



(Książki z salonu Urszulej Aleks. Tęczy)

Czesław

Składowa

Wielka ścieżka Urszulej

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WITOLD GOMBROWICZ **DIARY**

TRANSLATED BY LILLIAN VALLEE

Diary

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Diary

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

TRANSLATED BY LILLIAN VALLEE

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS ■ NEW HAVEN & LONDON

A MARGELLOS

WORLD REPUBLIC OF LETTERS BOOK

The Margellos World Republic of Letters is dedicated to making literary works from around the globe available in English through translation. It brings to the English-speaking world the work of leading poets, novelists, essayists, philosophers, and playwrights from Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to stimulate international discourse and creative exchange.

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CONTENTS

Foreword, vii

Volume 1

1953, 3 1954, 75 1955, 158 1956, 209

Against Poets, 264 Sienkiewicz, 274

Volume 2

1957, 287 1958, 306 1959, 398 1960, 433 1961, 488

Volume 3

1961, 519 1962, 532 1963, 584 1964, 625 1965, 655

1966, 673 1967, 712 1968, 724 1969, 728

Translator's Afterword, 739

Chronology of Important Dates, 743

Index of Works by Gombrowicz, 747

Subject Index, 749

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FOREWORD

When Witold Gombrowicz began writing his *Diary* in 1953, he was forty-nine years old. He had been living in Buenos Aires since 1939, when the war had caught him by surprise. As a promising young writer, he had been officially invited to the inaugural voyage of a new maritime route between Poland and Argentina, departing from the port of Gdynia the 29th of July 1939 on the dazzling transatlantic liner *Chrobry* ('The Brave'). On August 22, the day after he arrived in Buenos Aires, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact. A week later, the Nazis invaded Poland. The ship was scheduled to return to Europe. Gombrowicz boarded the liner alongside his fellow Poles, but at the last minute—shortly before the *Chrobry* cast off—he darted down the gangplank, clutching his two suitcases. He had just decided to remain in Argentina. He spent the war in extreme poverty, waiting to know the fate of his country before taking up writing again. But by 1945, Stalinism descended on Poland. His destiny as a writer was sealed. Gombrowicz refused to write in any language other than Polish, relying on émigré publications like so many other Eastern European writers, and in the tradition of Nabokov who still wrote in Russian when he lived in Berlin.

To break out of anonymity, Gombrowicz himself translated his novel *Ferdurke* (published in Warsaw in 1937) into Spanish, with the help of several friends, including the Cuban writer Virgilio Piñera. But the publication of this translation in Buenos Aires in 1947 was ignored in literary circles. Argentines were not interested in the work of this Pole they'd never heard of before. In December of that same year Gombrowicz resigned himself to working at a Polish bank in Buenos Aires. The bank director, a friend of his who knew his work, gave him permission to write while at the bank. This is how he came to write the novel *Trans-*

Atlantic, which was published in Paris by the Polish émigré journal *Kultura*. But pressure from the other employees forced Gombrowicz to give up writing during working hours. Reduced to being a weekend author, he abandoned the novel format in favor of a new means of expression. So it came to be that in 1952, while reading *The Journals of André Gide*, he had the idea of writing his own diary. On August 6 of that same year, he wrote to Jerzy Giedroyc, the director of *Kultura*: “I must become my own commentator, even better, my own theatrical director. I have to create Gombrowicz the thinker, Gombrowicz the genius, Gombrowicz the cultural demonologist, and many other necessary Gombrowiczes.” The *Diary* was the realization of this mad ambition. But Gide had written his diary when he was already famous, whereas Gombrowicz wrote his to become so. He was and would remain for a long time “the greatest of the unknown writers,” as one French journalist called him.

His *Diary* is the fruit of his monthly contributions to *Kultura*, which he began in 1953 and continued until his death in July 1969. Each chapter headed by a Roman numeral corresponds to one monthly contribution. The days are used as a form of punctuation. The first publication of the *Diary* in Polish in three separate volumes (1957, 1961, 1967) did not reflect any particular intention on the part of the author, but rather a need at the time to gather the texts together in book form. In truth, the *Diary* forms a single continuity that was severed only by his death. “It is very important to me that these fragments appear in the order in which they were written, because they are a whole. . . . I arranged this mosaic with more premeditation than it may appear,” he wrote to Giedroyc on April 8, 1957.

In this new edition, we have reunited in one book the three volumes that were published in the United States by Northwestern University Press between 1988 and 1993, as well as writings dated from 1966 to 1969 that until now had appeared only in *Kultura*. It is solely in this unified format that his writings take on their internal coherence and reveal the author’s intentions. Professor Allen Kuharski and Richard Lowe have compiled an exhaustive index that will help readers to orient themselves among the different chronological and thematic readings.

The literary journal *Kultura* and its publishing house *L’Institut Littéraire* were founded in 1947 by Jerzy Giedroyc, who would go on to direct them until his death in 2000. This Polish journal, which was published at Maisons-Laffitte near Paris, had three thousand subscribers scattered across the world. Unlike most

émigré publications, it was neither nationalist nor focused on the past. *Kultura* was unique in that it opposed the communist regime, while at the same time seeking to slip under the heavy veil of censorship to bring freedom of expression to those who remained under the communist dictatorship. In the quality of its contributors and in the independence of its spirit this politico-literary journal ranked among the top European periodicals. The communist regime quickly came to see it as an enemy and outlawed it severely—even if the party leadership themselves read it eagerly. Couriers used subterfuges of all kinds to smuggle the outlawed journal and other banned books into the country, including using false book covers. Some of these couriers were captured, brought to trial, and imprisoned. Gombrowicz's *Diary* was the heart of the journal. He touched on subjects that were fundamental for Poles, such as exile, patriotism, communism, and Catholicism, provoking fierce debates with his readers, whose letters and responses he published. In this way, Gombrowicz created a genuine forum for discussion, a pre-Internet "blog." With his *Diary*, Gombrowicz completely renewed Polish culture. *Kultura* provided for Gombrowicz's literary survival, and thanks to it he became an icon of liberty.

In communist Poland, all of Gombrowicz's works—as well as *Kultura* itself—were banned for as long as the communist bloc existed. However, his Polish countrymen would make several attempts to publish his works. The first came in 1956–1958. When Władysław Gomułka came to power in 1956, the regime undertook a brief period of liberalization referred to as "the thaw." In 1957 Polish publishers, with the permission of the author, issued all of his books with the exception of *Diary*. Success was immediate. *Ferdynand* quickly sold ten thousand copies. His plays were performed. But by the beginning of the following year, his books could no longer be found in bookstores. His plays no longer appeared on marquees. The press kept quiet; "normalization" had returned.

In 1978–1986, editors began printing clandestinely and published all of Gombrowicz's works, including *Diary*, using offset printing to produce pocket paperbacks. Then in 1986, three years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, his collected works in nine volumes were published in Kraków, although twelve passages from *Diary* were censored (indicated here by brackets). It is apparent that all of the "nonnegotiable" sections dealt with the USSR. One example: "You say that in order for the spirit to function the right way, the needs of the body must be satisfied? You claim that everyone must be assured a minimum standard of living?

Where is the guarantee, though, that your system can assure prosperity? [Am I supposed to look for it in the Soviet Union, which, up to now, cannot feed itself without the labor of slaves]” (p. 103). Another example: “In Tandil I asked a student from Bahia Blanca, a Communist, if he had ever had a moment of doubt and he answered: —Yes, once. I perked up my ears [thinking he would mention the concentration camps, the strangling of Hungary, or the unmasking of Stalin]. But he meant Kandinsky, who was ostracized or really shunned for abstract painting” (p. 417). After 1989, subsequent editions of the *Diary* would return the twelve censored passages to their proper place. Gombrowicz’s work is now taught in Polish schools. In the curriculum he is considered mandatory reading. Gombrowicz has become a classic.

One of the most fascinating aspects of his *Diary* remains its autobiographical character. How, in the limits and constraints of a literary journal, through the eminently Polish and philosophical themes he was supposed to address, was he able to introduce so much personal information about himself with such honesty? Like Montaigne—with whom he has sometimes been compared—he is the true subject of his book. By way of a preface to his first volume, he wrote: “Monday. Me. Tuesday. Me. Wednesday. Me. Thursday. Me.” Over the years he would sketch his self-portrait in relation to his readers, for whom he invented the multiple incarnations of a Gombrowicz searching for his way of being, for his “form.”

His *Diary* is his most personal work, but it is also his most universal work. His defense of his Self is nothing less than the defense of the individual in the face of an era in which its very existence was denied. His critique of “Polishness” is part of the search for identity undertaken by each person and each people. Bruno Schulz called him a “relentless hunter of cultural lies.” A demystifier and a humanist, an iconoclast and yet a moralist, Gombrowicz looked at the world through new eyes: painting, music, literature, philosophy, communism, Catholicism, youth, women, the Argentines, the Poles, the Jews, pain, agony, and death. There are also travel narratives, as well as lyrical and humorous writings. Incomparably rich—autobiography in movement, essay, and work of art—Gombrowicz’s *Diary* occupies a unique place in contemporary literature.

Rita Gombrowicz
Paris, November 8, 2011

Volume 1

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1953

I

Monday

Me.

Tuesday

Me.

Wednesday

Me.

Thursday

Me.

Friday

Józefa Radzymińska has magnanimously provided me with a dozen or so issues of *Wiadomości* and *Zycie*,* and, at the same time, I have been able to get my hands on a few issues of various Polish newspapers from back home. I read these Polish newspapers as if I were reading a story about someone whom I knew intimately and well, who suddenly leaves for Australia, for example, and there experiences rather strange adventures which are no longer real because they concern

* *The Literary News* and *Life*, Polish émigré publications.

someone different and strange, who can only be loosely identified with the person we once knew. So strong is the presence of time on these pages that we respond with a hunger for directness, a desire to live, and even an imperfect fulfillment. But it is as if this life were behind glass—removed—everything is as if it were no longer ours, as if it were being seen from a train.

If only one could hear a real voice in this kingdom of passing fiction! No—you hear either the echoes of fifteen years ago, or the rehearsed songs. The press in Poland, singing on the obligatory note, is as silent as a tombstone, an abyss, a secret, and the émigré Polish press is—charitable. Undoubtedly our spirit has become more kindly in emigration. The émigré press reminds me of a hospital where the patients are given only soups that are easily digested. Why open wounds? Why add more rawness to the wound life has already afflicted upon us and, after all, shouldn't we behave politely now that we have gotten spanked? Nothing but Christian goodness, decency, temperance, common sense, and virtue reign here so that everything that is written is nothing if not charitable. So many virtues! We were not this virtuous when we were surer of our ground. I do not trust virtue in those who have failed, virtue born of poverty and this entire morality remind me of Nietzsche's words: "The mitigation of our customs is the consequence of our weakness."

In contrast to the voice of the emigration, the voice from Poland resounds sharply and categorically, so much so that it is difficult to believe that this is not the voice of truth and life. Here at least we know what's going on, black and white, good and evil, here morality rings loud and strikes like a club. This singing would be magnificent if the singers were not terrified of it and if one did not sense the tremor in their voices, which arouses pity. . . . In the immense silence, our unforgotten, mute and gagged reality takes shape.

Thursday

Cracow. Statues and palaces, which seem quite splendid to them but which to us, Italians, seem without great value.

Galeazzo Ciano, *Diary*

Lechoń's article entitled "Polish Literature and Literature in Poland" in *Wiadomości*.

Is this really an honest piece of writing? His statements purport to show once again (yes, again!) that we are equal to the greatest world literatures, except that we are unknown and unappreciated. He writes (or says, rather, as this was a lecture given in New York for the local Polonia):

“Because our men of letters were preoccupied chiefly with things Polish, they could not fulfill the mission of designating the right place for our literature in the ranks of other literatures, or of establishing the world standing of our masterpieces. . . . Only a great poet, a master in his own language . . . could give his countrymen an idea of the level of our poets, equal to the greatest in the world, and could convince them that this poetry is of the same mettle, of the same fineness as the poetry of Dante, Racine, and Shakespeare.”

And so on. Of the same mettle? Lechoń was probably not too convincing. Because it is exactly the material of our literature which is different. To compare Mickiewicz to Dante or to Shakespeare is to compare fruit to preserves, a natural product to a processed one; a meadow, field, or village to a cathedral or city; an idyllic soul to an urban one which is rooted in people, not in nature, which is loaded with knowledge about the world of the human race. Was Mickiewicz less great than Dante? If we have to give ourselves up to these gauges, let us say that he looked at the world from gentle Polish slopes while Dante was elevated to the peak of a mighty mountain (made of people), from which he had access to other perspectives. Dante, while not being perhaps “greater,” was poised higher: this is why he has the advantage.

But that matters little. What I had in mind was the old-fashioned method and the endless repetition of this uplifting style. When Lechoń mentions, with pride, that Lautréamont “cites Mickiewicz,” my weary mind recalls, oh, how many other such revelations. How many times did this person or that, be it Grzymała or Dębicki, demonstrate *urbi et orbi* that we are not upstarts because “Thomas Mann considered *The Undivine Comedy** a great work” or because “*Quo Vadis* has been translated into all the major languages of the world.” These are the confections we feast on.

I would like to see the moment when the horse of the nation clamps its teeth down on the sweet hand of all the Lechońs.

* Romantic drama written in 1833 by Zygmunt Krasiński.

I understand Lechoń and what he was trying to do. This is, of course, our patriotic duty, considering the historical moment in our forced exile. This is the role of the Polish writer. And furthermore, he probably does believe in what he writes to a degree. I say “to a degree” because these are truths of a category that demands a great deal of good will. And, naturally, as far as “constructivism” goes, his appearance was entirely constructive and one hundred percent positive.

Fine. But my attitude toward these matters is different. I once happened to take part in a meeting devoted to yet another mutual Polish cheering up and support session, when, after having sung the Rota* and having danced the *Krakowiaczek*,† everyone settled down to listen to the speaker, who extolled the nation because “we produced Chopin,” “we have Curie-Skłodowska, Wawel,‡ Słowacki, Mickiewicz, and because we also figured as a bulwark of Christianity and our Third of May Constitution was really quite progressive. . . . The man explained to himself and to his audience that we are a great nation, which perhaps no longer arouses the enthusiasm of the listeners (who were familiar with this ritual and participated in it as in a Mass, where one does not expect surprises) but it was, nevertheless, received with something like satisfaction that one’s patriotic duty had been fulfilled. But I felt this ritual as if it were born of hell, this national Mass became something satanically sneering and maliciously grotesque. For they, in elevating Mickiewicz, were denigrating themselves and with their praise of Chopin showed that they had not yet sufficiently matured to appreciate him and that by basking in their own culture, they were simply baring their primitiveness.

Geniuses! The devil take those geniuses! I felt like saying to those gathered: Who cares about Mickiewicz? You are more important to me than Mickiewicz! And neither I nor anyone else will be judging the Polish nation according to Mickiewicz or Chopin, but according to that which goes on and which is said here in this hall. You could be a nation so devoid of greatness that your greatest artist might be Tetmajer or Konopnicka, yet if you talked about them with the ease of people *spiritually* liberated, with the proportion and sobriety of a mature people, or

* Traditional hymn sung at gatherings.

† Folk dance native to the area around Cracow.

‡ Hill where the Royal Castle, seat of the old capital of Poland, is located.

if your words could encompass the horizon of not some poor backwater but the world . . . then even Tetmajer would be cause for pride. But as things stand, Chopin and Mickiewicz serve only to emphasize your own narrow-mindedness, because, with the naïveté of children, you prance out your polonaises under the noses of a bored foreign audience just so you can strengthen the impaired sense of your own worth and endow yourselves with meaning. You are like the poor wretch who claims that his grandmother had a large estate and traveled to Paris. You are the poor relations of the world, who try to impress themselves and others.

This was not, however, the worst, most humiliating, or most painful aspect of the ritual. The most terrible thing was that life and modern minds were being sacrificed to the deceased. For this ceremony could be described as the mutual blunting of Poles in the name of Mickiewicz . . . and not one of those present was as unintelligent as that gathering, which constituted and belched a feeble, pretentious, and false phraseology. Yet the gathering knew it was unintelligent—unintelligent because it undertook issues which it had not mastered intellectually or emotionally. This is the source of the respect, the eager humility exhibited toward phraseology, the admiration for Art, the conventional and learned language, the lack of integrity and honesty. Here they were reciting. The gathering was also marked by inhibition, artificiality, and falseness because Poland was taking part in the meeting and a Pole does not know how to act toward Poland, it confuses him and makes him mannered. Poland inhibits the Pole to such a degree that nothing really “works” for him. Poland forces him into a cramped state—he wants to help it too much, he wants to elevate it too much. Observe that Poles act normally and correctly toward God (in church), but toward Poland they lose themselves. This means there is something here with which they are not yet comfortable.

I recall a tea in one Argentine home, where my acquaintance, a Pole, began to speak about Poland. Again, naturally, Mickiewicz and Kościuszko together with Sobieski and the Siege of Vienna came riding onto the table. The foreigners listened politely to these passionate opinions and heard that “Nietzsche and Dostoevski were of Polish extraction,” and that “we have two Nobel prizes in literature.” It occurred to me then that if someone were to praise himself or his family in this way, it would be considered quite tactless. I thought that this auction with other nations for geniuses and heroes, for merits and cultural achievements,

was really quite awkward from the point of view of propaganda tactics because with our half-French Chopin and not quite native Copernicus, we cannot compete with the Italians, French, Germans, English, or Russians. Therefore, it is exactly this approach that condemns us to inferiority. The foreigners, however, continued to listen patiently, as one listens to those who, pretending to the aristocracy, remind us over and over again that their great-great-grandfather was a castellan. They listened to this with all the greater boredom because it didn't interest them in the least because they themselves, constituting a young nation deprived, fortunately, of geniuses, were out of the running. Yet they listened indulgently and even sympathetically, because they could really sympathize with the psychological predicament of *del pobre polaco*. The Pole, on the other hand, enthralled by his role, would not stop.

Yet my situation as a Polish writer was becoming more and more scabrous. I am not eager in the least to represent anything beyond my own person: nevertheless, the world imposes these representative functions upon us against our will and it is not my fault that for these Argentines I was a representative of modern Polish literature. Therefore, I had a choice: ratify that style, the style of the poor relation, or destroy it, which destruction would have to take place at the cost of all the more or less flattering and positive information that had been imparted and the whole process would certainly be detrimental to our Polish interests. And it was, of course, nothing else but a regard for our national dignity that allowed me no calculations for I am a man with a distinctly heightened sense of personal dignity and such a man, even if he were not bound to his nation by bonds of common patriotism, will always maintain the dignity of his nation if only because he cannot tear himself away and is a Pole in the eyes of the world. That is why any humiliation of the nation humiliates him personally before others. These feelings, somewhat forced and independent of us, are a hundred times stronger than all learned and pat sentiments.

When we are overcome by a feeling such as this one, which is stronger than we are, we act somewhat blindly and these moments are extremely important for the artist, because it is then that form's bases of attack take shape and a position toward a burning issue is delineated. What did I say? I realized that only a radical change of tone could bring liberation. I tried, therefore, to indicate condescension in my voice and began to speak as one who attaches no great importance to the

attainments of the nation, whose past is worth a great deal less than its future, a nation for whom the highest law is the law of the present, the law of maximum spiritual freedom at a given moment. Pointing to the foreign elements in the blood of the Chopins, Mickiewiczes, Copernicuses (so that they would not think that I have anything to hide or that anything at all could take away my freedom of maneuver), I said that one should not take too seriously the metaphor that we, Poles, “gave” these people to the world as they were merely born among us. What does Mr. Kowalski have in common with Chopin? Does Chopin’s composition of the ballads raise Mr. Kowalski’s specific weight by even one iota? Can the Siege of Vienna augment Mr. Ziębicki of Radom by even an ounce of glory? No. We are not, I said, the direct heirs of past greatness or insignificance, intelligence or stupidity, virtue or sin and each person is responsible only for himself. Each is himself.

Here, however, I had the impression that I was not being adequately profound and that I had to speak more sweepingly (if what I was saying was to be effective). In admitting, therefore, up to a point, that certain specific virtues and the tensions, energies, charms, which are born in a mass and constitute its expression, do emerge in the great achievements of a nation, in the works of its artists. I struck at the very basis of national self-adulation. I said that if a nation truly mature should judge its own merits with temperance, then a nation truly vital must learn to disregard them. It must be absolutely condescending in relation to everything that is not its immediate concern and its current becoming. . . .

“Destruction” or “construction”? One thing is certain: these words were explosive to the degree that they undermined the diligent “propaganda” edifice and perhaps even shocked the foreigners in attendance. What a delight: to speak not for someone else but for oneself! When each word fixes you more firmly in yourself, lends you an inner strength, liberates you from a thousand fearful calculations, when you do not speak as a slave of effect, but as a free man!

Et quasi cursores, vitae lampada tradunt.

It was not until the very end of my philippic that I discovered the thought, which in that atmosphere of muddled improvisation seemed most excellent. Namely, that nothing that is really your own can impress you. If, therefore, our greatness or our past impresses us, it is proof that it has not yet entered our bloodstream.

Friday

The most characteristic part of *Wiadomości* are the letters from readers.

“Dear Editor: In the last issue, Zbyszewski is half-baked, as always; Mackiewicz lacks perspective; but that Naglerowa: delicious!—Felix Z.”

“Dear Editor: “It’s too bad that our writers work on themselves so little, good material, but unpolished, only Hemar is a real European. Keep working at it!—Joseph B.”

“Dear Editor: In my last letter I wrote that Roman is better than Żeromski. I will now say that he is the best, damn you, Roman, for that last feat, now that was a gem!!!! Keep it up! Kiss your children for me!—Konstanty F.”

A friendly little corner! A corner where Vincent can air his moans and Valerian can express his outrage and Frances can show off her erudition. What’s wrong with that? Nothing really, nothing at all. This is how literature is popularized, that’s all, this is how enlightenment is disseminated.

Yet this whooping it up in the corners by people who have not earned the right to figure in a different, less friendly spot, well, I have to say, this coziness disgusts me. Literature is a lady of strict habits and one should not go around pinching her in the corners. A characteristic of literature is its acuity. Even a literature that smiles good-naturedly to the reader is the product of the acute and solid development of its creator. Literature has to aspire to hone a spiritual life and not to tolerate this type of corner activity.

This detail, meaningless in principle, is nevertheless characteristic, as it accentuates the invasion of flaccidity into an area which should be firm. Literature, which is constantly made flabby by various kindhearted aunts who crank out novels or feuilletons, by producers of mediocre prose and poetry, or by slugs endowed with a facility for writing, is in danger of becoming a soft-boiled egg instead of being a hard-boiled one, which is its vocation.

Saturday

From B.T.’s article in *Wiadomości*: “I will risk stating that Polish optimism, despite appearances, is a result of pure intellectual laziness. Whenever the situation becomes difficult, we always resort to the tradition of ‘raising our spirits.’”

Next to this, on the same page, in W. Gr.'s article: "We are beginning to forget that the greatness of literature depends on its sovereignty. . . . Art serves no one."

Heatwave. My fatigue refuses to read on . . . yet these phrases are troubling. I could endorse them myself because they are so close to me in content. Yet, it is exactly because they are close to me in content that they become disturbingly hostile. Exactly because the content comes from someone else, is the result of other worlds, a different stylistic and spiritual background. It is enough for me to read one of the next sentences written by W. Gr.:

"*The Fop Goes A-Courting** is real literature . . . a self-sufficient bauble, just as a healthy man in cheerful sunshine or breezy shade is a self-sufficient bauble. . . ."

It is exactly this combination of bauble-health, matching what I know about this author from his other work, that repels me and makes his statement unsavory. How much depends on whose lips utter an opinion that is ours and that we support. I think that certain ideas in Poland have always lacked the right people. By this I mean that the people were not in a position to guarantee the ideas not only enough strength, but also that magnetic attraction that a "well-turned" soul wields. What is even stranger is that we had an exceptional number of noble, and even lofty, writers. Yet the personality of a Żeromski, Prus, Norwid, even Mickiewicz, was incapable of rousing (at least in me) the trust that fills Montaigne to the brim. It looks as if our writers hid something in themselves along the road of their development and, as a consequence of that concealment, were incapable of a comprehensive honesty, as if their virtue could not look all varieties of sin in the face.

The sentences cited above disturb me for another reason, too. The auto-didactic "we." We Poles are such and such. This and that happens to *us* Poles. Our weakness, the weakness *we* Poles share is this. This style is tiresome because it is provincial, yet who of us does not lecture the people in this way? This is one of those stylistic traps that wait in ambush for the person writing and that, judging from my own experience, are incredibly difficult to avoid.

As always, this stylistic slip is a symptom of a more serious ailment. The flaw in this conception is contained in the aphorism: *medice, cura te ipsum*. Of course, that "we" is a courtesy because here the author speaks as an educator, as he who

* Comedy in verse written in 1781 by Franciszek Zablocki.

confronts us with Europe and pronounces deficiencies that pain him as well. Behind such a seemingly simple remark lurks quite a load of conceit, not to mention that the heavy pedagogy of such formulations is of the kind that comes too cheaply, too easily, something that anybody can afford simply by putting on the airs of a “European.” Yet the main and fundamental root of this error reaches so profoundly into our depths that it is no mean feat to say to it once and for all: so long.

How can I say this? It is a matter of energy and vitality. It is a matter of our very attitude toward life. Ah, at school Adam wondered what his weaknesses were and how he could weed them out: he wanted to be pious like Zdzisław, practical like Joey, smart like Henry, witty like Wacio . . . for which he was highly praised by his teachers. But his classmates didn’t like him and gladly beat him up.

II

Monday

After a sixteen-hour, quite bearable (if it weren’t for the tangos that were blaring out of the speaker!) bus ride from Buenos Aires—the green hills of Sal-sipuedes and I among them with Miłosz’s book *The Captive Mind* under my arm. Because it poured all day yesterday, I am almost finished with the book. So you were destined for this, this was your lot, your road, my old acquaintances, friends, companions from the Ziemiańska or the Zodiak. I here, you there, that is how it has been described and unmasked. Miłosz tells the history of the bankruptcy of literature in Poland smoothly and I ride his book straight through that streamlined cemetery, just as, two days ago, I rode the bus along the asphalt highway.

Terrifying asphalt. It does not appall me that *tempora mutantur*, it appalls me that *nos mutamur in illis*. I am not aghast at the change in living conditions, the fall of states, the annihilation of cities and other surprise geysers, spurting out of the womb of History, but the fact that a fellow whom I knew as X suddenly becomes Y, changes his personality like a jacket and begins to act, speak, think, and feel contrary to himself fills me full of fear and embarrassment. What a terrible shamelessness! What a ridiculous demise! To become a gramophone, onto which is put a record with the label “His Master’s Voice”? What a grotesque fate for these writers!

Writers! We would save ourselves a great many disillusionments if we did not call everyone who can “write,” “a writer.” I knew those “writers.” They were usually persons of rather superficial intelligence and quite narrow horizons who, as far as I can remember, did not become anybody so that today they don’t really have much to give up. These cadavers were characterized in their lifetime by the following: it was easy for them to fabricate a moral and ideological face, thereby earning the approbation of the critics and the more serious part of the readership. I did not believe in Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Catholicism for even a second, and, after reading a few pages of his novel, I greeted his suffering and spiritualized face in the Café Zodiak with a face so doubtful that the offended author immediately broke off all relations with me.

Both the Catholicism and the sufferings of the book were received with shouts of “hosanna” by the naive, who mistook a reheated hash for rare tenderloin steak. The besotted nationalism of Gałczyński, who was truly talented, was worth as much as the intellectualisms of the Ważyks, or the ideology of the group around *Prosto z Mostu*.^{*} In the Warsaw cafés, just as in the cafés all around the world, there was a need for “idea and faith,” the result of which was that writers began to believe in this thing or that overnight. As for me, I always considered this child’s play; and I even pretended that it amused me although deep inside, I was appalled at this introduction to the future Great Masquerade.

All of this was cheap and no cheaper than, in the majority of cases, the cloying humanity of various women, the poeticality of Tuwim and the Skamandrites, the inventions of the avant-garde, the murkiness of the aesthetic-philosophical rampages of the Peipers, Brauns, and other manifestations of literary life.

Spirit is born of the imitation of spirit and a writer must pretend to be a writer in order finally to become a writer. Prewar literature in Poland was, with few exceptions, a fair imitation of literature, but that is all. Those people knew what a great writer was supposed to be: “authentic,” “profound,” “constructive” and they then tried to fulfill these requirements yet their game was spoiled by the awareness that it was not their own “profundity” and “loftiness” that was compelling them to write, but the reverse: they were creating the profundity so that they could be

^{*} Interwar publication, a Warsaw weekly, *Straight from the Shoulder*.

writers. That is how this subtle blackmail of values came about and it was no longer clear whether someone was voicing humility only to elevate himself and stand out, or if that someone was voicing the bankruptcy of culture and literature in order to be a good literary figure. The greater the hunger for real and pure value among these beings, so restricted by their own contradictions, the more desperate the feeling of the inevitable and all-demanding kitsch. O those exhausted intelligences, those inflated heights, those subtleties dragged out by the hair, those souls suffering, all this for a readership! There was only one means by which to get out of this hell: to disclose reality, bare the entire mechanism and loyally acknowledge the primacy of the human over the divine. Yet it is exactly this that literature feared, and it wasn't just our literature that feared it. None of the literati would admit it to the world even though this was the only thing that could arm them with a new truth and honesty. This is the reason that prewar Polish literature was becoming more and more of an imitation. Yet the virtuous little nation, which took its literature seriously, was very surprised to see that its "top writers," when pressed to the wall by the historical moment, began to change their skin, easily absorbed the new faith, and even began to dance to the tune that was played for them. Writers! The point is precisely that these were writers who would stop at nothing to be writers. They were ready to make the most heroic sacrifices in order to remain writers.

I don't at all claim that I would not have gone the same route if submitted to the same pressures as they, actually it would have been quite likely, but at least I wouldn't have made a fool of myself, like they did, because I was more honest in relation to myself and those absolute values did not issue from my lips as profusely. Then, in the swarming and noisy coffeehouses of Warsaw, it was as if I had a foreboding of the day of confrontation, the revelation and baring, as a result of which I preferred to avoid platitudes. Not everything is bankruptcy in that bankruptcy, however, and today, in Miłosz's book, I am inclined to look for new possibilities rather than signs of an ultimate catastrophe. The following question is what interests me: how far can these grim experiences assure the Eastern writers a superiority over their Western counterparts?

For it is certain that in their fall, they have an advantage in some special way over the West, and in several instances Miłosz underlines the power and wisdom that can result from that type of mendacity, terror, and consistent deforma-

tion. Miłosz himself is an illustration of this specific development, because his calm streamlined word, which watches what he describes with such mortal calm, has the flavor of a specific maturity, somewhat different from that which blooms in the West. I would say that in his book, Miłosz is fighting on two fronts: the point is not only to condemn the East in the name of Western culture, but also to impose one's own distinct experience and one's own new knowledge of the world—derived from over there—on the West. This almost personal duel between a modern Polish writer and the West, where the stakes are an exhibition of one's own value, power, distinctness, is far more interesting to me than Miłosz's analysis of Communist issues, which, even though it is exceptionally penetrating, cannot introduce elements that are entirely new.

Miłosz himself once said something like this: the difference between a Western and East European intellectual is that the former has not had a good kick in the a—. In keeping with the thought of this aphorism, our strong point (I include myself in this) would be that we are representatives of a *brutalized culture*, that is, a culture that is close to life. Miłosz himself knows the boundaries of this truth, and it would be pitiful if our prestige were based exclusively on the bruised quarter of our body. A bruised part of the body is not a part of the body in its normal state, and philosophy, literature, and art must also serve people who have not had their teeth knocked out, their eyes blackened, or their jaws broken. Nevertheless, look at Miłosz and see how he tries to adjust his wildness to the demands of Western delicacy.

Body and Spirit. It sometimes happens that bodily comforts intensify the sharpness of the soul and that, behind the still curtains, in the stuffy room of a bourgeois, a severity is born that is completely alien to those who threw themselves at tanks. Therefore, our brutalized culture can be of use only if it can be digested as a new form of real culture that is thought through and organized by our contribution to the universal spirit.

Question: Is Miłosz, is a free Polish literature, capable of even partially fulfilling these demands?

I am writing all of this in my room and I must stop as supper is waiting for me at the rooming house, Las Delicias. Farewell for now, little diary, faithful dog of my soul. Don't howl—your master is leaving, it is true, but he will return.

Wednesday

For a while (and, possibly, because of the monotony of my existence here), I have been overcome by a curiosity which I have never before experienced, a curiosity of such pure intensity, curiosity as to what will happen within the next moment. Right before me, a wall of darkness out of which springs the most direct immediacy, like a terrifying revelation. What will come around the corner? A man? A dog? If it's a dog, then what shape will it have, what pedigree? I sit at the table and in a moment, my soup will arrive, but, what kind of soup? This very basic feeling has not been adequately treated in art. Man—as an instrument transforming the unknown into the known—does not figure in the pantheon of its heroes.

I have finished Miłosz's book.

It is immeasurably instructive, stimulating, and shocking reading for all of us Polish literati.

I think about it almost nonstop when I am alone and I have to say that Miłosz the defender of Western civilization interests me far less than Miłosz the opponent and rival of the West. When he tries to be different from Western writers is when he is most valuable to me. I feel the same thing in him that I find in myself: antipathy and condescension in relation to them, mixed with a bitter powerlessness. Comparing Miłosz with Claudel, for example, with Cocteau or even Valéry, leads to odd conclusions. It would seem that this Polish writer, this pal of Andrzejewski and Gałczyński, his habitué of the Ziemiańska, dispenses a greater dose of realism and is more “modern,” and, what's more, more free spiritually, more open to reality and more loyal to it. Furthermore, one has the impression that he is even more isolated and more, that he has cast off the remainder of the illusions that Western seers cling to (Valéry, although he was completely bereft of illusions, did not stop being a man tied to a certain milieu and to a certain social order while Miłosz has been completely thrown from the saddle). So one could say that a brutalized culture furnishes one with considerable advantages. Yet all of this is as if it were unfinished, unarticulated, and unconsolidated and we lack, perhaps, the final consciousness that lends full distinction and power to our truth. We lack the key to our riddle.

How the indistinctness of our relationship to the West chafes! A Pole, when confronting the East, is a Pole delineated and known in advance. A Pole with his

face turned toward the West has a turbid visage, full of unclean angers, disbelief, and secret sore spots.

Thursday

It is raining and is still quite cold. Because of this, I spent all day reading *The Brothers Karamazov* in an excellent edition, which includes the author's letters and commentary.

Friday

The mail: R. sent me letters and periodicals, among them the latest issue of *Kultura*. I find out that Miłosz won the Prix Européen for a novel which I have not read: *La prise du pouvoir*.^{*} In that same issue of *Kultura* are Miłosz's comments on *The Marriage* and *Trans-Atlantic*.

Saturday

Most of the many letters that I am getting regarding *Trans-Atlantic* are neither an expression of protest—because of the “affront to the most sacred of feelings”—nor a polemic, nor even a commentary. No. Only two mighty issues concern these readers: How dare I write certain words with capitals in the middle of a sentence? How dare I use the word sh—?

What am I supposed to think about the intellectual and other levels of a person who does not yet know that a word changes depending on how it is used? That even the word “rose” can become less than sweet-smelling if it appears on the lips of a pretentious aesthete, and that the word “sh—” can be considered genteel if it is used intentionally by a discipline conscious of its goals?

But, no, they read literally. If a person uses lofty words, that person is noble. If he uses strong words, he is strong; if crude words, he is crude. And this dull literalness reigns on even the highest rungs of society, so how then is one to dream of a Polish literature on a more universal scale?

^{*} *Seizure of Power*.

Tuesday

(two weeks later, after returning from Buenos Aires)

I received a letter from Milosz, who writes the following critique of *Trans-Atlantic*:

“At the same time I would like to share with you my thoughts about your writing. There are times when I have the feeling that you act like Don Quixote, who lends a certain life to windmills and sheep. From a Polish perspective (that is, from the perspective of the terrible thrashing which they got), the ‘Poles,’ whom you try to free from Polishness, are poor shadows with an unusually low degree of being. In other words, you sometimes act as if that entire horrifyingly effective liquidation there in Poland had not happened, as if Poland had been swept away by a lunar catastrophe and you come along with your revulsion to an immature, provincial Poland from before 1939. Perhaps this settling of accounts is needed and even necessary, but in my view, this has already been done quite categorically. Many issues have already been settled this way. This is a difficult problem, which is based on the fact that Marxism eliminates certain problems (by the same principle that the blowing up of a city eliminates marital quarrels, concerns about the furniture, etc.).

“There is a nihilistic trap here and we are poised somewhere between the desire to speak to people in Poland, that is, to create a post-Marxist formation (which must digest and engulf Marxism) and the entirely personal desire for independent thought (which cannot take the climate over there, in conquered countries, into consideration but which, nonetheless, changes the past as well as the future). When I read your work, I always think of this. . . .”

To which I answered:

“Dear Czesław:

“If I understand you correctly, you have two reservations about Trans-Atlantic: first that I am settling accounts with a pre-1939 Poland, which has vanished into thin air, and that thereby I avoid today’s Poland, the real Poland. That my thoughts, like a cat, stray too much along their own paths, that I have my own world, which seems chimerical or outdated.

"Yet, as you correctly observe, you judge this issue from the perspective of the homeland while I cannot see the world in any other way except from my own perspective.

"To introduce a certain amount of order into my feelings, I decided quite a while ago that I would write only about my own reality. I cannot write about Poland as it is today because I do not know it. This 'memoir,' that is, Trans-Atlantic, concerns my experiences before 1939 in the face of the Polish catastrophe of that time.

"Can this settling of accounts with Poland be important for today's Poland? You mention Don Quixote in your letter and I think to myself that Cervantes wrote Don Quixote to settle accounts with the bad knighthood romances of his time, of which not a single tract has survived while Quixote has. From which humbler authors can derive the moral that one can write in a lasting way about things that are nonlasting.

"Even though Trans-Atlantic uses pre-1939 Poland, it is aiming at all Polish presents and futures, where the point is victory over national form as such and an elaboration of distance to any kind of 'Polish style,' whatever it may be. Today, Poles in Poland are subjected to a certain 'Polish style,' born there under the pressure of their new collective life. In a hundred years, if we are still a nation, other forms will emanate from among us and my future grandchild will rebel against them just as I am rebelling today.

"I attack Polish form because it is my form, because all of my works desire to be, in a certain sense (certain because this is only one of the senses of my nonsense), a revision of the modern man in relation to form, to form which is not a result of him but which is formed 'between' people. I do not need to tell you that this thought, together with all of its ramifications, is a child of our times, when people have intentionally set out to remake man. It even seems to me that it is the key to understanding today's consciousness.

"Yet even though there is nothing that appalls me more than anachronism, I prefer not to identify too much with the slogans of the present day, which change rapidly. I feel that art should maintain a distance from slogans and look for its own, more personal, paths. In works of art I like the mysterious deviation the best, the deviation that causes that a work, even while adhering to its epoch, nevertheless is the work of a separate individual who lives his own life. . . ."

I include this exchange of letters to let the reader in on the conversations of writers like Miłosz and myself who search for a certain line in writing, each in his own way. I must add a few comments though. My letter to Miłosz would have been a great deal more honest and complete if I had included this truth in it: that I really don't care all that much about these theses, ways, and problems and that I occupy myself with them against my will. Basically, I am *childish*. Is Miłosz, too, *primarily* childish?

Wednesday

Miłosz is a first-rate force. This is a writer with a clearly defined purpose, called to quicken our pulse so that we can keep up with the epoch. He has a magnificent talent, finely tuned to complete his tasks. He possesses something that is worth its weight in gold, something that I would call a “will to reality” and, at the same time, a sensitivity to the crucial points of our crisis. He belongs to those few whose words have meaning (the only thing that can undermine him is haste).

This writer, however, has currently transformed himself into an expert on Poland and Communism. Just as I distinguished between an Eastern Miłosz and a Western one, now perhaps I should also make a distinction between Miłosz the “absolute” writer and Miłosz the writer of the immediate historical moment. It is precisely the Western Miłosz (the one who in the name of the West, judges the East) that is the Miłosz of a lesser, more topical, caliber. One could accuse this Western Miłosz of many things that pertain to that entire section of today's literature that lives off of just one problem: Communism.

The first reproach is: *they exaggerate*. Not in the sense that they magnify the danger, but in the sense that they impute certain demonic traits to that world, some type of extraordinariness, something new and shocking. This approach is simply not reconcilable with maturity, which, in knowing the essence of life, does not allow itself to be surprised by its events. Revolutions, wars, cataclysms—what does this foam mean when compared to the fundamental horror of existence? You say there has been nothing like it before? You forget that in the nearest hospital no lesser atrocities take place. You say that millions are dying? You forget that millions have been dying, incessantly, without a moment's respite, since the beginning of

time. You are horrified and dumbfounded by that horror because your imagination has fallen asleep and you forget that we rub up against hell with our every step.

This is important because Communism can be judged effectively only from the perspective of the most severe and profound sense of existence, never from a point of view that is superficial and subdued, never from a bourgeois point of view. You get carried away by the desire (appropriate to artists) to paint the picture in brighter colors, to lend it as much expression as possible. That is why your literature is a magnification of Communism and in your imagination you build a phenomenon that is so powerful and so extraordinary that it doesn't take much more for you to fall to your knees before it.

Therefore, I ask you: wouldn't it be more in keeping with history and with our knowledge of man and the world if you treated the world from behind the curtain not as a new, incredible, and demonic world but as a devastation and distortion of a normal world? If you maintained the right proportion between the convulsions of a destroyed surface and the unrelenting, powerful, and profound life that continues beneath it?

And the second reproach: by reducing everything to that one antinomy between East and West, you must inevitably conform to patterns that you yourself create. And even more so because there is no way to make the distinction between what is the quest for truth in you and what a desire for psychological mobilization in the battle. I don't mean to say that you cultivate propaganda. I want to say that deep collective instincts, that today dictate to humanity that it should concentrate on just one struggle, are speaking through you. You swim with the current of the mass imagination, which has already created its own language, ideas, images, and myths, and the current is carrying you farther than you would like to go. How much Orwell is there in Miłosz? How much Koestler is there in Orwell? How much of both of them is in the thousands upon thousands of words uttered on that one subject and produced by printing presses day after day, which is not due to the American dollar but is the result of our very nature, which desires a sharply defined world for itself? In you, the boundlessness and richness of life are reduced to a few issues, and you use an oversimplified concept of the world, a concept you well know is provisional.

Why, the value of pure art is exactly in its breaking up of these set patterns.

The third reproach is even more painful. Whom do you wish to serve, the individual or the masses? Communism is something that subordinates man to a human collectivity, from which one should conclude that the best way to fight Communism is to strengthen the individual against the masses. Since it is obvious that politics, the press, and topical literature, calculated for practical effect, desire to create a collective force capable of battling the Soviets, the task before serious art is quite different. Serious art will either remain what it has been for centuries—the voice of the individual, the medium of man in the singular—or it will perish. From this standpoint, one page of Montaigne, a single Verlaine poem, or one sentence by Proust is far more anti-Communist than the accusing choir which you represent. They are free and therefore they are liberating.

And last, the fourth reproach: genuinely ambitious art (these reproaches are directed only at creators with high aspirations, at those who do not deny the name of artists) must be in advance of its time, it must be the art of tomorrow. How is one to reconcile this wonderful task with reality, that is, with today? Artists are proud that recent years have expanded their perception of man. By comparison, more recently deceased authors appear naive. Yet all of these truths and half-truths were given to them just so they could surmount them to discover others lurking beneath. Art must destroy today's ideas in the name of impending ones. But those impending tastes, tomorrow's issues, the awaiting spiritual states, concepts, feelings: how can they be born under a pen that strives only to consolidate today's vision, today's contradictions? The observations that Miłosz published in *Kultura* about my play are a good illustration of this. He saw what was “timely” in *The Marriage*, the despair and the moan that result from the degradation of human dignity and the violent crash of civilization, but he did not notice how far delight and play—which are ready to raise man above his own defeats at a moment's notice—hide behind that facade of today!

Gradually we are becoming sated with today's feelings. Our symphony is getting close to the moment when the baritone rises and sings: brothers, cast off your songs; let other tones resound! The song of the future, however, will not be born under a pen that is excessively tied to the present time.

It would be stupid if I harbored ill feelings toward people who, upon seeing a fire, sound the alarm. Such are not my intentions. Yet I am saying: let each person do what he was called to do and what he is capable of doing. Literature

of a high caliber must aim high and concern itself chiefly with not allowing anything to impede its range. If you want a projectile to soar, you must point the barrel upward.

Friday

A new issue of *Wiadomości* and in it my “Banquet.” And a flattering article about Miłosz. I read: “*The Captive Mind* is a great deflating of émigré literature.” And further: “Certain chapters of Miłosz, more than anything else that I know, remind me most of Proust, except that they are better than Proust.” Further down, this passage: “The remaining chapters—those historico-economico-philosophical theories clearly are beyond the author’s level of knowledge. They are well-articulated aphorisms which lack a scientific and informed base: the pretensions of this book rise well above its real worth.”

I am afraid that the aspirations of this review rise well above its real worth. If émigré literature still needs to be “deflated” and if that is to be Miłosz’s greatest service, then it is better not to mention Proust at all, who, for whatever it is worth, had less elementary problems on his mind. The very comparison of Miłosz to Proust is enough to make the reader go stark raving mad and utter: So what does this have to do with the price of tea in China? What does a weather vane have in common with a cock?

But this is not so important. Truly noteworthy is the third fragment I cited. Mr. Mackiewicz: Who of the literati, who of the educated, which of the wise men possess in full these “basics of science and knowledge”? Isn’t it true that our libraries have outgrown our capabilities, that we are all ignoramuses more or less and that the only thing we have left is to wield the amount of knowledge that we do have with good will? You mean to tell me that a man of unusual intelligence such as Miłosz has no right to simply tell us his most personal experiences, nor to seek the truth in them that he is capable of seeking, without having someone say that he is pretentious, conceited, and ignorant? In the sixth grade I was a member of the Debating Club, and I recall that these were the deadliest of reproaches and all the deadlier because, like a ball, they bounced back at you: it’s not I, but you that is a conceited ignoramus!

And where did he get these historico-economico-philosophical theories

that supposedly make up the greater part of the book? Really, people write just any old thing in their reviews.

My attitude to *Wiadomości* (and to *Kultura*) and to Stanisław Mackiewicz is complicated. I consider *Wiadomości* an excellent and uncommonly useful weekly and I read Mackiewicz with the greatest pleasure (even when he irritates me) but the crushing ease with which literary publicism dismisses literature arouses my resistance. There is something contained in the very nature of the literary press that lodges in literature's throat.

Thursday

Once I was explaining to someone that in order to feel the real cosmic significance of man for man, he should imagine the following:

I am completely alone in a desert. I have never seen people nor do I imagine that another man is even possible. At that very moment an analogous creature appears in my field of vision, which, while not being me, is nevertheless the same principle in an alien body. Someone identical but alien nevertheless. And suddenly I experience, at precisely the same moment, a wondrous fulfillment and a painful division. Yet one revelation stands out above all the rest: I have become boundless, unpredictable to myself, multiple in possibilities through this alien, fresh but identical power, which approaches me as if I were approaching myself from the outside.

To finish with the reflections on Miłosz: I try to understand what this key idea could be, which our Eastern experience can contribute to the West and what modern Polish literature's contribution can be to Western literature.

I will undoubtedly conceive of this thing in rather subjective terms as thinking is not my specialty and I do not conceal the fact that to me thought is simply auxiliary scaffolding. I would like only to indicate which strings are strummed by that, our Eastern reality.

To a believing Communist, the revolution appears to be a triumph of intelligence, virtue, and truth, so that there is nothing in it that would deviate from the normal line of human progress. To a "pagan," however, as Miłosz says, "revolution brings a different awareness," which he grasps in the following sentence: that man is capable of doing everything to another man.

There is something in this which begins to separate us, Eastern literati, more or less from the West. (Notice how careful I am. I say “more or less” and “begins.”) In spite of everything, the West lives with a vision of isolated man and absolute values. We, on the other hand, begin to see the formula: man plus man, man multiplied by man and that this should in no way be connected with any kind of collectivism. Buber, a Jewish philosopher, described this pretty well when he said that the individualist philosophy we have known up to now has done itself in and that the greatest disillusionment that awaits mankind in the near future is the bankruptcy of collectivist philosophy, which conceives of the individual as a function of the masses but really subordinates it to such abstractions as social class, state, nation, and race. It will be on the corpses of these worldviews that the third vision of man will be born: man in relation to another man, a concrete man, I in relation to you and him. . . .

Man through man. Man in relation to man. Man created by man. Man strengthened by man. Is it my illusion that I see in this a secret new reality? For in thinking about these misunderstandings that are springing up between us and the West, I always stumble on the “other” man, raised to the category of a creative power. This can be contained in twenty various definitions or expressed in 150 ways but it will remain a fact. To us, sons of the East, the problem of individual conscience is beginning to melt in our hands while it is still fattening half of French literature, and Lady Macbeth and Dostoyevski become unbelievable. At least half the texts written by the various Mauriacs seem to have been written on the moon. We sense certain indigestible luxuries in the voices of Camus, Sartre, Gide, Valéry, Eliot, and Huxley, remnants of times which are over for us. These differences become so sharp in practice that I, for example (and I say this without the least exaggeration), am incapable of talking about art with artists because the West has remained faithful to absolute values and still believes in art and the delights which it brings us, while for me the delight is imposed, born between us. Where they see a man kneeling before Bach’s music, I see people who force each other to genuflect and feel delight and admiration. This vision of art must be reflected in my coexistence with it and I listen to a concert differently. I admire the great masters differently and I judge poetry differently.

And this is how it is with everything. If our sensibility has not yet launched itself with enough force then it is because we are slaves of an inherited language,

but it is forcing its way to the surface through the cracks of form with increasing strength. What will be born, what can be born in Poland in the souls of a ruined and brutalized people when one day (in the future) even the new order that has stifled the old disappears and nothing follows? Here's a possible scenario: the dignified edifice of a thousand-year-old civilization collapses. It is quiet and empty and a swarm of ordinary little human beings, who cannot recover from the shock, stand on the ruins. Their church has fallen, along with the altars, paintings, stained-glass windows, and statues before which they knelt. The vaults that protected them have long since changed into dust and rubble and they are revealed in all of their nakedness. Where should they take shelter? What should they worship? To whom should they pray? Whom should they fear? Where should they locate the source of inspiration and strength? Would it be strange if they saw the only creative force and the only accessible Divinity in themselves? This is the way that leads from the worship of human products to the discovery of man himself, as the decisive and naked power.

The inhabitants of the splendid edifice that is Western civilization ought to prepare themselves for an invasion of homeless people with a new perception of man . . . which will not take place. I have just changed my mind. If a Bulgarian does not trust a Bulgarian, if a Bulgarian despises Bulgarians, if a Bulgarian takes a Bulgarian for a . . . (here we have to use that famous deleted word), then we will not impose our feeling on anyone else because we do not take our feelings seriously. And it would be too strange if this vision of man were to be born among people who have nothing but contempt for one another.

Tuesday

Another view, this time in *Orzeł Biały*,* about *Trans-Atlantic* and *The Marriage*. Jan Ostrowski. If I can't understand a thing in these crippled, disheveled, unwashed, bellowing sentences, then what will others understand?

"As usual, the avant-garde feelers of literature encounter a protruding 'back-side,' the most drastic things. Judging from his pronouncements, Gombrowicz's concerns depend on a revelation of partial perfection."

* *The White Eagle*.

“Gombrowicz has transformed himself from an importer of literary novelties during the war to an exporter of Polish literary products.”

Three columns of this sloppiness. Ostrowski is, as far as I know, the editor of the literary section of *Orzeł Biały*. It's probably true: this article could only have been deemed fit for print by the person who wrote it.

Why does the captive mind of the editor poke and pinch my book wherever he can? I looked for this secret and found it in the next sentence. “He defiled himself and the entire emigration. . . . For the time being he gets a polemical thrashing, doses of anaesthetic silence.” Mr. Ostrowski recognized that a polemical thrashing is more effective, even though persons who do not know how to speak ought to choose the anaesthetic silence. Silence on the subject of me, Mr. Ostrowski, would be more damning from lips capable only of stupidity.

What should one do with the charming phenomenon of a writer of feuilletons of Mr. Ostrowski's type. A delightful figure, who demolishes viewpoints with a few words, teaches, uncovers truths, shapes, consolidates, forms, unmasks, constructs, launches, orients. . . . He will even spice his feuilletons with God, but, God or truth, God is not what he wants but to stick a needle into someone's a—. What gives him the authority to misuse God's name in this way or to exploit so many serious names to stuff his article and exploit the good faith of his readers? What? Healthy ideals, of course. Yet I, an ignoble rabble-rouser and cynic, I know that there is nothing simpler than to have healthy ideals. Anyone is capable of them. Each person has healthy ideals, each according to his own convictions. These healthy ideals are a disaster, an illness, the curse of our dishonest century. Ostrowski is a microbe of that illness that Miłosz has diagnosed. This is how small causes bring about monstrous effects. It is easy to have ideals, but it is hard not to falsify minute details in the name of great ideals.

III

Wednesday

Upon meeting the young painter Eichler at the Grodzickis', I said: I don't believe in painting! (To musicians I say, I don't believe in music!) Then I found out from Zygmunt Grocholski that Eichler asked him if I make up these paradoxes for

the hell of it. They can't imagine how much truth there is in them, truth that is probably truer than the truths that nourish their slavish "attachment" to art.

Yesterday I went to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes with N. N., after submitting to his pleas. The excess of paintings exhausted me even before I began to look at them. We would walk from room to room, stop at one of the paintings, then move on to another painting. Of course, my companion exhaled "simplicity" and "naturalness" (that secondary naturalness that is a victory over artificiality) and, in keeping with the obligatory *savoir-vivre*, he avoided anything that could be construed as exaggerated. I belched an apathy that gleamed with revulsion, animosity, revolt, anger, and absurdity.

There were ten other people besides ourselves who walked up, looked, then walked away. The mechanical quality of their movements, their muteness, gave them the appearance of marionettes and their faces were nonexistent compared to the faces that peered out of the canvas. This is not the first time that the face of art has irritated me by extinguishing the faces of the living. Who visits museums? A painter, more often a student from a school of fine arts or a pupil from high school, a woman who does not know what to do with her time, a few art lovers, people who have come from afar and are visiting the city. Other than these types, there was practically no one else even though everyone would swear on their knees that Titian or Rembrandt are wonders that make their spines tingle.

This absence does not surprise me. Large, empty rooms hung with canvases are repugnant and capable of casting one into pits of depression. Paintings are not meant to be hung next to one another on a bare wall, a painting is meant to adorn an interior and to be the joy of those who live with it. Here in the museum, the paintings are crowded, the amount crowds the quality, masterpieces counted in dozens stop being masterpieces. Who can look closely at a Murillo when the Tiepolo next to it demands attention and thirty other paintings further down shout: look at us! There exists an unbearable, degrading contrast between the *intention* of each of these works of art, which wants to be the only and exclusive one, and hanging the paintings all together in this room. Yet art, not just painting, is full of such marginal clashes, absurdities, uglinesses, and stupidities which we cast outside of the mainstream of our feelings. An old tenor in the role of the young Siegfried does not jar us, nor do frescoes we can't see, a Venus with a broken nose, or an old lady declaiming young poems.

I, however, am less and less inclined to divide my sensitivity into compartments and I do not want to close my eyes to the absurdities that accompany art but are not art. I demand of art not only that it be good art, but also that it be well rooted in life. I do not want to tolerate its too silly temples or its too ridiculous prayers. . . . If these are the masterpieces that are to fill us with admiration, why then do we feel afraid, uncertain and why do our emotions wander blindly? Before we fall on our knees before a masterpiece, we wonder whether this is supposed to be a masterpiece. We ask shyly if this is supposed to astound us. We ask ourselves diligently if we are allowed to experience these heavenly raptures, after which we surrender ourselves to admiration. How are we to reconcile this supposedly striking, irresistible, spontaneous, and obvious power of art with the indecisiveness of our reaction? Every step of the way arise amusing gaffes, terrible mishaps, and fatal mistakes which unmask all the falseness of our language. The facts challenge our lies every time. Why is this original worth ten million and its copy (even though it is so perfect that it makes the identical artistic impression) worth only ten thousand? Why is there a pious crowd that gathers before the original, but no one admires the copy? That painting supplied divine emotions as long as it was considered to be a "work of Leonardo," but today no one will look at it, because a paint analysis has shown that it is the work of an apprentice. That back by Gauguin is a masterpiece, but in order to evaluate this masterpiece one must be familiar with technique, have the entire history of painting in one's head, and have a specialized taste. By what right then do those who have no preparation admire him? If (and this is what I said to my companion after we left the museum) instead of analyzing paint, we would subject the reactions of the viewer to a more precise, empirical examination, we would uncover an unlimited falseness that would bring all the Parthenons crashing to the ground and explode the Sistine Chapel with our shame.

He looked at me askance. He understood that he was experiencing a crisis of confidence. My reasoning sounded simplistic not because, in his understanding, I was not right, but, first of all, because this was not the language of a person from "good artistic society" and because neither Malraux, nor Cocteau, nor any other of the people whom he respected would have expressed himself this way. This was a collection of concepts that they had long outgrown. Yes, this was a "lower sphere," something really beneath them. No, one should not speak of art in this tone! I knew what flashed across his mind: that I am a Pole, that is, a more

primitive creature. Yet at the same time I was the author of books which he considered “European,” therefore, perhaps it was not Slavic primitivism issuing from my lips but perhaps I was making fun of him by making a nut out of myself? He said: You are saying that just to rile me.

Rile! If your stupidity riles me then allow me to rile you! Why don’t you want to see that sophistication not only does not exclude simplicity but should and must go hand in hand with it? If a person who complicates himself cannot also simplify himself at the same time, then he loses his inner resistance to the forces that he has awakened in himself and that will destroy him. Even if there were nothing more in my words than a desire to submit to art, while maintaining sovereignty in the face of it, then this ought to be applauded. This is healthy policy for an artist. Yet other, profounder reasons were crouching within me, about which he knew nothing. I could have said to him:

You think that I am naive, but it is you who are naive. You have no idea what is happening inside of you when you look at a painting. You think that you are getting close to art voluntarily, enticed by its beauty, that this intimacy is taking place in an atmosphere of freedom and that delight is being born in you spontaneously, lured by the divine rod of Beauty. In truth, a hand has grabbed you by the scruff of the neck, led you to this painting and has thrown you to your knees. A will mightier than your own told you to attempt to experience the appropriate emotions. Whose hand and whose will? That hand is not the hand of a single man, the will is collective, born in an interhuman dimension, quite alien to you. So you do not admire at all, you merely try to admire.

I could have said all this and a lot more, but I restrained myself. All of this must remain stifled within me. How does one lend this thought the right weight, how does one build it up and organize it into a more elaborate work, if my time is that of a minor clerk and not respected by anyone. Should I speak out of the side of my mouth? Should I allude to a truth that is impossible to elicit in its entirety? I had to remain unconfessed, fragmentary, and helpless in the face of an absurdity that distorted me. And not just me.

He says: I admire. I say: You are trying to admire. A slight difference, yet on this slight difference is built a mountain of devout lies. It is in this deceitful school that style is formed. Not just artistic style, but the style of thinking and

feeling of the elite which comes here in order to perfect its sensitivity and achieve a sureness of form.

Friday

I recall a lecture which I gave a few years ago in Fray Mocho (later printed in *Kultura*: "Against Poets"). At the time I had tried to show those Argentines, who were so removed, after all, from Europe, the necessity of renewing our approach to poetry. I was told: What? You, who are a typically elite writer, demand that art be for "everyone"?

Yet this does not mean that I insist on a popular art, nor that I am (and this was said, too) an enemy of art, nor that I doubt its importance and meaning. I only claim that it acts differently than we think. I am angered that an ignorance of this mechanism makes us inauthentic exactly at the point where honesty has the greatest worth. And it angers me most in Poles.

Our Slavic attitude to artistic matters is lax. We are less involved in art than the Western European nations and so we can afford a greater freedom of movement. This is exactly what I often said to Zygmunt Grocholski, who takes his Polishness (which is very elemental in him and is crushed by Paris) very seriously. His struggles are as hard as those of so many Polish artists, for whom the one rallying cry is "Catch up to Europe!" Unfortunately they are impeded in this pursuit by their being a different and very specific type of European, born in a place where Europe is no longer fully Europe. I said something to this effect to Eichler when we talked at the Grodzickis':

"I am amazed that Polish painters do not try to exploit their trump card, which is their Polishness, in art. Are you going to imitate the West forever? Prostrate yourselves before painting, like the French? Paint with gravity? Paint on your knees in great deference, paint timidly? I acknowledge this type of painting, but it is not in our nature because our traditions are different. Poles have never been especially concerned with art. We were inclined to believe that the nose was not for the snuff box but the snuff box for the nose. We preferred the thought that 'man is higher than what he produces.' Stop being afraid of your own paintings, stop adoring art, treat it in a Polish manner, look down at it, wield it, and then the

originality in you will be freed, new avenues will open before you and you will gain that which is the most valuable, the most fertile: your own reality.”

I could not convince Eichler, who had invested a great deal of energy and effort in creating a solid Europeanism for himself, and he merely looked at me in that by now familiar way, as if to say: how easy it is to talk! Painters and sculptors are crushed by the enormity of technical difficulties and so they concentrate on their struggle for the perfect line, color: they do not, generally speaking, desire to extricate themselves from their workshops. They underestimate the fact that a new way of seeing allows them to undo several knots that would otherwise not get untied. When I, therefore, demand of them that they be *people* who paint, they want only to be painters. I am confident, however, that today we have room in ourselves for thought about art which is more specifically ours and more creative. For we have experienced two concepts one after another, of which one, the aristocratic, forces the recipient to admire that which one can neither feel nor understand and the other, the proletarian one, which forces the creator to fabricate something that he despises, that is beneath him and good only for simpletons and imbeciles. The struggle between these two hostile schools takes place on our body and they destroy each other with such force that a vacuum has been created in us. Will we ever get ourselves out of this Turkish bath purified and capable of our own separate creative act?

Do not waste your precious time in pursuit of Europe. You will never catch up with her. Don't try to become Polish Matisse's, you will not spawn a Braque with your deficiencies. Strike, rather, at European art. Be those who unmask. Instead of pulling yourselves up to someone else's maturity, try instead to reveal Europe's immaturity. Try to organize your true feelings, so that they will gain an objective existence in the world. Find theories consistent with your practice. Create a criticism of art from your point of view. Create an image of the world, man, and culture which will be in harmony with you, because if you can paint this picture, it will not be difficult to paint others.

Saturday

G. R. read me a letter (which he claims was addressed to me) that he received from a Polish woman. I copied the following passages:

"Of course, I don't want to know anything, anything, anything at all, I just want to believe. I believe in the infallibility of my faith and in the actuality of my principles. A person who is healthy does not want to expose himself to bacteria and I do not want to inhale thought vapors which could undermine my faith, which is indispensable to me and my life, and which is even my very life itself. . . .

"One can believe only if one wants to believe and only if one nurtures one's belief. He who deliberately puts his faith to the test, in order to check if it is able to withstand it, he no longer believes in his belief. Yes, for not only must one believe. One must believe that one must believe. One must have faith in faith! One must come to love faith in oneself.

"Faith without faith in faith is not strong, nor can it give one the least satisfaction."

I read this in Fray Mocho. I was asked with great curiosity if Catholicism in Poland is as fervent now as it was before and whether or not *Polonia siempre fidelis*? I said that today's Poland is a piece of stale bread which breaks into two halves with a snap: the believing and the nonbelieving. After returning home I thought that the above passages were worthy of scrutiny. That "faith in faith," that strong accent on an act of will which "creates faith," that retreat from faith into the region where it is created, this is something that really addresses me.

Plus: what sort of position am I to take regarding Catholicism? I am not thinking of my strictly artistic work, because there one does not select positions or bases. Art creates itself, but I am thinking about my literature in its social form, about those articles, feuilletons. I am starkly alone when facing this problem because our thought, paralyzed in the year 1939, has not taken even one step forward in the area of fundamental issues. We cannot think anything through because we do not have a free mind. Our thought is so riveted to our predicament and so fascinated by Communism that we are capable only of thinking against or for it. We are secured to its chariot *avant la lettre*, it has conquered us, tying us to itself, even though we rejoice at the semblance of our freedom. Thus we are allowed to think about Catholicism only as a force capable of resisting, and God has become the pistol with which we would like to shoot Marx. This is a holy secret, which bows the heads of exquisite Masons, drives the anticleric wit out of lay feuilletons, dictates moving stanzas to the Virgin Mother to the poet Lechoń, restores a stirring

First Holy Communion innocence to socialist-atheist professors, and, in general, is the miracle worker of which philosophers have long dreamed. But is this the triumph of God or Marx? If I were Marx, I would be proud; if I were God, I would feel a little uncomfortable as an absolute. Pharisees! If you need Catholicism, then be a little more dignified and try to approach it a little more sincerely. Don't let that common front be sheer politics. I insist only that whatever happens in our spiritual life happen in the profoundest and most honest way. The time has come in which atheists should seek a new understanding with the Church.

The issue considered in an elementary way, however, immediately becomes discouragingly difficult, so that our hands really do hang helplessly at our sides. How are we supposed to come to an understanding with someone who believes, who wants to believe and will not entertain any other thought except the one that dogma will not include in its prohibitory index? Does any sort of mutual tongue exist between me, who derives from Montaigne and Rabelais, and that correspondent so passionate in her faith? Whatever I might say, she will measure it against her doctrine. Everything is already resolved in her, because she already knows the ultimate truth about the universe. Which means her humanity has an altogether different character and, from my viewpoint, an immeasurably strange one. In order to come to terms with her, I would have to demolish her ultimate truths, and the more convincing I become, the more satanic will I become in her eyes and the harder she will cover her ears. She is not allowed to entertain doubt, and my reasons will become nourishment for her *credo quia absurdum*.

A dangerous analogy comes to mind here, however. When you talk to a Communist, don't you have the impression that you are speaking to a "believer"? For a Communist, too, everything is taken care of, at least in the current phase of the dialectical process. He is in possession of the truth, he knows. And, what is more, he believes, and what is still more, he wants to believe. Even if you could prove otherwise to him, he will not be convinced, because he has given himself up to the Party. The Party knows better, the Party knows from him. Doesn't it seem to you that when your words were bouncing off this hermeticism like peas off a wall, that the real line of demarcation runs between the believers and nonbelievers and that this continent of faith encompasses such diverse churches as Catholicism, Communism, Nazism, Fascism. At that very moment you felt like someone threatened by a colossal Holy Inquisition.

Saturday

Engineer L. invited me to the meeting of a certain Catholic society. About twenty people and a monk. A short prayer was said, after which L. read passages from Simone Weil in his own very good, from what I could judge, translation. A discussion followed.

As always at such meetings, I was struck at first glance by the lamentable technical drawbacks of this undertaking. Simone Weil is difficult, dense, loaded with internal experience. One has to return to many of her thoughts over and over again. Who of these people could capture them in flight, assimilate and commit them to memory? Even if they had been grasped . . .

The discussion was of the type that is incapable of disturbing anyone, because it has become their daily fare. In spite of this, it seemed that the situation spoke to me like Shakespeare:

*Yet have I something in me dangerous
Which let thy wisdom fear.*

It is not true that all are equal, and that each person can discuss another. Simone Weil was falling into the hands of those less sophisticated minds, of those probably less mature souls, and in this hapless move they began to work over a phenomenon that is a lot higher and superior to themselves? They spoke modestly and without airs, but no one could get himself to say that he did not understand and that he had no right to talk about this at all.

The strangest thing was that they, who personally were a great deal inferior to Weil, treated her from on high, from the heights of that collective wisdom that made them superior. They felt that they were in the possession of Truth. If Socrates himself had shown up at this session they would have treated him like a freshman, because he hadn't been initiated. They know it all much better.

It is exactly this mechanism—which allows the inferior man to avoid a personal confrontation with the superior man—that seemed immoral to me.

Sunday

Yet I do not want, I do not desire a war with Catholicism. I am honestly seeking an understanding. One, of course, that is independent of the political

situation. Much time has passed since Boy* attacked “the black occupation.” I had never been a proponent of a too one-dimensional secularism, and the war and the postwar period did not change me much in this regard. They rather supported me in insisting on a more flexible world, with a profounder perspective.

If I can coexist with Catholicism it is because ideas concern me less and less while I put all the emphasis on man’s attitude toward the idea. An idea is and always will be a screen behind which are other and more important issues. An idea is a pretext, an auxiliary tool. Thought torn away from human reality is something majestic and splendid, but diluted in a mass of passionate and insufficient beings becomes nothing more than commotion. I am bored by stupid discussions. By the quadrille of argumentation. The insolent carrying on of intellectuals. The empty formulas of philosophy. Our conversations would be great, ah, yes, full of logic, discipline, erudition, method, precision. They would be fundamental, momentous, profound, innovative, if they were not taking place twenty stories above us. Not long ago, I had breakfast with one of these intellectuals. No one could have guessed, listening to the definitions supported by so many quotations, that this was an absolutely blind half-wit who works off his energy in the higher realms.

This weariness is not mine alone. And it is increasingly inhibiting to any genuine exchange of thought. I practically do not listen at all anymore to the meaning of the words, I listen only to how they are said. I demand only that man not allow himself to be duped by his own words of wisdom, that his worldview not take away his common sense, that his doctrine not deprive him of his humanity, that his system not stiffen and mechanize him, and that his philosophy not make him a dullard. I live in a world that still feeds on systems, ideas, doctrines, but the symptoms of indigestibility are clearer and clearer, the patient has already gotten the hiccups.

The reluctance that I feel toward ideas as such allows me to find a *modus vivendi* among people who believe in them. The question that I put to Catholics is not what kind of God do they believe in, but what kind of people do they aspire to be? And in asking them, I take into consideration man’s underdevelopment. In my understanding, they have fused into a group that is subordinated to a certain myth in

*Tadeusz “Boy” Żeleński (1874–1941): poet, translator, and a leading critic and publicist in the interwar period.

order to mutually create one another. This is why, for me, this myth has an auxiliary character and it is important what sort of man is born under its influence. Yet even here my demands became less sophisticated than they had been in an epoch of triumphant reason. Today, when I look at a Catholic, it is as if I were looking at myself. I see the changes in this mirror which have taken place in me under the severe historical events of recent years. Today do I ask that humanity be progressive? That it fight superstition? Bear aloft the standard of enlightenment and culture and care about the development of art and science? Surely, but I would first prefer that the other man not bite me, spit on me, or torture me to death. Here Catholicism and I come together. I am joined to it by its acute sense of hell contained in our nature and by its fear of man's excessive dynamics. Looking at a Catholic, I see that I have become more cautious in a certain sense. That which in Nietzsche's proud day passed for a travesty of a Dionysian life, exactly that careful politics of Catholicism in relation to natural forces has become dearer to me from the time that the will to live, raised to its maximum strength, began to devour itself.

The Church has become close to me in its distrust of man, and my distrust of form, my urgent desire to withdraw from it, to claim "that that is not yet I," which accompanies my every thought and feeling, coincides with the intentions of its doctrine. The Church is afraid of man and I am afraid of man. The Church does not trust man and I do not trust man. The Church, in opposing temporality to eternity, heaven to earth, tries to provide man with the distance to his own nature that I find indispensable. And nowhere does this affiliation mark itself more strongly than in our approach to Beauty. Both the Church and I fear beauty in this vale of tears, we both strive to defuse it, we want to defend ourselves against its excessive allure. The important thing for me is that it and I both insist on the division of man: the Church into the divine and human components, I into life and consciousness. After the period in which art, philosophy, and politics looked for the integral, uniform, concrete, and literal man, the need for an elusive man who is a play of contradictions, a fountain of gushing antinomies and a system of infinite compensation, is growing. He who calls this "escapism" is unwise.

In spite of everything, we mature, somewhere at the very bottom. If, in my opinion, Catholicism has done great harm to Polish development, then it is because Catholicism was reduced in us to a dimension of too easy and too serene a philosophy, which is at the service of life and its immediate needs. Literature does

not have a hard time coming to an understanding with a profound and tragic Catholicism because it contains an emotional content which is growing in us, too, when we look at the frenzy of the world. Retreat! Retreat! Retreat! At the moment when we will have gone too far, when we want to back out of ourselves, the genius of Christ will give us a hand: this soul as no other knows the secret of retreat. The Teaching, which was the undoing of the Roman Empire, is our ally in the struggle to destroy all those too lofty edifices that we build today and in the struggle to attain nakedness and simplicity and ordinary, elementary virtue.

The intellectual crisis that we are experiencing is not caused so much by our doubting the power of reason as much as by the fact that its range is so limited. We were horrified to see that we were surrounded by an abyss made of millions of ignorant minds, which steal away our truths in order to pervert, diminish, and transform them into instruments of their passions. We discovered that the number of people is far more significant than the quality of the truth. That is why we have such a violent need of a basic and simple language, so that it could be the place where the philosopher comes together with the illiterate. And that is why we admire Christianity, which is a wisdom tailored to all minds, a song for all voices from the highest to the lowest, a wisdom that does not have to change itself into stupidity at any level of awareness. Yet, if someone were to tell me that there can be no genuine understanding between a man who is spiritually free and the dogmatic man, I would say to him: Take a closer look at Catholics. They also exist in time and are subjected to its effects. Slowly and imperceptibly the attitude of the Catholic toward his faith is changing. In how many of them will you be able to read the same thing that I read in the letter cited at the beginning. "One must believe that one must believe. One must have faith in faith."

The father of this woman probably simply believed, without the prefatory exertions. But she has first to "want to believe" in order to believe, her faith becomes an exertion. When God stops revealing himself to this Catholic woman and she has to create him for herself, don't we fall from heaven to earth and isn't this will to believe rather human, even extremely human? This revealed faith has begun, therefore, along with all other human ideas, its march to its sources. So even with this approach, truth is not as great an obstacle to understanding as the will, the desire to impose a certain canon onto oneself, in order to be someone specific, in order to be somebody.

I say for my own benefit: Be aware of this fact, never lose sight of it, seek the point where the divine comes together with the human, because upon this rests the entire future of my thought. I should never forget that contemporary beliefs, even in their most violent manifestations, are no longer a belief in the old sense of the word. Those who want to believe differ very much from those who believe. Modernity's accent on producing belief proves that it does not already exist. Independently of what our credos are, we must all exchange an already revealed world for a world that is creating itself. If this does not happen, our last chance for mutual understanding will be lost.

Thursday

Concert in Colón.

What is the significance of the best virtuoso compared to the disposition of my soul, which today, this afternoon, was permeated through and through with a melody, badly hummed by someone so that now, this evening, it pushes away the music served on a golden platter (along with the meatballs) by a *maître* in tails. The food does not always taste best in first-class restaurants. To me, art almost always speaks more forcefully when it appears in an imperfect, accidental, and fragmentary way, somehow just signaling its presence, allowing one to feel it through the ineptitude of the interpretation. I prefer the Chopin that reaches me in the street from an open window to the Chopin served in great style from the concert stage.

This German pianist galloped along accompanied by the orchestra. Rocked to sleep by the tones, my mind wandered in some sort of daydream—reminiscences, things that I had to get done the next day, Bumfili, the fox terrier. In the meantime, the concert continued, the pianist galloped on. Was he a pianist or a horse? I could swear that this had nothing to do with Mozart but rather with whether or not this nimble steed would wrestle the bit away from Horowitz or Rubinstein. The folks present were concerned with the question: of what class is this virtuoso? Do his *pianos* measure up to those of Arrau's? Are his *fortes* attaining the heights of Gulda's? I imagined, therefore, that this was a boxing match and I saw how he drove Brailowski down the ropes, how he punched Giesecking with the octaves, and aimed a knockout trill at Solomon. A pianist, a horse, or a boxer? It also seemed to me that he

was a boxer who had mounted Mozart, who was riding Mozart, pounding and hitting him, jangling and jabbing him with his spurs. What's that? He's reached the finish line? Applause, applause, applause! The jockey got off his horse and bowed, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

The countess with whom I was sitting in the loge sighed: Oh how wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!

Her husband the count added: "I am not an expert, but I had the impression that the orchestra had a hard time keeping up. . . ."

I looked at them as if they were dogs! How upsetting when the aristocracy does not know how to behave! How little we demand of them and then they can't even do that! These people ought to have known that music is only a pretext for a social get-together, of which even they were a part along with their manners and manicures. Yet instead of remaining in their territory, in their aristocratic-social world, they wanted to take art seriously, they felt obliged to pay it timid homage and so, jolted out of their count- and countessness, they bumbled into sophomorphism! I would have gladly agreed to purely formal platitudes, expressed with the cynicism of people who know the weight of compliments, but they tried to be honest—poor things!

After which we moved into the foyer. My eyes rested on an excellent little crowd that circulated, dispensing bows. Do you see the millionaire X, Y? Look, look, there is the general and the ambassador and over there, the chairman is buttering up the minister, who is simpering in the direction of the professor's wife! I had the feeling, therefore, that I was among Proust's characters, who went to the concert not to listen but to grace it with their presence, where the ladies stuck Wagner into their hair as they would a diamond pin. Where the sounds of Bach accompanied the parade of names, ranks, titles, money, and power. But what's this, what's this? When I joined their ranks, I encountered the twilight of the gods, all the greatness and power were gone. I overheard them sharing their impressions of the concert, which were timid, humble, full of respect for music and worse than what an "aficionado" from the gallery could have said. This is what they had been reduced to. It seemed to me that these were not presidents but fifth-grade pupils and because I return to my school days reluctantly, I left this timid youth.

Alone, in the loge, I, a modern person, deprived of superstitions, I, an antisalon man, I out of whose head the whip of defeat had knocked the sulks and

airs, thought that a world in which man adores himself with music is more convincing than a world in which man adores the music itself.

After which, the remainder of the concert got underway. The pianist, sitting down to Brahms, galloped on. No one really knew what was being played because the perfection of the pianist did not allow one to concentrate on Brahms, and the perfection of Brahms drew attention away from the pianist. But he got there. Applause. The applause of the knowledgeable. The applause of amateurs. The applause of the ignorant. The applause of the herd. Applause incited by applause. Applause feeding on itself, piling onto itself, exciting, creating applause. And no one could *not* clap because everyone was clapping.

We went backstage to give our regards to the artist.

The artist was shaking hands, exchanging courtesies, and accepting compliments and invitations with the wan smile of an errant comet. I looked at him and his greatness. He himself seemed quite pleasant, yes, sensitive, intelligent, cultured, but his greatness? He wore that greatness the way he wore his tails, and, really, hadn't they been tailor-made? At the sight of so many eager kudos it might have seemed that there was no difference between his fame and Debussy's or Ravel's, after all, his name was on everyone's lips, too, and he was an "artist" as they had been. Yet . . . yet . . . was he famous like Beethoven or famous like Gillette blades or a Waterman pen? What a difference between the fame for which one pays and the one from which one makes a profit!

But he was too weak to oppose the mechanism that was exalting him, one could not expect resistance on his part. Quite the contrary. He danced to the tune. And he played for those who were dancing around him.

IV

Friday

I write this diary reluctantly. Its dishonest honesty wearies me. For whom am I writing? If I am writing for myself, then why is it being published? If for the reader, why do I pretend that I am talking to myself? Are you talking to yourself so that others will hear you?

How far I am from the certitude and vigor that hum in me when I am,

pardon me, “creating.” Here, on these pages, I feel as if I were emerging from a blessed night into the hard light of dawn, which fills me with yawning and drags my shortcomings out into the open. The duplicity inherent in keeping a diary makes me timid, so forgive me, oh, forgive me (perhaps these last words are dispensable, perhaps they are already pretentious?).

Yet I realize that one must be oneself at all levels of writing, which is to say, that I ought to be able to express myself not only in a poem or drama, but also in everyday prose—in an article or in a diary—and the flight of art has to find its counterpart in the domain of regular life, just as the shadow of the condor is cast onto the ground. What’s more, this passage into an everyday world from an area that is backed into the most remote depths, practically in the underground, is a matter of great importance to me. I want to be a balloon, but one with ballast; an antenna, but one that is grounded. I want to be capable of translating myself into everyday speech, but—*traduttore, traditore*. Here I betray myself, I am beneath myself.

The difficulty consists in the fact that I write about myself not at night, not in isolation, but right in a newspaper in front of people. In these circumstances, I cannot treat myself with the appropriate gravity, I have to be “modest” and then again, I am tormented by that which has tormented me throughout my entire life and which has so greatly influenced my way of being with other people. The necessity of slighting myself in order to be in tune with those who slight me, or who don’t know the least little thing about me. I will not submit myself to that “modesty” at any price and I consider it my mortal enemy. Happy Frenchmen who write their diaries with tact, except that I don’t believe in the value of their tact, I know that theirs is only a tactful circumvention of the problem, which by its very nature is unsociable.

But I should grab the bull by the horns. From childhood I have been very much initiated into this matter, it grew right along with me so that today I should be pretty comfortable with it. I know and I have said this on many occasions, that every artist has to be pompous because he aspires to be on a pedestal. Yet I have also said that concealing these pretensions is a stylistic flaw, and a sign of a faulty “inner resolution.” Openness. One must play with uncovered cards. Writing is nothing more than a battle that the artist wages with others for his own prominence.

Yet if I am incapable of making this thought real here in the diary, what is it

worth? Yet somehow I cannot, and something bothers me because there is no artistic form between me and people and our contact becomes too embarrassing. I ought to treat this diary as an instrument of my becoming before you. I ought to strive to have you understand me in some way, in a way that would enable me to have (and let this dangerous word appear) talent. Let this diary be more modern and more conscious and let it be permeated by the idea that my talent can arise only in connection with you, that is, that only you can excite me to talent or, what's more, that only you can create it in me.

I would like people to see in me that which I suggest to them. I would like to impose myself on people as a personality in order to be its subject forever after that. Other diaries should be to this one what the words "I am like this" are to "I want to be like this." We are used to lifeless words that merely ascertain. A better word is one that brings to life. *Spiritus movens*. If I could only succeed in summoning the spirit that moves to the first pages of this diary, I could do a great deal. I could, first of all (and I need this even more because I am a Polish author), shatter this narrow cage of concepts in which you would like to imprison me. Far too many people, worthy of a better fate, have been shackled. I alone should designate the role I am to play.

Furthermore, by suggesting, somewhat in the way of a proposition, certain problems, more or less linked to me, I pull myself into them and they lead me to other secrets still unknown to me. To travel as far as possible into the virgin territory of culture, into its still half-wild, and so indecent, places, while exciting you to extremes, to excite even myself . . . I want to meet you in that jungle, bind myself to you in a way that is the most difficult and uncomfortable, for you and for me. Don't I have to distinguish myself from current European thought? Aren't my enemies the currents and doctrines to which I am similar? I have to attack them in order to force myself into contradistinction and I have to force you to confirm it. I want to uncover my present moment and tie myself to you in our todayness.

In this little diary I would like to set out to openly construct a talent for myself, as openly as Henry fabricates a marriage for himself in the third act. Why openly? Because I desire to reveal myself, to stop being too easy a riddle for you to solve. By taking you to the backstage of my being, I force myself to retreat to an even more remote depth.

That is all. If only I could summon the spirit. But I don't feel equal to the

task. Three years ago, unfortunately, I broke with pure art, as my kind of art was not the kind that could be cultivated casually, on Sundays or holidays. I began to write this diary for the simple reason of saving myself, in fear of degradation and an ultimate inundation by the waves of a trivial life, which are already up to my neck. Yet it turns out that even here I am incapable of total effort. One cannot be nothingness all week and then suddenly expect to exist on Sunday. Journalists and you, honorable counselors and spectators, have no need to fear. You no longer need to feel threatened by any conceit and incomprehension on my part. I am tumbling into publicism along with you and the rest of the world.

Saturday

My attitude to Poland is a consequence of my attitude to form: I would like to elude Poland as I elude style, I would like to soar above Poland, as above style, here and there, my task is the same.

In a way, I feel like Moses. Yes, this is an amusing characteristic of my nature: to exaggerate on my own behalf. In my daydreams, I puff myself up as much as I can. Ha, ha, why, you ask, do I feel like Moses? A hundred years ago, a Lithuanian poet forged the shape of the Polish spirit and today, I, like Moses, am leading the Poles out of slavery of that form. I am leading the Pole out of himself. I laughed myself to tears over this megalomania of mine! Yet, theoretically speaking, this type of antinomy would not be totally unjustified and I would be curious to know how many people from our current so-called *pleno titulo* intelligentsia would be capable of feeling the meaning of this process. Oh, that a certain Pole, exactly because he was excessively, too forcefully, a Pole and only a Pole, wanted to liberate himself categorically from the Pole in himself and that it was exactly here among us, as a consequence of that strong losing of oneself in the nation, that quite the opposite feeling and an idea totally contradictory to it had to be born. I ask, too, how many of these *p.t.* intellectuals would be capable of understanding what immense possibilities are created before us by this opportunity, under the condition that it finds people adequately determined and broad-minded to take it to its ultimate conclusion. How invigorating! What a tide of creative energy! What resilience in this new freedom based on the revised relationship of one Pole to another! Ah, I dream sometimes of finding supporters who would blow me up to the

dimensions of an event in our history and I assure you that this would not be impossible because, in my understanding, the significance of a work depends as much on who reads it as on who writes it. There are so many books that could ring out like the trumpets of Jericho if people would raise them aloft and blow into them! Sleep, my little trumpet, tossed onto the rubbish of unexploited Polish possibilities.

The rubbish heap. The point is exactly that I come from your rubbish heap. All that you cast off through the centuries as refuse is now speaking out through me. If my form is a parody of form, then my spirit is a parody of spirit and my person a parody of a person. Isn't it true that one cannot undermine form by opposing it with another form, but only by laxity in one's very attitude toward it? No, it is not a coincidence that precisely at the moment when we desperately need a hero, up pops a clown—a conscious and, thereby, serious clown. You were too literal for too long, too naive in your game with fate. You forgot that man not only is himself but also pretends to be himself. You threw everything that was acting and theater in you into the trash can and you tried to forget about it. Now, when you look out the window, you see that a tree has sprung up on that trash heap, a tree that is a parody of a tree.

Assuming that I was born (which is not certain), I was born to spoil your game. My books are not supposed to say to you: Be who you are. They say rather: You pretend that you are who you are. I would like that which you have long thought barren and even shameful in yourselves to become fruitful. If you hate acting so much, it is because it is a part of you. For me, acting becomes a key to life and reality. If you are repelled by immaturity, it is because you are immature. In me, Polish immaturity delineates my entire attitude to culture. Your youth speaks with my lips, your desire for mirth, your elusive flexibility and lack of delineation. You hate that which you try to eliminate in yourself. In me, the hidden Pole is liberated, your alter ego, the flip side of your coin, that part of your moon that has been unseen until now. Ah, but I would like you to be conscious actors in this game!

Right now am I thinking about the nation's masses, the thousands and thousands of ordinary people? What do they need this for? Sorry, but in the darkness in which I find myself I can act in no other way except blindly. I write all this in the way of a proposition in order to see the reaction. If the reaction is positive, I will move on.

Wednesday

My presumption smells of grave illness. I am beginning to fear that the feuilleton writers will give me a well-deserved thrashing. But what should I do with my overweening pride? Should I go see a doctor? (This was written to protect myself and in protecting myself, to gain a greater freedom of maneuver.)

Then again, do I understand myself? In delineating myself, I sin not just against my own philosophy but, first of all, against my own lyrical element. One far too perceptive reader warns me in a letter: You shouldn't write commentary on yourself! You should just write! What a shame that you allow yourself to be provoked and write introductions to your own works, introductions and even commentary!

Yet I have to explain myself as best as I can and as much as I can. I am haunted by the conviction that the writer who cannot write about himself is incomplete.

Thursday

Z. K. For the past few years I have been spending about seven hours a day in one room. My co-worker was a clerk like myself and I grew to like him. Last Friday, I said good-bye to him as usual. On Monday he never turned up at his desk. He disappeared, that is, died. He died suddenly and vanished completely as if a hand had withdrawn him from us. I saw him once again in a casket, where he looked obtrusive drawing all eyes to himself. Painful impression.

Every so often one of my colleagues evaporates like that and then, shrugging our shoulders, we say: Hm, hm (what else can we say?) and a light consternation hangs in the air. Yet the great majority of us clerks are already in the process of dying. People over forty killing themselves off slowly, each year one year older. At the funeral I thought: it is not the living who are bidding farewell to the deceased but the dying. At the cemetery, on a bright afternoon, the faces were marked with a certain basic hopelessness and looked cadaverous, like the cadaver in the coffin, and each person dragged himself around like a bag filled with death.

Throughout the entire funeral, the ugliness of the slow death that we call aging weighed on me like a boulder, a boulder *sans phrases*. I thought, too, about the mystification that accompanies it. There cannot be a greater contradiction among people than the entering and exiting biography, development and decline,

man after thirty who is beginning to end and man before thirty who is still developing. This is fire and water, here something in man's very essence changes. What does a young man have in common with an aging man if each is written in a different key? It would seem that there should be two separate languages: one for those who have more and more of life and another for those who have less and less. Yet this contrast has been passed over in silence. The aging pretend that they still live and no one has been capable of creating a separate word for people stepping into dying. Look at art, it does what it can to blur the fatal boundary. Listen to how those "grown-ups" talk to one another, the same youthful speech, jokes, the same airs and graces, spiced only with a bit of void and caricature. The fact that our language does not drastically change after we step across the fatal boundary line, that there is no abyss between Beethoven's first and last sonatas that cannot be filled, is proof positive that man in his individual existence cannot express himself, that he is silence, that he is deprived of expression.

Current French thought about death is exceptionally artificial to me as are all the other *memento mori*. They constitute one more example of the degree to which our thoughts are alien to us. This mangling of death shows only that we are not in a state to assimilate it because if we really felt our way into its presence, it would have to deprive us of sleep and appetite. Yet death doesn't even prevent us from going to the movies. Not to mention a Catholic death with its purgatory and hell, teeming with the anticipation of pain. We must not, therefore, take our own thoughts seriously and it seems as if that thought thought itself, Hegelian style.

I do not believe, therefore, that death is man's real problem or that an art that is entirely permeated by it is completely authentic. Our real issue is growing old, that aspect of death that we experience daily. Perhaps not even growing old but the fact that it is so completely, so terribly cut off from beauty. Our gradual dying does not disturb us, it is rather that the beauty of life becomes inaccessible to us. At the cemetery I spotted a young boy walking among the graves like a being from another world, mysteriously and abundantly blooming, while we looked like paupers. It struck me, however, that I did not feel our helplessness as something categorically inevitable.

And I liked this feeling in myself at once. I hang onto only those thoughts and feelings that I like. I am incapable of feeling or thinking anything that would completely annihilate me. So that even here I followed this line of thinking which,

because it derived from me, created hope. Was it really impossible to bind old age to life and youth? That artificiality, to which I am becoming more and more accustomed in man, that *idée fixe*, which grows so gradually and so reluctantly in me, the thought that the terrifying concreteness of our form is not the only possibility, makes the world supple. If at one time I had believed that everything had already been said, today I am surrounded by endless combinations of ideas and forms and everything around me becomes fertile. (Here I would like to note that I searched for a half hour for the sentence which will appear below because, as always, I am trying to formulate a problem without knowing whether a solution is possible and I did not really think the issue through at the cemetery.)

According to me, youth at the core of its spirit does not like its own beauty and defends itself against it, and that distrust of its own beauty is more beautiful than beauty itself and contains the only possibility of overcoming the distance that kills.

Friday

Giedroyc wanted me to reply to Cioran's (a Rumanian writer) article, "The Conveniences and Inconveniences of Exile." The answer contains my view of the role of literature in exile.

Cioran's words reek of a basement coolness and the rot of the grave, but they are too petty. Who is he talking about? Who should one understand to be the "writer in exile"? Adam Mickiewicz wrote books and so does Mr. X, quite correct and readable ones, both are "writers" and nota bene, writers in exile, but here all parallels end.

Rimbaud? Norwid? Kafka? Słowacki? (There are a variety of exiles.) I believe that none of them would have been too horrified at this category of hell. It is very painful not to have readers and very unpleasant not to be able to publish one's works. It certainly is not sweet being unknown, highly unpleasant to see oneself deprived of the aid of that mechanism that pushes one to the top, that creates publicity and organizes fame, but art is loaded with elements of loneliness and self-sufficiency, it finds its satisfaction and sense of purpose in itself. The homeland? Why, every eminent person because of that very eminence was a foreigner even at home. Readers? Why, they never wrote "for" readers

anyway, always “against” them. Honors, success, reknown, fame: why, they became famous exactly because they valued themselves more than their success.

And that which is a little Kafka, Conrad, or Mickiewicz in even the smaller caliber writer, that which is genuine talent and real superiority or real maturity, will in no measure fit into Cioran’s basement. I would also like to remind Cioran that not only émigré but all art remains in the most intimate contact with decay, it is born of decadence, it is a transmutation of illness into health. All art, generally speaking, borders on silliness, defeat, degradation. Is there an artist who is not, as Cioran says, “an ambitious being, aggressive in his defeat, embittered, a conniving conqueror”? Has Cioran ever seen an artist or writer who was not, who did not have to be, a megalomaniac? And art, as Boy once correctly said, is a graveyard: for every thousand people who were incapable of “coming into existence” and who remained in a sphere of painful insufficiency, barely one or two is capable of really “coming into existence.” This dirt, therefore, this venom of unsatisfied ambitions, this tossing and turning in a vacuum, this catastrophe has very little to do with emigration and a lot to do with art. They make up an aspect of every literary café and truly it is a matter of indifference where in the world the writers who are not writers enough in order to really be writers, suffer.

And perhaps it is healthier that they were deprived of doles, applause, all those tiny caresses that the state and society lavished upon them in the good old days in the name of “supporting native creativity.” This family playing at greatness and distinction, the sympathetic noise created at one time by the condescendingly smiling press and the half-baked critics, deprived of a feeling for the scale of events, that process of artificially pumping candidates up into a “national writer” . . . didn’t all this reek of kitsch? And the result? Nations that at best were capable of producing a few authentic writers nurtured entire hosts of wonders in this incubator, and in this familial warmth, which was a mixture of spinsterish goodness and a cynical disregard for values, all hierarchy disintegrated. Is it surprising then that these hothouse creations, nurtured in the womb of the nation, wilt when out of the womb? Cioran writes about how a writer torn away from his people is lost. If that is the case, this writer never existed in the first place: he was a writer in embryo. Instead, it seems to me that theoretically speaking and bypassing material hardship, the immersing of oneself in the world, that is, emigration, should constitute an incredible stimulus for literature.

For lo and behold the country's elite is kicked out over the border. It can think, feel, and write from the outside. It gains distance. It gains an incredible spiritual freedom. All bonds burst. One can be more of oneself. In the general din all the forms that have existed until now loosen up and one can move toward the future in a more ruthless way.

An exceptional opportunity! The moment everyone has dreamed of! It would seem, therefore, that the stronger individuals, the richer individuals would roar like lions! Then why don't they? Why has the voice of these people faded abroad?

They do not roar because, first of all, they are too free. Art demands style, order, discipline. Cioran correctly underscores the danger of too much isolation, of excessive freedom. Everything to which they were tied and everything that bound them—homeland, ideology, politics, group, program, faith, milieu—everything vanished in the whirlpool of history and only a bubble filled with nothingness remained on the surface. Those thrown out of their little world found themselves facing a world, a boundless world and, consequently, one that was impossible to master. Only a universal culture can come to terms with the world, never parochial cultures, never those who live only on fragments of existence. Only he who knows how to reach deeper, beyond the homeland, only he for whom the homeland is but one of the revelations in an eternal and universal life, will not be incited to anarchy by the loss of his homeland. The loss of a homeland will not disturb the internal order of only those whose homeland is the world. Contemporary history has turned out to be too violent and borderless for literatures too national and specific.

And it is exactly this excess of freedom that inhibits the writer most. Threatened by the enormity of the world and the finality of its affairs, they grasp at the past convulsively; they cling desperately to themselves; they want to remain as they were; they fear even the slightest change in themselves, thinking that everything will then fall apart; and, finally, they cling convulsively to the only hope remaining: the hope of recovering the homeland. Recovering the homeland, however, cannot come to pass without waging a battle, and a battle requires strength and collective strength can be achieved only by giving up one's I. In order to produce this strength, the writer must impose a blind faith, among other deficiencies, on himself and his compatriots and the luxury of objective and free thinking becomes a grievous sin. He does not know how to be a writer

without a homeland or in order to regain his homeland, he has to stop being a writer, at least a serious writer.

Though perhaps there is yet another reason for this spiritual paralysis, at least where it is not a matter of intellectuals but artists. I have in mind the very concept of art and the artist, as it has come to be accepted in Western Europe. It does not seem to be that our modern beliefs concerning the essence of art, the role of the artist, the relationship of artist to society have tallied with reality. The artistic philosophy of the West derives from the elite in crystallized societies where nothing interferes with conventional language but there is nothing a man thrown outside the limits of convention can do with such a philosophy. The concept of art forged on that side of the curtain by the victorious bureaucracy of the proletariat is even more elitist and more naive. An artist in emigration, however, is forced to exist not only outside of his people, but also outside of the elite. He confronts the spiritually and intellectually inferior sphere far more directly. Nothing isolates him from this contact, he has personally to endure the pressure of a brutal and immature life. He is like a bankrupt count who sees that the manners of the salon are worthless if there is no salon. Sometimes this pushes people in the direction of "democratic" shallowness, into a kindly ordinariness or into a crude "realism" and sometimes it condemns them to isolation. We have to find a way to feel like aristocrats once again (in the deeper sense of the word).

Therefore, if there is talk about the disintegration and decadence of émigré literature, then this notion of the issue would be closest to me because here, at least, we liberate ourselves for a moment from the vicious circle of trivialities and touch the difficulties capable of destroying authentic writers. I do not deny at all that overcoming these problems requires a great determination and boldness of spirit. It is not easy to be an émigré writer, which means almost total isolation. Why should it be surprising, therefore, that overcome by our own weakness and the enormity of the tasks, we bury our heads in the sand and, organizing parodies of the past for ourselves, we flee the big world to live in our little one?

Yet sooner or later our thought must work its way out of the impasse. Our problems will find people to solve them. At some point, it is no longer a matter of creativity itself, but the recovery of the capacity to create. We have to produce that portion of freedom, boldness, ruthlessness, and even, I would say,

irresponsibility, without which creation is impossible. We have to accustom ourselves to a new scale of existence. We will have to treat our most cherished feelings unceremoniously, with sangfroid in order to attain other values. The minute we begin to shape the world in the place where we happen to be and with the means at our disposal, the enormity of the task will shrink, the boundlessness will become delineated, and the turbulent waters of chaos will begin to recede.

Thursday

Someone in Paris sent me a package of important French books, assuming quite rightly that I had not read them and that I should read them. I am condemned to read only those books that fall into my hands, because I cannot afford to buy them. I gnash my teeth when I see industrialists and merchants buying themselves libraries to adorn their studies, while I have no access to works that I need for somewhat different reasons.

You demand, nevertheless, that I be well read and well informed, right? Iwaszkiewicz once told me that an artist should not know too much. That is right but he cannot allow his voice to be late, either, and the boundless stupidity of a system that slams the doors of theaters, concert halls, and bookshops in his face will be avenged. A system that shoves the intellectual into a distant corner, that takes the possibility of development away from the intelligentsia, will be judged appropriately in the future and your grandchildren will consider you idiots (but what do you care!).

It is only now, thanks to a certain friendly Parisian generosity, that I can get acquainted with Camus's *L'homme révolté*, a year after the book was published. I am reading it "under the desk" as I once did in school, so that Camus might have his reservations about this kind of reading, but, nevertheless, his text became the immediate axis for all my reflections. "Dread?" Yes, "dread" (strictly speaking, I do not experience emotions other than in quotation marks). If I could speak about dread then I would say that I am less frightened by the tragic content of the book than by the will to create tragedy, which can be sensed in the author himself. Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, whom we should think about every second

while reading this, were no less tragic but the tragic thought of humanity of the time had something of the delight of discovery in itself. This is apparent in Schopenhauer and palpable and childlike in Nietzsche. Camus is cold.

The hell of this book is disturbing because it is cold. And even more disturbing because this is intentional. It would seem that there is nothing more unjust than these words because it would be hard to come by a work that is more human or has a more noble intention, one that is more ardent in its preoccupation with man. The mortal coldness is caused by the fact that Camus forbids himself even the pleasure that understanding the world gives. He wants to deal with pain alone, he discards the delights of the doctor who is pleased with his diagnosis. Camus wants to be ascetic. His desire for tragedy has its roots in the fact that for us, today, tragedy and greatness, tragedy and profundity, tragedy and truth have become synonyms. Which means that we do not know how to be great, profound, or real other than tragically.

Perhaps this is one of the most salient features of our thinking during the space of the past century. On the one hand, we have matured to the point where we no longer take any pleasure in our truth. On the other hand, we are set on tragedy and we seek it relentlessly, like a treasure. It is not the Old World monotonous in its unhappiness that has become more tragic, but man. And here we really should start to worry because if we do not stop bending over the abyss and evoking the demon out of nothingness, he will fill all the nooks and crannies of our being! The world will be as we want it to be. So if God in heaven exists and if he is, in addition, a merciful God, let him not allow us "to have bad dreams" because "that is not good, nor can it lead to good."

What do I have to say about the moral of "The Rebel"?

This is a work with which I would like to agree with all my heart. The point, however, is that for me, conscience, the individual conscience, does not have the power that it has for him as far as saving the world. Don't we see again and again that the conscience has almost no voice in the matter? Does man kill or torture because he has come to the conclusion that he has the right to do so? He kills because others kill. He tortures because others torture. The most abhorrent deed becomes easy if the road to it has been paved, and, for example, in concentration camps the road to death was so well trodden that the bourgeois incapable of

killing a fly at home exterminated people with ease. What disturbs us today is not this or that issue, but, how should I say this, the dissolution of the issue in the human masses, its destruction by the actions of people.

I kill because you kill. You and he and all of you torture, therefore, I torture. I killed him because you would have killed me if I had not. Such is the grammar of our time. It follows from this that the spring of action is not housed in the human conscience but in the relationship that is formed between it and other people. We do not commit evil because we have destroyed God in ourselves, but because God and even Satan are unimportant if a deed is sanctioned by another man. Nowhere in Camus's entire book will one find this simple truth: that a sin is inversely proportionate to the number of people who give themselves up to it and this devaluation of sin and conscience are not reflected in a work whose aim is to magnify them. Following in the footsteps of others, Camus removes man from the human mass and from his coexistence with other men, confronting the individual soul with existence, which seems a little like taking the fish out of the water.

His thought is too individualistic, too abstract. It seems to me that this race of moralists has been suspended in a void for a long time. If you want me not to kill and not to persecute, do not try to explain to me that rebellion is an "affirmation of values." Try rather to ease the network of tensions that have arisen between me and others. Show me how not to succumb to it. Conscience? It is true that I have a conscience, but, as with everything else in me, it is something of a half-conscience and a not-quite-a-conscience. I am half-blind. I am careless. I am any old way. Camus, an aggressive connoisseur of the lower world, one of those who was able to render best the gap existing in our incomplete humanity—even he seeks salvation in sublime formulas.

Why, when reading the moralists, do I always have the impression that man eludes them? The moral seems powerless, abstract, and theoretical to me, as if our real existence came to life somewhere beyond it. I ask: is it Camus himself who is speaking to me in this book or a certain school of moral thought that has arisen on French soil by the collective effort of the various Pascals? Then they apply this instrument, improved and sharpened, to me and others? Isn't this a rather specialized moral? A somewhat overwrought moral? I would say that it is excessively profound! Excessive? Oversized? The moral being not only the work of people with an especially subtle feeling of profundity, but also, of people who perfect one

another in that moral. Their thought is only superficially individualistic. It is concerned with the individual, but it is not the product of an individual.

Camus's passion often destroys this skeleton and then I can breathe. Nevertheless, that inflated conscience that he serves me, that final and cosmic conscience disturbs me. How does one revive morality? How does one free it from this theoretical aspect? How does one make it reach me, man? Camus tried in vain to deepen my conscience. My problem is not the improvement of my conscience, it is, above all, a question of how far my conscience is mine. For the conscience that I wield is a product of culture and culture is something that has come from the people, yet it is not at all identical with man. Here I would like to say: when applying this collective product to me, do not treat me as if I were a self-sufficient soul in the cosmos. The road to me leads through other people. If you want to speak to me effectively, never speak to me directly.

The loneliness emanating from Camus worries me no less than dry Marxist collectivism. The more genuine the values of that book, the more it disturbs me. I admire, I agree, I endorse, I support, but at the same time, I am skeptical about my own affirmation.

And I go in that direction not because I want to but because I must.

V

Saturday

Yesterday at Goška's garden party *petites tables thé dansant*, I bragged to the high heavens about my genealogical tree and I did it right in front of all present, first loudly and coarsely, then feebly, then once again brazenly and in a stentorian voice, then deviously and round and round, then charmingly, passionately, scientifically, and so I bragged until finally Hala and Zosia exclaimed with an artificial yawn: For God's sake, stop being tiresome, no one cares about all that anyway!

Sunday

When they cried out, I said: Imagine! Why, everybody knows I'm no count, yet a few years ago I pronounced myself a count in the Café Rex, where I go every evening, and for a while I would be summoned to the phone with a "Conde

Gombrowicz.” This only lasted a while because my friends from the Café Rex got ahold of a copy of Dostoyevski’s *The Brothers K*, where they read that every Pole traveling abroad is a count.

I had barely said this when one of those present uttered: What a mania you have, what a desire for endlessly compromising Poles in front of foreigners! Ha! I said. I am not doing this to compromise anyone but because I enjoy it.

At that, Ira, Maja, and Lusia cried out in unison: Oh, Witold, pardon us, but surely you are not going to try to convince us that a person such as yourself, a person of your caliber, advocates such nonsense! And Fila chimed in: After all, you are a writer and that means more than if you were a count.

Then . . .

Then . . .

Then . . .

I looked at them strangely with my poor beggar’s look of self-revelation and indigence and said honestly, barefoot style: I prefer to be considered a count *tout court* than to be considered a count of the fine arts, a marquis of the intellect, or a prince of literature. And they cried out in chorus: What games you play!

Monday

These exchanges at Goška’s remind me of an experience at the Sigismunds’. Yes, yes, that evening I did a good job of promoting myself. I had arrived late, as the evening was already at its apogee, and, having arrived, I sat down in a side room to talk to Christine, Yolanta, and Irene. My appearance did not go unnoticed and two, then three, persons joined us, and in a moment, practically everyone else was there, the entire group of Poles, curious, thirsty, attentive, listening with rapt attention to my words, which were, ah, rather careless but sharp and uttered with checked emotion. What was I talking about? I spoke, as this resulted from the course of our little talk, about the Faustian and Apollonian concepts of man and about the decisive role of the Baroque in modern times. I spoke with that internal, noble tremolo of brilliance that aggressively imposes its own higher purposes upon everyday life.

My severity (“No, don’t say that!”) combined with the mystery (“What is anxiety?”) and the sureness of a spiritual leader (“Behold the way, it is along this

line, this crooked line, that we must travel!”). The lights were dimmed. At one point, my audience, mesmerized by my murky brilliance, began to demand that I tell them what art is and on what art is based. What, after all, is art? These questions jumped all over me like dogs, like the dogs that once jumped all over me years ago when I drove up to the manor in Wsola. I replied:

—Now, that I can’t tell you!

—That is something I could tell only to a person of equal rank. In this group, I could give the answer to only one person.

—Who is that? they asked.

—I could say it only to her—I replied, pointing to one of the ladies—only to her because she is a duchess!

Tuesday

This scene at the Sigismunds’ brings to mind more painful and rather recent memories. . . .

At supper at the Xs’ something strange came over me!

Could it be that they were my social superiors? I believe not. This was one of those Argentine families from the so-called oligarchy, which had been introduced into the international aristocracy through marriages with the Castellanes, Buccleuch-et-Queensberrys, Wuringbrand-Stuppachs, and Brancacio-Ruffanos. Yet even if I had acknowledged the superiority of these dignitaries, where was my artist’s advantage? The subtlety and refinement of taste that would have compelled them to respect me!

Instead, something else happened. . . .

Instead of walking into the salon effortlessly, I walked in shyly. It is possible that for one split second I allowed them to appeal to me. That was enough! Instantly that other I of mine, that I of the poor café, the I affiliated with the trifles of inferior poets and even common fruit vendors, immediately my entire drab and sorry inelegance rushed in. How ghastly! I was turned into pulp. For a while I sat in silence but, then, suddenly, I began to try!

Ah yes, I began to converse and I tried, I tried to be casual, elegant, I tried to be pleasant. . . .

My entire world came crashing down around me! Everything that had

been won with such great effort over the years fell in ruins! Where was my pride? My intelligence? Maturity? Scorn? Everything was lost but you were trying, yes, trying, trying, kneeling before the god whom you had overthrown a thousand times!

After leaving this bathhouse, I ran out into the empty streets of the city, into the night, to my inferior café in order to be able to tell a few of my dear acquaintances and companions who were throwing dice and drinking Toro wine:

—I am just getting back from so and so's. . . .

Wednesday

This reminds me of something else, something more distant.

Before the war. The Café Ziemiańska in Warsaw. Haze. A table of young writers and poets. The avant-garde. The proletariat. Surrealism. Socrealism. Free of superstitions. They say things like: The idiotic snobbery of the epoch of the expiring bourgeoisie! Or: The ridiculous racial prejudices of feudalism!

I sit down and immediately emphasize, just in passing though, that my grandmother was a cousin of the Spanish Bourbons. After saying which, I politely pass them the sugar. But not to Casimir (who ruled them because he was the best poet), but to Henry (who had a higher social standing because his father was a colonel). When the discussion begins, however, I take Stefan's side, because he is from a landowning family. Or I say: Staś, poetry is poetry, but I advise you, first and foremost, do not be provincial! Or: Art is a first-rate heraldic phenomenon! They laugh, yawn, or protest but I keep on doing this for months, for whole years with the resolute consistency of the absurd because it is definitely not worth the effort.—“What boredom! What idiocy! What cretinism!” they shout, but slowly, one after another, they submit: one finally blurts out that his grandfather had a villa in Konstancin, another lets it be known that his grandmother's sister was “from the country,” and another draws his coat of arms in jest on a piece of tissue. Socrealism? Surrealism? The avant-garde? The proletariat? Poetry? Art? No. A forest of genealogical trees and we under them, sitting in their shade.

The poet Broniewski said to me:

—What are you doing? What kind of diversion is this? You have infected even the Communists with your coats of arms!

Thursday

I found myself in Argentina without a penny, in very difficult circumstances. I was introduced into the literary world and it was up to me to win these people with intelligent behavior. Instead I offered them genealogy and made them smile indulgently.

That passion, that stylizing, the most idiotic madness possible! That genealogical mania which is ruining me, which is costing me a social career! If only I really were a snob. But I am not. I have never even made the slightest effort to “be in society” and “society” bores, even disgusts, me.

What inclines me to recall these memories? What? Armorial. I was told that someone in Argentina had the intention of publishing a special armorial for emigrants. An émigré armorial: the height, the masterpiece of our absurdity. Yet, in spite of this, if this book does appear, it will be one of the most real to have been born among us because all these things have not come to an end, not in me or in many other Poles. Wars and revolutions, demolished cities, millions dead, ideologies, have steamrollered over us but our meadow blossoms as it did in the past with the myths of armorials, our imagination has remained true to our old love: our love of counts. And there isn’t a monstrosity around that this honeysuckle will not entwine with its sweet tendrils. Not long ago I heard the most upstanding woman in the world tell, with tears in her eyes, how the Germans tortured X to death in Poland. But I knew why she was telling this story. I waited for her like a cat waiting for a mouse until I finally heard what I knew was inevitable:—Please do not be surprised that I am upset by this, but we were actually related, my mother was *primo voto*. . . .

Admit that for this madness of yours there is no pretext that is too bloody.

Don’t lie, admit that to this day, even though you have been thrown out of salons, you recite a litany of high-sounding names.

Why are you blushing? Why do you grow furious and protest that you have already outgrown this when you know darn well that you have not, that this is still in you.

In that case, if you are filled with this, if this is in you, how can you aspire to a real existence? To a real life? The hierarchies, myths, and honors that arose in your former quarter-world and are dead today—because that fragment of being

from which they arose has already vanished—continue to veil our existence and it is to these dead gods that we secretly pay our ridiculous homage.

Enough, enough. Why am I talking about you? It would be better if I talked about myself. Listen to my story. For me, the aristocracy was one of those immature disturbances, those monstrous, green attractions (I did not know whether they were born of me or whether they were imposed on me) with which I did battle in literature and even more in everyday life. As is always the case with such an immature mythology, it seemed incredibly easy to vanquish so that it was only when I looked at it a little more deeply that a more precise accounting of the conscience showed its entire rapacious indestructibility. As for me: couldn't I simply despise snobbery and stand it on its head, dressing myself in those ready-made phrases that wait for each of us in such circumstances: "No, this does not appeal to me, a title has no meaning, it is the worth of man that is important, no, who would believe in such ridiculous misconceptions!" In saying this, I would not be lying insofar as this really would be in keeping with my reasoning, which is rather progressive and laundered of all that immemorial stupidity. Yet, even while being the truth, it would be the truth only to a certain extent and this understanding of the issue is not, in my opinion, adequately intelligent. On the contrary, it testifies to a superficial understanding because the power of all immature mythology is based on the fact that it gives us trouble even though we may not acknowledge it and know that it is absurd.

It is enough to have a real full-blooded duke approach a mature person who proclaims his freedom from all bias for all of his "equality" to become very industrious, forced, ha, he has to be very careful not to tumble into inequality! If you must protect yourself from it, then this is proof that something does indeed exist! Things do not always work out as smoothly as democratic decency would like.

And it is not difficult to understand why even those who consider themselves moderns must be respectful of hierarchy. Is it not because, even though the marquis does not appeal to you, he nevertheless appeals to others and you must be respectful of others? It will not be easy for you to treat someone before whom others bow as an equal. In vain will you secretly consider them fools. This is how immaturity always finds its own people and is supported. But one could also say that, while rejecting the value of the individual aristocrat, we are not, however, insensitive to the fact that he is the product of centuries of luxury (for which we all long), that he is a personification of riches, freedom from care, liberty, that he has been shaped by a

milieu that, justly or unjustly, had extricated itself from life's poverty. The old aristocracy is not distinguished by its strong points. These are often badly brought up people. Their minds are not too sharp and they can be flabby, repugnant characters. They possess lousy aesthetics and rather doubtful charm. Their servants are generally superior to them even in manners. But the foibles of the aristocracy are the result of the life it leads, they are testimony to its standard of living and it is this delicate standard that we adore despite the moral and aesthetic nature of the phenomenon. One could also add that the aristocracy attracts and captivates, as do all hermetic, exclusive worlds, which have their mystique. The aristocracy lures people with its mystique, which flickered and gleamed to Proust as much in the little group of *les jeunes filles en fleur* as in the salon of Madame de Guermantes.

Moreover, a summary resolution of the matter of snobbery with a few pseudomature phrases does not speak well of the person who defends himself this way and I had to look for a different way out, but how? I really do not know if I will not be taking advantage of the situation by reopening my book of reminiscences. . . . Yes, yes! Naturally I could not allow the Rothschilds, the Faucigny Lucinges, the old Duchess, the wife of Francis, or Eddy Montague Stuart to have the upper hand! I had to defend myself, oh yes, if I wanted to mean anything at all in culture, I had to shatter the count and ducal zodiacs in my heavens! But how? I know of only one cure for these illnesses: candor. Secret illnesses are cured only by open diagnosis. It was not that when I met the old Duchess at a reception in her home, she dominated me thoroughly with, it seems, that wild sophistication of limbs, but that I was ashamed to admit this. It was this discretion that was my defeat! On the day I dared announce my weakness for all to hear, the chain binding me to that fetlock was cut away. I remember it as clearly as anything. It was years ago in Stockholm, where I accidentally met Duke Gaetano, who with his sister, Paulina de Anticoli-Corrado, the Marquessa Pescopagano, lived at Oppedheimherr's. Oh yes, there for the first time, I figured out my approach to the aristocracy.

The Prince and my late father had been on intimate terms and perhaps had even been distant relations. Upon finding out who I was, he asked that I join them for coffee every day after dinner. I have already mentioned that I am not a denizen of salons and that my sensitivity in regard to the aristocracy manifests itself only in that its superiority irritates me no end. The visits at Duke Gaetano's, therefore, were not really something I wanted to accommodate and they soon

became a real burden because the most brilliant cream of *haute société* frequented his premises and the genre was born which annihilated me. I was without a doubt insufficiently initiated into the earthly stratum of *Durchlaucht*, not at all versed in the interfamilial connections of the reigning families, and definitely inadequately *au courant* with the gossip and the tittle-tattle that was the prey of this elegance and that constituted this elegance. O with what delight I would have confessed my inferiority and my constricted throat to bring the matter to a head in broad daylight! Yet I knew these hierarchies rely on the fact that they are unprofessed: this superior world possesses the power of appeal because everyone behaves as if they were not trying to appeal to anyone, as if the constant and endless attempt to appeal were not its own most essential content. The superior world does not allow itself to be grasped in its real meaning and this creates its impregnability. The Prince and his entire retinue treated me as if no one knew that they were honoring me by their treatment. . . .

Yes, it is impossible to smash, to destroy the salon because the salon immediately throws all those who are not of the salon out its doors. Because of this, I had to act slyly. I won my first victory when, looking at myself in the mirror, I turned to the Prince and asked him if I were distinguished enough (*Croyez-vous que je suis assez distingué?*).

My question was first treated as a joke. But I repeated it again in a way that left no doubt as to its being a joke!

My second question was followed by a moment of slight panic, exactly because distinction is its main assignment and it pretends that it knows nothing of this, it accepts that distinction as something with which all of its habitués are endowed at birth.

I then repeated my question again, but this time jokingly, as if I were amusing myself.

After which I asked: *Pourrais-je un jour être aussi imposant et aussi distingué que vous, prince, et vous, madame? Voilà mon rêve!* (Will I ever manage to be as imposing and distinguished as you, my Prince, and you, Madame? That is my dream!).

This question was even more risky than the earlier one and I was definitely walking a thin line. This question put seriously would have been indecent but as a joke, it would have been even more tactless, close to impudence, and worthy of the

most severe censure. It had to be put in such a way as to be clear that I really did acknowledge their princeliness (here I paid them homage), but at the same time it had to contain an element of joy and amusement, a sign that I was amusing myself with this situation, that I was toying with them and myself.

That is what I had intended to do. Yes, to toy with them: this was the secret milestone of my undertaking, marking an ultimate and irreversible triumph! But I could play with them only on the condition that I was capable of playing with myself, with my shyness and with my awkwardness before them. Only this kind of double-edged play could assure them and me some distance in the face of this provincial, bah, crude truth that I revealed to them. Gaetano understood. He had grasped both my honesty and my play. The game appealed to him exactly because it introduced him to the bloody, cruel, yet masked meaning of the aristocracy. Slowly he allowed himself to be pulled into this game, which on my part meant a more and more distinct accenting of the differences between us. This way I was able to deprive these aristocrats of all their masks imperceptibly, undress them, and prevent Aristocracy from hiding its true essence. After a little while, he allowed me openly to delight in them and Gaetano initiated me into his family tree in order to impress me. Raising his cuff, he allowed me to be annihilated by his fetlock, as refined as the best wine. I, on the other hand, delighted in the game, amused that I was delighting. . . .

Of course, this was the only episode that liberated a flash of style in an overcast and uneventful sky. Shortly thereafter I left Stockholm and the scrambled dregs of life washed over my momentary victory. Years later in Paris, at my Aunt Fleur's, when I met the Prince again, his Highness, forgetful of our games, was once again as hermetic as a bottle of old cognac. Nevertheless, it is from Stockholm that the secret work of my spirit dates, work that aimed to tame the tiger of aristocracy. From that moment on, I began to evolve a manner of being that depended on liberation through exposition. From then on I entered the half-world of the counts with some liking and took part in their mass, rendering them due homage and completing the ceremony in celebrating the holy ritual until democratic wisdom was dumbfounded and shocked by the sight of an intellectual transformed into a fop. But what do you know about a triumph that allows one to delight in one's own immaturity and that is simultaneously its liberation and overcoming. Have you tasted the divinity of opposing the fictional, countlike,

imagined values to the real and brutal values of life (such as health, reason, character) whose only meaning derives from the fact that they make up the pure play of hierarchy and value making? Come on now, do you know what it is to stand stubbornly by your own reality, just as it is, against all the protests of your mind? Do you know the madness of delighting in the absurd? Ha, if I kneel before princes it is not to surrender to them . . .

*Kneel, Richard, to become something higher
Rise, Sir Richard and a Plantagenet . . .*

Kneeling before princes, I, a Plantagenet, revel in them, myself, and the world. They are not my princes. I am the prince of these princes!

(Why did I write this?

I have a method in mind.

Pay a little attention to my method and try applying it to explode other myths.)

Saturday

Unfortunately, it is certain that the psychological evolution of this generation has chosen an entirely different direction than the one that I propose. Here is a generation of impoverished and serious workers, laboring to satisfy their elementary needs, a drab generation of laborers and bureaucrats while I am the mouth-piece of luxury, amusement, almost play.

Will the drabness dim all the light of existence? I do not believe that I will ever be understood by these engineers. The future will show who was profound and who was superficial. Is not play also a basic need? Don't the young people of the proletariat smile before they get harnessed to the treadmill and are constrained by their work?

VI

Wednesday

Jan Winczakiewicz's article in the September issue of *Kultura* about Baliński, Lechoń, Łobodowski, and Wierzyński. They figure in the *Anthology* that Dr.

Stanisław Lam has prepared under the categorical title of “The Most Outstanding Émigré Poets.”

Winczakiewicz’s review contains only one truth and that is why it strikes so forcefully. If the author were not a poet, full of cultured bows and delicacy for Poetry, I would not call it devastating. But the point is that all of the somewhat old-fashioned gallantry with which Winczakiewicz kisses the fingertips of the rhymed Muse was incapable of stifling the moan in him, which I share: Why does this smell of the attic? “These four poets gaze into the past. More: in looking into the past, they see with the eyes of the past. And still more: even while observing current events, they persist in seeing with the eyes of the past.”

What a shame! If it were just a matter of ordinary poems, then no big deal, but these are “wonderful,” “outstanding” poems that arouse so much of our admiration, so at least let us not allow them to compromise us. Yes, it would be better if the four distinguished faces did not look out at us as if from an album of old family photographs. These adored volumes should not be albums of dried autumn leaves. *Où sont les neiges d’antan?* What are these four subtle princes of our dreams raving about, what sort of canticle is their maudlin harp strumming? Oh, that canticle is really a lullaby! Go to sleep, go to sleep. . . .

I am by no means attacking the four prominent poets (it is difficult, as Winczakiewicz writes, for them to change their eyes). I am attacking our admiration. *Où sont les neiges d’antan?* This logic, which urges émigré poetry to be a poetry of remembrances, pity, retreat, escape, or, at best, noncontemporaneity, this logic is something so dialectically and historically logical that it almost gives you a sock in the jaw. What else has been left to us except the subtle perfume of memory? Isn’t it historically justified and recorded in the tomes of Marxist-Leninism that the poetry of the expiring social strata has to be the poetry of yesterday? Let us, therefore, get into the coach of these four historically justified poets and let us drive along with them toward those groves of bygone nightingales and bygone roses, toward old-time postcards, gallant swains, and grandmother’s autograph book. *Où sont les neiges d’antan?* It is in vain that Polonists such as Mr. Weintraub try to cheer us up by saying that Wierzyński is seeking new means of expression and that his rhythm has become “freer,” and his lyricism more direct and toned down. Unfortunately it is not just a matter of rhythm or a louder or less voluble lyricism, but of one’s spiritual predisposition, of the tuning, not of the harps, but the harpists.

Où sont les neiges d'antan? I do not agree with Winczakiewicz when he says that it is romanticism that forces them to avoid the present day and that their anti-intellectualism is the reason for their helplessness in today's antiromantic world, in which there is room only for intellectual poetry. No. The day, no, I am wrong, the night that we are living is filled to the brim with a romanticism that has the force of a thousand Byrons. There has never been such a storm in the tormented womb of humanity, our ocean is roaring and breaking itself against crags. Even I am inclined to say that the miracles of this threat are not alien to the four historically justified bards about whom I am speaking. Yet they cannot accommodate this beauty in their Poem, in the Poem, which evolved in bygone, prewar times and this beauty neither strays into their metaphor nor fits into their style.

How the naïveté of their faith in Poetry and in the Poet, their cult of the poetic form, and their loyalty to all the fictions that a poetic milieu creates have avenged themselves on these people! Today's poet ought to be a child, but a cunning, sober, and careful child. Let him write poetry, yet let him be capable of realizing its limitations at all times. Let him be a poet, but a poet prepared at all times to revise the relationship of poetry to life and reality. Let him, while being a poet, not stop being a man even for an instant. Let the man refuse to subordinate himself to the "poet." The naive Skamander school of poets, whose sole ambition was to write "beautiful poems," was not able to assure this self-sneering, self-ironical, self-despising, self-distrusting attitude. Today when Lechoń should be renewing and reforming the poet Lechoń in himself, where is his point of reference, where is that something that would allow him to at least risk some sort of change? He is afraid to move even one comma in his work, because, who knows, he may stop being a poet then and his poems will be less beautiful poems? How can this Lechoń turn against the poet-Lechoń if Lechoń is, as we have read, "altissimo poeta," and if poetry has become his profession, his social position and spiritual stance? How does one then go about destroying such a happily arranged harmony with the reader?

In these four historically justified poets, who were given to us in order that we could admire them and, in admiring them, feel the delight of dying and powerlessness, the problem is not a lack of form, it is a lack of distance to form. Free in the face of the world, they are inhibited only on one point: that of poetry. O that awful, that constricting "I am a poet," said with the solemnity of a holy

initiation, cuts them off from all beauty, which is born in the undergrowth of life and strikes at hallowed forms. Every once in a while, striking a hard blow at their own stiffness, they introduce some sort of terrible innovation, a new rhyme or assonance, and that's it.

The artist who realizes himself inside art will never be creative. He must remain on its peripheries where art meets life, where unpleasant questions such as the following arise: How much of the poetry that I write is conventional, and how much of it is truly real? How much are those who adore me lying and how much am I lying when I adore myself as a poet? When I posed a few such questions in the article "Against Poets," questions that were not at all complicated, whose one specific property was that they had nothing at all to do with rhymed speech but with poetry's link to reality, it turned out that no one understood a thing, and those who understood least were the poets. One aspect of this religion, which can be found in others, too, is that it does not allow for doubt, it does not want to know. Enough. Why am I taking it out on poets? I will let you in on the reason for my benevolent cruelty: I know that the poet can bear just about anything and will not feel offended on the condition that you acknowledge that he is a poet. And here I can give them full satisfaction and can say a hundred times, yes, they are poets, outstanding poets and even, as the *Anthology* will have it, the most outstanding poets (I have nothing against this).

But you, people, be on guard against their historically justified twilight. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into the little game which consists of their "singing" and your admiring. Review your platitudes. Sometimes we admire because we have grown accustomed to admiring and also because we do not want to ruin the parade. Sometimes it also happens that we admire out of delicacy, so as not to hurt anyone. Just in case, I advise you: let us strike at them hard to see whether or not they tumble over. For that blow may free the modern day in us and will give us a key to the future. Idiots! Why do you allow history to impose poets upon you? You alone must create them, them and history.

Friday

I went to the fashionable store Ostende and bought a pair of yellow shoes, which turned out to be too tight. So I went back to the store and exchanged this

pair for another in exactly the same style and size and identical in every other respect and they turned out to be equally tight.

Sometimes I amaze myself.

Saturday

X, his wife, and Mr. Y, who is very active in the Argentine Pólonia, related the latest gossip. Apparently at one of the organizational meetings of some group, my name was submitted for membership, at which time the chairman or some such person jumped up and roared that they had no room for such a degenerate! At a meeting of another such committee, my “cooperation” was voted undesirable.

May God be with them. Even if they sent me a delegation with flowers and music, I would not cooperate with committees that bore me to death, nor would I accept a chairmanship because, being a serious person, I would not make a good figurehead. These little games with chairmen, committees, and sessions are good for *Sonntagsjäger*s, but not for a laborer toiling on the land of native literature and culture, like me. I know that no delegation will harass me because the hatred of committees toward me issues from their very nature and committees as such will always fight me, even if all their members privately whisper into my ear: Keep scribbling, give it to them! Oh, if only a fire would rain down from the heavens and cleanse the Argentine life of Poles of its excessive kitsch. I can’t understand these people. It is puzzling to me that a man who has passed through the seven circles of hell, who has experienced a situation that has touched the very depths of his soul, who has finally exhausted the meaning of battle, pain, despair, faith, and doubt, having landed here in Argentina, joins a committee as if nothing had happened and begins to recite an immortal, it turns out, platitude. The knowledge of life that they gained, that they had to attain, is beside them. They have it in their pockets but not in themselves and in the end, even these pockets have been sealed.

The childishness of their tone is unbearable. The weekly *Głos* (*Voice*), fortified in recent years with new writers, has stopped being a terrible rag and has been reborn as a proud and useful “organ,” nevertheless, it is still a gathering of maiden aunts and uncles, devoting themselves to all possible precautions so as not to shock their adolescent nieces. This concern for the antediluvian innocence of today’s Poles is really moving. Persons who have experienced life at its keenest are

treated like fifth-grade boarding school girls and only certain subjects, appropriately sweetened and toned down, are allowed. Perhaps, however, it is better that the *Głos* maintains this caution, for if the *Głos* spoke with its real voice then one would have to worry that it would blow up that weekly and the entire colony in five minutes. We fear our real voice and that is why we use the *Głos* that is perfectly neuter.

I am far, however, from fighting this state of things with means that are too extreme. Occasionally someone, usually the president, treasurer, or secretary, turns to me with an intimate summons to become the scourge of the colony and run everything into the ground as it should be run down. This role does not appeal to me. We will not prove anything by mutually slandering each other and calling each other hypocrites, idiots, and dolts. We should, however, strive for something that would arouse the consciousness of unreality in Poles, that would awaken an awareness of the fiction in which they live, and that would make that awareness in them a vital organ. One must repeat to them: you are not as you are. You have really outgrown what you are saying. You act in this way because you are attuning yourself to others. You celebrate because everyone else is celebrating. You lie because everyone else is lying. Yet you and I are better than the farce in which we are acting. This is what must be said to them until this thought becomes a life jacket. This type of Ketman* is very much needed. We must feel like actors in a bad play who cannot fulfill themselves in their limited and banal roles. This consciousness will allow us at least to maintain our maturity until the moment when we are able to become more real.

I blame no one as it is not the people, but the circumstances, which are at fault.

Thursday

He, Miłosz, is just like the rest of them (literati of a certain school, raised on “social” problems), and experiences strife, torment, and doubts that were completely unknown to writers formerly.

* A reference to Miłosz’s *The Captive Mind* meaning to keep silent about one’s true convictions.

Rabelais had no idea whether he was “historical” or “ahistorical.” He had no intention of cultivating “absolute writing” or of paying homage to “pure art,” or, too, the opposite of that, articulating his epoch. He intended nothing at all because he wrote the way a child pees against a tree, in order to relieve himself. He struck at that which enraged him and fought that which stood in his way. He wrote for his and another’s delight and he wrote whatever came to mind.

Nevertheless, Rabelais expressed his epoch and felt the impending times. He also created the purest and most enduring art and this happened because by expressing himself in complete freedom, he also expressed the external essence of his humanity and of himself, as a son of the times and the seedbed of the new epoch.

Today, however, Miłosz (and he is not alone) puts his finger to his temple and ponders: How and what am I supposed to write about? Where is my place? What are my obligations? Am I to immerse myself in history? Or should I perhaps seek the “other shore”? Who am I supposed to be? What am I supposed to do? The writer Żeromski, bless his soul, used to say at such times: Write what your heart dictates! And this is the advice that rings most true.

When will we put an end to the tyranny of the mulches of abstraction in order to see the concrete world anew? The power of these philosophized antinomies is so enormous that Miłosz completely forgets whom he is addressing and imputes the role of defender of “pure art” to me, giving me practically the role of an aesthete. What do I have in common with him? If I oppose schemas which threaten a too topical literature, it is not at all in order to impose another schema. I am not speaking for an eternal art or a pure art, I am only telling Miłosz that one must be careful that the life beneath our pen not become transformed into politics, philosophy, or aesthetics. I do not demand applied or pure art, I clamor for freedom. I demand a “natural” creativity, the kind that is the unpremeditated realization of man.

But he says: I am afraid, I am afraid that when I move away from History (that is, from the truisms of our day), I will be alone. To which I reply: This fear is indecent and what is worse, imaginary. Indecent because it is, in fact, a resignation not just from excellence, but also from one’s own truth, just as it is a withdrawal from probably the only heroism that makes up the pride, power, and vitality of literature. He who fears human scorn and loneliness among people, let him be silent. This fear is also imaginary because the popularity that one gains in the

service of the reader and the currents of the epoch means only large editions and nothing, absolutely nothing more. Only he who is capable of standing apart from people and existing as a separate man and who only later wins two, three, or perhaps ten admirers, only he, my brothers, has overcome the isolation within the established boundaries of art.

He says (continually held in thrall by that reasoned vision, which is at odds with the most valuable characteristics of his person): Today we Poles can look down on the West and speak to it boldly (and here I cite him verbatim) “simply because our country is the scene of the most important changes that can take place and in these songs is the ‘song of the future’ which will rise up when Moscow’s reign over nations will come crashing down.” I would respond to this with advice that he apply this thought to Bulgaria or China, which are also in the historical avant-garde. No, Miłosz, no history will replace your own personal consciousness, maturity, depth. Nothing will absolve you of yourself. If you personally are important, then even if you live in the most conservative place on the face of the globe, your testimony about life will be important. No historical steamroller will squeeze important words out of an immature people.

So all of this becomes difficult, doubtful, dark, and muddled under the invasion of the complex sophistry of our times, but it can regain its crystalline purity when we understand that today we do not speak or write in a new and specific way but that this is how it has been since the beginning of the world. No concepts will replace the examples of the great masters and no philosophy will replace literature’s genealogical tree, so abundant in names that instill pride. There is no way around it: one can only write like Rabelais, Poe, Heine, Racine, or Gogol—or not at all. The legacy of this great race, which was passed down to us, is the only law that governs me. Yet I am not polemicizing with Miłosz, who is a thoroughbred, I am polemicizing with that horse collar, with that wagon full of scruples to which the past has hitched him.

Monday

Why didn’t I mention Wittlin when discussing Winczakiewicz’s review since Wittlin’s poems are also included in the anthology?

I omitted him because Winczakiewicz also leaves him out claiming that

the early Wittlin poems are not representative enough. But I would like to finish this up once and for all.

If Wittlin had only been the author of the poems from the anthology, I certainly would have mentioned him as well. Wittlin, however, is an earth-water creature and the denizen of ten realities: a poet who is a prose writer, a saint who is rebellious, a classic related to the avant-garde, a patriot and cosmopolitan, and a social activist who is a loner. One of these Wittlins derives, it is true, from Skamander and he is burdened to some degree by its legacy, but the remaining nine Wittlins pursue that one and demand a revision. This quiet tempest of Wittlins within Wittlin, this internal turmoil in a seemingly affable volcano, this tormented and active humanity of his is not my enemy but my ally. The force of Wittlin's entire rebellion lies in the fact that he does not want to rebel and if he does so, it is because he must. This is why none of us is as convincing as he is and no one else's word is as capable of reconciling people otherwise ossified in their prejudices. I know this power firsthand because Wittlin's introduction to my book is a masterpiece of lucid persuasion and generosity, infused with a very modern dynamism. Yet it is exactly because of this foreword that I would gladly attack Wittlin. I would strike at him so that no one could accuse me of sparing him because he defends and supports me (how destitute are my emotions!).

Saturday

Yes, whatever one says, I still fear these feuilleton writers who try to grow up to my ankles so that they can bury their malicious teeth in them. So what if they have lost their bearings? The judgment of a fool about you, even if he is the most ostentatious and monumental archcretin, is not necessarily bereft of meaning because the fool's name is Million. What is more important is that an opinion so strongly marked by even the most perfect nonintelligence and false from A to Z with all the aplomb of journalism reaches people who know neither you nor your books and who, in addition, are wanting in the capacity to arrive at their own opinion of you and your works.

When after encountering all these sputterings hot with the desire to ridicule, annihilate, discourage readers and inflict material and moral harm (all in the defense of sanctity and ideals), one stumbles onto a decently written article, the

divine air of pride fills one's lungs. Hats off to Ryszard Wraga. I do not demand that he like my work, but I am grateful that he plays fair. His word does not sneak up to my face in order to fix it with the mask of an idiot. Well! At last, a decent journalist! If he criticizes my views sharply, he does not, nevertheless, hesitate to admit that, in certain ways, the book exceeds his capacity and that which he cannot understand is deemed "great and splendid" by others. This honesty is morally valuable. His ideological reservations do not obstruct his doing justice to me and he even claims that "Sienkiewicz can't hold a candle to Gombrowicz"! He describes *The Marriage* as a "revolutionary play" and even cites "one of its most devastating scenes."

I am not hungry for this praise, yet the words of recognition that Mr. Wraga bestows upon me are worth their weight in gold because they come from an opponent, an opponent who is able to attain the elegance of objectivity. He is capable of scorning the advantage resulting from the fact that the reader, who is not familiar with my work, would be incapable of discovering his eventual distortions (in defense of threatened ideals) and falsities (in defense of violated sanctity).

Really! One must follow the example of such a worthy publicist. I hereby do this.

Tuesday

This is a speech, delivered to the nation at a banquet in the home of X, at the end of A.D. 1953.

As the holidays approach, you like to water the flower beds of memories with your tears and you like to sigh over lost native lands. Don't be silly or maudlin! Learn how to raise the burden of your own destiny. Stop your nauseating lamentations over the lost beauties of Grójec, Piotrków, or Biłgoraj. Know that your homeland is neither Grójec nor Skierniewice, not even Poland itself, and blush with energy at the thought that your country is you! So what if you are not in Grodno, Kutno, or Jedlińsk. Has man ever lived anywhere else other than in himself? You are at home even if you were to find yourself in Argentina or Canada, because a homeland is not a blot on a map but the living essence of man.

Stop cultivating pious illusions and false sentiments in yourself. No, we were not happy at home. Those pines, birches, and weeping willows were really ordinary trees that filled you with endless yawning when, bored, you looked at

them occasionally through the window. It is not true that Grójec is something more than an awful and provincial backwater in which your drab existence once fended for itself.

No, these are all lies: Radom was never a poem, even at sunrise! Those flowers were never wondrous and unforgettable! Grinding poverty, dirt, disease, boredom, and injustice encircled you even then like the howling dogs of remote Polish villages at dusk.

I say: Don't be crybabies! Do not forget that as long as you lived in Poland, not one of you was concerned with Poland because it was an everyday event. Today, on the other hand, you no longer live in Poland so Poland resides more forcefully in you and it should be present in you as your deepest humanity, the polished work of generations. Know that wherever the eyes of a young man uncover his destiny in the eyes of a girl, a homeland is born. Whenever anger or admiration find themselves on your lips, whenever villainy is struck a blow, whenever the word of the wise man or Beethoven's song ignites your soul leading it into unearthly spheres, whether it be Alaska or the equator, a homeland is born. On Saxon Square in Warsaw, in Cracow's marketplace, you will be homeless vagrants, homebodies without a corner, wanderers, hopelessly crude moneymakers, if you allow pettiness to kill all the beauty within you.

One must lament that you are not noble enough and inspired enough to discover the pathetic meaning of your wandering.

Nevertheless, do not lose hope. In this battle for a deeper meaning in life and its beauty, you are not alone. Luckily you have Polish art at your side, which today has become something more important and more real than a homeless ministry and offices bereft of power. Art will teach you profundity. Its lash, both harsh and benevolent, will crack over your heads whenever you begin to fall apart, get slimy, and begin to blubber. Art will open your eyes to the keen beauty of your day, the magnitude of your task, and it will replace your provincial feelings with a new, world-size emotion, in scale with the horizons opening before you today. Art will restore your capacity for flight and power so that people will not say of you, in Shakespeare's words:

*'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.*

1954

VII

Friday

I appeared at this dancing party (this was on New Year's Day) at two A.M. having consumed, in addition to a turkey, quite a bit of vodka and wine. I had arranged to meet with friends but they weren't there and so I wandered through the various rooms until I sat down in the garden where, unexpectedly, a crowd broke up into pairs and started dancing.

This happened because of the music, which was barely audible from where I sat and reached me only through the dull echo of the percussion instruments or in the few tones of a lively disappearing melody that barely gave a sign of existence. To the heavenly summons of the played fragments, which appeared consistently, always arranged around some sort of inaccessible phrase, responded the playful and violent, witty and insistent rhythm of bodies, dancing to the bursting point, more tangible, more real than that distant illusion until it seemed that it was not the music that was eliciting the dance, but the dance that was drawing forth the music. Yes, one had the impression that the rhythm here, at the bottom, now too overpowering, was tearing out the outline of the confirming sound there, at the top.

What dancing! The dance of bellies, gyrating bald heads, wilted faces, the dance of overworked, ordinary everydayness, kicking up its holiday heels, the dance of drabness and deformity. Which does not mean that these people were worse than any others, it was just that these were mainly older people and, ultimately, these were ordinary people together with their own inevitable poverty, a poverty that paraded itself shamelessly in convulsions, which, when deprived of music, were something blasphemously outrageous, terrifyingly pagan, and wildly promiscuous. It seemed as if they were determined to conquer and possess Beauty,

Wit, Elegance, and Gaiety by force and so in releasing their defects, they mutually created a dance, an amused form to which they had no right, a form that was a usurpation of form. Yet this mad clamoring for grace, which reached the highest pitch, suddenly tore that sign of life away from the melody, away from those few happy tones which, when washing over the dance, sanctified it for one moment—after which, there appeared once again that wild, dark, remote, godless working of frenzied bodies, carried away with themselves.

The dance, therefore, created the music, the dance conquered the melody with its violence and this in spite of its imperfection! At the flash of this thought I was so deeply moved that of all the thoughts in the world, it was that one that was the most important to us, today, the one closest to us, yes, this revelation crouched behind that curtain in Valéry's poem (in Lechoń's translation, I think), which I had so fervently recited:

*The heavy unfinished gate of sleep
The slowly rising curtain of rubies . . .*

It was this that was at the bottom of all our tomes, struggles, at the bottom of our genius and the boldness that reached the heavens. Humanity rushed toward this idea, that the dance creates the music, with all of its means and became the inspiration and metaphysics of my time. Even I strove to reach it along a spiral or ever more narrow loops. Yet it was exactly at this moment that I became devastated for I realized that I thought this thought only for its pathos!

Thursday

A bird flies, a dog barks. Instead of saying, "A bird flies, a dog barks" I intentionally said "A dog flies, a bird barks."

What is stronger in these phrases: the subject or the predicate? In "the dog flies" is it "flies" that is out of place or "dog"? Also: could one write something based on such a perverse association of concepts, at the tongue's profligacy?

Saturday

A conversation with Karol Świerczewski about *The Marriage* and, at the same time, a letter from S. with the notification that someone in the United States

desires to produce this play. Also, a letter from Camus with the question, do I have anything against his recommending *The Marriage* to a certain director of a theater in Paris.

What should I do? *The Marriage* without theater is like a fish without water. Yes, because not only is it a drama written for the theater, it is also, in its intention, the very liberating theatricality of existence. I, however, fear that no one besides me will be able to direct it and that the production will flop to my great shame, ruining the stage career of that work for many years to come.

The greatest difficulty is the fact that *The Marriage* is not the artistic expression of some sort of issue or situation (something to which France has accustomed us), but a relaxed outlet for the imagination, an imagination that is striving, it is true, to move in a certain direction. This does not mean that *The Marriage* does not tell us a certain story: it is the drama of a modern man whose world has been destroyed and who (in a dream) finds his home changed into an inn and his fiancée into a wench. In an attempt to restore the past, this man pronounces his father king and wants to see his fiancée a virgin. All to no avail. Not only has his world been ruined, he, too, has been ruined and his former feelings have long been gone. Yet, on those very ruins, a new world, full of awful pitfalls and an unexpected dynamism, devoid of God, reveals itself to him in the very strange convulsions of its incipient Form. Drunk with the omnipotence of his unleashed humanity, Henry pronounces himself king, God, and dictator and wants, by means of these new machinations, to force purity and love to revive in him. Yes, yes, he will sanction his own marriage, he will impose it on the people, and he will force them to recognize it! Yet this reality which was created by form turns against him and destroys him.

This is the story . . . but it does not exhaust the contents of *The Marriage* because the new world, which appears here, was not foreseen, even by the author. The drama is merely an artistic attempt to get at the reality that the Future conceals. This is a dream (about our epoch) that expresses the suffering of our modern times, but it is also a dream that is a forerunner of the epoch, it is a dream that attempts to decipher the times. On the peripheries of the action, the slumbering spirit of the protagonist-artist wants to break through the darkness, this is a dream-battle with the demons of tomorrow, this is a celebration of the holy ritual of the Becoming of the new and unknown. On stage, therefore, *The Marriage* should

become a Mount Sinai, a place full of mystical revelations; a cloud, pregnant with a thousand meanings; a galloping work of imagination and intuition; a Grand Guignol, full of play; a puzzling *missa sollemnis* on the threshold of time, at the foot of an unknown altar. This dream is a dream and it moves in darkness, by rights it should be illuminated only by bolts of lightning (forgive me for expressing myself in such lofty terms, but otherwise I would not be able to get you to understand how *The Marriage* should be staged).

If you conceive of *The Marriage* in this way, as an unburdening of the soul, brimming with the dark foreboding of impending times, as a mass of the future, it should work pretty well on stage. But don't forget that this production has to be as sensual as it is metaphysical, that is, all the brilliance and horror of unbridled form, the intoxication with the mask, and the exultation in the game for love of the game should make it a delight. And don't forget that its ultimate tragedy hinges on terrifying man, who should see that it is taking on a form that is unpredictable, who should see the dissonance between man and form.

There is melancholy in giving these tips. In truth, I am not at all certain that *The Marriage* will be staged in my lifetime.

Sunday

I would like to describe how I envision the general outlines of the direction of the first act.

The first scene with Henry and Johnny: the nostalgic, crushing melody of sleep and Henry's pathos in a void and Johnny's "ease," the appalling ease of youth. And "hola" as an incantation, which grows of itself and gives birth to expectation.

When his parents show up, Henry takes on the style of a "traveler," this is a typical scene with an innkeeper. Right after that, there is the violent shouting of his father and the entrance of his mother, whose shouting should harmonize with the father's shouting. And Henry's two monologues:

*I would seem so
But it's not altogether certain.*

and

*I am unable to speak to them
straightforwardly . . .*

like two crescendos. Here Henry begins to feel himself a high priest and the mass begins. From now on he will be both in the action and outside the action. Sometimes he will support it ardently as if with the desire to exhaust its meaning, he will accompany it in intoxication, he will assist from the sidelines, or, for a moment, he will completely halt it.

The dialogues with his parents are of various rhythms and changing moods. These dialogues have to be worked out vocally, like a musical score, and their theatricality must be brought out. The ritual of the banquet, the parade in pairs to the table, is an eruption of the grotesque: here for a moment they have forgotten about the drama and they have fun.

Then Molly appears, spiced with the tormenting mystery of a dream. Despairing but amused, Henry and Johnny surrender themselves to the lightness and carelessness, and the rhythm, the rhythm overwhelms them! Then the Drunkards burst in, conjured up by the “Pig!” that Father has become enamored of and the persistent leitmotiv “Porky Molly! Porky Molly!” and Henry, on the sidelines, allows himself to be drawn in and confirms, supports: “A bottle of pig bitters!”

Or, when repeating in an aside the words of the Drunkards (Molly, the pickles! . . . Right in the crucifix!) he does it as if he were assisting in some sort of ritual. When, at one point, he says to himself, “How much longer can this go on?” the Drunkard, who seems to break out of his role, answers, “Not much longer now!” and, for a moment, one of the pauses in action, characteristic of *The Marriage*, occurs:

Henry (to the Drunkard): What’s outside the window?

Drunkard: Fields, as far as the eye can see.

The desperate need to be untouchable and the wild fear of the finger of the Drunkard give birth to the royalty of the Father. This finger ought to be quite large and repugnant.

The introduction of the second main theme into this “symphony” (“Oh, Henry, Henry, Oh, Henry!”) which opposes with its loftiness the first, degrading one (“Pig! Pig! Pig!”) should sound appropriate, supported by shouts of “The King!

The King!” and the appearance of the Dignitaries. Dignitaries should appear wrapped in the miasma of a dream and only gradually should this scene consolidate itself in its new aspect of the royal court.

In the scene with the prayer, Fatherhood takes on a divine character. God is the father of the Father and this fatherhood torments, imposes itself, suggests words of faithful submission to Henry. Yet he, who is in a vacuum, does not know what to do with himself. All of a sudden, the light, miraculous word “Marriage” falls and the stage brightens: a wedding march, the triumphant swiftness of the finale, the polonaise with which the Father wants to “enforce” reality, which is marred by the last, short, explosive: “You pig!”

Monday

Am I allowed to publish such commentaries to my own works? Am I perhaps overdoing it? And doesn't it bore people?

Tell yourself that people dream about getting to know you. They desire you. They are curious about you. Lead them forcefully into your affairs, even into those that are of no interest to them. Force them to become interested in that which interests you. The more they know about you, the more they will need you.

The “I” is not an obstacle in being with people. The “I” is that which they desire. Make sure, though, that the “I” is not smuggled in like contraband. If there's anything the “I” can't stand it's half-heartedness, timidity, shyness.

Tuesday

How do we differ, Mr. Goetel and I?

Goetel says (in his article “Fatigue” in *Wiadomości*) that the Poles in exile live a partial, unreal life and that in order for those Poles to begin really living, they must recover Poland. He writes that from time to time we are overcome with weariness at the thought of that constant, centuries-long, never-ending struggle for Poland. He claims that the devil of escapism whispers into our ear and suggests various ways to avoid this task, but that there is no escape, there can be no real life

for us outside of Poland. According to him, there is no other fate for us, no other vocation, no other task, except for this splendid task of recovering Poland.

First of all, I ask: Are we so sure and is it so obvious that the life of a Pole in Poland was less half-hearted and less unreal? Was that life also not impoverished, miserable, and narrow? Was it not an eternal waiting for life, which “begins tomorrow”? Recall the faces in a Warsaw, prewar tram car. How tired they looked! How tormented! On those faces you could read the portentous meaning of life, a very universal meaning.

Second, I ask: Is it true that the life of a Pole in a foreign land must be devoid of the most basic content? What did the Catholic Church teach you? That you have an immortal soul, independently of the latitude in which you find yourself. It taught that wherever you are, you are to concern yourselves with salvation, with your own and that of your fellow man.

My position coincides exactly with that of the Church with the difference that, instead of speaking about the soul in a religious sense, I would list a few principal human values, such as intelligence, nobility, capacity for development, freedom, and honesty. It would seem from Mr. Goetel’s words that the road to these values runs only through Poland. I, on the other hand, feel that there is no road *to* them, as each of us carries them in himself.

And now I arrive at the question, which is a trial by fire, a really demonic question: If you were told that in order to remain Poles, you should have to give up some part of your human value, that is, that you could remain Poles only under the condition that you would become worse as people, somewhat less capable, less intelligent, less noble, would you agree to such a sacrifice to uphold Poland?

Those of you who have been taught to die will reply in the affirmative. The overwhelming majority, however, will answer that such a dilemma could not arise as Poland is an irrevocable condition of these virtues and a Pole without Poland cannot be a complete man. I, however, will call such an answer the most classic example of escapism. Here you have it, the answer of the coward who is afraid of reality because the values of which I speak have an absolute worth and cannot be dependent on anything. He who says that only Poland can assure him wisdom or dignity abandons his own wisdom, his own dignity.

I see, too, that I and this Mr. Goetel will never be able to understand one another because his concern is Poland and mine is the Poles. Goetel is so weighed down by Poland that even Conrad's or Curie-Skłodowska's attainments are considered purely for propaganda purposes, that is, how much they can be used to popularize the name of Poland abroad. Goetel appraises the role of "intellectuals" with condescension because they cannot be of much help to the Polish question. Conrad, Curie, and the intellect have all become bugs circling one candle: Poland.

What will Mr. Goetel say to this? He will say that I am an escapist, weakling, megalomaniac, (pseudo)intellectual, traitor, coward, and crazy aesthete. Goetel cannot say anything else. Goetel must say this (with the clearest conscience).

Thursday

Language. Not that a person should not make grammatical mistakes, but the mistake should not degrade. Anyone can make a mistake in writing, even a grammatical or spelling mistake, but some people dress themselves in classic togas and these folks are devastated by a mistake, even a minor one. The writer, on the other hand, who does not want to be too impeccable in articulation can allow himself frequent stumblings and no one will hold him responsible for those. Therefore, a writer must care not only for language, but, above all, for finding the right attitude to language, which is to say an attitude that is least inhibiting. It is a lousy stylist who allows his words to be used against him. And lousy is he who, like some women, makes a reputation for himself of being without sin. The least little sin then becomes a scandal.

Writers who delight too much in an alleged precision of style, who try to shock with some sort of nonexistent mathematics of language, who coquet (the school of Anatole France) with their "mastery": these writers are no longer in tune with our times. Especially since sybaritism has become unfashionable. A contemporary stylist must have a feeling for language as something infinite and dynamic that does not allow itself to be mastered. He will emphasize his struggle with form rather than form itself. His attitude toward the word, as something that eludes him, is one of distrust. This loosening of the bond between the writer and the word ensures a greater boldness in using words.

The most important thing is that the excess of theory, the conceited approach to style, not take away the word's efficacy in practice, in life. After all, art takes place among living, concrete, and, therefore, imperfect people. Today there is a glut of styles that bore, fatigue, and turn our stomachs because they are the fruit of a creative recipe, the work of an unsocial and poorly brought up people. The word should be aimed at people not at theories, at people not at art. The language I use in this diary is too correct; in my other works, I have more freedom.

Friday

Good Polish literature, modern or older, was not of much use to me and did not teach me much, and that is because it never dared to see the individual man.

The *individuum*: if it showed up in the pages of Polish literature at all, it appeared pusillanimous, weak, not genuine, always unfinished. Polish literature is a typically seductive literature. It strives to lure the individual, subordinate him to the masses, submit him to patriotism, citizenship, faith, and service. It is a pedagogical literature and, therefore, it does not inspire trust.

Yet I found bad Polish literature to be both interesting and instructive. In studying the wretched little novels of various spinsters in the Sunday edition of *Kurier Warszawski* or in reading the novels of German, Mniszkówna, Zarzycka, or Mostowicz, I was uncovering reality because these novels unmask, they are traitorous. This incompetent fiction splits at the seams constantly and through the crevices you can catch sight of all the dirt in those sloppy little authorial souls.

The history of literature: yes, of course, but why just a history of good literature? Bad art may be more representative of a people. The history of all Polish graphomania could tell us more about ourselves than a history of all the Mickiewiczes and Pruses.

Monday

We drove to Tigre in the delta of the Paraná. Our motorboat cruised along the dark and quiet surface that ripples through a forest of islands. All is green, blue, pleasant, and fun. We stopped and picked up a young girl who, how should I say

this? Beauty has its secrets: there are many such beautiful melodies but only a few are like a hand that strangles. Her beauty was so “fetching” that everyone felt strange and perhaps even bashful. No one dared betray that he was watching her, even though there was not a pair of eyes that was not casting furtive glances at her luminous being.

The girl then calmly began to pick her nose.

Wednesday

Virgilio Piñera (a Cuban writer): You, Europeans, think we are nothing! Never, not for a minute, did you believe that a literature could be born here. Your skepticism regarding America is absolute and boundless! Imperturbable! Masked with hypocrisy, which is an even more deadly variety of scorn. There is something unyielding in this scorn! Too bad that we do not know how to respond with a scorn equal to yours!

Even the best minds here fall victim to attacks of American naïveté. Every American, even if he has consumed all the wisdom of the world and has examined all varieties of arrogance, conceals that provincialism somewhere so that it always bursts out in a new, childish whine. Virgilio, I said, don’t be a child. All these divisions into continents and nationalities, this is really just a lousy schema imposed on art. Why, everything you write leads me to believe that you don’t know the word “we,” only “I.” Why the division then into “We, Americans” and “You, Europeans”?

Thursday

Will I be able to die like others and then what will my fate be? Among a people fleeing from themselves, I remain fixed on myself. I magnify myself to what extent? Is this unhealthy? To what extent and in what way is it unhealthy? Sometimes I suspect that the act of self-aggrandizement, to which I submit, is not an indifferent matter to nature and that it is a provocation. Haven’t I touched on something basic in my very relationship to supernatural forces and will not my fate be different “later” as a result of the fact that I did not treat myself as others?

VIII

Sunday

Tragedy.

I walked in the rain, hat perched over my forehead, collar raised, hands in my pockets.

After which I returned home.

Then I went out again to get something to eat.

Then I ate it.

Friday

With the Spanish painter Sanza in Galeon. He came here for two months, sold paintings for a few hundred thousand, knows and values Łobodowski. In spite of the fact that he has made a ton of money in Argentina, he speaks about it without enthusiasm. "In Madrid, a person can sit at a table in a street café and even though nothing specific awaits him, he knows that anything can happen: friendship, love, adventure. Here you know nothing will happen."

Sanza's discontent is quite restrained compared with what other tourists say. These foreigners pouting over Argentina, their lofty criticism and summary judgments don't seem to be of the highest category. Argentina is full of miracles and magic, but this charm is discrete; wrapped in a smile that does not want to express too much. Here we possess decent enough *materia prima* (raw material) even though we cannot yet afford manufactured products. We have no Notre Dame or Louvre, nevertheless, one does often see dazzling teeth, fabulous eyes, and the shape of harmonious, graceful bodies on the street. When from time to time cadets from the French navy visit us, the Argentine woman inevitably goes into raptures, as if she had seen Paris itself, but then she always says: What a shame they are not nicer looking. French actresses impress Argentineans with their Parisian perfume but they also say: There isn't a single one with everything in the right place. This country, satiated with youth, has a certain aristocratic serenity, specific to creatures that move easily and don't need to be shy.

I am speaking mainly of the young people because it is characteristic of Argentina that its beauty is young and “low,” earthy, you will not find it in larger amounts in the higher or median strata. Only the common people are distinctive. Only the common people are aristocratic. The young people alone are impeccable in every detail. This is a reversed country where the young stripling who sells the literary *revista* has more style than all of its collaborators put together; where the mediocrity of the plutocratic and intellectual salons is appealing; and where a catastrophe occurs when one turns thirty—the utter transformation of youth into uninteresting maturity. Argentina, together with the rest of America, is young because it dies young. Yet its youth, in spite of everything, is ineffectual. At the parties here you can spot a twenty-year-old worker who is a Mozart melody, approach a girl who is a Benvenuto Cellini vase, and see how nothing results from this meeting of two masterpieces. This then is a land in which poetry does not become reality, yet precisely because of that one feels even more strongly its awful silent presence behind the curtain.

One should not really speak of masterpieces as this word is out of place in Argentina. There are no masterpieces here, there are only works of art. Here not only is beauty something that is not abnormal, it constitutes the embodiment of ordinary health and average development. It is a triumph of matter, not a divine revelation. And that ordinary beauty knows that it is nothing extraordinary, which is why it does not value itself and is, therefore, an entirely secular beauty, deprived of grace. Nevertheless, because it is linked to grace and divinity by its very essence, it is all the more shocking as an abdication.

And now:

Just as with physical beauty in Argentina, so it is with form. Argentina is a country of early and easy form: there is not much here of the pain, degradation, dirt, suffering that accompany a form that perfects itself only slowly and with great effort. Rarely is there a social blunder. Timidity is the exception. Outright stupidity is rare and these people resort to neither melodrama nor sentimentality, to neither pathos nor buffoonery, at least they never resort to these altogether. As a result of this early and smoothly maturing form (thanks to which a child moves with the ease of an adult), which facilitates and paves, no hierarchy of values on a European scale has materialized in this country and this, perhaps, may be what attracts me most in Argentina. They are not repulsed, they are not outraged, they do not

condemn, and they are not ashamed to the extent that we are. They have not experienced form and they have not tasted its drama. Sin in Argentina is less sinful, holiness less holy, revulsion less repulsive and it is not just the beauty of the body but all virtue that is less lofty here and inclined to eat off the same plate as sin. There is something disarming in the air here: an Argentinean does not believe in his own hierarchies or else he accepts them as something imposed on him. The resonance of the spirit is not convincing in Argentina, something which Argentineans themselves know best and that is why two separate languages exist here: one public, serving the spirit which is ritual and rhetoric and another, private one through which people make themselves understood behind the back of the first one. There isn't the slightest connection between these two languages and an Argentinean presses a button in himself which turns on the lofty and then presses another button, which returns him to his everyday self.

What is Argentina? Batter that has not yet become cake, or something that is simply unshaped, or, perhaps, a protest against the mechanization of the spirit, the reluctant, devil-may-care gesture of a man who is removing himself from a too automatic accumulation—an intelligence that is too intelligent, a beauty that is too beautiful, a morality that is too moral? In this climate, in this constellation, a genuine and creative protest against Europe could arise if—if the softness found a way to make itself hard or if the indistinctness could become a program, a definition.

Thursday

My letter to members of the Discussion Club in Los Angeles:

Thank you for your nice Merry Christmas and Happy New Year's wishes and for the news that the first meeting of the Club was devoted to discussing my works, which delights me. Allow me, dear members, to return the compliment with a few remarks on the subject of the activity to which you devote yourselves, i.e., the art of discussion.

I wish to share my reflections on this matter with you because it is with great pain that I see that discussion belongs to those cultural phenomena that usually bring us nothing but humiliation and that I would call "disqualifying." Let us think about the source of this venom of ignominy with which discussion

plies us. We undertake it assuming that it will throw into relief who is right and what the truth is, in connection with which men primo, designate a topic; secundo, define notions; tertio, take care to articulate with precision; and quarto, take pains to maintain logical argumentation. All this is followed by a Tower of Babel, a muddle of concepts, a chaos of words and the truth is drowned in claptrap. How much longer can we maintain that professorial naïveté derived from the previous century whereby we can organize discussion. Are there certain things you still do not understand? Do you need more blather in a world sick with discussion to understand that gabbing is no bridge to the truth? Do you want to illuminate your darkness with this candle when not even a light-house can penetrate its walls?

If I said that discussion belongs to “disqualifying” phenomena then obviously I am thinking only of discussion of lofty and isolated issues because no one will expose himself to shame and foolishness when carrying on about the ways of preparing vegetable soup. Foolishness is a consequence not only of the fact that discussion cannot do its job, it arises primarily because we ourselves allow for a certain mystification that intensifies in proportion to the profundity of the subject. In other words, we pretend before ourselves and others that we are after the truth, whereas in reality, the truth is merely a pretext for our personal flight in discussion, for our, succinctly speaking, pleasure. When you play tennis, you don’t try to convince others that you are interested in anything else but the game. Yet when you toss arguments around, you do not want to admit that truth, belief, worldview, ideal, humanity, or art have become a ball and that the important thing is who beats whom, who shines, or who will distinguish himself in the scuffle that so nicely fills out the afternoon.

Does Discussion, therefore, serve the Truth? Or does Truth serve Discussion? Most likely it is both one and the other and in this split hides something elusive, something that is the secret of life and culture. Yet a talking man should know why he is speaking and it is enough to conceal this less serious side of the discussion and immediately our style gets mendacious, breaks down, and leads us to defeat. Persons who forget about other people and concentrate exclusively on striving for the Truth speak heavily and falsely, their speech is devoid of life, it becomes not a ball but a saw. But those who know how to liberate pleasure, who treat discussion as both work and play, play for work and work for play, they will not allow themselves to be crushed and then

the exchange of opinions will sprout wings, flash grace, passion, poetry, and, most important, regardless of the result, will become a triumph. Even absolute idiocy or lies will not be able to knock you flat on your back if you are able to play with them.

It seems to me that here, accidentally, I have betrayed the greatest and ultimate secret of style: we have to know how to delight in the word. If literature generally dares to speak, it is not at all because it is certain of its truth, but only because it is certain of its delight. If, however, dear members, I desire to draw your attention to this property of discussion, it is because the world has become mortally and stupidly serious and our truths, which are denied play, bore themselves and through their vengeance begin to bore us. We forget that man does not exist only to convince another man. He exists in order to win, to win to his side, to seduce, charm, possess. Truth is not a matter of arguments. It is only a matter of attraction, that is, a pulling toward. Truth does not make itself real in an abstract contest of ideas, but in a collision of persons. Being condemned to read a fair amount of books filled only with arguments, I know what truth severed from the person is: a laborious truth. And that is why I turn to you with the plea: Do not allow an idea to grow in you at the price of your personality.

You write that I was the subject of your talk. So I would like to ask: Did you respect my person? Did your words ring with vibrancy, did you speak about me with the flight and passion appropriate to art or did you merely extract some sort of “views” out of me and gnaw on them like a dry bone from my skeleton? You should know that I forbid you to speak about me in a boring, everyday, ordinary way. I staunchly forbid this. I demand a holiday word for myself. I punish those who allow themselves to speak about me boringly and wisely. I punish them cruelly: I die on their lips and they end up with an oral cavity full of my dead body.

Monday

Dionys Mascolo: *Le communisme (révolution et communication ou la dialectique des valeurs et des besoins*, Gallimard, Paris, 1953).

I assume that I will still have something to say about this important book (important because this is a sophisticated Communism, spiced with all the flavors

of the elite, a Communism for the aristocracy), of which I have read barely a hundred pages.

But for now:

The text creates the strange impression of absolute seriousness and absolute childishness. Absolute honesty and absolute mendacity. Absolute knowledge about reality and absolute ignorance.

Would it not, therefore, be appropriate to say that Mascolo has absolutely exhausted a certain sense of existence, but that he lacks the sense of another, complementary meaning? This work stands steady, but only on one leg.

That is why it often casts a blinding sheaf of light onto the venomous alchemy of current culture and our playing with false cards. Here Mascolo may come in handy. But he is completely powerless in the face of his own mendacity. This happens because he does not want to be himself, he wants simply to be an instrument. This is a man who has subordinated himself to his own opinion. He cannot understand the world because he wants to impose himself on the world and what is more, feels that the imposition is the only form of understanding. This is a soul that is insolent by premeditation.

This is reflected in his style. His language shouts: I am up to par! I am profound. I am penetrating. I am conscious and authentic. I am capable of using all the ploys, I know all the formulas, you won't catch me at any type of naïveté. This language, however, is not personal. It looks as if Mascolo has just ingested the amount of consciousness, subtlety, sharpness, etc., that is in the air, which is to say, the air that modern intellectualism breathes. He has appropriated all of this and uses it fluently, but it is not his property. Nothing is Mascolo's property because he himself is not his own property. One could take the "style" of this book and use it against him—it would be enough to put it in another envelope and send it to another address.

In this book, where the demon of a Communizing intelligence throws himself at the cosmos, which is equally demonic and equally abstract, one single truth is lacking, that is, the modest, warm, intimate truth of the author.

Thursday

Criticism has been a burning issue for me for a long time, perhaps even from my first literary contacts with people. Poles are not generally psychologists. A

Pole is incapable, for example, of correctly judging a man with whom he is talking or whose book he is reading. I knew that a Pole would not take the trouble to inquire about the point at which my joke becomes seriousness; my irresponsibility, responsibility; my immaturity, maturity. He is incapable of unmasking my game or understanding its causes.

But of all Poles, the literary critic, that professional evaluator, is exactly the being that knows the least about people and, what follows, about literature because his intellectual ballast crushes the remainder of the direct, intuitive feelings of a man. Because of this, I knew, when writing *Ferdynand*—a book that is unusually difficult and, what is more, is misleading and deceptive—that if I gave myself up into the hands of these men unarmed, I would be lost.

At the same time, I plied myself with a series of questions. Is it okay for an author to be unarmed before a critic? Why am I supposed to agree without protest to Mr. X's public assessment of me if perhaps he possesses less knowledge about life than I do and certainly has a worse idea of what not his, but my concerns are. Why should the opinion of Mr. X, which is really just one more private opinion, be raised to the level of a verdict by the mere fact that he writes for a newspaper? Why should I bear this arrogance and impertinence, that hurried sloppiness solemnly called criticism? Wouldn't I be in contradiction with the basic striving of my work, which is supposed to have assured me freedom and sovereignty and granted me a "sureness of self" if I agreed to this dependency on human opinion? But, most of all, I asked myself (because in *Ferdynand* I strove to reveal myself on the broadest scale possible) if it was right that authors should pretend that criticism does not matter to them at all, just as if those verdicts were being decreed on another planet whereas in reality we all write for people, their judgment is crucial, and our fear of it dominates us.

These questions were all the more painful because I, who was a little-known author and certainly one devoid of authority, wrote a book that was outrageously bold and provocative, in which I, a young whippersnapper, settled accounts with all of culture! My strength, however, lay precisely in the disclosure of my weakness. The starting point of the book, the revelation of my own immaturity, was supposed to have been its strong point. I decided, therefore, also to reveal my attitude to criticism and, instead of avoiding this aspect of creativity with a shame-filled silence, as is usually done, I tried to show as distinctly as I could that my book was written in fear and hatred of criticism, with the desire to escape it.

Today, naturally, I feel a lot more sure of myself as I am more firmly rooted in people and I am not so terribly alone as when I approached Kister with my first manuscript. Today I can oppose the opinion of Mr. X, who considers me a half-wit, to the opinion of Mr. Y, who appreciates me. Nevertheless . . .

Sunday

The cold wind from the south swept a mass of hot and humid air out of Buenos Aires and now it is blowing at a clip, howling, whistling, buzzing and slamming windows, throwing papers into the air at the intersections and causing real orgies of invisible witches. This pseudoautumn wind grabs me, too, and spurs me on into the past. It has the privilege of evoking the past in me and sometimes I submit to it for hours, sitting somewhere on a bench. There, blown through and through, I attempt something that is beyond my power but nevertheless ardently desired: contact with the Witold Gombrowicz from irretrievable epochs. I spend a lot of time reconstructing my past: I diligently establish a chronology and stretch my memory to its limits, looking for myself the way Proust did, but to no avail. The past is bottomless and Proust lies. Nothing, one can do absolutely nothing. Yet the southern wind, in causing certain upheavals in my organism, creates in me a state of almost amorous desire in which, desperately losing my way, I attempt to awaken my old existence in me for just an instant with a grimace.

On avenida Costanera, staring at the waves dashed into the air with relentless fury by the stone masonry of the shore, I, today's Gombrowicz, summoned that distant protoplast of mine in all of his tremulous and youthful vulnerability. Today, the triviality of those events took on (for me who already knew, who was now my own past, the solution to the riddle of that boy) the sanctity of legends about distant beginnings and today I knew the seriousness of that ridiculous suffering, I knew it *ex post*. I reminded myself, therefore, how one evening he-I went to the neighboring village of Bartodziej to attend a party, where there was a person who transported him-me into raptures and before whom I-he wanted to show off, shine. I-he needed this. Instead I walked into the salon and there, instead of admiration, I was greeted by the pity of aunts, the jokes of cousins, the crass irony of all those local landowners. What had happened? Kaden Bandrowski had "run down" one of my

novellas in words that were actually full of indulgence but which categorically denied me any talent. That newspaper had fallen into their hands and they, of course, believed it because, after all, he was a writer and he knew what he talking about. That evening I did not know where to hide my face.

If he-I was helpless in situations like this, then it was not at all because he was not up to them. On the contrary. These situations were irrefutable because they were unworthy of being refuted—they were too silly and frivolous to take the suffering that they caused seriously. You suffered and, at the same time, were ashamed of your suffering so that you, who at that time could easily handle far more menacing demons, broke down at this juncture, disqualified by your own pain. You poor, poor boy! Why hadn't I been at your side then, why couldn't I have walked into that drawing room and stood right behind you, so that you could have been fortified with the later sense of your life. But I—your fulfillment—I was—I am—a thousand miles and many years away from you and I sat—I sit—here, on the American shore, so bitterly overdue . . . and thus, staring at the water that shoots up from behind a stone wall, filled with the distance of the wind speeding from the polar region.

Sunday

Today, years later, when I am a lot calmer, less at the mercy and the lack of mercy of judgments, I think about the basic assumptions of *Ferdydurke* regarding criticism and I can endorse them without reservation. There are enough innocent works that enter life looking as if they did not know that they would be raped by a thousand idiotic assessments! Enough authors who pretend that this rape, perpetrated on them with superficial judgments, any kind at all, is something that is not capable of affecting them and should not be noticed. A work, even if it is born of the purest contemplation, should be written in such a way as to assure the author an advantage in his game with people. A style that cannot defend itself before human judgment, that surrenders its creator to the ill will of any old imbecile, does not fulfill its most important assignment. Yet defense against these opinions is possible only when we manage a little humility and admit how important they really are to us, even if they do come from an idiot. That is why the defenselessness

of art in the face of human judgment is the sad consequence of its pride: ah, I am higher than that, I take into account only the opinions of the wise! This fiction is absurd and the truth, the difficult and tragic truth is that the idiot's opinion is also significant. It also creates us, shapes us from inside out, and has far-reaching practical and vital consequences.

Criticism, however, has yet another aspect. It can be seen from the author's side but it can also be seen from the side of the public and then it takes on even gaudier tones of scandal, mendacity, and deception. How do these things look? The public desires to be informed by the press about books that appear. This is the source of journalistic criticism, manned by people having contact with literature. Yet if these people really had something to do in the field of art, if they really were rooted in it, they certainly would not stop at these articles. So, no, these are practically always second- and third-rate literary figures, persons who always maintain merely a loose, rather social, relation with the world of the spirit, persons who are not on the level of the concerns that they write about. This then is the source of the greatest difficulty, which cannot be avoided and from which arises the entire scandal that comprises criticism and its immorality. The question is the following: How can an inferior man criticize a superior man, how can he assess his personality and arrive at the value of his work? How can this take place without becoming absurd?

Never have the critics, at least the Polish ones, ever devoted even a single minute of time to this delicate matter. Mr. X, however, in judging a man of Norwid's class, for example, puts himself in a suicidal, impossible position because in order to judge Norwid, he must be superior to Norwid but he is not. This basic falseness draws out an infinite chain of additional lies, and criticism becomes the living contradiction of all of its loftiest aspirations.

So they want to be judges of art? First they must attain it. They are in its antechamber and they lack access to the spiritual states from which art derives. They know nothing of its intensity.

So they want to be methodical, professional, objective, just? But they themselves are a triumph of dilettantism, expressing themselves on subjects that they are incapable of mastering. They are an example of the most unlawful usurpation.

Guardians of morality? Morality is based on a hierarchy of values and they themselves sneer at hierarchy. The very fact of their existence is in its essence immoral: there is nothing that they have exhibited and they have no proof that they have a right to this role except that the editor allows them to write. Giving themselves up to immoral work, which consists of articulating cheap, easy, hurried judgments without basis, they want to judge the morality of people who put their life into art.

So they want to judge style? But they themselves are a parody of style, the personification of pretentiousness. They are bad stylists to the degree that they are not offended by the incurable dissonance of that accursed “higher” and “lower.” Even omitting the fact that they write quickly and sloppily, this is the dirt of the cheapest publicism. . . .

Teachers, educators, spiritual leaders? In reality, they taught the Polish reader this truth about literature: that it is something like a school essay, written in order that the teacher could give it a grade; that creativity is not a play of forces, which do not allow themselves to be completely controlled, not a burst of energy or the work of a spirit that is creating itself but merely an annual literary “production,” along with the inseparable reviews, contests, awards, and feuilletons. These are masters of trivialization, artists who transform a keen life into a boring pulp, where everything is more or less equally mediocre and unimportant.

A surplus of parasites produces such fatal effects. To write about literature is easier than writing literature: that’s the whole point. If I were in their place, therefore, I would reflect very deeply on how to elude this disgrace whose name is: oversimplification. Their advantages are purely technical. Their voice resounds powerfully not because it is powerful but because they are allowed to speak through the megaphone of the press.

What is the way out of this?

Cast off in fury and pride all the artificial advantages that your situation assures you. Because literary criticism is not the judging of one man by another (who gave you this right?) but the meeting of two personalities on absolutely equal terms.

Therefore: do not judge. Simply describe your reactions. Never write about the author or the work, only about yourself in confrontation with the work or the author. You are allowed to write about yourself.

In writing about yourself, however, write so that your person takes on weight, meaning, and life, so that it becomes your decisive argument. Do not write as a pseudoscientist but as an artist. Criticism must be as tense and vibrant as that which it touches. Otherwise it becomes gas escaping from a balloon, a sloppy butchering with a dull knife, decay, an anatomy, a grave.

And if you don't feel like doing this or cannot do this, leave it alone.

(I wrote this after finding out that the Association of Polish Writers in Exile, which considers criticism especially important to writing, has established an award of twenty-five pounds for the best work of criticism. Even though all the awards go on somewhere beyond me, even though this is a dance to which I have not been invited . . . hm, who knows, maybe this time? I submit the following "critical work" for the prize and highly recommend it to the Committee.)

Saturday

To persons who are interested in my writing technique, I offer the following recipe:

Enter the realm of dreams.

After which begin writing the first story that comes to mind and write about twenty pages. Then read it.

On these twenty pages, there may be one scene, a few sentences, a metaphor, which will seem exciting to you. Then write everything all over again, attempting this time to make the exciting elements the scaffolding and write, not taking reality into consideration, and striving only to satisfy the needs of your imagination.

During this second editing your imagination will head in a specific direction and you will arrive at new associations, which will clearly delineate your field of action. Then write an additional twenty pages, constantly heading along the same line of association, always seeking an exciting, creative, mysterious, revealing element. Then write everything all over again. By doing this you will barely notice the moment when a whole series of key scenes, metaphors, symbols (like the "walking," the "empty pistol," or "stallion" in *Trans-Atlantic* or the "parts of the body" in *Ferdydurke*) create themselves and you have arrived at the appropriate code. Everything will begin to take on flesh under your fingers by the power of its

own logic: scenes, characters, concepts, images will demand fruition and that which you have already created will dictate the rest to you.

The whole trick, though, is that while surrendering yourself passively to the work and letting it create itself, you do not, even for a moment, stop controlling it. Your rule in this matter is to be: I do not know where the work will lead me, but wherever it leads me, I have to express myself and satisfy myself. When beginning *Trans-Atlantic*, I hadn't the slightest idea that it would lead me to Poland, yet when it happened, I tried not to lie, or, to lie as little as possible, and to exploit the situation to release energy and participate with relish. All the problems that a work being born and blindly creating itself suggests to you—problems of ethics, style, form, intellect—must be solved with the full participation of your most alert consciousness and with maximum realism (as all of this is a game of compensation: the crazier, more fantastic, inventive, unpredictable, irresponsible you are, the more sober, controlled, and responsible you must be).

In the end a battle arises between you and the work, the same as that between a driver and the horses which are carrying him off. I cannot control the horses, but I must take care not to overturn the wagon on any of the sharp curves of the course. Where I will end up, I don't know, but I must get there in one piece. Moreover, I must, when I get the chance, recall the delicious terror of the ride.

Finally: out of the struggle between the inner logic of the work and my person (for it is not yet clear: is the work a mere pretext for expressing myself or am I a pretext for the work), out of this wrestling is born a third thing, something indirect, something that seems not to have been written by me, yet it is mine, something that is neither pure form nor my direct expression, but a deformation born in an intermediary sphere; between me and the world. This strange creation, this bastard, I put in an envelope and mail to a publisher.

After which you read in the press: "Gombrowicz wrote *Trans-Atlantic* in order to inform . . ." "The thesis of the drama *The Marriage* is . . ." "In *Ferdynand*, Gombrowicz wants to say . . ."

Friday

A letter from a stranger, Mr. H. of London. He asks: in my opinion, isn't a certain Polish diplomat an anti-Semite deserving of censure because in his diary

he called a certain Jew a “rabid skunk”? I regret that I did not keep a copy of my answer, which was more or less the following:

“My dear sir, you are completely mistaken. The invective that describes a Jew is ‘mangy dog.’ The words ‘rabid skunk’ are used quite frequently in colloquial speech to designate Aryans, therefore, even though both words have a common source, nothing authorizes one to assume that they were used in reference to that person’s Jewish background.

“I read the text that you cite a few days ago and the suspicion of the author’s anti-Semitism never even flitted across my mind. I must also admit to you, Sir, that even I—though it is easy to conclude from my literature that I do not have much in common with anti-Semitism—occasionally let fly the words ‘mangy dog’ when a particular Semite irritates me. This happens because I am not a rigid, forced, philo-Semite, but a relaxed one, with all the atavisms, my holy sir, of a Polish squire from the countryside.”

I assume that this answer will not satisfy my correspondent. Too bad. It is true that a certain shyness prevents me from writing precisely that which people expect. The incalculable abyss of crimes perpetrated on the Jews has permeated me through and through forever. However, I preferred not to include that in a letter. I would write it, but in a letter to an anti-Semite. I must also note that this grabbing at one’s words is a little unconvincing. There is a scar here, one which is frivolous exactly because of the seriousness of the tragedy. I will even go further and say that a Jew who insists too much on being treated as “a human being,” that is, as if he were not different from others, seems to me to be a Jew not sufficiently conscious of his Jewishness.

I don’t like it when the Jews are not up to their vocation. How many times have I been surprised by the pettiness that I have encountered regarding the assessment of their own fate in Jews (intelligent ones at that)! Why doesn’t the world like Jews? Because, of course, they are more capable, they have money, and they create competition. Why doesn’t the world want to acknowledge that the Jew is a man like any other? It’s a question of propaganda, racial prejudice, lack of enlightenment. . . .

