Ce qui est important 5 > Plusjapprends.com

Ammirevole è la vita delle cose.

Nulla trapela dai loro gesti

impassibili, presagiti e scelti

com.e unica e costante idea.

Sono sacerdoti assorti

che occupano questa sala

per un misterioso capitolo.

Cosi si percorre la vita.

con l’ansia del commensale

tra portate che non arrivano.

Si mangia molto pane e si beve,

molto si conversa di favolosi cibi,

universi d’origano, foreste

d’inauditi sapori. È già tardi

e sul limitare del pasto

in un deserto di molliche dalle segrete forme

(e questo è un piede sinistro, si vede),

la nera morte araba ci congeda.

Stasera mi sono visto nello specchio,

con una canottiera bianca

e la barba lunga delle malattie.

Ma avevo ancora attraversato il dolore,

e la carne era fresca

e tutto il dubbio dissolto.

Avevo doppiato una stagione di sconforti.

Appena girato lo scafo,

coperti dal promontorio grigio,

il vento cade di colpo

e l’impeto si quieta

e stupisce del suo esaurirsi.

Cosí il marinaio è salvo.

lo abito il mio cervello

come un tranquillo possidente le sue terre.

Per tutto il giorno il mio lavoro

è nel farle fruttare,

il mio frutto nel farle lavorare.

E prima di dormire

mi affaccio a guardarle

con il pudore dell’uomo

per la sua immagine.

Il mio cervello abita in me

come un tranquillo possidente le sue terre.

E specialmente nel pianto

che l’anima manifesta

la sua presenza

e per una segreta compressione

tramuta in acqua il dolore.

La prima gemmazione dello spirito

é dunque nella lacrima,

parola trasparente e lenta.

Secondo questa elementare alchimia

veramente il pensiero si fa sostanza

come una pietra o un braccio.

E non c’è turbamento nel liquido,

ma solo minerale

sconforto della materia.

S’introduce a volte nel pensiero

come nell’acqua, un riflesso

che l’attraversa e ne misura il fondale.

Ê un occhio che si apre

dentro le lucide onde e vi affonda.

La linea si distende e la luce

discendendo si quieta.

La mente torna allora a chiudersi

nello sforzo verticale e profondo

della ferita e del gorgo.

Il miracolo del riposo torna a compiersi,

l’accorto depositarsi delle gambe,

la cura della stanchezza che sparpaglia

le membra a terra, in gesti sigillati.

È il teatro metafisico del letto

che nasconde assorti bassorilievi:

un uomo corre e una donna alza la mano

per salutare il passante d’un sogno.

Nelle regioni della notte si snoda

la complessa meccanica dell’abbandono.

È una danza rituale che unisce

i termini del sonno, è il sonno stesso

in cui la carne diventa idea.

Ora la solitudine del braccio

si fa parola, nella linea

tracciata lungo il letto come un sentiero.

Cosi, secondo un ritmo vegetale

si alterna la respirazione della vita

e nel silenzio della mente

le sue radici di ossa cantano,

e nell’oscurità dell’occhio

la mano diventa pupilla.

Il cervello è il cuore delle immagini,

il suo orizzonte la curva

rigida dell’occipite.

E tutto ciò che vive

è nello spirito. Nel suo cerchio

silenzioso stanno il cielo,

gli uomini e se stesso.

Se io venissi a mancare a me stesso,

e questo il mio turbamento.

Temo d’evaporare poco a poco.

di perdermi nelle fessure del giorno

dimenticando cosí il mio pensiero.

A volte mi scopro nel silenzio

delle cose che ho intorno,

oggetto tra gli oggetti,

popolato di oggetti.

Dunque il dolore è metamorfosi

e le sue cause si susseguono

non viste mostrandosi

per quello che non sono.

Questo anzi è il primo dolore.

Gli occhiali allora andrebbero portati

tra l’occhio ed il cervello,

perché è là, tra boscaglie

e piantagioni di nervi

l’errore dello sguardo.

Qui si smarrisce la vista

e nel suo andare alla mente

si corrompe e tramonta.

Come se traversando

cagasse ad ogni passo

il pedaggio del corpo.

Il corpo è chiuso come una muraglia,

è come un pozzo immerso nella carne

che non giunge ad avere

impressione di sé.

E le sue membra stanno

mute e cieco e fermo

nella gamba riposa il ginocchio.

Ma nella testa s’apre

l’alba del mondo:

l’osso si allarga, accoglie

dentro di sé lo sguardo.

Dolcemente si compie

il paziente traverso del vedere,

acquedotto di chiarore, strada

che porta l’essere a se stesso.

E nella radura della fronte

il portale del ciglio ha la sua luce.

Ho la mente coltivata

come una piantagione.

A seconda del seme

il suolo si colora

e come nella lingua

ogni zona ha un sapore.

Il mio pensiero è una terrazza

aperta su me stesso.

O forse è solamente l’impressione

dei sensi che confonde

come fanno le dita accavallate

una cosa con due.

Sto rifacendo la punta al pensiero.

come se il filo fosse Icogoro

e il segno divenuto opaco.

Gli occhi si consumano come matite

e la sera disegnano sul cervello

figure appena sgrossate e confuse.

Le immagini oscillano e il tratto si fa incerto,

gli oggetti si nascondono:

é come se parlassero per enigmi continui

ed ogni sguardo obbligasse

la mente a tradurre.

La miopia si fa quindi poesia.

dovendosi avvicinare al mondo

per separarlo dalla luce.

Anche il tempo subisce questo rallentamento :

i gesti si perdono, i saluti non vengono colti.

L’unica cosa che si profda nitida

é la prodigiosa difficoltà della visione.

Un tempo si portava sulla pagina

il giorno trascorso, adesso invece

si parla solamente del parlare.

Come se nel tragitto

dall’impressione alla carta

si fosse dischiusa una vertigine.

Dunque passando

dall’una all’altra sponda

tutte le mercanzie vanno perdute

e il viaggiatore

dimenticato il viaggio

sa narrare soltanto del pericolo corso.

Soltanto il tempo veramente scrive

usando come penna il nostro corpo.

Per le strade, nei cinema o in un letto

questa calligrafia va persa

ed è atroce l’incuria

degli dei e degli uomini.

Quello che arriva sulla carta è solo

il commento residuo d’un poema

perennemente disperso.

Chiosa frugale, calco d’un racconto,

questo è l’indice ultimo degli indici.

Bisogna riflettere sulle idee

come fossero formaggi

î farle bollire e farle

fermentare.

Quando il coperchio

di vimini è tolto

l’occhio della crema

luccicherà bianco.

Molto siero è versato attorno,

aghi di pino si intrecciano

per filtrare e il latte

scorre tuonando in fondo ai secchi.

È un lavoro serale questo,

devono abbaiare i cani

e l’aria farsi fredda

e calda la ricotta e chiara.

Scrivere come se questo

fosse opera di traduzione,

di qualcosa già scritto in altra lingua.

La parola si carica ed esita,

continua ancora a vibrare

come sulla tastiera le note tenute

sopravvivono allo staccato

e lo percorrono fino al suo tacere.

lo sono ciò che manca

dal mondo in cui vivo,

colui che tra tutti

non incontrerò mai.

Ruotando su me stesso ora coincido

con ciò che mi è sottratto.

Io sono la mia eclissi

la contumacia e la malinconia

l’oggetto geometrico

di cui per sempre dovrò fare a meno.

Illustration: Champs de blé

Admirable est la vie des choses.

Rien ne filtre de leurs gestes

impassibles, prévus et choisis

comme une idée unique et constante.

Ce sont des prêtres rêveurs

qui occupent cette salle

pour un chapitre mystérieux.

L'esprit a-t-il accès aux choses?

Qu'est-ce que la matière?

Ainsi la vie se passe-t-elle

avec l’inquiétude du convive

entre des plats qui n’arrivent pas.

On mange quantité de pain et on boit,

on parle abondamment de mets fabuleux,

univers d’origan, forêts

de saveurs inouïes. Il se fait tard

et au seuil du repas

dans un désert de miettes aux formes secrètes

(et voilà un pied gauche, on le reconnaît)

la noire mort arabe nous congédie.

Le désir peut-il se satisfaire de la réalité?

Ce soir je me suis vu dans le miroir

en maillot de corps blanc,

avec la barbe des jours de maladie.

Mais j’avais une fois encore traversé la douleur,

et la chair était fraîche,

et tout mon doute dissipé.

J’avais franchi le cap d’une saison de désespoirs.

Dès que l’embarcation a viré de bord

et se trouve à l’abri du promontoire gris,

le vent tombe soudain,

et l’élan s’apaise

et s’étonne de son propre épuisement.

Et ainsi, le marin est sauf.

X

J’habite mon cerveau

comme un propriétaire paisible sur ses terres.

De toute la journée, mon travail

est de les faire fructifier,

mon profit, de les faire travailler.

Et avant de dormir

je vais les contempler

avec la pudeur qu’éprouve l’homme

face à sa propre image.

Mon cerveau habite en moi

comme un propriétaire paisible sur ses terres.

La conscience fait-elle de l’homme une exception?

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Que suis-je par rapport á mon corps?

C’est dans les pleurs singulièrement

que l’âme manifeste

sa présence

et, par une compression secrète,

change en eau la douleur.

Ainsi donc c’est dans la larme,

cette lente et transparente parole,

qu’a lieu le premier bourgeonnement de l’esprit.

Selon cette alchimie élémentaire

la pensée vraiment se fait substance,

comme une pierre ou un bras.

Et dans le liquide il n’y a plus de trouble :

seulement la désolation

minérale de la matière.

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Que suis-je par rapport á mon corps?

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Parfois dans la pensée

comme dans l’eau s’introduit un reflet

qui la traverse, et en mesure le fond.

C’est un oeil qui s’ouvre

au-dedans des vagues brillantes et s’y enfonce.

La ligne s’étend et la lumière

en descendant s’apaise.

L’esprit revient alors s’enfermer

dans l’effort vertical et profond

de la blessure et du tourbillon.

Qu’est-ce qu’une idée?

Peut-on se fier á l’intuition?

Le miracle du corps recommence à s’accomplir,

les jambes qui habilement s’étendent,

la prévenance de la fatigue qui disperse

les membres à terre, en gestes scellés.

C’est le théâtre métaphysique du lit

qui cache des bas-reliefs rêveurs :

un homme court et une femme lève la main

pour saluer le passant d’un songe.

Dans les régions de la nuit se dénoue

le mécanisme compliqué de l’abandon.

C’est une danse rituelle qui relie

les bornes du sommeil, c’est le sommeil lui-même

dans lequel la chair devient idée.

A présent la solitude du bras

se fait parole, dans la ligne

tracée au bord du lit comme un sentier.

Ainsi selon un rythme végétal

alterne la respiration de la vie,

et dans le silence de l’esprit

chantent ses racines d’os,

et dans l’obscurité de l’œil

la main devient pupille.

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Que suis-je par rapport á mon corps?

Qu’est-ce qu’une idée?

Admettre l’existence de l’inconscient est-ce rendre vain tout effort de lucidité envers soi-même?

Le cerveau est le cœur des images,

son horizon, la courbe

rigide de l’occiput.

Et tout ce qui vit

est dans l’esprit. Dans son cercle

silencieux se tiennent le ciel,

les hommes, et lui-même.

La conscience fait-elle de l’homme une exception?

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Que suis-je par rapport á mon corps?

Si je venais à manquer à moi-même ?

Le voilà, mon trouble.

Je crains de m’évaporer peu à peu,

de me perdre dans les fissures du jour,

oubliant ainsi ma pensée.

Parfois je me découvre dans le silence

des choses que j’ai autour de moi,

objet parmi les objets,

peuplé d’objets.

Donc, la douleur est métamorphose,

et ses causes s’enchaînent

sans qu’on les voie, se donnant

pour ce qu’elles ne sont pas.

C’est même la première douleur.

Il faudrait alors que les lunettes soient placées

entre l’œil et le cerveau,

parce que c’est là, entre des broussailles

et des plantations de nerfs

que se situe l’erreur du regard.

Ici se trouble la vue,

et sur son chemin vers l’esprit

elle se corrompt et s’assombrit.

Comme si en traversant

elle s’acquittait à chaque pas

du péage du corps.

La perception peut-elle s’éduquer?

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Les apparences sont-elles trompeuses?

Que sait-on du réel?

Le corps est fermé comme une muraille,

il est comme un puits qui s’enfonce dans la chair

sans parvenir à avoir

une impression de lui-même.

Et ses membres sont

muets, et dans la jambe,

aveugle et immobile, repose le genou.

Mais dans la tête s’ouvre

l’aube du monde :

l’os s’élargit, accueille

au-dedans de lui-même le regard.

Doucement s’accomplit

le patient transvasement de la vue,

aqueduc de clarté, route

qui mène l’être à lui-même.

Et dans la clairière du front

le portail du sourcil a sa lumière.

La conscience fait-elle de l’homme une exception?

Quelle différence peut-on faire entre l’esprit et le corps?

Que suis-je par rapport á mon corps?

J’ai l’esprit entretenu

comme une plantation :

suivant la semence,

le sol change de couleur

et, comme sur la langue,

chaque zone a sa saveur.

Ma pensée est une terrasse

qui donne sur moi-même.

Ou peut-être est-ce seulement

l’impression trompeuse des sens

comme au jeu des mains qui se chevauchent

où l’on croit voir un doigt là où il y en a deux.

Qu'est-ce qu'une idée ?

Suis-je le sujet de mes pensées ?

Je refais une pointe à ma pensée,

comme si le fil en était usé

et la cible devenue opaque.

Les yeux s’usent comme des crayons

et le soir ils dessinent sur le cerveau

des figures à peine ébauchées et confuses.

Les images oscillent et le trait se fait incertain,

les objets se cachent :

c’est comme s’ils parlaient par énigmes continuelles

et que chaque regard obligeât

l’esprit à traduire.

La myopie se fait donc poésie,

ayant à s’approcher du monde

pour le séparer de la lumière.

Même le temps subit ce ralentissement :

les gestes se perdent, on ne remarque plus les saluts.

La seule chose qui se profile avec netteté

est la prodigieuse difficulté de la vision.

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Que sait-on du réel?

Peut-on percevoir sans juger?

Les apparences sont-elles trompeuses ?

Autrefois on reportait sur la page

le jour écoulé, tandis qu’à présent

on parle seulement pour parler.

Comme si dans le trajet

entre l’impression reçue et le papier

s’était ouvert un abîme vertigineux.

Ainsi donc en passant

d’une rive à l’autre

toutes les marchandises se perdent

et le voyageur

oublie le voyage,

il ne sait raconter que le danger couru.

Connaissons-nous mieux le présent que le passé ?

Qui fait l'histoire?

A-t-on besoin du passé pour construire son avenir?

Peut-on percevoir sans juger?

Seul le temps véritablement écrit,

en se servant de notre corps comme d’une plume.

Dans les rues, dans les cinémas ou dans un lit

cette calligraphie se perd,

tant est atroce la négligence

des dieux et des hommes.

Ce qui échoue sur le papier n’est

que le commentaire d’un poème

éternellement dispersé.

Glose frugale, calque d’un récit,

ceci est l’ultime index des index.

Qui fait l'histoire?

Il faut réfléchir sur les idées

comme on fabrique des fromages :

les faire bouillir et les mettre

à fermenter.

Une fois ôté

le couvercle d’osier,

l’œil de la crème

luira de toute sa blancheur.

On renverse beaucoup de petit lait,

on tresse des aiguilles de pin

pour filtrer, et le lait

coule en grondant au fond des seilles.

Travail du soir, ce travail :

il faut qu’aboient les chiens

et que l’air fraîchisse,

et que la ricotta se fasse chaude et claire.

