A THIRD VOLUME OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

FOR THE TIME BEING

by Alex Aronson

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Aronson : FOR THE TIME BEING

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FOR THE TIME BEING

Alex Aronson

A
Writers Workshop
Publication

"I was born in 1912 in Breslau which then was in Germany, and now is called Wroclaw, situated in Poland. My mother tongue is German which I still speak and write and in which I still occasionally dream.

I went to school in Breslau and started my studies in German and French literatures while still in Germany.

The rise of Hitler to power put an end to my life in Germany. I left Germany for good on 1 April 1933 and escaped across the frontier to France.

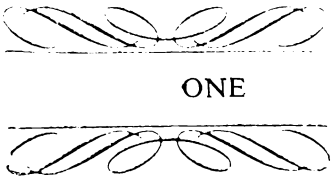
I took up residence in the South of France (Montpellier and Toulouse) and studied French and Comparative Literature. The language in which I spoke, wrote and even dreamt was then French.

I continued my studies at Cambridge, England, where I took up English Literature and spoke, wrote and dreamt in English.

I left England in October 1937 when I was appointed lecturer at the university of Rabindranath Tagore, at Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. Having retired from university teaching in Israel with the rank of Professor Emeritus, I live at present on the Carmel mountain in the quiet seclusion of retirement. *For the Time Being* is the third instalment of my autobiography."

1. *Lessing et les Classiques Francais, Une Contribution & l'Étude des rapports littéraires centre la France et l'Allemagne au 18e siècle.* (Ph. D. thesis, published in 1935).
2. *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes,* Kitabistan, Allahabad, India, 1943 (2nd edition, Calcutta, 1978).
3. *Romain Rolland, The Story of a Conscience,* Padma Publication, Bombay 1944, 2nd edition 1964.
4. *Europe Looks at India,* Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1946, 2nd edition 1979, Calcutta.
5. *Psyche and Symbol in Shakespeare,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington/London, 1972.
6. *Music and the Novel, A Study in Twentieth-Century Fiction,* Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, New Jersey, 1980.
7. *Shakespeare and Rembrandt,* Essen, West Germany, 1987.
8. *Selected Poems,* WRITERS WORKSHOP, Calcutta, 1989.
9. *Brief Chronicles of the Time,* WRITERS WORKSHOP, Calcutta, 1990.
10. *Studies in Twentieth-Century Diaries—The Concealed Self,* The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, N, Y. 1990.
11. *The Seeds of Time,* WRITERS WORKSHOP, Calcutta, 1994.
12. *Shakespeare and the Ocular Proof,* Vantage Press, N. Y., 1995.

This is the third volume of Alex Aronson's autobiography. WRITERS WORKSHOP have also published the first two, titled *Brief Chronicles of the Time* (1990) and *The Seeds of Time* (1994). In 1987 WRITERS WORKSHOP brought out his *Selected Poems*.



ONE

1

Arriving in Palestine shortly after the end of Hitler's war (in 1946) involved strict passport control. My *laisser passer*, issued in Calcutta, in which my nationality was described as having been "formerly German" was politically neutral, though not altogether above suspicion. To be stateless resembled, considering the moral ambivalence which the victorious Allies and the defeated Germans shared at that time, a sort of honorary title, a label of distinction, also a sort of compensation for having been deprived of your former nationality by your persecutors who after having consigned you to violent death in specially constructed gas chambers manufactured lampshade out of your skin.

Customs officials were opening suitcases looking among Indian odds and ends for concealed and unauthorised imports. As there was nothing to import from India at that time and nothing to declare they let me enter the country unmolested and unsupected. I must have appeared to them an innocent from abroad which indeed I was. They probably asked themselves what a white man had been doing in India in wartime, a civilian with a substitute passport and dressed in what must have appeared to them exotically non-European clothes. They probably assumed I was one of those religious fanatics who come to the holy land to worship and to pray, to found vegetarian villages on desolate hilltops in the Galilee.

Only one or two passengers left the plane in the falling darkness, all equally harmless looking white males (there were no women on the plane), dealers in second-hand goods and, as far as I could make out in casual talks during the flight, second-hand ideas. I was given an unexpected welcome by kind-hearted strangers who looked after me as if I were a prodigal son or some sort of ancient mariner who, after an absence of many years, and presumably in great need of succour, has found his way back home; one who, like the fabulous sailor in Coleridge's extraordinary poem, was "long and lank and brown", who has "strange powers of speech" and compulsively tells the story of his adventure to all those who are ready to listen and, out of a mixture of compassion and curiosity, encourage him to unburden himself of his tormented past.

I am sure I looked to those kind people not only like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner but even more like Lord Jim out of Conrad's novel. The clothes I wore had been manufactured by an Indian tailor sitting cross-legged under a roof made of palm leaves smoking evil-smelling Indian cigarettes, called biris. It was a somewhat farcical costume, tropically designed and exotically put together. It resembled those "Western" disguises worn by upper-class Indians at that time when when visiting British Government officials. My kind-hearted hosts evidently considered me a figure of fun though they didn't show it.

Neither did they show any surprise at meeting a resurrected prodigal son or the spectre of the ancient mariner who, says the poet, has passed "like night from land to land" and couldn't help revealing his strangeness by his exotic dress, his compulsive speech (one third English, one third German and one third an assortmeut of Bengali words which had been part of my daily attempts to communicate with non-English speakers while living in Bengal). Remembering their kind and bewildered faces I must have seemed to them a mixture of the fabulous sailor

and a resurrected Lord Jim in all his innocence and naivety, as well as the transmigration of the soul of an Indian holy man dressed in quasi-Western clothes, a quaint sort of reincarnation from the snowy heights of the Himalayas.

This is how I remember my homecoming; but the people who welcomed me at the airport were only vaguely aware of any literary associations. They were just being kind to one who had, they imagined, just escaped for some primeval desert or rainforest, a revenant out of the heart of darkness. If they had read Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" they might have associated me with the figure of Kurtz and some unmentionable hidden horror that had marked his life. However, thd place I had come from was in its own way highly civilised. The "darkness", if there was any, was within, not to be made public in speech or conduct.

I was treated like a long lost friend who at the end of his mysterious voyage was now looking forward to sharing his food in "goodly company". In spite of my long absence I did not feel like a stranger. I partook of the food, collected my belongings including the topi which was no longer of any use, and sped in a taxi to my brother's village. My homecoming having been so generously celebrated, the last part of my voyage took place in darkness and silence. Moved and bewildered ay the reception at the airport, I now was ready to apply the last lines of Coleridge's poem to my own future and to love "both man and bird and beast".

2

My thoughts, however, continued to dwell on the recent past, the sad farewell at Calcutta's Howrah Station, the melancholy faces of my friends who had come to bid me farewell, the handshake and the smile which were the last signs of friendship offered in the distressing setting of the

railway station, surrounded, as we were, by wailing beggars, naked children scrounging for food carelessly discarded, half-eaten and gnawed by cockroaches and mangy dogs.

The last fortnght had been spent travelling first by ship from Dacca (as it was then spelled), then by train from Calcutta to Bombay, and finally by plane to Karachi where I implored indifferent airline officials to grant me a priority which would enable me to board a plane reserved for British officers on their way home from war. When at last, in Karachi, an employee of the Jewish Agency literally went down on his knees before a BOAC counter to plead for my boarding pass, I was no longer in the mood to care whether I got it or not, and was quite ready to remain in Karachi for the rest of my life, buy a plot of land and build a tobacco shop there and then for itinerary gurus and their disciples. A tobacco shop near the airport seemed the easiest way to make a living. However, suddenly, when I had given up all hope, I got the longed-for priority. A kind British officer who wasn't in a special hurry to return home provided the seat. Thus my journey was completed in an atmosphere of compassion and generosity. In retrospect my obtaining the required priority against strict imperial regulations seemed at that time a miraculous reversion of bureaucratic procedure.

Contrary to traditional habits of religious piety I did not kneel down and kiss the ground in uninhibited ecstasy. Yet this was a sort of homecoming though I wasn't filled with the ardour that has so frequently been described—of the exile returning to the land of his ancestors, to the stories stories told in the Old Testament, to prophecy and kingship, and the one remaining wall of the Temple destroyed two thousand years ago. Neither was I an inspired pioneer returning to the land promised to the Jews in order to rebuild and to replant, to infuse new life into the desert, to help the young and the old to forget the traumas of the past.

Neither was my arrival in this country the result of nationalist fanaticism. I wished to meet my family which I hadn't seen for nine years. I also felt some sort of affinity with the country which I had visited twice as a student and which I loved as one loves something unusual and obscurely attractive without quite knowing why this should be so. Perhaps it was the infinite variety of landscapes and the diversity of racial features and characters that inhabit the land, the founding of villages and cities, establishing kibbutzim and frontier settlements, outside the framework of history and the continuity of timebound processes. Something that contradicted historical precedent was being created right before one's eyes, a new life out of a land that had been a swamp and a desert. The attraction was very powerful. Only deep prejudice, political, religious or otherwise, could resist it.

The history of the Holocaust had not yet been fully absorbed. I remember dancing on moonlit terraces, attempting a foxtrot, a tango and an English valse after nine years of passively enjoying various classical Indian dances performed in the peaceful surroundings of rural Bengal. Pictures of what had happened in occupied Europe, shown in cinemas, looked unreal, too awful to be believed. Yet, news items began trickling in through letters written by survivors, eyewitness accounts printed in newspapers, stories told by so-called "illegal" immigrants who came straight from death-camps in Europe to be taken to new camps in Cyprus and elsewhere by the British. Listening to these reports was a heart-rending experience. When black-bordered obituaries appeared on the walls of houses and the appalling news became widely known, people withdrew into private mourning. My escape from history which started in 1937 when I left Europe for Tagore's timeless seat of learning ended in a return to timebound devastation, the unspeakable horror of Auschwitz and its counterpart, Hiroshima.

3

I reached Palestine unburdened by any spiritual luggage. My literary studies and my teaching literature had not provided me with any sense of piety or traditional religious custom. In the internment camp at the outbreak of the war where "hostile aliens" were put away as potential fifth columnists I discovered a few Jews who every morning and evening faced west (in the direction of Jerusalem), wrapped in their prayer shawl, and addressed the God of their deliverance from slavery in the ancient language of the Bible. I was deprived of this benediction.

I was unaware of the blessings of prayer and had no God to whom such prayer could be addressed. I was equally indifferent to the various Hindu religious festivals which I attended as a spectator, feeling somewhat superior to the naive assumption of the existence of so many gods, male and female, of which small terracotta statues could be found in various locations, both private and public. There God appeared in many shapes, beautiful and ugly, inspiring a sense of the creative, side by side with a sense of the monstrous, the provocatively erotic and the equally explicitly repulsive.

But this land of immigration took for granted a shared belief in God's choice of a holy people to inhabit the land and make it fruitful. Many of the immigrants, both from East and West, considered their immigration (which in Hebrew is called *alia*, meaning ascent) a return to the undiluted purity of an ancient religious tradition. The voices of the orthodox minority sounded louder than those of the majority of unbelievers. There was no need to express one's agnosticism at the top of one's voice. Whether to eat pork or not did not concern me, whether to travel, switch on the light, look at television on Shabbat, in short, lead the life of an orthodox Jew, was never seriously contemplated.

I led the life of an emancipated European and did not suffer from an unquiet conscience. "Assimilation" was what my parents had prepared me for; this was, indeed, a conscious attempt on the part of my father to remove me as a far as possible from the oppressive medieval atmosphere of the orthodox Jewish community in Russia in which he had grown up and from which he had escaped to Germany to turn his children into free-thinking, democratic citizens of the Weimar republic. In this he had succeeded only too well.

Spiritual significance could be found at that moment in history only in man's attempt at transcending the chaos of the daily struggle for survival, the banality of man's political ideas, the folly of his moral inconsistencies. Being desperately in search of such significance inevitably led to withdrawal from everyday life. As I grew older I found the transcendence I was looking for among the books I read and those I wrote, in the music I listened to and in the visual arts. It was, I realise it today, a life of increasing alienation and seclusion but also, in spite or because of it, of love and friendship and self-discovery. Even though I might have seemed to those kind people who welcomed me at the airport an incarnation of some legendary ancient mariner, my arrival in Palestine was a return to historical continuity and tradition from which there was now no more escape. I also realised that there was no easy transition from the vast plain and the innumerable rivers of East Bengal where I had spent the last two years to the thirsty and rocky soil of this tiny corner of the mediterranean seaboard.

TWO

1

The transition from ancient India to ancient Palestine raised a number of controversial issues. Holy scriptures, divine dispensation, the timeless wisdom of legends, the stories of battles fought in heaven or on earth, of victory and defeat, the two countries seemed to have a great deal in common. Yet, religious custom and ritual are of a different order altogether. A multiplicity of gods, male and female, represented in human shape through painting and sculpture, dominated the spiritual life of numberless millions of Hindus. In traditional Jewish worship God is an abstract concept rooted in the mind of the one who devotes his life to prayer and the study of the holy books, to sacrifice and charity. As for the unbeliever, he can, if he is so inclined, cultivate the virtue of tolerance or, in all innocence, lead a free and easy life unburdened by religious law and tradition. As a freethinker and agnostic the transition from the liberal-minded Indians among whom I had lived to the mostly left-wing immigrants of Jewish Palestine was easily accomplished.

The one thing that India and Palestine had indeed in common at the time of my arrival, in May 1946, was the presence of the British as a colonial power. Resistance to oppressive authority was the common denominator. Yet, living in Bengal among Indians, I was, in political terms, merely an outside observer. Hitler's war of which faint

echoes occasionally reached the "Abode of Peace" where I lived concerned me but marginally. I remember how some of my colleagues, during an evening bridge party, sitting cross-legged among multi-coloured cushions, referred in humorous asides to such outlandish names as Sidi Barani, Tobruk and El Alamein. To many of them it was a matter of utter indifference whether the British lost or won. Had not Gandhi himself insinuated that any foreign occupation, even a Japanese conquest of India, would be preferable to British rule?

When the war broke out I became for a couple of months an "hostile alien" which reminded me in no uncertain terms of my status in Hitler's Germany as racially inferior and doomed to extermination. The British promptly interned me and transferred me to a camp. As far as they were concerned I had a German passport and, contrary to traditional colonial habits of conduct, had gone irretrievably "native". However, the committee appointed by the Government of India released me after several interrogations by the local C.I.D. during which they exhibited an utter ignorance of what was happening in Germany and the reason the war was being fought. It took them two months till they realised that as a Jew I couldn't possibly be hostile to the Allied war effort. In spite of having been declared politically innocent, I remained an "alien" both by definition and by choice. This was the only occasion that history from which I had tried to escape when I left Europe in 1937 caught up with me during my stay in India.

