it was. As a teacher, I had a lot of vacation time at my disposal; and as a single person, I didn’t have any financial obligations. On top of that, my father had died a few years before this and had left me a small fortune that put any trip in the world, whether to America or China, within my reach. But I didn’t take any trips. I knew that everything was only that much worse during vacation trips than at home. I saw no reason whatsoever to confirm again what I already knew; namely, that I always felt more depressed, unhappy, and alone on trips to places other people thought “lovely” than I did at home.

I didn’t make use of my inherited money for other purposes, either. I didn’t have to satisfy any of my desires because I had no desires. I was too unhappy to want anything I could buy.

Money was meaningless for me because there was nothing I could buy with it that would give me pleasure. I was not a voracious shopper because I knew there was nothing I wanted to buy. I had a lot of money, but I didn't know what to spend it on. That, too, was just the way it was. Another thing that was characteristic of me was that I did not subscribe to a newspaper. I didn't need to know what was going on in the world. The excuse I offered was that the newspapers usually printed nothing but nonsense anyhow. That is a basically correct statement that few people would dispute, but I hardly need add that this profound insight into the nature of our journalism was not the real reason for my abstinence.

It follows from what I have said in the preceding paragraphs that these years brought no change in the area that had always caused me the greatest unhappiness. I remained, as I always had been, alone. Most of my friends had married in the meantime—naturally enough. Others, just as naturally, could not settle with any one woman and kept changing from one to another, living typical bachelor lives. Many of my friends had children; others didn't and were dissatisfied with their marriages. Others were divorced or already remarried. I was the only one who didn't have a girl friend—naturally. That, too, was "just the way things were." It was just as natural for me never to have had a relationship with a woman as it was for most of my friends to be already married. I had never had any special feelings for a woman, much less felt love for one, and sexual encounters had been completely out of the question—naturally.

During my student years, when there seemed to be no hope of my ever having a close relationship with a woman, I had often felt I must be homosexual—or, rather, I was afraid I might be homosexual. I didn't stop to think that even if I had been homosexual I would have been just as incapable of loving a man as I was of loving a woman. My assumed—or feared—

homosexuality no more accounted for my unhappy situation than the “wrong” dancing class or the bad weather or my case of hepatitis had in the past.

But I never complained. Everything was always “fine” in my life. In fact, things were so consistently “fine” that many people told me they just couldn’t understand how any life could go as smoothly as mine did. The only explanation they could find was that I must have had what is commonly known as a sunny disposition. I would say now that I had an uncomplaining disposition, not a sunny one. I never complained about anything, except when I was at home, where everything was so pleasant and attractive. Then the voice would speak from within me over and over again:

*Ai, Deus, se sabe ora meu amigo,  
Como eu senheira estou em Vigo?*

The color I had always had such an overweening preference for made my sadness visible and announced my state of mourning. I knew that loneliness and lack of love were nearly destroying me. Frustration and depression filled my life so completely that there was next to no room left in it for anything else. I knew this, but I didn’t believe it. Or I didn’t want to believe it. (Perhaps that amounts to the same thing as not believing it.) I didn’t want to believe that my psychic life had succumbed to this dreadful desolation, that my psychic illness was critical. I didn’t want to believe that I was nearly incapable of any normal human feelings and was destroying myself within the cocoon of my own desperation. I refused to admit that my disorder was a major one and not just some “minor eccentricity” that any normal person might have. I refused to acknowledge how severe this psychic damage was, and I did not see that I was poisoning myself even more every time I tried to convince myself that it “really wasn’t so bad.” I suppose my behavior was typically human in the sense that no one is eager to ac-

knowledge that he is on the brink of disaster. No one enjoys being told that his situation is horrendous. At that point, I had not yet absorbed that piece of wisdom that says those who have already survived the very worst are capable of believing that the worst can be survived.

The word that best describes my state at that time is resignation. I had gotten so used to things going badly for me and had come to accept this condition as so routine that I sometimes didn't even notice it anymore. A madman presumably doesn't realize that he is mad. Someone who thinks he is Napoleon doesn't see himself as a crazy man with a Napoleon complex. He sees himself as Napoleon. In this same way, I began to lose track of the fact that I was miserable. True, I couldn't sleep at night. I stared at my pictures at sunset and recited mournful poetry as I stared. I spent hours scribbling words like *tristeza* and *soledad* on sheet after sheet of paper, and I always wore black. But I never would have said that I was miserable. I was lonely and yearned for warmth and love, and I suffered from a permanent sexual inferiority complex. But I never would have talked about being desperate and unhappy. On the surface, my life remained as calm and unruffled as it had ever been, but at the same time it was becoming increasingly shallow and empty. And all my vital energy, which now took the form of pain and suffering, raged at some subterranean level, split off from my conscious mind and lost to my conscious experience.

A remarkable manifestation of this condition took the form of a series of visions that I had over a period of years and that began just after my father's death. These visions did not consist of isolated images but of entire stories that kept endlessly evolving. They often took the form of family histories or of royal dramas in dynastic series. Once the first generation had died, the following generations picked up the family history and carried it forward, frequently repeating and varying what had already occurred in the past. It lies beyond the scope of



my report to present here all the more or less novel-like or psychologically interesting episodes and protagonists in these stories and to interpret each episode and the fate of each figure. All I want to do is mention a few constantly recurring features that most of these major figures had. Most of them were sad. But their sadness was not an a priori sadness. They became sad. Sadness caught up with them and overpowered them. It happened over and over again that one of these figures was afflicted by melancholy. As a rule, the figures in question did not give in to melancholy because of excessively severe blows they had suffered at the hands of fate. Their sadness seemed instead to rise from the ground like a fog and envelop them. This pattern was repeated with a whole series of both male and female figures who, at the outset of their histories, were perfectly cheerful and had no particular cause for complaint but who in the course of their lives sank into a profound melancholy that usually could not be dispelled. The reasons for this change were sometimes obvious. In other cases, the motivation was only partially clear; and in still others, the change was totally inexplicable. Several female figures in particular took on a terrifying allegorical stature and appeared to me repeatedly in great visionary clarity as symbols of petrified melancholy, as allegorical figures representing an impenetrable sadness. These female figures usually grew to be very old and were almost incapable of dying. They were obliged to live on as immutable images of sadness and misery.

No one should make the mistake of thinking I consciously produced these visions. They appeared by themselves, and the individual figures in particular were simply given. I had no hand in their creation. But once they were involved in dramatic conflict, I could sometimes influence the course of events a little and even decide whether secondary figures should live or die. But usually, these events just occurred without my having any conscious influence over them. One fine day, a figure would die

on me, and that was the end of that figure once and for all. It never happened that I (like some novelists) would regret having let one figure or another die and would later bring him back to life. Most of them didn't die because I had desired or ordered their deaths. They died without my doing, and then they were really dead. It was much more likely that I mourned these dead figures rather than had the ability to bring them back to life. Similarly, I wasn't able to kill them most of the time, and they just went on living whether I liked it or not. But if it did happen that I brutally disposed of one and managed to kill him off, I never benefited from the act, because, at that very instant, a new figure would appear who carried on the legacy of the old one and vexed me every bit as much as the one who had just died.

The main figure that appeared in all these stories was that of the woman trapped in suffering. This figure, who, interestingly enough, always lived to be very old, customarily outlived all her contemporaries and was the last of her era to die. But when a new epoch and a new generation began, this major figure of a mourning woman would reappear. I was sometimes not yet aware, when a new chapter had just begun, that the old figure of the mourning woman was already present; or I wasn't able to say which of the women in this new generation would turn out to be the great mourner. But circumstances would soon point to one of these indistinguishable female figures and make clear that *she* was the one. This figure then gradually assumed the same aura of melancholy as her predecessor had had, even if she differed greatly in character from the earlier figure. The fact was that all these women were very different, but they did have one thing in common: They would all ultimately become images of suffering incarnate; they would become, as it were, goddesses of mourning.

Thus, while I was outwardly proclaiming both to other people and to myself how well things were going for me, this image of

melancholy incarnate was appearing to me unremittingly and incessantly, always assuming a new shape yet always remaining the same sad and unhappy woman. Today I see this allegorical figure as the image of my own soul. It took this visible form so that I could see what my real condition was. Or perhaps it came to ask if I had still not noticed how dire its situation was and how grave my own danger. It's difficult for me to say now how long I kept having these visions because I cannot link these inner events to external ones and I therefore cannot say whether I was experiencing one certain phase or another in this visionary series at the same time that a particular event occurred in my outer life. I would guess, though, that it was a matter of some two to three years before the last trace of this world disappeared for good. I say "for good" because, toward the end of this period, this little universe seemed doomed many times, yet each time it came back to life of its own accord. It could not and would not die. Just as it had been impossible for me to let a major figure die without a new, parallel figure's springing up in its place, it was equally impossible for me to will the end of this whole visionary world. It continued to regenerate itself out of itself, and the only explanation I can offer for its eventual demise is that it decided of itself to perish. And so, without my having any more influence over it than I had ever had, it did just that, disappearing for good and leaving me without any further visions from that time on.

I never wrote these stories down because I felt they weren't really meant to be written down. Probably if I tried to record the fates of these individual figures in novelistic form, the results would be unutterably boring. The literary form would probably not be able to capture any of the fascination these figures had for me. If I had been a painter or composer, I might have been able to paint the figures or to convey their significance symphonically. But I can hardly imagine them as figures in a

novel. I have therefore just sketched the major events that befell these figures so that I would not forget them.

This visionary world disappeared again. If the figure of the mourning woman was in fact my soul calling for help, then that call went unheeded and finally fell silent. My soul, to remain with this image, fled back to that place of fear to which I had banned all my pain and sorrow. And I managed to maintain the illusion of my good cheer and good fortune for a little while longer before utter disaster overtook me.

## V I I I

But then, abruptly, my period of well-being was over. Two remarkable occurrences marked the beginning of my decline. The first of these was the sudden death of a neighbor. He was found dead in his armchair one morning. He had felt fine just the day before, when I had last spoken with him. This made me realize instantly that Death had come to this house. The building had been completely remodeled and renovated before I and the other tenants now occupying it had moved in just a few years earlier. In its new form, the building had not experienced a death. It is several hundred years old, and before the renovation everything had looked so different that one could hardly say this was the same building. But now Death had moved in, and I felt that he had made up for those years after the renovation when he had not yet been able to take possession of the building. Now this building, too, like all other buildings, was in his power. The next day I saw a detective movie. The murderer, who was also the hero in the film, had pretended to be very much in love with his young wife, but he had married her only for her money, and soon after the wedding he killed her. Because he was so convincing in his display of grief, no one suspected him of being

the murderer. After the murder, he planned to marry his accomplice in the act, but then he began to realize that he had been fond of his first wife after all. In the ensuing argument that he had with the second woman, he fell into a rage with her and with himself and wound up by killing her, too. The film ends with his being convicted of murder. After seeing this film, I realized that this criminal—even though he had two murders on his conscience, had landed in an insane asylum for the time being, and would probably be executed—was a much better and much happier man than I was for the simple reason that he had felt some love for his first wife. I had still not felt love for anyone. I understood right away that the two murders counted as nothing compared to the fact that he had loved his first wife a little (even though he then went ahead and killed her according to plan). In my case, everything was just the opposite. That I did not happen to be a murderer was insignificant, and all that really counted was my crime, i.e., that I had still never loved anyone. From that perspective, the murderer in the film was acquitted and it was I who was condemned.

I saw now that my life was worse than that of the murderer, and I knew that Death was in our building. From this point on, things went rapidly downhill with me.

Suddenly, things were not “just fine” anymore. My depression was no longer held underground and repressed. It came out into the open and spread over everything I had, up to now, claimed I was still capable of enjoying. I realized that there was absolutely nothing I enjoyed anymore, and I realized how many things there were that oppressed me. I would not have admitted before that these things had always oppressed me, nor would I have admitted how much they oppressed me. All at once, my self-image as a cheerful, contented person seemed questionable. It was more than questionable. It already lay shattered to pieces in front of me. Within a very short time, I realized that everything had suddenly become just the way it

used to be. But “the way it used to be” now had more than a chronological meaning. It meant instead “the way it has always been.” The truth was not that I had been wretched at some earlier time and then become increasingly happy over the years until I could finally say that everything was “just fine.” The truth was that I had been wretched all along but had not wanted to admit it.

Now it happened more and more frequently that I would suddenly catch myself sitting on my bed and, without meaning to, reciting the lines:

*Ai, Deus, se sabe ora meu amigo,  
Como eu senheira estou em Vigo?*

And it could happen just as frequently that I found myself at my desk incessantly writing *tristeza* and *soledad* all over pieces of paper. I often found, too, that life was just “too much,” as the idiom so accurately puts it. The distance was too great; the stairs were too high; the shopping basket was too heavy. Everything contained the hidden possibility of being more than I could cope with. I was tired. There’s a theory that claims the body is never tired and couldn’t be tired if it wanted to. It’s only the spirit that gets tired, and it’s the weariness of the spirit that induces the so-called physical fatigue. That may well be a corollary to the view that rainy weather will be depressing only for those who are already depressed. The distance was probably too great for me only because I didn’t want to go to the place in question to begin with. The task was too wearisome only because I didn’t want to do it. But the reason I didn’t want to do anything was probably that there was nothing that gave me pleasure.

At about this same time, a tumor began to form on my neck. It didn’t bother me because it didn’t hurt and because I didn’t suspect it was anything serious. I never thought that it might be cancer, and when I finally had it examined after I realized

that it would not disappear but was getting larger all the time, I never imagined that the doctors would come up with any very grave diagnosis. I still had not the faintest idea of my true condition. On the one hand, I was medically ignorant; and on the other, I was clinging to my old habit of not wanting to see how truly serious my situation might be. Although I still did not know that I had cancer, I hit intuitively on the correct diagnosis in regarding the tumor as an accumulation of "swallowed tears." What this phrase suggested to me was that all the tears I had not wept and had not wanted to weep in my lifetime had gathered in my neck and formed this tumor because they had not been able to fulfill their true function, which was to be wept. In strictly medical terms, of course, this poetic-sounding diagnosis is beside the point. But, seen in terms of the whole person, it expresses the truth. All the suffering I had swallowed and dammed up could no longer be compressed inside me. The pressure became too great, and the resulting explosion destroyed the body containing all that compressed pain.

One thing that speaks for this explanation of cancer is that there aren't any other explanations. The doctors know a great deal about cancer, but they don't know what it really is. I think that cancer is a psychic illness. If a person swallows down all his suffering, he will eventually be eaten up in turn by the suffering buried inside him. And since a person like this is destroying himself, standard medical treatments will usually do not the least bit of good. Just as a path you don't want to travel will seem disproportionately tiring or a shopping basket you don't want to carry will seem disproportionately heavy, so the body will destroy the life you no longer want to live.

When the winter had passed and the doctors had still not been able to determine the nature of my tumor, they decided to remove it surgically and examine it more closely. Even the prospect of an operation didn't make me feel I was in any danger; I readily accepted the idea that the operation was es-

sential for me, and I attached some vague hopes to it. It would be my first operation and my first experience with anesthesia, and I saw the whole process as a symbol of death and rebirth. I hoped in some way that, under anesthetic, I would suffer a symbolic death and then rise from the dead to live what would perhaps be a much happier life. In reality, things did not work out so neatly, and that simple operation brought me neither death nor resurrection. But the hopes I nurtured beforehand were realistic ones in the sense that I was sorely in need of just such a death and resurrection. I realized that I was ripe for death and that my one best hope was to die a symbolic death, then find my way toward a new and better life.

The operation went well, and I experienced no pain from it. After further studies of the tumor had been made and the doctors had gone through their usual routine of trying to hide the truth from me, I soon learned through my own reading that I had cancer.

Since the word "cancer" had never occupied a place in my consciousness up to now, the name of this disease and the fact that I had it came as something of a shock to me. I use the phrase "something of a shock" intentionally here because it would be incorrect to say that I felt a great or massive shock. I was not dismayed or horrified or surprised or, as we often say in such instances, "thunderstruck." My first words of response to this new fact were "Of course." It seemed instantly obvious to me that I should have cancer. I saw right off that it was only logical and right. I saw that this was inevitable and that I had even expected it. It wasn't cancer specifically that I had been expecting, but once the diagnosis of cancer was definite, I realized that it corresponded exactly, in form and in essence, to what I had expected. I knew that I had not just happened to fall ill with cancer in this particular winter but that I had been ill for many years and that this cancer was only the last link in a long chain or, if you like, only the tip of the iceberg.



Now the nameless thing that had tortured me my whole life long finally had a name. And as everyone knows, fear of something definite is always more tolerable than fear of the unknown. Some old magic formulas worked on the principle that you could ban the devil by calling him by name:

*Wola, wiht, thaz thu weist, thaz thu wiht heizist.*

(It's good, devil, that you know that your name is devil.)

And Rumpelstiltskin in the fairy tale is defeated as soon as the queen can tell him that his name is Rumpelstiltskin. It's similar with cancer. Since nobody dares to pronounce the word, it's no wonder that we haven't found a way to cure it yet. I have yet to meet a doctor who will say the word "cancer." And since the doctors refuse to call the devil by his name, it's only natural that they can't exorcise him. Patients undergo endless operations and radiation treatments and swallow pills by the rod, but the most important part of the therapy gets left out. It's common knowledge that not even cough syrup or cold tablets will work if the patient doesn't believe in them. And if the patient does have faith in his medication, you can give him chalk tablets and he'll still get better. But in all cancer therapy, the doctors retreat into silence. The result is that the patient loses faith in the treatment and therefore cannot be cured. But the doctors aren't the only ones who refuse to talk about cancer. No one else will, either. The word is taboo. (My poor parents probably would have said that cancer was one of those "difficult" subjects.) In this way, the cancer patient is condemned to utter despair, and he dies of his despair.

This is why I feel that cancer is primarily a psychic disorder and that the various tumors should be regarded only as secondary, physical manifestations of the disease, for cancer clearly has all the characteristics of a mental illness. We're allowed to talk about our colds or our flu, but we are not allowed to talk about our depressions. (I think people often get colds so that

they can finally do some complaining without violating the rules of good behavior.)

Here, too, I feel my behavior conformed very well to the rules of society and the rules of cancer. I have been unhappy all my life, but since my good breeding told me it was "not nice" to complain about unhappiness, I never said a word about it. In the world I lived in, tradition demanded that I not create a disturbance or call attention to myself, no matter what the cost to me. I knew that I had to be correct and to conform; above all, I had to be normal. But normality as I understood it meant that I shouldn't tell the truth but should be polite instead. I was a good boy all my life, and that's why I got cancer. That's the way it should be. Anybody who is a good boy all his life deserves to get cancer. It's a just punishment for all that goodness.

I could have continued to be good and nice; I could have decided to pass out of the picture quietly without making any fuss. But I was spared that fate because I came to see that my disease—this familiar yet unmentionable and therefore devilish cancer that usually kills people in fairly short order—did indeed contain the possibility of death and resurrection, though the death I might suffer was a real death and not just a symbolic one. The threat of death made me realize that if I did ultimately manage to escape this real death, I might finally have a chance at true resurrection, resurrection to a new life that would perhaps not be as painful as the previous one had been. I mentioned earlier that the confrontation with cancer had caused me only a slight shock because I had been living with psychic cancer all my life. But the shock was great enough to shake me out of my resignation and to make me at least notice that my life was intolerable. If it makes any sense at all to speak of cancer as an idea, then I would have to say that getting cancer was the best idea I have ever had. I think it was the only thing that was capable of freeing me from the misery of resignation. I don't mean to claim, of course, that cancer is a good thing in

and of itself. It's obviously a disaster that brings a great deal of suffering with it. But in my own case I have to say that this disaster is less onerous than the disaster comprising the first thirty years of my life. I suppose that no one who has cancer is very happy, and I'm not very happy, either. But I'm a little less unhappy than I was when, officially, I still didn't have cancer—except for the psychic cancer that I inherited from my family tradition.

## IX

My getting a little less unhappy didn't come about overnight. I had to go through a symbolic death before facing real physical death. Once my thinking had progressed to the point where I could see my acute illness as a first step toward dying and being reborn, I went to see the psychotherapist I had gone to before to discuss whether this idea of mine made sense or not. Although I had not had a regular course of psychotherapeutic treatment in mind when I began these consultations, something of that nature began to develop after several meetings, and its purpose clearly was to translate my idea of death and rebirth into reality.

One would now expect the most interesting part of this report, i.e., a description of my psychotherapy, to follow. But this is the very part I do not intend to write. One reason is that the course of treatment is not yet over, and I can't know if it will be successful. But a more important reason is that I can't afford to put off writing these memoirs until my psychotherapy is completed because I can't know in advance which will come first, the completion of my psychotherapy or my death by cancer. Since I want to write this report no matter what, I have to do it while I'm still alive. And since I still am alive for the time being, I want to write the report *now*, even though my

psychotherapy is not yet over and I have not yet been discharged as "cured." But an even more important obstacle is that I find it much too difficult to capture this therapy in words. To the extent that I can recall the events of the past, I can describe them and say that they were thus and so and my view of them now is such and such. I can also write down my present thoughts and opinions, but it strikes me as impossible to describe processes of psychic transformation, especially when they happen to be my own and I have no distance on them. Nor can I say: Now I'm undergoing this or that change, and now I'm in this or that phase. It is just possible—indeed it seems even probable—that in the course of my psychotherapy to date I have already undergone all sorts of changes and passed through a great variety of phases. (I am surely in some phase or other right now, and we are probably always in some phase or other. Perhaps there's just no getting along without all these phases.) But if I am going to avoid the error that a student of Portuguese made when she said the Romantic period in Brazil began on a July 17, I cannot say that yesterday I was in a Müller phase and today I am in my Meier phase.

So I will not attempt to describe my psychotherapy. At the outset, of course, it was distinctly unpleasant because all the memories I have written down here with such apparent ease first had to be called back to life in my therapy sessions. The most important thing to come out of this process was the real significance of those memories. It was by no means so that I, like anyone else, had had "problems" in my youth, that I had sometimes experienced "difficulties" at school, that I had had trouble "acclimatizing myself" and "making contact" when I first went to the university. These problems and others like them fall within the realm of the normal. In my case, it was incorrect to speak of so mild an affliction as "trouble making contact." I had spent my entire life up to this time without forming any ties with anyone. I did not have "initial difficulties" at the uni-

versity, difficulties that then faded away as I got to know other students. I had the same difficulties on my last day at the university as I had had on my first day there. I did not just "feel lonely sometimes," but I had suffered from loneliness constantly and without interruption for as long as I could remember. I had not just had "difficulties with women" or "sexual problems." I hadn't had anything to do with women at all, and my entire life was one great unsolved sexual problem. It was not just that I had been "unhappy in love," that "things had not worked out," or that I had "lost her" to someone else. I had never been in love in my life and I hadn't the faintest idea what love was. It was a feeling I was unfamiliar with, just as I was unfamiliar with almost every other kind of feeling. My problem could hardly be described as "difficulties with women." My problem was total psychic impotence. I had not just been "unhappy a lot" or "sometimes unhappy." For at least fifteen years and perhaps longer, I had suffered uninterruptedly from depression. It turned out that my so-called "happy childhood" was a fabrication on my part that I had taken for true coin. And it turned out that even my trump card was worthless: I was not "normal," much as I may have tried to convince myself I was whenever the sum of everything that was wrong in my life threatened to overwhelm me. My troubles were not the normal obstacles that any young person is bound to encounter in growing up. My troubles were abnormal, whatever "abnormal" might mean.