When I hear from the mouths of these people that the Jewish nation is just like all others, I feel more or less the same way that I would feel if I had heard

Michelangelo claim that he was in no way different from anyone else, or Chopin demand a “normal” life, or Beethoven assure himself that even he had the right to equality. Too bad! Those who were given the right to superiority don’t have the right to equality.

There is simply no more brilliant people, and I say this not just because it has contained in itself the most important inspirations of the world, or bursts every moment with some immortal name, or because it has left its stamp on history. The Jewish genius is obvious in its very structure, that is, in that which, similarly to individual brilliance, is most intimately connected with illness, defeat, degradation. Brilliant because it is ill. Higher because it is degraded. Creative because it is abnormal. This people, like Michelangelo, Chopin, or Beethoven, is decadence that transforms itself into creativity and progress. This people does not have easy access to life, it is in disagreement with life and that is why it becomes culture.

The hatred, scorn, fear, distrust, that this nation awakens in other nations is of the same category as the feelings that the sick, deaf, dirty, hysterical, and gesticulating Beethoven awakened in German villagers during his walks. The Jewish way of the cross is the same as Chopin’s. The history of this people is a secret provocation of fate, the bringing down upon themselves of all the catastrophes that could bring about the fulfillment of their mission as a chosen people. What forces of life brought out this terrifying fact—no one knows. They who are this fact, who constitute it, let them not delude themselves even for a moment that they will be able to get themselves out of these chasms onto an even plain.

It is curious that the life of even the most common, most healthy Jew is almost always the life of an outstanding man. Even though he may be healthy, ordinary, undistinguished from others, he is nevertheless different and treated differently. He must be isolated and is, even though he does not will it, on the peripheries. One could say, therefore, that even the average Jew is sentenced to greatness, only because he is a Jew. And not just to greatness. He is sentenced to a suicidal and desperate battle with his own form because he does not like himself (like Michelangelo).

You will not, therefore, put this menace to rest by imagining that you are “ordinary” and feeding yourself the idyllic soup of humanitarianism. O that the battle with you would become less insidious! As for me, your brilliance has often enlightened me and I am greatly in your debt.

Thursday

I got up, as usual, around ten o'clock and ate breakfast: tea with ladyfingers, then Quaker Oats. Letters: one from Litka in New York, the other from Jeleński in Paris.

I left to go to the office at twelve (on foot, not far). I had a telephone conversation first with Marrel Alberes about a translation and then with Russo, about a planned trip to Goya. Ríos called to say he had already returned from Miramar and Dąbrowski called to find out about the apartment.

At three, coffee and a ham sandwich.

At seven, I left the office and went to avenida Costanera to take in a little fresh air (a heat wave? 32 degrees C). I thought about what Aldo was telling me yesterday. After which I went to Cecilia Benedi's and we went to supper together. I ate: soup, a steak with potatoes, a salad, and compote. I had not seen her in a long time and so she told me about her adventures in Mercedes. A singer sat down at our table. There was talk, too, about Adolfo and his astrology. From there, around one P.M., I went to Rex's for coffee. Eisler joined me. Our conversations go more or less like this:

Well, what's new, Mr. Gombrowicz?

Pull yourself together at least for a moment, Eisler, I beg of you, sir.

Upon returning home, I stopped at Tortoni's to pick up a package and to have a talk with Poczo. At home I read Kafka's *Diary*. I feel asleep around three.

I make known the above so that you will see what I am like in my daily routine.

IX

Saturday

Extraordinarily Wise

Profoundly Moral

Absolutely Real

Very Honest

Abnormally Stupid

Repulsively Immoral

Ridiculously Unreal

Very Dishonest

Such is my double-tracked reaction to Mascolo (Dionys Mascolo: *Le communisme, révolution et communication ou la dialectique des valeurs et des besoins*). A book that is incisive yet menacing in its belligerent monotony. The specific goal of this work is to bring to the forefront the Marxist theory of *need* as the basis of dialectical materialism. Here Mascolo crosses swords with contemporary intellectualism, with the entire field of non-Communist thought, and his blows are accurate because the enemy is within him—he, the typical intellectual of Paris, Madrid, or Rome; frequenter of the same cafés; admirer of the same poems; listener to the same music; gourmet of the same tastes; and instigator of the same thoughts. . . .

That is why this is a book which is written with an alertness that never lags, even for a moment, and that anticipates all objections. How he protects his positions! *Primo*: the book does not speak to you with the voice of a Communist, but with the voice of an independent intellectual who understands Communism. At the same time (in the light of the fact that this independence does not sit well with Diamat), it is not the work of a classical intellectual but only of a man who “is enough of an intellectual not to be a Communist and enough of a Communist not to be an intellectual.” Here Mascolo arranges his own position between Communism and a classical intellectualism. *Secundo*: here the highest level of thinking is obligatory. Here one thinks seriously and for real, therefore, not only does one criticize Soviet Russia, but one does not even hide that fact that Communism is the heaviest and bloodiest of assignments. One says: This is unavoidable. No one can stop it. This is morally and materially necessary; this is an imperative of history and the conscience. *Tertio*: the greatest amount of unflagging energy is devoted to demonstrating that Communism is the alpha and omega of today, a revision of all values on a scale heretofore unseen. It is a categorical overturning of everything. It is the single possible revolution and the revolution encompassing all possible revolutions. We are in this so completely that all “beyond” becomes impossible and it is this viewpoint that lends the text the power of something superior, the enormity of a whale which carries the world on its back. Mascolo avoids nothing more than he avoids the common mistake committed by Communist sympathizers from the intelligentsia, which, while granting Communism the character of an idea, introduces it as just one more idea. No, Communism is not an idea, it is not truth, it is something that facilitates truth and the idea for man. Communism is the

liberation of man from material dependencies, which, up until now, have not allowed him to think and feel the right way, in harmony with his real nature. *Quarto*: the devastating thesis about the coordination of spirit and matter, this fascinating and revealing thought appears here the way God appeared to Moses and dictates the law.

This is not a revelation, but the action of these manifestations, of which I am heartily sick, becomes painful because they have been passed through the prism of a mind and culture more or less like mine. Here someone close to me is speaking, someone raised on the same masters as I, who, however, having gone down the same road as I, arrived at a different place, from which he views a different panorama. Why? How did this happen? Which of us has lost his direction? One should realize that for people like myself, it is far more difficult to resist Communism because they are joined to it in their thinking to the degree that Communist thought is almost like one of their own thoughts that, somewhere along the line, becomes distorted and suddenly becomes alien and hostile. It is not difficult to be an opponent of Communism if one believes in the Holy Trinity. It is not difficult if one breathes a beauty that has passed. It is easy, if one is a faithful exponent of one's milieu, if one is a count, cavalryman, landowner, merchant or industrialist, engineer or doctor, member of the Society of Gentrywomen, if one is a conservative or financier, a Sienkiewicz or an anti-Semite. But I! I who demand a humanity without fetishes; I, a "traitor" and "provocateur" in my "milieu"; I, for whom modern culture is a mystification . . . when my hand tears masks from my own face and that of others, when the very desire for an unfalsified reality lives in me so intensely—because I love the painful birth of the new world that has been trampling paths for itself for practically the past two hundred years, assailing one position after another—I greet it with joy. How can I be in contradiction with Communism? I really believe that I passed through the introductory phase of this process on my own and perhaps in a way more my own and more authentic than many Communists. I subtracted God from myself, I learned to think ruthlessly. What's more, I learned to discover beauty in the destruction of another, former beauty and love in parting from former lovers. Other ties, of a material or social nature, which could have bound me were dissolved long ago. Today there is no honor, no authority, no bond that could stop me. I am free, free, et cetera free! Why do I dismiss Communism?

Sunday

Eichler went to the country and I moved into his apartment for a few days. I have already written in this *Diary* that I prefer not to like art, that is, I wait for it to impose itself on me. I do not belong to that category of people who chase after it. . . . So now Eichler's paintings began to throw themselves at me from the walls of that narrow room with some sort of content that I was incapable of deciphering. In this man and in his paintings (which are very similar to him and very insistently his own: clean, expressing the maximum on the unusually narrow scale of his style) there is some sort of "biological" mystery which I cannot decipher. I suspected him of hysteria and, instead, upon closer contact, discovered a strong and balanced nature. One way or the other, these colors, these lines, such stubbornness (a hallmark of art) repeating one and the same thing in every imaginable combination of forms, suggested the thought of "silken betrayal" which I clung to for lack of anything better. Betrayal? What betrayal? Can I get at it? Each of us escapes from life through a different gate and a million doors lead to the immense fields of betrayal. What theoretical powerlessness in the face of existence (I thought, sitting across from those two-faced forms): Eichler seemed to me to be water running through Mascolo's fingers, a snake disappearing into the grass, an ant, an insect in foliage dappled by a breeze.

Monday

I could make certain accusations of an intellectual nature against Communism.

This philosophy is not convincing to me for many reasons—first of all because, in my understanding, Communism is not so much a philosophical or ethical as a technical issue. You say that in order for the spirit to function the right way, the needs of the body must be satisfied? You claim that everyone must be assured a minimum standard of living? Where is the guarantee, though, that your system can assure prosperity? Am I supposed to look for it in the Soviet Union, which, up to now, cannot feed itself without the labor of slaves, or in your reasoning, where you talk about everything except for the technical efficiency of the system? If Communism is materialism and if it wants to influence the spirit

through a change in material conditions, why do you preach so much about the spirit and so little about how that victory over matter will happen? The discussion that ought to take place among the production and management specialists is shifted to the general level, as if it were a matter of ordinary philosophy. Until the technical possibility of Communism is elaborated upon, however, all other reflections are only a pipe dream.

Yet even if your calculations in black and white showed that your system would double or even triple the amount of goods per head, liberating man from poverty, I personally would still be in no position to check these calculations as this technical matter requires a technical knowledge about the world that I, not being a specialist, do not possess. Therefore, I could only believe you, and, equally well, could believe other specialists, whose calculations indicate just the opposite. Should I base my access to revolution, which ruins all organizations created up to now to check nature, on such frail foundations? And by glibly swallowing all the violence, which accompanies these beginnings?

Thursday

I could produce many other arguments against Communism on intellectual grounds.

But wouldn't it be more appropriate from the point of view of my own politics if I didn't even write or think about this?

The artist who allows himself to be led astray into the terrain of these cerebral speculations is lost. Lately, we artists have allowed ourselves to be led around too sheepishly by philosophers and other scientists. We have proved incapable of being sufficiently different. An excessive respect for scientific truth has obscured our own truth. In our eagerness to understand reality, we forget that we are not here to understand reality, but only to express it. We, art, *are* reality. Art is a fact and not commentary attached to fact. It is not our job to explain, elucidate, systematize, prove. We are the word that claims: this hurts me, this intrigues me, I like this, I hate this, I desire this, I don't want this. . . . Science will always remain an abstraction, but our voice is the voice of a man made of flesh and blood, this is the individual voice. Not an idea, but a personality is important to us. We do not become real in the realm of concepts, but in the realm of people. We are and we

must remain persons, our role depends on the fact that the living, human word not stop sounding in a world that is becoming more and more abstract.

I think, therefore, that literature has submitted itself far too much to professors in this century and that we, artists, will have to cause a scandal in order to destroy these relations. We will be forced to act arrogantly and brashly toward science to make our desire for an unhealthy flirting with formulas of scientific intelligence go away. We must oppose our own, individual intelligence, our personal life, and our feelings as emphatically as possible to the truths of the laboratory.

Maybe it would be better, therefore, if I did not try to understand Marxism and would allow the phenomenon to permeate me only as much as it is in the air that I breathe.

Yet such an intellectual escape would mean that I am not capable of resisting it as a concrete person. I must, therefore, enter into that alien kingdom as a conqueror who proclaims his own right. Here I must say: I am not too interested in arguments and counterarguments, that two-step in which wise men lose themselves as easily as any old layperson. Having the straightforward emotions of a man, I look at your faces when you speak and I see how theory makes your face grimace. I am not called to confirm the justice of your reasoning. I am concerned that your being right does not change your faces into mugs, and that being right does not make you repulsive, hateful, and impossible to swallow. My job is not to control ideas, but merely to confirm how an idea affects a person. An artist is he who says: This man speaks wisely, but he himself is a fool. Or: The purest morality issues from the lips of that man, but, beware, for he himself cannot keep up with his morality and turns into a swine.

This is valuable, I believe, insofar as an idea abstracted from man does not fully exist. There are no ideas like embodied ones. There is no word that is not also flesh.

Monday

The predicament of people like Mascolo . . .

The spiritual process of which he is a product: what splendor! There is nothing more shocking than the sight of mankind during the past two hundred years, pulling up all anchors in order to pass from static into absolute dynamics,

from man and the world of given reality to man and the world in endless becoming, like a ship sailing from port into open sea. After having demolished heaven, after having demolished all stability, we revealed ourselves to ourselves as a volatile element, and our loneliness and singularity in the cosmos, that incredible unleashing of our humanity in a space filled with nothing except ourselves, can appall and horrify—the boldness of this thrust has no parallel. People who participate in this process, like Mascolo, like me, like practically all of European intelligentsia, could justifiably experience the worst fears and scruples if the thing did not have the character of something inevitable.

If Communism has become a fascinating phenomenon for many, it is because it constitutes the strongest, up until now, materialization of the intellect. It is as if the incantations of the most enlightened spirits finally drew a social force out of nonbeing: a force made of people and capable of concrete action. This wolf had to be called out of the woods and now the problem is not to let it devour us.

Mascolo personifies the predicament of the intelligentsia that spawned Communism in order to let itself be devoured. In this thinking one discovers the play of two mutually exclusive extremely intense elements: strength and weakness. This is probably the key to the riddle why this thought seems at once moral and immoral, wise and irrelevant, sober and drunk.

This thought, having demolished, as we have said, the old metaphysical order, suddenly glimpsed itself alone with the world. This was a world immeasurably easy to control by thought, it seemed, because all restraints on thought had vanished and it had become the sole arbiter of reality. This is the reason that Mascolo felt himself to be the lord of the world (hence the pride and feeling of power wafting from his book). Yet when Mascolo took in the whole world from these heights, it seemed to him to be something so overwhelmingly immense in its variety and so incapable of being exhausted in its movement that, in the end, Mascolo, the ruler, felt lost in it and his thought grew terrified and began to gasp (hence the panic in this book). The moment Mascolo tore his gaze from the world in order to confront his own thought, he found himself in the pincers of the same contradiction. On the one hand, thought is the sole and highest judge, the leader of mankind, the organizer of matter. On the other, it is an unclean thing, dependent on being, subordinate to matter, a thing that can hardly be called “thought” in

the old sense of the word. At the sight of this, he underwent both the highest intoxication with power and the most catastrophic feeling of annihilating powerlessness. What does one do then? Believe in the power of thought and tear into the world with it? Or, not trusting intelligence too much, allow the world to create itself? In this second instance the mind no longer asks what the world is supposed to be like and, instead, after narrowing its field of vision, asks, how am I to act in the world? The mind then becomes that which it has been for centuries: an instrument of individual cognition within the scale of a single life. In this reduced scale it feels surer of itself.

Yet Mascolo chose the first of these paths, why? First of all, because there is nothing left for thought (which is dependent on matter) to do, superficially anyway, except to transform matter. For the Hegelian who is a Marxist, there is simply no other way except the one that leads to reforming the world. This alone, however, would not have inclined Mascolo's thought to plunge so desperately into the world. That individual thought, even if there is a small sense of proportion left in it, would not dare commit a deed so bold. Here, in order to understand Mascolo's situation, we must take into account the fact that his thought is not in the least his own thought, but a collective one, the result of a thousand-year-long process, into which went countless individual achievements. If I use my mind to decide whether or not I am to board a train, I do not need to refer to that collective knowledge. I myself know what I am supposed to do. When, however, I am supposed to solve what mankind is supposed to be like, I cannot do this in any other way than by using the thought accumulated in libraries. The problem concerning mankind can be solved only through the thought of mankind, not that of the individual. The thought of mankind, greater than our own, intoxicates and stuns us: it thrusts us into the area of supra-individual solutions.

The following happened to Mascolo: to rule the world he fled to a thought stronger than his own; but it is exactly this thought that he is unable to govern and it now throws him back at the world.

Monday

Mountains. Córdoba. I arrived here in Vertientes this morning and settled into the Lipkowskis' beautiful chalet. Your gaze tears itself away from the horses,

chickens, dogs, cows, only to sink into an expanse full of a complicated geography of mountain chains and ridges. Panorama.

I still have the trip to Mendoza.

Tuesday

Mascolo's experience, described above, manifests itself in his language, which is completely removed from tangible reality and saturated with abstraction and thereby is similar to all languages of the intellect. Here you will find the same higher school of equestrianism, whose object is to maintain the appearance of freedom while struggling spasmodically to stay in the saddle. Yet this gets so deep by the minute that Mascolo drowns in it; it gets so subtle that Mascolo gets tangled up in his own web; so general that it can have a hundred other meanings; and so precise that it is the work of a watchsmith hanging over an abyss. When I read Mascolo, I am less interested in the thought itself, which I know from somewhere else, than in the desperate struggle between the thinker and the thought. What an effort! Multiply these efforts of the author by those of his readers! Imagine how these mountains of syllogisms will invade other weaker minds that read the odd thing here and there to understand the odd thing here and there and imagine how Mascolo's thought will blossom in each of these heads in a separate misunderstanding. So where are we? In the land of power, light, and precision? Or in the dirty kingdom of inadequacy?

<i>Power</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
<i>Light</i>	<i>Darkness</i>
<i>Method</i>	<i>Chaos</i>
<i>Triumph</i>	<i>Defeat</i>

What close neighbors these two sets of litanies are, two sisters! Yet what is even more amazing and disturbing is that because of this excess of virtue, thought tumbles into sin. It is stupid because of an excess of wisdom. It is weak because of an excess of power. It is dark because it is too thirsty for light.

Let us take another look at Mascolo's predicament.

He got stuck but he could have saved himself if he had maintained his freedom, a freedom that allows us to retreat when we get stuck. This possibility of

retreat, this “slowing down,” this extraction of oneself from excess into a more human dimension, a freer one, this, for me, is the only real freedom. I received a letter containing praise, which appealed to me so much that I realized at once how accurately it had struck at the heart of my aspirations. “The freedom that you render in your diary is more real than Sartre’s constrained professorial freedom.” This comparison suddenly revealed the difference between the freedom to which I aspire here and the intellectual freedom that is so “constrained” that it essentially becomes a new prison. My freedom, the ordinary, everyday, normal freedom, needed by us to live, a matter of instinct rather than cerebral meditation, is a freedom that does not want to be anything absolute—a freedom that is devil-may-care and free even in relation to its own freedom. The Sartres and Mascolos seem to forget that man is a being created to live in an atmosphere of average pressures and median temperatures. Today we know the mortal cold and the living fire, but we have forgotten the secrets of a light breeze, which refreshes and allows one to breathe.

Freedom! In order to be free one needs not only to want to be free. One must not want to be free too much. No desire, no thought taken too far will be capable of opposing extremisms. Mascolo killed the freedom in himself at the very moment he subordinated his ordinary, direct feeling of freedom to intellectual reasoning. If we were to ask this slave if he is free, he would answer yes, of course, because only he is free who understands his dependence on the dialectical process of history, etc., etc. How, therefore, can his reasoned freedom defend him from the intellect? How can this concept of freedom assure him freedom from other concepts? The hope that anything could bring about some sort of relaxation in him is absolutely out of the question.

That is why Mascolo cannot back out. He must keep going forward. It is as if he were riding a bicycle: if he stops, he’ll fall over. Mascolo is motorized, this is no longer a bike, but a motorbike—loaded with collective thought, collective suffering, and propelled by the dynamic of the proletariat. Propelled by the entire mechanism of culture and civilization, which relies on a ceaseless piling up, a unending accumulation. Do you believe the suspicion that he is speeding toward a task beyond his power would stop him? You are direly mistaken: this is a man who has lost his center. If the task is beyond his strength, then it simply means that he must make himself over in order to be up to the loftiness of the task. That is why he

is a mere tool to himself, that is why Mascolo is only one more obstacle for Mascolo to overcome. That is why his book is written even more for himself than for others: here Mascolo remakes Mascolo, cutting off his retreat. This is how he speeds into the cosmos, spurring himself to greater speed. The more enormous the cosmos becomes, the less graspable in all of the terrifying fluidity of its fathomlessness, the more convulsively these fingers grip. For this human being, just as all other human beings, desires a finite world. That entire dialectic of development, of becoming, of making dependent is a subtle lie that is supposed to conceal the real desire for finitude. He demolishes form in order to impose a new one. One cannot exist without form and whatever the form, the minute you choose it, you must take it to its ultimate conclusion. Why did he say A? Who knows. But if he said A, he must say B.

Wednesday

Wind and spindles of clouds crowding the peaks from the south. A lone chicken pecks away on the lawn. . . .

To be a concrete man. To be an individual. Not to strive to transform the whole world. To live in the world, changing it only as much as possible from within the reach of my nature. To become real in harmony with my needs, my individual needs.

I do not want to say that collective and abstract thought, that Humanity as such, are not important. Yet a certain balance must be restored. The most modern direction of thought is one that will rediscover the individual man.

X

Friday

Jeleński's letter in *Wiadomości* in which he answers Collector's note about the publication of my work in *Preuves*. Even though I am in complete agreement with Jeleński that there does exist a certain affinity between myself and Pirandello (the problem of deformation) and also between myself and Sartre (in *Ferdynand*, one could find several intimations of what later became existentialism), I would prefer, as Collector says, that they not have anything in common with my views.

For all practical purposes, I would prefer not being like anyone else, even though thought is just one of the elements of art, even though it has happened that a most common thought such as “love sanctifies” or “life is beautiful” was turned into a work of dazzling inspiration and astounding originality and force. What is an idea of even a vision of the world in art? Alone they are nothing. They can have meaning only in relation to the way in which they were felt and spiritually exhausted, in relation to the level of elevation and the light that they radiate from those heights. A work of art is not a matter of just one thought, one discovery, but a creative product that arises from a thousand minute inspirations, the product of a man who sets up residence in his own mine and keeps extracting new minerals from it.

Yet there are other reasons that I would like to separate myself from the Sartres and the Pirandellos: reasons of a social, worldly nature. Too often it happens that in the specific conditions of our Polish coexistence, someone tries to denigrate me with the help of such “famous names,” and, puffing himself up with Sartre, says with condescension: Gombrowicz. This is something I cannot tolerate in this diary, which is a private diary, where the subject is always and exclusively personal matters, where I desire to defend my person and create a place for it among people.

Ah, Jeleński, my friend!

Oh, to finally get oneself out of this suburb, foyer, hutch and become not a—Polish, that is, inferior, right?—author, but a phenomenon having its own meaning and justification! To break out of the deadly mediocrity of my milieu and finally come into existence. My situation is serious and, I would say, desperate. I have been delicately suggesting to these minds, furnished with “famous names,” that one can mean something even without world renown is one is really and ruthlessly oneself, but they want me to become famous first. Then they will include me in their inventory and will puzzle over me. In the opinion of all these disheveled Polish connoisseurs I am done for by the very fact that there exists a certain overlap between my own thinking and that of the Sartres or Pirandellos. It is assumed, therefore, that I want to say the same thing as they, that I want to break down open doors and that if I say something else, it is because I am less competent, less serious, and less coherent. They assume—with the conceit of snobs (because a snob is conceited not with a feeling of his own worth, but because he knows

someone who possesses worth)—that my sense of form together with its practical effects is “nothing new” and they believe that my criticism of art is an unpremeditated frown, malice, caprice. They will not take the trouble to check what the inner logic of my reactions is and their lackey’s soul will be enchanted if it is able to conceive of my soul as nothing but a humble if clumsy handmaiden and imitator of those lofty spirits.

I can defend myself against this only by defining myself, only by delineating myself endlessly. I will have to describe myself until, finally, the dullest expert notices my presence. My method consists of this: to show the battle I wage with people for my own personality and to exploit all the personal sore spots that arise between them and me, for a more and more distinct delineation of my own I.

Define myself against the Sartrisms and against all of modern thought, which is sharp and burning with a white heat?

There is nothing easier! I am blunted thought, a being of median temperatures, a spirit in a certain state of relaxation: I am he who relieves tension. I am like aspirin, which, if one is to believe the advertisement, rids one of excessive cramps. What sort of feelings will you have when reading my diary? Isn’t it something like having a country boy from Sandomierz county enter a thundering factory and walk around as if he were in his own backyard? Look at the white-hot oven where existentialisms are cooked up; here Sartre turns molten lead into his freedom-responsibility. Over there is a poetry workshop, where a thousand workers, dripping with sweat amid the dizzying speed of assembly lines and gears, work a sharper and sharper electromagnetic knife in harder and harder material; and over there are bottomless cauldrons bubbling with ideologies, worldviews, and beliefs. Here is the cavern of Catholicism. Further down the foundry of Marxism; then the hammers of psychoanalysis; Hegel’s artesian wells and the looms of phenomenology; and further yet are the galvanized and hydraulic pyres of surrealism or pragmatism. The factory, groaning and speeding in the clatter and whirl of production, produces more and more perfect instruments, which, in turn, serve to improve and speed up production so that all of this becomes mightier, more violent, more precise. Yet I walk among these machines and products with a thoughtful air and without much interest, exactly as if I were walking in an orchard, there, in the countryside, and every once in a while, trying this or that product (like a pear or plum) I say: —Hm, hm, this is too hard for me. Or: —This is somewhat overwhelm-

ing to my taste. Or: —The devil take this, this is too uncomfortable, too stiff. Or, too: —Ha! This would not be too bad if it were not so red-hot.

So that the workers cover me with furtive, suspicious glances. Well, well, look, a consumer has appeared among the producers!

Saturday

Yes! to be sharp, wise, mature, to be an “artist,” “thinker,” “stylist” only to a certain degree but never too much. And to make from this “never too much” a power equal to all the very, very intense forces. To maintain one’s own human scale in the face of all gargantuan phenomena. Not to be anything more in culture than a simple country bumpkin, just a Pole, and not even be a country bumpkin or Pole too much. To be free, but even in freedom not to be excessive.

Herein lies the difficulty.

For if I had entered culture as a pure barbarian, an absolute anarchist, a complete primitive, the ideal country boy, or a classic Pole, you would break into applause immediately. You would acknowledge that I am not at all a bad producer of the primitive in a pure state.

But then I would be a manufacturer like all the rest: like they for whom the product becomes more important than they themselves are. Everything that is clean from the point of view of style is an elaboration.

The real battle in culture (about which one hears so little) does not take place, according to me, between enemy truths or between different life-styles. If a Communist opposes his worldview to that of a Catholic, then these are still two worldviews. But that other antinomy:

culture—wildness
knowledge—ignorance
light—darkness

is not the most important either. As a matter of fact, one could say that these are phenomena that harmonize, that complement one another. The most important, most extreme, and most incurable dispute is that waged in us by two of our most basic strivings: the one that desires form, shape, definition and the other, which protests against shape, and does not want form. Humanity is constructed in such a

way that it must define itself and then escape its own definitions. Reality is not something that allows itself to be completely contained in form. Form is not in harmony with the essence of life, but all thought which tries to describe this imperfection also becomes form and thereby confirms only our striving for it.

That entire philosophical and ethical dialectic of ours takes place against the background of an immensity, which is called shapelessness, which is neither darkness nor light, but exactly a mixture of everything: ferment, disorder, impurity, and accident. Sartre's opponent is not a priest. It is the milkman, pharmacist, child of the pharmacist, and the carpenter's wife. They are the citizens of an intermediary sphere, the sphere of incomplete form and value which are always something unexpected, a surprise. Sartre will find an opponent from this sphere in himself, someone whom one could call a "not-quite-Sartre." Their argument is that no thought, no form at all is capable of encompassing being, and the more all-encompassing they are, the more mendacious.

Am I overrating myself? Actually, I would rather let someone else have this role of commentator on one's own dubious attainments, but the point is that, in the circumstances in which I find myself, no one can do this for me. Not even Jeleński, that priceless advocate of mine. I believe that I have accomplished much in my own domain to make this conflict with form palpable.

In my works I have shown man stretched on the procrustean bed of form, I have found my own language for showing his hunger and distrust of form. I have tried to bring the distance that exists between him and his form into the light of day, through my own perspective. I have tried to demonstrate in a way that was not boring but amusing, that is, human and alive, how form arises between us, how it creates us. I have brought out into the open this sphere of the "interhuman" which is crucial to people and I have lent it the characteristics of a creative force. I have come closer in art to a certain vision of man—man whose real element is not nature, but people, man not only situated among people but full of them and inspired by them.

I tried to show that the ultimate point of reference for man is man, not some absolute value and I tried to get to this most difficult kingdom of immaturity in love with itself, where our unofficial and even illegal mythology is created. I tried to point up the power of regressive forces hidden in humanity and the poetry of violence inflicted on superiority by the inferior.

At the same time, I bound this area of experience to my base—to Poland—and allowed myself to whisper to the Polish intelligentsia that its real assignment is not rivalry with the West in creating form, but the uncovering of the very relationship of man to form and, what goes with it, to culture. That in this, we will be stronger, more independent and effective.

I have probably succeeded in illustrating by my own example that making oneself conscious of that “lack of”—lack of form, underdevelopment, immaturity—not only does not weaken but strengthens. That it could even become the embryo of vitality and development—just as in art the other (I would say, slighting) approach to form can assure renewal and the expansion of the means of artistic expression. In proclaiming the principle that man is higher than his products wherever and whenever possible, I provide (him) with the freedom that our shriveled soul desperately needs.

Are you, experts, so nearsighted that one has to shove everything under your noses? Are you incapable of understanding anything? When I am among scholars like this, I could swear that I am among chickens. Quit pecking at me! Quit plucking my feathers! Quit squawking and clucking! Quit preening your turkey pride by blustering that this thought is well known, that that one has already been expressed—I signed no contract to serve up first-time ideas. In me, certain ideas that are in the air we all breathe are joined in a special and uniquely Gombrowiczian sense and I am this sense.

Tuesday

La Falda.

A health resort in the mountains of Córdoba. Ladies and gentlemen sit and drink *refrescos* in a sidewalk café on the avenida Eden while tethered donkeys nibble on tree bark and a loudspeaker broadcasts the overture to the third act of *Traviata*.

Nothing out of the ordinary. Yet for me this place is like faces in a dream, a combination of haunting faces, two different faces, one overlapping, one masking the other. An ominous duality hiding a heavy and complex secret. All because I was here ten years ago.

Now I see.

Then, lost in Argentina, without work, without support, suspended in a void, not knowing what I would be doing in a month, I asked myself with a curiosity that sometimes reached an almost completely pathological pitch (which is what the future usually arouses in me anyway) where I would be in ten years.

The curtain has risen. I see myself sitting in a café on the same *avenida*, like that, that's me. That is me in ten years. I put my hand on the table. I look at the building opposite. I call the waiter and order *un cortado*. I drum my fingers on the table. All this has the character of secret information, communicated to that other one ten years ago, and he acts as if I were being seen by him. All the same, I see him, when he sat here, maybe at the same table. Hence the awfulness of double vision, which I feel as the bursting of reality, something unbearable, as if I were looking myself in the eyes.

The loudspeaker broadcasts the overture to the third act of *Traviata*.

Wednesday

Miłosz: *La prise du pouvoir*.

A very strong book. Miłosz is an experience for me. He is the only émigré writer who was really drenched by that tempest. Others, no. They were out in the rain but they all carried umbrellas. Miłosz was soaked to the skin and at the end the hurricane even tore the clothes off his back. He returned naked. Be happy that decency has been preserved! At least one of you is naked! You, the remainder, are indecent: dressed in your pantaloons, various style jackets, your ties and handkerchiefs. What shame!

There is no lack of talent among us. Józef Mackiewicz's *My Friend, Flor* is charming and Straszewicz has burst out with a cascade of humor, but neither of them is sufficiently initiated. Miłosz knows. Miłosz looked and experienced: in the flashing tempest something appeared to him . . . the Medusa of our times. Miłosz fell, ravaged by her gaze.

Ravaged? Perhaps too much so. Initiated? Perhaps excessively or perhaps the initiation was too passive? To listen to one's time? Yes. But not to submit to it. It is difficult to talk about this on the basis of his works in prose up to now, *The Captive Mind*, *Seizure of Power*, and his one volume of poetry, *Daylight*, because their theme is special: a recapitulation of a certain period and also a testimony and warn-

ing. Yet I sense that Miłosz has allowed History to impose not only a theme but also a certain attitude that I would call the attitude of a man who has been overthrown.

But isn't Miłosz fighting? Yes, he is fighting, but only with means his opponent allows; it looks as if he had actually believed in Communism, that he is a devastated intellectual and that he has risen to participate in the last heroic battle as a devastated intellectual. This beggar, enamored of his own Job-like nakedness, this bankrupt engrossed in his bankruptcy, has probably voluntarily limited his chances for effective resistance. Miłosz's mistake—this is how I see it and it is a mistake that is quite prevalent—consists of his reducing himself to the level of the poverty that he describes. Afraid of rhetoric and denying his right to luxury, he, Miłosz, is loyal and true to his brothers in misfortune and wants to be poor like them. Yet such an intention in an artist is incompatible with the essence of his actions, for art is a luxury, freedom, play, dream, and power. Art arises not from poverty, but from riches. It is born not when one is under the wagon but when one is on it. Art has something triumphant in it even when it is wringing its hands. Hegel? Hegel doesn't have much in common with us because we are dance. The man who does not allow himself to be impoverished will respond to the creativity of Marxism with a different creativity, with the astounding, new, and unforeseen riches of life. Has Miłosz made a sufficient effort to extricate himself from the dialectics that have shackled him?

If not, I know that it is not due to lack of strength, but to an excess of loyalty. Talent should not be too loyal. Loyalty is a limitation and talent must strive to be unlimited. If Columbus had been too loyal to the egg, he would not have discovered America. There exist a great many undiscovered Americas. We are not at the limits of our land.

These are the kinds of dialogues I have with Miłosz when I read him, but I know that they are too impatient. These books are the harbingers of a new reality and their goal is to acquaint us with history. The transformation—this is a key word in art—will come later.

Friday

Walking in the dry bed of a stream which leads to the foot of the Banderita, I was reminded (because La Falda is a hand which runs across my keyboard

evoking forgotten melodies) of the twins who used to go there with me. Nothing is more eloquent! What a revelation! What a delightful and inspired joke of the Creator! These two sixteen-year-old boys were so alike that I could not tell them apart, in their huge cowboy hats shading amused eyes: they always appeared out of nowhere, one at a slight distance from the other so that their sameness enhanced the effect to such a degree that even though they were puppies and striplings, they nevertheless seemed to have a power that filled all the expanse and in their play bounced off the mountains. In the twins everything became brilliant and amazing, witty and wonderful, important and revealing, only because there was always another one hiding nearby somewhere.

Considering then the weight and holiness of the revelation, which I was privileged to observe of yore, I return to avenida Eden where someone suddenly grabs my arm: Witoldo! I look and it's the twin! A twin now sporting a mustache! And gaunt somehow. Ha, a twin, but no longer a twin. A twin rid of his former twin.

Next to him: a woman with two small children.

The twin said: This is my wife.

At that moment, I saw, somewhat further away, another twin also sporting a mustache and with him a woman and child.

Thursday

Mrs. Irena G. from Toronto has fired off a letter "To the Editor of *Wiadomości*." This one is so beautiful that it distinguishes itself in the uncommon collection that constitutes reader letters in *Wiadomości*.

"Since 1946," we read, "my hobby has been the diligent study of my friends' attitudes to the seers of tomorrow."

Having examined her friends' attitudes to the seers of tomorrow, Mrs. G. came to the conclusion that:

"In spite of everything, it is vox populi that determines the greatness of a writer. A hundred critics may shout that a play is brilliant, but if the auditorium is empty, the play must come down."

Mrs. G. does not stop with the discovery of this truth, she also explains why it has not been universally accepted.

"And if the cross-eyed and a handful of snobs, who have submitted to the

demagoguery of the cross-eyed, cry out like possessed cats, then it is precisely because vox populi, that mob of intellectuals, that highest judge, does not want to let them into the palace of art.”

But the cross-eyed are insufficient to incense Mrs. G., who speaks in the name of the highest tribune of the intellectual throng and, for good measure, the guardian of the palace of art.

“Cripples cannot irritate. Cripples arouse pity.”

But the most appealing is the Greek ending:

“Dogs may bark but the caravan moves on. The unsurpassed, Hellenic caravan, escorted by vox populi.”

Wednesday

Kafka’s *Diary*. It led me to take another look at *The Trial* and to compare it with Gide’s stage version. Even this time though, I could not read the book all the way through. I am dazzled by the sun of its brilliant metaphor, which breaks through the clouds of the Talmud, but to read page after page is entirely beyond me.

Some day we will know why in our century so many great artists wrote so many unreadable books. And how in the world did these unreadable and unread books influence the century, nevertheless, and become well known? I have had to interrupt my reading of many of these books with genuine wonder and unfeigned acknowledgment simply because they bored me to tears. Someday it may be obvious what sort of warped marriage of artist and recipient spawned these works so deprived of artistic sex appeal. What a disgrace! At times I have the impression that some sort of stupidity lives among us writers and that it warps all our work. We don’t know how to defend ourselves against it because it is almost always anonymous. Sometimes this absurdity appears with the shamelessness of a spread-eagled maiden; a few days ago, something like this happened to me. I am sitting in a bar. A certain Argentinean comes over to me to show me the collected works of the poet Pablo de Rokha—a volume the size of a small suitcase. I open it. In the center are four photographs of the author and three of his wife (also a poet). Further on, a reproduction of the manuscript, the introduction of the author, in which he says that he “offers these poems to the Chilean people” (something like that), and then more appendices. Leafing through the pages I read:

“Criminal faces shout their pale triangles.”

“The sun resounding mightily in the solar system, a junk wagon full of lightning.”

“In a daily hurricane, the tempest of war communicates its grumbings to the twilight . . .”

Perhaps I am not citing his words exactly, but even so you can see that this is not at all bad, a pretty decent class of poetry. Still . . .

The Argentinean said: He is a great poet.

I didn't say anything. Zero. With that enormous tome on my knees—with that gigantic object—the material enormity of the thing crushed me like a big boot. I knew that if I were to say anything at all of what I wanted to say, he would answer that I do not understand poetry, that I have not fathomed the Chilean soul, that I do not understand the metaphors or that I am not registering the subterranean vibrations of the word. Therefore, I said that I would read it, after which I lugged it home and deposited it in a corner. After a few days, I had to take and lug it back to the Argentinean, which I did, and when that enormous object found itself beyond my reach at last, I had to stammer a few words which joined all the other words stammered on similar occasions by all the other porters of the world in order to assure master de Rokha eternal praise in the heavens, amen.

Yes, yes . . . but de Rokha's volume is only the caricatured magnification of the microbe which is the secret disgrace of literature: that it no longer attracts or seduces. O unhappy ones! No one loves you anymore! You don't appeal to anyone anymore! You don't excite anyone anymore! You are appreciated, that is all. . . .

You testify to the dignities of the human spirit and the greatness of Art, but people do not like you.

The situation is made worse by the fact that contemporary criticism lacks sufficient intelligence and also sufficient strength to overcome the most difficult tasks: to return to matters that are elementary but eternally relevant, which seem to be dying among us because they are too easy, too simple. Criticism is capable only of perfecting, and perfecting to absurdity, the mechanism which rules us today and by dint of which better and better books are being produced as literature. These gentlemen will never dare touch the system itself, this exceeds their capabilities. For this, as any other characteristic of literature, is the result of interdependencies which arise between the artist and other people. If you want a singer to sing

differently, you must bind him to other people, make him love along with someone else and make him love differently. The combinations of styles are inexhaustible, but they are all basically a combination of persons, the enchantment of one person with another. Literature remains, unfortunately, the romance of older, subtle men in love with one another, who shower one another with favors! Break out of that magic circle! Seek new inspirations! Allow a child, a puppy, a half-wit to seduce you, bind yourselves to people of other conditions.

Up until now, only Marxism has been capable of such reform in the very condition of the writer by subjecting him to the proletariat. In fact, Marxism has merely submitted the writer to theory and bureaucracy, from which derives the most boring literature in all of history. No, no, you won't be able to do this with your wizened and pepper-dry theories: you need to have a wave of enchantment welling up from those lower levels to draw you out of yourselves. When you succeed in really falling in love with inferiority, you will appeal to it, even if your love turns out to be too difficult for your inferior brothers. By loving and loving openly, you will stop being all alone.

XI

Thursday

Zbyszewski's article in *Kultura*: that Polish literature has no chance in the world market because Polish life is not powerful enough to arouse interest. What nauseating cant from the perspective of art! I hold it against Zbyszewski that his concept of mountains is flat. He clammers all over the peaks with a journalistic unceremoniousness, with a practical "seriousness" that has become our latest wisdom? In this article one speaks of literature as "production" that requires "advertisement" and "propaganda," relies on "readers," and looks for publishers. To hell with the production language of the five-year plans! Earlier, Zbyszewski appeared with a revelation no less zealously trivializing: that literature is without a chance because of a crisis in the area of domestic help: for lack of servants, the ladies have no time to read. This is possible, I suppose, but isn't this a kind of kitchen realism? And isn't this avenue of approach to literary matters an answer in itself to the question of why Polish literature does not have a chance. No, not only

because we are exotic to the rest of the world. One can change a theme or improve it but it is more difficult to change the fact that our notion of literature is either highfalutinly romantic or flatly sober, on the level of domestic help—*tertium non datur*. Either holiness, a mission, and revelation or readers, awards, and publishers. We are great when we are drunk but ours is a kitchen sobriety and there is no chance of our reconciling greatness with sobriety. I heard that a certain professor's wife was transfixed by this article. And why not! He explains to us pleasantly why we are brilliant but unrecognized and this explanation is exactly in proportion to our lack of brilliance, our ordinariness.

Yesterday three men at Teodolina's: one clean shaven, the second mustached, the third bearded, and they were amazed that they could not come to an agreement about the political situation in the Far East. I said: I am amazed that you talk to one another at all. Each of you is a different solution to the human face and personifies a different understanding of man. If a bearded man is okay, then a clean-shaven or mustached one is a monster, a clown, a degenerate, and a general absurdity; and if a clean-shaven man is the right type, then a bearded one is a monstrosity, sloppiness, nonsense, and foulness. Well then! What are you waiting for? Start punching!

Gide's correspondence with Claudel: What a little piece of theater! How that deformed itself in a few years! The dialogue between the believer and non-believer does not make one laugh, but that little coat and tails . . . that coat of excellent French *mondanité*, the fact that everything is so smoothed out literarily. Maya nude and Maya clothed, God between Monsieur Gide and Monsieur Claudel. The naïveté of this sophistication. *Quelle délicatesse des sentiments!* The real author of this correspondence is the domestic help, this really is something for Zbyszewski. For all this delicacy is elaborated by an inferior people, this high dialogue is rooted in the populace but it has forgotten about its roots and struts about as if it existed on its own. Again, therefore, one must refer to this inferior truth, which is at the base of the superior truth.

Zosia appropriated my rug and decorated her bedroom with it, but when the subject of doling out three hundred pesos came up, Zosia claimed the matter wasn't urgent. And her friends, Gośka and Hala, flatter her by following in her tracks.

I stopped by the café where a group of young poets, Concreto-Invencion (or maybe it was the group Madi), gather every week. There are always ten poets

yelling at each other in a passionate exchange at one of the tables. Yet this café has terrible acoustics and at this hour is full of people. You can't hear a thing. So I said: wouldn't it be appropriate to move to another café? . . . but these words drowned in the general racket. So I shouted them again, once, twice, and I kept on shouting into the ear of my neighbor until I realized that they were probably all shouting the same thing—but they could not hear each other. Strange people those poets. To gather together every week in one place in order not to be able to make themselves understood in the matter of moving to another café . . .

Tuesday

With Ernesto Sabato (an Argentine writer) in the bar Helvetico.

Besides writing, Sabato teaches philosophy privately and initiates me into his method. He says: *Hay que golpear* (one must strike). One must tear them away from the reality to which they have become accustomed and cause them to see everything anew. Their uneasiness will force them to seek solutions and then turn to a teacher . . . but one has to do everything, one has to create a situation that threatens them. . . .

This is correct. For knowledge whatever it is worth, from the most precise mathematics to the darkest suggestions of art, is not to calm the soul but to create a state of vibration and tension in it.

Saturday

Tuwim's death. I can imagine the obituaries. Here, privately, however, I can jot down: the greatest contemporary Polish poet has died. The greatest? Undoubtedly. Great? Hm . . .

He did not introduce us to anything, he discovered nothing, initiated us into nothing, did not provide us with a single key. Yet he vibrated, spouted, dazzled . . . with the magic of "the poetic word." Such a sensual vibration of the poetic harp, breathing verbal luxury, is, in art, the highest aspiration of a primitive people. He was a poet, therefore, who brought us no honor, even unmasked us a little. Our shame lies in the fact that we can say that each of Tuwim's poems is "wonderful," but in answer to the question, what of Tuwim did he introduce into the poetry of

the world, we would not be able to give an answer. For Tuwim as Tuwim, that is, as a personality, did not exist. A harp without a harpist.

I am curious if those writing the obituaries will risk revealing this truth. I think rather that they will be kept in that healthily conventional poeticized style, with a tear because of “betrayal.” Our sense of poetry is, as I have said, rather primitive and strongly mechanized, but we have taken our talking about it to great heights: speaking, full of floriture, trills, and singing in a poetic tone, with false poetic sentimentality and with equally false poetic exultation. This category is excellent for funerals so I assume it will be mobilized for this occasion. In my opinion, Polish poetry (but perhaps all poetry) will not budge until it breaks with three terrible clichés: (1) the attitude of the poet; (2) poetic tone; (3) poetic form. Do what you want! Try to crawl out of this through the doors or windows, it’s all the same to me, but as long as you stay inside, nothing will save you.

Friday

“Tourists from stork nests.”*

Straszewicz is a squire on his manor, equal to a palatine,[†] something very Polish, a descendant of Rej and Potocki, grandson of Sienkiewicz, and also Weich’s cousin, which arouses confidence in wide circles of admirers. Although Straszewicz is, among other things, a caricaturist of Polishness, he is one of our own, someone familiar and that in spite of everything: the old tastes, the old banner, the old emotional nobility. Almost. Practically. Just practically because all this is purely “functional” in Straszewicz. Straszewicz is yesterday’s Polishness torn away from its foundation and radiating in a vacuum, acting on impetus. Is he belated then?

No! Humor . . . humor . . . if Straszewicz were stripped of his humor, he would be completely impossible, he would be spiritually and intellectually indolent in the current reality, equal to . . . Well, why name names, practically all the names? Humor is an inversion of everything and to such an extent that a real humorist can never be only that which he is. He is both that which he is and that which he isn’t. The hand that wrote “Won a lock, lost a lock” is the hand of a perverse Gogol and

* A colloquialism meaning Poles abroad.

† “*Szlacheic na zagrodne rowny wojewodsie.*” “A squire on his manor equals a palatine” was a declaration of equal rights of the nobility from the times of the noble republic.

under its touch, Straszewicz becomes anti-Straszewicz, and the synthesis of this thesis and antithesis gives us Straszewicz, who is still Straszewicz but Straszewicz already slightly out-distancing Straszewicz. Let us draw our conclusions from this: that in moments when devastating conditions force us to a complete inner transformation, laughter is our last resort. It draws us out of ourselves and allows our humanity to survive independently of the painful changes in our shell.

No nation has needed laughter more than we do today. And never has a nation understood laughter's liberating role less.

Our laughter today, however, can no longer be an elemental, that is, automatic laughter. It must be premeditated laughter, humor applied coldly and with gravity, it must be a serious application of laughter to our tragedy. On a broader scale than Straszewicz does it. That laughter, dictated by awful necessities, should encompass not only the world of enemies, but above all us ourselves and that which is dearest to us.

The author of "Tourists from Stork Nests" addressed me in an article about *Trans-Atlantic*. I record my retort, as it sets the tone for my other statements. This is one of my first appearances in the Polish press after fourteen years of absence. When, after having been born in my native tongue for the second time, I assessed the situation, I noticed that it was declining at full tilt. In Poland, literature has been seized by the throat and in emigration it has been "submitted to service," to the service of ideals, the homeland, readers, everything except its own principles and destinies. As a result of this, I have decided to respond not as a soldier but as a civilian.

Here is what I wrote under the title "Marginal Reflections on Straszewicz":

"Risum teneatis" appeared not long ago and once again I must respond. Isn't the public bored stiff by these polemics? Has not the tone of our literary press become excessively intimate?

It does not seem bad to me that literati write about themselves and argue with each other—on the condition that their persons will be a bridge to higher matters, to universal problems.



It would seem that I am that conceited creature that puffs itself up with "talent" while he, Straszewicz, pays homage to virtuous modesty. The reverse, however, is true. I say: I attempt to have talent. And what does Straszewicz

say? He says: *I have talent, but . . . look! . . . I gave it up as an offering to the homeland!*

So I claim that Straszewicz's talent will never realize itself completely, as Straszewicz lacks something that is indispensable: a respect for talent.

With what sort of absolutely Polish impertinence does our Czesław speak about these values! He is full of scorn for egotists and egocentrics, who dare take "talent" seriously at a moment when a real drama is taking place: the homeland is being defeated.

So what is this thing called "talent"? If idiots imagine a writer as a guy who sits in a café and, other than that, writes successful novels and short stories from time to time with the help of that vague, mysterious "talent," then it is high time for their opinions to undergo reform. A writer does not write with any mysterious "talent" but with "himself." That means, he writes with his sensitivity and intelligence, heart and mind, with his entire spiritual development and that intensity, that steady excitement of the spirit, which Cicero says is the essence of all rhetoric. There is nothing mysterious, nothing esoteric in art.

I can say without exaggeration that I "devoted myself" to literature. For me, literature is not a matter of a career and future monuments but the excavating from myself of the maximum value of which I am capable. If it were to turn out that that which I write is inconsequential, then I am defeated not only as a writer but as a man. Yet Straszewicz and his ilk treat literature as an appendix to existence and its ornament. They are inclined to tolerate the existence of writers as long as nothing really serious begins to happen.

Miłosz was also attacked along these philosophical lines. Ah yes! That crazy aesthete left the country because he noticed he couldn't write poems there! The country doesn't concern him, neither does the suffering of the people, just his poems! It is my belief that people who voice such opinions have not grown up enough to handle these problems. Neither art nor the homeland means much in and of itself. They mean very much, however, when a man binds himself, through them, to the real and profoundest values of being.



Cowardice! Lack of patriotism! A strange thing! Trans-Atlantic is the most patriotic and most courageous thing I have ever written. Yet it is exactly this work that draws fire to me for being a coward and a bad Pole.

Notice that I could have left those moments of my life alone. I could have written a book with completely different themes. No one reproached me with anything until I myself brought it on by publishing fragments of Trans-Atlantic.

Don't allow yourselves to believe that you have caught me in the act. I myself, voluntarily and freely, admitted to having certain feelings . . . but the disclosure of these emotional states (which even you—privately and quietly—must have occasionally experienced) was neither cynicism nor shamelessness on my part. I could allow myself this because I had very grave reasons and because I was being directed by a consideration for the common good.

What kind of reasons?

I feel that currently Polish literature ought to adopt a direction diametrically opposed to that which it has taken thus far. Instead of striving for as intimate a bond as possible between a Pole and Poland, it should get to work on creating a certain distance between ourselves and the Homeland. We must sever ourselves emotionally and intellectually from Poland in order to gain a greater freedom of action, in order to be able to create it.

We must, I believe, become aware of the temporary character of our current Polishness. Without this we will not be capable of keeping up with the world.



One can disagree with this. One can fight this. But let's not have Straszewicz demanding that I serve the Homeland, not in accordance with my best understanding, but only in a way that he considers right.

In that case, I would have an equal right to call Straszewicz a bad Pole because, from my vantage point, the emotional patriotism that he represents has done the most damage. It has deeply influenced our politics and, what is worse, our culture. Listen to what the world is saying about us. Consider how foreigners see and feel us. We are a paragon of spasmodic patriotism.

Straszewicz says to a man like myself: Go, sir, to the army! Fight for your homeland! If I felt like fighting, then it would be against the homeland for my human worth. Straszewicz would not have to encourage me to do battle with Hitler and fight on behalf of tormented humanity in Poland because,

independently of my opinions of the homeland, I know the extent of that suffering and I do not intend to wriggle away with “concepts” while a crime is being committed.

Still . . .

I do not conceal that, just like Straszewicz, I was afraid. Perhaps I was not so afraid of the army and war as of the fact that in spite of my best intentions, I could not handle them. I am not made for these things. Mine is a different realm. My development has always moved in a different direction. As a soldier, I would have been a catastrophe. I would have brought disgrace upon myself and you.

Do you think that patriots such as Mickiewicz and Chopin did not take part in the struggle out of simple cowardice? Or perhaps because they did not want to make fools of themselves? They probably had the right to defend themselves before that which exceeded their strength.

Perhaps these confessions are awkward and unnecessary. Perhaps it would be enough to say that at the time when the war broke out I had an army category “C,” and that when I reported to a medical commission at the consulate in Buenos Aires, I was given a category “D.”

Enough of this alphabet. I prefer to wrap this up.



One has to admit that Straszewicz is wonderfully noble. I respect his virtues, do not diminish his attainments, and I have sympathy for his writer’s predicament, but this article smells of Pasek’s Memoirs. Straszewicz invokes judgments against Miłosz and Gombrowicz. What does this mean? Once again, then, instead of a serious discussion, we are given a sejm, hullabaloo, and commotion. Once again profound letters—written by various fans kicking up their heels, protests, counterprotests, attacks, and jibes—addressed “Respectful Editor.” Has that frog’s croaking coming from the stagnant waters of your pond repulsed you yet?*

No. You may judge me only by reading my works more carefully, in the calm and quiet of your conscience.

* A political or debating assembly, with the connotation of being unruly.

Sunday

With the deepest humility, I confess that I, a mere worm, had the Spirit appear to me yesterday and hand me a Program, made up of five points:

1. To restore confidence, pride, momentum, and flight to a Polish literature that is fatally one-dimensionalized, weak, and pusillanimous.
2. To base it solidly on the “I,” to make the “I” constitute its sovereignty and power, to finally introduce that “I” into Polish . . . but emphasize its dependence on the world. . . .
3. To switch it to the most modern tracks and not at a snail’s pace, but with a jump, like this, straight out of the past into the future (*les extrêmes se touchent*). To draw it into the most complex issues, into the most painful complexities . . . yet to teach it lightness and how to maintain distance. . . . To teach it contempt for the idea and cult of the personality.
4. To change its relation to form.
5. To Europeanize it but, at the same time, to exploit all its possibilities to oppose it to Europe.

At the bottom appeared the ironic: sausage is not for dogs!*

Saturday

I headed for where the light blinds you. First a three-day trip by car to a certain city, bursting with sunlight. There the roads ended. Seventy kilometers still divided us from the *estancia*, so we flew over them by plane.

Country Diary

Saturday

We landed smoothly in a meadow, not far from trees, scattering the sheepish cows—sheep were also grazing close by—and I disembark, but really have no idea which direction is south, which north, and generally do not understand what is going

* A Polish saying meaning “it’s too good for the likes of you,” “you haven’t grown up to it.”

on, because I sweat so much that I exhaust myself and the air is so thin and heated that it dances before my eyes. . . . A manor amid eucalyptus trees, broken by parrots cawing.

The sun draws my eyes shut with its little paw, I walk among the trees, but Sergio is saying something and a large bird takes wing—I sweat—takes wing and I sweat—and I hear him say, how about going hunting, but I am sweating. I am sweating and am somewhat nervous! Grumpy. And finally I am bored by the fact that this fellow always does what is expected of him. When food is served he sits at the table, when it is late he yawns, and when we come to the country he suggests hunting. I asked that he quit boring me with banalities and try to be less predictable. He said nothing. Flies buzz.

Sunday

I awoke quite late and tried to figure out where I was but that was not easy because the beating sun does not allow you to open your eyes. I see only the sandy soil underfoot and, I guess, ants. I tried to lift my gaze and glanced to the right but a cow was there and when I looked to the left, another cow was on that side. I walked straight ahead among the sunny waves slipping through the lanes, I know there is a tree ahead. Sergio, who accompanied me, climbed the tree. I asked him if he couldn't think of something more original? Instead of answering, he climbed down, but probably without the tree. I say "probably" because from under my lowered lids, I couldn't see and, who cares, I am melting.

Monday

I think about my work, my place in literature, my responsibility, my destiny and vocation.

But a mosquito buzzes on my left, no, right, green melts into blue, parrots squawk and until now, I couldn't get a good look because first, I don't really feel like it, and, second, I am melting. I assume that there are palm trees, cacti, brush, pasturelands, swamps or marshes, but I don't know for sure. I saw a path, took it, it led to bushes that smelled like tea, but it was not tea, then I saw Sergio's legs from under the wings of my hat, close by, on the left. What was he doing here? Did he want

to accompany me on the walk? In a fit of irritation I asked, will he ever stop being conventional, at which his legs as if rose from the ground and began stepping above it, about fifteen centimeters in the air. This lasted a few minutes. Then they came down and trod the earth. . . . I used the words “as if” because I did not believe that this was possible and I was sweating and the hat, glare, and shrubbery limited my field of vision. Mandioka.

Tuesday

Nothing happened. If I am not mistaken, a whole herd of horses is watching me and cows, too, are looking at me in great numbers.

The evenings are cooler yet in spite of this, my head is compote, my bones sprawl. Sergio lit a curtain instead of a cigarette at supper and I was ready to scream but as it turned out, he didn't light it altogether, that is, not completely, rather halfway, to the astonishment of his parents, which was also half-hearted, and I said, in a mood of some sort of benevolent condescension—well, well, Sergio, so what are you up to?

Wednesday

I am melting and dissolving but everything else is dissolving, too, where is north, where is south, I know nothing, maybe I am seeing the landscape upside down, but I see no landscape only little flies, stalks, lines, the tremulous atmosphere, the buzzing, drowning in light. Sergio, on the other hand, begins to amaze me. Today at breakfast he amazed us somewhat by somehow turning so that, having entered the dining room, it was as if he had walked into the dining room once again, that is, somehow from the inside, yes, it was as if he had walked into the inside from inside which then allowed him to leave the inside to go to the inside to go to the inside and then only from the inside to the outside. . . . I say “as if,” “somehow,” because all of this was happening only to a certain degree, but undoubtedly this boy is moving further and further away from cliché. His parents reprimanded him, but only to a certain extent because it is impossible to concentrate when the sweat pours down your body and everything grows blurry. . . .

Thursday

If not for my sweating, I would feel profoundly disturbed, and maybe even afraid, as very strange things are happening. At noon, in the most intense heat and tremulousness, Sergio was mounting a horse. To the amazement of not only his parents, but also the entire estancia, he did not quite get on his horse, and not quite galloped after which he somewhat dismounted and went to his room, just like that, not quite enough. I had a lengthy conversation with his parents, who did not conceal their concern, which melted along with them in the tropical heat and as a consequence of this conversation, I turned to Sergio with the request that he be more predictable in the future. He answered that ever since I had opened his eyes to unknown possibilities, he felt like a king and did not intend to abdicate. I did not like it at all and I indicated all the impropriety of these games, to which he replied: Good, good, yes, naturally, I think, however, that you are right. . . . This “however” indicated that he was still clinging to his indirectness, incompleteness, that, however, he was trying to take advantage of that murkiness, fogginess, proximity of everything for his own purposes, that taking advantage of the fact that we, *nolens volens*, must close our eyes to this, he would do mischief perhaps not quite and would take liberties not quite entirely. . . .

The conversation had no positive effect, especially because, at the same time, we were taking a path that led into the brush near the swamp and at a given moment I noticed that I was in the cane and next to me, in addition to Sergio’s legs, Chango’s and Cumba’s feet, two farmhands from the estancia. Then something horrible happened. Namely, everyone stopped (I did, too) and Sergio’s hand gave me a rifle while his other hand suddenly indicated something in the shape of a triangle, in a yellow-green-blue light shadow there, in the bushes. . . . I shot.

A thunderclap shook the whole place. . . .

Something swished, darted, disappeared. After that nothing but the buzzing of mosquitoes. So I walked with them in the heat and shortly found myself home. A crocodile. Crocodile! A crocodile, shot, but not sufficiently; not quite killed, hit, but not enough. . . . and he now shoots everything around him. In addition to this, a blast the blast that also shot through and what was worse, sealed shut, yes, sealed shut!!! The hellish scorching of the sun. Sweat and a flash, bewilderment, laziness, and the crocodile, not quite a crocodile over there. . . . Sergio didn’t say anything but I knew

he was game for this . . . and it didn't surprise me at all when he not quite, but already openly, flew to a branch and gave out a chirp. Why not! Now, to a certain degree, now, whatever happens, he can allow himself everything.

I am somehow preparing myself for flight. I pack my suitcase to an extent. The crocodile, not quite, not quite a crocodile! Sergio's parents have almost gotten into the buggy harnessed to four horses and are almost growing distant . . . almost in a hurry. . . . Hot. Heatwave. Scorching heat.

XII

Saturday

I am taking a walk with Karol Świerczewski, along the streets of San Isidro: villas, gardens. From the hilltop, in the distance, we see a motionless river *color de leon*, and on the right-hand side in the shade of eucalyptus trees the white, century-old home of the Pueyrredons, its closed windows shining, vacant from the time that Prilidiano left. A largely arbitrary bond has arisen between the house and me. It began one day when strolling by I thought “and what would happen if this house became close to me, if it intruded upon my fate and for no reason other than that it is entirely alien to me?” Right after that came the thought: “And why did this house among so many houses suggest this wish to you, why exactly this one?” Right away this thought led to that one and from then on, I really did attach myself to the Pueyrredon house. So that now the light, the shrubbery, the walls, elicit greater and greater emotion—and uneasiness—in me each time, and whenever I am here, I break down under the inarticulated burden and somewhere on the border, at the extreme ends of my being a shout, violence, a terrifying panic explodes . . . and it is very characteristic of me, yes, it is right, that none of these experiences of fear, depression, sorrow, despair, is flesh. They are like the contours of emotions and thereby even more painful, filled with nothing, so completely pure. And this heavy pain does not intrude on my conversation with Świerczewski.

We talk about Father Maciaszek, but the Pueyrredon house is now in the back, behind me, and the fact that I do not see it strengthens its existence. Accursed house that invaded me. The less I see it, the more it exists. There, see, behind me, there it is! There it is! There it is exaggerated to madness and it is and is

with its windows and neoclassical columns and instead of disintegrating when I move away from it, it exists even more than before. Why it? Why, this shouldn't be the house that accompanies me, hounds me, other houses are my houses, why should somebody else's house, this alien white existence in this garden tug at me and attack me? But I am talking to Świerczewski. I know that I am not supposed to be interested in this! I am not supposed to find myself here! Where then? Where is my place? What am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to be? My native land is not my place nor is the house of my parents, no thought, no word, no, the truth is that I have no other home except that one, yes, unfortunately, unfortunately, the only house I have is that uninhabited, that white Pueyrredon house! Speaking of Father Maciaszek, we move farther away from the Pueyrredon house. He, Świerczewski, is also as if he were not and, absent, he rubs a dried weed into dust.

Tuesday

In Poland the tower of a too aristocratic culture crashed and everything there, except for the factory chimneys, will become dwarfed in this and the next generation. Should we, the Polish intelligentsia in exile, shrivel up because of this? This is strange but true: even though we have been suspended in a void, even though we constitute a dying class, a "superstructure" deprived of a "base," even though there will be fewer and fewer people capable of understanding us, we must continue to think in an unsimplistic and unprimitive way, in a way that is in keeping with our level, just as if nothing at all had changed in our situation. We must simply because this is natural in us and nobody should be more stupid than he is. We must realize ourselves completely and speak our bit out to the last letter, because only phenomena capable of a ruthless life have the right to exist.

Wednesday

I know well what sort of Polish culture I would like to have in the future. The only question is: am I not spreading a program that is only my personal need on an entire people. This is it: the weakness of today's Pole results from his being too monolithic, and too one-sided; therefore, all effort should be aimed at enrich-

ing him by one more pole, at completing him with another Pole, an absolutely, radically different Pole.

I have already written elsewhere about this alter ego of ours that urgently demands a hearing. History has forced us to exaggerate certain characteristics of our nature and we are what we are excessively. We are overstylized. And even more so because when we feel in ourselves the presence of those other possibilities, we desire to eliminate them violently. How, for example, does the matter of our manhood present itself? For a Pole (as opposed to the Latin race) it is not enough that he is a man to a certain degree, he wants to be even more of a man than he is, one could say that he imposes the man upon himself, he is the eradicator of his own womanhood. And, if one considers that history has always forced us to a military and martial life, that psychic violence becomes understandable. It is this fear of femininity that causes us to make rigid decisions which turn against us, and that marks in us the clumsiness of persons who fear that they will not be up to their theory; we "want to be" like this, rather than that, too much, and the result is that we "are" too little.

If we look closely at our other national characteristics (such as love of the homeland, faith, virtue, honor . . .) we will then see our excessiveness in all of them, resulting in the fact that the type of Pole that we have evolved must stifle and destroy the type that we could have been and that exists in us as an antinomy. Yet it would seem from this that the Pole is impoverished exactly by one-half of himself, in addition to which even the half that is allowed to be heard cannot appear in a natural way. I opine that the moment has come to activate this other personality of ours; today, not only because we must of necessity become more relaxed, more flexible toward the world; not only because this operation demands an immeasurable spiritual freedom, which has become possible for us beyond the boundaries of the country, but most of all because this is the only gauge truly capable of inspiring us with a new vivacity and opening new lands before us.

We will discover that other Pole when we turn against ourselves. At that time contrariness should become the dominant characteristic of our development. We will have to give ourselves over to contrariness, seeking in ourselves that which we do not want, before which we recoil. Literature? We ought to have a literature that is exactly the opposite of that which has been written up to now. We must

become the iconoclasts of our own history, relying only on our present for it is exactly history that has been our hereditary flaw. History imposes upon us an artificial conception of ourselves and forces us to simulate historical deduction instead of living our own reality. The most painful thing, though, will be to attack Polish style and Polish beauty in ourselves, to create a new mythology and new custom from the other half of our globe, from that other pole—to broaden and enrich our beauty in such a way that a Pole could like himself in two opposing forms—as he who is right now and he who destroys the one who he is.

Today it is not in the least a matter of enduring in the legacy left us by previous generations, it is a matter of winning out over it. Poor is a Polish culture that only binds and shackles; worthy of recognition, creative and alive is one that binds and liberates in a single stroke.

Friday

Yesterday (Thursday) a cretin began to bother and worry me all day. Perhaps it would be better not to write about this . . . but I do not want to be a hypocrite in this diary. It began when I first went to Acasusso to Mr. Alberto H.'s (an industrialist and engineer) for breakfast. At first glance, his villa seemed too Renaissance, but not betraying this impression, I sat down at the table (also Renaissance) and began to eat dishes whose Renaissance in the course of eating became more and more obvious at which time the conversation, too, settled on the Renaissance until finally and completely openly and even passionately one began to adore Greece, Rome, naked beauty, the call of the flesh, evocative, Pathos and Ethos (?) and even some column or other on Crete. When it got to Crete, the cretin crawled out, crawled out (?) and crept up but not in Renaissance manner (!) but quite neo-classically cretinously (?) (I know that I should not write about this, this sounds rather odd).

At four I left, extremely tired, and there were trees, leaves, houses—mixed, perhaps somewhat too tidy, and, I would say, not much to the point. Never mind. Leaving the subway, I was on my way to the Café Rex when out of the Café Paris (nor do I know why one café got mixed up with the other) some of my lady friends, who were supposed to be sitting at a table and eating ladyfingers and dipping them in cream, began to beckon (?) to me. The mystification appeared right away

because, actually, they were sitting at an enamel tabletop set on four bent prongs, and the eating consisted of sticking this or that thing through the opening in the face during which the ears and noses stuck out and the heels, too, stuck out from under the table, that is, out from under the tabletop. Yak, yak, about this and that but I see that this or that sticks out (?) and protrudes (??) from this or that woman, therefore, I finally excuse myself and leave, pleading lack of time.

Sociologically.

I do not really know if I should continue these confessions. The publicist's duty compels me to inform the public that rather too cretinous things are happening . . . too cretinous to be revealed and, I believe, on this all speculation relies—that an excess of cretinism does not allow these things to be revealed, that this is already too stupid to be expressed. Leaving the Café Paris, I went to the Café Rex. There an unknown gentleman who approached me and, having introduced himself as Zamszycki (maybe I heard this wrong), said that he had wanted to make my acquaintance for a long time. I said that it was my pleasure and then he thanked me, bowed, and left. Furious, I wanted to call him a cretin when, at that moment, I noticed that he was not a cretin because, after all, he had wanted to meet me and did, therefore, it was right that he should leave. Then I started to think: cretin or not? In the meantime, first one streetlight went on, then another, and when the second went on, a third lit up, then a fourth and with the fourth a fifth. Hardly had the fifth lit up when the sixth and the seventh go on, eighth, ninth, yet, at the same time, one, two, five cars go by; one, two, ten trams; people are coming, one, two, ten, fifteen; before me, one, two, three houses; the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh story and on the seventh, a balcony and on the balcony, who? Who but Henry and his wife! Beckoning to me.

I beckon. Yet I see, though not too clearly, that they are saying something and beckoning to me at the same time. Cars, trams, people, movement, crowds, neons are going on, glare from all over, a honking, ringing, and they there on the seventh story are talking. And again they beckon. I nod. I see: she beckons, he beckons. So I do, too. Then I look (really, I don't know how to articulate this, this is already a bit brash, however, I am not allowed to conceal anything) and he beckoned into himself, like into a bottle. I beckon. Then she (but no, no, I cannot make a cretin of myself; yet if I am to reveal the Cretin, I have to make a cretin of myself) then she beckoned out of him until he and she beckoned (but WHAT did she

beckon to) after which both lightly beckoned themselves out there and alone and poof. . . . (Ha! This I cannot say, it is beyond my powers!)

Monday

Every once in a while I sense certain foggy allusions to my person in various articles. Perhaps I am mistaken? Whom, if not me, does Mr. Juliusz Sakowski have in mind when he speaks of “dogmatic iconoclasts and sacristans of suspect initiations”? At whom, if not at me, does Mr. Goetel aim his phrase about “the grimacing at the traditional Polish attitude by some exiles, aspiring to the title of intellectuals”? Probably even in Mr. Grubinski’s Greco-Roman, Parisian-Athenian, Thucydides-Gibbonesque feuilleton. “A Brawl! A Brawl!” casts me a light, oh, ever so light, sidelong glance.

I would not be surprised if he were not wrong for, really, I must be a somewhat unnerving phenomenon. It is something else, however, that is ludicrous to me. Namely, that from the selection of epithets with which I am strewn it seems that none of these people has the slightest notion of what I am. The adjective “blasé” in no way fits me; the word “escapist” would demand considerable elaboration; “intellectual” is wide of the mark; and “free-thinking aesthete” is also quite useless. They all miss the mark because they have not read any of my books or, if they have, then they did so sloppily.

Thursday

Zygmunt Grocholski’s vernissage in Galatea. Portfolios full of engravings on the table. Large surfaces soaked in color on the walls. Compositions frozen in proud abstraction look down from the walls onto the sloppy human anthill; a mob of disorderly two-legged creatures tumbling past in wild disarray. On the walls: Astronomy. Logic. Composition. In the gallery: Confusion. Imbalance. An excess of unorganized detail, which overflows on all sides. Accompanied by the Dutch painter Gesinus, I comment on one of the engravings, on which certain masses are harnessed by the slanted tensions of lines and are like a horse reined in and frozen in a leap, when someone’s behind nudges under my rib cage. I jump

back. This turns out to be a photographer, bent over and aiming his box at the more important guests.

Thrown off balance, I try, nevertheless, to compose myself. In the presence of Alice de Landes, I feel myself drifting into a certain colorful fugue subject to its own laws when something rolls over me like a water buffalo or hippopotamus, barbarian style. . . . Who? The photographer, stretched beyond all endurance, shooting doublets *en face* and profiles.

I collect myself as quickly as I can and, seeing some French acquaintances who were weighing the inner logic of one of the linear arrangements with Aldo Pellegrini, the author of the foreword to the catalog, I walk over to them when whom should I stumble over? The photographer! I turn to say something unpleasant to him when, suddenly, a face looms before me. An unfamiliar face. And a familiar face. Familiar? Unfamiliar? Whose? The face looks at me and suddenly blurts out: "Whom do I see! Well, well, two mountains meet! Why, it's been ages!"

I said: Of course. Ah, what a meeting! . . . A pit. Darkness. Emptiness. I don't know him. I don't remember him. Anguish. The photographer leaps up, holds up his camera, snap, it's all over. He hands me a bill, twenty pesos. I pay the twenty pesos and take the receipt. Enraged that after all his elbowing and bumping, he had to snap my picture at the very moment that I was gaping at an unrecalled face, I went home, I, a child of chaos, son of darkness, blind coincidence, and absurdity.

At home I had the crazy thought: Hey, maybe that was Kowalski, the one I had met in Mendoza. Was it Kowalski or not? If only I could see his face once again, the memory of his face has become blurry.

Then I remembered the photograph! Why I'll have his face in the photo! Suddenly the mysterious logic governing that photographer struck me as if I had suddenly seen the most perfect balance of planes and dynamic tensions in Zygmunt's illustration. I ran to the address on the receipt.

O malicious fate! O perverse logic! Diabolical composition! Of course, there was a logic, but one leading to ultimate degradation. When I reached the house indicated on the receipt, I was told:

—You, too, have a receipt, sir? Many people have already been here today.

That photographer was a scoundrel, sir, who put a fictional address on the receipt and only pretended to be taking photographs. . . .

(He also stole Rebinder's coat.)

Wednesday

Once again a certain woman (because it is usually a woman, but this one is a woman-enemy who does battle with me) accuses me of egotism. She writes: "To me, sir, you are not eccentric, but egocentric. This is simply a stage in your development (*vide* Byron, Wilde, Gide). Some pass from this to the next phase which may be even more extreme but others don't go anywhere at all and remain fixed in their egos. This is a tragedy but a private one. It enters neither the Pantheon nor history."

Platitudes? Only a madman would soberly demand that a man not occupy himself with himself, that he not concern himself with himself, and that, in brief, he not take himself for himself. That woman demands that I forget that I am I, yet she knows quite well that if I have an appendix attack, it will be I that will be screaming not she.

The colossal pressure to which we are subjected today from all sides just to give up our own existence leads only to a warping and falsifying of life as does every postulate that is unrealistic. The person who is so dishonest with himself that he can say: someone else's pain is more important to me than my own, immediately falls into this "easiness" that is the mother of verbalism and all generalities and everything that is too easily made lofty. As for me: No, never, never, never. *I am*.

Especially an artist who lets himself be taken in and submits to that aggressive convention is lost. Do not allow yourselves to be intimidated. The word "I" is so basic and inborn, so full of the most palpable and thereby the most honest reality, as infallible as a guide and severe as a touchstone, that instead of sneering at it, it would be better to fall to your knees before it. I think rather that I am not yet fanatical enough in my concern with myself and that I did not know how, out of fear of other people, to surrender myself to this vocation with enough of a categorical ruthlessness to push the matter far enough. I am the most important and probably the only problem I have: the only one of all my protagonists to whom I attach real importance.

To commence creating myself and to make a character like Hamlet or Don Quixote out of Gombrowicz——? ——!

Thursday

Today's at N.'s tea, several Argentine literati got together from out of nowhere. X read us his story about a young worker and his mother, who saw Christ in Stalin. I listened in acute boredom to this edifying, sentimental story which was more religious than literary. Then a discussion erupted and Chamco accurately emphasized all the conventions and banalities that bristle in this text. I did not participate. I could have said the following: that no bourgeois literature has falsified the peasant and worker to this degree. This sad honor has been the work of Communist writers because they have set the proletariat on a pedestal and this could have disastrous consequences because this idealization will result in the intelligentsia's gradual loss of control over the force which it brought to life.

In the long run, it may turn out to be fatal that they, those intellectuals, go consistently daft on the subject of the proletariat.

X, in responding to Chamco's reproaches, talked about the necessity of simplification. He claimed that he would be happy if he could reduce psychology to its most elementary aspect and his literary language to the most important eight hundred words. He also said that art must adjust itself to the humble folk, no, he does not write for refined intellectual critics but for the people!

That mystical, fanatical face seemed like such darkness to me and I remembered how in my childhood, in the country, in the evening, next to the lamp, sometimes, in the quiet, in the stillness, I felt that something was happening endlessly, something demonic—and that is how I suddenly saw his face: as if it were being given up to the Process. There is something demonic in the fact that a superior, cultured man limits himself for the sake of a simpleton. This even appeals to me a little . . . and hardly anything amazes me more than this act of violence that Inferiority perpetrates on Superiority. Wasn't there a dynamic of violence in this man and wasn't he narrowed, stifled, loaded with power, more resilient? These suppressions that X was talking about, therefore, were not all that alien to me. And I might have greeted them warmly if they had represented a real bond with people. But X was not devoted to people. He was devoted to doctrine.

Theory was raping him. Basically, he did not (for even an instant) cease being “superior” in relation to those workers whom he approached as a teacher and guide. It was not simple people but the “proletariat” that existed for him. He reduced himself internally not because he was submitting to someone else’s inferiority, but because he was fulfilling a program. The cheapness of these Marxist Pinkos is unbearable! X’s formula was as follows: I, a mature man, give up my intelligentsia-like superiority in order to voluntarily serve the proletariat and to build, together with it, a rational world of the future. O brother, what garbage!

These formulas of theirs have not drawn us closer to the proletariat by a single inch. The mammoth issue of linking superiority to inferiority simply becomes even more counterfeit.

Sunday

I went to Cecilia’s *quinta* near Mercedes with “Russo”—Aleksander Russovich. For me, Russo is the embodiment of brilliant Argentine antibrilliance. I admire him. His brain is flawless; his intelligence, marvelous. Quick, receptive. Imagination, imaginative flight, poetry, humor. Culture. An easygoing perception of the world, free of complexes . . .

Ease. The ease comes from the fact that he does not want to, does not know how to, exploit his strong points. A European would cultivate them like fertile soil. He would bend over himself, as over an instrument. Russo allows his attributes to bloom in their natural state. Having the possibility of being outstanding, he does not want to, does not know how to? distinguish himself. . . . He does not want to fight with people. Discretion. He does not want to impose himself.

Goodness. His goodness disarms him. His attitude toward people is not sufficiently rigorous. He does not wrestle with them, he does not throw himself at them. He is not someone who exists “in people.” For him, man has not become an obstacle to overcome. He is the son of Argentine relaxation: here each lives for himself, people are not piled one on top of the other; here man does not use another man (in the spiritual arena) for a high-jump pole to jump higher; and man is not (spiritually) an object of exploitation. Next to him I am a wild animal.

Argentina. He is not alone. This is still an “unpeopled” and undramatic land.

XIII

Thursday

That Portuguese fellow, Dede's fiancé, asked me at one point where all of my contempt for women came from and immediately everyone agreed with him.

Contempt? What! I adore women! Yet it is true that until now I have not been able to figure out what they are to me in the spiritual order of things, enemies or allies? And this means that half of humanity is eluding my grasp.

The ease of bypassing women! It is as if they did not exist! I see around me many people in skirts, with long hair, high voices, and in spite of this, I use the word "man" as if it were not broken into man and woman. I also do not notice the split that sex introduces into other words.

To the Portuguese I replied that if one can talk of contempt at all, then it is only on artistic grounds. . . . Yes, if it happens that I despise women, then it is because they are terrible priestesses of beauty and revealers of youth. I grow angry because they annoy and offend me as bad artists. Artists, yes, because charm is their vocation and aesthetics their profession. They were born to fascinate, they are art to some extent themselves. Yet what shoddy work! What cheating! Poor beauty! And poor youth! You found yourselves in women in order to go rancid! She is your speedy destroyer! Look! That girl is young and beautiful only with the aim of becoming a mother! Shouldn't beauty or youth be something gratuitous, shouldn't it serve no one, this marvelous gift of nature, its crowning glory? Yet in women this charm serves to breed, it is allied to pregnancy, diapers, its highest manifestation creates a child and that marks the end of the poem. A boy barely touches a girl, enchanted by her and by himself with her, and he is already a father, she, a mother, therefore, a girl is a creature that seems to practice youth but really serves to liquidate it.

We, mortals, who cannot agree to death and with the fact that youth is only a torch that is passed from hand to hand, will not stop rebelling against this brutal perfidy of nature. Yet this is not a matter of barren protests. The point is that this deadly relationship of a woman to her own girlish charms manifests itself all the time and this is why she does not really feel her youth or beauty. She feels it less than a man. Look at that girl! How romantic . . . but this romanticism ends with a

contract at the altar at the side of that fat lawyer. That poetry must become legalized, that love will begin to function with the permission of spiritual and lay authorities. How aesthetic . . . but there isn't a bald, paunchy, or tubercular fellow that would be sufficiently repugnant to her. She will give her beauty to ugliness with ease and here we see her triumphing at the side of a monster, or, what is worse, at the side of one of those men who is the embodiment of petty revulsion. This is beauty that is not repulsed! Beautiful but not possessing a sense of beauty. And the ease with which a woman's taste and her intuition go wrong in her choice of men creates the impression of some sort of incomprehensible blindness and stupidity. She will fall in love with a man because he is so distinguished or so "subtle." Second-rate social values will be more important than the Apollonian outlines of the body, soul, yes, she loves the sock not the calf, the mustache not the face, the jacket not the chest. She will be awestruck by the dirty lyricism of a graphomaniac; the cheap pathos of an idiot will overwhelm her; and the chic of an elegant fellow will lead her astray. She does not know how to unmask, she allows herself to be deceived because she herself deceives. And she will fall in love only with a man from her "sphere" for she does not feel the natural beauty of the human race, only the secondary one that is a creation of her milieu. Ah, those slaves of majors, servants of generals, worshipers of merchants, dukes, doctors. Woman! You embody antipoetry! She knows her own poetry as much as she knows a man's and in this, is even clumsier. If these graphomaniacs, these painters of their own beauty, untalented sculptors of their shapes, knew anything at all about the rules governing beauty they would never do what they do with themselves. The laws about which I speak, known to each artist, proclaim:

1. An artist should not push his work under other people's noses, crying: This is beautiful! Be enchanted by this because it is enthralling. Beauty should be discreet and unimposing in a work of art, it should appear reluctantly, in the margin of another aspiration.

(Yet she is insistent about her beauty, perfecting it for hours before a mirror. She does not know what discretion is. She betrays herself all the time with her desire to please and so is not a queen, but a slave and instead of appearing like a goddess, worthy of desire, she appears as terrible clumsiness trying to conquer an inaccessible beauty. When a young boy plays ball for pleasure, he can

be beautiful; she plays ball in order to be beautiful, therefore, she plays badly, and, in addition to that, her beauty is bathed in perspiration, it is so forced. This is not all, however, because even while wheedling, always, everywhere, she pretends that she is not at all interested in men. And she says: Ah, I'm just doing this for the aesthetics of it! Who would believe such outright lies?)

2. Beauty cannot be based on duplicity (She desires that we forget about her ugly sides. She tries to convince us that she is not a woman, that is, a body, which, like all bodies, can never be just beautiful, which is a mixture of beauty and ugliness, an eternal play of these two elements [and in this is a beauty of another, higher category]. No one will be able to arrange things so that certain bodily functions are not uncleanliness. Nor will anyone completely liberate the spirit of uncleanliness. Yet she wants us to believe that she is a flower. She styles herself a goddess, "purity," an innocent babe. Isn't she comic in this absurd effort? And doomed to failure? What a masquerade! Am I supposed to believe that she is a bouquet of jasmine because she has perfumed herself? Or, upon seeing her on heels a yard high, think that she is lithe? The only thing I see is that the heels do not allow her to move freely. This is how that beauty inhibits her and becomes her paralysis: that terrible inhibiting of the woman, which is manifest in each of her movements, in her words, that curse, that she can never be comfortable with herself. . . .)

(And in this female frenzy, she completely loses the feeling of the effect, openly cheats, judging that she will be able to infect us with her cowardly and mendacious notion of the body [and spirit]. Fashion! What monstrosity! That which is called elegance in Paris, all those lines, silhouettes, profiles, are they not the most tasteless of mystifications, which depend on the overstylization of the body? This woman adorns her exaggerated behind with a sash and thinks that she has become majestic; that one pretends to be a panther; and this one tries to make her wilting complexion over into Melancholy with the aid of an elaborate hat. He who hides (for naught) the defect, however, submits to the defect. The defect must be overcome—overcome with real value in a moral or physical sense. The monsters offered to us by the Parisian fashion weeklies, those creations by Dior and Fath, with jutting hip, flowing line, bent finger, frozen idiotic "distinction," this from the vantage point of

art, is the height of revulsion, kitsch arousing nausea, this is ridiculous, naive, and clumsily pretentious. This is bad taste cruder and more provocative than anything a drunken droshky driver could possibly manage to do.)

3. Beauty is supposed to be supreme. (Maiden, ordinary milkmaid, hail O queen! Why, tell me, is there no mortal trembling in you that you will not be accepted? You do not fear being rejected. You know that it is not beauty that makes you desirable, but sex—you know that a man will always desire your femininity, even though it is not at all aesthetic. Your beauty, therefore, is not at the service of your sex, it is not afraid, it does not quake, it does not exert itself and instead is calm, natural, triumphant. O unimposing, reticent one. O distinguished one!)

Wednesday

Mortal are the sins of a woman from “society” in this temple of hers, aesthetics. Here is where she should feel most at home. To think that this is man’s inspiration, that these are our suppliers of lyricism, that we are to intoxicate ourselves on the wine from this barrel. Peerless is the primal beauty of woman, that with which nature adorned her. There is nothing more splendid or more thrilling and intoxicating than that man gained a younger companion, who is at once a servant and a master. There is nothing more wondrous than the tone that a woman contributes, that second voice that is the mysterious completion of manhood, the conception of the world on another scale, a separate interpretation, inaccessible to me. Why has this miracle undergone such a terrible vulgarization? Here one must introduce an important distinction: it is not the woman that is terrible but today’s femininity. What is awful is not the individual woman but the style that has arisen among women to which each woman succumbs. Who creates femininity? Men? Surely, man is the initiator, but afterward women themselves begin to perfect this among themselves and the art of misleading and enchanting, just like all others, grows and develops mechanically, automatically losing its sense of reality and sense of proportion. Today a woman is more of a woman than she should be: she is loaded with femininity, which is stronger than she is; she is the creation of a certain social convention, the consequence of a certain game, which pits man against woman until the dance grows and grows, becoming fatal.

What am I supposed to do with this? How am I supposed to behave? I always find my way easily with the help of the same compass. Distance to form! Just as I aspire to “unburden” man, I must try to “unburden” woman. What does “unburden” man mean? To get him out from under the yoke of that male style that arises among men as a strengthening of masculinity, to have him feel that his masculinity is something false, and that his own submission to it is weakness, to make him feel freer in relation to the man in himself. The woman must be brought out of the woman in the same way. Here, as in all of my writing, my goal—one of my goals—is to spoil the game, for as soon as the music dies and the couples break up, an invasion of reality is possible and only then does it become clear to us that the game is not reality but a game. To bring uninvited guests to that ball of yours; to bind you differently to one another; to ruin your dance.

It is possible and perhaps even certain that my literature is even more extreme and crazy than I am. I don’t believe that this indicates lack of control, instead it is a taking of certain charms which are magnified in the books to their ultimate formal conclusions. In me they remain that which they were, that is, only a slight deviation of the imagination, a kind of light “inclination.” That is why, speaking concretely, I was never capable nor will I ever be capable of depicting ordinary love in art, ordinary charm, because that love, that charm are cast into the underground, stifled, choked, that is why in this thing I am not ordinary but demonic (grotesque demonism!); by showing the dangerous tensions of uncensored charms, by dragging a compromising lyricism out into the daylight, I wish to derail you. This is the rock that I am putting on your train tracks. To pull you out of the arrangement in which you find yourself, so that you experience youth and beauty, but experience it differently. . . .

Sunday

At Stanisław Odyńiec’s in Mar del Plata. Late yesterday evening on the beach in front of the casino: the usual whisper and splash. The rising and falling chest of black water. A sudden burst of foam arcs and sizzles at my feet. There in the south, the silhouette of houses on a hill, here, before me a mast and flag, to the left the rising and falling, broken pilings . . . sudden thunder. Spring! The summer season will not begin for another two months, so no one is here, it is still

empty and quiet, the closed windows of hotels peer onto the beach where a dog meanders and the wind moves ropes, whistles through cans left from last year's preserves, ruffles papers. . . .

The enormous emptiness of the city, deprived, emptied of six hundred thousand people, the death of these streets, squares, establishments, houses, stores, closed, blocked and gagged with human absence at the ocean, which regained the inviolability of its own existence and is only for itself. Quietly it invades the sand of the coast. . . . Wait! What is going on here? Something is happening but I don't know what. . . .

What exactly? I am walking on the beach along the boundary of that foam and I am looking for the appropriate feeling in myself. What, what are you supposed to experience on the sand, which is under your feet again, in the fish and salt smell of wind eternally the same. Can one experience eternity? Or perhaps dying? Or uncover God in this? Know one's own nothingness or greatness? Know space or time? Yet I cannot . . . something is in the way . . . that one terrible thing . . . that it is already known, that it was said not once, but a thousand times . . . and even printed!

And I have to be original!

So I walk further along the edge of the same foamy line, head down, looking at the sand, listening to the eternal process but with a shackled heart—because I must be original, I am not allowed to repeat what someone else has said, and the most genuine emotion is forbidden to me only because someone else has experienced and expressed it. Wait, think this over . . . why, no one sees you here, there isn't a living soul in those windows, there is nothing on the streets except asphalt and there are no crowds in the city—why shouldn't you allow yourself an ordinary thought about eternity, nature or about God, why are you straining and pursuing something new, unseen and astounding . . . even here on the coast where a dog wanders? Look: here I stop in a salty freshness and silence, I take in at a glance the entire expanse of that loneliness and I waver . . . should I not surrender myself to one of those ordinary and known truths? And now I smile . . . this is because (I remembered) that in one week in the Polish club in Buenos Aires there will be a discussion of my books; and it is as if I were hearing the sour lamentations: that he works so hard to be original, that he has lost simplicity and thinks up feelings, and all *pour épater*. . . . Now I am approaching a rocky shore, where there

is a great noise, water pounding at the boulders and crags. Iodine shoots into the air. Again the same summons in unchanging waves: be ordinary, be like the rest, you can, you know, there is no one here, now is the time for you to experience something that has been experienced for centuries. . . .

But I have to be original!

No way! Nothing doing! So what if the city is without people? This absence is unreal, they are in me and behind me, they are my tail and crest and they shout: be unusual . . . be new, think something up. Experience something unknown! I smile with a certain embarrassment and look around timidly, I burrow my head into my shoulders, after which, in the glory of my acting and in the descending night, I turn my face to the water. I stand that way in all the pride of my unsimplicity—as he who is coerced into originality—as an instrument of a terrible and incomprehensible collective spirit, who, wrestling with the eternal sameness of the ocean, pushed forward to solutions unknown to it, bored with a violent impatience for that which is already known to it—desiring everything that is beyond it. I stand, annihilating today's feelings in myself for the sake of tomorrow's, killing the present tense. . . .

After which I walked home, through the emptiness of those streets—but I did it as if I were being watched.

Saturday

My anger at women is the same anger that incites me to attack an affected poem, an ingratiating novel, all ineffectual art. They irritate me. The style of this type of femininity is bad. Yet the point is not to take up once again the eternal duel, man versus woman, which warned our grandparents. If I am carrying on about this, it is for other, more urgent, reasons.

Woman is a key to man. This key can open a great deal, especially now in the current day and age. For whom? Poles.

One of the great problems of our culture is: opposing Europe. We will not be a truly European people until we separate ourselves from Europe because being European does not mean fusing with Europe, but being one of its integral parts, a very distinct, integral part. Also: it is only our opposition to the Europe that has created us that may result in our finally becoming people with lives of our own.

Therefore: Oppose the Polish woman to the European woman; or the Eastern European woman to the Western woman; reach a point where she becomes a separate inspiration. If you change the woman, you will change your taste, all likes and dislikes, you will attain new habits in life and art. Does such a possibility exist?

If I did not notice the possibility, why would I rave about matters that were impossible to realize? I feel that the Pole—in spite of the stagnation of his thought here, in exile, and in spite of the terror that suffocates him there in the homeland, in spite of the emptiness that sucks on him here and there—feverishly seeks himself. This means that we find ourselves in a state of radical, basic, even reckless thought, and for us, there is no decision that is too extreme.

Can we change our woman? Can a woman change for us?

Up until now (speaking roughly and somewhat symbolically), Paris has imposed a woman on us. That is why Paris reigns supreme in our imagination: this already repulsive song of Sarmatian Parisians intoxicated with charm, the electric spark of Ville Lumière. Paris is electro-erotic magic . . . nevertheless, have courage, become anti-Parisian. Try to see that entire erotic repulsiveness.

Listen to the amorous language of the French bedchamber. Does it move you? Amuse you? Move you to tears? Or would you be more inclined to vomit it up, as one of the monstrosities of the world: that love in a negligée, those triumphant underpants, those bourgeois capers in the ecstasy of heat? Tune in now to their more sophisticated language of love. Which do you prefer? The intellectual-sensual language, which is the wisdom of a wise bald man analytically examining his own fits of passion, or the charming language of salons, which is what if not a kicking up of frock coats, a dance of wigs, a male and female clothing shop, peppered to taste? The ugliness of the French love song is that it accepts the ugliness. The Frenchman has agreed to the ugliness of civilization, he has even come to like it. That is why a Frenchman does not relate to a naked woman, but to a dressed or undressed one. The French Venus is not a naked girl, but a Madame with a beauty mark who is *fort distinguée*. It is not the smell of the body that excites him, but perfumes. He has come to adore all the artificial beauties such as *charme*, elegance, distinction, wit, costume, *maquillage*—the beauties with which biological decadence and middle age mask themselves. French beauty, therefore, is a forty-year-old beauty. And if that beauty has conquered the world then it is because

it is resignation. This is something accessible to older, wealthy ladies as well as to paunchy, middle-aged *causeurs* and *bon vivants*. One can live this up well into old age. Resigned and realistic beauty sings: if you don't have what you like, then you like what you have!

It is this French beauty, this type of French woman that has impressed itself upon our Slavic wives of attorneys and upon the attorneys themselves. But Slavs! Didn't at least your Slavic lyricism protest?! Why, an obsession with a different woman-girl lives in you. Why, you are idealists in erotic matters. Isn't it exactly this erotic idealism of yours that causes your inefficacy in culture, which is and will remain the art of satisfying yourself with substitutes. Here all categoricalness of taste does not pay off. We did not know how to come to terms with reality, that is, civilization, that is, with ugliness, and while the French slyly, intelligently, matter-of-factly perfumed, painted, and dressed up their nature (and did not look them in the mouth), we dreamed . . . about immaculate Olenka, simple Zosia, native Basia . . . about (German's) Ivona and (Zarzycka's) Wild One. Even though these were our dreams, in the reality of our societal life, French beauty won out. Why was a nation of Wokulskis incapable of overcoming the Parisian woman in itself? Exactly because she was closer to reality. Our "type" was good for dreaming, theirs for living.

Today, however, as a result of war and revolution, the roles have changed. Now, I believe, we have reality on our side, against Paris. Our idealism was violated. Our daydream was trampled. What the devil! For a few solid years of the German occupation, you were touching naked being with an ungloved hand. The padded mattress that isolated you had vanished. Antaeus's touch should have filled you with power. After the war came Communism, that is, a further negation of idealism and the dragging of woman down from heaven to earth. At any rate, from a higher sphere to a lower one, into the sphere of the proletariat. And this relates as much to women at home in Poland as to those who, in emigration, work as seamstresses, maids, salesclerks. . . .

I know several of them.

To what does this ex-lady aspire in the new circumstances? Not to stop being a lady for even a moment! She wants to dress elegantly, even though that elegance must of necessity be impoverished. She wants to be fashionable, even though she cannot afford to buy the latest fashions. Her hats have remained

Parisian, even though this is Paris third-hand. Her type still sighs after the salon, even though this can only be a salon déclassé. Her tastes and aesthetics are still from the previous epoch: delicate. You can talk to her for hours and it would never occur to you that she has experienced something else, something very ruthless.

If only you were more creative, O Polish woman. . . . At least—more deliberate in leaning on your own strong points in your match with the world. I don't want to tempt you . . . but couldn't you rebel inwardly against the woman you are, since you are no longer that woman? I demand nothing else from you except a spark of rebellion, to liberate your own reality. Be a woman "not of this world," not of the world of the Western bourgeoisie. From what world are you supposed to derive? From the proletariat? How can that be if that, too, is not your element? Try to be beyond one and the other, or rather, between one and the other. Allow your situation to dictate your style.

It is not at all a matter of knowing what you want. It will be enough if you know what you don't want. The rest will take care of itself. Turn against the beauty that is inaccessible to you. In this way, you will bring about a reform of womanhood.

Monday

Yesterday at the Polish Club, I dropped by right at the end of the steam-rolling of my soul and works. The paper that was positive about me was the work of Karol Świerczewski and Mrs. Jezierska read a paper against. A discussion followed at whose conclusion I appeared.

Thomas Mann, an experienced connoisseur in these matters, said that an art that grows in the light of recognition from the very beginning will undoubtedly be different from an art that must win a place for itself with difficulty, and at the price of much humiliation. How would my work have looked if from its very inception it had been crowned with a laurel wreath; if even today, so many years later, I did not have to devote myself to it as to something forbidden, shameful, and inappropriate? When I got to the auditorium, however, the majority greeted me in a friendly manner and I had the impression that things had changed quite a bit since the time fragments of *Trans-Atlantic* appeared in *Kultura*. I attribute this

especially to the diary. I was also informed that the majority spoke out for me in the discussion.

Immersed in the rising and falling crowd, I felt somewhat like the mariners in the *Odyssey*: how many tempting sirens in these friendly faces coming up to me, coming to me! It would not be difficult to throw my arms around these people and say: I am yours and I have always been yours! Careful! Do not be bribed with sympathy! Don't allow nauseating sentimentality and sweet understanding with the masses, in which so much of Polish literature has drowned, to dissolve you. Be foreign forever! Be reluctant, distrustful, sober, sharp, and exotic. Hang in there, boy! Don't allow yourself to be tamed, domesticated. Your place is not among them, but outside of them. You are like a rope, which children call a jump rope: it is thrust ahead so they can jump over it.

Tuesday

Feuilletons. I hear the menacing grumbling of leashed lions from the feuilletons. I do not know if someone is keeping them at bay or if they themselves prefer to restrain themselves from jumping, content for the time being with their deadly allusions. This past and current year, the émigré press is rife with conspiring poisons directed at me. I read, for example, in a certain article, about the "faces made at the traditional Polish position by certain émigrés, aspiring to the title of intellectuals." Who are they talking about? Or the item about "dogmatic iconoclasts and sacristans of suspect initiations." Who could that be? I read further that a certain archmodern drama is very boring and incomprehensible or, too, that X's novel is a thousand times better than a certain novel aspiring to innovation, which is muddled and in the worst taste. What play, what novel are they talking about?

I don't wonder. I, in their position, would be equally irritated. Everything was functioning normally in our sleepy kingdom of emigration, roles had been appropriately distributed, the brotherhood was paying homage to itself to everyone's general satisfaction, when from out of the blue, from out of Argentina, pops a guy who does not belong to the gang. This fellow, who self-proclaims himself a writer and asks none of the columnists' permission, not only publishes a play and novel, which break rank and offend people, but also impudently begins publishing

a Writer's Diary, without being acknowledged by the body politic! What's more, each word of that diary is written against the grain. What a scandal! One has to admire the phlegmatic nature of these lions. I thought that they would tear my pant cuff to shreds and instead, all I get is a columnist's barking from the other side of the fence.

If Polish émigré writing were not to a great (great!?) degree a stagnant pond, reflecting yesterday's moon; if it were not mere blather, empty talk, babbling; if it were not a mere bovine mastication of yesterday's food; if you were capable of something more than a delightful *feuilleton*, sitting up on its two hind legs, ingratiating itself to the reader, I would have been engaged in decent and outright warfare with you long ago. Instead of meandering anonymous pinches from the rear, they would hit me from the front. I would have a real polemic to deal with, which would not ask how to ridicule and slander the enemy in the eyes of the public with insinuations, but which would loyally seek his truth and strike at him with all the force of inner conviction. Such a polemic, however, exceeds the strength of the *feuilletons*. The *feuilletons* do not aim to get to my truth, only to my a—, in order to pinch it. *Feuilletons* cannot polemicize with me, as their sly and idiotic calculations dictate to pass me over in silence so as not to advertise my existence. For the *feuilletons* everything is generally reduced to personal details, to stupid tactics and equally dumb strategy. *Feuilletons* would have to begin with a more thorough acquaintance with my literature and reflection of which they are incapable; they know only allusions, grimaces, jokes, kicks, and other pirouettes. *Feuilletons*, for the most part, prefer not to examine me seriously, because then it would turn out that I am no scandal, but only an honest, though perhaps unsuccessful (no one is infallible) attempt to renew our thought and adjust to our reality. The *feuilletons*, however, prefer to let me remain a scandal because this matches their demimonde psyche and allows them to make faces.

This drowning out of our public life by a *feuilleton* will end badly. Everything will change into a hash, and into an eternal bowing and scraping before the reader. There is no way that in these circumstances something unlike journalism can be born. It is anecdote, not even the former pompous clichés, that reigns. We are a group of tourists showering each other with jokes and sayings. In this vacuum of our thoughtlessness, in the pile of blasé, *feuilleton* nothingness, our eternal lyrical Poem has plopped itself down and howls like a soaked dog.

Friday

The pugnacious essay “Against Poets” arose from my irritation because for many Warsaw and un-Warsaw years the poets teased me with their insistent and consistent “poeticity.” I had had enough of it. This is, first of all, a reaction to the milieu and its unhappy genre. Yet that anger forced me to vent the whole problem of writing poetry.

Why did the battle, which had developed in the press from this article, not introduce anything worthy of attention?

My opponents, if they had actually wanted to understand my position, would have had to conceive of it against the background of the great revision of values that is taking place now in all fields. What is it based on? On the uncovering of the backstage of our theater. On the revelation that phenomena are not that which they would like to appear to be. We are reassessing morality, idealism, consciousness, psychism, history. . . . A hunger for reality has been born in us, the wind of doubt has blown, and it is this that has undone our masquerade. . . .

Should only art remain a taboo? Shouldn’t art be revised before all else? One more revision, an even more drastic revision? Yet this is an Augean stable! Nothing is as stupid as this: our cohabitation with art.

You say that this institution of verified poetry has functioned for thousands of years and that everyone adores poetry? This in itself is a good reason to try to bring this adoration under scrutiny. You cite the names of famous poets. Poets more famous that they have vanished in the flames of our growing distrust.

I would wait in vain for my question to be enriched by those who have surfaced with the polemic. They knew only how to narrow it to such arguments, for instance: Gombrowicz claims that no one likes poems, but when I declaimed poems to the soldiers, I saw on their faces, etc., etc. Or: Tasso’s octaves were recited from memory by simple Tuscan shepherds. When I want to decode the real meaning of our relations with rhymed poetry, to get beyond the facade, to check what our feelings are and, what is more, how far we can trust them, you give me shepherds and soldiers.

It is too bad that a matter that is difficult and profound should appear in the playground of journalistic polemic (my fault). If I started this, it was to separate myself from an area that reeks of mystification. A revision of rhymed poetry can

take place only within the framework of an incomparably more universal revision, encompassing our relation to art and, generally, to reform.

Nevertheless, my antipoetic conclusions seem to me to be worthy of examination. You cannot manage this in five minutes with a few scribbles of a capricious pen, this is a new thought, one based on authentic experience.

Friday

Another reproach in this polemic drew my attention, namely, the one that Łobodowski aims at my “geniuslike grimacing,” which means that I woo “brilliance” and betray tendencies to megalomania. I assume that this is not the last time I will be showered with invectives of this kind—I, and certainly my diary.

I agree. The indecency with which I bare my appetites for glory, discovery, even brilliance may be disturbing to a conventional way of seeing things, which relies on a tactful modesty. Never fear, O modest ones, I, too, know how to put on a humble face, no worse than yours, except that it is no longer useful in my relation with the reader to whom I want to be more real, secured in the real play of forces in literature.

Perhaps there is more modesty in my “airs and miens” which betray ambition than in your tactful concealing of it. . . . On a more general note, when dealing with a conscious man, who knows what he is doing and why, do not resort to such cheap tricks as pinching.

Thursday

From my letter to K. A. Jeleński:

“Ah, if only I could focus, concentrate, and, above all, tear myself away from readers! This diary is 30% of what it ought to be, it could be pushed into a more absolute sphere; my problems, an entire array of issues, and my becoming before the eyes of the public demand greater radicality, a sharper differentiation from the normal writing process. Exhausted from working to make a living, however, and writing every month, almost under the title of a *feuilleton*, being so directly tied to the reader and dependent on him—what am I to do? I am scattered. I should reveal myself more and bare myself, but these things cannot be done

halfheartedly. I console myself that one day, maybe slowly, gradually, I will be able to lead the diary into the right areas and I will be able to impose on them with the appropriate acuity that process of kneading and forming of my public being.”

(Written just a little to draw him even more into my affairs, with the calculation that this program will interest him and that this is the tone that he expects from me. I have to take care of Jeleński, who understands me, who is working his way up, whose position in Polish and French letters is delineating itself. With calculation or without, the above passage contains the truth.)

1955

XIV

Saturday

I find out from Tito that Cesar Fernandez Moreno recorded our conversation about Argentina and that he intends to publish it in a certain monthly. I called him with the request to show it to me before he prints it.

You don't know anything at all about my coexistence with the Argentine literary world. Yes, I realize that until now you have not been let in on this chapter of my biography. I don't doubt that you will listen to this gladly. Have I been able to draw you into myself enough so that everything that concerns me is not indifferent to you?

As you know, I arrived in Buenos Aires on the liner *Chrobry* a week before the war broke out.

Jeremi Stempowski, at that time the local direct of "Gal," took me under his wing and it was he who introduced me to one of the leading writers, Manuel Galvez. Galvez was a friend of Choromański, who had spent more than a year here before my arrival and had made many friends. Galvez showed me the finest hospitality and helped me in many ways, but the deafness he suffered pushed him to the sidelines, into isolation, so he passed me on to an equally well-known poet, Artur Capdevila, who was also an "amigo de Choromański." "Ah," said Mrs. Capdevila, "if you are as charming as Choromański, you will have no trouble winning our hearts."

Unfortunately, things went otherwise. I cannot blame the Argentineans. They would have had to have applied a much greater dose of perspicacity than is required by the hurried mill of big city socializing to find their bearings in my madness at that time and they would have had to have been angels of patience in

order to become accustomed to it. At fault was the “constellation” that arose in my lost sky. . . .

When I sailed from Poland to Argentina, I was utterly demoralized. Never (with the exception, perhaps, of the time spent in Paris many years earlier) did I find myself in such a state of disarray. Literature? I wasn’t at all interested in it. After the publication of *Ferdynand*, I decided to rest. The birth of that book was a strong jolt: I knew that it would be a long time before I was capable of mobilizing new contents in myself. I was also still poisoned with the venoms of that book. Had it wanted to be “young” or mature, I really did not know. Had it been a compromising expression of my eternal enchantment with young, therefore charming, inferiority, or a striving toward a proud but tragic and unprepossessing mature superiority? When on the deck of the *Chrobry*, I passed German, French, and English shores, all lands of Europe, frozen in the fear of the crime yet unborn, in a climate of stifling expectation, seemed to shout: be reckless, you are nothing, you will do nothing, the only thing left to you is drunkenness! I did get drunk in my fashion, that is, not necessarily on alcohol—but I sailed drunk in an almost complete stupor.

Then the boundaries between countries and the tablets of commandments shattered, the floodgates of blind forces opened and—ah! I was suddenly in Argentina, completely alone, cut off, lost, ruined, anonymous. I was a little excited, a little frightened. Yet at the same time, something in me told me to greet with passionate emotion the blow that was destroying me and upsetting the order I had known up to now. War? The destruction of Poland? The fate of those close to me, my family? My own destiny? Could I take this to heart in a way, how shall I say this, in a normal way, I, who knew all this from the beginning, who had already known this? Yes, I am not lying when I say that I had been living with catastrophe. When it happened, I said something to myself like: Ah, so it has finally happened and I understood the time had come to take advantage of the capacity that I had cultivated in myself to separate and leave. Nothing had changed. The cosmos, the life in which I had been imprisoned did not become different because the defined order of my existence had come to an end. Yet the shiver of some terrible and feverish excitement was born of the feeling that violence liberates that unnamed and unformed something whose presence was not foreign to me, an element of which I knew only that it was “inferior,” “younger,” and moving now like a flood in the black and violent night. I don’t know if I will be speaking lucidly enough when

I say that from the first, I fell in love with the catastrophe that I hated, that, after all, also ruined me. My nature told me to greet it as an opportunity to join with inferiority in darkness.

Capdevila, poet, university professor, editor of the great daily *La Prensa*, lived with his family in a beautiful villa in Palermo and the breeze fluttering from that house smelled of *Kurier Warszawski* and Lourse's café. I remember the first time I went there for supper. How was I supposed to present myself to the Capdevilas? As a tragic exile from a country overrun by the enemy? As a foreign literary personage discussing the "new values" in art, informing himself about the country in which he was staying? Capdevila was full of expectations, Mrs. Capdevila was full of expectations that I would appear to them in one of these guises and, of course, they were full of a potential goodwill for the "amigo de Choromański." They were soon confounded to see before them a rather young man, who was no longer such a young man. . . .

What happened? Yes. I have to confess this: under the influence of the war, the strengthening of the "inferior" and regressive powers, an eruption of some sort of belated youth took place in me. I fled to youth in the face of defeat and slammed the door. I had always had the inclination to seek in youth, that is, in my youth and that of others, a haven from "values," that is, from culture. I have already written in this diary: youth is a value in itself, that is, a destroyer of all other values, which are not necessary to it because it is self-sufficient. I, therefore, in the face of the destruction of everything I had possessed up to now—homeland, home, social and artistic position—took refuge in youth and with all the greater urgency because I was "in love." *Entre nous soit dit*, the war made me younger . . . and two factors aided me in this. I looked young, I had the fresh face of a man in his twenties. The world treated me like a young man—for the overwhelming majority of the few Poles who read me, I was a crazy upstart, an altogether frivolous person—and for the Argentineans, I was someone completely unknown, something of a debutant from the provinces who must first prove himself and win recognition. Even if I had wanted to impose myself on these people as a value and as seriousness, what could I have done, since their language was unknown to me and we communicated with one another in a rather lame French. Therefore, everything, my appearance and my situation, and that complete ejection from culture and the secret vibrations of

my soul, everything pushed me into the recklessness of a young man, into a young self-sufficiency.

The Capdevilas had a daughter, Chinchina, twenty years old. It just so happened that, after a while, he and his wife passed me on to Chinchina and she, in turn, introduced me to all of her friends. And imagine Gombrowicz in that mortal year 1940, casually flirting with those girls, who showed him the museums, took him out for pastries and for whom I gave a talk about European love . . . a large table in the Capdevilas dining room, twelve women and myself at the table—what an idyll!—speaking about *l'amour européen*. However much this scene seems to be a shameful contrast with those scenes over there, basically it was not so far removed from that. It was merely a different form of the same defeat, the beginning of a road that also led to the bottom. A kind of complete trivialization of my being took place. I became light and empty.

At the same time, I was sinking into Argentina, distant from all that, exotic and forgiving, indifferent and given up to its own everydayness. How did I come to know Roger Pla? Probably through Miss Galignana Segura. It is enough to say that he got me into the house of Antoni Berni, a painter, and there, too, I gave a talk about Europe to a group of painters and literati. Everything I said was very bad, however, yes, exactly at the moment when it was important to gain a certain amount of recognition, my style deceived me and my words became so feeble that it was almost compromising. What did I talk about? About the regression of Europe, about how and why Europe suddenly desired savagery and in what way this pathological tendency of the European spirit can be exploited to revise culture that is torn away from its base. In saying this, I myself was probably a sad specimen of regression and also its shameful illustration. It was as if, as if the words were betraying me and wanted to prove that I was not on the level of those issues, that I was beneath what I was discussing. To this day I remember how on the Diagonal Norte, Pla accused me of harboring stupid and naive sentimentality in my reasoning. I, on the other hand, acknowledging inwardly that he was right, and even suffering along with him, knew that this was inevitable. There are periods in which our personality is divided and one-half of our being trips up on the other half, as if it had chosen a different path and a different goal. There, at Berni's, I made the acquaintance of Cecilia Benedit de Debenedetti, in whose home on avenida Alvear a motley crowd of bohemians

gathered. Cecilia lived in a kind of stupor, amazed, terrified, stunned by life, surrounded on all sides, waking up only to fall into another and more fantastic dream, fighting, Chaplin style, with the issue of existence. She was incapable of bearing the fact that she existed, a woman of marvelous attributes, outstanding virtues, a noble and aristocratic soul. Because she was devastated and terrified by the very fact of existence, it was all the same to her who surrounded her. Parties at Cecilia's? Some of it remains in my memory, the dancing Joaquin Perez Fernandez, Rivas Rooney, dead drunk, some very young girl, very pretty and partying into unconsciousness . . . yes, yes, and those parties merge with many others in other places and I see myself, shot glass in hand, and I hear my own voice, coming to me from afar, blended with the voice of Juliet.

I: *See those two young girls there in the corner? Do you know them?*

Juliet: *Those are the daughters of the woman who is talking to La Fleur. I will tell you what they say about her: she took two boys off the street to a hotel and shot them up to excite them . . . but one had a weak heart and died. Can you imagine? An investigation, police . . . but she has connections, the whole affair was covered up, she left town and spent a year in Montevideo.*

I couldn't let on how important this news was to me and said only:

Well, you don't say!

Shortly thereafter I left the gathering and set out through the navy blue, still Argentine night and made my way to the Retiro, which you already know from *Trans-Atlantic*: "And there the hill sloped toward the river and the city steps down to the port and a light breeze from quiet waters winds like a song through the tree-lined square. There were many sailors there. . . ." To persons who may be interested I would like to explain that never, with the exception of sporadic incidents at a very early age, was I a homosexual. I do not know, perhaps, quite how to deal with women, I do not know how to deal with them in the realm of feelings, as there exists in me a certain obstacle to sentiment, as if I were afraid of feeling . . . yet woman, especially a certain type of woman, attracts and rivets me. I was not, therefore, seeking erotic adventures in the Retiro, but—bewildered, divorced from myself, disinherited and derailed, fed by blind passions kindled in me by my crashing world and bankrupt fate—what was I looking for? Youth. I could say that I was looking for both my own and somebody else's youth. Someone else's because the youth in a naval or soldier's uniform, the youth of those archcommon boys

from the Retiro, was inaccessible, their sex, the lack of sexual attraction, excluded all possibility of joining and possessing. My own because it was also mine, it came to life in someone like me, not in a woman, but in a man, this was the same youth that had cast me off, now blossoming in someone else. For a man, youth, beauty, and grace in a woman will never be as final as their expression because a woman is still something else and she creates the possibility of that which to a certain biological extent rescues us: a child. Here in the Retiro, I saw youth in itself, so to speak, youth independent of sex and I experienced the blossoming of the human form in its sharpest and most extremely—because it was marked by hopelessness—demonic form. What's more, down, down, down! This pulled me down, to the lowest stratum, into the land of degradation. Here, youth, already degraded as youth, was subjected to a second degradation, as rural youth, proletarian youth. And I, Ferdynurke, repeated the third section of my book, the story of Mientus who tries to fraternize with the stable boy.

Yes, yes! This is where I was led by a set of tendencies to which I submitted, while in my former homeland degradation was reaching absolute bottom and only a pushing upward remained. This was my new homeland, which slowly came to replace the other. How often I left the artistic or social gatherings to wander the Retiro, on Leandro Alem, to drink beer and, with the greatest absorption, garner the glances of the Goddess, the secret of blossoming and degraded life. In my memory, all those days of my being in Buenos Aires were lined with nights at the Retiro. Nevertheless this blind and deaf obsession was beginning to dominate me utterly and even though my mind still worked, I realized that I had gotten bogged down somewhere on a dangerous periphery. Naturally, the first thing that came to my mind was that I was paving the way for subconscious homosexual tendencies. Perhaps I would have greeted this fact with satisfaction, as it would have placed me in a specific reality, but no, at the same time, I established close ties with a woman, whose intensity left nothing to be desired. During this period I generally spent a lot of time chasing girls, in even a pretty scandalous manner. Please forgive these confessions. I do not intend to give you a tour of my erotic life, it is simply a matter of delineating the limits of my experience. If at the start, I took refuge in youth from values inaccessible to me, then shortly thereafter it appeared to me as the only, highest, and absolute value of life and its sole beauty. That "value," however, had one characteristic, probably devised by the devil himself, that, being youth, it

was always something beneath value, it was intimately connected with degradation, it was degradation itself.

It was probably in 1942 that I became friends with Karol Mastronardi: this was my first intellectual friendship in Argentina. The few poems Mastronardi had written had assured him a significant place in Argentine art. A little over forty, subtle, bespectacled, ironic, sarcastic, hermetic, perhaps a little like Lechoñ, this poet from Entre Ríos was the provinces, adorned with the most Parisian Europeanism. He was angelic goodness garbed in the armor of causticity, a mollusk, protecting his oversensitivity. He was curious about the rare, at that time, example of a cultured European in Argentina and we frequently met at a bar late at night which also had the gastronomic significance of his occasionally treating me to ravioli or spaghetti. Gradually I revealed my literary past to him. I told him about *Ferdydurke* and other matters and all that was Slavic in me and different from the French, Spanish, and English art that he knew interested him profoundly. He, in turn, introduced me to backstage Argentina, a difficult and elusive country to intellectuals, and even terrifying to them in many ways. Yet the game was much more masked on my part, because it was forbidden. I could not say everything. I could not reveal that place in me, smelling of night, which I called “Retiro.” I offered Mastronardi the work of my derailed brain, which sought “solutions,” without mentioning the sources of my inspiration. He did not know where this passion came from in me, with which I struck at all “old age,” and with which I demanded that this current surging from below be made manifest in culture (which is based on the supremacy of superiority, the older old age, maturity), this current which, in turn, makes old age dependent on youth, superiority dependent on inferiority. I demanded that “the adult be subordinated to the Younger.” I demanded that this striving for our relentless rejuvenation finally be legalized and that youth be recognized as a separate and authentic value, which changes our relation to other values. I had to impose the semblance of reasoning onto that which was my passion in reality and this led me into the fathomless constructs, which were really a matter of indifference to me . . . but isn’t this the way thought is born: as an indifferent surrogate of blind strivings, needs, passions, for which we are unable to establish the right to exist among people. The exonerating factor in this dialogue was childhood, because Mastronardi, who was almost as childish as I was, luckily knew how to play with me, just as I played with him. Childhood, being something that is

related to youth, is however infinitely less drastic; that is why it is easier for a mature man to be childish rather than youthful; that is why I almost always became childish in the face of the demon of verdure whom I could not handle. However, as much as I wanted to be childish, how much was I really childish? How much did I want to be young and how much was I really some sort of belated youth? How much was this mine and how much was it something of which I was enamored? Mastronardi was on intimate terms with Victoria Ocampo's group, the most serious literary center in the country, concentrated around the monthly *Sur*, published by the same Victoria, an older and aristocratic lady—sitting on thick millions—whose enthusiastic stubbornness resulted in her becoming a friend of Paul Valéry; receiving Tagore and Keyserling in her home; having tea at Bernard Shaw's and being a buddy of Stravinsky. How far Mrs. Ocampo's millions weighed in these majestic intimacies and how much her personal attributes and talents, is a question that I will not attempt to answer. The relentless smell of those millions, the strong financial perfume of Mrs. Ocampo, prevented me from making her acquaintance, too. People said that one well-known French writer fell on his knees before her, crying out that he would not get up until he received twenty or thirty thousand to start a literary revue. He got the money because, as Ocampo said later, what was I supposed to do with a man who knelt and wouldn't get up?! I had to give him the money! As for me, that French writer's approach to Mrs. Ocampo seemed to me to be the healthiest and most sincere of the lot, but I knew from the beginning that, not being known in Paris, I couldn't extract a thing from her, even if I were to kneel there for months. I was, therefore, in no rush to go on the pilgrimage to the residence in San Isidro. Mastronardi, rightly fearing that *el conde* (for, as I have already mentioned earlier, I announced myself a count) was ready to act strangely and even incomprehensibly, also put off introducing my person to these gatherings. He decided to acquaint me first with Victoria's sister, Sylvia, married to Adolf Bioy Casares. One evening we went there for supper.

Later on I came to know many literati and a substantial percentage of Argentine literature, but I will dwell a little longer on these first steps of mine, as those that followed were not much different. Sylvia was a "poetess," and published a volume every so often. Her husband, Adolfo, was the author of pretty good science fiction novels. This cultured husband and wife spent all day in poetry, in prose, attending exhibits and concerts, studying French novelties, and filling the

gaps in their collection of records. This supper, however, was also attended by Borges, probably the most talented Argentine writer, with an intelligence hewn on his own personal suffering. I, on the other hand, justly or unjustly, considered my intelligence to be my passport, something that assures my simplisms the right to exist in the civilized world. Bypassing technical difficulties, my unruly Spanish and Borges's faulty pronunciation—he spoke quickly and incomprehensibly—bypassing my impatience, pride, and anger, which were the consequence of a painful egotism and restrictions in foreignness, what was the possibility of understanding between me and that intellectual, aesthetic, and philosophical Argentina? I was fascinated by the lower stratum in that country and this was the upper crust. I was enthralled by the darkness of the Retiro, they, by the lights of Paris. For me, that unconfessed, silent youth of the country was a vibrating confirmation of my own emotional states and thanks to them the country swept me up like a melody or like the herald of a melody. They saw no beauty in this. For me, if there was something in Argentina that attained the fullness of its expression and could appeal as art, style, form, this something appeared only in the early phases of development, in the young people, never in the adults. What is it that is important in a young person? Not his reason, nor experience, knowledge, technique, which are always worse and weaker than in an established and consolidated man, but exactly and exclusively his youth. This is his only trump card. Yet they saw nothing positive in this and that Argentine elite remained one rather of docile and diligent young people, whose ambition was to learn as quickly as possible from their elders. Ah yes, to equal France and England! Ah yes, to grow up, to grow up quickly! And how could they be young, if personally, of course, these were already people of a certain age and their personal status clashed with that general youth of their country, their belonging to a higher social class excluded a real fusing with the lower stratum. Therefore, Borges, for example, was someone who took into consideration only his own age, tearing himself completely from his base, this was a mature man, an intellectual and artist, who was accidentally born in Argentina, though he could have just as easily been born in Montparnasse.

Yet the atmosphere of the country was such that in it this international, sophisticated Borges (for, if he was an Argentinean, it was in a European way) could not capture the undertone. He was something extraneous, pasted on, he was an ornament. It would have been almost nonsensical to demand that he, being older,

should express youth directly, that he, being superior, should literally express inferiority. Yet I held it against them that they could not work out their own relationship to culture, in harmony with their reality, with the reality of Argentina. Even if from a personal vantage point some of them were mature, they still lived in a country where maturity was weaker than immaturity and here, in Argentina, art, religion, and philosophy were not the same as in Europe. Instead of transplanting them here live onto this soil and then moaning that the tree is rachitic—would it not have been better to raise something more in harmony with the nature of their land?

The docility of Argentine art, its correctness, its mien of a good student, its behavior, were, for me, a testimony of impotence regarding its own destiny. I would prefer a creative gaffe, a mistake, even sloppiness, anything that was alive with energy, intoxicated with the poetry which the country breathed and which they passed with their noses stuck in a book. Sometimes, I tried to tell this or that Argentinean the same thing that I often told the Poles: Interrupt your poem writing for a minute, your picture painting, your conversation about surrealism, consider first of all if this does not bore you, consider whether this is really so important to you, think about whether you would not be more authentic, free and creative, by ignoring the gods to whom you pray. Interrupt this for a minute in order to reflect on your place in the world and culture and the choice of your media and goals. But no. In spite of all their intelligence they did not understand in the least what I was talking about. Nothing could stop the flow of cultural production. Exhibits. Concerts. Lectures about Alfonsín Storni or Leopoldo Lugones. Commentary, classes, and studies. Novels and short stories. Volumes of poetry. And wasn't I, after all, a Pole and didn't they know that Poles are not, generally, *finos*, and generally not on the level of Parisian issues? Therefore they decided that I am an adequately muddled secondhand anarchist of the kind that, lacking deeper consciousness, proclaim *élan vital* and despise that which they cannot understand.

This is how the supper at the Bioy Casareses' ended: nowhere. Like all suppers consumed by me with Argentine literature. And this is how time passed . . . the night of Europe and my night passed, in the course of which my mythology was growing with terrible pains. Today I could present a whole list of words, things, persons, places which have the taste of a heavy, intimate holiness for me. This was my fate, my tabernacle. If I were to lead you into this cathedral, you would be amazed to see how unimportant, how outright impoverished, worthy of

condescension and actually silly in their petty everydayness were these *sacra* that I worshiped. Holiness, however, is not measured by the greatness of the deity but by the tenacity of the soul, which makes anything at all holy. “One cannot fight that which the soul chooses.” Toward the end of 1943 I caught a cold and a slight fever remained which did not want to subside. I played chess then in the Café Rex on Corrientes, and Frydman, the director of the chess hall, a noble and good friend, became worried about my state of health and got together a little money to send me into the Córdoba mountains—a trip that I took with pleasure—yet even there the fever did not want to subside until finally, bam, the thermometer that had been borrowed from Frydman shattered. I bought a new one and the fever vanished. This was how I came to owe a stay of a few months in La Falda to Frydman’s broken thermometer which registered a few degrees too many. The stay was spiced by the fact that in the neighboring Valle Hermoso lived a certain acquaintance, an Argentine woman, whom I came to know through Cleo, the sister of the dancer Rosita Contreras.

Staying in La Falda, I did not suspect that terrible and silly experiences were awaiting me.

Everything was falling into place. Liberated from financial difficulties, I took up residence at the hotel San Martín and shortly thereafter became acquainted with a pair of charming twins (I have already written about these two); with them and other young people we took walks and I made new friends in whom a nascent life quivered, like a hummingbird, on whom fell a smile, this smile being one of the most noble phenomena that I know, as it happens in spite of everything, in spite of, first of all, an immeasurable sadness, the crushing nostalgia and regret of those years, condemned to insatiety. You know the carefree vacations in the mountains or at the seaside. Your hat is stolen by the wind, a sandwich is eaten on a boulder, you get drenched in the rain. My understanding with Latin America, being the renewal of the fabulous European races, amazingly quiet and discreet in its now polite being, seemed to me spoiled by nothing (at the same time, my brother and nephew were in a concentration camp; my mother and sister—having escaped bombed-out Warsaw—were wandering in the countryside; and the roar of horror and agony was ringing out over the Rhine. I did not forget this, it magnified my silence). You don’t have to imagine that in spending time with these boys, I acted as if I were one of them; why, my sense of the ridiculous would never have

allowed me to do that. I acted like the older, despising them, sneering at them, teasing them, exploiting all the advantages of an adult. And this was exactly what fascinated them and healed their youthfulness. At the same time, outside of this tyranny, a secret understanding was established, based on our mutual need. Nevertheless, one day, having looked carefully in the mirror, I saw something new on my face: a subtle net of wrinkles, appearing on my forehead and under my eyes and in the corners of my mouth, just as under the influence of chemicals a seemingly innocent letter reveals its ominous contents. My accursed face! My face betrayed me, betrayal, betrayal!

Was it the dryness of the air? Or the lime in the water? Or had the inevitable moment simply arrived, in which my age shot through the lies of my youthful complexion? Ridiculed, humbled by the quality of this suffering, I understood, peering at my own face, that this was the end, the limit, finale, point and end point! On the roads leading from La Falda there is a line along which the lights of the houses and hotels end and the darkness of space begins, broken into hills and overgrown with gnarled trees, gnarled space, broken, like a cripple and marred. I called this line the “shadow line” after Conrad and when I crossed it at night, on my way to Valle Hermoso, I knew that I was entering death, oh, an insignificant, delicate, and slow death, if you wish, but I was entering dying . . . that I myself was the aging process and a live death, which was pretending to be alive, which still walks, talks, even has fun, a great time, but is really alive only as a gradual realization of death. Just as Adam had been expelled from Paradise, so I sank into the darkness, beyond the shadow line, deprived of life, which there, beyond me, delighted in itself in rays of grace. Yes, the mystification had to expose itself, one day this illegal and belated excursion into blossoming life had to be interrupted and now, lo and behold, I am the aging process, I, poisoned, I, repulsive, I—an adult! And this filled me with a terrible fear because I understood that I was finally thrown out of the charmed circle and that I could not appeal to nature, yes, if youth is less afraid of life, it is because it itself is an attractive life: disarming, charming and it knows that it is appealing and can count on kindness. This, therefore, was the reason that I was so attracted to the blossoming, but now, on this suddenly dry earth under a vault of merciless stars, I had to withstand the pressure of existing, myself a flawed being incapable of winning anything over, so unattractive!

And here we can see what a liberation sex is, that division into women and men. For when at the height of my way of the cross, I reached that familiar villa where my mistress awaited me, the entire panorama of my fate changed and this was like the incursion of another new power, of an alien power which turned my entire “constellation” upside down! Youth awaited me there but a different kind of youth, embodied in a human shape, but different from mine. Those shoulders, at once the same but exotic, also made me someone else, forced me in those embraces to harmonize with the foreignness as its completion. Femininity did not demand youth from me, merely masculinity and I became only a man, possessive, capable of possessing, annexing someone else’s biology, the monstrousness of masculinity, which does not take into account its own ugliness, does not care about being appealing, being an act of expansion and violence and, above all, of dominance, dominance seeking only its own satisfaction. It could be this brought me temporary relief. It was as if I had stopped being a human being, fearful, threatened, and became a lord, possessor, sovereign . . . and she, a woman, was killing the boy with the man. But this did not last long.

It lasted as long as Being divided itself by force of sex into two poles. When I returned home toward morning in the cool, predawn hours, everything closed in around me. There was no escape: I felt like a cheat or like someone who fell victim to cheating, and the consciousness of dying tore into me again. I was already supplied with a negative sign. I was in opposition to life. A woman was incapable of rescuing me, a woman could save me only as a man, but I was also simply a living being, nothing else. Again the desire for “my” youth returned, that is, for the kind like myself, for the kind that was now repeating itself in others, younger than I. This, therefore, was for me the only corner of life where a blossoming was taking place, my blossoming, that is, something absolutely charming and enchanting which I completely lacked. All else was degradation, compensation. This was the only triumph, the only joy in a monstrous, bedraggled, weary, despairing, and debased humanity. I found myself amid monsters, I myself a monster. Looking at the houses, cast into the valley, full of any old kind of boys, sleeping a banal sleep, I thought that my homeland had moved to them.

I returned to Buenos Aires convinced that nothing was left to me, nothing at least that would not be a surrogate. I rode with my humiliating secret, which I was ashamed to confide in anyone, as it was unmanly and I, a man, was, after all,

subjected to men and the loud and ribald laugh of those gruff males threatened me for having broken rank with their possessive codes. In Rosario the train was overrun by twenty-year-old sailors returning to their base in Buenos Aires.

This is enough for now, my hand hurts from writing, but this is not the last of my recollections from those not-so-remote years in Argentina.

XV

Sunday

I want to finish talking about my Argentine past.

You are already familiar with the spiritual state in which I returned to Buenos Aires from La Falda.

At that time I was a thousand miles from literature. Art? Writing? All of it remained boarded up, dead on that continent and I, Witold, yes, it is true sometimes I presented myself as *escritor polaco*, nevertheless. I was already just one of the many disinherited deprived of even a longing for the past that the pampa was receiving. I had broken with Poland and I knew that in agricultural Argentina literature could assure me neither social position nor material well-being. So why did I stick with it? In the second half of 1946 (as time passed) having found myself with completely empty pockets for the umpteenth time and not knowing where to extract a little money, I had the following idea: I asked Cecilia Debenedetti to finance a translation of *Ferdynand* into Spanish and I figured we would need about six months to do the job. Cecilia readily agreed. I set to work, which looked as follows: first I translated as much as I could from the Polish and then I took the manuscript to the Café Rex, where my Argentine friends worked over the text line by line, searching for the right words, grappling with the syntax, with the neologisms, with the spirit of the language. I began this hard work without enthusiasm in order to survive during the following few months and they, these American helpers, approached the job with resignation, that is, it was a matter of doing a *ganchada* for a victim of the war. When we translated the first few pages, however, *Ferdynand*, a book that had been lying in front of me indifferently, dead, suddenly began to show signs of life as a thing. I noticed a growing interest on the faces of the translators, ah, you see, now they are boring into the text with a distinct curiosity!

Shortly thereafter the translation began to draw people. At some of the sessions at the Café Rex, there would be over a dozen people. The man who took the matter to heart as his own, however, and whom I made the chairman of the “committee” (made up of a few literati), the man who worked on the final version, was Virgilio Piñera, a very talented Cuban. He was the first and then a Humberto Rodríguez Tomeu. Both men were from Cuba, both were Europeans in spirit who were locked in a fierce, desperate battle with the America that surrounded them and with the America in themselves. They and the Argentine poet Adolfo de Obieta were the ones most responsible for bringing this difficult and, as critics later claimed, quite remarkable translation to a conclusion.

As for me, I had not read *Ferdynurke* in seven years. I had crossed it out of my life. Now I read it again, line after line, and its words meant nothing to me. The nothingness of words. The nothingness of ideas, problems, styles, attitudes, the nothingness of art. Words, words, words. All of this solved nothing in me, this entire effort only sunk me deeper into my greenness. Why had I taken this immaturity by the horns? So that it could toss me around? In *Ferdynurke*, two loves fight with each other, two strivings: the striving for maturity and the striving for eternally rejuvenating immaturity. This book is the image of the battle for the maturity of someone who is in love with his own immaturity. It was clear that I had not been successful in winning over this love, nor had I civilized it, and being wild, illegal, secret, it wreaked havoc in me as something secret and forbidden. So why had I written that book? And the ridiculous impotence of words in the face of life!

Nevertheless! A text that was so unimportant to me appeared very effective outside of me, in the external world, and lines that were dead for me came to life in others and how else could I explain to myself that suddenly the book became something valuable and personally close to some of those young people and not only as art but also as a revolt, revision, and battle. From them I was able to determine that I had touched certain cultural nerve centers and, at the same time, I saw how this enthusiasm, which would not have been very long lasting in each of them individually, began to consolidate itself “between them,” by virtue of the fact that one aroused the other and confirmed him in his enthusiasm. Yet if this is what was going on with this handful, why wouldn’t it repeat itself with others, when *Ferdynurke* was published? So the book could count on the same response here, abroad, as in Poland—or even better. It was, therefore, universal. It was probably

one of the few, one of the very very few of our books genuinely capable of moving strangers, readers, of the best class. And in Paris? I realized that *Ferdydurke*'s world career was not something from the realm of dreams (which I had known earlier, but had forgotten).

However, my nature, bound to inferiority, stopped dead in its tracks at the mere possibility of becoming superior and that repeated foray of literature into my life could turn out to be—this is what I was afraid of—the final liquidation of the Retiro. I will tell you something characteristic: when *Ferdydurke* was published, I took it to “where the tower stands that was built by the English” and showed it to the Retiro—in farewell, as a sign of a final breaking of relations. A fiery regret and fear. What an illusion! I didn't value the sleepy immobility of America enough . . . its juices, which dissolve everything. *Ferdydurke* drowned in this immobility, no reviews in the press or efforts of its advocates helped, this was, after all, the book of a foreigner, and nota bene, one unrecognized in Paris, yes, exactly, unrecognized in Paris. . . . It appealed neither to the group of Argentine intelligentsia under the sign of Marx and the proletariat, which demanded a political literature, nor to that one which nourished itself on the cultural specialties of European cuisine. The book was also furnished with an introduction by me, where I express myself about Argentina and Polish writing, without paying much homage to either. I finished the introduction with an appeal not to put me in the painful position of offering the courteous phrases usually offered in such cases. Because up to now the social role of art has been understood falsely and, as a consequence, you do not know how to treat the artists appropriately or know how to talk to them, I wrote, don't say anything to me. Save yourselves and me the embarrassment. If you want to let me know that the work appealed to you, touch your right ear; touching your left ear will mean a negative opinion; and touching the nose, a moderate opinion. Thus lightly, even carelessly, did I introduce *Ferdydurke* into the Argentine world, for this monstrous debut left me even more uncompromising toward the reader and his indulgence or lack of it.

I consider it a relative success that in these circumstances the edition was practically sold out and that my publisher did not lose money and was even able to pay me a little. After all, the average Argentine reader was not at all bad, on the contrary, he was capable of assimilating, and how much less hereditarily burdened and freer of complexes than Poles. Yet in a milieu in which no one trusted anyone

else (that disaster of secondary cultural milieus), where there were no people able to impose a value, *Ferdydurke* could not gain any authority. For difficult books that demand effort, authority is absolutely needed simply in order to force people to read. This way or that, once again I was drawn into the workings of literature. I began to outline the drama *The Marriage* quite clearly, and, I would say, shamelessly setting out for brilliance, aiming for a peak on the scale of *Hamlet* or *Faust*, a work in which I could express not only the pains of the epoch, but the new human sensibility that was being born. . . . How easy greatness and brilliance seemed to me, at least easier than correctness, which even a fairly good text demands. This did not result from some naïveté of mine but for the reason that greatness and brilliance together with all the other values were destroyed for me by the only demon that was really important to me, by that great destroyer of values, youth. I felt no respect for them because I was not especially dependent on them and, so, I could use them freely. It is not difficult to walk a plank up ten stories if one has stopped being afraid of heights—you walk it as if it lay on the ground. (But you cannot reproach *The Marriage* with this—it, at least, does not conceal this “easiness”).

It is enough that with the end of the European explosion that released the underground ferment, even I began to civilize myself. Yet, while my first debut, in Poland, was forced by pressure from inside out, the second, in Argentina, came to be because of pressure from external forces. In Poland I wrote from an inner need—here, now, I submitted myself to the existing order of things, which condemned me to literature. I continued myself from years ago. A tiny difference, yet one with an unfathomable and tragic significance, heralding that I had really ceased to exist and that I had spun out of orbit—I existed only as a consequence of that which I had done to myself earlier. I maintained a sense of humor, but first of all, I maintained the appearances of an absolving childhood. Literary work began to draw me into the dialectic of my reality and once again the question arose: what should I do in literature with my compromising ties to youth, with inferiority, to what degree could this lend itself to revelation? Was this only a complex, an illness, deviation, clinical case—or something that has the right to exist among normal human beings? The second question was: was I breaking down doors that were already open, or was this a difficult foray—as timid as a virgin—into wild terrain? In other words, did this lend itself to use in art?

Psychoanalysis! Diagnoses! Formulas! As if I had bitten the hand of a psychiatrist, who suddenly had the desire to scoop out my inner life. It's not that the artist should not have complexes, but that he be able to transform his complex into a cultural value. The artist, according to Freud, is a neurotic who treats himself, I guess because no one else can. Yet as if to spite me, in the instance of that hidden directorship, which I am not alone in discovering in life, I was shown an image of clinical hysteria through the wall around my feelings, as practically a warning: watch out, you are a step away from it! In other words, through the intervention of my friends from the ballet troupe, which came to Argentina for guest appearances, I entered a milieu of extreme, wild homosexuality. I say "extreme" because I had been rubbing up against "normal" homosexuality for a long time, the "artistic" world of any latitude is full of that kind of love—but here its face, frenetic to the point of madness, showed itself to me. I broach this subject reluctantly. Much time will pass before it will be possible to talk, let alone write about this. There is no other area that is so distorted and muddled with passion. Here no one desires to be or can be objective. *De gustibus* . . . The fury of "manly" men, contorted with revulsion—manifested, mutually nurturing and strengthening the masculinity in themselves—the curses of morality, all the ironies, sarcasms, and angers of culture, guarding the primacy of womanly charm—fall on the ephebe sneaking along the border of our official existence. And this thing takes on venom at the higher rungs of development. There, beneath, there, below, this is not understood as tragically, or as sarcastically, and the healthiest and most ordinary boys from the lower classes sometimes give themselves up to this for lack of women—and this, as it turns out, does not distort them at all and does not interfere later with the most conventional marriage.

However, the crowd that I had now met was made up of men in love with a man more than any kind of woman, they were *putos* at the boiling point, not knowing a moment's rest, in constant pursuit, "torn to pieces by boys as by dogs," just like my Gonzalo in *Trans-Atlantic*. I took my meals in a restaurant that was one of their main hangouts and every evening I immersed myself in the dregs of their madness, their solemn ritual, their enamored and tormented conspiracy, their black magic. There were first-rate people among them, with wonderful spiritual attributes that I observed with horror, seeing in the black surface of these passionate lakes the reflection of my own concerns. I asked myself once again: am I not, in

spite of everything, one of them? Wouldn't it be possible, bah even likely, that I was a madman like them, in which some sort of internal complication extinguished physical attraction? I had already come to know the power of the skepticism with which they accepted all "evasions," everything that, in their opinion, was a cowardly beautification of brutal truth. Yet—no. Why should my amorous attraction to young life, to what was unjaded, to that freshness, be unhealthy? My love of blossoming life, that is, the only life that deserves the name, as there is no phase in between: that which does not blossom, withers. Was it not the object of the concealed envy and no less secret adoration of all who, like me, were condemned to a slow dying, deprived of the grace of a daily augmentation of vitality. Was that boundary between entering and exiting life not the most essential of all? The only difference that came between me and "normal" men was that I adored the brilliance of this goddess—youth—not only in a girl but in a young man and he was an even more perfect embodiment than she was. . . . Yes, the sin, if it existed, boiled down to the fact that I dared to admire youth irrespective of its sex and I took it out from under the domain of Eros. On the pedestal where they had placed a young woman, I dared to put a boy. Here, there, it became clear that they, men, agree to adore youth only insofar as it is accessible to them, only insofar as they can possess it so that a youth contained in their own shape, youth with which they could not join, was, in some incomprehensible way, hostile.

Hostile? Watch out (I said to myself) that you don't fall into sentimental idiocy, into wishful thinking . . . why, I could see manifestations of kindness, and even tenderness, of the Older for the Younger all the time. But! But! At the same time certain facts were evident which meant just the opposite: cruelty. This biological aristocracy, this flower of humanity was almost always terrifyingly hungry—looking through the windows of restaurants at their elders who could eat their fill and amuse themselves until they dropped—while it was thrust into darkness by unsatisfied instincts, tormented by insatiable beauty—a flower trampled and cast aside, a degraded flower. The flower of maturing youth, drilled by officers and sent to death by the same, those wars being the wars of boys, wars of minors, above anything else . . . their training in blind discipline so that they knew how to bleed when the need arose. The entire terrible social, economic, intellectual advantage of the Adult manifesting itself with a cruel ruthlessness and accepted by those who submitted themselves. It was as if a boy's hunger, his death and pain had by

definition less weight than the death, pain, and hunger of the Adults, as if a puppy insignificance colored their sufferings. And it was exactly this unimportance, this puppy “inferiority” that made youth a slave, used for services that were somewhat beneath humanity which was already consolidated. I understood that this was happening almost by itself, simply because with the passing of years the weight and the meaning of a person increase in society but wasn’t there also the suspicion that perhaps the Adult was repressing the Younger so that he would not fall to his knees before him? Was not the suffocating vapor of shame arising from this and similar questions sufficient proof that something was being left unconfessed here and that not everything could be explained by the ordinary play of social forces? And was not this enormous wave of forbidden and shameful love, that really did cast a man on his knees before a boy, nature’s revenge for the violence wrought on the Maturing by the Aged?

The vagueness of these questions, their ambiguousness and even their arbitrariness, did not deprive them of meaning in my eyes, as if I had known from the beginning that there must be some truth to this. But the question became all the more troubling when I began to reflect on how far in our culture that opposition between entering and exiting life is mirrored. What was I after? What would I want? First of all, I wanted the fatal boundary, dividing two not just separate but opposing phases of life, to be acknowledged and made visible. Meanwhile, everything in culture indicated, instead, the desire to blur that boundary. The adults continued to live as if they were still living the same life as young people, not a different one. I do not deny that there is a vitality in an adult and even in an old man, however it is not really the same kind, it is readily a vitality that exists “in spite of” the dying. Yet it was exactly these already dying people who had the advantage. They wielded the power accumulated in the course of their lives and it was they who created and imposed culture. Culture was the work of the elderly—the work of the dying.

It was enough for me to bind myself emotionally to Retiro for one second for the language of culture to begin to sound false and empty. Truths. Slogans. Philosophies. Morals. Religions. Codes. All of this was as if it were in another key, imagined, said, written by people already partially eliminated from existence, who lacked a future . . . the heavy work of the burdened, the awkward work of the stiff . . . while there, in Retiro, all of that culture dissolved in some sort of young insuffi-

ciency, young undevelopment, young immaturity, it became “worse,” because someone who can still develop is always “worse” than his ultimate realization. The positively demonic secret of the Retiro was that nothing there could reach full expression, everything had to be substandard, introductory, undone, drowning in inferiority. . . . Yet this was precisely a lively life, worthy of admiration, the highest embodiment of it that is accessible to us. Nietzscheism and its affirmation of life? Why Nietzsche didn’t have the least idea about these things, it is difficult to imagine something more tawdry, ridiculous, or in worse taste than his superman and his young human beast, no, it’s not true, not completeness but inadequacy, worseness, inferiority, immaturity are appropriate to that which is still young, i.e., alive. Then I was not yet aware that various existentialisms (which did not become well known until after the war) were battering their brains over difficulties somewhat similar to mine, tied to the desire to understand life in the raw, in motion. Try to understand my loneliness and the internal contradiction which became a crack throughout my entire artistic undertaking: as an artist I was called to strive for perfection, but I was drawn by imperfection; I was supposed to create values, however something like subvalue or imperfect value was what I really valued. I exchanged the Venus de Milo, Apollo, the Parthenon, the Sistine Chapel and all the Bach fugues for one trivial joke expressed with the lips of those related to degradation, with lips that were themselves degraded. . . .

It is time now to end these confidences. Nothing of what I write here has been “solved” in me. Everything has remained in ferment until now. Perhaps elsewhere I will tell how in the following years the incursion of my homeland, of Poland, into my life removed me from the Retiro and partially returned me to other issues. If I have had to externalize these Argentine experiences, it is because it is important for a man speaking publicly—a man of letters—to lead his reader beyond the facade of form, into the boiling cauldron of his private history. Is it ridiculous, even humiliating? Only children or kindhearted aunts (whose spinsterish innocence is, unfortunately, an important factor in public opinion) can imagine that a writer is a calmly sublime being, a lofty spirit instructing about his “talent,” about what is Good and Beautiful from on high. No, a writer does not sit on peaks, but climbs to them from the bottom. Who would dare to demand seriously that we untie all the Gordian knots of existence on paper? Man is weak and limited. Man cannot be stronger than he is. An increase in man’s strength can

follow only when another man lends him strength. The task before a man of letters, therefore, is not to solve problems, but only to pose them so that they attract general attention and find their way to people. There they will be ordered and somehow civilized.

And I want to add in closing that the feeling of my own impotence in the face of this problem inclined me in the following years to back out of theories and into people, into the concreteness of human beings. Two clear and important tasks emerged from the fog of the Retiro: deciding whether or not I would be able to express myself more honestly in the future or whether I would be forced to hide myself. The first of these was obvious: to impose a first-rateness on that second-rate word "boy," to build one more altar onto all the official altars on which the young god of worseness, inferiority, insignificance, could stand in all of his power, bound to inferiority. Here was the necessary broadening of our consciousness: to introduce into art at least that second pole of becoming, to name the human form that binds us to insufficiency, to force others to pay homage to it! But here emerged yet another task, because even touching this subject with the tip of my pen was impossible without a prior liberation from "manliness" and, in order to be able to talk or write about this, I had first to overcome my own fear of insufficiency in this regard, my fear of femininity. Ah! I knew the masculinity that they, men, fabricated among themselves, goading each other into it, mutually forcing themselves to it in a panic-stricken fear at the woman in themselves. I knew men straining to attain Masculinity, convulsed males, giving each other lessons in manliness. This type of man artificially magnified his traits: he exaggerated his heaviness, brutality, strength, and seriousness, and it was he who raped, conquered by force. He was afraid, therefore, of beauty and grace, which are the weapons of weakness, he lost himself in male monstrosity and was becoming licentious and trivial or dull and clumsy. The highest realization of this "school" was probably those banquets of drunken officers from the czarist guards who tied ropes to each other's male organs and yanked on them under the table. Whoever could not bear it and cried out, paid for supper. One could say that the spirit of this enhanced masculinity appeared in everything in history. I saw how this panic-stricken masculinity deprived such men not only of a sense of measure, but of all intuition in dealing with the world: where he needed to be flexible, he inflicted himself, pushing and flaying noisily with his whole being. Everything became excessive: heroism, severity, might, virtue.

Whole nations threw themselves like bulls onto the sword of the toreador in paroxysms, in the mad fear that the audience might attribute something of the *Ewig-Weibliche* to them. . . . So I had no doubt that the magnified bull might charge me, too, if he scented my attack on his priceless genitalia.

In order to prevent this, I had to find a different position for myself—beyond man and woman—which would nevertheless not have anything to do with a “third sex”—an asexual and purely human position from which I could begin airing these stuffy and sexually flawed areas. So as not to be primarily a man, but a human being who just happens to be a man. Not to identify with masculinity, not to want it. If I could get out of this masculinity openly and decisively, its judgment of men would lose its bite and I could then say much about certain inexpressible things.

These projects, however, remained projects. Later in Argentina, the necessity of having to work for a living oppressed me to such a degree that all long-term and large-scale realizations of this project became a technical impossibility. I could not concentrate. Bureaucracy swallowed me up and overwhelmed me with its little papers and its absurdity while real life receded from me like the sea at low tide. I wrote *Trans-Atlantic* with the last remnants of my strength: you will find many of the experiences related here in that book. After that I was sentenced to part-time literary work, like this diary where I cannot communicate anything to you except a cursory, meagerly discursive, almost journalistic synopsis, on Sundays and holidays. Too bad. But let this at least be a clue to my entry into another, painful homeland, into Argentina, which was fated to me and from which I would not know how to tear myself away today.

Monday

Not without influence on the jotting down of these reminiscences is the fact that not long ago the police in Buenos Aires executed a huge cleanup of the local Corydonism. A few hundred people were arrested. But what can the police do when confronted with a disease? Arrest cancer? Fine people for typhus?

It would be better, therefore, to uncover the subtle bacillus of the disease than to quell the symptoms. But who is really sick here? Only the sick? Or the healthy as well? I do not share the narrow thinking that sees only a “sexual devia-

tion” in all this. Deviation, yes—but it has its source in the fact that matters of age and beauty are not adequately open and free in “normal” people. This is just one of our most burdensome silences and weaknesses.

Don’t you feel that here even your health becomes hysterical? You are inhibited, gagged, unconfessed.

I, therefore, want to speak out. I must say this though about the following: none of this is categorical. Everything is hypothetical. Everything is dependent—why should I conceal this?—on the effect it has.

That characteristic defines everything that I have produced as a writer. I have tried various roles. I assume various postures. I impose various meanings on my experiences and if one of these meanings is accepted by people, I live on in it.

This is what is youthful in me. *Placet experiri*, as Castorp said. I assume that this is also the only way of transferring an idea, that the sense of someone’s life, someone’s work is defined between one given human being and another. It is not only I who imposes meaning on myself. Others impose meaning as well. From the clash of these interpretations arises a third meaning, which delineates me.

XVI

Monday

The wail of sirens, whistles, streamers, corks popping from bottles and the tumult of a large city in great throes. The New Year 1955 enters at this very moment. I am walking down Corrientes Street, alone and distraught.

I see nothing before me . . . no hope. Everything is coming to an end for me and nothing wants to begin. An account? After so many tense years full of hard work, who am I? A clerk exhausted by seven hours of clerking, stifled in all writing ventures. I cannot write anything except for what I write in this diary. Everything suffers because for seven hours every day I commit murder on my own time. I have put so much effort into literature only to have it be incapable of assuring me minimal material independence, a minimum—even—of personal dignity. “A writer?” What do you mean? On paper! In life, zero, an inferior being. If fate was supposed to punish me for my sins, I would not protest. But I have been annihilated for my virtues.

Who am I to blame? The times? People? How many others have been even

more thoroughly ravaged. I have not been successful insofar as they wiped the streets with me and today, when I am finally respected here and there, there is no place for me. I am as homeless as if I did not live on earth but instead were suspended somewhere in interplanetary space, like a separate globe.

Wednesday

A letter from a woman in Canada (received in early December, which means she must have written it after reading the Diary fragments in the November issue of *Kultura*):

“My Dear Mr. Gombrowicz:

. . . I am writing because I am angry at you, and because I am worried that you are entering your ‘age of defeat’ so calmly, without embarrassment. So what. Are others supposed to do all the work for you? I gather, that is, fear that the Argentine pampa has already overcome you and you are forgetting that you should live a little before you die. It looks as if you are dying at a gallop—although, of course, that dying could be half a century at variance with the other dying after which you won’t even be able to write fragments from a diary, or even reminiscences of supper or a pair of shoes.

At first what you wrote had a polemical, controversial character, it provoked a reaction, even though it may have been negative, it was strong. The last ‘diaries’ provoke no reaction in me, beyond the amazement that you write that stuff and that Kultura prints it.

And I am very worried. Because if you so stubbornly insist on ruining yourself, then who will be able to help you? It seems to me that you are being obstinate. Is there a way out of this impasse?

Do you realize that lately you have been limiting yourself in these fragments to preaching: what the new art, literature, form, is, what it should be or what it should not be; and why this or that fellow seems absolutely lousy or not quite lousy.

Yet you yourself are not an art or literary critic. You are called a writer, you are supposed to create literature; therefore, you should create, not comment on what others have written (mainly what others have not written).

And what do you stand to gain from the knowledge of modern issues or

the spirit or tone of modernity. An artist feels the tone in which he can create—and whether or not that is a modern tone or one a hundred years ahead, is not his business. Nor is it whether or not other writers are in keeping with the tone or are atonal, or whether they exist at all.

If you feel like creating in some sort of modern way, it is insignificant whether you will be closer to Dali or Sartre—just so you create. Unfortunately, these échantillons found in the ‘fragments’ are made rather than created. There is in them no inspiration, conviction, or former panache. There is mainly negation.

I am convinced that you are ruining yourself and that only some sort of drastic catapulting can interrupt this process.”

She is worried? And she wants to catapult me? It is true that the diary in the November issue came out carelessly—a few loose notes and a vacation story about crocodiles. But why should I always shoot from a cannon? And what if I feel like coming out with a BB gun to shoot sparrows or a crocodile?

The letter is characteristic in many respects but above all as witness to that stifling pressure to which readers always subject the author. Don’t write this, write only that. . . . Be serious only. Inspired only. Don’t be a critic. Don’t think, why should you think . . . (I know this Polish school of non-thinking). A whole list of restrictions reminiscent . . . of what? . . . today’s restrictions on currency and commodity exchanges.

She would like me to write only things that are important (to her) and arouse controversy. But I am also writing my own story in this diary. That is, not what is important to her or you but to me. I need each of these monologues, each gives me a light impulse. Does my story bore you? That is evidence that you do not know how to read your own from it. She, for example, is outraged that I made public my supper and pair of shoes. You should have greeted me with peals of laughter-filled triumph and drumrolls because thanks to me a fact without significance for anyone but me was announced *urbi et orbi*. If one were allowed to write only about universal matters, what sort of literature would announce the existence of private soup and a private pair of shoes? Literature, after all, should include everything.

What is a diary if not this especially: private writing done for one’s own private use? This other starting point of the diary differentiates it from all other

genres—and how profound it is! Literature has a dual significance and a dual root: it is born of pure artistic contemplation, of the selfless striving for art, but it is also an author's personal settling of accounts with people, an instrument in the battle waged for a spiritual existence. It is something that matures in isolation, creation in and of itself, but it is also something social, an imposition on people, yes, a public creation of oneself with the help of people. It stems from a hunger for Beauty, Goodness, and Truth, but it is also a desire for fame, significance, popularity, triumph. The diary of a writer, expressing this other, personal aspect of literature, complements a work that is purely artistic. And we will receive a complete picture of creativity (the author's work) only if we see the author in these two dimensions: as a selfless, objective artist and a man fighting for himself among people.

But in that case don't demand that a diary be written only for your satisfaction, like a cheap novel or feuilleton, as it is also, perhaps even more so, a battle waged with you, a "getting you acquainted" with the author, filling you with someone else's existence, which needs you, but which may seem dispensable. And if you want this kind of private writing to exist at all, you would be wise not to interfere at all in my work. I would go crazy if I had to take every little whim—from the complimentary to the sour—into consideration. Make sure that my diary contains the indispensable minimum of intelligence and vitality, that is, as much as the average level of the printed word demands it—but as for the excess, leave me a free hand. I put many different things into this bag—a specific world to which you will grow accustomed only insofar as it gains power over you; until then much of this will seem superfluous to you, will even amaze you that it qualifies at all to be published.

Thursday

Should I tell or not? A year ago, more or less, the following happened to me. I stopped in a café on Callao Street to use the bathroom. . . . All kinds of drawings and scribbles were on the walls. Yet the unconscious urge would never have assailed me, like a poisonous dart, if I hadn't accidentally fumbled across a pencil in my pocket. The pencil turned out to be an ink pen.

Enclosure, isolation, the certainty that nobody would see, some sort of stillness . . . and the murmur of water whispered: do it, do it, do it. I took out the

pencil. I wet the tip. I wrote on the wall, high up so it would be hard to erase, I wrote something quite vulgar in Spanish like:

“Ladies and gentlemen, please comply . . .”

S— not on the toilet seat but straight in its eye!”

I hid the pen. Opened the door. I walked through the whole café and mingled with the crowd on the street. And the graffito remained.

From that time on, I exist with the awareness that my graffito is still there.

I hesitated to disclose this. I hesitated not for reasons of prestige but because the written word should not serve to spread certain . . . manias. But I won't hide the fact that never would I have dreamed that such things could be this . . . electrifying . . . and I can hardly refrain from reproaching myself. I wasted so many years without tasting this inexpensive and risk-free delight. There is something in this . . . something strange and intoxicating . . . resulting most likely from the horrible openness of the graffito, which is there on the wall, in union with the absolute secrecy of the perpetrator who cannot be found out. And also because this is not at all on the level of my work. . . .

Friday

Yet somehow I have made it. . . . This is almost like fame. At any rate, respect. It would seem, Gombrowicz, that you have triumphed on this home front and can now intoxicate yourself with the sight of those confounded faces . . . which considered you a clown not too long ago. Revenge is the delight of the gods! That hussy can no longer act brazenly toward you. That cretin had to back down from his opinion. I am walking in glory. But this glory . . . hmm . . . no, dullness cannot be conquered! It is invincible!

Yesterday I met Mrs. X., whose ears had picked up news of my many triumphs. After greeting me she looked at me with a certain approval and said:

—“Well, well . . . Congratulations . . . you have gotten serious!”

Accursed woman! So you still have not come to the conclusion that I was serious when you considered me a fop. You think I have gotten serious only since my triumphs!



She said: You have an easy life. I said: Why do you think that I have an easy life? She said: You have talent! You can write whatever you feel like writing and you have recognition and various daily amenities.

I said: But do you realize what it costs in effort to write? She said: When one has talent, everything comes easy. I said: Why “talent” is an empty word, in order to write one has to *be* someone, one must work on oneself unstintingly, even fight with oneself, it’s a matter of development. . . . She said: Tsk, tsk, why should you work if you have talent. If I had the talent, I would write, too.



You write? Everybody is writing nowadays. I myself have written a novel. I: Really? She: Yes, and I even got some pretty good reviews. I: Congratulations! She: Oh, I’m not saying this to fish for compliments, I merely wanted to emphasize that everybody is writing nowadays. It’s something that everybody can do.

Saturday

It would be lethal if I, taking after many Poles, delighted in the period of independence (1918–1939); if I did not dare to look it straight in the eyes with the coldest lack of ceremony. I ask that you not consider my coolness a cheap striving for effect. The air of freedom was given to us so that we could begin to come to terms with an enemy more tormenting than the taskmasters we have had up to now: ourselves. After our struggles with Russia, with Germany, a struggle with Poland awaited us. It is not surprising, therefore, that independence turned out to be more burdensome and humiliating than bondage. As long as we were absorbed with the revolt against a foreign power questions such as “Who are we?” “What are we to make of ourselves?” lie dormant, but independence awakened the riddle that was slumbering within us.

Along with the restoration of freedom arose the problem of existence. Because in order to really exist, we would have to make ourselves over. But such a make-over was beyond our power, our freedom was superficial, in the very structure of the nation were duplicity and violence which inhibited our undertakings. And our weakness warned us not to touch ourselves—because, well, everything was

ready to fall apart. We wore the Poland of that time on our chests like Don Quixote wore his armor, preferring not to test its strength, just in case.

The period of Polish independence was not a joyous creation, but a painful struggle with the invisible thread of our own inner slavery. A period of coded existence, a period of great masquerade. If I were writing the history of the literature of that time I would not ask why those writers were outstanding, but why, being outstanding, they could not be completely outstanding. One should write the history of that literature backward, that is, as the history of that which was not done. It would be better to be proud and to be firm in casting off everything that was really not to our size; only this approach will shield us from humiliation. If I were writing the history of literature . . . But I cannot write it because I am unfamiliar with the majority of those nauseating books, I know a little about Polish poetry and prose, but I looked through rather than read them and my concept of Polish writing is a synthesis of many impressions, of what I read, what was said, what was in the air. Who cares. One spoonful of soup is enough to know whether it tastes good—and why it doesn't . . . and I express myself not as a researcher and browser but as one who ate regularly in the cafeteria.

First one general thought: whatever the means of expression a literature chooses, realistic, fantastic, romantic, it must always be bound most intimately to reality—because even fantasy is important only insofar as it leads us into the essence of things more deeply than the commonness of a sober mind could do it. Thus the decisive moment for determining the authenticity of a literature or the spiritual life of a nation will be exactly this: how close were they to reality.

I would like to take a look at the period 1918–1939 from this standpoint.

Let us first occupy ourselves with the group of writers who formed the minds that were about to enter into independence.

Sienkiewicz. I have already written about Sienkiewicz. Sienkiewicz is the kind of daydream we allow ourselves to have before we fall asleep . . . or dream. . . . Fiction then? Lies? Self-deception? Spiritual debauchery?

Yet he is probably the most real fact of our literary life. None of our writers is even half as real as Sienkiewicz—I mean to say that he was truly read and read with pleasure. Therefore: it was not a real or even a deceptive world that he created, but a very real influence that he exercised. Was he an illusion or did he

really exist and more than the others? Let us take into consideration that fiction which changes something in the world also becomes reality. Sienkiewicz did not waste five minutes concerning himself with absolute truth. He did not belong to those whose predatory gaze rips apart masks and he did not have a penny's worth of solitude in him. He was social in essence, eager for company, and he wanted to please. It was more important for him to be joined to people than to be joined to the truth. He was a person who sought confirmation of his existence in someone else's being.

And because his nature did not seek truth, but a reader, he developed an incredible scent when it came to uncovering a need that he could satisfy. Thence his spiritual plasticity, that complete and completely sincere adjustment to that which made up the needs of the masses. And because he formed himself for people, he was also formed by people: this resulted in such a fabulous homogeneity of style, a form delightfully permeated with humanity and light, a capacity for mythologizing, a sense of one of the greatest and most difficult dangers to discover in art, the danger of boredom. Sienkiewicz is authentic insofar as needs (even if there is a need for duplicity) create values.

And here is the paradox: in this sense, the conservative Sienkiewicz is a precursor of the revolutionary today. This "believing" writer is subconsciously close to the philosophy that topples absolute values and lives with a dialectic of relative values, resulting from needs, where man becomes a measure of value. Sienkiewicz's faith? I am inclined to believe that for him God was a means of intimacy with the nation. Would a Bolshevik, atheistic Sienkiewicz be an impossibility? On the contrary, it is possible to the extent that if Polish Communist contemporaneity ever produces its great novelist, it will be precisely Sienkiewicz *à rebours*.

He, however, did not see himself this way. He was not aware of this. And if he had been aware, it would have finished him on the spot as Sienkiewicz. For Sienkiewicz is existence not in the world but in a certain world—in a segment of the world, in a simulated world that one accepts as the real world and whose roots, tying one to reality, one does not wish to know. Sienkiewicz was unaware of this mechanism, and this keeps him from being fully modern.



As for Żeromski . . . he was probably deeper and loftier than Sienkiewicz. But he is flawed, too, that is, the flute, made of two types of raw material, does not sound purely.

What was welded together so poorly that it caused this dissonance? Żeromski is all sex, love, instinct, he was fashioned by Eros, this is his country, here he is at home, here he is most tender, delicate, eloquent. But the lover became a citizen, the hunter of amorous thrills changes himself into a teacher, the tracker of passionate frenzy becomes a social activist and his undulating, bitter, wavering lyricism begins to hover over Poland with a sow's concern. Out of this arose the glass houses, the repugnant mixture of rainbow and habitable house, which he attached to the landscape willy-nilly, that lethal metaphor.

The mixing of sex with the homeland . . . why didn't it produce anything? Love lyricism is only superficially individual, this state of the soul results from submitting oneself to the species: the species inflicts violence on a person in love and there is no significant difference between the soldier dying for his homeland and the lover who risks his life to possess his beloved. Both fulfill a call that is more important than anything personal—he who defends the group and he who prolongs its existence in children, born of women, to whom instinct inclined him.

But in Żeromski, the feeling of love is ultimate and tragic. Żeromski the distiller of amorous elixirs is naked. Żeromski the patriot is, it is true, conscience and heart, but he is also a man with a goatee, a citizen and “Polish” writer. When Żeromski divines love he is disinterested, ruthless, freewheeling, but when he talks about Poland a thousand viewpoints assail him—yet here one cannot be exclusively tragic, one must be constructive and positive. And that is why Żeromski's nakedness dons the Homeland just as one would a shirt. An unsavory sight.

He, who had nothing of the novelist and everything of the poet in him, began to write social novels—and they are strange, to say the least. They are lofty and shallow at the same time, made of incisive perceptions and engaging inspirations, yet, at the same time, everything that goes into them as a more massive element of the composition is naive and clumsy. Here individual sentences are inspired but the characters, the plot, the novel's ideas, psychology, sociology, dialogues, views of society are made banal and naive in some inconceivable way, as if Rodziewiczówna had butted into his inspiration and that Żeromskian heroic self-sacrifice, stuffed with social do-gooding, philanthropy, folk gatherings, noble

suffering, socialism, that's all unreal . . . and becomes not first-, but second-, class. He did not know how to choose themes. Here we have a high-caliber writer who could not find a place for himself in the subject matter.

These things become understandable to me when I imagine Żeromski's development as an artist, the early forming of his style. Fate placed him in the regions of sex and love, but slowly, as he developed intellectually, the pressure of other issues, concerning Poland, the people, injustice, and hurt, began to impinge upon him and his conscience began to torment him. That is what he wanted to write about! But how? Everyone knows that art demands coolness, an artist expresses himself with precision and force in inverse proportion to his emotional engagement in a subject. He must see objectively whatever there is to see, therefore he must be disinterested. Frankly speaking, of all emotions, the most inhibiting is respect. An artist must hold the reins of his subject and, what is more, he must delight in it. But who was Żeromski in the face of those issues? Was it possible to domesticate, annex, or subordinate them, to take them into one's hands? Or did one have to serve them and devote oneself and one's work to serving these higher issues? His conscience did not allow him to ignore these problems. Nor did it allow him to handle the material creatively and freely. And this is how respect and love weakened his hand. He didn't dare be adequately sensual, instead he became modest, docile, serious, and responsible. No play, no delight with his own mother and so these honorable contents invaded his art and personality *in crudo*, undigested, undistilled. That which he treated with respect did not enter his bloodstream and this love did not possess his Poland, he respected her too much.



As for Wyspiański . . . He was the antithesis of Sienkiewicz, who surrendered to his readers. Wyspiański surrendered to art and, note this well, to bombastic art. Sienkiewicz aimed directly at vanquishing souls, Wyspiański at being an Artist; Sienkiewicz sought people, Wyspiański—art and greatness. A world of abstractions in which concepts replace people, a world of culture.

The boredom of his plays . . . Who understood anything in their liturgy. Wyspiański is one of our greatest embarrassments because never had our admiration been born in such a vacuum. Applause, homage—our emotions in his theater had nothing to do with us. What was the secret of his triumph? Wyspiański also

fulfilled certain needs, but these were needs removed as far as possible from an individual life, they were the needs of a Nation. The Nation needed a statue. The Nation demanded great art. The dramatic stance of a Nation demanded a national drama. The Nation needed someone who would celebrate its greatness on a grand scale. Wyspiański stepped before the Nation and said: Behold, you have me! Nothing petty, greatness itself and with nothing less than Greek columns. He was accepted.

A playwright. Of course the drama form has always counted on greatness: it is a net through which everything small escapes. It is also true that it is the trifle that is creative, the detail that is concrete, not monumentality. Wyspiański, too statue-sque to focus on detail, was condemned to an exclusive coexistence with the elements and elementary powers: Fate, Poland, Greece, Nike, or The Mulch.* This art, unlike Shakespeare or Ibsen, is not an elevation of ordinary life to dramatic heights (don't talk to me about *The Wedding*), here everything from the beginning to the end rolls across the heaven of History and Fate. When the material itself is magnified, however, the artist becomes small and powerless. Wyspiański set into motion the pathetic machinery that crushed him. That is why the production is so enormous and why his own message to Poles is so insignificant. To Poles and others. This play fell on its face abroad not because it was Polish, but because it offers nothing enriching from a universal perspective.

Greece? The Greek drama was something natural to the Greeks and it harmonized with their youthful experiencing of being. For us, however, Greek drama is only authoritative, it affects us by virtue of its historical dignity, as does Greece itself. Wyspiański's Greekness is only majestic decoration. It is not something that enlivens and purifies seeing, it is merely solemn.

Which indicates that this alleged realist was a hundred miles from reality. Wyspiański sees no concrete phenomena, he is agog with their conceptual syntheses and sublimations. A drama of concepts. A great scene designer. He made splendid decorations. He did everything to assure the pathos of a play. He even stepped on stage, but, overcome by the might of its decorations, said nothing.



* Symbol of inertia in Wyspiański's play *The Wedding*.

Let's talk about Przybyszewski, he took his toll of that generation, too. Przybyszewski was the only one who could have achieved a revision of our values, or at least strengthened our life with a series of rousing, and in their extremity, categorical myths. It is not important that he imported the Secession and a bohemian life-style. It is more important that he undermined our virtuous, clean, and citizenlike concept of art and introduced the concept of artistic creation as a demonic process into the Polish idyll. His was the first ruthless art in Poland: an art that accommodated nothing, being an unmerciful spiritual unburdening. He was the first among us to demand a voice.

But what a caricature! What a clown and jester! It is difficult to view his demise into shoddiness, his transmutation of hero into melodramatic actor without feeling embarrassment. A first-rate talent that calmly and matter-of-factly fords into buffoonery, unaware, oblivious to its own kitsch, blind to its own transformation. How do we explain an imagination that has gone pretentious, unsavory, twisted, shrill? Do we say it suffered from Przybyszewskitis? The direction of European thought that spawned him had been a step away from the ridiculous, but it had never deteriorated into the ridiculous: if Schopenhauer was stylistically flawless, then Nietzsche and Wagner, people of German Romanticism or French and Scandinavian demonism had often rubbed up against an emphatic kitsch. Yet it took a Pole for that seed to grow into a tree of obvious ridiculousness and kitsch. Are we incapable of demonism to this degree?

Here again we have the Pole's powerlessness in the face of culture. For a Pole, culture is not something of which he is a cocreator, it is something higher, superhuman, which comes to him from the outside and that is how it appeals to him. What appealed to Przybyszewski? The Nation? Art? Literature? God? Przybyszewski has something in him of the provincial allowed to dine at the most aristocratic table in Europe, but it is not Europe that appeals to him as much as Przybyszewski. There is nothing that appeals to a Pole as much as a Pole in a historical dimension. Nothing inhibits him as much as his own greatness. Just as Piłsudski was crushed by and even terrified of Piłsudski, just as Wyspiański could not crawl out from under the burden of Wyspiański, just as Norwid moaned and groaned from under the Norwid on his back, so Przybyszewski watched Przybyszewski with fear and holy terror. In everything he writes you hear: I am Przybyszewski! I am a demon! I am the revealer!

The incapacity to reconcile the everyday and ordinary with greatness, or with loftiness . . . If he had maintained the hearing, taste, and sight of an ordinary man, an attack of convulsive laughter would have saved him from demonic pirouettes. But, being a Pole, he had to kneel. And so he knelt before himself.



Kasprowicz. Whole-grain bread, soul of a dove, pure gold troubadour . . . But also: a peasant-traitor, false yeoman, an unnatural nature, artificial simplicity. After leaving the peasantry and becoming an intellectual, Kasprowicz wanted to remain a peasant—as an intellectual.

This is the source of his artistic inadequacy. He, a creature of mixed origin, a combination of city and country, was, in essence, disharmony, but he characterized himself as harmony. If his song had been honest, he would have been a bouquet of dissonance, the poetry of a person of mixed ancestry, the hymn of a strange creature born of opposite elements. He, however, preferred to don a peasant's homespun over his frock coat.

Kasprowicz: the highest achievement of Polish "folk" poetry, which was a serious misunderstanding as that which is a poetry about the peasantry is taken for peasant poetry. The peasantry becomes a poetic inspiration only when we look at it from the city through the binoculars of culture. A peasant as a peasant was certainly not poetry to a peasant. What is more artificial than when Kasprowicz makes himself a peasant to sing the beauties of nature? Why a peasant doesn't feel nature, he is in it, therefore, he does not notice it, he grapples with it, he lives off of it, but he doesn't worship it. Leave sunrises and sunsets to tourists. Everything in a peasant's world is ordinary, so he pays no attention to it. If a peasant adores anything at all it is the city, not the countryside. To a peasant, God manifests himself in a machine and not in a wayside poplar. He prefers cheap perfume to the smell of lilacs.

Would I forbid Kasprowicz from setting into motion this paean to the countryside? Not at all, let him draw it forth if it lives in him. The question is: How is he supposed to sing? As a peasant or as Kasprowicz?

And it would be more real if he did not try to have a style. If he did not shield his inner disharmonies with simplicity. If in art, instead of form, he gave us his struggle with form. Perhaps this would liberate him from his artificial folksiness and from his literary forebears. I would dress Kasprowicz in peasant trousers and

boots from the waist down and from the waist up, I would have him wear a jacket with a stiff collar. This is how I would send him on stage saying: Do what you can!



I do not deny that these were artists and teachers of some stature. But they were not teachers of reality. Sienkiewicz did not express reality, because he surrendered himself to the services of collective fantasy; Wyspiański, because he devoted himself to aesthetic and historical abstractions; Żeromski, because he was unable to reconcile his social mission with his instinct; Przybyszewski, because he became intoxicated with satanism; and Kasprówicz, who allowed the Folk to govern him. In order for a writer to “reach” reality, he must do both simultaneously: express the collective spirit but also his own individual existence. He must be an individuality controlled by the collectivity, but also a collectivity controlled by an individual. They drowned in the mass or in those abstractions—such as nation, history, art—which were the product of collective culture. And they were always someone’s servants. They were always on their knees before something or other (Positivism? But that was also something just for the nation, almost a political doctrine, not the positivism of an individual human being. I see that I have forgotten to mention Prus. What a shame!).

We greeted our independence in that uncomfortable, kneeling position. What would a liberated man have to do? Get up, stretch, rub his eyes, look around, and start from scratch: who am I, where am I, what is my assignment?

But independence didn’t restore our freedom: not in feeling or seeing. The nation became politically free, while each of us saw ourselves even more shackled and internally weakened than ever before. What had that resurrected state been if not a call to new service and to a humble new subservience. The state was a patient barely able to stand on its own two feet, and everything else, as urgent and intolerant of delay as it may have been, had to give way to one goal: strengthen the state.

They said:

You shall have no thought that might weaken the nation or state.

You shall note, think, and feel only that which strengthens the nation and state.

This caused a perplexity in us which, in my opinion, is the key to under-

standing the whole period of independence. Note, we were called to give up a full and authentic individual existence not for the benefit of some other authenticity and strength, but on behalf of a partial existence, which could attain nothing because it was marked by inadequacy. Poland, which we were supposed to sate with our own most living individual blood, was frail economically and militarily, politically situated between two concepts of sinister power, culturally ailing from anachronism. Such a state could not conduct reasonable politics, could not accomplish anything at all, it had to make do with occasional patching and with burying its head in the sand. And what was worse, it was neither a large nor a small state: it was big enough to be called to historical action, but too small to be able to handle the task.

This spawned an unreal, tawdry, grotesque atmosphere that covered the two interwar decades with soot. Unreality because we simply did not have the means by which to make contact with life. Even so we were ruining ourselves to maintain a huge army, but the army turned out to be an illusion. We limited ourselves spiritually and intellectually, but our state and national thought did not grow the stronger for it. As for the tawdriness—why our most fabulous talents had to come to waste in the pincers of that double, individual and collective, anemia, just as technical, financial, and social endeavors were wasted. And this was grotesque as well—for the grotesque is a sign of inability, the factory label for cheap goods.

I am not considering all of Polish life—I am talking just about the literature. It is possible that we had no choice in the political and economic arenas, so we did what we could however we could. But the freedom of art is a hundred times greater and I believe that, given even the circumstances in Poland at that time, real art was possible.

What's more, I believe that in those circumstances the most important and immediate task of art was not to allow contact with reality to be lost. To break through that reduced life to the real, full existence and become an anchor that would have moored us in elementary being. Why did art fail us utterly in this regard?

Ah, because of one small oversight . . . I will return to this subject in the near future. I will tell how one slight mistake in the choice of direction made it impossible for us to get out of our blind alley.

XVII

Sunday

Today I am devoting a little time to revisiting those years—of independence. To destroy them. My present dire predicament demands this. If I agree inwardly that they were the way they were supposed to be—blossoming, healthy plants on fertile soil while I am something dying in a desert, a cripple cast onto an alien shore, without a homeland, etc., . . . an exile, astray, lost . . . what would be left except to resign from all meaning? Therefore: I have to mobilize all the strong points of my situation thereby showing that I can live better and more authentically. I will now write a little something about the (versified) poetry from the period of independence and I will see what of this will be capable of upholding itself as real. . . . This curiosity—how much that which is born under my pen can be the truth. . . .

The poems of that period were better than the prose. Which is easy to explain. The more formalistic the art, the more independent it is from the external pressures of the milieu, the epoch. The most difficult thing to do in independent Poland was to have a conversation, after that, to write in normal prose, after that, to write in a stylized prose, and the relatively easy thing was writing to rhyme. In order to express oneself impeccably in a normal conversation, in everyday prose, one must be a man who can speak—one whose expression is not warped by external conditions. But those “excellent,” and “wonderful” poems can be written by anyone bound by all conceivable shackles if one has learned form.

Skamander and the Polish avant-garde . . . Yes, I remember. . . . Skamander floated to the top under the sign of a new freshness, modernization, Europeanization and the Skamander poets desired to produce a poetry that was already independent—a free and objective poetic, proud poetry that would serve no one except itself. A healthy idea! That intoxication with pure air was right in step with the times. Why did the mountain give birth to a mouse? Why did this amount to nothing? . . .

Nothing. If we eliminated all the Skamander poets from our spiritual life (be careful! I am using the concept “spiritual life” seriously), nothing would happen . . . it wouldn’t cause the slightest change. They were but they could have

not been. . . . We would see ourselves poorer by a certain number of metaphors and rhymes, a certain amount of beauty, also by a certain number of poetic novelties, imported or of the domestic variety, but that's all. None of these thoroughbred poets produced anything electrifying, nothing truly personal, no solution, no transmutation of reality into any kind of specific, distinct shape, as someone's face is distinct. They lacked a face. They had no relationship with reality. If one of them had a so-called conviction, it did not differ in anything at all from the commonplace political or social catechism of the epoch: Słonimski's socialism or pacifism, Iwaszkiewicz's aestheticism, Lechoń's Lechitism. They found their beliefs ready-made—they proclaimed their belonging to this or that credo, none of them really had an individual ritual. Outside of the rhyme, weren't they really children? Tear all the stanzas from Valéry, Claudel, or Rilke and there will remain, nonetheless, a spiritual phenomenon, a soul, someone unique and singular. Burn Skamander's rhymes and you will see a group of affable young men, who somehow managed to get along in life.

Keeping in mind that those were talented people, however, let us ask: to what should we attribute this nothingness? On the strength of what malice does art, in a given case, turn out to be an impoverishment instead of enrichment? It will not be difficult to give an answer, if we consider that they were not in the least interested in enriching the form that they wielded, but merely in purifying it. They found the poem polluted with various unpoetic ingredients and aimed to leave it strictly poetic. They were pious adherents and cultivators of form, whose majesty they bore like a royal robe. They were full of respect, modest and timid. But the artist who is afraid to touch form and is incapable of treating it brutally when the need arises—what can he do? How does one lead a poetry which is just on the verge of maturing, which is unsanctioned and half-noble, into holy song? How does one accommodate its enormous, awakening contents in an undersized vessel? Such annihilating tasks went beyond the much more timid effort of the Skamandrites, who aimed to perfect and purify expression. They were poets “by elimination” above all, poets only in the face of things already poetic, not poets who change nonpoetry into poetry.