During the nine years I spent in Bengal I devoted my life to reading and writing, teaching and counselling the young. I gradually lost touch with the harsh reality of historical events. They were, it seemed to me, happening on a different planet and among people who only vaguely reminded me of those that I had left behind. Sporadically letters arrived, speaking a language which became

increasingly incomprehensible, out of a nightmare where people were slaughtered according to the haphazard dictates of history. The local police deprived me of my wireless set, my camera, and any maps that were in my possession. I was also informed, after the fall of Paris, that in the near future I would be sent to a "Parole Settlement". Finally, due to the intervention of Tagore in a long letter to Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member in the Government of India, I was permitted to stay where I was, "going native" if I so desired, and projecting an image of Eliot's waste land on to the innocent minds of my students, who in the quiet seclusion of my cottage, shared with me Tagore's inconceivable dream of peace among the mango groves and rice fields of Bengal.

I chose a life of solitude, for as far as I was concerned History had come to an end. Recalling past loves and friendships or anticipating a no less meaningful future was an exercise in futility. Thus I created for myself an artificial paradise, into which only like-minded people were permitted to enter. The landscape of peace and tranquillity, as remote from aggression and extermination as an eighteenth-century pastoral setting or a Serenade by Mozart, helped me in no small measure to cultivate a sense of fulfilment in meditative silence.

I never fully realised that my choice of deliberate seclusion was a form of self-indulgence. Reading Shakespeare's sonnets and Keats's Odes with my students I could easily persuade them that here and nowhere else could be found the ultimate meaning of life on earth. On rare occasions I became aware of what must have seemed to others a claustrophobic atmosphere I had created around me. The local police had restricted my movements as a potential fifth columnist, while I had, as it were, abolished Time and had replaced it by a sort of eternal present. In the rare moments of self-awareness I reread Rilke's poem "Autumn Day" and found in the last stanza a melancholy

portrait of my present withdrawal from time-bound existence; for there Rilke says that whoever now has no home and lives in solitude, will remain so for a long time to come; he will read books, write long letters and will restlessly wander along autumnal avenues when leaves are falling.

2

Snch complete withdrawal from History and Politics was inconceivable in the Palestine of 1946. Secluding oneself from the events that happened all around you (the country is small, and you are, willingly or unwillingly, always placed at the centre of the prevaling turmoil) was considered anti-patriotic and, by implication, almost a criminal offence. Shortly before the outbreak of the Wat of Independence I was called up by the newly founded Israel Defence Forces and had to present myself at a recruiting centre where I was pronounced physically fit to serve in the artillery corps. The medical examination was thorough. I found myself surrounded by a group of cheerful and ablebodied nude males who were all found equally fit to join the army. I was given a number and told to be ready on a specific date.

It so happened that the headmaster of the school in which I taught at that time refused to let me go. He succeeded to convince the relevant committee to grant me an exemption from serving in a fighting unit. Instead I was appointed teacher of English to a group of army officers who had recently immigrated and who had spent the time they should have been at school as partisans fighting the Germans in Poland and Russia. They were in need of a valid matriculation certificate in order qualify as army officers. This was a pleasant assignment which I greatly enjoyed. Some twenty young officers assembled twice a week in a school-building in the North of the city to study English

language and literature. Their somewhat paradoxical enthusiasm for the study of the literary tradition and culture of England at a time when Britain was an enemy rather than an ally was infectious. I continued teaching these groups of former partisans twice a week in the evening for the next few years.

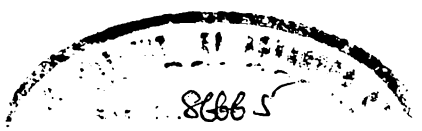
As wars followed each other in quick succession there was very little time to reach a full understanding of the intricacies of Middle-Eastern politics and the significance of victory or defeat. Threatened by a second Holocuust, the Jews fought back with utmost violence and cunning. Within the historical context in which they found themselves, they had no choice. Gandhi took to fasting "unto death" in order to convince his own people and the colonial power of the rightness of his cause. Ben Gurion, fasting "unto death", was politically inconceivable. He was no Mahatma nor had he ever considered the possibility of becoming one. Deep steeped in history, firmly convinced of the prophetic nature of his leadership, fasting for the sake of political contingency never crossed his mind. Political action and attempts at spiritual persuasion existed on two mutually exclusive levels. Non-violent resistance to evil must have seemed an utterly alien concept to him as, indeed, it was to most Jews residing at that time in Palestine. To a post-Auschwitz generation of survivors the very idea of what Gandhi called *satyagraha* seemed, at this moment of threat to their very existence, a somewhat eccentric form of national suicide.

3

The wireless provided the news and, at a later date, the TV screen supplied the image. History, reduced to the lowest common denominator, was ready-made for instant consumption. Opinions regarding past history, present

contigency and expectation for what the future had in store proliferated. They appeared on the screen insinuating night after night that the final apocalypse was at hand. There was no way of avoiding the hourly news bulletin. Together with everyone else I became addicted to what might be called the *son et lumière* of historical time. Its appalling nature had now become an intrinsic part of my private and public life: the announcer's voice was ever-present; it issued from loudspeakers in bus or taxi, in bar or restaurant. There was no escape, no place to withdraw to, no seclusion to make your own. You may of course, when you are alone, switch off the transistor or the TV screen. But like a chain-smoker or a drug addict you lack the will-power to do anything about it. You are never alone, and the "enemy" is everywhere. Once every hour you are reminded of it by the all-knowing voice. Dispensing with a watch does not help. Time pursues you wherever you are, in a traffic jam, in the desert of the Negev, the orange plantations of the Sharon or the forests of the Galilee.

No personal involvement is visible on the face of the one who provides the officially sanctioned and censored news. The predictable defeat of political innocence and the equally predictable victory of machiavellian cunning are being taken for granted. The emphasis falls invariably on the multiple opportunities for unthinking violence or the varying consequences of collective insanity; life itself, in the context of cataclysmic events, has become a communicable threat. This threat could be faced only by fighting it. "Fasting unto death" was, indeed, a fate reserved for the millions in extermination camps where the chances for non-violent resistance to evil were very slim indeed. Gandhi's potential or actual victory, depending on the way you look on it, was never mentioned in local news bulletins during the War of Independence or at the time of the wars that followed.



4

It would be easy enough to compare the two countries at the time of my arrival in terms of dynamic action and passive endurance. But this would be simplifying matters. Passive suffering was part of the heritage that Jewish fate had imposed upon them for many hundreds of years. Inquisition and expulsion, torture and humiliation, a life of constantly renewed physical threat had taught them to distrust their neighbours and to seclude themselves within the walls of the ghetto they inhabited.

Coming as I did from India I could not but become aware of the extraordinary difference in outlook and temperament, in historical continuity and tradition, between the two countries. It was like waking from a dream, a return to reality which was determined by the hourly news bulletin. The journey from Karachi to what was then called Lydda Airport took but a few hours. I was quite unprepared for the suddenness of the transition from a sort of drug-induced dream to full consciousness. Violently reminded of how nasty, brutish and short human life had become during my absence, political events acquired a mystique transcending by far my own personal life. Yet I remained an alien observing the events, as it were, from afar, unable and unwilling either to condemn or to acquit. History was very much in evidence. Its presences could no longer be denied. Evil, it occurred to me, could only be resisted by more evil. There really was no other choice after Auschwitz and Treblinka.

THREE

I

Moments of departure and separation echo in my memory. In the anonymous vastness of railway stations and airports, listening to invisible loudspeakers announcing arrival and departure, self-assured voices giving you information regarding flight numbers and the destination of trains, you shake hands, embrace, and speak some casual words into the surrounding noise of leave-talking. Reluctantly you turn your back and climb into the compartment, or ascend by escalator to the departure hall. You look back and see them standing among a crowd of strangers in the twittering brightness of neon lights and the shadows thrown by posters advertising the latest technology in the manufacture of computers and various competing information devices.

Now letters of love and friendship are to be written. They will cross seas, countries and continents before they reach their destination. They may get lost on the way because of wars or revolutions, and frontiers have been closed, planes carrying letters have been shot down. Your correspondence is being censored, names of cities and countries are blotted out, words disappear into nothingness, whole paragraphs are removed by invisible nameless readers. The arrival of a letter is a matter of celebration, an unhoped for ray of light, a conquest of chaos and vacuity. Then there is silence again, for months and years. And when the

wars are over and you try to re-establish relations that at one time had been the be-all and end-all of your life, your letters remain unanswered. You are left with your memories which gradually fade into echoless silence.

You reread the last letter you got years ago. It told you of conscription, black-out, rationing cards. Between the lines you could read the fear of invasion, parachutists dropping from the sky at night, and words of hollow hope that were meant to deceive the military censor. These were letters written in darkness, during air-raid alerts, or in trenches before or after an attack. Your life also has been reduced to a number in your passport. This was the only identity that counted. If you still wrote letters you acted like the chicken whose head had been cut off and who continued running around in search of an identity that was no longer available. As for your head, you had also lost it, though it took you some time to realise the significance of your loss.

The theme of separation from those whose presence had been taken for granted for so many years haunts me like a sudden discord in the middle of a piece of meditative music. For past loves and friendships were being constantly re-experienced when memory was at work. The innocent laughter of childhood, eyes half-closed at a moment of surrender, the encounter of bodies in the half-light of shuttered windows. No letter could convey these images. As war followed war the permanent black-out turned into a narrative device, a metaphor of nothingness. Letter-writing during a black-out was like a soliloquy spoken into darkness and addressed to a fictitious listener.

Few of these letters are remembered. What remains is a feeling of lost opportunities, of the expense of spirit in what appear today to have been relationships whose depth had finally remained unexplored; the recognition that perhaps there was no depth to be explored, that these were merely casual encounters that would provide occasions for

unpremeditaed pleasure at a given moment in my life. That is perhaps why the departure and separation from those dear to me lacked the tragic implication of some ultimate ending before the doors were closed and the curtain had come down.

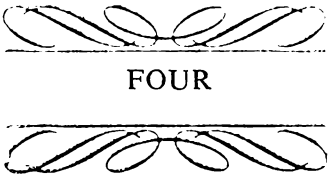
2

Books accompanied me wherever I went. In heavy wooden boxes or huge suitcases they arrived at their destinations to be placed on shelves and decorate the room. Some of these books are still with me today though they were purchased or given as presents in the early thirties in Germany before I left for France. They have, as it were, acquired a patina, pages torn, the binding in tatters, the margins disfigured by notes taken when I first read them. They are faithful mirrors of my literary preoccupations at certain moments in my life, but they also reflect stages of emotional development and the growth of a mature response to the problematic nature of the age in which I live and the age in which the books were written.

Separation from human beings was, as it were, a historical necessity. I could not envisage such a separation from my library. The books remained with me as a constant reminder of my past reading but they did not grow with time into greater wisdom as, presumably, I did. Thus many of the books I acquired in the past continue to speak in an old-fashioned idiom no longer of the present, reminding me in a somewhat nostalgic manner of what they meant to me in the faraway past. Those books that have survived the hurly-burly of the age continue to address me either in the language of great poetry—Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rilke and Yeats, or in the language of great prose—Montaigne, Stendhal and Flaubert, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. Life would lose much of its significance had not Shakespeare provided a stage on which it could be observed,

studied and relived. And there were Thomas Mann and Kafka to whom you could turn whenever you were looking for answers among books in the jungle of contemporary history.

I never doubted that books could supply answers to questions unacknowledged by contemporary mass media. I was not altogether mistaken. When at times of deepening anguish I cast a casual glance into the Bible, I was struck by the metaphoric precision of available answers whenever my mind was ready to listen and receive. So I opened the Book of Job while I was writing this and read—"For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow." Thus the days of departure and separation from those I loved were but a shadow as is the collection of books decorating the four walls of the room in which this is written.



FOUR

I

My choice of profession was determined, I believe, by the hold that books had from an early age upon my imagination. It certainly was not a conscious choice. An understanding of the human condition (however incomplete) that books had implanted in my mind led irresistibly to a profession where I could communicate to the young whatever knowledge I had acquired from the printed page. During my stay in India where my first teaching assignment as a lecturer in a department of English took place, I studied the art of sharing this knowledge with my students. I was not altogether unsuccessful in spite of my short stay in England and my ignorance of many aspects of English life and letters. What I communicated, first and foremost, to my students was not so much the history of English literature as a sense of literary discrimination and critical awareness my teachers had in so large a measure supplied. Literary history like any other kind of history was a secondary preoccupation.

Knowledge acquired by living experience rather than by books was not excluded; but communicating one's private self to a class of students whose main concern was to get a degree (and in India at that time even the lowest paid job required a university degree) which would qualify them to find employment, required a great deal of self-confidence. Occasionally books supplied a commentary to what seemed at first sight psychological complexities that eluded rational

analysis. These were the books that most powerfully attracted me. In retrospect it seems as if my selection of "favourite" books was determined by intellectual curiosity and the conscious attempt to understand the human condition in circumstances where rational thought failed to to apprehend the motivation for action. I frequently wondered whether my success as teacher and lecturer was not the rusult of this synthesis of knowledge acquired through book-learning and wisdom acquired through experience.

2

The reading habit started with Karl May whose Red Indian adventure stories captured my imagination almost from the moment that I learned to read. The middle-class existence of my home was suddenly lit up as if by some magic transformation. My dreams were filled wtth images of freedom-loving barbarians, of heroic deeds, of manly fights and sacrificial deaths. Reading these stories was like continuing to dream with eyes open and the mind on the alert. Dreaming was my main occupation in early childhood, a habit which continued into old age.

Nothing could be more revealing of the child's attempts at understanding the world than the stories that held up a looking-glass in which were reflected superhuman deeds committed for the sake of the honour and the dignity of the underdog. Reading Karl May threw a lurid light on white man's cruelty and racial complacency. It was a childhood preparation for the various racial encounters that became part of my life at a future date. To be red, yellow or black pertained to oppression, exploitation and slavery.

Very much later I discovered that Karl May had never visited the countries where his stories take place and that many of his novels were written in gaol where he spent some

time having come into conflict with the law. It was also at a later date that I became aware of the fact that his noble savages were the result of an imaginative effort rather than of historical evidence. Winnetou, one of his main heroes, never existed in life; he was the creation of a writer who had been brought up in the narrow provincial context of nineteenth-century Germany. This was my first encounter with imaginative literature which prepared the way for what was to come.

For these novels served as introduction to more complex and sophisticated narratives, in particular the novels and stories of Kipling and Jack London. The two complemented each other. Kipling describes what his imagination dictated to him, while Jack London's stories deal with events that he himself had at one time or another experienced. Where the former took for granted the reader's ability to recreate the details of his stories in his own mind, the latter told of adventures that had really happened and which he vividly remembered. In that sense the simultaneous reading of the two writers served a double purpose. They trained the imagination of the child while enriching and expanding the child's awareness of the contingencies that characterise human life, the irrational interplay of fortune and misfortune, of reason and folly.

To these two writers should be added the novels of Jules Verne which enjoyed great popularity when I was young. Here imagination ran riot and the impossible was transformed into the real, science was humanised and made accessible to the child's mind as a sort of prophecy to be realised in some near future, as indeed it frequently was. As a precursor of science fiction Jules Verne's novels fulfilled a historical purpose. Actually his books affected the creative eagerness of the child in various ways: they prompted the development of the imagination and provided an outlet for mental activity.