Qu’est-ce qu’une idée?

Prendre son temps est-ce le perdre?

Suis-je le sujet de mes pensées ?

Écrire comme si ceci

était le travail de traduction

d’une chose déjà écrite dans une autre langue.

Le mot se charge et hésite,

il continue à vibrer

comme, sur le clavier, les notes tenues

survivent au staccato

et le parcourent jusqu’à ce qu’il se soit tu.

La perception peut-elle s’éduquer?

En quoi la beauté artistique est-elle supérieure á la beauté naturelle?

L’art peut-il manifester la vérité?

En général quand une chose devient utile cesse-t-elle d'être belle ?

Je suis ce qui est absent

du monde où je vis,

celui qu’entre tous

je ne rencontrerai jamais.

Roulant sur moi-même, je coïncide maintenant

avec ce qui m’est dérobé.

Je suis ma propre éclipse,

la contumace et la mélancolie,

l’objet géométrique

dont je devrai à jamais me passer. “

Prendre conscience de soi est-ce devenir étranger á soi?

Valerio Magrelli, *Ora serrata retinae*, 1980, traduit de l’italien par Jean-Yves Masson, Edition Cheyne, D’une voix l’autre, 2010

Illustration: Le juste milieu

“ A CANÇÃO DAS METADES

Vasto mundo terás, meio entre o céu e a terra;

mora a meio caminho entre a cidade e o campo,

tem lavouras a meio entre rios e montanhas;

sê meio intelectual, meio fidalgo e meio

comerciante; vive em meio aos que são nobres,

mas também em meio do povinho comum.

Seja tua casa meio ornada, meio simples

e, tendo móveis bons, pareça meio nua;

tuas roupas, meio antigas e meio novas;

as refeições, meio triviais, mas meio epicuristas.

Tem criados não muito astutos, nem estúpidos;

mulher não muito feia nem bela em excesso.

É mais destro em beber quem só meio ébrio fica,

e a flor a entreabrir-se mais linda se revela;

mais firme é o navegar do barco a meia vela;

melhor trota o corcel de rédeas meio presas.

Quem tem bens demais, soma-lhes ansiedade;

quem de menos os tem, de aperto padece .

Como a vida se faz de doçura e amargor,

Quem só a metade prova é mais arguto e sábio. “

Múcio Porphyrio Ferreira, *Os Ensinamentos de Confúcio*

Ilustration: Forêt

“That there is a vast chaotic element in life must be admitted, and that one of the most powerful among the Immortals who preside over our fortunes is the great Goddess Chance cannot be denied, but there is also a curious pressure among the experiences that befall us, experiences that our character moulds in their occasion; which, for all this play of Chance, has an underlying tendency, a verifiable direction, a motion, a drive, through all the twists and turns of accident, towards some implied fulfilment in accordance with some deeply-involved entelechy.

In the light of what I am now at sixty, taking this ambiguous “what I am” as an entirely subjective vision—for who with all his efforts can see himself objectively—such a destined direction, steered by the interior life-urge in its moulding of circumstance, takes the form of a half-conscious self-creation. And what shape, as I regard myself now, myself and what I have come to call my life-illusion, does this character-destiny assume? Unless all my self-analysis is superficial it assumes the shape of a compound, less self-contradictory than it used to be, but not even yet entirely harmonized, of five rather discordant elements. I will name them in the order in which, at the present moment, I feel them to be more or less dominant. They resolve themselves into—a desire to enjoy the Cosmos, a desire to appease my Conscience, a desire to play the part of a Magician, a desire to play the part of a Helper, and finally a desire to satisfy my Viciousness.

Now it is clear that among the other four only the Magician-wish really lent itself, and that not altogether, to an enjoyment, half-mystical and half-sensual, of this bewildering Universe. For by degrees I discovered that the *kind* of enjoyment of life I wanted was what might be called an *imaginative sensuality*, a sensuality that required for its satisfaction a fluctuating margin of vague memory, of memory that, as I was dimly aware of it, seemed to recede, if I may say so, into the human lives that went before me, lives that had experienced the same feelings I was experiencing, only in an unrealizable past. Now it will be clear, I think, that the desire to be a Magician, that is to say to exercise a certain supernatural control over my destiny and that of others, did not completely coincide with the pure, unadulterated enjoyment of sensuous feelings surrounded by an aura of obscure memories. Sometimes it coincided with the cult of such feelings; but sometimes, especially in hard times, it derived an independent pleasure of its own from a certain attitude of formidable and stoical endurance. And if the role of a Magician—with its implication of personal pride—did not always harmonize with the imaginative sensuality that was my dominant urge, the remaining elements fell often into disturbing conflict with it.

Conscience for instance! I cannot remember a time when Conscience was not a trouble to me, ordering me to do what I didn’t want to do and to refrain from doing what I wanted to do. In fact it may be said at once that the grand struggle of my life has been between my Conscience and my impulse to live a life made up solely and entirely of sensual-mystical sensations.

I indicate my desire to play the part of a Helper as something distinct from Conscience, not only because it has often happened that this desire has conflicted with the more hum-drum mandates of Conscience, but because it would undoubtedly have been strongly operative in me—by reason of those imaginative nerves which compel us to identify our own feelings with those of an alien existence, human or otherwise —even had I no Conscience at all.

Clearest of all, I fancy, to understand is the difficulty I have had in harmonizing my Viciousness with a life of sensuous contemplation. It is unfortunately evident enough that any sort of Viciousness, by the mere fact of its insatiable exclusiveness and savage intensity, militates against any subtler, more continuous, more comprehensive form of happiness.

Without any question, from earliest childhood up to the present hour, my dominant vice has been the most dangerous of all vices. I refer to Sadism. I cannot remember a time—so early did this tendency show itself—when sadistic thoughts and images did not disturb and intoxicate me. One of my picture-books, when I could not have been more than three years old, contained a picture of an eagle seizing upon a lamb; and from the age of three, that is to say from the year 1875— for I was born in 1872—till about the year 1922, when I was fifty, this deadly vice transported and obsessed me. As a boy and as a young man it had greediness for its rival, and much longer than that it had a more normal, though never altogether normal, attraction to young women as its companion-vice; but it was not till I was fifty; and that date remains very clear in my mind, that I entirely overcame it. By “overcoming” it I mean never allowing myself to derive pleasure even for a moment in those sadistic thoughts which were my bosom-houris, the attendants at my pillow, for nearly half a century!” [...] p. 6-8.

Est-on soi-même ou le devient-on?

Prendre conscience de soi est-ce devenir étranger à soi?

L’Homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Faut-il libérer ses désirs ou se libérer de ses désirs?

Ne désirons que les choses que nous estimons bonnes?

Peut-on dire d’un désir qu’il est anormal?

Le passionné est-il l’ennemi de lui-même?

Le désir peut-il se satisfaire de la réalité?

Les passions nous empêchent-elles de faire notre devoir?

Une action désintéressée est-elle possible?

“ This queer expression, “having an ecstasy,” what does it really mean? What are the ingredients that compose them, the atmosphere out of which such ecstasies arise? The following is my own analysis of these precious moments. I think they always come, just as everything living does, o*ut of duality*, (out of the energizing of opposite poles of existence, poles of substance, poles of being, poles of electricity, if you prefer that scientific word. I think these moments of ecstasy are apt to come when, as you contemplate some particular scene or object, you suddenly recall some other deep cause of satisfaction in your life, but a cause totally independent of the one you are now regarding *and not in the same plane of feeling.*

For instance, I am looking at a patch of moss on a greenish marbly rock and I am aware of a deep sensual pleasure. But here suddenly comes into my mind the thought of a coal fire and of the light of candles, and of a chess-board, with the men all arranged for the game, and of old leather-bound Homeric Lexicon. Now either for a game of chess or for the looking out of Greek words the mind has to be active, whereas in drinking up the deliciousness of this dark wet green surface of stone, matted with moss, the mind is in a state of concentrated passivity. And my idea is that it is the sudden impact of the thought of pleasurable activity upon a mind concentrated upon pleasurable passivity that brings that tingling up-flow of exultation which is named “ecstasy.” Had the mind in contemplating this dark rain-dripping surface and these emerald-green spores been led away to think of the earth mould of a damp flower-bed strewn with rain-wet petals, there would almost certainly have been no increase in the sensual pleasure already being enjoyed. If however the mind had summoned up a spade or a fork left sticking in the border of this flower-bed it is very possible that an ecstasy of the same sort as that called up by the image of the chess-board or by the image of the Homeric Lexicon would have resulted.” [...] p. 42

En quoi le sentiment esthétique se distingue-t-il du sentiment religieux?

La beauté transforme-t-elle notre conscience du réel?

La beauté est-elle promesse de bonheur?

En général quand une chose est utile cesse t-elle d’être belle?

Exister est-ce agir?

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

Le bonheur est-il dans l’inconscience?

Ne peut-on être heureux qu’au passé?

La perception peut-elle s’éduquer?

“How many forms of stress, of strain, of tension there are in life that have no relation at all to a person’s main life-purpose! It sometimes seems as if we all move for years— sometimes for half a lifetime—through a perfectly meaningless chaos of irrelevant events, events that gather themselves together like bubbles on a stream—only they obstruct our boat more than any bubbles could—and then vanish into absolute nothingness! Man seems more subject to this tossing welter of irrelevance than anything else in Nature. What could be more beautifully fatal in the movement of its significant destiny than the life of a cow or the life of a tree? The truth is we each of us have to *invent* our own destiny out of the confusion and pell-mell around us, and it is because we are so long in deciding what destiny to invent that so many completely meaningless, insignificant, irrelevant episodes follow one another in our life, unconnected with any general “stream of tendency”, springing from nothing, returning to nothing. Chance, not destiny, rules us, swirling the litter and the debris into endless insignificant patterns that form and re-form, only to dissolve even as we gaze at them.

But it is not merely the person who has been lucky enough to find some main purpose for his earthly days that these silly, little, empty occurrences jolt, shake, prod and infuriate. They hurt us and tease us with their meaninglessness, long ere we have found any sort of *raison d’être* for our days equal to what chewing the cud is for a cow or being rained upon for a tree. Who in looking back over their early life can escape being put to shame and utterly confounded by the things that occurred, things for which you feel later nothing but a slowly fading disgust accompanied by a sort of gaping curiosity and base inquisitiveness, and a low, morbid, egotistical interest, a staring bestial interest that it was to you yourself and not another that they happened, an interest comparable to that with which infants contemplate their own excrement.

It is this element of self-love, in totally irrelevant happenings, that accounts for the indescribable tediousness of so many autobiographies and, to speak the honest truth, of so much human conversation. What excites our more intelligent interest *is a story*, that is to say the struggle of a soul, conscious or half conscious, with the obstacles that hinder its living growth, that obstruct the lilt of its pulse and joggle to left or right its integral continuity. The only interest in events, devoid of the negative significance of being obstacles in our path, is a symbolic one. It is possible for detached and isolated and even very unpleasant events to be pathetically significant symbols in the course of a life; but it is claiming too much to suppose that everything that happens to us is *intended* to be part of our particular story by an omnipotent artist. Interest, drama, meaning, purpose are qualities given to events by the individual mind. We are ourselves the gods who create the values of our life—what is essential, what is symbolic—and it is left to chance to provide the occasions for the application of these meanings and purposes.” [...] p. 45-47

Qu’est ce qui a du sens?

Risquons-nous de passer á côté de notre vie?

Quelle est la part de l’innée et de l’acquis dans le caractère?   
Ne sommes-nous que la somme des choix que nous faisons ?

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

Ne peut-on être heureux qu'au passé?

La chance existe t-elle?

“I have always been one to expect, and to accept, marvels and wonders, as part of what might be called the natural “chaoticism” of the world. To be a Pluralist rather than a Monist, is as much of an instinct with me as it is to every East Indian to be obsessed by Unity. The world was then - *and is so still* for in this matter my reason has only defended my instinct—an incalculable welter of criss-cross forces, each one of which has its own particular measure of consciousness or demi-semi-quaver consciousness. I am thus less liable to supernatural shocks than people whose minds are less credulous than mine, or if you will, for it comes to the same thing, less sceptical than mine as to all that they call scientific truth. If I actually did behold a ghost or a phantom, or some inexplicable phenomenon of magical origin, I should undoubtedly be bothered, and up to a certain point startled, as I was by the sight of these images in the South Walk, but I should not be paralysed or panic-stricken, because I should not be profoundly *surprised*. Every living organism—it is the fatality of our identity—has its own peculiar universe, not quite like any other—and my world remains a world under the sway of inscrutable mystery. In plain speech I still feel wholly convinced that the cause of every natural phenomenon is personal—the exertion of energy by a conscious, or at any rate a half-conscious *will*.” [...] p.55

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Toutes les cultures se valent-elles ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

“ My own feeling is—it may be a rooted insanity but I do not think so—that the only profoundly philosophical way of taking life is a threefold act of the intellect. First to accept our sense impressions of the world as the world’s true reality, against all electronic reduction. Secondly, to accept what interiorly we feel of our consciousness and will as our deepest hint as to what causes the nature of this reality to be as it is. Thirdly, to force ourselves to enjoy in a particular way this self-made universe that we are for ever destroying and recreating.” [...] p.56

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Les apparences sont-elles trompeuses?

Que sait-on du réel?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Choisit-on d’être artiste?

La perception peut-elle s'éduquer?

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

“ Yes, my eighth and ninth years, when we were settled at Dorchester and before I went to school were years of extraordinary and exultant satisfaction. And yet I have no memory —and that I have none makes me feel a disappointed anger with this fortunate era—of experiencing that Wordsworthian “Pleasure which there is in Life itself,” which is now my dominant cult. The absence of even the faintest, obscurest, vaguest memory of that kind makes me almost feel as if when the Johnny of those days turned into the Jack of the later time, some completely different spirit had entered into me; and this is a feeling extremely distasteful to me!” [...] p. 57

Changer est-ce devenir quelqu’un d’autre?

“ The more I ponder upon my memories of my early life the more I am convinced of two things. First that there are abysses of Being and Reality totally outside this astronomical “pinfold” in which, as Milton says, we are “confined and pestered”, *Second*, that all great urges of our spirit come nearest to the secret of the Universe when they enjoy Nature with the detachment of a Pilgrim rather than analyse her with the curiosity of a Scientist.

But what is forever escaping me as I look back on these days is what might be called my normal mood. I cannot recall any average, ordinary, commonplace, humdrum mood, whether cheerful or the reverse, to which I awaked every day and upon which I relapsed from my moments of unnatural excitement. What I feel now is that *all* my moments were moments of unnatural excitement! In fact I feel almost tempted to go a step further and to maintain that the whole conception of the normal, the average, the commonplace, is due to a specific mental disease. To call a thing “commonplace” becomes therefore just the same as if you confided to your friend the fact that you felt sick or insane. I believe the most unphilosophical, irreligious and immoral word in the English language is the word “commonplace.” [...] p. 60

Peut-on percevoir sans juger?

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

Risquons-nous de passer á côté de notre vie?

Une connaissance scientifique du vivant est-elle possible?

Commentez cette pensée de Nietzsche: « Ce n'est pas le doute, c'est la certitude qui rend fou. » ?

Que sait-on du réel?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

“ In one thing I know well the neurotic John of sixty is identical with the neurotic Johnny of nine, and that is in being born, so to speak, *fresh every day*. I certainly woke up every morning with a tremendous life energy pulsing through me and with a feeling that I could *flow through* every material object I looked at in a rapture of identification. I think—though confound it all! this is just what I do not remember!—that I expected daily to come upon some magical object, made of earth or of sea-sand or of moss, like that laid upon the top of my miniature Mount Cloud, which would immediately thrust into the world of grown-up people’s reality a wedge of *my* reality, so that it would be forced to come to terms with it! I am convinced that I *knew*, without question or doubt, that my world—the world in which I was a magician—was a great deal more than mere pretending.