In other words, it turned out that I was not only miserable now but that I had always been miserable and that I was perfectly set up to be miserable in the future. I had to face the fact that I was not "normal," even though that very statement raised the question of what "normal" and—perhaps more importantly—"abnormal" really meant. But whatever else this statement meant, it suggested that my life had, at some very early point, probably in my early childhood, taken a direction

that was not normal. Because of this false turn or crooked growth, the developmental processes a child or young person usually goes through or should go through took place for me either incompletely or not at all. The result was that I was stunted in many aspects of my growth, and this stunting or crippling constituted my abnormality.

This does not mean, however, that I was "insane" in the sense that we usually apply that term to people who suffer from hallucinations or do crazy things. My intelligence had obviously not been crippled. I am not exceptionally brilliant, but I'm not exceptionally stupid, either. My intelligence, that is to say, is "normal." That I studied at the university does not, of course, prove I am intelligent. You don't have to be particularly intelligent to graduate from a Gymnasium. As a rule, all you need is a rich father. And you certainly don't need any intelligence to study humanities at the university. On the contrary, intelligence can be a great hindrance. The only people who study humanities are ones who can't find anything better to do with themselves (and that is certainly no proof of intelligence).

Then, too, I remained capable of leading what seemed to be a normal life on the practical level. I had, at any rate, managed to teach at a public Gymnasium for a number of years without anyone's catching on to the fact that one of the teachers on the faculty was "abnormal." Whether my performance as a teacher was satisfactory or unsatisfactory is a question I won't go into here, but I think I can safely say that my work did not fall outside the range of normality.

I was also not mentally ill in the sense that I suffered from hallucinations. I was not schizophrenic, and I could distinguish clearly between the real and the unreal. When I had had my visions a few years earlier, it had always been clear to me what existed only in my imagination and what existed outside it. My illness obviously affected a totally different area of my life, that area we usually designate as the realm of "human

relationships” or, more simply, as the realm of feeling. My intelligence was intact and had not suffered any damage, but my emotional life was crippled. I couldn’t experience any feelings, especially none for other people. I couldn’t love anyone. I suffered from this loneliness, but I was incapable of escaping from it because I could not resolve—much less command myself—to start loving somebody. I couldn’t just say: “Well, now, starting tomorrow I’m going to love Mr. Müller.” You can’t just make up your mind to love Mr. Müller (or Mrs. Müller) any more than you can make up your mind to be intelligent from now on. Love just comes to you out of the blue. But love couldn’t come to me because I was incapable of recognizing its coming. You can’t command an idiot to understand that two and two makes four. If his intellect is so weak that he is incapable of understanding this, it will never just come to him out of the blue that two and two in fact makes four. He will never look up suddenly and say: “Aha, now I see.”

It would be appropriate to call my case one of emotional idiocy. My incapacity prevented me from saying: Aha, I like *him* or *her*. I didn’t like anyone because I lacked the capacity to like anyone. It was impossible for me to establish any emotional contact with the world. I could move about in it as a well-behaved citizen without creating the impression that I was a “madman,” but I could move about in it only as a perpetually alien being who never touched another human life either for good or for ill.

According to dictionary definitions, I was not suffering from mental illness in the narrow sense of the term because mental illness in that sense means psychosis. I was merely neurotic, and neurosis is defined as a mental “disorder,” not a mental illness. Since all I had was a neurosis and not a psychosis, I had something to be thankful for. Now, among neuroses, the experts distinguish between mild and serious ones. Mine was a serious one. That made sense to me because it is characteristic

of neuroses that they cause all kinds of physical disorders, and since my neurosis had caused as serious a physical disorder as cancer, it certainly had to be a serious neurosis.

A number of thoughts occurred to me at this point. I was not insane in the sense that my entire mental life was disturbed, and this was why I had been able to prove to myself time and again during my whole life how normal I was. In many areas, I could stand up to comparison with others very well. I was not muddleheaded, and if I compared myself to people who were, I came away looking much more normal than they. I wasn't hysterical, either, and in comparison to a hysterical person I would surely have to be called normal. In other words, my addiction for comparing myself with others led me to make those comparisons in areas where I would look good and where there was no chance of my suffering by the comparison. Now I finally realized how pointless this had been. I had repeatedly come to the conclusion that I couldn't be the least bit abnormal since there were other people who were stupider, clumsier, or more muddleheaded than I. The fact that my psychic life was in shambles had not affected the writing of my dissertation in the least. That I had lived in a psychic Sahara Desert the whole time I was writing it did not detract from its scholarly value, and my dissertation adviser did not have to judge whether his student was emotionally sick or well. All he had to decide was whether the dissertation made sense or not. And later on, when I was teaching, it was not my job to show my students that I was mentally balanced. My job was to teach them the subjunctive in Spanish, and they could learn the rules of the Spanish subjunctive just as well from a neurotic teacher as they could from a normal one.

All at once I was no longer that desperate "normal" person I had been for the last thirty years, who had continually asked himself: "Why, why is everything always so awful for me if I'm really normal?" There was suddenly no need to ask this



painful and unanswered question anymore. Now I knew why nothing had ever gone right for me and why my life was so painful. One could object here that the word "neurosis" is just a word and doesn't in itself explain much. But I would object in turn that this word explained a great deal. It shattered my illusion about being "normal," and it provided me with a new piece of information: that I could be normal in a number of areas without having to be afraid I was abnormal in them, too.

What I said about cancer also holds true for neurosis. Neurosis is not a good thing, and it brings a great deal of suffering with it. But the same principle applies both to psychic and to physical illnesses: The patient will find that precise knowledge of what his affliction is will be more a comfort to him than an additional burden.

The first insight to come out of my psychotherapy, then, was that I was neurotic and that I had been neurotic not just for a short time but for many years, probably for my whole life. A second and thoroughly unpleasant insight followed from the first: My whole life had gone wrong. From my very earliest years, all my actions and decisions had emanated from my mental disorder, not from a healthy human intelligence.

The fact I had to face was this: During my youth, I had been "insane" in the sense described above. My opportunity to experience a normal and perhaps even a happy youth was lost. I was not an old man yet, but I was no stripling, either, and I had to reconcile myself to the fact that I had not experienced in my first thirty years what is usually described as "youth." Instead, I had suffered from a psychic disorder that had prevented me from being young. I also had to realize that this psychic disorder had weakened my body so drastically that I now had cancer and that the chances were I would soon die of this cancer. I had to prepare myself for the possibility of dying before I could be healed of my psychic illness. It might be too late for me. I might die of my psychic disease and its physical

consequences before I could ever experience what life is like for a human being who is *not* psychically ill.

I had to accept the fact, too, that my life up to this point had been an utter failure. I could no longer regard myself as having been a happy child from a good background, a child who had grown up in a happy family and in healthy circumstances. The fact was that my circumstances had been far from good and healthy, even if I had failed to notice this as a child and an adolescent. Whether I might have been happier if I had remained the same child I was but had had different parents, or whether things might have gone better for me with the same parents if I had had a different character, or whether I might have been happier if I had been born into a different social class—none of these questions stand to debate here (and they are all completely idle anyhow). Only one thing is relevant: As the child I was and with the character I had and with the parents who happened to be mine and in the class I grew up in, I did not turn out to be happy. I turned out to be neurotic and to have cancer. I do not intend to discuss the question of guilt, either. Perhaps it was my character that was at fault; perhaps it was my family; perhaps it was middle-class society. Perhaps no one was to blame, and perhaps everyone was. But I was more concerned with the consequences than I was with placing blame or identifying the source of the disaster. The consequences were a human being who had been systematically destroyed from earliest childhood on. Now this destroyed human creature was sitting in an armchair in his psychotherapist's office, waiting to see what would happen next. And I was this destroyed human creature.

Along with this view of myself came a feeling of being lost and homeless. Suddenly I didn't have a home anywhere anymore, and having a protective shell I could hide in like the hermit crab had been an urgent need for me all my life. There was no place I could go home to now because I had no home.

My former life was no longer my home, and I was far from feeling at home in my new one. From a whole range of feelings that at first seemed contradictory, one thing finally emerged with ever-increasing clarity: It was not hatred I felt for my parents, my hometown, and my country; it was a sense of great estrangement. The feeling I had about my father, who was dead, was that he had always been dead and had never lived at all. His grave is in K., and when I go to visit it I always feel as if I should say: "Well, just look at that! There's somebody buried there who had the same last name as I do. What a remarkable coincidence!" My mother is still alive, and I see her occasionally. She seems to be a nice old lady, just like most old ladies on the Zurich Gold Coast. But if I happen to think that I'm related to this nice old lady, the thought strikes me as downright ridiculous. I could just as well be related to the emperor of China. I find my mother a sympathetic enough figure, but the idea that she is supposed to be my mother seems nothing but funny to me. I sometimes visit the house my mother lives in, too. It is a large, beautifully situated house with lots of rooms and a view of the lake. This lovely house is my family home. I am cognizant of this fact, but the phrase "family home" still seems strange to me.

One of the positive aspects of any illness—and that includes neurosis—is the possibility of being cured. Probably anyone who is ill hopes that he will be cured, and this hope constitutes a more or less clear goal for him. For me, having such a goal was a novelty. In the years when I was still trying to convince myself that I was normal, all I could do was keep telling myself that "everything was just fine," even though nothing at all was just fine. The idea that I might ever do something other than cling tenaciously to the myth that everything was just fine was an impossible hope. But now everything was not just fine. Things could hardly be worse. I was seriously ill, both physically and psychically, and I was immediately threatened by death. But

since both the cancer and the neurosis might still be cured, there was a chance that I would come on better days, that this difficult time would finally be over, and that I would no longer be ill.

If I had been psychically ill all my life and if it was now at least theoretically possible for me to be cured, that meant that I might be released from this misery I had dragged around with me for thirty years and had regarded as the true essence and form of my life. It meant that the pain I had accepted as my life for the past thirty years had not been my true life at all, but only the diseased element that had been destroying my life. It meant that the possibility of a real life was opening up for me, that such a life might well lie before me, and that I might awaken from my old life the way one does from a nightmare. If my pain was neurotic pain and if a neurosis could be healed, then I might yet know what it was like to live without this pain.

I *might* yet know. I fully realized that this dream of a better future existed only as a possibility, not as a certainty. There was nothing in my present situation to suggest that I would ever see this future. The cancer that had at first manifested itself only in the tumor on my neck—in my “swallowed tears”—had long since metastasized, and from a medical point of view my chances were slim indeed. The doctors had not given up on me, but I knew that my condition was much worse than it had been at the outset of my illness. The doctors would treat one part of my body successfully, but then the cancer would crop up at another point later on, always staying just one jump ahead of the treatment. I sensed that the doctors’ skills alone would not be able to help me and that I could be saved only if my entire organism—body and soul together—could summon enough resistance to overcome the disease. I also realized, however, that for the time being my soul was not capable of any resistance because it was still far more diseased than my body; and that meant that the body would only deteriorate much further before the soul would be strong enough to come to its aid.

My chances for survival, then, were not good. I could not say that my psychotherapy had made me much happier. On the contrary, all it had accomplished up to this point was to smash my previous life to bits—or, rather, to smash the illusions I had had about my previous life. Understandably enough, this process did not cheer me up but only depressed me all the more. This first year of psychotherapy was the worst year of my life. My old existence had to be completely destroyed before a new one could be created. And it was destroyed. The somewhat vague idea I had had about having to suffer death before I could even begin to think of rebirth became such a concrete reality in my therapy that I did in fact suffer a real death that year. In extreme psychic agony, I suffered the total eradication of my former self. There is no doubt that my former self was dead for good and all. Not a shred of it remained. All that was left was a bundle of misery that now had to wait for rebirth, sometime, somehow, and in whatever form that rebirth would take. This whole idea of rebirth seemed a bit farfetched, of course, for at this same time the doctors had all they could do to stuff me full of medications and subject me to an endless series of radiation treatments, operations, and examinations, all in the hope that the tiny bit of life that was left in me would not slip through their fingers and that the symbolic death I have talked about would not degenerate into just another banal instance of death by cancer.

Then, gradually, something remarkable began to happen. It was something I had hoped for and even expected. But, for all that, it was still remarkable. One fine day my depression was gone. I can't say that it disappeared on such and such a day or that it never came back, but over a period of time it did gradually fade away, and never returned. That doesn't mean I was much happier, but I could feel that this new state was, in many respects, preferable to my former one. Perhaps I can best ex-

press the change this way: It is true that I was still unhappy, but I never caught myself involuntarily reciting the lines:

*Ai, Deus, se sabe ora meu amigo,  
Como eu senheira estou em Vigo?*

nor did I catch myself sitting at my desk writing the word *tristeza* on sheets of paper for hours at a time. And there was another major difference in my behavior: I reacted to some situations in what one might call a “reasonable” manner. If, for example, I saw a funny movie, I would now laugh at it because it was funny and not cry over it, the way I used to, despite the fact that it was funny. Although I was still lonely, I tended to feel lonesome now only when I really was alone and had no company, and not, as I had in the past, when I was surrounded by other people. I had also gained some capacity to enjoy things. Generally speaking, I would say that I began to derive pleasure from more things that really were pleasant and to develop an increasing sense that unpleasant things were in and of themselves unpleasant. Before, everything had just been “the way it was,” and I had felt everything to be oppressive. It had been all one to me whether it was raining or the sun was shining. I would be depressed in either case. Now I began developing the capacity to be pleased *because* the sun was shining and to be irritable *because* it was raining. In the past, it hadn’t helped me at all when the rain stopped and the sun came out, because my depression would persist *despite* the sun. But now a bad mood caused by rainy weather would, naturally enough, disappear when the rain stopped. I could see now that the word “normal” amounted to more than an empty concept and that in many instances I was beginning to react more “normally” than I had before.

And I learned to appreciate still another side of myself, my comic side. All my life I have been what is traditionally re-

garded as an amusing person, and this capacity to be amusing was often the label I displayed to the world or the flag I sailed under. I realized now that my comic side had usually been nothing but a kind of cloak I had used to hide my sadness. I had never been able to talk about sad or serious things because the sadness I carried inside me was always so great that it would have overstepped the limits of any conventional conversation if I had opened up the gates that held back the flood of despair inside me. To avoid this ever-threatening disaster, I automatically cast everything I said in a witty or even a ridiculous light. My eternal wit was not usually spontaneous; it was the result of a desperate and prolonged effort to put off the impending catastrophe just a little bit longer. Thus, I had always felt obliged to spread merriment wherever I went, and I had been successful in doing so. But there was one point I had never taken the trouble to think about much: I could make everybody else laugh, but I never laughed myself.

Now, forced to see my comic talents in a new light, I came to the conclusion that all my merriment had been primarily a bluff. I'm convinced that I have a real talent for saying and writing funny things; and this talent, like any other talent, is clearly a valuable asset. But it is wrong to conclude that a talent for comedy makes one a merry person. The fact that my behavior in some areas was not abnormal did not make me normal; and, by the same token, the fact that I often came up with witty and comical remarks did not make me merry and cheerful. A painter who spends most of his time painting beautiful women won't necessarily be handsome himself. So I was forced to bury still another of my illusions: the illusion that I was a cheerful person.

On the issue of inferiority, I could no longer argue that I was not in some ways inferior. True, I was not inferior in every respect; but in one very important one, perhaps the most important of all, I was. I had been absolutely correct in feeling

that in every fundamental and important respect I was excluded from human society and that my life had been taken up solely with secondary matters. And all these secondary things taken together could not disguise the fact that I had been lacking the most important thing in life for as long as I could remember. Once my train of thought had progressed far enough that it reached the phrase "the most important thing in life," it became instantly clear what this most important thing was: love, of course. That was no great news to me. I had always known it. Everybody knows it and always has known it. And anybody who reads even the first page of this report will be able to tell me where the root of my affliction lies.

But then again this was news to me. I have written quite a bit here about not knowing and not wanting to know and about how we have to want to know something new before we can really say that we do know it. I had chattered on all my life about my "difficulties with love" without once admitting to myself that I was going to wrack and ruin for lack of love and was dying for lack of it. If someone dies of starvation, we don't say he was having "difficulties with nourishment" toward the end of his life. We say he starved to death. When I said I was having "difficulties with love," I was not speaking any more accurately than if I had said someone who had been flattened by a steamroller was having "difficulties staying in shape."

I had no choice now but to admit to myself that I had not had any of these famous "difficulties" but that I had been a total failure in the most important thing in life, that I had not been able to bear the lack of this essential thing, that I had therefore gone crazy (or become "neurotic," to stick with the socially acceptable euphemism), and that this madness had in turn produced a cancer that was about to destroy my body.

I needn't take a lot of time defining "love." That maleficent sect that is still reputed to be the major religion of the so-called civilized Western world has horribly abused and denigrated the



word “love” over the past two thousand years, and it would therefore not come as a surprise if not a single inhabitant of the Christian Occident knew what love is. But everybody does know. Just as the body and soul cannot be separated from each other, and the one influences and shapes the other, and the two together make up a whole, so it is with “spiritual” and “physical” or “platonic” and “sexual” love. We can’t separate the two, nor can we allow a distinction between love and sexuality. To cite Freud on this matter again, anyone who doesn’t care for the word “love” for whatever reasons can use “sexuality” in its place, and anyone who objects to “sexuality” should just go right ahead and say “love.”

But since current idiom seems to prefer “love” in some contexts and “sexuality” in others, I will make a concession to it and assert once again that I was a failure in both these realms. I hadn’t loved anyone, and I hadn’t had sex with anyone, both of which amount to the same thing if we classify these activities under the heading “love.” Of course I wasn’t normal. Of course I was inferior, and this was the reason. It all sounded so simple that I could hardly believe I had needed thirty years to stumble on such an obvious truth. But I have to repeat here that, for me, it wasn’t such an obvious truth because the consequences that followed on it were so far-reaching. Everyone knows that ripe apples have a tendency to fall from trees and hit you on the head. If one of these apples hits a Newton on the head, he’ll formulate the law of gravitation and found modern physics on it. Most facts are simple and generally known. They assume their true significance only after we understand the consequences that follow from them.

I was on the verge of discovering some of these consequences. I noticed that you could be a failure in any number of areas with relative impunity. But if you were a sexual failure, that was a disgrace and totally unforgivable. I realized that I had

stumbled on a taboo here that was far more important and deeply rooted than the superficial Victorian taboo that is customary in middle-class society. It's forbidden to talk about love. Love is taboo, and we have to act as if it didn't exist at all. That's our custom. But it's also forbidden to be a failure in love. Any one who is incapable of love isn't worth much. A man who isn't a man is nothing. No one talks openly about this because it's a taboo subject, but there is general silent agreement on it. Sexuality has been pushed out of middle-class life as a subject of conversation, but it nonetheless remains the standard by which everything is measured, evaluated, and judged. Nobody talks about this fact, but everyone knows it. No one talks about it, yet no one has ever talked about anything else since the beginning of time. Ever since writing was invented, the one predominant theme that has run through all literature is that sexuality is more important than anything else. It doesn't matter whether we turn on the radio and listen to the most trivial popular songs or read the words of the apostle in the so-called Book of Books. The message is always the same: Anyone who is without love is but "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

I am not the only one who has refused to accept this age-old truth. Society as a whole has refused to recognize it. At the beginning of this century, when Freud published his theory that all of life consisted only of sex, everyone was horrified to hear this fact announced openly, even though everyone had already known it for ages.

The skeptic may well ask here if things are really so simple that they can be summed up in so few words. Perhaps we are all skeptics because we all have an aversion for simple truths. Whenever an explanation turns out to be simple, we immediately suspect that there must be something wrong with it because nothing can really be so simple. It's probably a matter of temperament whether one believes in simple answers or not. In my

family, it was customary to assume that everything was "difficult" by nature. I tend more to the view that things are simple and that we just don't want to see how simple they are.

My life and the history of my illness don't strike me as the least bit complicated. I can't imagine anything simpler. True, they're not very pleasant, but that hardly makes them "difficult." I haven't the least bit of trouble, for instance, in accepting a theory as simple as Wilhelm Reich's, a theory whose simplicity it would be hard to match. Basically, Reich distinguishes between only two things: the unpleasurable suppression of vital energy, and the pleasurable release of vital energy. He maintains that these principles apply to creatures as radically different as protozoans and human beings. The protozoan can't do much else but contract or expand. Those are about the only two options he has in his repertoire of activity. But what about human beings, who are, as we know, much more "complex" creatures? Their repertoire isn't any more extensive, and all they do is contract sometimes, which is not much fun, and expand sometimes, which is fun. According to Reich, orgasm is the most pure and all-encompassing form of pleasurable release. An equally extreme suppression of vital energy in an organism will produce psychic debilitation and a debilitation of those individual physical organs that do not receive an adequate supply of blood and oxygen. The ultimate result will be cancer. An inhibited human being can be compared, then, to a protozoan that only contracts and makes itself smaller but never expands. That a person can get cancer from such inhibition is obvious. For Reich, orgasm and cancer are the two purest manifestations of the two key factors in life. I grant that this theory sounds extremely simple, and it is surely not anywhere near "complex" enough to suit many people. I don't mean to deprive anyone of the pleasure to be found in complexity, but I still feel that in all essential respects Reich's theory hits the nail right on the head. Anyone who doesn't want to take the theory literally can

take it metaphorically. I don't happen to think there's much difference between the two. I don't mean to imply here that everything in life is always utterly simple and mere child's play or that the whole of life is just one big picnic (my personal experience has certainly convinced me that it is not), but I do think we could see the simple principles at work much more often than we do if we did not always insist on seeing only the complexities.

These were the conclusions I finally reached: My situation was a dismal one, but it was not unclear. My chances were not very good, but I had some chance left. I was not yet cured, but it was possible that I could be cured. It was equally possible that I would not be cured and would die. Thus far, the doctors had been able to keep the isolated tumors from killing me, but they had not yet cured me of my illness. My psychotherapy had helped me to create some order out of the chaos of my psychic illness, but I was not cured of this illness, either.

This remains my present condition. I have still not been cured of my true illness, which is cancer. (When I use that word now, I mean by it both the psychic and the physical cancer together. I am not speaking of two separate diseases but of a single one that manifests itself both physically and psychologically. This is precisely what we mean when we use the term "psychosomatic.") I will either be cured of my disease, or I will die of it. Those are my two possibilities. We always tend to regard death as unpleasant, but if we consider that even today people can still make a virtue out of dying for God, for the capitalistic fatherland, and for the fatherland's conglomerates, then we have to conclude that there are more stupid deaths to die than a death for lack of love. If it made sense for people to die for love in the past—and in operas they still do—then it makes just as much sense for people to die today for the opposite reason; that is, for lack of love. I feel there are worse reasons for dying.

But if I should be cured, then my original idea of death and rebirth will become reality. Then it will be possible to say that in the course of something like the last two years and in some symbolic way, I did indeed die and was reborn into a new life, a life which one can justifiably hope will not consist solely of my illness and be, as it were, identical with that illness. No one can say whether this new life will be happy or unhappy. But the chances are good that it will be less diseased than my first one.

But if I should die before I am cured, I will miss this chance. Then I will have perished from my illness without having had the chance to know any other aspect of life but that of perishing. That may happen. As we all know, not everyone has a chance to live happily. Millions of Africans and Indians perish every year to the utter indifference of the rest of us. They die of hunger, leprosy, or some deficiency disease. They haven't had their chance, either. But I feel there is a crucial difference between me and any one of those Africans. The African simply succumbs to leprosy, the plague, or hunger without developing any clear sense of what is happening to him. He will probably wonder why he is experiencing this dreary fate, but after puzzling over it for a while without coming to any conclusions, he'll die. It's possible that I'll die of cancer fairly soon, too; but my situation will differ from the African's in that I've reached some clarity about the circumstances that have landed me where I am. I feel that I know precisely what is happening to me; and that, I think, makes my situation much more tolerable than the African's. Even if I die of my present condition, my death will be a much more human one than the death of that African, who will die as uncomprehendingly as any unthinking animal.

