Considered an eerie attack on realism, when first published in 1934, Miklós Szentkuthy’s debut novel ‘Prae’ so astonished Hungarian critics that many deemed it monstrous, despotically referred to Szentkuthy as cosmopolitan, and classified him alien to Hungarian culture.

Incomparable & unprecedented in Hungarian literature, ‘Prae’ compels recognition as a serious contribution to modernist fiction, as ambitious in its aspirations as Ulysses or À la recherche du temps perdu. With no traditional narration and no psychologically motivated characters, in playing with voices, temporality, and events, while fiction, ‘Prae’ is more what Northrop Frye calls an anatomy (à la Lucian, Rabelais, & Burton) or Menippean satire: the basic concern of the book is intellectual, its pervading mood is that of a comedy of ideas. As a virtual novel that preempts every possibility for its realization, it is a novel but only virtually so, a book which is actually a pra-preparation for an unwritten (unwritable) novel. In this, it maintains the freedom and openness of its potentialities, indicative for instance in the Non-Prae diagonals, a series of passages that intercut the novel and continually fracture space and time to engage in what one of the figures of the book calls the culture of wordplay or dogmatic accidentalism. ‘The book’s title,’ said Szentkuthy, ‘alludes to it being an overture. A multitude of thoughts, emotions, ideas, fantasies, and motifs that mill and churn as chimes, an overture to my subsequent œuvre.’

By challenging the then prevailing dogmas and conventions of prose writing, Szentkuthy was said to have created a new canon for himself but later derided as insignificant for supposedly not acquiring followers. Largely unread at the time, ‘Prae’ eventually gained cult status and would be reprinted in 1980 and 2004. To some critics, the book is not only one of the representative experimental works of the early 20th century, but in its attempt to bring ‘impossible literature’ into being, it also presages the néoveau roman by almost 30 years. And in its rejection of sequentiality and celebration of narrative shuffling, long before Burroughs & Gysin, ‘Prae’ enacts what is conceptually akin to the cut-up. Few of Szentkuthy’s contemporaries would reveal with equal bravura & audacity the new horizons that were opened up for narrative forms after the era of realism. In ‘Frivolities & Confessions’, Szentkuthy said that his goal with ‘Prae’ was ‘to absorb the problems of modern philosophy and mathematics into modern fashion, love, and every manifestation of life.’

Translated for the first time since its original publication in 1934, upon its 80th anniversary, this legendary & controversial Hungarian modernist novel is now at last available in English.
As far as Szentkuthy is concerned, the question may be posed as to whether a country, or a culture, can be rendered a more significant ‘service’ than to have a masterpiece written in that country’s language, raising said culture to hitherto unseen heights? *Prae* is one of the most important experimental novels because virtually all of the problems of the old and the 20th-century experimental novel can be found in it, and there are some elements (e.g., the theory of the novel, the theory of architectural wordplay) that are to be found solely in Szentkuthy’s novel… The role of language grows tremendously: *language is the home of being.*

— Pál Nagy

There is no other Hungarian book as intelligent as *Prae*. It skips lightly, playfully, ironically and in consummately individual fashion around the highest intellectual peaks of the European mind. It will become one of the great documents of Hungarian culture that this book was written in Hungarian.

— Antal Szerb

If *Prae* were no more than a loosely linked series of reflections, it would still impress us with its sheer flood of ideas and the delicate veining of its concepts, which reminds us at times of the representations provided by medieval idea-miniatures, those masterworks of subtle distinctions. But like in the Baroque novel, one of its inspirations, the modern recreation of which he consciously attempts, extreme intellectualism is united to luxuriant vegetation, with hosts of sumptuous similes, orgies of words, visionary imagination and, above all, matchlessly vivid sensory impressions.

— Gábor Halász
Selected Other Works by
Miklós Szentkuthy

Narcissus’s Mirror
A Chapter on Love
St. Orpheus Breviary
Divertimento: Variations on the Life of W.A. Mozart
Europe is Closed
Frivolities & Confessions
PRAE
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a) from architecture;
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Sachlichkeit & anti-materiality in modern fashion

Endnotes
I.

From experiencing to expression: a cataloguing of the most ordinary possibilities. Leville-Touqué sees the hat: bringing women’s fashion & philosophy to a first playful common denominator

the roots & problems of expression:

A) three unconnected starting-points

1. the sunflower-fragment in the brain arising from biological involuntariness

2. the unelaboratability of any “theme” (absolute theme)
   all thematic themes devised with rational high-handedness

3. the big picture expressing absolute “evocativeness”:
   a Venetian ship under construction at night
   relationship of tautology & oscillator

B) the way in which it is possible to utilize and connect the above three elements: the necessary relativity of the concepts of connected and unconnected: wordplay

1. wordplay with words

2. wordplay with spatial elements: modern architecture

3. ‘wordplay’ of elements listed under A) new-substance gastronome

C) the annihilation (over-realization?) of ‘person’ or ‘romantic’ hero in the dehumanizing novel technique. To be absorbed partly into a supra-ontological stratum, partly into a supra-fictional stratum separation of ‘object’-novel and ‘hyperaction’-novel
Leville-Touqué wrote an article on the subject of “Outline of a Starting Point, or New Composition,” for his periodical Anti-
psyche. In this he had advanced the case of an imaginary novelist, or maybe a philosopher who assumes the role of a novelist purely in order to gather arguments for his new logic from another field, and he gets that character to observe the point before which there was not yet a logical or artistic inspiration to write a new system or a new novel, but at which point the first germs of inspiration were already present; and with the help of the very first germ & its immediate continuations, he attempts to investigate the nature of the new compositional fashion, the special relationship of analysis and unity, fortuitousness and regularity. After the “Outline of a Starting Point” he had provisionally summarized his conclusions in a second article entitled “Toward a New Culture of Wordplay, or Concerning the Rules of Dogmatic Accidentalism.”

The content of the first article was as follows: for months I had been in love with a girl (the article, it should be noted, was written in the first person) with whom one sunny forenoon I was looking at Paris shop windows, the colorful shelves of flower shops, jewelers and drug stores, when we arrived in front of a milliner’s shop. Just one hat was on display behind the window, and even that barely resembled a hat: it was a small hemisphere in shape, one part of which was composed of shining, thin nickel tubules, with the gaps between being left empty, grid-like, the other part consisting of some thin, greenish-grey membrane about which I could not determine whether it was metal, paper, glass, or some textile. The sight of the superb structure of this marvel made my senses reel, but the girl remained rather cool. My feeling was that one could not construct a more splendid symbol of spring than that half-logical, half radio-technological hat: even in springtime I always took pleasure in some naïve ribbed regularity, the rational inspiration of babbling order
(that was superbly represented by the clove-like arrangement of the nickel straws) and, at the same time, paradoxical brightness, glittering gloom, the certainty and conscious uncertainty of clumsy instincts (that was symbolized by the other part of the hat, folded & puffed out of an indefinable material).

It is undoubtedly conspicuous that my brain accomplishes that symbolism with such a raw mechanism, but here I want to hint at something of the taste of my obsession, with the usual brutality of didacticism: the tight and instinctive coherence & desire to cohere, the cohering voracious technique of the most universal, & thus most obscure, feelings (like, for instance, the complex feeling that we feel in relation to spring and which could be called the infinitely private definition of spring along with some randomly different thing, such as, for instance, those nickel tubules and glass bags here in the milliner’s shop window).

What was the hat intended to declare? The glittering rigidity of the tubules, as rib-like they embraced the small globe of an to it as yet unknown female head, has always been considered the incarnation of the rule, the system, logical distinctions, chapters and ground-plans: tubules are the eternal symbol-lackeys of order. When those metal filaments and nickel runners cling to a black or blonde skull, they create strict Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, pedantic equators and Greenwich-meridians: the brain and short-cropped hair will become imprisoned between the scorpion fingers of the rule. But the rule that the aforementioned tubules represented nonetheless did not mean an old-fashioned cage of rules: partly in the degree of curvature there was a tendency to the grotesque, partly in their luster there was some exaggerated, cynical glitter, blind-white sparking: the original order, the puritanical scheme that such rigid and uniform runners always represent, inclined, in part, toward the world of burlesque, humor, game, and, in part, toward the world of luxury, self-serving elegance, & ascetic pose.
The two kinds of inclination do not count to the detriment (or richness) of order: it was then that I suspected with a discoverer’s naïve self-satisfied nose that new possibilities of editing styles are opening up for me; a bit of humorous distortion on the one hand and a bit of frivolous decorativeness on the other will express the forever desired and indispensible artistic or logical order much more energetically than the parallel wires of the old cage of order. I shall express the essence of the beauty of a splendid lily much more precisely with two artificial inaccuracies: a grotesque cactus somewhat resembling it (that is the game) and a hat ornament made of a glittering manufactured material (that is worldliness): caricature & practical ornament together would make artistic and jurisprudential order.

Yet I learned something else from that window there on the street, for by that time I had read quite a number of books in which philosophy was making its own hypochondria law with a certain grandeur: the concept of a concept, the foundation of foundations, the possibilities of possibilities, the infra-principle preceding the precondition supposing all preconditions, the sense of conjunctions (“reine Und-heit,” “absolutes So-tum”), the most elementary cognitive fundamentals; in short, in puritanical agitation, those books analyzed the whole ‘hyperlogical prelogic’.

Because they were indispensively puritanical: they looked behind the notions of conventional regularity, sense, orderliness, and consequentiality for an elemental order, which hardly resembled our ideas of order; this was an utter failure or triumph (or maybe failed triumph) of puritanism when absolute order was composed of obscure filaments, cell torsos, & plasma secessions. Because after reading German phenomenologies and systematologies it was my impression that these logical infras, the orders and absurd points of origin prior to order, were completely lacking certain geometrical or ‘compositional’ features of the notion of order and were rather a hypothetical gallery.
of opalescent frames, hesitant variations, and Proteus portraits. That is what the bigoted search for order, truly puritanical puritanicalness, led to.

At this point my pedagogical tactlessness interrupts, and it will symbolize this concept of order with the other half of the girl’s hat seen in the shop window, with that strange, uncertain, but massive material of which I did not know whether it was glass or felt. In front of the window, therefore, I had three ideas, which all related more or less to the ‘order,’ the ‘rule’: burlesque, wordliness, & infralogic.

I asked the girl, who, until now, had all along behaved rather indifferently, whether she would like a hat like that. In dry tones she said that she would not willingly put it on because she had the feeling there was no hat on her head, but — as I had told her just before — a radio apparatus or a fancy outfit of arteries that had been surgically removed & nickel-plated. Anyway she did not like to spend money on absurdities like that.

When she called that springtime fetish from which I had begun to extract the Boileau-esque rules of the style of the new novel an absurdity, I felt I had been hit in the head by a bullet. In a flash, I ran my eyes over the girl’s clothes like a bloodthirsty bailiff over the items in a suspect stock-list: flat-footed lace-up shoes on her feet, above them thick brown lisle stockings; a grey English two-piece suit with two buttons, a belt & grey buckle, a narrow-brimmed, grey felt hat with a single hatband around it. All at once my whole love for her became nonsensical: there was no point in my sniffing round so-called ‘discrete’ skirts. I knew that the girl had loads of money, and she was lacking in taste. I took speedy and cold leave of the girl, irately, dispiritedly animated by loathing for her.

So far, then, two important motifs have played a part in my story: an incipient theory and after it immense anger, desolation, & hatred. This was the ideal state for my imagination: the rudiments of a contrived theory coupled with strong revulsion.
The two components, the skeleton theory and the mass of emotions, suddenly combined in an odd resultant, to wit, an unexpected, strange, seemingly completely nonsensical pictorial fragment, or, to be more accurate, an enlarged metaphor. I saw two or three giant sunflowers with large, black carpals and short, golden-yellow ray-florets which were placed, crumpled and almost smoking, over a small, pale-blue lakelet like long plumes and crowns above and around the crest in a heraldic device. Although I saw no need for this picture for the time being, I sensed that it had taken the place of my trial theory and emotional repletion, stifling them and switching them out of reality.

This was both pleasant and unpleasant at the same time: I enjoyed the numbing gift of the sunflower image, its curative surprise, but I painfully missed the gymnastics of consistent thought and desire that had been styled by my body. Whereas before I had felt in every step I took the aggressive cruelty of a wild animal stalking after its prey, now every step was as empty as the empty splinters of shrapnel used as decorations in the homes of soldiers; all that was floating above my head with flirtatious tenacity was the uninvited guest metaphor. The reason for my referring to the intrusive and nameless friend as a metaphor, rather than as an image, is because I sensed that it had to relate to something, be a part of something: maybe more, maybe less than a symbol.

I have already indicated that I liked to research the organic connections of something universal and something completely random; I supposed that I was now standing before a task like that: my experimenting with theories & elementary hatred of the girl had no relation to this sunflower still life, whereas the latter rose into my consciousness with such sudden determination that I nevertheless strongly suspected a tight relationship between the two. When I looked more closely at the sunflower gift that could not be shaken off, I was able to convince myself that there was nothing pictorial about it: although it was wholly
made up of pictorial elements, this was a characteristically metaphorical symptom, just a few contrasts and a few lines in it were emphasized, close-up it could be seen that the black receptacle base was a detail of a detail, almost just a black emphasis; the petals were just little flutterings, trembling yellow motors, and all around they could not be seen. It was all like when one looks too closely at a flower and sees in part enlarged details, yet also in part very poorly & dimly. Perhaps the plant’s collecting cluster microscopic vision would correspond to the inceptions of theory and its dim vision to the spreading of sentiment? I felt that the unexpected picture had a logic, but I also suspected that it was not as vulgar as had been conceivable at the first moment.

As I was unable to find satisfaction with the free sunflowers, I reverted to my previous state: to the compositional theory and the anger, and I endeavored to find a story with which to express my disgust for discrete clothing and the girl acquaintance who represented it. In that way I switched to a new state, for the next step into the “Outline of an Opening.”

I invented the following story against the stingy girl: a Spanish duke had at one time been in love with a girl who didn't love him. They separate and meet no more. The girl becomes a nun, and before long acquires a reputation for saintliness: her chief virtues are thriftiness and forgiveness; she neglects the nunnery’s art treasures, sells them off, and calmly tolerates attacks on her and her convent. The convent’s belongings thus gradually fall into the hands of Venetian Semitic traders: the girl, who by then is famous as a saint, had stemmed from the Christianized Sicilian branch of a likewise Venetian merchant family, but that is not suspected by the fellow nuns of her sisterhood. The ‘saintly’ mother superior (for she soon became that) suddenly dies, and proceedings to canonize her commence. That is where the story began, in fact.
Among the pre-eminent priests and prelates who gather for the canonization is the Spanish duke, the former lover of the girl who is to be canonized, who had similarly become a priest and there soon stood out for his dialectical adroitness and feverish, erotic rationalism, which he sought to exploit now as an antagoništ & assailant of sainthood. He is clear that he does not wish to oppose the girl’s sanctification because she had not reciprocated his love back then, but because he holds her type of asceticism to be characteristically unchristian, indeed anti-Catholic: he wants to prove from her extant writings and sayings that her modesty was rooted in mercantile money-grubbing, her forgiving was none other than indifference to the truth, whilst her puritanicalness was ignorant laziness, and, as far as the practical side of things was concerned: those of the convent’s goods that she had deprived herself of with such exemplary self-denial had become the property of Semitic merchants, which they had devoted to women, wine, and, above all, the manufacture of weapons that the Ottoman sultan purchased as he was preparing for a devastating campaign against Christian Europe.

He discourses at length on the difference between exotic (i.e., truly Catholic) self-denial and naïve-mercantile secular puritanicalness: in the latter he does not see a disdain for the material but an almost calculated cult, which does not annihilate material but collects it, so that the luxury which spends the winnings on artistic entertainments or even frivolous reveling is still a more moral way of handling money than hoarding it. He manages to demonstrate that the reason the mother superior had cultivated a style of such extreme poverty was because she did not find in the world anything which was of so great a value as the magnitude that money signified for her. In his speech for the prosecution (which is what it was) he characterizes the whole convent as a dark symbol of “materiališt self-denial.”
Meanwhile, he learns by chance that the mother superior stemmed from the Sicilian branch of a famous Venetian merchant family, one of whose members had rescued the duke's family financially. The duke travels to Venice in order to observe merchants: there he meets the new pope and learns that he has Lutheran sympathies. This new pope had found a stash of manuscripts by the deceased mother superior in which she had expounded Catholic dogmas with the purest possible orthodoxy. For that reason, the Lutheranizing pope wishes to hinder sanctification, and is very glad to encounter in Venice the celebrated scholarly opponent of sanctification. The duke, naturally, is unwilling to come to terms with the pope, who is attacking the mother superior's virtues from the viewpoint of Protestant-flavored puritanism. The duke loathes simplicity of mercantile origin just as much as Protestant simplicity, and he leaves off his backbiting, not wanting to be in one and the same party as the pope.

The duke vanishes in Venice (Semite merchants, diplomatic Lutherans, & a vanished Catholic apologist: ça, c'est pittoresque!).

The conclave discussing sanctification is still together as a body in Sicily where two guests arrive from two sides at the same time: from the north the pope, & from the south, by ship, a Turkish army. The pope is none other than a machiavellianistically thinking Lutheran, who, making use of his oratorical and literary brilliance, had attained the papal throne in a hypocritical manner and from there now seeks to terrorize Catholics. At the head of the Ottoman army is the girl of Semitic descent whom, as it happened, the Sicilian conclave was seeking to sanctify. In other words, the girl is still alive; her entire nunnish career had been superficial (not hypocritical!), she escaped on the first Turkish ship onto which she had been lured. In her place a stranger's smuggled corpse was buried. The Turks scatter the conclave, but the girl disappears just as did the duke in Venice.
If I take the trial of a theory and my loathing for the girl as preparations, and the spontaneous sunflower fragment as the first phase of the “Outline of an Opening,” then this worked-out story is the second big step of my development into a novel.

This second step is characterized by a deliberate weaving of the abstract lines of the plot: a heap of tendentiously sketched dilemmas, nodes of tragedy, and mechanically condensed moral crises — it was in these that my hatred for the girl was lived out. That hatred was perhaps directed less against the ‘discretely clad’ rich girl than against those broad swathes of humanity which believe that the girl’s discretion is a virtuous and upper class matter, not noticing that it is vulgar shopkeeper mediocrity, obstinate stinginess. When I had the Ottoman army lay waste to the Catholic conclave in Sicily, I had the sense that I was hitting with my own hands at the naïve masses who had hallucinated moral modesty into the taste-impotence of my female acquaintance. However consciously I had mapped out the above story, that consciousness nevertheless did not operate on the level of mundane life, because the sunflower stump stood before it and transformed consciousness’s rhythm: the sunflower was the initial that performed the hygienic work of rendering things improbable, transposed consciousness onto a more frivolous and disquieting plane.

That would have left the ‘elaboration’ of the story. Where to start? The story as I wrote it down here did not arise in my brain as the sketch of a novel that was to be worked out later but was a stand-alone ready entity like the sunflower sign which preceded it, with the difference that I had deliberately forced the issue. But the aim of the whole thing was that I pour out my anger against the girl into a structure, a linear formula: if I had found the formula, the matter was no longer of interest, and it would have been an absurd idea to ‘elaborate’ the plot formula. An algebraic equation expressing a law of physics cannot be ex-
panded into a narrative: & the essential feature of the above plot
subject was that by its very nature it was not a narrative; it had
no novelistic aims, it was a closed, finished formula. With me
theme and development never depended on each other: I had
subjects that were perennial themes and it was just as impos-
sible to ‘elaborate’ them as it is impossible to construct or ‘elabo-
rate’ the Great Wall of China from a ball of mercury completely
contracted onto itself: an outline can never be related to a later
elaboration; every outline is self-contained and uncontinuable.