I wish I could communicate in intelligible speech what I really felt myself to be—I will not say what I really was—in those days at Rothesay House. I believe I can recall exact inner feeling on many separate highly-pitched occasions. What I cannot reproduce in my mind are my less agitated, less excited, less troubled moments. But perhaps there were no such moments! Perhaps, except when I was asleep, I lived such a nervous, strung-up life that my only relapses were changes from one kind of tension to another. I believe I *am* able, in a manner that I fancy must be rare among men or women of sixty, to feel the actual, identical feelings that I used to have at particular moments in those days. I certainly lived in a constant repetition of gestures of extreme psychic intensity. My head was always full of some fantastical transaction that broke up the normal world.

I touch here upon what is to me one of the profoundest philosophical mysteries: I mean the power of the individual mind to create its own world, not in complete independence of what is called “the objective world,” but in a steadily growing independence of the attitude of other minds *towards* this world. For what people call the objective world is really a most fluid, flexible, malleable thing. It is like the wine of the Priestess Bacbuc in *Rabelais*. It tastes differently; it is a different cosmos, to every man, woman, and child. To analyse this “objective world” is all very well, as long as you don’t forget that the power to rebuild it by emphasis and rejection is synonymous with your being alive.” [...] p. 61-62

Ce qui est vrai en théorie peut-il être faux en pratique?

Faut-il se méfier de la multiplicité des interprétations?

La pluralité des opinions est-elle un obstacle á la vérité?

L’esprit a t’il accès aux choses?

Les apparences sont-elles trompeuses?

Que sait-on du réel?

Peut-on être sûr d’avoir raison?

“My own experience of life has taught me that when Jesus prayed that His tormentors might be forgiven because they knew not what they did, He prayed for the most wicked and dangerous people in the world. Not to *know* what they do is indeed their sin—and it is the unpardonable sin. These “not-knowing” ones are worse than any devils. “ [...] p.113

Parler d’actes inhumains a-t-il un sens?

“I sometimes think that no one who has ever lived has had intenser moments of happiness in life than my father. His personality was so massive, so monumental, that he seemed to have a power of enjoyment, in mere weight and volume, about double that of ordinary human beings. And since his pride and his reserve hindered him from displaying this emotion in public, he hardly ever started down that vicarage drive, to set out upon one of those parochial excursions which were an excuse for the long walks he loved, without at some moment —between front door and drive gate—quickening his steps in this silent ecstasy which was his worship of life. This is really —as my brother Llewelyn has said, and said much more to the purpose than I can—what all his eleven children owe to him: the power of falling into an ungovernable transport, in the midst of the most ordinary doings. “ [...] p.116

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Exister est-ce agir?

Exister est-ce profiter du moment présent?

“I think that down at the bottom of my being has been concealed from pretty early days a deep distrust and a shrewd suspicion of that solidity of the objective world that most people take for granted. I was always superstitious—at one time I even believed in Hell—but I am pretty sure that the more I became true to my subtler instincts the more I regarded the whole astronomical universe with a certain detachment, regarded it in fact as the mere *material stage* for playing whatever romantic, picturesque, or fantastical rôle a person’s life-illusion might arbitrarily select. It has always appealed to me — that legendary last word of Cesar Augustus:

“Have I not played the Farce well? Put out the lights: ring down the curtain! Plaudite et vale! “

Deep, deep, deep must have sunken into my soul that grandiose acting in the presence of the gods and of Fate, of those classic Greeks and Romans! My mania for the sceptical Shakespeare, who like his own more sceptical master Montaigne, had a passion for these consummate actors, encouraged this predilection in me. Oh, how I revelled in every line of his *Julius Cesar*; and how startled I was when, in reading Dante, I found Brutus and Cassius thrust down to the bottom of Hell!

At a very early age somebody read to me Church’s *Stories from Homer*, and I found out that those more primeval and more elemental heroes were just as addicted to this vision of themselves as acting a spectacular part before gods and men, whether in exultation or desperation, as were the Greeks and Romans of the historical times. Thus I learned at a very early age what a consolation in life it is to enjoy things and to endure things as an actor; that is to say, not *hugger-mugger*, and in brute unconsciousness, but as though in default of any god or even of any fellow mortal, you could play out your part before your own awareness, and be to the end both performer and audience! “ [...] p. 121-122

Prendre conscience de soi est-ce devenir étranger á soi?

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

Ne sommes-nous que la somme des choix que nous faisons ?

“ Tuesday and Thursday; it was Sherborne and not any ancient god that made you holy to me for ever! Yes, it was Sherborne and Mr. Whitehead’s lessons. For even as I said to myself: “It is Thursday,” and took up my little, worn-to-pieces, plum-coloured edition of Euclid, such a great wave of ecstasy rushed over me that I can recall its subtlest essence even unto this hour. This little, ragged, plum-coloured Euclid—Ailinon! Ailinon! That I should have ever lost that book!—became at that moment, if I may say so without irreverence, a sort of consecrated wafer, into which every lovely sensation I had ever had, had miraculously gathered itself. It is really possible that that moment was the most important of my whole life! We have to live a long time to know what *are* the important moments. We think, at the time, they are the days when we change continents, or hemispheres, or nationalities, or religions, or infatuations, but they do not as a rule turn out to be these great lumbering events. They turn out to be some little, tiny, infinitesimal *sensation* —like Proust’s “*Madeleine*” dipped in camomile tea—that reveals to us the clue to our life. And what actually *did* that Euclid, picked up there in that leather-stinking, rotten-apple-reeking lobby, where stood our lockers and play-boxes, reveal to me? It revealed to me something much more precious that that Eternal Being of Proust’s, reaching him purely by chance and doing him, when it did reach him, no particular good. This tattered Euclid revealed to me that it is possible, even when the bulk of your days and the larger number of your hours are full of discomfort, to embrace a thousand essences of life. The limbs of the loveliest of women, the flanks of the noblest of hills, the mosses upon the most marbly rocks, the clearest Waterfalls, the freshest of ploughed-up fields, the blackest of rooks feeding in the furrows, the whitest dust rising up from the most ancient of classic roads, the gleam of glittering sea-pebbles, the faint music of the dying away of the burdens of old ballads, the taste of newly baked bread, the feel of the mystery of things as you muse over your tea—to enjoy such presences and such essences of life, and to do so in the scope of some negligible fragment of matter, this and nothing less is what I found I could compass under the spell of this little plum-coloured Euclid! Yes, I learnt from this moment in that littered lobby, smelling of acrid leather, sour sweat, and rotten apples, that our deepest pleasure strew behind them—even when at the time they are not consciously enjoyed—leaves of delight that become enchanted with the passing of time, like petals gathered in an ancient *pot pourri*.

And if they are always there in that storehouse, why cannot they be summoned up at will? *And they can!* Proust, with his impersonal Eternal Being, stops short at this point, leaving it all to the accidents of our way. But when I think *now* of that Euclid something comes back! Not in any thrilling tush does it comes. It comes quietly and *prepense*. But something does actually comes from where that book lies in my mind. “ [...] p.128-130

La beauté transforme t-elle notre conscience du réel?

La beauté est-elle promesse de bonheur?

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

Ne peut-on être heureux qu’au passé?

Tout s’en va t-il avec le temps?

Le temps détruit tout?

Qu'est-ce qu'une journée réussie?

Risquons nous de passer á côté de notre vie?

“I have, Heaven forgive me, a passion for being *liked* —I will not say for being admired, for I am not exacting about that—by every child of Adam I meet! The bottom of it is, I suppose, simply Fear. I must resemble a cowardly dog in my conviction that the most negligible person, any sort of a poor devil, *could*  be terribly dangerous. What I expect them to do to me I am sure I don’t know, but when I meet their eyes—the eye of a peddler, of an organ-grinder, of a grocer’s assistant, of a waiter, of a cab-driver, of the forlornest beggar—I feel as if I could not flatter this ferocious and terrifying being humbly enough, or get away quickly enough! Yes *that* is what it is. It is just *fear*. My life would have been different at every point, not only at school but long afterwards, *now* in fact, if I only had the power to stand up to people and speak out, or strike out, boldly. I am in fact the worst coward in this particular that has ever disgraced the perpendicular form of *homo sapiens*. There were occasions at Wildman’s when the least flash of normal pugnacity would have saved me from endless misery. If only I could have got angry! But I couldn’t. I have a long memory for insults, but I cannot flare up and hit back! It is this combination of a cold and even deadly analytical judgment with a perfect terror of scenes, contradictions, clashes, man-to-man challenges, that does the harm.

And Destiny has given me my chance to redeem myself again and again. Our dormitory opened upon another one; and one night, when I was at the height of my later unpopularity, the door between us was thrown wide open, and a well-directed boot, while I was quietly perusing *The Lancashire Witches* made it plain to all that here was a challenge for Powys Ma. to be something different from himself. The faintest show of fight would have done the trick. No prolonged fisticuffs would have been necessary. But not a finger had I the gall to raise! I must have excited the sort of disgusted distrust that country boys feel for a grass-snake when they stone it to death. Another time and this was the final catastrophe of the comedy, all my enemies were gathered in a mob outside our study and once more the door was flung open, and with it the door of fate. Did I take advantage even then of this ultimate opportunity? Not a bit of it! And, what is worse, on this particular occasion my cowardice was so hypnotic that it effected even Littleton; so that in all its history that Powys family has never been so betrayed. To strike a good, straight, honest, violent blow, in simple, open self-defence seemed to be impossible to me. And it is so still! Elderly gentlemen of three-score years are not any longer called upon to knock people down; but they *are* called upon, in ordinary decency, not to allow themselves to present the appearance of a circus-freak of sub-humanity. Even the philosophic Chinese—the least belligerent of all mortals—could teach me something. I would anyway learn from them how, as the phrase is, to “save my face.” A person who *cannot get angry* except with his nearest and dearest —and only with considerable difficulty then—is a fish out of water in this contentious world. He is a sort of anti-human, a male “Aunt Sally,” and it is only a matter of time before even his friends begin to fight shy of him, and to shirk dealing with a fish so queer that if you prick him he doesn’t bleed and if you tickle him he doesn’t laugh.

It is always easy for me, as I have hinted, to act out to the limit any spiritual gesture that has come to appeal to my particular life-illusion; but my dislike of social facetiousness is no spiritual gesture. The *normal humour* of the human race has always been one of the greatest trials of my life. I have my own humour; and I can assure you that it is very often in full activity when I am standing gravely agape among flying repartees like a Hallowe’en turnip head. But the genial jocosities that are the recognized wit of our lively world chill me to the bone. They fill me with an icy distaste; and I am always at a loss how to respond to them. I look at such times as I feel; a fool, a zany, a bewildered, drivelling, drooling “ambassador from the Moon.”

On the other hand Nature has endowed me, as a sort of protective colouring, with a Protean cleverness of my own. Sub-human though I am, I am devilishly shrewd. It is one of my most marked peculiarities. I am a regular Machiavel among idiots. What was it but an infernal cleverness that helped me at the two great crises of my life at Wildman’s; once when I pretended to be mad to avoid being made to throw B\_\_‘s great sponge at that torturer in the room below.—Would I had had the guts to fly to the rescue of his victim, and get my lean fingers on his bull’s throat!—and once, as I shall presently relate, when I was being mobbed by the whole house. My character was forming, rapidly forming, during those years at Sherborne. For one thing clever though I could be at a crisis when I was forced to use my wits, I was too ego-centric, too obstinately committed to my own furtive way of life, too devoted to my sub-human or anti-human sensations, *to want to assert myself*, as a general rule. People who pity me for being “put upon” by self-seekers do not understand me at all. I am a never pitiable; because I have been able, *if I had wanted to*, to escape from almost any imbroglio. But as a rule I did not want to do this, since I was all the while, after my own secretive fashion—”like water seeking its level,” as Llewelyn says— getting by hook or by crook the sensations that I required. Thus for all my extreme cowardice I never was a whimperer or self-pitier. I doubt if anyone has ever lived who pities himself less than I do! I always have the rooted conviction that if I am miserable it is my own fault. “ [...] p. 142-144

Comment peut-il y avoir un contre-pouvoir?  
Toute violence est-elle sans raison?

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

“Over the gulf of those forty years the now white-headed Littleton and the now invalidish Johnny exchanged worldless signals with those two little boys whose whole life in those enchanting purlieus and with those incomparable people had been one scarce broken paradise; and in a sense it was our farewell to those little boys! Back together they receded from this momentary re-incarnation, back hand-in-hand, little Johnny and little Littleton, till they faded into the branches of the cedar on the lawn, into bushes by the fish-pond, into the poplars along the river, into the alders of Alder Dyke. Shall we ever be able to summon them back again, those little wraiths of the past, as we did during that week? Have they retreated now for ever into an oblivion as deep as if they had been buried, side by side with ”The Canon,” under that tall flint tower?

Well! at any rate they were not, those two, like Elia’s Dream-Children, *always* insubstantial. In their day they bustled about in their small world, lively enough, threw their lines into Dye’s Hole, watched the great salmon-trout in Harrod’s Mill-pond, found greenfinches nests in the rose-garden with eggs in August, caught pike with their butterfly-nets and butterflies with their caps, saw a breath-taking vision, at least one of them did, of the almost extinct “Large Copper” in the fields by Oxborough Ferry, swung the old Venetian print that hung above their bed till its corners cracked holes in the ceiling, plunged with a submerging splash, at least one of them did, into the round lily-pond among the frightened frogs, devoured green gooseberries, and pink strawberries, got their boat from “little river” into “big river,” found plums in unknown trees and dab-chicks where they looked for water-rats, learned to say “Sir” to retired captains, “How is my Joy?” to retiring maidens, carried live perch in fish-kettles and dead dace on withy-twigs, and even stole his handcuffs from the village policeman. Yes, in their day, they were substantial enough and different enough from dream-children; *but where are they now*? The persons we have been are lost rather than fulfilled in what we become, and many who labour for bread in a penurious manhood carry within them the ghosts of children who had cake for the asking. “ [...] p. 149-150

Changer est-ce devenir quelqu’un d’autre?

“By slow degrees it has made itself manifest to me that the purpose of my life was to dodge—when I could get leave of absence from my exacting conscience—all obligations to humanity, and to cultivate certain totally useless, purposeless, unprofitable feelings. These feelings, which to me have come to be precious beyond any power of description, are regarded by many as pathetically colourless and sapless, by others as a kind of wilful insanity, by a few as a damnable affectation! “ [...] p. 167

Qu’est ce qui a du sens?

Les passions nous empêchent-elles de faire notre devoir?

N’avons-nous de devoir qu’envers autrui?

Pourquoi un acte est moral?

Qu’avons-nous à gagner à faire notre devoir?

N’est responsable que de ses propres actes?

“Did I share at such times the sub-thoughts, or over-thoughts, that the old earth herself has, as she turns upon her axis, or that the vast volume of the ocean has, as his tide gathers along his beaches or draws back hoarsely into his gulfs?

They were at any rate what might be called sensation-thoughts. They had to do with the impact of the wind on my face and with all those vague, obscure half-memories that the wind can bring with it, full of half-realized impressions from days far off, days perhaps so far-off that they actually belong to previous reincarnations. As I write these lines now, there comes back to me—simply from the mechanical obliteration of all those tiresome rational thoughts and worrying practical thoughts that spoil one’s life—one scene after another from those lonely roads. Even as I try to seize upon them they dissolve and melt away; but in their vanishing they leave a lovely residue, a mysterious satisfaction, that seems to well up from the inner being of old posts, old heaps of stones, old haystacks thatched with straw. From glimpses of white roads, appearing and disappearing in the twilight, these feelings spring; from wayside ditches, desolate ponds, solitary trees, windmills caught against the sky! What I would like to emphasize just here is that the pleasure I got from these things of my solitary walks did not present itself to me as an *aesthetic* pleasure, nor did it call up in my mind the idea of beauty. What gave me these sensations seemed to be some mysterious “rapport” between myself and these things. It was like a sudden recognition of some obscure link, some remote identity, between myself and these objects. Posts, palings, hedges, heaps of stones —they were part of my very soul.