Knut Hamsun's novels were a further stimulus to

imaginative identification. He was the first novelist I read as a young boy who revealed states of mind that could only be intuitively apprehended, an evocation of the close relation between the artist and the society of which he is a part. Nature came alive in his stories, not as a convenient background to human events, but as a necessary partner in man's emotional upheavals and intellectual questioning. The striving for integrity and commitment was there, on every page, as was the ambiguity of the conflict between aspiration and fulfilment. Knut Hamsun was the ideal writer to fill the gap between childhood and adolescence. I especially remember his novel *Hunger*, an artist's struggle for recognition in a pragmatic and materialist society.

It was a useful introduction to later novels and stories dealing with the figure of the artist as outcast or misfit. Thus as an adolescent I read Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe* and became aware of a secret affinity with the life of this fictitious German composer, his vulnerability, the part that friendship played in his life and his stay in France. I became acquainted with the sorrows of exile. Already at the age of 14 or 15 I imagined my future in terms of Rolland's biography of an artist's pilgrimage from innocence to experience.

3

I read a great deal at that time, rather indiscriminately, as there was no one to guide me. My parents certainly gave me complete freedom to read whatever came my way. I must have been a very precocious reader, for scarcely out of infancy I read for the first time the excellent German translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I understood little but was attracted to it by its stress on introspection and the consequent inability to translate his thoughts into action. It was also at that early age that I discovered Nietzsche's

Zarathustra and Hölderlin's *Hyperion.* Today I realise—though I understood but little of what I was reading with increasing fervour—that I was fascinated by the seemingly inevitable breakdown of creative power, after it had exhausted itself, into darkness and chaos. It did not take me long before I discovered the idiosyncratic vision that led to Van Gogh's late paintings and Schumann's decline into insanity. In my somewhat overwrought imagination the artist was by definition doomed to suffer some form of mental breakdown sooner or later in his life.

Today I am sure that my reading of *Hamlet* strenghtened my conviction. Here was what I considered the prototype of the artist as outsider who, a scapegoat of his vocation, was yet fully conscious of the privilege of being an outcast, a breaker of idols and images, indeed one doomed to withdraw from social intercourse into the privacy of his tormented soul. It was also at that time that I read Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*, a Hamlet-like figure in an early twentieth-century setting. Hamlet as a metaphor for the budding artist continued to haunt me throughout my life. Soon after *Tonio Kröger* I discovered Hermann Hesse's *Demian* and *Steppenwolf*, and, at a later date, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus—all of them, within the context of their age and circumstances, resurrections of Shakespeare's introspective prince.

After leaving Germany for France I discovered the delights of poetry. Though I had already read a great deal of Rilke, it was Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud who finally obliged me to re-invent a universe where poetry reigned supreme. The transition from prose to verse was not difficult to accomplish. Here again was the voice of the outcast, the scapegoat who willingly sacrificed himself for the sake of his art, thereby denying whatever usefulness civilisation might have for the non-conforming mind.

These poets were knowingly on the side of the devil.

What they worshipped was outside middle-class ideas of the good life. Those who read them belonged to a minority whom Baudelaire addressed as "mon semblable, mon frère". I had no doubt that I was one of them. These poets strenghtened my belief that life was worth living only outside or in opposition to conventional moral and intellectual criteria. And when Baudelaire turns to Satan and asks him to have pity on him in his misery I imagined myself to be one of those who are in need of the Devil's assistance to overcome what Shakespeare, in sonnet 29, calls his outcast state.

When, during my stay at Cambridge, I read and re-read T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* I realised that such a poem could only have been written by one who (quite apart from various literary influences) had experienced similar forms of alienation as those French poets whom I had studied during my student days in France. Nor was I surprised to learn that Eliot in November 1921 had left England for Lausanne to undergo psychiatrical treatment. It was during his stay in Switzerland that a major portion of this extraordinary poem was written. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, I thought, especially after having read Eliot's essay on Baudelaire. Speaking of Baudelaire's "capacity for damnation" Eliot writes: "In all his humiliating traffic with other beings, he walked secure in this high vocation, that he was capable of a damnation denied to the politicians and newspaper editors of Paris." To be thus "damned" as a poet was indeed a privilege reserved for the outcast. *The Waste Land* is a poem written by one who foresaw the poet's damnation inescapably rooted in contemporary life. In that sense the poem is also a requiem for all that had been lost in the collective insanity of the Great War. At the time I read *The Waste Land* the "Four Quartets" had not yet been written.

The poetry of Yeats was an additional revelation. In his old age some of his most moving poems were written in

praise of madness. Here was one who, having abandoned the twilight myths of Ireland, the "handiwork of Callimachus" and Pythagoras's numbers, the sages "standing in God's holy fire" of Byzantium, the philosophy of India and the No plays of Japan, composed verse in "an old man's frenzy". Crazy Jane was to accompany Tom the Lunatic on their voyage into final madness. Yeats repeatedly invoked the ultimate wisdom of creative insanity. His final prayer to be "a foolish, passionate man" was a sort of admission that creative insanity alone could justify the artist's existence in old age.

I believe that this growing interest in artistic creation and the price the artist has to pay for his dependence on the unconscious ultimately determined my choice of profession. It certainly added spice to a frequently trivial occupation where transmitting knowledge was all that mattered and grading exam papers was liable to disenchant the most enthusiastic teacher. Thus I was ready to emphasise in my teaching the artist's alienated self and his outcast state In a vague sort of way I knew that his latent neurosis was contagious and that both teacher and student may easily be infected by his ecstatic surrender to the unconscious act of creation. It never occurred to me to resist this attraction of the morally equivocal. It was not long before I also realised its hidden erotic ambivalence.

FIVE

1

There were other, less literary reasons, why I chose the teaching profession. When I was asked, shortly before the matriculation examination, what profession I wished to choose, I mentioned law as the obvious choice. I don't remember what made me do so. I had shown no interest whatever in legal matters, those of my friends whose fathers were lawyers exercised no influence. I probably mentioned Law as my future subject of studies merely to avoid revealing my own uncertainty regarding my professional future. Yet, at the back of my mind I had no doubts at all; I desired nothing more than to teach, regardless of the subject-matter, though I early on realised it could be only literature. I registered at the beginning of the first semester at the university of Freiburg in German Literature, History and French.

Though I made a conscious choice, the truth of the matter lay elsewhere. Like many young people at that time the growing alienation from what was considered a conventional social life, my increasing preference for introspection rather than a cheerful acceptance of the extrovert way of life, ineluctably led me towards an unconscious wish to share and to transmit, what seemed to me the only truth worth communicating—my commitment to an only half understood humanism and the undisturbed continuity of a self-chosen seclusion where I

could cultivate my literary studies, my love for music, and the visual arts.

These were intimations of possibilities of choice at some future date. My parents expected me to specialise in a profession which would guarantee an acceptable income, pension rights, health insurance and the founding of a family with a view to establish a well-deserved position as a "professional", a lawyer, a physician, a high government official, within the framework of what was still considered in the early thirties a civilised society. They were blissfully unaware of the kind of society that was being formed under their very noses, a society that would reject me out of hand whatever profession I might choose. They were equally blind to the alienating effects of political events that prevented me from becoming a well-adjusted member of an outdated upper middle-class society in which I was an alien, an outsider if not actually an outcast. This I realised soon enough without, however, being greatly disturbed by it.

The desire to share and to communicate the knowledge accumulated during several years of intense study in three countries and in three different languages could only be realised in the teaching profession. Sharing knowledge meant to reveal oneself through speech. Transmitting the meaning of books one had read and studied, implied a readiness not merely to communicate what one knew or thought one knew, but also, and in particular, to open up the innermost recesses of one's mind and to rid oneself of one's inhibitions for an audience whose age never changed while I grew older and, presumably, wiser from year to year. Transmitting this wisdom could be done only through speech and this is exactly what I so devoutly wished to achieve.

2

Very much later I understood that this desire to address yourself to the young who were willing and indeed eager to listen to me is not unlike the patient's stream of consciousness when he reveals his most secret being, his dreams and unacknowledged memories, to the analyst. The analyst's task consists in interpreting and bringing to light what, unknowingly, concerned the patient at the moment of speech. This is what led the patient in the first place to visit the analyst and to indulge in free association which would reveal to the analyst the origin of the psychic disturbance which causes emotional upheavals and anguish. I also disovered that according to psycho-analytical interpretation one's choice of profession corresponds with, and becomes associated to, deep unconscious trends that arose in early childhood life.

To be conscious of one's alienation, for example, is experienced as displeasure, a negative form of psychic energy which calls for relief and gratification. This can only be achieved by directing the energy of unconscious processes into what are called "normal" channels such as the choice of a profession in which such gratification can be achieved. As a teacher or educator you are part of a process of transference where those whom you address and who actively participate in an exchange of opinions, attitudes and evaluations unconsciously "transfer" their pleasure or displeasure on to the teacher's conscious attempt to communicate knowledge. This, inevitably, also implies self-knowledge. The pupil or student finds himself in the position of a patient who, if the teacher lives up to his or her expectation, transfers unconscious affects to the one whose business it is to interpret and to provide wisdom, and who, in psycho-analytical terms, functions as the "analyst".

Today I have no doubt at all that such an unconscious

motivation led me to choose the teaching profession as the only one that could provide the sort of "gratification" I was so greatly in need of. This happened long before I became acquainted with psycho-analytical theories. That the erotic element played a part in this choice is something of which I became aware only at a much later stage of my development. For erotic attraction or repulsion had at all times been an intrinsic part of my professional activity as a teacher, educator or lecturer. Transference in so far as it occurred (and I was unwilling to prevent it from occurring) frequently changed into compulsion where both "analyst" and "patient" were forced into a relationship which went far beyond a teacher's or educator's "normal" professional occupation. His success is, indeed, frequently the result of his alienation which, in the first place, led him to the choice of this profession. In addition, certain kinds of young people, in search of truth or identity or wisdom, willingly and at times cheerfully submit to a process of alienation which enables them to respond fully and unconditionally to art or music or literature.

3

During my tenure as a teacher in a Tel Aviv municipal high school I realised that I was teaching pupils of unusual intellectual maturity and insight. I invited them to my home to read and discuss Shakespeare's sonnets. The emotionally wide-awake came, partly out of curiosity to know more about their teacher and a desire to penetrate Shakespeare's mind where it was at its most equivocal. In the evening they came and sat around me listening, asking questions and wondering what could be made of sonnet XX which begins "A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted/ Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion"? And what psychological application could be made when reading

sonnet XXIX where Shakespeare "beweeps his outcast state" and desires to acquire "this man's art and that man's scope"? What is the meaning of the temptation of the flesh that so unambiguously seduced the poet who understood better than anyone that "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds"? Where was perfection to be found, in the beauty of the flesh or that of the poetry that the flesh inspired?

Here was I, then, opening doors of perception, uncovering areas of consciousness where, according to commonplace educational manuals, angels fear to tread. I was at no time sure of the effect that the reading of Shakespeare's sonnets may have on my young disciples. Most of them had been hardened by the political events that impinged upon their way of thinking and feeling. The cynical mind may indeed find Shakespeare's sonnets self-indulgent. They raised questions concerning the possibility of deliberate equivocation which remained unresolved. The young mind that has not yet undergone the steep ascent into emotional maturity remained bewildered by such unmitigated anguish and by the poet's flight into the untainted perfection of art. But his love, was it not "perfect" too?

What sort of a man was he, then, who knew so well the pitfalls inherent in human relationships and yet hankered after an unequivocal consummation which left him in despair? For the one whom he addressed in his first 125 sonnets remained "unmoved, cold and to temptation slow". My faithful listeners left late at night. I could hear their cheerful talk and laughter along the dark and deserted street while I was still sitting in front of the open book of sonnets.

4

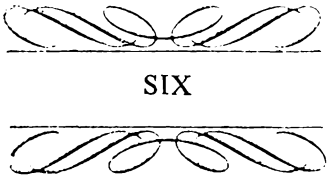
From psycho-analysis to the myth of Prometheus was but a short step. For as the thief of fire and the bringer of of light he provided a persuasive metaphor for the teaching profession. This I knew, was a presumption the unconscious result of my unhoped for success as a teacher. Now, at last, I could afford being human while supplying knowledge and inspiration from the books I taught while providing the fire and the light by which the books could be read and understood.

I recreated the mythic Prometheus in my mind's eye revolting against the gods and duly punished for his rebellion; half human and half divine his wound was being renewed each night; he was one who suffered in his vulnerability and the anguish of the unredeemed; for he was both corrupter and saviour having supplied the ignorant mortals with the ability to act in the full light of day and in the full knowledge of the consequences of his action.

For Prometheus—the myth tells us—is a being of crooked thoughts. Thus Zeus, angered by Prometheus's theft, created a beautiful maiden, Pandora, whom he sent as a gift to Prometheus who made her into the image of the first woman. According to the myth she is a temptation that cannot be resisted. Her sole purpose is to awaken desire. When this temptress opened the lid of the great vessel she carried (a splendid Freudian symbol), she released all the mortal ills that had been enclosed in it: plagues, old age, labour, sickness, vice and passion. Hope alone remained, imprisoned in the vessel. This, mythology continues its account, is the origin of man's various uncontrollable lusts, the passionate intensity with which he transgresses the rules that make civilisation possible, and, ultimately, his discontent and suffering.

The myth remained an unconscious projection to be acted out in darkness and the ignorance of self-deception.

It was, as far as I was concerned, an alien though desirable intrusion into the teaching of literature. To be wounded again and again is, I discovered in my Promethean disguise, more enjoyable than to be healed and made ordinary and commonplace. I welcomed Pandora and invested all my emotional strength in a game of fortune which finally I could lose only in anguished recognition of my presumptuous folly.



SIX

1

My closest relationships were with the young, the brightest as well as those who attracted me because of their emotional precociousness, their social insecurity and their obvious need of a father figure. Though I was not at all sure of my own identity within a disintegrating social context, I was forced to put on the disguise of an all-knowing mentor who could by his very presence help them to confront an age that lacked moral coherence and a meaningful intellectual core. In spite of my awareness of increasing alienation my disguise which soon turned into a sort of second nature frequently compensated me for the absence of other, more "adult", relationships in the privacy of my own life. My presence among the young strengthened their self-confidence in their studies, their early attempts at self-expression, and even assisted them to come to terms with their occasionally ambiguous sexual identity.

I recall my infatuation with the early Russian film *The Road to Life*. I saw it a number of times, first in Germany when still a schoolboy, later on in France and, finally, in England. I was attracted to it, in the first place, by the figure of the educator who single-handed managed to bring children who had been uprooted by war and civil anarchy back to normal life. Potential criminals, these children were, indeed, in need of guidance, professional training and social adjustment. By the time the film ended the educator,

himself a man of no intellectual pretensions, had achieved what seemed at first sight beyond the range of educational practice. The children were now ready to play their part in the rebuilding of their country. I was of course unaware of the fact that the picture was a propaganda effort on the part of the Bolshevik government. My response to the film was utterly non-political. What I was so enthusiastically concerned with was the relationship between the leader and the led, the adult educator (who must have been a convinced member of the communist party) and those pathetic young outlaws in need of guidance.