A ‘theme’ & a ‘novel’ are separate genres, and the two have
nothing in common: one cannot discover even the remotest rela-
tionship between novelists & thematicists. A theme, which has
no novelistic aim, means pure composition, and in my ‘elabora-
tions’ (which of course are not based on any ‘theme’) there have
occurred ‘themes’ as compositional plans; those compositions,
however, did not signify the structure of the work, the whole
work, but ‘structural’ chapters inserted as interludes, or in other
words, if I had written two chapters (without a ‘theme’) and
afterwards some compositional trick or compositional possibil-
ity came into my mind, I did not set the two already written
scenes into a structural unity but used the ‘structure’ as, so to
speak, a third scene after the already finished two scenes. The
so-called artistic structure was not the skeleton, a coherent sys-
tem of girders, of the novel, but an independent character, as if
one of the active roles of Romeo and Juliet were to turn into the
plot line of the same tragedy. The composition thereby becomes
unending, it proliferates forever, constantly changing shape, in-
corporating everything, but at any moment it might also lose
everything, but this structure elevated into a separate character
will float as a cork ornament above the eternal foam of this con-
tinuum of elaborations: as if I were suddenly to deprive a white
lily (which previously, with the aid of a cactus & white hatpins,
I had been able to express more precisely than with itself) of its
contours and thus end up with only an endlessly crumbling and contracting, stray white stream, a white stream onto which I toss the lace-like sample of a now self-reliant contour (painting has been using that technique for fair time).

What am I to do, then? I had two things at hand: the automatically presenting stump of a sunflower, the poverty and visual limitations of which were compensated for by the fact that it popped into my mind with biological self-evidentness and therefore allowed me to observe nature’s secret style. The other was this ‘theme,’ an arithmetic creation of deliberate abstraction that could lead no further. I could not have started with a description of Venice or one of the duke’s pleadings, because Venice was just an algebraic node, the duke’s speech just a sign in the operation, nothing more: the plot meant nothing, the words which played a part in it, like Venice, duke, Semite, Lutheran, or pope, had no conceptual scope: they just touched on the notions and immediately dropped them, otherwise they could not have become part of the structure: structure excludes ‘meaning.’

There is nothing for it but to look for a third step, i.e., this time an image (a genuine ‘scene,’ not the root of a metaphor like the sunflower rudiments) in which I can move freely: where the pictorial elements are unstable, between them hover the mobile waves of time and space in the manner of unregulated water, or an intoxicating wind, and thus washes down or blows away the rough corners of the target meaning that are sometimes revealed. Into this free sketch the ‘theme’ which floats about has to be sucked across, completely transformed, broken down to its atoms, or in the form of larger fragments, in the new and strange picture, like the fallen yellow leaves of chestnut trees on the surface of a distant lake. And in any case a more fortunate situation cannot befall a ‘theme’ than this leaf-like oscillation in parallel to an inorganic movement of the image.
The sunflower sample and the lines of the theme were characterized by a stifling staticness; this third picture (which I shall introduce right away) by a redeeming openness. Openness, not movement in the way that even a tranquil but tiny lake signifies infinite openness: a black mirror of sincerity. The sincerity of lakes is not a moral gesture but the optical chic of infinity: the further I look, the closer I am carried to a dormant stratum, which ever-more precisely expresses the substratal stratum; it’s like a speeding lead ball that always keeps sinking deeper and deeper: it may be that physically this is called movement, but spiritually the great bounds of lasciviousness of a lake mean the perpetually strippable, ever-further strippable nakedness of spatial life: every openness can be a smidgen more open: that is the sadistic suggestion of quiet garden lakes.

The first property that I sense from the picture that occurs in the third degree of the “Outline of an Opening” is ever-continuable openness: if I draw a circle then after the 360th degree I reach the starting-point, and if I carry on turning the compass, at most I can thicken the line of the already drawn line — the openness of quiet lakes and of the picture employed in the third phase consisted precisely of, if I had already opened it up ‘completely’ (that is, its sincerity is on a par with a glove turned inside-out: the openness of a picture is not measured in degrees but in units of a glove turned completely inside-out), & I open it up further, then I shall not be proceeding on the same spot, or rather opening on the spot, after 360º comes 361º of openness, 420º, and the actual number of degrees becomes infinite: the essence of openness is that the properties of a circle and a spiral of infinitely narrow thread are unified in it as spirals of 361º or 420º circles and so on to infinity are conceivable. Apertura semipiterna additiva: that can only be perceived and explained with movements, but in reality that is in no case a movement. I am facing closedness and openness, not staticness & movement.
Two calibrations of opposite direction take place at three places in the “Outline of an Opening,” as far as the material of the novel is concerned, that is ever-narrower, but as far as the sidereal field of the novel is concerned, that is ever-expanding. Materially, the sunflower sketch came first, then the theme, and finally a picture; e.g., in the present case (as will immediately be clear), a Venetian ship under construction. At first sight one has the impression that it is not a matter of gradual narrowing, but on looking closer one perceives these three stages of ‘material,’ like English traders of porcelain in China looking at what the glaze was, what the enamel was, what the inlay was, what was burned in, was the red an added glaze or was it maybe fired out of the material, etc., and classing their pails of clay accordingly; so we, too, can experience that the most materialistic was the involuntary sunflower flip, compared to which the theme was of a lot more diluted, not to say more fake, material, while the picture of the ship under construction was unable to offer anything material: it was all a big reflex. In contrast (and as a result) the sunflower, despite its being a fragmentary grimace of deficiency, inhaled the whole space into itself, like a small fish which puffs itself up to death by swallowing its entire water orchard; the theme, which from the viewpoint of material, was poorer and more limited than even the scrap of sunflower, left more space around itself, the way a part of sugar is left undissolved in tea, and in the end the ship under construction was like a door that has been smashed into smithereens by the continuation of absolute openness and the curtailment of the spatial nude figure (perpetuum nudile). Which, then, was the picture that represented the concluding, third stage in the initial scheme of my novel, leveled against the stingy, ‘discretely clothed’ girl as it was?

In a Venetian winter’s night, the sheer bulk of a giant ship under construction in a tight lagoon dock (more than likely ships were never constructed in places like that): the black iron bridge
is taller than the surrounding houses. On one side of the ship is a big, grass-green blotch, the Moon. In this part the shadows are so sharp that their parasitic roots have grown deep into the body of the ship, and every dangling cord, ratlin, ladder, left-behind girder, improvised bridge or strut occurs twice over like synonymous entries in two languages in a dictionary: in shadow \& in moonlight.

The air is warm, yet snow is falling sporadically in large flakes: the water around the ship, petrified into a blade of pitch, strains so quietly that the snowflakes remain in exactly the place on which they happened to fall: for some time they are still visible on the surface of the water while, as sparks, they become momentarily even whiter then dissolve, dissolution being preceded by a sweet geometrical rearing — when they seesawed in the air like miniature green perukes, they were only small knots of oakum, but when they touched the water with their bristly star branches, they suddenly clarified into regular stars, icy asterisk sparks, like ballerinas balleting on a glass stage, leaving only a black navel at the place on the water’s indolent body where the glass-hungry night swallowed them.

On the façades of the houses, with their spinster wrinkles, the snowflakes traced as precisely as one sees (marked with a penciled circle) on plaster statues \& which are needed, so I believe, in carving into marble or in casting (I have no idea which). The houses loll besides the green, concave saucer of the firmament like the remains of foam spilled onto a tabletop besides an overturned green tankard; it is not a full moon but a full sky, the whole night bursting with spring light that could only be followed for a couple of degrees counted from sea level; afterwards it was already green wind, spring water burgeoning, the moon’s ostensive counterfeit coin, and the snow’s big Danaë centenary.

The clouds rise vertically in snow-white spores, while the light-green cone of the firmament drills its nose into a distant
unknown goal: the whole glittering atlas is a fugue of a racing propeller or corkscrew. The harlequin architecture of the clouds counterbalances the shiny and transparent leap of the firmament like a vertical mast, the horizontal graze of foam arising in the wake of a propeller.

Around the ship there is dead silence. The huge blade of the rudder, the stained divinity of direction, is lifted entirely out of the water. When one sees ‘direction’ embodied separately in this fashion, one thinks involuntarily of a bad direction: as if all morality were based on us feeling, willy-nilly, that a thing placed outside functioning is bad. Nothing good could be supposed about that huge rudder, only evil: it was like one of the wings of a window that has been left open and was made of shade rather than glass, and behind it resides the most malicious intention. Anyway, this palsied backdrop of direction here above the water was so gigantic and helpless that it was inconceivable that this big Luciferian fin could be placed parallel to the fastidious and affected slight directional lispe of a compass needle: the compass indicated too précieuse a direction, the blade of the rudder — too Calibanesque: how was it possible for that giant shark donjon to move all the same? The blade of the rudder, besides seeming to denote a wrong direction, was also a direction-heretic: things raised out of their function not only bode a bad function but always a precept according to which that particular function is only a sophism, it does not exist, in its place there is something else: in place of the goal’s artificial sophistication the self-centeredness of the raised device. Besides its immorality, the rudder blade also suggested some kind of muddy ataraxia that could not be bothered with anything beyond itself: in its skewedness there was a dose of provocative lack of direction, zodiac-defiance (the way the wings of the window ripped out by the wind also do not point in any sort of direction unless toward self-interested
dimensions of insanity) coupled with a certain elfish old-geezer composure. The bottom had been overgrown by moss and some kind of waterweed, the way mournful ivy is in the habit of over-running Biedermeier gravestones: silt, muddy streaks, top-class aqueous plush and root tweezers gave a grey light to the lower, sparser, and cheaper layer of the moon. The giant rudder was, for all practical purposes, only attached to the ship’s stern at one point, the way the colossal earflaps of beagles dangle from their skull on just a single thread.

The whole ship was an ungainly climatic Janus: its side proclaimed every marvel of a snow-covered & moonlit clear spring, its stern (probably due to the sharp maneuvering of its monumental control vane) strove to maintain the anachronistic world of fog, rancid oil, moldy shadows and rusty catarrh among the rags of lifeboats.

The picture, incidentally, derived great pleasure in every kind of anachronistic feature: vernal warmth and pelting snow, nocturnal darkness & diurnal brightness, medieval sailors & a modern steamship: as if with the aid of those features it would have managed to make the area still more spacious and airier.

At the end of the lagoon, where it debouches into a broad canal, a diminutive yellow bridge was visible: a skewed, crooked, tottering bridge that had slipped sideways, at which it did not enter one’s head that it would serve any practical purpose but could be just some sort of appendix or partner of the hulking ship, like another form of hovering over the water: both boat and bridge were made of cumbersome, clumsy, and slack material, the one from iron plates buttoned together at one side like a soutane, the other from stones that had been forced together & like a fan, possessed only restricted local value, but still, that black salmon mausoleum and lemon-yellow parabola-Guignol represented hovering much more completely than a feather-weight gondola or a gull scudding low as it rubbed the sea.
The dilapidated yellow bridge was the brightest spot of the night, brighter than the side of the ship through which the moon is shining: behind it the stone-deaf setting of black houses, under it the water’s black ground-plan secretion, which Venice’s solitary body yields with gliding abundance. Which triumphs over the water more elegantly: the big repaired fish or this constrained barely-a-bridge, suffocated by reliefs: the one gets immersed, in accordance with Archimedean decorum, with the black ‘secretio venetica’ and thus ends up above it, the other accomplishes impossible gymnastic exercises, air acrobatics, and tightrope walking over a teensy-weensy gap in liturgical vestments of stone.

No doubt that heavy little bridge had been built by raising a thick wall, an embankment across the lagoon, and when that compact castle wall was completed the waters pushed through a small hole as if they were extracting a jammed cork with a blockbusting so-called battering ram: this is actually the other end of the bridge-building. (For, in point of fact, other bridges are constructed by shooting a long road over the river in the air, and from this a thinned row of subsequent pillars drops down in long drips.) Of course, the main attraction of the little yellow bridge (pontifex minimus fecit) is that nowhere is there a scrap of curvature, spring, jump, or hovering: every column, statuette, and ornamentation proclaims the unconcerned statics of the driest of dry-land art and nevertheless manages to get stuck in the air, and the undulating, completely slack unbound water under it does not even suspect what kind of accident it has to thank that it is able to reach the central canal of its desires.

That, then, was the third stage in “Outline of an Opening”: the open landscape (Pandora Canaletti, Linnæus). Two things are conspicuous in this three-step course: one is that the first, biological metaphor-refuse, and the last, broad tableau, represent
two regular extremes; the other is the radical disconnectedness, the foreignness of content, of the three stages that I nevertheless feel to be a logical kinship, indeed, I feel the relationship to be rational, because their pictorial parts are so disconnected.

Let us look first of all at the extreme features of the first and last visual stages: The first automatically sprang from my brain, the last I deliberately hunted for. The automatism of the first indicates that an incident in my life, in the present case the beginnings of a theory of the novel, coupled with my fury against a girl and the stingy pseudo-gentility of her dress, my soul or my body suddenly switches over an event like that into an inner concern: just as an exterior vibration of air evokes a pure C# minor or F in my soul, so an external event evokes that scrap of sunflower in my soul, signaling that the event, external history, has suddenly become an anatomical part of me: of course with the sonic example I immediately experience the C# minor or F, while in perceiving the event as the ‘stimulus’ is much more ramifying, processing of it occurs in installments — that sunflower is nothing more than a temporary signal that the story stimulus has been transposed to an esthetic inner plane: it has transformed into anatomy, & it is being handled as an esthetic symptom.

The sunflower snippet, therefore, exactly and with absolute taciturnity, merely signifies the event becoming my body or turning into my body: that tiny but significant + that a consciousness, a biologically reacting area, has been connected to an external story, as a matter of fact only a spark-like discharge between the story and the lowest, unconscious stratum of the estheticizing soul. Here my will had no role as of yet: here the lowest reflexes of my instinct perform the first subjective modification on the story as if a sand sculpture was suddenly surrounded by a wave of water, or a mimosa thin as a wisp of hair were suddenly caught by a gust of wind: the first alteration of the sand
sculpture, the first change of form, becomes a reflex-like transformation that is determined in every inch, powerless & fated, what is called a ‘blind force,’ working on its own. The way the scudding wind snatches at the defenseless mimosa, so the lowest biological stratum of my personality captures the external event & immediately yields that first sunflower metamorphosis.

All that means is that the novel or thought which had been set in train by the external event on this level is in a suffocating relationship with the biological arrangement of my personality: on me the novel is like wet tissue paper pressed on a bronze figure, its material may be self-contained but it totally displays the unalterable structure of my being: a slave novel, captive logic.

Touqué was clear about the fact that he had expressed his emphasis of the biological character of the sunflower in a highly tautologous fashion, but he found that the antidote to tautology was not abbreviation, greater concentration, and omission, but setting a special ‘oscillator,’ an identity-oscillator, which in the present study consisted of sunflowers from a special issue of *The Studio* devoted to gardens, indeed he had also enclosed pictures of poppies & hortensias, and had printed a dialogue diagonally, the daybreak chatter of two Englishwomen about their gardens. The two extremes, namely, the ‘infinite-definition’ & ‘infinite-whatever,’ had to appear once beside each other: the truth always seeks to loop more positive rings around itself, but it falls into the fatal absent-mindedness that ultra-definition does not lay concentric circles around a theme (in the present case the biological nature of the sunflower) but draws a helix, which can be continued forever, so that from the everyday point of view it does not seem to be a narrowing of precision as by virtue of its eternally valid nature its course is everywhere equally open, loose, and impotent. But Touqué wished fully to try out a schoolboyish delirium of verbosity, he wanted to wind out the phenomenologist’s open helical spool of self-repetition a good
bit further because he sensed that even if on the rational plane of the first degree that was just unproductive idling on the spot, on the rational plane of the second or nth degree even tautology is a useful logical dough.

For the ‘truth’ is always composed of two elements — one an eternal spiraling around the theme, a million thick shackles, but each one running over into the next, so that the theme to be defined lives behind it in only humbug-captivity (this is chiefly the Heideggerian automatism of German technology: the “opened identity”); the second is the oscillator, which indiscriminately shreds, intersects, diverts, refutes and betrays this eternal spiral (one might, with a touch of unscrupulous rashness, more just for the sake of neatness, call this English technology on the basis of the Baconian essay: the automatism of “playful role-flashing”). Truth therefore has two elements, which are directions, & irreconcilable directions at that; it is never possible to “lock up” the truth, at most to harry both the “definition” and the “oscillator” to the limit in their opposing directions: on the one hand into mythically stifling-tautology, & on the other, into sweating, anarchic flashing-apart. One can find no better oscillator than aimless conversation.

“…Yesterday evening I heard a great thud or scraping noise, I don’t know what it was, you don’t mean you hit the fence with your car at night?” “I did, good and proper too: you know that they are mending the fence at our place: they have dismantled everything, including the gate, so we organized a special patrol around the garden. I now drive in at the back of the garden because a little wooden gate was left still intact there…” “Are you so attached to the gate? Is the gate more important than the driveway to the garage?” “Laugh if you want; everyone does when I tell them, but believe me, I literally suffer from vertigo and get seasick whenever I enter the garage of a place that
has no fence.” “Well anyway, what happened last night?” “Our old gardener had stacked all the buckets of sunflowers that used to stand beside the dismantled fence over the small gate at the back, because he had no idea that when the entire park fence was taken down, I would drive around the whole lot so as to drive in precisely through that little wooden contraption to get to the garage.” “So you hit it, of course!” “And how! And there were those unusual sunflowers with huge seeds and huge florets.” “I don’t understand. I bought the same seeds and nothing came of them.” “Maybe your gardener just hasn’t got the knack. Why don’t you ask mine?...” “Ask him? I can’t imagine an unfriendlier chap. It’s incredible how a person who works with so many marvelous flowers can be so curmudgeonly and obnoxious. Are you annoyed?” “No, I’m not annoyed at all. But he’s only like that on the outside. If you get into a more prolonged conversation with him, he’s a sweet teddy bear. I dote on him.” “I can’t stand people like that who you have to test out for half-an-hour like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle and then they pompously turn all amiable. Was your car scratched at all? Judging from your appearance, nothing...” “Thanks. The fender was a little crumpled like the peeled-down tin-foil on a champagne bottle, on the other hand, I was hugely amused this morning from the bedroom window.” “At what?” “All of a sudden I heard my husband’s voice arguing with somebody in the garden. So I got up and went to the window and I saw that with his foreman he was inspecting all sorts of stone debris between the overturned pots of sunflowers. I shouted down to ask what was it, perhaps last night I had tipped over a stone amphora, or even a freshly built and still weak wall, trying to be like a Biblical vehicle and pass solely & exclusively through the eye of a needle into the garage? My hubby shouted back in a weepy voice that far from smashing any of the vases, it was a good deal worse: I had knocked down an artificial ruin which had been just in the process of construction.” “Good Lord! That’s amusing: ruining a ruin.” “Fortunately, the bits of the ruin had been marked with big daubed numbers so that they were able to
restore them into the disorder that they had spent weeks calculating, but I still had a big laugh.” “Tell me, do sunflowers always keep their heads pointing toward the sun? I always thought they had nothing to do with the sun.” “It shows how frank you are to think of something like that! It would never have entered my head to ask something like that. Anyway, come over for tea and we’ll watch from the terrace whether they turn with the setting sun.” “I can’t spare the time today because I have an appointment for trying on a housecoat. Just fancy, my girl will make an evening gown for two fittings but has difficulty with even as few as six for a housecoat.” “Tell you what! Then I’ll go across to your place to look at your things. My husband detests housecoats, so I never have one made: he says he can’t abide coming back home to have breakfast after he’s been out riding or playing tennis, full of fresh air and the joys of exercising, in his white shirt and trousers, to be greeted by a sleepy fake geisha in a swathe of silk.” “That’s interesting. My own husband said something to the effect that a housecoat makes a person spastic: knee-length sleeves and skirt pinned to the shoulder blades, so that the pattern of the textile is intact, but the girl is a Japanese hunch-backed monstrosity.” “That’s it, exactly that. In fact, my trousseau included, among other things, a housecoat that was cut every which way in such a manner that the whole thing looked like a clumsy bandage on a wound that extended the whole length of my body; on the other hand, embroidered on the endless flaps of the right arm and on the quite narrow waist area, there was a single giant sunflower…” “Apropos! Apropos!” “Yes, yes. In order for the sunflower to be easily and clearly visible I had to perform all sorts of grotesque movements, and my husband just hated that.” “I’m very fond of big patterns; indeed, on one of them the pattern is larger than the housecoat.” “How’s that?” “On the back the pattern printed into the material is cut in half, the thing has been tailored to the shoulders, with the missing half fastened in the shape of a stiffened plate like an angel’s wing or Stuart fin.”
“Is your girl still the same as the one you took on that time we holidayed together?” “That’s her.” “But I seem to remember you moaning from dawn to dusk about how inaccurate she was.” “I still moan now, but she’s highly skilled. Recently I’ve developed a particular loathing for models. Nowadays she comes here so often I’m not bothered if she comes three times in a week, don’t get into a flap if she doesn’t show up on days she has promised. I don’t go out, I’m always at home,” et cetera, et cetera.