But the mere movement of walking, the mere contact with earth and air and the breath of the free wind as I left the town behind, always seemed able to engender in me a mood in which the present took to itself a sort of winnowed essence of similar memories from the past and thus became a continuity of half-forgotten feelings that welled up in my consciousness and reduced the future to complete non-existence. I thus became on these lonely walks like one who has found the clue to the obliteration of the future; and although I did not feel as though I touched the Eternal, I certainly felt as though I ceased to want anything or wish for anything that I did not already possess. What I possessed was in fact—if I may put it so—a sort of *half-eternity*, made up of a fusion of past and present, with the future, and all its wants and wishes, totally annihilated. “ [...] p. 169-170

L’homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Le futur n’existe-t-il que dans notre pensée?

Le temps est-il la limite de l’homme?

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

“ From the bottom of my soul the sort of life that would best suit my life-illusion, that would nearest fulfil the classic *actor’s* rôle that hits my humour, would be some primitive labour, requiring no skill, but that had an ancient and poetical tradition behind it. I would have nearly all I wanted if I could link this up with the reading of the old classics and with the writing of new romances! My ideal life would be to do *some* manual work every day and some reading of Homer with a crib and to spend the rest of the time either walking or writing or making love. I do not “cotton” to financiers of any kind; but *small* shopkeepers I hold in high esteem, and I have always found that the small shopkeeper in a village is the nicest and kindest person in the place. The sympathy I feel with labourers in the fields is no mere ideal emotion; it is a profound poetical reverence that goes down to the very bottom of my soul. It is mingled with the very life and stuff of my whole sensuous and imaginative being.

As I walked by myself in that monotonous Cambridge country I used to practise what I practised in my walks at Sherborne, a metamorphosic partaking of—or vicarious participation in—the supposed feelings of lonely persons labouring by land and sea. Of course a weak, cowardly, fastidious degenerate like myself cannot *really* enter into the feelings of a peasant, or a factory hand, or a sailor; and of course I am always unspeakably grateful to the great goddess Chance for having made me lucky enough to be able to earn my living by my voice and by my pen; but I *have* the power, say what you please, of a certain direct man-to-man comprehension and *feeling with* such persons so that although *you* may call me a humbug, these labourers do not. The truth is I have a monkish conscience rather than any bourgeois complacency in the presence of those who work, and I always regard it as much harder to work with your hands than with your brain. [...] p. 184

X

“Gooch used frequently to express to me the spiritual difficulty he had in realizing the Pantheistic Absolute which was the object of Spinoza’s singular love. I can see his long white face and curious mouth and unhappy intellectual eyes as he said: “I can’t catch the thing, Powys. I can’t catch the thing!” and he uttered the words just as if the Absolute were a sort of “Questing Beast” and he was Sir Pallenure. Isn’t it Walter Pater, that grave Pyrrhonian monk of God, the man whom these mathematical Cantabs took damned good care to hide away from me, who says somewhere that one curve of a solitary rose-petal is worth the whole of the Spinozistic Absolute? But it was not the flawless, aesthetic beauty of the rose-leaf I was after. No! not that; not *that* at all! Like poor Gooch under his favourite trees by the river-bank, in the wide spaces of King’s, I too am sorely put to it; I too am fain to fumble and grope, and to hum and drum for want of words in a most disconcerting manner. How *can* I catch that stir, that rustle, that indraw sigh, that indescribable *silence* which emanates from the passing of my voyaging soul over all these little, casual chance-groupings of the Inanimate? How can I find the right expression for the feelings that came to me in those days when the wind blew in a certain way as I followed some muddy grass-track along the edge of the Ely Road or the London Road? How can I describe the feeling I got, as if all the scarce-noticed sensations that had come lightly and incidentally to long generations of my ancestors, when they met the rain, or felt the sun, or heard the calling of rooks or the twittering of sparrows, or saw the smoke rising from human hearths, were rushing over me, in a hardly bearable flood of ecstatic happiness, simply because, on that undistinguished road to the railway station, I heard some patient shop assistant mowing his scrap of grass behind a privet-hedge?

I know perfectly well that everybody born into the world has the feelings I am describing, is visited by these indescribable and apparently causeless transports. I am not in the least suggesting that I am peculiar in this. But why, in the Devil’s name, then, do we go on making a cult of everything else except these? Why must politics, religion, philosophy, ambition, revolution, reaction, business, pleasure—all be considered intensely important, and these rare magical feelings not to be considered at all?

“Because, my good John,” you will answer, “these feelings come of themselves, and go of themselves, and don’t leave us any wiser or cleverer or kinder or richer! “

*You have said it.* It is because they *are* different from these things; it is because they represent something totally beyond these things, that such feelings are so precious! A time will come when these feelings will no longer be the monopoly of women and babies and lovers and saints and mystics and idiots! “ p. 193-194

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

L’esprit a-t-il accès aux choses?

La Beauté est-elle promesse de bonheur?

Quelle est la relation entre la beauté et la bonté?

Suis-je le sujet de mes pensées ?

“ Not far from Trumpington Mill—somewhere in the umbrageous purlieus to the rear of the Fitzwilliam Museum—there stands an ancient wall; and as I drifted along to visit my lively satirist, I observed, growing upon this wall, certain patches of grass and green moss and yellow stone-crop. Something about the look of these small growths, secluded there in a place seldom passed, and more seldom noticed, seized upon me and caught me up into a sort of Seventh Heaven.

A few seconds ago, before touching my pen to tell you what kind of Seventh Heaven it was into which, leaning upon the handle of “Sacred,” I was transported, I felt all that I have ever felt, of the burden of this extraordinary moment. It certainly penetrated every recess of my being. I would call it a *beyond sensation*, and it lies in my consciousness now, like a sunken ship, full of fathom-deep treasure. But the touch of my pen—and I suppose it will always be so—breaks the spell I can tell you nothing! It has, however, whatever its fluctuating mystery may be, a power upon me that is like the power of a hidden Mass, celebrated by no human hands. It is impossible for me to describe it! And yet I never see the least patch of lichen, or moss, or grass, in the veinings of an ancient rock but something of the same feeling returns. Not, however, quite the same; for *that* impression, that vision of “Living Bread,” that mysterious meeting-point of animate with inanimate, had to do with some secret underlying world of rich magic and strange romance. In fact I actually regarded it as a prophetic idea of the sort of stories that I myself might come to write; stories that should have as their background the indescribable peace and gentleness of the substance we name grass in contact with the substance we name stone. “ p. 199-200

Y-a-t’il des choses que le langage ne peut pas dire?

L’esprit a-t-il accès aux choses?

La beauté est-elle promesse de bonheur?

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Ne peut-on être heureux qu'au passé?

Connaissons-nous mieux le présent que le passé ?

“ In and out of these motley scenes I would follow my maniacal quest for provocative feminine forms basking in that blazing sunshine and amid the smells of seaweed and fish and tar and sweat and sandwiches and rope and paint and cheap perfumes and foam-drenched petticoats and bilge-water and beer. I ultimately became aware of certain other men-and their eyes, eyes that had almost lost all human expression, shocked me and terrified me—who had evidently reached a point of obsession far beyond my own. No heartless seducers of women, no neurotic perverts, that I have ever encountered have had such a look of being hopelessly *damned* as these elderly gentlemen betrayed in their curiously high-coloured faces, as if they lived on the hearts’ blood of women, as they hunted and stared and eternally stared and hunted! Did the people they stared at ever grow conscious of the eyes of these spiritual hyaenas? I doubt it! My own impression is that few women have the remotest idea of the insane impersonality of masculine lust when it runs amok at these deadly and sterile tangents!

The question arises would a love affair have saved me at that epoch? *Hardly*! I was at that very time on the point of being happily married, and this maniacal pursuit of the sensations of impersonal lust increased rather than diminished after my marriage. If I had become a Turk of the old regime, and had been given a harem of Houris, would this mad desire to stare and stare at women, at the way the gods have moulded them, so differently from men, have come to an end? I doubt it. The curse laid upon lust is not only its maniacal craving for novelty. There is something else. I fancy that even Solomon “in all his glory,” must frequently have left his harem of hundreds to prowl in disguise about the environs of Jerusalem where another generation of forbidden Bathshebas might be glimpsed through cedar-trees and casements and lattices. [...]

Peut-on désirer sans souffrir?

Le désir peut-il se satisfaire de la réalité?

I have told you how deep the instinct of acting goes with me, and how I always feel towards the spiritual gestures it calls upon me to make as if they were religious *acts of grace*, and how I justify it by identifying it with the grandiose rôles played by the people of Homer, and how I feel as if it were the abandonment of this dramatic heightening of one’s personal life-illusion that has produced the widespread sense of futility in our time. Well! I had, during these crazy years, another thrilling experience, when an ecstasy of happiness came over me so intoxicating that it was as if I trod upon air. This happened when I was walking somewhere beyond Old Shoreham and Lancing and was following a path across some fields that seemed to be leading—and did eventually lead—to one of the most picturesque of East Sussex villages. The path passed the gate of a tiny cottage with a rambling garden where a girl was gathering sweet-peas. I wish I could recall what this girl said to this half-mad Bachelor of Arts trying to forget the fatal loveliness of her sex’s legs, as he used his own to walk on and on and on into the sunset; but I can clearly remember the end of our encounter, which is where the point lies. She gave me a bunch of flowers; not sweet-peas, for what she gave me had very long stalks and very large blossoms. Could they have been lilies? Are there any kinds of lilies that bloom while sweet-peas are out? I can’t recall! But this I do know: these long-stalked flowers, whatever they were, tilled me with a most singular rapture. Was I experiencing, in honest-to-God reality, that fantastical frenzy over a beautiful object that Oscar Wilde —poor devil, he was on the edge of the precipice in that year! —was wont to make such to-do about? Not a bit of f it. If I know anything of myself what gave me that ecstasy was partly the kindness of the donor, partly sort of ritualistic feeling, as if I were a priest carrying the pyx, and partly the purged and proud sensation of feeling myself an erect biped—anthropos something-or-other—trudging over the surface of the earth, holding by their cool, fresh stalks a handful of its loveliest children. I had already acquired my lifelong mania against picking flowers; and the fact that I was thus compelled to enjoy the breaking of this law by somebody else added no doubt to the uniqueness of my pleasure.

What in fact I enjoyed was the performance of an act that seemed at once symbolic and pious, pious in the old heathen sense. And, while I am speaking of this, I can well recall a similar thrill of curious satisfaction that suffused my whole being, when once, after my marriage, when I was living at Court House, I had to go to a near-by gamekeeper’s cottage with a wicker basket to get some fresh eggs. These episodes may seem ridiculously trivial; but my concern just now is simply with the history of my strongest feelings, not with a defence of the adequacy of what called them forth.” p. 217-220

En quoi le sentiment esthétique se distingue-t-il du sentiment religieux?

Qu'est-ce qu'une journée réussie?

“And yet this is not altogether true; for I moved blindly, desperately, and with a certain abandoned recklessness, along my obscure “Gloucester Road” of lonely personal sensations. How do I justify such behaviour? How do I justify —do you mean—my being “the soulless monster of selfishness” that some have called me? Indirectly, my friend, I do this, indirectly, indirectly; for I am too wise an antediluvian monster to argue with you in *your* language. But the truth is the transports of thrilling delight that these indescribable sensations of mine give me, these feelings that I would describe as the *marginal sensations* of the human race itself, seem to me so valuable a thing to come to consciousness in this world at all, that I—as this thing’s “medium,” or hollow reed—am entirely justified in being as I am. “

p. 294

Qu’est-ce qui a du sens?

Les passions nous empêchent-elles de faire notre devoir?

N’avons-nous de devoirs qu’envers autrui?

Le passionné est-il ennemi de lui-même ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Pourquoi un acte est moral ?

Suis-je le sujet de mes pensées ?

“When I got the “galley-proofs” of my copy-cat verses— “Odes and Other Poems” was its proud title—I certainly felt a wonderful delight. But I was not deceived. I knew them—who if not I?—for what they were! Had not a certain little girl, not long laid in the cold ground, given me “The Poetical Works of John Keats”? Yes, I knew I was a mere imitating copy-cat, repeating, repeating, repeating the rhythms of men of genius. But though there was nothing in “Odes and Other Poems” to justify it, and though “Odes and Other Poems” might have remained even unto this day my sole printed claim to originality, I knew then, just as I knew twenty years later, when I had not published anything else, that I *was,* in some way impossible to prove, great and for all my cringins and propitiations a terrifyingly formidable genius!

On what did I base this opinion, or conceit, if your prefer? *On nothing*. I mean on nothing outside the silence of my own thoughts and feelings. I had been secretly conscious, ever since in that lane at Shirley I pretended to be “The Lord of Hosts,” that I had the power of tapping some deep reservoir of magnetism that could be used—when I was driven to the wall—to blow the wall up, to lay it flat, like the walls of Jericho. The issue has always been a perfectly simple one. I regard myself as a voice crying in the wilderness, an individual with a devilish shrewd inkling as to the hidden tricks of the creative and destructive forces of the cosmos, and with something more than an inkling as to the craftiest, foxiest, and wisest way of seeking happiness for myself and of giving happiness to the entities I encounter.

Powys Ma., alias Moony, “claims,” in fact, as our cynical Americans say of every human statement, that he is in possession of a “Way” of life, to which the instinct of self-preservation in the human race must ere long bring a great many people, whether they be Communists or Fascists or simply Englishmen. But this “claim” of mine is naturally regarded by my enemies as one of the most megalomaniacal follies that have ever obsessed the barber-college brain of a bowing and scraping dancing-master in a young ladies’ academy and by my enemy-friends as a lovable weakness in a windy oracle, whom yet one cannot help liking.

Finding the real satisfaction of my pride therefore in a secret sense of power that did not *need* to prove itself to the world by any overt evidence, feeling myself, in plain words, to be—in spite of all evidence—a great magician, it was nothing to me that “Odes and Other Poems” was so thin a thing. I lived then, as I live now, *entirely in the present*. I had no ambition. I did not make—I have never made—one single move to forward my career.” p.225-226 [...]

“It is most important in writing the tale of one’s days not to try to give them the unity they possess for oneself in later life. A human story, to bear any resemblance to the truth, must advance and retreat erratically, must flicker and flutter here and there, must debouch at a thousand tangents. But it is quite clear, and borne out in a thousand cases and incidents, that I lived so completely in the present all along that what is called ambition had no room or time to sprout. Ambitious people are forced—as one learns from reading their lives—to cut down rigidly upon their contemplative tendencies, to harden themselves *against* their momentary sensations. I *lived* for sensations; and have always, in my deepest heart regarded such a life as the only adequate return we can make to Nature for giving us birth!