I don't think it is arrogant on my part to hope that this report and the insights contained in it may even be of some use to others. I can't imagine that my case is unique. (The Gold Coast

is very long, and overpopulated to the bursting point. And I can't imagine, either, that there are many normal people in all those multitudes living on the shores of Lake Zurich.) It's much more likely that my case is typical and that many other people's lives are or have been just like mine, or at least very similar to it. Even if I, like all these other people, experience nothing else in life but the process of being devoured from earliest childhood by my disease and eventually succumbing to it, I still feel that my life and death will have been a little less meaningless than the death of that African I have just described.

That's the first great advantage I have. The second, which follows from the first, is the knowledge and understanding I have of my affliction. I think now, as before, that an evil that is known and can be called by name is easier to bear than one that is unknown and ununderstood. One consequence of such knowledge is that one's hope for surviving the affliction takes a more tangible form. The hope may well be small, but this small fragment of hope is real and perhaps more hopeful than some vast hope that remains so vague and unarticulated that one hardly knows what it is one is hoping for. Perhaps it makes sense to distinguish between hopes based on probabilities and those based on concrete possibilities. Everyone hopes that he will never be hit on the head by a meteorite; and it is highly probable that this hope will be fulfilled. But hopes of this kind are not of much importance in our lives. In my case, it is highly improbable that I will survive my illness, but the still-existing possibility that I will survive lends great strength and importance to my hope.

This may be the reason I can say that my present life, despite everything, is less hopeless and dreary than my first thirty years. It's true that I am not happy, but at least I am just unhappy and not depressed. An elegant stylistic formulation for expressing the difference in meaning between "unhappy" and "depressed" doesn't come readily to mind, but it seems obvious

that being “unhappy” is not as bad as being “depressed.” To return to our example of the unwept tears, we could say that someone who cries is unhappy, while someone who has lost the ability to cry is depressed. This report certainly does not emanate pure happiness, but it is far less a product of depression than was the recurring vision I had two years ago of that allegorical female figure immobilized by pain yet unwilling to die. And my writing an essay on unhappiness now is a very different thing from constantly writing the word *tristeza* on a piece of paper, and far less a consequence of depression. (Freud makes a distinction between sadness and melancholy.) My depression consisted of an undefinable and omnipresent grayness. My new state has an ice-cold and crystal-clear transparency to it. It is painful, but it does not suffocate me. Then, too, I feel more active. After thirty years of avoiding life, as my parents and the social class they represented had taught me to do, I am now facing death in its most concrete form and doing battle with death. Or, in Latin: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*.

I have the feeling that my destiny, having seen that I wouldn't be able to make much of my life, said to itself: “Well, if things just won't work out with life, let's have a go at death.” And wonder of wonders, things started to go better. I'd like to refer back to the idea of cosmic humor that I mentioned once before. You learn that the worst is never as bad as you think it's going to be, and you begin to understand what Camus meant when he demonstrated in “The Myth of Sisyphus” that Sisyphus was happy in hell.

Another characteristic of the state I'm describing is that I don't wish in the least that things were any different for me. Given the premises on which my life was based, I can't be anything but pleased that I've gotten cancer and that my psychotherapy has totally destroyed my previous existence. It is impossible for me to wish that these things had not happened. I find them all to the good. And I can't wish, either, that every-

thing were different from what it is, because then I would have to wish to be somebody else, and that is an impossibility. I can't wish that I were Mr. Meier instead of myself. I can't wish that everything that has happened to me had not happened or had turned out differently. I have to accept that everything had to happen the way it did and that it is neither possible nor desirable that things should be different. The only thing I can legitimately wish is that my present situation will take a turn for the better. This wish is still within the realm of possibility and therefore realistic. There's no point in wishing for anything unrealistic, and I feel no need to wish for it. The fact that I can see my situation as inevitable makes it much more tolerable for me than if I considered it completely absurd.

There is still another point we shouldn't neglect. As I see things, I *myself* am not the cancer that is devouring me. It's my family, my background, the legacy within me that is devouring me. In medicopolitical or sociopolitical terms this means that as long as I have cancer, I am still the captive of a carcinogenic, bourgeois, middle-class world; and if I die of cancer, then I will have died as a bourgeois. From a sociological point of view, of course, the death of a bourgeois is no great loss. However, when it comes to grasping the essence of family life, I feel no one can top the Greeks. It's not without good reason that Oedipus and his family have come to symbolize the family as such, and Phaedra's whole horrible fate is contained and anticipated in that one line that identifies her as the daughter of her parents:

*La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé.*

Even good old German Iphigenia (pale creation of Goethe's that she is) senses how disastrous it is for her to be the child of her parents. But no figure is more revealing of cozy family life than Cronus, who devours his own children. I feel that this fine old custom has remained an honored tradition to the present



day, and there is probably not a single one of us who could not say of himself:

*Mein Mutter, die mich schlacht,  
Mein Vater, der mich ass.*

(My mother who butchered me,  
My father who ate me.)

These days we are more civilized and don't just grab for our knives and forks to gobble up our children. (Where I come from, table manners are terribly complicated.) Instead, we just see to it that our children are raised in such a way that they will get cancer. By virtue of this maneuver, the customs of our forefathers can be upheld and parents can continue to devour their children.

The only hitch is that children are not equally digestible at all stages in their lives.

And that is why I feel that the word "resignation" no longer applies to my situation. Earlier, I had subscribed to the dogma that everything was going "just fine" for me. But this specious state of well-being was constantly undermined by the fear that things were not just fine at all. Resignation accurately described my situation as long as I was content never to rock the boat and so activate that fear. It was resignation on my part as long as I kept the closet door closed and refused to let the skeleton inside come tumbling into the parlor. Now things are not "just fine" anymore. Things are dreadful, but there are no more skeletons hiding in the closets, and there is even a chance that someday things will stop going badly for me.

Finally, I would like to touch on an aspect of my history that borders on the magical but that I take no less seriously for that. This is the astrological aspect.

I was born under the sign of the Ram, which has to be regarded as the true sign of Mars, even though, in older astrology, the sign of the eagle was considered to be the sign of Mars.

(In regular astrology, the eagle has long since been replaced by Scorpio, but in other disciplines it is still retained. One of its uses is as a symbol for John the Evangelist.) Ever since Scorpio replaced the eagle, however, Scorpio has usually been associated with the planet Pluto; and the Ram is therefore more than ever the true representative of Mars.

Mars is the god of war, of aggression, and of creativity (the experience of centuries has shown us that war is the father of all things), of spring, and of the year's beginning. (For the Romans, March, the month consecrated to Mars, was the first month of the year. Then that disagreeable fellow Jesus came along with his ill-timed birthday and upset this perfectly good old order.) Mars is the god of new beginnings, of the creative principle, and, by all good rights, the god of creative and artistic personalities. Apollo, who is held in high regard in some circles (not by me, however), has something to do with culture, too; but this pasty-faced adolescent with his tiresome lyre and his Botticelli hairdo is more the god of literati than of poets. His place is in the Sunday literary supplement of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, not in the world of true poets, whose natures are Mars-like.

People born under the sign of the Ram and the star of Mars are aggressive and creative. (I am using the word "aggressive" here not in the common incorrect sense of "vicious, combative, malignant" but in the more general sense of "ready and willing to meet and deal with anyone or anything.") What they need more than anything else is a target against which they can expend their energies and so define and assert themselves. If a person born under Mars lacks this kind of external target and the resistance it offers him, he will turn his natural aggression inward and destroy himself.

The sign of Cancer, however, corresponds to the planet moon and the fourth astrological house. (Here the word "planet" is used in its traditional sense, not in the modern astronomical

one.) And the moon—which the Romance languages more aptly designate as feminine and call Luna, the goddess of night, or Isis, Astarte, Artemis, Diana, Hecate—the moon symbolizes the Great Mother, the feminine principle, the passive, the receptive, and the unconscious. The fourth house represents everything that has to do with a person's origins: his home life, his background, his relationship to his native soil—in short, his family and everything relating to his family. The sign of Cancer symbolizes the hermit crab I have discussed in earlier pages, the crab whose sole interest and ambition is to protect his unarmored and vulnerable hindquarters by sticking them into a vacant snail shell and who is constantly in search of a house, a home, domestic intimacy (whether in a snail's house or in the astrologer's fourth house). This hermit crab always withdraws into his home, withdraws into his loneliness and seclusion. He seeks refuge in everything that promotes that seclusion. He lulls himself into a cozy, childlike, regressive life, for it is the crab's nature to move backward in everything he does. He doesn't like to have anything to do with reality; he finds reality too "difficult." He prefers to retreat into a dreamworld of unreality. As the astrologer's guide puts it, "If he cannot live his dream, he dreams his life." He is never engaged in life but always looks at everything from afar and from the security of his house. Reality would be much too concrete and nowhere near delicate and fine enough for him.

It is easy enough to imagine what happens to a Ram when he comes under the influence of the fourth house, his parents' house, his mother's house, his family home. He loses that external target that is so essential to him. The outer world ceases to exist for him, and he has only the inner one. He directs his aggression back on himself and begins to attack himself. He comes under the influence of Cancer, and he consequently gets just that: cancer. Now, of course, the meaning of the term is not just medical but symbolic and astrological as well.

As if we had any need of astrology! It really doesn't matter much whether we believe in astrology or not; but for those in whom this discipline strikes a responsive chord the conclusion will be obvious: The fate of someone who finds himself in the situation described in this book is already written in the stars. The message is much clearer even than Professor Freud's utterly unequivocal one, which everyone has understood for ages. And this message can be read from the skies any night, either with or without a telescope. Here again I feel there is nothing esoteric about the facts themselves. What is at issue is whether we have eyes that are willing to see and ears that are willing to hear.

That is my life. I grew up in the best and most intact and most harmonious and most sterile and most hypocritical of all worlds. Now I stand contemplating the ruin that is my life. But how many thousands of times better it is to stand contemplating a ruin than to stand in front of a wobbly Christmas tree and live in constant fear that the whole idiotic thing is going to fall over and smash to smithereens. Which brings me to the moral of this tale: Better cancer than harmony. Or, in Spanish: *¡Viva la muerte!*

*Zurich, April 4, 1976*



# II *Ultima Necat*



I wrote down the history of my illness a while ago in the more or less clearly felt hope that a recapitulation of my past and confrontation with it would give me a certain distance on that past and perhaps even help me overcome it. Just the opposite has occurred. Having examined my past thoroughly, I find that the pain my personal history causes me is only coming down on me anew and with an intensity it had never reached before. Writing my memoirs has not brought me any peace. It has brought only more anxiety and despair.

My psychic disorder is no longer a depression that runs parallel to my official life and poisons that life. My illness has become an all-consuming fire, and now it is my external life—my job, my friends, my cancer—that runs parallel to the disease.

Since I have believed for a long time now that the physical and the mental state influence each other, it follows that my physical state has deteriorated rapidly. The small tumor that developed on my neck two and a half years ago and that then spread a bit in that area has now spread throughout my entire



system. My whole body is being devoured by this steadily metastasizing cancer. I am constantly undergoing treatment, and spend most of my time in the doctors' hands. One new symptom after another crops up, and every symptom says the same thing: *Memento mori*. And, of course, I am afraid, though not as much as I used to be. In the early stages of my disease, whenever a new lump appeared or I felt a new pain, I would say to myself: "I hope that isn't another sign of cancer." Now I can easily count up half a dozen places on my body where you can see and feel how, for example, the bone is being broken up and dissolved. I don't have to worry anymore whether a new symptom signals cancer or not. I know it signals cancer.

Nobody enjoys having cancer; I don't either. But I don't attribute any more significance to it than I feel it deserves. The main thing for me is not that I have cancer and that I am dying of it. The cancer is only the physical manifestation of my psychic state. It's only normal for a person to be afraid of death and to be depressed when he is dying, and whatever is normal about me has never worried me much. Fear of death is an emotion in its own right, but it is a minor and insignificant one in comparison to the emotional outbursts that really torture me.

There seems to be no end to the hatred and despair I feel. They are like a volcano that is exploding in me and that will never subside as long as I am alive. When I can't sleep at night and toss about in my bed, sweating, groaning, and howling, and when I run around in my apartment screaming senselessly and wailing at the walls, at those times the volcano is erupting. There are two specific physical sensations I suffer from over and over again. I often feel as if someone is slowly running a sword down the center of my spinal column right down to my tailbone. And my whole body is often suddenly shaken by pain. This is no mere shivering. It is not heat or cold that sets me trembling. It is not the weather or getting up too early on Monday morning. It is the naked, undisguised suffering of the

soul that hurls and tosses the body about in impotent and hopeless despair.

These physical reactions have nothing rational about them. They lead to nothing. They have no goal. They simply happen. The story of my life doesn't lead to anything either. It has no point. It simply happens. But that is the essence of all stories. They don't do anything but happen, and whether they are pleasant or unpleasant is quite immaterial.

My story is unpleasant, but I am writing it down despite that fact. Or, to put it more correctly, that is the very reason I am writing it down. I've decided to write down everything, and I think that's only right. If we are beaten, we cry out with pain. Crying out is irrational, too. It doesn't make anything better, and it is pointless. But it seems appropriate that we respond to the blows with screams. Screaming is the right thing to do. And in a similar way, writing down my story is the right thing for me to do.

I don't need to take up the subject of my family history again. I have already described it in my reminiscences. But I have to return to what resulted from that family history. I have to return over and over again to the product of that family, to the human wreckage that is myself; for the awareness of my destroyed life is like a machine gun that keeps blasting holes through me. The feeling of failure consumes me body and soul. The better I get to know myself, the more I experience myself as I really am: destroyed, castrated, whipped, dishonored, disgraced. With every curtain that I pull away from what was previously hidden in my unconscious, I see new and deeper dimensions of despair open up before me. It seems as if my suffering can only increase for all eternity without ever coming to an end. My world overflows with pain. As my situation worsens, my obligation to record and communicate these facts seems more and more pressing. For whose sake should I keep the story of my life secret? For whose sake should I keep silent?

If I kept silent, I would spare all those people who refuse to acknowledge that this is not the best of all possible worlds, all those who refuse to talk about unpleasant things and want to see only what is pleasant, all those who sweep the problems of our time under the rug instead of facing up to them, all those who condemn a critic of the existing order, even the most incorruptible critic, as a villain because they would rather live in an uncriticized pile of shit than in one where critics are crass enough to say “shit.” These are the very last people I want to spare and support and align myself with, for they are the very people who have made me what I am today. They don’t deserve my indulgence or consideration. They deserve my hatred. The reader will know whom I mean by this. I mean middle-class, capitalist, bourgeois society, the Moloch who devours his own children, who is about to devour me, and who soon will have swallowed me up altogether.

Of all the vices there are, there is one we cannot permit ourselves, and that is patience. I am thinking here of Job, the Old Testament model of this particular character trait. Even in the depths of his misery, Job never hits on the idea of taking a stand. All he does is cringe, or, as the Bible expresses it: “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Job’s wife, who was obviously the stronger character of the two, advised him: “Curse God, and die.”

But he said unto her: “What do you mean, curse God? What would God say to that? I’m sure God wouldn’t like it if I cursed Him.”

Well, so what if He didn’t like it? And so what if He did have something to say about it? Why would it be so dreadful if God was annoyed that Job had cursed Him?

God straightens things out in short order and lets Job know that it most certainly would not please Him to hear any criticism of His ways.

Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and

said: "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? . . . Who can come to him with his double bridle? Who can open the doors of his face? His teeth are terrible round about.

"Haven't I created leviathan, who is unequalled for cruelty? Can he not bite, murder, mutilate, cripple, destroy? How dare you question my authority when I am master over such horrors?"

Then Job answered the Lord, and said: "You're right. I acknowledge that you are the meanest, vilest, most brutal, perverse, sadistic, and degenerate type in the world. I acknowledge that you are a despot and a tyrant who strikes down and kills everything. This is reason enough for me to declare you the one true God and to honor and praise you. You are the foulest swine in the universe. My response to this fact is that I'm happy to be your subject, that I accept your authority, and that I will try to love you. To you we owe the Gestapo, the concentration camps, and the torture chambers. I therefore recognize you as the greatest and most powerful of all beings. Praised be the name of the Lord."

It is obvious which position—Job's or his wife's—is the ethically more compelling one. It is our duty to rebel against Him precisely because He *did* create leviathan. If He had not created it, we would not have any reason to rebel. Job's reaction is not only cowardly; it is stupid as well.

Like so many objectionable types, Job and his sort have won a great following, and the world is positively swarming with Jobs these days. You find them everywhere. My father was one of them. But the very fact that there are so many Jobs makes it an even more urgent duty for me *not* to follow their example but to side with Job's wife and die cursing God. If the only consolations we can find are false ones, we can't allow ourselves any consolations at all.

One question we cannot consider here is: What earthly use is it to curse this leviathan God? The point is that it doesn't have to be any use at all. The only thing that matters is that it's right.

How the other whipped and beaten creatures of this world react doesn't particularly concern me. All that matters is that "cursing God," to use the Biblical expression again, seems to be the right thing for me to do. It doesn't matter whether I am the only destroyed creature there is or whether I am one among a thousand others, and it is pointless to compare the various fates of the destroyed. Every day I see countless frustrated, crippled, and ruined lives. I see them in schools, on the street, in restaurants. Whether they are being pushed around in wheelchairs or driven off in an ambulance after a traffic accident, or whether they are mental or psychological wrecks, there is no end to their numbers. But it's useless to say to myself whenever I see someone like this that I am not the only defeated person in this world and that the other fellow is suffering a sad fate, too. That doesn't help me, and it doesn't help the other fellow, either. He has lost a leg in an accident. That's his problem. I'm neurotic. That's my problem. Everybody has to cope with his own problem. Someone else's amputated leg isn't my problem, and my neurosis isn't his. That's why I can't take on the job of telling those other people's stories for them. Everyone is alone with his own pain and his own isolation. Everyone has his own story.

Many people are worse off than I. That's true enough, but comparisons are useless nonetheless. If I have a toothache, it doesn't matter whether my neighbor has a worse toothache than I do. I can't deal with the toothaches of the whole world. All I can do is see to it that the dentist pulls my aching tooth.

But lots of people are more inclined to worry about their neighbor's greater toothache than about the lesser one that happens to be their own. Or, to return to the classic formulation, they behold the mote in their brother's eye but consider not the beam in their own. When I was still a child, there was an expression that was current in the social circles I was forced to regard as my own. The expression was: Anyone who doesn't like it here can go to Moscow. The reference was to dissidents and

to critics of our Swiss system, the implication being that anyone who had criticisms to make of Switzerland should go to that legendary city of Moscow, where—as we all knew—everything was much worse than in Switzerland. Thus, “to go to Moscow” meant—for the person who said it—something like choosing the lesser of two evils instead of thinking whether it mightn’t be possible to correct the ills in one’s own backyard.

What people really meant when they said “Go to Moscow!” was: We are not willing to hear any criticism of our ways. We are not interested in knowing whether we should improve or not. We prefer to point a finger at “Moscow,” where things are much worse, so that we will come off well in the comparison. We don’t need to improve things here because we’re already way ahead of “Moscow.” If anybody needs to make improvements, it’s those “Muscovites.” The beam in our own eye doesn’t interest us as long as we can divert attention away from our own shortcomings by pointing to the mote in our brother’s eye.

In reality, of course, there is no such place as this legendary Moscow where everything is much worse than where we happen to be. There isn’t a place where everything is much worse any more than there is an El Dorado where everything is much better. That Moscow where the nonconformists were supposed to go is an imaginary place, and even if things in Moscow are in fact much worse than in Zurich—as many Swiss hope—that doesn’t make “Moscow” any less unreal. One reason—but by no means the only reason—this is so is that it’s possible to be happy in Moscow and unhappy in Zurich. Even if Moscow was the gloomy place Swiss legend makes it out to be, what difference would that make to a happy Muscovite? And even if life in Zurich was as marvelous as everyone here makes it out to be, what good is that to an unhappy Zurichers?

But there is an even more fundamental reason why the Moscow of the saying is an imaginary place. In judging whether something is good or bad, it is irrelevant to ask whether some-

thing else is better or worse. Of two abysmally bad things one of them will necessarily be better than the other, and of two first-rate things one will have to take second place and so be the worse. If all we know about "Moscow" is that it's worse, then we know nothing at all about it; and it ceases to have any real existence. Saying "Go to Moscow" is as meaningless as saying "Go to that place that doesn't exist." There is no road that leads to Moscow, and I feel there never can be a road that leads there. The situation we happen to find ourselves in is the only possible situation we could be in, and we are never justified in saying: "Well, I can at least be grateful I'm not in Moscow, because I'd be much worse off there."

Whenever I see another cripple rolled past me in a wheelchair, it's almost as if a voice were calling out to me: "Be content with your lot. That fellow is worse off than you." And then I realize it's as if that voice were saying: "Go to Moscow if you don't like it here." But the sight of other cripples doesn't open up any road to Moscow. I'm not in Moscow. I'm not anywhere but here. I'm not anyone else but myself, and I'm living out my own tragedy. Indeed, I'm face to face with the final catastrophe. I have already summarized the plot of this tragedy in my memoirs: I'm the neurotic son of a neurotic father and a neurotic mother. My family represents for me the very essence of everything I despise, and yet as a member of this family I can't be anything but neurotic myself. I'm trying to fight my way free of my past, but my past—in the form of cancer—will have devoured me before I can liberate myself from it. The devastating aspect of the whole situation is that I can't win my freedom merely by not wanting to be like my parents and by struggling not to be like them. My parents are contained within me, both as a foreign body and as part of my own makeup, and they are devouring me. The same thing is true of my cancer. It, too, is devouring me and it too is both a dis-

eased part of my own organism and a foreign body within that organism.

Someone once put to me the impossible question of whether I would rather have been my father than myself. My answer was "No, of course not." My father was one of those many people who are worse off than I. He was like one of those cases who roll past me in wheelchairs and prompt the question: Would you rather be like them? My father was a typical Gold Coast millionaire who had sixty years of frustration behind him and died of a heart attack. Is it better to simmer to death slowly over the low flame of frustration for sixty years or to die at thirty of cancer induced by despair? Is it better to have the mill of hopelessness turn a little more slowly for sixty years or to have it turn at a faster tempo and grind you to death at thirty? The second choice is preferable. If, as an offshoot of my family, I have no other choice than to be crushed by despair, then I would rather die at thirty of the cancer generated by my hopelessness than wait sixty years for a ruptured aneurysm to put me out of my misery. If death is the only choice I have, then I prefer an honest suicide to one that is hushed over.

But what good does this insight do me? Am I supposed to recall my parents' lives and take some comfort in the fact that I'm not my father? What do I care about my father? Asking me to compare my life to my father's and to declare his the worse of the two is like asking me to go to Moscow. That doesn't do me any good. My father is dead. He has died already. I'm the one who is dying now. That my father's death released him from a psychological state far worse than my own has no bearing on my death.

For some people, death can amount to the same thing as "going to Moscow." Death reconciles them to many things, particularly to those things we would do better not to be reconciled to. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, the saying goes. Why? If every-



thing was not so *bonum* about these dead people, why should everything bad about them suddenly be forgotten just because they're dead? What I have in mind here isn't so much the usual social habit of claiming that anyone who is now dead was a good, lovable, and valuable person. I'm thinking instead of how we relate to our own deaths and how, in the face of death, we are tempted to picture ourselves as much better people than we in fact are. Even death, I think, tries to seduce us with the prospect of going to Moscow.