That is how an oscillator functions after a tautology.

The other visual state (the third phase) is the exact opposite of the sunflower: there freedom, an everlasting game, and unlimited artifice, rule. Everything fits into that picture, indeed, has to fit; only then is it perfect: all the elements, all the flowers, conceivable fifth, sixth, and seventh seasons, man and girl, supplemented with a couple of independent, untraced human genuses, all the stars, and all the fashionable, important dimensions: freedom and artifice operated with such impetus that something of which there were seven, like, for instance, stars in the Big Dipper, the seven days of the week, or the number of Wordsworth siblings & children, here starts straight away with the eighth, taking no notice of the preceding seven, which are just a kind of comme il faut prelude before the truth, starting at the eighth.

So in its first phase the incipient novel is essentially indistinguishable from my own anatomy: in point of fact only the retouching of a wave in the well of blood that softly sprinkles my brain; the last picture, however, leaves my thoughts, my life, my special theme, my theory of the novel, & the girl’s annoying and immoral miserliness, a long way behind and pushes it into a foreign and infinite delta of almost lexical and alphabetical pantheism of freedom.
If, then, I truly wish to draw a lifelike portrait of the sweetheart I had come to loathe, then, first of all, I must draw a quite insignificant thing, a poor sketch of a sunflower, i.e., the ‘absolute detail’; secondly, every imaginable thing in the world: ships, bridges, historical eras, and statistics about the distribution by occupation of those who will rise again at the last judgment: or in other words, ‘absolutely everything.’ These two are bound together by the second degree with colorless-odorless-insubstantial & transparent threads: the ‘theme’ produced. The third degree is linked together by no more than my intellectual will: I want all of this to stand in the service of my incipient, novelistic revenge against the miserly girl. At the beginning there are just two symbols, one a minus sign, the other the recumbent eight of the infinity sign: I am unable to get anywhere with the actual ‘theme’ between them.

As I mentioned, the first point of interest is that the first minus metaphor and the third infinite image are in an entirely contrasting relationship, while the second consists of, or rather arises, if I utilize all the three phases in the actual description of the novel or theory, and I relate all three to each other and separately to the central idea, namely, the tight-fisted girl. What will happen then? That is what was related by Leville-Touqué’s study in Antipsyche entitled “Toward a New Culture of Wordplay, or Concerning the Rules of Dogmatic Accidentalism.”

He started off from architecture, as so many times, and called attention to the following trick occurring at every turn: the engineer draws a square, and after that another, but in such a way that the latter square falls partially onto the area of the first square, and thus a shared area arises: that overlapping area will be the central and essential form of the whole construction; if the two squares occurred on the ground plan, then the self-contained box of the stairwell would rise above the overlapping area;
although it was perceptible that the form was not self-contained but a by-product, shadow, or reflex relationship of two almost accidentally superimposed foreign forms, out of it one of the most important parts of the whole building would nevertheless come. If the two squares did not occur on the ground-plan but, say, on a sketch of the façade, then double-thick balcony rails would be set up just as on the maps, where the statistical grid of colored lines on mutually intersecting but identically ruled areas would also be double thick.

No end of variations on that method are possible, but everywhere the principle is the same, with a bunch of forms being given that are pulled together so that a common area always arises, but the essential pillars of the whole construction will always be these ‘fortuitously’ doubled or tripled areas. Imagine a tree on which the leaves do not grow the way books of natural history describe, but on every branch the only formations to be seen are those arising such that two, three, or more leaves cover each other, and now only the common areas exist: in the place where a single leaf surface was left nothing at all figures at present. The style of the above-mentioned buildings is comparable to a tree like that. But that is nothing other than an architectural cult of wordplay.

Take a linguistic play on words, for example, the nickname of *Hippopochondra Stylopotama* given to a girl writer by a friend, where he drew on the scientific name for a hippopotamus to hint at the girl’s widely known hypochondria and literary inclinations. With that wordplay exactly the same thing happened as in the ‘chance’ dropping of the two figures, one above the other, in architecture: the ‘hippopotamus’ designates one of the squares, ‘hypochondriac’ the other, and now with an engineering trick I push the two over each other in such a way that there will be a double arc: the linguistic blob where the hippopotamus life and hypochondriac life concur and they become shared,
with two simple areas to the right and left where the notions of hippopotamus alone and hypochondriac alone lie. One can find no meaningful, logical connection between hippopotamus and hypochondriac; both have a vitally foreign essence, and we nevertheless force these two foreign entities and two substances onto one another in order to make their shared area a single, true substance: just as an architect does not make the foci of an ellipse the structural centers of a building, the diagonals of a square the internal bridges of ratios, but tosses onto the ellipse a non-pertaining, foreign, inorganic and risky form (let’s say a row of four small, contiguous circles), and the covered area which arises in that fashion is made a carrier of the gist, something which shows people a completely new state of their sensitivity to substance: it can only enjoy accidents as dogma. The old substance was always an intellectual product of internal proportionality & arithmetical regularity — a kind of rational focal point; the new substance is rather the result of a biological operation: for it to appear or be effected it needs external fertilization, an alien form which sprinkles its own capricious form-pollen, & that is when the new substance is born.

What can easily be solved in the body of language and accomplished architecturally must also be realizable in novels: from the three initial phases — from the sunflower discharge, the T-squared network of plots, and the picture of the endless Venetian ship — what will likewise be essential is what arises if I push those three states slightly on top of each other, like three playing cards on a green baize card table, on each an independent digit still showing, but the bodies of the figures, the hearts, clubs, queens & kings, are bettered into a common game of forms & game-substance. Thus, wordplay does not mean cheap humor, quite the opposite: a modification of the essence-sensualism, the essence instinct, extending to the whole culture.
Let us take as an example the following wordplay, where grammatical pushing together is replaced by the pushing together of human lips: what becomes of a kiss if I treat the inflexible collision of lips as wordplay? The lips will have a shared area, and on both sides there will be residues of the original two non-united (non-conformist) pairs of lips. The essence of a kiss does not consist of two people meeting in it, but only in what would clearly be visible if both sets of lips were caked in lipstick and a thin plate of glass were to be placed between them: the red imprints that would be visible falling onto one another on the two sides of the glass plate would be the play substance of the kiss, the new, accidental anatomy of the lips, with the help of which one might also one day be able to cure mouth diseases more easily than by the old-fashioned way.

To put it another way, a true positive is always the relationship of two things, and specifically not an intellectual relationship but a quite accidental connection: in playing cards, when after a deal one is holding cards that one has been dealt by chance and immediately strives to treat that unconnected haphazard fan of numbers and court cards that one sees before one’s eyes as fundamental truths on which one must build the entire hand: it is precisely the capricious incoherence of the cards through which one must calculate the essential course of the entire hand; if the cards lie systematically in the hand, one could deduce very little about the future and the neighboring hands, but if, on the other hand, there is considerable disarray, the broader the perspective the greater the order one sees around and in front of one. If an engineer builds a house, the blueprint of which is an infinitely narrow area that has arisen from two barely touching ellipses — precisely that hair’s breadth fortuity allows one to infer the horizons to the left and the right of two large ellipses, whereas an elliptically shaped house does not allow one to infer any dynamic supplementation or spatial prediction.
The whole century is progressing toward wordplay —, Leville-Touqué wrote in his essay. Wordplay is an expression of the instinct that we consider relations ordained by chance as being much more eternal realities and much more typical beings than the individual things which are the characters of the relationship. One can imagine a new arrangement of the world whereby trees vanish from an alley of trees & only the smudges of touching boughs are left; the constitutive elements disappear from chemical compounds, and lines of bonding force are all that remain as sole material reality; the cells of living tissues have all been annihilated to give way to the relation between cells: in the places where hitherto there had been nothing, where only purely intellectual bonds of relation had run, in other words, in practice, an emptiness yawned, that is precisely where realities live nowadays. Every right bank and every left bank fades away, but the world is filled up with an endless multiplicity of hard bridges. If previously one had been interested in rose gardens because of the roses in it, one is now interested in the area between roses; in other words, for us a rose garden will not mean the aggregate of roses but something like a house painter’s template, being a single large sheet of linoleum, out of which, however, the roses are cut off: that sheet of templates can be perceived as a separate space of the relationships of the roses, a materialized mass of relationships which is so dense that the roses are negligible abstractions in comparison.

I said previously that the essence of a rose is what another rose or a parrot’s beak that falls over it happens to be covering; if I sense that concealment too strongly, however, even if I pull the covering rose away from the first rose and take it a long way away, I still feel that it is hiding it, and that second kind of concealment or coincidence, when the covering and covered are far from each other, but even so the instinct for wordplay senses, at least in shadow-like form, the mutual falling on each other:
that is precisely what is called a relation. The relationship is nothing more than an opened-up falling upon each other: the furthermost things in the world cast some kind of shadow on each other, and in many cases the paradoxical case comes about that the shadow cuts nothing from the other thing but only a black communicating path between the two things, say, the two roses.

It is matter of two states of one and the same wordplay situation: the first, more primitive and more naïve state when two roses do actually partially cover each other, and the shared part is the 'flos substantialis'; the other state is when the two roses end up far from each other, but in such a way as if in falling onto each other they had been stitched together, & now, when I pull them apart, the second pulls with it the cotton threads which had bound it to the other: that is when what we call a relation actually arises. (In days gone by they used to manufacture a substance with similar industrial tricks as the above rose positionings, but in a significantly different direction: to start with, it was not just two roses placed one above the other in a possibly meaningless situation, but ten or thirty or two hundred roses placed one above the other in a possibly meaningful situation, exactly fallen onto each other, completely covering one another, and thus [the second crucial difference] the picture-like essence pressed out at the end of the old technological procedure was the innermost kernel of a single object, an end in itself and unique, whereas the picture-like essence manufactured by the wordplay technique is never the most intimate nucleus of an object but, quite the contrary, a surface & superficial torso, not for its own sake but rather expansive, something pointing to another thing.)

Two characteristic features of the new notion of essence are, first of all, that it is always composed of a capricious detail, which is raised to the strength of dogma (the second characteristic feature), that it receives that torso from another object and thus it
relates to another object: this social streak, let us call it, counterbalances the torso nature. This is where the essay connected to the program of *Antipsyche*, the mind being the means of individualization in man; the mind, for one thing, is the center of intelligence and moral center of gravity, and for a second thing, its strength is closed in on itself. On the other hand, the new essence, for one thing, is a torso, for a second, it is something which leads out of itself and into something else so that it cannot be concerned with the human mind in the sense it has hitherto had. Obviously, in the new novel, there will hardly be any role for humans and their minds: just as we shall soon forget that there was a ‘hippopotamus’ and ‘hypochondriac’ in the world and instead concern ourselves with ‘Hippopochondra,’ which is a new substance made of the two: a torso not self-directing (the ‘torso’ is not to be taken in the sense of sculptor-Romantic but, for example, that of an open conic section).

Wordplay has an extraordinary poetic value alongside its rational, not to say philosophical, use: by forcing two foreign things together it excites the fantasy most advantageously, for instance by adding to the picture of a hippopotamus the mental world of a pale, thin, and pretentiously decadent poet, while in the word ‘Stylopotama’ the academic-flavored scientific notion of the style is, all at once, crowded substantially with the green waves of tropical waters. Along with that we also have within us the instinct for involuntarily imagining two unconnected things as extremes, as if they denoted two ends of an extraordinarily rich series, boundary stones of arithmetical precision: beyond the hippopotamus there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the one direction, and similarly after hypochondria only space ensues in the other direction — thus, with the assistance of wordplay, which fuses these two endpoints of the phenomena of the world, we are always in possession of a huge arc, a reliable amplitude with which, as it were, we sum up the affairs of the world:
through holding the two boundary values (because those are what we sense these two unconnected things to be) we almost symbolically possess the sum of intervening values, the million other values falling between the hippopotamus and the hypochondriac.

After the analysis and propagation of wordplay culture it was necessary to examine the role of the thus nullified humans in the novel (which of course real society will follow somewhat later) or rather to imagine that non-featuring more precisely. That was the idea that was expressed in a newer paper entitled ‘Style-Person and Sache-Person’.6

Touqué set off from his memory of a love and strove to keep it in a novelistic vein, in contrast to the spoon-feeding manner of his notes on substance. One summer he had had a rendezvous at five in the morning on a pier in Cannes, but he had spent the preceding evening in Nice and had not slept a wink. The whole night he had walked between trees, his soul drifting in winds, in stars, in leaves, in times, and in paths among all the raw vast categories of lyric and logic. He then noticed that in fact he was a ‘man of sentiments,’ as the old phrase went. That surprised him since on the basis of the substance experiments, in the pedagogical elastic-sided boots of roses sewed with thread, he had begun to feel very much like a village schoolmaster who felt like he was dissolving in the superfluous effort of making comprehensible things clear. He realized later that his massive sentimentality lay at the bottom of the intellectual sterility of spoon-feeding (or already on the surface): massive because it was not a mental nuance but an edifice in space that was independent of him.

Tautology is always a lamentable effort toward where we nepotize a thought from our soul into a component part of a strange, inhuman space — a truly intelligent thought is like
an elegant girl in a druggist’s shop weighing out quinine in a transparent pharmacy shaped like a lamp bulb: she tosses a weight onto one pan of the balance, a knife-tip of powder onto the other pan, selects a new weight, takes off the first weight, replaces it with a glass bottle, flicks, stirs, withdraws, tips the scale, checks the balance pan; one might think that the quinine and the weights, multiplication and therapy, were going to fly out of the druggist’s shop into the world, like pollen from an autumnal flower, yet everything remains between the glass lamellae and tungsten table wires. The second possibility, however, is to load everything onto one of the pans, weight on weight, quinine on quinine, so that it all overturns, the sense of the balance ceases the handlebar-mustachioed selfishness of balance, and to install an asymmetrical block in its place. People sometimes believe that a person discussing tautology enjoys the milieu of his thinking like a dog’s nose the axillae of its own thighs, when on falling asleep it sticks its nose there, though actually wanting to be free of it, distance itself, become estranged from & forget it, but not by turning back but seeking to cut across its own jungle of thoughts and forestall itself.

Now at nighttime, when he was observing his feelings, he had no need of the tipping of the balance because it had already tipped over long ago of its own accord; a single pan was all there was on the world’s big sentimental balance, so it was not sentimentalism but trees, stars, times and paths. Every ontology is without fail a tautology, only the freshly tasted ontology of sensitivity, amorous hypochondria, & fermentation of memory is not exposed to the danger of prolixity in a grammatical sense; if the long longed-for & again longed-for longing is made a longing, the repetition falls smoothly in a single clean wave from the brim of the mind’s well in order that it be absorbed in the big ‘ens’ basin of nature, space, & God.7 Humans did not yet truly feel, he thought with chaste daring. If they had truly had feeling,
there would not have been any lyrical poetry, which means that the feeling was not so strong as to throw the mind’s internal balance pan over toward the glass window and thereby scatter its blonde quinine for primrose powder onto English and Greek fields at the same time. That is how the ‘Sache’-person had come to mind, who is nothing other than a pure-sentiment-person, but as he was an extremely pure-sentiment-person, not even a psyche-owner, indeed not even human, just an ontological dough, a pain-tree, pleasure-rain, desire, kiss-time & dream-space. Tree, rain, and time, of course, are not pantheistic case endings, only naïve & temporary signposts of an as-yet unknown ontological language.

When Touqué thought meanwhile of the girl and their morning rendezvous, he thought it was pointless; both the girl and he himself were ridiculous little grubs in the independent space of the sensation of love. When he turned against the wind, he did not expose his feelings to the star-acidy breath of the night like hair that girls uncover in order to dry it, but he displayed his little birth-certificate personality to the flow of emotions pouring from the distance, which was not him and which wanted nothing, just the sentiment qua sentiment, detached from the person. Women cannot be reached because they are much closer to us than our own conscience is to ourselves: love, consummation, everything has long been ready. He would be meeting the girl tomorrow morning? They were already past everything; at least that was how the oncoming feeling spoke to him on the school stage of “onto-mania.”

The morning, the girl, the thought of the meeting, were a frightful nuisance to him; he saw the whole thing as ill-timed adolescent canoodling. Love in him was so grand, sentimentalism so infinitely sniveling, that he hated the petty social dramaturgy of love, or simply love itself, the existence of sexes. All that he liked was this cold Nice night that united the girl’s body and
his own lyricism in a single dark gesture. But if one is pursuing narrative, then the technique for expressing this sentimental “Sachlichkeit” has to be found: the feelings that are not to be found either in the soul or in the trees but are new mythological realities in which decadent nervous disorders are so self-consistent that only the most savage realist branch of scholasticism is capable of expressing them: they became stronger and more positive than one did oneself. On the other hand, in the morning, he still had to meet the girl, as per arrangement, though when the first daylight clung like a lemon-green parasite to the breakers on the shore, he mourned for the girl as for a dead person (the fact that we imagine the girl as often as possible to be dead & decline her into the grave is merely an artificial trick for the purpose of smuggling her into the ontology).

The girl was not there. He waited half an hour for her then went up to her room in the hotel. The room was empty, the bathroom locked; only the gurgle of water in the wall plumbing being run out of the bathtub. He did not knock, just peeked through the keyhole. The girl was sitting before the mirror, or rather in the mirror, because in this hotel the fashion was for semicircular strip mirrors that could be rotated (rather like the wheel of a water-mill), so that a springed chair rose up if the mirror went deep down, possibly under the chair: thereby women could inspect themselves from quite wild & crazy perspectives, from which it was only natural that they immediately absorbed a quite new demeanor. The chair comprised two horizontal semicircles parallel to each other, armrest cocainism without a seat. Between the interstellar mousetrap of the armrest armature & the inverted light trough of the mirror on a glass board lay some diminutive boxes with which the girl was working at such short intervals, it was as if she were piano-playing back in a high-speed shot the coins that she had lost. Right then, as it happened, she was fiddling with her eyebrows, holding what looked like a small
toothbrush, black mascara on a small plate in front of her, beside that a grimy rag with black smudges on it. One of her eyes was as yet unprepared, on the other were huge black needles like those at the ends of escalators in the London underground where giant steel combs are set against the gamut of the deep creases of the steps as they melt away.