Fine for them! That music appealed to them. If it had been otherwise, how could they have maintained themselves in literature? Intellectually they were entirely not on the level of their times, they did not realize what was springing up

around them. Deprived of a personal, spiritual format . . . why, in essence, this was a collective eruption into Polish art and those people, in spite of the fact that each of them was distinct in regard to poetry, temperament, and thought, were quite indistinct in the deeper sense, so that to this day the poetry of Skamander is a group poetry. Could, however, a real poetry arise in Poland, a poetry based on real contact with life, without visual penetration of the walls of the house which we built for ourselves, and without seeing what was crouching within. They realized their place only to a degree, they knew their place in art, but not the place of art in life. They knew their place in Poland, but not Poland's place in the world. None of them soared high enough to see the lay of his own home.

On the other hand, they were intelligent enough to confess that Polish reality was inflated to a great degree. Sensing this with their infallible poetic intuition, and, at the same time, not having the least idea how to deal with this fact and what conclusions to draw from it, they decided that they would not worry too much about reality. And that is exactly what happened. They published their little volumes, content that their fame was growing, but not questioning it. They were happy to have readers, and they did not investigate that "reading" too closely. They attained higher and higher places in the hierarchy of poets, and did not examine that hierarchy too closely, either. In short, they behaved like all (with few exceptions) of the poets of the world and we could hold this against them only if we believed that a poet should not be too much a poet.

The Skamandrites found their opponents in the Polish avant-garde, to my memory a nightmarish and ill-boding school. So many deformities under those errant skies! I remember the strangely lopsided flyers, magazines, ridiculous manifestos, poems somewhat revolutionary, somewhat aborted, powerful but also powerfully comic theories, and stacks of unavoidable little volumes. Tadeusz Peiper (blossoming metaphor) and Stefan Kordian Gacki and Braun and Wazyk and hundreds of other adepts, dedicating poems to each other . . . all that was the avant-garde for me. This production looked more or less the same in all civilized cities and now, here, in Argentina, in cafés, I come across these old or not-so-old youths suckling this eternal mother. In Poland, however, it was a lot dirtier—the Polish avant-garde was unkempt, slovenly, barefoot, it was a freak with a rabbi's head and the bare feet of a farm boy. It was a remote, forlorn backwater, which, desperate at its own provinciality, dreamed of being equal to Paris and London. This body,

made up of shriveled, esoteric, and word-splitting rabbis and of naive towheaded noggins from around Kielce, Lublin, or Lvov, was distinguished by a holy naïveté, a zealous fanaticism, a consistent pigheadedness. Poets. Poets, determined to be poets, creating in themselves a poetic zeal and a poetic intoxication, poured into that avant-garde of theirs and corked up in it as if it were a bottle.

I never had the opportunity to speak seriously with any of them. Theoretically speaking, there was a point where we overlapped: I was “avant-garde,” though of a different design; but just their “poeticity” alone told me to arm myself with a sarcastic face and repellent joke. Nevertheless I found them profoundly unsettling. They certainly did contribute some sort of reality, this was not merely imagined, something was crouching in all this, something real . . . but what? What? They brought in poverty. These luxuries were lined with a horrible poverty. They were not reality in their creations, on their pretentious paper, but they were reality as a symptom—a rash on the body of the sick man. The majority of them were deprived of that minimum of mental prowess without which writing is impossible: indolents, decadents, dreamers, the undereducated, the aborted—the grim creations of Polish ghettos, the citizens of a dingy Polish backwater. They ran from their own poverty into a proud precursorship, this was a search for deliverance. . . .

Which came. They themselves would not have dared admit that they were born of poverty. This truth came from the outside and one day the Polish People’s Republic turned to them and proscribed their roles: from that time on they became a part of a bureaucratic literature and transformed themselves into an art bureaucracy. And because they had always been beyond themselves, not being able to bear the truth about themselves and their own existence, supplementing reality with sleep, abstraction, theory, aesthetics, they did not have much to lose and did not even notice that something unpredictable had happened to them. I was not there, but I am afraid that Bolshevism found a large segment of the Polish intelligentsia in a drunken stupor, the head of the nation was muddled. And many, very many, did not realize what was happening to them.



Prose.

I remember the abundance: a bumper crop of novels. And all the novels, it would appear from the reviews, were excellent. Nevertheless, one day I had the

following conversation with Nałkowska, apropos a certain book. She: —There are many excellent observations, various tastes and mini-tastes, a certain, well, you know, familiar cordiality, something special . . . and one has to penetrate this, look at it closely, search for it. . . . I: —If you were to stare at this box of matches, you could extract entire worlds out of it. If you search for tastes in a book, you will certainly find them because it was said: seek and ye shall find. But a critic should not rifle, search, let him sit back with folded arms, waiting for the book to find him. Talents should not be sought with a microscope, a talent should let people know about itself by striking at all the bells.

In periods when one's sense of reality is feeble, however, everything becomes automatic. Polish criticism threw itself mechanically into the pursuit of values—and, it is certain, that with enough good will it is not difficult to see an epic even in Gojawiczyńska, because, after all, even the average expresses something. In order to break with this inflation and regain the right proportion of phenomena, there is nothing healthier than tearing one's eyes away from the work and taking a close look at the author. Is the writer of this great novel great? And if he himself is not great, then how can the book be great? Having taken a good look at the people of the prose of that day, what do we see? That all of these novels did not give birth to even one personality—and that not even one attains the stature of a Żeromski or Sienkiewicz. Where did this dwarfing of people come from in independent Poland?

There were two cut out to be more than average: Kaden and Witkacy. Kaden, who had the nerve of a stylist, a brutal aggressiveness, and a vision in embryo—could have extracted some sort of Kaden-like truth from his time. Witkiewicz, unrestrained and penetrating, whose inspiration was cynicism and who was sufficiently degenerate and a madman to get himself out of Polish “normalcy” into the boundless, was at the same time intelligent and conscious enough to return his madness to the normal and tie it to reality. Both could have been great artists for fate had jarred them out of their “normal” Polishness. It was they, however, who surrendered to mannerism and utterly lost their battle for expression. Their defeat was a repetition of the defeats of the preceding generation. Kaden declined just like Żeromski, voluntarily surrendering his artistic sovereignty, immersing himself up to his ears in Polish life—he, a Piłsudskiite, a “sanator,”* a “Polish writer,” freedom

* Supporter of Piłsudski's “sanacja” regime.

fighter, the father of the homeland or its son, the conscience of the nation, the director of theaters, an editor, already a master, already a teacher and guide. Kaden's prose arrayed itself in a toga and began to wear a mien, and became a celebration of literature before it ever became literature. Witkiewicz ruined himself just as Przybyszewski had, lured by his own demonism and not knowing how to reconcile the abnormal with the normal. Consequently, he was left at the mercy of his eccentricity. All mannerisms result from the inability to oppose form, a certain manner of being rubs off on us, becomes habit-forming, is, as one says, stronger than we are—and it is easy to understand why these writers weakly rooted in reality, rooted rather in Polish unreality, or, too, in “an inadequately realized reality,” did not know how to defend themselves against the overgrowth of form. Kaden's mannerism was strained and diligent, as he was. For Witkiewicz, just as for Przybyszewski, it became a simplification and absolution from effort, that is why the form both of them employ is as hurried as it is sloppy; nevertheless, Witkacy's defeat was more intelligent: demonism became his toy and this tragic clown died during his life, like Jarry, with a toothpick poked between his teeth, with his theories, pure form, plays, portraits, with “guts” and “bulging,” with pornographically macabre collections. (My first visit to Witkacy's house: I ring the bell, the door opens, in the dark foyer a monstrous dwarf grows before me—it is Witkacy who opens the door all crouched over and slowly rises. . . .)

These characteristics are again marked by a powerlessness in the face of reality. Also worthy of emphasis is the dirt of their imagination: Witkiewiczian guts and Kaden's smacking of lips are not only the result of the thrusting of European art into these expanses of repulsiveness, they are mainly an expression of our impotence in the face of the dirt that was eating at us in the peasant's hut, in the Jewish cot, in the bathroomless country manor house. The Poles of that generation were keenly aware of the dirt as something both odd and awful, but they did not know what to do with it. It was a sore that was poisoning them.

The more aggressive prose, therefore, tottered into eccentricity or into the baroque. The prose whose pulse beat in the readable and artistically correct novels, on the other hand, was bereft of dynamism and, like honeysuckle, wound its way faithfully around Polish life. Mainly women. This is *testimonium paupertatis*: the novel of that time relied mainly on women and was like them. Rotund lines, soft, unfocused. Conscientious, petty, kindhearted, tender. It was she who “bent over

gray human fate with the wisdom of her heart” or “diligently spun a canvas of multiple existences into a design of sincere concern and sanctifying mercy”—these were always modest, even humble, authors with a praiseworthy self-denial ever ready to dissolve altruistically in others, or, too, entirely into being, voices of “certain truths” like Love or Mercy, which Renata or Anastasia uncovered toward the end of the saga in the quivering leaves or in the singing trees. . . . No one negates the talent of those Dąbrowskas, Nalkowskas, even Gojawiczyńska, no, but could this femininity, dissolving into the cosmos, shape the consciousness of the nation in any way?

So what is odd about women writing like women? Stranger and more menacing is that none of the talent manifesting itself in prose was able to stay alive, it all died. This or that book occasionally resounded like cannon fire. Wittlin’s *Salt of the Earth*, shining its triumphs abroad. Choromański’s firework *Medicine and Jealousy* was greeted with a great sounding of the bells; finally: a “great novelist” had appeared. Bruno Schulz’s *Cinnamon Shops*, writing of another category, high-class. Kuncewiczowa’s *Stranger*, also a foretaste, foresight, the scent of something unexpected. . . . The trouble that these works caused the critic stemmed from what? From the fact that there was no way to gauge their real quality. A work could be simply masterly, almost brilliant in some fragment, a page could be almost foreign, universal, worldly, this author could be equal to the best in this or that regard—this was a writing that constantly rubbed up against genuine distinction. Yet from these individually brilliant works, from these fragmentary attainments arose neither a great work nor a great writer. It was easy to see, therefore, that the short explosions of talent were not the result of a consistent spiritual development, but merely something marginal—all of this had the markings of something cramped and arbitrary. The authors themselves did not know why every once in a while something better appeared, just like the proverbial blind chicken who finds an unexpected kernel of corn. This was a literature of blind chickens.



Boy Zeleński, Antoni Słonimski. They were a success, two genuine events. Słonimski’s poems did not captivate me, his poetry exploded into pose, in the “chronicles” in *Wiadomości* he thrust himself onto everything and everybody and he had fun, master of organizing capers in which he himself was the hero (and, therefore, the poet). Is it silly to compare his influence to that of Sienkiewicz or

Żeromski? Yet I claim that a generation was brought up on him, so that one does not have to be a god to have followers.

But this is what I consider important and interesting: that Boy and Słonimski, writers of the only prose in the republic that was functioning efficiently, was a pulling down from the heights to the level of common sense and average sober thinking. Their power derived from their popping of balloons, which, after all, does not require a great deal of strength.

Boy—there is not much of himself in his works. This translator was translating France into Polish even in his own original writings.



Criticism. Can one really call this criticism? Each daily newspaper had its resident schoolmaster to do the grading. It was a holy mystery, however, why certain people and not others were the schoolmasters. It looked as if an order of initiated connoisseurs existed, who passed judgment. The real truth, however, was that no one, and not even the connoisseurs themselves, knew why they were called to judge (they had not noticed that this simply depended on the decision of the newspaper editor). Terrified by the mechanism that elevated them—simple nobodies—to the role of judges of works beyond their ken, they did not know how to handle a situation that was truly shameless and reckless: as judges they spoke from above, though they really found themselves at the bottom.

All of this criticism was sometimes grotesquely dull witted and sometimes fairly intelligent babble about art, with distinction, flourishes, froth, contortions . . . something that lives among us to this day. They watched mainly to make sure that no one poked his nose beyond literature. It never occurred to them to confront poetry, prose, or criticism with reality. They knew that this would summon the tornado that would sweep them from the face of the earth.



In reality (what a dangerous word!), the literature of our period was being born as literary publicism. It looked as if literary journals (*Wiadomości* and *Prosto z Mostu*) were supposed to serve writers and their writing; but in reality writers existed so that the weekly, the only real literature of that time, could nourish itself on them. Was this an unavoidable process that was taking place in the whole

world? Or the consequence of the weakening of the Polish “I,” the “I” that is the basis of creation? When writers are unsure of themselves, when none is real enough, when no one gets at the crux, and the entire direction of development misses and bypasses the most essential things . . . why are we surprised when the Editor appears on the scene to conduct and organize. These weeklies were the expression of the advantage that the collective had over the individual in Polish life, this was just one more example in our history of subordinating art to society.

The weeklies made a carnival and spectacle of art. Who is “the greatest”? Who should be advertised? Who should trounce whom? To whom should we grant an award? Poets and writers galloped like racehorses and the broad masses roared like sports fans: Get him, get him! Or like a nation: This one is a Polish seer! Or “ideologically”: Give it to him on the head, the spoiler! Naturally literary journals, *Wiadomości* included, run by the sophisticated and sometimes too sophisticated Grydzewski, just as *Prosto z Mostu*, which was run by the dull-witted Stanisław Piasecki (who, however, died bravely, at his post), acted in keeping with their nature. But artists felt a little out of their sauce and even a little like fish in a frying pan. They saw that something was happening with them that was not as it should be, and that they were being consumed in an unexpected way. It is significant, however, that not one of them tried to confront what was happening head-on. On the contrary, they mustered all their discretion so as not to notice anything.

Wednesday

Yes, this was more or less the vacuum which that joyful writing breathed, even though it was the clamor of a hundred mouths in comparison with the silence of today’s gagged ones. I have already said: I will not gauge the height of our flight by the depth of our fall. During those years in Poland, I felt as if I were in something that wants to be, but cannot, that wants to express itself, but is unable to. . . . What a curse! All the frustrations around me! Yet the human material was good and certainly no worse than any other European material. They looked like capable creatures, stuck doing shoddy work, inhibited by something impersonal, superior, interhuman, and collective emanating from the milieu. Entire social classes right out of a sarcastic dream: the landed gentry, the peasantry, the urban proletariat, officers, ghettos . . . Polish thought, Polish mythology, the Polish

psyche . . . an inept and inefficient Polishness, which permeated the heritage that delineated us like a subtle fume. . . . I returned from visiting my country brothers upset by the diabolical dissonance; yet in the city, cafés scuffling helplessly with destiny awaited me, and people like a sandy forest full of gnarled trees.

The hope of a slow perfection, gradual development and attainment could have been a guiding light, but should I have waited? I could not agree to have my life be a mere introduction to life. Was I to serve in literature only as a temporary stopgap, so that I could make possible the appearance of the independent Polish word in one or two hundred years? In that case it was not worth sitting down to write. Art that is incapable of assuring its creator an authentic existence in the spiritual sphere is only an unceasing shame, a humiliating testimony to a bungled job. Each second I saw how one of my “friends” tamed a faith for himself, an ideological or aesthetic position, in the hope that in the end he would become a real writer. This approach inevitably ended in a series of grimaces, a pyramid of claptrap, and an orgy of unreality.

Either a person is someone or not—one cannot fabricate oneself artificially. In independent Poland, the artificial fabrication of existence became an ever more frequent substitute for a genuine existence: these intellectuals and artists tried to be someone with this *arrière-pensée* in order to simply be. To believe in God not because it is a necessity of the soul, but because faith strengthens. To be a nationalist not from nature and conviction but because it is necessary to a good life. To have ideals not because one carries them in one’s blood but because they “organize things.” All of them searched feverishly for some sort of form so they wouldn’t disintegrate . . . and I would have had nothing against this, if they had had the courage to admit what they were doing and if they had not deceived themselves.

This, however, was naive self-delusion. I, therefore, finally broke off all relations with people in Poland and with what they were producing. I withdrew into myself, determined to live only my own life, whatever it was, and to see only with my own eyes. I thought that if I were capable of being myself, then I would discover solid ground beneath my feet. Shortly thereafter, however, it became obvious that this extreme individualism could not, alone, make me any more real or creative. It solved nothing, and least of all, it did not loosen my tongue. For what was this “I” on which I wanted to base my work? Was it not formed by the past and the present day? Wasn’t the way I was a consequence of Polish development?

Nothing of what I did, said, thought, or wrote satisfied me and you probably know this feeling: when you notice that you are constantly saying that which you don't want to say because the text you wrote sounds pretentious, stupid, false. For all the perversions of your upbringing, influences that shaped you, habits with which you were vaccinated, because all of your immaturity in the face of the main issues of being and culture make form impossible. I could not find a form to express my reality. I could not, in general, describe this reality, find my place. In these conditions I could only—and this is what I wrote in *Ferdydurke*—pretend to be a writer (modeled on other colleagues).

There is only one insurmountable difficulty in this thing—that even Solomon cannot draw something from nothing. Be oneself? Yes, but if one is immaturity? . . .

Nevertheless a thought that I never doubted guided me: that if I am, then I have the eloquence of a fact, something which is . . . in and of itself, that I was, I had the right to speak and this voice had the right to be heard.

It was then that I looked at that entire inadequacy of Polish expression in literature from another vantage point. This is what appeared to me.

This literature surely did not re-create reality—even though it was reality, even in its very powerlessness. Imagine an author who sets out to write a play, for example. If he isn't in the position to afford the appropriate honesty, spiritual doggedness, his work will be a mere pile of aborted words. This play, however unimportant and undramatic as a work, will, nevertheless, be a real play insofar as it is a testimony of defeat and the author, worthy of derision as an author, will, nevertheless, be deserving of sympathy and maybe is even great and dramatic as a man who could not find a way of expressing himself.

Poland's real reality, therefore, did not express itself in books, which were not of it—they were next to it—but in the fact that books did not express us. Our existence was dependent on the fact that we did not have an existence adequately crystallized. Our form consisted of its inappropriateness to us. So where had Polish writers made their mistake? In trying to be that which they could not be—formed individuals, when instead they were people in the process of being formed . . . and that they desired, in poetry and prose, to pull themselves up to the level of the European, more crystallized nations, regardless of the fact that this condemned them to everlasting inferiority—as they could not compete with that more polished form.

Therefore it seemed paradoxical to me that the only means by which I, a Pole, could become a fully valuable phenomenon in culture, was this one: not to hide my immaturity, but to admit it; and with this admission to break away from it; and to make a steed out of the tiger that was devouring me up to now, which steed (if I could mount it) could take me farther than those Western folks who were “delineated.” . . . At first glance, this does not look threatening as a program or rallying cry—behold, one more caprice of the intellect, seeking ways out . . . but when I penetrated its consequences (while writing *Ferdydurke*), I distinctly noticed their devastating perversity. What did this mean? One simply had to turn everything upside down, beginning with the Poles themselves. To turn the complacent, preening Pole, so enamoured of himself, into a creature equally aware of its inadequacy and ephemerality—and turn this keenness of vision, this ruthlessness in not concealing weaknesses into a strength. Not only would our approach to history and national art have to undergo annihilation, but our entire notion of patriotism would get transformed at its base. More, a lot more, our entire attitude toward the world would have to change and our assignment then would no longer be working out some sort of specific Polish form, but the acquisition of a new approach to form as something that is endlessly created by people and never satisfies them. In addition: one has to demonstrate that everyone is like us, that is, one has to reveal the complete inadequacy of the civilized man in the face of the culture which is too much for him.

It was a matter of no less than exchanging a man who had form for a man (this also pertains to a nation) who produces form—a dry recipe, but one that suddenly and unexpectedly changes the entire Polish way of being in the world. As for me, I did not concern myself with the mad enormity of this revolution. Even today I do not ask if it is pertinent to suggest something like this in Polish culture which, decimated and made to heel, is pulled in exactly the opposite direction (for dialectic thought in totalitarian practice changes into dogmatic thought). The programs did not frighten me because a program did not move me but an inner need did. An artist is not here to reason, he is not here to arrange syllogisms, he exists to create a picture of the world. He does not refer to someone else’s reason, only to someone else’s intuition. He describes the world as he feels it and expects that the audience will feel it in the same way and will say: yes, that’s it, that is reality and it is more real than that which I have been calling reality up to now—even

though perhaps both, the artist and the audience, would not know how to prove logically why this is more real. For me it was enough that a breath of authentic life suddenly refreshed me at this very thought. I strove in this direction blindly simply because each step made my word stronger and my art more real. I did not concern myself with all the rest. The rest—sooner or later—will create itself.

Monday

I must really call Pla.

Why haven't I called Pla yet?

I forgot to call Pla again today.

Tomorrow before one I will call Pla for sure.

Pla is home only between 12 and 1. Not to forget tomorrow.

I called but the phone was busy.

I called but Pla had just left (earlier the phone was busy).

I called but a child answered and I couldn't make myself understood.

I wanted to call but just at that moment Christina called.

I have to call Pla.

Why haven't I called Pla yet?

1956

XVIII

(Mar del Plata)

Saturday

I merely grazed Buenos Aires on my way south. I was supposed to go to Duś Jankowski's *estancia*, near Necochea, but Odyńec sat me in an automobile and drove me to Mar del Plata. After eight hours on the road—the city; then all of a sudden from the side, from the left side, seen from a hill, the ocean. We suddenly enter a street and finally the *quinta*. This is familiar. The great rustling trees of a garden, dogs, and cacti. An orchard. Almost country.

Tuesday

The Spaniard with whom we ate supper yesterday. An older man, unduly polite. That politeness is like a net that one throws on people in order to bind and capture them. He is so polite one cannot defend oneself against it. Politeness like the tentacles of a cruel and gluttonous Medusa.

I am alone on the estate. Odyńec has left. Formoza (so-called because she was born on the ship *Formoza*), the gardener's wife, cooks and cleans.

Wednesday

I am alone in this Jocaral (that is what the *quinta* is called).

I get up at nine. After breakfast I write until twelve. Dinner. I head for the

beach, and return at seven. I write. Supper. I write. Then I read Dumas's *Le vicomte de Bragelonne* and Simone Weil's *La pesanteur et la grâce*. I fall asleep.

The season has just begun. Pretty empty. Wind, wind, and more wind. In the morning the rustling trees that encircle the *quinta* break into my waking and the fickle winds, from the north, south, east will not be silent, the ocean gleams green, slamming white and salty into granite cliffs, the foam explodes on the sands, the uninterrupted invasion of menacing, rising, roiling heaps of water, not a moment's respite and a booming roar so vast it changes into silence. Silence. This madness is peace. The line of the horizon is motionless. The motionless glitter of an endless plane. Movement immobilized, passion of eternity . . .

I wandered somewhere beyond the port, along wild beaches, beyond Punta Mogotes, where there were whole flocks of seagulls, veering into the wind, straining, succumbing to sudden upswings at reeling heights from where, in slanted and beautiful line, unity of chaos and flight, they drop and roll over the surface of the water. I watch for hours awestruck, stupefied.

On my way here I had hoped that the ocean would cleanse me of my anxieties and that the state of siege in me since Milo would subside. But the winds have merely stunned my fears. In the evening, I return from the thundering shore to the desperately rustling garden, I open the empty house with a key, I turn on the light and eat a cold supper, prepared by Formoza, and then . . . What? I sit down and "explode," my drama explodes, my fate, my destiny, the indistinctness of my existence. . . . Everything surrounds me. My gradual departure from nature and also from people in recent years, the process of getting older makes these spiritual states more and more terrifying. Man's life becomes, with time, a steel trap. At the beginning, softness and flexibility, this is easy to wade into, but now the soft palm of life becomes ironclad, the unrelenting coldness of metal and the horrifying cruelty of hardening arteries.

I have known about this for a long time. Yet I never took it seriously as I was convinced that I would be changing along with my destiny; I assumed that with the years, I would become someone else, capable of handling the situation in its growing horror. I did not prepare any feelings for this time of my existence, believing that they would arise in me by themselves, at the right moment. Yet to this day, there aren't any. Only I am here and how little altered, except that now all the doors have been shut in my face.

I carry this thought out of the house to the shore, I lead it around on the sand, trying to lose it in the movement of air and water, but it is here that I see the awfulness that has come to fruition in me. For if these spaces liberated me earlier, today they imprison me, yes, even space has become confining and I walk along the shore as if I were someone pressed against a wall. This awareness: that I have already become myself. I already am. Witold Gombrowicz, these two words, which I carried on myself, are now accomplished. I am. I am too much. And even though I could still do something unpredictable for myself, I no longer want to. I can't want because I am too much. Amid this indelineation, changeability, fluidity, under the ungraspable sky I am made, finished, delineated. . . . I am and I am so much that this casts me beyond the limits of nature.

Thursday

I went beyond Torreón, which shields from the wind. I sat there a while and then went to Playa Grande. I lay there, almost all alone, the great anger of the sea, the din, roar, hollow bursts. Returning, I could barely move against the wind, which choked, penetrated, and tossed. The beauty of the bays, mighty cliffs, clusters of colored houses looking down from staggered heights on the slopes, the gold of sunny beaches.

When I returned to Jocaral in the dark, the trees howled as if their skin were being torn off. I sat down to write this diary. I do not want loneliness crawling all over me senselessly, I need people, a reader. Not in order for us to understand one another. Just to give a sign of life. Today I acquiesce to all the lies, conventions, the stylization of my diary, if only to smuggle the distant echo, the feeble taste of my imprisoned I.

I have already mentioned that besides Dumas, I am reading *La pesanteur et la grâce*. Mandatory reading. I have to write about it for an Argentine weekly. This woman is too strong for me to be able to push her away, especially now, in this internal tug-of-war, where I am completely at the mercy of the elements. Through her growing presence here before me grows the presence of her God. I say "through her presence" because an abstract God is Greek to me. We, the grandchildren of Kierkegaard, can no longer digest the reasoned God of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, or Kant. My generation's relationship with abstraction is completely in ruins

or, rather, has coarsened because we evidence a completely peasant distrust of it and, from the heights of the twentieth century, all of metaphysical dialectics appears to me to be the same thing it was to the simple-souled gentry of the past who considered Kant a swindler. How much one has to endure to come to the same conclusion but on a higher rung of development.

And even today, when my life has become, as I have said, ironclad? Life in its very monstrousness pushes me in the direction of metaphysics. Wind, trees, noise, house, all of this has stopped being “natural” because I myself am no longer nature but something gradually cast beyond its limits. It is not I myself, but that which is coming to an end in me that clamors for God, this need or necessity is not in me, but in my predicament. I look at Simone Weil and my question is not: does God exist? I look at her with amazement and say: how, by means of what magic, has this woman been able to arrange herself internally so that she is able to cope with what devastates me? I feel the God locked in this life as a power that is purely human, connected to no supraterrrestrial realm, a God that she created in herself with her own might. Pure fiction. Yet if it makes dying easier . . .

It has always amazed me that lives exist based on principles other than mine. There is nothing more commonplace or ordinary, or perhaps even more repulsive and vile than my existence (although I don’t feel repelled by myself or my life). I know no, absolutely no greatness. I am a petit bourgeois promenadeur, who has wandered into the Alps or Himalayas. My pen touches mighty and ultimate issues all the time, but if I have reached them, it was done while playing. . . . As a boy I climbed up into them and wandered around frivolously. A heroic existence such as Simone Weil’s seems to be from another planet, a pole opposite from mine: whereas I constantly elude life, she takes it on fully, *elle s’engage*, she is the antithesis of my desertion. Simone Weil and I are the sharpest contrast that one can imagine, two mutually exclusive interpretations, two opposing systems. And it is this woman I confront in an empty house, at the very moment when it is so hard to escape from myself.

Saturday

Bodies, bodies, bodies . . . Today on beaches sheltered from the southern gale, where the sun warms and roasts, a multitude of bodies, the great sensuality of

beaches, yet as always, undercut, defeated . . . To the left and right, thighs, busts, backs, hips, the soles of girls, women, taken out of hiding, the elastic harmony of boys. The body kills the body, however, the body takes power away from the body. This nakedness stops being a phenomenon that dissolves in its excess, the sand, sun, and air annihilate them and they are ordinary. . . . Impotence overwhelms the beach, beauty, grace, charm. They are unimportant: they are not possessive, they neither wound nor engage. A flame that gives no heat. An unarousing body, an extinguished body. This impotence debilitated even me and I returned home without the least spark, powerless.

Ah, my novel is on the table and again, I will have to exert myself to inject a little “brilliance” into a scene that is like wet powder and won’t ignite!

Sunday

I looked at the teapot and knew that this and other teapots will be more horrifying to me as time passes, just as everything around me. I have enough awareness to drink this goblet of poison to its dregs, but not enough sublimity to rise above it. Death throes in a crushing underground await me, agony without a single ray of light.

To tear myself away from myself . . . but how, I ask.

The issue is not in the least one of believing in God, but of falling in love with God. Weil is not a “believer,” she is in love. To me, in my life, God was never necessary, not for five minutes, from earliest childhood I was self-sufficient. Therefore, if I now “fell in love” (bypassing my general inability to love), it would be under the pressure of that heavy vault, which is lowering itself upon me. It would be a shout, torn out in torment, and so, invalid. Fall in love with someone because one can no longer stand oneself? This is a forced love.

Later, pacing the room, I thought: it is true that this state of love that Weil lived is organically inaccessible to me, but perhaps it would be possible to find some sort of analogical solution, cut to my proportions and in harmony with my nature. Is it possible for man to be incapable of extracting from himself the capacity to deal with what awaits him? To find in one’s own way the higher reasons for existence and death. To create one’s own greatness. Greatness must be hidden in me, for I am “ultimate” enough in all that is mine but I don’t have a key to it.

Whereas this woman was able to liberate from her inwardness spiritual currents and whirlpools of superhuman strength.

Greatness? Greatness? O greatness, I am lousy at saying you, the word is stupid coming from my lips. My distaste for that which is great.

Gustave Thibon writes about Weil:

“I recall a certain young worker, in whom, she discovered, or so it seemed to her, a vocation for the intellectual life and on whom she relentlessly bestowed splendid lectures on the Upanishads. The poor girl was bored to death but did not protest out of politeness and shyness.”

So the “poor girl was bored to death”? This is exactly how ordinary humanity is bored by profundity and loftiness. Just as we, through politeness, put up with wise men, holy men, heroes, religion, and philosophy. And Weil? How does she appear against this backdrop? Almost like a madwoman, locked in a hermetic sphere, not knowing where she lived, in what she lived, without a common denominator with others. Uprooted. This greatness loses in contact with commonness, immediately succumbs to a ridiculous *dégringolade* and what do we see? A hysterical woman, tormenting and boring, an egotist, whose swollen and aggressive personality is incapable of noticing others, nor is it capable of seeing itself with the eyes of others—a knot of tensions, torments, hallucinations, and manias, something casting about in the external world, like a fish taken out of water, for the real element of this spirit is only its own sauce. And we’re supposed to experience this metaphysical carp in a sauce of its own making?

Calm down. It bothers me that her greatness does not function appropriately with everyone. Great with Thibon but ridiculous with the girl. And this fragmentariness characterizes all great people, great or prominent. I would demand a greatness capable of withstanding each human being, in every scale, on every level, including all categories of existence, equally compelling at the top and bottom. Only this type of spirit would be capable of winning me. The necessity injected into me by the universalism of my time, which wants to enlist all awareness higher and lower into the game and is no longer satisfied with aristocracy.

Tuesday

Breakfast at the Hermitage with A. and his wife, whom I met accidentally. The food smells of, forgive me, a very luxurious water closet, I don't really know why, but when I poised myself over the edge of these appetizing delicacies, in the thick distinction of waiters, I could have sworn it was a closet. But then I wanted to sleep, too. Maybe that's why.

I have often been criticized—my works and I—but almost always senselessly. You say: petty. You say: coward, deserter. In one of these, here is more wounding truth than you can imagine. No one can imagine the boundlessness of my desertion. The ending of *Ferdynurke* is not gratuitous: "I fled, my face in my hands."

Am I not cut out for the epoch, which unfurled the banner of heroism, seriousness, and responsibility? (Weil, on the other hand, is the most perfect expression of all the moralities of contemporary Europe: Catholic, Marxist, and existentialist.)

Allow me, though: there is no spiritual posture, taken consistently to the ultimate, which would not be worthy of respect. There can be strength in weakness, determination in vacillation, consistency in inconsistency and also greatness in what is small. Bold cowardice, softness sharp as steel, an aggressive retreat.

Wednesday

Indefatigable wind.

I am suffering as much as nonphysical suffering is accessible to me—more hopelessness than pain. I would like to note: I am proud that my pains are not excessive. This brings me closer to the average, that is, to the norm, to the most solid layers of life.

As for God, there is no sense in dreaming of an absolute God on high, in the former style. This God has really died for me, I will not invent such a God in myself no matter what, there are no grounds in me for this. Yet there does exist the possibility of God as an auxiliary means, a road-bridge to man.

One could easily justify this concept of God. It is enough to accept that man must exist within the framework of his species, that, generally speaking, nature, the nature of the world, is given to him first of all as the nature of the

human species, which, because of his coexistence with other people, precedes his coexistence with the world. Man is *for* man. Man is in relation to man. The myth of an absolute God, therefore, could arise because it facilitated the discovery of the other man, intimacy and union with him.

Take Weil, for example. Does she want to unite with God or, through God, join other human existences? Is she in love with God, or, through God, with man? Is her resilience to death, pain, and despair born of her bond to God or people? Is that which she calls grace not simply a state of coexistence with another human life? That other absolute “Thou,” eternal, immobile, therefore, would be nothing more than a mask behind which hides the ephemeral human face. Sad, naive, but also moving . . . What a jump into the heavens simply to jump two yards from one’s own I to someone else’s?

If, then, faith is only a state of the soul leading to someone else’s temporary existence, then I should be able to attain this state even after casting off the auxiliary myth about the pre-Eternal. I really don’t know why I couldn’t prove this to myself. I’m missing some sort of key. Perhaps God is one of the keys but there must be a different key and one in accord with my own nature. As far as I am concerned, my entire life, all my experiences, all my intuitions, thrust me in this direction, not toward God, but toward people. I could achieve the facilitation, the normalization, so to speak, of dying only by shifting the weight of my individual death to others and, in general, by submitting to others.

People are an awe-inspiring power for the single human being. I believe in the superiority of a collective existence.

J. told me about the hell he experienced in a German concentration camp in Mauthausen. The climate of that camp, the human climate (after all, it was created by people) was such that death became easy. On his way to the gas chamber (which he avoided only by accident), he regretted not eating his morning portion of bread. This watering down of death was not only the consequence of physical deprivation, it was the “spirit,” degrading and depreciating, that had changed.

The means of our coexistence with people are unimportant to this day. The horrible isolation of animals which can barely communicate . . . but man? We have not yet grown so remote from animals and we haven’t the least notion of what it means to have another human being tear into our locked self.

To foresee ourselves in the future . . . what knowledge!

Thursday

Lefebvre on Kierkegaard:

"He lost his love, his fiancée. He implores God to return everything to him and waits. . . ."

"What does Kierkegaard demand? He demands a repetition of a life which he had not experienced, the recovery of his lost fiancée."

"He clamors for a repetition of the past—that Regina be returned to him as she was, at the time of their engagement. . . ."

How similar to *The Marriage*! Except that Henry doesn't turn to God. He deposes his father-king (the only link joining him to God and absolute morality), after which, proclaiming himself king, he attempts to recover the past with the help of people. He attempts to make a new reality of and with them.

Divine and human magic.

Lefebvre, as all Marxists writing about existentialism, is acute in places and then becomes entirely pedestrian, impossibly flat, as if he had fallen out a window into the street.

When will this whirlwind, this tearing, this madness of leaves, despair of branches, cease? When some of the trees calm down, others begin to howl, the noise rolls from one place to another, and I, locked in this house, locked in myself . . . and, now, at night, I really am afraid that "something" will appear . . . something abnormal . . . because my monstrosity is growing, my relations with nature are bad, lax, this laxness makes me open to "everything." I do not mean the devil, but "whatever" . . . I don't know if this is clear. If the table stopped being a table by changing into . . . not necessarily a diabolical thing. The devil is only one of the possibilities. Beyond nature is immensity.

"Finality" has surrounded me on all sides. This is an encirclement ripe with dread. Yet, as I have already noted with some satisfaction, I extinguish all powers in myself. A Romantic in my circumstances would gladly surrender himself of these furies. An existentialist would plumb his anxieties. A believer would prostrate himself before God. A Marxist would reach the bottom of Marxism. I don't believe that any of these serious people would deny the profundity of this experience, I, on the other hand, do what I can to return to an everyday dimension, ordinary life, nothing too serious. I don't want peaks and an abyss, I want the plain. . . .

To retreat from all “finality” . . .

I am quite at home with the manner of thinking that organizes this retreat. I say to myself: your dying lives and even lives quite intensely. You experience death to describe it in the most lively way, you want to use it for the remnants of your existence, for your literary career. You peer into the chasm in order to tell others what you have seen. You seek greatness to elevate yourself above others by a fraction. Before you is an abyss, but behind you is the swarming little world of people. . . .

Is it just I who does this? Wasn't the entire exploration of the Unknown by the “greatest spirits of humanity” done in order to become a prominent philosopher, poet, or saint amid ordinary everydayness? How can I explain that there is no irony in what I say, that, on the contrary, all my hopes are based on exactly this?

Dialectics, ruining greatness on behalf of what is small. To attain being average. To achieve the average on a higher rung, compromising all extremeness but only after exhausting it, all on my own scale.

Friday

Polish Catholicism.

I understand a Catholicism such as the one that has historically developed in Poland as the shifting of burdens beyond one's own powers to someone else—God. This is entirely the relationship of children to their father. A child is under the protection of the father. A child is supposed to listen to him, respect and love him, and abide by his commandments. A child, therefore, can remain a child because all “finality” is passed on to God the Father and his earthly embassy, the Church. This way the Pole gained a green world, green because it is immature, but also green because the meadows and trees blossom in it and are not black and metaphysical. To live in the lap of nature, in a limited world, leaving the black universe to God.

I, who am terribly Polish and terribly rebellious against Poland, have always been irritated by that little, childish, secondary, ordered, and religious world that is Poland. I attributed Poland's historical lack of dynamism as well as Poland's cultural impotence to these characteristics because God led us around by our little hand. I compared this well-behaved Polish childhood to the adult independence

of other cultures. This nation without a philosophy, without a conscious history, intellectually soft and spiritually timid, a nation that produced only a “kindly” and “noble-minded” art, a languid people of lyrical scribblers of poetry, folklorists, pianists, actors, in which even Jews dissolved and lost their venom. . . . My literary work is guided by the desire to extricate the Pole from all secondary realities and to put him in direct confrontation with the universe. Let him fend for himself as best as he can. I desire to ruin his childhood.

But now in this pursuant din, in the face of my own helplessness, in this inability to straighten things out, it occurs to me that I have just contradicted myself. Ruin a childhood? In the name of what? In the name of a maturity that I myself can neither bear nor accept? It is the Polish God, after all (in contrast to Weil’s God), who is that splendid system that has maintained man in a sphere of indirect being, who is that veering away from the ultimate that is demanded by my insufficiency. How can I desire that they not be children if I myself, *per fas et nefas*, want to be a child?

A child, yes, but one that has come to know and has exhausted all the possibilities of adult seriousness. This is the big difference. First, push away all the things that make everything easier, find yourself in a cosmos that is as bottomless as you can stand, in a cosmos at the limits of your consciousness, and experience a condition where you are left to your own loneliness and your own strength, only then, when the abyss which you have not managed to tame throws you from the saddle, sit down on the earth and discover the sand and grass anew. For childhood to be allowed, one must have driven maturity to bankruptcy. I am not bluffing: when I pronounce the word “childhood,” I have the feeling that I am expressing the deepest but not yet roused contents of the people who gave me birth. This is not the childhood of a child, but the difficult childhood of an adult.

Saturday

Today is Christmas Eve. I leave in the morning, the day after tomorrow.

The wind slackened and I strayed over the beaches in the afternoon, it got hot, but in the evening came a storm, bulbous clouds, similar to enormous sagging cannonballs, out of whose bellies crawled quick, self-shredding little clouds. All of

this grew tight, dense, heavy, close; it froze, rippled, not a single sliver of lightning, in the darkness of the evening made darker by the darkness of the storm.

Then the tormented trees crashed, having fallen into whorls of the mad blows of the gale, which tossed convulsively on all sides and finally exploded in a half circle bristling with zigzags of lightning. The house creaked, the shutters slammed. I wanted to put on a light, no, the lines were down. Downpour. I sit in the flashing darkness. "The heavens grew dark but they shone like a vision of Satan's capital." Phosphorizing without end and something like errant fires among the clouds and rolling thunderpeals, also endless. Ha, ha. I didn't feel too sure of myself. As they say, what a night! *C'est à ne pas mettre un chien dehors*. I got up, paced the room and all of a sudden, extended my hand. I don't know why—maybe because, being afraid, I was, at the same time, playing with my fear. This was an unsubstantiated gesture and so it was dangerous somehow, at such a moment, in these conditions.

Then the storm stopped. Rain, wind, thunder, light—all ceased. Silence.

I had never seen anything like it.

The cessation of the storm at full tilt, stranger than immobilizing a horse in full gallop, this suddenness, as if someone had cut its motion. Understand this: a storm which had not exhausted itself in a natural way, but which was interrupted. An unhealthy, coagulating darkness, some kind of illness, something pathological in space. I, of course, had not gone so crazy that I thought the movement of my hand had stopped the storm. Out of curiosity, I extended my hand again in the now entirely dark room and what should happen? The gale, rain, thunderclaps, it all began again!

I did not extend my hand a third time. I apologize. I did not dare extend my hand a third time and to this day, my hand has remained "unextended," scarred by this disgrace. No joke, what poverty! What a compromising situation! I, who am not, after all, a hysterical man or a half-wit! Then how did it happen that, after all the centuries of development, progress, science, I, not for frivolous reasons, but from a serious, solid fear, did not dare extend my hand out into the night, suspecting that "ah, perhaps" it governs the storm? Am I a sober, modern man? Yes. Am I aware, educated, well oriented? Yes, yes. Am I familiar with the latest attainments of philosophy and all the truths of the current day? Why, yes, of course! Yet how in

the devil am I supposed to know, be certain, be guaranteed that my hand is incapable of starting or stopping a storm with one magic gesture?

Why, everything I know about my nature and the nature of the world is incomplete—it is as if I knew nothing at all.

XIX

(La Cabania)

Tuesday

Yesterday morning I took a bus via Necochea to Władysław Jankowski's *estancia*, called La Cabania.

If this diary, written for the past few years, is not up to my level or that of my art or epoch, no one should blame me because this is work imposed on me by the circumstances of my exile, for which I may not be suited.

I arrived at La Cabania at seven in the evening.

"Duś" Jankowski and his daughters, Marisa and Andrea, Mr. and Mrs. Stanisław Czapski (Joseph's brother), their daughter Lena, and Andrzej Czapski and his wife. Supper, during which I made faces with one side of my face at the girls, who giggled.

A spacious room in a quiet guest house in the garden, where I arranged my papers in preparation for a final bout with them. Who has decreed that one should write only when one has something to write? Why, art consists of writing not what one has to say, but something altogether unexpected.

Saturday

There is no ocean, gleaming, salt, winds. After that storm there in Jocaral, here, peace. Quiet and relaxation. The most important thing is that the loneliness has left me. In the evening, by lamplight, a family atmosphere that I have not known for sixteen years. I take walks in the pampa, which is gigantically pastel, as

always, but reined in by avenues of eucalyptus and bouquets of trees. In the distance a mountain range.

What always amazes me in the Argentine countryside: there are no peasants, there are no farmhands. In spaces that would demand many many hands in Poland, there is no one. One man plows with a tractor. The same man reaps, threshes, and even packs the grain into sacks, moving along the field in a motorized harvester, which is also a threshing machine. Those working these fields and tending the great numbers of cattle and horses come to a total of a few peons, who are never in a hurry. What a relief after that brutal countryside, where a man had to be a master to a yokel.

Existentialism.

I would like to bring my anxieties at Mar del Plata to some sort of conclusion. I have to write certain things down so that they become more binding.

Monday

Existentialism.

I don't know how existentialism would be able to become something more than a toy in my hands, and change into seriousness, death, doing oneself in. I write down my opinion of existentialism here not out of respect for my own dilettante's opinions, but out of respect for my own life. Describing, as best as I can, my spiritual adventures (as if I were describing my corporeal adventures), I cannot bypass two bankruptcies which have occurred in me: the existential and the Marxist. I confirmed the crash of existential theory in myself not long ago by discussing it during my little course in philosophy . . . *contre coeur*, as something already dead.

I wrote *Ferdynand* in the years 1936–37, when no one knew anything about this philosophy. In spite of this, *Ferdynand* is existential to the marrow. Critics, I will help you in determining why *Ferdynand* is existential: because man is created by people and because people mutually form themselves. This is precisely existence and not essence. *Ferdynand* is existence in a vacuum, that is, nothing except existence. That is why, in this book practically all the basic themes of existentialism play fortissimo: becoming, creating oneself, freedom, fear, absurdity, nothingness . . . with the single difference that in addition to the typical existential “spheres” of human life, like Heidegger's banal and authentic life, Kierkegaard's aesthetic, ethi-

cal, and religious life, or Jaspers's "spheres," there is yet another sphere, namely, the "sphere of immaturity." This sphere or "category" is the contribution of my private existence to existentialism. Let us say it right off: this is what separates me the most from classical existentialism. For Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, the more profound the awareness, the more authentic the existence. They measure honesty and the essence of experience by the degree of awareness. But is our humanity really built on awareness? Doesn't awareness—that forced, extreme awareness—arise among us, not from us, as something created by effort, the mutual perfecting of ourselves in it, the confirming of something that one philosopher forces onto another? Isn't man, therefore, in this private reality, something childish and always beneath his own awareness? And doesn't he feel awareness to be, at the same time, something alien, imposed and unimportant? If this is how it is, this furtive childhood, this concealed degradation are ready to explode your systems sooner or later.

It is not worth carrying on about *Ferdydurke*, which is a circus and not a philosophy. It remains a fact, however, that even before the war, I was like a cat walking my own paths through existentialism. Why, then, when I became familiar with the theory later on, was it of no use to me at all? And why, now, when my existence grows more monstrous with each year, so very mixed with dying, and beckons me, forces me to seriousness, why is their seriousness of no use to me at all?

I might forgive those professors the twisting intestines of their thinking which does not want to be thinking, their leaps from logic into alogic, from abstraction into the concrete and vice versa. Their thought, that retching thought, really is "that which is not and is not that which it is"—that is how deeply their splitting contradictions penetrate. A self-destructive thought, which creates the impression that we are using our hands to cut off our hands. Their works are one cry of desperate impotence, the most artful expression of failure, and it is here that beating one's head against the wall becomes the only remaining method. Yet I might forgive them this, this might even suit me. I might even be able to handle the purely professional reproaches put to them by their colleagues, concerning, for example, the relation subject-object or their being handicapped by classical idealism or their illicit ties to Husserl. Perhaps I have already become accustomed to the thought that philosophy has to be a failure and I know that we can only dispense thought that has been dashed to pieces, after all, we know that a rider who mounts this horse, has to fall off. No, I am not demanding. I am not asking for absolute answers to absolute questions.

I would be happy in my poverty with even a dialectical scrap of truth, which would cheat this hunger for even a moment. Yes, if this could satisfy me even temporarily, I would not refuse even this regurgitated nourishment.

I would be satisfied all the more easily since, I have to admit, even though this philosophy is bankrupt in its very points of departure, nevertheless, it can become immensely fertile and enriching as an attempt to systematize our profoundest knowledge about man. After discarding this specific scholasticism that speculates in the abstract (this is what existentialism hates, but what it thrives on), something very important, something concretely, practically important remains: a certain construct of man, resulting from the profoundest, most authentic confrontation possible between consciousness and existence. The various theses of the existentialists will perhaps turn out to be a professorial ranting, but the existential man, such as they saw him, will remain the great acquisition of consciousness. This is certainly an abysmal model. Falling into this abyss, I know that I will not reach the bottom, but nevertheless it is not alien, it is the abyss of my nature. And perhaps this metaphysics of man and life will lead to nothing. It is, nevertheless, an unavoidable necessity in our development, something without which we could not reach a certain maximum of ours, that highest and most profound effort that must be attained. So many of the loose intuitions that are so abundant in the air we breathe that they visited me almost daily are here woven into a system, organized into a whole that is desperately lame and barely alive, but some sort of whole, nevertheless. Existentialism, whatever else it may be, is founded on our essential anxiety. It liberates our metaphysical *dernier cri*. It hones the ultimate half-truth about us to such a degree that Heidegger's or Jaspers's man must replace the other anachronistic models and it imposes itself on the imagination and delineates our frame of mind in the cosmos. Here, therefore, existentialism becomes a dread and proud power, along the lines of those great acts of self-delineation, which every so often model the face of humanity. The only question is: How long will this last model suffice? Our tempo is accelerated, resulting in lighter and more fleeting definitions.

My relationship with existentialism is tormentingly unclear and tense. It intrudes into my existence, but I don't want it. And it is not I who am in this predicament. Strange. Philosophy, exhorting to authenticity, leads us into gigantic falsehoods.

Tuesday

We told each other our dreams. Nothing in art, even the most inspired mysteries of music, can equal dreams. The artistic perfection of dreams! How many lessons this nocturnal archmaster gives to us, the daily fabricators of dreams, the artists! In a dream everything is pregnant with a dreadful and unfinished meaning, nothing is indifferent, everything reaches us more deeply, more intimately than the most heated passion of the day. This is the lesson: an artist cannot be restricted to day, he has to reach the night life of humanity and seek its myths and symbols. Also: the dream upsets the reality of the experienced day and extracts certain fragments from it, strange fragments, and arranges them illogically in an arbitrary pattern. It is exactly this lack of sense that has the profoundest meaning for us: we ask why, in the name of what, is our ordinary sense destroyed. Gazing at the absurd as at a hieroglyph, we try to decipher its reason for being, of which we know only that it is, that it exists. . . . Art, therefore, also can and should upset reality, take it apart into elements, build illogical new worlds of it and in this arbitrariness is hidden a law, which in disturbing sense has it, so that the madness that destroys our external sense leads us into our internal meaning. The dream reveals the abysmal idiocy of the task set for art by those classical minds that prescribe that art ought to be “clear.” Clarity? Its clarity is the clarity of night, not day. Its brightness is exactly like that of a flashlight that extracts just one object out of the darkness, immersing the rest in an even more bottomless night. It should be, beyond the boundaries of its light, dark like the pronouncements of the Pythia, veiled, not spelled out, shimmering with a multiplicity of meanings and broader than precision. A classical clarity? The clarity of the Greeks? If this seems clear to you then it is because you are blind. Go at high noon to take a good look at the most classical Venus, and you will see the darkest night.

Monday

Dus’s new poem which came to him this morning—in a dream or half-drowse:

Twisting his mouth into a crystalline word
The wise man said to the fool, you are absurd

And the fool replied with the smile of a swine
However it looks, whatever sense is mine

This is one of those sleepy, unremarkable poems. It begins like a trifle, but in the last line there is an unraveling, nonsense intrudes to save the rhyme and to maintain the appearance of sense. This little doggerel is like a solemn drunk who begins on topic but ends with gibberish, pretending cleverly before himself and others that the point he is making is excellent! The fact, however, that the fool answers “with the smile of a swine,” stupidly really, with porcine clumsiness, with gross piggishness, with the haughty carelessness of an idiot—isn’t this a point actually worthy of attention? This swine delights in his stupidity—this is his justification.

This is the poetry of the tawdry, of delight in bungling. I have always been drawn to this kind of mucking around and who knows if I did not miss my calling by veering from this swinish path. (In *The Marriage* and also in my story “Incidents on the *H.M.S. Banbury*” there is no lack of that drunkenness, but I should probably increase the portion).

Everything that is torpid astounds and excites me.

Thursday

How should I explain why existentialism did not lead me astray?

Perhaps I was close to choosing an existence, which they call authentic—in contrast to a frivolous temporal life, which they call banal. That is how great the pressure of seriousness is from all sides. Today, in today’s raw times, there is no thought or art which does not shout to you in a loud voice: don’t escape, don’t play, don’t poke fun at yourself, don’t run away! Fine. I, too, in spite of everything, would also prefer not to lie to my own being. I, therefore, tried this authentic life, full of loyalty to existence in myself. But what do you want? It can’t be done. It can’t be done because that authenticity turned out to be falsier than all my previous deceptions, games, and leaps taken together. I, with my artistic temperament, don’t understand much theory, but I do have a nose when it comes to style. When I applied maximum consciousness to life, in an attempt to found my existence on this, I noticed that something stupid was happening to me. Too bad, but no way. It can’t be done. It seems impossible to meet the demands of *Dasein* and simultaneously have coffee and croissants for an evening snack. To fear nothingness, but to

fear the dentist more. To be consciousness, which walks around in pants and talks on the telephone. To be responsibility, which runs little shopping errands downtown. To bear the weight of significant being, to instill the world with meaning and then return the change from ten pesos. What do you want? I know how these contrasts come together in their theories. Slowly, gradually, from Descartes through German idealism, I grew accustomed to their structure, but laughter and shame toss me about at the sight of it with equal strength, as in the first days, when I was still completely naive. And even if you were to “convince” me a thousand times over, there would still always be some elementary, unbearable ridiculousness in this!

This is impossible to bear, especially in existentialism. As long as philosophy speculated in isolation from life, as long as it was pure reason reeling off abstractions, it was not violence, affront, and ridiculousness to such a degree. Thought simply was, life simply was. I could tolerate Cartesian or Kantian speculations because they were only the work of the mind. I, on the other hand, sensed that beyond consciousness is being. I felt elusive in being. Basically I never treated these differently than as an exclusive creation of a certain power of mine, the power of reasoning, which, however, was only one of my functions, which was, in an ultimate sense, an expansion of my vitality. And so, because of this, I did not have to surrender. But now? Existentialism? Existentialism wants to get at all of me, it no longer appeals only to my cognitive powers, it wants to penetrate me in my deepest existence, it wants to *be* my existence. Here, therefore, my life bolts and begins to kick. Intellectual polemics with existentialists really amuse me. How can you polemicize with something that strikes at your being? This is no longer just a theory, but a rapacious act of their existence in relation to your existence and one does not answer this with arguments but with living differently than they would like you to and so categorically differently that your life becomes impenetrable to them.

Historically speaking, the plunge of the human spirit into this existential scandal, into its specific helpless rapacity and wise stupidity, was probably inevitable. The history of culture indicates that stupidity is the twin sister of reason, it grows most luxuriously not on the soil of virgin ignorance, but on soil cultivated by the sweat of doctors and professors. Great absurdities are not thought up by those whose reason hovers over daily affairs. It is not strange, therefore, that the most intense thinkers were the producers of the greatest idiocies. Reason is a machine that purifies itself dialectically, but this means that dirt is appropriate to it. Our rescue

from this dirty imperfection of reason was that no one has ever taken reason too seriously—beginning with the philosophers themselves. As for me, I can't believe that Socrates, Spinoza, or Kant were real people and completely serious ones at that. I claim that an excess of seriousness is conditioned by an excess of frivolity. Of what were these majestic conceptions born? Curiosity? Accident? Ambition? Gain? For pleasure? We will never know the dirt of their genesis, their hidden, intimate immaturity, their childhood or shame because even the artists themselves are not allowed to know about this. . . . We will not know the roads by which Kant-the-child and Kant-the-adolescent changed into Kant-the-philosopher, but it would be good to remember that culture or knowledge is something much lighter than one would imagine. Lighter and more ambivalent. Nevertheless, the imperialism of reason is horrible. Whenever reason notices that some part of reality eludes it, it immediately lunges at it to devour it. From Aristotle to Descartes, reason behaved calmly for the most part because it judged that everything could be understood. Beginning with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, however, and then Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and others, it began to delineate terrain inaccessible to thinking and to discover that life ridicules reason. This, reason could not bear and from then on, its torments, which reach tragicomic heights in existentialism, begin.

It is here that reason meets, face-to-face, the greatest and most elusive of sneerers, life. Reason discovered and made that enemy concrete, one could say that they thought long and hard until they thought up something about which they could no longer think. That is why one is overwhelmed with shame in the face of the creations of this freak reasoning: here, as if by the strength of some sort of maliciousness, repulsive perversion, and greatness in a demonic twist, reason becomes a great ridiculousness, profundity leads to the dregs of impotence, accuracy strikes at stupidity and the absurd. Horrified, we see that the more seriousness, the less serious! This did not happen to us to this extent with other philosophers. They grew closer to ridiculousness in proportion to their penetration into the terrain of life and, in this way, Nietzsche is more comical than Kant. Yet laughter was not yet a necessity when regarding them, for this thought was isolated, at least to a point, and it did not engage us. It was only when the theoretical problem became a "mystery" of Gabriel Marcel that the mystery turned out to be ridiculous to the bursting point!

Let us attempt to delineate the nature of this ridiculousness. It is not just a matter of this desperate contrast between an "ordinary reality" and their ultimate

reality, a contrast so massive and devastating that no analyses can patch it up. Our laughter in this is not only laughter planted with both feet in “common sense,” no, it is worse because it is more spasmodic, it is independent of us. When you, existentialists, speak to me of consciousness, fear, and nothingness, I burst with laughter not because I don’t agree with you, but because I must agree with you. I agreed and, lo and behold, nothing happened. I agreed but nothing changed in me, even by an iota. The consciousness that you injected into my life entered my bloodstream and instantly became the life that now shakes me in spasms of giggles, the ancient triumph of the element. Why am I forced to laugh? Simply because I also revel in consciousness. I laugh because I delight in fear, play with nothingness, and toy with responsibility. Death does not exist.

Tuesday

In spite of this I have to say that I do not believe that any culture, art, or literature can afford to bypass existentialism. If Polish Catholicism, or, too, Polish Marxism, fence themselves off from existentialism with an unwise disregard, they will become a blind alley, a provincial backwater.

On Sunday, Duś and I drove out into the neighborhood to visit.

The lady of the house, an Englishwoman (and the wife of a wealthy stockbroker from Buenos Aires, who bought a small parcel of land here and on it built a chalet) treated me right off with a strange aggressiveness, which was all the more unusual as I was a complete stranger to her. You, sir, must be an egotist. I smell the egotist in you! . . . After which she does not stop letting me know something more or less like this: You imagine that you are someone, but I know better! You are a pseudointellectual, a pseudoartist (if you were worth something, you would be famous!), which is to say, you are a parasite, a drone, a theoretician, a lunatic, anarchist, a tramp, and, certainly, a swaggerer! You must work! Live for society! I work, I sacrifice myself, I live for others, but you are a sybarite and a Narcissus!

To those “I’s” with which she destroys my egotism, I add another few: I am an Englishwoman! I am distinguished! Look how honest I am and casually impertinent! I have grace! I am charming, amusing, aesthetic, and also, moral! I have my own mind! Not just anyone appeals to me!

Once, Sabato or Mastronardi, I no longer remember which, told me that at

a certain party, an *estanciero* (a person otherwise well brought up) walked up to a well-known Argentine writer and said: You, Sir, are a numbskull! When asked what specifically in the writing of this particular author aroused such abomination in him, he admitted that he had never read him and had upbraided him *por las dudas*, just in case, so that he would not think “too highly of himself.”

This phenomenon has its name here. It is called the “Argentine defensive.” The defensive of this lady, who was rather likable although a bit mannered, was not serious because one could see that she wanted to be appealing and that she wields this genre because she considers it charming and distinguished. Sometimes, however, an Argentine becomes truly discourteous in a defensive, a rare thing in this polite country.

Monday

I feel that there is no way to ignore existentialism or to bypass it with any kind of dialectic. I believe that the artist or writer who has not come face-to-face with its initiations hasn’t the slightest notion about the current day (Marxism will not save him). I also believe that the lack of this experience, the existential experience, in Polish culture, which is bound firmly between the frameworks of Catholicism and Marxism, will once again retard it in relation to the West, by some fifty to a hundred years.

One cannot leap over existentialism, one must vanquish it. Yet one will not vanquish it with discussion because it does not lend itself well to discussion. It is not, after all, an intellectual issue. Existentialism will be overcome only by the passionate and categorical choice of another life, another reality. By choosing this other reality, we become that reality. Generally speaking, in the future, we should bid farewell to the methods of “objective” discussion, persuasion, and argumentation. We will not untie our Gordian knots with our intellect. We will cut through them with our own lives.

I resist the theoretical and systematic existentialism of philosophers because the world from which it issues is opposed to my life, it does not fit my life. To me, existentialists are dishonest people: this feeling is stronger than reason. Notice that I am not doubting their avenues of thought or the intuition by which they arrived at this doctrine. I am disregarding it because of its results, which, as exis-

tence, I cannot come to terms with or assimilate in any way. I say, therefore, that it is not for me and I push it away. At the instant that I dispose of their existential night of the single consciousness by passionate decision, I return a normal, concrete world to life and this is the world in which I can breathe. The point here is not at all to prove that this world is the most real reality. The point is the blind, stubborn affirmation of the temporal world in spite of that intuition, as the only thing in which life is possible, as the only thing which is compatible with our nature.

We must be aware of existentialism just as we had to make ourselves aware of Nietzsche or Hegel. What's more, we have to extract everything we can from this—all conceivable depth and wealth. Yet we cannot believe it. Of course, we should wield this knowledge for it is the best knowledge we can attain, nevertheless, he who believes in it is grotesquely stiff, inertly ponderous, awkward and clumsy! Let us retain this awareness on a remoter plain, as an auxiliary device. Even though existentialism may blind us with flashes of the highest revelation, we have to disregard it. We should treat it with disdain. This is no place for loyalty.

Wednesday

A letter from J. Kempka in Munich. I cite passages from Zbigniew Mitzner's introduction to the new edition of Uniłowski's *Twenty Years of Life*, published in Poland.

"When Uniłowski appeared on the literary scene, a ruthless cult, divorcing literature from life, opposed progressive tendencies. This was the period when Gombrowicz wanted to show Polish literature its 'backside,' and exerted, unfortunately, a broad influence on his contemporaries with his writing about childishness and the subconscious."

"In his novel, whose title itself constituted a program (the word *Ferdynand* means nothing), he wanted to reduce human life to childish reflexes. Uniłowski wanted to show the development and maturation of a child in a severe and evil world. Gombrowicz did the reverse: he wanted to reduce the issues of life and social questions to the epoch of childhood into the sphere of subconscious reflexes. . . . Uniłowski was a writer heading in the opposite direction from Gombrowicz and his adherents. . . ."

Is Mitzner ordinarily and simplemindedly stupid? Or does the regime force

him into stupidity? Or perhaps Mitzner is smart, but he backsides and blunts me in order to destroy me all the more easily? People! Cut my throat if you are told to, but not with such a dull, such a terribly dull, knife!

Let me add, from the treasury of my memories, that when I gave Uniłowski *Ferdydurke*—still in typescript—to read, he was bowled over with delight. He did not conceal the fact that this work affected him in a liberating way. In gratitude, he invited me to the Adria and got me drunk.

Together with this letter came a clipping from *Dziś i Jutro*.^{*} A lengthy article by Zygmunt Lichniak entitled, “Looking Askance But Not Cross-Eyed.” The subject is émigré literature, but most of the ammunition is fired at Miłosz and myself. I appear as an “anarchist” who acknowledges no law.

“That decent fellow,” as A. N. rightly remarked in *Kultura*, when discussing another one of Lichniak’s statements about me. “That decent asinine fellow,” I could add. Nietzsche asked: “Can a donkey be tragic?” Yes, when it staggers beneath a load it cannot bear.

There is something low in this coziness of theirs toward their fate, their “decency,” their “goodness,” their very specific virtuousness. . . . This is interesting. It would seem that there one lives keenly. In the meantime, these souls are like warm dumplings, these books and articles reek of a disintegrating softness, which was formerly characteristic of a provincial backwater. Their softness is not false, nor is it merely a consequence of the fact that sharper elements are removed from participation. The law is such that when collective life becomes everything, the individual becomes flaccid. I fear that quite a few of the builders of the new Poland—and I say this from a personal, spiritual, and intellectual perspective—are a pulp, baby food, stewed fruit.

In addition to the above clippings, two bulletins of the radio station “Homeland,” published in Warsaw, where there is also mention of me. The same sincerity, mixed with lies, but also blurred and almost innocent in its dull-wittedness. They cite a few sentences out of context, twist the meaning, and sprinkle everything with commentary. Even the Vice-Premier Cyrankiewicz extracted little sentences from my diary in order to shake them in front of the nation and shout: monstrosity! Almighty God, remove us some day from this absurdity!

^{*} *Today and Tomorrow*.

(La Cabania)

Wednesday

"The Novel" (it is difficult to call my works novels) does not go well. Its language, which is too stiff, paralyzes me. I dread that everything that I have written up to now—about a hundred pages—is awful tripe. I am not in a position to judge this because in my long coexistence with the text, I lose all sense of it, but I am afraid . . . that something is warning me. . . . Will I, therefore, have to throw everything into the trash can, several months' work, to begin from the beginning? My God! And what if I have lost my "talent" and will never write anything, anything, at least, on the level of my former works?

France: talent is only great patience. Gide: Talent is fear of failure. If talent is patience and fear, I do not lack talent.

I have thought up a captivating, stimulating theme, reality loaded with horrible revelations and the work is at the boiling point, stimulated by many ideas, and numerous visions and intuitions. Yet I have to write all this. My language deceives me. I have entered a category of words that are too calm, that are not mad enough.

Girls:

Marisa, fifteen, distinguished and romantic, lazy in her studies, but because of this, endlessly drowning in a luminous vapor of beauty, love, art. . . . I tell her about myself and Lollobrigida or about myself and Grace Kelly, setting the story on yachts, near waterfalls, or on mountain peaks. Distrustful.

Andrea, a pert, talented, and sharp girl, twelve years old, a giggler with whom I like to giggle, specializes in stealing my pipe. I tell her that one of the windows of the stable is "bad" and that one must be careful, which disturbs her sleep and mine.

Lena, fourteen years old. This one I have engaged in a light flirtation, which consists of looks expressing contempt, intoxication, rapture, condescension, desire, cynicism, indifference, sarcasm, love, madness, irony, boredom, indifference. . . . When the adults don't see us, we also communicate by making faces. After all, she despises me.

Blondes! How beautiful! The delicacy and stillness of their blossoming. They are but it is as if they did not exist. They are temporary, in love with themselves and despising themselves, important and unimportant, their ascending existence is both a joke and seriousness. I, on the other hand, being somewhat older, must submit to their amusement with my every approach to them and I lie, lie, lie because this is what their imagination demands. I have been false to the marrow. I tell them about my battles during the last war.

Thursday

This on one level. On another are thoughts which I could call for lack of a better term, an effort to extract some sort of morality from myself, the morality of my time. Catholicism, existentialism, Marxism. I think about this while walking along an avenue lined with eucalyptus. I think—which amazes me—because I usually avoid thinking. I can say with a clear conscience that I think only when I am forced to think. I prefer to stare rather than think.

But now I think much more calmly than there, in Mar del Plata, when I really feared dying.

Am I a man deprived of a moral sense?

No, definitely not. Mine is a rather noble nature, although an inexpressibly weak one (my master in this is probably Chopin—I arrange myself so that my weakness changes into strength). At any rate, this furious, deaf, almost spasmodic rebellion, which is born in me whenever I confront baseness, does not lie. To this day, I have preserved the simple moral reflex of a boy, as I have preserved so many other things from my youth.

Whence then my distaste for all delineated morality, locked into a system? Out of love for that simplicity. I want to have a relaxed morality, the morality of my nature, I want to preserve this freshness. For me, man is constructed in precisely this, in morality, and in an inappropriate morality that is the death of all moral life. So what? The world around me becomes more and more constructed, less and less like a rustling tree, more and more like a bathroom: repugnant cleanliness, smoothness of shiny enamel and metal, coolness and logic, pipes and faucets over a gleaming tub. As someone has accurately observed, I believe it was in *Kultura*, a bath in this tub is not a dip in a lake. Locked in this bathroom, I vomit.

When a modern moralist type like Sartre appears on the horizon, I have the impression that this is a frogman rising from the depths without remembering to remove his wetsuit. The awful mask, planned for an inhuman pressure, has adhered to his face.

Saturday

The ethics of Marxism.

I agree that Communism was born a hundredfold more from an offended moral sense than from a desire to improve material being. Justice! That is its cry. They cannot bear the thought that one person has a palace and another a cot. Most of all they cannot stand the thought that one person has the opportunity to develop and another does not. That one has it at the price of another. This is not envy, this is the desire for just laws. They are not at all certain that the dictatorship of the proletariat will provide each person with a house and garden. The point is that they prefer even a universal, just cot and common poverty to well-being rife with injustice. Ideal Communism is tormented moral feeling, which has become aware of social injustice which it can no longer forget. That injustice eats away at its liver like the eagle that tears at Prometheus.

Why, therefore, do I, having capitalism at my right hand, whose hushed cynicism I know, and on the left, revolution, protest, and rebellion born of the most human emotion, why then don't I join with them? Why, my art is important to me and it needs noble, hot blood. Art and rebellion are almost identical. I am a revolutionary because I am an artist and as much as I am him, the entire thousand-year process from which I derive, sown with names like Rabelais or Montaigne, Lautrémont or Cervantes, was an uninterrupted incitement to rebellion, sometimes on the scale of a hushed whisper, other times, exploding with full voice. How did it happen that to me, who entered literature under the sign of rebellion and provocation, fully understanding that writing must be passionate, that to me fell the role of being on the opposite side of the barricade?

What considerations could have inclined me to such a betrayal of my vocation! Let us examine them. Would I consider the program of this revolution a utopia and not believe that immutability, an eternity of injustice could change? Yet if for centuries, art has pushed toward this reform almost blindly, why should I

resist today, when I am permeated infinitely more strongly than they were with the awareness that humanity is moving, that it is moving faster and faster, that the course of history is accelerated and we are no longer walking, we are careening into the future. Never was the word “immutability” less in tune with its time. Yet, in that case, maybe I will oppose the river of the incensed proletariat on the basis of absolute justifications, like God or deductions of an abstract mind? No, this crag has shifted from beneath my feet, absolutes have mixed with matter and, in dialectical movement, thought has become impure, dependent on being. Perhaps, therefore, I am resisting in the name of common pity, seeing the enormity of the suffering and mounds of bodies inflicted by them? No. Why? If I am a child then I am a child that has passed through Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’s school. To put it coldly: what is the pain of a million slaves or a hundred-million-body morgue? If you gradually called to life all the victims tormented by history up to the present day, it would be a never-ending procession. And don’t I know all too well that life is tragic in its very essence?

Right now as I am writing this, a small fish close to the Galápagos Islands is crossing the threshold of hell because another fish has just devoured its tail.

If suffering is unavoidable, then at least let man endow his suffering with human meaning. How does one resist a revolution if it endows us with meaning, our own meaning?

Monday

At one time, twenty years ago, I was a “landed gentleman,” a person belonging to a higher social class. Today? Today, materially ruined, I earn my living by the pen, an intellectual and artist liberated from all the dependencies who would be more likely to find understanding for his work and its economic necessity on the other side. If I turned to that side, how much support I would find, what eager help in everything. This would be very good for my fame. Perhaps there is some sort of love of the past which rivets me? No, I have made a specialty of freedom and the school of exile strengthened that which was in me from birth, the bitter joy of separating from that which separates itself from me. No, if someone is “without prejudice” it is I.

I am undoubtedly shaped by the former world. Who of you, though, of you

Communists, is not a child of the past? If the revolution relies on overcoming an inherited consciousness, why couldn't I do this, like you? By knowing dialectics, which takes self-reliance away from the spirit?

Tuesday

I would like to supplement the above—I have to add that my view of reality is not at all removed from their, Communist, view. My world is deprived of God. In this world, people create themselves mutually. Making man dependent on man, seeing man in a constant creative bond with others, permeating them through and through, dictating the most “personal” feeling. That is how it is in *Ferdydurke* and *The Marriage*.

This is not all, though. I have always tried to bring out this “interhuman sphere” artistically, which, in *The Marriage*, for instance, grows to the heights of a creative force superior to individual consciousness, something superior, the only deity accessible to us. This happens because an element of Form is produced between people that delineates each man individually. I am like a voice in an orchestra that must tune itself to its sound, find its place in the melody or, like a dancer for whom it is not so important exactly what is danced, the important thing is to join in the dance with others. And that is why neither my thought nor my feeling is truly free or my own. I think and feel “for” people in order to rhyme with them. I experience a warping as a consequence of this highest of necessities: tuning myself to others in Form.

I applied this thought to art, for example, attempting to show (in the piece about painting) that it is naive to think that our enthrallment with a work of art comes from ourselves, that this rapture is born to a great extent not in people, but between people, and it is as if we mutually forced ourselves to admiration (although no one is awestruck “individually”).

It follows from this that thought and feeling entirely “my own” do not exist for me. There is artificiality in even the most intimate reflexes, behold the element of human essence, submitted to the “interhuman.” In that case, why does the falsity and artificiality of man, submitted to Communism, disturb me? What interferes with my acknowledging that this is exactly how it should be?

One more thing. I am generally considered an aristocratic writer. I have

nothing against this. Who, however, has more brutally felt the dependence of the higher sphere on the lower? And who, I ask, has gone as far in feeling that creativity, beauty, vitality, all the passion and poetry of the world is contained in the subjugation of the higher, the older, and the more mature to the lower and younger? This is all very much my own, as much as it can be mine, this is an experience which should weld me ardently to revolution. Why didn't it do that?

Thursday

Lies.

Dandy: that old nag has won my heart! He may be a little short in the neck, a little nervous, but what form in jumping, what a start at the bar and what a leap, softness and discretion when rounding the bends and also in acrobatics (I don't do this, but Lena does). Early in the morning, Lena and I set out, she on the calmer Tilly, I on Dandy and together we delight in our gallop in the pastures and fields, where fences and wire enclosures are devoured by the leaps of our horses, where a flushed hare shoots out from under our hooves! Behind us sometimes are Marisa and Andrea, on the African Girl and Lord Perez, unable to keep up . . . despairing . . . signaling to us! Yesterday a fierce quarrel with Duś and Staś Wickenhagen about Traviata, a thoroughbred mare, recently acquired, unfortunately of mannered reflex, even though not without style. I am trying to loosen her up with a "trockkett," first on a lead, then jumping, then at a measured trot, but the connoisseurs, even Jacek Dębicki, who is less familiar with this, do not predict success.

Lies, lies. On foot I am different, on horseback I am different. Horses lie to morality, morality to horses, I to the horses, morality, and the girls. Suddenly relaxation. Frivolity. Who am I? "Am I" at all? From time to time, "I am" this or that. . . .

Saturday

I walk along that tree-lined avenue, under the eucalyptus trees. Where is north? Where east? There, in the northeast, how many kilometers from here? Several thousand.

What am I doing here, alone on the pampa, with a frivolity that is already

on the wing? And, again, this foretaste of dying slowly in a crushing underground. God, as it has been said, will not be a haven for me in old age. Nor will the transcendencies of existentialism which is nothing but intoxication with its own tragicality. If only the neglected word "nation" would revive in me, simply to get close to it physically. To get on a ship and allow their revolution to embrace and sweep me away . . . what would happen to me? Wouldn't the temporal sense, temporal it is true, but enormous with that mass of human existence harnessed to it, wouldn't it make me more resistant to my dying? To allow that historical energy to permeate me. To join them. Why do you hesitate? What am I afraid of? You recoil before this vulgarization, this humiliation? Yet you yourself know this, you said it yourself: the higher consciousness must acknowledge its dependence on the lower. And the aim, the moral aim, of life . . .

I say this aloud to myself in order to familiarize myself with the presence of this thought. Yet I know at the same time that this is perfectly impossible. The words escape into silence, which alone remains, always present and unchanging.

It can't be done. Let us attempt to explain this improbability of nature not even intellectually, but spontaneously. It can't be done because I want to be myself. Yes, even though I know that there is nothing more misleading than that inaccessible "I," I know, too, that all the honor and value of life depend on the relentless pursuit of and the relentless defense of the "I." A Catholic would call this a struggle for one's own soul; an existentialist, the will to authenticity. Undoubtedly, the central point of all these moralities, including the Marxist, is here: to preserve one's "I," one's soul. How does the thing look in practice? Why, lo and behold, I get on a ship and sail. Even en route I would have to amputate myself and throw overboard half of what I considered to be of value. I would have to change my taste and develop (a monstrous recourse) a new sensitivity and a new insensitivity, fashioning myself on the model of my new faith. In what state would I arrive there? Wouldn't I be like a doll made of putty, molded with my own fingers?

Yet Marxism outlines an argument that is too acute and splendid, which strikes at the very core, at that "I." Your I, they say, has already been formed by the conditions of your life, by the process of your history. You are just as your exploiting social class created and delineated you, with a consciousness bound by the fact of that exploitation, falsified in its entire relation to the world because it does not want nor can it admit that all of it is calculated to suck out someone else's blood. In

fortifying yourself in your “I,” you can only fortify yourself in your own warpedness. What do you want to defend? What do you want to remain obstinate in? That “I” that was made for you and that kills the freedom of your real consciousness?

An excellent argument and one in keeping with my view of man because I know for certain and I have tried a thousand times to express this certainty artistically: consciousness, the soul, the “I” are the results of our situation, in the world and in people. This is probably the most central thought of Communism which breaks down into two points, both of which are exceedingly convincing. *Primo*, that man is a being rooted in people, which means that his relationship to people determines his entire relationship to the world. *Secundo*, that we cannot trust ourselves, that the only thing capable of assuring us a personality is the sharpest awareness of exactly these dependencies that shape the personality.

But now—attention! Let us catch them red-handed. Let us check the cards, how they are being dealt here, and reveal the trick with which this entire dialectics becomes a trap. This dialectic and liberating thinking stop exactly at the gates of Communism: I am allowed to cast aspersion on my own truths as long as I am on the side of capitalism, but this same self-checking is supposed to cease the minute I join the ranks of the revolution. Here dialectics suddenly gives way to dogma as a result of some astounding about-face. This relative, mobile, murky world of mine becomes a world sharply delineated, a world in which everything is known and precise. A minute ago, I was problematic but they made me like that just so I could crawl out of my skin more easily and now, when I am on their side, I have to become categorical. Doesn’t this amazing hypocrisy of every Communist without exception, of even those who are most intellectually refined, jump out at you: as long as it is a matter of destroying the old truth, this man amazes us with the freedom of his unmasking spirit, his need for an inner honesty. When we are enticed by this song, however, and allow ourselves to be led to his doctrine, bam! the door slams behind us! Where are we? In a monastery? The army? Church? Some sort of organization? You seek new dependencies, warping your new consciousness in vain. Your consciousness was liberated and from now on, only *trust* is appropriate. Your “I” became a guaranteed “I,” one worthy of trust.

I don’t want to oversimplify my criticism. I am not aiming at the terror, proper to their political organization, which kills the very freedom of thinking that it stimulates in the enemy camp. I don’t mean their theory, even its very charac-

teristic paradoxes, like the one, for example, that the dialectical process of history stops the moment revolution reaches its full realization in the ideal system of the future. Nor am I aiming at their philosophical system or their political system, simply at the conscience of those Communists, who wave it like a banner. I want to pin down that subtle but swinish change of tone when one switches into their territory, that sudden revelation of slyness, that awful experience when talking with them of having light suddenly change into darkness. The feeling that you are not dealing with someone enlightened, but only with someone who is blinded like the darkest night. A freethinker? Yes, in your backyard. In his own, a fanatic. An unbeliever? In you. In himself he tends the faith with the zeal of a monk. A mystic, who plays the role of a skeptic, a believer using disbelief as an instrument whenever it can serve his faith. You believed that you had a human soul before you that craved truth, but, behold, suddenly you faced the cunning eyes of politics. You thought that it was a matter of awareness, that is, of the soul, that is, ethics, but it turns out that the most important thing is the triumph of revolution. And we see that we are once again confronted with one of the great mystifications, similar to those unmasked by Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, who revealed that behind the facade of our Christian, bourgeois, and sublimated morality vied other, anonymous, and brutal forces. Here the mystification is all the more perverse, however, in that it relies precisely on unmasking. This is one of the profoundest disillusionments that one can experience in the sphere of ethics today because here it turns out that even the unmasking of forces becomes a mask, behind which hides the same eternal will to power.

This is the source of the dishonesty among them. And not only among the lesser functionaries. Their best minds are infected with that repulsive, halfhearted honesty: honest in relation to someone else's world yet inhibited, ready to castrate themselves of all integrity when it is a matter of their own chimera. Ophelia, get thee to a nunnery!

Yet I could understand even this. Why it is a doctrine of action, a doctrine of creation, this is not thought about reality but thought that transforms reality and that determines consciousness through being. They have to summon all their energy, so they limit consciousness. In that case, though, my, your, and universal morality, all of basic human morality demands that you admit this. You have to say: we are being blind on purpose. As long as you cannot admit this, how is one to talk

to someone who is dishonest in relation to himself? To join ranks with someone like this is to lose the last patch of solid ground from under one's feet and to plunge into the abyss.

Sunday

The thaw . . . Let us assume that it will lead to a certain surrogate of freedom and truth in Russia and in Poland. To a 45% freedom, to a 47% truth. What of it?

If I had been an inmate of that prison, I would hang onto this with both hands. If up until now it was forbidden to leave the cell, then won't it be fun to take a walk in the garden under the alert gaze of the guards? Who doubts that, in practice, the smaller lie is better than the greater one? But beyond the immediate bit of freedom, there exists, of course, the matter of Polish form, Polish style, Polish development, and Polish becoming. Because I cannot bear what is ersatz and I will always, in life as in a restaurant, protest when I am served a cat as rabbit, even in this case, therefore, I cannot agree to this ersatz, surrogate, cosmetic and kitsch. Freedom by permission, concession to a relative freedom, what is this? Neither fish nor fowl. As far as the authenticity of Polish life goes, this is worse than a 100% gag, the kind that doesn't lie. This is the existence of a creature of mixed ancestry; unclean; weak, half-alive, incomplete in its real expression. . . .

For me, the most awful thing in our culture has been that we have always restricted our spirit, voluntarily or because we were forced to. Our entire literature, all of our art is a symptom of this. When Polish awareness was incarcerated in recent years, perhaps it was not all that bad for our soul. Our insufficient production of words was stifled and replaced with open lies, while a prisoner could talk to himself and these were probably honest conversations. Then life fell apart into an external deceit and an inner truth, a difficult state of things but not a lethal one. Who knows if stupidity did not just sharpen reason somewhere deep inside?

Releasing their spirit into relative freedom on the condition that it is to report twice a week to the nearest Bureau of Supervision would simply constitute a blurring of this sharp but salutary line of demarcation, which, up until now, has divided the imprisoned truth from free deceit. They would enter into an area of half-truth, half-life, incomplete creativity, intoxicating oneself with appearances.

What would the result be? I do not deny that this opportunity for ramming the doors open for the future should be exploited politically. My field is not politics. I know only that style, form, expression, whether it be in art or in life, are not attained by making concessions and cannot be fabricated in measured doses. *Aut Caesar . . .*

Sometimes they say to me from over there that now my responsibility to my homeland would be to return. For what, I would like to know. So that I could become a person worthy of pity (because if an engineer or a worker has some right to respect in that system, then a writer, that “writer” of theirs, led by the nose and leading by the nose, is a repugnantly grotesque figure, a comic combination of schoolteacher and pupil—these are the two sides of didacticism). So when you tell me that I am wasting myself in exile, I will tell you about how important a national role I have earmarked for myself.

Using their dictionary, what type of “social need” could assure that my American existence is not deprived of meaning for at least certain people in Poland? For what kind of people? Not for those for whom a child’s pants are enough. It is certain, however, that beyond that artificial, childish, substandard timid reality, there is another penetrating, sharp, sober knowledge in Poland which does not want to cheat itself, the tone is different, more reasonable, more cruelly mature. My task was to get to exactly this Polish sound, get to this tragic and aware Pole. Not to stuff him with other delusions or to make anything easier for him. I want to express the ruthlessness of this Polish task, which clamors for full awareness and a full existence. Is it a paradox that I, who am at cross-purposes with this awareness in its philosophical aspect, that I have to—this is stronger than I am—insist on this, demand it, as a condition *sine qua non* of our humanity?

And one more thing. It would be important that tragedy not become a catastrophe. They got into the iron cogs of collective life without the appropriate historical preparation that would have made their individual life indomitable. Many of them today, therefore, simply do not know how to be themselves honestly, decently, vitally. They do not know how to endure in themselves, without appearing under any banner and without seeking refuge in a system, dogma, faith. They are helpless and humiliated. I claim, therefore, that one has to work out a style of individual life and one so extreme that it can withstand this pressure.

What could be more important for Polish culture, no matter what direction

it takes, than the creation of this style that assumes our maturity? This *modus vivendi* must be set, as it is only on this will to awareness that Polish authenticity can be built in the future. If a man in Poland believes that he is base only because he is a conscious man . . . if he allows himself to be talked into impotence . . . well, then a long childhood still awaits us.

This is not something that I can teach, however, I am not a teacher. I can only infect others with my manner of being, which is contained in my books, in this diary.

Tuesday

Poland, the thaw, the return, Communism, why have I waded into this, why do I discuss these details of my fate?

And morality? I delineate myself in the face of Catholic ethics or existentialism or Marxism but morality is only a fragment, just one of the faces that attack me from all sides, all sides! Reality is inexhaustible. What should I do with myself? What should I do with myself? This settling of accounts with my conscience didn't solve anything in me, once again I simply am—I am on this Argentine pampa, on this *estancia*.

Tomorrow I leave for Buenos Aires. I have to pack my things. There will be a long journey by boat northward, along the River Paraná.

Thursday

Geography.

Where am I?

I was walking along the eucalyptus-lined avenue for the last time. There I was, facing those trees, in the perspective of the avenue, on such frail ground, amid things distinct: tree, leaf, clod, stick, bark.

At the same time, I was in South America, but where was north, west, south? Where am I positioned in relation to China or Alaska? Where is the polar cap?

Dusk and the enormous vault of the pampa casts the stars out of itself, one after another, their swarms show themselves extracted by the night, a palpable world of trees, earth, leaves, the only friendly and believable world, dissolved into

some sort of un——, unseeing, nonexistence, faded away. In spite of this I walk, I push on and on, but not on the road anymore but in the cosmos, suspended in astronomical space. Can the globe of the earth, itself suspended, assure you ground under your feet? I found myself in a bottomless abyss, in the womb of the universe, and what is worse, this was not an illusion, only the truest of truths. You could go crazy if you weren't used to it.

I write in the train that takes me to Buenos Aires, to the north. Paraná is the enormous river on which I will sail.

I am calm. I sit. I look out the window. I look at the woman who sits across from me and has tiny, freckled hands. At the same time, I am there in the womb of the universe. All of the contradictions vent themselves in me: calmness and fury, sobriety and intoxication, truth and claptrap, greatness and smallness. Yet once again I feel an iron grip being applied to my throat, which slowly, so very imperceptibly, constricts.

The Rio Paraná Diary

Tuesday

At one in the afternoon, the boat left shore, but I had not noticed it as I was looking at the ships deep in port which slowly began to move and along with them, everything began to move, as if on an axle, to my left, and Buenos Aires moved. . . . We sail.

Six in the evening. Cutting across the entire width—about seventy kilometers—of the Río de la Plata, we practically reach the green shores of Uruguay. We sail in the delta.

Eight in the evening. We are sailing along the delta. The waters are metallic, the sky angry, the clouds have unloosed their hair over Uruguay and it reaches the earth in strands of rain. Grief.

The waters swell, gather, and before us a cloud has plugged the horizon, the river swells with darkness, the cloud unrolls bolts of darkness from out of itself, the darkness steams from shores kilometers away. We sail on.

Two in the morning. A moment ago I awoke and immediately a slight trembling, permeated by a barely perceptible rocking, reminded me of where I was. I was on

a ship, in its cabin. But where was the ship? I understood that I didn't know what was happening to the ship and it was as if I didn't know what was happening to me. The vibrations announced that we were sailing, but . . . where, how were we sailing? After having gotten hurriedly dressed, I went on deck. Rain . . . was going on. The rustle of rain and its drops suddenly grazing my cheeks, as well as the wet boards, the dripping roofs, railings, and ropes. Yet we were sailing. Not one light on the ship, whose darkness bored into the darkness, but these two darknesses did not join, each was separate and you could not see the water, you saw nothing around you, as if someone had confiscated everything. There was only the rain filling out the sailing in a double darkness. We sailed northwest and, as a result of the all-encompassing night, our sailing became, along with the rain, the only, the highest idea, the zenith of all things.

I returned to my cabin and undressed. While I undressed, lay down, and fell asleep, we sailed.

Wednesday, Four in the Afternoon

The sky is all feathers and flowers, flourishes of lights on a fluid expanse, while there in the distance, white pours out like a gate leading to worlds beyond. Yet we sail on. We have passed the monastery of San Lorenzo and continue to sail, on our right, the lands of Entre Ríos, on the left, Santa Fe, and we sail.

One of the men has field glasses through which one can see an unknown shore, shrub, tree, or board, which, suddenly, appears black in the muddled waters and then is carried away. Today again I stood next to him and then he asked:

Do you want to look?

He said the same thing to me yesterday but today it sounded different. It sounded as if he really hadn't wanted to say it or as if what he said had not been completely said, as if it had been painfully interrupted. I looked at him, but his face was congenial, calm. We sail on. With the accompanying green (because we sailed near the shore), darker, lighter, the overflow saturated with light and gathered to bursting, until, it seemed, it was entering the sky. We, on the other hand, sail on. We sailed while I ate breakfast and when, after a game of chess, I went on deck, I saw that we were still sailing. Yellow water, whitish sky.

Evening of the same day. From behind the fence of the black cloud an enormous, spouting red face looked out and lashed horizontally with a stream of

glistening water, as a result of which the mirror of waters became slanted and the most distant archipelagoes there, beyond the isthmuses, in the depths of the bay, ascended. And the sun struck the city Paraná, which, ruffling its turkey feathers and spreading its peacock's tail, became a bastion of colors, a fortress of hues exploding with a barrage, breathing fire, bombarding wildly in this silence and solemn calm. A choir of flashes rose from the waters. We quickly sailed out of this landscape and now we are sailing along a groove which widens at times to ten kilometers and the water is abundant, almost excessive, we, on the other hand, sail on, sail on.

I met a priest, who played chess with me, at the "proa" (the bow).

We sail, I said.

Yes, he replied, we sail.

Wednesday Night Going on Thursday

Again I woke up (in the middle of the night), not being able to bear the thought that it, the ship, sails without me, when I am not with it and I don't know that it sails or how it sails. . . . The starriness of the sky. The ship pressed uphill, against the current, against the wind, and about a hundred meters later I saw the white wall of a lofty shore, which was moving astern without stopping, astern, astern!

The Next Morning

Powerless expanse, lazy river, the air stands, the flag droops, but we push on with the noise of motionless whiteness—constantly ahead—and we sail into the equatorial sphere, so that even though there is no sun, it is warmer.

The industrialist from San Nicolas spoke:—Lousy weather . . . yet again this didn't sound right, as if he had wanted to say something else, yes, something else. . . . I had the same impression when, at breakfast, a doctor from Asunción, a political exile, told me about the local women. He talked. But he talked precisely so as not to say anything (this thought hounds me), in such a way as not to say what he really had to say. I looked at him but nothing, a congenial face, satiety and bliss, without a trace of any mystery. After breakfast when I went on deck, I realized that during our conversation, just as during breakfast, we were sailing. . . . And now we are sailing. . . . The wind struck me from the side. We sailed through the strait joining the

two oceans, the ocean before us augured a boundless whiteness, the ocean behind us was a mass barely perceptible behind the shoals smoking with sand. The strait itself was a geography of bays, promontories, islands and islets and strange secret branchings, which led into an unknown incline. At one point, we sailed into a group of seven mirrored lakes, being the seven spokes of mystical raptures, each at a different height but all suspended in the subcelestial regions. After about a half hour, all of this fell away and settled in the river, which appeared once more and on which we sail, sail. . . .

Evening of the Same Day

Monkeys and clowns! Snakes and geysers! The parrots and frolicking of playful violet dandies! Fountains and parrot and heated fun, threaded onto rooster scarves, the water became a warble, this is the zoology, this is the ornithology on which we sail with the inevitable furrow and noise behind us.

Two women—the librarian in a coin necklace and the wife of the engineer—were talking on deck. I could not quite hear and this was surely trivial woman talk, unimportant, yes, but who knows if not too unimportant. I say “too,” aware of the disturbing idea that this word contains. However, there was nothing in this that was “too much,” everything was as it should be . . . and while they talked, they sailed, just as I sailed, too.

Morning of the Next Day

The river is pale, rustling, stagnant. We sail.

At night something happened. Or, to put it more precisely, something gave way, or, maybe something broke through. . . . Actually, I don’t know what happened and, to tell the truth, nothing happened. But it was exactly the “nothing happened” that was more important and worse than if something had happened. Behold the event: I tried to sleep and I fell into a deep sleep (because I have been getting too little sleep lately), when all of a sudden I woke up overcome to the bone with a terrifying, devastating concern that something was happening . . . which I couldn’t control . . . something beyond me. I tore myself out of bed, ran out and there, on deck, the lines were taut, the vibrations, the tension of the whole pushing on in silence, at night, in

the immobility and invisibility of the world, this movement the sole living thing. We sailed on. And all of a sudden (as I just mentioned), something broke and the seal of silence broke and a shout . . . one resounding cry . . . rang out. A shout that was not. I knew with absolute certainty that no one shouted and, at the same time, I knew that there had been a shout. Because there was no one who could have shouted, I recognized my fright as nonexistent and returned to my cabin and even fell asleep. Upon awakening at nine-thirty, I noticed that we were still sailing along a river silver as a fish's underbelly.

What, therefore, had happened? The whole secret is that nothing took place. And nothing continues to happen and the best detective in the world would find no clue, nothing to latch onto. We eat abundantly and with relish. Our conversations are carefree. All are satisfied. The doctor, a Paraguayan, picks up a pack of Particulares, which a brown-haired man with bushy eyebrows dropped and then waved away with his hand as a sign that there were no cigarettes in the pack. At the same time, a child runs by, tugging on a small locomotive and, at the same time, an estanciero calls to his wife, who has just tied a scarf around her neck there on the stairs. Newlyweds on their honeymoon are having their picture taken. So what is so special about all this? What ship is more ordinary? What deck the more banal? Yet precisely because, oh, precisely because we are completely vulnerable . . . in the face of that which threatens . . . we can do nothing because there is no basis for even the least anxiety and all is in the most perfect order . . . yes, everything is in order . . . as long as the line, the line, the line does not snap under the unceasing pressure!

Evening of the Same Day

Enormous, anonymous waters. We sail on.

The doctor made fun of me when I lost the chess game to the fumbler, whom he introduced to me as Goldberg, the master of Santa Fe. He said:

—You lost out of fear.

I said: I could give him the rook and win.

But my and his words are like silence before a shout. We sail on toward . . . we head for . . . and I now see clearly that the faces, conversations, movements are loaded. They are defeated. Frozen in a pitiless leading of something to . . . An unpredictable tension crouches in the smallest movement. We sail on. Yet this madness,

this despair, this horror are inaccessible because they don't exist and because they are not, they are in a way that is impossible to refute. We sail on. We sail on the water, as if from another planet and night begins to steam in from all sides, our field of vision begins to narrow and we in it. Yet we sail on and in us grows without respite . . . what? . . . what? . . . We sail on.

Next Day

Whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we devote ourselves to, we sail and sail. While I write this, we also sail. The faces are terrifying because they are smiling. Terrifying movements because they are full of calmness and marvelous bliss.

We sail. The ship trembles, the machine works, the rustling billows of water at shipside, sprays and dregs, we sail on, plunging deeper, ever deeper into . . . reaching. . . Words are no help because while I am saying this, we sail on!

Next Day

We sail. We've sailed all through the night and even now we sail!

Next Day

We sail. The complete helplessness in the face of pathos, the incapacity to get at this power, which happens in us with a constant straining and tightening. Our uneventfulness, the most common uneventfulness, explodes like a bomb, like a thunderbolt, but beyond us. The explosion is unattainable for us, cursed in commonness. A moment ago, I met a Paraguayan at the bow and I said, yes, I said, ha, I said!

Good day!

He, on the other hand, answered, ha, he answered, yes, he answered, O merciful God, he answered (sailing all the while):

Nice weather!

Goya

Monday

Then I sailed back slowly and sleepily from north to south and yesterday, at eight in the evening, I was transferred from the ship to a motorboat, which let me off at the port . . . Goya, a small town, 30,000 inhabitants, in the province of Corrientes.

This is one of those names which, when we see them on a map, sometimes arouse our curiosity because they are uninteresting and nobody goes there. What, therefore, could this be . . . Goya? The finger pauses at a name like this—villages in Iceland, towns in Argentina, and the temptation arises to go there. . . .

Wednesday

Goya, a flat town.

A dog. A storekeeper in front of the corner store. Red truck. No comment. Unworthy of a remark. Here it is as it is.

Thursday

The house in which I live is spacious. It is the old and worthy seat of a certain local *estanciero* (*estancieros* usually have two homes: one on the *estancia*, the other in Goya). The garden is full of mastodons: cacti.

Here I am. Why here? If someone had told me years ago in Małoszyce that I would one day be in Goya . . . If I am in Goya, then by equal right I could be anywhere else and suddenly all the places in the world begin to weigh heavily on me, demanding that I be there.

I stroll along Plaza Sarmiento in a bluish evening. An exotic foreigner to them. Finally through them, I become a stranger to myself: here, I lead myself around Goya as a person unknown to myself. I stand him on a corner, I sit him down on a chair in a café. I tell him to exchange meaningless words with a random partner and I listen to my voice.

Monday

I stopped by the Club Social and drank coffee.

I talked to Genaro.

Molo and I rode the jeep to the airport.

I worked on my novel.

I went to the little square overlooking the river.

A little girl, riding a bike, dropped a package which I picked up.

A butterfly.

Four oranges eaten on a bench.

Sergio went to the movies.

A monkey on a wall then, a parrot.

All of this happened as if at the bottom of a deep deep silence, at the bottom of my stay here in Goya, on the peripheries of the earth. Who knows why this town became mine. This abatement . . . Goya, why had you never appeared to me in a dream, why hadn't I ever sensed that you were fated to me, that you were along the way? There is no answer. Houses. A street latticed with angular shadow. A dog lying down. A bicycle leaning against a wall.

Rosario

Monday

Rosario. We reached port at about three A.M. after a seven-hour delay because the water in the river is low. Not wanting to awaken the Dzianotts, I strolled around the city until seven. Trade. Exchange, budget, balance, investments, credit, inventory, account, netto, brutto, just this, nothing more, the whole city is under the sign of accounting. The dullness of this fat America.

Rena and her husband and also little Jacek Dzianott, erupting with joy, which really is our sole victory over being and the only human praise. Why, though, is that pride and praise contained in a twelve-year-old child so that one has to bend down toward it? And why is development the road to humiliating bitterness? How ironic that our highest emblem, our proudest banner is a child's knickers.

Buenos Aires

Thursday

After four months of sojourns and visits to faraway places, I am here again. I came home to a stack of letters on my desk. It is one in the morning. I have finished reading the letters. In a moment, after I have placed the period at the end of this sentence, I will get up, stretch, begin to take things out of my suitcase, and go to the hallway to get my address book, which I left by the telephone.

XXI

Wednesday

After returning to Buenos Aires, I changed my daily routine. I get up around eleven, but I put off shaving until later because it is very tiresome. Then comes breakfast, consisting of tea, baked goods, butter, and two soft eggs on the even days of the week and two hard ones on the odd. After breakfast, I get down to work and I write until the desire to stop working overcomes my reluctance to shave. When this breakthrough occurs, I shave with pleasure. Shaving inclines one to go downtown, therefore, I go to the Café Querandi, on the corner of Moreno and Peru, for coffee and croissants and reading *La Razon*.

I return home to work some more, but these hours I devote to earning money by working for the local press or to sitting down to my Remington and taking care of my correspondence. While at this, I puff on my Dunhill or on my BBB Ultonia and I smoke Hermes para pipa tobacco. After eight, I go the Café Sorrento for supper and then the program varies, depending on the circumstances. I earmark the late night hours for reading books, which, unfortunately, are not always the kind I really desire to read. . . .

I bought six summer shirts that were on sale for a very good price.

Thursday

A pile of newspapers from Poland, sent to me by Giedroyc. *Nowa Kultura*, *Życie Literackie*, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, *Po Prostu* . . . I leaf through them. New

people. Unfamiliar names: Lapter, Bartelski, Toeplitz, Bratny. Who are these people? Reviews of books of which I know nothing, references to events I have never heard of, limericks with incomprehensible allusions, conflicts and tensions which are unfamiliar to me. It is all as if I had sneaked up to the walls of a great encampment in the dead of night and began listening to the voices that reached me. What sort of din is this? I was once a foreigner in Poland because my literature was exotic and was rejected. Today, once again, I wander along its peripheries.

I look through these publications and would like to find out what is *really* happening in them. The temporality of what they write is indisputable: I was not able to extract a single text, a single author about which I could say, here begins genuine work of the spirit, definite, conscious, not opportunistic, calculated to endure. The problem is not what they write. I would like to be able to see into their heads: what are they thinking? Do I understand what has happened to them? Is it possible to so strangle the word that it betrays nothing?

In these not too interesting columns full of settling accounts called ten years of People's Poland, they use a balance sheet similar to those used in other lines of production: they count their little volumes of poetry and determine what the output of the prose factory has been. What if I, standing at the sidelines, gropingly, practically blindly, took stock of the decade for them? By listening not to their words, but to their voices.

Friday

Let us confirm that they passed through two vast experiences: war and revolution. And, let us say, that they can be, represent, or create something only insofar as these experiences have entered their bloodstream. For they have ceased being people from the year 1939. They are 1956 models. If, having lost that reality, they have not adequately assimilated the new one, if they are not to an adequate degree this or that, then what are they? Nothing.

It seems to me precisely that they have not experienced their lives.

Their inexperience of the war. Someone in these newspapers refers to Adolf Rudnicki. He was supposed to have said that the literature of postwar Poland is incapable of adequately exhausting the subject of war, that not everything possi-

ble has been extracted from this infernal abyss. It is true that not much has been mined, but is hell conducive to exploitation?

These writers, among others and most of all Rudnicki, got busy working on the bodies of the tortured thinking that the astronomical level of suffering would furnish them with some sort of truth, morality, or at least some new knowledge about our limitations. They found little that turned out to be fertile and creative. They discovered, just as Borowski had, that there is no bottom to our baseness. Yet if we are all base, then none of us are. This thought humiliates us only when it is used to distinguish one man from another. They discovered that culture, the blithe spirit type of aesthetes and intellectuals, is only froth. What an antediluvian and childish revelation at that! In describing this inhumanity, they appealed for humanity in a moralizing tone (Andrzejewski), but nothing is changed by such priestly sermons, neither in the one who preaches them nor in those who hear them. The embarrassing contrast between the pile of mangled bodies and the wanness of this commentary, which, in spite of the abundant exclamation points, has been incapable of thinking up anything beyond the *pia desideria* already contained in the statements of the Holy Father, namely, that people should not be bad but good. Proust found more in his cookie, servant, and counts than they found in years of smoking crematoria. There is also nothing surprising in the fact that this blinding smoke became the incense offered to a new dictatorship. They (forgetting about the smoke of Kolyma) burned it to pay homage to their newfound liberation under the Stalinist regime. This was followed by the domestication of hell and the harnessing of it into constructive political work.

I don't consider their artistic impotence in the face of the war to be shameful; on the contrary, it was predictable. Why is it that a soldier goes to the front, comes to know atrocities, becomes one himself, and then returns to civilian life as if nothing had ever happened . . . exactly as he had been before setting out. There is such a thing as an overdose. The organism rejects it. That is why, if I were the comrade-chairman of their Literary Union in those postwar days, I would recommend an exceptional caution, or at least exceptional cunning, in treating demonic themes that are simply too vast. If Proust got more out of his counts, it was because he could move and feel easily among them and the cookie did not overwhelm him. Four million murdered Jews, however, are the Himalayas! I would ban that typical Polish naïveté that believes that there is something to discover only on peaks.

There is nothing on peaks except snow, ice, and rock. There is a lot, however, to see in one's own garden. When you near the mountains of a million torments with your pen, you are overcome by fear, respect, horror, your pen trembles and your lips produce nothing but a moan. But one does not create literature with moans. Nor with a void à la Borowski. Or with "conscience" à la Father Andrzejewski.

Of course, this pertains not just to literature. An average member of the Polish "intelligentsia" was incapable of experiencing the war all the way to its dregs. In these circumstances the only honest approach to the matter would be not to strain to experience something which cannot be experienced, but to ask precisely why such an experience is inaccessible. Poles have not yet experienced the war. A Pole has experienced only that the war cannot be experienced, cannot be experienced fully, cannot be exhausted and especially when peace introduces a different dimension, normality. The issue conceived of in this way would at least have the advantage of not debilitating them philosophically, morally, and emotionally in peacetime. By apprehending the capacity of their nature, these people could more easily recover their balance.

Their attitude to the war, however, has undergone distortion. The war was perceived in conventional terms: as a "great" experience from which one has to draw, therefore, great emotions and great lessons. Whoever does not draw them is evil. However, since no one could draw them, everybody felt evil and when they began to feel evil, they became careless. And, of course, one could have said to them: know that war isn't a bit more horrifying than that which happens in your garden on a sunny day. If you know what goes on in the world and in life in general, then why does war horrify you? And if you don't know what goes on, why do you insist on having precisely this kind of knowledge about the war?

One does not have to interpret the above remarks as cynicism—because all that is desired here is to confirm that there are phenomena to which access by the shortest possible route is impossible. One can get close to them only via the whole world and via human nature in its more basic aspects.

Their inexperience of the revolution. So exactly what was it from the war that made its way into their consciousness—what became formulated? A variety of casual thought about "atrocities" and a somewhat lame, moralizing pathos.

In reality, the end of the war found them turned upside down, stunned, emptied. They were still capable of various collective actions, they participated in

organizations, but this was because they grabbed hold of just about anything to survive, just to move, the instinct of struggle and life convulsed them, but they had been stunned. Marxism filled the vacuum in them. Marxism, I imagine, fell on them before they were really able to come to themselves, that is, to their prewar selves. I think, too, that they did not experience the revolution because they didn't have anything to experience it with. If only Marxism had appeared in Poland spontaneously, gradually, overcoming resistance. Instead Marxism was imposed on that country, just as one drops a cage over a stunned bird or clothes a naked person.

At the instant they found themselves in a cage, all Polish discussion of revolution became impossible. This also goes for the secret dialogue of the individual soul with Marxism, as Poles were completely unprepared to face this pressure. Our culture was individualistic only superficially. When had a Pole's individualism been anything more than loosening his belt a few notches? Had it ever occurred to us that individualism might be virtue or the difficult responsibility of being faithful to oneself? How could souls raised on Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, and Żeromski oppose themselves effectively to Marxism? When the Poles were shackled it was too late to organize a conscious Polish individualism, so they, deprived of intellectual arms and doubtful of their moral right, swung around in a clumsy manner instead of fighting. They rejected Marxism and did not absorb it into their consciousness. The paradoxical result is that in bourgeois countries of the West, in France or in Italy, Marxism is infinitely more profoundly experienced. In Poland, Marxism is merely the social system in which one lives and which one does not experience. Poland: one of the least Marxist countries in the world.

Wednesday

Returning to these newspapers from Poland, which lie here on the shelf. In my opinion, the people over there, in Poland, barely exist. . . . They exist only to a certain extent . . . it is a puny, introductory existence.

So that my words don't ring empty. Behold a characteristic symptom of their incomplete existence in this new reality.

How did they experience the people, the proletariat? I am speaking of the

intelligentsia. Why, this proletariat suddenly crawls into the scene in a leading role: a member of the intelligentsia should have, out of fear alone, detected this presence all the more strongly. . . .

Of course, in these newspapers, the proletariat is exactly like the one on the poster, stalwart and radiant. If before our war, the “upper stratum,” which was so threatened with the wild and bottomless inferiority in Poland at that time, was unable to come up with anything more on this subject than a paper, scribbled with philanthropy, social do-gooding, and Żeromskian heroic self-sacrifice, then now the attitude of the intelligentsia to the people has become debased and smoothly rattled off with official phraseology. Understandable. Logical. But unofficially? In their poetry, metaphor, language, in the manner, or rather, in the tone, of their thinking, I seek the echoes of an intenser experience of inferiority as a creative force. Yet if this was in them, it would have to manifest itself somehow. But nothing happens. It is as if their imagination has fallen asleep.

Their lack of feeling for the people—for at least (they are allowed this) its beauty and its poetry. It is downright incredible and even shocking! The revolution falsified and diluted their relations with the proletariat, reducing them to “constructive cooperation,” when, in reality, this is a tragic but creative struggle of forces. What, in a revolutionary’s thinking, is a member of the intelligentsia supposed to do with a worker, with a peasant? Build a factory together? Enlighten him? Create a common party front? Technical cooperation is not personal contact. Personal contact, on the other hand, will immediately erupt into misunderstanding, antipathy, distrust, revulsion, and fear because these two levels of consciousness, the higher and the lower, are foreign and hostile to one another and superiority can contact, can join with inferiority only through violence and struggle. According to me, therefore, never before has the contact of the Polish intelligentsia with the lower stratum been as impersonal, so exclusively technical or lifeless, that is, spiritually uncreative. I am not considering, I repeat, their bureaucratic thinking, that which they write on demand. I claim that even quietly and surreptitiously, no such thoughts visit them. Who of them, the weary, would be dazzled by the beauty of this skirmish of the spheres? That it is splendid when the higher consciousness swoops down on the lower like a bird of prey? Or perhaps even more splendid, when inferiority allows itself to do violence to superiority? Having overcome my detestation of rhymed verse, I read their poems and drown in constructiv-

ist boredom. I did not come upon a single accent that would have led me out into the field of these tensions.

Let us, therefore, note: in People's Poland, no one really, *personally*, experiences the people. They are fed up with the proletariat. They have lost their sensitivity.

Friday

Today a sleazy guy sat down at my table in the café and told me that he wanted to possess a twelve-year-old girl and that she, too, would want to. . . . He cursed the authorities, the state, the social system, the law, priests, civilization, and culture. He swore quietly, mawkishly, in a melancholy way, picking at his ear with a dirty finger and looking at the ceiling.

Supper in Crillon with Rodriguez Feo. Virgilio and Humberto were also there. Rodriguez Feo is the editor of the pretty good literary monthly *El Ciclón* in Havana. He came to visit. All are Cubans. A strange species! They are intelligent and well informed, but they are not made of clay but water. Moving, gleaming, vanishing fluidity.

Returning home, I thought about Poland and about those fellow writers of mine. Sometimes it seems to me that I should think about them with greater humility. However, the certainty that I am more than they are . . . allows me to make no concessions. Not talent, reason, or moral values determine hierarchy, but this most of all: a stronger, more real existence.

I am alone. That is why I exist more.

Sunday

I am angry when I read their press to discover that even in the area of art, they have turned out to be sluggish. It is astounding that, even though the revolution shook the foundations of their being, nothing has changed in their literary works. The world has caved in, but the little world, the artistic one, has remained untouched. Here before me is that cheap Parnassus from before the war, just as it was except that it was a different color. The searching reflections "about the essence of poetry" or, too, about painting, contests, awards, reviews . . . and this one is the "leading prose writer," that one a "fabulous poet."

It is irritating after an earthquake in your house, to discover that the only things remaining are those that are the least valuable and the least fixed. What could one expect of a revolution (if it became an experience)? At least some sort of brief clash with reality so that for one instant they would have to look into the eyes of this Medusa.

It is a fact, a fact that is a merciless force before which one must bend, that poems are not read. That practically no one is able to distinguish a good painting from a bad one. That the races of these horses, that is, excuse me, of the various panting pianists and other virtuosos vying for primacy have as much in common with art as horse races. That museums are archlifeless things that only induce headaches. I intentionally do not want to reach to the roots of these absurdities. I am merely listing them. Could one not have expected that the fictions, silliness, and idiocies of art would be shoved against a wall by the revolution and that aesthetics would be built on facts, not illusions, nor on conventions or traditions?

Why should one acquiesce to the fact, for example, that Wyspiański announced our national playwright and poet, if there aren't even a hundred people in the country who are adequately familiar with his work? How is one to claim that Słowacki or Mickiewicz fascinate if they do not captivate? Why do you say that Kasprówicz lives among you if you know him only from the catalogs of libraries? It would seem that these questions ought to be left where the social sense of art rises to the forefront. But they are still indecent. If my *Kultura* article "Against Poets" were published in Poland, it would become an article that is called revolutionary but your own revolution should have introduced this revolution long ago. One should have approached art brutally, destroyed its myths, searched the impossibly archaic language of its acolytes and adherents and consolidated it in that which is. Then one could have moved forward somewhat. Troubled, you asked, how should we go about this? Why, it's very simple. Stop claiming falsely that "art fascinates." Say, in keeping with the truth, that, it is true, art fascinates from time to time but that it is mainly people who force themselves into a mutual fascination with art. Force themselves? Why? How? What for? I wrote about this elsewhere, yet notice that the very determination of the matter tears you out of the circle of false worship of artificial value and of an anachronistic liturgy.

Hasn't revolution created a climate for such realism? Isn't it in keeping with the spirit of Marxism? I am thinking not of the errant Marxist theory of art, but its spirit. This concept of art, as dialectical as possible, shows us artistic experience

as something arising “among” people. For a Pole such realism would be a great attainment, it would create our own approach to art, it would lead us to an aesthetics more in keeping not only with life, but also with our nature.

Instead of this—what? Nothing has been done. People demand that art be “for the masses,” which is equal to demanding that it be drab. People demand that art be for the masses, but the relationship of the masses to art has not been reformed. It has still remained “fascinating.” The artist has been bureaucratized, maintaining the priesthood intact as well as the whole church and all the masses in it. Pooh! One more element of the absurd has been added and it is of no mean format. In Western societies, a bourgeois with a secondary education opines that he really can absorb a Bach fugue or Raphael’s painting. But the People’s Democracy feels that any yokel or workman, having a “soul sensitive to beauty,” can feel his way into a Chopin sonata, so he is led to a concert and he “experiences” this cultural session, in exactly the same way they experience everything else over there, no more. What kitsch!

And again. I know, I understand, that nothing could be done as long as Zhdanov ruled. But to this day, I see no clues that would indicate even the slight possibility of such a revision germinating over there.

Monday

Giedroyc has sent me a new stack of publications—these are from recent months, March and April.

After Comrade Khrushchev’s speech and the revelations of the XXth Congress. A new stage and a change of course. They are elated and proud.

Nevertheless, these articles, poems, letters to the editor, comments, seem as if they were written by one and the same person. Deviations are minimal. One theme dominates unanimously: the XXth Congress and the new course.

Most of all it is moving to see how happy they are with the piece of life that has been apportioned to them.

As for these people in Poland, the few who want to live seriously and want to achieve something universally important, that is, not locally, but on a world scale . . . they are going to have to dismiss with a smile the celebration and joy at the permitted freedom.

Tuesday

I read what I wrote above about the proletariat and art. How unconvincing this will be for those who do not understand me, for whom my meaning is elusive. There are legions of such readers. Oh, that they have an ear sufficiently tuned to warn them that these are not just flighty caprices, but rather an indication of a road that is difficult, because it is not in the clouds but on the ground.

I return to my point of departure: they have not experienced their lives. Yes, this is why I am so haughty toward them, so conceited and indifferent. I simply cannot acknowledge that these are people on my level. Behold, considering that not a tenth of what befell them has befallen me and that, while they bled, I was making the rounds of Buenos Aires cafés, a feeling like this—I admit—is not really in order. Humility and admiration would be more appropriate. This cold indifference is so strong in me, however, that I cannot conceal it in this diary, where I would not want to lie too much.

How dare I treat them lightly? And dismiss them so cruelly that even the pain and the defeat of these people, who are, after all, close to me, become less important? I do not know how to explain this to myself other than that I experience their existence less strongly. . . . No, not because of distance or a long-term separation. They have stopped being someone for me. They have stopped being who they were and haven't become concrete enough in any other new existence. They are indistinct. Blurred. Incomplete. Embryonic.

Communism? Anti-Communism? No, let us leave this aside for a while. It is not a matter of your being Communists, or anti . . . it is simply that you *be*. To be is the minimal postulate that I set before Polish intelligentsia, Polish consciousness. You will have to exert yourselves considerably in the coming years to pass from half-existence to existence and it is uncertain whether you will be successful. Until then, friends, neither your life nor your death will carry their full weight. And each of you will have to earn this right to life and death separately.

A few more casual comments from the reading of these newspapers.

Their imagination. It is purer than it was before the war. They have purified themselves strangely. Their imagination has ceased being sybaritic, it has been turned in the direction of effort and battle. It is more essentially tied to energy. And

the healing current of the primitive imagination, to which they are closer today, has cleansed many of the distortions, oddities, and hysterias from them.

Before the war, there were many people living a genteel life—the landed gentry, the bourgeoisie. They found release in the imagination, but were not disciplined enough, and, therefore, were dirty dreamers. Those in Poland now—no. Marxism didn't do this, poverty did.

This is a better groomed imagination, but it is also impoverished. Its poverty, too, is not the result of a social system, of these directives and prohibitions, it is connected with the general pauperization of the country. When the prohibitions fall away, the nation will remain with an empty imagination, it will put its hand into an empty pocket.

Their morality. They have a mouth full of morality. Nonstop. Who, therefore, can believe in their morality?

In my opinion, their morality remains in inverse proportion to their gab. Is the morality of public life always up for discussion? In this they are pretty good cynics. On the other hand, in personal relations, family relations, etc., there where a certain discretion can exist, they are, surely, honorable people.

Their beauty. What sort of beauty do they crave for themselves? What sort of crest? What ornaments? What poetry, what sort of grace do they seek to decorate their excessively drab being? Difficult question. Their official beauty is the beauty of a battle for a new order. Yet this beauty has become rationalized and excessively identified with virtue, and this deprives it of vitality. They abound in beautiful virtues, like the Catholic Church. But where are their beautiful sins?

If their imagination has not shrunk to zero, then one can assume that beyond the official poetry, another, surreptitious, private poetry is being created and that it is the poetry of anarchy.

Their modesty. These writers are uncommonly modest. Their modesty is their *savoir-vivre*. It relies on the concealment of one's arrogance. This is the only caution: not to get someone incensed at you.

In literature such modesty is useless. Arrogance, loftiness, ambitions cannot be removed from writing because they are its motor. They must be divulged and then they can be civilized.

AGAINST POETS

It would be more subtle of me if I did not disrupt one of the rare ceremonies which we have left. Even though we have come to doubt practically everything, we still venerate the cult of Poetry and Poets and this is the only deity which we are not ashamed to worship with great pomp, deep bows, and inflated voice. . . . Ah, ah, Shelley! Ah, ah, Slowacki! Ah, the word of the Poet, the mission of the Poet, and the soul of the Poet! Nevertheless, I have to attack these prayers and spoil this ritual as much as I can simply in the name of elementary anger, which all errors of style, all distortion, all flights from reality arouse in us. Because I am setting out to do battle with an area especially elevated, almost celestial, I have to watch so that I don't float off like a balloon and lose the ground beneath my feet.

The thesis of the following essay, that almost no one likes poems and that the world of verse is a fiction and falsehood, will seem, I assume, as bold as it is frivolous. Yet here I stand before you and declare that I don't like poems at all and that they even bore me. Maybe you will say that I am an impoverished ignoramus. Yet I have labored in art for a long time and its language is not completely alien to me. Nor can you use your favorite argument against me, claiming that I do not possess a poetic sensibility, because I do possess it and to a great degree. When poetry appears to me not in poems but mixed with other, more prosaic, elements, for example, in Shakespeare's dramas, in the prose of Pascal and Dostoyevski, or simply as a very ordinary sunset, I tremble as do other mortals. Why then does this pharmaceutical extract called "pure poetry" bore and weary me, especially when it appears in rhymed form? Why can't I stand this monotonous, endlessly lofty singing? Why does rhythm and rhyme put me to sleep, why does the language of poets seem to me to be the least interesting language conceivable, why is this Beauty so unattractive to me and why is it that I don't know anything worse as style, anything more ridiculous than the manner in which poets speak about themselves and their poetry?

Perhaps I would be inclined to acknowledge some sort of special defect in this regard were it not for certain experiments . . . certain scientific experiments. That accursed Bacon in art! I advise you never to try to conduct experiments in the field of art as this area does not tolerate it and all declamations on that subject can endure only on the condition that they coincide with reality. We would, for example, find out some pretty things if we began to examine how much a person who likes Bach can really like Bach, that is, is capable of grasping something of Bach and his music. After all, didn't I have the pleasure (even though I can't play "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" on the piano) to give two rather successful concerts, which consisted of my pounding on that instrument any which way, after having conspired with a few connoisseurs beforehand to assure applause and after having announced that I would be playing modern music? What luck that they who carry on about Valéry in lofty terms do not lower themselves to such confrontations. He who approaches our aesthetic high mass from this avenue can easily discover that his kingdom of superficial maturity is really the most immature backyard of humanity, where bluff, mystification, snobbery, deceit, and stupidity all reign supreme. It would be good exercise for our rigid thinking if from time to time we thought of Paul Valéry himself as an archpriest of Immaturity, a barefoot priest in underwear.

I conducted the following experiments: combing specific sentences or fragments of sentences from the poetry of a certain poet, I constructed an absurd poem and then read it to a group of genuine poetry aficionados as the new work of the seer—to the general rapture of those poetry lovers; or I began to quiz them on specific details as to this or that work of poetry and concluded that these poetry lovers had not even read it in its entirety. So what was going on? How could a person be enraptured without even having read a work all the way through? How could one delight to such an extent in the "mathematic precision" of the poetic word and not notice the radical botching of its precision? How could one carry on, declaim so much on these subjects, revel in the subtleties, nuances, and then commit such serious, such elementary mistakes? Naturally, each of these experiments was greeted by a great many protests and much taking of offense, and the poetry lovers swore on all the saints that this was not how it was . . . that in fact . . . but these peas bounced off the hard crags of the Almighty Experiment.

I found myself, therefore, facing the following dilemma: thousands of people write verse; hundreds of thousands adore that poetry; first-rate geniuses have

expressed themselves in poems; from time immemorial, Poetry has been revered; and against this mountain of praise, I, with my suspicion that the poetic mass takes place in an absolute vacuum. Oh, if I had not known how to play with the situation, I almost certainly would have been horrified.

In spite of this, however, my experiments heartened me and I began to seek the answer to the tiresome question even more boldly: Why didn't I like the taste of pure poetry? Why? Wasn't it for the very same reasons that I didn't like sugar in a pure state? Sugar is good for sweetening coffee, but not for eating by the spoonful like gruel. In pure, rhymed poetry, the excess wearies; the excess of poetry, poetic words, metaphors, sublimations, finally, the excess of condensation and purification of all antipoetic elements, which results in poems similar to chemical products.

Song is a very special form of expression. . . . Yet, behold, in the course of centuries, the singers have been multiplying, the singers who, while singing, are forced to assume the posture of the singer and it is this posture that in time becomes more and more rigid. And one singer arouses another and one confirms the other in an ever more stubborn frenzy of song, ha, they are no longer singing for the other people but for one another; and between them, on a path of unceasing rivalry, a constant perfecting of themselves in the singing, a pyramid is created whose peak reaches the heavens and which we admire from below, from earth, looking upward. What was supposed to have been a momentary flight of prose became a program, a system, a profession—and today one is a Poet, the way one is an engineer or a doctor. The poem has swelled to monstrous proportions so that we no longer control it; it rules us. Poets have become slaves and we could describe the poet as a being who can no longer express himself as much as someone who must express—a Poem.

Yet there can be no more important assignment than for one to express himself. We should never lose sight of the truth: that all style, every distinct attitude forms itself through elimination and is, basically, an impoverishment. Because of this, we should not allow any attitude whatsoever to reduce our potential, becoming a gag—when it's a matter of so artificial, no, of almost pretentious posture as “singer,” then that is all the more reason that we should be especially alert. We, however, up to now anyway, have spent a lot more time and effort perfecting ourselves in this or that style, or in this or that position, rather than maintaining a certain inner freedom and independence from them, in order to work out the right relationship between ourselves and our position. It would seem that Form is a

value in itself independently of whether or not it enriches or impoverishes us. We perfect art frantically but the question, to what degree has it maintained its bond with me, doesn't seem to concern us at all. We attend to Poetry, not noticing that what is beautiful is not necessarily "becoming." If, therefore, we do not want culture to lose all contact with the human individual, we must interrupt our diligent creativity from time to time and check to see if that which we are creating expresses us.

There exist two contrary types of humanism: one, which we could call the religious, tries to send man to his knees before a work of human culture—it forces us to adore and respect Music or Poetry, for example, or the State or Divinity; and the other, a more difficult current of our spirit which strives to restore man's sovereignty and independence in relation to the Gods and Muses, which are ultimately man's creation. In this second instance, the word "art" is written with a small letter. And it is beyond doubt that a style that is capable of encompassing both of these tendencies is fuller, more authentic, and more closely reflects the antinomies of our nature than a style that expresses only one of these two poles of our emotions. Of all artists, poets are people who fall to their knees most persistently—they pray most fervently—they are priests *par excellence* and *ex professo*, and Poetry in this understanding simply becomes celebration. It is exactly this exclusivity that causes the style and position of poets to be so drastically unsatisfactory, so incomplete.

Let us speak a moment more about style. We said that an artist must express himself. But, in expressing himself, he must also take care that his manner of speaking be in harmony with his real situation in the world and he must render not only his relationship to the world, but also the relationship of the world to him. If, being a coward, I take on a heroic tone, I am committing a stylistic mistake. But if I express myself as if I were respected and loved by everyone, while in reality people neither respect nor like me, I am also making a stylistic mistake. If we want to have an idea of the real situation in the world, we cannot avoid a confrontation with realities that are different from ours. A man who has formed himself only in contact with people similar to himself, who is a product of only his milieu, will have a worse style than he who has come to know various milieus and people. And thus in poets not only their piety irritates us, that complete surrender to Poetry, but also their ostrich politics in relation to reality: for they defend themselves against

reality, they don't want to see or acknowledge it, they intentionally work themselves into a stupor which is not strength but weakness.

Don't poets create for poets? Don't they look only for disciples, that is, for people like themselves? Aren't these poems merely the product of a certain, tight-knit group? Aren't they hermetic? Of course, I am not accusing them of being "difficult"—I am not demanding that they write "in a way comprehensible to everyone" or that they step under thatched roofs. This would be equal to having them surrender the most real values such as consciousness, reason, a greater sensitivity, and a more profound knowledge about life and the world in order to lower themselves to an average level, oh, no, no art which respects itself will ever agree to that! He who is reasonable, subtle, noble, and profound must speak reasonably, subtly, and profoundly, and he who is sophisticated must speak in a sophisticated way—for superiority exists and it does not exist to lower itself. It is not bad, therefore, that contemporary poems are not accessible to just anybody, but it is bad that they are born of a one-sided, tight, coexistence of identical worlds, identical people. Why I myself am an author who stubbornly defends his level, yet at the same time (I bring this to everyone's attention so as not to be accused of cultivating the type of art which I am fighting), my works do not forget, even for a moment, that beyond my world exist still other worlds. Any even if I do not write for people, I write as someone who is threatened by them, or, too, dependent on them, people created by people. Nor did it ever occur to me to assume the pose of an "artist," a "writer," a mature, recognized writer; rather I appear exactly as a candidate for an artist, I am he whose only desire is to be mature—in an unceasing and fierce collision with everything that interferes with my development. My art has shaped itself not in confrontation with a group of people related to me, but in relation to the enemy and confrontation with the enemy.

But poets? Can a poet's poem survive if it falls not into the hands of a friend of the poet, but into the hands of an enemy, a nonpoet? Just as all other statements, a poem should be conceived and made real in such a way as to bring no disgrace to its creator even if it doesn't appeal to anyone. Furthermore, poems shouldn't disgrace their creator even when they do not appeal to the poet himself. For no poet is exclusively a poet and in each poet lives a nonpoet, who does not sing and does not like singing . . . and man is something broader than a poet. The style born among confessors of the same religion, however, dies in contact with a mob of

unbelievers; it is incapable of defending or fighting itself; it is incapable of real life; this is a constricted style.

Allow me to present the following scene. . . . Imagine that in a group of several people, one rises and begins to sing. This singing bores the majority of listeners, but the singer does not want to acknowledge this fact. No, he acts as if he were captivating; he demands that all fall to their knees before this Beauty; he demands a ruthless recognition of his role as Seer; and even though no one attaches great importance to his singing, he acquires a mien as if his word had decisive meaning for the world. Full of belief in his Poetic Mission, he casts thunderbolts, thunders, roars, and goes crazy in a vacuum. What is more, he does not want to admit to himself or others that his singing bores, torments, wearies even himself—because he does not express himself freely or naturally or directly, only in a form that has long lost its contact with direct human feelings and is inherited from other poets. Behold, he not only vaunts Poetry, he is also enamored of it; being a Poet, he adores the greatness and the importance of the Poet; he not only demands that others fall to their knees before him, he, too, falls to his knees before himself. Could one not say of such a man that he took too great a burden upon his shoulders? For he not only believes in the power of poetry, but he also forces himself to this faith; he not only offers himself to others, he forces them to consume this divine gift, like a host. How, in such a hermetic state of the soul, is a crack—through which life could tear into the inside—to be found? We are not talking about some third-rate singer; no, this also pertains to the most famous and the best poets.

If only a poet could treat his singing as a mania or ritual; if only he would sing as those who must sing even though they know they sing in a vacuum. If, instead of a proud “I, the poet,” he were capable of saying these words with shame or with fear . . . even with revulsion . . . but no! A poet has to worship the Poet!

This helplessness in the face of reality, therefore, characterizes in a devastating way the style and attitude of poets. A man who flees reality, however, finds no ballast in anything . . . he becomes a plaything of the elements. The minute the poets lost sight of a concrete human being and became transfixed with abstract Poetry, nothing could keep them from rolling down the incline into the chasm of the absurd. Everything began to grow in and of itself. Metaphor, deprived of all rein, took the bit in its mouth and let loose to such an extent that today there

is nothing in poems except metaphors. Language has become ritualistic—those “roses,” “dusks,” “longings,” or “pains” that at one time had a certain freshness have become, as a result of overuse, an empty sound—this pertains as much to the more modern “semaphores” or other “spirals.” The narrowing of the language is accompanied by a narrowing of style, which has led to a state in which poems today are nothing more than a few insistent combinations of a miserly dictionary. As the narrowness became increasingly narrower, an unreined Beauty became more and more Beautiful, Profundity more Profound, Nobility more and more Noble, Purity more and more Pure. Because, on the one hand, the poem, deprived of all brakes, inflated itself to the limits of a gigantic poem (similar to those forests really known only by a few explorers), and on the other, began condensing itself to dimensions too synthetic and homeopathic. Poets also began submitting themselves to various experiments and discoveries with a mien of frightening initiation—and nothing is capable of restraining this boring orgy. It is not a matter of man’s creativity for man, but of a ritual completed before an altar. And for every ten poems, at least one will be devoted to the worship of the power of the Poetic Word or a glorification of the Poet’s vocation.

Let us agree that these pathological symptoms are characteristic not just of poets. This religious attitude has also wrought great devastation in prose, too, if we take such works as Broch’s *Death of Virgil* or *Ulysses* or some of Kafka’s work, then we will have the same sensation—that the “excellence” and “greatness” of these works realize themselves in a vacuum, that they belong to those books which everyone knows are great . . . but which, nevertheless, are somehow remote, inaccessible, and cold . . . for they were written in a kneeling position with thought not about the reader but Art or some other abstraction. This prose was born of the very same spirit which illuminates poets; it is essentially a “poetic prose.”

If, casting aside the works, we concern ourselves with the persons of the poets and the little world that these persons create along with their followers and acolytes, then we begin to lack even more air and space. Poets not only write for poets, but they also praise each other and honor each other. This world, or rather microworld, does not differ much from other hermetic and specialized micro-worlds: chess players consider chess the height of human creativity, they have their hierarchies, they speak of Capablanca with a reverence equal to that used by poets when speaking of Mallarmé, and one confirms the other in the feeling of his own

importance. Yet chess players have no pretensions to a universal role and that which can be forgiven in chess players becomes unforgivable in poets. As a consequence of this isolation, everything becomes inflated, and even mediocre poets puff themselves up to apocalyptic dimensions and trivial problems assume outrageous proportions. Let us recall at least the terrible polemics on the subject of assonances, the tone in which this issue was discussed. It seemed to them that the fate of humanity depended on whether or not “could” could be rhymed with “wood.” This is what happens when the mob corporate spirit gains an upper hand over the universal spirit.

Another no less compromising fact is the number of poets. To the excesses just touched on above should be added the excess of seers. These ultrademocratic figures explode the aristocratic and proud fortress of poetry from within—and, of course, it is quite amusing when one sees them all together at some sort of congress: what a throng of exceptional beings! Yet isn’t art triumphing in a vacuum an ideal place for those who are nothing, whose empty personality compensates with raptures in these straitened forms? Really funny are the criticisms, the little articles, aphorisms, essays, which turn up in the press on the subject of poetry. This is gibberish, but bombastic gibberish, so naive and childish that it is difficult to believe that the people wielding the pen did not feel the ridiculousness of this publicism. Those stylists have still not understood that one is not allowed to write about poetry in a poetic tone and their newspapers are bursting with such poetic lucubrations. Great is the ridiculousness, too, that accompanies the recitals, contests, and demonstrations, but it is probably not worth going into great detail about this.

I believe I have explained more or less why rhymed verse does not arrest me. And why poets who gave themselves up entirely to Poetry and subordinated themselves and their own essence to this Institution, forgetting about the existence of the concrete man and closing their eyes to reality, found themselves (centuries ago) in a catastrophic situation. In spite of appearing triumphant. In spite of the complete pomp of the situation.

Still I have to parry a certain accusation.

One can explain the incredible simplemindedness with which poets (people who are usually neither stupid nor naive) defend themselves when one finds fault with their art only by a voluntary blindness. Many of them seek rescue in the

pronouncement that poems are written for one's own pleasure as if all of their behavior didn't undermine this claim. There are those who maintain in all seriousness that they write for the people and that their fantastic charades constitute the spiritual nourishment of the simple folk. All, however, believe irrevocably in the social resonance of poetry and it will be difficult for them to understand how they can be attacked on these grounds. They will say:—What! Can you doubt this? Do you not see the masses of people that attend our readings? The many editions of our volumes? The number of studies, articles, works written about us? The adulation with which famous poets are surrounded? It is you, sir, who do not wish to see that which is. . . .

What should I say in reply? That all of these are—illusions. That it is true that crowds attend the readings, but that it is also true that even a very educated listener cannot understand a poem declaimed at a reading. How many times have I attended these hopeless sessions, at which one poem is recited after another—and each of them must be read at least three times with the greatest attention in order to more or less decode its contents. As far as the editions are concerned, we know that thousands of books are bought never to be read. As we have said, poets write about poetry. Admiration? Don't horses at the races arouse an even greater interest—but what does this sporting vein, in which we watch all rivalry and all these ambitious aspirations—national and other—that accompany these races, have to do with genuine artistic emotion?

Nevertheless, this answer, even though it is correct, would not be adequate. The problem of our coexistence with art is much more profound and difficult. There is no doubt—in my understanding at least—that if we want to understand something of this at all, we have to break completely with the far too simple thought that “art captivates us” and that “we delight in art.” No, art fascinates us only to a certain degree, and the delights it provides are doubtful. . . . Can it be otherwise, if intimacy with great art is tiring, a difficult intimacy with a more mature people, with a wider range and a more powerful sensibility? We do not delight in this, rather we try to delight in this . . . and we don't understand . . . we try to understand. . . .

How superficial is thought, for which the complicated phenomenon is reduced to the simple formula: art fascinates because it is beautiful—ah, there are so many snobs . . . but I am not a snob. I am frank in admitting it when something

does not appeal to me—says this simplicity (of soul), and it seems to it that everything is taken care of.

When, in fact, it is here that one feels factors having nothing to do with aesthetics. Do you think that if we hadn't been forced to admire art in school, we would have so much ready admiration for it at a later age? Do you think that if our entire cultural organization did not impose art on us, that we would be interested in it at all? Isn't it our need for myth and adoration that expresses itself in this adoration of ours and don't we, by adoring the superior, elevate ourselves? And are these feelings of amazement and admiration born "of us" or "between us"? If there is a storm of applause at a concert, it does not necessarily mean that each of the clapping persons was fascinated. One timid applause provokes another—mutually exciting themselves until finally there arises a situation in which each person has to adjust himself internally to the collective madness. Everybody "behaves" as if he were enthralled although no one is ever "really" enthralled to this extent.

It would be a mistake worthy of pity if we demanded of poems, or of any other art, that they should be, oh, simply, a source of human delight. And if we look around in the world of poets and their admirers from this perspective, then all of its absurdities and ridiculous sides will seem justified: because apparently, this is how it should be and it is in harmony with the natural order of things that art, just as enthrallment, which it arouses, be the work of the collective spirit, rather than the direct reaction of the individual.

This is not true, however. Even this conception is incapable of rescuing poets or making the life and reality of their poetry blush. If this is how reality really is, then they, at any rate, don't realize it. For them, this simply happens: the singer sings and the listener, enthralled, listens. It is certain that if they were capable of recognizing these truths and drawing all the appropriate conclusions, then their attitude to song would have to change radically. Nevertheless, rest easy: nothing will ever change among poets. And don't succumb to the illusion that in the face of these collective powers, which distort our individual sensitivity, they will evidence a will to resist—as if art were not a fiction and a ceremony, but a genuine coexistence of man with man. No, these monks prefer to humble themselves!

Monks? This does not mean that I am an opponent of God or his numerous orders. Yet even religion dies the moment it changes into ritual. We sacrifice authenticity and the weight of our existence too easily at these altars.

SIENKIEWICZ

I am reading Sienkiewicz. Distressing reading. We say: this is pretty bad, and we read on. We say: what flimsy stuff, yet we can't tear ourselves away. We shout: insufferable opera! and we read on, mesmerized.

What a powerful genius!—and there has probably never been such a first-rate second-rate writer. This is a second-rate Homer, a first-rate Dumas. It is difficult to find a comparable example of the captivation of an entire nation, or of a more mesmerizing hold on the imagination of the masses in the history of literature. Sienkiewicz, that magician, that seducer, stuck a Kmicic and Wołodyjowski and Great Hetman into our heads and corked them up. From then on, nothing else could really appeal to a Pole, nothing that was anti-Sienkiewicz, nothing that was pro-Sienkiewicz. This corking up of our imagination resulted in our experiencing this century as if we had been on another planet and not much modern thought reached us. Am I exaggerating? If the history of literature accepted the influence of art on people as a criterion, Sienkiewicz (that demon, that catastrophe of our collective mind, that pest) should occupy five times more space in it than Mickiewicz. Who read Mickiewicz of his own accord, of his own unforced will, who was familiar with Słowacki? Krasiński, Przybyszewski, Wyspiański . . . was this anything more than an imposed, a forced literature? Sienkiewicz is wine which really intoxicated us and here our hearts beat quickly . . . and no matter whom you talked to, a doctor, worker, professor, landowner, clerk, you always came upon Sienkiewicz, upon Sienkiewicz as the ultimate, most intimate secret of Polish taste, the Polish “dream about beauty.” Often this was a masked Sienkiewicz, or an unconfessed Sienkiewicz, shamefully concealed or sometimes even forgotten—but always Sienkiewicz. Why were books written and published after Sienkiewicz—which were no longer Sienkiewicz's books?

In order to understand our secret affair (for it is compromising) with Sienkiewicz, it is necessary to touch a slippery issue, namely, the problem of “produc-

ing beauty.” To be fetching, attractive, alluring—is the desire not just of woman and, perhaps, the weaker and more threatened a nation is, the more painfully it feels the need for beauty, which is a challenge to the world: look, don’t persecute me, love me! Beauty is also necessary to be able to fall in love with oneself and that which is one’s own—and it is in the name of this love that one is able to resist the world. Therefore, nations turn to their artists in order to extract beauty from them and this is where French, English, Polish, or Russian beauty comes from. Has anyone ever compiled a history of Polish beauty through the centuries? It would be difficult to find a more important subject, as your beauty delineates not only your taste but your entire relationship to the world, certain things become unacceptable not because you should condemn them, but because they are “unbecoming,” because “they detract from your type,” because with them, you would not be able to realize the beauty which you crave and on which you model yourself. Thus a woman who models herself on a child or a scatterbrain does not want, does not like, does not love thinking; a lancer, on the other hand, has to like whiskey, even though he may not like it; an adolescent must love cigarettes.

Sienkiewicz’s *salon de beauté* is the result of a long process and, I repeat, we will understand little of his mind-boggling triumphs until we have a look at Polish adventures with beauty during the course of recent centuries. Take a look at our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature and you will be convinced that it has almost always equated beauty with virtue. There was no room in it for beauty born exclusively of life; on the contrary, life here turned out to be a bridled morality and only a virtuous youth, decent and god-fearing, could come to know aesthetic canonization in art. This is exactly what does not appeal to us today. This bores us, it seems neuter, unattractive, for virtue in itself is uninteresting and predictable. Virtue is settling the matter, that is, death. Sin is life. Virtue can be vital only as a victory over sin, which is original and, what’s more, something that separates and delineates us. Human nature manifests itself in sin, in a vital expansion, and he who has not known such a period of vitality, who from childhood was only virtuous, will not know much about himself. The blasphemous thought that Hell could exist beyond Virtue was inconceivable to the literature of that day. Which inevitably had to lead to the ossification of form. The type of Pole which literature and art proposed, not being saturated enough with sin, attached adequately to life, had to become an isolated formula. Isn’t this what is happening today with the

official Bolshevik beauty of the young, radiant worker with a smile on his lips, hammer in hand, and gaze directed into the luminous future, which bores with its excess of virtue? This is the source of our incredible, adventurous eighteenth century, the almost brilliant crisis of Polish beauty, which put us face-to-face with our Ugliness, our Profligacy . . . a century of sclerotic, senile old stiffening and at the same time, a dull unruliness, when the armistice between form and instinct had created a chasm . . . probably the deepest which has ever shown itself to our idyllic spirit. Never before or since have we been closer to rubbing up against hell and any thought about Poland and the Poles is not worth much if it bypasses the period of Saxon scurrility. But what exactly happened? What happened was that the Pole suddenly felt himself the caricature of a Pole. The Jesuit schools could not provide a more vital beauty, therefore, desperate with a tormenting sense of our own awfulness and ridiculousness, we tottered into sclerosis and farce.

Undoubtedly the profound imbecility of our behavior during that period derived from, among other things, an unsatisfied desire for beauty. The Poland of that day was a nation which simply did not know how to be beautiful. At the bottom of that quadrille of obese squires one can divine a despair which results from an incapacity to reach the sources of living grace; this is the tragedy of beings forced to be satisfied with such surrogates as ceremony, honors, distinctions and to find outlets in solemn ritual, while gluttony, debauchery, and pride are boundless. What irreparable harm! That this Saxon burlesque did not get carried out to its ultimate conclusions! For the self-torment in ugliness, in stupidity, would have led us most likely to the higher forms of beauty and understanding—this tormenting conflict with form, which became hostile to us, could have wonderfully perfected our sensitivity to form—and, who knows, maybe we would have gained a better understanding of this incurable disharmony in this way, the disharmony which exists between a man and his form, his “style”—and this thought would have allowed us to finally notice the existence of Form as such and would have resulted not so much in the “Polish style” as much as in our relationship, as people, to that style having become our highest concern. Yes, perhaps we would have made important discoveries, perhaps we would have arrived at fertile, new ideas if . . . if not for Mickiewicz! Yes! Mickiewicz soothed our pains, taught us a new beauty, which for many long years became the obligatory beauty and resulted in our being content with ourselves again.

If that had really been good work! . . . But real beauty is not attained by passing over ugliness in silence. You will not be able to do much with your body if shyness does not allow you to undress completely. And virtue does not rely on concealing sins, but on overcoming them; real virtue not only does not fear sin, but seeks it—as it is the reason for its being. Art is wonderfully capable of magnifying the beauty of a man or a nation, under the condition that we leave it complete freedom of action. But Mickiewicz, a sage as merciful as he was shy, as pious as he was timid, preferred not to undress all the way and his all-encompassing goodness feared looking truth in the eyes. He was the greatest revelation of that Polish aesthetics which does not like “to dabble” in dirt, or cause anyone any pain. Yet Mickiewicz’s great weakness consisted of his being the national poet, that is, his identifying with and expressing the nation, whereby he became incapable of seeing the nation from the outside, as something “existing in the world.” Deprived of a base of support in this external world and in his own being, he could not move the nation from its haunches and in these conditions did something which he could not afford to do, that is, provided us with a beauty which appealed to our national interests at a given moment. Because we had lost our independence and were weak, he decorated our weakness with the plumes of Romanticism, he turned Poland into the Christ of nations, he opposed our Christian virtue to the lawlessness of the partitioners and sang the praises of our beauteous landscapes.

Once again virtue became the foundation of our beauty—and Poles readily submitted themselves to this bit of cosmetic unaware that it takes place at the cost of life. Mickiewicz, the national poet of a conquered people, a people with a reduced vitality, was basically afraid of life, he was not one of those artists who tease the bull, who provoke, who stoke reality to a white heat, just to bring aesthetics and morality under control. No—he was instead one of those teachers and educators who prefer to avoid temptations, while Western art was an endless excitation and expansion. Mickiewicz’s art is a rather careful braking, an avoidance of “evil thoughts” and exciting views. How would our development have looked if a star other than Mickiewicz’s had appeared in our sky: a man equally outstanding and lofty, who would not have surrendered himself to the service of the nation, but, proudly contemptuous of all our poverty, all the necessities of our slavery, would have tried to reach Beauty as a free man, a man spiritually free. But no such star—of the Goethe variety—appeared to us at the right moment and today it is probably

too late . . . for problems have their chronology and right now other things weigh on our hearts.

In order to understand how in a given historical period the feeling of beauty prevails, one must first take into account society's relation to youth. It is characteristic that in the poetry of the creator of "Ode to Youth" the beauty of the youth is still subordinated to a "mature" beauty—one could say that this is still a literature of the fathers and it is not the young man that fascinates Mickiewicz, it is the man or a young man having the requirements for a man. In spite of its romanticism, we will not find in all of Polish art even a pinch of that exaltation of youth with which the art of Greece, Renaissance painting, or *Romeo and Juliet* is saturated . . . no, here youth is always stifled, here a bit is clamped on the horse of youth. . . . What then was the predicament of a Polish young man in the Mickiewiczian period? Finding no affirmation of his twenty years in any art, for the grace which nature had endowed him, he could be beautiful only as a romantic son of defeat, or as a Pole, or as someone whose beauty—the beauty of virtue, merit—begins only after thirty. But even this beauty of virtue, having God or Nation as its source, turned out to be immeasurably narrow in the face of so many various beauties which gradually made their appearance in the West—for there they began to notice that there exists a beauty of ignominy and baseness, the pagan beauty of sin, the beauty of Goethe and the ill-boding gleam of Shakespeare's and Balzac's worlds, and beauties which were to find their expression in Baudelaire, Wilde, Ruskin, Poe, Dostoyevski, but nothing of this Western striving for the enrichment of the gamut of human beauty penetrated the soul of the young man who was destined only for the role and function of the "virtuous son of Poland." If, therefore, carried away by instinct and temperament, he made his way into the jungle of those forbidden charms, it was always on his own, without a guide, left to his own unsophisticated, murky instincts.

Let us return to Sienkiewicz.

The dilemma virtue/vitality remained unresolved, therefore, and rankled all the more because unofficially in all of the literature in post-Mickiewicz times. Nowhere does it appear in a more caricatured manner than in Kraszewski and studies of this author would cast a great deal of light onto our psyche. We were submitted to a narrow aesthetics and within this framework we should have painted our own face. The new generation was increasingly irked by the fact that this civil

beauty provided outlets that were too narrow for the temperament and they sought a unity of virtue with beauty and grace, to create a type of Pole who would know not only how to pray but how to dance. One could say that we were seeking the opportunity to sin, yet paralyzed by a centuries-long tradition, we sought only mollified sin, sin which would not be base or ignominious or ugly or horrible . . . yes, our need was for likable sin, which would not repel anyone. Sienkiewicz sensed this secret need wonderfully and this paved the road for his triumph. The type of Pole, inherited from Mickiewicz and, in spite of everything, of a high class, made him easier, more acceptable and more attractive. He peppered virtue with sin, he coated sin with sugar and was able to concoct a sweetish liqueur, not too strong but exciting, of the type most appealing to women.

Likable sin, decent sin, charming sin, “pure” sin—behold the specialty of this kitchen. Not the Roman Skrzetuski but the sinner Kmicic is the typical Sienkiewicz hero. The Kmicices and Winicjuszes are allowed to sin on the condition that the sin comes from an excess of vital forces and a pure heart. Sienkiewicz realized this liberation of sin, which had long been necessary for Polish development . . . but on what a level! The difference between a real aspiration to beauty and coquetry is that in the first case we want to appeal to ourselves and in the second case, it is enough to charm others. For years, Poles have been practicing a nonobjective beauty, always in the name of some other, higher, right; why then, is it strange that Mickiewicz, who was, in spite of everything, in great measure objective and powerful, was slowly transformed into Sienkiewicz, who was the open desire to please at all cost? First, he desired to appeal to the reader. Second, he desired that one Pole appeal to another Pole and that the nation appeal to all Poles. Third, he desired that the nation appeal to other nations.

In this net of absorbing seduction, it is obvious that value disappears and that the external effect becomes decisive—and the ease with which Sienkiewicz attains the appearance of value is worthy of amazement and is immensely characteristic. If his theater is full of titanic figures, with the power and glory of the Great Hetman and Wojewoda of Wilno type rarely met with elsewhere, then it is exactly because this is pure theater and pure acting. The skills this cook manifests in preparing soups of many glories for us are exactly those characteristic of a mediocre man who plays with values. The tragedy of genuine superiority is that it does not want to lower its flight for anything, that it will fight to the death to maintain its

level, as it does not know how to and cannot get rid of itself—and that is why an authentic superiority is always creative, that is, it transforms others in its own image. Sienkiewicz, on the other hand, surrenders himself entirely to the service of the average imagination, and by resigning from the spirit, nevertheless does not resign from talent and, in this way, arrives at an archsensual art, based on satisfying the unrealized tendencies of the masses, and becomes a peddler of pleasant dreams . . . to the degree that the awestruck mediocrity exclaims: What a genius! And it is true that this is, in a very special sense, a brilliant art, brilliant exactly because it derives from the desire to please and enchant; and hence that marvel of narration—the intuition when it is a matter of avoiding that which tires, bores, which does not amuse—that sauce, that color, that melody. . . . A rare genius, but also a somewhat embarrassing one, a genius of those somewhat embarrassing dreams to which we succumb before falling asleep, a genius of whom it is better not to boast abroad. And that is why, in spite of all his glory, Sienkiewicz has never been given his due. The Polish intelligentsia delighted in him “as bedside reading” but on official turf, it preferred to mention the names of other, infinitely less talented but far more serious artists like Żeromski or Wyspiański. . . .

For he is a genius of “easy beauty.” With terrifying efficacy he makes everything he touches shallow; a very specific harmonizing of life with spirit takes place and all the antinomies with which a serious literature bleeds become blurred, and as a result, we get novels which adolescents can read without blushing. Why doesn’t the endless torture and atrocity in which the *Trilogy* or *Quo Vadis* abound not arouse a protest in sensitive virgins who faint reading Dostoyevski? Because it is obvious that Sienkiewicz’s tortures are described “for pleasure.” In his world even physical pain becomes a piece of candy. His world is threatening, powerful, splendid, it has all the attributes of a real world, except that the label “for entertainment” has been affixed to it, as a result of which it does not horrify.

Yet the game would not be so bad in and of itself, because it is nowhere written that fun, coquetry, daydreaming, is forbidden . . . if that playing with values did not take on the appearance of a cult of values. No one forbids selling a cat, but one should not sell a cat in a sack. If we asked Sienkiewicz: Why do you beautify history? Why do you simplify people? Why do you feed Poles the steak of naive illusions? Why do you put the conscience to sleep, stifle thought, and impede

progress?—the answer is ready and contained in the last words of the *Trilogy*: to cheer the heart. In addition, a nation is its own justification. But, outside of the nation, there is also God. For this work as conceived by Sienkiewicz and his admirers is writing that is moral par excellence, based solidly on a Catholic world-view, a “pure” literature. From which it turns out that Sienkiewicz’s starting points harmonize with our centuries-long tradition: everything that is written is written in the name of the Nation and God, God and the Nation.

It is easy to notice that these two concepts—God and Nation—are not entirely reconcilable, or at any rate are not conducive to appearing one next to the other. God is absolute morality, and a nation is a group of people with specific aspirations, fighting for its daily existence . . . we must decide, therefore, if the highest right is our moral feeling or the interests of our group. It is certain that in Mickiewicz as well as in Sienkiewicz, God became subordinated to the nation and virtue was primarily an instrument in the battle for a collective existence. The weakness of our individual morality, our stubborn herd instinct in time had to plunge us into a more and more distinct laicism, and in truth Sienkiewicz’s virtues become outright pretexts for beauty; he is like a woman who maintains purity in thought and deed not to please God, but because instinct assures her that it pleases men. Therefore, Sienkiewicz is a Catholic writer only superficially and his lovely virtue is a hundred miles away from true, painful, ugly Catholic virtue, which is a categorical rejection of easy attractions—his virtue not only harmonizes with the body, it also decorates it like a smile. That is why Sienkiewicz’s literature can be defined as a proposal for “an uncomplicated life,” a disregarding of absolute values in the name of living.

Never has Gide’s wonderful saying that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” turned out to be more apt than in this case . . . and the demonic consequences of the nobility and honesty—there is no reason to doubt this—of Sienkiewicz’s intentions were not long in appearing. His “beauty” became the ideal set of pajamas for all of those who did not want to gape at their own hideous nakedness. The gentry-landowning social stratum, living on their estates, with that simplified life of theirs and being, in the majority, a desperate band of slovenly dolts, finally found its ideal style and, what goes with it, attained complete satisfaction with itself. It soaked up this pleasure. The aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the

clergy, the army, and every single element which wanted to ridicule its way out of confrontations that were too difficult, and patriotism, Polish patriotism, so lazy and brisk in its beginnings and bloody and enormous in its effects, got drunk on Sienkiewicz's Poland until it passed out. Various countesses, wives of engineers and lawyers, female citizens of town and country finally found the "woman-Pole" who could embody the idealism supported by their husbands' money and polished by their servants, and from then on these priestesses and guardians, these buxom country lasses, these Oleńki and Baški became waterproof and inaccessible to all of external reality—as knowledge interfered with their "purity," for their beauty consisted of exactly their impenetrability. But, what was worse, the whole soul of the nation became insensitive to the external world, as happens with dreamers who prefer not to ruin their dreams. And perhaps not because the stubborn revisionism bursting with a new Marxism, Freudianism, or surrealism of the West did not interest the mass of Poles, but because in their heart of hearts, they knew that their notion of themselves, embodied in Sienkiewicz, was like the armor of Don Quixote, which is better off not being put to the test. After all, they *did not like* that stuff, they found no pleasure in that, their knight-lancer's soul had fallen in love with something else, O mighty art! Alas, a certain style determines the emotional possibilities of the nation, making it blind and deaf to all else, determining its most concealed tastes to the degree that 90% of the world becomes inedible to it. Naturally, Sienkiewicz did not accomplish this alone.

As we saw, he had his predecessors; he also had his followers, that is, a whole Sienkiewicz school in literature and art.



From the above, bird's-eye view of our nation's adventures with beauty, it would appear that a more real, more authentic Polish beauty does not exist. Neither beauty, nor form, nor style. Let us not deceive ourselves even for an instant into believing that the literature and art that we wield today is really a style. For style, form, and beauty can only be the work of a people who are spiritually free, a people who aspire to this goal with complete ruthlessness, who are bold and passionate in the search, in order to treat with contempt all outside considerations and to bare us in a way we have not ever been bared. It is only then that Poles will

acquiesce to reality and will settle down to themselves with the appropriate freedom. We will attain neither Polish beauty nor virtue until we dare reveal Polish sins and Polish ugliness.

But let us not underrate Sienkiewicz. It is up to us whether he becomes an instrument of truth or falsehood and whether or not his shameful work leads us to self-exposure in greater measure than any other. The unmasking denuding power of Sienkiewicz consists of exactly his moving along the line of least resistance, insofar as he is all pleasure, an uncommitted reveling in cheap daydreams. If we cease seeing a teacher and master in him, if we understand that this is our intimate dreamer, the shameful teller of dreams, then his books will grow for us to the size of art with a spontaneous character, an analysis of which will lead us into the murky dark recesses of our personality. If we treated Sienkiewicz's writing in this way, as an outlet for our instincts, desires, secret aspirations, we would see truths in him about ourselves that would perhaps make our hair stand on end. Sienkiewicz, as no other writer, leads us into those crannies of our soul where our Polish escaping from life and our Polish circumvention of truth take place. Our "superficiality," our "lightness," our basically irresponsible, childish attitude to life and culture, our lack of belief in the existence of a complete reality (probably resulting from the fact that while we are not really Europe, neither are we Asia) manifests itself here all the more violently the more we are ashamed of it. If modern Polish thought does not attain the appropriate acuity, then horrified by this discovery and desiring to be like the West (or East) at any price, it will begin to persecute these "faults" in us and make over our nature—which will lead to one more grotesquerie. If, however, we will be sensible enough to draw the consequences for ourselves, we will undoubtedly discover some unforeseen and unexploited possibilities and we will be capable of providing ourselves with a beauty quite different from what we have known up to now.

Discussing modern Polish thought and development when we are gagged, when we live in conditions of utter poverty and backwardness, might appear to be nothing but empty talk. Not so! Existence is a complicated thing. Behind the main events mental work continues. Not for a second has the life in us been extinguished that is calculated for the long run; it simply cannot get to the surface. In Poland today, more than ever, the Polish masses are choking in the muzzle of an

artificial aesthetics imposed on them in the name of proletarian virtue. What is more, never have we been more torn between East and West. These two worlds, destroying each other right before our eyes, create an emptiness in us which we will be able to fill only with our own contents. Sooner or later, the real devil will appear to us and only then will we know which God we must worship.

Volume 2

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1957

I

I have not been completely understood (I am referring to the articles that are appearing in Poland on the subject of *Ferdydurke*) or rather they have extracted from me only what is “timely” and corresponds to their current history and current predicament. I am resigned to this: this partial—I might even say egotistical—interpretation, always from the angle of current need, is inevitable. Before the war, *Ferdydurke* passed for the ravings of a madman, because in a time of jubilant creativity and straining for political power, my book ruined the parade. Today, when the Mug and Fanny have really irked the nation, *Ferdydurke* has been elevated to the rank of satire and criticism. As if I were Voltaire! Now they say it is a wise (hah! even a clear and concise) book, the work of a sober rationalist who judges and metes out punishment with premeditation, a virtually classic and most carefully pondered work!

To go from being crazy to being a rationalist—is this a promotion for an artist? Yet this Ferdydurkean rationalism breaks down at some point, for the critics and the articles usually close with the troubled statement that Gombrowicz has probably “not thought his ideas all the way through” because somehow the work does not want to fit into the “concept” they have so busily deduced. Or perhaps it doesn’t fit because the concept is too narrow? I will try to describe our greatest misunderstandings.

Ferdydurke is difficult to interpret because it contains a very specific view of man. How do they see this man of mine? And how do I see him?

They say—and correctly—that in *Ferdydurke* man is created by people. But they understand this primarily as man’s being dependent on a social group, which imposes custom, convention, and style upon him. . . . They even say that this is an altogether banal truth, a cliché and a forcing of open doors.

There is one thing, however, that they have not noticed. Namely, that this process of forming man through people is conceived of much more broadly in *Ferdynand*. I do not deny that the individual is dependent on his milieu—but for me it is far more important, artistically far more creative, psychologically far more profound, and philosophically far more disturbing that man is also created by an individual man, by another person. In chance encounters. Every minute of the day. By virtue of the fact that I am always “for another,” counting on someone else’s seeing me, being able to exist in a specific manner only for someone else and by someone else, and existing—as a form—only through another. Therefore, it is not a matter of my milieu’s imposing a convention or, speaking in Marxist terms, that man is a product of his social class, but that the depiction of man’s encounter with man in all of its fortuitousness, directness, wildness, results in showing how Form, and often the most unpredictable, absurd form, is born of these accidental encounters. Since I do not need form for myself, I need it only so another person can see, feel, and experience me. Can’t you see this Form is something far more powerful than a simple social convention? And that it is an uncontrollable element? As long as you understand *Ferdynand* as a battle with convention, it will trot calmly down the well-beaten path; but if you understand that man creates himself with another man in the sense of the wildest debauchery, *Ferdynand* will neigh and leap forward as if you had jabbed it with a spur, carrying you off into the realm of the Unpredictable. *Ferdynand* is more a form-element than a form-convention.

They say further that in *Ferdynand* (and in my other works) I wage a battle with distortion, with hypocrisy. . . . Undoubtedly. But isn’t this also a simplification of my intentions and my concept of man?

Why, my man is created from the outside, that is, he is inauthentic in essence—he is always not-himself, because he is determined by form, which is born between people. His “I,” therefore, is marked for him in that “interhumanity.” An eternal actor, but a natural one, because his artificiality is inborn, it makes up a feature of his humanity—to be a man means to be an actor—to be a man means to pretend to be a man—to be a man means to “act like” a man while not being one deep inside—to be a man is to recite humanity. In these circumstances, therefore, how is one to understand the struggle with the mug, with the grimace in *Ferdynand*? Not that man should get rid of his own mug—for beyond it he has no

face—here one can only demand that he be conscious of his artificiality and confess it. If I am condemned to deception, the only honesty to which I have access is the admission that honesty is inaccessible to me. If I can never be entirely myself, the only thing that allows me to save my personality from annihilation is my will to authenticity, that stubborn-in-spite-of-everything “I want to be myself,” which is nothing more than a tragic and hopeless revolt against deformation. I cannot be myself, yet I want to be myself and I must be myself—this is the antinomy, one of those that do not let themselves be resolved . . . and do not expect me to provide you with medicine for incurable diseases. *Ferdydurke* merely confirms man’s inner division—nothing more.

And degradation?

Why have they almost completely ignored the degradation which plays so strongly in my works, which alone lends my form its true flavor?

They have concentrated on the problem of deformation—they have forgotten that *Ferdydurke* is also a book about immaturity . . . man cannot express himself on the outside not only because others warp him—he cannot express himself because, first of all, only that which is already ordered in us and mature lends itself to expression, and all the rest, that is, our immaturity, is silence. Therefore form will always be something compromising—we are degraded by form. And it is not difficult to see how, for example, our entire cultural inheritance, which exists precisely because we have concealed our immaturity, is the work of people pulling themselves up to a certain standard, of people who are wisdom, seriousness, profundity, responsibility only on the outside (and being incapable of revealing their immaturity never mention the other side of the coin)—just as all of our arts, philosophies, moralities, compromise us, for they are above us and more mature than we are; they plunge us into some sort of second childishness. We cannot handle our culture internally—this is a fact which has not been adequately considered, but which nevertheless determines the tone of our “cultural life.” Deep inside we are eternal striplings.

Man’s degradation via form also happens in other ways, however.

If my form works itself out through contact with others, these people can be superior or inferior to me. In shaping my form through beings found on a lower rung of development, I gain a lower form, more immature than the one due me. I

draw your attention, dear critics, to all the places in my art where the Inferior, the Younger, creates the Superior in its own way, because there you have the most intense poetry I can create.

But let us also not forget that man does not like maturity because he prefers his youth. That is why *Ferdydurke* also contains both of these strivings—it is as I have already indicated in this diary, “the image of the battle for one’s own maturity by someone enamored of his own immaturity.” Here, therefore, the formula becomes degrading once again.

And, finally, will a man who is always beneath value, always compromised (insofar as to be a man means to be “worse,” worse than that which he produces), not seek an outlet for his inner life in the appropriate realm, in trash? Bruno Schulz grasped this in his study of *Ferdydurke*, published in the prewar literary monthly *Skamander*. He calls it “the sphere of subcultural, undereducated and rudimentary contents,” where human immaturity finds release. “Our immaturity”—he continues—“(and perhaps at bottom our vitality) is tied in a thousand knots, braided with a thousand atavisms to a second-rate suit of forms, to a second-class culture. While under the cover of official forms we honor higher, sublimated values, our real life plays itself out secretly and without higher sanctions in that dirty realm, and the emotional energies located in it are a hundred times more powerful than those the thin layer of officialdom dispenses.”

I will add: he who does not extract and does not feel this “degradation” in *Ferdydurke*, in *The Marriage*, and in my other works, has not grasped my most important point.



They conceive of my work as just one more struggle with society, a critique of society. Let us see if my man does not explode this concept.

These, in brief, are his characteristics:

- (1) Man created by form, in the profoundest, most universal sense.
- (2) Man as the creator, the indefatigable producer of form.
- (3) Man degraded by form (always being an “under-” or an “im-”—under-educated, immature).
- (4) Man in love with immaturity.
- (5) Man created by Inferiority and Youngerness.

- (6) Man subject to the “interhuman” as a superior, creative force, our only accessible divinity.
- (7) Man “for” man, knowing no higher instance.
- (8) Man animated, elevated, magnified by other people.

These features of my man are the ones that occur to me right now. Do you want to reduce all of this to one single revolt against the social forms of being?



Occasionally they have rather strange grievances. They demand—or at least some of them do—that I “solve” this world—that I take care of its tragic contradictions, change it into a “constructive” little world. This is a bit childish. I most certainly will not untie the Gordian knots of life. My morality? It depends, first of all, on my expressing protest in the name of my humanity—on the irony and sarcasm that express my rebellion. Second, it depends on the belief that everything that helps us decipher our true nature and predicament in the world is our triumph over nature.

In my opinion, only a literature that cannot be taken seriously attempts to solve the problems of existence. Serious literature poses them. One man will not solve the problems of existence—they solve themselves, if they solve themselves at all, in humanity.

Serious literature does not exist to make life easy but to complicate it.



I must combat the pettiness of the reader. His is a pusillanimous reading of my texts. It seems that they are afraid of getting the entire meaning, not because it would terrify them but only because they are not accustomed to a complete contents. They try violently to change me into one more specimen of a conventional literature, yet they themselves claim that my writing defies all conventions.

I don’t say this about all the reviews that have appeared. It does happen that a critic will allow himself a little boldness and panache now and then only to follow them with an immediate and hurried withdrawal into the land of platitudes.

Trans-Atlantic? What will happen to *Trans-Atlantic*, which should be appearing in Poland any day now? Everything I write is equally basic and universal. Try as I might, I cannot reduce my subject, which will always be man and the

world. But *Trans-Atlantic* also concerns Poland, and that little word “Poland” is all it takes to have all the local complexes echo in response.

Sunday

Sometimes, when reading these articles, I forget that I am, after all, an artist. I begin to believe that I am the author of a multivolumed philosophical work. . . . There is constant talk about my “concepts,” almost never about my art.

No, I would not accuse most of my commentators of a lack of intelligence. After having read Janusz Kowalewski’s silly article about the *Diary* in the émigré press, I realized that this level of discussion would be impossible in Poland. And when I compare these critiques of *Ferdynand* with those from before the war, I see that the atmosphere . . . of the times . . . is quite different. I reproach them, as I have said, for their timidity, for their conceptual narrowness, which, however, is understandable considering that they write more for the masses than the aristocratic critics of the West do. Still, I note a flaw in the very function, attitude, and arrangement of this criticism. Columns full of diligent analyses that can be neither exhaustive nor clarifying because they are too short, columns that must weary the reader because they are too long . . . what purpose do they serve? Who needs them? And so devoid of artistry! The dreariness of Polish life pulsates from this forced, tiring, straightforward thinking that wants to understand, to realize, to explain to others but does not know how to thrill—it lacks imaginativeness, *Schwung*, charm, radiance, poetry, playfulness. This criticism is like a finger put to a quivering string—it kills the vibrations. There is something wrong in their approach to art—and in the long run it can have a negative influence on the artistic temperament of the nation.

This is probably tied to the Polish “beauty crisis.”

On the whole the criticism is very much *comme il faut*, it has very good manners—how much more unpretentious and sensible, less aggressive and uncere- monious than before. . . . With the exception of Mr. Kisiel in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. That he refers to me as that “guy” and can’t even get the title of my novel *Trans-Atlantic* right does not bother me, but everything in that little piece is shallow, non-sensical, swimming in a soup concocted of nonchalance, a dismal journalistic arrogance that endows columnists with some sort of euphoria when it comes to

babbling just any old thing. He proclaims that *Ferdydurke* and my *Diary* are “nothing more than endless variations on the topic ‘Poland and I.’” And he reproaches me with having “messianic and polonocentric illusions.” I have read many untruths about myself, but something so utterly wrong from A to Z, neither here nor there, so “concretely invented” as my Argentine friends from the group Concreto Invencion say . . . ha, Mr. Kisiel, I cannot reciprocate other than by pinning to your chest, my dearest buddy, the Order of the Fellowship of Jokers and Blahblablah.

Thursday

In the dining car it is five in the afternoon, we are approaching Tandil, which is reminiscent of Salzburg from here—the slender tower of the church rising from the hills. Streams of spring light pour into space, the sun trembles in the air, color after color rises from the meadows until the last dispersion in the peripheries of the heavens. Lost in dreams. It is warm. . . . The train stops in a field. I see before me, through the window, grass, rails, a scrap of paper.

Exhausting! I have seen it all a thousand times before. A thousand times the train has stopped and I have seen: the rails, a scrap of paper. The entire landscape summed itself up: rails, scrap of paper. Riveted to the paper, I don’t take my eyes from it, I wait until the train moves and the paper moves—left behind. I have done this a thousand times before. I, paper, and rails. Rails, I, and the paper. The paper, rails, and I.

Sunday

Sandauer is defending himself in Poland—he is under siege. . . . I watch this from America. I am taken aback because Adolf Rudnicki and I were once close friends—we made our debut together and that united us. On the other hand, there is the distance, the chilling distance of years and kilometers. I watch Poland as if through a telescope and can see only the most general contours of their existence, and this invites ruthlessness.

From this distance only what is not petty remains. Why then has this local hullabaloo over Sandauer’s running Rudnicki into the ground in a way that

seemed too cruel to Rudnicki's admirers—why has this literary tempest reached me across the Atlantic undiminished, while their most successful books remain barely perceptible? I have just read Sandauer's reply, "Three Times . . . No!" in *Życie Literackie*. I will not enter into the specifics of the dispute, I don't know how right Sandauer is in regard to Rudnicki, completely, somewhat, or not at all, but the tone of the reply thrilled me—a tone that I have not encountered thus far in the literary press, a tone that is categorical. Is it possible that a real dialogue about art is finally taking place in Poland? This wonderful article is like breaking open a window in a room that has not been aired for years. It is a fist striking at a fiction. At a conventional literature. At a conventional life.

This I like! Indeed I believe that the chief goal of Polish postwar existence is getting at reality. For many years they have lived in a perfectly artificial system, locked in it as if it were a glass ball. Yet the weakening of the system is certainly not synonymous with a return of a genuine play of powers and values—for, after all (Sandauer is right here), a certain arrangement has survived from that time, an arrangement made between people and groups interested only in hanging onto their present positions, and this "mutual courtesy" perpetuates paralysis and mystification. Were pride and self-interest the only things keeping this arrangement intact? What about goodness? What about decency? Various feelings and sympathies? Just so as not to hurt anyone? Who knows if softness is not what lends an arrangement the toughness and resistance of a wall, the weight of a cliff.

That is why criticism, devastating criticism, is essential. With the aim of smashing the arrangement, jolting people out of their places and forcing them to become what they really are. Sandauer is a critic who has a profound understanding of the unprecedented, vital, and crucial role of the critic in this "new start" of Polish literary life. He has grasped its purifying and invigorating potential.

To be a pale moon shining with borrowed light, to be second-rate, conventional, vapid, cheaply provincial and inflated—or to sail out onto the broadest waters in fearless confrontation with the world, to earn the right to the fullest existence possible? This is the dilemma of Polish art, barely wheezing after its last serious illness and handicapped by its tradition of nonconsummation. . . . For me, from my vantage point in the West, the matter is as clear as day. Nothing stupider could happen to us than to continue to nurture a timidity that does not allow us to bare ourselves. Poland and Poles must be stripped bare—at least in art. Sandauer

was accused of speaking about Polish writing with an excessive openness and honesty in Paris. How do you want a decent man to speak to the world? Dishonestly?

Tuesday

As a supplement to the polemic with critics:

First.—Let them get rid of the notion that I am an enemy of “interhumanity” (forms that become established between people). I have to rebel because this deforms me—but I know that this is unavoidable. This is how it should be.

For example. The fact that, according to me, “people mutually force themselves to admire art” (although no one is so directly enchanted by it) certainly does not undermine the value of art. Except that it works differently than we suppose.

Second.—There exist two orders: the human and the inhuman. The world is an absurdity and a monstrosity to our indestructible need for meaning, justice, love. A simple thought. A sure one . . .

Don’t make a cheap demon out of me. I will be on the side of human order (and even on God’s side even though I am not a believer) to the end of my days and in dying as well.

II

Saturday

The history of my becoming is the history of my constant adjustment to my literary works—which always surprised me by being born in an unpredictable way, as if not of me. . . . To a certain degree my books are a result of my life—but my life was formed in greater measure from them and with them. How was it with *Trans-Atlantic*? Once when returning from Caballito at night, I began to amuse myself by composing reminiscences from my first days in Buenos Aires on the model of some sort of Grand Guignol, and, at the same time, by dint of the past, I felt anachronistic, draped in an antique style, entangled in some sort of almost ancient scleroticism—and this cheered me up so much that I immediately commenced writing something that was to have been an antiquated memoir from that time. How unsettling is that opening phase, when one has to extract the first shape of a work,

so awkward and unenriched by all the small inspirations that the pen encounters only much later. Only obstinance allows one to tear through that repulsive fog-ridden beginning. But naturally—and as always—the commenced work began to slip away from me and began writing itself: what I had conceived as a chronicle of my first undertakings after landing had transformed itself somehow—God knows how, probably by way of those thousands of submissions made to form—into a strange novel about Poles, with a “puto,” a duel, and even a sleigh chase. . . . After a little more than a year, I noticed that I was the author of *Trans-Atlantic*. But what was this *Trans-Atlantic*? A queer and whimsical thing drawn out of thin air, woven of tens of thousands of excitements, a fantastic work. Poland? Poland had slid under my crazy quill accidentally, only because I was writing about Poles—and perhaps because I thought of it as an anachronism; it lent itself to my little theater, to that old-fashioned scenery.

Yes. But now the work is supposed to go among people—Polish people—and the Polish reader will begin to pound, as on a drum, on the flimsy, imagined transatlantic Polishness—until it emits the rumbling sound of the war drum.

Here is an account of the course of events.

I am on the lookout for some sort of publisher; after all, I have to do something with this text. Somehow I get the address of Paweł Zdziechowski in Paris. Through him the contact with Giedroyć. Fragments of *Trans-Atlantic* are supposed to appear in *Kultura*. (I don’t take this much to heart, I am still on the peripheries of the emigration, practically a foreigner.)

But letters arrive from writers I know and to whom I have sent the typescript. “God Almighty, do you realize what you have written?!” Or: “This whole thing is impossible for ‘fellow Poles in exile’ to bear. Too cruel. Such things must be written if one can, but—unfortunately—publishing them must be put off until later, when the models have died, the scenery has fallen down, and the times have changed. . . . Of course one doesn’t have to put it off, but then woe! Woe to the author!”

What’s this? So—I began to understand—there’s going to be a scandal. Just as *Ferdynand* in its time. Even more dangerous because I am lost in the world, alone, without support. I ask Wittlin to be the midwife for this difficult birth.

I write an introduction to the fragments that *Kultura* is supposed to print: “I assume that the book you have in your hands will seem quite jarring—as if some lay

or even heretical spirit had torn into your piety. . . .” The preface is in some ways a new provocation because I do not intend to win anyone’s indulgence—I want to pay for disregard with disregard, of which I have known plenty from my countrymen and which constantly threatens me. Yet at the same time, I attempt to relieve the tension by explaining my blasphemous sneering—which not only accentuates the Polish problem in *Trans-Atlantic*, but forces me even further into seriousness.

The fragments appear in *Kultura*. Immediately afterward Wittlin pours the clear oil of his prose onto the raging waters. An eloquent, courageous, and calm article, worth its weight in gold to me (but again, in defending the work, he has to extract and fill in the contours of the Polish problem and so other aspects of the work grow pale).

Polemics. W. A. Zbyszewski pricks me in *Wiadomości* with his journalist’s pen, in his way, that is, affecting impudence and utter shallowness. Should I reply? While editing a short reply to Zbyszewski’s two bits, my thesis formulates itself clearly for the first time: to overcome our current Polishness. The thesis drops into a vacuum. No one even twitches. Only Mieroszewski, alert as always, comments in *Kultura*: “Crazy thoughts stalk the minds of our contemporary Polish writers. These are extraordinary views.”

I reply to Straszewicz. Here for the first time I find a certain tone—of sovereign individualism—that I will continue to deploy. Remember that at that time my voice was not yet tempered for such polemics and articles. I used only an “artistic” style, borrowed from my books.

Trans-Atlantic appears in book form, with Wittlin’s preface and my own. Outrage. Letters. Reactions pro and con. Now my role is clearly delineated. My second entry into my native literature in twelve years takes place under the sign of rebellion against the homeland.



I outline this chronology because from it one can see how the nation—let us assume that the emigration is a nation—shapes the work and a writer for itself. A writer and a work are something changing and elusive—only the reader preserves them in some sort of definite and commanding sense. In setting out to construct my rickety transatlantic I had no clue that I would sail it to the shores of my homeland as a mutineer and pirate. And if my raving, almost somnolent blas-

phies had not been extracted and waved about, they would not have become my flag and I would not have discovered that my ship was a war frigate, whose assignment was to fight for a new Poland. I—that is, who? I—a child. For the captain of the ship was neither a responsible thinker nor an exquisite politician; merely a child who noticed, somewhat unsettlingly, that he was riding into seriousness on a thing begun in jest.

But now this tempest in a teacup forced me to find objective and serious reasons, to secure myself in seriousness—and then slowly I realized that I was in possession of a dynamic idea, capable of transforming our national sense of self and giving it new vigor. The idea was certainly nothing that could *épater* the modern intellectual—especially after Hegel—and was no discovery of America; it was a rather natural consequence of our thinking today, which turns with such passion toward movement and becoming, casting off the static, defined world. But as an instrument to plow through the Polish consciousness of the homeland, radically refreshing our spirit, at a crucial juncture, one of those creative antitheses of development, a new point of departure . . . yes, this could be exploited! No, no, nothing new, even for the least enlightened of Poles—this thought had rattled around in many minds, every second it let one know it was there like a pike in a pond, one could discover it in many innuendos—but to make it a rallying cry, goal, and program? Elevate it to the rank of chief thought about the nation?

What was the point? This is how I saw it. I walk up to a Pole and say to him:—You have spent your whole life falling to your knees before It. Now try something just the opposite. Rise up. Think not just that you must serve It—but that It is also supposed to serve you, your development. Therefore get rid of the excessive love and honor that shackle you, try to liberate yourself from the nation. To which that Pole would answer furiously:—You’ve gone crazy! What would I be worth if I did that? To which I say:—You must (because today it is unavoidable) decide what is the highest value to you: Poland or yourself. We must finally know what your ultimate reason for being is. Choose what is more basic to you: being a man in the world or a Pole? If you give first place to your humanity, you must recognize that Poland can be useful only insofar as it works in favor of your humanity—but if it hinders or deforms you, it must be overcome. Decide then! But he would answer passionately:—Not true, and you will not deceive me with your sophistry, for I, being a Pole, can attain humanity only in my nation. Can a dog be

only an animal? No, a dog is an animal, but as a dog, a concrete dog, a bulldog or pointer. And a goose? A horse? Don't take away my concreteness, for it is my life. I then say, taking him by the arm:—Are you deluding yourself into believing that you can attain the concrete, that is, reality, by not expressing all your feelings? Admit, that It limits, inhibits you. . . . He:—Silence! I can't listen to this! But I:—You want to exist genuinely yet you are afraid of your own thoughts? . . .

The eternal dialogue, the classic invitation to revolt . . . Perhaps I would have undertaken this denationalizing reluctantly. . . . Why, I have already said: I am not an admirer of cosmopolitanism—neither the scientific, dry, theoretical, and abstract cosmopolitanism with its cerebral schema of ideally universal systems—nor that which is born, in murky heads, of a sentimental anarchy, of a mawkish dream of “freedom.” I have trusted neither one nor the other. On the contrary, my perception of man as a being creating himself in connection with other, concrete people pushed me in the direction of all kinds of closely bound associations. Yet the point is that now, in this phase of my dialectics, I did not feel at all that I was striking at Polishness; on the contrary, I had the impression that I was rousing and enlivening it. How could that be? After all, didn't I want to liberate them from their Polishness? Yes, indeed . . . but this challenge really had a strange feature, thanks to which a Pole became more of a Pole the less he was devoted to Poland. Sophistry? Let us try to be more precise.

A Pole is a Pole by nature. Whereby the more a Pole is himself, the more will he be a Pole. If Poland does not allow him to think and feel freely, it means that Poland does not allow him to be himself fully, that is, to be a Pole fully. . . .