Human sensations are Nature’s self-expression. They are the earth’s awareness of herself. They are like the blossoming of flowers—the only way in which the rooted life of the organism can realize itself and *be* itself. Besides, as long as I had enough to eat and drink, enough to purchase a certain measure of privacy, enough to buy tobacco and cigarettes, enough to take me where I could turn upon the ankles of women my idolatrous and ravished stare, enough to save me from working in a school or an office or a barber’s shop or a factory or a farm or a mine or on ship-board, enough in plain words to dodge, avoid, shirk, run away from, sneak out of that *manual labour* upon which—and don’t you suppose I didn’t always know it!—we other men are privileged and petted parasites, what on earth did I want a career for? You will say —putting one’s duty to humanity aside—”for the sake of winning reputation, approval, respect, honour, renown!” But, my good friend, you are forgetting “the rock whence I was hewn and the pit whence I was digged.” You are forgetting my father! I inherited from him, and was strengthened and fortified in, by watching him and listening to him, an abysmal personal pride that was sufficient to itself under all conceivable conditions. “ p. 237-238

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

Qu’est-ce qui a du sens?

Est-il préférable de se connaître?

Prendre conscience de soi est-ce devenir étranger á soi?

L’idée d’inconscient exclut-elle celle de liberté?

L’homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Comment peut-il y avoir un contre-pouvoir?

Prendre son temps est-ce le perdre?

Travailler est-ce perdre son temps?

La division du travail sépare t-elle les hommes?

“That is the curse upon anyone who has once got the gad-fly grubs of neurosis under the skin. These devils have no sooner been driven from sucking blood out of one part of you, than behold! they are trying it again at another. All I can say is— for the comfort of any kindred sufferers who may read these lines—that it *is* possible, by the crafty use of certain habitual mental tricks, without having to retire whither my poor guide to Court House retired, to go on living in the world and having moments too of thrilling enjoyment, while you remain perfectly aware that you are *not wholly sane*. Let me indeed breathe this in your ears. There is a deep and subtle pleasure, that only we madmen know, in outwitting these psychiatrists by never being driven to the point of having to undergo their treatment, or if you *have* to undergo it, in making them believe you are cured, when you know perfectly well you are *not* cured! And let me add, that, just as I saved myself from my worst suffering at Sherborne by pretending to be mad, it is possible to save yourself, *the other way round*, by pretending to be sane!” p. 257-258

Comment peut-il y avoir un contre-pouvoir?

Que pouvons-nous savoir des autres?

Qu’avons-nous à gagner á faire notre devoir?

Faut-t-il préférer le bonheur á la vérité?

N’y a t-il aucune vérité dans le mensonge?

Ce qui est vrai en théorie peut-il être faux en pratique?

N’avons-nous de devoirs qu’envers autrui?

L’exigence de justice et l’exigence de liberté sont-elles séparables?

“ I can for example derive extraordinary pleasure from feeling itself to be a *young girl*. This girlish metempsychosis is the one that I enjoy toying with in my imagination most of all. And this is exactly—if you are a real psychological critic—what you would expect a Words worthian like me to feel. Of course I often enjoy feeling myself to be an extremely old Punchinello-Puppet, but when I change from this into the part of a young girl, in the complicated cosmic play of which I am the protagonist—aye! but what a thrill I get! It has always been a singular satisfaction to me to indulge in this curious imagination. I derive a quaint sort of , genuine erotic pleasure from turning my withered elderly shanks into girlish limbs.

Indeed my own view of all this pathological theorizing that Freud has started—my own sympathies are very much in favour of Jung—is that our present psycho-analytical dogmas break down when they deal with a person who, like me, has both an abnormally powerful imagination and an abnormally strong will. For myself I disagree with this whole modern tendency to disparage the will and the imagination in favour of *letting yourself go*. My theory is that it is with the reason that we attain the irrational, with the will that we change our character, and with the imagination that we re-create the world!

If for instance I were to announce to an orthodox psychiatrist that I derive extraordinary pleasure from imagining myself a young girl, especially with a young girl in love with another young girl, his stupidly rigid pigeon-holes of thought compel him to think of me as—well! you know the sort of jargon he would use in the effort to turn me into some fixed, definite, finally-labelled victim of abnormal eroticism. Not at all! A person can be childish without having infantile fixation. A person can be influenced by his father without having the opposite of the Œdipean Complex. What I would say of myself is that I have a morbid fastidiousness, a super-refined, almost *maidenly* detestation of the grosser aspects of normal sexuality. It seems quite simple to me. In my non-human cult for impossibly slender sylphs I resolve myself—like all true contemplative ecstatics— *into the element I contemplate*.

When I write my essay about my great master Wordsworth I shall show how his cerebral mystical passion for young women is intimately bound up with his abnormally sensual sensitiveness to the elements. *He wanted his girl to be an Elemental*. And in his poetry—where people betray their deepest souls—he loved, above all, to *imagine himself a girl*. I myself idolize the particular type of a girl I call a sylph to such a tune that I want to destroy everything that is not sylph-hood. But I still want to make love to what attracts me! And so, refining upon flesh-and-blood and winnowing flesh-and-blood, till it becomes purified if not beyond Nature certainly beyond normal *human* nature, I contemplate my sylph as if I were another sylph, or, if you prefer it, as if I were a salamander contemplating the ravishing limbs of an undine. It is extraordinary to me, considering the abnormal strength of my constitution and the demonic force of my will, how brittle, how fragile, how attenuated, how purged, thinned-out and transparent, how like a quivering candle-flame, all my intensest responses to life are. When I am peaceful and content or when I am struggling with obstacles I feel perfectly solid and opaque; but the minute a thrilling wave of happiness transports me, I feel as if I turned into air, into fire, into water! I actually experience the physical sensations of floating, of flaming, of flowing. Who knows if a certain kind of happiness does not dehumanize me and restore me to my natural birthright of Elementalism? [...]

And now I must turn to quite a different matter. I have always had a very strong, an almost hurtingly strong sympathy with tramps. I would identify myself, in a sort of imaginative projection of my spirit, with these strange wayfarers. There is an awareness that has been the accompaniment of all my days; namely an intense realization of the privilege of having a roof over my head, a blanket over my bed, dry boots on my feet, a good fire to warm my shins, and a dish of bread and milk in front of me! Never have I taken for granted the inestimable privilege of being assured of the necessities of life. It is the one point where I drop my touchy individualism and grow humanly and most humbly thankful. I feel grateful not only to Chance, but to the actual human race, whose “collective” activities in this great twenty-five thousand years “Plan” of theirs, have given me protection from these elements I am always praising so! “

p. 274-277

Peut-on dire d’un désir qu’il est anormal?

Est-il absurde de désirer l'impossible?

Le désir nous impose-t-il d'en faire l'épreuve?

Le désir nous éloigne-t-il du vrai ?

Le désir peut-il se satisfaire de la réalité?

Prendre conscience de soi est-ce devenir quelqu’un d’autre?

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

Qu'appelle-t-on manquer d'imagination?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

“It is a curious and significant thing—for before very long these lively vandals within my iron frame, my cursed ulcers, succeeded in making both wine and cake totally impossible for me—that just as in Rome Willy O’Neill fetched us that divine bottle so on our way back, before he left us at Marseilles, he conjured up an extremely aged and decrepit Frenchman, who in the middle of the night, when we were faint from want of food, offered us large slices, light, crumbly, honey-tasting, of the most miraculous home-made cake I shall ever know again. The scent of damask roses was mingled with the sharp salt airs that came in to us from the darkness outside; and as we ate that cake, rushing through the night along the shores of the Mediterranean, it seemed to me that having drunk the blood, I was now permitted to devour the flesh, of some anonymous “Numen inest,” some “unknown god” of my remote Cymric ancestors, that I might—and again might not—call upon at a crisis. Or does it happen that at certain particularly sacramental moments in your life you are permitted to enter into some mysterious conscious relation with the spirit of the earth itself? “ p. 297

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Y a t’il une beauté naturelle?

”A parrot to an eagle came.

And boasted that he knew

The language and the ways of men,

And things both old and new.

The eagle looked him up and down

With eyes of burning coal:

‘Fly with me then towards the sun

And hear the thunders roll!’

‘I am afraid,’ the parrot said.

The eagle laughed full high:

‘That is a word I have not read

In earth, or sea, or sky.

Back to your perch! These lonely heights

Were not for parrots made.

I would not leave my eagle flights

To learn to be afraid!’” p. 313

Être cultivé rend-il meilleur?

La culture est-elle libératrice?

Le développement technique transforme-t-il les hommes?

Y a t-il plus à craindre qu’à espérer de la technique?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

“ I have been much less able to make friends with real men of the soil than my father was; far less than my brothers have been. Why is this? I think it is because my maniacal pursuit, of what seems to flee from me in ever-narrowing perspective, causes me to turn a lack-lustre and not *deeply-involved* eye upon these Hesiodic figures, the poetry of whose life gives me such ideal pleasure. “ [...]

“No, I don’t believe I excite a quarter of the confidence that Llewelyn does. Human beings - even the simplest—are quick to catch these nuances of character. People know that my nervous flatteries and lively propitiations cover up a touchy animal yearning to be off and away. In a certain sense it might be said that it is the ridiculous impulsiveness and the transparent abandonment of my manner with people that accounts for this curious lack in my life of friendships with men of the soil. I puzzle them, I agitate them, I embarrass them, just as certain kinds of highly-strung women disconcert me. “ p. 321-322

Pour aimer autrui faut-il le connaître?

Faut-il s’identifier á autrui pour le comprendre?

Que pouvons-nous savoir des autres?

“He is a man of action; but a man of action of a very special type, the type *who act in order to feel,*  not the type who lose themselves in action. “ p. 348

Exister est-ce agir?

Exister est-ce profiter de l’instant présent?

L’esprit a t-il accès á la matière?

“I think I am more likely to go out of my way to be nice to persons of whose character and tone and temper I disapprove than he is. Llewelyn says I am a spreader of carpets. He says I spread carpet after carpet before people, leading them on and on and on, till finally they discover they have crossed a kind of pit—like those pits I dug for old Curme in the potato-garden—and at *that* point, when they can’t step back, I fall upon them, bursting out in one of my quivering rages and denouncing them for things which *at the time they did them* I passed off with the utmost affability.“ p. 353

Comment peut-il y avoir un contre pouvoir?

Que pouvons-nous savoir des autres?

“What I mean is that our modern pseudo-science and pseudo-realism tend to corrupt the up-mounting Spring of life-acceptance in us, which keeps us going in spite the “urchins” of the First Cause. The old religious faith gave our forefathers the stoical habit of drawing their life-energy not from external conditions but from within. That they called this power, welling up from inside themselves by the name of “God” had an historical justification which is lacking to-day. But *that* is no reason for deserting the living well-spring of mysterious magic within us. Never mind the name! The point is that we *have* the power of re-creating the universe from the depths of ourselves. In doing so we share the creative force that started the whole process. It is personality, the out-rushing energy of living organisms, that underlies all the criss-cross currents of the world. Every time a living being gathers itself grimly together, and draws on its inmost vitality to be happy *in spite of all,* it is doing what our sturdy ancestors called “praying”. “ p. 361

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

L’homme a-t-il nécessairement besoin de religion?

Une connaissance scientifique du vivant est-elle possible?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

Peut-on être heureux dans un monde injuste?

“I had acquired a mania for Walt Whitman in those days; and I used to lie at dawn, for I woke early in that place, looking out over the roofs of London, and trying to cope with the impressions of life in the way he did. But I soon found that it was impossible for me to “accept” the cosmos—all these loathsome abominations, all these shifting Masks of Fear—in Walt Whitman’s *tout ensemble* style. For a long time the clue to any master-word for myself was obscure; but as the years passed I finally discovered this magic sign, this thaumaturgic gesture, in the word “forget.” Perhaps Walt Whitman really *was* the one man in the world who actually could envisage all and accept all. But I was different. Or did I see more than he saw? *Were things worse than he knew?* These are questions no man can answer! The nerves of the tortured alone know the torment. But I found by degrees that for me the clue lay in having faith in my power of “forgetting”’what I could *not* accept. Thus below all my energy and ebullience of spirit and Pangloss-like insistence on the best rather than the worst, at bottom I am a pessimist. How can I be anything else as long as there are entities in the world—human or sub-human—who are doomed to endure such unendurable things? I have enough imagination to *become*, although in a faint indirect half-and-half way, these children of perdition, these little ones “offended” by the First Cause, these lynched negroes, these victims of cancer, these animals in traps, these vivisected dogs.

But I am no saint. My primal affair is the difficult one of keeping “Number One” happy. Have I told you yet, by the way, that one of the words my father found it impossible to pronounce was the word “difficult”? He always pronounced it, even in his sermons, “*difficut*” leaving out completely the letter “l.” But though I am no saint, and though I fight in my own devious fashion for my own hand, I refuse to be “squared” by any tricks of the First Cause. I won’t say I am not grateful to *something* — for gratitude is a strong impulse with me—that I am not the victim of American policemen, or of Chinese bandits, or of an Alabama mob, that I am not a Jew in the hands of Hitler, or a dog in the hands of a vivisector, or a foundling in one of our old-fashioned English workhouses, but I tend to lavish this gratitude upon some special guardian angel rather than upon Providence. To thank God for sparing you, when He so delights in tormenting others, has always seemed to me a questionable proceeding.

I don’t mind being “archaic,” as the Russians say, with regard to other feelings, but when it comes to this one I confess I am a modern of the moderns. It seems odd that the son, grandson, and great-grandson of a clergyman, not to speak of the father of one, or of a priest, as *he* would prefer me to say, should presume to change the names of the two Greatest Commandments. But I cannot do less than plead guilty to this impertinence. In place of: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” I would substitute : “Thou shalt force thyself to be happy in thine own soul”; and in place of: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” I would substitute: “Thou shalt be merciful and pitiful and considerate *to all living organisms*.’’

For what, in the name of Jesus does this biblical “love” mean? That’s what puzzles me! I can understand D. H. Lawrence’s “dark gods,” which are simply erotic attractions and repulsions; and I can understand perfectly the Chinese reverence for parents. And I can understand tenderness and pity and wonder and awe in the presence of *any* human being. It is this business of “lovingness” that puzzles me, and, to speak quite plainly does not altogether please me. I have seen, now and again, a look in the eyes of this “love” that gives me a very queasy feeling. Nietzsche and D.H. Lawrence are undoubtedly right. There is something “funny” about this Christian “love.” At any rate it needs a thorough heathen analysis. Dostoievsky who understood it to its fathomless depths was himself doubtful about it. And it is not as if I hadn’t in my own nerves a devilishly meticulous conscience. But my conscience has *never*, not in all my life, commanded me to “love.” Perhaps this is not anyway the business of your conscience. But I don’t think I exactly “love” *myself*, though I exploit my sensibilities to get the particular sensations my nature requires. No! the character I admire is a character that is a rod of iron to itself and a well-spring of tenderness and pity for others; a character that forces itself to be happy in itself, blames no one but itself, and compels itself to clear away obstacles from the path to happiness for every organism it encounters.” p. 374-376

N’avons-nous de devoirs qu’envers autrui?

Le bonheur est-il dans l’inconscience?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

Faut-il préférer le bonheur à la vérité?

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Une action desinteresse est-elle possible?

Pourquoi un acte est moral?

Faut-il s'identifier à autrui pour le comprendre ?

Peut-on aimer son prochain comme soi-même?

Respecter tout être vivant, est-ce un devoir moral ?

“”What do you *exactly* see when you look at these conventional pictures?” she would indignantly ask, in the true Paul Valéry manner of trying fiercely to reach the unappeasable objective of perception, tearing away the subjective as if it were some sort of clinging bindweed.

“I see what pleases me in Nature,” I would reply, “only *more* of it; and with the rest left out. “

“But what do you *feel*?” my boy-girl would insist.