He looked at the boxes: a long column of lipstick, a dinky Venetian coffin of face powder, nail varnish flat as a British silver coin ironed out on a railway line by the Orient Express; the face cream in a white porcelain jar like a fattener for sick infants; the perfume bottle as a scroll — the sole glass flourish, twisted shepherd’s crook, or a moving-coil Kelvin galvanometer; the rouge — a small princely crown with a crimson brain inset already visible on her cheeks in the form of a first rough daubing. What shone through the keyhole was not desire, not love, not the stare of an inquisitive male like beams of light in a physics laboratory, but the lump of ontological dough rested on the bridge of cosmetic articles.

Touqué was unashamed, he left the antithesis as an antithesis: ontology and frippery, analogy entis and empty cosmetics — there you have it: a love story. Now, for a second time he ceased to be intelligent and human: at first he had been so much what he is that that identity became the cause of the greatest asymmetry, swaying & drawing away, while now the girl had so much vanished and been reduced to nothing behind the fiction-mathematics of cosmetics that this again rendered impossible regular love, as described in books. The girl was, in point of fact, in those boxes: cream, powder, oil, varnish and mascara, & in the implements: brush, sponge, rag, tweezers, scissors, perfume atomizer. His lover that night was the world itself, trees, roads, times and stars all together, in God’s Jacobius Maritanus Ens-salon, his sentiments the virtually unbearable positivity of being — now an artificially assembled figure of deceptive anatomy, a game, algebra, fiction.
Love, therefore, fluctuates between two non-human poles: between ontological *Sachlichkeit* and cosmetic, radical artificiality. That made him optimistic. What, he wondered, could be the most faithful epic expression of this ersatz person who had fled into cosmetics? Perhaps that the protagonist of the novel (having already transformed into a material pain-constellation for the sake of ontology) transforms into the *style*, *structure*, grammar of the novel concerning him, becomes a ‘*style-person.*’

The novel is thus not a closed affair but two counterposed infinite cones with rounded ends; the two mirrors absorb different things about the ‘hero’ arranged around them. One sucks out his soul, his sentimental kernel, the nest of sentimentalism, and projects it beyond the most universal, absolute world of existence, beyond even categories; the other cone-mirror, by contrast, absorbs the surface of the surface, the outermost of outer boundaries, slips it through into the world of fiction, abstraction & cosmetics, where (unlike the other cone’s world of pure raison) only grammar, only word, empty & self-serving grammar rules.

Touqué tried to write something like that under the title “Kiss.” The first part was scene-setting (the setting is always the first, ready-to-hand device for ontologically-intended dehumanization): night sky, crepuscular pink, with golden veils, analysis of the pink, idyll, sorrow, fire, flesh-color, time, flower, girl, weariness, virtue, irony, daybreak, dream convention; in it pale-green acacia leaves: ash, line, something, a fault, commutator brushes; a spherical early arc light in the pink sky: total light, total absence of rays, light, isolated color, no color, no light. The impressing upon one of the scenery’s impossible totality, the nature of the absolute godly nude and infinitely compensated repleteness with paradox, signifies the kiss’s emotional content, which naturally is beyond and foreign to the kiss. The second part is a fragment of a strange story, describing the curriculum vitae of an electric current flowing through the shunt of an ammeter and the repeated
wing-beats of tamed seagulls: everywhere mouth, teeth, red-
ness, collision, parallel, double & quadruple numbers, polarity,
choice. Of course it is hard not to describe a cosmetic fiction
but to give a sense of the humbug through linguistic formulæ.
The kiss novella also had a subtitle: “An attempt at a permanent
definition of ‘onto-fict.’” ‘Onto-fict’ seems a fairly toothpaste logo,
but what Touqué wished to signal with this witticism was the
inseparable (but at the same time also infusible!) parallelism of
extreme truth and extreme falsehood in the new intellec-
tual & ordinary life.

Touqué experienced this duality not just in his own life but also
in other areas. One and the same university published, in one
and the same month, two books, one with the laconic title of
Ens Ens, the other that of Berkeley. The ens-ens one had a single
basic idea, which was to demonstrate that there is no such thing
as an individual mental life, zero psychology, but on the other
hand all those moods that shiver on the surface of our mind are
great surges of ontological essence, the incandescing of the wires
of existence in man, the way that the incandescent filaments
of light bulbs give light not through any lyricism of their own
but through a massive extrinsic electric current. A new mythol-
gy is under development, and people are taking out ever more
of the hitherto neglected, despised quantity and raising it to a
mythically positive plane of reality; just as in the past dogmas
migrated into the world of hallucinations, now the most fleet-
ing nerve-shadows get into the ontological divine hall of dogmas,
with name, body, infinite concreteness.

The Berkeley-book likewise had a fundamental idea: a new,
ferocious idealism was under development, because people had
realized that they were unable to recognize the essence of things,
the ultimate points of life & matter, in their immediate naked-
ness, the pudency-tension of existence being so fantastic that it is impossible to bend the ring of virginity apart and therefore the true basic structure can only be substituted by symbolic signs, mathematical façades. The Berkeleian finite idealism of old had a melodramatic flavor — “we must renounce knowledge of reality” — which is completely lacking from neo-Berkeleianism: the ontological need is in fact a primitive and barbarian need, and the grand fiction-systems that act in place of “reality” completely satisfy man’s more sensible need for a “probable reality.”

When Touqué read the two books in quick succession he knew that he did not have to “choose” here: he accepted both, because he found equally sharp guarantees of both in his most intimate experiences, in his amorous adventures. If he read a new book on physics, the sort of things that he noted down for himself from the chapters on optics were that light simultaneously manifested in the most medieval of material particles and in the most Berkeleian-tinged clouds of probability, perhaps-mists & uncertainty-fields — on the one hand, naïve material, on the other, de Broglie-fiction. 8

Every phenomenon is composed of a great heterogeneity of existence and equivocation: briefly, being is a dark ontological night, then blinding lightness of symbolism, only then creasing back into the selfish blue womb of reality, of course not so as to stay there. Neither the darkness nor the light delirium permits vision, yet one can hardly count on temporary gentle lighting in the present style.

Could there be any sense to his love? The desire, the feeling, got nowhere, it was always rambling in an endless sea of existence without wanting anything (‘vitalism’ is the conceptual, vacantly joyless plaything of weekenders’ ‘ontologism’, the dark underworld drink of tragedians), it is never possible to make buds blossom in a higher world if they had opened there, never possible to accomplish plans hatched there, because that is the
underwater, bereaved Nereid world of eternal premises that forever turns toward itself on the indigo-blue serpentines of an endless umbilical vortex. When embracing pairs settle on a plan for tomorrow, that is seemingly usually realized since Touqué, too, had in the end met the Cannes girl at 5:30 in the morning, but there was no connection between the plans and what transpired afterwards, the meeting was just a mathematical de Broglie equation of action for the approximating & more hypothetical expression of the ontologically complete encounter conceived in the plan.

Every love is, first of all, ‘something’ that a person senses with mythologizing rapture and physical determination, but then the acting (theatrical marking rather than expression) of that closed ‘something,’ that unapproachable identity, which runs with eternal conditionality above or beside the ‘something,’ with the mendacious taste of symbolism — a tiring series of games or arbitrary formulas which hang in the air. Perhaps the twentieth century will feel and formulate ‘theologizing sentimentalism,’ the absurd forces of feelings, the blue waves, alien to life and self-serving (ontology is not ‘life’), that Touqué lived through in great solitude, where pleasure, weeping, desire and questioning turned into ‘Sache,’ which is a bigger record than Werther’s. In vain does tomorrow come round for the lovers in the calendar, in their souls the tomorrow feeling does not transform into a today feeling but carries on as a tomorrow wave, which pushes its lamé-sheathed waters bell-ringing out-of-time, to right and left for itself. It is not emotions of having reached the goal that foam in the little poodle slipcase of the consummation bed, but the beginnings of desire, the very beginnings, because love does not develop, the emotions do not alter under the influence of life’s events, in just the same way as the nature of light does not vary under de Broglie-intermezzos.
In a study entitled *Elegance and Schisma Moralis*, Touqué likewise examined the duality of emotional-ontology and arbitrary-action fiction. In women’s fashion, in the style of evening dresses, golf costumes, and, above all, bathing costumes (1933 summer season), he saw the exciting struggle, the wish for futile uniting and penetration into each other of being and fiction, the most humane human and the most stylish human, anatomical human and dehumanized human: in a beachwear costume two phases of being & despotism snaked against each other like the left and right limbs of a figure eight. In ethical life, as opposed to writhing around, after a ‘mundane chiasm,’ that happened to characterize complete separation: the helpless parallelism of onto-morality & ficto-morality (to make use of compound words redolent of toothpaste ads). Only nowadays do the sort of people who continually commit crimes but are nevertheless good, and those who possibly continually heap correctness on correctness but are nevertheless bad, have a true, almost scientifically experimental, season: simply because not even the faintest connection, the most naïve, thin blood-transfusing little bridge, exists between ontological morality stratum and action stratum.

For Touqué fashion and ethics meant a study of essence since it was there that the bipartition of concrete *Sache*-Person and the fictive *Style*-Person was most “evident”: in fashion they crossed each other in the shape of an x; in ethics they accompanied each other in parallel, or more accurately ‘dialectically.’ What did that imply for prose? In the past, the milieu and story were together in a lukewarm combination, now the items of the milieu and the story being played out among them separate and thereby they will run next to each other. There will be separate object novels (that is the ontological branch) and hyper-event novels (that is the mania for fictiveness). Touqué had an inclination to write big, mythical catalogue-novels about his favorite objects, like bridges, wells, ships, lakes, and women’s stockings.
On the other hand, he also had an inclination to write complicated event novels that combined 17th-century English dramas of blood and guts and all the opportunities for modern detective story complications. After all, that contradiction was also acted out in the strange but related possibilities of the theme and the ship in the two phases of *Scheme of the Beginning*.

This narrative-duality was like the oscillating parts & nodes of electric standing waves: on reflection the waves intersect each other, & non-oscillating points (bridges, wells, ships, etc.) arise at distances of half the length of the wave, whereas by virtue of the reflection the whole phenomenon denotes a double drama (ultra-Webster): infinite passivity and infinite motion assume and generate each other.

Once he had traveled up to Paris in order to watch a performance of a modernized play by Plautus in a small theatre, the director of which was an old acquaintance from Nice. On the train he had read some neo-Thomist reviews that had discussed the most varied neo-realist theories of knowledge, everywhere with the big reality cult of *Veritas fundatur in esse rei*: by the time he stepped down from the train in Paris, porters, Cinzano posters and bar counters surrounded him on all sides, with the pathological wholeness of realism & objectivity independent of him; things were in acute *Esse*-paralysis. That evening he watched the Plautus performance: it was like puppet theater in a madhouse. The characters were made up with deadly ridicule, their voices were the mixed whinings of eunuchs and cretins, their movements the kangaroo epileptic fits of beasts & acrobats, the music a children’s song, the text senseless pornography as if he had not found himself among humans but turns of abstract paranoia. The crummy make-up was precisely perceptible: sometimes the index numbers in a formula had to be pushed by one to the left on the bottom (that is how in a big storm the leaves of a swaying tree customarily displace their index number one further on
with each leaf), four stepping into three’s place, three into two’s, or in other words, the signs stay but at the base a total shift is carried out: on the stage, too, the characters somehow remained in a stunning borderline case of identity, but the make-up hung on them exactly like an index number shifted by exactly one person with the deadly ridicule of senseless otherness because the whole game was criticism & death. The dehumanization ridicule-unit in make-up was somehow felt to be exactly one ‘person-worth’ and he always saw a regular different person on one of the people. Marionettes, buffoons, animals and idiots: when he saw those somersaulting amid the glaringly piebald set scenery, the ontological concepts of the *Bulletin Thomiste* were still stretched out in his brain, and he felt that he would have equal need of both things if not for his entire life, at least for a good few ensuing months of his youth.
Conversation about Leatrice
(a former actress and industrial designer, currently dancer, who wishes to quit nightclub life)

— Sorry, but something is up with Leatrice.
— Leatrice? — he inquired in pained astonishment.
— You see, that’s the main thing I hate in my whole so-called Leatrice cult; that people think a sentimental Do sto evskyism is driving me to gad about with those kinds of girls.
— Is it such a dreadful disgrace if a person, God forbid, just by chance, purely out of some sort of dawn-time moment of abstraction, happens to clothe themselves in yesterday’s, in a just generally outworn, worldview? — he asked, pursing his lips, dispensing with a stylized mollycoddling smile pseudo-pedagogical rococo bonbons of the sort with which visiting aunties customarily pamper brats who, for ceremony’s sake, have been deformed into ultra-tots.
— It’s not a fault from the worldview’s point of view but it is an affront to my instinct for the chick if people think I am yesterday’s person. I don’t ascribe any more value to the today than to the yesterday, it is just part of my hygiene that the ‘cut’ of my thoughts should, as far as possible, be the dernier cri.
— You are always so neat and elegant, no doubt about it. But what is the matter with Leatrice?
— She’s rebelling.
The response was a scowl.
— Don’t laugh. I am well aware in just what bad taste rebellion is as a sport, but now I’ll take my chances with your irony & approve of rebelliousness. But then Leatrice’s rebelliousness must be a special affront to your sense of form: it’s not some kind of refined, inward rebellion, with a disciplined exterior, but a thickset, beastly toady ing, ‘idealistic’ rebelliousness, fed by brazen testimony.

The response was again the pseudo-pedagogical auntie smile with some words quietly muttered with quotation marks emphasis:

— It was not for nothing that our Uñez said about you: “You know, the one with her mouth routinely half-open — in wonderment, of course, we thought, comme il faut: though in the end it wasn’t a kiss which popped out, but a definition.”

— Where did Uñez go?

— To Mexico as an architect: he said that with him that is the transitional condition between mathematics & fashion design. But Leatrice? What’s up with her?

— She doesn’t want to be a cocotte.

— Mon Dieu, how common. Leatrice has to be saved. Didactic, pedagogical, and moral urges are spurring me to save her.

— Why?

— For the sake of the general education of those corpulent coffee brokers, who only once in their life hear something intellectual, however trivial the affectation, they heard something via Leatrice, saw it, felt it. For these coffee brokers, the cheap, press-stud pathos with which she speaks about her memories of Italy (she was never there in her whole life) counts as the height of their ‘wits,’ not to say ‘soul.’

— A truly fine general education: getting a coffee broker to stomach a fraudulent Venetian cliché.

— There’s no need to put on airs! It’s what a coffee broker needs; everybody needs the feel, even if only just that once, of
intellecÍťual matters: for some that senseless metaphysical libido comes via a Heidelberg literature mystic, for others via a cocotte talking about a Naples she has never seen, but in any case there has to be something for once in their life. A bit of goose flesh that has not been provoked by a woman’s foot or some such thing. Sorry, but I’m a pedagogue. I… — at which point he breaks into a laugh. — Never mind! I won’t get worked up about it. I also detest Bartley, who won’t pay the streetcar conductor a penny for a ticket but gathers the sections of an apology for his existence, and at university for five years has done nothing else but phrase this catechism of the grounds for his existence. I am a pedagogue, and that’s an end to it. Leatrice is needed; let her stay a cocotte.

— She doesn’t want to. She’s had enough of traveling salesmen for coffee. Yesterday she came close to making a scene behind the bar counter.

— Mon Dieu, an ideological drama, an ethical Grand Guignol. Poor Leatrice! She’s also been infected with gravitas. So is the time over when cocottes had a sentimentality of didactic value about them? She’s been infected by refinement, she’s been infected by you.

— Merci. Do you know Steermans, that wee rubber salesman who has himself analyzed in the surgery room of that shrink Lednitzer and in the evenings is of such joy to Leatrice?

— Meanwhile he writes confused discourses from which all that is clear is that he is offended since some form of schematic university idealists (‘professional idealists,’ as he wrote in Mercure Methodized) with caste-Inquisitional arrogance reduce the big problem-complex of the ‘mercantile spirit’ (I recollect: he makes constant use of the attributive ‘teeming’ as in a teeming problem-complex) to the concept of ‘salesman.’

— That’s just great! Poor Leatrice finds herself mixed up in that tragic shortsightedness; indeed, that’s the basis of her revolt, her little rebellion, that I venture to espouse.
— Self-patented patronage mams’elle of revolutions related to the conversion of behind-bar-counter cocottes — a fine occupation! Colossal.

— In plays of old at this point the blushing heroine would say, “How cruel! Mock not,” now I am constrained to say something of the kind.

— Let’s accord advantage to gossip over metaphysics: how was this whole Steermans-Leatrice affair?

— Then come with me over to The Perspective.

— Perspective?

— Yes, Leatrice didn’t like the name Boxico, and she announced that she would quit the whole business if they didn’t change its name to The Perspective.

— Leatrice, mea Leatrice peccatrice,¹⁰ I think your sentimentalism overstepped the mark of its having any pedagogical value from the viewpoint of coffee reps. In any case, at 9:30 in the morning as it is, our friend Leatrice peccatrice won’t be in the nightclub even if she does rebel and she has ethos-thrombosis of the spinous process.

— She may not be in the bar, but she has an apartment on the floor over the bar; she has locked herself in there, sniveling and quivering with rage. She would like to cry out to the world that she hates the dictatorship of salesmen over her erotic needs. Yesterday evening, when she dragged herself from the nightclub up to her apartment with all the cheap, ready-to-wear ‘inhibitions’ of her suppressed revolts, who do you think was standing before the door to greet her?

— Well, who?

— A woman from the Sally Army, that’s who. I’ve no idea how news of Leatrice’s attempt to raise the roof had spread so fast as it can have been barely three-quarters of an hour since the first symptoms of her moral qualms till her return home; but you couldn’t disguise the fact that she had been standing before

⁰ Suggesting that Leatrice’s name was a play on words, possibly implying a sense of guilt or regret.
the door, I have no idea for how long, a cross-eyed little maid from the Salvation Army, with, perched on the bun of her hair, one of those black bonnets that look like a muzzle, epaulettes like Tegethoff-class flyswatters on her shoulders, and clutching a crimson-edged book. Ena was with Leatrice because Lea was ever so slightly sozzled and so could not have got home alone. Ena had talked about the Sally-Army lass’s hand, to the point of sculptor snobbism that it was possible to establish from the degree of the luminance of the skin surface and the diameter of any warts the duality which characterizes these dipso dames for one thing, their withdrawal from the world of devotion, for another, the memories of primitive handiwork (both a lily & a wound), going on to apply that repugnant morphology to priestly hands in general.

— You won’t credit this, but Ena, Lea’s other supporter, has been hanging around in cafés & art galleries for days with that wee, bespectacled Danish sculptor.

— Excellent source research. Suffice it to say that Ena threw the poor Sally Army cherry out, declaring in the stairwell that if someone gets a bellyache that is not in itself going to turn them into an ascetic; if someone is disgusted by an uncivilized coffee dealer, that is not going to make them a wet nurse in a Protestant kindergarten, et cetera, and she was not going to hold her soul out to any fishy cretin of the God squad to crumble dollops of a Bible printed on crimson-edged paper into it.

— That’s Ena’s style for you; she is the last orator in European literature and in our hotel.

— On that they went to Lea’s room and were together until six in the morning.

— My word, that is a great subject for a serenade or an ethical textile pattern or even an as yet undiscovered branch of art: those two women together the whole night on the floor above the nightclub; I have a talent for reconstruction, being able to spin out minuscule scraps of solid gossip into an impudent epic;
I see it all, Lea and Ena on the edge of the bed — Lea is howling, racked by sobbing, the cocktail and the ethical inspiration; beside it Ena, the public speaker: I would never have believed that the most universal negative doubt could encounter such rhetorical health. There is something delightful about Ena; to look at she is life and mechanized sensuality, but to hear the driest of professional nihilists, who does not allow one to relish anything, anything at all. The only thing living about her is her rhetoric. And there on the bed beside her my little Lea!

— Is Leatrice of greater interest to us?

— And you’re asking me?