Does this still seem like sophistry? In that case let us look for examples in history. Germans in Hitler's day stoked adoration of the nation to a white heat, yet this kind of German was almost a fabrication, completely deprived of his Goethe tradition, bah, of his normal German humanity. Because of this, Germany became more powerful while the individual German became weaker because he had to surrender a part of his individual strength and resilience to the nation and, what is more, to become less typical, less real as a German. Let us take France next. Is, for example, a Frenchman who sees nothing but France more of a Frenchman? Or less of one? But to really be a Frenchman means exactly that: to see something beyond France.

A simple law. Collective strength is the sum of concessions each person

extracts from himself . . . that is how the power of an army, state, or church is created. The power of a nation. But this happens at the expense of the individual.

And what if a nation is so geographically and historically situated that it cannot attain power? What then? That spontaneous and natural Polishness, contained in each of us, suffers a great loss because we have surrendered full honesty and freedom of the spirit in exchange for a collective power—which we have not gained because it is unattainable. And what then? We immolate ourselves but nothing but smoke remains of the sacrifice.

Thus my desire to “overcome Poland” was synonymous with the desire to strengthen our individual Polishness. I simply wanted the Pole to stop being the product “of” an exclusively collective life and “for” a collective life. I wanted to complete him. To legitimize his other pole—the pole of individual life—and stretch him between the two. I wanted to have him between Poland and his own existence—in a perspective more dialectical and full of antinomies, conscious of his internal contradictions and capable of exploiting them for his own development.



I strove for a Pole who could take pride in saying: I belong to an inferior nation. With pride. For, as you will easily see, such a statement degrades me in my role as a member of the collectivity, but at the same time it raises me above the collectivity: I did not allow myself to be cheated; I am capable of judging my own position in the world; I know how to take stock of my situation; I am therefore a man of full value. (Parenthetically speaking, only then would you be able to love Poland *without reservations*—because it could no longer rob you of value.)

I went even further in this demand than had been accepted—even the French, English, or Americans, who have infinitely more freedom in this area than we, could not manage so extreme a formulation. After all, they didn’t need it! They belonged to powerful, dominant nations that not only did not ruin their personal lives but even enhanced them. With us things were different, we could not allow our cultural past, our collective level, our convulsive history, our national poverty, to delineate our limits. No, it had not been my intention at all just to relax our patriotism to the English or French level. To Poles I proposed a stance toward the nation that was even more radical—without precedent—something that would immediately set us apart from the bulk of nations, would make us a nation with an

exclusively different style.—Madness!—you will say.—A pipe dream!—Really?—I will ask.—And why are we the most fervent patriots in the world? Isn't it exactly because there is material in us to be the coldest antipatriots? In us the stoked love of homeland has reached its maximum, our dependence on it has become the worst imaginable—therefore, it is from us, not from anyone else, that the salutary antithesis will spring, the creative opposition that will be a step forward.

I didn't consider myself a dreamer in this—on the contrary, I was faithful to a realism that had entered my bloodstream much earlier. I had no doubt that Poles—tired and despairing because of the history of their homeland—live with an ambivalent feeling at the bottom of their hearts. Did they adore It? Yes, but they also cursed It. Love It? Yes, but they also hated It. It was holiness and a curse for them, strength and weakness, their pride and humiliation—but Polish style, formed and imposed by the collectivity, with only one side of the coin allowed to be expressed. Our literature, for example, deprived of all real individualism, could manage to express nothing but affirmation of the nation. And that reluctant, hostile, indifferent, or scornful feeling remained unacknowledged and meandered on its own as sin, anarchy. . . . Thus all my efforts boiled down to creating a principle that would allow me to set into motion openly this second pole of feeling, to reach this facet of the Polish soul, to sanction the heresy.



I wielded mighty arguments. Of course, a basic turnabout in our relations with the nation could be achieved only in the name of individual dignity, individual development. And this position was inordinately strong and timely, both as much among the émigrés as in Poland, as in the entire world—for the necessity to defend what was once called the human soul grows stronger under deforming and inhuman collective powers.

Something else also troubled me. Yes, as I have already said, I hated the nation because I couldn't bear it; and I couldn't bear it because of cowardice. But in this case what were my advice and lessons worth if they derived from my basic inability to cope with life? I, a decadent, how could I point the way to healthy individuals?

But this terrible problem, being not just my own torment, had already been mulled over several times. For it is well known that progress and development are

not the work of people who are of average health, of those who barely have an inkling . . . but are worked out by deformed persons, exiled from decent “normality.” A sick man is better able to grasp the absolute essence of health—because he does not possess it, he longs for it. He who lacks an internal balance can therefore become an expert on matters of balance, and the advice of a deformed man can be useful to a healthy life. Those who because of personal flaws cannot join the herd and who wander the peripheries see the path of the herd more clearly and know the surrounding forest better.

I believed then, and believe to this day, that the embarrassing genesis of my idea should not hurt—that a thought born in the little hell of my insufficiency, softened by childhood, could become objectively important. And healthy. On the condition that (beginning with myself) I do not conceal of what and how it was conceived.

I am not selling a cat in a sack. Feet and cards on the table, if you please—you have me just as I am, I am not praising the merchandise—if my existence can be of some use to you, use it in any way you wish.



The consequences of such a change in our attitude toward Poland would be rich and profound—it would cause a series of refreshing and electrifying revisions, ensuring us dynamic development for quite a while. For example—a revision of Polish history. I do not claim it would be necessary to liquidate the historical school that analyzes the span of our history from the vantage point of Poland’s existence, recognizing as positive that which promotes this existence, and negative that which stands in its way. However, this school should be supplemented by a different one in which history would be considered from the perspective of the development of man in Poland—and then it might turn out that these two developments, of the state and of the individual, do not always go hand in hand and that periods that were the most successful for the nation were perhaps not the happiest for the individual. At any rate, it might be clear that these two developments are not identical. This, however, would not be of primary importance.

The most important thing would be that finally we could get at least one foot out of history . . . and thereby regain our footing, we who are so swiftly borne under by the vortices of our past. For in no longer being forced to love and worship

Polishness, we would not need to love our history. Seeing our value not in what we are but in what we are capable of overcoming in ourselves, our current form, we could relate to history as an enemy. I am the result of my history. But this result in no way pleases me. I know, I feel, that I am worthy of something better and I do not intend to give up my rights. I base my value on my dissatisfaction with myself as a historical product. In which case my history becomes the history of my deformity and I turn against it—thus freeing myself from it.

Allow me to dream. This would be a monumental achievement of the spirit—it would be as if we had come out of a river and felt the ground under our feet. I am not saying that this new, cold, perhaps reluctant, perhaps sarcastic or scornful tone in Polish history would become the key to opening up whole regions of our past, blocked until now—and that, for the first time, we could speak directly about the great creators of our national personality. The problem is more serious. It would mean no more or less than our wanting to begin our life from the beginning and our ceasing to be only a consequence of the past. This, in one fell swoop, would allow us to resist the current history that is being perpetrated upon us now. We could extricate ourselves both from the past and from the current moment in one leap and we could judge both—in the name of our ordinary humanity, our ordinary human needs and our universality. Let us not forget that only by opposing history as such can we oppose today's history—*tertium non datur*. Yet let us also not forget that I want to be neither extreme nor dryly theoretical in this matter and that I do not lose sight of the rich variety of life—I do not aim to eradicate an affirming love but only to enrich our possibilities by activating, as I have already said, the other pole of our antinomy, by revealing the other side of the Polish coin.

So much for history. But I have also wished that we could revise our art . . . because it is not mandatory that we be sentenced to adore forever our own artistic works and the forms they have shaped. This forced adoration is parochialism; it leads to upsetting the proportions between us and the world (that is, reality); and it is also prickly with complexes and breeds stupidity, lies, pretentiousness . . . but what is more and most important is that we do not know how to adequately scorn rubbish because it is ours and this renders us defenseless against it; we have to adjust ourselves to our expression even when it doesn't know how to express us. I have already tried to talk about literature in this diary, not as a source of national pride but often as something of a national calamity—and this, in my opinion, is not

bad, this tone is worthy of commendation because it is the only way to avoid having literature cut us down to its size, so that we might realize ourselves as something better than what we have produced.

These are only two examples to indicate the far-reaching practical consequences of ideas. Of course—there has never been a lack of various “self-criticisms”; so many times have we settled accounts with our “national flaws.” This was temporary, stopgap self-criticism, however, that clung spasmodically to Polishness, while somewhere in its depths it confirmed Polishness as an absolute value. What I speak of would be more conscious, more categorical, more basic—a position from which we could reach for world citizenship.



Communicating by means of art is an amusing misunderstanding. A prose work mixed with poetry is not a mathematical model and is different in each head. Much, much depends on the head. Not long ago I read the following in the Polish press about *Trans-Atlantic*: “Here Gombrowicz’s intention is unusually accurate and appropriate: to depict through the distortions of the grotesque and parodic, and to accomplish a vicious satire of the *sanacja** regime. . . .”

Thus establishing my intentions, the author laments that subsequently, everything disintegrates. *Ecce* head!—like a melon born from the soil of their social pressure. . . . But I am certain that more than one will follow in his footsteps. For today people demand, not a gratuitous, but a utilitarian art, harnessed to the grindstone, industrious as a blind horse. And for many, *Trans-Atlantic* will fall apart right after the first few pages, after the scene of the talk with the Minister, “ah, such a clever satire on ministers, bureaucracy, all as it should be, but then later nothing but fantasies, complexes. . . .”

Trans-Atlantic does not fall apart. Its construction is my success; it is a gradual sinking into a deeper and deeper phantasmagoria, the growth of my own autonomous reality; the whole point is that the world is nothing but itself. It is not a satire. It is not a “settling of accounts with the national conscience.” It is not a philosophy. It is not a philosophy of history. What is it then? A story I told. In which, among other things, Poland appears. But it is not Poland that is the subject;

* Political movement of supporters of Pilsudski after his death.

the subject, as always, is I, I alone, these are my adventures, not Poland's. Except that I just happen to be a Pole.

This in itself is a satire inasmuch as my existence as a Pole in this world is a satire.

This is not the fruit of an early pondering of the Polish question—I was writing about myself—myself in Buenos Aires—only later did I begin to think about Poland—and now I draw these thoughts, like so much explosive contraband that I carried unknowingly, from the hull of my bottomless ocean liner.

One way or another, it was this ship that took me back to Poland.

I returned, but no longer as a wild man. For I had, at one time during my youth in Poland, been completely wild in relation to it, incapable of handling it with style, incapable even of speaking about it—it served only to torment me. Later, in America, I found myself beyond Poland, adrift. Today things are different: I return with specific demands, I know what I must exact from my fellow Poles and I know what I can give them in return. Thus have I become a citizen.

1958

III

Tuesday

The New Year, approaching from the east with a speed equal to the rotation of the earth, caught and overtook me in La Cabania at Duś's house, while I sat on a couch holding a glass of champagne. Duś sat in an armchair under a lamp. Marisa next to the radio. Andrea on the arm of another chair. No one else.

Scattered chessmen in front of Duś.

A dramatic moment. What will happen? What will the future, having arrived, give birth to? "If only I didn't have nightmares . . ." Perhaps we'll get through it without catastrophe. The coming of the new year is the rushing, the terrible rushing of time, humanity, the world, everything is racing like mad into the future and the magnitude of this astronomical race takes one's breath away. I sped along with everyone else, my destiny rolled from one year into the next with a boom, and, at this very minute, this second, something has happened even though nothing has happened. The year has begun.

My growing sensitivity to the calendar. Dates. Anniversaries. Periods. With what diligence I now surrender myself to this tallying of dates. Yes, yes . . . why didn't I write down something every single day from the moment I learned to write? Today I would have many volumes filled with notes, and I would know what I did twenty-seven years ago at this exact hour. What for? Life escapes through dates, just as water runs through one's fingers. But at least something would have remained . . . some trace. . . .

My concluding history begins to give me an almost sensual delight. I immerse myself in it as in a strange river that strives for *clarification*. Slowly

everything is filling out. Everything is concluding. I am beginning to decipher myself, though still with difficulty, as if I were looking through hazy glasses. How strange: finally, finally I begin to see my own face making its way out of Time, accompanied by the foretaste of irrevocable finality. Pathos.

Wednesday

I was walking along a eucalyptus-lined avenue when a cow sauntered out from behind a tree.

I stopped and we looked each other in the eye.

Her cowness shocked my humanness to such a degree—the moment our eyes met was so tense—I stopped dead in my tracks and lost my bearings *as a man*, that is, as a member of the human species. The strange feeling that I was apparently discovering for the first time was the shame of a man come face-to-face with an animal. I allowed her to look and see me—this made us equal—and resulted in my also becoming an animal—but a strange even forbidden one, I would say. I continued my walk, but I felt uncomfortable . . . in nature, surrounding me on all sides, as if it were . . . watching me.

Thursday

Today, after breakfast, a discussion—Verena, Duś, Jacek, and I—provoked by my contention that a man on a horse is a weird and ridiculous thing, an affront to aesthetics. In this equine Acropolis, my thesis struck like a blasphemous thunderbolt.

I explained that an animal is not born to carry another animal on its back. A man on a horse is as weird as a rat riding a rooster, a chicken riding a camel, a monkey riding a cow, or a dog riding a buffalo. A man on a horse is a scandal, an upsetting of the natural order of things, violent artificiality, dissonance, ugliness. They called on works of sculptors celebrating the equestrian. I laughed in their faces. Statues! Why art has always paid homage to convention—it was almost like fashion! Custom decides everything. For centuries we have looked at equestrian statues just as we have looked at men on horseback, but if we rubbed our eyes and

looked afresh, we would scowl in distaste—because a horse’s back is no more a place for man than the back of a cow.

We discussed this during a morning stroll while sixty thoroughbred mares in the pastures fixed their soft, warm eyes upon us. And I attacked horseback riding. A delight? A pleasant and beautiful amusement? Ha, ha, ha! Jumping up and down on a beast, rising and falling with legs spread apart, bouncing a butt off the inevitable back, astride an unwieldy and stupid beast, difficult to mount, just as difficult to dismount, and almost impossible to steer? “Race” on it with the speed of a bicycle? Or repeat again and again the same one-hundred-thousandth jump over an obstacle, on an animal that does not lend itself at all to jumping? Struggle with this desperate equine ungainliness, which can never really be overcome? Why, these so-called delights are pure atavism! There was a time when the horse was indeed useful, he determined the superiority of a man, a man governed others from a horse, a horse was wealth, power, the pride of its rider. The cult of horseback riding and the adoration of a quadruped, which is an anachronism, have survived those antediluvian times. You automatically imitate the admiration of your grandfathers and bruise your seats to honor the myth!

The monstrosity of my blasphemy echoed wildly from one end of the horizon to the other. The master and slave of sixty purebred mares eyed me wanly.

Thursday

Cows.

When I pass a herd of cows, they turn their heads toward me and their eyes do not leave me until I pass. Just like at the Russoviches’ in Corrientes. But then I paid no attention, whereas now, after the matter of “the cow who saw me,” these looks seem like seeing to me. Grass and herbs! Trees and fields! The green nature of the world! I immerse myself in this expanse as if I were pushing off from shore and a presence consisting of a billion beings overwhelms me. O pulsating, living matter! Resplendent sunsets; today two white-and-coffee-brown islands—mountains and towers of glowing stalactites—rose before me in a crown of rubies. The islands melted together creating a bay of mystic azure so utterly without blemish that I almost believed in God—and then dark, creeping billows gath-

ered right over the horizon—just one luminous point, a single beating heart of light, remained among the deep brown bellies of clouds crowding the horizon. Hosanna! I don't really want to write about this; after all, so many sunsets have been described in literature, and especially in ours.

I mean to say something else. The cow. How am I supposed to act toward a cow?

Nature. How am I supposed to behave toward nature?

So I head down the road, surrounded by pampa—and I feel that I am a foreigner in all of this nature, I, in my human skin . . . a stranger. Disturbingly different. A separate creature. And I see that Polish descriptions of nature, like all others, are worthless to me in this sudden opposition between nature and my humanity. An opposition clamoring for a resolution.

Polish descriptions of nature. So much art has been invested in them with what hopeless results. How long have we been smelling the flowers, basking in sunsets, immersing our faces in clumps of spring-green foliage, inhaling early mornings and singing hymns in honor of the Creator: who thought up these wonders? But this humble and profound prostrating of ourselves, kneeling, sniffing and smelling, has merely removed us from the most unrelenting human truth—namely, that man is not natural, he is antinatural.

If the nation to which I belong had felt at one time that it differed in its essence from a horse, it was only because the Church lectured it about the immortal human soul. But who created that soul? God. And who created the horse? God. Thus man and horse merge in the harmony of that beginning. The contrast between them is reconcilable.

I am getting to the end of the eucalyptus-lined road. It is getting dark. The question: am I, deprived of God, closer to or farther from nature as a result of this? Answer: I am farther away. And even this opposition between me and nature becomes, without Him, impossible to mend—here there is no appeal to a higher tribunal.

But even if I were to believe in God, the Catholic view of nature would be impossible for me, in contradiction to my entire consciousness, at odds with my sensibility—and this because of the problem of pain. Catholicism has treated all of creation, except for man, with disdain. It is difficult to imagine a more Olympian

indifference to “their” pain—“theirs,” the pain of plants or animals. Man’s pain has a free will and, therefore, is punishment for sins, and his future life will make just amends for the injustices of this world. But the horse? Worm? They have been forgotten. Their suffering is deprived of justice—a naked fact gaping with the absolute of despair. I am bypassing the complex dialectic of the holy doctors. I speak of the average Catholic, who, walking in the light of a justice that endows him with everything he deserves, is deaf to the immeasurable abyss of that—unjustified—suffering. Let them suffer! This does not concern him. Why, they have no souls. Let them suffer, therefore, senselessly. Yes, it would be difficult to find a teaching that concerns itself less with the world beyond man (the ahuman world); this is a doctrine proudly human, cruelly aristocratic—and how can we be surprised that it has led us into a state of blissful unconsciousness and holy innocence regarding nature, which surfaces in our idyllic descriptions of dawn or dusk.

Friday

I am pushed toward these lower strata, toward a confrontation with horse, beetle, plant, by my striving for “contact with inferiority.” If I try to make superior consciousness dependent on the lower consciousness in the human world—if I want to bind maturity to immaturity—shouldn’t I descend even lower on the ladder of the species? To embrace the entire downward scale?

But—I am reluctant . . . I admit—this bores me. I do not feel like thinking about this. And I don’t like, I practically can’t stand—to travel in thought beyond the human kingdom. Is it because the kingdoms surrounding us are too enormous? A reluctance to stray too far from one’s own home?

To understand nature, to look at it, examine it—that’s one thing. But if I attempt to get close to it as if it were something that is equal to me because of the life common to all of us—when I want to be on friendly terms with animals or plants—I am overwhelmed by an obstinate lethargy. I lose animation, I return all the more quickly to my human house and I lock the door.

Let us write this down, because who knows if this is not one of the most important characteristics of my humanity: some sort of resistance appears in me and takes the form of boredom, fatigue, whenever I want to grasp and recognize that lower life.

Friday

Today “I became a fly killer,” which simply means that I killed flies with my wire swatter.

Who knows where the flies come from (the windows in my room have screens). I liquidate them this way almost every day. Today I killed about forty. Of course, I don’t kill all of them right away—some of them, seriously mangled, fall to the floor, and every so often I find such a fly, left to face its death alone. I immediately finish him off. But it does occasionally happen that one escapes into a crack in the floor, and becomes inaccessible to me with its pain.

In my youth I tortured animals. I remember how in Małoszyce I amused myself with the country boys. We chopped up frogs with whips. Today I am afraid—this is the right word—of the suffering of a fly. And this fear, in turn, terrifies me, as if some awful weakness toward life were contained in it. I am in fact afraid of this, that I cannot bear the pain of a fly. With age, I underwent a general evolution, whose tragic and malignant character I do not want to hide; on the contrary, I would like to emphasize it as strongly as I can. And I claim that it is characteristic not just of me, but of my entire generation.

I will note its salient points:

- (1) *The devaluation of death.*—Death, be it human or animal, becomes less and less important to me. It is becoming more and more difficult for me to understand people who consider taking someone’s life the greatest punishment. I do not understand revenge, which is pleased to shoot someone suddenly in the back of the head—as if that person felt something. I have become almost completely indifferent to death (I am not talking about my own).
- (2) *The enthronement of pain.*—Pain becomes the starting point of existence, the basic experience from which everything begins, to which everything is reduced. Existentialists with their “life for death” do not satisfy me, I would pit life only against pain.
- (3) *Pain as pain, pain in itself.*—This is the most important of all. Only this shift in feeling is really horrifying and awful and enormous. It relies on my caring less and less about *who suffers*. . . . I think that currently two schools of thought exist on this point. For people of the old school, the

pain of someone in the family is, aside from their own, the worst: the pain of a dignitary is more important than the pain of a peasant; the pain of a peasant is more important than the pain of a boy; the pain of a boy is more important than the pain of a dog. They exist in a limited circle of pain. But for people of the more recent school, pain is pain wherever it appears, equally horrifying in man as in a fly; in us the experience of pure suffering has become informed, our hell has become universal. Some consider me insensitive because it is difficult for me to hide that the pain of those nearest to me is not the pain nearest to me. And my whole nature is attuned to discovering that—lower—suffering.

God-fearing families—as I recall from bygone days—sat in their country manors at supper, speaking decently, innocently . . . while flypaper dangled right over the table, and on the flypaper flies in predicaments worse than those of the damned in medieval paintings. This did not disturb anyone because in the sentence “the pain of a fly” the accent fell on “fly” not “pain.” Today it is enough to spray a room with insecticide for clouds of tiny beings to begin to writhe—and no one pays any attention.

Yes. But how am I to reconcile my discovery of universal suffering with what I jotted down yesterday—with my reluctance to recognize the ahuman, inferior, world? This is one of the strangest rifts within me. I am overcome by inferior suffering and my entire being is attuned to uncovering it. Yet an icy boredom, almost drowsiness, overtakes me when I want to equate myself with these creatures in existence and try to acknowledge their full right to exist. This is a tedious and sluggish desire—is it tedious and sluggish because it exceeds my strength? To what, therefore, has the evolution, contained in the three points above, led me, me and many more like me? We are even more muddled—and even more uncertain in relation to nature than people of bygone times, who, one has to admit, exhibited more style in these matters than we do.

Dus had a dream about Bishop Krasicki who, upon closer inspection, turned into Witkacy. Witkacy puckered his lips which stretched into a little snout, and with this bustling little snout expressed the desire that Dus compose a “sibilant” poem for him, a “susurrous” poem. Dus became shishkabobish and shad-bushy and set about composing a poetic work of which he could recall only a few stanzas upon awakening.

They whispered
In the bulrush shrouded shack of Schlomo the shrewmouse
Stephen Owlglass and Simon Owlclaw
Owlglass, Owlclaw . . .

In Owlglass the grotesque predominates but in Owlclaw it begins to bristle with menace, he has talons. . . . The wonder of these names—they haunted me for a long time.

I remembered and declaimed the poem that Witkacy composed about me, and in which I detect a powerful prophecy because at that time, before I had written *Ferdydurke*, neither I nor anyone else knew that immaturity would become my *cheval de bataille*.

His first name was Witold, surname Gombrowicz
On the surface he appeared a common strollerowicz
But in him an unknown wildness dwelt
That one day would make the horse a fine colt!

So Dus (because he was with Edith—a teacher in a girls' school and a student of philosophy with that typically American ravenousness—we discussed certain “transcendental” issues) composed this trifle.

Set aside for a moment your pipe
And seriously, for the fun of it,
Drunk on a gulp of stupidity
Tell them with much embroidery
About the essence of being
And after you have padded the tale
Pounce on their being once more
And explode their imagination

Wednesday

Mail. A clipping from a newspaper in Poland—I learn about the program “Witold Gombrowicz’s Books” on Radio Warsaw. And about Artur Sandauer’s talk, in which he said, among other things: “Today it is difficult to imagine how a writer who is the pride of the Polish nation, whose ‘unrealistic’ books surpass all other

realistic—holy God, forgive us—masterpieces, was sentenced by our cultural bureaucrats to so many years of exile.”

My independence, self-sufficiency, or even frivolous impudence, my taking potshots at everyone, universal provocation and exclusive reliance on myself—all of this was a result of my social and geographical situation. I was forced not to pay attention to anyone because no one paid any attention to me—I was formed in almost complete isolation—I think that few literati have known such extreme isolation. In prewar Poland I was treated nonchalantly, almost ignored—then I was crushed by the war—then I was put on the censor’s index by the Communist regime—and here, in Argentina, I was deprived of even a literary café, of even a group of artist friends in whose bosom every gypsy, innovator, avant-gardist can curl up in the cities of Europe. I became bold because I had absolutely nothing to lose: neither honors, nor earnings, nor friends. I had to find myself anew and rely only on myself, because I could rely on no one else. My form is my solitude.

Well, yes . . . until suddenly . . . I am the “pride of the nation.” Can it be? Didn’t he get a bit carried away? I realize that my rebirth in Poland can be sudden. Polish publishers jumped at my books. And something has changed in the tone of private letters and articles in the Polish press, I sense forces gathering around me, this growing wave may toss me aloft. Could this be?

But this would completely change the address on the long letter that is my writing. I wrote for my enemies—and now I will write for . . . the nation?

(I am strolling down a eucalyptus-lined avenue and as it turns out—I am furious! *Chimangos*—small hawks—screech and fly directly over my head.)

What if these shoulders should raise me on high?

A sudden sharp turn. Oh, that it not throw me from the saddle. . . .

What will I do there, at the top, with everything that formed itself in degradation? How does one move stylistically from degradation to elevation?

Sandauer . . .

Luckily (unfortunately!) it is more than doubtful that the nation will be so docile as to agree with Sandauer’s opinion. I know that for the time being I will still have to win people in Poland to my side—one at a time.

Yet if I were finally able to become “the pride of the nation”?

This tormenting riddle . . .

When such exciting *piropos* fall on you, let your frustration think, for its

own health, about the high-flown adjectives bestowed upon your fellow writers. No need to worry. Yet . . . I cannot rid myself of the certainty that my victories are more real than the victories of poets like Tuwim, let's say, or Lechoń.* Insofar as my art is less conventional . . . and more difficult . . . and more original and written against the current. *Ferdynand*, if it is victorious, is more victorious. . . .

. . . This makes me ridiculous. My delighting in this, my excitement, makes me ridiculous and offends me. I am offended. Pride. Obstinacy. Cold. Distrust. Opposition. "To not allow oneself to be pulled into the nation."

My literature must remain that which it is. Especially that something which does not fit into politics and does not want to serve it. I cultivate just one politics: my own. I am a separate state. Perhaps now, when they approach me with outstretched arms . . . is when the battle really begins. This is an attack from their side—an attempt to conquer and I must defend myself!!

(I am incensed. I know that I am incensed. I know that I know that I am incensed. Because I know that I am incensed, I thrash my arms [no one sees]—I, "pride of the nation"! What strength, at such moments, is my childhood!)

Friday

The eucalyptus-lined avenue all the way to the end, this time at dusk, under the sign of two disturbing thoughts.

- (1) That nature is ceasing to be nature for us in the old sense of the word (when it represented harmony and peace).
- (2) That man is ceasing to be man in the old sense of the word (when he felt himself to be a harmonious part of nature).

The twilight hour is incredible . . . there is such an imperceptible and inevitable evaporation of form. . . . It is preceded by a moment of enormous clarity, as if form were resisting, didn't want to give in—the clarity of everything is tragic, persistent, even frenzied. Right after the moment when the object becomes itself most concrete, alone and left to itself, without the play of light and shadow in which it luxuriated until now, a more pervasive weakening, evaporation of matter

* Julian Tuwim and Jan Lechoń were the most successful and well-known Polish poets in the interwar period.

follows; lines and blots join causing a tiring blur; contours put up no resistance; the outlines, in dying, become difficult, incomprehensible; there is a general retreat, withdrawal, a sinking into growing complexity. . . . Before the actual coming of darkness the shape becomes stronger once more, but not with the power of what we see but with the power of what we know about it—the cry proclaiming its presence is now merely theoretical. . . . After which there is a mixing of everything, blackness pours out of holes, thickens in space, and matter becomes darkness. Nothing. Night.

I groped my way home. I walked hard and stiff straight ahead, drowned in unseeing, absolutely certain that I was a demon, an antihorse, antitree, antinature, a being from elsewhere, a newcomer, foreigner, alien. A phenomenon not of this world. Of another world. The human world.

I returned completely unaware that somewhere, close by, was a terrifying dog, crouching, ready to lunge for the throat, pin to the wall. . . . But enough . . . for now.

IV

To be with nature or against it? The thought that man is contradictory to nature, something beyond and in opposition to it, will soon cease being an elitist thought. It will reach even the peasants. It will penetrate the entire human race from top to bottom. What then? When the last reserves of “naturalness”—deriving from the lower strata—exhaust themselves?

Tuesday

Yesterday evening a neighbor, Tadeusz Czerwiński, came to visit and right off began to tell us something, but we were not listening closely and his narrative took shape very slowly. . . . Duś's hounds (we finally understood him to say) had run into Garanio's field and attacked a sow. Garanio had jumped out with a shotgun, killed one of the hounds, and wounded another—the rest escaped. I am giving only the crux of the narration, which was rich in branches, like a tree.

Duś ran out onto the porch with a flashlight, and the golden hounds, as usual, rose at seeing him and surrounded him. But there were only five—Step and one young hound, by Saeta, were missing.

Thirteen-year-old Andrea burst into tears. Duś's rancor—rising like the song of Isolde—prevailed over all else. He would have exchanged his most beloved horses for Step. He had a desperate face—and this was a face that was strangely weakened, like the face of a small child—weakened perhaps by the pettiness of that despair, on account of a mere dog . . . for which he could not demand full recognition from us.

He took a revolver out of a drawer—got on a horse—and a gallop bore him away into the night. We waited, disturbed and helpless in the face of the anger that vanished into the fields, carried off by a horse. Would he kill Garanio for killing the dog? No, it didn't end that badly. Duś, upon arriving at Garanio's *estancia* and seeing Garanio's dogs, wanted to shoot them—but the *estanciero* came running out and began asking his forgiveness, explaining that he had acted in defense of a sow, whom the dogs would have torn to pieces. So the anger left poor Duś and only sorrow for his most faithful dog remained: Why did you do this to me? he asked. I have always been a good neighbor. He left. He began searching for the bodies in the night. He found them. It turned out that Step was still alive. Hidden in the bushes, he was dying. He was brought home on that strange sleigh that one uses here on the ground as one might elsewhere on snow.

Duś, Jacek Dębicki, Miss Jeanne, and I went to the stable—there was the dog, gasping and shaking spasmodically. Council: cut short his agony? His suffering was terrifying—and he was locked in it, inaccessible to us, separate, alone.

The scene that disturbed me: night, the stable, all of us practically in the dark hovering over an unleashed, diabolical pain. We were capable of putting an end to this. . . . It would have been enough to shoot. Would we shoot? We, four human beings "from another world," a higher world, four demons from anti-nature, four antidogs. The only things that joined us to this creature was our understanding of its pain—we knew the taste.

Should we put an end to the torment? A vote. But this demands a more detailed narrative.

The first antidog, Miss Jeanne. Handsome, twenty years old, multimillionaire parents, herself shuttled from Paris to Rome, from Rome to London to the States, on ships, airplanes, first-rate schools, luxurious institutes, always different, out of which she has gotten nothing except the five languages she wields like a native. Which language does she think in? Luxurious—and a Communist—be-

cause luxurious—from the excess, the surfeit. . . . Sober, energetic, spunky—modern and an atheist. Seeing her bent over the dog, I realized that Communist justice, just like Catholic justice, does not include animals. Within this doctrine humanity ends with man. It forbids the exploitation of one human being by another—but agrees to the exploitation of animals. Which is, let us add, incomprehensible. It is not all well and good. For if religions casts animals into the margin, as soulless, then materialism acknowledges no basic difference between this suffering matter and human matter. . . . How then will Miss Jeanne act toward the suffering dog—if her reasoned morality has nothing to say? What will she do?

She made a female of herself! Strange . . . in a wink, she undressed herself . . . not so much of her communism, but of her humanity. She suddenly changed into a female—she took refuge in her sex . . . what a sudden eruption of gender into the realm of pain, as if gender could cope somehow with the pain. . . . She became a female, that is, love, that is, pity. She bent over the dog with a mother's tenderness. Is it possible that as a female she could do more than as a human being? Or, did she retreat into her sex in order to escape her own humanity?

When she became a woman, however, death seemed worse than pain to her. She began to love the dog cruelly—demanding his life even at the price of his pain.—No, no—she said, trembling.—Don't kill him!

The second antidog from a higher human sphere. Jacek Dębicki. A zealous Catholic. Yet his Catholicism is as useless here as Miss Jeanne's communism. Nor is God a factor. There is no salvation for the dog. And hence my impression that in leaning over the dog, he was leaning away from God—he is now “face-to-face” with the dog and therefore not “face-to-face” with God. An entirely different register of existence. He is “with the dog” as if, giving up his immortal soul, he put himself on its level, identified with it in its suffering. And out of the blue an animal—rebellious and blasphemous—terror of pain mounts in him. But what do I see? I see (because I almost saw this, rather, I “knew” this) that in another register he is not getting rid of even an iota of his Roman Catholic dignity, and the terror changes into pity . . . a legalized . . . civilized . . . well brought up . . . ah, I almost forgot that God, himself ruthless to animals, allows man to pity them—so *he is allowed*; he even has the “approval” of the Church! But the humanity that he rediscovered in himself is not a fraternal socializing with the animal but with his own humanity, that is, with his feeling of the dog's pain from on high—from the

distance of that soul—and, what's more, he again possesses an element of non-chalance and cruelty. The decision he makes will be dictated by three considerations: first of all, by his animal compassion, which is almost wild, spontaneous; second, by his more human and spiritualized calculation that the soulless life of a dog is not of great significance; and third (a thought even more spiritual), that one should end this ordeal—which is somewhat embarrassing to God and the soul—as soon as possible.

Kill him—he said.—He won't make it.

The third antidog: Me. For me, there is no higher authority. Even the dog doesn't exist. Only a piece of suffering matter writhing before me. Unbearable. I cannot stand it. Gripped by the suffering in this stable, I demand that an end be put to it. Kill him! Kill him! Stop the machine of pain! Let this not be! There is nothing else one can do, just this! But this we can do!

The fourth antidog: Duś. Agronomist, landowner, a hunter, sportsman, horseman, and lover of hounds. Between him and us—a complete disharmony; he is from a different reality. He is not afraid of pain “as such,” as I am. He does not seek universal justice, like this Catholic or that Communist. He disregards abstractions, does not grasp them, does not want to. He exists among creatures of flesh and blood, he is a creature among creatures, a body among bodies. In the depths of his spirit, he does not know what equality is. He is the master. He has come to love this dog; therefore, he would, without scruple, sentence forty million ants and ten thousand whales to suffer . . . if it would bring relief to the dog. For this creature close to him, he is ready for any sacrifice but he does not want to know everything, identify with everything, he wants to remain within the circle of his own limited feeling. He would rather not see what is beyond his gaze. And he has come to love the dog with the love of a master. He loves the dog because it adores him—he loves the canine adoration in the dog. Therefore, the egoism of the master and ruler, the aristocratic feeling born of a ruthless human superiority, all of nature exists for him, it serves him, he, subordinating to himself all inferior beings, is the dispenser of favors. And he seemed to me to be the most “anti” of all of us—in that dark stable, leaning over the dog, the absolute king of creation, proclaiming: everything exists for me.

But perhaps this was most consistent with nature. And if the dog could understand, he would understand him, not us!

With the delicacy of a griefstricken mother, he said: Let us wait. Perhaps he won't die.

It is a fierce love that prolongs agony in order to save the dog—for itself.

This dramatic scene would not have been so tense and urgent if not for the wheezing of the dog, his eyes following our every move.

Thursday

Necochea. The seaside.

I walk straight ahead along an enormous beach, hardened and brown from the daily tides that flood it. The houses of Necochea disappear behind the cliffs.

Emptiness, sand, undulation—that drowning, soporific thunder. Space—distance—boundlessness. Before me, all the way to Australia, nothing but furrowed water and its gleaming crest, to the south the Falkland and the South Orkney islands—the polar cap. And behind me the “interior”: Río Negro, the pampa. . . . Sea and space thundering in eyes and ears create confusion. I walk and leave Necochea behind—until at last even its memory disappears and only the growing distance persists, eternal, like a secret I take with me.

I stay at the Hotel Shangri-La.

Sunday

I wander over to the Hotel Quequen, on the other side of the port, but there is no one there from the Argentine high life*—none of the Anchorens, Santa Marinos, etc., I came to know through Duś and Henryk Sobański.

They left because January had come to an end. Their grandparents gathered in this hotel (at that time a first-rate hotel) every year in January, which is why they also arrange a rendezvous in the Quequen (now an anachronistic hovel, bereft of comfort). In January this *boliche* squeaks with millions and rings with names.

The local aristocracy, or rather the so-called oligarchy, consists of a few families whose genealogical tree begins with the sudden wealth of a great-grandfather. But these millions are weighty. The influence of money is so strong on people that a few generations of such wealth is enough for the differences between them and,

* “High life” in English in original.

let us say, the Radziwiłłs, to be minimal. They look good and dress all right and have impeccable manners—embedded in an aristocratic calm in their circle. But just in their circle. Unfortunately, I am the one who—when we confront each other—knocks them off balance. An intellectual? Artist? Perhaps an atheist? Anarchist? This embarrasses them, shames them, fills their provincial kindness with trepidation . . . they fear tactlessness.

Monday

I met him on the beach. He was wonderful! He greeted me magnanimously. He kindly asked how I was. With a majestic finger, he indicated the kiosk where one could get *langostinos*. He smiled with the benevolence of a prince. With regal courtesy, he allowed me to go first along the board leading to the cabin.

All because he was not in pants but in bathing trunks.

Wednesday

. . . of the Mr. Grubiński* type. Since Mr. Sakowski—although less Latin-Hellenic and daintily Renaissance—is really Grubiński—except not so mortifyingly smooth. Their highest wisdom consists of the following: “All this has already been tried.” “There is nothing more banal than originality.” “The only things I have not become accustomed to are empty talk, affectation, and pitiful clichés.”

A credo typical of eunuchs! What an irony of fate that *Wiadomości*, which in its *Sturm und Drang Periode* ate Grubiński alive every week, today, in old age, has two Grubińskis in its stable. Yet in a way it is a pity that Grydzewski did not delegate a less flimsy mind to discuss the *Diary*, which, for whatever it’s worth, contains a portion of my life. I hold nothing against Sakowski—the *Diary* would miss at least one of its (less lofty) destinies if it did not provoke his type of mentality, and his reactions are, in this case, as natural as those of a cat whose tail has been stepped on. I admit that I hurt him badly. I tore into the boudoir of his soul like a barbarian and I smashed his most beloved tomes of poetry; I trampled Tuwim, I dishonored Lechoń, I profaned his dearest saints and sweetest delicacies, even Boy

* Grubiński and Sakowski were Polish émigré writers in London.

Żeleński. His entire little shrine in ruins! O horrors! This is the source of his aversion to me, in his article, written in the *parlé français* style.

And that little old man, Kajetan Morawski, was greatly concerned in that same issue of *Wiadomości* that I might be a “futurist.” God almighty, why this is *Kurier Warszawski*,* *redivivus*!

And if this were not enough, Janusz Kowalewski jumped on me, too—quarrelsome and inflexible, truculent and thrashing with his little feet. But that was in another newspaper.

Tuesday

Something happened yesterday . . . something like a continuation of the dog at the *estancia*. . . . And if I said that there is nothing equal somehow to the repugnance of the dilemma that I experienced . . . that I found myself where humanity must retch. . . . I could say this. I could also torment myself with it—it is really up to me.

I was lying in the sun, cleverly concealed in the mountain chain that sand forms when blown by the wind to the edges of the beach. These are mountains of sand, dunes, abundant in ravines, slopes, valleys, a curving and shifting labyrinth, overgrown here and there with brush that vibrates under the unceasing toil of the wind. I was shielded by a substantial *Jungfrau*, nobly cubic, proud—when one of those hurricanes that endlessly lash this scorched Sahara kicked up about ten centimeters from my nose. Some sort of beetles—I don’t know what to call them—bustled along this desert for reasons unknown. And one of them, within my reach, lay upside down. The wind had overturned it. The sun beat on its belly, which certainly must have been unpleasant considering that this belly was usually left in the shade—there he lay, thrashing his little legs—and it was obvious that nothing was left to it except a monotonous and desperate thrashing of its legs—and it was growing weak, perhaps it had been there for hours; it was dying.

I, a giant, inaccessible to him in my enormity, an enormity that made me invisible to it—I watched that thrashing of legs . . . and extending my hand, extricated him from his agony. He moved ahead, returned to life in a split second.

* Respectable, conservative newspaper in interwar Poland.

I had barely done this when I noticed a little farther away, an identical beetle in an identical predicament. And he, too, was thrashing his little legs. I didn't want to move. . . . But—why did you save that little guy and not this one? . . . Why that one . . . when this one? . . . You make one happy and the other should suffer? I took a stick, extended my hand—and saved him.

I had barely done this when I saw, somewhat farther, an identical beetle in an identical predicament. Thrashing his little legs. And the sun was beating down on his belly.

Was I supposed to change my siesta into an ambulance for beetles in their death throes? But I had become too friendly with these beetles, in their strangely helpless thrashing . . . and you will probably understand that once I had started the rescuing, I had no right to stop at some arbitrary point. It would have been an awful thing to do to this third beetle—to stop exactly at the threshold of his defeat . . . too cruel and somehow impossible to do. . . . Bah! if there had been some sort of boundary between him and the ones I rescued, something that could have authorized me to stop—but there was absolutely nothing, only another ten centimeters of sand, always the same bit of sand, “a little farther away,” it is true, but only “a little.” And he waved his little legs in the same way! Looking around, however, I noticed “just a little” farther, another four beetles, thrashing and being scorched by the sun—there was no helping it, I got up and rescued them all. Off they went.

Then what should my eyes behold but the gleaming-hot-sandy plane of a neighboring slope and on it five or six little thrashing dots: beetles. I rushed to their rescue. I saved them. And by this time I was so wrapped up in their suffering, I was so absorbed by it, that, seeing new beetles all along the plains, ravines, and canyons, an endless rash of tortured dots, I began to walk the sands as if I were demented, rescuing, rescuing, rescuing! But I knew this could not last forever—for it was not just this beach, but the entire coast, as far as the eye could see; it was sown with them so there had to come a moment when I would say “Enough!” The first unrescued beetle would have to happen, too. Which one should it be? Which one? Which one? Each time I said “this one”—I saved it, unable to bear that awful, almost vile arbitrariness—because why this one, why *this* one? Until I finally broke down, suddenly, easily, I suspended my empathy, stopped, thought indifferently, “Well, time to go back,” and left. But the beetle, the beetle I stopped with, remained behind thrashing its little legs (all of this was a matter of complete indif-

ference to me by now, as if I had grown disgusted with the game—but I knew that this indifference was imposed upon me by the circumstances and I carried it within me like a foreign object).

Thursday

The café on the *rambli*,* where at this evening hour there is dancing; a samba is underway, discretely elegant, beating from the windows along with the light onto the immobility of rustling waters . . . all the way to the pole, to Australia. Sumampa. Such exotic names crouch behind me in the interior, still full of the language of Indians so recently exterminated.

Waiters. Young people dancing with abandon. *Refrescos* and *helados* . . .

. . . And what if I said that the business with the bugs had been humiliating? And “dishonorable”? But most of all, “basely helpless?” I could describe it this way. It all depends on me. Here at the dance I can surrender myself to disgrace, or ask for one more helping of ice cream and dismiss it as a silly incident with bugs.

Yes, I am the master of my terrors, my fears. Which *should be* appalling to me? I must first nod to the devil—then he will show himself. Perhaps I beckon too often . . . and what’s more, I cultivate a certain category of fear, which I know belongs to the past—these are still fears in embryo, which will become trouble-some only to the generation now maturing.

Numbers! The numbers! I had to abdicate from justice, from morality, from humanity—because I could not cope with the numbers. There were too many of them. I’m sorry! But this is the same as saying that morality is impossible. Nothing more or less. Because morality must be the same in relation to all, otherwise it is unjust, and therefore immoral. But that number, that enormity of numbers, concentrated itself on the one bug I didn’t rescue—on the one I stopped at. Why him and not a different one? Why must that one pay for the fact that there are millions?

My pity, ending at precisely that moment—no one knows exactly why at that bug, the same as all the rest. There is something unbearable, impossible to swallow, in this infinity suddenly made concrete—why that one?—why that one?—

* Pier.

The more I think about it, the stranger I begin to feel; I have the impression that I dispense only a partial morality . . . a fragmentary . . . an arbitrary . . . an unjust . . . morality, which (I don't know if this is clear) is of its very nature not continuous but *granular*.

Saturday

Painting . . . I don't know. Maybe I exaggerate this phobia.

I will not deny that in spite of everything, there is something in a painting, even if it is a faithful copy of nature, that disarms and attracts. What is it? A painted landscape undoubtedly says something else to us than does the same landscape in nature; its effect on our soul is different. But not because a painting is more beautiful than nature, no, a painting will always be incompetent beauty, beauty spoiled by the clumsy hand of man. It is possible, though, that this is the reason behind the attraction. The picture shows us the beauty that was felt, seen by someone like the painter. The picture not only says: "this landscape is beautiful," but also: "I saw this and was struck by it and that is why I painted it."

If we consider that the contemplation of an object, whatever it may be (landscape, apple, house, man), fills us with the despair of loneliness—because then you find yourself alone with the Thing and the Thing crushes you—perhaps this fear of the thing, as such, would explain the paradoxical phenomenon that an imperfectly painted trunk is closer to us than a natural trunk in all of its perfection. A painted tree trunk is a trunk filtered through man.

Sunday

Today again, at tea, there was a discussion about painting at Atilio's (what else could they possibly talk about?). The catch is, though, that one cannot talk about painting. These conversations, therefore, remind one of dialogues between mutes—they smack their lips, flail their arms, bare their teeth. . . . "What do you mean, you don't understand that blot?" . . . "In this is something . . . something . . . something like, you know, well . . ." "Lovely, lovely, by golly . . . dog damn it!" . . . "Brilliant, on my word!"

Why do they talk if they are only supposed to paint? After all, the language

of the best works on the subject of the plastic arts is not much richer. And that mute blather continues among people . . . it goes on. . . .

I don't like these . . .

I met an Austrian at Pocz Oddone's. An architect. He clamors for urban planning and rationally aesthetic, functional interiors, etc. I told him that people had more important concerns than aesthetics. I also said that an excessively subtle sense of beauty could get us into deep trouble! To explain to an average member of the middle class that his mirrored dresser, commode, and little curtains are frippery would make life altogether repugnant to him. We, in our poverty, could use a more universal skill—the discovery of beauty in everything, even in frippery.

He didn't understand me. Conceited. European. Didactic. Educated. Modern. Architect.

V

Wednesday

The weather wheels into dirty inclemency, the clouds, not certain whether they will rain or not, creep out of the sky; occasionally the sun shoots out, illuminating the beach, where gold, blue, and white dance before my eyes. On the sand: games, jokes, capers—but bitterly, terribly paid for because these people have to undress! Incredible cynicism! Their play is an act of desperate shamelessness, yes, they dared to do this . . . they undressed . . . they removed their shoes, socks, stockings, underpants, ties, shirts, blouses, jackets . . . and heigh-ho! . . . fraternizing with nature, they frolic in their birthday suits! But this nudist is not naked, he is undressed! What impudence! Yes, yes, the wife of that pharmacist, look at her, she digs into the sand with her feet, her heel, denuded, rises, crawls out—and the head of the sales department cuts capers, kicks a balloon, wheezes, cries out! Ha, wholeheartedly! Naked! But in an undressed, stripped nakedness! And an undressed boss! The pharmacist's wife without underpants! And the toes strangely complement the fingers! And the whole beach roars with the mad provocation of carnal repugnance. God, allow me to vomit up the human body! A dog appeared. An unblemished dog who passed with canine elegance—distinguished. . . .

I watched this from a little hill, and with me was Atilio, a sophisticated

expert on Mexican art. He said: Lovely little scene. There is a little Turner in this, isn't there?

Oh sure—a lovely scene, made up of horrors.

Thursday

Piñera claims that every crazy aesthete who has respect for himself in Havana must have an “antiquity”—a clock from the epoch of Louis XIV, or a medallion—which he wouldn't part with, bestowing on it the enthusiasm he would have had for cathedrals, museums, and all the old things of Europe in general if fate had allowed him a pilgrimage to Europe. As it turns out, Atilio, who is Mexican, also has his antiquity. Yesterday he removed a silver cup from a splendid leather case and showed it to me with reverence.

—Authentic!

Well, perhaps. . . . This was a furiously Renaissance cup of imposing proportions, full of some sort of sculpted scenes in every millimeter—a thicket of incredible figures, ornaments—to unravel this, to penetrate the many years of the artist's work, one would have to devote hours to methodical analysis. I doubt that any one of its possessors had ever taken the time to do this—it was unlikely that the cup had ever really been “examined” by anyone, ever. As for me, I limited myself to the pronouncement, from a bird's-eye view, that the work seemed good . . . afterward I remembered my mother's old china, parading in rows on shelves and also full of fine points never uncovered by anyone. It was enough that the porcelain was authentic. . . .

After caressing the cup lasciviously (whereby he also embraced the effort of past centuries) and casting a synthetic look at it (for all the world like the one we used to cast at our porcelains), Atilio put it back in the case. And he took a stack of art books out of his suitcase.—I always take these books with me, he said.—I wouldn't be able to live without them! These were books about the cathedral at Chartres, about Picasso, Michelangelo, Etruscan vases, Giotto's frescoes, and the Greek temples.—Ah!—exclaimed Atilio, turning the pages.—Ah, have a look at these, Mr. Gombrowicz, here . . . here . . . And here!? Really? I glanced, then he glanced, but this was more like bathing in an ocean . . . knots of form washed over us, like waves; we were drowned and lost in it. Chartres knocked me over like a mountain of water. How many months, years, would it take to know a cathedral that was, from top to bottom,

all the way to the arches in the nave, rock that had been worked over, tormented, saturated with passion, humanized—as if entire swarms of workers had thrown themselves on the rock, like waves. How could one onlooker absorb the effort of so many artists? And Giotto and Picasso and Michelangelo were already waiting in ambush, as we flipped through the illustrations of the cathedral.—Ha!—Atilio tossed—Ha! Splendid!—We were drowning. We were drowning in this like in a store with too many luxuries; like children hunting butterflies, we kept grabbing at this line, that spot, pale testimony to what was eluding us. . . .

We did not see much . . . instead we conducted an inventory . . . like a miser who passes pieces of gold from hand to hand, we sated ourselves on these riches, practically without looking . . . trusting that someone must exist, after all, who *has* examined these things. Take this Giotto fresco. I cannot devote too much time to it, but I trust, I trust, that *someone else* has, has examined it. . . . Here, however, I was surprised by a deadly thought: what if that someone else did not exist? And what if *each person* shifts this burden of examining onto another person and what if this delight is passed from hand to hand, pushing it into nothingness? Atilio shrugged his shoulders:

—Pshaw! You say this to me, Mr. Gombrowicz. Why, I've invested half my life in art. . . .

He lied. Apparently he never did anything except casually leaf through this oversized book of plastic arts. He merely leafed through it . . . occasionally glancing here and there . . . pecking at it like a chicken. . . . But how could anyone prove he was lying?

Friday

Senora Mercedes H. de A. has come all the way from Buenos Aires expressly to see Atilio's cup (Atilio is not returning to Buenos Aires, he is going to Chile)—this lady is skinny, hermetic, voiceless, and she took the cup into her hand, looked at it, put it down and whispered: Ah-h-h.—I would never have forgiven myself if I had allowed you to leave Argentina without my having seen the cup!—After a brief pause, she whispered:—I would also like to know what you think about Pettoruti, about his last color? Atilio grimaced:—I preferred him from five years ago.—We agree then!—she cried out almost inaudibly, pleased. She got into her car and drove off.

As I watched the enormous car carry off Madame Mercedes, I thought of that Polish girl, the blonde, a young painter whom I met when she showed up here from Poland via Paris, a few years ago. She had no car. She spent a few months in Argentina, running from exhibit to exhibit. From painter to painter. Industrious. No, that one would not waste a single minute. Focused. Panting with the desire to enrich her painter's estate. Like a pointer sniffing out "values." Never speaking of anything else. Copying, sketching, writing down, planted firmly in the problems of the plastic arts and constantly, without a moment's respite, educating herself sincerely, modestly, diligently. There is nothing more irritating than her greedy and pious, her poltroonish industry.

At least Mercedes . . . I don't know which is worse: that exhausting, proletarian avidity, vehement in its "self-education," or the pluto-aristocratic gesture of the rich lady who, having driven four hundred kilometers to see a cup, barely devotes one careless glance to it—but why should she have looked at it; it was enough that she, Mercedes, paid it a visit! Art objects are exasperating because they are so material, and yet they are also the church and the drawing room, art and jewelry. . . . At the hotel I found Jerzy Rohde's diary—he is the secretary to the Argentine embassy in Paris and a writer—entitled *Five Years of Paris*. "Cuántas expresiones del arte, hijas del supremo buen gusto!" (How many works of art are born of the most distinguished taste!) This blissful exclamation point graced his enraptured lips at the sight of Gobelins, Clodion's bronzes, Roettier's silver, Fragonard's paintings, and other miracles of the ennobled French Jew Monsieur de Comondo at his Parisian residence, a copy of the Petit Trianon. Mr. Rohde admires both works and *duquesas* but the *duquesas* a little more. (*Loli Lariviere—la encantadora—me lleva al salón de la duquesa de La Rochefoucauld* . . .) I have studied about fifty pages and am beginning seriously to wonder whether our attraction to old Fragonard and to the old Duchess de La Rochefoucauld does not spring from the same source—from the intoxicating word "aristocracy."

Saturday

Not long ago at a banquet in honor of Racquel Forner (in my opinion, a mannered and bad Argentinean painter) and her husband, the sculptor Bigatti (because having snagged some award or other, they were leaving for the States), I

saw them, painters, an entire body of them, talking, lashing each other with discourse, having a holiday. I observed this from the sidelines, from another table in the same restaurant. "One can only wonder," as people say. It is indeed strange to see how a mechanism of degradation becomes one of elevation in such circumstances. Each of these painters secretly scorned his colleagues because, well, an Argentinean brush is nothing compared with a Parisian brush—yet here, at the banquet, all together, affirming mutual honors, they became quite a lion, altogether in one heap they became a paean to their own honor; and their table rang with praise, their table seemed momentous, even appealing, because of the number of persons participating in the act of self-elevation.

That it did not last long is another matter. Shortly, their peacock tail closed up and a more workmanlike atmosphere got the upper hand. The conversation focused itself on exhibits, awards, the sale of paintings—they were like owners of companies, worrying about their little factory, prudent and a little embittered, full of ill-feeling toward society, which is ignorant, does not want to buy. . . . They are usually anarchists . . . sometimes Communists, but in fact they are inextricably bound up with the bourgeoisie. Only a bourgeois could afford what appeals to them—beautiful interiors, Renaissance cups, valuable antiques, the refinement—all this is a denial of mass production, that is, proletarian production. And no matter what is said and done, their valuable objects exist only for someone to possess, to materially possess, so they become someone's property—possessing in this art means a lot and it cannot take place without private capital.

Sunday

I spoke about England with Mrs. Kropka Czerwińska.

Now I am at the beach, among bodies, and I write, lying on my stomach. I wonder . . . I wonder if my rebellion against the plastic arts did not begin with my portraits. . . . I posed for artists a few times and I was always troubled by it because of that stranger's eyes moving all over my form, because of my being sacrificed to those alert eyes, intent, almost excessively observant . . . and he there, behind the easel, making of me whatever he liked. A highly abnormal situation in which one should expect a great deal—in a creative-artistic sense. . . . But even during the sitting I had the impression that the painter's advantage over me was illusory—

simply because he was unable to master my form, and the technical difficulties connected with re-creating my nose, ears, cheeks on the canvas make a diligent craftsman out of him rather than the lord and ruler of my body. And as the work progressed, the combination of lines and blots re-creating a form became more and more complex—the more he transferred me to the canvas, the more I lorded it over him, the more difficult it became for him to change something in this arrangement, “to do something” with me, to remake me. I assume that if a cliff or tree could feel something, they would experience exactly these kinds of triumphantly ironic feelings toward the painter attacking them with his paintbrush, feelings, I would say, of triumphant powerlessness, which resulted from the painter’s surrender to form in order to grasp it—and at the very moment that he grasps form and transfers it to the canvas, he will no longer be able to manage it because this very same “thing” rules the painting and rivets us with its relentless thingness. It seemed to me as well that the humiliating physicality of process, that oily re-creation of the nose, ears, eyes, hair, that melancholy sensuality, surrendering to nature, deprives the painter of the *capacity to create*, and in each case the margin earmarked for creativity becomes, in proportion to my becoming concrete in the painting, more and more narrow and insignificant. And then the portrait was ready. It was shown to me. Disenchantment!

What happened?! He turned me into a thing! He painted me exactly as if I were a rock, ha! and now I see that he paints human beings the same way he does other objects. And so what if his eyes missed me! . . . He painted me as if it were not I but my shoe that was important!

Tuesday

I met a band of misshapen nudists—sensually bearded or at least hairy . . . near the Quequen; they were helping the fishermen draw in their nets. I felt myself recoil. I can’t stand their bohemianism in glasses and a beard, their slovenly but urban corporeality, that artistic “simplicity” combined with refinement. . . . But I went up to them, greeted them and said (as always when they get in my way): I don’t believe in painting (*no credo en la pintura*)!

They answered by exploding with laughter.

I said: Let us imagine that one of you had painted this fisherman. What do

you think, would I be able to judge the art of a painting if I were deprived of a sense of color, of form, and if my taste were not adequately informed? In other words, if I could not look freshly, with a painter's eye?

They: Of course not! In that case you wouldn't get anything out of the painting!

I: Really? But if I am able to do all that, why would I need a painting?

They: What do you mean?

I: Well, yes! If I am capable of seeing, I prefer to look at the living face of a fisherman. Instead of one painting, I'll have ten, because that face is always different, I see it from a different angle, in a different light. If I can extract the painting value from a living face, why would I need the immobile one in your painting? And if I am unable to do that, your picture will tell me nothing interesting.

Should I cast off the dazzling whirl of form, light, color that is the world for your lifeless kingdom where nothing moves! Don't you see how I want to get at you? . . . I simply want to say that your brush is incapable of rendering the plasticity of the world. For the world is form in motion. Even when the form is still, the light and air change. But you, on your canvases, condemn nature to paralysis by taking the life from its form: by subtracting movement.

They: What? What? Painting does not express movement? Absurd! Movement in a painting, even though it is suspended, frozen, is still movement—it is movement even more precisely for that reason!

I: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Lies! Ah, how I love these typical lies about art, always ready to prove its weaknesses are its strength!

Yes, just between us . . . No one is listening . . . Yes, privately . . . Admit that if you could bring this divine quickening movement to your palette, you would be in paradise.

Why not confess that a paintbrush is a clumsy instrument? . . . It's as if you took to painting explosions of cosmic light with a toothbrush.

No art is so poor in its means of expression—except perhaps sculpture. Painting is one great resignation from what cannot be painted. It is a cry: I would like to do more, but I cannot. This cry is oppressive.

Would you like to hear a short tale about your bankruptcy?

Formerly painters strove for the most faithful rendering of nature. But why

re-create something that already is? And besides, isn't this condemning oneself to work that is eternally slipshod? Nature paints better. No Titian can paint the fisherman's face with equal excellence—error is impossible, every shadow, every spot is exactly as physics dictates.

Not being able, therefore, to match nature, one begins to rescue oneself by way of the "spirit." More and more human spirit is crammed into a painting. At this point, however, the sensuality of painting, antispiritual in its very essence, crawls out. What should one do with the spirit when one deals almost exclusively with matter? Pump it into a painting as sublime content—as anecdote? . . . But this spirit would then be somewhat comic, an afterthought!

Then it became more and more clear that the painter was not supposed to express external nature or the spirit but his view of nature . . . that is, himself, without transgressing the limits of his own physical sphere . . . to express himself with purely a painter's means, contour, color. . . . Thus began the deformation of the object. But how is one to express himself in a painting deprived of movement? For existence is movement, it takes place in time. How can I pass myself on, or my existence, operating only with combinations of immobile shapes? Life is movement. If I cannot render movement, I cannot render life. Notice that I am thinking of real movement, not the suggestion of movement that a painter gives us in sketching, for example, a jumping horse. Compare, in this regard, line and color with the word. The word unfolds in time, like a procession of ants, and each one brings something new and unexpected; he who expresses himself in words is born anew each second; scarcely has one sentence been completed than the next one supplements it, completes it, and behold in the movement of words the endless play of my existence expresses itself—when I express myself in words, I am like a tree in the wind, rustling, quivering. And the painter is chucked out in one shot, all in space, immobile on the canvas—like a clod. We take in the entire picture at a glance. And so what if we notice a certain play of elements in the painting, if the play does not develop or unfold? Painting can undoubtedly communicate the vision of the painter, his spiritual adventure with the world, but only in the cross-section of one moment—and for me to be able to penetrate his personality, I would have to have a thousand such visions; only they, all together, would be capable of introducing me to his inner movement, his life, his time.

What deception to claim that van Gogh or Cézanne communicated their

personalities! To paint apples a little differently from natural ones—and to want to rival the airborne becoming of poetry and music with these apples . . . A man expressed by an apple! An unmoving apple! If I, a writer and poet, were told that I should communicate via apples, I would sit down and cry in humiliation. But if we are talking about art and its masters, we are visited by a certain indulgence . . . sympathy, and even adoration, lead us to overlook some trifling and some not-so-trifling inaccuracies, just so we do not upset the status quo . . . how ready we are then to swear that it was apples or sunflowers that led us to Cézanne or van Gogh, but we forget that if they became our close acquaintances it was because biographies filled in the enormous gap left by the sunflowers and the apples. If the word had not conveyed their lives to us, there's not much we could do with their self-portraits.

Painting, then, even though it was already deforming, continued to suffer chronic insatiety—those martyrs of the paintbrush (that clumsy instrument) felt that they could not express themselves on a larger scale by imitating existing forms in nature, even if they underwent an extreme transformation. What were they to do? How were they to liberate themselves from the Thing; the Thing to which they were chained like dogs? Wouldn't it be possible—to destroy the Thing, take it apart and create one's own language out of this—an autonomous language? That is how abstract art began. But so what if it does not move either or, strictly speaking, is congealed movement. In music pure form is attainable, because music is a becoming—after the pianissimo of the violin comes a stroke of percussion, here form renews itself every minute—but an abstract painting is like one chord . . . it is as if a musician invited someone to concert and then offered him just one chord. Abstraction has taken away from painting the imitation of life that it had when it was imitation of nature—and did not give it another vitality in exchange.

To hell with your painting! I have had enough of it! Enough of this mania!

They: Listen, mister! You are insensitive! Ignorant! You understand nothing! You don't get it!

I: Look at these three matches I put down on the sand.

Imagine that in a certain group of people there arises a stubborn rivalry on the subject of how to arrange these three matches so that they would be more revealing artistically. If I make a triangle of them, for example, they will be more

interesting than if I place them side by side. But one can devise even more interesting arrangements.

Let us imagine that the great effort of many fine “matchists” became invested in this; that some turned out to be more, others less, ingenious; that hierarchies arose; that schools and styles emerged; that there arose an expertise on the subject. . . . But, I ask you, why would this be absurd? Why, even with just those three matches man could express something—about himself, about the world. . . . By concentrating all of our attention on these three matchsticks, we could uncover the mystery of the cosmos in them—they are a part of it and one knows that the universe is reflected in a drop of water—nevertheless they are no more and no less than a Thing in all its majesty—for in their behavior the laws of nature express themselves—for in looking at these matches with the appropriate concentration we perform a solemn act, we confront consciousness with Matter.

All of this—under the condition that we begin to *look closely* at them. The question remains—is it worth it, is it worth it, is it worth it? We could use trees rather than matches or animals or anything else just as successfully and with even better results for this initiation.

And I don’t deny that if we begin to look with such concentration at Cézanne, Cézanne will become a revelation. The question remains—is it worth it, is it worth it, is it worth it? Why not seek these revelations elsewhere?

In my opinion, you err in thinking that the paintings themselves are something of a revelation and that is why people look at them. In my opinion, just the opposite has happened. Paintings have become revelations because people have begun to search for revelations in them—that is why the offensive poverty of this art has burst into profundity and riches.

Why then has mankind begun to look closely at paintings?

You will find answers to this in the mechanisms of human cohabitation, in its historical development. Painting, in spite of everything, is pretty, right? It serves to ornament. Hence a market for paintings has arisen, just as it has for jewelry. People began to pay because—to paraphrase Pascal—if a Titian hangs on my wall it means that I am somebody, because I am rich. This pretty object—a painting—has thereby inflamed the possessive instinct in kings, dukes, bishops, all the way to the bourgeoisie, and the need has created a whole scale of values. There are many

reasons for this; people, just like individuals, have their games and manias. . . . Who, for example, could have foreseen that a certain type of stone, such as a diamond or ruby (whose artistic effect is minimal), would arouse such powerful desires in man? And what about postage stamps?

Of course, a painting is not a postage stamp. It is, however, art, although quite limited in its means of expression. Combine the artistic charge of a painting with other powers, not having much in common with art, and you will understand why it has been raised so high by our feelings, almost to the level of holiness.

The only question is—is painting worth keeping at these heights?

Today this is what happens to you: *first* the complicated herd instinct, which creates itself historically, throws you on your knees before a painting—and *only then* do you try to force yourselves to explain that if you reeled with admiration, it was because the work was worthy of it.

Is it worth surrendering oneself to such intricate games with one's own feelings?

Stop becoming enraptured—that's a lot simpler.



(Everything I have reproached them with is quite arbitrary. And does not exhaust the subject. One could attack them from a different angle—from ten different angles—their Achilles' heels number in the dozens.

But my purpose is not to explain but to revolt. I wish to protest! I believe that others will follow me. Providence, allow me to endure a few more years in the opposition—it will find its own.

To derail enthusiasm, which moves along a well-worn track!

My war with painting, like my war with poetry, is primarily a struggle with the milieu—painters, poets—with the group, with the profession. . . . Never before has the law borne itself out more truly than it does here: the conditions of production create the Spirit in its own image—nothing better illustrates Marx's thesis than the awful artistic mystification, which they, Marxists, do not dare touch. Painters, poets, their zealots and acolytes, are a typical example of an accommodating consciousness—they not only believe, they want to believe. My reproach is that their faith comes to them too easily, even too eagerly—maniacs, exploiting for their artificial passion a certain artificial state of things, created by historical circum-

stance. And not a single one wants to sober up. Each one does his utmost to drown in his mania. And they want to drown me in it, too. I will defend myself!)

Saturday

I showed them the matches. Too bad that I neglected to show them a cigarette.

Doesn't a cigarette provide us with great pleasure? Almost as great as eating? Who, though, would dare compare bread to cigarettes? Bread is a genuine necessity but a cigarette became a value only when an artificial need was born, created by habit.

Therefore, don't be so proud that today's humanity inhales with such pleasure the fragrant incense rising from art exhibits. I do not doubt man's inborn need for beauty. But I ask whether in certain types of art (such as a poem or painting) the producer does not fabricate his recipient as well.

This pressure, this forcing of paintings onto people—this is something to think about!

Friday

From my letter to Artur Sandauer in connection with Mr. Kisiel's article in Poland's *Tygodnik Powszechny*, whose title was: "Sandauer and Gombrowicz, or the Conspiracy of the Absent."

In reading the passage from your essay that was cited and attacked by him, I thought how incapable he is of reading us, neither you, nor me, how he understands nothing of our work. I am completely unfamiliar with your essay except for the passage included by Kisiel—I haven't the least idea what you wrote, but, in spite of this, allow me, my dear Sandauer, to say how your words should be interpreted from my vantage point.

Here they are as cited by Kisiel:

"Something has arisen which is a complete novelty in Polish literature: self-irony, self-denigration. In laughing at himself and sneering at the gamut of Polish issues, Gombrowicz rids himself of that self-importance and solemnity that

for many long years has been a feature of our culture; thus he seems to present the perspective of creating a more authentic, more national, culture. . . .”

It was this that roused Kisiel—and he explains triumphantly in his article that your “novum” is really nihil novi, that our literature, beginning with the bards, has been full of this “self-irony and self-denigration.” “This has been a basic tradition and convention of Polish literature for the past 150 years,” he writes.*

But he writes this because he does not understand what you are trying to say. Kisiel maintains that in The Wedding Wyspiański denigrates himself and practices self-irony. In fact—nothing could be further from the truth. The Wedding does, perhaps, compromise the Polish nation, but he himself, Wyspiański, is the highest judge here; and it is he who casts thunderbolts and tears at his robes. The Wedding does not, therefore, compromise Wyspiański, just as the thunderbolts, curses, and sneers aimed at the nation beginning with Słowacki and Norwid, Bobrzyński or Brzozowski and ending with Nowaczyński, have nothing to do with self-denigration.

In writing “self-denigrating” didn’t you have in mind that in Ferdynande I accepted a posture that was quite unexpected, proclaiming my own immaturity and accusing other authors of hiding theirs? Wouldn’t this constitute a certain “novum” in our writing? And even in all writing? And here one can speak about “self-denigration,” under the condition, of course, that this confession of immaturity will not serve merely as a polemical stratagem or humorous effect. What sort of dialogue would have erupted between Wyspiański and myself if we could have met for coffee at a café? He:—I grieve over the shortcomings of the Polish nation because I am more mature than the Polish nation. I:—I don’t bemoan the Polish nation at all; I bewail only my own immaturity and the nation concerns me only as one of the components of my immaturity. I, therefore, lock horns with the nation, just as I lock horns with every other phenomenon that obstructs or negates the possibility of maturity; which does not mean that I am more mature than my fellow Poles, no, I am simply more aware of my immaturity and this allows me a little distance; but I also confess that this immaturity fascinates, beguiles, and fills me with delight. For I am at one and the same time a mature Immaturity and an immature Maturity. . . .

Let us forget about the last sentence, perhaps it is too difficult for

* Polish Romantic poets, chiefly Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki.

persons unaccustomed to this kind of thinking. . . . But one can see from the above that my "criticism" of the nation has nothing in common with traditional criticism in our literature; that it is based on a different self-image, different vision, different theory. And that it is not really criticism, but a battle for my psychological existence and a battle for the form that delineates this existence—a battle in which I, an individual, grapple with the milieu not in the name of a higher, objective, purpose, but in the name of my own purpose.

And now, if you go on to write that I am "sneering at the gamut of Polish issues"—how am I to understand this? Certainly not in the way that Kisiel understood it, that I am sneering at what is clumsy about them, but instead that I condemn them as a whole, with their good and bad sides, because they are "off the subject," because they are concerned with the existence and development of the nation and not with the existence and development of the people who make up the nation. Because these Polish issues revolve around the collectivity, while I insist on the problem of the individual. Because they are issues above our station and stature, the work of an artificial maturity that makes one person more of a patriot than he really is in the presence of others—which has nothing to do with our authentic psychic life. And it would be good if Kisiel finally understood that the course of my revolutionary and rare thesis is this simple truth: an individual is something more fundamental than a nation. The individual takes precedence over the nation.

But, Mr. Sandauer, how should one interpret your words that here is "the perspective of creating a more authentic, more national, culture"? Is it not because the Pole has more reasons than a Frenchman or an Englishman not to identify himself with his national form (something which Kisiel does not grasp); and that this greater distance from form could ensure us an altogether original contribution to European culture? Imagine the shock—if the proud "I am a Frenchman" of a Frenchman and the "I am an Englishman" of the Englishman met with the Polish, unexpected "I am not wholly a Pole, I am above being a Pole. . . ."

Have I explained your intentions well? I repeat, I am not familiar with your lecture, I do not know the context of these words and whether you used them in a narrower sense—but I intentionally applied the broadest, deepest meaning to them to show that these few lines could be interpreted in whatever way the soul desired; superficially, like Kisiel, or a little more profoundly. It is

possible to drown these two sentences in our immortal banality—load them with all the platitudes, slogans, schemas, perversions, and mannerisms of Polish national thought—or one can find fresher contents. Except that, in the second case, one must have some concept of the ideas forming the skeleton beneath the living flesh of my books. . . . one must know something about form and immaturity. . . . But is it worth demanding so awesome an intellectual effort from Kisiel, who, being a Sarmatian,* is not a philosopher and whose highest philosophical efforts express maxims like: “Poor souls, these egocentrics. Can an egocentric be a prophet? Maybe, but a false one.” Just as for that other connoisseur, Mr. Sakowski of London’s Wiadomości, at whose mercy I live here, in emigration, my Diary is rife with nonsense, which he, Sakowski, cannot comprehend for all the world and is forced to attribute to a strange pose or to a stupid craving for originality, so for Kisiel my treatment of Poland is yesterday’s reheated leftover—a peculiar thing in an author to whom he otherwise attributes a sizable dose of innovation. The conclusions of these two gentlemen sound so strange because their expertise has blinded them to what every intelligent reader notices—that my views make up an organic whole, that my attitude to art or to the nation, or to other similar matters, is simply the branching of a tree whose root is my concept of form. Yes—but Poles don’t like to get down to the roots, Mr. Sakowski or Kisiel are instead “social” beings, far from boring themselves or others with thinking that is too rigorous. After all, what’s the Catholic Church for? The Church will, once again, absolve Kisiel of the disagreeable task of rigorous thinking.

One more little word. I smiled when I read the following passage in Kisiel’s article:

“That which is universal and creative in Gombrowicz ensures him a place in the history of literature without regard for the anachronisms of the thirties. On the other hand, Gombrowicz is not suited to be a leader of intellectual life in Poland today: his judgments about this life are as dogmatic as they are naive and outdated. Sandauer has elevated him to the role of leader, and a few young people are inclining in his direction. . . .”

*Term often applied to Polish country squires to designate their provincial, undereducated, but extremely self-satisfied posture.

Now what's this? Is Kisiel letting the cat out of the bag?

Let him relax . . . his fears are groundless. . . .

I really believe that from here, from America, I see Poland a lot better than Kisiel, who is embedded in it, like a potato in a sack of potatoes . . . whose dialectics smell a bit musty, who thinks in clichés culled from Polish literature; who, furthermore, is unbalanced, provincially unbalanced, chafing from a sense of Polish inferiority only to elevate himself a moment later with that Polish “nevertheless” megalomania (“the conflict of two ideas, animating millions of people in Europe and directing general attention to Poland”). Yes, I definitely see this better from here, from the world, and more soberly, and I think about it much more freely. But—never fear—I am not thinking of being a “leader” of any sort. I—a leader? Why, I don’t even aspire to the title of “Polish writer.” I simply want to be Gombrowicz, nothing more.

VI

Wednesday, Tandil

I arrived in Tandil a few days ago and took a room at the Hotel Continental. Tandil is a city—surrounded by low hills bristling with rock, like fortresses—of seventy thousand inhabitants and I have come because it is spring and to get rid of the last microbes of an Asian flu.

Yesterday I rented, for a reasonable rate, a lovely apartment somewhat on the outskirts of town, in the foothills, where there is a great stone gate and a park joins a mountain forest of conifers and eucalyptus.

Through the window, opened wide onto the dazzling sun of the morning, I see Tandil in the hollow, as if on a platter—this little house floats in a gentle cascade of palm and orange trees, pines, eucalyptus, wisteria, multitudes of trimmed shrubs and the strangest cacti tumbling toward the city while in the background a high wall of dark pines climbs almost vertically toward the peak, on which stands a confectionary castle. There is nothing more floral or springlike, more blossoming or radiant. And the mountains surrounding the city—dry as pepper dust, bare, rocky, and jutting out in enormous boulders—have the appearance of pedestals, prehistoric bastions, platforms, and ruins. An amphitheater.

Before me Tandil: three hundred meters away yet as clear as if it were in the

palm of my hand. It is by no means a health resort with hotels and tourists but an ordinary provincial city. Brushing my teeth in the sun and inhaling the fragrance of blossoms, I considered ways of “penetrating” the city I was warned against: “You will be bored to death in Tandil.”

I ate a marvelous breakfast in a small café suspended over gardens—ah, nothing much, coffee and two eggs but awash in blossoming!—after which I entered the city and its squares, the rectangles of blinding white houses with flat roofs, sharp angles, drying laundry, and under a wall—a motorcycle and a large, flat square exploding with greenery. One walks in the hot sun and the cool air of spring. People. Faces. One and the same face, walking in pursuit of something, running some errand or other, preoccupied, unhurried, kind, calm. . . . “You will be bored to death in Tandil!”

I looked at the sign on one of the buildings: “*Nueva Era*, Daily.” I walked in. I introduced myself to the editor but didn’t feel like chatting, I was somewhat drowsy, dreamy-eyed, and because of all this I answered him badly. I said I was *un escritor extranjero* and asked if anyone intelligent lived in Tandil, someone worth getting to know.

—What?—retorted the editor, offended.—We do not lack intelligent people. Our cultural life is rich, there are seventy painters alone! Writers? Well, we have Cortes; he is a big name, he publishes in the press of the capital. . . .

We called Cortes and arranged a meeting for the next day. I spent the rest of the day wandering the streets of Tandil. A corner. On the corner stands the plump, behatted owner of something or other next to two soldiers, farther down a woman in her seventh month and a wagon with delicacies—whose vendor sleeps blissfully on a bench, covered with a newspaper. And a loudspeaker sings: “You have imprisoned me in your dark eyes. . . .” I sing to myself: “You will be bored to death in Tandil.” A weather-beaten gentleman in boots and a cap.

Thursday

From here, from the mountain, Tandil looks surrounded by prehistory—shattered mountains of rock. I ate a delightful breakfast in the sun, trees, flowers.

But I feel uncertain, alien, this unknown life is bothering me. . . . I go to the “Centro Popular,” where I had agreed to meet Cortes. This is a sizable library of

about twenty thousand volumes—deep within is a small room in which some sort of arts and culture committee is meeting. As I walk in, the session is adjourning and Cortes introduces me to those gathered. After five minutes of conversation, I get the picture: Cortes, a Communist-idealist, dreamer, upstanding, full of good intentions, well-wishing, decent—that fifteen year old is not a girl but the wife (in her twenties) of that young man over there, also an idealist made sublime by Marx. The secretary, on the other hand, is a Catholic, and a third man, who looks like Rembrandt, is a militant Catholic. They are united by faith.

They have never heard of me. What did I expect—this is a backwater. But I become cautious. I know immediately what tactics to use in these circumstances and I do not make the mistake of introducing myself; on the contrary, I act as if I were well known and I merely give them a hint of my Europe through my tone, my form—this manner of speaking must be piquant, careless, unceremonious, with a dash of intellectual chic. Paris. This grabbed them. They say: Ah, you’ve been to Paris! I, casually:—Well, yes, it’s a city just like Tandil, houses, streets, a café on the street corner, all cities are the same. . . . They like this. That I did not pride myself on Paris but instead denigrated it resulted in their seeing the Parisian in me; I see that Cortes is almost won over and the ladies are interested but still a little suspicious.

Nevertheless . . . they demonstrate a lack of attention—some sort of absent-mindedness—as if they were consumed by something else—and suddenly I begin to understand that even if Camus and Sartre themselves were to show up in Tandil, these people would be incapable of overcoming their stubborn inattentiveness, their thinking about something local, about something Tandilian. But what’s this? Suddenly they become animated: they begin to talk, interrupting one another. About what? About their affairs, about the fact that almost no one came to the last lecture, that they have to force people to come, that Fulano does come but that he immediately falls asleep, that the doctor’s wife has taken offense. . . . They talk as if they were talking to me, but it is really among themselves that they lament, groan, certain of my writer’s approval, that I, as a writer, will share in full their bitter sorrow over their “grass-roots work,” all of that Tandilian *Zeromszczyzna*.^{*} Br-r-r- . . . “You will be bored to death in Tandil.” Suddenly Tandil crashes over my

^{*} After Stefan Żeromski, Polish novelist of the Modernist period whose works often featured characters sacrificing their personal lives for the public good; here used pejoratively.

brain, that rancid, unleavened, coarse content of a modest, limited life, behind which they, as behind a cow, boring and eternal, are made concrete for all time.

—Let the people be!—I say.

—But . . .

—Where did you get the idea that everyone has to be intelligent and enlightened?

—What?!

—Leave the yokels alone!

The word “yokel” (*bruto*) fell and what was worse, “populace” (*vulgo*)—at which I became aristocratic. It was as if I had declared war. I had torn away the mask of convention.

Now they became cautious.

—You deny the necessity for universal enlightenment?

—Of course.

—But . . .

—Away with teaching!

This was too much. Cortes picked up his pen, looked at its tip under the light, and blew.—We don’t understand one another—he said, as if he were worried. And a young man in the shadows muttered malevolently:

—You’re probably a fascist, eh?

Friday

I had indeed said too much. It was unnecessary. Nevertheless, I feel better . . . that aggressiveness strengthened me.

And what if they brand me a fascist? . . . That’s all I need! I have to talk to Cortes—patch things up.

Saturday

What’s going on?

Often a soul forms itself murkily, bluntly . . . from just any old series of haphazard incidents. The encounter with them in the library, well, it was nothing but it acted like a catalyst. Now the roles are clearly distributed. I am an aristocrat. I

have been revealed to them as an aristocrat. I am an aristocrat in Tandil . . . which at the same stroke came to embody common provincialism.

One should understand, however, that this was the mere outline . . . the mere outline of some sort of theater against the background of a million other events filling my day, events, which I cannot enumerate, events, in which the outline of drama dissolves like sugar in tea—so much so that the shape is lost and only the taste remains. . . .

I write this after another conversation with Cortes which instead of patching things up, aggravated the whole situation. I was irritated. I was irritated by the angelic sweetness of a Communist priest.

I will not repeat the entire conversation. I told him that the idea of equality contradicts the entire structure of the human species. The thing that is most splendid in people, the thing that establishes their brilliance when compared with other species, is exactly that man is not equal to man—while an ant is equal to another ant. *These are the two great modern lies*: the lie of the Church, that all have the same soul; the lie of democracy, that everyone has an equal right to development. You think that these ideas are a triumph of the spirit? Not at all, they derive from the body, this view is founded chiefly on our all having the same body.

I do not deny (I continued) that the optical impression is not to be doubted: we are all more or less the same height and we have the same organs. . . . But the soul, this specific characteristic of our species, intrudes on the uniformity of this picture, and it causes our species to be so individuated, so precipitous and vertiginous, that between man and man arise differences a hundred times greater than in all of the animal world. Between Pascal and Napoleon and a little village peasant there is a chasm greater than between a horse and a worm. What's more, a peasant differs less from a horse than from Valéry or Saint Anselm. An illiterate and a professor are only superficially the same people. A director is someone different from a worker. Are you telling me that you don't know that—intuitively speaking, in the margin of theory—our myths about equality, solidarity, and fraternity are incompatible with the real situation?

I admit that I doubt whether in these conditions one can speak of the “human” species—isn't this a concept that is simply too physical?

Cortes looked at me with the eye of a wounded intellectual. I knew what he

was thinking: fascism! and I was going crazy with delight proclaiming this Declaration of Inequality, because for me intelligence was changing into harshness, into blood!

Tuesday

—*Tilos—pinos—platanos—naranjos—palmeras—glicinas—mimbres—alamos—cipres*—breakfast on the veranda of the café in this bouquet; in the distance, ancient amphitheatres and bastions, great piles of rubble, circuses gleaming with sun.

I loaf and wander about Tandil. Their monotonous bustle—the deadening pedestrianism of these comings and goings—their antlike thrift, their equine patience, bovine languor, when I . . . when I . . . I cannot get to anyone because they are drowned in their own world and their isolation is unfathomable, each chases after his own, theirs is the solitude of animals, horses, frogs, fish. They are defined by their routine tasks, nothing else. The whole city is one great big hustle and bustle. What should I do?! *A la recherche du temps perdu*—I find this book in the library, I take Proust home and I read: I read in order to immerse myself in an element that is more familiar to me, to be with my brother, Proust!

Wednesday

Is he really a member of the family? Yes—we are both from the same distinguished family. We should embrace one another. A subtle work, sharp as a blade, vibrating, thin and hard—what a delightful counterpoint to this clumsy, heavy, massive, Tandil existence. We are both of the aristocracy—both refined! But no! To hell with him, he irritates me, disgusts me, I see too much of my own caricature in him.

He has always irritated me. I could never reconcile myself to the panegyric attached to him. This monster . . . refinement due to suffocation, eternally stuffed into bedclothes, overheated and sticky, enfeebled and muffled, drowned in medicinal compounds, condemned to all the dirt of the body, walled up in his cork-lined room . . . my ordinary, Polish provincianity is revolted by his French decadence. One could admire and even adore the energy inspired from on high that decreed that this life—swaddled in the folds of a maternal skirt, coddled; limited to bed, books, paintings, drawing-room conversations, snobberies—should give birth to a

work that is hard and cruel, touching on the most concealed nerves of reality. One might see the redeeming secret of the aristocracy in this transformation of softness into hardness, delicacy into acuity. One might even risk the statement that his sickness is transformed into health. Which is in keeping with the very essence of art. In art it is not a healthy person who creates a healthy work or a strong person who creates a strong work but quite the contrary: the sick man is better able to grasp the very essence of health, strength. . . .

Noble health.

No one knows

How you taste

Until you waste away.*

It is not odd, therefore, for him, a sick person, to have a keener sense of health; for a person confined to the four walls of a room to attain the most distant horizons, and for artificiality to lead him to splendid authenticity.

But . . . What a shame! His compensation is incomplete. It is like an underdone steak—on these pages I uncovered entire pieces of this half-cooked meat, wretched, sick meat. . . .

The flaws of Proust's book are enormous and innumerable—a gold mine of defects. His duel with Time, based on an exaggerated, naive faith in the power of art—this is the professional mysticism of a crazed aesthete and artist. His psychological analyses could drag out into infinity, for they are only an embroidering on observations—they are not exploratory, they lack a fundamental revelation of the world, they have not come from a single penetrating look, they have not come from a vision, they are only the minutely detailed work of the (uninspired) intellect. His rich statements constantly rub up against mannerisms; it is almost impossible to determine when their sumptuous beauty tumbles into artificial effort. His brand of metaphor betrays his weakness: it is not, in most cases, a metaphor that reduces secondary phenomena to a more elementary form, but the reverse—it will always tend to translate the great, elementary world into his own secondary reality, into the language of his “sphere,” to explain nature through a painting, not painting through—nature. There is perversion in all this—an intentional lack of loyalty

* Fragment from a *fraszka*, or short occasional poem, by Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski.

to life. As for the world that he has brought to life in his romance, there is nothing narrower—his people are all of one mold, this is one family in which the same inherited traits appear in various combinations—Charlus, Norpois, Madame de Guermantes, are cut from the same cloth, they all say basically the same thing. Monotony of plot characterizes a work with poor innovation and imagination, but appealingly diligent in cultivating detail. There is nothing that unmasks the “unbaked side” of Proust more than his intelligence—which can be wonderful—but how often it also stumbles, who knows how and where, into helplessness, naïveté—these are the remnants of an unconquered naïveté, overrefinement, which has not been digested into knowledge but which has remained just that: overrefinement.

Why do we admire him? We admire him, first of all, because he dared to be delicate and because he did not hesitate to show himself as he was—sometimes in tails, sometimes in a bathrobe, accompanied by a bottle of medicine, a little bit of homosexual-hysterical lipstick, phobias, neuroses, weaknesses, snobbery, all the misery of a refined Frenchman. We admire him because beyond that strange, tainted Proust we discover the nakedness of his humanity, the truth of his sufferings, and the power of his honesty. Too bad! If we look a little closer, again, beyond the nakedness, we uncover Proust in a bathrobe, in tails, or in a nightshirt together with all the accessories—the bed, medicines, bibelots. This is a game of hide-and-seek. No one knows what the ultimate is here: nakedness or costume, drawing room or life, illness or health, hysteria or power. That is why Proust is a little of everything, profundity and shallowness, originality and banality, incisiveness and simplicity . . . cynical and naive, elegant and unsavory, graceful and clumsy, amusing and boring, light and heavy. . . .

Heavy! This cousin of mine crushes me. Because I do belong to the same family after all—I, the refined . . . I am from the same milieu. Except without Paris. I did not have Paris. And coarse Tandil is trying its hardest to get at my delicate skin, unprotected by Parisian balm!

Thursday

Cortes suggested a young poet to me whose name was Juan Ángel Magariños, son of the owner of the Hotel Residencial. I asked him to invite a few other poets to the café.

At five o'clock, three boys showed up who hadn't the slightest idea who I was and asked how I had found myself in Argentina. The fourth, a slight sixteen year old, upon hearing my name, smiled and said: —Ferdydurke!

They call him "Dipi." So I now have two readers in Tandil (the other is the eighteen-year-old son of the museum director, Ferreir).

They all write. —So I now have what I wanted: readers and a table of artists in the café, colleagues. What a shame that not one of my colleagues is over twenty!

Friday

Cox is also a pal of mine. This thin, tall, seventeen-year-old bean pole who has something of the bellhop about him—a familiar manner and easy knowledge about everything, the most perfect disregard I have ever encountered, an awful worldliness, as if he had come to Tandil straight out of New York (yet he has never even set foot in Buenos Aires). Nothing appeals to him—his is a complete inability to feel any kind of hierarchy, a cynicism arising from his skill at maintaining polite appearances. This is wisdom born of a lower sphere—the wisdom of a street urchin, newsboy, elevator or errand boy, for whom the "higher stratum" is worth as much as one can make off of it. Churchill, along with Picasso, Rockefeller, Stalin, Einstein, are nothing but big game peeled down to the last tip if they run into them in a hotel lobby. . . . This boy's relationship to History calms me and even brings me relief, it provides me with an equality that is more real than one composed of slogans and theories. I relax.

Saturday

Life that is limited. Local life. One lives with whatever the new day brings. No one looks around, everyone looks at his feet, at his own path. Work. Family. Activity. To survive, somehow. . . . A concrete existence.

This exhausts and attracts at the same time . . . oh, so these are the limitations I have craved! I am tired of the cosmos. I confirm a crisis of "universalism" in myself. I assume that many other people today also suffer from it. The diagnosis is as follows: century after century we expanded our horizons; our vision finally encompassed the entire planet; we demand morality "for all," rights "for all,"

everything “for everybody”—and then it turns out that we are unequal to the task! Catastrophe! Disillusion! Bankruptcy! Why I have already made insects equal to people in my desire for universal justice, the only one possible! But the blow dealt my soul by the first unrescued insect casts me into impotence . . . and now panequality, universal justice, universal love, all that is universal, are liquidating themselves in me—not because I want this to happen—but because I cannot help it—after all, I am not Atlas lifting the whole world onto his shoulders!

I, who not long ago was still angry at Catholics and Communists for their aristocratic egotism toward animals, here with Cortes suddenly deny even people equality! How one thing contradicts another in me!

Do I become the “reaction” then? To that entire process striving for universality? I am so dialectic, so very prepared for the themes the epoch has stuffed me with, for the bankruptcy of socialism, democracy, scientism, that out of sheer impatience I look for unavoidable reaction, I myself am almost reaction!

Narrow myself! Limit myself! To live only with what is mine! I want to be concrete and private! I am sick of ideas that tell me to concern myself with China—I have not seen China, I don’t know China, I haven’t been there! Enough appeals to see my brother in a man who is not my brother! I want to lock myself within my circle of vision and not reach further than I can see. I want to topple the accursed “universality” that shackles me more than the most confining prison and escape into the freedom of the limited!

I record this desire, today, in Tandil.

VII

Wednesday

In Tandil I am the most illustrious of men! No one equals me here! There are seventy thousand of them—seventy thousand inferiors. . . . I carry my head like a torch. . . .

Thursday

I am growing in Poland. I am also growing elsewhere. In Poland *The Marriage* and *Trans-Atlantic* are being born and a volume encompassing all of my

stories, called *Bakakaj* (in memory of the street Bacacay, where I lived in Buenos Aires). The French translation of *Ferdydurke* is almost finished. Negotiations concerning the French and Spanish edition of the *Diary*. *Ivona* is supposed to be staged in Cracow and Warsaw. Correspondence in the matter of staging *The Marriage*. An avalanche of articles and commentary in the Polish press. Ha, it's finally gotten off the ground, now they will fuel one another—the process of my growing is assured for many years to come! Gloria! Gloria! Sh . . . ! Sh . . . !

Tandil!

Friday

I ate a very nice breakfast. . . . “You will be bored to death in Tandil. . . .” Out of despair I went to Filefotto’s lecture on Beethoven’s symphonies. Filefotto, potato nose on a face like a bun, with a smile of indulgent irony, says: —There are those who think that the master’s deafness provoked his talent. Nonsense, ladies and gentlemen, how absurd! Deafness does not cause talent. His talent was a result of the French Revolution, it opened Beethoven’s eyes to social inequality!

I see Beethoven in the little puff-pastry hands of Filefotto; I see how, using Beethoven like a baton, he shatters Inequality. Ah, Beethoven in the hands of Filefotto!

At the same time, in the deeper strata of my being there is something like contentment, like a liberating joy at the thought that an inferior can use a superior.

Saturday

Yesterday, while I was writing, the door opened and in walked Ada, short, small, teeny-tiny—shriveled to microscopic proportions by her pale fear. She had just had an operation. She can barely stand on her feet. In Buenos Aires I tried to talk her into coming here for a “nachkur” as soon as she was able to move. So here she is. Henry, her husband, will appear in a few days, and until then Ada will wallow in anxiety. “Whatever made me come here? What am I doing here?!” We went for coffee to a café. “God, what a café!” “Ada, get ahold of yourself. . . .” “I can’t get ahold of myself. Why am I here?” “It would be nice if you could get ahold of yourself. . . .” “I can’t get ahold of myself because I’m not all here yet. What kind

of coffee is this supposed to be?" "Why, it's the same kind of coffee as everywhere else. . . ." What do you mean, the same. . . ." "What kind of horse is that supposed to be?" "A horse like every other, quite ordinary, as you can see." "This horse is not ordinary *because I have not started living here yet!*"

Wednesday

I didn't know what to do. I remembered that N. N., the owner of the bazaar, had invited me for supper, and I went . . . to try my luck, maybe it'll work out. . . . But at the sight of me a call to arms was sounded, the guards were doubled, the cannon were wheeled out.

I had the impression that I was attacking a bulwark. The man of the house was behind a breastwork of congeniality. The lady of the house and her aunt, Raquel, an old woman, manning the earthworks of holy Catholic principles, were ready to fire in the event that I blurted out some heresy (one never knows with these intellectuals!). The daughter, decked in an armor of token smiles, offered a salad. The son, an engineer, in a soft shirt, plump, neat, little moustache, ring, watch, comfort-loving—a masterpiece of self-sufficiency.

Friday

Yes . . . The bourgeoisie is distrustful. And the proletariat? I don't understand it! I can't understand it! Ah, for at least a half hour I tried to "understand" the worker, standing on one corner, staring at the one opposite. How and what does he think about? What sort of thoughts does he have, how do they form themselves? It can't be done. There is some accursed gap—some sort of hole in him, through which I cannot pass. Why can I understand children, young working-class people so well, without difficulty—but an adult peasant or worker is locked in by a strange emptiness, awful vacuum? . . .

Sunday

Look at them, *en familias*, circling the square on their Sunday walk. They're going in circles! It is impossible to believe they walk in circles. This reminds one of

the elementary movement of planets and goes back a million years into primal existence. Until space itself seems to bend, Einstein-style, for even while moving forward they are constantly returning. The disarray of this procession! Upstanding, calm, bourgeois faces sparkling with Italian and Spanish eyes, teeth peering out from friendly lips—and this is how that decent petite bourgeoisie promenades with its wives and children.

Soldiers!

A column vibrating with the rhythmic stomping of jackboots marches in from Rodriguez Street. It intrudes onto the square, like a blow. Cataclysm. The promenade is interrupted, everyone runs to admire the soldiers! It is as if the square suddenly came to life . . . but what a disgrace! Ha, ha, ha, allow me to laugh—ha, ha, ha, ha! An invasion of pinioned legs, and bodies, inserted into uniforms, slave bodies, welded together by the command to move. Ha, ha, ha, ha, gentlemen humanists, democrats, socialists! Why, the entire social order, all systems, authority, law, state and government, institutions, everything is based on these slaves, barely grown children, taken by the ear, forced to pledge blind obedience (O priceless hypocrisy of this mandatory-voluntary pledge) and trained to kill and to allow themselves to be killed. The general gives orders to the major. The major gives orders to the lieutenant. After which the hard palms of the pledged and trained field hands grab rifles and begin to fire away.

But all systems, socialist or capitalist, are founded on enslavement, and, to top it off, on the enslavement of the young, my dear gentlemen rationalists, humanists, ha, ha, ha, my dear gentleman democrats!

Tuesday

Much of what happens to me in Tandil is indistinct . . . dark . . . like that encounter with Ricardon. I met him in a café, a quiet, middle-aged man. He said: —Gombrowicz? Ah, I don't know your books, but I have read about you. Mallea (an Argentinean writer) mentioned you in *Leoplan* (a weekly).

—Yes, that's true. But that was fifteen years ago.

—Yes, about fifteen or so.

—But it was just one sentence—as far as I can remember—he mentioned me only in one sentence. . . .

—Yes, exactly, one sentence. Your name fixed itself in my memory.

—But it is impossible, that you should remember such an insignificant remark after fifteen years especially since it concerns an author you have never read!

—N-n-n-o, why not? It just fixed itself in my . . .

??????? Darkness. A wall. I understand nothing. I ask no more because I know that I will learn nothing. I grow faint. . . .

Wednesday

Much of what happens to me in Tandil is so . . . inexplicable, as if the person I was talking to and I were just missing each other. The vapor of what is left unsaid rises between them and me. The riddles are multiplying. I am a hundred times more of a foreigner and I carry my foreignness within me. The mistakes are multiplying. My contacts with them are cautious and trite. I have lost my agility—I know that I am clumsy—and I almost conceal myself. They also hide themselves behind themselves.

The curtain, the smoke is thickening. . . . Timidity is growing. . . . A double darkness, made of my and their shame, is rising. Shame because when they find out that I am a writer, they shrink back into their shells like snails. Shame—I am ashamed, because I am alone against thousands.

Half-light, curtain, darkness, smoke, timidity—as in a church, as before the altar of a growing mystery . . .

Thursday

Our greatest holiness is contained in our most ordinary commonness. The only time I am not ashamed of this word is when I use it in regard to something trivial, something that is its opposite.

Friday

I am not the first to seek the Divine in what I cannot bear . . . because I cannot bear it. . . .

On one of the hills, at one end of avenida Espania, rises an enormous cross, which dominates the city—and because of this becomes a kind of liturgy grown lazy, loitering in jeering, shameless Mediocrity, content with itself and laughing with its hand over its mouth . . . something like parody and trash . . . a lower, giggling mystery play—but not less holy (in its own way) than its higher version.

Saturday

The slender trunks of the eucalyptus forest growing out of a hillside plowed up by boulders are stonelike—the mountain, forest, leaves, everything is ossified, and a solemn stony silence visits this slender and clean, dry, and translucent immobility, brightened by pools of sun. Cortes and I walk along the path. Groups sculpted in marble present the story of Golgotha, the entire hillside is devoted to Golgotha and is called Calvario. Christ falling under the weight of the cross—Christ flogged—Christ and Veronica . . . the whole grove is full of that tormented body. On the forehead of one of the Christs is written—in the hand of one of Cortes's disciples: *Viva Marx!* Cortes, of course, is not concerned with the figures of Christ's Passion—he is a materialist—and he lectures to me zealously on a different holiness, namely that of the Communists' war with the world for the world, that man has no choice but to conquer the world and “humanize” it . . . if he does not want to remain its comic and repulsive clown, its repugnant tumor forever. . . . Yes, he says, I agree with you, man is antinature, he has his own separate nature; he is, by his very nature, in the opposition; furthermore, we cannot avoid a showdown with the world; either we will introduce our own human order, or we will become the pathology and absurdity of being for all eternity. Even if this battle is hopeless, it alone is capable of realizing our humanity together with its dignity and beauty—the rest can lead only to humiliation. . . . This credo soars and reaches the peak where the enormous Christ on the cross presides; I, from here, from below, see through the tapering eucalyptus the arms and legs nailed to wood; I note in passing that this God and this atheist are saying exactly the same thing. . . .

We are practically at the cross. I steal a glance at the body tormented by its liver, like Prometheus (this is what torture on the cross consists of, agonizing pains to the liver). Reluctantly I recall the complete rigidity of the crucifix wood, which is *incapable* of yielding to the writhing flesh for even a millimeter and *cannot* be

horrified at the suffering, even if it exceeds all limits and becomes something *impossible*—this little game between the absolute indifference of the torturing wood and the limitless pressure of the body, this mutual, eternal missing of the wood and the body, shows me, almost in a flash, the wretchedness of our predicament—the world breaks into the body and the cross. In the meantime, next to me, the atheistic apostle, Cortes, does not cease voicing the necessity of a different struggle for salvation. “The Proletariat!” I look askance at Cortes’s body, thin, meager, nervous, bespectacled, hideous and bleary-eyed, undoubtedly with an aching liver, tormented by ugliness, so painful, so awfully repulsive—and I see that he, too, is crucified.

I am caught as if in the crossfire between two agonies, one of which is divine, the other godless. But both shout: struggle with the world, rescue it—then man again takes on *everything*, unable to find himself a place, rebellious, and the cosmic, all-embracing, universal Idea explodes with force. . . . Before me, below, the city, from which one can hear car horns and the sound of immediate life, limited and shortsighted. Ah, to escape from this high place down to that one below! I lack oxygen here at the top between Cortes and the cross. This is tragic, that Cortes has brought me here to repeat with other, godless lips the same absolute, extreme, universal religion, this mathematics of Universal Justice, Universal Purity!

Suddenly I notice that someone has written on Christ’s left leg: “Delia y Quique, verano 1957.”

The eruption of this scribble in . . . no, let us say rather the intrusion of these fresh, ordinary, and untired bodies . . . this breeze, this wave of a human life that was relatively content . . . this breath of a miraculously holy naïveté in existence . . . Darkness. Mist. Veil. Smoke. What religion is this?

Sunday

What religion is this whose incense assailed me through Delia and Quique, when I found myself on Golgotha, between Christ and Cortes?

I said to Cortes: —Why do you, atheists, deify ideas? Why don’t you deify people?

The divinity of the general is obvious. Isn’t his finger basically the same as

the finger of the most miserable of soldiers? Yet one crook of the general's finger sends tens of thousands of people to their deaths—they will go and die without even asking about the meaning of the sacrifice. What more valuable thing than one's own life can man offer the Highest God? If a man dies at the command of another man, this means that one man can be God to another man. He who is ready to stop living at the command of his leader—why should he recoil from falling to his knees before him!

And the divinity of the Chairman? And the divinity of Directors or Professors? And the divinity of a Landowner or Artist? Service—slavery—a humble submission—the losing of oneself in another man—succumbing entirely to the Higher—this penetrates human kind to the viscera. Ha, you atheists-democrats would like to have people lined up evenly, like rows of vegetables, and subjugated to the Idea. But this horizontal image of humanity is disturbed by another, vertical image . . . and these two images mutually destroy themselves, they do not *submit* to a common law, there is no one theory for them. Is this reason, though, to exclude from consciousness the vertical image of humanity and to be content with just the horizontal? I really don't understand you, atheists. You are not sensible. . . . Why do you close your eyes to this sacrament, if it takes place perfectly without God, and even the absence of God is its *conditio sine qua non*? I, of course, do not see why modern metaphysical anxiety could not express itself in the adoration of man, if God is lacking.

In order for this to happen, all you would have to do is turn your attention to a certain property of mankind, its unceasing need for form. It is like a wave, made up of a million tiny particles, which takes on a specific form every minute. Why, even in a small group of freely conversing people, you will notice their need to attune themselves to this or that form, which creates itself accidentally and independently of their will by dint only of their mutual adjustment to one another . . . it is as if all together they assigned to each person his place, his "voice" in the orchestra. "People" are something that must organize itself every minute—nevertheless, this organization, this collective shape, creates itself as the by-product of a thousand impulses and is, in addition, unforeseen and does not allow itself to be ruled by those who make it up. We are like tones from which a melody issues—like words forming themselves into sentences—but we are not in control of what we express, this expression of ours strikes us like a thunderbolt, like a creative force, it

arises from us unrefined. Wherever form arises, however, there will also be Superiority and Inferiority—and that is why among people the process of elevating one person at the cost of others takes place—and the thrust upward, even if it elevates just one person, even if it is the most absurd and unjust, will be an absolute condition of form; it will also mean the creation of a higher sphere within humanity, dividing it into levels; from the bosom of the common people will come a more noble kingdom, which, for the inferior, will be both a horrible burden and a magnificent elevation. Why do you refuse to honor the accidental world of—if not gods, then demigods—that issues from us? Who forbids you to see in this a Deity arising from the people themselves, not descending from the heavens? Doesn't this phenomenon possess divine attributes, which are a result of interhuman power, that is, superior and creative, in relation to each of us separately? Don't you see that here Superiority is created in a way that is not controllable? Why has your reason, atheists, surrendered itself with such passion to abstractions, theories, ideas, justifications, without having noticed that here, right under its very nose, concretely, humanity reels off Gods and new revelations like a firework? Would this seem unjust, immoral, to you—perhaps unjustified spiritually? But you forget that if your spirit were able to conceive it, it would not be a Superior force or even a Creative force.

If only in the end I, I personally, could have ditched, eluded, the Idea—to live permanently in this other church made of people. If I could have forced myself to acknowledge this deity—and not concern myself anymore with absolutes and just feel above me, not high, barely a yard above my head, the play of creative forces, born of us as the only attainable Olympus—and to worship this. *The Marriage* contains this liturgy and I was not joking when I wrote in the introduction: here the human spirit adores the interhuman spirit. Still, I have never been capable of prostrating myself—and between the interhuman God and me grotesqueness was always born instead of prayer. . . . Too bad!—I say this sincerely.—Too bad! For only He—this demigod born of people, “superior” to me but only by an inch, something like a first initiation, such an imperfect God in a word, in proportion to my limitations—could extricate me from this accursed universalism which I cannot handle and restore a salutary concreteness. Ah, to find one's limits! To limit oneself! To have a limited God!

I write this bitterly . . . because I do not believe that this leap into limitation

will ever happen to me. The cosmos will continue to devour me. Therefore, I am writing this not altogether seriously, pooh, as rhetoric . . . but I feel the presence of human natures different from my own around me, I feel this otherness surrounding me, containing solutions inaccessible to me . . . therefore, I leave all this to that otherness to do with it what it wants.

Tuesday

I saw him again! Him! That boor! I saw him while having a nice little breakfast in the café suspended over the gardens. O holy proletariat! He (a fruit vendor who came in a wagon) was mostly dumpy and butt-heavy—but he was also stubby-fingered and chubby-cheeked and a stocky, ruddy, greedy gut straight from a good snooze in his bed-clothes with a hot chick and right from the outhouse. I say “right from the outhouse” because his butt was stronger than his mug; he was all butt. The whole was characterized by an incredible striving for boorishness, his liking and relishing of it, stubborn persistence in it, diligent and active transformation of the whole world into boorishness. Plus, the guy was in love with himself.

What was I to do with him? I drank coffee with Bianchotti, to whom I said nothing.—What was I to do? If only inferiority were always young! Young! Youth is its salvation, its natural and sanctifying ingredient . . . no, beguiling inferiority is not a problem for me . . . but to find myself eye to eye with, not a boy but a peasant—and to have to bear him in his double ugliness of an aging boor.

Double? Quadruple ugliness—because I, who look at him with all of my bourgeois refinements, complete his repulsiveness, I match it, like a negative; we are two monkeys, one coming out of the other. . . . Two aging monkeys. Brrr . . . Do you know what the worst meeting of all is? To meet a lion in a desert? A tiger in a forest? A ghost? The devil himself? What an idyll! It is worse, a hundred times worse, when a pale intellectual comes upon a heavyset boor in the absence of any youth! This meeting will take place in mutual adult-human revulsion, which you would never experience with a lion that devoured you; it will be bathed in physical decay; and that you must bear this man, together with yourself, in this *abschmack*, in the sauce of this idiosyncrasy, in the curse of this caricature!

This adult boor torments and exhausts me. . . . I cannot get away from him! That walking abomination!

Thursday

Hitler, Hitler, Hitler . . . What rock did he crawl out from under? In the flurry of my life, in the chaos of events, I have long since noticed a certain logic in the accumulation of plots. If a certain thought becomes dominating, facts strengthening it from the outside begin to multiply, it then looks as if external reality were beginning to cooperate with the internal one. Not long ago I noted here that I was called—by mistake of course—a fascist! Now, when I accidentally entered an unfamiliar part of Tandil, the *barrio* Rivadavia, chalk graffiti smeared on the walls, scribbled on boulders, caught my eye:

“LOOR Y GLORIA A LOS MARTIRES DE NURENBERG” (Glory to the martyrs of Nuremberg).

A Nazi in Tandil? And such a fanatical one? After so many years? This fanaticism, where does it come from?—in Tandil—why here? . . . This again will be one of those Tandil blind spots, stupors, most certainly some absurdity . . . which I will not even attempt to unravel . . . but (keeping in mind the “fascism” already offered me) it looked as if this drunkard were drinking a toast to me. . . . An allusion? I have known for a long time that many are the allusions to me and many have drunk my health. . . .

Moreover, this Hitler pounces on me, because a boor disgusted me, because I am vomiting up the boor having been vomited up by him.

Friday

Hitler was pounded into dirt and dust, and to top it off (in fear of his resurrection) he has been characterized *post mortem* as a diabolical mediocrity, a raucous hell-born sergeant-megalomaniac. You have soiled his legend. You did this out of fear. But fear is also a form of homage. I would advocate not being afraid of Hitler *post mortem*—he rose on someone else’s fear, oh, that he not rise, again, on yours.

What strikes one about this hero (and why shouldn’t I call him a hero?) is his incredible boldness in reaching an extreme, the ultimate, the maximum. He believed that the man who is less afraid wins—that the secret of power is to go one step farther, that one single step farther that others are incapable of taking—that he who terrifies with his audacity is impossible to withstand and is therefore devastating—and he applied this principle as much to people as he did to nations. His

tactics were as follows: go one step farther in cruelty, cynicism, deception, cunning, boldness, go that one mad step jolting you out of the normal, that one unbelievable, impossible, completely unacceptable step . . . to stand your ground when others, horrified, call: I pass! That is why he thrust the German people and Europe into cruelty—he desired the cruelest life as the ultimate gauge of the capacity to live.

He would not be a hero if he were not a coward. His supreme violence was that perpetrated upon himself when transforming himself into Might—thereby making weakness in himself impossible—cutting off his own retreat. His supreme resignation was his resignation from the other possibilities of existence. An interesting problem: how did he pop up as the god of the German people? One should assume that he at first “bound himself” to only a few Germans—“bound himself,” that is, proposed himself as a leader—and this was achieved by personal distinction, for on this scale, in the company of a few people, personal qualities still have some value. And in this first phase, when the bond was still fairly loose, Hitler must have had to endlessly repeat his arguments; convince, persuade, bandy his idea—for he was dealing with people who were subordinating themselves to him voluntarily. But all of this was still very human and very ordinary; there always existed, for Hitler and his subordinates, the opportunity to back out, each of them could break away, choose something else, bind themselves to others in a different way. Imperceptibly, however, there came into play the action of a practically unnoticeable actor, namely, the number, the growing number of people. As the number grew, the group entered another dimension, almost inaccessible to one man. Too heavy, too massive, it began to live its own life. It is possible that each member trusted the leader only a little; however, that little bit multiplied by increasing numbers became a dangerous blast of faith. And lo and behold, there came a moment when each of them felt, rather uneasily, that he no longer knew what the others would do to him (the others of whom there were so many, whom he did not know) if it occurred to him to say “I pass” and to take to his heels. The minute he realized this, the doors slammed shut. . . .

This, however, was not enough for Hitler. He, fortified by this mass of people, had already grown—but he was not sure in the least about his people or himself. There was no guarantee that his private nature, his ordinary humanity, might not suddenly stir in him—he had not yet completely lost control of his own

fate and he could still say “no” to his own greatness. Here then arose the necessity of transferring everything to a sphere higher and no longer accessible to the individual being. In order to do that, Hitler had to act not with his own energy, but with that which the mass supplied him—that is, a power that surpassed his own. That is what happened. With the help of his subordinates and followers and by exploiting the tensions that arose between him and them, by extracting the maximum audacity from them in order to become even more audacious himself and to arouse them to even greater audacity, Hitler drives the whole group to the boiling point, and makes it more fearsome as a group, together exceeding individual capacity. Each, not excluding the leader, is aghast. The group enters an abnormal state. The people who make up the group lose control of themselves. Now no one can back out because they are no longer in a “human” but rather in an “interhuman,” or “suprahuman,” realm.

Let us note that this is all very similar to theater . . . to playacting. . . . Hitler pretended to be bolder than he was so that others would be forced to join in the game—but the game elicited the reality and created facts. The masses of people, obviously, do not grasp this mystification; they judge Hitler according to his deeds—and lo, a nation of millions of people recoils in fear before the decimating will of the leader. The leader becomes great. Strange, this greatness. This is a magnification to incredible dimensions, infinitely astounding—because the word, deed, smile, anger, exceed the reach of a normal man, resounding like thunder, trampling other existences, the same, after all, basically no less important. . . . But the strangest characteristic of this magnification is that it creates itself from the outside—to Hitler, everything grows in his hands, but he himself is the same as he was, ordinary, with all of his weaknesses; this is a dwarf who reveals himself to be Goliath; this is a common man who is God from the outside; this is the soft human palm striking like a club. And Hitler is now in the claws of that Great Hitler, not because he has not retained his usual, private feelings or thoughts, his private reason, but because they are too small and too weak and can do nothing against the Giant that penetrates him from the outside.

Let us notice, too, that at the moment the process reaches the suprahuman stage, the idea is no longer needed. It is indispensable at the beginning, when one has to convince, unify supporters to themselves—now it is almost superfluous because man, as such, does not have much to say in this new, suprahuman,

dimension. People begin to pile up. Pressures are created. A shape arises having its own reason and logic. The idea exists merely for the sake of appearances; it is the facade behind which the possession of man by man takes place, creating itself first, and only later asking about its meaning.

Saturday

Farewell, Tandil! I am leaving. My suitcase is packed.

I pour my crisis regarding democratic thinking and universal feeling onto paper because not I alone—know this—not I alone, if not today, then in ten years, will be assailed by the desire to have a clearly delineated world and a clearly delineated God. Prophecy: democracy, universality, equality, will not be capable of satisfying you. Your desire for duality will grow stronger and stronger—a desire for a dual world—dual thinking—dual mythology—in the future we will be paying homage to two different systems simultaneously and a magic world will find a place for itself next to a rational one.

VIII

Sunday

Sick.

Blah.

I am si—

I don't feel like . . .

Monday

I throw myself onto the bed— I rest—usually with Andrzej Bobkowski's *Pen Sketches*. Two thick volumes. A diary. Subtitle: "France 1940–44."

I am a passionate reader of diaries, the cavern of someone else's life draws me in, even if it is embroidered or fabricated—but this way or that, it is a broth made of the taste of reality and I like knowing, for example, that on 3 May 1942 Bobkowski was teaching his wife to ride a bike in the Vincennes forest. And I?

What was I doing on that day? You will see, or you probably will not see: that in two hundred or a thousand years a new science will arise that determines the connections between various people in time and then it will be plain that what happens to one is not without connection to what has happened to someone else. . . . And this synchronization of existences will open new perspectives, but enough. . . . Bobkowski's notes concern two of my interests, France and Poland—this is the main reason that I study them. They are written with fervor and passion, although I assume this didn't happen without a little touching up *ex post*. The heat of this criticism results in criticism that immediately arouses criticism of the initial criticism. . . , etc.—(the meaning of this statement will become a little clearer in a moment).

Homelands . . . How is one to get at them? This is almost a forbidden subject. When a man writes about his homeland, his style gets twisted. How does one write about Poland, for example, without falling into that classic “because we are Poles,” without making a European of oneself, without making a face, without denigrating oneself, without making oneself superior—without claptrap, attacks, without biting, kicking, or roughing up . . . how does one thrust fingers into one's own wounds without contorting one's face with pain? How does one tickle this Achilles' heel without making a clown of oneself? I discover in Bobkowski's book that in the years 1940–44, the same feelings were hatching in him that crawled all over me when the outline of *Trans-Atlantic* was ripening—he also grumbles, rebels, blasphemes. . . . But in me, perhaps because of the greater geographic distance, or perhaps as a result of the greater spiritual distance (an artistic work is one thing, a diary another), this anti-Polish process was frozen, I always wrote about Poland cold, as one of the obstacles making life difficult for me. For me, Poland was and is only one of my many troubles; I did not forget even for a moment about the secondary importance of this topic. In his diary, Bobkowski, who is younger, is less cold than I am—he pushes Poland away from himself, but in pushing it away, he cuts his hands until they bleed. I want to liberate myself!—he shouts—I will not immolate myself on this altar, I want to live at my own expense . . . but it is exactly this passionate cry that shows that his umbilical cord has not been severed—its negation would express itself better in a quiet, even ordinary voice, one of those indifferent voices that remove the theme from central importance. The “sketches” would have been stronger stylistically if Bobkowski's open struggle with the myth of Poland had been deleted from them.

The confusion in our heads regarding this “universalism,” which has become fashionable for us, is extraordinary. Let us take Mr. Kisiel, for example. For many of us universalism is equal to not writing about Poland and practically not writing in Polish. For example, Mr. Michał K. Pawlikowski. In his review of Józef Mackiewicz’s *Contra*, we read:

“I would not hesitate to call Mr. Mackiewicz the most ‘un-Polish’ of all Polish writers. Indeed, the setting and climate of Road to Nowhere are a corner of former Lithuania and—if one does not count the language—so-called Polishness is not the ‘tuning fork’ of the novel. The plot of The Careerist would be possible in any country. Finally, Contra is a work whose author a foreign reader would not conclude was Polish.”

After which Mr. Pawlikowski decrees that I am a “very Polish” writer, and Mackiewicz, because of the above-mentioned traits, is “universal.”

But why, Mr. Pawlikowski? What does the universal humanity of an author have to do with his subject?

Mackiewicz is—of course—an artist of the Polish borderlands . . . but this—it is obvious—in no way interferes with his “universal humanity.” Because one has nothing to do with the other.

The most universal French or Italian writers were simultaneously the most French or Italian writers—because art is (as we have known long and well) the elevation of a private, particular, local, even parochial concreteness to the heights of the universal . . . to cosmic proportions . . .

The most worldly of Chopin’s melodies are the most Polish melodies—for art is (it is almost ridiculous to have to lecture on this) a demonstration of the typical, universal, and eternal element in that which is concrete, individual, and ephemeral.

And it is really ridiculous that Jacek Bocheński blusters (like Kisiel) that in *Trans-Atlantic* I have “an unhealthy romance and mad obsession” with my Polish heritage. With what am I supposed to have it? My Chinese heritage?

Let us return, however, to Bobkowski. One could say several things about how in his diary he is working on a new style for the Liberated Pole . . . and not without an exhausting pushing and shoving . . . for Bobkowski, a lively intelligence and talent, sees with horror how, after crawling out of Poland on his hands and

knees, he falls into a new stereotype, this time an antinational one . . . and he must now find some sort of antidote for this convention of Polishness *à rebours* . . . and that this new form again demands to be corrected. In a work of art perhaps this would be shocking. But in a diary? Here we want to have an author in person and an author at the boiling point, still imperfect. And let us look at the date. Who in those years 1940–44 was not at the boiling point?

But it is not Poland that is the most interesting in Bobkowski's diary, but France.

France, which in the course of centuries became an international complex. This begs for psychoanalysis. France turns people into idiots—entire nations are enchanted by France—by mythic France and a fairy-tale Paris! Everywhere in America I come across this stupefied: Ah, Paris, ah, Paris! But this altar stands in our backyard too, and prayers, curtsies, capers, leaps, contortions, also take place back there—although I will bypass that delightful second-hand Frenchness, that absolutely indefatigable imitation, practiced by all those Messrs. Sakowski, that endless bowing to the myth. No, not only former members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are so culturally disoriented, the devotion penetrates all the way through the upper social classes, and Bobkowski, a Polish intellectual living in Paris, was unable to avoid its spell. But the “historical” weight of his confessions consists of the appearance here of the will to destroy the myth—and just as it attacks Poland, it now throws itself with fury onto France, and the young and stormy arm strikes at its own dream. Here our conversation with France begins from a different position and although the author has not yet discovered his complete sovereignty, the tone becomes infinitely sharper and more to the point, the accent difficult to define, betraying that the romance is over once and for all and that only a settling of accounts remains. The tone and accent are all the more valuable to me in that they are contained in notes concerning everyday and ordinary events.

Sunday

After returning to Tandil, I found the novel *Conspiracy* sent to me from Poland by the author, Mr. Stefan Kisielewski (“Kisiel”) with the conciliatory dedication:

“To W.G., the ‘fellow’ who pretended he didn’t understand my article about him, his constant critical-enthusiastic reader—Kisiel, Cracow. 18.XII.57.”

I replied:

“Dear Sir,

“Please forgive me for not thanking you sooner for the copy of *Conspiracy* with your dedication, but I have been away from Buenos Aires for about six months.

“Great—the dedication is nice—but why do you write such idiotic things about me in the paper? I say ‘idiotic’ not to offend you, but because you are being beneath yourself when you do so. Your first piece contained nonsense, which I could understand only by ascribing to you a lack of knowledge about the material—that you had forgotten Ferdydurke and knew the Diary from some fragment or other in *Kultura*. The second article shows more reading, yet you still stand by your thesis, so simplistically childish and incompatible with my person, category, reality.

“You think that I can be avant-garde and anachronistic, intelligent and stupid, innovative and conventional—that I can write penetrating books and then surrender myself to such lousy banalities as those you attribute to me? No, this doesn’t happen. You conceived of my settling accounts with Polishness shallowly, as if the newspaper were speaking and not art. You did not understand its genesis or its ties with the overall form of my art and my worldview.

“This doesn’t hurt me—it even suits me, because the more you reduce me, the more fiercely will I explode, and the polemic with you will be a polemic with the shallows and the shoals of contemporary Polish thought (in its Catholic variety). But I am amazed that you appear in this role as coryphaeus. This is not for you. You are worthy of a better fate. I write this in all good will, because I assume that ‘personally’ we are not enemies. Please do not be angry with this letter. . . .”

Friday

Tyrmand!* Talent! This is like a barefoot Warsaw wench in the eyes of a teenager, like a fat Warsaw cook in the eyes of a student, like a drunken wh— in the eyes of a street urchin! Dirt and tawdriness but desired and bewitching nevertheless! What sex appeal† this saga has, 300 percent Varsovian, the same that once

* Leopold Tyrmand, Polish émigré writer who lived and died in the United States.

† “Sex appeal” in English in original.

lurked in the doorways of the houses on Hoża or Żelazna—except that then it merely lurked, now it explodes!

A criminal novel, a cheap romance? Why yes, and even worse: a romance from a back alley, full of ramshackle buildings and gutters. Yet this gleams, spurts, sounds, sings. . . . A romantic moon rises above the ruins of the city and brawls reach me from dens, caverns, alleys—again!—how poetic. Tyrmand is the most perfect continuation of our romantic poetry, he inherited its panache, he continues its writing but in keeping with the new—proletarian—history. This is writing at the level of a street ruffian, pimp, racketeer, etc., but the spirit is the same. Not to mention . . . the body. That sinful Polish carcass with all of its little blemishes!

A story, of course, that is lies from A to Z—for the pleasure of the reader and the author alike. Yet how real and Polish is this lying in the area of the imagination, sentiment, and temperament. Do you know what this book is? Vodka, pure and simple. The same vodka that somehow allowed the Poles to bear life before the war, except that then they drank it out of shot glasses while today they are drinking it straight out of the bottle. Out of it comes that murky “fantasy” without which the excess of flops and down-and-outs would be impossible to swallow.

Flipping through Tyrmand’s pages is like walking the prewar streets of Krucza or Hoża, maybe even Żelazna, on the trail of our pummeled history. Even then I knew Tyrmand was inevitable! That some sort of moon must rise romantically and explode! Yes, exactly! Exactly this kind of hooligan, ramshackle, beaten up, drunken and bashed-in mooniness. I remember a passage from X’s letter that I received not long ago (from the States): “My God, this Poland is the grim dream of a madman! That obscurity, suffocation, uncertainty and boredom. . . .” And further: “This new *Pol’sza** makes me laugh because, God is my witness, the Saxon† period has stayed with us the longest and has left the deepest imprint. The nation is ignorant, national democratic, truculent, boorish, lazy, belligerent and half-baked, sanctimonious and ‘infantile,’ and a Kremlin communism has been attached to this mess. Only now how the dust must fly from those besotted heads!”

* Russian for “Poland,” used pejoratively.

† Period when kings from Saxony ruled Poland; judged as the time of greatest decay of state and culture.

Sunday

I do not have much to say on the subject of the victory of Artur Frondizi, who became the president of Argentina; on the other hand, I wish to note that elections do not cease to amaze me. The day on which the vote of the illiterate means as much as the vote of the professor, the vote of the idiot as much as the vote of the wise man, the vote of the lackey as much as the vote of the potentate, the vote of the cutthroat as much as the vote of a virtuous man is for me the most confused of days. I do not understand how this fantastic act can determine, for the next few years, something as important as the government of the country. On what sort of fairy tale does authority base itself? How can this five-adjective fallacy constitute the basis of social being?

Monday

I visited M. in the hospital—he has been dying for many months, more and more in fact but, so his doctors say, he will go on dying for a few more weeks. He lay immobile, head on a pillow, eaten by death piece by piece, each day a little more dead. Was he suffering? Very much?

In the room there were also a few living—I would say, assistants, because they were assisting death . . . with their hapless looks, separated from this martyr by the conviction that there is no help and they must wait until he bites the dust. “Man lives alone and dies alone”—Pascal. Not entirely. Men live in a herd and help each other, only when death strikes does a man see he is alone . . . utterly alone . . . like those expiring animals from which the herd moves away on a winter’s night. Why is human death still like the death of an animal? Why are our agonies so isolated and primitive? Why have you been unable to civilize death?

To think that this horrifying thing, this agony, prowls among us as wild as it was in the first days of creation. Nothing has been accomplished in the course of these thousand years, this wild taboo has not been touched! We cultivate television and use electric blankets, but we die wild. A timid injection by a doctor may shorten suffering on the sly with increased doses of morphine. A shameful measure, too small for the enormous universality of dying. I demand Houses of Death where each person would have at his disposal modern means to an easy death. Where one could die easily, not by throwing oneself under a train or by hanging

oneself from a hook. Where a weary, destroyed man could surrender to the friendly arms of the specialist, so that he could be assured a death without torture or disgrace.

Why not—I ask—why not? Who prevents you from civilizing death? Religions? Ah, this religion . . . today forbidding suicide, yesterday no less vociferously forbidding anesthesia . . . the day before yesterday allowing barter in slaves, persecuting Copernicus and Galileo . . . this Church thundering condemnation, and then retreating discreetly, quietly . . . what sort of guarantee do you have that in a few decades today's condemnation of suicide will not flag and come to nothing? Until that day we are supposed to die like dogs heaving and shuddering—we are supposed to wait patiently, strewing this slow path with millions of agonizing deaths described in obituaries as “after prolonged and agonizing suffering. . . .” But, no, the bill for these “interpretations” of the holy texts is already too high and too bloody and it is better for the Church to give up scholasticism, which intrudes too arbitrarily into life. If believing Catholics want to die in agony—that's their business. But why don't you, atheists, or people only loosely tied to the Church, have the audacity for something as simple as organizing your death? What inhibits you? You have done what you needed to do to move us easily from place to place when changing apartments; but when it comes to moving to the other world, you want it to happen the old way, you want the ancient method of dying.

What muddled clumsiness! And to think that each of you knows exactly: not a single person close to you will escape dying, unless, of course, that person has the extraordinary luck to have a sudden and unexpected death; each will be gradually destroyed until his face becomes unrecognizable—and, knowing this, knowing this inevitable fate, you will not lift a finger to save yourselves the torment. What are you afraid of? That too many people will escape if you crack the gate a bit? Allow those to die who choose death. Do not force anyone to live with the discomfort of dying—this is too vile!

The blackmail contained in artificially impeding death is a dirty trick, an impingement on the most valuable human freedom. For my greatest freedom is contained in my capacity to pose Hamlet's “to be or not to be?” and to answer it freely. The life to which I have been sentenced can trample and disgrace me with the cruelty of a wild beast, but there is in me one splendid and sovereign arrangement—that I can take my own life. If I choose, I do not have to live. I did not ask to

be brought into the world, but at least my right to leave remains . . . and this is the basis of my freedom. And also of my dignity (because to live in dignity means to live voluntarily). But the fundamental human right to death, which ought to be included in the constitution, has succumbed to a gradual and imperceptible confiscation—you have arranged things so that it would be as difficult as possible . . . and as horrifying as possible . . . so that it would be more difficult and more horrifying than things should be at our current level of technology. Not only does this express your blind affirmation of life, which is quite animal—but also your unusually thick hide when it comes to pain you yourself are not yet feeling, and agony that is not yet yours—that stupid nonchalance with which one tolerates dying as long as it is someone else's. All these different little considerations—dogmatic, nationalist, everyday-practical—all this theory, practice, spreads itself like a peacock's tail—as far as possible from death.

Friday

My springs pulsate in a garden whose gate is guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. I cannot enter. I will never get through. I am condemned to an eternal circling of the place where my truest enchantment is sanctified.

I am not allowed in because . . . these springs bubble with shame like fountains! Yet there is the internal imperative: get as close as you can to the sources of your shame! I have to mobilize all my reason, consciousness, discipline, all the elements of form and style, all the techniques of which I am capable, in order to get closer to the mysterious gate of that garden, behind which my shame bursts into flower. What, in this case, is my maturity if not an auxiliary means, a secondary matter?

Eternally the same thing! Dress up in a splendid coat in order to step into an inn on the docks. To use wisdom, maturity, virtue, in order to get close to something that is *just the opposite!*

Sunday

I can't stand Balzac. His work, him. Everything in him is exactly what I don't like and don't want to like. I can't stand it! He is too contradictory and

somehow repulsively, stupidly contradictory! A wise man—and such a dolt! An artist—and how much bad taste from the most distasteful of epochs there is in him! A fatso—yet a conqueror, Don Juan, seedy womanizer. A distinguished man—yet such petit bourgeois vulgarity and such nouveau riche chutzpah! A realist—but also a lousy, romantic dreamer. . . . Perhaps these antinomies should not disturb me; I know their role in life, in art . . . yes, only that in Balzac even antinomy becomes obese, repulsive, seedy, fat, and worse than coarse.

I can't stand his *Human Comedy*. To think how easily the best soup gets spoiled when one adds a spoonful of old grease or a bit of toothpaste to it. One drop of bad, pretentious, melodramatic Balzac is enough to make these volumes and his entire personality unpalatable. They say that he is a genius, that one must be tolerant because of this. The women who slept with his brilliant obesity know something about this tolerance because in order to sleep with a genius, they must have had to overcome many abominations in themselves. But I am not sure if this calculation is worth it and if it is in harmony with nature. In the realm of personal relations—such as our relations with artists—sometimes the trifle has more meaning than monoliths of monumental service. It is easier to hate someone for picking his nose than to love him for composing a symphony. For the trifle is characteristic and describes the person in his everyday dimension.

Monday

On 4 February of this year ('58), I finished *Pornografia*. This is what I have called it for the time being. I am not promising that the title will stay. I am in no hurry to publish it. Too many of my books have appeared in print lately.

One of my most persistent needs, during the writing of this quite pornographic—in some places—*Pornografia* was: to pass the world through youth; to translate it into the language of youth, that is, into the language of attraction . . . To soften it with youth . . . To spice it with youth—so it allows itself to be violated.

The intuition that dictated this to me is probably based on the conviction that a Man is helpless against the world . . . by being only power, not beauty . . . and, furthermore, in order for him to be able to possess reality, it must first be put through a being that can be attractive . . . that is, that can surrender itself . . . a lower, weaker being. Here there is a choice—woman or youth. The woman I

dismiss because of the child, that is, because her function is too specific. Youth is what is left. And here one comes upon extreme formulas: maturity *for* youth, youth *for* maturity.

What is this? What have I written? Whether or not the accent I put on the Spirit of Youth and its Doings is worth anything . . . and how much will be hard to tell for a while.

IX

Sunday, Santiago del Estero

Yesterday, late in the evening, I finally reached Santiago after many hours of the train's clattering and rolling: first through the green lowlands of the Paraná, then across the entire province of Santa Fe, until, finally (after many, many kilometers marked by poles that sped away from the train as it stole by somewhere near that lake—so mysterious to me—of Mar Chiquita in northern Córdoba), a desert expanse overgrown with gnarled trees began that great white blot on the map that stretches over tens of thousands of square kilometers of land and that means there is not a living soul between settlements. The train speeds along. Through the windows of the train car, hermetically sealed because of the all-pervasive sand, there is nothing to look at except those miserable little trees (growing out of the sand) and the sparse grass. Night falls, and sometimes, when I put out the light on the window with my hand, those same trees flit before my eyes. How many more hours remain of this trip and through what sort of surroundings? I don't know, I fell asleep.

And finally: Santiago.

One of the oldest cities in Argentina. Founded by Francisco de Aguirre, supposedly on 23 December 1553. The beginnings of local history are mythical, distant and fantastic, even crazy, almost like a dream. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Spanish conqueror, his head bursting with legends and blinded by the desire for gold and precious stones, tore his way into the soft Indian tribes (called the Huries, Lules Vilelas, Guaycurues, Sanavirones) living in these lands. These maniacs and rapists, criminals and heroes must have been exceptionally courageous to immerse themselves in an unknown space that did not

obstruct the imagination. Fourteen soldiers, their heads muddled with tales of bejeweled cities, detached themselves from Sebastian Cabot's expedition in the Fort of Sancti Spiritus and blundered their way into the environs of Santiago for the first time, whereby they discovered the neighboring province of Tucumán, known today as the "Garden of Argentina." Diego de Rojas also searched after the mythical treasure called "the treasure of the Caesars" in 1542; and he was followed by Francisco de Mendoza, who marched on the fairy-tale cities, which were supposed to have been called "Trapalanda," "Yungulo," and "Lefal." Afterward came Captain Nicolas de Heredia, Captain Francisco de Villagra, and about ten others. But this rather recent past is prehistory here, these are the murky beginnings that have been blurred in the confused, unsettled, or unknown geography, in the swarming of wandering tribes, in the enormous, absorbing, but indistinct expanse over which the imagination of these conquerors galloped, dark, stubborn, determined . . . and isolated from Spain by that enormous expanse of water. It was as if they were on another planet, free and accompanied only by the horse, which here became an alien and terrifying creature.

The Hotel Savoy, where I was assigned an unsightly room without a window and with doors that opened only onto the corridor—you have to leave a light on during the day. I washed up in my "private bathroom," in which the only fixtures native to a bathroom were a faucet and a shower. The evening meal, however, was quite satisfactory: a wonderful chicken in sauce and a carafe of heavy, red wine.

Monday

I wanted to add that the day before yesterday, before I went to sleep, something happened to me, something rather indistinct. . . . I really don't know how to take this and I am shaken. . . .

After supper, which I ate in the hotel, I went out onto the square. I sat on a bench, concealed by trees and bushes, great palm fronds over my head, and I was somewhat stunned by the lightness of the apparel worn by this hot, starry night, its laughter, its naked shoulders, while I was still in the damp winter of Buenos Aires and my thick winter jacket still warmed me! Such violent change: there it was harsh and cool, while here it was sensual and, at least so it seemed, carefree and

lighthearted. . . . Suddenly, it was as if I had immersed myself in the South (here it is called the “North” because it is in the southern hemisphere).

The square turned round me like a carousel, with a laughing Saturday crowd from which enormous dark eyes and raven hair stared at me . . . scintillating laughter . . . limbs light as a dancer’s . . . cheerful voices, free and kind. . . . What’s this? What’s this? The square is alight with the teeth of distant youth . . . for I am not here, but elsewhere . . . my remoteness (because I still see the crowds on Corrientes and hear the honking of the cars) made them distant, even though they were right before me. But I had not yet arrived. I watched as if I had no right to look, as if I were spying. . . .

Silence rings in my ears. The eerie silence of a distant place—all the sounds are mute like in an old film: I hear nothing. Sound frozen at the threshold of its realization.

In this silence, the parade on the square mutely intensifies itself in a revelation of corporeal splendor, in a stunning play of eyes and lips, hands and legs. The snake stretching itself before me bursts into rainbows of beauties the likes of which I have not seen before in Argentina and, dumbfounded, I ask myself: where does this come from, here in Santiago?

At the same time I discover that *this does not exist*, the taste of its absence is overwhelming. I am felled by the sensation of its nonexistence and desperately lost in unfulfillment.

Sunday

Beauty! You will rise where you are sown! And you will be as you were sown!

(Do not believe in the beauty of Santiago. It is a lie. I have made it up!)

Monday

The sunlight is blinding and full of colors, as if filtered through stained glass. It seems to saturate objects with colors. Light and shadow. The aggressive blue of the sky. Trees laden with golden and enormous *pomedos*, blooming red . . . yellow. . . . People walk around without jackets.

I went to Miss Canal Feihoo's place via a street dark with shade on one side and white with light on the other. She is the sister of a writer who lives in Buenos Aires. An older person full of the kind of suspicion (I can see this right away) that mistresses of households have for restaurant meals that "are concocted who knows how" and for globetrotters who are also "concocted who knows how." But she received my request (I asked her to help put me in contact with the local literati) very kindly. *Como no!* she had said very quickly and simply. "There are a few, they even publish a magazine. I will call them immediately. . . . My brother meets with them whenever he visits."

When I returned to my room, I tried to get my impressions from the previous night under control. They were exaggerated! I had been seeing things. . . . It's true that here you see that "loveliness" so common in Argentina, there is a lot of it, maybe even more than anywhere else . . . but there is also some sort of Indian difference, a coloring that I have not seen until now . . . but should this be a revelation, no, this is no revelation. Besides, the perpetual problem of *making contact* with a new city and securing oneself company absorbed me and jarred me out of my ecstasy.

Tuesday

In the afternoon I have a rendezvous with Santucho (one of the literary figures and the editor of *Dimension*) in the Café Ideal.

It smells of the East. Not a minute goes by without having some insistent little urchin thrust lottery tickets in your face. Then an old man with a million wrinkles does the same: he pushes tickets into your face as if he were a child. An old woman, strangely shriveled into an Indian design, enters and she too pokes tickets into your face. A child grabs you by the leg and wants to shine your shoes, and another with a beautiful Indian head of hair offers you a newspaper. A soft, hot, lithe miracle, a girl-odalisque-houri, holds a blind man by the arm and guides him between the tables. Then someone jabs you in the back: a beggar with a small-boned, triangular face. I would not be surprised if a goat, mule, or donkey pranced into this café.

There are no waiters. You have to serve yourself.

A somewhat humiliating situation developed that nonetheless I can hardly pass over in silence.

I sat with Santucho, who is heavysset and has a passionate, stubborn olive face focused on the past and rooted in the past. He droned on about the Indian essence of these parts. Who are we? We don't know. We do not know ourselves. We are not Europeans. European thought, the European spirit, are something alien that invades us, as the Spaniards once did. It is our misfortune that we have the culture of that "Western world" of yours which we have soaked up like paint, so that today we must use European thinking and a European tongue, for lack of our own Indio-American one, our lost substance. We are barren, because we have to think about ourselves in a European way! . . . I listened to this somewhat suspect line of reasoning but was really watching a *chango* (sitting two stools away from us) who was with a sweet young thing. They were drinking: he, vermouth and she, lemonade. They sat with their backs to me and I could only guess at how they looked from certain clues, such as the arrangement and immobile play of their limbs, that difficult to describe inner freedom of nimble bodies. And I don't know why (was this some distant reflex from *Pornografía*, which I had finished writing not long ago, or a result of my excitement in this city?), it is enough to say that I had a vision of their invisible faces as beautiful, absolutely beautiful and probably elegant and artistic, like movie stars . . . suddenly something happened as if there, between the two of them, they embodied the highest intensity of local beauty, here in Santiago . . . and this seemed all the more likely because, indeed, the very outline of this pair, as I saw it from where I was sitting, was as lively as it was sumptuous.

Finally I could not stand it any longer. Excluding myself before Santucho (who was carrying on about European imperialism), I left the table on the pretext of getting a drink of water but really to stare into the face of the secret that was tormenting me. To look into their faces: I was sure the secret would reveal itself like an apparition from Mount Olympus. In its own sublime elegance! Divinely weightless like a young colt! O what disillusionment! The *chango* was poking at his teeth with a toothpick and was saying something to his girl, who was eating the nuts that went with his vermouth. There was nothing more, nothing, the scene was so barren that I almost tripped, as if my adoration had been knocked out from under me!

Wednesday

Scads of children and dogs!

I have never seen so many and such gentle dogs! If a dog barks here, it is merely in jest.

The children are all darkly unkempt and skipping around . . . never have I seen children who are so “picture perfect” . . . and delightful! Two little boys walk in front of me with their arms around each other’s necks and tell one another secrets. But *how* they do it! One of them points something out with his finger to a gawking band of children. Another solemnly sings to a stick which he has poked through a candy wrapper.

Yesterday I saw the following in the park: a four-year-old toddler challenged a little girl to a boxing match. She hadn’t the slightest idea what that meant but, being taller and heavier, she gave it to him for all she was worth. A little group of two and three year olds in long shirts grabbed one another by the hands and began to jump up and down, shouting in her honor: No-na! No-na! No-na!

Thursday

A strange repetition of the scene from the day before yesterday with Santucho in the café, although this time with a slight variation.

The restaurant is in the Hotel Plaza. I am sitting at the table of Dr. P.M., a Santiago lawyer, who represents the estates of wisdom contained in his library. With us was his *barra*, or group of café cronies: one doctor and a few business men. . . . I, armed with the best intentions, give myself up to a conversation about politics when . . . uh oh! I am once again distracted by another little couple straight out of a fairy tale . . . and there they are, sinking into one another, like one lake spilling over into another! Again, *belleza*! But I must hold up my end of the conversation at the table, I must contribute to this soup simmering with the platitudes (spiced with hatred toward the U.S and with a panic-stricken fear of the “temptations of imperialism”) of South American nationalists: yes, unfortunately, I must say something to this guy even though I am watching and listening to the beauty taking place not far from me—I, a slave, in love with death and passionate,

I, an artist. . . . And again I ask myself how can it be that such marvels sit in this restaurant just a step away from . . . well, from this garrulous Argentina. . . . “We have always demanded morality in international relations. . . .” “Yankee and British imperialism tries to . . .” “We are no longer a colony! . . .” “All of this is pronounced by my adversary (and not just today); I, on the other hand, cannot understand, cannot understand, cannot understand. . . .” “Why does the United States grant loans to Europe but not to us? . . .”

“The history of Argentina shows that we valued dignity above all else! . . .”

Oh, if only someone could yank the platitudes out of this otherwise appealing people! This bourgeoisie, sipping wine here in the evening and maté during the day, is so whiny! If I were to tell them that compared with other nations they live snug as bugs on their splendid *estancias* as big as half of Europe, and if I were to add that not only are they not hurting but that Argentina is the *estanciero* of nations, an “oligarch” proudly sprawled over his splendid territories . . . I would grievously offend them! Better not. . . . So this is exactly what I tell them to their faces! What do I care!

There, there at the table is the Argentina that has beguiled me—it is quiet but has the sound of great art—no, no, not this one, which is garrulous, indolent, and overpoliticized. Why am I not sitting over there with them? My place is over there! Next to the girl who is like a tremulous black and white bouquet, next to the young man who looks like Rudolph Valentino! . . . *Belleza!*

But . . . what is happening! Nothing. Nothing, to the extent that even now I do not know how and what it was that reached me from them . . . maybe a word caught midway . . . an accent . . . flashing eyes. . . . Enough so that suddenly I was informed.

That whole *belleza* was just like everything else! Like the table, chair, waiter, plate, tablecloth, like our discussion, it was in no way different—it was the same—the same world, made of the same material.

Thursday

Beauty? In Santiago? Where in the devil from?

Thursday

What could possibly happen to you if a train takes you to a small town that is remote . . . off the beaten track . . . unknown . . . colorful?

What could possibly happen to you in a small town that put up no resistance . . . that was too congenial . . . or too timid . . . too naive?

What could possibly happen to you in a place where nothing opposes you and nothing is capable of becoming your limits?

Saturday

First I write down the facts.

I was sitting on a bench, in a park, and next to me sat a *chango* (apparently from the Escuela Industrial) and his older companion. "If you had gone out wh—ing," the *chango* explained to his companion, "you would have had to scrape up at least fifty. So I should get at least that much!"

How am I to understand this? I am convinced that here, in Santiago, everything can be understood in two ways: as extreme innocence or extreme license. I would not be surprised to learn that the words I overheard were quite innocent, like a joke in a pupil's conversation. But something a little more perverse is not out of the question. Nor is this archperversity excluded: that those words, having the meaning that I attributed to them, were, nevertheless, innocent . . . and even in that case the greatest scandal would depend on the most perfect innocence. That fifteen-year-old *chango* was obviously from a "good home." His eyes shone with health, kindness, and gaiety. He had not said that wantonly but with the absolute conviction of a person defending a just law. And, after all, he was laughing . . . that local laughter, certainly not excessive but rather engaging.

A thin, iridescent, colorful, laughing face.

Am I allowing myself to be fooled by the appearances of a nonexistent depravity? It is difficult to get at anything . . . here everything becomes a jungle in which I lose my way. . . .

That girl, barely grown, is going around with a soldier from the eighteenth infantry regiment? . . .

Another *changito*, who made my acquaintance in five minutes, told me how his father had died not long ago. If he told me this (as it appeared) to entertain

and amuse me with an interesting tale, then this would show that he is a decent and hospitable boy . . . but it would also prove that he is a monster. . . .

A monster?

That transparent, colorful, and blinding sunlight everywhere: in the spaces between trees, in the luminous cascades and streams between the walls and crowns of trees. The goodness of that Santiago. Its equanimity. Its sedate smile. Eight children and three dogs around a palm tree. Ladies are out doing the shopping. Trees covered with violet or red blossoms peek from around walls, and a *motoneta* comes skimming down the middle of the road. The kind glances of Indian eyes. Swarms of bicycles. The sun sets. The streets close with distant landscapes of dark verdure.

On the bench a *niña* is sitting, her figure straight out of a painting, fetlock, smooth wave, gleaming hair . . . but, in addition to this, she is beautifully and strangely elongated . . . where did she get this, from what mixture of races . . . her beau lies on a bench with his head in her lap, looking at the sky. He has a white windbreaker on and an almost triangular face, young and beautiful, without sin. And even if they succumbed to a crime on this bench, it would take place in some other dimension. Is the tone too high, too high-pitched for me to hear? Silence.

Sunday

This imperceptible madness, this innocent sin, those dark, languid eyes. . . . I am attracted by madness, I go to meet it, I! At my age! Catastrophe! For what reason other than age am I attracted to madness . . . expecting that it will revive me, as I was, in all of my creative sensuality!

I would receive sin which was and is inspiration with open arms because art is begotten of sin!

Except that . . . there is no sin here. . . . What I would give to catch this little town in the act! Nothing. There's just the sun. And the dogs.

That accursed body of theirs . . .

Monday

That accursed, easy body of theirs!

Is this the heritage of those naked tribes who bent their backs so easily

under the whip? When I complained to Santucho that here the body “does not sing,” and that nothing here wants to rise, he answered:

—That’s the Indian’s revenge.

—What revenge?

—Oh yes. Surely you can see how much of the Indian there is in all of us. Those tribes of Huries and Lules that were settled here were degraded by the Spanish and reduced to the role of slave, servant. . . . The Indian had to defend himself against the advantage of his master. He lived consumed by the thought not to submit to that superiority. How did he defend himself? By making fun of superiority, by sneering at his master, he nurtured a talent for poking fun at everything that aspired to superiority and rule. He demanded equality, mediocrity. In every flight, in every spark, he saw the desire to dominate. . . . And now you have the result. Now everything here is so ORDINARY. . . .

This thickset, stubborn Santiago cacique is wrong, however. Everything here happens without sin, but also without jeering, sneering, malice, or irony. The jokes are friendly and one senses goodness in the very tone of the language. It’s just that . . . it will remain the secret of South America that decency, goodness, and the commonplace are becoming very aggressive and even dangerous! I came to the conclusion that when that goodness accidentally hits me from the side with its laughter, or when those boundless, inscrutable, and gentle eyes of a slave impale me, I begin to have the vague feeling that I am meeting a masked threat.

Tuesday

Donkeys . . . goats . . . often remind me of Italy or the southern Pyrenees, the South in general.

This is where the thought comes from that, in my settling of accounts with this South America, there are more of the Nordic’s fears than anything else. It is this shock, from the collision of North and South, that bothered me so much in Europe. Where the metaphysics of the North tumbles head over heels into the corporeal concreteness of the South.

No, this is not true, not true . . . and it is time to disclose the monstrous sensuality of the North. I, for example . . . would I want to be metaphysics? . . . Wouldn’t I agree to be the body?

Oh! I am mortally in love with the body! The body is almost my only touchstone. No spirit can redeem corporeal ugliness, and a man physically unattractive will always hail from a race of monsters even though he may be Socrates himself! . . . Ah! how badly I need that consecration of the body! I divide humanity into the physically attractive and the physically repugnant, and the line between them is so distinct that it never ceases to amaze me. And even though I can love someone ugly (Socrates), I would never be capable of *being in love*, that is, of drawing myself into the magic circle, without a pair of divinely corporeal, attractive . . . enfolding . . . arms.

Do you want another confession from me, a Nordic? My metaphysics exists to become flesh . . . constantly . . . without respite. . . . It is like an avalanche with a natural tendency to head for the bottom . . . the Spirit? I will say that my greatest pride as an artist is not at all in inhabiting the kingdom of the Spirit, but in the fact that I have not broken relations with the flesh. I take more pride in the fact that I am sensual than in the fact that I am knowledgeable about the Spirit. My passion, my sinfulness and darkness, are more valuable to me than my light. More? Should I keep confessing these things? I will tell you, therefore, that the greatest artistic achievement of my life is not the few books I have written, but only and simply that I have not turned my back on "illicit love." Ah! because to be an artist means to be mortally, incurably, passionately, but also wildly in love and without wedlock. . . .

"And the word became flesh" . . . who could possibly exhaust the radical contents of these words?

Tuesday

Is the body of an Indian more of a body? Is their slave body more of a body? Is slavery closer to love out of wedlock?

Questions that you, Santiago, drown in the twitter of birds.

Thursday

Why did I come to Santiago?

To avoid the damp winter in Buenos Aires because of the poor state of my bronchial passages?

Or perhaps . . .

Witold Gombrowicz chose Santiago del Estero to avoid the damp winter in Buenos Aires. It turned out shortly thereafter, however, that all this talk about his health was a pretext and that the real, hidden motive of his journey was different. Gombrowicz, checkmated by approaching old age, sought violent rescue and knew that if he did not establish some link with youth within the next few years, nothing could save him. In addition, it was an urgent matter of life or death to find some sort of new, unknown connection with the freshness of that new life . . . a mad idea, because it was dictated by a perilous situation that offered no other way out. And at first, it seemed to our traveler that, who knows, perhaps the most fantastic dream could come true, that is how docile and kind Santiago seemed . . . that is how easy . . . soon, however, that easiness would bare its teeth . . . white as they might be!

X

Friday, Santiago

(Witold Gombrowicz, having arrived in Santiago, succumbed to a wave of belated eroticism, the same as before, years ago. . . . But this time the wave was strengthened by the miasma of this city of Indian blood, easy beauty, and hot sun. And this wave, all the more scandalous because of its belatedness, bore him away again into the vortex of foolishness and shame! But his mastery of these types of situations (which have become his specialty, because an artist must act on the borderline between shame and foolishness) shone once again . . . when, to be exact, instead of giving himself up passively to this madness like any ordinary drunk, he took this madness in hand and took to ordering it, thereby changing intoxication into drama. This, however, happened with the help of the pronouncement that he, Gombrowicz, he, Doctor Faustus, had come to Santiago with the aim of concluding a great discovery, that he had finally decided to find a way of linking old age to youth, so that a generation that was nearing its end could, in its twilight, draw new substance from youth, and experience the beginning once again . . . and, who knows, friends, if it is not within our power to find this mysterious key, which would allow our dying to experience, in its farewell, a taste of new life, to link ourselves to birth! Imagine! If, at first glance, salvation seems possible, it can be contained only in this!

This is a pronouncement that is probably somewhat false . . . because, just between you and me, he did not come to Santiago for this reason. Nor could this Faustian swagger seem like the real thing for even five minutes of his mortally-stripped-of-all-illusions sobriety. Yet he has raised this lying to the high heavens without hesitation and unfurled it above his head like a banner on the basis of the following calculation: that, first of all, this lying stops being a lie because of its naive and disarming obviousness, and that, second, even though it is false, it contains something so real and harmonious with nature that it is more difficult to resist this mystification than to resist many other obvious truths. That is why, once again, he threw himself into a mad and aging attack with the shout: "Onward toward youth! To youth! To get at it, experience it, and destroy that barrier of age!")

Saturday

. . . the naked back under the whip, black head of curly hair hunched into the shoulders, eyes glancing sideways, ears alert to the swish of the strap . . . This is the poison that is killing me in Santiago. They have this in their blood! In their look. In their smile.

Spears, swords, spurs, armor, the plumed helmets of the white, bearded conquerors invading the naked defenselessness of those Huries, Lules, Vilelas three or four hundred years ago . . . And a hundred years ago? In his memoirs, General Paz describes how in the 1840s, the governor ordered that two Indians have their throats cut daily. . . . These were Indians ("whose eyes I often saw," writes the general) chosen from the heaps of rotting prisoners in the dungeon and then led out to be slaughtered . . . sadism and masochism still play in that colored air and dance in the streets. Their stench poisons me. Such is the perversity of Santiago!

Mix a little slave with the most common of cities . . . but . . . I could be wrong.

Sunday

Tandil! Ah, Tandil! That obsession! Santiago is like Tandil: the same four-cornered square, similar streets, and the same café, the same church, the same bank, it's just that they are situated differently. Where in Tandil there was a Banco

de la Provincia, here there is a Hotel Palace. I walk almost automatically to the bank and I bang my nose into: a hotel. As if I were in a Tandil that is not Tandil but something maliciously tangled, a trap. . . .

Oh Tandil, with your cold, oceanic wind and your stone amphitheaters! . . .

(The author of Pornografía is becoming obsessed with Tandil as an escape from the importunate and tempting horrors of Santiago.)

My friends, the minors from Tandil! Yesterday a letter came from Dipi and it is difficult to express how easy it is to breathe after that letter . . . here in Santiago! . . . I include it in order to give you a sense of the tone of my relationship with them, one of the tones of it . . . and because what is written there, that Gize (otherwise known as “Quilombo”) *te adora* (adores you), is very important to me. This Dipi (alias “Asno”) is sixteen years old and the author of an unpublished novel, a play (which a theater in La Plata is producing), and a few stories:

“Cadaver!

“I was in La Plata and spoke with the director of my play. I have not told you anything about it. It is a farce as they claim, apparently well constructed from a theatrical point of view. In my opinion, it is too simple to be literature. As theater it can be pleasant, but at the present time, I feel that it is of doubtful value . . . it would flatter me to have it put on, but I am not satisfied with it.

“Your epileptico-elliptic letter twisted all our necks into corkscrews. Quilombo has sworn revenge.

“Gize is turning things out, possessed as he is by *Ferdydurke*. If this comes out brilliantly, well, all the better! But I fear that you will turn him into a Gombrowicz. You know that Quilombo is feverishly passionate and that he adores you. He has succumbed completely to your ha! ha! ‘genius.’ Do not be taken aback by the quotation marks; I acknowledge your genius but then you know my cynicism, my characteristic doubting, negating, poking fun . . . I make fun of you, too (while imagining your sniggers at my expense), but it’s as if I were laughing at myself. Do you remember how we understood each other in this, surprisingly, when you were visited by momentary weakness and were walking so pained because of Gize’s arrest? Don’t try to squirm your way out of this, don’t deny it! As for Gize, he moves in Polish, thinks in Polish, and

practically speaks Polish. He is really very 'artistic'—perhaps even more than you think. He wants to divide time here into 'pre-Witold' and 'post-Witold' epochs. Well, this is a slight exaggeration, though I admit I have gained a great deal from this Witold epoch. Your sober, elemental, violent, and somewhat deceitful (now don't get upset!) criticism has taught me a lot.

"Write. I would like to know how you are doing. I am brutally curious. But I am also becoming more reasonable in my childhood, from which I prefer not to abdicate as of yet. That is why I want to know what is happening with your expiring life. It is common sense that makes me ask, even though this may appear strange . . . the point is that my common sense submits me to convention and compels me to ask what is new with you . . . because, frankly speaking, you yourself will understand this, I don't really care, because I respect you but I do not adore you. I am far from adoration *à la* Gize. I see that this passage has turned out to be quite abstruse. It's because I am tired. Are all those women still in love with you? Maybe you could pass one on to me, as I am suffering from a lack of women in spite of Fuchi, Puchi, and Tuchi.

"It is sad that a GREAT WRITER writes 'holla' instead of 'olla.' It is a great shame and dishonor: after which you ought to KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT FOREVER! We were rolling on the floor with laughter, we and dozens of other people who read your letter. *Ciao!*

Your,
Donkey"

This donkey is named Jorge Di Paola. I christened him the donkey in an attack of sarcasm and from then on he became *asno*, to his friends, who were really tickled by this name.

I don't know if I have done the right thing by including this letter. . . .

(Why did he include it? Was it only to show that he was popular in Tandil? But there is clearly the more sophisticated intention of elevating himself, setting himself apart, which could be formulated as follows: Peek-a-boo! Do you older folks now see how much more intimate my relations with young people are than with you! And how much more important to me a letter like this is, in which there is nothing out of the ordinary, than your most sophisticated epistolary feats. . . .

Once again, therefore, Gombrowicz appears to us as someone who will

in no way occupy his rightful place in society and who is always plotting with other elements, groups, and phases of development.)

Wednesday

I have read this letter many times. And I doubt that it will be understood that this and a few other letters from Tandil have become an escape and haven from Santiago. “You know that Quilombo adores you.” Those words sounded like a prelude to hope for me, this was youth showing itself in another, less cruel, role . . . and even in a friendly role. . . . Therefore, I said to myself, “adoration” is not impossible between him and me?

Quilombo, alias Gize, also called Colimba (this in folk dialect means time served in the army as well as “recruit”). Our meeting was the result of casual circumstances that were, nevertheless, deeply and movingly artistic. At first, a weakening. When I got to know him in Tandil, in the Café Rex, I was somewhat weakened by an imminent angina attack and my sensitivity was tremulously, painfully tense. Second, there was his stuttering. That is: he stuttered. . . . I did not know at the beginning what made him so likable, it was only on the second day that I understood that, as a result of his stuttering, he must make a special effort to speak which, together with his Spanish face, alive like an adventure film, bestowed a special amiability upon him.

The angina attack, along with a fever reaching 40°C, kept me bedridden. I lived alone in a small house close to Calvario, on the outskirts of town, and I remember no more desperate days than those that accompanied my recuperation. There was no help from any quarter. I knew that nothing would save me. The days were rainy and windy. Through the window I could see the mountain peak torn to shreds by clouds, or perhaps it was the clouds that were torn to shreds by the mountain peak. And one day was especially terrifying: it came after a whole night’s downpour, almost unlike day at all, changed into water, cold, fog, winds, and a white damp darkness. I could see just one dripping tree enveloped in fog, blurred and indistinct, and only that tree, dripping and monotonous. . . . That day my neurasthenic despair reached such a pitch that if I had had the means for an easy death at hand, who knows if I would not have liquidated myself. I knew that the illness was beyond me, but I also knew that my health was worse than my illness. I

had reached a state in which health is no less repugnant, and perhaps even more repugnant because it confirms an existence already infected with death and therefore condemned.

Then suddenly I heard a fist pounding on the kitchen door, and Colimba walked in, dripping wet! He got through the water that had been pouring from the sky and, what's worse, he sloshed through the street, forded his way through the slurping and sticky mud until he finally got here, fighting the wind, rain, and cold, and he was cheerful! Witold, *che, como estas?*! His face was rich with adventure, like a film, swinging acrobatically from seriousness to jest, from groan to joy, from poetry to rambunctiousness, from compassion to anger, his face immediately filled the whole room and I probably never had a stronger sense *that the potential of someone's joy is not inaccessible, that one can gain access to someone's joy, if it is young*. That youth is something that it is possible to possess (Please don't make stupid jokes out of this!). It is as if some sort of Wave Mechanics completed and enlarged my feeling of well-being. I felt that I was not just a concrete individual, destined for destruction, but a wave . . . a current, stretched out between the rising and setting generations. Sometimes my hopelessness is visited by a spark of conviction, a completely palpable certainty that *salvation is not impossible*. This is exactly what I was feeling while Gize prepared my food and opened the bottle he had brought.

Even though neither he nor I said a word about it . . . I knew that his coming was the result of his great concern for me, and his adulation. . . . He had come because he was charmed! Enchanted! What's more, I know that his spending his precious little amount of free time with me meant that he was taking it away from his girlfriend, who did not yet completely bore him. . . . How amusing therefore: I, a man of certain age, was a stronger magnet for this young man than a beautiful girl and my charms were stronger than love! What was it in me that could equal a young girl's charms?

The repulsive and sneering comicality of this comparison was the reason I preferred to think about this only with one little corner of my mind, but even that was enough for me to realize that this repulsiveness was the real source of deepest joy. For when an old man looks at a young man, usually it is difficult for him to understand that the young man can have his own tastes and needs, completely independent of what seems the most important and the most characteristic in him

to the older man. It seems, for example, to that older person that only the young can appeal to the young, only the handsome to the handsome . . . until, suddenly, it turns out that youth likes old age instead . . . or likes some special category of ugliness . . . that, in a word, it takes a liking to something completely unpredictable and even irreconcilable with its essence (such as the older man sees it). So that, at first, it irritates and offends us, as if it were a betrayal and, what is more, some sort of corruption and warping of an ideal. But not long afterward we are overcome by a wild joy and we begin to understand that not all is lost in such a case! So, therefore, we both push away this realization in revulsion and receive it with joy as a miracle and sign of grace.

In order to gauge accurately one certain, dirty, and repugnant aspect of this joy, one should realize that I acted toward Gize somewhat like an old woman, delighted that his hunger outweighed his revulsion, because, in the end, certain attractive and repulsive forces were at play at the same time. . . . Yet, on the other hand, in order to measure the entire generous splendor of this arrangement in nature one must understand that no one decides about his own attractiveness and that it is exclusively a matter of one's taste. If I, therefore, was attractive to him, then I was and that was that. . . . and I was, too, because I possessed a technique, style, level, horizon, and quality of which he could not even dream at his age because I wrote books that dazzled, because with each accent, face, joke, game, I led him into an unseen and unheard of superiority. What did it matter that I knew my misery? I charmed him! Just one more example from the area of physics in order to make palpable the infernal slipperiness of this conclusion: imagine yourselves endowed with a defect, let us say you have donkey ears. Well, fine, but what if your ears fascinate the princess and what if she falls in love with you because of them? What then? If you cut off the ears, which you don't like, you will stop being attractive to someone whom you like. What should you choose? Isn't it more important that you should appeal to someone who appeals to you rather than appeal to yourself?

And if some possibility of salvation did exist for me in all of this, didn't it depend on this very thing?

I understood it well: my "existence" fascinated him, while his life *in crudo* appealed to me. I adored his freshness and he adored what I had made of myself, what I had become as I developed. The closer I was to death, the more he adored

me, because he saw all the more of my already expiring existence. Therefore our understanding would have been possible only if that which is characteristic of youth, that which is hot and impatient, the desire to exist, if that could be exchanged for the hunger for life that is particular to aging. . . . Exchange existence for life? . . . Stop, perhaps there is something to this, perhaps something can be done using this approach, think a minute, don't let this thought get away. . . .

Thursday

(So there, in the end, a redemptive thought came to him, an exchange of existence [that is, a formed life, just as man had made it] for that passively natural life, in its young, initial phase.)

*This thought moved him quite perceptibly. Would it be an exaggeration to conceive of all his writing as a search for the elixir of youth? In *Ferdydurke* [written when the author was not yet thirty] he had already been thrilled by the forbidden delight: that man could be created by man . . . by a younger man, right? This in itself was a way of regaining youth. In *The Marriage* he exploits this specific generosity to its core when he exhorts the younger to surrender himself . . . to kill himself for old age. In *Pornografia* he is excited by the fact that youth exists for those older and vice versa.*

*No other world needs youth as much as Gombrowicz's world . . . and one could say that this is a world built by "taking youth into consideration." And if up until now he sought salvation in the violence perpetrated on the younger by the older [*The Marriage*] or finally in the coordination of these two forms of violence [*Pornografia*], now we see him in *Santiago*, overcome by the thought that came to him in *Tandil* about the possibility of exchanging life for existence, which simply means that two separate categories of human beings exist and that they desire one another. . . .)*

Thursday

Yes . . . but our rapprochement was, as I said earlier, a coincidence above all else . . . a mere coincidence. . . . If not for the stuttering and the effort to get through the bad weather outside . . . if he had not caught me ill . . .

To this was added the magic of names. “Gize,” I like that diminutive, it was good for a pathetic apostrophe, I like to call out, dramatically: “Gize!”

This lent our conversations distinction and luster. On one occasion, my tongue slipped and made “Quilombo” out of “Colimba.” “Quilombo” means “bordello” in Spanish, except that it is not as vulgar and can be used jokingly and metaphorically to mean disorder, confusion, a nuthouse. Used as one’s name, it becomes very amusing and perversely poetic. *Che, Quilombo, como estas?* I would say with refined politeness and this would establish a distance between us that facilitated intimacy.

I could not get close to him without Form, without the structure of Form. And he (also being an artist with a passion for drawing, but at his age it was not yet clear whether this was genuine talent or mere ability) also demanded Form of me.

How moving was the passage in his letter from Tandil: “Believe me . . . whenever I remember last summer . . . that house, the girls . . . your sad angina when a certain angelic ‘Quilombo’ took care of you . . . I get sad just reminiscing about it.

“And then your move to Park Mountain and my ‘imaginary’ as you said, angina . . . and recuperation . . . our talks . . . walks in the sunlight . . . my drawings . . . That was a summer I shall never forget. Never!”

I wrote back: “Ah, my unforgettable Quilombo! You have managed to give these insignificant events the stature of myth and legend. . . .”

Tuesday

My talk “Contemporary Issues” took place yesterday. I gave this talk out of sheer boredom and to make contact with the intellectuals of Santiago. I did not foresee that this would end demonically.

I tried to characterize current thought by saying, for example, that it is “reduced,” that slowly it is becoming accustomed to “dual interpretation,” that we feel it as something “acting not only on the outside, but also on the inside, creating the one who thinks.” I referred to science, quanta, Heisenberg and wave mechanics. Husserl, and Marcel. My merciful God! I spoke as I always do, as even the finest speakers do, that is, pretending that I was quite at home with this material and that this is my daily bread and butter, when, in reality, any indiscreet ques-

tioner could have laid me flat on my back. But I have grown so accustomed to mystification! And I also know that this kind of mystification is not scorned even by the most prominent! I was doing my part, then, and it was coming out pretty well. Suddenly, in the audience, behind the first row of people, I noticed a hand resting on someone's knee. . . .

Another hand, closer by and belonging to someone else, was resting on or was hooked by the fingers to the back of a chair . . . and suddenly it was as if the two palms had grabbed me, until I was terrified, until I began to choke . . . and so again the body in me spoke up. But I looked closer: the hands belonged to students who had come from Tucumán and that calmed me down immediately. I had a vision of Tandil, I knew there was no reason to be afraid, these were well-wishing, friendly hands. I looked around the auditorium once again, all of the hands were friendly and, although corporeal, they were nevertheless at the service of the Spirit, these were hands belonging to intellectuals. . . . This thicket of spiritualized hands did wonders for me. It was probably the first time in my life that I lost that portion of acting, bluster, artifice that had clamped onto my spirit. Suddenly, the seriousness and essence of my work as a teacher outweighed all my dishonesty. I understood the meaning of my assignment; it was something a great deal more important than a professorial lecture, than "cultural work," or an artistic or literary showing off. I was fighting for myself here, trying to draw them out of their flesh and transform them into existence. My fate depended on how much I could win them over and force them to the spirit, for that was the only thing that could save me! I began to speak with such passion that I listened to myself in disbelief, it was so real. . . .

A discussion followed: but their timid and moved voices were only a springboard for my metaphysical one. I was so strong that for the first time in my life I understood what a force I could be if I could believe in myself, the way the saints and the prophets had. Finally one young man rose and expressed his gratitude, and then others came up to me. It was obvious that I was not being thanked for my intellect but for something more important: for fighting the body, corporeality, physicality. . . . I asked for a glass of water. Everyone rushed to fulfill my wish. In a moment a *chango* came in with a carafe on a tray. I went mute, terrified. That *chango* . . .

But the body of that illiterate was so decent . . . it was decency itself . . . this common, calm, freely living, easy-moving, quiet body was sincerity, morality . . .

and so much so and so completely that compared to this the meeting sounded like a shrill note, like a high-pitched squeal . . . I don't know. . . . The blessed simplicity of a chest, or perhaps the moving honesty of a neck, and the hands that can barely trace letters, rough and real from physical labor . . . My spirit gave up its ghost. A complete flop. I tasted lipstick on my lips.

In the meantime, the Indian (because he had a lot of this blood in him) poured water for me with the careful movement of a slave, with his hands summoned into being to serve, devoid of pride, but also of meaning. The quieter his hands were, the more terrifying their explosion, because that *chango*, like every servant, was a *quantité négligeable*, "air," and it was exactly because of this, because of his negligibility, that he became a phenomenon from another register, and overwhelming in that margin of his. His unimportance, cast into the periphery, there, became important! I said good-bye and left. I did not want to prolong my being alone with the *chango*. Out on the street it was dark. Santiago's colorful sunset went out and the violent cold of the winter, which appeared right after the disappearance of the sun, forced me to put on my coat. I was still exchanging parting niceties with persons who were seeing me off, when the *chango* . . . walked by, just a few feet away from me.

Was this the same *chango*? Was this him? They were all alike . . . so much so that you could substitute one for another, almost identical one. . . . Therefore, I was inclined to believe that this was a different one, a brother, colleague, companion . . . but did this make any difference? He walked slowly in the direction of the river, Río Dulce. I followed him. I followed him because it was absurd and unthinkable that I, Gombrowicz, would follow some *chango* just because he was similar to the *chango* who had poured water for me. But once again his perfect unimportance exploded, like a thunderclap, in the margin of everything that passes for important. And I followed him, as if it were my most holy obligation!

I walked on, uneasy. . . . Because I had long given up these walks in the Retiro and along the Leandro Alem (about which I have written before), and now, in Santiago, this situation, the deepest, most essential, and most painful of all of mine, returned again unexpectedly: I was following a village boy. This time, however, there was a new slant to the situation, namely, that it was neither beauty nor youth that was at stake but morality. I walked, led astray by that other honesty, simplicity, purity, which was undermining and destroying my spiritualization. I

walked after his plain back, visible neck, calm hand! And my recent triumph evaporated, poof! it was gone! . . . Yet while I greeted with despair this new march of mine into defeat, I decided, gritting my teeth, that now I would finally find a solution to this problem . . . any solution . . . this could not go on any longer. This had to be done away with. And I believed, I don't know exactly why, maybe because of the intensity with which the body imposed itself on me, that if I was capable of solving the physical shape of the event, if I could find the physical solution to the situation, then that would also lead me to a spiritual solution. At any rate (as long as it lasted), I walked after that *chango* in the dusk, aware that my walking after him was, first of all, the formula of the situation: I and he, I walking after him, I with him . . . we are a problem to solve. . . .

Somehow the problem was growing . . . with that peculiar power with which certain meaningless things swell. This unexpected procession was ringing in my ears, pounding at my temples! Theoretically, I knew why the body before me was so honest, in contrast to the perversity that characterized us intellectuals. The transparency of the body! The honesty of the body! Because the body created a simple and radiant game of needs and values, and for that *chango*, a value was something that satisfied his physical needs, the normal needs of a healthy body, so that he was really the passive playground of natural forces. He was nothing more than nature and that is why he shone before me in the dark: pure, simple, and lucent. Moral like a dog, like a horse! Moral like everyday health! And I? And those like me? Oh, we broke with the logic of the body and were a product of complicated factors, deriving not from nature in general anymore, but from specific human nature, we, a product of humanity, a product of this "second nature" that is the nature of humanity. We were perversity, refinement, and complication, we were the Spirit, oh, unhappy ones! . . . Yet I could not agree to this situation, that I was following him, I, in adoration . . . this would be equal to complete failure. . . . Tearing myself away by force, therefore, I turned into the first street on the left. I broke contact and now I was walking alone. . . . I told myself, shaken up: The hell with it! Don't forget who you are! He is only a meaningless body, one of the many on the compost heap! You are indispensable, singular, original, irreplaceable!

But the fact that, bodily, I was not as honest or as transparent as he carried a weight that was so absolute that I sang hymns of praise to myself in vain. They were spiced with bitterness and a putrid smell rose from me. I felt on that empty street

that there was no helping it, I had to murder something. I continued to walk, set on committing murder. I had to reduce him to the level of an animal and remain alone in my humanity. I was not allowed to tolerate my dual humanity anymore, his or mine. Either I had to become a monster or he an animal. There was no other way out. . . . This obvious truth was accompanied by another: that I should not leave him and allow him to be alone, in secret. I decided, therefore, to catch up with him and have it out. What if he had gotten too far away. No, it was almost certain that, having gotten to the park, he would have turned right, walked along the street parallel to mine, but I imagined to myself that I was catching up to him and that I was following him again. . . . No, that would be for naught! Coming upon him from the side, from around the corner, would not be satisfying. . . . I decided to quicken my pace so that I would come out ahead of him, face-to-face, at the next intersection. . . . And that thought dazzled me! Not from behind, not from the side, but face-to-face!

Not from behind.

Not from the side.

But straight at him, head-on, face-to-face! Such was the physical formula for victory. This allowed for the attack. And I needed this war with him, because it made him my enemy, it put him on the outside. I set off almost running, and the running itself, having him in view, changed the situation to my advantage. I turned violently. I slowed my steps. Now I walked along a street with sparse street lamps. One side of the street was formed by the great, black, quiet trees of the park. And then he approached me, still at a substantial distance, dissolved in the lights of the swaying lamps. He was getting closer, and my hostility was expelling him out of me like a rash, there he was in front of me. Kill. I honestly wanted to kill him. And I was killing him in myself with my wanting to kill him. In the certainty that without this murder, *I would never be capable of being moral*. My morality became aggressive and murderous. The distance between us quickly decreased. I, naturally, did not intend to kill him “externally.” I merely wanted to murder him in him and I was certain that if I killed him, then even I could believe in God, at any rate I would be on God’s side. . . . This was one of those moments in my life in which I understood that morality is wild . . . wild. . . . Then . . . when we came abreast of each other, he greeted me, smiling:

—*Que tal?*

I knew him! He was one of the shoeshine boys that milled around the square. He had polished my shoes a few times. An acquaintance! I had not been ready for this! The murderous encounter fell to pieces. . . . I nodded to him and shouted back, *Adonde vas?* We passed each other and out of this frenzy, nothing remained except the everyday and the ordinary, as the highest tone, as the king of the entire event!

(Therefore he experienced catastrophe once again. Again that accursed pedestrianism tore through, just when he had his drama organized, and once again everything disintegrated in his hands, as if “the other” simply had not wanted to play . . . and our Faust got bogged down in the everyday. They sure made a fool of him! The drama was taken away from him, the drama that was his only ornament in this battle with the younger set. . . .

But from this unconsummated encounter there will remain with him, probably to the very end, the growing conviction that virtue has claws and knows how to murder, that the moral and spiritual world is subject to the universal law of cruelty. In spite of all efforts, the gap between flesh and the spirit grows smaller and smaller, they penetrate each other and harness one another, these worlds. . . .

And this is what he had learned in sun-blessed Santiago.)

1959

XI

Monday

ONE SOPPING OR MERELY DAMP DOGGIE, YOU CHOOSE.

Wednesday

Every lawyer, otherwise known as “the patron,” basks in the high-flown conviction of his own “cultural well-roundedness” (because, of course, “law educates”), and any old hydraulic engineer considers himself a full-fledged scholar, like Heisenberg. It is almost not worth mentioning that when it comes to the imagination, they haven’t the least notion of what it is.

Yesterday. How irritating! For two whole hours I had to bear the conceit of both these species of pseudo-intellectuals-with-diplomas. Incredible stupidity. The attorney with his little lawyer’s “look,” his worldview, style, form reeking of that pitiful university, just the way a suit reeks of mothballs. . . . His engineership proclaimed the superiority of the hard sciences, because, man, those there philosophical or artistic romances are not for a disciplined mind and “have you gentlemen heard of quanta?” The level was appalling. And each of them was furnished and supplemented by a better half who adored his intellect with real feminine ecstasy. It is a sad fact that each year the universities produce thousands of these jackasses and that sooner or later they find their unfailing she-ass complements.

How is one to prevent the higher institutions of learning from producing such rubbish and from polluting the air in the civilized world? The air around me is getting thick with young cretins of university fabrication, laundered of all natural intelligence. South America, too, is filling the air with a stifling student populace

that knows only what is crammed into its head. Stuffed with information, it has lost all sense of the imponderables: character, reason, poetry, and grace. The coarse ugliness of these intellectual workers, specialists in medicine, law, technology, etc., even here in Argentina, is getting annoying. People who are insensitive to art, unfamiliar with life, and formed by abstraction are conceited and ponderous. I like to whip these unaesthetic idiots into a fury or drown them in the chaos of names and theories invented on the spot—oh, they may even beat me up one day! I am amused that these coarse natures sentenced exclusively to science consider all else, anything beyond the sciences, all of the spiritual life of the human tribe, as nothing but the pulling of someone's leg—the consequence of which is that they are in deathly fear of having someone pull their leg.

I take great pleasure in stoking their peasant distrust of the “writer,” that jokester *par excellence*, and occasionally I assume a mien or drop an altogether dubious or sometimes even quite comic word. Their simple respect for seriousness is so great that they are struck dumb. Or I attack them with aristocracy and genealogy, a foolproof trick when it comes to driving imbeciles into complete imbecility.

Ah yes . . . the aristocracy . . . ah yes . . . the aristocracy. O aristocracy, perhaps you are something more than a malicious joke. The idol of the people is *utility*, and the idol of the aristocracy is *pleasure*. To be useful and unpleasant—is the goal of every robot and specialist. To be so useful as to be able to be unpleasant—is their dream. The dream of aristocrats is the diametrical opposite: to be so pleasant as to be able to be useless. As for me, I claim and record this as one of the canons of my knowledge of human nature: he who wants to please people has easier access to humanity than he who merely wishes to be a useful servant.

Thursday

ONE WHITE, TASTY, WELL-FED DOGGIE.

Friday

I say to my pupils: remember that I am not one of your upstanding, patented and guaranteed professors. One never knows with me. I could lie or say

something idiotic at any moment—I could make a fool of someone. With me there are no guarantees. I am a knave—I like having fun—and I don't give a hoot . . . not a hoot, about you and my preaching.

Saturday

I WILL EXCHANGE ONE MEAN BLACK DOG FOR TWO OLD ONES.

Saturday

I was walking along a path, across a large meadow in the forests of Santiago; the terrain seemed to be marked for construction, overgrown with sparse grass, white bald hillocks of sand, uninteresting. I was walking along slowly, lost in thought, looking at the ground, the sun had already set. I walked by rubble of scattered bricks and bits and pieces of machines and boxes when all of a sudden the path rose under my feet, not much, just a little, as a result of a light swelling of the ground—and immediately fell. This was enough. I felt that the earth had hit me from below with a wave, I felt her undulation, her unexpected, hidden resilience. Stop! What was this?! Had the path come alive? Had the earth come alive? Stop, stop, for goodness sake, is it possible for objects to come alive . . . but then *you would have to become a lifeless object, irreversibly!* How's that? How's that? Three stones on the path riveted my gaze, one next to the other. . . . Is another interpretation of the cosmos—in which their lifelessness would become life and my life, death—possible? No, away with this thought, this is stretching things a bit, making them too fantastic, but listen, if in addition to the living world and the lifeless world, some sort of third world existed—a third principle—oh! of which we haven't even dreamed, assuring action to an object, transforming an object into a subject? To conceive of these three little stones as *alive* . . . Would an active inertia be possible? Oh stop! What nonsense! . . .

All of this because you are a bright boy. That is why there is no nonsense you can't swallow . . . intelligence and imagination surrender you to stupidity, because nothing is fantastic enough for you . . . and you stand on the path as if led astray by some nonsense, which in a thousand years—in a thousand years, oh, you son of the millennia—is ready to become a thing related to the truth.

Monday

ONE FAT WET DOG. *A characteristic statement by a high official.* Comrade Minister of Culture and Art said on the radio (December 1958):

“There is something abnormal in today’s situation. Let us take a random example: Gombrowicz’s book is a literary tidbit reviewed by all of our publications and not just once, but many times, while books for the mass reader are not reviewed at all.”

