

2 The Need For Laughter

I always withdrew from occurrence, afraid of being *what I was*—
LAUGHTER ITSELF!

Slowly, fever.... Darkness growing, a world is giving birth to something, veins are standing out on my temples, this cold sweat.... Eyes inflamed, mouth dry, a queasiness pushing up words from my throat, I choke. I didn't turn my eyes away (sometimes, though, I wanted to...).

A's good luck insults B's *lack* of it. Or else luck gets ashamed and hides. Constricting waves of sickly sickness—I'm at the core of it.

If I laugh now, maybe unbearable pain will be the cost. I can laugh from a core of unhappiness. Or I can laugh because I'm suspended by chance.

Oh if I could *die* from this laughing!... Today dying isn't any big deal. What's clear is—the last act isn't easy. What else is there to say?

On the plane of impossibility, I love Poe and Baudelaire and I burn with *their* fire. Will I have more strength than they do—*more consciousness*?

Poe and Baudelaire measured impossibility like children. Like Don Quixote. Or like being *white with fear*.

"Recover your willpower before rats gnaw it away!"

My will: relaxing out in sunlight, in shade, reading, a little wine (my appetite for rich, hot food), the hazy empty sun-drenched countryside, writing, putting notes into book form (a goal that requires self-discipline from me, self-control competing with my easy-going side, my childishness: something has to shake me out of complacency). I suggest to myself that we come to terms, that we reach an agreement.

My will: a stream that flows along. I'm hardly a man. Defended by my teeth? I'm yawning to prove brilliantly...(what?)...I'm dreaming. I flow along unaware of who I am, except that I get drunk, put others in a similar condition.

There's nothing I can possess, that's clear (all the same I still have to eat and drink, sometimes not do anything at all, and that's where hazard or chance comes in...what would I do without chance?).

Huge randomness.

An alternation (between a stream flowing along and the eagle over the waters). Twistings, turnings. The countryside can't be described, tree-studded, various, made of conflict and "pleasantness." Everything in it disconcerting. Uneasiness succeeded by relaxation. Like an excited dog that circles, appearing and disappearing. I'm speaking of laughter.

To the right is a gable made of hollow bricks. Big buzzy insect crawling inside one of the bricks, apparently at home. Where the gable peaks—a blue and violent sky. Everything broken, and a feeling of inexorability—which I love. Inexorability and I agree. My father, blind and desperate, but his empty eyes towards the sun. My window with a view of the valley (we're quite high up, like we were at N). Unprotected, consenting, ecstatic: *as if blood poured from my eyes*.

Should I keep a distance between myself and rational truth? N's (Socratic) attitude. Not my business.

I'll leap in. The water—swallowing you up—is *time*. Still, it's important to struggle against the tendency to *rest*. Sometimes there's no relaxation: that's when it's so attractive, and when anguish takes hold of you. If rest is easy, the danger (now remote) is just as great.

There has to be alternation.

Sometimes there has to be simulated danger—*anguish*—so that movement can be maintained. Anguish, inevitable as fear, has the advantage of eliminating relaxation, even when in principle relaxation is possible.

Anguish is there because action isn't.

Action is the effect of anguish and cancels it.

But there's more to anguish than concern for danger which requires action in reply. Anguish is fear and also a desire to be ruined (an isolate being has to lose himself and, losing himself, communicate). Anguish and the feeling of real danger mix—they're usually confused. Sometimes I'll *flee* from pure anguish through action. And sometimes there is no answering action, nothing in response to the fear that would otherwise solicit it. In that case we respond to fear as if it was anguish (especially in primitive forms: sacrifice for the sake of useful ends, when only action...).

Swimming through time's waters has its different stages:

- a1) real concerns
- a2) action (productive expense of energy)
- a3) rest
- b1) anguish
- b2) partial, explosive loss of self...(unproductive expenditure, religious dementia, but categories of religion and action intermixed—eroticism is something else—laughter reaches divine innocence...)
- b3) rest, etc.

Different mistakes.

All of these coming from fear of swimming, apparently.

Someone wants to go from concern or anguish to rest without acting. Someone else prefers concern or anguish, since rest disgusts him. Another's enmeshed in action that has no end. Sex impulses obsess still another. No one *realizes* what *swimming* is. Methods oppose swimming: each of them teaches you *not* to swim. Swimming: chaos, confusion itself. It wouldn't take much (consciousness, I mean) to see swimming as sickness or neurosis.... Swimming isn't a skill, it isn't learned. Swimming is a *letting-go: we can't desire concern or anguish*. We're so stubborn that against all evidence we're convinced (by upbringing and morality) that concern and anguish are pointless. If human enterprise indefinitely succeeded, anguish and concern would be excluded. But we couldn't be reconciled with time, since we're its negation. If success does take place, it's a veneer or facade (life of a little rich girl...).