“I’ll tell you in two words, my dear.” I would answer. “I feel *sensual lust*. My contemplation of these old tree-stumps, of these bits of broken wall, of that ancient bridge, with the sheep crossing it for ever and for ever, of that far-away silvery gleam on the distant sea, gives me the same sensation that I get when I contemplate you yourself; at least when I contemplate you when you are in a placid mood or, better still, fast asleep! Yes, what I feel when I gaze in such deep satisfaction at these eighteenth-century landscapes, is a definite psychic sensuality. It is much more than the physical sensation of eating and drinking. It is exactly like what I feel, when you, my beautiful one, allow me to hold you on my lap! “ p.414

La beauté est elle promesse de bonheur ?

“I saw most of these field-paths, these wayside heaps of stones, these hawthorn stumps, these wind-blown tamarisk-bushes, these dung-heaps by old cattle-barns, these cart-ruts going sea, once only, for I was always exploring in new directions, but for that very reason, in my sensitized state, they became more than just hedges and ditches round the town of Bognor!

Not that they were transformed, not that they became picturesque or “artistic.” But I saw them as they had entered, and as they had left, the consciousness of men and women, going about their affairs, seeing them without seeing them, as they followed their purposes and their desires. But I saw them as they were—no! as they were when they had passed through the half-conscious consciousness of all these human minds. I saw them as you see the designs round the illuminated letters in old breviaries. From being “minute particulars” they became “universals,” each one an enchanted “gleichnis,” or symbol, of that secret burden of unspoken knowledge under which all those inanimate things that are the background of our life, droop, stiffen, or hold their breath when you catch them off-guard.” p. 378-379

“But I remember how, when wandering with Willy in the neighbourhood of Les Halles, down in some narrow streets among tall, ancient, very Gothic-looking houses, houses that had that dim, rich, massive, *intricate* appearance, which, of all things in an old historic city fascinates me the most, we both looked up, just as a couple of Pantagruelians, and caught sight of a lovely sylph-like figure looking down upon us with intense interest from a mediaeval casement high up above our heads. This vision, I recollect, was as disturbing to William as it was to John, but whether it was John or William who made the gesture that caused the figure to disappear I cannot tell. Its vanishing was clearly not followed by any descent to the street-door; and, though we could not help lingering there a while, she never came back to that high mediaeval window. Even now, as I think of this incident, an indescribable sensation, like that of some old romance of a thousand years ago, steals over me. If you cannot follow me, reader, in this, I have no more to say: but I am certain that my own secretest happiness, as I go about the world, comes from certain revelations of this kind to which I am porous, and to which I am continually struggling to make myself more porous.

These revelations have to do with precisely such recurrent human situations as the one in this case, of two men watching from the pavement of a street a solitary girl in a high window. You may laugh at me, as I am accustomed to being laughed at, but I cannot tell you how strongly I feel that the kind of imagination which the gods have given me is *more* than imagination! In fact almost all the power we *call* “imagination” may come from an actual tapping of some great reservoir of planetary, if not of cosmic, experience. As I write about this episode now, the whole thing comes over me as if from the touch of a magic wand! It is because of these revelations of the eternally recurrent moments of human life, moments which, like this one of two men looking at a girl in a window, must have repeated themselves for thousands of years, that I feel such a nostalgic preference for ancient buildings over modern ones.

To get this sense of “eternal recurrence” which is to my mind the secret of the most significant poetry of our race and a feeling far more important than any scientific “law,” you must have *something* old in the background. Nature is always old, and therefore Nature can always serve this purpose; but, if you are flung into the midst of a city, what you *must* have is the presence somewhere or other of buildings old enough to give you this sense of the continuity of the generations. To the modern aesthete all that I am saying now will sound literary, sentimental, *affected*. But it is these moderns themselves, not I, who are the “affected” ones. *They are shutting off the magnetic current* between themselves and the accumulated poetic feeling of our race’s long history.

No, this emotion of mine, which always returns to me when I think of that figure at the high Gothic window, amid a dim intricacy of balconied masonry, must have, whatever its secret may be, a mysterious connection with the organic link that binds together the human generations. We inherit other things from our remote ancestors; *why should we not inherit particular memories*? Why should we not inherit, buried fathom-deep in the soul, certain intensely vivid moments of awareness, moments that were experienced by the men of old time hundreds, even thousands of years, before we were born? But even if what we inherit is only the capacity for response, or the groove of response, to such heightened moments, it is certain that, just as we add something of our own experience to the great familiar works of art, like *Hamlet* or *Faust*, so we are all of us allowed to re-experience in our own lives emotions and gestures that have recurred again and again down the ages. A fusion of balconies and roofs, is, I admit, a simple enough image and no unusual one, but by having recurred through so many ages and by having gathered to itself the feelings of so many generations, it comes to be something symbolic and mysterious. This actual girl may have been a silly little good-for-nothing, a wanton hussy, a selfish baggage; but that is only what she was *superficially*. In essentials—though she were the most frivolous girl in the town—she answered to the gathered-up poetic emotion of thousands and thousands of years! “ p. 435-437

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Autrui m'apprend-il quelque chose sur moi-même ?

L’esprit a t-il accès aux choses?

Qu'appelle-t-on manquer d'imagination?

Quelle est la part de l'inné et de l'acquis dans le caractère?

L’idée d’inconscient exclut-elle celle de liberté ?

“Arnold Shaw has had a greater effect upon my life than almost any other person. He remains, for I am thankful to say when I recently visited him on Staten Island he was just the same, the most unmalicious, unvindictive, and, in many ways, *unselfish* character I have ever known. But I must be careful what I say; for the bed-rock of his character resembles my own. That is to say in the depths of his being he is sceptical about everything that exists, or subsists, or that is *said* to exist or subsist. Yes, at the deepest bottom of his heart he is sceptical. He is indeed—just as I am—a natural-born disciple of the greatest of all philosophers. I refer of course to the philosopher, Pyrrho, who when asked, at the end, whether he was alive or dead, replied, “I do not know.”

But now I am going to initiate you, reader, into an important psychological secret, which, like all the deepest secrets of our contradictory human nature, sounds at first like a paradox. As Heraclitus long ago taught—and the indestructible *livingness*, as even Goethe was forced to allow, of certain aspects of the Christian faith bears out his teaching—the magnetic energy of the system of things is dualistic, and depends upon the coming together of opposites and of contraries. Arnold was, and no doubt is still, a born doubter; and as for myself there is much I cannot believe. But, and here lies the paradox, so far from this profound scepticism in Arnold and myself lending itself to the bad sides of our character, we have invariably found that the more we indulged it the nearer did certain aspects of our eccentricity approach to what—queer fish though we were—belonged to the realm of Simon-pure sanctity.

Of all attitudes of the pure intellect the most utter scepticism is the one—out of some paradox in the occult nature of the cosmos—that lends itself, when you come really to consider it, to the life and to the condition of being a saint. I am, as I tell you, both an anti-narcissist and an anti-exhibitionist. I would blush, as Rabelais says, “like any black dog,” to catch myself approaching the verge of these aberrations. But I cannot help often recalling a certain family-group picture that shows me as such a hopeless Ninny, as such an imbecile-idealist, that I always summon it up before me when I desire, for purposes of my own, to identify myself with extreme foolishness.

To believe in nothing, to be a Pyrrhonian sceptic down to the very bottom of your nature, and yet to put into practice— if not actually to feel—many of the most subtle emotions which have been from time immemorial linked up with the idea of a saint, does not that strike your mind, reader, as having in it not only something for which *irony*, with all its nuances, is only a rough-and-tumble synonym, but something which marks a real step forward in that planetary *casuistry* with the difficulties of which all higher intelligences are forever struggling?” p. 446-447

Le doute: Une force ou une faiblesse?

Notre liberté de pensée a-t-elle des limites ?

“What I am going to confess to you now is really very curious; but I get the same pleasure from yielding up my egotism with people as I get from the malice with which I play the zany! Everybody I meet seems to want to assert their ego. “I! I! I!” they cry. No one seems to get the depraved pleasure I get from turning my “I” into thin air and helping my friend’s “I” to swell and swell till it’s a regular balloon.

My progress and track through Life can be easily followed by all the wonderful balloons that go sailing up to the sky; balloons that formerly were little miserable soap-bubbles! No one—not even my intimate friends—can possibly realize the shifts, the subterfuges, the evasions, the devices, the serpentine coilings, the mole-like burrowings, to which I am always resorting, purely and solely to ward off some hurt to their pride, some blow to their life-illusion, some loss to their self-esteem - and this with practically every person I meet! It is interesting that I should have thus been inspired to discover a way of “acquiring merit” unknown to any Christian cult. Perhaps it is really some trick, derived—if there were by remote chance *anything* in my pretence that I am a re-incarnation of Taliessin from the ancient Druids.

But it really is curious why I should have come to have such a deep superstitious mania for trying to make every living entity I encounter think more highly of itself. That is what I do! I flatter the life-illusion of birds, fishes, beasts—especially dogs and cats, to whom, without any “love” for animals, I quickly become a slave—and of every man, woman and child I meet.” p.453-454

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

Peut-on aimer son prochain comme soi-même?

Une action désintéressée est-elle possible ?

“What happiness from life we can attain, what revelations about life we can reach, what beauty in life we can respond to, must always have as their background—so, in my desperation I argued—an awareness of the terrible necessity of forgetting the unthinkable things which the cruelty of the First Cause has prepared both for those who accept Him and those who reject Him. What I endeavoured to indicate was that though we all had to forget so much, there was no reason why we should pretend there was nothing to forget, or nothing beyond what a sturdy nature was able to face.

It was, I think, this realization of the appalling cruelty of life and the unspeakable depths of wickedness in human beings, that made my lectures more acceptable to Catholics and Communists and Jews than to any others. The mediaeval universe, as we know from Dante, had as its very foundation those eternal sufferings for which *Divino Amore* has created a cosmic “locale” from the beginning, and in the Catholic liturgy we pray—just as Unanumo and my friend J. W. Williams were “always praying—”O deliver us from Eternal Death! O deliver us from Eternal Death!”

There was always a sort of under-tide in my lectures indicating that however much moralists tried to put the onus of the unspeakable abominations in the world, and of all the sufferings of animals and children in the world, upon our power of free will, it still remains, as St. Paul says, that “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together”; and I must have felt as I tried to make this clear that the terrible *lacrimae rerum* in the System of Things was *allowed for* more thoroughly in the Catholic temper than in the more boisterous “aura” of Protestant ministers or ethical preachers. It was allowed for—so it seemed to me—at every point in the Catholic cult, not only in the idea of the Inferno, but in the Wounds of Christ, in the Sword that pierces His Mother’s heart, and in all the wild desperate ritual-cries that are so full of that planetary “groaning and travailing.” Then again the mere Cult of the Mother of God seems to hint at a certain element of irrational pity behind the universe, to which those of us who suffer from its judicial cruelty can turn for relief.” P. 463-464

Le bonheur est-il dans l'inconscience ?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

“But I had yet another and a far more subtle way of “acquiring merit” and that was the manner in which I refrained from any attempt to change the characters of the new friends I made or to bully them into the values that I held. Some deep instinct put it into my head to believe that all sentient living things can have a right to their own personal identity and their own personal pleasures. I had come to recognize that in conversation with people it is silly to try to force them to embrace *your* values, *your* disgust, *your* excitements, and that it is a *splendide mendax*, a meritorious treachery, to flatter them into self-complacency and well-being. I felt with all my imagination, as I have already hinted, that every organism in the world ought to be fed, comforted and “jollied along,” and that as long as you could give their poor forlorn nerves a few thrills of ecstasy in this bitter and unfeeling world, any number of lies” were lawful.” p.466

Pourquoi un acte est moral ?

N’y a-t-il aucune vérité dans le mensonge ?

“But their real soul, their inmost soul, *they keep entirely to themselves*. And I do not think it is from reserve or reticence that they do this. They do it for the same reason that they would find it impossible to refer to their secret sexual life. They are unaware of so much as the existence of this inner Being of theirs, this Eternal Being who has such strange raptures! Yes, I know I am on the right track here. The spiritual life, the erotic life, the intellectual life, the life of the awareness of our subtler senses, is simply non-existent to most American men. Mind ye, I don’t say it is not there. It *must* be there. But they are innocently unconscious of it. How they find anything to talk about with one another is a mystery to me. They are fond of bawdy stories and humorous anecdotes but when these come to an end unless you plunge into the technique of machinery or the management of your business it is hard to keep things from falling flat.

American women on the other hand are as sensitive to the mystical-sensual aspects of life as women in the old world, and in mental restlessness and general intellectual acquisitiveness I think they have a passionate curiosity beyond that of the old world.

But American men are most assuredly a race by themselves among all the men on the face of the earth. There are no men like them. I know *where I am* with a Negro, with a Chinaman, with a Mohammedan, with a Spaniard, with a Russian, with a New Zealander, with a Hungarian, with a German, with a Turk. But I don’t know where I am with an American. I do not say that he embarrasses me or makes me feel shy, or that I lack gratitude to him for his benevolence; but I cannot relax in his presence, or let myself go, or speak my mind. He is frank where I would be secretive; and again he is reserved where I chatter like a magpie. It would be difficult to be in the company of an Englishman of my own class for five minutes without giving myself away in a manner that would make all but my oldest American friends think I had gone off my head.

I don’t necessarily mean give myself away in erotic things. I mean in whimsies, caprices, fantasies, manias, humours, oddities, idiosyncracies, apathies, antipathies, sympathies, prejudices, the whole paraphernalia of that pyschic-sensuous margin of life which is the most precious thing in the world. No, I don’t mean obvious erotic things, or obvious obscene things! These I have heard talked about in America, either when men were alone or when men and women of the intelligentsia were getting drunk together. I am not referring to things that are shocking or outrageous or scandalous. I am referring to things that are evasive and subtle, things of atmosphere, things of religion, things belonging to those floating, drifting mysterious over-tones and under-tones of life which are in reality overtaking us all the time, but of which if I spoke to an American man he would look as uncomfortable as if I had turned before his very eyes into what they call a “fairy” or into what they call a “cake-eater.” [...]

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

Toutes les cultures se valent-elles ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Faut-il s'identifier à autrui pour le comprendre ?

Some Europeans have quarrelled with the kindness of Americans. Far off from me be such ingratitude! I here and now protest to all the recording angels in the occult universe that I have received more unalloyed and disinterested kindness in one year in America than in ten in my own country! What are the dominant American virtues? *Kindness and humility!* No unchristian virtues these, eh? as Mr. Pecksniff might opine. But it is true; and these two holy cardinal virtues form the largest components of that simple heathen goodness which Sir Walter Scott with his last breath told his son-in-law “was all that mattered.”

American men are tragic without knowing that they are tragic. They are tragic, by reason of the desolate thinness and forlorn narrowness of their sensual and mystical contacts. Mysticism and sensuality are the things that most of all redeem life. Let the workers march to triumph, singing the International. But when you *have* marched, when you *have* reorganized society when you *have* given the people bread and the circus, the question comes*, what next*? It is then that we want to worship the elements; it is then that we want to return to the imaginative and poetic life that Science has for so long been destroying. [...]

This impersonalization, this thinning down of the life-pulses, the life-nerves, the life-senses, the life-imagination of human beings has been achieved in America without the least restriction upon unbounded capitalism. The phrase “rugged individualism” has grown to be the catch phrase to describe the life-destroying condition of this old state of affairs. Individuals became “rugged”—though such “ruggedness” looked repulsively *sleek* to the naked eye—by hardening their hearts against all the things in life that can be described as “poetical or philosophical“. Our unfortunate human nature has never been subjected to conditions quite so anti-pathetic to all the most interesting stimuli to poetic human feeling since the beginning of the world, as it has been subjected to in America. One can only hope now that the great Mr. Roosevelt, by some inspired conjuring-trick, may be able to change the actual tempo of human psychology in this amazing country in at least *some* important ways.

Toutes les cultures se valent-elles ?

L'art est-il moins nécessaire que la science ?