— You practice psychology as an expert, and you know that when human relationships reach a critical point one feels that they are not true relationships, or rather what there is, in fact, is absolute artifice & affectation, there is no space freer of lines of force (and you must surely be aware that I am plagiarizing you with these semi-official metaphors!) than that between protector and protégé.

— Well, of course. I well recollect that before the school leaving examinations, at the closing ceremony for the literary circle, I read out something about a lover leaving a girl and afterwards her feeling something very painful, very new and, for all its indefinability, very concrete, but in no way resembling the conventional notion that up till then she had formed (more on the basis of the sense of the word rather than its content) about ‘pain.’ My short story had a title something like “The Eclecticism of Pain.”

— Why was that?

— The title is a terse reference to the heroine of the story feeling that what is referred to as pain signified a big void, which had to be filled with something; anything; a large abstract hangar into which positive concepts (it didn’t matter what) have to be put; a new perspective before there were space and color whereby her perspective could be more objective.
— It’s my belief, please excuse me, that you are wrong (*non credo quia credibilis?*).11 It may be that when I like Leatrice’s primitive emotions, which you may see as complicated hysterias, then I am doing something like Rococo or whatever maidens did when they began stroking white lambs, but the fact is that nostalgia sometimes takes hold of me & I swing back from the ‘eclecticism of pain’ to ‘sensation’ (but I had difficulty in uttering it & no doubt flushed good and red in doing so, didn’t I).

The other knit his brow, and said in imitation of severe, self-important doctors:

— You were quite right to refer to lambkins when you stand beside Leatrice’s bed & try with great incredulity to beg some ‘feeling’ from someone who happens to be uncultured but is just as complicated (on another plane, of course) as others, you are going to create a truly melodramatic impression.

— Well, that’s necessary! — the other interjected querulously, signaling with the voice and an ambiguous smile that after those remarks he did not dare take the side of melodrama, yet also did not wish to part company for good with that small point of principle, and so half-apologetically, half-ironically letting drop that little ‘that’s necessary,’ indeed leaving the lips open in the belief that in that way a stronger connection would be left between the words and himself, so the other would not dare give great offense.

— Nothing can be done. New points of reference, more secure pivotal points, have to be sought than those ‘feelings,’ which have already been modified as much as possible. Poor spontaneity. *Requiescat in pace.* We have to seek out a new inner life, & it would be cowardice coupled with naivety to incessantly run back toward the failed stations of melodrama we long left behind us, merely on the basis of the illusion that those good old, substantial, homogeneous ‘feelings’ & other categories are — *horribile dictu* — primary or what the hell.
— That is just as if Ena had said it — and incidentally I advise you to get Ena to write the introduction for your psychological thesis: sometimes a bit of metaphor jingling at the head of a dissertation has quite a good effect, and Ena has enough intelligence not to unduly compromise your style of definition. In any case, you yourself are nothing like as cool as you would like to be: your own exactnesses are pathetic exactnesses, indeed the technical part of defining is sweeping you toward new contents (admit it, often pseudo-contents); you pile up two hundred definitions in succession without even suspecting what you want to restrain between the contours, and after such protracted overscaffolding, finally some small realistic content evolves as a by-product (on the basis of intellectual abiogenesis?). That’s your way of working, isn’t it?

— You know full well, I’m sure, it is a basic law of intellectual life, of creative intellectual life, that one does not fix just one point and endeavor to build that into a reality with words, but a small irrational, yet strong nucleus starts sporulating aimless ideas, and the main idea, that particular leading idea, is an unexpected gift, something totally chance, utterly unexpected. It’s not a case of, having found God, one starts praying to Him, but before that, when one as yet has nothing in the least concretely tangible about God, then one prays; we start with a prayer, which leans across from nothing into nothing, and those words create, exude, God from themselves and He springs from the clattering thicket of words — and here he burst out laughing and made a gesture like a magician in whom there is something of the chic of self-irony — like Venus from the water. Every big system and strong positive is a by-product: there is no ‘goal’ at all, only chasing and galloping into nothingness, apart from which results that were never counted on, never even dreamed of, and that were only in retrospect lied about as being the ‘goal’ all along.
— Nice! By the way, Touqué’s magazine, *Antipsyche*, is full of stuff like that.

— Leville-Touqué is an imbecile, because all that he understands by psyche is psychoanalysis or infantile special needs education, but he has no inventiveness, no feeling for, in the same way as you, pardon me for saying so, you also have no feeling for there being a new opportunity here which is a radical break from categories heretofore, and people are in the process of clarifying a new attitude.

— O, attitudes, o, opportunities: positively prosaic ways of plugging things. I can only guess what joy you get, with your sardonic view on life, from the symbolic nature of our pilgrimage to Leatrice’s place: at one end of the street a wee sentimental cocotte, at the other end a sterile rationalist, or what the hell! someone who doesn’t have the guts to launch deliberately into nothingness (in all honesty there is no ‘dynamic nucleus’ in me) and you prefer to cadge from a person like Leatrice.

— It’s not uplifting, I can assure you.

Meanwhile they had arrived at *The Perspective*. It was the kind of house which can be seen in their thousands in a small French town; all that was special about it was that the entire house was squeezed between two staircases that were barely broader than firewalls, as if it had been placed between two desktop printing presses. It was narrower below than higher up, so one really did get the impression that the stairway-stay was squeezed between continuous forces and was bending. The two staircase walls down below naturally jumped a bit forward onto the sidewalk while up above it led to a newly constructed terrace or some kind of hanging garden, which was Leatrice’s work. In point of fact, she had studied interior decoration in Paris and the terrace was a modified implementation of her final exam project. This had extended the mansard style of the house with ironical touches, but she had also mixed in a moderation of ‘Nordic’-cubism and
a Russian folk element. The columns of the terrace were imitations of vast, naïve chimneys (huge Fontainebleau-like dressage for smoke), but on their sides there were small enamel tags with gaudy Russian folk-embroidery patterns. Iron railings were quite modern again: dense bands of horizontal iron bands ran wave-like along them, the distance between them widening and squeezing together (alpha particles in the wild path of deflection of snakes of probability in the meticulously vertiginous space of an atom’s nucleus); according to Leatrice, it was all nothing other than an enlargement and isolation of the hair on a Gothic bust of Jesus.

For all the infantile gaudiness it nevertheless made a uniform impression of healthy cynicism spreading in mixed forms. The bar premises were on the ground floor, from which an infinitely narrow spiral staircase led to the upper floor, which was now Leatrice’s room; in the place in which the spiral staircase was now located only a big service lift had operated, and after that had fallen into disuse, a staircase had been crammed into the tight tube such that if a person walked up it they appeared to be revolving on one spot. The three flights of stairs looked like three propellers threaded one above the other onto a shared vertical axle.

Leatrice’s room could also be reached from the back garden, and that was what Anny & Halbert used. Leatrice’s room was very long and very narrow, taking up the entire façade of the house, and it had three large French windows. The furniture was crimson, a garish and yet still agreeable crimson, warm & clean. The vivid carmine-furniture agreeably alternated three times with the pale countryside that filtered in through the greenish-grey windows. In front of one of the windows was a horizontal lath into which were set thick wires on the upper ends of which were impaled a row of long, narrow wax heads. They were colored busts; the bespectacled Dane had on one occasion used
them to pay Lea; right then she happened to be in the throes of some sort of hyper-baroque Spanish affectation, and the six heads stuck on wires were a souvenir of that. It could be that one day they would acquire historic renown, because Leville-Touqué had made use of the heads in a rhetorically intoned simile at the start of one of his most important leading articles in *Antipsyche*. As it happened, the second head from the left bore a distinct resemblance to Leville-Touqué, and it is not out of the question that the bespectacled wee Dane had fashioned it after him from memory. The resemblance was particularly striking right at that moment, because seated there, at one of the little tables, was the man himself.

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**description of Leville-Touqué**

He had a sallow complexion, almost a lemon color, which in the chin area opalesced into pure green due to a residual tuft of beard. The chin was extremely narrow, in fact no more than a particularly sharp indentation directly under the lower lip, after which there was a pointed little bony prominence. The lower lip was excessively fleshy and light red, like a pale beetroot, and had no wrinkles on it, so that it glittered like the surface of a silk-tie-dyed Easter egg. His upper lip was thin, the nose big and a fraction concave. He had a steep, domed brow, “a Cartesian Turkeștani-melon,” it was called by someone who loved giving clever-clever definitions of things. He had small eyes of a vivid green; the lids were flat and quite dark brown, setting them in sharp contrast to the pallor of the forehead and face. He wore bottle-lensed eyeglasses set in a spindly black frame that was perched a conspicuous distance from the eyes.
For all the sloppiness, a sort of brisk discipline ran through the man; in point of fact, he was upholding the tradition of the Romantic scholarly type without any of the awkwardness. There was a lisping tang to his voice, but that only served to even better bring out the chiseled yet mouthwateringly delectable precision of his sentences; he stammered a little, but words almost sparkled from the sly positives. He seldom reasoned aloud; he was more full of pathos while still arousing the impression of being a rationalist; everybody sensed his irrationality as being a ‘smart’ logic, his enthusiasm as being mathematical. His head also embodied that: a mystic mulishness mingled with arid rationalism in his features, his look. He wore loose-fitting collars and stylish neckties, achieving a singular compromise between elegance and clumsiness with his external appearance and gestures. Scrawny hands dangled out of the loose coat sleeves; the palms of the hand were small and puffy, the fingers long and widely separated, the whole looking something like broken bamboo. He sat at the end of the table, legs crossed, and under his arm was a yellow-covered notebook with a red spine carrying in blue Anglo-Gothic lettering the word Antipsyche. On his knees was a sheaf of creased printer’s proofs.

— Good morning; where’s Leatrice?

Leville-Touqué dropped the galley proofs & jumped to his feet.

— Good morning, She’s washing.

— Decay, decay — said Halbert in a sarcastically unctuous tone —, she didn’t use to pay any attention to personal hygiene. O, those overscrubbed cocottes! I hate them. I have to undertake major excursions until I come across a woman who has even a faint odor of flesh. Embracing one of the hygienic hetairas you get nowadays is like caressing a bathtub in a druggist’s shop. Tiles, cold water, soap — revoltingly clean. Poor Leatrice.

— What are you doing here? — Anny asked Leville without so much as glancing at him. She placed her handbag on the table.
and in Leatrice’s mirror examined the pale-green new tweed jacket with pale grey stripes that she had on; she was wearing a broad antelope-skin belt; the mercury-modesty of the wide, dove-grey surface of the skin was in harmonic contrast to her long, slender cinnabar-red lacquered fingers: the signatures of borrowers tend to be latticed on the pink mermaid tails of bank notes in the same way as Anny’s hand was on the belt. In female dressing one of the greatest joys is always feeling the body and garment separately, the fashion and the figure. That trivial fact is the greatest perversity: that dress and woman do not coalesce, that the curves never spill over into creases, and the lapels do not run across into true breasts as in some superficial metaphors but instead stay very much separate in stimulating raw duality. There was something barbaric in the vivacious digits as they danced around the loosened antelope belt.

— Me? — a sloshing of cleansing water now carried to them such a cheerful, clean morning sound that one could not imagine that swimming-bath Triton hooray was brushing against a body in which a ‘spiritual struggle’ was nesting. — I gave a bundle of page-proofs to Ena, who has meanwhile become a directrice de conscience, and instead of correcting the misprints she spent last night with Leatrice. I haven’t a clue as to what she had been helping with.

— Where is Ena?
— Inside, in the bathroom.
— What is this? — Halbert asked with evil-minded distaste as he cast a look at the proofs that had been left on the table with a dismissive wave of the hand like a valet tossing dirty napkins into a basket for table linen.

A moment before, Leville-Touqué had glanced at Anny, who, with a skeptical-encouraging smile, responded with something along the lines of: “Go on and slaughter each other, it’s my pleasure, though for the sake of convenience I am strictly neutral at
present”; from which glance Leville only exploited the encouragement, and said with a smile:

— One of my articles. It bears the title “Exteriora Imperent”\(^{12}\) — I took it from a medieval work on jurisprudence, where it did not have the same meaning as it does for me.

While speaking he was waiting with a petty sneer on his face for Halbert’s mimicking response, though in that leer there was a streak of cowardice, in his somewhat awkward brashness, a certain prior defensiveness. Undeniably there was also a lot of sardonic prudishness about Leville, of course carried off very oddly; that was also what guided him even as with the smile he politely and cordially adopted in advance a critic’s snigger. He even blushed slightly. Halbert smirked, and he tugged at the end of his nose as though he were taking a sheath away. From the bathroom could be heard the kind of deep gurgling noise that usually accompanies water being run out of a washbasin. Moreover, an unpleasant smell, almost like that of muddy pipes, pervaded the room. The sound of the wooden heels of mules clopping sharply on wooden slats thrown onto the floor, and in the meantime panting deadened by wet toweling.

— Exteriora Imperent — he addressed Anny —, are you familiar with those geometrical figures in which the whole structure of the basic figure only gains structural sense on the basis of an outer point, from which various straight lines usually run toward the figure? Well, that is what it is about: our life only becomes constructible (nice and rounded, that is to say) if one finds an external point like that to which to form ourselves. I formulated that radical ‘exteriorism’ in the April issue. The most radical ‘exteriorism’ of all is morality. There was a time when the saying went: “Know thyself.” That is naivety. Self-knowledge is: death. Forget yourself, forget your mirrors — at this he gulped, a sort of half-swallowing, half-hiccoughing; he was ashamed of
his pathos even as he enjoyed it —, renounce the whole lot of intelligent narcissus masks; the lyrical mask and the psychoanalytical mask, and fix on something absolutely alien, a thing that holds no resonance within you and comes from precisely the opposite direction than your soul.

— As far as geometrical diagrams are concerned, you could submit that to a sermonizing journal & their reverends would be thrilled by similes like that. Don’t send the technical guff, because they will be less impressed by that. What are you looking to get at with that external point? What kind of illusion is it to talk about an outside at all?

— In the glass there are internal layers, flaws and folds, and there are pictures projected onto it. Both are equally on and in it, yet it is still very much two kinds of a thing: in our souls there are projections and internal autonomic elements. The distinction stands. — There was an undeniable hint of pusillanimity in his emphases.

Leville-Touqué’s childhood and youth in parenthesis

Leville-Touqué grew up in southern France; his mother was a simple, highly religious woman who deferred to her husband in all things. He was a semi-cultured writer who took part in a series of lectures in a Lodge run by Spanish Freemasons, the subject of which was how psychoanalysis might be employed to undermine Roman-Catholic morality. In this there were diplomatic and fanatical, pedantic and dilettante plans of methods, all of which made a great impact on the short story writer’s father. The son was a marvelous pupil and an excellent pianist.
It came to pass that a strange disorder set in with the boy’s sense of rhythm, with him being tormented by neurotic hallucinations of sounds. The father got it into his head that his son was going to hit upon a new rhythmic system and thus tried to inculcate in his son his own obsession of ‘an inventor of genius,’ whereas the boy merely felt ill and was overpowered by a severe depression. His mother wanted to call in the old family doctor at all costs but the father brought in a Spanish neurologist who awakened in the boy a disgust for the ‘psychic life.’ He quite literally took to his feet to flee the doctor & for a while he resided with an old aunt. There he wished for nothing more than to forget about any ‘psychic life.’ He detested the illness, the diagnosis even more, & the treatment most of all. He was well aware that he had something wrong in his mind, his nervous system, but he did not seem to wish to recover. At least not that way.

This all happened during a summer vacation. When he again started attending school (this was when his father took him home), for assignments he wrote essays on subjects like “Superfluous Psyche,” “Banished Psyche,” et cetera, as a result of which everyone regarded him as a materialist. At the time he was as yet too young to dare denying that openly. He quit piano playing.

It was a confused year. He made the acquaintance of a sixteen-year-old Romanian young woman who had come to France for classes during summer. She became his lover. As a matter of fact, he pursued carnal pleasure like a maniac, virtually non-stop, yet he was nevertheless overcome by a kind of tranquility. He knew it was a pseudo-tranquility, and more numbness than harmony, but he held on tight to it nonetheless. That was when he started to pare self-apology into a dogma, already avowing that Antipsyche did not denote materialism.

He was teeming with smoldering psychological confusion and fanatical sensuality but meanwhile denied Psyche & denied
materialism. At the age of 24, with a few university students & young priests, he launched Antipsyche as a quarterly journal. He sent a copy of the first issue to the Romanian girl who sent back the following response: “Perhaps I am at liberty to accept Antipsyche from you in interpreting it as: «Pro Corpore Meo» — no?” Leville-Touqué was not surprised that his history teacher and his first lover held him to be a materialist & it was with a wry smile that into the first issue he had slipped a small card with a fountain-penned note: “Sap-head. Maybe I deserve that.”

Before one of the windows red & blue lights flashed wanly in the morning sunshine.

— What’s that?

— In the neon sign of Perspective the tubes for the letters RSPE are on the blink and they are being repaired.

Leville’s face was strange in the daytime reflected red-and-blue lights; it was all like the dress rehearsal for an anatomical ceremony. A soft Laue-print slipped over his greenish-yellow chin with cathodic routine, and the anti-psychologist frowned slightly if the upper edge of a wedge of light precisely intersected his eyes, so that the baggy yet taut skin under his eyes, which was somewhat whiter than the other parts of his face, glinted quite silvery, whereas his eyebrows were a darker brown than they had been up till then. The muscles around the eyes had a singular structure of elasticity: he never ‘opened’ or ‘closed’ his eyes, it was more a matter of adjusting the muscle threads and skin inlays around the eyes by precise switching of the nerves, leaving the eyeball itself fixed, with only the direction and position where they bunched together altering; the degree of turbidity of the thin capillaries, that fine, reddish-brown network, which was reminiscent of the ribs on the underside of oak leaves: the brown cuticle of some of them could have been scrubbed off with a toothbrush so as to separate the system of vessels like a
miniature map. Beady black and green eyes around them huge lids, which were located around the pupils like a beach parasol over a black powder compact; all of that under gigantic spectacles, on the glass lenses of which floated colored bands & rings reflecting the neon sign's lights.

In this theatrical or circus-mystic lighting, Leville-Touqué greatly resembled one of those sculptural heads executed with Spanish mannerism, with the yellow-jacketed journal with the blue of its title lettering under one elbow. He had sparse hair, starting only at the top of the skull and looking as if it had not grown from his head but hovered several millimeters above it, flattened horizontally; if one held one's eyes at the same level as the starting points of his hair, one could have seen between his hair & head.

The way he was now looking in front, he was ‘demonic’ and idyllic at once; he was a yellow statue onto which one involuntarily imagined a silver wreath provided with some panegyric inscription, a wreath which could be bent with the fingers like the wire cage of a muselet cap on bottles of champagne; there was something morbidly selfish & isolating in his features, the promise of something very urgent and true, but something his audience was unable to capture as thought, to such an extent it was identical to his profile. That is how it is customarily phrased in obituaries: the tragedy of the hero of antipsyche and anti-individualism was that his personality & mental curiosity were marked with such exotic anatomical preordainment that no one reached the tenet that “the salvation of man is a fiction beyond man,” or “the soul is not inside us,” but they couldn’t go further then claiming that “an extraordinary personality represented an interesting reaction at this time,” etc.
a comparison to Leatrice stepping out of the bathroom:

one of those old postcards of a nude in a lake at night

by Stengel & Co. of Dresden & Berlin.