To take account of useful action on one hand and loss on the other....

Formerly humankind would stave off its anxiety through loss (religious sacrifice), though today we try to stave off anguish with the help

of useful activity. Today's attitude is more sensible (the old one being infantile). A genuinely manly attitude wouldn't allot *more*, only *more conscious*, importance to loss.

I can't justify this principle: *irreducible anguish*. In such cases, we refuse to recognize *the unjustified*, however inevitable it may be.

Lately I notice I've been switching from one anguish to another. By anguish I mean apprehension of misfortune: naked anguish evidently doesn't have an object except that we exist in time—which destroys us. The confusion is necessary. I'll make a distinction. Anguish is an effect of desire that by itself and *from within* engenders a loss of being. Fear, apprehension, and concern are so many general effects coming *from outside* dealing with needs (self-preservation, nourishment, and so on). Naturally, though, in each new apprehension it's possible that (desire's) disguised and unfathomable anguish might surface.

Threatened need is a need for more (sex-) pleasure. And in this case, anguish is nearer than it is in simpler states we share with animals—like hunger or fear of some immediate danger. An imperceptible transition from accumulation to loss is implied in this principle—that *the condition of loss is the movement of growth*, which can't be indefinite and which becomes resolved only in loss. In the simplest animal state, this is asexual reproduction.

For the individual, partial loss is a means of dying while surviving. It's foolish to try to avoid the horror of loss. At the brink of what can't be borne, desire names this horror as possible. You have to come *as close as possible* to death. Without flinching. And even, if necessary, flinching.

...and even, if necessary, dying.

Alternation of the six stages (grouped in two movements: concern, action, and relaxation / anguish, loss, and relaxation) implies a double movement: charge and discharge, potency and impotency. But while it's easy to see that action and loss exist in opposition, concern is often indistinguishable from anguish. So you have to simply say that, in alternation, you have to act *first of all* (loss presupposes action and a previous charge), *then* lose. Action without concern wouldn't be thinkable. Loss stems from unfathomable depths of anguish. There's a rhythmic awkwardness here. Laceration (which you never intend) is introduced by concern from the *outside* and by anguish from the *inside*. From

inside—but in spite of conscious will, which is only a means of producing *action*.

Rereading these fragments from last year, I remember I felt death—a chill in my soul. It wasn't anguish but a chill, an exasperation with the fact of being me, an exasperation with the lack of happiness and excess I felt. But what about God? His absence was no longer bearable in my distress. The passages I reread were intended to show how this absence grabbed me by the throat—they demonstrated the *presence of God*. God lives, God loves me...that's how my feeling of fear concluded. In that moment every feeling opposing fear was annihilated—or seemed to be.

In bed this morning the first thing I thought was that God *existed*, then (going more slowly) that God, his absence and I, we were equally ridiculous—ridiculous appearances.

But without the strength of my youth (gone now!) how would I reach divinity's laughter...? Youth is excessively impulsive though! And the impetuosity of a *self* limits it.

Taking everything into account, there's a reconciliation to be hoped for with the straightforward, the young and the healthy: those opposed to complexity. No reconciliation with Christians, intellectuals, and aesthetes.

Going as far as you can: the argument about Christians, intellectuals, aesthetes disappears. It stops being important as an issue.

Always the same lack of harmony and reason. Sometimes happy, drinking, laughing. Later at the window I stop breathing. Moonlight floods the valley, outlining the terrace hedges in profile. A little later, prone on the floor, the cold tiles of the bedroom underneath me, I'm begging for death, you can hardly hear my voice.

Flowers in the woods, so lovely, this (oppressive) exhaustion of war, the different kinds of unrest, work, nourishment—all paralyzing, pushing, shoving me, cancelling me out.

The hurry and anguish come to a halt at nightfall. I go out on the terrace and lie on a deck chair. In the sky bats wheeling, darting (blindly?), emerging from the woodpile and from the bathroom, swooping down on roofs, trees, faces. Sky pure and pale now. Rolling hills stretch out into the distance, and beyond lie peaceful valleys. I'm making it a point to carefully describe this place where I picture spend-

ing the year ahead. Narrow houses, surrounded by broken-down roofs overlapping each other, the thin strip of property divided by a hedge-lined path, the terrace. High over the village walls our terrace looks out on a mass of forested hills.

After a long period of relaxation, the *absence* of starry skies triggers laughter in me.

When I'm anguished, each difficulty I encounter is insurmountable ...none when relaxed, though.

When the relaxation begins I feel diminished. I can't make love, I'm sick physically. A limp dishrag. Laughter that reaches the stars—and explosive life returns....