La beauté est elle promesse de bonheur ?

En général quand une chose devient utile cesse-t-elle d'être belle ?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

And yet I know well how greatly I shall miss, when I leave America, certain free and noble aspects of life there. When I think of our English social distinctions, and of our deep-rooted snobbishness, that evil vice from which we all, without exception suffer, when I think how afraid of each other we all are, how abominably self-conscious about these wretched little differences, how nervously patronizing to those “below,” how nervously obsequious to those “above,” when I think how many levels and sub-levels of social life we possess, to be struggled into, or dropped out of, when I think of all the conventional bird-lime there is to be washed off, before we can de-class ourselves out of “upper class” or “middle-class” or “working-class,” *into intelligent and indulgent humanity*, I can make a shrewd guess at what I shall miss.

Toutes les cultures se valent-elles ?

Est-ce l’égalité des droits qui assure l’égalité des hommes ?

There *is* real democracy in America; and in spite of all the wicked power of money you feel it all the time. A man is a man in America, and a woman a woman, though the former *may* be called a “guy” and the latter be ever so “emancipated” and “highbrow.” That he is a de-personalized man, pathetically anxious to conform to type, heart breakingly averse to developing anything idiosyncratic or original, does not un-man him; or that she feels towards him a double charge of feminine contempt for the male’s lack of subtlety does not *divest her* of her womanhood.

Vaguely conscious of the psychic and sensual sterility of his native air the American’s attitude to Old World values is shown in his troubled, half humorous, half bewildered restlessness. Seeking he knows not what, he rushes about in ever-improving automobiles, drugging himself, distracting himself, exhausting himself, in a blind sub-conscious struggle to find that psychic-sensuous Absolute of human satisfaction which the basic conditions of his life deny him. As long as he can be a pioneer, all is well! Any primeval wrestling with Nature solaces him while it numbs and atrophies him. But the tragedy of an American begins when his pioneer-psychology has no further outlet. Desperately then does he hunt the wind, recklessly then does he rake the dust! To say he worships the dollar is a preposterous lie. It is we who worship *me money*, as Sexton Truggins puts it in Theodore’s book. What the American worships is not even power. It is some will-o-the-wisp *idea* of power, bringing with it the prestige, the reputation, the glow, the glory of being the one who has ”huffed” the other, in the great cosmic game. What the American cannot grasp, and what gives him a vertiginous and ghastly sense of a yawning gulf, is the planetary law of Nature that all human action is only a means to contemplation. [...]

If I have learnt anything from my life in America it is a certain lonely and perhaps rather desperate stoicism, a certain stark endurance of one’s fate in the presence of air and water and fire and the basic rock-structures of this earth. You must remember that every American man is a Jack of all Trades. In the midst of his towering cities, in the forlorn and woefully standardized “residential-sections” he has built for himself, you find this cheerful, nervous, restless, humble-minded person, without mental recreations, without aesthetic interests, without spiritual or sensuous contemplation, hammering, sawing, chopping, brushing, cleaning, polishing, improving, pulling down, building up, like a competent, shrewd, cynical, kindly, but quite mad, super-artisan. He may be a manipulator of half the railroads of the country, or he may be a furnace-Stoker in a flimsy apartment-house, put him on his back underneath a broken motor-car, and you will see a man who can be happy—and perhaps only entirely happy—when he is tinkering at the bolts and screws and pistons that he, or others like him, have caused to take shape from the bowels of a gouged-out planet! It is this competent grasp of the essentials of machinery, of tools and engines, of inventions and the art of running inventions, this restless concentration on the industrial exploitation of Nature, combined with an absence of all aristocratic airs, that creates the yearning and wistful admiration with which our Russian friends—since their upheaval—tend to regard Americans.

It is hard to worship Demeter in America. I cannot conceive of any expression less appropriate in this country than the expression “our Mother, the Earth.” The Earth is *not* a mother to an American. She is a tool-shed, a smithy, a tank, a malevolent but sublime volcano, out of which so much horse-power calculated in terms of so many dynamos or kilowatts is forced to erupt.” p. 492-497

Exister, est-ce agir ?

Exister est-ce profiter de l'instant présent?

Respecter la nature, est-ce renoncer à la transformer ?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

Le bonheur se trouve-t-il dans le repos ?

Serions-nous plus libres sans machines?

Qu'est-ce qui a du sens ?

“Most of the young ladies of the Chicago Little Theatre married—for you can believe how pretty they were!—and ceased to be nymphs and fairies and Trojan women; but, as I followed their lives and the lives of others like them, it was borne in upon me that the particular and special charm of American woman—this aristocracy of America—springs from the fact that they *create themselves*. Yes, these young people choose, select, design, plan, sketch, execute, and finally clothe, in this bewitching flesh and blood of their own invention, some private and quite original idea of what it would be exciting for a girl to be.

All Maurice had to do to supply his Little Theatre with novices was to go out “into the by-ways and hedges”; in plain words into the buses and trolley-cars. All American girls are potential actresses. They can “make themselves up” for any mortal rôle on earth, from that of a Grand Duchess to that of a strolling gipsy. They actually decide upon what kind of accent and intonation they fancy will suit them best; and having decided on one that matches, let us say, their eyes and their hair, or the droop of their head, or the slenderness of their waist, or the warm depth of their bosom, they just *invent it* and then practise it till they are perfect in it. And this really is what they do with their whole character, their tastes, their tricks of manner, their ways of behaviour. All American women are, in fact, *made and not born*.

But since the essential being of women and their inmost nature cannot be altogether made over, cannot be made *not to be feminine*, a most charming and piquant situation arises, which is—or at any rate has proved to be to me—peculiarly provocative. The delicate arrest we get when women dress up like boys, a transformation that has always been singularly appealing, undergoes in this case a kind of spiritual sublimation. American women, in other words, “dress up like boys” in their souls! Thus while they carry by necessity their feminine nature about with them, the contrast between it and the brave mental bravura, the “doublet and hose” of their self-creation, has a disarming awkwardness far more appealing than any possible masquerade of ordinary women.

Women of other countries let their womanliness alone. They refuse to meddle with it. But American women are meddling with it all the time; and though they cannot, as I say, make it *not to be feminine*, they are for ever putting it into situations where its own feeling of strangeness gives it a special appeal. It is not so much that American women carry the harem with them while they play their open-air boy’s rôle, or their intellectual student rôle, though I *have* heard them accused of just that. It is much more as if they were constantly saying to their lovers:

“It’s amusing, isn’t it, what we women are like? But it’s much nicer being a woman than you guess!“ p. 514-515

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

Changer, est-ce devenir quelqu’un d’autre ?

Quelle est la part de l'inné et de l'acquis dans le caractère?

“I expect I still think of that well-constituted torturer, in the dormitory below ours at Wildman’s, and of his ill-constituted victim. That bully was a strong, handsome, brave fellow, “a fine, clean, up-standing youth,” his victim was weak, timid and anything but striking in appearance; and every night we used to hear it going on. Do you think I’ll ever cease to pray that somehow, somewhere, there may be a punishment for such things? I tell you if they “know not what they do” it only makes their crime the worse.

Well, at any rate my own particular kind of pity has turned, because of long suppression, and because I have never exercised my formidable fingers on a fellow of this type, into what undoubtedly is the noblest emotion I possess, a prophetic anger against all scientists who vivisect dogs, all Southerners who lynch negroes, and all men and women who ill-use children. And I think I am a more dangerous enemy than is usually realized. As I tell you, without my *consciously* doing anything about it, there’s not a bully-boy who has ever crossed my path who has not come to serious grief!

And I have a curious power too of identifying myself with those morons, these idiots, these imbeciles, these degenerates, against whose bare faces, as I used to observe in my favourite shows, the well-constituted pressed their hands; so that it may be that as I go through the world I really do possess a curious “evil eye” for those who torment these “little ones.” I sometimes think that, as in Dostoievsky’s case, a sublimated sadistic tendency is an organ of insight of which the oppressor may well beware! O ye cohorts of queer ones, of “half-born” and “funny” ones, ye whose secret endurances I alone know, I shall not soon forget you! There are so many of you in America; and you suffer all the worse because there are no groups, no classes, no barriers to protect you from the brutality of the normal.” p 516

X

“My hotels, of course, were often in the very centre of their cities, and so I was frequently pretty exhausted—for I never would take trolleys—by the time I returned from these walks. But such was my power of enjoying the most delapidated Specimens of grass, or moss, or plants, or trees, or shrubs, or old walls, or vistas of roadway, or bridges over rivers, or warf-sides, or tow-paths, or cobble-stones, or stables, or chimneys with smoke coming out of them, that I often used, after my fashion, to be really quite happy as I explored the most unpromising environs. I was, of course, laying up for myself a rich treasury of sharply cut sensuous images, fragmentary vignettes of the inanimate, essences of the past, that would grow the more rich and the more magical, the longer they lay in the sepulchre of my mind, till the time came for their resurrection.”p.517

X

“My whole art of self-expression in lecturing was as a matter of fact based upon a certain kind of mental independence, an independence which I was always desperately trying to convey to others, for I regarded it—and do still regard it—as one of the most important elements in human happiness and by no means exclusive of the devotion of a scholar to the Past.

This cosmic pride of mine—you can call it “comic” if you like, but mine will be the last laugh in our altercation implied a mental process by which I thought of my “ego,” the inmost “self” within me, as independent of the accident of being born a man, or of being born a man upon this earth!

To look at human life with the eyes of a stranger, as if I had suddenly been projected out of space—as indeed in a sense I had—into this particular society, was the attitude which I sought to assume as my final spiritual refuge; for this and this only could offer me a real escape from all the teasing frets and fevers, all the worrying envies and jealousies and competitions and comparisons, of the ambitions of the world.” p.522

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

La solitude est-elle sans valeur ?

Avons nous le choix d'être libre?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

”My enemies, and those worse than enemies, my patronizing admirers, who are even now skimming this excitable work, will doubtless affix many semi-scientific labels to my aberrations, have indeed probably already rushed to their psychopathic text-books to find out what I can possibly be up to, when I refer to my power of experiencing the emotions of women and girls. But the more I soak myself in the work of Shakespeare and Dostoievsky the more I recognize that both these men have the magic power of *becoming women*. That is the point. That *is* where the intelligencies of our modern critics are so dull. They do not understand what the meaning of the word “Imagination” is.” p.528

L’imagination enrichit-elle la connaissance?

Qu'appelle-t-on manquer d'imagination?

“”John, what is it? What is the matter with you?”

But of course “the matter” simply was that I was feeling as Proteus felt when he was clutched tight, through all his transformations, by yellow-haired Menalaus. The truth is I didn’t like being influenced, no! not by the noblest and dearest. No, I have never liked being held, not even by the wisest and most affectionate of human hands. I am like the wind. I have to blow *where I list*. Perhaps this is one of my feminine characteristics. Or is it the devil in me and pure misanthropic malice? I don’t know what it is; but at a hint of being held down to *any* course of action—off I sheer, with a cry like the cry of the cuckoo.” p. 529

L'idée d'une liberté totale a-t-elle un sens ?

Être libre, est-ce ne rencontrer aucun obstacle ?

Pourquoi voulons-nous être libres ?

S'opposer à l'autorité est-ce toujours une marque de liberté?

“The hope I hold

The leering 1 demon-days

Deride 2, and reason plays,

Snug as a raven on a gallows tree 3

Its ancient game with me,

Flapping its wings and lewdly 4 gibbering 5

‘Life is a humorous thing!’

But on I fare, clutching—

It is not gold,

The hope I hold.

“The hope I hold

Nature herself with glee

Derides. And destiny

With evil goblin laughter indicates

The adamantine 6 gates,

And with a maniac-chuckle rallies me,

‘That way is closed, you see!’

But I fare on, clutching—

It is not gold,

The hope I hold.

“O hope, whose face in madness I have kissed,

O hope, that art a mirage and a mist,

Shall I destroy thee now, and laugh thereat 7?—

It is too late for that.” p.530

*1 malicious*

*2 to laugh at someone or something in a way that shows you think they are stupid*

*3 hanging tree*

*4 inclined to lust*

*5 to speak inarticulately or meaninglessly*

*6 mythical material*

*7 instead*

Le désir peut-il se satisfaire de la réalité ?

Faut-il libérer ses désirs ou se libérer de ses désirs ?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

Faut-il préférer le bonheur à la vérité ?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Le désir nous éloigne-t-il du vrai ?

Ne fait-on que fuir le réel?

“Absent-mindedly I looked at those ten devoted society women sitting alone in the tails and at the immeasurable space above their heads, rising and rising tier above tier, gallery above gallery and I became aware, more vividly aware than I had ever been, that the secret of life consists in sharing the madness of God. By sharing the madness of God I mean the power of rousing a peculiar exultation in yourself as you confront the Inanimate, an exultation which is really a cosmic eroticism, however much the Prince of this World may deride it, for it means the finding of “the eternal feminine” in Matter itself. p. 531-532

[...]

Qu'est-ce qui a du sens ?

La beauté est elle promesse de bonheur ?

Qu'aime-t-on dans l'amour?

Dans tout amour n'aime t'on que soi-même?

It is quaint to think how impossible it was for me actually to make friends with one of the chorus-girls in those burlesque shows. But if it had *not* been so, if I had been a little less of a helpless bookworm in such matters, how I would have liked to hear from the lips of such an one exactly what it really felt like to be gazed at as I used to gaze at these delicious beings. It is a curious thing to say, but I have a shrewd idea that such a girl would understand far better than any man—except perhaps a village idiot if he could speak—what a mysterious Grail, though I suppose I must say a *heathen* Grail, her unequalled form was, as it rested for a moment in her dancing and suffered my soul to swirl and eddy about it, like the sea-tide about a marble column.” p. 531-532

X

“‘ in the first place what is the deepest, secretest purpose of my life? I can answer categorically: “To enjoy the sensations that I like enjoying, when I am most entirely and shamelessly myself.” Now I *know*, not only from looking in the looking-glass when I shave, but from certain realistic photographs, that there is an unmistakable ninny-look or zany-look in my face. This look answers to what I feel, and to what I let myself feel, and to what I maliciously encourage myself to feel! *And why not?* Why should I devote myself to feeling and expressing only noble, monumental and dignified sentiments? It is natural to Llewelyn to be dignified. It is *not* natural to me. I can be formidable as the Devil at a pinch, and, as Louis deplores so sadly, a certain scoriated and long-suffering expression, resembling that of an actor playing Christ, often appears spontaneously on my countenance when I am alone.

Qu'est-ce qui a du sens ?

La beauté est elle promesse de bonheur ?

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

But why need I have laid upon my shifty, Protean, unfrocked hedge-priest shoulders the necessity of being dignified? You will remember how St. Paul refers to the sensuality of heathen? “It is a shame even to speak of what they do in secret.” Well this, I take it, implies that certain vicious doings are not altogether dignified. But “let the galled jade wince; my withers are unwrung.” Being as you know, not one for the normal rites of love, and being totally unashamed of this peculiarity, there is really hardly any aspect of my secret life that I would hesitate about revealing to the exacting Apostle.” p.537

X

“We English are the only race in the world that put happiness before everything else—we *un-aesthetic people!*—and Walt Whitman’s gigantic sense of well-being suited us from the start. We are rooted and grounded in this cult of “happiness” in a way Americans are not. Too restless are they, too nervously tense, too buoyantly brittle, too easily worn out, and too soon ready to collapse into premature old age. It must be confessed, however, that they are more spontaneously concerned about the “other person” than we are; and their whole self-love, with its wild fumblings of telepathic antennae, is in a thousand subtle ways different from our more crafty, more deeply entrenched egoism.” p. 543

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Le bonheur est-il le but de l’existence ?