If I look at my life as a whole and pass judgment on it, I can only conclude that it is a failure. As long as we are still alive, we can always hope that our lives have been a failure only "thus far" and that they will improve in the future. But when we're facing death, we don't have that back door to slip through. "Thus far" doesn't apply anymore. All we can say is that our lives *are* a failure. In this extreme situation there is no escaping to Moscow. It is of no help or use to look at death through rose-colored glasses and claim that your life has not been so bad after all and that you're dying at peace with yourself and the world. If it is not true that you're dying at peace with yourself and the world, then you shouldn't say it, not even at the moment of death, when there is no possible chance for aid, improvement, or comfort.

Shortly before Fontane's Effi Briest dies of the grief her parents' and her husband's lack of understanding have caused her, she remarks to her mother that she is dying at peace with herself and reconciled with the world. She compares life to a description of a banquet she read in a book. One of the guests has to leave the table before the banquet is over, but it turns out that his early departure did not deprive him of much after all. When he asks someone else what happened after he had left, the reply is: "Oh, nothing much. You didn't really miss anything." Effi dies as a very young woman, almost as a girl. She dies of grief, but she has made her peace with death, and she

feels she hasn't missed much. Lucky Effi or unlucky Effi? Interestingly enough, my father could never stand *Effi Briest*. He was put off by the very idea that someone might ask himself at the end of his life whether that life had been worthwhile or not. The only explanation I can find for this aversion of his is that he was afraid to raise this question, and the only reason he was afraid to raise it was that he must have felt intuitively what the answer to it would be. Was it lucky or unlucky for my father that he didn't dare ask whether he had missed something after all, even though life amounts to "nothing much"?

If your life amounts to "nothing much," then you've achieved too little and have failed the test of life. When I ask myself what it is people want above all else, I imagine that *happiness* is their primary goal. And happiness, as I picture it, is a state in which the fact of existence is not a source of pain but a state in which one enjoys life and takes pleasure in it. I have never experienced this state and I don't know what it is like. The capacity to be happy has been destroyed in me. That is probably the hallmark of neurosis. A neurotic is a person who is *unable* to be happy. The clearest indication of this incapacity for happiness is my sexual impotence. The destruction of my sexual capability is surely the greatest harm that has befallen me. I am an emotional gelding; I feel no sexual impulses; I can't have sexual feelings for either women or men. I have never had any relationships with women because I can't love them and I can't desire them. From that it follows logically enough that I am not able to engage in sexual intercourse, even if the act were purely mechanical and devoid of all arousal or feeling. I cannot force to happen what simply cannot happen, and so I remain physically impotent, too.

Another typical sign of neurosis is that I cannot laugh. This may be a less dramatic sign than the sexual one, but it is not therefore any the less oppressive. What makes it so oppressive is that I cannot force laughter to happen, either. I can't laugh

because laughter simply does not "happen" in me. This, too, is an incapacity and an impotence that cannot be corrected by willpower. I can't command myself to laugh. Laughter just won't come. Something remains dead in me.

The word usually used these days to designate this kind of incapacity is "frustration." And of all frustrations, sexual frustration is obviously the most deadly. This frustration has ethical dimensions because it affects honor. Human honor consists of sexuality. Sexuality is the stuff of which honor is made, and there is no other kind of honor but sexual honor. I would even say that the concepts "honor" and "sexuality" are identical. They are synonyms for the same idea. Such is my feeling, at any rate. If I ask myself of what stuff is sexual frustration made, I have to reply "dishonor, disgrace." The deadliest aspect of the sexual frustration I experience is the sexual disgrace I suffer from. This feeling, too, often takes the form of a physical sensation: I feel forced to lower my head because I cannot claim the right to stand with my head up.

To say that I am being eaten alive by frustration is no mere turn of phrase. It is actually happening in physical form. I am in fact being eaten alive by cancer. Indeed, the cancer is nothing other than my frustration. The frustration is the reason for the cancer, the origin of it, the despair at its roots, whatever other explanations medicine may care to offer.

A second goal in human life is, I feel, the achievement of *meaning*. If we cannot be happy, then we at least want to know that our lives, even the unhappy ones, have meaning. But the issue of meaning in life has been obscured by a lot of tommyrot. I am thinking primarily here of the widespread, popular tendency to find everything meaningful, no matter how absurd it really is. One of the major offenders in perverting the concept of "meaning" is the Christian religion, which teaches us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the constructor of this bird having willed it so. What the Christian dogma boils

down to is this: If the sparrow doesn't fall, then God has willed that the sparrow should live, and the sparrow's life is therefore meaningful. But if the sparrow falls, God has willed that, too, and the dead sparrow is as meaningful as the live sparrow. The only difference is that we fail to see the meaning in the sparrow's death. If the sparrow lives, that has a meaning we're capable of understanding. If the sparrow dies, that has a meaning we're *not* capable of understanding. Ergo, *everything* is meaningful. This proof contains a contradiction so repulsive that it moves me to the point of violence. Faced with a proposition so monstrous, we would have to invent the God who created this sparrow (it is my personal belief that He does not exist) if for no other reason than to punch Him in the nose.

I am convinced that there is such a thing as meaning. If this is so, there must be meaninglessness as well. It is impossible for everything to have meaning. Some things have to be devoid of meaning. And in judging human lives we can't claim, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that every one of them has meaning. Meaninglessness is a reality, and even if the moment when we are asking whether our lives have had meaning or not happens to be the moment of our death—the moment, as I have said, when there are no more back doors that lead to Moscow—that still doesn't alter the fact that we have to answer the question either with yes or with no. A no answer will be painful for the individual, but that doesn't make the no any less true.

I cannot discover any meaning in my life. My parents produced in me a human being who was not physically weak enough to die immediately after birth but one who was so thoroughly destroyed psychologically by the neurotic milieu in which he grew up that he was no longer capable of leading a life that could be called human. I have existed physically for thirty years. For this same period of time, I have been psychologically dead. Now, after thirty years of sterility, my body is

breaking down, and this unviable human product is destroying itself. Does it make any kind of sense that thirty years of misery, depression, and frustration have intervened between my psychic death and my physical death? Does it make sense that I did not die the moment I was born? No, I cannot find any sense or meaning in that. I find it absurd that my parents produced this tormented creature that I am and that they had nothing but their own incapacity for life and their own neurosis to offer him as a legacy. It would have made more sense if they had not bothered to produce me at all. It would have made more sense if my father had had himself sterilized and my mother had been infertile. But those things didn't happen, and the fact that they didn't happen I call absurd.

But then there is a third possible goal, aside from happiness and meaning, that a human life can strive for, and that goal is *clarity*. Even though I am not happy and my life cannot have meaning, I can at least achieve some clarity on what I am and what my life is. Looking at things from this point of view, I feel I can clearly detect a certain logic and consistency in my life. I have already written about my parents' neurotic tendencies and mentioned my assumption that they were not happy people, either. If I trace the course of my life, I can see in it a chain of cause and effect that had to lead to catastrophe: My parents' neuroses were responsible for producing my neurosis; my neurosis was responsible for producing my lifelong despair; my despair is responsible for my being ill with cancer; and my cancer will be the cause of my death. Not exactly a cheerful tale, but it has its inherent logic. I find my personal history lethally oppressive, but it has its logic. I see in it a kind of ill fate that does not prompt me to say, "Oh, come on, things like that just don't happen," but moves me to recognize instead that things like that do indeed happen. This is no doubt what we mean when we talk about draining the cup of life to the dregs,

only to find that our lives are the dregs, the dregs and nothing else.

I also recognize the necessity to make the best of every situation, and by way of that insight, I come to the necessity to be honest. If we have once realized that our case is lost, it is dishonest to hide this fact from ourselves. A defeat owned up to is better than one not owned up to.

I haven't made it. I have suffered defeat. The war is lost. The war against whom? Who are my enemies? That's hard to say, although a number of words for them come to mind: my parents, my family, the milieu I grew up in, bourgeois society, Switzerland, the system. None of these terms taken alone captures the whole truth I am after here, but each of them contains a small portion of what I would call the hostile principle operative in my life. This thing could also be described as a completely amorphous and anonymous overwhelming force in which the individual concepts like "my parents" or "society" flare up occasionally like momentary sparks. In my present state, I am not overly concerned with who is a part of this anonymous force or what his degree of involvement with it is, for I feel that at this time and in this place—in Zurich, in Switzerland, in our political system—everyone is threatened and harmed by this anonymous hostile principle. I have already mentioned earlier in my reminiscences that I do not consider myself an isolated case, severe as my case may be by comparison to others, but as one case among many. Everyone has been exposed to the same kind of damage I have. Some have been relatively unscathed by it. Others have overcome it. Others have more trouble bearing up under it but still manage to keep their heads above water. Still others have not overcome it, and they are being destroyed by it.

According to Sartre, the key point in this situation, which seems to be universally human, is not "what has been made out

of a person but what he makes out of what has been made of him." I can subscribe to that. We certainly can have the chance to make something out of what has been made of us. It may be that everyone has this chance. Even I might have had such a chance. Perhaps if the harm my parents (and everything that comes under the concept "parents") did to me had not been so boundless, I might have had time enough to become myself before my cancer could devour me. Or if the course of my disease had not progressed so rapidly, I might have been granted a reprieve long enough to let me overcome my neurosis. Perhaps. But these hypotheses are idle because there is no place for them in reality. Or, to come back to Sartre, I have not succeeded in making something out of what has been made of me. Something has been made of me all right—a total wreck. But the salvaging of this wreck, which is what Sartre calls for in this situation, is more than I have been able to manage.

I want to add one final item to this inventory of my life. My tragedy consists in this: I was not able to be and act out in my life what I feel to be the only worthwhile things in life. The reason I could not is that my own will and feelings and self were not the dominant forces in my life. It was the legacy of others that controlled me. What became of me was not what I wanted but what my parents—and it is more accurate to use quotation marks here: my "parents"—implanted in me. My parents willed, for example, that sexuality would have no place in my life, even though, in that part of myself that I like to describe as "my true self," I value sexuality above all else. I feel that only the very smallest part of myself is my true self. The greatest part of that self has been poisoned, violated, and destroyed by the hostile principle I mentioned above, a principle of which my parents were the most typical incarnation. What consumes me and what I suffer from is like an immense foreign body that is considerably larger than the part of myself I designate as "my true self."

The use of the concept of a "foreign body" makes the borderline between what is alien to me and what is native to me clearly visible, and the final step I have to take to achieve the goal of clarity in my life is to determine which last, minute part of myself has *not* been poisoned by my past. I have to know which part of myself I can embrace without having to turn away from it again in hatred and abhorrence. In this regard, too, I feel there is a parallel between my neurosis and my cancer.

Just as my body has been invaded by the foreign body of cancer (and even this foreign body originally consisted of non-malignant cells that were part of my body), so my soul has been invaded by the foreign body that was my "parents." And, like the cancerous tumors of the body, this foreign element is intent on destroying the entire organism. As we know, cancerous tumors are not in themselves painful. It is the otherwise healthy organs that register pain when the tumors exert pressure on them. I think the same principle applies to my psychic illness: Wherever I experience pain, my true self is still healthy and intact. My parents' legacy in me is like a huge malignant tumor. Everything in me that suffers from that "tumor"—all my misery and my pain and my despair—that is my true self. I am *like* my parents, but I am also *not* like them. My individuality consists of the pain I feel. My life is more tragic than my parents'; their lives were more depressing than mine. My parents destroyed themselves without ever realizing that they, too, might have had a chance to escape from their resignation. I do realize that I might have had such a chance; but because this chance did not materialize, the hopelessness I feel, fueled as it is by deathly disappointment, is much fiercer and more piercing than the dull ache of my parents' lifelong depression. I differ from my parents, too, in the degree of my hopelessness, for they were unwilling to run the risk that hopelessness entails. And the manner of my death differs from my father's. The hackneyed and sentimental image of a worn-out old clock that is choking



in its own dust and finally just refuses to strike anymore is quite an accurate one for my father. He really was like some kind of machine that manages, with the greatest difficulty, to keep ticking for a while but then just gives up and is nothing but a rusting heap of scrap metal. I see my own death more as an explosion bred of despair. I'll go down in flames. That may be a hackneyed and sentimental image, too; but it's not as bad as running down like an old clock.

And then there is the hatred. A creature that will still scratch and bite and hate like an abused animal despite all the hopelessness and meaninglessness it feels, that is my true self, too. I have been destroyed, but I will not make common cause with those who have destroyed me. The last shreds of my real self, ground down by suffering and pain and consumed by cancer, are dying now, true enough, but dying under protest. Meaning and meaninglessness are categories unimportant to the idea of protest. Protest is self-generating and exists independent of any concepts of meaning, rationality, or good sense. Was it rational for Ulrike Meinhof to declare total war against an entire nation? "Rational" is probably not the right word to describe what she did, but then "irrational" isn't, either. But then again, even if we do call it irrational, it still remains *logical* and *consistent*. I don't know what the circumstances were that made a terrorist of Ulrike Meinhof, but I'm convinced they were not favorable circumstances; no one whose life is going well becomes a terrorist. It's highly probable that her life was an unhappy one; perhaps it was a meaningless one as well. But one thing her life did have was *consistency*. I may not be tossing bombs around at the moment, but I feel that I, too, have consistency. Even if that's the only thing I do have.

If I ask myself whether I might not yet find happiness, consolation, and salvation, I can't delude myself about the answer. The answer is no. Life has not granted me these things. But there are two things it has granted me. One is clarity, the ability

to analyze the catastrophe of my life, to understand it and not deceive myself about it. The other is the strength to bear the truth as I have seen it. My life is hell. I know that, and I'm facing up to that fact without attempting to disguise it.

I'm in a concentration camp now, and I am being gassed to death by the "parental" legacy inside me. But I am *in* the concentration camp, and the people who are gassing me are *outside* it. Within the camp, I have a certain measure of individual freedom, however limited that freedom may be. I am free to choose whether I will respond to the blows I receive by crying out or whether I will acquiesce in my mistreatment. I can choose whether I will cry out "Heil Hitler!" or "Murderer!" while I am being gassed. I am free to comprehend the perversity of the society that made me what I am, and I am free to suffer from that knowledge. I could resign myself to everything and consent to my own murder. My determination to reject my past to the same extent that I suffer from it is the form my freedom takes. I am defeated and destroyed, castrated, violated, poisoned, and murdered; but this vestige of individual freedom I have preserved for myself distinguishes me from some dumb animal going to the slaughter. By virtue of that freedom, even I achieve some measure of human dignity.

It is, I feel, the immoderation of my pain that ultimately emancipates me, despite all else, from my family and my past. (In the circles I used to frequent, people died more restrained deaths.) I have fretted myself to death. I am dying from my misery. It may be that death is the price I have to pay for wanting to be different from my parents. It may be that my cancer is even a voluntary decision on my part, the price I am willing to pay to escape from my parents. One could object here that this is like tossing out the baby with the bathwater. But if the baby is doomed and has to die anyhow, then isn't it more imperative than ever to get rid of the bathwater, particularly when that water is so abhorrent and repulsive that it has to be gotten rid

of *no matter what the cost?* I have to emancipate myself from my past no matter what the cost because the misery I have suffered from that past has filled almost my entire life. If this emancipation cannot be achieved at any other price than the price of death, then even death is not too high a price. No price is ever too high if what one acquires with it represents an absolute necessity. I could resign myself and make peace with the idea that I just am the way my parents made me. But then I would be betraying that little part of myself I have called "my true self." If I resigned myself to my situation and suffered less from what I am, I might not even die of my misery. I might go on living. But then I would have saved the part of my life I abhor most at the cost of the only part that still remains unpoisoned. Then my defeat would be even more ignominious than before, because I would become a traitor to myself. The fact that I have not done this remains, despite all else, a small victory I can claim within this otherwise vast and crushing defeat.

*Zurich, June 7, 1976*

# **III Knight, Death, and Devil**



I feel compelled to write a third part of my history even though I do not think my situation has changed in any essential way or that I have come to any new insights on it. Everything remains the same with me, but everything has changed, too. I'll try to clarify this with an example that has, I assume, like everything else in my case, psychosomatic character. For a short time now my diagnosis has been somewhat different from what it was before. The doctors have recently discovered, after innumerable examinations, that I am not suffering from cancer but from a similar virulent disease called malignant lymphoma. This disease shares many features with cancer, but there are also several differences that justify the different designation. This suggests the following observations: The differences between malignant lymphoma and cancer are too subtle for the layman to detect. As far as the layman is concerned, I still have "a kind of cancer." Only a physician will be able to ascertain that my illness is not cancer. We can also look at this matter from a historical perspective. Not too long ago, medicine was still not capable of

distinguishing my illness from cancer and would have called it cancer. Certain conditions have to prevail, then, before the difference between cancer and non-cancer can even be perceived.

My personal situation also has to be taken into account. Malignant lymphoma is a virulent disease, too, and therefore one that threatens life. If I die soon of malignant lymphoma, it will amount to the same thing for me as if I had died of cancer. Or, to make the same point differently, if I had cancer—as everyone assumed only a short while ago—and survived it, I would in fact have survived it despite all its virulence. This insight makes the statistics appear relative. The fact is that the chances for survival are somewhat better for malignant lymphoma than they are for cancer. But it makes little difference to an individual whether he dies of a disease with statistically better chances for survival or of some other one. For the patient, all that matters is getting well again. The statistical chances for or against his recovery are of little interest to him.

The major difference between my present medical situation and my previous one, then, is one of style. The word “cancer” expresses everything we traditionally regard as evil. From a stylistic or, if you will, poetic point of view, the word “lymphoma” expresses nothing at all. It has no flavor; it inspires no dread. It is just another item of medical terminology. It has no magical powers but is merely a word that we have to look up in a medical dictionary. What this means, in the context of this essay, is that the word “cancer” stands for evil in a general and undifferentiated sense, while the term “malignant lymphoma” stands for evil in a very precise and highly differentiated sense. The purpose of this essay is to define the difference between the generalized evil and the specific one.

As far as my emotional state is concerned, the difference is of no great significance. I am no less miserable than I was before, and the only thing I can do in the face of this misery is to write it down over and over again. As long as I remain captive

to this misery, I have to keep repeating that fact and screaming out my grief, even if I will never be able to get it all out and will have to spend what time is left me doing nothing but spewing up my pain. Vomiting my undigested past for the rest of my life is not a particularly cheerful prospect, but it would be much worse if I were unable to do it at all. The feeling of nausea before throwing up is always worse than actually throwing up.

The question is justified here whether enough isn't enough and whether I haven't already given my past all the attention it deserves. The realities of my life indicate that enough is not enough and that the agony of my past and present life has not yet been dispelled. New cancerous lesions, both physical and psychological, keep cropping up continually; and so far none of these lesions has been the last. "The last" can mean one of two things. It can mean that no more will appear after this and that once this last one has been healed, I will be cured of my illness. But the last one can also be the one that will kill me. Either of these things can happen. For the moment, only one thing is certain: that the malignancy is now quite literally in my bones, piercing me, as the idiom has it, to the marrow; for it is there, in the marrow of my bones, that my disease has been doing the greatest damage recently. It has invaded every single one of the innumerable bones in my skeleton and is now just waiting for its chance to destroy those bones and me with them. The situation is similar with my psychic disease. My neurosis, too, has invaded every last corner of my being and is waiting there, just as malignant, just as widespread, just as fatal. No one can say yet whether the poisoned mass of the malignant lymphoma will kill me or not, nor can anyone say yet whether the poisoned mass of my neurosis will become too great for life to bear it.

On top of all this comes the fear that I will not have time to do what I've set out to do. My psychic illness is not yet cured. If I die of my physical disease before the psychic one is cured,



then I will not have made it in time, and the day will come when I will have to say that I have failed and have not achieved my life's work. What oppresses me most is the fear that I don't have enough time, that I won't live as long as I need to live if I am to free myself from my past.

For that is my task: to free myself from the crushing pain of my past. There is no doubt in my mind that this is the crucial and imperative task of my life, whether I am able to accomplish it or not. The validity of the problem itself is not affected by whether I win or lose. It is painful to me to think that my probability of losing is great, but that alters nothing in the statement of the problem. Every moment from my past has the power to kill me, just as every cell in my body has the potential to destroy my organism. The answer is obvious: I have to get away from here. I have to get away from everything I have been because it threatens me with death.

The situation can even be stated mathematically: The farther away I can get from what is killing me, the better. I may not have time enough, but the tiniest partial victory is still worth something, even if I cannot defeat the malignancy in its entirety. Better small victories than none at all. Or, to put it the other way around: *Tanto molesta lo poco como lo mucho*. Relief is relief, no matter how small; and, conversely, even when we feel we have reached the utter depths of despair, we can still experience some further torment that adds to that despair.

Mikhail A. Bulgakov's book *The Master and Margarita* provides an excellent illustration of this point. It was not until I read this book that I had ever heard mention of the flies that tormented Jesus on the cross. The "sacred head, now wounded" has been celebrated thousands of times in songs and paintings, but no one before Bulgakov had ever thought about the flies. Flies are certainly not the worst thing that can beset a person, either on the cross or under normal circumstances. But if you should happen to be hanging on the cross, soaked in your own

blood, suffering humiliation and physical agony, and broiling in the Mediterranean sun, then a swarm of flies buzzing around you may well seem like the last straw. From a certain point on, they may even seem to be the worst of your torments. I can imagine that a swarm of annoying flies might be the last thing a crucified person would register just before he lost consciousness and long after pain and exhaustion had blended together into a sensation of generalized and undifferentiated suffering.

On the other hand, if someone is sentenced to be hanged and is already tied to the tree he will be hanged from as he waits to be executed, we can assume that he will, if it's a hot day, choose to sit in the shade of the tree rather than not. That will not alter the fact that he is going to be hanged, but it is obviously better to await one's execution in the shade than in the glaring sun.

I feel, similarly, that any alleviation of my psychic illness is worthwhile, even if it is too late for a complete cure. It is still not certain, however, that I will not be cured. I am not cured yet, it is true, but it has not been established beyond all reasonable doubt that I am incurable. As long as the hopelessness of my situation is still not proved, there is reason to hope, and if I ask myself what it is that keeps me going and lets me continue to endure my life, the answer is my hope for improvement. Up till now, this hope for a better life has been greater than my despair over my past and present situation, and the desire to be released from that situation has been stronger than the desire to take my own life.

This is nothing new, either; but I feel compelled to repeat this insight again and again. Even if I have nothing new to say, I want to keep saying over and over what I have said before. I have already put down the essentials of my history, but the variations and ramifications of this history insist on being described in their particular individuality. My main goal at this point is clarity, the need to bring the various aspects of the

misery that threatens to suffocate me into sharper focus and to call them by name.

I have already suggested that what is unusual about my misfortune and what puts me so completely at the mercy of it is a quantitative matter. Everyone is neurotic, but I'm a little more neurotic than other people. Everyone is sick, and probably all illnesses are caused psychologically. (The hypothesis has been put forward that even disasters like automobile accidents are psychological in origin.) But migraine headaches pass and cancer kills. It is irrelevant to suggest that since everyone is neurotic my neurosis, too, must fall within the realm of normality. I'm willing enough to believe that I am "normal" in that I am suffering from the same neurosis that afflicts everyone else, but I am convinced that what is abnormal about my case lies in the quantitative difference, in the little bit extra that distinguishes the psychic damage I have sustained from the psychic damage that "normal" people have sustained. Water doesn't boil until it reaches 100 degrees Centigrade. It doesn't boil at 98 degrees, and it doesn't boil at 99 degrees, but at 100 degrees it boils. That is the minute difference that makes such a big difference.