A first sign of anguish in me. I feel impotent, unable to introduce necessary acts into time. The harmony I have with time is broken, causing remorse—the feeling: I'm on the decline. Directly related to the fact of writing this notebook: I'm not following the plan I drew up—instead of laughing in synch with time.

There's a necessity, in this alternation, to link up with time through action. Still, action is like laughter in requiring prior relaxation (this is the mystery of movement, of the rapid linking up of movements).

I could never find what I wanted in a book, much less put it inside one. I'm afraid of looking for this in poetry. Poetry is an arrow aimed at something. If I've taken good aim, what's important (what I want) isn't the arrow—or goal—but the instant the arrow is lost, dissolved, in the night air: so even the memory of the arrow is lost.

Nothing is more embarrassing, as far as I'm concerned, than success.

With success, approbation of natural fact is implied. And with approbation there's an equivalent of God—a God who reassures and satisfies.

And really, laughter is a weird sort of success. Action and concern correspond to natural fact, but with laughter, a load of worry's off your shoulders: the frame explodes that gives order to action.

Nonetheless, to succeed is to resolve problems. I'm given existence like an enigma to resolve. Life is a test you have to pass, to win at. It's hard not to make a wonderful story of life. What I have to do is lay the mystery bare, reject its human aspects. Even if it's true that everything

is a trick or a manipulation, it would be presumptuous of me to think it. Appearance is absence of motivation, and the possibility of explanation is introduced by doubting explanation's absence—that's all. Whatever else there is is complacent stupidity, giddiness, predatory—or pious—desperation.

I can't respect Jesus. Just the opposite. I can only feel complicity in my hatred for apathy or dour faces. The same desire for fluidity or intensity of body movement (which seemed impossible). And—as well?—the same innocent irony (desperate, relaxed confidence, together with a sick lucidity).

That God could arise from feelings of being miserable puts a bad light on the human condition. We can't bear distress. The feeling of God's absence is linked to disgust with beatitude.

To continue to be *self, myself*! My time and life in existence right now: am I the wind blowing in ripe wheat, song of the sky black with birds' wings? The bee sees me, the blind clouds....

Incomprehensible joy, inner recesses of my heart, Negro spider...poppies of the field, sun, stars, can I be something more than heaven's wildness? Then to go deep inside me again and discover endless grief, night...and death...and desire for grief, night, and death.

And what about—bitterness, WORK, dreary cities, heads bowed down, orders bellowed out (hate), the cesspool of slavishness?

I'm like some angry fly trying to get through the screen, I cling to the limits of possibility. Suddenly I'm lost—lost in a wild heaven—raised to infinite laughter. But FREE (upset with my bad attitude, my father used to say, "Work makes you free") and emancipated from slavery through CHANCE.

Work, though, and freedom and chance are just earthly viewpoints. The universe is FREE: it doesn't have anything to do. How could there be chance or laughter in *it*? Philosophy—extending chance beyond itself—is situated in a difference between the universe and the "worker" (humankind). Against Hegel: since Hegel tried to develop the identity of the subject/worker with his universe, his object.

Hegel, by elaborating a philosophy of work (I mean the *Knecht* or emancipated slave or worker who, in the *Phenomenology*, becomes God), cancelled out chance—and laughter.

(Laughing *in my own way*—and convulsed with laughter—I felt pain, a struggle to the death. It was dreadful and enticing. Which is *healthy*.)

If bad luck didn't exist, there wouldn't be (good) luck *in the universe* (we disclose the universe to ourselves this way). But humanness (chance) doesn't develop or become what it is without further ado. Chance discourages us, and we deify it (deny it, crucify it, nail it to necessity). Our need to *guarantee* chance, to make it eternal, is the curse of chance as flesh and blood—it's the apotheosis of a shadow we cast. We experience chance first as a rout. A reaction of fear on our part corresponds to this, and it's followed by seeking refuge in tears. Then, slowly, terribly, the tears laugh.

Parallel to the painful "metamorphosis of tears" left like sediment by swirling waters, the work of reason has continued. The God of theology exists in the interfacing of those movements.

Yesterday, an immense buzzing of bees rising up into the chestnut trees like obsessions of teenagers wanting sex. Blouses undone, afternoon laughter, the sun shines down on me with deadly laughter, rousing a wasp's stinger in me.

Each being is given a place in the world's arrangement (animal instinct and human customs), and each uses time in the appropriate mode. Not me, though—"my" time is normally a gaping wound, it gapes for me like a wound. Sometimes incapable of doing anything, sometimes rushing around—ignorant about where work begins, where it ends. Anxious, panicky, confused: unfocused. And yet, *I know better*. The anguish, though, is latent in me, and it flows out in the form of feverishness, impatience, and avarice (the stupid fear of *wasting* my time).