Le bonheur se trouve-t-il dans le repos ?

Toutes les cultures se valent-elles ?

Dans tout amour n'aime t-on que soi-même?

“I think I have, after my fashion, and carrying a little further those Sousa strains that I heard in the “Kardomah Café” in Liverpool, really caught something of the double-edged essence of life in the United States, its brutal cynical youthfulness, its heroic reckless unselfishness. What makes so many European visitors, if they are not themselves “healthy, wealthy and wise,” that is to say pretty tough, pretty complacent, and pretty prosperous, feel such unkind and bitter feelings and express such wickedly unfair opinions about America, is the dominance of youth. Young American voices are strident, young American shoulders broad, young American flanks well-fleshed, young American legs long, and we all know how the exuberance of youth seems noisy and blustering to the unsympathetic touchiness of old age. American youth often *is* insensitive and un-subtle in addition to being idealistic and gallant and candid, and of course the impact of these noisy high spirits on our shaky nerves tends to make us bitter, prejudiced, unkind, and akin to poor old Scrooge, when thrust into the

presence of such riotous well-being. What this exuberant American youthfulness wants when it is riotously rather than exquisitely happy—what it “wishes,” in fact in that significant Americanism in which “want” and “wish” are identical—are strength, health, glitter, glory, bloom, splendour and dazzle. *And why not?* After all, this is what the youth of the ancient world in its day “wished”; it is what the Borgian youth in *its* day “wished”; and the sneering trepidation of neurotic and testy Modern Europeans in its presence is nothing less than that evil *resentment*, masquerading as spirituality, upon which Nietzsche animadverts so searchingly. In the old world of today we make it rather a point of gentility to go about in shabby or at least in well-worn clothes. But the mediaeval lads must have glittered and swaggered in glimmering-new plumes and shiny feathers, until they “won their spurs”; and sometimes even after that sobering event.” p. 545-546

X

“But by degrees I have outgrown this innocence. I now see that it is Chance, and not merit, that decides who shall be famous at any given epoch, and I have learnt not only to discount the applause of the vulgar; but also, which is a good deal harder, the intellectual and fashionable suffrages of the damned “illuminati.” I have come to recognize as a basic fact in life, as indeed a sort of spiritual law, that the subtlest intellects and the rarest imaginations, in every age, are “too proud to fight,” and are consequently never heard of! I have found out that merely to *be* successful, merely to *be* known, humanity being as it is, is an invariable sign, not of superiority, but of vitality. Such “glory” among men—yes! even this posthumous “fame” about which the great, deluded, innocent poets make such a to-do—requires for its attainment more energy than genius, more liveliness than sensitiveness, more brute force than imagination, and more *luck* than anything else!” p.557

“No! I think you can roundly assert that the majority of extremely successful men, such as the vulgar call “great,” are successful because they want *just that* above everything else. Mistakes of course do happen, as when quiet mathematicians are suddenly hurled, like meteoric projectiles, into notoriety. But as a rule it is those with energy and will and desire to be at the top who *are* at the top! But it is a very interesting psychological problem to analyse the effect of notoriety and success upon a person of literary talent. It is generally fatal!” p. 558-559

La chance existe t-elle?

Ne sommes-nous que la somme des choix que nous faisons ?

La détermination du bien n’est-elle qu’une affaire d’opinion ?

Exister, est-ce agir ?

“The grand secret of enjoying yourself with a free heart is to get rid of ambition, rid of even the most trifling competitions with other poor devils. But we must have our pride; and we must have a very deep pride. We must have a pride in simply being ourselves outside and beyond any conceivable competition. Luckily for me I have inherited from my father a towering pride; but not a pride in anything particular. [...]

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

For myself I am always thinking how I would get on in a Communistic State. It would be nothing to me to give up private property as long as I was freed from worry. Nor do I see why I could not work honestly for a Communistic State and yet live ultimately for my own secret sensations and for my own unbounded secret pride in my sensations! Oh, I have pondered on these things so much, walking about these hills! Suppose machinery *does* extend its sway, suppose science in the hands of minority-dictators *does* more and more dominate us, suppose the great battle of the future, with its own particular “good and evil,” comes to be the struggle of the individual to be himself against the struggle of society to prevent him being himself, what we shall have to do will only be what the saints, lovers, artists, mystics have always done, namely *sink into ourselves and into Nature* and find our pleasure in the most simple, stripped, austere and meagre sensations. [...]

What I would admire in myself would be the courage to live like a tramp, or at any rate if I *had* to have a roof over my head, like Wordsworth’s leech-gatherer, or like that sly old peddlar, the hero of the “Excursion.” What I have been doing in my walks for these last four years has been to imagine myself a solitary elderly man, regarded as half-crazy by his neighbours, who has escaped the workhouse, or “poor-house,” as they call it in America, by means of some infinitesimal relief, or dole, upon which he can just manage to live. [...]

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Comment peut-il y avoir un contre-pouvoir?

Independence! Independence! That is the secret of all philosophy. To be independent of the opinions of your neighbours, of your relations, of your friends; to be independent of this ridiculous itch for “being heard of”; to take the neck of your desire to compete and wring it; and then, when it becomes a question of pride, to let your pride tower up like a wavering, fluctuating, gigantic Genie from the smoke bottle of your own magical soul!

Mind you I don’t want to be “mad John of Rats’ Barn” till I have written a shelf-ful of first-rate romances. But just as Montaigne who was a master life-lover is perpetually gathering himself together to cope with Death, so, though I am driven on by a terrific “libido” to write book after book, I feel uneasy and uncomfortable if I am not making constant efforts to adjust my life-illusion and my pride to a situation starker [...]. The mind—heaven help us all!—has always to be surmounting obstacles to its peace; and what I have come to feel is that since, as Heraclitus says, “all life is war” peace of mind is something that must be perpetually fought for and held with a grim clutch. I have come of late to use the phrase “premeditated ecstasy” and I would try to explain what I am aiming at in this daring expression. When our inmost self gathers up its battle-mood and *en protois iiachon eche monuchos hippous!*” … “and into the mêlée drives with a cry its single-hooved horses,” it attains an interior calm underneath the turmoil of its gesture; and this interior calm offers itself, like a clear mirror beneath confusion, to all those restorative elements, in the impinging weight of the surrounding cosmos, which are the cause of human ecstasy. In reality both the initial peace of mind and its exultant response to these elements *are creative acts of the mind itself*, of the mind using what is called “the will” and “the imagination”—whatever mysterious activities these may be—to force itself to be strong and exultant in the midst of an opposing turmoil and in the face of a catastrophic menace. [...]

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Le bonheur est-il dans l'inconscience ?

Le bonheur se trouve-t-il dans le repos ?

Faut-il libérer ses désirs ou se libérer de ses désirs ?

Comment peut-il y avoir du nouveau?

To a considerable extent, this book of mine, the “Autobiography” of a tatterdemalion Tahessin from his third to his sixtieth year, is the history of the “de-classing” of a bourgeois-born personality, and its fluctuating and wavering approach to the Communistic system of social justice: not however to the Communistic philosophy: for I feel that the deepest thing in life is the soul’s individual struggle to reach an exultant peace in relation to more cosmic forces than *any* social system, just or unjust, can cope with or compass.

What is wrong with so many clever people to-day is the fatal distrust lodged in their minds—and lodged there by a superstitious awe in the presence of transitory scientific theories—of the power in their own souls. What we need—and the key to it lies in ourselves—is a bold return to the *magical* view of life. I don’t mean to the magic of Madame Blavatsky, but to that kind of faith in the potentialities of the ego, with which all great poetry and all great philosophy has been concerned. That feeling of exultant liberation from the immediate pressure of practical life, which any “logos” from the arena of Goethe, or Spinoza, or Leonardo, or Plato, or Heraclitus, or Epictetus, or the old Chinese Taoists conveys, is what we need.

Science has not changed the human soul. Science has not changed the basic relations between the human soul and the mystery surrounding it. We are still potential magicians as long as we have faith in the power within us to create and to destroy. Social justice is one thing. The free life of the individual soul *under any system* is another thing. What we do is important; but it is less important than what we feel; for it is our feeling that alone is under the control of our will. In action we may be weak and clumsy blunderers, or on the other hand sometimes incompetent and sometimes competent. All this is largely beyond our control. What is *not* beyond our control is our *feeling* about it.

“I am a cowardly, blundering, incompetent worm.”

Very good. So be it. But it is in my power to be a worm with a deep, calm, resolute cheerfulness, if not with a magical exultation. [...]

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

Exister, est-ce agir ?

Le bonheur est-il affaire privée?

Le bonheur est-il le but de la philosophie?

Le développement technique transforme-t-il les hommes ?

Ne sommes-nous que la somme des choix que nous faisons ?

L'art est-il moins nécessaire que la science ?

[...] not since those years when I was eight and nine at Dorchester, [did I ] realize[d] to the full limit, my identity, my native peculiarities, my cherished manias, my sweet superstitions. Yes, I have had, in “up-state” New York, what is seldom allowed to mortal man upon this earth—I have had the full unhindered swing of my personality. I expect it is for no other reason than to get this very “swing” that so many of us individualistic Englishmen leave the island, whose bones are in *our* bones, and settle down in such far-off alien spots. We carry our ways with us, our turns of speech, our traditional routine, our rock-bound prejudices. We are all so eccentric that penned up close together we lack space wheren to expand. And so we sail away, to have our fling among less crowded, less furiously egoistic, less obstinate, less self-righteous, less adventurous natives!

How could I expand freely, how could I be the unmitigated, unqualified, unconscionable “Cowperist” I wanted to be, when I had all round me the class-distinctions, the class-prejudices, the back-bitings, the obsequiousnesses, the superciliousnesses, the superiorities, the perpetual psychic question, “*Is* he a gentleman? *Has* he been to a decent school?”

It must have been a considerable moment in my youthful life for instance, when hidden once behind the laurel-hedge above the road to the station we heard Mr. Phelips say to some guest at Montacute House:

“Yes, that’s the Vicarage; Powys is the name; a very good family.”

But here in these hills, with an “aura” around me of Mohawk chiefs, as formidable as any Owen Glendower, these hard-working descendants of old Dutch “Patroons” and old German and English settlers take me at my face value. I don’t need to hide behind any un-mortar’d wall, or any criss-cross fence, to learn what my status is among such as eat bread upon the earth. *I am a man*. In the city I confess I fall below that level, and become a “guy.” But here in “up-state” New York I feel I can say, even as the Lord of Hosts said to his questioner, “I am *that* I am.” [...]

Peut-on être soi-même devant les autres ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

La culture est-elle libératrice ?

Avons nous le choix d'être libre?

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

Then the thought, the good, careful, anxious, meticulous thought, will cross my mirror, like a sudden breath of journeying wind, that I must take my net, before I do anything else this day, and make another attempt to rescue some little fish in a drying-up pool and transport them to a deeper one and one that shows signs of surviving the drought.

This matter of saving fish in my small river was constantly on my conscience all these years, and I used sometimes to have to walk as far as a mile carrying a pail of them, till I found an adequate pool for their reception. Once I was rewarded for my untiring fussiness by seeing a strange sight. I actually saw a procession of small fish working their way across a strip of bare earth from under a rock where the water had deserted them to the pool from which I was catching the others. It is not everybody who has actually seen a number of little fish crossing the dry land. It is true it was only a very short distance and it is true they were desperate for water; but you would have supposed they would have flopped aimlessly about till they perished, instead of taking this direct course. [...]

X

In this realistic mood I recognize with a grim animal acceptance that it is indeed likely enough that the “soul” perishes everlastingly with the death of the body. But what this realistic mood, into which my mind falls like a plummet through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt, never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb is my *certain knowledge*, derived from the “Complex Vision” of everything in me, that the whole astronomical universe, however illimitable, is only-one part and parcel of the Mystery of Life. Of this I am *as certain as I am certain that I am I.* The astronomical universe is *not* all there is; but whether this certainty implies the survival of any portion or any degree of my own consciousness after death is a very different matter; and of this, I confess, I am *not* certain. [...]

En quoi le sentiment esthétique se distingue-t-il du sentiment religieux ?

L’homme a-t-il nécessairement besoin de religion ?

Peut-on croire sans savoir ?

L’homme doit-il se résigner à mourir ?

Now there is a path along the edge of the small stream flowing near this house where there grows an enormous and very ancient willow. To this aged tree I have given the mystic name of the “Saviour-Tree,” and here and now I recommend to all harassed and worried people who can find in their neighbourhood such a tree—and it needn’t necessarily be a willow—to use it as I do this one. For the peculiarity of this tree is that you can transfer by a touch to its earth-bound trunk *all* your most neurotic troubles! These troubles of yours the tree accepts, and absorbs them into its own magnetic life; so that henceforth they lose their devilish power of tormenting you. Of course we all of us only manage to live at all by means of our power of forgetting. This is Nature’s supreme gift. To “live according to Nature” is to possess the power to forget. No “Saviour-Tree” can ever take the place of the precious Fountain of Lethe in ourselves; into which we can acquire the power of flinging our neurotic troubles; but, as I am hinting, a tree of this kind can at least serve as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” [...]

Faut-il préférer le bonheur à la vérité ?

Le bonheur est-il dans l'inconscience ?

Est-ce illusoire de chercher á être heureux?

Ne peut-on être heureux qu'au passé?

L'homme est-il chez lui dans la nature?

Looking back over these fifty years, since the days when I jeered so rudely at that “Spanish Maiden” in the chestnut-walk at Dorchester, I am inclined to think that the two great electric currents of my life, the currents that have gathered and gathered their momentum beneath all the changes and chances of circumstance have been first the gradual discovering and the gradual strengthening of my inmost identity, till it can flow like water and petrify like a stone; and second the magic trick of losing myself in the continuity of the human generations. By this continuity I mean the way in which from father to son our life-sensations are handed down from the past, creating a sort of “eternal recurrence” of the poetic mystery of the *little-great* ritual, the daily acts by which we all must live.

These immemorial recurrences I have learnt how to appropriate to myself, just as if my soul had the actual trick of passing into the lives of the uncounted generations.

My father was an inarticulate man. I am an only too voluble one. My father was a man of rock. I am a worshipper of the wind. But now when from this resting-place, this ledge, this slab of stone, in the wavering Indian trail of my migrations and reversions, I look back at the path behind me and the path before me it seems as if it had taken me half a century merely to learn with what weapons, and with what surrender of weapons, *l am to begin to live my life*.

The astronomical world is *not* all there is. We are in touch with other dimensions, other levels of life. And from among the powers that spring from these *other levels* there rises up one Power, all the more terrible because it refuses to practise cruelty, a Power that is neither Capitalist, nor Communist, nor Fascist, nor Democratic, nor Nazi, a Power *not of this world at all,* but capable of inspiring the individual soul with the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove.

And thus it comes to pass, even while we are still in life, that when our soul loses itself in the long continuity of kindred lives, it does not lose itself in any power less gentle, less magical, less universal than itself, or less the enemy of cruelty; for what it finds is what it brings, and what it sees is what it is; and though the First Cause may be both good and evil, a Power has risen out of it against which all the evil in it and all the unthinkable atrocities it brings to pass are fighting a losing battle.

Est-on soi même ou le devient-on?

La beauté transforme-t-elle notre conscience du réel?

Quel est la relation entre la beauté et la bonté?

Existe-t-il un privilège de la beauté?

La beauté est elle promesse de bonheur ?

En quoi le sentiment esthétique se distingue-t-il du sentiment religieux ?

Cela a-t-il un sens de vouloir échapper au temps?

Le temps est-il la limite de l’homme ?

La conscience de l’individu n’est-elle que le reflet de la société à laquelle il appartient?

THE END” p.622-652

John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, 1934, Faber and Faber