What finally sets the pot boiling is the difference between 99 and 100 degrees. It's a minimal difference on the thermometer but a crucial one all the same. I feel the need to understand things clearly. I described in the first part of this history how "difficult" everything was in my parents' house. I'm going to try to demonstrate now that nothing is "difficult" but that everything is ultimately simple or at least simple to express in words. What I mean by this is that the statement of a problem is always simple enough even if the solution to that problem is difficult. Life is not "difficult." It's very simple. The only difficult thing about it is mastering it. The essentials of life aren't "difficult," either. Of themselves, they are simple, but it is often frightening to call them by name. We have trouble saying "He is dead" not

because that sentence is difficult to articulate but because it is so terrifying.

My world has become simpler and more oppressive in the course of my illness. My fears, my anxieties, and my despair have increased steadily, but now I am able to call all those fears and afflictions by name. Names are of great importance. Just as Adam, at the beginning of the world, felt the need to name all the animals and say: Your name is tiger, and your name is spider, and your name is kangaroo, so I feel the need, faced as I am with imminent destruction, to say to each stabbing pain: Your name is thus, and your name is so. No one wants to be anonymous, and presumably no one wants to die of something anonymous.

But, most important of all, I want to be able to give myself a name and say to myself: My name is such and such. My life consists primarily of unhappiness. I have already recorded that in the first part of my history: On the basis of everything I know about myself, it is only logical that I should be unhappy and therefore my unhappiness is not in itself very interesting. The reason that I am unhappy is that I cannot be what I want to be. The greatest part of myself does not consist of my true self but of some alien element that is hostile to it and is even threatening to devour and destroy it. I am, for the most part, a waste product made up of bourgeois prejudices and frustrations. (I'll have more to say about these concepts later.) But then there is another part of me that does not consist of these things. I have already defined my individuality as the pain I feel at being the way I am. I would like to expand this definition now and suggest that my individuality consists not only of the pain I feel over my situation but also of the judgment I make on it. If I have to regard myself as a waste product of bourgeois society, I would now like to crystallize out of that waste the part of me that reflects on being waste, for it is this part of me that is me. And

it is this part that constitutes whatever is genuinely interesting in my history. My misfortune is merely an arbitrarily selected fragment of an all-pervading misfortune; as such, it is representative of generic misfortune and is therefore not particularly interesting. The only thing that is of interest is my individual rebellion against this misfortune. Only the *individual* aspects of my history constitute my history; or, more accurately stated, *my* history consists solely of what is individual to me.

Almost everything about me was programmed in advance. My neurotic parents, a neurotic milieu, and, on my part, a certain obvious receptivity for the neurotic elements in my environment made of me the product that I now am. But that isn't all I am. I am something more than the mathematically calculable product of an infernal computer, a product I find thoroughly detestable. This something more is the very thing that extricates me from the influence of that infernal machinery, and this thing I do not find detestable. It is not preprogrammed or compulsive or degenerate. It is new and important. Obviously, a person will be unhappy if he is degenerate. But the crucial thing here is what I do with the part of me that is not degenerate. This is the fascinating and unusual aspect of a history that is otherwise no more than another ordinary and therefore uninteresting tale of misfortune.

The fact that I had parents who passed on to me their unresolved problems and their neuroses does not make me anything special. That is the normal course of things, and all parents do it. Parents are a necessary evil. We have to have them to exist. I have often wondered whether the evil wasn't greater than the necessity in my case, but I have to answer this question negatively. If it really would have been better for me not to have been born at all, I would have committed suicide long ago. I conclude from the fact that I have not killed myself that the need to live has thus far outweighed all the afflictions of my life.

The unusual thing about my case is that the evil influence of

my surroundings and of my parents was a little bit greater than it was for other abnormal or normal people; and that little bit more was just enough more to be disastrous. Perhaps I can illustrate this point with an example from nature. A child's individuality and the hostile parental influence to which it is subject are comparable to factors in an ecosystem. Take a forest that is inhabited by deer and wolves. The wolves eat the deer; the deer eat the vegetation; and the forest provides a habitat for both the deer and the wolves. If there are too many wolves, they eat too many deer. The result is an excess of vegetation. The forest becomes too luxuriant and jungle-like, and neither deer nor wolves can live in it anymore. If, however, there are too many deer, the wolves can't eat enough deer. The result is that the deer eat too much vegetation. The forest becomes depleted and, again, incapable of supporting either deer or wolves. It is right—and essential to life—that the wolves eat a certain number of the deer. But they can't eat too many, nor can they eat too few.

My life resembles an ecological imbalance of this kind. Being eaten a little bit does not overstep the limits of the normal and the healthy. My problem is that too much of me was eaten. That one creature in the forest eats another is in the natural order of things. The forest will continue to function as long as the proper proportions are maintained. But the minute too much of anything gets eaten, the forest will not function anymore, and will die. The tastes of any particular observer are of no importance here. It makes no difference whether he happens to prefer deer over wolves or vice versa. The deer are not those "poor deer," and the wolves are not those "awful wolves." All that matters is that the animals in the forest eat and are eaten in the right proportions. If they do and are, the forest will function.

And so we come to the definition of life: The forest is alive as long as it functions. Someone looking at a forest doesn't ask whether it makes any kind of grand philosophical sense that the

wolves eat the deer and the deer eat the leaves. All he knows is that the forest exists and is green. That seems to satisfy him well enough. I quite agree with Wilhelm Reich's view that the only thing that matters in life is that life works. We don't need to give it some kind of "meaning." Or, to put it differently, the observer looking at the forest in my example isn't thinking in terms of what we ordinarily call "meaning" when he finds it good that the forest works. He finds the functioning of the forest good because he would think it an "unhappy" state of affairs if the forest did not function. I therefore conclude that not to function is to be unhappy and that to function is to be happy. Or, putting it the other way around, to be happy is to function.

I think, too, that happiness is a very concrete thing. It has something brutally direct about it. Life is a pretty harsh business, so why should happiness be a matter of great delicacy? We are happy to the extent that we are alive. It doesn't take any great amount of education to see that. If someone is unhappy or is lying dead on the street, we don't need a professor to study the case thoroughly and then pronounce from the richness of his wisdom: "This man is dead."

I don't need a professor to pass judgment on my case, either. All I need is the courage to call a spade a spade. I'm unhappy because I don't function and never have functioned. I didn't act young when I was young. I haven't acted grown up as an adult. As a man, I haven't been masculine. I haven't functioned in any respect. Now, in order to make this non-functioning visible for all the rest of the world, my body is following suit, symbolically and logically, and is refusing to function, too. My body is sick, poisoned, permeated with death. This non-functioning, this death, this death of the feelings, this death of the body, this death of life, that is my misfortune and unhappiness. There is nothing "difficult" about this. It's logical. It's clear. It's simple. It's just the way things are.

It's easy to see what unhappiness is, and I think it's just as

easy to see what happiness is, even though the concept of happiness has been subjected to any number of more or less sophisticated interpretations over the millennia. I'm thinking, for example, of the difference between the Old Testament and the Christian views of happiness. The God of the Old Testament promises to give Abraham visible signs of His blessing, and He keeps that promise: "And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. . . . Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. . . . Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6:20-25). The New Testament view of happiness is obviously the more sophisticated one, so sophisticated, in fact, that it will effectively keep anyone from being happy. The sentence "Blessed be ye poor" is enough to induce a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach, but when I come to "Woe unto you that laugh now!" my insides turn right over. An advocate of the new faith might object here that the happiness God promises to Abraham is utterly banal because it consists of nothing but gold and camels, while the happiness that Jesus promises us is of a much higher and nobler order. He might well ask: "What good is a camel?" But then I might well ask: "What good is happiness of a nobler order?" It's interesting that proverbial wisdom and Christian theology are at odds on this point, too. In theology, hope is counted as one of the seven cardinal virtues; but the proverb says: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." I have acknowledged before that hope plays an important part in my life; and I feel that hope is a good thing, but I wouldn't call it a *virtue*. The whole issue strikes me as being one of taste, and as we all know, there's no accounting for tastes. Whether you prefer Abraham's camel or Jesus' Kingdom of God is a matter of temperament. I'm for the camel myself. It strikes me as a choice on the side of life.

I picture happiness in very concrete terms, and I suffer from



unhappiness in equally concrete terms. My unhappiness has taken the form of cancer; and here, as always, I use the term to include both the physical and psychic aspects of my illness. I have tried to explain the genesis of my misfortune, and I have arrived at the following formulation: My parents are my cancer. I remain convinced that this formulation is correct, but I am not content to let it stand merely as a kind of slogan, and I want to analyze it more closely. It seems significant to me in terms of this effort that my present medical diagnosis is no longer cancer but—more precisely and less sloganlike—malignant lymphoma. To say that my parents are my malignant lymphoma doesn't sound much like a slogan anymore, but it does express that my parents do not represent evil as such for me now but rather a more specific and clearly defined evil.

I'm suggesting that not only the word "cancer" is a catchword but also the word "parents," even though my parents are not merely a theoretical concept but actually did exist and one still does exist. What I mean is that I see my parents, just like myself, as a mixture of the most diverse elements. I have come to understand myself as a mixture of my own true identity and a mass of bourgeois prejudices that are alien to me. I see my parents as similar mixtures of individuality and inherited, non-individual ballast.

I said earlier that I do not regard my parents merely as incarnations of evil who in turn worked evil on me. This statement needs to be made more precise: The fact that my parents were not exclusively evil does not lessen the evil impact they had on me. To put it mathematically, my parents were not just a little bit evil for me or somewhat evil or half evil. For the most part they weren't evil at all. But in a certain sense they were thoroughly evil; they were absolute evil. As far as their influence on my life and fate is concerned, there was one side of my parents that meant absolute evil for me. I do not see the phrase "absolute evil for me" as logically inconsistent. On the

entire spectrum of evils, this evil is relative, but for me it is absolute in the sense that it threatens me with death. For me, *my* death is absolute.

Taken as individuals, my parents were not bad people—not my father, not my mother. My father was a quiet, melancholy man of high-minded—indeed, even of noble—character. He went to work every day, conscientious and depressed and weighed down by a gloomy feeling in the pit of his stomach. If anyone had asked him what that feeling was, he probably would have mumbled something about “fortitude.” My mother is a lonesome old lady living out her days vapidly and politely in a large villa on Lake Zurich. They were not bad people, yet they were very bad for me. I don’t hate the man I called “Father” and the woman I call “Mother,” and yet I do hate those two people who did me so much harm, those people I call my “parents,” in the broadest possible sense. I don’t think it right for me to hate my father or my mother, but I do think it right for me to hate my “parents” in a general sense, because we have an obligation to hate those who torture us. We have to hate people who kill us. Not to do so would be dishonorable. We can’t say to someone who is killing us: “It’s all right with me if you kill me.” We just can’t do that. It would be downright immoral.

I used to think a lot about killing my mother, and I often fantasized about doing it. In this vision I had over and over again, I saw myself throw my mother down the cellar stairs and then smash her bloody head against the stone floor again and again until it dissolved into a formless mass and a puddle of blood. It is a horrendous vision but a true one. It reminds me of Goya, who wrote as a title under the most horrible of the nightmares and atrocities he pictured in his *Desastres de la guerra* nothing but the words “*Yo lo he visto*”—I have seen it. I, too, have seen it, and the fact that I have seen it means it has happened, means that it is real and true. But if I translate this vision into real life and imagine throwing my real mother down

the real cellar stairs of her house—how absurd that would be! If this bloody crime were committed in the real world, it certainly would be a pointless crime. But on another level it would not be pointless at all. To the extent that my mother embodies evil for me, it is rational and essential that I smash her head into a bloody pulp, even though the words “head” and “bloody pulp” do not have a concrete meaning in this context but a purely symbolic one.

On the one hand, it was pointless to behead Marie Antoinette. She was not to blame for the misery of the French people. But on the other hand, it was only right to behead her because, whatever her individual personality might have been, she was a figure who symbolized that misery. It was not just the head of the woman Marie Antoinette that the executioner displayed to the mob. It was also the head of the Queen. That was the head the mob had to have, and it was only right that the mob got it. The objection that the mob is not very refined and that its demands therefore need not be taken into consideration is beside the point. The mob exists, and it makes its demands. That is a reality. Cancer isn't very refined either, but it exists.

The head of that nice old lady living on Lake Zurich doesn't have to fall, but some other symbolic head does have to fall because heads do fall now and then. That's the way of the world. I am threatened by death and am being killed at this very moment. Someone is killing me or has already killed me, but I still don't know who did it. My parents have killed me, but then again it wasn't my parents who killed me. They did it, but then they didn't do it either. And, more important still, they didn't know they were doing it. They did it without meaning any harm, did it unconsciously and against their own intentions. My father is dead; my mother is still alive. In a certain sense, my mother has killed me; but I don't want to hate her and cannot hate her for this because I know that she doesn't know she did it.

Still another fantasy I used to have that may seem utterly absurd but that also makes a great deal of sense symbolically is that of blowing up the Swiss Credit Bank in Zurich. Why did I single out the Swiss Credit Bank? This choice seems perfectly clear to me now because all the money I inherited from my father is kept in this bank. The thousands of francs stored there make up the visible—and smaller—portion of my legacy. By far the greater part is made up of thousands of fears, afflictions, and agonies. In symbolic terms, I could hardly find a more deserving object to blow up than the Swiss Credit Bank. The practical details would present no great problems; almost everyone these days has a friend who knows a Palestinian. It's true, of course, that this project would be foolish from a financial point of view because I need the money I inherited from my father to pay my doctors. (My health insurance has cut me off because cancer is expensive. After all, the insurance company has to look out for its own skin; and so I'm thrown back on my own financial resources.) I consider this money a kind of compensation. I have it coming to me for all my pain and suffering. It has been harder earned than with the sweat of my brow. It has been earned with my tears. I regard it as money genuinely earned and rightly mine. I even see a kind of social justice in my present financial situation. I may have inherited more money from my parents than most people do, but I need more money than other people because it is costing me a great deal to repair the damage that is as much a part of my inheritance as the money is.

Looking at this once cherished project of mine from the perspective of the present, I feel that blowing up the Swiss Credit Bank, understood as a symbolic act, is a highly worthwhile thing to do. The place that houses my legacy certainly deserves to be blown up, but that opulent building on Zurich's Paradeplatz, the building in which my money waits for its doctors to fetch it, does not literally have to go up in smoke. For one

thing, I can't afford to see it blown up; as long as I'm ill, I need the money I have in it. But there are other reasons apart from financial ones that make it pointless for me to transform Zurich's finest bank into a heap of rubble. One of these reasons is that no dynamite in the world can destroy what this building symbolizes for me: the place where the essence of my deadly legacy lies stored. The Swiss Credit Bank also symbolizes the worst of Zurich, of the bourgeois world, and of Switzerland. But what is malignant about Zurich, the bourgeoisie, and Switzerland is not contained in a stone building that can be blown up. The malignant substance is in my bones, and my bones cannot be cured with dynamite.

Another reason is that I don't consider banks altogether bad. I don't find the Zurich banks a particularly attractive feature of our city. They reflect the snobbish, disdainful character of the *Zuricher* in its most blatant form. It is not, after all, Zurich's lake and medieval towers that make it hated and despised the world over. But at the same time I realize that banks, quite apart from what they may symbolize, fulfill a necessary function. Garbage dumps are not pleasant things, either; but that doesn't make them any less necessary.

This is why I have stressed symbolic values in the discussion of the money that I inherited from my parents and that is stored in the Swiss Credit Bank, for it is the symbolic aspect of my violent visions that allows me to take them seriously. The visions gave tangible form to underlying values. It would have been pointless to translate those visions into reality, but that detracts nothing from their symbolic significance.

I have to add here that what the mind can easily accomplish is not always so easy for the feelings. It's perfectly clear to me, for instance, that my parents have a double aspect. On one level, they are a man and a woman who lived in a house on Lake Zurich. On another, they are the embodiment of something I perceive as dreadful and deadly. If I'm sitting at my desk

looking at things with complete detachment, then my "parents" are an intellectual concept that I, as an educated man, can artfully and cleverly manipulate and that I can use, as though in a glass-bead game, to illuminate the various facets of an abstract problem. But there are times when I'm not sitting at my desk. There are times when I'm tossing about in my bed, full of rage and despair, unable to sleep for pain. At those times I'm not an intellectual rattling off witty remarks about pain on his typewriter. At those times I am utterly at the mercy of my physical and psychic torment, and at those times I am also the rabble of Paris, the mob that hungers to see a bloody head and couldn't care less whether that head used to belong to a woman by the name of Marie Antoinette or not. The only thing that matters to the mob is that it have the head of the Queen.

My program of treatment and my prognosis can be summed up like this: Once I have overcome my parents' (my "parents' ") influence, once they have lost their grip on me, I will be healed and saved. But that is difficult for me to accomplish as long as the mortifications I suffer only multiply instead of coming to an end. I could forget the injuries I have sustained if they lay behind me. But they do not yet lie behind me. They are still affecting me, here and now. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, and though I may not be able to forget my past entirely, I at least feel able to come to terms with it. But the fact that everything that has tormented me in the past continues to torment me now is too oppressive a burden to be taken lightly or simply shrugged off. It is not pain already experienced that distresses me but the fact that the pain goes on and on and on. What weighs on me so intolerably is not the burden of the past but the fact that I have to keep carrying that burden with no end in sight. Every day brings some new physical or psychic affliction. Every day brings some new pain, and every pain can signal the presence of a new malignant tumor. Every one of these tumors is out to kill me, and every one of them can be

that last tumor that will kill me. The symbolic aspect of these tumors is changing from a merely symbolic one to a demonic one. Every new tumor, rising from the depths of its psychosomatic origins and punching up through the smooth surface of my body like a balled fist, takes on for me the fiendishly distorted features of my demonic "parents." And at this point, the image of my "parents," caught in the maelstrom of some terrifying cosmic nebula, is swept away into an infinite, ineffable realm of primal horror.

It may almost seem as if I were trying to prove here that my parents were nothing other than my "parents"; that is, my parents only in terms of the symbolic role they have played in my life. It may seem as if I were trying to make two unreal beings out of my parents, two intellectualized figures that I can move about on the chessboard of my mental constructs. But the fact that I see my parents as symbolic figures representative of parenthood, the bourgeoisie, Zurich, and Switzerland in general does not mean I see them as that and nothing else. I see them as real human beings, too: my father, who died of a ruptured aneurysm a few years ago; and my mother, who is living as a widow in her inherited house on Lake Zurich. As my real-life, flesh-and-blood parents, they were not merely representatives and archetypes of the species "parents of the Zurich upper middle-class," but they also had their special, individual qualities. Yet if I try to define just what the special quality was that proved so disastrous for me, I only conclude once again that the difference between my parents and other equally normal or abnormal parents was a purely quantitative one, which is to say that as far as their reprehensibility is concerned my parents were not in any way extraordinary.

They were not reprehensible in any special way. They were just a little bit more reprehensible than other reprehensible parents from the same bourgeois circles. They weren't even more evil than other parents. (I have indicated before that they

were thoroughly nice people.) But they were just a little bit more degenerate than most people on the Zurich Gold Coast, where the level of degeneracy is pretty high to begin with. They were just a little bit more bourgeois, a little bit more inhibited, a little bit more hostile toward life, a little bit more hostile toward sex, a little bit cleaner, a little bit more *comme il faut*, a little bit more Swiss than their neighbors who had these same qualities. And it is all these little bits more that are killing me now. I can only repeat again that in the end it takes just one drop more to make the barrel run over.

And what about me? I was just a little bit more sensitive than other children, and that's why I haven't withstood my surroundings as well as others have. Since I would have survived very neatly if I hadn't been so sensitive, can we conclude that my upbringing wasn't so bad after all? Of course not. If only the insensitive children can survive an educational process, then it is bad; but if the sensitive ones can survive it, too, it is good. I don't think that sensitivity is, by definition, a negative quality, and it certainly can't be held accountable for someone's death. After I have died, people will not be able to say that I was "destined" to die because I was so sensitive. The fact of the matter will be that, sensitive or not, I died because of my faulty upbringing. I rebel against the idea of being "destined" to die early because of my sensitivity. I know very well why I will die, and it's not because I happen to be sensitive. Another point about sensitivity: I don't feel in the least that it makes a person inferior, but at the same time I have no patience with the prevailing bourgeois view that it's a compliment to call someone a "sensitive type." Schiller showed in his essay on the naïve and the sentimental that it can be very hard on an individual to be a sentimental type but that this quality is essential for society as a whole. I would go a step further and suggest that sensitivity can often be a great disaster for the individual and that it brings him a great deal of suffering but very little



joy. There's no doubt that it represents a misfortune for the person afflicted with it, but I hardly feel it is just cause to eradicate him. I consider sensitivity an affliction but not a weakness in the sense that migratory birds regard weakness as sufficient reason to tear their frail offspring to pieces in order to promote the well-being of the species. Weakness may well amount to inferiority in a society of migratory birds, but sensitivity does not represent that kind of weakness and inferiority in human society. On the contrary, it is a necessity there, for only the sensitive human being registers the ills of his society clearly enough to express those ills in words and so initiate improvements.

If I may be allowed a brief digression from my main purpose here, which is my desire to survive as an individual, I would like to add that what is happening to me is highly unhealthy from a sociological point of view as well as from an individual one. I see myself, sociologically, not as a "difficult" case but as a necessary one; and from this perspective, too, I think it bad that I am being killed. We know these days that it's impossible to kill off one species without killing many, or possibly all, of the other species within the same ecosystem. What has happened to me is not just a disaster for me alone but also a public scandal that has consequences for society as a whole. If all the Federicos are killed, then the world will end because eradicating the species Federico is a kind of environmental pollution, and polluting the environment always has disastrous consequences.

I have presented my situation as resulting from a conflict between my individuality and middle-class, bourgeois values; and I should note here that I want the term "bourgeois," just like the concept of my "parents," to be understood in quotation marks. Bourgeois values are not solely and exclusively evil, and not everything evil is bourgeois, but there is an aspect of bourgeois values that does embody evil, and absolute evil at that. I am using "bourgeois" in a political sense here but not only

in a political sense, and I certainly do not mean to suggest that everything anti-bourgeois is a priori preferable to what is bourgeois. The fact that things look as bleak as they do in bourgeois society does not necessarily mean that everything looks rosy in a Communist society, and the fact that Europe is degenerate does not mean that primitive blacks live a life of pure joy. Europe may well be a ruin crumbling under the weight of its own culture, but Idi Amin Dada, despite his utterly unspoiled primitiveness, is not a very attractive alternative. In Europe just about everyone needs a psychiatrist, but I doubt that the natives running around in the jungles and pursuing beauty by stretching their necks and stuffing plate-sized disks in their lower lips are any more natural or free of neuroses than we Europeans. In opposing bourgeois values I do not claim that things are much better in places like Siberian concentration camps or Zulu villages that lie outside the Zurich, Swiss, or European sphere of influence. But I do maintain that the very concept "bourgeois" contains a principle hostile to all human life and, ultimately, to the bourgeoisie itself.

This hostile principle I recognized in my parents is also present in that complex of factors I subsume under the term "bourgeois" (and my parents and the "bourgeois" are no doubt just two aspects of the same thing if we consider that my parents identified themselves totally with the bourgeois ideal by accepting it as their personal ideal). There is one more point I would like to make about my parents' apparently trouble-free identification with the bourgeois ideal. I noted earlier that I regarded my cancer as an opportunity, the kind of opportunity that any warning signal offers us when it calls our attention to impending danger. I said my parents had not been given such a warning and that it was therefore more difficult for them to realize how dreadful their situation was. But does the warning signal have to be as catastrophic as cancer before we take notice? Can't anyone see what his situation is if he is only willing to see? If

I take this into consideration, I find I cannot absolve my parents of all suspicion. Their identification with everything bourgeois was too complete to be altogether honest.