The ‘morality’ of the comparison: infra & ultra

are driving normality out of modern thinking

The bathroom door opened: Venus Anadyomene. Ena had her back to it, bent over the washbasin, where she was tidying soap and brushes. She was wearing a morning dress and so moved stiffly, lest she get wet or get soap on her. The big yellow beads of her necklace were hanging down into the porcelain basin and clinked continually. The lively tinkling clatter was a discrete but definite musical accompaniment to the birth of Venus; meanwhile the flickering letters RSPE had immediately taken possession of the threshold of the doorway & the lower half of Venus’ body, cutting it from her left hip to the center of the breast on her right, splintering into tiny ancillary undulations to vanish in the region of her right armpit. On her upper body was an ordinary white linen pajama top, which ended above her knees and was clinging to her body in damp grey patches here and there. Her feet were bare and her bathing costume was rolled down below the knees into a sort of double ring of leggings; she was just in the act of heaving and tugging it off when she had nervously nudged open the bathroom door and plunged the world into an all-pervading smell of sponges. The base color of the bathing costume was probably black, but it was covered with jazzy thin horizontal stripes and had balled into fuzzy tufts. A white leather belt was draped over the door handle. She was tall and in her pose she resembled the slim blonde nude bathing in a lake that had been popularized by the Stengel & Co. postcard.
It should be added that the Stengel & Co. postcard was very instructive: amid rings of immense, dark green waves was standing a slim Psyche epigone who managed to prove with her movements, her colors, and her topographical coda, that petty-bourgeois piquancy and petty-bourgeois mysticism are closely related and, besides being psychological blood relations, they did not denote some inferior thing. The long fingers of the young woman covered her lap; her three middle fingers were, so to speak, a coquettish triad of her mons veneris in the green silence of the cave or clearing. This bashful gesture at first seems to be just a movement of a freezing cold woman: a twilight breeze swirls forth from the cave’s dark dens, the wind-whistles of the trees and grass, so that the bathing young woman first foremost feels chilly — “in principio erat gooseflesh.” In the water, too, sudden substantial temperature differences may have arisen: where the sun broke through the selfish counterpoint of the branches, which dismembered the raw and aggressive theme of rays into cool golden slivers of diminutive mirror negations — there the young woman feels the water to be suddenly too warm, whereas where the water shivered from one end to the other under the blue murk — there every grace note of a wavelet was now gradually icy: at sunset everything turns cold within a trice, rather than gradually, with leisurely transitions.

The active hand of the sun still lingered on the upper green organ manuals of the trees, but the lake was cold like a February episode. The leaves, the grass, the stones, the earth, the flowers & her own skin grabbed at separate ice roles: the outset of bashfulness in this picture is undoubtedly improvised coolness, which is shed toward the alarmed target doll of the nude in accordance with the separate personality of every object. As on the occasion of the hydraulic dissection of the water we would find individual sections of water to be sweltering directly after sunset, but others icy, so on the girl’s body and skin there were hot and cold
spots: the sunlight no longer reached her shoulders, but nevertheless she glowed among the Ariel terrycloth of the breeze as if she had managed to salvage a radiant scrap of the sun. She would have liked to collect her entire body (pudor est frigidarium glaucum postmeridionale) into this glowing bit of her shoulder blade; on the other hand she dared not move because she suspected that the warmth that had been left behind would vanish at the first flicker; if she were wishing to make use of it then it would suddenly come to the mind of the departing sun that it had left a scrap of itself behind & would promptly return to make good its absent-mindedness. By now a small, ruddy ray of sunlight gleamed only at the top of the tallest tree, so her eyes were turned that way, which was extremely difficult, as she did not want to move her head together with them. She was rather like a bat pinned alive to a door for purposes of torturing it: with averted eyes fixed on the uppermost branch of a cypress & a shoulder blade in the other direction, clinging to the smuggled residual heat of her body — a piquant borderline value of a caloric function.

The picture displayed a mixture of the realism and outstanding affectation that can be found in so many paintings of the time: the girl's face was a photograph of a Bavarian model from Munich, whereas the endlessly broad and endlessly rhythmic waves lapping around her legs displayed the most acute degree of stylization. Precisely that duality could be of service to a new century. It was decent of the waves to start around the girl's ankles: she was not immersed up to the knees or the waist in the lake, but only to the ankle, so that the endless rings of water and the nude pendulum, slim as a reed in the middle, came into impressive contrast and were likewise in the service of modesty: what on the yellow area of the nude was merely a small modesty spot in the open-handed mirror protocol of the waves was blown up in a monumental melody of modesty, a landscape, the
wood’s virginal rule of construction. The water’s loudspeaker of modesty transmuted the girl’s small efforts to cover her lap into the profuse concealing shade of the wood, into rays’ vespertine incognito. Indeed, in the final analysis, looking at the whole picture, the pudendum no longer signified even a secretive blot over something that was to be concealed but was itself the necessary form of existence: little shoreline flowers, underwater pebbles, shirts and socks lying on a beach were all happy amulets of modesty — the barely-an-artist managed to emancipate his hero’s psychic quivering into the ontological nub of things. (So why do I still say he is barely-an-artist?)

The girl therefore was, above all, cold: that was the beginning of the modesty. Secondly, though, the whole world consisted only of modesty: boughs, clouds, water & four-leaved clovers were all products of modesty — that was the end of modesty. The first, animal shivering: infra-virtue; the other, the pudendal shape of all natural things: ultra-virtue. It would be no wonder to me if historians of the future were to call the twentieth century the century of ‘infra-ultra culture’: art, science, & fashion all follow that technique (though, more than likely, it is not pure technique) when presented with a theme, be it humankind, a number, or a suit jacket, they do not start out from the average phenomenon in practice but from the preceding, what could be called negative state, which is then supplemented (leaving the ‘normal’ out of consideration) with the ultraphenomenon, one might say ‘transpositive’ state: a picture of a leaf will not be a green chlorophyll tray, covered with veins, which hangs from a branch in the picture or a poem but the leaf’s logical prefiguration, its foreground (that word is perhaps more precise than the ponderous ‘precondition’), connecting to the ultra-leaf, indeed anti-leaf features that can be sucked out of the leaf: the first circumstance is the exalted degree of leaf predestination; the second circumstance, precisely the opposite, is the degree of
leaf-superfluity or leaf-universality, by which, that is to say, every imaginable thing is a leaf; or in other words, it can no longer be called a leaf, the word only having any sense to the point that it signified some differentiation from other things in the world.

When one speaks of the style of the infra-leaf and ultra-leaf, in which the ‘normal’ leaf is completely exterminated from among the brain’s notions, then infra-leaf is in no case to be interpreted as meaning, let’s say, ‘bud,’ & ultra-leaf in no case, for example, as ‘a fallen yellow dead leaf-feather,’ but the leaf’s logical necessity, its formal, conceptual determination, and, finally, such generalizations of the form as become senseless or a game: after all, normality consists precisely of keeping a balance of inevitability and frivolous chance (i.e., the infra and ultra), but the twentieth-century’s routine of ratiocination is not interested in keeping a balance and instead the lower & upper poles, the big torsos of ‘not-yet’ and ‘not-anymore,’ are enticing.

In the art of a century like this not much of a role falls to a person, to souls in general, because the individual is always expressed by the pre-mental (this has no imaginable connection to the ‘subconscious,’ a notion which typically lies outside the more recent sphere of thought of the ‘infra-ultra culture’) and post-mental; in other words, the personality, life in its entirety, is omitted. As a matter of fact, the new art can have no kind of theme, for there too ante-theme and post-theme will play a role, but as the ante- & post-theme are also ‘something,’ a role will again be played by the infra-something and ultra-something with the simple omission of the ‘something’ — and so on ad infinitum, and this whole syntax, indeed lexicology, will have to be recast. Just as we can imagine eyes that see heat and are blind to the visible spectrum, so brains are now being readied that are blind to ‘something’ but highly sensitive to pre- & post-figurations of that. We have seen the success of this routine in rectified eyes with the vespertine bathing of the Stengel & Co. postcard,
but we have to refrain from a pure truthfulness that destroys itself — let us move further into the rich bower of obscure and sustaining moments that precede the truth.

A reddish-golden sunlight shone in the girl’s hair and at the top of a cypress and this irradiated a subdued russetiness into the empty blotches of shadow as if one of the characteristic features of bashfulness were autumnal pomp: the girl was nothing but simple shuddering, harsh alarm, and yet, that late brownish-red sunlight gives her body a princely splendor, rank & balmy distinction. The smoldering, late sunlight runs like fiery moss through muscles gone green from cold: every fall ‘lucrum cameræ’ and resounding nobility conceit marched by on the Bavarian model of puberty. There is no kinship between these thin bones, immature muscles, and boyish legs & the flickering, splendid sunlight: adolescents and purple do not customarily produce good dialogue: here too each lived its own role, with the light laying out with itself each of its daytime incidents, the girl preserving her simple-minded non-genericness among fantastic sunbeam tactics of love.

In the Leatrice who stepped out of the bathroom there was a lot of this heroine of the Stengel & Co. postcard: her ankles were bogged down in the wet ankle rolls of the peeled-down swimming costume like the ankles of the girl in the picture under the sweeping waves. It is always on the basis of such quite minimal but important similarities that we find the most diverse things as being similar; and justly so, for in fact if a quite ‘insignificant’ detail of a detail tallies one cannot think of that as a pure accident, but one supposes a common cause must be at work: we always treat the infinitely small detail as a disclosure and on that basis we also try to equate the dissimilar ‘significant’ parts, in this case the pubescent portrait of the Stengel & Co. postcard from Munich with elements of the profile of a ‘cocottoid.’
She had long blonde hair, parted not quite in the center. On one side, the longer cascade, there were several large waves running down the hair, perhaps two-and-a-half times larger than normal, but they were so large that, even though the hair came down to her chest there were only two of them altogether. The band of hair had its own particular dynamic scheme: just as bodies often have a center of gravity that lies outside their physical bounds, so too in this case the direction of the line of the wave that was manifested in the hair did not coincide precisely to the actual waves, only in places, and there it was almost audible. But precisely that was what was beautiful, those only occasionally materialized waves, those suggestive half-lines and dissolving trial sinus curves. The other, shorter side was full of little wavelets that were like silk springs, and there seemed to be very little linear about it, because the sun was shining onto it, making the whole look rather like a ball of steam billowing in a headlight, which glowed, shone, steamed, and only here & there showed a hint of a misty-green internal smudging that allowed one to infer a degree of plastic cohesion. The hairline at the parting was pink, like a gently arched rubber cord of rosewood, & beyond it the bifurcated hair rolled down like a dark blonde shadow on the shaded side. People generally called faces like that of Leatrice Achariol-Zaninoff ‘regular beauties,’ that is the best that can be said, & it also tends to be how they are described in films. Her brow was not big & seen from the front, it was shaped like the white bone handle of a moustache brush — an anonymous oblong oval.
Her eyes were two smaller-scale repetitions of the same basic form. She had soft, greyish eyebrows, with all the indefiniteness and quiet precision of a shadow: what is beautiful in the pale shadows is that, for all their misty nonchalance and trembling amoeba-like nature, they preserve with such immutable strictness the palpable essence of the tangible object to which they owe their existence, being functions, negative ones at that, and yet proclaiming the formal content of the object more definitively than the object itself. There are also painters who are able to depict edges and intersections far more sharply by eschewing the use of lines and employing the thickening and hatching of certain bands of shade. Leatrice's eyebrows likewise seemed like cunningly placed shadows of a distant little blade: around the nose they suddenly thickened and became like plumply velvet catkins, while toward the temples they stretched out, almost purring, like the brow lines on Egyptian statues, but not at all in those fashionable sharp, skintight streaks, but pliantly and unsculpted. The eyes themselves were also elongated, like the cross sections of glass lenses in a physics textbook, & there was no sharp contrast between the white and the iris of the eyeball.

There are eyes of which the physical surface, and so to say the psychological surface, are entirely identical: those are vacant, insubstantial, & sterile-looking eyes. On the other hand, there are 'deep' eyes where the distance between the two kinds of 'surface' is so big that the physical one virtually completely vanishes, and the eyes as a whole arouse the impression of the last shaded room of an endlessly long enfilade of rooms, or the ceiling of a low room of which there is a fresco in perspective so that the room seems to expand upwards almost to the sky: the eyes come from much further away (from 'more deeply') than the face, and they lose the character of physical simplicity & homogeneity, and instead of that create a special suggestion of space, full of
shadows and plastic grades of continual deepening. As if one were looking into the deepest depths of a warm tent in which there is no light, only a sense of distance that is only realizable for us as a ray. Leatrice had ‘deep’ eyes like that. The rings around her pupils, which rippled and floated in her eyes, were dark grey. When she rolled them there was no sharpness or determination in the movements of the eyes, because somehow they were not reduced to around the pupils but the look was everything from the lower band of the brow to the cheekbones. Just as in modern homes, instead of a light source localized to one lamp, people prefer scattered light pre-filtered from hidden lamps, so too that principle was realized with Leatrice’s eyes because the sharp gaze-arrows did not flash from the pupils but the whole of her central face was a rippling, dark-grey gaze area. The irises seemed to float in that twilight tent without any constraint.

It is not impossible that the romantically-decoratively inspired historian of ideas who first radically defined the ‘latent Gothic’ of the Greek soul in place of long-used poetic allusions, had a face like that to thank for the idea of this perspective. Because there was something ‘Greek’ in that face, just as there is in many film actresses, broken through all American sentimentalism, metropolitan ultra-hygiene, and English racial conventionalism. The nose could barely be seen, so uniform was its color to the color of her skin, and its modeling stood out so faintly — that just-mentioned paradoxical statuesqueness which owes its contours to its murkiness. The lips right now, in the morning, were pale, like a plump, grey lizard, as if she were tightly squeezing them together at the two ends, whereas in the middle the lips lay loosely one on top of the other: a person’s lips are usually in such a position after a contented swallowing, when one has swallowed a big bite but is already preoccupied with a new thought, yet due to the pressure of bliss this lip gesture
is left abstractedly on one’s face. Her legs right at the foot were very slim, but higher up they widened with slightly exaggerated eagerness — lower down, they were smooth, gleaming, taut & agile-firm, but above the knees tiny dimples cropped up in the softness: on stepping it was striking how much further the upper parts trembled than the lower.

— Anny? — Her voice was childish, slightly husky, and slightly insincere.

She raised her right foot, leaned on the door, and started to nervously shake and jiggle the foot about in the air, which was her way of dumping on the floor the wet swimming costume clinging to her calves: it did indeed slip down the stiff right leg to her ankle but it stayed on the foot. — Ahh — she ejaculated in frustration, at which Leville-Touqué, who was now seeing Lea for the first time in his life, ran across and pulled the wet costume off. — Thank you. Who are you?

— Leville-Touqué; I need to speak with Ena.

Leville-Touqué pushed up his spectacles with the bone of a flexed thumb then folded the swimming costume, indeed on his own accord wrung it and threw it onto the bathroom floor (meanwhile sensing that however much he might wring and squeeze it the body somehow latently remained in it, in the strict meaning of the word, within a certain time it is not possible to crumple it in such a way that some tangible emptiness was not left in it that could be sensed by a person in the same way as voids in lava in the wake of bodies that disintegrated long ago): that plopping was the end of the Anadyomene scene.

Ena, too, had cleaned out the washbasin, and through the clicking of her beads, the accelerated and suddenly dying clack, one could hear that their wearer had also straightened up.

— I’ve had a bath. — She threw herself down on a red couch (‘la Cardinalle’; where she sat, the cover darkened in a thin band around her because her legs were still wet. — Hand me a blanket,
they are in the second of the flat drawers. — Ena squatted, the beads tumbling to the floor and rattling on the handle like hailstones on a window. The light of the letters RSPE went off. With her two flat palms, her fingers pressed together, Leatrice spread on the front of her legs the bottom of some linen pajamas and thrust the bathroom door with the tip of an outstretched right foot. — I am very happy to have the company, I’m delighted to see you all, but may I respectfully ask the gents to go out on the terrace for a couple of minutes. Au rev.

Halbert exclaimed plaintively, too loudly:
— _Mea peccatrice_, why are you raising your price? I know everything, and it’s all nonsense. The difference between morality and being a tart is only one of price — a virtuous woman is very expensive, a cocotte is cheaper. _Mea peccatrice_, what an anti-democratic streak morality would have in you.

He brightened up so much on his cheap wisecrack that Leville-Touqué clapped him on the shoulder and jerked him out of the room. Ena and Lea called out something, Ena’s sentence longer than Leatrice’s, and at the end of Ena’s sentence Anny also interjected, then all at once silence ruled.

When they were outside on the terrace any momentary rapture at the jest had slipped away from Halbert and he felt lousy beside Leville-Touqué.
— What do you make of Leatrice?
— It was always my bad luck that despite having just a moment’s glance at a woman, I noticed a great many things about her so that when as a naïve boy I passed on my remarks to my
friends they always guffawed — and quite rightly so. As a matter of fact a fair woman does not mean for me what she does for a Lebemann, a man of the world, and a connoisseur — I have no idea what makes for a lovely leg or a perfect neck, that sort of thing. A fair woman (do excuse me, if I expound at length; that is an intolerable and useful by-product of my craft) is a person who inspires me to invent a special anatomy that I then, once I have worked them out in the workshop of my intellectual and logical desires, relate back to the woman, & I can spread it over her like a sleeping jacket of airy weave but embroidered with patterns of pedantic symmetry. Their true beauty is not in them but in the ability they have to force one to live through and create an unreal anatomic vision; or to put it briefly & laconically for you — female beauty lies in the possibility that on glimpsing it we shall immediately be unfaithful to her for the sake of an unreal, strange, hallucinated woman.

— You’re a fine one to talk, dear Touqué; you are incapable of enjoying something without first having convinced yourself that the thing is unreal, remote, constructed & artificial. If you eat an apple you strive to terrorize yourself into the illusion that the only feature that we wish to discover in a natural apple is one which can be found in an artificial wax apple, indeed, in certain respects a genuine apple is more artificial than papier-mâché fruit, and having thus satisfied your perversity you can then go ahead and take a bite of an apple. No?

— You’re making fun of me. In times of old the prophets would have been enraged at the jolly jokers who took their thoughts to the point of absurdity and thereby caricatured them. They, however, were naïve and exceedingly undiplomatic prophets. I am grateful for being satirized, in the present case, for instance, because satires express my thoughts much better than I do. If I were to have my complete works published then I would assemble an anthology of the satires and communicate my own
works only in the margins or in the form of footnotes. A writer can never take his principles ad absurdum, he daydreams vainly in the empty illusion that he is capable of self-parody. My dear Halbert, I await the final formulation of my thoughts in your belle-lettristic frivolity. If by any chance your services were to be enlisted for my journal, I would be deprived of a wonderful propaganda opportunity.

— You put it diplomatically, or in other words, steer clear of the truth. In the end, when your corpse is fished out of the great flood of literary history no one will recognize your face, but a not particularly cunning coroner-philologist will light upon a two-dime popular, selected paperback edition of Oscar Wilde in your soggy pockets. What a blunder that will be, Touqué, what a blunder.

— That’s very possible, only I don’t get why would it be a blunder? By the way, one thing I don’t like about you is that for all that you are a gentleman you make use of such unserviceable and demagogic terms as ‘truth’ & ‘diplomacy’ — what’s the good of that? There are some people who out of a naïve love of convenience identify the truth with ordinary and cheap plausibility, thinking anything that is not plausible cannot be true. That is when those petty-bourgeois legends come upon the opposition of ‘artificial’ & ‘natural,’ and other puppet-theater duels. Humans and their mental life are very plausible and tangible, but the matter does not end there.

— You live in an exaggerated anti-truth cult that you are capable of lumping together the cheapest traveling-salesman positivism and most intricate psychoanalysis.

— Aren’t they the same? Are they really two different things?