As I approached the summit...everything got confused. At the decisive moment there's always something else to do.

Start out...forget it...don't conclude. As far as I'm concerned that's the right method and the only one able to deal with objects that resemble *it* (resemble the world).

When? How will I die? That's of course for others to know some day. I can't know it myself. Ever.

A farmer is working his vineyard, cursing at his horse. His shouted threats raise a deadly cloud over the countryside newly awakened in

springtime. His shouts attract other shouts—a net of threats darkens life. Like swearwords of laborers and farmers, and like prisons, work on assembly lines makes everything ugly. Dirty hands and lips expecting a storm....

I'm restless and don't have a job. I'm poor and keep spending my money. But if the situation's hard to put up with, it gets even more so. I live "from moment to moment"—and the moment after leaves me totally at a loss. My life is a melange—sensuality and diversion, luxury and table scraps.

I can't abide anguish which a) puts me under a strain, b) turns life into something burdensome and keeps me from really living, and c) takes away my innocence. Anguish is guilt. The movement of time needs potency and rest. Power is linked to rest. In sex, impotency derives from undue worry. Innocence, though, is an abstract idea. An absence of guilt can't be negative—it's glory. Arguably, the opposite—an absence of glory—is guilt. Guilt means being excluded from glory.

I'll go to bed, and the dreams I anticipate terrify me. I recall dreams I had other nights—ruins turning into dust. I love flowers, sunlight flooding in, the gentleness of someone's shoulder....

I'm summoning up youthful strength, energy, and the solemn or slender beauty of song. And as I age—the masculine melancholy of music.

What I used to like about nonsense and strangeness was the sparkle, the urge to dazzle, life that was lived in an easy-going, impetuous way.

The more impetuous or anxious beauty is, the more painful the laceration that results. In any case, the pain people have is co-extensive with their misery. But in glory, their pain and anguish are consumed.

With the least slippage, the movement of life is no longer tolerable. Everything is built on a foundation of slipping. The most timid laughter absorbs infinite slipping.

It's dawn as I write. As if my courage was on the verge of failing!

If it got to the point I wasn't fascinated by this or that possibility of glory, I'd be pitiful trash.

I'll overcome even petty difficulties, inability to live my life, impotence. I'm somewhat frightened by laughter, a horrible pleasure which

tears you apart—a pleasure so demented I think of the knife of a murderer.

The most bitter thing for me: the misunderstanding that mars the word “glory.”

But it can't be denied that human existence is linked with what this word designates. Shrugging your shoulders doesn't help. The lies of which this word's been an occasion don't alter our feeling about it. The necessary thing is getting to the core, where physical truth is disclosed.

All the earth has spoken and lived glory, and not just the glory of war. The sun is glorious, so is daylight. If something is glorious, it can't be cowardly. But this doesn't mean glory can be reduced to the glitter of disreputable undertakings. No: glory is present where life is affirmed. And chance—or people's willpower—will decide whether they affirm it in one way or another.

Glory can't be abandoned to the whims of frivolous people who divide it up like children playing with toys, using it for legal tender, selling off wild freedom to those with the money. Withdrawn from a ridiculous or sordid circulation, there remains in glory a youthful energy that consumes you and fills you with surges of pride, synchronizing you to the desires of other people.

A loyal response to the desires of others is glorious whatever else happens. But the fact that vanity can be procured from glory is a sign of its withering.

I'm teaching the most cheerful and most difficult of moralities. And this is all the truer since the difficulties in it aren't overcome with effort. Threats or the whip won't help the “sinner.”

There's little hope for me. My life is exhausting ... and it's not easy to maintain my childish “take” on things (a laughing playfulness). Innocence and confidence are cruel; they ignore the tension that threats produce. Given my difficulties, who could continue? Sometimes death looks preferable. I'm at the end of my rope....

I'm just as opposed to poetic mysticism as Hegel is. Aesthetics and literature (literary dishonesty) depress me. I suffer from a concern for individuality, for staging “self” (this, as it happens, is something I've

indulged in). So I'm snubbing vague, idealistic, and elevated views and seeking a humdrum reality—humiliating truths.

A basic difficulty. At present, my state of lucidity (which anguish brings to the fore at the times I'm strongest) excludes relaxation, without which I'd stop being able to laugh. Action governs my present-day lucidity. Hence the impossibility of a state of loss. I could only recover my ability to laugh by rediscovering relaxation. And for now I'm not considering that.

Instead of exhausting myself in the contradictions of states of loss (through which it's disastrous to swim against the current—without willpower, in play or through chance), I'll try to show action as being in charge of those states.