Then, a moment later, in the same dialogue about “cultural” politics, as they often say on Polish Radio, Comrade Minister again returns to the same obsessive theme:

“Considering how little available space there is in the press, for example, the fact that Gombrowicz is reviewed twenty-five times and Wanda Melcer not even once has much to do with the politics of culture.”

I see. This is an obsession all right. And already an indication of a very strict diet. The idyll is over.

Now, there’s a fine ballet! What a shame that my colleagues in the West are ignorant of this two-step with their own nations—one step forward, one step back. For ten years you are nothing, for two years prominent, after which a writer, by dint of their cultural ordinances, becomes the author of “literary tidbits,” and not at all bad ones at that.

This “at that” disturbs me the most. Perhaps I would prefer them to preserve a wild and absolute silence about me forever, as was the case not too long ago, to burn me at the stake or drown me in the toilet. Art, like faith, is afraid of just one thing: the lukewarm. But they—culturally. With a plan. Oh sure, you can praise a little, lest it look like terror . . . but not too much. This kills “a little bit,” like poison in small doses, released slowly.

Wednesday

DOGS SNAP AT EACH OTHER DURING A HEAT WAVE.

Thursday

Recalling my numerous fears, I come to the conclusion that my poor resistance or, simply stated, my cowardice—which makes getting into an elevator difficult and appears when I get on a tram, the cowardice which poisons my life—stems from that feature (or perhaps mannerism) of my imagination that causes my suffering to appear most often in some sort of inferior, diminutive aspect. For me, “I am choking” is not the moment when my lungs are bursting but when there begins to be not enough air—but for good. I am ready to compare a back pain when one cannot change position to a broken leg, and the taste of yesterday’s tea, a blister on the finger, or darkness to war. Such vision undercuts courage the way pests fell a tree.

What can fear have in common with innocence? Yet for me, maximal horror is something as pure as . . . maximal innocence.

ONE YELLOW DOG, A LITTLE GNAWED ON BUT NEW.

Thursday

The New Year 1959 in Tandil. From here, from the beautiful villa of the Mauros where I live like a king, spoiled by their hospitality, I watch fireworks bursting over the city, nestled in a dell. And behind me a dark wall of coniferous mountain rears up like a horse and stands mute. From the left and right, large expanses of night, lost among the hills. We drink champagne.

Thursday

How little I have written this past year! A little of the diary. A little *Operetta*, which I have stopped writing again. Oh well! Infirmary! I am still not in the best of health, although Zellner has been able to put me back on my feet.

What am I supposed to do? Let us make a list—this may interest those who are interested in me. . . . (The blurring of the perspective as a result of my growing fame: I have lost the former, clear distinction between that which is boring in my writing and that which is interesting, because now something boring can be interesting simply because it concerns me; this is how the growing “I” engenders confusion. . . .)

So let us make a list.

Complete this segment of the *Diary*.

Finish the second act of *Operetta*, introducing the plot line “mother slut,” and strengthening the parts of Firulet and Charmant.

Go over the French translation of the *Diary*. Letter to Suzanne Arlet.

Correspondence. Janusz, Kot, Alicia Giangrande, Giedroyć, *Preuves*, Koszella, etc., Alice de Barcza.

Go over the Heidegger notes, in connection with the fourth talk to the club “Amigos del Arte.”

A telegram to the Świeczewskis.

Prepare the radio texts.

Correspondence with publishers.

The French translation of *Ivona* (get it moving). I have no idea—whether this list is boring or interesting.

Friday

He doesn't know! This is how corrupting the weight of his burgeoning “I” has become—and this growing “I” is muddling his relationship with the world more and more. Outside of the physical illness which he mentions to justify why he wrote so little, there is the other infirmity which is even more painful: he really does not know what to do with the Gombrowicz who appears to him from time to time in foreign newspapers, already quite international, European, already (almost) cosmopolitan. An infirmity all the more humiliating because this kind of trouble is so typically Gombrowiczian—what is more his, as a theme and problem, than the burgeoning of his personality inflated with fame? Yet it is exactly this that increases his feebleness—because this obligates—and it is not appropriate for him to set off on well-trodden paths with an issue so very personal, so lived through, he must find his own solution here to the question of “how to be great?” he should give a completely singular answer. Well, certainly! He will not, of course, resort to well-known “solutions” of the famous and glib greats; not for him, for example, the affected mastery of Anatole France . . . yet Dostoevski's greatness, simple and rustic, sly but passionate, is also useless . . . after all, it is completely alien to him. And what of Goethe's Olympus! Erasmus or Leonardo? Tolstoy from Yasnaya Polyana? Jarry's metaphysical dandyism or

Lautréamont? Titian or Poe? Kierkegaard or Claudel? No, none of this, none of these masks, none of these scarlet cloaks. . . . One has to create something of one's own . . . except that greatness is an old wh—e, and one of the unfailing lures of art, so it has already been used a hundred times, in various versions. Greatness that is pathetic and humble, clownish and cynical, zealous and brutal, Christian—pagan—lyrical—and dry—and mathematical—is well known. . . . but each of these timeworn odalisques danced in her own way.

Of all these styles of greatness, proposed by so many masters, the closest to him was perhaps the one that Thomas Mann worked out for himself in the course of his long career. For Mann was able—in the spirit of his epoch—to link, better than anyone else, greatness to illness, genius to decadence, superiority to degradation, distinction to shame. He approached that mad harnessing of opposites with a sincerity that aroused trust . . . and at the same time, he treated this shameful contradiction not as something deserving revulsion and condemnation but as something passionate and intoxicating and so worthy of love that the great artist in Mann's rendition is repulsive and ridiculous, but also marvelous and attractive . . . like a lover. This "justice" of Mann's in arranging light and shadow, this profound intelligence in grasping the problem, appealed to Gombrowicz more than he could say and in conversations he would often refer to Mann and to the very lovely contours of the story "Tonio Kröger," in which he, Gombrowicz, quickly recognized his fate and vocation. As years passed, however, it became even clearer to him that Mann's honesty, integrity, and openness were just one more form of coquetry and one more way of forcing—under the guise of honesty and even humility—others to acknowledge his own right to glory. Indeed, this unmasker of dirt and poverty exploded and revealed, as it turned out, only in order to furnish himself with a more solid, durable monument grounded more firmly in reality and awareness. And more and more clearly could one hear in proportion to the growing of Mann's work, behind that unmasking iconoclasm of the revolutionary, a ponderous rhetoric, enamored of stateliness, wheedling with its mastery, majestic, and purple as a cardinal. Ah, Mann, you old strumpet! So this is the coquet you are?!

What should Gombrowicz have done then? Could he have, leaning on Mann, conquered him—become a new Mann, a more advanced Mann? More modern by one generation? In short, was Gombrowicz supposed to play, in regard to Mann, exactly the role that Mann had played in relation to his

forerunners—should he have ruined Mann's greatness dialectically in order to found a new one on a higher level of consciousness? Our candidate for master was not deprived of merits that could have ensured him instant success in this regard; he had a new honesty at his disposal, and even a new shamelessness—resulting from his slogans that pronounced an eternal breach between man and his form and, as a consequence, allowed one to approach these extreme issues with an ease probably unmet with until that day. He could, for example, have described in his diary his own coming into prominence, his entering history, transforming himself from an unknown minor author into a personality, as if it weren't about him, as if this triumph were merely the imposition of a new and not very comfortable "form"—"made for him," and even warping him. To become great? How's that? What does one feel? How is it that man divides himself in two and which of these persons is real? He could show (burying Mann) that greatness is always inauthentic, that man is incapable of realizing himself in a higher dimension, even if his talent is really deserving of fame and admiration. Confessing to all of the pettiness of his greatness with a completely unheard-of insolence, boring, tormenting, irritating with his growing, he could change his confessions into a first-class literary scandal, and himself into a freakish clown of greatness. Which, actually, would be completely in keeping with his philosophy of form and would probably ensure him a fairly original place in the history of twentieth-century culture.

Certainly—an interesting and attractive assignment! Because this did not mean at all that he should ascetically scorn greatness—on the contrary, this allowed him to surrender himself to it with all his greed, caress himself with his greatness, intoxicate himself, pride himself on it—because the minute he stopped identifying with his greatness and began treating it as something that just happened to him, it lost its intimate and timid character. Self-advertisement was also allowed, for in expounding on these subjects it was impossible to avoid it and this ultimately was also pleasant and even convenient. Gombrowicz was not so naive as to be blind to the unusual artistic advantages of this so free and public intimacy with greatness—for the reader likes glory, prefers a story about kings, princes, or great artists; shoemakers or petty clerks interest him but little, he is an aristocrat in his daydreams and, as we have already said, greatness, that old who—e, or rather courtesan, is a very effective lure and constitutes the sex appeal of older gentlemen in laurel wreaths.

ONE COLD DOG IN SPRINGTIME. Gombrowicz could then really ameliorate his preoccupation with Mann—on the one hand compromising greatness even more; on the other, surrendering to it with an immeasurably greater shamelessness and without that “masterly” pomposity that became Mann’s weakness. But something got in the way . . . what was it? To begin with, in actual practice (that is, when our author took to realizing this program in his Diary by including, at first, slight and restrained remarks about his fame), it turned out that the convention forbidding the writer “self-praise” and pronouncing this type of information “boring” is exceptionally difficult to dismiss—much more difficult than if it were a matter of Gombrowicz’s usual carrying on about himself (which also aroused considerable resistance). Why did people react so very negatively? It should have been just the opposite. Success, glory, acclaim, growing prestige—this is a tasty trifle; the average reader adores such glories in novels imagined from beginning to end, therefore why not in a real diary, having to do with someone’s real destiny, someone’s autobiography? Instead they reacted with anger, revulsion, boredom, even genuine embarrassment . . . as if the reader did not really want to hear about all that.

Stranger still was that the reader’s dislike was confirmed by the inner unwillingness of the author—an unwillingness that was also unjustified, at odds with the reserves of spiritual freedom at his disposal. Nevertheless this was resistance . . . some sort of unhappiness with himself, similar sometimes to pangs of conscience, and sometimes even to regret . . . bitterness, and boredom, and even displeasure or pain advised don’t take this on, leave it alone, don’t interfere—let it be. . . . What was going on? Where did this difficulty come from? This protest was not born of intellectual criticism, how much more spontaneous it was . . . it was as if he, in destroying his greatness, destroyed his own youthful dream about himself and as if he were liquidating this beloved, youthful “project” concerning his own future. Here, therefore, something very personal, lyrical, intimate, stood in the way, something connected with—watch out!—youth and something almost as shameful as love. The situation was becoming scabrous and painful. . . . This was not an intellectual problem, this was something from another realm, of the religious perhaps, or perhaps of love. . . . Love? Youth? Was it possible that the true interpretation of this complex of old men called greatness had eluded Mann, even though he was saturated with Freud’s ideas and closer to Freud than to Schopenhauer? And if so . . . what was it that had remained unsaid?

—Good—thought Gombrowicz—good . . . the Master in Mann is attractive to a pupil. A pupil “loves” his master. If in an early phase of development the ordinary is attractive, enthralling, then the extraordinary, that which is outstanding, becomes alluring in the later phase. . . . If this is so, if the extraordinary is attractive, why does it reveal itself only as strength—not as weakness? Because—and this is a truth one should not forget—only weakness and inadequacy are enthralling, never power and perfection. And it is true that Freud and Mann knew how to extract all of the biological poverty accompanying greatness, those deviations, the sicknesses of a great man, but what determines greatness in him, genius, talent, the Olympian spark, the flame of Sinai, this is powerful in them, priding itself on all the glories of Perfection and Blossoming. . . .

But this does not correspond to the truth (he thought further). Inadequacy is not something that accompanies greatness, superiority; it is its “quid,” its substance. Greatness—let us say this at last—is inadequacy!

Madman! Madman! He’s gotten on his hobbyhorse again! His face, poring over the sheet of paper, has assumed a dramatic concentration, he sought something, something that perhaps was too elusive . . . and perhaps his truth was contained in the pursuit and not in the attainment. . . . Ah, how transparently and efficiently all of this shaped up for him in theory: who was this so-called great man if not the product of unceasing effort, of an artificial engorgement of maturity, of the diligent covering up of his deficiencies, of the forced adjustment to other outstanding people who allowed themselves the same mendacity—and is not greatness an “interhuman” creation like all of culture? In that case he who in the sphere of collective life succumbed to being elevated always had to be below . . . and it is here that greatness, distinction, dignity, and mastery became insufficient, immature . . . secretly affiliated with everything young. . . . Mastery therefore was eternal tawdriness! An eternal feebleness and charm! Yes! But if this were so, why couldn’t he, Gombrowicz, find a practical counterpart for this theory, why did this thought become unbearable when he tried to bring it to life in the pages of the Diary?

It became more and more apparent to our candidate for master that his formulas did not exhaust the practical meaning of these matters . . . an empty, perhaps “erroneous,” perhaps even mutually contradictory meaning. . . . My good God, who will find the right word for the ineluctable, the elusive

thought! . . . And it became more and more evident that one cannot show too much of the curtain in a show in which one is appearing—here the play was too passionate, the coquetry was too real, important . . . elementary . . . engulfing. . . .

He sought. He looked around for some sort of “solution.” But for the time being, he resigned from a frontal attack on these difficult issues in the Diary, and from finding his own new genre of greatness. He decided to wait . . . to take a closer look at this greatness of his and to determine which kind would ultimately be awarded to him: a difficult aristocratic greatness, incomprehensible to the throng, destined for a narrow group of initiates, or a more popular variety? . . . The only thing he could manage for the time being was the introduction of a “second voice” into the Diary—the voice of a commentator and biographer—which allowed him to speak of himself as “Gombrowicz,” through someone else’s lips. This was, in his opinion, an important discovery, intensifying the immeasurably cold artificiality of his admissions, which also allowed for greater honesty and passion. And this was something new, which he had never encountered in any of the diaries he had read.

An interesting innovation, of course. And perhaps more important than it might seem. Gombrowicz had been noticing for some time that great style is not just great, it pokes you in the ribs endlessly, whispering: “watch out, don’t miss me, I’m great.” A great style possesses its own master of ceremonies, lecturer and commentator. In addition, this division into voices was justified by the very structure of style and firmly grounded in reality. But beyond this—what wealth to be able to speak about oneself in the first and third persons simultaneously! For he who speaks of himself with “I” must, of necessity, lie a lot and leave much unsaid—while he who speaks of himself with “he” and tries to describe himself from the outside will also be wielding only a partial truth. This switching from the “I” to “Gombrowicz” could gradually (in proportion to the perfecting and deepening of this device) lead to interesting results.

And it permitted him to praise and unmask himself in one stroke!

Monday

A soccer match at the stadium Rio de la Plata. About thirty thousand spectators. Warm sun. Suddenly, over stands alive with conversation during the restless

wait for the beginning of battle, a little balloon appears. . . . A balloon? Everyone knows that it is not a balloon but a condom, enormously blown up with someone's indecent breath. The condom-balloon, aided by the currents radiating into the air from the heated audience, glides overhead, and when it falls, it is batted back up by the insignificant palms of jokers . . . and the thousands present are riveted to this flying scandal, so horribly visible, so offensive! Silence. No one dares say a word. Ecstasy. Then some *padre de familia*, furious, jabs it with a penknife. It bursts.

Whistles! Howls! An incredible fury shoots out from all sides—near and far—and terrified, the “head of the family” bolts for the nearest exit. This was told to me by Flor de Quilombo alias Florquilo alias Quiloflor alias Coliflor alias Flor-en-coli alias Coli-en-flor.

XII

Tuesday

The average educated Argentinean knows well that his creativity is deficient.—We don't have a great literature. Why? Why is there a dearth of geniuses among us? The anemia of our music, philosophy, the plastic arts, lack of ideas, people? Why? Why? It is listless and dull. Why? Why? It is barren and passive. Why? Why? . . . And here the prescriptions begin to multiply: —We live by the borrowed light of Europe. That's the reason. We have to break with Europe, and find within ourselves the slumbering Indian of four centuries ago . . . that is our only source! But the nationalism of another faction is repulsed by the very thought —what, *Indio*? Never! Our incapacity derives from our having moved away from mother-Spain and mother-church. Here, though, the atheism of the progressive left gets feverish, Spain, the clergy, yuck, obscurantism, oligarchy, learn from Marx, you will become creative! . . . while a young man, *fino*, from downtown Buenos Aires, returning from a tea at Victoria Ocampo's, carries a Parisian *revue* and an ornate volume of Chinese poetry.

Pills to cure impotence—ridiculous, thus it amazes me a bit that this discussion has been going on solemnly for decades and has even transformed itself into the main intellectual controversy of Latin America. It is the subject of endless lectures and articles. Believe in the Most High and Catholic Isabella and you will

be creative! Implement a dictatorship of the proletariat and the cult of the Indian—and you will see how things improve! But this whining isn't too serious; they need geniuses in the way they need a soccer team—to win a match with foreign countries. The undoing of their spirit is exactly this desire to show the world, to keep up with it. The main concern of these artists is not the expression of their own passions and the building of their own world, but to write a novel “of European stature”—in order for Argentina, for South America, finally to have a presentable work. They treat art like an international sports championship and they worry for hours about why there are so few goals for the Argentine team.

Why are there so few goals? Isn't “we” the problem, that little word “we” (which I distrust so profoundly, which I would forbid the individual man to use)? As long as an Argentinean speaks in the first person singular, he is human, supple, real . . . and perhaps in certain respects, even superior to the European. The smaller the ballast, the smaller the hereditary burden, the less history, tradition, custom, and thereby more freedom of movement and greater possibility for choice; it is easier then to keep up with history. And this advantage would be absolute if South American life were not easy, discouraging effort, boldness, risk and persistence, categorical decisions, tragedy and struggle, any extremity that is the “creating” arena *par excellence*. A soft life softens (why be hard?) . . . everything dissipates. . . . Yet in spite of his lack of intensity, the Argentinean, as long as he expresses himself in the first person, is someone who is not at all stupid, open to the world and sober—and I slowly learned to like and appreciate him. Argentineans often have grace, elegance, style.

Unfortunately, this “I” functions only on the lowest rungs of local existence. They do not know how to get it onto a higher rung—that is, into culture, art, religion, morality, philosophy—here they always switch to “we.” But “we” is an abuse. Why, the individual exists in order to use “I”! This foggy, abstract, and arbitrary “we,” therefore, deprives them of concreteness, that is, their sanguineness; it ruins their directness, almost knocks them off their feet and puts them in a haze. Then the Argentinean begins to preach about how, let us say, “we” need history because we cannot hold a candle to the other—more historical—nations, and he willfully begins to fabricate a history for himself by erecting monuments to countless national heroes on every street corner, by celebrating a different anniversary every week, by giving lectures, often pompously, and by talking himself into an

illustrious past. In South America, fabricating history is an enterprise consuming colossal amounts of (wasted) time. If he is a writer, the Argentinean will begin to consider what Argentina really is—in order to deduce from this what sort of Argentinean he is supposed to be—and what his works should be like so that they turn out sufficiently familiar, national, continental, creole. These analyses will not necessarily produce a novel that fits into gaucho literature; they could also produce a very sophisticated work—but inevitably written according to this program. In other words, this deduced Argentinean will create a deduced literature, poetry, music, a deduced worldview, deduced moral principles, and a deduced standard . . . so that everything fits snugly into his deduced Argentina.

In the meantime, what is this Argentina like—what sort of “we” is this? No one knows. If an Englishman or a Frenchman says “we,” that means something sometimes because in those countries people have known for centuries what France or England is. But Argentina? The mixture of races and legacies, the brief history, unformed character, unestablished institutions, ideals, principles, reflexes, a splendid country, it is true, with an abundant future but certainly not formed. Is Argentina chiefly its natives, who have lived here for a long time? Is it chiefly the immigration that is transforming and building the country? Is Argentina precisely this: a combination, cocktail, mixture and ferment? Is Argentina Undefinability? In which case that whole Argentine questionnaire—“Who are we?” “Which truth is our truth?” “What are we striving for?”—has to end in fiasco. For it is not intellectual analyses, but action—action based firmly on the first person singular—that contains the answer.

Do you want to know who you are? Don’t ask. Act. Action will delineate and define you. You will find out from your actions. But you must act as an “I,” as an individual, because you can be certain only of your own needs, inclinations, passions, necessities. Only this kind of action is direct and is a genuine extricating of yourself from chaos, self-creation. As for the rest: isn’t it mere recitation, execution of a preordained plan, rubbish, kitsch?

There is nothing easier than to allow oneself a handful of paradoxes, smacking of the most sober realism. For example: an authentic Argentinean will be born when the writers forget about Argentina . . . when they forget about America! They will tear away from Europe when Europe stops being an issue for them, when they lose sight of it; its essence will reveal itself to them when they stop looking for it.

It is absurd to think that a national identity can be realized from a predetermined program—it must be unforeseen. Just as personality is determined on an individual scale. To be someone is to inquire incessantly about who I am and not to know in advance. It is impossible to extract creativity from that which already is; it is not a consequence. . . .

Wednesday

However, one could also apply a different method, quite the opposite and closer to what they practice today. It would consist of openly discussing all these concerns (impotence, lack of originality, dependence on other cultures), of seeing them as the subject in order to gain a little distance, to break with them. Similarly, someone who is shy, by speaking of his shyness, can free himself from it, because it is no longer him—it is merely a problem. I know this method well and have recommended it often.

Certainly. But this would have to be presented not collectively but in the first person. “I,” “my concern,” “my solution.” No Argentinean will ask, however: Why is it that *I* am not creative? Their question is: Why can’t *we* create? Everything dissolves in the “we.”

Thursday

The awful invasion of stereotypes, theories, abstractions, readymade forms worked out somewhere else, is a result of their “I” being barely able to stand on its own feet. The invasion is all the more grotesque because abstraction is not in their nature. There is something painful about their need to theorize and their incapacity to do so.

The artists of this country (and the entire continent) cannot take a single step without a crutch—be it Marxism or Paris, ancient Indian digs or Toynbee—dandyism as much as anarchism as much as monarchism (I have seen these types as well). They live on elaborate essays. And because the word inflates quickly in this easy, soft life, all of the -isms end in mere verbiage. The word! Their literature is pretty words. To be an artist it is enough to express oneself beautifully. The most original and independent writer of Argentina, Borges, writes a fine and elegant

Spanish, is a stylist in the literary sense (not in the sense of spiritual solutions), and most gladly cultivates a literature about literature, a writing about books—and if sometimes he surrenders himself to pure imagination, it leads him far from life, into a sphere of convoluted metaphysics, the ordering of beautiful rebuses, a scholastics made up of metaphors.

The people who are most alert and most pained by this impotence, for example, the Cuban Piñera, are often too conscious of defeat to be able to fight. Piñera, feeling powerless, pays homage to the Great Absurd, which smashes him—in his art the adoration of the absurd is a protest against a senseless world, his revenge, even the blasphemy of a man offended in his morality. “If meaning, the moral meaning of the world is impossible to attain, I will make a fool of myself”—this is how Piñera’s revenge and his rebellion look, more or less. But why does he, like so many other Americans, doubt his own strength so much? Well, because for him it is a matter of the *world*, not his own life. In the face of the world, humanity, the nation, one is powerless, this exceeds one’s powers—but one can, in spite of everything, show them a thing or two with one’s own life, here power returns to man, although in a somewhat limited dimension.

Some of them—some of the local writers—are endowed with an efficient brain mechanism and precision of expression, and cannot move from where they are only because they have become bogged down in an inherited and obsolete set of problems. This always happens to superficially modern minds. They are constantly seeking victory within the rules of the same game when one should be overturning the chessboard. Coming up with new questions—is the best way of taking care of the old.

Level! Ah, what torment! Level! Ah, how it paralyzes! The main effort is expended on elevating banality and on complicating truisms, as is always the case when one has little to say. This literature, on various social rungs, is always mystification. Each side wants to write a level higher. The provinces do what they can to equal the capital in artificial words. The worst thing is when those at the top, from the highest rungs of the capital, want to make people know who they are—then their inflated and twisted sentences become unbearable and one cannot understand what they are driving at.

An easy life. A provincial life. Here, anyone who has garnered a few prizes transforms himself painlessly into a “master.” But “maestro” means both “master”

and “teacher.” Because no one wants to write for himself but only for the nation (or readers), a South American writer is also often a reader, a master of little guys, a leader, enlightener (generally speaking, it is odd how scholastic this culture is . . . so much so that one has the impression that schoolmarms have shaped the nation). With a little good will, the “maestro” succumbs to the next metamorphosis: he becomes a prophet, seer, sometimes a martyr or hero of America. Strange that in a nation so disarmingly modest there is so much pomposity in the upper strata, almost a childish self-aggrandizement.

Saturday

Returning to Polish affairs . . . I prefer to play with my enemies rather than destroy them. I have always tried to play with my enemies, even when they gave me no peace.

Today I am amazed by the delicateness of these hippopotamuses—now when I am on top and can crawl under their skin from time to time for the fun of it. How thin their skin is! Occasionally one of these dolts, having not yet caught on to the real, so to speak, relationship of forces, will send a few epithets flying in my direction out of sheer habit—well, let us assume that I am a poseur, jester, zero, a fraud, but if I give him tit for tat, he cries to the high heavens. He is allowed to write that I am a clown, but I am not allowed to write that he is dull-witted. When he gives me a royal working over from the heights of his bombastic vacuity, everything is fine. But I am supposed to sit mum! I am not allowed to utter a word because he is a “critic.” And I am not a critic, I am an author, for whom it is “out of place to polemicize,” oh, no, what a lack of tact!

When I in my turn take on, just for the fun of it, the criticism of Mr. Critic, without mincing words, a diabolical row breaks out, help, save me, people! That Gombrowicz is a brute, he is evil, no good, how dare he, that conceited so-and-so, that megalomaniac!

Conceited? Megalomaniac? Listen, hippopotamuses: I am not complaining that your professional or columnist’s stupidity has constantly slandered my writing, which, as it turns out, is worth something. You did what you could to ruin my life and you were partly successful. If it had not been for your dullness, shallow-

ness, mediocrity, perhaps I would not have starved for so many years in Argentina and would have been spared other humiliations. You stood between me and the world—a group of omnipotent schoolmarms and publicists—warping, twisting, falsifying values and proportions. Fine, never mind all that, I forgive you! And I don't expect that one of you will grunt out something on the order of a meek "I'm sorry," I know only too well what I can expect from jokers like you.

But how can I forgive your being victorious over me in my ultimate victory over you? Yes. Cheer up. You have been victorious in defeat. You caused my victory to come too late . . . ten, twenty years too late . . . as I am too close to death and it infects even my triumph with defeat. . . . You know, I am no longer so perverse as to be happy at the revenge. Triumph? Megalomania—conceit? You have deprived me even of that—I can delight neither in my exaltation nor in your defeat—how can I forgive that?

Monday

I like and appreciate Argentina . . . yes, but which Argentina? I do not like and do not appreciate Argentina . . . yes, but which Argentina?

I am a friend of the natural, simple, down-to-earth Argentina of the folk. I am at war with the higher, ready-made Argentina—that awful concoction!

Not long ago one Argentinean said to me: You are allergic to us. But another, Jorge Apalos, wrote to me from Santiago: "You are looking for real value (*lo legitimo*) in this country because you love it." (Love a country? I?)

Wednesday

Get the government! Everyone is always in opposition and the government is always guilty. After the overflow of Perón, the idyll took to the streets—joy and visible emotion, banners and all. But this lasted a whole week. After that, twenty opposition newspapers with gigantic headlines sprang up: GOVERNMENT OF BETRAYAL, NEW TYRANNY, DIGNITY OR DEATH, ENOUGH DISGRACE. After three months, poor General Aramburu, the president, didn't have even ten percent of the supporters (it wasn't until he left that they pronounced him a decent man).

When afterward Frondizi was chosen by an overwhelming majority, again joy—and then again after a few months he was a: “traitor,” “renegade,” “tyrant,” . . . These were the more delicate compliments. . . .

The vociferousness of the opposition press is astounding.

The source of these sad phenomena you could probably find in the easy life, in the enormous or sparsely populated expanse, where a person can allow himself a great deal without punishment because ultimately “things will somehow work out.” If the private life of an American is still characterized by a certain regularity and if it is still obvious, for example, that if he does not repair the roof, it will rain on his head, then this social, wider, higher political life becomes something like a Great Frontier—one can clamor, riot, and frolic, for where there is no logic, there is also no responsibility, nothing will happen to so vast a country. And so demagoguery, claptrap, political lunacy, illusions, theories, phobias, manias, megalomanias, caprices, and especially the most ordinary *viveza* (we can pull the wool over their eyes but they’d better not do it to us!) abound! One can tell people absurdities strewn with the cheapest banalities and life will never unmask them, because collective reality is *laxer here*—and a blusterer will walk in glory in his old age.

An easy life exudes beneficence, good humor, sentimentality, naïveté, unresourcefulness, delicacy—a softness in which one slowly drowns. But a society that is threatened by softness, that feels the danger subconsciously, wants to defend itself—this is where that famous *viveza* comes from, a little bit of cunning that is supposed to prepare them for life, make reality accessible to them anew, save them from the shame of gullibility and naïveté.

Volumes have been written about the psychology of the South American; they are often metaphysical, almost always too “deep”—knowledge about a man or a nation is not always a deep-water fish—sometimes spiced with a tasty home-grown mysticism (that there is some undiscovered truth in the “silence” of an Argentinean, for example). All right, let it be most profound where it should be, but why should one look for a chasm on the straightaway? Ninety percent of Argentina and South America can be explained by the life these people lead, a life that is, in spite of their complaints, quite easy in comparison with other continents.

Saturday

This is how they lose themselves in collective reality, how it becomes fantastic to them, impossible to grasp.

In Tandil I speak with the owner of a beautiful villa, the director of a fairly large company, a man of experience. I ask him: what do you think, how many people were killed during the revolution in Córdoba on 16 September? He thinks a moment, then says: —Twenty-five thousand.

Why, only one battle of this revolution took place in the city of Córdoba and only two regiments of infantry, a school of artillery, and two more military formations participated. The battle consisted of firing mainly light weapons and it lasted for two days. The number of fallen was not announced, but if there were three hundred, that was a lot. . . . And this guy tells me: Twenty-five thousand! Twenty-five thousand! What insanity—did he stop to think even for a moment what twenty-five thousand corpses means?

In Goya (Corrientes) when I said that on 16 June 1955 during the bombing of Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires two hundred people died, they looked at me as if I were crazy. In their opinion there were no less than fifteen thousand casualties! Fifteen thousand! I allowed myself to risk the statement that their whole revolution from 1955 did not cost them more than a few hundred lives and most of those as a result of automobile accidents (because a lot of people fled and others chased them). Which offended them greatly.

In Santiago a certain law student at the university of Tucumán assured me gravely that Freud is useless to South Americans. “Because Freud is European knowledge, and this is America.”

In Tandil I asked a student from Bahía Blanca, a Communist, if he had ever had a moment of doubt and he answered: —Yes, once. I perked up my ears thinking he would mention the concentration camps, the strangling of Hungary, or the unmasking of Stalin. But he meant Kandinsky, who was ostracized or really shunned for abstract painting. This was the only thing he acknowledged as being out of order . . . a little.

Stupidity? No—they are not stupid. It is simply that the world that exists beyond the concreteness of their family, house, friends, earnings, is dispensable. It

offers no resistance. It does not punish for errors, therefore an error does not become forbidding. Ultimately, twenty-five thousand or three hundred is almost the same. In this kind of conversation, they are sybarites, they prefer the pleasant to the true.

The moment comes, however, when Reality bares its teeth. Thus in Argentina—after ten years of prodigality, wage increases, the building up of a completely incomprehensible bureaucratic apparatus, and printing paper money—the bottom of the purse loomed up and a crisis exploded, the likes of which the country had never seen. How difficult it is for them to understand! To this day, the majority are convinced that the government *does not want* to guarantee the people affluence. The political crudity of this nation is glaring; they are touched by Daltonism, they do not know how to distinguish between what is of prime importance in politics and what is secondary and trifling.

Yet they are, from birth, magnificent realists. . . .

Monday

A few months after my arrival in Argentina in 1939, a small group of minor literati, with whom I formed friendships, began to urge me to give a lecture in the Taetro del Pueblo. At the time, I knew nothing of Argentina. I asked what sort of theater it was. —First class—they answered—these lectures are attended by *the* elite, the *crème de la crème*! I decided, therefore, to cook up a lecture that was highly intellectual and, after writing it in French, had it translated into Spanish. I entitled it: “Cultural Regression in Lesser Known Europe.”

I intentionally did not mention a word about Poland, since this was a tragic time, immediately after the September events. . . . I described how the wave of barbarism that had crashed over Central and Eastern Europe could be used to revise the foundations of our culture.

These beginnings of mine in Argentina today look like total darkness, concealing within its womb a tragicomical *quiproquo*. How did that happen? I show up at the theater—overflowing with people—I read my paper with a horrible accent—bravos—and I return quite content to my reserved loge where I find an acquaintance, an Argentine girl from the ballet, with a low-cut dress and coin necklaces. She had come to admire. I am in the process of taking my coat off the

hanger to leave with her when I see some guy get onto the stage and declaim—what a spectacle. I understand nothing and hear only “Polonia.” Bravos, excitement. After which another guy crawls up to the podium and fires off a speech, all the while flailing his arms—the public roars. I understand nothing, but I am very pleased that my discourse, which had irritated me like a fly buzzing up my nose when I read it, was causing such a stir. Suddenly—what’s this?—our envoy rises and together with other members of the Polish Legation leaves the hall. Oh, oh, something is not right! . . . More speeches, the atmosphere heats up, more clamor, someone turns to me: —Why don’t you do something? They’re attacking Poland! . . . A fine pickle! How am I supposed to react to a sermon in Chinese?

The next day—trouble. As it turned out, my lecture was used by the Communists to attack Poland. It also turned out that the somewhat communizing “intellectual elite” was not all that creamy, the result being that the attack on “fascist Poland” did not distinguish itself with refinement and stupid things were said, such as there is no Polish literature and that the only Polish writer is Bruno Jasiński.* Appalled, I ran to the Legation—where I was received icily, and suspected of sabotage, almost of treason. In vain did I explain that the theater director, Mr. Barletta, had neglected to inform me that, according to custom, there is a discussion after the lecture (I have no reason to suspect him of deliberately keeping me in the dark; besides, I did not consider him a Communist, as he passed himself for—and to this day passes himself for—an upright, enlightened, and progressive citizen, impartial and just, an opponent of imperialists and a friend of the people; it was only during the Hungarian revolution, when the impartial, just, and noble anti-imperialism of Mr. Barletta inclined him categorically to support Russian tanks, that I lost all vestiges of my faith).

The worst was the ballerina—her rough, powder, neckline, and coins completed the balance of my misfortune.—What cynicism—they said.—At such a moment! As far as I remember, even the Polish press in the United States jumped on the bandwagon . . . but I would have been capable of withstanding this tornado of mad suspicions, accusations, and condemnations, if not for Pyzik! Pyzik, the

* Bruno Jasiński (1901–37), Polish futurist poet who switched to writing revolutionary poetry and novels. Arrested in the Soviet Union in 1937, he died on his way to a concentration camp in Kolyma. He was rehabilitated in 1957.

president of the Union of Poles in Argentina, wrote something in his article that knocked me out . . . to wit, he accused me of *not mentioning a word about the Polish school system*. . . . What???? The school system???? What school system? Why the school system? Ha! That's all I needed—the Polish school system!

XIII

Monday

I devoured a few pages with great satisfaction, that he is so intelligent and, bravo, that he reads me so thoroughly, that he is familiar with even the little nooks and crannies of my writings, ah, the critic who *reads*, what a rarity! (I am talking about “Key Issues in Gombrowicz’s *The Marriage*,” written by Andrzej Falkiewicz and published in Poland.) But the farther one goes into this forest, however, the thicker the underbrush—and by the time I got to the end of Falkiewicz’s essay, I had lost my way . . . I, the subject, I, who should know this territory. . . . So what can I expect of others?

This is disturbing . . . especially since I cannot dismiss it as the clumsiness of the critic, who is penetrating, earnest, unusually subtle. . . . Why the misunderstanding? And if it had been only one of many! But this has happened to me so many times with other critics—that I think it proves not so much the inadequacy of the critics as the perversion of criticism itself, in particular of the most difficult kind, concerning literature that comes into being today, that is, the literature of tomorrow, “modern” literature. I even feel that the situation is perilous, that something must be changed in the method, in the attitude, or in something else. I don’t know—something innovative is absolutely essential, like having the authors and critics work together . . . perhaps this would work to pull the wagon out of the mire?

As things are now, the author, though he is alive, has to pretend he is dead. I was once present at a fierce discussion between Kott—and Breiter?—on what X “wanted to say” in his last work. They pelted each other with quotes. I proposed that they put the question to the author over the telephone and even gave them his number. They stopped dead in their tracks and in a minute began to talk about something else. When the problem was reduced to a question over the telephone, it ceased to interest them.

To get back to Falkiewicz—if even he, in my opinion, did not understand *The Marriage* completely, where should I look for the source of the problem? Isn't it because in his impatience he wanted to understand it too profoundly right away? One should advise critics of the modern and most difficult art not to be so profound right off the bat—they should be shallow at the beginning, and then gradually and very carefully should immerse themselves in searching for profundities. My point is this: each literary work exists on various planes, some closer and others more distant, but first the story must “move, amuse, make you laugh,” then it acquires various “more profound meanings,” and only in its ultimate sense becomes (if it does at all) precipitous, vertiginous, and sometimes crazy. One has to establish this rule and adhere to it: one can speak about the deeper aspects of modern art only after mastering the more immediate, easier aspects which join it to the art that preceded it.

Falkiewicz began to look behind the curtain prematurely, he neglected to look first at what was happening onstage. He is wrong to say that *The Marriage* is “unclear and inconsistent”—on the contrary. What is so strange about a dream (an outlet for daytime worries) that shows Henry the ruin and disgrace of his parents, his fiancée, the family home? Is it so strange that in this dream about an inn Drunkards appear and that these Drunkards begin to persecute the Father when he forbids them to touch Molly? Is it not logical and appropriate to the situation that the panic-stricken Father pronounces himself “an Untouchable King” to elude the touch of the Drunkard? And that Henry feels in his dream that he alone is responsible for sustaining the miracle or having it totter into farce—is this not a feeling that often visits us in our dreams? So isn't his wavering between Wisdom and Stupidity at the beginning of act 2 understandable? And his new grappling with the Drunkard, who intrudes once again with his Finger to “touch” the king and then Molly? But the Drunkard, seeing that he is unable to overcome Henry in open battle, changes his tactics, proposes to “have a little talk” on the side—the result of which is that the scene transforms itself into a courtly, diplomatic reception (has such a change of scenery never occurred to you in a dream?). And, further on, isn't it the culmination of a psychological process already begun in the opening act when Henry's growing doubts about the royalty of the king lead, in a more and more muddled atmosphere of drunkenness, to a coup d'état? When, by reverting to new methods, the Drunkard arouses jealousy in the new

king about Johnny—is he not consistent in his striving to obstruct the marriage and “get at” Molly?

The marriage that Henry would like to perform on himself in the third act is, as Falkiewicz correctly writes, a consequence of his idea that God did not create man but man created God. This marriage in the “human church,” replacing the former in the “divine church,” is the main metaphor of the drama. When there is no God, values are born of, or rather between, people. But our hero’s dominion over the people must become real—that is why Henry needs Johnny’s death, that is why he commands the release of his parents and the Drunkard to pit himself against them in one final clash. And here he collapses. . . .

Is this action so difficult to extract from the text? Certainly, I myself am not without blame. In the introduction (“Idea of the Play”), I wrote: “Everything in the play ‘creates itself’: Henry creates a dream and a dream creates Henry, the action of the play creates itself, people create one another, and the whole pushes forward toward unknown solutions.”*

How careful one must be! I know now that this imprecise formulation can lead one astray. In writing about creating oneself, and especially in saying that action creates itself, I had in mind that one scene often arises from another in a casual way, almost accidentally, and that the drama, as an embodiment of the inner spiritual work of Henry, makes up a canvas of associations that is sometimes absurd and that sometimes eludes form—but I forgot to add that these superficial freedoms are based on the core of the story, which the drama tells, and which in its general outline is not deprived of logic. I did not mention this because it seemed so obvious to me at first.

Falkiewicz grasped this outline, but he didn’t follow it to the end. Led astray by my murky information about “creating oneself,” he conceives of the drama as an almost completely unrestrained explosion of associations and, as a consequence, seeks justification in the breakneck antics of the latest trends in philosophy, sociology, and psychology even for things which can be explained by the normal course of action. He ponders the existential and antiexistential sense of my laughter, seeks the ultimate contradiction between the problems and the form,

* *The Marriage*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Grove Press, 1969; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1986), 16.

analyzes my ties to “dream logic,” but sometimes does not notice the most obvious links in the development of the plot. From which comes the moral of avant-garde criticism: beware! Only gradually and with the greatest caution do you descend to the most profound layers of a work—never lose the connections between surface and depths. Grasp the work first in its easiest, its most public form, and then go backstage. Metaphysics, yes, but one must begin with physics. Grasp the work, too, in its connection with the past, with a more classical literature, because ultimately even the most revolutionary outgrowth stems from previous forms the reader is familiar with. And accept the principle that if something finds its justification in the physics of a work, very often it can do without metaphysics. I have often experienced on my own hide that heaven and earth have been moved to explain a comma which simply resulted from the construction of a sentence. . . .

Tuesday

A few more words about avant-garde criticism, but now in its more journalistic aspect and without ties to Falkiewicz. . . . One must simplify. One must facilitate, simplify things for the reader! You have turned too far away from him, your reviews swell with indigestibles. This is exactly one of those problems of style, one of those real problems of style—which are a headache and silliness itself, and which one haughtily avoids because they are too practical by nature, not enough *à la hauteur*. . . . I, if I cultivated this profession of an avant-garde critic, would stand on my head to change and improve something here, to break out of this deadlock.

Who is this avant-garde critic who writes in a newspaper? Is he an intellectual? An artist? A teacher? A journalist? If he is a journalist, one must admit that he is not enough of a journalist, he does not know how to reach the reader. If he is a teacher, this is knowledge that is far too ranting, condensed, hurried, unclear. If he is an artist, he is not charming enough, he is too heavy, he does not know how to dance. . . . In the role of an intellectual he is reminiscent of goulash, stew, salad, tripe in oil, cabbage and peas. And how often he turns out to be an *élégant* with soiled underwear and dirty fingernails because all this tends to be poorly laundered, not thought through, and poorly written . . . pretentious shoddiness, terror (of both readers and editors). Snobbery? Why, of course, snobbery. Unfortunately, this is true, this discipline is polluted with snobbery and claptrap. Take a look at the

sentences which crush the reader with their *dernier cri* terminology while their construction, punctuation, and grammar are lousy. A magnificent tie worn with a soiled shirt.

The question is, what can one correct here, where should one begin? In my opinion, reform is needed, and it is high time for it. If criticism, especially avant-garde criticism, has become fictional, pompous, deceptive, it is because it is suspended in abstractions, far from any kind of concrete flesh, blood, and bone—these critics wallow in art, culture, philosophy, and other such generalities—well, one can easily drown reality in this and really have a good time! The essence of the problem, then, is breaking with abstraction and linking up to that lost concrete detail. When the critic feels that he is a man writing about another man and for people, when he finds his lost Sociability, he will gain a solid basis for many pressing revisions.

The pseudoscience of today's criticism is becoming unbearable. The schools are to blame for this—high schools and universities—the universities have done a lot of damage by convincing people that one can approach art scientifically. How catastrophic this method of occupying oneself exclusively with the work, torn away from the person of the author, turned out to be!—after this abstraction came others, which separated the work from the author even more, conceiving of it as a self-sufficient “object,” conceiving of it “objectively,” transferring everything to the realm of a false, lame aesthetic or sociological pseudo-mathematics, opening the gates wide to pedantry and prating analyses as well as to license, dressed superficially in majestic scientific precision. I do not at all demand that a work be interpreted naively through the biography of the writer and that his art be tied to his life's experiences—my point is the principle contained in the aphorism “style is the man,” that is, that Chopin's style is the organization of Chopin's soul, and Rabelais's style is the solution to Rabelais's personality. Chopin's romances with Georges Sand interest me little—but beyond Chopin's music I look for Chopin himself; I want to understand the creator by way of his work. Behind the tale Poe tells me I must find the person who tells it, as—understand this—the *only* reality, the *only* thing that is concrete. Thus I draw conclusions about the creator from his work; yet once again this personality of the creator will simplify and open up a work by binding it inseparably to someone . . . to someone's particular existence.

What is this or any other work? “A work of art,” “a cultural phenomenon,”

“an expression of social processes,” “a source of aesthetic feelings”—or perhaps it is first of all a person’s work, an element of someone’s life, someone’s spiritual effort. Who doubts that *Hamlet* is not just Shakespeare’s reverie but also Hamlet, that is, an imagined character, but as authentic as if he were more alive than Shakespeare . . . in addition, Hamlet contains discoveries and beauty that ensure him an existence independent of Shakespeare’s. Yet in spite of all that, the truth about Hamlet is that Shakespeare made him up (even though Shakespeare was even more elusive than Hamlet) and it is only this Danish prince, bound to his creator, fixed in his creator, who is one hundred percent real. Do you remember Descartes? When I think of the centaur, I cannot be certain that a centaur existed—the only thing I know for sure is that my thought about a centaur exists. . . . Although Hamlet, the Danish prince, is imagined, the Shakespearean dream of Hamlet existed and this is the concrete fact that we desperately need. When you begin to carry on about “art,” you can say whatever you like—abstractions offer no resistance. When you discover the persons behind the books, however, when your literary world becomes peopled with Tolstoys, Schillers, Balzacs, Ibsens, when style becomes someone’s personal style, when you link form to someone’s experience, then much of the fog now blanketing our eyes will burn away. No, I do not forget that form and art are born “between” people and not of man; I am very far from granting the creator exclusivity, but if modern criticism is to regain strength, sociability, efficacy within the pale of the human world, we must look beyond the work to the man, to the creator, at least as a point of reference. Not—for heaven’s sake—in order to ask “What was he trying to say?” (this would again reduce criticism to the examination of the intellectual, that is, abstract, intentions of the author and, anyway, this kind of questioning is irrelevant in art). But in order for a book to grow out of some sort of—out of someone’s—reality, out of someone’s experience.

While establishing this kind of contact with the person of the author, should not the critic also introduce his own person onto the stage? Analyses, sure, syntheses, yes, dissections and parallels, well, so be it, but at least let this be organic, red-blooded, pulsating, permeated with the critic, let it be him, his spoken voice. Critics! Write so that the person reading you knows whether you have blond or black hair.

(I dedicate this to Poland. Before the war, while listening to their conver-

sations—when Knowledge, Society, and everything that was social and rational was worshipped, when people turned with fury against the Person and the Personal, when they hated, worse, did not like art for its intimate uncontrollable whisper—while listening to them, to these artist-moralizers, artist-constructors, artist-theoreticians, and poet-mathematicians—I knew already that an incompetent epoch in art was approaching, an epoch full of painful mistakes.)

Thursday

I ate breakfast at the harbor. A series of scenes expressing one and the same idea. At a neighboring table workers discussed politics; one smarted off, gabbed, palavered, others also smarted off, palavered—at the same time, far inside, the resigned owner tried to convince the waiter of something; the waiter, an old and sly man, but a dolt and a loudmouth, threw himself at the owner excitedly, drunk with his own inanities, deafening himself with his own twaddle. Farther still porters joked, chortling on the subject of a certain part of the body. . . . What idea did this express? An awful one! Probably the one that is most capable of depriving people of hope. . . .

We, the intelligentsia, are guided by the salutary thought that the *lower classes are not crazy*. . . . We, yes, we are condemned to all the illnesses, manias, madnesses, but the masses are healthy . . . and the foundation on which humanity leans is just fine. . . . And actually? The people are sicker, crazier than we are! Peasants are madmen! Workers—pathological! Do you hear what they are saying? These are dark and maniacal dialogues. Illiterates dull not with a healthy dullness but with the ravings of a madman, crying for a hospital, a doctor. . . . Can their never-ending curses and obscenities—and nothing beyond that—can this drunken, mad mechanics of their life together be healthy? Shakespeare was right to present the simple folk as “exotic,” that is, unlike human beings.

Monday

To the editor of Wiadomości:

It is only now that I have had the opportunity to acquaint myself with the fragment of Lechoń's Diary reprinted in the sixteenth issue of Wiadomości, of 19 April of this year, in which he mentions me and my Trans-Atlantic.

“Gombrowicz . . . is also a madman, I am sure because I know him. . . . Trans-Atlantic is a very seedy story. . . . Amusing enough though somewhat foul-smelling. . . .”

Such being the case, I will allow myself to quote the following excerpt from Lechoń’s letter to me, received in May 1956, that is, a month before his death:

“I will reply in your words ‘your soul is somehow familiar to me’ and I would like it to give me credit once and for all. If a work of art appeals to me, this outweighs all differences of conviction and even grudges between writers. I think of your works, Ferdydurke and Trans-Atlantic, with considerable pleasure, as stunning works. . . .”

And he continues:

“I would like you to know, therefore, that I expressed what I think of you most sincerely and, I think, with all due respect, in an interview published a few years ago in Wiadomości and that this is for now my modest Roma locuta.”

???????

(1) Keeping in mind that the above-mentioned fragment of Lechoń’s Diary comes from the year 1953, and the letter from 1956, perhaps one could assume that Lechoń changed his mind. . . .

(2) Rejecting this explanation, we would have to assume that these passages in the letter are hypocrisy from beginning to end. But to what purpose? This assumption would be painful, since I value Lechoń.

I include the text of Lechoń’s letter because, of course, it didn’t get printed without being invaded by the meddlesome pencil of the editor of *Wiadomości*. Namely, the beginning was changed as follows:

“In his ‘Pages from a Diary’ dated 1 March 1953 (Wiadomości, No. 681), Jan Lechoń writes in connection with my Trans-Atlantic: ‘Gombrowicz . . . is also a madman . . . ,’” etc.

Holy Mother of God! I can’t hold this against them—they sent me the corrected text and I, for the sake of peace and quiet, did not protest—but isn’t it just a tiny bit irritating that not even a few lines of a letter written to the editor can be included without corrections and alterations? And isn’t this rummaging through

letters, not articles, altogether indelicate and rude, especially with respect to those who have covered reams of paper with writing? If only this correction had been made in the name of Holy Grammar! All because I wrote “it is only now that I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with,” from which the broad masses of readers could deduce that I rarely peek into that newspaper. Oh well, it is true, I rarely do, but that Altissimo besmirched me. I found out only a few months later and by accident (at the Swieczewskis’, while putting on my coat). Of course the fact that the shot fired at me from London reached me so late hardly testifies to the devastating properties of the old culverin, but are the only letters that have a chance of being printed in *Wiadomości* without corrections those exclaiming “I just can’t wait to get the next issue, etc., etc.,”? Maybe the letters of praise are also tampered with?

That this was a bullet and a shot that they were aiming at me with the intention of shooting me dead or at least wounding me—I am positive. The shot came after my delightful scrap with a certain Polonist figuring in *World Biography* (New York, 1948). But one must admit they have bad luck. For the heroic attack on the author of the novel *The Quiet of the Forest* allowed me to praise myself until I burst, as I have never praised myself in my life—and now it ends so badly that Altissimo’s devastating opinion has transformed itself with the help of a little black magic into the same Altissimo’s almost archlaudatory and positive opinion. And I put all the faithful who belong to this little chapel face-to-face with an awful dilemma—for either-or: either Altissimo Poet is enraptured with that seedy *Trans-Atlantic*, or Altissimo Poet is a regular bluffer and a first-class pharisee. Enough. Jokes aside. What sort of magic was this? How could Lechoń make such a leap from abomination to rapture in so brief a time (the interview that he mentions in his letter bears the date 1954, and even then he is speaking of me rather favorably)? There is a riddle concealed here, one that is interesting to a student of literary life.

Perhaps the riddle is confusing only because—like that document from Poe’s short story—the solution is staring us in the face instead of hiding in the secret drawer. Why the change of opinion? Because he never had one. Why didn’t he have one? Because he never *read* it. I sometimes wondered how it happened that students were perfectly capable of handling the contents of my works while professional literati said the same stupid things over and over again. A student reads, that’s all—a literatus looks at, flips through, sniffs out. . . . I sense that Lechoń read

me as much as I read his poems . . . but wasn't this the reason our opinions did not dig a chasm between us? . . . After all, his notes were private, he hadn't intended them to be published. Sometimes it's worse. A few years ago, a certain well-known publicist gave me a dressing down in the Polish press on how my *Diary* was terribly provincial . . . that these were merely "endless variations on the subject: Poland and I . . ." I rubbed my eyes (Had this man written that in a drunken stupor? I don't think ten percent of the diary is about Polish matters), until I figured out that he had read just the few fragments in *Kultura*, which happened to be about Poland, and that from this gnawed bone he had imagined the entire animal.

A few more words about Lechoń. He was an uncreative and unoriginal poet who was too highly esteemed at the beginning—who for his whole life remained nothing but a "promise." An uncomfortable situation that aggravated his innate creative impotence. What was worse, this poet, barricaded in a tower of classicism (the consequence of an excessive pomposity as well as of barrenness; classicism is the "expertise" of artists having nothing to say), completely lost a sense of modern man and his problems (about which, *nota bene*, he knew little, since the paths of human thought beginning with Hegel were almost completely unknown to this Polish head). His life was disloyal, his place in the hierarchy undeserved, his position insincere; none of these things allowed him direct contact with the epoch, with history. He sneaked by. He eluded it and maintained face. At one point he found himself out of it. His whole politics consisted of releasing a "beautiful" poem into the world now and then (so that people would not say, too loudly, that he was finished), as well as of nurturing his social prestige, in which his background, intelligence, and wit were very helpful to him. He also wrote for his "drawer" a diary which was excellent writing and luminous with a natural intelligence, but compromising because of a pathological, almost complexlike, narrowing of intellectual horizons—as if this man preferred not to know, preferred not to see—a melancholy diary, a pitiful incarnation of the Warsaw bourgeois spirit and the cafés of that day. . . . This was how Lechoń tried to pretend that he lived, by reviving a dead world from his youth, from times that had treated him more graciously. . . . Stop! What is this, did I hate Lechoń? Why am I destroying him? Destroying? No! Not at all! Wouldn't dream of it! I value Lechoń! The more reasons I find to denigrate him, the more I value him; I value him in spite of the reasons I have given, I value him because in spite of everything, this was *someone*—this was a personage—no one

knows how, no one knows why this profile has become engraved in our memories; the gestures, tone, silhouette, will remain long after everyone has forgotten his work. . . . He realized himself as a person. Even though this man made no significant contribution to Polish progress with even one important poem, one thought, nevertheless he created something . . . he created himself . . . he created Jan Lechoń. And perhaps it is this game with his own nothingness that fascinates me, this realizing himself in a vacuum, that not having even one-tenth of the poetic merits of Tuwim, he was able to distinguish himself in our literary world with almost the same intensity. . . . At any rate, this was a figure to contend with!

A figure, nevertheless, that does not lend itself to what *Wiadomości* does with it, Lechoń as the bard of the emigration—what a bad idea; he was predestined for that chair only by his worst weaknesses, his veneration of the past, his classically Polish romanticism, and everything in him that unfortunately came straight out of *Kurier Warszawski*. It was too obvious that the publicity in *Wiadomości* was dictated more by the megalomania of the editors than by the recognition of Lechoń's alleged greatness—this campaign was inspired by the conviction that the “readers” can be talked into anything—the odor of this conviction mingled fatally with incense and mingles still today. Beyond the *Wiadomości* coterie, no one took up this thesis; Lechoń had miserable press coverage in Poland after his death, even in the camp favorably inclined toward him—the bard remained the local London bard. And it is sad that the man who was a “splendid Lechoń” was made (through unbearable cant) into a “splendid poet”—poor guy, he came out of this campaign on the short end of the stick.

Tuesday

One more little word about *Wiadomości*. Actually, I myself am amazed and appalled, but this time I must admit that Mr. Zbyszewski is right: this publication was exciting, compelling, and illuminating at one time and Grydzewski was doing Poland a great service. But now?

*For you must know, my dearest crone,
That paradise has become a crick
Where Jove once ruled from his throne
There now rules a pri . . .*

Add a rhyme yourself, my gracious prince! How did this betrayal of Grydzewski by Grydzewski come about? One has to begin talking about this and not for the sake of petty annoyance: today *Wiadomości* is a chapel, museum, mutual adoration society, catalog, album of withered souvenirs, cemetery, armorial, corner for philatelists or billiard players, anecdote, chat, correction, snobbery, little column—but most of all it is the resurrected and, as it turns out, immortal *Kurier Warszawski*. Unfortunately! There is really something that bodes ill in this victory of the Lewenthal family from beyond the grave—who would have dreamed it! This London weekly is the most recent edition of the same indestructible bourgeoisie from Krakowskie Przedmieście.* And this really is a National Institution whole hog: here the proofreader has triumphed over the writer; the reader over the author; the editor over the writer; the comma and semicolon over talent; form, trademark, pattern over individuality; formalism over art; organization and bureaucracy over flights of fancy, drama, poetry, and life. During the past dozen years of its life, *Wiadomości* has managed to alienate practically all the creative elements of literature in emigration. Miłosz was treated with a boisterous unintelligence worthy of the late Rabski;† a bucket of table scraps was poured over Miłosz’s head and he was pronounced a “traitor”—which did not prevent him from affecting the orientation of world opinion toward red terror in Poland more effectively than all the issues of *Wiadomości* put together. Who of today’s better authors contributes to this publication? Not only has it been cut off from talent, it has been cut off from living Polish thought. If there is any kind of discussion, effort, struggle, anything at all going on in emigration, it takes place a hundred miles from *Wiadomości* and its contests: “Whom should we nominate to the Literary Academy?” I, rightly or wrongly, successfully or not, have touched on a multitude of issues of prime importance for us in the course of my writing in emigration—I received not one serious commentary or decent polemic in *Wiadomości* in the space of ten years, nothing except cursory “reviews” which were not as bad as they were shallow, twittering, unwisely nonchalant, and often malicious. Naturally, one should not forget that garbage must be our daily fare in emigration and when it is a matter of critics, beggars can’t be choosers—yet if Mr. Grydzewski were able to tolerate

* Old boulevard in Warsaw.

† Władysław Rabski, second-rate writer at *Kurier Warszawski*.

modern Polish thought and Polish writing, if he were not allergic to them, *Wiadomości's* relations with writers could have worked out more pleasantly and the contributors to the publication would have gradually gotten better. The way it is now is pitiful, it really is! In Poland no one is interested in *Wiadomości*, the publication has no political significance at all on a broader scale, it has nothing, absolutely nothing at all in common with the current artistic strivings of the nation or emigration. The only thing that has remained are the readers, still convinced that they are terribly high-minded to be subscribing to this Olympian organ and participating in the contests and polls that are embarrassing testimony to nothing but complete disorientation, an artistic jumble and intellectual hodgepodge, and glaring proof that in the heads of Mr. Grydzewski's sheep absolutely nothing has stirred since 1939.

(. . . I should have chosen a different time . . . it's true, I am giving them ammunition, and to all appearances it looks as if my super-egotistical and solipsistic "I" has attacked them to avenge itself for Lechoń. . . .)

1960

XIV

Saturday

At around nine o'clock the insistent ringing of the doorbell awakened me—at the door was a short little someone in a big hat—and quietly, almost inaudibly, I could hear him asking for the real estate agent Delgado.—No, he doesn't live here!—I slammed the door. The end. Period. Dot.

And then I could not get back to sleep, so I put on a record with Beethoven's Fourteenth Quartet. Bach? No, not Bach. . . . Actually, I don't like Bach . . . they, modern music, will one day notice through their glasses that Bach was not the right signpost and that he led them to bankruptcy. You adore him because all you can afford is mathematics, the cosmos and purity—oh, that astronomic, pale face of yours nags and torments! You gain the heavens but you lose the earth, you eunuchs! In love with Abstraction, you have forgotten that song served to enchant the female, and nothing will be able to get you out of the Music as such, to which you have devoted yourselves for lack of anything better. The end. Period. As for Beethoven, I have had enough of his symphonies, his orchestra is incapable of drawing me in for good and holding me at bay—but the quartets of his last period, where the sound is difficult, on the borderline and even beyond it. . . . Oh, you Fourteenth Quartet!

If I listen to you so moved, it is probably because you are abundant in sensual delight as much in form as in the violence perpetrated on this form in the name of . . . I wanted to say in the name of the Spirit, but I will say in the name of the creator. For, O crowning glory of the quartets, every moment your four instruments sound in their union, reach for the most intoxicating harmonies, and wind around in voluptuous modulations; and yet, now and again, a severe and even

brutal hand violates that delight and forces you to terrifying sharpness, sudden jumps, a hard economy of expression straining for metaphysics, an ascetic expression stretched between the highest and lowest registers, listening with rapt attention to a more distant and higher realization. Suddenly, it got quiet. The record ended. Period and point.

I have to go have coffee.

10:00 (In the Café Querandi)

I was drinking coffee, I was eating crescent rolls. And something else. When the waiter walked up to ask what I needed, his hand hung down, quiet, curled up, secret—and idle—until not knowing what to think, I thought about some sort of bush, which I had looked at once at a station, from the window of my train. The hand attacked me in the silence that fell between us. . . . Period. The end. Someone was already walking in and sitting down noisily at a neighboring table—two men—and they asked for dice.

I pulled letters out of my pocket.

“This is a strange example of great intelligence whose object of interest is a field from which he is intuitively cut off. . . .”

“Sandauer est arrivé ici il y a une dizaine de jours. . . .”

“Passing through Kielce, I found Rena. . . .”

“Richter sent me copies of his letters in which he explains all the oddities and problems of this prose. . . .”

10:45 (At Home)

The hand of the waiter had vanished and was no more. Until a certain thought from Nietzsche injected it with a dose of splendid existence.

Neske, the German publisher of Heidegger, sent me his *Essais et conférences*, published by Gallimard. The book lay next to the record with the quartet and caught my attention. Why, here in his lecture on Zarathustra, Heidegger discusses the thought that Nietzsche called his “most abysmal”—about the eternal return, “which liberates the spirit of vengeance,” vanquishes time that escapes, time that approaches, and imparts to becoming the character of being. *Imprimer au devenir le caractère de l'être . . . telle est la plus haute volonté de puissance.*

I won't let them lead me around by the nose—I am familiar with this

childhood, frolicking with Infinity, I know all too well how much frivolity and irresponsibility is needed to proudly enter the terraces of those thoughts-not-to-be-thought and severity-not-to-be-withstood, I know this brilliance! And this Heidegger, at his Nietzschean lecture, suspended over the precipices—clowns! To despise the abyss and not to digest unreasonable thoughts—I determined to do this long ago. I ridicule a metaphysics . . .

. . . which devours me (*nota bene?*).

It is interesting that at the same time and without the least embarrassment I can be a man and a Man. While wondering whether or not to send out the laundry, I am like an arc stretching from there, from the primal beginning, to its latest realizations in what is before me. Not losing a most everyday train of thought for even a second, I am the Mystery of being and its pride, its malady and torment. The bitterness of humanity. The fury of humanity. The unleashing of humanity. The quiet of humanity. The quiet hand of the waiter there in Querandi—quiet and curled up. What is it doing there—while I am here?

11:30

If I had not returned to the hand of the waiter, it would have easily disintegrated into nothingness. . . . And now it will keep returning to me because I have returned to it.

12:00 (At the Ambassador's)

One of those limpid days with a refreshing heat, deliciously mixing late spring with early summer. The park has become green from the palace to the river, which, as almost always, is immobile and blinding. Breakfast was served in the pavilion, outdoors. Sausage patties—then small and masterly beefsteaks on toast, probably à la Chateaubriand, with artichokes—and phenomenal desserts of cold fruit and cream—add to this a few wines, five butlers.

Adante scherzo quasi allegretto. Sun flashing on crowns of fern. Conversation ripples and gleams. And the minister plenipotentiary, an amphitryon, playfully wraps the serpent of conversation first around Spanish bulls, then around Aztec sculpture, Parisian theater, Argentine *asado*. The topiary swans glisten with pearls, while we—the guests, butlers—are like a concert hushed in flawless singing. The French ambassador finds a few kind words for the writer who has paid him a

visit, and the flash of a restrained smile appears on the lips of both ambassadors (that is, his and mine). Liqueurs are served.

A diplomatic hand on the arm of the chair, with fingers slightly bent, but it is not this hand but that one, left there as a *point of reference*—a distant flash in the night, a beacon! Farewell, land! I am on the open sea, foam spurting, wind, storm, furrowed waters . . . and the open sea, open thunder and fury.

(Satisfaction that I had not donned my white but cream-colored shirt from Smart—because we ate in the garden—and that I did not have on too ornate a tie, brown, single-toned, rather unattractive.)

5:00 (In the Car of the Embassy Attaché Officer)

She swallowed the hook. . . . What, Olivos already? . . . This old man, his coloring . . . Charlemagne has more in common with me than does Bolesław Chrobry. . . . They will have to grow accustomed little by little to revolutions vanishing into the past. . . . I have not seen . . . in a long time. . . . The dentist . . . Should we go to Tandil? . . . How easy it is to move the world from a standstill. . . . Make a telephone call . . .

6:00 (At Home)

I am on the open sea again!

She prattled and gabbed without mercy. Until her girlfriends cried: Cut your tongue off! Well, this offended her!

She grabbed the scissors, snip, snap, look, you bad girls: the tongue is on the ground, blood on the lips.

In a corner bar. A seventeen-year-old worker talks to his fiancée on the phone. . . .

. . . Hospital. The right leg shattered. The left cut up and threatened with gangrene . . . ??? What luck! What a coincidence . . . because exactly when he was calling, the Peronist Moya, a militant and a terrorist, was passing by the bar with a bomb under his arm. The bomb mechanism was put into motion unexpectedly. Horrified, Moya threw the bomb helter-skelter, into the bar, and . . .

Without legs. Without a tongue. I read this in the paper.

I was alone, I was sitting on the couch with the paper and before me in the middle of the room were two tables loaded with papers, the back of the chair, a

typewriter cover, farther away a wardrobe. I was on the open, open, open sea. What can one do? Pity? I will have pity *here*—and they *there*. . . . Love? I will love *here*—and they *there*. . . . If only our positions didn't bypass each other. . . . A strong wind, dark masses of water that are thrown up and fall back in an uncontained boiling, drowning in one another, a furrowed expanse, an expanse of unappeased movement, no land, no lighthouse and only there, there, there, in Querandi, that one, that chosen land . . . what is its purpose?

I am very afraid of the devil. A strange confession from the lips of an unbeliever. I am incapable of liberating myself from the idea of the devil. . . . This roaming of the dreadful in my immediate vicinity . . . What good are the police, rights, all guarantees and means of solicitude if a Monster strolls freely among us and nothing protects us from him, nothing, nothing, there is no barrier between him and us. His hand is free among us, the most free of the free! What separates the bliss of the casual stroller from the underground wailing of the voices of the tormented? Absolutely nothing, only empty space. . . . The earth upon which we walk is so covered with pain, we wade in it up to our knees—and this is today's, yesterday's, the day before yesterday's pain, the pain from a thousand years ago—for one should not be deluded, pain does not dissolve in time and the cry of a child from thirty centuries ago is no less of a cry than the one that resounded three days ago. This is the pain of all generations and all beings—not just of man. And finally . . . but who told you that death can bring some sort of peace by releasing you from this world? “And what if nothing but spiders are ‘there’?” And what if there is pain there infinitely exceeding anything we can imagine? You don't tremble too much at the thought of that moment because you surrender to the illusive certainty that beyond that wall you will encounter nothing that will be completely ahuman—where does this certainty come from? What authorizes you to have it? Isn't there some diabolical principle contained even in the very womb of our world which is inaccessible to man, inconceivable to the human mind and emotion? Where is our guarantee that the other world is supposed to be more human? Perhaps it is antihumanity itself, the complete contradiction of our nature? But we cannot accept this, for man because of his nature—and this is certain—is incapable of comprehending evil.

Point. I want to believe that in Querandi there is nothing deviating from the most ordinary of the ordinary even though I lack all basis for such an assump-

tion . . . but the presence of evil makes my existence something so risky . . . so disturbing . . . so inclined to the diabolical . . . that in truth it would be difficult for me to succumb to any certainty at all, especially since the lack of data in this case has exactly the same meaning as an abundance of data.

6:30

That ridiculous Leon Bloy! One day he writes in his journal that that morning a terrible cry awakened him, as if it were coming from infinity. He did not doubt that this was the cry of a damned soul, so he fell to his knees and surrendered himself to ardent prayer.

The next day he writes: “Ah, now, I know whose soul that was. The press announced that Alfred Jarry died yesterday, at exactly the same hour and minute at which I heard his cry. . . .”

And now for a contrast—the ridiculous Alfred Jarry! In order to avenge himself on God, he asked for a toothpick and picking his teeth, died.

I prefer him to Bloy, whom God supplied mainly with a splendid “absolute” superiority over other mortals. Bloy lived well off the Omnipotent One.

Medieval mind, medieval soul? During the time of Charlemagne the role of the intelligentsia was exactly the opposite of today. Then an intellectual was submitted to the collective thought (of the church) and it was the simple man who thought—empirically, dogmatically—for himself—in practical, daily matters. . . . Today it is just the opposite. . . . Nothing will stop the intelligentsia from running riot any longer . . . (the way communism would like). . . . I have to go see J.

If I could for one moment cope with the whole. To constantly live only with fragments—pieces? To always concentrate on one thing, in order to have all the rest escape? What do I need this Leon Bloy for? And then again . . .

8:00 (At the Corner of Las Heras)

I dropped by J.'s but he wasn't home.

I was standing on a stone island in the middle of the street. Evening and early nightfall, lights being born and flickering—and the growing hubbub, cars shoot out next to me, I barely have a chance to look around when two trolley buses turn with a screech, a column of ringing trams approaches, a truck tears out from

behind me, I turn around pierced by the whistle of speeding taxis—what madness is this?—still more of this, faster, a high-pitched, earsplitting tone rises from the booming, grating, ringing din, swarming with prickly flashes.

Speed moving into the deep—moments of such velocity that everything wailed, and I lost my footing on the island as if swept up by an undertow. . . . I don't like and I like Bach. I am a "profound nonexpert" of painting. He said ridiculous things. . . . What time is it? It's unfortunate that I lost the letter in French about the translation, when I told M. to leave the table . . . it's good that it happened this way . . . but too bad that . . . What a crater! . . . I have no luck with . . . That bill . . . Chlorine—God, save me from the river surrounding me from the outside and the even worse river that rushes in my center—from the inner whirlpool—from my dissipation into a thousand moments. From my own haze! My dust cloud! From the flurry that I am. But I do have a—calm—hand in my pocket.

But what about the hands of these people speeding by in vehicles! Calm. Resting . . . on knees. . . . And the hand in Querandi? What does it do? And what would happen if I knelt before it? If I fell to my knees before a hand? On this island . . . here . . . Well. Yes . . . But what for? No, I will not do this. Of course not, from the beginning I knew that I would not do it.

8:15 (In the Tram)

I would call this groping along the peripheries in search of . . . A constant toiling on the borderline in order to . . . An attempt to build . . . An attempt (unsuccessful, as always, as all attempts) to raise there, farther away, some kind of altar, to whatever, in any old place . . . Ah, this kind of grabbing onto any old thing! The hand of the waiter from the Café Querandi!

8:30 (In the Restaurant Sorrento)

The waiter comes to the table, I choose snails *à la marinera* and a carafe of white wine, but his left hand is at rest, just like the one in Querandi, although this hand of his doesn't concern me at all—it is important only insofar as it is not that hand. . . . I thought about this a little for my amusement . . . and it amused me that that hand had caught hold of me so easily . . . and also that it grips me harder than this amusement.

To the left and the right the bourgeoisie. The women are putting cadaver meat into the openings of their mouths and moving their mandibles—this goes to their gullet and alimentary canal—they make a face as if they were sacrificing themselves—and again open the opening to put in . . . The men operate knives and forks—among other things their calf muscles are nourishing themselves in their trouser legs, exploiting the workings of the alimentary organs . . . and it would really be strange to conceive of the work of the persons gathered here as the feeding of calves! . . . ? . . . But the apparatus of their movements is set down to the tiniest detail, these manipulations have been shaped by centuries—reaching for a lemon, buttering pieces of bread, talking in between swallowing, pouring or serving with a conversation on the side, with a crooked smile—the uniformity of movement almost as if it were from the Brandenburg Concertos—and here one sees humanity repeating itself without respite. A room filled with grub, revealing itself in endless variations, like a waltz figure taken up by dancers—and the face of this room, focused on its eternal function, was the face of a thinker.

Yes, but—oh God—this is Sorrento!

This is not Querandi!

8:40 (In the Restaurant Sorrento)

Why do I feign anger?

Why should it bother me that this is not Querandi?

And why am I clinging to his hand like a drowning man—I'm not drowning, am I? I admit that the hand means absolutely nothing to me. I do not know that waiter personally. A hand like so many other hands . . .

9:00 (On Corrientes Street)

I adore the thing that I myself have elevated. I kneel before the thing that has no right to demand of me that I kneel before it—consequently, my kneeling derives only from me.

My anger is the anger of that sea—an unending expanse, a movement unencompassed by anything—but my secret is the fact that I am located in reality twice. Because I walk along Corrientes Street in Buenos Aires having eaten my supper in the restaurant Sorrento. Yet at the same time, I am there, on the open,

open, open, and roiling sea! Tossed by tossing spaces . . . I am on Corrientes and, at the same time, I am in the darkest, interstellar abysses—alone in space! I have just had a pretty good supper and I am cast into infinity, like a shout. . . .

Bah! I chose a hand in Querandi simply to grab hold of something, to feel in relation to something. . . . As a point of reference . . . I chose it precisely for the reason that it has no meaning . . . all directions, places, and things are equally good in my boundlessness, where there is nothing except motion that is becoming. I chose it from the billion things that surround me, but I could have chosen something else. . . . Only now I would not want it to do something to me! To do with me—or to do to me. . . . Am I no longer alone? Am I already one-on-one with the waiter's hand, which I have chosen . . . are the two of us together?

9:10 (Corrientes Street)

I do this only to show how rapacious this parenthetical hand can be in grasping (parenthetically). For my amusement.

9:15 (Corrientes)

Gombrowicz felt that he had the right to a metaphysical tempest, to a cosmic catastrophe and a transcendental spine tingle. On the condition, however, that he not betray the everyday.

He felt that he had the right to sail on the open sea on the condition that his foot did not leave solid ground, this ground here, in Buenos Aires.

9:20 (In a Bar on the Corner of Lavalle and San Martin)

A discussion with Gomez on the subject of Raskolnikov (because one of them, Goma, or perhaps Asno, is reading *The Possessed*).

My view: that in *Crime and Punishment*, there is no drama of the conscience, in the classic, individualistic sense of the word. This is what I lectured to them about.

—At the beginning of the novel—says Gomez—Raskolnikov commits a crime. At the end of the novel he voluntarily turns himself in to the police and confesses the crime. What is this if not his conscience?

I: —Not so simple, *niños!* Look closer. . . .

Raskolnikov does not experience pangs of conscience. In the last chapter it is clearly stated that he regretted only that he “was unsuccessful”—this he considered his sole transgression and in the throes of this guilt, no other, he bowed his head before the “absurd” sentence that overtook him.

If he lacked conscience—what force possessed him therefore to give himself into the hands of the police? What sort of force? The system. The system of almost mirrored reflections.

Raskolnikov is not alone—he is situated in a certain group of persons, Sonia . . . the investigating magistrate . . . his sister and mother . . . his friend and others . . . that is what his little world is like. His own conscience is silent—Raskolnikov, on the other hand, suspects that other consciences will not be silent and that if those people found out, they would condemn him as a criminal. He is hazy to himself, and haziness is allowed everything. But he knows that others see him distinctly, more sharply though superficially, and, for them, judgment of him would be possible. Well—for them—he would be something of a criminal? It is from this suspicion that a feeling of guilt begins to crystallize, he slowly sees himself with the eyes of others and he sees himself a little like a criminal—and this image of himself he communicates in thought to the others—and from there return the even more distinct face of a murderer and the damning verdict. But this conscience is not his and he senses this. This is a specific conscience, arising and growing between people, in a system of reflections—where one man sees himself in the other. Gradually, in proportion to the swelling of a bad self-image after committing the crime, Raskolnikov makes them his judges more and more—and his guilt outlines itself more and more boldly. But I repeat, this is not the verdict of his conscience—this is the verdict that has risen from a reflection, a mirrored verdict.

As for me, I would be inclined to think that Raskolnikov’s conscience manifests itself in only one thing: when it surrenders to that artificial, interhuman, mirrored conscience as if it were his rightful conscience. Herein lies the moral: because he who killed another human being now fulfills the dictate born of human association. And he does not ask if it is just.

12:10 A.M. (On the Way Home)

I could have told them. About the hand. I didn’t.

12:20 A.M.

Yes, yes . . .

My good God, the things one says!

One says whatever comes to mind. This mechanism of speaking . . . astounding! When and how do I plan the sentences I utter! How do I know what I want to say, if I do not consider it for a moment in the brisk course of my speech? When beginning a sentence, do I know how it will end? How the words choose and round themselves . . . the thoughts . . . ?

Yes . . .

But better yet, explain why, in saying so much, you told them nothing about the hand, about the hand from Querandi?

I could have said something. But I didn't.

Whereby it became more secret.

And in its own way that *reflex* . . . this *reflex* . . . is a mirrored conscience, created from reflections . . . but this is, after all, similar to creating for oneself the hand somewhere on the outside, beyond . . . as if on the strength of the reflex. . . .

12:30 A.M.

How his conscience built itself up (Raskolnikov). Just as this hand is building itself up.

It is like a parasite. Now it is feeding on what I said about Dostoevski—it will not rest until it sucks from my words . . . everything that it needs. . . .

For what?

Polyp! It sucks, exploits, in order to construct, to construct there, beyond my limit. . . . It is indefatigable!

I have to finish these notes and send them off tomorrow so that they will make it to Paris by the sixth.

The sixth—the sixth—it is not yet here, it will be, but here it is . . . like the hand!

Again!

12:50 A.M. (At Home)

Where can it be right this minute? Still in Querandi? Perhaps it is already resting and sleeping in some apartment, on some pillow?

Futile hopes. There is no way to take advantage of its sleeping, to be rid of it. . . . The more it sleeps, the more alert it is. The less it is, the more it is.

Let us note: It seemed so calm when I saw it for the first time, in *Querandi* . . . but it is becoming more and more possessive . . . and I myself no longer know what could stop it there, on the periphery . . . where I end.

XV

Tuesday

1939–1959.

A little history? Polish history? I follow it so little, I seek it so feebly (it peeks in at me)—I look at it from afar, as at a chain of mountains. Should I speak of it? But history is—after all—precisely a viewing from afar!

How have these roles finally organized themselves? Who has lost, who has won—Poland or the emigration? Where has Poland finally decided to settle down—in Poland or in “the hearts of émigrés”?

Admit it: the emigration is one big dud; this 1939 version is a failure. Something broke down in its dynamics—it has not fulfilled its historical task. Riddle: what is the difference between an emigration and a can of sardines? Emigration does not benefit from hermetic isolation.

In the meantime, you (it is obvious to whom this “you” refers) worked only for one thing. An aseptic cleanliness so as not to allow any bacillus! To preserve the past! To preserve an unadulterated past! To this end you have become Guardians. And the holiest of your shrines is you yourselves, just as when you drove away on the road to Zaleszczyki from that happy twenty-year period. I will not waste words on well-known topics. Conserve! Preserve! Be a statue changing into bronze, this distancing, running away! To live for the past! To live for now so that in the future one can resurrect the past. Not to allow the least little scratch to appear on this armor of loyalty.

Existence is like a river—this river, when it encounters obstacles, immediately begins to seek other beds and bursts through whatever it can, opening new outlets for itself sometimes in directions it would never have imagined. Our emi-

gration has little in common with a river. It has run into a wall and waits for it to topple over: to this day, it stands and waits. It tries to replace natural movement with massages. And in the course of twenty years you have not been able to muster anything unpredictable, you have not surprised History with anything. This docility testifies to your good upbringing, but it is incapable of reconciling your Nemesis, who values tough guys with . . . Never mind, let's drop this!

Politeness! You are cultivated gentlemen!

Wednesday

What has happened in the life of the twenty-year-old written word in exile? Writers? Works? Ideas?

I occasionally visit the archboring Argentinean literati, where the conversations begin: —*Que nuevos valores surgen entre Vds.?* What new talents are appearing among us? I could answer this question for hours! Well, because there is Józef Mackiewicz, Czesław Straszewski, Nowakowski; there is Bobkowski's prose and Baliński's poetry—all of this was really born in emigration—as were so many truculent publicists, so many other artists, whom one is not allowed to omit. . . . And would it be right to forget about all these valuable works which writers prominent before the war have added to their achievement? Really! "The literature of exile has left a beautiful legacy . . .," etc., etc. Sure, sure. But . . . from a historical perspective? . . .

As long as we are speaking about history—what sort of historical task stands before Polish art and Polish thought?

Nothing complicated. Actually, a very simple task: to live, to live at any cost. Not to die! Let us admit that this is quite an elementary program, with a few additional points, such as: do not be a statue, do not be a mourner, do not be a gravedigger, do not recite, do not repeat yourself, do not inflate yourself, do not belittle yourself, do not thunder and roar, do not make jokes. And most of all let's have—a revision! A revision of everything we possess and a revision of ourselves, too. If everything around us is changing—how can we alone remain fixed in an undisturbed identification with what created us, and which therefore no longer fits into the present moment?

Friday

In one respect, one has to admit that they were intensive. Their barricading and holing themselves up in anticommunism, their war with red Poland.

At least they were able to muster something in themselves. Except . . . on what level does this work take place? There should be, for God's sake, some sort of difference between a political (and propagandistic) anticommunism and the anti-communism of a thinker and poet. The contest between a literature in exile and the enemy does not necessarily have to be reduced to crying "thugs," or sneering, wailing, ridiculing, and cursing. There is room, beyond this easy stuff which quickly absorbs all the ready strategies, for an intellectual and spiritual effort in proportion to the most powerful jolt accorded us since Poland became Poland and worthy of one of the boldest adventures mankind has encountered.

But they would have to strike a most painful blow at themselves—without this, not a step forward. They would have to begin by treating communism with goodwill and even friendship . . . they would really have to feel themselves "comrades." And the second part of this self-inflicted violence would have to be, as much as possible, even more contrary to nature, for they would have to treat their own persons, as well as everything that formed them, that is, all of their history up to now, which is the history of the nation, with hostility. A trifle! Get fraternal with the Kremlin and push away your most valuable treasures—this is what is being demanded of you!

How do you propose to *get at the enemy* without having first penetrated his reasoning in complete goodwill, and without examining his ideal in utmost seriousness? He must be understood even in his venom and dirt (which are inseparable from his virtues)—only then will your blows hit their mark. But perhaps this exceeds your strength? In that case only cold objectivity and justice remain, which see the crimes on both sides of the barricade, a judgment of your own sins so severe it would give you the right to settle accounts with someone else's.

All criticism of communism would also have to be joined to an examination of one's own conscience, an examination which would not retreat before the truth. Who of you has been able to do this? Only Miłosz possessed this coolness—he and Mieroszewski, who introduced a cold sobriety into politics. Besides them? It would be looking for a needle in a haystack to find in your twenty-year-old poetry

and prose a struggle that steadfastly seeks the opponent on his own turf—seeks, finds, strikes. Emigré literature has acted differently . . . consistently . . . and, unfortunately, predictably. When they throw you out of your home, what are you supposed to do? (1) Moan and groan. (2) Reminisce. (3) Inveigh against others. (4) Proclaim your innocence. This program has been implemented and it deprives our polemic with communism of its class, stature, and creativity.

Most of the literature under the leadership of the “bard”—(and why not!)—Lechoń and the editor Grydzewski serves this purpose. The remainder of this writing exists in order for writers to prove that they are still writers—and exactly the kind they were before. Oh, this *status quo ante*!

I am intentionally not being more precise about whom I am referring to as “you.” Everyone, with very few exceptions. The truth will out.

Saturday

Moreover I will note that they have not fulfilled two fundamental intellectual tasks earmarked for them by History: to become more familiar with Marxism and to get closer to existentialism.

One might believe that these two do not have much in common—nevertheless, it is only the two concepts together that really introduce the epoch. Except that . . . Hegel is as necessary to Kierkegaard as he is to Marx. And you won’t be able to crack Hegel without the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This in turn derives a bit from Hume, Berkeley, and further back it would be necessary to know Aristotle and maybe even a little Plato; even Descartes, the father of modern thought, would come in handy and all this as a prolegomena to phenomenology (Husserl), without which one cannot read *L’être et le néant* or *Sein und Zeit*. I do not want to frighten you with titles or names. I don’t make a philosopher of myself, as I am a poet and I have an inborn *abschmack* for abstract thought. But these names and titles indicate the horizon of a second-year philosophy student—and, I ask you, would many of our thinkers be able to handle this exam? Thus they have nothing to offer. You want to fight using your complete ignorance of the modern view of the world and man, of the intellectual development of mankind in the space of two thousand years, with a muddled head on the subject of the most crucial moments of human consciousness—this is what you want to fight with? One senses in everything you

write the lack of exactly this most general philosophical orientation, you know all the letters of the alphabet, except your ABC's.

It is not really a matter of intellect, however—one has to listen and to feel one's way into the newness of the world that is coming into being, into its taste, style, rhythm, passion. These artists weren't tempted. The emotional breach between this group of consistent conservatives, buttoned to the last button, and modernity (I know that this word is forbidden and that in saying it I may be accused of snobbery) has the proportions of the Cologne cathedral.

Catholicism! Well, what is one to do, Catholicism! He who knows everything and listens to all the rest between yawns . . . the blinders on Polish eyes which do not allow them a glance sideways. . . . I repeat, I am not an enemy of Catholicism, I am an enemy only of its function in our culture and not just as of today. But your liberalism, scientism, socialism, etc., are equally poorly acquainted with what I would call the disposition of the modern sensibility. You simply do not know what is going on and in which church the bells are ringing. After twenty years of direct contact with the West, you know less about it than people know in Poland!

Let us assume that I am mistaken, that existentialism is not worth much and that Marxism is defeated. . . . Terrific. But how do you want to despise them if you know them only superficially?

Monday

Originality has never flourished among Poles. A nation almost always inseminated, almost never inseminating, which introduced so little into universal culture, did not feel creation, did not understand it. To us, creativity is something rather distasteful. In art, we appreciate only good secondhand work.

Hence the tragicomic situation when all the Lechońs were backed into a corner: now you must drag something out of yourself, take a leap, have an inspiration, idea, something unexpected and unusual in order to steal the initiative away from History. They replied by reciting all the works they knew up to now plus new ones, which were exactly the same, word for word. All in beautiful, cultivated language, exemplary syntax, dignity and commas intact.

I am far from demanding that each member of the Writers Union in

London become a fire-breathing volcano. But let at least two or three of them try. Even unsuccessfully.

It seems to me that you were doomed by the righteousness of your suffering and the decency of your intentions. And, then—you are so charming!

Wednesday

In the emigration—said Wittlin—in an instructive lecture entitled “The Sorrow and Grandeur of Exile” given at a congress of the P.E.N. Club in Exile—*there almost always occurs a confusion of concepts and criteria. There are no real yardsticks for measuring the true value of a writer’s work. It is mainly sentimental considerations, obsolete myths and the obsolete laws of national aesthetics—observed by the old emigration when judging its “bards”—that determine this value. This confusion was especially irksome to the Polish emigration during the last war.*

Wise words. But the less life one has, the more difficult it is for this kind of natural selection. *Wiadomości* became the ideal expression of a mediocre demise of the emigration, it would be hard to come by a more polished, pressed, groomed, spruced up, and *comme il faut* graveyard. *Wiadomości*, along with the whole group of London blithe spirits, snobs, Englishmen, Europeans, foreign affairs deputies, Polonists, aesthetes, connoisseurs. Fear grips me at the thought of what would have happened if *Kultura* had not appeared on the horizon by some happy miracle of dialectics, as an antithesis. Think for a moment how we would look without this Parisian monthly. Mieroszewski, of course, would not have been allowed into *Wiadomości*, he would have been sentenced to writing columns in minor newspapers and this most sober and most open mind (which has already attained a prominent place in the history of Polish political thought) could not have galvanized and uncorked our eternally bottled up “conceptions.” Not to mention Miłosz, whose *casus* is glaring and obvious. Jeleński! I don’t know how it happened, but I think that Jeleński without *Kultura* would not have become the one Polish publicist and essayist really at home in Europe; he would not have penetrated the real French elite. Most certainly, because of those “sentimental considerations, obsolete myths, and the obsolete laws of national aesthetics” that Wittlin mentions, Jeleński’s supple intelligence, for he knows European literature better

than any other Pole, would not have gained entry to Grydzewski's Olympus and he simply would not have had a place to begin his literary career. And—so as not to cite any more names—many other new things introduced by *Kultura* on the social, political, artistic front—where would all of that have gone? And last but not least, how would our coexistence with Poland look—why, *Wiadomości* and its group are like the Great Wall of China—do you remember the resolution of the Writers' Union in London forbidding publishing in Poland, that monumental resolution, the epitome of absolute incompetence?

Wednesday

Why have I broken with the discretion that characterizes me, and why am I somewhat embarrassing and even downright provocative? I am not doing this for the fun of it. It is a matter of creating a polarization, a line of demarcation. All that is alive has been sitting in the morgue for too long. Life must feel itself alive; it must experience its own ruthlessness, asperity, vigor, and commence clearing a way for itself.

Friday

I will cite Wittlin again:

The writer-exile lives in a restricted society in which it is not easy to create, let alone publish, revolutionary works. A restricted society such as this most willingly lends an ear to that which it has long known. . . . Therefore, it is difficult for an émigré writer to impose his own taste and novelty on the emigration.

Woe to him if he yields. Because if, in a normal society each artist is threatened by the danger whose name is "desire to please," that danger is one hundred times greater in a restricted, ghetto-like society. . . .

There you have it! And one should not ingratiate oneself, this would not be healthy in a "constricted, ghetto" society. Better would be the brusqueness of honesty, even though it might not be to the taste of those who for two decades have sprawled in their sinecures, taking advantage of the fact that "a constricted society such as this most willingly lends an ear to that which it has long known."

The dividing line! The line between movement and the “feigning” of movement!

Saturday

What a shame that we don’t have a Sandauer! He would come in handy with his “No Reduced Fares” stamp. At least Poland was able to come up with a Sandauer—this alone indicates how far they were able to surpass the immobile shallowness of the emigration.

How so? Surpassed? They, bound, and you, in completely unhampered freedom? Impossible! Irritating! Indeed! As one can see, prison is not the worst place for a spirit that becomes vigorous only under lock and key. Whereas it is so easy to dissolve in the boundlessness of freedom—like a piece of sugar that has fallen from a ship into the ocean.

In a certain sense Poland and the emigration are sick with the same disease. For if the emigration sinks into artificiality, as a consequence of its being cut off from the nation, then it is also true that artificiality in a more brutal dose was imposed in Poland by a theory as rapacious as it was false. In emigration one exists in a void, bereft of the contact with life that tests and renews. In Poland everything is also tainted with fiction, but because it has been separated from the world, from the free play of values, Poland has turned into a closed system, subject to special laws. In these conditions it is not difficult to find criteria in art: everything there, in Poland, or here, with us, that invokes reality, life, truth, not the relative and provincial but the universal and ultimate truth, is valuable and even priceless; everything that in its essence is owed to the existing state of affairs and rests on deceit as on a throne is miserable and flat, cunning and mediocre.

Before me on the table is Sandauer’s book *No Reduced Fares*, containing his all-out attack on contemporary Polish writing. I said “all-out” even though the blood-thirsty Sandauer limits himself to devouring Adolf Rudnicki, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Jan Kott, and a few others. But basically this book is, from first page to last (it doesn’t matter whether it is glorifying Bruno Schulz or trouncing Kott), a blow aimed at the game—the game according to the agreed-upon rules of Polish literature.

Didn’t he get a little carried away when butchering Rudnicki? Is Andreze-

jewski really so awful? The issue is not them but rubbish as such and the dubious distinction of this literature. I am not inclined (like Sandauer) to blame their shabbiness exclusively on the period of muzzle and terror. First of all, this all ended quite a while ago, and, second, art, being a metaphor *par excellence*, bears all kinds of inquisitions quite well. Third, it would probably be enough if art in Poland, even without touching politics, would manage to produce even one truly profound and authentic individuality—this immediately infects, forces people to exert themselves, dictates a standard. Their miseries are a result not so much of their situation as of their being unable to look their situation in the face. Yet how do you want them to look it in the eyes, if they have gotten so entangled in it? They did attempt—for all their concern about the spiritual and artistic values they represent—to come to terms with the situation somehow, which, after all, *entre nous soit dit*, worked in their favor to a great degree by removing the competition and introducing a discount fare. The only recipe for good writing is to get at reality through convention, to get at the ultimate reality via conventional reality. But they? So entangled, so embedded in their own history, steeped in it up to their ears, they, the actors in this play—how were they to go about acquiring distance? Even the enemies of communism, such as Hłasko, are embedded in communism for—in an artistic sense—they live off of it . . . and Sandauer was right to include in his book a brief exposé of the career of this talented author, touchingly helpless, incapable of getting his troubles under control intellectually, disoriented, primitive, doomed to elaborate on a few naive themes. Hłasko: interesting, but only as a product of communism—also a son of everything shoddy and one of its constituent parts.

If this is how it is, why did I say that they have outstripped the emigration?

Because they—in contrast to you, here—are tired of the rubbish. Sandauer's tone—that cool determination in unmasking—is not a coincidence but a necessity, and he must have many, many readers in Poland (sometimes a book is not printed in large editions, but its tone is passed from mouth to mouth like “village news”). Sandauer does not altogether appeal to me, he is too cerebral, his intellectualizing is dry, without suppleness, and sometimes even seems lame, but one must admit that no one has inserted his finger more unceremoniously into their throbbing wound. He said what could no longer remain unsaid; he found within himself stores of honesty, ruthlessness, harshness which are absolutely essential and vital for the future development of Polish literature. It is not just a

matter of this or that particular opinion, which may sometimes be wrong. In this book, for the first time since the war, one hears the voice of a *clerc*, returning Poland to Europe (which does not mean: to European capitalism).

Sunday

For Gombrowicz, Sandauer in Poland was what Jeleński was on European soil. Jeleński and Sandauer: both pushed him to the top with indefatigable industry, which he admired (because it was practically inconceivable to him that one could muster something more than acknowledgment—which obligates one to do nothing—in relation to someone else's works). Nor could he conceal from himself that Ferdynurke is mentioned a lot in the pages of No Reduced Fares and that, for Sandauer, it became a point of departure in his offensive on Polish writing. And, entre nous soit dit, a book that devastated those around it to establish the ruthless preeminence of Gombrowicz's achievement as a writer could not help appealing to him.

Did it please him? Why, certainly. So what? Was this reason to refrain from talking about Sandauer? He felt that it would be enough to let these debts be known in order to purify himself. When this complex was admitted, it lost its sting.

After all, he saw more and more clearly that his understanding with Sandauer was far from perfect, encompassing only part of his works and his person. One could not expect Sandauer to have the extraordinary receptiveness and sensitivity that allow Jeleński to grasp things in midflight—Sandauer was a species of beetle, an individual marching to his own drummer, a mastodon, crustacean, monk, hippopotamus, crank, inquisitor, cactus, martyr, crocodile, sociologist, and avenger. This lone man took from him—from Gombrowicz—only what fit him and in the long run, who knows, one even had to count on the possibility that this ally might change into the enemy . . . this turn of events, although not too likely, was not out of the question. . . .

Tuesday

To me, it is clear: in spite of its impoverishments, the higher stratum in Poland is superior to the émigré elite in matters of intelligence and enlightenment.

While the emigration has wasted the bulk of opportunities and riches that the wide latitude of the West has given it, the Poles have at least been able to exploit some of their advantages. What sort of advantages? First, the inner, secret, almost conspiratorial, individual maturing that inevitably occurs in an atmosphere of being stifled, in an atmosphere of violence, persecution, and complication—not to mention catastrophes, horrors, blows, defeats. All of this taken together has sharpened them as much as the softness and monotony of the emigration (whose only struggle is the struggle for money) have made émigrés emblems of the ideal bourgeoisie. The affability of the official tone in Poland is accompanied by an awful dissonance somewhere deep inside—a dissonance as dynamic as it is bitter. Disillusionment—a series of disillusionments—is probably the advanced instruction they have received.

Let us also remember the renewal that is always brought by a revolution, even a bungled one. The social reconstruction had to bring with it changes in intellectual and spiritual perspectives. The new materialistic evangelicism was after all a jolt, a jolt out of the narrowness of Catholic tradition, which had become so inhibiting in Poland that only now is the legacy of the Jesuit boarding school being eliminated. This is how Marxism has compromised the Church while compromising itself, after having revealed itself as no less rigid and dogmatic. On the other hand, the Nation has also been questioned (I am speaking of the upper class), because its weakness has been revealed and because in the new political constellation of Poland the issue of nationality has less and less to say. It seems, therefore, that on the corpses of Dogma, of Philosophy, and of Ideology only Science and Technology can proclaim their kingdom. But Technology and Science are barely inching along in Poland, something is plugging along here and there—too clumsily to be able to become even the semblance of life's profound daily contents. Degradation is common, it has encroached upon all areas and it has disposed of all the gods—hence their disillusionment, hence their wisdom.

This wisdom, however, is specific . . . not to be revealed. For political reasons? Not only. These people are like children who would like to build a new edifice with only a pile of blocks left over from a lot of previous birthdays; they build something inharmonious, with castle vaults, the facade of a Swiss house, a factory chimney, and a church window. Poland is full of clutter and her intellectual life consists of flinging platitudes at one another—those from before the war

and those that were inserted into their mouths after the war. In listening to these learned discussions we sense a poor education, even a poor upbringing, but most of all the absence of a style that would allow these fine talents to achieve something every once in a while—everything is a junkyard, chaos, ineptitude, and dirt. So much dirt! So much garbage! Nevertheless, the underground pressure of their restless, tragic, brutal, disillusioned intelligence seems to me infinitely stronger than before the war, and will probably one day make its way to the surface.

XVI

Tuesday

Art is aristocratic to the marrow, like a prince of royal blood. It is the refutation of equality and the adoration of the superior. It is a matter of talent, even genius, or superiority, prominence, uniqueness; it is also the harsh creation of a hierarchy of values, cruelty in relation to that which is common, the selection and perfection of that which is rare, indispensable; it is, finally, a nurturing of personality, originality, individuality. No wonder, then, that the magnanimously endowed art of the People's Democracies is a mountain that gives birth to a mouse. This costs cool millions and all this "production" boils down to nothing but gab.

Gab. When I happen to cock my ear in the direction of Poland, this is what I hear—gab and more gab. They are terribly garrulous. Their books are like their literary press, and their literary press is like their coffeehouses—everything is dripping with chitchat, bursting with blather. I don't know a single work of theirs that I could recognize as being born in silence. Nor do I know a single author (except for maybe two) about whom I could say: he doesn't write on the sidewalk or in a café attached to the sidewalk. Even the works of people who have been isolated for some time have in them this peculiar sociability, characteristic of persons who do not own their own apartments (spiritually speaking; I am not speaking of a kitchen and bathroom). Listening to the café hubbub they create, one could claim that all their voices have more or less the same intensity; they also have the same "color," as musicians say. There is such a cacophony of voices and instrumental groups that the trumpet is indistinguishable from the flute and the double bass flows together with the oboe. Altogether it sounds like an orchestra, pardon me, like a café—yes,

there is no question about it, modern Polish literature is not only great babble but a great “locale” with pastries, demitasses, and souls.

I would make a face at them today and call out “tsk, tsk”—because, formerly, before the war, for the heroic Polish left, I was a coffeehouse literatus worthy of condescension . . . but now the roles have been reversed. It is obvious that their truths have been hammered out over a demitasse (hey, do people still say this?), that their poems are washed down with tea, that their essays are like a layer cake and their novels like “napoleons” (hey, do you still use this word?). Not that they are too sweet. The matter is more peculiar than that. As you know, a man feels different whether he is, for example, in a dark forest, in a manicured French garden, or on the fortieth floor of an American skyscraper. For an expert like myself (for I have worn my teeth down to the gums in cafés), there can be no doubt that their sense of well-being is the sense of well-being of café habitués. There is in them, how shall I put it, this little aftertaste . . . the limits of their personality are exactly the distance “from one table to the next.” In vain would one seek in them a holy thicket or the expanse of a meadow. There isn’t a penny’s worth of the dramatic ferocity of a loner like Kant or Proust. They lack the metaphysical anxiety born of a concentrated silence. They lack the religion revealed in a burning bush. They lack the method, hygiene, discipline that characterizes science laboratories. Each of them ends close by—where his neighbor begins—they are limited by each other, by their own company. Of course they know all this and they do what they can *not* to be a café; but their spiritual convulsions exist so that they not be a café, the result of which is that they again become a café, inside out. A vicious circle.

Even before the war, the excessive domestication of literature in the cafés Ziemiańska, Ips, Zodiac, etc., was disturbing. A café is dangerous because it creates its own world; a café, even a Parisian café, is always local and so provincial. Sandauer’s achievement will go down as the discovery of the forbidding percentage of cafés and, what goes with it, the provincialism in the work of an eminent Polish writer, but in my opinion it would be better to praise this writer for a creativity that is so typical and representative. How is one to be cured? There is only one means of escape. Immediate departure abroad, to the other side of any border (as long as one gets across). This is inopportune because of the difficulties caused by the authorities in getting a passport—but let us not forget that a writer can leave on a book, like a witch on a broom. Do you get my advice? A Polish artist,

if he wants to achieve something, has to leave, leave spiritually, leave without budging an inch—and he has to leave for the mountains. The Polish plain is in every respect moving but for an artist there is nothing like mountain air, sharp, sharp mountain air, accompanied by such unevenness of terrain that someone is always looking at someone else from above or below—is this clear? Move out (in spirit, not budging from the spot) into a blessed land, which swells beneath your feet, stiffens, grows and rises. Or in other words: if you want to cultivate art, you have to lean on art, move out to seek the highest art of Europe, and recover in its nature your own nature as an artist and bind yourself to it. . . .

I would refrain from these suggestions if communism had not revealed art and literature to be in a state of such advanced sclerosis . . . one must admit that although communism is not always sclerotic, in such “cultural” matters it suffers from an incurable stiffness and clogging of the arteries. In other areas it is innovative—here it is heavy, blind, unintelligent. If Communists wanted to approach art less brutally and dully, they would have to understand that one cannot change art in its very essence—that it, like certain shrubs, is a high climber. There is little in humanity that is as uncompromising as the artist. It would be wisest, therefore, to leave artists in peace and allow them to be like the aristocracy of old, in keeping with their vocation. This kind of aristocracy is conceivable and acceptable within Marx’s system. But Communists preferred to “level” art by stomping on its face. Too bad, but in these “civilized” conditions only one thing remains—to emigrate in spirit as quickly as possible—but, of course, I give this advice only to the two or three authentic princes divinely ordained, the remaining thirty thousand democrats, engaged in dabbling, can do what they want, because it is of no great importance.

Tuesday

All of the (monstrous) Communist disasters in treating art derive from their incapacity to understand its reasons for being.

The power of art, its capacity to resist, its perpetuity which always re-nourishes itself, derive from the fact that the individual expresses himself through it. Man. Individual man. Science is collective just as reason and knowledge are not private property; truths arrived at by reason, abstract truths, are passed from generation to generation and a scholar is like an architect who adds one more brick to the

edifice built by his predecessors. Philosophical, conceptual truths are no less abstract and no less Communist—they are thereby common (as long as the philosopher does not become an artist, which often happens).

On the other hand, when you step onto art's terrain—watch out, Communists! For this is private property, the most private property man has ever achieved for himself. Art is so very personal that each artist begins it from the very beginning—and each creates it in himself, for himself—it is the vent for one existence, one destiny, a separate world. In its effects, in the mechanisms of its effects, it is social; in its conception and spirit it is individual, separate, concrete, unique.

What would happen if you liquidated art, Communists? Nothing, you say? Human progress would not be hindered, there would be no void, no silence, the loud voices of Science, Philosophy, the Party, maybe even of Religion would still ring out, each day would bring new discoveries. Surely. . . . But are you really prepared for one major sacrifice? From then on, there would be no way of knowing what a man thinks or feels. What the individual man thinks or feels.

It would be unbearable. But why shouldn't Communists be capable of acknowledging a separate place for art and respecting its needs? They will need this kind of preserve, they could allow (others, but also themselves) this kind of private property and this kind of aristocracy. Why don't they do this? I don't know. Doesn't the established pattern allow it?

Wednesday

Councillor Podśrocki of *Trans-Atlantic* reminds a person I know, I am told, of a comical personage, the councillor Korczyński. This Korczyński was, around 1947, the secretary of the Legation that sailed into Buenos Aires from Warsaw under the leadership of Minister Szumowski. A secretarial figure, bureaucratically diplomatic and Galician to boot—extremely good material for vaudeville. And he wasn't the only one at the consulate who roused one's sense of humor.

Thursday

Ah, a Polish teacher! In answering Mr. Grabowski, I thought he was a mere columnist, even though he had the air of a teacher of Polish. And my feelings

probably did not lead me astray, because his reply brought the proud admission that he was the son of a professor (history of literature) and then—how inestimable, delightful, and typical the passage—that he was used to evaluating a work of art methodically, according to three considerations (I no longer remember what they were, but I read them with great enthusiasm).

Alicja Lisiecka, who carries on about Sandauer in *Nowa Kultura* (“Jubilee of Criticism”), also, unfortunately, smells like a Polish teacher. Her piece is a little too smart-alecky, academic, and professorial, like a bullet that misses its mark. (P.S. Strange. Another article in *Życie Literackie*, also about Sandauer, also schoolmarmish and like a schoolteacher’s, but not by Lisiecka but Lisicka and not Alicja but Teresa. What is this: a holy professor in two persons? Could it be that she splits herself in two like an amoeba?)

Friday

Byron and Debussy. These revolutionaries from years ago are worth envying. They at least had something specific to destroy, they had a distinct, solemn enemy they could strike down. In our times the revolution has penetrated everything and there is no longer anything shocking. The scandal has exhausted itself.

But today Byron’s letters are richer in dynamite than *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, than *The Corsair*, than the works that were intended to be revolutionary. And Debussy? Doesn’t his conservative stubbornness, his peculiar classicism, appeal to us at least as much in his partiturs as his “modernism” does?

Sunday

Guitarra was taken to *colimba*. “Guitarra,” as the name itself indicates, is a guitarist, whom I came to know in Tandil when he played Bach and *Suite en ré*, whose author is probably Visée. And “colimba” is military service. Later, during successive meetings, I read from his face all the horrors of the torture—which in Argentina lasts for well over a year in the army and two in the navy.

Is it possible to reconcile the barracks with democracy? With constitutions guaranteeing personal freedom and dignity? With the declaration of the rights of man? They put a twenty-year-old boy, who has committed no crime, into this

concentration camp, worse than a prison (because in prison there is no sergeant who takes you for a gallop; because prison, unlike the barracks, is not determined to break down your being; because prison is incarceration but not harassment day and night). One or two of their most beautiful years must be given away to the Sergeant. They are lucky if they come away unscathed (and no one pays reparations). The inevitability of this ordeal poisons their youth long before the fatal date.

How does one explain that the wrong of some individual Dreyfus or some other lucky fellow becomes a problem of conscience and provokes something like a civil war, while annually depriving ten million boys of their most elementary rights (sometimes together with their lives) gets swallowed so easily by our humanitarian throats? Why does no one protest, neither the parents, nor they themselves, nor, finally, any of these sensitive consciences of humanity who are always ready to rend their garments.

If you are curious to know who is at fault, take a look around . . . yes, it is, it is . . . age (this hidden spring of social life). Twenty years old! *Colimba* is where two types of violence basic to society take place. The violence of the more enlightened upon the less enlightened and the assault of the older upon the younger. Here an officer, more aware, grabs half-illiterates by the throat, here the older grabs the younger by the hair. We live tempered lives, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, but somewhere there must be a little cranny where the superior meets the inferior, the older the young, oh, just like that, without inhibitions or restraints.

Flor, Marlon, Goma, and others, already liberated, told anecdotes from the *colimba* yesterday—hair-raising!

What would happen if a law was announced sentencing a person who completed, let us say, his fortieth birthday to prison for a year? The general protest would lead to revolution in a second. But the *colimba*? Well, people have been used to it for centuries. And, after all, this age . . . The age of complete, yet still childish physical prowess makes it easy, enables . . . the concentration of many lives in the fist of one officer, as if it were the fist of a demigod.

Tuesday

Today I awakened in the delight of not knowing what a literary award is, that I do not know official honors, the caresses of the public or critics, that I am not

one of “ours,” that I entered literature by force—arrogant and sneering. I am the self-made man* of literature! Many moan and groan that they had difficult beginnings. But I made my debut three times (once before the war, in Poland; once in Argentina; and once in Polish in emigration) and none of these debuts spared me one ounce of humiliation.

I thank Almighty God that he got me out of Poland when my literary situation began to improve and cast me onto American soil, into a foreign tongue, into isolation, into the freshness of anonymity, into a country richer in cows than in art. The ice of indifference conserves pride quite well.

Thanks be to you, too, Almighty God, for the *Diary*. One of the most dramatic moments in my life happened ten years ago when the first fragments of the *Diary* were being born. Oh, how I quaked! I cast off the grotesque language of the works I had written to that point as if I were taking off armor—this is how vulnerable I felt in the diary, I was so overcome by the fear that I would emerge pale in these simple words! Was this not my fourth debut and the most dangerous of them all? But afterward! What security when it turned out that in a tight spot I could comment on myself—that is exactly what I needed: to become my own critic, my own annotator, judge, director, I needed to deprive others of the power to decree sentences . . . that is when I truly won my independence!

I owe much to a few writers who supported me, beginning with Bruno Schulz, who is very well known today. But it was only when I really started to write in the *Diary* that I felt I was wielding my pen—a wonderful feeling, which I got from neither *Ferdynand* nor any other of my works of art, which seemed to write themselves . . . somewhere beyond me. . . . From then on, my pen began to serve me. . . . It was as if I were accompanying my art all the way to the point where it dropped into another person’s existence and became hostile to me.

Tuesday

Grombrowicz felt that exceptionally malicious circumstances forced him to such directing of his personal drama in the Diary (although perhaps it was also justified by the spirit of his writing, in which the idea of directing and the figure

*“Self-made man” in English in original.

of the director appear so often)—therefore, no one ought to reproach him for this. He wrote in conditions that were downright stifling—gagged in Poland, cutoff from the world at large by his exotic Polish, choking in an émigré narrowness. This is how his unfortunate works were born—not easy, after all, not easy to the point that even in the very center of Paris they would have to fight hard for recognition.

It is a measure of the unbelievable shallowness of the Polish minds with which he had to contend in the suffocating emigration that even his Diary, so much easier to understand than his earlier works, did not often penetrate their brains. He was labeled “egotistical”—and Schluß! that settled it! It never occurred to the majority of these émigré readers and critics—scholars of Polish literature, poets, writers, intellectuals—that one could speak about oneself in various ways, that his “I” in the Diary is not the “I” of a trivial egoist, or a naive Narcissus, but of someone who realizes what is going on . . . that if this is egotism, then it is a methodical, disciplined egotism testifying to a high and cold objectivity. They saw only the pattern. And furthermore the outcry: —Egotist! Conceited! Tactless! Aggravating, angry, unlikable!

It is true that Gombrowicz sometimes teased the emigration on purpose. —I tease it so that it will not throw itself at me—he once said; for he claimed that Stupidity is an exceptional beast, one that cannot bite if it is yanked hard by the tail.

XVII

Friday

Beethoven’s form and its drama in history.

For some years I have been existing beyond music. I have become unaccustomed to it. As for Beethoven, I devoured him with pleasure in my youth just like everyone else, but later, what do you expect, he had settled in my ear too much and a time came when his “phrase” came close to being trite for me. And all these revelations—Beethoven’s “thought” and his ecstasies and demonisms and lyricisms and the very outline of the theme, harmonies, modulations, transformations—I already had everything in me for good . . . only echoes reached me from the stage.

Nevertheless a few months ago, I began listening, by accident, to his Quartet in F Minor, the eleventh—and I don't know if I was particularly craving music that day or if perhaps I was simply won over by the polyphonic riches of the quartet as a string group, always so inexhaustible . . . immediately the next day I bought myself records with these quartets of his . . . and I drowned. E-flat major, E minor, C major, C-sharp minor, F major, A major, G major—quartets! Sixteen quartets! It is one thing to dip occasionally into one of them, in passing, and another to step into the building, to immerse oneself, to wander from hall to hall, wander in the galleries, take in the vaults, examine the architecture, uncover the inscriptions and frescoes . . . with a finger to one's lips. Form! Form! It is not him I look for, the building is not full of him, but his form, which I get to know in the course of this gradual self-composition of adventures, changes, acquisitions—similar to creatures human and nonhuman from ancient fairy tales. As if through a fog, constantly losing my way and with a finger to my lips, I move from “*adagio molto e messo*” from the seventh to “*molto adagio—andante*” from the fifteenth, or, too, pensive, I examine how and why Haydn's sun from the time of his youth returns so strangely at the threshold of death, in the last rondo and in the *andante* in F major? How and why? An unclear question—undelineated answers—dissolved in a musical noise, like the noise of a river—this is not an area of clear contour—and one cannot do more than ask, than answer, while constantly searching with a finger to one's lips, constantly losing one's way.

Certainly, if not for that elegant sound of four stringed instruments, if not for that polyphonic quartet refinement, thanks to which all music that passes between these four instruments undergoes an inordinately subtle transformation, I would not have gone crazy about Beethoven so unexpectedly. But he also interested me as a problem. . . . I thought: this music is probably one of our greatest compromises in the area of art . . . its history is the history of the dirty trick that was played on us . . . its history is the history of our defeat . . . and this old, easy Beethoven is one of the most difficult nuts to crack, today, in the day of Schönberg.

For in art nothing is as difficult as easiness. For art becomes more and more difficult in proportion to its development; easiness is then contradictory to its tendency, easiness remains behind, easiness dies, is taken care of—keeping easiness alive is then contradictory to the natural evolution of art.

And one more thing, before I get to Beethoven: as everybody knows, music

is almost exclusively a form, pure form, which develops by itself, with its own logic, from generation to generation. A composer, depending on his era, finds an existent musical language with which he must express himself.

Let us now take a look at musical form from the Mozart-Beethoven period. Forests, groves, streams and pools, flowery meadows and fields rustling with wheat—freshness, lushness, youth, splendidly fertile ground—this is natural music, as God ordained, whose rising force one had to stop. What a wealth of singing! What a flood of harmony! During those blessed times, O musicians, Form was gracious to people. And Beethoven, happy fellow, arrived in the world exactly at the close of this period, when naturalness began to exhaust itself and artistry was gaining momentum. What a happy moment, musicians! Joining nature and art so attractively, as in his transformation of the sonata form, already fanciful and disciplined, yet still direct, fresh. . . . These idylls of art with nature rarely happen to humanity, and humanity, having once experienced them, does not forget them for long centuries. . . .

But Form wouldn't be our curse if it allowed this romance to endure for any length of time. It began to fulfill its ominous destiny. The virgin soil of Mozart and Haydn began to exhaust itself. Chopin and Wagner understood with horror that they could not cultivate the same ground, something repulsive—satiety—stood like an angel with flaming sword in their way; they then found other lands which had lain fallow—but they turned out to be worse. Unhappy Wagner had to complicate his mighty musical invention with the intellect just so as not to follow in the footsteps of those masters—what an autocatastrophe, musicians! And Chopin, exploiting his discovery—the different treatment for piano—to its maximum, discovered his own row from which he did not budge, happy that he possessed at least this farmstead. For these people, music begins to contract violently, limit itself, concentrate, make itself difficult, this is no longer Beethoven's evening stroll but hard labor, digging the well, irrigating the land. When then of Debussy or Stravinsky, and all the others later, cast out by music, by Form, and even further on, where there were clods, crags, fallow ground—laborious, grim effort, in the sweat of one's brow, the acquiring of bloody, meager fruits, isn't this true, musicians? They could delude themselves, like Debussy, that they were getting out from under the tyranny of classical rules into freedom—it is true that these few freedoms, fought for in

agony, were accompanied by the growing pressure of Form, but an (already) inhuman and cruel Form, acting against our humanity. Did not this worthy-of-our-pity Debussy say that music should be esoteric and accessible only to the chosen? to specialists?

Yes, a glaring example, one of the most glaring in the entire history of culture, that “form deforms,” turning against man. The history of music of the past one hundred years is the almost clinical history of suffocation. I do not deny that this slow choking of the soft body in the harder and harder armor of form does not lack its lofty and insightful moments—for even wanderers who are exiled by hunger from their native land and who take on the desert and wild regions often have stunning experiences, an unusual revelation—the exiled spirit, wandering spirit, attains in such extreme circumstances a store of new and raw material, which one would search for in vain at home. I do not treat this wealth lightly and even someone as good as Schönberg—his face twisted with lack of joy in a feeling of tragic obligation and tragic fate, pushing on toward a complete realization of his demonic destiny—fills me with as much pity as respect. But how far you are, O torture, from the happy days of Merciful Form. The most scathing absurdity of these martyrs is that they do not express what they live. When Form turns against you, you experience awful and poisonous states. The pleasure that you desire to create torments you and humiliates. Your lungs lack the air that is called joy. Everything becomes an effort and you are like a high jumper who puts the bar higher and higher in order to jump higher still. Mysterious powers force you to seek, not what tastes good to you, but taste, and your shame is that you must completely support and confirm that which is killing you.

Saturday

Tchaikovsky's artistic defeat is proof that in art one can neither go back nor lower oneself—a backward direction and a downward direction are not allowed. The unbearable stench penetrating his work, of something like the inessential mixed with something “that was,” ex, buried, and now artificially blown up, the feebleness of the melodiousness that has seen its day! And what can one say about Shostakovich? Folklore, melody, anecdote—no, returning is not allowed! Making

it easier is not allowed! One is not allowed to lower oneself! Up, crawl up, without respite, without looking back, even though you might have to break your neck, even though, at the top, there may be nothing but rock.

Today Beethoven is an inaccessible yardstick. The most precious thing about his song derives from the impossibility of its ever being repeated.

Saturday

This tragic exodus of modern composers is not only a matter of gradually making barren our musical ground—everything in our culture, all of its mechanisms, counts on this pushing out to the extreme or up to the top. . . . Nietzsche's and Ortega's opinions about Beethoven interest me, for example, because I deny them freedom. These are forced opinions, the kind that "speak themselves" as if against the will of the person who utters them. This is a little like a totalitarian system: everything must support the dominant tendency.

Nietzsche (in *The Gay Science*):

He says first that vulgarity has visited German music—a bourgeois, revolutionary vulgarity, intolerant of "nobles," especially in their embodiment of *esprit* and *élégance*. "If you want to imagine the human being that goes with *this* music, merely imagine Beethoven as he appears beside Goethe—say, at their encounter in Teplitz: as semi-barbarianism beside culture, as the people beside nobility, as the good-natured human being next to the good—who is more than merely a 'good' human being—as the visionary beside the artist, as the man in need of comfort next to the man who *is* comforted, as the man of exaggeration and suspicion next to one who is fair-minded, as the mope and self-tormentor, who is foolishly ecstatic, blissfully unhappy, guilelessly extravagant, presumptuous and crude—and in sum, as the 'untamed human being': that is what Goethe felt about him and called him—Goethe, the exception among Germans. No music of his rank has yet been found."*

Interesting. Because this is, on the one hand, aristocratic, profound, refined, but on the other is a glaring lie and quite a coarse simplification. To furnish

*From Walter Kaufmann's translation of *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 159.

Beethoven's music with Beethoven's nose—to humanize it to the point where it almost has the shape and gesture of the person? One could say to me: how's this, why you yourself have often said that one must seek the creator behind the work? Yes, but not so simplistically! A creator, in my opinion, should be only "one point of reference" for the critic, the work can be bound too closely to the creator only by someone who does not know how much in art "the language deceives the voice and the voice deceives the thought." And in music this kind of naïveté is almost inconceivable because here form reaches the highest degree of objectivity. That Nietzsche! To make the transformation of a theme in a symphony dependent on the expression of the eyes or the manner of bowing! To accuse of "unrefinement" someone capable of refining the fugue! To deny self-control and style to someone whose profession it was to saturate an aristocratically cool form with emotion! To imagine that Beethoven, consumed by the most specific musical assignments, such as the shaping of a theme, the extracting from it of all its possibilities, following it through tonalities, such as the organization of harmony, in short, all the work of composing, which ultimately relies on drawing out of the musical embryo a few new elements of form which then later "work together," blazing their own trails . . . to imagine that the Beethoven who lived in this kingdom of sound was also supposed to be a "soul" in the ordinary sense of the word while he worked!

And why does Nietzsche add to the music the not necessarily handsome nose of its creator, instead of adding the music to the nose? Are the variations from the Thirty-Second Sonata really supposed to be barbaric because they were composed by a barbarian quite shocking when compared with Goethe? It would probably be simpler to recognize that the barbarian who wrote these variations was not a barbarian. The author of the fugue from the *Quartet in C-sharp Minor* a plebeian? A bourgeois good old boy with the adagio from the *Hammerklavier* Sonata in his head? An eccentric dreamer, hammering out the architecture of the Fifth Symphony? A simpleton with ideas from "adagio molto e messo"?

Why does Nietzsche fall apart when he gets to Beethoven?

But let us take a look at what Ortega y Gasset, that modern *porte parole* of the latest generation, has to say.

"The same distance that exists between Bach and Beethoven exists between the music of 'ideas' and the music of 'feelings.'"

"Beethoven takes for his point of departure the real situation in which life

places him—the absence of his beloved, or the absence of Napoleon, a spring day in the country, etc.—this situation unloads in him streams of feelings, sorrowful or tempestuous. . . .” “This same procedure proposed to Bach would be interpreted as impertinence. . . .”

And further:

“Romantic musicians, including Beethoven, devote themselves to expressing the coarse feelings that visit the decent bourgeois.”

And he explains that common, lower feelings exist, as well as the higher, more refined ones—that Beethoven is the bard of exactly this inferiority, but that Debussy is “a real artist”; even if he experienced such common, average feelings, he would stifle them in himself, ashamed—he would allow only refined, artistic experiences deriving from the higher sphere of the spirit to be heard. That is why—concludes Ortega—a musician like Beethoven writes the *Pastoral* Symphony and a musician like Debussy, *The Afternoon of a Faun*.

It is enough to repeat what I said a minute ago about Nietzsche: why, when Ortega touches Beethoven, does Ortega fall apart?

Is it really “the absence of a loved one or the absence of Napoleon” that constitutes a point of departure for Beethoven’s works? So “common” feelings are deprived of the right to greatness in art? Does Beethoven express feelings in his music? Isn’t it really peculiar, bah, even offensive that one speaks about Beethoven in this way? Why do people speak only of him in this way? And how does one arrive at this kind of listening to his music? Why him exactly? Why is Ortega in top form, sensitive, knowing and not stupid when he listens to Stravinsky, but Ortega listening to Beethoven totters down to the level of an ordinary engineer, a romantic lawyer, a sentimental hairdresser, and looks around after his lover, after Napoleon, humanity, destiny, or a stream in the woods? Why, I ask, doesn’t he listen to Beethoven in the same way he listens to Bach?

Why? But let us also add that these are not the private perversions of two wise men. The dull-witted, the dull-wittedly malicious approach to this artist becomes a feature of our times. These commentators! Even Wagner said the first thing that came to his mind. In the last chord of the andante from the Thirteenth Quartet these jackasses want to see “the laughter of Bettina Brentano.” Those two musical Tartarins, Romain Rolland and Herriot, dream of battles, sylphs, gnomes, or even “giants throwing mountain crags.” And particularly repulsive is the fate

prepared for the splendid Quartet in A Minor, opus 132. This quartet has been labeled the “convalescent quartet.” It was generally agreed that the first allegro was illness; scherzo—the recovery; adagio, molto, andante—the thanksgiving hymn of recuperation; the final allegro—health and happiness. This precious quartet about a clouded, desperate sky, whose first allegro always gives me a precipitous jolt—namely, that after the modulation there enters another theme—they have dressed in a bathrobe, slippers, nightcap, and stuffed with pills.

But these oddities, mistakes, stupidities, or brutalities do not take place exclusively in the higher strata of the musical world. The average listener’s attitude toward Beethoven, the attitude of those attending concerts, is tainted with disease. At the beginning, an honest and joyous love, there are no tones of God above him then, no style grabs you this way. . . . Then the young student experiences his idyll with form and wallows in delectation. This, however, does not last long . . . the hearing becomes accustomed, satiety follows—too bad, too bad! Splendor becomes too intimate, it wearies.

And together with the melancholy boredom of exhaustion, the pressure starts to get annoying—from where? From the air—the pressuring, all-pervasive suggestion that of all the creators it is exactly this one that is “in bad taste,” that is too easy. . . . A malicious ease turning itself into difficulty! Bach, Chopin, Schubert, even Mozart—well yes! But not Beethoven! From then on, therefore, music becomes a steep staircase leading upward for our student, a difficulty that surrounds him; it is as if he, in casting off delight, were entering another realm, raw, hard, dry, bitter. And finally the highest initiation appears, the tragic Moloch and tyrant: Bach!

Monday

Bach is boring! Objective. Abstract. Monotonous. Mathematical. Sublime. Cosmic. Cubic. Bach is boring!—This is how the worst of heresies sounds, which can deprive one of respect in the musical world.

Take a close look at the priests of Bach’s mass, look them in the eyes: obduracy, concentration in abstraction, severity, just like the one that offered the bodies of young children to the gods.

Now is the time to answer the question: why do people want to destroy

Beethoven, why is every absurdity allowed as long as it is anti-Beethoven, why is a strangling net woven of naive compliments and reproaches? Is it perhaps because they don't like Beethoven? Quite the contrary: because this is the only music that humanity has been successful in creating, because it is beguiling. . . .

He captivates us and that is why we must revile him.

This will be a paradox only for the person unaware of the danger of the situation—that we are under Form's sway, which exists according to its own laws, independently of us and our tastes. This form—the musical form in a given case—must develop; therefore it must shatter all of its attainments up to now; and specifically those that have enchanted man, those that humanity has fallen in love with, those . . . that are riveting . . . and that is why Bach is raised onto a pedestal—because they don't like him, or they don't like him too much—and this creates the possibility of development, here form does not fit man well, here, therefore, something is left to be done between man and form. Modern music, based on Bach, can still live and progress. And that is why in Bartok's six quartets, whose ties with Beethoven's last chamber phase are very strong, Bach dominates in spite of everything. And Schönberg?

But how sad this is! How unenviable our fate!

We are condemned to revile our most genuine delights and to think up other, revolting ones which torment us, which we cannot bear—and, what's more, we are forced to admire them as if this were our true love—we are artificial in this self-abuse, artificial and poisoned, with a tormenting, repulsive art which we are not allowed to vomit up!

Tuesday

Ways of listening to the quartets. —Sometimes I try to tie them with another age, even with another sex. I try to imagine that the C-sharp minor was composed by a ten-year-old boy or by a woman. I try, too, to listen to the Fourth as if it had been created after the Thirteenth. In order to gain a personal attitude toward each of the instruments, I imagine that I am the first violin, Quilombofflor plays the viola, Gomozo is at the cello, and the second violin—Beduino. It is also splendid to listen to the quartet as if it were one instrument—then one values the expansive-

ness of the scale and the richness of color. I think of names for them: the Eighth, for example, I call the “raspberry” (because of the tonation in the first allegro) and the Fourteenth the “Nietzschean” (because it is so borderline). There are no childish things that will not serve to excite the feelings.

Friday

Native Realm (I agree with Mieroszewski) lacks that something which in Aristotle is called *quid*—it doesn’t get to the heart of the matter, doesn’t answer the question “what is this about” and also “what is the reason for it.” Once I sailed along the Paraná like this: early dawn, neither day nor night, just fog and the movement of the all-encompassing, rustling water, sometimes a specific object would appear in these whirlpools—a board, a branch—but it made no difference because it was immersed in a thrust so universal that it took away your consciousness.

Miłosz, who is immersed in Life and in History, will say that there is no greater falsehood than the definition that the only truth is the one that cannot be encompassed. Naturally. Except that . . . in reading Miłosz I recommend caution, for he is—I believe this—personally interested in blurring contours.

To me Miłosz is one of those authors whose personal life dictates his work. It is not always this way. If my life had turned out differently, who knows if my books would have changed. But Miłosz! Except for his poems, all of his writing is tied to his personal literary situation, that is, to his personal history or to the history of his times. Gradually he turned out to be almost the official informant on the subject the East, at least, the Polish informant; all of the prose he has written to date is devoted to this subject. This is not art for art, this is art for the West. This has its consequences. Among them the fact that if Miłosz cares for his prestige, he cannot be shallower in his information than the French or English; on the contrary, he must be more profound. And if Miłosz cares about the productivity of his subject, among other things, he should not deprive it of greatness or danger. . . .

Here already one discerns the outlines of certain pitfalls. . . . Let us add one more, deriving from the very nature of the East: namely the East has always

oscillated between extremes for which the principle of *tertium non datur* governs. If we do not see the terrible profundity of this, it becomes terrible shallowness instead. If not loftiness, then flatness. But let us add one more danger, quite typically Polish, deriving from the intermediary Polish situation, thanks to which our country is a little bit of a caricature of the East as well as of the West. The Polish East is an East dying in contact with the West (and vice versa), which results in “something being amiss.” Let us then imagine Miłosz’s troubles when he writes about Tiger,* for example. The issue is whether or not this Tiger is really a tiger or merely a meowing tomcat prowling the rooftops. Is there a real riddle to him or is he one more lush from that fabulous Polish inn called “Under the Dead Cat and Dog” (“Under the Dead East and West”)?

Miłosz’s troubles are augmented by his being from this very same inn. One of the most interesting, subtle, and even moving aspects of Miłosz’s prose is his personal tie to the Polish flea market—one feels that for all of his Europeanism, he is one of them. . . . While recently admiring Wajda’s wonderful directing in *Ashes and Diamonds*, I thought about Miłosz and his Polish homeland. How difficult it is to write a synopsis of *Native Realm* because one is its son and come what may, one sails on its waves, immersed in its murmur and fog. . . .

But the strong point of *Native Realm* and a guarantee of its modernism should be nothing else except that here it is not a Pole writing about Poland and the East, but a man writing about the Pole in himself and about “his” Europe. A program like this is almost Husserl or Descartes. Yes, except that they were philosophers and did not scorn abstraction, whereas Miłosz-the-artist and existentialist fears it like wildfire, because he knows that it kills art. He avoids formulas, and so there is no way that he is going to get out of the river to have a look at it from the shore; he immerses himself in its muddied waters, he engages himself personally in his description all the time and then he stops being a man; he again becomes a concrete Miłosz. . . . And this is where the balancing act of this scrupulous writer begins: “Haven’t I denigrated myself too much?” “Haven’t I raised myself too high?” “Haven’t I denigrated them too much?” “Haven’t I raised them too high?” From wave to wave, from top to bottom, bottom to top—the dialectical seesaw. Noise. River. History.

*Tiger (Tadeusz Kroński), name of a character in Miłosz’s *Captive Mind*.

XVIII

Friday

Roby has come to visit from Santiago. He is the youngest of the ten brothers S. Two years ago I spent a few months in this Santiago del Estero (1,000 kilometers north of Buenos Aires)—at the time I looked at all the fads, irritations, and inhibitions of this backwater, stewing in its own sauce. . . . The bookstore owned by the so-called “Cacique,” a member of that numerous family S., was the collection point for the spiritual anxieties of this small town, placid as a cow, sweet as a ripe plum with its earth-shaking and earth-making ambitions (I am speaking of the fifteen people who met regularly in the Café Aguila). Santiago despises the capital, Buenos Aires! Santiago feels that only in it, in Santiago, is the authentic (*legítima*) Argentina preserved—that all the rest, there in the south, is an assembly of half-breeds, gringos, immigrants, Europeans—a mix, dirt, garbage.

The family S. is a typical specimen of Santiago vegetation, transforming itself with an inconceivable twist into impulse and passion. All of these brothers are of saintly goodness and do not lack that sugarplum sweetness—they are a little like fruit ripening in the sun. At the same time, mighty passions from somewhere, some substratum of a telluric character, galvanize them, their torpor gallops, touched by the madness of reform, creation. Each is a sworn adherent of a different political tendency, thanks to which the family does not need to worry about the frequent revolutions here; whatever happens it will always be the triumph of one of the brothers, the communist or the nationalist, the liberal, priest, Peronist. . . . (Beduino once explained this to me.) During my stay in Santiago two of these brothers had their very own press organs, published at their own expense by the dozens: one published *the* intellectual monthly, *Dimension*, and the second a newspaper whose job was fighting the local governor.

Roby . . . Shortly before his visit to Buenos Aires he surprised me—we never wrote to each other—with a letter from Tucumán in which he asked me to send him the Spanish edition of *Ferdynurke*.

“Witoldo, something of what you say in your introduction to The Marriage has caught my interest . . . these ideas—immaturity, form—which seem to be the groundwork of your work and have a connection with the problem of creativity.

“Of course I didn’t have the patience to read more than twenty pages of The Marriage. . . .”

Further on he asks for *Ferdydurke* and writes:

“I spoke with Negro (this is his brother, a bookseller) and I see that you continue to be chained by your European chauvinism; the worst thing is that this limitation does not allow you to attain the deepening of that, so very interesting, problem of your writing. You don’t seem to understand that the most important thing ‘currently’ is the predicament of undeveloped countries. From knowledge of this you could extract basic elements for whatever you intend to do.”

I am on intimate terms with this puppydom and I let them say whatever they want. I also understand that for all practical purposes they prefer to attack first—our relations are far from a mawkish idyll. Nevertheless, the letter seemed to me too smart-alecky—well, how dare he? I answered with a telegram:

TO UNDERDEVELOPED ROBY S. TUCUMAN—DON’T TALK NONSENSE. CANNOT SEND *FERDYDURKE*. WASHINGTON FORBIDS IT. NATIVE TRIBES ARE BANNED FROM READING IT TO RETARD THEIR DEVELOPMENT, SENTENCE TO ETERNAL INFERIORITY—TOLDGOM.

The telegram was put in an envelope and mailed as a letter—these are actually letter telegrams. Shortly thereafter an answer arrived which addressed me indulgently:

“Beloved Witold, I got your short letter, I see that you are progressing, but you are trying to be original unnecessarily,” etc., etc. Perhaps it is not worth writing this banter—except that life, authentic life, is nothing extraordinarily brilliant and it is important to me to re-create it here not in its culminations but exactly in its average, everyday character. And let us not forget that a lion, tiger, or serpent can sometimes be concealed in trifles.

Roby then came to Buenos Aires and appeared in the *barcito*, where he officiates almost every evening: a boy “strong in color,” raven-black head of hair, olive-brick complexion, lips the color of a tomato, blinding set of teeth. Somewhat slanted and hunched Hindu style, robust, healthy, with the eyes of a clever dreamer, gentle and stubborn—what percentage of him is Indian? And something even more important: a born soldier, fit for a rifle, trenches, a horse. I was inter-

ested in whether something had changed in the two years of our separation; had anything changed?

For in Santiago nothing progresses. Every evening the same bold “inter-continental ideas” are expressed in the *Café Aguila*—Europe is finished, Latin America’s time has come, we must be ourselves and not imitate Europeans, we will find ourselves when we return to our Indian traditions, we must be creative, etc. Yes, yes, Santiago, *Café Aguila*, Coca-Cola, and these bold thoughts, repeated day in and day out with the monotony of a drunkard who first puts out one foot and then does not know what to do with the other, Santiago—that cow which chews its cud every day, that nightmare in which one runs at breakneck speed, never changing place.

It seemed to me, however, that it was almost impossible for Roby to protect himself from mutation, even partially, at his age, and at one in the morning I went with him and Goma to another bar, to discuss things within a smaller circle. He went gladly, was ready to talk the night through, and it was evident that “brilliant, crazy student talk,” as Žeromski puts it in his journal, had entered his bloodstream. Generally speaking, they sometimes remind me of Žeromski and his colleagues from the 1890s: enthusiasm, faith in progress, idealism, faith in the people, romanticism, socialism, homeland.

My impressions from this conversation? I left discouraged and disturbed—bored and amused—irritated and resigned—and as if dressed down, as if they had taken me in.

This dummy hadn’t appropriated a thing for himself since I had last seen him in Santiago. He initiated the same conversation he did two years ago, as if it were just yesterday. Word for word—I saw only that he was better organized in his stupidity, and therefore more conceited and unyielding. And again I had to listen to: Europe is finished! America’s time has come! We must create our own American culture. In order to create it, we must be creative—but how is one to do this? We will become creative when we have a program that liberates our creative powers, etc., etc. Abstract painting is betrayal, it is European. A painter, writer, should cultivate American themes. Art must be related to the folk, must be with folklore. . . . We must discover exclusively American issues, etc.

I know this by heart. Their “creativity” begins and ends with these declamations. What misery and penury—I can count dozens who recited this to me and I

never heard anything that could not be summarized in the following groan: “We are uncreative, we should do something to achieve originality, personality . . . we should do something. . . .” They don’t see the silliness of this griping. They do not know, these childish creatures, that creativity is not made to order. . . . They do not see the grotesqueness of this choir, howling as far and wide as Latin America: originality, personality. They see only that Europe creates; therefore, they too would like to do the same—but it has not occurred to them yet that this desire for originality is also an imitation of Europe. They have not yet comprehended the compromise contained in the rhetoric beyond which they are not capable of moving. They do not sense the frivolity expressing itself in the fact that they desire to “live their own lives” not from a real need, but only to rival Europe—which is better! The naïveté of the postulate they propagate escapes them—that “we are supposed to discover and delineate who we are in order to know what we are supposed to create” (for the reverse is true—man, a nation, a continent, only in creating finds out who he is, his creativity precedes him). In short, envy, inferiority complex, shallowness, feebleness and muddle.

Rubbish. There was no way that I could convince him.

—You are a *europeo*. You are in no position to understand us.

Or:—You are not grasping that the consciousness of our historical moment delineates us in our self-creation and in our subconscious mythology (because, of course, this must all be terribly Toynbee, Spengler, Freud, Marx, Jung, phenomenology, Heidegger, Sartre, Sorel). Despair! His passion is draped with every single paper he has ever read. He is so stuffed with “thoughts” that he has lost his taste, hearing, smell, sight, and touch, and—what is worse—he has stopped feeling his own feelings.

Cairo, China, Bombay, Turkestan, and even the Parisian suburbs and London working districts—all that “thinks,” all of the inferiority of the world is immersed in this kind of “thinking.” How is it that Europe—not this geographic but spiritual Europe—has withstood the onslaught of so many avaricious ferments which have but one goal—to reach Olympus or destroy it? And this has a nasty taste—this spiritual superiority and intellect, the fruit of development, cannot count on obedience, respect, and gratitude, but becomes an object of desire, of a wild greed for its place, its honors. The disturbing taste of this dirty work which replaces genuine effort (of this they are incapable), a compound of passion and deception.

Rubbish. And, let us add, the unheard-of-naïveté which thinks the “creation of new cultures” is easy.

This Roby pushed me into the past. Into Nazism. I remember: the same powerlessness when that Austrian was intoxicating himself on the consolidation of Brochwicz-Kozłowski (in the train that was taking us from Vienna to Tarvisio), the crash of a rotten Europe and the impending triumph of a new spirit. 1938. The same powerlessness in the face of another language, “their” language. The astonishment that rubbish could be so powerful and aggressive. And the nagging suspicion that the quality of the slogans, truths, ideologies, programs, their meaning, their reality, haven’t the slightest significance here, as they serve a different purpose; the only important thing—to accumulate people, produce masses, mass power, a creative power. Ah, to be nothing else except oneself, only one’s “I”—how beautiful this is! How clear and unambiguous. To stand firmly on one’s own feet. You know what reality is—your reality. You are far from the blather, din, intoxication, deceit, declamation, terror. . . . During the interwar and wartime period I lived through the victory of collective power as well as its defeat and breakdown, when again that immortal “I” was reborn. Gradually those fears faded in me—until here again, with Roby, it assaulted me with the same evil smell!

Not a pleasant discovery. You have the impression that once again a monstrous plot is being hatched in order to grab you and subject you to the blind forces of the collectivity and History. Words, ideas, everything then gains another meaning, morality, science, reason, logic, everything, everything becomes the weapon of some other, superior idea, everything is masked, everything desires to conquer you, possess you. What sort of idea is this? You seek it in vain, it does not exist, only the Collectivity itself exists, nothing more, the concentration of people, mass, a creature arisen from the masses, an expressive mass. I sat over a beer across from that student, fetchingly young and so vulnerable, yet so dangerous. I looked at his head and his hand. His head! His hand!

A hand ready to kill in the name of childhood. The extension of the absurdity, imagined by him, was a bloody bayonet. . . . A strange being—with a muddled and frivolous head, with a dangerous hand. The thought occurred to me, a thought neither clear nor complete, which I nevertheless desire to note here. . . . It would sound more or less like this: his head is full of chimeras, therefore it is worthy of indulgence, but his hand has the gift of transforming chimeras into

reality; it is capable of creating facts. Unreality from the head, reality from the hand . . . *and the seriousness from one end.* . . .

Perhaps I am grateful to him that he returned my old anxieties to me. The self-assurance of a member of the intelligentsia, intellectual, artist, which grows in me with age, is bad! Remember, those who do not write in ink, write in blood.

Monday

They do not know that I am somewhat of a specialist in their main problem—immaturity—and that all of my literature is at home in it. It is paradoxical that in South America, Borges, abstract, exotic, not tied to their problems, is a luminary, but I have only a handful of readers. The paradox, which stops being a paradox when one reflects that they can show Borges off in Europe. Not me because I am a Pole. I am not *valor nacional*.

That they do not want to be the darling pupils of alien cultures, I feel is right. And I also agree that they have their own reality and that only in supporting themselves on it can they become someone in the world. . . . But, in my opinion, they commit one serious, dramatic error. . . .

Namely, instead of saying “I,” they say “we.” We Americans. We Argentineans. When a single man says “we,” he is misusing the word, for no one has authorized him to use it, he is allowed to speak only in his own voice. Whoever wants to get at his “own reality” and support himself on it should avoid the plural form at all costs. What is this “our reality”? I can be certain only of “my reality.” What is America, Americans? A concept, generality, abstraction. What is the “American reality”? Something that each person can understand as he wishes.

The difference between them and me comes down to their wanting to *first* discover American reality and liberate America from European dependence and only later to produce this new type of “mature” American. This new America, discovered and defined, will create its people. In my view, one must begin with man, the individual man, and I will say more: the development of America can only be the work of people who have overcome America in themselves.

You say that your America is backward, immature? Good. But in that case your first task should be to liberate yourself from its inhibiting influence. As a man, you are just as good as an Englishman or a Frenchman. As a Cuban or a Paraguayan,

you are worse. Feel yourself a man, then place yourself above this undeveloped America. Do not allow your milieu and your American way of thinking to shackle you.

Except that . . . this immaturity imposes the word “we” on them. They are in a collective phase and this phase is also South America’s so they cannot make their way out of it. “I” is too independent for them, too free. They are “we.” They are America. And in being America, how can they progress? They have gotten bogged down together with it in history. Amen.

Much of this could be applied to Poland and Poles.

Tuesday

On the ship *General Artigas* on the way to Montevideo. Night. Storm. A priest reads the paper. A child cries. Waiters talk in the corner. The boat creaks.

The melody from Brahms’s Fourth Symphony, which has been dogging me from the time I left Buenos Aires. I think about Brahms’s themes and Beethoven’s themes. Beethoven makes a strange impression against the background of Brahms’s constant threat that the work will not be organic enough—Brahms’s thematics, cautious and *deliberate*, are permeated by a concern for the homogeneity of composition; you can see that this architect is afraid his building might collapse. But Beethoven loaded themes suggested by his spirit into a work with the certainty that whatever is conceived of the spirit cannot be stillborn. And this tearing of Beethoven’s theme into a work, as if from the outside, only to sink its roots into it, seems to be somehow singular, singularly bold, captivating, when I recall how Brahms builds up gradually, cautiously from himself and never, so to speak, does he stick his nose beyond himself.

How the wind batters the canvas on the deck! Fatigue. Why does this entrancing melody—the second theme from the allegro of the third concerto—come to mind exactly at this moment? Ravishing.

Why—I would like to know—in musical analyses, in learned commentary, does one avoid mentioning the beauty and charm of such melodies? There is no doubt that when we are still in the beginning phase of listening to the work the overwhelmingly melodious entrance of the orchestra and piano are what they should be: the dominant effect, the most important, most thrilling effect. It is only in a gradual acquaintance with the work that one exhausts their charm; other more

complex values then attract our attention. This is why experts are silent about their first impressions. Is it right, though, that a work be judged by an ear that has become weary and is incapable of experiencing the holiness of its first emotions?

The lights flicker. The front wall of the salon rides from the bottom up and from the top down. The ship is blown through and through by the whistling wind. In *Pornografia* I tried to return to such melodies . . . melodic, thrilling . . . alluring. . . .

And not only in *Pornografia*. But in *Pornografia* I was able to get up my courage and I resigned from humor, which isolates.

A waiter brings black coffee. Something knocks against the wall, as if trying to get to my head. What impertinence on my part—to flee to such thrilling-melodic subjects! And today, when modern music is afraid of melody, when the composer, before he uses it, must clear it of attractions, render it dry. It is no different in literature—a modern but self-respecting writer avoids lures, is difficult, and prefers to repulse rather than tempt. And me? I am exactly the opposite, I load the text with tasty tastes, charming charms, I stuff it with excitement and colors, I do not want dry, unprepossessing writing . . . I am seeking the most graspable melodies . . . in order to get at, if possible, something even more “captivating.” . . .

Siren. I go on deck. The ship is moaning painfully, it plunges into the exploding water under the dome of a full moon wracked on the surface. God! What pain! What despair! In my heavy, painful striving to rejuvenate, to freshen my art, I have not even refrained from, ah, let us confess . . . boy with girl. Oh, shame! Who in today’s literature is bolder? This is my boldness! The river-ocean roars. But, but . . . let us confess on this thundering trail of water, white with fury, unloading its despair under a quiet moon. . . . I, accursed one, could approach their nakedness only in a costume more sophisticated than that worn by the most modern avant-garde, by the driest intellect! I made them parenthetical!

I made them parenthetical; I couldn’t sing any other way!

Wednesday, Montevideo

I stroll in a tidy city, with odd balconies and congenial people. Montevideo. Here the old decorum still reigns after having been expelled from many other parts of South America.

Kind faces, rich apparel, a beach twenty minutes away by bus, this is the life! And if I moved here permanently?

Avenidas running into the ocean-river.

The world is written for two voices. Youth supplements the Incomplete with Completion—and this is its brilliant task. This is the subject of *Pornografia*.

One of my chief aesthetic and spiritual tasks: to find an approach to youth that is sharper and more dramatic than that which is currently in use. To thrust it into maturity (that is, to reveal its ties with maturity).

Thursday

Peace. Anxiety! I am a little disturbed by the complete lack of a “metaphysical spine tingle” in the Uruguayan capital, where no dog has ever bitten anyone.

Pornografia. Pulling two older men down . . . into the body, senses, the juvenile . . . when I was writing this, I felt vague. But I needed “physics,” it was indispensable as a counterweight to metaphysics. And the reverse—metaphysics cried out for the body. I do not believe in a nonerotic philosophy. I do not trust thought that frees itself of sex. . . .

Of course it is difficult to imagine Hegel’s *Logic* without abandoning the body. But pure consciousness must once again be immersed in the body, in sex, in Eros, the artist must again thrust the philosopher into beauty. Consciousness dictates the conviction that it is final, and its work would surely be impossible without this certainty—but the results of its work can be returned to life, conceived from a different position, by another spirit, here the spirit of art can be of use to the spirit of the thinker. And even if an incurable contradiction between them does exist—are we not a walking contradiction, are we not forced to live the division we are?

That peculiar absolute of sex, the erotic absolute. This divided world of the sexual drive which, because of its division, becomes self-sufficient, absolute! What other absolute is needed when he who desires has drowned in the eyes of she who desires?

Sun. Breakfast with Minister Mazurkiewicz and with the long-time honorary consul in Montevideo, Józef Makowski, who plays host. We fondly remember Straszewicz and other friends.

Friday

Foul weather rants and raves in all directions. We sit at the Tip Top, Dipi and I, and we drink coffee, staring at the dirty waves under the rain. I look at the paper. Ah, in the evening at the Writers' Union Dickman, who is visiting from Argentina, is supposed to read a paper at a session chaired by an old acquaintance, the Uruguayan poet Paulina Medeiros. We will attend—I not so much to hear Dickman but to see Paulina.

It ended dramatically (all of my contacts with the *escritores* of this continent ended dramatically).

We appear midway through the lecture. Dickman is talking about twenty-five years of work as a writer. Uruguayan literati—not one interesting face—and universal courtesy, banality, and boredom hang in the air. I feel that the sight of this mob of writers is beginning to excite me—as always. I am allergic to writers in groups, in their mob aspect; when I look at my “colleagues” all together I get sick. But I don't know if this will be clear, the sound of the word *escritor* in South America is somehow dumber than anywhere else; here the writing profession floats in some sort of special, pompously fictional sauce, highmindedly sincere, rancid and honeycombed. And this ridiculousness, rising like steam from the *escritores*, amuses me. Applause. He is finished.

Paulina Medeiros rises and announces that by happenstance the Union also has a foreign guest, the writer Gombrowicz, whom we greet, etc., etc.—and now perhaps Mr. Gombrowicz would like to say a few words? . . . Silence. Expectation. I admit that I really did act inappropriately. Instead of saying a few pleasant words, that I greet them, etc., etc., I say to Paulina:—That's all well and good, Paulina, but what have I written? What are the titles of my books?

A lethal question, for no one in America knows anything about me. Consternation. Paulina's stammering and blushing, for she's completely taken aback. Dickman comes to her aid: —I know! Gombrowicz published a novel in Buenos Aires, a translation from the, uh, Rumanian, no, from Polish, uh, *Fitmurca* . . . no, *Fidafurca*. . . I sit in cold sadism, I sit and say nothing; people begin to stir and to leave their seats in embarrassment, when finally the chairman, or the secretary, carries in an enormous book into which Dickman inscribes an appropriate aphorism and I my signature—after which I pass the tome to Dipi so that he can sign it

too. Which again sends a ripple of anxiety through the respectful crowd, because Dipi is of draft age and doesn't look like a writer at all. He signs his name with a flourish—his signature is probably the most commanding in the whole book—and I explain that he has been writing novels since the age of fourteen and already has four to his credit.

Saturday

Straight from the unfortunate visit to the Writers' Union—I am speaking of my stay in Montevideo—we, Paulina Medeiros, Dickman, Dipi, and I, went to a *peña* of poets. This took place in a tiny, pretentious restaurant, where a wall painting added wings to a menu deprived of all imagination. At an enormous table sat about fifty people. Paulina explains quietly: this is a banquet given by the poets in honor of Professor R., this will introduce us to the poetic climate of the capital. Who is this Professor R.?—Oh!—a worthy gentleman—a renowned critic—university professor—author—friend, father, guardian of poets—who has just received an award for a collection of essays and hence the feast.

Never would I have assumed . . . no, I still do not know America, I do not know it in all of its complexity, its strange mixture of levels, its half-baked quality. . . . What I saw, so terribly provincial, would not have been possible in the worst Argentine backwater, but, at the same time, to my delight, was straight out of the Pickwick Club.

A luxuriant angelicism reigned. Next to the angel Professor R., who smiled, greeted, and charmed, sat another angel, a frisky and ardently poetic old man, so poetic he ran the session, warming and buoying everyone's spirits. Speeches, a poet stands up and lets out a poem in honor of Professor R. Applause.

Right after that a *poetiza* rises and dashes off a poem in honor of the professor. Applause.

Then yet another poet rises and lets fly a poem in honor of the professor. Praise. Applause. It was only then that I realized a strange, uncommon thing not so much out of Dickens but Chesterton: *even if there were fifty of them, all of them were poets and each would launch a poem in Professor R.'s honor* (who discreetly and tactfully let it be understood that it was not he who mattered but the poetry).

I called the waiter to bring me two bottles of wine, one white, the other red,

and I began to drain them both! Meanwhile poets were declaiming, R. beamed, angelicism glowed along with all of the virtues practiced in such cases—humility, discretion, but also gentility, emotion, heart, as if it had all been taken out of the sweetest and most poetic dreams of some old maiden aunt: “beautiful” and “pure.” When the poet finished, people shook his hand and everyone yelled “bravo!” When, in conclusion, this fat hussy impatiently awaiting her turn tore from her seat and, tossing her bust left and right and waving her arms, trundled out more bouquets of rhymed gentility, I, full of the red and white, couldn’t stand it any longer and burst out laughing, stifling my spasms in Dipi’s back. He also broke up but had no back to bury his face in and so exploded with laughter right in front of the entire gathering!

Shock. Looks. But here stands the honorable laureate and utters: that he wasn’t deserving, although maybe he was, but no he wasn’t, although maybe he was. . . . People are moved. Applause. The angel-chairman-poet thanks all present and warms their hearts. . . . The atmosphere becomes so rarified and sweet that Dipi and I dash for the nearest door, stumbling, drunk as skunks, soused, and mightily plastered.

Had I once again compromised Poles in front of foreigners? Give me more, “this is what I like,” as Mickiewicz would say! But this is not the point. Something else interests me here. How would these events look from the other, Uruguayan side?

“Indifferent, conceited, and stuck-up European writer demonstrates contempt for the naive, perhaps, but heartfelt freshness of Uruguayan poetry!”

Meanwhile—it was exactly the opposite. I was freshness, sincerity among them and they—what can one say—were a gang of dealers, fabricating an artificial atmosphere of mutual adoration.

This kind of *quiproquo*: a provincial young poet is no innocent . . . while an old cynic fights for the purity of poetry naively, purely.

Saturday

Gossip in action! While eating supper the next day at the Tip Top, Dipi overheard a conversation at a nearby table about *the scandal at the Writers’ Union and the provocation at the poet’s banquet* . . . and somebody suggested that they

write to Ernesto Sabato to ask him if his letter of recommendation to Julio Bayce was authentic!

Saturday

A cocktail in Carrasco. I can't stand this comfortable bourgeoisie with its *aire acondicionado*, electric heating, two bathrooms for the servants, and a view of the ocean.

Michelangelo's David is lending luster to the town hall. A sudden, moving invasion of the Renaissance—a feeling, some sort of shortcut, of the countless delights contained in style in general, and in this style in particular, so happily rediscovered after so many centuries! A conversation with Asnito (Dipi) on the subject of the Renaissance—the Baroque—Cézanne—concrete art. I am amazed at the fluency with which this young nestling swims in today's complicated eddies.

A letter from a certain writer.

"A few days ago I finished reading Pornografía. Kultura's announcement of it, done with your permission I am sure, speaks of the metaphysical substance of this book. . . . Until now, it seemed to me that I have always managed to decipher the hidden meanings beneath the surface of your works, but in Pornografía, for the first time, I was incapable of getting at its hidden sense. That is why I am allowing myself to turn directly to you for help, with a plea for an indication of where I am to seek the metaphysical content of Pornografía."

But of course! This letter comes at a good time. It allows me to remember once again who I am and what my position on the spiritual-artistic map is.

I answer:

"I had nothing to do with composing the announcement in Kultura, but I will most gladly tell you what, according to me, are Pornografía's ties to metaphysics."

"Let us try to express it another way: man, as we know, strives for the Absolute, for Completeness. For absolute truth, God, complete maturity, etc. To embrace everything, to fully realize the process of his development—such is the imperative."

"Thus, in Pornografía (in keeping with my old habit, because Ferdy-

durke is also saturated with this) another, probably more hidden and less legitimate, aim of man is revealed, his need for the Incomplete . . . Imperfection . . . Inferiority . . . Youth. . .

“One of the key scenes of the work is the one in the church where under the pressure of Frederick’s consciousness the Mass, together with God-the-Absolute, collapses. Then out of the darkness and emptiness of the cosmos comes a new divinity, earthly, sensual, underage, made up of two underdeveloped beings creating a closed world—because they attract one another.

“Another key scene is the deliberations preceding Siemian’s murder—the Adults are not in a state to commit murder because they know all too well what it is, what weight it has, and they must do it with the hands of minors. This murder must, therefore, be cast into a sphere of lightness, irresponsibility—only there does it become possible.

“I am not just writing about this now, these ideas permeate all my work. And in the Diary I mention, for instance, that ‘Youth . . . appeared to me as the only, highest, and absolute value of life. . . . That “value,” however, had one characteristic, probably devised by the devil himself, that, being youth, it was always something beneath value.’

“These last words (‘beneath value’) explain why, in spite of the sharp conflict in life-consciousness in me, I did not end up in any of the modern existentialisms. The authenticity and inauthenticity of life are equally precious to me—my antinomy is Value on the one hand and Not-Quite-Value on the other . . . Dissatisfaction . . . Underdevelopment. . . . This is, I think, the most important thing in me, the most personal and individual. A lack of seriousness is just as important to man as seriousness. If a philosopher says that ‘Man wants to be God,’ then I would add: ‘Man wants to be young.’

“And according to me, the various periods of human age are one of the tools of this dialectic Completion-Incompletion, Value-Nonvalue. That is why I attribute a significant and dramatic role to the introductory age—youth. And that is why my world is degraded: it is like grabbing the Spirit by the scruff of the neck and immersing it in lightness, in inferiority. . . .

“Of course, in Pornografia I am not so much seeking philosophical theses as desiring to extract the artistic and psychological possibilities of the subject. I am looking for ‘beauties’ appropriate to the conflict. Is Pornografia metaphysical/ Metaphysics means beyond-physics, beyond-corporeality, and

my intention was to get at certain antinomies of the soul through the body.

"This work is probably very difficult, although it has the appearance of an ordinary 'novel' and even a pretty indecent one at that. . . . I am impatiently awaiting its appearance in French, German, and Italian—these editions are slowly in the making—I hope that I will find more readers, like you, seeking its meaning on foreign soil."

Sunday

Malvin, the beach beyond Carrasco, an oceanic revelation, the sudden salt, greenness of the waves, astonishment, admiration, regret—the wreckage behind me of an enormous river, its annihilation in splashing, salty, green infinity, whose whisper expresses nothing.

Perhaps I am more yoked to the nation than it seems? Again this suspicion. And if *Pornografía* is an attempt to revive Polish eroticism?

An attempt to recover an eroticism more appropriate to our fate and our history of recent years, which consists of rape, slavery, humiliation, dog fights, a descent into the dark extremes of the consciousness and the body? And perhaps *Pornografía* is a modern Polish, erotic, national poem?

A rather unexpected and strange idea—it never occurred to me while I was writing it. Only now. I do not write for the nation or with the nation or from the nation. I write with myself, from myself. But isn't my thicket joined in secret passage with the thicket of the nation?

I, an American, I, an Argentinean, walking the coast of the Atlantic . . . I am still a Pole . . . yes . . . but just from my youth, childhood, from the awful forces which formed me then, pregnant with what was to follow. . . . There, beyond Malvin, the proud insolence of land conjured up by the setting sun, like the most noble philosophy and the most splendid poetry. Downward! Downward! Degradation! I am my own degradation! How mercilessly man has to cast himself from the peaks—foul his own nobility—violate his own truth—destroy his own dignity—for his individual spirit to undergo slavery once again and submit to the herd, to the species. . . .

1961

XIX

Monday

A very peculiar book, I have never read anything like it, exciting in a strange way, Gaëtan Picon's *Panorama des idées contemporaines*. In Polish translation, Picon's work is called *A Panorama of Modern Thought* and has been published by Libella in Paris.

It has been a long time since I dove into a book with the enthusiasm I felt in reading these seven hundred pages, stuffed with the latest wisdom from recent decades. Philosophy and social science, art and religion, physics and mathematics, history and psychology, but also the history of philosophy and political problems and contemporary humanism . . . the volume encompasses various branches of science, not by giving a dry summary, however, but by presenting excerpts from the most representative works. This is the kind of anthology where the history of philosophy is reported by the selected texts of Dilthey, Lenin, Trotsky, Jaurès, Berdyayev, Spengler, Toynbee, Croce, Aron, Jaspers, and on quantum theory and associated problems by Broglie, Bohr, Einstein. One should not seek exhaustive discussion here—but rather an introduction to the style of today's science, its tone, temperament, “character” (because sometimes I have the impression that science is a person), and customs! It is as if you were listening to a meeting where first one then another sage expresses himself; what an opportunity to listen closely to their manner of speaking. . . .

Wednesday

Buenos Aires. An interview with me in *Clarín*—Pat Leroy (Zdzisław Bau) conducted it. *Clarín* is the most popular daily in Argentina; the two-page interview with a huge photograph of me and a drawing by Quilomboflora—will surely cause a stir. I said (among other things) that “not being a premier Shorthorn bull, I could not aspire to fame in Buenos Aires.”

Thursday

And what if Cassandra appeared to Socrates in a dream with this prophecy:

—O mortal ones! O human race! It would be better for you not to reach the distant future, which will be diligent, scrupulous, forced, slick, shallow, miserable. . . . Let women cease bearing children—for everything will be born to you inside out, greatness will give birth to pettiness, power to weakness, and your stupidity will be born of reason. Oh, better that women should strangle their newborn! . . . because you will have functionaries for leaders and heroes, and decent little souls will be your Titans. You will be deprived of beauty, passion, and delight . . . a cold, tired, and barren time awaits you. And all of this will be perpetrated upon you by your Wisdom, which will break away from you and become impossible to comprehend as well as rapacious. And you will not even be able to cry because your misfortune will happen beyond you!

Is this blasphemy against the Almighty Lord? Against today's creator? (I am speaking of science, of course.) Who would dare! Even I am prostrated before the youngest of Creative Forces—and I humble myself, hosanna; the above prophecy hails the triumph of almighty Minerva over her enemy, man. Let us take a closer look at these people of the future, these people of science—and today there is no lack of them, they are spreading fast. One thing is repulsive in this scientist: his smiling impotence, his genial helplessness. He is similar to a pipe that funnels food but does not digest it, so that knowledge never becomes personal in him; he is simply a tool, an instrument from head to foot. One talks to this kind of professor the way one would to a fish out of water; each of them dies if taken out of his special area—this is shameful, one should burn with embarrassment! Modest? In their place, I would also be modest, why not? Nothing they do enters the bloodstream.

Accursed blind chickens who happen upon a kernel! Blind masons laying brick upon brick, ignorant of what they are building! They are workers. They are co-workers. If one says A, the other says B, and the third C, and so the prevailing opinion is formed: each is a function of each, each uses the other, all are always servants—sucked dry by the vampire of the intellect, pushed down by the more and more inaccessible Thought rising above them.

Even in my youth people laughed at the professor, an abstract old granddad, chasing his hat. Today no one laughs anymore, we are beginning to shrink, curl up, we begin to feel a little strange when we see how this kindly band of specialists tries to get at our hides, rearrange our genes, creep into our dreams, transform our cosmos, stick a needle into our central nervous system, feel our most intimate inner organs, which should not be touched! This brazen and vile unceremoniousness, this nasty thing that is beginning to happen to us does not horrify us enough—but shortly we will begin to howl, we will see how this friend and benefactress, Science, as it is more and more unleashed, becomes a bull that takes us on its horns, an element more volatile than anything we have had to deal with up to now. The growing light will be transformed into darkness and we will find ourselves in a new night, the worst one yet.

Professors love their wives. They are good fathers. Their attachment to the hearth is cozy and begs for forgiveness, since they know well that they never feel at home in their homes. They speak no language. A scientist betrays ordinary human speech for scientific language, but he does not wield this either—the tongue wields him, not the other way around. Formulas form themselves in this closed Land of Abracadabra. As long as a mechanistic interpretation of phenomena held up, things weren't too bad—but today when the mechanism no longer satisfies and we reach for a “whole” that does not lend itself to division into parts, when functionalism, finalism, and various coordinates fascinate scientific thought, the statements of biology or psychology are sphinxlike, headlong, no better than physical, mathematical, or philosophical statements.

Picon's anthology, mentioned above, is an excellent demonstration of the scientific style in various guises, in a thousand variations; here one sees how this language is created and what it does with these people. One sees clearly how expression becomes convulsive and goes crazy from the desire to grasp what is ungraspable. This is quite a circus. And how could the language of a ratio-

nalized international wisdom that is constantly growing from generation to generation and turning against the very nature of the individual mind in order to do it violence be otherwise? The pressure to utter the inexpressible becomes so overwhelming in the final phases of the development of science that its statements become related to philosophy. Translating the texts selected by Picon must have been pure torture; the translator must do ugly things with words here, it is unavoidable.

The hideous strangeness of knowledge . . . it is like an alien body introduced into the mind, it always obstructs. One bears this kind of thinking like a weight, in the sweat of one's brow; science often acts like poison; the weaker the mind, the fewer antidotes it finds and the more easily it succumbs. Take a look at the majority of students. Where, for instance, does their lack of joy come from? Is their fatigue merely a consequence of excessive work? Weren't their reactions poisoned by the habit of false precision, an exaggerated objectivity, did this not cast their judgments into uncertainty, fear? Let us see how the cult of logic kills understanding of the personality, how principles replace an inborn self-assurance and the certainty of one's own *convictions*, how theories extirpate grace and beauty . . . this is where the new type of student comes from ("Hey, pal, are you passing?"), a decent, upright, useful, but wan being . . . with a lunar pallor drained of all brilliance and heat, reflecting only that awful, incomprehensible light. Perhaps still alive but only as a weakened, twisted form of life.

Is this the introduction to a race of pigmies with swollen heads and white lab coats?

Friday

Degeneration awaits us so we should brace ourselves for it today. I do not deny that someday science may lead us to paradise. Until that day, however, we are threatened by a series of operations, deforming, almost surgical interventions (which is what happens to patients who are subjected to only three introductory operations in a series of twelve that are supposed to improve their faces).

The transformation of the conditions of our lives, as well as of our psychophysical structure, with the help of technology, will knock us out of our groove and unsettle us.

Friday

Science muddles.

Science reduces.

Science disfigures.

Science warps.

Will scientism replace art? Oh, I am not at all afraid of losing admirers!

I do not fear that “future generations will not read novels,” etc. It is probably a complete misunderstanding to conceive of serious art in categories of production, market, readers, supply and demand—what does this have to do with anything?—art is not the fabrication of stories for readers but a spiritual cohabitation, something so tense and so separate from science, even contradictory to it, that there can be no competition between them. If someone fine, dignified, prolific, brilliant (this is how one ought to speak of artists, this is the language art demands) is born in the future, if someone unique and unrepeatable is born, a Bach, a Rembrandt, then he will *win* people over, *charm* and *seduce* them. . . .

As long as superior and inferior people exist, a superior man, expressing himself in art, will be attractive . . . and nothing will weaken his existence.

You talk about engineers, technocrats, and other functionaries’ indifference to art? Was a dialogue between an artist and a cog on a wheel ever possible? Yet everyday I realize how eager for the glow of artistry is a person who has been drawn into a rut yet has maintained enough humanity to feel that his back is being broken.

When a student of the sciences sits down at my table to look at me condescendingly (as I “shoot the breeze”), to scorn me (because this is “putting people on”), to yawn (because “one cannot prove this with an experiment”), I don’t try to convince him. I wait until a wave of weariness and satiety overtakes him. For it is true that in science there is less putting people on, less claptrap, and less of the “personal dirt” that infests art—ambitions, striving for effect, posing, affection, rhetoric—but it is also true that science gives these guarantees only because it functions in a very limited territory—and this laboratory “certainty” becomes odious and humiliating to a nature not entirely mediocre.

Average intelligence loves blinders, which facilitate an even trot; but a brisker and livelier intelligence desires uncertainty, risk, a play of more deceptive

and elusive forces, where one lives . . . where one can preserve flight, pride, joke, confession, rapture, play, struggle.

A moment arrives when theory becomes a personal enemy; one desires man, one desires him, however he may be, vague, untruthful, unascertainable . . . just to see humanity and touch it again.

Sunday

Publishing books at a distance of ten thousand kilometers ruins the nerves!

Ferdydurke appeared in Germany without commentary to explain briefly “what it is about”—thus some critics and readers did not know where to begin. I immediately wrote to the English publisher to have him add a brief explanation to the preface.

All for naught! The English *Ferdydurke* also appeared without the few sentences it needed so badly.

Let it appear, as it wants, I have to leave it all to God’s mercy and shut my eyes. Let it happen by itself!

Tuesday

When will we take the offensive?

Will we, artists, finally be able to attack the man of science in the name of a more radiant humanity? To attack—from what position? With what means? Are we in a position to attack at all? In past decades art has acted badly—it allowed itself to be appealed to, it almost fell to its knees, it received everything greedily from the hand of its enemy, it lacked pride and even an ordinary instinct for self-preservation. The results?

Painting overrun by abstraction and other concepts of form—all inspired by science—there is in this art a greater and greater diminishing of individuality, superiority, talent, the work is more and more “democratic” and “objective.”

Music corrupted by theory, technique, followed by a breakdown of the personality and the violent shrinking of composers so that soon no one will know what to call these dwarfs.

And belles lettres, whose beauty kills itself more each year and which has

become evil and brutal, almost rabid—or nauseous—or dry and stiff—analytical, sociological, phenomenological, laborious, boring, and off the mark.

What sort of attack can this kind of art dream of if it cannot even defend itself and is already half-conquered? Theories could not have achieved this if the artist had not personally—again I return to this key word—suffered a breakdown and had not allowed his separateness to be weakened.

The individual is a nut so impossible to crack that no theoretic tooth will be able to manage it. And so nothing will be able to justify your defeat, bumbler!

Thursday

A letter from Maria Dąbrowska—so typical that I wonder if I should discuss it in the diary.

I decided to write the preface to the French edition of *Pornografia* myself. Quequén.

Santiago Achaval, Juan Santamarina, Paco Virasoro, and Pepe Uniburu—wealthy young people from the oligarchy. How many brothers and sisters do they have? Paco has the least—a mere six. Forty-plus siblings altogether for the four of them.

Niaki Zuberbuhler has eighty first cousins. Rural reform is being carried out in bed.

The false erudition of the literati is also the result of their being depraved by science. How easy it is to arm oneself with a few encyclopedias and shine with quotations, everyone does that, from columnists to Nobel laureates! And what's more, it was always this way. But we live in an era that is unmasking us—why doesn't someone speak openly about the misery of quotations?

A taboo subject! Anything but this! It might turn out that the staunchest seekers of truth and strivers for ruthless honesty pretend to be more educated than they are. What a lack of dignity. . . .

Saturday

I expect that in years to come art will have to shake off science and turn against it—this clash will take place sooner or later. Then there will be an open battle, with each side completely aware of its cause.

Meanwhile we have lots of camouflage, ruses, betrayal; even a fifth column is not lacking. The fifth column in art territory is existentialism and phenomenology.

It might appear that existentialism wants to help art—but this very strange courtesan, who betrays everything with everything, can only compromise the person who socializes with her. This neither fish nor fowl cannot aspire to form at all—what then can it have in common with art?

Yet it is so tantalizing! It is so full of promises! In it dwells a concentrated and incorruptible (it seems) striving for the concrete, for the personality. . . . So what if this antiabstraction cannot sustain itself in any kind of philosophical thinking in which a conceptual schema is inevitable. In fact, existentialism becomes a trap: this antirational pork fat is supposed to entice the gullible into just one more conceptual cage.

Each spiritual stance creates its own style. But existentialism, conceived of nothing but contradictions and incapable of reconciling them à la Hegel (because dialectics fails here), does not lead to just any style but to one of the worst styles, obscurely precise, abstractly concrete, subjectively objective, to empty talk that splits its seams. One would swear upon seeing these thinkers that they want to dance sitting down—that is how pedantic and volatile existentialism is.

I prefer phenomenology; it is purer from the standpoint of form. One could even nurture the hope that it is a means of purging the waste of scientism; well, well, isn't this a return to a natural, direct thinking, immaculately virgin? Put science outside the pale! That's what we need to do!

Existentialism is a mirage! A ruse! If it can't stand science, then it is like a daughter who cannot stand her natural mother—Cartesian, conceived in a scientific spirit, passionless, cold, like ice—and her cadaver coldness is of no use to us at all.

Monday

Bondy, the editor of *Preuves*, appeared in Buenos Aires preceded by a ringing of bells in the press. After reading these articles I was certain that at the airport there would be a group of dignitaries with the French ambassador at their head and that Bondy would be torn to pieces, at least like Barrault; I decided, therefore, to behave discreetly and did not appear at the hotel—which, having in mind the category of guest, could only be the Plaza or Alvear—until the following day.

Meanwhile, when I returned home that day, Frau Schultze told me that a certain man had been asking for me and that he had left his name and address. I read: François Bondy, City Hotel. I go to the City, a few blocks from me. We greet each other cordially. I explain why I did not appear sooner, that I did not want to take his time.

—Why? I had breakfast at Victoria Ocampo's but now I am free. Let's talk!

We go to the café and gab, gab. Evening. Once more I cautiously fish for mention of dinner at the ambassador's, the Academy of Literature, the Jockey Club. . . . No, speaking frankly, he has nothing to do and doesn't know where to go. I had been invited to Zosia Chądzyńska's house for supper that evening and not thinking much about it, I took him along. Zosia, a worldly person, did not betray surprise when he appeared behind me. I said: —Bondy! They greet each other as if everything were normal. The architect Zamecznik is visiting from Poland, I call the Lubomirskis and ask them to come over, we organize a small supper (very modest, as always at Zosia's, but the French bubbles like champagne . . .), yet something unsaid hangs in the air.

On our departure the ladies wink at me: —Confess, who did you bring? Who is this? A poet? Italian, or what? Where'd you get him?

They thought I was putting them on! This important editor, whom it is difficult to imagine without four phones and three secretaries, is very much the poet. He is a poet so much that sometimes we, poets, harbor the suspicion that his indolence, his expression of a lost child, greedy eyes, the strange capacity for just appearing (instead of walking in normally), are to lure us and use us coldly to his own purposes. But I cheer myself that politicians are inclined to do the reverse, to nurture the fear that Bondy's cold organizational talents are to dupe them and to

catch them in nets of poetry. Bondy probably (I know him very little) is one of those people whose strength lies in his *absence*; he is always removed from what he is doing, keeping at least one foot somewhere else, his wisdom is the wisdom of a calf that suckles two mothers.

Tuesday

How should one mobilize against science? From what positions should one strike? To find a point of support in order to rouse contempt from its positions, the possibility of contempt. . . . And this terrifying perspective of a greater and greater division into *Homo sapiens* and . . . and . . . and into what? Into something that will reveal itself in a future art.

XX

Friday

In Fragata.

I asked them: —What should an ordinary man do when he meets a learned man? And when a scientist surrounds him with his concentrated knowledge—his *besservisser*? How should he go about defending himself?

They did not know. I explained to them that the most appropriate counter-argument would be a blow with foot or fist to the very person of the specialist. And I added that this is called in my terminology “paring a person down to size,” or “reducing someone to a person.” At any rate, it drives one straight out of theory. . . .

And I asked, could you, O artist, deliver a punch or kick to the professor? An indecent question. Yes, but a crucial one.

You are perhaps of the opinion that art and science ought to run forward together, passing the torch from hand to hand, like a marathon? Leave this running to the athletes. The future looks unkind and even pitiless. Cooperation between art and science in the name of progress would be refreshing but a poet should know that the professor will strangle him in that tender embrace. Science is a rogue. Let us not believe in the humanity of science, for man does not steer it, it rides him! If

you are interested in how the scientific “humanity of man” will look in the future, take a look at a few doctors. Their “goodness,” their “humanity”? Yes, but what sort of humanity? A bit strange, isn’t it? Yes, good but not really good, human but inhuman . . . what a guardian angel, dry and cold as a devil, an angel-technocrat. The hospital doesn’t ruin his breakfast. Infernal coldness and *unbelievable indifference*.

Unbelievable—I emphasize this because all of the changes in our nature influenced by science bear the mark of the fantastic, as if they happened outside the normal course of development. We are at the threshold of a bizarre humanity. Reason will perform surgery on us that is unpredictable. It must go forward all the time, its syllogisms never retreat—they do not return to where they began.

It might perhaps appear to someone of rosy disposition that if science tears us away from our humanity, it is only to return us to it . . . that someday the degeneration dealt by reason will lead back to human nature . . . to a nobler, healthier man . . . and that at the end of this painful road we will find each other.

No! We will never recover anything again! We will never return to anything! In giving ourselves up to reason, we must bid farewell to ourselves for all eternity—it never turns back the clock! The man of the future, a creation of science, will be radically different, incomprehensible, unrelated to us. This is why scientific development means death. . . . One dies just as one is . . . for the sake of some stranger. Man, led by science, throws himself away—in his present form—once and for all. Don’t you understand? By this I simply mean that if the man of the future has a second head growing out of his butt, they will find this kind of thing neither funny nor repulsive.

And art? What does it have to say about this, the art that is so in love with today’s human form, so cuddled up to our person? There is nothing more personal, private, unique, or our own than art—the Brandenburg Concertos, the portrait of Charles V, *Les fleurs du mal*, if they have become common property it is only because the unique and unrepeatable character of the creator was imprinted upon them, like a seal claiming that it belongs to me, this is my work, this is I!

If, therefore, as I have said, nothing plants you as firmly in your personality as a fist or a kick—when, O art, will you stop being docile and begin to punch?

Monday

I am not a brute. I am not looking for a street fight. Nor am I ranting, scaring, exaggerating in demagogic flight—no, I am not exaggerating—I have always sought strength in moderation.

I am not losing sight of the fact that science (even though it is inhuman) is our hope, that (even though it warps) it also saves us from a thousand warpings, that, even though it is a cruel mother, it is also a caring one. That this curse of ours is also our blessing.

I am talking art into kicking—smack!—but not so that the professor feels kicked but for the artist to feel that he is the one doing the kicking. I am not seeking to crush science, but to restore art to its own life, in full counterdistinction. Let the poodle ingratiating itself on its hind legs finally bite someone! After listening to a “modern” concert, after attending an art exhibit, after reading today’s books, I get faint with this weakness, as if I were facing capitulation and mystification at the same time. One simply does not know who is speaking: a poet—or an “educated, cultivated, well-oriented and well-informed man”? The artist whose voice seemed divine not long ago today creates as if he were faking it. And he creates like a pupil. Like a specialist. Like a scholar. Enough of this outrage!

Tuesday

Whack ’em in the stomach! Sock ’em in the jaw!

Wednesday

Straight in the kisser . . .

Thursday

Pow! Give it to ’em with all your might!

Friday

Get ahold of yourself, rhetoric of hooligans!

But, artists, what else is left?

Yesterday in the bar. With a certain sociologist, or psychoanalyst.

I sat before him, like before a bureaucrat's window—on the other side of which someone is engaged in accounting, adding, cataloging, a whole process inaccessible to me yet defining. I felt as if I were in the hands of a surgeon or despot. I expounded to him on my homegrown convictions—but what were my individual convictions compared with his, which have debrained three hundred thousand minds in a thousand years, which are a mountain made of submissive and functional heads.

Nec Hercules contra plures!

But when I kicked him in the shins, he cried out! Oh, how liberating the shriek of a scholar is!

Saturday

Punch 'im in the snout!

Sunday

Speaking seriously, though, artists, you must strike. Well, perhaps not with a fist, because you might encounter stout men among them.

But it would be really wonderful if they felt our hostility. Then they would understand that not everyone judges them according to their usefulness and the goods they deliver. I will tell you what happened to my provider. This functionary was very pleased with himself, his function as a deliverer of baked goods was socially positive, everybody respected him; he felt, therefore, that he could allow himself a bow-legged figure, shallow mug, dull look, general mediocrity and drabness, in conjunction with indecision and an ample dose of the fragmentary.

I had to strike hard, therefore, once, twice, and draw blood, so that he would feel that *who you are* is more important than *what you do*.

Science is allowed to chase profit. Art must guard the human form!

Tuesday

That communism is scientific in theory—that these two worlds, science and communism, are closely related—that, therefore science has a communizing tendency—why this is as clear as day! Not long ago I was explaining to Professor Teranów (in Quequén) that if the young people at the universities usually like red it is not the work of agitators but the result of their scientific culture. They honor and profess knowledge; communism appears to them in the aureole of scientism.

Authentic kinship with the preeminent spirit of science is revolution's trump card in the game for the conquest of the world. If they reach their goal, it will be on this wave of science, which crashes over everything. Strange, on the other hand, is the behavior of art in the cold war—how could it not notice that its place is on the opposite side of the barricade? This is really quite amazing—art has so much anticommunism in its blood—occasionally I catch myself in the act of thinking that even though I might yield occasionally to my strong sympathies for some of their achievements there, behind the curtain, as an artist I must be an anticommunist, or, in other words, that I could be a communist only by resigning from that portion of my humanity which expresses itself in art.

Of course! If art is “the most personal thing,” if it is “the most private possession one can imagine,” if art is the personality, the “I” . . . Try, you adherents of combines and collective farms, to tell Chopin that the Sonata in B Minor is not his. Or that he is not the Sonata in B Minor and in the wildest, most ruthless fashion. Oh, I can imagine the dancing clown of artism seducing, loving, going crazy, thirsty for superiority and all the luxuries and not allowing itself to be ruled, apprehended, described—I can imagine this little, incomprehensible, but arrogant imp under the aegis of your regulation, fulfilling cozily and usefully its prescribed functions. How amusing this is: the madness of art, its conflagration, against the background of a stable, reasoned morality and all of this “socialization.”