That the "leader" was himself a simple soul, a man of apparently no specific educational training, seemed to me when I first saw the film an initial advantage. In my imagination he was the ideal pedagogue who succeeded where the government and the educational system of the time had failed. His success, I very quckly realised, was due to his identification with the uprootedness, the social alienation that characterised a whole generation of homeless young people who had never undergone any sort of educational guidance, who were unfit for meaningful professional training in Russia's post-revolutionary society.

2

The Road to Life, I realised, had a general message applicable to any society in transition. Germany, in the early thirties, with six million unemployed, was such a society. The threat of social anarchy and political mayhem was very real indeed. As long as school-life provided a a meaningful intellectual environment, I deliberately ignored what was happening in the streets of the city in which I lived. In addition there was the youth movement, the immaturity of its emotional tensions and its idealisation of a non-conventional life, which involved me in a variety of

relationships, time-consuming and rarely satisfying. These movements consisted of Jewish middle-class youngsters, vaguely Zionist, banding together on Sundays to commune with Nature on long walks singing songs which they inherited from the German "Wandervögel". I was one of the "Führers", as we were called, long before "mein Führer" became an intrinsic part of the new German language under Hitler. It is an ironic paradox that we should have used, in all innocence, a term which in the near future became one of the most prominent linguistic features of Nazi Germany. This also was a "road to life", a training in discipline and loyalty, but ultimately a pleasing self-deception. It didn't take us long to realise the fatuity of it all.

3

Shortly after finishing school, when I was eighteen years old, I volunteered to assist in the social work organised by an association of young leftwing liberals who had established in Berlin an office the purpose of which was to help young men and women to cope with problems arising from unemployment, lack of meaningful leisure-time activities, various sexual delinquencies, and drug-related temptations. At the head of this organisation stood a number of well-known personalities whose names carried a message of democratic conviction. Among them I especially remember Käthe Kollwitz, the painter whose drawings of the wretched poor of the Weimar Republic I had seen on frequent occasions at the home of one of my school friends whose father had collected many hundreds of these original drawings. It is, thus, not altogether by accident that I wished to participate in the efforts of these young idealists to alleviate the lot of the social outcasts with whose misery I had become acquainted through the drawings of Käthe Kollwitz but of whose actual existence I had till then been

unaware.

The starting-point of my adventure into the unknown, then, was my youthful response to compassionate art. I had taken a life of material privilege for granted. I was in a vague sort of way conscious of the threat of the millions of unemployed in democratic Germany, but it didn't concern me personally in either moral or political terms. Hitler's rise to power was a threat one was unwilling, or politically too unschooled, to take seriously. Yet, those drawings by Käthe Kollwitz opened my mind to possibilities of social disaster on a vast scale. In the summer of 1931 I left for Berlin. I took a room not far from Alexander Platz, the very centre of that section of the big city where the number of unemployed and juvenile delinquents was highest.

I spent two months in Berlin doing the sort of work which even a qualified social worker would have found not merely exhausting but of an emotionally demanding nature. The organisation of which I had become a part was closely associated with the municipal department dealing with juvenile delinquency. Files describing individual cases of endangered youth and requiring closer investigation were passed on to us on a daily basis. A few of these files were given to me early in the morning when I visited the office. My job consisted in meeting the young men whose maladjustment to what society expected of them was the subject of these files. I had to initiate an informal exchange of ideas, invite them to visit the dances that were organised by us every Saturday evening, and finally, write a report summarising whatever result my visit had achieved. The files dealt with men between the ages of eighteen and thirty.

I had to investigate three or four "cases" every day; some of them had a criminal record, others emphasised the need for guidance in those cases where young people, resentful and desperate, had to be assisted in their search for moral certainty in a society that increasingly tended towards opportunist political organisation and a social order based

on party discipline, military conscription and fascist dictatorship. It was, as far as I was concerned, a desperate undertaking. I received no guidance from those who had been working there for months or years; it was my own ignorance and inexperience that guided me in an atmosphere of threatening apocalypse. For S.A. troops were marching along the street where the office was situated singing their obscene songs and shouting their threatening slogans. My work consisted not merely in helping the unemployed young men to come to terms with extremely difficult economic circumstances but also to face the coming political disaster. Many of the cases that were passed on to me were in need of psychiatrical treatment. Frequently I was at a loss as to the practical implications resulting from my well-meant interference in the lives of these young and rootless people.

4

I vividly remember some of these visits. One concerned a young man who had been hospitalised in a lunatic asylum and who was going to be released on the day of my visit. My job was to help him to readjust to "normal" living, to introduce him to other young people, in short, to assist him to make the transition from the madhouse to ordinary everyday life as smooth as possible. I recall my waiting in the large entrance hall of the asylum for the arrival of the "patient". The huge building in which I was sitting was filled with echoing sounds of appalling savagery which originated in the upper and lower floors of the asylum. These were barely recognisable human voices, shouts and shrieks, groans and lamentations, wild laughter and the incoherent babbling of madness. After listening for more than an hour to these voices communicating the chaos of mental anarchy, I was reduced to speechlessness and silence when the young man appeared, ready for the journey home.

I remember our sitting side by side in the bus without exchanging a single word during the long voyage across the city. I wonder what the report was like which I submitted next morning to the office.

Another visit I undertook concerned a sexual offender, considerably older than I was at that time, who, except for the reported violent advances towards young males and females, seemed a perfectly harmless human being. During my visit to his middle-class home in one of the suburbs I invited him to attend one of our weekly dances the purpose of which was to provide a normal and pleasant outlet for young people who had nowhere to go on a Saturday evening. He told me that he dare not attend such a dance because, as he put it, he would not be able to keep his sexual drives under control. He said this in a somewhat casual, noncommittal manner as if my invitation did not conern him and as if he was talking about someone else. I left him, conscious of my utter lack of experience to provide an acceptable solution which would free him of his compulsion.

It was after such a visit (and there were many more to come) that I realised that my youthful idealism and Käthe Kollwitz's moving portrayals of human wretchedness had misled me. It seemed to me then that I myself was in danger of becoming a "case", a victim of the irrational and the inarticulate. After a few of such experiences I informed the people in charge of the organisation that my time in Berlin was coming to an inglorious end. They were ready to let me go and did not try to retain me. I left after a stay of two months, utterly disillusioned with my attempts at translating compassion into meaningful action. I went home and took to my bed for a fortnight. I didn't communicate my Berlin experience to anyone. The fortnight I spent in bed was meant to restore my mental and emotional equilibrium. Within the seclusion of a comfortable middle-class existence I undertook a fortnight's retreat into inarticulate self-examination.

5

The time I spent in Berlin was not without compensations. I visited the Pergamon Museum whenever I had a free afternoon. Ancient Greece was resurrected in physical dimension, a unified perspective in architecture and sculpture, a reminder of human creativity beyond the nightmarish vision of presentday society as I encountered it every morning in my work. One day I got a ticket to a performance of *Cosi Fan Tutte* at the Staatsoper, conducted by Bruno Walter. This was one more counterpoint in my search for significance in a life devoid of meaning, a musical experience of unhoped for extraordinary power. Any attempt to establish a synthesis between my experiences as a volunteer doing social work and this musical perfection inevitably led to a growing sense of frustration and failure.

There was no apparent bridge between the two opposing perspectives. I remember walking back from the Opera House to my lodgings near Alexander Platz, desperately conscious of the futility of my work. The very concept of meaningful action was put in doubt. I had nothing in common with the young people I was supposed to assist. Neither had I anything in common with those other volunteers who were mature human beings, aware both of the significance of the work they were doing and of the coming political apocalypse that concerned the rich and the poor alike, the proud and the humble, the road to death rather than to life.

SEVEN

Even before my first appointment as a teacher I considered education as a form of creativity; the educator's relation to the young, I assumed, resembles that of the artist to the medium of his art. The poet, the painter, the composer, in full command of their medium, express the inarticulate through language, design and colour, or musical pattern. This could serve as a metaphor for the perfect educator whose medium is the mind and the affective life of the young within a given social context. He prepares the ground for "The Road to Life" on the many levels that are open to him. His primary task would be the training of imagination rather than merely social adjustment or book knowledge.

My somewhat naive conception of the educator as artist was soon put to the test when I was appointed lecturer at Tagore's university in Bengal. My colleagues were matter-of-fact, down-to-earth men who prepared their students for the various examinations they had to pass. In no sense of the term were they artistically inclined. Their training had been professional and thorough. They were competent craftsmen, devoted to their profession, readers of Tagore's writings and, in all likelihood, of more than average intelligence. The training of imagination, however, played no part in their teaching.

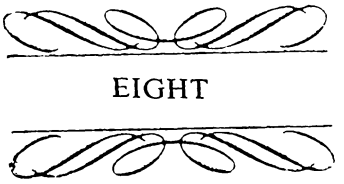
I was still very young and inexperienced when I was appointed to serve as a lecturer in an institution that had been founded by a poet as an attempt to fuse the acquisition

of knowledge and the training of the imagination. Even before going out to India I was uncomfortably aware that I was expected to fulfil a double function: that of the teacher preparing students for their examinations and that of the "artist" assisting them in their attempts at leading a life of creativity. Tagore had founded the institution in opposition to the then prevailing educational practice in India. Within the Indian historical context his was a revolutionary attempt to infuse new life into the training of the young. He did so as a poet in terms of artistic creativity. He imagined the ideal teacher as a creator who, indeed, gives shape to the unformed mind, as the poet recreates language in the poem he is writing. For Tagore education, then, was a creative process; his main problem was to find the teachers who would be able to respond to this ideal. This problem he could never quite solve. When I started teaching in the full knowledge of what was expected of me I was, predictably, overcome by the growing awareness of the difficulty both to transmit relevant knowledge and assist my students in controlling and disciplining their imagination.

I met Tagore a number of times. We talked about the teaching of English poetry to the students. I recall how deeply impressed I was by his voice, his physical appearance, the utter simplicity of his arguments which were less literary than human. Basically, our talk was about education, how the teaching of poetry would enrich the students' imagination and serve as a counterpoint to material preoccupations in later life. I listened to the poet's voice in utter fascination. The advice he gave me was not the result of academic scholarship. He had never received any training in education. He spoke as a poet who had descended from his ivory tower to assume the role of a teacher in the true humanist tradition, at a time when, according to his friend W. B. Yeats, the Second Coming was at hand, and T. S. Eliot's Hollow Men had usurped the

earth.

Such an encounter was liable to destroy whatever preconceptions I had brought with me to Bengal. T. S. Eliot's early poetry which I knew well and which I admired as being the most convincing expression in modern poetry of the loss of any sort of faith in our age, man's desperate search for salvation through the spirit, the awareness of his repeated failure to find the words that would interpret his alienated self. Listening to Tagare talking to me as a poet-educator revealed to me an attitude of spiritual strength, a rootedness in the language of the past which was liable to be treated with ridicule or at least incredulity in the West,—all this overwhelmed my critical faculty, especially as it was expressed in the conviction of one who had resurrected the moribund past to make it live again in his poetry. For Tagore, I realised, belonged to the past. This was particularly obvious since he was when I met him an old man who could look back on his own past with the satisfaction born of the humility of a creative mind. Yet, Tagore's educational ideas were remarkably modern. They corresponded, to a considerable degree, to various statements made on education and its needs by such contrasting minds as those of Bertrand Russell and D. H. Lawrence.



EIGHT

On my arrival in Jerusalem, in 1946, having been appointed as a guest lecturer at the Hebrew University, I met a number of men of outstanding intellectual distinction who had expressed a wish to meet me, evidently not realising how young I was, how intellectually immature and unshaped. My coming from India must have been the reason for these unhoped for encounters. Thus I met Martin Buber in his booklined study in Jerusalem and talked to him about India and my experiences in Tagore's university. I had listened to Buber's lectures while still in Germany. If I remember them at all it is because he spoke about the spiritual need of a Zionist return to Palestine at a time when many of us youngsters did not seriously consider leaving the country of our birth for an unknown national identity in the Near East. He spoke in the manner of a prophet intimating what was in store for us while we were ignorant and full of a superficial trust in the future.

After meeting Buber in Jerusalem I reread some of his books, in particular his *I and Thou*, an interpretation of the significance of man's relation to God. A close affinity with Tagore's poetry and its religious implications seemed to me then self-evident. For Buber's philosophy is not abstract but based upon human experience, reminiscent of Blake rather than the scholarly discourse of professional academics. I do not know whether Tagore ever read Buber but I wouldn't be surprised if he had. By temperament they were opposites in spite of the fact that both pertained to the

East rather than the West in their attitude to divine revelation and man's need of God's guidance. Meeting Buber made me realise that on the highest level of spiritual communion between the human and the divine the alienated *I* may discover a transcendent *Thou* within himself. This is also what Tagore's poetry so insistently articulates.

During my one-year stay in Jerusalem I was introduced to Professor Hugo Bergmann, one of the survivors of the Prague Circle, who taught philosophy at the Hebrew University. Our talk was more personal than the one I had with Buber. Bergmann was at that time intensely interested in things Indian, especially in the metaphysical aspect of Indian thought. He was reading Aurobindo Ghose's *The Life Divine* and wanted to know more about the relation between the everyday life of the average Indian and his religious conviction and practice. I told him whatever little I knew, in particular I stressed Tagore's symbiosis of religion and the affective life of man. All this interested him greatly and our meetings became increasingly more personal. He expressed a growing interest in theories of non-violence and, finally, asked me to contribute an article about Gandhi for the Hebrew Encyclopedia of which he was one of the editors. This was a great honour which I scarcely deserved. In spite of my doubts as to my qualifications I wrote the article which was duly published, in Hebrew. This is one of my minor sins of commission.

Shortly afterwards I was introduced to Gershom Sholem. We talked about Kafka whom I had not read at that time. He spoke about Kafka's attitude to his Jewishness as it is revealed in his various writings. Being utterly ignorant (Kafka's writings were virtually unknown in India at that time) I listened and took notes. Sholem, realising the attention I paid to everyone of his words, lent me Kafka's three novels (in the original German) which opened unexpected vistas on the human condition as Kafka portrayed it at the beginning of this century. The step from

The Waste Land to *The Trial* was easily taken in spite of the different endings of poem and novel. Eliot's "*Shantih*", however, never quite convinced; the peace he intimated was, in the context of his poem, merely a wish fulfilment. The final truth was the execution of Joseph K. at the end of *The Trial*. "Like a dog", he murmured, knowing at the last moment of his life that his humiliation alone would survive him. The immensity of his defeat promised no return to any kind of faith. It was absolute and beyond hope.

I met Max Brod who had saved Kafka's work for us from final oblivion when I moved from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv one year after my arrival in Palestine. Man Brod lived at that time in a somewhat ramshackle building near the seashore where I met him a number of times. I had written an article on Kafka which was published in the local English language paper after having read Brod's biography of Kafka which though not fully convincing served as an introduction to his work. Brod at that time was conscious of his well-deserved reputation as the saviour of Kafka's work rather than on account of his own writings; he wrote me a long letter to justify his disagreement with my interpretation of Kafka's significance as a writer in our time. In this letter he wrote, "The common denominator [in Kafka's work] is man's alienation from other men, his inability to adjust himself to a world of love for other human beings, and the punishment which man must suffer because of his isolation. . . . At present a book of mine is being printed—Kafka's belief and message, Kafka and Tolstoy—in which I reprcsent Kafka as the great Evangelist who speaks out against the sin of man which consists for each one of us in separating himself from others and in closing his heart against love. This is our sin because of which the bankclerk Joseph K. and Kafka's other heroes are being punished, the same sin against which Tolstoy in his journals repeatedly warns. Kafka was a great admirer of Tolstoy, a fact that has not been sufficiently commented upon . . ."