The evil I find in my parents, on the one hand, and the evil I find in the concept bourgeois, on the other, are not exactly the same, but in both cases I am on the track of the same evil. I would even go so far as to claim that evil is always the same and that there is, in reality, only *one* evil. It is always the same evil that people suffer from, or what is perpetrated on them is always the same evil. Or, expressed in cosmocriminalistic terms, there is only one crime, and it is being committed all the time on everyone. The only thing that differs from case to case is quantity. If the crime against us is committed within reasonable limits, it doesn't seem to do much harm. We find it unpleasant if a crime is committed against us; but more often than not we survive it quite well. I have already mentioned above that I consider my case normal in the sense that I, like everyone else, have had a crime committed against me. What is abnormal about me is simply that I have gotten too large a dose. Or, in other words, an excess of evil has been perpetrated on me.

Earlier in these pages, I called it good when something functioned and bad when it could not. Perhaps we could go even further here and say not only that it is good when something functions but also that the ability to function is the definition of goodness as such. I have denied that the functioning of things has to have some kind of meaning. All that matters is the functioning itself. An atom functions when its electrons orbit around its nucleus. There's no meaning to be found in that, but the electrons don't seem to care. They keep on orbiting despite the lack of meaning. An anthill functions when ants scurry around in it doing their chores. We may not see any meaning in the fact that ants are always so industrious, but it's good that they are. The forest I mentioned before functions when the wolves eat deer. The world functions when the moon circles around the

earth and the earth around the sun, and that brings us back to the atom and its orbiting electrons. If anyone doesn't believe that going around in circles is good, all he need do is ask a small child on a merry-go-round whether circling is good or not. He'll learn the truth that way because, as we all know, little children always speak the truth. Everything that crawls, scurries, and circles is good. But not everyone thinks those things are good, and lots of people are even openly against them.

As I sit here in my apartment on Krongasse in Zurich and write down some notes for this essay, people are yelling "Quiet!" from the windows of the neighboring buildings. Krongasse is a highly desirable street to live on in Zurich because it's so narrow that it makes car traffic almost impossible, and if an occasional car does turn in here, it glides quietly by. Krongasse is also in a respectable neighborhood where there are no bars, and we are never disturbed at night by the whooping and singing of drunks. But that still isn't quiet enough for the people around here. At noontime little children sometimes play in the street, which is an ideal play area for them because there is no traffic. And sometimes as they play they make noise, which in turn prompts the old ladies on Krongasse to yell "Quiet!" from their windows. It's already quiet here, but it's got to be even quieter, and that's why people scream "Quiet!" out the windows. If a group of young people gathers on a terrace in the evening to sing, then someone will call the police because singing is a disturbance of the evening peace. And if someone sits by one of the fountains in the Old City playing a guitar during the noon hour, the Zurichers will call the police again because that is a disturbance of the midday peace. Every hour of the day is supposed to be quiet for some reason or other, and if this quiet isn't respected and if anyone sings, then the police will come because peace and quiet are not only the bourgeois's most important duty but also his most important privilege. Within the peace and quiet of his own four walls, everyone can sink into abject

imbecility; and if some unwelcome noise disturbs him in this process, he feels that his right to imbecility has been violated and he summons the police. (It should be obvious here that I am not promoting noise; I take for granted that there is a difference between the racket caused by a four-lane highway and the sound of a guitar. I also see a difference between the necessity for every individual in Zurich to drive to work in his own car, thus creating noise, and the necessity for children to play, which also creates noise.)

This concept of the "bourgeois" that I am using here takes on an evil aspect when it becomes identical with "peace and quiet," which are in turn related to the categories of the clean, the sterile, the correct, the *comme il faut* that I have already mentioned. Everyone, of course, wants "a little peace and quiet" sometimes; and in that context, peace and quiet are clearly positive, just as relaxation, holidays, and leisure time are positive. But when the old ladies of Krongasse scream "Quiet!" out their windows, the word takes on a frightening and sinister quality. Quiet is so peaceful. What I want to suggest with what may seem to be idle wordplay is the elegiac, funereal quality of these terms. To call for quiet is almost the same as calling for death. Peace, Shelley said, is in the grave; and when someone dies we ask that he may rest in peace. In Switzerland, peace and quiet have to reign at all times, and the demand for them is always expressed as an imperative. "Be quiet, quiet!" people command, and the implication is "Die, be dead!"

It was always peaceful and quiet in my parents' house, and being quiet was regarded as a virtue there. Nice people of good character were always quiet. They were even better than quiet. They were "quiet." When a girl in my family or in the social circles we frequented reached marriageable age and found her future husband, my parents would sooner or later be asked what they thought of the candidate; their answer would inevitably be "Oh, he's a nice, quiet type." The young wives of these

quiet men usually got a divorce after a few years of nice, quiet marriage, no doubt because their husbands had proved a little too quiet for them. The women complained more or less openly that they found their peaceful marriages too boring and that they felt frustrated in them. My mother, of course, put up with thirty years of marital peace and quiet and could well have taken as her motto for those years the lines of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff:

Here I must sit so sweet and fine  
Just like a well-behaved child.

There are many coincidences in life, but some of them seem just too perfect to be merely coincidence. My maternal grandfather's first name was Gottfried, and all the men on my father's side of the family have been called Gottfried, including my father's father and my mother's husband. They were all called Gottfried Zorn and were never angry with their God. They lived in peace—in peace with God and with the world.\* They said: Quiet, quiet, and never expressed anger. I recall my mother complaining openly to me on one occasion, and on one occasion only, that she would have liked to have some fun now and then but that "things just never worked out that way." Interestingly enough, she used the same phrase that her own mother, my grandmother, had once used when she confessed to me that she would have liked to go dancing when she was a young woman but that it "just hadn't worked out" because my grandfather (she called him "Daddy") got dizzy if he danced. "Daddy" sat at his desk all day long across from a nearly life-sized medieval picture of Christ on the cross, and on his desk there was a smaller picture of the crucifixion. My grandmother was not a noble figure, far from it. Maybe she was even downright vile; but, vile or not, she was certainly pitiable. Any impulse I may feel to censure her disappears instantly when I think about her wanting to go

\* The components of the name Gottfried mean "God" and "peace." The author's pseudonym, Zorn, means "anger," "wrath."—TRANS.

dancing while "Daddy" Gottfried sat squatting in front of his crucifixes.

And my mother, my poor mother! Every Sunday evening she would call up one relative or another and tell him or her how we had spent the day. She always said the same thing: "We've had a nice, quiet day." A nice, quiet day—what a horrible phrase! On Sundays, my nice, quiet father always played solitaire; and I have already mentioned that he knew only one game, Klondike, which is the most boring of all solitaires. I play solitaire myself every once in a while, but not every Sunday, and I know a lot of different games, Napoleon at St. Helena being the most interesting. In other words, solitaire has its place and can be fun, but this eternal game of Klondike every Sunday was an oppressive, dreary business. And while he played, my father listened to records, preferably sad, romantic pieces by Schumann, Schubert, or Brahms. He sometimes played Schubert's *Winter Journey*, too, which contains two lines that were just about the last my peaceful, melancholic family needed to hear:

I hear the linden whisper:  
There you'd be at peace.

There was, of course, a good reason why my father always played solitaire. He was "tired." His life "wasn't easy," and that made him "tired." I've come to see fatigue as a complex phenomenon. Sometimes I get tired from working, and sometimes I get tired from not working. I'm always much more exhausted after not working than I am after working. And sometimes I experience a state of fatigue in which "tired" and "sad" become synonymous. On these occasions, when exhaustion and sadness are identical, I feel most tired of all. The phrase "weary of life" was coined to describe the need for rest that arises from this state.

I find still another thing sad about all this. My father, who was an intelligent, talented, educated, sensitive, and high-minded man, let all his capacities lie fallow and sat around playing solitaire. My father committed his greatest crime against himself. Instead of being the productive, creative man he was born to be, he was always tired and kept dealing out cards for his endless game of solitaire. And my mother, good wife that she was, never interrupted his game and never rebelled. After all, her husband was "tired." My mother was born to rejoice in life and have a good time, but instead she spent one "nice, quiet day" after another her whole life long. What a curse on my parents' house all that peace and quiet was!

Whenever I think about my family history, I come to the conclusion that I, for all my pain and suffering, am experiencing my life much more intensely than my placid parents did theirs. I am unhappy, violently and passionately unhappy. My parents led a "nice, quiet" life, but that is far worse than what I am experiencing. I am overwhelmed by my afflictions and endure thousands of fears, but I am at least experiencing something. My parents experienced nothing at all. I am in hell, but at least I *am* in hell. My parents—where were they? In limbo, at best. But in reality, they weren't anywhere. I am on the verge of death now, but did my parents ever live at all? My father has gone to his "eternal rest." My mother is sitting alone and sad in a big, dead house.

But not just anybody can qualify as "sad" in the way I understand the term. My parents didn't think they were sad. They thought they were correct, proper, and *comme il faut*. The peace and quiet that reigned in their house was not a source of pain to them but a virtue. (In this they no doubt reflected the feelings of most people, for in our society a great many afflictions pass as virtues.) My parents' house did not function, and my parents were proud of that fact. And because it didn't function, no one



else was ever adversely affected or disturbed by it. Things were always very, very peaceful and quiet at our house. No one needed to shout "Quiet!" at us; we were already quiet. And since we never disturbed anyone else's peace and quiet, we were *comme il faut*. And that we could claim as a virtue.

I feel I can now propose the following definition of "bourgeois" values. To be "bourgeois" is "to maintain peace and quiet at all costs for fear of disturbing someone else's peace and quiet." And this is precisely what is evil. It is bourgeois and evil if we object to electrons circling an atomic nucleus "because someone might be disturbed" by that circling. It is bourgeois and evil to object to ants crawling through the woods "because the path where the ants are crawling might be a private way and trespassing on it may be punishable by fine." It is bourgeois and evil to object to the lion eating the gazelle "because, first, the lion is a foreigner and, second, the gazelle has not registered his place of residence with the police and, third, both of them are minors." It is bourgeois and evil to object to the moon turning around the earth "because the bright moonlight might possibly disturb someone's sleep during the night." It is bourgeois and evil to object to the sun rising in the morning "because the bank has already bought up the majority of the stock for the heavenly domains and is waiting for an upswing in the market before the sun can be allowed to rise." It is bourgeois and evil that there is always a potential somebody one might disturb. And if this potential somebody can't possibly be there, then he has to be invented.

I feel that not wanting to create a disturbance is bad because disturbances are essential to life. It isn't enough just to exist. We have to call attention to the fact that we exist. It isn't enough just to *be*. We also have to *act*. And anyone who acts is bound to *disturb* in the best sense of that word: to stir up, to excite, to set in motion.

As Bach's cantata puts it:

Many a lovely flower blossoms there;  
 And here to Flora's greater glory  
 A plant rises up  
 And seeks its growth to show.

It's not enough for the flower simply to rise up. It also has to show its growth.

In the first part of my story, I cited a number of examples illustrating the phenomenon of quiet, peaceful, bourgeois Swiss existence in its most disastrous form, and I needn't add any further examples to this list now. But I do want to return to one subject which both represents and throws light on all the other aspects of my past, and that subject is sexuality. When I say that bourgeois attitudes forbid the sun to rise, the reader will surely take that in a figurative sense and realize that the image, as a lyrical device, suggests many other things. But if we consider that anything having to do with sex "doesn't exist" in the bourgeois world, i.e., doesn't exist because it is forbidden there (as if something could cease to exist simply because it is forbidden)—then we are no longer dealing with a lyrical figure but with a reality and a perverse reality at that. Sex exists, but it "creates a disturbance"; or, worse yet, it "might create a disturbance." Therefore everyone acts as if it didn't exist. The sun shines, but it's forbidden for the sun to shine here. Therefore we act as if it were not shining. The moon rises, but its rising might possibly disturb someone; and therefore, acting as if we hadn't seen it rise, we run around in a moonlit night and bump into a tree on purpose to prove, in accordance with what we want to believe, that the moon is not shining and it is dark.

That isn't stupid. It is evil. The stupid things we do, we do unintentionally. The evil things we do, we do on purpose. Somebody who runs into a tree in the dark is stupid. Somebody who runs into a tree in the moonlight is evil.

Now I come to the part of this report that weighs most heavily on me. In the first part of this history, I described the atmosphere

of my parents' house and what became of me as a product of that house. I have also shown why I can't hate my parents, despite all the mistakes they made in my upbringing, and why I have ultimately come to see them not as my "evil" parents but as my "poor" parents. I have also tried to show how my parents were "to some extent responsible," in however complicated a way, for my disaster. I don't like that "to some extent responsible" anymore because it implies that answering this question is "difficult." But now that the question has been put, it can be answered in only one of two ways: Yes, my parents are responsible; or No, they are not.

My misery is a fact, a reality. This reality did not arise from nothing. There are reasons why it came about. I am not just "an unhappy type." I haven't had "bad luck." It's no coincidence that I'm unhappy. I've been made unhappy. My unhappiness is not the result of a coincidence or an accident but of a crime. It didn't just "happen"; it followed from specific causes. It is not just my fate; it is someone's fault.

I'm ready to concede every conceivable extenuating circumstance to my parents, but when it comes to the issue of whether they are guilty or not guilty of making me the miserable person I am, then there is only one possible answer: guilty. I am also ready to forgive my parents, and in the course of my reflections here I already have forgiven them. But the fact that someone has been pardoned does not mean that he was innocent to start with. On the contrary, only the guilty can be pardoned.

After World War II was over, all the Nazis were suddenly transformed into "good Germans" who had simply carried out the Führer's orders and done their duty. They "really hadn't known" what was going on in the death camps and had "meant well" all along. I can even manage to believe them when they say this. But the Jews were still dead. My parents only "meant well" by me, too; and they did their best to bring me up *comme il faut*. I believe my parents. I believe my dead father, and I

believe my poor mother. But I am about to die of their *comme il faut*. By their fruits ye shall know them.

And now not another word about my parents. I have come to see what they have done to me. I have condemned them for it. I have forgiven them, and I have mercy on them. There's no more I can do for them. They don't interest me anymore. I am the one who is left. I am the one who is suffering. That is a fact, and I recognize it. It is not customary to complain in our bourgeois society. It is not *comme il faut*. In Zurich, you repress your pain instead of experiencing it because your suffering "might disturb someone." You don't dare face up to your misery; it might "disturb the peace." In the bourgeois jargon of my native country, this cowardice that keeps us from disturbing others with our sadness is called "keeping a stiff upper lip." But I don't accept that dodge. If it holds that:

Many a lovely flower blossoms there . . .  
And seeks its growth to show,

it also holds that death and decline should be shown, too. It's not joy alone that seeks expression but pain as well. If a wrong has been done, it's essential to complain of that wrong. The matter doesn't always have to be taken to court. It often suffices that a complaint is registered. What I feel to be characteristic of my life as far as this question is concerned is that these things *are happening*. I am suffering, but I am also registering my grief over that suffering. Grief is a task in itself, as Alexander Mitscherlich recognized when he developed the idea of "working through grief." I would guess that this view of grief and mourning is an unpopular one. Mourning for the dead is suppressed in bourgeois society. The next to the last line of Schiller's poem "Nänie"—"To be a song of mourning sung by one's loved ones—that, too, is glorious"—does not reflect reality in present-day society; nobody sings songs of mourning for the dead anymore, much less glorious songs. The last line, how-

ever, still applies: "For all lowly things sink down unsung to Orcus below," though it is no longer just the lowly who disappear in silence these days. In America, I understand, it's not socially acceptable to talk about death, and in the American way of death even the noble have long since been sinking unsung to Orcus below. In this, we have become thoroughly Americanized: First you get done in by an emotionally degenerate society; then your death is hushed up. If somebody dies, people don't even say anymore that he's dead. All they say is that he "is no longer with us." Our refusal to use the word "dead" is typically bourgeois, too. Everything has its name; death is no exception. But for every crime there is a punishment. It will be the fate of the bourgeois that one fine day he will simply "no longer be with us." That will not be my fate. I will not be someone who is "no longer with you." I will be dead, and I will have known why.

I have already expressed my criticism of bourgeois society a number of times, focusing particularly on that aspect of bourgeois values that I have come to see as evil. I feel an aversion to bourgeois society because I am a product of it and because I don't like being a product of it. I know I am a product of it, but I feel that I am more than just a preprogrammed product. Just as I feel that the role my parents have played in my life has come to an end, so I am convinced that the influence of the bourgeois way of life on my fate is also at an end.

It seems to me that I am made up of three parts. First, there is my own individuality. Second, I am a product of my parents, my education, my background, and my society. Third, I am a representative of the life principle in general. By that I mean the force that causes the electrons to circle around the nucleus of an atom, the ants to crawl in the woods, and the sun to rise in the sky. I, too, am partially made up of electrons, ants, and sun; and that part of me can't be ruined by even the most bourgeois of upbringings.

My suffering is also a part of universal suffering. My life is more than just the wailing of an individual brought up by the Zurich bourgeoisie for no other purpose than to die. My life participates in the wailing of a whole universe in which the sun has ceased to rise. When I was a child, I was always struck by a certain passage in the New Testament. After Christ's death, the Gospels report, the veil of the temple was rent in twain. This is the feeling I have now in the midst of my greatest torments. I feel that in my life the veil in the temple is constantly being rent in twain, that all the veils in all the temples of the world are constantly being rent in twain. This feeling is one of several possible ideas I mean to suggest when I write: "Suffering goes on." This idea of uninterrupted suffering is a universal one. To cite only one example: Throughout history the peoples of the earth have never ceased mourning the death of Tammuz, of Dumuzi, of the "true son," of the lover and son of the Near Eastern goddess Astarte, whether this figure is conceived of as the divinity of scorched vegetation and drought, as Adonis killed by the wild boar, or as Jesus on the cross. The death of every single man is the death of all men, and the death of every man is the end of the world.

According to the law of conservation of energy, the sum total of all energy in the universe always remains unchanged. I think that the sum total of all suffering and all injustice remains unchanged, too. Not a bit of it is ever lost. It is more than just a turn of phrase when we say that an injustice cries out to heaven. The injustice does more than just cry out to heaven. It arrives there and is stored there.

But—as I have remarked before—just as I do not consist solely of what is bourgeois in me, of what has been passed down to me, and of what has been made of me, so I do not consist solely of the universal. To some extent, I am suffering the symbolic and ritual death of the Near Eastern god Tammuz. But above all else I am a non-symbolic, specific human being

who is threatened by a very real death, a death that may well overtake me before I have completed my life's work. That danger wakens anger and hatred in me. It may not be particularly sensible to feel anger and hatred in certain situations, but that's just the way things are, and it is only natural in such situations that we feel anger and hatred.

I don't know what my condition really is, and no doctor can tell me because no doctor knows. The game may be lost already, but as long as it has not actually been lost, I still can't know that it is lost. Then, too, whether the game is lost or not doesn't ultimately affect how I'll run my life. Either way, I would do the same things, even if the things I do aren't of any use. But then what does it mean to say that something is of use? If we say something is of use, that's the same as saying it has some kind of meaning. But I have already pointed out that what I do doesn't have to have any meaning at all. If I step on a bee, it will sting my foot before it dies. It isn't of any use to the bee to sting me, because it will be crushed to death anyway, but when the bee stings me before it dies, it is doing precisely the right thing. That's just what bees do.

I too rebel against my impending death. I too hate being killed. I too will sting before I die. Bees aren't the only creatures that do that. Human beings do it, too. Given my situation, I can behave more or less correctly. Faced with death, I can do, more or less successfully, what a human being faced with death can. Before I die, I can review the thoughts that all humanity before me has ever had about death, but I'll have to die my individual death alone. The explanation for and the significance of my psychic illness can be grasped on a general level. The thoughts I have had about that illness have a certain validity for everyone. Anyone will, I think, be able to understand the causes of my death. But I am the only one who can experience my fear and pain. No explanations in the world can relieve me of them. When I am dead, I will be one more among many

others, and the reasons I died will be understandable to many. But as a dying man, I am alone.

Now for another sociological hypothesis. Even if I as an individual am destroyed, I will have been eradicated in a way that will prove disastrous for society. If I should die, my death will not be an accidental one but a profoundly typical one because I have fallen ill from the same causes that are making everyone in our society more or less ill. And typical deaths have a tendency to become epidemic in their societies. It has never been much of a problem to destroy things, but what to do with all the resulting junk is beginning to be a problem. I will have died in a way that is so symptomatic for our society that I will have to be regarded, in my state of posthumous ruin, as a hunk of symptomatic radioactive waste, one that cannot be hidden away anywhere and that will pollute the environment. The fact that this society has killed me will, I am convinced, continue to smolder under the surface and ultimately bring down the very world that has destroyed me. Utterly dominated by the *comme il faut* themselves, my parents raised me so *comme il faut* that I'm dying of *comme il faut*. But a society whose children die from completely internalizing the values of that society is doomed. The pitcher does in fact go to the fountain only until it breaks. But then, I feel, it's quite *comme il faut* that it breaks. We might even say *il le faut*. I see in this still another manifestation of the cosmic humor that has turned up so often before in the writing of this report.

We have to pay a price for all our social follies, sooner or later. In Imperial China, all the women used to have crippled feet. Each of those women limped and suffered pain as an individual. (The reports tell us that those bound feet stank, too.) But eventually those millions of crippled imperial feet brought about the revolution, and when the revolution came, both the emperor and the crippled feet disappeared. Poor emperor? No, stupid emperor. If he had taken the trouble to consider his



subjects' feet while he was still emperor, he might even have remained the head to all those feet.

I think that once a certain number of crippled feet or other crippled limbs or crippled souls has been reached, the revolution becomes inevitable. It has to come because what is new is always better. If you take that statement with a grain of salt and aren't overly persnickety in your interpretation of it, you'll see that it's always right. (Another way of proving its correctness is to turn it around, for it's obvious to anyone that returning to the old is always bad.) I have already cited the French Revolution as another example of a revolution and asserted that despite all its gratuitous atrocities and despite the pointless beheading of Marie Antoinette, no one shed a single tear over the death of the Queen. Or, to put it a different way, is there anyone who would wish the French Revolution had never happened and that the Bourbons still ruled over France from Versailles?

Still another note, this time one that borders on the comic. In the autobiography of the last emperor of China we learn that no one profited more from the Chinese Revolution than the emperor himself, for he, locked up as he had been in the golden cage of the imperial palace, had suffered more from the imperial regime than anyone. In a country where privileges are unequally distributed, the underprivileged will be badly off, but just think how badly off the overprivileged are! That isn't true just of China but reflects the quintessence of my own history.

I want to stress once again that I don't conceive of this essay as a political tract, though I am not unfamiliar with the claim that any statement is a political one. And even though I am convinced that revolution is inevitable, I do not think that every revolution necessarily has to be political in nature.

I feel, furthermore, that we don't necessarily have to be *for* the revolution. We just shouldn't be *against* it, for the revolution will come of its own accord. It will always come, even if it

usually takes a lot of time in coming. Just as each of those millions of crippled Chinese feet was a cog in the works of the Chinese Revolution, my story, too, is a cog in the machinery that will overturn bourgeois society. I am only one little cog, but I am a typical cog. And once a certain number of typical little cogs has been reached, they cease to be just a bunch of cogs and take on a collective existence as a machine that can accomplish work. Or, to put it in medicosociological terms, an organism is only as strong as its weakest link. In my case, my malignant lymph cells have called attention to the illness afflicting my entire physical and psychic organism. In terms of my society, I am a malignant cell that is poisoning the social organism. The danger any diseased cell represents for the whole organism has to be recognized, and the diseased cell has to be cured. Otherwise the organism will die. From a sociological point of view, I am a cancerous cell in my society, and just as the first malignant cell in my body was of psychosomatic origin—which amounts, in a sense, to the same thing as saying it was self-inflicted—so I, as an embodiment of illness in my society, have to be entered on the psychic debit side of this society's ledger. Seen in this light, what may seem to be nothing more than a clever turn of phrase takes on the most concrete reality: I am the decline of the West. I do not, of course, represent the total decline of the West, and I am not the only person who represents it, but I am a molecule in the mass from which that decline will proceed.