It eluded Marx that art is and will always remain his implacable enemy, whatever the circumstances, independent of the system of production that feeds it. Did he know art too little? And did he, like all those who do not know enough about it, not appreciate its elementary, explosive character? He felt that it is, or can be—civilized, normal, positive. He did not understand that it is an outlet, an explosion. And that from it one finds exactly what Marxism is incapable of fathom-

ing. Communism's romance with art, which continues to this day and has borne such grotesquely miserable fruit, should be credited to the humble loyalty of the holy doctors and acolytes of the red church.

On the other hand—haven't the funds expended on the maintenance of "artistic production" and cultural tenderness to the artist been paid back lavishly? As mismatched as this couple was, it managed to create the appearance of a common front for decades. They said to art: —You must accompany us. In the name of progress! Morality! Humanitarianism! Justice! They lacked no arguments. They inundated art with arguments.

And today's artist, who has lost his instinct, is especially sensitive to arguments. This is what has been happening to him since the time when, intimidated by science, he drowned his temperament in intellect and began to smell the flowers not with his nose but with his soul. What should one demand from the naive but noble-minded scruples of those "working on themselves," perfecting themselves, analyzing, constructing their morality, trembling in the face of their responsibilities, suffering for all of humanity, those researchers, teachers, leaders, judges, inspectors, engineers of souls, finally martyrs, sometimes even saints—but not dancers, singers. . . . Art fried up in laboratories . . . but what should one demand from these fried eggs, what can this omelet possibly resist?

I am not thinking of political warfare. . . . Away with politics, art! Be yourself, pure and simple! Watch your nature, nothing more.

Thursday

—How am I supposed to believe you when you make art a champion of the personality? You say that this "is the most personal expression of man," that art is "I"? Yet how many times have you wailed that man can never express himself fully? Your own words are: "to be a man means never to be oneself"—for the form in which we manifest ourselves is formed between us and other people, it is imposed on us. . . . You even claimed that we are "created" by others, from the outside. . . . And art? And the artist? How can you say that "Chopin is the Sonata in B Minor" if you have concluded that the work creates itself to a great degree with its own logic and is limited by its own exigencies? How can you accuse scientists of being warped

by science, when, according to you, art warps its people in the very same way, creating itself beyond the artist, imposing a form on him? . . .

—Allow me. I do not deny that art is “extrahuman” or, more accurately, “interhuman.” But an artist is different from the scientist in that he wants to be himself. . . . And haven’t I already written in this diary that this “I want to be me” is the whole secret of personality, this will, this desire, defines our attitude toward deformation and results in the fact that deformation begins to hurt. And even if external forces crush me like a wax figurine, I will remain myself as long as I agonize over it, protest against it. Our authentic form is contained in the protest against deformation.

—And you claim that this protest is alien to scholars?

—Yes of course! They—objective—always ready to dissolve in their matter-of-fact truth . . . no, they are not called to experience disharmony between man and form! If they concern themselves with this at all, they do it scientifically—that is, without suffering—that is, without experience. . . .

—You think, therefore, that this pain, this experience, can be felt only by the artist?

—Oh, no! This is the daily torment of every man; but perhaps it is more concentrated in those who devote themselves with greater passion to expressing themselves. . . .



And notice that the invasion of science promises art the most beautiful career.

We will one day recognize art as our sole friend and champion; it will even become our only identification card.

Yes! Just think! Upon waking one morning you may notice that, as a consequence of biophysiological methods applied to you, another head had grown out of your rear during the night. Terrified, you will become disoriented and no longer know which of these heads is your real one—what will remain except to cry out in terror, rebellion, protest, despair . . . that you protest!

This cry will then find its poet . . . and will declare that you are still the same being you were yesterday.

As for me, I expect the future scientific world to confirm what *Ferdydurke* proclaims about a distance to form and about not identifying with it. Tomorrow's art, the art of deformed people, will rise under this sign. . . .

They will consciously create their form (their physical form, too). But they will not identify with it.

Saturday

I wouldn't give three cents that Scriabin got to the (altered) quartet chord in Prometheus independently of Liszt. And then—how should one trace the subsequent path of this chord in Debussy, Mahler, Dukas, and Richard Strauss?

And as for the quartet-sextet chord, does the fifth, I ask, being its base, really “play” emotionally—is this not convention upheld by the cadences of classic concerts (perhaps with a more codal theme)?

Hm, hmmm . . .

Sunday

The unexpected visit of Siegrist, who is currently staying in New York and has spent the past two years at Yale and Cambridge. He came with J. C. Gomez. He seemed somewhat lukewarm to me, the flame that had warmed him in La Troya has gone out in this splendid man. As is his custom, he began drawing figures on paper that I hospitably slipped to him.

Both claim (but this seems to be mainly Siegrist's opinion) that the recent slowing down of the tempo in physics must be attributed not so much to the exhaustion of philosophical possibilities in the area of chief, inseminating contradictions of the type continuity-noncontinuity, macro-micro cosmos, wave and corpuscular interpretation, gravitational and electromagnetic fields, etc., as to the fact that physics has fallen prey to a system of interpretation shaped in the intellectual exchanges of scholars. They are thinking of the polemics between Bohr-Einstein, Heisenberg-Bohr, all the opinions exchanged about the Compton effect, the coexistence of such minds as Broglie, Planck, Schrödinger, that entire “dialogue,” which, in their opinion, delineated the issues and their centers imperceptibly, gradually, but prematurely and arbitrarily, creating the necessity of moving along a

certain line. This happened of itself, as a result of their desire for precision.—These are the sad consequences of too much talk—noticed Gomez. They said a little too much. . . .

When I allowed myself to draw attention to the rare scrupulosity of the majority of these scholars in controlling their system of interpretation and delineating its role and cognitive limits, when I gave Einstein as an example, I noticed that Siegrist was writing something down on paper. He was writing out the word “MACH” in capital letters.

And he added:

—Stocks are dropping.

Monday

I ate a tasty fish.

Monday

The riddle of “light” in Mozart. Gide is quite right when he says that the drama in Mozart’s music, illuminated by intelligence, spirit, stops being dramatic. The kind of splendor found in the first allegro of the *Jupiter* Symphony is the crowning glory of this internal process. Radiance conquers and reigns supreme. But in him, as in Leonardo da Vinci, I see an element of perversity, a kind of illegal retreating from life—Mozart’s and Leonardo’s smile (especially in his sketches) have this same characteristic, it is as if they wanted a forbidden amusement, as if they wanted to play and delight even in that which is forbidden, even in that which gives pain . . . a delicate but roguish game, sly, an archintelligent sensuality . . . but even the very juxtaposition “intelligent sensuality” is sinful. . . . Is the ascending and descending scale in *Don Giovanni* not a strange joke which pokes fun at hell? The high registers of Mozart sometimes assail me like something forbidden, like sin.

The reverse of Mozart would be Chopin—for here the affirmation of weakness, delicacy, executed with rare determination and stubbornness, results in strength and the capacity to look at life without flinching. He “insists so much on what is his,” he wants to be who he is so absolutely that this makes him really exist—makes him unrelenting and, as a phenomenon, invincible. Thus, in self-

confirmation, Chopin's despairing, lost, morbid romanticism, subjected to the forces of the world like a reed to wind, transforms itself into a severe classicism, into discipline, into mastery of matter, into the will to rule. How moving and sublime his heroism is when seen this way, and how declamatory, rhetorical, and paltry when one looks at it from a "patriotic" perspective. "I will cling most strongly to what is weakest in me"—his work seems to shout.

Wednesday

Veal cutlet. Pineapple. Drab day.

*Come clean, "Gombrowicz!" There are at least nine of you and you have written a masterpiece unawares. . . .** I would like someone to translate this sentence for me, I feel a summons in it, but what could it be? . . . Who is calling me? And why don't I know English? Today I die unknown. Who is calling me?

Friday

An exchange of letters with Adam Czerniawski and indirectly with Czakowski, on the occasion of the appearance of the English edition of *Ferdydurke*, as well as the discussion about *Wiadomości* and *Kultura* in *Kontynenty*, leads me to wonder whether I should write in greater detail about this group of young émigré writers, so vehement in their Polish start on London soil. This would not cost me much and might come in handy to them. . . .

Scarcely do I dream this idea when I back out of it convulsively. I am flushed out by my revulsion to the collective character of literature. Oh dear, groups! Unions! Debuts! "Writers," "young writers," "old writers," "the young generation," "new values!" . . . It is enough for me to notice someone in literature and begin reading him for him to stop being a "writer" and to become Pasek, Chesterton, *tout court*. I see nothing in art except names.

If a spark of spiritual alliance did flare up between one of these young people and me, that someone would become . . . merely himself . . . not a literatus or a young person or a beginning writer in exile. But sparks do not fly so easily. It is

*Italicized phrase in English in original.

easier to establish contact with young people in Poland, not here with these already one-quarter Englishmen, half-choked by the muzzle of their acquired English culture. Their Englishness stifles, inhibits, their Polishness. Their Polishness does not allow their Englishness to be grafted onto them. Their task is uncommonly difficult, almost breakneck: to join the two spheres in such a way as to generate a little electricity and loosen their tongues. (It would come easier to them if they wrote in English, like Conrad, like Pietrkiewicz, then their deepest Polish exoticism would intoxicate them.)

Peculiar this shrub rising in our émigré garden—and on such inhospitable soil. If I were a gardener I would water it conscientiously day and night because oddities sometimes become valuable. Except that I am not a gardener.

Friday

What did Śmieja say about me in the discussion in defense of my diary? “His brutality, egocentrism, and arrogance toward writers of lesser stature may be distressing. . . .”

But no! He misinterprets me! With me there are no “writers of lesser stature.” This again is a collective viewpoint. It is true that I sometimes demolish, with gusto, in jest, by attacking, writers, but only those who prance around in their epaulets. I have never really taken part in a single duel while clad in my stripes and epaulets; I have never written a single word dressed in anything but my birthday suit.

Saturday

Now people are accusing me of mystification. Not long ago a woman charged up to me in the Polish Center:—You mystify! It is never clear whether you are being serious, paradoxical, or just bluffing.

—A nitwit—I answered—fears nothing more than being turned into one. This fear never leaves him: they are putting me on! But listen, nitwit, what good will it do you to know whether I am “sincere” or “insincere”? What does this have to do with whether or not my thoughts are right? I can utter a soaring truth “insincerely” and say the stupidest thing “sincerely.” Learn to judge the thought independently of who says it or how.

Sure, mystification is advisable for a writer. Let him muddle the waters around himself a bit so that no one knows who he is—a clown perhaps? Scoffer? Wise man? Cheat? Discoverer? Blusterer? Guide? Or perhaps he is all of these at once? Enough of this blissful sleep in the womb of mutual trust. Be vigilant, spirit!

Be prepared!

And so long, nitwits!

XXI

Wednesday

An enticing little morning, an idling little springtime, dust motes dancing in the streaks and streams of sunlight—oooh, ahhhh, I am happy to pull on my trousers with the thought that I am going for a walk, a little walk, I'll relax, I walk to the door—the bell, Irmgard goes to open the door and in a minute in walks Simon.

So I say: —*Hola*, what are you doing here at this early hour? Have a seat, *compañero*! To which he replies: —How are you?—and he sits down—sits down—sits down somewhat too easily perhaps, too quickly, or perhaps because he sits down in the nearest chair—enough that he immediately alienates me with his terrifying absence.

I say something again—he to me—but this conversation is and is not—as for him, it looks as if “he had forgotten to take himself along.” It was as if . . . yes, as if he were not there. But what do I know, after all. . . . I smile and keep talking when suddenly his upper lip quivers, in a bad way, in a bad, bad way.

He looks.

Explains.

A vat.

A vat full of boiling water.

His daughter.

A vat filled with boiling water spills on his daughter . . .

So, I see . . . and “it has been going on for hours in the hospital and is still not over” and he “doesn’t know what to do with himself” and he “is of absolutely no use,” so he came. And he apologizes for intruding at such an early hour.—No problem! Of course, certainly . . . But I go silent, he goes silent and we sit, if I can

express it this way, nose to nose. Face to face. Alone. Hand to hand. Foot to foot. Knee to knee. Face to face. Until this stupid identity begins to irritate me in the room and I think, how is it that he repeats me, that I repeat him, face to face—all of a sudden the scalding of the child scalds me until I hiss—and then I see that even though we are so similar, there is no use sitting here and it is better simply not to sit at all but to leave, leave, leave, exit, any kind of exit; distance, removal, become urgent, burning! . . . And I say: —Shall we take a walk? He gets up immediately and we leave; first I and he behind me with that daughter of his.

Zephyr.

We go out and the fact that we go out is just right. So we go. I immediately turn right, although I could go left—streets, houses, sidewalks, movement, hubub, ringing, honking, look—someone is hopping into a tram, someone is bending over, someone is biting into a chocolate bar, someone is buying something from a vendor—we feel better immediately at the sight of this hive with hands, feet, ears, like us, but alien, as if it were innocent. . . . And what relief! . . . because even though that evil thing is lodged in us, there on the street corner people call out to one another! They greet each other from afar!

I choose the most crowded streets to lose myself in the throng and disappear—and I gamble that this is a race with time, that his daughter cannot keep dying endlessly, it has to end somehow, and then Simon will leave me alone. I haven't the least idea what is going on in him, a conflagration or frost—he walks next to me. Sun. I see a fruit vendor on the corner, he is weighing apples and somehow I like it that he knows nothing and is weighing a kilo of apples, talking to a customer . . . his ignorance appeals to me so much that I think that I, too, will buy some apples and will at least relax for a moment with this man, rest, somewhere at his place, far away. . . . —A kilo?—said the fruit vendor.—Right away. Everyone is buying them because they are as sweet as pears.

Suddenly I blurt out:—A terrible thing has happened to this man, he has a four-year-old daughter and she is dying.

I bite my tongue . . . why?! It is out! Never mind. He weighs the apples. I am humbled in this silence and empty, like an eraser rubbing away everything. How awful—says the fruit vendor—such a misfortune!

When I hear this, it grows in me, unwinds, jumps and howls all in one second, bursting all boundaries . . . I shout:

—Take these apples away! Take them!

Lightning bolt. I move forward, blindly, like a man possessed! Behind me Simon with his little daughter, like a man possessed! And again we are alone, he and I, I and he, but this time the secret is out, the war declared, trumpets and drums, the march is beginning!

And at exactly this moment, note, a dog barks (I do not see him, I merely hear his barking).

Trams! Buses! Swarm of passersby! The street is unrolling itself like a carpet, I walk on, after me him, and after him, his daughter! We walk in my outburst, in my outburst to the fruit vendor, which revealed, betrayed, and announced . . . and it no longer helps us to be immersing ourselves in the throng, my cry follows us and behind it that horror . . . and with it something like an animal, why has an animal joined in? An animal? I am thinking of the dog's barking. Well, a dog not a tiger . . . at any rate this barking joins my outburst, my outburst, I remember it now, it rings out together with the barking of the dog and as a result my outburst changes a little into some kind of animal, well, it is enough that the animal is, that it has already joined in, dog or no dog. An animal. We walk. He walks. I walk. Out of a cornucopia come houses, windows, streets, street corners, signs, displays, and the human swarm, in which we are immersing ourselves more and more quickly, in order to lose ourselves . . . what will I do? Where are we going? What should we do? . . . but we go down Florida Street, where the crowds are greatest, and we tear through, push, rub shoulders. Until we stop because a passing omnibus blocks our way and an elderly gentleman asks Simon, very politely:

—Pardon me . . . Which way to Corrientes?

Simon looks at him and does not answer.

Then a little taken aback, the man turns to me with his question. And I look at him—and don't answer. NO. I agree, it is nothing too unusual, he probably thinks he has come upon foreigners who do not know the language . . . nevertheless, you must understand, this is a NO and a shove into nothingness . . . as if a knife were cutting it away. This is a REFUSAL, a dark, black, remote refusal in the bright sun. And we move ahead, like madmen, and then the shriek of a parrot reaches us, who knows from where, maybe from a passing taxi, this shriek joins to my earlier outburst and renews the earlier barking of the dog . . . and the Animal again makes itself heard and suddenly tears into our lack of an answer! Nothing. I still do not

know what is in him, in Simon, although I am the same as he, and alone with him! Nor does he know about me. But bound by our outburst and by our lack of an answer, isolated and marked like criminals, we quicken our pace to get lost in the crowd, when the end loomed before me—the end, I say, which makes me feel queasy. . . .

Namely, Florida is ending. Before us the square—the Plaza San Martin—as if on a platter.

Return to Florida? But no . . . because we walk in a hurry, as if we were going somewhere and this would reveal that our movement is a lie!

Enter the square? Except that there are almost no people there. What are we to do in that square—the two of us, alone!

Too late for second thoughts. We are walking through the very center of the square—it is cool, quiet, fresh, and the wind blows over us from afar. The sudden distance practically knocks our feet out from under us. The square is sublime, overlooking the port and river, it hovers like a balcony, and there, in the distance, in the black and blue combinations of water, fog, and white sky, floats the cringing or straight smoke from ships immobile on the river, and this immobility of ships on the immobile river together with the stone skeleton of the port, sharp with the spines of buildings—from here, from the mountain—smells of stagnation and backwardness. We slow our pace. Stillness. Emptiness. Peace. Our gallop has exhausted itself, broken down in the immobility—and we stop. Suddenly our walk has completely exhausted itself.

What?

Face-to-face, but I have no idea what he is doing with himself in there—perhaps something, perhaps nothing—I have no idea. We stand, he a little to the side, and we stand, and there, in the distance, some sort of immobile gloom is forming and growing between the glassy water and the watery heaven of steam, fog, clouds of smoke, in the stillness of ships imperceptibly moving, in the lifeless outline of port fortifications. Silence, silence, when a piece of paper rustles at our feet, moved by the wind. I look at my companion out of the corner of my eye—he is holding the paper down with the tip of his shoe and his eyes are riveted to the ground. The paper rustles again. I glue my eyes to the paper, he glues his eyes to the paper.

Again the paper rustles. Then he looks at me with furrowed brow, with a

look so concentrated and penetrating that it seems he is preparing to say something most urgent, important, and conclusive, in the greatest haste . . . but he says nothing, the paper rustles, he holds the paper down with his foot and looks at me, and there far away it goes on, grows and floats. . . . I think, what will happen if the paper rustles again?

One-on-one. I prefer not to look at him and in not looking at him, I begin to wonder if I am in danger . . . will he . . . me? . . .

It is important for me to substantiate this thought, it is not at all fantastic, I would not want to be accused of lacking common sense. . . . Let us agree: a man subject to such pressure could explode, is it not true that he could explode? But the very explosion worries me less—the nature of the explosion, more. For, let us understand that I do not know what is going on inside him, and more may be going on . . . well, much more may be going on than custom anticipates and one could even ask if this tormented creature is still residing with both feet in our, human world . . . and in general this story is risky and elusive beyond expression, yes, risky . . . but perhaps I would not be so disturbed if not for the paper, if not for the paper flapping under his foot, like something living, like an animal, you see, completely like a shout turned into an animal, the result being that the animal joins us again, but this time, how shall I say it, low, at the very bottom, because it is no longer from a dog, a parrot, but from a piece of paper, a lifeless thing, and there, low, the Animal with the child answers, the child-animal. . . . And I wrack my brains, wrack my brains, why is the child turning into an animal, but there is no helping it, one has to bear it—except, that I am relating to “man” with suspicion, to a man who stands in a void, next to me, a man for whom a dying child has become an animal and who carries this within himself. . . . I do not believe in the devil. Simon is a good person by nature, he wouldn’t harm a fly. Except that . . . this time . . . There is no grace to be found anywhere. Not a penny’s worth.

What then might he be capable of . . . if the paper rustles again? (This is all connected to the paper.) But the breeze has died down. I prefer not to look at him too much. The worst thing is that this kind of animal is an unknown to me, even up close, but the fact that it comes from the child, and is linked to a dog and a parrot and paper, does not inspire confidence. There on the outskirts smoke and streaks of fog. A child? An animal? What kind of animal? I should not, in any case, have taken a walk with him, this is really unprovidential and now I have to duck out,

detach myself—before it becomes too late—and what are we doing here like this anyway, on this elevated square, alone, one-on-one, without anyone except for us. . . . I have to detach myself. But how should I detach myself? Quickly, quickly, because at any moment the paper might rustle . . . it is really silly that even though he is so similar to me, nose for nose, ear for ear, foot for foot, I haven't the least idea as to what he might do!

I calculate that if I leave suddenly, at least a moment will pass before he can move—during which I can reach the stairs and quickly run down the stairs alone. Except . . . how am I to leave so abruptly? . . . I go silent inside—and then under the influence of my silence that silence returns to me, the silence with which we received the gentleman who asked me about Corrientes; that silence of ours returns together with the deafness and blindness, and in this deafness and blindness, I break with him, I suddenly leave!

I am already on the stairs. I am running down. This escape is like a challenge! Because I am fleeing from something like an evil spirit! And he remains behind like an evil spirit! Suddenly a diabolical evil finds itself between us. I was hoping to come upon a station and lose myself in it—I run, I run inside, I dive into a crowd and finally I stand in line for the cashier, any kind of cashier, just to stand.—Where to?—asks the clerk at the window.—To Tigre—I say the first station that comes to mind, because it's all the same, the important thing is to get on a train, to get away. But I hear behind me: —To Tigre—And it is his voice.

This frightened me and I am not joking!

Actually there is nothing shocking about all this—the two of us step out for a walk, then the two of us buy a ticket for a suburban train . . . well, yes, except that I am running away . . . and he, in order to catch me, has to run after me and this running after me is pursuit. . . . At any rate, he attaches himself to me again. And this time I am no longer able to escape, the possibility of escape has already been exhausted. So we take our tickets and together, shoulder to shoulder, await our train in a great hall of glass and iron; we stand over a line of sleek tracks, where slowly the passengers gather—we wait for the train.

Which is not arriving. We wait. He says nothing. I don't know what is in him, what he is like now, where he is going. I know nothing—zero—about this face staring at the tracks—and, at the same time, in proportion to the arrival of people, our intimacy grows, our acquaintance forces us to stand next to one another, it

creates a pair of us. Who is this creature standing next to me and what sort of animal has his child—which he has with him—become? My common sense, as healthy as it is, does not leave me for an instant in these obsessions of fear and about ten times I become furious at my fantasies and chimeras—but—but—once the facade of the ordinary shatters, the place we occupy in the cosmos becomes what it is in essence—something abysmally inconceivable and therefore containing the possibility of everything. After all, I would not even concern myself with this too much—if not for a certain drastic detail, if not for a certain reptile, concealing itself in the dark womb of being—if not for the Pain—yes, if the riddle did not cause pain!

Pain! Only this is important—the cruel eyes of Pain in this black well—pain hurts!—This merciless finger transforms everything it touches into reality—even fantasy becomes truth in contact with this real thing, pain. I wouldn't make anything of this if it didn't hurt; but I have already been informed about the pain of the child in the hospital, the terrible pain that hurts here, right next to me, in this man—and this horror is not a delusion, because it hurts!—and I am close, close . . . and maybe it is beginning to look at me . . . that animal of a burned child . . . I do what I can to conceal it from myself, or, too, myself from it, but the undeveloped thought about the child turned into an animal, a bad thought . . . Animal? What kind of animal? The barking of a dog, a parrot, rustling paper, ah, I weave my deaf, dumb, blind arabesques from anything at hand and they would be so harmless if it didn't hurt, it hurts, O the pain, the pain, it hurts!—except for the pain of a child confirming my fancies!

Meanwhile more people arrive, Sunday travelers with bags and in spite of everything their normal demeanor somehow soothes our unusualness—until a train rolls into the vastness of the iron-glass hall, pigeons in the vault—and together with others we board, he and I—and we are confined to an overflowing train car. Whistles. The train moves. In a moment it emerges into the sun, devouring the tracks that run out of the sides of the road with a rhythmic rocking. We ride the relaxing, fleeing space and I am already thinking about what I am supposed to do in this Tigre for which I am headed, when—Tigre? Tigre! Why Tigre?!

Why to Tigre, for what, to do what? . . . And why not to some other station? In the crush I can see practically nothing through the gaps created by chins, spines,

collars, and necks, but I feel hijacked to Tigre . . . why to Tigre? . . . and I know that in the train there is not one person who is going the way I am going there with him, without reason, so completely blindly (and deafly) to Tigre . . . and with the same kind of baggage. I look, truly amazed, at their faces, so similar, it is possible that they may even look like us—and this fact becomes a springboard for a mad leap, that we are going to Tigre without reason, borne away by the train. Tigre? What is waiting for us in Tigre? The train stops, then moves. I feel something . . . nearby . . . some sort of machination, some sort of indistinct effort to overpower . . . me . . . thirst for conquest . . . of me.

This is indistinct. Murky, dark, quiet. He stands next to me, squeezed. This is not a distinct, possessive movement—nothing of the kind. I catch him in rather tiny almost preliminary doings—the movement of a hand, perhaps the shifting of weight from foot to foot, the shy, crowded movement of an elbow—perhaps this is natural in the discomfort, but I seem to see something, that it is not he who is moving, but something within him . . . something I fear desperately, a child turned into an animal, that animal of his, which is endowed with its own movement like the rustling paper and which possesses him. Again I feel in him the movement, something like the movement of a fetus in a mother's womb, and I feel the presence of an evil with fangs, claws, furiously evil. I cringe again, for the cry of that child, in the hospital, really is—so my delirium has real fangs!

Then I realize: Tigre—tiger! Which has not occurred to me until now. So we speed on to Tigre . . . and I would laugh to tears over this, if not for the child in the hospital making it come true!

Simon moves again!—or it moves in him—and I run to get away—but in the crush all I can do is move away from him spasmodically and thus, moving my entire body, I crawl onto another—soft—body. An enormous, warm obesity whose face I do not see, into whom, out of horror, I am falling, into a sweaty, awkward, vulvar softness, into a probably quiet, humble, decent obesity, hospitable if suffocating. Oh, what a cozy little corner this is! . . . in which I slowly domesticate myself, make myself at home . . . in the warmth of his shirt plays today's and yesterday's sweat, mingled with the scent of vanilla, in his pocket he has a notepad, on his lining a label with the name of the tailor SMART, the shirt is patched. It is quiet here and good, a hundred miles from that . . . burning . . . problem, that other

thing is completely inconceivable, it is something completely different, a different country, respite and calm . . . at the other end of the world. Finally! I am resting. I am elated. And suddenly a terrible blow is dealt beneath me from beneath.

I say “beneath me from beneath” because this is neither simply “beneath me” nor simply “from beneath,” just as if it were divided and doubled—do you understand?—and this was not really a blow, rather a grabbing; and this grabbing was not “executed,” but was becoming like a threat on my periphery . . . and suddenly I understand that my moment of laxity has been taken advantage of in order practically to bite! I freeze. My head is stuck between his chest and jacket. I cannot pray. I cannot move. I cannot shout. No, I cannot shout, but a god-awful shout breaks out from all over and embraces everything, tumbles headlong into the heartrending Animal to the very bottom. And, with my head hidden, immobile, I wait for it to jump.

But then . . .

Something . . . something . . . something! What? Hm . . . Suddenly . . . something like a tickling on the back of the neck. Can’t be. Perhaps someone has pulled out a handkerchief and is touching the back of my neck? No. Someone is tickling me. Deliberately, his fingers on the back of my neck. . . .

I wonder. What could this be? Who?

The fat man? Why? I take all the possible solutions into consideration: madman, homo, joker.

Simon? Has he gone mad? Even if he has gone crazy, he cannot reach my neck from where he is.

One of the people standing next to me? Maybe an acquaintance is letting me know he is here? Highly unlikely with my head stuck in the Fat Guy.

Meanwhile someone’s fingers are dancing lightly down the back of my neck.

I wonder—who? What? I puzzle and puzzle.

I wrack and wrack my brains, what sort of joke is this—but I have no illusions for I know that the lack of connection between the tickling and the Animal is precisely the guarantee of their diabolical *affiliations*, their plotting, their pact—and I wait for the Tickling to get chummy with It, with the Animal, before it sinks, like a knife, into the unknown, inconceivable, still unuttered scream.

Volume 3

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1961

I

Friday

Before me I have Bruno Schulz in the French translation, heralded a few weeks ago by Suzanne Arlet (the poet). It is a volume of stories entitled *Traité des mannequins* (chiefly stories from *Cinnamon Shops*) published by Juillard.

Introductions. First Maurice Nadeau: “. . . we must assure him a place among the great writers of our day.” Followed by Sandauer’s* fine study—it is obvious that he is quite at home in Schulz; he is cautious but penetrating.

Bruno.

I have long known about this edition prepared with such painstaking effort, yet when I finally saw the book, I winced. What will happen now? Will it be a “dud” or a universal success? Its ties to Kafka may smooth the way or, just as easily, obstruct it. If they say, here is one more relation, he is lost. If, on the other hand, they spot his particular luminosity, the light pulsating from him like from a phosphorizing insect, then he will glide into the imagination cultivated by Kafka and his kin. . . . But right now in July it is impossible to say, and certainly not easy to predict the fate of this uncommon work in Paris.

The devil take Paris! How exhausting this is—Paris! If not for Paris, I too would not have to be bothered writing this *souvenir* about a “deceased friend,” I would have been spared this stylistic exercise.

*Artur Sandauer, a controversial postwar Polish literary critic whose studies of Schulz and Gombrowicz led to discussion and reassessment of their work.

Saturday

It would be hard to call it friendship—in the years we became acquainted we were both still unborn. The years 1934, 1935. Aleje Ujazdowskie. We are strolling along. Talking. He and I on Służewska. He, Witkacy, and I. Nałkowska, he, and I.* In this film, “flickering onto the screen of memory,” I see him as someone almost completely unknown to me, but then I see myself that way, too—it was not us, but the introduction to us, an overture, a prologue.

I would like to unload immediately an irritating impropriety, something most certainly in bad taste: *Bruno adored me but I did not adore him.*

He first showed up at my place, on Służewska, after the publication of *Cinnamon Shops*—I had just published my *Memoir from Adolescence*. He was small, strange, chimerical, focused, intense, almost feverish—and this is how our conversations got started, usually on walks.

That we truly needed one another is indisputable. We found ourselves in a vacuum, our literary situations were permeated with a void, our admirers were spectral, something of the *apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, we both roamed Polish literature like a flourish, ornament, chimera, griffin.

After reading my first book, Bruno discovered a companion in me. He kept showing up in order to find confirmation in me, for me to furnish him with the Outside without which an inner life is condemned to a monologue—and he wanted me to use him in the same way. He would show up as a friend, yes (I emphasize), as a kindred spirit to consolidate and raise my esteem.

And here is where the “miss” or “dislocation,” to use the language of our works, came in . . . for his extended hand did not meet my own. I did not return his regard, I gave him abysmally little, almost nothing, of myself, our relationship was a fiasco . . . but perhaps even this secretly worked to our advantage? Perhaps he and I needed fiasco rather than happy symbiosis?

Today I can speak of this openly because he has died.

Allow me therefore to repeat once again with delight: how he built me up,

*Aleje Ujazdowskie and Służewska are streets in an elegant section of Warsaw. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz was a Polish playwright, novelist, painter, and philosopher. He committed suicide in September 1939. Zofia Nałkowska was a well-known Polish novelist and a promoter of Schulz's work in the period between the two wars.

how he strengthened me. In my melancholy literary life I have gotten my share of shabby treatment, but I have also met people who would favor me, out of the blue, with the lavishness of a padishah—no one, however, was more generous than Bruno. Never, before or since, have I bathed in such crystalline joy on account of my every artistic attainment. No one ever supported me in so heartfelt a manner, no one ever delighted in me, ever stoked each and every one of my thoughts the way he did—I note: never in the course of our friendship was there any malice toward me on Bruno's part; indeed, he fed me the milk of human kindness. . . . It will suffice for me to tell you what happened with *Ferdydurke*. I gave him the unfinished book, still in typescript, and he returned it within a week, his face extinguished.

—You should return to your fantasies of *Memoir of Adolescence*, that kind of writing suits you better—he said with obvious and considerable vexation.

But later when he read *Ferdydurke* in book form he burst into a flame that almost scorched me, cool as I was. When he had the opportunity to come to Warsaw, he gave a lecture (later reprinted in *Skamander*) on *Ferdydurke* at the Writers Union which was taken for a lot of fanfare and infuriated the mandarins of our day.

Do you think I am not aware? Of how much more tactful it would be if I did not thrust myself to the forefront in this souvenir about a “deceased friend”? Modesty! . . . I hasten to warn you that I am familiar with this rule in its social as well as moral aspect. But didn't Prince Ypsilanti say that those who know one should not eat fish with a knife may eat fish with a knife? So much for the drawing room. And if you have in mind even more profound moral considerations, then I will say to you, quite frankly, that in maintaining silence about these things I would be completely distorting what had come to exist between us—and this kind of sin, committed by a writer whose maxim is optimal proximity to reality, would be unforgivable. Perhaps I should not write about Schulz with me or me with Schulz—but would this kind of abstinence be worth recommending? Prim old maids, not literature, should avoid dangerous subjects. Omit this? The distaste, the weariness with myself that overwhelms me because even here, in writing about a “deceased friend,” I have to be myself . . . I have to risk being distasteful.

And what was my reaction to Schulz's magnanimity? I liked him . . . yes. We had a lot of friendly talks, I often backed him up; in the eyes of others, we were

a pair. Appearances! My nature never allowed me to approach him other than with incredulity; I trusted neither him nor his art. Have I honestly ever read even a single one of his stories from start to finish? No—they bored me stiff. I had to be extremely careful, therefore, in everything I said so that he would not suspect the void that lay waiting in ambush for both of us. How much did he really suspect?

I am not blaming myself at all for lacking the feelings to reciprocate. On the contrary—I consider it laudable that I did not allow myself to be bribed; I find it quite appealing when one responds with an icy coolness to someone else’s white heat; an artist should not be the function of someone else’s temperature. Except that . . . I did write a brief article about Bruno in the *Kurier Poranny* and I recall dreading that people would say I was praising him because he had praised me . . . out of this fear came an article not directly about Schulz but about how one should go about reading him. And sometimes I could be quite petty toward him and perhaps this might even have been mean except that the meanness of my stinginess, just like the nobility of his magnanimity, was strangely deprived of all weight. Inauthentic. As if. Unreal. In virtue and in sin, we embryos were innocent.

Sunday

Were we friends? Colleagues? How often we were mentioned together in various literary inventories under “Polish experimental prose.” And yet if anyone existed in Polish art who was 100 percent my opposite, it was he.

I am no longer capable of remembering whether this was ever openly stated in the dialogue we carried on with his every visit to Warsaw. But once, while walking down Aleje Ujazdowskie, in front of the Chopin monument, he said that even though our works were joined by “their irony, sarcastic escapism, and game of hide-and-seek, my spot on the map is a hundred miles away from yours, and what’s more, your voice, in order to reach mine, would have to be deflected by a third something or other; there is no direct telephone line between us.”

In my opinion, it was like this: Bruno was a man who was denying himself. I was a man seeking himself. He wanted annihilation. I wanted realization. He was born to be a slave. I was born to be a master. He wanted denigration. I wanted to be “above” and “superior to.” He was of the Jewish race. I was from a family of Polish gentry.

And he was a relentless, untempered masochist—one sensed this in him all the time. No, he was not made to dominate! A tiny gnome with an enormous head, appearing too scared to dare exist, he was ejected from life and couched along its peripheries. Bruno did not acknowledge his right to exist, he sought his own annihilation—not that he wanted to commit suicide; he merely “strove” for nonbeing with all his might (and this is precisely what made him, Heidegger-style, so sensitive to being). In my opinion there was no sense of guilt à la Kafka in this striving, it was more like the instinct that moves a sick animal to separate, remove itself. He was superfluous. He was extraneous. It is possible that his masochism also had a different aspect, I don’t know, but it most certainly was homage paid to the powers of being that were trampling him.

What should a man cast out of life do? He can do nothing but take refuge in the Spirit—and it will be God if he is a believer; Morality if he is not a believer but a moral man; Art if he has deified beauty. . . . Bruno was not so much a disbeliever in God as he was uninterested in him, and even though he demonstrated a profound moral sense in all his dealings, he was not at all disposed to morality conceived as doctrine and conscious dictate of action. So only art remained. . . . And indeed, I saw him completely devoted to it, consumed by it with a zeal and concentration I had never seen in anyone else—he was a fanatic of art, its slave. He entered this cloister and submitted to its rigors, carrying out its strictest injunctions with great humility in order to attain perfection.

Except that he never attained sanctification.

As far as I got to know Bruno, a man not at all easy to get to know, his masochistic inclinations, duly thrown into relief by Sandauer, make up the key to the spiritual defeat that befell him in his last refuge—in art. Yes, the dialectic of pleasure and pain peculiar to masochism (and characteristic of art as well), and even more so the desire for self-destruction, can explain a great deal.

What happens when a monk who is flagellating himself with enthusiasm before a holy image suddenly feels that the whip has stopped being the instrument of torture and has become the instrument of ecstasy? The logical development of this situation would lead us to a macabre paradox: the sinner, to attain salvation, thinks up more and more horrific tortures, yet the greater the pain the greater the fun, the more delicious the sin!

Never mind about the pain. Let us talk about the self-destruction. This

holy artist—such do occur—could most certainly have drawn so much dignity and pride, so much spirit, from the splendor of artistic attainments that his biological decrepitude would have become less important. He could have come into existence in another sphere, because life was rejecting him. He who humbles himself will be exalted—he could have risen this way. But what if degradation and humility cost him nothing, what if they had no moral value in him, on the contrary, he was pleased by everything that degraded him, everything that hurled him to the ground. He approached art as if it were a lake he intended to drown in. Falling to his knees before the Spirit, he experienced sensual pleasure. He wanted to be a servant, nothing more. He craved nonexistence.

Such are the trials of someone who likes the taste of the lash!

And if he called art “betrayal” or a “feint,” it was due to this perversion.

Monday

And it was with a perverse artist like this that I made friends. Since he groveled with delectation and kneeled sensually, couldn't art at least have become a tool of his personality even momentarily, something that he could put to his own spiritual or simply personal use? Hermes, Sandauer calls him. No, no, to my mind there wasn't much Hermes in him; he was useless as an intermediary between spirit and matter. In fact, his perverse attitude to being (the Heideggerian question “Why does Something and not Nothing exist?” could be the motto of his work) resulted in the fact that for him matter became illuminated by the spirit, and the spirit was incarnated, but this Hermes-like process is spiced with the desire to “debilitate” being: matter is corrupt, diseased, or insidiously hostile, or mystifying, and the spiritual world is transformed into an utterly sensual phantasmagoria of color and light, its spiritual purpose is corrupted. To replace existence with half-existence, or with the appearance of existence—such were Bruno's secret dreams. He also wanted to weaken matter as well as the spirit. We often discussed various moral and social issues but behind everything he said crouched the passivity of someone brought to ruin. As an artist he was completely fixed in the very material of his work, in his own game and internal arrangements, when he wrote a story he had no other law beyond the immanent law of the unfolding form. A false ascetic, sensuous saint, lascivious monk, nihilistic fulfiller. And he knew this.

While he subordinated himself to art this way, I wanted to be “above” it. This was our chief disagreement.

I hail, as I have said, from the landed gentry, and this is a burden almost equally strong and only a bit less tragic than to have behind one those thousands of years of Jewish banishment. The first work I wrote at age eighteen was the history of my family, based on household archives that encompassed four hundred years of affluent living in Samogitia.* A landowner—whether he is a Polish squire or an American farmer makes no difference—will always harbor distrust of culture, for his remoteness from the great centers of human activity makes him resistant to human confrontations and products. And he will have the nature of a master. He will demand that culture be for him, not he for culture; all that is humble service, devotion, sacrifice, will appear suspect to him. To which of the Polish gentry who imported paintings from Italy in their day would it have occurred to humble himself before a masterpiece hanging on the wall? Not to a single one. Both the workers and the artists who created them were treated high-handedly.

I, on the other hand, traitor and derider of my “class” that I was, belonged to it nevertheless—and I have probably already said that many of my roots are to be found in the epoch when the gentry was most unrestrained, the eighteenth century. I am very much from the Saxon period. For this reason, then, Bruno, kneeling before art, was completely unacceptable. But that’s not all. Having one leg in the jolly world of the landed gentry, another in the world of the intellect and avant-garde literature, I was in between worlds. Being in-between is not a bad way to elevate yourself—for in applying the principle of *divide et impera* you can bring about the mutual devouring of the two worlds and then escape and soar “above” them.

I had the habit of passing myself off as an artist with my relatives in the country (to irritate them), and with artists I passed myself off as a first-rate landed gentleman (to infuriate them in turn).

I was always irritated by artists who were too fanatic. I can’t stand poets who are poets too much, and painters too devoted to painting. I generally want man not to devote himself to anything entirely. I want that he always be a little detached from what he does. Bruno was more of an artist than all of the *poètes*

*The ethnic heartland of Lithuania.

maudits put together, and for the paradoxical reason that he did not adore art at all. In adoring, one is someone, and he preferred to lose himself in it, to vanish altogether.

I, on the other hand, wanted to be myself, myself, not an artist or an idea or any of my works—just myself. I wanted to be above art, writing, style, ideas.

Tuesday

He liked me to attack him. Actually I even have the impression that he understood a really strange fact—namely, that I, having known him for so long, did not even take the trouble to read his book. He was discreet and did not quiz me on it, knowing I would fail the test. (But perhaps he knew—the way I did—that high art almost always remains unread, that it acts differently somehow, by its very presence in a given culture?) Everything that went into my knowledge of him (and still goes into it) derives from the bits of reading (which dazzled me) combined with bits that have remained from our many conversations. Did he perhaps relish my despising it? And put me on a pedestal because I despised it?

I was also astonished by his keen and easy understanding of what alienated me from art but united me with the everyday things in life. Cultured, educated people have a difficult time grasping this in me.—How is it that you, a difficult, sophisticated writer, are bored by Kafka, unimpressed by painting, read cheap novels?—I have often been asked these questions. Bruno had no trouble at all with the schoolboy in me (perhaps this was simply because his marvelous intelligence conceived of me in broader terms).

Frustration. False note. Who knows . . . perhaps this appealed to him not only because he was an enemy of realization on principle. Perhaps it was because his capacity for awe hit upon my incapacity for it that our contact turned out to be a mutual enrichment from the standpoint of our artistic potentials?

Wednesday

If someone had eavesdropped on our conversations in those, now distant, years, he would have taken us for conspirators. What was the plot? Bruno talked to

me about an “illegal codex” and I spoke to him about “exploding the situation” and “compromising form.” He told me about “reality’s sidetrack” and I carried on about a “liberating cacophony.” There was also talk about “subculture” and “just-short-of-beauties” and “kitsch” (which Bruno called “*ersatz*”), etc. What sort of laboratory was this?

In fact we were conspirators. We were consumed with experimenting with a certain explosive material called Form. But this was not form in any ordinary sense—the issue was “creating form,” “producing it,” and “creating oneself through the creation of form.” It is hard for me to explain this in a few words; those interested should look into our books. I will note only that although each of us began differently (for while I wanted to get at myself, and at man in general, through a provocation of form and its dissonant explosions, Bruno gave himself up to this alchemy gratis, completely gratis, with the impartiality of a peripheral being), we had a certain trait in common. We were both utterly alone in confrontation with Form. Bruno the monk without God . . . and I, with my proud humanity, which was indeed “alone with itself,” supported by nothing, a king of the categorical imperative crying in a void: be yourself!

These games with form united us, therefore. And it is exactly here that I have the suspicion—for experimenters like ourselves, people in a trial stage—that the failure in our mutual bond may have been the most felicitous of things. What would have happened if I had responded to admiration with admiration—wouldn’t we have felt too satisfied . . . too serious in each other’s eyes? If he had felt my awe, if I had, in admiring, placed a value on his admiration—wouldn’t this have made us too heavy for experimentation . . . with one another? Ah, yes, both he and I sought admiration, affirmation . . . because a vacuum wears one down. . . . Would this kind of harmony have been in keeping with our style? Far more in keeping with our style was exactly the bungled reverse of the thing, in which his extended hand did not meet mine—this typically Schulzian situation, certainly not alien to me either, allowed us at least to preserve the strange freedom of beings not yet born, the peculiar innocence of embryos—this, therefore, rendered us light in confrontation with Form.

And as for admiration—or lack of it—what did we really care, since both of us were not *real* writers.

Thursday

Let us not forget to mention the third musketeer. Witkacy. The one arrayed in plumes of a metaphysical dandy, the perpetually removed madman. I did not like him. He irritated me, and his experiments with form, probably the boldest of all, were unconvincing to me—they were too intellectual and incapable of moving beyond a grimace. . . . I felt he lacked talent. And his tricks, the same Dali uses today to *épater*, were too classic in their surrealism for my taste.

Like King Lear, Witkacy always showed up with a retinue of courtiers and jesters, recruited chiefly from among the various literary deformities (like all dictators, he could bear only inferior beings). Upon seeing Schulz or me with the master, many of these humble acolytes would consider us members of Witkacy's court, as no other interpretation would fit into their servile heads—and hence the rumor that Schulz and I hail from Witkacy's school. Nothing doing. Bruno, as I recall, profited little and regarded him unenthusiastically, and I see no traces of Witkacy in his work.

But we were, nonetheless, a trinity and a fairly characteristic one. Witkiewicz: intentional affirmation of the madness of “pure form” through vengeance as well as the fulfillment of his tragic destiny, the distraught madman. Schulz: self-destruction in form, the drowned madman. I: burning desire to use form to get at my “I” and reality, the madman in revolt.

Saturday

I am looking at the pages I wrote about Schulz. Was he really like that? Was I really like that? O real truth, who will sprinkle salt on your tail?

As for gratitude . . . I don't like the feeling . . . not that I am ungrateful by nature but because it is so awkward, does not allow itself to be expressed, and is, therefore, dangerous. How many names, as Shakespeare says, “should I write in the book that I read again each day”! The note in *Kultura* that I finally snagged my first award (Good God!) mentions Wittlin and Sandauer as those who said to my corpse: rise! But if Jeleński wrote this note, then he forgot to add that all the editions of my works in other languages should be stamped “thanks to Jeleński.”

Sometimes I see nothing but a forest of enemies around me. And some-

times, when I look, I spot a benefactor. I am indebted to Litka for Walter Tiel, for example. And I am indebted to Tiel for the translation of *Ferdydurke* from Polish into German, which was greeted with a chorus of praise in the German press—and I am grateful to him for an effort so fervid, unselfish, and scrupulous that right now practically all my works have been translated into German and are ready to be published. How did I repay Litka for finding this treasure and forcing him on me? I wrote: “It is true that you hit the mark, but as you know, man shoots, God steers the bullet.”

Sunday

Correspondence. It pains me that I have to refuse Gerda Hagenau of Vienna permission to include my text in an anthology of Polish literature that she is preparing in Italian for the publisher Feltrinelli.

I do this because in this lady’s introduction to her anthology of Polish stories in German entitled *Polnisch erzählt*, which appeared not long ago, émigré literature was clearly neglected and writers living in Poland were elevated at the expense of those in exile. Ignorance? Politics? I don’t know. At any rate, I do not believe émigré writers should participate in projects that are sorry grist for that mill—and what’s even worse, under the guise of “objectivity.”

Tuesday

Beduino and I at the bus stop, waiting for bus 208. I say to him: —Hey, old boy. So as not to be bored in the bus, let’s cut a fine duo. This will get them! You talk to me as if I were the conductor of an orchestra and as if you yourself were a musician, ask me about Toscanini. . . .

Beduino is game. We board He sits at an appropriate distance and begins loudly: —If it were me, I’d bring up the double bass, and pay attention, maestro, to the fugato. . . .

People are eavesdropping. I say: Hm, hm . . .

He: —And the brass in the passage from fa to re . . . When is your concert? I’ll be playing on the fourteenth. . . . Apropos, when are you going to show me Toscanini’s letter?

I (loudly): —Young man, you amaze me. . . . I have never known Toscanini, I am not the conductor of an orchestra, and I really don't understand why you insist on showing off in front of people by pretending to be a musician. Yuk, what sort of parading around in borrowed plumes is this? It's not very nice of you!

Everyone looks sternly at Beduino. Who turns beet red and shoots me a murderous glance.

Wednesday

What an abundant harvest in the émigré press of intermediaries between my depravity and general virtue. Not long ago I was nothing more than a clown and a pig; today—because of the resonance abroad—various explainers have taken to “objective” if sour lecturing on my creations (monsters?) with the expression “I will not praise nor condemn, let the reader draw his own conclusions.” Phooey! After such flabby, hopelessly “objective” prose, a man looks for enemies just so he can breathe the purest, frostiest, mountain air.

Another matter: I discover myself in every young author who fights for himself.

I say this because in *Kontynenty* Czaykowski demands that I, an old man, read their works—the works of these children who can't even imagine being thirty. Does he understand what he is saying? Read! Doesn't he know that even writing masterpieces is merely a profession—and that art, real art, is to manage to get someone to read what you write. It was only in old age that I managed to achieve having ten or fifteen people read me here and there (and I'm not even sure I managed this much). Read?! Ha, ha, I, too, demanded such unreasonable things at their age.

Thursday

To while away the time, the Anglicist Grabowski is again counting catalogs in which he appears. In a letter—the third in a row, this time to the editors of *Kontynenty*—he wrote to protest that the decent Mrs. Danilewicz absentmindedly forgot about him in her lecture on émigré literature. And here is the opinion of this so-cataloged critical authority on Kajetan Morawski: “Morawski knows how to

write, but he is not a writer!” In light of this proclamation Grabowski’s thought has finally become clear and consistent: a writer is someone who does not know how to write but who figures in catalogs.

In its own way, the penetrating unself-critical egocentrism of our Anglicist, together with his boring episotolary egotism, is probably not a laudable symptom from a social or national point of view. And what would happen if we all began proclaiming the praise and merits of our Most Honorable navels? It is sad that there are so few people who know how to live through others not just through themselves. It is really quite easy, Grabowski, all it takes is a little good will.

1962

II

Wednesday, Hurlingham

I arrived here yesterday at five in the afternoon, having in my suitcase a few dozen pages of a *Cosmos* well underway. I am having bad luck with traveling lately. In the train that was already waiting at the Onze station there were no vacant seats. I let it leave and waited for another—and I waited for it standing up because the benches were occupied—and while waiting, I watched, with some distress, the dense, denser and denser, onslaught of people. . . . After a half-hour the train pulls in, empty as can be and clean as a whistle, the crowd becomes animated, presses forward, staggers in, I am carried away in the crush, there is no way I am going to get a seat, I am not even standing, I am wedged into place. The train moves.

That mug ten centimeters away. The teary, reddish pupils? Little hairs on this ear? I don't want this! Away! I will not go on about his chapped skin! By what right did this find itself so close that I practically have to breathe him in, yet at the same time feel his hot trickles on my ear and neck? We rest our unseeing gazes on each other from a very near distance . . . each person is curling up, rolling up, shutting, shrinking, limiting to a minimum his eyes, ears, lips, trying to *be* as little as possible. Their revolting, fat, veiny, droopy, or dry properties fling me straight into the air, I feel as if I were leaping straight into the sky—I don't want this! This is an insult! I am insulted! The train is racing forward and suburban houses flicker by. Station. They push, they push their way in. The train moves.

Too much.

Joke. Laughter. Someones says: Fidel. Dialogue. I don't know who is talking to whom but slowly the discussion is settling over us, the same one as always,

the one they have learned by heart: imperialism, Cuba, why the government this and why the government that and order must prevail. Disagreement. Variety of viewpoints. Meanwhile another twenty people push their way in from the new station, the voices are becoming more and more hollow, by the time we got close to Morón, one demanded agrarian reform, another the nationalization of industry, the third abolishment of class exploitation, but this gabbing wheezed with the awfulness of crushed rib cages. Lofty thoughts shot straight into the air—could it be from the pressure of squeezed butts? And one more station and once more the pressing, the discussion wheezes, but it doesn't stop.

Why aren't they capable of noticing the most important fact—that during the discussion more and more people are boarding the train? What sort of unsubstantiated devil does not allow them to realize the *numbers*? Tell me, what good will your most just systems and the most egalitarian division of property be if in the meantime your neighbor divides herself into twelve, the cretin on the ground floor makes his old lady into six, and eight are born from two on the first floor? Not counting the Negroes, Asians, Malays, Arabs, Turks, and Chinese. Or the inhabitants of India. What are your speeches if not the blather of idiots, ignorant of the dynamics of their own genitalia?

What are they if not the clucking of a hen sitting on an egg—that most terrifying of bombs?

In Morón

The train slowly pulls into the station at Morón, and, having gotten out of the mangle, I walk away into space. I go to the square. As often as I come here, I make a pilgrimage to the square in order to take a look at my past from 1943.

But the pizzeria where I shot the breeze is no longer there, nor the café where I played a chess match with the chess master of Morón while dancing the boogie-woogie (we both danced—shuffling up to the chessboard when we had to make a move).

Gone as if devoured. And the person searching is no longer the same, also gone. Poland, my homeland! I have in my pocket a letter from Hollerer inviting me to Berlin and perhaps I might even visit you, Poland, at the same time, to see—but, I ask, who is supposed to look at what? Someone who is not the same at something that is no longer what it was? To look from solid ground onto moving

water, yes, this can be done. But why should one moving river look at another? Double is the flowing, double the movement and double the noise. . . .

Morón, which had formerly been spacious, is now towering, stuffy, urban. Numbers! I go to the bus station, I get in line, a sweetish-sick smell wafts from a corner bar, people before and after me, butt and beak, anemia and lichen, one vendor to another, 175 at 3 percent, woman to woman for 5.30, went up a bit, and someone's pocket radio: "Get your Tarko detergent now." A little boy makes a wisecrack. Sun. Soap. Here we stand in line, and there, on the opposite sidewalk, they walk and walk, pass and pass, without interruption they lick and lick, where has all of this come from, why, I am already twenty kilometers outside of Buenos Aires! Yet they keep passing and passing, constantly coming from around a corner and crossing and coming from around the corner and crossing and coming from around a corner and crossing and coming from around a corner until I threw up. I threw up and the guy that stood in front of me looked and didn't say much of anything because what the heck! A crowd.

I threw up again and—I am not sure that I am exaggerating—I threw up again. But what of this again and once more if they are still crossing and still crossing, and in Buenos Aires itself there are five million going to the outhouse five times a day or a total of twenty-five million every twenty-four hours, I threw up, the bus came and we got on, one after another, and a third after the second and the seventh after the sixth, the driver yawned, took money, handed out tickets, we paid one after another, we move, we are riding, radio, it is getting warm, stuffy, before me spills melted butter, spilling for her highness with a gold necklace and an old man is mumbling something, they push their way in, they fill it up, push out, push, I could have thrown up. . . .

Why? Millions! Millions! Millions! How many had thrown up that very moment in Buenos Aires, how many? Maybe 100 altogether, or 150? Why add more vomit? What riches! I was a millionaire, everything was multiplying by thousands and millions. The bus stops. I'm supposed to get out here. I get out. I am on the road with a suitcase . . . a scene familiar to everyone? The road is long, cars zoom by, I walk away, down a sandy road, breeze, trees, distance, silence.

The boredom of nature, grinning like a dog. And the cow of my destiny chews away. Slices spaces.

Quinta

Large trees, stretched like flags, beneath, a white one-story house and black shaggy dogs jumping all over me.

With Alicja and her husband; I walk in the garden and we say something so as not to be silent.

Giangrande, former captain in the Italian Navy, Alicja's husband, is absorbed with patching the fence so that the puppies don't get out in the road and says something only from time to time.

It gets dark. We return home. Tea.

One goes somewhere, drinks tea, converses, then the opening of the suitcase, arranging things in the guest room . . . isn't this one of the main activities of my life? Listening to new whispers, breathing strange air, deciphering a strange system of sounds, smells, lights. When I spoke with them, these details were crawling all over me, like insects, and made me practically absent.

The lamps were on, the dogs lay on the rug.

They had bought this *quinta* [villa] not long ago to get out of the city. Buenos Aires is twenty kilometers from here—at night one can see its pale glow in the sky, and during the day the air in that direction is dirtier. But between them and Buenos Aires, countless hamlets and small towns almost melting into one another, actually the buildings, the houses know no interruption, the streets, gardens, roads, factories, plants, hamlets, plantations, wires, stations, regions, vegetables, sewage systems, stores, shacks, kiosks and booths . . . scattered, with greater or lesser density, and one would have to walk many hours to the west to hit real fields.

Luckily the trees and shrubs of the *quinta* are a buffer.

At Night

My room is low and elongated, with a large barred window. As always when I arrived somewhere, I spread my papers on the desk—the started *Cosmos*—and I looked around, to see where I was. It was almost midnight, they had gone to bed and I was also getting ready to go to sleep. Here I had come to rest in peace and to “recover myself” (as Ernesto says) after the hurly-burly of recent days, when I felt sucked into a panicky whirlpool at times. The central *avenidas* with traffic jams of screeching automobiles were still pounding in my ears, the presence of the mon-

ster on the horizon was giving me no peace, strange, it bothered me more now than when I was in it.

Furthermore, I was bothered by finding myself tired even here—a peculiar kind of fatigue—the *quinta* exuded relaxation, and its verdure, its sun, were water for thirsty lips, but it was exactly this that brought on the thought about the fatigue that was seeking relief here.

I thought about the alert attitude of the owner of this oasis, Giangrande, who early in the morning, at six, left in his car for a distant factory where he was the director and in the course of many hours, in the din and confusion, counted the minutes separating him from a return to peace—except that when he returned in the evening, the necessity of making the most of every minute of peace took away his peace; resting became work, because once again he counted the minutes, this time separating him from the factory. He was a sculptor in these “free moments.” Amid the trees stood his stone busts frozen in line and mass . . . which he sculpted checking his watch.

Sitting on my bed, I thought about the masses and, looking at the things in my (guest, side) room, I thought about Alicja’s abstract paintings decorating the hall. If not the *quinta*, then the art was peaceful. Was art peaceful though? Didn’t the anxiety reach even this ultimate refuge, and not for some inner reason, but as a result of the very essence of artistic work? Their surrendering themselves to art in this *quinta*—this beloved project of theirs—seemed to me to be almost bankruptcy as I spoke with them; there was bitterness not joy in what they said, disappointment, ah, I’m constantly running across signs of this kind of disillusionment in the world of painters. Painters are depressed by the number of painters. There are too many. Everyone is painting. This art has become difficult, in our times mediocrity has triumphed, thanks to which painting has become easy, accessible to students, children, retirees, just step right up, each has been able to ignore all the technical difficulties, the forms that once barred access to the altar, and today anybody can be an artist-painter—and, furthermore, these paintings “are not all that bad.”

“Not all that bad.” Her words had all of the inconsolable amazement of a person unjustly slapped. In assessing my elongated room I thought that this oasis was filled with the stone silence of lumps, and with a metaphysics of abstract paintings, that it is not at all an oasis and I wondered if I had done the right thing in coming here to escape from the monster whose whitish sheen burned on the horizon.

The Next Morning

I accompany Alicja, who goes to the grocery store to do some shopping—right beyond the *quinta* begins a mangy meadow, on it small, unfinished proletarian houses, jutting out as if someone had scattered them over the earth, chaotically, unjoined to themselves or the land. Stones and old bags. Rubble and brats. Bricks, wheelbarrows, men. Dogs and trash. A radio accompanies the stench, the sun warms up, here and there someone looks at us. . . .

To the southeast the dirt in the sky announces Buenos Aires. Could I break down and cry? Oh yes, I am merciful enough to sit down on the first rock that comes along and cry real tears over my own humanity and that of all my brothers—but when I had taken in the fields of this riffraff, pushing toward us through the meadow, pressing onto us, when I saw how THEY were approaching again, reaching again, revulsion and hatred overcame weeping.

Birnam wood is marching on you, Macbeth! . . . It wasn't a wood but growing dirt. . . .

In the Afternoon

She talked about the consternation of a few of her friends—painters—who had just returned from a long trip to a few provinces of the “interior.” They said that in each town one could easily count several dozen painters. “No one wants to work, everybody wants to be an artist.” Whosoever has any life in them, smears canvases! And—unfortunately, yes unfortunately!—“these paintings are not all that bad!”

If only they were bad!

But they are not all that bad! A way of seeing and producing has been formed in the plastic arts thanks to which a completely mediocre person can produce something not all that bad. What good fortune for those people! If the small towns boast several dozen painters, how many could there be in Buenos Aires? Twenty thousand? And in Paris?

This is what they—she and Giangrande—talked about, as well as about other things such as awards, exhibits, art dealers, criticism, concerns, advertising, crazed aesthetes, experts, scientists, dealers—and they weren't even complaining, merely informing, like people resigned to the fact that an unknown Circe was changing everything into pigs.

What a defeat for the proud art of the Titians! With malevolent satisfaction I

took in the decadence of this impure art which was always lewdly tied to the instinct to possess, trade, to expertise and collecting, and perhaps more tied to this than to aesthetic delight. I learned with satisfaction that it had met a fate not much different than that meted out to pearls and precious stones when means of mass production were found: they became common, they are being killed by market supply!

Ha, ha, ha!

Am I doing the right thing by laughing right in the faces of paintings, statues?

Me?

The Next Day, After a Walk

There are streets here that are made of the ivy-covered walls of gardens and gardens—tucked inside are villas. I move along the sand and earth of these streets never knowing for sure whether someone is watching me or not, sight could reach me from all sides, the dense foliage is inhabited. At the end of the street the distant sky sags its dark underbelly—torture! What a hullabaloo and rush over there, at the horizon, what a roar, din, what an anthill of activity, words, and confusion of events, combinations and complications, uninterrupted whirlpool . . . that mill, that labyrinth, weighs on me!

Quiet and warm. Across from me, down the street, comes a child, a little boy pushing a bike. A child is marching on you, Macbeth. . . . He comes closer slowly and I, who just yesterday had a face loaded with strange faces, now, this minute, now break down—and I can “almost” not stand this approaching one another, until I “almost” blend in, I “almost” turn sideways, in order to have this come out a little gentler. “Almost”? The point is (and I have noticed it for a quite a while) that some sort of theory . . . imposes itself upon me in my relation to people: *I know* that getting close to someone in an empty place *should* touch me in my essence powerfully . . . and I try to rouse the right reflex in myself. I know, I feel, that the “how” and “whence” and “why” of this other’s “approaching” or “emerging” and what our “disposition” is toward one another should not be a matter of indifference; I know that it should be more fundamental than one can express in words; and that it should be “introductory,” or “preceding” my other sensation constituting something like a background.

I try to adjust myself to the theory as if I were declaiming a role.

And this lends my actions a half-hearted quality. . . . The oppressive complexity on the horizon, heavy and dirty vomit of the sky hanging over the speeding and boiling confusion of this million-strong incomprehensible nightmare.

Saturday

Peekaboo, peekaboo, our servant Helena is really a cuckoo! So chirrup, chirrup and tweet, tweet, tweet! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

That was the orchestration . . . and now the plot.

Right after I got here I noticed that something was not quite right with Helena. Neat, polite, but when she serves the soup one has the impression that she could very well be doing something quite different, such as bursting into song. She is like a tightrope walker, finding her balance over the abyss “of something else” and “anything at all else.”

She was diagnosed as undoubtedly crazy by the psychiatrist to whom she was sent for a checkup. —Sometimes she has attacks—says Alicja—and then she makes scenes, but it passes. Worse yet is that the doctor says she is dangerous: one of these days she could have a real attack and grab a knife. . . .

—And you afraid to be around her—I mean Cio (Giangrande) spends so much time out of the house, and then you are all alone. . . .

—What am I supposed to do? Send her packing? Who’ll hire a nut? And her daughter? What would I do with the child? Should I send her to the hospital? She’s not crazy enough and it would be inhuman to lock someone like her up in an asylum. . . . Those places are overcrowded, it’s hell in there. . . .

Peekaboo, peekaboo, she’s really cuckoo, I stepped onto the road from where I could see in the aforementioned direction the darkening sky boding. . . . I went home, defended by trees, brush, enclosure, greenery, bars in the windows, statues, paintings, but tainted now . . . where paranoia bustled among the pots and pans. . . . It was quiet, Alicja was sleeping, echoes came from the kitchen, the dogs were sleeping, I felt surprised, disconcerted, I felt that I should come up with something but I didn’t know what, with some . . . First of all, I didn’t know what sort of burden I was carrying. Was I heavy? Or light?

Sunday

Democritus . . . How many? We write:

Democritus, 400,000

St. Francis of Assisi, 50,000,000

Kościuszko, 500,000,000

Brahms, 1,000,000,000

Gombrowicz, 2,500,000,000

The numbers next to the name are supposed to indicate the “human horizon” of a given man, that is, how he imagined, more or less, the number of people in his time—how he felt as “one of many.” Of how many? I am jotting the numbers down haphazardly . . . but I believe that one should supply figures for the names so that not just the name be known, but its “place among people.”

This is the “singular” of a man, this is his “number.” Will I be understood? What I am saying is that, until now, man has never taken up the problem of his numbers. The numbers have not permeated him sufficiently. I am a man—yes. But one of many. Of how many? If I am one of two billion it is not the same as if I were one of two hundred thousand.

In us lives Adam’s lone sense of himself. Our philosophy is a philosophy of Adams. Our art is the art of Adams. Two things astound me when I consider how man has expressed himself in art until now: that his expression did not break into two phases, the two phases of his life, the ascending (youth) and the descending; and that this expression was inadequately saturated with numbers.

You will say: in how many novels, films, poems, symphonies and even paintings there appears the human element—the masses. The epic! Yes, this happens in art, nor is it unknown to sociology, psychology, but this is a description achieved from the outside—one describes the human herd as one does any other herd. It is not enough for me that Homer or Zola will sing the praises of and describe the masses; nor that Marx analyzes them; I would like for something to appear in their voices which would allow me to know that one was one of a thousand and the other, one of a million. I would like to see them permeated to the core by numbers.

I am writing all this because of the servant Helena. It is growing dark and I

turn on the lamp on my little desk, inhale the damp air pulsating from the garden (it rained all morning). What is Helena up to? In the kitchen? Yes, in the kitchen. And the thing on the horizon? Yes, it most certainly is there, glowing. . . . And the tiny houses creeping up on the mangy meadow? Yes. The paintings and statues? Yes, on the walls, in the garden . . . Look, will you, at how many elements of composition you have in hand, begging to be given an artistic setting—but why can't I compose myself? I collapsed—an impotent at the desk—I drooped: the horn doesn't work, the flute is broken, I cannot draw a single note. I lack direction, I don't know which direction to speak to, I can't, I lack the direction that precedes the voice.

Confirm in yourself once more: you are tormented more by not knowing what to do with yourself when faced with human unhappiness than you are by someone else's unhappiness. The paranoia in her messed-up head—in her ignorant head—I might be able to endure it if I knew whether or not I was allowed to use the word “head.”

Who is she? And how can I know who I am if I don't know who she is? Is she one more piece of baggage added to the heaps of women already on the earth, another cow? O Eve the only! Here at my desk, I am extending all my love and all my—what shall I call it—sublimity, I, Adam, for you to become an Eve to me, but something is creeping into my parade . . . of a billion devils! a billion cows! a million women! and when I realize the numbers, I plummet into strange states of mind, amid which the states of revulsion and recoil are not at all first. And the Olympian indifference that results from the interchangeability of one woman for another and one paranoia for another paranoia? And add to this boredom. . . .

I repeated out loud: “I am bored by suffering in such quantities,” and I listened to the strange, even odd, but so much my own (and human) content of these words.

And believe it or not but my soul makes me laugh, my spirit, just one of so many. If I do not pity the servant Helena, then who will pity the servant Helena? Pity has multiplied too—in Buenos Aires alone there are about a hundred thousand spirits that one could term spiritualized. This makes me laugh. . . .

I repeat out loud, “pity in such quantities makes me laugh,” and I listen to the peculiar, unusually human, content of this.

I get up. I leave. From the road I see rising on the horizon into the descending night a whitish, electric fog, practically elusive but tormenting, com-

plicated, as if unreal . . . the awful fact that is crushing me . . . trampling me into the ground. . . .

Monday

“Except for: did his fears and worries . . . really exist. —Some sort of theory—writes Gombrowicz—imposes itself upon me in relation to people . . . And wasn’t that problem of numbers also an imagined one, drawn from a theory that told him to accept the notion that numbers reach us in our humanity?”

“Gombrowicz understood that his first responsibility would be to determine how attainable this was. But . . . is it worth determining? And why really bother?”

“For even if he doesn’t figure it out, others will do it for him, how many hundreds of thousands of heads there are to rack their brains over the problem!”

“And this is why instead of spending a sleepless night, he went straight to bed.”

III

Tuesday, Buenos Aires

I was returning from Hurlingham at night, by car, the trip was endless, the lights obtrusive and blinding, the speeding shooting masses skidding out from the dense growth of houses and lamps descending upon us, and radio towers, and the largeness of lone buildings and clattering trains—we were caught in a net of desperate, unconscious movement. I sat quietly in the comfortable cavity of the car. Suddenly we slow down, turn into a side street, stop—what’s this?—Engineer Orlov, our driver, says in a barely audible voice that he must rest a moment . . . he hardly has enough time to apologize when he falls asleep at the steering wheel. Consternation.

In a few minutes he wakes up and we’re driving again, although more slowly. —Please do not be worried. . . . Nothing is wrong. . . . I have to drink some coffee. We drive up to a corner bar that is the quintessence of sleep, the *moso* was dozing, a few coffee and grappa drinkers were also dozing, the empty tables, chairs,

windows, walls, were sleeping, the head of space itself was nodding, overcome by a little sleep—and on the outside vehicles were tearing by one after another—and this mixture of speed and sleepiness . . . was it sleepy speed or speeding sleep? . . .

Coming Home

My apartment was so loaded with sleep—I had to pass by five doors behind which so much sleep was concentrated, first Roberto's (Argentine, a student) and Herr Klug's (a merchant); then don Eugenio's, who is Russian and works in the port; Basilio's, who is Rumanian; and Arana's, Argentine, a bureaucrat. They are sleeping or they are not. One has to move carefully amid this density and respect rest, which is alien to me. . . . Here nothing and no one is familiar to me, my conversations with them boil down to *que tal?* and *tiempo loco*; the old man who until recently lived in Arana's room stopped me once to ask if I didn't want to buy his brass bed and a week later he died.

Our discretion is flawless, there is no way anyone is going to blurt it all out tearfully, howl or roar, sometimes it is only at night that the ghost of someone's groan rises and circles the working of the lungs. Each consumes his life like a big steak on a separate plate at a separate table. Would I be reckless not to lock myself in at night? Who will guarantee that crime will not be born in this confusion of fates? No. The repellent discretion has arisen from the sense that one person is repugnant to another, boredom and pain, this timidity enjoins one to avoid intimacy, it protects me better than an English keep. I can sleep peacefully. They will not kill me. They will be too afraid to approach me.

The Next Day

My God, what kind of infinity is it that you are proposing? I would describe it as "internal," contained in our own bosom.

It is certainly strange that we cannot exhaust our species, that I will never be able to get to know all the people there are (nor am I anywhere close), that I will not be able to say: this is it, I have seen them all, there are no more.

To constantly meet a new variety of man, with a different humanity in each, and to know that there is no end to these variations—and that we are loaded with the infinity of other possible combinations—and that there is no man who is

impossible in the near or distant future . . . what an inner abyss! This leads to a lawlessness of the imagination!

This destroys all psychological, moral and other norms, one has the feeling that we are being exploded, not in the least by the spirit but by the connivance of copulating bodies creating variants.

Thursday

The last business before departure—tomorrow—with Gomez to Uruguay. I pull out my suitcase.

Friday

Airplane. Azure. Altitude 1,500—what a joke! Someone's joke on me.

But really amusing (and it is with difficulty that I keep from laughing), that besides me there are forty-nine others, just like me, rocking in space. We are gliding in a group. This number in the air is different than the earthly one and makes me giddy.

Next to me is my traveling companion, J. C. Gomez.

Down below a lichen of five million people is growing smaller at a speed of five hundred (per hour).

Saturday, Piriapolis

Two hundred and ten kilometers, fifty passengers, two hundred and ten kilometers traveled in twenty-five minutes, but the fifty took almost one hundred and eight minutes, or three hours (inspection of suitcases, documents), from which I conclude that the number of passengers was greater by one hundred and fifty-five, in the difficulties that had to be overcome, than the number of kilometers. Gomez approves of this reckoning, supplementing it with reflections on the subject of “the phenomenon of numbers and numbers of the phenomenon”—this was when we were leaving customs in the Uruguayan capital—although it seemed to me that he was talking earlier, too, throughout the entire flight, except that the propellers were making too much of a racket.

We get to the bus that is supposed to take us to Piriapolis, I poke him with my elbow because in front of us is a leaky bundle, yes, the bundle of the person in front of us was leaking and it was vodka, the smell said vodka! I almost fell over because I was still feeling a bit unsteady on my feet after that altitude and that vodka dripping from the bundle (filled with vodka?) right on the other side of customs was vodka even more, this was a so-called fortified vodka . . . and the shock of this confused my friend, he actually had to leap out of the moving bus, because his hand luggage had gotten lost somewhere and this resulted in a solitary ride to Piriapolis (at four in the afternoon).

I settled down in my little room, in the Villa Los Angeles, waiting for Gomez to arrive on the next bus.

The building was hidden in a pine forest and hollow as a stump, frozen in a Gothic perspective of trees and no people, where garlands of male and female washing, as well as linens made up the moment, after that recent tussle—I assume that this will not be very clear—of *debilitating human numbers*, its substitute, or even *decadence* . . . this was the pale specter of a crowd something like the moon . . . and like illness . . . I breathed deeply. Calm. Quiet. When will Gomez show up? Ah, and that bundle, how that smuggled liquid dripping out, forbidden, the drops glittering in the sun illegally. . . .

The Next Day, Piriapolis

Oh, how relaxation intoxicates!

Sunday

Indefatigable alcohol pokes me with its elbow in the immediate vicinity.

The Next Day

The landscape has penetrated my bones. A bottle but not that one, together with three others, in the cabinet, in a corner room with a veranda, looking out onto the road.

Tuesday

The rustle of almighty silence . . . but is it sleep inducing?

Wednesday

Should I be a joker?

Oh no . . . It doesn't suit me. You aren't expecting this! I am not one to amuse with jokes.

But what can you do if the Joke lies in ambush, on all sides, if you are surrounded by the Joke?

Thursday, before Going to Sleep

I am inhaling the soaring greenbrown lack of people with a moon—this house is sly, because on our side, mine and Gomez's, there is not a living soul, no human intrusion, but on the other side it is stuffed like a liver sausage, two people per cubicle—but nobody know this, no noise reaches us on this side . . . and they have different paths, invisible to us, through the woods.

Today a morning discussion with Gomez about the modern forms of affirmation and about our relationship to it (this is the negation of negation, he said); a different, afternoon, one, bordering on hermeticism; and an evening one with "pi" as a symbol, which would lend itself to grasping all that "goes by," including that which is the ultimate secret of art. He likes this. He calls himself: chatterbox. Yesterday he talked about how his pals at school would say *cierra la canilla!* (shut off the faucet) and when this did not help, they put a wash basin or some other container in front of him. . . .

We eat on the veranda, carrying on. Our food is brought to us by an eight-year-old girl, the only representative of *them* from the other side of the building, and what satisfaction that *they* over there appear to us in weakened form, reduced to something less than ten years old. We know who is cooped up over there on *that* side, we make the acquaintance of Diputado and his señora, Helman and Ricardo, as well as the crazy Andaluz, also an *escriba*, and his family, we know something

about the overcrowding in those cubicles, but on *this side* a wooded expanse and only that laundry hanging on the line, shirts in various sizes, underpants, towels. . . .

It moves, caressed by a breeze. . . . I would prefer not to have to deal with this degraded presence, with this calling card of a kind, smacking of mockery. . . .

And some are yet ungotten and unborn

That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn.

O Shakespeare! Except that in this case the joke itself is unborn. Perhaps I am drawing from the visible circumstances of our stay the detached fact of the—uncrystallized—joke oozing from the crevices, but ungracefully . . . clumsily . . . The question why is this comical, do we look comical in all this, remains hanging (and, if I were tipsy, I would add, “hanging like those shirts and underpants”).

(It never occurred to me that he had this habit and I had no idea that such an elaboration was taking place in him).

Chissotti. Nuts.

Friday

Oh, what a brilliant and generous feature of literature: this freedom to make up stories, exactly as if we were choosing different paths in a forest, never knowing where they might lead—or what awaits us. . . .

Friday

Around eight o'clock there is a breakthrough: for at this hour I emerge from isolation and enter the “city” made up of two parallel streets, thirty hotels, and twenty stores, but a city all the same, with asphalt and neon.

I go in order to eat supper in the restaurant at the Hotel Rivadavia. My learned friend appears. The dining hall is full, but the number is weakened, dusky. . . .

We sit down. . . .

Even before the *moso* brought hors d'oeuvres and a carafe, a dialogue gets going about Proust's lack of brilliance or about the naïveté of perversion or about

“dry” and “clammy” tragedy. We get warmed up, our eyes shine, we raise a hand, we say *permiso* in order to have our say and we enter such labyrinths that really (I say) one no longer knows what one is eating. Nor what one is drinking. And a glaring contrast is being born between our table and the remaining ones, where people drone on in fumes of boredom. A mother is scolding her children. Fathers are muttering something almost equine, with newspaper or without. The fiancé will say something stupid to his fiancée. Then they stare at us . . . they would like to understand something or other. . . .

Gomez raised a glass of Curaçao to his lips. He confides in me with a smile that until now he has never met anyone in Piriapolis who discusses things . . . we are the only ones. . . .

Returning home we had quite an energetic discussion on the subject of “ex,” that persistent idea (*ex-istir*) invading various areas, and its connections with transitoriness. He cited Siegrist and his opinions about the maniacal nature of physics. I, on the other hand, reminded him of Siegrist’s sighing, “The stocks are falling!”

Sunday

Our trips to higher and higher peaks, wading in thickets that take your sight away, scaling rocky walls and being suspended over dizzying precipices just to have unencompassable, immeasurable spaces unfold before us and melt into fog.

Excursions—tramping through dense woodland that leads to blindness, confusion, dizziness—scaling crags and clinging to rock faces with bare hands in a vertiginous climb in order to have unbounded spaces unfold before us, lulled to sleep by the fog. We take along food and drink for three days.

Intellectual excursions, of course.

Sunday (Late at Night)

I can’t see.

Argumentation cries to the most various grimma

Comicality twists itself toward comedy

The language beast somersaults from the dialecti axle

Dalldaltonnismmmmm phy!

Joooke? pokey

Beat it, get out jo joooke. No. No. I don't want to. Beat it. But why is it bothering me!

He pees from the bottle and the underpants are drying.

Scram Beat it joke Why is it bothering me that Joke oke . . . why is it crawling all over me like a bug . . . son of a . . . Joke . . . Beat it.

.
These were my late Sunday night ravings!

The next afternoon

(I am writing this in my room)

I could jot down today that "I feel awful" and this might be the joke I fear most of all.

Helman was here a moment ago. He supposedly came to see Gomez (whom he did not find at home) in order to take care of some small bills. At any rate, this was the first visit from "that side" and I would not bet two cents that his behavior was completely laundered of all joking intentions. . . . Malicious?

Joke? Oh, if in the end this vapor of a joke, steaming elusively . . . To finally catch sight of the monster meandering drowsily among the trees, behind the house, along the crest of the mountains and the ocean horizon. . . . Well then, monster, show yourself! What's it all about? What do you want from me! Show yourself!

Nothing.

At breakfast, a lengthy exchange of opinion that began quite accidentally from the quadruple root of sufficient reason but immediately passed into the "basis of corporeality" as introduced by the Renaissance and changing itself currently into the "basis of compromise," which in the future could become (as I claimed) the "basis of passion." A woman with two children stopped on her way to pick up a few of our violent words—but she caught nothing. She left.

Tuesday

Laziness . . . I could not guarantee that laziness was not what was happening to us . . . before the lazy mountains, glassy sea, the few ants moving about and (why should I hide this?) that which is hanging on the line . . . and sagging. . .

Laziness . . . Laziness . . .

How pleasant: it is good not to know—to allow it to speak for itself—to listen to one's own words . . .

Ahhhhh!

Sleep.

The Same Day at Night

Be quiet! Be quiet!

It probably slipped by. . . . Who? The Joke!

Calm down!

I have the feeling that he appeared to me at twilight, where, sitting on the veranda, I was looking at . . . why shouldn't I admit it . . . the laundry, which at this hour seemed a poisoned, ruined flag, cadaver pale and moonlit. This was THEIR flag, from over there, from *that side*, ha, this was they, they themselves, I saw them hanging in a row on a rope: Diputado and the señora, Helman and Ricardo and Andaluz and little Celia and the notary public's family. . . . I saw them but in the form of underpants, shirts, a debased and sneering reflection of the real existence *on that side*.

And here the Joke peeped out, grinning. . . .

For—I understood—*that side* was a trick! A joke! Because *that side*—for them—is on our side!

So then it was not a reflection . . . it was they, on those clotheslines, in their natural form!

Wise guys!

Joke, or only the possibility of a joke? I do not want to talk to Gomez about this. I have already talked to Gomez too much. I will not talk to Gomez anymore. Enough gabbing with Gomez. I only want to write down, just in case, that I personally have had no hand in any sort of joke. . . .

No.

I know that if I answer joke for joke, I am lost. I must maintain, even now, the seriousness of my existence.

Wise guys! If I am to be comical, then only on the outside, not internally—let this comicality be like an approaching cloud, a thickening fog, a rustle in the underbrush, an insinuation on the horizon; let it seep secretly from the outside, let it seep through, approach my center from all sides, from all directions, I will remain unyielding, like Tell with the apple . . . of gravity . . . on my head. . . .

Sapienti sat!

Wednesday, the Third

Here it ends. I left Piriapolis on 31 January via Colonia and I arrived in Buenos Aires the same day at 11:30 P.M.

Gomez left before me, summoned by a telegram from someone at the university.

So I will never know what really happened to us in Piriapolis.

Coming Home

The apartment was loaded with sleep when after midnight, my head still swimming from the dancing of the boat on the waters of La Plata, I sneaked into my room with my suitcase. Roberto, Herr Klug, don Eugenio, Basilio, Arana, were sleeping—sighing and groaning phantoms rose above the work of their lungs. What are numbers in sleep? Sleeping numbers? Are you sleeping, numbers? Or don't you ever sleep?

No—our numbers do not fall asleep with us, how could sleep overcome a creature made of adding and subtracting . . . it circles tirelessly. . . . I kept asking myself, in my room, sitting on the bed, if the fact that there were many sleeping people (five) was a soothing or disturbing fact? Is the sleep of one person more dangerous than that of a few, a few dozen or a few hundred? Ah, hm, a pretentious question . . . but not without its sting. Numbers in relation to man—allow me to observe—act astonishingly, as they multiply and divide at the same time. Who can doubt that the activity of five people pulling on a rope will be five times more productive than if only one does it? But with death it is quite the reverse. Try killing

a thousand people at one time and you will be convinced that the death of each of these is less important than if each had died alone.

Thus it was a soothing thought—that they slept, dreamed, five at a time—and I could place my head on my pillow quietly and join them as number six in their heavy, greedy, meandering breathing. What harm could the night or sleep do me while benevolent *Numbers* watched over me, diluting me in themselves. Like a fairy godmother! Like a guardian angel! Good night! Time to end these confessions . . . is everything clear? A bit muddled? Something a little dissolute, unsteady, diffuse, licentious . . . di . . . diluted? Friends! What do you want? Even if there were some sort of intellectual debauchery here, Numbers will dilute it in themselves, just as they dilute our sins and virtues, amen.

IV

Friday

The same and nothing but more of the same!

I was at a boxing match with Quiloflora, bam, bam, bam, they punch one another, the public roars, the referee dances. It was clear that this was a match but even so I couldn't be sure it wasn't a funeral.

With Świeczewski at the Georges Pretre concert. Yet if someone had told me that this was a suburban beach on a scorching day, I could not have contradicted him. Or maybe—a bus?

Eichler's show. Grocholski's show. Yes, but what is it about them that smells *five o'clock*-ish?

Five o'clock. * A funeral rather, because at the cemetery, and it was raining, umbrellas, raincoats with collars up, speeches, hats. A funeral? Well, to a degree. Why not a wedding? . . . A tram?

Supper at the Plaza, tables, footmen, chandelier, hors d'oeuvres, jokes, except for the question: funeral—beach—wedding—boxing match—tram?

I know you, O force, reducing everything to a common denominator. I know you *basso ostinato* in the lowest register of existence. I hear your relentless

*Italicized words in English in original.

step. I see you, Numbers, blurring everything, melting everything, how you sprout from a woman's belly!

Tuesday

I saw Stanisław Wiśłocki—the conductor of the Warsaw Philharmonic who has come to make guest appearances—a few times, the conversation was almost exclusively about music. A little present from him—how lovely on his part—a Polish recording of the Brahms Concerto in D Minor in which he conducts the Philharmonic orchestra and Małcużyński.*

The virtuosi are still holding together, as their contact with music is fragmentary; it takes place through works that they “have at their fingertips,” not many, therefore, and usually not the latest. A pianist or violinist, even if he carries within himself the artistic dignity of a Backhaus, is close to his craft and this preserves him from excessive spiritual poisoning. But where music takes on a creative character and reveals itself completely, a pale terror reigns. A modern composer deals with a hostile, many-layered, even fuming element that is like a bird raising itself above the flood with the last remnants of its strength. Stagnation and inundation. The conductors who must channel this element are no less stupefied. The Polish conductors also radiate panic—I am speaking of the ones I have met in Argentina (Skrowaczewski, Panufnik, and now Wiśłocki).

As long as it is a matter of things professional and of rivalry in the great international contest, who is better, who worse, will Poland stand a chance, etc., etc.—it isn't so bad. But the minute one pushes the musician up against a wall, that is, up against music, pure music, music alone, he begins to bang his head against that wall. In his voice one hears the helplessness of someone who is drifting calmly down a river when his river suddenly stops, having struck underwater reefs, and now he doesn't know what to do with the stirred and spilled mass, gushing in all directions, in unending movement, yet immobile. . . .

It is easier to see all the time that musicians are no longer “able to stand” music (just as painters cannot stand painting).

It is true that their situation in history was never, from a social standpoint,

†Witold Małcużyński, noted Polish pianist.

normal or completely honest. If one considers that a person with a fairly trained ear is unable to recognize even a work with a classically lucid structure, like a sonata, unless he listens to it at least five times, then the public intimacy with music in concert halls will seem almost exclusively humbug and a putting on of the guests. I ask myself many times, in leaving a concert hall, what those impassioned applauders could have grasped if I, a little brighter perhaps in these matters with both eye and spirit, came out with nothing more than a mishmash. Therefore, these concert sessions, which have gone on successfully for centuries, are testimony that the majestic social role of music has little to do with . . . listening.

Nonetheless this inborn, let us say, original sin of music, which in Handel and Haydn's day was only a sin, today festers like an enormous, venom-filled boil. That mill, thousands of orchestra halls, throngs of listeners, hosts of virtuosi like bolides flying between the continents, academic convocations, festivals, contests, armies of technicians, theoreticians, engineers, writers, critics, stacks of books . . . and this whole racket taking place as if behind glass, inaccessible, unknown, unrealized in people. Scandal! Silliness! Shame on a large scale! O woman! If only you knew what horrors you cause with your procreation you would be more careful!

But if someone was cheered by the thought that the scandal caused by numbers is limited to the social role of music, one has to enlighten him. No, the writing on the forehead of modern man that marks him "as one of many" touches us even at the highest peaks, where, it would seem, there are no crowds. You did not confine yourself, O woman, to procreating listeners. You procreated creators as well! In Bach's day there were fewer organists than there are Bachs today—and with ambitions greater than Johann Sebastian's! Someone talked with Wislocki about the talented Argentinean Ginastera—Oh, he's a marvelous musician, I am taking his suite to Warsaw.—What place would you give him on a world scale?—I think you could list him as one of the top hundred composers.

But if anyone has nurtured the illusion that the indefatigable fecundity of woman, in surrendering man to Numbers, leaves his work alone—that is, that a really outstanding work endures in its majesty despite the number of recipients and the number of creators—let him know that he is mistaken. The work most obviously has a negative attitude toward pregnancy: musical works have become reluctant, even malicious today—they become a bone stuck in your throat, they

stifle you, choke you. Others get restive like wild donkeys and kick and bite. Bach was one, but the catalog of his works includes hundreds of works, he spawned easily in the highest style. Today there are more composers than there are works by Bach, but all of them together have probably not given birth to ten partitas solidly grounded in the Spirit. Today's work does not want to be born (as if to avenge itself on woman), the idea devours more and more efforts, "pulling up to a certain level," the composing of humble works stretches across years, when the composer reaches his opus no. 20 he says, "ugh!" as if he were scaling a skyscraping mountain. Also worth noting is that the malice of a musical work is the reverse of the one that a painting gives off: in painting, disqualification follows the ease of procreation, which passes into one giant miscarriage. A certain popular painter (who would remember his name?), after arriving in Buenos Aires one morning, painted in the course of one day at least twenty scenes to fill up the exhibit space, rented the following day. . . . And he sold the paintings, making a bundle.

How is it with this procreation? Does the procreation of a woman take away from the procreation of the Spirit? I return to the question: is there a connection between number and personality, some deadly link?

I hold it against Wislocki that he did not get drunk. I thought that he would be more consistent (I was told about a group of eminent musicians who gathered weekly for conversations about music and who, after half an hour, crazed looking, pale, and sweaty browed, drowned their hopelessness and defeat in vodka). But Wislocki drank little and was never in a bad mood—how unfair of him.



I am noting in the margin so as not to forget: if you want to astonish a musician and throw him off balance so he cannot utter a word—attack Bach! It seems as if this is still left to them: Bach. Naturally one must first show that one is no ignoramus—and then attack, out of the blue!

Wednesday

(How These Days of the Week Already Bore Me!)

The sense of undeserved hurt and grievous offense are prominent here, as well as in painting, where these people do not know what is happening to

them, except to say something is happening. Simply: Form has gone mad, roused by Numbers.

Wislocki reminded me of Skrowaczewski, or rather the situation in which I found myself with Skrowaczewski when he invited me to supper, a year or two ago. We are walking down Corrientes, we go from restaurant to restaurant, full, overflowing, the street is filing up, the cinemas are spewing out. . . . A conversation (about music) is a shout from a great distance, as if we were talking long-distance on the telephone.

Numbers, this is the kingdom of mathematics. And mathematics is science. . . . That poor X, a young man who wanted to sing his heart out, full of enthusiasm—gets busy studying, bold, diligent, capable of great self-sacrifice, wants to possess the language of tones . . . until he begins to notice that something awful is coming from all this, for the mathematics hidden in music, and in itself quite poisonous to the spirit, surrenders to the increase and doubling resulting from the invasion of a different mathematics, connected to the numbers . . . of works, concerts, formulas, theories, styles, schools, instruments . . . and with the numbers of people. . . . Accursed belly of woman! What was he to do? Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he became a sound engineer instead of an artist, a scientific producer of art.

Thursday

I, if I touch upon the crisis in art, do not do so because I overestimate it, I myself being an artist—but it does express a universal crisis in human form. . . .

Georges Girreferèst-Prést flew in from Paris. Spent yesterday with him in Fragata. . . . Coffee. Cognac.

He told me what other people told him . . . gleanings of rumors and old gossip from the immediate postwar period . . . it is difficult to check and God only knows what really went on . . . but it does throw a beam of strange light on the history of Sartre's thought. . . .

It is interesting how much this adventure of Sartre's reminds me of something that happened to Skrowaczewski and me: crowds, anthills, throngs (this is not the first time that anecdotes add up like this). Anyway, Sartre, still young then,

was taking a stroll down l'avenue de l'Opéra at seven in the evening, at a time when the traffic was heaviest. It was especially hideous (as he confessed to friends later) when we experience man a short distance away as an almost physical threat, yet if, at the same time, he is dehumanized by the mass, he is only the thousandth repetition of a man, a duplicate, an example, almost a monkey; when he is, therefore, simultaneously, because of the numbers, very close and awfully far. Having found himself in this throng-crush, people-nonpeople, our still young nonauthor of *Being and Nothingness* takes to summoning loneliness with his whole soul: Oh! To stand out! Be apart! Break away! Escape! But people were stepping on his feet. . . .

Finally he ran away—Giffèrèst droned on—into himself! Into the unity of his own consciousness and into the concreteness of his own existence. This was a kind of double wall, with which he hermetically sealed himself off from others. Having slammed the doors of his “I” after him! (From what Prést said, it would seem that the double-tracked isolation of Sartre's existentialism began in a crowd!)

But this is not all. Apparently (according to Giffèlè-Prést's version) the radical idea of isolation was not happy with being isolated in his being for very long. For something indecent happened, which Sartre later remembered reluctantly—namely, that as soon as the idea of isolation came to live in him, he immediately noticed, in his peripheral vision, that it would find a glad response in those thousands of souls threatened by numbers, the numbers still seemed to be fixed to an idea that derived from it and was tied to it antinomically. And it was exactly the feeling that his thought about isolation could be accepted by many that inclined him to devote more time to it. In vain did he fend off this confusion of philosophy with numbers, showing himself in black and white that neither Consciousness nor the Concrete has the right to grow fat on such yeast. In spite of everything, they did grow fat. They grew. Until he finally undertook a systematic elaboration and, leaning on many philosophers from the past, began to work out his own system, which in its original phase merely pronounced that I am I, not Peter or Paul. I am exclusively myself in a way that is absolute and impenetrable to others, like a can of sardines. And, after all, there are no others!

But it does not end here, though. Suddenly, Sartre is horrified by the thought: —What? I am alone. I have discovered that no one has access to me!

I have cast off classical philosophy because it was too social, too communicative in its abstract logic; I have locked myself in myself, I—the impenetrable, singular in my consciousness! I have destroyed the Other! I have annihilated all other people!

Let us agree that the thought of isolation fattened by numbers can terrify—such a creature does not go on foot. The worst (still Giffelèr Pretét's version): that this fear was also not alone. It immediately became magnified by the numbers of all those others whom he could share himself with—and the burning of a tree became the conflagration of an entire forest in our philosopher.

In vain does Sartre turn to self-persuasion: —Why, in being the Only One I cannot be one of Many! . . . All for naught. Can't manage it. In not being able to manage this thought, he decides to undo what he has done. —Have I destroyed the Other? Then I have to rediscover him, reinstitute, recognize, reestablish my bond with him!

He proceeds to elaborate. He draws out the Other . . . ha, I am no longer alone, I have already felt his glance on me, victory! Victory?

What are you talking about! The thing gets complicated. The matter becomes altogether unpleasant.

—But what happened?—I asked Prevèst. To which he replied: —So, you see, the Other one, now reinstituted and called into being, had nothing in common with the concrete man. It is not Peter, not Paul, it is someone else. The Object to which I attribute the character of the Subject, whose freedom I recognized. You say this is nothing awful? But you should note that now our philosopher has found himself face-to-face with full numbers—of all possible people—of man in general. He who took fright at the Parisian mob now saw himself facing all mobs, all individuals, everywhere and always.

—I made his acquaintance during this exact period—droned Giffelèré, sipping a liqueur.

—This was already after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*. The enormity of the confrontation crushed him: he vs. everyone else. But in spite of the horrifying panorama, he did not give up and with unyielding consistency proclaimed his slogans: responsibility for everyone, union with everyone. And he might have made it even though he took humanity onto his shoulders . . . if not for

this, if not for the fact that numbers had again mixed into the whole, including everyone, overflowing in a way that was really indecent . . . the number of copies of his work . . . the number of editions . . . the number of readers . . . the number of commentaries . . . the number of thoughts that hatched out of his thoughts and the number of thoughts hatching out of these thoughts . . . and the number of all the different variants of these variants. . . . The amount is unbearable in this, overflowing, as it is supernumerary. . . . This was Everyone plus Numbers.

Then I saw (these are still Prêst's words) him write when he got close to a damp window.

NEC HERCULES CONTRA PLURES

And he was close to suicide. For how could he retreat or flee when a million people were reading him and new editions were constantly going out into the world? Oh, not Everyone horrified him but the fact that there were so many of Everyone! Death then? He tries to commit suicide. But, after a moment, he gives it up. Because, when he thinks about it, things are not so bad. It is true that his bankruptcy is awful and his catastrophe terrible. But catastrophe dissolves in millions. Caused by numbers it comes to nothing as a result of these same numbers, in the topsy-turvy and hurly-burly, when no one knows anything, no one understands anything, people talk but no one knows what about, one about this, another about that, and somehow nothing comes of it. . . .

NEC HERCULES CONTRA PLURES

Saturday

(in the Café at the Corner of Maïpu and Laval; Rain)

The numbers have bored me stiff. . . .

I look at the issue of *Wiadomości* with the report of the deliberations of the jury, whom to give the award to for the best book of 1961. What a banquet on this occasion! Finger-licking menu:

vol-au-vent

brochet farci à la juive

paupiettes de veau hongroise
soufflé grand succès

I see them—that moving imitation of the Academy and imitation of literature—that sweet dream about distinctions with speeches, honey-coated compliments, anecdotes, praise, puffing up one with the other and everything *parlé français*, of course, with Parisian piquancy and Galician culture in the best taste. Until it would seem

*That Wojski was still playing. . . . But no, it was just an echo!**

What does it hurt that a few older men get together to give themselves a little pleasure or even delight? It would be wrong only if it were erotic, and this is absolutely out of the question. And why shouldn't they support one another, if the majority of them (I am skipping over the praiseworthy exceptions) have a hard time standing up on their own? It is always merrier in a group. How can I hold it against them that they are eating away their fate with pastries—especially since these speeches, opinions, and views testify (I am skipping the exceptions) to the most proper philosophical disorder and are calm, polite, decent, duly anachronistic, and somewhat backward, in a word—harmless. It is worth depriving yourself of that little bit of *vol-au-vent* and the *brochet farci* that melts in your mouth?

Yet it is difficult for me to refrain from indiscretion. What scandal happened unexpectedly with the vetoes, namely, the stunning *soufflé grand succès*?

Is it true, as they say—a thing impossible to believe—that when that heavenly *soufflé* was served, someone . . . someone absent . . . someone uninvited . . . someone who was absent from the banquet, bah, someone completely shunned and forbidden, “of whom one does not speak” and “of whom one does not even want to think,” someone despised and relegated to the darkest dungeon of the subconscious . . .

. . . that this someone sneaked up and ate everyone's *soufflé*, exactly this *grand succès*? Horror! Only the *soufflé* itself remained on everyone's plates because *grand succès* was eaten right out from under their noses!

(I dedicate this to Jan Rostworowski and Józef Wittlin)

*A quotation from Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*.

Tuesday
(*I am Reading Miłosz's Book on Brzozowski,*
Man among Scorpions)

"Why have so many people borrowed from Brzozowski's accomplishments hand over fist, but stealthily, without admitting this publicly?" asks Miłosz.

Have I? I have a clean conscience. I have not met Brzozowski to this day, I have been able to manage my life so that nothing of his or about him has ever come into my hands. . . . Such oversights do happen, he is one of those Polish authors who are most perfectly unknown to me. And in his way, when Miłosz mentions his "obsession with liberating himself from Poland" or: "Brzozowski said that he burns with shame for Polish literature because it produced a Sienkiewicz," I am reminded of my own obsessions and embarrassment. Except that they are as different and are executed from as different positions as our natures are different.

As a matter of fact, I see, in reading Miłosz's prose, that I am in such sharp and fundamental opposition to this philosopher as I am perhaps to no one else among the enlightened Poles.

For example:

"The Polish intelligentsia's main sin, in Brzozowski's opinion," writes Miłosz, "is in substituting sociability for thought." No one was seriously interested in the philosophical attainments of the West. No one took thinking seriously. . . . No one experienced this great and sanguineous intellectual effort. . . . Theories were subjects for conversation.

Miłosz cites these words: "With what aristocratic calm, with what aristocratic offhandedness of judgment, were people and ideas slapped on the back. The wise man absorbed in playing patience, or the national martyr yawning in between card games or market stalls, would look upon the son whose rose red-hot from reading the works of Darwin or Buckle with an indulgent smile."

I will establish the contrast between Brzozowski and myself by saying that in this case I am on the side of the father not the son. Yes! I support the old gentry's distrust and the idea that theories are "impractical," as is everything in general that does not allow one to experience thoughts too much. And Miłosz should stop before nominating me for membership in Grydzewski's Academy because it will soon be demonstrated that my still water is not without a certain subcutaneous dynamics.

I will first try to describe in a few words our historical moment in contrast with Brzozowski's. His time was one of triumphant intellectualism, of a violent assault on all fields—it seemed then that stupidity could be weeded out by a persistent effort of reason. I believe that this intellectual assault grew in subsequent years and probably reached its apogee directly after the Second World War—when Marxism on the one side and existentialism on the other (not to mention other rapacious ideas) poured over Europe like water boiling out of a pot. This brought with it incredibly broad horizons for people who devoted themselves to thinking.

Yet . . . in keeping with that unfortunate dialectics of history . . . today, in my opinion, this period is ending and we are beginning to see the outlines of the period of Great Disenchantment. We have noticed that yes, the old stupidity is vanishing, but in its place is appearing another that the intellect is giving birth to, a by-product of the intellect, a stupidity that is, unfortunately, intellectual. . . .

I assume that Miłosz will agree with me when I say that the squire was less prone to stupidity than today's people are. The worldview of his times was based on authority, the Church's authority, first of all; the farmer attended mass on Sundays, and on the other days of the week he gave himself up to innocent little thoughts about whether he should plant oats or clover. Even persons with a more abundant mental life did not indulge in philosophizing, philosophy went its merry way on life's peripheries, as something important perhaps, but remote. But today, each of us has to rethink the world on his own because the authorities have bit the dust. Let us add that the intelligentsia is extraordinarily naive, in it lives a strange youthfulness, there is a reason why it is one of the latest attainments of humanity, the youngest. . . . These intellectuals, therefore, have not only commanded, think for yourself, with your own head, don't believe anyone until you verify—but, as if this were not enough, they demand that you "experience thought." No sweat! Not only am I supposed to think, but I am also supposed to take my thought seriously and feed it my own blood! The monstrous results were not long in appearing. Swarms of fundamental thinkers appeared out of the blue, thinkers reaching for the basics and building little worlds for themselves. Philosophy became obligatory. Yet access to this high-minded and profound thinking, studded with great names, is not at all easy: and thus we have sunk in an awful quagmire of incomplete thought, in some sort of general indigestion, in the slime and mud of half-profundities.

But, my likable Miłosz, what is happening with the intellect and intellec-

tuals today is an absolute scandal—and a hoax, one of the greatest in all of history. This intellect has been “demystifying” for such a long time that it has finally become the tool of a monstrous deception. Knowledge and truth have long stopped being the chief concerns of the intellectual—they have been replaced by the simple concern not to have anyone find out that he does not know. The intellectual, bursting with contents that he has not made his own, hedges as much as he can so that no one catches him at it. What are the ways of his caution? To formulate with such cunning that no one can question him. Not to poke his head beyond what he knows more or less. To use concepts with a kind of shorthand, as if they were already quite well known but chiefly not to betray his own ignorance. Give the impression that you know. A special art has arisen that consists of the agile parrying of unmastered thoughts with a face that is supposed to mean everything is normal. The special art of citing and using names has also been developed. Of the thousands of examples that come to mind, let us take just this one: one of the most violent intellectual disputes after the war was the polemics provoked by Sartre’s demand that the intellectual “commit himself” and “choose.” No man of letters could avoid, practically speaking, expressing himself for or against. But in order to understand Sartre’s theses from *Situations*, one first had to understand his “freedom,” which, in turn, would have required the study of the seven hundred pages of his *Being and Nothingness* (yawn-yawn), which, being phenomenological ontology, required knowing Husserl, not to mention Hegel, not to mention Kant. . . . I ask you, how many of the people who discussed Sartre would have dared to have themselves examined on the subject?

And (considering the tireless work of woman’s womb) all the ingredients of this masquerade have to multiply and increase with each accelerating day. Ah, that “sociability” which Brzozowski condemned has acquired an unexpected facet. . . . We are so bored by all these ultimate and profound truths that have to be fed our own blood that, not really knowing how to reconcile our yawning with the profundity of our undertaking, we began to care only about maintaining appearances.

Miłosz is on Brzozowski’s side. Miłosz wants the Polish intelligentsia to catch up with the West. Here he is the mouthpiece of the postwar Polish movement in the direction of “Europeanism” and “modernity.” And I, my dear sir, vintage squire farmer, extend my hand and say: —Slow down! This is not the way! What in the devil do you need this for? First of all, you won’t catch up, because

forms of thinking and style take shape slowly. Second, it is not worth it, because it's not really worth the trouble. Third, it would be great if you would consider the following: today you have the aces; your slowness is beginning to be on top; what has been your shame until now can be introduced to Europe as a starting point for a salutary revision.

Today, in my opinion, Polish "tepidity" has a chance and it should not be ashamed. I would listen to a Polish voice in Europe with great pleasure, saying to the intellect: enough, I don't understand you, I can't, I don't want to. Only this much, nothing more. It would not be a matter of finding a way out but merely of presenting the situation . . . which only then would find its people and solutions. I am far from assuming that our proud "classicist writers" could become these people who wrinkle their noses in disgust at "novelties," wear "snobberies" threadbare, and savor their own "mastery"—nor could our dandies, gourmets, sybarites, jokesters, yarn spinners—nor our stout peasants, that dismal fraternity devoted to "practical life." No, none of these forms of intellectual doubt appeal to me. It would have to be done more honestly; and in a more European way; and more intelligently.

V

6.x.62

(the Week Has Seven Days; They Have Bored Me Stiff)

Which of them is closest to hell? Tuwim? If there is something that was not his lot, then it was that he could not get at hell with his poems, which were so fond of light, sheen, juice, color, the moment. Lechoń? To all appearances quite a reprobate in the flesh, and if the heavens of his poetry were in proportion to his personal hells . . . but, what can we do, they were not. Wierzyński? Oh, yeah, "he dropped in, hell was on his way!" Iwaszkiewicz, Słonimski, Baliński—yes, yes, valuable but not profound. Who then? Wittlin? Wittlin, the blessed soul, would be most likely to be from hell?

Infernal or demonic—but I prefer "infernal," it sounds stronger. How can this be: Wittlin, that angelic sweet thing in a nightcap, practically straight out of Dickens, woebegone and ailing, respectable right down to the marrow. . . . Why

yes, Wittlin. And if I ever had to write a study of Wittlin, I would prove black on white that he is the way he is just so that he would not be his reverse—perversity. If Wittlin is holy, it is so as not to be diabolical. If Wittlin translates the *Odyssey*, then it is not because the *Odyssey* appeals to him, but only so he does not destroy it. Wittlin busies himself with classicism but that is because Wittlin is anarchy and despair. Calm? Balanced? Judicious? Friendly? Pedagogue? Master? Only so that the exploding bomb will not burst in his hands. And his faith is like that of those who pursue God, just as horses on a merry-go-round pursue each other, an eternal ring-around-the-rosy.

Am I wrong? I am allowed to be wrong in this diary, in my private notes.

Wittlin, in my perception, is bourgeois demonism. Can a bourgeois be demonic? Let us consider the following biography: a boy raised on the respectable principles of the past century, in a climate of culture, art, Christian morality, gentleness, and delicacy, initially goes through the first European war and experiences it actively, as a volunteer in the legions, then as a soldier in the Austrian infantry (that first war did not have cataclysmic features, however, and it could have appeared to a bourgeois that it was the gateway to a nobler and gentler life). Furthermore, our young man becomes a teacher, educator, writer, contributor to various publications, theater director, translator of Homer, author of the *Hymns* and *The Salt of the Earth*—international fame, translations into many languages . . . Lovely career! But the career, conceived in a bourgeois spirit and its affirmation, is accompanied by disintegration, somewhere at the bottom, underneath. Today's Wittlin is still the same Wittlin, he hasn't changed a bit . . . with the single difference that today he is suspended in a vacuum because history has pulled the ground out from under his feet. He is a bourgeois who got the bourgeois pulled out from under his feet. In this lies his demonism.

If Sienkiewicz could be moved to our times, I doubt whether he would be particularly troubled by it. . . . Sienkiewicz was a healthy nature, and healthy natures do not lose their vigor very easily. Wittlin, however, a bourgeois, came into a world of bourgeois coddling, and this coddling made him susceptible to illness . . . and illness is actually the only brutality that could strike a bourgeois living in bourgeois fluff. I should add that not only was (and is) Wittlin sickly but that he is distinguished by a peculiar talent for being sick. It's too bad I can't remember all of Hemar's amusing little bits of doggerel on the subject of Wittlin's superbourgeois

hypochondria. It begins with Hemar's inviting Wittlin to a drinking bout. To which Wittlin replied:

I cannot, he said ruddy, but with a feeble voice.
I have galleys to do and the flu.

And Hemar concludes with:

Since the flu is your obligation, the galleys your illness,
I humble myself before you, king of neurasthenics!

Nothing other than illness, of course, a specific factor, linking us to the keenest reality and liberating us from it into an unknown realm at the same time, enabled Wittlin certain achievements in poetry and prose. Because of his illness, he became an artist. But this talent for finding an outlet in his own indispositions also allowed him to get at the disease of the century, the disease of History at its most destructive and nihilistic extreme. Through Hitler and his own illness and, let us add, through his Jewish heritage, he reached the very edge of night.

And this upstanding, modest man became suspended over an abyss—what a sight! If Malraux, Camus, Schulz, Miłosz, Witkacy, Faulkner, are all hanging over an abyss, there is nothing to worry about because these are hangmen by nature. But when a decent man like Wittlin hangs over the abyss, the view can make one dizzy and maybe even nauseous.

And now the riddle, one of those “easy to give, hard to solve.” If Wittlin is hanging over an abyss, then what is the thread that he is holding onto, that he is attached to? You will say: God, because everybody knows Wittlin has a religious nature. But I have already expressed my doubts on this point. I do not trust—this is intuition, nothing more—the efficacy of Wittlin's God, in my opinion he belongs to people who lean their foreheads against the windowpane and then everything is over. Oh! “All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.” Only two feelings are left: first, that you are caught like an animal in a trap without exit; second, that you are in a complete vacuum, a vacuum without walls, and so also without an exit. Wittlin, this apprehensive man . . . but apprehensive in a sense that reveals Nothingness. . . . I will ask therefore: if everything has slid out from under his feet and if nothing is holding him at the top, why, instead of collapsing, does he

continue to be Wittlin and to bestow upon us his classical, balanced writing, not without its pedagogic vein?

A nihilist pedagogue? An absolute bankrupt? Serene catastrophe? Kindly hell? How did this bourgeois resist, as a bourgeois, although it was exactly his bourgeoisieness that underwent complete liquidation? I once accused the Skamandrites and other émigré writers of not changing enough . . . and Wittlin? Compared to them, he hasn't even twitched. Monolith? Except that a person for whom everything is over and done with is in a different position than those for whom much is over and done with. In what sense, in what direction, can a person whose meanings and directions have evaporated change? What remains if not the one thing still left to do: repeat oneself? This is why people who appear completely defeated by life function "as if nothing had ever happened" down to the very last minute of their lives. The captain of a sinking ship knows that in a minute the water will swallow him up—him and his honor, responsibility, duty—that for all practical purposes these no longer exist, that the water is already reaching his calves . . . why, then, does he recite his captainhood to the last minute of his life, instead of, let us say, singing or dancing? Perhaps because when there is nothing else to cling to, man can only grab onto himself, the principle of identity. "I am I" is a fundamental principle not only of logic but also of the ultimate right of humanity; and when everything disappears, there is only the fact that I was someone; such a person and no other; and loyalty toward oneself appears to be the last law we can still obey. . . .

Wittlin entered literature years ago as a creation of the bourgeois spirit of the time: Wittlin was the author of books, the bourgeoisie was the author of Wittlin. He did not scorn the bourgeois spirit—which left powerful achievements in culture—in the least. I simply want to say that in this phase Wittlin created while himself being the creation of his own environment and epoch.

Today? Today Wittlin is no longer just a creation of the bourgeoisie but he who creates what is bourgeois in himself. Today Wittlin is his own creator, he sustains himself with his own strength. Externally, nothing has changed, Wittlin's most recent texts are joined to the previous ones by a stubborn uniformity of tone, style, and vision and everything seems more possible than if he had veered from himself even by an inch. The only difference is that now Wittlin himself must create Wittlin.

But let us taste Wittlin's goodness, for example. Let us taste it first as something natural that issues from him like juice from sugar cane. And then let us taste it in its next embodiment, when it becomes "anti-natural," isolated, only human, inborn, self-contained, self-confirmed. Quite a difference in flavor.

I have sketched this little history to demonstrate that a man annihilated by history may, in time, become a creator of . . . his own history. What cheers me up most in this scenario is the splendor of the contrasts: this hellhound, constantly drawing from himself in hell the same goodness—delicacy—tenderness—equanimity—faith—good judgment—kindheartedness. . . . Just like the little spiders that hang good-naturedly by their own gossamer threads! "You will sit on a fierce lion without giving offense and you will ride a giant dragon!"

10.x., Tuesday

Madariaga, Silone, Weidlé, Dos Passos, Spender, Butor, Robbe-Grillet, etc.—all of them are in Buenos Aires, invited by the local PEN Club. The sessions lasted about five days and were a nagging pain on the subject of the Word, the Writer, Culture, Spirit, etc., as always. Everyone waited in vain for something to happen; not even a fly felt like sitting on anyone's bald head. Occasionally, it is true, the session would begin to skip a little and it seemed, yes, that it would kick up its heels but then everything would dissolve in their droning.

I know all this from what others told me, I was not there—why? The Argentine PEN Club had not invited me—aw, and why not? Why not? Bah! Why not! Because instead of "he loves, likes, respects"—"he does not want, does not care, he goofs around!" And why? Pooh, pooh! The persons who vote for members of *Wiadomości's* Academy will guess handily: because I'm a pain in the neck. And especially because of certain remarks I made about Argentine literature, published recently in *Quadernos*. It is true that if they had invited me, I would not have been there either. I am not so stupid that I would commute to these sessions by taxi or tram—if they had offered me, as they did those other gentlemen, a ticket for a transatlantic journey, there and back, as well as accommodations in a first-class hotel, well, that's another story. But because I live in Buenos Aires about six blocks from the auditorium, I cannot demand that they bring me there via a transatlantic

voyage and, leaving all else aside, it would be too strange, if from the transatlantic I went to the auditorium straight through the first-floor window.

Yet maybe . . . just maybe it has nothing to do with the transatlantic but with dignity?

Dignity? I don't know. I don't guarantee it. I don't want to be obligated.

Last year Berlin University invited me to a similar conference, except with a slightly different program. Namely, that each of the invited guests was to read fragments from one of his works, which a translator present in the auditorium would immediately translate into German. The author reads for five minutes, the translator translates, then the author reads for another five minutes, etc. . . . When I found out that I was supposed to fly ten thousand kilometers to read a passage from *Pornografia* in Polish to Germans, I was mortified. And I did not go. More perhaps because of the enormity and depth of the water, but also a little out of . . . spiritual . . . and physical embarrassment . . . because, well, reading something Polish to Germans is hardly a spiritual coming together. And if not spiritual, then . . . hm . . . hm . . . physical. . . . At my age! I was ashamed and did not go.

During these past few days I have had, out of shame, bitter feelings, it was painful for me to see my colleagues in this situation. . . . Oh yes, I am angry at them for this: that they knew neither how to refuse nor how to figure out the situation the right way! I saw them as *wise* people . . . and one is allowed to expect more than average skill in self-conduct from a wise person . . . thus when one sees them, these wise ones, up to their ears in stupidity, it hurts.

These discourses about calling the writer to do battle with what is untrue, about his unmasking role—when they know darn well that they are babbling in exchange for the trip they got. And they know that everyone knows that they know! Once a courtesan said to me: “Everybody sells something. I sell my body.” And at least she does not give papers on Authenticity at the Foundation of Developmental Perspectives of Culture.

Thursday

One after another, they drove up, streamed in, flew in, and the papers announced every single bit of it. Having found out that Weidlé had arrived, I called

him at the hotel. I did not know him personally but he wrote me a letter a few years ago after reading *Ferdydurke*.

It turned out that he had not forgotten me (it could have happened, you never know what can happen on these worldly waters) and he asked me to come see him right away. So I shaved and, after putting on my coffee-colored suit, the one from Cervantes, and a green tie, a present from Ada, I walked to the hotel, not far at all.

It was a spring day and the evening sun was pouring into Peru Street, arousing playful flashes in glass and metal. My approaching Weidlé was the approach of someone little known, almost anonymous in Argentina, to someone long and solidly fixed in the intellectual world. I was not surprised, therefore, by the witty abundance of unleashed flashes.

Hotel. Auditorium. Electric lights. Curtains. He was holding something when he got out of the elevator: *Pornografía*, the French edition. And he told me in a very disarming way that he had brought it with him from Paris in the hope that he might meet me and that I would inscribe it for him.

Which made me happy. I relaxed. But at the same instant I felt anger, that I had relaxed. And I knew that he knew (among ourselves we intellectuals know everything).

Friday

And then what? We barely had a chance to sit down when a reporter from *La Nación* lunged at him. Then a photographer. The photographer began to aim. The auditorium was full of international literary aces and photographers. I proposed we go to a café to have a talk in peace.

We left. On the street a little man leaps up to him—and something rings a bell from the past. Then the little man says to me: —You don't recognize me, Mr. Gombrowicz? Aita. I greet him courteously because this is the president of the Argentine PEN Club, Antonio Aita, whom I have not seen in twenty-three years.

Aita did the work of hundreds. He was the host and supervised: the programs, hotels, receptions. . . . During our conversation Weidlé asked me a few questions that I could have answered by unloading my sarcasm. How was it that I was not invited? That Aita . . . who was he, what had he written? (Nothing.) What

was my life here like? But I didn't get anything off my chest, fatigue interfered . . . a kind of apathy toward London, Paris. . . . I answered politely and "naturally," without amusement or brilliance. Nothing was bright anymore anyway, the sun had gone down.

He walked me back to Venezuela Street, where I live, and, upon seeing my *Diary* in a German edition, said that this would interest him and that he knows German well. I gave him a copy as quickly as possible, it means a lot to me, I engage in my own politics, too.

Saturday

I take a peek at them in the auditorium while visiting Weidlé. Their—Europe. I have no desire to get to know them, why get to know the unknown? But I look at them while being one of them, beyond them—this is complicated—I look with the gaze of one who has been excluded and misunderstood. Rome. Paris. New York.

They sit in armchairs—they stand—the press is handling them. How could it be otherwise? The hyena of journalism had to fall upon this literature, easy plunder, defenseless as a lamb.

I see them, expressing themselves, one after another . . . slowly, with concentration, furrowed brow, before a person with a notebook, while a photograph—click! The next day I read the fruits of these confessions: coleslaw, mish-mash. Could it be otherwise? Even while listening to the man speaking, he, the journalist, knew that he would have to make journalistic pablum from these far-reaching thoughts, on the run, in half an hour, so that his piece could make tomorrow's paper; and while speaking to his listener, the speaker knew that his difficult, rarified, sophisticated thought, expressed any old way, "off the top of his head," in order to pass through another panting head of a journalist, would change into coleslaw, marmalade, a rabbit pulled out of a hat. In vain does he then try to safeguard at least partly the importance of his thoughts with a finger, voice, eyebrow, ear. They know that it is in vain (intellectuals know everything among themselves). And, in spite of this, they speak with thoughtful expression, raised finger. . . .

What fun for the newspaper!

Fun and no fun. The newspaper is delighted, it is true, that it can frolic with them on its own terms. And it prints up whole pages about them—features, reports on the sessions, anecdotes. Yet at the same time, the editors are biting their nails and desperately asking: What for? Yes, what for? Why, if this watered-down broth of dense thoughts will not be read but merely skimmed over—it is as if people read it but they do not. So what for? Oh, don't ask "what for," ask "why"—when the mechanisms are triggered "what for" is lost, only "why" remains. Why? Mechanism. Convention.

Am I dreaming? It seems to me that a microphone made so readily available by the press really strengthens the voice of literature, but by mixing it up in a completely indecent brawl, not of the spirit but of the stomach . . . and now I recall what Delia said about the universally respected critic Guillermo de Torre, who is hard of hearing and wears a special device in his ear to amplify sound. "I was sitting next to him in the theater. . . . Suddenly I heard—something amazing—these revolting noises, absolutely unearthly, human yet inhuman, from some region of gibberish, ferment. . . . And I was horrified, thinking that this worldly mind was speaking to me, in a sudden attack of debauchery, not with an articulate tongue but with a *rumbling*. . . . Then I understood: Guillermo had fallen asleep, the device had fallen out of his ear and onto his stomach, amplifying the rumbling coming out of it."

Sunday

"Gombrowicz did not, of course, pass up the stroke of luck that the appearance of this Europe turned out to be. Immediately he—the indefatigable director—took to staging a little play: he, the province, against them, the world."

"Could this mean, however, that he did not feel that he was sitting firmly in the international saddle? That he was losing himself when faced with Europe, he who was supposed to be shown onto the parquetry but was still full of anxiety? This emphasizing of his own provinciality—wouldn't it be honest to some degree?!"

"In that case—what hell! what torment!"

Monday

I am tormented.

Nothing compromises an artist more than another artist.

Actually, an artist ought to cross to the other side of the street at the sight of another artist.

One is an artist for the nonartist, for the not-enough-of-an-artist—for the reader-recipient. But when the artist meets an artist, both change into . . . Professional colleagues. Into members of the PEN Club.

These people were invited here from all parts of the globe, Cassou is forced to exchange pleasantries with Silone, Weidlé is saturating Madariaga with his smile, Butor is bowing to Dos Passos and then nothing but: I am so happy to . . . I am very pleased to . . . I wish . . . Of course, with great pleasure. They encounter one another with the greatest precautions, as if they were afraid to get dirty, all the manners usually applied at diplomatic teas are in use; they look like a group of old countesses on a mission. And in spite of this, they destroy, devalue, disqualify themselves.

Upon seeing me the young Butor rose from his chair:

—*Vous êtes connu en France.*

I sank one of those absent looks into him: —*Mais vous? Est-ce que vous me connaissez?*

He was silent. He had never read me. Nor I him.

Monday

Publicists, critics, theorists, men learned in art, like Madariaga or Weidlé, still come out of this unscathed—they have behind them the humanist tradition, masters degrees, they are disgraced less by the platform. The poets and novelists of “pure art,” on the other hand, are amused by nothing, they look like pieces of raw meat, thrown out to be devoured, like a gnawed bone. . . .

Are they suffering? Doesn't the conspired protest bother these tourists of the Spirit? How far have they sunk, I ask, are they ruined through and through? Oh, how humiliated I am by the innocent provinciality of my question—and the more I am ashamed, the more innocent I become! Sitting in an armchair, I look at the hand of Dos Passos resting powerless and old on the arm of another chair. My

sensitivity to hands is well known. I look at his creative hand, therefore, his author's hand, and I see it, as though it were on a platter, with a salad, mushrooms, olive oil. The sleeve and cuff of the shirt are coming at the hand like a gigantic spoon, the fingers of the hand suggest a fork, I look and think, how he is eating himself! And this hostile gastronomical and sneeringly restaurantlike thought is my armor against him . . . but what's this? . . . There, to the side, in that armchair, Madariaga—next to Silone—farther in the interior three ladies, with whom Robbe-Grillet—Cassou in the fourth armchair—Butor in the corner, writing a letter . . . And I in my armchair, I, who do not know Madariaga, who should get to know Silone, because if it gets out that I know neither Madariaga nor Silone . . . and shouldn't I ask Weidlé to introduce me to Robbe-Grillet?

Torture! Torture! My pride, howling like a dog! Consternation and vomit that what I have sneered at a thousand times is getting to me and permeating me—I, a lover, so high-mindedly buried alive in Argentina for twenty-three years. Oh—oh—to show with one's whole life that one doesn't give a damn about honors, to make fun of that mondanite, to be unbribable and inaccessible . . . in order to suddenly, in a constellation of five armchairs, experience the most small-town sort of *épater*-ing and to feel the exigencies of the world, demanding that I be allowed into this society, to become one of them! In some sort of frozen form I bore my casual essence of a writer dependent only on acceptance into the group . . . and what will happen if it gets around that I was not accepted? Should I deny this feeling, spit it out? But the pressure of the courteous and immobile five-armed constellation made me one of them—embittered that I was not one of them! And here I was not sparing them a bit of venom for their hotel club concentration, myself now helplessly included in their system of armchairs.

One of the curtains, covering the windows of the hall, was drawn back . . . and through a crack I saw the street, sidewalk, houses, all ordinary and full of daylight, like in a picture. I sprang through the crack and began to grab convulsively at the faces of people flickering by, I hung onto each until it disappeared, and then I hung onto the next one, as if this procession of passing faces could tear me out of the five armchairs in the quiet of the hotel, in the discreet gleaming of the chandelier. . . . Nonetheless, the faces passed, preoccupied, talkative, laughing, giddy, were passing, disappearing, and I sat here in the sixth armchair in courtesy, in silence. And so what? So what? So what?

Tuesday

"He avoided irrelevant criticism, based on abstract sophistry. —I first have to swallow the problem—he said—and only when my stomach begins to hurt, do I try to deal with it. A trustworthy method! Who would not believe him while watching him externalize his most shameful complexes. . . . Yet, who would believe him? For we note immediately that this externalizing comes a bit too easily, it is too simple and cunning—and again, for the who-knows-what time, doubts begin to assail us: honesty or artifice?"

"He—the protean and open and obvious opposite of the monoliths, he—a gambler! If we had voiced our objections, he would have said his bit about: the personality is like a costume we don over our own nakedness when we are supposed to meet someone; that no one is a personality when he is alone; that we can be several different people at the same time, and thus a certain lightness in manipulating personalities is highly recommended. Who knows, however, if this kind of response would not be too philosophical and whether one could not seek the roots of this proteanism rather in what radically separates him from philosophy—in his artist's nature. To paraphrase his own words, one could say that the 'artist is form in motion.' In contrast to a philosopher, moralist, thinker, theologian, the artist is endless play, it is not that the artist conceives of the world from one vantage point—endless shifts take place within him and only he can oppose his own movement to the movement of the world.

"That is why lightness often becomes profundity—for the artist. Lightness—this is perhaps the most profound thing the artist has to say to the philosopher. And isn't it here that one should look for the reason that epochs with overwhelming metaphysical and moral anxieties, in which people try to fix man in a specific character (as God's creation; as society's creation; as freedom finally), were heavy epochs, bluntly oppressive, the least artistic. How pronouncedly the artism of our lives has changed since the year 1930, in proportion to our reviving desire for responsibility!"

"Let us continue to look at our little jester—with what sort of leaps and somersaults will he continue to amuse us?"

VI

Piriapolis

My notes about the congress of penclubbers . . . too much levity, too little rebellion, I can't say I am satisfied, is it possible that, infected with their impotence, I could not dig into my subject?

Their literary decadence was not made clear enough—this literature is flagging with each year, if not in the sense of the works themselves, then in the sense of their people. Indeed . . . if we cannot count more than five or six authentic composers in the world per generation, it is difficult to demand that there be many more authentic writers. The rest are, let us say, a few dozen gentlemen of the first category who are not up to the demands of the assignment, although they are known, recognized, even famous and with prospects of having monuments, squares, and streets named after them? . . . no, they are not really literature of good quality. Let us note the dread that issues from this statement. With this art butter things are such that if it is not of the best quality, of the ruthlessly best quality, it immediately smells of margarine.

The elite of world literature becomes more and more numerous each year; but it also becomes more and more questionable with each year. This happens because the technique of imitating superiority, like all techniques, is making progress. Excellence and even greatness is a matter of technique to a certain degree, however—and today an intelligent second-class writer knows pretty well what and how to reform himself to get to the first class. For example: it is better for me not to be too spiritual, only sensual-spiritual; and one must mobilize one's antinomies; the fog of indelineation is advised; the brutal directness of Rimbaud is also good nor should one scorn some of the gimmicks of modern Yankees; and, just in case, it is better not to lose sight of certain prescriptions for "objective" greatness, propagated lately in France. Wholesale disqualification of these measures of technique would be unwise . . . no, why shouldn't someone who is not deprived of the Divine spark consciously create himself, using the experiences of others? Doesn't real genius begin, almost always, by imitating brilliance? And it does happen that this imitative genius enters the bloodstream, becomes flesh.

I don't really have anything against this method. Nonetheless, thanks to this, it is undoubtedly true that a certain European elite is growing weaker and weaker on its feet each year. These are usually people who have been exalted, who have "made" themselves too much, whose excellence, deprived of spontaneity, is a laborious disquisition. Ninety percent—only ninety percent?—of today's French literature is created by persons who cultivate a certain style, category, level that are a collective attainment, contained in the intellectual, artistic air of France. Their personal achievement is too often reduced to their being able to wear a store-bought suit as if it were specially tailored for them . . . but between Pascal's France and Mauriac's France there is as big a difference as between Maya naked and Maya clothed. Compare the singularity of people from Verlaine's period with today's entourage, where almost everyone can be replaced. This is what is also happening in other literatures. There was a time in European life when one could have invited Nietzsche, Rimbaud, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Ibsen to breakfast—people so unlike one another each one of them could have come from a different planet—yet what breakfast would not have exploded from such a gathering? Today one can easily arrange a general banquet for the entire European elite and it would take place without a jarring note, without a spark.

It is against this background of deadbeats that the increasingly disgraceful role of the impresario is growing . . . evicted from the individual spirit, literature is getting into the hands of extraspiritual social factotums. Prizes. Contests. Academic commemorations. Professional associations. Publishers. Press. Politics. Culture. Embassies. Conferences. One must, after all, organize these people and force them to function—function and organization become a leech that sucks out blood that is already anemic. This would not, in my opinion, be so much of a defeat if the pressure came only from the outside; a man of art knows that he is not a social man, he instinctively defends himself against the temptations of the layman. Everyone knows that society will always demand what we cannot give. But what's worse is that, as I have said, literature is becoming less and less vigorous and because of this it is losing its resistance and capacity to create antibodies, it might even seem that some sort of negative selection is going on, having a suicidal character. Not only because the feeble artist is beginning to rule and to push around the better one within the framework of this bureaucracy (an artist, the better he is the less time he

has for “functioning”), but also because in the best, the unclean element gains the upper hand over the proud stubbornness of the soul. Lack of boldness. Decisiveness falters. The inclination to make hardheaded, straightforward decisions that cleanse begins to vanish, the world becomes muddled. They are not frank with the spirit, natural with the spirit, and because they themselves have fabricated something of that spirit, they are not really so far from literature’s becoming a function, fabrication, production—they have in themselves that impersonal quality which imposes pressure from the outside.

Coziness! There is no way that invited, awarded, honored, feted, addled, ridiculed spirits will rebel and take the bit between their teeth and find means sufficiently explosive to shake up their situation. Let us resign ourselves to the fact: genius, talent, is dynamite less and less and not much has remained of the holy innocence of forest or alpine flowers. Since everything in society is functional, the social order of the spirit likes a certain production of superiority and greatness and thus a new category of functionary arises: the spiritual functionary.



Do I have enough strength and intelligence? And I am one of those who has come to possess the technique of fashioning himself in the style of great art; I confess that I have come to possess subtle secrets in this matter, those even that lead to results that are right next door to authentic greatness. Will I have enough strength, I who am like they are but perhaps even sicker?

My truth and my strength rely on my endless spoiling of the game. I spoil it for myself and others. I do not fight artificiality in myself. I simply limit myself to revealing it whenever it appears in me: I spoil my elegance, I force myself to use other tactics, I change the situation for myself. And I would ask this of my dignified colleagues as well: the endless spoiling of their elegance, ruining their situation, tearing the cobwebs until the most deeply personal energies work their way to freedom.

But . . . it is painful. . . . To ruin one’s situation . . .

Sartre, in whom the pathology of the epoch has concentrated itself, is also a glaring example of this crisis—of greatness or of independence, or perhaps of the dignity of prominent people in a functional literature. Strange and painful is his sudden tumbling from the peaks onto the flat plain, it looks as if he had two voices,

one that was categorical and of the spirit and the other—out of nowhere—of a schoolmaster and moralist. He is incapable of joining the realm of fundamental truth to the realm of daily affairs, with practical life; he lets out an unpleasant, trivializing inner squeal. Where does the proud extremity of his claim that literature is freedom lead him? To his telling the writer what his social function is, that of a schoolmaster talking to children: you are supposed to be here, not there, on the side of the left against the right! The chapter in *Situations* in which, after devastating criticism, he gets down to positive guidelines and lectures on the role of the writer in society, he exudes all the weaknesses of sermons, regardless of whether they are priestly or Marxist . . . and one can almost see how his loneliness is then ashamed and suffers.

I have already passed over the strange simplification in his reasoning: that someone, by virtue of not being on the left, is thereby an enemy of the proletariat. But I can be a conservative and the most genuine communist at the same time—it is simply a matter of choosing the means that lead to the goal, this is an exploitation of man by man that is bearable. I can be of the opinion that the revolution costs too much, destroys too much, and merely increases the misery and slavery of the masses, and that the liberation of the proletariat can happen only on the path of slow and careful, fairly conservative evolution, and I can even feel that an excessive concentration on this one problem is, in its ultimate consequences, damaging to the development of humanity and, therefore, to the workers.

But, I ask, which of the old philosophers could have borne in himself Sartre's cacophony of levels, tones, concepts. They, however, less "made," more natural, did not know the desires of self-destruction and self-compromise, like today's intellectual, who, in not trusting himself, decides on a brutal tone, issuing from the lower spheres. After going to bed with an elevator boy, the heroine of one of Thomas Mann's novels cries out in exaltation: "What, I, Madame so-and-so, a poet, lady of society, in bed with a naked elevator boy!" I think this anecdote is right for Sartre not so much because of the dialectics of the "base" which it contains as for the "superstructure," the elevator. For even in our time, one occasionally comes upon one of those scrupulous people who, panic-stricken that not his own substance but a mechanism is raising him aloft presses the button of the same machine to ride down as quickly as possible.

Piriapolis, the Beach

A female baobab of a woman with exploding butt, sprawling calves and thighs, sticking way out on all sides—help!—fixed to the beach like a bovine-cretin meteor, like an archstupid wedge, help, the seams are ready to burst, pop, meat will come pouring out! . . . What butcher could manager her?

Older fat women.

Older skinny women.

Look, mister, at these slabs . . . or at these bones . . . take a look, please, do you see? In its lazy bovination of shameless arrogant hideousness, it has kept just one thing from bygone times, like a memory. A little foot . . . neither skinny nor fat and . . . take a look . . . doesn't it look a little like the tiny foot of your fiancée? Do you understand me? Do you know now what potential of bodily cynicism and what indifference to ugliness are concealed in your little beauty? Charming ladies, graceful wives, advise your mothers to sit at home, don't allow them to expose you too much!



Two perceptions of Wittlin. Wittlin, as it turns out, has a completely different notion of Wittlin than I do. Furthermore, he writes to me: “Who I really am neither you nor I know. For my part, I admit that I do not have the time to concern myself with this.”

From his letter, however, I can see that my thesis about his being a product and representative of bourgeois values does not please him. He writes that he comes from a family that lived in the country for generations; he was educated there, he carries no city in his breast, and his life, heavy and replete with struggle, at first military, arms in hand, and later with a pen, is a “brazen denial of bourgeois fluff.”

Agreed, I made a mistake by putting him in town if he is a child of the countryside. Nor would I even think of accusing someone of being “bourgeois” *sensu stricto* if I write that in all of émigré literature, he has more to do with hell than anyone else. He is, in my view, an intense being for the reason that he joins in himself (with the clarity of a mountain stream) extreme opposites, that he is an “upstanding man” fixed in catastrophe, living with the abyss.



The beginnings of my friendship with Vladimir Weidlé could also serve as an illustration of the powerlessness and inhibition overwhelming us literati at a time of laicized, socialized literature. Our conversations were very friendly but rough going; we were weighed down by the staging, he appeared to me in the aura of his function at the PEN Club congress, speech making, surrounded by the press, invited—compared to him, I felt like someone emerging from the shadows, “arriving.”

This lasted until he boarded his ship and left. There is no question that in the current atmosphere of literary life the happiest moments are departures and separations.

After a few months . . . a letter from him in which I find out that this Weidlé, this solemn pillar of the congress, flawless in manner and style, was a conspirator conspiring with me . . . and like me, a hidden enemy of the literature that he supported with his person, a person who hates the artistic “product,” and, just like me, a destroyer of “art” in the name of “humanity” . . . therefore my rebellion reached him in spite of everything and now he wrote to me, like one iconoclast to another. . . . Except . . . except . . . this letter was at the same time a writer’s letter to a writer, from start to finish, he described *professionally*, literarily, that which constituted a *spiritual* desire—a tidy conscientiousness, polite respect, the kind that is combed and smoothed—this letter was like an anarchist in a top hat, with a bomb but in gloves, he drove before me in a stately limousine, like the president of a bank. . . . The letter struck me the way Goethe’s bow before the prince of Weimar struck Beethoven. . . .

Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s. . . .



Borges did not take part in the PEN Club congress but our tragic fate did not spare him other ridiculous games.

For he got on an airplane and together with his mother, doña Leonor, headed for Europe in search of the golden fleece known as the Nobel. No other purpose inclined this man, over sixty, almost completely blind, and that old woman, who had behind her no less than eighty springs, to soar over there in a jet plane. Madrid, Paris, Geneva, London—lectures, banquets, garden parties—so that the press would write about him and to set in motion all the mechanisms. The rest, I

opine, is Victoria Ocampo's doing ("I put more millions into literature than Bernard Shaw was able to extract from it").

Apparently some deputy in the Argentine Parliament wanted to propose that the Senate, in a special session, appeal to the Swedish Academy of Literature to give Borges the award (they have such an appetite for this Nobel, which they have yet to snag). Luckily they were able to talk the deputy out of it at the last minute.

Nonetheless Borges got on the plane. So now we have one more traveling representative. One more fortifying the national soccer team in the great international match. . . . Oh, that he not feel more like the ball than the goalie!

The sight of this pathetic hermit blindman, with his almost ninety-year-old mother, harnessed to these airplane efforts . . . the worse thing is that it fits him somehow. . . . And I don't doubt that he will get the Nobel. Unfortunately, yes unfortunately . . . it is as if he had come into existence expressly for this purpose. If anyone, then Borges! This is a literature for literati, something like a special kind of writing for members of the jury, this is exactly the kind of candidate that is needed: an abstract artist, scholastic, metaphysical, unoriginal enough to find a road already paved, original enough in this unoriginality of his to become a new and even creative variant of something known and recognized. An excellent head cook! A gourmet cuisine!

I do not have the least doubt that Borges's lectures on the "essence of metaphor" and the others by this same authority will be appropriately feted. And this will be exactly as it should be: sparklers, the fireworks of an intelligentsia intelligently deprived of intelligence, the pirouettes of rhetorical and unliving thought incapable of taking on a single living idea, of thought completely uninterested in "real" thinking, consciously fictional, arranging its arabesques, glosses, and exegeses on the sidelines consistently ornamental. Bah, but the *métier*! Literarily flawless! What a head cook! What could arouse greater enthusiasm in pure-blooded writers than this kind of bloodless, literary, verbal, unseeing writer who sees nothing except his own mental combinations?

But he is just right, exactly like the cards we insert into machines so that everything begins to turn and jump in rhythm. . . . If the measure of great literature is its unliterariness, its capacity to overcome itself and get at reality, then one must

admit, this type of greatness does not interfere with Borges's diligent efforts. Oh, but it is not Borges who irritates me, I could come to an understanding with him somehow, face-to-face. . . . I am angered by the Borges-ists, that army of aesthetes, meticulous people, connoisseurs, initiates, watchmakers, metaphysicians, know-it-alls, gourmets. . . . This clean artist has a disturbing capacity for stirring up around himself whatever is cheapest and most eunuchlike.

1963

VII

18.v.63, *Berlin*

I am writing these words in Berlin.

How did this happen? I went to Uruguay for January and February, the hottest months of the Argentine summer, to bury myself in forests overlooking the ocean with my *Cosmos*, almost finished but still nerve-racking because the ending would not reveal itself; it seemed to me it should be pushed into another dimension—but where?—the solutions that came to mind were unsatisfactory. The forest, monotony of wave and sand, the smiling and bathed Uruguayan mellowness, turned out to be good for my work, I returned from the coast fidgety with impatience to keep wrestling with the text and confident that the growing form would manage the difficulties by itself. Then came the day I was supposed to go back to Buenos Aires. Half an hour before my departure—the mailman. A letter from Paris . . . in which I was being asked privately if I would accept a Ford Foundation invitation to spend a year in Berlin.

I have often experienced a blinding fog that invades life's most important moments. Births prefer night but if deep stirrings of fate auguring Momentous Change cannot take place at night, then there is created around them, as if on purpose, a strange confusion and blurring that distracts. . . . The invitation to Berlin solved a problem I had been mulling over for a long time and somewhat bitterly—of breaking with Argentina and returning to Europe—and already I felt that the die was cast. But here was the first perplexing and muddling complication: the letter was dated a month earlier, had gotten misplaced at the post office, and contained a request for an immediate reply (because this kind of invitation is a bit of good fortune many crave). Why did the letter get lost? Why wasn't another letter

sent? Could it be—good God!—that nothing would come of it after all and I would be left in Argentina?

The following day I arrive in Buenos Aires and find a telegram on my desk, urging a response. But the telegram is from two weeks ago. In the wake of a combination of neglect and bad luck, this one telegram, of all the mail that was forwarded, was not sent. I wire that I accept—but by now I am almost sure that nothing will come of it, that all was for naught, the devil take it, and that I, good God, would remain in Argentina!

But something began to happen all around me . . . in these days of uncertainty, some aspects of my Argentine reality underwent a sudden awakening, it looked as if this reality, in anticipation of a quick end, began to hurry and intensify in all of its strangeness . . . this was most pronounced among the young people, which is so characteristic of my situation. . . . It was as if they suddenly realized that something like me does not happen to them everyday: a “ready-made” writer with a well-known name who does not hang around with anyone over twenty-eight, an artist with a special aesthetic or pride who dismisses cultural luminaries with contempt and boredom in order to be with young people, with those *à l’heure de promesse*, the incoming class from the literary foyer . . . this was quite exceptional, without precedent! But it was perfect—striking with that young-old juxtaposition, like a battling ram, at the literary *beau monde* of Argentina, breaking down doors, exploding hierarchies, causing scandal—and here these *blousons noirs* of art, these *iracundos* (one of the groups called itself “Maufados,” the other “Elefantes”), leaped at me, full of martial enthusiasm; they quickly figured out ways of infiltrating the most important newspapers. Miguel Grinberg, the leader of Maufados, feverishly prepared his combative issue of the “revista” devoted to me—mobilization, movement, electricity! Which I watched in amazement . . . because it really did seem that they knew the end was approaching . . . but of course they did not know. . . . I watched this in amazement but not without pleasure—because it always pleased my inborn sense of the perverse that in spite of the whole Grand Guignol that deprived me of dignity in the eyes of self-respecting writers, I am nevertheless—peek-a-boo—someone serious and worthwhile. And the Grand Guignol particular to my situation grew in these last days in a truly incredible way, some sort of eccentricity was also exploding in the press, there were more and more frequent notices that I was an obscure genius, victorious in Europe, and Zdzisław Bau, who

edited the social chronicle in *Clarín*, advertised me by publishing weird notes about how “Gombro” was seducing dancers at fashionable health spas. Did this madness reach the European salons of Madame Ocampo and what did our respectable *escritores* make of it, if anything at all, if this reached their Olympus? Did they not feel like Macbeth looking down from Dunsinane castle to the green forest approaching him . . . in whose greenery farce, wildness, anarchy, sneering, waited in ambush, but all of it raw, undercooked, substandard, practically from tenement basements. I forgot about Berlin. All this promised some fairly good fun, the kind that I like, that bowls you over, knocks you off balance, neither fish nor fowl, inept.

Then came a letter from the Ford Foundation with an invitation.

My foot touched Argentine soil 22 August 1939 and from then on I kept asking: how many years? how long?—until on this 19 March 1963 the end came in sight. Pushed by the knife of this revelation, I died immediately—yes, all my blood ran out of me in a minute. Already absent. Finished. Ready to go. That mysterious something between me and my place had been severed.

This end begged for understanding, for comprehension of what was happening—but the obliterating and distracting whirlwind bore me away: documents, money, suitcases, errands, the liquidation of everything, I barely had two weeks to take care of all this, from early morning to late at night I rushed around in taxis, running errands and putting an end to things. I was finishing off friendships with an affection that was already gone, I got feelings out of the way, sorrows, the quicker the better, breakfast with X, supper with Y, faster, I won’t have time to pick up the parcels. . . . And so in these final moments flowers and fruits began to ripen violently and unexpectedly, friendships that had been half-dormant for years began to blossom, I saw tears . . . but I no longer had any time and it was as if these feelings had put off realizing themselves until the instant in which I became unreal. Everything at the last minute and everything *ex post*. I must tell one amusing story: I am leaving at 7:30 one morning to take care of a dozen urgent matters, and here on the doorstep is a maiden, an eighteen-year-old beauty, the fiancée of one of my students, called “Suitcase” by him because, as he claimed, going around with her was like carrying a suitcase. “Suitcase” is sobbing, tears are rolling down her cheeks, she confesses her love for me, “and not just I,” she says, “all my girlfriends were or still are in love with you, Witoldo, not one was able to avoid it!” And thus a week before my departure I find out about all this maidenly love—oh, amusing,

but then not really so amusing, this silly farewell triumph sent a cold little chill up my spine: so these girls were also ready to play in my drama? How many times had I been stunned and amazed by the unusually violent reaction of young people to the suffering that was linked to them, this is a painful and helpless generosity, a hand extended in friendship which can no longer reach. . . .

Other blossoms and fruits were born in me in these moments before my death in the garden cultivated by my drama of many years—yes, a hurried violent maturation, while I, an ascetic, ran around doing the shopping. Everything was in motion, the strange onslaught of time speeded up by my departure was just like when it is five minutes to the arrival of the New Year, movement, stress. I could no longer grasp anything, everything was falling out of my hands and getting lost, as if it were being seen from a train window. Never was I more alone—or more careless.

I tried in spite of everything—sometimes feverishly—to impose some sort of form on this exodus of mine. I saw an analogy between these last days and the first ones in 1939, only a formal analogy, it is true, but I clung to it in my chaos and I did find a little time to make a pilgrimage to the places that were once mine. I dropped by the large building at 1258 Corrientes, called El Palomar, swarming with all sorts of poor folks, where I spent probably the hardest period, then in the closing months of 1940, sick, without a peso to my name. I climbed up to the fourth floor, saw the door of my room, the familiar blotches and splatterings on the walls, I touched the door handle, the railing of the staircase, the old insistent melody from the dance hall below rang in my ears, I recognized the old smell . . . and for an instant, staring at something invisible, I waited, thinking this very act of returning would be able to give form and sense to the present moment. Nothing. Nothing at all. Emptiness. Void. I stopped by one more building, at 242 Tacuari, where I lived in December of 1939, but this visit was even less successful. I walk in, get in the elevator to ride to the third floor where my past was, and out crawls a porter.

—Who did you come to see?

—Me? . . . Mr. Lopez. Does Mr. Lopez live here?

—No Mr. Lopez lives here. And why are you getting into the elevator instead of asking at the caretaker's window?

—I thought that . . . On the third floor . . .

—And how do you know he's on the third floor if you aren't sure that he lives here? What do you really want? Who do you want to see? Who gave you the address?

I beat it.

April 8. The harbor. A café in the port, right next to the white monster that was supposed to bear me away—a table in front of the café, friends, acquaintances, greetings, hugs, well, hang in there, remember us, my regards to . . . of all this just one thing was not dead, one thing I saw, which for some unknown reason will always stay with me, because I, that is, I looked accidentally at the water of the port, for a split second, I saw the stone walls, a lamp on the sidewalk, next to it a pole with a sign, a little farther launches and boats rocking, the green lawn of the shore. . . . This is how Argentina ended for me: with one careless, unnecessary glance in an accidental direction, a lamp, sign, water, this got sucked up into me forever.

Now I am on the ship. The ship moves. The shore recedes and the city emerges then drifts away, the skyscrapers sink slowly behind one another, perspectives blur, confusion enters the geography—hieroglyphs, puzzles, mistakes—the “English tower” from the Retiro is still visible, not where it should be, there’s the post office building, yet the panorama is elusive and dreamy in its complexity, as if reluctant or forbidden, perhaps maliciously deceptive—the city is closing itself before me, I now know so little! . . . I reach into my pocket. What? I am missing the \$250 I took with me for the trip, I pat myself all over, I run to the cabin, I search, maybe the money’s in my coat, in my passport, no, it’s not there, hell! . . . I will have to sail the Atlantic with the pesos I have left, with about \$3! But there, on the outside, the city is floating away, concentrate, don’t let them steal this farewell from you, I rush back on deck: now it was askew, at the edge of a sheet of water, a concentration of indistinct matter, a fog with a contour woven in here and there, my eyes no longer understood anything, plasma with some sort of too difficult geometry . . . and this difficulty, growing without end and debilitating, was accompanied by the sound of water parted by the prow of the ship. And, at the same time, the \$250 were tearing into the 24 years of my life in Argentina, the moment was splitting into 24 and 250, oh, gloomy and crazy mathematics! Robbed twice, I went to take a look at the ship.

Supper and night, earned by my great fatigue. The next day I went out on deck, the roar, billowing, heavenly azure, the deeply plowed ocean, the wild blossoming of foam in space consumed by the repeated madness of violent movement, the prow of the *Federico* strikes at the heavens and falls into the depths,

spurts of salt spray, there is no way to keep standing without grabbing hold of something . . . there, on the left, about fifteen kilometers away, the shores of Uruguay, and aren't those hills familiar, the ones surrounding Piriapolis? . . . Yes, yes, and now I can see the white blocks of multistoried hotels in Punta del Este and I swear, a sharp flash reached me from over there, the kind the sun creates when reflected from car windows—bright and far-reaching. This flash from Punta del Este, from some car, on some turn, was the last human word uttered to me from the America I knew, like a shout, reaching me in the enormous disorder of the sea, under a sky that was somehow cursed and it strengthened the pervading turmoil. Farewell, America!

Yes, but what sort of America? The Atlantic greeted us with a thunderstorm that was uncommon (the steward later told me that there hadn't been one like this in a long time), the ocean was annihilating, the wind was stifling, and I knew that in this frenzied desert (as indicated by our direction) Europe was looming before me—yes, it was already getting closer, but I didn't know what I was leaving behind. What sort of America? What sort of Argentina? Oh, what had they really been, those twenty-four years that accompany me to Europe? Of all the encounters awaiting me, one was most disturbing. . . . I had to confront one white ship . . . heading from Gdynia to Buenos Aires . . . and which I would meet inevitably in a week's time on the open seas. . . . It was the *Chrobry*. The *Chrobry* from August of 1939. I was on it and so were Straszewicz and Rembieliński, the senator, and Minister Mazurkiewicz, the whole jolly group . . . yes, I knew I would have to confront the Gombrowicz sailing to America, I, the Gombrowicz sailing away from America. What a monstrous curiosity about my destiny gnawed at me, I felt my fate like a dark room, where you have no idea what you'll break your neck on, how much I would give for the slightest ray to illuminate the contours of the future—and so today I am approaching that other Gombrowicz, as solution and explanation, I am the answer. Will I, as an answer, be up to the task? Will I be able to say anything at all to that other one when the *Federico* appears to him on the foggy expanse of waters with its powerful yellow chimney, won't I have to *keep silent*? . . .

That would be painful. If he asks me, curious: —What are you returning with? Who are you now? . . . I will answer him with the troubled gesture of empty hands, a shrug of the shoulders . . . and perhaps something like a yawn, “Aaahh, I

don't know, leave me alone!" The rocking, wind, noise, the enormous heaving and stirring merging at the horizon with the motionless sky whose stillness was immportalizing fluidity, and in the distance, on the left, glimmers the American shore, an introduction to remembering. . . . Will I not muster a different answer? Argentina! Argentina! What sort of Argentina? What was it—Argentina? And I . . . what is this now, this I?

Drunk with the evasiveness of the deck as it moved from under my feet in all directions, clutching the railing, thrust into a staggering bewilderment, addled by the wind—green faces all around, confused looks, huddled figures—I tear myself away from the deck and, demonstrating a miraculous balance, I walk . . . suddenly I look, something is lying on one of the deck planks, something small. A human eye. There was no one here, but next to the stairs on the upper deck there was a sailor chewing gum. I asked him:

—Whose eye is that?

He shrugged.

—I don't know, sir.

—Did somebody lose it or was it poked out?

—I didn't see sir. It has been here since morning. I'd pick it up and put it in a box, but I am not allowed to leave the stairs.

I was just about to resume my interrupted march to the cabin, when an officer appeared in the curve of the stairs.

—There's a human eye lying on deck.

He showed genuine concern: —I'll be damned! Where?

—Do you think that it fell out or was taken out?

The wind was snatching our words, we had to shout, but the shout also fled into the distance, it was hopeless, too battered by the wind, I kept going and the gong sounded, announcing breakfast. The dining hall was empty, universal nausea had stripped the tables of people, there are six of us bold folks staring at the seesawing floor and the incredible acrobatics of the waters. My Germans (because I share a table with a German couple that unfortunately speaks Spanish the way I speak German) did not show up. I order a bottle of Chianti, and the 250 jabs me again, like a needle—how will I pay the bill I am signing? After breakfast I send a radio telegram to friends in Paris to wire a \$200 money order to the ship. I am traveling comfortably, I have a separate cabin, kitchen, a good one, like that time

on the *Chrobry*, what a life. . . . Life? What is this journey if not a trip into death? . . . people of a certain age should not move at all, space is too tied up with time, rousing space provokes time, this whole ocean is made more of time than of boundless distances, this is infinite space that calls itself: death. What the heck.

In reflecting on my Argentine life over a space of twenty-four years, I noticed without difficulty a certain distinct architecture, noteworthy symmetries. For example: there were three periods, eight years each, the first period—poverty, a Bohemian life, no concerns, inactivity; the second period—seven and a half years at the bank, the life of a clerk; the third period—a modest but independent existence, growing literary prestige. I could also conceive of this past by averaging certain subjects: my health, finances, literature . . . to order it in a different way, from the vantage point of problems, “themes” in my existence, slowly changing in time. But how is one to drink of the soup of life with the slotted spoon of these statistics and graphs? Bah, one of the suitcases in my cabin contained a briefcase, and that briefcase contained a whole slew of yellowed sheets with a month-by-month chronology of events in my life—let us look, for example, at what was happening to me exactly ten years ago in April 1953. “*Last days in Salsipuedes. I am writing ‘Sienkiewicz.’ Ocampo and walks to the Rio Ceballos, late night returns. I am reading The Captive Mind and Dostoevsky. Returned to Buenos Aires on the twelfth by train. The bank, boredom, Zawadzka, misery, letter from Giedroyc that the book is not selling but that he would like to publish something more. At the Grocholskis and Grodzickis. ‘Banquet’ in Wiadomości . . .*” etc., etc. I could prod my memory this way, take a walk from month to month in the past—but what of it? What should I do, I ask, with this litany of particulars, how should I absorb these facts, when each one disintegrates into a swarm of smaller events that ultimately turn into a vapor, I was being hemmed in by billions of facts, dissolution in an elusive continuity, something more like a tone . . . how can one talk about facts at all? Yet while sailing to Europe, after everything was over, I was beset by the purely tyrannical necessity of getting at this past, of grasping it, here, in the roar and tumult of the sea, in the restlessness of waters, in the boundless and noiselessly melting flood, along with my departure on the Atlantic—and was I really supposed to be just the senseless sputter of chaos like these waves? One thing became clear: this was not a matter of intellect or even a matter of awareness, it was simply a matter of passion.

To be passionate, to be a poet toward it . . . If Argentina had won me over to the extent (now I no longer doubted it) that I was deeply and forever in love with her (and at my age one does not cast these words to the ocean winds), then I had to add that even if someone were to kill me, I would be unable to say what had led me astray on this boring pampa, in ordinary bourgeois towns. Her youth? Her “inferiority” (oh, how many times the thought—one of my great, exciting thoughts—had occurred to me in Argentina, the thought that “beauty is inferiority”)? But even though these and similar phenomena, supported by a friendly and innocent look, by a dazzling smile in a somewhat cinematic setting, full of color, heat, effluvia, or maybe palm trees, played no trifling role in my seduction, my Argentina was still something a hundred times richer. Old? Yes. Triangular? Yes, that too. Also square, blue, but also sour in the spiral, a little bitter, yes, but also internal and a little like a polished shoe, gopherish like a post, or gate, and of the turtle species, exhausted, dirty, overflowing like a tree hollow, or a trough, chimpanzeelike, corroded, perverse, sophisticated, monkeyish, and chummy with sandwiches, similar to a dental filling . . . oh, I am writing whatever crawls under my pen, because it’s all the same, whatever I say would fit Argentina. *Nec Hercules* . . . Twenty million lives in all possible combinations, that’s a lot, a lot, for the single life of one man. Could I have known, what took hold of me in this mass of tangled lives? Finding myself without any money? Having lost all of my Polish privileges? Having this American Latinness somehow complement my Polishness—or maybe the southern sun, the dissolution of form—or perhaps their specific brutality, dirt, shabbiness . . . I don’t know. . . . And, furthermore, the claim that I was in love with Argentina did not correspond to the truth. I was not really in love with her. To express myself more clearly, I merely wanted to be in love with Argentina.

Te quiero. An Argentinean says, “I want you” instead of “I love you.” I meditated then (still on the ocean, tossed by the ship that was tossing on the waves) that love is an effort of will, a fire we kindle in ourselves because we want to, because we want to be in love, because we cannot stand not being in love (the coarseness of my articulation corresponds to the awkwardness contained in the very situation). . . . No, it’s not that I loved her, but I wanted to have myself in love with her and apparently I needed desperately to get close to Europe in no other way except in a state of passionate intoxication with Argentina, with America. I

probably did not want to show myself to Europe at the close of my life without the beauty that love gives, and perhaps I feared that tearing myself away from a place I had saturated with myself, moving to unknown places, unwarmed by me, would impoverish, cool, and kill me—thus I desired to be passionate in Europe, passionate with Argentina—and I quaked especially before the one meeting that awaited me (on the open seas, at dusk, perhaps early dawn in the developing salt-spacious mists) and there was no way I wanted to appear at this rendezvous absolutely empty-handed. The ship pushed forward. The water raised and buried it. The wind raged. I was somewhat helpless, abashed, because I wanted to love Argentina and my twenty-four years there, but I did not know how. . . .

Love is dignity. This is how, at my age, it had seemed to me; the greater the biological defeat, the more necessary the passion of a consuming flame, it is better for you to burn than for you to slowly, cadaverously, cool off; passion—now I knew this—is prescribed more for old age than for youth. Night falls. Absolute night. From the left side, barely, barely, somewhere out there, winking lighthouses recede on what is already the Brazilian shore, while here, on the deck, I strain forward, edging farther and farther away, without respite, in an inconceivable march . . . this was a desert. The infinity of the rushing emptiness, thundering, exploding, impossible to distinguish, to grasp, made of eddies and vortices, the same here and there and still farther and farther still. I am straining my eyes until they hurt, all in vain, I couldn't see a thing; on the other side of the wall of night everything was pouring in and out in an unending drowning and dissolving, I knew that behind the darkness, there at the bottom was nothing but formlessness and movement, before me nothing but inessential space, above, a sky studded with countless stars, impossible to distinguish, to grasp. . . . Still I strained to see. Nothing. Did I really have the right to see, I, chaos in confusion, oblivious, lost, whipped into passions, pains, that I did not recognize, how is it possible that one is nothing more than spilling water, vacant space, dark night, boundless sky . . . a blind element inaccessible to itself. O Argentina! What kind of Argentina? Nothing. Dud. I couldn't even desire, all possibility of desiring was excluded by the excess of the all-exhausting spilling, love was spilling into nonlove, everything was running together, I must go, sleep a while, it's late, the human eye, where did I get that human eye on deck? . . . Had I imagined it, how do I know, well, it doesn't

matter, eye or no eye, because why, tell me, should I play at formalities, should a phenomenon be asked for its passport, what pedantry . . . and can you see, better sleep.

VIII

My notes from this journey? Here you are.

Wednesday, 10 April

The storm is over. Gentle seas. A woman comes up to me: —Senior Gombrowicz? An acquaintance, as it turns out, of Ernesto Sabato, an Argentine woman from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She introduces me to her millionaire friend, who is knocking off her twenty-fifth trip to Europe. I find out from them that the new chargé d'affaires of the Argentine embassy in Warsaw is aboard the ship.

The chargé d'affaires invites us for a drink.

The conversation is about the problems that arise when a Pole who has become an Argentine citizen and lives in Argentina is still considered a Polish citizen by Polish authorities.

Cognac.

The meeting with the multimillionaires and the chargé d'affaires gives me some hope as far as the 250 is concerned.

Coffee.

Correspondence. Chess with an aviator.

All while the mountainous shores of Brazil loom on the left, where vision ends.

Thursday, the 11th

Yesterday Santos.

Today Rio de Janeiro.

To hell with the views! Views are ridiculously stupid! I really prefer petty theft. To saunter off the ship for an hour, to stand on an unknown corner and to

steal . . . the sight of a stumbling peddler out of whose hands flies a bunch of bananas that then trip up a child . . . to steal something to which one has no right, something happening “over there, in Santos,” to catch, to take.

The tiresome euphoria of Negroes.

Saturday

The mingle-mangle, basking and floating, colors and light, quiet, warmer and a lot warmer, hidden gleam in streaks and mists, clouds bristling with sunshine, fish jumping, imaginings and sunny processions, behind us a bubbling streak, foaming tail, they play, games and amusements, deck chairs and lying around, camera in a shoe, the light hurts, the pool is open, they jump in, get out snorting, jump, conversations, chats, an industrialist, ha, ha, ha (in a stentorian voice), she took out a notebook, that one is scratching himself *ja, bitte sehr, buon giorno*, probably got offended, she left, maybe not, waved his hand, whose is this, copper gleams, he dove well, what time is it, oh, no, how was it with this then . . . who finally . . . quail, why did he not know how to, oh, goose wrist in the back, what would happen if . . . locomotive . . . locomotive . . . for example . . .

“For example” is the perfect phrase, comfortable, making it easier, Adás Mauerberger said to me once, probably in Konstancin, on the veranda, that words such as “for example” or “actually” make things easier . . . with their help one can say everything, even something that is incompatible with the truth, one can say “actually bread and butter taste like chocolate.” The slowspreading blue indolazifying skyspansiveness and isn’t it better to leave, to leave it untouched, let it slowly sail away, and so long . . . Argentina, Argentina, Argentina!

Argentina! Sleepy, squinting, weary, again I am searching for it in myself—with all my might—Argentina! I wonder and would like to know, I wonder, why in Argentina I never came upon this passion for Argentina in myself. Why is it attacking me now, as I leave it?

My God, I who did not love Poland for a second. . . . And now I am standing on my head to love Argentina!

It is curious, too, that the word love was forbidden you until now. And now, here, you experience shameless attacks of love. Oh, oh, oh (this is difficult for me

to write, difficult to edit—as always, when I increase the candor in myself, the risk of being excessive, pretentious, grows, and then stylization is unavoidable) . . . And surely—I thought—surely this is nothing more than growing farther apart: not to love Poland because I was too close to it, to love Argentina because I always had it at a certain distance, to love it now, yes, when I was moving, tearing away . . . and surely because in old age one can demand love more boldly, bah, beauty too . . . because they already appear at a distance, allowing for greater freedom . . . and they are more concrete, perhaps, at a distance. Yes, and one can love one's past from a distance, as I am being removed not just in time but in space . . . carried away, subject to the uninterrupted process of growing more distant, of tearing away, and, in this growing distance, consumed by a furious love for what is growing more distant from me. Argentina—the past or a country?

Monday

The tarpaulin is flapping, the furrow foaming—the tail gurgles—the sailing rustles—many deck chairs—games and conversations—ahhh, the muted murmur of voices, dreamy amusement, ahhh, luminous crease, gleaming copper, lines and bars are drawing a net of silken shadows, salt and distance, instability in the blue and someone says *traigalo aqui*, someone turns over, air.

I was looking for excursion points from which I could leap onto Argentina in a conquering tiger's pounce. There was a boy, perhaps ten years old, Daniel, a Uruguayan, jumping into the pool . . . with such bodily ease that even for America this ease was too facile. The flawless soft, dark skin, beneath which played muscles childishly elastic—the coordination and silence of the body, as if every movement had been oiled, eyes, ears, delightfully, childishly laughing, a black head of soft wavy hair, a sparkling animation—and unbelievable unceremoniousness, unbelievably friendly in attaching itself to others—which, however, at its peak moments became identical to some sort of wild indifference or even simply wildness, because one could see that it was all the same to him whom he got close to. . . . Why, this boy wanted mostly to attach himself to children, he ran at them, grabbed them, picked them up, joked around, gentle, chaotic play, making the group of children ecstatic as it ran after him in leaps and shouts . . . but at some point turning into an arbitrariness that was wildly indifferent and, after all, no less

intimate. . . . Behold Argentina! . . . Yes, this is Argentina! . . . and it seemed to me that I had captured it here in this Hispanic-American child, why not? . . . Yet next to him, not far away, lounging on the deck chair a lovely miss with the corners of her mouth turned down, distaste and bitterness hung from her lips like Negro ornaments, distaste and revulsion, a thin hopelessness—and I said suddenly to myself, “This is Argentina,” and I felt as if this country, growing distant and already far away, formed itself for me in these lips, in its past as well as in the present, in its cities, rivers, mountains, streets, cafés. . . . And whatever happened to me in Argentina could be expressed just as well by that child as by that frowning mouth, those embittered lips . . . but then I looked at the lining of someone’s jacket and thought I could also “grasp, express, master” Argentina with that lining. Drinks. Someone is taking a picture. No big deal. Side. The tarpaulin is flapping, the foaming streak is bubbling, all suddenly turn their heads left, bang, a shot, skeet shooting, and in this simultaneous turning of heads, Argentina is also contained somehow. We are sailing. Penknife. She cried out. Earring and death. Something was always happening, constantly, as if on a film screen, it didn’t stop for a minute, and, in not stopping, it did not allow me the conquering pounce, oh, perhaps I would have reached the past, if now had stopped happening.

Sheet and chimney. Elbow. Sailor. Attendant. Oh, any sort of feeling toward the irrevocably disappearing was impossible because of the multitude of facts . . . facts and facts . . . a pleiad of facts, facts were hatching, a swarm of events were attacking me like locusts as I retreated, I could not simply detach myself from facts, and thereby their enraged abundance led to some sort of furious degradation of them, nothing could exist seriously because the other was at its heels, I was never devoured by facts to such an extent, tarpaulin flapping, foaming trail, fun and games, thread and heel. Stupidity. Simpleton. Take it out. Went out. Hop. Silhouette. Noise. Bottle. Pray. Cradle. Skin . . . and in the noise, in the gleaming, in the speeding ahead and the leaving behind, the approaching and the sailing away. Oh, how the present moment was sucking me dry, how it was weakening me! We were passing the northern shores of Brazil, the *Federico* was drifting with an average speed of eighteen knots, in a favorable tail wind. I watched the fleeing shores of America. Farewell, America! In proportion to evening’s fall the degradation of facts that I mentioned, facts hatched and dissolved in noise, as well as rocked, merging, and blurring, began to bother me more and more, but I was not so completely sure

of this, immersed as I was in noise and rocking, devoured by leaving . . . but just a moment, let's take one such event, as much as I could see, as much as I could observe, quite brazenly even, it happened, for example, sometime after eleven (and not at night, but the next morning, in broad daylight), it happened, let us say, that one of the sailors, a certain Dick Harties, *through inattention swallowed the end of a thin line, hanging from the mizzenmast.*

Because of, I think (but I can't speak of this with complete certainty, many other facts were clamoring for my attention), because of the peristaltic action of his alimentary canal, he began to draw the rope into himself violently and, before anyone noticed, rode it to the top, like a mountain funicular, with his mouth wide open, terrified. The wormlike nature of his alimentary canal turned out to be so strong that there was no way to pull him down, in vain did a sailor attach himself to each of his legs. It should be added that at this time the ship was moving without interruption, I was getting farther from . . . in any event, some sort of consultations were undertaken, after which the first officer, named Smith, hit on the idea of giving him an emetic—but once again the question arose as to how to introduce something to make him vomit into his alimentary canal, completely filled with rope. Finally, after longer consultations than before (during which whole hosts of events approached and flew over us in noise, dying away in the rocking), they decided to act upon his imagination through his eyes and nose.

This is what happened (the scene has become fixed in my mind as much as a scene that is constantly getting farther away can become fixed). At the officer's command, one of the sailors climbed up the mast and presented the patient with a plate of rat tails. The unlucky fellow's eyes were ready to pop out of his head—but when a small fork was added to the tails, it all reminded him suddenly of the macaroni of his childhood and, vomiting, he slid down to the deck so fast he almost broke his legs. I, I admit, preferred not to watch this scene—whose garishness was weakening and fading just like ancient chromolithographs from somewhere, out of a trunk, attic, vivid, yes, but as if it were being seen through smoky glass, as if it were lost forever.

Tuesday

We broke with the American continent. The Transatlantic on the open Atlantic, crosses the equator aiming its prow for Europe.

Curiosity? Excitement? Expectation? Why, no. The friends whom I had never seen awaiting me there—Jeleński, Giedroyc, Nadeau? No. Paris, thirty-five years later? No. I don't want to get acquainted. I am finished and summed up.

I wander aimlessly . . . and everything I think of is a little farther behind in that very instant. My thought is behind me, not ahead of me.

Telegram from Kot Jeleński—that they are supposed to send me two hundred dollars. The money has still not arrived. In Las Palmas maybe?

Boring. Not one interesting face. Chess. I won the tournament, got a medal, and am now champion of the ship.

Reaching death with a backward motion? (I do not trust these kinds of “thoughts.”)

Wednesday

Architecture.

A cathedral built without respite. . . . I build this edifice and build . . . I cannot catch a glimpse of it. Sometimes, at exceptional moments . . . it is as if I were discerning something in a flash . . . the joints of vaults, arches, some element of symmetry . . . mere appearances?

In 1931 . . . and how could I have known then that Argentina would be my destiny? The word never gave me the least hint.

But I did write a short story at the time entitled “Incidents on the H.M.S. *Banbury*.” In this story I sail to South America. Sailors sing:

Under the azure skies of Argentina

Where the senses are slaked by a wonder of a girl . . .

By strange coincidence, the short story was translated into French a few months ago and perhaps has already appeared in Paris in *Preuves*. I am sailing toward it.

Illusions! Mirages! False ties! No order, no architecture, the darkness in my life from which not even one real element of form emerges—while today whole passages of this story attack me, born of memory, pale, desperate, like apparitions. “*Imagination like a mad dog let off the leash bared its teeth and growled silently, crouching in corners.*” “*I have a weak mind. I have a weak mind. Because of it the distinction between things is blurred. . . .*” “*The deck was completely empty. The sea*

boomed impressively, the sea wind huffed with redoubled force. The raging trunk of a whale loomed in brackish waters, tireless in its circling motion."

I would also like to mention that the "meeting" took place today at daybreak, northeast of the Canary Islands. I put "meeting" in quotation marks, this word does not have its usual value. . . .

I did not sleep that night, I went out on deck before daybreak, looked long through the darkness at a thing one can always look at: the water. I spotted the lights of a few ships, slitting the ocean to Africa . . . finally the night, I will not say that it grew lighter, but it vanished, collapsed, got lost in itself, meanwhile white densities appeared here and there which in the rawness of an indifferent predawn emerged like cotton, and the sea swarmed with these white icebergs of fog, amid which I saw what one can always look at, the water, waves striding like roosters in white. Then it sailed out of its white wrapping, also white, with an enormous chimney that I immediately recognized at a distance of three or four kilometers. It immediately fell into a puff of fog, again peeked out, I did not look out, it is true, I was staring instead at the water . . . knowing well that this was not happening, this did not exist, I preferred not to look, but my not looking was a kind of confirmation of its presence. How curious that not looking can be a form of looking. I also preferred not to think and not to feel in vain. Yet how curious that not thinking and not feeling can be a kind of feeling and thinking. In the meantime, the phenomenon was drifting by—and not drifting by me in a phantasmagoria of windblown puffs with an almost operatic pathos and something like a lost brotherhood, like a killed brother, dead brother, mute brother, a brother lost forever and indifferent . . . something like this appeared and took over the hollow despair and was utterly mute among white puffs.

Finally I thought about myself on that deck—and that for him over there, I am probably the same sort of phenomenon as he is for me.

Then it was as if I had suddenly recalled that aboard this very thing, years ago, sailing on the *Chrobry* to Argentina, one night near the Canary Islands, I could not sleep and at daybreak I went out on deck to look at the sea . . . and I was looking for something . . . I immediately confiscated this memory because I noticed that I was fabricating it, as we have already mentioned, for architectonic reasons. What a mania: you look into a crystal ball, into a glass of water, and even out of that comes something out of nothing, a form. . . .

Friday, 20 April

Europe before me! Paris!

On the day before Paris, when I should have had the gleam, hardness, and sharpness of a razor, I am blurred, distraught, dissolving. . . .

I have not been in Paris since 1928. Thirty-five years. I hung around Paris then as an insignificant student. Today Witold Gombrowicz is coming to Paris, and so we have receptions, interviews, conversations, consultations . . . and one has to create a certain effect, I am going to Paris to conquer. Many people have been drawn into this battle and they expect an effect. And I am sick! Parched lips, blurred vision, fever . . .

In this slackness I am tormented by the necessity I know is inevitable—that in Paris I will have to be the enemy of Paris. Never mind talking about it! They will swallow me up too easily if I don't become a pain in their side—I will not be able to exist if they do not perceive me as their enemy. No, no scruples in regard to such a posture ad hoc, coldly premeditated, sincerity is nonsense, there can be no talk of sincerity when one knows nothing of oneself, when one has remembered nothing, when there is no past, when one is nothing but the ever-receding present. . . . In a fog, like mine, moral scruples?

It would be hard to come by a fate more ironic: that I, again, now, in my bewilderment, ebb, must sculpt myself in the fog that I am—and have to transform this fog, dust cloud, into a fist!

Sunday, Barcelona

Today, the twenty-second, I touched European soil, I have long known that two twos are my number. I also touched Argentine soil for the first time on the twenty-second (of August). Hail, magic! The analogy of numbers, eloquence of dates . . . you miserable creature, if you can't catch yourself in anything else, at least try this.

I walked to the square where there is a statue of Columbus and I glanced at the city in which, perhaps, I will settle permanently after Berlin (every word of this sentence horrifies me: "I walked" and "to" and "square," et cetera).

They horrify me beyond description and fill me with despair, that I am

carrying myself around these places, like something even more unknown than all these unknown places. No animal, reptile, crustacean, no imaginary monster, no galaxy is as inaccessible and alien to me as I am (a banal thought?).

You strive for many long years to be somebody—and what do you become? A river of events in the present, a turbulent stream of facts, happening now, at this cold moment that you are experiencing and you can relate to nothing else. Confusion—only this is yours. You can't even say good-bye.

The two hundred dollars showed up neither in Las Palmas nor in Barcelona. . . . So what now? Where will I get money for tips and checks? The millionairess!

Monday

Cannes, at night, illumination, quite a sight. I had barely gotten ashore with my suitcases when a young lady from the agency comes running up and hands me two hundred dollars (luckily the millionairess lent me some money aboard the ship).

Night in the hotel. The next day (rain) I speed along in the *Mistral* to Paris, mountains, sea, lake, the Rhone Valley, the train bellows and rushes, the dining car.

Paris at one in the morning, the hotels are packed, the taxi driver finally gets me into a hotel not far from the Opéra which is called the Hôtel de l'Opéra.

I open the window. Like an idiot I look from the fifth floor onto the small street, Rue du Helder, I inhale the air I breathed thirty-five years ago, I open my suitcase, I pull something out of it, I begin to undress. The situation is perfectly soulless, completely empty, absolutely quiet and deprived of everything. I go to bed and turn off the light.

Wednesday

First I call Kot Jeleński. Taken aback (because he did not expect me for another few days), he explodes into greetings. And I: —Please, Kot, without a big fuss, let's pretend that we have known each other a long time and that we just saw one another yesterday. He came to the hotel, we went to a café on the corner,

where first he talked about all sorts of projects related to my arrival . . . then we began to gab a bit. . . .

This is how I became acquainted with Jeleński, who, having smashed my Argentine cage, built me a bridge to Paris. And so what? Nothing. Peace and quiet. I returned to my hotel.

What's this? An opportunity to hate Paris—an opportunity that struck me as urgently as fighting for my life—it has already awakened and is looking for prey. A few passers-by while I sat in the café with Kot were enough, the accent and smell of the French, their movements, gestures, expressions, clothes . . . antipathies long nourished are breaking out. Am I becoming an enemy of Paris already? Will I be an enemy of Paris? I have known my Paris phobia for longer than just today. I knew this city touches my greatest vulnerability, my age, the problem of age, and it was a sure thing that what I had against Paris was its being a city “over forty.” Oh, in saying “over forty” I do not have in mind the age of its thousand-year-old walls—I want to say only that it is a city for people reaching their fifth decade. Beaches are for young people. In Paris one smells forty, even fifty, in the air, these two numbers fill the boulevards and squares.

If this feeling cut me to the quick now, it was not because of its intellectual content, but because it was poisoned with poetry. Poetry forced me to such violent revulsion. On the wall of my room hung a lithograph of the moment in the vault of the Sistine Chapel when God, in the figure of a powerful old man, strains toward Adam to breathe life into him. I looked at Adam, who was about twenty, and at God, who was well over sixty, and I asked myself, whom do you prefer, God or Adam? Do you prefer twenty or sixty? And the question seemed extremely important to me, bah, even critical—because it is not an indifferent matter what sort of ideal of man and humanity slumbers within you, what sort of beauty you demand from the human species, what sort of man you want to have. Man, yes, but of what age? There is no one man. Which man is the real man for you . . . the most beautiful . . . the most happily formed physically, spiritually? Or perhaps you consider a child the highest embodiment of human beauty? Perhaps an old man? Or do you also think that everything over thirty, or below, is “worse”? In looking at God and Adam, I meditated that the most splendid works of the spirit, reason, technology, may become unsatisfactory for the sole reason that they are an expression of a

human age that is no longer capable of arousing love or admiration—and you will have to discard them, in spite of your own recognition, in the name of a more passionate reason, connected with the beauty of humanity. And, in allowing oneself this little sacrilege, I rejected God in Michelangelo's painting in favor of Adam.

I did this, though, to forge a weapon against Paris—because as a writer I had to separate myself from Paris. It is strange and painful, that the beauty in me is so *practical*. . . .

That Same Day, Evening

Governesses? Governesses? Mademoiselle Jeanette, then Mademoiselle Zwieck, a Swiss . . . teaching us children, French and good manners . . . once upon a time, there, in Małoszyce. Plumped down into the fresh and roughhewn landscape of a Polish hamlet, like parrots. My distaste for the French language . . . weren't they the ones who vaccinated me with it? And Paris? Isn't it for me, today, just one gigantic French governess? Mlle Jeanette and Mlle Zwieck curtsy around the Eiffel Tower, at the Place de l'Opéra, isn't it they who glide over the sidewalks?

Away, away, silly nymphs, compromising my attack on Paris!

IX

Maisons-Lafitte. Sunny afternoon. I enter the house of *Kultura* for the first time. Giedroyc shows himself to me. I show myself to Giedroyc.

He: —I am happy to see you, Mr. Gombrowicz. . . . I: —Jerzy, my good God, surely you will not address me as “Mr.” when we have corresponded in the familiar for years! He: —Hm . . . hm . . . why, yes . . . well, I am happy that you have arrived. I: —What a lovely house! Pure pleasure to behold! He: —Pretty spacious and comfortable, good working conditions . . . I: —Jerzy, upon my word, I have become a regular Mickiewicz, no one doubts it, people's voices crack when they speak to me over the telephone. He: —Hm . . . I have never really cared much for Mickiewicz. . . .

Józef Czapski listens with delight to this dialogue of diverse temperaments.

I am having fun, but—staring at a streak of sunlight on the floor—I am not having fun at all. I am embarrassed. Deadly silence (which in me is tied to the distance I feel). It is as if while still being over there, I were here and were looking

at something I had no right to look at. . . . I notice a tiny scratch on the table leg. So you have sailed the ocean to have a look at this . . . and you look at it shyly, desperately. . . .

Out to breakfast with Tadeusz Breza.

With Paweł Zdziechowski.

Awful ratlike meetings . . . because we leave our long-lived hatreds of one another the way rats leave their holes . . . and we try not to look too closely at one another, like bats, like reptiles afraid of light and shape.

At the Café de la Paix with Jadwiga Kukulczanka and Jorge Lavelli, the director of *The Marriage*. Silence.



I have not had a lot of time for walks—former and new friends, French literati, publishing matters, translators . . . —but in each contact with the street of Paris I looked for ugliness . . . and I found it. This seeking of eyesores was something like an act of love on behalf of the Cast Off (Argentina)—but for me it was not just a matter of decorating myself with love, I did not forget that I had to irritate Paris. . . .