Max Brod did not look like one who could easily surrender to a love emotion. His face had the sharp features one associates with a critical mind, one who by temperament and character is capable of committing himself through his intellect only while remaining aloof and emotionally uninvolved. He was then past middle-age and very conscious of his place in the history of Kafka scholarship. He made the impression of a man who—realising the brittleness of his reputation as a writer—cultivated an attitude of exclusive ownership as regards Kafka's work which he had indeed salvaged for posterity. In the meantime Kafka scholarship had become an industry which Brod, for obvious reasons, detested, especially because most of the scholars either ignored his existence or treated Brod's biography of Kafka with ironic contempt. The best instance that comes to mind is Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka in which Brod's biography is mentioned in passing as an instance of misinterpretation.

The sole occaaion when I saw Max Broad in a human setting was when I invited him to address a class of my pupils. It was a girls' class who met once a month in a private home. As I was the form master it was my business to arrange a proper topic of discussion. I asked Max Brod to talk to them about Mahler's Lieder which he did to everyone's satisfaction. In fact, there was much excitement among the girls who greatly appreciated the honour of Brod having come to speak to them. I am not sure how many of them had ever heard any of Mahler's Lieder before. But this didn't really matter. The presence of the great man playing on the piano and telling them all about the art of Mahler's songs was enough to provide them with the sort of exaltation that originates in such a meeting between a creative and adult mind and the inexperienced young in search of meaning.

Thus I travelled from *Gitanjali* to *The Trial* within the short period of twelve months. The two books had nothing

in common. Tagore's poems were of no help in Joseph K.'s existential dilemma. This was a transition from the illusory dreams of the Pre-Raphaelites to the stark, uncompromising language of Kafka's view of things. It was not a road to life but to death. The spiritual context was that of Eliot's *Waste Land.* My recognition that Kafka prophetically spoke in what was to become a characteristic twentieth century idiom while Tagore pointed the way back into a transcendent past helped me to address my pupils and students in a language that could resurrect the past and give meaning to the present. In my own personal life I was ready to identify with Joseph K. and his alienation from other human beings. For it was I who was on trial; the castle I wished to explore remained inaccessible. The America that Kafka portrayed and that offered itself for my salvation was not for me. Yet the seclusion in which I lived constituted a universe in which I was given the freedom of choice I had always desired.

NINE

1

I read Kafka's novels for the first time in Jerusalem. I remember the effect that *The Castle* had on my response to the holiness of the city, a holiness that was rooted in prehistory and served as a setting for events that shaped the destiny of the world for thousands of years. It was an emblem of irrationality, a structure of dark mysteries that called for constant discovery and re-discovery by those who visited it regardless of the purpose of their visit. Situated on the top of a mountain it was visible for miles while it looked down upon the plains and the far away sea.

The university where I was appointed guest lecturer in the Department of English shortly after my arrival in Palestine was strategically located on Mount Scopus. It was, as it were, one more castle to be explored by me. Bus No. 9 took me there. It passed through orthodox Jewish quarters and suburbs inhabited by Arabs. It was a short journey. The old city of Jerusalem and the wall surrounding it were visible from afar while the ancient bus wound its way along narrow lanes and up the mountain. Once on Mount Scopus, the whole city, like a magic carpet, could be viewed as it lay before one's eyes, its minarets and church-spires, emblems of worship, prayer and holiness.

I was luckier than Kafka's Land Surveyor who had some trouble with his lodgings in the village after his unannounced arrival at the inn. My arrival had been

expected and I had a letter of appointment in my pocket. A room was ready on Balfour Street. As the name implies it was situated outside the walls of the Old City, a modern quarter inhabited by dour government officials and elderly white-haired professors. I was given a large room in a flat belonging to a German lady, known as Katinka, who, contrary to Jewish customs, kept an Arab servant. During the war she had been employed as a German speaker for propaganda purposes at the local (British controlled) radio station. I liked her easy-going ways and her non-interference in my public and private life.

Reading Kafka's *Castle* and getting increasingly involved in the Land Surveyor's various misfortunes I became aware of vague and imaginary similarities which I found disconcerting. I surveyed the land when looking out of my window in the early morning. Nearby was the tower of the YMCA building and the front of the King David Hotel. Rather farther away there was the wall which circled the Old City, and beyond it, silhouetted against the hazy morning sky, the golden dome of the Omar Mosque. Beyond the Old City I could see Mount Scopus, the inviolate seat of learning and bureaucracy, the modern castle by the side of the ancient one, to be explored by me at the start of the semester. During the day clouds moved across the sky driven by the western wind from across the sea. At times they descended upon the city and covered it in a dense fog. Then I had the "castle" all to myself; the window revealed white nothingness and silence, occasionally disturbed by the barking of a lonely dog in the street.

Secretaries abounded on Mount Scopus. This, of course, was inevitable, for even a seat of learning had to be governed by rules and regulations, principles of conduct and scholarship. They had each their own room where they sat among files which they were liable to mislay or forget. They were generally kind people, anxious to make you feel comfortable while at the same time looking after their own

interests. It wasn't easy to find out what these interests were, but they knew how to manipulate matters in such a way that there was no place for complaints. This, incidentally, was true of all the seats of learning where I had ever been employed; there was, however, something incongruous about it on Mount Scopus; for it seemed to me then as if all the secretaries were dressed, as it were, in aristocratic eighteenth-century clothes cultivating a remote sort of aloofness in keeping with their official standing in the castle. They were invariably kind to me, treating me as a welcome guest in their well-guarded domain.

2

In 1946, two years before the War of Independence and the founding of the State of Israel, Jerusalem was a quiet and somewhat provincial city, inhabited by British government officials and scholars in the various departments of the university. It was indeed a castle of learning and government and had acquired an air of authority and toleration. The city was a refuge for exiled kings and their families, an extraordinary mixture of religious sects and multicoloured races. It was a symbol for holiness to believers and unbelievers alike, an imperial stronghold, a Zionist citadel, sacred to Muslims, Jews and Christians, a home for Armenians, Ethiopians and numerous esoteric Christian sects. The Wailing Wall (as it then was called), the Omar Mosque and the Church of The Holy Sepulcher stand for complex rituals pointing the way backwards into a past that supplied numerous themes for irrational debate. For archeologists as well as for land surveyors of whatever religious persuasion it is a unique setting.

This osmosis of archeology and modern imperial associations made exploration a complex undertaking. Lord Balfour and his Declaration promising a homeland

for the Jews had prepared the ground, General Allenby had conquered the land and the city from the Turks. Though neither the former nor the latter had acted for idealist reasons, streets were named after them. Occasionally and rather surprisingly, streets are also named after writers. Apart from writers in modern Hebrew, there is a Heinrich Heine Street and an Emile Zola Street though neither of the two was a Zionist. But they had the distinction of being conscious of the fatal destiny of being Jewish, of the suffering that this entails, of the injustice committed by Gentiles against Jews, the anguish, the torments, the humiliation. There are other streets named after Gentiles who had provided help and encouragement or simply had shown compassion to the Jews before, during, and after the Holocaust—King George the Fifth among them, Herbert Samuel, and Wingate who had organised Jewish resistance during the Arab revolt in the late thirties. As was to be expected there were streets named after Freud and Einstein, but none after Karl Marx.

Jerusalem is as old as time. Yet, mortality beckons wherever you dig. Human remains rise to the surface in protest against the rebuilding of the city. Archeologists try in vain to designate the origin of the skeletons; they may belong to unknown soldiers of some invading army at the moment of drunken orgy and rape, crusaders in search of holy reliques, merchants haggling for easy money, exiled kings or prophets who died at a time of quiet meditation and prayer. These graves are still points in time, seemingly outside history and mortal duration, evoking in one's imagination shadowy figures celebrating victory in battle, the execution of some prehistoric holocaust or moments of exhortation following the words of inspired prophecy. They are the brittle reminders of the vanity of human wishes conveying no message of immortality and the transmigration of souls.

Jerusalem is a city of death and resurrection, a city of

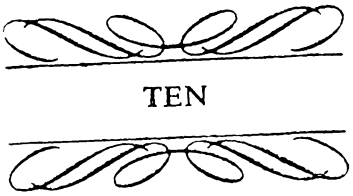
the eternal return, to be destroyed in order to be rebuilt again. The rocks on which it is built have outlasted the vagaries of time, silent witnesses to man's vanity and to his fascination with the city that inspired three religions endlessly fighting one another in the name of some irrational spiritual dogma. So the fight continues in the same spirit of wild fanaticism as two thoushand or three thousand years ago. It is an overwhelming, though disheartening, spectacle of armies of men deluded into a paroxysm of rage and annihilation. In the meantime the ancient bones are being uncovered to make place for highrise buildings, hotels, swimming pools and football fields.

3

My explorations were manifold and various. Following in the footsteps of the land surveyor in Kafka's *Castle* I discovered the nooks and corners of secluded markets in the Old City, lost my way among meandering lanes, visited the Wall, the Mosque, the Holy Sepulcher, was addressed by Arab merchants and Jews in prayer shawls on their way to worship at some holy place, tourists dressed in colourful clothes, who took photographs of me at moments of contemplation and silent withdrawal, priests of various anonymous religious sects. The "castle" remained as mysterious as ever. I explored its outer appearance and its human potential. The inner mystery remained, in more senses than one, a closed book. What defeated me were the secret underground caves where the skeletons lay, the uncounted layers of unredeemed time.

Teaching on Mount Scopus was pleasant and relaxing. The transition from land surveyor to lecturer was easily made. Changing from one imaginary disguise to another had by then become my second nature. My students were older and more mature than those I had taught during my

Indian transformation. Many of them were members of the Hagana, the Jewish Defence Force. They were called up from time to time to serve in various military activities. Some of them were survivors of the Holocaust, having reached Palestine straight from the camps to be recruited immediately for military service which they combined with their studies at the university. It was a heterogenous lot. Their sole common denominator was the suffering they had witnessed in childhood and early youth. They were desperate to acquire a profession and to forget the past. I came to know some of them on a personal level. Theirs was a more difficult transition than mine, from the murderous chaos of Eastern Europe to the study of the poetry of Keats and Blake. Thus, in their pleasant company, I surveyed and explored what the printed page so generously provided. Outside the windows of the lecture-room lay the holy city, reminding me of Blake's vision of holding "Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour."



TEN

1

Tel Aviv is a city without secrets. Its history is devoid of ancient monuments proclaiming its holiness and fame. It has no Western Wall, no Omar Mosques, no church of the Holy Sepulcher. Its streets are unencumbered by gothic cathedrals, by baroque palaces, and Roman castles. It ignores the past, it is without memory; its history is that of the present century. One looks in vain for statues of naked gods or goddesses decorating public gardens. Foreign divinities are rigorously excluded from the city. Rectangular lines characterise the architecture of buildings, private or public. There is a stock-exchange where people make or lose money without having to do a stroke of work and there are supermarkets made of steel and glass. Large-scale consumption is the equivalent of a good life. The standard to be applied is invariably American. Success is measured by the level of your income. The rhythm of life is as fast as you can make it. The only thing that can stop you are traffic jams. They are frequent and of enormous dimension.

Culture also is being consumed on a large scale. There are theatres, concert halls, cinemas, museums, pubs and nightclubs. It is said that the city never goes to sleep. It is hectically alive; this includes the ancient city of Jaffa, the oldest part of which has been transformed into an artists' quarter. There archeologists have discovered traces of ancient civilisations

intimating that time in this part of the world never stood still. History was at work creating layer after layer of human survival, an endless series of destruction and rebuilding, and blood spilled for the conquest of a piece of rocky earth.

By coincidence I moved to a flat situated once again on a street named after Lord Balfour when I descended from the heights of Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. It was at that time (1947) as quiet as any suburban lane, with little traffic and a somewhat aristocratic air of aloofness and unconcern. At one end of the street was the old municipal hospital, at the other end a building devoted to the performance of music such as the subscription concerts of the Israel Symphony Orchester. That's where I first listened to Mahler's Second Symphony conducted by Leonard Bernstein. It was an experience full of contradictions, of tragic drama and reminiscences of leisurely folk music, exploding into the meditative tranquillity of a middle-class audience.

2

Balfour Street joins Rothschild Boulevard at one end and Allenby Street, on the other. Evidently it is a part of the city where street-names were chosen from among the famous in British politics, finance and military valour. Parallel to Balfour Street was George Eliot Street, named after the nineteenth-century novelist who achieved fame neither in politics nor finance nor war. The name, so incongruous among these imperial reminiscences, led to grotesques misapprehensions, especially among my students who, passing George Eliot Street on their way to my lodgings, mistook the nineteenth-century writer for the twentieth-century poet. Attending my seminar on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, they were justly bewildered by the name of a street honouring an explicitly anti-semitic poet who, in his early poetry, spelled the word Jew with a small

j (which, however, was changed into a capital J in later editions of his verse). In any case, most of them had but a vague notion of the importance of George Eliot in the history of British fiction and of her proto-Zionist novel *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876.

In the novel Daniel Deronda considered it "my duty—it is the impulse of my feeling—to identify myself . . . with my hereditary people." The duty of which he speaks is derived from genuine religious inspiration. His emigration to Palestine was indeed part of a religious impulse, an intense emotional drive which compelled him to seek a "higher life" in the country of his ancestors. Literary critics consider this part of the novel the least convincing. Occasionally they compare Daniel Deronda's idealistic vision of a land reborn in the innocence and purity of a revived religious ardour with the reality of the Jewish state as it exists today and look upon the newly founded state with unconcealed Christian bias or British political prejudice.

3

My students used to stop at the corner of Lord Melchett, acother imperial figure though Jewish, and George Eliot Streets, wondering what possible Jewish message "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" could convey to its readers, Gentile or Jewish. Were the women that "come and go / Talking of Michel Angelo" perhaps Jewish and, being part of a cultural minority, wished to exhibit their knowledge of European culture by talking about Michel Angelo so that all those present would realise that they were not strangers in this pretentiously highbrow setting? But then, why call a street after this melancholy poem where the speaker is neither Jew nor Zionist? Had my students known that George Eliot was a woman whose real name was Mary Ann Evans and that her unconventional alliance with

George Henry Lewes was a subject of malicious gossip in the Victorian society of her day, they might have become reconciled to the fact that a street was named after her.

Yet, George Eliot Street was quiet and respectable, inhabited by shopkeepers, owners of modest old-fashioned carpentries, shoemakers who worked for an elderly clientèle and retired government officials. The street had nothing in common with the streets in T. S. Eliot's poem, streets "that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent / To lead you to an overwhelming question." No questions whatever were evoked, the street called for no daring, no introspection. When night came the street fell asleep and even the dogs retired into silence. There was nothing bo be afraid of. No vision of Hamlet, Lazarus come from the dead, or of mermaids singing each to each.