In this sense, I call myself a revolutionary, both active and passive. I am not, however, an active revolutionary in the sense that I advocate transforming Swiss society into a Chinese, Cuban, or African society overnight. Indeed, I would oppose that kind of change. I felt it would have been ridiculous to blow up the Swiss Credit Bank (however desirable and necessary the demolition of that bank seemed and still does seem in a symbolic sense), and I feel it would be equally ridiculous to replace our

bourgeois devil with the Beelzebub of some other political ism (though we shouldn't forget that the reason why our old devil has not improved one iota is that we have *not* called in some other Beelzebub). It is true that I have attacked everything typical of the Zurich, the bourgeois, and the Swiss way of life, but I have not done so with the intention of getting rid of them. We shouldn't do away with them, but we certainly shouldn't leave them the way they are, either. A patient suffering from an infected leg can be restored to full health only by curing the leg, not by cutting it off.

I see myself as a passive revolutionary in the sense that my story, my suffering, and possibly even my death will constitute one of the many elements required to set the mechanism of the revolution in motion. From a broad perspective, that is what makes my story essential; from a personal one, it is what makes it so sad. I am nothing but a cipher in the revolutionary process, just as all those limping Chinese women were ciphers to the Chinese Revolution. And once that revolution was achieved, no one gave any further thought to the pain those women had suffered as individuals. I am item number 5,743 in the catalogue of the revolution. I play an essential role because without number 5,743 there could be no number 5,742 or 5,744. But my chance for personal happiness and fulfillment is gone. That is my loss. My life has served a useful function for humanity as a whole, and the intellect can take some satisfaction in that. But the heart hungers and cries out.

This brings me to the end of this sociological digression and back to my personal concerns. I realize that the world functions in me and through me and because of me, that I am one of many reasons it functions; but my soul is not interested in the world's functioning as much as it is in its own. The heart of a Chinese worker may beat faster when its owner reflects on the fact that he is working hard and putting in overtime for Mao and the Chinese people. But I don't have a Chinese heart. Mine is

different. The praying mantis consumes sixteen times its own weight every day, but the boa constrictor eats only once a month. The praying mantis and the boa constrictor are different. Everything works out beautifully in my sociological equations, and I see that I am one of many ciphers essential to adding up the desired sum. But I remain sad, and no mathematical formula in the world can dispel that sadness.

Since a rational approach is not fully adequate for treating this particular theme, I would like to come at it from an irrational—or, perhaps I should say, religious—point of view; and in this attempt I will be using the word “religious” more in a demonic than in an ethical sense. But before I begin, I would like to comment briefly on my penchant for using Christian terminology. I’m no particular friend of Christianity, but I often use concepts drawn from the Christian vocabulary when I discuss religious questions because I feel that these concepts are more accessible to me and my audience than ones from other religions would be. A person who grows up in this country, whether he ultimately comes to accept or reject Christianity, will still have been raised under its influence and so will best be able to contemplate the religious issues of the world, as well as the emotions those issues evoke, if he approaches them from the Christian context. The bad character of Tezcatlipoca, the Toltec god of darkness, will not be of much concern to us Europeans; and the Chinese probably won’t trouble their heads much with Abraham’s father complex. The use of Christian terminology has the additional advantage that it speaks to us on a subconscious level. The name John is Judaic and Biblical in origin, but we are not consciously aware of specific religious associations when we hear it. Similarly, the historical reality of the Jewish rabbi Joshua is, I feel, less important than the image we retain of him in our subconscious minds. And all of us—including myself, who was not raised as a Christian at home—carry such images with us, whether we are aware of them or not.

In the second part of this history, I suggested that even if we began with the hypothesis that God did not exist, we would have to invent Him for the sole purpose of punching Him in the nose. Now I would like to carry that suggestion a step further and say that if we feel the need to create a concept, we have already created it the moment we feel the need for it. I think that a tormented soul feels the need for God's existence. God's is the address to which we direct our accusations, and it is at that address and that address only that they can arrive. He is the container into which we pour our hatred. He is the personage we will address on Judgment Day, just as it is described in the Bible, except that it is we who will pass judgment on Him, saying that we were hungry, naked, and downcast and were not fed or clothed or comforted. It is important to note here that it is *I* who have not experienced any of these kindnesses and that it is *I* who have suffered all these afflictions.

Christian theology has asserted that Jesus is being crucified constantly, that He is being nailed to the cross at every moment in eternity. I can accept this idea, but again only in its inverted form. I can easily understand how tormented humanity would nail God to the cross constantly, and I know why, too. Humanity is enraged over what God has done to the world, and that is why mankind is constantly nailing God to the cross. I feel that I am one of those people who constantly crucify God because they hate Him and want Him to suffer unending death.

This brings me to a subject that I feel is a particularly important one in this essay: the subject of hatred toward God and of the necessity for His death. I have seen myself, in a vision, embroiled in battle with God. We are wielding the same weapon against each other, and that weapon is cancer. God strikes me down with a virulent, lethal disease, but then He himself is the organism in which I act out the part of a cancerous cell. By virtue of the fact that I am so ill, I prove how bad God's world is, and I represent the weakest link in the organism "God." As

a diseased organism, God cannot be any stronger than His weakest link, i.e., He cannot be any stronger than I am. I am the carcinoma of God. In the overall picture, I am only a small carcinoma, of course, but a carcinoma nonetheless. Size doesn't matter, because the smallest nerve can, if it hurts enough, make the whole body feel pain. I see myself striking the nerve in God's body with such accuracy and force that He, too, just like me, cannot sleep at night, and tosses around in His bed, screaming and wailing.

But there is something else I have understood from this vision. Granted, both combatants—God and I—are using the same weapon, cancer, to poison and disintegrate the other's body; and we are using similar tactics. But our reasons for fighting are different. I am motivated by a raging hatred; God, by some dull-witted, evil-minded vindictiveness. I recognize in myself the overwhelming need to pierce my opponent's heart clean through. In God, I sense a kind of amorphous and soporific ill will aimed at crushing me within the framework of a large-scale operation to crush everything in sight. In this particular vision, God most resembles some huge, evil creature, like a repulsive jellyfish that is trying to suffocate me and poison me or like an octopus with a thousand tentacles that are grabbing at me from all sides.

If I reflect on this image of the octopus, there is much about it that strikes me as familiar. I have had the feeling over and over again in my life that I was being engulfed by some hostile being with innumerable tentacles, a being whose sole purpose it was to poison and suffocate me, a being whose embrace I doubted I could escape. I have detected something like this creature in my parents, in peace and quiet, in everything that is typically Zurich, typically bourgeois, typically Swiss. And I have tried to suggest the presence of that creature in and beyond these concrete phenomena by putting them in quotation marks: my "parents," "peace and quiet," the "bourgeois." All

these terms mean more than what they appear to mean. They all point toward a deeper, underlying meaning. My "parents" proved to be only one facet of the "bourgeois," and the "bourgeois" proved to be only one facet of the need for "peace and quiet," and these last two concepts, along with a number of others, proved in turn to be but one facet of "evil." And in my vision of the huge octopus, the "evil" and the "divine" became one.

Should we conclude from this that God is the embodiment of absolute evil? (This would be a novel conclusion because it runs directly counter to the generally accepted and rather banal assumption that God is the *summum bonum*, the embodiment of absolute good.) There is much that speaks for the correctness of this conclusion, but I am still not altogether happy with it. What I object to in it is not the word "evil" but the word "absolute." I would therefore like to propose the following as a working hypothesis: God is the embodiment of evil but not of absolute evil. Or, to put it more concretely, the world is bad (evil), but it can be improved (it is not absolutely evil).

The opposite of the absolute is the relative or, to use a less abstract expression, the regional. So I would like to reformulate my hypothesis to read: God is the embodiment of regional evil, which is to say that God has to be conceived of as a regional phenomenon. Indeed, it seems to me that His regional character is what constitutes His effectiveness and His appeal. Modern man, in his philosophical speculations, tends to think of God in absolute terms; but he will have to get used to the idea that an absolute and universal God is a mere intellectual construct and that God, whenever He represents the "divine" and not just the intellectual, is totally different in different corners of the earth.

Not only is God conceived of differently in all the different religions of the world, but even the image of our supposedly universal Christian God differs radically from country to coun-

try. We wouldn't expect the God of Northern Ireland to be like the *bon Dieu* of France, but even within culturally homogenous regions, like the Catholic countries of southern Europe, we find major differences. There is little resemblance between the Spanish God and the Italian one, and even Mary of Nazareth, the carpenter's widow who has been elevated to the mythological role of great goddess and earth mother, is pictured very differently in these two countries. The Madonna of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, bending over the washed and manicured body of her son in an attitude of refined mourning, bears not the slightest resemblance to the *Macarena* of Seville, who looks out at us from all the outrageous pomp of her African frippery.

No one would dream of suggesting that the Spanish *Macarena* reflects attitudes representative of Europe as a whole. She may do very nicely for the Spanish, but outside Spain no one knows what to make of her. We have long since accepted the regional status of God's mother. Wouldn't it seem logical to assign a similar status to Him, that other mythological figure whom all of us in Europe rather carelessly designate as "God," not even bothering to put a definite article in front of His name? I grant that the Christian God's claim to universality is the very thing that makes Him special, but I feel this claim is rather overblown. Gods just aren't universal. They always originate in specific geographic areas, and they belong to those areas. It is their very nature to be local. Furthermore, they are finite beings, not eternal ones. That's just the way it is with gods, and it's only right and meet that it should be that way. Cronus displaces Uranus, and Zeus displaces Cronus. Seth kills Osiris, and Horus kills Seth. And the Germanic tribes have their *Götterdämmerung*, which works on the same principle.

Only the Christian religion claims universality and eternal life for its God (or gods). Only the Christian religion refuses to give way to new gods. I consider this attitude anti-revolutionary and reactionary. I think that the great failing of the



Christian religion is that it insists on being the best religion of all and that we are expected to regard the gods it has created as infinite and eternal. Other religions show that all gods die sometime and are replaced by new ones. Only the Christian God refuses to die and relinquish His place to a new and better god.

I think I now understand what I have been trying to express with words like my "parents," the "bourgeois," the "Christian," "peace and quiet," and now, finally, with the word "God." "God" is the word I am using now to designate that whole world that seemed to be so good because it was so quiet, so clean, so correct, so *comme il faut*, so bourgeois, and so well-mannered. In reality, though, that world was bad, so bad for me in particular that I am about to die of it. All the things that were presented to me as good and drummed into me as a child, all those things taken together make up a world that is hostile to me and intent on my death. Deadliness surrounds me and permeates me. Every cell in my body and every second in my family history is poisoned. My very own being is so intent on my destruction that I can't help perceiving the sum of all these hostile elements as a total all-encompassing enemy, a total enemy to whom I have to assign the most total word my language knows: God. But that is a mistake after all. For just as I have seen that I am not *merely* the product of my home, the product of bourgeois society, and the product of the universal Christian neurosis, so I can see now that what I have designated as "God" is not infinite. God is *not* omnipresent. There are places where He is not present, where He has come to an end, where He has ceased to exist. He has His place somewhere, and there He belongs. But there are other places where He does not belong or does not belong anymore. In those places, He has been abolished, just as there are places where my parents have been abolished and where bourgeois society has been abolished and where everything that torments me has been abolished. In the light of everything I have written here about the nature of the divine, we can prob-

ably say: God exists. I'm even willing to regard that statement as a real possibility. But if this statement is correct, it is only correct if we make it more precise and say: God exists only partially, for He has also been partially abolished.

There is little point in debating whether belief in eternity is justified or not. This question seems to resemble the famous issue of tastes, for which, as we all know, there is no accounting. Or, if you like, we might say it's a matter of temperament whether we believe in eternity or not. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce offers a horrifying description of eternity and deems it a frightful thing: "Eternity! O dread and dire word!" In *La doctrina de los ciclos*, on the other hand, Jorge Luis Borges shows, with all the succinctness of the Latin mind, why the world is finite and will have to end: "*Entonces habrá muerto.*"

I tend—probably because I am temperamentally so inclined—toward the second view, and not the least important of my reasons for doing so is that I believe everything has its opposite or at least stands in contrast to something else. I don't mean this merely in the generally accepted sense that black cannot exist unless there is white, too. I would extend this principle much further, pushing it into the dimension of the irrational and claiming that if the universal, the total, and the absolute exist, there must also be something left over that is not included within the universal, the total, and the absolute. If we postulate this concept of "the absolute plus this little bit left over," then I feel there has to be still something else left over beyond that, something that falls outside our postulated "absolute plus this little bit left over which is not included in the absolute," the upshot being that what is total can never be altogether total and what is absolute can never be altogether absolute. Fortunately, there's always something left to upset the applecart. (I have mentioned before how attached I am to the idea of disturbances and upset applecarts.)

This A-Absolute or Anti-Absolute is difficult to express in philosophical terms, but in religious ones nothing could be easier. There's a very simple term for it, and this term is: the devil. I'll never be able to understand how people got the idea that the devil was something evil. I feel, quite to the contrary, that the devil represents our last and perhaps our only hope.

Oddly enough, or perhaps not so oddly enough, we know very little about the devil. It's obvious that he couldn't be allowed to turn up too often in the Bible. He's much too explosive an element for the Good Book to handle in very sizable doses. It's not a good idea to strike sparks around a powder keg. The devil or Satan is referred to in the Bible merely as the "adversary," and in one passage (II Peter 2:4) it says of "the angels that sinned" that God "cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness." We don't learn much more than this about Satan and his band, but even this little bit of information tells us a great deal. We know that Satan has been "cast down to hell," which indicates that he is no longer here. That is true enough in the sense that he is no longer *here*. But the fact that he is not here anymore means that he is *there*, i.e., in hell. This train of thought reminds me of a similar one I often heard rehearsed in my parents' house. The Communists were very evil people, my parents claimed, but there weren't any of them in Switzerland. In psychology, this process of hoping that something not immediately present does not exist anywhere else is known as repression. That we know so little about the devil would seem to suggest that we are investing a lot of effort in repressing him. This place called hell interests me a great deal. It strikes me as that "someplace else" where I would most like to be. The devil is someplace else. He is present where God is *not*. The devil is in hell, and hell is, as we all know, a beastly unpleasant place; but it makes sense to be in hell anyway because hell is the place where God isn't.

The Romantics even cast Satan in the role of a hero and noble

rebel, conceiving of him more or less as the prototype of the revolutionary. Satan is the rebel who deliberately chooses to sit in hell rather than endure the sight of that abomination known as God. I feel a real kinship with Satan here because, as I wrote in the first part of my story, I deliberately chose to be ill and have cancer. (Two years ago, my illness still went under the name of cancer.) I *wanted* to be “cast down to hell” so that I could be somewhere else, anywhere else than in that depressive world where I had spent the first thirty years of my life. And this is why I turn to the Satanic world to find salvation. I lived for thirty years in a world that was not hell but that was—to pick but one of any number of adjectives that offer themselves here—“quiet.” And that world was far, far worse than hell. Now I am in hell, but one thing I certainly do not have there is “peace and quiet.” Hell is a horrible place, true enough. But it’s worthwhile to be there. Camus goes even a step further than that when he says of Sisyphus in hell: “*Il est heureux.*” But I prefer to look at this differently, probably because I, unlike Camus, do not begin with the assumption that hell is infinite. Having developed the view that everything comes to an end eventually, I can’t help thinking that there must be an end to hell, too. Or, as the brothers Grimm put it, “Now that you’re in, you’ve got to get out,” which is to say that if you’re able to get into a place, you’ve also got to be able to get out of it again. I feel it would be pointless and banal to stay in hell forever, eternally committed to the idea that God is the embodiment of evil and the devil the embodiment of good. That would just be making the old mistakes all over again, but this time with the roles reversed. I see hell merely as a way station—an essential way station but a way station nonetheless—and not as a place where we should stay forever; for if we stayed in that heat too long, it would prove to be much too hot for us. Furthermore, too long a visit with Satan would run counter to his very nature, for he is by definition an “adversary,” and as such he has to

be *against* something. If he should triumph in his cause, then the need for an adversary would cease to exist; and the devil, if he survived his final, victorious battle against God, would then become Beelzebub himself.

But I have not triumphed in my cause, and as long as I have not triumphed, the devil will remain at large and I will favor his being at large. I have not yet triumphed over the thing I am against. But I haven't lost yet, either. More important still, I haven't capitulated. I declare myself in a state of total war.

*Comano, July 17, 1976*

# Afterword

## *The History of a Manuscript*

The author of this book lived to be thirty-two years old. He was still alive in early October when a prominent bookseller asked me to read the manuscript and judge whether I thought it could be published. The author hoped so fervently. In the course of my reading, I came to feel that it was I and not the manuscript that was being put to a test; and I wrote the author that his manuscript had left me with the impression—and it is one I have had only rarely before—of having read an indispensable document. This impression was so strong, I told him, that I could not even pretend to any critical objectivity and that I would not attempt such objectivity for the time being. Instead, I would send the manuscript to a publisher who could render a more balanced judgment and who might well be inclined to publish the book. I felt obliged to remind the author, however, that a published book, unlike the manuscript, would have to take the feelings of his family into account.

He wrote me—and he had left this same message with friends in testamentary form—that he was willing to publish under a pseudonym, but that was the only concession he was ready to

make. The book simply had to appear. This letter from "Fritz Zorn," which is the only document I have of our acquaintance, displayed a clarity that extended even to the handwriting itself. The hand had something hopelessly neat about it. It is a quality I learned (too late) to spot in the writing of a friend of mine who committed suicide not long ago, a neatness expressive of extreme anguish.

After returning from a trip to America, during which *Mars* had preoccupied me a great deal, I received a hesitant reply from the publisher. He had not come to a final decision and still had some serious reservations. The publisher then learned from "Fritz Zorn's" psychotherapist that the answer could not be postponed any longer if the author was going to be alive to receive it. He was in the hospital and in critical condition. The possibility of a white lie was considered, then discarded. Here, "consideration" of that kind was utterly impossible. The publisher then sent the author a letter of acceptance; but, to avoid creating the impression of haste, he did not send the letter special delivery. This tactful gesture went unappreciated, for when I called the hospital on November 2 to let Z. know I was planning to visit him, I learned that he had died that morning. I and several others were tormented for a number of hours by the thought that the news of the acceptance of his book, which was the only thing left that Z. could look forward to with pleasure, had failed to reach him in time. But he did receive it after all. His psychotherapist, who had brought him the message the evening before his death, assured us that Z. had heard the news and comprehended it.

### *A Sense of Kinship*

Without ever having met the author, I was nonetheless familiar with his background, his surroundings, his education, his pros-

pects in life. The close resemblance of his biography to my own was staggering. I was born ten years earlier than Z. on the same Zurich "Gold Coast." I went to the same schools that Z. did, up to and including the university. I taught at a Zurich Gymnasium, just as he had. Like him, I was—despite much evidence to the contrary—a poor traveler. And I, too, took the route of psychoanalysis when I realized how deadly my prospects in life were. In Z.'s report, of course, the word "deadly" is not used metaphorically. There it refers to concrete medical findings with a name that is part of the vernacular and that inspires dread in every heart: cancer. That is what made this book such a powerful experience for me. This life could have been my own, but at the same time I was on the lookout for what separated me from this familiar stranger who called himself Fritz Zorn.

And there were differences. My petit bourgeois background had not been as horrendously airtight as his more privileged one, which had offered him no openings on life. The norms that governed his life kept me in a state of fear and trembling, too; but in my case this system broke down earlier. With every day that I worried about being socially acceptable, I also came to see more clearly the artificiality of the system. This insight did not emerge into my consciousness at that point, but it did influence my behavior nonetheless. Even as a child I had had to create another existence for myself apart from that crumbling, "right side of the lake" life that surrounded me. I created it in words, in my imagination, and, finally, in the real world as well. Z. saw this possibility only when it was too late for him to act on it. And, unlike Z., I was what is known as a good athlete; that is to say, I was compulsively active. What I was trying to do in every school recess was cast off my own body in frenzied activity. But this at least made me aware of that body, even though I did not—any more than Z. did—develop a comfortable relationship with it. I experienced the same kind of difficulties making contact with others that Z. did; but some dim, unarticu-



lated feeling compelled me over and over again to retreat by moving ahead. And on this advance I encountered sexuality, unhappily at first and in ways that induced guilt in me; but I did not bog down at this stage of development. One thing that remains totally incomprehensible to me in Z.'s history is his apathy toward newspapers, toward every kind of cultural novelty, toward jazz, toward the latest hit song. The walls around the little bit of autonomous life I possessed were no lower than the ones around his, but I took advantage of every breach in them either to attempt escape or to draw in something new. The double moral standard I lived with had at least taught me that I could not expect my salvation from myself alone. I knew for a fact that I was not sufficient unto myself. My problem was not paralysis but a kind of inner cramp, a fear of missing out on life and of not doing all I could to atone for my guilt (guilt being the only true capital a petit bourgeois has). I did not need a diagnosis of cancer, as Z. did, to make me aware of the fear of missing out. That fear was the shaping force in my life.

And perhaps it was this fear (with the concurrent excessive demand it placed on me) that kept the future open for me again and again. For it is absolutely unthinkable that I would have let a swelling on my neck go unattended. My fear of missing out would never have allowed that. My puritan upbringing had not taught me any love for my own body, but for that very reason the body had to be watched all the more carefully. Another thing in Z.'s manuscript that I read with utter incomprehension was how he interpreted the first symptom of his fatal disease as a metaphor ("swallowed tears") instead of instantly seeking medical advice. If he had been a less noble soul, this fear might well have saved his life. As the son of a privileged family, he had not been raised to worry about sins of omission. He had already experienced too many of them. And perhaps he knew all too well—or "something" in him knew—what was blossoming there on his neck; and perhaps that "something" was secretly

in league with death. For in this biography, the first, painful consciousness of what life really can be comes only with the first signs of impending death. It is a melancholy truth that we often learn the art of enjoying life only at the cost of life itself. In this case, we see that truth concentrated, like the sun's rays through a magnifying glass, in one glowing point; and this truth might have worked a miracle if it had not consumed the very medium in which the miracle was to be performed. But truth is no adequate compensation for a wasted life, and no white-hot flame of truth can make up for missing out on the green of springtime.

### *Is This Literature?*

This book is the life's work of a dying man, but we can't let that fact exert a kind of moral extortion on us when we consider its literary merit. Whether it is literature or not is an aesthetic question and one that we have to take very seriously indeed in judging a document whose central themes are purloined sensuality and the loss of perception. The sentence we pass on the literary value of this book will have to remain unaffected by the death sentence passed on its author. The reader deeply involved in Z.'s story will not find it easy to reach such a judgment.