The salty coldness of the sea drifted over from the distance, the rustling of the leaves was like the icy sputtering of little wavelets. The sun was cold and yellow, the terrace was wet from an early-morning sprinkling. It was an ascetic morning, which
awakened Leville-Touqué’s sensuality. Warmth, ‘lush’ colors, & glutinous sounds are good for many things, but not for screwing up sensuality: they spread one’s desires on the asphalt, onto posters, into darkening windows; by contrast on cold, slightly damp and sunny mornings, the dark fleshiness that accumulates in a person at night is lagged with insulating material, as it were, it does not radiate asunder into the world but sets out from the body and springs back to its source by the outlines of the body in order that it may thereby intensify and tauten even better. It is a mistake to suppose that trees, birds, and all the sets of the Rousseau-esque régime and the opéra comique have to participate in true eroticism: it is much better if the body stays in plastic isolation & quietly excludes the aforementioned poor lyric-masked mediator called nature from the game.

— What sort of person is this Leatrice?
Halbert was very crestfallen.

— Ask her yourself.

— Do you want me to make a fool of myself? Fifteen-year-old boys are in the habit of seriously asking street girls to tell them their life story.

— She likes to talk about that, it belongs to the blessed little Romantically-minded bundle of which Ena will deprive her only for Ena’s pushy skepticism to fill its place with a banal morality.

— Leatrice is an exceedingly lovely woman — Leville said frankly, with a feeling that rationalist types rarely permit themselves, and if with due discretion they do allow themselves that lyrical mood for a few minutes then, they are very much aware of what they are doing and are pleased that their audience also ascribes to it a special value; should they blush or possibly display some microscopic tear drops in their eyes, then the cause of their emotion is not the lyrical subject but their own ceremonial affectedness.
Leville-Touqué was like that as well when he uttered the word ‘lovely.’ He even remarked: — How many a time one has fought against the novelistic interpretation of ‘loveliness,’ how many a time proclaimed the esthetic points of view of negligible quantity, how many a time smashed to pieces the justification for the decorative — and then, what do you know, sometimes, there is a rare moment when something (not necessarily a woman) appears before one’s eyes which, with its gentle certainty and provocative definitiveness, demands those few phonemes which make up the word ‘lovely.’

— I’m glad of the occasion of being able to see you as a poet. A big Easter celebration.

— You’re so sure of yourself — but perhaps there is more shameful and concealed lyricism in your irony than in my pathos. It is not a trembling voice and tears that make one lyrical, and most certainly not the cynical formulas of critical style that make one a stone-hearted intellectual. There are weepy rationalists and ironic Werthers, you should be well aware of this, because as a professional psychologist you pigeonhole people a lot.

— If it comes to hidden illnesses, it is perhaps not malapropos if I make so bold as to point out that you, too, are secreting a psychologist on your person: you may have had psychiatric aspirations, but they have not succeeded, and now that you are sick you have launched Antipsyche, which may be none other than a graph of a pathological state of mind deriving from your suppressed psychologist nature. All one has to do is find the key to unlocking the true cause of each rhetorical programmed utterance. You have your nostalgias, so you are a little bit ill, because every desire is a slightly sick state — and you have the talent to work them into a program.

— Perhaps you are right; the difference between us merely consists in how we interpret desire as such. I am at one end of desire; at the other end is the object of my desire. You, on the
other hand, trace desire in a circular form, with the ego as a starting point coinciding in the area of the circle with the goal as an end point. I perceive and draw desire as a long straight line: the starting point is inside me & the end point outside, at the antipole, as a horrible fact, an objective external reality. — He broke into a smile, & tweaking the smile further, added softly, in a well-scrubbed, easy trill: — *Exteriores imperent.*

A waiter in shirtsleeves with a white apron & black waistcoat came up onto the terrace seeking to enter Lea’s room.

— What do you want? You can’t go in — Halbert said with genial emphasis as he felt that the embarrassing dejection that Leville’s supercilious manner had aroused in him had relented.
— A whole lot of cocktail mixers from last night are in there.
— I’ll have a word — Halbert said, knocking on the door.
— Hang on a tic — the girls roared.
— It’s not that we are burning up with longing, just hand out the cocktail glasses and tin shakers that were left in Lea’s room last night.

Ena came and gave the waiter four glasses.
— Lea sends the message that if any of the gentlemen are naive enough to have the idea that Lea is throwing fits of modesty in not permitting you into the room then they are kindly asked to adjust their thinking before they come back.
— Lea did not send that message, my dear Ena — Halbert said with a chuckle —, that’s your style, sweet Ena, being as how you are the last of the Mohicans who still seeks to impose some kind of class consciousness on cocottes as if they were immoral in principle.

When Halbert came back Leville asked with childish sheepishness:
— Have you already been with this — Leatrice?
— Yes, I have — he said with a smile and somewhat uncertainly as he did not know what tone Touqué was getting at.
— You think I just want to get you riled, but I can assure you that I am leveling with you: for me women represent the symbolic satisfaction of my thirst for unreality. My thoughts are extremely conventional, and the most perverse paradoxes are prepared from the same colorless-odorless boring material as a caretaker’s most half-witted humdrum notion. Prosaic. Concrete. There is something secure in philosophy, something comprehensible and transparently limited from every angle. But when I get near a woman’s body I sense the magic of the unreal and transcendental. At first blush, that sounds hopelessly romantic, and I would not disown it at that, it’s very à la mode and yet it’s not that at all. You yourself had your flirtations with psychoanalysis and know in which line of their Koran cases like mine are dealt with: I saw Leatrice, I have a very dim memory of her, but I see before me all the more strongly and more alluringly a tall, slim woman in a tight and smooth, lemon-yellow frock of balloon cut with a black-lacquer belt and dark bronze hair that looked half-wet — so, on what page of the psychology of associations does that stand?

— I could carry on, so my excuses if I ask: is everything with you of such a ‘psychic’ stamp, if you will permit me to use that poor expression?

— Call off your hunting hounds, and quit the dreadful lousy mirror mania you guys have about it all being a matter of mirrors and there is no world. You surely don’t think that I deny the presence of the psychological? Of course I make no mention of it in my journal and my articles, because I loath such tasteless and gushing compromise-sentences like ‘although we emphasize that the true person starts in the remote-external and not in the self, that by no means implies a total & ridiculous denial of the great importance of psychological life,’ etc. What would be the point of blunting the shameless bias and frivolous edge of that program? But there are times when I, too, for amusement, make
use of your ‘psychological life.’ At times like that I don’t think, just associate. It’s a pleasant enough game, though it soon pales, of course. But if a woman is running through my head, I can live for days on associations without thinking of anything. At times like that I am inclined, just for the heck of it, to write a psychological novel. You can imagine how that would be followed in the next issue by a thunderous article about psychological novels. In point of fact the whole issue would be a supplement about psychological novels. If you wanted you could have the right of reply. I regard you as the first chance of Psyche’s rule. My role is easy because as a so-called pioneer I have the right to be obscure and undecided. There is a bit too much polemical favor in its tack, but successors may make a Trans-Psyche out of Antipsyché.

Halbert drummed nervously on the door.
— It’s clear, it’s clear — said Leatrice in a brisk tone, and quietly, as if she had not yet completely finished a thought, Ena.

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**Ena’s character**

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Because Ena did a lot of thinking in general. For her it was a profession in itself, one that she had learnt and applied, that she was proud of and enjoyed. As her university colleagues said, it was not “l’art de penser” that was manifested in her but the “métier de penser.” As someone had previously remarked, her external appearance was in singular contrast to her way of thinking. She was always dressed in the very latest fashion, but deep down she was anti-mondaine by nature, and that was evident just by looking at her. She avoided French fads as far as possible and was always outfitted in the English style. But what on another woman would have looked chic for sure merely seemed to be the con-
summation of some insipid program on her: “a woman should always be up-to-the-minute in every fiber of her being, in every stitch of clothing” was the dry principle and the highest grade of up-to-dateness. For her dressing was the product of a strictness of worldview, not an ingrained instinct. In any case her whole being was more a slightly anachronistic carrying into effect of the ‘female idea’ without the least trace of femininity. There was little that was chic in her, but a lot of naïve rhetoric. Many people at the university laughed at her for her ideological way of dressing. For her the woman as a whole meant a ‘healthy woman,’ so she was also one of those hygiene-obsessed women about whom someone just before made a sarcastic remark. Truly, everything about her smelt of sponges and her skin was rough to the touch from all the cold water it had been scrubbed with.

Her father had died a long time ago, so even in high school she had grappled a lot with poverty and done a lot of tutoring. People were pleased to take lessons with her because she was a ‘clever’ girl of exceptional memory and impertinence, which impressed many parents. She had an uncle with a huge library that embraced the scholarship of the entire nineteenth century, and she would prepare copious notes late at night in slightly leftward-sloping hand, with horizontally flattened, squat and rounded, separated letters. The uncle was repressed, a tireless utopian, one of those sickly dream-constructors whom only a vogue for positivism is able to breed. He had once written a book with the title Murderous Sainthood, which in those times as an as of yet still uncertain vision had been denied distribution rights, but he had lived on in Ena’s mind and had blossomed into a dissertation on the concept and practice of marriage among the Scandinavian peoples that she had written as a seminar exercise in her first year at university. She had once had an untidy pseudo-love affair with a man who was employed at the embassy, but whenever the matter of marriage came to the fore he always
developed severe peptic ulcers. In her second year she had obtained a grant in Norway to carry on her studies and read law.

Ena was a tragicomic minor heroine of unsanctified work for its own sake: she supported her mother and she paid for her own clothes, as a result of which she had developed a layman’s respect for work, which lay just as far from any idea of the acceptance of a religious duty as it did from a wholly brutal ‘efficiency’-sentiment, but it was nevertheless something very bleak and aimless. “One has to work” — & Ena was sedulous, tireless, her teeth like scoured porcelain, her clothes puritanical, the latest word in fashion, and unutterably lifeless.

That was why she was standing alone in the railway station at the time. Because she had no women friends. She had students who respected and loathed her, and she had tennis partners who were likewise frightfully bored with her even though she was actually a very good player; but for her tennis was just an arithmetic problem to be solved, and she played like a machine, almost never missing a ball and being highly economical in her movements. When there were tennis contests at the university everyone decided to set her on a par with the Japanese, who were similarly clockwork players, quite inhumanly so.

She set off on her journey alone, with her brand-new yellow leather handbag, in a green herringbone-pattern two-piece suit with a raw-silk fawn blouse and a little brimless cap; a silver lorgnette hung around her neck. Her tragicomedy, which had developed in full-blown form in Norway and was still maintained now, was that in point of fact she deemed to discern in the latest intellectual trends and lifestyles, in the emergence of new types of man, in new styles and institutions that showed the most total dissociation from the principles that she had found conserved on the shelves of her uncle’s library, a vindication of his own antiquated views — an enlivening of the library of her childhood. In Norway she had straightaway set to work positively, greedily
observing the family with whom she lodged as a paying guest and people in general, while of an evening she would assemble her data and construct myths from them. Like every born positivist observer, she was a hybrid of impressions and legendary inferences. She failed to notice that her colleagues had long got over the demand for ‘truth’ in the naïve dictionary sense of the word, and, through the very fact that they admitted they wanted ‘myths,’ came much closer to the true content of certain things than she did with her own bigoted self-delusion.

Her whole awkwardness was evident in relation to Gerda Staalbreck’s women’s clinic. Ena fell ill in Norway and had to be operated on. At that time a high repute was being built up by the Staalbreck sanatorium, which was situated not far from the seacoast and had only female physicians. The clinic was surrounded by waves of gossip, views of the world, and belles-lettres. The physicians were called a white-coated lesbian league, & Gerda Staalbreck — predictably, and as was only natural — the surgeons’ Sappho. Some called the hospital a modern nunery of a new type of woman where the patients were not only treated but also drawn with the assistance of some sort of mystic suggestion into a secret freemasonry of the ‘new woman.’

Ena saw in it nothing less than one of the fortresses of classical feminism wie’s im ‘Buche steht.’ When she recovered, it is said, she essentially had no contact with either the clinicians (there were a dozen of them), nor with other patients, but she dictated to a young high school student an essay under the title Nouvel Embarquement pour Cythère in which she extolled the clinic, the female physician, lack of illusion, dwindling maternal sentimentalism, etc. Gerda’s sanatorium truly did have significance as a view of the world and development of a model, but that had nothing to do with Ena’s materialist Cythera; indeed, it was the opposite. When Ena thought that the body cult of the Gerdas of this world was a fight launched against the mind,
then these female physicians also ‘transcendentalized’ the body, & they had reached the point that a millimeter separated them from formulating a new, all-pervading, all self-avowing & self-corroborating program of metaphysical rebirth in the Gynaikeon, which was Gerda Staalbreck’s medical journal.

The sole person who had an inkling of the true path of Gerda and her supporters was a village preacher, the priest of a village near the sanatorium, the not totally uncultivated population of which, not unnaturally in view of its proximity, had the most to say about the inhabitants of the sanatorium, and in a Christmas-tide or Advent sermon spoke about the spirit of Gynaikeon. The congregation had not understood much of it, & he had written it up as an article, but that could not be published because that would have given the impression that the Church endorsed what many, including Ena, regarded as an anti-Christian totality of ‘materialism.’ It may have been that, but for that very reason, as a paroxysm of the material, it forced him to face a big metaphysic, which he later had the courage to accept & profess, in contrast to Ena’s affected & cowardly ignorabimus. 19

Gerda Staalbreck and her physicians never responded to the reflections relating to them, but later on, in one of the numbers of the rejigged journal, she set off from the lyrical picture (elegant, indisputably elegant, when a surgeon picks up with gloved hands a poetic picture like an excised body part resembling a plant) that the rural parson had made use of: the picture of a convalescing woman buried under thick rugs on the terrace, but the murky-brown morning sun was cutting through the mist to shine on her face: over her head twinkled a mist-shrouded, lusterless yet still burning morning star, and the woman’s hair was clouded on the terrace by hoarfrost or powdery snow: she was smiling and carried under her eyelids the possibility of an unknown new morning; it was then that she sensed a connection between the star of Bethlehem and the dull star above a misty
sea, etc. Neither by poetic suggestion nor by logical reasoning did those sorts of relations enter Ena’s head: she saw nothing of those.

When she returned from Norway she had recovered her strength. It was then that she became truly rhetorical — it was then that her ‘symphonic doubt,’ as Leville-Touqué called it, developed and, at the same time, her great faith in the material, which had lost its credence. Her world started to crumble at all hands, and she saw ruins as flowers, agony as renaissance. She had met Leatrice about six months before at the Perspective nightclub. Ena was a puritanical soul, never flirtatious or coquettish. When she wanted to dissuade Leatrice from giving up her trade, she was not seeking to gratify her own eroticism in continuing to keep a tart as a tart. Ena was rhetorical, but she lacked all passion & sentimentality. She was a rhetorician of doubt, sobriety, and ‘principle,’ but her life was like that of a Quaker old maid. The concept of ‘modesty’ slightly bothered her, yet she herself was very prudish — on the other hand, at every step she would protest that with her it was not a principle but selfishness, a reasonable saving, etc. She would have been cut to the quick by anyone who called her ‘virtuous,’ not to say a ‘lady.’ When Halbert and Leville-Touqué went in, all three of them were sitting next to one another on the bright-red settee in virtually the same pose: Leatrice, Anny, Ena. It would have made a good cover on a book with a title like ‘Profiles & Metaphysics.’ Anny was a young, slim girl in the third year of university, but a year younger than she was officially supposed to be. She was rosy cheeked, but that was not a wan, corny, ‘discreetly fresh’ rosiness, but vivid, vigorous special rose color that shaded almost into lilac whilst differing sharply from a flushing & healthy ruddiness. On it were strongly etched features as if nature had worked over a standard pretty ‘blonde-and-blue-eyed’ face with a touch of cubism. Her blonde, slightly dry,
and fanned-out hair had been trimmed to half-length, but at its ends there were looped-back curls that like tubes of pastry into which cream can be piped had never stiffened but gently come undone and poked forward on either side of her neck.

She had piercing blue eyes that, if she opened them fully, almost led beyond her inasmuch as they gave the impression of just a single light blue, almost silver point of light completely independent of the anatomy of the face, which was not constrained within borderlines: a glittering white sphere around which two blue rings arose in the air like the colored ripples of wavelets in a lake; when laughing, on the other hand, the eyes would be knitted together (half in embarrassment and half in flirtatious irony) at which time all that could be seen between two small frown-wrinkles was an incised blue filament (the eyebrows & skin under the eyes would wrinkle; for a young girl the lachrymal sacs stood out unusually sharply) — and in the corner of the eyes toward the temples the preciously unitary white-and-blue halo seemed to spin apart in the form of minute white globules of mercury. Her lips were narrow, her nose discretely snub, but the nostrils were, so to speak, in special frames, having all around them a fairly complex modeling as of gummed-on miniature pretzels. When she laughed her mouth lengthened. She went through a particular mimicry when she suddenly switched from laughing to paying serious attention: one half of the face stayed in a rigid laugh (the eyes became blue slits as on a special kind of Japanese print; the light on her glasses would break up into tiny lead-shots) while the other half displayed childish naivety mixed with a skeptical fervor that best typified her whole flirtatious being. It all looked like an easy little half-sided smiling fit; the eyelashes were short and reddish, spaced a big distance from one another. Her foxy little face was well suited to the university’s new aluminum benches.
Leatrice looked up without moving and in a slightly hoarse voice asked the two men who had entered:

— What’s this? Curiosity? A circus? Or university?

With slightly stale humor Halbert noted:

— Don’t push your good taste too far, my dear Lea. You need to look out for your future as well for it will be a trifle odd if you are continually going to make *ex cathedra* pronouncements on moral issues and every day make recommendations to the pope on the reform of the monasteries & the constitution. Be at one with your honorable past, not by idealizing it, that would be stupid, but by being modest about it. That is a major virtue — modesty. Your poverty and willingness to help were always conspicuous, even though they had in them a fair dose of mockery and the blasé; but those rebellions of yours were not non-committal. We are clever. Tell us, what did you do?

— I don’t know. There was and is a huge confusion in me. I could say that I feel this & that, or I want this & that, but all I would relate is the lesson that Ena fed into me. I don’t know what I want, though I have the feeling that I’m very determined and strong. I am very, very determined & strong.

As she was saying the last sentence she became like a doll: her eyes were fixed remarkably penetratingly and rigidly in an impossible direction whilst her voice was low and singsong, with certain sounds dropping out like on a telephone line when contact is lost for a moment, whereas others burst like bubbles — there was scorn and tired cynicism in the abstracted pronunciation of what she had to say.

— You people have a theory about ‘square pegs in round holes’ — that’s what you call those who do not fit into your little boxes, your tedious branch of learning, and your ideas of marriage, though anyone who accepts that ‘square peg in a round hole’ whatsis thinking is a coward. What if it’s you who are the square pegs in the round holes? — she asked with a grin,
pulling all kinds of grimaces. She twitched her nose, crinkled her eyes, and her tongue was pressed up behind her teeth: there was gap enough between the teeth to allow her to wedge her white tongue between them.

Leville-Touqué felt utterly lousy. For him it had always been the greatest mystery of life that there were some people who shamelessly dare to invest all their taste & conceptual abilities into making some trifle the moving force of their lives. If that strange act by any chance happened in front of his eyes he usually became very flustered and began to feel ashamed of himself as if by the very fact of being in the same place he was also responsible for the other’s stupidity. At the same time it occurred to him that nobody had yet truly worked out these bestially self-gullible people. Right then that was how he was looking at Lea: like at an unknown animal in an expedition film. The elementary stupidity which shook up the map of her musculature so pathetically only intensified the woman’s erotic value in Leville’s eyes: the body’s extraordinary beauty aroused an impression of improbable intellectuality in him as distinct from the dreadful nonsense of the practical content of the speaking. The body was concrete & yet unreal, its smell, shadow, and weight on top of the settee was pure rationalism, like some higher organization that was entrusted to Lea only for a short time — like a delicate liturgical utensil into the hands of a nervous young boy.