Balfour was different. People went to the hospital in the morning, to concerts in the evening. At a later date occasional traffic jams filled the air with impatient hooting and shouting. From my balcony I could observe the frequently motiveless activities of my neighbours, their parties at midnignt, their children screaming at each other, their radios giving forth background music. This sort of of nervous and frequently purposeless agitation became associated in my mind —especially during sleepless nights when I listened to the women coming and going, talking not of Michel Angelo but of the latest popular football player whose name I discovered was Tchaikovski—with no "overwhelming questions", but the gradual recognition that I was a scapegoat, a sacrificial victim, in a society that rarely went to sleep, and when it did so, accompanied by the shrill ringing of phones and the threatening voice dispensing the hourly news bulletin.

ELEVEN

1

My first job in Tel Aviv (in 1947) was as school-teacher in a municipal high school. No institute of higher learning was available. Ye the very idea of becoming a school-teacher filled me with a sense of inadequacy and failure. Used as I was to the respectful silence of a lecture room, I was terrified at the prospect of having to face a class of howling and screaming youngsters.

I had few illusions as regards my ability to control a class of over forty untamed and restless adolescents in a country where childhood was worshipped as a privileged station in life. In a land of immigration where most newcomers were themselves young people, middle-aged gravity was out of place. Obtaining a teaching position caused no problems though I had never attended a teachers training college. In vain I looked in the staff-room for advice and assistance from among my new colleagues. I was left to my own devices. These were based on reminiscences of my own schooldays, my dislike of the stereotyped image of the teacher as mentally fossilised and emotionally underdeveloped. I also suspected already then that to be a teacher was to be an alien in the society of his contemporaries and a figure of fun in the company of his pupils. Teaching poetry in a foreign language and portraying life in a setting of which my pupils knew next to nothing and a cultural background they could not share,

seemed an exercise in futility. Added to this, the political chaos of the time was against me.

The Second Coming was at hand. "The blood-dimmed tide" had overtaken me. Yeats wrote in 1919 that innocence was drowned In 1947, in this country all alternatives of innocence had been exhausted. "Passionate intensity" which preceded the Second Coming in Yeats's poem was the only option still open for survival. No poetry, however passionate, could be intelligently absorbed while terrorism indiscriminately killed the innocent and the guilty alike.

Both past and present history were out of sympathy with poetry. The British were still in occupation and the Arabs were arming for war. English poetry had to be taught as if it existed in a political vacuum and as if it were bound to no specific society or time. It had to be interpreted in a social and political no-man's-land. Yet, disintegrating imperialism threw its shadow over the printed text. My previous escape from history was no longer available, though questions regarding the historical setting of these poems had to be answered. It became extremely difficult to establish meaningful distinctions between literary excellence and political mayhem. To my class of politically inspired adolescents English poetry was, as far as they were concerned, a by-product of British imperial domination.

During my stay in India as a college lecturer I had faced the same dilemma. I had solved it in neither literary nor political terms: within the context of Tagore's "Abode of Peace" human qualities had mattered more than either literary or political criteria. Poetry if taught in human terms by a teacher who had absorbed it as if it were his own, could convey a deeper meaning than sophisticated literary criticism or political discourse could provide.

2

When the first Egyptian bombs fell on Tel Aviv I was in the middle of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". His reflections on "the still sad music of humanity" meant little to my pupils who—when the sirens sounded—rushed down to the shelters where they cheered themselves up by singing popular songs at the top of their voices, thus drowning the noise of the battle above the city. When the air raid was over we climbed back to the classroom on the fifth floor. Incredulously my pupils read of Wordsworth's "tranquil restoration" in the incongruous setting of the sirens sounding the All-Clear. The world became once more intelligible, all mystery was solved, and the class naturally failed to respond to "the heavy and the weary weight" of an air raid that provided no opportunity for tranquil restoration. Instead of emotion recollected in tranquillity I was faced by mental dissociation, the result of attack and counterattack, political cunning and folly.

Among these children were those who had survived the Holocaust. How could I help them to grasp the horror which I myself found incomprehensible? As for those who were born in this country and who had but a vague idea of the implications of the Holocaust, they dreamt of a life of freedom and independence as a gift of nature preparing the way for a future devoted to work on the land that was theirs by spiritual inheritance and sacrifice. Some of my most gifted pupils joined kibbutzim as a matter of course after their matric. To these Israeli-born youngsters I must have appeared like a spectre from another world.

Occasionally they asked me to tell them stories about my stay in India. This was a golden opportunity to talk about monkeys and snakes, about holy men in Himalayan caves and the Calcutta slums. These stories produced a relaxed atmosphere free of the pressures of air raids and other political malignancies. Wordsworth's "still sad

music of humanity" was heard again, though I did not conceal from these children that in India also various kinds of holocausts were taking place and people fought as fiercely as they did here in the name of passionately held political convictions leading to the murder of the innocent and the guilty alike.

My impressionistic accounts of life in India were remembered by my grateful listeners for a long time to come. Many years later, they would remind me of my Indian stories with a smile of nostalgia in their eyes. It was the nearest I ever got to Wordsworth's belief that "all which we behold / Is full of blessing" in the course of my career as a school teacher.

3

When Tel Aviv University was founded it was at first situated in an old British army camp, on the outskirts of the city, near an ancient Russian church and a deserted Arab village, a place of utter desolation. There I resumed my university career in 1955 shortly after the foundation of the university. A botanical garden was planted on the side of of the barracks which served as lecture rooms, while a small zoo had been established on the other side. At 6 p.m. the animals were being fed amidst much snorting, grunting and bleating. This accompanied the lecture like a musical counterpoint, reminding both lecturer and students of the irresistible life force in action, beyond bookish wisdom and scholarship. As the animals were being fed at regular hours I organised the start and the end of my lectures according to the biological time-table and the animal sounds emanating round the corner from my lecture room. It also helped me to realise that the teaching of language and literature depended in no small measure on nature's need to be controlled and nourished at fixed intervals. This inevitably

affected the contents of my lectures.

Shakespeare's *Tempest*, for instance, and the animal sounds emanating from the miniscule university zoo complemented each other. Caliban was never far away. For though I have forgotten the faces and names of most of my early students, and my old lecture notes are of little interest today, the various animals emitting sounds of hunger or lust are remembered as if recorded on tape for eternity. When for unforeseen reasons the snorting, grunting and bleating started in the middle of a lecture I stopped speaking for the time it took the animals to quieten down. It was only then, with a polite nod across the space separating the room from the cages in which the animals were kept, that I restarted the argument. These interludes provoked much laughter among my students who, in a context of comedy, were made to realise what Shakespeare's *Tempest* intimated,—the close relation between art and nature in terms of such basic urges as hunger and sexual rivalry. For even Prospero, no longer in possession of his "Art", has to acknowledge Caliban, "this thing of darkness", as part of his own being.

I wonder whether other lecturers were as aware of this ambiguous relation between a poet's art and the irrepressible urges of nature. Lecturers in zoology were, in all likelihood, not troubled by this ominous parallelism. After all, the text they were studying dealt with matters natural rather than spiritual, with digestion and excretion, fertilization and birth, mating and the care of the young. Lecturers in the Natural Sciences were not involved in the magic of transmission from the poet's experience to the reader's imagination. Nor were they concerned with a stage representation of the human comedy at moments of self-deception or self-realisation. They may, of course, project their sense of the comic or the tragic into their study of animal behaviour; but there is no catharsis, no pity or terror in biological science. The zoologist looks upon animal behaviour as conditioned by

natural urges rather than by consciousness. Fiction has no place in his science. The animal sounds in the falling darkness of an early evening had their pedagogical uses. As an acoustic counterpoint to Shakespeare's imaginative recreation of his own art, they were of no small relevance.

It was a decaying urban landscape where the university was situated during the first year of its existence. A bus crowded with new immigrants from North Africa travelled from the city centre to Abu Kabir, the name of the former Arab village. Very few of these newly arrived immigrants attended my lectures. They were in need of material support rather than the study of English poetry. When I started teaching in those inhospitable barracks it was an out-of-the-way location which one normally avoided. But as the university grew from its original two hundred students to several thousand, new barracks were added, old ones were repaired, the botanical garden and the zoo were expanded.

4

In 1962, the university moved to its new location on the other side of Tel Aviv. It had already become a full-fledged institute of higher learning, with multiple departments and faculties, modern impersonal buildings which contained all that academic scholarship required. It was like journeying from a tropical jungle to a metropolis built on American lines. Administrative efficiency improved, secretaries were appointed and in due time computers were installed and teaching was organised according to American ways of scholarship with its emphasis on the writing of scholarly papers, the MLA style-sheet and the correct placement of footnotes.

An American chairman of the Department of English was duly appointed and a syllabus was prepared in which American literature appeared as a sort of counterpoint to the

teaching of traditional English literature. Most of my colleagues were indeed Americans who had been brought up within an American academic setting. Also new appointments were made after the chairman had attended the academic market which took place at the annual conference of the Modern Language Association of America and had interviewed candidates who could be considered suitable. Thus new faces appeared at the beginning of each academic year while old faces mysteriously vanished. There was a constant coming and going regulated by the chairman's frequently haphazard decisions. Departmental coherence depended very largely on who's in and who's out, who's up and who's down, who has published and who will perish. Hapless young lecturers remained for a couple of years only. When their time was up they were sent back to the United States accompanied by a letter of dismissal for reasons that were as mysterious as they were arbitrary.

Students came for a variety of reasons. No one was ever asked why he or she chose to study English Literature. When I suggested to them that there were other financially more promising subjects of study such as economics, chemistry or electronics, they replied rather shamefacedly that they "loved" English and wished to improve their proficiency in that language. Very rarely was I told that they were interested in literature or that they wanted to become teachers of English. When I suggested that teaching was a more satisfying profession than a government job or even a well-paid appointment in local industry, they gave me a supercilious smile implying thereby that teaching was for those who, in the struggle for the survival of the fittest, could find no other job.

Most of the applicants to the department were women, young, middle-aged and old; only occasionally males ventured to join the department and then they were often people of esoteric manners of speech and appearance, neurotically inclined towards the reading of modernist

poetry, frequently themselves writing verse in contemporary American slang. These were "cases" of considerable psychological interest cultivating a laconic sort of prolixity which was meant to disguise their strangeness.

Occasionally the presence of Arab students enlivened our literary discussions. They were mostly exceedingly ambitious, but frequently lost in the complexities of English literary history as they lacked even a basic knowledge of European cultural tradition. I couldn't blame them. Their outlook on life, their mother tongue, their cultural setting was Arab. What could possibly John Donne or William Blake mean to them? Yet they were hard-working, serious people, earnestly devoted to their studies, devoid of any sense of humour, extremely well-behaved, in short, students whom one liked to teach in spite of the very real obstacles teacher and student had to overcome.

I remember one student, a young Beduin of quite exceptional ambition who had specialised in a study of *Troilus and Cressida* and wrote an M.A. thesis on that play. In due time he applied for and got a British Council scholarship to do his Ph.D. at Birmingham, spent two years in Britain and returned with an M.Lit. of Oxford University, having written one more thesis on *Troilus and Cressida*. Dissatisfied with his quite remarkable academic achievements he promptly got married, introduced his fiancée to me and requested me to write several recommendations testifying to his qualifications as a teacher and scholar. I did as requested, ready to encourage the first Beduin in the village (as he told me) who had chosen English Literature as his favourite subject to which he would now devote the rest of his life. His fiancée was pretty and bashful. As a last measure of persuasion he brought one day his uncle along who was an officer in the Israel army and came fully uniformed speaking to me in fluent Hebrew. I was duly impressed and granted my young disciple anything he requested. I deliberately avoided suggesting to him the

possibility of enlarging his knowledge of Shakespeare by reading some more of his plays.

In order to obtain a degree in English Literature you had to cultivate the art of specialisation. This was the be-all and end-all of your studies. The choice of your subject was frequently quite arbitrary. According to your choice you also selected the courses you wished to attend. You were not going to waste your time studying any aspect or figure or genre in the history of English literature that didn't fit in with the special subject of your choice.

In vain I expected a minimal knowledge of literature outside their special study. Reading books beyond the prescribed syllabus was a luxury very few students indulged in. Whenever I mentioned names of either English or foreign authors that were not part of the prescribed syllabus I was met with astonished glances of disbelief. Who, indeed, were Voltaire and Diderot, Verlaine and Rimbaud? Something similar happened in discussions relating to the books that were on the programme of studies. Who were Ruskin and Walter Pater, William Morris and Matthew Arnold? Introducing the poetry of Yeats to my students in a seminar I once again was met with disbelieving ignorance. In the meantime American Fulbright scholars were invited to lecture on Steinbeck and Hemingway before a large assembly of attentive and admiring students. I found all this disheartening, though my colleagues congratulated me for being able to read Baudelaire's poetry (in French) and not only Eliot's essay on Baudelaire.

Literary Criticism was a favourite subject and became increasingly popular among the more sophisticated students. They specialised in semiotics or psycho-analysis and read Lacan and Derrida. They called themselves post-Freudians, post-Jungians, post-structuralists and post-modernists. They filled their essays with trendy formulas and the sort of critical discourse which was fashionable at that time. In spite of my own growing doubts as to the relevance of the

tradition in which I was brought up, I was at all times aware of a rewarding sense of fulfilment. In one of his old-age poems Yeats asserts that "Bodily decrepitude is wisdom: Young / We loved each other and were ignorant." Did Yeats refer to his own bodily decrepitude and the wisdom he had acquired in old age? As I grew older it was was my ignorance I was increasingly conscious of.

TWELVE

1

Knowledge rather than wisdom, academic distinction to be achieved, in spite of my realisation that my exile was final and that new languages had to be acquired to express that knowledge in a coherent way, was my goal during the first years of my studies in countries that were at all times liable to expel me as an undesirable alien; for, however fluently I spoke French, it was in a German accent and, later on, my English sounded suspiciously like French. It was, linguistically speaking, a confusing time. During my stay in France and England, and later on in India, I never spoke or wrote in the language of my birth. I willingly surrendered my nationality as an unwelcome burden on my life of exile and study.

Considered in retrospect, the proceedings to be followed were awkward and time-consuming. Today I ask myself how I managed to write lengthy seminar papers and, later on, books, without the help of word-processors, data bases, hard disks, and stored memory. An ancient typewriter, purchased in a shop situated in a squalid suburban lane in Montpellier specialising in secondhand goods, was the sole mechanical appliance with the help of which I wrote pretentiously scholarly papers in the convoluted language of academic research. Writing in French came to me easily during my stay in France. I loved the language and felt perfectly at home in it. Recalling my love affair with

France at that time I can only wonder how easy it was to switch from French to English when I left France for England after a stay of three years.