I drew physical defects out of the crowds, oh, look, flat chest, anemia of the neck, hunchback, twisted trunk, the tragedy of those limbs . . . and this close scrutiny of bodies resulted in my not having any looking left for palaces, churches, squares, views, arches, bridges, cupolas. . . . I was persistent in seeking out a certain defect, a kind of very French inelegance dancing about their very noses, lips, not of all Frenchmen, but quite a few. I could forgive this, though. The French mob is in no way worse than the crowds in many other cities, Parisian ugliness is located deeper, it is fixed in their attitude to ugliness, this intelligent city is a city of conscious ugliness. On the Avenue de l'Opéra, on the Rue de Rivoli . . . oh, how they knew each other, too many mirrors, too many hairdressers, tailors, and fashion plates, cosmetics, oh, how they drank the cup of ugliness to its very dregs! I saw the worry of wilting ladies, the bitterness of emaciated young poets, the diligent stylization of men in beards, the obese resignation of pot-bellied men, the strangest attempts at sublimating themselves into aesthetics with the aid of hats, even umbrellas, a relentless battle with ugliness was being fought every step of the way and at every step it was being marked by defeat (which fascinated me because I wanted

to beautify Argentina for myself). I saw the permanent distaste on the faces of *Messieurs-Dames*, as if they were sniffing something unpleasant and Paris smelled, to me, of negligees, of that hour of the day when we do our daily ablutions, the hour of creams, powders, cologne, bathrobes and pajamas. All this would still have been bearable, but this ugliness conceals yet another, more painful one consisting of *gaiety*. This was really bad! I would have forgiven them their sadness and despair; what I could not forgive them was their ugliness because it was cheerful . . . well-stocked with humor, *esprit*, and *blague*!

There, on the corner, a rotund old foggy looked cheerfully up the skirt of a young thing boarding a bus—*tout Paris* chortles at his beaming roguishness.

I look with horror as an inflated, rosy-lipped chef, standing in the doorway of a restaurant, sends peppery *bons mots* in the direction of Madam, so sophisticated in the curves of her body that she almost resembles a labyrinth.

So they did want to enjoy life after all. . . .

These scenes did not fill me with enthusiasm and I had no desire to greet them with full recognition *violà Paris*. Susanna and the elders—*violà Paris*! I felt (and not just I in this city, I was not the first) a profound distaste at the sight of greedy ugliness. A sensuality that can no longer express itself naked throws itself into lipstick, corsets—into elegance—into costume and manners—into conversation and art—into song and joke—that “sociability” whose sundry defects created a splendid ball when they danced together—this *esprit*, which allows one to pinch with charm—and that awful “gaiety,” diligently nurtured throughout the ages in order to be able to have fun in spite of everything . . . hideousness so aware of itself, so amused! This repulsive aesthetics contained a deadly naïveté, based on the illusion that one can mask years and take one’s delights to some higher level, where they can come true in another dimension.

O Paris, I thought to myself, Paris, you old tenor, wilted ballet dancer, hoary joker, what is your mortal sin against Beauty like? Is it not that you eat it? *Mais permettez-moi donc, cher Monsieur! Monsieur*, getting on in years, stops being the *beau garçon*, that is, the generous, blissfully disinterested beautification of the world, beauty, which is a gift . . . but should his relations with beauty have ended here? Not in the least! Life is still full of charm! He may, for example, drop into a restaurant chosen from among thousands and order *Veau à la Crevette Sauce*

Moustache, or *Sautée Velay Mignonne Asperges* . . . and he can even ask to be served *Fricassée de Jeunes Filles en Fleur* or *un Beau Garçon rôti à la Bordelaise*, dishes undoubtedly tasty and light!

The culinary metaphor whose sense is such that in order to consume beauty you must completely break with it; not only must it come to you from the outside, on a platter, but you must also arrange yourself internally so your ugliness does not interfere with your pleasure; and this ploy is something so pitiful that I doubt anyone with a higher degree of development could do it to himself—it requires a person to cast himself into a collectivity, into sociability, the cooperation of others, one must first create a system of coexistence, culture, where the surrogates of beauty such as *belles manières*, *élégance*, *distinction*, *esprit*, *bon goût*, etc., etc., could replace abject nakedness. And then, having put on Swann's top hat, you can be a gourmet without embarrassment! The Top Hats have relegated the great, real beauty of the human race, the young and naked beauty, to statues standing quietly among the trees of Paris, and it is these statues the Top Hats look at with their expertise, as if this were merely the object of their cultivated pleasure. Thus if resigning from one's own beauty is worthy of praise when it leads to pure contemplation, it becomes repugnant when it happens under the auspices of greed and desire. If I find something unaesthetic to the bone—I thought, trodding these avenues—then it is a gourmet . . . it is Paris!

This city, dissolving ambrosias in its aged mouth! While walking in Paris rather downcast, extinguished and quiet, I thought that the only thing lacking was for them to sneak up to the naked statues one night and dress them in the latest fashions, daub them with perfume . . . Diana in Dior toilet, yes, this would match their penchant for *mondanité*, producing tasty substitutes for beauty. But, I repeated to myself, but real beauty is naked! And man cannot be loyal to this beauty in any other way than through his own nakedness—if not the one you are particularly in currently, then that which you had—and if you did not have it, then through the one you could have had, in keeping with your age.

But the tailor dressed Paris's nakedness. When they see *une belle femme*, they have a haberdasher's fit, the ecstasy of Top Hats has no bounds, a Top Hat will fall in love and subject his feelings to subtle analysis . . . but he will never undress. The roles will be divided, nakedness is only on one side. . . . I don't know if what

they told me is true, that they put gloves on to caress and, when undressing *la belle*, they button themselves up quickly, down to the very last button.



I went by way of the little street, Rue Belloy, between Avenue Kléber and Place des Etats Unis, to see the building I lived in thirty-five years ago.

When returning from Alan Kosko's (he was not at home), I took a walk along Boule Miche to refresh my memory.

The stubbornness with which I persist in the same anti-Parisian reaction really astounds me—my feelings then were exactly the same.

Silence



Interviews. Guy Le Clegh interviewed me for *Le figaro*.

Supper with Mathieu Galey, who afterward, late at night, drove me around the old neighborhoods. He is supposed to write down our conversation for *Arts*.

Weigh your words! After all, this is for the Paris press, this is important! Wouldn't it be better to edit some of these thoughts once written? Or at least ask them to see these interviews before publication? Nahhhhhh . . . What the heck . . . No . . . Silence.

Telephone call from Miss Mayaud about an interview tomorrow for *L'Express*. Le Clegh put me in touch with Rawicz, author of *Le sang du ciel*, who will write about me in *Le Monde. Publicité*. Death. The same silence, born of distance, ensnared me once in Santiago.

I converse, I am animated, I try to be amusing and "natural." A little reception at Bondy's. Breakfast at Mrs. Julliard's.



Kot takes me to see the Comtesse Ruby D'Aschott, whose sister (if I am not mistaken) is the Princess de la Rochefoucauld. Piece of cake!

He claims that today artists and intellectuals have become the aristocracy of Paris. Long ago a writer tried to imitate a prince, today the prince imitates the writer. In spite of this, my relations with Kot have completely warmed up and we

really started to feel comfortable with one another when we discovered we had a great-great-grandmother in common.



And Hector Bianchotti took me to the Louvre.

Crowded walls, the stupid hanging of the paintings, one next to the other. The hiccups of this accumulation. Cacophony. Public house. Leonardo is punching Titian's face. Everything is cockeyed because when you look at one, the other crawls into your eyeball from the side. . . . Walking from one to the other, standing, looking. The light, color, and shape that gladdened your heart a moment before, on the street, here crossbreed to produce so many variants they crawl down your throat, like Fleming's quill at the end of an old Roman feast.

Until finally you get to the holy corner where she—La Gioconda—presides! Greetings, Circe! . . . just as industrious and engaged as when I saw you last, indefatigably transforming people not into pigs, no, but into dolts. I was reminded of Schopenhauer's horror at the thought of the eternity of the mechanism by dint of which some turtles have been crawling out of the sea every year, for thousands of years, in order to lay their eggs on some island—and every year they get eaten, after laying their eggs, by wild dogs. Every day for the last five centuries a small crowd gathers before this picture in order to experience a cretinous gaping, this famous face stupefies their faces every day . . . click! An American with a camera. Others are smiling indulgently, in blissful ignorance that their own cultural indulgence is no less stupid.

Stupidity is in great abundance in the rooms of the Louvre. One of the stupidest places on earth. . . . Long rooms . . .

Forty thousand painters in this city, like forty thousand cooks! All of this dabbles in beauty. Its fabrication on canvas by refined fingers allows them an intentional, it would seem, nurturing of ugliness in themselves, rarely fashioning themselves on monsters having beauty only in the tips of their fingers. One enters this painting like some great perversion, like a gigantic masquerade, where the artificial creator creates artificially for an artificial recipient to the accompaniment of vendors, snobs, drawing rooms, academies, riches, luxuries, criticism, commentary, where the market as well as supply and demand create an abstract system, built on fiction . . . and what is so strange about Paris being its capital?

A model, undressing for a painter, is the equivalent of a woman dressing for Dior or Fath. Both stop being naked in an instant. The nakedness of one becomes the pretext for a dress. The nakedness of the other sinks into the painting. One become “elegant.” The other becomes “art.”



Since my arrival in Paris, strange things have been happening to me in connection with Sartre.

I, in Buenos Aires, had long admired him. Alone with his books, having all the advantages of a reader when I could have done him in with one curl of the lip, I had to be afraid of him the way we are afraid of someone stronger. But in Paris he became an Eiffel Tower, a person overwhelming the whole panorama.

It began with my deciding—out of curiosity—to test whether the French intellect had absorbed Sartre’s existentialism . . . and by steering the conversation to Sartre I would discreetly plumb writers and nonwriters on their familiarity with *Being and Nothingness*. My research had startling results. First of all, it turned out (and this was not a surprise to me) that these ideas bounced around and meandered in French heads, but in a larval state, drawn from wherever they could get them but mainly from his novels and the theater, absolutely murky, fragmentary, still having to do mainly with the “absurd,” “freedom,” “responsibility,” but it was clear that in France *Being and Nothingness* is practically an unknown work. Sure, his thoughts prowled around in people’s heads but rather loosely and in a way that made them seem crippled, truncated, torn to pieces, a little wild, awful, and weird, causing a weakening, an undermining of the order of previous thought until now. . . . Further results would be much more interesting. I was struck by the antipathy with which they discussed him, not antipathy perhaps, something like an incidental inclination to murder. Sartre? Well, yes, naturally, except that he “repeats himself so.” Sartre? Yes, but that was yesterday. . . . Novels? Plays? “Actually they’re nothing but illustrations of his theories.” Philosophy? “Nothing but the theory of his art.” Sartre? Yes, but there is already too much, why does he write so much, and he’s so slovenly and not a poet, politics you know and he is finished, Sartre, you know, he’s finished on all fronts.

This made me stop and consider. . . . In our admiration for artists there is a lot of maiden-aunt goodness, which praises the little boy in order not to

worry him—the artist has simply been able to buy his way into our good graces, he has won our sympathy to the degree that we are happy to be able to admire him—and not admiring him would cost us too much. This is evident in the French attitude to Proust, who is fed sweets even in the grave—he was able to win them over. But Sartre is probably the only outstanding artist who is personally hated. Who, in comparison with Sartre, the mountain of revelation, is this Argentine Borges? A tasty soup of writers? Yet they coddle Borges and pound Sartre . . . is it only a result of politics? This would be unforgivable pettiness! Pettiness? So is it not politics but pettiness that is behind this animosity? Is Sartre hated because he is too big?

The course of my thoughts in Paris was haphazard, chaotic, and permeated by a specific kind of extremism . . . as a consequence of the accidental juxtaposition of Sartre and Proust, all of France fell apart into Proust and Sartre. When one day I made a pious pilgrimage (I, a born antipilgrim!) to the windows of Sartre's apartment on that little square next door to Deux Magots, I no longer doubted that they had chosen Proust over Sartre. Yes, they had chosen the restaurant *du coté de chez Swann*, where elaborate morsels were served, prepared by a chef who, himself a gourmet, knew how to encourage delectation. I was told once that high-class chefs usually kill the turkey slowly, with a pin, for the meat is tastier then—well, now, to return to Proust, I will not deny him a tragic air, severity, even cruelty, but all of this, like the turkey's torments, is edible after all; it contains a gastronomic intention, remains in touch with the platter, veggies, and sauce. . . . And on the other side, *du coté de chez Sartre*, was the most distinct French thinking since Descartes, with an enraged dynamic that destroyed all their tasting. . . . Stop! What? Two or three girls, two girls, a group bubbling with laughter, playful, a charming, young France suited to nakedness, tears into my meditation, they walk by the square, disappear at the corner—Sartre sort of hurt me in that instant, I felt that he was ruining them . . . but when they disappeared from view, when I saw *Messieurs-Dames* before me in a gastronomic age, I understood that for them there was no salvation beyond Sartre. He was a liberating energy, the only energy that could tear them out of ugliness—I will say more, French ugliness, accumulating for centuries in apartments, behind curtains, amid bibelots, and not being able to stand itself anymore, produced Sartre, a sinister Messiah . . . he alone could destroy their restaurants, drawing rooms, top hats, galleries, cabarets, feuilletons, theaters, rags,

scarves, reduce the Louvre, the Champs-Élysées, the statues, and the Place de la Concorde at sunset, and the Bois de Boulogne to ashes! It was not shocking to me; on the contrary, it is admirable that this philosophy was born in an unprepossessing Frenchman, and with such a passionately artistic sensibility. Who had more right to demand withdrawal behind the object, behind the body, behind the “I” even, into a sphere *pour soi*, where one exists for oneself? To introduce as Nothingness into man—but this also leads to cleansing oneself of ugliness!

Sartre, not Proust! The powerlessness of Proust when compared with Sartre’s creative intensity! How is it they did not notice this! Half of his deductions from *Being and Nothingness* are unacceptable to me, they do not correspond to my truest experiences in life and I am convinced that his *cogito* cannot survive its absolutism, and that in spite of its singularity it demands some sort of other, supplementary principle, equally fundamental but antinomous—for it is easy to see that in his concrete application this thought sins with its awful one-sidedness, it looks as if one face were being taken away from a two-faced god; this is half the truth. And Sartre, as a moralist, psychologist, aesthete, politician, is for me only one half of what he should be. (Should I add, however, ignoramuses, that I also do not know Sartre well, that in spite of my admiration, I have not read all his works, that in *Being and Nothingness* there are chapters I have only glanced at?) It is certain that it is he who is breaking down closed doors, no one else. That which in Proust, in all of French literature, is the continuation but pretty close to the end, in Sartre takes on the character of a beginning, a start. And if in Proust the awareness is continually greedy (but what a tumble when compared with Montaigne), in Sartre it regains the pride of a creative force.

I, a Pole . . . I, an Argentinean . . . Slav and South American . . . writer lost in Paris and hungering to sting, to annoy . . . I, the melancholy lover of a lost past . . . I sought an alliance with Sartre against Paris. And I was tempted by that little trick in order suddenly to elevate and isolate someone already cataloged.



I am not attacking Paris from any other angle, and I limit myself to beauty in getting even with it; perhaps because I am, however, an artist to some extent, maybe because I am still fixed in that cast-off, that beauty beyond the ocean; and maybe because beauty is a galling argument.

But what sort of cult of nakedness am I talking about when I say that Paris has lost its nakedness? Could I be more precise?

I do not demand that they worship the body, nature, naturalness, simpleheartedly and I do not demand that they sing hymns to nudists.

But I do demand of man that the idea of the beauty of the human species live in him—this he should not forget. “I belong to a race that enthralls me.” “I worship the beauty of the world through human beauty.”

That is why it is important, even very important, that we never break within ourselves with the period of the human lifetime in which beauty becomes accessible—this is youth. For whatever beauty is gained in old age, it will always be incomplete beauty, marred by a lack of youth. This is why young beauty is naked beauty, the only kind one need not be ashamed of.

And someone constantly joined to youth will never like clothes. This is the foundation of my aesthetics. I am all about this aversion to clothes. That is why I will never reconcile myself to Paris, which adores clothes.



A different matter: I have become the winner of *Wiadomości*'s award for the *Diary*.

I will say honestly that this gave me much pleasure, and even joy. And I will say honestly (nothing except honesty!) that the description of the ties and torments of the jury, also included in this publication, entertained me even more. All of it worked out splendidly. In the discussion Mr. Zygmunt Nowakowski made the best impression on me as an upstanding fellow, honest and certainly not petty—I would shake his hand gladly, but I know he wouldn't want me to. General Kukiel also spoke frankly, tersely, and to the point—bravo! Mr. Grubiński was a model of caution and restraint, and Mr. Stanisław Baliński did what he could so that I would not get the award, but instead of doing it with class, he twisted, connived, and schemed, demonstrating a rather hackneyed hypocrisy and a small-caliber perfidy—this poet is less and less to my liking, his format is too pocket-sized.

I owe thanks to the persons who fought for me. Mr. Sakowski gave an imperious speech that was about 75 percent honest (which is really something). As long as we are talking about honesty, I regret that the gathering could not manage to state one ultraobvious truth, namely, that I was granted the award under pres-

sure, simply because they could no longer keep someone worshipped by Paris and other capitals under a bushel basket without creating a scandal (I am not referring, of course, to those few members who have long tried to force me through at the risk of their own good reputations). Why, tell me, should they pretend they were discovering, after scrupulous consideration, the virtues of my pen, if this Honorable Jury found out about these virtues from the French and other nations (not to mention such scorned “lipsmackers” as Jeleński, Sandauer, and Mieroszewski)? Truth is no sin! Honesty! A man feels better immediately! It particularly surprised me that the poet Baliński led everyone to believe that he had recognized my works before the war. Phooey, what snobbery! How could Baliński have known such sacred mysteries!

I will add with no less frankness that the honorable members evidence too much servility toward each other. I was fortified by all the praise that came my way but my jaw dropped when I found out, incidentally, that Mr. Zygmunt Nowakowski is a “great writer,” that “ten serious and seasoned experts” make up the Jury, that Kukiel’s book is “splendid,” that Mackiewicz’s book is “Dostoevsky with a touch of Tolstoy,” that Mr. Z. Nowakowski is “steadfast,” that Messrs. Kukiel and Nowakowski are “excellent,” etc., etc. My dear gentlemen, if I sing my own praises in the diary then at least we all know I am doing it for myself, but to divide self-glorification into voices and to create for this purpose a collective organ with a polyphonic structure, this is far too sophisticated for me and even a bit of a scam. Kiddies, don’t get upset by these moralizing tidbits, tit for tat.

Strange are the ways of gods and men. I have been granted this award at the very moment that I came down hard on *Wiadomości*, accusing it of passing over me in a silence worse than that of the red press in Poland. I came down hard on them, but, as always, sincerely. Agreed, *Wiadomości* has spoken of me rarely in the course of the last few years, very rarely, here a mention, there a review, so it wouldn’t look as if they were treating me on equal terms with other writers. But it is obvious that an émigré literary periodical is not a bureaucratic window taking care of customers waiting in line. A publication like this is supposed to support free Polish art—to preserve its influence—to publicize the artists’ successes in the world—and all the more so if they are repressed in Poland. If not for *Kultura*, not a lame soul would have known that I had done something for the sake of Poland.

Never mind. I am glad that in recent issues *Wiadomości* has begun to treat

me well and I must admit that editor Grydzewski gave proof of great restraint in publishing a positive article and other equally friendly notes about me with true English phlegm in spite of how ruthlessly I expressed myself. My continuing relations with this paper could be better or worse, or altogether good—this is up to it completely—but I, at any rate, will try not to handle anything with kid gloves. Honesty! Openness! Integrity! Feet on the table! This is the basis of social health!

X

In Paris, still blindly in love with Argentina, I felt Younger (which confirmed the charming youthfulness of Argentina and my own youthfulness as a lover). I also felt Younger as a Pole, I, an ambassador of younger cultures. Thus was I fortified in my diatribe against the old age of Paris and pushed into nakedness. But personally I was getting on in years. And I did whatever I could, I, a writer, in order to be older than the Parisians, more cunning, refined, so as not to allow them to catch me being naive. . . . I pushed before them this youth prepared à la Paris, that is, old, with all the maturity I could stand.

So in the end I no longer knew what I was: young or old? In this cacophony I hit on more than one dissonance. . . .



I asked them who X was, whom I knew only thirdhand. They answered that he was a well-known writer. I said, all right, a writer, but who is he? They explained that he was associated with surrealism but recently had devoted himself to a specific objectivism. I said, fine, objectivism, but who is he? They told me he belonged to the Melpomène group. I answered that I agree to Melpomène, but who is he? They responded that his genre was characterized by a combination of *argot* and fantastical metaphysics. Then I said that I agree to the combination, but who is he? To which they answered that he received the Prix St. Eustache four years ago.

This was in a small but delightful culinary nook overlooking the Seine and I was downing a *mouton* that had a heavenly aftertaste. I suddenly understood my tactlessness: what do you care who your cook is, I mean you eat not him but his dishes. Parenthetically speaking, this was tactless not just regarding cooks but

regarding tailors, for the question “who one is” is by its very nature denuding (and antiphenomenological, to boot). After all, a French writer is not going to parade around naked, there are thousands of coats floating in the air, you put out your arm, grab the coat most to your liking, and voilà, you are a *romancier*, *historien d’art*, a Catholic, or a *pataphysicien* . . . the air is swarming with techniques, directions, solutions, levels, platforms, the Parisian air is refreshing and light, like a furniture cart. This literature knows practically no raw material, it feeds itself on disquisitions that succumb to further disquisitions. I shouted that I was neither a writer nor a member of anything, neither a metaphysician nor an essayist. I was me—free, unencumbered, living. . . . Ah, yes, they said, so you are an existentialist.

But my transoceanic nakedness, from over there, from the pampa, nakedness that I needed for my love of Argentina (in spite of my age!), does not allow me *not* to be denuding with them. Something indecent was created. With what embarrassment these hotshots accepted my passionately naive gaze, reaching them through their clothes . . . deadly discretion, discreet melancholy, tactful understatement, were an answer to my desire from over there, from the peripheries of the world, from the fatherland of the Indians. Dressed from head to foot, wrapped up, even though it was May, with faces fashioned by hairdressers . . . and each one had a small, completely naked statue in his pocket, for him to look at with the eye of an expert. Modesty and discretion predominate. No one imposes himself on others. Each one does what belongs to him. They produce and function. Culture and civilization. Imprisoned in clothes, they can barely move, similar to insects smeared with something sticky; when I began to remove my pants there arose such consternation, they bolted for the doors and windows. I remained alone. There was no one left in the restaurant, even the cooks had run away . . . it was only then that I noticed that, wha—, my God, what am I doing, what is wrong with me . . . and grimacing, I stood with one cuff on my foot, the other in my hand.

Then Kot walks in off the street and, seeing me standing there like that, asks me, astounded: —Have you gone crazy? I am cold and ashamed and say that, yes, I was beginning to reveal a bit of myself but all of them ran away. He says: —You’ve gone mad, you’re confused, who in the world would be afraid of your nakedness here? Why, where else in the world will you find such tearing of raiment . . . wait, you happened on rabbits, but I will invite such lions that even if you dance naked on the table, they won’t bat an eye! Then we made a bet between ourselves, not a

modern but a Polish squire's bet (I felt not Argentine but Polish with Kot because we had that shared grandmother), a late nineteenth-century sort of bet. Well, great. He asked the right people, intellectuals that undressed most brutally—I, nothing, until we got to dessert, when I begin to take off my trousers. They all scam, politely excusing themselves, pretending it is time for them to go! So Leonor Fini and Kot say to me: —What's going on? It can't be that they got scared off, why they have intellectuals that specialize in this kind of thing! I am very heavyhearted indeed, sadness is devouring me and I almost burst into bitter tears, but I say: —The point is that they, you will notice, dress themselves even while undressing and their nakedness is just one more pair of pantaloons. But when I just dropped my pants in no special way, they were ready to throw up, and mainly because I did not do it à la Proust or Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Montaigne or existential psychoanalysis but just for the heck of it, to take them off.



An interview with Marc Pierret for *France Observateur*.

In one interview I said that they are like Pavlov's dogs.

Oh, oh! I shouldn't have said that! From then on their artificiality took on the character of an artificial dog and the howling of mannered dogs rang in the streets in the night silence.



When a grown man tears himself away from a young man, nothing will stop him from increasing artificiality.

Their being together—in whatever—happens through a system of signs agreed upon, as if over the phone, all directness is strictly forbidden. A conditioned reflex—that is the whole secret! If you want Pavlov's dog to salivate, you do not have to show him meat, just honk a horn. If you want them to go into raptures, you have to recite Cocteau's poem or show them Cézanne—then they go into raptures, they associate this with beauty, they salivate, or rather, applause appears on their hands.

In this magic world, full of signs, symbols, slogans, rituals, ceremonies, formulas, gestures, I have had really strange adventures.

I knew well, long before I arrived in Paris, that it was harder and harder to speak here; one can see this from their books, which are more and more mute . . .

but I did not know that it was true to such a degree! On the second or third day after the breakfast with Breza, I went to supper with a few writers . . . licking my spiritual chops, because these were first-rate minds! The production of introductory conditioned reflexes—namely greetings, compliments—went smoothly and as long as the conversation was carried on according to this reflex, everything went fine, a joke was told, I laughed and they laughed. Until finally, distressed by the dogs, choking on the laboratory dogs that were literally lunging for my throat and baying in my gullet, howling in awful torment in their unending *qui pro quo*'s, I wanted to say something. . . . God almighty, is my sin so awful, I simply expressed a so-called thought . . . about life or art . . . as often happened to me in the Café Fragata in Buenos Aires. They went mute. They devoted themselves exclusively to eating and keeping silent, keeping silent and eating took up the rest of the symposium. I was aghast, I think to myself, what is this, have I offended them . . . but the next day I was at supper at Vladimir Weidlé's and I tell him, how and what, over cheese, and he says to me that no one in Paris talks anymore . . . that in Paris one talks to avoid talking . . . he said, in example, that the annual banquet the Prix Goncourt jury meets at a certain, fair, restaurant, and talks exclusively about food so as not to say anything about art. . . .

Sure, when a man loses the young man in himself forever, where will he get a little lightness, where the strength, that could stop him from endlessly gaining weight? So it is with them: an awful difficulty crawled into their articulation, someone might even want to say something, but he cannot, it's too difficult, too deep, too high, too subtle . . . and each person pays homage to his difficulty with his silence. I meet Butor at a party at the comtesse's, I say to him that I am happy because, well, when we are together in Berlin, we will talk ourselves out, even if on the subject of the *nouveau roman français*. Instead of an answer, the leader laughed out loud—and this was a polite excluding laugh, completely hermetic, the laugh of a can of sardines in the Sahara. . . . Good gracious!

The genius of Paris does not stop its feverish activity, works and ideas are born in the womb of the boldest of cities, racing at the very head today, just as centuries ago . . . however, I would say that some sort of painful waywardness has emerged between the city and its inhabitants, this genius is changing into some sort of antigenius, one would like to say that they are inhibited by their own bold-

ness, their courage frightens them, their rebelliousness makes them cozy, their being above average casts them into the average . . . and so they walk around this Spirit of theirs like field hands tending their milch cows and selling their milk. Paris, yes, a palace, but they gave the impression of being the palace servants.

. . . palace servants. In Paris, city of dogs who salivate if you honk, I had wayward and perverse adventures. One night, while returning from a tasty bistro with a good wine on the brain and seeing the open gates of a palace alive with the loveliest baroque lines, I think to myself . . . I'll drop in . . . and I dropped in . . . and there were ballrooms, sculpture, bas-relief ceilings, a coat of arms, and gold leaf. Then a small man appeared, well dressed but so modest that I thought he must be the majordomo or a valet. I ask him to show me the rooms and he calls his wife, sons, first one son comes out, then right afterward another, then a third, they show me everything very politely, wherever they have to they dust, blow, touch the sculptures, paintings, sweep, brush off . . . it was only at parting, when I reached into my pocket, that he said, ah, no, I am the prince, this is my wife, the princess, my son the margrave, the count, and the viscount. I said good-bye to them in a silence that resembled stagnant water.

I went out into the street and walked for a long time until I finally reached the statues in the Jardin des Tuilleries—in the evening light the soft and curving nakedness of the statues surrounded me, swaying and fluid, graceful, slender, then . . . except that it was of stone, stone cold, a paradox, I confess, because it was immobile movement, lifeless life, hard softness, cold warmth, and this is how all this lives lifelessly at night in the moonlight. . . I think to myself what magic is this, what a paradox . . . and here the paradox expands, stiffens, and outgrows itself . . . and I thought that it would be best not to stand here too long in this paradox, between statues, it would be better to leave. . . I began to leave, slowly at first, then faster and faster, but there were lots of statues, a stone forest. . . I dodge, I turn . . . and then I stood there as if changed into stone. Dogs before me! I look: it was a marble Actaeon who, having seen Diana naked a moment earlier, now fled . . . but his own dogs were after him, baring their teeth, their fangs, they are upon him, they are biting him to death! . . .

But how awful! The mortal sin of the daredevil pursued by dogs, fleeing, did not move at all. . . . And it went on, like this, without respite, for eternity, like a

frozen stream. And in the encounter with petrified sin Pavlov began to howl, all the way to the outskirts of Paris . . . and Pavlov howled piercingly in the still night! I went home.



The plastic arts are invading their literature more and more—one can see this in the criticism, the genre is being applied to a literary work straight out of painting exhibits and galleries. In the plastic arts epochs, styles, movements, overshadow the artist's individuality (which can express itself infinitely more freely in words than in pictures)—this advantage of the collectivity and abstraction is also apparent in literary criticism. The plastic arts are closer to a thing than to a man; the painter or sculptor fabricates objects and therefore one approaches a literary work like an object. The catalog is overwhelming the critics; the most important thing is cataloging, including in a group, in a movement, criticism becomes more and more objective, there is more and more theory in it, the critic is less and less of an artist and more and more of a researcher, expert, scholar, and source of information.

Critics of painting or sculpture must write about them as about something basically alien and external, because painting values cannot be grasped by means of the word, the word and the brush are two separate disciplines. Criticism of literature, on the other hand, is words about words, literature about literature. What is the result? That a literary critic must be an artist of the word and a cocreator; there can be no talk of “describing” literature the way one—unfortunately—describes paintings. One must participate in this criticism; it cannot be external; it cannot be a criticism of things.

But ever since they strangled youth in themselves with its sacred inclination to embrace and attract, their world becomes more and more external. That is, objective. The *nouveau roman français* is also a melancholy resignation from humanity in favor of the world, there is no poetry in it. . . .

Or, rather, this poetry is too one-sided. It is a poetry deprived of exactly the things that make up the poetry of youth: charm, which attracts and disarms. It does not know how to, does not want to, appeal . . . it lacks lightness, ease, originality, that which does not distinguish and specify but fuses and blurs. . . . And this young poetry is attainable if the writer knows that he is a writer—for young people as well.

That all literature is also a literature for young people. That an adult also exists for a young person.

Beauty, poetry, produced exclusively among fifty-year-olds, forty-year-olds . . . hm, what? Heck if I know. It would be better if all phases in our development played in us at once—this would be real music! It is difficult to produce beauty in isolation from the age at which man is beauty.

Otherwise the works will have all the possible virtues except one: attractiveness. They will lose the secret of attracting. It will be competent and repulsive literature.

French literature or literature in general? I keep confusing Paris with the world.



With Geneviève Serreau and Maurice Nadeau. Little supper. *Truffles à la Soubise* and *Crème Languedoc Monsieur le Duc*. I speak, they listen. Hm . . . I don't like this . . . when I left Buenos Aires for the provinces, for Santiago del Estero, I kept quiet and those writers talked . . . only a provincial, a guy who wants to prove himself, always talks.



Genet! Genet! Imagine! How embarrassing! That homosexual attached himself to me, kept following me, I go somewhere with acquaintances and there he is on the corner, somewhere, under a lamppost, beckoning or something . . . sending me signals! Just as if we were out of the same mold! Shame! And also—the possibility of blackmail! Before leaving the hotel, I looked out the window . . . he wasn't there. . . . I leave . . . there he is! His huddled shoulders gape at me!

It was only in Paris that I got acquainted with Genet. In Argentina I knew nothing about him. I am emphasizing this because it is important that people know that my *Pornografía*, whatever else it may be, is a spontaneous birth and not conceived from a romance with Genet. About a week after landing on the streets of Paris, I was given his *Les pompes funèbres*.

I open it. First impression? This is from the war, the years 1939–45; this is the most perfect extract of that awful taste. I have never read a book that was more “wartime.” Second impression? People, he fused ugliness and beauty into one

angel, in his work both look out with the same eyes, what impertinence, what heroism! Third impression? Brilliant France, once again you have come up with a safecracker who, using a crowbar, opens doors locked with a key—you astound and horrify me! The fourth? Poetry! The fifth? He, the hoodlum, did a good job of sniffing out a fireproof safe with unheard of but forbidden wealth! The sixth? Oh, how difficult and unavoidable this is, like a dream, like Golgotha, deriving from destiny and connected to fate. . . .

The seventh? It seemed to me that it was I who brought out Genet, I thought him up just the way I thought up scenes from my books. . . . And if he outdid me, then he did so as a creation of my own imagination.

But I felt confused . . . this brotherly soul was, hm, compromising . . . Not just, however. This hand which tried to touch me in a forbidden way under the lamppost was so cold!

In spite of this, I could not get myself to look through other works of his and I gave even *Les pompes funèbres* a rather cursory read. What do you want, telephones, meetings, turmoil, and so it passed. . . . I did not read it carefully. I did, however, buy Sartre's study of Genet, *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*, a book of 578 pages, and in my free time I devoted myself to the seesaw Genet-Sartre, Sartre-Genet. But I didn't read Sartre carefully either, although his existential psychoanalysis is equal, to my understanding, in terms of the amount and quality of discoveries, to eleven or twelve Prousts. What do you want, this is how it worked out. After all, you know that books are not read carefully. I read the way everybody else does.

During my reading the question arose: what is it in Genet and in Sartre's interpretation of Genet that I have to defend myself against the two of them, against Genet himself and against Sartre's Genet? What makes them repugnant to me?

After all, this poet shook me up. As for Sartre, it was with delight that I saw how, in his understanding, Genet the pederast loses his separate, "abnormal" character in order to merge with "normal" ones in profoundest humanity: someone who, like everyone else, merely "became" a homosexual and "became" a criminal the way others "become" sports figures or merchants. The humanity with which Sartre treated Genet's inhumanity, that disarming of the demonic in a study, leading the demonic to ecstasy, seemed to me a considerable intellectual achievement. Yet I could not resist the impression that Sartre was taken in by Genet. Fine,

according to Sartre, Genet turns against his own freedom in an act of free choice by choosing a self that is a “thief,” “pederast,” and “bad guy”—an act that confirms freedom as much as it negates it—and a dialectical process emerges whereby that which is aimed against one’s own freedom leads being to general ruin, being becomes a phantasmagoria, the internal contradictions of Evil, which “is” negation enabling even Evil to exist . . . and thus Genet recovers his freedom through nothingness, freedom that he has renounced and along with it, the world. Fine. Yet this reasoning, without losing the ground under its feet for even a moment, somehow, somewhere became suspended in a void . . . why?

And why did the Genet who announces that he chooses Evil and wants Evil arouse as many doubts in me as a cutthroat telling tall tales to a prosecuting attorney? Someone allowed himself to be taken in. Sartre by Genet? Genet by Genet? A surprise of sorts crouched on the other side of the menacing gates allegedly leading to hell. No, it was not hell but something else. What? Easiness. Listen, how easily, how simply and unremarkably, everything happened: this boy, Genet, began to steal because he had to get money from somewhere; and he became a pederast by following the voice of his body. And this, too, happened normally, smoothly, gradually, in a million imperceptible moments of existence, no longer from minute to minute but second to second; smoothly therefore; in and of itself; in carelessness; in irresponsibility; in the flurry of life; among companions, equally easygoing. As for Absolute Evil, he attached it to his existence only after beginning to write when more advanced in years and it was necessary for literature. It was only then that he announced that he had chosen Evil; but he did not add that he had chosen it *ex post*. And Sartre’s study was not an interpretation of his existence but merely an interpretation of an interpretation . . . he got busy on Genet’s life only after it had already been mythologized by Genet in his art.

With what *ease* the diabolical temple has come tumbling down; and it has tumbled down into facility.

Someone else, I assume, would be disturbed by this; how is it that everything gets explained away so easily? I knew, however, that this was not a coincidence and that if there were something that could trip up the two of them, Genet and Sartre, then it was this *ease*—as if it were the most insurmountable obstacle.

What finally pushed me away from this poet who, like me, tried to make the highest good of young beauty and put a twenty-year-old on a pedestal?

Why, he did not grasp youth, at its most profound—its essence is disarming; it is relaxation, inadequacy, something that can never attain full existence and thereby is something transitional, which simplifies and absolves of sin. For him it was a crime—cruelty—sin—holiness—torture . . . this monk, sinner, saint, criminal, and executioner approached it with knife in hand to make it frightening and to thrust it into extremity.

How characteristic that in Paris, the capital of the world, the most brazen attempt at deifying youth ended by casting it into hell—into sin—into morality, and so into culture. Not for a moment did Genet allow it to loosen up whole centuries of French morality; on the contrary, he took it to its greatest power and rigidity, turning a supple hazelnut tree into murderous steel. And to this youth, concocted by old age, Sartre applied his even more mature analyses. . . . O Paris! Are you and Sartre and Genet and I and all of us ever going to be able to take a break from that rockier and rockier road to Mastery? Never even once look back? O Argentina! Is the past unattainable? I will add something more to erase the melancholy pathos of these last sentences. I saw Winczakiewicz. I spoke on the radio. I met Antonio Berni on the Quai de la Tournelle.

1964

XI

I landed at Tegel airport in Berlin on the sixteenth of May, one year ago.

Professor von Bonhard, a representative of the Ford Foundation, put me and my suitcases into his beautiful black car and drove me through the city. Me—just another piece of baggage. I landed in front of some building, somewhere in a park, elevator, corridor, room; large with an enormous window, stairs from this room to the top, where there is another room, balcony, bed, wardrobe, unpacking, table.

I went out on the balcony: rectangular blocks of fifteen-story buildings in lush greenery, a city-garden. I wallowed in these spaces after my Parisian hotel cubicle.

Ingeborg Bachmann, a poet from Austria, also invited by Ford and also living in the same Akademie der Künste, was the first person I made friends with. We took walks, both somewhat amazed, or stunned by this island (in a Communist ocean), or perhaps by something else, we had seen little, almost nothing, I recall that I was amazed by the lack of people in Berlin—when someone appeared in the distance we would shout, “Oh, oh, a man on the horizon!” In foreign, distant places one is visited by a difficulty in seeing, in discernment . . . this has to do especially with unusual, exotic places. . . . I remember, once on the Upper Paraná a full moon crawled right up under my nose, a few steps away, I pinched myself in vain, the luminous bubble over the water was right there and it was the moon, and you could put as much effort as you wanted into explaining to yourself that it was not like that but it was that way . . . the difficulty in getting our bearings that accompanies us everywhere, in our own homes, in a room, becomes more and more insistent, as one or more anomalies lend this place the character of something coded. Why did Berlin seem practically empty to me in those first days? I lived in a neighborhood in a park, but I was also driven around all the main streets.

I don't understand. *Fata morgana*. After a week I noticed there were quite a few people in Berlin after all.

After the confusion of Paris—blissful calm, blissful silence. A holiday. I am walking in the Tiergarten in the May sun and squinting. Nothing urgent to do, except for a few visits—then Professor Höllerer drove Miss Buchmann and me to Wannsee, where we were filmed. A few interviews. Vacation. And the coagulating of all that is behind me. Argentina, the journey, Paris, all is anaesthetized. . . .

It was then (while walking in the Tiergarten) that I caught a certain scent, a mixture of herbs, water, stone, wood bark, I couldn't say what exactly . . . yes, Poland, this was Polish, just like in Małoszyce, Bodzechów, my childhood, yes, yes, the same, why, it wasn't too far away now, a stone's throw away, the same nature . . . which I had left behind a quarter of a century earlier. Death. The cycle was coming to a close. I had returned to those scents, therefore, death. Death. I had come across my death in various circumstances but there was always some sort of missing each other that gave a perspective on life, meanwhile in the Tiergarten I came to know death head-on—and from that moment it has not left me. I should not have left America. Why didn't I understand that Europe meant my death? Why, for a man like me, for someone in my situation, any sort of getting closer to childhood and youth has to be deadly—and even though later “I was amazed” that something as delicate as a smell could so suddenly bring my life to a close, from then on death sat on my shoulder, like a bird, throughout my entire stay in Berlin.

And, at the same time, the period in Argentina, which was over, took on a mythological glow. While walking in the Tiergarten, I was recovering from oblivion the incredible moment when I, a 1939 Pole, found myself in Argentina, alone, alone on land lost in oceans, like a fish tail reaching the south pole, oh, the loneliness of Argentina on the map, its disappearance in waters, its being pushed to the bottom, drowning in distances. . . . Alone, lost, cut off, alien, unknown, a drowned man. My eardrums were still being assailed by the feverish din of European radio speakers, I was still being assaulted by the wartime roar of newspapers and already I was immersing myself in an incomprehensible speech and in a life quite remote from my former one. Which is what is called an uncommon moment. A silence like that in a forest, a silence such that one hears even the drone of a tiny fly after the commotion of the previous years, makes a strange music—and in this ripe and overwhelming silence, two exceptional, singular, specific words be-

gan to make themselves audible: Witold Gombrowicz. Witold Gombrowicz. I left for Argentina accidentally, for only two weeks, if by some quirk of fate the war had not broken out during those two weeks, I would have returned to Poland—but I did not conceal that when the door was bolted and I was locked in Argentina, it was as if I had finally heard my own voice.

Twenty-four years of this liberation from history. Buenos Aires—a camp of six million people, great camp ground, immigration from the entire globe, Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Germans, Japanese, Hungarians, mixed, temporary, from day to day . . . And the native Argentines spoke freely *que porquería de país* (swinish country) and their freedom sounded terrific after the stifling fury of nationalists. It was pure pleasure in those first years, knowing nothing of Argentina, knowing nothing of the parties, programs, leaders, newspapers, to live like a tourist. If this tourism did not leave me barren, it was because, luckily, as a writer used to manipulating form, I could undertake the shaping of my person from this new position, in this situation . . . but wasn't Argentina one of my predestinations, since as a child in Poland I did everything I could to march out of step in the parade?

The munificence of enormous waters whipped into eternity which divided me from European history! And then suddenly . . . a return, the move to Europe, and this into a place that is more bespattered with history than ever, into the most painful place. I was figuring out, I knew, that all this would not go smoothly, that generally this entire trip to Europe had become something much more dangerous from the very first than I could have foreseen when I was packing my bags in Buenos Aires. Something very desperate has been mixed into this journey. But who could have known that death would ambush me in the Tiergarten. A joke? Platitude? Sure, joke and platitude, but the kind that do not give up easily once they have sunk their claws into you. . . .



I was still mulling over Paris, thinking about Sartre.

Who is more provocative—Sartre or Voltaire's Pangloss? It is a little like having smoke rising from ruins and crematoria to the appropriate height and forming the words "freedom."

Never mind about the war and concentration camps—a proclamation of freedom like this would be a provocation always and everywhere. To try to con-

vince us that we are free, we, victims, martyrs, slaves, up to our ears in disease, addictions, desires, always in the rat race, drudgery, fear, panting, cowed? We are experiencing the most hideous slavery from early morning to late at night . . . and here Sartre talks about “freedom”! It only deepens the irony that the thought most at odds with our daily experience turns out to be quite reasonable and fertile in its various repercussions.

Can a philosophy whose starting point is consciousness have much in common with existence? Consciousness, as such, is something indifferent to life. Life knows only the categories of pain and pleasure. The world exists for us only as the possibility of pain or delight. Consciousness, if it is not the consciousness of pain or delight, has no meaning for us. I made myself aware of the existence of this tree, and so what? I couldn’t care less. Conscious being is no being—unless my sensitivity registers it. Not conscious being but felt being is important. Consciousness then must be the consciousness of sensitivity, not the direct consciousness of being.

But pain (and thus pleasure) of its very essence contradicts the concept of freedom. To say that we have the slightest possibility of freedom in suffering (which would be tied to the sense of purpose delineating our system of values, even if it were only freedom “in a given situation”), one has to scratch the meaning of the word. Suffering is something I don’t want, that I must “get through,” having no choice is its essence, that is, a lack of freedom. It is hard to come by greater opposites than suffering and freedom.

Assuming that existentialism’s starting point may be only sensitivity, I thereby exclude all existential philosophy that is the philosophy of freedom.

I write about Sartre to get away from Berlin. It is obvious—never write “about Berlin,” “Paris,” only about oneself . . . in Berlin and Paris. . . . I will not allow my writing to digress from the subject. But ever since I left Buenos Aires and came to know the wide world, it is harder to concentrate on myself, I, an Argentinean, corrupted by the South, saturated with its sun and sky, now walking under heavens whose shapes and lights have been lost in me. . . . I immerse myself in shrubs, or moss, reflective, excited, sniffing like a dog . . . that sharp northern sky with its scuttling clouds, space, time. Nothing over my head except speeding infinity. I once wrote that after arriving in Argentina, I experienced a kind of second youth, and this second youth somehow killed that other, first, Polish youth . . .

all that over there, Bodzechów, Małoszyc, my school years in Warsaw, my literary debut, cafés, was over in me, it fell away. So? What now? To find in oneself, outside the vastness of the heavens, this entire cast-off enormity, to drown, dissolve in it as well?

In the meantime Berlin began to take on the features of a city not all that easy. . . .

I had no illusions, of course, as to my German—but that all this should be so malicious! I saw the malice I am talking about when a certain official invited me to supper. Other people who spoke English were also asked, whereas I converse freely only in Spanish and French. Every once in a while they turned to me pleasantly but it always ended in mimicry. Then one of the people present reached for the German *Ferdydurke* lying on a shelf and began to read some of its passages.

This was very nice of him. But . . . I hear myself speaking, those are my words . . . but I do not understand . . . I see that I am speaking and that they understand, but I do not understand. . . . A strange split, as if I were merely the corporeal complement of that written Gombrowicz—and then I felt that my existence here must be incomplete and . . . and . . . rather physical. Which frightened me. But this is not my point, not my point. Should I go to Poland? This question began to plague me on the ship. In Paris they tried to talk me into it, go ahead, what'll it hurt, you will see how many friends you have. . . . And it was enough to get close to the windows for the northern sky, dark and boiling with clouds, to bear down, confound it, for my prehistory to bear down on me from all sides, from colors, ways of walking, boarding the bus, the caps, the German smile which was right next door to a Polish smile. To go? Or not to go? I would not be journeying to Poland but to myself as I was . . . and this I feared a bit. It meant nothing that everything there had been turned inside out and was unrecognizable—I would have found myself. But I could not handle this, the whole Argentine period was eluding my grasp too handily when the slip sailed away from Buenos Aires, I was too lost. . . . A great opportunity, oh, pencil pushers, to shout in chorus: —Such is the fate of an emigrant and egoist! Nonsense. The fate of any person, at a certain age, whose life has split into two parts. To peer into that moldy well where I would see my ten-year-old, sixteen-year-old, and twenty-year-old face and go to the cemetery to dig up the grave where I lay . . . and at the same time to greet my family, friends, exchange views, participate in social gatherings?

Lost in such thoughts, inundated with fears (because ever since leaving Argentina I am stalked by anxiety) and with this death, encountered in the Tiergarten, I began my life in Berlin. After a two-week stay in the Akademie der Künste, I was moved to a comfortable apartment on Hohenzollerndamm. I unpacked and arranged my things. During this time I became acquainted with almost all the leading writers and editors (Berlin was hosting the cream of German literature), with whom, unfortunately, I could not always converse. Günter Grass, Peter Weiss, Uve Johnson, my fellow writers, spoke poor French. Generally, after a twenty-five-year absence, Europe seemed to be a Tower of Babel. Sometimes six different languages were spoken at a dinner for ten people. Airplanes flung people around, I knew people who had three apartments, one in each capital—Rome, Berlin, Zurich, let us say—each for ten days per month. This new, modern Europe was impossible to grasp; it was too fast, galloping, I held it in my hands like a bomb, I didn't know what to do with it. But this is not my point, not my point. West Berlin, divided by the infamous wall from the East, has a little over two million people and occupies an enormous space in proportion to its numbers, bestowing parks, lakes, forests, every instant; some neighborhoods are so sunk in trees that one does not know, buildings or forest. City-spa, the most comfortable of all the known cities, where cars move smoothly without traffic jams and the people move smoothly, unhurriedly, where crowds and stuffiness are almost unknown. An unusual IDYLL in the air: older men are tenderly walking their well-groomed dogs, a neat woman waters flowerpots on the windowsill, cars stop politely at traffic signals, a worker is unloading packages with a smile, someone is eating a pastry on the café veranda, a lovely, pedigreed maiden is window shopping. . . . POLITENESS. In the elevators strangers are exchanging bows and courteous words. If you ask a passerby for a street, he will take you there, going out of his way. In conversations one hears a tone that inspires trust, as if lying, irony, and malice had been banished from here forever. An immeasurable CORRECTNESS appears in collars, ties, fingers, fingernails, shoes, in the way taxis drive up, in the way clients are waited on, in the gesture of the postal clerk, in choosing the correct stamps or sticking them on your letter. A deep MORALITY in the eyes, and in the whole body, in the outline of a hat down to the shoes. CONGENIALITY, SERENITY, and GOOD WILL permeate the city, whose living standard is higher than that of the United States. BEAUTY often looks you in the face, reticently northern and strong. In the city, nerve center of the

world, island, and with a wall to boot, one sees practically no police, one can walk for miles without seeing a uniform . . . in this green spa, in idyllic Berlin. . . . But this is not the point, not the point. I ate my suppers in a garden restaurant on Fehrbelliner Platz: serene, trees, umbrellas. Sparrows, which no German ever chases, sat on my table and pecked at whatever they could get. Two fountains, parrot-bright with constantly changing colors, like two bouquets in the area of the tables, among the conversing guests, the bustle of the waiters. And every so often it was red's turn, and then I, in innocent Berlin, thought of blood and blood spurted from the pitiless earth! But this is not the point, not the point. Berlin . . . no, this is not easy, perhaps it would be easier if,—oh, Hamlet!—I didn't have bad dreams. A good six months after living on Bartningallee, and eating my breakfasts in the restaurant on Hansaplatz, I had the following experience. Across from me, a few tables away, sat a German, an older man, with trembling hands, probably retired, with a tankard of beer, a little touched in the head maybe, but movingly sociable—he greeted the waiters, me, and other guests with great warmth, enthusiastically took advantage of the least opportunity to speak out or to gesture with his arm, his loneliness must have been great . . . (was it from *over there*, I, the ahistorical one, asked). He always turned to me with particular relish: —lovely today, eh? . . . (long pause) . . . what snow! . . . (fifteen-minute silence) . . . a cigar perhaps? . . . Once we left together, it was Sunday, he said that, you know, on Sunday excursion buses leave from here, perhaps we could take one? . . . I said, no, thank you. He looked, silent, finally he said his hands were trembling, he said something in German, of which I understood only bits, just scraps: —not to go . . . to go . . . not to get there . . . the various things that could happen . . . one cannot, there is nothing, nothing, there is nothing, what do you want (*was wollen Sie?*) . . . *ganz unmöglich*, impossible, why this cannot be (*das kann nicht sein*) . . . too bad, too bad (*schade*) nothing (*nichts*) . . . *nein* . . . *aber sehen Sie, mein Herr, das ist vielleicht trotzdem, und gegenüber* . . . He ended emphatically: —*Nichts*. And thus he stood, somehow contradicting, resistant, stubborn, steadfast, and elusive, categorical, resigned, desperate, wavering, soft, hard, dramatic, decent, with something on his lips . . . with a complaint . . . protest . . . negation, perhaps emptiness, perhaps nothing. . . . I, on the other hand, stood, unable to understand, grasp, figure out, I stood over these words as if I were standing over a pile of scattered blocks . . . or over a hole from which blew denial. . . . But this was not the point, not the point. So what then?!

Since leaving Argentina, I have lost the thread—and here, in Berlin, too many threads crisscrossed—there were houses, streets, trees, lawns, asphalt, I stood in all this, he was babbling something, I don't know, death, mine or theirs, was brushing against me again, I have to go home, smile, bow. . . .

XII

Lady Macbeth. They keep washing and washing their hands . . . (for starters).

Faucets. Bathrooms. Hygienic washing . . . yet.

The length of legs and a certain paleness in the eyes and the neck and the color of skin . . . egoistic . . . (But Swedes, for example? Norway, Holland?)

Waiters. Ballet. Rock. They never suffer. They are without blemish. Courtesy. (The German as actor.)

Do they like masks and games? (One can come at it from this side, generally, unfortunately, everything is possible).

Seclusion. They work well together, that is, they give of themselves only partly, within the context of their functions. Their loneliness is devoured by their transformation of the world and by satisfying their needs. They marry early. To employ the woman, to harness her to work. . . .

The North, the North . . . How much of them is in them, and how much is simply the North (the English? Swedes? Danish?). The answer to this: Northern characteristics grow stronger and change in their mass, incredibly compact. And finally they change into wings. Irresistible! (One can do it this way. When one man thinks about a few dozen million . . . he can do anything. . . .)

A German left to other Germans.

A German condemned to Germans, that is, in its simplest version: whom should he trust if not his engineer, general, thinker? German work has always been very solid. Germans, here is a nation where the worker puts his trust in the elite, and the elite places its trust in the worker. . . . It is true that they lost both big wars, but they kept the whole world in check, and until they were trounced, their leaders led them from victory to victory. In spite of everything, they are accustomed to victories: in the factory, in war, in carrying out all their assignments . . . Hitler, too, was a matter of trust.

Because they could not believe that it was so coarse, they had to accept it as brilliant. . . .

Parallel: a Pole informed by defeat, a German—by victory.

They are not more capable, just more afraid of what is slapdash—which is alien to them . . . (the face of an electrician, fixing the wires in the elevator, attentive, painful, almost martyrlike).

Etc., etc. One could also take the line of arbitrary, accidental comparisons and see what comes of them. . . . For example, eyes—eye sockets, work as a variant of the camera, being reduced to eating, the relation movement-rest, or, for example, what is always *behind them* when they walk . . . (one could say a great deal; and the benefit is certain, that this would preserve me from the same, eternal, schematic concepts in which they are boxed up . . .).

Not to inform oneself.

Not to read, neither books nor newspapers.

Not to look at the wall.

Not to get too interested in anything.

To sit in the café and stare at the street. . . .

(Notes, compiled in the café on Kurfürstendamm, while I waited for Zuzanna Fels).



No, I am not writing about Berlin, I am writing about myself—this time in Berlin—I have no right to write about anything else. Do not lose sight of your subject!

I recognized other artists invited, like me, by the Ford Foundation. I had a few fine suits made for myself. I was finishing up the chapters of my diary that deal with my journey to Argentina and my stay in Paris. I was flooded with invitations: concerts, exhibits, colloquia.

It seems, however, that That Thing from a quarter of a century ago caused me, a somewhat ahistorical newcomer from across the ocean, the most sleepless nights . . . or thrust me into sleep. . . . The idyll went hand in hand with a certain monstrosity, which one could not identify for certain as today's monstrosity or yesterday's—because, in the final analysis, today comes from yesterday. Berlin dogs, for example, are ultra *correct*, one after another, yet I did see, maybe some-

where deep down, dogs emerging, dogs that had assumed a monstrous appearance. Every once in a while a little word no less horrid was uttered and also stretched between yesterday and today—did I imagine, for example (because this mixing of time gets into your sleep), that someone said to me, “You know, here somewhere close by is a hospital where cripples too awful to show to even the closest family members are kept locked up. Their families are told that they died.” People say: There on the other side of the wall was Hitler’s bunker (was, or is? Because it still is, though as a former bunker). People say: Oh, the war, those were bad years! Or: I have been alone since the war, my husband and son died then. I was driven to the prison and shown an ordinary, bright room with iron hooks in the ceiling—used to hang people who fought against Hitler—but maybe not to hang but to strangle (because I didn’t understand all that well, sometimes I didn’t even hear well, as happens in the mountains, on great rivers, in places where nature become fantastic). And again: This “was,” or “still is” . . . although not quite, already eroded by Time. But I had to see on the streets of a city so decent, so deeply moral, not just monstrous dogs, but people-monsters, for who could guarantee that the right foot of this man of a certain age did not once effectively crush someone’s throat? Their astounding strength in overcoming their past sometimes makes it hard to believe. . . . In this city the whine, the howl of an idiotic dog, a macabre dog, is united with an appealing will to normalcy.

The scene of crime or virtue? I, a person from Argentina, rather ahistorical and inexperienced, kept having the feeling that Berlin, like Lady Macbeth, was endlessly washing its hands. . . . And, in these conditions, the generations beginning life, that enormous revivifying and purifying wave, starting from something like the beginning, inundating the past, took on a distinct meaning—but this German youth constantly eluded my understanding because our lame dialogues, a bit in German, a bit in French, did not allow us to really get close to one another. Of all our meetings, the one most vivid in my memory is celebrating the New Year 1964 in a certain young painter’s studio, where I found myself because of my Greek friend, Christos Joachimedes. When I stepped into the half-lit, split-level studio and saw northern youth, laid out on couches, standing in corners, I immediately noticed their confinement to their own hands, the hands were strongest, they filled the room as they grew denser or thinned out, strong, large, clean, with carefully trimmed nails, civilized. And the heads accompanied the hands, the way a cloud

accompanies the earth (this was not a new impression, once earlier Roby Santucho in Argentina had also pushed himself down for me, knocked himself down, toward his own hands).

Criminal hands? Of course not, these were innocent hands. . . . New and not the same, yet, the same after all. . . . What was the difference? Not the same eyes, hair, lips, the same laughter? The golden-blue blond fellow cordially gave me a glass of whiskey but this hand reached out to me *from over there*, eyes *from over there* looked at me. . . . Someone else put a hand on my shoulder and this was brotherly, but fraternity from over there was death. . . . I don't know, friendly or maybe hostile. . . . And at that moment a lovely girl shrugged her shoulders playfully, it was love, love, yes, but *that over there* was also love, a forest, a forest of arms stretched before them in a conquering gesture, lovingly, *heil*, creating hands! Idiocy! Away! Imaginings! How Europeans (I did not meet this Europe even in Paris), calm and easy, not a pinch of chauvinism or nationalism, broad perspectives on a world scale, yes, this was the most modern youth, I had the opportunity to meet. They did not even deny the past, one could see in the half-light that that was not their affair, they were something else, something new. To tear away! "Come on, let's go, what do you need their Achilles for?" A generation, given birth to by no one, parentless, without a past, in a vacuum, except for their being bound to their own hands—which hands, it is true, no longer killed but were merely occupied with graphs, bills, fabrication, production. And they were rich . . . extrastrange jackets, beautiful watches . . . their cars parked in the streets. . . .

The luxury, therefore, of boys highly civilized, in the very heart of Europe . . . nevertheless, murderous associations exploded in my brain every minute. In order to fill a gap in my German gobbling, I quoted Goethe's *Hier ist der Hund begraben* and immediately some sort of buried dog got in my way, no, not a dog but some sort of contemporary, the very same one who could lie somewhere around here, close by, over the canal, under houses, here where young death must have been thick in the last battle. This skeleton was fixed somewhere close by. . . . At the same time I looked at the wall and saw there, high up, practically right at the ceiling, a hook fixed in the wall, fixed into the bare wall by itself, tragically, nothing could be worse than that hook, there, pounded, a hook, the wall, high up, pounded, into the bare wall. Could the luxurious and European young people, isolated and self-sufficient, figure out what I was thinking? I knew that they did not want to be

“Germans” with me, just as I did not want to be a “Pole” with them—and perhaps even, who knows, they did not want to be Germans at all, cast into the world, beginning from the beginning, hungering after the widest horizons. Yet the hook remained fixed in the wall! Whiskey. Wine. Sandwiches, cakes, fruit. Conversations and flirtations. One always talked about *something else*, Brecht, Grass, studios, travels, Lessing. My curiosity grew as midnight drew near . . . what will they do with Time? What will they do with the New Year? What will they do with the moment when the Past tears into the Future? And so? The hour sounded, the corks shot out of champagne bottles, and they, with smiles, wishes, hugs, blurred the dangerous moment. Are you going to Greece? Did you see Benrath’s exhibit? Piers Read is in England. You will see that by next year, I will be a *Frau*. New Year in Berlin turned out to be perfectly serene, bourgeois, without Time, actually, and without History.

They were, therefore, private individuals. And I, who always strained to be a private person in life, could not applaud this. Citizens of the world. Europeans. Except for that hook pounded into the wall, pounded, pounded . . . only this fraternal skeleton, death close by . . . and only hands, that elusive advantage of hands. . . . I gulped down one more whiskey! There, then, at parades lovingly deadly, the hands of this youth were thrust before them, oh, a forest of hands passing by and leading forward . . . they marched with their hands . . . here, however, now the hands were calm, unoccupied, private, yet, I saw them chained to their hands, hurled into their hands.



German hands in Berlin . . . I have been stealing glances at them for a long time . . . these hands disturb because they are more efficient, more serious, I would say, all German work realizes itself better. . . . But the complete emptiness, the deadly silence of these hands, became obvious to me only when I spotted them at the party, among the orphaned young people in the city rebuilt from ruins, without character, that is a temporary . . . island. . . . None of them had anything to latch onto. Goethe’s great German tradition was too compromised by what happened after it. The slogans of the new Europe were not lively enough. After all, they—now—were afraid of slogans, programs, ideologies, bah, even morality, that scrupulous German morality which led to diabolical escapades. So what then? Work. And

I knew that each of them has something to do, something concrete, exams, the office, shop, painting maybe, or literature, production, fabrication, technique, they produced it and, in producing it, transformed it, and this designated for them for the time being and while it lasted their meaning, function, role . . . in the emptiness and silence of hands . . . in this odd Berlin. I saw German youth as a blow aimed at the outside world in order to find out who one is—as the remaking of the exterior to gain finally, along this road, the awareness of its own I. But how many times have the Germans struck at the world like a battering ram in order to get at this secret? I repeat: what crushes one in contact with them is the consciousness that one is playing for keeps here: this is by no means a secondary nation, but one in the forefront and thus actually making its way blindly, not imitating but creating, innocent, because it is entering virgin territory. Here one does not know what one will be or even what one can or cannot be. Oh, their exoticism, their hermeticism (even and primarily when they give of themselves), their own content that cannot be expressed, the self-control that has the character of madness, that humanity, being an introduction to some sort of future, unknown humanity, their “functionalism,” owing to which five of the most ordinary Germans become an unpredictable whole . . . this is not so simple. . . . Wait! Wait! Trust in God, not in your dreams! The hands of these young people were perfectly still, private, what did they want? A car, wives and children, promotions . . . that is why they worked . . . they wished to live their lives as decently as possible, that is all. The hook? The cadaver nearby? The forest of hands? These were only my comments on them.

And really one does not know what to grab hold of: for I have never seen young people more humanitarian and universal, more democratic and decent and genuinely innocent . . . calm. . . . But . . . with hands!



Strange and beautiful: those calm heads, thoughtful eyes, punctuality, peace, good humor . . . yet at the same time all of this is careening into the future, galloping away. A German is a slave of Germans. A German is run by Germans. A German is magnified, pushed, given wings and momentum by Germans. But this happens quietly.

In the half-light I saw how they were in relation to one another, sideways or head-on, how the German density was created, and I knew that there, “among themselves,” they were rather merciless . . . or just defenseless. . . .

Production! Technique! Science! If Hitler became the curse of that generation, then how easily science can become the defeat of German youth. Science, fusing them in abstraction, in technique, can make anything of them. . . .

Were these boys in a position to discover and understand their predicament—if it didn’t fit into their daily schedules?



Let us imagine that I will ask one of them whether he likes jam? He will reply in the affirmative. But if he had replied in the negative, it would have been the same. . . . For his needs, tastes, preferences, are the result of his reliance on other Germans, the consequence of a figure they compose, all together, at a given moment. They change their taste between themselves.



When I went out onto the frosty street at dawn, the New Year was fading in Berlin, cars were returning full of people, still in a festive mood. Calm was reappearing and sleep . . . in the city, full of wallets, watches, rings, first-rate sweaters . . . with a lost past and future.

But everyone already knew that tomorrow the city would begin working again, in higher gear, in a tempo that quickened with each passing day, and this work was solid, normal, as if nothing had happened, bringing better and better results . . . healthy work. . . . Comfortable streets with rows of trees, sturdy, plump, peaceful houses. . . . Berlin gives the impression of someone walking evenly, surely, except that it doesn’t know *where* it is going. What will they do? I asked myself and the word “do” meant both “do *for* themselves (produce)” and “do *to* themselves.” Ah, newcomer from the pampa, aren’t these judgments a bit too swift and hasty? Why, all of Europe, since I landed in Cannes, seemed to me to be blind with work . . . I had not met anyone who was not a function, a cog in a wheel, all the lives were interdependent and the brilliance was conquering, mad, it discarded man to become the incomprehensible vibration of the human masses at full throttle. Goethe? Instead of Goethe—mastodons of factories, no less creative. Ex-

cept that Berlin, suspended in a void, condemned to its own vibrations, had gone one step further. . . .

During my entire stay in Berlin not one Goethe, Hegel, or Beethoven presented himself, nor anyone that might even remotely resemble them. There certainly was no lack of fine, technical talent, but that spiritual brilliance escapes from the people into a product, into a machine, plays in the hum of transmission belts, there they are brilliant . . . outside of themselves.

Their health! Their balance! Their affluence! Oh, how often this made me almost laugh, what a joke, what a historical prank, that here, in the very center of catastrophe, people are living so comfortably and earning more than anywhere else. How comical that they were able to get out from under so many fiery and destructive bombs—as if nothing had ever happened, ruddy and with overnight cases and bathrooms to boot. . . . Infuriating! Where is justice . . . and common decency!

But it would be good to understand and remember that this ascetic and religious (even if God disappears) nation splits up into two meanings, two realities. Suitcases, overnight cases, electric shavers—yes, all this spoils and tickles them—but at the same time all this elates and spirits them away. From what? Toward what? The question is neither easy nor trifling. At any rate one would do well to remember that for them luxury tends to be sacrifice, and petit bourgeois calm a fierce tension, and that when they stop gently during a snowy bright noon in front of their displays meditating on what else to bestow on themselves, it is exactly then, somewhere in the mountains, in their deserts, that pressures are born, avalanches, and in the thrust, the toil, in the din and slamming, in the roar of all the rotating cogs, the new step into the Unknown is being taken for them.



I want to write as far away as I can from politics. . . .

Which perhaps is dumb, as the swift economic rebirth of the Federal Republic affected the fate of all of Western Europe and has become etc., etc., etc. All this is obvious. And the snow falls, an enveloping whiteness, which I had almost forgotten, the silence of whiteness, its drowsiness, stubborn, falling slowly, blurring. . . . Sleep. Sleep. Instead of my being an alert observer here, I prefer to tell my dreams. I am sleepy, my sobriety is also a kind of sleep, sometimes as if I were

waking, I begin to speak more to the subject, but then immediately one, two flakes of sleep-inducing snow fall on my brow. . . . I have been asleep ever since I left Argentina—and even as I write this I have not yet awakened. Snow. Sleep. If these are supposed to be my observations . . . then I want them to be relaxed by sleep as much as possible.

XIII

Max Hölzer, a poet, and I at a table at Zuntz's. On the other side of the window a refreshing whiteness and the sleepy neons of Kurfürstendamm. He complains, speaks, bah, bah, the devil take it, where has our genius gone, the devil take it, we had so many people in philosophy, in art, who generally did not deign to notice anything outside the greatest issues of being, the most basic, and today, I ask you, where has this race of *grands seigneurs* gone to, our literature keeps rehashing the war and Hitler and politics, nothing but democracy's settling of accounts with dictatorship, this is what brilliance has been reduced to. . . .

Dusk and cars, whiteness and cars. Hölzer is a disenchanted descendant of Goethe and he says Hitler, yes, Hitler, Hitler constantly blocks the panorama, this narrowing, this limitation, this red cape at which the German bull strikes. . . . I agree with Hölzer, I think that the brilliance constantly present in the highest—former—attainments of these men on pedestals, these *grands seigneurs* of the German spirit with unmatched panache, irritates today, torments, humiliates. . . . *Göttliche Funke*, bah, bah, but how to be brilliant when one has so many matters to attend to, the telephone, radio, press, exchange of services and production, daily production, in which they're stuck like flies in a spider's web. . . . And they are like the victims of some sort of unremitting action surrounding them . . . in bombarded, destroyed, hastily rebuilt Berlin, in the hurrying, makeshift Berlin where the wall, where past and future are shattered . . . on this island that was an ex-capital. . . . This liquidated place demands some sort of novelty on a big scale, tailored to German idealism, German music, but there is nothing but telephones, activities, cars, offices and work, only that growing, all-encompassing spiderweb. Sometimes at seven in the morning I was awakened by a cannonade, I saw from my fifteenth story how antiartillery rockets burst in clouds on the red side, I saw the wall and American helicopters, British soldiers, suddenly the tension grew, since they again shot

the daredevil who tore like a madman through the empty strip separating the wall from Western checkpoints. So History then? Why no, not this is dangerous in Berlin but the calm course of everyday activities, only the everyday and the trifle are diabolical.

But what about that brilliance? I asked about Heidegger.

The answer was . . .

—His influence is slight, it is limited to professors, to this day his prewar ties to Nazism have not been forgiven.

So politics then.

Many movements, many activities surrounded us in this café—which was like all cafés except that German movement and German activity are as if made of steel. Someone was eating ham. Waitresses. A dozen or so men walked in, the bustle increased, a few tables were put together.

—And those people . . . Who are they?

—Specialists.

—In what?

—I don't know.

—Fine, but what is that corpse doing here, that young skeleton sitting with them. . . .

—Corpse?

—Well, yes, he's ordering a gin and soda.

Hölzer was not absolutely certain, he asked out of courtesy, "What corpse?" but finally he agreed with me.—Even if there was some sort of corpse sitting over there with them—he explained diligently—then you must consider that they, as specialists, are not really all that present here themselves; one could even say that they are absent, because ultimately a specialist really exists only in his specialty, thus their absence somewhat softens the presence of the corpse who, to put it mildly, is with them and is not. He was saying this slowly and perhaps with a certain reticence or doubt, I looked around the hall and I had to admit in my soul that all the people here really were . . . and were not . . . for while sitting here over coffee they were, however, somewhere else, each in his own specialty, his own office. In Berlin, however, this incompleteness of existence (allowing for a mirage, *fata morgana*, perversity, and other abuses), with which I had to deal so many times in Poland, in Argentina, had in itself all the seriousness of German technique and

labor, Trust in God, not in your dreams, perhaps they were not so very real, but they were becoming real . . . real therefore in their effect but unreal in their existence? I have no idea. But perhaps this is not the point? . . .

—Oho—said Hölzer—There is Höllerer, he's looking for us. . . .

—Are you sure—I asked—that Höllerer really came in and is here and is looking for us? . . .

—Of course—he replied, somewhat irritated—why you know very well that he is supposed to take us to a *Lesung* at the university.



Sure enough . . . Höllerer walked in, Höllerer the professor, the specialist, art theoretician, chief organizer of cultural life, editor of the important quarterly *Akzente* and of one other, even more specialized, publication devoted to, as far as I know, quite specific experimental research having to do with certain subconscious mechanisms of articulation! It is always indecent on the part of an author to introduce real persons into a half-real text like this one—even if he graces them with the warmest praise—and this simply because the author can do with them what he pleases, like God; they, on the other hand, become his creations, with no right to protest. I hope, however, that my Berlin friends—Hölzer, Höllerer, and others—will want to pardon this indecency of mine (which in this instance is even more blatant, considering that I was a guest of the city and a guest of the Ford Foundation) of the type that he who knows he is not supposed to eat fish with a knife is allowed to eat fish with a knife. It is enough that Höllerer, after having a drink with us, did in fact put us in an automobile and drove us to a *Lesung* in a neighborhood I was not familiar with, a garden, in it buildings and trees, everything comfortable, the students' cars occupied the free space of the park, we walked into a sizable auditorium, sat on the dais, Höllerer as the chairman, Hölzer, Mr. Berlevi, Miss Ingrid Weikert, Klaus Völker: before us were rows of chairs, on them students, their diligent, calm heads, applause. —What's going on?—I asked, unfamiliar with the word *Lesung*.

—Nothing big. You will read passages from your books in German translation.

—But my pronunciation . . .

—Won't hurt.

—But I won't understand what I am reading—and they won't either. . . .

—No problem. You are a foreign author visiting Berlin, so this is merely a courtesy on our part, and also something prescribed by international cultural cooperation, not to mention the enrichment and enlivening of our curriculum. Then Hölzer will read a few of his poems and a discussion will follow.



I thought in a flash about the situation Höllerer and I found ourselves in. He belonged to those people who inspired trust, I did not doubt that as a professor he must be an excellent professor and as an organizer an excellent organizer, German competence beamed from his eyes, movements, words. . . . I knew that I had found myself in competent, efficient and refined hands. But Höllerer had yet another quality—that he was as much a student as he was a professor, he had, this was evident, the cheerful soul of a fraternity brother. If you approached a building that was holding a party attended by Höllerer, you could hear his resonant student laughter coming out the window from quite a distance. It was this liberating laugh that I was expecting now when, obviously, he could not take my predicament seriously, faced with these students, this *Lesung*, the pointlessness of this undertaking was certainly obvious to him. . . . But, by dint of that—so German—division of roles, he lost the student in himself when confronted with his students. He became nothing but the professor and he sat on the dais ready to begin the session. Please understand my situation. I was at the end of my tether . . . perhaps not of my strength as of reality. . . . From the moment I left Argentina behind, Europe was sucking me dry, the way a vacuum sucks people dry. Lost in countries, cities, crowds, I was like a wanderer consumed by mountain perspectives. Having landed on a city-island, a city-chimera, I sensed my own death in the Polish scents of the Tiergarten. Weakened by this death from the inside, I had to deal with the hidden death of the city, which meted death and got it. And how difficult my whole life was made here, when at Zuntz's I had tried to articulate my thoughts, give something of myself, when I participated in the multilingual international receptions, suppers, when I attempted to tear through the strange fog, the mists of this strange land, this theater wrapped in clouds like a mountain, truth never grasped, undeciphered hieroglyph. Yet, at the same time, and as if against the grain, the reality of Berlin, the reality of each scene, each situation, seemed more and more sincerely solid—oh, this talent of theirs for actualization based on nothingness! Let us

take, by way of example, the scene that now took place: no way around it, the *Lesung* will now happen as solidly as possible, everything, beginning with the windows and door knobs and ending with the students' heads, showed evidence of good work, oh, the heads of the students, diligent, thoughtful, calm, oh, their robust, healthy bodies, armed with notepads and, oh, Höllerer at the dais like a choirmaster! My only hope, therefore, was his laugh and I, Ferdydurke, at the end of my journey, could count only on his juvenile laughter, his student's easy laugh, exploding everything to smithereens! Forget it! The roles had been assigned. The situation was organized, it broke up into students and the professor. Höllerer is solemn and he begins the session, he introduces me, I bow, applause, he gives me the marked pages of *Ferdydurke* to read, I refuse

I refuse

I refuse

brief confusion, momentary lapse, finally, at Höllerer's request, Klaus Völker reads

I am listening and am not listening

I sit and I am but I am not

the reading

everything goes without a hitch

I am?

They are?

I listen as if this

but there somewhere at the top was a hook pounded into, pounded, pounded, pounded into the wall, but not into this wall probably, but that one, and that hook was fixed but maybe not here, there, how hard it is to know something in the mountains, in a cloud, in the fog

while here, in the lowlands, everything happened so smoothly, with such strange belief in the reality of what was being done that I was dying

the end, applause, I smile, the nothingness of my smile annihilates me

then Hölzer steps up to read his poems, he reads, applause, smiles, sits down Höllerer, Berlevi, Hölzer, Klaus Völker begin a discussion, a discussion discussion

Höllerer spoke, as a professor and only as a professor, within the framework

of Function. Berlevi, as a Pole and as a prewar Warsaw futurist and as a painter preparing an exhibit and as the guest of Höllerer. Hölzer as a poet and a participant . . . Völker as a young writer.

I will not say that I am taken aback when I see, for example, five Germans with eight machines, engaged in building a house. Of course, this unrelenting passion for actualization, even though it is so terribly calm, congenial, can disturb . . . but how much more dangerous it is to see them realizing themselves in something more chimerical, in Culture . . . I knew that the Berlin organizing its spiritual and intellectual life is full of sessions, congresses, meetings, exhibits, lectures, seminars, etc., etc., everything—functional, everything done as if no one could doubt this work. . . . I would have to talk a lot if I wanted to tell what I saw, what I came upon, first of all that incredible loyalty of a German working for culture, a loyalty all the more strange because it goes hand in hand with the most penetrating skepticism. . . . This Höllerer . . . why he knew no less than I do that here unreality realizes itself . . . yet he did not hesitate to act, function, similar to actors who strike at each other's swords with all their might, real only from the side that strikes, unreal in their result, being some sort of half-hearted, incomplete creation. . . . And I kept waiting for an explosion of the professor's unbridled student laughter to liquidate the session, destroy, explode, but Höllerer, for reasons unknown to me, and probably the most perfectly German, did not abandon an iota of his solemnity.

But I was already too exhausted in my existence, I had to defend myself, I did not want to die, I decided therefore to give a sign of life, but how, what could I do here, the discussion was droning on . . . and suddenly, just as I was with my German, I stammered something, asked to speak, intruded into the discussion, began to orate.

I speak to a full auditorium, they listen. The brazen irrelevance of my jabbering was immediately incomprehensible, I lost my train of thought, I was threading together haphazard words, just for the sake of talking, just to get these, the words took sharp turns, threw me here and there, shaken, rolling, grasping for words, drunk, madman, idiot, incomprehensible to them, to myself, I talked and talked, and the more nonsense I uttered, the more violently I spoke and gesticulated without rhyme or reason. And I see to my horror that the audience, led by the imperturbable Höllerer, is listening to me! Yes, the diligent, calm, unperturbed

heads of the students listening to me steadfastly, I would say, and my anarchy falling into their most calmly alert will to order, sense, organization. Nonsense accepted as sense! Madness momentarily transformed into something *normal*. Were they then ready to accept into themselves all the madnesses of the world in order to mold them among themselves . . . so absorbed in themselves that there was no lack of restraint that could upset them?

Berlevi?

I felt that I could no longer speak like a drunkard to this German rock. But here, a few chairs away, was Mr. Berlevi, a Varsovian, after all, a prewar futurist from Ziemiańska, from Lourse's, bah, a fellow Pole, a little more relaxed, something of a crack in this pitiless homogeneity, something like a door slightly ajar, like some sort of softening . . . and I could sneak out this way. . . .

I turned right to him and passionately made incomprehensible accusations, I came down on him hard, I got into some furious polemic beyond the boundaries of sense, somewhere in the absurd. This, on the other hand, sank into him like into a pillow, slowly both our heads were overcome with drowsiness and Berlevi fell asleep first, I immediately afterward, just like after vodka, in a bar, where one talks just to be talking in sweet oblivion, it was or wasn't, one more shot, who cares what time it is, one more! . . . One more! Because you feel that only a to-subepidermal quieticization of agglomeration conceived antropoidally pour lose drink what three already let's go right away the surrealism of sociology that bottle twaddle well then let's ass-im-i-late these here schnapps schnapps schnapps.

Yes, unfortunately! Both Berlevi and I drank ourselves into unconsciousness.

Meanwhile applause broke out, the students were rising, Höllerer thanked Hölzer and me with a short speech, the *Lesung* was over. I stood up, thanked him with a bow, and also began to leave but my leaving began to stretch itself somehow, I kept leaving and leaving but I could not leave, I wanted to scream, I could not, I decided to turn to someone to complain that, what is this, I keep leaving and leaving but can't get out, but no one was left, strange—I thought—what a city where activities stretch out like gum and are like traps. Just then I spotted Höllerer, he stood by the wall, his laughter tucked under his arm like a briefcase . . . and he was different somehow. I looked a little closer . . . he was heavy . . . heavier than anything I could imagine, as if made from the matter of those dead, concentrated

stars, like bullets in the dark corners of the cosmos, I thought, uh oh, what now, why is he like that, what has happened? . . . And he stood and weighed, standing his weight . . . weighed. . . . And a little farther away stood Senator Arndt, who was always very well disposed toward me, or rather it was a variant of him and so removed from the real thing that, actually, it was and was not him. . . . I thought, they know how to flee from themselves, however, far, far away, and the earth slipped out from under my feet; in the frenzy of pride, in a surge of power, I found myself somewhere in the solar system and I thought oooo, what's this, a few blazing fiery masses zoomed by in fury and passsssed; crying, despair, sobbing could be heard. Could it be, I thought, could it be, how careful one must be with them, this is clearly no earthly race, it seems that earth is not enough for them, neither earth, nor man, they have higher aspirations. . . . Sobbing. Despair. Sorrow. Then I saw the likable and young Mrs. Kurpiers, but through a telescope in the incomprehensible distance, and she also looked at me through a telescope and cried through the telescope and said oh, please understand our pain and our suffering, we must constantly go and go and remove ourselves from ourselves and throw ourselves into space, which does not end, which is unearthly, which is beyond. . . . Enough. Maybe even this is boring. I finally succeeded in extricating myself from this and returned to my beautiful apartment on Bartningallee, across from the Akademie der Künste. I threw myself on the bed without undressing and fell asleep.



N. told me (he was not alone) about the Americanization of Berlin. He said: —We needed America so badly after the debacle . . . and its spirit even more than its military force and dollars. America slid over us like a steamroller, leveling, democratizing, simplifying. We liquidated our remaining towers with banners proudly waving, our entire metaphysics, all of romanticism, fog, high clouds, and in exchange our feet touched earth, and the concreteness of ordinary life and ordinary activities were revealed to us.

I did not mention a word about my experiences . . . as described above . . . which would confirm instead that reality in Berlin does not belong to the most stable and crystalline of realities. . . . Oh sure, everything on the surface is, I repeat, extraordinarily solid . . . but there are basements and in these basements reality gets

into their hands like a laboratory rabbit, like rubber which one forms and almost, one could say, changes itself into something produced like any other product.



Eva Bechmann was saying to me: —Nothing calms a person after Paris like the view of a Berliner drinking coffee on a café veranda on a summer’s day. He and his coffee are something like the absolute.

Sure. Except . . . are they really people? Sure, they are—and very human—but at the same time they are people in some ways unlimited, almost no longer people but creatures for whom the form “man” is only an accident and a temporary stage. I would not trust the Americanization of Berlin too much, either. The expiration in this generation of the race of *grands seigneurs* making breakneck somersaults into the Abyss of Existence does not calm me in the least. On the contrary. The fact that Hegel is resting quietly in the cemetery in East Berlin is no guarantee regarding the absolute of coffee, cakes, or men’s or women’s ready-made clothing. If I were coffee or cake in Berlin, I would not feel too sure of myself.



Their metaphysical anxiety no longer finds an outlet in the consciousness of brilliant individuals and wanders aimlessly, like an exiled ghost, seeking expression in combinations of people, in combinations of collective life, in forms superior to the individual. And what if this were to turn out to be most important for the nascent, new Europe?

The enormous increase in the number of human beings ready to facilitate the appearance of these new divinities.



Politics. Economics. You hear about this, and only this, all the time. Sobriety. Objectivity. And I ask what would happen if it turned out in fact that they devote themselves to something else. . . .

Do they produce? Yes, but while a Frenchman works to make something, they work for the sake of the work itself.

I would even be inclined to assume that their appealing material accomplishments became possible because this is not what they were very interested in.

How much of what is occurring to me stems from my illness? How much from Berlin's illness? This city is in some ways so like me that I no longer know where I end and it begins.



I missed having an artists' café in Berlin, something like the Ziemiańska or Zodiak in prewar Warsaw. The editor J. liked this thought, so we decided to begin our doings on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the Café Zuntz, and we informed our friends and acquaintances. At the beginning there were lots of people; it seemed that slowly the traditions of famous Berlin cafés of this type would be revived. Foreign artists invited to Berlin by the Ford Foundation also dropped by, and of German writers, Günter Grass, Uve Johnson, and sometimes Peter Weiss. . . . This did not last long. After a few months everything was reduced to my table, which lasted a little more than six months before it vanished. . . . I assume that if this initiative had been more theirs, internal, less international, it would have been sustained somewhat longer—but probably not much longer. It seemed to me that they generally did not want to give of themselves, they did not need an exchange of thought or any other kind of exchange, each knew his thing and what he knew he expressed in what he produced: books, articles, paintings or other activities. There was a general skepticism regarding any direct contact not within the framework of a specific assignment. Their eyes met but always about something, never in the way that eyes look deeply into other eyes.



Professor Hasenclever invited me to a chat with his students—with the students of the Literarische Colloquium. They impart rather strange knowledge there: how to write, how to become a writer. Young people who feel God's call to literature study the technique of composition there, and artistic expression, description, action, the devil knows what exactly, maybe even the technique of inspiration. A beautiful villa on the Wannsee as well as the splendid quarters in the center of town constitutes the setting for this specific experiment, the only one of its kind. *Veni, vidi* . . . , and I said *primo* that if they want to be writers they should tear out of here through the doors and windows, *secundo* that they not allow Butor, who will lure them with the little wonders of the *nouveau roman français* as well as

other theories, to lead them astray. Both Professor Hasenclever and his students received my counsel with great satisfaction (as far as I could tell), not to mention delight. This is really strange: they are all in science, in technique, up to their ears; scientism intrudes even into those areas that have formerly been the refuge of human freedom, yet I hear their liberating laughter all the time, and I feel that they are somewhere, somehow, my allies.



Butor was immeasurably good to me: he visited me when I was recovering from my various flus—I paid him back with attacks, aimed at his dearest artistic credos. Ugly? But I believe that if every artist must be, even though he may not want to be, a dramatic phenomenon (because art deepens), then even the momentary contacts with artists cannot be like a lukewarm and nauseating soup. Joyce's accursed progeny! Cursed like him, they who slowly, imperturbably, cultivate literature for literature's sake, exalted, esoteric, supported by a group of initiates, while I am bored, faint, while I dry up!

But not just Butor and not only Berlin. . . . To me all of Europe seems like a horse that steps into a horse collar voluntarily. . . . Obedient, submissive, full of good will toward theory, constructive, positive, methodical, cerebral. . . . Oh what a desert!



Barbara Swinarska, wife of the theater director, comes to visit me right after arriving here from Poland. She gives me a beautiful rose and says that she wants to get to know me, have a talk. . . . Lovely. I have had visits like this before. We go to a café.

The conversation turn to the psychology of the Germans. It seemed to me that Mrs. Swinarska was somewhat simplifying a psychology on which volumes have been written, which is one of the key issues of modern times—because it is difficult to deny this nation virtues and talents, nor can one deny that these virtues and talents led them, in Hitler's time, to the edge of night. Mrs. Swinarska says that she knows best, I know less, because I was sitting in Argentina and did not experience the Germans on my own hide; I did not see them at their bloody work. I say,

well, you see, I don't know, if it is a question of penetrating someone's soul—the experience itself is not enough, one needs intelligence, perspicacity, one must immerse oneself deeply in another man, or in a nation, and that in addition to this, a lack of distance often makes understanding difficult . . . and it is possible that Poles, after everything they suffered, are not always in a position to approach the psychology of Germans with a sufficiently cool objectivity. . . .

Gab, gab, gab. And what do we have here? She is offended? She felt touched to the quick that I did not trust her intelligence? . . . enough that I create irritation, which has plagued me a thousand times before, especially with women. She thinks that I am puffing myself up, treating her nonchalantly, that I am a “writer” and therefore treat her condescendingly . . . and I, on the other hand, seeing Mrs. Swinarska all ruffled, saying things less and less to the point, add something nasty. She says good-bye and leaves in a state of positive irritation.

In a few weeks I receive a clipping from Cracow's *Życie Literackie*. This is a little piece by Mrs. Swinarska entitled “On Distance, or a Conversation with the Master” which describes our meeting. I appear in it as a ridiculous coxcomb and antipathetic egotist, as well as Narcissus of course, a blithe spirit and the fruit of decaying capitalism. Here are a few excerpts from this characterization (I quote verbatim):

I, the ridiculous coxcomb: “Why don't you tell me why I know how to write the way I do?”

“Because you are talented.”

“Talented! I am not talented! I am not talented but I have awareness! Do you understand? *Awareness*. Because I know what others do not. Because I can understand everything!”

I, the egotist, commercialized to boot, the Ford stipendist and guest of Berlin:

“You know, I have a Ford stipend here, \$1,200. And I don't have to pay anything for my apartment because I am a guest of the Berlin Senate. In Spain it is cheap to live. I'll buy a little house.”

“Do you have to write anything while on the stipend?”

“Have to? No. This is simply a stipend that recognizes a writer's achievements.”

And so forth. After this introductory “dilution,” it was not difficult to put the following words in my mouth (we were talking about war victims in Poland):

“You are always priding yourselves in an immodest way on the number of your five million slain. It is clear that you have nothing else to say on the subject of the occupation. Poles are backwater nationalists. . . . It is only in Poland that people talk about the atrocities that took place during the war. . . .”

Etc.

Let us note that this text is not completely fabricated. I did indeed talk to Mrs. Swinarska about the mountain of corpses obstructing the view of Germany, and people know from other things I have said that I demand a revision of an excessively spasmodic, in my opinion, Polish nationalism, bah, not just nationalism but outright patriotism (a revision not liquidation) . . . why, not too long ago Zygmunt Nowakowski was shocked by this very thing when *Wiadomości* awarded its prize. . . . But how did we get from there to these provocative obscenities? When a so-called journalist wants to do a hatchet job on a writer, talent consists of not changing him too drastically, one has to, rather, shade in, misquote, add a little here, subtract a little there, and from out of nowhere the thinking of a decent man who has tried his entire life to think quite seriously becomes swinish.

Actually, I would bet that Mrs. Swinarska did not quite grasp the swinishness that trickled from her pen. I assume that though she may have felt a little uneasy both in fashioning me as an amusing prig and insinuating that I was whitewashing the Germans in exchange for Ford dollars, all but a second Goebbels; after writing all this it was not hard for her to believe that I did say something like this, “more or less.” Why, yes, a little misunderstood, a little she didn’t hear, and the rest she improvised in proportion to her growing outrage and conviction that she was defending the Fatherland. Besides, everyone knows Poland is a cheerful little country, especially those in the literary world shower one another with jokes and riddles from morning ’til night, a giggle ripples through the whole nation . . . so what’s the big deal, she smeared Gombrowicz a little, that’ll teach him not to be so uppity! Who is going to pay any attention! My thesis, therefore, is that Mrs. Swinarska was, in her reactions, as indignant as she was jocular.

Here, however, the venerable Ludwik Hieronim Morstin appears on the stage. He dashes off a “Letter to Gombrowicz,” which appears in *Życie Warszawy*.

"Today, in *Życie Literackie*, I read Mrs. Barbara Swinarska's interview with you and I am so upset by it that I have decided to write you a few words. . . . I am quoting your words from the interview conducted by Mrs. Swinarska" (lengthy quotes follow). Further, Mr. Morstin takes me to task for my villainy. And in conclusion, he writes: "The most common form of human egoism is closing one's eyes to the misfortune of one's fellowman so as not to disturb one's enjoyment of all the pleasures and allurements of life. . . . You, Sir, are not worthy of the name writer!"

This is really quite splendid and I would agree with Mr. Morstin entirely except . . . wherever did he get the idea that there was an "interview"? In Mrs. Swinarska's article there isn't a single word mentioned that would entitle one to this assumption. Well, so what, he made a mistake. . . . A mistake? The article is so satirical and malicious that a small child could not have taken it for an interview—it is so obvious. . . .

Passons. These combinations of jocularity and high-mindedness do not amuse me and I would like to be brief. When the article attained the status of an interview, it was no longer difficult to see me as a real scoundrel. *Trybuna Ludu* reprinted Morstin's letter "because of the great timeliness of the message," and in the weekly *Siedem Dni*, they wrote, "Whoever has such a cynical attitude toward the martyrdom of millions of his fellow Poles . . . is a man without a conscience."

I sent a letter to these newspapers in which I state that Mrs. Swinarska's article is not an interview and that it was written and published without my knowledge. And furthermore: "In my darkest dreams I could not have been visited by the base intention of whitewashing or even making light of Hitler's crimes in Poland, which I condemn sharply along with all decent people of the world. There cannot be the least doubt about this, as I have expressed myself on this subject several times in my *Diary*. I have the greatest respect for the unprecedented sufferings of Poles during the last war."

I also sent this letter to the Writers Union in Warsaw. The letter was edited so as to be as concise and as to the point as possible, without reference to any political issue—a letter in which a Polish writer fairly well known to the world asks that people be informed that he did not utter cynical ravings that justifiably insulted the feelings of Poles . . . this letter, of course, was not published.

Someone from Poland writes: "People are talking about you all the time

now, you are being discussed. This will not hurt you. You are not destined for the masses anyway, so it goes in one ear and out the other, but in the cafés there is a lot of talk, people are informing themselves and the truth about you is spreading.”

It seems so to me as well. There are already too many people informed about me—through my books. One can agree or disagree with me, but I certainly do belong to the most candid writers in Polish literature. Everyone knows everything about me, even if from my *Diary*. Here in Volume 1, for example, is a statement about Nazi atrocities in Poland: “I know the measure of those sufferings and the measure of that lawlessness and I have no intention of evading them with ‘concepts’ when a crime is being committed.”

And I have written more than once in this spirit and vein!

Dąbrowska? Iwaszkiewicz? Słonimski? Others? What do people who know me, people who have often sent me proof of their esteem, have to say about this? How will they swallow this article-interview and the correction in the wastebasket?

(P.S. The above text was written in November 1963 and immediately printed in the Parisian Kultura. I have to add that my correction was finally published in the Polish press—after several months had passed and I was appropriately hacked to pieces. Only Życie Literackie printed it, after removing the date—so that the readers would not notice the delay—and after cunningly providing it with selected quotes from my Diary that were supposed to demonstrate that I am a monster after all. . . . It is not I who will be compromised in the long run by this premeditated combination of quotes from a book forbidden in Poland and by the elimination of the date of the letter, in order to lead public opinion astray. . . .

1965

XIV

I will bet that the above Berlin memoirs will get into the paws of newspaper people; that politics will dance its savage Negro dance around them; that I, an artist, will be given up to the columnist. I, a man, will become the prey of editors, the scapegoat of publicists, the carrion of nationalisms, capitalisms, communisms, the devil knows what else, victim of an ideology that is more a mythology, and a decrepit, infantile, sclerotic, bureaucratic, and worthless mythology at that.



The triumph of Günter Grass; sales figures for the last novel are approaching 200,000 books sold. Grass's humor: people were upset that he showed up at balls in a sports jacket, so he had himself made a hideously violet tuxedo that he dons to add chic to breakfasts and afternoon teas. Another feature of Grass's humor: he has no appetite for philosophy, so, knowing this, I steered the conversation to philosophy immediately. Grass—courteously leaned over, subtle, and discreet: "I beg your pardon but my sister, who is present, breaks out into a nervous hack when people mention more than six philosophers at once."

I would run into these three—Grass, Johnson, Weiss—from time to time but these meetings were annihilated either by linguistic difficulties or by the presence of third persons. I kept saying to myself, I have to have a talk with Weiss, I have to find out from him, he will tell me. . . . As for Uve Johnson, he was pure North. A Nordic so northern that I determined many times that I would challenge him to a conversation that was something more. . . . Nothing came of it. We were hermetic, they to me, I to them, it was obvious from the start, nothing, absolutely nothing, and the best that we could do was to leave each other alone. A little like horses grazing in a meadow. But also like possessive creatures, in a state of expan-

sion, ready to devour one another at the first opportunity. Once Uve Johnson came upon me accidentally in the little restaurant across from the Akademie der Künste. He came up to me and with a kind of northern embarrassment mumbled something that I figured out was a compliment referring to the freshly published *Pornografia* in German. I became embarrassed by his embarrassment; I muttered something and the conversation was steered to the more usual topics between us, that is, pipes, buttons, and jacket lapels.

The new Philharmonic, “Scharoun’s circus” as the taxi drivers call it, is yellow on the outside, and inside there is a light, elegant, cascading of listeners toward the orchestra from all sides. One hears this architecture well and one hears well in it. Karajan inaugurated it (no mean holiday) with a performance of the Ninth. The orchestra is the pride of Berlin; it is “excellent.” I put “excellent” in quotation marks not because I doubt it but because only specialists can say something about this; the remainder, thousands, have to take their word. More appropriate, therefore, would be the formula “one listens to this orchestra as if it were excellent.” But art is a luxury, and thus our language, when one speaks of it, becomes luxurious. One says proudly, “I can’t listen to the Ninth any more, I know it by heart.” But to tell the truth, about 9 percent of the Ninth is known, even here in Berlin.

The “excellent” Vegh Quartet, which I listened to on record so many times, is now before me on stage. Immersed in people after my solitary listening to records, I do not listen, do not hear, I merely admire the entering and exiting of four gentlemen in tails winged with violins, and especially the acting of Vegh himself, who knows how to inspire his rotund figure with very strange torments.

Szeryng at the Philharmonic, violin concerto with orchestra, painful, the inadequacy of the violin is grating, one sees the superhuman efforts of the “master” in order to extract the songs, furies, madness from the strings . . . but someone who “is not an expert in music” might say that one could barely hear. . . . What does it mean to be “an expert in music”? It means: to sense with a critical ear the most subtle imperfections in the execution and to discreetly forget about the glaring deficiencies when they pertain to—let us risk this metaphor—the chessboard itself on which one plays. Difficult and in vain: the sound of the solo violin is too weak in a large hall, even with the best acoustics. If even the piano barely makes it in these spaces, then the violins become a dribble, completely as if . . . hm . . . And from the vantage point of a less “sophisticated,” that is, less professional, aesthetics, perhaps

it would be more tolerable if the artist would simply pee, rather than to see how all his inspirations and his power, frenzied in his violin playing, are transformed into . . . hm . . . dribbling. What degradation of the human spirit. But this, of course, is too naive and too “unsophisticated” a view.

I am inundated with invitations: exhibits, concerts, operas, performances, conferences, lectures . . . has Berlin decided to become Paris? The number of Berliners who are “experts in art” must, in such circumstances, be growing at a tempo certainly not less than that of the number of cars. But I have preserved my longstanding antipathy for spectacles, I do not believe that long box-office lines can lead anyone to art, one has to make it oneself, I want to see it not on stage but in eyes, smiles, lips, and speech. . . .

Be careful . . . watch out . . . the young skeleton again . . . this young cadaver intruder! What do their current theaters mean compared to that theater; they gave the world the greatest tragedy of the century, a performance so revealing it turned everything Europe could know about itself upside down and gave the European a new dimension—but it is not about the glare of that hell that I wish to speak but about the young nearby corpse, with its young-corpse beauty. One student told me that he prefers to spend a few marks on the bus than to wait by the side of the road for someone to pick him up, because, as a rule, the older man at the wheel begins to offer him his memories from the war—and this is boring, this is very boring! Why did this irritate the student so much? Wasn’t it simply jealousy? Wasn’t he envious of that youth, its fraternity with death, beautifully cadaverous, poetically cadaverous . . . he, standing in line for various box offices selling poetry and beauty, he, the passive spectator of recited dramas? Berlin is a political issue. Berlin is a cultural, economic, or metaphysical issue. But Berlin is also an issue of expoetry, poisonous as a young corpse, rapacious as a young corpse. Let us not forget that beauty belongs to the concealed but mighty motors of History. Let us take into consideration that not only does a girl tremble for her beauty but that this trembling is also proper to boys . . . thus this student, standing in line with his change purse, car, and fiancée, with his bourgeois-corpulent life that has settled down so much, is, however, poisoned by the venom of *that* young horror-beauty; for the nostalgia to which he will not admit for all the world. Let us note, in addition, that a German, as such, seems to be a creature especially prone to hideousness as well as beauty. His liking for science and technology often thrusts him into absolute aesthetic insensitivity, into greasy-

white, heavy, abstract pedantry, in glasses, with beer and a notebook—and again, in reverse, his immortal lyricism and romanticism surrender him to the Muses. Thus this student standing in line to buy a ticket, where people sell an already prepackaged poetry within the framework of a rationally functioning division into production and consumption, sometimes experiences a blank and furious revulsion, just as if he were buying a ticket to a bordello—and afterward, sprawled out, pleased with the comfort of the auditorium, repulsive to a degree, he trembles, nevertheless feeling the potency of his lips twisted with cold, fear, hunger, perhaps deported on trains, and he—Narcissus—feels on his lips the kiss of his other, soldier's lips.

The older folks have their eyes fixed on that thing . . . like fishermen hoping to draw out of the dark and accursed water the reflection of that other . . . dangerous . . . naive face. . . . The younger people tremble, disturbed by the underground closeness of their contemporary. . . . Which modern German poet has been tempted to express this poetry? I do not know a single one. And none of the languages ones uses today in Berlin, not the daily-life practical one nor the political one, nor the language of theory, faith, morality, are in a position to burrow into the subterranean place where innocent sin, hideous beauty, killed life, and living death reside. And no beauty on the surface, driving a car, motorcycle, wallowing in a river, pole vaulting, going to the cinema, eating a sandwich, is capable of deadening the sting of that beauty, which changes day into night.

Concerts and exhibits—theaters and film theaters—lectures and recitations . . . Sure. Modern. Rationalized, organized, more and more “scientific.” Sure. But if you, O poet, want to get at the source, you will have to step down into the underground. I would expect something from you on the order of a god with two faces.



I left Berlin after a year's stay in May 1964, bereft of all strength—I was barely able to board my plane. Disease crouched in me from the very first months of my stay, but it took the snows, rains, winds, and clouds of a northern sky, unseen for a quarter of a century, to arouse and develop it. Two months in the hospital. I was a lousy guest.



During my illness I edited, only for myself, the “Diary of Navigation” on the sea that I called “Bersee.” Yes . . . Berlin was a sea . . . and I sailed and sailed along its undulating . . . sunlit . . . black . . . waters.



I was weak during my entire journey to Europe. Therefore this diary was also just the encounter of my impaired, sickly existence—with the existence of Europe; and my feebleness, my fatigue, must have infected . . . Oh! In vain did I challenge youth in order to extract myself from my inadequately existing existence, from my insufficiently real reality.

After twenty-five years I sailed in, eaten away by time and space. . . . I lacked the strength to overcome the stony foreignness of Europe. Throughout my years of Argentine exile I tried as hard as I could to remain loyal to Europe, the secret pride of my writing was exactly this: loyalty to Europe. It was just that in Paris, in Berlin, I felt right at home, I, a European. So many friends. Readers. Such blandishments. Tenderness. Yet I was too weak physically, disease had sucked me dry. And I was still too fixed in Argentina. So that when Argentina recedes behind me, dissolves, the Europe rising before me is like a pyramid, Sphinx, and an alien planet, like a *fata morgana*, no longer mine, I do not recognize it, I do not recover it in time and space.

And it does not allow me, the enfeebled, to possess it.

I felt lost, leaving Buenos Aires.

I am lost.

Return to Argentina? If I went back, I would be going back only to the past.



During all of my stay in Europe, wherever I was, in Clermont-Ferrand, Royaumont, Paris, Berlin, I did not drink a single cup of coffee that was “real” or “ordinary”—that was not extracted from an abyss and suspended in an infinite vacuum.



Admit that in my Polish soul, postwar Berlin had to elicit a storm—of revenge, horror, sympathy, admiration, condemnation, fear, esteem, friendship, hostility—there is room for all these and for many more feelings. . . .

But no, Berlin became a riddle of realization for me . . . and of unrealisation.

One thing dominated everything else: the creation, demolishing, warping, correcting, evaporating, mixing, intensifying . . . of reality.

I had ended up in Berlin at the end of my pilgrimage in Europe, in a place that is most real and most fantastic. The journey was taken twice: once on the map, and the second time within me. Berlin became my inner adventure . . . but I realize this only now, gradually, in the course of writing. . . .



They treated me, as I have said, with great and impeccable hospitality and with no less impeccable friendship—but no, not a penny’s worth of politics, nonsense, but a lot, I assume, had to do with my being a Pole. Obviously, as a Pole I weighed on their conscience. They felt guilty.

All for naught! For naught! Don’t be children, your smiles and all the comforts you could offer me will not remove one single minute of the thousands of Polish agonies, so varied, on such a broad scale of torments. I will not be seduced! I will not forgive!

I did not forgive but something even worse happened to me. I, a Pole (because I did experience this “as a Pole”), had to become Hitler.

I had to take on all *those* crimes, just as if I had committed them. I became Hitler and I had to accept Hitler’s presence in every dying Pole and the fact that he still existed in every living Pole.

Condemnation, scorn, this is not the way, this is nothing . . . the eternal revulsion to crime simply extends its life. . . . One must swallow it. One must eat it. Evil can be overcome, but only in oneself. Nations of the world: do you still believe that Hitler was only a German?



The view from my windows on the fifteenth floor: the white ponds of a broad, slumbering park, about a kilometer beyond it the Kurfürstendamm, the Zoo, the very center of West Berlin with an American profile, pulsating, winking, blinding, neon lights appear and disappear, hosts of cars speed along the boulevards, an electrical streak floods the horizon.

From the second large window: gloom and mystery, an enormous silence,

beyond the wall spreads East Berlin, with long streets, sad street lamps. Chimneys, towers, blurring in the early dusk of winter, somewhere over there something is shining, I take my binoculars, a multistoried building, maybe on the hillside. . . .

This bauble, West Berlin, the last coquetry of luxurious Europe—farther, dead silence as if it were no longer a city but an expanse, gigantic, as far as China. I look with concentration at the mute isolation of winter fields as if I were in the country . . . magic has hidden in this primeval space, of which we know that it is subject to universal and organizing thought, dominated indivisibly by the Idea.

While West Berlin is a luminous blindness, organizing itself blindly with disorder, on the other side, where there is night, space, earth, winter, darkness, the Idea has settled, dogged, silent. Raw. This annoys. Strange, perhaps painful, that the Spirit is there, not here . . . its closeness fascinates . . . but astounds, depresses, that it is more similar to the rising mists, the descending darknesses, the passing clouds, the successive seasons of the year, than to something that would be more human. . . .

This primordial quality . . .

—When one looks out a window, it looks gloomy. But, you know, in East Berlin people are much more likable. . . . Friendly, kind . . . Disinterested. Not to be compared with the West Berliner, who is materialistic. . . .

—Aha, you are a proponent of that system?

—No, on the contrary. The people are better because they live in poverty and are oppressed. . . . It's always like that. The worse the system, the better the man. . . .



It's over! I am tearing away from you, island! I am flying to Paris.

The plane climbs into the firmament. Europe is opening up and spreading. I in the plane. Dusk. Speed of eight hundred kilometers an hour, altitude eight thousand meters. France already. Snuggled into my seat, I and my gaze fall to the very bottom. Swarms of houses. At the end of my falling gaze there, there, houses and gardens, chessboards, chimneys, bridges, dams, factories, triangles, lines, highways, housing settlements, buildings. I at a dizzying height, flying with an unheard, resounding roar. I am flying. I, a madman. I am flying.

I am flying all by myself. Thrown completely outside the orbit. Separated.

And with me, streaking the heavens at a speed of eight hundred kilometers an hour, everything, my baggage, thoughts, dealings, memories, Berlin, Argentina, Poland, this, that, reminiscences, key, she said, fish, one should, what for, Hoza Street, all of this is flying along with me at an altitude of eight thousand meters, I fly, and at the same time, I associate, I work, I wheel and deal, I dream up, lost, wandering in the forest. I and my forest. I and my thicket, swarm, anthill, multiplying, overflowing. I don't see them but I know that they are there. Many thousands of doubles. I alone am flying over and beneath me, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of my likenesses, copies, my "like me's" swarming, binding, wheeling and dealing with a multiplying anthill, I know I can't I don't know I they I. I unleashed by the multiplying. Multiplethoughts. Multipleexistences.

Paris.

Densification, magnification, enlargement, the wild roar of multiplication. Beast! I am flying! Monster! I am flying! My Multiple-Million Double is spreading in filling and overflowing, I am flying close to my multiplecomplications. . . . Howling and din! I will disembark soon. I will take a taxi. I will see one, two, three. . . . I will see a thousand. . . . I will see a million. . . .

XV

When I left Berlin in May of last year, I settled in Royaumont, about thirty kilometers from Paris. An abbey from the thirteenth century where St. Louis served monks, from where apparently France was ruled for a while, powerful Gothic, four-sided, four stories, walls, galleries, arches, rosettes, columns, in a peaceful park with the green, mossy water of its canals and ponds.

The building is half-empty—"echo" refectories, halls, with august tombstones, Latin inscriptions—half-inhabited, for the cells of monks on the second floor, along with the cell in which St. Louis supposedly lived, were fixed up for intellectuals and artists journeying from Paris. I was still sick. Something of a period of recuperation after the Berlin hospital, but somehow I wasn't getting any better, I felt that the secret poisoning me was still in me, I was grouching, I was taking feeble walks under chestnut trees, I walked sluggishly to the road, to the bridge, I sat on a rock, I looked at the expansive silk of sweet France—dales, meadows, hills, along which were high voltage lines, set on steel towers, transparent, rhythmic. I

looked at this dejected, with a reluctant soul, like a dog's snout turning away from a full dish, and slowly I directed my steps back toward home, entered the thickness of walls, Gothic vaults.

In the morning while shaving, towel around my neck, I saw people slipping through the park: a professor toting a lawn chair to a secluded place, two subtle ladies with umbrellas, a painter looking into the canal, a student laden with books in the grass. Every few days foreign-speaking groups intrude upon this peace, for example, sixty biologists, forty ethnologists, seventeen parapsychologists (I saw this from the window), since Royaumont is an important scientific-cultural center, a place of international congresses, also lectures, concerts, seminars. At the beginning I thought that it would not be bad here for me, I preferred this to the boredom of an ordinary hotel—and not being able to live in Paris (because Paris has become an automobile apocalypse, howling, roaring, speeding, stinking), I was happy that here I would have a combination of the delightful greenery from the Café Flore with the Sorbonne, bah, with Japan even, with Australia.

And when, on the first day, I entered the small dining room reserved for regulars and members of the *cercle*, I was greeted with cheerful shouts—because, as it turned out, Alan Kosko used to spend time here not long ago working on the French translation of my *Diary* and various linguistic problems were discussed at the time. I heard from many people: —Kosko tormented us with your diary!

Presiding over our meals was Monsieur André d'Hormon—a still rather distinguished old man, “diplomatic counselor and political adviser” in his day to the Chinese government in Peking, a man who spent forty-eight years in China (and was, as rumor had it, the empress's lover). China had washed over him without a trace; he looked as if he had never taken a step out of the Quartier Latin; a connoisseur of cheeses, eater of salads, worshiper of Anatole France, Zola, and Renan, Monsieur d'Hormon was also quite deaf, which did not stop him from managing the conversation with a true French *cordialité*. —Who is that gentleman?—he would discreetly ask his neighbor at the table whenever someone new appeared. —That's editor X, professor Y, poet Z!—his neighbor would shout into his ear. —And this man is a writer. A Pole, well, well, could you tell me which of the modern French authors you value most?—Sartre!—I shouted. —Who? Sartre? Sartre, *ce n'est rien du tout, mon ami!* And do you like Racine? —Oh, not at all!—I shouted.

—What? No? But listen here a moment: . . . *Quoi! Pour noyer les Grecs et leur mille vaisseaux / Mer, tu n'ouvriras pas des abîmes nouveaux!*

—Nothing special!—I shouted. —What? Pardon me? What did that gentleman say? Nothing special? Why, *excusez-moi, mon cher ami*, you exaggerate, etc.



It was not just with Mr. d'Hormon that I put on this vapid and contrary air. I remember once a superintellectualized woman asked me if I shared the views of Simone de Beauvoir on the problem of the modern woman. I answered that I inclined more toward the opinion of Kaiser Wilhelm's "KKK," that is, "*Kinder, Kirche, Küche*." What, what, consternation, I was asked if I was serious, I answered, that yes, but . . .

But this sort of game in this place? And in general . . . to play with the artistic-sociological-psychological cream of Paris, served up in a Gothic gravy dish from the thirteenth century? And to play . . . at all . . . I, a sick man?

—I adore you, you have a gift for making fools of people!—one of the rebellious students of Royaumont, Jacques Clauvel, confessed fervently.

—Royaumont is good for my nerves—I confided a few days later to Mr. Crespelle, the administrator. —Royaumont is good for your nerves because you ruin other people's nerves—he answered sententiously.

Just a little one-upmanship. . . . In any case, I prefer to play than . . .



That I should become an *enfant terrible* and dissolute fellow—oh, yes, and all the more, the more Royaumont was splendid, majestic, Cartesian, Racinelike, Voltairean—the more it was ethnological, historiographic, logistic, cybernetic—the more it was laden with rosettes, swans, and St. Louis. But I danced in chains, oh, what a crushing oppression, what a hundred-pound weight! The seriousness of disease, this complete lack of humor proper to the dark crannies of a suffering organism, joined, after all (as if behind my back) with certain unpleasant properties of the place in which I stayed. At two or three in the morning this medieval edifice was not one of the most cheerful of places. . . . When the unillustrious state of my stomach got me out of bed at night, I did not feel particularly confident in

the long corridor, with some sort of reflex of light flickering in its depths, while the thickness of the walls pressed forward in the general slumber and the emptiness farther down responded in the uninhabited rooms, its loneliness, its weight, the ubiquitous pressure of an emptiness filled with dead, ended, past time. In this expiring there came from somewhere only the fervent whispering of old Mr. d'Hormon, who, not being able to sleep, recited the poems of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Racine, in his room, like prayers . . . what would have happened if, walking down the corridor I had suddenly come upon some sort of Anomaly, no, not upon a ghost, a monster—that would be too naïve—but upon Anomaly; why, I had to take into serious consideration that the accumulation of so many lives, stifled by so many deaths, could produce a certain ferment, something that would really surprise me, if I came upon this something in a dark corridor. Man is always expecting something like this . . . and he is prepared for it. . . . I myself was disease, that is, anomaly, that is, something related to death and more perhaps than a ghost, I feared my not being too afraid. . . .



After a year's immersion in Germany, I looked at the French with curiosity.

When, right after arriving from Berlin, I spent a week in a villa not far from Paris, I hobbled as well as I could, using the last bits of my strength, to get to the gate, into the street, to see them *again*. I wanted to check on how they looked after the Germans.

The Europeans cast ashore in South America, like melancholy survivors, shells and algae, were weakened . . . here in their nations they are like fruit on a tree, juiciest.



I was wondering how much my first impression of Paris—when I saw it a year ago for the first time after years in America—how much these impressions contained in two chapters of my diary devoted to Paris could be hasty, crazy. . . . The Parisians who happened to read this text published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* were fussy. The following letter came from a French writer: “You hate Paris and you are entitled to your opinion. But in those chapters one would look in vain for

the freshness and honesty of which there is so much on other pages of your diary. Here you use well-worn clichés and are banal, you do not want to get to know the city, you turn against it with irritation. . . . And one can see more clearly here than anywhere else how much you concoct reality in order to adjust it to your subjective vision.”

Agreed, I did concoct reality, why should this diary be a report or an official record . . . my description of the world is made according to the laws of a poem, it is supposed to express my passion, and my passion through the world. What sort of passion have I put into my description of Paris?

The French from Royaumont—I knew—would also not catch onto this. This elite, which is inclined to believe that in spite of everything “man has a proud sound!” also had to accept that “youth has a naive sound!”

Elevating oneself above the word soaked with embarrassing nostalgias. . . . I know, I recognize . . . how many times have I waved it for the fun of it before the proud nose of maturity! Paris? It wasn’t so much Paris that I was attacking in my notes as Europe—Paris as the maximal expression of European aesthetics. For oh, Europe, Paris, in you beauty becomes civilized, that is, organized, and what’s more it is subject to a division of functions: some exist to make beauty, others to consume it. The beauty of man, humanity, seems to be fragmenting more and more into the writing of poems and reciting of poems, into the painting of pictures and looking at pictures; into producing lipstick and applying it; into dancing in a ballet and watching it.

This process involves removing the center of beauty from oneself so that it becomes something external, objective . . . so that it stops hurting . . . and degrading. . . . I in my capacity as a poet want to return to the beauty of the human species, its wild, primal, embarrassing, unrelenting sense . . . its *personal* sense. . . .

Look, there where the child ends and the adult does not yet begin, there, from the fourteenth to twenty-fourth year, man is given his time to blossom. This is the only time of complete beauty in man. There is in humanity a refuge of immortal beauty and grace, but—too bad, too bad!—it is tied to youth. Oh, it is not enough to admire the beauty of abstract pictures—this beauty is not extreme—you have to live it through what you were, what you are not, through the inferiority of youth. . . .

This is, more or less, the starting point for my satire on Paris.

Lean over the river of passing time, Narcissus, and try to fish out the receding, relentlessly charming face. . . .



Poles often dropped in on me in Paris.

Kot Jeleński. Alan Kosko appeared one Saturday and both of us bent over my *Diary* 1953–56, which had just appeared in his fastidious translation.

Lavelli, the director of *The Marriage*, brought the lovely little Krystyna Zachwatowicz to see me; I owe her the scene design, which was a great success.

Also Jadwiga Kukulczanka, translator of *The Marriage*, who, disturbed by the way the first syllables of her name sounded in the language of the Gauls, thought up for herself the really strange pseudonym, Koukou Chanska.

Father Sadzik was present from time to time, as reading. I read with interest his *Esthétique de Heidegger*, interspersing it with Saint-Simon.

Under chestnut trees.

Chestnut leaves.

Poland. Argentina.

The two mythic tigers of my history, two waves washing over me and ravaging me with a terrifying nonbeing—because this no longer is, it was.

Am I already entering my concluding phase, when one is in fact still alive, but one lives on what has already died? The written works, things completed, make me still alive for the people who come to visit—while in the present I am reeling, dying. That which is, is inert, inert, inert, as if petrified.



Have you read Peyrefitt's reply, ladies and gentlemen, no, Celtic influences in Normandy . . . so, you are somewhat cosmoselenitic, olala, twenty-six bodies last Sunday, he told her that violets, *mais quelle corvée cet encombrement*. . . . Conversation! On Saturdays and Sundays we move to the larger Gothic hall for our meals. Amid the ascetic, ecstatic faces carved in wood on the walls, among mitres and crosses, we, about forty people, at the great tables, *hors d'oeuvres*, *potage*, *entrée*, *rôti*, *salade*, *fromages*, *dessert*, *café*. Conversation.

Unstinting. Unrelenting. Animated. And the shock of the holy and pained faces looking at us from the walls? No, because French frivolity is heroic. And the

faces stuffing themselves at the table, blissfully smiling, gabbing, are not so very different from those on the wall; here, too, the eyes are faded, parchment cheeks, and the side dishes and roasts disappear into gap-toothed mouths, this garrulous assembly has, for the most part, one foot in the grave. Nevertheless, under the guidance of Mr. d'Hormon, deaf as a tree stump, the conversation does not stop for even an instant. It would seem: they talk in order to drown their identity, with its pain and fear of the walls. . . .

These conversations merged into a tiring buzz under the vault, the acoustics were awful, people answered any old way, just to answer, they had deafness on their lips and in their eyes, they said any old thing, they said that, but they talked, talked . . . they were eating but the conversation was devouring them. . . .

Like talking to a wall.

Thought about Anomaly, that nocturnal Anomaly, from my meandering in the corridor, slowly changed into the idea of a sucking Vampire. . . . The Vampire was “animated” conversation, more and more “animated” in proportion to the dying of those noses, eyes, and lips.



I the obstreperous, I the vampiric, I the amused, I the tormented, I the living, I the dying.

I thought about Europe's eluding me. It depressed me that I had been unable to muster anything more personal and original when confronted with Europe after a twenty-five-year absence, I, a newcomer, an Argentinean, a returning Pole. . . . I was ashamed to think about these countries in an established, talked-to-death, banal way—I didn't want to discuss technology, science, the rise in the standard of living, motorization, socialization, moral permissiveness. . . . Will I be incapable of mustering anything better than this? What sort of Columbus am I?

It seemed almost silly to me that this enormous thing in history, Europe, instead of dazzling me after years of pampa, years of not seeing it, falls into a pile of well-worn generalities.

—The worst thing—I thought—is that the truth about it does not interest me in the least. I want to revive it for myself—revive myself with it. All this so that time would become rejuvenating—instead of aging me and it! That is why I want to think up a thought not yet thought—it is supposed to serve me, not the truth!

Egoism. The artist, that is the subordination of truth to one's life, the utilization of truth for personal goals.



The stone enormity of Royaumont, growing out of Cartesian lawns and boulevards.

Parisian Louvres roaring with cars . . . and then here again that pious Gothic, painfully stuffed with intellectual-atheists and invaded by scientific bands of ethnologists, etymologists, sociologists, brought by airplanes from the five corners of the world . . . loaded down with notebooks, cameras, glasses, tweeds, discussions, broken French, broken English. Covered with cars and scientists, like lichen, France is suffering, is still trying to defend itself! Conversation! Conversation is like a big stomach, trying to digest it. How long? As long as *it* remains the subject of our conversation. Even in talking we know that our talking is the subject of sociological studies on *that other* . . . scientific side. . . .

In the stairwell there hangs a great tapestry from the seventeenth century. Barely climbing the stairs to my room on the first floor (which really was the second), I stopped halfway up to catch my breath . . . and not having anything else to do, I stared at the tapestry; I, an iconoclast, was the only person in Royaumont who would look at something (not of my own free will, it is true). I threw this at them at breakfast. —How is it—I asked.—This place is full of artwork yet I have not been able to catch anyone in contemplation with the exception of excursions of children led around on Sundays and holidays. So it is enough for us to have these things hanging on the wall? . . . Of course, it was enough. Pictures, statues, and other wonderful things exist only so that people know they exist . . . one knows they are and one does not pay any more attention to them than one pays to radiators and ventilators.

They protested. I demanded that they tell us immediately, from memory, what scene is depicted in the large, eye-catching, and hundred-times-viewed Gobel in the adjoining hall. They did not know. I asked if they could name any other works of art found in that room. They could tell me about 40 percent.

I asked the librarian, Mr. Gueri, the ideal clerk, in black with a white collar and tie, if he could tell me what percentage of volumes in his seven-thousand-volume library was in circulation, and what percentage rested in eternal peace,

requiescat in pace? He looked at me distrustfully and gave me an evasive answer. I asked him if the government was preparing for the arrival of the inevitable moment when the libraries will be completely full—when they begin to burst the cities, when one will have to give them not just separate buildings but entire neighborhoods, when the accumulation of books and artworks will pour out into the fields and forests from cities filled to the brim?

—Let us not forget—I added—that just as quantity turns into quality, so quality also turns into quantity.

The son of Valéry, the Iraqi ambassador, a minister from Thailand.

The ladies with Robbe-Grillet's latest novel, *La jalousie*, in their hands. They pass. Each says: —People apparently can't get through this book . . . I will! I told myself that I would!

Professor Lucien Goldmann. Broad shouldered, with a warrior's chest, bearing down, something like a truck or even a thirty-ton ship. He was at the Récamier theater at a production of *The Marriage*, participated in the discussions, explained to people left and right where the whole secret lay, until he finally came out with an article in *France Observateur* entitled "Critics Understood Nothing" in which he gave his own interpretation of the play. It began promisingly. *The Marriage*, in his opinion, is closely bound to the historical cataclysms of our times, it is a "chronicle of history gone crazy," the action of *The Marriage* is a grotesque parody of real events. But then? Goldmann makes the Drunkard into the rebellious masses, Henry's fiancée into the nation, the King into the government, and me into a "Polish squire" who contained the historical drama in these symbols. I timidly protested, yes, I do not deny that *The Marriage* is a wild version of a crazy history; in the dreamy or drunken becoming of this action is mirrored the fantasticality of the historical process, but to make Molly the nation and Father the state . . . ?? Nothing doing. Goldmann, professor, critic, broad-shouldered Marxist, decreed that I did not know, that he knew better! Rabid Marxist imperialism! They use that doctrine to invade people! Goldmann, armed with Marxism, was the subject—I, deprived of Marxism, was the object—a few people, not at all amazed that Goldmann was interpreting me and not the other way around, listened to the discussion.

And the latest bulletins from the front? Yes, from the front because the battle of my partially acknowledged greatness with these Frenchmen cannot cease

for an instant. I could, in fact, or so it would seem, be on a wartime footing with those who know nothing about me or know it poorly, or I could relax on the side with my admirers. But—and I say this seriously—how would I look if the enemy caught me in a moment of such weakness with my worshipers? No, I must continue to be difficult! Difficult! And most of all the way I was in Argentina, oh, oh, if I would change even an inch under the influence of Paris, it would be a disaster, no, I must be just the way I was with Flor or Eisler at the Tex, that is how I must be now, oh, oh, in the cupola of Les Invalides, in the towers of the Notre Dame, to leave an impression of myself using Flor from Argentina!

With Flor or even old-gentry Poland! That is why I put so much effort into telling two communists, “And, reverend sir, in the old days, a boor was a boor and a gentleman a gentleman, and that was better.” This is what I told them under the chestnut trees. Those two—professors of philosophy, came to attend the Nietzsche congress—were extremely pleased and for a moment all three of us were happy.

I feel, however, that politics is encircling me . . . the worst of the wild monkeys of the Parisian jungle. At dusk I feel the cinctures growing tighter and extending their feelers for me. . . . The “Polish squire” and “émigré” are beginning to hurt, as they are not all that difficult to exchange for “anti-Semite” and even “fascist” and a fascist is only a step away from a “Nazi.” The German critic, a Jew, Hans Mayer, who devoted a chapter of his book *Ansichten* to me, announced from out of the blue at a meeting of the Formentor jury that he knows for certain that I am an anti-Semite and that the book I am currently writing is full of anti-Semitic sallies. Who imparted this information to him? This outburst was all the stranger in that Mayer did, after all, discuss my *Diary* in his book and he could not have missed the lengthy passage describing my sympathetic attitude toward Jews (in Warsaw cafés I was called the Jewish king). Defend myself? Protest? Oh, oh, let us allow the coupling of my person with a threadbare vocabulary to give birth to monstrosities that will devour one another. It is worse that French newspapers, on the occasion of my arrival in Paris, emphasized my countlike appearance and aristocratic mannerisms, and the Italian press wrote *gentiluomo polacco*. Protest? oh, oh, what would I accomplish with protests? Yes, I know that this compromises me in the eyes of the avant-garde, students, and the left, as if I were the author of *Quo Vadis*; while it is *the left and not the right* that is the natural territory of my expansion. Unfortunately, the old story from times when the right saw me as a “Bolshevik” and the left

as an unbearable anachronism is repeating itself. But I do see something of my historical role in this: oh, oh, oh, to enter Paris with innocent nonchalance, as a conservative seditionist, provincial avant-gardist, rightist leftist, leftist rightist, Argentine Sarmatian, aristocratic plebeian, antiartistic artist, immature adult, disciplined anarchist, and a person who is artificially candid and candidly artificial. This will do us, you and me . . . a lot of good!

Illness.

Stone.

Night and vampire.

With the Charaires under the chestnut tree.

Death.

A philosophical discussion with Mr. d'Hormon at the table. Probably the most splendid of all my disputes! I said, "There is a concealed Bergson in your Renan," to which the old man, not having heard a single word, answered, "For the monad must be conceived of in this perspective, believe me, I have thought this through and Democritus, after all . . ." I (brutally): —No, I do not trust Theocritus! He (charmingly, with the greatest courtesy): —What? Heraclitus? Well yes, yes, I support your feelings to an extent, *cher Monsieur*, but Heraclitean horizons . . . People were listening in deep silence with the greatest reverence, the whole table hung on our every word, until finally the old man patted my shoulder: *Nous sommes du même étage* (we are on the same level).

Hector, Jean, Raoul, Dominique. Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old. They change plates, carry the platters around, brisk, fluid—is this ballet to serve us or are we overeating and displaying our dignity just so they can dance? In the evening they rush out of the kitchen into the park, playgrounds and tennis court, jump on motorcycles, and then St. Louis, the tower, Gothic facades, congresses conferences, artists, scholars, all this collapses before these children, as before an invader speaking a foreign tongue.

1966

XVI

More than a year has passed since I settled in Vence, twenty kilometers from Nice, on a slope of the Alpes Maritimes—a chic place, there is no dearth of residences elegantly concealed in palm stands, behind walls of roses, dense array of mimosa.

From my window I sometimes see a few Rolls Royces, whose owners are buying milk or shrimp at the market in the square.

In addition to the Rolls Royces, Jaguars.



Who would like to know what happened to me in the course of almost a year's silence. . . .

I spent three months in Royaumont, near Paris. Then I fled the autumn, first to the area of Cannes, to La Messuguière. I occupied a room Gide had lived in years ago. My path finally converges with the traces of people I have been familiar with for a long time, as if I were reaching them physically *post mortem*, and a voice answers: you were exiled.

I finally settled in Vence. A pleasant little apartment, five balconies, four views, three fireplaces. Between the Alps, boiling with lights, sea flashing its blue in the distance and the ancient streets of this captivating little place with remnants of the castle of the barons de Villeneuve et de Vence.



In the sixty-first year of my life I have attained what a man usually acquires around thirty: a family life, apartment, dog, cat, comforts. . . . And I have undoubtedly also become (everything testifies to this) a “writer.” This silly story, lagging

along strangely and sluggishly from early youth through my entire life has somehow taken on color; lo and behold, I am a “writer.”

Except that the shore I left two years ago, there on the other side of Gibraltar, the Canary Islands, the ocean beneath the hills of the Brazilian coast and the beaches of Uruguay, is still roaring and smoking in me. From here Argentina seems to be heaving ocean foam and wind. I have her in me like something dark, imprecise, puzzling. I will probably never be able to get used to Argentina, I keep wavering, now it seems to me that she was destined for me, she was in my stars, then again comes the thought that no, this was something accidental, external, like an animal’s leap into a forest, predatory.

It is also painful to me that so little will remain of that Argentine period. Where are the people who could tell my story, describe and pass on what I was like? The people I spent time with were not usually writers; it is difficult to demand colorful anecdotes, happy characterizations, a lovely silhouette . . . and, I must admit that I was different with each one, thus none of them know what sort of person I was.

I get an unpleasant feeling when the mail sometimes brings me news of what is being written about me in Argentina. As one could have expected, I am characterized as a kind-hearted uncle, friend of young people; in these cozy little memoirs, articles, I am the conventional figure of an artist “misunderstood” and rejected by my milieu. Oh well! *Tu l’a voulu, Georges Dandin!* Why did you choose a way of living that was difficult to describe—a too-complicated system of masks? Wary people care that their lives are suited for memoirs. At any rate, it is certain that there, beyond the ocean, even my memory is undergoing disintegration, is dying.

Will I be able to revive once again, here, on the Riviera? For now I am like the tone of a piano key that has been pressed, there is more death in me than life. It is too late.



Sometime in May *Cosmos* appeared, just in Polish for the time being, published by *Kultura*.

I gladly call this work a “novel about a reality that is creating itself.” And because a detective novel is precisely this—an attempt at organizing chaos—*Cosmos* has a little of the form of a detective romance.

I am establishing two starting points, two anomalies, very distant from one

another: (a) a hanged sparrow, (b) the association of Katasia's lips with Lena's. These two puzzles will begin to demand sense. One will permeate the other in striving to create a whole. A process of conjectures, associations, circumstantial evidence, something will begin to create itself but it is a rather monstrous embryo . . . and this murky, incomprehensible charade will call for its solution . . . it will search for an explanatory, ordering idea. . . .

What adventures, and what rows with reality during this tearing out of the fog!

Internal and external logic.

The stratagems of logic.

Intellectual wilderness: analogues, oppositions, symmetries. . . .

Suddenly the growing dithyrambic rhythm of the furiously forming Reality. And its disintegration. Catastrophe. Shame.

The sudden overflowing with excessive fact.

The creation of backwater tributaries . . . dark caves . . . obstructions . . . impediments, whirlpools . . . twists. . . .

Etc., etc., etc.

The idea circles me like a wild beast. . . .

Etc.

My cooperation. I on that side, the side of the charade. I as he who tries to figure out the charade through himself. I abducted by the whirlwind of events, seeking Form.

In vain do I throw myself into the whirlwind, at the cost of my happiness. . . .

Microcosm—macrocosm.

Mythologizing. Distance. Echo.

The sudden breaking out of *logical* absurdity. Shamelessness.

Reference points. Leon and his mass.

Etc. etc.



Still in connection with *Cosmos*: from the immensity of phenomena taking place around me, I draw one thing. I notice, for example, the ashtray on my table (the rest of the objects on the table slip into nonbeing).

If I can justify why I noticed the ashtray in particular (“I want to drop my cigarette ash”), everything is all right.

If I noticed the ashtray accidentally, without any intention, and I never return to this observation, everything is still as it should be.

If, however, having noticed this phenomenon without significance, you return to it for a second time . . . woe! Why did you notice it again if it is without significance? Ah, so it means something to you after all, if you returned. . . . Oh yes, by dint of the fact that you concentrated unjustifiably on this phenomenon one second longer, this thing already begins to stand out, becomes remarkable. . . . No, no (you deny), this is an ordinary ashtray! —Ordinary? Why are you denying it if it is ordinary?

This is how a phenomenon becomes an obsession.

Is reality obsessive by its very essence? In light of our building our worlds through associating phenomena, I would not be surprised if at the primal beginning of all time, there was a *double association*. It indicates direction in chaos and is the beginning of order.

In consciousness there is something like its being its own trap.



Also at this time, at the end of April and the beginning of May, I had so dreadfully stupid an experience that I was sick with humiliation for two weeks.

Let us not forget that a poet is an intimate, nocturnal, almost underground being. The artist has the nature of a bat, rat, mole, and mimosa. I was sure that this year I had no chance of making off with the ten thousand dollar International Publishers Award. The press did not name me in the list of candidates and people explained to me that such and such considerations, interests, tactics, and procedures put me in the margin. I did not pay much attention to the deliberations of the jury, right next door, in nearby Valescure. But during the third or fourth day of deliberations, an Italian journalist from Valescure visited me to conduct an interview and said that there was more and more talk about me, that *Pornografía* was beginning to stand out from the dozens of works discussed. This was enough. I was overcome by desire. Dollars! And then somebody kept calling, dollars, dollars, in the final round it was between me and Saul Bellow, dollars! On the day the

announcement was supposed to be made, my dignity was a rag, my sovereignty idiocy, dollars, dollars, dollars. . . .

Which with the passing of minutes, were vanishing . . . at five in the afternoon I was drinking coffee in a small café on the square, dollars, when they drove up: Bondy and his wife, the Greek writer Kay Cicellis, Seaver, the director of Grove Press, and a few more people, all from Valescure. A report on the dramatic deliberations which, if not for . . . Bah! If the Spanish delegation, which was with me in principle, had not put forth a certain Latin American writer in the first round of voting, to give him a little publicity . . . Bah! If *Pornografia* had not been called *Pornografia* . . . because luck would have it that the same jury granted its young writers award to an American a few days earlier for a novel that was a little extreme, so they were worried about the title, something about too much of a good thing . . . Bah! If not for the tactics of the German delegation and the particular interests of large publishing houses . . . Bah! If . . .

Relato refero. I started a little rumor that, well, actually, I could get a lawyer and take this jury to court. Yes indeed! The legal bases for such court action are undoubtedly there. The granting of this award, the largest after the Nobel, is no laughing matter. The members of the jury are obligated by the statutes to grant the award to the best book artistically. Only this consideration should determine the winner. In the meantime, as one can see from the press reports, they consider factors that have nothing to do with artistic quality: give it to this one because “we must award someone from the *nouveau roman français*,” or give it to that one because “it is time for Latin America” . . . the members of the jury drink a little whiskey and chat about all sorts of topics. It would be interesting, I said, to win this trial. This would bring about an avalanche of other trials, all the injured would demand a revision of all the awards and this would lead to liquidating the Award as such . . . this gratuity, this compromise. . . .

I was dissuaded, ha, ha, what paradoxes, then Seaver took me aside, laid out certain propositions in the name of Grove Press, dollars, dollars, I felt a little better, but in the days that followed something else leaked out (because in the papers a lot was written about how I lost by one vote), so it was as if I felt a little better. But I really felt just awful.

Please understand me: we artists know the ephemeral, fleeting nature of

our undertaking extremely well. Of course, covering paper with made-up stories is not a serious occupation. How ashamed I was of this in the first years that I wrote, how red-faced I would get if someone caught me at it! An engineer, doctor, officer, pilot, or worker is taken seriously right away, but an artist attains serious recognition only after many long years.

An artist steps up to each person individually, whispers in his ear, and quietly demands that he recognize him. It has happened! I have one, even two, who have recognized me. I now have fifteen, one hundred, four thousand of them. I begin to breathe deeply—so I am approaching seriousness at last! How many years it takes! My climb swallowed up thirty years of effort, poverty, and humiliation.

What then? Then they grab you by the collar and bam! . . . they stick you before the High Tribunal. O blessed night, where art thou?! A minute ago you were completely alone . . . now in a social atmosphere, in the light of hotel lamps, you are one of thirty milch cows and one of thirty racing mares that are patted and judged. Who is that cultured old schoolmarm that blurted out that she was “incapable” of reading more than fifty pages of your novel? This is, in person, the chairman of the honorable jury herself, Mrs. McCarthy. McCarthy? For me, McCarthy—and I say this with absolute candor—does not belong to serious literature. I am ready to swear under oath that, for me, McCarthy was always a mediocre, third-, even fourth-class writer. How is it then that I, at the height of my efforts, after so long and so hard a journey, find myself at the feet of this respectable lady prattling she was “incapable,” etc. What sort of jokes are these? Jokes with my seriousness? With my pride? With my dignity?! What sort of demon has suddenly returned me to that stupidity, frivolity, and triviality of my beginnings?!

Who? What demon? Ten thousand dollars! That you desire! That have penetrated you to the core! Ten thousand? But this is a completely ridiculous sum! A million at least! Fifty million!

No, ten thousand, a sum made by an average financier on a completely mediocre transaction.

(Written not to disparage awards, but to be able to be a candidate for them as stingily as possible, without damaging my inner life. But I wrote this also for the public good; it is time people understood how hurtful this rabble can be. . . .)



I will also mention something that happened not long ago, in November probably, having to do with Sandauer's essay. . . . But first a few words about a walk in the valley of the Var. A walk in the Var River valley? It is being done, we are already hastening along the balcony of the Alpes Maritimes, open to the sea. The valley, the dry bed of the wide river, so what? Farther? Yes, the highway takes us deep inside, into the ascending mountains . . . what's this? There, a thousand meters above us, a little *bourgade* with a castle, with a tower, it hangs off the nose of an enormous rock . . . onward! Winding roads, precipice, droning engine. Breakfast time? Not a prayer. In this tiny medieval place everything is closed, boarded up. End of the season. Autumn. We drive down. But we spotted the road dividing . . . this one to the right, to Roquesteron! And the trip to Roquesteron begins in the whiteness of bursting sun, through an autumn spattered with color . . . the transparency of leaves, gold and red, the depths of shade, enormous verdure, rushing water, and nests of rock.

At five in the afternoon back in Vence. I can definitely not reconcile myself to their literature. Wouldn't it be better for them not to have a literature at all?

On the table in front of me is Sandauer's essay from the Warsaw *Kultura* entitled "Gombrowicz, Man and Writer." For the last seven years I have heard nothing from over there but silence (and sometimes mudslinging), what does this mean, are they being allowed to write about me again?

Gréolière, Thorenc, Coursegoules, I am full of panoramas.

Polish literature in Poland is ostensibly the same as all the literatures in the West: they have "excellent writers," "fine works," poetry, prose, criticism, feuilletons, awards, contests, conferences. There you have it! Just like Paris! It is only upon closer inspection that one discovers that everything is inflated. And who can know whether they are heroic for blowing on the embers of Polish literature in conditions so . . . difficult . . . or whether they are practical, grabbing those sinecures, honors, comforts whenever they can? . . . Tragic? Or sly?

This "humanism" . . . this virtuous cannon of theirs, shooting bullets of moral condemnation at "violence perpetrated upon man." But why does this cannon fire in just one direction? What sort of one-way morality is this?

Sandauer? We are old acquaintances. A scrappy *clerc*, he struck at that fiction the hardest . . . but in the confusion of concept, people, values, how am I supposed to know whether that Sandauer is still today's Sandauer? On paper a

person is even more elusive than in life. Literature is a row of sentences, waddling like geese, one behind the other. A person can write three honest, free, proud sentences but in the fourth sentence this honesty of his concentrates itself on, for example, my “feudal complexes” instead of choosing some other aspect of my person—and this is already a slight distortion—and although the next sentences will again be so firm and ruthless that we say to ourselves with admiration, “Well, how about this!” not too much farther down, one of them will mention my “fascist inclinations.” . . . We will then notice that honesty has not stopped being honesty, nor firmness firmness, no, they have merely begun to choose the areas of their activity with a certain caution. . . .

This, for example, is a Sandauer passage having to do with Mrs. Swinarska and our famous meeting.

This interview, Sandauer writes, may not be so far from the truth because the “overbearing, contrary, provocative [tone] has something Gombrowiczian in it.” And, he adds, Gombrowicz himself often mentions his fascist inclinations (this is followed by quotations from my diary).

How much freedom and expertise in these subtle analyses—too subtle perhaps in reference to blatant swinishness. To hell with nuances or whether the tone was Gombrowiczian or not because, as Sandauer knows very well, this whole affair was nothing more than a crude political campaign against me: for two months those unfortunate Polish newspapers worked me over on orders and condemned me in the strongest possible terms, while my correction, sent not just to the newspapers but to the Writers Union, was shelved on orders. All of the local “leading” and “excellent” writers, all subtle, moral, responsible and European, watched this working over of a silenced victim without daring to utter a word. I don’t hold this against Sandauer, of course. That he sat like a mouse under a broom and didn’t let out a squeak—who knows, maybe he wasn’t informed well enough at the time. But now he is informed because as he himself admits, he read my detailed explanations in the Parisian *Kultura*. So what? So instead of at least keeping silent out of shame, our Mr. Critic writes, wrinkling his nose, that it really is strange how this Gombrowicz has a knack for creating scandals . . . and he commences an analysis of my spiritual tonations.

Et tu, Brute? “For Brutus is an honorable man.” But perhaps we should not

expect too much. If the criticism of this critic cannot function as he would like, let it at least function as it can. Let us give him a reduced fare. . . .*



Sandauer's reflections in this essay in regard to my purported sexual deviations? By all means! As long as this is done with tact and solemnity. . . . I know very well that the right to pride is paid for with humility and I am not avoiding analyses that I myself provoke with my half-hearted confidences. (And why are the confidences half-hearted? Because one is and is not a homosexual; because one is at a certain period in one's life or in certain circumstances; that—this is my opinion—there is practically no man who could swear under oath that he never had the temptation. It is difficult to demand too-categorical a confession on the subject).

But I fear that Sandauer does not lend himself to this kind of confession.

Five years ago I wrote the following in my diary:

After all, he saw more and more clearly that his understanding with Sandauer was far from perfect, encompassing only part of his works and his person. One could not expect Sandauer to have the extraordinary receptiveness and sensitivity that allow Jeleński to grasp things in midflight—Sandauer was a species of beetle, an individual marching to his own drummer, a mastodon, crustacean, monk, hippopotamus, crank, inquisitor, cactus, martyr, crocodile, sociologist. . . .†

What, I ask, can this cactus know about Eros, deviant or not? For him the erotic world will always be a separate room locked up with a key, unjoined to the other rooms of the human house. Sociology, yes, psychology . . . these are the rooms in which he feels at home. But eroticism is, to him, "monomania."

Novels, those volatile fairy tales, become significant only when the world unveiled by them becomes something real to us. Dostoevsky will remain a fairy tale for someone who does not grasp him in his naked reality. Kafka, Valéry, Dante, surrealism, dadaism, anything at all in art, everything in art, has the right to exist only insofar as it pertains to reality, to some new, sometimes shocking, reality which it makes accessible, alive, palpable.

*A reference to Sandauer's book *No Reduced Fare*.

†*Diary*, vol. 2, p. 453.

Sandauer, researching my erotic deviations. But he would first have to determine if they led to some sort of truth. If not, then they are not worth his or anyone else's time. This sort of case study would lend itself only to a hospital. A critic who would want to assess *Pornografia*, for example, would first have to examine whether such a view of man would result in a genuine enrichment of knowledge about ourselves. The author of this book says that here man's desire to be God is pitted against another desire, extremely different: to be Young. Is this real? Unreal? Enriching? Realized in the novel? What is the extent of this? What is its dynamic?

Am I wrong if in my work a man ascending, that is, a young man, must become an idol (or perhaps: the completion of a man already realized, aging, descending)? Is it merely a symptom of my pathology when I claim that the proud ruling of the older over the younger, together with all of its social, cultural, and psychological consequences, serves to blur the other, equally important, reality—namely, that the man descending can bind himself to life only through a being ascending, maturing—for life is always “ascending”? Am I a pervert when I claim that the nature of a boy, so specific, so different in its incompleteness, inadequacy, inferiority, in its strange lightness, becomes essential to understanding the nature of an adult—and, thereby, the nature of our adult world? Am I sick when I claim that in humanity there is a constant secret cooperation between ages and stages of development, that there is a play of mutual captivation, enchantments, violence, thanks to which the “adult” never is merely an “adult”? We say: man. The word means nothing to me. I would ask: A man of what age? Enchanted by what age? A man devoted to what age? Bound to what age in his humanity?

These are questions that, even if they are not named in *Pornografia*, determine the nature of the experiment that happens in it, and especially the category of beauty and poetry that it is about. But what has this beetle understood of all this? Actually, about as much as Madame McCarthy. For him the action of this novel has nothing, and I mean nothing, in common with reality, he thinks it is a little fable, that everything in it happens, oh, of its own accord, magically, simply at Frederick's command, a supernatural and practically “divine” character . . . who, *nota bene*, is my alter ego. From which the penetrating Sandauer concludes that as a result of publishing successes on the international market I have been stricken by

megalomania. . . Oyoyoy! I agree that nonerotic natures have a hard time fathoming erotic worlds and I really do not at all expect my works to be assimilated too smoothly. I would feel rather uneasy if it happened without resistance; but there must be some sort of limit to stupidity even for Messrs. Critics. And what can a man who interprets my books so shallowly and unwisely know about me? Why should he assiduously establish all sorts of aspects of the antinomy “superiority-inferiority” playing in me if he is incapable of tying it to something really essential? And why is he digging around in my “deviations” if he is incapable of figuring out their ramifications?



A nice walk with my Pooch.

In the café on the square, painters (Vence is full of them). Beer, whiskey . . .
They say, “Oh, that one is now his girlfriend. . . .”

Chagall, Dubuffet, and Papazoff.

Mistral.

My table has one leg that is too short.

I have to buy matches.

A hat.

XVII

My mother’s maiden name was Kotkowska. It is not certain, unfortunately, yes, it is rather uncertain, the Kotkowskis’ descending from the mythical Ścibór. But be that as it may, Bodzechów, the family residence (where I spent part of my childhood) measured over five thousand hectares of prime Sandomierz land. The venerable manor was built by the Małachowskis in a century-old park, where the ghost of Chancellor Małachowski strolled on nights tremulous with a full moon.

My grandmother, Onufrowa Gombrowicz, was of (the better) Dąbrowskis, born of Benisławska (good), who was born of Baroness Toplicka (good), who was born of Sołtanówna, daughter of the chamberlain Sołtan and Radziwiłłowna (excellent). The Benisławskis also merged with the Radziwiłłs a few times.

My great grandmother, wife of Józef Gombrowicz, the marshall of Upice,

was a Gintowt Dziewałtowska, niece of Chamberlain Jan Gintowt and the granddaughter of Chamberlain Joachim. She was born to Tekla Gombrowiczówna, the starost's wife (not bad at all).

Now my great grandfather, father of Józef, Jan, the starost of Wasilany and Miguciany, judge of the Great Lithuanian Tribunal, took to wife Marcjanna Rajeczka of Juzyn (*très bien*). Her sister was married to Weyssenhoff. Miś Rajeczki, from *Soból i panna* [Sable and a lady],* is thereby my cousin (quite satisfactory).

John's father, Michał, esquire carver of Mozyry, was married to Scybutt Romanowiczówna.

His father, Jan, took to wife Jadwiga Sipowiczówna, born to Połubińska (there you have it!).

And Jan's father, Michał Kazimierz, took to wife Burbianka from the venerable, though now extinct, house of the Burbs.

Michał Kazimierz's father, Jerzy, was married to Dorota Jawoyszówna (this then is my great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother).

I will also mention some other alliances of my house with the houses of Białłozory, Witold Alexandrowicz, Wołodkowicz ("as once Wołodkowicz, a proud and impudent man . . ."), Puzyna, Dunin Kozicz, Zawisza. . . .

The estates of Lenogiry, Wysoki Dwór, and Mingajłów in Lithuania belonged to the Gombrowicz for a few centuries. And I will also casually mention a few other estates, Uzorty, Rady, Użubol, Poniemuń, Barkłojnie, and Poremigole, which we possessed for a much shorter period of time.



I am a dreadful snob!



Poet, of a poet, to a poet, with a poet . . . A poet arose, a poet sat down, a poet became downcast, a poet began to declaim. . . . And something strange happened to me! . . . I stopped dead in my tracks! . . . I was turned to stone! . . . Seduced by poetry . . . Dazed by the poetic word . . .

*A novel by Józef Weyssenhoff describing the amorous adventures of a young hunter.

Remembering Julian Tuwim, a book published in Poland, contains about forty accounts by various people, but all of it looks as if it came from the pen of one person who is not, just between you and me, too intelligent. . . . (O literature! *De mortuis nihil nisi* . . . bad news. . . . We have to get rid of this mawkishness, no genius can handle it!)

This fat volume does not bring much honor to the Poet. It is obvious that the Poet specialized in playing the role of the Poet from early youth (therefore he was noble, alert, intense, magical, eaglelike, fervent, human, honest, simple . . .) and he delivered this Poet tirelessly from morning to night. And, who knows, maybe the role finally entered his bloodstream. Me, I recall that in the prewar Café Ziemiańska, he wore us out a bit with his not allowing us to forget, even for five minutes, that he was a Poet. I am a proponent of greater discretion in these delicate matters.

This cloying book smells of the worst traditions, or rather conventions. . . . Tuwim himself does not add much; as one can see from the text, in these nightingale tralalas he almost never hit upon a word worth noting (except for his sometimes very amusing jokes). Ladies and gentlemen, that the world around Tuwim broke down so easily into the Poet and the worshipers of the Poet will not be to your credit. Why did you allow this to happen? Where did all this indulgence come from? Is there not a drop of salutary coolness, severity, irony, criticism, or common sense in you? Nothing. Only an eagerness to participate fully in the melodramatic scenery of this tralalaling *bel canto*?

The end of Tuwim was his last years in People's Poland—how deserved! His nightingaleness had to end badly, had to lead him to being an official Poet, a provider of Beauty, a functionary of nobility, a Citizen-Bard, etc. It was no accident that his tralalaling led him to the palacelike villa in Anin (palacelike; not the first nor the last of the Noble-minded, lovingly bent over the misery of the proletariat . . .). Between his immoral naïveté (because naïveté is immoral) and the incurable naïveté of proletarian culture there always existed a profound understanding. An excess of poetry is so painful in its consequences!

What do I have against him, after all? He allowed them to adore him, that is his sin!



How despicable I am!



Operetta, what's wrong with you, what am I supposed to do, what methods am I supposed to devise so that your sacks speak with the voice of History? . . . The raving of history in sacks, this is how I see it right now. . . . Unexpected, ironic, venomous, gale-thunderstorms, and sudden, interrupted songs and dances. Theater is a deceptive thing, it tempts one to be trenchant. How much easier it seems it would be to get to the end of a play than to finish a many-paged novel! But the minute you allow yourself to be drawn into all the traps of this disgusting, awkward form—when the imagination feels overcome by the weight of the people on stage, with the awkwardness of the “real” man who makes the floorboards creak . . . when you understand that you have to affix wings to this burden, to change it into a sign, fable, art . . . bah, then one version after another ends up in the wastebasket and this trifle in several acts begins to swell with the months of your life.



I am lazy.



I am lazy, so instead of overworking myself, I will attach the “interview with myself” below. I wrote this at the request of the German daily *Die Welt* in Hamburg.

Not too long ago they were barking at me in the People's Repub about my serving the Germans “for Ford dollars.” And now the Germans have come down on me. A person who would see a contradiction in this would be completely deprived of a sense of higher historical logic, expressing itself in the fact that when the Poles go bam, bam, bam (they strike), then the Germans also go bam, bam, bam (they strike).



Interview with myself for Die Welt:

Question: What have you got to say for yourself?

Answer: Nothing special.

Ques.: What . . . for example?

Ans.: Heck if I know.

Ques.: ?

Ans.: Okay! Now we can begin. That beginning was just to be careful. So that people would not expect something too brilliant from me. I take it that on this stage here in *Die Welt*, where a writer is listening to his own confessions, many of my colleagues have already shone . . . as for me, I prefer not to shine next to someone else's light. I prefer to shine where it is dark. So let us conduct an ordinary little interview, without fireworks and arabesques, without pretensions.

Ques.: Three of your books have appeared in Germany in recent months. Let us talk first about *Berliner Notizen*. Let us remind our readers of the circumstances surrounding this matter. The Ford Foundation invites you to Berlin for a year's stay. You publish your impressions first in *Kultura*, then in a book entitled *Berliner Notizen*. The book evokes very contradictory reactions in the German press, some of which are even quite hostile. It is enough to review the titles of the articles: in *Die Zeit*, "Ein Exot in der deutschen Wohnküche"; in *München Merkur*, "Klecks in Berliner Gästenbuch"; in *Der Spiegel*, "Dieses Glitzerding." What do you have to say for yourself?

Ans.: Yes, some Germans felt hurt. But I wrote those things to hurt Germans.

Ques.: To hurt them?

Ans.: Yes, a writer ought to be painful. Just as in love: one has to get through the clothes to the living flesh.

Ques.: But how do you explain the fact that your touch became a caress to some Germans and a pinch to others?

Ans.: This is a very basic difficulty—impossible to avoid. Because I am someone; because I am someone very hungry for form, the most distinct form . . . I am also very aggressive . . . and I have enemies who hate me, no, this is too strong, who cannot stand me, whom I irritate . . . because my very existence undermines theirs. This is a spiritual struggle for being, as old as the world. Mrs. Maria Osterkamp wrote that I am an *extreme* person, the result of which is that my diary has to be either accepted or dismissed as a whole. Fine. I am not a proponent of lukewarm soups.

Ques.: But you were a guest in Berlin. Doesn't this obligate you in some way?

Ans.: No, a self-respecting literature must demand, more than anything

else, that it be taken seriously. In Berlin I was not a guest but something far more horrifying, desperate, powerful, I was myself, my own existence and my own drama. Guest! Drama! Existence! Grappling with fate! Today, in a day of easy voyages, a writer becomes more of a cultural traveling salesman. No. No one is going to import me as if I were a bag of lozenges. I truly beg your pardon, I am a Spirit. A Spirit, of course, that is as well brought up as possible (I have the impression that nothing in this regard can be held against the *Berliner Notizen*), but a spirit nevertheless.

Ques.: Hm . . . one has to admit that your opponents see the matter in a less emotional and more practical light. You were distinctly given to understand that for the round sum in dollars received from the Ford Foundation you could have been somewhat . . . more amenable in your writing. . . .

Ans.: *Hélas!* This argument was also advanced. I am afraid that this was neither very fair nor very elegant on the part of my opponents. The Foundation places no conditions on invited artists: come, sit in Berlin awhile, do what you like, no one expects anything of you. If, therefore, I wrote the Berlin diary, it was not because I was invited but because I write it wherever I happen to be . . . in Buenos Aires, Paris, Berlin. . . . But I am being awkward in defending myself too extensively against these accusations. It might seem that *Berliner Notizen* provoked a scandal, while I actually received more responses that were warmly well-wishing and genuinely friendly.

Ques.: Probably no one expressed the kindheartedness of some Germans better than Karl Korn in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. This is the conclusion of his article: “Gombrowicz got the most from his role as a guest. He extracted the highest art, to really be himself. . . . Today one is silent about Germans. This Pole has broken that silence. He made it known that—like it or not—we are his business. And he has become our business, whether we like it or not.” What do you say to this?

Ans.: Korn expresses a very real need the German soul has. Here a German is asking a foreigner to be free, asking him for honesty, and especially independence, because he knows that without this he himself cannot be free, honest, independent toward the foreigner. Toward the foreigner, that is, toward the world. Toward the world, that is, toward himself.

Ques.: So what are your critics demanding?

Ans.: They would prefer more . . . respect. . . . Let me be allowed to express

my humble opinion: this contradiction in the German soul will get deeper in proportion to the increase in . . . comfort. Material comfort but spiritual comfort even more. Actually they go hand in hand.

Ques.: Let us move on to the next book that recently appeared, *Aus dem Tagebuch des Witold Gombrowicz*, the popular edition of your diary for the years 1953–56.

Ans.: If I were to give my cocreators, that is, my readers (because reading is no less creative than writing) some really important advice, it would be this: do not simplify your task by saying “he is doing this to be paradoxical” or “to go against the grain” or “to irritate.” Paradoxes, poking fun, *épater*-ing . . . no, this is not for us, it’s coming out of our ears, it was fine when one could shock the innocence of the respectable bourgeoisie. Try to believe me and you will see how all my oddities and games begin to join in an organic whole capable of living. In me, artificiality is what enables me to be honest, jokes lead to seriousness, obstreperousness to truth. Try to grasp me as profoundly as possible. Honest, I am up to it!

Ques.: And what would you say about *Indizien* (*Cosmos*), your last novel? It’s already in the bookstores.

Ans.: I don’t like these births. . . . They’re unpleasant. . . .

Ques.: You mean you’re not sure of that work?

Ans.: I really don’t know. It is really still hot, it just appeared in Polish and German, and it will appear in France any day now. Not that I am afraid. . . . I do not like . . . All my labors are difficult, complicated. . . . First something like darkness, saturated with light consternation, appears around every one of my books. My friends are disturbed, often ashamed. I try to know as little about this as possible, and it is only months later that I begin to look through the clippings sent to me from newspapers. I have yet to see one of my plays at the theater. I prefer not to think about this to the extent that I almost always overlook the premiere dates and it is only an unexpected telegram that brings me back to reality.

Ques.: What last thing do you have to say?

Ans.: Friends! Allow me, by way of an exception, to occupy myself with something other than myself: Europe. The name “Europe,” so much broader than “Germany,” “Poland,” or “France,” excites me, so full is it of a nascent energy. But the rapid advance of European technologists is not accompanied at all by the rapid advance of European humanists . . . could it be that the spirit of Europe has sunk

into a machine? What has happened that we humanists are bungling everything—music is becoming pettier, poetry drier, literature terribly boring? Yes, indeed, for the last two hundred years the European consciousness has been under the sign of reduction: in Germany Kant, Marx, or Husserl, or Heidegger are the gradual stages of a careful curtailing of the spirit. But the devaluation of art and literature has nothing to do with this process, whose gravity cannot be underestimated. What a failure! Absurdity is present in everything we touch, in our way of creating (which became cerebral and repugnant), in our talking about art (there is too much talk), in all the mechanisms of our little artistic world, that gigantic machinery made up of 100,000 doctors, docents, interpreters, glossators, sucking pale blood from the anemic bodies of thousands of ordinary artists. What is happening? Where have the splendid, red-blooded, stunning beef steaks such as Goethe, Beethoven, evaporated to from our artistic kitchen? How can we make art stop being an expression of our mediocrity and again become an expression of our greatness, beauty, and poetry? This is my program: *Primo*, to realize, in the most painful way, what milksops we are. *Secundo*, to discard all aesthetic theories produced during the last fifty years that are working furtively to weaken the personality. This whole period is poisoned by striving for the leveling of values and people—away with it! *Tertio*, having done away with the theories, to turn to people, to the great personalities of the past, and in covenant with them to recover in our own persons the eternal wellsprings of imagination, inspiration, panache, and grace. For there is no democracy in which some kind of aristocracy, some species of superiority, would not be attainable. *Dixi*. I am taking advantage of this opportunity to warmly greet Miss Hanna Garthe of Sarrebrück.



I am lazy sometimes, it is true. . . .



Revenge is the delight of the gods!

The dumbbell who gave himself up to this intoxicating delight (I know who he is) forgot that in the natural course of things I would also get my chance.

But I am including in my diary my little letter (below) to *Wiadomości* in London, not out of revenge but out of a citizen's concern, to draw the attention of

émigré opinion to the gaps and flaws in our émigré press. How many émigré dailies, weeklies, monthlies, devoted to nothing but Polish life do we have? And how many Poles in emigration found out from the Polish press that a certain, for example, *Ivona*, had considerable success here and there? Not to mention other little facts of the same authorship, equally worthy of attention, and busily clad in the veil of silence. It might seem, in truth, that our press divides authors into likable and despicable. They write even the tiniest detail down for the likable ones and they avoid writing down even less tiny details for the despicable ones.



I am despicable!



To the editor of *Wiadomości*:

The Polish critic Artur Sandauer visited me and said that various people in literary circles in Poland, including himself, received clippings from *Wiadomości* and *Dziennik Polski* sent anonymously from London from which one could surmise that my play *Ivona*, performed in Paris a few months ago, had been “panned” by the critics.

Intrigued by this strange news, I looked into the issues of *Wiadomości* from this period. Sure enough, in the 7 October issue of last year, there is a note entitled “Gombrowicz flogged in Paris.”

The beginning said that *Ivona* was “mercilessly panned” by the *Figaro* reviewer, Jean-Jacques Gautier. After which there follow long excerpts from his review. I will allow myself to refresh your memory: “One cannot imagine a more pretentious or depressing spectacle. It is difficult not to shake with outrage at such an indulgence of absurdity, incompetence, stupidity, and bluff.” Et cetera. In the end there were an encouraging two little sentences from the author of the piece stating that another critic, however, Lemarchand, “has great esteem for the play as well as the set.” I want to share with the readers of *Wiadomości* the rather outdated, but nonetheless felicitous, news to the Polish ear that the play of the Polish author was received quite well in Paris. In the Information Bulletin of the de Bourgogne Theater (this is the troupe that did *Ivona*), the following is listed under the title “*Ivona* in Paris.”

“Out of thirty-nine reviews, thirty were favorable (of these, twenty were very flattering); five favorable for the play as well as the set design, and four unfavorable (of which one was extremely unfavorable).”

The “extremely unfavorable” one was, of course, the one reprinted in *Wiadomości*. But let us listen to how some of the favorable ones sound: Jean Paget in *Combat*: “This is a very great play”; Robert Abirached in *Le Nouvel Observateur*: “A masterpiece”; Gilles Sandier in *Arts*: “An admirable, astonishing presentation”; Christian Megret in *Carrefour*: “This lesson in good and beautiful theater.” . . .

“Gombrowicz panned in Paris” right? As for the review in *Le Figaro*, let us listen to the response it got in the French press.

“Poor Gombrowicz,” writes Sandier in *Arts*, “let the rabble [*goujats*] accuse you of being a half-breed. . . . French theater is proud that it can present you, the author of *Ferdynand* and one of the people who bring honor to our time.” There were protests against the brutal review in *Le Figaro*, not just in *Arts*, but in other publications and on the radio.

I will not blame *Wiadomości* for overlooking the stark fact that the Polish play in Paris was unquestionably a great success. One cannot demand satisfactory press service from a publication functioning in difficult, émigré conditions. But you will admit, Mr. Editor, that you owe the readers of the magazine as well as me the satisfaction of printing the above correction. Polish opinion has the right to know that a Polish writer has not made a clown of himself at the Théâtre de France and that I, a writer, would have the right to turn to you with the cautious request for, I would say, a more friendly disposition, in connection with greater, I would say, care in presenting information that concerns me. For the dose of silence, distortion, and calumny to which the red regime in Poland sentences me is quite enough, I feel, and I would prefer that the émigré press not add oil to the flames with such tasty morsels.

A writer, gagged in his own country, should be able to count on the support, help, and goodwill of the Polish press. How eloquent all this is when taken together! You, sir, exhaust and torment yourself to give this Cinderella native literature a little success in the world, and for this they will strangle you in Poland, pinch you in emigration, and some dirty and envious joker will disseminate this stuff by mail, to boot! Ugh!

And one more little thing. After the premiere in the Théâtre de France

there followed a premiere in the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm. *Dagens Nyheter*: “An extraordinary theatrical event”; *Stockholm Tidningen*: “A production exceeding all our known boundaries”; *Aftonbladet*: “This is not theater, this is magic.”

“The premier of *Ivona*,” writes the Stockholm *Wiadomości Polskie*, “transformed itself into a paean of Polish dramatic creativity.”

Hm . . .



Peek-a-boo.



3.vii.66

It's all ready to go to print. I looked it over. Corrected it here and there. I can now send it to Giedroyc so that the third volume of my diary, from the years 1961–66, can appear.

I am far from being satisfied with it.

I will say honestly: one of the most important tasks that constantly rattled around inside me when I began working on my diary in those years has not been accomplished. I see this now clearly . . . it depresses me. . . .

I have been unable to express adequately my passage from inferiority to superiority, this exchanging of an insignificant Gombrowicz for a significant one. Neither the spiritual sense of this passage, nor the sense shamefully personal, nor the social sense (the change pertaining to my being grounded in people) was treated adequately. Convention turned out to be more powerful. Whenever I touched upon this subject, it always shattered into little pieces, evaporated, turned into a joke, polemics, into superficial self-praise, into obstreperousness . . . into a feuilleton. . . . The usual means of articulation got the upper hand. The passages that brush against this string in my diary lack energy, boldness, seriousness, and ingenuity.

This is a serious stylistic and personal defeat. And I doubt that even in the future I would be able to grab this bull by the horns. The time for that has passed!

XVIII

16.x.1966

Through me the way to a doleful land
Through me the way to everlasting woe
Through me the way to a forsaken people

“Doleful land? . . . About hell? Couldn’t he have come up with something better?

That’s rather lackluster and ordinary . . . something that is too straight from life. . . . I can express it better today! “Meta!” Hell is primarily *metaphysical*!

When speaking of hell, one has to select words that are internally contradictory to capture the Inexpressible.

So that instead of “Through me the way to a doleful land,” let us write something like:

Through me the way to a fathomless land
Which eternally chases its own abyss.

There! That’s better! How much deeper is a hell that plunges into its own depths. . . .

And the second line of this Dantean inscription on the infernal gates (because this is the third canto of the *Inferno* where Dante and Virgil approach the gates of the Inferno):

Through me the way to everlasting woe

The only disturbing thing here is that “everlasting.” Couldn’t he have brought himself to find something better? I reach for my pen. Let us think a moment. . . . But why wrack my brains? I have at least a dozen better, ready-made ideas nestled in my head . . . such as:

Through me the way to the place where
Eternal evil corrodes and consumes itself.

And the following is an interpretation of these lines: whereas in the former (metaphysical) designation, I underscored Hell’s absolute inhumanity, here I ex-

press the only thing that could humanize it somewhat and make it accessible to man. To put it simply, it is a botched piece of work. Hell is a bungled enterprise.

A modern thought (and what an attractive one to me!).

For Absolute Evil must also be “bad” in its being. Evil desiring evil and only evil cannot realize itself “well” or fully. An “evil” man does something bad (kills a neighbor), but that evil is a good to him, he does not do it because it is evil but because it is good for him and corresponds to his welfare . . . and he does not want to do this thing “badly” but “well.” This man, like others, therefore, seeks the good; the only difference is that he sees the good in a criminal act. . . . And Satan, Satan wants evil and only evil, he cannot want what is good. Satan, therefore, even wants to exist “badly.” Hell is something that is poorly realized. It is tainted in its being. Hell is shoddy.

An interesting thought. A modern thought. A thought a trifle too dialectic, but it does expand the imagination. . . .

Nothing else except the idea of a bungled job can make the infernal abyss accessible to Humanity. A vision of Evil eating its way into itself, tormenting itself . . . yes, that whets the appetite. . . .

Our Florentine pilgrim did not know this, he was incapable of such thought. . . . If he had been able to see it, he would have greeted it on his knees, he and Virgil! How his hell would have jumped when gouged with this spur!

As for the third line:

Through me the way to a forsaken people

Good, fine. I have no reservations about this line. “Forsaken,” yes, today we know the taste of that. . . . But I would add just one more slightly unexpected adjective:

Through me the way to a forsaken and
Indefatigable people

Yes, of course, “indefatigable,” that very harsh adjective as in “indefatigable dancer” or “indefatigable worker,” but also close to that other word “unmurdered.” . . . Yes, because all of damned humanity is inconsumable, for eternity. Devil and man are the two inexhaustible pillars of hell.

Let us read the whole thing from the beginning.

Through me the way to a fathomless land
Which eternally chases its own abyss.
Through me the way to the place where
Eternal Evil corrodes and consumes itself
Through me the way to a forsaken and
Indefatigable people . . .

Now compare this with his superficial and clumsy tercet! What a Dantean hell we would have if it were delineated by my three ideas! But I repeat, I could just as easily have added ten others, equally heady, completely unknown to him (I could have, for example, conceived of hell as “continuous,” or made it something “granular,” or treated it in categories of “metastasis,” “backdrop,” “transcendence,” “alienation,” “function,” “mental state,” “being in and for itself,” etc., etc., boy, oh boy, oh boy!).

When I come in touch with Dante through this swarm, this whirlpool of six hundred years filled with existence, I immerse myself in time that has been disposed of to reach him, this dead, this somehow “former” Alighieri. . . . In our communion with the dead, the only abnormal thing is that we consider it so normal. We say: he lived, he died, he wrote the *Divine Comedy* and now I am reading it. . . .

But the past is something that no longer exists. And a past made up of six hundred years is so distant that I have not even come across it in my own past. For as long as I have been alive, it has been something “past.” What does it mean, therefore, when we say “he lived in the past”? In my present I find some sort of traces—a poem—and from these traces I draw out that bygone existence, I re-create it for myself. But for me to be able to say that someone “was” (an incredible word, something like “is” but weaker), that “was” has to show itself to me on the very horizon of my present as the strange point of intersection of two beams of light: one that issues from me, from my effort to re-create, and the second, which is born on the outside, at the very intersection of the future and the past, at the very point of their passing, allowing one to feel that that which was still “is,” that is, is as something that “was.”

Communion with the past is, therefore, a continual laboring to attain it, to summon it into being . . . but, because we read it from the traces it has left behind

and because those traces are themselves dependent on chance, on the more or less frail material in which they were left behind, on various experiences in time, because of this, that past is chaotic, accidental, fragmentary. . . . I know nothing about one of my great-grandmothers, nothing about the way she looked or her character or life, nothing except that on the sixteenth of June in 1669, on the very day that King Michael was elected, she bought two ells of fustian cloth and ginger. A yellow sheet of paper, covered with figures, had survived, and in the margin was written, I don't remember it exactly anymore, but something like "I kindly ask the village administrator to buy two ells of fustian cloth and ginger on his way back from Remigola." Ginger and fustian, nothing more.

The past is a panopticon made of fragments . . . that is really what it is. . . . So isn't it strange that, in spite of all this, we want it complete, alive, filled with people, a specific past? . . . and that this is a very stubborn need in us?



It is ten in the morning and fog, pierced here and there by light, is climbing the mountains.

I have noticed for quite a while now that the books I am reading run together somehow. For example:

Dante: *The Divine Comedy*

Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things*

Roland Barthes: *Critical Essays*

And earlier, a little Borges.

Are these books friendly to me or hostile? Once when sailing down the Upper Paraná on its twisting backwaters, I absorbed the views into myself with tension. The views were new at each bend in the river—as if they could bolster or weaken me, just as during my years of literary work, I cast my eyes over the world to see whether my Time confirmed or refuted me. For many years, these reconnaissances were positive, and nothing is capable of cheering you up as much as when you see that everything—the evolution of tastes, ideas, customs, techniques—is in alliance with you and opens the door for you. But now the matter has become more complicated. Certain phenomena around me are multiplying, things to

which I am closely related but which are, at the same time, poisoned by some sort of intention that I find intolerable.

The problem of Form, man as a producer of form, man as a prisoner of form, the concept of Interhuman Form as a superior creative force, inauthentic man: I have always written about these things, I was always concerned with them, it was this I drew out, and please replace the word *form* with *structuralism* and you will see me at the center of today's French intellectual issues. Why, in *Ferdurke* and *Cosmos*, there is no subject except for the tyranny of form, the ballet of structures. And in *The Marriage*, it is clearly stated: "We do not say words, they say us."

Why, then, is there this antipathy between us . . . as if they were turning away from me and heading in a different direction . . . their works—whether it is their *nouveau roman français* or their sociology, linguistics, or literary criticism—are marked by a spiritual striving that seems quite distasteful to me, unpleasant, inappropriate, impractical, ineffective. . . . But surely the most significant thing that divides us is that they are from science and I from art. They reek of the university. That deliberate and fierce pedantry of theirs. Their professorialness. The spitefulness, obstinance in boredom, unsociability, intellectual pride, austerity . . . their manners offend me, their language is too high-flown. . . . But that is not all. There is also a deeper dimension to the resentment between us. Because I want to be relaxation itself and they are cramped, tense, stiff, and pigheaded . . . and while I move "toward myself," they constantly—and they have been doing this for a long time—pant with the desire for self-destruction. They want to get out of themselves, leave themselves. The object. Objectivity. Some sort of almost medieval asceticism. That "purity" which draws them in the direction of dehumanization. But this objectivity of theirs is not cool (although it would like to be icy). The sting of an aggressive intention crouches in it, something provocative, yes, this is a provocation. And I greet their nomenclature (which I thought had been dead and buried once and for all) with a certain amazement because often it is so close to astrology, the Cabala and magic and so truculent and willful that it is as if death itself were coming to life.

For me, all of man's strivings to escape himself, whether they are pure aesthetics or pure structuralism, religion, or Marxism, are naive and doomed to failure. This is a variation on a martyrlike mysticism. And this drive to dehumanize

(which I engage in as well) must inevitably accompany the drive to humanize, otherwise reality falls apart like a house of cards and threatens to drown in the verbiage of unreality. No, you will not satisfy man with formulas! Your constructions, your structures, will remain empty until Someone comes to live there. The more elusive man becomes, the more unattainable, abysmal, immersed in the other elements and imprisoned in forms, as if they were not articulated by his own lips, then the more urgent and burning becomes the presence of the ordinary man, just as we know him in our everyday experience and in our everyday feelings: the man from the café, from the street, given to us concretely. An attainment in the human peripheries must immediately be balanced by a violent withdrawal into ordinary humanity and into human everydayness. One can immerse oneself in the human abyss, but only under the condition that one returns to the surface.

If, however, one would want the deepest and most difficult definition of that someone I am talking about who should begin to live in those structures and constructions, then I would say that that someone is Pain. For reality is that which offers resistance; namely, that which hurts. And a real man is one who is in pain.

No matter what we are told, there exists, in the entire expanse of the Universe, throughout the whole space of Being, one and only one awful, impossible, unacceptable element, one and only one thing that is truly and absolutely against us and absolutely devastating: pain. It is on pain and on nothing else that the entire dynamic of existence depends. Remove pain and the world becomes a matter of complete indifference. . . .

What am I saying! Perhaps this is too serious a subject for mere philosophical discourse. . . . Truly menacing! I would like to note that for those thinkers (and for others) the world is always, in spite of everything, a place for rather calm, if not Olympian, cerebral speculation. All of these analyses are healthy inasmuch as they are produced by professors who are pretty well off and rather comfortably seated in their armchairs. The completely childlike ignorance of pain is at the base of this tireless playing with intellectual blocks. But if Sartre's freedom feels no pain, and is not adequately afraid of it, then today's objectivisms create the impression of something spawned in a state of anaesthesia.

Let us underline the contradiction of the above argument. I demand both a "relaxed" and "ordinary" man and also a man who is, at the same time, pierced through with pain. But the contradiction is superficial.

Should I fight with this militant asceticism? Or should I immerse myself in myself, give myself over to myself, live in myself as in a fortress?

I wish them all a toothache.



My American electric shaver costs seventy francs more than Koska's shaver, a regular Phili-shave. There was a note in the elegant leather case: "Our congratulations! You are extraordinarily intelligent, and therefore you have become the owner of the best shaver in the world! It will improve your self-confidence."

It is true, I did feel better at once, but, unfortunately, I am rather poorly shaven of late and . . . and . . . somehow this, yes, no, yes, somehow as if this were . . . that is . . . but something is not quite right . . .



That book, *The Divine Comedy*, still in front of me on the table, is really six hundred years away. What is mankind's past supposed to mean to me? I am resting on a gigantic heap of corpses: these are the people who have gone before me. What is this then that I am resting on? What is this, this pulp beneath me, this anthill of existence that ended somewhere beyond me?

Am I to look for people in the past or for an abstract dialectic of development?

The thing that stands out immediately: only the most important people reach me. In History, one must occur to endure. . . . All the cemeteries of ancient Greece boiled down to a few hundred names: Alexander, Solon, Pericles. . . . And who, other than Dante, has remained of medieval Florence?

In that great procession of all the dead of the world, I would recognize none except the Great. I like arithmetic, it lets me face certain issues squarely. How many people die daily? Two, three hundred thousand? Every single day, an entire army, approximately twenty divisions, marches into the grave. I am unfamiliar with them, I know nothing, I am not *au courant* . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . all of it happens somewhere beyond me. The discretion of death (and the discretion of illness)! Someone who did not know that people die in this world could spend years roaming our streets, roads, parks, fields, and squares before he discovered that such a thing as death was taking place. And even among animals, this

discretion is astonishing. How do the birds, for example, arrange things so that no one knows that they have died? Forests and groves should be littered with dead birds, yet, instead, you can walk and walk and almost never come across the least little skeleton. What absorbs all this? Where does it go? There are certainly not enough ants or other predators in those forests to do away with all the remains.

Death is commonplace, inconspicuous, obscuring.

And what of me? Me in these circumstances? I with my necessities, with the necessities of my "I"? The less I can distinguish the cemetery masses, the more I cling to the Great. I know them personally. They are History. No panopticon of bits and pieces can take their place.

But is my attitude toward them personal enough?

I attach enormous weight to this question.

The Divine Comedy is not enough. I look for Dante in it. But I will not find him there because the Dante passed down to me by history is none other than the author of *The Divine Comedy*. The Great are not people, they are accomplishments.

Yet all the more irritating is the fact that even our attitude toward these accomplishments has become distorted. At home and in school we are taught nothing but reverence and respect for these accomplishments, but in real life our attitude is ambivalent: it is true that I humble myself and marvel at these works, but I also regard them with condescension and disdain. I am lower because they are Great, but I am higher because I am later, that is, I am on a higher rung of development.

This second approach, which I would call a "brutal" or "direct" one, is not used much. We are capable of seeing the artist and his work only from a historical vantage point and only in the light of their historical significance. Let us attempt the direct approach. Am I, with my imagination of today, capable of being genuinely captivated by the workings of the almost peasantlike, barely stirred imagination of Dante? The sufferings of his damned are so crude! And so meager somehow! And garrulous! Those discourses expressed between one agony and the next. . . . The same situations return with a wearying monotony (yet, if I were to judge the work from a historical perspective, I would have to say that these situations are rich and innovative for a fourteenth-century work), and Temporality, with its political and other troubles, keeps barging into Dante's Eternity *in crudo*. Nor

does he have a feel for sin: those sins of his have no force of conviction, they are more like breaking a rule, and, therefore, they neither attract nor repel.

How much more one could say to demonstrate that this work is crude, mean, boring, and inferior! And the sad conclusion: that I cannot get to man by way of his work, no matter what I do. For he becomes only a great and historical accomplishment. And when I try to get at him brutally, directly, bypassing time, that *Divine Comedy* of his doesn't amount to a hill of beans!

But does this mean that the past must remain a mere hole? Without real people?



I return to the tercet I rewrote earlier:

Through me the way to a doleful land
Through me the way to everlasting woe
Through me the way to a forsaken people

And the next lines of this infernal inscription:

Sacred Justice inspired my Creator
I was made by Divine Omnipotence,
By Supreme Wisdom and Supreme Love.

Here suddenly . . . a jolt!
What?!
How could he?!
What monstrosity!
How vile!

I have just now realized it: this is the most monstrous poem in world literature. It is, page after page, a litany of agonies, a register of torments. "Supreme Love . . ." It is exactly these words, "Supreme Love," that point out the complete monstrosity of this work. And its vileness. I have nothing against Purgatory . . . if those sins called for such Satanic punishment then, fine, at least the light of Salvation gleams in the distance. But Hell?

Hell is no mere punishment. Punishment leads to purification, it has an end. But Hell is eternal torment and ten million years from now the damned will

be wailing just as loudly as they do now, nothing will have changed. One cannot consent to this. Our sense of justice cannot bear it.

Yet he inscribes on the infernal gate. "I was made by . . . Supreme Love."

How can one explain this except to say that Dante must have done it out of fear and baseness, to ingratiate himself! . . . Terrified and quaking with fright, he pulls himself together and pays the highest tribute to the highest terror and calls the highest cruelty the highest love. Never has the word *love* been used in such a brazenly paradoxical way. No other word in the human language has been applied in such a shamelessly perverse manner. And it is this word that is the most holy, the most sacred. This disgraceful book falls out of our hands, and our wounded lips whisper: he had no right. . . .

I pick the shameful book up again and run my eyes over the poem. Yes, there is no denying it: the entire infernal torture chamber smokes with the incense of Supreme Love. Dante accepts hell, he agrees to it, ha! he even adores it! But how is it . . . how could it have happened that a work so depraved by the wildest fear and so servile, a work so contrary to man's most fundamental sense of justice, how could this have transformed itself in the course of centuries into a Book of Edification, into the most eminent of poems?

Catholics . . . this is, after all, your *Divine Comedy*, how have you been able to digest it?

Man, according to Church doctrine, was created in the image and likeness of God.

What is contrary to our deepest sense of justice, therefore, cannot be just. Neither here in this world nor in the next.

A Catholic writer cannot write against himself. This entire *Divine Comedy* is in a state of mortal sin.

And the Catholic world adores it nevertheless.



Yes, yes . . . and now I've got him, I've gotten a hold of him, he offends me, infuriates me, so there he is . . . behind that wall of time . . . and now, now he has become a person. . . .