*Mars* is, of course, literature in the sense that it was written by an educated man with considerable verbal skills, a man who never passes up opportunities for witty formulations, sometimes pushing them to the point of aphoristic conciseness. "I was intelligent, but I didn't know how to do anything." . . . "Anybody who is a good boy all his life deserves to get cancer." . . . "It is far more blessed to receive than to give." . . . "I find my personal history lethally oppressive, but it has its logic." The wit of these formulations is striking and reflects the classical education this student of Romance languages had, the Latin

capacity for clarity under duress. Anyone who thinks that a man's final agonies can only take the form of shrieks will be surprised by Z.'s finely honed rhetoric. And this book achieves the status of literature in another respect, too. It has the discomfiting noblesse we find, for example, in André Chénier's poems, where the presence of the guillotine and the brilliance of the Alexandrine exist side by side. In Büchner's *Danton's Death*, despair and bon mot strike this same delicate balance; in Schiller's plays, ingenuity of structure and inner devastation achieve the same effect. We can learn from this book (and in German it is something we desperately need to learn) that this kind of link between content and form does not have to be a mark of insincerity but can arise from the total investment of the author's person. And petty moralists can learn something here about the origins of rhetoric in the spirit of courage.

But, despite this, *Mars* is not altogether satisfying as a work of literature. Not only is it a book without anecdote, but it is also a book that omits "live" experience and supporting detail at crucial points. We learn, for example, that Z.'s parents had an argument once (and only once). But we do not learn what that argument was about, even though it would be of the greatest factual—and therefore literary—interest to us to know. Still another example: We learn that this sick man was a teacher of Spanish and Portuguese, and it so happens that he continued teaching until shortly before his death. But he never mentions what kind of effort it cost him to go on teaching or how he saw his students during this critical period. Z. did not have the socially sensitive eye, the ease, or—to put it bluntly—the sensual relationship to language that a writer has to have to register this kind of movement and feeling in the world beyond his own head. When Z.'s writing is not dazzling, it tends to be pale. It draws what color it has from the very same fire that is consuming it, and it requires a peculiar kind of coldness to exist at all.

Indeed, it is essential to the tragic irony—or, to put it in non-

literary terms, to the credibility—of this book that it displays the very shortcomings it complains of and condemns. It is an artifact created by a man without ties to the outside world, and it is therefore autistic in the most extreme sense of the word. We cannot expect to find in Z.'s art the things that were lacking in his life: a wide range of physical responses, a varied relationship to oneself and to the world, interaction with others, the ability to affect a reader intuitively, almost involuntarily. If Z. had had talents of this order, he probably would not have had to die so young. He certainly would not have had to throw away his life the way he did. Z.'s artistic intent is, by necessity, a different one from what we are accustomed to. Nothing he shows us is bathed in the light of tenderness, longing, or memory. He refuses to blur the sharp outlines of the insights he reaches. The only concession to feeling that his art makes (if it is such a concession at all) lies in the abstract sculpturing of his images of fear and terror. Whatever memories of physical pleasure he has are frozen into these icy forms.

But then it would be incorrect to say that this book is addressed to Death alone. It makes an appeal to the reader as well, an appeal, however, which shows no trace of forced intimacy and certainly none of pandering. The implicit form of direct address here is the one found in a legal plea. An attorney seeks justice for a client who has been denied it, and that client is himself.

### *Monsieur le vivisecteur*

This text does not show consideration for anyone's feelings, and it does not ask any in return. It insists that we keep our distance, and that quality in its style stems from the pathos of a subjective intelligence presenting itself to the reader as an object of study, the object of an extremely private but at the same time supra-

personal science. There is an element of mockery and vindictiveness in this pose, a vindictiveness toward the lifelong insensitivity of a soul that now, at the moment when physical pain is beginning to animate it, has to submit to the knife of cognition and lie absolutely still in the process, as if it felt no pain.

We can see how thin the aesthetic illusion of this anesthesia is, how fragile this construct of a soul kept alive for no other reason than to serve as a demonstration model. But because Z. is so intent on making this demonstration and maintaining this illusory objectivity, we have to respect his wishes. He insists on regarding himself as a case. (This is his last will.) He presents himself to us not only as an individual but also as an example, hence the peculiarly tutorial quality in his style. The attitude he wants to be seen in is not that of distress but that of the only virtue to which such extreme distress can still attain: that of the anatomist using himself as a cadaver. But we are supposed to forget that we are attending an antemortem here, not a postmortem. We are witnessing a vivisection. Furthermore, we are supposed to profit from the extreme conditions implicit in this experiment. This book demands more of us than just our sympathy. It demands an emotion that can yield richer results than that. It demands our interest.

The cognitive value of this document is unusual, from both a psychological and a medical point of view (to uphold once again that highly questionable division of disciplines). Z. describes his childhood as typical of a social milieu in which it was good form to avoid the present, a milieu that had developed the mechanism of procrastination into a style of life. This style made it possible to live every moment in a state of harmony—or, rather, in a state of *fictitious* harmony—because harmony in a real sense would have required the psychic effort of communication and reconciliation. And that effort was precisely what was impossible in Z.'s family. For them, the conduct of proper family life meant regarding all problems as inelegant, declaring it rude

to call attention to the challenge inherent in facts, and postponing all irksome realities until "tomorrow" or else tabling them for further study (by someone else). It meant the complete renunciation of a personal point of view, the refusal to grant any validity to other points of view, the artful combining of a noncommittal yes with an implicit no. It meant the creation of a topography lacking both light and shadow, a topography notable for its absence of problems, which—if they should rear their ugly heads—were relegated to those distant realms where things either were "difficult" or "simply could not be compared." It meant compensating for the loss of delight in one's own physical existence by witnessing the exotic (but respectable) display of other people's bodies. It meant that one quite literally "killed time" until death by avoiding all reality. And, for the time being anyhow, even death is someone else's death.

In this ghost house where people played solitaire and avoided all contact with each other, where they found other people "ridiculous" and all issues "difficult," time and space, influenced by the magic of ritual, subsided into total emotional stagnation. In such a world, it is possible to pass through one's childhood without being a child, to pass one's youth without being young, to become an adult without a present, to greet people without living. Yet at the same time this is happening, the victim is not even aware that he is suffering a loss. His condition is utterly painless, for pain would be a feeling, and all he does with feelings is wear them like clothes. He does not experience them; he does not react to them. In these social circles, feelings are unnecessary. Anyone who pays to see the show doesn't have to jump around on the stage himself. And what does he pay with? Money is the least of what he pays; but, because money is taken for granted, nobody talks even about that. And nobody dreams of talking about all the things that are not taken for granted—like sex, for example, which is spirited out of everyone's life in traditional fashion. When you're a child, it's too far off in

your future to be of any immediate interest; and then when you come of age, it's expected that you'll have put it behind you long since. It never exists here and now. This is a culture of spectators. The awareness that so much propriety can be paid for only at the price of one's life gradually dawns on Z. in his youth and begins to poison that youth. At first, this poisoning takes the form of a psychological suspicion: What if I appear as ridiculous to other people as they do to me? How much terror must the world conceal if, as seems to be the case, the only way to cope with it is with imperturbable courtesy? If everyone is obliged to keep silent about everything that concerns me, how massive must be the guilt I have to absolve myself of? The adolescent moves among other people with the feeling that he has "a dead crow hanging around [his] neck." This is a strangely accurate premonition of the symptom that will signal the onset of his terminal illness. But at this point in his life it stands for a distinction that no human being can ever truly have deserved: the feeling that one has no place in life. During his university studies, which represent the next phase in his life, what had been a mere inkling now becomes a certainty: What's happening to me isn't right. There's something out of kilter with me. This postponing of life that I was taught and that I have adopted as my own is a sickness unto death.

We watch horrified as the negation of genuine needs leaves its mark on the body and soul of this young man. The shadow of an inexplicable sadness is the first thing to affect him, a general lessening of what medical science of an earlier age called "the vital spirits." His deficit on reality, built up over years of illusory harmony and of seemingly privileged life, seeks some route out of the imposed silence of his childhood and finds at first only this summary expression of sadness. But in acknowledging his misery, he has moved a step closer to reality. Traditional psychiatry calls this state "depression," and when the psychiatrists are unable to identify what induced the

state, they add the adjective “endogenous” to the diagnosis. Psychiatrists might learn to express themselves more effectively if they would read Z.’s biography as if it were an anamnesis. But to do so would be to overstep the limits of their professional wisdom and, consequently, of their competence. Where mightn’t they wind up if they were obliged to regard a successful effort to conform to society’s rules (in this case, the submerging of a human body in social respectability) as neurotic and as the cause of a psychic disorder?

After his depression has frozen into resignation—his success at school and at the university is unable to dispel it—he consults a psychotherapist, a representative of a discipline that is more inclined to recognize the unity of body and soul than the medical specialists are. The treatment begins to show results, and for the first time in his life, Z. realizes that what he does bears consequences. But at first these consequences seem to be directed against him, and they are harsh—indeed, catastrophic in nature. The insight he gains into the quietly and internally destructive way he has lived triggers external destruction and threatens to destroy not only the fiction he has been living but also the basis of all his hopes as well. His therapy does in fact prove that the unity of body and soul that his good breeding has obliterated is an indissoluble unity and an overwhelming reality. But reclaiming this indissoluble unity amounts now to the same thing as despairing of ever being cured of his illness, for the reclaiming of that unity has its price. He will have to pay with his *entire* existence; the unity of body and soul has re-established itself in him in the form of cancer.

Was it this diagnosis that prompted Z. to seek refuge from his despair in psychotherapy? It’s much more likely that the medical diagnosis, suggesting at first only a limited danger, was such a relief to the soul that it now felt able to handle psychotherapy. “From outside” it may seem difficult to understand how the word “cancer” struck the patient initially not as a death



sentence but as a symbol of hope. The principle hostile to life, now that it had attacked him openly, had finally offered him a target he could hit back at. Psychotherapy could strengthen him in his determination to make this counterattack. For the first time in his life, this invalid who had suffered so long from lack of relationship had an obvious enemy, and the enemy could now take the place of all the ties he had failed to make in the past. At this point, it did not yet seem fatal that his enemy appeared to him in the form of his own deceived and deprived body.

### *Cancer—What Is It?*

This book can be read as more than just a contribution to the psychology of a deadly way of life. It can also be used as an aid in treating that way of life and in understanding an illness that is commonly described as “mysterious” and “insidious,” one that the medical profession prefers not to call by name. By defying the ingenuity of our physicians as successfully as it has, cancer gives rise to the suspicion that it simply cannot be treated by allopathic means at all and that we will need a new and revolutionary understanding of the relationship between sickness and health if we are ever to conquer it. Cancer is a disease in quotation marks, a disease which is, confusingly enough, not really a disease at all. It is instead an asocial variation on a biological norm. A growth of cells, which under certain circumstances is desirable and, indeed, even essential to life, oversteps the limits of the desirable one day, breaks out of the “healthy” order of things, and injects into its host system a kind of anarchy that kills that system. Who gives the signal that sets this development in motion, a development that is possible in any of us at any time (hence the adjective “insidious”)? Does this growth that leads to death require a secret predisposition toward it to function, maybe even the acquiescence of the organism affected?

Are we perhaps dealing here with a development guided unconsciously "from within" and not with an attack "from without"? Older forms of medical science based in magic and alchemy, forms that still survive in a few heretical but nonetheless flourishing offshoots of traditional medicine and that we see re-emerging today in various exotic therapies, have never regarded health as a quality *per se* but as an equilibrium—a labile balance of material and spiritual metabolism—as a certain level of communication between the inner and outer life; in short, as harmony. It would seem to follow from this that disease corresponds to imbalance and disturbed communication and that it should therefore not be described and treated as the *cause* of a disharmony but as its *consequence*. No one "gets" sick unless he already "is" sick, unless he is living in a chronically unbalanced relationship with his environment and so with himself.

The truly disturbing thing about cancer is how thoroughly, down to the last physiological and psychological detail, it seems to confirm this interpretation of health and sickness. It remains impervious to any and every therapy that proceeds from a less radical understanding of the circumstances of its generation. Radical technical treatment by surgery and radiation is, as the results demonstrate, a totally inadequate substitute. If we study and treat cancer in isolation, then we are not studying and treating it properly. That is the conclusion we should be drawing from the incurability of this disease so prevalent in the "civilized" world, a conclusion that would, admittedly, be very cost-intensive—and not only in an economic sense. It would revolutionize our image of humankind if we accepted the idea that there is nothing we die of more frequently than our incapacity to live in peace with the conditions of the civilization we ourselves have created (a peace, that is, in which we can live out our conflicts instead of having to repress them). Z.'s case offers us the chance to study what the cancer of one individual most

likely is: a protest against the dominant—and objectively verifiable—conditions of non-life in our society; a signal of impending death that the organism, stunted by these conditions, gives itself, developing a *compensatory* growth in itself and, ultimately, against itself.

It is not, of course, enough to regard a cancer as an individual instance of an unwillingness to live, as an unconscious reclaiming of the body-and-soul unity (though individual therapy will have to take this view as a point of departure if it is to reverse the deadly process early enough). Cancer is a condemnation of a society that lives from oppression and makes callousness essential to survival. The reference to “Moscow”—that stereotypical place where people are even worse off—serves as an excuse for our own sins of omission. It bears witness to our abdication from reality, to the unrealized potential of our own selves. Z., who can hardly be called a Leftist, sees very clearly here what the connection is between un-lived life and anti-Communism, between misery and aggression. “Moscow” is the word we use to disguise the fact that we have to feel threatened in order to exist at all.

In cancer, however, this predisposition develops into a real threat. And each case of cancer is an indictment of those aspects of our world that prevent us all from living our lives fully. The laying bare of these connections—an act carried out with the last reserve of a healthy rebellion and sealed with death—is what constitutes the power of this book. If the premise of Z.’s act (his refusal to accept false, inadequate, and repressive ideas about “health” and “sickness”) could be elevated to a general law, the publication of this book would represent a milestone. It would set new goals for the understanding of human nature and—perhaps more importantly—for medicine, goals that might well be removed 180 degrees from the ones the pharmaceutical industry and the physicians representing it are presently prescribing.

### *Counterattack*

It is integral to the tragic irony of this book that the hope Z. draws from understanding the origins of his disease comes too late to do him any good personally. And he knows this. The almost intolerable tension in the last two chapters derives, whether he admits it or not, from his race with death. But in a certain sense Z. does not *want* to know yet that he is doomed. The little advantage he feels he has—the one that may yet save him—stems from this new obstinacy of his. The objective proximity of death suggests to him a proximity to life that has been inconceivable to him thus far, and it rids him, at least in the realm of thought and language, of those problems that up to now had remained locked in the prison of his depression and his polite silence. Whatever else cancer may yet do to him, it—in conjunction with analytical insight—has driven away his depression, his all-pervading melancholy, and replaced it with real pain. For that, Z. can feel a kind of gratitude, however backhanded that gratitude may be.

In this book, Z. demonstrates previously untapped powers of resistance. He does not even shy away from using the deadly tumor on his body as an instrument of cognition. “That, too, is me now,” he learns to say, this person whose self has remained underdeveloped all his life. (That he had previously consisted of nothing but self, that he had been dominated by a melancholic autism, does not make this last point any the less true.) And he goes still further. He finally does what every flower manages to do but what he had never managed to do before; he learns “to show his growth.” This display of self seems to cancel out the death contained in his malignant growth. That death, which now takes the place of all those external ties he never formed and of that whole external world he has let slip by, that death is now an *external* death. It may well be more

painful but is by no means as malignant as that silent inner death he has experienced before. If he proves unable to ward off this external death, he can at least make it *his own*. But he differs from Hofmannsthal's Claudio, who greets death with these words:

Since my life was death, be you, Death, my life!  
 What obliges me, a stranger to both,  
 To call you Death and that other thing Life?

For Z., dying *his* death means knowing both death and life. It means keeping his terminology clear and doing without poetic shell games once and for all. It means calling death death and not losing sight of the terrible arbitrariness of it. It means insisting on calling life life, even though he himself is at death's door.

Refusing to make peace with death, refusing that depressive reconciliation with and indifference toward facts that had made his life an empty dream, refusing these compromises at all costs—that is what constitutes the personal significance of this testamentary document. If there is an element of calculation in Z.'s attitude, it reaches far beyond the hope of gaining some possible advantage in his struggle. And here it seems appropriate to mention the genuine audacity this dying man displays. He demonstrates for himself—and for his dismayed reader—that this sickness unto death, even if it cannot be halted, can be reversed, but reversed in a different sense from what we expect. What Z. means is that it can be turned, in all its absurdity, against the originator of all that is absurd. . . . Z. will pay the leviathan God back in His own coin for the cancer God has inflicted on him. For if it is true that the universe is an organism, then this metaphysical organism cannot be any stronger than its weakest member. But the very fact that Z. is the weakest and

therefore the sacrificed member is precisely what lends the victim his deadly strength. His death will initiate an attack on the whole and carry a deserved death over to the enemy. . . .

Cancer appears here not merely as a reflector of the victim's own life but as a weapon, as black magic, as a malevolent inversion of that New Testament sentence that says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The anti-Job theme, the absolute refusal to be reconciled with the Death-God, is the dominant motif of the last two chapters. Z. digs himself in, adopting the defiant stance of Camus's Sisyphus and having the nerve to declare: "*Il est heureux.*" This is indeed an extravagant form of existentialism that this man—with one eye on his cohort Satan/Lucifer—professes here with all the force of his living (at last: living!) soul. It takes a maximum of self-control—no, of self-affirmation—for someone in Z.'s situation to adhere to Camus's principle which says that in the face of the absurd, the important thing is not to live *le mieux* but to live *le plus*. This kind of libertine immoralism amounts, in Z.'s case, to living beyond the means of his numbered days. But Camus's *le plus*, this principle of living to the maximum, is extreme enough to counterbalance—metaphorically, at least—the mute, suffocating weight of Z.'s un-lived past.

Yet this dying man's resistance, his rage (which led him to choose the pseudonym he did), is not directed solely at the transcendental absurd. He is no less bold in his speculations on the concrete absurd as it manifests itself in our social institutions. He is no less harsh on the absurdities of his familial and social background. These things, too, Z. means to poison with his hopelessness, which assumes, ultimately, a kind of vitality of its own. He sees his death—or what little is left of his raging and outraged life—as a revolutionary attack on the status quo, even though he is not ready to ally himself with any existing

revolutionary forces, none of which satisfy his disquieting absolutism. It is his death that will make what is deadly in this society visible and impossible to ignore. His death will not only disturb the peace of his parents and their society; it will not only expose their guilt for all to see. (Having at first merely implied his parents' guilt in the form of a general accusation, he finally, toward the end of the book, pronounces an utterly unambiguous verdict of guilty on them.) His death will accomplish still more. It will make it impossible for his parents and this society to go on living as they have. (This will not happen immediately but only after the victims, of which he is but one, have reached a critical mass.) As a "passive revolutionary," he will contribute to the decline of the West simply by not having been against the revolution. A society that has not learned how to live is a dying society. It is already dead. All that is lacking is that this death to which society is condemned be revealed.

### *The Sufferings of a Boy*

This is the revelation that Z.'s book throws at our feet. And to make sure that its harshness is not softened by any hopes of another world, he pronounces a death sentence on God as well as on this society. The God that lets this society flourish and that this society needs as the creator of its excuses and alibis ought not to exist. Since He must feel some attachment to the system that created Him, one man's solid hatred should suffice to destroy both Him and the system together. This is possible in Z.'s view because God is not an infinite being but a local one. He is the god of the Gold Coast. He may be absolute in His narrowness, but otherwise He represents only relative evil, which can be eradicated by cutting off all ties to it. It is moving to see how much intellectual acuteness Z. applies to demonstrating the limited and regional nature of God. It seems as if, unbeknownst

to him, he were being guided by the absurd hope that evil in the universe can be circumscribed and isolated, just as he is still hoping it can in his own body. Through the very last page of this book—and through Z.'s very last days, when, consumed by metastases, he went to the hospital for a "rest cure"—the benevolence of what he wished for himself and for others is obvious. The only reason he adopts such a fierce manner is to avoid the disastrous "politeness" of his upbringing. But even when he curses God, using the most extreme form of rhetorical inversion imaginable, we still hear an expression of hope sounding through that curse. How else can we interpret his desperate wish that he will be able to infect the universe with his misery but as a wish for human contact, spoken by a man lonely unto death? His celebration of life *per se* at the cost of his own—what else does that convey but a last plea for procreation? What else does it express—turned upside down and made into a curse—but a desire for love?

The man who wrote this book was developing in it a strategy—no matter how devious—for survival. If all else failed, he meant to leave at least one thing behind, and that was a single penetrating insight: "I will be dead, and I will have known why." That may be a poisoned insight, but rather than see his entire existence disappear as though it had never been, Z. prefers to regard it as a kind of toxic waste that will force us to deal with it, that will be a burden on the world, and that may even destroy the world.

"Mars" wanted to live right up to the last minute of his life and beyond. He needed cancer, which he then tried in vain to escape, to make him realize how much he had always wanted to live, how little he ever had lived, and what life could have been. If anyone feels this manuscript lacks a certain maturity, he should keep in mind that this man was not allowed to experience even immaturity. This is a man with so-called normal impulses who died at thirty-two without ever having slept with a woman.



The fact that he is not an isolated case is reason enough for outrage, the only moral outrage that I would consider legitimate in our society. What this outrage would have to attack would be the life-crippling forces present in each of us, and that is precisely what this report by a dying man does in the most incisive and personal way imaginable. The reader may also object that this book could have gained in power if its author had given more attention to the "minutiae" of experience instead of indulging in his eccentric speculations, that only in this way could the book become a truly "personal" one. Granted. But the very misery this young man complains of here and the very misery he died of is that the premises for just such a personal—which is to say: sensual—existence were denied him. He tries to maintain his dignity by expressing his most profound suffering as anger, not as pain. What Z. is protesting against is death in life, and the only thing he has truly experienced that he can hold up against that death is the life he insists on living before he dies. That life may be a tormented and incomplete one, but it is a life nonetheless, a life that will at least know agony and death, even if it knows nothing else. His rage never quite obscures his plea for justice, his desire to be fair. This old, deep-seated, and suspect desire is at odds to the very end with Z.'s elemental need to express *himself*, to make his wishes known at last.

But even these wishes, if we look at their cutting edge from an inner perspective, appear muted and strangely modest. Z. writes at one point that it was just that little bit too much of everything that activated his cancer: just a little bit too much hypocritical peace and quiet, just a little bit too much institutional callousness, just a little bit too much parental influence. Seen qualitatively, his mode of life did not have to be fatal. It was the quantity, that excess of the inhuman, that made it take the form of a terminal illness. Can we conclude from this that a little more imagination, a little more affection, a little more attention to body and soul might have saved this life despite

its bourgeois surroundings? We can draw this conclusion, and probably we must. Z. slammed the back door to human contact so violently only because he knew that it could not really be shut that way. This radical dying gesture invites the reader to contradict it. The contradiction of a dying man's gesture, being stronger than that gesture, is legitimate because it commits us to act and because it can and must be acted upon here and now. This young man who was condemned to die is not the victim of some blind fate. He died of us, of our inability, time and again, to be full human beings. He died because he did not learn how to share his life and communicate it to others before it was too late. What he lacked, in short, was that friend and that lover who would have demanded sharing and communication of him early enough to help him. In a society that is sick unto death, his death is not the exception but the rule. We will continue to die as he did as long as we continue to live as we do. That is the truly devastating message of this book.

ADOLF MUSCHG



A NOTE ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS

Robert and Rita Kimber are free-lance translators who live on an old farm in western Maine with their son, Gregory. Their major interest is in literature, but they have also translated books and articles on German and American history, art history, science, philosophy, natural history, travel, and sports.



#### A NOTE ON THE TYPE

This book was set on the Linotype in Bodoni Book, a type face so called after Giambattista Bodoni, a celebrated printer and type designer of Rome and Parma (1740–1813). Bodoni Book as produced by the Linotype Company is not a copy of any one of Bodoni's fonts, but a composite, modern version of the Bodoni manner. Bodoni's innovations in type style reflect a greater degree of contrast in the "thick and thin" elements of the letters and a sharper and more angular finish of details.

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