Shortly after finishing my studies in England I wrote my first book in English during my stay at Tagore's "Abode of Peace" in Bengal. My linguistic proficiency in German and French was no longer of any use. The book was written during the war and was published in India in 1943. By a stroke of good luck the publisher who had published some of Nehru's works accepted the manuscript. So my book sold well and was reviewed in most Indian papers and learned magazines. It was not a book of literary criticism but a comparative study of the clash between two cultures which occurred when Tagore, in the early decades of this century, during his several journeys to Europe and America was received as a "light from the East" in sensational public celebrations, usually reserved for film stars and political leaders, while ironic articles appeared in the press describing him as a charlatan and a bogus prophet.

I was not concerned with establishing new literary standards or with applying contemporary aesthetic theories to Tagore's work. I was scarcely qualified for such a task. Nor did I think it necessary to edit an anthology containing all the words of praise written at that time about Tagore by Western scholars, poets, and men of letters. Though many spoke out in sympathy with Tagore's message of goodwill, such an anthology would have called for little critical comment; for when goodwill responds to goodwill the dividing line between wisdom and triviality is hard to draw. Even the wisest and well-intentioned sayings are liable to acquire a hollow ring when measured by the actual demands made by reality in a specific historical context. For wisdom and charity, however much they may mean to us personally, produce no conspicuous echo in the mass-civilization of our age.

When Tagore's voice was heard in Europe it evoked

(in Matthew Arnold's words about Shelley) "a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing." This may seem a jaundiced view to take of Western civilization and the impact of an Eastern poet upon it; but the events that characterize the history of the West during the decades that followed Tagore's visits have amply borne me out. Only a poetry of horror and desolation can do justice to the reality of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

2

In search of a common denominator for the books I wrote in the first half of this century I realise that they were all concerned with the West rather than the East in spite of the fact that the earlier ones were written and published in India. What led my thought back to Europe from which I had so successfully escaped was the recognition of the dualism underlying the history of Western culture as symbolised by the encounter and clash of opposites in potentially comic or tragic situations. Certain archetypal human relationships such as those between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Hamlet and Horatio, Don Giovanni and Leporello, Faust and his disciple Wagner, or in our own time between the composer Adrian Leverkühn and his friend and the narrator of his life-story, Serenus Zeitblom, in Thomas Mann's most tragic novel *Doctor Faustus*, are relevant instances.

What fascinated me was what made these relations psychologically and historically inevitable. I was only incidentally concerned with comic or tragic implications. It seemed to me that such relationships constitute a significant pattern inherent in Western culture. In retrospect it also helped me to discern a recurrent rhythm that defined the history of my own inner life, such as my preference for human relationships with people who were in intellectual

perception, emotional maturity and even physical constitution, my very opposites.

Thus my doctoral dissertation had been, without my being fully aware of it at that time, concerned with the dualism inherent in cultural premises as they were expressed in French classical literature and German critical theories in the eighteenth century. What attracted me to the subject must have been already then the intimation that the most significant aspect in Western civilization was an inherent contradiction between opposed forms of cultural development and critical discourse.

What seemed to be a conflict between diverse literary evaluations as exemplified by two contemporary men of letters such as, for instance, Voltaire in France and Lessing in Germany, acquired a deeper significance in terms not merely of literary convictions, however violently argued, but of opposed and irreconcilable cultural assumptions. French rationality and the German tendency towards the irrational were the true subject matter of my dissertation, without my realising it. Reading the book today I miss the explicit statement of this polarity; it eluded me at a time when representative figures attracted all my attention rather than the cultural premises they stood for. Not altogether surprisingly, it was Shakespeare who provided the criterion by which the literary output of both Voltaire and Lessing could be measured. As far as I was concerned I was more interested in Hamlet's disturbed mind than in Horatio who was neither "time's fool" nor "passion's slave".

3

Shortly after my first book in India 1 wrote a study dealing with the life and work of Romain Rolland The emphasis was on Rolland's concern with human greatness as illustrated in his biographies of Michel Angelo, Beethoven

and Tolstoy, and later on in his writings about Gandhi, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Here was indeed a writer out of sympathy with Western civilization, painfully aware of the discrepancy between technological progress and cultural decline. The third book written in India consisted of an analysis of the response of outstanding Europeans, from Voltaire to W. B. Yeats, to Indian thought. Once again it was a study of cultural dualism as represented by the acceptance or rejection of Indian art and philosophy, its architecture and its music, by Western thinkers.

What concerned me, in all these books, was the West rather than the East. Within the context of the war of which I was a remote witness I could not but stress the failure, indeed the defeat, of European civilization, the decline of the West as Spengler had called it, the return to barbarism and the compulsion towards self-destruction. Because I was obsessed with the idea of final cultural disintegration, I also realised that my actual escape out of time and history was valid only in so far as I could give expression to the meaning of exile in terms of my clear understanding of what I had escaped from. Yet, my flight from history was partial only. In the writing of my books I constantly had to face historical premises, forcing me to take account of the fact that Time and Duration are an integral part of the human condition, and thus, inevitably, of human folly from which there is no escape.

As I grew older my study and teaching of Shakespeare acquired increasing significance in my attempts at establishing a relevant system of values in my own life. Shakespeare forced me to confront historical time beyond the conventional antagonism and clash between East and West. Reading Shakespeare's plays and witnessing them performed on stage was like seeing the human condition, as it were in the raw, but constrained by historical necessity and inhibited by social compulsion. Shakespeare's main dramatic interest, however, was directed at the

individual, even when he wrote his history plays. The emphasis was again on contrary impulses, symbolised by the split between man's consciousness and his affective life, between past expectation and present, between the marriage of true minds and the expense of spirit in a waste of shame. With increasing age I discovered in Shakespeare my own divided self, inexorably involved in the history of his age, yet struggling for deliverance from historical time and social compulsion.

To the Shakespeare scholar all this is familiar territory. But my concern was very largely personal and untainted by the literary theories fashionable in our time. When I discovered the writings of C. G. Jung they opened unhoped for vistas into the mysteries of Shakespeare's creativity and the symbolic validity of the archetypes he put on the stage. Jung himself hardly ever mentions Shakespeare. "He is like God", Jung is supposed to have said in an interview, the implication being that nothing beyond trivialities can be said about him. I wrote my first book on Shakespeare, *Psyche and Symbol in Shakespeare*, based on Jung's various psychological investigations of the unconscious and of archetypes, the mask, the shadow, the Ego and the Self. Ten years later I ventured into a study of the intuitive apprehension of the inner life as it is revealed in Shakespeare's dramatic poetry and Rembrandt's paintings. These two books led me, without my fully realising it at that time, from the anguish of the divided self to the evocation of a potentially unified personality, what Jung calls the process of individuation.

The step from visual art to musical experience was easily taken. Twentieth-century fiction provided ample evidence of the novelist's interest in the relation between his imaginative recreation of life and the musical experience as it impinges on human consciousness. Music in a context of fiction is more than mere background. It involves the character in the novel in emotions over which he rarely has

conscious control. Music, in twentieth-century fiction, is a way of denoting character and of establishing coherence and continuity in the novel. Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Patrick White, among others, supplied the evidence which I used in writing my book *Music and the Novel.* My emphasis was on the contradictions inherent in conscious and unconscious elements in character and plot. What I was once again involved with was the twentieth-century novelist's concern with a unified vision of life. More often than not such a unified vision was the result of a deliberate attempt to escape form the dualism inherent in contemporary thinking and feeling. Yet, music in Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead Game* and Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* continues to symbolise the polarity which, in our time, more than ever, underlies the artist's concern with his own and his reader's inner division.

When, a few years ago, I wrote *The Concealed Self* I gave an additional dimension to my various attempts at coming to terms with conflicting tendencies in my own life. As a study of contemporary diaries kept by novelists in the twentieth century, this is indeed a sort of conclusion to the writings that went before. Dualism is still present, that between the public and the private self of the novelist, between the anonymity of the literary work and the diary as a form of self-analysis and self-confession, and thus, between what the writer reveals of himself in keeping a diary which may or may not be published in his or her lifetime, and the mask he wears in public. But the result of my investigations into the various disguises of the creative self and the accomplished work of creation, ultimately revealed a unified vision of creativity when diary and novel achieved coherence transcending the polarity between being and seeming, the concealed and the revealed self.

It was a long road which led from eighteenth-century dramatic criticism to twentieth-century novels, *via* an Eastern

experience, the discovery of Shakespeare, an exploration of visual art in thc paintings of Rembrandt, the musical experience as it has become part of contemporary fiction writing and, finally, though not unexpectedly, an investigation into the creative Self. It is also the story of a largely predictable development from compulsive academic ambition in youth to the resigned recognition of old age when, in moments of seclusion and meditative calm, literature, the visual arts and music are being rediscovered, an intimation of the true meaning of the human condition beyond the trivialities of technological research and the futile explorations of the silence of infinite space. It is this that I shared for more than half-a-century with the young whom I taught (in so far as such revelations can at all be transmitted) in the quiet solemnity of the lecture room.

THIRTEEN

I

Speaking of solemnity prevailing in lecture-rooms, I recall my friend and colleague Khagen (pronounced Kogen) going to his lecture in the early morning. He invariably chose the same shady place under a tree where his students waiting for him. His subject was economics. He was accompanied by a medium-sized dog, a spaniel of mixed breed. He took it along wherever he went. The spaniel with its large drooping ears and its silky hair lay at his feet while he lectured. From time to time the dog looked up at him in what seemed a mixture of amused wonder and sceptical incomprehension. From time to time it also fell asleep which greatly amused the students.

Above Khagen's head birds had settled on the branches of the tree, attracted by his voice and, in apparent protest against the disturbance caused by his lecture, they provided a musical though discordant background to his economic analysis of present-day India. It was indeed a peaceful setting though it lacked the formal atmosphere created by the raised platform for the lecturer, and all the academic paraphernalia one generally associates with the solemnity of a lecture room. This "room" under the tree offered an unobstructed view of a landscape open on all sides, and above it the vastness of the dark blue tropical sky stretching from horizon to horizon. It was a silent, meditative sort of place. The early morning breeze whispering in the leaves of

the tree provided a somewhat somnolent accompaniment to Khagen's eloquent and scholarly delivery.

Khagen was used to the humid and oppressive heat which spread all around him an hour after sunrise. His voice seemed to emanate from the branches of the tree under which he was sitting or standing while the spaniel lay at his feet listening to his master's voice. The students were sitting on small carpets around the lecturer, eagerly scribbling in their notebooks. They had got used to the dog. They didn't question or object to its presence. It was an intrinsic part of the sitting. They would have been greatly surprised if Khagen had come to his lecture without his spaniel.

My lectures also took place under a tree close by. Our two voices mingled in the early morning silence under the blue sky. I had no dog to accompany me and I rather envied Khagen for his escape from solitude though I knew that my envy was quite misplaced; for Khagen had lost his wife some months before, followed by the death of his little son a few weeks later. Sudden death, inexplicable by medical science, occurs quite frequently in India. He never mentioned this tragic event to me in our talks. His was a life not to be envied. I had visited him when, for some time, he had stopped lecturing and had remained secluded in his room, his jaws locked, avoiding all human contact. It was also at that time that he acquired the spaniel.

We became friends and took long walks together in the afternoon. We were both young and in great doubt as to the intellectual validity of the contemplative life we were leading. There was much to be discussed. The spaniel followed or preceded us, in the certainty that we would not leave it behind when we returned home, a silent reminder of the fact that we were not alone in our peregrinations and that questions and doubts had their roots in the silence of of the surrounding landscape. The dog hardly ever barked. Its silence was reassuring; it corresponded to the speechlessness of the earth and the sky. An awareness of

the solemnity of the occasion was within us; the landscape appealed to the sense of sight rather than to the intellect. The subjects of our discussions during those afternoon walks were, it seems to me in retrospect, really quite irrelevant.

As there were no walls there was no echo. Our voices lost themselves among the ricefields, green during the monsoon, arid and yellow during the hot months. Human language was a stranger in the tropical quiet of those afternoon walks. Words themselves had no place in this landscape of violent transformations when, after weeks of oppressively humid heat, the rains came. It was an uncompromising wordless universe. So we also, from time to time, kept silent walking side by side under the brooding sky.

2

It is a memory that leads to more recent lecture-rooms and relations among colleagues in this country. I recall open-air lectures which were organised on the spur of the moment because there weren't enough chairs available; these were hilarious and exciting occasions, because unexpected and contrary to academic custom and tradition. They took place under a city-sky and were interrupted by city-noises. They were a temporary and improvised substitute for the costomary formal disguise assumed by lectures on their raised platform. Dogs were strictly inadmissible. Bringing one of them along to a lecture would have been considered a deplorable want of scholarly tact and dignity.

The lecture-room constitutes an aggressively competitive universe. Outside the four walls people shout and quarrel. The one who shouts loudest survives. The lecturer has at times to raise his voice to outdo the struggles that go on beyond the solemnity of undisputed scholarship. His words break into the tense silence, interrupted by the hooting of

cars in the street. Mediterranean people are unaware of the blessings of silence. Shouting comes to them naturally. A low voice is an invitation to defeat. In order to survive one has to assert oneself. This is true of the man in the street as of the debates in the Knesset. Also raising one's voice is a sign of perfect physical and mental health. It almost seems as if certain people, both high and low, are waiting for an opportunity to give vent to their feelings of outrage by shouting in order to subdue their real or assumed adversaries.

Friendships between colleagues in such a setting are rare. I remember a few, some of which added a human perspective to scholarly activities and preoccupations. City life doesn't encourage such relations; I recall a coffeehouse on a busy street, tired talk about salary questions, gossip about obnoxious colleagues and their incomprehensible promotions. Personal questions are not on the agenda. Curricular problems are occasionally mentioned over a cup of coffee. Intimacy in talk or gesture is avoided as not becoming the high social status of a university lecturer. There is a great deal of childish condescension and snobbery at such meetings. The city environment encourages all this; silent aloofness is frequently misunderstood as a form of hostility unacceptable among colleagues. A general consensus of opinion is achieved whenever a strike is declared. These are occasions for vociferous speeches, undisputed statements of intent, and attacks on government policy. We join the open air market a few blocks away where secondhand goods, vegetables and imported electronic instruments are offered with the help of loudspeakers to the potential buyer.

3

I met Khagen again in 1980 when I visited India to meet old friends and visit the Abode of Peace. He lived at that time in Calcutta at the Ramakrishna Mission where I looked for him. He didn't seem surprised to see me though almost 40 years had passed since we last met. He sat down by my side and started a long complicated lecture on the Poet's vision, on Tagore who had founded the Abode of Peace, his message of goodwill and tolerance and a life dedicated to the inner truth which everyone of us carries within himself. I dared not interrupt him.

He had a haggard and exhausted look in his eyes and spoke in a low voice. Outside the Ramakrishna Mission the passing traffic of cars, rikshas, horse-drawn vehicles, buses and bullock-carts provided a chaotic, impenetrable background noise. After addressing me for about half-an-hour, Khagen suddenly got up and left the room. He showed not the slightest interest in my wellbeing or the circumstances of my life. It was an encounter that should never have taken place. Today I realise that I was saved a great deal of disappointment because many of my friends of the past had died. It took me some time to find out that early friendships rarely survive. They are replaced by marriage, family life and professional ambitions. You return like a spectre assuming the disguise of old-age wisdom and expecting the past to have remained unchanged. Those of my friends who were still alive had in the meantime become grandfathers and grandmothers. So I was left to mourn for what I thought was time irretrievably lost. I was invited to attend a party organised in my honour by my former students. It was, as far as I was concerned, a sad occasion. I hardly recognised them though I could easily recall their physical appearance, their voice and their youthful exuberance when I was lecuring to them forty years earlier. They laughingly reminded me of some of the jokes I had made during my lectures. I suspect that this

was all they remembered of their past as students of the university.