He has become a living person to me through the highest Pain.

Satisfaction. I jot down: yes, Pain makes real. Only pain is capable of joining

men in time and space, it is Pain that reduces the generations to a common denominator.



But . . . what is that polyphonic choir, like a choir of frogs, whose voices I hear rising, like an enveloping fog, like a diluting humidity? . . . The book has already become embodied in a concrete man. Yet now, listening more and more closely, I realize that it is not he that is singing. It is the entire Middle Ages.

How could I have been infuriated moments ago? It is not Dante alone who has agreed to hell, but his entire epoch. After all, his work is only a recitation of formulas that had already been well codified in general sentiment. Words, empty words . . . this is only the way in which people were spoken to at that time. . . .

And once again *The Divine Comedy* becomes a mere monument, form, codification, ritual, gesture, rite, ceremony. . . . It is worth noting: when I discovered, a moment ago, that the author was writing against himself, I came into personal contact with him. But now, now that I have discovered that, in writing against himself the author wrote according to the dictates of his Epoch, that inner contradiction loses its power to bring to life. Everything has paled.

Furthermore, how could I have taken the poem's nobility and its current prestige seriously a moment ago? Words! Nothing but empty words! . . . This is nothing more than that interhuman ritual of adoration, the equivalent of that other interhuman ritual of singing. He officiates over there, so they bow to him over here. And adoration is the best proof that no one believes a word of what he is saying.

Hell! But that's a myth!

Aha, aha, now everything appears in another light. Why was he able to write "Supreme Love" so easily? Because that hell is not real. Those torments are rhetorical. The damned recite. That eternity is the painless eternity of a figure of speech. The rising and falling circles, the majestic hierarchies of sins, torments, initiations, prophecies, growing lucidity, virtues and choirs, theology and knowledge, the damned and holy mysteries: all of it, all of it is rhetoric. Dante was reciting his epoch, but the epoch was also reciting, and the poem is, so to speak, a double platitude: the poet simply recited what was already being recited. Something like those Sunday discussions of soccer by people gathered in bars and coffee houses. Do they really care about soccer? Not in the least. The discussions go on only because

those talking are familiar with a certain vocabulary, with a certain way of speaking and because they lack the terminology to talk about something else. Humanity glides along the worn ruts of articulation.

An empty poem, which exists in defiance of reality and almost as if to spite it!



Wait a minute! This is all falling into place much too neatly.

You won't escape hell this easily, you conniver! It does exist, it does, it does.

Have you forgotten that heretics burned at the stake in the name of the code contained in *The Divine Comedy*? So that its fire *does* sear the flesh. . . .

And then this infernal poem begins to scream to the high heavens! And reeks of agony!

It is immensely instructive (and I recommend this experiment to all theoreticians of culture) to get a little closer sometimes to the center of pain. It draws you in. After that it is difficult to get out again. And truth becomes a scream and a howl.



But . . .

Now it occurs to me again that making something real was possible only in an atmosphere of absolutely reckless unreality.

Yes! St. Dominic's censuring authority had to step down among the potentates of the "lay" sword. It had to fall prey to politics, ambition, and various other very earthly appetites; make its way to bureaucratic tables of officials and embody itself in function, occupation, and work; and, still lower, it had to get itself into the fat paws of thugs insensitive to suffering. Without this gradual degradation, what man would dare to burn another? These radical ideas of sin, hell, torture, had to be broken down in many half-ignorant minds and feeble sensibilities before they could finally explode with a hard, uncompromising fire that really burned!

And what are you, therefore, O *Divine Comedy*?

The ungainly work of a little Dante?

Or the mighty work of a great Dante?

The monstrous work of an ignoble Dante?

Or the rhetorical recitation of a deceitful Dante?

The empty ritual of Dante's epoch?
A firecracker or a real blaze?
Unreality?
Or a difficult and complex tangle of reality and unreality?
Tell me, O pilgrim, how am I to reach you?

XIX

30.x.66

I must (because I see that no one will do this for me) finally formulate the main problem of our times, one that completely dominates the entire Western *episteme*. This is not a problem of History, or a problem of Existence, or a problem of Praxis or Structure or Cogito or Psychology or any other of the problems that have spread across our field of vision. Our main problem is the problem of *the smarter, the dumber*.

I return to it, although I have brushed up against it on many occasions. . . . The Stupidity that I sense is getting stronger all the time, in a way that is increasingly humiliating, that crushes and weakens me; it has gotten stronger since I moved closer to Paris, the most blunting of cities. I do not assume that I am alone in feeling I am within its reach; it seems to me that all those who participate in the great march of modern consciousness have not been able to muffle in themselves its accompanying step . . . its tearing through the undergrowth right here, right here. . . . I wondered and I still wonder how to settle on a Law that would most concisely describe the specific situation of the European spirit. I see nothing except

THE SMARTER, THE DUMBER

Actually I am not talking about a certain contingent of stupidity, not yet overcome, that development will come to terms with sooner or later. This would be a matter of stupidity progressing hand in hand with reason, which grows along with it. Have a look at all the picnics of the intellect: These conceptions! These discoveries! Perspectives! Subtleties! Publications! Congresses! Discussions! Institutes! Universities! Yet: one senses nothing but stupidity.

I must warn you that I am formulating the law *the smarter, the dumber* without a bit of jesting. No, this is really so. . . . And the principle of inverse

proportionality seems to get at the very essence of this, for the more noble the quality of reason, the more despicable the category of stupidity; stupidity has become cruder thanks to nothing but its own coarseness, and it eludes the increasingly more subtle instrument of intellectual control . . . our reason, too smart to defend itself against stupidity that is too stupid. In the Western *episteme* what is stupid is stupid in a gigantic way—and that is why it is elusive.

I will allow myself by way of an example to indicate the stupidity accompanying our, ever more rich, system of communication. Everyone will admit that this system has been splendidly developed of late. Precision, wealth, the profundity of language in not just brilliant expositions but even in peripheral ones, bordering on publicism (like literary criticism), are worthy of the greatest admiration. But the inundation of wealth brings about a flagging in attention, therefore increasing precision is accompanied by increasing disorientation. The result: instead of a growing understanding, you have a growing misunderstanding.

And there are even cruder complications marching onto the scene. Because the critic (let us stick with this example) is, it is true, learned, saturated with readings, oriented, but also overworked, overscheduled, bored, barren; he races to one more premiere, to see one more play, and, after such a onetime look, to hurriedly dash off one more review—which will be thorough and superficial, excellent and slapdash. And, unfortunately, I don't see that the Western *episteme* will be capable of solving the contradictions of the communication system, it cannot even register them, as they are beneath its level. . . . The vulnerability of the *episteme* when faced with the most blatant stupidity is a characteristic feature of our times.

An acquaintance of mine told me a story from before the war. They were drinking a nightcap on the veranda when Uncle Simon showed up. "What?" I asked. "Why, Simon has been resting in the cemetery for the past five years!" "Well, yes," she replied. "He came from the cemetery in the suit he was buried in, he greeted us, sat down, drank some tea, chatted a bit about the crops, and returned to the cemetery."

"What?! And what did you do?! . . ." "What did you want us to do, my dear, in the face of such cheek. . . ." And this is why the *episteme* cannot muster a riposte: it is too shamelessly stupid!

But—what luxuries!

L'écriture n'est jamais qu'un langage, un système formel (quelque vérité qui l'anime); à un certain moment (qui est peut-être celui de nos crises profondes, sans autre rapport avec ce que nous disons que d'en changer le rythme), ce langage peut toujours être parlé par un autre langage; écrire (tout au long du temps) c'est chercher à découvrir le plus grand langage, celui qui est la forme de tous les autres. (Roland Barthes)

Hm . . . what? . . . One has to admit: they do not lack cheek!

We so-called artists are mountain climbers from birth; this kind of intellectual-verbal hike really agrees with us; if only it did not make us dizzy.



Here I touched upon the stupidities of our system of communication. Let us cast an eye at the garland of stupidity that winds itself around our erudition.

It really is a scandal that up until now they did not have a language to express their ignorance; they must express their knowledge, their “mastery of the subject,” constantly and exclusively.

When they sit on the dais and participate in discussion, the bolt falls: they must know it is forbidden not to know, or to know more or less, even with a gesture, even with a wink, they cannot let anyone know that their knowledge is full of holes and hit-and-miss. . . .

In the expanse of all discussions consuming the Western *episteme*, there is not a single voice that will begin with “I really don’t know . . . I am not familiar with . . . I have not read it through very well . . . who could remember all that . . . there is no time to read. . . . I know something on the subject but not too . . .” Yet people should begin with this! But who would dare! They might begin this way, but all together, having given each other their word of honor first!

The *episteme* is falsified. Ugly things are happening. When not long ago an eminent philosopher visited another eminent philosopher, I said: —Well, will they talk up a storm about philosophy! —What are you talking about!—answered someone who was informed.—They wouldn’t be so indiscreet as to check each other’s readings!

The form of transmitting thought has been the same for a long time—it is

not subject to evolution—it is always the same string of words running across the paper. And this verbal tapeworm reaches as far as the sun already! Why don't they shout that this activity is exhausting them?



I would also like to touch upon the obvious stupidity of methods sick with the same inner contradiction that I have already mentioned. The methods of the humanistic Western *episteme* are all the more rigorous the more indefinite its object; the more specific they are, the less their object lends itself to a scientific approach.

The humanistic faculties of the universities are bursting with heavy, professional nonsense. *Delenda est Carthago!* Liquidate them!



But what should I do with myself?

I am stuck in this!

From the time I began to write, I had to keep destroying someone to save myself. If in *Ferdydurke* I attacked critics, then it was to exclude myself from this “arrangement,” to become independent of it. My attacks on poets, painters, were also dictated by a need to separate, exclude myself. I died from shame at the thought that I would be an “artist” like they, that I would become a citizen of that ridiculous republic of naive souls, a cog in that awful machinery, a member of this clan. All for nothing!

But as the years passed, my words, these written words, seem to have less and less to do with me, they are already so far away, in foreign tongues, in various editions that I have rarely seen with my own eyes, in the hands of commentators about whom I know nothing. . . . I no longer have any control over this. What then is happening to me, in what language, in what country? I became a literature and my rebellions are also literature. And the law *the smarter, the dumber* can be applied to me in full.

So what next? Close in on an *episteme*, grab it by the throat, fight with it like Don Quixote? Again? One thing is certain: my rebellion will find publishers, commentators, readers, and will be smoothly absorbed by the mechanism. Why,

there is no one in the *episteme* who is not aware of its irrelevance and who would, in spite of this, not be a component part. One would somehow have to cunningly . . . perhaps even naively, so simply-mindedly that this would become irrefutable . . . No. Naïveté with premeditation? No. What sort of force is necessary to shake this up! I cannot. I cannot afford to. And there is no time. I have to check on the translations. And there is my correspondence. Other tasks. So what? Nothing. Too bad. I can't do everything myself. Let somebody else. Who? If only I were a leader! To be a leader and to have an army behind you, ready to strike. Wherever I pointed a finger! All for naught. I am alone. No one will back me up. Can one get off a train speeding along the tracks? Pound one's head against a wall? Why? To find out that the wall exists. Who does not know this? Everyone knows, everyone knows everything, but this is private knowledge. . . . Pride. Be happy that at least you are defending your dignity. Will I be less ridiculous in a few centuries because I wrote what I have here? Good God! This is just an allusion, suggestion, sketch, something like a preface, oh, here in the diary I write at about 10 percent, no more. *Sapienti sat*. And who, after all, is writing this? . . . Who?

Hello, hello! Who is speaking please?

I don't know.



When I read

When I write

When I participate

When I function

I always and everywhere come upon the law

The smarter

The dumber.

It is very interesting indeed that while our entire spiritual effort in the course of centuries goes into separating ourselves from stupidity and triumphing over it, in the very womb of humanity stupidity seems to cohabit with intelligence. The personal makeup of humanity assures stupidity an important role. Humanity is made up of men, women, young people, and children—this alone condemns us to eternal oscillation between development and underdevelopment, stupidity revives in each generation. And is it not necessary to life, would a woman want

to give birth without it, would orders be possible, obedience, mechanical work, would the railroads, mines, offices, and factories be able to work without this oil in their gears? Would death be bearable without lightness, frivolity? The human condition? The effort of the *episteme* to cleanse itself of stupidity finds no confirmation in the internal organization of the human species, where it would be more appropriate to speak of a division of roles: some are supposed to express a superior, others an inferior, consciousness.

No, Kant! Your *Critique*, written with the sweat of your brow, no matter how precise and profound, is not enough. Grab an ax! Grab an ax, I say, run in with an ax and slash, to the right and left, women and children, young people and workers, everyone in general, yes, all and everyone! . . . The extermination of stupidity cannot take place just on paper! Kill! Uh . . . what did I just say?

1967

XX

1.i.67

Rita and I stepped into 1967 yesterday. The two of us, without champagne, looking out our window at the silence, emptiness, our beautiful Place du Grand-Jardin, the steep roofs of old Vence, the cathedral tower, with the stony walls of the mountain far away, which the moon floods with a mystical light.

The moon was so strong that one could see a sheet of water beyond Cap d'Antibes on the other side.

Almost nothing happens to me. The unremarkable state of my health has become something of a cloister for me. I live like a monk. Breakfast at nine, then writing, mail at noon, car excursion into the mountains, a stroll, we come back, lunch, newspaper, nap, correspondence, reading. . . . Most often we visit Maria Sperling and Józef Jarema, who have a lovely house and an even more beautiful garden on one of the slopes overlooking Nice.

There is no lack of visits because this is the drawing room of Europe, someone is constantly appearing, from America, Australia, Sweden, Poland, there are scads of kings, financiers, maharajas, admirals, movie stars during the holidays. But nothing ever happens. Sometimes, with an effort bordering on self-torment, I try to unearth in my head some lost detail from years ago. For example, I wondered about this yesterday evening and right before falling asleep last night and this morning: in which courtyard, on what street, did I run for cover from the down-pour then, in September 1955, in Buenos Aires, during the revolution, when I fled from my endangered apartment to Russo's.

In spite of everything, there is a lot of bitter irony in this: that now, after an Argentine fast of many years, I have finally made it to such an elegant country, to such a

high civilization, to such landscapes, to such bakery goods, fish, delicacies, such roads, beaches, palaces, cascades, and elegant things that, unfortunately, I with my television, record player, frigidaire, and dog, cat, I in the mountains, in the sun, in the air, at the seaside, that I would have to enter a monastery. But in the depths of my soul I acknowledge that the Force, which has not allowed me to consume my success too greedily, is right. I have known for a long time, from the very beginning—I was warned in advance—that art cannot, should not, bring personal gain . . . that it is a tragic business. Something else seems unjust to me: that my artistic work has furnished me so few of the pure pleasures that are allowed the artist; if writing gives me a certain satisfaction, then it is a cold, stubborn, and even reluctant satisfaction; but how often do I write like a kid at school doing his homework; and more often in terror; or in nagging uncertainty. It is true that there were times when I was on the verge of total obsession, I was in no state to tear myself away, for hours after tearing myself from the paper I would persist in a strange, barren excitement, repeating sentences and phrases just written down (I remember one such maniacal stroll in Buenos Aires, near the river, when my head was buzzing not even with sentences but with loose words from *The Marriage*). But this had the character of speeding, some sort of gallop, trembling, shaking, and did not have much in common with joy.

Perhaps this is unjust and a little cruel, that my lofty vocation was accompanied by such an awful lack of illusions and pitiless sobriety. The anger that mounts in me when I think about artists like Tuwim, D'Annunzio, or even Gide, would it not be connected to their being able to read someone their text without the desperate suspicion that they were boring him? And I also think that a little of that feeling we call the societal meaning of the artist would be more desirable than my certainty that socially I am a zero, a marginal being. This is quite sad, however: to devote yourself to art but at the same time to be beyond it, beyond its ceremony, hierarchies, values, charms—with a practically peasant distrust—with a peasant's cunning and reluctant smile.

And if one were to accept that at the heart of this matter is an extremely pleasant and salutary thoughtlessness, then why, I ask, have I never known those plots and games, those artistic pranks and frolics, that the Skamandrites—or the romantics in Victor Hugo's day—the surrealists, or other frisky young people knew? My time was bloody and raw, agreed. War, revolution, emigration. But why had I chosen this time (when I was being born in 1904 in Małoszyce)?

I am a saint. Yes, I am a saint . . . and an ascetic.

In my life there is a contradiction that knocks the plate out of my hands at the very moment it nears my lips.



I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write having finished *Operetta*, and I don't know what to write this minute in my diary. An unenviable predicament.



Le Clézio? Let it be Le Clézio then, although I have no idea what to write about him here. . . . Le Clézio and his wife visited me shortly after I moved to Vence and he made the best impression, serious, intelligent, honest. Dramatic (he is twenty-seven) and intense. He is quite handsome and even more photogenic, so *L'Express* and other revues are plastering whole pages with his photos.

The press sees him as the leading presence in French literature *à l'heure de promesse*, he is already known in Europe, cataloged as the future Camus of France, people stop when he passes them on the street. Twenty-seven years old and he has three novels behind him (these Frenchmen . . .).

Leaving aside the inconveniences of this somewhat reckless position, Le Clézio—or so it seems to me—is endangered from two sides. The first danger is his paradisaical-idyllic life. Healthy, strong, tanned among the flowers of Nice, with a lovely wife, shrimp, popularity and a beach . . . what more could one want? His novels exhale an impenetrable cloud of the most extreme despair while he, a young god in swimming trunks, immerses himself in the salty azure waters of the Mediterranean. But this controversy is too superficial to really compromise him and it is only the second venom, much more penetrating, that becomes the vehicle of this first poison. This second venom is beauty.

I would have had to have known him when he was fourteen, thirteen, to be able to say something more concrete about him. The way I see him now, he defends himself against beauty with his voice most of all—a voice that is surprisingly deep, manly, solid—thus the extreme tragedy of his vision of the world, and also the heroism of his ethical posture. In spite of this, he makes certain concessions. His wife, for example, is also quite lovely and they have an expensive sports

car that is no less handsome. And I also consider it very significant and characteristic that they live in Nice on a square that is called Ile de Beauté (Isle of Beauty). I will not claim, of course, that they chose this square on purpose but in life these kinds of indiscreet coincidences unmasking a hidden tendency do happen . . . this coincidence, in my opinion, is not mere coincidence.

Le Clézio is thus made up of contrasts: on the one hand, beauty, health, fame, photos, Nice, roses, sports car; on the other, darkness, night, emptiness, loneliness, absurdity, death. But his greatest difficulty is that his problems become lovely in him, attractive. He rebels, "Youth, I don't know what that is, it does not exist," he said in an interview . . . but he did not take into consideration that a person is not young for himself, one is young for others, through others.

The only thing that could save him is laughter.



Nadeau writes to me that he will publish my rather provocative (to structuralists) self-interview in *La Quinzaine*. I am probably surrounded by enemies. The fellows from *nouveau roman français* and *nouvelle critique* can't stomach me since I tell them at every opportunity how awfully boring they are. Nevertheless I am joined to these people, for in spite of everything we are moving in the same direction. Form.



The London *Dziennik Polski* laments: "The way in which English critics handled *Pornografia* is really very painful." Painful? More like sweet and delightful! For various mongrels in the émigré press under whose skin I got (and justly so because they attacked me first) can get back at me by saying with a sad face that one review said *Pornografia* was mad, another that it was stupid, and a third that it was crazy.

And in the London *Tygodnik Polski* we read: "Derdywurke, that is what a critic for the *Times Literary Supplement* called his review of *Pornografia*. This jumbled title of Gombrowicz's first novel is supposed to characterize his most recent novel: the first part of this neologism suggests 'dirty'; the second 'work.' The whole means a 'swinish book' or something like that."

Piers Read, the author of this review, writes to me: "I am at your disposal if you would like me to send them a correction. But it's probably not worth it. It is

impossible to understand the title without the rest of the review, where I say that you are one of the greatest of European writers. How foul this is! Are you really the object of such foul play in Polish circles?"

Well, yokels? Piers Read is the son of Sir Herbert Read, the worthy art historian, friend of Bertrand Russell and of many other fine men. So naturally in these circles, as well as in the editorial offices of the *Times*, these gentlemen will sip their whiskeys and say: "That poor Gombrowicz, how awful that they treat him so shabbily in Polish circles!" Oh, yokels! You organize anniversaries, solemnities, spend a ton of money to show off your culture and then some smelly detail like this slips out and does you more harm than all the good Copernicus, Chopin, and Małcużyński can do.

It is easy to puff oneself up with Copernicuses. It is more difficult to find an intelligent and decent approach to the living values of the nation.

Nor does it end here. This consternation in the higher spheres of the English will be answered by the delirious joy of Warsaw. Comrade Kliszko burst into Comrade Gomułka's office: —Comrade! Have you received an anonymous letter from London with a clipping from *Dziennik Polski* yet? —No, but I have gotten an anonymous letter from London with a clipping from *Tygodnik Polski*! —Terrific! I will send it on to all the newspapers right away! The intellectuals are upset that we are not publishing this Gombrowicz in Poland, that we have forbidden our press to write about his rotten European awards. . . . Good, order rescinded, both articles will be scrupulously reprinted, let the people know that we are right not to publish such swinish novels like that *Pornografia*! Comrade! Emigré literature is rotten to the core but the émigré press has some very healthy reflexes! (Both do a little dance waving their clippings. Music. Ballet. Confetti.)

So now what, defenders of Polish culture? And as for the swinishness itself, well, I once knew a Pole who was lost deep in thought. After which he shook it off and said: "It takes a pig to screw a pig." "Who do you have in mind?" I asked. "I am thinking of Poles."

6.viii.67

Heat wave—two months—not a drop of rain—the temperature reaches twenty-eight degrees Celsius. A delightful freshness descends from the Alps every evening, and another freshness wafts in from the sea.

Miłosz. His wife. They are staying right next door, on the St. Paul slope. Discussions. Walks. I have not seen him since before the war and even then only a few times, so I never really knew him.

We became friends immediately and rather intensely.

But that was in May. Now I am waiting for the arrival of Maria and Bohdan Paczkowski from Chiavari, with whom I will also be carrying on discussions.

Tooth, on top, on the side, upper right, and also as if something were itching behind the ear.

Jarema went to Rome, and Maria Sperling-Jarema has pulled out all the stops in preparing her exhibit for New York.

Hamilton and I drove to the beach at Jean-les-Pins every day.

Jalard, Roux, Christian Bourgeois.

Kot.

Odier, Volle, Björnstrom, Boden, Stolpe, and a few more Dutchmen and Swedes, and also a Swiss. And Einaude.

I have lost my craving for yogurt and now most gladly eat thin slices of red roast beef with a salad for supper in the evening.

Beer.

Not many Poles have been by this summer. Write to Evergreen, visit the Charaires, go to the colonel's, will Piper come to an agreement with Neske, what about Japan, send papers, dispatch a pile of letters, call Berlin. And that telegram!

7.viii.67

I bought a period wardrobe as well as a period table and High Renaissance chairs.

Let us jot down what happened with the Prix International de Littérature, twenty thousand dollars.

I have been nominated for this award for the last five years. While its first laureates, Beckett and Borges, both excellent, seemed to deserve it 100 percent, the names honored in the years that followed smelled of calculations that did not have much to do with pure art. My candidacy slowly began to take on some vibrancy and two years ago I almost snagged the award for *Pornografia*. But luckily the venerable Mrs. McCarthy voted against me. What luck! How much I owe this fine writer! Through

the intercession of the Most High (who probably wanted to reward me for the conspiracy that victimized me), the award was afterward reformed to lend it greater weight and to provide it with double the number of dollars. From then on, it was going to be awarded only once every two years and the ten thousand jumped up to twenty.

I was possessed by mad desire when I read of this change in *Le Monde*.

But aware of the fact that I am a perfectly private, ideally isolated individual, deprived of cliques, coteries, groups, embassies, uninteresting from a political or economic vantage point, I told myself, using the words of the czar of all the Russians: *point de rêveries!*

In the meantime, bam! Bonanza! Twenty thou. A sum like this doesn't grow on trees, so, ha, has, I will buy myself a nice little car!

Immediately upon receiving the award I made myself a list of all my literary enemies (the majority, unfortunately, were Polish names) and picking out this or that name at random, I drank deeply in my imagination of that desperate acid, that sort of gray bitterness.

This was my only pleasure. Outside of this there was more work than anything else; I had to do about thirty interviews alone. As for my fame, it turned out to be quite specific. The French critic Michel Mohrt said, among other things, in defending my candidacy during the jury's deliberations: "There is some sort of secret in the work of this writer, I would like to get to know him, who knows, maybe he is a homosexual, maybe an impotent, maybe an onanist, at any rate he has something of the bastard about him and I would not be surprised to find out that he gave himself up quietly to orgies like King Ubu." This acute interpretation of my person and works in the best French taste was broadcast by the radio and multilingual press, and as a result, the young people sitting in the café on the square in Venice observe when they see me go by: —Look, there's that old impotent homosexual, who is a bastard and has orgies!" And because the Scandinavian delegation on that jury supported me as a "humanist," some of the press reports bore the rhyming title "Humanist or Onanist."

In another report on the proceedings I read that an American critic, an advocate of Mishima's, my Japanese rival, let slip that he had not read my *Cosmos* at all. When he was asked how he could know that *Cosmos* was a worse novel than Mishima's, he answered that he was sorry but he couldn't read *Cosmos* because he hadn't gotten it in time.

I am also noting that the jury forgot to inform me about getting the award. After waiting for eight days and getting no official telegram, I wrote to Nadeau to ask him what this meant. It turned out that the Secretary General had lost my address somewhere and then told himself that it wasn't worth letting me know because I had probably already found out from the press.

But these are trifles. I am accustomed to this, all that counts is that I have the award in my pocket and that I won the race, I must say, under tight rein, because, to everyone's stupefaction, in the preliminary ballot, of thirty candidates, only Mishima and I remained in place, everyone else dropped out. I therefore have confirmation in writing that I am a writer in high regard and this certificate is signed by the cream of international criticism. Triumph! Success! Bravo! Why then, O laureate, is your face stiffening, becoming harsh—revolting—where has the starkness, exoticism, loneliness, dumb gravity, profound antipathy, and painful irony come from, as if the face were being closed by seven seals? . . . An alien face expressing just one thing: let them dance around you as much as they want, don't you bat an eyelash!

Mieroszewski expresses surprise in *Kultura* that the Poles in emigration are not happy enough about my success. I am amazed that he is amazed. For them an award like this is at most *testimonium paupertatis*, proof that they cannot figure out their own values. What is there to be happy about? If one of "ours" had snagged this little prize, Wierzyński, for example, there would be a jubilee! But with me, this way or that, nothing but unpleasanties.

Let them dance around you as much as they like, but you don't move a muscle! That my things have not lost their vitality in thirty years, that this *Ferdurke* of mine can be greeted with an explosion of joy today by an Italian, Dane, Canadian, Paraguayan, just as it was years ago—this means something to me!

8.viii.67

Polish literature! I, ragged, plucked, pinched, I a poseur, renegade, traitor, megalomaniac, place at your feet the international laurel, the holiest since the time of Sienkiewicz and Reymont.

(One asks that condolences not be sent.)

21.viii.67

I have been thinking and thinking . . . this is the third week. . . . I don't understand a thing! Nothing! L. finally arrived, looked everything over in great detail, and finally said the same thing, that it was worth at least \$150,000. At least! In this dry, pine forest, a crunching underfoot, as if from Poland, with a royal panorama at the top, with princely views onto the processions of castles, St. Paul, Cagnes. Villeneuve, as if rising from the illuminated sea.

A beautiful oak hall on the first floor and three large rooms in the suite. On the first floor two more rooms with a common yet spacious bathroom. Solid verandas and . . .

Why does he want only forty-five thousand (but in cash)? Has he gone crazy? This elusive rich man . . . who is he? Could he be one of my readers? Is this price exclusively for me? The lawyer says: Such are my instructions.

???

3.ix

I cannot think about anything else. At any rate the twenty thousand will make things much easier. . . .

7.ix

Should I buy it?

9.ix

I bought it.

14.ix

Now the measuring—the counting, deliberations—arguments.

I want Jarema's wall hanging with its deep and juicy juxtapositions of black-green-ruddy texture to stand in the hall with its oak paneling, the counter-

part to the goldish red *tapisserie* of Maria Sperling, saturated with a black net of rhythms . . . and hanging there, at the end of the suite of rooms, on the wall of my study.

The four tense and crazy Glazes, two structurally transparent Stankiewiczzes, as well as six vibrating Sperlings well frozen by silence I would put (if I were listened to) into the first two rooms, while the two old Dutch canvases, the valuable gift from Read, let them go on the walls of my study.

Let Jarema's red (along which I am supposed to stroll, he said) burst into colors between the Flemish wardrobe and the doors of my study.

Chagall?

Problem with the dining room.

If only she would want to sell me these armchairs. . . .

Today I was sitting, it is true, on a makeshift stool in the many-windowed rotundities of my study.

14.ix

A letter from Basilio in Argentina, that "Henry" is on his way on one of the "C" liners to Cannes to "surprise me."

27.x.67

Henry. Not Henry of course! But if Henry then probably Fernando.

In his letter Basilio does not even go to the trouble of explaining why Henry. Why not Rodrigo? Hiacento, Pedro perhaps? Keep going, keep going this way and we'll see him again as Esteban, Thaddeus, yes, yes, why not Thaddeus?

Rosa! Indistinct, dusky, mulatto.

I am sitting on a makeshift stool in the rotundities of a still-empty study. I make notes on a pad, on my knee. The whole joy of a villa amid pines, landscapes, joy at the move, at the furniture—the hell with it! This dark mulatto is like seaweed at the bottom and she appears like a phantom, like a blackish tuft . . . poor visibility . . . no visibility. . . .

And already gossip (because I assume "Henry" must have someone here, otherwise he would not come). Alastair, upon returning from a walk with Pooch,

told me yesterday, a bit embarrassed, that our bearded Viking asked him in La Regence, “Is Mr. Gombrowicz expecting a family member?”

Rosa—no, I will never be able to remember this—Rosa—I don’t remember—Rosa—I don’t know—Rosa—centuries have passed—Rosa—has drowned—Rosa—is drowned—Rosa—at the bottom—Rosa. . . .

An indistinct mulatto at the bottom.

And he is a maniac, maniac, maniac!

It never in my life occurred to me to have a son. And actually it is a matter of real indifference to me whether legitimate or illegitimate. My spiritual development, my entire intellectual development, were of the kind that today I am beyond the orbit of this dilemma. And the fact that some half-mulatto shows up on my doorstep with a tender “daddy” . . . from where, how, why? . . . who cares, I could get used to the idea in the end, get accustomed to it. But as far as blackmail . . .

Who gave him money for the trip from Brazil? And these constant about-faces, tricks, pirouettes with the nomenclature, with the name, what for? To shock? To stun, to weaken? Is he counting on being able to make my head spin with his multiple-name dance of a half-breed, with this dance of a warring Apache, he, the supposed (because even this is not certain) son of an indistinct mulatto, conceived of an accidental night, by way of passing, driving by, of a hotel night, which has dropped into the night of forgetfulness. . . . I know nothing. . . . I don’t remember.

Out of the empty blackness comes a son!

I bought Louis Philippe armchairs, have to reupholster them, in dark green.

1.xi.67

Rosa, Rosa, Rosa, and Henry, Henry, Henry and Rosa, Rosa, Rosa and Henry, Henry, Henry.

What Henry are you talking about!

In the rotundities of my study.

6.xii.67

Henry, Henry, Henry and Rosa, Rosa, Rosa, and Henry, Henry. Henry!

What Henry are you talking about, I say, what Henry, I repeat?

A Fernando rather, with a Pedro hidden inside!

Władysław! From which a Dionisio peeps out?

Illegitimate! Perhaps unchristened even . . . And if he says, "I have no birth certificate . . ."? . . .

A venomously multinamed thicket around me, beyond the windows, on the slopes, where I sit like this in the illegitimate rotundities of my study!

12.xii.67

Rosa, Rosa, Rosa and Henry, Henry, Henry and Rosa, Rosa, Rosa!

From the negro semidarkness tropically hotelish (a hole) emerges illegitimacy. Mists. Mists awaken, crawl, sneak up, seep, squeal, gasp, lap, screech (yes, screech! Screech!) when I in the illegitimate rotundities of my study with my ineloquent Glazes of which I have

Four

Henry? And what if it were simply Hieronymus!

Leonard?

1968

XXI

10.i.68

Pedro?

Francisco?

Nicolas?

Conrado?

Esteban?

Manuel?

Roberto?

Marcelo?

Eduardo?

Luis?

Lucio?

Alejandro?

Bernardo?

Pablo?

Gregorio?

Antonio?

Guillermo?

Felipe?

In the illegitimate rotundities

of my with Rosa

study . . .

14.i.68

Cristomo?

Javier?

Axel?

Bartoleme?

Basilio?

Modesto?

Benito?

Celestino?

Illegitimate

Rotundity

Stu

St

21.ii.68

Rosa

Rotund

Stud

In the rotundities of Rosa's study

Multinamed

Illegitimate

Conceived

And circles, surrounds, and yesterday, he also asked

Mrs. Leonce if

Ro

Stud

Rotundrostudsaityintherorostud

25.ii.68

Circling illegitimate son

Rotund illegitimacy of son!

Rosa's rotund study
In which a son was begun!
I will sell it! Sell it! Sell it!

I will sell the villa and its suite of rooms, solid verandas and panoramas in a pine forest with a rotund study for work dirt cheap!

I will sell a son and Rosa with the attached rotundity. . . .

VILLA FOR SALE NOW VERY CONVENIENT TERMS

TEL. 36-850-1 FROM 3-5 IN THE AFTERNOON.

29.iii.68

I sold it for two hundred and fourteen thousand dollars, including the grounds, the panorama, the son, and the mulatto. Nothing is left!

3.iv.68

I recall that in writing about Tyrmand's *Angry* years ago I began like this: "Tyrmand! Talent!" And today I prize this poem in a hooligan's cap, stinking of vodka and defeat, with a romantic moon over the caverns of a strangely protruding Warsaw. Easy? "Criminal"? Popular? Almost of the streets? But yes! And because this singing from a fermenting mug, gap-toothed from a fight, does not care who's looking, does not want to be a higher literature, nor a folk or proletarian literature, but is simply born of a trivial, street taste, of *genius loci*, of the imagination, like a cat padding along these hovels, that is why, I say, this is a work worthy of admiration and creative in its own way. And lively.

It is likely, then, that Jeleński and others exaggerate in taking up the same condescending attitude toward this gap-toothed poet that he has already been offered in Poland. That Tyrmand, having gotten out into freedom, now takes care of personal accounts at first opportunity? Even if this were so, isn't every trial against the current Polish system also, if not primarily, a personal battle? In addition, Tyrmand's feature, like all of their features, formed by postwar Poland, is lack of crystallization, they are like a shaken liquid that has not been able to settle in layers, their best values are somewhat defenseless, because they are too messy with life. Perhaps this is not so bad at times when we have learned all too well how to

isolate values and use them. Hłasko, Tyrmand, belong to that faction of our modern literature that is perhaps the most original and fraught with the greatest personal difficulties. I would allow Tyrmand to do battle, however, with whatever he wants, and I would follow him to see what appears in the sparks of this fray—because his *Social and Emotional Life*, although it is something of a satire and the analysis of a gap-toothed lyrical tenor, does lead to reality . . . to a certain peculiar, Polish reality . . . and becomes unusual, exceptional, characteristic. Why? Why because one reads the book and its author at the same time, the author is “from over there,” is created by what he describes, is tied to his description with an invisible umbilical cord, is always the son of what he is denying—even though he has broken away, even though he fights it. This stamps the book with a particular authenticity. It is best seen in the most innocent marginal little sentences, those that are least engaged politically, involuntary.

7.iv.68

I spilled the compote.

1969

XXII

Friday

Astonishing and embarrassing. Lechon's *Diary*, Volume I, which I looked through once again, a little more carefully. How did this tangle that makes up the true originality of this diary come to be? That combination of artistry, tremendous sensitivity and acuity with . . . primitiveness, ignorance, narrowness, blindness? In general, the language is wonderful and in this language are expressed subtle judgments about literature, art, and, frequently, people, but it is also in this language that Lechon expresses his awful, unbearably Polish limitations. From an intellectual standpoint, the diary is like a 1939 suit we remove from our wardrobe—it reeks of mothballs. Lechon had no access to modern man or the modern world; he was lost in culture, didn't have a clue about contemporary thought, about anything that would allow him to grasp and order the present-day world. Chaos. Darkness. Fog and confusion. Superficial passions and complexes. The years he spent in Paris ran off him like rain from a roof. And when History kicked him out of Poland for good, he drowned in the big wide world like a squire dispossessed of his holdings.

The tragic tone of the notes revealing Lechon's struggles with the novel *Ball at the Senator's* is comical. Nothing beyond naïve "questions" like, should Skarga appear before or after the dialogue with Eleanor.

How did this fetid basement establish itself in our spirit? Could blindness to the world, naïvete, ignorance, have been caused by loss of independence? Yet Saxon Poland was clearly the stupidest country in Europe, and even in the Jagiellonian period brought up the rear of civilized countries; while France boasted Rabelais and Montaigne, we had Rej and Kochanowski. So what is it? What's the

reason? The lack of larger cities? Polish “provinciality”? The undisputed spiritual primacy of the parish priest? Yes, but perhaps these are not the most important; more important may be the form, that vulgarization of the form of Europe which finely sculpted, like Greece, rolls across the Polish plains into the coarse immensities of Russia, Asia. Being a transitional country is not easy!

Because pompous titles tend to proliferate in a backwater, Lechon became “Poet *Altissimo*” and Jozef Mackiewicz the “Commander-in-Chief.” But if *Altissimo* was at least a pedigreed artist, the Commander-in-Chief would have been better off as a captain of the, I want to say “light” but I’ll say heavy, cavalry. The Commander-in-Chief lives for one idea—his battle with communism—and nothing else concerns him, especially not the thought that these fifty years of bloody revolt are the answer to a thousand years of oppression of peasants and workers by the petty gentry which sat astride the boors and stuffed themselves. The battle with communism and also the examination of the snobberies, eccentricities, and excesses of today’s intellectualism appear to be indispensable and I cultivate them myself. But bravado of 1939 vintage, when Polish lancers charged tanks to the astonishment of the entire world—and nothing more, is not enough. I will allow myself the assumption that if the higher literary and intellectual strata of Europe were not equally well armored against his charges, like those tanks, his judgments about them would not be so harsh. Tough and too bad—names like Schulz, Witkiewicz, Milosz, or Mrozek have reached these strata, but not a word about the Commander-in-Chief. He claims that my *Ferdydurke* is “inflated” but facts are facts and *Ferdydurke*, though written 30 years ago, has conquered, with youthful verve, practically all the countries of the West; if they translate the Commander-in-Chief now and then, it is not because he is good but because he is easy. It’s true that it is difficult to establish a hierarchy for artistic works but, if I am a writer and I live twenty kilometers from the Nice airport and deal incessantly with writers, critics, journalists of all nations, and I do not hear the name “Mackiewicz,” I have the right to say that his books excite no interest in the reader who takes literature seriously. Nonetheless, the Commander-in-Chief looks down his nose at me and scolds me for being a snob, poseur, dimwit—eternally the same hopeless litany of names, as stupid as they are offensive, showered upon me from time immemorial by the mental impotence of a certain sector of the emigration. When I was eight years old, I applied a certain “Peek-a-boo” tactic in fights with my older brother. I would crawl

out from behind a bush and yell: “Lunatic!” And when he bolted in my direction, I popped out from behind another bush and yelled, “Oaf!” Aren’t these rather childish methods, gentlemen, considering we are all, more or less, in our sixties? The Commander-in-Chief’s crude attacks make it easy for me because they free me from having to exercise the restraint to which I have always felt bound in relation to émigré writers. But it is time to put the brakes on our increasingly frothing Savonarola. Attention, Your Lordships! Under the leadership of this kind of Commander-in-Chief, you’ll go straight to Backwardville.

P.S. In his article in *Wiadomości* about a collection of Hemar’s columns, on whom he showers the highest praise (“the most intelligent book to have appeared in emigration”), the Commander-in-Chief makes the disclaimer that his praise is not in the least connected to the exaggerated enthusiasm expressed by Hemar in his article. It appears that in the last issue of *Wiadomości* we read Hemar’s letter to the editors. “Please congratulate that terrific Mackiewicz . . . what a fine lesson in writing essays!”

But this was not about Mackiewicz’s essay on Hemar, but about the next one, devoted to a book by General Prąglowski, which the Commander-in-Chief pronounces “splendid” or something like that. Congratulations. Not three months have passed and we have four masterpieces! Living is easy in a mutual adoration society!

Saturday

My polemic with Barbara Szubska in *Wiadomości*—joined by about fifteen people—scandalized a few of my friends who write to me: who ever heard of a serious writer slumming this way! Jeleński says that they persist in convention and have no understanding of the point. He’s right. To climb off the pedestal, dismiss the courtiers and personal guard, undress completely, hang the ermine boas on a peg, and go out and brawl with the first guy who comes along—yes, this is my style. In this kind of fighting, all the artificial “superiority” of the writer—based on convention and ceremony—vanishes, and instead the actual superiority asserts itself with even more ruthlessness and annoys real inferiority, that awful, haunting problem. Why, I have maintained for a long time that the judgment of an inferior

touches and hurts, like “a shoe that is too small,” and that it is not true that “writers” don’t care.

And it is better that this fistfight in the nude was started by a woman. A writer and a woman are two delicate and protected beings, so it’s great that we had a fight. Surely it would have been even more interesting if I had taken the fight seriously; nevertheless, the fact that I challenged Basia publicly to recognize her own inferiority and my superiority, has significance. This polemic—I will allow myself to modestly observe—is the only one like it in the history of literature. Glory to Basia and me!

It is easy to understand where the difficulty and danger of the issue lie. Basia, like, o horror, everyone else, can see the world only with her eyes and thrive only in her own mind. Even if she says, “He who is superior is better than me,” it is she, not anyone else, who has made the judgment. And even if she said she believed in the superiority of Einstein, because she was so informed by those who understand, she, not anyone else, has to decide ultimately whether or not those specialists are worth trusting. Therefore, because each person, like it or not, has to be the center of his world and the highest judge, this argues against objectivity which tells us to recognize the worlds and views of others. The torment of those who came to Basia’s aid and threw me into confusion comes from this because, objectively speaking, it is difficult to assume that all who praise me are cretins; and again one cannot see with someone else’s eyes and from this perspective, all those who praise me are cretins and me, too. Contradiction. *Inde irae.*

Sure, if I could take all of this seriously . . . yet, in spite of everything, it was an instructive experience. The most important thing is that after this run-in, I felt much more comfortable with Basia, a lot better, practically chummy. But what about her? If she feels this way, too, then this would prove that it is easier to bear the superiority-inferiority torment if one is naked than if one is swaddled in subtleties, manners, pruderies, other hypocrisies.

Wednesday

The most profound division in a man, his bleeding wound, is precisely this: subjectivism—objectivism. Basic. Hopeless. The relation of subject-object that is

consciousness and the object of consciousness is the starting point of philosophical thought. Let us imagine the world reduced to just one object. If there were no one then to register the existence of that object, it would not exist. Consciousness is beyond everything, is definitive. I am aware of my thoughts, my body, my impressions, my sensations, and that is why all this exists.

Even in ancient times, in Plato and Aristotle, thought splits into subjective and objective. Aristotle, by way of Thomas Aquinas, reaches us by various routes, and Plato by way of St. Augustine, by way of Descartes, by way of the blinding explosion of Kantian criticism, and from it the line of German idealism through Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and by way of Husserl's phenomenology and existentialism comes into a flowering, greater than in the early days. Objective thought manifests itself today primarily in Catholicism and Marxism; but Marxism is not, as Marx himself claimed, a philosophy and Catholicism is metaphysics, based on faith, quite the paradoxically subjective conviction that the objective world exists.

Do you want to rediscover subjectivity and objectivity in the plastic arts? Have a look. Are not the Renaissance and the Baroque, objectivity and subjectivity, respectively? In music Beethoven is subjective, Bach objective. And what minds have spoken on behalf of subjectivity! Artists, thinkers like Montaigne or Nietzsche . . . if you want to see how profusely this duality is still bleeding, read the dramatic pages in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, devoted to the strange question, do people other than me exist?

I say "strange problem" because the existence of other people is surely the most visible, tangible reality—but for Sartre the existentialist, Marxist, and moralist, it appears to be almost a matter of life and death to recognize that reality. Yet after a thorough analysis of this problem in Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl, Sartre is forced to accept that the existence of another human being is unacceptable to a strictly scientific, philosophical mind. Why? Because I am, in my very essence, pure consciousness. I am a subject. . . . And if I were to accept that another human being is also consciousness, then I become, in that very instant, the object of another's consciousness, and, therefore, a thing. Two subjects cannot exist in rigorous thinking; one excludes the other.

To the ignoramuses for whom philosophy is a heap of nonsense because they understand nothing of it, I will allow myself to observe that others puzzle over analogous paradoxes, for example, physics scholars (wave and corpuscular theory,

the dual concept of electrons, the Einstein continuum, and Planck's theory). Everywhere, everywhere, the deepest human thought shatters against the same duality of interpretation, irreconcilable internally. And this is why people are mysteries to themselves.

But for Polish thinkers this trivial little problem is pure bother, suitable only for egocentrics, snobs, or aesthetes.

And it is a peculiar thing, but this contradiction appears again when we try to think about what consciousness is as such, as pure consciousness—because the point is that consciousness must be consciousness of something, is correlative; I can be aware of the shape of this table, or the movements of that cow, but consciousness in isolation from its object cannot be thought as it is the act of becoming conscious of something. Thus here the right of equivalence, that A is equal to A, is deceptive—again the basic contradiction in our thinking, impossible to overcome, and this leads us to an existentialist formula, which throws into relief the somehow fundamental “veering away occurring in us, this elusiveness of humanity: man is that which he is not and is not that which he is.”

This, in rough outline, is how the little problem of subjectivity looks, to many minds nothing but “an egotistical gazing at one's own bellybutton” and “muddleheadedness.”

To dull-witted minds everything is murky. The trivial problem, that little difficulty, dominates all of contemporary culture. But muddled heads are not even capable of understanding their own struggle with subjectivity and objectivity. For Marxism derives from science, is a scientific experiment, that is, an objective organization of society, and is thereby an abstract theory operating with abstract concepts, conceiving of people, so to speak, “from the outside.” And he who defends his inner world, his freedom, his private, concrete life, is on the side of subjectivity.

Here is one more example illustrating the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. When you are operating on a man who has had an appendix attack, he is an object for you, you operate on him exactly the way you would fix a car or any other machine; this is a mechanism functioning poorly. But from the perspective of the sick man, the one who is “experiencing” the operation, the matter presents itself differently; it is something separate, unique, his own; this is “his” operation.

Monday

"The little book about Dante is disgusting. It is senseless, idiotic, that this slander appeared in print. I tore it up and sent this imbecilic monstrosity to hell. Ungaretti"

Ungaretti sent this telegram to Dominique de Roux after reading my French Dante. Dominique writes that an attaché from the Italian embassy in Paris has scheduled a visit.

Thursday

Heart attack and marriage. Today I am walking around the apartment a bit—after four months—and I am beginning to write a little. Everything happened in the past as if in the past perfect—on November 17 in early morning—fierce pains in the area of the heart—I can't move, I moan. But a man is an endless surprise even to himself, and I, even though I was afraid I was dying, and had a sharp pain boring into my chest, I was too embarrassed to waken Rita and to call a doctor at such an early hour; finally he came and gave me a shot, but when the pain calmed, Rita and I were overcome with gaiety and good humor, we laughed and said silly things; the doctor looked at us as if we were a couple of dimwits.

In the following days a few more attacks—I lay condemned to absolute motionlessness—incoherent from pills. If I moved my hand, the doctor yelled, "Don't move!" The immobility lasted two months—it is better now, but I was not allowed to leave the house for four months but was able to answer the most urgent letters, to listen to music. A heart attack is what this is called.

I did not die yet something in me was touched by death—[some sort of shift in time had taken place]—the time before the illness is as if behind a wall. Some sort of new difficulty between me and the past.

[Dr. Marinov said, "You had very little chance of making it." I understood this as the attacks were coming one right after another, but I was not—o wonder!—too concerned with dying; I simply kept hurrying Rita to give me the painkiller.

Rita defended me valiantly as much as she could and struggled with trembling hands not to lose a single drop of the injection.

We were married about a month later, in late December. I wavered—she

was over thirty years younger than I—and I am nearing the end, <but she had taken such a beating, had lost so much weight during those sleepless nights and difficult days that> I finally made up my mind. <She is young, pretty, lively, intelligent, and without a shadow of artifice, straightforward, frank.>*

On January 7,† I married Rita, who has been my faithful companion for the last five years, and in the end, in my illness, dazzled me with her faithfulness and devotion. Me, 64, with her, so young? Does this make any sense? Yet when a person has one foot in the grave, sense is blurred. And she accepted this with joy; it had never even occurred to me that this was what she wanted, what she wants. A Canadian, pretty, unusually sincere, a little naïve in her sincerity and innocence, intelligent (we spend hours discussing things and do not grow bored with one another), independent, slightly boyish, she wins people over; not an iota of pretentiousness, artificiality, putting on airs—in short, good manners.

The marriage was very private, in our home, in the presence of only the Paczowskis who, at word of my illness, rushed here from Milan to nurse me. Two or three days later we read in *Nice Matin* that the venerable writer Count Gombrowicz married his secretary on his deathbed (not on my deathbed as much as in a wheelchair). It appears that the description of this dramatic ceremony was distributed to newspapers. It appeared in Europe and America. I'm afraid that now there is no human power capable of persuading both hemispheres that I am not a count. I am also afraid that this will be considered snobbery on my part when, in fact, it is rather an expression of my not taking titles too seriously. I once pronounced myself a count in Argentina to irritate the authentic ones, as well as serious democrats and socialists responsible for the word, and also to introduce a little luster <luxury> into my Argentine squalor. Today there is nothing I can do. I am a count. And all the vendors address Rita as “Madame la Comtesse.”

In light of the fact that the first and second floors of our little house have become inaccessible to me—no elevator—I have rented a modest apartment on the third floor of the Val-Clair residence on the southern slope of Vence, on the road to St. Paul. No more than six rooms, but it has the advantage—because of occupying the entire top floor, of being surrounded by an enormous veranda,

*Jan Blonski and Jerzy Jarzębski, editors of the definitive Wydawnictwo Literackie edition of the *Diary*, use < > to indicate words and phrases crossed out by the author in the manuscript.

†Blonski and Jarzębski note that the wedding actually took place on December 28, 1968.

which is so wide along the length of the living room, it creates another room. And because the walls of the living room and two others are glass, a very nice little view stretches to the sea as far as Nice, Cannes, and the Lerins Islands; on the opposite side are the Alps—the high snow-covered peaks exceeding 3,000 meters, as well as the lower ones, like the three rocky Baons, <only a little lower than Giewont> are riveting. It is true, however, that various shrubs and flowers obstruct the view somewhat.

My address as of April 1: Vence (A.M.), residence le Val-Clair, route de St. Paul. Please note.]

Sunday

One observes the same old internal quadrille among Poles visiting from Poland. They say communism is suffocating us, impeding development, the country is impoverished, we have no freedom of speech. . . . And immediately afterward, what do they say? *Our* literature, the rebuilding of Warsaw, *our* bicycles and motorcycles, *our* postage stamps are among the most beautiful, and *our* ballet . . . for we are—tah-dah! The prancing Cracovians!

Either or. Either literature is stifled or it is “great.” What shame doesn’t allow us to admit to being ourselves, that mania of adhering to fashion! Putting on a good face.

A Pole who can *own up* to himself immediately becomes a European and a high-class European. The Pole who hides things, tries to put on airs abroad, who is ashamed as if today’s or yesterday’s stagnation was solely his fault, identifies with his misery. Whosoever tosses off his old rags becomes supremely naked; whosoever is royally ashamed of the frayed pant cuffs he hides under a chair and the holes in his jacket he covers with his hand is a beggar. That eternal shame of ours! That weakness!

Mr. Stanislaw Kocik writes occasionally in a certain Parisian daily informational articles about literary life in Poland. Not long ago he wrote a little article in which he calls me “the most Polish of the ‘great’ contemporary Polish writers.” Very nice but wouldn’t it have been better to have said, “distinguished”? Who will believe that in Poland currently we have so many “great” writers if no one in the West knows anything about them? Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz is, according to

our Mr. Kocik, “immense,” and I have nothing against his opinion, but wouldn’t it be better to have a sense of humor and not toss around so much immensity and “greatness? I am proud that Mr. Kocik took advantage of the opportunity to write about me and smuggle in so much “Polish greatness” but this could backfire since, irritated by such a number of greatnesses, I am ready to mention something here and there in the foreign press about mediocrity. It’s odd. My entire life I have fought not to be a “Polish writer” but myself, Gombrowicz; that whole habit of calling a writer “our” I consider ridiculous. “Stayed the sun, moved the earth, born of the Polish nation” smells a little musty in the Europe creating itself now. I fought to be myself and lo and behold the nation, as personified by Mr. Kocik, plucks me out and makes me a feather in his peacock tail. It is also irritating that Mr. Kocik, having mentioned that I am a banned writer in Poland, did not hesitate to add that nonetheless I figure in some encyclopedia there, that some weekly there has nonetheless printed, in the last decade, an essay about me written by a certain Yugoslav, and that somehow my play, *The Marriage*, was performed in the provinces (this lasted three days before the police banned it). What sort of lofty impartiality is this? Wouldn’t this serve to demonstrate that things are not so bad after all, that culture does indeed exist in Poland, etc.? Good God! Do I need to explain further that such silly pastiches applied to the serious issue of censorship could only arouse pity in a French reader? It would be better, Mr. Kocik, if you didn’t wave Witkiewicz like a flag and simply spoke candidly. Even Poland would benefit.

There is another, even more subtle, example, but this one doesn’t lend itself to jokes. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet armies, Polish protests—some of them, like Andrzejewski’s, rather courageous—appeared in the émigré press. Being of the opinion that a writer is not leader or teacher but a private individual and perhaps even more private than others, I sign no protests on principle. The protests have multiplied beyond efficacy. Nonetheless, I share completely their feelings and I respect them unstintingly. But a certain detail, almost Freudian, intrigues me: their practically child-like outrage appears to forget that Poland has suffered the same assault. For years Poland has been an occupied country—exactly like today’s Czechoslovakia. If they had said, “For me violence is a daily act, I know what it is, therefore I condemn the Russian invasion,” everything would be clear. But they have forgotten . . . even those who live abroad. Engrossed in Czechoslovakia, they have forgotten their own fate.

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TRANSLATOR'S AFTERWORD

As I look upon three very worn, broken-spined volumes of Witold Gombrowicz's *Diary* in my favorite, Instytut Literacki, edition, I realize that what I will miss most about translating these books are the accompanying dreams. *Diary* works its mysteries on the reader's innermost life, and whenever I translated Gombrowicz, his writings inspired wonderfully extravagant dreams: I am aboard a ship that is moving at dizzying speed—I see the curve and foam of its wake as it turns, leaps, and somersaults over the water and into the air; the only steady point of orientation in all the thrilling movement is someone's left shoe on deck. In another dream I am there, in Santiago del Estero, and my voluminous skirts rustle and sway as I walk examining the town, or a relaxed Gombrowicz strolls among old oaks and manicured lawns in a blinding white suit, bucks, panama hat, talking to Berkeley professors and dazzling them with his flawless English. In the last dream, I am in my own garden and every plant that has ever grown there and died is suddenly blooming, bearing flower after flower, and I am overwhelmed by the bounty and especially by the miracle of a pink and white magnolia in a corner I had never noticed before. When I call others to show them, the blossoms are too high for them to see, just at the tip of a tree that is now a very tall and somber pine.

In the course of translating *Diary* I have watched many reviewers break their pens (just as I have broken all of my translator's teeth) trying to get Gombrowicz right. He has been called a "crank," "enfant terrible," "scourge," "prophet," "bad boy," "hermit," "demythologizer," "cunning child," "the anti-intellectuals' intellectual," and "classy heel," just to begin the list. My own favorite image of Gombrowicz is that of a Socratic or Voltairean gadfly, egging on the lagging old mare of Polish culture or sinking its teeth into the backside of complacent intellec-

tuals, modern-day “scorpion people whose knowledge is awesome but whose gaze is death.” And many critics (including one Oxford notable) who tried to make too much sense of the mundane-metaphysical cocktail of Gombrowicz’s musings ended up, as Gombrowicz had predicted, with an oral cavity full of his dead body.

Gombrowicz wrote that during the interwar period in Poland it was easiest to write a novel and most difficult to have an honest conversation. *Diary* is really this overdue conversation with the reader, whom Gombrowicz, for all his silliness and provocation, is treating with utmost seriousness. And while one can spend a great deal of time analyzing his critique of Marxist literary theory or existentialism or interwar Polish literature, the real benefits of this literary partnership are often secret, subterranean, elusive, subversive, difficult to put into words and label resistant because they do not translate into knowledge as such but simply into a rich compost for our imaginative flowerbeds. I urge the reader to judge *Diary* according to the basic criteria for judging art that Gombrowicz himself reintroduced: Does it strengthen or debilitate? Does it make you regard your identity as a more expansive, spacious, freer place—failures, complexes, ignorance notwithstanding—or does it paralyze, gag, diminish?

In the third volume of *Diary* there is one passage that is quintessential Gombrowicz. Having received a Ford stipend, he is living in West Berlin and is invited to a reading and discussion of his own work in German, a language he knew only superficially. He is listening to his work being read and discussed in a language not his own, and he feels himself fading, disappearing. To assert his existence as something more than just an appendage to his work, to assert his being in that room, he begins to babble his imperfect German, to argue passionately in gibberish, to gesticulate violently—anything at all to make his existence known. And it is this insistence on making sure others know you are alive—in spite of the nonsensical means sometimes necessary to preserve that dignity—that governs this work.

A translation is never the work of just one person, and there are two people who were indispensable throughout the years of work on *Diary*. The first is Jarosław Anders, who reviewed the manuscripts and frequently saved me from pits of abysmal ignorance; the second is Susan Harris, managing editor at Northwestern University Press, who sublime patience, unfailing courtesy, and wicked humor made a daunting task doable (and probably gave her an ulcer). While the translation is not perfect, I think Gombrowicz would have been tickled by the fact that

Diary, the masterwork of a cosmopolitan from the provincial Polish village of Małoszyce, appeared in English through the labors of a provincial from the great industrial city of Detroit.

This is not a book for the pusillanimous or the pedantic. But if you want wild, extravagant dreams, if you want to reclaim every dead plant and neglected corner of your imaginative garden plot, take *Diary*, read it twice, dance with it in the rain, pass it on to a loony friend. Let Gombrowicz rise from your garden, dark as a soaring pine, translucent as a magnolia blossom.

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CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT DATES

- 1904 Witold Gombrowicz born 4 August in Małoszyce, Poland.
- 1915 Enters elite Catholic lycée, St. Stanisław Kostka, in Warsaw.
- 1920 During defense of Warsaw he is sent away to Małoszyce, where he writes his first book, a history of the Gombrowicz family, based on four-hundred-year-old family archives.
- 1922 Graduates from lycée.
- 1922–27 Studies law at the University of Warsaw and obtains a master's degree.
- 1927–28 Visits France. Spends several weeks in Paris, six months on the Riviera.
- 1928–32 Works as an apprentice examining magistrate in a Warsaw court. Begins writing short stories.
- 1933 Publishes first book, *Memoir from Adolescence*, a collection of seven stories. Received well, but a few condescending reviews convince Gombrowicz his debut is a failure. Nevertheless, enters Warsaw literary life. Death of his father.
- 1933–38 Publishes over six dozen journalistic pieces. As an eccentric café personality attracts young and marginal writers.
- 1937 Publishes stories, “On the Backstairs,” and “Pampelan on the Radio.” *Ferdynand* comes out, provokes zealous admiration and abuse. Bruno Schulz defends it in a famous lecture.
- 1938 Gombrowicz travels to Italy. *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*, a play, is published in *Skamander*, the leading literary journal. Noticed by a single critic.

- 1939 Published story, "The Rat."
Under the pseudonym "Niewieski" publishes a serialized potboiler, *Possessed*, which he writes for money.
In August, sails as a journalist on the maiden voyage of a Polish luxury liner. A week after he arrives in Buenos Aires, is cut off from Poland by the outbreak of war. Settles in Buenos Aires, where he lives almost twenty-four years.
- 1939–47 Bohemian life, poverty, sickness. Frequents Café Rex, where he plays chess; supported by charity, menial clerical jobs, small subsidies; several trips to mountains for health. Publishes about fifteen short pieces in Spanish-language press.
- 1947 *Ferdynand* published in Spanish in Buenos Aires, translated by a committee of young Latin American writers at Café Rex.
Takes job, a sinecure, as a secretary at the Polish Bank. Does own writing during working hours.
- 1948 *The Marriage*, a new drama, published in Spanish, translated by young philosophy student, Alejandro Rússovich.
- 1948–50 Tries unsuccessfully to have his works published in Poland, the U.S., and France.
- 1951 Makes debut as an émigré writer in the Polish émigré monthly *Kultura*.
Writes dramatic fragment, *Historia*, an early version of *Operetta*.
Published in 1975.
- 1953 *Trans-Atlantic*, a new novel, and *The Marriage* are published in Polish by the Literary Institute (*Kultura*), which issues all his subsequent books. The Polish émigré press receives these new works mainly with hostility.
Monthly installments of the *Diary* begin coming out in *Kultura*.
Publishes last story, "The Banquet," in the Polish émigré periodical *Wiadomości*.
- 1955–63 Leaves the bank and lives moderately on literary earnings, paid lectures on philosophy, small grants, and the hospitality of friends. Spends long

- periods in provincial Argentine towns, where he attracts another generation of youth.
- 1957–58 All his works, except his *Diary*, published in Poland, with great popular and critical success.
- 1957 First volume of the *Diary* issued by Literary Institute.
World premiere of *Ivona* in Warsaw.
- 1958 First attack of asthma.
His works, and most discussions of them, banned in Poland.
Ferdydurke published in French.
- 1959 His mother dies in Poland.
- 1960 *Pornografia*, a novel, published by Literary Institute.
Ferdydurke comes out in German.
- 1961 Receives *Kultura* Literary Award.
His sister dies in Poland
Ferdydurke published in the U.S. and England.
- 1962 Second volume of the *Diary* published by Literary Institute.
- 1963 Invited by the Ford Foundation to spend a year in Berlin as a writer in residence. Leaves Argentina for Europe.
Wiadomości Award for the *Diary*.
World premier of *The Marriage* in Paris.
- 1964 Severe illness in Berlin. Recuperates at the abbey of Royaumont, near Paris.
Meets Marie-Rita Labrosse, whom he marries in 1968. They settle in Vence, on the French Riviera.
- 1965 *Cosmos*, his last novel, is published.
Berliner Notizen (Paris-Berlin Diary), published in Germany, provokes great controversy.
- 1966 Third volume of the *Diary* and last play, *Operetta*, published.
Receives Jurzykowski Polish Millenium Award (New York) for life work.

- 1967 Wins International Publishers Prize for *Cosmos*.
Wins Radio Free Europe Prize for *Operetta*.
Begins publishing installments of his *Conversations with Dominique de Roux*, a French critic. Gombrowicz wrote the entire book himself.
- 1968 Mentioned as candidate for the Nobel Prize.
Conversations come out in French under title *Entretiens avec Gombrowicz*.
Suffers heart attack.
- 1969 Dictates his “Guide to Philosophy” to de Roux and to his wife, Rita.
Dies 24 July in Vence of respiratory failure.
The Literary Institute begins publishing his *Collected Works*.

Compiled by Lillian Vallee and David Brodsky

INDEX OF WORKS BY GOMBROWICZ

- “Against Poets” (from *Diary*), 31, 67, 155, 260, 264–273
- Aus dem Tagebuch des Witold Gombrowicz* (first German edition of the *Diary*, Volume I: 1953–1956), 689
- Bacacay* (*Bakakaj*), 351; “The Banquet,” 23, 591, 744; “Incidents on the *H.M.S. Banbury*,” 226, 598–600; “On the Back Stairs,” 743; “Pampelan on the Radio,” 743; “The Rat,” 744. See also *Memoir from Adolescence*
- Berliner Notizen* (Berlin Notebooks), 687–688, 745
- Collected Works*, 746
- “Commentary on Cioran’s “The Conveniences and Inconveniences of Exile,” 48–52
- Conversations with Dominique de Roux* (*A Kind of Testament*), 746
- Cosmos*, 532, 535, 584, 674, 675, 689, 697, 718, 745, 746; Katasia (character), 675; Lena Wojtys (character), 675; Leon Wojtys (character), 675
- Diary*, 41–43, 103, 153, 154, 156–157, 160, 182–184, 211, 221, 232, 244, 262, 290, 292, 293, 303, 321, 340, 351, 367, 402–403, 404, 405–408, 427, 429, 461–462, 486, 503, 507, 565, 571, 613–614, 653–654, 659, 663, 666, 667, 671, 680–681, 681n, 687, 689, 690, 693, 710, 739–741, 744–745
- Entretiens avec Gombrowicz*, 744. See also *Conversations with Dominique de Roux*
- Ferdydurke*, 91, 93, 96–97, 110, 159, 164, 171–174, 206–207, 215, 222–223, 231, 237, 287–290, 292, 293, 296, 313, 315, 338, 349, 351, 367, 386, 391, 427, 453, 461, 473–474, 485–486, 493, 504, 506, 521, 529, 570, 629, 644, 692, 698, 709, 719, 729, 743–745; Ferdydurke (character), 163, 644; Miêtus (character), 163; Prof. Pimko (character), 142
- “Guide to Philosophy,” 746
- Historia* (History), 744

Indexes compiled by Allen J. Kuharski.

Ivona, Princess of Burgundia, 351, 403, 691–693, 743, 745

“Marginal Reflections on Straszewicz,” 125–128

Marriage, The, 17, 22, 26, 73, 76–78, 79, 97, 153, 174, 217, 226, 237, 290, 350, 351, 358, 391, 420–423, 422n, 473–474, 605, 667, 670, 697, 713, 737, 744–745; Dignitaries (characters), 79–80; Drunkard (character), 421–422; Drunkards (characters), 79, 421–422; Father/King (character), 79–80, 217, 421, 670; Henry (character), 43, 78–80, 217, 421–422, 670; “Idea of the Play” (Gombrowicz’s introduction), 422, 473; Johnny (character), 422; Molly/fiancée (character), 79, 421–422

Memoir from Adolescence (Bacacay), 350, 520–521, 743. See also *Bacacay (Bakakaj)*

“On Dante,” 694–706

Operetta, 402–403, 686, 714, 744–746; Baron Firulet (character), 403; Count Charmant (character), 403

Pornografia, 372–373, 377, 386, 391, 480, 481, 485–486, 487, 494, 569, 570, 621, 656, 676–677, 682, 715–716, 717, 745; Frederick (character), 486, 682; Siemian (character), 486

Possessed, 744

“Sienkiewicz,” 274–284, 591

Trans-Atlantic (Trans-Atlantyk), 17–19, 26, 96, 125–127, 152, 153, 162, 175, 180, 291–292, 295–297, 304, 350, 364, 365, 426–428, 458, 744; Councilor Podśrocki (character), 458; Gonzalo (character), 175

SUBJECT INDEX

- A., 215
 A. (wife), 215
 A.N. (author of article in *Kultura*), 232
 Abèrès (Alberes), René-Marill, 100
 Abirached, Robert, 692
abschmack, 359, 447
 absolute, absolutism, 223, 236, 304, 358, 481, 485–486, 612; erotic absolute, 481
 abstraction, 25, 54, 70, 105, 108, 190, 194, 199, 211–212, 223–224, 236, 269–270, 319, 358, 399, 410, 412, 424–425, 433, 447, 457–458, 469, 472, 478, 488, 493, 495, 536, 620, 638, 658, 700, 733
 absurd, absurdity, 30, 76, 94, 119–120, 139, 222, 227–228, 232, 261, 265, 269, 273, 288, 295, 355, 360, 412–413, 416, 442, 477, 610, 675, 691, 715
 Académie française (French Academy), 560
 Academy of Literature (Argentina), 496
 Achaval, Santiago, 494
 Achilles, 635
 Acropolis, 307
 Actaeon, 619
 actors, acting, 45, 69, 219, 279, 288, 362, 452, 632
 Ada. *See* Lubomirska, Ada
 Adam (biblical), 169, 540–541, 603–604
 admiration, 30, 65–67, 237, 262, 272–273, 527
 Adolfo. *See* Obieta, Adolfo de
 aesthetics, aesthetes, aestheticism, 70, 138, 197, 222, 229, 255, 260–261, 273, 277, 278, 284, 307, 327, 347, 399, 424–425, 449, 481, 583, 585, 606–607, 612–613, 657, 666, 690, 698, 733; anaesthesia, 699; national aesthetics, 449; rational aesthetics, 326
 Africa, 600
 Aguirre, Francisco, 373
 Aita, Antonio, 570
Akzente, 642
 Alaska, 74, 244
 Alastair. *See* Hamilton, Alastair
 Alexander II Romanov (Czar) (“Czar of all the Russians”), 717
 Alexander the Great, 700
 Alexandrowicz family, 684
 Alexandrowicz, Witold, 684
 Alicja. *See* Giangrande, Alicja
 Allub Mansur, Leopoldo, 470, 473. *See also* Beduino
 Alpes Maritimes, 673, 679
 Alps, 211, 673, 716, 736
 Altissimo (pseud.). *See* Lechoń, Jan
 Alvear, 161, 496
 ambition, 263
 America, Americans, 84, 86, 117, 172–173, 252, 293, 298, 300, 305, 341, 366, 411, 414, 417,

America, Americans (*cont.*)

478–479, 483, 576, 589, 596–597, 598, 609, 626, 647, 665, 712, 735; “mature” Americans, 478

anachronism, 308

anarchism, anarchists, anarchy, 232, 263, 299, 301, 321, 330, 412, 581, 586, 672

Anchoren family, 320

Andaluz (neighbor in Piriapolis), 546, 550

Anders, Jaroslaw, 740

Andrea. *See* Jankowska, Andrea

Andrzejewski, Jerzy, 13, 16, 255–256, 451–452, 737

animals, 216, 307–312, 317–320, 345–346, 350, 369, 371, 396, 510, 512, 514–516, 523, 602; ants, 319, 333; beetles, 310, 322–324, 453; cows, 307–309, 541; dogs, 298–299, 312, 316–320, 327, 378, 382, 395, 398–402, 510, 609, 617–618, 619, 633–635; donkeys, 382; fish, 346; flies, 311–312; frogs, 311, 346, 704; geese, 299; goats, 382; horses, 238–239, 299, 307–310, 317, 346, 352, 395; lions, 616; monkeys, 359, 557; rabbits, 616; sows, pigs, 316–317, 609; tiger, 515; turtles, 609; whales, 319; worms, 310

Annunzio, Gabriele d', 713

anomalies, 665, 668

Anselm, St., 345

Antaeus, 151

anti-Semitism, anti-Semites, 97–98, 102, 671.

See also Jews

Anticoli-Corrado, Paulina de, Marquessa

Pescopagano (fictional character), 61.

antinomy; contradiction in terms, 300, 303, 404

Apalos (Abalos), Jorge, 415

Apollo, 178

Arabia, 566

Arabs, 533

Aramburu, Pedro Eugeno, 415

Arana (neighbor in Buenos Aires), 543, 551

architecture, architects, 326, 458, 463, 479, 599, 656

Argentina, Argentineans, 31, 59, 68, 73, 85–87, 116, 142, 153, 158–159, 160, 161, 164, 166–167, 171–175, 180, 180, 198, 230, 243, 251, 314, 329–330, 349, 366, 369, 374–376, 379, 399, 410–411, 412, 415, 416, 418, 420, 459, 461, 473, 478, 482, 489, 553, 570, 574, 584–585, 588, 589–590, 592–593, 592, 594, 595–597, 599, 600, 601, 605, 606, 612, 615–616, 621, 624, 626–629, 630, 632, 633–635, 640–641, 643, 650, 659, 662, 667, 668, 671, 674, 721, 735; Argentine art, 164, 167; “Argentine defensive,” 229; Argentine parliament, 582

aristocrats, aristocracy, aristocratism, 50, 59–64, 214, 237, 281, 292, 310, 319, 320–321, 329, 344–347, 350, 399, 405, 408, 455, 457–458, 466, 561, 608, 672, 690; Gombrowicz's aristocratic pretenses, 55–64

Aristotle, 211, 228, 447, 471, 732

Arlet, Suzanne (Arleta), 403, 519

Arndt, Adolf, 647

Aron, Raymond, 488

Arrau, Claudio, 39

arrogance, 263

Arschott, Ruby d', 608

art, artist, 7, 22, 25, 28, 30, 37, 47–52, 58, 70, 74, 83, 94–96, 103–105, 111–112, 113–115, 117, 123, 143, 149, 152, 155–156, 160, 166–167, 171–173, 175, 178, 182–184, 190–191, 192, 205, 207–208, 221, 225, 226, 229, 230, 235, 236–237, 243, 259–260, 262, 264–265, 267–268, 272–273, 274–284, 289, 292, 294–295, 303–304, 307, 309, 315, 320, 327–337, 347, 357, 372, 399, 401, 404, 410, 421, 423–426,

- 448, 451, 455, 457–458, 461, 464, 466, 468, 478, 488, 492–494, 495, 497–504, 522, 523–526, 530, 536, 556, 565, 566, 573, 577, 583, 608–611, 618, 640, 650, 655, 657, 662, 669, 672, 676, 677, 688, 690, 698, 701, 708, 713, 732; abstract art, 334, 582; art for the masses, 261; concrete art, 485; French art, 31, 164; Gombrowicz's art, 314; Mexican art, 327; plastic arts, 409, 620; Polish art, 31, 74, 219, 242; pseudoartists, 229; "pure art," 573, 718; Spanish art, 164; utilitarian art, 304. *See also* society
- artificiality, 48, 237, 243, 284, 289, 294, 307, 408, 442, 451, 470, 575, 578, 617, 672, 689, 735
- Arts, 608, 692
- Asia, 283, 729
- Asians, 533
- Asnito, Asno (Osioł) (nickname). *See* Di Paola, Jorge
- Association of Polish Writers in Exile, 96
- Asunción, 247
- atavism, 290, 308
- atheism, atheist, 318, 321, 356–358, 370, 409, 669
- Atilio, 325, 326, 327, 328
- Atlantic Ocean, 294, 487, 588, 589, 591, 598
- Atlas, 350
- Augean stable, 155
- Augustine, St., 732
- Australia, 3, 320, 324, 663, 712
- Austria, 625
- authenticity, 187, 195, 196, 205, 222, 224, 226, 239, 241, 267, 273, 288–289, 327, 338–339, 405, 474, 486, 522, 569; inauthenticity, 698
- avant-garde, avant-gardists, 58, 71, 72, 314, 671–672
- B.T. (author of article in *Wiadomości*), 10
- Babkowski, Andrzej, 365
- Bach, Johann Sebastian, 25, 40, 176, 261, 265, 433, 439, 459, 467–470, 492, 554–555, 732; Brandenburg Concertos, 440, 498
- Bachmann, Ingeborg, 625–626
- Backhaus, Wilhelm, 553
- Bacon, Francis, 265
- Bahía Blanca, 417
- balance, 302
- Baliński, Stanisław, 64, 445, 564, 613–614
- Balzac, Honoré de, 278, 371–372, 425; *Human Comedy*, 371–372
- Banderita (mountain), 117
- Barcelona, 601–602
- Barcza, Alilcja de, 100, 403, 529
- Barletta, Leonidas, 419
- Baroque, 56, 201, 485, 732
- Barraut, Jean-Louis, 496
- Bartelski, Lesław, 254
- Barthes, Roland, 697, 708; *Critical Essays*, 697
- Bartók, Béla, 470
- Basilio (fictional character?), 721
- Basilio (neighbor in Buenos Aires), 543, 551
- Bau, Zdzisław (pseud.), 489, 585.
- Baudelaire, Charles, 278; *Les fleurs du mal*, 498
- Bayce, Julio, 485
- beauty, 30, 37, 48, 75, 83–84, 102, 163, 166, 176, 178–179, 181, 184, 197, 213, 238, 258, 262–263, 264, 267, 269–270, 272, 274–283, 325–326, 337, 372, 375, 377, 394, 479, 481, 486, 489, 491, 523, 580, 592, 596, 603, 606–607, 612–613, 621, 623, 630, 657–658, 666, 682, 685, 690, 714–715; Argentinean beauty, 85–87; Bolshevik beauty, 276; English beauty, 275; feminine beauty, 143–

- beauty (*cont.*)
 147; Polish beauty, 136, 263, 274–276, 282–283, 292; Russian beauty, 275
- Beauvoir, Simone de, 664
- Bechmann, Eva, 648
- Beckett, Samuel, 717
- Beduino, 529–530. *See also* Allub Mansur, Leopoldo
- Beethoven, Ludwig van, 41, 47, 74, 99, 351, 433, 462–470, 479, 581, 639, 690, 732; Eighth Quartet, 471; Fifth Symphony, 467; Fourteenth Quartet, 433, 471; Fourth Quartet, 470; *Hammerklavier* Sonata, 467; Ninth Symphony, 656; *Pastoral* Symphony, 468; Quartet in A Minor, opus 132; Quartet in C-sharp Minor, 467, 470; Quartet in F Minor, 463; Thirteenth Quartet, 470; Thirteenth Symphony, 468; Thirty-Second Sonata, 467
- being, life, 48, 195, 206, 210, 212, 215, 217, 224, 228–229, 230, 231, 236, 241, 243–244, 252, 260, 269, 275, 281, 283, 290, 291, 310, 318, 333, 348, 370, 391, 399, 400, 413, 431, 451, 460, 471, 474, 486, 505, 523, 524, 618, 628, 640, 699; conventional life, 294; Polish way of being, 207, 241
- Bellow, Saul, 676
- Benedict de Debenedetti, Cecilia (Cecylia in text), 100, 142, 161–162, 171
- Benislowski family, 683
- Benrath, Frédéric, 636
- Berdyaev, Nilolai A., 488
- Bergson, Henri, 672
- Berkeley (University of California), 739
- Berkeley, George, 447
- Berlin, 533, 569, 584, 586, 601, 618, 624–625, 628–632, 633–639, 640–643, 647–651, 655–660, 661–662, 665, 687–688, 717, 740, 745; Akademie der Künste, 625, 647, 656; Americanization of Berlin, 647–648, 660 cafés, 649; Bartningallee, 631, 647; Berlin Philharmonic, 656; Berlin Senate, 651; Berlin University, 569; Berlin Zoo, 660; East Berlin, 648, 661; Fehrbelliner Platz, 631; Hansaplatz, 631; Hohenzollerndamm, 630; Kurfürstendamm, 633, 640, 660; Tegel Airport, 625; Tiergarten, 626, 627, 630, 643; West Berlin, 600, 630, 661, 738
- Berni, Antonio, 161, 624
- Berni, Paula (née Cazaneuve; wife of Antonio Berni), 161
- Betelú, Mariano (nicknames: Coli-en-flor, Coliflor, Colimba, Flor, Flor de Quilombo, Flor-en-coli, Florquilo, Gize, Quiloflor, Quilombo, Quilombolflor), 386–392, 409, 460, 470, 489, 552, 671
- Bialłozór family, 684
- Bianchotti, Hector, 359, 609
- Bigatti (sculptor), 329
- Bioy Casares, Adolfo, 165, 167
- Bioy Casares, Silvina (née Ocampo), 165, 167.
- Björnstrom, M.C. Gustaf, 717
- blasphemy, 297–298, 307–308, 318, 413, 489
- Bloy, Léon (b. Marie Joseph Caïn Marchenoir), 438
- Błoński, Jan, 735n
- Bobkowska, Barbara, 363
- Bobkowski, Andrzej, 364–366, 445; *Pen Sketches: France 1940–1944*, 364–366
- Bobrzyński, Michał, 338
- Bocheński, Jacek, 307, 366
- Boden, 717
- body, corporality, 15, 144–145, 212, 281, 319, 326, 330–331, 345, 346, 355–356, 368, 375, 377, 381–383, 393–395, 426, 481, 486–487, 515, 544, 549, 569, 580, 605, 613, 732

- body parts, 213;
 Bodzechów, 626, 629, 683
 Bohr, Niels Henrik, 488, 504
 Bolesław the Brave (Bolesław I Chrobry;
 Polish King), 436
 Bolshevik, Bolshevism, 188, 199, 671
 Bombay, 476
 Bomhard, Prof. von, 625
 Bondy, François, 496–497, 608, 677
 Bondy, Liliane, 677
 boredom, 58, 119, 190, 214, 310, 312
 Borges, Jorge Luis, 165, 412, 478, 581–583, 611,
 697, 717
 Borges, Leonor Acevedo de, 581
 Borowski, Tadeusz, 255–256
 Bourbon dynasty, 58
 bourgeoisie, middle class, 58, 257, 261, 263,
 281, 330, 335, 352, 353, 359, 379, 439, 454,
 466, 468, 485, 565, 567, 580, 592, 639, 657,
 689
 Bourgois, Christian, 717
 boy, 312
 Boy-Zeleński, Tadeusz, 36, 36n, 49, 202–203,
 321–322
 Brach, Hermann, 270; *Death of Virgil*, 270
 bragging, 55–56
 Brailowsky, Alexander, 39
 Braque, George, 32
 Bratny, Roman, 10, 254
 Braun, Mieczysław (B. M. Braunstein), 13,
 198
 Brazil, 594, 597, 722
 Brecht, Bertolt, 636
 Breiter, Emil, 420
 Brentano, Bettina von, 468
 Breza, Tadeusz, 605, 618
 Brochwicz-Kozłowski, Stanisław, 477
 Brodsky, David, 746
 Broglie, Louis de, 488, 504
 Broniewski, Władysław, 58
 Brzozowski, Stanisław, 338, 561–563
 Buber, Martin, 25
 Buccleuch-et-Queensberry family, 57
 Buckle, Henry Thomas, 561
 Buenos Aires, 12, 18, 92, 128, 148, 158, 163, 170–
 171, 180, 209, 229, 244, 245, 253, 262, 295,
 305, 328, 349, 351, 374, 376, 383, 409, 417,
 440, 441, 458, 473, 474, 479, 482, 489, 496,
 534–537, 540, 542, 551, 555, 568, 584, 585,
 586–589, 591, 610, 618, 621, 627–629, 659,
 688, 712, 744; 1258 Corrientes (El Palomar),
 587; 242 Tacuari, 587; Avenida Costanera,
 92; English Tower, 588
 Bulgaria, Bulgarians, 26, 71
 Burb family, 684
 Butor, Michel, 568, 573–574, 618, 649–650
 Byron, Lord George Gordon Noel, 66, 140,
 459; *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 459; *The*
 Corsair, 459
 Cabala, 698
 Caballito, 295
 Cabot, Sebastian, 374
 Café Adria (Warsaw), 232
 Café Aguila (Santiago), 473, 475
 Café de la Paix (Paris), 605
 Café Flore (Paris), 663
 Café Fragata (Buenos Aires), 497, 556, 618
 Café Ideal (Santiago), 376
 Café Ips (Warsaw), 456
 Café Lourse (Warsaw), 160, 646
 Café Paris (Buenos Aires), 136–137
 Café Querandí (Buenos Aires), 253, 434–435,
 437, 439–441, 443–444
 Café Rex (Buenos Aires), 55–56, 100, 136–
 137, 168, 171–172, 388, 744

- Café Sorrento (Buenos Aires), 253, 439
 Café Tex (Buenos Aires), 671
 Café Tip-Top (Montevideo), 482, 484
 Café Tortoni (Buenos Aires), 100
 Café Ziemianska (Warsaw), 12, 16, 58, 456, 646, 649, 685
 Café Zodiak (Warsaw), 12, 13, 649
 Café Zuntz (Berlin), 640, 643, 649
 cafés, 314, 455–456; artists' cafés, 649; Berlin cafés, 649; coffeehouse literatus, 456; post-war Polish cafés, 654
 Calvario (hill), 354, 388
 Cambridge University, 504
 Camus, Albert, 25, 52, 54–55, 76, 343, 566, 714; *L'homme révolté* ("The Rebel"), 52–53
 Canada, Canadians, 73, 182, 719
 Canal Feihoo (Feijóo), Bernardo, 376
 Canal Feihoo (Feijóo), Miss (sister of Bernardo), 376
 Canary Islands, 600, 674
 Cannes, 602, 638, 673, 721, 736
 Cap d'Antibes, 712
 Capablanca y Graupera, José Raúl, 270
 Capdevilà, Arturo, 158, 160–161
 Capdevilà, Chincina, 161
 capitalism, 235, 240, 353, 453, 651, 655
 Carrasco, 485, 487
Carrefour (Paris), 692
 Cassandra, 489
 Cassou, Jean, 573–574
 Castellane family, 57
 Castorina, María Anna (nickname "Suitcase"), 586–587
 Castro Ruz, Fidel, 532
 cathedrals, 327, 599; Cologne cathedral, 448
 Catholicism, Catholic Church, 13, 33–38, 81, 112, 113, 215, 234, 239, 244, 263, 281, 309–310, 318–319, 340, 343, 345, 350, 352, 367, 370, 438, 448, 454, 562, 616, 703, 732; Polish catholicism, 218–219, 229, 230, 448
 Cato the Elder ("Delenda est Carthago!"), 709
 Cazeneuve, Paula. *See* Berni, Paula
 Cecilia. *See* Benedict de Debenedetti, Cecilia
 Celia (daughter of neighbors in Piriapolis), 546, 550
 Cellini, Benvenuto, 86
 censor, censorship, 314, 737
 centaur, 425
 Cervantes, 19, 235, 570; *Don Quixote*, 18, 19, 141, 187, 282
 Cézanne, Paul, 334–335, 485, 617
 Chądzyńska, Zofia, 55, 122, 496
 Chagall, Marc, 683, 721
 Chamco (Chamico in original), 141
 Champs-Élysées, 612
 chaos, 52, 139, 455, 676, 728
 Chaplin, Charlie, 162
 Charaire, Georges, 672, 717
 Charaire, Véronique, 672, 717
 Charlemagne, 436, 438
 charm, spell, 85, 147, 169, 175, 213, 229–230, 278, 279, 389–390, 407, 479, 492, 620. *See also* grace
 Chartres, cathedral, 327–328
 Chesterton, Gilbert Keith, 483, 506
 Chiavari, 717
 child, childishness, childhood, 21, 163, 164, 174, 218–219, 223, 228, 231, 243–244, 252, 289, 298, 302, 378
 Chile, 119–120, 328
 China, 23, 71, 244, 350, 450, 476, 661, 663
 Chinese, 533
 Chopin, Fryderyk (Frédéric), 6–9, 39, 99, 128, 234, 261, 365, 424, 464, 469, 501, 502, 505–506, 522, 716; Sonata in B Minor, 501, 502

- Choromański, Michał, 158, 160, 202; *Medicine and Jealousy*, 202
- Christ, 38, 141, 277, 354, 355, 356
- Christianity 4, 6, 38, 241
- Chrobry* (ocean liner), 158–159, 589, 591, 600
- church, 26, 300
- Churchill, Winston Leonard Spencer, 349
- Ciano, Galeazzo (quote), 4; *Diary*, 4
- Cicellis, Kay, 677
- Cicero, Marcus Tullius, 126
- Cioran, Émile Michel, 48, 50; “The Conveniences and Inconveniences of Exile,” 48–50
- Circe, 609
- circus, 223, 490
- citizenship, 304–305; world citizenship, 304
- civilization, 26, 109, 259, 616
- Clarín*, 489, 586
- clarity, 225, 315
- classicism, 506
- Claudel, Paul, 16, 122, 197, 404
- Clauvel, Jacques, 664
- Clermont-Ferrand, 659
- Clodion (Claude Michel), 329
- clown, jester, 45, 364, 414, 501, 508, 530, 575
- Cocteau, Jean, 16, 29, 617
- cogito (Latin), 706
- Cold War, 501
- Coli-en-flor (nickname). *See* Betelú, Mariano
- Coliflor (nickname). *See* Betelú, Mariano
- colimba* (military service in Argentina), 459–460
- collective, community, 107, 194, 204, 232, 243, 256, 273, 300–301, 339, 407, 438, 477, 507, 607, 620; collective power, 299; collective strength, 299
- collectivism, collectivist philosophy, 25; Marxist collectivism, 55
- Collector (pseud.). *See* Sakowski, Juliusz
- Coloñ (Argentina), 39
- Columbus, Christopher (Colombo, Cristoforo), 117, 601, 668
- Combat* (Paris), 692
- Communism, Communists, 15, 20–22, 24, 33–34, 58, 89–90, 101–107, 113, 117, 151, 235–236, 236, 237, 240–241, 244, 262, 313, 317–319, 330, 343, 345, 350, 355, 368, 419, 438, 446, 452, 457–458, 473, 501–502, 579, 625, 655, 729, 736–737; anti-Communism, 262, 446; “artistic production,” 502; People’s Democracies, 455; Polish Communists, 188, 314; “red church,” 502
- Comondo, Mr. de, 329
- compassion, empathy, 319
- Compton, Arthur Holly, 504
- concrete reality, concreteness, 105, 179, 191, 223, 228, 231, 269, 299, 315, 350, 358, 366, 382, 410, 417, 424, 472, 495, 557–558, 612, 647, 699, 704. *See also* abstraction
- Conrad, Joseph (b. Teodor Józef Konrad Korzeniowski), 49, 82, 169, 507
- conscience, 53–55, 60, 243, 441–443, 460, 653; national conscience, 304
- consciousness, awareness, 223–224, 227, 229, 231, 237, 239–241, 243, 258, 268, 309–310, 447, 476, 557–558, 628, 637, 648, 676, 711, 732–733; Polish awareness, 242, 262, 298; pure consciousness, 733; superior and inferior consciousness, 310
- consumers, customers, 113. *See also* readers
- contemplation, 184
- contradiction, 291, 300, 309, 315, 694, 704, 714, 731, 733
- Contreras, Cleo, 168
- Contreras, Rosita, 168
- conventions, conventionality, 287, 291, 294, 307, 452

- Copernicus (Kopernik, Mikołaj), 8–9, 370, 716
 Córdoba, 107, 115, 373, 417
 Córdoba mountains, 168
 Corrientes, 168, 181, 251, 308, 374, 417, 440–441, 510, 513, 556, 587; El Palomar, 587
 Cortes (Juan Antonio Salceda), 342–346, 348, 350, 354–355, 355–356
 cosmopolitanism, 72, 299
 cosmos, universe, 219, 224, 245, 350, 400, 441, 469, 486, 490, 504, 514, 699
 cowardice, 402
 Cox (from Tandil), 349
 Cracow (Kraków), 4, 6n, 74, 351, 366, 651
 creativity, creation, 52, 117, 184, 192, 204, 238, 241, 242, 267, 280, 287, 288, 291, 340, 358, 409, 447, 448, 456, 467, 473, 475–477; “natural” creativity, 70
 crematoria, concentration camps, 254, 255, 627
 Crespelle, Alain, 664
 Crete, 136
 criticism, 112, 120, 203, 294–295, 425, 575, 620, 707; art criticism, 620; Polish criticism, 200
 critics, columnists, feuilleton writers, 46, 49, 72–73, 118–119, 138, 153–154, 156, 182–183, 202, 222, 290, 291, 292, 294–295, 420–426, 462, 466, 493, 554, 573, 655, 680–681, 683, 707, 729, 739; avant-garde critics, 423–424; literary critics, 90–92, 93–96; Polish press, 304, 314, 414
 Croce, Benedetto, 488
 cruelty, 319, 361, 397, 455, 611, 624, 703, 713
 Cuba, Cubans, 172, 259, 478, 533
 culture, cultural life, cultures, 45, 55, 109, 113–115, 160–161, 175, 177, 190, 192, 206, 219, 229, 255, 259, 267, 283, 289–290, 407, 410, 418, 424, 465, 466, 475, 477, 525, 565–567, 568, 577, 607, 616, 624, 645, 657, 728; parochial cultures, 50; Polish culture, 68, 127, 136, 207, 229, 242–243, 257, 716, 739; second-class culture, 290; universal culture, 50, 448
 Curie-Skłodowska, Maria, 6, 82
 Cyrankiewicz, Józef, 232
 Czapka (wife of Andrzej), 221
 Czapka, Helena (Lena), 221, 233, 238, 675
 Czapka, Verena, 221, 307
 Czapki, Andrzej, 221
 Czapki, Józef, 221, 604
 Czapki, Stanisław, 221
 Czaykowski, Bohdan, 506, 530
 Czechoslovakia, 737
 Czerniawski, Adam, 506
 Czerwińska, Kropka, 330
 Czerwiński, Tadeusz, 316
 Dąbrowska, Maria, 100, 202, 494, 654
 Dąbrowski, General Jan Henryk, 683
 dadaism, 681
Dagens Nyheter (Stockholm), 693
 Dali, Salvador, 183, 528
 Daltonism (colorblindness), 418
 dance, dancer, 75–76, 147, 237, 279, 423, 495, 502, 586, 606, 666, 739
 dandyism, 403, 412, 528; metaphysical dandyism (Jarry), 403; metaphysical dandyism (Witkacy), 528
 Daniel, 596
 Danilewiczowa, Maria, 530
 Dante Alighieri, 5, 681, 694–697, 700–706, 734; *The Divine Comedy*, 694–697; *Inferno*, 694–697
 darkness, 225
 Darwin, Charles Robert, 561
Dasein, 226. *See also* being; existence; fate; form; human nature

- De Rokha, Pablo, 119–120
- death, dying, 46–47, 143, 169, 212, 216, 218,
222–223, 229, 234, 239, 311, 318–320, 368–
371, 390, 400, 415, 462, 498, 509–516, 559,
591, 597, 608, 626, 627, 630, 635, 643, 657,
668, 672, 696, 700–701, 715, 734; Catholic
death, 47
- Debenedetti, Cecilia. *See* Benedit de
Debenedetti, Cecilia
- Dełbicki, Jacek, 238, 317–318
- Dełbicki, Zdzisław Klemens, 5
- Debussy, Claude Achille, 41, 459, 464–465,
468, 504; *The Afternoon of a Faun*, 468
- decadence, 404, 545, 576
- Declaration of Inequality, 345
- Dedé the fiancé (Portuguese), 143
- degradation, 163–164, 170, 178, 216, 223, 289–
290, 314, 330, 454, 487, 524, 597
- Delia, 572
- Delicias, Las (boarding house in Buenos
Aires), 15
- democracy, 350, 353, 363, 459; People's
Democracy, 455; rights of man, 459
- Democritus, 540, 672
- demonism, satanism, 192, 194, 201, 360, 462,
465, 564–565, 622, 641
- Denmark, Danes, 632, 719
- depravity, 530
- Der Spiegel*, 687
- Descartes, René, 211, 227–228, 425, 447, 472,
495, 611, 732
- desertion, 215
- despair, 216, 310, 316, 325
- Detroit, 741
- devils, demons, devilishness, 217, 316, 317,
324, 437–438, 512, 541, 695. *See also*
demonism
- Di Paola, Jorge (nicknames Asnito, Asno,
Osioł, Dipa, Dipi), 349, 386–387, 441, 482,
483–484, 485
- dialectics, 218, 224, 227, 230, 236, 237, 240,
299–300, 310, 341, 350, 449, 472, 486, 495,
562, 623, 695, 700
- Diana, 607, 619
- Dickens, Charles, 483, 564; *Pickwick Papers*,
483
- Dickman, Max, 482, 483
- didacticism, 243–244, 326
- Die Zeit*, 687
- dignity, 569, 578, 593
- dilemma, 322
- Dilthey, Wilhelm, 488
- Dimensión*, 376, 473
- Dionysos, Dionysian, 37
- Dior, Christian, 145, 607, 609
- Dipa, Dipi (nicknames). *See* Di Paola, Jorge
- Diputado (neighbor in Priapolis), 546, 550
- Diputado, Señora, 546, 550
- directors, theater, 461–462, 565, 572
- discipline, 506
- dogma, 454
- Dolega-Mostowicz, Tadeusz, 83
- dollar, U.S., 21
- Dominic, St., 705
- Dominique (from Royaumont), 672
- Don Juan, 372
- Dos Passos, John Roderigo, 568, 573
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor M., 7, 25, 56, 264, 278,
280, 403, 441, 443, 577, 591, 614, 681; *The
Brothers Karamazov*, 17, 56; *Crime and
Punishment*, 441; Raskolnikov (character),
441–442, 443; *The Possessed*, 441; Sonia
(character), 443
- drama, play, 206, 210, 431, 657, 688, 707; mys-
tery play, 355
- dream, dreams, 77–78, 96–97, 117, 173, 187,

- dream, dreams (*cont.*)
 204, 225, 280, 283, 303, 399, 421–423, 490,
 524, 737–739
 Dreyfus, Alfred, 460
 dualism, 363, 393
 Dubuffet, Jean, 683
 Dukas, Paul, 504
 Dumas, Alexandre (père), 210, 211, 274; *Le
 vicomte de Bragelonne*, 210
 Dunin Kozicz family, 684
 Duś. *See* Jankowski, Władysław
 Dzianott family, 252
 Dzianott, Jacek, 252
 Dzianott, Rena, 252
Dziennik Polski (London), 691, 715–716
Dziś i Jutro, 232

 East, Eastern Europe, 15, 16, 21, 283–284, 471–
 472, 630
 Eastern European writers, intellectuals, 21,
 24–25
 economics, 648, 657
 Edith (student of philosophy), 313
 ego, egotism, 140, 166, 229, 319, 340, 462, 507,
 531, 632, 651, 653, 669. *See also* “I”
 Eichler, Janusz, 21, 27, 31–32, 552
 Einaudi, Giulio, 717
 Einstein, Albert, 349, 353, 488, 504–505, 731–
 733
 Eisler, 100, 103, 671
El Ciclón, 258
 elegance, 410
 Eliot, Thomas Stearns, 25
 elites, 316, 418; European elite, 577; German
 elite, 632; Polish postwar, 453
 engineers, 398, 492, 554, 556
 England, the English, 166, 173, 228–229, 300,
 330, 339, 379, 411, 449, 507, 632, 636, 743

 English, Englishmen, 8, 471, 478
 Entre Ríos (province), 164, 246
episteme (Latin), 707–711
 equality, 319, 349, 363, 455, 477
 Erasmus of Rotterdam (b. Gerhard
 Gerhards), 403
 Ernesto. *See* Sábato, Ernesto
 Eros, eroticism, 176, 189, 384, 481, 487, 560,
 681–683; erotic absolute, 481; Polish eroti-
 cism, 487
 essence, 47
 ethics, 222–223, 241, 244, 715; ethics of existen-
 tialism, Catholicism, and Marxism, 243
 Eugenio (neighbor in Buenos Aires), 543, 551
 Europe, 12, 31–32, 51, 87, 129, 149, 159, 161,
 167, 167, 192, 215, 283, 314, 327, 341, 343, 361,
 378, 382, 409, 411, 449, 453, 457, 472, 475–
 477, 478, 562, 564, 571, 572, 581, 584, 585,
 589, 591–593, 594, 598, 601, 626, 627, 630,
 635, 636, 638, 643, 648, 650, 657, 659–661,
 666, 668, 689, 712, 714, 728–729, 735, 737,
 745
 Europeans, Europeanness, Europeanism, 30,
 32, 84, 142, 149–152, 196, 326, 377, 410, 449,
 472, 475, 563, 577, 635–636, 665, 736;
 European chauvinism, 474; European
 thought, 43, 192
 Eve (biblical), 541
Evergreen Review, 717
 evil, 256, 437, 513, 623, 694–696
Ewig-Weibliche, 180
 exile, emigration, émigrés, 48–52, 80–82, 134,
 160, 221, 236, 243, 296, 301, 314, 449, 457,
 529, 671, 713; Polish émigré literature and
 thought, 232, 444–455, 451, 453–454, 462,
 567, 691
 existence, 21, 49, 52, 54, 186, 195, 205–208, 210,
 212, 216, 222–224, 226–228, 239, 243–244, 257,

- 262, 283, 288, 291, 294, 300, 302, 311–312, 318, 339, 390–391, 393, 424, 438, 444–445, 458, 461, 524, 550, 557, 623, 628, 641, 645, 648, 659, 662, 688, 699, 700, 706, 732; authentic existence, 205, 208, 222–224; collective existence, 216; *ex-istir*, 548; heroic existence, 212; lowest register of existence, 552; nonexistence, 245; psychological existence, 339
- existentialism, existentialists, 110–112, 178, 215, 217, 222–224, 226–229, 229–230, 239, 244, 311, 422, 448, 472, 486, 495, 557, 562, 610, 616, 617, 622, 628, 732–733, 740; Sartrean existentialism, 110–112
- experience, 230, 254–257, 259, 260–261, 262, 311, 425, 612, 628
- Express*, 608, 713
- expression, 243
- faces, 105, 115, 169, 197, 216, 224, 289, 307, 316.
See also grimace; masks; mug
- faith, belief, 38, 50, 83, 135, 188, 205, 216, 243, 269, 336, 343, 361, 401, 658, 732; faith in faith, 38
- Falkiewicz, Andrzej, 420–423; “Key Issues in Gombrowicz’s *The Marriage*,” 420–423
- Falkland Islands, 320
- falsehood, lies, deceit, 224, 234, 238, 239, 242, 283, 289, 293, 303, 368, 375, 385, 399, 408, 451, 466, 471. See also truth
- fame, 185, 229, 236, 405, 718
- farce, 276, 386
- fascism, 34, 344, 346, 360, 671, 680
- fashion, 145–146, 307, 607–608
- fate, destiny, 45, 84, 139, 181, 190, 191, 200, 205, 210, 404, 458, 465, 528, 601, 688, 737
- Fath, Jacques, 145, 609
- Faucigny Lucinge family, 61
- Faulkner, William, 566
- Faust, Doctor Faustus, 384, 397
- fear, 360, 402
- Federico* (ocean liner), 588–589, 597
- Fels, Zuzanna, 633
- Feltrinelli, Giangiacomo (publisher) (“Peltrinelli” in English text), 529
- Fernández, Joaquín Pérez, 162
- Ferreya (Ferreira) (museum director in Tandil; father of Juan Carlos), 145, 348
- Ferreya (Ferreira), Juan Carlos, 349
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 732
- Fidel. See Castro Ruz, Fidel
- Figaro*, 691–692
- Fila, 56
- Filefotto (musicologist), 351
- Fini, Leonor, 617
- Fleury (Gombrowicz’s aunt; fictional character), 63
- Flor, Flor de Quilombo, Flor-en-coli, Flor-quilo (nicknames). See Betelú, Mariano
- Florence, 700
- folklore, 465, 475
- folklorists, 219
- fool, foolishness, 88, 105, 384, 400, 413
- Ford Foundation, 584, 586, 625, 633, 642, 649, 651, 652, 686, 687–688, 740
- form, deformation, 45, 77–78, 82, 110, 112, 113–115, 129, 166, 182, 193, 196, 201, 205–207, 237–238, 243, 266, 275–276, 282, 288–290, 295, 301–302, 303, 314, 315, 333–334, 340, 357–358, 392, 405, 431, 433, 463, 465, 469–470, 473, 493, 495, 502–504, 527, 556, 575, 587, 675, 687, 698, 704, 708, 714; deformation, deformity, 289, 295, 298, 303; form-convention, 288; form-element, 288; Polish form, 19, 44, 207, 241
- Formoza (mistress of W. Jankowski’s *estanzia*), 209–210

- Forner, Raquel, 329
- Foucault, Michel, 697; *The Order of Things*, 697
- Fragonard, Jean Honoré, 329
- France Observateur*, 617, 670
- France, Anatole, 82, 233, 403, 663
- France, the French, 8, 42, 77, 150–151, 166, 203, 257, 299, 300, 339, 348, 351, 364–366, 411, 471, 478, 573, 576–577, 605, 610–612, 612, 614, 622, 648, 661, 662, 669, 670, 689, 714, 728, 743, 744; French decadence, 346; French elite, 449; French Revolution, 351; French thought, 47; Gauls, 667
- Francis of Assisi, St., 540
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 688
- Fray Mocho, 30, 33
- freedom, 50–51, 70, 102, 108–110, 112, 113, 117, 186–187, 194–195, 222, 237, 241, 261, 266, 277, 282–283, 299–300, 303, 410, 451, 459, 558, 563, 575, 579, 610, 623, 627–628, 650, 680, 699, 726; freedom of speech, 736
- French literature, 25, 122
- Freud, Sigmund, 175, 241, 282, 406–407, 417, 476, 737; subconscious, 231, 560
- Frondizi, Arturo, 369, 416
- Frydman, Paulin (chess master), 168
- Fulano (of Tandil), 343
- functionalism, 490, 578; spiritual functionaries, 578
- futurism, futurists, 322, 645, 646
- G. Irena. *See* Grobicka, Irena
- G.R., 32
- Gacki, Stefan Kordian, 198
- Gaetano (Kajetan), Prince (fictional character), 61–63
- Galápagos Islands, 236
- Galey, Mathieu, 608
- Galicia, 560
- Galileo Galilei, 370
- Galiñana, Segura, 161
- Galiński, Tadeusz (quoted in text), 401
- Gallimard, Éditions, 434
- Gálvez, Manuel, 158
- Gałczyński, Konstanty Ildefons, 13, 16
- Garanio (neighbor of W. Jankowski), 316–317
- Garthe, Hanne, 690
- Gauguin, Paul, 29
- Gautier, Jean-Jacques, 691
- Gdynia, 589
- Genaro (from Goya), 252
- gender, 318
- Genet, Jean, 621–624; *Les pompes funèbres*, 621–622
- Geneva, 581
- genius, greatness, 53, 156, 174, 190–191, 193, 202, 212, 214, 215, 218, 228, 245, 265, 270, 274, 362, 386, 403–410, 455, 468, 471, 576, 578, 583, 618, 690, 700–702, 736–737; Jewish genius, 99; Polish greatness, 737
- geniuses, 6–8, 280
- gentry, Polish, 263, 281, 522, 525, 561–562, 563, 617, 671, 729; Sarmatians, 672
- geography, 244
- German, Juliusz, 83
- Germany, Germans, Germanness, 8, 59, 299, 361, 493, 569, 571, 627, 632–634, 636–639, 641, 645, 652, 657, 665, 686, 687, 688, 690, 745; Federal Republic, 639; German language, 740; German psychology, 650–651
- Gesinus (painter), 138
- Giangrande, Alicja, 403, 535–537, 539
- Giangrande, Silvio (Cio), 535–537, 539
- Gibbon, Edward, 138
- Gibraltar, 674

- Gide, André, 25, 119, 122, 140, 233, 281, 505, 673, 713
- Giedroyc, Jerzy, 48, 253, 261, 296, 403, 591, 599, 604, 693
- Gieseking, Walter, 39
- Ginastera, Alberto, 554
- Gintowt Dziewiałtowska, Tekla (Gombrowicz's ancestor), 684
- Gintowt, Jan, 684
- Gintowt, Joachim (Gombrowicz's ancestor), 684
- Giotto di Bondone, 327–328
- Girreferèst-Prést, Georges (nicknames: Giffelèr Pretèt, Giffeleré, Gifferèst, Giffè-Prést, Prést, Prèvest), 556–559
- Gize. *See* Betelú, Mariano
- Głaz, Kazimierz, 721, 723
- Głos, *Głos Polski* (Buenos Aires), 68–69
- Gobelin tapestry, 669
- God, divinity, 7, 26, 27, 33–34, 36, 38, 53–54, 77, 102, 122, 148, 188, 192, 193, 205, 211, 212, 213, 215–216, 217, 236, 237, 239, 267, 273, 278, 281, 284, 291, 295, 308–309, 312, 318–319, 354–358, 361, 362, 363, 396, 422, 438–439, 469, 485–486, 489, 523, 565–566, 575, 576, 603–604, 637, 639, 642, 682, 703; Polish God, 219; Simone Weil's God, 219
- Goebbels, Joseph, 652
- Goetel, Ferdinand, 80–82, 138; "Fatigue," 80
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 277–278, 299, 403, 466–467, 581, 635, 636, 638–639, 640, 690; *Faust*, 174; *Hier ist der Hund begraben*, 635
- Gogh, Vincent van, 333–334
- Gogol, Nikolai, 71, 124
- Gojawiczyńska, Pola, 200, 202
- Goldberg (chessplayer in Santa Fe), 249
- Goldmann, Lucien, 670
- Golgotha, 355, 356, 622
- Goma (nickname). *See* Gómez, Juan Carlos
- Gombrowicz (family), 684, 743; Barkłojnie (estate), 684; Jużyn (estate), 684; Lenogiry (estate), 684; Miguciany (estate), 684; Mingajłów (estate), 684; Mozyry (estate), 684; Poniemuń (estate), 684; Poremigole (estate), 684; Rady (estate), 684; Upice (estate), 683; Użorty (estate), 684; Użubol (estate), 684; Wasilany (estate), 684; Wysoki Dwór (estate), 684
- Gombrowicz, Dorota (née Jawoyzsz) (Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Irena (Rena) (Witold's sister), 168, 434, 745
- Gombrowicz, Jadwiga (wife of Jan; née Sipowicz) (Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Jan (son of Michał Kazimierz; Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Jan (Witold's father, son of Onufry), 743
- Gombrowicz, Janusz (Witold's brother), 168, 216, 403. *See also* J. (Janusz Gombrowicz, prisoner at Mauthausen)
- Gombrowicz, Jerzy (Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Józef (Janusz's son; Witold's nephew), 168
- Gombrowicz, Józef (Witold's ancestor), 683–684
- Gombrowicz, Marcela Antonina (née Kotkowska) (Witold's mother), 168, 683, 745
- Gombrowicz, Michał (Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Michał Kazimierz (Witold's ancestor), 684
- Gombrowicz, Rita (née Marie-Rita Lambrosse) (Witold's wife), 712, 734–735, 745, 746
- Gombrowicz, Witold (nickname: Witoldo),

- Gombrowicz, Witold (*cont.*)
 26–27, 56, 73, 92, 97, 100, 111, 115, 118, 128,
 141, 147, 155, 161, 182, 185, 211, 231, 287, 304,
 313–314, 327, 337–341, 352, 366, 383–384,
 386–388, 391, 394, 401, 403–408, 414, 427,
 441, 453, 461–462, 473–474, 482, 506, 519n,
 540, 542, 570, 572, 586, 589, 594, 601, 604,
 627, 629, 652, 680, 688, 691–692, 693, 715,
 721, 734, 736, 739–741, 743–746; *Fer-*
dydurke, 644; “Niewieski” (pseud.), 744;
 “self-made man of literature,” 461
- Gombrowiczowa, Marcjanna (wife of Jan
 Gombrowicz; née Rajeczka) (Witold’s great-
 grandmother), 684
- Gombrowiczowa, Michałowa (née Scybutt
 Romanowicz) (Witold’s ancestor), 684
- Gombrowiczowa, Michałowa Kazimierzowa
 (née Burb) (Witold’s ancestor), 684
- Gombrowiczowa, Onufrowa (wife of Onufry;
 née Dąbrowska) (Witold’s grandmother),
 683
- Gombrowiczówna, Tekla (née Gintowt
 Dziewałtowska; wife of Józef; Witold’s
 great-great-grandmother), 684
- Gómez, Juan Carlos (nicknames: Goma,
 Gomez, Gomozo), 441, 460, 470, 475, 504–
 505, 544, 545, 546, 548, 549–550, 551
- Gomułka, Władysław, 716
- goodness, 178, 184, 277, 294
- Gońska. *See* Wickenhagen, Małgorzata
- gothicness, 662, 672
- Goya (Argentina), 251–252
- Grabowski, Tadeusz (father of Zbigniew), 459
- Grabowski, Zbigniew, 428, 458–459, 530–531;
The Quiet of the Forest, 428
- grace, 86, 163, 169, 179, 213, 263, 276, 278, 279,
 390, 399, 410, 491, 512, 666, 690
- Grand Guignol, 78, 295, 585
- graphomania, graphomaniacs, 83, 144
- Grass, Günter, 630, 636, 649, 655
- Great Lithuanian Tribunal, 684
- Greece, Greeks, 136, 191, 225, 278, 636, 700,
 729; Greek temples, 327
- Greek drama, 191
- grief, 245
- grimace, 156, 205, 288, 528. *See also* faces;
 masks; mug
- Grinberg, Miguel, 585
- Grobicka, Irena, 118–119
- Grocholski, Zygmunt, 27, 31, 138–139, 552, 591
- Grocholski, Zygmunt (children of), 56–57
- Grodzicka, Halina, 27, 31, 55, 122, 591
- grotesque, 195, 304, 358, 412, 461, 476
- Grove Press, 677
- Grubiński, Wacław (W.G.), 138, 321, 613
- Grydzewski, Mieczysław (b. M. Grycendler),
 204, 321, 430–432, 447, 450, 561, 615
- Grzymała-Sidelecki, Adam, 5
- Guaycurues (Native American tribe), 373
- Guida, Friedrich, 39
- Guiéry (Gueri), Bernard, 669
- “Guitarra,” 459
- H. (from London), 97
- H., Alberto (industrialist), 136
- H. de A., Mercedes, 328–329
- Hagenau, Gerda, 529
- Hala. *See* Grodzicka, Halina.
- Hamburg, 686
- Hamilton, Alastair, 717, 721
- Handel, Georg Friedrich, 554
- Harris, Susan, 740
- Hasenclever, Walter, 649–650
- Havana, 259, 327
- Haydn, Joseph, 463, 464, 554
- health, 347

- Hector (from Royaumont), 672
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 47, 52, 107, 112, 117, 231, 298, 429, 447, 481, 495, 563, 639, 648, 732
- Heidegger, Martin, 222–224, 403, 434–435, 476, 523, 524, 641, 690; *Essais et conférences*, 434; *Sein und Zeit*, 447
- Heine, Heinrich, 71
- Heisenberg, Werner, 392, 398, 504
- Helena (servant for the Giangrandes), 539–541
- hell, 236, 255, 255, 275, 276, 281, 302, 312, 505, 564, 567–568, 572, 580, 623, 657, 694–696, 702–705, 734
- Helman (Gombrowicz's neighbor in Piriapolis), 546, 549–550
- Hemar, Marian (b. M. Heschels), 10, 565–566, 730
- “Henry” (Rosa's son; supposed illegitimate son of Gombrowicz), 721–726
- Heraclitus of Ephesus, 672
- Hercules (in anon. Latin quotation “*Nec Hercules contra plures*”), 559
- Heredia, Nicolas de, 374
- heresy, 301
- Herriot, Édouard, 468
- Hetman (pseud.). *See* Mackiewicz, Józef
- hierarchy, 59–64, 87, 95, 198, 259, 270, 349, 429, 455, 585, 704
- Himalayas, 212, 255
- Hindu, Hinduism, 474
- history, 12, 50, 67, 70–71, 101, 109, 117, 135–136, 140, 155, 191, 194, 207, 219, 227, 236, 239, 280, 303, 349, 405, 410–411, 429, 446, 447, 448, 471–472, 476–477, 479, 488, 553, 562–563, 565–566, 627, 636, 641, 657, 668, 670, 686, 700–702, 706; Polish history, 300–301, 302–303, 444–445, 452
- Hitler, Adolf, 127, 299, 360–362, 566, 632, 634, 638, 640, 650, 653, 660
- Hlasko, Marek, 452, 727
- Holland, the Dutch, 632
- Höllerer, Walter, 533, 626, 642–646
- Holy Trinity, 102
- Hölzer, Max, 640–646
- homeland, fatherland, 50, 364, 475, 533, 652
- Homer, 153, 274, 540, 565; *Odyssey*, 153, 565
- homosexuality, 162–163, 175–180, 180–181, 348, 621–623, 681–683, 718; “puto,” 296
- honesty, 289, 295, 300, 575
- Horace (quote) (“*Risum teneatis*”), 125
- Hormon, André d', 663–665, 668, 672
- Horowitz, Vladimir, 39
- Hôtel de l'Opéra (Rue du Helder, Paris), 602
- Hugo, Victor Marie, 713
- human nature, 215–216, 221, 256, 261, 267, 275, 291, 309, 359, 395, 437, 498
- humanism, 267, 353, 488, 679, 689, 690, 709, 718
- humanity, human being, 36–37, 110, 113, 223, 236, 243, 255, 265, 288, 291, 295, 298–299, 303, 307, 309, 310, 316, 318–319, 322, 324, 345, 348, 355, 362, 395, 399, 413, 426, 435, 440, 460, 465, 470, 489, 493, 527, 537, 540, 542, 543, 558, 567, 579, 603, 607, 613, 622, 651, 666, 682, 695, 710; antihumanity, 437; human form, 500
- Humberto (nickname). *See* Rodríguez, Tomeú Humberto
- Hume, David, 447
- humor, 124–125
- Hungary, Hungarians, 419, 627
- Huries (Native American tribe), 373, 382, 385
- Hurlingham, 532, 542
- Husserl, Edmund, 223, 392, 447, 472, 563, 690, 732

- Huxley, Aldous, 25
hypocrisy, 240, 288
- I ("I" as subject), 3, 41–46, 50, 80, 84, 92–93, 129, 140, 158, 204, 205–207, 211, 229, 239–240, 244, 259, 288–289, 298, 305, 331, 402–403, 408, 410–412, 462, 477–479, 487, 501–503, 527, 528, 557, 567. *See also* ego
- Ibsen, Henrik, 191, 425, 577
- Iceland, 251
- ideals, idealism, 151, 155, 205, 343, 390, 411, 475, 603; classical idealism, 223; German idealism, 227, 640, 732; Slavic erotic idealism, 151
- ideology, 50, 59, 112, 454, 655
- idylls, 464, 469, 474, 630, 633, 714
- imagination, 77, 258, 263, 274, 348, 400, 690, 726
- immaturity, 45, 47–48, 60–61, 91, 113–115, 167, 172, 178, 206–207, 223, 228, 265, 289–290, 310, 313, 338, 340, 407, 473, 478–479, 672; immature maturity, 338; Polish immaturity, 45, 218–219
- imperialism, 377–379, 419, 533
- impresario, 577
- India, 533
- Indians, Native Americans, 409–410, 412, 474–475, 616
- individual, 54, 83, 107, 110, 194–195, 206, 232, 236–237, 243, 267, 288–289, 299–300, 302
- individualism, individuality, 25, 205, 237, 243, 257, 297, 299–300, 301, 339, 366, 410–411, 431, 453, 455, 457, 478, 491, 493, 558, 577, 636, 648, 737; authentic individuality, 452; concrete individual, 389; Polish individualism, 257
- inferiority, 94, 114, 141–142, 159–160, 173–174, 177–179, 206, 238, 258, 289–290, 300, 310, 312, 319, 351, 358–359, 468, 474, 486, 492, 592, 682–683, 693, 702, 711, 730–731; Polish inferiority, 341
- infinity, 435, 543
- innocence, 402
- instinct, 276, 278, 283
- Instytut Literacki (Institut Littéraire "Kultura") (Literary Institute), 739, 744–746. *See also* *Kultura*
- intellect, 56, 106–107, 207, 214, 219, 230, 464, 502, 528, 562, 564, 591. *See also* poetry, intellectual poetry
- intellectuals, intellectualism, 50, 52, 82, 101, 117, 118, 138, 153, 193, 236, 255, 321, 352, 359, 393, 395, 399, 423, 438, 562–563, 563, 571, 579, 608, 662, 729, 739–740; Polish intellectuals, 340, 366, 716; pseudointellectuals, 229, 398
- intelligence, 398, 400, 455, 505, 578, 710
- intelligentsia, 52, 106–107, 141–142, 426, 438, 478, 562, 570; Argentinean intelligentsia, 164, 166, 173, 582; European intelligentsia, 106; Polish intelligentsia, 115, 134, 205, 256, 257–259, 262, 280, 561, 563
- interhuman relations, 30, 114, 204, 237, 288–289, 291, 295, 358–359, 362, 391, 407, 442, 502–503, 698, 704
- Iraq, 670
- Irena, Ira, 56
- Irmgard, 508
- irony, 291, 382, 522
- Isabella I of Castile (Queen), 409
- isms, 412
- Isolde, 317
- Italy, Italians, 8, 257, 365, 382, 382, 525, 627, 719
- Iwazskiewicz, Jarosław, 197, 564, 654
- J. (editor in Argentina), 438, 649
- J. (editor in Berlin). *See* Jaesrich, Helmut

- J. (Janusz Gombrowicz, prisoner at Mauthausen), 215, 216. *See also* Gombrowicz, Janusz
- Jacek. *See* Dębicki, Jacek
- Jaesrich, Helmut (referred to as editor J.), 649
- Jalard, Michel Claude, 717
- Jan III Sobieski (King), 7
- Jankowska, Andrea, 221, 233, 238, 306, 317
- Jankowska, Marisa, 221, 233, 238, 306
- Jankowski, Władysław (nickname Duś), 209, 221, 225–226, 229, 238, 306, 307, 312–313, 316–317, 319, 320; doggerel poems, 225–226, 312–313
- Janowska, Krystyna (m. Konarska) (referred to as “a person”), 92–93
- Janusz. *See* Gombrowicz, Janusz (Witold’s brother)
- Japan, Japanese, 627, 663, 717
- Jarema, Józef, 712, 717, 720–721
- Jarry, Alfred, 201, 403, 438; pataphysics, *pataphysicien*, 616; *Ubu Roi*, 718
- Jarzębski, Jerzy, 735n
- Jasieński, Bruno, 419
- Jaspers, Karl, 223–224, 488
- Jaurès, Jean, 488
- Jean (from Royaumont), 672
- Jeanette (governess), 604
- Jeanne (Miss), 317–318
- Jeleński, Konstanty Aleksander, 100, 110, 111, 156–157, 403, 449, 453, 528, 599, 602–603, 608, 614, 616–617, 667, 681, 717, 726, 730
- Jericho, 45
- Jesuits, 276
- Jews, 97–99, 201, 219, 255, 522, 525, 566, 671. *See also* anti-Semitism
- Jezierska, 152
- Joachimides, Christos, 634
- Jocaral (property), 209, 211, 221
- Johnson, Uwe, 630, 649, 655–656
- jokes, 546–547, 549–551, 606, 627
- journalism, journalists, 570–572, 652
- joy, 389, 465, 712, 719, 735
- Joyce, James, 650; *Ulysses*, 270
- Julliard (wife of René), 608
- Julliard, René (publisher), 519
- Jung, Carl Gustav, 476
- justice, injustice, 235, 295, 310, 324, 356, 502, 639, 702–703; universal justice, 319, 350
- Kaden-Bandrowski, Juliusz, 91–92, 200–201
- Kamiński, M. (“K,” co-worker at Banco Polaco in Buenos Aires), 61–62
- Kandinsky, Wassily, 417
- Kant, Immanuel, 211–212, 228, 456, 563, 690, 711, 732; *Critique of Pure Reason*, 228, 447, 711
- Karajan, Herbert von, 656
- Kasprowicz, Jan, 193–194, 260
- Kaufmann, Walter, 466n
- Kelly, Grace, 233
- Kempka, Jan, 231
- Ketman, 69
- Keyserling, Hermann von, 165
- Khrushchev, Nikita S., 261
- Kielce, 199, 434
- Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye, 211, 217, 222–223, 228, 404, 447
- killing, murder, 53–54
- Kisielewski, Stefan (nickname Kisiel), 292–293, 337–341, 365–367, 366; *Conspiracy*, 366–367; “Sandauer and Gombrowicz, or the Conspiracy of the Absent,” 337
- Kister, Marian, 92
- kitsch, 49, 68, 192, 242, 261, 411, 527
- Kliszko, Zenon, 716
- Klug (Gombrowicz’s neighbor in Buenos Aires), 543, 551

- knowledge, 123, 228, 491, 563, 708
 Kochanowski, Jan, 347n, 728
 Kocik, Stanisław, 736–737
 Koestler, Arthur, 21
 Kolyma, 419n
 Kolyma River, 255
 Konopnicka, Maria, 6
 Konstancin, 58, 595
Kontynenty, 506, 530
 Korczyński (counsel to the Polish embassy in Buenos Aires), 458
 Korn, Karl, 688
 Kościuszko, Tadeusz, 7, 540
 Kosko, Allan, 608, 663, 667
 Koszella, Leo, 403
 Kot (nickname). *See* Jeleński, Konstanty Aleksander
 Kotkowski family, 683
 Kotkowski, Ignacy (Gombrowicz's ancestor), 683
 Kott, Jan, 420, 451
 Koukou Chanska (née Jadwiga Kukulczanka). *See* Kukulczanka, Jadwiga
 Kowalewski, Janusz, 292, 322
 Krasicki, Ignacy, 312
 Krasieński, Zygmunt, 5n, 274; *The Undivine Comedy*, 5
 Kraszewski, Józef Ignacy, 278
 Kremlin, 368, 446
 Kroński, Tadeusz, 472n
 Kukiel, Marian Włodzimierz, 613–614
 Kukulczanka, Jadwiga, 605, 667
Kultura (Paris), 17, 22, 24, 31, 64, 121, 152, 182, 232, 234, 260, 296–297, 367, 429, 449–450, 485, 506, 528, 604, 614, 654, 674, 679–680, 687, 719, 744, 745; Literary Award (to Gombrowicz), 745. *See also* Instytut Literacki
 Kunczewiczowa, Maria, 202; *Stranger*, 202
Kurier Poranny, 522
Kurier Warszawski, 83, 160, 322, 430, 431
 Kurpiers, Waltraut, 647
 La Cabania (property), 233, 306
 La Falda, 115, 117, 168–169, 171
 La Messuguière, 673
La Nación, 570
 La Plata (city), 386
 La Plata River, 245, 551
La Prensa, 160
La Quinzaine, 715
 La Rochefoucauld, de (princess), 329, 608
 La Troya (Argentina), 504
 Labrosse, Marie-Rita. *See* Gombrowicz, Rita
 laicism, 281
 Lam, Stanisław, 65; *The Most Outstanding Émigré Poets* (anthology), 65, 67
 Landes, Alicja de, 139
 language, words, 82–83, 90, 141, 171–172, 205, 206, 208, 233, 242, 254, 258, 260, 264, 270, 317, 325, 333, 372, 445, 448, 477, 490, 492, 520, 568, 620, 658, 666, 684, 698, 703, 704, 707–709, 709, 728
 Lapter (Polish author), 254
 Larivière Loli, 328
 Las Palmas (Canary Islands), 599, 602
 Latin America, 168, 409, 475–476, 592, 677
 laughter, frivolity, 125, 183, 193, 228–229, 238, 337, 382, 421–422, 435, 476, 643–645, 650, 667, 711, 715
 Lautréamont, de (b. Isidore Lucien Ducasse), 5, 235, 404
 Lavelli, Jorge, 605, 667
 lawyers, 398
 Le Clegh, Guy, 608
 Le Clézio (wife), 714
 Le Clézio, Jean Marie Gustave, 714–715

- Le Monde*, 608, 718
Le Nouvel Observateur (Paris), 692
 Leandro Alem, 163, 394
 Lechitism, 197
 Lechoń, Jan (b. Leszek Serafinowicz; pseud. Altissimo), 4–6, 33, 64, 66, 76, 164, 197, 315, 321, 426–430, 432, 447, 448, 564, 728–729; *Ball at the Senator's*, 728; *Diary*, 426–429, 728; “Polish Literature and Literature in Poland,” 4
 Lefal (mythical city), 374
 Lefebvre, Henri, 217
 left-wing, political, 409, 579, 671; Polish left, 456
 Lemarchand, Jacques, 691
 Lena. *See* Czapska, Helena (Lena)
 Lenin, Vladimir I. (b. V. I. Ulyanov), 488
 Leonardo da Vinci, 29, 403, 505, 609; *La Gioconda* (Mona Lisa), 609
Leoplan, 353
 Lerins Islands, 736
 Leroy, Pat. *See* Bau, Zdzisław (pseud. Pat Leroy)
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 636
Lesung (German), 642–647
Lettres nouvelles (Les), 665
 Lewenthal family, 431
 Lichniak, Zygmunt, 232; “Looking Askance But Not Cross-Eyed, 232
 life-styles, 113
 lightness, 575
 limitations, 255, 358, 728
 Lipkowski family, 107
 Lisicka, Teresa, 459
 Lisiecka, Alicja, 459
 Liszt, Franz, 504
 literary prizes, 460; Jurzykowski Polish Millennium Award (New York), 745; Nobel Prize in literature, 7, 494, 581–582, 677, 746; Prix Formentor, 671; Prix Goncourt, 618; Prix International de Littérature (International Publishers Award), 676, 717–720, 746; Prix St. Eustache, 615; Radio Free Europe Prize, 746
 literary-artistic groups: “Concreto-Invencion” (Argentina), 122; “Elefantes” (Argentina), 585; “Madi” (Argentina), 122; “Melpomène” (France), 615; “Mufados” (Argentina), 585
 literature, 37, 49, 56, 60, 68, 156, 159, 171–174, 182–184, 192, 229, 235, 256, 280, 281, 282, 291, 303–304, 315, 457, 480, 493, 499, 506, 547, 560, 567, 571, 576–583, 591, 620–621, 623, 637, 678, 680, 687, 690, 709, 726, 728; Argentinean literature, 84, 158, 165, 167, 409, 411, 568; avant-garde literature, 525; conventional literature, 294; European literature, 206, 716; French literature, 157, 576–577, 616, 620–621, 714; German literature, 630, 640; history of literature, 274, 459, 731; literature for literature’s sake, 650; “modern” literature, 420; seductive literature, 119–121
 Lithuania, 365, 525n, 684
 Litka (nickname). *See* Barcza, Alicja de
 logic, 234, 363, 477, 558, 567, 675, 686
 Lollobrigida, Gina, 233
 London, 97, 198, 317, 321, 339, 428, 430, 431, 449, 450, 476, 506, 571, 581, 690–691, 715–716
 looseness, laxity, relaxation, 45, 112, 142, 217, 221, 238; Argentine relaxation, 142
 Los Angeles, 87
 Louis XIV (king), 327
 love, 102, 120–121, 147, 189–190, 201, 213, 216, 295, 302–303, 318, 320, 383, 389, 404, 406–

- love (*cont.*)
 407, 415, 437, 541, 586, 592–593, 595, 604,
 605, 612, 615, 616, 687, 702–704; European
 love, 161; illicit love, 383; Supreme Love,
 702–704; universal love, 350
- loyalty, 117, 226, 231
- Lublin, 199
- Lubomirska, Ada, 351, 570
- Lubomirski, Henryk, 351, 496
- Lucretius (quote) (“*Et quasi cursores, vita
 lampada tradunt*”), 9
- Lugones, Leopoldo, 167
- Lules (Native American tribe), 373, 374, 382,
 385
- Lusia, 56
- Lviv, Lwów, 199
- Ł. (engineer), 35
- Łobodowski, Józef, 64, 85, 156
- M. (dying acquaintance of Gombrowicz),
 368
- Maciaszek (priest), 133–134
- Mackiewicz, Józef (pseud. Hetman), 10, 10,
 23–24, 116, 365, 445, 614, 728–729; *The
 Careerist*, 365; *Contra*, 365; *Road to
 Nowhere*, 365
- Mackiewicz-Cat, Stanisław, 23–24
- macrocosm, 675
- Madariaga y rojo, Salvador de, 568, 573–574
- Madrid, 85, 101, 581
- Magarinos, Juan Ángel, 348
- Magariños (Magarinos) (hotel owner, father
 of Juan Ángel), 348
- Magariños (Magarinos), Juan Ángel, 348
- magic, 85, 175, 212, 217, 220–221, 363, 698
- Mahler, Gustav, 504
- Maja (Maya, Hindu concept), 56, 122
- Makowski, Józef, 481
- Malachowski family, 683
- Malachowski, Jacek, 683
- Malayans, 533
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, 270, 665
- Mallea, Eduardo, 353
- Malraux, Andre, 29, 566
- Małcużyński, Witold, 553, 716
- Małoszyce, 251, 311, 604, 626, 629, 713, 741,
 743
- man, mankind, 25, 106–107, 178, 207, 215–216,
 223–224, 237, 240, 277, 287–291, 298, 309,
 315, 318, 325, 345, 357, 362–363, 435, 437,
 446, 447, 465, 476, 486, 497–498, 503, 603,
 648, 700, 703, 733
- Mann, Thomas, 5, 152, 404–407, 579; Hans
 Castorf, 181; *Tonio Kröger*, 404
- mannerism, 200–201
- Mar Chiquita (lake), 373
- Mar del Plata, 147, 209, 222, 234
- Marcel, Gabriel, 228, 392
- Marinov (Gombrowicz’s doctor in Vence),
 734
- Marisa. *See* Jankowska, Marisa
- Marlon (nickname), 460
- marriage, 734–735
- Marx, Karl, 33–34, 173, 241, 336, 343, 355, 409,
 447, 457, 476, 501, 501, 540, 690, 731
- Marxism, Marxists, 18, 101, 105, 107, 112, 117,
 121, 142, 215, 217, 222, 229, 234–236, 239, 244,
 257–259, 260, 263, 282, 288, 336, 412, 447,
 448, 454, 501, 562, 579, 670, 698, 732–733;
 Marxist literary theory, 740; Marxist theory
 of art, 260; Marxist-Leninism, 65; Polish
 Marxism, 229–230
- Mascolo, Dionys, 101, 103, 105–110; *Le com-
 munisme*, 89–90, 101–102
- masks, masquerade, 144, 155, 187, 216, 235, 241,

- 404, 408, 477, 494, 569, 632, 674. *See also*
face, grimace, mug
- masochism, 523
- Masons, Free Masons, 33
- Mass, Catholic, 6, 78, 675
- masses, 25, 45, 83, 153, 188, 194, 204, 261, 274,
292, 361–362, 477, 540, 557, 579, 654, 670,
701; art for the masses, 261; human masses,
54; Parisian mobs, 558; Polish masses, 283
- mastery, 624
- Mastronardi, Carlos, 164–165, 229
- materialism, 103–104, 318, 454, 661
- mathematics, 123, 488, 490, 556
- Matisse, Henri, 32
- matter, 308, 335, 524
- maturity, aging, adulthood, 21, 47–48, 60–61,
86, 91, 113–115, 142, 164–167, 169, 172, 176–
177, 181, 210, 218–219, 239, 239, 243–244,
265, 268, 272, 289–290, 310, 338, 371, 384–
385, 389–391, 407, 460, 478, 481, 485–486,
540, 585, 596, 621, 624, 666, 672, 682;
mature immaturity, 338
- Mauersberger, Adam, 595
- Mauriac, François, 25, 577
- Mauro (family in Tandil), 402
- Mauthausen (concentration camp), 168, 216
- Mayaud, Monique, 608
- Mayer, Hans, 671; *Ansichten*, 671
- Mazurkiewicz, Władysław, 481, 589
- McCarthy, Mary, 678, 682, 717
- meaning, 227, 236, 243, 291, 295, 363, 394, 413,
477, 676
- Medeiros, Paulina, 482, 483
- mediocrity, 355, 360, 382, 415, 451, 500, 536–
537, 678, 690, 737
- Mediterranean Sea, 714
- Medusa, 209, 260
- Mégret (Megret), Christian, 692
- melancholy, 145
- Melcer, Wanda, 401
- men, masculinity, 135, 146–147, 149–151, 163,
170–171, 175–177, 179–180
- Mendoza, 108, 139
- Mendoza, Francisco de, 374
- Mercedes, 100, 142
- mercy, 201
- messianism, 293
- metaphor, 258, 347, 413, 582
- metaphysics, metaphysical, 78, 383, 413, 416,
423, 434, 435, 441, 456, 481, 485, 486, 575,
582, 615, 647, 648, 657, 694, 732, 740
- Michael (King). *See* Michał Korybut
Wiśniowiecki (king)
- Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (king), 697
- Michelangelo (b. Michelangelo Buonarroti),
99, 327–328, 485, 604; David, 485; Sistine
Chapel, 29, 178, 603
- Mickiewicz, Adam, 5–9, 11, 48, 83, 128, 257,
260, 274, 276–279, 281, 338n, 484, 560n,
604; *Forefathers' Eve, Part III* (quote), 467;
aka “Lithuanian poet,” 44; “Ode to Youth,”
278; *Pan Tadeusz*, 560n
- microcosm, 675
- Middle Ages, 704
- Mieroszewski, Juliusz, 297, 446, 449, 471, 614, 719
- Milo, Melo, 210
- Miłosz, Czesław, 12, 14–16, 17, 18, 20–24, 27,
69–71, 116–117, 128, 232, 431, 446, 449, 471–
472, 561–563, 566, 717, 729; *Captive Mind*,
12, 23, 69, 117, 472n, 591; *Daylight*, 116; *La
prise du pouvoir*, 17, 116; *Man Among Scor-
pions*, 561; *Native Realm*, 471–472; *Prix
Européen*, 17; *Seizure of Power*, 116
- Miłosz, Janina, 716
- Minerva, 489
- Miramar, 100

- Mishima, Yukio, 718–719
- Mistral* (train), 602
- Mitzner, Zbigniew, 231–232
- Mniszkówna, Helena, 83
- moderation, 499
- modernism, 343n, 459, 472
- modernity, moderns, 39, 60, 183, 318, 326, 448, 563
- modesty, 263, 489, 616
- Mohrt, Michel, 718
- Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), *Georges Dandin* (quote), 674
- Molo (from Goya), 252
- Moloch, 469
- monarchism, 412
- monster, monstrosity, 295, 346, 381, 382–383, 396, 437, 530, 602, 633–634, 662, 671, 675, 702, 734
- Montague, Stuart Eddy, 61
- Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de, 11, 22, 34, 235, 612, 617, 728, 732
- Montevideo, 162, 479–483, 544
- morality, 53–55, 95, 100, 155, 175, 177, 215, 229, 234–235, 234, 239–241, 244, 255, 257, 259, 275, 277, 281, 290, 291, 318, 324–325, 349, 379, 394–397, 410–411, 413, 477, 502, 523–524, 544, 575, 579, 612, 624, 630, 636, 658, 679, 685, 732; Christian morality, 565; Marxist morality, 106; Polish postwar morality, 263
- Morawski, Kajetan, 322, 530
- Moreno, Cesar Fernandez, 158
- Morón, 533–534
- Morstin, Ludwik Hieronim, 652–653; “Letter to Gombrowicz,” 652
- Moses, 44, 102
- Mostowicz, Tadeusz. *See* Dolega-Mostowicz, Tadeusz
- Moya (Peronist terrorist), 436
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 39–40, 86, 464, 469, 505; *Don Giovanni*, 505; *Jupiter Symphony*, 505
- Mrozek, Sławomir, 729
- mug, 288. *See also* face, grimace, masks
- München Merkur*, 687
- Munich, 231
- Murillo, Bartolomé Estéban, 28
- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires), 28
- Muses, 267, 658
- museums, 260, 327
- music, musicians, 27, 39–41, 75–76, 225, 267, 334, 409, 433–434, 440, 459, 462–471, 468, 480, 493, 499, 504, 505–506, 553–556, 621, 656–657, 690; composers, 553–554, 576; conductors, 553; German music, 640; listeners, 554–555; pianists, 219, 260, 553; singers, 502; violinists, 553
- mythology, mythologizing, 167, 188, 363; immature mythology, 114
- myths, mythology, 59–60, 192, 260, 308, 449, 476, 623, 626, 655, 675, 704
- N., 141, 647
- N.N. (bar owner in Tandil), 28, 352
- Nadeau, Maurice, 519, 599, 621, 715, 719
- Naglerowa, Herminia (pseud. Jan Stycz), 10
- naïve, naïveté, 30, 84, 88, 90, 199, 205, 348, 356, 416, 467, 470, 476–477, 484, 547, 562, 615–616, 666, 685, 709, 710, 728
- nakedness, nudity, 150, 189, 213, 326, 348, 507, 575, 577, 607–608, 611, 613, 616–617, 731
- Nałkowska, Zofia, 200, 202, 520
- Napoleon I Bonaparte, 345
- Narcissus, 229, 462, 651, 658, 667
- nation, 207, 239, 275, 277, 278, 281, 282, 300–

- 301, 302, 413, 414, 446, 454, 476, 487, 651,
660, 670, 716; emigration as a nation, 297;
national identity, 412; Polish nation, 186–
208, 274, 279, 314, 338–341, 487
nationalism, 473, 627, 635, 652, 655; Argenti-
nean nationalism, 409; Polish nationalism,
652; South American nationalism, 378
nature, 114, 143, 148, 193, 210, 212, 215, 217, 218,
219–221, 221–222, 244–251, 291, 307–310, 312,
315–316, 316, 318–319, 321–323, 324, 333,
347, 464, 613, 626; anti-nature, 309, 316,
317, 355, 568; opposition of man to nature,
309–310; writing about nature, 309
nature, being, 170. *See also* being; *Dasein*;
existence; fate
Nazism, Nazis, 34, 360, 477, 641, 671. *See also*
fascism
Necochea, 209, 221, 320
Negroes, 533, 595, 597, 655
Neske, Gunther, 434, 717
New York City, 5, 100, 349, 422n, 428, 504,
571, 716, 745
Nice, 673, 712, 714–715, 729, 736
Nice Matin, 735
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 4, 7, 37, 52–53, 176, 192,
228, 231–232, 236, 241, 434–435, 466–468,
471, 577, 671, 732; *The Gay Science*, 466;
Zarathustra, 434
nihilism, 567
Nike, 191
nonexistence, nonentity, 244
Normandy, 667
North, Nordic, 382, 632, 655
Northwestern University Press, 740
Norway, Norwegians, 632
Norwid, Cyprian, 11, 48, 94, 192, 338
nothingness, 222, 226, 229, 510, 566, 612, 623,
643–644
Nowa Kultura, 253, 459
Nowaczyński, Adolf, 338
Nowakowski, Tadeusz, 445
Nowakowski, Zygmunt (b. Z. Tempka), 445,
613–614, 652
nudists, 326, 331, 613
Nueva Era, 342
numbers, 324, 361, 533–534, 540–545, 551–559
Nuremberg, 360

Obieta, Adolfo de, 100, 172
Ocampo, Silvina (m. Bioy Casares). *See* Bioy
Casares, Silvina (née Ocampo)
Ocampo, Victoria, 165, 409, 496, 582, 586, 591
Oddone, Francisco (nickname Poczo), 100, 326
Odier, Daniel, 717
Odyniec, Stanisław, 147, 209
Olsen, Regina, 217
Olympus, 358, 377, 403, 450, 476, 586
onanism, 718
Onze (station), 532
Oppenheimherr (fictional character), 61
originality, 111, 148–149, 321, 340, 412, 448, 455,
474, 476; unoriginality, 115
Orłow (engineer), 542
Ortega y Gasset, José, 466–468
Orwell, George (b. Eric Blair), 21
Orzeł Biały, 26–27
Osioł (Asno) (nickname). *See* Di Paola Jorge
(nicknames: Asnito, Asno-Osioł, Dipa,
Dipi)
Osterkamp, Maria, 687
Ostrowski, Jan (editor), 26–27
Oxford University, 740

P.E.N. Club in Exile, 449
P.M. (lawyer in Santiago), 378
pacifism, 197, 459–460

- Paczowska, Maria, 717, 735
Paczowski, Bohdan, 717, 735
Paget, Jean, 692
pain, suffering, 53, 140, 166, 215–216, 236, 262, 309–310, 311–312, 316, 317–320, 348, 402, 406, 437, 505, 508–516, 523, 540, 573, 628, 632, 687, 699, 703–705, 734
painting, painters, 27–28, 30–32, 103, 161, 237, 259, 325, 329–337, 342, 346–347, 493, 525–526, 536–538, 541, 553, 555, 609–610, 620, 634, 637, 649, 663, 666, 709; abstract painting, 417, 475; landscape painting, 325; Renaissance painting, 278
pampas, 244, 309, 320, 592, 616, 668
Panufnik, Andrzej, 553
Papzoff (painter), 683
Paradise, 169
paradox, 243, 470, 523, 619, 689
Paraguay, Paraguayans, 478, 719
Paris, Parisians, 7, 31, 52, 63, 77, 85, 90, 100–101, 145, 150, 151–152, 159, 164–166, 173, 198, 295, 296, 317, 329, 330, 343, 348, 366, 412, 443, 462, 476, 488, 519, 537, 556, 570, 571, 581, 584, 590, 599, 601, 602, 603–615, 615–621, 615, 624, 626–626, 633, 635, 648, 657, 659, 661–667, 671–672, 673, 679, 688, 691–692, 706, 728, 734, 743, 745; Avenue de l'Opéra, 605; Avenue Kléber, 608; Bois de Boulogne, 612; Boule Miche, 608; Café Deux Magots, 611; Champs-Élysées, 612; Eiffel Tower, 604, 610; Jardin des Tuileries, 619; Les Invalides, 671; Louvre, 85, 609, 612, 669; Maisons-Lafitte, 604; Montparnasse, 166; Notre-Dame, 85, 671; Petit Trianon, 329; Place de l'Opéra, 604; Place des États-Unis, 608; Quai de la Tourmelles, 624; Quartier Latin, 663; Rue Belloy, 608; Rue de Rivoli, 605; Sorbonne, 663
Parnassus, 259
parochialism, 303
parody, 45, 95, 304, 355
Parthenon, 29, 178
Pascal, Blaise, 54, 264, 335, 345, 369, 577
Pasek, Jan Chrysostom, 128, 506; *Memoirs*, 128
pathos, 307
patriotism, 83, 126–128, 135, 189, 207, 282, 300–301, 506, 652
Pavlov, Ivan P., 617, 620
Pawlikowski, Michał K., 365
Paz, General, 385
peasants, peasantry, 193, 201, 204, 212, 258, 312, 315, 352, 359, 399, 426, 729
Peiper, Tadeusz, 13, 198
Peking, 663
Pelligrini, Aldo, 100, 139
PEN Club (Argentina), 568, 570, 573, 576, 581
perfection, 178, 205, 223, 225
Pericles, 700
peripheries, 616, 699
Perón, Juan Domingo, 415
personality, 575
Peru, 253
perversion, 228, 524, 547, 565
Pescopagano, Marquessa (fictional character). *See* Anticoli-Corrado, Paulina de, Marquessa Pescopagano (fictional character)
Petit Trianon (Versailles), 329
Petrarch (“*Placet experiri*”), 181
Pettoruti, Emilio, 328
Peyrefitte, Roger, 667
phenomenology, 494, 495, 732; phenomenological ontology, 563
philanthropy, 258
philosophy, philosophers, 36–38, 70, 104, 123,

- 167, 177, 214, 218, 219, 220–221, 222–224, 227–229, 230, 241, 288, 289, 304, 409–410, 422, 424, 447, 454, 458, 472, 481, 486, 488, 490–491, 495, 504, 540, 558, 561–562, 575, 579, 610, 612, 628, 640, 655, 671, 699, 708; history of philosophy, 488
- physics, 488, 504–505, 548; quantum theory, 488
- Piasecki, Stanisław, 204
- Picasso, Pablo, 327–328, 349
- Picon, Gaëtan, 488, 490–491
- Pierret, Mar, 617
- Pietrkiewicz (Peterkiewicz), Jerzy, 507
- Piłsudski, Józef, 192, 200n, 304n. See also *sancja* regime
- Piñera, Virgilio, 84, 172, 259, 327, 413
- Pirandello, Luigi, 110–111
- Piriapolis, 544–545, 548, 551, 576, 580, 589
- pity, 318, 324, 437, 465, 540
- Pla, Roger, 161, 208
- Place de la Concorde, 612
- Planck, Max Karl Ernst, 504, 733
- plants, 310
- Plato, 447, 732
- Plautus (quote) (“*Sapienti sat!*”), 551, 710
- play, game, playfulness, 45, 60–64, 88–89, 91, 117, 146–147, 190, 212, 214, 226, 280, 292, 362, 408, 575, 578, 632
- playwrights, 260
- pleasure, delight, 53, 88–89, 228, 272, 281, 283, 337, 399, 418, 465, 489, 524, 538, 560, 607, 628
- Po Prostu*, 253
- Poczo (nickname). See Oddone, Francisco
- Poe, Edgar Allan, 71, 278, 404, 424, 428
- poetry, 64–67, 119–120, 123–124, 149, 219, 225–226, 238, 257–258, 261, 263, 264–273, 290, 292, 304, 312–313, 336, 399, 431, 446, 456, 483–484, 487, 566, 603, 620–621, 622, 657–658, 666, 679, 682, 690, 696, 705; Chilean poetry, 119–120; Chinese poetry, 409; doggerel poem by S. I. Witkiewicz (Witkacy), 313; doggerel poems by W. Jankowski (Duś), 225–226, 313; intellectual poetry, 66; Polish poetry, 64–67, 71–72, 123–124, 155–156, 193, 254, 258, 259, 264–273; Uruguayan poetry, 483–484
- poets, 58, 122–123, 189, 218, 334, 446, 447, 496, 497, 525–526, 573, 579, 605, 610, 658, 676, 684, 685, 709; Citizen-Bard, 685; *poètes maudits*, 525–526; second-rate poets, 57
- Poland, 4, 6n, 7, 11, 12–13, 18–19, 20, 26, 33, 44, 44–45, 59, 73–74, 80–82, 97, 115, 125, 127, 134, 151, 159, 171–172, 174, 178, 186–187, 189–192, 195, 196, 198, 200, 204–206, 218, 222, 231, 232, 243–244, 254–263, 276–278, 282, 287, 291–292, 293, 294, 296, 298–300, 301, 302, 304–305, 312–313, 321, 329, 336, 339, 341, 350, 364–366, 367, 368, 418–419, 420, 425, 429, 430, 431–432, 444, 446, 448, 450, 451–453, 454, 455, 461–462, 472, 479, 496, 507, 529, 533, 553, 561, 595–596, 614, 626–627, 629, 641, 650, 652–654, 662, 667, 671, 679, 685, 689, 691–692, 712, 715, 718, 726, 728, 736–737, 740, 743–745
- Poland, Poles, 18, 19, 29, 31, 45, 56, 56, 59, 69, 71, 80–82, 111, 113, 124–128, 134–136, 149–152, 160, 167, 173, 207, 218–219, 242–244, 254–258, 274–284, 296–305, 478–479, 561, 612, 615, 626, 627, 633, 636, 646, 651–654, 660, 663, 667, 668, 686, 688, 691, 716, 736; independent Poland, 194–195, 205, 444; Poland of the landed gentry, 262; Poles in exile, 296; Polish borderlands, 365; Polish People’s Republic, 199, 253, 257–258, 260, 314, 446, 685, 686, 692; “Polish problem,”

- Poland, Poles (*cont.*)
 297; "Polish question," 305; postwar
 Poland, 134, 259–260, 261–263, 287; prewar
 Poland, 186–208, 257, 262–263, 287, 292,
 314. *See also* Polishness
 Polish Bank (Buenos Aires), 744
 Polish Club (Buenos Aires), 148, 152
 Polish Constitution, Third of May, 6
 Polish émigré press, 4, 153, 292, 530, 715–716,
 744
 Polish literature, Polish writers, 14, 16, 17, 24, 27,
 43, 83, 121–122, 124–128, 129, 135–136, 153, 157,
 173, 231–232, 242, 301, 309, 337–341, 451–452,
 455–457, 520–521, 561, 654, 679, 692, 719, 727,
 728–730; émigré literature, 116, 124–128, 138,
 154, 716; Polish postwar literature, 254–255,
 259, 297, 452–453, 727, 736; Polish prewar
 avant-garde, 196–199; Polish prewar litera-
 ture, 186–208, 456, 740; sixteenth-and
 seventeenth-century literature, 27
 Polish Radio (Radio Polskie), 401
 Polishness, 18, 31, 124–128, 200, 205, 274–284,
 296–305, 365–368, 507, 592, 659–660; new
 Polishness, 44; Polish authenticity, 244;
 Polish consciousness, 304; Polish "folk"
 poetry, 193–194; Polish form, 243; Polish
 intelligentsia, 44, 199; Polish literature,
 274–284; Polish mythology, 204; Polish
 naïveté, 255; Polish psyche, 204; Polish
 "tepidity," 564; Polish thought, 204, 283
 politeness, 209, 214, 230
 politics, 37, 50, 70, 127, 243, 315, 426, 429, 446,
 454, 502, 571, 610–611, 639, 640, 641, 648,
 657, 660, 705; cultural politics, 401
 Polonia (Polish diaspora), 73–74, 419–420;
 Argentine Polonia, 68–69, 419–420
 Polonists, 449
 Pope Pius XII, 254
 positivism, 194
 Potocki, Wacław, 124
 power, 300
 Prąglowski, Aleksander, 730
 pre-Eternal, 216
 precision, 265
 press (media), 49, 581; émigré press, 691;
 Polish press, 692; red press, 614
 Pretre, Georges, 552
Preuves, 110, 403, 496, 599
 pride, 574
 prison, 460
 procreation, 555
 professors, 490
 progress, 281, 301, 475
 proletariat, 58, 64, 141–142, 173, 204, 235–236,
 257–259, 262, 284, 330, 352, 356, 359, 368,
 410, 426, 579, 685
 Prometheus, 235, 355
 prophets, 414
 prose, 270, 304, 447, 471, 566, 679; Polish
 prose, 254, 259
Prosto z Mostu, 13, 203–204
 Proust, Marcel, 22, 23, 40, 61, 92, 255, 346–
 348, 456, 547, 611–612, 617, 622; Charlus
 (character), 348; Madame de Guermantes
 (character), 348; Norpois (character), 348;
 Swann (character), 607, 611
 provinciality, provincialism, 84, 229, 232, 413,
 451, 456, 483, 572, 573, 621, 672, 729
 provocation, 314, 450, 698
 Prus, Bolesław (b. Aleksander Głowacki), 11,
 83, 194; Wokulski (character, *The Doll*), 151
Przegląd Kulturalny, 253
 Przerwa-Tetmajer, Kazimierz, 6–7
 Przybyszewski, Stanisław, 192, 194, 201, 274
 psychoanalysis, 112, 175, 500; existential psy-
 choanalysis, 617, 622

- psychology, 141, 416, 422, 486, 488, 491, 540, 544, 681, 706
 Pueyrredón (Pueyrredon), Prilidiano, 133–134
 Punta del Este, 589
 Punta Mogotes, 210
 Purgatory, 702
 Puzyna family, 684
 Pyrenees Mountains, 382
 Pythia, 225
 Pyzik, Estanislao (Stanisław), 419

 Quadernos, 568
 Quequén, 494, 501
 Quiloflor, Quilombo, Quilomboflor (nicknames). See Betelú, Mariano

 R., 17
 R. (Professor Rusconi), 483–484
 Rabelais, François, 34, 70–71, 235, 424, 728
 Rabski, Władysław, 431
 Racine, Jean, 5, 71, 663–665; *Iphigénie* (quote), 664
 Radio Warsaw, 313
 Radom, 9, 74
 Radziwiłł family, 321, 683
 Radzyńska, Józefa, 3
 Rajewski, Michał (nickname Miś), 684
 Raoul (from Royaumeont), 672
 Raphael (Raffaello Santi), 261
 Ravel, Maurice, 41
 Rawicz, Pierre (Piotr), 608
 Read, Piers Paul, 636, 715–716, 721
 Read, Sir Herbert, 716
 readers, audience, 48, 95, 108, 156, 178, 188, 190, 198, 208, 262, 279, 291, 296, 406, 414, 423–424, 430–431, 452, 462, 478, 487, 492–493, 559, 659, 689, 692; mass reader, 401, 428
 realism, 51, 260
 reality, 51, 114, 123, 151, 187, 191, 194–195, 197, 199, 200–201, 205–207, 225, 228–229, 231, 236, 241, 244, 254, 265, 267, 269, 273, 277, 282–283, 294, 299, 319, 360, 362, 372, 408, 418, 424–425, 440, 451–452, 477–478, 521, 582, 643, 647, 659–660, 675–676, 681, 689, 699, 706; American reality, 478; autonomous reality, 304; collective realities, 416–417; internal reality, 360; “ordinary reality,” 228; Polish reality, 205–208, 257, 727; Polish unreality, 205; unreality, 706
 reason, rationalism, 38, 227–229, 230, 242, 259, 268, 287, 318, 362–363, 399, 457, 477, 495, 498, 562, 579, 603, 706–707; abstract reason, 109
 Rebinder, 140
 Regina (Kierkegaard’s fiancée). See Olsen Regina
 Rej, Mikołaj, 124, 728
 religion, 167, 177, 214, 273, 318, 356, 370, 406, 410, 456, 458, 488
 Rembieliński, Jan, 589
 Rembrandt (b. Rembrandt Hamerszoon Hermensz van Rijn), 28, 343, 492
 Remigola, 697
 Rena (Gombrowicz’s sister). See Gombrowicz, Irena
 Renaissance, 136, 485, 549, 732
 Renan, Ernest, 663, 672
 responsibility, 228
 Retiro Park (Buenos Aires), 162–164, 166, 173, 177–179, 394, 588
 revenge, 311
 revolution, revolutionaries, revolt, 21, 59, 104, 151, 188, 207, 236, 240–241, 254, 256, 258, 260, 289, 291, 297, 299, 317, 454, 460, 466, 473, 579

- Reymont, Władysław Stanisław (b. W. S. Rejment), 719
- Rhine River, 168
- Rhône Valley, 602
- Ricardo (Gombrowicz's neighbor in Piriapolis), 546, 550
- Ricardon (from Tandil), 353
- Richter, 434
- ridiculousness, 228, 271, 273, 291, 315
- right-wing, political, 579, 671
- Rilke, Rainer Maria, 197
- Rimbaud, Jean Arthur, 48, 576, 577, 665
- Rio de Janeiro, 594
- Río de la Plata. *See* La Plata River
- Río Dulce (river), 394
- Río Negro (province), 320
- Río Paraná, 83, 244–245, 247, 373, 471, 625, 697
- Ríos, 100
- ritual, 77, 175, 264, 269–270, 273, 276, 704
- Riviera, 674, 743, 745
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain, 568, 574; *La jalousie*, 67
- Roberto (Gombrowicz's neighbor in Buenos Aires), 543, 551
- Roby (nickname). *See* Santucho Roberto (Roby)
- Rockefeller, John D., 349
- Rodríguez, Feo José, 259
- Rodríguez, Tomeú Humberto, 172, 259
- Rodziewiczówna, Maria, 189
- Roettiers (family of silversmiths), 329
- Rohde, Jorge (Jerzy), 329; *Five Years of Paris*, 329
- Rojas, Diego de, 374
- Rolland, Romain, 468
- Roman Empire, 38
- romanticism, 277, 468, 475, 647; German romanticism, 192; Polish romanticism, 66, 338n, 430; Romantics, 217
- Rome, 101, 136, 317, 571, 630
- Rooney, Rivas, 162
- Roquesteron, 679
- Rosa (mother of “Henry”), 721–726
- Rosario, 171, 252
- Rostworowski, Jan, 560
- Rota, 6
- Rothschild family, 61
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 617
- Roux, Dominique de, 717, 734, 746
- Royaumont (abbey), 659, 662–664, 666, 669, 673, 745
- Rubinstein, Artur, 39
- Rudnicki, Adolf, 254–255, 293–294, 451
- Rusconi, Professor. *See* R. (Professor Rusconi)
- Ruskin, John, 278
- Russell, Bertrand Arthur, 716
- Russia, Soviet Russia, 101, 182, 242, 419, 419n, 729, 737
- Russians, 8
- Russo (nickname). *See* Rússovich (Russovich), Alejandro
- Rússovich (Russovich), Alejandro, 100, 142, 712, 744
- Rússovich, Sergio (brother of Alejandro), 252
- Rússoviches (parents of Alejandro and Sergio), 308
- S., 76
- S. family. *See* Santucho family
- Sábato, Ernesto, 123, 229, 485, 535, 594
- Sadzik, Józef (priest), 667; *Esthétique de Heidegger*, 667
- Sahara Desert, 322, 618
- Saint-Simon, Claude-Henri, 667
- saints, 218
- Sakowski, Juliusz, 138, 321, 340, 366, 613
- Salceda, Juan Antonio (Cortes). *See* Cortes (Juan Antonio Salceda)

- Salsipuedes (hill), 12, 591
 Salzburg, 293
 Samogitia (Žemudž), 525
 San Isidro, 133, 165
 San Nicolas, 247
sanacja regime, 304. *See also* Piłsudski, Józef
 Sanavirones (Native American tribe), 374
 Sand, Georges (b. Aurore Dudevant), 424
 Sandauer, Artur, 293–294, 313–314, 337–340, 434, 451–452, 453, 456, 459, 519, 523, 524, 528, 614, 679–682, 681n, 691; *Gombrowicz, Man and Writer*, 679; *No Reduced Fares*, 451–453
 Sandier, Gilles, 692
 Sandomierz, 112, 683
 Santa Fe, 246, 249, 373
 Santa Marino family, 320
 Santamarina, Juan, 494
 Santiago del Estero, 373–397, 400, 415, 417, 473, 475, 608, 621, 739
 Santucho family, 473
 Santucho, “Cacique” (nickname), 473
 Santucho, Francisco (newspaper editor), 376–377, 378, 381
 Santucho, Negro, 474
 Santucho, Roberto (Roby), 376–378, 382, 473–477, 635
 Sanza (Spanish painter), 85
 sarcasm, 291, 303
 Sarmatian, Sarmatism, 340
 Sartre, Jean-Paul, 25, 109–112, 114, 183, 223, 235, 343, 476, 556–558, 563, 578–579, 610–612, 622–624, 627–628, 663, 699, 732; *Being and Nothingness* (*L'être et le néant*), 447, 557–558, 563, 610, 612, 732; *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*, 622; *Situations*, 563, 579
 Satan, 54, 220
 satire, 304–305
 Savonarola, 730
 Saxon dynasty, 276, 368
 Scharoun, Hans, 656
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von, 732
 Schiller, Friedrich, 425
 Schönberg, Arnold, 463–465, 470
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 52–53, 192, 228, 236, 406, 609
 Schrödinger, Erwin, 504
 Schubert, Franz, 469
 Schultze, Elsa, 496
 Schulz, Bruno, 202, 290, 451, 461, 519–528, 566, 729, 743; *Cinnamon Shops*, 202, 519, 520; *Traité des mannequins*, 519
 Scibor family, 683
 science, 220, 393, 398–399, 454, 457–458, 477, 488, 490–494, 497–505, 556, 638, 650, 657, 668, 698, 733; abstract science, 104–105
 scientism, 350, 448, 492, 495, 501, 650
 Scriabin, Alexander, 504
 sculpture, sculptors, 32, 307, 332, 536, 538, 541, 619, 620; Aztec sculpture, 435
 Seaver, Richard, 677
 Secession, 192
 Seine river, 615
 sejm (Polish parliament), 128
 self, 84, 222
 sensuality, 505, 606
 Sergio (fictional character), 130–133
 Sergio (from Goya), 251
 Sergio's parents (fictional characters), 131–133
 seriousness, 228, 289, 291, 298, 399, 478, 486, 585, 678, 688, 693, 740
 Serreau, Geneviève, 621
 sex, 163, 170, 189–190, 481

- Shakespeare, William, 5, 35, 74, 191, 264, 278, 425, 426, 528, 547; *Hamlet*, 174, 241, 370, 425, 631; *Henry V*, 547 (quote); *Julius Caesar* (quote), 680; *King Lear*, 528; *Macbeth*, 25, 566 (quote), 586, 632, 634; *Richard II*, 74 (quote); *Richard III*, 64 (quote); *Romeo and Juliet*, 278
- shame, 45, 227–228, 354, 371, 384, 404–406, 480, 489, 554, 561, 564, 569, 575, 675, 680, 709, 736
- Shaw, George Bernard, 165, 582
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 264
- Shostakovich, Dmitri, 465
- Siedem Dni*, 653
- Siegrist, 504–505, 548
- Sienkiewicz, Henryk, 73, 102, 187–190, 194, 200, 202, 257, 274–275, 278–283, 561, 565, 719; Great Hetman (character), 274, 279; Kmicic (character), 274, 279; *Quo Vadis*, 5, 280; Roman Skrzetuski (character), 279; *Trilogy*, 280–281; Winicjusz (character), 279; Wojewoda of Wilno (character), 279; Wołodyjowski (character), 274
- Sigismund. *See* Grocholski, Zygmunt
- Simon (fictional character), 508–516
- Simon's daughter (fictional character), 510
- simplicity, 30, 149, 193, 234
- sin, 50, 54, 87, 108, 146, 181, 263, 275, 277–279, 283, 301, 310, 381–383, 505, 521, 523, 554, 561, 606, 612, 614, 618, 619–620, 624, 658, 685, 702–705
- Sinai, Mount, 78, 263, 407
- sincerity, 507
- Sipowiczówna, Jadwiga (daughter of Połubińska) (Gombrowicz's ancestor), 684
- Skamander*, Skamandrites, 13, 66, 72, 196–198, 521, 567, 713, 743
- Skrowaczewski, Stanisław, 553, 556
- slavery, 353, 487, 522–523, 579, 628
- Slavic primitivism, 30
- Slavs, Slavic, 31, 151, 164, 612
- Ślonimski, Antoni, 197, 202–203, 564, 654
- Słowacki, Juliusz, 6, 48, 260, 264, 274, 338
- Śmieja, Florian, 507
- Sobański, Henryk, 320
- social science, 488
- socialism, 190, 197, 350, 353, 448, 475
- socialist realism, Socrealism, 58. *See also* Marxism
- society, 290
- Society of Gentrywomen, 102
- sociology, 422, 494, 500, 540
- Socrates, 35, 228, 383, 489, 739
- softness, 215, 416
- solitude, loneliness, isolation, 48, 55, 70–71, 219, 221, 314, 325, 369, 557, 715
- Solomon (b. Solomon Cutner), 39, 206
- Solon, 700
- Sołtan (court chamberlain, ancestor of Gombrowicz), 683
- Sołtanowa (née Radziwiłł, ancestor of Gombrowicz), 683
- songs, singers, 266, 269, 273
- sophistry, 299, 575
- Sorel, Georges, 476
- soul, 168, 190, 197, 205, 216, 232, 240–241, 242, 257, 261, 269, 278, 282, 309–310, 318, 319, 324, 344–345, 350, 424, 427, 437, 456, 487, 502, 541, 557, 622, 651, 659, 663, 688, 689, 709; Polish soul, 301
- South, Southern, 382
- South America, South Americans, 244, 382, 416, 479, 480, 482, 599, 612, 628, 665
- South Orkney Islands, 320
- Soviet Union, Soviets, “Moscow,” 22, 71, 103, 419n, 419

- Spain, Spaniards, 351, 374, 377, 382, 409, 627, 651
- Spender, Stephen, 568
- Spengler, Oswald, 476, 488
- Sperling-Jarembowa, Maria, 712, 717, 721
- Sphinx, 659
- Spinoza, Baruch, 228
- spirit, 15, 48, 87, 104, 129, 196, 198, 205, 210, 214, 215, 216, 219, 227, 237, 242, 298, 300, 303, 319, 333, 336, 383, 393–394, 397, 399, 410, 413, 433, 446, 455, 457–458, 481, 485–486, 505, 523–524, 555, 567, 568, 569, 573, 577–579, 603, 606–607, 619, 657, 661, 680, 688, 690
- sports, 410
- St. Louis, 662, 664, 672
- St. Stanisław Kostka (lycée in Warsaw), 743
- Stalin, Joseph, 141, 349, 417
- Stankiewicz, Teresa, 721
- Staś (nickname, b. Stanisław Piętał), 58
- state, 194–195, 259, 267, 300, 302, 315, 353
- Stempowski, Jeremi, 158
- stereotypes, 412
- Stockholm, 61, 63, 693
- Stockholm Tidningen*, 693
- Stolpe, Jan, 717
- Storni, Alfonsino, 167
- Straszewicz, Czesław, 116, 124–128, 297, 445, 481, 589
- Strauss, Richard, 504
- Stravinski, Igor, 165, 464, 468
- structuralism, 698, 715
- stupidity, idiocy, cretinism, 30, 58, 88–89, 100, 119, 136–137, 141, 214, 225, 227–228, 231–232, 242, 265, 276, 303, 398, 400, 417, 421, 462, 475, 562, 609, 676, 691, 706–711
- style, 44, 50, 89, 90, 93–96, 145–146, 166, 226, 243–244, 266–270, 276, 281–282, 287, 301, 305, 314, 364, 390, 408, 410, 413, 423–425, 455, 485, 495, 526, 527, 555, 556–567, 577, 578, 596, 730; “barefoot” style, 56; Polish style, 19, 44, 136, 242, 276, 301; precise style, 82. *See also* parody
- subject-object relations, 223, 315, 670, 698
- subjectivism and objectivism, 424, 495, 558, 615, 620, 731–733
- Suitcase (nickname). *See* Castorina, María Anna
- Sumampa, 324
- superiority, 94, 114, 141–142, 164, 167, 173, 204, 216, 238–239, 258, 268, 273, 279–280, 289–290, 291, 308, 310, 319, 351, 358, 358, 382, 390, 404, 407, 455, 476, 492–493, 578, 690, 693, 711, 730–731; superior and inferior, 57
- supernatural forces, 84
- Sur*, 165
- surrealism, 58, 167, 615, 646, 681, 713
- Susanna (biblical), 606
- Sweden, Swedes, 632, 712
- Swedish Academy of Literature, 582
- Świeczewska, Maria (wife of Karol; referred to in Polish text), 552
- Świeczewski, Karol, 76, 133–134, 152, 403, 428, 552
- Swinarska, Barbara, “On Distance, or a Conversation with the Master,” 651. *See also* Witek-Swinarska, Barbara
- Swinarski, Konrad (husband of Barbara Witek-Swinarska), 650
- Szeryng, Henryk, 656
- Szubska, Barbara (nickname Basia), 730–731
- Szumowski, Stefan, 458
- Tagore, Rabindranath (b. R. Thakur), 165
- talent, 117, 125–126, 178, 186, 192, 195, 200, 202, 233, 259, 280, 368, 405, 407, 431, 455, 493, 528, 578, 650, 651, 652

- Talmud, 119
- Tandil, 293, 341–344, 345, 348–351, 353–354, 360, 363, 367, 385–388, 391, 393, 402, 417, 436, 459; Rivadavia, *barrio* in Tandil, 359
- Tarvisio, 477
- Tasso, Torquato, 155
- taste, 275
- Tchaikovsky, Peter, 465
- technology, 454, 491, 603, 657, 668
- Tell, Wilhelm, 551
- Teodolina, 122
- Teplitz, 466
- Teran, Prof., 501
- Thailand, 670
- theater, 45, 52, 190–191, 279, 296, 362, 386, 657–658, 686, 689, 692; French theater, 692; Parisian theater, 435; Royal Dramatic Theater (Stockholm), 693; Teatro del Pueblo (Buenos Aires), 418; theater in La Plata, 386; Théâtre de Bourgogne (Paris), 691; Théâtre de France (Paris), 692; Théâtre Récamier (Paris), 670
- Theocritus, 672
- theory, 83, 121, 142, 179, 197–199, 226–228, 240, 339, 345, 349, 357–358, 399, 407, 412, 416, 451, 493–494, 501, 542, 554, 556, 561, 573, 610, 620, 650, 658, 690, 733; theoretical existentialism, 230
- Thobon, Gustave, 214
- Thomas of Aquinas, St., 211, 732
- “Thou,” 216
- Thucydides, 138
- Tiel, Walter (b. Rudolf Richter), 529
- Tiepolo, Giovanni Battista, 28
- Tigre, 83, 513–515
- time, 306–307, 347, 634, 636, 659, 697, 701
- Times* (London), 716
- Times Literary Supplement* (London), 715
- Titans, 489
- Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), 28, 333, 335, 404, 537, 609; “Portrait of Charles V,” 498
- Tito (Espino Nicolás), 158
- Toeplitz, Krzysztof Teodor, 254
- Tolstoy, Leo, 403, 425, 577, 614; *Yasnaya Polyana*, 403
- Tomeú, Humberto Rodríguez. *See* Rodríguez Tomeú, Humberto
- Toplicka, Baroness (née Soltan) (ancestor of Gombrowicz), 683
- Torre, Guillermo de, 572
- torture, 53–54, 59
- Toscanini, Arturo, 529–530
- Tower of Babel (biblical), 630
- Toynbee, Arnold Joseph, 412, 476, 488
- tragedy, the tragic, 52–53, 78, 85, 140, 232, 236, 239, 243, 258, 276, 279, 289, 291, 311, 315, 410, 455, 465, 466, 548, 611, 635, 657, 679, 713, 714, 728
- transformation, 117
- translation, 738–739
- Trapalanda (mythical city), 374
- trash, rubbish, 290, 303
- Trotsky, Leo (b. L. D. Bronstein), 488
- trust, 632
- truth, truths, 22, 35, 38, 53–54, 60, 65, 88–89, 101, 104, 113, 122, 154, 176–177, 184, 188, 201, 242, 245, 255, 260, 273, 283, 287, 309, 348, 400, 407, 418, 447, 451, 457–458, 471, 485, 487, 494, 507, 514, 528, 563, 578–579, 595, 613–614, 643, 668, 669, 682, 705. *See also* falsehood
- Trybuna Ludu*, 653
- Tucumán, 374, 393, 417, 473
- Turkestan, 476
- Turks, 533
- Turner, Joseph Mallord William, 327

- Tuwim, Julian, 13, 123–124, 315, 430, 564, 685, 713
twins, 118, 168
Tygodnik Polski (London), 715–716
Tygodnik Powszechny, 292, 336
Tyrmand, Leopold, 367–368, 725, 726–727;
Angry, 726; *Social and Emotional Life*, 727
ugliness, 145, 150–151, 276, 307, 356, 359, 388, 399, 580, 605–607, 611, 621, 650; Polish ugliness, 283
Ungaretti, Giuseppe, 734
Uniburu, Pepe, 494
Uniłowski, Zbigniew, 231–232; *Twenty Years of Life*, 231
United States of America, U.S., 76, 317, 329, 367, 368, 379, 419, 630, 744, 745
universality, 214, 271, 290, 291, 299, 303, 312, 326, 340, 349–350, 356, 358, 363, 365, 366, 451
universities, 398–399, 424
University of Warsaw, 743
urban planning, 326
Uruguay, 245, 481, 544, 584, 589, 674
utility, 399
utopia, 235
Valentino, Rudolf, 379
Valéry (Paul's son), 670
Valéry, Paul, 16, 25, 76, 165, 197, 265, 345, 670, 681; *Profusion du soir*, 76
Valescure, 676–677
Valle Hermoso, 168–169
Vallee, Lillian, 739–741, 746
values, worth, 55, 114, 160, 163–164, 178, 188, 192, 200, 268, 279, 280, 290, 298, 300, 303, 336, 395, 415, 451, 455, 480, 486, 506, 679, 690, 716; artificial value, 260; artistic values, 452
vampires, 668
Var River (France), 679
Vegh (musician), 656
Vence, 673, 679, 683, 712, 714, 718, 735–736, 746
Venus, 150, 225
Venus de Milo, 178
Verdi, Giuseppe, *Traviata*, 115, 237
Verena, 307
Verlaine, Paul, 22, 577
Veronica, Saint, 355
Vienna, 7, 9, 477, 529; Seige of, 7, 9
Vilela, Jorge Rubén. *See* Marlon (nickname)
Vilelas (Native American tribe), 373, 385
Villagra, Francisco de, 374
Villeneuve et de Vence, de, family, 673
violence, 104, 114, 141, 170, 186, 258, 391, 433, 446, 460, 679, 737
Virasoro, Paco, 494
Virgil, 694–695
Virgilio. *See* Piñera, Virgilio
Virgin Mary, 33
virtue, 108, 128, 135, 179, 181, 232, 263, 275–279, 281, 283–284, 371, 446, 522, 530, 650, 704
Visée, Robert de, 459; *Suite en ré*, 459
vitality, 238, 263, 275, 277, 278, 279, 290
viveza, 416
Völker, Klaus, 642, 644–645
Volle, Jacques, 717
Voltaire, 287, 627, 664, 739
vox populi, 118–119
W.G. *See* Grubiński, Wacław
Wagner, Richard, 40, 192, 464, 468
Wajda, Andrzej, *Ashes and Diamonds*, 472
Wansee (lake), 626, 649

- war, 20, 59, 176, 713
- Warsaw, 13–14, 58, 74, 81, 155, 168, 232, 312, 351, 368, 429, 431n, 458, 520n, 521, 522, 553, 554, 594, 629, 645–646, 649, 653, 671, 679, 715, 726, 735, 743, 745; Hoża Street, 662
- Washington, DC, 474
- Ważyk, Adam, 13, 198
- “we” (subject), 410–411, 478–479
- Weidłé, Vladimir, 568, 569–570, 571, 573–574, 581, 618
- Weikert, Ingrid, 642
- Weil, Simone, 35, 210–216, 219; *La pesanteur et la grâce*, 210–211
- Weintraub, Wiktor, 65
- Weiss, Peter, 630, 649, 655
- West, Western Europe, 15, 16–17, 21, 31, 50, 71, 115, 230, 278, 282–284, 294, 401, 448, 454, 471–472, 561, 639, 679, 729
- Western European writers, intellectuals, 16, 21, 24–25, 207
- Weysenhoff, Józef, 684, 684n; *Soból i panna* (*Sable and a Lady*), 684
- Weysenhoffowa (née Rajeczka; wife of Józef), 684
- Wiadomości* (London), 3, 4, 10, 23–24, 80, 110, 118, 202–204, 297, 321–322, 340, 426–430, 431–432, 449–450, 506, 559, 568, 591, 613, 614, 652, 691–692, 730, 744, 745; *Wiadomości* Award, 745; Polish Academy (London), 561, 568
- Wiadomości Polskie* (Stockholm), 693
- Wickenhagen, Małgorzata, 55, 56, 122
- Wickenhagen, Stanisław, 238
- Wiech (b. Stefan Wiechecki), 124
- Wierzyński, Kazimierz, 64–65, 564, 719
- Wilde, Oscar, 140, 278
- Wilhelm II (Kaiser), 664
- will, free will, 30, 310
- Winczakiewicz, Jan, 64–66, 71, 624
- wisdom, 36, 108, 289, 371, 421, 454, 489, 491, 497, 569, 702
- Wisłocki, Stanisław, 553–555, 556
- Witek-Swinarska Barbara, 650–653, 680. *See also* Swinarska, Barbara
- Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy (Witkacy), 200–201, 312–313, 520, 528, 566, 729, 736–737; doggerel poem to Gombrowicz, 313; “pure form,” 528
- Wittlin, Józef, 71–72, 202, 296–297, 449, 450, 528, 560, 564–568, 580; *Hymns*, 565; Introduction to Gombrowicz’s *Trans-Atlantyk*, 72; *The Salt of the Earth*, 202, 565; “The Sorrow and the Grandeur of Exile,” 449–450; Wołodkowicz family, 684
- women, femininity, 143–147, 149–152, 163, 170–171, 175–176, 179–180, 248, 282, 318, 372, 398, 541, 554–556, 580, 632, 651, 664, 731
- women writers, 201–202
- workers, 426, 579
- World War II, 127–128, 158–160, 174, 223, 254–256, 257, 259, 314, 562, 627, 657, 729; German occupation, 151
- Wraga, Ryszard (b., Jerzy Niezbrzycki), 73
- Writers Union (London), 448–449, 450
- Writers Union (Montevideo), 482–485
- Writers Union (Warsaw), 653, 680
- writers, literati, 23, 48–52, 58, 69, 82–83, 91–92, 118–119, 161, 165, 172, 178–179, 181, 182–184, 230, 243, 268, 314–315, 334, 342, 399, 401, 414, 424, 428, 431, 475, 494, 506–507, 527, 531, 554, 568, 569, 576, 579, 581, 585, 612, 614, 615, 652–653, 663, 673–674, 729; Argentine writers, 141, 412–414, 445, 612; Communist writers, 141; French writers, 605, 663; Latin American writers, 413–414,

- 612; national writers, 49; Polish émigré writers, 51, 445–455, 450, 506–507, 730; Polish writers, 6, 612, 736–737; Slavic writers, 612; Uruguayan writers, 482–485 writing, 96–97, 186, 221, 235, 263, 338, 461, 526, 708
- Wsola (Gombrowicz family estate), 57
- Wurmbrand-Stuppach family, 57
- Wyspiański, Stanisław, 190–192, 194, 260, 274, 280, 338; *The Wedding*, 191, 338
- Yale University, 504
- youth, 47–48, 143, 147, 159–171, 174, 176–179, 181, 191, 234, 238, 278, 290, 359, 372, 375, 384–385, 389–391, 394, 406, 407, 460, 463, 481, 486, 540, 562, 585, 592, 607, 613, 615, 618, 621, 623–624, 628, 657–658, 659, 666, 682, 714, 735; Argentinean youth, 85–87; European youth, 635; German youth, 634, 638; modern youth, 635; northern youth, 634; Polish youth, 45, 628
- Ypsilanti, Prince, 521
- Yungulo (mythical city), 374
- Zabłocki, Franciszek, 111
- Zachwatowicz, Krystyna, 667
- Zaleszczyki (Ukraine, formerly Poland), 444
- Zamecznik, Wojciech, 496
- Zarzycka, Irena, 83, 151
- Zawadzka, Helena, 591
- Zawisza family, 684
- Zbyszewski, Wacław Alfred, 10, 121–122, 297, 430
- Zdziechowski, Paweł, 296, 605
- Zeleński, Tadeusz (Pseud. Boy). *See* Boy-Zeleński, Tadeusz
- Zellner (doctor), 402
- Zeromski, Stefan, 10, 11, 70, 189–190, 194, 200, 203, 257, 258, 280, 343ⁿ, 475
- Zhdanov, Andrei A., 261
- Zola, Émile, 540, 663
- Zosia (nickname). *See* Chądzyńska, Zofia
- Zuberbühler, Niaki, 494
- Zurich, 630
- Zwieck (governess), 604
- Życie Literackie*, 3, 253, 294, 459, 651, 653, 654
- Życie Warszawy*, 652