Lea spoke in a whining, arrogant-imploring tone of voice, in what was almost a diphthongal phonetics in the way that great violinists are able to draw the bow in such a way that one has the impression two or even three violins are playing at once, with sentences whirling all along in a weeping-caterwauling scale & simultaneously on a sharp, sulky trail and meanwhile her body writhed under the constraint of a totally superfluous thought. She set her eyes and lips as if the thought were written out on a lath in the air and she were biting it in such a way that she was
hanging on by the skin of her teeth and her body was just dangling in the air — if she were to let go of the lath she would fall, but the lath was coated with gall. She would have liked to possibly knead her knee into a ball with her hands. As she looked up toward the ceiling with imploring eyes, she seemed to be relying on some mystical listener who would be able to release her from the burden of thinking & expressing herself and who ‘knew & understood her’ — the sun shone on her face & the murkiness around her eyes was like the paths in parks on which the shadows of leaves float in hushed sunlight, or like those neon signs on which threads of tulle are made to flicker under frosted glass & the fuzzy-frayed shadow which eerily flickers like the blood in a filmed x-ray of a person’s veins. Apart from or rather precisely because of all their triviality, Leville thought some people are able to play their ‘not-really-one-of-us-ness’ magnificently.

— The two of you are going to explain me, or you want to interrogate me, or laugh at me, or write about me — you want to tell me that it is shameful & ridiculous to want what I very much want, which is why I defended myself and will continue to defend myself against you. It’s just that I am very afraid to defend myself. Because one has to be very brave, & what if it’s to no avail?

Leville felt that he was faced with some terrible labor, a process of parturition in which the body that had developed as a self-reliant intellect was seeking to shake down the stunted thought: he could almost see as the helpless ‘soul’ with its rotten roots clung on in an asymmetrical position to this liberated raison body, like a dark crab which nips its claws into the white ankle of a Venus seeking to rise from the sea and does not let her step onto the shore. If he had to decide quickly, on the spot: would he kill the crab with a sharp pebble lying on the shore, or would he possibly twist Venus’ other leg toward the crab’s mouth in order to wrench it behind the field with the blue murmur?
an examination of styles of desire:
the essentially two kinds of adolescent desire & mature desire

He had the impression that if one were to pull out of the girl’s body, in algebraic fashion, in front of the parenthesis of her skin, the biological and esthetic factors, indeed those similar to the rational germs as well, there would still remain within the parentheses of the surface certain palpable entities which, without the least intellectual trait, would resemble truth-like formations. At some point in time the body was propagated as an anti-pope against the soul simply because people sought to take revenge on the haphazard garden of so-called illusions with the homogeneous mechanicalism of material: before any thorough observation of the body, on the grounds of an inflexible prejudice it was perceived as a merely theoretical antithesis of the ‘soul,’ as a vengeful negative posing as a Parca. All those gloating determinists who formulated their new criticism armed with the new Erynis-mask of the ‘body’: they worked with a theoretical notion of the body — in natural science material meant nothing other than an abstract-logical antithesis of the spirit, all the complexity of chemistry no more than an idea of the ‘fatal function,’ as opposed to the self-important free play of the soul, etc.

The more he became immersed in the analysis of pure material, the more he developed matter into a theoretical notion, indeed, an apparition: the pathos of positivist ambition in the end saw in the body only a criticism automat that could flood the pretentious fields of the ‘psyche’ with a shower of vetoes at any moment. As a result, a kitsch predestination, looming darkly to far and wide, stuck to figures of nude females as mystic embodiments of the concept of abstract material: always with the
theatrical bearing of a nihilistic Circe or the sin-hegemonic ‘natural force.’ In front of him pedants, vapid gigolos, or specima of hereditary transmission: this nude figure was unable to inspire any pleasure because there was nothing truly material in it & thus its ‘queue’ comprised grey seminars, monotonous revue bars, or logically constructed sick patients.

Leville-Touqué recalled very clearly that his father had still looked at a strange woman as at the badge of an anticlerical club that had the power, with the assistance of a few tickles, to drag a person back to primeval chaos: the primal amorphousness was a great delicacy in his father’s eyes to the extent that an entire logical chaos etiquette evolved in his behavior, an ananke-routine that the family could also easily learn, and out of convention could accommodate to in the interests of a hypocritical peace. Thus, when Touqué first felt sensual impulses he was already equipped with some ready answers in facing them, which, that being the first occasion, actually did correspond to the stimuli. After all, at that time the entire female circle was of a lamentably antiquarian nature; replica statues, lines of poetry, entries in encyclopedias, snatched keyhole-mosaics, philosophical half-wings: nothing but scrap iron, niggardly compilations like the study of a 17th-century dilettante polymath, in which dried grasshoppers and Italian pictures acquired at auctions are strewn next to each other: through naïve ‘home-empiricism.’ That is truly detrimental in the head of a youngster even if he does not notice that it is merely a matter of untidiness in which seductive primacy plays no part — and in that way the destiny-clichés heard from his father’s lips could easily be assimilated.

That was therefore the first erotic stage: disorderly female-encyclopedism plus theoretical matter-superstition. Into what did that well-known dualism evolve: a lot of erotic data and one erotic faith, which related to each other in the way an incomplete borrowed herbarium of pressed flowers does to a monopolist
named Pan of a romantic-colonnade of rhymes? At first sight it may strike one as sensational to call something dualism which is so unitary for everyone, but this separation runs perceptibly all through Touqué’s early youth, because what he heard from his father was separated by strict boundaries from himself, and however much he developed those ‘thoughts’ further and thus, as the saying goes, subsumed them into his own personality, he nevertheless placed them into a separate, foreign plane, which was to his own erotic antique shop what the obliquely slanting, uniform blue of a distant sea is to the randomly planted flowers of a hillside garden.

Of course, the essential difference can be observed in styles of desire: in the starting state every moment is replete with the shy dynamism of possession, which, as it were, develops ‘abstract empiricism’ in the brain — observes shoulders, hands, & other parts of the body, but in all of those sees only graphs of love, even if not entirely anonymously. What is of interest is always the connection between the distribution of the intensity of desire and the nature of the observing, and only if one examines that relationship will one manage to give an accurate psychological ground for the fact that right then Touqué saw in the female body (and in ‘senseless’ material in general) a certain truth content, in a trans-rational sense of the expression, as opposed to the paternal tradition, which, in line with the taste of the times, celebrated in the body an elementary denial of every kind of truth, indeed, truth-like thing.

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simile about adolescent desire

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At the time of ‘abstract empiricism,’ with every woman, indeed fantasy image, love begins again from the beginning: one notices
the individual properties of bodies, does not see ‘the shoulders’ and ‘the neck’ as people like to put it — it is only lacking desire’s ability to apportion: the total energy fills every single form as if those were flexible forms into which desire flows as an expanding gas and distorts them into not so much anonymous as over-individual figures — sexual caricatures instead of a sexual portrait.

That age could best be perpetuated with intercommunicating vessels: a tube runs horizontally, and all manner of fantastically winding branches of tubing rise up off of that: if one pours in water, or desire modeled as a fluid, the liquid will stand at exactly the same height in even the most elaborate branches. Maximal desire & maximal object always coincide absurdly so that a person has difficulty distinguishing in this drama the case in which the figure of a woman which crops up immediately elicits the total desire from the state in which desire is stored in the soul in the stylized but individual form of a colossal nude. The fact that it is always nude figures which occur is more logical than natural.

The style of desire when one looks at the soul’s content from an intellectual viewpoint and calls it a domesticated and unopinionated antique-shop is best called hieratic, though if, by contrast, one examines the individual erotic elements, then one should make comparisons to a large hall of statues in which the statues grow separately out of the ground, but no kind of system or connection can be seen in their grouping: the forms of the statues represent those particular ceremonial forms of realism which are able to unite baroque epilepsy and the closed nature of Egyptian mummies.

If one now envisages desire as a red tongue of light in the didactic waxworks, then the game will be as follows: a red tongue of light appears above one of the statues & all the other figures will be invisible in the darkness. The flame picks out the head
of a single figure and suddenly sinks into the material of that figure; within a few seconds it suffuses the whole body, the figure loses the color and nature of its material, retaining only its form, although a frame of incandescence replaces the line of the boundaries of form (in the way that with certain painters the outline of a foot is not rendered by a single line parallel to the outline but by innumerable perpendicular brushstrokes): that is the sterile moment of the identity of desire and its object — force is no more than an image, and that image is no more than a dynamic scheme. The image is truly maximally clear, but for that very reason there can be no question of observing. In that state desire is aware of the object as a whole, but it cannot observe, only see — like a mask that matches the contours of the face exactly: every detail of the mask can be sensed, but it cannot be observed because it is wholly identical to one’s own face. The red flame of desire completely took up the figure so that it knew every atom of it, but only functionally: the red light has filled the figure, but so perfectly that the figure is unable to move in it.

At this degree of desire, therefore, desire and its object are in suffocating balance with each other like two wrestlers stuck together, who tussle with each other, intertwined, and not so much as a hair’s breadth of asymmetry arises in their movements, as if they were not wrestling but were made of magnetic materials every point of which would adhere for evermore to every single point of the other. There can be no question of perspective between desire and its object, in the same way as a tourist who has suddenly been transformed into a hill cannot see the landscape.

Truly typical of that drama is the loneliness in which it is played out: it is pitch black in the waxworks, the Magdeburg hemispheres of flame and desire completely exclude all the wing flats of time and space — if only one, infinitesimally small shard of milieu were to fall between, the entire simplicity would be ruined in a trice and the desire style would switch to a higher
degree. When it has united in that way with the first figure, the red flame is all at once extinguished, but moments later is playing through the same comedy with another figure: it permeates it, fills it (not surrounding it like a halo, like a cowardly ring does coquettish Saturn) and thus is a radically empiricist fire, though that makes an inverse Narcissus farce insofar as it does not fall in love with itself but greedily feels all over it with its whole body in order to turn completely into it. This tragicomic scene resembles that otherworldly diagram in which it is palpable that God is infinite knowledge & infinite truth in one person. The desire would sometimes like to escape from what is, after all, the slavery into which this greedy possession of objects has led it, but it does not succeed. The way this can be seen in the waxworks is as follows: the red light sometimes lifts a millimeter from the outline of the figure, but the next moment the figure immediately rises after it, and the two forms which briefly slide apart now again completely coincide. The whole thing is like a parody of an animal fable in which the prey pursues a fleeing bearded vulture—or the efforts of a person who does not see objects as if they were located in the outside world but in his own eyeballs & is trying to drag the various objects out into the world with his two hands in order to be able to see them properly.

Interpolation: relation of Prae to Non-Prae

Every work develops its organic ‘not this work’ counterpart. Two comparisons:

from architecture;
from phenomenological Roman Catholic theology.
(Not this; not this! Every thought, every truth, is just a neutral blank wall, an inhibitory frosted glass and meaningless dividing layer between Touqué’s two craved and driven ‘truths,’ between his life and his dreams. Analogies, hypotheses, pedagogical statues, correlations and facts were all just helpless private parties with which he had nothing to do, in any truly wished or even approximately vindicated way. If anything was a matter of life and death for him, it was the incidents in his own life, though those incidents had neither beginning nor end, no time or color, had no sense and were in no way fateful, because these were all already naïve rubrics of ‘thought’: for a while he was happy enough to spoon the sterile inverse of his life into their toy caskets, but then he soon yearned to be back in ‘life’s’ alien, devastating, self-evident deafness to raison. And alongside the almost unconscious and endless movement denoted by the word ‘life’ ran that emotional desire-mill of dreams: by day there was the amorphism of the inarticulate deed, by night the colorful composition of pure, absolute emotion.

‘But thoughts, novels, truths, professorial terminology or poetic lies say nothing, nothing at all, of either the invisible plans of events, or the eternal precision of form and lyricism of dreams. Was what you could read above the essence of adolescent love? No. It was a matter of a million things [though even that is a distortion, because as it happened there were no words at all], but his life never knew anything about such matters as an ‘object of desire’ or an ‘identity of desire.’ Here it was not a matter of a naïve counterposing of ‘life’ and ‘consciousness’ so much as a universal incongruity of ‘an endless but excessively articulated, moving nothingness’ [that is in place of ‘life’] and ‘a finite, tautologically-false something’ [that is at the back of ‘consciousness’]).

The essence was life and dreams, the former with its blind lines of force, the latter with its radiating clusters of emotions, because by day there is no true emotion and desire, whereas by night there is no true endless course, or floating-nowhere in a thousand directions.
There is no maneuvering booby-trap narrative that would be able to salvage anything at all from these two things. At times like this, kind gentlemen and cultivated ladies say with a smile, “after all, literature is one thing and ‘real life’ is something else,” but all art [primarily of the programmatically unrealistic, anti-life, dehumanizing kind] nevertheless seeks the reality of reality, the tangible nub of the everyday — even the most characteristic dream-burlesque is the way it is because it wishes to be ‘onto-onto-onto-onto-logy.’

If the title of this writing as a whole is Prae: does Prae have anything to say about what it wants? No. It does not. It does not even come anywhere close to itself. The same thing happens here as with the over-scrupulously penitent: as they pronounce the name of the sin, its place, the number of times, they immediately feel it is untruthful, so unaccustomed is the limited atmosphere of the ‘truth’ after the infinitely extended nothingness of ‘life.’ ‘Life’ itself is truly unrepresentable, but on the other hand this ‘unrepresentability’ itself ought to be tacked on, as tangible fact, to every representation so as to give, in conjunction with that, a more credible whole. A quite crude way of allowing us to sense the unavoidable content of untruth and prevarication of every representation or thought was Touqué’s oscillator, which signals after each ‘consistently accomplished thought’ that the consistency is merely grammatical, the harmony merely conceptual (in the present context the term is invariably used pejoratively): that the spark of reality which set off the whole thing instantly fell into the depths in a divergent arc, only words remain floating in the logical plane of a neutral horizon like the pictorial remains sketched out of the smoke of exploded form over the downward-scattered spark-parabolas of a firework.

‘Life is inexpressible’: that is an intolerable commonplace for everyone. But the massive concreteness of the ‘inexpressibility’ can be expressed, and a form of expression of this kind, it so happens, would be the polar opposite of a commonplace, because never yet
has it been done radically. Running behind, beside, and around the text of Prae, is an organic accompanying stream, the ‘Non-Prae,’ inseparable from Prae, which, unlike the temporary episodes of the above-mentioned oscillator, is a finite counterpart, complement, fellow balance-pan, or metaphorical arc of commentary to Prae.

What exists, which is to say Prae itself, is a continual blunder, institutionalized prevarication (‘truths’); what is truly exciting, interesting, the one true faith or the actual, by its very nature lies outside any narrative, and that is the inaccessible, the “Non-Prae,” which bears the same relation to Prae as a tautened bow string does to the arched shaft of the bow. On statues of Eros the figure of Eros is sometimes shown holding a marble bow; this has no bowstring, to be sure, but the bow is nevertheless arched in such a way that the viewer cannot fail to imagine the non-existent string as being there. In the figure of Prae there must, therefore, be some sort of positive signal from which the tensile strength of the ‘Non-Prae’ that is constantly running in coexistence to Prae can be made perceptible, deducible.

Principle: to utilize the essential impotence of literature with productive optimism as a useful structural factor: to make the constant ghostly absence and its continuo of otherness a harmonious component, to incorporate the ‘Non-Prae’ into a work’s preserve in much the same way as in the Pantheon there also used to be a positive altar to the ‘unknown god.’

The above principle was accomplished equally by architecture and by the new scholastic theology, which incorporated phenomenology. In one corner stands the baptismal basin: its ground plan is a three-leaved (unequal) clover, above which rises the completely smooth and soot-black font wall. Standing out horizontally from the wall of the green font are metallic cloverleaves: their color is incandescent, they are totally without veins, almost immaterial wafers of clubs symbols dissected from the playing cards of archangels. In the
wall directly beside the font is a huge window, the dimensions of which are roughly five times that of the font’s ground plan, though the shape of the window is absolutely the same as the font’s cloverleaf. One third of the window’s cloverleaf has been chopped off to fit it onto the wall in such a way so as not to leave enough room up to the corner angle.

What does this black leaf of marble mean and above it this light, translucent giant cloverleaf fragment: what does their close juxtaposition mean? The relationship of Prae to ‘Non-Prae’: the font but, above all, the green clubs-shaped trays horizontally standing out from it signify the real plant, but the perpetual octave further intensified by the window’s huge clarity, absolute openness, and severedness signifies the unrepresentability that complements the plant, the perpetual flight, the obvious transcendence which radiates from the cloverleaf denotes that [for empirical eyes or artistic hands] incomprehensible nothingness, negative, or ‘anti’-feature which is every object’s most positive feature if we approach it with any sort of [theological or horse-feeding] interest. There is no need to emphasize that this ‘supplementary organic nihil pendant’ happens to be the nidus of values, precisely what we like in the thing, and it is only ‘nihil’ or negative or ‘anti’ from the viewpoint of explicit expression. The window cloverleaf must also be sought next to the font cloverleaf in the narrative: the positive form of ‘Non-Prae,’ which naturally here, too, means the ‘True-Prae.’

If one wishes to grow said font in rapid kinship with modern phenomenological theology, then one must see in the font the duality of ‘in-über’: the pulling-apart of things to a concentric nucleus of the identity [‘in’] and to rings of otherness leading out of and away from themselves and receding in transcendent circles [‘über’]. [L. Brehle, “Heidegger’sche »Sich-vorweg-im-schon-sein-in« und Neue Sachlichkeit: Nichts als Sache.” Marburg: 1933.]²⁰
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SOME FORTHCOMING TITLES

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Considered an eerie attack on realism, when first published in 1934, Miklós Szentkuthy's debut novel *Prae* so astonished Hungarian critics that many deemed it monstrous, derogatorily referred to Szentkuthy as cosmopolitan, and classified him alien to Hungarian culture.

Incomparable & unprecedented in Hungarian literature, *Prae* compels recognition as a serious contribution to modernist fiction, as ambitious in its aspirations as *Ulysses* or *À la recherche du temps perdu*. With no traditional narration and no psychologically motivated characters, in playing with voices, temporality, and events, while fiction, *Prae* is more what Northrop Frye calls an anatomy (à la Lucian, Rabelais, & Burton) or Menippean satire: the basic concern of the book is intellectual, its pervading mood is that of a comedy of ideas. As a virtual novel that preempts every possibility for its realization, it is a novel but only virtually so, a book which is actually a pra-preparation for an unwritten (unwritable) novel. In this, it maintains the freedom and openness of its potentialities, indicative for instance in the Non-Prae diagonals, a series of passages that intercut the novel and continually fracture space and time to engage in what one of the figures of the book calls the culture of wordplay or dogmatic accidentalism. "The book's title," said Szentkuthy, "alludes to it being an overture. A multitude of thoughts, emotions, ideas, fantasies, and motifs that mill and churn as chimes, an overture to my subsequent œuvre."

By challenging the then prevailing dogmas and conventions of prose writing, Szentkuthy was said to have created a new canon for himself but later derided as insignificant for supposedly not acquiring followers. Largely unread at the time, *Prae* eventually gained cult status and would be reprinted in 1980 and 2004. To some critics, the book is not only one of the representative experimental works of the early 20th century, but in its attempt to bring 'impossible literature' into being, it also presages the *nouveau roman* by almost 30 years. And in its rejection of sequentiality and celebration of narrative shuffling, long before Burroughs & Gysin, *Prae* enacts what is conceptually akin to the cut-up. Few of Szentkuthy's contemporaries would reveal with equal bravura & audacity the new horizons that were opened up for narrative forms after the era of realism. In *Frivolities & Confessions*, Szentkuthy said that his goal with *Prae* was "to absorb the problems of modern philosophy and mathematics into modern fashion, love, and every manifestation of life."

Translated for the first time since its original publication in 1934, upon its 80th anniversary, this legendary & controversial Hungarian modernist novel is now at last available in English.