Similar experiences occurred whenever I left this country on a nostalgic visit in search of the past. I left for the South of France to recapture memories of my stay in Montpellier. But there was no way of resurrecting what had vanished in the course of time. Montpellier and the nearby seashore had become a tourist attraction. There was no one to welcome me. I had become a stranger, one of the thousands of tourists that passed through the town in search of the sun on their way to Barcelona.

The same kind of disenchantment awaited me when I visited Cambridge. King's College Chapel was crowded with noisy Japanese tourists whose boisterous laughter echoed among the gothic pillars. Here also I was a stranger, recalling what seemed to me then a return to a memorable past. I was an ancient among the young. It was easy enough to idealise my stay at Cambridge as a student. Thus I revisited Cambridge whenever I was in England during the last fifty years. There was indeed no escape from the cosmopolitan crowd of visitors that took hold of me as if I was one of them. The medieval fascination of the town had become a consumer item. You went there for a day to take video pictures to be shown to family and friends on your return home. Thus "culture" was being consumed instantaneously and on a large scale. Privacy was a luxury to be purchased at a high price at a five-star hotel. You had become one of the crowd, an alien in the midst of an alarming assembly of exotically dressed voyagers in search of what they had been told was Western culture. They looked upon it with awe, not unmixed with condescension, and, frequently, with considerable suspicion; for, in this post-colonial age, they had also been told that this culture was founded on heartless economic exploitation and racial bias.

4

But to return to the "solemnity of lecture rooms" from which I escaped to visit the South of France, Cambridge and other places associated with the past. This solemnity could occasionally acquire a claustrophobic character whenever you realised your solitude when talking to your students who looked up to you, both literally and symbolically. While outside the lecture room wars were being fought, students were called up, some of them never to return, your voice was thrown back from the four walls, a hollow echo of predigested literary culture made intelligible by the proper choice of words and concepts. At times it seemed to me that I was talking in a void, a lightless cave where there was nothing left to be explored.

Yet, that there was a light somewhere in the future I never doubted. What was required was infinite patience and a never-ending desire to communicate what knowledge one had accumulated in the past. Occasionally I got the feedback without which my lecturing would have been an exercise in futility. It was then that the four walls of the room vanished and were replaced by images emanating from a heightened awareness, replacing the somewhat artificial atmosphere of solemnity, opening vistas of intense emotional and intellectual discovery. Suddenly my voice acquired a new vitality as if I had undergone a miraculous reincarnation into an earlier time. It was as if I had returned to the natural setting of an open air lecture, under a tree, among birds and beasts, in a landscape of unquestioning tranquillity and silence.

FOURTEEN

1

The harvest of time, as it has been retold here, has been a mixed lot, consisting of the odds and ends of what memory has preserved and what has lain buried underground for many years waiting to be resurrected. This is the way that memory works; it has its unexpected twists and turns, its narrow passages through dark forests that seem to lead nowhere, or winding its haphazard way across the squares and thoroughfares of cities, the silence of villages and the desolation of nameless slums which are not to be found on any map of the earth. At times I recognise the mountains and plains of a familiar landscape as seen through the smudged window of a plane, while I am wedged among four hundred anonymous passengers adjusting their watches to the changing time dimensions of air travel. Added to the discomfort of snoring neighbours and shrieking infants when solitude would have been infinitely preferable I realise that my passport, traveller's cheques, driving licence and credit cards have been lost, presumably stolen. All I can do at the present moment is to reconstruct my old identity out of the fragmentary remains of my past among strangers (some of them wearing a skull-cap and prayer shawl) and the murmuring TV screen in front of my seat reminding me of time passing and the myth of the eternal return.

Occasionally memory supplies images of extraordinary

sharpness. I recall encounters on the way, people who have preceded me or who, in their youthful eagerness, attempted to overtake me; accidental encounters when—no longer a passenger on a flight across anonymous landscapes—the green light at a traffic junction enabled me to cross the street and I found a stranger waiting for me on the crowded pavement, giving me a smile of recognition though we had never met before. Suddenly I was no longer alone, eyes of an indistinct colour but recognised as having belonged to someone left behind in a faraway past, were looking at me in silence and wonder. We shook hands as if we had known each other for a long time and continued the journey asking no questions as to the end of the voyage since at the moment of recognition there was no end that could ever be imagined.

The story of such encounters, if it could be told at all, consists of a circular movement from the start in the light of early morning to the threatening darkness of a stormy night, and back again to a beginning full of a renewed hope. The narrative will be contrapuntal, in alternating keys and rhythms, at times chromatic and discordant, while echoes of some past adagio accompanies the central melody. There will be gaps in the fugal progression when an abyss of confused sounds opens and only the scratching of untuned instruments can be heard. Occasionally chromaticism and syncopation create dissonances that presage a conclusion in a minor key. It remains a musical fragment, to be recalled in snatches of melody situated in a context of final, abrasive atonality.

These encounters are being re-enacted in my memory. They exist as metaphors of a past beyond the thoughts, emotions and actions that constitute my everyday life. For they took place on some inner stage, seen now from far away and indistinctly, contingencies remote in time and place. Thus faces rise from the dark well of oblivion revealing—as in a Rembrandt painting or in a piece of Mozart's chamber

music— the invisible components of a man's or woman's soul. Such a soul may seem to be no more than an evasive presence, scarcely worth remembering; or, at other times, an image of human perfection to which no common psychological or esthetic criteria are applicable. It exists in a social vacuum, independent of others' approval or disapproval. It continues to haunt me in my waking hours and in my dreams at night, not merely a vaguely remembered spectacle on a dimly lit stage but the very essence of my life.

2

It has also been, inevitably, a life of many self-begotten fictions. Thus, as if turning the pages of some out-dated guide book, I visited Venice in Nietzsche's footsteps and in the company of Proust; and have been one of Gide's juvenile counterfeiters in early twentieth-century Paris; and discovered aspects of my concealed self in Baudelaire's "Petit poèmes en prose" and in chapter 30 of the Book of Job as they are quoted by Rilke in his *Malte Laurids Brigge*, written in a wretched little room in Paris during the first decade of this century; and visited the Sainte Chapelle to listen to madrigals by Gesualdo and Monteverdi. I am familiar with the streets of Dublin where Stephen Dedalus discovered the uses of silence, exile and cunning; and with the streets and squares of Emma Bovary's Rouen where she lost her innocence.

But I always returned to Venice, obsessively recreating a fictitious past: Shylock who is given short shrift in a courtroom presided over by Portia who tells him that the quality of mercy is not strained; and Othello who tells Desdemona the story of his life, his "travel's history" and "the Cannibals that eat each other"; and Volpone's delightful reversal of capitalist enterprise and the ridicule bestowed by him upon Machiavellian politics. I looked at

the Venetian landscape through the eyes of Canaletto and listened to Vivaldi's concertos while in search of hidden secrets in the Jewish ghetto of Venice; and Aschenbach's infatuation with the boy Tadzio which almost became my own, his nightmare of death and resurrection in the ironic setting of ancient Greece. At times I recreate Venice in my memory as I had so variously experienced it, in adolescence, during my student days, in early manhood, in middle-age, but always in the presence of one whose love gave meaning to the experience, ever in pursuit of a dream, in the uncertain twilight before dawn, somewhere between sleep and waking.

My favourite fiction throughout my life was the stage on which I imagined myself acting a part that had been bestowed upon me at birth long before I became aware of its trials and its raptures. The curtain provided privacy when I required it. I imagined myself being watched by an anonymous audience hidden in darkness; I could not prevent them from observing me but I behaved as if I were alone on the stage or in the company of those only whom I had invited to share my solitude. It was a fiction full of hidden significances: my self-imposed solitude, the multiple options at my disposal to choose among the select elite of prospective companions the ones that most strongly evoked in me a sense of tenderness or of passion, for the play in which I acted was my own creation, I was the producer, the director, the main actor. There was no one to interfere, no one to tell me what to do and how to do it. I was at all times the main performer in my favourite fiction. And when I was in need of a friend with whom to share a bottle of wine, a lover to share my bed, I introduced them to the spectacle of my fictitious universe, the abode of peace I had found in my youth, dispensing with any outside help, into which I could withdraw whenever it suited me, outside the eonventional dimensions of time and free of the accidental confines of geographic space. And when I became one of the spectators

of the play I had improvised, I looked at myself out of the darkness of an imagined auditorium and did not always like what I saw.

Nothing and nobody could rob me of these fictions. They were what others appreciated about me, my assumed identity of aloof introspection and intellectual curiosity and, if they were of a tolerant disposition, my various unsatisfied lusts and my rage at human folly. As I grew older, my fictions grew accordingly in complexity and sophistication. Nothing could prevent them from increasingly taking hold of my mind and body until my whole being had become an imaginary construct of images and metaphors which ignored historical reality and its appalling manifestations. While extermination was being enacted on an unheard of industrial scale I dreamed my fiction of peace into fanciful existence. And like many others I experienced at a later stage a feeling of guilt at having survived.

At a time of intense wakefulness, long after the war, when fictions had gradually ceassed to exercise their insiduous influence on my imagination, I studied the phenomeon of the Holocaust for months on end, reading hundreds of novels, learned pieces of scholarly research, the biographies of those who enacted the "Final Solution", political and psychological studies, historical monographs. The university library was well stocked with such books. My attempt at understanding the inconceivable led nowhere. This, indeed, was no fiction. I was left stranded helplessly among the indifferent faces of the socially illiterate and the politically corrupt, and the heaps of corpses, the gas chambers, the ovens, the horror.

3

When the six-day-war broke out I was on a Sabbatical in Washington, D. C., at the Folger Library doing research

on Shakespeare. On the second day of the war, having left my transistor at home and deeply worried as to the fate of my country and those whom I loved, forcing myself to concentrate on the study of some early edition of a Shakespeare play, I felt the slight touch of someone's hand on my shoulder. I turned round and discovered a nun standing behind me whom I had seen on previous occasions in the library. We had never exchanged a word. She looked at me as if we were old friends and said, "Did you know that I prayed for you last night?" It was a moment of recognition when the cunning artfulness of dreams is extinguished and the imaginary is transformed into the real. It was compassionate reminder of battles in which the best among the young in this country went to their death for the sake of an uncertain future, while I was absorbed in a book of ancient tales, telling the story of the struggle for power among medieval dukes and princes whose names evoked, at that moment, no responsive echo in my mind. The nun whose name I did not know and who never spoke to me again, appeared to me—a living metaphor—out of the dark well of oblivion which had held me prisoner for so long a time.

Such reminders were necessary. They were not always spoken in the language of compassion. Occasionally they were expressed in the form of a smile, a handshake, or a moment of silence in the course of a conversation. Talking about the Holocaust was the sort of challenge one was afraid to face. What, indeed, was there to talk about when the event was beyond human imagination and human speech. Poetry, music, the visual arts could at best reproduce the banality of it all. The horror was unspeakable—language refused to adapt itself to what lacked the respective vocabulary to be articulated. Increasingly, as I got more involved in the literature of mass extermination, I was fascinated with the problematic use of language, the need to invent new words to define

concepts that were not to be found in any dictionary or cylopedia.

Occasionally I came across writers who, in simple and unsophisticated prose, told their story as it never been told before. But the events they attempted to portray were not simple when interpreted as part of the fate of individual human beings. One could analyse the political or religious background; but such analysis, as it was supplied in many of the books I read with increasing anguish, took place in an intellectual and moral vacuum, for the basic questions were left unanswered. Gradually I was led to assume that the very concept of the "human" was misapplied. I acquired a new image of humanity, far removed from eighteenth-century enlightenment and nineteenth-century belief in progress. At last the true image of what was human became available to me in all its awfulness. And so was the new grammar and vocabulary of language as used by executioners and victims alike to portray what was outside the confines of reason and imagination. It took me some time to find out that I was not alone in my discovery. Most people took the banality of evil for granted and as the century progressed towards its no less awful conclusion, one holocaust following another, questions were no longer asked because the executioners acted in terms of political righteousness and were indifferent to moral questions, and the victims had become mute scapegoats of irrational slogans that could no longer be formulated in the language of everyday life.

4

The other day an American scholar was invited by the local university to deliver a lecture on "Holocaust Poetry". A small number of people attended the lecture, mostly middle-aged and free of any illusions as regards the relation

between poetry and the extermination of millions. His lecture was mercifully short, but then he started reading a selection of the poetry he had chosen. While listening to his very emotional rendering of the poems it occurred to me that his emphasis on the awfulness of it all turned the occasion into a literary farce, almost a parody of contemporary dark comedy. Yet he was most likely a man of great sincerity and compassion; thus, he put his tormented soul into the reading of these second-rate poems. I do not blame him: his identification with these young American poets was as genuine as his conviction that the Holocaust should be immortalised in these verses.

My thoughts wandered elsewhere. How wonderful it would be if all the memorials, museums, reconstructed camps, could be obliterated; if memory should dwell within the immortal souls of each one of us, never to be articulated in any form whatever. These museums with their cafeterias, their audio-visual devices, their appeal to the consumer and his desire for authentic information, their concern with historical continuity broadcast as ready-made image, should all be consigned to a rubbish heap. So should the poetry written by well-meaning, sincere young American poets who articulate words that do not apply, indulging in metaphors that fail to circumscribe the unspeakable. These poems did indeed remind me of those memorial museums that provide parking space and toilets for the inquisitive visitor, and a cattle-car especially imported from Eastern Europe to demonstrate the horror of deportation. It is like a visit to a circus, with its professional entertainers, its make-believe, its tight-rope walkers. People enter the museum, their faces in solemn expectation of a grand guignol. They will not be disappointed. They finish their visit in the cafeteria where they consume a hamburger and a bottle of Coca-Cola.

★

Soon it will be midnight. The screen flickers and dies. The last piece of Information has been given. The all-knowing voice is silent. The weather forecast in non-committal. It will be partly cloudy, hot in daytime, cool at night. I am alone within the four walls of my booklined room. Memory no longer troubles me. Images have withdrawn into some primeval darkness which is their proper home. The abode of peace, any abode of peace, is a figment of my imagination. The story ends where all stories, true or false, end,—in the security of nowhere, beyond History and its inexhaustible Folly. Music alone remains.

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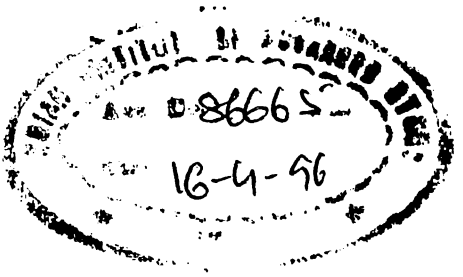
Indian Creative Writing in English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